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## Why Did a Journalist Want to Become a Statesperson?: In the Case of Tanzan Ishibashi

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### Introduction

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Election for the House of Representatives, the last general election under the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, was held on 10 April 1946. That election featured the greatest number of candidates to date: 2,770 candidates ran for the 466 contested seats.

Winning 140 seats, the Japan Liberal Party, led by Ichirō Hatoyama, became the leading party. Coming in second with 94 seats was the Japan Progressive Party, followed by the Japan Socialist Party in third place with 92 seats. Five members were elected from the Japan Communist Party (JCP), which was legalised in December 1945, including party leaders Kyūichi Tokuda and Sanzō Nosaka.<sup>1)</sup> This was the first time that the JCP had won seats in the Imperial Diet since its formation in 1922. In addition, the amendment of the Act on the Election of Members of the House of Representatives gave women the right to vote and run for election. Thirty-nine women were elected to the lower house, including Shizue Katō (Japan Socialist Party), Shizue Yamaguchi (Japan Socialist Party), and Tenkōkō Matsutani (Anti-Starvation League).

Meanwhile, among those defeated in the election were Yoshio Sakaurauchi, who would later serve as Speaker of the House of Representatives; Tatsuzō Isikawa, the first winner of the Akutagawa Award in 1935; and Tsurumatsu Kubota, who in 1961 would become the only Vice-Speaker of the House of Representatives against whom a motion of no confidence was adopted.

Tanzan Ishibashi, president of Tōyō Keizai Shimpōsha, was also among the 2,234 candidates who lost the election. With 28,044 votes, he ranked 20<sup>th</sup> among the 133 candidates who ran for the 12-member Tokyo Second District Constituency.

Ishibashi's foray into national politics to contribute to Japan's post-war rebuilding has been considered his way of repenting for his role in causing its defeat in the Pacific War, due to the inability of his pre-war discussions to influence actual politics. The mainstream research perspective on Ishibashi has thus recognised both the continuity and discontinuity between his pre-war activities as a journalist and his post-war political career.

Therefore, in this paper, we will retrace how Ishibashi got involved in politics as a political pundit and examine, based on his actions and the issues he was involved in, how his speeches themselves were essential to his political career.

## 1 Politics as the target of Ishibashi's discussions

Tanzan Ishibashi's involvement with politics began when he wrote critiques of politics and diplomacy as the editor of the monthly magazine *Tōyō Jiron* (*Discussions of Current Events in the East*), at the publisher Tōyō Keizai Shimpōsha (hereinafter, Tōyō Keizai), where he was hired in 1911.

Tōyō Keizai published the inaugural issue of the magazine *Tōyō Jiron* in May 1910, which sought to dismantle the politics, society, and ideas that were current during the period of change following the Russo-Japanese War, and to create a new society through any and all forms of social reform.<sup>2)</sup>

More specifically, the magazine endorsed the new currents of thought that arose at the end of the Meiji Period, such as naturalism, individualism, liberalism, and socialism and espoused progressive views on all fronts. In the political sphere, it opposed imperialism and called for universal suffrage; in the military sphere, it called for conscription to be shortened from three years

to two; and in the social sphere, it was critical of totalitarianism and advocated the emancipation of women.<sup>3)</sup>

*Tōyō Jiron's* progressive and even arguably radical tone strongly reflected the opinions of Hisaaki Uematsu and Tetsutarō Miura, who ran *Tōyō Keizai* at the time. Ishibashi was initially responsible for op-eds on arts and culture, social issues, and ideas, but he too gradually widened the scope of his discussions to include politics and diplomacy as a way to criticise the domain politics that were prevalent within the company.

In particular, Ishibashi regarded Japan's political system at that time as an autocracy overrun by bureaucrats and considered it essential to introduce representative and democratic politics so that the people could express their demands as appropriately and harmoniously as possible.<sup>4)</sup> At the time, *Tōyō Keizai* would officially advocate for universal suffrage, and Ishibashi called for its urgent introduction so that Japan would have representative and democratic politics both in name and in reality.<sup>5)</sup>

## 2 Memories of Yukio Ozaki, the God of Constitutional Politics

To make universal suffrage a reality, Ishibashi spoke out and petitioned politicians. He visited Yukio Ozaki, who would later come to be called 'The God of Constitutional Politics', in what he remembered to be the 'winter' of 'the 45<sup>th</sup> Year of Meiji, just after getting the job at *Tōyō Keizai*'.<sup>6)</sup> Since the 45<sup>th</sup> Year of Meiji ended on 30 July, that would place Ishibashi's visit to Ozaki in January or February of 1912.

