

Book Review

Media Politics in the Age of Antagonisms

YAMAKOSHI Shuzo (Ed.)

Keio University Press, 2022, 238 Pages

SATO Shingo*

Today, political events and media are inseparable. Authors attempt to explain the relationship between media and “politics,” which is a broad concept that includes not only politicians, political institutions, and political processes but also “the political” in everyday life. In understanding today’s political division, such as the crisis of democracy and the rise of populism, attention must be directed to the type of media environment people are in. *Media Politics in the Age of Antagonisms*, edited by YAMAKOSHI Shuzo, is the fruition of the joint research project “Contemporary Phases of Media Politics in Asia” by the Keio Institute of East Asian Studies. This book presents various perspectives for analyzing how political divisions are constructed, described, and promoted by and through the media.

Media Politics in the Age of Antagonisms covers four countries: Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Germany. The first three chapters, namely, “Media Events of ‘Integration’ and ‘Division’” (Chapter 1), “Japanese Style Media Populism and the ‘Reform’ Discourse” (Chapter 2), and “The ‘Mediatization of Politics’ and ‘Journalism-tization’ in Contemporary Japanese Society” (Chapter 3), focus on contemporary Japanese political issues. The South Korean cases are discussed in the next two chapters. “Media Cynicism and Political Communication in South Korean Society” (Chapter 4) and “Selective Contact and Sharing of Political Information in South Korea” (Chapter 5) analyze citizens’ contact of political information through web-based surveys and quantitative research. “Conflict between Law on Mass Organizations and Moslemization” (Chapter 6) presents the construction process of a “mass” image by political actors in Indonesia. The final chapter, “Hate Speech Measures in Germany” (Chapter 7), presents in detail the German laws regulating hate speech on social networking services (SNS).

Chapter 1, written by MITANI Fumie, extends traditional media event theory and attempts to analyze the coverage of contemporary Kawasaki hate speech demonstrations. Mitani criticizes traditional discussions that have focused

* Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Human Relations, Keio University

exclusively on the “celebration” and “integration” aspects of media events and argues for the need to evaluate events from the “division” and “disruption” aspects. The case of Kawasaki is a good example. After the enactment of the law on hate speech countermeasures, mass media celebrated by constructing the logic of “integration” between the victims and the people who shouted these hate speeches. Conversely, many “division” logics could be observed on SNS, indicating that conflicts were not over. Mitani notes the difference between these two logics and explains the importance of media event theory based on the logic of “division.”

Chapter 2, written by YAMAKOSHI Shuzo, analyzes the rise of neoliberal policies during Japan’s “lost decade” (from 1991 to 2002) on the basis of the “politics of signification.” As he emphasizes, liberal media, such as Asahi Shinbun, played a key role in the penetration of neoliberal and populist discourses into Japanese society as the logic of “reform.” To criticize the old Liberal Democratic Party politics and bureaucracy systems, these media extensively used “reform” discourses and asked political actors for change. As a result, they deliberately and unconsciously supported the neoliberal politics promoted by Koizumi Junichiro. Yamakoshi concludes that the political discourse strategy, which distinguishes between “enemies” and “allies” and attacks opponents as “vested interests,” has now spread from national to local politics. Using “reform” discourses has become a major style of Japanese political communication.

Chapter 3, written by YAMAGUCHI Hitoshi, suggests the concept of “Journalism-tization.” Yamaguchi analyzes the coverage of the Toyosu market relocation issued by KOIKE Yuriko (Governor of Tokyo). As is often said, the social role of journalism is to expose problems and thoroughly investigate them. In this matter, Koike acted like a journalist and declared to disclose information about the contamination of this market and to pursue the parties involved. Yamaguchi points out that journalism has not been able to criticize cases in which politicians “act in line with the norms and values of journalism” (called the Journalism-tization of politics) like Koike.

Chapters 4 and 5 respectively focus on the media and politics of South Korean society. Chapter 4, written by LEE Kwangho, explains media cynicism through two web surveys of South Korean metropolitan residents in 2019 and 2020. This survey revealed that Korean journalists and news media are broadly perceived as pursuing their own interests rather than fulfilling their professional duties. This chapter also reports that those who are exposed to discourses about media criticism become more media-cynical, indirectly accelerating the tendency to contact the media that they prefer. LEE Kwangho explains that the political polarization of citizens and the rise of media cynicism are important topics. He concludes that social and political psychological research needs to be accumulated to shed light on these problems.

Chapter 5, written by LEE Jinah, examines the actual use of online political information by citizens in South Korea. It reports that in South Korea, many

conservatives (right side) obtain political information from TV and newspapers while reformists (left side) obtain information from online media. Moreover, the growing influence of YouTube political channels has led to a polarization between the two sides. LEE Jinah believes that these political information biases have created echo chambers in this society.

Chapter 6, written by YAMAMOTO Nobuto, analyzes the Law on Mass Organizations in Indonesia. Even after the fall of Suharto's dictatorial regime and democratization in 1998, Indonesian governments have repeatedly tightened restrictions on social organizations, such as civic groups and nongovernment organizations. In this environment, these social organizations, called Ormas in Indonesia, have maintained a deep relationship with politics and are politically active during election periods. As Ormas is highly influential and has high news value, news media have reported extensively about Ormas' activities and constructed their social image. Yamamoto notes that members of Ormas have understood this mechanism and attempted to aggressively obtain media coverage. Yamamoto states that we need to focus on these interactions to understand the image of the Indonesian "masses."

Chapter 7, written by SUZUKI Hidemi, explains the legal framework for curbing hate speech in Germany. Under German criminal law, hate speech, such as "the Lie of Auschwitz," has been punished as sedition of the people (die Volksverhetzung) since 1961. However, because such restrictions did not exist in America and hate speech was widespread on United States-based SNS platforms such as Facebook, the German parliament passed the law, including the obligation for SNS companies to respond to all complaints about hate speech from citizens and to disclose the status of these responses. These legal approaches are updated annually. In response to concerns about excessive restrictions on freedom of expression, the Federal Constitutional Court constantly checks the law and its enforcement. Countries attempting to introduce such hate speech laws should consider the balance between regulations and checks.

As I summarized, the seven authors analyze "media and politics" on the basis of their expertise. Hence, reading this book may shed light on how to address these political issues. Critical discourse analysis reveals the form of the political space that surrounds us. Meanwhile, content analysis reveals how citizens use and touch political information in daily life. Legal analysis poses a difficulty in balancing information control and freedom of expression. Each of these articles can be regarded as a starting point for discussing important contemporary topics, and we need to further develop the analysis.

An important direction for this development is multinational comparative research. These seven chapters do not compare more than two countries, but we can assume that the comparison will provide new ways to understand these problems. What political actors are deeply related to the use of "reform" discourse outside

Japan? Is the Journalism-tization of politics a global phenomenon? What are the similarities and differences in media cynicism between South Korea and Japan? Is the perception of “floating masses” (the masses who play an important role only during elections and not before or after elections) in Indonesian politics unique to the region or is it universal? How can the German process of enacting SNS laws be applied to other countries? “Media and politics” must be analyzed internationally, and this book offers a good foundation. It would be a good compass for those who have finished reading a beginner’s guide to media sociology or media politics and are at the stage of deciding on their own area of expertise and region.