

WHY DOES NOT EXIST ANY ECOLOGY PARTY IN JAPAN ?

: NEW POLITICS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

The ecology parties or so-called Green parties are undoubtedly one of legacies of May 1968. They have already occupied legitimate positions in the parliamentary democracy of almost all western countries and retained considerable influence to the global agenda despite their quantitative marginality. In the United States national parliamentary ecology party does not yet exist but the candidate of American Green Party attracted a fair amount of voters discontent with eight years of Clinton administration in the presidential election of 2000. And at present in 2001, the governments of following five European countries—Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and Finland—contain ecologist ministers who are charged with the environment or transport policy.

How can we explain the reasons why Japan is the only exception that has no ecologist representatives in her political institutions among industrially developed liberal democracies? This paper will present some clarifications mainly through two interrogations: (1) what was the quality of 'postwar democracy' in Japan and what were the achievements and their limits of its most eager defender, left wing parties and their social movements? (2) what were the comparative characteristics of Japanese political system and of political culture including their mutation over the period of 1970's and 1980's? I will focus on these twenty years because they were crucial period for the formation of new type political party.

Working on this subject, the author was influenced by two political scientists, D. Inglehart and H. Kitchelt. Comparative study of cultural change by the former and of 'political opportunity structure' for 'left libertarian parties' by the latter offered the basis of my reflections that were completed by the analysis of political process and cultural data in Japan concerning those years.

1. Cultural Aspect

According to Inglehart's study (1990) about twenty-one main countries, the degree of postmaterialization of citizen's values (citizens prefer more and more environment, nature, participation, self-expression, identity etc. to material richness and physical security) was relatively high at the beginning of 1980's in those countries which had already attained substantial level of GNP per capita in 1950, i.e. North American, Central and Northern European countries, whereas Southern and Eastern Europe and Japan that had not yet reached high standard of living in 1950 showed themselves more 'materialist'.

And in the former group of countries the economic growth rates were at low or middle level in 1965~1984, whereas in the latter (except Eastern Europe) they were relatively high. At the first half of 1980's Japan continued the highest rate of growth but she was at the second rank after Italy as to the degree of having materialist values.

Another opinion poll led by Sorihu (a ministry of Japanese government) on the postmaterialist attitude showed that the answer "I think the richness of mind is more important than material richness" was increasing throughout the 1970's and passed the opposite answer in 1979 and continued to grow. In 1990 the postmaterialist answer was 53.0 percent and the opposite answer 30.8 percent. Of course the question of this poll

is largely different from that of survey by Inglehart, whose question contained the items concerning the sense of belonging and participation. So the degree of postmaterialization in his survey is far less advanced.

There should be two reasons for this lower score. The first is that a certain time lag was necessary between attainment of richness and maturation of postmaterial conscience. The second, which is more important, is that Japanese society—not her political institutions—was still much more authoritarian and communitarian than western societies where had been consolidated the individualist values.

So in Japan “the shift from materialist to postmaterialist values does not encompass a heightened emphasis on ‘belonging’—the need that Maslow identified as taking next priority after the needs for economic and physical security had been met.” (Inglehart, 1990, p. 145) Especially younger generations yearned for individuation and privatization instead of sense of belonging or participation.

Since postmaterialist shift of western culture contributed most effectively to the creation and development of ecology parties, this peculiarity of Japanese culture can explain the basic reason why she did not see such a party born.

Beside this, I would reinforce his argument by adding an interesting comparative survey data that J. Misumi collected in 1982 on the sense of importance given to work in several countries. (Misumi, 1990) Japanese gave apparently the highest score to work among seven countries. And we could say here that above-mentioned inclination of younger people to individualism had its limit, because the attachment to work meant the attachment to work place, mainly to the private enterprises. What is more suggestive to our interest is the fact that Japanese baby boomer, who had been the angry generation in 1968, adapted themselves to the

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Japanese style of management in about ten years, reaching their thirties.

For many Japanese employee their enterprise is at the same time pseudo family, welfare, leisure and even a part of religious life (shintoist ceremony). Japanese character of management has been largely modified since the depression in 1990's, but at that period it was still alive and efficient for economic growth and baby boomer became brave warriors dedicated to prosperity.

The revolt of younger generation in the late 1960's in Japan was an isolated struggle of students in contrast with that in France and the United States. Students were cut off from labor movements and liberal intellectuals. At the 30th anniversary of May 1968 *Le Monde and Nouvel Observateur* issued a special number that I found fairly favorable to that movement, while in Japan there was nothing alike on the part of liberal left journalism because students of Zenkyoto (University Action Committee) were the 'changeling' or the orphan of postwar democracy.

Although radicalization, division or degradation of movement is universally observed after its culmination, the Japanese case was truly excessive in this aspect. Above all the successive bloody 'vendetta' between Trotskyite or Maoist new-left factions were cruel enough to alienate younger left oriented people from politics and political party. All the more true, because the political party, as one of voluntary associations in civil society, had only weak tradition and legitimacy in modern and contemporary Japan.

