

Theory and Reality in Political Development

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Professor Perumal and Professor Masumi;
President Mendes, President Kamishima; Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am most delighted and honoured to be here today among you and participate in the inauguration of this important Round Table of the International Political Science Association. I should at the outset say that it is actually a triumvirate of institutions which has been instrumental in bringing together this distinguished gathering. My omission from the initial salutations was deliberate as I wanted to signal the very hard work and splendid arrangements for which we must all thank President Kiyooki Tsuji and his colleagues on this Tokyo Round Table Organization Committee.

Over the next several days, this Group on Political Development in Asia and the Pacific and the New International Economic Order will be focusing its attention on two of the late twentieth century's most compelling dynamics, those at play in the Asian Pacific region and those that might come into play at the global level in the creation of the new international order. Obviously, these two dynamics are interlocked, affecting each other in an intimate fashion. It is precisely at such interface that the political scientist might profitably bring his

expertise to bear. The Asian Pacific region is the fastest growing in the world; the heralding of a new international economic order is problematic and perhaps controversial, but nonetheless undeniable. I would like to devote my remarks on how to best understand the two dynamics together and the role of political scientists in providing such an understanding.

Political science has been going through stormy days in recent years. Increasingly the discipline has been criticised for its irrelevance in a world of rapid change and multifaceted transformation in which new forces have entered, unanticipated actors have emerged, and the managerial capacity of established institutions has got severely eroded. The question to ask is, is political science at all equipped in dealing with such a world.

In understanding the questions now being asked of political science a few words of history might be in order. In the 1950s and 1960s political science, concerned with political development, generally sought to define the difference between traditional and modern societies. It was assumed that the former must be modernized and that modernization would generally follow the same pattern. Thus, non-modern societies came to be studied in terms of their resistance to modernization.

Criticisms arose in the late 1960s and the 1970s focusing on, on the one hand, the ahistoric and, on the other hand, the ethnocentric nature of that branch of political science. An emphasis on history re-emerged. Many states were not developing in the direction towards modern Europe nor were they in a transitional stage. There was an internal logic to their development and a part of this logic was derived from their own

traditions. One could discern a transformation of traditional forces but not necessarily moving towards a fixed end. Criticism also emphasized the historic characteristics of the modern era -- a phenomenon of European expansion of capitalism combined with a new imperial order of governing other societies and using that power for command over their resources. It is therefore important to study the social transformation of society in the context of its interaction with the international system, and to study the manner in which the workings of the international system is influenced by processes of social change within societies.

What is needed is still deeper understanding of historic processes, how, for instance, cultural orientations and traditions are interwoven with institutional arrangements of societies, who are the major carriers of such integration; what are the processes of interaction and struggle through which these carriers influence events. Still further, how and why a given institutional arrangement collapses in country after country and another generation of institutions comes into being. Even where the older generation of institutions survives, the real substance changes and the mere forms remain. What insight does political science offer in understanding these phenomena and, what is more, coping with them in this and other regions of the world?

In that light we will have to study the relationship between economic development and the violence that often accompanies it, either as a phenomenon that is diffused throughout a society in change and turmoil, or systematically applied either from the centre or from the periphery. Likewise, it will be necessary to study processes of social transformation within the context of shifts of and clashes between value orientations.

No political scientists can afford to continue to ignore the political consequences of the sense of moral outrage especially from the disadvantaged and marginalized segments of society, in light of what is perceived to be the crass materialism, greed and corruption accompanying the disparities in modernization. Such reactions are reflected in the religious fundamentalist responses which are now with us. It is a phenomenon that is not limited to the Islamic world or even to the third world in general. It manifests itself in post-industrial societies as well.

It seems to me that Western political scientists lost interest in these developing societies after the collapse of the first generation institutions while the third world political scientists in the absence of relevant theory often became too ideologized to be able to contribute significantly to a more comprehensive understanding. Such large scale and complex institutional changes among widely dispersed mass populations do not lend themselves to research in laboratory settings as is the case with other sciences. The society and its transformation itself becomes the vast laboratory in which one needs to be personally involved and participate if one is to develop a relevant theory. "Too few political scientists," said Warren B. Miller in his 1980 presidential address to the American Political Science Association, "have first-hand experience in designing research that will faithfully reflect the real political world." There is also too few political scientists who are professionally trained for rigorous multilingual, cross-cultural research, he said.

There seems to have been a strange division in political theory. One part of it deals with the state in terms of static equilibrium models,

almost in total isolation from the international world. It is clear by now that this is an empty exercise rooted in too sterile a conception of society and politics. The other part was the theory of international relations which dealt with relations between states and ignored the great transformations under way within societies. This too has proved to be irrelevant. There is need not just to deal with societal transformations and institutional changes in a dynamic way but also in a manner that conceptualizes the large range of convulsions that are shaping these changes. There is a need for integrating historical and cultural dimensions with political and economic ones. When some of these societies turn too inward or too outward, this is not because of economic issues as is often made out but rather deep-seated cultural impulses.

