

LEARN MORE BEFORE WE MAKE ASSERTIONS:
TEACHING AMERICAN POLITICS IN JAPAN

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Japan and the United States have maintained a bilateral alliance for almost seven decades through the Japan–US Security Arrangements. Because they have been staunch political, strategic, and economic stakeholders, both countries work together not only on bilateral issues but also on global and regional issues in the Asia–Pacific (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Occasionally, there have been sources of conflict between the two nations. This article examines how Japanese educators have been influenced by these tensions, for better or worse.

Early in the Meiji era, when Japan was modeled after European nations that adopted constitutional monarchy (e.g., Germany and Prussia), academic and educational interest in the United States was marginal. Although important American political texts and documents, including the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and even Woodrow Wilson's *Congressional Government*, were translated into Japanese, they were rarely used in the classroom (Saito 1992, 486–87).

In 1905, Japan's victory in the Russo–Japanese war significantly shifted the balance of power in Asia. The United States was wary of Japan, and Japan disapproved of US meddling in Japanese affairs. In the United States, Lea (1909) wrote *The Valor of Ignorance* based on the assumption that a war between Japan and the United States was inevitable. The growing tension caused anti-Japanese school segregation in San Francisco; in Japan, pundits published numerous anti-American articles and books (e.g., Uchimura 1913; Uesugi 1924).

Concerned by this hostility, intellectuals in the two nations sought strategies to promote mutual understanding. In February 1918, the course titled “Lectures on American Constitution, History, and Diplomacy” was established at the Tokyo Imperial University; A. Barton Hepburn, an American politician, had funded a chair dedicated to teaching American politics to Japanese students. Concerned by the surge of anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States, Hepburn wrote: “[c]hauvinists in both our countries have pictured our nations as inevitable enemies and war as a resulting certainty.”¹ Hepburn expected the course to enhance Japanese students' understanding of American politics and to relieve the tension between the two nations.

The Japanese Minister of Education attempted to overturn the decision to establish the Hepburn lecture series, fearing that it would instill American values in Japanese students and further encourage their anti-government sentiment (Yoshino 1918, 109). Inazo Nitobe, a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, confronted the government interference and defended the lecture series. Nitobe's stance is summarized by the following remark: “We have to learn more about the Americans before we make assertions about them” (Nitobe 1919, 16).

During World War II, antagonism between the United States and Japan was heightened at unprecedented levels. However, even in wartime, classes on American politics such as the Hepburn lecture series continued, albeit strictly limited. After Japan surrendered and under occupation by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, democratization was urgently needed. As part of this endeavor, the Japan Association of American Studies (JAAS)

was established in 1947. Yasaka Takagi, the leading founder of JAAS and a professor who held the Hepburn chair, believed that the most essential action for Japanese educators was to consolidate knowledge about the United States among students and even the general public. However, during this period, educators often were criticized for being too pro-American to have an objective and neutral perspective (Saito 1998, 262–64).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the pendulum swung the other way. The war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal fueled anti-US sentiment and cast serious doubts on American democracy. Publications by Japanese academics focusing on the imperfections and injustices of American politics increased. The topics discussed included racial segregation in the Southern states (Honda 1964), discrimination against Native Americans (Shimizu 1971), internment of Japanese Americans (Matsui 1975), and suppression of women's rights (Honma 1977). These books were used as references in classrooms but occasionally were deemed overly critical of American politics (Kihira 1998, 62–63).

According to Diamond (2015, 142–44), the expansion of freedom and democracy in the world has come to a prolonged halt, and the average level of freedom worldwide has been deteriorating since 2006. This alleged decline of democratic efficacy, energy, and self-confidence in the West, including the United States, is worrisome for Diamond. To a certain extent, students in my seminar course question President Trump's demeanor. Many of my students ask if President Trump is causing the deterioration of American democracy. Whereas in some ways, President Trump seems unique and may be altering the American political landscape, it is too early to know whether he is an anomaly. Regardless, Japanese educators should teach basic aspects of American politics to students and maintain a healthy level of interest. There is still much truth in what Nitobe said: “We have to learn more about the Americans before we make assertions about them.” ■

NOTE

1. A. Barton Hepburn to Eiichi Shibusawa, June 11, 1917. *Shibusawa Eiichi Denki Shiryō Digital Version*. Available at <https://eiichi.shibusawa.or.jp/denkishiryō/digital/main/viewer.php>. Accessed February 15, 2019.

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A LESSON IN EVENTFUL TEMPORALITY: PEDAGOGIES OF DONALD TRUMP FROM ABROAD

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An unexpected consequence of Donald Trump's presidency has been its occurrence exposing popular simplifications of American history and politics. Trump's election and presidency has had the salutary effect of sharpening some of the contradictions of American political analysis. Methodological orientations, epistemologies, and just-so thinking that were taken for granted—in scholarship and in popular thought—have been exposed for their deep decontextualization and simplification.

