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Mark Metzler

## Partisan Policy Swings in Japan, 1913–1932

**Abstract:** This essay develops a temporal and conceptual framework for analyzing some core processes in the political economy of Japan and in the political economy of two-party systems in general. It takes as a case study the era of “Taishō democracy”. The two-party politics of the era, originating out of the Taishō political crisis of 1912–13, were shaped by an opposition between the so-called *positive policy* of fiscal-monetary expansion and the so-called *negative policy* of retrenchment. The “positive-negative” divide structured a wide range of policy domains, including fiscal policy, monetary and foreign-exchange policy, diplomatic policy, military policy, social policy, and industrial policy. This essay constructs a chronology of this policy dialectic across multiple policy domains and contributes to theoretical discussion of policy fields, polarities, and regimes. It concludes by making a cross-temporal comparison to policy swings in the 1990s.

**Keywords:** policy swings, two-party systems, fiscal policy, “positive policy”, Taishō democracy

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Back-and-forth swings of policy appear to be an inherent feature of political systems in general. The regular alternation of executive-level political leaders was not common before modern times, but it became increasingly normative internationally in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When this type of executive-level alternation does occur, it interacts strongly with policy swings. This essay analyzes short-term policy swings within the specific context of a two-party system. The question has hitherto lacked definition in historiographical research. In fact, it has a general historical significance, and Japan during the second and third decades of the twentieth century contributes an important case study.

Partisanized fiscal-monetary policy swings took shape in Japan concurrently with the formation of a two-party system after 1913. As the two-party system approached its end in 1932, these policy swings became increasingly comprehensive across policy domains. Fiscal policy was in many ways fundamental to



this policy dialectic. To frame the analysis, Part 1 defines periods in central government finance on the scale of multiple decades, while Part 2 schematizes the history of partisan political alternation during Japan's era of two-party politics. Part 3 surveys the "positive-negative" policy divide across multiple policy areas, including fiscal policy, monetary and foreign-exchange policy, social policy, industrial policy, and foreign relations. The essay closes by suggesting some historiographical implications and methodological possibilities offered by this view. By charting the specific chronology and contours of these policy movements, we gain a framework for making rigorous cross-national and cross-temporal comparisons. Comparisons between the 1920s and 1990s, for instance, are especially suggestive.

## 1 The macroscape: alternating phases of fiscal expansion and stabilization, 1868–1940

For as long as governments have taxed and spent, phases of greater government spending have surely alternated with phases of retrenchment and reduced spending. Familiar-seeming policy polarities are visible as early as two millennia before the present; for instance, in the contention between activist state-mercantilists and "laissez-faire" agrarianists in Han-dynasty China.<sup>1</sup> By the mid twentieth century, such policy tensions came to be expressed in a common international language of "Keynesian" versus "monetarist" macro-economic policies.<sup>2</sup> These fiscal and monetary policies were now conceived as *macro-economic* policies, meaning that their intended field of action extended beyond specifically budgetary and currency concerns to take in the regulation of national economic life as a whole. The recognition that fiscal and monetary policies had wide economic consequences was not new in itself, but it had not yet been so systematically expressed. Before the 1920s and 1930s, the pro-spending position also tended to lack both moral legitimacy and systematic macro-economic justifications. By contrast, the virtue of austerity seemed unproblematic.

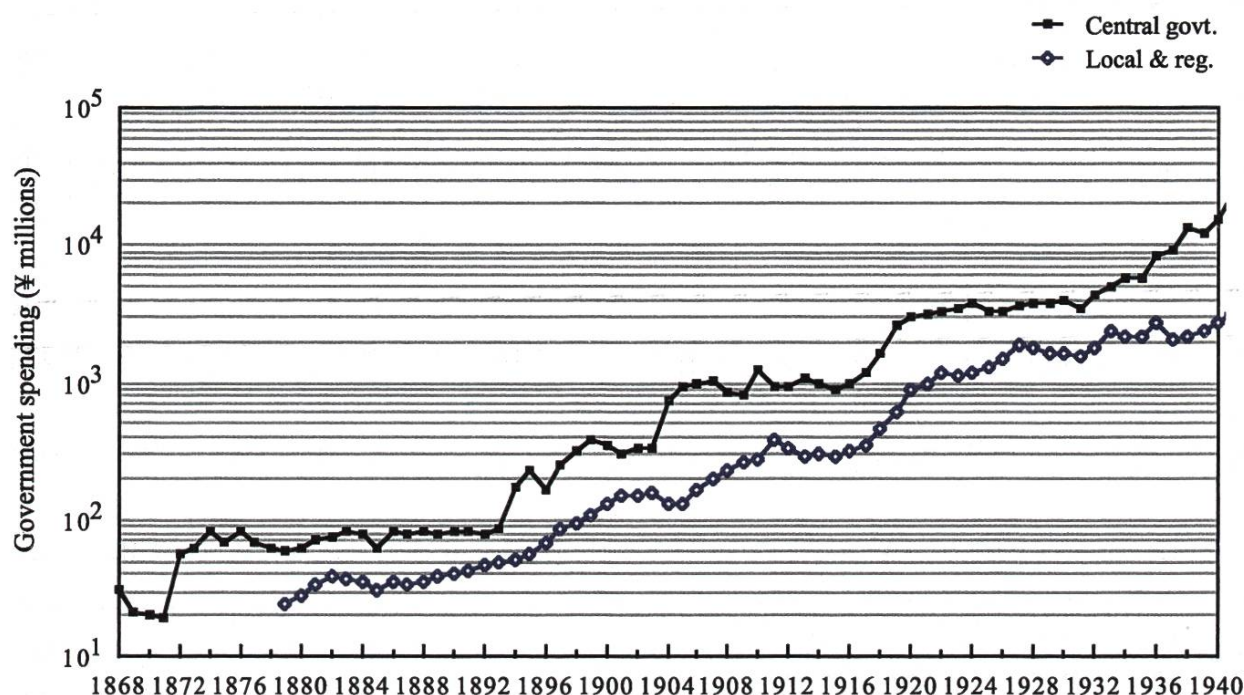
The alternation of policies of expansion and retrenchment happens on multiple timescales. This essay analyzes changes on a year-by-year timescale during a period of two decades; to situate this history, Figure 1 gives a view of state spending on a timescale of multiple decades. Table 4 in the appendix gives a more detailed accounting. In this view, one can see that the rhythm of

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<sup>1</sup> Yang 1961; Gale 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Kindleberger 1985 gives examples of similar dynamics in various times and places.





**Figure 1:** Japanese central government spending, 1868–1940, and local and regional government spending, 1879–1940 (logarithmic scale). Note the stepwise increases of 1872–74, 1894–95, 1904–05, 1917–19, and the nearly continuous rise from 1932.

Source: Tabulated from Emi and Shionoya 1966: 147–149, 162–163, 168–171.

expansion and retrenchment is also a story of war and peace, as major wars were funded by “positive” inflationary means and were typically followed by phases of retrenchment and deflation. The fiscal scale of the Japanese state thus expanded in a stepwise way, shaped by cycles of expansion and retrenchment on a scale of decades.

This pattern of stepwise increase is a clear case of the “crisis and leviathan” dynamic described by Robert Higgs for the case of the United States, whereby government spending, meaning more or less the size of the state, has been ramped up during episodes of crisis, usually wars.<sup>3</sup> In Japan’s case, stepwise increases occurred during and immediately after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), and the First World War and Siberian expedition (1917–20).<sup>4</sup> Each wartime fiscal expansion was followed by a postwar inflationary boom, followed in turn by a postwar depression and a turn to retrenchment. Sometimes, retrenchment policies seem to have brought depression; other times, it seems more that depressions induced retrenchment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Higgs 1987. Thanks to Gregory Kasza for indicating the significance of this idea.

<sup>4</sup> The great spending increase came not with Japan’s entry into World War I in 1914 but rather with the Siberian intervention (1918–22).

<sup>5</sup> For related considerations, Nakamura 1990.



Beginning in 1932, there was another round of state expansion accompanying the war in northeast China. The greatest stepwise increase of all came during and after the Asia-Pacific War of 1941–45, not shown on the graph in Figure 1. It is difficult to compare this overwhelming event to Japan's previous (limited, victorious) wars. Even after 1945, however, there was a two-step process of inflation, in 1945–48, followed by deflationary stabilization in 1949–50.<sup>6</sup>

Between the stepwise increases shown in Figure 1, central government spending mostly held to a level: roughly around the ¥100 million level from the mid 1870s to 1893; around ¥500 million from the late 1890s to 1903; around the ¥1 billion level from 1905 to 1916; and then roughly around ¥5 billion from the early 1920s to 1931.

The present essay focuses on policy swings on a shorter timescale during the two fiscal “plateaus” that followed the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. During these peacetime plateau periods, expansionary policies alternated with retrenchment in a way that largely correlated with cabinet changes. The alternation of policy lines was connected directly to partisan politics after 1913. By the 1920s, these policy swings structured not only party politics but also the Japanese political economy as a whole. This pattern has gone unrecognized in most of the historiographic literature, as has the integral character of political and economic movements.

Compared to central-government spending, spending by local and regional government grew in a steadier and more constant fashion, as Figure 1 also reveals. Trends in central-government and in local-regional spending reinforced each other during the “plateau” of the early 1910s and during the stepwise increase of the late 1910s. During other periods, if the two are added together, the effect is to smooth out the stepwise character of the process. Hara Akira, who pioneered the study of this policy alternation in the fiscal domain, has thus argued that when we include local and regional government spending, the overall spending policy of the 1920s was more “positive” and counter-cyclical than it appeared to be at the level of the central-government budget.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 When Japan had a two-party system

In the era from 1955 to the mid 1990s, Japan became known for a one-party (or “one-and-a-half party”) system, and Japanese experience was brought into

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<sup>6</sup> Metzler 2013a, especially ch. 5–9.