As we take all of this into account, we also have to bear in mind the larger forces at work which traditional theoretical formulations cannot explain. We are living in a world where the ideological high pressure points have collapsed and turned status-quoist, where in turn relatively cohesive societies have undergone dramatic convulsions where almost all of the social fabric seems to have disintegrated, and yet other societies have turned inward and have chosen to become hermit states. We have lived through a period when war has brought disaster to those directly involved, and prosperity to others. It is a period when large and significant non-government actors have emerged on the scene with much greater access to modern communications and with greater capacity to shape opinions and orientations. We in developing societies witness in our societies a gradual erosion of solidarities, whether of family or neighbourhood or community, under the impact of the mass-media and their atomizing

individualizing tendencies, alongside, of course, the erosion of institutions like party and parliament. The question before us is how to rebuild the capacities towards solidarity formation within changing societies of our region, among nations, and across nations so that we are better able to manage tensions in peaceful ways which are nevertheless capable of reducing the asymmetry in the interdependence at both the global and the regional level.

We see other such phenomena. Large programmes of rural development support mounted by major international agencies have resulted in large increase in the power of rural bureaucracies and the police at the expense of the self-managed growth potential of rural communities, sometimes releasing in the process waves of local repression. Projects that started in the name of development produce totally unanticipated consequences. The study of human rights will have to go into these issues which provide new entry points into the whole problem of freedom. It is not enough to grade nations only in terms of their human rights performance; it is equally important to identify forces and understand their interplay that threaten human freedom, including forces that may not be ill-intentioned. I could go on mentioning other examples of dilemma and trauma of this region and the world at large but I think I have said enough to suggest that in the face of these enormous transformations of structural, cultural and deep psychological type political science finds itself often speechless. And yet, it must speak and speak with conviction.

The reconsideration of theories of political development that emerges from such an effort should also include the impact of development concepts

and strategies on the state, and on the distribution of power and the means of control between the state and society.

It should also include a consideration of the role of non-state actors whose control over large segments of the international information system enables them to respond more rapidly than governments to changes at the international level, thereby further reducing the capacity of governments to manage the international system. These non-state actors have also shown great capacity to shape, for better or for worse, opinions and orientations in the changing societies of the developing world, adding to the complexities of the transformation process. All this then seems to call for a political science capable, first, of recognizing and reducing the distance between visionary rhetoric and adequate understanding of the complex forces at work. Secondly, it calls for a political science capable of transcending the present disjunction between theory and reality in political development in two ways. One, by overcoming the separation between political development at the national and sub-national level on the one hand, and the study of international relations on the other. Second, by drawing into its analysis of social, political and economic forces, the very powerful historically rooted perceptions of the meaning of life that undergird cultural institutions and ways of life. It also requires the articulation of political theories of democratic social transformation within the context of a global communications environment.

If, against this background, we look at the Asia Pacific region, its dynamic growth, the new disparities and shifting alignments resulting from such growth, and the areas of potential instabilities accruing from developments outside the region, it becomes clear that the political

scientists in this region will have to set for themselves a distinct research agenda that addresses some of these issues, as a first step towards a political theory of greater relevance for our understanding of the formative processes of a new, more just and viable international order in this region, as well as greater explanatory and somewhat greater predictive capacity. Obviously, this cannot be done in isolation by the political scientists in this region alone. It will require comparative perspectives and broader, more generalized reflection on the historical dynamics of societal transformation in which scholars from other regions also join.

The life of a political scientist in much of the third world is not an easy one -- the risks are obvious. Still despite all these risks and disadvantages, there is a noble task for the political scientist in contributing to a society's capacity for self-understanding and for heightened understanding of its international environment. This may add to his society's capacity to go through the inevitable processes of change with the least human and social cost, with a greater change that freedom, or at least the potential for freedom, will survive in the process, and with a greater capacity to manage complex systems of interdependence.

I wonder if we might not more fruitfully look at today's world in the way the meteorologist does -- as an intimately connected series of events whose impact honours no national boundary where a seemingly localized disturbance in one remote corner of the globe can have immense consequence for large segments of the rest of the world. Perhaps if we attempt to see our modern interdependent world in this manner -- as one whose patterns of change and definition we read as constantly shifting, largely unpredictable,

and capable of large impact many thousands of kilometres away from where a particular combination of meteorological circumstances occur.

Let me put this thought in more down-to-earth terms. When we all watch the evening television news, in whatever country, it tends to come at us as segmented, largely disconnected, reports from various parts of the world -- what we get in, say thirty minutes, is a very crude kaleidoscope of the state of the world tonight. Then comes the weather report -- replete with satellite maps showing swirling, shifting elements of weather all over the world. I wonder if our world view of political, ideological and other forces might not profit from such a view. Perhaps the evening news gives us our best perspective of spaceship earth and all its wondrous and myriad dependencies.

I leave you with these rambling thoughts that have come to my mind as I look to this region and its relationship with the emerging international order -- both equally tenuous and vulnerable and yet both full of potential and possibilities. I wish you all the best in all your deliberations and look forward to reading the papers and reports that emerge from them.

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