

WHAT KIND OF POLITICAL PROCESS WILL APPEAR IN THE 21st CENTURY ?

—A Hypothesis From the Interest Group Perspective*—

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1. Introduction

The political process of the 21st century I believe is too big to tackle in this short discussion. However, it is also not too early to begin to cope with this major issue, because there seem to be many characteristics which may be clearly perceived as quite different from trends in the 20th century.⁽¹⁾

I am now engaged in three different but closely related projects; "Social Impacts of the Public Administration Reform by *Rinchō*⁽²⁾," secondly "The Crisis of the Welfare State⁽³⁾," and finally "The Role of the Opposition Parties in Japan and its Future⁽⁴⁾". *Rinchō* (*Ad Hoc* Commission on Administrative Reforms, set up in 1981, 3/16, dissolved in 1983, 3/15) is the most important and effective policy-making body or arena initiated by the conservative bloc. This commission enthusiastically argued that Japan should not follow the European path of Welfare State or Big Government if the people want to continue to enjoy the affluence, especially in the unstable environment since the mid-70s⁽⁵⁾. This argument is partly true when we see European countries suffering from economic stagnation under the heavy burden of welfare expenditure⁽⁶⁾. Figure 1 shows simplified relationships among principal concepts of the main trend in advanced countries before 1975, when the oil shock

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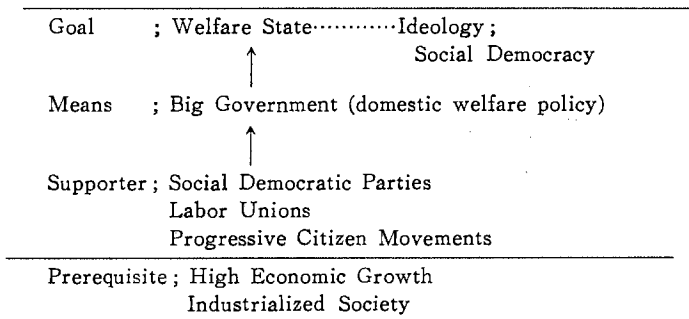


Figure 1 Main Trend in the Advanced Countries before 1975

and subsequent world-wide depression completely deny the prerequisite or radically destroy the base of this scheme. Following the Socialist or Communist ideal, the Social Democratic ideal seems to be fading. Although this model has been established by European social democrats, Japanese opposition parties, which always imitate other nation's models, seem to be puzzled and confused in the pits of disillusion.

However, we have to direct the stream of policy toward the future. *Rincho*, the crisis of welfare state, and the dullness of the opposition parties are not only the result of world-wide low economic growth caused by the sequential oil shocks, but also a symptom of the great transformation originated in cumulative changes in various fields, which leads to the 21st century.

The purpose of this short essay is to sketch the transformation, secondly, to point out several important aspects of the change in interest groups reflecting that process, and then to present some materials to shed light on the 21st century's political process.

2. Great Transformation in the Social Process Since the Mid-70s

Since the mid-70s, great social and political changes have occurred, and in the 80s these changes become tangible to people living throughout Japan. Through all advanced countries, the situation they share may be apparently similar, but the Japanese situation seems to be most dramatic because of its simultaneity. The transformation could be summarized into four dimensions as follows; low and uncertain economic growth or zero-sum society⁽⁷⁾; post-industrialization⁽⁸⁾ or softnomics (soft + economics)⁽⁹⁾ inclined toward information and service industries; aging society and increasing social participation of women; and increasing international dependency

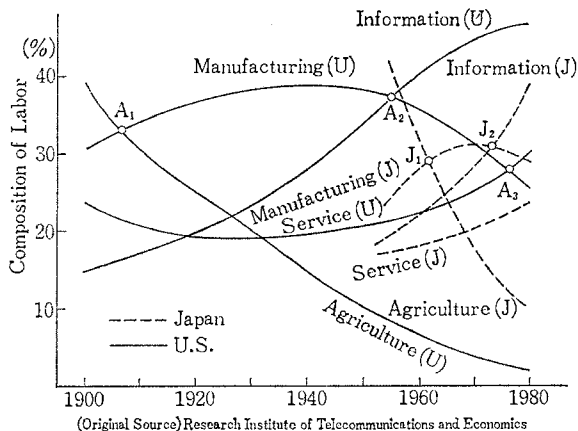
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from commerce to politics or internationalization.

