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The Logic of Political Media Scandals in Japan and the Case Study of Ozawa Ichirō

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Abstract: First of all we wish to reveal certain universally-structuralist qualities, same as culturally-relative features of scandals and their mediation in a non-Western society. Secondly, we will illuminate how the mass media take active part in processing political issues in Japan, where as anywhere else in the media-saturated modern industrial world politicians significantly depend on the media (and vice versa); where political live shows and news programs – including scandals – became an important force, at times driving public sentiment while eventually generating support for opposition; and where wealth and its surplus is inevitably tied to a higher potential to grasp and secure power. We will then proceed to the main part of the paper, where we focus more closely on Japanese political scandals whereby preparing theoretical ground for a discourse analysis in the scandal case study of Ozawa Ichirō – one of the most powerful political heavyweights, and simultaneously one of the epitomes of political corruption in Japan.¹ In our endeavor we were motivated by the fact that there exists plethora of literature on scandals in the west, but a detailed media discourse analysis of Japanese scandals is still lacking in academia worldwide.

Keywords: Japanese media – corruption – political scandals – Ozawa Ichirō

Introduction

De-westernization of media-communication studies is an attempt to step out of the originally Anglo-American media communication paradigm, where mainly American theories and approaches have been widely used to explain global media processes and communication patterns (de-westernization is however usually not conceived of as a new paradigm; it is just another theoretical trend within the given academic framework). Apart from the initial focus on (new) countries in the Third World and Eastern Europe (but also on Latin America, Middle East, etc.), social scientists worldwide have become gradually interested in media and

¹ We are elaborating more closely on the person of Ozawa in the section “Who is Ozawa Ichirō” (see below).

communication systems in Asia (among others China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong). In this academic context such research projects sometimes dealt with issues of media production and reception in other than Anglo-American socio-political contexts, or even attempted to reconfigure the mainstream media theory.

Although Japan did not initially belong to those cultures that were scrutinized within the perspective of de-westernization, it can be argued that analyzing Japanese media does offer certain results that may update the de-westernized perspective in question. On the most general level of media de-westernization some scholars came to critically focus on the problematic relationship between media institutions and power structures in Japan. Furthermore, it can be asserted that focusing on the phenomenon of media scandals – especially the political ones – and analyzing the “politics and poetics” of their narratives the Japanese media culture can also be ascribed to the aforementioned field of interest.

Method

Regarding the research method when analyzing scandals in general and the Ozawa Ichirō case study in particular we basically utilize the critical (media) discourse analysis approach. By combining various interdisciplinary perspectives on discourse analysis (see e.g. Jaworski and Coupland 2002) we mainly refer to meaning and context, sequence and structure, and political subjectivity. We thus focus on the way the media co-construct the scandal narrative (both linguistically and visually) while framing the transgressor by utilizing a specific language use. Next to other concepts the role of “ritual” and “trickster” in the political scandal discourse is emphasized here, while borrowing these concepts from the field of cultural/structural anthropology (see below). Regarding the collected data, apart from various primary and secondary sources that were dealing with the Ozawa case we mainly analyze the mainstream Japanese/foreign press in the time period of 2009-2012 (i.e. within the time span that most significantly constituted the Ozawa scandal macronarrative). Apart from the leading Japanese and foreign dailies in Japan (The Japan Times or *Yomiuri Shimbun*) we also focus on semi-mainstream weeklies (*shūkanshi*) and their role in mediating not only political scandals in Japan.

The Universal Phenomenon of (Political) Corruption

It may be the case that human beings are in given circumstances inherently egoistic and unjust (Plato) while being consumed by desire/will to power (Hobbes, Nietzsche) or by certain unconscious, irrational desires (Freud, Lacan). This all is happening in a pleasure-seeking society where private vices are in the end “good” for the public, and where public and private morality has to be separate (Mandeville, Machiavelli). It would be, however unreasonable to limit the

responsibility of various “defects” only to human agency itself. Much more importantly it seems to be the case that more often the systemic environment, its platforms (structures) and various external forces within a society do facilitate this pathology and “enable” people (i.e. societal elites) at times to engage in “wrong” conduct. The persuasive practice of corruption itself – the wrongdoing that is at root of most of contemporary political scandals in Japan and elsewhere – is as old as humankind. As Edmund Burke and many other key political philosophers reminded us, politics is based on mere “skill” rather than on any abstract moral virtues, and similarly the field of rhetoric – one of the essential dimensions of the political discourse – was since Plato apprehended as “psychagogy”, or “guidance of the soul”. In a similar vein many intellectuals from Orwell to Bauman would add that the inevitably inherent, “latent” function of political discourse in general, and its rhetoric style in particular is to present lies under the guise of “truth”.

Nowadays political corruption is generally viewed as a morally problematic phenomenon and malfunction of the political system that is usually grounded in misuse of public authority for more or less private gain. Not only in the case of Japan it can be simply described as a trade-off between corporate and private donations, and an unlawful selling of services by politicians and officials in exchange for personal and/or party benefits (e.g. Rothacher 1993; McCormack 1996; Castells 2009). If we take into account various overviews of unveiled corruption, which led into major political scandals, we see that this phenomenon is a standard feature of all forms of political systems worldwide at various points of history. It is not only the centrality of elections in the political discourse and the value of winning them which inevitably triggers the politicians’ “arms race” that is connected with corruption (and scandals in case of revelation). Besides, it is also the fact that corporate contributions and “donations” somewhat inherently bear an element of bribery. Corruption can thus also be understood as being endemic in all kinds of systems and cultures, and it is rather its degree and magnitude that matters and makes a “difference”. We may also find different intensity based on the nature of the transgression, and various modifications (collusion, favouritism, bribery, cronyism, etc.), however the very basic patterns of corruption in general seem to be universal.

Structural Corruption and Money Politics in Japan

According to some Western accounts on the history of Asia (and ancient China in particular), corruption, connections, nepotism, etc. were significant aspects that at times seem to have been far more widespread than in Western economic and political systems (see e.g. Murphey 2009). According to Richard Mitchell (1995) Japan actually has a history of corruption that dates back to the Heian period (794-1185), while the political bribery itself was a common affair since the beginning of her recorded history (e.g. Hayes 2005), where today the cost of being a politician significantly surpassed that of any other country (McCormack 1996).

After all, some time ago the archetype of scandal corruption, Tanaka Kakuei – Ozawa’s main political mentor and formerly the most influential member of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – claimed that his political modus operandi was “consistent with Japanese traditions of political action...” (Stockwin 2003, 156). Others insist that in Japan scandals stand for “traditional” means for bringing down politicians such as Ozawa (e.g. Wolferen 2011, 28). Unsurprisingly important academic books on Japanese politics which fail to at least briefly touch upon the phenomenon of corruption and scandal in Japan are virtually non-existent.

Very important for the Ozawa Ichirō case study is the infamous bid-rigging within the corrupted “cement industrial complex” of the “construction state” (*doken kokka*) – an actually tolerated, widespread practice – which is based on the nexus between officials, business people, high ranking politicians, and even yakuza, the Japanese Mafia (e.g. Goodall 1996; McCormack 1996; Kingston 2004). Consequently, in contemporary Japan financial scandals, money politics (*kinken seiji*), and structural corruption (*kōzō oshoku*) are wide spread phenomena, referring to the fact that corruption itself is built into the societal and political system. Power abuse seems to be an inevitable conduct of politicians with amassing political funds being understood as taking “alternative routes”.

This post-war system of “money politics”, including the aforementioned “construction state”-phenomenon is attributed to Tanaka Kakuei who in 1970s perfected the structural collusion-based corruption system while depending on the financial management of his political support group (*Etsuzankai*).² Although Ozawa himself is famous for bullying big business for additional campaign funds (see e.g. Rothacher 1993, 30-1), the construction industry (and the money-for-favours related corruption) had always been the main source of his campaign financing.

The nation’s politics continues to run on money: political operations require underground funding, necessitating the accumulation of large amounts of money by parties and factions, exchanging favours is an indispensable component of the Japanese political process (including the voting process), and bribes came to be viewed only as an additional cost of projects in the world of political/capitalist competition. Regarding the representation process, corruption is consciously confined to the latter part of the “Japanese” dichotomy of explicit “front” (*omote*) – or what is exposed to public attention – and implicit “rear” (*ura*) – or what is hidden from the public eye.³

² Although many claim that corruption in Japanese politics was there long before Tanaka Kakuei, it was precisely Tanaka who supported the system where public works projects funded by the government facilitated economic development and the job market. The fact that Tanaka’s model, no matter how much permeated by corruption, actually proved successful in terms of bringing about the Japanese “economic miracle”, only points at the inconsistency of the political discourse with general moral theories, while partly bringing back home the apologist argumentation of Karel van Wolferen (2011), who is one of the most eager Western supporters of Ozawa.