<sup>7</sup> Hara 1981.



comparative political studies with this conception in mind. Knowledge of Japan's earlier two-party system has not informed international comparative work.<sup>8</sup> A system of partisan alternation in power developed after 1913, took more definite form after 1918, and continued to 1932. One historical source of this system was the practice of regular alternation of prime ministers that characterized the Satsuma-Chōshū clique (*hanbatsu*) system. A second source was the political parties themselves, which originally represented groups excluded from the Satsuma and Chōshū cliques.

The alternation in office of prime ministers from the former feudal domains of Chōshū and Satsuma went back to the beginning of the cabinet system in 1885. In the context of a relatively closed and authoritarian system, this alternation of executives is remarkable, and it was probably an important factor in the flexibility and stability of the Meiji state structure. In the first generation of Meiji-era leaders, prime ministers alternated in office for thirteen years, as follows:

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1885/Dec.–1888/Apr.	Itō Hirobumi (Chōshū)
1888/Apr.–1889/Dec.	Kuroda Kiyotaka (Satsuma)
1889/Dec.–1891/May	Yamagata Aritomo (Chōshū)
1891/May–1892/Aug.	Matsukata Masayoshi (Satsuma)
1892/Aug.–1896/Sep.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Itō Hirobumi (Chōshū)
1896/Sep.–1898/Jan.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Matsukata Masayoshi (Satsuma)
1898 (Jan. 12–June 30)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Itō Hirobumi (Chōshū)
1898 (June 30–Nov. 8)	Ōkuma Shigenobu (Saga)
1898/Nov.–1900/Oct.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Yamagata Aritomo (Chōshū)
1900/Oct.–1901/June	4 <sup>th</sup> Itō Hirobumi (Chōshū)

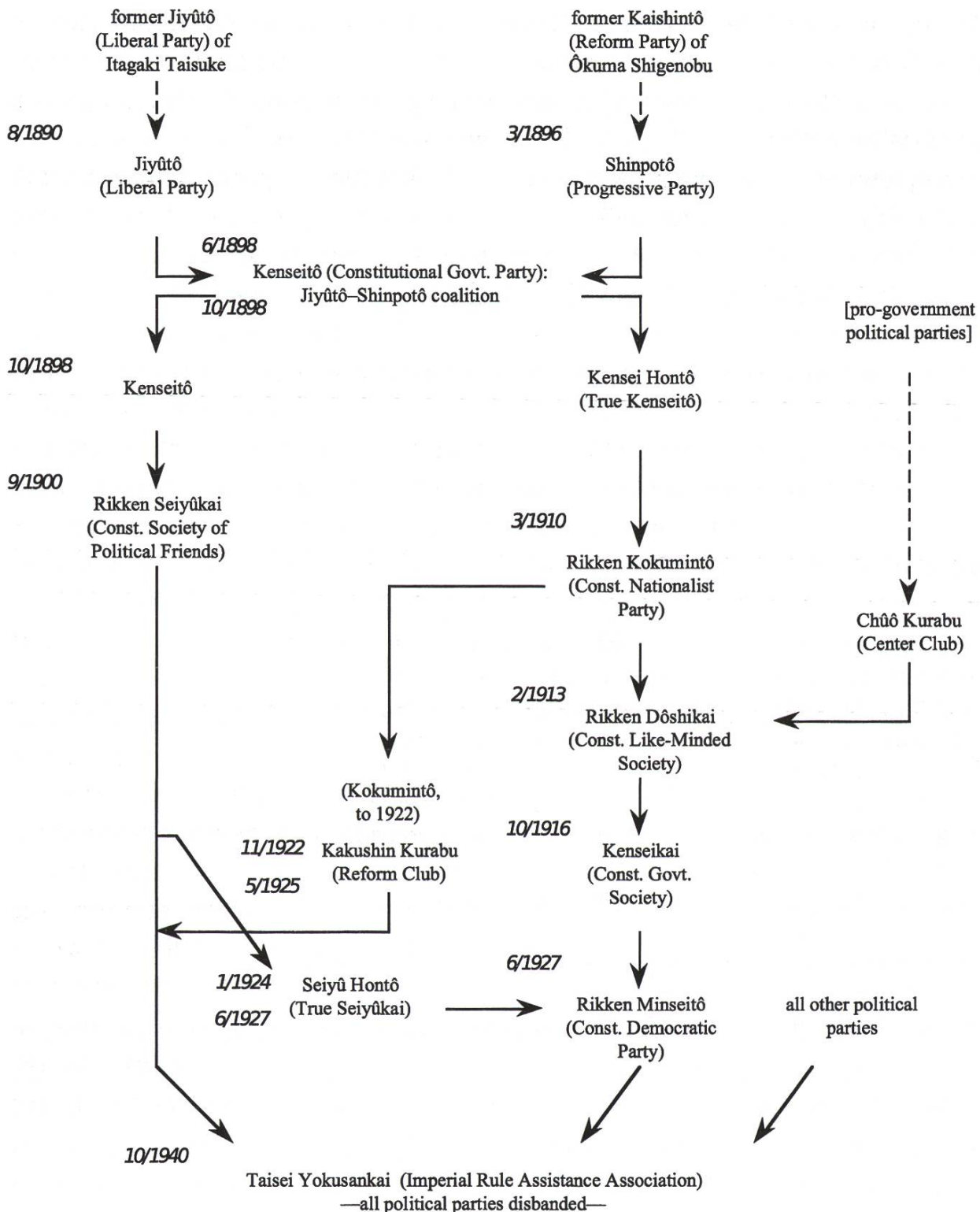
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The system of Chōshū–Satsuma alternation thus broke down in the busy year of 1898. The first attempt at a party cabinet came in June 1898. This effort, which involved a failed merger of the two main opposition parties (Figure 2), lasted only four months, overlapping almost precisely with the 100 Days Reform in China – a summer of dashed expectations. Seen in retrospect, however, it announced the new era. After 1900, there developed a new pattern of alternation between second-generation leadership cliques with more diverse regional origins, led by the two most powerful Chōshū oligarchs, Itō Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo. This was a generational transition, as both Itō and Yamagata retired from the front lines of politics.

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<sup>8</sup> Working from the other direction, however, Duus (1968) provided an account of how Japanese practice was informed by Britain's two-party model.





**Figure 2:** Lineages of the Seiyūkai and Minseitō parties, 1890–1940 (not to temporal scale). When political parties reemerged in late 1945, the new Liberal Party continued the Seiyūkai line, while the parties that coalesced into the Democratic Party continued the Minseitō line.

The two governing parties of the “Taishō democracy” era trace back to the opposition parties founded by Itagaki Taisuke of Tosa and Ōkuma Shigenobu of Saga. After 1890, Itagaki’s Liberal Party (Jiyūtō, 1881–1898) and Ōkuma’s Reform Party (Kaishintō, 1882–96) and Progress Party (Shinpotō, 1896–98)

gained representation in the Imperial Diet, but they did not participate in forming a cabinet before 1898. Both parties at first tended to favor “small government,” reflecting the preferences of an electorate of taxpaying local elites, and they used their platform in the Diet to oppose government taxing and spending plans. With the party merger in 1898, the governing oligarchs began to instrumentalize them as tools of their own leadership. In 1900, Itō Hirobumi teamed up with members of the former Liberal Party to organize the Rikken Seiyūkai (Constitutional Society of Political Friends). In 1913, Prime Minister Katsura Tarō joined forces with a section of the former Shinpotō to form the Rikken Dōshikai (Constitutional Society of Comrades), which became the Kenseikai (Constitutional Government Society) in 1916 and was reformed as the Rikken Minseitō (Constitutional Popular Government Party) in 1927.

The two party lineages acquired distinctive identities in policy. The Seiyūkai especially after the Russo-Japanese War promoted an expansionist “positive” or “active” spending policy (*sekkyoku seisaku* 積極政策). This was the political program of party boss Hara Takashi (1856–1921), the political genius behind the Seiyūkai’s rise to political dominance.<sup>9</sup> The Kenseikai and successor Minseitō contrariwise attended to fiscal and monetary retrenchment. Their Seiyūkai opponents called this a “negative,” or passive policy (*shōkyoku seisaku* 消極政策). These were polemical terms, but their symmetry has an analytical appeal, and Japanese historians use them frequently. I use the terms here in a descriptive sense, with the understanding that, in any fiscal administration, both “positive” and “negative” policies are inevitably necessary in their own time.

Table 1 summarizes the pattern of factional and policy alternation from the time of the first Seiyūkai-backed cabinet in 1900 until 1918. In reference to the macro-level policy cycle introduced in Section 1 above, this period includes (1) the fiscally and monetarily expansive wartime and postwar boom years of 1904–06, (2) the retrenchment phase from 1907–08 to 1914–15, and (3) the renewed expansion after 1916. The Seiyūkai was initially headed by Itō Hirobumi’s follower Saionji Kinmochi, while the Yamagata group was led by Yamagata’s follower Katsura Tarō. The year 1900 thus represented both a generational and an organizational shift; hence the idea of the “1900 system” advanced by Banno Junji, following Masumi’s idea of a “1955 system” in politics.<sup>10</sup> This “Katsura-Saionji period” (*Kei-En jidai* 桂園時代) ended with the Taishō political crisis in the winter of 1912–13. After this, opposed party-backed cabinets alternated in power.

<sup>9</sup> Najita 1967; Nakamura 1993: 32–39.

<sup>10</sup> “1955 system”: Masumi 1995; “1900 system”: Banno 1994.



