

The emergence of comparative politics in Japan

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Abstract

This article describes the emergence of comparative politics in Japan in the new millennium. Applying Lipset's American exceptionalism as a negation of comparative politics to the oft-used Japanese uniqueness and particularism, I characterized a newly-born comparative politics Japanese style as: 1) metamorphosis of standard comparative politics; 2) dramatic rise of cross-national survey research; and 3) bringing area specialists and comparativists together. Some pronounced conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical issues that remain to be tackled are discussed. In conclusion, the non-exceptionalist comparative politics based on conceptual clarity, methodological sophistication, and narrative persuasiveness is the line along which Japanese comparative politics should be evolving.

Keywords

comparative politics, Japan, non-exceptionalism, regime change

Introduction

Seymore Martin Lipset (1960) is known for saying that one cannot know everything about a particular country or society if one does not know about other countries or societies. Being able to place and weigh up a society or country in a comparative context is essential for authentic knowledge.

Lipset was painfully aware that American social science has often been addicted to American exceptionalism. Richard Rose (1989) quibbles:

America marches to a different drummer. Its uniqueness is explained by any or all of a variety of reasons: history, size, geography, political institutions, and culture. Explanations of the growth of government in Europe are not expected to fit American experience, and vice versa.

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Lipset's books and other writings revolve around the theme of American exceptionalism. *The First New Nation* (1955) and *American Exceptionalism* (1996) are two of the most noted of his writings about American exceptionalism. In the former he compares the development of the United States and Canada. In the latter he compares the development of the United States and Europe. In his mind his social science is intrinsically comparative in its nature. In exploring one of his pet subjects, cleavage and stratification, he assiduously compares America and Europe. It is as if trans-Atlantic comparison would be nearly sufficient for his comparison to produce authentic knowledge. Thus the cleavage theory of political support patterns which Lipset and Stein Rokkan, a Norwegian sociologist, together proposed is very systemically comparative, thereby presumably overcoming the American exceptionalism at least in Lipset's own mind (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

In this article I explore the emergence of comparative politics in the development of Japanese political science in relation to the changing features of the Japanese regimes especially since 1945.

The emergence of comparative politics in Japan

Discussing the development of political science in Japan, Inoguchi (1995, 2012) focused on the two themes: 1) what went wrong with modern Japanese history ending up with the total defeat in 1945; and 2) how Japanese political science might learn from Western political philosophers in reconstructing Japanese political institutions. The first theme led Japanese historians and social scientists to examine Japanese politics from 1853 to 1945 in often exhaustive detail. The second theme led Japanese philosophers and political scientists to find out which philosophers fit well with Japanese institutions. These themes were dominant in political science for the period between 1945 (the year of defeat) and 1968 (the year of student revolts nationwide as well as worldwide).

The period between 1968 and 1989, the end of the Cold War, was the period of the inflows of American social science on the one hand, and the permeation of self-assertive Japanese uniqueness on the other. In the third quarter of the 20th century, American political science bloomed with the trinity of professional spirit and training, methodological positivism of testing hypothesis, and the aggressive expansion based on the 'publish or perish' culture. In coping with the inflows and influx of American political science, the contre-temps of putting the emphasis on Japanese uniqueness emerged. The latter trend mitigated the former trend thanks in part to the 'Japan as number one' syndrome, whereby something similar to American exceptionalism took root in Japanese society, albeit briefly. Junichi Kyogoku, professor of political science at the University of Tokyo, published a book on the latter trend, *The Dynamics of Japanese Politics* (Kyogoku, 1983), in which all things are understood more or less in relation to the all-embracing cultural concept wherein 'sui generis' is most often used.

The battle between American universalism and Japanese uniqueness simmered around 1989 when Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* (Fukuyama, 1992) led many to look into similarities and differences between democracies and capitalisms when communism, at least in Europe, had disappeared. Thus 1989 is the benchmark of the emergence of comparative politics in Japan as well.