³ This dichotomy is of course not exclusively Japanese – it parallels Erwin Goffman’s (1959) distinction between the front stage and back stage. Also in case of mediated politics and scandals we can distinguish between the stage where politicians engage in formal, conventional

Although corruption is a universal phenomenon, political scandals seem to influence voter behaviour differently depending on cultural context. As Laurie Freeman (2000) and many others convincingly illustrated, the Japanese media system indeed is a product of its own history, the nature of public sphere, or national institutions. Moreover, Japan can serve as an example of how the relationship between scandal politics and political trust is mediated in a specific cultural and ideological context. For example, negative depictions of politicians do not necessarily resonate with their voters – especially when they are motivated by local interests.

Consider the Japanese practice of local “support groups” or “personal support networks” (*kōenkai*): apart from common members these loyal support bases are also backed by local companies and government workers, who vote for their politicians, who are in turn expected to deliver “pork” to their constituents (also Ozawa’s mentor, Tanaka Kakuei was famous for taking a good “care” of his own constituency in Niigata prefecture). As a result, by profiting from this sort of reciprocity the constituents can not only easily forgive the corrupted politician’s transgressions, but they also usually re-elect him/her no matter the scandal development. Simultaneously, local construction firms donate money in order to maintain a friendly relationship with politicians who wield influence over public works contracts, and the politicians are in turn dependent on these firms for necessary campaign funds. It is thus not only the local support base (*jiban*) and a politician’s name recognition/reputation (*kamban*) – it is most fundamentally the campaign funding (*kaban*) that makes a difference and thus renders *kōenkai* as one of the major sources of political corruption in Japan.⁴ Especially in case of Japan it seems to be the case that people are in given situations more “obligation-preoccupied” than “right-preoccupied” (Lebra 1976, 106), and if we exaggerate this train of thought, we may say that it is the politician’s “right” to transgress if necessary (of course only within the borders of institutionalized structural corruption), in order to fulfill his “obligation” towards his/her constituency.

Corruption in Japan is indeed structural, and thus somewhat “unavoidable” (one root of Japanese corruption was usually the electoral system, i.e. the multi-seat constituency system which let parties strive to win as many seats in the same constituency as possible, wherefore the candidates from the same party must fight one another). Moreover, according to Karel van Wolferen (1989; 2011) the problem really surfaces only if a politician is all-too “successful”, whereby threatening the balance of the hierarchical system with its unofficial, informal rules, not to mention its necessary ties to the media. As mentioned above, typically for

performances while being more or less aware of the fact that they are “framed” by the media, whereas in the back stage informal actions and role performances of the politicians are primarily not in the focus of the media, nor the public as a whole.

⁴ Another institutionalized corruption practice in Japan is the so called “descent from heaven” (*amakudari*) where former senior officials join some of those organizations that used to be under their jurisdiction before their retirement.

manufacturing political corruption the magnitude of transgression, or “excess”, is usually expressed by the amount of money at play: if huge amounts are “unsystematically” used, the usually overlooked conduct is labeled as inappropriate, contemptible, anti-social, etc. and is prone to become the object of a major media scandal.

Post-War Scandals and Politics Made in Japan

Although sharing certain fundamental structural features, political scandals should also be examined in the context of particular wider social system, not to mention that clearly categorizing the Japanese political system itself is somewhat problematic. Japanese democracy, based on the American model (i.e. the post-war constitution which is however quite different from the US model) initially generated political domination of conservative coalition with weak rival parties, although some principles that pre-date Japan’s modernisation and occupation reforms were retained. In this context we can recall somewhat controversial scholars such as Clark D. Neher who went as far as to describe the political phenomenon in various Asian contexts as “semi-democracy” or “Asian style democracy”.⁵ Perhaps more instructive in this regard is Stockwin’s (2003) introduction into theories of Japanese politics, including the notion of democracy (especially the theoretical dichotomy of universalism and cultural relativism).

The conservatives of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) while being backed by the US, created a strong coalition of business and landed interests. At the end of the millennium some critical voices from within the system – and the loudest one was again Ozawa Ichirō – attacked the power of bureaucracy on one hand, and the impotence of the opposition towards the omnipotent ruling coalition (LDP) on the other. Nevertheless, the economic success in the 1960s and 1970s was a result of close collaboration between the power elite and the businessmen, while the more affluent and confident Japanese were in a long run supporting the conservatives despite the fact that corruption scandals were mushrooming.⁶

Apart from scandals involving bureaucrats at various government ministries, several Prime Ministers and cabinet members were forced to resign throughout this period. The following post-war Prime Ministers have actually been involved in corruption: the then LDP member Satō Eisaku (along with Yoshida Shigeru and Ikeda Hayato) was investigated on multiple occasions – most notably because of the 1954 “Shipbuilding Scandal”, where leading shipbuilding firms bribed the

⁵ Other ways of describing the phenomenon in Japanese context were “it-can’t-be-helped democracy”, MOFocracy (MOF stands for the Japanese Ministry of Finance), “karaoke democracy”, or “feudalistic democracy” with semi-aristocratic power elite, etc. Karel van Wolferen (1989) went as far as to suggest abolishing the concept of “real” democracy per se altogether.

⁶ Among many others the most notable scandals (or more importantly: the most publicized transgressions) in Japanese post-war history have been the 1972 Lockheed Scandal (Prime Minister Tanaka accepting bribes), the 1988 Recruit Scandal (Prime Minister Takeshita and many other involved in insider stock deals), and the 1992 Sagawa Kyūbin Scandal (many politicians accepting illegal donations from the parcel delivery company).

government into revising a law to increase government shipbuilding subsidies. Kishi Nobusuke (Satō's brother and also a member of LDP) was employing government programs to generate business for political supporters, and Tanaka Kakuei, the key person of the foremost Japanese corruption scandal (the Lockheed affair) and long before the Ozawa saga the epitome of political corruption in Japan, earned the status of the father of money politics in Japan (also Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro from the LDP was indirectly implicated as a suspected recipient of Lockheed funds, same as the Recruit shares, while Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi from the same political party, also tainted by the corruption, resigned during the Recruit scandal).

Uno Sōsuke (LDP) was a sort of "exception" in Japanese Prime Ministers' corruption narrative since he was simply doomed by a sex scandal. Hashimoto Ryūtarō (LDP) had to resign over his involvement in concealing political donations, Hatoyama Yukio (LDP until 1993, DPJ from 1998 until present) resigned after misreporting of a vast amount of donations in the context of Japan's securities scandals in 1991, and the DPJ's Kan Naoto, once heroically exposing the wrongdoing of his own ministry's HIV-tainted blood scandal in 1996, later followed the post-war "scandalogy" after failing to pay mandatory premiums into the National Pension System. Takeshita Noboru (LDP) and his cabinet, while hoping to create a stable administration following Nakasone, was involved in, and paralyzed by the aforementioned stock-for-favor Recruit scandal, and although Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (LDP) himself was not directly embroiled in any serious political scandal, many of his Cabinet Members (including Matsuoka Toshikazu who committed suicide in 2007) were involved in numerous corruption cases and gaffes (for the full list of Abe Cabinet scandals see e.g. Sassa 2011, 99).

By the way the Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō (LDP), who was (same as Ozawa) famous for causing confrontations with the Japanese mass media, made a minor scandal by calling Japan a "divine nation" (and carelessly continuing to play golf after being informed about the fatal "Ehime Maru" accident in 2001). Since the 1970s, the Japanese media have been, and still continue to be in the post-Koizumi years the most important "agents of change", bringing down cabinets and politicians. According to Rothacher (1993) a major scandal with a magnitude strong enough to bring down governments in Japan usually occurred on average only once a decade. As we will see below, it is the media organizations themselves (and the specific nature of their relationship with elite power structures) that significantly determine which stories will be transformed into a scandal, and especially if accompanied by certain dramatic (visual) imagery, into a national obsession.

Shaping Scandals Based on Press-Politics Relations in Japan

Although the penetration of politics to the world of media (and vice versa) is a widespread discussed phenomenon in media studies, some scholars claim that this

takes on distinct, culture-specific qualities in Japan. While the usual argumentation rather links corruption to the “maturity” of its democracy, others are in this context once again pointing at the aforementioned pathology and “immaturity” of a dysfunctional democracy in Japan (e.g. Iimuro 1995; Sassa 2010; Wolferen 2011). Ozawa himself in his interview for *Asahi Shimbun* on February 24, 2012 regarded Japanese democracy as still not really mature, while being quoted in Bowen (2003, 57) when blaming public distrust in politics on scandals that are “...rocking the very basis of parliamentary democracy”. Unsurprisingly it was also Ozawa who would openly lean towards the understanding that if we deal with political scandals and corruption it is the Japanese media reality with their structural aspects, unwritten rules etc. that seem to matter much more than the political discourse itself.⁷

The Japanese political journalists in the political section (*seijibu*) of mainstream media have usually long-lasting, close personal links to their political sources (e.g. Feldman 1993; Krauss 2000; Freeman 2000; Sassa 2010; Uesugi 2012). The members of *seijibu* are either experienced journalists, responsible for editing political news, usually stationed in the organization’s headquarters, or the less experienced political journalists who are dispatched to gather the data on various key political spots (e.g. the government departments’ buildings). They are organized in the so called “reporters’ clubs” (*kisha kurabu*), which are physically attached to those political nervous centres (see below). In Japan it is in principle the “social affairs” section (*shakaibu*), which is in some regards more free from specific constraints and rules imposed on the political section, and which among other aims pursues political scandals, including gathering information from the prosecutors (some also claim that also the latent rivalry between political and social affairs journalists in Japan is noteworthy). Moreover, in Japan many veteran journalists developed their later influence, reputation and friendly ties through long-term coverage of political heavyweights (this was also the case of Watanabe Tsuneo, the media baron leading *Yomiuri Shimbun* who still wields considerable influence on Japanese politics; see below).

