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On the Development of Democracy in Japan: from Samurai to Civil Society

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*On the Development of Democracy in Japan:
from Samurai to Civil Society*

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

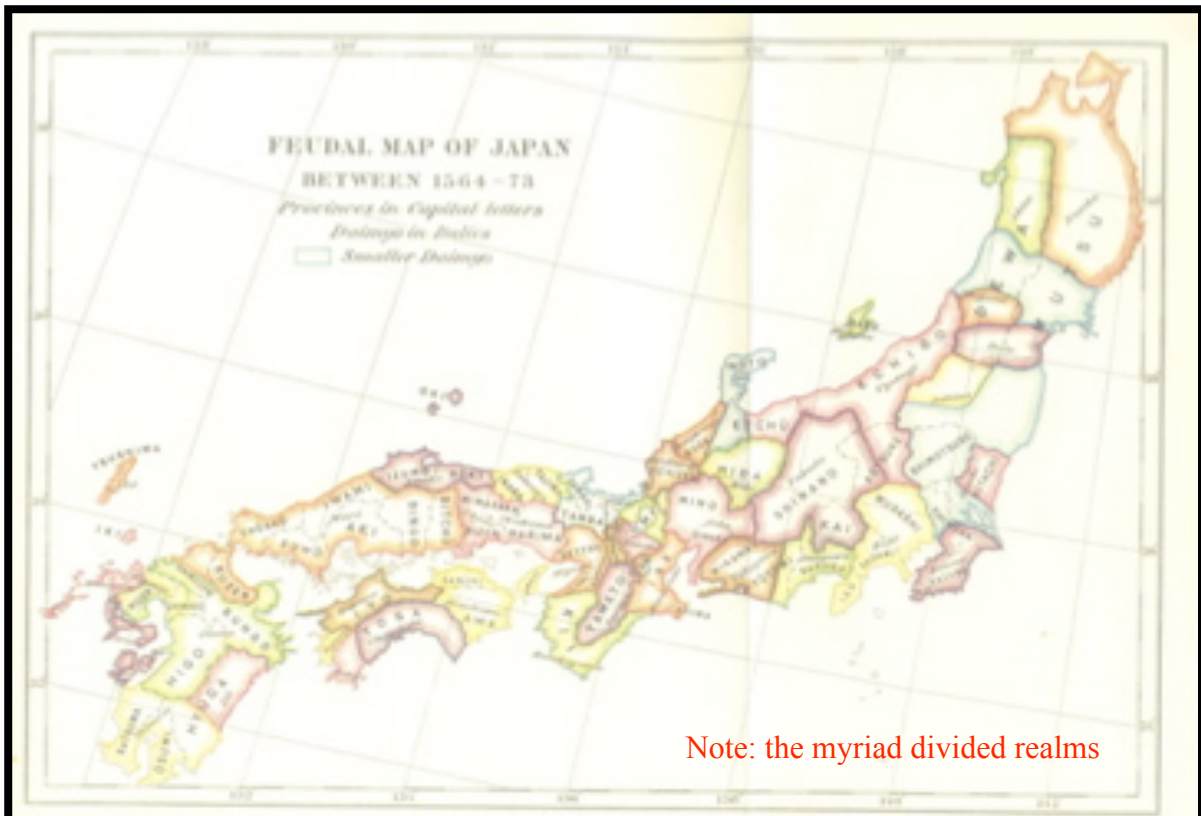
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MAPS of PRE-MODERN JAPAN



Note: the myriad divided realms



Note: more consolidated territories

(Murdoch and Yamagata 1900)

MAP of CONTEMPORARY JAPAN



(Lonely Planet Productions 2009)

INTRODUCTION

Not too long ago, I found myself at a conference held on behalf of the Honor College programs of the State of Louisiana. After a rather bland buffet dinner of fried fish and hushpuppies—though the bread pudding was pretty good—I was subjected to an obligatory talent show. Once the two dwarfish twins had finished their knife-juggling act, I was making my way back to my room, when a girl stopped me in the elevator. I recognized her as the student who displayed her cultivated talent of self-taught belly dancing with rather mixed success, which I remembered ended ambiguously to a smattering of applause. I stared for a moment at her sweaty, smeared and dripping pen-drawn tattoos of vaguely Arab-looking things; she caught my eye and smiled, asking why I had come to the conference. I explained that I too was belly dancing, but I had unfortunately forgotten my bangles and jangles at home; so as a backup I was going to present on my research topic: “Democracy in Japan.” She looked a bit disappointed and then confused, saying, “I didn’t know that Japan had a democracy.” “Well,” I responded, “neither did the Japanese.”

* * *

The presence of democracy as an egalitarian system of rule reached by consensus can be traced back over three hundred years to the feudal era in Japan. As a form of government founded on elected representatives but limited suffrage, democracy first surfaced as a codified political institution during Japan’s modern period. As a system of rule defined by universal suffrage and free and fair elections, democracy has been the established form of governance since the end of WWII. Nevertheless, democracy as a system of rule where a citizen engages in politics through casting votes for

representatives and voices her or his opinion to protect and promote her or his rights and values is actually a very recent development in Japan. In fact, only within the past decade have the Japanese people begun to make use of the advantages conferred to them by the right of political expression held within democracy. At the time of this writing, the citizens of Japan are discovering the tools and merits of their democracy¹.

This research project explores the struggle for the development of democracy and equality in Japan, focusing on its opposition, its imposition, its dereliction, and finally its utilization. There are three chapters that each focus on a different period of democratic development with the aim to answer a specific question about democracy in Japan.

Chapter I of the research will be used to examine what aristocratic structures existed to prevent democracy as an equal rule by the populace, and how these structures maintained their support and met their end. It will posit and address the question: “How did the *samurai* slay democracy?”

Chapter II will be devoted to the study of the challenges and successes or failures of democracy imposed from without via the American military Occupation following WWII; it will be used to delve into the conundrum of the evolution of the one-party system, which lasted thirty-five years and essentially rendered Japan a one-party

¹ Unless otherwise noted, throughout this research the term *democracy* will refer to four broad principles.

“1. A competitive, multiparty system.

2. Universal suffrage for all citizens (with the restrictions that states may legitimately place on citizens for criminal offenses).

3. Regularly contested elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy, reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud that yields results that are unrepresentative of the public will.

4. Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning.” (Piano and Puddington 2004, 716).

This research will focus particularly on issues associated with points 1, 2, and 4. The issues outlined in point 3, during the course of this research have not proven to be a major problem in Japan; therefore, matters associated with point 3 will be discussed only indirectly.

dominant democracy without competition. This chapter will answer the question: “Why was democracy Japan’s unopened present?”

Finally, Chapter III will explore the conditions necessary for development of civil society in the context of Japan, and concentrate on how these building blocks for collective action have been historically limited by Japanese culture. Additionally, it will be used to directly address the unprecedented social issues that are currently surfacing at the grassroots level due to a shift in cultural values. Moreover, it will explore if these issues are consequentially creating unbridgeable rifts in what once was a solid political structure, suggesting for the first time the development of a multiparty system. Overall this chapter will attempt to resolve the question, “Why is civil society rising in Japan and what tides of change will this bring?”

Therefore, ultimately, all three chapters will piece together and solve the political puzzle that has made Japan as a latent democracy an enigma among many other contemporary democracies. Specifically, due to the fact that landholdings were historically a means to transfer and maintain political power, this resulted in the concentration of that power into cliques, which were the primary impediment to democratic development; therefore, it is unclear as to why after the Allied Occupation—during which former ties to land were cut and the power centers were sundered—did the growing middle-class citizens of Japan opt consistently to elect one party to rule the government for thirty-five years. Lastly, why only recently has the political structure of Japan come to resemble most other contemporary, multi-party democratic republics?

In short, why did the Japanese following the aristocratic fights over land, the oligarchic fights over the government, and the militaristic fights for the empire, no

longer—as individual, free citizens, endowed with the political tools to do so—see a need to fight for themselves and their interests in the later twentieth century until just recently?

* * *

I think it is important for the reader, before investing any time in reading this work, to understand why Japan has been chosen as the topic of research. Personally, my involvement with Japan has spanned over four years, starting with my study of the Japanese language, and continuing with my research of Japanese society, culture, history and politics. Last year, I lived abroad in Beppu city of Kyushu in southern Japan, where I studied at Ritsumeikan Asian Pacific University for a year. This experience greatly shaped my perspective about Japan, and has had an unparalleled effect on the direction of this research.

Nevertheless, I do not propose that the culmination of my experiences represents all of Japanese society. Japan is a very large nation with many, many people and a complex society. Though I traveled extensively in Japan, I can only write based off of my experiences of living in southern Japan and off of the other places I was fortunate to visit.

Overall, from my observations, Japan is a very safe, generally quiet and orderly country, where spontaneity, loudness and anything generally out-of-line in a public setting are all frowned upon. Japan is also a country that attempts to deal with any sort of issues, problems and emotions indirectly for the sake of politeness and tranquility. This is a trait both charming and at times—especially when you need a direct answer—infuriating. Most interestingly, I found that in general Japanese people are just non-confrontational. So it is curious to me how once one of the most belligerent countries in the Eastern hemisphere, has now come to represent—whether well founded or not—mere

docility. To transform from a warmongering, military power, into a peaceful democracy is no easy transition, because that alteration is a complete change in a way of life. The echoes of the past surely influence how smooth and successful that change is. In understanding how Japan has become a democracy, politics, culture and society must be taken into account. I think this process of transformation—which happened in a relatively short time—has been what has interested me enough to write about Japan.

Ultimately, I wish to use my understanding of and my experience in Japan as tools to explore the situation specific to the country—keeping in mind Japan’s cultural particularities—and to help better explore the political workings of a society that has been so influential, yet at times, so perplexing. By understanding Japan and its political and social evolution, I feel we can understand in part the workings of power, freedom, equality and democracy.

CHAPTER I

How did the *Samurai* Slay Democracy?

“It is the law of inheritance which caused the final advance of equality.”
—Alexis de Tocqueville, *On Democracy in America*²

The island archipelago of Japan historically has been a relatively limited space that has hosted a comparatively large population. Nevertheless, Japan is arguably a country lacking in abundant resources, especially in regards to agrarian food production. Due to the scarcity of plains and the ubiquitous presence of mountains—and even incorporating a fifteen percent slope—scarcely sixteen percent of the total land is cultivable (Isida 1961, 63). This small amount of arable land has allowed for a very complex history of heated struggles over territorial possession, and whoever controlled the few precious fields of Japan, in turn has had unparalleled persuasion over the populace. Traditionally, it has been the nobility in Japan who has owned the vast majority of the land; the most power and pervasive noble class was known as the *samurai*. It was the *samurai* who were able to

² Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) was a French political thinker and historian, most famed for his lengthy analysis of democracy as it functioned in early and mid-nineteenth century America, which culminated in his two-tome work *On Democracy in America*. Though Tocqueville lived and wrote in the 1800s, his writings are filled with keen insights into the inner workings of democracy as a political system and as a way of life that are no less relevant today. Moreover, Tocqueville was a pioneer of the role of collective action in the political process. In general, Tocqueville’s work focuses primarily on two broad topics that are pertinent to this research: the power that an aristocracy cultivates and maintains from land—which is addressed in this chapter—and the importance and influence of civil participation in politics—which will be addressed in later chapters. Though Tocqueville wrote about democracy in America, Tocqueville’s work is not meant to serve as a comparative element, nor is it a goal of this research to use Japan to prove or disprove Tocqueville’s work. The writer is merely referenced to give succinct analyses of ideas that are extremely applicable to the topics addressed here concerning Japan, even though he never set foot in Asia. Moreover, because of his keen observations, Tocqueville—and later the scholars he inspired—will be making small cameo appearances throughout this research.

transform the influence they garnered from their monopoly of the fields into political power to control Japan for the greater part of a millennium.

In spite of this link between land and leadership, however, from around the start of the eighth century, Japan's head of state did not officially rule through the vested powers of the earth but seemingly from the sky. The emperor—in Japanese *tennō*, “heavenly ruler”—was the supreme sovereign over all the lands and the head of the established centralized government.³ Yet notwithstanding the ruler's power over the lives of men, even he was not above the power vested in the land: to satiate his court's hunger for glamour and the developing bureaucratic complexity, food sources—primarily rice—had to be secured, organized and regulated. Thus, virtually since the inception of the Imperial Court, it was the peasant farmers as the cultivators who played the indispensable roles behind the scenes of imperial power. For the next twelve hundred years, it would be those that tilled the land who would serve as the very foundation of the stage that housed all of Japan's political drama (Hewes 1955, 20). Power in Japan's classic period—from the sixth century until the twelfth century—was passed along hereditary lines, both within the court and within the families that came to control food production. As the court expanded in its complexity, its need for resources grew, and so grew the power of the families that controlled the production of rice (Hewes 1955, 21; Denoon & Hudson 2001).

Nevertheless, rice and even grains were not the only sources of food production, and to imagine Japan as a society built completely upon backs of farmers would render an incomplete picture. From ancient times people engaged in fishing, salt-making, hunting, trapping, etc. Indeed, mountain dwellers rarely dabbled in the field, and seaside towns'

³ “Under the heavens there is no land which is not the king's land; among the holders of the land there is none who is not the king's vassal”(Hewes 1955, 21).

stable foods were from the ocean. Yet notwithstanding this diversity, historical records show that for the last thousand years in Japan, the field—and particularly the rice paddy—have been the primary source of food production. This is especially true for the valley plains of central and western Honshu, which have supported the majority of Japan’s population and have served as the nation’s political headquarters (Denoon, Hudson et al. 2001). So though this research will dwell upon the influence of food of the fields due to their prevalence, it should be understood that not all of Japanese people tilled the soil.

Nevertheless, with food production principally tethered to the field, a feudal society evolved during the Classic period—roughly the start of the sixth century and ending just before the turn of thirteenth century—with the central court at its apex that ruled over the outlying regional clans; this relation only grew strong throughout the centuries as farmers came to play a greater role in Japanese society. Those who headed the mass collection of these regional, clan-based, hereditary landholdings were known as *daimyo*. The *daimyo* were collectively organized under the *shogun*, who served ostensibly in the name of the emperor as the general over the military force. The *shogun* and all of his officials were collectively called the *bakufu*—literally “tent government” (Hall & Yamamura 1990). The idea of a *tent*—as in a field marquee—was symbolic of the field commander, and due to the nonpermanent nature of a tent, *bakufu* also denoted the position as being temporary (Beasley 1955, 321).

THE RISE OF THE SHOGUN

Over the centuries, as powerful landholding-clans seized weaker ones and maximized their regional authority by absorbing the conquered into their hereditary lines, three principle feudal clans eventually emerged—the Taira, the Minamoto, and the Fujiwara—who came to fight for dominance over the waning Imperial Court (Hewes 1955, 22). Once clan lines were definitively defined, a dichotomy between an aristocracy and a royal family evolved. Here, the term aristocracy—based on Tocqueville’s definition—explicitly refers to those families whose means of support were maintained by the succession of land being handed down from one generation to another (Toqueville 1969, 33). The *shogun* as an individual who was outside of royal lineage was traditionally therefore a member of the landed gentry. Through his mastery over and monopoly of the workable land, the *shogun*—once a tool of the emperor—became a contending force in the political hierarchy.

Since Japan was all but an agrarian society, the ability of the clans to control the food supply yielded unprecedented, direct power to maintain permanent military power over the court. Weakness within the position of the emperor was measurable by the clout carried over him by the power clans; moreover, this heavenly mandated right-to-rule was incessantly threatened by the latter clans’ possessive campaigns to rule over the empire and place their agendas ahead of those of the emperor. Towards the end of the Classical period in the thirteenth century, terrestrial importance supplanted that of the celestial when central control of the Heavenly Ruler in the capital of Kyoto yielded to the control from the headquarters to anyone of the three major clan families who could place and keep a clan member in the position of *shogun* (Hewes 1955, 22). This brought Japan into the Medieval period—roughly 1250-1550.

The basic reason for this political advancement was an effect of Japan's economic environment. It would be shortsighted to suggest Japan was strictly an agricultural society; the political and cultural capital of Kyoto served as a witness to the industrial development, which would only continue to flourish under the *shogun*'s reign during the Medieval period. Encouraged by trade with neighbors China and Korea, Japan came to host a healthy merchant class, who was responsible for manufacturing and trading a variety of goods and products including gold, pearls, mercury, sulfur, scrolls, folding screens, fans, luxury cloth, incense, fragrances as well as wood products. Throughout the Medieval period, trade gave rise to a healthy commercial sector and even allowed for the formation of guilds called *za*. In total this merchant class and its affiliates provide a lucrative tax-base. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten, that behind the silk screen, this merchant class was built upon the backs of the provincial worker who tilled the field, which proved that Japan's economy during this time was firmly grounded in agriculture. (Hall & Yamamura 1990, 354, 358, 376).

A major cultivator of land was naturally the *shogun*. Therefore, with the rise of *bakufu* as the true governing force over the Imperial Court, the political power residing in the emperor was largely overshadowed by the *shogun*; and though the emperor remained an important figure of tradition, he was no longer in a position of actual authority. Over the following centuries, the emperor—harbored in Kyoto and stripped of most his real estate—would come to play a largely symbolic role under the rule of the *shogun* as a living god who supported the generalissimo's command. Whether for the purposes of pomp and circumstance or merely as an ode to tradition, the emperor's central purpose in

Japan's government was simply to confer to an individual the title of *shogun*, a right that only he could perform, even if he had no choice (Hall & Yamamura 1990, 191).

On account of the *shogun* being a principle landholder, his position of power would prove to be for the most part insulated from the emperor's reprisal due to the fact that the Medieval period was a time of agricultural intensification. This was made possible by new technological developments such as the diffusion of iron tools and double cropping—i.e. when a second crop is planted after the first has been harvested. During this period, the productivity of the land was exercised to an unprecedented capacity and the warlords vied with unmatched fervor for this new agricultural production power. From this time until the Modern Era, Japan witnessed unparalleled population growth and increased life expectancy from people living until their mid-twenties and early-thirties to their upper thirties and forties (Deal 2007, 120; Tsutsui 2006, 36-47).

Organizationally, villages as centers of agricultural production came to replace former aristocratic estates of the Classical period as centers of economic activity. This gave rise to a change in demographic concentration, where people lived more and more outside of the estates and collected within individual towns (Deal 2007, 120). Rather than members of the Imperial Court, it was the farmers who settled in the villages and came to preside over them; those farmers who found themselves as the village heads eventually became employees of the regional lord, thus linking the villages to a larger geographical network held under one principle power (Deal 2007, 134). This is not to say that the estates fell into disrepair, but that they simply no longer served as microcosmic capsules of Japanese society. In short, the nation's human topography was now spreading beyond the boundaries of the estate.

In order to continue to maintain power over a given region, the regional lords of the estates capitalized on the growing resources of the villages to fund their campaigns and field their armies (Deal 2007, 120). Land-based economies found themselves under the rule of the warrior class; thus, Japan was unlinked from the theoretical idea of a supreme ruler from the heavens to a more immediate ruler on earth. “Once [the vestiges of the *ritsuryō* system—which linked the imperial court to the commoner—were abolished] power seekers were able, indeed were forced, to devise mechanisms of control that enabled the shrewdest and/or luckiest of their number to overwhelm the others and restore order to the realm” (Totman 2005, 76 & 146). The changes in Japanese society that ensued during the coming centuries provided the basis for the politically and militarily ambitious to construct a new governing order that would be far more potent than any Japan had ever known before (Totman 2005, 147).

THE WARRING STATES & THE DIVIDED REALM

With such political power to be had, over the course of next three hundred years, from the mid-thirteen century until the mid-sixteenth century, the landscape of Japan became the playing field of territorial rages between competing factions, a time referred to collectively as *sengoku*—“warring states”—period (Totman 2005, 203). In the latter part of the sixteenth century, the warlords were finally quieted, when the powerful *daimyo*, Toyotomi Hideyoshi—a descendent of the Taria clan—conquered and consolidated the lands under his rule (Totman 2005, 211). This unification brought Japan into the Early Modern period.

Nevertheless, Toyotomi Hideyoshi—who later changed his name to Hashiba Hideyoshi—was not satisfied with simply unifying Japan. A few years later, he took up the hobby of imperial conquests and led a campaign to invade Korea. For all the success, Hideyoshi/Hashiba had on the island, his continental conquest was an abysmal failure, and it seriously weakened the Toyotomi clan's power within Japan. Moreover, since the Toyotomi clan was known to be of peasant stock, a member could never officially be conferred the title of *shogun*; for, as aforesaid, this position was traditionally available only to families of noble descent. Following the failure in Korea, Hideyoshi spent the remainder of his days quarreling with his brother over who should rule from a seat that could never be legitimated. In the wake of Hideyoshi's death, the quarrels between the siblings' factions broke out into open hostilities. As the families squabbled amongst themselves, a new contesting force emerged that challenged the authority of the Toyotomi clan; this was the fearsome warrior Tokugawa Ieyasu (Bryant 1995; Totman 2005).

On 21 October 1600, Ieyasu engaged in open battle with Hideyoshi's son, Toyotomi Hashiba in an area to the northeast of Kyoto called Sekigahara. The principal forces in the conflict were divided geographically: the men loyal to Toyotomi Hideyori were daimyo clans of Western Japan; those loyal to Tokugawa Ieyasu were primarily clans of Eastern Japan. The incident became known as the Battle of Sekigahara, but due to the clear dichotomy between factions it became popularly called *Tenka Wakeme no Tatakai*—A Realm Divided. In the end, Tokugawa Hideyoshi emerged as victor and consolidator of the vast divide (Bryant 1995).

THE NAME GAME

Though Tokugawa Ieyasu was not a descendent from one of the aforementioned accredited bloodlines, he was no slave to the established link between lineage and the legitimacy that a name afforded one the right to rule. So as to sunder any potential claim to his mere *thanedom*, Ieyasu forged a family tree linking him to the mighty Minamoto clan, famed for its military lineage (Hall & Jansen 1988, 131).⁴ With the right pedigree in hand, Ieyasu was conferred the title *shogun* in 1603 by the emperor, thus officially establishing the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Early in his work *On Democracy in America*, Tocqueville elaborates heavily on the power vested in a name. He explains that when the law of inheritance is based on primogeniture, land is naturally held intact through generations. Over time, the family's name becomes associated with the land: "the family represents the land, and the land the family, perpetuating its name, origin, glory, power, and virtue" (Tocqueville 1969, 52). Thus in pre-modern Japan, the name of a noble clan bore a history and certified one's legitimacy to high status, and in the case of some elite, the primary prerequisite to rule. Therefore, Ieyasu's forgery—though comical—expressed the need for credibility that could only have been afforded by name, which historically could only have been acquired through land. This example of name-dropping would eventually become a pattern in future business practices built around family names, when power became less grounded in land.

⁴ Interestingly, Ieyasu also had in his back pocket another family tree that certified his lineage to the Fujiwara family (the foremost court family), just in case the need for proof of a better mannered versus militant genealogy arose (Hall & Jansen 1988, 131).

THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE

With the territories of central Japan unified under the Tokugawa *bakufu*, the power vested in the land was ultimately monopolized in the Early Modern period. The organization of politics under the rule of the Tokugawa clan mirrored closely that of the *bakufu* feudal structure of the past: power-descending from the *shogun*, to the *daimyo* and then to the lower levels. Owing to the organization skills of Hideyoshi during his brief reign, the complexity and chaos of the former warlord domains were restructured and more clearly defined. Specifically, the *daimyo* became rulers over vast landholdings, organized into groups called *han*; the military nobility known as the *samurai* were the owners of the estates within the fiefdom-like *han*. Within a *samurai*'s domain, local village leaders served as the power-holders (Totman 2000, 229-235).

For someone unfamiliar with Japanese feudalism, the organization of titles might be confusing. It is important to remember that *samurai* was the general term for the military nobility; the power of the *samurai* and their influence varied greatly depending on a number of factors: the size of the family's estate, lineage, connections, etc. Specific names for *samurai* were conferred depending upon the type of landholding, or if they came to hold lands at all; some of these titles will be reviewed later in the research. It should also be mentioned for clarity sake, that the *daimyo* were also *samurai*, but they were specifically the powerful, ruling *samurai* of the *han*.

Due to the challenges posed by Japan's geography, swift communication and omnipotent control often proved difficult when traversing the mountainous terrain. Therefore, it became necessary and practical from the top *daimyo* down to the local level

for feudal lords to administer with some autonomy within their own domains; thus the structure of the Tokugawa *bakufu*—though better organized—was arguably not fully centralized; furthermore, decisions at the local level headed by chiefs and elders were often reached by consensus and not by official decree (Ishida, Takeshi & Krauss 1989, 4). Even though chiefs and elders resided at the lowest levels of administrative powers, the correlation between land and power still held true in that their right to rule was garnered from their comparatively large estates.

Regardless of the authority the Tokugawa *shoguns* boasted to command, because the lords and the lieutenants in major *daimyo* conducted their affairs with a striking degree of autonomy, a threat of a political *coup* was always an ominous cloud on the horizon. In order to forefend against any storm with potential rival forces, the *bakufu*—from around 1550 to 1650—started a series of reforms that transformed and bureaucratized the life of most of the *samurai* from warriors to gentlemen. The Tokugawa *shoguns* stripped them of their weapons, and transplanted them to urban settings; moreover, the warriors were increasingly denied involvement in local taxation and administration and were transformed largely into civil administrators (Jansen, 1989 528; Waswo 1977, 14). Thus being extricated from their former land ties the majority of the *samurai* found themselves with little leverage against the *shogun*. Yet not all *samurai* were stripped of their land. Those who escaped the reassignment by the Tokugawa *shogun* were resettled to the countryside by their *daimyo*; these few were known collectively as *gōshi* (Waswo 1977, 14).

With the individual aristocrats organized, the shogun also thought it wise to prevent the collective influence of landholders within the *han* from rallying against him.

Therefore, the shogun organized the *daimyo* into three categories of potential hostility: the *shinpan*—virtually harmless as relatives of the *bakufu*; the *fundai*—low risk as the *daimyo* who were the hereditary descendents of the shogun; and the *tozama*—potential threats as the large *daimyo* who fought against the Tokugawa during the Sekigahara war. Since Tokugawa Ieyasu strove to keep distance between him and his potential rivals, the *tozama* were kept on the periphery of the empire and the *shinpan* and *fundai* *daimyo* were strategically placed between the vassals of the *bakufu* and the *tozama* (Totman 2005, 228).

In addition to reorganizing the *daimyo*, Ieyasu also thought it wise to transplant the headquarters of the *bakufu* to the Edo region—modern day Tokyo (Totman 2005, 220). This fertile valley plain and prime port location insured the *shogun* a natural seat of authority, protection and commerce. The relocation was completed in the 1620s, just a few years after Ieyasu's death. The Tokugawa clan's tactical real estate arrangements helped it in part rule in relative peace for over 200 years.

