

US Study Group, FY2009 Research Overview Report No. 1

June 29, 2009, Large Conference Room, Japan Institute of International Affairs

Study groups focusing on the US have been one of the longest running features of the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA). As far back as April 1963 a study group was established by the late Saito Makoto and other key figures to examine US foreign policy decisions and the Congress, a research project that continued until April of the next year. The results of that study group were published by JIIA in 1965 as “America’s Foreign Policy Decisions and Congress.”

In May 1983, Hosoya Chihiro formed a Reagan foreign policy study group in JIIA that included Aruga Tadashi and Igarashi Takeshi. Its discussions and exchanges of opinions culminated in the publication of “American Diplomacy” (1986, JIIA).

Following in the above tradition of American political research, a two-year research project on the composition of America’s political infrastructure was begun in FY2008. During the second year, the first FY2009 meeting of this US study group was held at JIIA on June 29, 2009. Below are an overview of this project and a description of its significance.

[Research overview]

The aim of this project is to examine the political infrastructure that structurally supports American politics. Distinct from the political actors that participate in direct political processes as typified by political parties and lobby groups, political infrastructure refers to the organizations and groups that seek to influence political trends utilizing a variety of means in and around the core of the power game.

While research on political infrastructure tends to get overlooked in favor of situational analysis with a short-term scope, the dynamics of the emergence of the conservative movement from the 1970s onward, for example, cannot be understood absent the role played by political infrastructure. This is because the conservative movement since the 1970s has freely made use of think tanks, foundations, media monitoring groups, education monitoring groups, human resources development organizations, etc., and achieved its remarkable rise by skillful combinations of these. Even the Democratic Party has referred to the Republican Party model in pursuing similar attempts.

Thus it goes without saying that deeper research on political infrastructure is needed to

ascertain future trends in American politics. As far as can be determined, however, there is no serious analysis being conducted in this field in Japan, and such research is rare in the US as well.

[Research objectives and findings thus far]

The purpose of this project is to conduct research on the mechanisms comprising the political infrastructure and on the actual means by which the foundations for long-term structural change are formed, and to establish a new perspective for observing US politics in future.

This project has already compiled an interim report of its findings for the first year. It ultimately hopes to carry out further research on the basis of the interim report and publish the results as Volume 9 of JIIA's Modern America series.

It should be added that this project has received a research grant from the Suntory Foundation.

[Study group members]

As mentioned above, this project does not entail conventional research focused on individual political groups and think tanks but rather theoretical and empirical analysis on the mechanisms by which groups and organizations link up with other groups to form greater political dynamics. This project has assembled researchers engaged in front-line research in their respective fields, and placed its main focus on connecting the "dots" of existing research with "lines" and releasing the research findings as "planes." The cooperation of specialists in varying areas who share an interest in the same issues is essential. The members of this research project are listed below.

Project leader:

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