

Feudalization of Re-feudalization

—Where is ‘Modernity’ in Japan?

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1. Emile Lederer’s Analysis in 1929

Lederer was a successor of Max Weber in the University of Heidelberg. He was invited to Tokyo Imperial University from 1923 to 1925 and he taught socio-economics there.

After he returned to Europe, he and his wife published a book *Japan-Europa* in 1929. Very interestingly, he focused upon the essence of Japanese politics.

„Ebenso schwer läßt sich eine Zuordnung der einzelnen Parteien zu konkreten Interessen vollziehen. Die Zwei großen Parteien, Seyukai und Kenseikai, die bis vor kurzem fast allein auf dem Plan waren (hier eine äußerliche Anlehnung an das englische Zweiparteiensystem), sind nicht etwa deutlich als Vertreter von agrarischen und industriellen Interessen (wie Whigs und Tories in England) oder von konservativen und fortschrittlichen Gedanken aufzufassen. Das wäre schon übertrieben. Es zielt zwar eine gewisse Gliederung nach dieser Richtung hin, aber sie geht nicht durch. Prominente Industrielle und Bankiers finden sich in den Reihen der Seyukai, die im übrigen agrarfeudal ist. Und wenn man die andere Partei, die Kenseikai, als progressiv bezeichnet, so ist auch das nur mit starken Einschränkungen richtig.

Zu welcher Partei man gehört, bestimmt sich daher nicht nach Ideen, und erst in dritter Linie nach Interessen. Sondern: die Tradition der Familie entscheidet. Also im Wesen keine politischen Gesichtspunkte.“¹

¹ Emil Lederer, Emy Lederer-Seidler, *Japan-Europa. Wandlungen im fern Osten*, Frankfurt am Main 1929, S.234 f. If I translate this citation into Japanese.

「個々の政党を具体的利害関心で振り分けるのもやはり難しい。政友会と憲政会が二大政党であり、最近まで（英国風の二大政党制度を表面上借用した）そういう構想にあったが、（英国におけるホイッグとトーリーのような）農業の利害代表と工業の利害代表、あるいは保守的考えか、進歩的なそれかということて捉えることは難しく、見た目だけである。そういう方向での区分が目指さ

2. A Hidden Meaning of the 'Land Reform' in 1946

If we follow our school textbook, the feudal agricultural system by the landlords (地主) which Lederer found out in Seiyukai, had ended in 1946.

However, lots of rich landlords had already changed their own farmlands into various financial securities since the 1920s.² Therefore, Lederer found out a strange combination between feudal landlords and big bankers in Seiyukai.

Indeed, the tenant farmer (小作人) system had ended in 1946, but the distribution of national wealth has continued to be strongly unbalanced between the financialized old landlords and the suddenly liberated ex-tenant farmers.

These ex-tenant farmers could certainly have their own lands. But they were not any 'Yeoman (独立自営農民)'. The area of farmland given to them was very small, not more than 100 meters square in extent. So, through the industrialization since 1890 most of them had moved from the poor tenant-farmers to the manual workers or the so-called 'Salary Man (salaried office workers).'³ Of course, they wished they were salaried office workers. Therefore, they would be eager to have higher educational careers.

The 'High Economic Growth' in Japan means only that the former tenant farmers under a non-monetary economy had become the consumers. It was the social mobility in the 20th

れているが、それは貫徹できない。大企業、大銀行が、他はすべて封建的農業である政友会に入っている。もう一方の政党、憲政会を進歩的として特徴づけようとしても、そう言い通すことはたいへん難しい。

どの政党に属すかは、それゆえ理念によるのではなく、その次の次くらいに初めて利害によるが、そうではなく家族の伝統が決定する。つまり、本来的に〈政治的〉視点というのがないのだ。」

² 中村政則『近代日本地主制史研究－資本主義と地主制』東京大学出版会 1979年。

³ 前田一『サラリマン物語』および『続サラリマン物語』東洋経済出版部 1928年。

Century Japan.