During this sort of *Pax Japanica*, a very small but significant development occurred in the economic sector. Though Japan was a society deeply rooted in agriculture, not all noble families depended forever and always on the land itself to fill their coffers. The domains of the *daimyo* housed large castles around which grew cities, known as castle towns; these towns were centers of administration, consumption and commerce (Jansen 1989, 585)⁵. Within these urbanizing centers, the social hierarchy of the period that

⁵ Castle towns in Early Modern and Modern Japan were strong concentrations of populations and centers of industry and commerce, the most notable of which were Edo—the *bakufu*'s central headquarters in central Honshu—Kyoto—the court town and primary silk and *kimono* producer found in western Honshu—and also Osaka—the nation's economic and trading hub—located also in western Honshu. Castle towns were the major urban centers of the Tokugawa era and later became industrialized cities. The towns were connected, though commerce was primarily city-state oriented and later inter-state oriented. Though these centers were of particular importance to Japan's foreign relations and served as centers of tradition and culture, the point when their urban population and economic significance definitively outweighed that of

evolved ranked *samurai* at the top, farmers in second place, artisans in third and trades people at the bottom (Sugimoto 2003). One reason for the lower ranking of artisans and trades people could be that they were further removed in distance from and association with the estates and the nobility; yet as time marched on, Japan would witness a shift in later centuries where the status of these craftsmen and transporters would climb with the rise in economic activity.

For the time being, it was during the Tokugawa period that the castle towns as economic junctions served as the potential breeding grounds for entrepreneurs who were no longer fixed to the fields. The perfect candidate for such a position, who had influence, capital and time to spare, was the weaponless *samurai*. Therefore, encouraged—or perhaps forced—by the policies implemented by the *shogun* to divorce the average *samurai* family from their land-based power, a select few opportunists used the prestige associated with their names to help foster enterprises that would create for them profit based on industry and commerce instead of agriculture.

One such notable clan was the Mitsui, whose *samurai* ancestry could be traced as far back as the 1400s (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 40). In 1616, after a visit to Edo, clan member Mitsui Sokubei, decided to capitalize upon the growing wealth available in the urban areas and become a merchant. Throughout the 1600s, the family business flourished, and due to his *samurai* status the Mitsui clan's business became a merchant supplier to the military government (Kerbo & Mckinstry 1995, 39-40). This instance could perhaps be one of the first notable marriages between a specific commercial institution and the government in Japan. Over time, this relationship continued to become

their rural, agrarian counterparts did not occur until the middle of the Twentieth century (Jansen 1989). This will be discussed in greater detail in chapters II and III.

more intimate, and by the 1800s, the House of Mitsui—by this point a conglomerate—had become the government’s banking house (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 40). This symbiosis encouraged the government to keep the house from declining or suffering from unfavorable ripples in the market. Yet, the peace cultivated at the highest levels of the administration did not percolate to the lowest rungs.

Despite the efficiency with which the *bakufu* organized and maintained the landed gentry, as an effect of the divisions inherent in the feudal makeup that virtually isolated the top from the bottom, the *shogun* and his administration were not successful in extending this stability to the peasantry. Moreover, this was of the growth and power of the merchants that gave rise to development of cities; the cities necessitated specific attention that was not easily provided under the feudalistic centralized market. Marius B. Jansen summarized well this structure in his article “Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century”: “By accepting its role [sic] as the greatest of the feudal lords, the bakufu [sic] closed itself off from the possibility of devising a more rational centralized structure...With responsibility for the great cities but not for the areas that supported their needs, the bakufu [sic] had to deal with the effects of economic centralization without being able to respond with effective measures of allocation and control” (Jansen 1989, 72).

During the middle of the nineteenth century, the neglect and ignorance of the *bakufu* allowed the avarice of the landlords to cripple the livelihood of farmers: raising taxes to confiscate the increased harvest if crop yield was good; and taking so much of the yield to the point of starving the farmer if the harvest was poor. Unbearable conditions were also exacerbated by relentless drought and crop failure, coupled by famine and plague.

These deplorable conditions all together culminated in distress and riots among the peasantry that were flamed frequently into rebellions, which collectively seriously weakened the authority of the *bakufu* and sowed the seeds for opposition and dissent (Hewes 1955, 27). Forces challenging the *shogun* would use this mounting discontent engendered by the injustices of the malfeasance of the village headmen, landlord-tenant relations and foreclosure of loans—all of which affected the commoner but did not directly involve the central government—as ammunition to reveal the limits of the government and to help overthrow the *bakufu* (Jansen 1989, 368).

In addition to the dissent surfacing at the peasant-level of the *bakufu*, opposition eventually arose from landholding *samurai* as well. It is interesting and ironic that the landholding *gōshi* of the *tozama daimyo* on the outskirts of the empire—who the *shogun* had allowed to keep their lands⁶—were the very ones that collaborated with opposition forces—particularly that of the resurfacing Imperial Court—against the *shogun* (Jansen 1989, 325). The two principle *tozama daimyo* that opposed the *shogun*, were of the Satsuma domain—found at the southern most party of Kyūshū, and the Chooshū's domain—located at the southern tip of Honshū .

While struggles over supreme sovereignty ensued once again, not all nobles rushed to the battle lines. The Mitsui clan, though the official banking house of the *shogun*, played both sides during the struggle by forging business relations with the Satsuma-Choshū rebels. Through their actions, the House of Mitsui illustrated perfectly the fickle and opportunistic role of entrepreneurs at the end of the Tokugawa Era (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 40).

⁶ Even more ironically, the *gōshi* of Satsuma who helped the Meiji Emperor succeed in restoring power to the emperor were the very victims of the Meiji Reformation that sought to eliminate the class of the *samurai*.

The *bakufu* officially met its end after the Satsuma-Choshū rebels and imperial forces—in a crusade to unify Japan once again under the emperor—defeated the Tokugawa regime during a civil dissension known as the Boshin War (1868-1869). Though politically stepping back in time by restoring the emperor again at the head of the state, Japan entered the modernizing period known as the Meiji Restoration.⁷

THE MEIJI RESTORATION

Up until this point in history, peace—and for that matter war—had been forged and broken along the lines of the land. The Tokugawa *bakufu* elected to unify the country under its control and then strove to maintain a static, closed feudal system. By contrast the Meiji Administration sought to integrate agrarian affairs into its plans for creating a modern-world empire (Hewes 1955, 28).

First and foremost, in regards to land-power relations, the Meiji Administration set out to replace the arguably outdated tenure relations between the vassals and their lords with more lucrative tenures based on ownership through cash purchases; here a new relation between tenant and landowner was not based on loyalty but rather on the more tangible idea of rent (Hewes 1955, 30). Tocqueville explains that indeed the love of land is ephemeral, because it is not the land itself that is valuable but rather the value invested in holding the land upon which an aristocracy thrives: few people holding much land becomes a game of the have's and have-nots (Toqueville 1969, 52). The Meiji land

⁷ A significant turning point in Japanese history, the Meiji Restoration brought Japan—kicking and screaming at times—from the dredges of feudal society to the forefront of industrialization. With the ambition to make a modern nation out of Japan, the restoration was successful in dramatically remodeling Japan's political and social structure through a series of reforms including opening Japan to Western technologies and philosophies, incorporating Western systems of governance, introducing universal education, and industrializing—all the latter of which is very important to Japan's modernization, but not as essential to the premise of this research as that of the land reforms.

reforms simply changed the rules of the game and inadvertently created a sort of crude land market. Since land could be bought and sold instead of conquered and defended, the nobility that were allowed to sell and buy, or more importantly those not of aristocratic descent that came to possess large holdings, were fated to part with land; for in a developing market where a name became a brand instead of title, “other forms of investment earn a higher range of interest and liquid assets are more easily used to satisfy the passions of the moment” (Tocqueville 1969, 52). Thus, these actions by the Meiji Administration incited instability and distrust in the long-held belief of the endless wealth and power drawn from landholdings.

After the rise of the emperor, the lands of the over 250 *daimyo* that had served as their domain for two and half centuries were expropriated—albeit with handsome compensations (Waswo 1977, 12). For comparison’s sake, such a transformation was akin to the dispossession of the landed aristocracy following the French Revolution, Eastern Europe in the wake of World War I, and India in the 1950s and 1960s (Dore 1965, 487-89).

Ultimately, the effects of the initial Meiji land reforms eliminated the ascendancy of the nearly two million *samurai* of the warrior class and consolidated the divided power of decentralized feudal structure, and concentrated it under the central control of the emperor and his administration (Jansen 1989, 309). Moreover, the reforms changed the dynamics of countryside life, as the laws afforded landlords hitherto unparalleled profit possibilities from leases and unprecedented authority over the lives of their tenants and thus a powerful position in both village and ultimately national affairs (Waswo 1977, 3).

As one might imagine, the changes in the makeup of authority at the local level created by the land reforms also had a corollary effect on the political makeup at the highest level. In the past, under the rule of the *shogun*, the emperor for nearly a millennium had not exercised direct authority over the island nation. The Modern era would prove no different as the promises laced in the restoring-the-rightful-ruler, nationalistic discourse of the Meiji Restoration was merely a smokescreen to give credibility and popular acquiescence to the restoration leaders.

When Emperor Meiji assumed power at the age of fifteen, it was of course not by his will alone, but through a coalition of military and political elites that made up his court. Aristocratic loyalists to the emperor sought to replace the *bakufu* with an emperor-centered feudalism and forge an imperial domain in which the court nobles would benefit: structurally, the new government existed “simply by the halo surrounding his [the emperor’s] sacred name” (Beasley 1972, 302). This feigned renaissance of the *true* culture of Japan was in fact the creation of something entirely new: an empire ostensibly headed by an emperor but actually ruled by an oligarchy of political elites; these men—not unlike the *shoguns* of the past had—used the emperor’s seal of approval to make their reign official in the eyes of the populace. From the inception of the Modern era in 1868 to the present, supporters and opponents of the throne would use the emperor as a powerful, unquestionable tool to define the nation and unify its people to support their cause (Ruoff 2001, 1).

In order to modernize politically, the Meiji government elected to structure itself along the Western-style political separation of powers; it should come as little surprise that those who headed the new departments of state of the emperor were the very nobles

of the *daimyo* that opposed the *bakufu* (Beasley 1972, 318). Moreover, field marshals who founded the Corps of the Imperial Guards—such as Yamagata Ariomo—were also nobles of the renegade *daimyo* clans (Beasley 1972, 319).

Herein lies an interesting pivotal point that again illustrates the relationship between landed power and politics: though they were divorced from their estates, the former landed gentry of the feudal system became the political elites in the Meiji statehood; these were primarily the clan leaders of the Satsuma and Chōshō leaders who supported Emperor Meiji during the restoration (Jansen 1989). The authority they had garnered from their landholdings throughout generations had changed form: like the physical principles of energy, it did not dissipate, but merely morphed into something else. Based on the latter, this research posits that real estate capital was liquidated into political capital, and among this aristocratic clique, an oligarchy was formed.

PEOPLE'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Nevertheless, liberal reformists behind the scenes of this political pantomime did not hold their tongues for long. Throughout the following decade, an opposition movement coalesced against the administrative monopoly that the Meiji reformers had bequeathed to themselves. Those objecting to the oligarchs were heavily influenced by Western concepts of democracy and saw themselves as the true reformers of Japan, for they sought to modernize the nation by demanding that popular rights to be integrated into the polity (Stockwin 1999, 16).

Those who endorsed that political power being held the populace criticized the Satsuma-Chōshō oligarchy, which rendered the government cliquish; these petitioners

charged the incumbent leadership with monopolizing power and excluding the emperor and the people from the government (Jansen 1989). Espousing the novel principles of liberty, equality, and the right to elect government officials, these advocates in the 1870s formed the socially and politically diverse coalition known as the “People’s Rights;” the pressure group was particularly famed for enunciating the corruption and hypocrisy in the administration by pointing out how the Meiji government, despite its aims of imperial control, was in fact an oligarchy (Ishida, Takeshi & Krauss 1989, 6). The “People’s Rights” were ultimately successful in triggering the social movement, the Popular Rights Movement (*Jiyū Minken Undō*).

Ultimately the movement, though progressive, did not fulfill its objectives of instigating democracy. The reasons lie in the fact that the People's Rights Movement failed to relinquish the grip of the central government, which was maintained by the political oligarchy of the Satsuma-Chōshō clans. Nevertheless, consequential to this movement—and to much political brawling—came the Meiji Constitution in 1889, which established the fundamental law for the Japanese government; it would remain in effect until the Allied occupation (Totman 2005). The Meiji Constitution enfranchised only those few men who could pay a sizable amount in property tax. This limited any potential democratic involvement to a select group (Jansen 1989).

THE MEIJI CONSTITUTION

The constitution was heavily modeled off the Prussian ideas of Statism for the purposes of central control; this was the notion espoused by many bureaucrats who

thought that a “social monarchy”—as witnessed under the British system, where the monarchy was married with a state welfare and capitalism—was completely inapplicable to Japan. These political elites saw the Japanese citizens as a “numerical mass of governing units” that needed to be trained in “the modern ideas of public and political life” (Jansen 1989, 662-663). Statism fittingly gave the leaders tight control over the economy and the direction of politics.

Within a year of its ratification, the Meiji Constitution established Japan’s first legislative assembly known as the Diet, composed of two houses—the House of Representatives and the House of Peers—as well as a cabinet, bureaucracy and military, all of which fell under the rule of the emperor (Ishida, Takeshi & Krauss 1989, 6). The House of Peers was determined by appointment, and those who were selected were most often former *daimyo*; and though these nobles “remained wealthy and as members of the House of Peers had a direct voice in the political system, they were no longer a landed aristocracy with the power to control local affairs ” (Waswo 1977, 13).

With the House of Peers being largely an institution of the nobility, democracy via popular election at this time was limited to the House of Representatives; suffrage, however, was restricted to the wealthiest few—and holding true to former Western examples of limited enfranchisement like those of the United States before 1920 or Britain before 1928—these were of course all men (Schlesinger 1999, 31). Here, it does not necessitate a great stretch of the imagination to see that the majority of the wealthiest in Japan were not the tenant farmers of nineteenth century, but the landowners. So, ironically, despite the magnanimous gesture of extending power to the people, land once again served as a natural barrier between the top and the bottom. Furthermore, the power

of the House of Representatives was limited to merely tweaking the national budget, as it had no legal control or influence over any other branch of government (Schlesinger 1999, 31).

One last important detail in regards to liberty was the coding within the Constitution that made clear that sovereignty was held solely by the emperor on the basis of his divinity and that he was the center of the state.⁸ It is here in the Meiji period that loyalty even until death to the emperor—a phenomenon some call the “cult of the emperor”—was created: “The Meiji era saw Japan adopt not only railroads and other material features of modernity but also a modern national ideology as well: the cult of the emperor... This was in part the result of efforts by provincial officials and local notables to convince the masses to accept, as common sense, the emperor-centered ideology” (Ruoff 2001, 28). Nevertheless, despite the popular polity’s perversion and limitations, it was here that democracy as a representative form of government was for the first time officially recognized and established in Japan.

Notwithstanding these innovations in modernizing Japanese politics, what the Meiji Constitution did for political liberties it did not do for the sovereignty of the tenants:

“According to Article 27 of the Constitution, the rights of property of Japanese subjects were to be inviolable. Although permanent tenancy was recognized in the Civil Code as property right (*bukken*), a limit of fifty years was placed on its duration. Ordinary tenancy, by far the more common form, was defined in the Code as an obligation (*saiken*), not as a property right. Landlords could cancel tenancy agreements at any time and were not required by law to compensate tenants for any improvements

⁸ Ito Hirobumi, a high level statesman and Japan’s prime minister as well as the principal author of the Meiji Constitution—which came into effect on 29 November, 1890—gave his interpretation of Article 1 in his *Commentaries on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan* (1889):

“At the outset, this Article states the great principle of the Constitution of the country, and declares that the Empire of Japan shall, to the end of time, identify itself with the Imperial dynasty unbroken in lineage, and that the principle has never changed in the past, and will never change in the future, even to all eternity. It is intended thus to make clear forever the relations that shall exist between the Emperor and His subjects” (Ruoff 2001, 25).

they had made on the land...Their property rights almost totally unrestricted, landlords were permitted by law to deal with tenants in any way they chose. Unprotected and to a great extent ignored by the government, tenants were more vulnerable to exploitation than ever before” (Waswo 1977, 21).

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ARISTOCRACY

Up until the dawn of the twentieth century, an interesting land-related phenomenon occurred where the former aristocracy—having been tucked away in the upper echelons of governance—came to be replaced on the ground by a de facto aristocracy of the non-lineage-based landholders. Some accounts of the time clearly illustrate the ironic actuality that these new landowners had little to do with the land: “While tenants weeding the fields expose their backs to the scorching sun, landlords slip on *haori* and romp around on bicycles, their destination the village office, the temple or the police station, where they play checkers all day” (Waswo 1977, 4).

It is clear that farmers at the end of the nineteenth century did not elect to stay subservient in a society where mobility became possible, nor did they find solace in being managed from a landlord figure as they had for centuries. Farmers and their families followed begrudgingly the terms established by their landlords and they funded the empire by paying taxes⁹: these two forms of dues coupled with the fact that the farmer was paid once a year from the yield of his crops—which itself was dependent on the capricious nature of the market and the weather—created high-cash demand system with

⁹ Of course, farmers were not the only members of society paying taxes. National taxes and local taxes were virtually applied universally. Yet at the end of the Nineteenth century seventy-seven percent of the households were “agriculture,” nine percent were “miscellaneous, servants, and employees,” six percent were “commercial” and 3.7 percent (mostly carpenters) were categorized as “industrial.” Moreover of 1,981 nongovernment factories, 1,237 were in rural villages, largely employing farmer family members. (Jansen 1989, 613).

the farmer often having limited capital; so to make tax payments, the farmers began to borrow in secret to save face from local usurers at exorbitant rates (Hewes 1955, 30). Though they were usually able to pay their taxes, making rent was forever an onerous endeavor, and little money was left over for savings or material gain.

By 1892, almost half a century after the Meiji Restoration, the tax system and the evolving practice of usury had yoked forty percent of Japanese farmers to tenancy. Thus tenants—remaining relegated to an inferior social status—found themselves more or less in the same unsavory position that they had suffered during the end of the Tokugawa Era, and the Meiji government, ignorant of various types of tenancy that evolved through the country during feudal rule, did little to tailor legislation to suit the variety of needs (Hewes 1955, 30; Jansen 1989, 369; Waswo 1977, 23). The later examples of injustices and mismanagement culminated in widespread tenancy unrest (Waswo 1977, 22-23).

Yet into the twentieth century, the Japanese economic structure underwent a successful transformation from one largely agriculturally based, to one whose base was shared by the production of manufactured goods. Such a transformation challenged the well-padded seat of the landlords in society and afforded the newly growing business sector of entrepreneurs' social mobility above that of landlords. This was made possible by the growing economic sectors of the urban centers—Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Fukuoka, etc. (Jansen 1989).

As Japan continued to modernize economically, and since increased industrialization and commercial activity was strongly encouraged by the government, the nation experienced a healthy growth in a business class. By effect, the once dominant landholders found themselves surpassed both in social and in political influence by men

involved in commerce and industry, and by the newly developed career path of professional politicians (Waswo 1977, 3). This degradation in status—only exacerbated by tenant revolts and the rising education standards among the populace—became a trend that continued until the end of Imperial Japan in 1945.

TAISHO DEMOCRACY

The next great phase in Japanese political development came with the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912. His heir, Emperor Taishō, assumed the throne, and in the wake of his ascension, the political landscape underwent significant reorganization. Primarily influenced by ideas from abroad and increasing domestic urbanization, there came a general trend among political parties and liberal intellectuals to push for more democratic systems; with the fading out of elderly statesmen allied to the old regime, it became easier for the demands of more liberal reform to push Japan into a period known as the “golden age of Taishō Democracy” (Ishida, Takeshi & Krauss 1989, 7).

In 1918, the country saw its first party-led cabinet, which yielded the first elected prime minister, Hara Kei; for the coming twenty-two years—save for the years 1922-1924—Japan could boast of a government lead by party cabinets and of a legislature where the prime minister came from the majority party versus appointment (Schlesinger 1999, 31; Ruoff 2001, 30). During this time, despite the stipulations in the constitution that the sun rose and set by the hand of the emperor in Japan, it became customary for the emperor to affirm the decisions of his cabinet; moreover, the actual decision-making occurred within the Diet, placing checks on the emperor’s authority (Ruoff 2001, 30). Though in the past, the emperor in application had articulated little control over his

nation, these checks and balances of power made it official that the sovereign was no longer above the sovereignty of the nation. In both precedence and precept, the powers of the emperor were limited.

In addition to the unprecedented democratic implications of the order, there also arose the understood possibility of upwards-political mobility and development of political diversity. The 1920s was a time during which a two-party political system evolved, as did the practice that the prime minister would preside over both houses in the Diet (Ishida, Takeshi & Krauss 1989, 7). In 1925, in order to make elections fair—at least for that half of the population constituted by men—the Diet passed laws that extended voting rights to all men (Ruoff 2001, 33).

To elaborate on the significance of universal suffrage, Tocqueville pointed out that it has always been those who did not own enough land by which they could live comfortably without working and those who owned no land at all that collectively have made up the vast majority of society. By extending suffrage to the populace, the government would be in theory handing power over to relative poor, who constituted the majority of society (Tocqueville 1969, 251). Moreover, in the case of Japan in the 1920s, with barely 15 percent of the population living in urban centers, this legislation pulled political efficacy away from the wealthy, developing cities and pushed it towards the poorer countryside (Odaka et al. 2003, 13). This sole action was an unprecedented step in Japan in giving political efficacy to the individual.

Yet despite the symbolically democratic gesture like universal male suffrage, it would be shortsighted to envision Taishō Japan as a full-fledged democracy. Laced within the legal framework and the political culture, legislation existed and surfaced—particularly

towards the end of Taishō's reign—with the intent to temper popular movements of potential political dissent. One such example was the 1925 Peace Preservation Law, which defined permissible ideological limits for both individuals and groups; moreover, it prohibited advocating change in the basic political sense and was imbued with criticisms of the institutions of private property (Mitchell 1976, 20-21). One could speculate that this latter limit on private property was to void people of land-based power, a correlation well demonstrated and perhaps understood over the past centuries. Moreover, also in 1925, the Farmer Labor Party was formed by farmers seeking to challenge the existing tenant-landlord disputes; it was promptly disbanded (Hewes 1955, 34).

In a sort of preview of the thought-control that China would experience decades later under Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution, the Japanese populace in the mid-1920s was subject to the authority of the Special Higher Police—commonly called the “Thought Police;” these men were commissioned to control social movements and the threat of “dangerous foreign ideologies” (Hayes 2004, 25; Lieberthal 2004). Author A. Morgan Young explains the extent to which thought was monitored: “by July 1928, there was hardly a liberal professor left in any high school or college in Japan” (Young 1938, 25). Further undermining the seemingly idealistic advances of the Taishō democracy, corruption and bribery grew to epidemic proportions in Japan (Hayes 2004, 25).

THE DEBUT OF THE CONGLOMERATES

Nevertheless, the legislature alone was not the soul actor in obscuring the actions of the state. The transparency of political action was further muddled by the entwining of the politics and economics. As former *samurai* populated the highest political positions,

they too were a prominent force among the business elite; so the very echoes of power that had helped the former nobles rise to political power, was reflected in their counterpart's economical ascension. A sort of unofficial club evolved among former royalty that encouraged the blending of economic and political bodies. For example, because of its 'loyalty' during the Meiji Restoration, the House of Mitsui found itself in a parallel position to that which it had served under the *bakufu* as the government's banking house. As the Meiji movement for modernization progressed, entrepreneurial elite like the Mitsui received many government favors in the form of contracts and business preferences during the drive for the nation's industrial development (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 40).

By the 1920s, the House of Mitsui had become a conglomerate, incorporating 130 major corporations in Japan (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 40). Though Mitsui was the largest—twice as large, in fact, as its competitor Mitsubishi—it was not the only composite organization of its type. Other family-based conglomerates had evolved throughout the Meiji period and up to the Taishō, among the largest were the Yasuda, Okura, Fujita, Iwasaki, Sumitomo, Furukawa and Asano. Not surprisingly, like the House of Mitsui most all of the conglomerates—save for the Okura and the Fujita—were former *samurai* families and had similar origins with initial business fostered by the government's patronage (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 42). Collectively, these mega-companies were called the *zaibatsu*.

The *zaibatsu* were not just mere companies, though. As suggested by the development of the House of Mitsui, the *zaibatsu* were actual creations by political elites that came to serve the government because of their unparalleled industrialized

capabilities. Nevertheless, these industrial titans were not puppets of the state. From their inception, gradual independence from the claws of the government became key to successful business practices. There were other companies that the government did have a hand in forming and utilizing. Those that did not wean themselves from the dependency on the government, however, suffered from stunted growth due to lack of innovation and adaptation to the market because of the bureaucratic involvement and mandates. These companies were overall less agile and less autonomous; they never obtained the status of *zaibatsu* (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 42-43).

As more wealth infiltrated Japanese society, and the basis of social status shifted from that of strictly familial origins to that of wealth, social mobility became possible based on financial capital alone. So for the first time in Japanese history, a name was not necessarily the main means for rising within the echelons of society. Nevertheless, in this evolving structure, despite the individual's chance to become affluent and prominent, it was the wealthy family members of the *zaibatsu* that naturally constituted the upper echelons of high early twentieth-century Japanese society (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 48). So though a *nouveau riche* business class did surface, and though the landowners served as a new rural aristocracy, the descendents of former *samurai* now clad in business suits already had a social advantage. At this time, heritage plus business-made wealth seemed to be the apparent equation for dominating the commercial sector.

Moreover, aside from dominating the upper levels of society, the *zaibatsu* families also came to harbor a comfortable place in politics; their shift from the status of contracted employees for the government to actual political participants came about with the death of the *genrō*—older Meiji statesmen—during which time political parties

gained importance as Japan democratized in the Taishō era. These parties became dominated by the *zaibatsu*, with large *zaibatsu* being essentially masters of their own political parties. In spite of political policy and the bureaucrats at the head of the government programs, by the late 1920s the *zaibatsu* had extensive political influence; but their sway was limited by a growing imperialistic agenda.

THE MIGHT OF THE MILITARY

It is important to remember that at this time Japan was still an empire—and as history would soon reveal—a lack of democratic advances among the populace, within the legislature or through the political discourse of the time, would come to undermine its growing imperial agenda. The nation was emboldened with a growing economy and the success of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) between Japan and Russia over both nations' imperial ambitions in the East; this victory awakened many countries to Japan's growing power in Asia. So with growing military might, in spite all of its success in the advancement of freedom, in the 1920s, when faced with a choice between cultivating liberty or conquering land, Japan chose the latter.

Thus the blossoming trend of popular polity came to an abrupt end a few years after the rise of Emperor Taishō's heir, World War II's Emperor Shōwa—known in the West as Hirohito—in 1926. In the early 1930s, fueled by fear of disunity that might compromise Japan's military trek across Asia, opposition against the democratic trends fully took center stage.¹⁰ Indeed, Japan's growing imperial conquests—known as the Fifteen Year War—was an agenda run by the military elite and threatened by the

¹⁰ “But even the many government leaders had been wary of democracy, worried that it would undermine national unity by giving voice to dissent. They had also felt that discussion of popular sovereignty would threaten the sovereignty of the emperor” (Schlesinger 1993, 31).

legislature, who viewed such an epic endeavor as costly and a potential threat to economic growth and development.

