

A New Liberal Class in Japan: Based on Latent Class Analysis

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1. Introduction

In Japan, the opposing political power to the dominant conservative becomes less visible and less powerful than ever. While conservative majority people support the Liberal Democratic Party, anti-conservatives or liberals seem to lose their powerful representation in the politics. How can we capture the image of an alternative politics supported by the center forming liberals? We would like to explore some attributes of the newly emerging middle class which may support alternative politics.

Our hypothesis is that there might be newly emerging liberals or new middle class, which would be characterized roughly with the following two features.

(1) The “new middle class” is a feature of the “creative class” that emerged with the rise of the IT industry since the mid1990s. (However, they do not necessarily belong to the IT industry.)

(2) The “new middle class” has some relevant features which support the “Neo-Welfarism” emerged in the recent Nordic welfare states.

Viewing from these two features, new liberals would be captured by the following two characteristics. The first characteristic would be “growth-orientation” or “investment-orientation.” Based on the analysis of Pablo Beramendi et al., we interpreted the idea of “growth orientation” as the idea of “investment-orientation” toward educational capital and/or cultural capital. The idea of growth orientation is contrasted with the following two: One is the orientation towards “asset formation” and the other is the orientation towards “consumption.” New liberals would have a tendency toward investment to form cultural capital rather than to form assets such as land and buildings. In addition, they would employ it for human capital formation of their children and grandchildren, rather than consuming it.

The second characteristic of the new liberals would be “universalism.” Here, universalism means a position to believe that making society open and fair will lead society to the next stage of the development. Let us take the example of some attitudes toward “nationalism.” In the stage of history, from the state of “regionalism” towards “the integration of a nation”, nationalism was guided by the idea of universalism over regionalism. However, from the stage where each nation state has sovereignty to the

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stage toward the global union of nations, the idea of universalism goes beyond the idea of nationalism while preserving the nation state system. “Universalism” goes beyond nationalism and directed toward the idea of a more open and fair society. Contemporary universalism will seek social relations to restrict nationalism, while recognizing its significance. In addition, modern universalism includes social relations that restrict traditionalism, while recognizing the significance of traditionalism. Here, universalism is not a position to deny nationalism, to deny tradition, to deny authority, but to stand for the “liberal soundness” in handling our society.

These two features, namely investment orientation and universalism, would be basic to what we call new liberals.

On the other hand, we assume that the old liberals in Japan are conceived through the following four questions: [Q8-1] Japan should hold its “absolute pacifism” and if another country attacks us by any chance, Japan should surrender quickly without any bloody battle or should resist without appealing to any weapons (Only policemen not soldiers should deal with the war on behalf of security maintenance). [Q8-2] Regarding the issue of comfort women in World War II in South Korea, the Japanese government should continue to apologize for them until people in South Korea become fully satisfied. [Q8-3] Japan should not rely on American military power and Japan-US security treaty should be abolished. [Q8-4] Since the symbolic emperor system is not compatible to our democracy, it should be abolished.

These questions have been decisively relevant to the political constellation in the post-war period in Japan. So-called “post war liberals” are likely to answer “yes” to these four questions since they share the idea of anti-authoritarianism. An anti-authoritarian would tend to support absolute pacifism, apology toward comfort women, anti-American military power, and Japanese emperor system.

Our hypothesis here is that the “new liberals” grasped by “investment orientation” and “universalism” might not be the same as those who support the idea of “postwar liberals” in Japanese politics. In order to see whether we can grasp the new liberals separated from the old liberals, we conducted web survey via Nikkei Research through Ritsumeikan University in 2018 summer having 1,200 respondents (with a well-balanced variety of their backgrounds in terms of sex, region, and age) and analyzed their political consciousness using the method of latent class analysis (LCA). Latent class analysis is defined as “a subset of structural equation modeling, used to find groups or subtypes of cases in multivariate categorical data.” These subtypes are called “latent classes” (according to the Wikipedia’s simple description).

