



Dialogue: The lessons from Western politics straying out off course — Welcoming the storms of the international community with a philosophy of inclusion

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European politics in confusion



Prof. Hiro Aida

Aida Hirotsugu (Hiro Aida): Three years have passed since the 2016 Brexit referendum, in which the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union (EU), closely followed by Donald Trump being elected president of the United States. Turmoil persists in the United Kingdom and the United States, populism is rampant in other European countries, and formerly sound governments based on the ideals of parliamentary democracy have struggled to function.

In Italy, the leftist Five Star Movement and the far-right Lega formed a coalition government in 2018, which saw the establishment of an anti-EU administration heavily influenced by populism. In France as well, the Yellow Vest movement broke out in November 2018 and still shows no sign of dying down. Initially, the movement started from demonstrations against the Macron administration's fuel and car tax hikes. But in the confused state of affairs, far-right groups called for anti-immigration policies and some demonstrators turned into rioters. The situation is at the height of confusion. Recent populism has been characterized by occasional cooperation between rightist and leftist camps, although they are strongly opposed to each other. But it is clear that there is strong antagonism against the existing elite among the general public.

Uno Shigeki: The Yellow Vest movement is weakening in momentum, but it still remains uncontrollable. President Macron's policy is criticized as favoring the wealthy, which arouses resentment among anti-immigrant right-wing activists as well as left-wing activists. The weakening of the administration becomes inevitable.

Macron, who graduated from Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA), was part of Hollande's Socialist Party administration.

The fact that the Establishment politicians dared to venture out and establish a new political party named La République En Marche! and won a presidential election shows the weakening of two existing major political parties—the Republican Party and the Socialist Party.



Prof. Uno Shigeki

Macron's rivalry with the far-right National Rally (formally the National Front) led by Marine Le Pen is a cohesive force, but the immaturity of his handling of the government has been conspicuous so far. Brexit has the United Kingdom in chaos, but Macron can no longer afford to pay attention to the UK. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has managed thus far to support the EU, but she has also become a lame duck with two years remaining in office and her ability to exert strong leadership fading.

Aida: One factor in Europe's disorder is anti-EU sentiment. EU members have been forced to implement uniform fiscal austerity policies. At the same time, they have to accept immigrants, and middle class and low-income citizens in EU member states cannot stand decisions made by the EU headquarters. EU member states are also affected by changes in employment, with the transformation of industrial structures, the post-industrialization of society, and the progress of IT. Similar to events in the US, Europe's manufacturing industry, traditionally a major employer, became obsolete, leaving an increasing number of people unable to get jobs.

The transformation of industrial structures has hit the middle class directly

Uno: In 2018, I stayed in Germany for four months to lecture. In 2011, the German government launched the Industry 4.0 initiative to reduce distribution and production costs by making the most of artificial intelligence (AI) and IT. In fact, Germany is said to be the clear leader of EU member states and I went to Germany expecting that the country would be getting increasingly efficient. But trains did not arrive on time and train service was also suspended suddenly. This experience made me realize how accurate and efficient the Japanese railway system was. [Laughs] I rather thought anew about why the productivity of the Japanese service industry was said to be low.