The “full-time reporters” are attached to their political counterparts on everyday basis, maintaining specific proximity, which in turn influences the way of coverage. They are part of the so called reporters’ club system (*kisha kurabu*) which largely controls the political reporting in Japan, giving the official reporters privileged access to politicians while disadvantaging the regional press, the foreign press, and the freelance journalists (for a detailed analysis of this phenomenon see e.g. Feldman 1993). Besides, many political journalists (*ban kisha*) that are assigned to a corresponding reporters’ club are often younger and inexperienced.⁸ On the

⁷ The change in politics has to be also ascribed to the change in media, especially after the wave of the “infotaining” political news broadcasts in Japan since the 1980s (e.g. Taniguchi 2007).

⁸ Sassa Atsuyuki ironically remarks that one of the reasons why are young political section journalists attached to governmental nerve centers is the fact that they are physically capable and thus ready to quickly shuttle between the parliament building and the Prime Minister’s official residence (Sassa 2011, 89).

other hand, the media itself can simultaneously end up facing backlash from the politicians over the way of reporting: one such incident occurred in 1993 when the TV station Asahi was accused of biased political reporting; allegedly helping to bring down the LDP's one-party rule in the July 1993 elections (see e.g. Altman 1996).⁹

Consequently, the result of these elections was often attributed to voters' dissatisfaction over innumerable corruption cases (it however goes without saying that the public's discontent would not have culminated without the corresponding media exposure).

It is often the case that the Japanese dailies do not publish scandalous information unless their editors pick it from some of the notorious-but-popular magazines (*shūkanshi*), or unless it appears on the commercial TV station hybrid entertainment format of "wide show" (*waidoshō*).¹⁰ One important agency which belongs to what some call the "foreign pressure" (*gaiatsu*), and which at times did trigger, or at least facilitate full-scale political scandal coverage in Japanese mainstream media is the foreign press. Perhaps the most notable cases of *gaiatsu* were the Lockheed mega-scandal in 1976, which was broken by the Los Angeles Times, or the Uno Sōsuke scandal in 1989, where the *Washington Post* significantly contributed to escalating the case.¹¹

Finally, the Japanese language itself offers various means of blurring the sources and maintaining the status quo of press-politics relations in Japan. When citing the sources (not only in case of scandals) the mainstream media often use expressions such as *suji mono* ("official sources"), *seifu shunō* (usually the secretary general or the Prime Minister himself), or *shunō shūhen* (usually people close to the person of Prime Minister such as his personal secretary), though the meaning remains indistinct.¹²

The Scandal Mediation Process in Japan

It is perhaps an obvious fact that scandals are never naturally "born", occasionally

⁹ Tsubaki Sadayoshi, then the head of TV Asahi's news department, later admitted to the fact that the agenda of political reporting style had been deliberately set in order to outdo the LDP and invite political power shift in Japan.

¹⁰ *Shūkanshi* are tabloid newspapers, altogether amounting to a circulation of 5 to 6 millions, and it is them who are usually the prime movers of scandals in Japan. (see e.g. Farley 1996; Gamble and Watanabe 2004).

¹¹ For more examples of this phenomenon which we called "bottom-up mediation" of scandals, see Prusa (2011).

¹² Among other means of blurring and protecting (not only political) sources via language in the media (and thus avoiding the journalist's responsibility) it is the way Japanese verbs are utilized, appearing usually in their passive form, i.e. like verbal cues (in Japanese it is usually the sentence ending since the semantically significant category of the verb often appears at the end of a sentence): ...*to ieru* (it can be said that...), ...*to iwareru* (it is said that...), ...*to omowareru* (it can be thought that...), ...*to mirareru* (it seems to be the case that...), ...*keikō ga aru* (there is a tendency that...), ...*koe ga aru* (there exists an opinion...), ...*kanōsei ga aru* (there exists a possibility that...), or ...*koto ga wakatta/akiraka ni natta* (it became clear/ it was understood that...).

surfacing here and there, but that they are always “given”, i.e. realizing itself if, and only if it hits the headlines. Every scandal requires some form of information leak (a revelation with/without real intention) through a variety of channels: insiders, whistle-blowers, often financially motivated anonymous reporter/non-reporter sources, members of political opposition (parties/factions), or sometimes even ordinary citizens.¹³ Generally the revelation must contain some kind of undisclosed breach of norms while contradicting certain widely held ideas and expectations (i.e. the so called “expectancy violation”). Since it is not only the media who get involved – in case of alleged violation of certain law it is also the prosecutor's office and the police. As such, scandals are processed on the symbolic/mediated level, and the repressive/legal level.

In the case of Japanese political scandals, the mainstream media may ignore the story, which was previously released by tabloids. This is more or less caused by the *kisha* club system, which is obliged to behave in accord with what Freeman (2000) called the information cartel logic. Thus the Japanese mainstream press in general only rarely confronts certain political controversies (e.g. Farley 1996; Hayes 2005). The media themselves are also rather unlikely to carry out any investigation that would uncover corporate secrets – sometimes being pressed by major advertising agencies such as Dentsu, various “business circles” (*zaikai*), and even the government ministries (see e.g. Wolferen 1989). It is often the semi-mainstream tabloids or the non-mainstream media who either investigate the case or contact the foreign media, prosecutors, police, etc. Of course their risk lies in the reliability of leaked information and tips from informers (including the police and prosecutors). The media proceed with speculating about the “truth” while emphasizing the negative aspects within the narrative. Depending on various circumstances the big media eventually pick up the scoop (often from the tabloids) and start covering the case. These circumstances may for example lie in the fact that the case grew out of proportion, being picked by a commercial TV station, or by the foreign media, making the scandal “inevitable”.

If a scandal story fails to give rise to moral/criminal charges or if the media falsely indict the alleged transgressor they can on the contrary become the “villains” of the narrative, are sued and brought to court. On the other hand if a transgression is fully acknowledged, the media uniformly and in detail cover the final part of respective scandals including apologies, dismissals, and criminal prosecutions.. One of the pseudo-spectacular highlights in this part of the scandal narrative is the “final” press conference (see e.g. Sassa 2011; Prusa 2012). Some press conferences can start up the process which aims to “purify” and restore the alleged wrongdoer's reputation and make his/her future comeback possible. The politicians and

¹³ The commoner-whistleblower case is however rare. Takie Sugiyama Lebra mentioned one particular case from 1952 where a local Japanese schoolgirl exposed an information to the media regarding a violation of law in a village election whereby actually triggering a political scandal (Lebra 1976, 11). However Lebra aimed here to illustrate a different significant culturally-specific phenomenon, namely the social ostracism: after her exposure of the corruption to a newspaper editor, the girl and her family were excluded from social interaction with villagers.

corporate heads can demonstrate deep regret, apologize, resign, and (in cases of court trial) pay a fine and get a suspended sentence (they rarely go to jail). Some politicians take a rather offensive stance, denying the indictment (Ozawa Ichirō is a prototype of this pattern). If deemed “inevitable” the transgressor may be “exiled” (i.e. celebrities and politicians end up not being allowed to go immediately back on stage for a period of time) while undergoing the strategic process of what we want to call here the “secular ritual”.

Secular Rituals and Their Use in Mediated Politics

It is usually the case that the goal of revealing corruption is not any moral crusade of politicians (factions, parties), followed by the media that process the leaked information in accord with the “social responsibility” expectation tied to them (of course the most naive assumption the Japanese media often make is that by exposing wrongdoings within the world of structural corruption they are “protecting” the society). Similarly the primary aim of “attack politics” and negative image-making via the media by using damaging information and publicly denouncing wrongdoings is to raise doubts among potential candidate supporters and to mobilize opposition voters (e.g. Taniguchi 2007; Castells 2009). Not only this: in order to maintain the always-already corrupted system, the Japanese parties themselves may seek “replacement” (resignation, stepping down, retreating into background, etc.) of their own members in case those individuals happen to be all too “polluted”, or as Karel van Wolferen (1989; 2011) would put it, if they demonstrate the potentially destructive “excess”, which now needs to be curbed in order to preserve the status quo of the system.

