

## Imposing Democracy

**Purpose:** Students are to evaluate the probability/possibility of imposing democracy upon a culture where there is no history of this type of government. As a tie in to comparative governmental systems and current geopolitical events surrounding the establishment of a new Iraqi government, this lesson place students in a position to consider the difficulties of creating a new government in a society without a historical basis in democracy. Students are involved in a post-AP exam investigation of traditional comparative government material coinciding with current U.S. foreign policy issues.

**Grade level:** 12<sup>th</sup> grade Government/AP Government class. Adaptable to Global History.

**Topic:** Looking at the Japanese experience with democracy and considering the difficulties of establishing a functional democracy.

**Time:** One 47 minute class period.

**Materials:** Robinson, Donald L. "Building a Democratic State in Postwar Japan"  
Asia Program Special Report, Woodrow Wilson International Center  
for Scholars, March 2003, pp 9-12.

Parisi, Lynn. "Lessons on the Japanese Constitution."  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/Digests/const.html>

Al-Marashi, Ibrahim. "Iraq's Microwave Democracy"  
<http://www.zaman.com/?bl=commentary&trh=20051126&hn=21604>

**Skills:** Historical analysis and comparison of Japanese model for democracy with current events.

**Procedures:** Students will have read first two of the above readings with the Al-Marashi reading as an optional reading. Lecture/discussion beginning with "Japanese Democracy" notes. Students will compare the structure of the US Constitution (previous content) with the basic structure of the Japanese constitution. The main question revolves around the possibility of success in an "imposed" constitution and considering the success of democracy in Japan. Discussion will focus on a comparison of the Japanese model for democracy as an instance of "imposed" governmental style that has succeeded and the current efforts to establish democracy in Iraq.

**Assessment:** Final yearly assessment is a college-level paper analyzing the process of democracy building in the Middle East as a component of current U.S. foreign policy. Students should reference other efforts at nation/democracy building in the world.

**Standards:** Describe and compare opportunities for citizen participation under different systems of government.

# **Japanese Democracy**

**I. Japan a defeated militarist state: Meiji constitution considered flawed, leads to rise in military**

**II. Constitution of 1947**

**a. Imposed by Allied Occupation force (MacArthur) from consultations, including Japanese input.**

**b. Parliamentary system with elected Diet and Prime Minister. (multi-party)**

**c. Self Defense provision – *Article Nine***

“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.”

**d. Never amended**

**e. Constitutional monarch (Hirohito retained)**

**III. Can this work elsewhere? (*Opinion*)**

**Japan as a country completely defeated in 1945;  
population used to obedience to authority.**

<http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/Digests/const.html>

## Lessons on the Japanese Constitution

Lynn Parisi

November 2002

Japan's current constitution was written in 1946 and adopted in 1947, while Japan was under Allied occupation following World War II. On the occasion of its adoption, one Japanese politician called the document an "ill-fitting suit of clothes," totally inappropriate as a governmental blueprint for Japan. Observers predicted that the constitution would be replaced as soon as the Occupation ended. Debate over the workability of Japan's constitution has been a political constant; yet, the document has not been amended since its inception. Much of the ongoing controversy stems from the context in which the document was brought into being.

Following a brief exploration of the history of Japan's 1947 Constitution, this digest introduces recent scholarship and offers examples of how that scholarship deepens the story of Japan's postwar constitutional process. In its final section, the digest provides ways in which study of the postwar constitution can enrich social studies instruction.

Historical Overview. When the constitution was presented to the Japanese people in 1946, official commentary explained that the Japanese government, with significant input from the emperor and feedback from Occupation authorities, had written the document. Quickly, however, the explanation of Japanese authorship was replaced with a version acknowledging the strong hand of Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) General Douglas MacArthur and Occupation personnel in the constitution-making process. Early in the Occupation, Americans charged with overseeing the democratization of Japan identified the Meiji Constitution of 1887 as a flawed document that had enabled militarists to take control and lead Japan into war. The Potsdam Declaration, which had set the terms for Japan's surrender and reconstruction at the end of WWII, provided the rationale for modifying the Meiji Constitution by requiring that Japan remove all obstacles to democracy and ensure basic freedoms and rights. SCAP called upon Japan's leaders to revise the constitution in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration. When Japanese government leaders made only cosmetic changes, MacArthur concluded that it was within SCAP's authority to draft a completely new government charter for Japan. During one week in February 1946, a committee of 24 Americans, both military and civilian, drafted a democratic constitution for Japan. MacArthur approved it and SCAP presented it to Japan's foreign minister as a fait accompli.

