

The origins of Japanese national symbols

M. A. Shtan'ko^{1a}, V. N. Skvortsova¹, A. I. Shcherbinin², Elena L. Rudneva¹, Tatyana A. Spichenko¹

¹Tomsk polytechnic university, 634050 Lenina str., 30, Tomsk, Russia

²Tomsk state university, 634050 Lenina str., 36, Tomsk, Russia

Abstract. From the point of view of constructivism, the image of national and ethnical identity – the image of a nation as an "imaginary political community" – supposes the inclusion of the specially created symbolic signs, which are recognized by the whole community in general. First of all, these signs encompass national symbols. This article is dedicated to revealing specific aspects of forming of such national symbols as the flag and the anthem of Japan. Analyzing these symbols through the prism of political culture, the authors indicate the stable continuity in symbolism of national tradition modern expression within the historical constituent of Japan.

Introduction

The analysis of a political situation cannot be made without reference to the history of the state, its norms and values that have been formed over time under the influence of many factors. Political values play a most important role in it. All these principles, factors, regulations, and orders form such a phenomenon as a "political culture." Careful study of a political culture makes it possible to understand many political issues and international relations, as well as to establish new inter-state contacts and make political and economic alliances. Without general knowledge of a political culture it is hard to imagine the political situation in the country and make political forecasts.

Moreover, the relevance of this category lies in the fact that in recent years, political scientists and other researchers observed an increased interest in a "political culture". A study of this phenomenon in the context of modern Japan has an especially great value.

Firstly, a political culture makes up an important part of a general culture, which combines a sum of ideas of the public about government and politics, a style, behavior and participation in political events, political and ideological values and political experience gained. Therefore, in the area of political culture, research is focused on a deeper understanding of all the aspects of the political process, especially the political consciousness and national behavior, ways and limits of the evolution of government policy.

Secondly, Japan, as one of the leading centers of the Asian-Pacific region, is of great interest to study, because all the issues and problems of the state influence the whole region.

Thirdly, a study of the political culture of modern Japan is connected with the necessity of understanding the results of the social and political changes that have occurred in Japan lately. There is a consensus on the fact that in recent years Japan has changed a lot, and this, in turn, led to changes in consciousness and behavior of its citizens. Therefore, the issues of interest are how changes in the country affected the consciousness, attitudes and values of the Japanese, and what characteristics remained unchanged.

Today, in many countries there is a large number of books and articles written on political culture. For domestic political science, this problem is relatively new, not deeply explored, and research on political culture and a national symbol as its key element is considered to be relevant and necessary.

Sustainable national shared philosophy and national identity are generated as a result of symbolic synthesis. "Deprive me of my tricolour, know it, I will be deprived of the half of France vigour both at home and abroad" – the phrase of 1848 belonging to well-known French poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine [1]. An anthropological tradition deriving from the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss highlights the general symbolic environment created by the ethnic consciousness of nation's people. "American-ness, German-ness, Russian-ness are all proper deeply rooted national identities and each has a unique historic essence. Symbolic forms like flags, architecture, works of art, and treasured histories give form to these identities" [2].

These symbols and signs are related to both domestic policy aspects of public life (common perception of an ideal type of state traditional government, peculiarities of political culture, etc.) and common principle concepts of country's international life. The most significant national

^a Corresponding author: osk@tpu.ru

symbols represent the most important values and positively viewed qualities shared by the members of society, as either developed or learned through people's personal life experience. That is why the analysis of national idea from the point of view of its symbolic representation contributes to better understanding of its axiological foundation as the essential of national unity and identity. A national symbol is tightly connected to community self-identification and therefore has global sociopolitical meaning. Symbols serve as a consolidating force for the political system based on political culture.

An international community has not developed any unified rules or criteria for representation and interpreting of national symbols. It can be explained by each country's inalienable right to create their national symbols according to their own understanding of the symbol meaning. As a rule, national symbols are created with respect to historical, political, military and cultural traditions of the country as well as traditions of ethnic groups inhabiting the state territory; they reflect national relations with other countries, borrowings and cross-cultural interaction of different customs and cultures.

