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Author(s)	Yamazaki, Mikine
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Regionalism and Governing Style in the UK and Japan: A Comparative View on Devolution

YAMAZAKI Mikine*

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine the characteristics of regionalism in both the UK and Japan from a comparative point of view, especially dealing with Scottish devolution. Regionalism is leading the transformation of the governing style in modern nation states. The trends of regionalism, creating a sub-governmental unit between the state and second-tier local government, have gained political influence in Western Europe since the end of the 1980s. Regionalism can be understood as a symbolic representation of regional governance. This article, in particular, focuses on the advances of regionalism both countries and explains the similarities and differences between them. The evolution of British devolution is often explained by historical context and regional identities. In addition to them, we can point out political factors and the impact of political processes which has influenced regionalism. Finally, this article investigates the differences of governing system between UK and Japan to explain the evolution of regionalism in each country.

2. Trends of Regionalism in Western Europe

Regionalism is one of the most significant trends of governance in modern states during the age of globalisation (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Although the evolution of regionalism depends on particular political factors attributed to each country, globalisation, devolution/decentralisation and regional identity are understood as universal factors. Globalisation and European integration have been accelerating the borderless phenomenon of communication, transport and market activities worldwide since the 1990s. As a result, nation states cannot monopolise the abilities of policy formation and implementation under the age of globalisation. The nation state does not necessarily cope with economic and cultural issues derived from regions. The decline of the nation state's power and European integration encourage the unit of a region as a political space these days (Keating, 1998). The reasons of

* Hokkaido University Public Policy School
E-mail: myama@juris.hokudai.ac.jp

the appearance of regionalism can be explained as follows.

First, a region is seen as a proper political unit to carry out current economic development policy. During the post war era, most Western European states implemented Keynesian welfare policies. It promoted a diversionary policy, which encouraged the removal of factories and workforces to underdeveloped areas in accordance with development planning. However, the change of economic structure decreased the ability of the state. Rather, a region is suitable to promote present endogenous development policies. A region is expected to coordinate different sectors and set up networks, such as small-medium-sized enterprises, research institutes and public bodies. In addition, the EU gives regions an entitlement to implement economic development policy through the Structural Funds. In other words, a region is given a new function in regard to economic development policy (Keating, 1998). Although the position is different from European academics, Ohmae also stresses the significance of the region under globalisation. According to him, regional governments can implement economic development policies more appropriately than nation states in accordance with global competition (Ohmae, 1995).

Secondly, as well as decreasing the competence of the nation state in economic development policies, cultural distinctiveness emerges in each region. Some regions have unique languages or customs. Although cultural distinctiveness can be considered a kind of tradition, they are by no means directly derived from ancient times. Some of them are rediscovered and others are remade to coordinate with current political situations (Keating, 2003).

Thirdly, institutions give a region visible features. Administrative organisations for economic development and regional governments reconfirm a region as a political space. States set up regional development agencies during the post-war era to promote diversionary policy. Still now they are in charge of endogenous development policy. Moreover, regional governments have a strong influence on forming regional features, for example, regional identity, regional politics and civil society.

Finally, as state-led centralisation is becoming inefficient and ineffective, the value of local democracy and self-government are getting more popular. Decentralisation is often demanded by the localities; at the same time, the state has been transforming its administrative power to regional and local governments. It is a means of reform which seeks “small *central* government”. The state, maintaining its influence on regional and local governments, has its own objectives of decentralisation which aim to improve efficiency and effectiveness of public policies through sub-national governments and to cut back its fiscal resources, giving authority to sub-national governments. More or less, decentralisation/devolution has also been carried out from the point of the state all over the world (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

3. The structure of regional/local government in the UK and Japan

We can see common trends of regionalism in the UK and Japan. But the actual political consequences are quite different from each other. In the UK, after Labour came to power in 1997, devolution was promoted in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Blair government. All three regions set up their own parliament/assembly following the result of referendums in each territory. Each parliament/assembly has a different legislative power, the structure of the Cabinet, the organisation of administration and electoral system. The forms of regional government were established in accord with political and social situations in each territory. For instance, while the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly have primary legislative power, the National Assembly for Wales just had secondary legislative power until 2007. Maintaining the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, the British constitution does not impose strict uniform institutions on each territory and allows asymmetrical devolution (Keating, 2004). The British constitutional system has evolved gradually and not experienced radical changes of constitutional principles and practices (Midwinter et.al., 1991). As far as a region stays within the Union, a great amount of political autonomy is allowed in each territory.

