

Development of Japanese Political Science in the Era of Digitalization:
Historical Background and Institutional Changes

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Historical Background and Institutional Changes

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While a number of institutional changes in Japan have prompted researchers to look more closely at the growing digitalization of political science, this trend has faced three main restrictions. First, there is the historical context that delayed the introduction of behavioral political science. Japanese political studies started as a discipline with a tendency towards abstraction and authoritarian attitudes. Second, even after the end of World War II the relation between politics and science was fragile. Although the importance of the scientific study of politics was clearly recognized, the science at that time was intimately connected with the normative evaluation of Japanese politics. Third, when behavioral political science finally became influential in the 1980s with the publication of the journal *Leviathan*, the institutional framework within which Japanese political science had to develop had already been completed. The digitalization of Japanese political science has had to proceed within this framework, which is not supportive enough for its development. However, it is clear that Japanese political scientists need to deal with digitalization, considering the enactment of the 2013 and 2015 revisions of the Public Officials Election Act and the flourishing public use of digital media such as Twitter and Facebook. Thus, considerable institutional changes are necessary for Japanese political science to fully cope with the digitalization of the field.

1. Japanese political studies before political science

Modern Japanese political studies first began when a professorship for political science was established in the First Division of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo in 1877. The university was the first modern national university in Japan. The professorship was reestablished

in 1885 under the Faculty of Law in the reorganized University of Tokyo.¹ According to Masamichi Royama, there were two schools of political studies in pre-World War II Japan.² One was the *Staatslehre* school and the other the positivist school. The former was introduced from Germany, where the imperial political regime was considered to be similar to that in Japan. Law and politics were considered to be intimately connected. The University of Tokyo, as Japan's first university, adopted this model, and as a result many universities followed the same path. Thus, political scientists frequently belonged to faculties of law. That means that most of the students studying politics acquired a law degree instead of a political science degree. The latter school, led by Waseda University, was one of the most distinguished privately established universities in Japan, and was strongly oriented to the empirical study of politics. The school was influenced by political science from the United States and England.

At first glance, the *Staatslehre* school, which was mainstream at the time, was more philosophical and norm-oriented, and the positivist school was more empirical and scientific in a strict sense. However, neither school can be said to have been founded on empirical and scientific approaches, for there was very limited academic freedom in Japan at that time. The emperor system was the cornerstone of the Japanese political system and could not be criticized. The so-called "concept of the political controversy" in the early 20th century shows how this limitation affected Japanese political science.³

Initially, the debate was stimulated by the emergence of the pluralist theory of the state in England. Influenced by the works of Harold J. Laski and G. D. H. Cole, and against the backdrop of the surge of social movements during the Taisho democracy era in Japan, political scientists in Japan discussed whether the concept of politics should only be applied to the activities of the state and public institutions or to the broader social realm including unions and voluntary associations. In England, as well known, this sort of debate was related to urgent issues such as the relative importance of the state and church, the participation of trade unions in parliamentary systems, and the transformation of the entire political system. However, as the Japanese political regime under the Meiji imperial constitution could not be changed, the debate in Japan could not help but be

¹ Masaki TANIGUCHI, "The State of Political Science in Japan," *University of Tokyo Journal of Law and Politics* 7 (Spring, 2010), pp.29-44.

² Masamichi ROYAMA, *Nihon ni okeru Kindai Seijigaku no Hattatsu*, Jitsugyo no Nihon Sha, 1949, esp. Chap. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, Chap. 3.

detached from the politics of ordinary lives and was liable to be extremely abstract. The debate only focused on the concepts concerning politics, not the functions or institutions of politics. In a sense, the debate was so scientific, neutral, and value-free because it was isolated from real politics. Therefore, it could not serve as an objective evaluation of the political situation and institutions. This detachment of political science from politics remained throughout the pre-World War II period and later came to be considered as a cause for the ineffectiveness of political science against belligerent decision making in prewar Japan. Thus, political science in Japan before 1945 was both scientific and ineffective.

