

## Newspaper reports and the Cabinet approval ratings during the Recruit Scandal

–By the examples of Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun–

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### Abstract

Because of its great impact on the Japanese politics, the Recruit Scandal was regarded as the biggest political scandal after 1945. In addition to the arrest of numerous politicians and businessmen, the then Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita even resigned from the position to take the responsibility when the cabinet approval rating declined to the lowest level in history. At the same time, as an example of the ‘investigative journalism’, the Asahi Shimbun and other major Japanese newspapers reported actively throughout the investigation of the scandal. Thus, this study surveyed how the newspaper reports influenced on the cabinet approval ratings in the Recruit Scandal, or the newspapers’ function on the public opinion in this period. For this research purpose, the article first analyzed the details of the reports on the scandal from Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun, and put up with the hypothesis that the relation between the reports and the cabinet approval ratings was close. Then in the following part, by comparing the reports and the opinion polls with the way of quantitative analysis, the article proved the negative coefficient between the newspaper reports and the Takeshita Cabinet approval ratings. In conclusion, by plenty of reports on the Recruit Scandal, especially on the related politicians, the newspapers played the priming function on the public negative image toward the cabinet, which led to the breakdown of the cabinet eventually.

### Introduction

The term ‘Recruit Scandal’ (1988.6~1989.5)<sup>1</sup> refers to a political scandal exposed during the Takeshita Cabinet in Japan. In order to get more benefits and information from the government, Recruit Cosmos Co., one of the main subsidiaries of an information and staffing service company called Recruit Co., granted its unlisted shares to politicians, senior bureaucrats and business leaders. In fact, the celebrities involved in bribery included Yasuhiro Nakasone (former Prime Minister), Kiyichi Miyazawa (former Finance Minister), Yoshiro Mori (former Education Minister), Takao Fujinami (former Chief Cabinet Secretary), Hisashi Shinto (former President of NTT<sup>2</sup>) and so on. What is more, to take responsibility for the scandal, Premier Noboru Takeshita, resigned from the position on April 1989. As a result, the Recruit Scandal was regarded as the biggest political scandal in Japan after 1945 (Tahara 2007).

As is well known, the newspaper reports played an important role during the Recruit Scandal. On June 18<sup>th</sup> 1988, the Asahi Shimbun reported the vice mayor of Kawasaki city accepted the corruption from the Recruit Co. during a local real estate project, which was considered as the beginning of the huge political scandal (Asahi Shimbun Local News Section 1989). After this report, major Japanese newspapers such as Yomiuri Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun, Sankei Shimbun also began to investigate the facts of the scandal respectively. As a matter of fact, bribe list including former Education Minister Yoshiro Mori, former Finance Minister Kiyichi Miyazawa and many other leading figures in both political and financial circles had already been published even before the prosecution began their formal investigation on October 1988. Accordingly, the newspapers were considered to take the lead in the investigation of the Recruit Scandal (Asahi Shimbun Local News Section 1989). Furthermore, because the individual reports of the scandal had a great impact on the process of the scandal, Asahi Shimbun and other newspapers were highly valued as the ‘perfect example’ of the investigative journalism<sup>3</sup> (Komata 2009).

On the other hand, Tahara (2007) pointed out that by controlling the public opinion, the newspapers made up the bad image of some politicians in order to appeal the so-called ‘Clean and Justice’ with the prosecution. In other words, the reports in the

scandal lost the objectivity and detachment per se. Similarly, former Prime Minister Takeshita also noted the newspapers were managed by the prosecution to lead the public opinion to criticize the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Takeshita Cabinet (Mainichi Shimbun Political Section 1989). Ezoé (2009) criticized the newspapers stirred up the public to believe the Recruit Co. and some LDP politicians were guilty before the prosecution got involved into the investigation. Tsuneo Watanabe, former President of Yomiuri Shimbun, also reviewed there was a trend against the government among the newspapers during the Recruit Scandal (Ito, Mikuriya, Iio 2000).

