Political Party Preference in a Japanese Community

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THE existence of a political party or parties is now an ubiquitous phenomenon in all nations of the world today. An expanding franchise is making the growth of political parties everywhere more and more meaningful in recent years to a greater number of citizens. In non-dictatorial countries, voters are asked to "choose" one party over another in an election. Why does an individual vote the way he does? This question is of vital concern to politicians as well as to political scientists.

With the advancement of research methodology and techniques, many studies of voting behavior have appeared in the United States since the end of World War II. A considerable number of voting studies were also done in Japan, only some of which are available in English. The cross-cultural analysis

1 This study is based upon a survey conducted in Japan in the summer of 1963. It is part of a larger study on "Political Life in a Japanese Community." The author is indebted to the Social Science Foundation of the University of Denver (1963-4), the Joint Committee on Asian Studies of the ACLS and SSRC (1966-7), and the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Hawaii for financial support.

2 For a comprehensive account on the history of American franchise, see the following and the references therein, Robert E. Lane, Political Life, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959, 8-42.


of political behavior is a *sine qua non* to the development of theories because it determines the extent of generalization, specifies conditions under which hypotheses are true, provides an opportunity to examine some of the assumptions which are hitherto taken for granted, and might also raise new questions.\(^1\) References to American voting behavior will be made in this paper whenever it is appropriate to do so.

The purpose of this paper is to examine several correlates of political party preference found among a systematically selected sample of the registered voters in a Japanese community. The sample consists of 287 respondents from a community of 16,500 people located near Tokyo. The sample for the general adult population was secured from a list of registered voters. There were 9,345 registered voters in this community at the time of the last election on April 30, 1963. Every 30th voter was selected as one of the respondents. This gave us 321 systematically selected respondents. Out of the 321 we were able to interview 287, about 90 per cent of the original sample. Marriage, death, refusal, and summer work relocation were reasons for not being able to interview the rest of the sample.

**Setting**

A brief historical description of the development of Japanese political parties is presented next in order to make the analysis of the survey results most meaningful.

The first political parties emerged in the 1880's. They were founded as a sectional protest against the new central government. The movement was led by the traditional elite (ex-samurai), although the parties were labelled as "popular" practice. Industrial powers (Zaibatsu) began to influence agrarian-based political parties after World War I. The two major conservative parties, "Seiyukai" and "Minseito," dominated the Parliament. Several socialist parties came into being in the mid 1920's. They represented several shades of socialism from Lenin to the Fabians. They reached their peak when the Social Mass party obtained almost 15 percent of the total votes cast in the 1937 general election.

\(^{1}\) The plea for comparative political analysis is made by many. Some of the recent articles in this regard include: William John Hanna, "Issues in the Cross-Cultural Study of Local Political Systems," Unpublished paper delivered at the 1965 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 10, 1965: Harold D. Lasswell, "Forward" in Robert E. Asheer et al., *The Rulers and the Ruled*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964, p. v: Robert M. Marsh lists four reasons why comparative analysis is helpful in developing sociological theory. They are: "1) to *broaden* the range of variation in variables, thereby requiring theory to explain more than it has heretofore: 2) to *replicate* studies done in one society in other similar societies: 3) to *generalize* propositions from one society to other types of societies: and 4) to *specify* apparently divergent findings from different societies by developing new propositions which account for the originally discrepant findings." Robert M. Marsh, "The Bearing of Comparative Analysis on Sociological Theory," *Social Forces*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (December, 1964), pp. 188–196.