As regards Scotland, while the Scottish Parliament was set up and established legislative power, the authorities and institutions of the Scottish Government were transferred from the Scottish Office which was in charge of most administrative affairs in Scotland as a territorial ministry of the UK government. The extent of policy fields of the Scottish Government is almost the same as the Scottish Office in pre-devolution era. The jurisdiction of administration between UK government and the Scottish Government was stipulated by the Scotland Act 1998. It regulates the reserved matters which are the responsibility of the UK government and the devolved matters which are the responsibility of the Scottish Government (Convery, 2000).

Scotland has been performing its own political activities through the legislative power and fiscal resource allocation to each policy field. The Scottish Parliament introduced an original electoral institution which combined the first-past-the-post system with proportional representation (the Additional Member System). As a result, no political party has gained an absolute majority of seats in parliament. It made it possible for minority parties to get parliamentary seats, such as, the Green Party or the Scottish Socialist Party. Scottish politics shows some different political aspects from Westminster. For example, Labour and the Liberal Democrats formed a coalition government from 1999 to 2007. After the third election, the Scottish National Party came to the power as a minority government. Among the enactments of the Scottish Parliament, some of them made it possible to implement original policies which have not been carried out in England, such as, free personal care for the elderly and the abolition of tuition fees for university. The others are innovative policies which were enacted

ahead of England, such as, the ban on fox hunting and the ban on smoking in public spaces.

In terms of policy implementation, the Scottish Government has to rely on local government (councils) and Non Departmental Public Bodies (quangos) (Yamazaki, 2004). While the Scottish Government has accountability and responsibility to Scottish people on all devolved matters, it does not have its own instruments of implementing public policies. In order to enforce public policies effectively and efficiently, the Scottish Government has to induce local governments to follow its directions and take control of NDPBs properly.

The Scottish parliament also has a tax-varying power, which enables it to vary income tax rates by 3% up or down. However, no cabinets have used the tax power because of political considerations in Scotland. In particular, it seems difficult for political parties to raise a tax-increasing policy in a manifesto during an election campaign.

In general, most Scottish people are satisfied with the performance of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. Moving the place of decision-making of public policies from London to Edinburgh has broadened chances of political participation and promoted access to the parliament and politicians. However, according to MORI Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Parliament, the majority of people think the UK government still has a strong influence on Scottish affairs and that the Scottish Parliament should have more effective power (Herbert, 2006). In addition, Scottish devolution was supported by the people and civil society who expected to realise “New Politics” which means more openness, accessibility and promoting minority participation. In practice, it is pointed out that the activities of the Scottish Parliament have not necessarily completely attained their aim and not dramatically changed the traditional political style which has been familiar with Westminster until now (McGarvey & Cairney, 2008).

As regionalism to some degree has common features with decentralisation, it might be better to explain the background of the trends of decentralisation in Japan at first. In 1990s, the Japanese political and administrative system which had a centralised structure caused many kinds of problems (Hein and Pelletier, 2006). Political scandal and corruption which involved politicians happened frequently. Efficiency and effectiveness of public policies which were formulated by the central government deteriorated. The serious fiscal condition also encouraged the central government to reform the fiscal structure in order to ease its burden. Local governments also demanded to get larger legislative and administrative powers for strengthening the abilities of self-government. At the same time, local governments tried to reform their governing system to be more open and transparent for encouraging citizen’s participation. It is a symbolic incident that the Non-Profit Activities Promotion Act was executed in 1998.