In 1932, resulting from clashes between the Diet on one end and the army and navy on the other over heated issues such as military funding, fanatics within the military orchestrated the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, marking the end of party-led cabinets (Ruoff 2001, 34). Though the Diet remained open and held elections, in reality Japan was being run by a series of ‘national unity’ governments headed by the military (Schlesinger 1999, 31, 40); the Diet was no longer a threat to the military’s imperialistic agenda. Military leaders of the time successfully justified their actions by manipulating the constitutional principle of the emperor’s right of supreme command and claiming that they were carrying out the emperor’s wishes; all aspects of conquest abroad were fought in the name of the emperor (Ruoff 2001, 34).¹¹ An ironic stipulation in the Meiji Constitution that well may have foreshadowed this unofficial coup was that the War Minister was held accountable only to the emperor himself, and not the civilian elected government (Gluck & Graubard 1993, 40).

Even the powerful *zaibatsu* were no match for the military oligarchy. The *zaibatsu* conglomerates overwhelmingly did not favor war, as they saw it a threat to economic stability. Yet in the face of the military elite, the power that they had commanded through the political parties was just as powerless as any other potential opposition (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 42). Rising above the land to the industrial sector, the *zaibatsu* clans at

¹¹Such an ideology harkens to mind one of the most poignant quotes I have yet read: “Human beings...just get carried away by new ideas, like dressing up in jackboots and shooting people, or dressing up in white sheets and lynching people, or dressing up in tie-dye jeans and playing guitars at people. Offer people a new creed with a costume and their hearts and minds will follow.” –Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*

the time of the military's ascent supplied the vast majority of Japan's manufactured goods (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 42-43). Since under military rule, many of these manufactured goods were channeled for the purpose of combat, "...in the eyes of many people, the leading *zaibatsu* such as Mitsui came to be strongly identified with the military and war devastation" (Kerbo & McKinstry 1995, 40). Though the *zaibatsu* had a monopoly over the economy, the military had a monopoly over the emperor's seal of approval. So with the Diet debilitated, the *zaibatsu* mere order-takers, and the emperor having long since been stripped of any real authority, the military reigned supreme with impunity.

With the opposition quieted, the military made a crafty move in bringing the populace on its side, thus insuring its rise to rule. By 1935, less than one quarter of the nation was urbanized (Odaka et al. 2003, 13); therefore, the military strove to make rooted ties with those that tilled the land. Tenants and independent farmers alike came to see the military as a means of advancement beyond the modest means they could afford their families. Top ranking generals capitalized on the mutual disdain for the urban dwellers the military and country folk shared; and since many military personnel had origins in the countryside due to former warrior class holdings, people of the rural villages felt a close connection to these leaders (Hewes 1955, 36). Therefore, sending your son beyond the boundaries of the field, to fight in the name of the emperor was seen as an honor and eventually a duty as Japan's military might expanded in correlation with the growing borders of its empire.

Despite war meddles, the individual was mostly disenfranchised from the government and did not question—at least outright—the established political structure and the legitimacy of the throne, so the military was easily able to carry out its agenda by

manipulating the faith invested in the sovereign (Ruoff 2001, 34). With democracy dead, civil rights were suppressed, and the country bowed to the will of belligerents who marshaled millions straight to the grave for imperial conquest and war in the name of an earthly god.

Moreover, in regards to terrestrial matters, it should come as no surprise that the very military tailors that stitched together Japan's blanketing conquest across Asia, did not achieve such high ranks on merit alone. As explained earlier, the military elite in the Meiji Administration were the former *samurai* of the loyalist *daimyo*. Keeping with this motif, the chief generals during the Pacific War—Hideki Tōjō, Kuniaki Koiso, Kantarō Suzuki—were all direct descendants of former *samurai* families (National Diet Library, Japan).

MODERN DAY CLANS

Though no longer members of a land-based aristocracy, the political capital that had been built upon generations spent in the higher echelons of society by the elite families of the generals was the very power that led them to achieve the crown of governance. While the power to own and to rent out land had forged a new type of commercial aristocracy among commoners in the rural scene, the vestigial power still inherent in the former land-owning nobility served to forge a new type of aristocracy that transcended the land: a political aristocracy. Thus, one could argue that since the supreme sovereign of the nation ironically in actuality had no real clout, the former landholders who found themselves no longer tethered to the earth rose to be alongside if not actually above the heavenly ruler in regards to their political might.

These periods from the Tokugawa to the beginning of the Shōwa Era, not only illuminate Japan's path to modernization and its rise as a global power, but they are significant in showing the development of democracy and the relation between the effects of land as a political tool on society and society on governance in the pre-World War II time.

Before the Meiji Restoration, land was the basis for control. After the rise of the Emperor Meiji, the royalty were separated from their landholdings. This caused two interesting phenomenon: 1) in the rural areas new landowners essentially replaced former *samurai* elite and 2) in the urban sector, the descendents of select *samurai* clan, riding on the coattails of their ancestry came to dominate the political, economic and military sectors of the state. So a select few, former low-lying men rose to high status in the countryside, while former high-riding nobles transcended the boundaries of the field and entered new, metaphysical fields of power and control; the landless still remained subject to the whims of others. Even though the *samurai* as a class were officially dead, their descendants until the end of WWII continued the belligerent and political tradition of fighting for control from three, new, notable and modern clans: the Diet, the *zaibatsu* and the military.

A LONG STORY SHORT

Overall, democracy was not something that developed naturally, but rather it was one of many imported and adapted Western novelties. For the most part, as a result of the hierarchical social structure, the average citizen was mute in administrative decisions, yet many forget that as Japan progressed through the early twentieth century, it showed possibilities of developing into a functioning democracy; that is until the usurpation of

the military oligarchy.¹² The restrictions on free speech—something indelible to the exercise of democracy—as well as the fine print in the former-warrior written Meiji Constitution that permitted the military to sit above all other citizens were indeed two great catalysts to the inevitable failure of Imperial Japanese democracy. In the end, it was decedents of the landed gentry who, in preparation to waging war throughout Asia and across the Pacific, fought and won against the sovereignty of the populace, against the rights of elected officials and overall against the rights of the individual within Japan. Through their authoritarian reign, these men sundered any chance for a government by the people. In the end, it was the scions of the *samurai* that slew democracy.

The next chapter of democracy in Japan would begin ironically in the wake of another absolute ruler, who brought the military monster to its knees and ended the nation's imperialistic trek across Asia and the Pacific. He was the last dictator that Japan would see. His name was Douglas MacArthur.

¹² It is possible to argue that in a microchronic timeframe of only half a century, Japan's political evolution mirrored that of England's over nearly 800 years from a feudal society, to the Magna Carta and the general trend of the king and his posse slowly yielding rights and sovereignty to individual citizens, eventually bearing the constitutional monarchy. Of course, "whereas the British monarch's role had gradually become limited to largely symbolic functions even while it retained its historical legal sovereignty, the Constitution of Japan transformed the emperor into a symbol overnight" (Ruoff 2001, 52).

CHAPTER II

Why was Democracy Japan's Unopened Gift?

“When the great mass of citizens does not want to bother about anything but private business...one is left in astonishment at the small number of weak and unworthy hands into which a great people can fall.”—Alexis de Tocqueville, *On Democracy in America*

After witnessing the torching of its capital, the loss of millions—both citizens and soldiers—and the nightmarish impossibility of two cities disappearing in smoke, Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces—and in particular to the United States¹³—on 15 August 1945, marking the end of Japan's military expanse across Asia. The news came from the mouth of Emperor Hirohito himself; despite being a recording instead of the implied live broadcast, it was the first time that millions of Japanese ever heard the voice of their god (Ruoff 2001, 41).

Ruling in the emperor's stead, the United State's government chose General Douglas MacArthur to lead the Occupation of Japan. Compared to the cruelty many conquered people suffered under Japan's reign throughout the Far East, the American Occupation of Japan by contrast has been heralded as a gentle and constructive reformation. Indeed, America—arguably the most powerful country in the world at the end of WWII—had little to gain by exacting revenge on the war-torn nation. From the US point of view, Japan's geographical location yielded vested interest for the new super power regarding Japan's wellbeing and prosperity.

Japan as an island country was arguably easier to defend than one landlocked. Though it lacked in resources, Japan could serve potentially as a gateway to the East: the

¹³ From here on out, the terms United States, America and US will be used synonymously

nation, aside from Russia and a few small islands of Oceania, was the most eastern territory. As Hawaii had served America as a hub in the Mid-Pacific, Japan could serve as the link on the other side. Moreover, due to its proximity to a myriad of East Asian countries, Japan would be a fulcrum for trade and for military affairs in the Far East. It would then make sense to focus attention away from scolding and humiliating Japan—perhaps a lesson well learned from the nefarious effects of the Treaty of Versailles and Germany’s reaction at the end of WWI—and rather to concentrate on forging the nation into an ally and an economic partner that could be wielded for the avail of the United States. If the US wanted this profitable symbiosis to be continuous, then whatever actions the Americans took would be those aimed at securing long-term benefits and not just instant gratification.

In addition to the economic and militaristic benefits, one could speculate that Japan also afforded the Allies a blank political canvas in the East. The international arena following WWII was proving to be a continuously intertwining sphere. In a matter of three decades two wars had pervaded the expanse of the globe; moreover, with successful establishment of the United Nations in 1945, much evidence pointed to the fact that isolation was no longer an easy feat and that the nations of the world were becoming increasingly connected. Those who could in theory dominate the network could in turn have their agenda’s implemented across a vast expanse of the globe. Though the democratic country of the United States had proven itself a superpower, it was not alone. On the other side of the globe, rising from the ashes was the communist power of the Soviet Union. Japan was more or less in the middle.

Nevertheless, it was the Allies that got to Japan first, and the Americans elected to make the country into an official democracy¹⁴. It is interesting to question the impetus behind establishing a democracy, and perhaps naïve to assume that the main motivation was to model a foreign nation on American values. Truly, the United States had even by 1945 a history of sponsoring dictators whenever such a tactic paired well with the American agenda: notable pre-WWII examples of this include support of Francisco Franco of Spain, Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez of El Salvador, Anastasio Somoza Senior of Nicaragua, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and Fulgencio Batista of Cuba.¹⁵ Therefore, vis-à-vis the choice of what kind of power to implement, the US had a choice. So it should not be taken for granted then that the sole motivation of United States administration was to be the liberator of Japan, at least in the altruistic sense. Beyond the surface of any propaganda of a nation's benevolence, there lies at the core the selfish incentive for that goodwill.

Specifically, a democracy in Japan would be the first politically compatible hub in the East, plausibly observant of and sympathetic to US wishes; it would also be in direct opposition to the Soviet Union's communist trek, which by that point already had stirrings in China with Mao Zedong and the Communist Red Party; the spread of countries falling under the centralized authoritarian control that artificially implemented communism as a viable governing system, which often impeded free and fair trade, was a

¹⁴ Henceforth, the term "democracy" will refer to the broad definition of governance in which the populace holds the power to rule and officials are brought into and out of power through free and fair elections.

¹⁵ One might notice that all of the examples have some correlation to Latin America; this could perhaps be explained by the effect of the isolationistic Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which stipulated the United States would view further colonization of the Americas by European powers as a threat to US sovereignty. This came at a timely moment when Latin American countries were on the verge of independence from Spain. As the World Wars proved, though, matters of political affairs could no longer be limited to hemispheres. The United States' actions in Japan and in Oceania following WWII, showed a shift in political attention and represented what would become an ever-widening scope of what constituted 'American interest.'

growing concern of the US government. Thus, bringing the pheasant¹⁶ under the eagle's wing, the United States could gain a permanent foothold in East Asia. Geographically, Japan would be America's new best democratic friend.

“...when General Douglas MacArthur arrived at Atsugi Air Base near Yokohama on August 30, 1945, he promised a dictatorship that would be benign—one that would not exact reprisals but would swiftly remake Japan into a peaceful, stable society. The general vowed to ‘sever for all time the shackles of feudalism and in its place raise the dignity of man under protection of the people’s sovereignty.’ He was giving Japan democracy” (Schlesinger 1999, 31).

Though MacArthur's aim through his “benign” dictatorship was to impose on Japan a democratic government where the right to rule was held by the populace, it is arguable that democracy as a functioning system of political equality is not something that can be superimposed over an already existing power structure. By democracy's definition, universal equality is essential before a *government by the people* can be practiced. As demonstrated in Chapter I, land up until the end of World War II had played the pivotal role in creating and maintaining inequality within Japanese society. So even at first glance, the American administration in Japan understood that a complete reorganization of the systems that had come to hold a concentration of inherited aristocratic power in the pre-WWII era—namely that of the Diet, the military and the *zaibatsu*—had to be completely restructured for more egalitarian purposes. Therefore, a series of reforms were employed to restructure the concentrated systems of power, starting with the highest possible point: the emperor.

POLITICAL REFORM

¹⁶ Japan's national bird is the Green Pheasant or Japanese Pheasant, called *kiji* in Japanese.

For the purposes of stability and acceptance, MacArthur and his advisors were sensitive to the central role the emperor embodied for the importance of nationalism, cultural identity and tradition; therefore, the British System, which too was headed by a monarch but in effect run by a democratically elected parliament, was chosen as the most suitable style of democracy to cater to the perspectives of both the Allies and the Japanese: from the Allies' point of view—"By adopting the actual functioning of the British constitutional monarchy as their model, occupation authorities sought to prevent a recurrence of the throne's being used against democracy; their solution was to align the constitutional position of the emperor with the symbolic role [sic] they intended him to play in practice" (Ruoff 2001, 44); and from the native's point of view—"The Japanese could point to the example of Britain, a constitutional monarchy widely viewed as one of world's most stable democracies, to argue that the imperial house was not necessarily an impediment to development of parliamentary democracy"(Ruoff, 2001 4). Either way, the system could be appreciated on both sides of the Pacific as a compromise between tradition and progress.

Notwithstanding the emperor's new clothes, the political structure as a whole received a complete makeover—coincidentally bringing back many retro-styles of policy and political make-up lost under the military oligarchy. Among these changes implemented by MacArthur's staff were strengthening the legislature by making it the supreme governing organ, establishing universal suffrage and including women in that suffrage, liberating the media from censorship¹⁷, reforming and liberalizing the economy,

¹⁷ In his work *Embracing Defeat*, writer John W. Dower, elaborates that decree and implementation were vastly different missions during the occupation. Sore subjects were decreed as "impermissible discourse." Among which in 1964 included "Criticism of United States," "Criticism of SCAP (Supreme Command of the Allied Forces)," "Divine Descent Nation Propaganda," "Glorification of Feudal Ideals," and ironically

giving workers the right to organize and strike, as well as incorporating a ‘Bill of Rights’ in the Constitution; all latter were reflections of liberties and stipulations also shared by American citizens. Thus, in one fell swoop, the Meiji Constitution—to which 70 million Japanese had been accustomed—was completely obliterated by the new Constitution of Japan (Ruoff 2001, 41).

Nevertheless, the Japanese situation was special because of the past clusters of power that had existed in its feudal and hierarchical history. So as to instigate social equality, the constitution included a few unprecedented clauses that the United States’ Bill of Rights, for example, did not share. These specifications included 1) a guarantee of the economic right to make a decent living, 2) forcing landlords to turn property over to tenant farmers, 3) a bureaucratic cleansing by purging over 200,000 government, military and business leaders and barring them from public office and the executive suite, along with 4) the infamous ‘peace clause’ under which the Japanese relinquished the right to maintain an army (Schlesinger 1999, 31-32).

At the beginning of the occupation, the political reformation coupled with the constitution’s stipulations had outright disbanded two of the former, pre-war aristocratic cliques: the military and the Diet. With no army at all to be had, a military oligarchy was no longer possible. Moreover, since both houses of the Diet would now come to be composed of solely elected members, chosen at the discretion of the populace, the former Diet clan had officially ended. To make sure that all went according to plan, American ‘democracy instructors’ were deployed across the nation to teach citizens on how to make use of their new freedoms (Schlesinger 1999, 31).

“References to Censorship.” These were relaxed as the political winds shifted to a direction that whispered no talk of dissent or anti-Ally sentiment; by the end of the occupation such measures were unnecessary. (Dower 1999, 410-12).

LAND REFORM

In addition to the immediate political reforms, the MacArthur administration set out to undo what it felt had been the central foundation of Japan's previous belligerence: manipulation of the power vested in land. The basic tactic of the Occupation's land reform policy was to "*uproot and destroy* the various evils which had for so long blighted the lives of the peasantry" (Hewes 1955, 54). To achieve this end, MacArthur implemented the Land Reform Directive that contained four basic provisions: "1) transfer of land ownership from absentee land owners to land operators, 2) purchase of farm lands from any non-operating owner at equitable rates, 3) sale of land to tenants at annual installments commensurate with tenant income, 4) protection of former tenants who purchased land against reversion to tenancy status" (Hewes 1955, 54).

In his work *Japan – Land and Men*, author Laurence Hewes, Jr. succinctly summarizes the political and historical implications of the reform and the motivation of the Americans: "[The Land Reform Directive] was tantamount to an open avowal of one central purpose: destruction of the feudal social relations in Japanese villages and removal of agricultural production as an element of economic support of the political power of autocratic government" (Hewes 1955, 59). Moreover, symbolically the new laws would permit the common Japanese citizen to own the land that they had cultivated for so long but never really possessed. Since land historically had been a representation of status and prestige that aided in the cultivation and maintenance of a social hierarchy, it was a great symbol of equality for the populace to have an equal chance at owning land.

Notwithstanding this lofty reformatory ambition, it is important to remember that what the Americans were proposing was to eliminate an entire way of life, and this was not met without opposition. Japanese politicians were ultimately sympathetic to the

inevitable plight of the landlords and fearful of hierarchical social and culture shocks the reform would create; moreover, many Japanese officials had interpreted the Occupation's proposal as a means to punish landlords instead of maintaining peace (Hewes 1955, 60). The Japanese proposed a more moderate approach that would still allow some forms of tenancy to exist (Hewes 1955, 59). Yet the Americans viewed these proposals as essentially the antithesis of their aim for equality and a resurrection of the very way of life that cradled Japan into the depths of war; so objections, though heard, were for the most part rejected.

In June 1946, the Allied Council published the conclusions that had been reached regarding land questions: the most significant aspect of the publication would be that landowners would be limited to 7.5 acres and exceptions would only be made in areas like northern Honshu—where farms were generally larger—or in cases where farmers had sufficient family labor to cultivate more than the permitted 7.5 acres (Hewes 1955, 62-63).

The latter decree ultimately divided the seven million acres of farm land and shattered the landscape of Japan into a patchwork of tiny plots among the better part of four million farm families—over sixty percent of the total farm population—living as tenants (Hewes 1955, 59). Of course this did not happen over night, but the limit of less than 8 acres per family with the abolition of the anti-democratic *house system*¹⁸—through

¹⁸ The *house system* was a framework through which households organized themselves. From patriarchal top down, birth determined status and this could not be changed. The father as head of the house would define social status for the family, and his lot was passed to the first son (Hewes 1955, 139).

which the transfer of real estate had been traditionally primogenitary—land through generations was further fractured, so that diminution of holdings was inevitable.¹⁹

By their newly drawn maps, the Americans had uprooted Japan from the power so long cultivated from the land. With people more equated in land capital, and few willing to conglomerate their holdings, the Japanese were no longer members of a feudal society, and land—though precious and scarce as it may be—no longer served as the fulcrum of politics. Owing to the fact that they could work the land that they now owned, farm families become more economically independent; therefore, no longer fettered to the wishes of landlords, their new personal autonomy allowed the farm families to participate more easily in the new democracy. Leaders were elected for a variety of reasons, though no longer riding on the clout afforded them by their clods of land. With the death of the landlords, the Americans had assured that a peaceful democracy for the first time had a fighting chance in Japan.

ECONOMIC REFORM

Coupled with freedom from the land, the occupation reforms also concentrated on liberalizing the economy. As the Soviet Union was perceived as a greater threat, economic liberalization and economic reforms to make Japan a stronger, open trading partner and a more powerful economic force intensified throughout the decade of the

¹⁹ Today, one can easily observe by flying low over interior Japan, or taking a train through the countryside, that the rolling plans near the ocean shore or nestled in the mountain valleys are carved up into tiny plot farms. A verdant landscape of rice paddies or wheat fields, set against the backdrop of forested mountains, and distinguished from owner to owner only by a two-story, charcoal colored farmhouses and delineated by tiny asphalt roads, is a common countryside scene. To conserve space and fuel, Yamaha and Hinomoto compact tractors no bigger than a golf cart serve as the main means of tilling and reaping. What would be just the right size plot for an over-zealous, sunhat wearing, Martha Stuart-like gardener of America, is at times a family's entire farm in Japan.

1940s. This was achieved by privatizing industry to make companies more independent and conceivably competitive, and by changing laws to allow for free trade unions to make workers more independent.

One pivotal point of the reform was the attempted breakup of the *zaibatsu*. The *zaibatsu* were viewed as too big and too powerful; the vertical organizations that kept political power in the hands of select business men and essentially helped run the government before the military junta rule (Kerbo, McKinstry 43). Therefore, these mega-companies were just as big of a threat to democratic rule as the military or the feudal structure had been. So when the Americans proposed the dissemination of the pre-WWII family conglomerates—which had been the economic backbone of Japan for decades—this sparked immediate opposition. Many supporters of the *zaibatsu*—namely those wealthy businessmen heavily invested in the companies—feared that Japan would lose its competitive edge in the international markets. Nevertheless, by the late 1940s partial success was achieved in the dissolution of many of the major *zaibatsu*.

Yet where there is a will—or a loophole, rather—there is a way. The dismantled corporations soon interlinked again via alliance across industries, and also set a premium to supply one another where possible. Arguably less integrated than the *zaibatsu*, these newly forming organizations were a highbred of horizontal—based around business entities outside the production of a product or of a service—and vertical organization—based on structures within a company that work together for the production of a product or of a service. Within half a decade of the initial *zaibatsu* dismantlement, the *New York Times* reported in an article “Japan Again Plans Huge Corporations” on July 17, 1954 that Japan announced that they would encourage the merger of its strongest companies

into giant corporations with the strategy that these new conglomerates could withstand intensifying pressure from a growing global economy. Ironically, virtually all of the prewar *zaibatsu* had sifted through the cracks and regrouped on the other side to become members of the new mega-companies known as the *keiretsu* (Heenan 1998, 6).

In contrast to the *zaibatsu* that were strictly vertically organized and centered around one family-clan, the *keiretsu* were defined as “conglomerates with major banks or industrial companies at their centers, which provided ample, often cheap, investment capital to other members of the group” (Heenan 1998, 10). An article titled “Japan’s ‘Third Wave’ Breaks onto Keiretsu Rocks” by contributor Yone Sugita that appeared in the *Asia Times* on March 27, 2001 explains how the corporate alliances were “bound together by preferential lending, supply, distribution, mutual appointment of directors, financing, and intra-group transactions, and webs of cross-shareholdings among groups of firms and banks to manage the risks inherent in business transactions.” In short, what once had been a family company was transformed into a family of companies, and a side effect of this was the dawn of group loyalty, where a company employee and his or her family felt compelled to buy and use products and services provided by businesses within their own *keiretsu*. Emerging from the rubble of the *zaibatsu*, six specific *keiretsu* were formed; these conglomerates known as the ‘Big Six’ were Dai-Ichi Kangyo, Fuyo, Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sanwa and Sumitomo.

Though economics is not a central point or theme in this research, it is important to note that Japan’s tactics following the occupation was to focus on its economic productivity and development. No longer having the need to defend itself, the technology that had been developed during WWII by the military led to innovations in Japan’s

business sector and helped give them an edge in the global market. Intense amounts of energy were spent on industrialization, which helped facilitate the repopulation and expansion of the urban setting. With more wealth available and largely concentrated in cities, the economic reforms of the occupation ultimately resulted in a high increase in Japan's urban centers over the next three decades and a sharp rise in the average household income; this in turn permitted the majority of the population to enjoy more comparable levels of income (総務省 統計局 (Sōmusho Tōkeikyoku), 2008).

POLITICAL PARTIES

In the wake of the death of the three former power parties—the Meiji-style Diet, the *zaibatsu*, and the military—the development and success of the political parties could be a possible indication of the progress of implementing a democracy in Japan, for in contrast to oligarchies political parties afford the individual the possibility of engaging in politics. Yet in spite of the newfound possibility of effective political parties and the attempts by the Allies at political re-training, it could be argued that the Japanese, suddenly thrown into a new political environment, did not know how to adapt or make constructive use of their new system.

Proof of this need to acclimate came in the years following the Occupation, when the world of politics was opened to people who previously never had a chance at a political career. Statistically, ninety percent of the new genre of candidates had never held political office before. The democratic fiesta to which everyone—not just for the landed gentry—were invited, successfully sparked a multitude of parties—ranging from the Socialists and Liberals to the Great Japan Charcoal Production Party—that sought to

dogfight for seats in the Diet during the first postwar election in April 1946 (Schlesinger 1999, 32).

It is important to remember that, despite the United States' lofty attempts at getting the nation back on its feet, early postwar Japan was still a country licking its wounds and trying to make sense of a painful past and a promising albeit daunting and disorientating future; society was being completely transformed and so were politics. Therefore, when the United States ended its seven-year occupation in 1952, the democracy left behind looked fragile at best (Schlesinger 1999, 46).

The new Japanese policy makers were faced with fresh obstacles and never-before-encountered debates over fundamental issues such as capitalism versus socialism, rearmament versus pacifism, and loyalty to either the Americans or the Soviets. In spite of the nonviolent occupation, the Japan left in the wake of the America's departure was not as peaceful: "Mass rallies, general strikes, brutal police crackdowns, even politically inspired acts of rail sabotage were a way of life" (Schlesinger 1999, 46). Almost three years would pass before the whirlwind of politics wound wind down and the divisions that separated its politicians would merge themselves into solid, large-scale political parties.

The latter period of political chaos gives the observer insight into the potential nature of raw—i.e. imposed versus evolved and tested—democracy, where the politically aspiring individuals are all allowed at once to engage in a system that lacks precedence. In contrast to the myriad of tiny competing parties in a raw democracy, more seasoned democratic systems tend to harbor megalithic political parties—such as the Republicans of US or the Labor Party of the UK—which espouse values that are rarely pure or

absolute; rather they embody a sort of general feeling—liberal, conservative, environmentally-conscious, etc. This is rendered by a compromise between political ideals and realities, which can be found as sort of an alloy of values. This tempering and merger of ideals can by its extensive range possibly then cater directly to classes found at the extremities of society. For example the wealthy, fiscally conservative Republicans in the US have little necessarily in common with the right-wing social conservatives that make up the other part of the party; by contrast well-educated, liberal minded Democrats might have little in common with their virtually uneducated, welfare-seeking counterparts residing at the opposite spectrum of the party.

