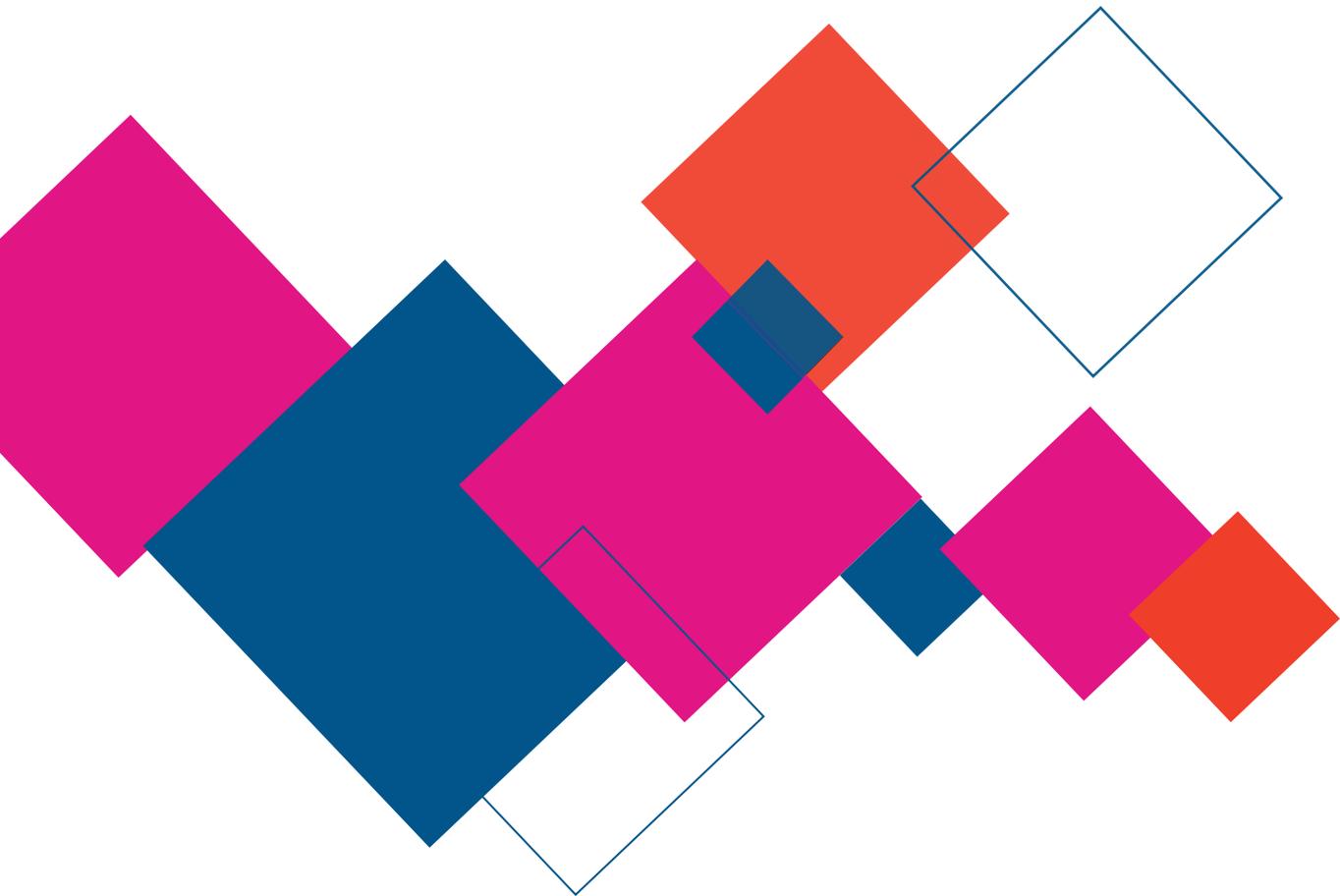


Japan's Democracy: Lessons and Reflections

日本の民主主義の再評価

3rd Panel Discussion
Civil Society, Diversity, and Media



Japan Center for International Exchange

About the Democracy for the Future Project

In 2018, JCIE launched a multipronged initiative to explore and expand Japan's support for democratic governance that is based on the values of liberty, accountability, the rule of law, and individual dignity and empowerment. The initiative, known as "Democracy for the Future," is designed to engage Japanese leaders in dialogue with domestic and overseas experts on ways of strengthening the building blocks of democratic governance in Asia and elsewhere. The program convenes a study group of Japanese experts to identify strategies on how support for these values can be incorporated in Japan's foreign policy and development assistance. These ideas will be shared widely to raise awareness about the importance of democratic governance among policy makers and opinion leaders. The program also engages Japanese Diet members and other senior leaders in international dialogues on issues related to democracy, and it serves as a platform to involve Japanese experts, civil society leaders, and others in international forums on the topic.

As part of Democracy for the Future activities, in June 2021, JCIE launched a new project, "Japan's Democracy: Lessons and Reflections," to create a platform for Japanese scholars, political and opinion leaders, and the broader Japanese public to reflect on Japan's own experience in building a democratic society post-WWII, examine the resilience of the elements that support democratic governance in Japan today, and identify possible ways to strengthen it further into the future. JCIE has partnered with Dr. Harukata Takenaka, a leading scholar in Japan, to organize a series of three discussions with Japanese scholars and policymakers to conduct this reassessment: This report is a record of the third of these discussions.

About JCIE

Founded in 1970, the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization that works to strengthen US-Japan relations and build international cooperation. Operating with partner organizations in Tokyo and New York (JCIE/USA), JCIE sponsors a wide range of projects in collaboration with institutions around the world. These include policy research and dialogue on cutting-edge issues in international relations, leadership exchanges, and efforts to strengthen the contributions of civil society to domestic and international governance. Through these initiatives, JCIE aims to create opportunities for informed policy discussions that can contribute to a more peaceful and stable world.

Japan's Democracy: Lessons and Reflections

3rd Panel Discussion—Civil Society, Diversity, and Media

The following is a record of a discussion that was originally conducted in Japanese on October 27, 2021, as part of JCIE's Democracy for the Future Program

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The Evolution of Japan's Civil Society Organizations

Takenaka: I would like to start today by discussing Japan's civil society. There were widespread civil society activities in the aftermath of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in the form of assistance and relief operations. Then, in 1998, we saw the enactment of the NPO Law (Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities). Prior to that law, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) were typically referred to as "associations without the legal capacity to hold rights," and whether it was renting office space or opening a bank account, the organization's representative bore total responsibility, making it very difficult for such groups to operate. Robert Pekkanen of the University of Washington studies this topic, and his findings show that the enactment of the NPO Law led to a rapid increase in civil society organizations (CSOs), which went on to become incredibly active and make qualitative contributions to Japan's democracy.



In the United States, for example, when something happens, an organization is immediately created in response. What about Japanese society? I would especially like to ask you, Mr. Abe, to share your feelings on this matter given that you are active in this field. When I spoke to you the other day, you mentioned that in recent years, many have left work in Kasumigaseki* to join NPOs and other civic groups, thereby raising the quality of those organizations' work. You also noted that changes in the past five years have meant it is now possible to

make a living working for a civic group. I think it will be most beneficial for our readers in Japan and overseas if you could explain this situation.

But first, without further ado, I would like to ask Professor Kage to share her evaluation of civil society in Japan today.

Kage: You mentioned Robert Pekkanen, and he is the one who talks about "members without advocates." Countless small-scale organizations are engaged in local social welfare activities or environmental action in Japan. Because their focus is on service provision, their work does not extend to policy advocacy. His book was published in 2006, but I think the big picture is basically still the same today.

The background for this, which Pekkanen also discusses, is that many of the organizations are extremely small both in terms of budget and personnel. A Tsukuba University research group led by Professor Emeritus Yutaka Tsujinaka conducted a very detailed survey on this topic, finding many small organizations with annual budgets of less than ¥5 million. Such small budgets make it impossible to hire dedicated staff, especially people with high levels of expertise. That seems to be changing a little lately, so I would like to hear from Mr. Abe about that.

One other thing I would like to say is that I believe the NPO Law enacted in 1998 was quite successful as a law. As of 2021, there were approximately 50,000 organizations created under that law. To grow to 50,000 in just 22 years shows that the system has been applied extremely well. And yet, despite all these groups undertaking grassroots activities with a great deal of know-how, I feel it really is a waste that they are not producing policy recommendations.

Professor Haruya Sakamoto of Kansai University talks about the close relationship between the media and NPOs. He found through a search of one year's worth of newspaper articles that there are more articles referencing NPOs than labor unions. This shows that the media pays a great deal of attention to NPOs and has good relationships with them. That would suggest that NPOs have great potential in terms of political messaging power, but are not currently leveraging it.

* Kasumigaseki is the seat of the national government in Japan and thus refers to government work. —Trans.

Takenaka: So there has been an incredibly rapid increase to 50,000 organizations in 22 years.