2. Four Classes based on Latent Class Analysis

The Figure 1 is the result of the Latent class analysis (See Appendix), which shows 4 class model is the most appropriate way of grasping latent classes in number in our

web survey.

These four classes are precipitated by the following sets of questionnaires; (1) a set of questions to find “new liberals”, (2) a set of questions to find “old liberals” and (3) a scale to measure “self-recognized liberal – self-recognized conservative”. What are the characteristics of each of these four classes? Based on the analysis shown in Table 1 and Table 2, we named these four classes as “conservative class”, “judgment pending class”, “new liberal class”, and “old liberal class,” respectively.

The ratio of “new liberal class” is 28% of all respondents. They stand out in terms of their tendency toward universalism. Compared with the respondents as a whole, the “new liberal class” has a co-relation with to self-acclaimed liberals, but about 25% of the new liberal class said that they do not know their own political orientation.

“Old liberal class” is about 14% of all respondents. Unlike the new liberal class, they show an opposite tendency toward universalism. The “old liberal class” has a positive tendency to answer clearly which can be regarded as “old liberal” in the set of questionnaires precipitating the “old liberal class”. For example, they tend to respond positively toward the phrase that “Japan should pursue absolute pacifism.” Compared with all respondents, the “old liberal class” has a positive tendency to self-acclaimed liberal, but at the same time they tend to admit that they are self-acclaimed conservatives. This point may be due to technical difficulties of our questionnaire survey. (It may be necessary to exclude those who tend to answer “yes” to every question from our analysis.)

The “conservative class” is about 38% of all respondents. They show an opposite tendency toward universalism as well as “the old liberal class.” On the other hand, as for the set of questions to precipitate the “old liberal class”, it shows an opposite tendency toward “the old liberal”. Moreover, compared with the all respondents, there is a positive tendency that they recognize them as “conservative”.

The “judgment pending class” shows a tendency opposite to the new liberal class” regarding investment-orientation and universalism. For the set of questionnaires to precipitate the “old liberal class”, they select the answer, “I cannot say either”. As for the question of whether you consider yourself as “liberal” or “conservative”, they chose the answer “neutral” or “I do not know (the meaning of this scale).” Judging from these answers, it can be said that people classified in this class are those who do not have clear political consciousness.

We initially made the following hypothesis: the people of the “new liberal class” are those who do not have much self-awareness that they are liberal, whereas the people of the “old liberal class” are those who are strongly aware that they are liberal. However, according to the latent class analysis, both new and old liberals showed self-recognition that they are “liberal” at almost the same degree. However, among people in the “new liberal class,” there are also many who said they do not know their own political orientation. On the other hand, according to the survey results, many people of the “old

liberal class,” recognize themselves as “conservative”. This may indicate that the attitude of “keeping Article 9 of the Constitution” shows conservative stance when facing at the reform of the existing constitution.

3. Personal Characters of These Four classes

What are the characteristics of each of these four classes? We first analyzed the relationship with “personal attributes” (see Table 3) by regression analysis (multinomial logit latent class regression analysis).

Features of the “new liberal class” are; people in the age of 60s, graduates of university/ graduate school, professionals, low income people (less than 3.5 million yen in their household income), and people who feel that their hierarchical status is lower than their status at the age of 15. There is a possibility that highly educated people over 60’s may be at the center of this class. One of the reasons for this possibility would be the fact that they are low income earners since they have already retired.

Features of the “old liberal class” are; people in the age of 30s, people in management positions, those who feel that their hierarchical status is higher than their hierarchy at the age of 15. This result is somewhat different from our initial conjecture. We initially speculated that the “old liberals” are elderly people over 60. However, in our online survey, respondents in their 60s tend to be biased toward highly educated people with “internet literacy”. Thus, it might be difficult to say that our data reflect the consciousness of people in their 60s in a balanced way. Due to this technical difficulty, our survey might not well grasp the old liberals in their age of 60s.