So by contrast to large parties fused over time from seemingly incompatible members witnessed in a seasoned democracy, in a raw democracy, there develops a sort of natural state among the members—much like a group of opinionated and picky adolescents trying to make a decision as where to eat, with everyone voicing loudly their own uncompromising opinion. Therefore, until everyone gets hungry enough, compromise is out of the question. Until then the selfishness of small parties radiates in their actions.

At this point in the research, it is important to draw attention to possible discrepancies between naturally evolved versus artificially established democracy and the role social practices might play in political orientation. In a state where democracy came about gradually—such as in England—parties slowly formed and were defined over time through struggle, wins and losses, as important issues arose and subsided, were integrated or abandoned. In an artificially imposed democracy—especially one so charged with endless political possibilities, imperative decisions and new responsibilities—it would

seem that all the issues, which would have otherwise arose incrementally, came rushing like a tsunami through a framework that was designed to deal with broad topics—not so much on an individual basis but—through more organized, compromised channels—i.e. platforms. This naturally would present a huge obstacle for new politicians who wished to develop a succinct platform and suddenly had to appeal to a mass of people, who were not accustomed to making much use of political machines.

Despite the chaos, some researchers view the first decade of post-war Japanese politics as a relatively “typical” state of contemporary democratic practice.²⁰ Yet *typical* is a relative term and, whether there is a general consensus that the first frenzied decade following the Occupation was unremarkable or not is ultimately unimportant for the objective of this research. What is important is that Japan did establish political parties, which held open elections and put popularly elected candidates into office.

Nevertheless, despite the arguably normative process of establishing functioning political parties, what is intriguing is the fact that within a few years after the United States’ withdrawal—instead of complete collapse—Japan experienced political solidification: politicians aligned themselves to just a handful of parties and the pandemonium of the past yielded to a predictable political pattern, known as the 1955 System.²¹ Perhaps being the most debated aspect of Japan’s history, the 1955 System was a political phenomenon where one party ruled the Diet for 38 years, virtually unopposed (Richardson 1997, 1).

²⁰ “For the first decade of the postwar period, Japan’s parliamentary democracy represented a typical multiparty system. During this period, several major parties, from both conservative and progressive camps, competed for legislative seats took turns forming coalition and minority governments” (Kohno 1997, 5).

²¹ “In 1955, the division hardened. Until then, Japan’s postwar Parliament had been a confusing whirl of governments, of parties appearing, disappearing, merging, and splitting apart” (Schlesinger 1999, 46).

THE 1955 SYSTEM

The 1955 System began in the fall of 1955 when two new parties were formed by the compromising and merging of four. In one corner—despite years of animosity and friction—the two conservative parties, the Japan Democratic Party and the ironically named Liberal Party, merged in November to form the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), whose support base was more conservative—i.e. the newly freed and mobilized rural folk and business men, both of whose numbers were growing thanks to the Allies' land and economic reform (Schlesinger 1999, 47). In the other corner, the Rightist Socialist Party of Japan and the Leftist Socialist Party of Japan too buried their hatchets and created the new Japan Socialist Party (JSP), whose support was more economically and socially liberal, white-collar and urban based—not yet a strong demographic number (Hook & Weiner 2000). Over the next 38 years, the LDP would run virtually unopposed, with the JSP rarely gaining any significant ground in the Diet houses.

There are many theories as to why the one-party monopoly evolved and why it was stable for so long. Regarding the LDP's evolution and establishment, Tocqueville offers insight. Using Tocqueville's example of the political change that follows a bloody revolution as a prism, it can be speculated that the Japanese people, weary from war and conflict had developed a “blind passion” for and “inordinate devotion” to order (Tocqueville 1961, 677). Since the LDP represented unification among the dissenting factions and promised order, perhaps this is one main reason why the party hegemony was established and vastly supported.

In regards to the sustainability and structure, published debates on the topic can be divided into either one of two camps: those that viewed the Japanese government—and in particular its manifestation of the 1955 System—in a positive light and those that were highly critical of the structure. Perhaps the most common trend among the researchers was the manner in which everything was based upon and defended by uncompromising models: essentially Japan was white or black, sweet or sour, democratic or holdover feudalistic.

In his work, *Japanese Democracy: Power, Coordination, and Performance*, Bradley Richardson invests much of his time outlining, defining, contrasting and comparing other researchers' theories and either criticizing or defending various theoretical models that have developed over the decades as to how the LDP functioned and the degree to which it was truly democratic.²² In an attempt to make things simple, these theories can be roughly divided into two overarching and opposing positions—Semi-authoritarian and Democratic—and these positions can be further subdivided into more specific categorical models: Vertical-integrated and Centralized versus Horizontal-Fragmented and Decentralized, respectively. Overall, these models, though rigid, are still essential in learning about the dominating views of Japanese politics as well as gaining insight into how democracy imposed from without began to function in Japan.

Semi-authoritarian: Vertical-Integrated and Centralized

²² Richardson's work is perhaps one of the politest and most levelheaded of all reviewed. Though he overall personally looks fondly upon the Japan's political games, Richardson is diplomatic in his presentation of the various political models; therefore, it seemed most evenhanded to use his work as summary of the varying points of view.

Perhaps because Japan was historically feudal and spent many of its years under the reign of one individual or a select few, a common theory that has arisen about the 1955 System—and sometimes beyond—is that the government was actually semi-authoritarian instead of democratic, a legacy of Japan's pre-World War II political trends. One viable reason for considering Japan as semi-authoritarian resides in the fact that under the 1955 System there was no effective opposing political parties or influences from labor unions (Richardson 1997, 2). Indeed, having no other parties to answer to, the LDP was free to dominate the political landscape as it saw fit. This undermined the implicit role of other parties in imposing sort of checks and balances on the ruling party; and though other parties filled seats in the Diet, since they rarely had chance for a majority seating, for nearly 40 years there was no real threat to the LDP. (Richardson 1997, 95).

The original intent of the United State's blueprint for Japanese democracy was to place power in the hands of the citizens who elected members of the Diet; members of the Diet in turn elected the prime minister, who would appoint the cabinet and ministers; a democratic system organized from the bottom up. By contrast, however, the Vertical-Integrated and Centralized model posits that Japan is organized from the top down—in sort of a feudal, chain system—where authority (or democracy) is administered by a few centralized elites. Here, the central bureaucracy dominates politics in a close cooperation with the LDP and businesses²³, which are also vertical in organization. Yoshio Sugimoto,

²³ “During the period of the 1955 system, LDP-business relations were based on shared interest and values, paralleling similar interest group-political party alignments before World War II.”

Business relations were reciprocal: business supported the LDP in exchange for the LDP's guarantee of a stable, pro-capitalist political environment. The Socialist commitment to nationalize major industries kept that party from being a viable alternative in the 1950s and 1960s, thus the JSP undermined their credibility within the business community (Bradely 1997, 174 & 181).

is a supporter of this theory, which he expresses in his book, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*: “By and large, the bureaucracy is the virtual legislation maker of the nation, and the Diet simply endorses or rejects the proposed laws prepared by bureaucrats” (Sugimoto 2003, 221). Richardson elaborates on group interests that only those “that do not contradict bureaucratic goals are indulged” (Richardson 1997, 2).

Enter the *keiretsu*. Though the new *keiretsu* were less centralized than their predecessors, this did not necessarily mean that they were less politically potent. It is not a surprise that the new conglomerates, as the powerhouses of industry and commerce, were intimately involved in politics. Elaborating on Sugimoto’s point about the role of bureaucrats—a bestowal of the Americans—it should be understood that the *keiretsu* groups as the principle body of the industrial constituency were the primary traffickers of ideas to and from the bureaucracy; as Japan’s economy became more industrially powerful, the power of the *keiretsu* naturally became more potent. Since Japan’s primary focus was economics, interests were primarily economic across the board; those that petitioned the parliament did so for economic reasons and those that dominated the economy were the *keiretsu*. As the primary political party, the LDP assumed the central position between bureaucracy and business, and served as mitigating force that coordinated affairs and arbitrated (Chen 2009, 197). Here an intimately knit triangle was formed. Mathematically, triangles are the strongest geometric shape, so fittingly this trinity seemed destined to last until any one of the three corners cracked.

Additionally, in regards to structure of the party, author Ethan Scheiner offers insight in his work *Democracy Without Competition* in Japan into how the business of politics was actually a business model itself. Scheiner suggests that the LDP was

structured politically much like the *keiretsu* were professionally: that is, largely vertical. In the following three quoted paragraphs Scheiner explains three significant facts about Japanese political structure: 1) how the central party was related to its periphery members and how party membership yielded potential access to the national coffers; 2) the link between the rural population and the LDP; and 3) how the political structure helped the LDP keep and maintain power. Scheiner calls the power structure between top and bottom politicians “*keiretsu*”, which in the coming three paragraphs is not to be confused with the economic conglomerates.

From the top down, “within Japan, patron-client relationships, called *keiretsu*, link national LDP politicians to local LDP politicians...to gain national pork, many local politicians join national politicians’ *keiretsu*. It is striking that members of Japan's traditional opposition parties typically do not have *keiretsu*, which tend to be tied only to the benefit-providing center of Japan, the LDP-controlled central government” (Scheiner 2006, 128). “During the late 1950s and early 1960s, as local governments lost their independence, several progressive party mayors switched to the LDP to improve their chances of obtaining public works project funding” (Scheiner 2006, 130).

In regards to the their impressive support in the rural sector, “because LDP politicians rely on well-organized networks of voters, these politicians are less able to find success in cities, where voters are less tightly knit. In short, opposition party success at the prefectural level depends on the level of urban-ness [sic] and not the level of autonomy.” “Autonomy and urban-ness [sic] are highly correlated, and urban voters have reasons beyond independence from the center for supporting opposition parties” (Scheiner 2006, 130).

Lastly, Scheiner's work can also be relied upon to illustrate the nature of Japan's post-World War II political pecking order. Scheiner explains that Japanese political structure was hierarchical in nature, and the LDP as a top-down institution was nestled itself into the governing framework. Therefore, once the LDP became the national ruling party—like a mold filling a cast, or blood following through veins—the very nature of Japan's political model only insulated the party and helped it maintain this pervasive status. Since other parties could not get a steady foothold in the mainframe, they remained on the periphery and therefore were not a threat to the LDP. “The fact that most local politicians' party switching occurred in concert with national *keiretsu* leader's party switching indicates the importance of links between the two levels...in general, local politicians did not switch parties unless their national *keiretsu* leader did, and most local politicians switched parties when their *keiretsu* leader did.” (Scheiner 2006, 129) “...opposition parties face tremendous obstacles to gaining power at the local level in Clientist/Financially Centralized systems. Most obvious, the system gives local organizations, politicians, and voters much greater incentives to affiliate with the national ruling party than with the opposition. In the Japanese case, this dramatically helped the LDP”(Scheiner 2006, 131).²⁴

Therefore, under the assumptions proposed by the latter examples, bureaucrats reign as the actual political elite and party leaders work hand in hand with senior bureaucrats and business leaders in the establishment of policy priorities and support; this pattern continues to trickle down to the local level in business²⁵ and citizenry, where

²⁴ Note: henceforth, the term *keiretsu* will again mean the economic conglomerates

²⁵ From its formation the LDP was clever to engage into social contracts with farmers and small-business owners that would last for most of the coming four decades and yield them support rooted well throughout the nation (Richardson 1997, 9).

“voters are manipulated by local social elites and machines so they will vote for conservative party nominees; thus the relationships between candidates and voters are hierarchical” (Richardson 1997, 2-3).

Socially, it is logical to presume that people accustomed to orienting themselves vertically—indeed, there are endless works that dwell on the degree of hierarchy and the role of Confucian social order and filial piety in Japanese society—might naturally conform to or support a system that mimics this social tendency. Yet some criticize the bureaucracy-dominated model as being “too narrowly focused on the policy making to constitute a general explanation of Japanese politics” (Kohno 1997, 23). Counter-theories propose that individual politicians and their agendas have a larger impact on the playing field than for which the vertical model allows.²⁶ Moreover, a more societal-oriented counterpoint held by some researchers is that, “the practice of those at the helm of the establishment corresponds with the social habits of many people at the grassroots” (Sugimoto 2003, 227). Lastly, in viewing the voting history of Japan, voter turnout was always nearly 70% until the 1980s; so whether manipulated or not, Japanese citizens have proven far more politically involved—even if more single minded—over the decades (Richey 2001).

Concerning the organization of farmers and their relation to the LDP, a rural network called the *tochi kairyoo-ku*—“the land improvements”—was created to link the urban-base polity with the agrarian periphery. The networks are composed of units made up of at least fifteen farmers and are legally recognized as a juridical corporate charged with a wide range of responsibilities in the administration of a given agricultural community. Collectively the units constitute the National Land Improvement Political League, which provides the LDP with some ninety-three thousand members, thus “acting as the political grassroots of rural communities.” Moreover, “the majority of these organizations prefer the status quo and [would be], in effect, an agricultural bastion against major structural reform” (Sugimoto 2003, 230-231).

²⁶ “Over the last decade or so, the microanalytic approach, focusing as it does on individual political actors and their strategic behavior, has contributed innovative theoretical insights and methodological rigor to various subfields of political science” (Kohno 1997, 11).

Democratic: Horizontal-Fragmented and Decentralized

Contrasting the feudalism-in-democracy's-clothes approach, the Horizontal-Fragmented and Decentralized models view Japan as a functioning and competent—albeit culturally influenced—democracy. In this model, power is held in multiple, competitive and fragmented centers; interest groups look for allies in political parties and ministries. Traditionally, in a horizontal-fragmented system, multiple competing parties yielded natural checks and balances, opened participation and thus more universal political representation and also a sense of transparency. Nevertheless, few could argue that the latter was true in the 1955 one-party system.

Therefore, some researchers have justified the horizontal-decentralized theory by claiming that fragmentations witnessed on the outside in the multi-party system were taking place internally within the LDP²⁷; so whereas some viewed the hegemony of the LDP as unmatched political stability, others saw it more like a duck, gliding across the political pond—calm and composed on the surface but paddling like hell underneath.²⁸ Ironically, other researchers also claim that it is this very presence of internal-fracturing and the inability to reach a consensus that guaranteed the weakness of opposition JSP.²⁹

²⁷ Richardson, for one, essentially proposes that the LDP hegemony was a proxy for a multi-party system in view of all the “internal fractionalizations:” “The configuration of power looked more like those in a multiparty system with alternating coalitions that look like those in a political system with single-party domination” (Richardson 1997, 150).

This particularity in Japanese politics is something Richardson calls “Twin Political Dynamics,” the summary being that: Japanese political life has conflict, however conflict is handled below the surface, resolved through informal meetings; this visible consultation and coordination over time might become institutionalized. “Liaisons meetings between top LDP officials and cabinet members are one example” (Richardson 1997, 7).

²⁸ “The LDP was large enough to control the government through the rest of the 1950s. But that did not ensure political stability...The nation was still split over many issues, most sharply over foreign policy” (Schlesinger 1999, 47).

²⁹ This is a more specific viewpoint of the discord called the socio-ideological: “Thus the socio-ideological view attributes much of the LDP’s extraordinary success to the rigid and polarized nature of the Japanese

Author Bradley Richardson gives insight into the make-up of the LDP, explaining that it was modeled on the British Conservative Party, of which one of the most important features was internal factions: “when the LDP was in power, factions collectively chose party and government leaders and supported candidates in elections” (Richardson 1997, 50). He contests then that the democratic element of the system takes place internally.

Furthermore, in the horizontal view, as Richardson describes it, there was a natural give-and-take between the political parties that is mimicked in the intergovernmental framework of compromise and work between governing organs³⁰; it is argued that during the LDP rule this give-and-take existed between the prime minister and cabinet and the Diet (Richardson 1997, 128). The latter does paint a pretty, functioning system of democracy, but only at the decision-making level. It fails ultimately to explain the level of political involvement from the lower rungs and essentially takes for granted that all political problems would be solved internally. Thus, the horizontal system that proposes that democracy existed within the walls of the LDP fails to yield insight into why the system ultimately collapsed. With strong opinions and endless research and arguments both ways—democratic or not, it is perhaps impossible to determine what role the bureaucracy actually played and to what degree did the average citizen voice his or her independent opinion versus being manipulated by political tools.³¹

Regarding the voice of the average voter, Dr. Sean Richey of the Department of

[political] cleavage that prevented the leading opposition party, the Japanese Socialist Party, from becoming a viable alternative to the ruling conservative party” (Kohno 1997, 8).

³⁰ Richardson reassures his reader of the democratic presence, “Complex checks and balances were evident at times when the LDP or the opposition parties, or both, were divided over issues and when groups of Dietmembers were allied with an element of the bureaucracy” (Richardson 1997, 143).

³¹ Candidates have been known to win and maintain support over the years by a variety of tactics such as gift-giving, public appearances, candidate-led campaigns and activities that are usually targeted at local interests, personal phone calls as well as through influential elites and union organizations. (Richardson 1997, 27-30).

Social Psychology at the University of Tokyo, reveals in his research paper “Voter Turnout in Japan and the United States,” that Japanese citizens for the vast majority of their voting history maintained a relatively healthy voter turnout—rarely dropping below 65%—and in most every single case rivaling that of the United States (Richey 2001). Therefore to be fair, considering the theory that political participation is a corollary effect of perceived political efficacy, researchers who postulate that Japanese citizens under the 1955 system were by and large alienated from their government because of its structure would by that conclusion have to agree that American citizens, as counterparts of a more “normal democracy,” were even less involved in their government, perhaps just as politically alienated if not more.

Notwithstanding the latter conjecture, political participation does not always necessarily equate to political efficacy, and certain research has revealed that the Japanese as voters in fact have felt alienated from their government.³² Since strikes were low in number and voters often impassionate—or at least they were under the 1955 system—it is difficult to determine really the level of political efficacy under the LDP; more research will need to be conducted on the relationship between the voter and the LDP, particularly regarding the correlation between hiccups in society—such as a recession—and LDP support.³³

³² “Surveys indicate that voters in Japan are less satisfied and less trusting regarding politics and politicians than their counterparts in most other democracies; ordinary voters usually trust Dietmembers [sic] representing their local constituency but distrust national politicians”(Richardson 1997, 23).

³³ Throughout his book, Richardson chronographically lists from World War II onward periods of significant ups and downs in Japan’s society; interestingly, these mirror support for the LDP and suggests the fickle relationship of the voter to the party. When the economy is good, support is strong, when there is a hiccup, support wanes.

<u>Society:</u>	<u>LDP Support:</u>
1960s: a time of strong economic growth	1955-1976: LDP has comfortable majority
1970s: economy slows, cities become crowded, pollution is a major issue, protests are on the rise	1976-1980: LDP had a very thin majority

THE 1955 SYSTEM: Summary and Speculation

The aforementioned, opposing political paradigms are important as they represent the dominant views towards Japanese democracy over the last half-century. Additionally, through their models one can speculate the role of the average voter. Nevertheless, after contemplation and digestion of the latter models, this research finds fault in their theories of absolute thought³⁴ and posits that democracy in Japan was just as democratic as it needed to be depending on the social demands of the time—which were arguably not significant or unified enough to warrant an active, competitive multi-party system outside the folds of the LDP. Thus the LDP held within its frame for that 35-year period, the solutions to satiate the majority of the voting population.

Due to the hegemony of the LDP some Japanologists perpetuated that Japan was indeed an uncommon democracy, and that the ruling pattern of the LDP was some manifestation of Japan's political uniqueness (Kohno 1997, 4). Yet, since every country is culturally divergent, it then stands to reason that democracies, as a political structure for personal involvement and expression of the individual well-entrenched in their culture, would be expressed differently; it is inarguable that no two democratic systems—or any two political systems for that matter—the world over look the same. In addition, the one-party dominant system, though often a political red-flag for lack of transparency and of

1980s: concerns with high of cost of governance and deficits arise; political scandal is revealed	1980: “Nearly Equal” period in power relations afterward seesawed
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(Richardson 1997, 9 & 145-147).

³⁴ For example, even Richardson's “big picture” of Japan is stagnant; ironically like those of the stoic views he opposes in his work Richardson simply creates another unyielding paradigm. He often talks of Japanese politics in terms of absolutes without attention paid to the possible evolution of the political landscape. Of course, it is unfair to judge Richardson too harshly when one considers that his work is over a decade old and in the time between his publication and that of this writing, Japanese politics have continued to undergo changes.

political efficacy, is not something uncommon among newly formed democratic states, especially those with a history of corruption. Some notable examples of such political powerhouses are the PRI of Mexico, the Indian National Congress in India and the Democrazia Cristiana of Italy. Of course each instance of one-party dominance—which is different from one-party rule, where there are no choices—varies situation to situation and can be affected by an endless number of factors. To assume then that Japan is uniquely unique—i.e. more unique than any individual country’s people, culture or process are unique—is stereotypically naïve.

Nevertheless, instead of or in addition to debates over the level of democracy in a given country with a one-party dominant government, perhaps there should be more research that delves into the reasons behind the lack of motivation for demand of political choices. Such answers would yield insight into the level of acceptability of multi-party democracy—which by now within political discourse has become an essential prerequisite for being a “true” democracy.

Overall, in the breadth of research behind this paper, no theory seems to succinctly summarize what might have occurred among the newly democratized citizens better than—*quelle surprise*—that of Tocqueville. In the following lengthy but keenly insightful paragraph Tocqueville offers his observations of the trends among newly democratized people, that may be used as a potential explanation as to why the LDP boat was rarely rocked for such a long period of time. He proposes that a strong focus on economic prosperity—which Japan experienced in bulk under the LDP’s reign—equates to weak political involvement, which is not necessarily a result of lack of perceived

efficacy. Moreover, his words insinuate what might have occurred at the ground level of the populace to eventually dethrone the LDP from the long-held seats.

“When the taste for physical pleasures has grown more rapidly than either education or experience of free institutions, the time comes when men are carried away and lose control of themselves at sight of the new good things they are ready to snatch. Intent only on getting rich, they do not notice the close connection between private fortunes and general prosperity. There is no need to drag their rights away from citizens of this type; they themselves voluntarily let them go. They find it a tiresome inconvenience to exercise political rights, which distract them from industry. When required to elect representatives, to support authority by personal service, or to discuss public business together, they find they have no time....

“...I freely agree that public tranquility is a very good thing. Nevertheless, I do not want to forget that it is through good order that all peoples have reached tyranny. That is certainly no reason for nations to despise public peace, but they should not be satisfied with that alone. A nation which asks nothing from the government beyond the maintenance of order is already a slave in the bottom of its heart. It is a slave to its prosperity, and the road is free for the man to tie the fetters.

“The despotism of a faction is as much to be feared as that of a man.”
(Tocqueville 1961, 540)

If accepting that Tocqueville, who never set foot in Japan, or into the 20th century for that matter, is correct, then one must assume that the fall of a “faction” that placates a society well enough to assure its position year after year could only arguably occur when members of that society are dissatisfied and when the value of political involvement outweighs that of income. In this moment would such people then reach for their rights, and through their involvement would a political revolution ensue.³⁵

THE COLLAPSE OF THE 1955 SYSTEM:

³⁵“There are times when nations are tormented by such great ills that the idea of a total change in their political constitution comes into their minds. There are other times when the disease is deeper still and the whole social fabric is compromised. That is the time of great revolutions and of great parties”
(Tocqueville 1961, 174).

From 1988 through 1993 a series of political scandals in regards to the misuse of finances and the normal run-of-the-mill corruption emerged and eventually led to a political crisis and a loss of faith in the LDP. Over this five-year period, internal hemorrhaging within the party brought about the collapse of the political giant. Top party leaders, as well as two prime ministers—Takeshite in 1989 and Miyazawa in 1993—were either forced to step down from office or to resign. This eventually lost the LDP its majority in the Diet and effectively ended its political reign.

Of course, scandal is enough to bring any political figures to their knees, if caught. It seems unlikely, however, that anyone who had anything to do with politics did not know that the LDP had its hands in lots of cookie jars throughout its hegemony. As there are many theories as to why the party lasted as long as it did, so too are there theories as to why it suddenly collapsed.

THE 1980s & 90s: BUBBLES & WAVES

Up until the 1980s, Japan had been in a very comfortable, amniotic-like political state, and the Japanese citizens were by-and-large arguably satisfied with—or at the very least unmotivated to react against—their government, and had voted comfortably for one party for three decades.³⁶ More importantly as a society, they had little to complain about: since the United States protected Japan they experienced no wars and could focus their attention on the prosperity they reaped from an ever-growing economy and a rising standard of living. Change simply was not necessitated.³⁷

³⁶ “People felt the LDP was capable of governing Japan” (Richardson 1997, 25).

³⁷ “The machine style of government [LDP] had been a natural consequence of postwar Japan’s two main articles of faith: that the country could enjoy eternally escalating prosperity and that it could exist in blissful, peaceful isolation—courtesy of America’s indulgent protection—from the stresses of global affairs. *In that*

Nevertheless, moving towards the new millennium, the peaceful world of the postwar era began to change. In the mid-1980s, Japan's racing economy came to a screeching halt. Known in Japanese as *baburu keiki*, or the bubble economy, it was a time when Japan's ballooning land prices suddenly burst and the economic structure essentially collapsed. Interest rates soared and many were left with great debt. The once growing economy fell into recession and the people turned to the government to solve the problems:

“By the late 1980s...the demands facing Japan, both at home and abroad, were growing more complex, unsettling the delicate political balancing act. Policy responses to these new challenges often required acting quickly, taking sides, and asking for sacrifice, unpleasant tasks the [LDP political] machine hadn't been designed to perform” (Schlesinger 1999, 231).

Moreover, around this time, resulting from the ripples of instability caused by the bubble's bursting and decreasing competitiveness, the *keiretsu*—once famed for their ability to weather any storm—soon found themselves forced to change and adapt or face extinction. Journalist Yone Sugita in her aforementioned article in the *Asian Times* (pg. 52) explains how Japan in the 1980s entered what is referred to as the ‘Third Wave’ of economic reorganization. In this wave, business norms like lifetime employment, which were standard in Japanese *keiretsu* companies, started to prove to be too taxing and were accordingly beginning to fade out; moreover, for the purposes of competitiveness, *keiretsu* members began looking beyond their own family structure to forge alliances with other companies. Most threatening to the LDP's affair with the business conglomerates was the push for deregulation of the companies—a campaign carried out even stronger today—and something the LDP vehemently opposed.

fantastic setting, Japanese politic was freed from the normal difficult choices and ideological divides of democracy” (Schlesinger 1999, 231).

In an ironic twist, the divisions of the interest groups that had been maintained and tidied up within the LDP from its onset—a process that some thought warranted the title of democracy—had over time grown too strong and too vast to be held internally. “What finally triggered the demise of the LDP’s regime was the breakup of the LDP itself” (Kohno 1997, 7).

Whereas it can be argued that the LDP during its hey-day was democratic, no one can contest that following its collapse many who were critical to the party—both internal and external—viewed it as an abomination of democratic ideals.³⁸ A no-confidence motion was passed that dissolved the LDP-headed Diet; in the wake of this new political chaos emerged new political parties, who did their best to reform the government as old-regime parties did their best to adapt.³⁹ Soon after, “intra-LDP competition [had] been replaced by interparty competition” (Richardson 1997, 4). New, perhaps once suppressed, political ideas emerged and in their wake came the possibility for change and new democratic reform.⁴⁰

History was made on 6 August 1993, when Morihiro Hosokawa of the Japan New Party (JNP) became “prime minister of Japan, heading a remarkable eight-party coalition.