Abe: That pace has slowed in recent years. There is essentially no process in place for shutting down an NPO, so the numbers keep growing, but many are “ghost NPOs.” That 50,000 number should simply be taken as a milestone, showing that there are now as many NPOs as there are convenience stores. But, in fact, many of these are no longer active, having faced challenges when they had to transition to new leadership. We are seeing this issue of succession among the first-generation NPOs.

Just like a Bactrian camel, there have been two major humps in the history of Japanese social movements. The first was a change, prompted by the enactment of the NPO Law, in the status of what had previously been citizen activities. The new law meant that an organization could obtain official recognition and begin operations after a six-month process, including the public notice period, thereby opening up many new possibilities. The NPO Law created an outlet and existing civic groups rushed to gain status as legal entities.



The second hump came with the buzz of social enterprise in the late 2000s. There was a sudden jump in enterprise-style NPOs. In the NPO sector, there exist two totally different cultures: civic group-style organizations and enterprise-style organizations. It goes without saying, but the culture of people engaged in political movements outside the National Diet building in Kasumigaseki and those providing services as nonprofit enterprises are totally different. And there is very little communication between the two.

I believe the infrastructure for activities in the NPO sector is gradually maturing. Take, for example, organizations like the Japan Association of New Public, which was created in 2017 and brings together mostly social enterprise-style NPOs, NPOs supported by the Nippon Foundation, or groups close to Keidanren (Japan Business Federation). These organizations are now sharing know-how on public interest activities, making joint policy recommendations, and raising and distributing funds for public interest activities. The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 served as a major turning point, as NPOs emerged that were handling projects with budgets over ¥1 billion. The funding base for carrying out NPO activities has thus become more robust.

Takenaka: Going back to your point about the two-humped camel, what role does each of those play? Are most of the people in civic groups engaged in political movements?

Abe: From my generation’s perspective, rather than a policy function, they play more of a community function for older generations. And I think that is significant in its own right. They are engaged in all kinds of activities, in groups whose purposes range from environmental protection to community contribution, but it is mostly about grassroots activities. I think it is amazing how they have stuck at it for so long. But the fact is, those organizations struggle with the succession issue because while current members are aging, new young members are not joining. These groups conduct activities, but they do not have funds, and this lack of sustainability means there is very little incentive for young people to take over.

Takenaka: What kind of activities are enterprise-style groups primarily engaged in?

Abe: They too are engaged in a wide range of activities. The fields for NPOs are predetermined, and while we see welfare groups, we can also find groups dealing with local revitalization, nursing care, child-rearing, and environmental issues. The themes are endless, but whether they can be

commercialized, and the degree to which they can influence policy comes down to the group's management and operating capacity, or the capacity of its leader. Whether they can be scaled up as an enterprise links into their managerial effectiveness.

Takenaka: What kind of impact do you think the emergence of these enterprise-level NPOs organizations has had on democracy?

Abe: I think it is very important in terms of democracy that movements are undertaken in spaces independent of economic incentives. The activities of civic groups are inherently at the heart of democracy. However, continuity and creating linkages with others call for strategy and quality personnel, which in turn require enterprise feasibility.

For example, when drafting policy for legislation sponsored by an individual Diet member (known as a private member's bill), those of us in civic groups often write that on behalf of the Diet member. This is impossible if we do not have the same or even better understanding of the data and the issues on the ground as the bureaucrats, so the standard of competency expected of personnel at civic groups is extremely high. Moreover, even if you want to create a policy, there are times when the door is open and times when it is shut. You can try ten times and maybe succeed once, but even trying ten times takes a great deal of endurance. It is one thing if it is an organization that people are naturally drawn to because the representative is incredibly charismatic, or it has mechanisms for attracting outstanding talent. But if that is not the case, you have a process whereby talented people have to keep raising their expertise and demonstrating their abilities for about ten years before they can change policy, which requires business feasibility as a basic strength of an organization. Be it in terms of policymaking competency or the provision of problem-solving services, it is clearly the enterprise-style organizations that are making their presence felt now.

Takenaka: Professor Hayashi, I read your book, *Media Fushin* (Media distrust), and in it you mentioned how the media does not pay much attention

to civil society. I thought some newspaper companies had an affinity for civic groups, but is that not the case?

Hayashi: I think it depends on the definition of "civic group." If you analyze news sources in Japanese media in comparison to other places in the world, you find that while citizens are often interviewed for information, it is rare for civic groups to be the source of news.

I found it interesting how Mr. Abe referred to people engaged in political movements as "civic group-style" and those undertaking nonpolitical activities as "enterprise-style." Does this mean the enterprise-style organizations do not have political opinions? In particular, the enterprise-style groups in the second hump of the camel, are they more focused on practical policymaking than on having political opinions? They think it is important to feed in the necessary pieces, working with bureaucrats within the existing framework, but that speaking about politics or considering how they can contribute to democracy is not the work of enterprise-style organizations? Is my understanding correct?

Takenaka: How do you view civil society, Professor Hayashi?

Hayashi: I think what we refer to in Japanese as *shimin shakai* (civil society) and *shimin dantai* (civic groups) both fall under the concept of "civil society," and I believe that civil society is about people and groups of people who want to make society a better place, taking a position that is distinct from economic activities or from the state/government. It includes people who make policy proposals and people in the community who clean around the station every day.

Returning to your question about the relationship between the media and civic groups, a good example is the television news coverage in the weeks after the Great East Japan Earthquake. We conducted a survey of major news programs in Japan, Germany, and America, which showed that most of the news in Japan was sourced from the government, while other pieces presented the voices of ordinary people. There were almost no cases where the source of information was civic groups.

In comparison, in Germany, even though the disaster did not occur at home, the news included various civic groups in combination with politicians' views on nuclear policy, so it became a political issue. This presentation of different voices may be peculiar to Germany, but civic groups take an ideological stance much like political parties. Thinking about the term "civic group," if you are talking about a group that drops political ideology and simply carries out work on environmental issues or the like, that is quite different to my idea of a "civic group."

Abe: I think there are a number of interesting points in what you have just said. One is that among the groups traditionally engaged in civic activities, more are like the ideology-based groups found in Germany. Then there are the newer enterprise-style groups, which at one time had people taking political action and considering creating political parties. The thinking of people in enterprise-style organizations is that policy formulation is not enough; policy can only be realized by coordination with citizens through the implementation of real-world trials followed by ongoing service provision. The government also seeks players who can take concrete actions, and thus policy formulation and implementation are actually a cycle. The policymaking side shuts down when recommendations do not take into account this cycle, which is why people in enterprise-style organizations believe that the ability to implement policies is crucial. From that perspective, both civic group types of organizations and enterprise-style organizations are political to some degree; it is just that the approach is different.

On your point about very few media outlets citing information from citizen groups, I think there are two issues here. Part of my work is as a media commentator, and I have a media outlet in my own company, so I have thoughts on both issues. To start with, there are still so many media outlets that take dispatches from the government, police, and other public institutions and report them as if they were announcements from the Imperial Headquarters of old, and the press clubs are the same. It is simply a product of a lack of competency among the media. And on the other side, civic groups may be active,

but they do not have any data ready to supply to media. It would be great if they raised issues and had data to back that up, but I think part of it is that they are not prepared in that way. I think the issues lie with both the media and civic groups.

Takenaka: I made the mistake of launching into today's discussions without first defining civil society. To share my understanding from lessons and learnings with my teacher and democracy expert Larry Diamond, I believe civil society can be defined as follows: civil society refers to organizations that are independent of the state in terms of both personnel and funding, and I believe it can be described as the collection of organizations concerned with public matters. I think it is also possible to think of its relationship with democracy in the following terms: First, the government cannot cover all matters, so civil society engages in public activities to supplement government actions, thereby raising citizen satisfaction. Second, by engaging in debate and majority rule in the administration of civil society, participants become very familiar with the workings of democracy. And third, and this is extremely important, is the role of civil society in monitoring authorities. Even in a democratic society, the state is prone to monopolizing information. By concerning themselves with public activities, participants in civil society can gauge if there are discrepancies between the information conveyed by the government and what it is actually doing, allowing them to monitor the government and politicians and fulfill the role of providing political oversight. This explains why civil society is extremely important to a functioning democracy. In light of this, how do you view Japan's civil society organizations?

Hayashi: You mentioned that civil society is independent from the state in terms of both personnel and funding and that it engages in public matters, and I would also like to add my understanding that detachment from the market economy is a very important point when thinking about civil society. But is this no longer the case in modern society?

