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The Meaning of 'Middle' Identification in Contemporary Japan —Debates on Middle Class and Types of Politics—

ABSTRACT

There have been three debates on the nature of middle class during the course of social change in postwar Japan, which reflected different types of politics. The first debate around 1960 was concerned with the nature of the middle class, particularly in relation to class politics among Marxist scholars and non-Marxists and politicians. The second debate in the late seventies was joined by a number of social scientists who, despite having different theoretical frameworks, shared the perceived fact that more than 90 percent of the total population regarded themselves as belonging to the 'middle' bracket. The debate is characterized as related to status politics. The third debate, which has just begun, corresponds to the present period of so-called life politics. This debate is concerned with whether 'middle' would polarize itself into the rich and the poor or merge into a homogeneous mass. The outcome of the debate will affect the criteria to be adopted for fairness or distributive justice in the future, since those who identify themselves as belonging to the lower bracket are likely to choose the criterion of effort rather than accomplishments as fairness.

Key Words : middle class, debate on middle class, types of politics