2. Rebirth or birth of political science after 1945

It was after its defeat in 1945 that Japan became a genuinely democratic nation, not only regarding its parliamentary system and elections, which had been already become so in the 1890s, but also in terms the people's sovereignty under the new constitution instead of the sovereign emperor. This eventually supplied post-war Japanese political scientists with something to survey in the real world, rather than abstract ideas and concepts. The fact that the Japanese Political Science Association (JPSA) was established in 1948, only 3 years after the end of the war, illustrates how the democratic nature of society is important for the development of political science. The first issue of the association's journal recorded the process of its foundation and explained that it was established "in view of the removal of the political regime which had restricted the freedom of political studies, and seeing the advancement of the new regime which aims at the realization of eternal peace and the building of a cultural state."⁴ The first president, Shigeru Nambara, wrote in the "Issue of Political Science in Japan," that political science since the Meiji Restoration in 1868 had been no more than the legalistic conceptual construction of the modern Japanese state or the formalistic sociological study of the state based on the methodology of natural sciences. He insisted that Japanese politics needed positivist political science and that science served to construct post-war Japanese politics.⁵

The epoch-making and representative work on this point is "Politics as a Science" published in 1947 by Masao Maruyama, a specialist in the history of Japanese and Asian political thought.⁶

⁴ "Gakkai Kiji," in *Nihon Seiji Gakkai Nenpou Seiji-gaku*, Vol. 1, 1950, p. 247

⁵ Shigeru NAMBARA, "Nihon ni okeru Seiji-gaku no Kadai," in *ibid.*, pp. 1-4.

⁶ Masao Maruyama, "Politics as a Science," reprinted in *Gendai Seiji no Shiso to Kodo* (1, 2),

According to Maruyama, there had been no room for political science before 1945 because there was no room for social groups and associations to compete for the position of power. That left only the emperor (who was beyond analysis), a malfunctioning parliament, and researchers simply importing abstract concepts and focusing on methodology without applying it to Japanese politics. Maruyama insisted that political science in the true sense of the word needs to be “realistic science” and grounded on the analysis of the reality of politics. The newly set up diet, for example, which became “the highest organ of state power” (Article 41 of the new constitution of Japan), could now be the focus of political research. However, Maruyama also argued that political studies had to keep a distance from concrete political groups and to avoid involvement in real political strife. That is, post-war political science had to face two problems at the same time. First, it had to stay in touch with day-to-day political events. Without such contact, political science would have been powerless against the turmoil of politics; this had been the fate of the pre-war political science. Second, it also had to avoid involvement in factious strife. Keeping abreast with concrete political affairs does not mean becoming a party to the actual turmoil. For Maruyama, post-war Japanese political scientists were assigned dual tasks, which were dealt with simultaneously.

Based on Maruyama’s argument, the implication for political science in Japan was that the science had to be value-free in the sense of being distant from actual strife, while also committed to certain values in the sense of being able to, at the same, criticize the pre-war political regime. Science was necessary because it was conceived to be able to state where the pre-war political regime had gone wrong. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this is one reason why Marxism became a powerful academic trend in post-war Japan up to the 1970s. For Japanese academics, it serves well for this sort of science.

Science was there to defend the post-war democratic values and regime. Therefore, science had to be empirical and positivistic. However, these two needs are not necessarily met side by side. This is especially true when controversial issues come to the fore, such as Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, stipulating the renunciation of war.⁷ Thus, the aspect of science that helped to defend

Mirai-sha, 1956, 1957 (*The Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, 1963, Oxford University Press).

⁷ Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan reads as follows: “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as

the post-war value of peace also comes to the fore and easily invites criticism from realist politicians. Furthermore, there were very few political scientists specializing in empirical research at that time, although some leading scholars had started to publish important studies. It was the appearance of *Leviathan* in 1987 (the first fully fledged empirical and theoretical academic journal of political science in Japanese) that marked a major shift toward scientific studies in the strict sense in Japanese political science. In its “aim of publication”, the founders criticized the field of political studies up till that point, stating that it “analyzed Japanese politics only by an essayistic and impressionistic way.” They also acclaimed the efforts of those political scientists who introduced “the modern political science, which has been developed mainly in the United States.”⁸ We can say that a behavioral revolution was substantively introduced in Japanese political science only after the 1980s. Academic studies of media and mass communication, which are more than journalistic reviews, had to wait for this moment until it develops as a major theme in political science.

