

RESEARCH NOTE

A note for the special issue honoring the legacy of Susan Pharr

Christina L. Davis^{1*}  and Junko Kato²

¹Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA and ²University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

*Corresponding author. E-mail: cldavis@harvard.edu

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Abstract

The editors and authors provide a brief postscript about the contributions and the legacy of Susan Pharr for each author and the field of Japanese politics.

Key word: Japanese politics

We are pleased to present a special issue in honor of Professor Susan Pharr to recognize her extraordinary contribution to the study of Japanese politics and political science.

Having started her path to Japan studies in a judo dojo in New York City, Susan never stopped wanting to learn more about Japan. After receiving her Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University in 1975, she taught comparative politics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison before joining the faculty at Harvard in 1987. During her 32 years as director of the Program on US–Japan relations, she hosted over 700 seminar events and sponsored over 600 visitors to Harvard. Through her work as a teacher, adviser, and program director Susan trained and mentored students who have filled the ranks of those studying Japanese politics and society.

In her scholarship, Susan used the experience of women in Japan to highlight the strategies taken by activists and politicians to influence society from positions of disadvantage. Her work also profiled the role of the media in politics to both reflect and transform the understanding of events in society. Themes of trust and civic cooperation underlay her analysis of democracy with a focus on Japan in comparative perspective. Drawing on her experience having worked as the Senior Social Scientist with the Agency for International Development, she also wrote about development assistance and foreign policy.

This special issue features papers by her former students that touch upon many of these themes that featured prominently in Susan’s research. The papers were first presented at her retirement symposium, held on 25 May 2021. JJPS editors Robert Pekkanen and Rieko Kage helped in the process of putting together the special issue. Christina and Junko have ensured that the editorial process of this issue has no conflicts of interest by seeking outside editorial review as appropriate for specific articles.

Daniel Aldrich’s contribution, ‘How social infrastructure saves lives: a quantitative analysis of Japan’s 3/11 disasters,’ pushes our understanding of what kinds of infrastructure may be most effective during shocks and disasters such as tsunami. Aldrich uses quantitative data from 550+ neighborhoods in the Tohoku region to investigate how social infrastructure – the places and spaces that build and maintain ties, such as libraries and cultural halls – correlates with disaster mortality. Building on his work investigating the power of social capital, he suggests that decision makers should recognize that smaller investments in social infrastructure may lead to larger payoffs than larger spending on seawalls and other standard mitigation strategies. Susan mentored and guided his early career through graduate school and some initial tough decisions after hurricane Katrina. She continued to do so as his

research evolved into a combination of deep analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and storytelling that he now teaches to students. Daniel hopes to match Susan's levels of kindness and willingness to invest in her students in the short and long terms.

In 'How incumbent politicians respond to the enactment of a programmatic policy: evidence from snow subsidies,' Amy Catalinac and Taishi Muraoka tackle a puzzle in the comparative politics literature: on some occasions governments enacting programmatic policies reap electoral rewards for doing so, but on other occasions, they do not. Why? What explains this variation? Amy owes an enormous debt of gratitude to Susan for the constant reminder that everything starts with a puzzle, and that truly great research projects do two things: help us understand particularities of our case, as well as make general contributions to the field as a whole. Leveraging a programmatic policy enacted by the Japanese government in 1962, a subsidy that municipalities that experience heavy snowfall are eligible to receive, Amy and Taishi find that places receiving the snow subsidy do not exhibit more electoral support for incumbents, but *do* receive significantly higher levels of discretionary spending. This finding forms the basis of a new explanation the authors offer, for *how* programmatic policies might influence support for the incumbent. This new perspective can account for both the Japan results as well as the varied results in the literature. Amy will be forever grateful to Susan for the way in which she taught her to think about comparative politics.