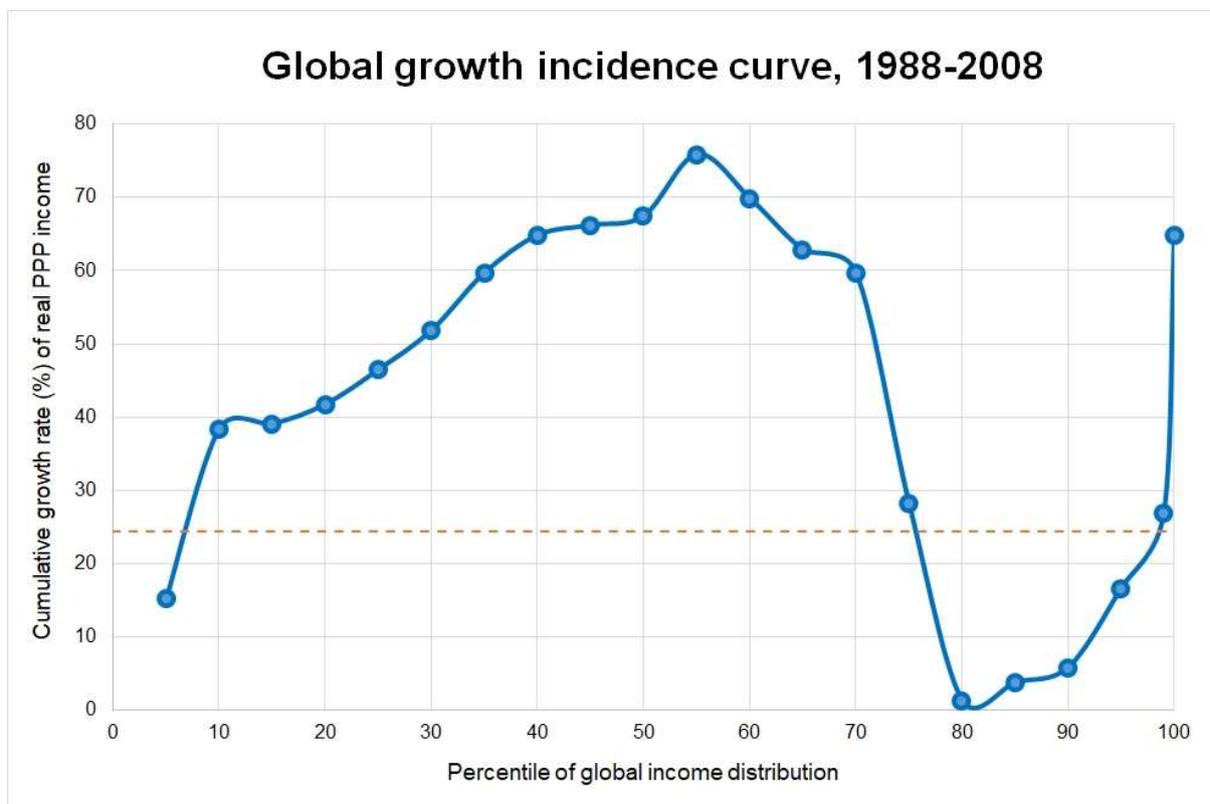
Working hours are short in Germany and there also remain many conventional work systems. But I was impressed that Germany made clever use of AI and IT to make up for that. Germany leaves old things and innovates how to connect each of them rather than ultra-streamlining everything in society. There are a lot of suggestions there for Japan, which works to streamline workplaces while leaving working hours long. I think that Japan also has room to improve social functionality and efficiency while securing a comfortable life, instead of just pressuring workers to streamline even more.

Aida: But such efforts to boost efficiency will cause some people to lose jobs.

Uno: Exactly. You cannot assert that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will definitely create employment opportunities and lead to economic growth. It is predicted that greater efficiency through AI will cause particularly serious damage to the middle class that supports industries.

Democracy has operated under a two-party system in Western countries for the last century. Social democrats representing workers and conservatives representing the bourgeoisie developed social security and maintained national institutions by vying for power and making mutual

concessions. This was based on the premise of economic growth and the expansion of the middle class, but this premise has collapsed completely now. It will be difficult for this two-party system to be restored as it is. I think that the two-party system can survive by upgrading itself in some way or other, but I still cannot predict how that will happen.



Note: Y-axis displays the growth rate of the fractile average income (in 2005 PPP USD). Weighted by population. Growth incidence evaluated at ventile groups (e.g. bottom 5%); top ventile is split into top 1% and 4% between P95 and P99. The horizontal line shows the growth rate in the mean of 24.34% (1.1% p.a.).

Source: Lakner and Milanovic (2015)

Aida: The collapse of the middle class reminds me of Branko Milanović’s “elephant” curve [Global growth incidence curve, 1988–2008]. This graph illustrates the changes in global individual income between 1988 and 2008 and the curve is shaped just like an elephant. The graph shows that the income of the middle class in emerging economies increased significantly. In addition, the income of the wealthy classes in developed countries also rose while the income of the middle classes in developed countries did not increase at all. The curve shows the twenty years from 1988 when the world entered full-scale economic globalization. But the updated graph shows that the middle class has been left behind for thirty years. This is the factor that caused the surge in populism in the United States and Europe.

Though, from a global perspective, the graph also shows that the wealth of humankind is increasing and that standards of living are improving in Asia and Africa.