2. Socialist Party and Social Movements

Now we proceed to the political opportunity structure, focusing on the structure of competition with the potential rivals of ecologists. Ecology parties were relatively strong in Central and Northern Europe in

1980's (electoral support greater than 4 percent of vote in national elections). These countries had shared common systemic features since 1970's: the period in which the social democrat parties were in power was relatively long, the percentage of syndicated workers were high, trade unions were more or less reformist and a pattern of policy-making process so-called neo-corporatism (system of coordination among the government, capital, and labor) was developed particularly in macro-economic and social policies (H. Kitchelt, 1990). Also there were moderate social democratic parties and hardly influential communist party. Ecology parties emerged as a left libertarian critique to these social democratic compromise and bureaucratization of welfare state.

On the other hand, in southern Europe, Japan, the United States and United Kingdom, where ecologist never obtained votes more than 4 percent, have different features. In France, Italy and Japan we had considerably strong communist parties and socialist parties which are not so moderate and rarely or never went to power in 1970's.

In Japan Socialist Party has never been the government party except in 1947 since the end of War. Its principal organizational and electoral supporter Sohyo (a national center of progressive unions) was leftist oriented and colored by orthodox Marxism, according to which the technological progress should not be accepted if it sacrifices the vested interest of working class as by restructuring, reshuffling of personnel etc. Sohyo was also a politicized national center in the sense that it had been deeply committed together with socialists to the defense of postwar democracy and institutional reforms. (Shinkawa, 1999)

This Socialist-Sohyo block organized mass movements in two field that gave it a distinguished character compared with European social democrats: pacifist movement demanding the neutrality and unilateral

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disarmament, and anti-nuclear plant movement demanding the security and transparency. Since the biggest symbol of peace movement was anti-nuclear bomb, we might easily understand that these two 'anti-nuclears' (hankaku) deprived potential ecologists of their turn.

Socialist Party had confirmed its opposition to the construction of new power plants and its demand for advanced check of security and for exploitation of new energy at the beginning of 1970's. This was not a position so radical as that of European ecologist, but socialists and labor unions participated actively to the local protest movements against the power plants.

But this fact does not necessarily mean that Socialist-Sohyo block had been gradually 'greened' in European sense. As mentioned above their main theoretical view was the orthodox Marxism (in the sense that it does not refuse the productivism) and their organizational basis the traditional working class of public sector. The majority of socialist deputies were former union leaders. Some part of well educated white-collar employee voted for socialists but they were neither organized nor solid supporters. Both organizations were very 'masculine' ones in which women were hardly represented until Takako Doi was elected as the first female president of SP in 1986.

As to the anti power plant movements, its main bearer was peasants and fishermen whose legal rights were directly affected by their construction, neighborhood inhabitants (situated far away from urban districts) and aiding local unions. There were not remarkably formed wider network including the urban citizen movements for environmental protection, consumer protection, convivial recycle system and so on, except for a few years after Chernobyl. (Hasegawa, 1999) I interviewed a national leader of citizen movements who answered me "Anti nuclear plants

movements seemed to us too ideological and confrontational.” (Interview, February 2001)

3. Local Government of Progressive Coalition

At the beginning of 1970's almost all local collectivities of great cities and urban prefectures in Japan (Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Yokohama, Kawasaki, etc.) were managed by progressive left or left-center coalition including Communist Party. They realized considerable policy innovation in welfare and environment, resisting to hostile attitude of conservative national government.

In a few years since late 1960's, there had occurred a large scale of transition of power at local level. This was a rare phenomenon in the world and it also offered a kind of substitute to the alternation of government at national level that Japan had not seen since 1947.

It showed how grave was the deterioration of urban life as a result of rapid economic growth. The local progressive governments made their efforts to ameliorate the urban environment, since they were not born only from party coalitions but also from raising movements of inhabitants especially against the industrial pollution. So they gave as a whole much satisfaction to movement participants in a decentralized and incremental manner. Inhabitants embraced the sentiment of compassion for the local authorities, because the latter seemed to be heroic victim under the pressure of national government.

But at the same time we should not forget the fact that there were sometimes serious disputes between the progressive authorities and citizen movements, for the local authorities were based on the organizational support of trade unions and economic interest groups—such as of shop keepers and small enterprises—whose industrialist preferences tended

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to neglect some essential ecologist values. For example we can cite the problem of constructing a pedestrian bridge over a road which is convenient for the drivers but never for the handicapped.

From the end of 1970's, these progressive local coalitions were going to be replaced by more inclusive and conservative ones called "all riding coalitions"—all except Communist Party, and some of acquired fruits were lost, for example the heightened control level of NOx and SOx density in the air or free medical care for the old.