Regime and the development of comparative politics

Regime changes of two sorts took place in Japan (Krauss and Pekkanen, 2011). One was the Hosokawa-led, all opposition-led coalition excluding the Communist Party (1993–1994) and the subsequent Socialist-led coalition government with the Liberal Democratic Party (1994–1997),

and the other was the Democratic Party-led government (2009–2012). Both regimes were short-lived. But their impacts were not small. Both regimes were ignited by the collapse in 1991 of the economic bubbles fermented in the 1980s and the subsequent deflationary economic trend which lasted more than two decades until Shinzo Abe II implemented what might be called the revolutionary policy of monetary easing in 2013 (Inoguchi, 2013a, 2014a). The influences of both the two-decade-long deflation (1991–2013) and monetary easing (from 2013 onward) on the nature of regimes are visible. There was a pronounced, steady fragmentation of what was euphemistically called the ‘middle mass’ or ‘middle class’ which had enlarged during the high economic growth period (1960–1973) (Miura, 2005; Murakami, 1982). The post-oil crisis lowered economic growth period (1973–1985) contributed to the dissolution of the enlarged middle class formed in the preceding period. Yet the real fragmentation needed the formation of the bubbled economy (1985–1991), ignited by the Plaza accord (1985) and the sudden collapse of the Japanese economic bubble (1991). Three factors contributed to the two-decade-long deflation of the economy (1991–2013) in which the zero-interest-rate economy met the preference of big business, the government, and the middle class. Big business steadily embarked on business investment abroad when the domestic market shrank. The government relied on the issuing of government bonds to meet the reduced government revenue and the political inability to introduce tax hikes. The middle mass steadily fragmented itself by sticking to what it had attained. Ironically, the emphasis on Japanese uniqueness or Japanese exceptionalism and the comparative outlook expanded in Japanese political science as well. When the standing of Japan in the world slowly receded and when the emerging economies, especially Japan’s neighbors, rose very steadily, big business shifted its attention to markets abroad. The middle class found no strong reason for the continuing emphasis on many Japanese virtues as expounded in Ezra Vogel’s *Japan as Number One* (1981) when virtues such as diligence, life-long employment, lowest Gini (inequality) figure, consensus decision making, and family solidarity were increasingly difficult to observe. Thus Japanese political science inadvertently went comparative.

The blossoming of comparative politics Japanese style

Comparative politics means the departure from Japanese exceptionalism in the Lipset sense. At the dawn of the new millennium such blossoming started to take place. Three major genres are identified: 1) metamorphosis of standard comparative politics; 2) survey data-based comparative analysis; and 3) area specialists going English.

Metamorphosis of standard comparative politics

By metamorphosis I mean the not-so-subtle but sudden change in the angle of comparison. In the immediate postwar period (1945–1968), comparative politics means the Western political philosophy from which the defeated and repentant Japan hoped to discover a new Japanese regime model. Skipping the period of Japanese uniqueness and exceptionalism (1968–1989) and the period of Japanese floating identity (1989–2000) (Inoguchi, 1979; Muramatsu and Krauss, 1987; Pempel and Tsunekawa, 1979), in the new millennium (2001–) the object of comparison shifted from learning to new discovery. Foreign countries offered new vistas for academic curiosity and research. Intellectual history and philosophical reflection were replaced by comparative empirical inquiries. Normative questions on justice, peace, equality, dignity, identity, and rights were slowly but steadily overwhelmed by empirical questions on participation, influence, benefits, well-being,

and representation. It is not that normative questions are asked less often but that empirical research questions are asked more often and that publications of empirical research have increased dramatically in the new millennium. Some standard and orthodox comparative politics inquiries have continued to be carried out. Some notable examples include: comparative political economic analysis of Japan, the United States, and South Korea by Yoshiaki Kobayashi (2014); comparative analysis of political party manifestoes by Naoko Taniguchi (2014); and comparative inquiry into electoral rules in Asia and Pacific by Yuko Kasuya (2010).

The dramatic rise of cross-national survey research

The periods of learning from the West (1945–1968) and of exhorting Japanese virtues (1968–1989) did not register the frequent use of survey research for comparative research. Although George Gallup established the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1935, it was only after 1945 that public opinion research became routine in Japan for business, politics, and mass media. Even then, academically inspired public opinion research focused on Japanese politics, especially in the domains of elections and voting behavior. Into the new millennium the picture has changed dramatically. The frequency of public opinion research across nations has increased. The scope of public opinion research ranges from quality of life, democracy and democratization, non-profit civic associations and organizations, national characters, and health and the environment. The dramatic rise of public opinion research across nations has been driven by a number of factors: disillusionment with learning from the West; disenchantment about exhorting Japanese uniqueness, especially virtues; and government investment in upgrading academic and scientific levels, coping with the increasingly competitive tide of globalization in higher education.

Quality of life has attracted two big projects: those by Iwai (2014) and Inoguchi and Fujii (2012).