Although each of the four aspects mentioned above needs at least several pages of explanation, all what we can do in this short treatment is to comment briefly and provide three graphs which give a quick overview of the situation of Japanese society since 1970s.

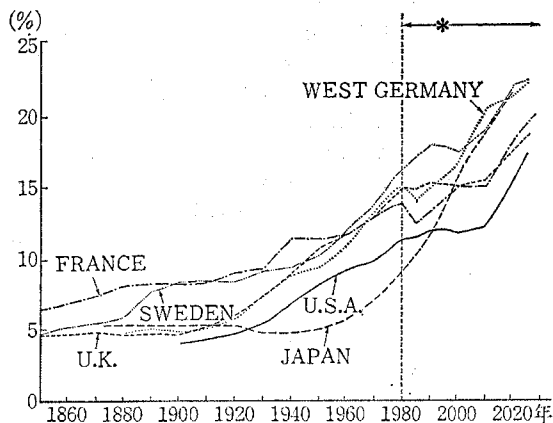
In a sense, a decisive or critical turning point was the twice oil shocks. Some sectors were directly and others were indirectly influenced or mediated by it. The first oil shock damaged the Japanese economy terribly in a comparative perspective. Since then all the budgetary units, such as the government, corporations, and households have been suffering from deficits. In other words, a zero-sum society has arisen, where one person's gain is another's loss, and therefore the struggles among organized, especially vested interests have been getting increasingly severer (exactly speaking, in the government sector, since 1981 the zero-sum situation has emerged because of the zero-or-minus ceiling budgetary policy.)

Since the same year as the first oil shock occurred, Japanese society has turned into a post-industrial society accelerated and followed by depression (Figure 2). Other advanced countries, except the U.S., which is running about 15 years ahead, also have entered upon this stage. In this kind of society, more than half of the population is working under the non-goods-productive sector, such as information and service. Boundaries among industries are getting ambiguous and confused. Not only the



cited from Ken'ichi Imai ed. *Jōhō netto wāku-ka to Sangyō Soshiki* (Information Network Formation and Industrial Organization) (Okurashō Insatsukyoku, 1984) p. 6.

Figure 2 Changing Industrial Structure in Japan and United States



* Estimated by Institute of Population Problems in the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

(Source) Council of Population Problem ed., *Nippon no Jinkō Nippon no Shakai* (Japanese Population and Society), (Tōyōkeizai Shinpō-sha, 1984), p. 30.

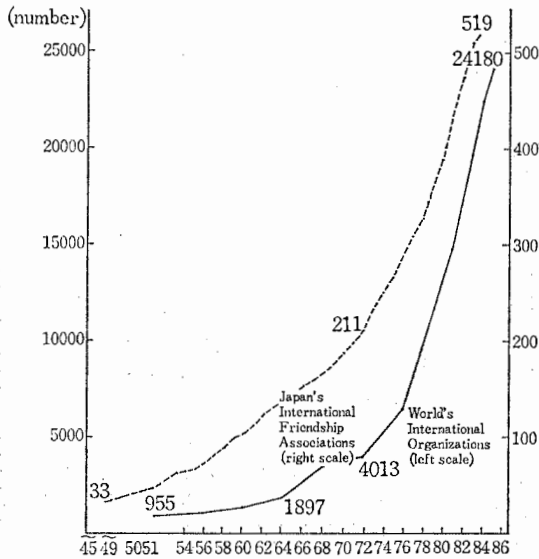
Figure 3 Changing Proportion of Aged Persons (older than 65 years old)

content of technology and industry, but also the quality of labor and human relations at the workplace have drastically changed.