The “pollution” has usually its roots in a derogatory information leak, which is eventually manufactured by the media, commodified, and transformed into a major political scandal. In order to protect the whole platform (but equally often simply in order to make a personal political profit out of the recognized transgression), the “good” actors attempt to charge the “bad” ones.¹⁴ One means of how to achieve that is to implement a sort of secular ritual that works on the basis of a binary “exclusion/inclusion” mechanism. This discursive marking is usually an outcome of the simplified polarized networks of (more or less culturally-specific) understanding of certain conduct and is followed by the differentiation of “we” (the “pure” politicians) and “them” (the corrupted, intolerable, “anti-social” transgressors). Not only in case of political scandals the Japanese media often apply specific terminology of claiming that the transgressor is not like “us” (in Japanese *watashitachi* or *wareware*) because “we” are “normal” (respectable, moral), while “they” are deviant and anti-social (*hanshakaiteki*).

¹⁴ Ofer Feldman (1993) reminds us that in Japan the interpellations during the Budget Committee meeting, which is attended by all Ministers, and broadcast live on television and radio, are one of those platforms where rival politicians aim to attract public attention by attacking their counterparts on grounds of their alleged wrongdoings.

Once the arbitrary boundary of criticality is crossed – and this must be again made public through the mainstream media channels – the transgressor may either take a protective/offensive stance, or he/she takes the “responsibility” (*sekinin*), or conduct an obligatory ritual of apology, and becomes temporarily externalized: transgressors are ritually excluded to the “outside” (*gaibu*) of their platform, that is, beyond the imaginary border that delineates their “difference”. Apart from personal profits based on media attention (both reputational and financial), and apart from what Taniguchi (2007, 153) calls “the invisible part of politics” (lobbying, majority manoeuvres, etc.), the basic aim is to define, eliminate and neutralize this perilous “difference”, and to preserve the stability of the “inside” (*naibu*). The inside in the Japanese context can represent a political faction, or the whole political party, or even the political system as such. Like the violation of a taboo, these rituals work in a similar way to the notion of contagion. While related to fears of pollution, they evoke antipathy towards the transgressor (unlawful, anomalous, etc.). Moreover, the transgressor, if publicly convicted and negatively sanctioned, becomes both an easy target for unloading the surplus confusion in the public, and a scapegoat of the system: by channelling the transgression through the media the guilt is relieved by blaming, setting apart and externalizing individuals (excommunicating, ostracizing, exiling, etc.). Of course at stake here is the ambivalence of such moral crusade since the primary aim of putting a scandal-tainted party together through the ritual of exclusion is often nothing more than to win in the upcoming election.

According to the conspiratorial/apologist point of view (e.g. Wolferen 2011), the logic of attacking Ozawa lied in applying the strategy of inserting him into a “scapegoating” framework, so that he would become politically isolated. This framework utilizes the means of the aforementioned “secular ritual”, which is shaped into a public media scandal. A rather sober view would be that Ozawa himself was skilfully utilizing some aspects of the pseudo-ritual while either scandalizing others, or intentionally excluding himself from his platform, or by using his aides as a protective shield once his corruptive practices were revealed (see below). The “really” scandalous outcomes of Ozawa’s individual political endeavor can be spotted in different “extreme phenomena” (Baudrillardian jargon) such as was the death of Keizō Obuchi (member of the LDP and Japanese Prime Minister from 1998 to 2000) as a result of his stroke, which was said to have been caused by stressful one-on-one talks with Ozawa in 2000 (e.g. Tada 2000).¹⁵ At

¹⁵ Another “extreme” impact of political scandals in contemporary Japan could be also seen in cases of committing suicide as a result of involvement in a scandal-turned corruption. Matsuoka Toshikatsu (then Minister of agriculture and member of the LDP) and Yamazaki Shin’ichi (former executive director of a government environmental agency) committed suicide after a scandal regarding suspicious book-keeping practices in 2007-8. In 2009 the former Minister of Finance Nakagawa Shōichi (LDP) allegedly committed suicide following the faux-pas (he seemed to have been drunk during the press conference) at the G7 finance Ministers’ meeting in Rome, which later contributed to his resignation. The “obligation” can however stretch further from the centre of the key transgressor: the chief aide and finance secretary (Aoki Ikei) of then Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru committed suicide in the aftermath of the Recruit bribery scandal in 1989, while much earlier even the chauffeur of Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei killed himself in the aftermath of the Lockheed scandal.

any rate, as we will attempt to show in the following text, the strategic logic of a secular ritual – or at least some of its mechanisms – is useful when illuminating the scandal saga of Ozawa Ichirō.

Who is Ozawa Ichirō?

The veteran lawmaker Ozawa Ichirō, a native of Iwate prefecture (born in 1942), being famous for constantly drawing both praise and criticism, is one of the most significant politicians in contemporary Japan, surviving as a key player in national politics for almost three decades. While being strongly influenced by his main mentor and protégé Tanaka Kakuei – at times one of the most powerful and scandal-tainted politicians – Ozawa is now mostly known as a “reformist” politician: apart from attempts to take on powerful bureaucrats, his initial aim was to end the 1955 system (i.e. the one-party rule of the LDP since 1955).

The main twist in Ozawa’s political career came in 1993: Ozawa shocked the political world when joining the opposition camp, creating the Japan Renewal Party (*Shinseitō*). By doing so, he replaced the LDP as a ruling force since 1955 and briefly controlled the non-LDP government with Prime Minister Hosokawa as its formal leader. In the years of 1994-7 Ozawa first appeared as the head of the New Frontier Party (*Shinshintō*), back then the largest opposition party which mainly consisted of the renegades from the LDP (Ozawa started as a secretary general just to later become the party’s president). Besides, two years after the power shift, the scandal-tainted *Rikuzankai* group became Ozawa’s political funding management body. In December 1997 Ozawa broke up with the party due to the split of pro- and anti-Ozawa factions, just to form his own small party *Jiyūtō* (The Liberal Party). While being part of the next strategic move, Ozawa’s *Jiyūtō* joined with the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), and in 2004 Ozawa, then the deputy head of the DPJ, was appointed to the head of the party instead of Kan Naoto (Kan resigned earlier over a scandal because of his failure to pay mandatory premiums into the National Pension System). Finally Ozawa became the president of DPJ in April 2006.

A few months after the arrest of Ozawa’s chief secretary in March 2009 over shady political donations (the “Nishimatsu scandal”), Ozawa resigned as the DPJ president, being succeeded by Hatoyama Yukio. It is however a matter of fact that in August of the same year Ozawa was standing behind the DPJ’s historical win in general election. Nevertheless, already at the end of 2009 Ozawa was again involved in two other scandals related to unreported donations from construction companies in the past (the “Mizutani scandal”), and to a shady land purchase in Tokyo back in 2004. In May 2009 Ozawa announced his resignation as the leader of the DPJ and few months later he became the party’s secretary general. Although in January 2010 Ozawa was denying any wrongdoing during his press conference, the inquest panel decided to indict him in April over false reporting of political

donations in the time period of 2004 to 2007. Later in June Ozawa finally stepped down as the DPJ Secretary General. Despite this course of events, Ozawa decided as soon as in August to run in DPJ's leadership race (and thus virtually aiming to become Prime Minister), but was again indicted in February 2011 over another shady land purchase based on a decision of a prosecution inquest committee. His trial started in October 2011 and in April 2012 he was found not guilty of any fund conspiracy and was acquitted.

The new "Ozawa-shock" however came in July 2012: after not willing to agree with the DPJ policy on the issue of consumption tax hike, and blaming party leadership for violating their core values, Ozawa, accompanied by dozens of his loyal followers, left the DPJ and created a new party – in order to once again ritually exclude himself from his former "inside" to point at, and profit from the "difference".¹⁶

Ozawa Saga: The 2009-2012 Scandal Macro-Narrative

As of January 14, 2012, based on the information published earlier in 2010, the Japan Property Central¹⁷ made public a list of Ozawa and his wife's real estate holdings (altogether 9) while estimating that if including all shares and golf memberships, their property was worth more than three billion yen (by the way only Ozawa's private residence and adjoining land in Fukuzawa are worth around 1.3 billion yen). Moreover, according to Kyodo (as cited in *Japan Times* on December 8, 2011), Ozawa's political funds in 2010 were the highest ones compared to all other Japanese lawmakers, reaching the amount of circa 329 million yen. Besides, Ozawa's investments are usually to be traced back to the deep past: for example one of the real estate holdings which also became a subject of discussion in the media not earlier than in 2009 (the Minami-aoyama apartment) was purchased by Ozawa's political fund management body already in 2001. Another key event in the Ozawa scandal narrative, the shady land purchase in Tokyo's Setagaya Ward, happened already in 2004, and as a matter of fact the 2009 illicit donations (the "Nishimatsu scandal") had its roots already in 1995. Here we see the "retrospective", or "noumenal" quality of scandals in general and political corruption in particular: the transgression is dormant for the time being, and it becomes "real", or "phenomenological" if, and only if it is revealed either by an incidental leak, through investigative journalism, or based on a conspiracy-laden political struggle.¹⁸

¹⁶ Besides this, his wife Kazuko also virtually "excluded" herself at around the same time by announcing her divorce from Ozawa, allegedly based on his "immoralities", while giving birth to yet another mini-scandal. Although she was mainly blaming Ozawa for his irresponsible and cowardly attitude during the Fukushima radiation crisis last year (while he was simultaneously criticizing the government's handling of the situation) the real main reason of her revelation may have been Ozawa's long-lasting extramarital affair).