For example, there is an investigative journalism group in America called ProPublica. The editor of

*In addition to the four above, this refers to the deputy prime minister; minister of finance; minister for internal affairs and communications; minister of economy, trade and industry; minister of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism; as well as the chairman of the National Public Safety Commission.—Trans

About Civil Society Organizations in Japan

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are voluntary, nonprofit, nongovernmental private organizations that respond to societal needs, typically defined as representing the “third sector” after government and business. In Japan, they are active in diverse fields at home and abroad, and even private organizations like the neighborhood associations that have long existed in Japanese society are counted among CSOs. In Japan, nonprofit, nongovernmental groups active in international cooperation emerged in the 1960s, gaining momentum in the late 1970s on the issue of accepting Indochinese refugees. Foundations, incorporated associations, and private organizations numbered approximately 80,000 in the 1990s. However, having been established in the Meiji Period, many of the organizations were strictly regulated according to the Civil Code and not socially recognized. In addition, preferential treatment under the tax system for the promotion of civilian activities, as seen overseas, was very limited, with fewer than 1,000 of 24,000 incorporated bodies gaining that status, thus inhibiting the development of NGOs. The 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake sparked great progress among Japan’s CSOs, bringing volunteers into the limelight for the first time because of their swift aid response in the face of rigid government aid. It became known as the “first year of volunteerism.” As a result, citizen groups gaining status as legal entities more easily and faster than ever, and in 1998, a movement driven by citizen groups and a Diet members caucus demanding legislation to facilitate public interest projects gained traction, and a bill introduced by a Diet member led to the enactment and implementation of the Act to Promote Specified Non-profit Activities (NPO Law). That resulted in public interest corporation reforms and other civil code reforms, and in 2008, the NPOs formerly designated as “incorporated association,” “incorporated foundation,” and “intermediate corporation” were reclassified into four types of legal entities—general corporation (association/foundation) and public interest corporation (association/foundation)—with the latter granting tax exemption. With expanded options for incorporation of civil society activities, CSOs now include public interest corporations (association/foundation; approx. 9,700), general corporations (association/foundation; approx. 75,000), NPO corporations (approx. 50,000), social welfare corporations (approx. 20,000), and volunteer organizations with no corporate status. Today, reflecting society’s diversity, the younger generations and social entrepreneurs are driving the expansion of new activities in more than 20 fields prescribed by the NPO Law.

(The Japan Center for International Exchange, or JCIE, became an incorporated foundation in 1973, and in 1988, under the former Public Interest Corporation law, it was the first to obtain tax exemption status in the field of international exchange. In 2011, under the new system, JCIE became a public interest incorporated foundation.)

the group receives a very high salary, likely a much higher income than the CEOs of Japanese media outlets, but they say it is not an issue because it is a nonprofit group. Of course, there is no need to live like an ascetic, but I had always thought that civil society was detached from economic and market principles. Is that kind of thinking outdated now?

Abe: The general conclusion on this is that even in civic activities and civil society, a certain degree of expertise is required, and that expertise can be deepened through long-term engagement. Civil society is based on a premise of many people voluntarily working together in solidarity, but of course there will be disagreements in communication among people. In those situations, it takes a certain level of management expertise to guide everyone skillfully to achieve significant social reforms. How to cultivate that expertise and ensure that the people playing those roles can make a living in the process are critical issues.

Donations may seem independent of market principles, but looking around the world, that is not the case at all. ProPublica is quite exceptional in that it is backed by two extremely wealthy financiers, but it was able to attract well-known journalists only on the condition that the two investors do not interfere. It is very rare that those two conditions—well-known large investors but no interference—are in alignment. So, in an effort to ensure greater levels of citizenship and sociality, groups gather small amounts of money from many supporters. Groups attracting high levels of donations have a highly effective marketing capacity, and large NPOs invest heavily in marketing and advertising. In that sense, civil society is inevitably attached to market principles, and if you try and go it alone, you must have an answer to the question of how the core actors are going to make a living out of it.

Hayashi: I believe I understand the reality. However, as an ideal, even if there are people in an organization dealing with money issues, there is a firewall separating the organization from market principles and it engages in civic activities that cannot be covered by market principles. To me that has always been one definition of civic activities and civil society.

I think the word “expertise,” as Mr. Abe just mentioned, is the key. Expertise is the element that has functioned as a shield from market principles since the 19th century. Specialized knowledge is a public good contributed toward society’s development, and it is held in high esteem precisely because it is something money cannot buy. It is also a source of social responsibility. That is why professional groups like bar associations and medical associations are established and act under strict professional ethics, and likewise why society expects that of them. Journalism, too, is in many ways a professional job, but with the spread of the internet and the fact that now anyone can disseminate information, the lines of the profession have been blurred. In any case, there is a public nature to specialist professions, which adopt a strong sense of ethics, and I do not think that can be maintained unless there is a firewall to protect it from economic principles. That is how I have always thought about it.

Takenaka: In the definition of civil society I offered just before, I think there is a firewall of sorts from market principles in the fact that they engage in public fields.

Hayashi: So is just being in the definition enough?

Takenaka: My understanding is yes. Naturally, there is the issue that a certain level of funding is required to attract outstanding talent. They cannot all carry out their work and survive on air alone. We see enterprise-style organizations emerging in Japan, and you can even take NPO management courses at business school in the United States.

Abe: I agree with Professor Takenaka, and I would also like to add that in terms of personnel, it probably depends on how you define the word “recent.” It is not just about the trends in enterprise-style NPOs late in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s; a look at the decade following that shows another trend, namely the competition with startups for the acquisition of talent. There was a fight for entrepreneurial talent, social entrepreneurs, and for people who could become core members of organizations. It was a tough battle, but over

those 15 years, compensation at enterprise-style NPOs improved such that those NPOs formerly paying monthly salaries of just ¥130,000 (slightly over US\$1,000) can now pay annual salaries of ¥3–4 million (about US\$25,000–35,000). Some organizations are even paying average annual salaries of ¥5–6 million, approaching those of large corporations.

For people in the start-up sector, which does operate under market principles, that growth was even bigger and happened faster. And over these 10 years, their orientation has switched from creating on-line games to a desire to resolve society's issues. Of course, we played a role in encouraging them in that direction, but it prompted competition for talent in the field of tackling the problems facing society.

Because start-up players made faster progress than NPOs, that role of allowing younger generations to raise questions and take action to solve societal issues has largely been cornered by start-ups over the past decade. And the emergence of players who advocate a public agenda for solving society's problems while operating under market principles has blurred the situation, complicating the question of whether they belong to the "social sector" or not. This is the precisely the question raised by Professor Hayashi about market principles and the public sphere. Until recently, they have been more or less separate, but in reality, there has been considerable blending in the past 10 years. I think this is inevitable, but it is growing increasingly difficult to ascertain to what extent something is public and to what extent market principles are at play. It is becoming increasingly difficult to categorize them in an academic sense.

Kage: Looking at students now, just as Mr. Abe has said, there are many interested in this kind of social entrepreneurship, the areas where corporations, NPOs, and civic activities overlap. My question may be rather blunt, but where does the capital come from to be able to pay such salaries? Is it from the state?

Abe: In our case, we have quite a broad portfolio. Some of our projects are based on monthly fees of ¥1,000 from the general public, while others are

funded by schools to cover costs for educational trips. We charge approximately ¥7,000 per person for our tours taking children to see sites related to specific social issues, so if we get 100 participants, that amounts to ¥700,000. We also have programs for corporate training, local governments, and research institutes. I think there are few organizations with portfolios as broad as ours, but generally, most NPOs understand the importance of diversifying their sources of income. NPOs have what is called a golden triangle of income composed of one-third from income from conducting their own programs, one-third from national government or foundation funding, and one-third from donations. Operating with 33 percent income from each basket allows NPOs to maintain a financial footing that has an appropriately public nature, without pandering to the will of specific groups or industries.

Takenaka: How does Japan compare to other countries on these matters? Is this situation likely to occur in other countries too? Professor Kage, you touched earlier on the lack of policy advocacy organizations in Japan—why is that the case?

Kage: I believe it has to do with the lack of organizations with sufficient funding to employ the personnel needed to create policy proposals. If they can spend more on human resources as Mr. Abe mentioned, does that mean there is now strengthened capability within civil society to make policy recommendations?

Takenaka: In short, as people carry out their work, they develop opinions about the kinds of policies that should be implemented and lobby Diet members and others in Kasumigaseki in support of those policies. And because they can pay better salaries, NPOs can bring former bureaucrats onto their staff, so I wonder if this has contributed to greater policymaking competency in civil society.

Abe: We are starting to see signs of greater competency. It is possible to hire former bureaucrats once you reach a certain scale, but in reality, that is still quite difficult except for a few organizations. The reason being that unless the bureaucrats have

reached the deputy director or director level, they will not be able to draft good policies anyway. Those people are typically in their late 30s or 40s, and if they have a family, they need a considerable income or they just cannot make a living. I think very few organizations can pay those kinds of salaries. That is why we are still just seeing the first signs of change. But as in our case, we are seeing an increase in local government employees and state-level bureaucrats making career changes.

It is important to take a big picture view of lobbying and policymaking competency. The first draft of a policy is never perfect, and we often see operational gaps between state and local governments. One striking example this past spring concerned issues surrounding Japan's special adoption system (a system whereby all links to an adoptees birth parents are severed) that were widely covered by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and specifically the issue of the disappearance of the representative of a private adoption agency. We have published a special feature article with a follow-up if you are interested in reading about this case ("Sugata o keshita 'assen kikan' kankeisha ga kataru konwaku" [An adoption agency disappears, people involved describe their shock]). There have always been many dissenting opinions from orphanages on various components of the workings of special adoptions. On the other hand, we have seen a global trend emphasizing home care over institutional care and lobbying from the social sector advocating for home care, but there has been very little progress in Japan. This is apparently because people at orphanages reached out to childcare associations all over the country, sending faxes imploring them to "demand your local politicians not permit home care," with the consequent actions of those politicians further complicating matters. Ultimately, the law enacted in 2018 brought about an enormous shift to a system favoring home care, but getting to that result was extremely difficult. We have seen over the past five years how an emergent social sector is working to transform systems that are long-established or built on vested interests, and thus I feel we are finally starting to see improvements in this area.