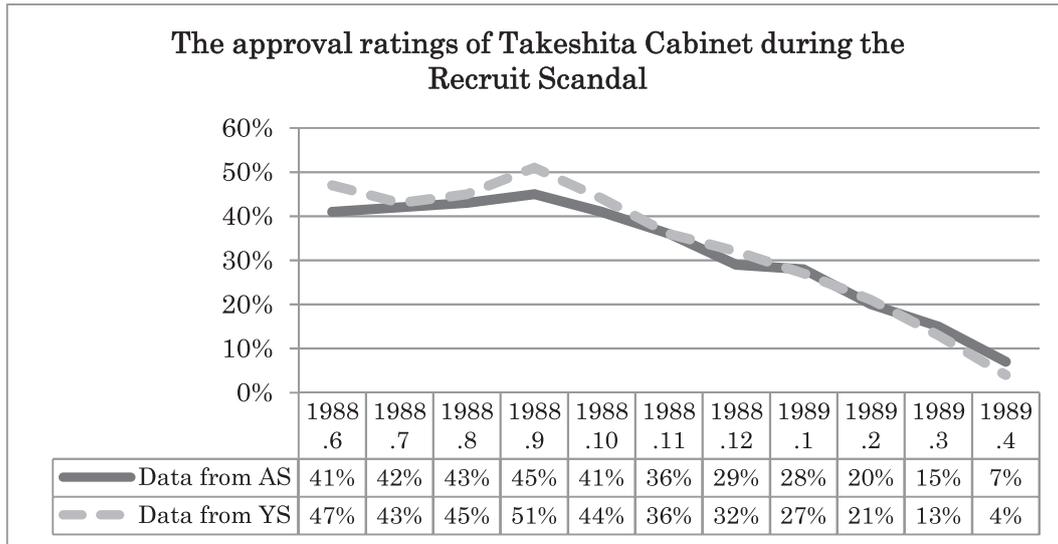
As mentioned above, it is obviously that the role of the newspaper reports during the Recruit Scandal was argued during the past 20 years. Generally speaking, the media's function can be summarized as surveillance, interpretation, socialization and manipulation (Graber 2006). In other words, informing the public and explaining are the two basic functions of the media. Weaver (1981) found that the news media played an active role in sketching our daily version of reality, or the media's agenda-setting function, by which the media effected on the public's concern. During the early period in the 1976 US presidential campaign, the newspapers were even the initiators and prime movers of television emphasis on various issues. In fact, not only on the decision of concern, the media also has an influence on the public's judge of special incidents or figures. Iyengar and Kinder (2010) suggested the media's priming function, which meant that the standards citizens used to judge a president may be substantially determined by which stories newscasts chose to cover and, consequently, which considerations were made generally accessible. As a consequence, immoderate negative reports on the politicians may harm the citizens' interest in political participation (Kabashima, Takeshita, Serikawa 2010).

However, until now, the research on the Recruit Scandal mainly focused on the introduction of the scandal (Takano 1989, Murobushi 1988), the effect on Japanese politics and the prosecution (Kunimasa 1989, Tahara 2007). Indeed, the studies on the role of Japanese newspapers during the Recruit Scandal, especially the relation between the reports and the government were still insufficient. Even if some viewpoints on this issue were referred early in this part, it is hardly to say that they are forceful because most of them were described or reviewed by the people who involved in the scandal. What was the role of newspaper reports during the investigation of the Recruit Scandal? Did the media bias or the so-called 'feeding frenzy' stimulate the deterioration of the public opinion towards Takeshita Cabinet and eventually lead to the dissolution of the cabinet? Without answering these questions, it is hard to grasp the overall situation of the scandal and the appropriate role that the media should play during a political scandal in the future. Therefore, in this article, we want to find the relation between the newspaper reports and Takeshita Cabinet approval ratings to verify the role of the media during the Recruit Scandal. Because the cabinet approval ratings are the reflection of the citizens' attitude towards the politics, it is possible by this research to get closer to the answer of the pending issue, the newspapers' influence on the public opinion in this period. At the same time, we hope this research would also provide some useful resources for the political scandal study in Japan.

Actually, according to an opinion poll published by Asahi Shimbun in April 1989, the approval rating of Takeshita Cabinet was only 7%, which was recorded as the lowest one on the history of Japanese politics. However, by looking back through the fluctuation of the approval ratings during the Recruit Scandal, we should notice the fact that the number did not slump to the worst condition immediately after the exposure of the scandal. As indicated in Figure 1, between June and September in 1988, the approval ratings of Takeshita Cabinet almost kept steady although the secretary of Premier Takeshita and some cabinet members were reported to be involved in the scandal since June. In fact, the number even increased to 45% in September. Nevertheless, things began to change after October. Approval ratings of Takeshita Cabinet dropped below 30% for the first time since the inauguration of Premier Takeshita in November 1987. Three months later, it declined to 15% and even diminished by half to 7% in April 1989. Moreover, similar changes were also shown by the statistics from Yomiuri Shimbun.

Why did the cabinet approval ratings change as we talked above during the Recruit Scandal? How did the newspapers influence on the Takeshita Cabinet approval ratings? The answers to these questions will be explored in this article.

For this research purposes, we choose the reports mainly from the Yomiuri Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun as they had the largest newspaper circulations in Japan (Fujitake 2001) and their influential reports during the Recruit Scandal as mentioned. Moreover, when we discuss the relation between the reports and the cabinet approval ratings, we will not only analyze the contents of these newspaper reports, but also use the way of quantitative analysis to demonstrate the correlation between them. Thus, in the following sections, after explaining the reason why we choose the newspapers to analyze the media's role in my research, we divide the Recruit Scandal into three stages and review the sequence of events briefly. Then we discuss the reasons of the swing in Takeshita Cabinet approval ratings and try to explain the correlation between the newspaper reports and the approval ratings in the following two sections. At last, the newspapers' influence on the public opinion will be summarized in conclusion.