Iwai examined Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese societies, using a Chicago-format general social survey questionnaire. Inoguchi and Fujii's research covered all of the Asian societies (East Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia) plus Asia's adjacent neighbors, Russia, Australia, and the United States, with the quality of life questionnaire as the organizing formula. Research on democracy and democratization has been conducted by Blondel and Inoguchi (2006), Inoguchi and Blondel (2008), and Inoguchi and Marsh (2008), covering nine Asian and nine European societies and focusing on how citizens link their identity, satisfaction, and trust to the state. Civic associations and non-profit organizations have been examined with the standardized cross-national survey for selective Asian societies (Tsujinaka, 2002). Health and environment have led Inoguchi (2014b) to examine 10 Association of South-East Asian Nations member countries. Inoguchi et al., (2014) covers 12 Asian societies on the degree of satisfaction with health, environment, income, family, housing, workplace, and food, taking advantage of the Asian Network for Public Opinion Research, a network association of Asian pollsters.

Bringing area specialists and comparatists closer

For historical reasons, in Japan, area specialists are larger in number than those who categorize themselves as comparative politics specialists. The former have accumulated both historians and field work researchers for the last century and a half, whereas the latter have emerged and increased in number only in the last quarter of the 20th century. Whereas the former have had strong links with business and government, quasi-governmental organizations such as think tanks

have been run by area specialists of various kinds, especially those under the umbrella of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry. Two factors have encouraged the two to move closer: 1) government deficits have become of astronomical proportions, which has led to reductions in the sizes of quasi-governmental think tanks; and 2) business has been relocating factories and services abroad in tandem with the tide of globalization. Area specialists shrunk in number and comparative politics specialists expanded in number both need to collaborate with each other, whether in business, government, or academia. The Japan Consortium for Area Studies was established at Kyoto University in 2004 and has been active in bringing them together to learn from each other, with the publication of a journal, *Area Studies* (in Japanese).

The academic branch of comparative politics has grown for the last quarter of the 20th century, as has been summarized above. The Japan Association for Comparative Politics was established in 1998. It will start publishing an online journal called *Hikaku Seiji Kenkyu in 2015 (Japanese Journal of Comparative Politics)*, in Japanese and in English, in 2015. It has been publishing edited books annually since 1999 with such titles as *Politics of Social Welfare*, *Contemporary Democracy*, *Comparative Politics of Gender, Cities and Political Innovation*, *Comparative Politics of International Migration*, *Politics of Leadership*, *Has Terrorism Changed Politics?*, *The Future of Comparative Politics*, *Comparing Japanese Politics*, *Chinese Politics in Comparative Perspective*, *Nation States within the European Union*, *Religion and Politics*, *Conditions of National Coexistence*, *Politics of Globalization*, and *Administrative Reform in the World*. Waseda University Press (WUP) and Minerva Bookstore (MB) have been publishing book series with titles such as: *Democratic Identities*, *Comparative Welfare Politics*, *Deliberative and Participatory Democracy*, and *Comparative Politics of Executives* (from WUP) and *Populism*, *Democracy and Leadership*, *Constructivist Political Theory and Comparative Politics*, and *Politics of Expertise* (from MB).

A thorough survey of comparative politics research by Munck and Snyder (2007) enables us to see that all five categories – political order, political reigns, social actors, domestic and state institution, and economic process – are well covered by its annual publications.

Whither comparative politics Japanese style

I have noted two pronounced features of comparative politics in Japan: 1) the persistent influence of the once-predominant area studies carried over from colonial studies in the past (–1945) and invigorated through close collaboration with business and government in the heyday of the high economic growth period (1960–1989); and 2) the persistent influence of Japanese uniqueness and exceptionalism which itself peaked in the heyday of ‘Japan as number one’ (1968–1989).

The shackle of area studies?

Emperor Meiji proclaimed in 1868 the Five Articles of the Meiji Restoration, in running the modern Japanese state. This oath by Emperor Meiji is very informative of the spirit of modern Japan. To summarize: the Japanese subjects should seek knowledge throughout the world (universalism in knowledge search); everything should be guided by the just law of nature (rationalism should guide everything); all matters should be decided by public discussion (democracy should prevail); everyone, irrespective of class or other differences, should carry out the affairs of state to strengthen the foundation of imperial rule.

