

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - An Analysis Of TV Debate: Democratic Party Of Japan Leadership Between Hatoyama And Okada



On May 11, 2009, the party leader Ichiro Ozawa announced his decision to step down under a shadow of financial scandal which allegedly lowered the support rate for the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)[i]:

“I have decided to step down [from the post of DPJ president] to make our party unity stronger so as to secure victory in the upcoming House of Representatives election and to realize a regime change,” Ozawa said at the press conference. (Editorial; Public disapproval, 2009, p. 4)

With Ozawa’s resignation, the party executives set the leadership election for May 16. It was just five days from the announcement till the election so that they would avoid having a long interregnum. Indeed, they needed to prepare for the Lower House election scheduled in the upcoming summer. On May 12 to their supporters, and on 14 officially, with the damaged public confidence in the DPJ, the two candidates Yukio Hatoyama and Katsuya Okada ran for the party leadership election to win trust not only from its 221 lawmakers, or the voters of the party election, but also from the Japanese public, who would essentially be choosing a prime minister in the upcoming House of Representatives election.

The DPJ presidential race is of particular interest to the public as it is not just an election for party leader, but also to choose a candidate who will aim to be the next prime minister. The lead-up to the party poll provided a good opportunity to check and review the DPJ’s policies. (Editorial; New DPJ leader, 2009, p. 4.)

The uniqueness of the election for the party leadership is the open debate between the candidates held by the political party. This essay examines the TV debate between Hatoyama and Okada for the DPJ leadership held on the election day of May 16, 2009, which was the very first televised debate held under the

party's management to decide a major party leader in Japan. This essay has two analytical purposes. The first purpose is to analyze the social significance of the TV debate for the party leadership. The second is to closely look at the arguments made in the debate for the coming election. These two subjects are intertwined as is the relationship between the context and discourse is to be analyzed and discussed.

Note that such a debate did not take place between the candidates when the last prime minister Yukio Hatoyama decided to step down on June 2, 2010. The first reason for no political debate to choose a new party leader was that the DPJ did not have enough time to hold such an event since the next national election of the House of Councilors was imminent on July 11. Second, and probably more important, the DPJ was already in charge, and hence it did not need to energize the party itself by holding such a "campaign event." Given that the DPJ was still a second party, or challenger to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in power, the TV debate analyzed here merits special attention. We hope to provide significant insights from our critical analysis of what was a unique campaign event.

1. Literature review: Comparison with U.S. presidential debate

In order to discuss the social meaning of Japan's political debate, it is useful to look at past studies on presidential debates, which can be divided into three areas, although they may overlap. Initially, some groups of scholars examine presidential debates from the perspective of rhetorical and argumentation theories. Such analyses scrutinize any clash of argument, argument form and content, candidates' use of evidence, and strategies. This approach rests on the premise that debates are substantial arguments, and valuable for the audience. Scholars in this area have tried to demonstrate that a substantial clash did occur and the candidates used both evidence and analysis. Carlin, Howard, Stanfield and Reynolds (1991) argue that substantial amounts of direct clash do occur in presidential debates. Also, after studying the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debates, Ellsworth (1965) reports that the predisposition of the debates allows the candidates to spend more time in presenting evidence compared to those of other campaign opportunities such as nomination acceptance addresses and ordinary stump speeches. On the contrary, some scholars suggest that the use of evidence does not always determine the outcome of the presidential debates. Riley, Hollihan and Cooley (1980) argue that in 1976 Carter was a much more aggressive debater than Ford, although Ford used more evidence than Carter. They conclude that incumbent Ford was put on the defensive by Carter's attack.

Furthermore, Riley and Hollihan (1981) note that the audience could easily find a declarative statement not composed of evidence and analytical support, although they can distinguish argument with evidence from one without evidence. Their findings show that the way a lay audience perceives the debates is different from the way critics view them. Critics tend to focus on the content, the issues, and interaction among candidates from a professional perspective. The lay audience, on the other hand, tends to evaluate a debate based on general impressions.