³⁸ “Most ‘reformers’ were idealists, utopians even, who sought a kind of purification of democracy. They viewed the LDP as a cauldron of depravities, of politicians who pursued self-interest instead of a higher national interests; their aim was to purge, along with the party, all of the LDP’s squalid preoccupations and petty turf battles” (Schlesinger, 1999 266).

³⁹ “Coinciding with the advent of the era of coalition governments that began with the historical alternation in power of 1993 and with the rapidly deteriorating state of public finance following the burst of the bubble economy, countless cases of bureaucratic corruption, incompetence, and maladministration came to the surface and unleashed an unprecedented public distrust of the administrative elite....Party competition intensified as new parties were formed and old ones struggled to adapt (or merely to survive) in a fluid political context that followed after the collapse of the 1955 system....No self-respecting party could do without having its own proposal for the reform of the state” (Nakano 2006, 83).

⁴⁰ “A central element of ‘democratic government’ is the idea the government should be kept in check from the *outside* through deconcentration of power to other branches of the state, local governments, or the civil society. Thus, in the 1990s, such reform items as the enhancement of parliamentary power, decentralization, and government information disclosure, have been taken up in an attempt to reinforce democratic control of the government” (Nakano 2006, 82).

The event heralded the nation's first transfer of power in nearly four decades, a historic development that no knowledgeable observer would have predicted just three months earlier" (Schlesinger 1999, 272). In regards to its background, the JNP was composed of members who left the LDP due to the exposed scandals; the JNP—though less conservative⁴¹ than the LDP—and the surrounding political parties were not necessarily a significant strict liberal⁴² alternative.

The fact the LDP could be outvoted proved the party's mortality. The latter few pages—which provide examples that imply a corollary between weakening support of the LDP to a weakening economy—suggest then that people voted for the LDP because they thought that party was the best suited for a strong economy; when the economy weakened so would their support. Yet such a cut-and-dried relationship is a bit narrow sighted, and arguably unsupported if one examines the relationship between economic problems and LDP support.

To add a bit more depth and clarity to the issue, authors Romberg and Yamamoto offer as an explanation in their book *Same Bed, Different Dreams* the possibility that under the LDP's 1955 Regime, the Japanese voter shifted as a political participant from one who was partisan-based to one who was issue-based. They deduce that because support for the regime actually did show signs of weakness starting in the 1960s and

⁴¹ The term "conservative" in this context and henceforth refers to those who support modest fiscal spending and who are generally opposed to large-scale innovations or changes. Japanese society lacks the sort of puritan conservatism based on the interpretable concept of morality as witnessed in American or British society; therefore ideas like restricting social or private behavior is a different ballgame in Japan, and not the principle platform of conservative parties. Nevertheless, it is not unfair to say that what would be perceived as "radical" actions, and therefore, a threat to the status quo would not be favored by Japanese conservatives.

⁴² The term "liberal" in the Japanese context refers to those who support a more fiscally loose, broad-minded approach to politics. Liberals are not generally opposed to change or foreign influence in Japan. In opposition to the stoicism of conservatives, liberals often paint themselves as liberators, innovators and those that promote transparency within the bureaucracy.

continuing until the 1970s—which can be proven by the parliamentary voting record—that the theory that the Japanese people would only vote against the party during times of economic hardship is unfounded. They suggest that the Japanese who consistently voted for the LDP were not voting for a party necessarily but rather for the effective coalition between the LDP and the government that had thus far proved competent. The authors also shed light on the actual motivation of the Japanese voter during the 1986 election, just before the crash; they explain that nearly eighty percent of those who voted for the LDP did so out of being life-conservatives and not party loyalists (Romberg & Yamamoto 1990, 123-24).

Therefore, if the Romberg-Yamamoto proposal is correct, it would seem that a shift in the number of conservative voters would also add to fragility of the LDP dominant conservative party. Furthermore, paired with the Tocquevillian concept of political apathy, this hybrid explanation reveals a potentially flexible Japanese voter with a stronger degree of voting autonomy than otherwise suggested under the strictly vertical models; moreover it develops the image of a Japanese voter who poses a greater sense of issue-based—versus party-based—political depth than explained by the horizontal models.

Following the historical election of 1993, the victory for the opposing political parties was short lived, however, when the LDP regained its composure and control of the Diet a few years later in the mid-1990s. Since 1996 the LDP has celebrated yet another decade of putting their candidate in the prime minister's seat, even in the face of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. In light of this lack of political diversification in the party structure, using the latter Tocqueville-Romberg-Yamamoto explanation would

suggest that Japanese voters have over the past decade and a half been complacently conservative voters. Though this political aligning shows signs of change.

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT & CONCLUSION

When the Americans came, they brought food, clothes and building materials to restock and rebuild Japan. More importantly they brought a plan for the reconstruction and completely new ideas of how matters should be done. Of all the crates that fell from the sky—the “gifts from heaven,” as they were called by the Japanese—the ones most readily used were the things for which the Japanese people readily understood the value and purpose, like clothes and food (Dower 1999, 73). By contrast, ideas like free market and liberty were unprecedented concepts for the vast majority of the population, and therefore were not as readily opened, investigated and employed. In regards to economics, the novel, free-trade market was fused with the former Japanese model, thus yielding the *keiretsu* as a byproduct. Yet politically Japan had no former political system upon which the democratic model could be projected. In the past, Japan had been ruled by oligarchies, and following the Allies’ departure, the nation ironically for three and a half decades freely elected to be ruled by more or less the same number of people through LDP political party. Researchers who view democracy as a multiparty system that values transparency—such as political structures of the United States, Great Britain or France—would likely see democracy as Japan’s unopened gift. This is arguably because Japan as a society did not know *how* to or perhaps did not *need* to use this new tool, until now.

The landscape of Japanese politics today is markedly different than that of the 1955 System. First of all, as of this writing, from the published result of the latest election in July 2007, the LDP only holds a majority in the House of Representatives (the

lower house), where it shares seats with 8 competing parties. In the House of Councilors (the upper house), the LDP sits in second place to its primary competition, the more liberal Democratic Party of Japan⁴³; in this house there are seven main political parties. Furthermore, the third place in both houses is held by the New Komeito Party (NKP)⁴⁴.

This sort of legislative anatomy is beginning to mirror many democracies of the West. Japan still is largely a conservative society, so in the lead is the conservative LPD—whose roots are held in small businesses, agricultural and rural regions, by white-collar bureaucrats and traditionalists. The LDP is the United States' equivalent of the Republican Party, supported in part by both the rural folk and the advocates of big business. In second place, is the more liberal and progressive DPJ, who garners its support from blue-collar workers, the middle class as well as women of the urban class, and it sports a more open-minded policy to its members.⁴⁵ The DPJ is the United States' equivalent of the Democratic Party. Lastly, the New Komeito Party is Japan's humanitarian, nuclear arms-hating, peace-loving party; not being as radically left as its predecessors, the NKP to a degree shares support with the LPD. In many regards the NKP is comparable to Europe's Green Parties.

In regards to the past, such a paralleled comparison between Japan's political parties and those of other democratic countries would have been impossible fifteen years

⁴³ The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was formed in 1998 as the result of a merger of smaller parties opposed to the LDP: namely the previous Democratic Party of Japan, the Good Governance Party, the New Fraternity Party, and the Democratic Reform Party.

⁴⁴ The New Komeito Party was founded in 1998 by a Buddhist, Daisaku Ikeda; it is the result of the merger of the former Komeito Party and the New Peace Party. The party's declared mission is "people-centered politics, a politics based on a humanitarianism that treats human life with the utmost respect and care" (New Komeito, 2007). Within Japan, the party proposals are to reduce the central government and bureaucracy, increase transparency in public affairs and increase local and region autonomy, as well as to have the private sector play an increased role in economic affairs. In regards to diplomatic and foreign relations, the NKP proposes to eliminate nuclear arms and armed conflicts. With regard to foreign policy, the Party wishes to eliminate nuclear arms and armed conflict in general.

⁴⁵ The DPJ boasts having several members in the Diet who are not of Japanese nationality.

ago. The reader will recall the former JNP that dethroned the LDP and installed its own prime minister was not necessarily a clear liberal alternative; perhaps coasting on the passions of a population politically provoked by the corruption of the LDP, the JNP was able then to rally voters to vote against the LDP for the new party that promised more purity and less payola.

At present, looking upon the make-up of the parties and each party's political stance, it becomes apparent that support for each party can be categorized and predicted based on social background. In the last ten years, the real threat to the LDP is two trailing parties—versus a coalition of eight opposing parties. Moreover since these parties share by and large a different social base of support—particularly the DPJ—it seems apparent then that societal shifts are responsible for differences between the composition of the current legislature and that of the 1955 System. This information also suggests that through their balloting, voters are expressing a higher diversity in the makeup among Japan's political interests—that cannot be strictly held under one party. Even if Japan is still conservative in the majority, the political surface is showing that rifts in ideology at the grassroots level are being converged into significantly large opposition parties.

Based on the rise of political opposition, one could debate that Japan is becoming more politically diverse and that its democracy—whether arguably democratic or not—is reflecting more and more democracies like that of the United States. In the face of this assumption, the aforementioned paradigm of Japanese government—being either vertical or horizontal, internally-democratic or authoritarian—seems far less applicable and less important in light of the new circumstances. In an Occam's Razor's sort of reasoning—where the simplest explanation tends to be correct—it appears that the society of Japan—

no longer in the amniotic sack of security from the 1955 Regime's era—seems to be dividing along issues that cannot be addressed within the LDP alone. In order to understand the cracks now being witnessed at the surface of politics one must first look at the rifts occurring at the base of society.

In his work, Tocqueville suggest that social changes, which are currently being witnessed at the surface of society, actually have been mostly on the move for some time: "...there are times when the changes taking place in the political constitution and social structure of peoples are so slow and imperceptible that men think they have reached a final state; then the human spirit believes itself firmly settled on certain fundamentals and does not seek to look beyond a fixed horizon.

That is the time for intrigues and small parties" (Tocqueville 1961, 175).

CHAPTER III

Why is Civil Society Rising in Japan & What Tides of Change will this Bring?

In this last chapter of the research, as a way to further explore Japanese civil society, I elected to provide first hand accounts of my impressions and experiences of contemporary Japanese society. Therefore, the following pages are laced with my personal observations of the various facets of Japanese society for which I can account during my year abroad there.

* * *

“No one among them being any longer strong enough to struggle along with success, only the combination of the forces of all is able to guarantee liberty. But such a combination is not always forthcoming.”

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *On Democracy in America*

THE CHANGING FACE OF JAPANESE SOCIETY

Not all Japanese people look alike. Yet homogenization of the Japanese population is a belief that since the rise of nationalism the Meiji era and the concept of a unified “Japan”⁴⁶ has been a crux of national pride for the patriots who wish to promote and protect what is uniquely and ubiquitously Japanese. Overall, the belief in racial, social and ethnic homogeneity⁴⁷ that surrounds the notion of “one people with one history” has played a strong role in promoting a sense of a pure “Japaneseness,” which by the edicts of some should not be contaminated or threatened by outsiders. (Sugimoto 2003, 183).

⁴⁶ “Throughout Japanese history, many living in the area which is known as Japan did not have the consciousness that they were ‘Japanese’ (*Nihonjin*)...at the time of the establishment of the Japanese state in the late seventh century, the term *Nihon* (Japan) emerged as a description. Yet the concept then covered mainly the Kinki [Osaka-Kyoto in western Honshu] region, as evidenced by the fact that nobles and officials sent outside it regarded their assignment as a posting to a foreign area or a land of foreigners. At the time, ordinary people dwelling outside the Kinki region hardly conceived of themselves as belonging to the nation of Japan.” (Sugimoto 2003, 63).

⁴⁷ The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) calculates that approximately 98.5% of residents of Japan are of Japanese ethnicity (CIA World Factbook 2009).

This might seem affronting to someone who equates Japan with the image of a cosmopolitan Tokyo—famed international hub, cultural core and tourist destination. Without a doubt such an image is not unmerited, for arguably there are many open minded and curious Japanese people—especially among the younger generations—that embrace openly foreign cultures and people within Japan. In fact during my time in Japan, it seemed in vogue among Japanese students of my university to want a *hafuto*—“half”—baby (i.e. half Japanese half Western); but whether such an ethnically mixed child would be an object of affection or just an object with which to accessorize seemed unclear at the time.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, more open-minded or not, only recently has Japan—due to low birthrate and an accelerating death rate resulting from an aging population—been forced to reconsider its exchange student practices and immigration policy to balance out its decreasing population. Over the past decade, higher education institutions of Japan have been facing challenges such as a decrease in the size of college age cohorts, heightened expectations in the manners of information sharing and instruction through the advances of information and communication technologies (ICT) and also global competition for college students, particularly from English-speaking countries. Among higher education institutions, there has been anticipation of the inevitable imbalance of the number of

⁴⁸ Older Japanese-born individuals with whom I spoke who were of ethnically mixed descent explained that during their teenage years they felt an increase in noticeable discrimination against them by their ethnically “pure” Japanese peers as well as by older people. One reason for this, they explained, was the fact that discrimination in Japan—especially in regards to race—often occurs behind closed doors and only in their later adolescence did they pickup on the subtleties of Japanese-style, indirect bigotry. Moreover, teenage peers in Japan feel a heightened sense of pressure to conform to social norms than do younger people; so discrepancies that were overlooked or non-pressing in one’s youth, become of growing concern as one ages. By contrast, students at my university who were of ethnically mixed origins seemed to have experienced less discrimination than their older counterparts might have. These students who were half-Caucasian, half non-Japanese Asia or half-black seemed to be well accepted among their Japanese peers and held high positions in social organizations and clubs.

rising college students and an overabundance of university and college openings. The year before I arrived in Japan, an unprecedented disparity was reported among the Japanese university population: that year there were more seats available in Japanese universities than the number of high school students that had graduated (Aoki 2005); my campus still buzzed of this news when our classes began.

As a remedy, many Japanese universities are exploring opportunities to internationalize and forge ties with higher education systems of other nations. Recently in an article of the *Arab Times*, “Kuwait, Japan to Boost Educational Ties,” which appeared on November 27, 2008, it was announced that many universities like Meiji University—one of Japan’s oldest and most prestigious private universities—expressed a strong interest in joining forces with Kuwaiti universities for scientific development and research. Kuwait, a country with which Japan has shared little history, might seem like an odd choice, but is one of many examples of Japanese universities internationalizing their research efforts through cooperative networking.

Of course, increased research ties would naturally lead to increase exchange of ideas and people; some universities have already taken a more direct approach to filling their emptying seats by encouraging international students to enroll and to stay. One such example of this is the Ritsumeikan system in which I studied. Ritsumeikan University is a private university based in Kyoto Japan and has three other satellite campuses throughout the country. Whereas the rest of the campuses are national, my university, Asia Pacific University (APU), is international with half the students and faculty being from abroad, the majority of which are from Asian nations. The university spends large sums of money for scholarships to secure these students from countries—like Thailand, Indonesia,

Mongolia, Bangladesh or China—who could otherwise not afford to come to Japan and study. After the students obtain proficiency in Japanese, they can transfer to other schools within the network. This steady influx of students from abroad serves to keep the seats of the university filled and promotes the Ritsumeikan system as a novel international institution of higher learning, thus securing research grants and creating an angle for advertising to the more cosmopolitan Japanese students who opt for an ‘international experience’ in Japan. Interestingly since the turn of the millennium, just about the time Japan’s population began to taper off and decline, there was a dramatic jump in the number of foreign students in Japan, mostly paid for by private institutions—like my university—in Japan (Japanese Student Service Organization 2008).

In addition to the examples at the collegiate level, Japan administratively has also been opening its doors more and more to foreigners who are not just students. Just a few months after I had left, the Japanese Ministry of Justice reported a steady increase of legal foreign residence in Japan. In addition, in December 2008, following a Supreme Court decision, the Ministry announced a change in the criteria to become a Japanese citizen after birth. This new relaxes the restrictions on nationalizing a foreign born to a Japanese father, so that even if the parents are not married a child can become a citizen (Ministry of Justice 2006). This ruling overturned a law that had been in place since 1985, which stipulated that children of a Japanese father and a foreign mother born out of wedlock would be denied Japanese citizenship if the father did not claim the child while in the womb; the new ruling deems the former unconstitutional.

More interestingly, this new verdict is revealing of two factors in how the Japanese government perceives ethnically mixed children and interprets the role of

women. First, one can infer from the ruling the changes in Japan's judicial stance on the necessity of pure blood natives, which seems to be now less of premium than before in the face of a declining population. Secondly, the research revealed no specially stipulation for children born to Japanese mothers and foreign fathers out of wedlock. So if the possibility of becoming a national is contingent on the child of a Japanese father versus a child of a Japanese mother, this would suggest that in the eyes of the law, men are the primary agents for passing on citizenship.

In their work *Foreign Migrants in Contemporary Japan*, authors Hiroshi Komai and Jens Wilkinson, discuss the changing role of immigrants in Japan and discuss how the gaps in the roles of Japanese society—especially at the lower end of the work force—can only be filled by immigrants, because the Japanese can no longer naturally replenish their population. The book hypothesizes that immigrants in the near future as they increase in number and diversity will come to have a profound influence in shaping Japanese society. So notwithstanding certain individuals' ideas of a pure Japan, even the casual tourist can observe that the nation does not lack diversity. The streets—even in the tiny city of Beppu, in southern Japan—are a common place to see tourists, exchange students and migrant workers from origins all over the world. The growing variety of people in Japan does not equate to a melting pot—at least not yet—but it does infuse Japan's mainstream with diverse cultures and Japan's bloodstream with new heritages.

THE CHANGING FACE OF JAPAN'S BUDGET

Nevertheless, the discrepancies in Japanese society, of course, are not limited to face value alone. Within the population of Japanese natives, there exists a myriad of social divides that cast doubt on the once-claimed “homogenized” and “traditional”

society. At the most personal level, that which constitutes the average Japanese household has undergone alterations over the decades from the end of WWII. Marriage has decreased (総務省 統計局 (Sōmusho Tōkeikyoku) 2008). This in part could be because the social pressure to stay together has decreased since Japan has shifted from an agrarian-based society to more industrialized and urbanized. People marrying out of personal choice, based on notions of mutual attraction or “love”—*ren’ai*—has since the 1930s almost completely replaced unions based on the obligation of an arranged marriage—*miai* (Ehara & Inoue 1999).

In addition, people are marrying later in life, and consequently, women are having children later in life. Moreover, the divorce rate has risen. The size of families has decreased, and the three-generations household—once the standard for Japanese families—has been vastly outnumbered on two fronts by the pervasiveness of the nuclear family followed by the one-person households (総務省 統計局 (Sōmusho Tōkeikyoku) 2008).

In addition to the diversifying social composition, the budget for the average Japanese citizen has also been showing greater signs of disparity. Once upon a time, during the 1970s and 80s, the Japanese were proud to be a society where nearly 90% of the population could call themselves middle class. Nevertheless, staff writer Tetsushi Kajimoto of *The Japan Times* wrote an article entitled “Vanishing Middle Class? Income Disparities Rising in Japan” on January 4th, 2006, in which he explains that since the bubble burst of the late 80s and due to increased globalization, the once homogenized, middle class Japan is now being divided into a two-tier society with an increasing gap between the top and the bottom. “The reality is that the rich appear to have become

increasingly affluent and the poor more and more deprived, thereby widening the status discrepancy since the mid 1970s” (Sugimoto 2003, 49). Kajimoto points out that Japan’s Gini coefficient—a way to measure income inequality—has climbed in recent years to surpass levels witnessed in Europe and rising to that exemplified in the United States.

Kajimoto cites many reasons for this shift in earnings, including the rise of the new “freeter” class. A term borrowed from England, “Freeter” is a relatively new phenomenon among many younger Japanese citizens, who have been put off by the overstressed, overworked, career-intensive lifestyle of the cookie-cutter, corporate business man, known as the “salaried men”; these nonconformist, individuals opt instead to jump freely from one unskilled part-time job to the next with no desire to or possibility of building a future career (Fargo 2007).

Nevertheless, even at the opposite end of the spectrum at the higher rungs of employment, Kajimoto explains that the corporate model is being forced to restructure itself to maintain competitiveness: nonregular workers are replacing full-time employment in many cases. Consequently for the non-freeter, career-expiring individuals, job security becomes an issue, and qualified employees in their thirties and forties lack opportunities for fulltime employment. Kajimoto in his work referenced sociology professor Masahiro Yamada of Tokyo Gakugei University to link this developing economic situation with the social consequences of couples deciding in the sea of uncertainty to postpone having children until later in life, thus only exacerbating Japan’s decreasing birthrate.

Regarding Japan’s population’s reaction to the changes in wealth, Kajimoto turned to an authority on the subject of income and equality in Japan, Yoshio Higuchi, who is a

professor of business and commerce at Keio University in Tokyo and editor of the book “*Nihon no Shotoku Kakusa to Shakai-Kaiso*” (“Japan's Income Disparities and Social Strata”) that was written in collaboration with the Finance Ministry's Policy Research Institute. In the article, Higuchi spoke about the domestic sentiment: “ Many Japanese have preferred a society of equals to one where people freely compete against each other according to effort and ability. Thus, analyses that show social and economic disparities are widening have shocked the people.” To compensate, a natural reaction has been a general push from the majority of society—which, of course, is not composed of the very wealthy—for more liberal funding for legislation that would be more generous to social security programs.

Notwithstanding this gut reaction for government assistance, Yoichi Ito, chief economist at STB Research Institute, expresses his belief in the article that a widening of disparities is not a bad thing “as long as it does not lead to a stratified society where people inherit power and authority.” This statement is endlessly ironic considering that it was the Allied Occupation’s reforms—many pushing for economic liberalization—which ended such a rigid and inequitable social structure. Ito asserts “...it's wrong to adopt policies that punish success just to save those who cannot keep up with the pace of socioeconomic changes in a globalized economy.” The economist explained that it is important for Japan to sustain economic growth but to allow for that growth without reducing the social and economic vitality that stems from competition. “The more diverse the values a society accepts, the more meaning and incentives they can provide for young people to participate in social activities and reinvigorate society.” Regarding competition and diversity; no other statement could be more appropriate.

The latter examples of the intertwined social and economic changes, exemplify the shifts occurring at the most basic fundament of Japans' social structure and hint at the contemporary challenges now posed to tradition in Japan. As the latter article suggests, competition is on a rise in Japan, and society—especially among the youth—has more motivation for being involved in the factors that affect them. Shocked and insecure, the Japanese people are finding new incentives to compete amongst each other and to become active in the political forces that arbitrate economic and societal developments.

As hitherto demonstrated, the Japanese no longer live in a static, hierarchical society, and over the past half-century they have felt motivated and secured by economic progress and internal peace to focus on personal monetary success. Yet at the dawn of the twenty-first century, encouraged by the financial and societal challenges, Japanese people are unlike ever before engaging in civil society. For the first time, in a long time, they are fighting not for a leader, not for a lord but for themselves and for the individual.

Thus far having established diversity in Japanese society and explaining how this diversity is causing rifts that is laying the groundwork for competition, it is important to analyze next how collective action is orchestrating social cohesion based on social issues and not on social classes at the grassroots level. These social groups are now engaging in civil involvement, and they are expressing themselves by putting pressure on politicians and the legislature to support their causes. This concept of collective action in contemporary discourse is often expressed as “civil society.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The Centre for Civil Society of the London School of Economics—a world leading constituent college—specifically defines “civil society” as follows: “Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced [sic] collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations [sic] such as registered charities, development non-governmental

Having introduced the Japanese as a diversifying people, engage in civil society, now arrives the crux of the research: the point that links the citizen with the state, and demonstrates the relationship between civil society and the development of democracy in Japan.

* * *

CIVIL SOCIETY: DEFINITION AND HISTORY

Civil society—as the organization of voluntary civic and social organizations that form the basis of collective social action—is a concept in contemporary social science discourse that is strongly associated with the development of democratic principles, due to the influence unified action has on political structures. An early pioneer of this theory was Alexis de Tocqueville who in the two tomes of *On Democracy in America* discusses in great depth the link between democracy and collective action in America, which he witnessed during his extended periods of study in the early 1800s. Tocqueville harps on the merits of association within groups and the power of a unified group, which allows the individual to campaign for his or her beliefs, all the while fighting for or against other groups who are pushing their causes. Ultimately, Tocqueville saw this ability and right to associate, coupled with its successful execution, as a key element of democracy (Tocqueville 1961).

Later, building upon the ideas of Tocqueville, one of the most renowned thinkers of the twentieth century, Max Weber, articulated that civil society was the cultivating ground for public citizenship, and he postulated that it was through civil involvement that one was able to affect the public realms (Mommson 1992).

organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.” (Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, 2004).

Lastly a living example of someone who has set much store by the role of civil society on democratic development, who has contributed much to stocking this store with theories concerning the influence and function of civil society, is Harvard political science professor Dr. Robert D. Putnam. Putnam's contributions to the understanding of civil society and democracy can be summed up in that civil society makes democracy work because individuals that engage in civil society have done so because they essentially share a bond or a trust with other members over a mutual issue. Putnam contends that trust is essential for collective action (Putnam et al. 1993).

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The latter works of Tocqueville, Weber and Putnam have helped establish the generally accepted correlation that collective action fosters democratic development and ensures a working democracy. Nevertheless, the link between civil involvement and democracy is only half the picture. For people to engage in civil society, certain social elements must be present before collective action can occur.

Building upon the ideas of these great thinkers, author Lucian W. Pye in his article "Civility, Social Capital, and Civil Society: Three Powerful Concepts for Explaining Asia" explores the prerequisites that are needed for the development of civil society. As a jumping off point, Pye references Putnam's work *Making Democracy Work: Civil Traditions in Modern Italy*, which suggests that "the creation of civil society is critical for the effective performance of democracy" (Pye 1999, 764). Therefore, if we assume that democracy as a form of government is the apex of social organization, civil society then is a means for a citizen at the base to engage in politics at the summit. If one accepts that

civil society is a vehicle to influence the state, this begs the question, “How does the individual board that vehicle?” In his work, Pye concentrates more specifically on the factors necessary for the formation of civil society itself. By defining and articulating the building blocks underlying collective action, Pye is able to link the individual ultimately to the realm of civil society.

In order for civil society to develop, Pye proposes that two underlying substructures—*civility* and *social capital*—must first exist in such a fashion that allow for collective action to challenge the established political authority. Pye defines *civility*—a term not to be confused with good manners—as “rules that ensure social order, which form an integrated functioning society and prevent confusion, disorder, and anarchy.” Pye claims that all societies have *civility*, because all societies have rules of conduct (Pye 1999, 764).