Consequently, national symbols which exist as a synthesis of different factors are to briefly express the nature of society, the historical age and a specific level of country's development. Also, they provide an insight into ethnic culture and the principle of political power, they attract people's attention, uniting them around some major idea and encouraging them to certain action. However national symbols can be considered a manifestation of political culture functions such as communication, integration, socialization, etc. Thus, they undoubtedly influence the political culture of Japanese society as well as of any other nation. The main forms of political symbols include the following:

1) National-state symbols (flag, anthem, constitution, bank notes, etc.).

2) Political procedural ritual symbolism. It includes congresses and meetings of political parties and movements, political demonstrations.

3) Sculpture and architectural political symbolism. Here, a symbol of power and the state is represented in the form of palaces, government buildings, squares and others.

4) Cities - political symbols. They help to form a national - political consciousness.

5) Conventional-graphic political symbolism. For example: the Christian cross, the Muslim month, the sickle and hammer, etc.

6) Visually-political propaganda symbols include slogans, posters, portraits, banners. Often this symbolism is used during the election campaigns and public holidays.

7) The object-substantive political symbols which materialize the memory of the most significant events.

8) The political and musical symbols (national anthem).

9) The political fashion. Expressed in clothes and its various amendments.

10) The political language. As a general rule, it includes terminology and gestures. By gestures it implies voting, applause, greetings in different versions, etc.

Materials and methods

This research used a complex method combining elements of sociocultural analysis, which allows revealing the dependence of political processes on political culture, and institutional approach, which determined the meaning of governmental structures and formal political rules.

The methodology of the modern political science allows us to analyse political phenomena and how they change in dynamic political systems, as well as changes in the content of political processes and the nature of power. It helps to study and evaluate the phenomena happening in the political life of the country, which have a direct impact on the public consciousness, as well as to adjust and predict political behaviour of different groups of people.

Results and discussion

2.1 The flag and the State Emblem of Japan. Their origin and history.

The history of the Japanese national flag extends back over one thousand years. Through different historical periods, flags, banners and standards were used as symbols of power, as one or another fighting squad insignia of branch and even as shop signs to attract clients. The national flag of Japan was introduced to emphasize Japan entering the world international community to be the sign of Japan's free will to follow its accepted standards.

A Japanese flag prototype - a red disk on the white background - appeared as early as in *Heian* period (794-1185). But then it was drawn on the war fans of warlords. The first Japanese emperor *Jimmu* is believed to have achieved a great victory with the sun as his ally - it was behind his back blinding his enemies. In the medieval period Japanese warlords were summoning sun's power to their side placing the fans with pictures of sun on them behind their army of soldiers. Selecting this flag as a national symbol, high officials of Japan appealed to the sun's protective nature [3].

In 1867, after a long period of self-isolation, Japan opened itself once again for the outside world. Almost immediately after that, the need for creation of a symbol that would represent the country arose. In 1870, under Proclamation No. 57 of *Meiji* 3 issued on February 27, the presence of the "*Hinomaru*" flag on every sea vessel was stated as obligatory [4]. After that the flag came into common use as a Japanese national symbol.

During the Second World War the flag was generally regarded as a symbol of Japanese imperialistic and militaristic nature. In countries of East Asia a mere sight of the "circle of the sun" caused great resentment. Even in post-war Japan, riding on the wave of restoration, there was a lot of hot discussion considering the substitution of national flag, though these discussions gradually faded for the country was having a time of intensive economic, social and political growth. Only in the mid-90s Japanese society returned to the flag issue. Only considering the necessity of the flag-raising

ceremony in educational institutions on ceremonial occasions gave a new impulse to the dispute. Finally, on August, 13, 1999 by virtue of *Act on National Flag and Anthem* existing within the framework of the current Constitution [5] the flag *Hinomaru* was recognized as an official national flag of Japan. For Japanese people, August 13, the day of the law approval became the *Day of National Flag*.

Acceptance of *Hinomaru* as an official country symbol is, first of all, attributed to comparing the Japanese emperor with the sun. The combination of scarlet and white colors is very important. In *Shinto*, a scarlet color symbolizes the purifying power of fire and the sun. Besides, it is also considered the color of life. The white color is the color of primeval purity. Thus, the combination stands for innocent and happy life with the support of Shinto deities.