In the second area, scholars conduct research on presidential debates using the statistical approach. For instance, Benoit (2001) employs the function theory of political campaigns. He examines the question of whether the media coverage accurately reflects the nature of those debates by examining the proportion of acclaim, attacks and defense messages between the debates and the media coverage. The survey points out that the media tend to exaggerate attacks although acclaim for candidates might be used more often in the debates. Although this kind of approach is useful in showing concrete evidence, voters usually do not think about how much evidence is used. When voters watch the debates, they are more relaxed than critics imagine. They do not use specific criteria to assess debates as critics do. It is an unanswered question as to how far the evidence determines who wins the debate.

Finally, political communication scholars analyze debate as a campaign event, and not as a “true” debate but as a pseudo debate (Auer, 1962). They argue that the presidential debate can play a number of pedagogical roles, such as informing the electorate about important issues, illustrating candidates’ leadership abilities, and giving a chance to compare candidates’ advocacy skills.

One of the reasons for these scholars’ view of presidential debates as pseudo argument seems to be the defective format of the debates. Some scholars argue that the candidates do not directly attack each other and argue without enough evidence and analysis (Auer, 1962; Carlin, Howard, Stanfield & Reynolds, 1991; Dauber, 1989; Hogan, 1989; McCall, 1984; Weiler, 1989). Auer (1962) presents five basic criteria of “real debates” (p. 46): (1) a confrontation, (2) in equal and adequate time, (3) of matched contestants, (4) on a stated proposition, and (5) to gain an audience decision. He argues that the form of current presidential debates does not meet the requisite of the five elements.

In addition, other scholars lament the traditional style in which the panel of

journalists questions the candidates instead of conducting actual debates between the candidates. Because the panel of journalists used to ask the candidates hairsplitting questions, the audience could not get involved in the debates. Responding to such complaints about presidential debates, many attempts to improve the debates have been made. For instance, in 1992, a town hall format in which questions could be asked by unaffiliated voters was introduced. In recent elections, instead of a panel of questioners, a single moderator has been in charge of the debate. As a result of these many changes, scholars tend to examine the effectiveness of the new formats. Some scholars have been opposed to comparing presidential debates with formal academic debates. Hinck (1993) regards presidential debates as “rhetorical events” in which the candidates show their leadership, credibility, competence and so on and argues that it is misleading to conclude the style of presidential debates should follow that of formal academic debates.

The DPJ debate shares most of the characteristics with those of the third type of debate, and is regarded as one of the campaign events pertaining to its text and context because Hatoyama and Okada often refer to the general election and it was also what the public was concerned with. In addition, its form is unlike that of academic debates. The two candidates answer questions posed by political science professor Masayuki Fukuoka who played the role of the moderator. The questions show that the nature of the debate was pedagogical in raising several issues that the public was likely to be concerned with. In this debate the moderator raises major three questions, each of which is followed by relevant or detailed questions. The first question is on what type of leader each contestant would be. The focus is on candidates, who had not yet blamed each other. Second, Fukuoka asks what type of administration they aim to establish, as distinct from that of the LDP. Their answers share the central idea of being independent from the intervention of bureaucrats. The final issue is on economic policies and financial resources. Again, both candidates are focused on the explanation of their own party’s uniqueness. The order of asking questions starting with personality issues, then the party, and finally policies serves the purpose of attracting public attention to the superiority of the DPJ itself rather than a comparison between the two candidates.

The DPJ debate in playing a pedagogical role is unique to the 2009 election, thus worthy of analysis. In fact, Hatoyama’s administration was as short-lived as the

previous administrations, which was about eight months. On June 2, 2010, Hatoyama announced his intention to resign. Only two days later, the DPJ held its party leadership election again, yet this time, without an open debate as that between Hatoyama and Okada. Thus, the DPJ's debate of May 2009 is particular to its context. The DPJ members needed to tactically locate the debate in the broader political campaign because they were going to fight in the summer Lower House election two months later. It was the first chance for the DPJ to realize a change of government in which the leader of the party would become Prime Minister. The rival LDP's public support rate drastically dropped after their subsequent short-lived administrations, while at the same time, the public expectation toward the DPJ was enhanced. Hence, candidates for the DPJ leader needed to show that they were qualified to be Prime Minister, to maintain the climate of opinion favorable to the DPJ.