One step higher in the social sphere is *social capital*, which is “trust among the members of a society [that] builds upon the norms of civility [and] that makes collective action possible” (Pye 1999, 764). In other words, *social capital* is the trust that individuals can build amongst each other as a definitive group and/or as a subset of society; the ease in building trust and the degree to which it can be reinforced is largely dictated by the culture of the society. Ultimately, *social capital* is the gateway to individuals being able to act collectively.

Lastly, at the highest level of social organization is *civil society*, which “consists of the diverse autonomous interests groups that can exert pressure on the state.” Collectively, Pye explains that “these three concepts are the building blocks of democratic theory. Civility involves the most general norms of personal interaction; social capital determines

the potential for reaching community and national goals collectively, and civil society provides the critical basis for the articulation and aggregation of interests essential for pluralistic democracy⁵⁰.” (Pye 1999, 764).

In addition, Pye’s work is useful and convenient because it is sensitive to the Asian context; specifically, his research suggests that Asian nations—because they have a different cultural base than those arguably Western—will have different social manifestations that will affect politics in both a manner and in a timeframe different than those of their Western counterparts (Pye 1999). Therefore, by understanding the structure and substructures of civil society in a Japanese context, it then becomes possible to answer questions such as “Why did civil society never develop on its own before the Occupation of Japan?” Or rather, “Why has it taken essentially fifty years for civil society to evolve in Japan?” So with a grasp of collective action as a manifestation of social demands permitted only within the parameters of that society can one then follow the evolution of the individual Japanese citizen’s voice as it comes to engage in collective action and eventually to help dictate the degree of civil participation in Japan’s post-WWII government. In short, through the development of civil society in Japan, one is able to see when and how the Japanese have finally opened the crate left by the Americans, have taken out its contents and, therefore, finally have taken advantage of their democracy.

THE JAPANESE CONTEXT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

⁵⁰ Pluralistic democracy: a form of democracy where power is shared among multiple political parties and/or sensitive to diverse interests and social groups.

Concerning *civility*, Japan as a society that endured centuries of a hierarchical culture, still today has—if compared with cultures like the United States or even Europe—a rigid, ranked and complex *civility*. The Japanese society, though politically egalitarian, still harbors elements of hierarchy and is therefore not socially egalitarian; these categorizing elements are based on a series of factors—not necessarily as much financial as that which exists in the United States for example—but rather on grounds like family origin and also title, age and time invested in an organization that together define rank.

~ORIGINS

For centuries, nearly all of the people living in Japan, have been of native Japanese descent. There is little religious strife and few notable ethnic divides—save for the small, native Ainu population inhabiting parts of the island of Hokkaido or the decedents of the Ryukyu people in Okinawa. So for Americans—whose national history as been fraught with conflict over issues of discrimination based on religion and ethnicity—one would imagine that in Japan, there would historically have been less opportunity for prejudice. Yet necessity is the mother of invention, and humans seem to have some need and a remarkable ability to find grounds to be intolerant against a group of people in order to establish an *us-and-them* sort of grouping. In Japan this has been manifested in the discrimination against the *burakumin*.

When I first heard the word *burakumin*, I immediately thought the context was describing Japanese bigotry against people of African descent, since the term *burakumin* in Japanese phonetics could be understood as Japanization of the English term “black

men⁵¹.” I was gravely mistaken. In the word *burakumin*, *buraku* means settlement, hamlet or even village community and *burakumin* essentially means residents of these units. In the feudal period, members of certain settlements had undesirable occupations—such as—tanners, butchers, executioners, etc.—which placed them in a category below ordinary citizens. Today, the *burakumin* ancestors have fallen victim to the bigoted belief that since their ancestors were caste in these lower social rungs, they too constitute a fundamentally inferior class (Sugimoto 2003, 189).

They look no different than “normal” Japanese people, but simply have a stigmatized name of origin. By moving away from a location and changing one’s name, someone from a *burakumin* family could then live incognito among the rest of Japan. To be honest, I thought the whole notion of what seemed like forced discrimination against a group of people based on a historically—not even current—occupation was silly and certainly a joke. Nevertheless, when I asked Japanese people of my university, if they would consider marrying someone of *burakumin* origins, I was promptly told without a smile that that would be absolutely unacceptable. Interestingly, when I asked them if they would consider marrying someone some of Western origins, the response was often “maybe” followed by a shy smile or giggle.

~COMMUNICATION

As language is the basis for communication, and as communication is the essential foundation for forming an association based on trust, it is critical to understand

⁵¹ Incidentally, the term for people of African decent in Japanese is *kokujin*—litterally “black person”; by contrast a person of European decent is *hakujin*—“white person.” The highly cultivated Japanese notions of politeness do not extend to titles for groups of people in the same fashion as American notions of political correctness.

how the rules of communication in Japanese society influence an individuals' ability to interact with each other. First and foremost, title and age are two very important facets of Japanese social interaction, as they determine how one is to engage in conversation. The most rudimentary elements of conversation—speaking about oneself and inquiring about others, addressing someone and sentence structure—are all dictated by the hierarchy in contemporary Japanese communication; even a basic understanding of the Japanese language necessitates an understanding of this hierarchy.

First of all, at the very fundament of simple conversations—specifically self-introduction and inquiring about the listener's name and origins—the Japanese language has a very complex ordering of words for *I*, ranking from formal to very informal: *watakushi* (very formal), *watashi* (formal), *boku* (neutral; used by men and boys only), *atashi* (informal; used by women and girls only), *ore* (very informal; used chiefly by men). The latter list is not all of the terms, but some of the most commonly used. The terms for *you*—such as *anata*, *kimi* and *omae*, ranking from formal to informal respectively, are not often used in conversations, except at the most personal level, as direct address is considered rude or uncouth. Instead of pronouns referring to the speaker or even another individual, a person's name is often used, which segues now to the point of titles.

People in Japan—as with many Asian nations—are often addressed by their family name instead of their personal name, except for close friends and family. Nevertheless, from my experience in Japan, this formality is changing rapidly among younger generations, who are finding it less and less offensive to address even mere peer acquaintances by their personal names. Nevertheless, personal or family, names almost

always have an ending appended to them, which dictates the relationship between the speaker and the subject. Everyone may have the universal ending of *san*, which can be used by anyone when addressing others despite age; yet the use of *san* does depend on the context prescribed by other factors like rank. *San* essentially translates as Mr., Mrs. or Ms; therefore, *Honda-san* means essentially “Mr. Honda”. More formal is *sama*, which translates essentially as “honorable”; in this case, *Honda-sama*, would more or less mean “The Honorable Mr./Mrs. Honda.” *Sensei* is an ending used for professionals like doctors or teachers, who are revered for their studies and body of knowledge; its usage is not based on age as much as it is on the addressee’s title. Thus *Honda-sensei* can mean “Dr. Honda” or “Prof. Honda” depending on the context. On the more informal end of the spectrum, two common nominal endings used when speaking to someone of the speaker’s age or younger are *chan* for girls—usually used in a coy, cute or endearing context—and the male equivalent of *kun*, bearing the same likeness. Yet these endings as they are informal are not used in conjunction someone’s family name, as in Japanese that would be an odd blend of formal and informal; so the *chan* and *kun* endings are reserved for someone’s personal name. Therefore, Honda Aiko⁵² and her brother Suichi would be respectively called *Aiko-chan* and *Suichi-kun*, which might roughly translate as “Little Miss Aiko” and “Little Mr. Suichi.”

In addition to pronouns and names, verbal communication in Japan can be divided into three levels of speech: plain, polite, and *keigo* or “honorific speech.” Moving from plain to *keigo*, the level of politeness increases, as does sentence complexity and word length. Having a specific tense or person to denote politeness—such as the *vous*-form in

⁵² Personal names in Japanese are expressed with the family name first and the personal name second. There are no middle names.

French or the archaic *you*-form in English⁵³—is not necessarily an anomaly. What is interesting is the employment of *keigo* as it appears in relationships between superiors and inferiors such as professors and students, businessmen and their elites or subordinates, even doctors and patients. *Keigo* essentially functions as almost another language with a completely different set of verbs and nouns and sentence structure.⁵⁴

The former examples of pronouns, titles and sentence structure illuminate the complexity of Japanese society as expressed even at the fundament of social discourse. If Pye's ideas of *civility* and the individual's ability to engage a union holds true, even the casual observer can see that the possibility of forging a basic sense of egalitarianism and comradeship of a group is made challenging at best by the tenants of communication. The reason is simple: Japanese citizens, even though politically equal, still exert upon each other a sense of inequality based on rank. This results in a feeling of disconnection and disunity as individuals cannot feel equal in each other's presences; their mere modes of communication in how they address each other, speak of themselves and of others and the words they concede themselves do not easily allow people of various ages, ranks and titles to interact in the same manner over the same issue, thus building social capital.

⁵³ It is interesting that some English speakers used to use the second person plural *you*-form to cultivate politeness in speech. Somewhere along the way, *thou* was replaced by *you* and now everyone is equal; everyone is *you*. This might suggest in regards to linguistic psychology that English itself has become a more egalitarian language. Japanese is definitely not. When I returned from my year abroad, just using the word *you* to address my professors and doctors, seemed for some reason too forward, and I felt a bit embarrassed and rude to speak so directly to my superiors. Perhaps in the future, if the social ranking rigidity in Japan is relaxed, maybe the language too will show more egalitarian traits.

⁵⁴ For example, the simple phrases "My name is Hamilton. Sorry I kept you waiting." can be expressed in Japanese at three levels of politeness, each increasing in length with the rise in respect:

Plain: *namae wa hamiruton. matasetano de gomen ne.*

Polite: *watashi no namae wa hamiruton desu. mataseta kara gomenasai.*

Honorific: *watakutashi no namae wa hamiruton degozaimasu. o matase shimashita. moshiwakarimasen.*

~RANK

In addition to the hierarchy in language, there is the manifestation of the hierarchy in social order. A strong philosophical influence for this is Confucianism—a philosophical and ethical system—that Japan shares with many of its other neighbors such as China, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Writer Michael Hoffman discusses the history and influence of Confucianism in Japan in a collection of articles for a special series *Confucius and His ‘Golden Age’: He Shaped Civilization; His Ancient Values Speak to Us Now*, which appeared in *The Japanese Times* on September 10, 2006. Hoffman reviews the origins of Confucianism in Japan, which date back to the classic period in the seventh century. The articles review edicts of Confucianism that are founded on the principles of an ideal social order, which is structured along the ranks of superiors and inferiors: men rank above women, fathers above their sons, older brothers above their younger siblings and the king above all. Within a Confucian family, for example, children are expected to engage in filial piety—which is essentially unquestioned honor and respect for one’s parents and their wishes⁵⁵; a servant always respects the word of his lord, as a wife was to respect the word of her husband.

⁵⁵ My personal encounter with this notion of filial piety occurred one day while in Japan; three of my friends, Pin, Paya and Rina, from Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan respectively, each tried to convey the pressure they felt to uphold their parents’ demands to me over dinner one evening. Though the three were from different countries, there was a definite consensus among them in regards to how important it was to honor their parents’ wishes, even at the cost of their own dreams. This was something that I could not easily understand. “But this is your life,” I offered. “Don’t you think you should follow your dreams? Your parents are wonderful; I’m sure.”—“I don’t like my dad!” Paya interjected—“But this is not their life. It’s yours.” “But my parents gave me everything,” Pin explained. “They gave me life, and food, and sent me to school...without them I am nothing. I should do what they say, because that is fair.” “Yar!” Paya exclaimed, “We have to, you know. No choice.” “It’s like law,” Rina said. “If we don’t our parents will ignore us...and give us no money.” “But fairness?” I rebutted. “It is fair to do what makes your family happy, if it makes you unhappy?” “Only if they don’t live long,” Paya reasoned.

Though the latter prescribed Confucian order is a bit dated, its principles of hierarchy are still found in contemporary Japan, which can be witnessed in the organization of social ranking. Japanese social ordering can be expressed most easily by describing the relationship between *senpai* (seniors) *kouhai* (juniors). This institutionalized ranking is based often on a system of status, which is often determined by how much time one has invested in an institution or group—be that a school, a company or a club. Age plays a role but only when that age naturally affords someone a higher status such as in situations among acquaintances or friends. This requisite essentially means that status is based on the temporal element of one's involvement, and not necessarily on the idea of merit or contribution; so rank by status comes to be the dominating factor in social ordering, as it supersedes age, popularity and sex (Nakane 1973, 27-28; 33).

The *Sempai-kouhai* relation—as the fundamental orienting guide for individuals—is found within all realms of Japanese society. Linguistically, this relationship dictates which pronouns one will use, which titles can be employed and whether Japanese will use polite speech, plain or *keigo*. As matter of behavior, it is interesting that *kouhai* are preemptively discouraged from challenging the authority of their *senpai*, even if collective; this social restriction is a result of the edicts found in rank-relations of the hierarchy and was a phenomenon that I observed everyday. There is, indeed, a great ingrained reluctance to challenge the authority of the established order.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ At my university—APU—in Japan, I noticed an interesting phenomenon among Japanese student who were asked to speak out in class. The university employed many foreign professors and outspoken Japanese professors who wished to engage students in critical thinking discussions. These professors would pose a point of view and ask the class—which was often composed of both Japanese and international students—to discuss the topic or challenge or defend the point of view. I rarely witnessed Japanese students voicing

This idea of maintaining order as it were is largely related to the concept of *wa*—which essentially translates as “peace.” In Japan, there is a huge premium placed on harmony, whether this is a balance among flavors and colors, clothes and products being seasonable or the individual not working to distinguish him or herself from the group (Sugimoto 2003). *Wa* represents the harmony of society; specifically it is the harmony of a group—not the kind forged by civil interest—but the kind made up of *senpai* and *kouhai*. Disunity in the group is highly frowned upon, and one who threatens the *wa*, one who challenges the order, can be ostracized from the group.

Indeed, my friends in Japan, often explained to me that they did not voice their opinions often to their *senpai* or challenge them because they did not want to be ignored or mistreated. More generally, disrupting the *wa* is commonly expressed as a form of rudeness, and rudeness is a fact of life that Japanese people try desperately to avoid: disagreements and suggestions are non-committal and indirect, and words are chosen carefully so as not to offend. Therefore, in theory *social capital* in Japan would be permitted among peers—known as *douryou*—where chances to be rude are fewer and rules of conduct less strict, but there is little guidance by the social hierarchy as to how equals are suppose to interact amongst each other, particularly in opposition to a superior.

Because Japan is largely a society based on rank, the tenants of social order are mostly concerned with relations between superiors and inferiors, not between equals. Pye explains that “civility [is] a key ingredient in linking the general culture of a people to

their opinions or challenging a point of view a professor posited. Even when the professor explained that there was no right or wrong answer, the Japanese students still remained silent or struggled with great reservation to form a verbal response. It was always the international students—particularly those of Western origins—who spoke out first. In most every case, it seemed that Japanese students were disinclined and embarrassed to speak out in public or interact in a discussion with an authority figure, something I was told rarely occurred in Japan’s high school environment.

their political culture. The Asian cultures have elaborate standards of personal civility, but they are strikingly weak in the areas of impersonal interaction, which is most important for democratic political cultures. They have vivid standards for superior-inferior relations, but few guidelines for the behavior of equals, which are indispensable for democracy. Finally, their oversensitivity to any sign of antagonism is a serious obstacle to a legitimation [sic] of political competition” (Pye 1999, 769). Therefore, in this vertical structure, since stability resides in the imbalance between powers where one dominates the other, the existence of equally competing powers is most unstable for Japan (Nakane 1971, 54).

Therefore, decisions in Japan are based on precedence, and rules—written or not—are enforced from the top-down, but actually maintained from the bottom up as individuals support this structure. One who disagrees with the process or who threatens this order, challenges the peace or *wa* of society, discredits themselves within the ranking, and suffers the scorn of their peers.

Writing in the context of the cultural links within Asian societies, Pye explains that cultural features ultimately determine how the individuals interact with each other, how they organize themselves into groups, and how those groups would in turn interact with the state. Pye establishes a chain from the personal sphere at the bottom of society to the public sphere at the top.

Nevertheless for the ideas of the individual to reach the top, he or she must travel collectively. This is achieved through *social capital*. “Social progress calls for the accumulation of binding sentiments of trust and reciprocity, which can provide the basis for effective collective behavior. When a society as a whole is deficient in such

sentiments it lacks the capacity for social mobilization and cannot achieve much economically or politically (Pye 1999, 769). *Social capital* is analogous to the amassing of financial capital, there must be a certain amount—often pooled together—to achieve a commonly agreed upon project. Since equals receive little social guidance as how to interact collectively amongst each other, and since the hierarchy discourages personal ties between ranks, building trust for *social capital* has traditionally been a challenge.

In short, the major discrepancy between the principles of *social capital* and Japanese etiquette is that “democracy treads a thin line between respect for authority and the belief that no man is any better than another” (Pye 771). As explained earlier Japanese people have a hard time questioning authority; this not so much because they feel that the authority figure is necessarily right, but rather that this would break the bounds of Japanese *civility*, and that discredits the individual, forcing them to lose face.

This idea of saving face in Japanese society can be expressed by the powerful notion of *giri*—a concept that roughly translates as *duty*. Traditionally Japanese people tend to feel a strong obligation to a certain organization—such as their company—or to individuals like a parent or boss. Asking of someone a duty they could not fulfill would be a huge display of rudeness, or serve as a strong suggestion of approval or disapproval. Thus the notion of obligation has only underlined the hierarchy structure and maintained a peaceful balance of expectations and ability. (Pye 1999, 772). Should an individual fall short of their expectation, they lose face and are shamed; this can seriously threaten their credibility and status and humiliate them among their *kouhai* who are looking up to them, among their *douryou* who are counting on them and among their *sempai* who have expectations of them. Such a triple strike is a heavy impediment against one’s personal

advancement on the social ladder (Sugimoto 2003).

~CIVIL SOCIETY & HISTORY

Aside from its implications in understanding contemporary Japanese society, the ideas of *civility* and *social capital* can be used in understanding why *civil* society never developed in Japan. The practice of Japanese *civility*—encompassing the *sempai-kouhai* structure and factoring in the influence of *giri*—can be used to understand how the hierarchical structure of Japanese society has historically preempted the development of *civil society* and why the vast majority of the population have not fought for their individual freedoms or rights.

In the Tokugawa feudal society, *civility* was based on the idea of *bushidō*. *Bushidō*—literally the “Way of the Warrior”—was a code of conduct, analogous to the European idea of chivalry. Originating as a moral code founded on the Confucian tenants of duty and social rank, the edicts of *bushidō* focused heavily on the notions of loyalty, honor and responsibility (Beasley 1972). Though the code is primarily associated with the warrior class, the influence of *bushidō* during feudal Japan spread throughout the entire nation. “If the shogunate [*bakufu*] reveres the imperial house, all the feudal lords will respect the shogunate. If the feudal lords respect the shogunate, the minister and officers will honor the feudal lords. In this way high and low will give support to each other, and the whole country will be in accord” (Beasley 1972, 34).^{The hierarchy of the feudal} structure plus the contractual obligations of *bushidō* would have prevented any pooling of *social capital* over a substantial group; fighting, therefore, took place among the lords who could field troops for the purpose of combat.

Later, the Meiji era introduced and instigated nationalism, which held the state above the individual; this insinuated the notion that the citizen's duty was to support and to uphold the agenda of the state, which was symbolized by the deified emperor. Moreover, with the emperor as the symbol of Japan's growing glory, how could the individual question this without being viewed as a traitor? Quarrels took place among the oligarchs but not systematically from among organized, common citizens addressing the state. Into and beyond the establishment of the 1955 system, society was mobilized and motivated for economic gain and for the overall recovery and prosperity of Japan. The notion of "public" was intertwined with the concept of public good; thus as the quality of life increased social order became a primary goal and *civil society* saw little chance to debut, for what was there to fight for since the United States was protecting Japan, and the nation elected to peacefully focus on its economy (Germaine 2005).

This notion of popular passiveness, or perhaps placation, as a danger to civil society is something that the Founding Fathers of the United States of America—even before Alexis de Tocqueville (see Chapter II, page 28)—warned against. A great example of this counsel appears in the *Federalist Papers*, an 85-article work, published in 1788 written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, advocating the ratification of the American Constitution. Within this vast political opus, one article comes to mind that is particularly applicable to this research, that being *Article 10*, written by James Madison.

In Article 10, Madison discusses how a successful democracy must guard itself against "factions," which are essentially groups of citizens whose interests are in opposition to the rights of others or of the entire community. Factions—as concentrations

of a potentially influential and exclusionary few—are described as a primary threat to the democratic principles of universal liberty. Madison explains that factions with agendas lethal to liberty are formed through like-minded individuals with analogous interests so essential to this group that they are more or less undivided by other potential issues, which would otherwise instigate fractioning within the faction. The most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property; Madison points out that historically “those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society”—a quote that supports the notion that landholdings and their political power implications in feudal and modern Japan were of pivotal interest to the powerful faction known as the aristocracy.

In order to prevent the cohesion of factions, a democratic society must be diverse and economically stratified. Therefore, if a group of citizens agree over a certain issue—like preservation of the Panda—due to diversity in ethnicity, occupation, income, faith, age, etc., its members will inevitably disagree on other points. This lack of absolute unity renders the members of the faction—no matter how passionate about one issue they may be—susceptible to divisions along other lines. So in a diverse democracy—versus one homogenized—liberty will be further assured by the inevitable divisions of competing—but not dominating—political agendas (Library of Congress 2008).

In the context of Japan, the 1955 system—as suggested in Chapter II—existed because of a deficit in the demands for alternatives to the LDP. The party faction itself had little competition and little divide among its members. So, if the Federalist Papers’ counsel is taken as fact, one would assume that if Japan diversifies economically and socially then a multitude of issues would arise to create competing factions strong enough

to challenge and overthrow the dominating faction. Consequential to economic and social diversity—which was the agenda of the Founding Fathers and something praised by Tocqueville—is born political diversity and a safeguard against a faction’s infractions on freedom.

Nevertheless, this concept of social diversity might sound contradictory when compared to the aforementioned necessity of social equality that is the basis for a functioning civil society. The existence of true social equality is a topic well debated among political scientists. Indeed, in a contemporary democracy there exists a vast range of incomes—as well as education levels, discrepancies in regional development, social rights, etc.—that fosters diversity, which stands in direct opposition to the idea of equality. Moreover, since wealth often equates to power, one might argue that the wealthy of a democracy have a greater hand in political affairs, and therefore a higher concentration of political power.

Notwithstanding this correlation between wealth and inequality, Tocqueville elaborates on the nature of democracy that often counter balances the natural imbalance of wealth in the context of social equality in the America: “It is not that in the United States, as everywhere, there are no rich; indeed I know no other country where love of money has such a grip on men’s hearts or where stronger scorn is expressed for the theory of permanent equality of property. But wealth circulates there with incredible rapidity, and experience shows that two successive generations seldom enjoy its favors” (Tocqueville 1961, 54).

Therefore, in a democracy wealth is not necessarily tied to a name, and since competition for wealth is prevalent and social mobility is afforded in theory to all, wealth

and therefore power is not easily held by a certain group of people for an extended period of time. Thus, the very idea of being socially equal in democracy is actually the ideal. The reality of social equality exists because there is always the possibility of everyone either rising or falling; since all are susceptible to this fate, all therefore have the potential to be socially equal. In a democracy, no one's wealth or prestige is guaranteed forever.

~CONTEMPORARY CHANGES

Since the time of the Meiji era and the 1955 system, younger generations in Japan have enjoyed freedom from war, the development of a consumer society, financial security and growing flexibility as the rigidity of Japanese society slackens. Case studies like those by researchers Frauke Hactmann and Yoko Kitagawa of the University of Nebraska Lincoln discuss the *shinjinrui*—essentially Japan's Generation X—who has developed a comparatively more matured sense of the self over the group and how they unlike their forefathers have elected to pursue personal goals and individual dreams more so than the wishes of society or the family (Hactmann & Kitagawa 2009). In short, the *watashi* has replaced the *wa*. Such a development has challenged the inflexible notions of *civility*, led to diversity in interests and skills that has encouraged *social capital* and essentially paved the way for civil society.

To add to this, my experiences in contemporary Japan also show that *civility* is continuing to change among younger generations. As mentioned early, the view of traditional Japan—the extended family and a homogenous population—has actually become a myth. Students I met were children of *shigarumazaas*—i.e. “single mothers;” I

knew people who were from divorced households. Moreover, very few of the college-age Japanese students that I met had households that host more than two generations.

In addition, *keigo*, for example, is used less and less. When I conducted interviews at my university asking questions about the necessity of *keigo*, professors explained that though it was used comparatively less than just a few decades ago, it is still an essential part of Japanese business practices. Yet when I questioned my peers, many of them confessed that they did not know how to properly speak in *keigo*, and only repeated what they had heard from their elders or followed a format they had been trained in if they worked in a service position like a waiter or a cashier.

Perhaps the most telltale sign of challenges to the traditional social order can be seen in interactions between juniors and seniors. When I was at APU, I joined a club for traditional Japanese Taiko drums. Of all the experiences abroad, it was in this circle that I experienced the most culture shock. Our group was multinational and composed of nearly 50 members; we had regular practices that often were geared for performances. The rank within the group was not based on age, but rather on one's tenure as a member. Therefore, even though I was sometimes three to four years older than some of the other members, I was ranked lower. Lower ranking meant that I had to adhere to the wishes of my *senpai*, address them respectfully and follow their orders. Questions were to be addressed mainly to my more knowledgeable *douyou* peers. Any challenges I posed to my *senpai* were severely looked down upon. So, unfortunately, by simply proposing alternatives to methods that I found extremely impractical and a waste of time—such as suggesting

shortening meetings so that they did not exceed three hours.⁵⁷ I soon found myself in the disfavor of my *sempai* and the group as I had disturbed the *wa*.

Nevertheless, though I was an outsider and often ignorant or even defiant of Japanese *civility*, I was not alone in this. During the fall semester, just before the winter holiday, my dear friend Rina—a Japanese native from Osaka—and I signed up for a performance. The leader of the piece in which we had been caste apparently did not fancy Rina and me very much. We were dependable, hard working and good performers, but we made the mistake of voicing what we viewed as simple and respectful requests: such as not announcing all-day rehearsals at 11pm the evening before and expecting us to have a cleared schedule, or to restructure the rehearsal time so that those like Rina and me, who were in just a few pieces, would not have to wait through out the rehearsal time with nothing to do. But these simple suggestions were in themselves challenges to our *sempai*'s authority, even though he was younger than both Rina and me. Our ideas were listened to, but not necessarily heard by our *sempai*. Though later, when no one was around, Rina and I were told by our *kohai* and *douryou* that they thought our ideas made sense and thanked us for suggesting it... "I've been wanting to say that for forever."

Sensing the growing sentiment among others in support of our ideas and not to have us causing dissent within the group, our leader began scheduling rehearsals and did not inform Rina and me about them. Later he would use our absence to discredit us in front of the other members—an indirect method of attack that is very common within

⁵⁷ Potentially one of the most annoying facets of Japanese society for anyone with a strict schedule and a list of things to do is the endless productions of the group meetings: these tend to start on time, but usually last for hours and hours on end. By the end, however, very little has been decided except when to schedule the next meeting in order to review was being reviewed during the current meeting.