One of the main things that were considered while choosing the flag was the country's geographical position. People inhabiting Ancient China believed that China was a so called "central empire", while Japan was situated in the east of the world, exactly where the sun was rising. People of Japan also accepted that concept. Then, the Japanese flag represented the rising sun.

One more traditional symbol of the country is a *National Emblem*. Japan does not have a statutory National Emblem and, thus, is the exception and extra regular among the countries. This can be explained by several factors, and the main one is that chivalry traditions of medieval Europe had remained unknown in Japan until the late XIX century. Yet, from the olden times Japan did have the symbol exercising the function similar to European countries' National Emblems, and it was the formal sign of a ruling dynasty. In Japan it is an *Imperial chrysanthemum emblem*, which is a picture of 16-petal chrysanthemum with sixteen petal tips of the lower ring seen from beneath the petals of the upper ring.

Emperor *Go-Toba*, who ruled the country from 1183 to 1198 during *Kamakura* age, was a connoisseur of chrysanthemum flowers and started to use a chrysanthemum stylistic convention as his personal seal. The succeeding emperors of the *Kamakura* age carried on the established tradition and a chrysanthemum flower automatically gained the status of the sacred symbol of the emperor dynasty.

The chrysanthemum flower received an official status of the ruling emperor household emblem in 1869 by the *Meiji* government Edict [6]. In 1871 another Edict was issued to secure the privilege this emblem assigned to the emperor household, and anyone who did not belong to it was strictly forbidden to ever use this emblem [7]. During the Second World War the emblem was actively used as the symbol of the Great Empire of Japan. It was set at the prows of the battleships. After the war the restriction to use the emblem by non-members of the emperor family was lifted. Nowadays the symbolic image of the chrysanthemum flower is often used by Japanese diplomatic missions and institutions overseas [8].

The ancient Japanese used to associate this beautiful flower with the sun [9]. In Japan, the chrysanthemum

flower imported from China has become a symbol of happiness and wisdom.

2.2 The National Anthem of Japan. Origin and history.

Similar to the history of the National Flag of Japan, the necessity of having a national anthem arose in the *Meiji* age, when the isolation period of the country had been over. In 1888 *Kimigayo* was recognized as the country's official National Anthem [10].

Tanka pentastich from the early-X-century poetic anthology *Kokinshū* (*Kokin Wakashū* - Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times) was chosen for the anthem's lyrics [11]. Although, Japan was one of the last countries to create its own anthem, the current lyrics of the Japanese anthem are the oldest in the whole world. The lyrics author remains unknown. The pentastich, however, used to be popular enough to be included in later collections of poems and, because of that, the current version of the text is slightly different from the initial. The main peculiarity of the tanka pentastichs is the combination of the many expressive means of the language such as epithets, metaphors etc. From this comes the necessity to interpret the meaning of the text. For example, the first line of the lyrics *Kimigayo* is difficult to understand. In Japanese language, *kimi* stands for informal form of "you" and is also used as "Thee" to be one of the ways to address to the emperor. Thus, the anthem's lyrics is commonly interpreted as the laudation of the emperor to wish him to stay in good health, though an individual, and especially an educated one, may find the other meanings and be free to interpret it.

The idea of creating a national anthem belongs to John William Fenton, an Englishman who worked as a leader of the military band in Japan. The text of tanka pentastich was provided to him by the "progressive" people who were in favor of active reforms. The music created by Fenton lacked the necessary degree of splendor and was considered a failure. The second attempt was made by Hiromori Hayashi who belonged to the music department of the emperor household [12]. Then, the tune was edited by another military band leader, the German Franz Eckert, the official Anthem of Japan was performed in public for the first time on December, 3^d, 1880. 1888 is considered to be the year when the Anthem was established because that year the tune and the text of the Anthem were sent to all the countries with whom Japan had diplomatic relations [13].

As in case with the National Flag, during the post-war decades, the Anthem was associated with the militaristic past of the country. After the *Treaty of San Francisco* signature, 1951, the Anthem was performed on the *NHK* radio station and since 1953 it has been performed daily on the *NHK* TV-channel. In 1999 the *Act on National Flag and Anthem* once again confirmed the national status of the Anthem [14].