2. Argument of Hatoyama and Okada

In general the debate contains almost no clash of arguments made by each candidate. They never blame each other or deny each other's statements but show general agreement with the opponent's idea. The only distinction is with phrases such as "If I may add another thing ...". Additions to the opponent's statements show that each candidate's claim is mutually complementary. Thereby their arguments from both sides as a whole explain their party's policies to the public in a pedagogical way.

Yet, there are common and different characteristics in their arguing styles. The following are the major findings of common and different characteristics of their arguments, in addition to other major issues dealt with in the debate. The original language used in the debate was Japanese, and the quotations of this debate in this essay were translated into English by the authors.

2.1 Common characteristics

There are two characteristics common in both Hatoyama's and Okada's arguments. First, both speeches targeted the general public. They spoke to not only empirical audience who were the DPJ's diet members, the voters in that election, but also ordinary citizens some of whom watched live, or later looked at edited clips as well as reading newspaper articles or other mediated information. They believed the debate would provide some criteria for voting in the upcoming Lower House election, based on which outcome the major party's leader would be the next prime minister. The inclusion of the general public in the audience led to

the participants explaining some of the important policies of the DPJ throughout the debate.

Second, both candidates called for party unification. Notably, neither candidate pointed out the opponent's faults, and did not even positively distinguish himself from the other as more qualified. Instead, they were rather focused on differences between the DPJ and the rival LDP with a view to the general election. The nonassertive tone toward the opponent is unlike the attitude of American candidates in a presidential nomination contest who claim their own credentials as superior to the other candidates. Not until the acceptance speech, is the nominee expected to bridge the divide caused by the primary competition and call for the party's unification needed for fighting in the final. Unlike the U.S. presidential primary, the DPJ's leadership debate as it was held in the limited campaign period of five days was not a harsh battle that questioned candidates' aptitude.

In his opening remarks, Okada targets the voters in the party leadership election who are directly listening to him. Okada calls those partisans who are enthusiastic for a change of government. This serves his purpose of promoting unification within the DPJ in a way that leads the partisans to seek for the establishment of their own government. Okada then reflects on his original intention to work for the public good that he had twenty years ago when he aspired to turn a politician from a national public employee. Then Okada recalls the election campaign of summer 2005. At the end of his speech, Okada again calls for unification, including Hatoyama as well:

Yesterday in front of the Yurakucho Marion shopping complex I made a speech with Mr. Hatoyama. I felt that people's heart which was a little bit away from the DPJ is coming back. What people expect now is the start of a new DPJ under a new leader. Let us meet the people's expectation to begin a new era of the DPJ.

As in Okada's speech, Hatoyama's speech also calls for party unification, twice in his opening remarks. He also includes Okada in this call for unification:

"Japan is faced with a national crisis. I'm happy to devote myself to the nation with Mr. Okada. At the beginning of this speech, let me ask you to give me an opportunity to be at the forefront of realizing a change of government along with you, all the people attending now."

At the end of the opening, Hatoyama even refers to Ozawa, the ex-party leader,

who had showed his intention to resign, while Okada never mentions Ozawa's name.

We would firmly take over the leader Ozawa's direction toward the party unification and realize the change of government under the system of the untied party and devote ourselves to creating an encompassing society full of love.

Thus, in their opening remarks both Hatoyama and Okada do not intend to compete against each other, and this cooperative tone is maintained throughout the debate.