This account of the making of Japan's postwar constitution has been the accepted history until recent years. The account credits the making of Japan's postwar constitution as an essentially American story. In it, U.S. government and Occupation forces are the key actors and authors. Japan, represented by its government, is a minor and, in fact, reluctant player. Although this account casts the United States in the role of bearer of democracy, it has led to the more negative but common sentiment that the United States imposed a constitution on Japan. This raises the crucial question of how an alien political document survived in a reluctant nation. If Japan was resistant to the document and to the democracy it put in place, how did this foreign constitution stay in

place? Why did this exercise in democracy building succeed when many others have failed?

**Japan's 1947 Constitution: A New Narrative.** Recent scholarship has led to more complex understandings of Japan's postwar constitutional story. Over the past two decades, American and Japanese historians and political scientist have re-examined the birth of Japan's 1947 Constitution. Looking beyond the initial drafting convention of February 1946 and taking advantage of documents that were classified until the 1970s, researchers have uncovered a story of democracy building in Japan that involved intricate debate and collaboration within and across national lines. Their research has brought into focus diverse Japanese as well as American roles in the constitution-making process, integrating Japanese chapters into what had been an American-centered story.

**Japanese Involvement.** Current research reinforces the narrative that Japan's postwar leaders resisted changes to the Meiji Constitution. However, such scholars as John Dower argue that focusing on the role of Japan's political leaders obscures the supportive role played by common Japanese people. While Japanese government response to SCAP's call for constitutional revision did stall, Japanese people responded to the opportunity. Between late 1945 and spring 1946, SCAP received 12 proposals for constitutional revisions from outside the Japanese government. Proposals came from liberal and conservative sources, including the Communist, Liberal, Progressive, and Socialist parties, the grassroots Constitutional Research Association, and individuals. Suggestions included the abolition of the emperor; retention of the emperor with limits on authority or exclusively symbolic duties; economic rights; gender equity; and the right to education. A number of these popularly generated suggestions correlated with SCAP interests and with provisions SCAP ultimately included in its own draft.

**Not Simply an American Replica.** American writers from SCAP's government section, charged by MacArthur with writing a draft constitution, took note of suggestions for the document contributed by Japanese people and groups. They also chose not to limit themselves to creating an American replica for Japan. They looked within but also beyond the U.S. Constitution. Many on the American writing committee embraced the expansive human rights of the New Deal. These ideals were not reflected in the U.S. Constitution, nor necessarily embraced by conservatives within American occupation personnel. Beate Sirota Gordon, a young and idealistic member of the committee, has recorded her search through Japanese libraries for sample constitutions from other nations that might provide models for a progressive Japanese document. In its original form, Gordon's human rights section for the Japanese constitution articulated rights far more progressive than anything in the U.S. Constitution. In the constitution's final version, articles on women's rights significantly surpassed U.S. guarantees. Other features in the American draft clearly reflected compromise with Japanese tradition. Notable, of course, was the maintenance of the emperor. While the 1947 Constitution demotes the emperor from his earlier position as sacred and inviolable, it maintains a hereditary throne as a symbol of the state, making the Japanese governmental system comparable to the British.

**The Adoption Process.** Japanese input in the constitutional process became more pronounced after SCAP presented the American draft to the Japanese government in February 1946. Adoption was an arduous process that entailed months of intergovernmental, parliamentary, and popular discussion. As the document moved through multiple drafts, it was translated from the original English into Japanese, then back into English for SCAP review. Some scholars argue that, in this process, the original

American draft underwent "Japanization," becoming more representative of Japanese thought. The following example illustrates the process by which Japanese writers influenced conceptual issues through translation.

American political philosophy rests on the concept of popular sovereignty: ultimate power resides in the people. This principle was fundamental to Occupation efforts to rebuild the Japanese government. The preamble in SCAP's draft constitution established popular sovereignty within Japan; sections on human rights underscored it.