Japanese institutions as an alternative to direct confrontation, which would be viewed as disrupting the *wa*.

Had Rina and I followed protocol, we would have apologized to our *sempai*, begged for his forgiveness, and then we would have been permitted back into the group on its outskirts or perhaps we would simply have taken the hint and quietly left, never to come back. Yet I was a foreign exchange student there for just a year and Rina had lived two years abroad in the US and was soon about to start her final year; we both had little to lose. So we did not crawl or beg. Instead, we elected to fight.

This fateful showdown took place after both of us had received an e-mail informing us that since we had missed a series of rehearsals—none about which we had known—it had been decided that we could not perform. Both she and I were livid. Rina and I confronted our leader that evening in front of the group. I started off in my broken Japanese by expressing that since he as our leader acted like a child, we no longer wished to be part of the group, so a formal dismissal was not necessary. I told him that there is no need to play games, and that if he wanted us to not be part of the performance, then he should have just said something. Yet my words were not as articulate as they appear on this page, and somewhere along the way, mired in my limited vocabulary, sweet, quiet Rina interjected. She scolded her *sempai* telling him how ashamed he should be, and that he has been a terrible leader and that if he wants respect so badly, then he should work to deserve it. “We just wanted to help you,” she concluded. Our leader—who elected to stare at the floor while I was speaking—took several steps back during Rina’s cutting remarks, his widened eyes almost filled with tears as she scolded him, using only plain Japanese. Once we had said our peace—effectively destroying any chance for peace—

Rina and I left a silent and stunned room, and a leader whose only face was not a saved one, but a humiliated one.

As an American, a confrontation for me—even addressing a superior’s immature and questionable actions—though not common, is not necessarily novel. Yet for a Japanese woman, from a good, well-to-do family, to talk directly and unabashedly down to her *sempai* in a room filled with others, was something few people had seen. Later we found out that others following our lead had left the group, and the performance that we had signed up for never went on stage.

The Taiko story—aside from being true—is a keen, microcosmic example of a *civil society* experiment in a contemporary Japanese context. In review of our actions, Rina and I ignored the pre-established *civility* in the Taiko group, and therefore because we changed the rules, we consequently were alone. Yet behind our actions was a binding sentiment that later was expressed when others left as well; there existed a common notion among the members that they did not have to participate in a voluntary system so unfair or respect a leader so humiliated. If these sentiments still pervade next semester, and students realize that based on precedence, their participation can cause the success or failure of the program about which the *sempai* leader cares very much and in which he or she has invested much capital, there could be fostered a shared sentiment and trust in each other, which could be in opposition to the *sempai*. This building of *social capital* among them could result in collective action. The latter story and possible future scenario demonstrates that Japanese society might arguably be rigid, but it is not unbendable.

Later that evening, after we had left the circle, I was asking Rina why she stood beside me and against our leader. Rina is one of my best friends. She is not necessarily a

maverick, but she told me later that her actions that evening even surprised her, and that she had no plan of leading a cultural revolution in Japan. *Sempai-kouhai* relations are important, but they should not be binding she made clear to me. “A *sempai* might have been there longer than me, but if I have a good idea, then they should listen. Though it may be rude, I think sometimes there are things worth fighting for.” I could not agree more.

* * *

CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Having discussed the changes in society that have permitted the evolution of civil society in the context of Japan, the final leg of this research will address the effects of civil society on politics. In political discourse, the latter discussion of civil society can be summed up in terms of social equality, where members of a society feel free and entitled to band together for a specific cause and challenge an authority figure or fight for a cause without threat of complete social exile. Following the American Occupation Japan might not have been ready for or simply did not appreciate the concept of social equality; one exemplary case of this rests in the principles of the political party that the Japanese had voted in for so long. In the decade following its formation, “among LDP supporters those who believed that absolute equality is unattainable, if not undesirable, far outnumbered those who did not believe this, but the opposite was true among [its competition parties] JSP, CGP, and, especially JCP supporters” (Duus 1988, 208).

Nevertheless, society in Japan has changed greatly since the Occupation of Japan. Diversification in the family structure and in Japan’s demography has caused waning support of traditional Japan. Even the longstanding role of the emperor has been

questioned as he is largely recognized a merely a symbol of history but not a pillar of tradition. Once revered as god and then made into a national symbol for unity, and into a banner under which a war was fought, the Japanese emperor—a man people once died for—has become nothing more than a figurehead.⁵⁸ Much like the Imperial Family’s British counterparts, there is an unspoken truth that keeping and paying for the royals is essentially lip service to tradition and is utterly politically useless in a contemporary context—something even the crowned heads themselves cannot deny.⁵⁹

Ironically in the twentieth century, the monarchy was able to survive in the public eye and be—if not forgiven—overlooked in the West for the Japanese atrocities committed during wartime by selling itself as a symbol of democracy (Ruoff 2001, 157). For many outsiders, such a system and a social value would be hard to understand; nevertheless, “Japan’s cultural heritage and traditional values and beliefs, which are strikingly different from the Western experience in many important ways, have great impact on Japanese political behavior” (Kohno 1997, 17).

The latter would also lead one to think that even the oldest traditional values and beliefs are giving way to modern ones. When I asked my peers about the emperor, they had very little say beyond “He’s nice, you know.” Contrasting the status of the revered king in Thailand, who in Thailand it is illegal to criticize or to mock and who is recognized and thanked before any major event—something akin to playing the Star Spangled Banner before a sporting even in the United States—in Japan, few it seemed

⁵⁸ “There is not doubt that the present-day monarchy is much weaker than its wartime counterpart. It is no longer an inviolate symbol of the state” (Ruoff 2001, 260).

⁵⁹ In an article by Norimitsu Onishi, published in the *Herald Tribune* on 20 October 2007 under the title “A Japanese royal known for talking up a storm,” Prince Tomohito of the Royal Family was quoted saying, “If you ask me what the imperial family is all about, and I think and think and think about it, the very final conclusion is that our meaning lies in our simply existing.” He went on to add that the royals, could fulfill their duties simply by “waking up in the morning, eating breakfast, eating lunch, eating dinner, then going to sleep, repeating that 365 days a year.”

revered the emperor any more than they might a celebrity. He received no special recognition during a ceremony and never once cropped up in casual conversations that I witnessed.

In addition to historic tradition, social tradition also is demonstrating change, as the rigidity of the social structure shows signs of weakness due to a rise in competition and as merit gains a higher premium over seniority. During my stay in Japan, I can bare witness to what I saw as the relaxing trends in communication. Japanese people were still polite and rank-rules still applied, but the manner of communication was more relaxed than illustrated for past generations. I often heard people middle aged or older blaming the problems with contemporary Japan on the declining values of respect among the youth. I observed that high-ranking individuals who had assumed a position of power saw their once cozy seat threatened by those from below; untouchables were suddenly mortal. And the terms *equality* and *fairness* were newly buzzing about.

It is, therefore, fitting that the very platform for the Democratic Party of Japan against the Liberal Democratic Party is a push for equality, transparency and decentralization of control. This political party is the self-titled political revolutionaries who pose a threat to the traditionalist LDP. Chapter II proposed the idea that the weakening hold of the LDP is in part due to divisions at the grassroots level in Japan, which can no longer be reconciled within the framework of the one party. Social organizations particularly clubs and circles have increased steadily since the 1990s—during the LDP’s first unstable period.

As one might expect, the late 1980s and early 90s was also the time of rising civil involvement. Authors Hasegawa, Shinohara, Broadbent in their article “The Effects of

‘Social Expectation’ on the Development of Civil Society in Japan” explores the recent phenomenon in the rise of collective action and the increase in NGOs as well as their influence in Japan. To compliment the changes in society that this research has explored, these authors attribute this rise in civil involvement specifically to the disillusion of an ever-growing economy and to the rise of globalization in the late 1980s early 90s. Fittingly, since the notable onset of civil society, the involvement in volunteer organizations and personal volunteerism has skyrocketed in the 1980s (Hasegawa, Shinohara, Broadbent 2007). Overall, involvement in these clubs, interest groups and NGOs have created a newfound voice for Japanese people to interact with each other and ultimately with the government.

My university in Japan was a primary example of the pervasiveness and influence of social organizations. During my time at APU, student life it seemed was centered more around student organizations; for the smaller size of student body, around 5,000 students, there was a sizeable proportion of student organizations, nearly 100. These organizations ranged in interests from topics like art and culture to political, social and environmental concerns. It was not uncommon—and often expected—for students to spend more time in these circles than in the classroom or studying. I learned that this pattern is common for Japanese universities, and when I criticized the fact that college students were essentially ‘wasting’ their time in clubs instead of preparing for the ‘real world,’ I was promptly corrected. Apparently, during job-hunting, when soon-to-be graduates are searching for potential future employment, involvement in social organizations is essential to one’s resume as it shows signs of dependability, being a team player and leadership skills.

Overall, clubs, circles and NGOs—just by their existence alone as mediums to united people over a certain issue—promote the idea of diversity and permit avenues where one’s personal beliefs can be explored and addressed; such a development is new for Japan. Suddenly people are finding themselves fighting for causes that were otherwise absorbed within, silenced by or handled by the social hierarchy. With a rise of mounting social issues and a stagnant economy, the Japanese people since the 1990s have found themselves having issues to fight about and venues through which the individual can contend with the state.

SOCIAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The following subsections discuss specific, contemporary issues over which Japanese people are currently divided and which collectively are adding strain on the LDP to resolve. Arguably, the political rifts caused by these issues and, in fact, the origins of some of these issues have collectively resulted in a wane in support of the once hegemonic party.

~RURAL VS. URBAN

In modern democracies there is a trend that appears regarding the relationship between the rural class—which at one point was the conservative majority—and the urban—which becomes the growing and liberalizing majority. Though the camps of *conservative* and *liberal* are defined differently for each country, there is the general

trend that liberal groups more easily than conservatives welcome political changes to once traditional values. This has largely been the result of the diversity of experiences people of urban centers encounter versus their rural counterparts; so change in cosmopolitan areas and exposure to new things, people and ideas are a part of daily life.

In the 1955 System, farmers played an indelible role in supporting the LDP and carrying out the party's agenda (reference Chapter 2, page 21, footnote 13: the *Tochi kairyoo-ku*).⁶⁰ Whereas farmers once enjoyed a majority, their numbers and influence have virtually inverted since the increase in urbanization;⁶¹ Japan is currently sixty-six percent urbanized, and this pattern of moving into and around the cities is steadily increasing (総務省 統計局 (Sōmusho Tōkeikyoku) 2008). Such a trend will lead to the recoiling of the LDP's rural octopus-like support groups whose tentacles stretch far out into the rural population. Moreover, in the face of the Western-modernizing trend to urbanize, local communities that were once faithful to traditional values—and implicitly the parties there that supported these values—will experience a great diminishing in rural areas as they disperse and are integrated into urban zones, thus adopting a new set of values (Sugimoto 2003, 62-65 & 69).

To add to this, during my stay in Japan, I personally witnessed the effects and process of demographic shifts from rural to urban. As referenced earlier, the town of Beppu in northeast Kyushu—where I went to university—used to be a sleepy, steamy seaside town, revered as an *onsen*—Japanese volcanic hot baths—resort. Though the

⁶⁰ “Farmers have been very important in politics since the war. They have always been a major group in the electoral coalition of the LDP...In addition to other allies, farmers generally had broad support within the parliamentary caucuses of the LDP” (Richardson 1997, 158-159).

⁶¹ “In view of the fact that the farming population is now a small minority in comparison with the workforce in export industries, there are indications that the business hierarchy of Japan is about to desert rural interests” (Sugimoto 2003, 242).

baths are still the primary attraction for Beppu, the addition of a local university, as well as the aforementioned APU international university, plus the transit system that links Beppu to nearby Oita city and to Kyushu's largest city of Fukuoka, no longer makes Beppu feel isolated. In a sort of an unofficial exchange, students from abroad come to study and fill part-time, local jobs during their college experience in Beppu, while locals in turn can now easily find work outside of Beppu in one of the surrounding cities. In addition, due to growth of the town and its agenda for tourist attractions, the Japanese equivalents of bed and breakfasts—*ryoukan*—virtually have been replaced along the hillsides by resorts and by casinos known as *Pachinko* parlors, as well as by theme parks. Beppu, now hosting a population of over 120,000 residents, is just one of many once rural towns that I visited, which have followed the lucrative path of transforming themselves into interconnected cities (別府市役所 (Beppushi Yakusho) 2008).

By contrast to places where the city comes to the people, there are also areas where the people come to the city. Most notably, during my tour of Japan, I traveled through the regions Kanzaï—Tokyo and its suburbs—and Kinki—Osaka, Kyoto and their suburbs—and noted that these valleys, once upon a Tokugawa time divided into fields, are now essentially vast urban sprawls; it is difficult to determine where the boundaries of one city or district end another begins. The rural patches that oddly crop up in between are flanked on all sides by massive vast urbanity. These central and western regions of Honshu are Japan's most concentrated—but sure not its only—urban centers. Moreover, thanks to Japan's highly efficient and extensive transit system of highways, ferries, planes and most importantly trains, all four major islands of—Honshu, Kyushu, Shigoku and Hokkaido—are well-connected, and most citizens have easy access to the Kansai-

Kini cosmopolitan spread. Since travel is made easy for those living at a distance, relocation for study and work is not a great obstacle. Moreover, for those not willing to move, study and work is made possible for those who will engage in a lengthy commute from the outskirts to the city centers. Nevertheless, the essential pull that the urban centers create—particularly that of the largest, Tokyo—are not without consequence or opposition.

~CENTER VS. PERIPHERY

Reflecting a trend seen more in England and France—where the hub of the nation is the capital—than in the United States, regional differences (peripheries) in Japan threatened by the continuing trend of urbanization and essentially Tokyoisation—where by the capital (center) becomes the hegemonic beacon of the nation and the source of politics, economy, news, cultural trends, etc.—could likely become points of dissent, thereby resulting in minority led interest groups or regional based interest groups. While I was in Japan it was generally understood that Tokyo and the second biggest urban area of Osaka were in opposition to each other: Tokyo people viewed those from Osaka as loud and uncouth, and Osaka saw Tokyo dwellers as cold, uptight and rude. During my travels, the Tokyo dialect—which is taught as the standard dialect of Japan—was incessantly mocked among students from Osaka and vice versus. Moreover, all major areas of Japan—Kyushu, Shigoku, Hokkaido, eastern, central and western Honshu—all have their own dialects, culinary traditions and customs.

Aside from the main regions in general, some other likely candidates for the divides of these groups would be the residents of the Okinawa island chain in the far south or the minority Ainu people of Hokkaido in the far north—both of which do not

necessary feel a part of Japan nor connected to the triple powers of Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto. Moreover, Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto feel little connection as all disagree over various facets of cultural issues ranging from food to language to fashion (Sugimoto 2003, 62-65 & 69). Since the DPJ has made it part of their platform to promote regionalization, one would imagine that this might garner them the upper hand in groups that do not believe that Tokyo should represent all of the nation.

~TRADITION VS. MODERN & THE GENERATION GAP

In a world where societies are being guided more and more by consumerism—which is innately indulgent—instead of traditional customs and expectations, the newer generations of Japanese—much like their American counterparts—are often criticized for a misplacement of values and a selling of the soul—even if at the highest market price.⁶²

Indeed, many of my friends and peers were much more concerned about appearance than meaning; objects—such as a marijuana leaf—were chosen as an accessory or theme because of their trendy nature or aesthetic value, paying no attention to the actual significance. The Japanese people that I knew and observed were very fashion conscious; trends had amazing pull in how someone ate, dressed and even acted. Tradition—which was by and large boring for the vast majority of the youth—was recreated during holidays, in theatres and on television. Therefore, new generations find it less of a priority to embrace conventional values.

In addition to value shifts, as noted earlier, Japan's demography is becoming top-heavy by a disproportionate amount of elderly citizens; this trend among

⁶² “Concurrently, the key elements of generational subculture have shifted away from perseverance, patience, and diligence towards indulgence, relaxation, and an orientation valuing leisure” (Sugimoto 2003, 72).

industrializing nations—where the old live longer and the young need and want less children—has been effectively offset in some other nations—such as United States and England—by a controlled influx of immigration. Japan, which historically has been more isolationist, has been in effect setting itself up for a social crisis on multiple levels.⁶³ The rising voters that will have to face these new challenges will be forced to view the international world as well as the make-up of their own society in a very different light than their parents and grandparents.

~NATIONAL DEFENSE

The idea of national defense is not something most of the outside world would associate with Japan. Japan is fondly thought of by many—except the Chinese—as being pacifistic, well secured under the protective wing of the American eagle. Few realize that since Japan’s right to maintain a military of any sorts was revoked in Article 9 of the Allied-drafted Japanese Constitution, internal political debate to remain pacifist or to building defensive forces has gone on for over sixty years. Aside from the limited Self-Defense Forces⁶⁴—which were grandfathered into Japan’s national policy at the end of the occupation—Japan cannot legally maintain any substantial military force; some view this bargain between the Allies and Japan when signing the Peace Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 for the nation’s freedom as actually an evasion of true sovereignty.⁶⁵

⁶³ “The age profile of the Japanese population is rapidly changing because of the declining birth rate and increasing life expectancy. The changing demography of age distribution in Japan has brought about crises both in the labor market and in the social welfare sector” (Sugimoto, 2003, 80).

⁶⁴ Japan’s only standing national military force is the Japan Self-Defense Forces (*Jieitai*). It was established during the occupation of Japan for the protection of Japan’s islands in the event of attack. Traditionally the military has not been permitted to leave the territory of Japan. In recent years, though, member of Self-Defense Forces have been engaging in peacekeeping missions abroad.

⁶⁵ David Williams argues quite controversially in his article, “The Japanese evasion of sovereignty: Article 9 and the European canon—Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, Foucault” that if the dictionary form of sovereignty is ‘supreme and unrestricted power,’ then because of Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution established during

In the past, the unpopular Japanese Socialist Party was in favor of Japanese pacifism, however, the JSP's successor the DPJ has taken a tactful new stance on defense, where debated economics issues are addressed as pressing concerns and presented as alternatives to military decisions.⁶⁶ Moreover, and perhaps most surprisingly, in light of the current crisis in the Middle East, it has been the pacifist DPJ who have been one of the more vocal in favor of Japan becoming active along side its Western allies in the desert turmoil and therefore becoming a more invested and influential force in international affairs.⁶⁷ As America's War on Terrorism is still being waged in the Middle East at the time of this writing, the ultimate effects of the DPJ's party stance in relation to the war effort and the Japanese citizen's response to this stance remains to be seen.

In addition to Japan's involvement in combat on the other side of the globe, regional issues might also necessitate the nation's military involvement more close to home. A recent article titled "Japan Prepares for North Korea Missile Launch" by Yumiko Ono, appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on March 28, 2009. It discussed Japan's potential commitment to shift from a pacifist nation to one more active in military defense. The subheading of the article noted that for the first time, Tokyo claimed that it will deploy missile interceptors against the rocket or any debris from Pyongyang's planned launch.

the Occupation by an outside force and claiming that the Japanese are not allowed to create a national army, they cannot therefore be truly sovereign (Williams 2006, 46-47).

⁶⁶ "[DPJ] stopped emphasising defence issues and opted to emphasise economic policy... Whilst the DPJ lost the moral high ground that the JSP used to occupy in defense policy, it was almost creating the image of having a sensible and moralistic policy on the economy in comparison to the LDP's policy of pumping money into public works" (Hyde 2006, 112).

⁶⁷ "The dispatch of SDF troops to Iraq in January 2004 heightened awareness amongst the Japanese public of defense issues, and concurrently the DPJ's stance on defense. Whilst over 50 per cent [sic] of the Japanese electorate opposed the sending of troops, the DPJ have said they support the dispatch... Whether this will solidify the DPJ policy to move away from the Left's traditional stance on defense and move towards economic policy, or whether it will cause them to lose support as they contravene public opinion, remains to be seen" Hyde 2006, 12-113).

This “launch” refers to the announcement by North Korea on April 4, 2009, which stated that the government would launch what it referred to as a “communication satellite” over the Sea of Japan and into the Pacific Ocean. This event was explained in more detail by journalist Choe Sang-hun in the article “North Korea Rocket Launch on Track,” which appeared in the *New York Times* on April 3, 2009. Sang-hun elaborated on the controversial launch—which would defy a series of resolutions by the US, China and the United Nation’s—by explaining that experts believed that the launch was actually a missile and would be used to demonstrate North Korea’s latest missile technology. Similar launches had been conducted by North Korea in both 1998 and 2006 but to no avail except effectively defying the wishes of the international community and aggravating Japan.

In a follow-up article on April 4th in the *New York Times* titled “North Koreans Launch Rocket Over the Pacific,” Choe Sang-hun noted that the launch did effectively take place as scheduled: it flew over the Sea of Japan on April 4th and crashed into the Pacific. Though, no debris was reported to have fallen on Japanese soil, Japan did not conduct a counter launch. In contrast to the *Wall Street Journal* article—which postulated that “the move [to prepare to shoot down any debris] is a bold one for Japan, which has a pacifist constitution that strictly restricts its military to measures of national defense”—the *New York Times* confirms that there is no such evidence that Japan carried out its threat.

Despite this heated issue with North Korea, Japan militaristically at the time of this writing is chiefly still a pacifist state. Nevertheless, in regards to defense, North Korea has proven over the past decade to be a potential threat to the security of the island

archipelago. Though the Japanese government—for whatever reason—chose not to react with force to North Korea's recent launch, this does not mean that all is forgiven or forgotten. If North Korea continues to prove to be a pariah of a state in regards to international peace and a hazard to Japan, political parties that wish to fill seats of Japan's Diet will likely have to incorporate into their platform a defense plan that will effectively address the unease that many Japanese citizens feel towards the nation's vulnerability to North Korea's "experiments."

~GENDER & SEX:

~~WOMEN

As one of those interesting quirks of history, an amazing fifty percent of the population as women is often forgotten—well-over fifty percent of the time. Since MacArthur, Japan has experienced universal suffrage yet women by and large still sit second place in regards to power and influence. Concerning that which often determines contemporary influence—i.e. money—women in industrialized societies could perhaps be divided into two broad categories: those that work for money and those that work as mommy.

Traditionally—that is to say post-World War II onward—women in Japan have been more encouraged to be homemakers than to pursue a career; even those that chose to work were expected to choose the home over the office after marriage and children. Women were dependent on their husbands and were relied on to make marriage and motherhood a career. Nevertheless, it has become a generalizing trend for more and more

women to return to the work force while married and after having children.⁶⁸ In addition, despite divorce laws to deter separation and the social pressures to remain married and keep the family structure intact, divorce rates have increased since the 1980s to nearly one in three couples.⁶⁹ If these trends are maintained, it is likely that working women—both married and single—and those that support them will become more vocal and active in pushing for changes in the work place as well as a revision of laws governing divorce.

Notwithstanding the impact of the employed, non-working women too are making their demands known by creating and maintaining networks at a community level, which in turn are playing significant roles in reformist political groups.⁷⁰ Moreover, specific campaigns—such as those against prostitution—have been effective in connecting Japanese women with the rest of the world via these globally shared issues.⁷¹ As Japan has integrated itself into the Far East, and the world at large, Japanese women have been able to compare themselves to those of other nations.⁷² At a higher political level, women

⁶⁸ “Divorce laws are in place, but perhaps the single greatest deterrent for a woman considering divorce is the emphasis placed on marriage not as a relationship between a man and a woman but as the structure within which children are born and raised. I consider this is a bigger problem for most women than economic concerns. **More women work than do not these days, and a woman’s reentry into the workforce after marriage or child raising has become far more common**”—Interview with Kanazumi Fumiko: (Buckley 1997, 80).

⁶⁹ “The divorce rate in Japan remained low compared with major Western countries before the 1980s but has risen steadily to the level comparable to some European countries. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, one couple divorces while three marry: the divorce rate calculated this way is about one-third” (Sugimoto 2003, 171).

⁷⁰ Many women who are not active in the business world are responsible for the creation and participation in local networks, community-based organizations. “Some networkers play major roles [sic] in reformist political groups at the community level...The demands of these women are connected with community issues and family needs directly enough to affect local politics. With time available and good networking skills, these activists represent significant political voices in grassroots Japan” (Sugimoto 2003, 164-165).

⁷¹ “Campaigns on migration, tourism, prostitution and militarized sexual violence have brought women from various communities in Japan into contact with international networks” (Mackie 2003, 224).

⁷² “Others observed the forces of globalisation [sic] whereby Japanese companies conducted manufacturing assembly offshore, aid agencies invested in infrastructure projects in other parts of Asia, Japan’s increasing prosperity made overseas travel a possibility for huge numbers of tourists, and increasing disparity in wealth between Japan and other Asian nations brought immigrant workers to Japan. All of these processes had a gendered dimension. As women’s groups came to consider the intersections of gender, class,

groups have been working diligently since the 1970s to install females in the government and to change laws that might permit loopholes to discriminate against women.

Regarding abortion⁷³, for example, some organizations and government officials over that past two decades have been concerned with the prevalence of abortions and the negative social and demographic consequences the practices might have, so certain groups have pushed for stricter abortion restrictions. Nevertheless, “the women’s movement has done a lot to alter the public awareness of this issue. So far, it has been able to muster enough resistance to block all attempts to reform the abortion law or limit access” (Sugimoto 2003, 80). Moreover, despite the fears of those who oppose abortion in Japan, the total number of legal induced abortion has declined gradually from 1,170,143 in 1955 to 333,220 in 1998—though the nation’s fertility rate too has fallen (Baba 2005, 10).

Among those women who have had legal abortions, there is a noticeable division between age groups, which by effect yields insight into certain motivations of these women to have or not have children at different times in their life. From the early 1990s to the turn of the millennium, the rate and number of induced abortions among women fifteen to nineteen year-olds increased steadily. By contrast, the number of older women, who had abortions in their late-twenties and early-thirties has decreased over the decades. Therefore, the portion of Japanese women to practice legal abortion the least are women who are twenty-five to thirty-four years old. This discrepancy of induced abortion

ethnicity and ‘race’ in the political economy of the East Asian region, they also gradually confronted the histories of such differences, and their own imbrications in these histories” (Mackie 2003, 197).

⁷³ In Japan, though abortion is not available on request, the practice is permitted on grounds to save the life of the woman, to preserve physical health, in cases of rape or incest and for economic and social reasons. Two grounds not explicitly permitted in the abortion policy are for the preservation of mental health or because of fetal impairment; nevertheless, since the law allows for abortions to be performed for socio-economic reasons, the latter two specifics are presumed to then be covered (United Nations 2002, 78).

between age groups is in part due to the fact that having children at a younger age is less and less desirable as that might interfere with a woman's education or personal freedom (Baba 2005,11-13). One can also infer that for a woman to have a child in her mid-thirties or older would be an impediment to those who wish to have or to continue a career. The practice of abortion in Japan suggests in part how women are choosing to focus on their own personal and career goals versus that of any potential children or a family. Moreover, though, abortion only adds to the problem of a decreasing population, women have not been prevented from choosing how to live their lives in regards to children.