3. Studies of media in political science in the early setting

The foundation of *Leviathan* paved the way for behavioral political science in Japan. However, there were a couple of obstacles in the development of media studies in the field of political science. One concerned the career path of graduates from law departments. As already stated, Japanese political scientists often belonged to law faculties under the strong influence of the *Staatslehre* school. While many graduates with law degrees and specializing in legal studies sought bureaucratic offices or entered the legal profession, the common path for law graduates with knowledge of political science (who were trained in a different “department” or “course” inside law faculties) was journalism. Consequently, research on media tended to be published by journalists, and was naturally more journalistic than academic.

The other but related obstacle was the division of labor between political science and sociology. Although there were some prominent researchers on media and communication in the field of political science, studies on media were and have been considered to be included in the field of

other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

⁸ "The Aim of Publication," in *Leviathan*, Vol. 1, Bokutakusha, 1987, cited in Fukuji TAGUCHI, *Sengo Nihon Seijigaku-shi*, The University of Tokyo Press, 2001, p. 423.

sociology in Japan. For example, in the context of the introduction of behavioral political science, the University of Tokyo Press published a 20-volume political science handbook, the first series of its kind, starting from 1988. Topics concerning mass communication and mass media are only analyzed in volume 5, *Voting Behavior* by Ichiro Miyake, in the chapter “The election campaign and mass media” (just 28 pages long) and in volume 6, *Political Participation* by Ikuo Kabshima, in the chapter titled “The announcement effect and the buffer players” (even shorter at 14 pages).⁹ In contrast, there were a lot more journalistic articles and reviews in Japanese newspapers, which boasted a larger circulation compared with other countries.¹⁰ As a result, behavioral political science and media studies did not easily develop in tandem with each other.

4. Current status of media studies in Japanese political science

The status of media studies in the field of political science can be made clear by analyzing statistical data concerning academic associations. The JPSA is made up of about 1,800 members including academics, journalists, and various political professions. Members can search the specialties and affiliations of fellow members via an online search system available only to members. The member list requires members to select up to three specialties, chosen from a list of 57. A total of 59 members listed “political information and mass communication” as a specialty area (Table 1). Other than the items on the list, members can also include specialty areas not listed. A total of 22 members included “mass communication” (or its abbreviated form “mass comi”) and 10 cited “media.” Just one member belongs to an organization with “media” in its name (a private research institute). In contrast, nine members belong to organizations with “information” in the title. The majority of them are researchers from Niigata University of International and Information Studies. Regarding faculties and departments, there are no data available online.

⁹ Ichiro MIYAKE, *Voting Behavior*, The University of Tokyo Press, 1989; Ikuo KABASHIMA, *Political Participation*, The University of Tokyo Press, 1988. The series include the titles such as Political Regime, Public Choice and Interest Groups etc., but there are no volumes on the history of political thought or political philosophy.

¹⁰ The 2015 circulation numbers and circulation numbers per 1,000 persons are 44,247,000 and 399.9 in Japan, 296,303,000 and 317.4 in India. 2,858,000 and 125.7 in Malaysia, 786 and 168.2 in Singapore, and 15,786 and 222.6 in Germany. The data are from the website of the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association.

(<http://www.pressnet.or.jp/data/circulation/circulation04.html>) based on the *World Press Trends*(<http://www.wptdatabase.org/>).

Inside the JPSA, we have 16 study groups that specialize in various subfields of political science. The study group system has been officially operating since 2007. Each group has to have more than eight members, with at least six being JPSA members. Although seven groups are categorized as belonging to the field of political process, none specialize in mass communication and information (Table 2).

At first glance, these figures seem to indicate that there are very few researchers and little research on media and communication in Japan. On the contrary, media studies is an active and productive area for researchers. The problem is, as stated before, that political science and studies on media and information are not well connected. While the JPSA is one of the most general and largest academic associations in Japanese political science, there are also other influential associations such as the Japanese Association of Electoral Studies (established in 1981) with a membership of approximately 500 and the Japanese Conference for the Study of Political Thought (established in 1994) with a membership of over 500. There are also the Japanese Society for Public Administration (established in 1950) with more than 600 members, the Japan Association for Comparative Politics (established in 1998) and a membership of around 700, and the Japan Association of International Relations (established in 1956) with approximately 2,000 members. However, associations focusing on media and communication are classified in the field of sociology, and include the Japan Society for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication (previously the Japan Society for Studies in Newspapers established in 1951, renamed in 1991) with a membership exceeding 1,200 and the Japan Association for Communication, Information and Society (established in 2004) with more than 200 members.¹¹ Although there is no means to confirm how many political scientists participate in associations in the field of sociology, or how many sociologists participate in associations in the field of political science, topics concerning media and information are generally dealt with in sociology.

