

## THE TURN AGAINST THE MODERN: THE CRITICAL ESSAYS OF TAOKA REIUN (1870-1912)

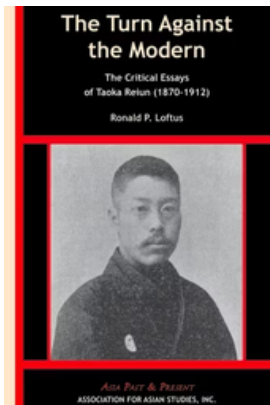
BY RONALD LOFTUS — ASIA PAST & PRESENT BOOK SERIES

### SUGGESTED COURSES:

- History - East Asia
- Modern Japan

### KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS:

- To what does "modernity" or the process of "becoming modern" refer?
- What is the role of Subjectivity in Modernity? How do Marshall Berman and other writers characterize modernity?
- According to historian Sho Konishi, the Western version of Modernity had become the "master narrative" for modern Japan. What did that mean for someone like Taoka Reiun?
- What was the "Popular Right Movement" and how did it affect Taoka Reiun?
- Why do you think Taoka Reiun embraced "anti-modernism"? What did that mean to him?



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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When Taoka Reiun emerged as a literary critic in 1895, what struck him about what was going on in the world around him and what did he think writers should be focusing upon?
2. Reiun often thought of himself as a "straggler," a "maverick," or a "contrarian," someone insistent on going against the grain and going his own way. Why do you think he was so drawn to this sort of stance?
3. Taoka was fascinated with how European thinkers were taking a deep dive into Eastern thought. Why do all these European writers matter to him?
4. Why do you think Schopenhauer's writings held so much appeal for Reiun?
5. In his later years, he would openly embrace a *hibunmei-ron* or an "Anti-Civilization (Modern)" stance. Why was he drawn to that position and what ideas did he want to see explored?
6. On pp. 159-160, Reiun talks more about his "socialism"? How would you describe his beliefs? How was he influenced by Edward Carpenter?
7. As his health declined, Taoka outlined four projects he would like to undertake if time permitted. What kinds of projects were they and what do they tell us about him?

## EXTERNAL LINKS & RESOURCES:

- James Huffman, “Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan” (UH Press)  
<https://uhpress.hawaii.edu/title/down-and-out-in-late-meiji-japan>

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*“This study vividly brings to life an overlooked contrarian whose writings tell us that Japan’s modernization process was much more complex and controversial than the standard ‘Meiji progress narrative’ would have us believe. Taoka Reiun comes through in this exhaustively researched study as a powerful critic who thought capitalist materialism had robbed Japan of its soul –a much-censored opponent of slavish Westernization who insisted that modernity should spring from the creation of autonomous individuals (women as well as men). Loftus’s analysis is incisive; his attention to Reiun’s tumultuous personal life brings a special energy to the work.”*

– JAMES L. HUFFMAN, Wittenberg University

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