What were called World Affairs and Colonial Problems were pursued predominantly by government and quasi-governmental organizations until 1945 and were the precursors of comparative politics whose pronounced features were: 1) seeking accurate and detailed description; and 2) observing events and personalities from the angle of imperial Japan (Inoguchi, 1995). After 1945, the name was changed to Area Studies, due in part to the United States' preference for diffusing American area studies as a model of academic and policy research into developing areas of the world and enriching American area studies by digesting what Japanese area studies had inherited from the pre-1945 period. American area studies was promoting the modernization paradigm by WW Rostow and others which differed from Japanese area studies, now being repentant about the past but retaining a solid and meticulous idiographic descriptive approach whether in historians' text criticism or anthropologists' or economists' fieldwork.

Disillusionment about Japanese uniqueness?

As Japanese per capita income level reached its peak, uniqueness talk abounded. As has been noted above, the illusion of Japanese uniqueness was shattered in part in the two-decade-long experience of the stable but zero-interest deflationary economy (Inoguchi, 2013, 2013a). For instance, Japanese diligence and deference to the elderly have been lost according to the AsiaBarometer survey (Inoguchi, 2013a, forthcoming). Arithmetic and linguistic literacy levels have been much lower in Japan than in some East Asian neighboring countries (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf>). Although Japan has been rated very high across Asia-Pacific except for China and South Korea in terms of how the rest of the world feels about it (Pew Research Center, 2013), the alliance partner, the United States, has sometimes been adrift about commitment to an alliance with Japan (Smith, 2015). Former US Ambassador Mike Mansfield's one sentence, 'the most important bilateral relations—bar none', has not been echoed by Japanese leaders lately.

Japanese pride in the upper level of manufacturing related technology has been retained. Japan's technological semi-hegemonic position in East and Southeast Asia has been steadily challenged yet not overtaken. Symbolically, the number of Nobel prize winners for Japan amounts to 19 (mostly for service and medicine), while South Korea has one (the peace prize) and China has three (peace and literary prizes given to dissidents of the Chinese government and medicine most lately). This is a source of pride for Japanese citizens.

All the above is meant to show how the negative legacies, past and recent, have been muted in comparative politics in Japan.

Some pronounced issues: Conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical

Conceptual issues

Comparison entails the choice of strategy for selecting objects to compare. Japanese comparative politics used to focus on Western political philosophy. Which philosophy fit best to Japanese institutions and practice in the latter half of the 20th century? Japan's desire in this time was to catch up with OECD Western countries in terms of per capita income level and democratic institutions. Thus comparative politics in Japan during the 1945–1968 period focused on OECD countries for comparison. In the early 1990s, the author of this article organized a publication series on *States*

and *Societies in East Asia* for the University of Tokyo Press (Inoguchi, 1993–1994). The six volumes, each dealing with China, Taiwan, North Korea, South Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, were reviewed very highly by the *Journal of Asian Studies* (Ozawa, 1994). It was only in the late 2000s and early 2010s that comparative politics textbooks began to examine Japan along with regional countries. Yuko Kasuya (2010), for example, examined the East and Southeast Asian countries' presidential systems – the rules and institutions – and similar attempts also flourished. One should not forget this: Reed (1993) has been a front runner in preaching anti-exceptionalism in Japanese Studies and Reed (2006) has demonstrated his non-exceptionalistic comparative politics as taught in Japan.

Theoretical issues

American paradigms of political science were largely born in the third quarter of the 20th century: cleavage theory by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) on political parties and elections; Downsian voters tending to crowd the central position when placed on any scale (Downs, 1957); Inglehartian theory of materialist and post-materialist citizens (Inglehart, 1977, 1989, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005); democratization triggered by per capita income level X (UNDP); popular confidence in the government reaching its height when war-related deaths and unemployment are counted as low (Hibbs, 1987); in a district in which dynastic politicians have prevailed for a generation or two, district economic development slackens because the politicians win elections with ease year after year (Fukumoto, 2015).

The question posed to Asianists: does Asian comparative politics give birth to new theoretical paradigms? Perhaps mildly and continuously yes. Inoguchi (2015a) has presented a new typology of civil societies on the basis of satisfaction with daily life aspects in 29 Asian societies whereby three types are generated by the rank order of materialist, post-materialist, and public sector-related satisfaction levels. Also, economic policy management by government is like the government surfing over economic waves rather than manipulating the type of economic policy instruments, especially when widespread doubt is cast on the effectiveness of policy instruments (Inoguchi, 1983). In Margaret Thatcher's view, Europe is shaped by history whereas the United States is molded by philosophy. If that is true, it is no wonder that Europe and its extension, Latin America, are full of some new theoretical paradigms like those of S Rokka, G Sartori, FM Cardoso, and GO O'Donnell. Leading on from Thatcher's view, is Asia framed by geography? This is my hunch after reading and reviewing Bruce Gilley's (2014) *Asian Politics*, in which he argues that power considerations dominate politics in Asia. In my review of his book, I argue that if one looks at Asia from above, that may be true, but that if one looks at Asia from below, somewhat different pictures of diversity, heterogeneity, and plurality emerge (Inoguchi, 2015b), like Inoguchi's society-focused typology of Asia (Inoguchi, 2015a).