Uno: Tocqueville, a French political thinker in the nineteenth century, said that the world was basically moving toward equality. It can be said that if you look at the current situation from a microscopic perspective, the world is not equal at all and the gaps are widening. But it can also be said that if you look at the current situation from a macroscopic perspective, as the elephant curve shows, the gaps between emerging and advanced economies are being closed and the world is moving toward equality. The last century was an age when world wealth concentrated in several advanced economies. Now, the world is moving increasingly toward equality with the expansion of GDP in countries with large populations, such as China and India. In this sense, I feel that the world is now in a tough period of transition while it struggles to seek a new equal society integration model.

What political system will be wanted in the future?

Aida: I have known Francis Fukuyama, an American political scientist, for many years. A few years after the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, he noted four problems that the world would face from then on. First, there will be constant challenges against modern progress. This just means confrontations against political Islam. Second, democracy cannot be expanded beyond national borders. As is shown by the EU, the EU headquarters' arrangements have a huge impact and inflict disorder on countries within its bloc. The third is the issue of global gaps.

Fourth, the progress of science and technology can pose a threat to freedom and democracy. At that time, Fukuyama's discussion was based on assumptions about biotechnology. He pointed out that new biotechnologies and medical services would save peoples' lives but they might also abandon others' lives, which could destroy democracy. Certainly, biotechnology has that possibility, but now IT poses a threat to democracy. That is, manipulation of awareness and brainwashing by fake news distributed through social media.

Uno: I feel that Fukuyama's discussion about biotechnology has something to do with Yuval Noah Harari's critical thinking shown in *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Harari argues that people are missing the meaning of being human amid the development of AI. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama also argues that human beings are losing their thymos with the leveling and equalization of the world. The spirituality that makes human beings human is being lost. I feel that the two scholars share highly humanistic critical minds.

Aida: After freedom and democracy are guaranteed institutionally, the issue of thymos exists. That is, it is the issue of recognition and esteem; that people want to be recognized and esteemed. This is a very contemporary matter. We see the global thriving of nationalism and the sudden rise of regionalism represented by the Catalan independence movement.

Identity politics can be seen noticeably in the United States. Individuals seek their own identities based on social awareness of race, sexual orientation, and feminism, conduct political activities in small groups and fight fiercely. As a result, people forget large political themes and cannot act with solidarity. These are all the issue of asking for recognition. The more people come

and go amid globalization and the more widespread equalization gets, the more aware people become of minor differences. If you analyze the confusion that is currently occurring in the United States and Europe, you may get there.

Uno: Tocqueville, who mentioned equalization, was born in 1805 and Karl Marx, born in 1818, was a contemporary of Tocqueville who put forward the theory of class struggle. Compared with Marx, Tocqueville may seem to be rather carefree and easygoing, but they shared the same critical mind. At that time, it was a deep-rooted class-based society and the aristocracy and the common people lived in completely different worlds. In this situation, the commoners were not particularly jealous of the aristocrats. But as the revolution of equalization progressed and the awareness that both the aristocracy and the common people are human beings was raised, the commoners became frustrated with the way they had to live tough lives, although while the aristocracy enjoyed elegant and graceful lives. Regarding equalization, Tocqueville mentioned people's clashes and anger as well as a bright future. The progress of equalization creates massive confusion, especially in a period of transition. Tocqueville and Marx looked at the same phenomenon from different angles.

Today, 200 years after the age when Tocqueville and Marx lived, people have reached the next stage of equalization, and again have friction in the quest for identity and recognition.

Aida: Fukuyama says that it is the state as an institution that resolves such issues. But he also deplores the strength of state in China and the weakness of state in the United States.

Fukuyama points out the shakeup of the liberal international order. After two world wars, international coordination organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, were established. But in fact, it is conceivable that because those organizations functioned well, it caused a new problem. Fukuyama assumes the development of free democracy based on nation-states. But now the freedom and democracy of nation-states suffers a setback in the face of the challenge of globalization.

Uno: In *Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Present Day*, Fukuyama noted the modern state, the rule of law and democratic accountability as the three major pillars of politics in that priority order. His logic is based on the premise that if states are destabilized, it will be a very serious problem.

After the end of the Cold War, multilateral cooperation was halted temporarily. But subsequently, in *Empire* Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri presented a picture of the decentralized and deterritorialized world order of Empire. Although today is a supranational age of globalization, everyone depends on states in the end. The more expectations people have for states, the less the liberal international order will last in turn. Each state just thinks about itself and tries as hard as it can to meet the demands of its discontented people.