We also made another hypothesis: the people of the “new liberal class” would enjoy their higher status than their own level at the age of 15. However, on the contrary, the people of the “old liberal class” would not enjoy such uplift of the class mobility. The result of our research betrayed our expectation. People in the new liberal class feel that their status has declined compared to their status at the age of 15, whereas people in the old liberal class feel that their status rose compared with their status at the age of 15. How should we interpret this result?

One plausible interpretation is that although the people of the “new liberal class” have become major players of rising industries, such as the IT industry, their fathers and mothers have already enjoyed high status in our society in the past 10 to 50 years. Another interpretation is that those in the “new liberal class” do not necessarily earn high income and they just engage in creative works with low-income. Third, it might be the case that people in their age of 60s who have already retired may have low disposable income and tend to estimate their status lower than before. We need to inquire and examine these possibilities in our future research.

The characteristics of the “conservative class” are the following: they are men, and in their age of 50s. Their educational backgrounds are colleges of technology, junior

colleges, and vocational schools. They have no job or are students. They are non-regular employees or in the high income groups. They feel that their hierarchical status is higher than their status at their age of 15. From these features, we may say that the conservative class consists of two different tiers: (1) those who are middle-aged and elderly who earn high incomes but are low-educated and (2) those who are non-permanent worker and feel that their hierarchical status has declined compared to their status at the age of 15. Why do those people who are low-educated and earn high income tend to become conservative? One interpretation is that male workers in their age of 50s basically support the structure of our society since they feel that their hard work enabled them to get high income when they become at the age of 50s and more irrespective of their poor educational background.

Characteristics of “judgment pending class” are the following: They are in their age of 20s and 40s. They are those who responded that they don’t know their household income. They are those who answered that their hierarchical status remain the same level as their own status at the age of 15. It would be true that people in their twenties are still young and their political consciousness has not been fully formed. However what are those people in their age of 40s who are pending their political orientations? We need to investigate more on these people.

4. Personalities and Classes

Next, let us analyze the relationship between the above four classes and their personalities with using our original categories of “personhood clusters” by cross tabulation (See Table 4).

The “new liberal class” shows the following personal characteristics. Conversation lover (Hierarchical Transparency), Ex-cultural circle, Homogeneous intimacy-oriented people, Naturalist, Matter-consumer, Person good at caring, Comedy loving satire, Minimalist, and Working Poor.

The conservative class, on the other hand, shows the following characteristics: Online originator, Homogeneous intimacy-oriented people, Naturalist, Matter-consumer, and Enlightened consumer.

Both the “old liberal class” and the “decision pending class” did not show any correlation with those personal characteristics.

Comparing the “new liberal class” and the “conservative class”, we can see that both people share the characteristics of Homogeneous intimacy-oriented people, Naturalist, Matter-consumer. However, when we use correlation analysis instead of latent class analysis, we got significantly different results. “New liberals” defined by investment orientation and universalism-orientation is categorically opposite to “conservatives” who do not have these tendencies. In the correlation analysis, Homogeneous intimacy-oriented people, Naturalist, and Matter-consumer are all

correlated to the new liberal people.

In latent class analysis, the “new liberals” are different from the “conservatives” in the following characteristics. The new liberals are: Conversation lover (Hierarchical Transparency), Ex-cultural circle, Person good at caring, Comedy loving satire, Minimalist, and Working Poor. From these characteristics, it can be roughly said that the “new liberals” are strongly oriented toward communication and culture and have critical sense. On the other hand, people in the conservative class are distinctive in their utilization of Internet as a tool of disseminating information.

Through our latent class analysis, the personal characteristics of the “old liberal class” were not precipitated. We need to examine further what kind of personal characteristics the people of the “old liberal class” have. We need to set up another questionnaire items in order to capture their personal characteristics.

5. Supporting Parties

Next, let us analyze the relationship between the four classes precipitated by latent class analysis and their supporting parties by cross tabulation (See Table 5).