Conclusion

The example of Japanese political symbolism is an argument to prove the idea that national symbols are tightly connected to the history and cultural traditions of the country. The Japanese symbols obviously express the nature of society and the development level of the nation. The symbols give us the understanding of the country's culture and sources of its political power. The identification of political symbols with the sun, the gods and immaterial domains stands for fair and happy life of Japanese society. Hence, unanimity and integrity of the nation have evolved on the basis of devotion, commitment and respect to them. This is how political aspects of culture work and manifest.

The specific nature of such an interpretation of the political functions of culture lies in the fact that the political culture is seen as an integral part of national culture, and, above all, political experience of mankind, obtained in the course of historical evolution. This experience has an impact on the formation of political consciousness of people and, eventually, is expressed in their political orientations, which in turn determine the political behavior.

The existence of a large number of definitions of a political culture is due to the fact that, until now, scholars have not managed to develop a universally accepted definition of this phenomenon. It is due to the recognition of the influence of political and cultural characteristics of the society, the most important of which is the mentality, the dominant views, theories and concepts - it is impossible to give a single definition of political culture valid for all types of societies. Nevertheless, political analysts are unanimous in their opinion that it is the political culture that has an impact on all spheres of society. Political culture plays an important role in the formation and development of political institutions and relations in modern Japan. It determines the direction of the political process, facilitates the integration of society, and ensures the coordination of political institutions, thus creating a common value-normative space.

Built by many generations, political culture along with political institutions has a constant regulating effect on the political life of Japanese society by providing people with certain values and influencing their choice of rational goals.

Due to national symbolism, the will of the Japanese people to know and confirm their belonging to one nation and one exclusive type of the society and entity is expressed, and their symbols attest their national identity, common goals and predestination. The Japanese consider their First Emperor *Jimmu* to be of divine origin and thus his power was sacral and holy. That is why Japanese National Anthem is dedicated to the rule of the emperor, the National Emblem is in fact the emperor's Personal Seal and the image of the National Flag is connected with the victory of the *First Emperor Jimmu*. Existing symbols, in their turn, promote the Japanese society better orientation and challenges, as well as norms and top priorities, which determine specific political behavior and political consciousness of the Japanese.

Generally accepted political symbols are the socially generated vehicle of the further adaptation, integration, socializing and communication of the Japanese as a nation. Confessional respect is known to play an important role in the life of Japanese society. It is inherent to the National symbolism, and *Shinto* religion grants the meanings and interpreting to the National Emblem and Flag. Japanese society is encouraged to stay committed to combatant values and norms, which is to be reflected in their political behavior.

Finally, in agreement with the idea of German philosopher Oswald Spengler that "every culture's unity is based on the common language of its symbols", it is to be mentioned that ethnic and national symbols of modern Japan are based on long-lasting tradition of national and political self-identification. Some of these symbols appeared extemporaneously through the country's political history and some of them were created and specifically incorporated by the elites or outsiders. For this reason, Japanese national symbols are an essential part of development, evolution and regeneration of their nation and country as sociocultural and political community.

References

1. A. Lamartine (Paris, 1863)
2. M. Price (Oxf. Univer. Press., 1995)
3. Paul S., *Dull Annap* (U.S. Nav. Inst. Press, 1978)
4. R. Goodman, N. Ian, *Routledge* (1996)
5. The constitution of Japan. Promulgated on November 3, 1946. Came into effect on May 3, 1947
6. M.B. Jansen, G. Rozman, eds. (Princeton Univer. Press, 1986)
7. R. Murphy (New York: Pearson / Longman, 2004)
8. *A Diplomat in Japan* (Stone Bridge Press, 2007)
9. Luis Frois, Josef Wicki, *Monum. Nipp*, **34(1)**, 1979
10. M.Itoh, *Palgrave Macmillan* (2003)
11. Y. Sugiyama, *Compar. Lit*, **13 (3)**, 1961
12. Jun Hongo, *The Japan Times* (17.07.2007)
13. *Whaling in Japan* (Oxf. Univer. Press, 2009)
14. *Act on National Flag and Anthem* (Japanese Law Translation, 2009)