**Figure 1.** The approval ratings of Takeshita Cabinet during the Recruit Scandal. AS and YS are the abbreviations of Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun.

**Source:** The data origin from the Electronic Data Base of Asahi Shimbun (Kikuzo) and Yomiuri Shimbun (Yomidasu Bunshokan)

## 1. The special role of the newspapers in Japan in 1980s

In this research, we choose the newspapers to analyze the media’s influence on the Cabinet approval ratings during the Recruit Scandal. Besides the important role of the newspapers in the investigation of the scandal mentioned above, the newspapers’ special role in Japan, especially during the era of 1980s, should also be considered as an important reason. Table 1 shows us the newspaper circulations and diffusion rates (set paper counted separately as two copies) in Japan in 1980s.

According to the Japan Newspaper Annual (1990), it is obviously that from the year of 1980 to 1989, the circulations of Japanese newspapers remained above 66 million annually, and the copies for every Japanese household were more than 1.71 on average. That is to say, both the newspaper circulations and the diffusion rates were exceptionally high in this decade. Particularly, based on the data from the Japan Newspaper Annual of 1989, the diffusion rate of Japanese newspapers in 1988 was the highest level all over the world.

Moreover, if we compare these data with the newspapers in the United States, where a lot of world famous newspapers such as New York Times and Wall Street Journal were born, it is easier for us to find the overwhelmingly strong position of the Japanese newspapers.

**Table 1.** Japanese newspaper circulations and diffusion rates from 1980 to 1989

Year	Circulation unit: 1000 copies	Copies per household
1980	66257	1.75
1981	67293	1.74
1982	68142	1.73
1983	66782	1.78
1984	67380	1.77
1985	68296	1.76
1986	68653	1.76
1987	701941	1.73
1988	71172	1.71
1989	71457	1.71

**Sources:** Japan Newspaper Annual (1990)

As Table 2 illustrates, the total newspaper circulations in the US remained almost unchanged from 1980 to 1989. Compared with Table 1, we can find that the margin of the newspaper circulations between Japan and the US was getting larger gradually each year, especially from the year of 1985. Further, if we take the factor of population<sup>4</sup> of the two countries in the decade into consideration, the advantage of the Japanese newspapers would be better understood. As a matter of fact, in contrast with the high diffusion rate of newspapers (1.76) in Japan in 1985, copies per household in the US was only 0.72. Moreover, by the year of 1990, larger disparity of the diffusion rate was observed between the two countries. Each household paid 1.69 newspapers in Japan on the average, while only 0.67 in America.

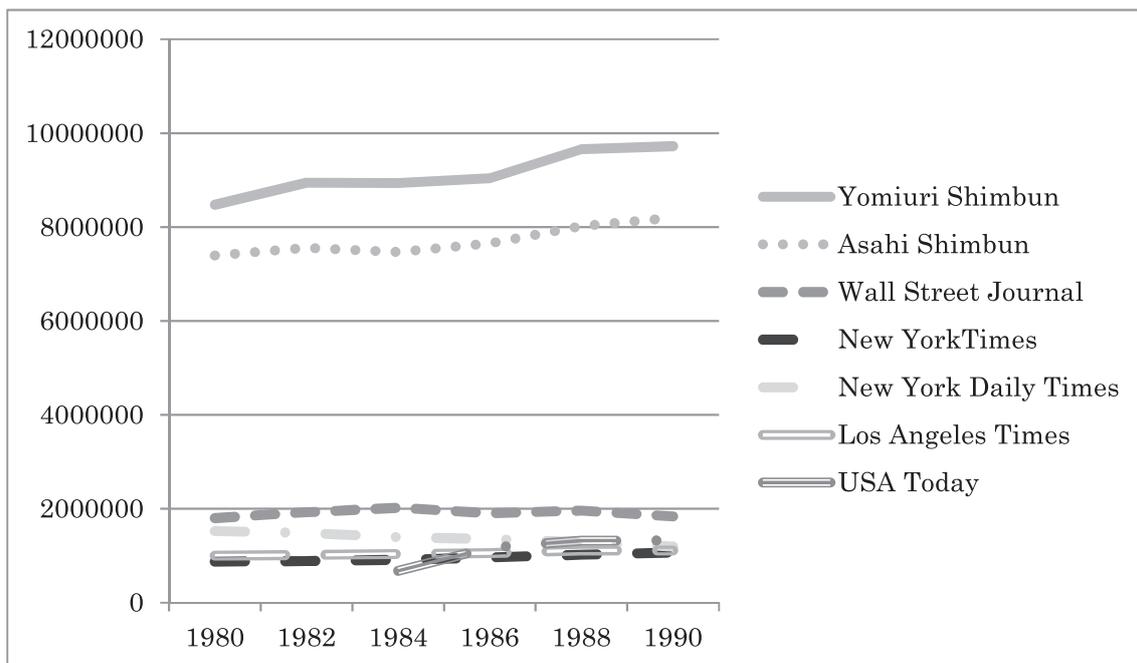
Indeed, the comparison on circulations between the two biggest newspapers<sup>5</sup> in Japan and the American national newspapers (morning) in 1980s is also observed in this part. As shown in Figure 2, the circulations of each American national newspapers, including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the New York Daily Times, the Los Angeles Times and the USA Daily (founded in September 1982), were almost under 2 million copies during the 1980s. In contrast, the total circulations of the