Following these trends, the Comprehensive Law on Decentralisation was passed in 1999. However, the main objective of the law was to increase the discretion of local governments by abolishing the system of agency delegation to local government (Muramatsu et.al., 2001). On the contrary, the transformation of administrative and fiscal resources from the central government to local government did not take place, nor did reorganisation of the local government system. In other words, regionalism was not intended at the end of 1990s.

In addition, during 2003 to 2007, the reform of local finance allocation system, which is called “Three reforms in One”, was carried out. It aimed to cut subsidies to local governments, transfer tax resources to local governments and to reduce the amount of local grants taxes which are allocated to local governments to secure their activities (Stockwin, 2008). On one hand, that reform enabled local governments to increase discretion of spending fiscal resources. On the other hand, many local governments complained that the total amount of fiscal resources would get decreased through the reform. However, as the abolition of subsidies was not enough to enhance local discretion, most local governments could not realise the result of the reform.

The idea of regionalism has been attracting the interest of many political actors since 2003 as an agenda in central politics. There is not an accurate definition of regionalism (*dō-shū-sei*) in Japanese academia and politics. Nevertheless, most people share a common idea that regionalism means to create regional government incorporating several prefectural governments and transforming administrative and financial powers which are under the jurisdiction of national ministry branches. As a result, between 8 to 13 regional governments have been proposed nationwide. The number of politicians who are interested in regionalism is growing year by year. The Prime Minister’s advisory committee, the Local Government System Research Council, showed the directions for regionalism in 2006, as they would not be carried out in the near future. Some of the politicians who are members of the Liberal Democratic Party set up a committee in the party to promote regionalism. Moreover, the Devolution Promotion Act was established in order to transfer administrative authorities from the central government to the Hokkaido government as an experimental model of decentralisation in 2007. Some people think that it might be easy to realise regionalism in Hokkaido prior to other areas because it does not have to combine with neighbouring prefectural governments. Rather, it is just necessary to transfer several national ministry branches into the Hokkaido prefectural government in order to establish regional government.

Thus, since the 1990’s, the local government system has been reformed, going through several changes. However, the basic structure of central-local government relations has not been changed in Hokkaido nor in other areas of Japan so far.

Present Japanese local government system has been maintained as a two-layer system: 47

prefectural governments and about 1700 municipalities. It has a similarity with the French local government system which is controlled by Ministère de l'Intérieur. As regards Japanese prefectural governments, they have quite substantial administrative and legislative powers which enable them to perform their own public policies under the present local government system. However it is occasionally inadequate to cover fiscal resources and there still exists formal and informal regulations from the central government. The Japanese governing system of the central government is highly vertical structures which is segmented among functional ministries and lacks integrative powers to consolidate them at the centre (Samuels, 1983). So, prefectural governments are expected to coordinate different policy fields which are separated in line with the jurisdictions of functional ministries. For instance, unemployment policy has been mainly regarded as the domain of the central government for a long time. Meanwhile, social-inclusion policies are needed to adjust other related policy fields, for example, education, job training and urban redevelopment. Some prefectural governments have been positively implementing comprehensive social-inclusion policies, cooperating with civil societies, business sectors and universities.

The performance of prefectural governments depends on the leadership of governors who are elected by direct election and manage prefectural administration on the top of the organisation. In practice, some of the governors have received attention for their remarkable performance of running prefectures. For instance, some of them executed a freedom of information bylaw or a Non-Profit activities promotion bylaw or introduced innovative administrative management systems which are derived from the idea of the New Public Management prior to the central government. The others implemented some kinds of environment taxes which have not been planned in the state.

It seems that the policy capacity of Japanese prefectural governments is much more than the Welsh Assembly/Welsh Assembly Government and less than the Scottish Parliament/Scottish Government. While Japanese central government still retains administrative and fiscal powers which intervene in the affairs of prefectural governments, they have been dealing with a large number of policy fields and it has been possible to implement innovative bylaws and new local taxes.

