

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

Title: Meiji Restoration and “council system”: The formation of political and social order through majority rule

Doctoral Program: Major in Humanities
Graduate School of Letters
Ritsumeikan University

イコミ タカノリ
IKOMI Takanori

This thesis examines the transformation of the act of debate and consensus in the Japanese archipelago in the 19th century. This is the transformation of the act of debate and consensus building in early modern society, which was based on the idea of unanimous consent, into the act of debate and consensus building in modern society, which was based on the principle of decision-making by majority vote.

In this paper, I focus on the concept of the local council system, which is inseparable from the issue of discussion and consensus. The process by which majority rule became normative was the emergence and institutionalization of council system and the transformation of its meaning.

However, majority rule did not work in local councils. Each council member was constrained by the will of the village, the electing body, and was seen as a spokesperson for the village in the proceedings.

Therefore, the introduction of majority voting led to a situation where the will of some delegates = the will of the village was denied unless it was unanimous. Therefore, the criticism of majority rule from the council members. In order for the majority rule-based parliament to function smoothly and permanently, it was necessary for the social structure to be transformed.

The land tax reform brought about this transformation of the social structure. The land tax reform recognized the land ownership rights of individuals and transformed the village into a community organization that recognized the homogeneity of the individuals within a certain geographical area and their diverse interests in principle. Thus, on the premise that homogeneous individuals with different interests existed as members of the society, prefectural and township councils and village councils were institutionalized, which provided for majority voting in order to obtain the consent of individuals.

In parallel with this transformation of social organization, there was a shift in perceptions among people that made it possible for them to acquiesce in the decisions of the majority vote. In other words, it is a shift in the perception of the parliament as a place for extracting a majority = a public opinion, and defining the will of the people obtained by majority vote as the only public opinion.

As a result of this shift in perception, the political powers came to seek their own legitimacy in terms of a majority = a public opinion, and to advocate the existence of a public opinion in their claims. This was the establishment of a power with a de facto power to force people to abandon other choices and to submit in the name of the majority.

Furthermore, the claim to justify the public opinion led to the legitimization of the central official = public power to rule. The shift in perception that led to the power of the majority led to the search for a higher power and the unconscious legitimization of the official power.

Thus, a political and social order was formed in which decisions by majority rule were enforceable against the people.