**Table 1:** Factional alternation in power during the formative period of the two-party system, 1900–1918.

Cabinet begins	Prime Minister*/ Finance Minister	Factional backing	Policy tendency ("+” or “-”)
1900 Oct. 19	4 <sup>th</sup> Itō – Saionji <sup>[1]</sup> / Watanabe Kunitake	Seiyūkai (SYK)	[mixed]
1901 June 2	Katsura Tarō/ Sone Arasuke	Yamagata group	[mixed]
1906 Jan. 7	Saionji Kinmochi*/ Sakatani Yoshio	SYK	+
1908 July 14	2 <sup>nd</sup> Katsura/ (Wakatsuki Reijirō) <sup>[2]</sup>	Yamagata group	–
1911 Aug. 30	2 <sup>nd</sup> Saionji*/ Yamamoto Tatsuo	SYK	+
1912 Dec. 21	3 <sup>rd</sup> Katsura/ Wakatsuki R.	Yamagata group; Dōshikai formed	–
1913 Feb. 20	Yamamoto Gonbei/ Takahashi Korekiyo	SYK	+
1914 Apr. 16	2 <sup>nd</sup> Ōkuma Shigenobu/ Wakatsuki R.; Taketomi T.	Dōshikai→Kenseikai	–
1916 Oct. 9	Terauchi Masatake/ Shōda Kazue	Yamagata group (unofficial SYK backing)	+
1918 Sept. 29	Hara Takashi*/ Takahashi Korekiyo	Outright SYK cabinet	+

Notes: \*Asterisk indicates presidents of the Seiyūkai party. [1] Saionji Kinmochi was acting prime minister for most of Itō’s fourth cabinet. [2] Katsura served as his own finance minister and his vice-minister Wakatsuki Reijirō functioned in practice as finance minister.

In seeking to outline the contours of these policy swings, this essay mostly leaves aside the questions of who, how, and why.<sup>11</sup> However, to identify these swings requires some mention of the policymakers whose alternation in office constituted the pivot of the process. On the “positive policy” side, two names stand out. The first is Hara Takashi, who was home minister in the first and second Saionji cabinets and again in the first Yamamoto cabinets; in 1914, he succeeded Saionji as Seiyūkai party president. After 1913, Hara’s positive policy was also associated with Takahashi Korekiyo, who served first as Bank of Japan governor and then, repeatedly, as minister of finance. It was Takahashi who

<sup>11</sup> These questions are addressed in Metzler 2006a.

turned the positive policy into a full-fledged economic program, a kind of “Keynesianism before Keynes.”<sup>12</sup>

The “negative” retrenchment policy was after 1905 associated with Wakatsuki Reijirō (1866–1949) and later also with Hamaguchi Osachi (1870–1931). Both Wakatsuki and Hamaguchi were career officials in the Ministry of Finance; both advanced to political careers and both served in turn as minister of finance, home minister, party president of the Kenseikai-Minseitō, and prime minister.

The prominent role of former financial bureaucrats during this period is notable. So, too, is the frequent accession of finance ministers to the office of prime minister. The finance minister had authority over the budgets of every other part of the administration and was able to influence most of the policies discussed here, including foreign-exchange policy and domestic monetary policy. Cabinet ministers often had long tenures during this period, and most ministers were former career officials who could exercise strong authority within their ministries. Their situation was thus quite different from the situation after World War II, when ministerial positions went to elected Diet members who were shuffled frequently in and out of office, who were usually outsiders to their ministries, and who, aside from their role in dispensing patronage, often served largely as figureheads. In short, cabinet changes mattered for policy.

Table 2 continues the account for the era of party government from 1918 to 1932. In reference to the fiscal-monetary macro-cycles presented in Figure 1, this era began with a stepwise fiscal and monetary expansion in 1915–19, followed by a long phase of postwar retrenchment, partially interrupted, from 1920 through 1931. A new phase of fiscal and monetary expansion began in 1932. Politically, the new era began in the aftermath of the national Rice Riots, when the senior statesmen asked Hara Takashi to form a cabinet in September 1918; Hara was the first sitting member of the House of Representatives to serve as prime minister. Every prime minister for the next fourteen years, except for the two years following the Seiyūkai’s schism in 1922, was the president of one of the two major parties. (Major third parties did exist for much of this period, as did a number of smaller parties.) The assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi in May 1932 ended this period, making Japan’s “era of party government” the nearly exact co-temporal counterpart to Germany’s Weimar Republic (and suggesting that historians undertake a more detailed type of comparison along the lines suggested below). After 1932, no party president served as prime minister until 1946; in these fourteen years of non-party government, most prime ministers were military men, and the others were either senior officials or

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<sup>12</sup> Smethurst 2007.



**Table 2:** Party backing and policy tendency of cabinets, 1918–1932.

Cabinet begins	Party	Prime Minister*/Finance Minister(s)	Policy Tendency
1918 Sept. 29	SYK	Hara Takashi*/ Takahashi Korekiyo	+
1921 Nov. 13	SYK	Takahashi Korekiyo*/ Takahashi Korekiyo	+
1922 June 12	---- [1]	Katō Tomosaburō/ Ichiki Otohiko	–
1923 Sept. 2	---- [2]	2 <sup>nd</sup> Yamamoto Gonnohyōe/ Inoue Junnosuke	[mixed]
1924 Jan. 7	---- [3]	Kiyoura Keigo/ Shōda Kazue	[mixed]
1924 June 11	both [4]	Katō Takaaki*/ Hamaguchi Osachi	–
1925 Aug. 2	KSK	2 <sup>nd</sup> Katō Takaaki*/ Hamaguchi Osachi	–
1926 Jan. 30	KSK	Wakatsuki Reijirō*/ Wakatsuki R., Hayami S., Kataoka N.	
1927 Apr. 20	SYK	Tanaka Giichi*/ Takahashi K., Mitsuchi C.	+
1929 July 2	MST	Hamaguchi Osachi*/ <sup>[5]</sup> Inoue Junnosuke	–
1931 Apr. 14	MST	2 <sup>nd</sup> Wakatsuki Reijirō*/ Inoue Junnosuke	–
1931 Dec. 13	SYK	Inukai Tsuyoshi*/ Takahashi Korekiyo	+
1932 May 26	----	Saitō Makoto/ Takahashi Korekiyo	+

Notes: SYK = Seiyūkai, KSK = Kenseikai, MST = Minseitō (successor to the Kenseikai). \*Asterisk indicates party presidents. [1] Non-party: supported by Seiyūkai, opposed by Kenseikai. [2] Non-party: opposed by Seiyūkai, Kenseikai neutral. Many “positive” measures were forced by the earthquake emergency. [3] Non-party: supported by the Seiyūhontō, opposed by both Seiyūkai and Kenseikai. [4] Three-party coalition cabinet (Seiyūkai, Kenseikai, Kakushin Club). [5] After Prime Minister Hamaguchi was shot, Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijūrō was acting prime minister from November 15, 1930 to March 9, 1931.

aristocrats. Since 1946, it is the constitutional norm for the president of the majority party in the House of Representatives to serve as prime minister.

To grasp the nature of policy swings during this period, it is also important to understand the bounded nature of “party government.” Under the 1889 constitution, the authority of the state was said to be derived from the emperor. The constitution was silent concerning the position of the cabinet and the rules

governing cabinet changes, except to indicate by implication that the emperor appointed ministers of state. In actuality, cabinet changes were decided informally by a small group of elder statesmen.<sup>13</sup> The Imperial Diet was marginal to the state structure; nonetheless, the system often appeared to function in the 1920s as though it were a parliamentary system. The party presidents who led cabinets during this period did not necessarily represent the majority party – in fact, typically, the party in power attained an electoral majority *after* receiving the imperial mandate to form a cabinet. Thus, far from elections resulting in cabinet changes, it was normally cabinet changes that determined the results of subsequent elections. Here, the home minister was pivotal, as he used his authority over the local governments and police to assure election results favorable to the government. Bribery was routine and violence and intimidation not uncommon.<sup>14</sup> Party men like Hara Takashi, with national organizations at their disposal, were appointed to the post of home minister, but even in the era of party cabinets, regular “party men” were not permitted to be army minister, navy minister, or foreign minister.<sup>15</sup> The party presidents themselves, such as Katō Takaaki, Takahashi Korekiyo, and Tanaka Giichi, were mostly retired civil or military officials and members of the peerage. Of the party presidents who did serve as prime ministers, only three – Hara Takashi (PM 1918–21), Hamaguchi Osachi (PM 1929–31), and Inukai Tsuyoshi (PM 1931–32) – were members of the House of Representatives. All three left office by way of assassination.

### 3 Dimensions of the positive and negative policies

When looked at issue by issue, the elements that composed the positive and negative policies may appear as a loose assemblage of ad hoc measures, or even as the effects of opportunistic partisan opposition for the sake of opposition. Many historians have described the politics of the era in this way. Viewed altogether, however, they add up to a consistent set of policy differences.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Steven 1977. Because cabinet changes were not electorally driven, the question of an *election-driven* political business cycle (e.g., Tufte, 1978) is a separate matter from the partisan policy swings discussed here. For attempts to trace electorally-driven “political business cycles” in postwar Japan, see Ito 1992: 89–95 and Cargill/Hutchison 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Siniawer 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Furuya 1990: 88.

<sup>16</sup> Metzler 2006a: 80–81.



Fiscal policy was at the heart of the positive-negative policy tension. Differences over spending policy were connected, by extension, to monetary and later to foreign-exchange policies. From the mid-1920s, the range of policy domains structured by these linked binaries widened to include social policy, industrial policy, and diplomatic and military policy.

