

Media and Politics in Japan

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Media and Politics in Japan

Edited by

Susan J. Pharr and Ellis S. Krauss



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To Robert and Martha
with love and gratitude

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PREFACE

THIS book resulted from an international collaborative venture that has a long history. The project from which it grew was sparked by a discussion of the Joint Committee on Japanese Studies (JCJS) of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in the early 1980s. Reflecting on what key areas of research had been neglected in the social science literature on Japan, the committee asked why the media as a force in social and political life had received so little attention. No country in the industrial world is as media-saturated as Japan. Its five national dailies—each with a circulation of over 2 million—translate into the highest per-capita newspaper circulation in the world. Some 90 percent of adults read newspapers daily, and the average person watches more than three hours of television a day. Given the rising importance of the media in all the industrial societies, Japan thus presents itself as a laboratory for exploring the role the media play today in democracies. Japan is an especially useful testing ground, JCJS members held, because the great bulk of research on the role of the media in politics and society has focused on the United States. Japan offers a setting for testing and rethinking theories derived from American experience.

The JCJS agreed to make funding available for a planning meeting if scholars came forward to take up the challenge. But organizing a project on the media in Japan proved to be more difficult than the committee had thought. Most collaborative research ventures of the kind encouraged by the SSRC bring together scholars who are already working independently on related topics or themes and who are thus ready and willing to join in a common endeavor. In the case of work on the Japanese media, however, the situation was entirely different. Remarkably, despite the widely acknowledged importance of the topic, relatively few scholars outside Japan have conducted research on the contemporary Japanese media's role in politics. In Japan itself, despite the existence of key media research centers at the University of Tokyo, Keiō University, and elsewhere, relatively little research has focused on the broad effects of the media on political life in a comparative framework.

Susan Pharr agreed to organize the project, and there followed a long period of recruitment that continued, indeed, until the book assumed its final shape. Of the American authors whose work is represented in this volume, none had a lengthy track record of academic research on the media in Japanese politics at the time of the first planning meeting, held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in May 1984. Partly as a result of this project, Ellis Krauss was stimulated to expand his preliminary research on NHK into a larger research program. He came to play a leading role in the project and later joined Susan Pharr as an editor of this volume.

John Campbell, University of Michigan, and Scott Flanagan, Florida State University, joined Pharr and Krauss at the first planning session. Also at the session were Michael Reich of Harvard University, Fukashi Horie of Keiō University, and Ted Bestor representing the SSRC. Frank Schwartz, then a graduate student at Harvard, served very ably as rapporteur. David Paletz, a political scientist at Duke University who has studied the media in a comparative political-science framework, was unable to attend, but he made valuable suggestions concerning scholars working on related topics with a focus on other parts of the world who might be enlisted at some stage as discussants.

At the session, it was agreed that the project should be binational, in order to draw on and learn from the base of media research in Japan. Pharr subsequently contacted Hiroshi Akuto, University of Tokyo, who became, with her, co-organizer of the project. It was also agreed that Akuto would edit any Japanese-language publication resulting from the project. Further recruitment then proceeded on both sides of the Pacific. Akuto successfully sought a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) to support travel and research-related activities of the Japanese participants. Pharr received funding from the SSRC for the first workshop, and from the Japan–United States Friendship Commission for the second and follow-up activities.

The first workshop was held at the Nissan Institute, Oxford University, 11–14 July 1985. Arthur Stockwin, director of the institute and Nissan Professor of Modern Japanese Studies, served as host. The Nissan Institute provided a congenial setting for a workshop that included Michio Muramatsu, Kyoto University; Hirohisa Suzuki, University of Tokyo; Olga Linne, University of Leicester; and Colin Seymour-Ure, University of Kent; Ted Bestor, representing the SSRC; and Morio Watanabe, then of the University of Wisconsin, serving as rapporteur. At the workshop, the project participants presented preliminary drafts of their papers or research plans. Because most of the

participants were new to comparative research on the media in politics, Olga Linne and Colin Seymour-Ure, both of whom have studied the media in other advanced industrial nations, made very valuable contributions to the meeting. Michio Muramatsu, though he is not a media specialist, played an important role in the discussion because of his deep knowledge of politics and political behavior in Japan.