2.2 *Different characteristics*

While the audience and the purpose of their remarks overlap, a rhetorical style unique to each speaker lies in their choice of language apparent in the attitude toward the issues the moderator Fukuoka poses. Okada mainly takes a dialectical approach while Hatoyama tends to adopt narratives. "*Dialectical terms*, in contrast, can be defined only by and in relation to other words" (Campbell & Burkholder, 1996, p. 92). Offering an account of Kenneth Burke's concept of dialectical terms, they raise an example of "contrasting capitalism and socialism to emphasize ownership of the means of production." It is important to provide a contrast between the two terms when one of them is being explained.

Okada describes a concept in relation to its oppositional idea. In his opening remarks, Okada says, "Shall we strengthen the culture of our party that respects open discussion and its outcome, although not sufficiently cultivated yet, which is different from that of the LDP?" The dialectical description of the party is further developed when Okada answers the second major question from the moderator, asking both candidates to explain in detail how they would distinguish the DPJ's administration from the previous ones led by the LDP when they bring about a change of government. Okada mentions the LDP and the DPJ are different in nature as political parties in that the DPJ produce policies on their own terms while taking the people's voice into consideration, independent of the bureaucrats. This is in contrast to the crusty LDP, which is restrained by long-term bonds to the establishment. Thus, Okada describes his DPJ in opposition to the rival LDP. Because no one had ever seen the DPJ holding the reins of power, it was necessary to establish an image of the DPJ in a way that was accessible to the public as well as to distinguish it from other parties. After Okada answers the question of what distinguishes the DPJ from other parties, Hatoyama, agreeing with Okada's point, adds an account of the importance of local self-government.

Indeed, in most of the debate Hatoyama goes along with Okada. He says the DPJ will take the standpoint of the people, or tax payers, not bureaucrats, or tax eaters. In other words, this means that power must be shifted from the center to the regions. Thus, Hatoyama's addition to Okada's point makes the whole issue more understandable.

Differing from Okada's dialectical approach, in his opening remarks, Hatoyama gives two narratives corresponding to his catchphrase "politics of fraternity" covering the issues of the social participation of the challenged, health, and employment. First, Hatoyama quotes a story of the president of the dustless chalk company in which 70% of the employees are challenged:

The president asked the chief priest of a temple, "Why is it that illiterate people seem to enjoy working at my factory? I think they would be happier at a care center." The priest replied, "Is it possible for humans to be able to be happy by getting goods and money? The ultimate happiness of human beings is to be useful, loved, praised, and needed." ... In terms of measures for the challenged, it is important to make ample care centers, and more important to provide the challenged with working opportunities in which they feel happy.

Thus, in this story, Hatoyama originates the fundamental value of happiness not as his personal idea but indicatively from the culture of Japan since the speaker in this story is the head priest of a Japanese temple. After the episode of the dustless chalk factory, Hatoyama talks about a life care system in which several doctors provide home medical treatment for some 300 households. According to him, this system enables 64% of the residents to die at home, while the rate is only 6% outside the system. He continues, "I want to create a society of fraternity that realizes a high degree of satisfaction at a low cost."

With these narratives, Hatoyama constructs an idea of fraternity, and he goes on to say "the idea of fraternity is that everyone is valued and should contribute to each other's lives, and thus connect to society in which they can clearly find ties and places to belong to." Hatoyama then mentions that he would create an all encompassing society, which was undermined by the reforms of Koizumi of the LDP. Here, Hatoyama explains the idea of fraternity as well as differentiating the DPJ from the LDP.

Another unique rhetorical feature is found in the ending of their arguments. Okada's statement is often inconclusive in a way that gives more discretion for interpretation while Hatoyama extends points of his arguments to affirm his

determination. The first differing expression appears in their opening remarks. Okada ends his remarks by asking the audience only to think of what they can do to win the general election when they vote in that party election. On the other hand, Hatoyama makes a rhetorical question, "Why is a change of government necessary?" He continues:

"The answer is that in the long-lasting administrations of the LDP they demanded posts and gave all the policy-making decisions to bureaucrats ... thereby isolating politics from the voice of the people. ... So, my mission is not only to realize a change of government.... Let us end the era of bureaucrats."

Thus, Hatoyama shows his vision of society after the change of government, directly appealing to the audience in a tangible way.