### 3.1 Spending policy

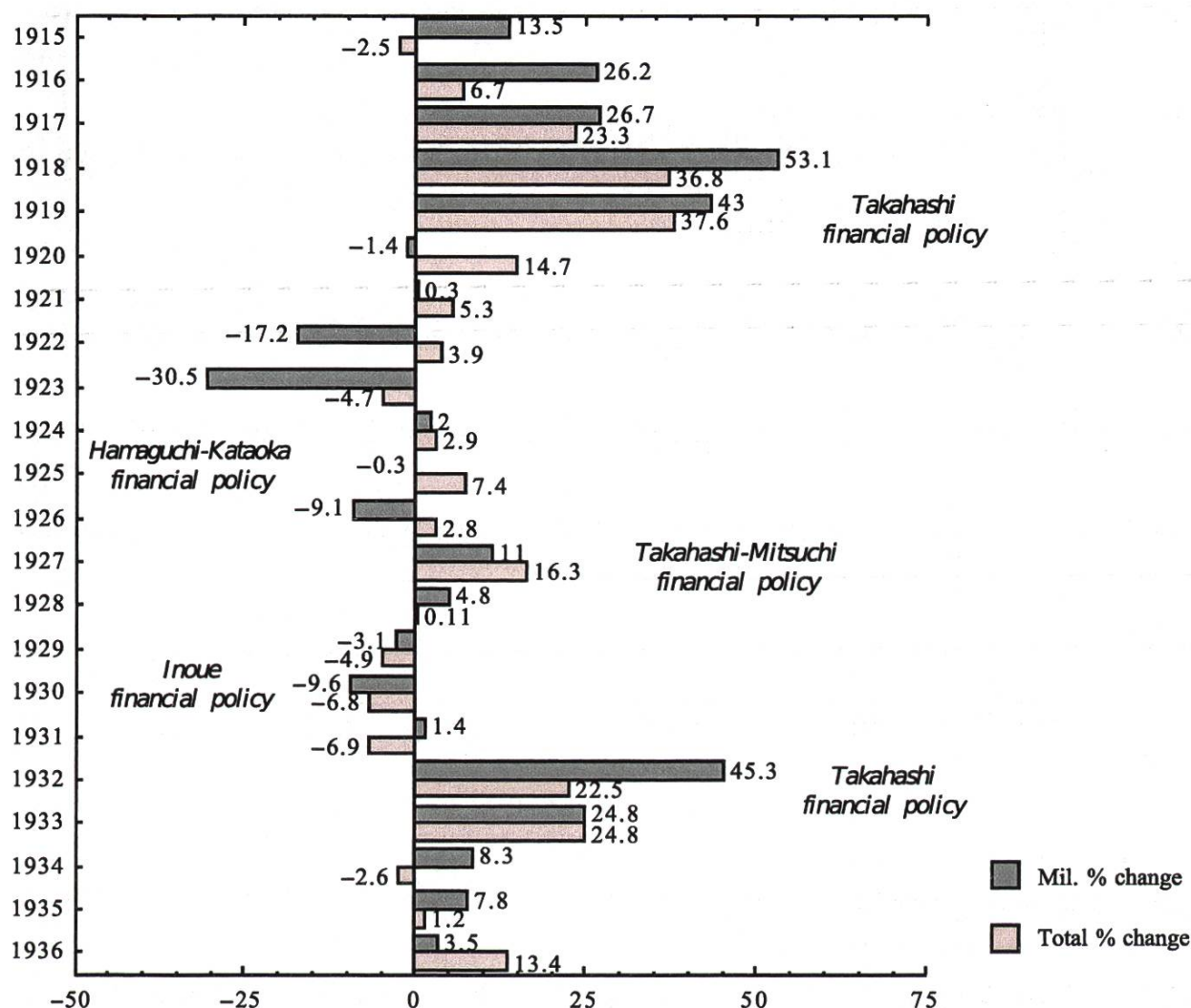
In politics as it is actually played out, policy choices often assume a binary, either-or structure. Such binarisms may be an artifact of people's mental habits and psycho-social constructions. Frequently, they are also given by the nature of the policy choice involved. Total budgetary spending, for example, is a scalar quantity that may either increase (+) or decrease (–), contributing a basic sense to the notion of “positive” versus “negative” spending policies. Policy polarities in other domains often arrayed themselves along an axis first established in relation to fiscal policy. The actual structure of budgetary spending is revelatory in itself: the skeleton of the state stripped of misleading ideologies, in the famous formula of Rudolf Goldschied as advanced by Joseph Schumpeter. These are good reasons for beginning the analysis here.

To outline this structure in practice is enormously complicated. Since the time that state budgets ceased to be state secrets – which in most countries happened with the advent of constitutional government – statesmen have devised ways to shield parts of the state budget from outside knowledge and to exclude parts of it from parliamentary authority. This was certainly true in Japan, where in the 1880s, during the years of preparation for the opening of an elected national assembly, the Meiji oligarchs devised a kind of state within the state, creating an elaborate structure that grew to include such institutions as the Imperial Household funds, the Ministry of Finance Deposit Bureau (Yokinbu), and the system of Special Accounts for extra-budgetary spending.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 3, following the seminal analysis of Hara Akira, illustrates the basic pattern of fiscal expansion versus consolidation or contraction from 1915 to 1936. The Special Accounts have been included in total spending, in order to show overall central government spending. Local government spending, which was under a high degree of central control, has also been included, though it entails

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<sup>17</sup> Ferber 2002; Kuroda 1966.



**Figure 3:** Changes in total government spending and in military spending, 1915–1936.

Source: Calculated from Hara 1981: 80–81. Hara's tabulations include special accounts; total spending includes both central and regional government spending.

Note: The totals given in Hara's Table 3 for 1923, 1924, 1928, and 1929 differ slightly from the totals I've derived from his Table 2 (on which they are based); I have used the retabulated figures.

many distinctive questions of its own.<sup>18</sup> A breakdown according to central and local government spending is given in Table 4 in the appendix.

Conspicuous in Figure 3 are the spending surges of 1916–19 and 1932–33, as also is the overall retrenchment trend of the decade from 1920–21 to 1931. Shifts in military spending accounted for much of this volatility. Military spending increased more greatly than civilian spending during 1915–19 and was then retrenched proportionally more greatly in the 1920s. After 1931, when “activist” army officers manufactured new emergencies on the continent, military

<sup>18</sup> Full analysis of budgetary policy would require a year-by-year, item-by-item analysis of the kind that Hara Akira (1981) began to undertake for the 1920s and that McCubbins and Noble (1995) began for the High-Speed Growth era.



spending again increased greatly. Partisan politics did not cause these war-related increases. One might more plausibly argue that political causation ran in the opposite direction.

This does not change the fact of a clear contrast between the two parties in terms of budgetary expansion and retrenchment. Seiyūkai cabinets (in 1918–21, 1927–29, 1931–32) consistently spent more. Kenseikai and Minseitō cabinets (1925–27, 1929–31) consistently retrenched. Notably, however, Takahashi Korekiyo, the great practitioner of positive spending policies, turned toward a retrenchment policy during the latter phase of his tenure in office in 1920–21, responding to the needs of the times. The Seiyūkai cabinet did the same in 1929. Takahashi himself again attempted a policy of restraint in the latter part of his long tenure of 1931–36. These efforts helped provoke his assassination by radical army officers on February 26, 1936.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2 Foreign-exchange policy and the gold standard

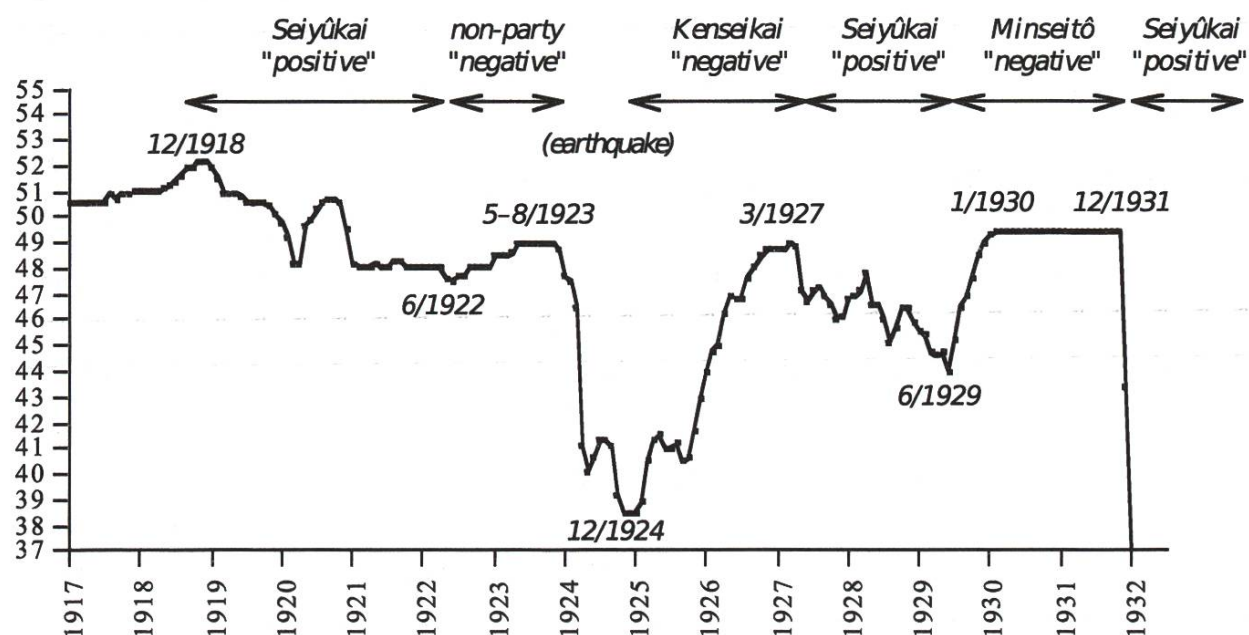
In the 1920s, foreign-exchange policy became a new field for differences between the positive and negative policies. Phases of yen depreciation (*en-yasu* 円安) and yen appreciation (*en-daka* 円高) now began to reflect the policy swings seen in other connections.