The people of the “new liberal class” are supporting the Constitutional Democratic Party in comparison with the people in other classes. On the other hand, nearly 70% of the people in this group have no supporting party. In other words, they are independent.

The people of the “old liberal class” are supporting the so-called leftist parties. They support the Constitutional Democratic Party, the National Democratic Party, the Communist Party, and the Social Democratic Party. On the other hand, nearly 30% of the people in this group support the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party, the dominant major party in Japan).

The people of the “conservative class” tend to favor the LDP, compared to people of other classes. More than 70% of the people in the “judgment pending class” had no supporting party.

6. Other characteristics of the New Liberals

What are the other characteristics of the “new liberals”? We made the following hypothesis prior to our analysis; (1) new liberals will try to activate critical discussions in the management of the organizations which they belong to. (2) They will prefer to belong to more than one community in order not to be trapped by one community. (3) They will welcome those who are seen as inferior (such as women and foreigners) to become their leaders, while they accept hierarchical relationships in their business management. (4) While they think that they need to have a leader for their organization management, they will not obey the unreasonable demands of the leader. (5) They will think that government should intervene in the realm of family so that people can have

substantially equal opportunities at the starting stage of their lives. They would never deny the role of the state, but would contribute for the state by pledging loyalty, when the nation think highly of the freedom and equality.

We made these five hypotheses in advance. However, the results of the latent class analysis did not necessarily support all these hypotheses.

The analysis supported our hypotheses from (1) to (4). However, about 40% of the new liberals accepted inequalities due to the family environment, which would mean that their tendency toward egalitarianism may not be very strong.

On the other hand, people in the old liberal class strongly support women as leaders. In this respect, the “old liberal class” shows a different feature from both the “conservative class” and the “new liberal class”. As for female leaders, both the “conservative” and “new liberal” people did not support very much in the same proportion as people in the “old liberal class”.

It is interesting to see that the people of the “conservative class” showed no interest at all (0%) in belonging to multiple organizations. They also tended to tolerate the gap in the starting line of life due to the home environment.

It is also interesting to see the result of answer for the question: I am the person who accomplishes the task no matter how irrational the request is. People in the old-liberal class tend to answer “yes” to this question, means they are tolerate in doing unreasonable work when it is assigned to them. Why on earth? It can be interpreted that the people of the “old liberal class” are deprived of their autonomous judgment in the organization to which they belong. This would be contrary to the personality of liberal human being.

7. Final Remarks

In this paper, we developed our analysis of articulating features of the newly rising middle class in Japan with using the method of latent class analysis. Over all, the result supports our hypotheses. However, some result betrayed our expectations. Although there might be some technical difficulties of the survey, we find that the new liberals are not rising in terms of their social class. To the contrary, conservatives say that they are rising in social classes. This seems to be paradoxical but we need to see the nature of this paradox more closely.

Appendix:

Table 1: The Choice of the Number of Classes

	L ²	df	P-value	BIC
1class model	4681.66	1183	0.000	-3705.90
2class model	3659.43	1165	0.000	-4600.51
3class model	3171.70	1147	0.000	-4960.62
4class model	3042.83	1129	0.000	-4961.86
5class model	2964.97	1111	0.000	-4912.10
6class model	2910.25	1093	0.000	-4839.21
7class model	2866.71	1075	0.000	-4755.12
8class model	2821.83	1057	0.000	-4672.38
9class model	2778.10	1039	0.000	-4588.49
10class model	2728.33	1021	0.000	-4510.64

Table 2: Features of 4 Classes based on the Latent Class Analysis

	conservative	Judgement pending	new-liberal	old-liberal	All respondents
cluster component ratio	38%	26%	22%	14%	----
【Conditional response probability】					
【Investment】 How to leave assets in grandchildren					
Have them use as educational expenses	48%	42%	49%	42%	46%
Leave it as land and financial assets	52%	58%	51%	58%	54%