Fukuyama has consistently considered how people should live and the political system that each person thinks of as an ideal one. These are two sides of the same coin. Now we inevitably tend to

pay attention to the negative aspects, like the collapse of democracy. But essentially speaking, we should focus on what to do with a new political system.

Aida: Looking back, Japan after the end of the Cold War, that is, Japan in the Heisei period carried out political and administrative reforms aiming to develop a two-party system and aimed for a kind of regime change. Politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals worked hard to create a new era for Japan. But they failed to realize a two-party system, and we have no idea whether the election system change was good or not. Administrative issues also erupted. Things ended up half-finished.

Uno: Looking back on thirty years of Heisei, what Japan aimed to realize was a change of government modelled on the United Kingdom. But society fluidized in the UK and party politics were also being destabilized. Tragically enough, Japan aimed to take that path. But social fluidization became clear in Japan as well. Intermediate groups and local communities that are the bases of political parties weakened. As a result, politics based on competition among political parties became unworkable. The reason why the coalition government involving the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito continues to be in power is that the support bases of the two political parties were only strong if they were seen relatively. There is no positive factor.

Young people working on social issues

Aida: Waves of populism surge in many countries around the world and such countries are swinging to the extremities of right and left. As Brexit symbolizes, even the United Kingdom, which can be said to be the pioneer of parliamentary politics, cannot determine national guidelines and is straying off course. People yearn for a charismatic leader and their wish for dictatorship can even be glimpsed.

How should Japan be positioned in such a situation around the world? Mr. Uno, you have recently given special lectures in high school and have also participated in local revitalization projects, haven't you? I look at your activity with great interest as an educator. How was that?

Uno: Japan has eaten up the fruit of past economic growth and its present rests on it. Japan has many future issues. But that is why it is important how we deal with young people.

I have surveyed Ama Town, Oki District, Shimane Prefecture, for the last few years. This town was afflicted by very serious depopulation. But the town succeeded in revitalizing itself with all the islanders' energies and the power of human resources from outside. Now this town is chosen as a successful example of the I-turn phenomenon in which people migrate from urban areas. In Ama Town, a former mayor who initiated reforms stepped down and a section chief who had a hard struggle in the town office at that time became a new mayor. The baton was passed. What is interesting about the case of Ama Town is that young people from outside do not necessarily settle and migrate to other towns. I also pay regular visits to Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture, which was affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. I saw a case in which young people who had experienced local revitalization in Ama Town participated in a restoration project in Kamaishi.

Human resources built up experiences and real abilities and spread to many parts of the country. I thought that this was an interesting and new cycle.

For another thing, I gave a special lecture at a girls' high school oriented toward preparation for university entrance examinations and thought about politics together with the students, which was an interesting experience to me. In the beginning, they appeared to be uninterested in politics. But in fact, they were strongly eager to resolve social issues. Apparently, the students think that the existing political method of voting for a particular political party in an election to realize a change of government takes much time and questions the significance of being involved in such politics. That is why they feel a psychological gap with politics. But they have a strong social interest in things close to them with eagerness to do something for the local community. I thought that this was the key.

John Dewey, who disseminated pragmatism, argued that an important point of pragmatism was that a society allowing everyone to conduct experiments embodied democracy. I also think that this is important in creating politics for the future. Party politics and election-based democracy are important. On the other hand, open governance is important in our lives; the government discloses information and citizens solve social issues on their own. I think that we have to build a more direct political participation model to close the gaps with the central government's politics. I believe that in doing so, the social mind of young people today will be able to work.

Aida: That's a great activity. In the meantime, I also think about the future of Japan together with students. One thing weighs on my mind.

Political scientist Inoguchi Takashi commissioned an opinion poll company to conduct a survey with Japanese people during the US presidential election campaign in 2016 and ask "If you were a US citizen, which candidate would you vote for, Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump?" The result was that about 60% of the respondents answered Clinton and about 10% answered Trump. This was a logical conclusion from Japanese citizens who saw Japanese media reports that followed US mainstream media. The percentages were, on the whole, similar by generation and gender. But men aged from 15 to 29 showed a different tendency. About 40% of them were in favor of Trump and compared favorably with Clinton supporters. As this was just a one-off poll, you cannot conclude everything by that, but I felt that young men had a feeling of helplessness within them. That is, Japan is saddled with a massive amount of fiscal deficits. They are concerned about future economic prospects and are also worried about whether they will be able to receive pension payments in the future. In addition, women's empowerment is touted and I speculate that young men are discontent and worried that they will be abandoned.