Under the gold standard (1897–1917), the yen's exchange rate was effectively fixed relative to gold-based currencies like the British pound and the US dollar. The yen held close to its par value of US \$0.4985, and questions of foreign exchange were not an active field for policy differences. There was, however, a policy question as to *how* to secure the gold and foreign-exchange reserves needed to back the yen and keep it at par: the “positive” policy was to take out large foreign loans for infrastructure construction projects that would hopefully assist future exports; the “negative” policy was to limit foreign borrowing, restrain government spending, and contract money and credit in order to lower prices and reduce present imports. These two approaches were associated, respectively, with Takahashi Korekiyo and Wakatsuki Reijirō. They played out in a two-phase movement after the Russo-Japanese War: in the first phase of “postwar management,” heavy foreign borrowing continued; then came a “doubly negative” policy of cutting spending and halting government borrowing.<sup>20</sup> The “positive–negative” theme appears in overseas borrowing policy in general,

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<sup>19</sup> Smethurst 2007, ch. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Kamiyama 1989.



**Figure 4:** Yen-dollar exchange rate on the New York market, January 1917–January 1932, showing the tenures of the “positive” and “negative” economic policies. Left axis: yen per \$100. Dates indicate high and low points in the exchange.

Sources: *Nihon no keiki hendō* (1931), sect. 3: 15–16; E.B. Schumpeter et al. 1940, Table IV.

as taking out loans could function as a support for a positive policy, while paying them back required “negative” policy measures.<sup>21</sup>

The gold standard was suspended during World War I, as a presumably temporary wartime measure. After this, the yen fluctuated in value as shown in Figure 4, and foreign-exchange policy became a conspicuous domain for policy differences.

In these movements of the yen exchange, one can chart seven phases, whose political contours were as follows:

1. 9/1918–6/1922: yen depreciation (= positive policy) under the Hara and Takahashi (Seiyūkai) cabinets. The yen reached its low point in June 1922, the final month of Takahashi’s tenure in office.
2. 6/1922–9/1923: yen appreciation (= negative policy), as the non-party Katō Tomosaburō cabinet reversed policy and presided over a rise in the exchange.
3. 9/1923–6/1924: depreciation (earthquake emergency). The non-party Yamamoto and Kiyoura cabinets oversaw a sharp drop in the exchange, owing to the great Kantō earthquake in September 1923.

<sup>21</sup> Instances are given in Metzler 2006a. For a full picture of Japan’s foreign borrowing, see Bytheway 2005 and Bytheway 2014.



4. 6/1924–4/1927: appreciation (= negative policy) under the two Katō Takaaki cabinets and the Wakatsuki cabinet (predominantly Kenseikai and Kenseikai-only). The yen rose to a high point in March 1927, the final month of the Wakatsuki cabinet.
5. 4/1927–7/1929: depreciation (= positive policy) under the Tanaka (Seiyūkai) cabinet. The yen reached a low point in the final month of the Tanaka cabinet.
6. 7/1929–12/1931: appreciation (= negative policy). Rapid rise of the yen to its former parity, to which it was then fixed for 24 months under the Hamaguchi and Wakatsuki (Minseitō) cabinets.
7. After 12/1931: depreciation (= positive policy); regime shift in foreign-exchange policy. Great depreciation of the yen under the Takahashi financial policy (Seiyūkai and “national unity” cabinets).

Thus, after 1920, whether by design or as a side-effect of other policies, the Seiyūkai did not vary from a yen-depreciation policy, and the Kenseikai-Minseitō did not vary from a high-yen policy. Not only that, but cabinet changes determined most of the major turning points in the exchange rate during this period.<sup>22</sup>

The question of preventing or permitting gold shipments also became connected to these policy swings, as shown in Table 3.<sup>23</sup> This happened after September 1917, when the Ministry of Finance suspended the gold standard and established a permit system governing gold exports.

To summarize, Seiyūkai cabinets in general, and Takahashi Korekiyo personally, tended to postpone efforts to restore the gold standard. In the domain of international monetary policy, this was the more “independent” and nationalist policy. Kenseikai and Minseitō cabinets consistently supported a timely return to the gold standard, and they implemented deflation policies to prepare for it. This was the more “liberal” and internationalist policy. The Minseitō’s return to the gold standard in January 1930 thus meant a commitment to the international system financially centered on Great Britain and the United States. With this overlaying of international and domestic policy issues, the polarities that shaped fiscal and monetary policy within Japan’s domestic political field began to interact more intensively and more continually with the Western/international political field. During the 1920s, alignment with the Western gold-standard

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<sup>22</sup> For the interest-group politics around this issue, Miwa 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Bytheway/Metzler, forthcoming; Metzler 2006a.

**Table 3:** Gold exports, 1918–1936 (in millions of yen). Years of large gold exports are highlighted in boldface type).

Year	Gold exports	Comment
1918	1.39	<i>Gold exports limited</i> (Seiyūkai and non-party policies)
1919	2.74	"
1920	1.14	"
1921	0.11	"
1922	0.05	"
1923	0.28	"
1924	0.91	"
1925	22.28	<i>Active permission of gold exports</i> (Kenseikai policy)
<b>1926</b>	<b>32.19</b>	"
<b>1927</b>	<b>36.33</b>	"
1928	0.35	<i>Gold exports limited</i> (Seiyūkai policy)
1929	0.09	"
<b>1930</b>	<b>308.66</b>	<i>Gold exports deregulated</i> (restoration of the gold standard)
<b>1931</b>	<b>419.87</b>	"
<b>1932</b>	<b>122.49</b>	<i>Gold exports re-embargoed</i> (Seiyūkai and non-party policies)
1933	24.49	"
1934	0.32	"
1935	2.01	"
1936	0.72	"

Source: Nihon Ginkō Tōkeikyoku 1966: 298–299.

Note: There were net gold imports in 1918–24, 1928–29, and 1934–36.

orthodoxy was in general the “negative” policy in that it prevented currency devaluation and meant monetary restraint.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.3 Monetary policy

Table 6 in the Appendix below gives figures for Bank of Japan credit creation, currency in circulation, and total bank balances from 1903 to 1936, broken out into phases of overall monetary expansion and contraction. Banknote circulation and interest-rate policy were administered by the Bank of Japan rather than the government; this allowed some play for policy variation between the two,

<sup>24</sup> Bryan 2015. Internationally, adherence to the gold standard usually implied a contractionary policy but not invariably, as Steven Bryan (2010) shows in a study of Argentina and Japan. In Argentina around 1900, the “positive–negative” valences were even reversed. Adherence to the gold standard could be congruent with nationalist as well as with internationalist policies.



but Bank of Japan governors during this period were rather directly under the authority of the minister of finance. The overall level of account balances in the banking system as a whole was not then under close Bank of Japan control, so as indicators of policy, BoJ lending and currency in circulation are more significant.

The pattern we saw in the fiscal indicators – wartime expansion in 1904–05 followed after 1908 by retrenchment – appears also in monetary policy. Takahashi Korekiyo seems to have bucked this trend during his tenure as Bank of Japan governor from June 1911 to February 1913, when he attempted with partial success to run his own positive policy out of the Bank of Japan. During the 1920s, on the other hand, Bank of Japan monetary policy under Inoue Junnosuke's leadership appears to have been relatively more restrictive than fiscal policy. To summarize, we see two major cycles of wartime inflation and postwar deflation:

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Cycle I.	1904–06: Russo-Japanese war and postwar expansion [stepwise increase].
	1907–08: initial postwar deflation.
	1909–1912: interim expansion.
	1913–1914: second postwar deflation.

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Cycle II.	1915–19: World War and postwar expansion [stepwise increase].
	1920–22: initial postwar deflation.
	1923: earthquake expansion
	1924–1927: second post-war deflation.
	1928: interim expansion.
	1929–1931: third post-war deflation.

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One great difference between the deflation period that followed the Russo-Japanese War and the deflation period that followed the First World War was that in the second case, there was not only a national but also a global-level process of postwar adjustment. This fact worked to intensify the policy cycle after World War I. To introduce the terminology employed later in this essay, Japan's domestic *political field* (and field of policy discourse) was then strongly affected, and to a degree contained, by an international political and discursive field centered in London and New York. These international influences reinforced the “negative” policy pole within Japan's domestic political field.

A break in policy regime came in December 1931, with end of the gold standard and the “quasi-war” expansion of 1932–36.

The Bank of Japan's interest-rate policy shows some of the same phasing but with significant differences. If we take 6% as a normative median BoJ discount rate for the period, and consider rates below that to be stimulatory and rates



above that to be restrictive, it yields the picture given in Table 5 below. From 1919 to 1925–26, the Bank of Japan followed a deflation policy featuring exceptionally high interest rates. During the deflation policy of 1929–31, however, the Bank of Japan actually lowered its rates, raising them only during the final emergency of the gold-standard system in late 1931. Here too, a shift in policy regime came in 1932, when Takahashi Korekiyo implemented his historically unprecedented low interest-rate policy. Before this, the BoJ discount rate had never been lower than 4.75%, and it generally ran much higher.

A final point deserves mention, especially for its present-day resonances. Japan's banking system faced repeated crises in the 1920s, and the Bank of Japan repeatedly bailed out troubled banks. Should this be reckoned as a kind of positive policy? If so, BoJ governor Inoue Junnosuke, who practiced a “negative” monetary policy in the early 1920s, practiced a positive policy when it came to the banks themselves. This raises a fundamental point: one sector's stimulus may be another sector's austerity. This is a question of transferring social resources from one place to the other. Such a transfer of resources may happen directly; for example, through shifts in budgetary spending and taxation. It may also happen indirectly; for example, through inflationary methods and changes in relative prices.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.4 Taxation policy

The other side of expenditure policy is revenue policy. Here, recent work by Andrea Revelant makes clear that taxation policy was also subject to partisan policy differences and that differences between the two conservative parties were not merely a matter of tactical opposition but rather were “rooted in broader policy visions.”<sup>26</sup> Under the pressure of the increase in fiscal scale outlined in Section 1 above, the average tax burden per capita almost doubled between 1897 and 1914, and the question of its social distribution became sharpened. The Seiyūkai, in line with its orientation toward regional elites, pursued a policy of devolving land-tax revenues to local governments. The Kenseikai-Minseitō countered with centrally-oriented spending plans oriented toward social-policy goals. This conflict over tax reform was a proximate cause of the split of the short-lived Kenseikai–Seiyūkai coalition cabinet in 1925.<sup>27</sup> As a domain of policy formation, taxation policy was not characterized by short-term swings on the scale of only a few years. However, like

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<sup>25</sup> Metzler 2013a for the latter point.

