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# Politics of Symbolization:

## A Constructionist Approach to Political Communication Studies

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### Introduction

Mass communication research, which emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, was dedicated to several themes in its early stages, such as wartime propaganda, the rhetoric of political leaders' speeches, and the effects of election campaigns. These research themes have shown that political science in the 20th century could only be established by considering mass media's political influence. The intersection of political science and mass communication theory eventually became known as political communication.

The "linguistic turn" movement in the 20th century has significantly impacted political communication research. This phenomenon can be characterized as a shift in perspective regarding how we observe humans and society, achieved through a thoughtful reflection on language. Although the concept of the linguistic turn originated in philosophy, it evolved into a general term encompassing an intellectual revolution that was not confined to a specific field. This transformation extended to various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, with the field of political communication studies being no exception.

Following the linguistic turn, "media discourse" has become the keyword of political communication studies, reshaping the traditional understanding of "political communication." The term no longer carries the old connotation of a "one-way flow of information" from sender to receiver. Instead, political communication refers to the process of constructing common perceptions, feelings, and norms using discourse and representations in public media spaces.

The research series analyzing media discourses, conducted by William Gamson, has played a critical role in this paradigm shift (Gamson 1988, 1992; Gamson & Mogdiliani 1987, 1989). Gamson was a prominent theorist in the study of social movements, particularly for his contributions to the "resource mobilization theory" and he published a series of excellent works in the 1960s and the 1970s (Gamson 1968, 1975). Gamson then moved from the University of Michigan to Boston College in 1982, where he founded the Media Research and Action Project. He

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wrote a series of influential articles on the relationship between mass media and public opinion. He developed a “constructionist” approach to political communication research.

The constructionist approach of Gamson does not refer to a rigorous and systematic methodology. Instead, it refers to an attempt to describe new trends in the study of mass media and public opinion, and to consider their theoretical implications. The characteristics of this approach are as follows (Gamson 1988)<sup>i</sup>. (1) Political communication research, which concentrates on the study of electoral campaigns, tends to diversify its interests into various issues, domains, and cases. (2) The short-term, one-way effects and influences of mass media on public opinion have been relativized, and media and public opinion have become understood as a system of discourse construction that is deeply interrelated yet independent of each other. (3) Attention has been paid to several concepts to analyze the cognitive mechanisms by which humans assign meaning to events, such as frames, schemas, and narratives.

Nearly half a century later, the research trends observed by Gamson in the 1980s have endured. Scholars worldwide have convincingly embraced his early proclamation regarding the emergence of a constructionist paradigm in political communication studies. Media discourse has become an essential topic in political communication studies, indicating that a linguistic turn has transpired in political communication research.

This study aims to delve further into the significance of the “linguistic turn” promoted by constructionists in political communication research. Introducing a new theoretical perspective on the “politics of symbolization” serves this purpose. The study is dedicated to presenting the idea of “the politics of symbolization” and positioning this theoretical perspective as a development and deepening of the “linguistic turn” in political communication research.

## Invisible Power and Political Symbols

Japanese political sociologist Yutaka Oishi regarded Gamson’s research as exemplifying constructionism in political communication studies and evaluated it highly. Gamson did not necessarily actively endorse the term “political communication” research. Based on the theoretical perspective of the resource mobilization theory in social movement studies, Gamson pioneered a groundbreaking research approach to mass media and public opinion. His approach freely transcended the traditional fields of political science, sociology, and media studies, displaying considerable intellectual creativity. Oishi evaluated this emerging cross-disciplinary approach as a developmental extension of political communication research (Oishi 1998).

Oishi argued that the communication process should be understood as a process of exercising power. He argued for the importance of expanding the scope of power

studies to include the issue of “invisible power.” Invisible power is a general term for various concepts that focus on the “potential exercise of power” (Oishi 2005:11). For example, if a certain word influences people’s cognitive formation, withholding the expression of their political will or eliciting voluntary obedience, these are examples of invisible power. As theories of power develop their horizon of thought at the level of human cognitive formation, it is natural for concepts such as representation and discourse to play a central role. It is easy to see why political communication studies have been discussed using constructionist vocabulary.

