

Ray of hope for democrats

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On Sept. 18, people all over the world, holding their breath, were glued to reports of the referendum on whether Scotland would become independent of the United Kingdom.

About 55 percent of the participants in the referendum, which saw a voter turnout of some 84 percent, voted No to independence and won the final decision, while Scots who wanted independence succeeded in getting an official promise of more devolution from U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron.

The referendum brought a considerable sense of political achievement to the local population without the shedding of blood. For those Japanese who grumble about low voter turnouts in local and national elections, or who complain about the secretive character of political procedures — such as a plan to build a large road in a wooden area of Kodaira, Tokyo, leading citizens to successfully force their local administration to hold a referendum in May 2013 — the open, democratic process of the Scottish referendum was remarkable and somehow an object of envy.

As many media reported, even the decision against independence will have influence on movements in regions of other countries where self-determination and eventual independence are an issue, such as Basque Country and Catalonia in Spain, Hong Kong in China, and Okinawa in Japan.

We should look also at particularities in Scotland's case. The summation by many media was that many people in Scotland preferred the present state of stability with the currency and the economy, and were not strong enough in their nationalistic self-confidence. The explanation is not that simple.

One of the important aspects is Scottish people's mistrust of the British government's inclination toward

neoliberalism since 1979. In that year, Margaret Thatcher took power and started to promote policies to get over the recession and "the British disease." The so-called Thatcherism, based on market fundamentalism and privatization, became one of the main promoters of neoliberalism in the world.

Thatcher also incited the self-image of a strong and unified U.K. among Britons, as demonstrated in the public response to the Falklands War. Delicate sensibilities against an England-centric worldview were ignored.

This in turn gave rise to a counter-culture of protest and a strong call for self-determination in Scotland. The upsurge of support for the European Union in continental Europe helped the spirit of independence.

Newly launched Scottish journals, for example, sought a different way from Thatcherism. Intellectual and literary activities with consciousness of the advancement of social welfare and moral sentiment were also nourished.

This movement reminds us that Scotland has a long tradition of civic humanism that has produced the likes of Adam Smith, the founder of classic liberalism. Before union with England in 1707, Scotland had had its own parliament, which was revived in 1997.

The justification for a referendum this time was along this line. Many Scottish people have been discontent with the British government's relations with the U.S. since the time of the Iraq war and with the government's measures to resolve recent economic and political problems. The Scottish National Party received increasing support as a counterforce to the British government.

Certainly SNP was unable to present satisfying alternative economic policies. Its currency policy to continue using the pound-sterling of the U.K. looked evasive and disappointing. Yet we have long known that the ideal of "one currency for one nation-state" does not always function well in reality.

Even if SNP had symbolically put forward any idea of creating Scotland's

own currency, the pound-sterling would have seemed far stronger. Thus the relationship between the two currencies would not be equal. In view of the situation with "politically independent" Crown dependencies, it seems practical and profitable for Scotland to stay in the pound-sterling bloc.

Apart from the consideration of the "optimal currency area," the possibility of independence for a certain region of a country has highlighted the more general problem of how far a state has the right to reach geographically to exploit natural resources as well as operate infrastructure and "not-in-my-backyard" types of facilities for the public good.

In the Scottish case, the U.K. is reluctant to give up its right to North Sea oil and to the Her Majesty's Naval Base, Clyde, which serves as a homeport for Trident missile nuclear submarines.

It would be difficult to arrange or negotiate in advance the possible redistribution of such resources and facilities. Any payments of royalties or special rents by the government would cause further problems if they were mismanaged or aimed at financial speculation.

It would be a pity if people, conscious of local economic interests, treat possible changes to the conditions of the area in which they live as a mere bargaining chip in negotiations with the state power. The provision of more devolution should mean a substantial increase of people's well-being.

Looking back at the Japanese situation, we can gain insight from the Scottish experience now that our current government has appointed a Cabinet minister for the special mission of "overcoming the population decline and revitalizing local economies."

The Scottish referendum will hopefully offer encouragement to local people who want to see democratic principles take root in their political lives.

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The reluctant warriors against Islamic State

**HUGH
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