<sup>26</sup> Revelant 2013: 851.

<sup>27</sup> Revelant 2013: 860, 868–870, 889–891.



social policy and like industrial policy, it was shaped by the partisan polarities that shaped the wider political field.

### 3.5 Social policy

The Kenseikai and especially the Minseitō tended to support social policy as then conceived, while the Seiyūkai opposed it. Social policy involved primarily questions of political inclusion, relations between owners and employees, relations between landlords and tenants, and social insurance.<sup>28</sup> In regard to initiatives in these areas, the respective positions of the Seiyūkai and the Kenseikai-Minseitō conformed with the labels “Conservative party” and “Liberal party” that Westerners frequently attached to them. The Seiyūkai was historically close to agricultural landlords, who formed the largest part of its original base, and to factory owners. Through the 1920s, Seiyūkai leaders (including relatively progressive ones like Takahashi Korekiyo) often espoused a paternalistic-authoritarian ideology in regard to workplace relationships. The Kenseikai supported the movement for universal male suffrage, which was passed into law under a Kenseikai-led cabinet in 1925. Urban residents and agricultural tenants (after 1925) gave more electoral support to the Kenseikai-Minseitō. The Minseitō subsequently proposed also to give women the right to vote in local elections; this was rejected by the House of Peers. In this policy domain, the “active” policy, as it were, belonged to the Minseitō.<sup>29</sup> Thus it was that the new Minseitō cabinet called in 1929 for “the establishment of social policy” as part of its Ten-Point Program.

### 3.6 Industrial policy

State-led industrial promotion became another field for policy difference. The partisanization of this policy domain appears already to a degree in the early years of the twentieth century, in the Seiyūkai promotion of infrastructure projects and railway nationalization.<sup>30</sup> Regional-development plans were central to the Seiyūkai’s positive policy as envisioned by both Hara and Takahashi. Industrial policy developed much more fully from 1924, when Seiyūkai president Takahashi Korekiyo became minister of Agriculture and Commerce.<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Garon 1987.

<sup>29</sup> Garon 1987; Nolte 1986.

<sup>30</sup> Ericson 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson 1982; Metzler 2006b: 100–103, 107–116; Smethurst 2007.



Seiyūkai slogan *sangyō rikkoku*, or “building an industrial nation,” was transformed into the slogan “a positive industrial policy,” as expressed in the party’s 1929 party platform. By the 1930s, Seiyūkai politicians linked it to ideas of national-level economic planning.

The Seiyūkai was thus “active” in regard to industrial policy. Here, the Kenseikai-Minseitō seemed to have less to offer; their advocacy of industrial “adjustment” in the 1920s was a code-word for retrenchment. This idea was later joined with the idea of “rationalization,” a term employed by members of both parties that could encompass both downsizing and technological upgrading.

### 3.7 Diplomatic and military policy

The “positive–negative” policy opposition also took on new meaning in Japan’s diplomatic policy toward China and the Western powers. The Kenseikai’s predecessor, the Dōshikai, was originally organized to support the militarist-politician Katsura Tarō, while the party’s leader, the diplomat Katō Takaaki, was both a pro-British liberal and the instigator of an aggressive, hegemony-seeking policy toward China in 1915. The early Kenseikai thus combined a pro-British stance, a policy of fiscal restraint, and a policy of foreign-policy adventurism vis-à-vis China. By contrast, the Hara–Takahashi policy toward China was more pacific and moderate. Thus, the Seiyūkai in the 1910s looked more like the peace party and the Kenseikai more like the war party. At the Washington Conference in 1922, the Japanese government agreed to the principle of naval arms limitation, which was in harmony with the Kenseikai’s policy of budgetary retrenchment. Under the influence of diplomat Shidehara Kijūrō, the Kenseikai in the 1920s thus combined a restrictive financial policy with a policy of arms limitation and international cooperation. Shidehara himself never joined the party, but his diplomacy became a fixture of party policy from 1924 to 1931.

As the Kenseikai turned toward a more cooperative diplomatic policy, the Seiyūkai under the party presidency of the militarist Tanaka Giichi after 1925 adopted an avowedly “positive” policy of “continental advance” and “independent diplomacy” (*jishuteki gaikō*, meaning independent of Britain and the United States). In budgetary terms, this meant military build-up (Figure 3 above).

It would require a separate, extended study to describe the funding bases and interest-group constituencies of the two parties, and to analyze their electoral bases and the effects of electoral rules on party structure.<sup>32</sup> Also important (and

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<sup>32</sup> See Miwa 1974 and Tiedemann 1959: 207–210; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1998 discuss questions of rules and structure.



little recognized in the international literature of political studies) is the question of support for the parties from within the executive apparatus of the state – a corporate body in relation to which the parties themselves were in many ways peripheral. Here and in other connections, a historical *anthropology* of political life has great potential. Another question, and one which originally motivated this research, concerns the linkages between policy swings and business cycles. These linkages are many and close, but they are far from simple or stable (and far from being susceptible to simple correlation analysis). In some cases, causation seems to run from policy shifts to business conditions. In other cases, causation seems to run in the reverse direction. It is better to describe these connections as a matter of mutual causality and continuous interaction.<sup>33</sup> There was also a kind of gendered moral economy attached to these policy binaries.<sup>34</sup>

## 4 Party politics and political fields

If, heuristically, we limit our view to the field of actual government during a given time period – thinking, that is, of the political “establishment” as it existed – it is useful to visualize the range of policy choice as a charged field, constituted by its own policy polarities. By *political field*, I thus mean to suggest a picture of a bounded social field of policy actors, associated also with a bounded *discursive field* of policy debate. This is something like Bourdieu’s social and historical idea of the “intellectual field.”<sup>35</sup> To Bourdieu’s spatialized field picture, I propose to add a temporal and conjunctural dimension.

As we have seen, Japan’s domestic political field interacted with an international political field. Especially in regard to monetary policy, an international political field took shape after 1919 as never before in history, in the context of the world’s first system of coordinated international monetary policy.<sup>36</sup> One pole of this international field – the “negative” policy pole, in the terms introduced above – was identified with monetary orthodoxy, as considered at the time. This set of policies included domestic deflation, domestic budgetary austerity, and the restoration of the gold standard (meaning, for Japan, re-linking the yen to the US dollar and, after 1925, to the British pound). Within Japan, this policy-set was represented politically by the Kenseikai-Minseitō party lineage.

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<sup>33</sup> For wider thoughts on mutual causality, Macy 1991; for business cycles, Metzler 2006a.

<sup>34</sup> Metzler 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu 1969 [1966]; 1993 [1984]; Ringer 1990; Metzler 2010/2013b.

<sup>36</sup> Bytheway/Metzler, forthcoming, ch. 5.



Internationally, this policy-set was backed by central banks and private financial groups headquartered in London and New York. For Japanese financial policymakers, this international political (and discursive) field was in some ways a “containing” field whose polarities were partially homologous to those of Japan’s domestic political field. But this international monetary policy was also the product of social circumstances and cultural constructions radically different from those present in Japan. This combination of quasi-mappability and quasi-incommensurability made this national-level/world-level overlap both highly potent politically and highly problematic.

Simple binary schemas naturally capture only a small slice of social reality. Indeed, people employ such schemas – when playing at politics especially – precisely because they are grand simplifications. The binary schema explored in this essay can therefore serve as a rough analytical guide to the rhetoric and thinking, at least at an instrumental level, of many of the policy actors themselves. Its usefulness lies in its “rule of thumb” character as an abstraction from diverse, inconsistent, and incommensurable social realities.

I have deliberately avoided here the ubiquitous twentieth-century binary terms “left” and “right,” in an attempt to abstract away from political value positions and rhetoric in order to consider an alternate “binary” dimensionality. In the prewar Japanese context, “leftwing” would in any case refer to the socialist, communist, and anarchist movements. To bring their radical critiques into the picture would take us outside the “establishment” political field and into a much wider discursive field much less united by common language and social identifications. Marxist analysts, going back at least to the Comintern’s 1927 *Theses on Japan*, thus discounted the differences between the two governing conservative parties, which they treated, along with the state structure and economic elites altogether, as a single anti-pole.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “At present, the two main bourgeois parties – the Seiyukai and the Kenseikai – alternate with each other in the government. Both of them are not only closely connected with big capital but represent the direct and open political agents of the two most powerful capitalist concerns of the country – the Mitsui and the Mitsubishi. However, the Seiyukai has closer ties to the nobility and the military and royal cliques, whose role in the government is very great, whereas the Kenseikai acts as the representative of the quasi-liberal bourgeoisie, which aims at the consolidation and support of the government mechanism of capitalist exploitation with the help of more ‘liberal’ methods. Thus, in 1925 the Kenseikai extended the franchise. In comparison with the Seiyukai, the Kenseikai occupies a more moderate position in relation to the U.S.S.R. There is no doubt, however, that as the struggle against the revolutionary movement in the Japanese colonies and in Japan itself proves, there is no essential difference between the two parties.” (From the 1927 *Theses on Japan*, in Beckman and Okubo 1969).