In essence, Oishi emphasized Gamson’s concept of media discourse to develop his theory of invisible power. It is important to note that Oishi attempted to connect the study of media discourse to the study of political symbols. Using Edelman’s theory of political symbols and Cobb and Elder’s work, which was greatly influenced by Edelman, Oishi reinterprets Gamson’s study of media discourse as a theory of political symbols.

The aim is to connect the concept of media discourse with policy theory through political symbols. Oishi clearly stated that while there are various political symbols, such as human beings, buildings, and rituals, the most important are linguistic symbols (Oishi 1998:203). This is a natural decision because policy theory is the target. Policies are produced in the form of voluminous documents, and if they hold significance for a large portion of the nation, they become subjects of intense diet and mass media debates. As policies are discussed using many words, examining how the decision-making process is affected by the introduction of words as powerful symbols is extremely important. Oishi discusses the importance of paying attention to the process by which policies are disseminated as “words,” emphasizing that the perspective of “policy as a political symbol” is valid in light of these circumstances (Oishi 1998:203). For this reason, Oishi emphasized Gamson’s study of media discourse.

Oishi later advocated for the active introduction of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in political communication studies. CDA has its origins to critical linguistics, which emerged in the 1970s and has since been intertwined with the social theories of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Jürgen Habermas, and others to construct a theoretical framework for the critical examination of the process of reproducing unequal social relations through language. As exemplified by Norman Fairclough, a key figure in CDA, clear ideas on language use as a mechanism of exercising power were developed. These ideas strongly resonated with Oishi’s approach to political communication. It is fair to assert that CDA was anticipated to provide detailed linguistic insights that were lacking in existing social theory.

## Language as Symbol

The introduction of CDA into political communication research has undeniably

held great significance; CDA has explored methods of detailed linguistic analysis, offering excellent insights into language and power. These contributions are indeed meaningful. However, it should be noted that CDA has maintained a strong orientation toward formalization (e.g., Fairclough 2003), becoming highly successful worldwide. Ironically, the success of CDA has given rise to a discourse analysis that takes language for granted. Japanese philosopher Karatani once remarked:

Linguists often fail to retain a sense of wonder about language, whereas economists often fail to do the same regarding commodities. No one who has never thought of it with a sense of wonder can tell what language or commodities are. (Karatani 1990:236)

If we focus on language to deepen our understanding of invisible power, we must explore the “magic” inherent in language. The most critical element here is a theoretical perspective that considers the “magic” of language rather than detailed linguistic knowledge. Regarding the “magic” of language, we must understand that language essentially functions as a symbol. Toshihiko Izutsu, a Japanese Islamic scholar and accomplished linguist, provides valuable suggestions on this matter.

Toshihiko Izutsu initiated his linguistic research based on the literature on symbolic studies. In *Language and Magic: Studies in the Magical Function of Speech*, published in 1956, he expressed:

I have made a beginning by assuming that both language and magic may with some confidence be traced back ultimately to the basic need of the human mind of forever providing itself with symbolic versions of experience, that is, in short, to the natural proclivity of man towards symbol-making. As regards the mutual relation between the two, it has been suggested that magic may possibly antedate the evolution of language, for such an elaborate and high form of symbolism as human language could hardly have arisen except in those places where the lower processes of symbolization were already in exuberant growth. (Izutsu 1956:8)

What Izutsu refers to as a person’s intrinsic tendency toward symbolic formation aligns with what Susanne Langer describes as “the desire for symbolization.” Langer’s concept of the “desire for symbolization” serves as the theoretical basis for this study. When he embarked on his study of language, he emphasized the critical significance of the study of symbols promoted by philosophers like Ernst Cassirer and Langer. Izutsu initiated his language study based on their insight that it was the most highly refined system of symbols.

Political communication research should emulate Izutsu’s strategy. In other words, political communication research should not establish linguistics or CDA as its foundation but rather embrace “symbol studies,” encompassing these two fields.

To approach the “magic” of language, we must shed light on its function as a symbol. Thus, linguistics and CDA must draw suggestions from symbolic studies.