Uno: I think that young men surely have a feeling of helplessness within them. They do not have the success model of the Showa period (1926–1989) that the generation of their parents had, and do not know where they should exert their masculinity. They may hope for strong leadership out of a free-floating anxiety. On the other hand, I found some hope in young people who participated in local revitalization in Ama Town and my special lecture at a girls' high school. These girls and

young men who look to get a society close to them back on its feet seem to want to work in areas where they can, to utilize their experiences and knowledge again in another place and to be evaluated and recognized. They do not put importance on solidarity just as people did in the past but on individual actions. Being aware of society, they are somewhat like libertarians. I also felt that such young people's way of thinking might create a new society.

For Japanese society to coexist with foreigners

Aida: Populist politics just postpones the solving of problems whether they are right-wingers or left-wingers. That is, they turn a blind eye to fiscal deficits and conduct pork-barrel politics to curry favor with the people. This tendency can be seen in the Abe administration as well. But young people know that they will have to pay the price for it and are strongly concerned about that.

On the other hand, there are shortages of workers due to declining birthrates and the aging population. The revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was enacted in April 2019 to encourage foreigners to work in Japan. As discussed above, massive friction has developed in Western countries due to the immigration issue. I think that strong measures for preventing division will be necessary to prevent people from feeling that they are left out in the cold in society.

Uno: Japan appears to be stable and free from division on the face of it. But clearly, the redistribution policy does not work well. For example, the Lost Generation faced the employment ice age for the Lost 20 Years. The employment rate was good temporarily in some years. But the generations who were affected by fluctuations in the economic climate are getting older. In addition, there are also cases in which single mothers are engulfed in relative poverty.

The Abe administration introduced social democratic policies with an emphasis on gender equality helping to bolster annual spring wage negotiations and equal pay for equal work. But it is undeniable that divisions and poverty are progressing with burdens concentrating in particular areas from the perspective of entire Japanese tax and social security systems.

Japan shifted its policy toward bringing foreign workers from overseas. But in Japan today, preparations for accepting people from abroad are not complete; wages are also low and foreigners do not find Japan to be an attractive place to work. I think that a system of including and integrating foreigners who come to Japan as part of Japanese society is important.

Aida: While there is concern that people who feel that they are left out in the cold have antipathy toward foreign workers, Japan is more tolerant in comparison with identity politics in the United States. In the United States, conservatives are getting more religious-minded against the backdrop of strong opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. Trump sides with the religious right and uses that antipathy for political purposes. But no such movement can be seen in Japan. There is slim possibility that sexual orientation will cause divisions as a political issue.

Uno: In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell also point out that religious polarization is underway in the United States. Now a stance

on abortion or premarital sex is a divisive issue in the selection of Supreme Court justices in the United States. I think that Japan is tolerant toward sexual orientation and is tolerant enough to include foreign cultures and people. On the other hand, if Japan does not clarify its philosophy on accepting a multicultural society and receive foreigners in a more judicious manner, there is some possibility that people living tough lives will become reactionary and become more nationalist. That is why I think that Japan needs to have firm discussions about policies and philosophies for coexisting with foreigners.

Aida: The emperor in the Heisei period (1989–2019) did great work in terms of inclusion. He started a journey to console the spirits of the war dead in 1995. In that year the emperor visited Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa, and then Tokyo Memorial Hall. He also traveled around many other parts of the country and to the island of Saipan, the United States, Peleliu Island, Palau and Caliraya, the Philippines. His journey to console the spirits of the war dead regardless of nationality may have been the ultimate one without political characteristics as a symbolic emperor. But the Japanese people also accepted the emperor’s journey of consolation as something positive.

Uno: The emperor in the Heisei period visited the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Hansen’s disease patients and talked with them from their viewpoint with his knees on the ground. He always tried to take sides with people who were suffering. I think that the emperor during the Heisei period was a symbol of Heisei democracy that continued to show a philosophy of inclusion. In the Reiwa period, I am focused on what democracy the new emperor and empress will succeed in.

But, of course, we are also part of the Reiwa democracy. I think that how to reduce friction and realize inclusion is important in an increasingly multicultural society.

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