Since it is closely connected to both changes, the demographic factor should not be overlooked. Demographically speaking, the budgetary crisis should be considered as an “aging society” problem, or how an increasing aged population can be supported by a relatively decreasing working population. This graph (Figure 3) clearly shows that in this “aging race”, Japan was a late-comer but soon will catch up with other ‘advanced’ countries.

In old Japan and still now, the problem of who takes care of the aged, especially the bedridden, is a heavy burden to women. While social participation of women is increasing, a considerable number of women painfully manage to coordinate their social activities and domestic lives including the care for the elderly.

Besides domestic social changes, the international environment is also being transformed. An world-wide explosion of international organizations occurred just after the beginning of the summit meeting in 1975, and since then the number has grown six times between 1972-85 (Figure 4). Internationalization relates to all aspects of life. But politically, the trade friction issue,



(Source) • *Yearbook of International Organizations* 1985/86.
 • *Wagakuni no Kokusai-bunka-kōryū Dantai Ichiran* 1985 (International Friendship Associations in Japan).

Figure 4 Internationalization of Association

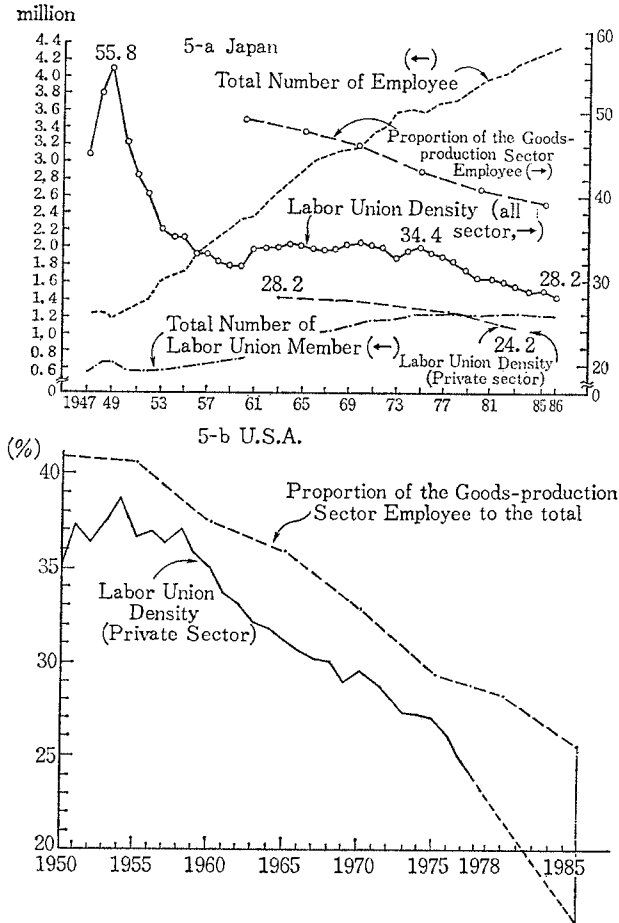
particularity between Japan and the U.S., and increasing capital mobility as a result of the liberalization of money goods, are especially critical.

3. Changing Trends of the Interest Group Politics

From the other point of view, four aspects of the transformation can be expressed as four tasks from the changing society. In contemporary democratic society, various interest groups ranging from huge peak organization to *ad hoc* small voluntary meetings are expected to mediate these issues and transmit them to political arena. Thus, in order to forecast the future, we should inquire and research the situation or dynamics of groups, particularly their formation⁽¹⁰⁾. In this section, we will discuss what kind of interest groups are formed and activated, and what are declining inactively matching or not matching, the transformation.