The study of “symbol studies” cannot be confined to a single field like linguistics; instead, it intersects with anthropology, psychoanalysis, logic, developmental psychology, animal behavior, philosophy, sociology, literature, and other studies, including linguistics. “Symbol studies” represents the convergence of insights from various fields, transcending their boundaries, especially those considering the “magical powers” highlighted by Karatani. Although it is extremely difficult to paint a complete picture of “symbol studies,” it would be beneficial for contemporary political communication studies to retrace its intellectual roots.

In the subsequent sections, we explore research achievements in symbol studies within political science, history, and philosophy. Based on this discussion, the latter part of this paper briefly presents a theoretical perspective on the “politics of symbolization.”

## Symbolic Forms of Governance

Charles Merriam, often regarded as the father of modern political science, pioneered emphasizing the importance of studying political symbols in modern political science. Merriam, a key figure of the “Chicago School” in political science, started as a lecturer at the University of Chicago in 1900 and remained there throughout his career. In June of the same year, he visited Berlin and witnessed German national elections, witnessing the Nazis emerging as the leading party for the first time (Saito 1973:4). As Takumi Sato discusses in detail in *The Myth of Mass Propaganda*, the Social Democrats waged a fierce “symbolic struggle” against the rapidly advancing Nazis (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) in this election (Sato 1992). It is easy to imagine that witnessing an unparalleled example of symbolic politics on a massive and spectacular scale prompted Merriam to reflect on Miranda and Credenda.

Merriam contends that examining power’s front and back faces, encompassing positive and negative elements in each period is crucial to understanding political power (Merriam 1934). The front face of power attracts and convinces people, legitimizing political power and establishing justice. However, the back includes aspects that make people dislike and distrust politics, such as violence, deception, corruption, and rigidity. This implies that to understand the stability and strength of political power in a given period, one must meticulously and comprehensively assess how people are captivated by the front faces of political power and the extent to which they dislike and distrust its back faces.

Miranda and Credenda represent the public faces of political power, both serving as ways to justify political power. Miranda justifies power by appealing to human emotions, whereas Credenda attempts to justify power through appeals to human

reason. Miranda was conceived as the subject for the study of political symbols.

It is important to note here the idea of “symbolic forms of governance” (Merriam 1934), that Merriam introduced in explaining Miranda. Symbolic forms of governance vary widely, as they include monuments, music, flags, ornaments, statues, uniforms, stories, history, carefully orchestrated ceremonies, and mass demonstrations with marches and speeches. Through these symbolic forms, he emphasized the increasing importance of contemporary political science to investigate the process of creating strong impressions, captivating people, and emotionally mobilizing them by appealing to their visual, auditory, and aesthetic senses.

Merriam’s discussion of symbolic forms of governance provided a basic outline of an idea, leaving a detailed and thorough study of political symbols to subsequent scholars. Harold Lasswell was among the researchers who deliberately tackled Merriam’s challenge. While a comprehensive view of Lasswell’s research on political symbols is challenging, we can examine his book on political power, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Research*, published in 1950, considered one of his most significant works. This book was written as a byproduct of the “Wartime Communications Research Project” established at the Library of Congress through a donation from the Rockefeller Foundation shortly before the outbreak of World War II (Lasswell & Kaplan 1950). The central mission of the project was to develop a theoretical framework for the study of mass communication, which required theoretical examinations of power and communication. *Power and Society* are products of these theoretical considerations. In other words, the book is understood as a theory of political power and a basic study of mass communication.

Interestingly, this book was not written solely by Lasswell but was co-authored by Abraham Kaplan, a scholar of the philosophy of language. Kaplan, who had been involved in semiotics and semantics for many years, first introduced his book by noting that, as a philosopher, he had a deep interest in symbolism (Lasswell & Kaplan 1950). In other words, although this book is about political power, it is the product of a collaboration between a political scientist and a philosopher with a strong interest in symbolism. Clearly, symbol studies are important pillars of the book, and political-symbol studies are inextricably linked to the theory of political power. For Lasswell, there is a significant difference between a mere “symbol” and a “political symbol.” Political symbols play an important role in exercising power. This view is the most basic guideline for symbol analysis in political science.