I began teaching US history and politics in Australia in 2014 after 10 years in diverse American university contexts. Beyond important institutional contrasts, the key difference between American and Australian students is native contextual knowledge. This, of course, is standard for anyone teaching geographically contingent topics outside of the subject country.¹ We cannot assume that students have some knowledge of things we often take as given when walking into an American classroom. Things as diverse as rights-based constitutionalism and basic geographic characteristics cannot be assumed. American federalism and local governance are often particularly alien. For instance, a lecture on the politics and history of school segregation must attend to foreign notions of municipal control of education. Students also are less embedded in ongoing ideological debates within American culture—especially social media—about the meaning of Trump. Finally, whereas Australian students occasionally exhibit stereotypes of the United States and Americans, in most instances, they are so self-evidently shallow (e.g., *all Americans own guns*) as to be easily disabused and, in my experience, less ingrained than stereotypes of Americans vis-à-vis other Americans.

These contexts precede the manner in which students and the broader public at large in Australia understand American political life. The scale of global surprise that greeted Trump's election rivaled that of most Americans. Indeed, given that outlets like the *New York Times* and *fivethirtyeight.com* probably disproportionately inform the opinions of non-Americans and local media outside of the United States, it is quite possible the disbelief surpassed that experienced in American living rooms on November 8, 2016. I spent much of that night doing interviews with Australian media, the subject of which was some variation of "How could (most) everyone have gotten this so wrong?"

Continued surprise also has been the hallmark of how Trump appears in my classroom. His presidency is an *event* that requires explanation—for students, the general public, and scholars alike. An event that many were unable to conceive of before the fact and are baffled by after the fact. I emphasize *event* because sophisticated thinking about events, what Sewell (2005) termed "eventful temporality," is a hallmark of theoretically conscious historical epistemology and what separates it from its positivistic/experimental

and teleological/path-dependent social-scientific cousins. Eventful temporality disavows the notion intrinsic to experimental/positivistic social science that causality and its measurement can be fixed across time and place and that any occurrence can be isolated from its context. Although I agree with teleology/path dependency insofar as arguing that prior events affect those in the future, eventful temporality denies that causality and its structures can be uniform across time and space (Sewell 2005). This framework is not limited to the discipline of history but rather is found across divisions of human knowledge. It is an epistemological point, not a disciplinary one—a point that Trump's presidency usefully demonstrates in the classroom.

When students bring less fixed knowledge of American life to the classroom, it is precisely the unfathomability of Trump that makes him pedagogically useful. The broad popular explanations for Trump's election typically involve some prioritization of one of the following abstractions: so-called racial resentment; sexism and misogyny; populism defined as mood/status anxiety (Jäger 2019)²; anti-Muslim/Latin American nativism; non-voting; James Comey's actions; Russian interference; third-party voting; supposed white working-class conservatism; the reemergence of Theodor Adorno's authoritarian personality; voter suppression; deindustrialization, or automation and capital flight. Through encounters with scholarship or media, students bring these explanations into the classroom. Unembedded in ongoing popular debates within American life, however, they are less ideologically wedded to specific explanations for Trump.

This is not to advance or critique any of the previous interpretations but rather to suggest that each as an explanation for an event like Trump's election/presidency begs more questions than they answer. This opens up a broad pedagogical space to study a wide swath of radically different temporal events in American political life—from centuries of American exceptionalist ideology to the forces behind deindustrialization; from the strategies of modern voter suppression to the broad diversity of reasons more Americans see no reason to vote than vote for any single candidate. Accounting for the existence of one of these interpretations requires a contingent and temporally heterogeneous explanation. Accounting for the event of Trump's presidency in any halfway convincing manner then requires a sophisticated attention to countless other events and processes of radically distinct temporalities.

Less embedded in American popular and social media discourse, Australian students grasp this intuitively. To understand the existence of something like "racial resentment" as a motivating factor for a political decision, they then immediately want to know when, why, in what context, and for whom does this catch-all concept become motivating? In student discussion, I have rarely seen recourse to the phenomenon as pathological—for instance, built into American cultural "DNA"—that often becomes the explanation in US contexts. Rather, which policies, cultural trends, or political strategies led a certain group to act on this in this specific time and place? If some cohorts of Americans tend to exhibit characteristics of "racial resentment" or nativism, why do some act on it in politically meaningful ways and others do not? Why do some people exhibit these characteristics one day in the voting booth and show solidarity in the workplace the next? The very existence of so many distinct interpretive strands for this singular event and the clear way in which these strands are themselves temporally eventful tends to disabuse students of the more monocausal explanations such as Comey's actions. Students quickly