5. Current issues on digital politics in Japanese political science

It can be said that there are not enough institutional and theoretical resources upon which the study of digital politics can develop, at least in the field of political science. However, several

¹¹ This information is from the webpages of *the Directory of Academic Associations* (<https://gakkai.jst.go.jp/gakkai/>), run jointly by Science Council of Japan, Japan Science Support Foundation, and Japan Science and Technology Agency (as of October 5, 2017).

factors that could promote such development have recently made their presence felt.

One is the amendment of the Public Offices Election Law in 2013, which opened the way for the so-called “Net-Senkyo” (where an election campaign uses online services). The amendment made it possible for candidates and voters to use websites, social network services, blogs, and so on for election campaigns. It also enabled candidates to distribute emails with attached documents. Since then, three national elections have been held: the 2014 lower house election and the 2013 and 2016 upper house elections. In light of the 2013 upper house election, the first Net-Senkyo attracted attention from political scientists, and a number of studies have now been published on the effect of digital media on politics.¹² While it seems that little effect has been confirmed, research on this topic is expected to continue to grow.

Another institutional change is that the voting age was lowered from 20 to 18 years of age by an amendment to the Public Offices Election Law in 2015. One reason why political scientists in Japanese universities had not previously emphasized topics relevant to future voters might be because many students had not yet reached voting age. However, with the new amendment, and the fact that young people now frequently use digital devices such as smartphones, the importance of teaching students about digital technology and problems concerning politics will increase for researchers at universities. For example, *Shuken-sha Kyoiku* (education that is necessary for sovereign voters) has been a common topic for high school teachers recently, and researchers working in universities have been cooperating with them. For example, a proposal from the Political Science Committee of the Science Council of Japan in 2017 concerning the establishment of new high school subject Civics scheduled for 2022, states that the Internet-native generation using Twitter and Facebook also needs knowledge and prudence that differs from that acquired through the Internet.¹³ It is not clear what kind of knowledge for and against digital media is necessary at present. Still, cooperation between teachers and researchers to prepare younger generations for the digital age will undoubtedly accelerate under the new legal circumstances.

¹² A couple of representative works, both in Japanese, are Akashi SUGIYAMA, "A Survey of the First 'Internet Election': 2013 Japanese Upper House Election," in *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies*, Vol.20, Kyushu University, 2014, pp. 11-29, and Tetsukazu OKAMOTO, Shoichiro ISHIBASHI, and Toru WAKISAKA, "Measuring the Impact of the Internet Campaigning Liberalization on Voters : An Analysis Using the Data from the 2013 Upper House Election of Japan," in *The Law Review of Kansai University*, 64(6), 2015, pp. 1-22.

¹³ <http://www.scj.go.jp/ja/info/kohyo/pdf/kohyo-23-t239-2.pdf>. As of October 7, 2017.

The topics stated above are common in many countries around the world. However, there is also a unique phenomenon in Japan, and Japanese political science must address it. According to research by Vincenzo Cosenza (based on traffic data) and statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (based on the number of users), the popularity of Twitter has been far more dominant in Japan than other countries¹⁴(Table 3). The reason for this is not clear, but anonymity may be a factor. As Twitter is sometimes used to promulgate fake information and hate speech about politicians and minorities, research on the effect of the tool concerning divisive and malicious use needs to be conducted urgently, especially in light of the introduction of the Act on the Promotion of Efforts to Eliminate Unfair Discriminatory Speech and Behavior against Persons Originating from Outside Japan in 2016.¹⁵

6. Conclusion

There is no doubt that political scientists in Japan have to take digitalization seriously. However, against the backdrop of the powerlessness of the detached and abstract political science before World War II, post-war political science had to become a normative cornerstone of the newly emerging liberal democracy. This remains an important task for Japanese political scientists. There was a good reason why behavioral political science was introduced as late as the 1980s. The problem today is that research on the digitalization of politics must be conducted after the delayed introduction of behavioral political science and at the same time with research in the still influential subfields of, for example, the history of political thought and political philosophy. Recent changes in the Japanese legal system do not allow political scientists in Japan to confine themselves to limited specialized areas of research. Cooperation among political scientists studying different subfields and an exchange between political scientists and researchers of other fields (e.g., legal studies and education) are most needed in the new institutional landscape. Academic institutions may also need to change their traditional recruitment and faculty systems, which are reminiscent of the *Staatslehre* tradition. In this way, they can bring more researchers studying the topic of digitalization into the educational system of political science. These institutional changes and the

¹⁴ <http://vincos.it/world-map-of-social-networks/>, and <http://www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/ja/h28/html/nc132220.html>, as of October 7, 2017.