## A History of Symbolic Politics

The most sophisticated scholarly work addressing the research question of symbolic forms of governance, as posed by Merriam, was undertaken by George Mosse, who studied the “History of Symbolic Politics.” In his 1975 book

*Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbols and Popular Culture Leading to Nazism*, German historian Mosse proposed a significantly new interpretation of the rise of fascism in the interwar period that Merriam had witnessed firsthand (Mosse 1975). Before his work changed people's understanding of the rise of fascism, it was common to frame it exclusively as a particular pathology of interwar German society. This view has come to be seen as lacking validity, at least in today's academic research.

Mosse's highly influential work led to the view of 20th-century mass politics as an outgrowth of the "new politics" that had developed since the 18th century. Nazi mass propaganda came to be seen not as a notable exception in Western modernity but as an outgrowth of the symbolic form of the people's worship of the people themselves that emerged in the French Revolution (Mosse 1975). Similarly, it is now necessary to rethink how "new politics" developed in Japan's modern and contemporary period while incorporating the techniques of symbolic politics of the preceding Western societies (Ariyama 2004:236).

Media historian Takumi Sato delved into the significance of Mosse's discussion of the "new politics" for media studies. Sato, who translated *The Nationalization of the Masses*, emphasizes in his commentary that Mosse was consistently critical of studying Nazism from viewpoints of "propaganda" and "manipulation" of the masses (Sato 1994). Rather than discussing the "manipulation" of the masses by the elite, the emphasis of research should lie in understanding the experience of the masses actively "participating" in politics through symbols and forming their own identity through these symbols. The analysis should not solely examine how one-sided "manipulation" of popular consciousness occurred but should delve into the complex process of "mediation," where symbols were linked to interests and concrete actions (Sato 1994:363).

The Nazis, or Adolf Hitler, are often cited in journalistic discussions as perhaps the most famous example in history of the power of modern media. The significance of this clear paradigm shift in Nazi studies must be carefully examined by those involved in political communication research. It is necessary to understand that terms such as "urge toward symbols" (Mosse 1975:8) and "aesthetics of politics" (Mosse 1975:45) that appear in Mosse's writings are not mere expressive devices but inevitably emerge from his theoretical perspective. Mosse's language of the history of symbolic politics has undeniably enriched our understanding of the symbolism of politics and the fundamental theme of why politics requires symbols.

## The Linguistic Turn in Political Science

Murray Edelman was among the first to practice the "linguistic turn" in modern political science. As a political scientist, Edelman is consistently committed to studying political symbolism. He understood the importance of studying political



language as a political symbol more deeply than anyone else.

Edelman was born in 1919, received his degree from the University of Illinois, was an associate professor there, and later became a professor at the University of Wisconsin (Hoki 1998:329). Furthermore, he served as the vice president of the American Political Science Association from 1988 to 1989. His 1964 book *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* has been cited by numerous scholars and is widely read outside of political science. It is difficult to find anyone in political symbolism or the politics of symbols who does not refer to his book.

The first significance of Edelman's study is that he consolidated the vast existing literature on symbols that arose extensively outside political science, including in anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, sociology, literary criticism, and philosophy, and reread them as themes for political science. Edelman's strong will to create a new theoretical language to discuss politics characterized his work. He was willing to absorb research results from all possible fields to achieve this goal.

When Edelman began his career as a political scientist, behaviorists dominated American political science, focusing exclusively on the technical aspects of how people achieve their interests. In the political science of the behaviorist heyday, he perceived the inadequacy of theoretical language to represent politics. At the beginning of *The Symbolic Use of Politics*, Edelman argued that politics is a symbolic form (Edelman 1964). What did he mean by this term? His series of writings emerged from his pursuit of this question. Motivated by his desire to create a new theoretical language for discussing politics, Edelman's works were influenced by stimuli from various fields. His writings serve as an excellent guide for expanding the intellectual scope of contemporary symbol studies.

## Langer's Theory of the "Desire of Symbolization"

Ernst Cassirer argued that humans are "animal symbolicum"- creatures that manipulate symbols (Cassirer 1944). His philosophy of symbolic form was a monumental contribution to modern symbol studies. Taking Cassirer's work a step further was the American philosopher Suzanne Langer. In her book, "The Philosophy of Symbols," Langer put forth the fundamental idea of "the desire of symbolization." Humans have a fundamental need to constantly replace their experiences with symbols (Langer 1942). This desire is not a human instinct. Based on a series of studies in psychoanalysis, developmental psychology, linguistics, and other fields, Langer defined the desire of symbolization as the need that humans acquire after they are born and develop under certain conditions necessary for language acquisition.