**Table 2.** Newspaper circulations in the US from 1980 to 1989(unit: 1000 copies)

Year	Morning	Evening	Total
1980	29414	32787	62202
1981	30552	30878	61431
1982	33174	29313	62487
1983	33842	28802	62645
1984	35683	27657	63340
1985	36362	26405	62766
1986	37441	25061	62502
1987	39124	23702	62826
1988	40453	22242	62695
1989	40759	21890	62649

**Source:** Newspaper Association of America

<http://www.naa.org/Trends-and-Numbers/Circulation-Volume/Newspaper-Circulation-Volume.aspx>



**Figure 2.** The circulations of major newspapers (morning) in Japan and USA from 1980 to 1990

**Source:** Japan Newspaper Annual (1981 to 1991)

Yomiuri Shimbun and the Asahi Shimbun, the two biggest newspapers in Japan, were above 15 million in the same period, which accounted for more than half of the whole circulations of the Japanese morning newspapers<sup>6</sup>. In other words, as national newspapers, the Yomiuri Shimbun and the Asahi Shimbun were more influential in Japan than their American counterparts did in the US in 1980s. Therefore, we choose the reports from the two newspapers as the examples to observe the role of the newspaper reports in this study.

Furthermore, the high reliability of the Japanese people on newspapers is another reason for us to choose the newspapers in this research. According to the Investigation of Public Reliability on Newspapers in Japan, which published by NSK (Nihon Shimbun Kyokai, the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association) in 1992, the Japanese people chose the newspaper as the most reliable sources among the radio, TV, the newspaper and the magazine to understand the social issues (Sunohara, Takeichi 2004). Concretely speaking, 70% of the respondents preferred to analyze political issues based on the reports from newspapers, while 64% felt the newspaper resources were the most reliable and 68% of them considered the reports from newspapers as the most accurate resources. Therefore, as a matter of fact, the newspapers took priority over other media during the people's recognition and judgment on the political issues (Kato 2001).

Meanwhile, we have to admit the considerable influence of the TV media in Japan from 1980s, especially the new style night news shows were released among major private key broadcasting stations, which recorded very high audience ratings. In fact, as major Japanese TV companies were associated with newspaper companies, the contents of the scandal reports on a newspaper in the morning were broadcasted in the night by the TV show programs. However, due to the limited time and resources, we are not able to analyze the TV media in details. Accordingly, we only observe the influence of newspaper reports in this article and try to analyze the influence of the TV media in Recruit Scandal in future studies.

## 2. Stages of the Recruit Scandal

Before analyzing the newspaper reports and cabinet approval ratings during the Recruit Scandal, it is necessary to review the case in details. In general, from June 1988 (the scandal was firstly reported by Asahi Shimbun) to May 1989, the scandal can be divided into 3 stages.

The first stage was from June to September in 1988. After the unlisted shares bribery committed by Cosmo Co. was reported by Asahi Shimbun, the Chairman of Recruit Co. Hiromasa Ezoe and the President of the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Japan Economic Newspaper) Kou Morita resigned from their positions successively<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, as the investigation of the prosecution had not started until October, no politicians were arrested although many of them, including Premier Takeshita and the Finance Minister Miyazawa were reported to be involved in the scandal. However, the prosecution decided to take action as they felt more evidence of the scandal could be confirmed after the bribery details conducted by the executive secretary of Cosmos Co. Hiroshi Matsubara were reported on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1988<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, the period from October 1988 to March 1989 should be regarded as the second stage the scandal. By the chance of the 'Matsubara report' mentioned above, the newspapers concentrated the critics on not only Matsubara, but also Chairman Ezoe and the whole Recruit Group. As a result, on October 20<sup>th</sup>, Matsubara was accused of bribery and arrested by the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office. One month later, Ezoe appeared in the House of Representatives as the witness for the first time. Before the Premier's resignation in April 1989, NTT President Shinto, the Justice Minister Hasegawa, Governor of the Economic Planning Agency Harada and many other prominent figures resigned and got charged because of accepting the unlisted shares from Recruit Group.

Finally, as Prime Minister Takeshita resigned on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1989, the Recruit Scandal entered into the third stage. In this period, the prosecution transferred their main investigation from government officials to the politicians. In addition to Premier Takeshita, former Finance Minister Kiyichi Miyazawa, Chief Secretary of LDP Shintaro Abe, who was regarded as the successor of Takeshita to be the Premier of Japan, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Takao Fujinami and many other influential politicians were charged. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, the prosecution declared the formal investigation on the Recruit Scandal was finished.