Methodologically, to periodize historical time according to the alternation of expansionary and contractionary policies is useful for revealing linkages and recurring patterns across multiple policy domains. We can think of a period characterized by a relatively stable configuration of back-and-forth policy cycling as constituting a *policy regime*. “Regime shifts” are moments of major change in these configurations themselves – that is, in the structure (and structuring polarities) of the political field. We see one example in the shift from the “liberal” two-party system to a radically more statist system after 1932. We see another example in the shift from the postwar system (the “1955 system” or “High-Speed Growth system”) to a kind of Japanese-style neoliberalism over the course of the 1990s.<sup>38</sup>

The account of short-term policy swings can be carried into Japan’s postwar one-party period. Japan began its era of single-party government in 1955, when the Democratic Party (Minshutō) merged with the (second) Liberal Party (Jiyūtō) to form a united conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyū Minshutō, or LDP). Many analysts have suggested that intra-LDP differences and cabinet changes meant little for policy. Closer analysis shows definite “positive–negative” policy swings within the ambit of the united LDP.<sup>39</sup> Here, a full account would require analyzing the LDP factions, which formed an *intra*-party system of alternation in power after 1955. The LDP regime broke down in the early 1990s, and positive–negative policy swings again became a matter of inter-party as well as intra-party politics, as outlined below. By the end of the 1990s, there was much public discussion and perhaps a general consensus that Japan needed a “normal” two-party system with regular partisan alternation in office. In 1998, anti-LDP groups formed the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshutō, or DPJ). This second Democratic Party merged in 2003 with the smaller (third) Liberal Party. With this, a combined “Minshu Jiyūtō” (so to speak) was ready to stand against the governing Jiyū Minshutō. Not only the well-worn party names resonated historically. As opposed to the LDP’s traditionally rural base, the DPJ attracted more of its support from urban salaried workers. It appeared in general to be the more liberal of the two parties, in the sense of being more pacifistic and favorable to social policy as well as in the “classically liberal” sense of housing a conservative and laissez-faire wing from the former Liberal Party. In this, the new Democratic Party resembled the more liberal and urban-based prewar Kenseikai-Minseitō party lineage, as opposed to the more conservative and agrarian-based Seiyūkai. The LDP more openly embraced a Seiyūkai-style

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<sup>38</sup> For regime shifts, Pempel 1998, and for other constructions of historical policy systems, Noguchi 1995, Okazaki/Okuno 1999, and Teranishi 2003.

<sup>39</sup> For policy swings in the 1950s, Metzler 2013a, ch. 10–11.



system of “pork barrel” political payouts to diverse constituencies. DPJ cabinets did hold office in 2009–2012; the LDP is back in power at this writing, making the question of two-party politics again seem moot.<sup>40</sup>

The outline of policy swings within a single regime-period presented in this paper begins to allow systematic comparative work. One dimension of comparability is lateral and synchronic: for example, comparison with policy swings in other countries during the 1920s. Such comparison will require the construction of similar accounts for Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and so on. It has the potential to yield a new view not only of domestic politics but also of the articulation of domestic and international political fields. This kind of concrete, year-by-year comparison and integration involves taking time seriously as a matrix for comparison and offers a new domain for comparative history.

A second dimension of comparability is cross-temporal. An example is the comparison of different postwar or post-bubble decades. Thus, we might compare the post-bubble deflation era of the 1920s with the 1990s, along the lines of the following sketch. First, a rough summary of 1920–32, divided into the main phases of positive and negative policy; in order to comprehend time as a factor, let us count the years:

1. The bubble of 1919–20 was promoted by “positive” fiscal and monetary policies.
2. In late 1919, the Bank of Japan adopted a “negative” policy stance, and the bubble collapsed in the spring of 1920 [year 1 (y1)]. Initially, the governing Seiyūkai maintained a positive fiscal policy, but in 1922 [y3] the party split and lost power.
3. A comprehensive negative policy was adopted by a non-party cabinet in 1922–23. The 1923 earthquake interrupted this process, but the negative policy line was resumed under coalition and Kenseikai cabinets in 1924–27 [y5–y8], and general price deflation recommenced.
4. This negative policy culminated in a great financial crisis in 1927 [y8], after which the Seiyūkai came into office and followed a positive policy [y8–y9].
5. There was a return to a negative, liquidationist policy under the Minseitō in 1929–31 [y10–y12].
6. There followed a turn to radically expansionist policy under Seiyūkai and non-party cabinets in 1932 [y13], from which point a general economic recovery began.

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<sup>40</sup> Jou 2010; Scheiner 2012.



This sketch leaves out important details of policy valence and timing across the variety of policy domains, but it does enable a first approach. Now, let us compare the 13-year period beginning in 1990. In the 1990s, key terms associated with the opposed policy lines were “stimulus” (+) versus “fiscal consolidation” (–) and “structural reform.”<sup>41</sup>

1. The bubble of 1989 was promoted by “positive” monetary and fiscal policies.
2. In late 1989, the Bank of Japan adopted a “negative” policy stance, and the bubble began to deflate from the beginning of 1990 [y1]. The Bank of Japan maintained a negative policy stance while the governing LDP maintained a positive fiscal policy under the Miyazawa cabinet in 1991–93 [y2–y4].<sup>42</sup>
3. The governing party split and lost power in 1993 [y4] and a negative policy was implemented under a coalition cabinet that excluded the LDP. Under an opposed three-party coalition cabinet that included the LDP, general price deflation commenced in 1994 [y5]. The LDP leadership turned to a negative “structural reform” policy under PM Hashimoto in 1996 [y7].
4. This negative policy culminated in a great financial crisis in 1997 [y8] followed by a second financial crisis in 1998 [y9]. The LDP returned to a positive fiscal policy under PM Obuchi and Finance Minister Miyazawa in 1998–2000 [y9–y11].
5. In 2000, there was a turn to a comprehensive negative, “structural reform” policy. This policy went further under PM Koizumi after 2001 [y12], and the deflation intensified.
6. The BoJ, however, turned to a radically expansionary policy after 2002 [y13], and a long, slow economic recovery commenced.<sup>43</sup>

To put it dramaturgically, one might say that Miyazawa Kiichi played the role of Takahashi Korekiyo, Hashimoto Ryūtarō the role of Wakatsuki Reijirō, and Koizumi Jun’ichirō (but with better luck!) the role of Hamaguchi Osachi. This sketch is hasty and crude, offered only as an invitation to deeper analysis. It is enough, however, to suggest that we are looking at structurally comparable

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<sup>41</sup> During the 1990s, “structural reform” was paired primarily with a negative rather than positive policy, but this shifted in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. For a conceptualization of these polarities as a two-dimensional field defined by two axes rather than as a bipolar field, see Metzler 2010/2013b.

<sup>42</sup> Metzler 2008: 657–658.

<sup>43</sup> For discussion of policy swings in the 1990s, Koo 2007, Metzler 2008.

conjunctural situations, and that the time-structure of policy swings allows cross-temporal comparison in detail.

There are many other potential comparisons. The kind of analysis undertaken here can be extended to historical two-party systems more generally; the creation of systematic case studies offers the prospect of rapid gains in understanding. If we consider swings in policy as constituting a basic type of social-temporal structure and take these movements as a framework, it may also render other historical patterns and processes more visible. To consider such questions systematically, across both time and place, requires *time-frames* – that we treat time itself as a factor, observing exactly how long things take, and the nature and temporal contours of their animating rhythms. By putting historical *timing* in the center, we open multiple new domains for systematic historical comparison.

## Appendix

**Table 4:** Government spending, 1900–1937 (in millions of yen), subdivided into phases of increase and decrease. Decreases relative to the previous year are marked by a down arrow and shown in boldface type; years of *total* spending declines are shown in bold.

FY	Budget <sup>[1]</sup>	General account <sup>[2]</sup>	Special accounts <sup>[3]</sup>	Central govt. total <sup>[4]</sup>	Local and regional <sup>[5]</sup>	Total spending <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>1900–01 contraction:</i>						
1900	257.9	292.8	52.5 (↓)	345.3 (↓)	128.6	473.9 (↓)
1901	281.4	266.9 (↓)	38.2 (↓)	305.1 (↓)	150.7	455.8 (↓)
<i>1902–07 expansion (stepwise increase, 1904–07):</i>						
1902	281.8	289.2	51.3	340.5	153.9	494.4
1903	294.3	249.6 (↓)	89.6	339.2 (↓)	158.9	498.1
1904	399.6	277.1	474.7	751.8	128.4 (↓)	880.2
1905	464.9	420.7	497.2	917.9	131.0	1,048.9
1906	505.0	464.3	491.6 (↓)	955.9	167.8	1,123.7
1907	635.9	602.4	409.1 (↓)	1,011.5	201.0	1,212.5
<i>1908–15 contractionary tendency (with expansions in 1910 and 1913):</i>						
1908	626.8 (↓)	636.4	222.4 (↓)	858.8 (↓)	230.2	1,089.0 (↓)
1909	520.5 (↓)	532.9 (↓)	274.8	807.7 (↓)	263.1	1,070.8 (↓)
1910	548.3	569.2	653.4	1,222.6	280.6	1,503.2
1911	574.0	585.4	345.3 (↓)	930.7 (↓)	389.2	1,319.9 (↓)
1912	582.0	593.6	345.5	939.1	328.6 (↓)	1,267.7 (↓)
1913	594.4	573.6 (↓)	480.8	1,054.4	292.7 (↓)	1,347.1
1914	668.2	648.4	311.5 (↓)	959.9 (↓)	299.3	1,259.2 (↓)
1915	750.7	538.3 (↓)	359.0	897.3 (↓)	295.3 (↓)	1,192.6 (↓)

(continued)



Table 4: (Continued)