Once humans acquire this desire of symbolization, they constantly desire to transform their experiences into symbols. For example, chatting with someone else

in our daily lives is a typical example of symbolization in which we try to replace our experiences with symbols (Langer 1942). We chat with others about things that surprise us, make us angry, make us happy, and sad. What we do in these vast and repeated daily activities is a phenomenon called symbolization.

The desire of symbolization is closely related to the human desire to use symbols to control uncertain situations. There are some arguments regarding this point. For example, semiotician Hidetaka Ishida discussed how Freud drew interesting insights by observing his one-and-a-half-year-old nephew playing with a string (Ishida 2003). Freud's young nephew regarded the string as if it were his mother. He would play with it, creating situations in which he would throw the spool of thread and it would disappear from sight, and situations in which it would be pulled by the string and come back into sight. According to Ishida, this play meant to the young nephew that he could control the presence and absence of his mother by his own hands. The nephew was trying to control reality through symbols by creating his own symbols, the spool of string (Ishida 2003:268).

Ishida's argument clarifies that a man's creation of various symbols and his attempt to manipulate them at will is nothing more than an attempt to take control of the reality that plays with him. The process of a young child unconsciously creating and manipulating symbols to escape from a situation in which he or she is at the mercy of the mother is a prototype of "symbolic politics," in which people attempt to control their own situation by making full use of symbols.

Edelman's discussion on rituals offers a similar suggestion. Edelman pointed out that humans, who have long been at the mercy of their natural environment, require rituals to survive the uncertain and chaotic surrounding conditions. For example, by performing a rain dance or a victory dance performed prior to a battle, people attempt to acquire the symbolic dimension of what they need and seek by pre-acting their desired outcome (Edelman 1964). In doing so, they attempt to direct the group's behavior toward their goals. Edelman argues that rituals are the product of the human desire to transform a desired outcome into a force for achieving a desired future by sharing it with the group in advance. Here, symbols are important in men's attempts to control their uncertain futures.

Literary critic Kenneth Burke's discussion is interesting. Burke notes that symbols play an essential role in making difficult situations more acceptable to humans. Humor symbols make it easier to accept a situation by demeaning it. Satirical symbols make it easier to accept a situation by making us feel detached from it, tragic symbols make us feel the dignity of being in it, and comedic symbols make us feel empowered to overcome it (Burke 1989).

As is typical of Burke, who is well-versed in literature, this point beautifully captures the literary value of symbols. As in Freud's string case, symbols are relied upon by humans to control the formidable circumstances surrounding them. Symbols are indispensable resources for humans to proactively confront the

uncertainty, chaos, and fear of their situations. It is essential to consider the perspective that the desire of symbolization is integral to the human desire to use symbols to control reality.

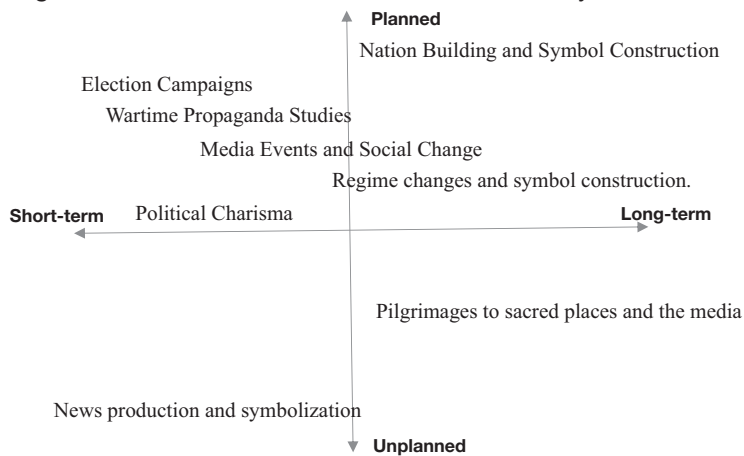
## Reflective Process of Political Symbols and Society

Langer’s theory of the desire for symbolization is restricted to the dimensions of individual experience. Therefore, to advance the study of the “politics of symbolization,” it is necessary to generate concepts to consider the collective dimension of symbolization.