Another different expression in their ending is seen in response to the first and relevant questions after the openings. The moderator Fukuoka, after explaining a change of government as the best chance for information disclosure, asks what type of leader both candidates aim to be by reflecting on their experiences of being the party leader once before. Hatoyama says, "being a loser once is good," appreciating all his experiences as well as making many friends in time of need. He adds that his variety of experiences would make him a better leader. In addition he reveals an episode in which former Prime Minister Nakasone said that Hatoyama changed from being whippy ice cream to being an ice lolly, indicating he had developed a hard core as a human being.

In contrast, Okada tells a story of spending four years, after the DPJ lost lots of seats in the previous election, wandering around the world and this enriched his experience. Yet he ends his statement with, "In the end I am only judged by you everyone, whether I've really changed or not." Thus, Okada does not directly conclude how he's changed or what he is now, instead giving information indicative of what he is. Also, Okada mentions he followed Nakasone's way of traveling overseas and scribbling memos on what he would do if he became the prime minister, indicating Okada has ideas and is a person like Nakasone.

2.3 Other issues

There are several arguments seemingly cooperatively constructed by Hatoyama and Okada targeting the public. That is why the debate as a whole functioned to underline important issues. The moderator Fukuoka chose these important issues, which the two candidates responded to while taking the general public into consideration.

Related to the issue of the bureaucrats, the moderator intuits the short answer from Hatoyama saying that he would take the knife to labor costs for national and local government officers which is estimated to amount to 35 trillion yen in 2011. Then the moderator Fukuoka calls Okada "*kako kanryo*," or a former bureaucrat. The moderator asks Okada if the DPJ, although union-backed, will really free itself from the labor-related bonds so that sovereignty can be moved from the bureaucrats of Kasumigaseki to the people. In his answer Okada distinguishes the issue of national bureaucrats from that of local ones, claiming the central government and the local bodies should manage their own employers respectively. Okada adds that he does not regard it to be real politics for politicians to puff themselves up by bashing bureaucrats whom they are supposed to make use of.

On the issue of politics and money, or corporate donations, Okada mentions it may be the same as Hatoyama's opinion that the system of corporate donations will be abolished in three years simultaneously with more individual donations encouraged. On the other hand, Hatoyama agrees with Okada, but adds tax deductions for individual donations are needed. Hatoyama foresees a harsh battle with bureaucrats in pursuing the deductibility, recalling the then finance ministry's resistance to the same policy they put forward as members of the Sakigake party, which Hatayama used to belong to. Hatoyama pledges to realize the deduction for individual donations when the DPJ takes the reins of government, in cooperation with Okada.

The third major question is concerned with economic policies and financial resources. Hatoyama and Okada share the view of the status quo as critical. Hatoyama finds that tremendous efforts are needed to boost the economy, focusing on the growth of Japan's domestic market. For this purpose, consumer purchasing power needs to be enhanced. In his words, this policy is not pork-barrel, but a national need. Hatoyama criticizes the purpose of the LDP's policy as unclear in this area, that plans to provide 36,000 yen for children between the ages of three and five for only a limited period of one year. Hatoyama emphasizes, "it is possible to secure a source of revenue by using a screening process that would generate ten trillion yen."

Agreeing with this domestically focused economy, Okada adds a medium- to long-term economic policy. In his view, one of the major problems to be addressed is too much focus on the U.S. market which the former administrations of Koizumi

and Abe structured. Okada says:

“It is necessary to reform the economic structure by shifting to the domestic demand in Asia. Possible new industrial fields are the energy industry related to the global warming issue, the care business and the like, expected to create employment opportunities.”

Related to economic policy, securing financial resources is the other indispensable topic here. On the issue of consumption tax which is directly related with the people’s lives, Hatoyama and Okada explain it is not necessary to raise the current rate in the following four years. Yet, Hatoyama’s tone is strong even over excluding the issue of consumption tax:

“Discussion on consumption tax is not necessary during the harsh economic conditions such as now. But we’re designing a reform plan of a prototype of a pension system in which the basic pension will be covered totally by the revenue from consumption tax. This shift to the tax-covered pension will take 20-30 years or longer. Thus a plan to raise the rate will have to be considered, but it will not be necessary within the next four or five years.”