Naturally there was disappointments on the part of movements, but it brought about neither broad contestation nor crystallization of ecologist opposition. Because then the crisis in public finance, both national and local, had changed the *climate of opinion*: the well educated new middle class, notably white-collars in big private corporations had begun to see the progressive local governments and national public enterprises as wasteful and themselves suffering from the unfair tax system which seemed tender to the traditional middle class. So they had been ready for neo-liberal reforms that were going to demand "small government" in 1980's.

4. The Formation of Social Democrat Alliance

The great mass of white-collar workers generated by rapid postwar economic growth and expansion of higher education had more and more the sentiment that "we are not represented to the politics" through 1970's, because the dominant conservative party Jimintou (Liberal Democratic Party) was based on the support of old middle class and of big business and the opposition parties were fragmented and narrowly based (class, sector or religion).

Facing the political situation at the second half of 1970's, when the

Lockheed scandal (in which the former Prime Minister Tanaka was arrested in 1976) had thrown LDP into a grave predicament and the overthrow of conservative government seemed probable, several moderate socialist deputies formed a new party.

This party had two objectives. The first is to form a plausible alternative for conservative government, that is to say a center-left coalition distinguished from Socialists' hardly realistic project known as 'collaboration among all opposition parties' encompassing from Communist Party to diehard anticommunist Minshyato (Democratic Socialist Party). The second is to create a new progressive party open to new middle class and citizen movements. For the latter purpose, it declared the priority given to "new mode of economic development, moratorium to nuclear power plant, participatory democracy and gender equality".

Certainly SDA had some new look, but it failed to form a vivid linkage with citizen movements and rested rather small sized intra-parliamentary group (consisting of 4 to 6 deputies) "open to center" searching for new balance within opposition. The reason of missing each other between SDA and movements was perhaps that SDA seemed too moderate to many activists of citizen movements.

5. Other Elements of Explanation——Issue Saliency and Electoral Institution

After investigating the structure of party competition as one of conditions for the emergence of ecology party, we treat briefly other factors that made it difficult in Japan: the structure of national issue and electoral institution.

The main political issues in second half of 1970's, Lockheed scandal, alternative project of coalition government replacing that of LDP, and the

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reform of taxation system(introduction of VAT of Japanese style). The urban problem and decentralization which dominated the political scene at the beginning, attenuated their saliency.

In 1980's the surging tide of neo-liberal reforms, that is, privatization, deregulation, cut of welfare expenditure and so on occupied the political arena. And also tax reform debate continued. The beginning of New Cold War brought about intensified disputes over the constitutional ideals of pacifism. We can find similar cases in the United Kingdom and in the United States, where the neo-liberalism was in power and political ecologism lost its way.

As to the electoral institution, Japan had the system so called "middle sized constituency system" until 1993, in which people elect from three to six seats. That was fairly unfavorable to the smaller or newcomer parties. The minimum winning barrier was about 12~13 percent of effective votes which was far higher than the 5 percent barrier in the German proportional system. And its very expensive legal deposit, which was 3 million yen (constituency candidate) or 6 million yen (proportional list candidate), undoubtedly discouraged the citizen associations to become political parties.

6. Why are there ecologist parties in France ?——a tentative of comparison of two similar countries

France seemed apparently no fertile land for the political ecology until 1990's, since she had, as Japan, the left oriented socialist party and the hard lined communist party which had never assumed power for twenty-three years since 1958. Its national electoral institution was and is the majority system which always prevents the intruder. She had only weak system of neo-corporatism namely the connivance between the

capital and labor on the bureaucratized welfare state. And her score was just medium in postmaterialist map of Inglehart.

Effectively the formation into ecology party of new social movements are slow and winding in France. It was only 1984 that actual “Greens” was formed as a political party.

But there were some positive factors for the emergence of French Greens. We can say at first the French political culture is the “culture of protest”, whether for particularist or universalist objectives. People easily and often resort to direct action such as strikes, demonstrations and mass meetings and these means are tolerated by the public opinion. This national character might have helped the postmaterial social segments to form a solid subculture like environmentalism, feminism or ethnic regionalism etc.

Secondly the anti nuclear movement assembled a large mass of participants against the plan of bold and rapid expansion called “Messmer Plan” fixed in 1974 which intended to increase the dependence of electricity on nuclear plants to seventy percent by 1985. Mass protest was always confrontational, because the procedure of public decision-making was very bureaucratized and closed like in Japan. But the wide and diverse nature of participants made it possible for the movements to become a sort of catalyst to bring about a political formation.

Thirdly and finally the disappointment caused by the policy change (that is, a social democratic management of economic crisis, including restarting of nuclear project) after it became clear that “socialism in one country” was impossible under the presidency of Francois Mitterrand, was great enough to crystallize the ecologist opposition in 1984. Its electoral progress was slow but on the tide of aggravating conscience on the global ecological crisis in the late 1980’s—Chernobyl, ozone hole,

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warming effect and so on—it was going to get considerable importance in the early 1990's.

We might say that these three major reasons for the existence of French Greens cannot be found in Japan.

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