## 3. The analysis of the cabinet approval ratings during the Recruit Scandal

### (1). 1988.6~1988.9

As we discussed above, the cabinet approval ratings changed from 41% when the scandal reported by the Asahi Shimbun in June to 45% in September after the 'Matsubara Report'. That is to say, the public opinion on Takeshita Cabinet was not damaged so much as expected.

The reasons can be summarized as follows. First, even if some politicians were reported to accept the bribery from Cosmo

Co., most of the newspapers failed to show more details about the corruption like the motivation of the bribery, transfer routes of the unlisted shares and so on. Take the editorials from both Asahi and Yomiuri for example.

**Table 3.** The Recruit Scandal related editorials of Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun from June to September in 1988.

Editorial	Asahi Shimbun	Yomiuri Shimbun
1988.7.8	Recruit Scandal destroyed the base of the tax reform <sup>9</sup>	Tax reform should not be postponed because of the scandal
1988.7.22	The similarity between Recruit Scandal and Shokusan Scandal	The differences between Recruit Scandal and Shokusan Scandal
1988.7.30	Ezoe should appear in the House of Representatives as a witness	It is urgently necessary to realize the tax reform
1988.8.10	Comments on Meidenko <sup>10</sup> Scandal	Comments on Meidenko Scandal
1988.8.26	Ezoe should appear in the House of Representatives as a witness	The investigation of the scandal should not be the tool of political strife
1988.9.7	The facts of the scandal should be investigated immediately	The investigation should not be the tool of political strife

As shown in Table 3, Asahi and Yomiuri mainly argued over the order of priority between the tax reform and the investigation of the Recruit Scandal without referring on the details of the scandal. Meanwhile, the request of urging Ezoe to appear in the House of Representatives as a witness also showed that the newspapers needed more evidence to verify the fact of the scandal. Thus, both Takeshita and Miyazawa denied their involvement in the scandal, by which they prevented the public opinion on the cabinet from getting worse to some extent.

In addition, as the condition of Emperor Showa<sup>11</sup> got worse from August, a considerable number of reporters in the press were asked to transfer to the ‘Emperor news crew’, by which the press’s attention on Recruit Scandal was distracted (Asahi Shimbun Local News Section 1989).

## (2). 1988.10~1989.3

As mentioned in last part, the approval ratings of Takeshita Cabinet dropped sharply from 41% to 29% during the second stage of the scandal, and even slumped below 15% three months later in March 1989. In fact, after the prosecution declared their formal investigation at the end of October, more details on the scandal began to be reported by the newspapers. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, NTT President Hisashi Shinto was reported by the fact of accepting the unlisted shares from Recruit Group by his secretary. Later on, the newspapers published that 10000 unlisted shares of Recruit Group were transferred to former Vice-Minister of Education Takaishi. Meanwhile, the bribery details of other politicians such as Fujinami, Miyazawa, Ibuki and Hamada<sup>12</sup> were also listed. Especially in the editorial on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1988, Asahi Shimbun criticized these politicians severely.

*“The corruption fact of these politicians and their denial on it make us doubt their credit not only as leaders but also as human beings. Why did they hide the fact? What do they still hide? We should investigate more by all means. This is only a start” (More details are waiting to be discovered, Asahi Shimbun, 11/22 1988)*

Moreover, despite of the objection from other parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) passed “The Bill of Consumption tax” in November, which would tax daily consumption 3% for the first time after the war. All of these factors resulted in the approval rating dropping to 29% (Asahi Shimbun, December 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) in December.

On December 9<sup>th</sup> (one day after the opinion poll was released), Kiyichi Miyazawa resigned from the Finance Minister. As the first cabinet member who resigned from the position after the scandal, Miyazawa’s resignation was significant. Asahi Shimbun predicted on the next day that if the LDP did not clean up the political world immediately, the situation of the approval ratings would be worse and worse. The only way was to reflect on themselves by reacting to the people’s criticism, and reshuffle the cabinet. In fact, after Miyazawa’s resignation, NTT president Shinto, the Justice Minister Hasegawa, the head of the Economic Planning Agency Harada resigned respectively in December and the following month.

However, there were still another two factors might effect on the approval ratings during this period we should mention. The first was the death of Emperor Showa, who led Japan for around 62 years since 1926. Similar to the situation we mentioned in August 1988, to the Japanese press, the health of the Emperor was always a big topic. That is to say, it would attract rather of their interests from other cases including the scandal, as Table 4 shows below.

**Table 4.** The Recruit Scandal related reports from Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun both in December 1988 and the following month.

	Reports from AS	Reports from YS
1988.12	589	453
1989.1	234	189

**Note:** These data were counted by the use of automated keyword-based searches of the online news archives of Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun. In both cases, the keyword was Recruit Scandal. Therefore, the statistics only showed the quantities of the reports without referring the original sizes of the reports on the newspapers. AS and YS are the abbreviations of Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun.