At the time, Ozaki was both a member of the House of Representatives and Mayor of Tokyo. Ishibashi went to visit him at his mayoral office, located inside the Tokyo Prefectural Office in Yūrakuchō, to advocate for the introduction of universal suffrage, and found the mayor in a morning coat, warming his backside in front of a space heater. Upon hearing Ishibashi's argument, Ozaki displayed a negative attitude towards universal suffrage,

saying, 'that simply won't work.'

Despite the mayor's general opposition to domain politics, Ishibashi scarcely expected to have his argument met with disapproval, let alone outright rejection.

According to Ishibashi, Ozaki opposed it because Japan did not have a social order like England, where people knew, and kept to, their place:

In England, the social order is such that, for example, there are two restaurants, and it is established that one is for gentlemen, and the one next door is for laborers. Gentlemen go to one, and labourers go to the other. They each stay in their lane--gentlemen are gentlemen, laborers are laborers, and laborers do not encroach upon the gentlemen's space. So, while you could give *them* the right to vote through universal suffrage, it would be ridiculous to give disorderly, uncouth laborers like the ones in Japan the right to vote. Things would get out of hand.<sup>7)</sup>

Ozaki seemed to suggest that the possibility or impossibility of universal suffrage depended on the existence or absence of social order. Hearing the mayor's opinion, Ishibashi revealed his discomfort: 'While his words seem high and mighty, I can't help but think that he is talking nonsense'.<sup>8)</sup>

Though Uematsu, the central figure in Tōyō Keizai's push for universal suffrage, would pass away on 14 September 1912, Miura and Ishibashi, who survived him, never changed the company's official position. In fact, it might be more apt to say that their increasingly radical call for the introduction of universal suffrage was a condemnation of the anti-universal suffragists Ozaki and Tsuyoshi Inukai. Ishibashi also participated in the March 1919 meeting of the Association for Universal Suffrage and started to work towards universal suffrage through his tangible actions as well as through his speeches.

### 3 Ishibashi's 'selfish, naive argument'

Ishibashi was thus deeply involved in the introduction of universal suffrage, one of the chief concerns in Japanese domestic politics from the end of the Meiji Period through the beginning of the Taishō Period. He pressed on undaunted towards his goal, at times by writing and at other times by leading demonstrations.

However, according to his later recollections, his initiatives were based on a 'pretty selfish, naive argument' that ignored the reality of politics, or rather, he would adopt the somewhat idealistic attitude that the right goals would come to fruition no matter what.<sup>9)</sup>

Of course, the ultimate goal for any politician is to enact their policies. That said, no matter how lofty one's ideals may be, it is difficult to get any kind of measure passed without occupying a seat in the Diet or a prefectural assembly. While Ozaki and Inukai called for the abolishment of domain politics and for parliamentarianism on the one hand, they never shied away from advocating policies to curry favour with their constituents or from cooperating or compromising with domain forces themselves. By striking a deft balance between ideals and reality, the two of them won consecutive elections, starting with the first election for the House of Representatives in 1890. That track record is what led to his appellation as the 'God of Constitutional Politics' and would bolster his reputation.

However, Uematsu and Miura, as well as Ishibashi, were not actually involved in politics; they were pundits advocating for what the country's politics *ought* to look like. What was important for them was to encourage statesperson who knew what to do but did not translate that into action or to galvanise politicians by arousing public sentiment. They were not interested in reconciling interests in order to enact policies or working to preserve the status quo in society once those policies were introduced.

This is one of the differences between, on the one hand, Ishibashi and the

others, who sought the swift introduction of universal suffrage, and Ozaki and Inukai, on the other, who displayed a negative attitude not only towards universal suffrage, but to what society would be like after its introduction.

#### 4 A deepening connection, from domestic affairs to diplomacy

Ishibashi's connection with political issues, which started with the issue of universal suffrage, became even deeper in the 1920s. The scope of his so-called 'Little Japanism' principle concerning Japan's colonialist policy went beyond domestic affairs to include diplomatic issues as well.