Methodological issues

American comparative politics paradigms have tended to be Westphalian, in the sense that comparative analysis has tended to be based on national samples whereby responses are recorded to a questionnaire given to randomly selected groups of people taken from the whole national population. When American comparative politics examine human rights, democracy, and equality, they are Philadelphian. However, instead of choosing a global or regional sample of people, they stick to national sampling on the basis of the national population. Gilani and Inoguchi (2015) have been experimenting with the contrast between the global sample and the sum of national samples in

terms of precision and costs involved. Their preliminary results show that with the use of Google Earth technology the global sampling method yields quite robust and efficient results.

Empirical issues

The traditional Japanese approach to area studies has involved an idiographic and empirical approach to its subjects. The term 'barefoot empiricism' is often used ironically to describe the dominant Japanese approach. This strength has not been well developed for comparative politics. Two major reasons exist: first, academic publication has been overwhelmingly limited to the Japanese language; second, those area studies specialists use local languages very well for their field work. When combined, those area studies specialists do not show up very much in the English language in academic publications.

Conclusion

Comparative politics in Japan has become a solid (sub-)discipline in the new millennium. Having gone through the learning from the West period (1945–1968), the identifying Japanese uniqueness period (1968–1989), and the rediscovering Japanese strength period (1989–2015), the period of synthesizing West and East (2015–) has begun. It is an attempt to synthesize social science and area studies, to integrate Western conceptual clarity and Asian sensitivity to nature and culture (Inoguchi, 2008, 2009), and to come up with non-exceptionalist comparative politics based on conceptual clarity, methodological sophistication, and narrative persuasiveness. At least this is one of the goals that many Japanese comparativists have in mind.

To illustrate what I mean by non-exceptionalist comparative politics, I will briefly describe what I have been working on of late – global citizens' preferences and multilateral treaties registered at the UN (Le et al., 2014). Since 1935 when George Gallup established his American Institute of Public Opinion, opinion polls have proliferated the world over. Ronald Inglehart has made his World Values Survey (WVS) one of the universal and indispensable data-cum-tools for understanding how citizens feel about daily life, political preference, and international events throughout the world. Christian Welzel (2013) has updated and synthesized the accumulated WVS findings by identifying key dimensions of global citizens' preferences and locating 10 regions of the world onto these key dimensions. As if global citizens' preferences were reflected by global legislation, multilateral treaties turned out to be broadly in harmony with global citizens' preferences in terms of key dimensions and each country's locations on these dimensions. Although there is no global parliament as such, there are a number of global legislative institutions called regimes composed of various international organizations and non-governmental transnational organizations and movements. One hundred and twenty multilateral treaties deposited at the United Nations are selected in our work as a set of global legislations. A number of their features in terms of their policy domains (like labor, peace and disarmament, intellectual property rights, commerce and trade, environment, and health), the year of promulgation for each country, the difference between promulgation and ratification for each country, the country distribution over time as legislative yeas or nays votes, etc are factor analyzed to generate key dimensions onto which each country is located (Inoguchi and Le, 2015).

A most important, albeit provisional, finding is that key dimensions of global citizens' preferences and multilateral treaties legislation are fairly similar in contents, and their correlation coefficients between the first dimensions of citizens' preferences and multilateral legislations are

significantly high, e.g. at 0.5. No less significant is each country's location on key dimensions. In terms of both key dimensions of citizens' preferences and global legislations, the predominance of the broad West is striking. By predominance I mean that the West prevails in the high locations of emancipative (vs protective) and secular (vs sacred) orientations. The broad West means especially such countries as the US, the UK, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. In other words, there are enormous disparities between each country's locations on key dimensions to favor the emancipative and secular legislations of citizens' preferences. Whether it is good or bad is left for readers' judgments. But the point here is that non-exceptionalist comparative politics is aimed at carrying out this work.

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