In addition, during this period, Takeshita Cabinet decided to carry out the ‘Hometown Creation Project’, which planned to distribute 100 million yen as the special deliver tax to every municipality. This policy benefited almost all the Japanese citizens, especially the people in rural areas. Thus, the approval rating in these areas slightly increase to 36% (Asahi Shimbun, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1989), despite the data still lingered below 30% (Asahi Shimbun, January 26 1989) as a whole all over the country.

From February 1989, as the prosecution expanded their investigation, more related figures including NTT President Shinto and Vice Labor Minister Kato were arrested. Meanwhile, the newspapers also released more corruption details on other politicians in LDP who involved with NTT and Recruit Co., by which created an image that not only the Takeshita Cabinet, but also the whole LDP were not clean. Here is the editorial on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1989 by Asahi Shimbun.

*“By investigating more on the NTT route, we can find there are much more politicians still being hidden behind the scandal. And for sure, most of them are LDP members”*

Undoubtedly, this declaration seriously damaged people’s reliance on the cabinet consisted of LDP members. Thus, the approval rating fell to 15% according to the opinion poll (Asahi Shimbun, March 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>).

**(3). 1989.4**

On April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1989, another Japanese newspaper Mainichi Shimbun (Daily News) published the fact that Recruit Co. supplied 100 million yen to some of the LDP politicians as political finance and 1/5 of the money were accepted by the faction whose leader was Premier Takeshita. Moreover, the fact was reported again on April 5<sup>th</sup> by Asahi Shimbun and got confirmed in the budget committee of the House of Representatives. In other words, the Prime Minister’s declaration that he never got money from Recruit Group before was actually a lie. Consequently, the approval rating dropped to the lowest level after Takeshita’s inauguration as Premier. On April 25<sup>th</sup>, he resigned from the position because of his dishonesty to the citizens.

As discussed above, although we pointed out some factors that might affect the approval ratings, the newspaper reports, as an important factor acted in all the stages of the scandal. Thus, it is possible to put up with the hypothesis that the relation between newspaper reports and the approval ratings was close. In the next section, we will use the quantitative analysis to verify this hypothesis.

**4. The relation between newspaper reports and the approval ratings-verified by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson’s r)**

In order to demonstrate the close relation between the newspaper reports and the approval ratings in the Recruit Scandal further, we choose the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson’s r) as a tool to verify the viewpoint in this part.

Generally speaking, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson’s r) tells the strength and linear relationship between two variables. The value of Pearson’s r fluctuates from -1 to 1, which means a strong negative and positive relationship respectively. When there is no correlation between two variables, the Pearson’s r is 0 (Kato 2014). In order to explain the strength more easily, we use the absolute value of the data as Table 5 shows.

Importantly, sometimes the correlation maybe misleading when the outliers exist for the data is not robust (Wilcox 2012). Therefore, the correlation should not be considered as a causal relationship. In this part we only talk about the Pearson’s r to observe the correlation by cutting the outliers. Moreover, because Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun ranked as the two biggest newspapers in Japan and both acted actively during the Recruit Scandal, we use them as the representatives to discuss the correlation between newspaper reports and the approval ratings.

First, Table 6 shows the total reports from the two newspapers and the approval ratings of Takeshita Cabinet during the Recruit Scandal.

**Table 5.** The strength of the correlation shown by the absolute value of Pearson's r

0~0.2	Almost no correlation
0.2~0.4	Weak correlation
0.4~0.7	Relatively strong correlation
0.7~1.0	Strong correlation

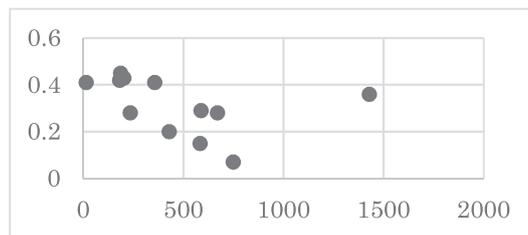
Source: Sakata 2006

**Table 6.** Reports and the approval ratings from Asahi and Yomiuri during the Recruit Scandal

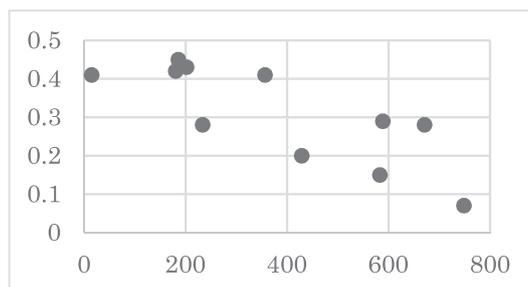
	Reports from AS	Reports from YS	Approval ratings AS	Approval ratings YS
1988.6	15	6	41%	47.3%
1988.7	181	123	42%	43%
1988.8	202	148	43%	44.5%
1988.9	186	159	45%	50.6%
1988.10	357	257	41%	44%
1988.11	1429	501	36%	36%
1988.12	589	453	29%	31.9%
1989.1	234	189	28%	27.4%
1989.2	429	403	20%	21.3%
1989.3	583	415	15%	12.9%
1989.4	749	444	7%	3.9%