Takenaka: Professor Kage, you conduct comparative research on Japan's civil society. What aspects present lessons for other countries?

Kage: I think the mechanisms of the NPO Law itself provide a great reference. The new law created a much less cumbersome procedure for nonprofits to incorporate compared to the previous framework, and once established, organizations can continue their activities without having to submit complicated paperwork every year. In that sense, it is a good, user-friendly system that I believe other countries can learn from.

Takenaka: This is the continuation of my previous question to Professor Hayashi, but is the reason for a lack of civil society sources in the press an issue on the media side or is there not sufficient action by civil society for the media to reference? I get the sense that with organizations in the United States, the fact that they have a solid financial footing and human resources mean there are plenty of people actively reaching out to the media.

Hayashi: I think it is both. Professor Kage raised the issue of actions not translating into policy capability, and there really are so many small-scale private organizations that do not formulate policy recommendations. On the other hand, while the media covers stories in a very detailed and accurate manner in response to government moves, it is rare for outlets to take the lead in unearthing social issues and investigating them. "Political coverage," in particular, centers on the press club and it is a style of reporting characterized by pursuing matters that are already unfolding. That means that a lot of the news does not relate to civic groups, and so it creates this vicious cycle where such groups are not sought out for comment

Takenaka: When we worked together previously on the Asia Pacific Initiative project, Professor Hayashi called for training of investigative-style journalists. I wonder if the lack of investigative journalists in Japan goes some way to explain the weak links with civil society.

Hayashi: That Mr. Abe’s organization has a journalism section, I believe, is symbolic. It shows that mass media is not keeping up with the new social issues that need to be solved. We talked about the growing proximity between entrepreneurs and civic groups, and I think the same can be said of journalism and civic groups. There is a broad range of issues that are being talked about recently, such as eldercare, non-regular workers, or individuals overstaying their visas, and it is the people at civic groups who are actually working in these fields who are the most knowledgeable on the issues. If that is the case, they should be able to write the news on those issues. Journalism is great on the “big politics” issues like predicting who will win during election coverage, but so insensitive to the smaller political issues of daily life related to child-rearing or care for older people. “Politics” has so many definitions, and yet they only throw resources at “big politics,” resulting in very weak coverage of civil society.

Takenaka: It is fascinating hearing about these issues related to both sides—civil society and journalism. Are there any takeaways for other countries from Japan’s experience in these areas?

Hayashi: Japanese media is large in scale and very stable. The system for making news public, including the press club, is well established, and it serves as a source of trustworthy primary information. NHK, especially, has developed an excellent reporting system in times of disaster that combines accuracy and timely reporting. In some countries, the chairman of the public broadcast system changes each time there is a new administration, dramatically changing news selection methods and content, which is very destabilizing. Several odd people have served as NHK chairman, but it nevertheless has survived due to the stability of the organization as a whole.

Diversity and Democracy in Japanese Society

Takenaka: This discussion on the latest trends in civil society has been most informative. Now I

would like to turn our discussions to the topic of diversity. In the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index 2021, published in March 2021, Japan was ranked an abominable 120th, and it has also adopted policies that show a reluctance to accept immigrants. Professor Kage, how do you view this current state of affairs?

Kage: Diversity will likely be the Achilles’ heel of Japan’s democracy. The proportion of female candidates for the current House of Representatives election stands at just 17 percent. In the 2000 general election it was only 15 percent, showing there has been virtually no increase in 20 years. The House of Councillors is a little higher at 28 percent, but at the time of the election for that house in 2001, it was 27 percent, so there again, we see virtually no increase in 20 years. It feels like it is come to a standstill.

People talk about differing policy interests between men and women, so there is no question we need to see some increases here. Politics, in many ways, is easy territory for women to enter. By that I mean there are a lot of women in Japan who have interrupted their careers, and politics is a field that is easy to enter mid-career. Among those who have taken a break in their careers despite being incredibly talented, women probably far outnumber men. On this point, while varying by prefecture, we do see the proportion of women in local elections rising. I researched those circumstances together with my collaborators Professors Frances Rosenbluth and Seiki Tanaka, and when the question is posed as, “Would you run for election if someone took over your household responsibilities?” a considerable number of women responded, “In that case, I would run.” This shows that the heavy burden of housework is one of the hindrances for women. And I get the sense that the reason there are more women running in local elections than in national elections is because of the difficulty of commuting to Tokyo.

On the topic of immigration, the numbers are low, but they were increasing at quite a pace prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigrants went from 1 percent of the population in the year 2000 to 2 percent in 2020, so the numbers have doubled in 20 years. That 2 percent figure is still extremely low compared to other developed nations,

but in terms of rate of increase, the pace was faster than America over the same period. Of course, it is difficult to make these simple comparisons because quite a lot of people in America are not represented in the statistics. I think Japan should be recognized for the fact that amid this rapid increase in immigration, we have not seen increased anti-immigration movements or ultraconservative political parties like those emerging in America or various European countries.

Our research covers these topics too, and when we ask, “What should be done about immigration?” no country has large numbers of people responding, “We should actively accept immigrants.” But what we have found is that Japan stands out in terms of



how few people say “I’m against it” compared to other developed nations. With low immigration numbers in the first place and Japan facing a labor shortage due to declining birth rates, I think most people understand the imminent difficulties due to labor shortages. Immigrants currently make up about 2 percent of Japan’s population, but I do think there is scope to expand it a little more. Looking in more detail, in the industries said to be suffering from shortages, like construction, manufacturing, and hospitality (pre-pandemic), there were comparatively more people responding that “it is reasonable to accept unskilled immigrant workers.” There is an element of interconnection between the labor shortage situation and tolerance for immigration. However, a survey conducted after the emergence of COVID-19 in September last year showed the numbers were virtually unchanged from those in a prior 2016 survey. I am fascinated by the fact that in September 2020, the proportion of people

accepting of immigration is identical to what it was in 2016.

Takenaka: Why do you think there are still so few female parliamentarians in the Japanese National Diet?

Kage: People often note that the election system centered on single-member constituencies makes it harder for women to run than the proportional representation system. Under the single-member constituency system, candidates must diligently tend to their electoral district, which presents an enormous burden for women. With proportional representation, the battle is conducted at the party level, thereby removing the requirement of engaging with every corner of a district and constantly servicing the local electorate.

Takenaka: With the proportional system, if the parties determined to field a specific percentage of women, those numbers could be achieved for the most part. The proportion of women in the Diet is not rising, but what about the ratio of women at the University of Tokyo? When I was there, of the 660 undergraduate students in the University of Tokyo Faculty of Law, only 60 were women. Professor Hayashi, how would you describe diversity at the University of Tokyo at present?

Hayashi: It is terrible. The university is trying to raise the ratio of female students from 20 percent to 30 percent, but even that was a big decision. I am sure everyone questions why it is only a 10 percent rise and why the goal is not 50:50. And the target value for female faculty has been raised to 25 percent, but a quota system has not been instituted. This might still look like a small figure, but the reality is that there is opposition from both within and outside the university to these kinds of measures.

It is the same in politics, but whenever you try to implement policies aimed at women, talk emerges of reverse discrimination. There is perhaps a conviction that there is equality in the current system and so people are adamant about not changing it. With foreigners also, we do not discriminate, but the conditions are such that even as a foreigner,

you have to act the same way as Japanese people. If you speak Japanese and behave the same way as Japanese people, and if you have the qualifications, there is equality—I get the sense there is an understanding in society that that kind of diversity is good enough.

Takenaka: Scholars like Professor Mari Miura of Sophia University have been engaged in in-depth debates on the subject of Diet members. She says that without a quota system for ensuring a fixed number of parliamentarians, we will make no headway on social advancement of women. Others say it is better to institute parity from the outset rather than wait for the number of female parliamentarians to increase naturally. If nothing is done, the numbers clearly do not increase.

Hayashi: I agree there are many good aspects to a quota system. But I fear that when you try to introduce such a system, you will end up with a debate over the implementation process itself, and so the whole thing will collapse on procedural grounds before the goals are reached. Nevertheless, both Princeton and Yale Universities in the United States went co-educational in 1969, after which they instituted an array of measures including quotas until they reached parity, thus changing the campus landscape. I think that was an incredible effort.

Takenaka: American universities are achieving male-female parity through quota systems?

Hayashi: A range of measures are being implemented. And quotas are not only aimed at women.