¹⁵ http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/m_jinken04_00001.html, as of October 7, 2017.

historical context set limits to the study of politics in this age of digital revolution. Nevertheless, they can also create the possibility for a new kind of research in political science, requiring cooperation among political scientists with a variety of concerns and interests.

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Table 1. The number of researchers in subfields based on JPSA categorization

History of Political Thought	125	Public Administration	192
History of Asian Political Thought	13	History of Public Administration	29
History of European Political Thought	131	Organizations of Public Administration	35
History of Political Thought in the US	17	Local Self-government and Politics	223
History of Political Thought in Russia and Eastern Europe	5	Policy analysis	106
History of Politics	14	Studies on Metropolis	36
History of Asian Politics	20	Political Study or Political Theory	264
History of European Politics	99	Political Methodology	25
History of the Politics of the US	44	Political Philosophy	108
History of Politics in Russia (the Soviet Union) and Eastern Europe	23	Political Regimes	27
Comparative Politics or Regional Studies	212	Political Development	23
Regional Studies in Asia	89	Studies on the Theory of State	32
Regional Studies in Europe	126	Political Institutions	70
Regional Studies in the US	60	Policy studies	48
Regional Studies in Russia (the Soviet Union) and Eastern Europe	36	Political Process	205
International Political Theory	109	Group Politics	14
International Society and Economics	22	Political Parties	67
International Organizations	23	Political Movements	20
International Relations and Diplomacy	178	Political Consciousness and Public Opinion	57
History of International Politics and Diplomacy	106	Political Information and Mass Communication	59
Study on War and Peace	73	Election Analysis and Voting Behavior	95
Comparative Culture and Political Anthropology	11	Political Culture	27
Studies on Japan	38	Languages concerning Politics	9
History of Japanese Political Thought	95	Political Sociology	55
History of Japanese Politics	196	Legal System and Constitution	39
History of Japanese Diplomacy	80	Political Economy and Fiscal Analysis	30
History of Occupation	18	Mathematical and Quantitative Analysis	45
Contemporary Japanese Politics	133	Political Systems	5
		Studies on Modern Society	35

Table 2. Study groups in the JPSA

Study group name	Subfield	Year of foundation
Contemporary Political Process	Political process	2007
Contemporary Political Process	Political process	2007
Modern Political Science	Political theory	2007
Comparative Political History of Prewar and Postwar Japan	History of politics	2007
Regional Governance	Public administration, local government	2007
History of the East Asian International Relations	History of politics	2007
Political Process of Japan	Political process	2007
Clinical Political Science	Political process	2007
Regional Integration	Comparative politics	2008
Political Methodology	Political process	2009
Policies and Institutions	Political process	2011
Modern Local Politics	Local politics	2012
Micro Political and Economic Behavior	Political process	2013
Western Politics	Comparative politics	2014
Critical Political Theory	Critical political theory	2015
Gender and Politics	Gender and politics	2015

Table 3. Usage rate of social networking sites by country

(Based on the 2016 Information and Communications White Paper by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications)

(%)

	Facebook	Google+	Twitter	LinkedIn	YouTube	Instagram	Pinterest
Korea	69.3	27.6	33.0	5.6	58.8	29.1	2.9
China	16.1	14.7	9.4	6.9	12.2	4.1	2.6
Japan	35.3	9.4	28.7	2.1	39.5	10.2	1.5
India	92.9	62.3	50.5	46.5	78.3	25.9	17.2
Germany	64.4	18.6	12.5	5.1	47.9	10.4	5.6
US	77.7	29.1	39.1	26.3	53.7	34.3	24.4

	Line	KakaoTalk	WeChat
Korea	20.2	75.6	1.5
China	4.0	1.1	88.2
Japan	44.9	1.4	0.5