¹⁷ "Politician Ozawa's vast real estate holdings," Japan property central, assessed June 6, 2012, <http://japanpropertycentral.com/2012/01/politician-ozawas-vast-real-estate-holdings/>

¹⁸ As we notice throughout this text, Ozawa, his followers, and some pundits strongly insist that the

Only by consulting the aforementioned data from the Japanese property market, followed by countless media accounts, one cannot dismiss the fact that Ozawa was already more or less involved in money politics within the “inevitable” framework of structural corruption in his political past. At any rate, the real opening of Ozawa’s 2009 scandal narrative did not start with his person: it was the arrest of his chief secretary, Ōkubo Takanori, or more precisely, the consequent media hype which was initiated after the Japanese news agencies, followed by all other mainstream media, reported the details on March 4, 2009. Although it was Ōkubo who was arrested on the grounds of allegedly breaking the Political Funds Control Law, the media immediately linked the violation and corruption to the person of Ozawa and his political fund management body (*Rikuzankai*). This in turn gave birth to a major political media scandal with conspiratorial undertone, mainly because Ozawa was expected to make the victory of the DPJ in the next general elections possible (which later actually happened) and thus to become the next Prime Minister. At any rate, this scandal occurrence only confirms the “culture” of structural corruption (*kōzō oshoku*) being widespread across the whole political spectrum. However, it was precisely the DPJ, which promoted itself as a fresh start, promising to end the back-room politics, corruption and lack of transparency, and thus providing a viable alternative to the LDP that had been countlessly implicated in donations scandals.

At this point of the media narrative Ozawa finally steps in, and by unsurprisingly utilizing his “strategy of offense” (*seme no senryaku*), he openly attacks the prosecutors’ conduct whereby casting serious doubt upon the exercise of their authority. Simultaneously he vehemently refuses to admit any breach of the law in question.¹⁹

The next step taken by Ozawa towards the media, following the opening stage of the scandal (i.e. the emergence of disequilibrium) was a rather “protective” one (*mamori no senryaku*): while utilizing the notorious ambiguity of the Japanese language, Ozawa (same as many other resistant Japanese politicians accused of corruption) appeared in the media admitting to the fact of accepting the donation, apologized for causing “trouble” (*meiwaku*), but took the “knowing-nothing” approach (*shirimasen deshita*), claiming that he was “unaware” of the source of donation. Other typical strategic expressions utilized by Japanese politicians when confronting the media in such situations are claiming “memory loss” (*kioku ni gozaimasen*, or simply *wasureta*), or claiming inability to “rationally explain” the money sources, deeming it not necessary to react (*kotaeru hitsuyō ga nai*); or

latter was the case – perhaps most notably Karel van Wolferen, who in his recent book *Dare ga Ozawa Ichirō o korosu no ka* (“The Character Assassination of Ozawa Ichirō”) claims that Ozawa was assaulted by the establishment (via the media-prosecutors-bureaucrats axis) for which he came to represent a major threat (see Wolferen 2011).

¹⁹ The media also attempted to launch the so called “snowball effect”, where through widening the scandal radius the narrative shifts its focus away from the main transgressor to others, and eventually further uncover the network of structural corruption (here the media immediately reported that other LDP lawmakers were also receiving illegal donations from the same construction company in question, however their investigative endeavour stopped right there).

simply refusing to give any comments due to the ongoing investigations and promising to discuss the issue when everything is over. As a matter of fact the personal responsibility certainly can be formally put aside since all kinds of duties (especially those related to political funding management) are usually re-delegated to a management body, and to the politician's aides/secretaries.²⁰

In the first instance these loyal secretaries thus served as a protective shield; a sort of "primary scapegoat", setting Ozawa at a greater distance from all alleged transgressions. During his own trial in 2012, Ozawa himself was actually pleading innocent partly based on the fact that the financial reports were said to be completely in the hands of his aides. In order to further avoid responsibility Japanese politicians may use the phrase "...I left the matter up to my secretary" (*hisho ni makaseteiru*).²¹

The third stage following the arrest of Ōkubo was a rather "cooperative" one: only three days after Okubo's arrest Ozawa himself voluntarily agreed to be questioned by prosecutors. In the meantime this however did not change the fact that the media power/influence was significant enough to have persuaded around more than sixty percent of the Japanese public to call for Ozawa's resignation.²² It should be however also noted that the media polls taken by Japanese daily's like Yomiuri, Asahi and Mainichi were showing somewhat different results, not to mention the fact that the public opinion is basically "realized" through media texts, and thus the notion of "publicity" – here represented by around 1,000 randomly picked Japanese in a telephone survey – is somewhat doubtful.²³ At any rate, another form of media power here lies in recursively influencing the public opinion (and the political agenda as well), by conducting polls immediately after a transgression leak, and publishing the results whereby eventually reinforcing the spiral of silence-effect especially when the majority shares similar opinion.

In the first instance (and notwithstanding the public opinion, which was partly

²⁰ All three Ozawa's former aides have been indicted on charges of falsifying the financial records of *Rikuzankai* in a trial that started in February 2011. In September 2011 they all were given suspended prison term.

²¹ The loyalty of Ozawa's aides became however somewhat "problematized" in 2011 after one of them (and later one of the key persons in Ozawa funding scandal), Ishikawa Tomohiro published a book called *Akutō: Ozawa Ichirō ni tsukaete* ("The Villain: Serving for Ozawa Ichirō"), in which the politician is depicted in the privacy of his house. In a similar manner (but in a much more critical tone) Philip Brasor noted for *Japan Times* article on January 24, 2010 that among other duties Ozawa's aides have to weed the politician's garden early in the morning, cook his family breakfast, do the laundry, clean the house, etc.

²² The media power and the consequent pressure of the public opinion on the politician was by the way also the case of Ozawa's lifetime mentor, Kakuei Tanaka. In 1972 Tanaka was on the top of popularity, however only after the media revealed the Prime Minister's shady land deals, Tanaka's popularity plunged to minimum, foreshadowing his consequent fall (Tanaka finally fell from power in 1974 due to the Lockheed scandal). The Ozawa scandal narrative will however show us that such a development is not always necessarily the case.

²³ The fact that different surveys come to a rather wide range of conclusions has to be also attributed to media's varying formulation of the poll questions (e.g. apart from the basic agree/disagree set of options some may as addition choose to offer rather neutral answer options such as "can't tell" or "dont know").

informed by the mediopolitical pressure) Ozawa returned to his offensive style, denying any wrongdoing and refusing to step down. Nevertheless, at the end of March he surprisingly switched to the “classical” scripted apologetic strategy (*shazai no senryaku*): in his statement accompanied by tears he apologized to the “nation” (*kokumin*), while mentioning the term *kokumin* eight times (Sassa 2011, 121). Consequently, in May 2009 Ozawa made his next step in the “damage control” mission, announcing to the media his aim to resign – this allegedly in order to prevent the DPJ from losing the upcoming general election. In this “self-cleansing” of the DPJ we can spot the logic of the strategic use of the ritual of separation for the sake of maintaining stability, unity and integrity of the “inside” (*naibu*) by individually taking the blame (scandals are in principle individualized) and temporarily, as-if-voluntarily exile oneself to the “outside” (*gaibu*), or at least retreat to the background. The major election victory of the DPJ which followed in August is to be ascribed mainly to this successful purification ritual of Ozawa’s temporary exclusion.

