Preface

This special feature is a collection of three research papers based on the data collected by an opinion survey on the political orientations of the Egyptian public, which was executed in 2008\(^{(1)}\). The survey was conveniently called “Poll Survey” before. But, in this special feature, it is named “Opinion Survey,” for the survey covered not only the public opinion on specific subjects but also the general views of the Egyptian public towards the state and society including their unconscious identities\(^{(2)}\).

One of the originalities of our survey is that the concept of region is introduced in the research\(^{(3)}\). This is because we believe that the standpoint from “region” is inevitable to comprehensively understand the Egyptian society and to construct the democratic society in Egypt. As is well known, Egypt has been described to have a homogeneous nature as a hydraulic society, totally dependent on the Nile. So the aspect from the “center” is remarkable in the study of the Egyptian society, and the rural has been underestimated to the urban in the dichotomic social view of the urban versus the rural.

However, real Egyptian society is spatially diverse in socioeconomic terms in the past and present. In fact, there are differences in terms of income, employment structure, and educational level not only between Cairo and the provinces but also between and within Lower and Upper Egypt. Therefore, it is not apparently enough to analyze the Egyptian society from the central viewpoint, especially the viewpoint of Cairo, for understanding it in total. And, it is supposed that the regional difference is reflected not only in socioeconomic terms but also in the political attitudes of the Egyptian public. Egypt Opinion Survey 2008 was executed to collect data for examining this hypothesis. The Survey is a questionnaire survey in national scale (see http://wakame.econ.hit-u.ac.jp/%7earaest/)..

On 11th of February in 2011, President Mubarak was obliged to step down from his power. Our Egypt Opinion Survey was executed in October and November in
2008 when food riots, which foretold the “revolution” in 2011, happened. Our analysis in the three papers in this special feature may throw light on the background of the “revolution” and on the future of Egyptian society.

February 21, 2011

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Disaster struck when writing the above Preface and when the three articles in this special feature were accepted by the editorial committee of JAMES. This was, of course, the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. I became aware of the news during my stay in Cairo. I was overwhelmed by the television reports and, depressed by its terrible effects, was unable to work properly for several days.

However, unrelated to my gloomy emotion, political movements, which began with the “Jasmine Revolution” in Tunisia from December 2010, expanded throughout Arab countries. The Egyptian political change was named the “25 January Revolution” after the date of the first big popular demonstration in Cairo, with the Jazeera TV network reporting daily on the demonstrations of citizens in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and other Arab countries.

I went to Egypt from the UAE on March 11, the day of the Great East Japan Earthquake and one month after former president Mubarak had been obliged to relinquish power. In Cairo, the political situation was calmer and more peaceful than I had expected, and everyday life continued in the daytime, although the streets remained relatively quiet overnight.

I visited Tahrir Square, the symbolic space of the Egyptian popular movement, which was renamed “Martyrs’ Square” after the revolution, on March 18. It was a Friday. The Square was cleaned and collective prayer was offered in one area, despite the stones having been torn off from the pavement in some places. It had a vivid, carnival-like atmosphere and the people gathered there looked cheerful.

March 19 was the day of the Referendum for Egypt’s constitutional amendments, the main subjects of which concerned the competence of the president and his eligibility for the presidential election. The “youth”, who initiated the Egyptian popular movement, insisted on a new constitution and appealed to people to vote “no.” The handbills were distributed and posted on walls, appealing to vote “no.”
On that day, I visited one of my survey villages named “Abu Senita” in Menufiya Governorate in order to observe the Referendum in a rural area. The Referendum took place in an elementary and secondary school of the village, with voting performed in order and overseen by the military authority. The villagers we knew stated that they had all voted “yes.” According to The Egyptian Gazette, dated April 4, 2011, the voting percentage was 41.2%, of which “yes” votes comprised 77.2%. Graphs 1 and 2 show the voting rate and the rate of the vote for “yes” by the governorate. These results are compatible with the findings of the three articles, based on the Egypt Opinion Survey 2008, in this special feature.

It suffices here to make reference to the following three points, since we plan to write a more detailed article on this subject(4).

First, a distinct difference can be observed between the Urban Governorates, including Cairo, and other governorates in terms of voting behavior.

Second, with voting behavior in mind, no difference can generally be observed between Lower and Upper Egypt in general. The difference seems to be within the region in Lower and, especially, Upper Egypt.

Third, regarding the Urban Governorates, a distinct difference can be observed between the findings from the Egypt Opinion Survey 2008 and the voting behavior of citizens in the Referendum for Egypt’s Constitutional Amendments. In the Egypt Opinion Survey 2008, citizens in Urban Governorates preferred not to vote, despite a significant interest in politics. Conversely, in the Referendum, a high percentage voting rate was apparently observed in the Urban Governorates compared to elsewhere. This reflects the fact that the “25 January Revolution” in Egypt was initiated by citizens, especially youth, within Urban Governorates.

As such, we can observe the political behavior among the Egyptian public, which differs from that seen before. However, it is not the result of the Referendum in itself but the voting process that is the key to the future of the Revolution. Voting proceeded peacefully among Egyptian members of the public aged above 18, despite differences of opinion, and to date, no strong objections were reported concerning the voting process, which seems to prove the maturity and civility of Egyptian society.

April 5, 2011
(Note) Voting rate here refers to the proportion of voters in the total population in each governorate.
(Source) The Egyptian Gazette, April 4, 2011.
Notes

(1) This special feature is based on the presentation of one of the panels in WOCMES on July 21, 2010, in Barcelona, Spain, which was organized by JAMES. It was composed of four papers and titled “Multiple Identity of the Arab People Based on the Results of Recent Poll Surveys.” In this special feature concerned with the political opinions of Egyptians, one of the four papers in the panel, titled “A Political Mental-Map of the Palestinians”, by one of the presenters, Dr. Shingo Hamanaka, was excluded, for it treats with the political opinions of Palestinians, and the paper of Dr. Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Latif, who was anticipated to attend the panel, but could not attend it for an urgent matter. This is why the title of the special feature was changed to “Political Orientations of the Egyptian Public Based on the Result of Egypt Opinion Survey 2008.”

We appreciate the Japan Foundation for its financial support in sending some participants to WOCMES in Barcelona.

(2) The opinion surveys were done by two academic projects. The first is “The Middle East within Asia: Law and Economics” (Need-Based Program for Area Studies sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: Representative Hiroshi Kato), and the second is “Relation between Political Changes and Stereotypes in the Middle East” (MEXT-Sponsored Research Project, “Promotion Project for Improvement of Collaborative Center of Excellence in Human Studies and Social Science”: Representative Hiroyuki Aoyama). Three opinion surveys have been executed: (1) Syria in October–November 2007, (2) Egypt in October–November 2008, and (3) Palestine in May 2009. This special feature is concerned with the second survey.

(3) Regarding the opinion surveys in Arab countries, a lot of them have been done in recent years. For example, the World Values Survey was conducted in Arab countries, including Egypt (and Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria), in “2000–2002 (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.com/).”

(4) We conducted the second and third opinion surveys in Egypt in December 2010 and from February to the beginning of March 2011, soon after the Revolution. These two surveys were conducted in three governorates—Cairo, Port Said, and Sohag—and used the same questionnaire as used in the Egypt Opinion Survey 2008. However, some question items were either modified or deleted, because the questionnaire was prepared just before the National Elections, meaning some political items could not be included. We will try to compare the political attitudes of Egyptian public between before and after the Revolution, based on the data of the three surveys and the Referendum.

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