First of all, we would like to pay attention to low-spirited groups; labor unions. Figure 5-a (Japan) and especially 5-b (U.S.) eloquently show the parallelism between the declining proportion of employee in

goods production and the declining density of labor union in the private sector⁽¹⁾. This is a clear reaction of post-industrialization or softnomics. Considering the importance of union support for the welfare policy and support for opposition parties in all respects, the impact of such a drastic



(Source) • 5-a Ministry of Labor ed., *Nippon no Rōdōkumiai no Genjō* 1987 (Japanese Labor Union Today).
 • 5-b Richard B. Freeman & James L. Medoff, *What Do Unions Do* (Basic Books, 1984), Figure 15, 1.

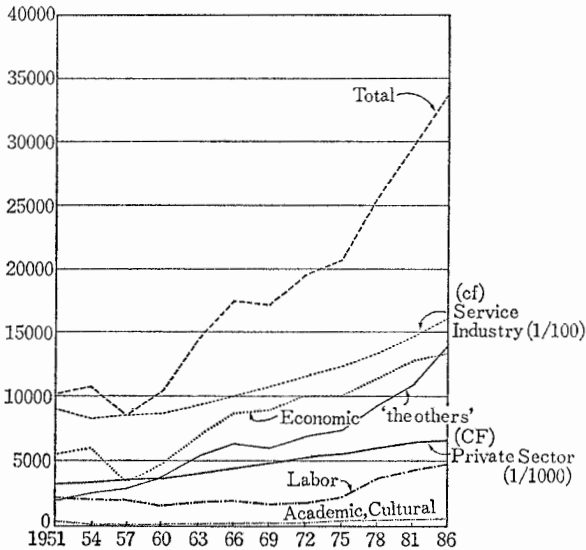
Figure 5 Parallelism between the Goods-production Sector and Labor Union Density

decay is inevitably critical. In addition, in the same manner as unions, their partners in the 1960s, that is, citizen movements and residential protest groups, seem to be inactive after the oil shocks, especially in Japan⁽¹²⁾.

Lacking the old important actors of welfare policy, we are rushing into an aging society which has never been experienced.

On the other hand, the last decade was the age of the group explosion, the fourth wave of flourishing new groups (Figure 6-a) in Japan. The total number of association with payroll has increased from 20 thousand to 33 thousand between 1975 and 86. These waves are important because after the first wave (late 20s to 30s), the Japanese type of Fascism emerged, and then the "1955 Regime System" followed the second wave (1945-50). Recently the opposition was subdivided and fragmented along the third wave (1960-66)⁽¹³⁾. Besides, different from the preceding three waves, characterized as industrial and domestic, the fourth wave now going on is unique in quality, that is post-industrial and international.

Figure 6-b shows the contrast between the third wave (1960s) and the fourth (1975 to 80s). While in the former, economic or business associations, particularly sector-based manufacturers' industries, played the main melody,



(Source) Statistics Bureau in the Management and Coordination Agency, *Establishment Census of Japan*, each year.

Figure 6-a Changing Number of Association with Payroll

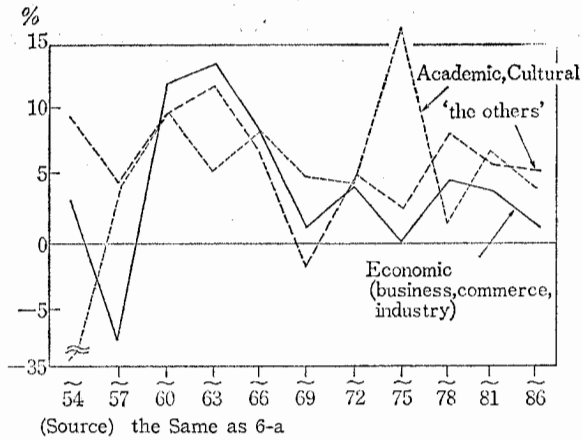
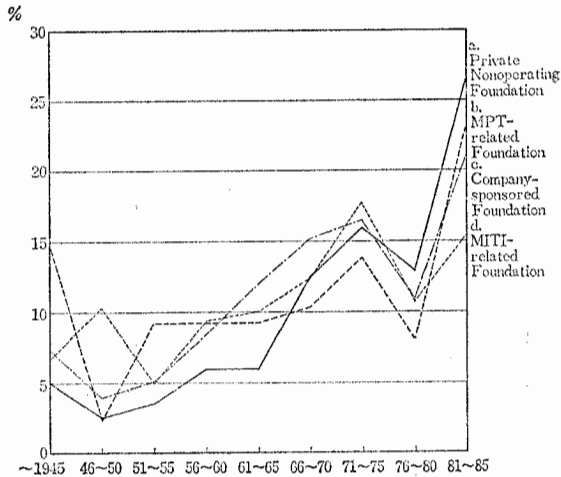