Note: The way to count the numbers of the newspaper reports was the same with Table 4

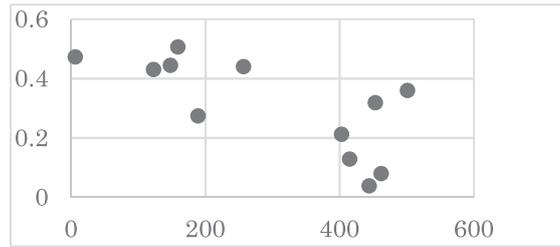
By using the data above, we can get the linear relationship and the correlation value of each item (Reports and Approval ratings by AS, Reports and Approval ratings by YS) as the following figures. Obviously, the linear relationship between Asahi Shimbun reports and the cabinet approval rating on November 1988 was the outlier compared to the others in Figure 3. Thus, we cut the data in this month and check the correlation again in Figure 4.



**Figure 3.** The relationship between the reports from Asahi Shimbun and the approval ratings (the scatter chart)



**Figure 4.** The relationship in Figure 3 without the data of November 1988 (the scatter chart)



**Figure 5.** The relationship between the reports from Yomiuri Shimbun and the approval ratings (the scatter chart)

Based on the scatter charts of Figure 4 and Figure 5, we can find that the cabinet approval ratings tended to be lower as the newspapers increased their reports related on the Recruit Scandal. In other words, the public opinion on Takeshita Cabinet turned to be negative when massive reports occurred on newspapers from June 1988 to April 1989. The Pearson’s *r* of the newspapers and approval ratings (Table 7) also prove this relationship. Although the data are different when we compare the two newspapers with the approval ratings respectively, the similar negative coefficients (-0.798 in the case of Asahi Shimbun and -0.720 for Yomiuri Shimbun, both at 1% level of significance) indicate the strong negative relation between the newspaper reports and the approval ratings on the whole of the scandal.

**Table 7.** The value of Pearson’s *r* of Figure 4 and Figure 5.

	Pearson’s <i>r</i>
Figure 4	-0.798**
Figure 5	-0.720**

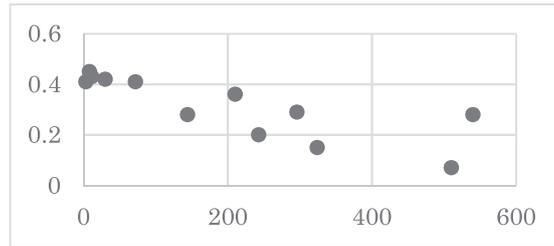
**Note:** \*\*at 1% level of significance

Furthermore, if we concentrate the reports on the politicians or bureaucrats in the database as in Table 8, the correlation turns to be stronger. As shown in Figure 6, Figure 7 and Table 9, the Pearson’s *r* reaches to -0.816( $p < 0.01$ ) when we observe the relation between the reports of Asahi Shimbun related to politicians and bureaucrats, which means a higher negative coefficient compared with the case of the whole reports we talked above. Meanwhile, the observation on Yomiuri Shimbun also shows the same situation.

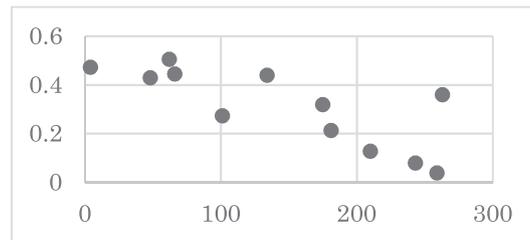
**Table 8.** Reports (on politicians and bureaucrats) and the approval ratings from Asahi and Yomiuri

	Reports from AS	Reports from YS	Approval ratings AS	Approval ratings YS
1988.6	3	4	41%	47.3%
1988.7	30	48	42%	43%
1988.8	11	66	43%	44.5%
1988.9	8	62	45%	50.6%
1988.10	72	134	41%	44%
1988.11	210	263	36%	36%
1988.12	296	175	29%	31.9%
1989.1	144	101	28%	27.4%
1989.2	243	181	20%	21.3%
1989.3	324	210	15%	12.9%
1989.4	510	259	7%	3.9%

**Note:** The way to count the numbers of the newspaper reports was the same with Table 4



**Figure 6.** The relationship between the politicians and bureaucrats related reports from Asahi Shimbun and the approval ratings (the scatter chart)



**Figure 7.** The linear relationship between the politicians and bureaucrats related reports from Yomiuri Shimbun and the approval ratings (the scatter chart)

**Table 9.** Pearson’s r of Figure 6 and Figure 7

	Pearson’s r
Figure 6	-0.816*
Figure 7	-0.782**

**Note:** \*at 5%, \*\*at 1% level of significance

According to the analysis above, even if it is insufficient for us to draw the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between the newspaper reports and the approval ratings, the strong negative correlation between them can be verified. This negative correlation means the intensive critics on the government and LDP Party by the newspapers effectively harm the citizens’ reliance on the government, which eventually led to the collapse of Takeshita Cabinet. By covering on the stories related to the politicians and the scandal, the newspapers made the citizens choose to believe the politicians and bureaucrats should be responsible for the political scandal.