The donation scandal macro-narrative of Ozawa, then secretary general of the ruling DPJ, was however far from being concluded. In November 2009 it became clear (again in a retrospective fashion) that between 2004-5 one of Ozawa’s aides obtained an unreported donation worth of 100 million yen in cash (of course the media did not identify the whistle-blower who contacted the prosecutors, limiting their description to “sources”). Only a few weeks later another scandal emerged, this time related to a shady land purchase, realized through Ozawa’s funding management body (*Rikuzankai*) in Tokyo back in 2004. Same as in case of the Nishimatsu scandal it was not Ozawa who was primarily targeted, but his ex-aides (the first of the three *Rikuzankai* secretaries, Ishikawa Tomohiro, was arrested in the beginning of 2010). On the top of this all, even the DPJ president (Hatoyama Yukio) became a target of his own scandal based on misreporting of a huge amount of donations, which he was receiving from his own mother (over 1 billion yen during the years 2002-8).²⁴

It has not been even three months after the DPJ’s phenomenal victory in general elections, where the old, corruption-tainted LDP structures had been ousted out of power at the expense of the DPJ, promoting itself as a new viable alternative to (money) politics. It can also be assumed that the Japanese public, after experiencing decades of the scandal-tainted LDP’s hegemony, became apathetic towards political corruption as such, approaching the structural corruption as a form of necessary evil. After all the DPJ won the general elections despite the fact that Ozawa’s scandal saga had been actually on the news agenda already before the actual election. Moreover, it is not a surprise that after the recent DPJ’s corruption series, the LDP, overlooking their own (structurally) corrupted past, is now struggling for comeback, directing the public/media attention to funds scandals of

²⁴ In this case the Hatoyama’s “mother scandal” was further spiced up by the fact that after tracing the official source of his political donations it became clear that they were recorded as donations from deceased or fictitious people.

their political rivals in order to hit voter support. More importantly, over-focusing on Ozawa scandals both in the media and in the Diet actually created a sort of political void while stalling much more socially relevant contemporary issues such as the measures to stabilize employment, the “abduction question” (*rachi monдай*), or the problem of relocating the U.S. Marine forces in Okinawa.

The criticism can thus be taken a step further by stating that it is the Japanese media themselves, who are at times “anti-social” since some editors in a state of hysteria pay disproportionate attention to scandals whereby overshadowing more relevant social issues.

Another act of scapegoating through Ozawa’s aide happened in February 2010 when the prosecutors did not charge Ozawa himself but indicted his former secretary Ishikawa Tomohiro. Nonetheless, along with Prime Minister Hatoyama’s abrupt resignation in June Ozawa simultaneously decided to quit as DPJ’s secretary general. This again has to be seen as an act of a mediated political ritual of as-if-voluntary self-exclusion – although not in form of total ostracism, but here again realized through a strategic temporary retreat to the background and remaining silent while the image of the party could be rebuilt, and public sentiment improved.

Ozawa broke his “punitive” silence already in August when he updated the media on his decision to run for the presidency of the DPJ. However just a few days before the election the Tokyo No.5 Prosecution Inquest Committee (an independent judicial inquest panel composed of 11 citizens) again urged to review the previous prosecutors’ decision not to indict him. As a result of the decision by citizens on a prosecution inquest committee, Ozawa was consequently indicted over shady land purchase, triggering speculations that his political career was over (another speculation in the news media reports was that Ozawa practically became a political scapegoat so that Kan’s Cabinet’s approval rating could be improved; see e.g. the *Japan Times* editorial on February 2, 2011). Consequently Ozawa’s party membership was suspended until the end of his trial, which started in October 2011 with Ozawa himself of course pleading not guilty. Ozawa was acquitted at the end of April 2012.

One interesting intermezzo, and certainly another strategic move orchestrated by the pro-Ozawa group (if not by Ozawa himself) during the final stage of his scandal/trial narrative, was the act of letting display his own portrait in the Diet on March 12, 2012 (as a general rule the long-time Japanese lawmakers can have their portraits displayed in the Diet after reaching the 25th year in service). This act once again confirmed the unshaken validity of the aforementioned structural corruption in Japan: one of the chief epitomes of political corruption in Japan decides to honourably display his own portrait in a Lower House facility – right in the middle of being on trial for breaking the political funds law.²⁵

²⁵ Another noteworthy occurrence during the narrative climax was a rather high demand of the public for attending Ozawa’s final trial session on April 26th (almost 2000 people were waiting to

Some moralists would claim that the final part of Ozawa's saga will follow the Greek dialectical model, namely the "hubris-nemesis" axis. In the most general sense "hubris" means infraction by mortals – usually by those in position of power and/or wealth – against other mortals. This act, usually stemming from overconfident, blinding pride and arrogance, will be (at least in the Ancient Greek understanding) punished through retribution (nemesis) and through shaming of the one overcome by hubris. The narratives of many Japanese political scandals actually did seem to follow this script (for example in case of Ozawa's political mentor, Kanemaru Shin), but at this point of time Ozawa himself is successfully bypassing the axis, replacing the widely expected "nemesis" of his political persona with a phoenix-like resurrection.²⁶

Ozawa versus the Media

Although being notoriously famous for taking critical and openly offensive stance towards the Japanese media, who were at times him as a "villain", it can be argued that Ozawa, while struggling for power and leadership, was actually obtaining certain public support exactly due to his non-repentant, self-confident political "sophistry". His stance towards the existing media system was reflected already in 1993 right after the power shift: in order to demonstrate his will to improve political transparency Ozawa temporarily abolished the infamous practice of *kondan* (the top politicians' background briefings, often off record, held after regular press conferences). One example is Ozawa's attempt to reform the elitist *kisha* club culture while open press conferences and include journalists of the weekly magazines or the foreign press in his briefings. Nonetheless, while proclaiming that "politics had changed, and the change in the relationship between politicians and journalists must follow" (Iimuro 1995, 41), Ozawa himself, after being attacked by some newspapers because of the way they reported his remarks, imposed embargos on topics related to his scandals and proclaimed that a press conference is a form of a voluntary "service" (*sābisu*), which can be bypassed if deemed necessary (ibid.).

Another paradox may be seen in the fact that it was precisely the broadcast of *Asahi Shimbun*-affiliated TV Asahi, which partly helped to oust the LDP out of power in 1993 whereby paving the way for Ozawa and his reformists. Later on, and

get into the Tokyo District Court to see the "spectacle"). It is however highly presumable that many people in the line were actually part time "extras" hired by the media companies in order to get into the courtroom. This was exactly the case of the scandal-tainted pop star Sakai Noriko and her trial exactly half year after Ozawa's (Prusa 2012).

²⁶ Kanemaru was not really the archetypal case of structural corruption, mainly because the money he "raised" was not politically channelled and directly intended for servicing the constituents, campaigning, and other "structural" needs. While the media were emphasizing his "contemptible", individualistic motivation of sheer personal enrichment, Kanemaru failed to return to his duties after the scandal, where he accepted 500 million yen while ignoring the fact that the law limit for contributions from a single source is 1.5 million yen. Once publicized, his corruption was "sanctioned" not only by his forced departure from politics, but by contributing to end the LDP's stranglehold on power as a result of following defections from the party.

throughout his career, it was Ozawa who was often criticizing the left-of-centre, liberal *Asahi Shimbun* for making use of his persona for commercial profit while their libellous “violent reporting” (*pen no bōryoku*) consciously contributing to his “character assassination” (e.g. Iimuro 1995; Wolferen 2011). Similarly “problematic” seems to be the attitude of the largest Japanese newspaper, the centre-right conservative *Yomiuri Shimbun*, which, by using official sources (including the government, the LDP, but also information leaks from prosecutors and the police), at times tended to negatively frame Ozawa.

At any rate, although Ozawa usually targets particular media, his attacks are often oriented towards the Japanese media system as such. One of his typical ways of criticizing the media in general – apart from his all-too-obvious argument related to “distortions” (*yugami*) when depicting political reality – was the assault on the journalists contradicting themselves because they tend to talk about the necessity of political leadership but at the same time they aim to scandalize anyone who aspires to a position of being a leader (here Ozawa was actually unconsciously pointing at the “media-trickster” role which we will elaborate upon below). At another point Ozawa went even as far as to voice his belief that the mass communication media in general are here primarily to be utilized by politicians (Iimuro 1995, 246) while politicians should be able to use political donations as they wish (see e.g. the interview for *Time* on March 13, 2009).

Also the way the Japanese media (and to an important extent the foreign press) came to be labelling the person of Ozawa is an interesting one. Throughout decades of his political “reign” – and especially when his scandal narrative was culminating – the journalists were particularly inventive when labelling the person of Ozawa by using various metaphorical nicknames. Here and there they were framing him as a “strong-armed”, “self-confessed opportunist” and “lone wolf” (because of his tendency to act without consulting other party members and to switch factions/parties several times), the “crasher” or “destroyer” (because he both broke up and formed various political groups, and finally ended up splitting from his own party), the “kingpin”, “kingmaker” or “shadow shogun” (because without his approval it was close to impossible for any intraparty politician to be recognized, and his behind-the-scenes political influence lasted for decades, managing the situation in a similar strong-arm manner as his role model and mentor, the former Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei).