Abe: Seen in that light, the proportion of women at the University of Tokyo is a major issue. But we must also consider students from regions outside of Tokyo. The University of Tokyo is no longer the number one university in the country; it has become a local Kanto region school. When contemplating what needs to change, I believe any kind of major change requires affirmative action. Any attempt to rectify structural discrimination will result in momentary reverse discrimination, but I think you have to approach it positively, providing

a full explanation of these impacts first. But if it is going to be done, then it should be something that is going to be highly effective. Really big changes should be carried out timed with and in fields experiencing growth.

What we see now is the result of a failure to do that. This is true looking at politics overall as well. Thinking about whether to cater to younger generations or the elderly, from the logical viewpoint of the future of this country, it should absolutely be the young. Looking back, somewhere along the way a mechanism should have been introduced to create capital for investment in younger generations. For example, an arrangement adopting life expectancy figures to determine the start year for pension payments. A pension is insurance for long life, but when the system was created, average life expectancy was just 65 years. Now, it is 80–85 years,* so that is the age that pension payments should begin. But it is extremely difficult to change a system that is now so set in stone. Because the fact is there will be resistance. But if you are going to do it, you have to do something in the transition phase, like paying out ¥10 million in cash to every elderly person without savings. Even at that amount, with an elderly population of about 30 million, a third of whom do not have savings, total distributions would cost ¥100 trillion. It is impossible to start that debate if you are not in a growth phase.

Takenaka: It is hard for Japan to enter a growth phase now. So, what can be done?

Abe: One idea is to create very niche growth. Build small domains and create growth within those domains that can trigger reform. And then use that successful transformation as an example for other areas. I believe that is the only way to develop now.

Takenaka: Mr. Abe, do you think Japan has made some reasonable resolutions on the issue of diversity?

Abe: I think there are actually two types when it comes to diversity: whitelist items and blacklist items. For example, when companies describe themselves as diverse, we do not see them claiming, “We have cows and frogs, so we are a great

*In 2020, life expectancy in Japan was 81.64 for men and 87.74 for women.

company because we value diversity.” What we picture when companies describe themselves as valuing diversity is a company with foreign staff and a high ratio of women. Deeming situations as adequate is a whitelist kind of thinking. But diversity is essentially a blacklist concept: “You can do whatever you want as long as you maintain certain conditions.” I believe diversity is about having extremely diverse allocation in every area besides the ones that must be guarded. But what happens most in practice is that the whitelist thinking for resolving the question of diversity is pervasive, such that the ideals of advocates for diversity are now so strongly reflected that it goes beyond the original meaning. I support whitelist forms of affirmative action, but I believe they should come with a time limit.

On the question of whether we even have the foundation to tolerate diversity in Japan, a country where there is strong pressure to conform, I feel there are quite a lot of redundancies in our systems. Because the systems rely on Japanese society’s pressure to conform, they in fact have broad tolerance. Take for example the employment support facilities for disabled people established under the Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act. They were founded on the concept of the importance of participating in society through work even if you have a disability. The system was created based on that ideology and a great deal of tax money has been committed to building facilities to support disabled persons in becoming self-reliant. But some of these facilities have no intention of supporting disabled persons to work and just use the arrangement to get funding to sustain their facility. To me, that is one way of safeguarding diversity because social contribution and participation by disabled persons does not have to be in the form of employment. The concept of disability in the first place is a reverse calculation with social productivity as the starting point, so the question remains whether work is the only way for disabled persons to participate in society. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to provide support for disabled persons with private money alone. But allowing facilities to gather resources in the name of employment support despite not engaging in that

work—I think these kinds of redundancies are a feature of Japan’s systems.

It is precisely because of complicated arrangements that it is possible to hack the system or come up with excuses. Redundancy does not arise in simpler, clearer systems. In terms of securing diversity in civil society, I think there is a dichotomy. On one side, the consequence of strong pressure to conform and complex social systems is a pattern of built-in redundancies in some areas. On the other, the systems are simple, but they are guaranteed through a culture of tolerance among citizens.

I once heard something very interesting from some Korean media representatives. They said the Korean media has accomplished two major agendas: market liberalization and democratization. They asked me, “What are the biggest accomplishments of the Japanese media, including mass media, from the last 50 or 100 years?” I do not see it as having achieved anything on that level.

One of the biggest roles of the media in Japanese society is not reform, but to cultivate a sense of what is “normal” for everyone. I think it has always functioned as a form of infrastructure that makes sure roughly the same information reaches everyone. It is constantly working to make society more robust. That is because if everyone’s sense of normal is the same, there is an enormous resistance to change. Getting married is what you do, a woman takes her husband’s name—the more these ordinary things are normalized, the harder they are to change. However, I think diversity is being safeguarded in Japanese society when a certain level of redundancy arises within that incredibly strong dynamic for making things robust.

Takenaka: Your discussion just now about how the media plays a part in spreading ideas of what is normal relates very closely to Professor Hayashi’s ideas. Professor Hayashi, you have often pointed out how many television dramas contain stereotypical female images, have you not?

Hayashi: Commercials also present many stereotypical images related to gender-based role division. And there is no end to the cheap advertising using women purely to catch people’s eyes. So often we

see ads where a model or actress is smiling holding some product. And then there is the morning news programs with a sweet young weather reporter saying, “It is fine weather today!” and the use of the word *joshi-ana* (announcer girl) to indicate a female television announcer. All around us there are expressions that fix the image of women’s roles. In addition to Japanese society generally accepting that situation as Mr. Abe mentioned, leadership in the media—in other words Japanese men—laid bare their desires for how the world should be, and without any major opposition to that, a stable society was achieved. So, we have gotten nowhere.

Takenaka: Is it the perpetuation of male domination? A repeated cycle of women being expected to fulfill certain roles?

Hayashi: I think it is just that lots of people think, “What is wrong with the way it is now?” They are the kind of people who say, “Women these days are brilliant. In fact, they are superior.” These are not people who are openly hostile to women. But the ruling class in Japanese society, that is elderly Japanese men, forever hold on to this Showa Era dream of an old-fashioned nuclear family with the office worker father, housewife mother, and two children, and they refuse to think about anything else. The flip side of stability is a strong distaste for change.

Takenaka: And is that impacting the ratio of women at the University of Tokyo and in the National Diet as well?

Hayashi: Indirectly, yes. At the University of Tokyo, the number of female applicants is low to begin with. If there were lots of women taking the entrance exam and many of them were failing, that would be an education issue and that would suggest different measures. But it is not that. I think the reason there are so few applicants is that, as women, they cannot envision their career path and future after entering the University of Tokyo. The student body at the medical schools of Tohoku University, Hokkaido University, and Nagoya University are already 50 percent female. Smart women who want

a career and want to live an independent life go to regional medical schools. It seems a very rational decision to me. We just do not see the kind of women who will launch a competitor to Ridilover, for example, entering the University of Tokyo.

Takenaka: Is that because there are no role models to base that vision on? Or is that the effect of media and social values having no expectations for women?

Abe: If you really look at the details, one of the factors is the high cost for women living alone. The cost for women coming to Tokyo from from other regions of Japan to live alone and survive, considering apartment security and the like, is overwhelmingly higher than for men.

Hayashi: Yes, that is right. There are many dorms in Tokyo owned and operated by other prefectures, like Tokushima and Kochi, but most of them are for men. The University of Tokyo was criticized when it said it would provide ¥30,000 housing allowances for women. These are the kinds of instances where I wish the media would look into public dorms in Tokyo and report on how there are countless men’s dorms. But that is not what happened. Instead, it was described as reverse discrimination.

Takenaka: Professor Kage, what can we do to change this situation?

Kage: I personally feel that the issue of the proportion of women at the University of Tokyo standing at just 20 percent originates one step further back across the board in the elite combined junior high and high schools for boys. There are very few elite junior highs and high schools for girls, and that is where I believe the problem begins. It creates quite a gap in academics between boys and girls when they come out of high school. A quota system at the university would be good, but if the changes do not involve enabling girls to enter the elite schools one stage earlier, it is hard for them to adjust once they do reach university. What do you think, Professor Hayashi?

Hayashi: I would like to return to the issue of how to cultivate the type of social consciousness that makes girls at a young age take on these goals and think that they want to become a politician or go to the University of Tokyo and become an entrepreneur. It is not just the tap—the entrance exam system—regulating flow; the stereotypes mentioned by Professor Takenaka play a major part.

From the moment they are born, Japanese women are told “you are a girl,” and are expected to live “like a girl.” Only a privileged few can resist that and walk a different path.

Takenaka: Sadly, there is no way out of this debate for now. As a systems theorist, I think we must change national policies such as the provisions of Japan’s national pension system that give preferential treatment to full-time housewives, the so-called “Category III.” However, I think there would be opposition given that a significant number of constituents are housewives. We need to undertake a thorough inspection of this system that favors men and assumes the presence of housewives. But if we make a lot of noise about changing it, there will be resistance, so we need to change it quietly, little by little. It seems like the long way around, but I think it will prove to be a shortcut. There may be issues in how this 120th place ranking in terms of women’s social advancement is interpreted, but are there any areas in our experience that other countries can reference?

Abe: It is the perfect example of failure, so perhaps it could be a reference on what not to do. Japan has very little to be proud of when it comes to the gender gap.