Figure 6-b Increase Rate of Associations with Payroll (per year averaged, %)



note; each point, except the first, shows the percentage of formation in each five years to the total.

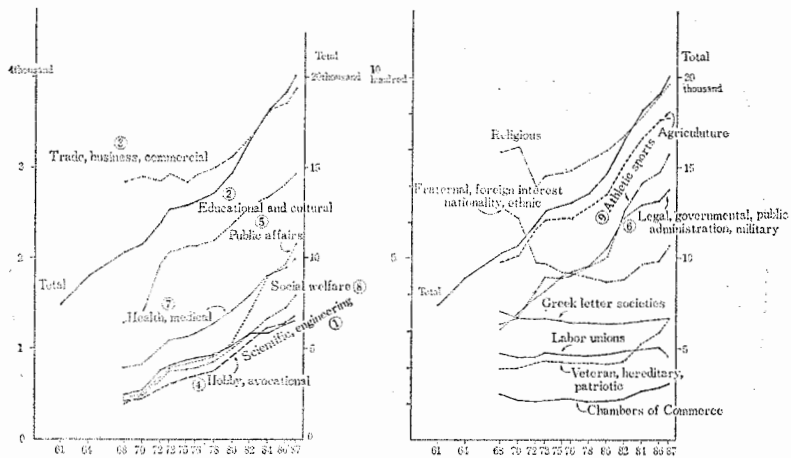
- (Source) a; Josei Zaidan Shiryo Sentā, *Josei Dantai Yorān* 1988, (Private Non-Operating Foundation Directory).
 b; Teishin Kenkyūkai, *Yūseisyō-shokan Zenkoku Kōeki Dantai Maikan* 1986 (Foundation Directory of Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications).
 c; Takako Amamiya "Kigyō Zaidan no Genjō (Company-Sponsored Foundation Today)" *Kōekihōjin* Vol. 15, No. 1 (1986).
 d; MITI, *Kōeki Dantai Binran* 1987 (Foundation Directory of MITI).

Figure 7 Distribution of Foundation Formation

in the latter, a category called 'the others' plays it and in regard to the growth rate, academic and cultural groups are also remarkable. If we step into the individual organizational level, legally speaking, a number of 'foundations' would appear (cf. Figure 7). Functionally, a significant number of 'think-tanks' or information centers could be observed, and by nature they should be located in the gray-area between the public and the private sector.

We may understand the arrangement of new groups, if we switch our consideration to the American trends (Figure 8). There, in short, soft-nomics (①②③④) and internationalization-related groups (⑤⑥) (in addition, unlike Japan, aging-society-related groups (⑦⑧⑨)) are increasing rapidly in this decade. American case must be heuristic because of being advanced more than 10 years with respect to post-industrialization, internationalization and affluent society.

As mentioned before, under the harsh realities of zero-sum society, old vested interest groups such as agricultural cooperatives, medical associations, local government associations, concerned with subsidy policy, are being cornered, in spite of their efforts.



(Source) Gale Research Co., *Encyclopedia of Associations*, each year.

Figure 8 Changing Number of Various Associations in the U. S. A.