The relative scarcity of data on the media in Japanese electoral politics spurred the Japanese team to conduct an election study in Japan for the project. Sponsored by JSPS and carried out in February 1986, the survey (described in the chapters by Hiroshi Akuto and by Toshio Takeshita and Ikuo Takeuchi) included questions submitted by Ellis Krauss and Scott Flanagan. It enriched the data base for the project and represented a form of American and Japanese collaboration that has not been common in binational projects sponsored by the joint committee.

The second workshop was held in Hawai'i, 5–9 January 1987. All the people whose work appears in this volume (except journalists Maggie Farley and Kristin Kyoko Altman) presented drafts at the workshop. Hirohisa Suzuki and Kiyoshi Midōka, both of University of Tokyo, also made presentations that proved highly useful in the exchange. Patricia Steinhoff of the University of Hawai'i, at that time a member of the JCJS, joined the sessions as a discussant. Majid Tehranian, also of the University of Hawai'i, was an able general discussant for the workshop. Stefan Tanaka of the SSRC served as staff.

From the second workshop emerged a fascinating series of drafts at various stages of research and preparation. But the picture of the media's role in politics was still incomplete. To round it out, a contribution on the media's highly visible role in political scandals was required. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, scandals were convulsing Japanese politics, ultimately triggering the fall of the Liberal Democratic Party in the summer of 1993. Maggie Farley, a professional journalist with much experience in Japan, was invited to contribute a chapter to this volume based on her 1992 master's thesis at Harvard. Kristin Kyoko Altman, a political reporter and anchor for TV Asahi, agreed to prepare a chapter on the intriguing and portentous role of television in the watershed events of the summer of 1993. Krauss contributed a new chapter on another topic of growing interest today: the media's role in trade tensions between the United States and Japan.

Conceived a decade ago to fill a lacuna in the literature on Japan as well as to contribute to comparative research on the media's role in politics, this project has achieved what it set out to accomplish.

Remarkably enough, this book stands alone as the first major collaborative research volume in English to deal with the media's role in contemporary Japanese politics in comparative perspective. The project has also sought to play an active part in spurring further research. In addition to the collaborative activities discussed so far, the project has led to panels at meetings of the American Political Science Association, the Association for Asian Studies, and the International Political Science Association, and to numerous meetings in Cambridge, Tokyo, New York, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere among the many scholars who have participated at various stages. Works by Gregory Kasza (*The State and the Mass Media in Japan, 1918–1945* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988]), Ofer Feldman (*Politics and the News Media in Japan* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993]), and others that have appeared since the project began, or that are now under way, offer promising signs that scholarship on the Japanese media's role in politics and society in comparative perspective is thriving today.

According to the usual practice of books on Japan that seek a wider audience, Western name order is used for Japanese names throughout this volume.

A book so long in the making incurs many debts. We would like to express appreciation to the Joint Committee on Japanese Studies for providing both the inspiration for the volume and the resources for the project in its early stages, and to the Japan–United States Friendship Commission for its generous financial support. We are also grateful to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for providing funding for the Japanese participants in the project. We would like to single out Ted Bestor, Stefan Tanaka, and Mary Byrne McDonnell of the SSRC and Lyn Sloan of the Friendship Committee for particular thanks; we have a debt to them as well as to numerous other people in those organizations.

We also extend thanks to the many scholars mentioned in this account who, though not contributors to this volume, took part in the planning meeting, workshops, or related panels at professional meetings, or who participated in some other way. This project brought many of the contributors, including the editors of this volume, into a new area of research, and we all benefited greatly as a result. None of those mentioned bears responsibility for the final volume, but each helped to make it possible.