As a first attempt, Figure 1 provides examples of the breadth of themes in the politics of symbolization. Here, we prioritized the cases that were foreseeable for this study. The horizontal axis represents the length of the time covered by the research theme, and the vertical axis indicates whether the symbols under study were created in a planned or an unplanned manner.

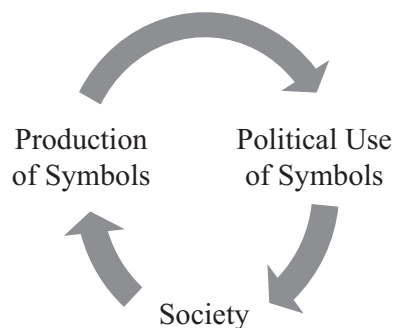
This figure is primarily intended to illustrate the wide range of topics covered in the politics of symbolization. Please keep in mind, therefore, that how each item is arranged is not necessarily rigorous and is merely a guide. In general, when one thinks of the study of symbols, many people associate it with the study of national flags or planned symbols such as the symbolic emperor system (“Nation Building and Symbol Construction” in the figure). However, if one follows the general definition of the symbolic concept, the study is much broader and includes a variety of themes. This figure is an attempt to illustrate the breadth of these themes.

Figure 1: Research Themes of “The Politics of Symbolization”



The basic ideas of the politics of symbolization are illustrated in Figure 2. According to Edelman and Kurtzer, to study symbolic politics, it is necessary to understand how symbols enter politics (Edelman 1964:5 Kurtzer 1988:11). Figure 2 illustrates the circulation process between political symbols and society. This shows how symbols brought about by society are incorporated into politics. The process can be divided into two parts. The first is the process of symbolic production in society. Symbolic studies should focus on understanding the social conditions that make symbols more powerful. The other is the process of incorporating symbols into the political arena and managing them so that their authority is not undermined.

Figure 2: Reflective Process of Political Symbols and Society



There are several important issues to consider in the symbol production process. In particular, the social conditions that produce “powerful symbols” are an essential topic. By “powerful symbols,” we mean symbols closely linked to people’s emotions and desires. Focusing on how powerful symbols are created and used politically is necessary.

Several hypotheses can be presented regarding the social conditions that give rise to powerful symbols. For example, the latent desire hypothesis states that symbols associated with many people’s latent desires can exert a strong influence. Or the extraordinariness hypothesis: this is the idea that symbols created through unusual experiences are more likely to be powerful symbols. The media digitization hypothesis was also considered. This refers to the fact that the digitalization of media has facilitated sharing powerful symbols, as shocking videos can now be easily shared on social media.

The most well-known of these in media studies is the extraordinary hypothesis. As is well known, Katz and Dayan refer to the historical festivities broadcast by television as media events (Katz & Dayan 1992). However, Japanese media studies have emphasized that television is an everyday medium. Media events have been defined as events sponsored by the media (Yoshimi 1996), and television staging of extraordinary events has been neglected.

However, in Katz and Dayan's symbolic anthropological theory of media events, special attention is paid to extraordinary events that interrupt the rhythm of everyday life and bring about historical moments. When television "interrupts" regular programming and all channels focus intensively on a single historical event, an atmosphere and sense of obligation is created in society to engage with that event. Viewers transform from mere spectators into witnesses of that historical moment, actively participating in a special event.

Katz and Dayan point out that the protagonists of these extraordinary media events acquire political charisma. Interestingly, they discuss how media events confer charisma on political leaders, repeatedly citing John Paul II's visit to Poland in 1979 and Egyptian President Sadat's visit to Israel in 1977. In other words, they argue that extraordinary media events produce charismatic leaders as powerful symbols.

## Types of Collective Symbolization

The most fundamental theme when considering the political influence of collective symbolization is the crystallization function of symbols. The crystallizing function of symbols refers to the establishment of a common perception within a group through symbols. Symbols play a political role in constructing a common cognition within a group and strengthening its cohesiveness.

Several types of crystallization have focused on the crystallization of common perceptions. These three types are discussed here.