4. Suggestions for Future Politics

Summarizing the situation of the social transformation and interest group sectors, we can find four categories of group fields corresponding to the four dimensions of change or four tasks from it. Needless to say, four changes, zero-sum, aging, post-industrial and internationalizing society and tasks of how to adapt the system to them, are equally important for us. Above all, while adapting it, keeping balance of them or equilibrium must be critical.

However, as observed roughly above, the gears of the social transformation and interest groups seem not to be meshing smoothly. That is to say, a great number of groups coping with internationalization and post-industrialization are flourishing, while supporters for welfare policy tackling aging society and women's problem seem to be shrinking or fading. And old vested interests which are facing hard time under the zero-sum situation can be not more than the status quo. (Figure 9 is mere a rough-hypothetical drawing.)

This gap, in appearance, is advantageous to the conservative bloc.

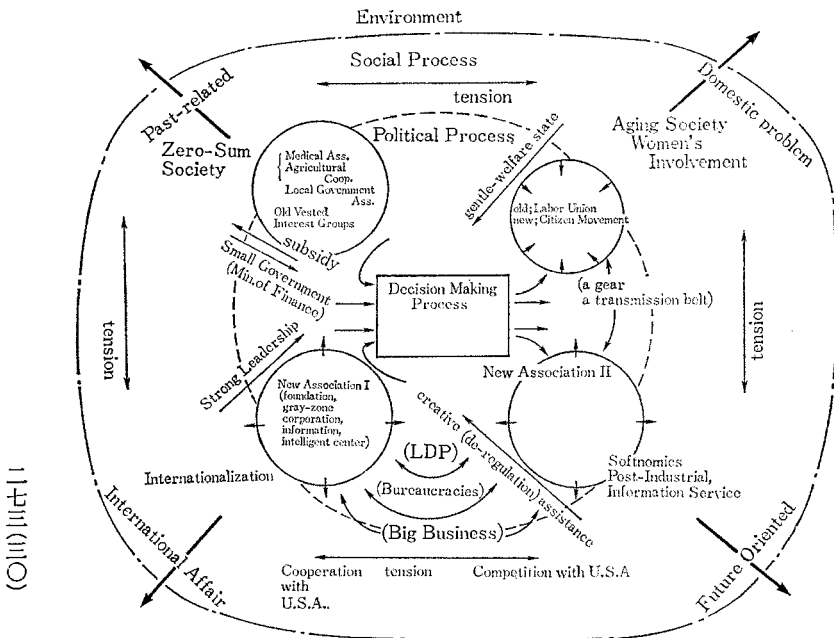


Figure 9 Gap between Political Process and Social Process

reflectionists still keep partial validity. See David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process, Introduction to the second edition*, (Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, (Harvard University Press, 2nd 1971), David Knoke, "Associations and Interest Groups," *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol 12, 1986.

- (11) While this parallelism might exist among most of advanced countries, it can be clear in Japan and U. S. A. One of the reasons may be originated in the form of labor union and characteristics of industrial relation in both countries. And this reason may be connected with the fact that they are the only countries among advanced countries that have never experienced "the industrial period" when, regarding composition of labor, the 2nd sector (manufacturing, mining) occupies the first place among three.
- (12) See the article below, which claims that citizen movements are still active in other direction. Akane Nakajima, "1970 *nendai Kōhan Ikō no Wagakuni no Shimin-undō ni tsuite* (Citizen movements since late 1970s in Japan)," *Kansai Daigaku Hōgaku Ronshū*, vol. 35 no. 2.
- (13) See M. Muramatsu, M. Itō and Y. Tsujinaka, *Sengo Nippon no Atsuryoku Dantai* (Pressure Groups in Post-war Japan), (Tōyō Keizai Shinpō-sha, 1986), ch. 2.
- (14) For example, after the dissolution of *Rinchō*, various kinds of reform on social insurance system, annuity system and welfare system have been performed or are being arranged in late 1980s. See National Federation of Health Insurance Societies compiled *Shakai Hoshō Nenkan* (Social Security Year Book) (each year, Tōyō Keizai Shinpō-sha).