In fact, there are more materials can be used to verify this observation. As mentioned in the book “The Reports of Recruit Scandal” (Asahi Shimbun Local News Section 1989), the newspaper reports led the investigation of the scandal. Indeed, Norio Munakata, who worked as a chief public prosecutor during Recruit Scandal pointed out as follows.

*“The newspaper reports equals to public opinion. If the prosecution does not pursue criminal charges in the scandal reported by the newspaper, we may lose our authority among the public.”(The truth of Hiromasa Ezoe, p.150, 2009)*

In other words, when the newspapers believed the politicians and bureaucrats who involved in the scandal were criminal, so did the public. By which the reports showed a strong negative impact on the Takeshita Cabinet approval ratings.

## Conclusion

In this article, we used the reports from Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun to observe the relation between the newspaper reports and the cabinet approval ratings during the Recruit Scandal. In order to achieve this research purpose, we analyzed the details of these reports in each stage of the scandal and their possible influence on the approval ratings of Takeshita Cabinet. Then we chose the Pearson’s r as a way to prove the close relation between them. By comparing the scatter charts and the Pearson’s r, we observed the strong negative coefficient between the reports and the approval ratings based on the opinion polls, which meant the

newspapers played an important role on the citizens' negative image towards the politicians in Recruit Scandal. This negative image led to the breakdown of Takeshi Cabinet eventually. Thus, we can summarize the newspapers' role in the Recruit Scandal as the priming function as we mentioned at the beginning of this article.

In fact, including the priming function, the study on the function of newspapers or other media in the past mainly focused on the case of voting action and election (Kabashima 2007). As a kind of trial, this study intends to expand the scope to other directions such as the observation on political scandal especially by the way of quantitative analysis. After analyzing the formulation of the newspaper reports in Recruit Scandal, we find the importance of the surveillance on the politics from the media in a democratic society. On the other hand, we should also emphasize the necessity of objectivity, or the 'non-partisan principle' addressed by Asahi Shimbun<sup>13</sup>. Instead of guiding people's negative image with preconception on the politicians as arbitrators, the newspapers should offer more unbiased materials to the public as reporters.

However, the discussion in this article only observed the newspapers' role in the Recruit Scandal, without mentioning the function of the TV media. Besides, when we summarized the numbers of the newspaper reports in this research, we failed to take the original sizes of these reports into consideration, by which the situation might turn to the paradox that a big front page article and a small rear page article were both counted as the same one. Therefore, the technology of counting the reports should be improved in the future.

Meanwhile, when we talked about the reports, we only emphasized the contents per se without checking the resources of these reports. For instance, how the newspapers got the details of the scandal even before the prosecution's formal investigation? Were the materials collected by the newspapers independently or leaked from the opposition parties to the newspapers on purpose as some LDP member speculated (Mainichi Shimbun Political Section 1989)? That is to say, in order to compete for more scoops, did the newspapers perform as the so called 'Guard dog' (Donohue 1995), which meant sentries not for the whole community, but for some particular groups who had huge power and influence to create and control their own security systems? These questions should also be discussed in the further research.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The prosecution declared the investigation of the Recruit Scandal finished on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1989
- <sup>2</sup> The largest telecommunications company in Japan
- <sup>3</sup> According to the definition given by the Asahi Shimbun local news section, the targets of the investigative journalism only refer to the bureaucracy and the political corruption (Fujitake 2001)
- <sup>4</sup> According to the data from the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>), the population in the US was nearly twice as large as that in Japan from 1980 to 1990.
- <sup>5</sup> Japan Newspaper Annual (1981-1991)
- <sup>6</sup> Based on the data published by Japan Audit Bureau of circulations, the total circulation of Japanese newspapers (morning) per year was around 23 million in 1980s (Fujitake 2001)
- <sup>7</sup> Kou Morida was reported to accept the unlisted shares from Ezo by Asahi Shimbun during July 1988
- <sup>8</sup> Matsubara's bribery on a member of Congress was photographed surreptitiously and broadcasted by Japan Television
- <sup>9</sup> The Liberal Democratic Party tried to reform the tax system by introducing 5% consumption tax at this period, whereas other parties objected to the plan strongly
- <sup>10</sup> Another political scandal related to the unlisted shares in 1988
- <sup>11</sup> The 124<sup>th</sup> Emperor of Japan
- <sup>12</sup> Both Ibuki and Hamada were the Diet members belonged to the LDP
- <sup>13</sup> Japan Newspaper Annual (1988)

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