(1) Collective Effervescence: This is when common perceptions, feelings, and intentions crystallize among people due to the intensive sharing of a particular symbol over a short period. The work of sociologist Emile Durkheim is well known. Durkheim argued that physical interaction is critical for collective effervescence (Durkheim 1975). However, a similar phenomenon can be observed in mass communication, where humans do not physically assemble. This is when a specific symbol is shared quickly through intensive media coverage, creating common awareness. What makes this kind of short-term cognitive consensus-building possible is its high intensity. Sharing symbols intensively in a short period, whether in news reports or social media, can be understood as collective effervescence.

Political charisma is an interesting example of "crystallization" from a political science perspective. Sociologist Arleigh Hockshild, who participated in the rallies of Republican supporters surrounding Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election, interestingly described how Trump generated the frenzy. She describes how Trump became a "living symbol" (Mosse 1975:167), producing a strong solidarity among the people. Trump's freewheeling rhetoric, without any concern for "political correctness," filled his supporters with a sense of liberation and created a "high" mood in the audience (Hockshild 2016:323). According to Hockshild, many

supporters, immersed in a dizzying sense of liberation, felt compelled to stay in that high mood for as long as they could and tried to dismiss any objections that might dampen their “high” mood. She even interviewed one woman who talked about Trump for six hours (Hockshild 2016:324).

Hockshild’s description captures the reproduction of a “powerful symbol” (Trump as political charisma) in the frenzy and excitement of the “extraordinary” and collective emotion (solidarity) mediated by that symbol. This goes beyond merely asserting that a physical assemblage generates excitement. These communities share a common disregard for societal norms. The Australian clans that Durkheim focused on, in a ritual called “corroboree,” transgressed far beyond normal sexual norms and reached “a state of hyper-excitement so intense that it could not be endured for a long time” (Durkheim 1975:390). Similarly, the community of Trump supporters reached a state of frenzied excitement by forcefully rejecting “political correctness,” a norm required in social morality. The words and deeds of Trump supporters that disrupt the moral norms governing everyday life have brought a distinctly “extraordinal” sense of celebration to their rallies.

(2) Penetration refers to the process by which new symbolism permeates people’s minds over a certain period. In this case, the word “symbolism” has many symbols linked to form a symbolic system with a specific worldview. However, it is not necessary to assume that “penetration” is a process of organizing and mastering such a system of symbols. For example, it is possible to accept Christian customs, such as Christmas, into one’s life without having a deep knowledge of the Christian cross’s religious meaning. In other words, the degree of “penetration” can usually be considered to vary significantly from person to person.

During a political revolution, the disappearance of the prevailing symbols of the old regime and the creation of new symbols do not necessarily mean that all of them will be socially accepted. Whether newly created symbolism will penetrate people’s minds must be observed over a long period. If a newly created symbol does not take root after the disappearance of an influential political symbol, a “symbolic vacuum” can be created.

Karasudani conducts a case study on the penetration of symbolism. In the postwar Japanese society, rapid economic development was accompanied by many serious pollution incidents. Ishimure Michiko’s *Paradise in the Sea Sorrow*, which clearly describes the Minamata disease incident, created a new worldview that had never existed before and became a bible for the movement to support victims of pollution problems. Using Michiko Ishimure’s worldview as a case study, Karasudani conducted a theoretical study to investigate the pervasive power of newly created symbolism.

There is much to be learned from the history and sociology of religion to study how Ishimure’s symbolism permeated people. For example, valuable insights can be drawn much examining how Christianity established powerful religious symbolism,

such as the cross, the Bible, and hymns, to penetrate people's hearts and minds.

Considering George Herbert Mead's concept of "role-taking" can be beneficial in understanding the pervasive power of symbolism (Mead 1934). Based on this concept, Edelman drew attention to the significant question of how humans internalize symbols. In modern society, mass media has developed a communication network that can quickly send newly produced daily symbols to a wide range of people. However, regardless of the development of communication media that diffuse symbols over a wide area, the extent to which individuals internalize these symbols into their inner worlds ultimately depends greatly on the circumstances of those who receive the symbols.