3. The Hosokawa Government and the Japan New Party

'The Fall of the Berlin Wall' influenced upon the Liberal Democratic Party. As mentioned above, the LDP was originally rooted in two streams.

Firstly, the Association of Politician Friends (Seiyukai), which was a party of landlords.

Secondly, the Constitutional Politics Association (Kenseikai), which was a party of the new rich (nouveau riche; 成金) who had suddenly become wealthy under the industrialization and colonization since 1895.⁴

Therefore, the LDP has been originally a disordered complex of variously opposed interests. Their eventual consensus was anti-socialism or anti-communism since the Russian Revolution.

Therefore, after the Berlin Wall, they could not find any more temporal compromises, because socialism was defeated.

It is the LDP that various groups and fractions in the same party have been compromised and mediated with money and concessions. They love money very much.

In such a political circumstance Morihiro Hosokawa could suddenly form a new political party 'Japan New Party' with a slogan 'responsible change' in May 1992. They could get four seats in the House of Councilors (Upper House) in July 1992, and 35 seats in the House of Representatives (Lower House) in January 1993.

Consequently, they could form a coalition cabinet in July 1993. The LDP cabinet lost their governmental power. It means that they had been keeping their political power for 38 years long until then.

⁴ 米田庄太郎『現代智識階級運動と成金とデモクラシー』京都弘文堂書房 1919年.

Indeed, this eventual topic might be a symbol of 'new change.'

However, some serious traditional problems existed there. Hosokawa's coalition cabinet was composed of various residual members. If we pick them up, it was composed of five groups; the Japan New Party, the New Party Sakigake, the Japan Socialist Party, the Komei Party and the Japan Renewal Party.

Certainly, they would cooperate with each other for a while. But the New Party Sakigake and the Japan Renewal Party were originally two groups divorced from the LDP.

First of all, they don't have any political and philosophical ideas at all. They are mediated with atmosphere and private interests.

Very ironically, Hosokawa comes from a well-known feudal lord family (Tonosama) since the 15th Century. Such a symbolic sense could mediate various persons inclusive of non-political 'Salary Men'.

Probably it might have been a quasi-revolution against the long LDP regime. In a moment such 'ordinary' persons except old landlords or except old new riches could be politicians.

However, Hosokawa himself was originally an ex-LDP member. Very interestingly such a symbolic expectation for 'the responsible change' by 'Tonosama' could paradoxically conceal a true reality of Japanese politics.

Hosokawa, namely an ex-feudal lord also could not help throwing out his own cabinet with the unexpected result of the 'Tokyo Sagawa Express bribery Scandal' in April 1994.

His cabinet lasted only for 8 months. He also loved money.

4. Landlord or New Rich?

Despite of Tonosama Hosokawa, the Japan New Party might have been the first attempt of a political party neither by the family of the landlord nor by the family of the new rich, but by the ordinary persons.

His original motivation came from a much bigger bribery case of 'the Recruit Scandal' in 1988-89.

He would certainly reform the dirty connection between money and politics in Japanese tradition. But he also had to retreat from politics with another bribery case. In other words, Japanese political history is a history of bribery cases.

Today, the same bribery case is known as 'the Slush Party Scandal' (2023-) by the LDP. This 'party' does not mean any political party. It means dinner party or drinking party for collecting money. Nobody cannot cure such an endemic disease in Japan.

Hosokawa's 'responsible change' had reached a transformation of election system of the House of Representatives. This system began under Hosokawa regime in 1994.

According to their ideas, the change of governmental party by the two large parties was expected like in the USA or Great Britain. The new system of 'A parallel voting system of single-member district and propositional representation' was proposed.

The former 'single-member district' comes from a system in England. The latter 'propositional representation' may come from Germany.

However, if we follow Lederer, this new system also is superficially modern only in appearance.

In fact it was a product of compromises. Since the establishment of Male General Election in 1925 the 'plural-members district system' had been used.

This 'plural-members' means that two or more conservative members (landlord and new rich) and fewer,

namely, one or no member (socialist or communist).