Hayashi: Global surveys show that large Japanese corporations are ahead in terms of work-life balance. Systems for maternity leave, childcare leave, and reduced working hours are all firmly in place. I too am a systems theorist, and I believe there are many areas where Japan lags behind, including the issue of Category III insured persons. However, compared to America, Japan has a better insurance system in place, and better maternity and childcare leave, and while there is no law on sexual

harassment, there is a place for in-house consultations, so there are measures in place. But the reality is that these are not being sufficiently utilized.

Takenaka: If that is the case, as a systems theorist I would ask the question, “Doesn’t that mean there is a more effective system?” Although I know it is quite difficult to verify, doesn’t the fact that the systems you mentioned are not being utilized suggest that some other system, such as the Category III insured persons, is indirectly impacting the situation? And the system of tax deductions for dependents is being relied on for living, so I think we need some revisions there also. Related to this, one hot topic of debate in Japan right now is the option of having separate surnames for married couples. What are your views on this issue?

Kage: With the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) so opposed, and in terms of the judiciary, I get the sense that it is hard for even the Supreme Court to take action.

Takenaka: This relates to the field of justice—your specialty, Professor Kage. The Supreme Court’s judgment was based on the argument that because the freedom to take the woman’s name already exists, a system of optional separate surnames for married couple is not needed. Why is the Supreme Court being so cautious?

Kage: I think it is out of consideration for the LDP, because the option of separate surnames has become such a hot topic.

Takenaka: This is where I think there would be some value in forming a joint project to carry out a thorough reevaluation of our politics and society. Mr. Abe, can you please give us some more concrete details on the idea of finding small areas for growth to be used as breakthroughs?

Abe: Currently, there are start-ups in the fields that appear to be on the verge of big growth. I think those are the perfect spaces to shore up to help raise the proportion of women.

Takenaka: Are you suggesting that because start-ups often do not operate under existing rules, if they have gender equality and a successful female manager emerges that they could become a role model for others?

Abe: The gender gap is appalling in the start-up world right now. It is a totally male-dominated world. The key is to raise the proportion of successful female entrepreneurs and women overall in the world of venture capital. Increasing the ratio of female investors who can provide capital and female entrepreneurs whose successful businesses allow them to become angel investors for the next generation of entrepreneurs will kick off a cycle for increased numbers of females in management. This relates to the example provided earlier of women saying they would run for election if they had support for household chores, but it is extremely difficult for people with no surplus capacity to act from a sense of crisis or a sense of mission. They do not think to take on some new challenge on top of dealing with the issues they personally face. With that being understood, when thinking about areas where women's social progress can be advanced, the first domino to fall could be the ratio of female investors and female entrepreneurs.

Hayashi: Do they not then run into the issue of banks not financing women?

Abe: With start-ups, the main providers of risk money are venture capital funds, not banks. It is equity, so it does not have to be returned. But there are many past examples of bad providers, useless investors who demand their voice be heard in exchange for equity, although we are seeing a self-cleansing process at work in more recent times.

Hayashi: We see that in politics too—cases of sexual harassment where people demand to be heard in return for their vote. Apparently it is called “vote harassment” (*hyo-hara*).

Abe: I think the striking lack of female candidates in the LDP is a clear indication of the culture of

harassment in the LDP's support base. In politics, candidates are always a direct reflection of their support base. One option would be to create a women-only political party. I think there are plenty of other things that could be done, including adopting an agenda to institute a quota system.

Kage: I think in many ways, the roots of women's issues and immigration are deeply intertwined. One of the most obvious examples is how, in America and Europe, immigrants are employed to undertake housework to enable women to work outside the home. Opening the door to immigration is tied to the ability of women to go out into the world.

Stability and Independence of Japanese Media

Takenaka: I would like to now move our discussions to the topic of the media. Professor Hayashi earlier described the Japanese media as being accurate. In your book, *Media Fushin*, you compare Japan's media with that in other places in the world and indicate that the Japanese people have a relatively low level of confidence in the news and therefore little trust in the media. On the other hand, in a survey on global values, on the question of which of Japan's institutions are trusted, there was quite a lot of faith in the media. I am curious about that gap. In essence, the numbers reveal a slightly higher level of trust in the media than in bureaucratic institutions or political parties. Professor Hayashi, please tell us your thoughts on Japan's media and journalism, including the issue I just raised.

Hayashi: The difficulty is in the definition of trust. Recently, trust feels more like a popularity contest, with people putting their trust in something as long as it is harmless. In countries with limits on freedom of expression, like China and Indonesia, trust in the media is high. I am uncomfortable with the fact that the old men running Japan's media wear “trust” like a badge of honor. The media cannot just run innocuous stories; it needs to be prepared to be hated if it wants to be able to write all different stories. I do not

necessarily believe indicators of trust to be the best gauge against which to measure media.

Takenaka: So, is the strong point of Japan's media its accuracy?

Hayashi: The Japanese media is indeed accurate, and a great many of the journalists are very diligent. Tabloid journalists in England, for example, write whatever they want—anywhere from rumors to absolute nonsense—but very few journalists in Japan are



that bad. On the contrary, Japanese journalists show great self-restraint, speculating on the decency of writing something or not.

I felt that most at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake. They conducted countless interviews but they said, “Society would go into a state of panic if we publicize all the knowledge we have acquired, so we cannot do that,” choosing, for example, not to publish information on radiation. Not disclosing that information is problematic for various reasons, but on the flip side, the media also has a responsibility to think about people's health and safety. There is no doubt that radiation has an impact on people's health, so not sharing that information was not good, but I can also understand how they came to the judgment of not sharing it for fear of creating chaos.

Takenaka: Some argue that media in Japan fails to get to the bottom of issues. On the other hand, is it fair to say that Japanese media is able to criticize the administration?

Hayashi: I would not say that the media fails to criticize the government. But on issues like the Moritomo Gakuen scandal, where the central government sold land at a discount to a school that was closely connected to the then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife, as soon as one piece of information is revealed, they all come out at once to criticize the government. Then when the excitement dies down, they all back off and forget about it. When an issue is topical, they all cover it in the same way. My sense is that journalists lack the initiative to take the lead on their own and pursue a social issue.

Takenaka: Some media outlets have already started to cover and criticize elements lacking in the Kishida cabinet, so my impression was not that they are waiting to see what others do. The Moritomo Gakuen issue blew up like it did because the *Asahi Shimbun* jumped on it.

Hayashi: During the election for the House of Representatives this time, for example, very few articles have dug deep into the issues of Japan's electoral system overall. Despite there being numerous issues with elections, like the short campaign period and problems with the Public Office Election Law, few articles have delved persistently into those issues. What is more, the articles themselves are extremely short.

I believe there is far more to delve into on the issue of politicians and social media too, such as how the LDP is using social media, what kinds of activities parties and politicians conduct over social media, and there is possibly also some fake news. How is foreign disinformation handled? How is information disclosed and what are the politics behind it? I have never really seen any persistent investigative journalism on these matters.

Takenaka: That is exactly right. You view the issues from a somewhat broader framework.

Hayashi: When talking about changing society, you need to view it from a broader perspective, or nothing will change. It is the same with women's issues.

Takenaka: Mr. Abe, you operate your own media organization and you yourself make media appearances. What do you see as the issues and challenges for Japanese media?

Abe: I would like to add to Professor Hayashi's comments by raising the very bad situation created by Japanese media companies or groups of companies being so closed off in their own ecosystems: take for example, the Asahi affiliates, including TV Asahi, which are their own ecosystem, and *Asahi Shimbun* is just *Asahi Shimbun*. Even on the Moritomo scandal, if an editor said, "I will take responsibility for this one. Let's do this as a company," they could launch a powerful attack. However, TV Asahi will never allow a news team to take a stand like that based on material unearthed by a freelancer. The whole system is inside itself, so there is no cultivation of journalism as a craft and all you get is "*Asahi Shimbun* journalism."

Japan has no journalism ecosystem; all we have is closed-off mini corporate-journalism ecosystems. They may function well from time to time, but generally speaking, there is a lack of balance and extremely low levels of diversity. Incidentally, the benefits of well-developed internal systems are steadfast adherence to internal rules and an incredible level of organizational strength. But the strength of an organization, including in economic terms, must be considered in combination with journalism. Outlets that have not established that financial strength face very tough conditions. Japanese newspapers and television stations of old have done splendidly in this regard, creating good organizational strength to persevere until now.

But seen over a span of the last 20 years, the virtues of big traditional Japanese media outlets have been lost. Once the founders, the postwar revival generation, were gone, there was no one to bridge media content and business. Managers must understand the product—content—but equally, they cannot manage if they do not understand operations. Therefore, when the internet emerged, they had no idea how to tackle the dual challenges of a new business model and a new content format. Not knowing what to do, they just put stuff up and made money through advertisement revenues from

having their posts picked up by news aggregators like MSN and thought, "This will do, won't it?" It ended up negatively impacting the market for fee content in the Japanese media space.

