

Charles University Lecture, 18-22 April, 2016

**Essentially Contested Concepts: Tradition and Transformation of Key Political Terms in Modern Japan and China**

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The Aim and Structure of the Lecture

The political and legal key concepts in East Asia underwent significant changes in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. It was initiated by the conclusion of diplomatic and trade treaties which raised the need for setting up the rules to solve the possible conflicts between involved parties with contrastingly different cultural backgrounds. The change was not limited to the technical terminology but resulted in the overhaul of definitions of political/legal relation between the state and society, and between each individual within Japanese or Chinese society. The conceptual formation of individual rights, interests, and autonomy brought in a new vision to intellectuals, political activists or anyone who thought the political system was unjustifiable, not functioning efficiently and/or suppressing dissent voices.

Most of those key terms were adopted from conventional vocabularies or rediscovered in classical canons and were converted into different meanings. We have to note that, in most of the cases, the priority was less placed on whether each term carried the correct contents and implications of the original Western concept than on whether it was able to be fitted naturally or, at least, less strangely in the political/legal discourse and in the cultural contexts of Japan or China, which allowed the modification or sometimes deviation from the original meaning. However, the conceptual appropriation was often useful for expanding the horizon of political vision.

Also, we have to pay careful attention to the fact that the original Western concepts themselves were loaded by diversity caused by historical, cultural, and political differences within the West. It is not difficult to point the difference of the implications of key concepts among, for example, English, French and German. “Right”, “droit” and “Recht” have never been completely corresponding between each other. Not only the differences of meanings, implications and nuances but also the political and theoretical arguments on the differences themselves were introduced and affected the translations and

usages in Japan and China. Thoughtful intellectuals made efforts to understand the contesting meanings of each key concept. They considered whether the translation would make any sense in their cultural context and how it would affect to their own political system and society.

The lecture will be divided into five parts. I will pick up two key concepts in each part. Overall, we will consider the historical background, linguistic mechanisms and effects on political and legal thinking of those key concepts at the dawn of the modernization of Japan and China.

Contents:

Lecture 1: Rights and Liberty

Lecture 2: Equality and Disparity

Lecture 3: Justice and Legitimacy

Lecture 4: State and Society

Lecture 5: People and Citizen

Readings, Provided in PDF files

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