Karasudani mentions people whose lives were profoundly affected and changed by reading Michiko Ishimure's writings. A certain kind of symbolism has the undeniable power to enrich human life. Symbolism in religion and art is a diving trove of such abundant power. Psychoanalyst Hayao Kawai, referring to findings at the intersection of psychoanalysis, the history of religion, and the history of art, touches on the problem of how the rational mind, which developed considerably in the 19th century West, relativized the rich power of religious symbolism (Kawai 1977:58-61).

From this problematic viewpoint, one may consider the possibility of a critique of civilization that takes "the poverty of symbols" (Stiegler 2004) as its subject. Perhaps it is difficult for human beings to live in a world dominated solely by a rational mind, and it would be meaningful to consider the pervasive power of symbolism by noting that people's desire for spirituality and conspiracy theories are stirring at the bottom of modern society.

(3) Transformation: This refers to a significant shift in the meaning of influential symbols deeply rooted in people's minds and given new meanings.

The Japanese Emperor System provides a dramatic and exciting case study. The process of the great transformation from the absolute emperor system of the Empire of Japan to the popular emperor system in the postwar period, triggered by the defeat of the war, and the reason why this transformation from "living god" to "human" proceeded so successfully, is a fascinating case study of "transformation."

In *Embracing Defeat*, John Dower thoroughly examines the thinking behind the GHQ's decision to allow the Emperor System to continue (Dower 1999). The GHQ staff, led by MacArthur, did not see the emperor as an inseparable symbol of militarism but believed that if they succeeded in separating him from the military, they could redirect his influence for positive purposes. Looking at the various systems of governance worldwide in the past, present, and future, the Emperor of the Japanese Empire is a prominent example of a successful political symbol that has demonstrated its power to seize the hearts and minds of the people. Rather than disposing of this compelling political resource to win the hearts and minds of the people, the GHQ aimed to use it for its own purposes of occupation and governance.

There are countless examples of “transformation,” not limited to the case of the Emperor System. In the context of more general issues, when a revolution or significant transformation of a political system occurs, the question arises as to how the old system’s most potent symbols will be treated in the new system (Kertzer 1988). In some cases, such as the Japanese emperor system, the old symbols are reused while being given new meanings, while in others, such as the execution of the king by revolutionary forces, the old symbols are entirely extinguished.

The degree to which the old and new symbols are successfully replaced does not allow for easy predictions. What is certain is that the “transformation” of symbols accompanying the process of regime change is a transformation of the entire symbol system. When a state regime undergoes a significant transformation due to revolution or political change, the symbolic system used to justify individual political actions and policies undergoes a large-scale reorganization. In the case of the imperial system, a major change in the meaning of the emperor means not merely a change in the imperial system but also a change in the principle of legitimacy of the state. It is vital to understand how radically the principle of political legitimacy has been altered by the shifting meaning of the emperor as a core symbol.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we explore theoretical perspectives on the politics of symbolization to enhance the significance of the linguistic turn in studying political communication. We reiterate the key findings of the present study.

First, the study of media discourse promoted by constructivists in political communication is highly commendable. However, gathering detailed knowledge about linguistics does not necessarily advance the research on political communication. To deepen the significance of the linguistic turn, we must understand that the essence of language lies in the function of symbols.

Second, we emphasize the human desire to transform experiences into symbols. Susanne Langer’s theory of the desire of symbolization serves as the theoretical foundation of this study. Based on Langer’s theory, the study of the politics of symbolization should explore the process of collective symbolization.

Third, the circulation of political symbols and society is discussed as a basic idea in the politics of symbolization. The primary interest in the politics of symbolization is how symbols that emerge from society are incorporated into politics, how these incorporated symbols are integrated into politics, and how these incorporated symbols are used in political practice. The production and use of symbols involve detailed considerations. Particularly, the social conditions under which “powerful symbols” are produced require further investigation.

Fourth, when considering the political influence of collective symbolization, it



is necessary to understand how symbolic crystallization operates. By focusing on the function of symbolic crystallization, we identify three aspects of collective symbolization: collective effervescence, penetration, and transformation. Through in-depth case studies of these processes, future research aims to deepen our understanding of collective symbolization.

## Note

- <sup>i</sup> These are not the only three characteristics of constructionism pointed out by Gamson, but we have limited our discussion here to those that are closely related to the theme of this paper.

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