For media outlets to subsist through internet subscriptions, they must carefully consider the timing for switching over from the advertising model. Because this was not done well, the media turned into a space for headlines all about celebrity extramarital affairs, kicking off a dynamic that caused the entire media industry to start shrinking. This is a major problem. Journalism's value is found in good journalists bringing important stories, but I do not think any outlet will have the capital to be able to keep their journalists fed going forward.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are relatively successful in the online fee content battle. They have a strong business sense and understand content, so they were able to take their strengths with them when they switched to online, managing to survive in the internet space. Going forward, I think there will be very few players investing in genuinely good journalism content in Japan. And I think conventional media outlets in particular will struggle in this regard. *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* is one of very few success stories when it comes to online subscriptions.

Another problem was that the Japanese media placed too much weight on its role of monitoring political power. Media is described as the "fourth estate," and as such it has a role in monitoring authority, but really that is not all; its function is also to make recommendations for society. All kinds of defects can be found in policies and incidents when you examine them from different angles. It is easy to provide criticism, but then you need to make recommendations on how to steer things in the right direction and be able to stand by those things that are good. The Japanese media is not taking responsibility and proposing better options. Ending a story with something abstract like, "We must all think about this," does not resonate with readers.

Takenaka: That is absolutely true. So many articles close with a statement like, "We should deepen our discussions on this," or, "We must think about it more."

Abe: The people writing those articles have done more research than anyone else, so you would think they would take a position, but the fact that they do not shows that either they have not delved into it deeply enough or they do not have sufficient understanding of the big picture to make any proposals. Media must carry out three functions: transmit accurate information in a timely manner, follow and monitor authority, and put forward systematic proposals in a transparent manner. Japanese media is incredibly weak on this third point.

Hayashi: I am in absolute agreement with you on those points, Mr. Abe, but a sore spot for journalism is that element of deliberately avoiding policy recommendations in order to maintain objectivity. Should some kind of media recommendations be adopted in politics, journalism carries responsibility for it, making it very difficult to provide coverage from a detached, neutral position. This is the reason for the age-old ironclad rule that the media should not become a player. *Yomiuri Shimbun* made recommendations on constitutional reform—an area of great debate—but was it right for them to take a position like that?

This is the basis of journalism that takes the monitoring of authority as its mission. But as you pointed out, Mr. Abe, the result is journalism that is irrelevant and detached from civil society. In the countries of the West, the media is being told that taking such a position is not good enough.

After the war, Japan stuck with the style of objective American journalism, and the mainstream view was that they should deliberately avoid getting involved in social action. That stance is fundamentally still observed today. However, the result is that journalism loses its social relevance. I believe this to be the big issue facing Japanese journalism now.

Abe: We constructed our own internal media model based on that historical context to deal with modern social issues. The problem is that major media outlets are not able to get information from the NPOs and people at the heart of social issues. People on-site at NPOs have an intense distrust of mass media. The reason for that is that they detest simply being used as material in the reporters and

directors' predetermined narrative. That is what they have experienced countless times to date. They do not get any money, their time is taken up so the media can paint its own story, and the reporters are gone again as soon as the interviews are done. In doing so, the media lose the trust of the people with first-hand information and can no longer gain access to those sources. The acquisition of primary sources is critical to the media, but even that competency is weakening. Acquisition of primary information is fundamental to all three functions of timely reporting of primary information, monitoring and review, and making recommendations, but that is getting harder in some fields. I think this explains why Japanese media is struggling.

Takenaka: Professor Kage, what is your take on Japanese media?

Kage: It overlaps with what Professor Hayashi has said, but looking at the division in America's media, I get the impression that Japan has not yet reached that point. You get people who prefer to read either *Yomiuri Shimbun* or *Asahi Shimbun*, or what not, but the situation is not such that those people cannot even understand each other or that they are seeing totally different news.

Takenaka: You are right that things are still quite calm in the Japanese media. It is not like what we see between Fox and CNN. There is still social stability. In the United States, it feels quite unstable because it is like they are bashing each other rather than airing competing opinions.

Professor Hayashi, I would like to ask you now about existing media and how they handled the rapid diffusion of the internet—the point Mr. Abe raised. It is the suggestion that their organizational strength has weakened over the medium to long term because they have struggled to switch from the model of earning through providing articles and advertising to a subscription model. What is your view on this assessment of the issues?

Hayashi: I think the Japanese media is quite strong when it comes to the subscription model. The public broadcaster NHK is buttressed by license fees and

the newspapers rely on income from subscriptions. But as the people paying for those subscriptions are getting older, the reality is that will ultimately die out.

Takenaka: I think the subscription issue Mr. Abe is referring to is about transferring over from paper to the internet. Is that right?

Abe: Correct. The fact that they looked to the advertising model when making the switch from paper to online.

Takenaka: I believe even the online version of *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* is a viable business on the basis of subscriptions, and I think other companies are doing their best to make it with user-fee systems, but the results are not clear.

Hayashi: The Oxford University Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* has published results showing a higher proportion of Japanese people unwilling to pay for paywall access compared to other countries. There is not much awareness of paying for information, and many people do not want to pay money for news. I think there are a range of reasons why there are fewer people wanting to go to the trouble of paying ¥4,000 or ¥5,000 for a subscription to *Asahi Shimbun* or *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*. But I do think that “paper” newspapers will pretty much disappear.

In addition, opinions may be split on this, but most regional Japanese newspapers are run independently. In contrast, in America, most regional papers have been brought under chains like McClatchy. And there are even cases in America where owners change overnight, such as when a regional paper was suddenly bought out by a casino magnate. The Japanese prewar system of “one prefecture, one newspaper” was carried into post-war times. Most are owner-operator companies run by local dignitaries or distinguished families, and many still reach more than 50 percent of households.

Takenaka: Maintaining independence is probably a good thing. National newspapers penetrate the Tokyo market, but have made almost no

headway in other prefectures. The fact is that if you go to the Chugoku region, it is the *Chugoku Shimbun*; in Fukuoka, it is *Nishinippon Shimbun*; in Kagoshima, *Minaminihon Shimbun*; and in Nagano, *Shinano Mainichi Shimbun*. That is what people are reading.

Hayashi: It is good to be independent, but there have been virtually no advancements in terms of digitization in the regional presses.

Takenaka: That is definitely problematic. How about polarization? Japan does not have anything like the Fox vs. CNN situation.

Hayashi: Japan has the Broadcasting Act, which prescribes political impartiality. In America, the Fairness Doctrine was abolished under the Reagan Administration in the 1980s, which basically created an environment of anything goes. We do not see major polarization like that in the Japanese broadcasting sphere.

Takenaka: Is this lack of polarization an area that other countries could learn from? Looking at the newspapers, they do adopt different tones setting them as either right- or left-wing, so I believe it is possible to appreciate diverse opinions if you read them all.

Hayashi: The question is, how cognizant are readers of that distribution of opinions? The old marketing strategy of these newspapers was, “Subscribe to us and you get three months no charge and free detergent!” The next person would come along saying, “If you subscribe with us, we’ll give you a free ticket to a Giants game,” and people would simply change their newspaper subscription. Rather than focusing on content, the newspaper companies’ strategy for expanding sales was about giveaways. But with the spread of the internet, they now have to compete on content. I think they are getting the tab for that era now.

Takenaka: How do you view the information overflow we have now due to social networking sites?

Hayashi: For me, there is a lot that is fun about social media, but I am also worried. This has become a big problem in America and Facebook is on the brink. We do not talk about it that much in Japan, but Facebook has become a hot bed of hate speech, rumors, and other fake news. Even a female researcher friend of mine suffered from trolling on social media. Attacks on women who speak out are especially hostile on Twitter.

Takenaka: Is that a threat to the freedom of speech? Should there be even stricter requests for disclosure of who makes those attacks?

Abe: That first press conference yesterday by former Princess Mako after she stepped down from the imperial family to marry a commoner was essentially a statement about libel, was it not? As I watched the press conference, I thought that is how you say in an extremely polite, carefully considered way, “You idiots, do you have any idea how much emotional pain libel causes?” I think it is fine for her to talk as she pleases now that she has left the imperial family, including parts that she was not able to share previously, but it was very indicative that the core message was a deep indignation for all the libel she was subjected to.

Overall, with the law now changed, it will get easier to make requests for disclosure of the attackers. So, I think we are moving in the direction of controlling obvious libel on social media. But distinguishing between fake news and less obvious libel, as well as labels like “right-wing” and “left-wing” is where it gets difficult. By way of an example, I published a book on my dialogue with Heizo Takenaka, and for that alone people say of me, “He is an ally of Heizo Takenaka, a neoliberal academic elitist who approves of poverty and wealth gaps.” My job is about resolving issues of poverty and for 12 years I have been consistently opposed to the idea of people being responsible for their own poverty. But the conversation does not go into that kind of content. Despite the fact that I engaged in dialogue with Takenaka precisely because we have different opinions, people assumed I felt the same way. Legal handling of this kind of labeling is very difficult and will continue to be so. It is a troublesome topic

because the very act of labeling serves as a hindrance to communication.

Takenaka: Professor Kage, do you have any thoughts on these issues?

