Discussion and Conclusions

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During the workshop, a number of important points surfaced during the question-and-answer period at the end of each presentation as well as the longer discussion period scheduled after the workshop. Yokoe Kumi of Vote Japan, our presenters, and the audience actively participated in discussing the immediate issues brought up in each of the presentations. In turn, their insights and comments also served as departure points for the general discussion period. The aim of this general discussion was, first, to discuss the individual presentations and to pinpoint the differences between the three countries, and then, to discover possible reasons for these differences.

Differences

Clearly, the broadest and most obvious overall differences in using the Internet for political activities were found when comparing Korea and the other two countries. Compared to Japan and Taiwan, it became clear from the presentations that the use of the Internet in Korea is very active and that the Internet has had a considerable impact in the recent national election, mainly in terms of organizing supporters and getting out the vote. Yet in contrast, despite offering a media voice to small and relatively minor political groups, the Internet has not made much of a difference in Taiwanese politics. In Japan as well, although the Internet could serve as a means to "level the playing field" between major and minor political parties, the direct influence of the Internet on the political circumstances appears to be limited. We believe there is an undeniable potential for this situation to change, and indeed the political use of the Internet is becoming increasingly active albeit on a much lower level than in Korea.

During the discussion, a number of questions were raised about different aspects of the political environment in each country such as media structure. Discussion surrounding these questions often immediately led to an inquiry into the differences among the countries. Concerning South Korea, for example, one audience member asked about the strong monopoly position of traditional newspapers and the lack of success of the

print versions of progressive newspapers. Lee explained that there were some progressive newspapers, and certainly an audience interested in such news, but that a large part of this audience also desired the interactive features offered by the Internet. They would therefore prefer reading the online version of a progressive newspaper – and indeed, online versions of newspapers are now given a similar level of respect as the established print newspapers. The *technological* difference between the different media formats apparently influences their appeal to certain audiences. It appears that some content, such as that regarding progressive political issues, tends to be more successful when distributed via certain media channels.

Conversely, this consideration led to the question why it is possible in Taiwan to offer sensitive information and opinions on the Internet whereas the same content would presumably be censored if it were available through the print or broadcasting media. The discussion regarding this point drew out the implications of regulating media content and applying such regulations to the Internet. In this case, rather than a *technological* difference, it was suggested that legal differences between different media may influence the choice of distribution media. Media regulations have been erected based on the top-down or one-to-many distribution means of traditional media channels and allow for a certain amount of censorship. In contrast, little regulation has been imposed on the rapid content delivery system available through web sites.

With regard to Japan, several questions focused on the reasons for differences in the use of web sites by party candidates. Discussants mused how party affiliation, age, and gender may influence the use of web sites by candidates. In this context, several participants suspected a correlation between a candidate's funding and the existence of an election-oriented web site. In particular, Tkach-Kawasaki's findings that proportionally fewer female candidates had web sites and candidates in middle age ranges such as in their 40s and 50s proportionally had the most web sites could be explained by a difference in campaign resources. Female candidates and young politicians in their initial bids for public office may not have access to financial, human, or information resources. Furthermore, presented with a choice among various campaign strategies and faced with limited resources, they may prefer to wage campaigns using traditional campaign practices. For these candidates, although the Internet may offer a number of advantages, it cannot guarantee electoral success as a relatively new and untried campaign medium.

Some interesting differences were also found among Japanese candidate web sites with regard to party affiliation. Tkach-Kawasaki found

that candidates of certain parties with strong internal structures and centralized funding control, most notably the Japan Communist Party (JCP) candidates, tended to show more symbols of party identification with logos and links to the party's web sites than candidates from other parties. In comparison, candidates from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) tended to demonstrate fewer symbols of party identification on their web sites. Tkach-Kawasaki acknowledged that funding is certainly a relevant point in terms of creating and maintaining web sites. However, she also pointed out that compared to other campaign advertising channels available to candidates such as posters or postcards, determining the cost of web sites in terms of creation, maintenance, and communications through e-mail highlights the difficulties in calculating expenditures involving new-media campaign practices. In this context, she argued that contents were more important for drawing return visitors to the web sites as opposed to design, and of course, the cost of this is rather difficult to calculate.

Japanese candidates also displayed a certain amount of caution with regard to the selection of issues that they addressed on their web sites. In her analysis of the candidate web sites from the 2001 Upper House election, Tkach-Kawasaki found that candidates tended to avoid hotly contested issues such as the constitution. Gender issues as well were not often mentioned among even female candidates. In comparison, the most common issues addressed by candidates were valence issues concerning local or regional development, education, and welfare. These contents suggest that candidates are utilizing the Internet in ways similar to traditional campaign media channels to appeal to a broad audience.