Little Japanism, which was iconic among Ishibashi's various ideas, was a theory of peaceful development that opposed Big Japanism and Greater Asianism as amounting to militaristic autocracy and a policy of encroachment onto foreign territory; advocated limiting Japan's sovereign territory to the four main islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu; and was based on economic rationalism.<sup>10)</sup>

The main reasons Ishibashi advocated Little Japanism were (1) the anti-Big Japanist tone that the *Tōyō Keizai Shimpō* had developed since its inaugural issue and (2) the fact that the *Tōyō Jiron* was 'extremely severe in its opposition to the policies of the domain-based bureaucrat-landlord administration' and that 'it would not [have been] an overstatement to say that that tone dominated almost all' of the magazine's pages.<sup>11)</sup>

For example, Tetsutarō Miura published two long-form editorials in the 1913 edition of the *Tōyō Keizai Shimpō*: 'Abandon Manchuria or Expand Armaments?' (5 Jan.-15 Mar. 1913 issue) and 'Big Japanism or Little Japanism?' (15 Apr.-15 Jun. 1913 issue) in an attempt to 'excise the lesions in [Japanese] politics'<sup>12)</sup> at that time.

Miura stipulated that Big Japanism was a perspective that sought to advance the interests of Japan and the Japanese people through territorial expansion and protectionist policies. He noted that Big Japanism would (1)

entail increased spending on the military and on the administration of overseas territories that would put pressure on the national treasury, and (2) allow soldiers to run rampant, military factions to impose tyranny, and military politics to emerge as consequences of foreign expansionist policies, which would effectively restrict freedom of thought and equality of opportunity in society. Consequently, the path forward for Japan would be to abandon that policy and instead follow Little Japanism, which was based on industrialism, liberalism, and individualism.

When the United States hosted the Washington Naval Conference in 1921, a nationwide debate erupted in Japan over whether to accept the US invitation to attend. Ishibashi published two op-eds in the *Tōyō Keizai Shimpō* on the debate ('The Readiness to Abandon Everything' and 'The Illusion of Big Japanism'), in which he took Miura's argument a step further, affirming cooperation with other countries, especially the US, and asserting that an internationalist policy would be in Japan's interest and ultimately enable Japan to act as a world leader.

In addition, while Ishibashi emphasised cooperation with other countries, he was not merely pro-American or pro-British. Rather, he criticised the positions of the UK, which continually rejected other countries' advances into India while pursuing an open-door policy with China, and the US, which did not take kindly to foreign companies establishing a presence in its own colonies.

This is how Ishibashi began to actively speak out more than ever before on various issues in politics starting in the 1920s.

## 5 Resistance to Little Japanism

However, Ishibashi could not get the authorities to accept his viewpoint. In fact, *Kenseikai* (Constitutional Politics Association) leader Takaaki Katō directly denounced the call to abandon colonialism at the *Kenseikai*'s Hokuriku General



Assembly, though he did not mention Ishibashi and company by name.

There are some people who think that we should return all of our special privileges to the world or China. If that is the case, then what did Japan go to war with China for? What did we go to war with Russia for? And if Japan should be the only one to return its colonies, what about the other countries? Should England, France, and the US give back Hong Kong, East India, and the Philippines? There is no reason that Japan alone should have to adopt such a position without other countries doing the same.<sup>13)</sup>

In an era when a country's power was symbolised by the number of its colonies, the critical argument that Japan would not only forfeit territory but also fall behind in the power struggle with other countries if it alone were to abandon its colonies was more persuasive than the call to abandon colonialism, given that doing so would render the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War meaningless and that there was no possibility of Britain, France, or the US giving back Hong Kong, French India, or the Philippines, respectively.

Above all, it was intuitive and simple to ask what Japan would stand to gain if it were the only country to give back its colonies, and thus this question was easier to understand than Ishibashi's argument. His reasoning was that if Japan alone *were* to do so and adopt such liberal policies, then not even Britain or the US would be able to maintain moral superiority and so would fall into severe crisis; China and the other minor powers of the world would come to trust Japan; and colonies such as India and Egypt that had great power status would seek freedom from their colonisers and rise up.

Ishibashi used logic, rather than reason, to call for Japan to abandon its colonies, but he could not beat Katō and company, whose argument was more easily accepted due to its appeal to emotion rather than logic. This is clear

because the idea of Japan bolstering its reputation in the international community by giving up its colonies never dominated public discourse. On the contrary, public opinion would later call for even greater territorial expansion.

In that sense, it could be said that here too, Ishibashi was making a 'naive argument' about the reality of politics.