FY	Budget <sup>[1]</sup>	General account <sup>[2]</sup>	Special accounts <sup>[3]</sup>	Central govt. total <sup>[4]</sup>	Local and regional <sup>[5]</sup>	Total spending <sup>[6]</sup>
<i>1916–24 expansion (stepwise increase, 1918–20; attempted contraction in 1922–23):</i>						
1916	<b>602.3 (↓)</b>	590.8	366.8	957.6	313.0	1,270.6
1917	780.2	735.0	432.5	1,167.5	342.6	1,510.1
1918	902.4	1,017.0	595.6	1,612.6	469.7	2,082.3
1919	1,064.2	1,172.3	1,433.8	2,606.1	610.6	3,216.7
1920	1,504.8	1,360.0	1,711.2	3,071.2	879.2	3,950.4
1921	1,591.3	1,489.9	1,604.7	3,094.6	995.0	4,089.6
1922	<b>1501.5 (↓)</b>	<b>1,429.7 (↓)</b>	1,928.7	3,358.4	1,182.9	4,541.3
1923	<b>1,389.4 (↓)</b>	1,521.1	1,955.1	3,476.2	<b>1,137.5 (↓)</b>	4,613.7
1924	1,785.4	1,625.0	2,231.0	3,856.0	1,198.0	5,054.0
<i>1925–26 contraction:</i>						
1925	<b>1,580.5 (↓)</b>	<b>1,525.0 (↓)</b>	<b>1,750.0 (↓)</b>	<b>3,275.0 (↓)</b>	1,300.6	<b>4,575.6 (↓)</b>
1926	1,666.8	1,578.8	<b>1654.1 (↓)</b>	<b>3232.9 (↓)</b>	1490.7	4723.6
<i>1927–28 expansion:</i>						
1927	1,759.3	1,765.7	1,836.6	3,602.3	1,860.7	5,463.0
1928	1,856.6	1,814.9	1,961.3	3,776.2	<b>1,772.5 (↓)</b>	5,548.7
<i>1929–31 contraction:</i>						
1929	<b>1,773.6 (↓)</b>	<b>1,736.3 (↓)</b>	2,001.1	<b>3,737.4 (↓)</b>	<b>1,596.5 (↓)</b>	<b>5,333.9 (↓)</b>
1930	1,828.1	<b>1,557.9 (↓)</b>	2,443.1	4,001	1,647	5,648
1931	<b>1,497.9 (↓)</b>	<b>1,476.9 (↓)</b>	<b>2,032.1 (↓)</b>	<b>3,509 (↓)</b>	<b>1,528 (↓)</b>	<b>5,037 (↓)</b>
<i>Expansion after 1932 (stepwise increases in 1932–33, 1936, and after 1937):</i>						
1932	2,091.4	1,950.1	2,328.9	4,279	1,754	6,033
1933	2,320.5	2,254.7	2,825.3	5,080	2,390	7,470
1934	2,223.8	<b>2,163.0 (↓)</b>	3,547.0	5,710	<b>2,163 (↓)</b>	7,873
1935	<b>2,215.4 (↓)</b>	2,206.5	3,610.5	5,817	<b>2,118 (↓)</b>	7,935
1936	2,417.6	2,282.2	6,149.8	8,432	2,718	11,150
1937	3,488.9	2,709.2	6,485.8	9,195	<b>2,049 (↓)</b>	11,244

Source: *Chōki keizai tōkei*, Vol. 7, pp. 147–149, 162–163, 168–171.

Notes: The Ministry of Finance was responsible for preparing budgets and for all other fiscal matters. The General Account budget was subject to Diet approval; the Special Accounts were outside of the Diet's purview. [1] General Account budget including supplementary budgets (subject to Diet approval). [2] Settlement figures (actual General Account spending). [3] Special Account spending, less duplications with general account spending. [4] Net total of General Account and Special Account spending. [5] Net total (less duplications among local government accounts). [6] Net total of central and local spending (less transfers between central and local governments).

**Table 5:** Bank of Japan official discount rate (*shōgyō tegata waribiki buai*), 1906–1940. Peak levels (monetary restriction) are shown in boldface type; trough levels (monetary ease) in italic.

Year/month	Annual percentage rate <sup>[1]</sup>	Comments
<i>High rates (restriction = “–” policy):</i>		
1906/7	6.57%	
1907/12	<b>7.30%</b>	
1909/5	6.57%	
<i>Low rates (“+” policy):</i>		
1909/8	5.84%	
1910/1	5.11%	
1910/3	4.75%	
1911/9	5.48%	
1912/2	5.84%	
<i>High rates (“–” policy):</i>		
1912/10	6.21%	
1912/11	6.57%	
1914/7	<b>7.30%</b>	
1916/4	6.57%	
<i>Low rates (“+” policy):</i>		
1917/3	5.11%	
1918/9	5.84%	
<i>High rates (“–” policy):</i>		
1918/11	6.57%	
1919/10	7.30%	Inoue interest rate hikes, autumn 1919.
1919/11	<b>8.03%</b>	
1925/4	7.30%	
1926/10	6.57%	
<i>Low rates (“+” policy):</i>		
1927/3	5.84%	
1927/10	5.48%	
1930/10	5.11%	
1931/10	5.84%	
<i>High rates (“–” policy):</i>		
1931/11	<b>6.57%</b>	
<i>Low rates (“+” policy):</i>		
1932/3	5.84%	
1932/6	5.11%	
1932/8	4.38%	
1933/7	3.65%	
1936/4	3.29%	The 3.29% rate was maintained until April 1946.

Source: Nihon Ginkō Hyakunenshi linkai 1986: 374.

Notes: [1] Interest rates were quoted in *sen* (¥<sup>1</sup>/10) and *rin* (¥<sup>1</sup>/100) per ¥100 per day. Thus, a rate of 1 *sen* would mean an annual rate of 3.65%. Hence the odd numbers when these rates are converted into annualized percentage rates.



**Table 6:** Bank of Japan credit creation and total money supply, 1903–1936 (in millions of yen), subdivided into phases of increase and decrease. Years of decline in *currency circulation* are highlighted in boldface type.

Year	Total BoJ lending	[of which, BoJ lending to Gov't]	Currency in circulation (A)	Total bank balances (B)	"M1" (A + B)	M1 percent change from previous year
<i>Russo-Japanese war + postwar expansion</i>						
1903	122	43	325	759	1,084	6.8
1904	223	116	384	811	1,195	10.2
1905	248	70 (↓)	423	974	1,397	16.9
1906	<b>167 (↓)</b>	22 (↓)	469	1,395	1,864	33.4
<i>Post-Russo-Japanese war ("Boshin") deflation</i>						
1907	179	22	509	<b>1,325 (↓)</b>	<b>1,834 (↓)</b>	-1.6
1908	<b>128 (↓)</b>	22	<b>499 (↓)</b>	<b>1,304 (↓)</b>	<b>1,803 (↓)</b>	-1.7
<i>1909–1912 mini-expansion</i>						
1909	<b>92 (↓)</b>	22	521	1,506	2,027	12.4
1910	170	31	586	1,649	2,235	10.3
1911	213	47	634	1,776	2,410	7.8
1912	218	26 (↓)	649	1,941	2,590	7.5
<i>1913–1914 deflation [second post-RJ war deflation]</i>						
1913	<b>178 (↓)</b>	22 (↓)	<b>628 (↓)</b>	2,110	2,738	5.7
1914	<b>108 (↓)</b>	22	<b>561 (↓)</b>	2,112	<b>2,673 (↓)</b>	-2.4
<i>World War + postwar expansion</i>						
1915	<b>78</b>	22	623	2,569	3,192	19.4
1916	209	22	827	3,464	4,291	34.4
1917	293	22	1,117	5,146	6,263	46.0
1918	597	22	1,576	7,236	8,812	40.7
1919	737	22	2,082	8,734	10,816	22.7
<i>Post-World War deflation</i>						
1920	<b>256 (↓)</b>	22	<b>1,801 (↓)</b>	8,829	<b>10,630 (↓)</b>	-1.7
1921	395	22	1,949	9,494	11,443	7.6
1922	585	36	<b>1,858 (↓)</b>	9,551	<b>11,409 (↓)</b>	-0.3
<i>1923 earthquake expansion</i>						
1923	894	42	2,195	9,692	11,887	4.2
<i>1924–1927 deflation [second post-WWI deflation]</i>						
1924	<b>767 (↓)</b>	45	<b>2,177 (↓)</b>	10,232	12,409	4.4
1925	<b>718 (↓)</b>	22 (↓)	<b>2,137 (↓)</b>	10,821	12,958	4.4
1926	<b>608 (↓)</b>	22	<b>2,062 (↓)</b>	11,272	13,334	2.9
1927	914	22	2,199	<b>11,247 (↓)</b>	13,446	0.8

(continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Year	Total BoJ lending	[of which, BoJ lending to Gov't]	Currency in circulation (A)	Total bank balances (B)	"M1" (A + B)	M1 percent change from previous year
<i>1928 mini-expansion</i>						
1928	870 (↓)	22	2,286	11,691	13,977	3.9
<i>1929–1931 deflation [third post-WWI deflation]</i>						
1929	701 (↓)	22	2,179 (↓)	11,972	14,151	1.2
1930	777	22	1,915 (↓)	11,546 (↓)	13,461 (↓)	–4.9
1931	987	24	1,828 (↓)	11,093 (↓)	12,921 (↓)	–4.0
<i>"Quasi-war" [準戦時] expansion [end of gold-standard regime]</i>						
1932	818 (↓)	47	1,965	11,445	13,410	3.8
1933	879	24 (↓)	2,130	12,049	14,179	5.7
1934	944	68	2,288	12,775	15,063	6.2
1935	959	118	2,480	13,626	16,106	6.9
1936	930 (↓)	186	2,596	14,726	17,322	7.5

Source: Nihon Ginkō Tōkeikyoku 1966: 166, 192–193, 195 (year-end data).

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