Ducke also agreed that while financial means do affect the content and initial appeal of a web site, at least for small citizens' groups, an expensively designed web site was not necessary, and that contents, regular updates, and responsiveness of the organization were more important features. Many of these were achievable by volunteer input rather than through financial support. Accordingly, the groups might not need a large budget set aside for their Internet activities to reach audiences – and many groups indeed have no extra budget or even a definitive online strategy. For many of these groups, elaborate web site features would in fact be a waste of resources since many of the members access the Internet mostly via mobile phone. Very simple features such as e-mail newsletters or simple web sites geared toward mobile phone users would therefore be more useful than sophisticated and expensively designed web sites.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR DIFFERENCES AMONG THE THREE COUNTRIES

The use of the Internet as an agent for political change in Korea, a means of limited political expression in Taiwan, while hardly illustrating any impact on Japanese political activities gives rise to further questions. Why is the Internet having such an impact in Korea, but not in the other two countries? How could Japan, assumed to be a technological forerunner, become the country where the political use of the Internet appears least developed, compared to Korea and Taiwan, where the Internet has become a highly developed means of political expression?

The most straightforward explanation is to point to differences in the political cultures among the three nations, and within that, focus on the culture of political discussion. Several participants mentioned that "Koreans like talking about politics," and that emotional language is much more accepted in Korea. Yokoe viewed this as the main reason for the discrepancy and offered the example of political chat rooms available on the Internet in both countries. She suggested that in Japan, such chat rooms were often shunned by many because of the aggressive and emotional language associated with them. Accordingly, moderated chats with registered members and moderated mailing lists had a higher acceptance rate in Japan. Although little or no academic research has been conducted to date concerning positive or negative political discourse through such Internet channels, this suggests that formalized structures for political discussion have yet to appeal to a broad audience in Japan.

Another explanation discussed in the meeting was the state of democratisation in each country, and the levels of enthusiasm that citizens demonstrate regarding their individual rights to participate in politics. This explanation would plausibly divide Japan from the other two countries. Both South Korea and Taiwan experienced democratisation movements at a similar time in the 1980s, and the majority of politically active citizens today may remember and maintain strong opinions regarding these events. It is likely that such experiences in political upheaval would positively affect enthusiasm for new media forms promising even better access to political participation. In the case of Taiwan, this might include even the merely incidental opportunity of using the Internet to avoid censored political discussions, since no laws exist there that allow the same degree of censorship as on print media. This immediately brings to mind comparisons with Singapore as another South-east Asian nation that employs efficient censorship measures despite presumably similar democratisation experiences. In Korea, on the other hand, the Internet's interactivity itself is regarded as the key feature. Thus, the eagerness to participate in political decisions – after sometimes physically

fighting for the right to do so – would lead citizens to choose an interactive medium rather than traditional media like TV and newspapers. Comparatively, Japan has had a longer experience with democracy in general and one-party political rule under the LDP in particular. Its tendency towards political stability, coupled with very low percentages of interest in politics overall among the public, may be critical factors in explaining why the political use of the Internet has had relatively little impact on organized political activities.

This context provides a stepping stone into considering the role of established media such as broadcast and print journalism in each country and whether they are satisfying the public's need for political information and debate. Lee described the established print media in Korea as conservative and often unwilling to tackle certain topics, with little room for progressive media to enter this market. The Internet thus offers a conduit for information and debate that is ignored in the traditional media. In addition, Chung described her impression that Korean television programming seems to consist mostly of apolitical drama series, compared to Taiwan, where a variety of political talk shows are available. This, she argued, might decrease the need to express one's opinions via Internet for many citizens, except for those minorities not even present in such TV shows. By contrast, the attitude of Japan's media environment with regard to political information demonstrates elements of both political conservatism and political exposure.

Although Japan does not suffer from a lack of political programming on television or political information available through newspapers, similar to the situation in Korea, overall both media channels are conservative in their reporting of political news. Especially during election campaign periods, Japanese news programs and newspaper accounts of campaigning are scrupulously balanced, no doubt due to Japan's strict regulations under the Public Offices Election Law. Yet the media's role in exposing a number of scandals involving politicians in the late 1980s and early 1990s is well documented and may well have contributed to public disenchantment with politics in general.

Of course, technological considerations and the role of the government in promoting Internet access, computer literacy, and e-government initiatives were also discussed. Participants noted that political participation via the Internet required experience with Internet tools, and that new Internet users would often not immediately join online discussions or use other interactive features. In addition, Yokoe added that a lack of knowledge or experience concerning proper conduct in chat rooms might lead to frustration and even failure of such potential discussion spaces if many inexperienced users behaved inappropriately.

This aspect is closely related to years of experience in using the Internet on the part of individuals, as well as formal computer education facilities and government involvement in promoting the Internet. The relatively early efforts by the Korean government to promote "e-Korea" would thus help indirectly explain the political impact of the Internet in Korea, since the incubation period was longer there than in the other two countries. Korean Internet promotion policies are also more advanced with extensive information technology (IT) education in all schools. Lee cautioned however not to relate political activism on the Internet simply to formally acquired IT education: the current generation of *netizens* who were most active in the virtual election campaign 2002 did in general not learn their Internet skills at school but experimented with Internet tools on their own, even if the technological environment was largely shaped by government initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion of Internet use in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, a number of preliminary conclusions could be drawn. Most important among these are assumptions about the conditions for active citizen participation via the Internet, inferred from differences found among the three countries and their possible explanations.