Here, Hatoyama clarifies it is unnecessary not only to raise the tax but also to bring it to the table. It is confusing that the consumption tax will not be discussed on while the source of basic pension will be discussed. This extreme position is modified not by Hatoyama himself, but by Okada in answering the same question: “My understanding is that the consumption tax rate will basically not be raised in the following four years. But when a new pension system is established by adopting a new taxation regime as Mr. Hatoyama mentioned, it is necessary to discuss what pension system should be created. In this process, therefore, we will need to discuss the consumption tax together, I think.”

On this issue, Okada supports Hatoyama in a way that avoids excluding the possibility of touching the consumption tax, although Okada could attack Hatoyama by criticizing Hatoyama’s ignorance of the necessity to link the consumption tax with the issue of pension reform.

Later in the debate, the moderator comments that it was after the election of September 2005 that the government started discarding the weak under the Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act and the healthcare system for the greatly aged. The moderator is neutral but backs the DPJ over the LDP. He then asks each candidate to make a comment specifically targeting the young.

On this question, Hatoyama and Okada show slightly different views. Okada answers that politics should be for the sake of the younger generation. He proposes free education in senior and junior high school in addition to investment in teachers and hardware. This is a growth strategy for Japan, with its lack of natural resources and its small landmass, and relies only on human resources. Okada's key is education. On this point Hatoyama refers to American young people as bringing Obama to the presidency, believing in the potential of Japanese young people to do so as well. He refers to financial support such as children allowances, free education, and university scholarships. But he admits that it is now difficult to find what is worth working for and living for. Under such conditions it is important for politics to enrich the soil for NPOs and volunteer activities, by which more meaningful opportunities will be created. Here, Hatoyama's answer is connected to his catchphrase "politics of fraternity."

At the very end of the debate the moderator asks both candidates to add final comments. Hatoyama says that it is his pleasure to show the DPJ in an open way to the general public. He insists that they would win in the Diet debate. Okada's final comment is that the new DPJ would play a greater role in Japan's politics. The party executives would visit and support struggling candidates all over the country, supporting the public's expectations.

3. Conclusion

This was the first time to air a debate to decide the political party leadership. It was held during the campaign for the upcoming general election with the great possibility of a change of government. In a broad context, the televised debate for the DPJ's leadership functioned as a pedagogical tool to explain important issues. The debate focused on the appeal of the DPJ itself rather than the competition between the candidates, and thus became significant in choosing the potential candidate for Prime Minister of Japan rather than the leader of the DPJ. Under these conditions Hatoyama and Okada commonly targeted the general public in seemingly concerted efforts to distinguish the DPJ from the rival LDP.

Okada's and Hatoyama's arguments were mutually complementary. Yet, Hatoyama, chiefly with narratives, took more advantage of the cooperative construction of arguments than Okada with dialectical tactics. Centering around the goal of a change of government in the general election, the DPJ needed to establish a fresh image since public confidence in the party was damaged under leader Ozawa's financial scandal. Hence, the DPJ started their campaign on the

concept of politics by politicians' initiatives, thereby locating itself in opposition to the rival LDP.

Future research should look at the functions of debate for party leadership in the context in which there is great possibility of a change of government. Since Hatoyama in fact became Prime Minister with the DPJ as the ruling party, it was the first time for the second major party to realize a change of government through the outcome of the general election, in the postwar period. Under such conditions, more pedagogical roles are to be expected. Accordingly, specific strategies of the language use and the development of argument in pedagogical debate will be invented.

NOTE

[i] Mr. Kenichi Sakata, the representative of the Think Tank "Plato" of the Democratic Party of Japan kindly provided the authors with a DVD recording of the TV debate on May 16, 2009 for their analysis. The authors are indebted to the generous support from the DPJ.

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