Overall, feminist organizations have worked to make women's issues an integral part of national policy. And though reservations and skepticism abound, there is evidence that women and women interests groups have brought about changes in society including but not limited to the legal system, labor division and the mass media.⁷⁴

Of course, though success is present and progressing, its full effectiveness is debatable; few could deny that the advancement of women's rights can only celebrate limited success. For Japan to obtain the status that many would consider a true democracy—absolute equality for both sexes, something few nations indeed have accomplished—Japan still has far to go. Awareness of these inequalities is slow in coming, especially among women themselves. Many but not all Japanese women—especially young women—with whom I spoke were looking forward to the future prospect of marriage and children; they planned after college and a career to get married

⁷⁴ “From the mid-1970s to the 1990s, then, feminists had focused on reform of some of the basic institutions of Japanese society: the legal system, work practices, the gendered divisions of paid labour and domestic labour [sic], the welfare system, and the mass media industry. By the end of the 1990s, these efforts had culminated in the creation of the Office of Gender Equality, housed in the Prime Minister's Department, the drafting of a Plan for Gender Equality, and the inclusion of issues of gender equality in the activities of all of the arms of government, through all levels of local government from village, town and prefectural level to national level” (Mackie 2003, 196).

and focus on family life. Japanese women today are truly painted as the crux of the family and essential for social stability. These examples strongly contrast my experience in the United States, where the majority of young women that I know question the role of marriage and children in their life, debating if they should be involved in either, versus actually planning for these experiences.

Although the most progressive voices in Japan are cognizant of the obstacles women face in affecting legislation, they are still optimistic that following paths beaten by feminists of the West women will continue to become a growing force in changing society and ultimately politics.⁷⁵ Moreover, regarding political parties, the DPJ boast of having a diverse composition as many more women and even minorities fill its seats than the LDP (The Democratic Party of Japan 2006).

~SEXUALITY

Having a separate cultural base than Western nations, sexuality generally functions differently in Asia. For example, Western notions of masculinity that necessitate men to prove that they are men or women having to flaunt that they are women through their femininity do not exist in the same way in Asia or in Japan in particular. From what I have heard and witnessed, the notions of femininity and masculinity have blurred since the turn of the twentieth century, regarding one's personal appearance and dress. Boys are just as concerned as girls in regards to looks. Men often

⁷⁵ "It's some fifty years since Japan became a democracy, yet we are still far from achieving a society in which all individuals, regardless of gender, have the freedom of self-expression and individual development. Japan has caught up with other nations in the area of economic and industrial development, but there has been little progress in the area of basic human rights. Seen from the outside by a Western feminist, it must be difficult to understand why Japanese women seem so unconcerned, seem to feel so little dissatisfaction. **I think that awareness is slow in coming but will emerge as a crucial factor in the transformation of the status of the individual and the family, a transformation of the basic fabric of Japanese society**" —Interview with Kanazumi Fumiko: (Buckley 1997, 81).

have longer, multicolored hair, and invest time in removing excess body hair. Pop star men openly wear makeup to cultivate an image. Overall, fashion leans to more the feminine side, as guys are encouraged to accessorize, don a multitude of colors and prints of various lengths, and generally experiment with fashion. At times it is difficult to tell what style is marketed for men and which is for women. Moreover, for the more fashion brave, wearing clothes of the opposite sex was not unheard of. In addition to appearance, men and women often bathe with the same sex in public baths. Nudity is not shameful, and because the dominant culture lacks dogmatic, social conservative, religious overtones, sexuality is a much more free-spirited facet of life.

From what I have learned, one main reason behind this is the fact that private matters happen behind closed doors. For example, Japan is filled with private pubs called *sunaku baaru*—snack bar. When I first saw these hole-in-wall, rather seedy looking venues, I naively asked my friends, “What kind of snacks do they serve?” Laughter was the response, because the nibbles in these establishments are not the sort found in a bowl. Snack bars in Japan are themed social clubs, where mostly men gather to be doted upon by women dressed as servants, motherly figures, showgirls, etc. Though, these places are not always overtly sexual in appearance—such as the mother themed snack bars, where older women pretend to be the loving mother figure their clients never had—but they all have a something-not-be-discussed-with-real-mother sort of air about them. These bars are generally found in the red light district, alongside escort stands, and sex clubs. These are mostly all heterosexual in nature, and notwithstanding the prevalence of private, sexual entertainment in Japan, none are openly discussed.

On the opposite end of the spectrum (no pun intended), homosexual expression is not necessarily discriminated against in Japan; there are simply few social options to publicly express one's sexuality. Homosexuality, like heterosexual behavior, exists behind closed doors. During my time at university in Japan, homosexuality was not a taboo topic at all, though it was never openly displayed or discussed either. Keeping with the tactics of the snack bar culture, issues of sex, relationships and sexuality of any gender or orientation—even among university students—were often treated as very personal issues altogether. Sex was not discussed unless among a small intimate group of friends.

Individuals that I knew who were homosexual or bisexual did not struggle with their identity, like many of their American counterparts, because there was no guilt or confusion in being homosexual. Yet they also in general did not discuss this aspect of their personal lives with their parents, claiming that that would be a point of stress as it meant they would not be part of a “normal” household if they lived with someone of the same sex, or that they would be a potential point of gossip. For the same reasons that heterosexual relations were not broadcasted, the homosexual world also existed behind closed doors. Thus, overall, being homosexual was treated more or less as a fact of life, not necessarily though a way of life. Like many aspect of Japanese private life, it was not unknown or shameful, but rather not talked about.

Nevertheless, in the past twenty years, social pressures and human rights activists have forced many Western countries to talk more openly about homosexuality. These nations have had to rethink the societal boundaries of sexuality and therefore familial relationships as recognized by the state. It is becoming commonplace to see more and

more North American and European societies taking a greater socially liberal stance towards freedom of expressing one's sexuality and towards issues such as same-sex unions. Keeping in mind that Japan thus far has followed common Western patterns of social development—such as the replacement of the traditional family with the nuclear family structure and the rise of women rights issues—one would think that gay rights, same-sex marriages and anti-discrimination movements based on sexuality should also be taking root. Interestingly this is not necessarily the case, as there is nothing in Japanese law that actually discriminates against sexuality.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, though sexuality and the definition of “gay” is truly socially relative, it is not to say that homosexual women and men in Japan do not feel limited or discriminated against: “When homosexuality is discussed in terms of ‘human rights’ (*jinken*) at all, it is often by Japanese men who live or have lived abroad. They view America in particular as being advanced in this respect with Japan lagging behind” (McLellan 2000, 228). Taking the latter into consideration, it is logical that social awareness of and acceptance of issues related to non-traditional sexualities will continue to grow and to gain ground. In addition to human rights, civil rights could also become a hot topic if the role of marriage continues to change in Japan to reflect unions founded out of mutual love and respect instead of social contracts based on heritage or business.

More specifically, in regards to marriage and based on my observations, heterosexual unions—ideally: man+women+child=*happy family*—has served in Japanese

⁷⁶ “...unlike gay rights groups in Europe and America which have organized around the need to fight for changes to discriminatory regulations encoded in the law, Japanese homosexual people face no *legal* discrimination. This means they are less likely to [be identified] as a minority group stigmatized by legal regulations which distinguished them from a majority as happens in countries like the UK which maintains a higher age of consent for (male) homosexual sex and places restrictions on the situations in which such acts can take place and the number of men who can be involved” (McLellan 2000, 41).

society as more of a social contract and duty versus a romantic endeavor in Japan. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, the role and function of marriage is changing as Western notions of romance are introduced to the mix. Valentines Day—though expressed slightly differently—is a growing trend in Japan. Girls are dreaming more of having a wedding—not in the Japanese traditional style—but in the white dress, flowers and lace traditions of Western marriages.

There was an expression that I often heard in Japan: “We Japanese are born Shinto, marry Christian and die Buddhist.” Though the Japanese people in my experiences were hardly religious at all—except the occasional tossing of money into a shrine and wishing for good fortune—this latter phrase I interpreted to mean that the religious ceremony exists in Japan for its face value. Shinto rituals accompany birth, as death follows the Buddhist traditions of cremation and shrines. Neither of these faiths seemed to be practiced whole-hearted throughout the average person’s time on Earth. Somewhere in the interim, the Christian aspect specifically is manifested in modern society as couples marry more and more in white dresses and black tuxedos, and exchange vows in a church setting. Since Japan is not a Christian, church-going society, to fill this demand for stained glass, pew-having venues, buildings and rooms have been created to mimic Western churches, where individuals can be wed in a more romantic setting.

So into the future, as the social view on the function and business of marriage continues to change, reflecting notions of unions based on preference and romance, there could be a push for same-sex unions, because same-sex couples in Japan like their

heterosexual counterparts choose to be together based on mutual liking and not through social arrangements.

~ISSUES SUMMARY

All the foregoing issues listed in this section are inarguably linked to some of the most difficult decisions Japan will have to make in the coming years. All these matters are proof of change: in values, in power and in what is essentially Japanese. Moreover, in most every significant social field there is a parallel of a pattern or value-change that originated in or was inspired by the West. Surely more detailed, up-to-date and socially-specific research and fieldwork would need to be conducted to determine the level of mimicry and the continuation of influence, but few can deny that Japan has been changing. These changes are affecting its society by creating rifts over issues that political parties are apparently folding into their platform. This would, in turn, affect the government as groups ban together to fight for common cause.

Nevertheless, before becoming too comfortable with this simplistic explanation, a theory called the Value Cleavage is a concept posited by author Bradley Richardson, which counters the direct link between social changes and the government's makeup. Richardson claims that Japanese society is too complex to be defined by and its future path's forecast based on solely social values, and that it is far too difficult to identify a specific link between values and political behavior (Richardson 1997, 20-21). In this specific point, Richardson is right: society is not a machine, it is messy and organic, and often contradictory; it builds upon the past and stumbles blindly into the future. There is

no way to predict or link a value—lost in the murk of humanity—with a law written cleanly on a page.

All the same, society exists and is maintained only in the capacity that its subscribers will permit and follow. Since society is built upon the people, as they change, it will too. People make up society; they also make up laws. Herein lies the main flaw in Richardon's counter-argument: society and politics are not separate, as politics is just a branch of the societal tree; water at the root will one day reach the *sakura*⁷⁷ atop.

In short, the diversifying values in Japanese society are creating social cleavages that are currently resulting in and will continue to result in interests groups; these interest groups as the building blocks of civil society are creating divisions in the political arena—evidenced by the rise in new and diversifying political parties—as citizens via politicians fight for emerging and popularizing causes.

* * *

GLOBALIZATION: A CAUSE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

Since the Japanese trends of the development of civil society at the issue level strongly mirror those of other nations, such as the United States, the last phase of this research will examine the potential role that foreign nations—particularly those of West—have had on the development of civil society in Japan.

Up until this point, this research has emphasized little the potential role of the West in regards to a change in values and influence over the course of Japanese history. Indeed, since the Meiji Era, Western practices, technology and values have become an

⁷⁷ The *sakura* (or cherry blossom) doubles as Japan's national tree and unofficial national flower.

increasing influential and important aspects of Japan. The first round of democracy in Japan followed the Popular Rights movement and developed to its utmost extent during Taishō Era; it was a Western import—though it was adapted for Japanese purposes. During round two, democracy appeared as a result of the Occupation; this time it was a Western imposition.

If one does consider the political practices of democracy as a Western concept—evolved from and tailored to a Western society—it seems only logical then that the society over which democracy reigns must reflect Western societal values in order for that democracy to resemble its Western counterparts. Surely it would be a field day for over-excited cultural and social anthropologists to observe a democracy that evolves in isolation and categorize that outcome as a new form of democracy, but that has not been the case in Japan.

Japan is not isolated: “As Japan’s modernization continues, the characterization of Japan as a mysterious Oriental nation has all but vanished...” (Kohno 1997, 21). Japan is a member of the contemporary world and is linked intrinsically to the West. Both through force and freewill it has adopted Western institutions and values. Democracy in Japan is beginning to look like Western democracies because Japanese society is starting to resemble more and more societies of the West. Nevertheless, Japan in this regard is by no means unique.

Among certain circles, *convergence* has become a four-letter-word. The Convergence theory in regards to globalization proposes that in industrialized societies, social structures become increasing congruent and individuals’ values become similar (Mouer & Sugimoto 1986, 5). The convergence theory—which does nastily imply the

unapologetic loss of traditional culture—is often viewed as a side effect of globalization. Critics of this—and traditionalist against it—view convergence as the Westernization of the world, as a form of cultural imperialism that has been imposed upon other people.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, this point of view is dated and increasingly inapplicable as most nations begin to intermingle in sort of a global orgy of exchange.

This research posits that instead of the simple convergence approach, a more likely and impacting impetus behind changes seen in Japan is through *transculturation*, which essentially implies that nations become more increasingly similar through interaction and that the influence on the development of culture and society is not necessarily just one-sided (Iwabuchi 2002).

From my observations in Japan, this notion of a hybrid culture versus a hegemonic dominated culture was the prevailing trend. Japan, like all nations, has a very distinct and organic culture. It is not simply that Japan has been dominated by the West and that Japanese are becoming Westerners because they wear T-shirts or eat fast food, because of their interest in pop music concerts or frozen dinners, and because products like asphalt roads, light bulbs or saline solution for contacts, which are originally Western inventions, but that now have become global norms. Despite the origins of these items, they do not directly hearken of identifiably Western values that are still separate from contemporary Japanese values. When Japanese people get dressed in the morning and put on their Estée Lauder makeup, don their cotton blouse from Diesel, climb into their car, and pick up a sandwich for lunch, never does the thought that these products are Western

⁷⁸ “[Westernization] argues that American popular culture, combined with economic and political hegemony, is disseminated all over the globe, instilling American consumerist values and ideologies. The cultural imperialism thesis...tends to describe the relationship between the West (America) and the Rest as one of unambiguous cultural domination and exploitation” (Iwabuchi 2002, 39).

in origin cross their mind; they are just aspects of daily life in Japan. These products and the values that they represent have by now been stitched into the fabric of Japanese society and are components of contemporary Japanese interests and values.

Moreover, it should be understood, regarding the trends shared by Japan and Western nations in regard to the development of civil society, that the island nation has not just been a blank canvas for America to paint upon. If America is the most powerful broadcaster of any one nation's values throughout the world, then its signal—though received loud and clear in Japan—is merged with other signals in the Far East from regional broadcasters. Japan itself has a very powerful signal. Japan is the most powerful country economically in the Far East. While I was abroad and traveling throughout Asia, it was easy to see the influence that the Japanese popular culture has on its surrounding neighbors. Japanese style food, fashion, music, business, electronics, etc.—which are markedly different than those of Western nations—pervade throughout East Asia. Therefore, smaller nations like Taiwan and Korea that are caught in the range of both the American and Japanese cultural broadcastings, feature the hybrid impacts of these transmitted cultures blended with the indigenous ones.

Perhaps for this writing, such a point of view is a bit premature and begs for future research to follow-up, but it reminds those that wish to predict the course of Japan's politics to look to global standards versus strictly Western or American ones.⁷⁹ Taiwan and Korea are both multi-party democracies. This is to say that if the latter theory

⁷⁹ “The theoretical shift from cultural imperialism to globalization thus goes together with a turn from the notion of a straightforward globally homogenizing cultural dominant toward the idea of an orchestrated heterogenization under the sign of globalizing forces; from an emphasis on content to an emphasis on the form of cultural products, which structure diversity and difference in the ever-increasing interconnection of the world” (Iwabuchi 2002, 43).

of *transculturation* holds true, it will soon be world values that will influence Japanese society—and all interconnected societies for that matter—versus strictly *Western* values; to what degree these world values will continue to be dominated by or built upon strictly by the West remains to be seen.

CHAPTER SUMMARY & PREDICTIONS

So what does all this prove for the development of democracy in Japan and the individual's role in politics? Overall, this rather lengthy chapter has explored how social changes have rendered Japan as a society no longer traditional. Moreover, it has explored the development of civil society and its substructures as it has applied to Japan. Lastly it examined the rise of a civil society based on current unresolved and potentially soon-to-surface issues.

For the individual, the recent cultural shifts culminate in venues for one to voice one's personal beliefs with an increasing degree of confidence. Succinctly, issues in Japanese society are giving people something to fight about, and civil society is now allowing them to engage in civil combat. Of course, there is no timeframe to positively pinpoint when and to what degree civil society will develop as the foremost means for political expression. So though the social issues discussed in this research have been presented with a degree of optimism for the political changes they promise, there is no guarantee that these points of interest will effectively change Japanese society.

Nevertheless, in recent years, the political landscape is changing and no doubt the strain experienced by the LDP in recent elections is the result of many of the aforementioned, unresolved social issues. Since social hierarchy is showing signs of

weakness, and since individual is increasingly coming to be the focus of the individual over the group, it is ultimately the opinion held within this research that the rise of civil society is linking the Japanese citizen to his or her peers through interests and not rank, and that these organizations are providing means for the individual to interact with the state. In addition, it is believed that the above listed social issues will become the platforms for many new and developing social organizations and these will indeed cause a change in the political structure as voters start to vote more so on the basis of diverse issues that cannot be easily addressed by one political party.

Such unprecedented social and political shifts beg the question, “Is this ultimately good for Japan?” During the 1955 system, Japan did very well for itself—establishing the second most powerful economy in the world and a high quality of life for its citizens—even though the average individual showed little interest in political action through collective action. Nevertheless, England too was once upon a time the most wealthy and powerful country in the world, though it was ruled by a monarchy. The idea that democracy is somehow normatively better than any other form of government is debatable; though the general trend is that more people in a democracy prosper overall than those of non-democracies that have a concentration of power and wealth. Regarding the merits and faults of democracy, Winston Churchill was quoted one day pointedly and succinctly stating, “It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.”

Overall, democracy gives people choices and allows the citizens to determine how they should be ruled. Citizens voicing opinions through political platforms and interest groups do create strife, discord and tension—such as that witnessed with social liberals

and religious fundamentals, state welfare supporters and fiscal conservatives, or tofueating hippies and hamburger lovers. Yet because these opinions and values are expressed, decisions can be made that allows everyone to have a say and thus potential influence. Within a monarchy—no matter how efficient, fair and benign—satisfaction is maintained as long as one wants for nothing outside of the system. By contrast, in a working democracy, the citizen is a part of establishing and recreating the system.

Now in contemporary Japan, Japanese citizens are redefining the roles of society, and thus creating choices for themselves to pursue their personal goals and therefore exercise their personal freedoms; they are contributing to a functioning and organic democracy. So if one considers that democracy is a means and not an end to political equality, higher quality of life and overall personal freedom, then civil society as a means to express one's political thoughts, assure ones quality of life and exercise one's freedom is at the end of the day a positive development for the individual under democratic rule.

Ultimately, since society is changing, this research predicts that following the future parliamentary election this year (2009) in September, the LDP will lose a sizable number of seats in the Diet, and most likely its majority. Moreover, do to its megalithic scale as a party, it will have to regroup and redefine itself after the coming election since it is likely that factions within the LDP will abandon the sinking ship and regroup in the form of another party or parties or either hop aboard the platform of already existing parties. Therefore, over the coming years, we will see the rise of a multi-party system that mirrors that of other democracies throughout the world. This has happened because the LDP has essentially grown obsolete. The effects of a loss of support in the business and

rural sector, a shift in Japanese values and the rise of the civil society will render a change and restructuring at the political surface.

In conclusion, an evolution in values and the rise of civil society is forging a more diverse Japan, where hierarchical boundaries are softening and the individual can effectively voice his or her opinion and now fight for causes even within one of the most peaceful societies in the world.⁸⁰ For the first time, the Japanese people are discovering the merits and tools of their democracy.

⁸⁰ For those skeptical of this assertion about Japan's tranquility, in 2008 the Global Peace Index—which is an attempt to measure the relative position of a nation's or a region's peacefulness—ranked Japan fifth in the world (Vision for Humanity 2008).

CONCLUSION

Today, Japan is the premiere democracy of the East; it was the first established there, and it is the most influential. The country is an economic superpower and boasts the world's second highest GDP, coupled with a very high standard of living that is enjoyed by its population, and a heavy regional and global influence. Due to this tenable success, many of the authors and social scientists that have been referenced for this research have tried desperately to discover a model where Japan is used as the template of how to instigate a successful democracy in a non-democratic nation. Some have tried to paint Japan as a regional Asian model, while others have taken the more lofty approach of suggesting that Japan could be a global model. As a general rule of thumb, I am not too fond of models, for the reason that they generally try to establish a paradigm to fit all cases, but often ignore the individuality that makes each case unique; since all countries are unique. Nevertheless, I often ironically find myself in situations where I am compelled to study, debate or—god forbid—propose a model.

A couple of weeks ago—about a month after the Honors College Conference and the fateful encounter with the belly dancing extraordinaire—I found myself at another conference hosted by Loyola University, where I presented on the topic of Japan once again. During my speech, I explained to the audience that the initial impediment to democratic development had been the concentration of political power in the hands of a few, and that only until after the Allied Occupation was this clustering of control divided and distributed equally. This doling out of political capital among the populace was what, I argued, laid the groundwork for a functioning democracy in Japan.

At the end of the lecture, during the question and answer session, a student asked me if I would propose for Japan to serve as a political—and I waited for it—*model* for establishing democracy in a non-democratic country. My response was this: first of all, before it became a democracy, Japan—both figuratively and literally—was virtually obliterated, and from the ashes, an entirely new social order was imposed. Democracy was not an option, but an obligation. Yet in the wake of the new, free order, former cultural echoes of hierarchical ranking surfaced that deterred the Japanese as individuals from engaging in civil action and therefore from making full use of the freedoms afforded to them by their democracy. I posited that to make use of democracy—and therefore make it effective—was something that Japan as a society had to learn on its own. I also offered that democracy is a process and not necessarily a goal. In view of the fact that it was Japan's particular historical power structure and later its distinct culture that together impeded the evolution of a working democracy, I concluded that indeed the way the Americans imposed democracy on Japan and its subsequent effects would make a wonderful model for how to establish democracy, so long as the country for which it was to be a model was just like Japan.

* * *

I have been to Japan and have seen that it is unique. Not necessarily uniquely unique, but it is a specific nation with its own culture, history, social issues and general ways of doing things. If the goal of determining models is to instigate democracy, then I imagine that no one political structure can exist to accommodate all nations' specifications and needs. To embrace political equality is as much a process as it is a choice. The main obstacle to the type of equality that is found in democracy—where the

populace holds and hopefully uses the power—is a concentration of political power in the hands of one or a few. Moreover, a society's willingness to embrace and employ their freedoms determines just how democratic the people of that society will become and the degree to which democracy will be utilized in that country.

So if *models* are what are in vogue, be it far from this research to not accept this challenge. Nevertheless, the foregoing chapters have not been written to delineate a blueprint model where Japan is an exemplar of a good democracy. Rather the focus here has been to understand that if democracy is to come about, what are the established political structures—i.e. political power distribution—that allow a government by the people to take root; and what are social expectations and limitations—i.e. cultural edits—that permit or prohibit the individual from interacting with an existing or evolving democracy. In that regard, Japan can be a real model for other nations that are not like Japan, since all nations have politics and culture.

Therefore—based on the latter ideas of power concentration and a culture's susceptibility to the practice of democracy—in order to set the stage for democracy, the first task is to determine the mechanism that has allowed political power to be concentrated and to parcel out that power among the populace. In Japan's case this mechanism was land; in another country, it could be a facet of the economy, religious structures, technological advantages, etc. Next, once power is equated, cultural constructs—such as a caste system—that would prevent individuals from engaging in collective action to influence the state need to be altered through a shift in values that would promote a social democracy, where all members of society are more or less on the same playing field.

In some cases, however, developing social diversity might be a prerequisite to the division of power or occur in tandem. Moreover, as suggested by the Founding Fathers, a free and equal society does not necessarily mean a homogenized society: diversity is the primary safeguard against a power dissenting faction. Acclaimed political scientist, Dr. Charles Tilly of Harvard University has proposed, “The fundamental process promoting democratization in all times and places...consist[s] of increasing integration of trust networks into public politics, increasing insulation of public politics from categorical inequality, and decreasing autonomy of major power centers from public politics” (Tilly 2003, 23). In the end, when people of a non-democratic nation are both politically and socially diverse can functioning democracy occur. Such a process would be truly a model democracy, and such a process did happen in Japan.

* * *

Notwithstanding the supercilious proposal of making Japan into an example for all, this research has primarily focused on studying Japan as it is, and has attempted to determine how and the manner in which democracy has developed on this grouping of islands. Model or not, this research has proposed that with its political power divided and its society diversifying and freed, Japan is now evolving into a multiparty democracy, where the individual at the bottom can through civil society influence the political structure atop.

In Japan’s past, landholdings as a means to transfer and maintain political power, resulted in the concentration of that power into oligarchies that were the primary hindrance to the development of democracy. Following the military rule of WWII, the Allied Occupation essentially equipped Japan with the tools for a democratic government.

Yet history proved that the Japanese were not politically ready to embrace all aspects of democracy, and power was again concentrated—this time in the form of a political party (the infamous LDP), which came to rule for almost four decades. This research has shown that LDP's success might not have been buttressed so much by sweeping, popular support but merely by the fact that Japanese people were unmotivated and socially preempted due to a held-over hierarchy; this kept the vast majority from engaging in collective action so as to interact with and influence the state. By this evidence, this research has suggested that that democracy simply cannot be imposed but must be acquired, adapted and learned.

Today Japan is socially diversifying, and new issues are arising that a one-party political system will not be able to address. Resulting from a shift in cultural values and a stronger emphasis on one's personal needs and wants versus that of the group, these issues plus the influence of the global community are encouraging Japanese individuals to engage in civil society, voice their opinions and take an active role in utilizing their democracy. As a result, the political structure of Japan is coming to resemble those of most other contemporary, multi-party democratic republics. So in conclusion, though there is no set timeframe, it seems that the development of democracy in Japan is well on its way to being developed.

In the end, after reading these past 140 some-odd pages, one might ask why is this evolution of democracy important, especially for those who do not live in Japan? It is important because Japan has become a player on one of the fastest growing and most influential teams in the world that share an unparalleled track record for liberty and peace—two virtues that Japan has historically lacked.

Ultimately, since there has been a trend over the past half-century of a growth in the number of democratic nations, the study of democracy—its origins, processes and results—is now more than ever pertinent (Freedom House 2009). People of democratically free nations tend to enjoy greater amounts of wealth, which tends to correlate to higher standards of living; moreover, they prosper from social movements instead of civil wars and have a much greater sense of political efficacy. Though democracy is imperfect, it is a major force throughout the world as the most affluent and influential nations are currently democratic. Nevertheless, because democracy is a process and not a guarantee, there is always the chance of de-democratization. Therefore, to understand how democracy is born, develops or stagnates and dies in a variety of cultures and contexts is pertinent to promoting, protecting and perfecting this government by the people... “Because working democracies display some of humanity’s finest political accomplishments and because democracy remains threatened throughout much of the contemporary world, we are engaged in a search [to determine how democracy develops] of the greatest urgency” (Tilly 2007, 24). I could not agree more.

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