4. Factors which influenced regionalism in the UK and Japan

As we saw above, the actual political consequences of regionalism between two countries have been contrasted. However, regionalism cannot be understood as the movement of ethnicity nor cultural and economic reductionism. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have each regional identity which is derived from history and society. Regional identities do not necessarily directly take on political distinctiveness nor raise political

movements seeking for self-government, devolution, and independence. Rather, the differences between Japan and UK should be explained from how the meaning of a region is revealed in the real political processes. In fact, both Scotland and Wales were not able to achieve devolution because the proposals were rejected in the first referendums in 1979. It was attained after people had realised the decline of the abilities of Keynesian welfare state system and experienced a difficult time under the Conservative government in both regions. On the contrary, although the context is quite different from the UK, regionalism is becoming the main agenda at the centre these days in Japan too. In some areas, the demand for regionalism is derived from local areas, for example, Kyushu where governors and business groups are considering the general plan of regional government in Kyushu.

In the UK, political factors were the most important element which promoted devolution besides the strength of regional identities. Scotland suffered a democratic deficit, in other words, no mandate, under the Conservative government (Mitchell, 2005). While the majority of Scottish people did not support the Thatcher and Major governments, they had to obey unpopular policies which were enforced by the central government. Poll tax was the most symbolic issue which caused serious tension between the government and Scottish people. Under this situation, in 1988 the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which was an umbrella alliance of influential civil societies, including labour unions, church groups and local governments, was set up to demand the establishment of their own parliament in order to remedy such a democratic deficit. The Scottish Constitutional Convention had promoted the diffusion of the idea of Scottish devolution and urged political parties to join their movement (Scottish Constitutional Convention, 1995). In addition, changes of government, a kind of

political factor, which periodically occurs in British politics, have caused structural reform of local government system during the post-war era. Devolution, which is a political reform in order to resolve such situations, was achieved due to Labour coming to power in 1997.

Next, policy factors are important because in Scotland most people expected that devolution would improve the qualities of public policies and supported that political reform in the referendum in 1997. On the contrary, it is pointed out that the expectations-capability gap, which means that the Scottish Parliament does not have relevant power to respond to the expectations of the people, had grown during the devolution referendum campaign and caused disillusionment among the people in Scotland after the Scottish parliament was established (Mitchell, 2004).

In Japan, policy factors which make it possible for localities to widen their discretion to form and implement their own public policies are the biggest momentum for regionalism. For instance, many people think that the unit of a region, which incorporate several prefectural governments, are suitable to perform economic development policy under globalisation. It is

also expected that regional governments could accept administrative authorities and staffs from national ministry branches. Like Western Europe, it is thought that regional governments must be relevant to coordinate among different sectors and create networks to promote prosperity. In addition, regional governments can be seen as a proper polity to arrange infrastructures rather than national government. It is possible for regional governments to directly link with the global market, bypassing Tokyo and to compete with the national capital region to unify an economic area (The Local Government System Research Council, 2006). It might be seen as if Ohmae's "region state" could be applicable to this point.

Meanwhile, political factors, which could contribute to revitalise local democracy, are too weak to promote regionalism as an impetus. In the Japanese political context, it is rare that party politics causes political tension between the centre and local governments like Scotland and Wales. The Liberal Democratic Party has been in power since 1955 except for 10 months. Governors, who have been supported by the opposition party, occasionally have been elected during the post-war period. However, the LDP government did not impose so harsh policies for localities that the political situation did not necessarily bring about a democratic deficit in central-local government relations nor enhance regional identities. Also, while the number of politicians having an interest in regionalism is growing, both main political parties do not show concrete plans for regionalism nor a normative local government system. It is difficult for Japanese people to understand the difference of local governmental system reforms which are proposed by political parties. While Japanese local areas have the characteristics in terms of geography and culture, most of them do not shape a regional identity. Okinawa is the only region which has strong regional identity and political inclination. Most people might be satisfied with present local government system which has a possibility to improve local democracy.