## 6 Lifting the gold embargo: A key policy of 1920s Japan

In addition, one event would drive home to Ishibashi the lesson that no matter how logically sound your viewpoint may be, translating it into policy is no easy feat: that was the controversy over the so-called lifting of the gold embargo.

'Lifting the gold embargo (*Kin-kaikin*)' refers to resuming the export of gold, which had been prohibited for a time, and returning to the gold standard. Countries had banned the outflow of gold during the Great War or the First World War, but after the war, movements advocating for a return to the gold standard spread throughout the US and elsewhere. Meanwhile, Japan faced a post-war economic recession that contrasted with its wartime economic boom and, like other countries, found it hard to return to the gold standard immediately.

However, in 1929, the falling exchange rate caused imported goods to become fairly expensive, leading to poor performance among iron and steel companies, import-export companies, and others that depended on imported materials. This prompted industrialists to claim that Japan needed to return to the gold standard and stabilise the exchange rate. The banking world also shifted from the cautious approach it had been taking to a proactive one so that the operating conditions of borrowers could recover.

In response to the pleas from industry and the banks, the Hamaguchi Cabinet, inaugurated on 2 July 1929, would make lifting the gold embargo one

of its key policies. In fact, it was included in the Ten Major Reforms announced on 9 July, just a week after the new Cabinet's inauguration, along with the clean-up of government corruption, coexistence and co-prosperity between Japan and China, and disarmament.<sup>14)</sup>

As a result, an ordinance to repeal Ministry of Finance Ordinance No. 28 (1917), which prohibited the export of gold, was promulgated on 21 November through publication in the supplement of the official gazette, and on 11 January 1930, Japan would return to the gold standard after twelve years and five months.<sup>15)</sup> Though Hamaguchi was the leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party, he reached outside of his party to entrust Junnosuke Inoue with lifting the gold embargo as his Minister of Finance. Inoue rose to expectations.

Contrary to the expectations of the general public, however, the Great Depression, which was sparked by the crash in stock prices on the New York Stock Exchange on 29 October 1929, only worsened. Because Japan lifted the gold embargo under such conditions, Japanese firms now faced a slump in exports and exhibited worsening performance. The grave situation Japan had fallen into led the Inukai Cabinet, inaugurated in December 1931, to reinstate the gold embargo.

## 7 Setbacks in the dispute over lifting the gold embargo

Around 1923, Ishibashi became involved in the lifting of the gold embargo. The *Tōyō Keizai Shimpō* used the decline of the exchange rate within Japan to call for the lifting the embargo under a new par value instead of the current 'old' par value.

In countries that have adopted the gold standard, the 'gold par' is the amount of currency needed to purchase one ounce of gold. Lifting the embargo under the old par value means doing so with the gold par from before the ban on the export of gold, while lifting the embargo under a new

par value would be based on the real exchange rate after the ban. Along with Ishibashi, Toshie Obama from the *Chūgai Shōgyō Shimpō* (*Journal of Foreign and Domestic Commerce*: now the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*), economic critic Kamekichi Takahashi, and Seijun Yamazaki from the *Jiji Shimpō* (*Current Events*) opposed the former and advocated for the latter.

Ishibashi, Obama, Takahashi, and Yamazaki were initially in favour of lifting the gold embargo. However, the Great Kanto Earthquake caused the exchange rate for ¥100 to slip from \$50, where it had been, to under \$40, and then fall to \$30 after the Great Depression. Amid such conditions, Ishibashi and the others believed that lifting the gold embargo at the old par of \$50 for ¥100 would not be appropriate for the state of the Japanese economy, as it would deal a blow to industry and cause a recession.

Since the government initially promoted lifting the gold embargo as one of its key policies, public sentiment across all industries was in favour of doing so under the old par and did not warm to the argument of Ishibashi and company. On the contrary, some financiers even threatened them, saying, 'You let go on about how there'll be a recession if we lift the gold embargo, but if [we don't and] the stock market crashes, it'll be your fault!'<sup>16)</sup>

The 'four samurai' against lifting the gold embargo<sup>17)</sup>, as they were called, remained steadfast in the face of public criticism. They toured the country to campaign for their cause, and by doing so, they eventually won over major newspapers and influential people from industry and finance, who were initially in favour of the gold embargo.