Broadly, these conditions can be divided into two areas: institutional infrastructure, or the "hardware" which includes the legal and technological environments in which the Internet is being used for political activities. This is essentially the "playing field" on which the political Internet is being used. The second set of components is composed of "soft" factors such as political and media culture and attitudes towards democratisation and political expression.

Institutional Infrastructure

Obviously, the widespread existence and acceptance of new technologies is a factor in their political usage. The differences between Japan, Taiwan and Korea are not very great in this respect with a rather broad range of their populations enjoying access to the Internet either through fixed PCs, mobile telephones, or a combination of both. In fact, in all countries, mobile phone penetration is very high. Yet there are apparent differences in terms of preferred mode of Internet access – via mobile phones, dial-up telephone lines, or broadband technologies – and the price of these connections. These factors largely depend on government regulation, although private initiatives such as access through Internet cafes can quick-

ly change the situation. In Japan, for example, inexpensive Internet access is largely limited to mobile phones, because Internet-connected mobile phones are prevalent but Internet cafes are rare.

Access means to the Internet may also affect information gathering and communication activities conducted by users. Access means aimed at fixed PCs such as network connections through the workplace, universities, and public facilities, as well as broadband and fiber-to-the-home access aimed at the home market may very well have a positive effect on users' information gathering activities such as reading longer texts, spending more time gathering political information, and engaging in online discussions. Alternatively, the pricing structure of mobile phone information provision and communications make it better suited for organizing purposes.

Costs, too, are apparently a factor, although this may be less obvious on a personal level in these rather affluent societies. Tkach-Kawasaki's data suggests the appearance of a "digital divide" among electoral candidates in Japan. The fact that not all candidates have web sites may be explained by a number of factors. The most obvious reason is that candidates may not have the human, information, and financial resources to wage political campaigns on the Internet. In addition, although various political parties such as the LDP and New Komeito have distributed guides to using the Internet in the form of media-use booklets and articles in party-sponsored publications it appears that as yet parties do not offer formal financial support for candidates to create and maintain web sites. Although candidates may understand that the use of the Internet could benefit their campaigns, they are unsure of how to integrate it within their existing campaign structures or resource allocation.

In addition to regulations and initiatives affecting the spread and cost of certain technologies, governments directly influence political activities via the Internet with laws concerning such activities, such as censorship rules or the direct prohibition of certain Internet activities. In Japan, for example, as the Public Offices Election Law to date has prohibited candidates from purchasing advertising either through the print or broadcast media on an individual basis, candidates may not have experience in creating their own media-centered campaigns, compared to political figures in other advanced democratic nations. Certainly the prohibition of active campaigning on the Internet during officially sanctioned campaign periods immediately preceding elections has resulted in politicians displaying caution in utilizing the Internet. In contrast, the Taiwanese government's slowness in expanding censorship laws to include the Internet naturally encourages political online activities by marginalized groups.

Political culture and democratisation

Somewhat less obvious, and certainly more difficult to grasp in terms of hard facts, are certain "soft" factors that nonetheless seem to have an important impact on the political use of the Internet. The phrase first used in the discussion was "political culture," although it proved difficult to concretely define its exact meaning. It seemed obvious that a positive attitudes to discussion and exchange had a positive effect on an active Internet participation and in particular to the political involvement via Internet. Of course, such a predisposition among a majority of the citizens would probably be grounded in shared (political) experiences rather than some innate behaviour of a certain (ethnic) group. The search for explanations therefore led to "political culture" in the sense of political experience and environment, and in the case of the three countries studied, the timing and status of democratisation was clearly relevant.

The assumption arising from these three cases – which needs to be confirmed in other contexts – is that the relatively long-standing democratic tradition in Japan generated political fatigue rather than an interest to use the opportunities offered by new media. Taiwan and Korea, by contrast, have achieved democratisation only recently, within the memory of politically active generations, and this seems to have had a positive impact on motivations for political participation in general and for political online activities in particular.

In addition, the role of traditional media may reinforce the enthusiasm for online activities if the existing media are anti-progressive and powerful and the Internet as an alternative media form offers a welcome means to circumvent their position as gatekeepers. This is certainly true for Korea, but somewhat less so for Taiwan, where in spite of official censorship a limited amount of controversial discussion seems to take place in the traditional media. In Japan, political participation appears to be heavily structured, with the great majority of political information and communications being disseminated through traditional mass media and channels circumscribed by established political actors such as political parties. This "top-down" structure provides few channels for "bottom-up" communications or the expansion of alternative channels for political feedback or participation. Furthermore, it is unclear if "online political activities" will have an impact on "offline" political realities.

In summary, we strongly believe that the issues brought forward in each of the papers presented at our workshop and the ensuing discussions emphasize the need for further comparative and comprehensive research in these areas. As the Internet continues to mature and diffuse as a political information and communications platform, we are finding that the factors

affecting its utilization are simultaneously expanding. To this end, the results of our workshop show that the relationship between the Internet and political activities has progressed beyond simple cause-and-effect explanations to encompass a wide range of variables. Our future research will concentrate on delineating and comparing these factors to delve deeper into the complex relationship between the Internet and politics.