

Political Culture and Democracy in France: Pierre Rosanvallon's Theory of French Democracy

Kazumu Nozue

This essay will explore French democracy through the major works of Pierre Rosanvallon (1948-). Recent studies on the history of political thought have included studies on several individual philosophers. However, these studies of individuals neglect to consider the field as a whole. Moreover, the history of political thought on the subject of French democracy also neglects to examine the field as a whole.

By contrast, Rosanvallon's works on French democracy are considered one of the outstanding achievements of the modern French academic circle that continues the earlier studies of French democracy and reshapes the history of French democracy studies. This essay proposes to shed light on the schematic interpretation of Rosanvallon's model of French democracy.

First, Rosanvallon defines revolutionary Jacobinism as the way of thinking of "the political" (*le politique*). This way of thinking constituted "the political culture of generality" (*culture politique de la généralité*) that has continued since the revolutionary era, albeit in a somewhat modified form. Second, the term "polarization" is one of the most important key concepts in Rosanvallon's interpretation of French democracy. Rosanvallon argues that "the political" and "the social" (*le social*) are "polarized." Since the revolutionary era, French democracy has been constituted based on this concept of "polarization." On the other hand, Rosanvallon describes "the social" as something that has been eliminated or suppressed by "the political." Finally, he concludes that "the social" is on the "periphery" (*périphérique*) of French democracy, not at the "center." According to his thesis, the history of French democracy is strongly linked to the superiority of "the political" over "the social"; specifically, the unity or integration of the French Republic has been guaranteed based on "the political."

Ultimately, it is by exploring the history of French democracy that one can confirm whether Rosanvallon's thoughts and theory are an accurate reflection of reality.