Kage: As Professor Hayashi said, I just hope that the kinds of issues we saw arise related to the presidential election in America, such as fake news and the spread of slander through social media, does not happen in Japan.

Takenaka: On the topic of how to engage with the internet, the issues of libel and labeling were raised.

Abe: When it comes to social media platforms, there is also the problem of delayed responses to fake news because they are not domestic companies. To give a specific example, much of the vaccine hesitation that spread across America and Japan occurred on Instagram. Anti-vaccine information on the HPV vaccine and others spread in Japan mainly over Instagram through networks of mothers. Social platforms in America acted pretty early to hide such information and ensure it was not spread. And it stands to reason that if action was being taken by the head office in America, there would be an awareness of the need for action by the Japan branch office also. But the Japanese response was exceedingly slow, thus delaying proactive recommendation of the HPV vaccine. I believe this is highly immoral because this issue has strong and direct links to people’s lives, and because of it the lives of somewhere between several hundred and several thousand young women were indirectly lost. However, as long as the headquarters are in America, similar events are bound to happen in the future.

Takenaka: Professor Hayashi, I believe you are concerned there is no capacity within the Japanese media and journalism for unearthing new issues. With *NewsPicks*, *HuffPost*, the journalism division at Mr. Abe’s *Ridilover* organization, and the like, as well as newer internet-based media groups investing in investigative journalism, how would you assess their potential?

Hayashi: I have very high hopes for them. It would be wonderful if these new forms of media could cover previously unheard voices and viewpoints. But with internet media, consumers have to go out looking for the information, and if left alone, we end up with a big gap between those people who know what they are looking for and can carefully monitor news on that theme and those who cannot. To prevent this, simply put, we need media literacy, and we need to create more spaces to discuss where the information is and how to go about accessing it. Schools are now engaging in digital education, but they must go beyond simply teaching how to use the machines and start teaching early on about how to deal with information, how to create it, and different ways to provide information.

Takenaka: Is it possible to create mechanisms that make investigative journalism financially profitable?

Abe: *HuffPost* and *BuzzFeed* have not been able to switch to subscription models and while individual journalists are doing their best, I think things are still tight financially. *NewsPicks* is a totally different story—it has very stable financial affairs. I think when creating media, it is very important to have a strong business arm aimed at corporations. *Ridilover* launched into media on the back of our businesses for school trips, corporate training, and tourism. In our case, our social issues-based

tourism is carried out through contracts with NPOs, drawing on our network of several hundred sites. Our handling of information is based on long-term relations with those organizations, enabling us to present high-quality information obtained at relatively low costs in a business structure that differs from conventional media. I sense that in the end, the only media still standing will be those with enterprise-type strategies.

Takenaka: That kind of enterprise model could serve as an example for people attempting to start up media in emerging democracies.

Abe: In order to transmit journalism's true meaning, it is extremely important to demonstrate enterprise models of media, not just standalone media players. Because with standalone media it all comes down to enticing people to notch up more page views. And especially now in the internet era, it takes a long time before you can turn a profit with a fee-based model. The key is either to have some other business that can sustain you until that time comes or be really good at fundraising.

Takenaka: We have covered an enormous range of topics today. I find it most regrettable that Japan has very little to offer by way of lessons on diversity, but I do think Japan may provide a reference for foreign nations in some of the other fields. Thank you all very much.

3rd Panel Participants



Harukata Takenaka [Project Lead/Moderator]

Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)

Harukata Takenaka is currently a professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo, where he specializes in comparative politics and international political economy, with a particular interest in democratization in prewar Japan and changes in the Japanese parliamentary system. His recent publications include *Korona Kiki no Seiji: Abe Seiken vs. Chiji* [Politics of the COVID-19 Crisis: The Abe Administration vs Governors] (2020) and *Failed Democratization in Prewar Japan: Breakdown of a Hybrid Regime* (2014). Professor Takenaka formerly served in the Ministry of Finance between 1993 and 1995, and later joined the Headquarters for the Reorganization of the Government in 1998. He joined GRIPS in 1999 first as an assistant professor, and then taught as an associate professor until assuming his current position in 2010. He received his BA from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo, and his MA and PhD in Political Science from Stanford University.



Toshiki Abe

Representative, Ridilover Incorporated Association and Ridilover Inc.

In 2009, while still a student at the University of Tokyo, Toshiki Abe established Ridilover, a platform to share and disseminate information on social issues through study tours. Ridilover was incorporated as an association in 2012, and Ridilover Inc. was established the following year. Through study tours, Ridilover has dealt with more than 350 different social issues and sent more than 10,000 people into the field. Mr. Abe was selected as one of Forbes Asia's "30 under 30" in 2017, won the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications NICT Entrepreneurs Koshien, and won the Grand Prize of the 4th KDDI Infinity Lab. He is the author of *Nihon ni Tsukeru Kusuri* (Remedies for Japan, co-authored with Heizo Takenaka), and *Itsuka Riida ni Naru Kimitachi e* (To those who will become leaders). From 2012 to 2015, he lectured on social entrepreneurship at the University of Tokyo and held lectures for faculty members as well.



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Rieko Kage is a professor at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Her field of research is comparative politics and civil society, with a special focus on political sociology and interest groups. She was a visiting scholar at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, an associate professor at the Graduate School of Law, Kobe University, and an associate professor at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo, before assuming her current position in 2020. She is the author of *Civic Engagement in Postwar Japan: The Revival of a Defeated Society* (2011) and *Who Judges? Designing Jury Systems in Japan, East Asia and Europe* (2017). She co-authored "What Explains Low Female Political Representation? Evidence from Survey Experiments in Japan" *Politics and Gender* 15, no. 2 (2019): 285–309, and authored "War Democratization, and Generational Cohort Effects on Participation in Japan" *Electoral Studies* 73 (2021). She received a BA in 1995 and an MA in 1997 from Kyoto University's Faculty of Law, and a PhD in political science from Harvard University in 2005.



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Kaori Hayashi is professor of media and journalism studies at the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, University of Tokyo. She is executive vice president of the University of Tokyo in charge of global and diversity affairs, as well as Director of the B'AI Global Forum, which was set up within the Institute for AI and Beyond at the University of Tokyo. Her most recent English publications include "The Silent Public in a Liberal State: Challenges for Japan's Journalism in the Age of the Internet" in *The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism. Japan and the World Order* (2020), and "Gendered Power Relations in the Digital Age: An Analysis of Japanese Women's Media Choice and Use within a Global Context", in *Feminist Media Studies* (2021).

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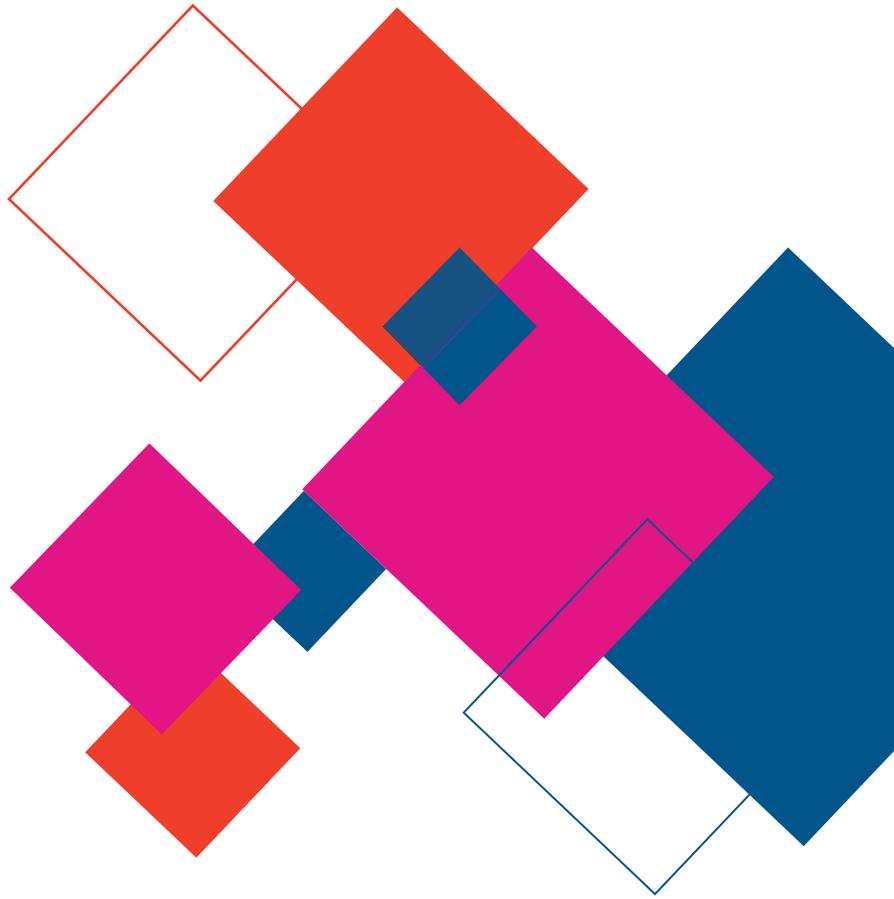
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