Rather, many political actors and business executives are interested in regionalism as a means of administrative reforms, which aim to decrease the number of public workers and fiscal allocation resources from the centre and functionally reshuffle central and local administrative organisations. They are sharing great concerns about national financial conditions because the total amount of national debt is growing and therefore "small government" is being sought. Of course, there is some degree of administrative duplication and redundancy between the centre and localities, and it is necessary to reduce inefficiency and ineffectiveness. However, it might not be clear that administrative reform is compatible with revitalising local democracy. It is worth contrasting that Scottish/Walsh devolution did not have an element of administrative reform.

5. Differences of governing system

The differences of regional governance in the two countries should be explained from the features of governing systems. Especially, it is also important to examine how the Cabinet integrate functional policy communities and ministries and territorial ones into a national governing system. The central government occasionally has to adjust various interests among policy communities and ministries in the process of policy formation and implementation. Also, the central government has to occasionally conciliate conflicts between regions. Some of regions complain that there are unfair differences of fiscal resource allocation and political representation opportunities between them. Thus, regionalism is not just the product of political decision-making processes inside each region. Political leadership of the Cabinet is also crucial in order to incorporate the institutions of regional governments into a national governing system. It can be said that regionalism is a kind of constitutional reform.

In order to analyse the feature of a modern political system, it is useful to apply the concept of policy communities to the real activities of the government. Two categories of policy communities can be seen in the modern political system as follows. First, according to Richardson and Jordan, the activities of the government can be understood as the amount and variety of policy communities. Many kinds of interest groups form a wide range of relations with the departments of the government and politicians. They compete with each other in the political process and sometimes have overlapping domains (Richardson and Jordan, 1979). In addition to such functional policy communities, territorial policy communities embody territorial interests in the policy process. In the UK, there are several territorial policy communities along with regions, e.g. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (Rhodes, 1988). Territorial policy communities do not necessarily share a monolithic interest. In fact, territorial policy communities are comprised of many functional policy communities (Keating and Loughlin, 2002). In addition, functional policy communities and territorial policy communities do not contradict each other. Rather, parts of them occasionally duplicate (Keating, Cairney and Hepburn 2008).

The British governing system is named as a union state, which gives asymmetrical political and administrative power in each region as far as the principle of parliamentary sovereignty is maintained (Mitchell, 2003). Formally, the UK government has still maintained strong controlling powers over devolved regional governments. In Scotland, the Scotland Act stipulates that devolution “does not affect the power of the Parliament of the United Kingdom to make laws for Scotland” (Lynch, 2001). The power of the UK government still overrides the power of the Scottish Parliament. The UK government has kept a large number of powers as the reserved matters. Moreover, almost 90% of fiscal resources of the Scottish Government are allocated by the UK government. Such a fiscal system has been applied to all three regions

since the end of 1970's. In this sense, devolution means political-legislative self-government and not fiscal autonomy.

In Scotland, some features can be seen in territorial policy communities. First, education and law have institutional distinctiveness. They are different from England and Wales. In addition, the existence of the Scottish Office kept the distinctiveness of the Scottish administrative institutions and maintained the Scottish interest until 1999. The Scottish Office, which was a territorial ministry, was established to provide the national public services in 1885. Secondly, the Scottish Office and the Scottish interest groups formed close policy communities during the post-war period. Their relations are based on consultation and negotiation. It can be said that the relations between governmental organisations and interest groups tend to become one of a bargaining-style. The governmental organisations regulate interest groups and allocate resource to them. Their relations had been formed interdependently, based on consensus politics (Keating and Midwinter, 1983, Midwinter et.al.,1991).

When devolution took place in each region, the organisations of territorial ministries were transformed into regional governments. The scale and extent of regional administration was essentially moved from the jurisdictions of former territorial ministries. On the contrary, Westminster and Whitehall has still been playing the leading role in integrating many kinds of policy communities even after regional governments were established. So, Westminster and Whitehall retain final authority in terms of the legal, the fiscal system and civil services, most of which are ordinarily implemented by each regional government.