【Investment】 How to spend money									
Lessons of myself and family	53%	51%	63%	61%	56%				
Entertainment	47%	49%	37%	39%	44%				
【universalism】 How to respond to foreign group customers									
Do not accept	32%	41%	5%	43%	30%				
Have customers learn manner and continue accepting	68%	59%	95%	57%	70%				
【Universalism】 How to recruit people who work part-time									
Prioritize Japanese people	35%	40%	1%	52%	31%				
Recruit without distinction between Japanese and foreigners	65%	60%	99%	48%	69%				
【Old-liberal】 Japan should pursue absolute pacifism									
Agree	9%	5%	23%	72%	20%				
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	12%	91%	35%	16%	38%				
Disagree	79%	5%	43%	12%	42%				
【old-liberal】 We should apologize to South Korea for the comfort women issue									
Agree	3%	4%	16%	64%	15%				
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	5%	86%	28%	17%	33%				
Disagree	91%	10%	56%	18%	52%				
【Old-liberal】 We should discard the Japan-US Security Treaty									
Agree	12%	6%	17%	71%	20%				
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	22%	87%	59%	25%	48%				
Disagree	66%	7%	24%	4%	33%				

【 Old-liberal 】 The symbolic emperor system should be abolished									
Agree		4%	3%	13%	50%	12%			
Neither Agree Nor Disagree		13%	91%	29%	32%	40%			
Disagree		83%	6%	58%	18%	48%			
Political orientation									
Self-recognized core liberal (0-2)		4%	0%	13%	12%	6%			
Self-recognized liberal (3-4)		16%	9%	24%	23%	17%			
Neutral (5)		15%	33%	19%	13%	20%			
Self-recognized conservative (6-7)		28%	21%	17%	26%	24%			
Self-recognized core conservative (8-10)		22%	5%	2%	17%	12%			
No idea		16%	32%	25%	9%	21%			

Table 3:

	conservative		Judgement pending		new-liberal		old-liberal				
	B	S.E	B	S.E	B	S.E	B	S.E			
Male dummy	0.348	***	0.081		-0.002	0.075	-0.460	***	0.123	0.114	0.101
age											
20-29	0.148		0.158		0.264	†	0.145		0.279	0.087	0.203
30-39	-0.151		0.141		-0.012		0.134		0.224	0.369	* 0.160
40-49	-0.169		0.128		0.229	†	0.126		0.194	-0.223	0.168
50-59	0.248	†	0.128		0.055		0.138		0.208	-0.220	0.193
60-70	-0.076		0.133		-0.536	***	0.145		0.188	-0.013	0.177

downward	0.233	*	0.096		-0.186	†	0.106		0.308	*	0.134		-0.355	*	0.144
no-movement	-0.063		0.093		0.448	***	0.091		-0.368	*	0.155		-0.018		0.120
upward	-0.171	†	0.098		-0.262	*	0.110		0.059		0.149		0.373	**	0.125
Coefficient of determination	0.102														
N	1108														

†: p < .10, *: p < .05, **: p < .01, ***: p < .001

Table 4: Political orientations and Personal Clusters

		conservative	Judgement pending	new-liberal	old-liberal	total
Q44_0 1	I want to engage in creative things both in hobbies and work.	35.7%	23.7%	37.4%	34.2%	32.7%
Q44_0 2	Even if the salary is low, I want to get a culturally valuable job.	14.2%	6.9%	17.4%	19.9%	13.8%
Q44_0 3	I like to talk with people without concern for each other's social status in circles and events.	21.4%	8.5%	31.7%	26.7%	21.0%
Q44_0 4	I like to talk to people in a bar or a tavern.	17.9%	12.0%	20.0%	22.4%	17.4%
Q44_0 5	I have been active in cultural club activities and circles in junior high school, high school or college (university).	25.2%	11.4%	31.7%	21.1%	22.4%
Q44_0 6	I like to do "favorite registration" on the net and to make a list of "my favorites".	21.0%	10.4%	18.5%	15.5%	16.9%