The list can go on with Ozawa being labelled as the “puppet master”²⁷ and

²⁷ Ozawa was labeled by the media not only as a puppet master of the Cabinet as a whole – they also called the ex-Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, who was at times of crisis always backing Ozawa, as his “puppet”. Besides, up until now the media refer to Ozawa’s direct supporters from the DPJ as “Ozawa’s children”, while the unqualified, attractive female candidates, who Ozawa strategically installed in order to broaden the party’s appeal to voters were dubbed by the Japanese reporters as “Ozawa girls”. Apart from the fact that they were politically rather unqualified, also somewhat “disturbing” could have been the reputation of some of the “girls”: For instance David Nakamura remarked in his article for *Global Post* on October 5, 2009 that Tanaka Mieko originally worked as a sex-industry reporter and appeared in an erotic horror, while another female member

“backroom fixer” (because apart from setting the stage or writing scripts he was often pulling the strings and manoeuvring politics, especially at turbulent times – this without even being ever appointed as Prime Minister). In addition to this plethora of labels, Ozawa was sometimes even rendered as “militarist” or “nationalist”, also because he developed the idea of “normal Japan” (whereby problematizing the concept of “normality” itself), which lies in his understanding of Japan as a self-standing, independent “ordinary nation” with its own standing army for the sake of pursuing the “right of collective self defense”.

During the Ozawa scandal saga, he seemed to have been generally much friendlier towards the foreign press (and vice versa), whose coverage was at times rather less negatively framed, if not apologetic (in the context of the U.S. media this might also be caused by the success of one of his books from 1993, *Nihon Kaizō Keikaku*, translated into English and published under the title “Blueprint for a New Japan”). The importance of the foreign media was also reflected in the fact that (similarly as the foreign embassies in Japan do) Ozawa was hiring a female translator that was on a daily basis briefing him on the news from the foreign press.

When Ozawa was losing support in Japan after the March 2009 scandal outburst, it was a foreign magazine he agreed to give an interview to (the article titled “A Conversation with Ichirō Ozawa” was released on March 13, 2009 in *Time*). Perhaps unsurprisingly minimum space was given to discuss his corruption scandal. Also the *Japan Times* was at times giving significant space for certain pro-Ozawa voices (consider e.g. the editorial “Indictment of Mr. Ozawa” on February 2, 2011, or the reader’s opinion article titled “Madness of the attacks on Ozawa” on October 28, 2010, or the article of Roger Pulvers, somewhat justifying some of Ozawa’s controversial statements in an article on November 22, 2009). Of course only the fact that a controversial politician is voluntarily giving interviews to (not only foreign) press can in the end make the article look more or less favourable.

Also the conservative Korean mainstream media were rather favorable when portraying Ozawa. Generally speaking the Koreans can become hostile to those Japanese politicians (especially the LDP members) who are conflicting on the sensitive territory/history issues (i.e. most notably the Takeshima dispute and the *zainichi* problems related to long term Koreans in Japan who ended up living in Japan in the period Japanese colonialism in Korea). As a matter of fact – and despite all the corruption – when Ozawa’s protégé, Hatoyama Yukio (DPJ), came to power, he was welcomed by the Korean media mainly because of his diplomatic attitudes towards mainland Asia, including his will to make certain amendments to colonial damages. Also in many editorials of leading Chinese papers Ozawa was not necessarily viewed as a “villain” – quite on the contrary: he was more often compared with his mentor Tanaka Kakuei, who tended to support friendly ties with China. Also here it seems that Ozawa, himself an advocate of the foreign suffrage, inherited Tanaka’s pro-China sympathies – one of the most evident

of the DPJ, Ota Kazumi used to be working as a hostess.

demonstrations of this sort was Ozawa group's visit to China (the giant diplomatic delegation had more than 600 participants including 143 members of Ozawa's DPJ).

Although being ideologically grounded on national pride than on any material profit, the way the foreign press was dealing with Ozawa can remind us of the give-take reciprocity of the aforementioned local support groups (*kōenkai*), where the issue of corruption is rather secondary in terms of overall moral evaluation of a politician since we tend to judge the actions of others on the basis of the consequences and the "fruits" of those actions.²⁸

Ozawa was simultaneously utilizing mainstream media channels for his criticism of other politicians as a part of his political struggle (for example in May 2004, Ozawa, himself being obviously "structurally corrupted", used certain media channels to attack the then DPJ chief Kan Naoto and other members of the Koizumi cabinet because of the so called pension scandal, i.e. the tax evasion related to not paying the mandatory premiums for the National Pension System). At the same time however Ozawa would insist that he himself became a victim of what he called "libellous reporting", this allegedly aiming to taint the image of his political persona, and of the whole DPJ as such. For example in November 2007, he argued that most of the mainstream media purposely manipulated the public opinion by a "scandalous" report about an alleged plot to form a grand coalition government of the LDP and the DPJ. Notwithstanding the validity of his argumentation, this plot also illuminates the specific interpenetration of media and politics in Japan: according to a *Japan Times* article on November 17, 2007, the "go-between" initiator of the failed pact, facilitating communication between both parties and acting as a mediator, was the most powerful Japanese media baron, Watanabe Tsuneo, who is chairman and chief editor of the biggest newspaper in the world, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*.

While not necessarily generating a full-fledged scandal, Ozawa is also infamous for his controversial remarks and oral gaffes. Such remarks throughout his political career could however be also conceived of as another part of his self-imposed image of a high-handed controversial reformist politician who "doesn't care", whereby impressing on certain segments of Japanese public. Ozawa is also famous for his arrogant attitude towards other politicians. One example is the leaked off-record quotation in the magazine *Bungei Shunju* from 1994, where Ozawa was quoted labelling the former Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki from the LDP as an "idiot" (*baka*) (Iimuro 1995, 73). In another example Ozawa at around the same time allegedly made a misogynist remark, which leaked to the public through *Asahi Shimbun* and was met with harsh criticism from the female members of the

²⁸ It also appeared that there even are certain loyal, "Ozawa-friendly" tabloid magazines (sometimes called *goyō shūkansi* or "patronage journals"), that at times contradict the Ozawa-bashing discourse, but as Tanigaki (2012, personal conversation) indicates, more than any sort of ideological leaning it is simply the competitive conflict between the tabloids themselves, which can generate the pro-Ozawa framing in order to challenge the rival on the tabloid media market.

Diet. Unsurprisingly, instead of apologizing Ozawa attacked *Asahi* while even attempting to exclude their journalists from all of his upcoming press conferences.

Ozawa's scandalous remarks are however not restricted to domestic politics. In a public speech in November 2009 Ozawa referred to Christianity as a self-righteous, "exclusive" faith (*haitateki*) because according to him it tends to exclude other religions. As is often the case, in this and other similar statements the backlash comes first from the periphery (in this case it was the Japan Christian Federation of Churches, supported by critical voices in foreign newspapers' opinion columns). Moreover, the development of the gaffe usually depends on the magnitude of a statement, same as on the decision of the mainstream press to either ignore the story, or to include it in the news agenda. By the way another famous controversial remark, made by Ozawa the very same year, was related to the U.S. military presence in East Asia (the incident lied in Ozawa's implication that all American military bases in Japan except for the one located in Yokosuka should be closed).

Also partly based on a rather offensive media framing Ozawa became one of those politicians who came to use the new media and the internet in order to bypass his traditional rival – the big mainstream media. Apart from his own carefully administered and frequently updated homepage (www.ozawa-ichiro.jp), Ozawa was an early user of *Niko Niko Dōga* (the popular Japanese video hosting website), and in November 2010 he actually used the site for elaborating on his funding scandal (instead of speaking in the Diet), while criticizing the TV and print media for their biased reporting. While still serving as the president of the DPJ in October 2008, Ozawa decided to give an on-line interview, presumably in order to improve his public image. By talking about his favourite food or his first love, Ozawa acceded to a tabloid agenda of "positive gossiping": by revealing certain private experiences and illuminating his personality which goes beyond his onscreen persona, he was attempting to heighten the affective connection to the audience of especially younger voters. This is usually achieved by bypassing the traditional ("representational") media and using new ("presentational") media such as live internet broadcast or the social network (e.g. Castells 2009; Marshall 2010).

Nevertheless, not only in Ozawa's case it was also the traditional Japanese media that sometimes spread "harmless" gossip of all sorts: rather than considering their political message the Japanese audience was occupied by the fact that the Prime Minister Nakasone regularly practices Zen Buddhist meditation, Prime Minister Koizumi loves Elvis Presley, Prime Minister Asō has problems with reading Chinese characters (*kanji*), or that Ozawa's favourite meal is *tōfu* (bean curd made from soya), and his first love was unrequited...²⁹

²⁹ Other sort of harmless gossiping, usually initiated by the tabloids and aired on commercial TV broadcast, was at times concerned with Japan's First ladies. The media were for example informing nationwide audiences that the wife of Abe Shinzō worked as a radio DJ, or more interestingly, that Hatoyama Yukio's wife believes she was abducted by aliens. By the way it was Ozawa's wife herself (Ozawa Kazuko), who in June 2012 revealed intimate details to Ozawa supporters (and they in turn

The Role of the Media in Ozawa Saga: Concluding Remarks³⁰

It is often the case that when analyzing various media(ted) phenomena including scandal narratives the analysts attempt to infer from available information what actually was the role of the media and the impact of their re-presentation. Also in case of Ozawa and his scandal narrative we can on one hand lean towards the conservative version of interpretation, where the media were the “villains” since they attempted to cover Ozawa’s narrative in a contentious and negative way with the main aim of turning the public against him, which would eventually lead to voters’ withdrawal from him, and as Wolferen (2011) would insist, to his “character assassination”.