The Japanese governing system may be called a vertical state which has common features with a unitary state. It arranges a homogeneous local government system across the country and fundamentally delivers uniform public policies through functional ministries. It has similarity with the French system of central-local governmental relations before 2003 (Thoenig, 2005, Keating, 1999). To put it correctly, since the French constitution was reformed in 2003, its centralised and uniform structure has been relaxed. The constitution gave some regions, such as Corsica and DOM-TOM, special positions which are different from other domestic regions (Loughlin 2007).

The Japanese governing system is comprised of many kinds of policy communities, most of which are functional policy communities in accordance with functional ministries (Campbell, 1989, Samuels, 1987). The ministry bureaucrats, interest groups, and politicians have formed the functional policy communities. They are compartmentalised by the functions of the central ministries. Each policy community involves the departments of local governments that have close relations to the central ministry via implementing public policies (Samuels, 1983, Krauss,

1995). Some researchers regarded them as an informal channel between the centre and localities, because they enable local government to inform the centre of their will and interest (Reed, 1987; Muramatsu, 1994).

In two exceptional cases, there were territorial policy communities and ministries in Hokkaido and Okinawa during post-war era; their main domains were limited to economic development policies. Moreover, the influences of functional ministries are so strong that territorial policy communities have been penetrated by uniform and functional administrations. It also shows that the Japanese governing system is a centrifugal structure.

While functional ministries have exerted legal, financial and personnel authority individually, the central government lacks integrative powers to consolidate them at the centre. As far as regionalism/decentralisation are concerned, the Cabinet and its office would not show political leadership to promote creating regional government and to integrate functional administrations. As a result, in the Japanese political context, the process of regionalism inevitably entails integration of national functional administration at the regional level. That strengthens the tendencies of administrative reorganisation in Japanese regionalism rather than revitalising local democracy.

6. Conclusion

The causes of regionalism can be explained from how the meaning of a region is revealed in the real political processes. In the UK, political factors are the most crucial momentum for devolution which is lacking in Japan. In addition, the British governing system has integrated territorial policy communities and ministries into a governing system, maintaining centralised structure. On the contrary, the Japanese governing system is characterised by an accumulation of functional policy communities, which deliver uniform public policies across the country, with functional ministries. The Japanese governing system does not have strong power of consolidating them at the centre.

We must pay attention to the transformation of Japanese regionalism as to whether it would follow asymmetrical devolution in accordance with the characteristics of each region like the UK, or promote functional reorganisation of administrative institutions uniformly nationwide like France before 2003, or proceed in directions unique to Japan in the near future.

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Regionalism and Governing Style in the UK and Japan: A Comparative View on Devolution

YAMAZAKI Mikine*

Abstract

Regionalism is leading the transformation of governing style in modern nation states. The causes of regionalism cannot be described just as the roots of the existence of original history nor identity derived from territory. Rather, the differences of both countries are explained from how the meaning of a region is revealed in the real political processes. In the UK, political factors are the most important elements which have promoted devolution besides the strength of regional identities. In addition, policy factors are also pointed out that most people expected devolution would improve the qualities of public policies. In Japan, policy factors which make it possible for localities to seek their own economic development policies are the biggest momentum for regionalism. In contrast, political factors, which could contribute to revitalise local democracy, are too weak to promote regionalism. Rather, many political actors are interested in devolution as a means of an administrative reform. Furthermore, the differences of regional governance in the two countries should be explained from the features of governing systems. The British governing system consists of territorial policy communities, which are formed in accordance with each region, and territorial ministries in addition to functional policy communities and functional ministries since pre-devolution. In Japan, there have been territorial policy communities and ministries in Hokkaido and Okinawa since the post-war era, but their main domains are limited to economic development policies. Rather, the Japanese governing system features an accumulation of functional policy communities, which deliver uniform public policies across the country, with functional ministries.

Keywords

regionalism, devolution, decentralisation, governing system, Scotland, Hokkaido

* Hokkaido University Public Policy School
E-mail: myama@juris.hokudai.ac.jp