Q44_0	I like to write and transmit information on the net.	7.0%	2.5%	4.9%	8.1%	5.5%
7						
Q44_0	I like to support minor idol or artist activities that have not yet been sold so much.	5.0%	3.5%	3.8%	11.8%	5.3%
8						
Q44_0	I like to spend time with people whose tastes are similar to me.	34.6%	14.5%	37.4%	33.5%	29.8%
9						
Q44_1	It is OK for me to make lunch box every morning for my partner, so I want my wife (or future wife) to work.	4.2%	1.6%	4.2%	5.0%	3.6%
0						
Q44_1	I prefer simple and natural life than gorgeous one.	46.2%	25.9%	55.8%	31.7%	41.0%
1						
Q44_1	I would like to spend money on eating and traveling rather than materials such as clothes and furniture.	21.2%	9.8%	21.9%	13.0%	17.3%
2						
Q44_1	I like comedy-related performers who will laugh away the authority of the great people.	14.2%	6.9%	21.5%	21.1%	14.8%
3						
Q44_1	I am good at caring people gently, so I think that it is suitable for me to do medical and nursing care work too.	8.8%	3.5%	11.7%	9.3%	8.1%
4						
Q44_1	I think it is better to buy items after thinking carefully, not distracted by advertisements.	42.2%	18.6%	35.5%	23.6%	32.0%
5						
Q44_1	I want to live without material things as much as possible.	36.8%	29.3%	42.3%	26.7%	34.7%
6						
Q44_1	I am now working with low wage (minimum wage), and there is no hope in the future.	9.2%	8.8%	12.8%	6.2%	9.5%
7						

Q44_1	I am a full-time housewife of a college graduate, and it is natural to use more than 1,000 yen for the lunch when eating out.	3.3%	5.0%	3.0%	3.7%	3.8%
8						
Bold : Adjusted residual is +1.96 or more (conservative and new-liberal only)						

Table 5: Political orientations and Supporting Party

	conservative	judgement pending	new-liberal	old-liberal	all respondents
Liberal Democratic Party	33.5%	18.6%	10.6%	28.0%	23.8%
Constitutional Democratic Party	4.8%	3.2%	10.6%	9.9%	6.3%
National Democratic Party	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	3.1%	0.7%
Komeito	1.1%	1.9%	1.5%	1.9%	1.5%
Communist Party	1.8%	2.5%	4.5%	8.1%	3.4%
Japan Restoration Party	2.0%	1.9%	3.0%	1.9%	2.2%
Socialist Party	0.0%	0.3%	0.4%	2.5%	0.5%
Other parties	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
No political party	55.8%	71.6%	68.3%	44.7%	61.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%

Table 6: Political Orientations and New Liberal orientations (Crosstab)

			conservative	Judgement pending	New-liberal	Old-liberal
Critical Attitude	Q32_1	Even in a convincing organization management at present, it should give the members more opportunities to discuss the management.	0.0%	29.7%	37.7%	18.0%
De-contextualism	Q32_2	I want to belong to multiple organizations in order not to be bound by human relations in one organization.	0.0%	18.0%	29.1%	18.3%
Equalization	Q32_3	We should assign a certain portion of leaders to women in many organizations.	29.1%	18.3%	31.0%	53.4%
Anti-Prejudice	Q32_4	There is no problem even if a foreigner becomes his / her boss, when the boss doesn't have any problem in Japanese language skill.	64.6%	30.9%	75.4%	67.7%
De-contextualism	Q32_5	I am the person who accomplishes the task no matter how irrational the request is.	32.2%	18.0%	37.0%	46.6%
Equalization	Q32_6	It is unavoidable that there are social advantages or disadvantages depending on the family environment and the living areas.	55.8%	26.2%	40.0%	52.8%
Sound Loyalty	Q32_7	If the leaders of your country, region, or organization are those who value freedom and equality, I would like to contribute as much as I can.	49.4%	20.2%	63.4%	62.8%