According to the liberal version however, the mainstream media were the “heroes”, because they felt responsible for telling the people the real truth about Ozawa, the truth that he, his aides, and his political followers were trying to hide (needless to say, this interpretation is shared among the Japanese mainstream journalists themselves). Same as it is basically impossible to lean towards only one of ideal type of the media’s role in such cases (i.e. the media as watchdogs of democracy, obedient servants of the state, neutral spectators, etc.), it is equally problematic to lean towards only one side of the dichotomy of media-heroes/media-villains. That is also perhaps why since 1990s various “reformist” critical accounts on Japanese media were appearing, including the relationship between sources and reporters (or more generally between the state and the media). Among these accounts still relevant are Laurie Freeman’s theorizing on Japan’s information cartels where the mainstream media play a role of “co-conspirator” of the System when processing various information (Freeman 2000), or Omar Feldman’s comprehensive elaboration on the *kisha* club system (Feldman 1993).

While departing from traditional categorizations, Ellis Krauss was leaning towards understanding the Japanese media as “guard dogs” (1996), and Gamble and Watanabe (2004) went as far as to label particular cases of Japanese media’s conduct as “media atrocities”. Simultaneously, Karel van Wolferen (1989) made one step back while returning to the traditional critical category of the “servant of the System” when criticizing the Japanese media’s *modus operandi*. In the case of Ozawa Ichirō scandal narrative the most suitable, although somewhat controversial, seems to be the notion of the Japanese media as “trickster” (Pharr 1996). While borrowing the concept from symbolic anthropology, Susan Pharr argued that the Japanese media are emblematic of their unpredictability, and at times play both the roles of insider and outsider, depending on the actual status quo, the *Zeitgeist*, the relations with different political/business forces, etc. This

leaked them to the media) regarding her mistreatment in her marriage. The motivation of this revelation coincides with the Sōsuke Uno’s sex scandal, where the geisha-whistleblower voiced her desire to protect Japan from this “immoral man” whereby initiating Uno’s resignation.

³⁰ Due to limitations of space, I only refer to the theoretical framework of scandal mediation (including a model that characterizes Japanese media scandals), which I analyze elsewhere (Prusa 2010).

modus operandi also enables such media to influence public opinion, transform the state, or alter the political process – this owing to their unfixed, liminal position: similarly as tricksters they praise or mock, badger or satirize, horrify or cajole; they can be both creative and destructive, the tension releasers and scapegoats – this all in order to maintain the structures and institutions of society, same as the patterns of authority (Pharr 1996).

Furthermore, we argue that the relation of Ozawa versus media, and vice versa, can be at least partly illuminated by this notion: media-tricksters are located in the liminal zone, i.e. on the in-between periphery of the “inside” (established order) and the “outside” (realms of transgression). By mediating between those two symbolic dimensions – here most importantly by their scandal-mongering coverage while being conditioned by commercial profit combined with certain ideological leanings – they create and destroy, challenge and legitimate, etc. Also Ozawa has a political history of creating and destroying while at times annihilating the very framework he helped to create. Regarding the “scandalicity” itself, really scandalous are thus not occasional incidents of corruption. It is rather the system of daily flow of vast amounts of money into political parties from major interest groups, whereby circumventing the law; it is the “natural” fact that for new enterprises (such as Recruit) it is under given conditions of privatization and deregulation “necessary” to bribe political administration in order to win their patronage and thus to prevail over competitors (generally speaking, the scandalicity here lies in the fact that successful economy, based on informal rules, invokes corruption and vice versa). And finally, scandalous are the scandal-hungry media-tricksters who while consciously concealing the “truth” stir up feelings of insecurity (or even at times incite national panic) while proclaiming their quest for “search for truth”. Along with the system they do not help to eliminate, but only illuminate some of its corrupted parts.

General Conclusion

Despite the media’s attempt to insert the transgression into the scandal framework of searching for truth while utilizing the bipolarities of good-evil, social-anti-social, or moral-amoral, the impression we get after reading Ozawa Ichirō’s scandal (macro)narrative is that there is no such thing as “truth” in the world of structural corruption (perhaps “utility” could better substitute the term). If seen from the radical philosophical perspective, the conduct of Ozawa can be labelled simply as “non-moral” or at best “antagonistic” since he himself is hard to be deemed responsible and put into the moral binary framework of praise-blame. In such train of thought we may go as far as to assert that there is no such thing as a “real” scandal. Especially in case of political scandals the “scandalicity” is diffused, same as is the power across the spectre of the system. As “scandalous” can we perceive the fact that damage control mechanisms, such as the ritual of temporarily excluding a politician. They are not a form of moral reflection, but simply one of

the means of preventing voters/supporters from distancing themselves from the party, and thus the means of not losing against the rival party in upcoming selection.

Also the unhealthy-but-inevitable relationship between politics and money in Japan can itself be seen as much more “scandalous” than individual transgressors themselves, who are after all just a sort of a symbolic container, bearing the features of the necessarily corrupted system where power inevitably colludes with shady money transfers.³¹ Thus the scandalicity of the Japanese media-tricksters on one hand lies in the way of reporting that does not put the transgression into a wider (ideological) context, and on the other in the way of both protecting and attacking the system, depending on connections, circumstances, etc.³²

Also Ozawa’s mediated (macro)narrative itself can hardly be conceived of as a sort of moral “search for truth”, as the media itself sometimes tend to proclaim. It is a long-lasting power struggle between interconnected actors of the system: politicians, factions, parties, prosecutors, lawyers, the police, the public – and the media trying to “make sense” of this complex process of interaction across the whole spectrum (this despite the fact that their impartiality when framing events and actors will always be “problematic”). If we academically approach the issue in question, it does not matter if we focus on a rather critical account on Ozawa scandal discourse in the period following the politically revolutionary year of 1993 (e.g. Iimuro 1995), or if we consult the Ozawa-apologetic treatise of his scandal macro-narrative (e.g. Wolferen 2011). We end up wondering that not much had changed in the world of Japanese mediated politics in general and corruption scandals in particular for decades now. It obviously is the case that the deeply rooted structural corruption in Japan is, and will perhaps always stay an inevitable component of the system as another form of “necessary evil” in a society.³³

As Nietzsche would assert in one of his aphorisms, madness in groups, parties, nations, and ages is the rule, same as “objections, digressions, gay mistrust, the delight in mockery are signs of health” (Nietzsche 1966, 90). Moreover, partly in accord with this one also cannot help but conclude that the Baudrillardian dictum of “scandals themselves not being scandalous” is the only possible “rational” explanation of the inherently irrational/emotional system of (mediated) politics

³² When moralizing about scandals one can add that the media/journalists themselves at times happened to become part of the corruptive conduct, or at least deliberately participate in its cover-up. Consider only the two major Japanese corruption scandals in the Japanese past: the Recruit Case (1988-9) and the Sagawa Kyūbin case (1991-3): in the first case, where the top politicians were involved in insider trading in return for political favors, it became clear that also many journalists, including the president of the economic paper *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* were taking bribes. In the second case, where a trucking company bribed more than 100 politicians for the same purpose, the club reporters did not immediately publish the transgressors’ names although they knew them.

³³ Here we may also go as far as to theorize on the human entity as such, at times naturally, but rather “creatively” inclining to transgress various borders of always-necessarily socially constructed norms of morality and normality (the most “harmless” version of this process is perhaps best visible in the realms of art with its “scandalous” paradigm shifts; see e.g. Adut 2008).

not only in Japan, with its actors' ceaseless struggle for meanings and identities that condition their political survival. Like it or not: while desiring for power in the discursive political vacuum beyond good and evil, and while arrogantly interacting with prosecutors and media-tricksters, in his own struggle Ozawa Ichirō is making his point.

The traditional media/communication research often served, among many other means, as a scientific framework for implementing modernity in (more or less underdeveloped) non-western countries. Recently however, it seems that the theoretical conception for better understanding media reality of those regions is becoming rather insufficient. Firstly, in the context of this text we think that all the aforementioned scholars did more or less significantly contribute to actually re-shifting the focus on the problematic relationship between media institutions and power structures in a non-western society such as Japan while actually upgrading the de-westernization discourse. Secondly, by analyzing media and power in Japan (including various media aspects such as the media scandals), which was not really a focus of the de-westernized scholarship, we attempted to show how (dis)similar the Japanese media are in their nature to the western media, and more importantly we aimed to indicate what can the case study in question (i.e. a critical discourse analysis of one corrupted/scandalized Japanese politician) teach us, and how may we thus develop the work of de-westernizing media theory.

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