This is a compromise of Japanese democracy. In the new planned 'single-member district' it was supposed that the LDP should be relatively stronger than others. Therefore, the propositional system was additionally introduced for the existence of other small parties.

This means only a renewal of an old compromise between Seiyukai, Kenseikai, other small parties and socialists. It was the most important that they could be only politicians as their family business. I believe that the socialists also should be their own family business. As a result, the old classes of the landlord and the new rich since 1920 continue to dominate Japan until now.

It means that the politics in Japan is not constituted by the rationally discussed ideas, but always only the evil compromises mediated with money and their own interests.

Most of them have not been any 'politicians' at all, but only 'brokers.' Consequently, they could believe only their own family members and followers. The 'Ie'-family (イエ家族) is permanently existing in Japanese political world still now.

5. Typology of Politicians in Japan

Lastly, I propose the five types of 'politicians' in Japan.

- 1) From the old landlords and its various derivatives: Family Kohno, Family Abe, Family Kishida, Family Ishiba, etc.**
- 2) From the old 'new riches': Family Hatoyama, Family Koizumi, Family Aso, Family Hayashi etc.**
- 3) From the high-class bureaucrats: Bunmei Ibuki, Katsuya Okada, Yasutoshi Nishimura etc.**
- 4) From the so-called 'talents (タレント)': Family Ishihara, Ren-ho, Taro Yamamoto etc.**
- 5) From the 'salaried worker': Yoshihiko Noda, Sanae Takaichi, Akira Nagatsuma etc.**

Type 1) and 2) will have been existing since the 1920s

forever. They will live as their own le-family, which was mainly constituted in the Meiji period.

To be a politician means a private family business for them.

For example, Kishida worked in Japan Long Term Trust Bank, Hayashi worked in Mitsui & Co., Kohno worked in Fuji Xerox Corporation, Abe worked in Kobe Steel and Ishiba worked in the Mitsui Bank.

Most of them worked in famous companies after their graduation like many ordinary people. But they were only time-limited ordinary salaried men in appearance.

Of course, they were going to inherit their fathers' political and economic properties through their own family traditions.

Type 3) may be traditionally reserved as the son-in-law of Type 1) or Type 2). Usually, they graduate from the University of Tokyo. After that they work professionally as high-class bureaucrats for the Japanese government. For example, Katunobu Kato, Yasuhiro Hanashi.

Type 4) includes very characteristic and remarkable persons like 'TV-talent, singer, actress, writer, athletes, etc. Interestingly, this type 4) may wish to change themselves to Type 2).

In other words, a peculiar word 'talent' corresponds to the word 'new rich' in the 1920s, who made their wealth from colonies and wars. But the 'talents' have been produced under a popular television world after World War II.

Type 5) has only some rare cases, because they don't have any money for their election.

The word 'salaried workers' is not any workers as 'proletariats' in Marxism. They are organized in their companies like tenant farmers. The membership, namely which companies they belong to, is the most important for them.

Therefore, they could organize their laborer union only in their own companies. In other words, a national center of the Japanese Trade Union Confederation also exists only in appearance. It doesn't represent any solidarities of all laborers. Japanese actuality is totally different from the history of social democratic movements in Germany, France and England. The salaried persons cannot be associated and mediated by 'labor' in Japan.

The ordinary salaried workers cannot be so free from their companies like the tenant-farmers under the landlords. But the quasi-salaried men of Type 1) or 2) can behave so freely.

The ruling classes of Type 1) and 2) will continue to exist forever in this new feudal society Japan.

6. Theoretical Conclusion: Is the 'Modernity' possible in Japan?

This question means how modern the politics in Japan is.

Following Habermas's view, a process of modernity could begin with a 'Re-feudalization.'⁵

But my impression is that Japan may have been superficially 'modern' only in appearance. In other words, Japan has been in a recursive circulation of feudalization of re-feudalization for last hundred years.

⁵ **Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1990 (Neuwied 1962), S.292, S.337.**