In closing, the editors of this English-language volume wish to express particular thanks to Hiroshi Akuto and other members of the

Japanese team for their warm hospitality in Tokyo to both of us over the years of the project, and to the Nissan Institute and Arthur Stockwin for providing such a pleasant and stimulating setting for the first workshop. We also extend our thanks to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, formerly headed by Amos Jordan and now by David Abshire, where the workshops were planned and organized; to Harvard's Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, directed formerly by Akira Iriye and now by Helen Hardacre, where the final work on the volume was completed; and to the Japan Council and its Japan Iron and Steel Federation endowment fund, Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dean Peter Koehler, and Political Science Department Chair B. Guy Peters, University of Pittsburgh; to Margot Chamberlain, who ably oversaw the many drafts and changes that come with an editing project; to John McVey and George Scialabba for their editing; and to Kim Reimann, Saori Horikawa, and Christina Davis for their valuable research and other assistance; to Mary Mortensen, who prepared the index; and to Patricia Crosby and Cheri Dunn of University of Hawai'i Press. On a personal note, Ellis Krauss is grateful to Martha Leche for her unflagging support and tolerance during the later stages of this project. Susan Pharr would like to thank her husband, Robert Cameron Mitchell, for his help and unstinting support throughout.

SUSAN J. PHARR
ELLIS S. KRAUSS

PART I

The Mass Media and Japan

Introduction

Media and Politics in Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

SUSAN J. PHARR

FEW questions are as intrinsically fascinating and of obvious importance for understanding the present and the future of industrial democracies as those that concern the role of the media in society and politics. At the U.S. political conventions in the summer of 1992, media representatives far outnumbered the presumed “real” players, the delegates. Lingering television images of town halls, memories of billionaire Ross Perot on camera with graphs in hand, and news of a media-stung Democratic president’s 1994 moves to reshuffle his team of spokespersons and spin-doctors once again: these are vivid reminders of the omnipresence of the media in politics today and of their centrality to politicians and the public alike.

The role of the media in the political upheavals in Japan in the summer of 1993 offered similar reminders. Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa’s fall, sealed by a no-confidence vote in Japan’s parliament, or Diet, on June 18, began on May 31 with some ill-advised remarks in a television interview.¹ As new conservative parties rose to challenge the long-standing dominance of Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had held power since 1955, their leaders raced from one talk show to the next positioning themselves for the July 18 lower house election. No sooner had election results confirmed the demise of the LDP’s solid majority than leading politicians from all of Japan’s parties rubbed shoulders on two- and three-hour television specials discussing coalition formulas. In the political rumble of summer 1993, *tarento* (literally, “talents”)—media celebrities turned candidates—trumped Japan’s aging generation of conservative leaders who were more skilled at backroom deal making than talking on camera.

In industrial societies today, some politicians—no matter how intelligent their grasp, how astute their political judgments, or how incisive their issue positions—cannot be packaged successfully, while others can. This has led numerous scholars and other observers to conclude that the media are recasting political leadership itself, at least in the case of national political elites. Meanwhile, media-borne scandals—whether over nannies in America or stashed gold bars in Japan—thin the ranks of those who would serve the public.

As the bureaucracies of the advanced industrial societies “note, register, inventory, tax, stamp, measure, enumerate, license, assess, authorize” (to quote the French anarchist Proudhon) by way of policies that reach into ever increasing domains of human behavior, the media become powerful screening devices for vast flows of information. Only a tiny fraction of the work of the state in the United States, Japan, or elsewhere becomes exposed to public scrutiny, and many of the struggles within bureaucracies and among and between interest groups represent efforts to capture or deflect media attention or to turn it to advantage. Not only do politics and bureaucracy feel the media’s presence and power; so, too, does the public. Despite a vast amount of research, mystery surrounds the simple act of voting in a media age: from what confluence of forces and factors do voters make their decisions on candidates, and how do the media confound the process? A broader issue for the 1990s and beyond is whether the media—especially television and new electronic media technologies—foster political community or, instead, breed apathy and alienation.

If media saturation is well advanced in most industrial societies, Japan is no exception. The case can be made—and indeed has been made in works by scholars such as Ezra Vogel—that Japan leads the world in the information revolution and in the breadth of coverage and sophistication of the media.² The circulation of Japan’s largest daily newspaper, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, is greater than that of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *New York Daily News* combined.³ Over 72 million newspapers are published each day in a country where 90 percent of the public, according to one study, reads newspapers on a daily basis.⁴ Japan’s per-capita newspaper circulation (581 copies per 1,000 persons) is the highest in the world, more than twice that for the United States (250 copies per 1,000 persons).⁵ The penetration and influence of the print media are even greater than these figures suggest, since five newspapers (*Yomiuri*, *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Sankei*, and *Nihon Keizai*) are national papers, each with a circulation of more