In 'Changing faces of political women in Japan,' Margarita Estévez-Abe revisits Professor Pharr's earlier work, *Political Women in Japan*, and applies its insights to gauge the progress women have made in Japanese politics in the 40 years since its publication. When Japan first saw a surge in the number of female local politicians in the 1990s, the *Seikatsusha Nettowaku* movement, which led the charge, consisted of educated urban housewives akin to the 'New Women' as described by Pharr. In the past 15 years, however, Japan has witnessed the emergence of a new type of political women called *Mama Giin* (literally, mommy politicians). The new type of political women is neither Pharr's 'New Women' nor 'Radical Egalitarians' and might be called 'New New Women.' These 'New New Women' enjoy greater job options and life choices not available to the 'New Women,' but are not interested in challenging Japan's patriarchy. This article examines the biographies of female local politicians in Tokyo's 23 special ward assemblies to understand the rise of *Mama Giin*.

In 'Voter responses to female candidates' voice pitch: experimental evidence from Japan,' Claire Bower, Rieko Kage, Frances M. Rosenbluth, and Seiki Tanaka draw on original survey experiments to assess the impact of Japanese female candidates' voice pitch on voters' willingness to vote for the candidate. They find that in contrast to previous studies, voters in Japan do not systematically prefer lower-pitched over higher-pitched female politicians. Japanese men are more likely to prefer female candidates who speak at lower pitch, but Japanese women are indifferent to female candidates' pitch levels. Their findings suggest that lowering pitch is likely to increase female candidates' electoral prospects by attracting male voters without backlash from female voters. Rieko observes that this paper builds on Susan's pioneering work on women in Japan. Susan served as an incredible inspiration for women graduate students. She gracefully balanced her many research, teaching, and administrative responsibilities, while being exceedingly generous to her current and former students in every respect. Susan set a shining example that Rieko and many other women academics strive to emulate.

In 'Japan: the harbinger state,' Phillip Lipsky argues that Japan is a harbinger state, which experiences many challenges before others in the international system. As such, studying Japan can inform scholars and policymakers about the political challenges other countries will likely confront in the future. In turn, scholarship about Japan offers a critical opportunity to develop theoretical insights, assess early empirical evidence, and offer policy lessons about emerging challenges and their associated political contestation. His piece also surveys English-language political science scholarship about Japan during 1980–2020, a period that roughly coincides with Susan's career. Contrary to common perceptions, there is no meaningful decline in Japan studies in political science – in fact, the subfield has grown dramatically in journal publication volume as well as theoretical and empirical sophistication. This is an important legacy of Susan's lifelong career of fostering and connecting the next generation of Japan experts. It is a legacy that Phillip is very proud to carry on.

In ‘Space and the US–Japan alliance: reflections on Japan’s geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy,’ Saadia M. Pekkanen draws attention to a new strategic domain for the two countries’ interactions. Drawing on theories of the Japanese state, she probes the ways Japan is now positioning its interests in the context of the US–Japan alliance, and what that means for the future of the alliance. Her reflections are rooted in her work as a graduate student under Susan, who also served as her dissertation committee chair at Harvard. While the Japanese state has proactively aligned its space policy and postures with the USA, she looks across the full spectrum of its geopolitical and geoeconomics strategies and cautions that Japan is not forever caught in the US orbit. Given the uncertain fate of US domestic politics that also bear on great power competition, the Japanese state is also prudently positioning for how the status of its ally may evolve. This is what complicates straightforward projections about alliance cooperation and balance of power politics in the unfolding international space order. Through her work on the Program on US–Japan relations, Susan instilled in her students a passion for bridging the academic-policy divide, and Saadia too is inspired to connect and advance scholarship in the public interest.

As editors, we have been among those to benefit from the encouragement and advice of Susan over many years. Robert Pekkanen took his first ever political science class from Susan, and so he credits her for his career. She has been a wonderful mentor to him at all important steps along this career, and he is thankful for her sterling guidance and friendship.

As her undergraduate thesis adviser and dissertation committee chair, Susan taught Christina how to develop a research question and to write with attention to both theory and narrative storyline. At a time when the field seemed riven by methodological differences, Susan encouraged an openness to different approaches that can be seen in the wide range of research styles among her students. Junko is one of the scholars whom Susan generously hosted for their sabbatical at Harvard. Susan ensured a very fruitful research experience for scholars who visited from all over the world, and also inspired interdisciplinary research across the humanities and social sciences.

It is our honor to bring together these papers as a tribute to her legacy.