For example, Kanebo president and member of the House of Representatives Sanji Mutō advocated lifting the gold embargo under the old par value in the Diet, along with Yukio Ozaki, who was an independent at that time. Mutō supported the old value because it would be immoral to selfishly change the monetary worth of gold that the country had agreed upon.<sup>18)</sup> That said, when the gold embargo was actually lifted under the old par value and Kanebo's operating conditions worsened as a result, he became an ardent opponent of

the old par value, saying, 'I found the *Tōyō Keizai*'s opinion to be reasonable.'<sup>19)</sup>

The distribution of 13 million leaflets<sup>20)</sup> with Osachi Hamaguchi's signature and speeches on radio broadcasts<sup>21)</sup> nevertheless had a considerable effect. To the Japanese people, who longed for some kind of policy to break the stalemate amid the unrelenting recession, the messaging from the government that positioned the lifting of the gold embargo as delivering the expansive, bright future that would prop up the slumping Japan was a fleeting illusion, and Ishibashi and company's opposition to lifting the gold embargo under the old par value never did gain a majority following.

## Conclusion

Except for the fact that universal suffrage was achieved in 1925, albeit only for men, the ideas Ishibashi advocated, such as the abandonment of Japan's colonies and the opposition to lifting the gold embargo, never gained acceptance by politicians or led to specific policies.

Rather, what ended up happening was that (1) Japan's ambition to expand its interests in mainland China brought about the Mukden Incident in 1931, which led Japan to withdraw from the League of Nations and forced it into isolation from the international community, and (2) lifting the gold embargo under the old par value caused an outflow of specie and a currency and credit crunch, which, coupled with the Hamaguchi administration's austerity measures, caused Japan to fall into a deep depression, known as the 'Shōwa Depression'.<sup>22)</sup>

That begs the question: Why did public sentiment not side with Ishibashi and company? Why did politicians not support them?

However sound their logic may be, people do not support arguments that have only sound logic; instead, they support arguments because they trust the people espousing them. This is why translating your views into real politics can only be accomplished by winning politicians' trust so they will accept

your proposals or by becoming a politician yourself and turning your ideas into concrete policies.

When asked about the reason for his foray into national politics, Ishibashi recollected that 'I thought that Japan took the wrong path during the war and that it must never again take the wrong path. That's all it took for me to get into politics.'<sup>23)</sup>

Despite the frustration he experienced at being completely unable to correct Japan's course in the Pacific War and in the various events that led to the war, Ishibashi resolved to participate in national politics himself after the war so that Japan would never again take the wrong path.

In his later years, Ishibashi would cite two reasons why he ran in the 1946 general election. One was that Japan's political parties were in a dire situation, having lost their good candidates after many former Japanese politicians had been banished by orders from the Allied Occupation forces, and the other was that the economy was at risk of failing if Japan were to enact austerity measures just after its defeat<sup>24)</sup> in war.

This is how Ishibashi expressed how he felt at the time:

I felt that it was not the time for me to get absorbed in the literary world. I wanted to put the principles and positions I had been espousing into practice and serve the cause of rebuilding Japan, even though I didn't know how effective I would be. ...I felt I had to get into politics myself and get whatever political party I could to incorporate my ideas into their policies in order to stop this [potential failure of the economy].<sup>25)</sup>

This passage indicates that, despite amending the policies and plans of the government after his tenure at *Tōyō Jiron* to chart a course for a better Japan, Ishibashi felt remorse and shame in the end for having been unable to achieve his longstanding goal.

## Notes

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&lt;ABSTRACT&gt;

## 石橋湛山はなぜ政界への進出を志したか ——戦前の言論人としての活動を手掛かりに

鈴木 裕輔

1910年代から言論活動に従事した石橋湛山（1884-1973）は、戦前は東洋経済新報社の発行する『東洋時論』を経て経済専門誌『東洋経済新報』を中心に経済、政治、外交、文化など多岐にわたる分野に関する評論を行った。また、戦後は1946年に大日本帝国憲法下での最後の総選挙となった第22回衆議院議員総選挙に出馬して国政に関わるようになった。その結果は落選であったものの、言論人が政治家を目指したことは、活動の場を言論から実践に移す試みの一つとして見逃せない。従来の石橋湛山に関する研究では戦前の言論活動と戦後の政治活動との間の関連について十分な検討がなされてこなかった。そこで、本論では、石橋湛山の言論活動について、その代表的な所論である「小日本主義」や金解禁論争に注目し、議論の内容と実際の政策への影響を検討した。その結果、石橋が政策の提案や当局の批判によっては実際の政治を改めることが出来ず、自分自身が政治に関与しない限り所説を実現できないことを自覚したことが、戦後の政界への進出に繋がったことを明らかにした。