But for their part, Japan's postwar governmental elite had not swayed from the position in the Meiji Constitution that the Emperor commanded ultimate and inviolable power. When Japanese leaders received the American draft, their first task was to translate it into Japanese. Translators dropped the American-authored preamble altogether, thus circumventing the troubling issue of popular vs. imperial sovereignty. Required by SCAP to reinsert the concept of popular sovereignty, Japanese translators used the archaic word *shiko*, meaning "supreme height." A term out of use in 1940s Japan, *shiko* was meaningless in conveying the concept to Japanese readers. Through this word choice, the Japanese government obscured the meaning of a political concept they did not endorse (Dower: 379-382). SCAP, in turn, re-translated the Japanese version into English and succeeded in catching most of the conceptual changes that the Japanese had introduced. Translation continued to be an issue through six revised drafts in the Japanese Diet.

Opportunity for Revision. MacArthur invited Japanese review and revision of the constitution between 1948 and 1949 to insure that it reflected the free will of the Japanese people. Constitutional scholar Shoichi Koseki has noted that there was little response, despite vocalized concern over foreign authorship. The Japanese government established a review committee, but received only a few proposals for minor revisions. Although it could have done so, the government did not invite public response to the constitution through a national referendum. According to Koseki, the fact that the Japanese government and people disregarded the opportunity to change the constitution when invited to do so, indicates an early level of support that renders the claim of foreign imposition moot (249-254).

Article Nine. Early in the occupation, MacArthur identified the abolition of war as a critical principle to be included in any revision of Japan's constitution. MacArthur drew on the idea of a world without war expressed in the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact. However, the no-war provision as it appears in the final constitution is very much a negotiated principle, going beyond American mandate or authorship. MacArthur stipulated that Japan would abolish war as a sovereign right of the nation. War would be renounced as a means to settle disputes and as a means to preserve security. Japan would not have the right to build or maintain a Japanese Army, Navy, or Air Force, and would relinquish the right of belligerency (Gordon: 104). This wording would have denied Japan the right to use military force for any reason, including defense. In the February 1946 draft constitution, Charles Kades, chair of SCAP's constitutional committee, deleted the reference to national defense, but broadened the prohibition against military forces and supplies.

Once in their court, Japanese Diet members debated the clause, particularly its implications for national defense. Many within the Diet argued that this meant Japan could not defend itself from attack. Others countered that the right of national defense was irrevocable and so Article Nine could not prohibit it. Still others cautioned that the

Pacific War had been waged in the name of national defense. Some argued that Article Nine would keep Japan out of the United Nations by precluding Japan from contributing to international peacekeeping and thus, be ultimately self-defeating. While politicians argued, the Japanese people embraced the no-war provision. John Dower suggests that they did so because Article Nine offered this devastated, defeated people a positive national result from the war. While they might be proud of little in their recent national past, Japanese could be proud to lead the world in outlawing war (398).

Following months of debate, the final version of the "no-war" clause came from Japan's House of Representatives:

*Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.*

*In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.*

Most analysts agree that the failure to clearly define national defense left the meaning of Article Nine open to debate for all time. Article Nine's ambiguity came into play almost immediately with the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, and then again with the Korean War. In the Cold War context of a regional communist threat, U.S. and Japanese governments interpreted Article Nine to support rearmament for national defense.

The Japanese Constitution in American Classrooms. What are the lessons worth teaching in Japan's constitutional story? Why is changing historiography on this topic relevant in the classroom? Where can Japan's constitution be taught in the social studies curriculum and to what purpose?

On one level, multiple narratives of Japan's postwar constitution over half a century offer students a living case study in how history is constructed, modified, and enriched by ongoing research and new access to previously unavailable historical sources. Japan's constitution also provides a case for examining national perspectives in the intersection of two nations' histories. The conventional narrative that Americans authored Japan's postwar constitution claims the story as an American story. Newer research makes it a binational and negotiated story.

In civics classes, students can examine what has been seen as an example of successfully transplanting American democracy. In considering the complex story that has emerged, students can better appreciate the multiplicity of factors in that success. Study of Japan's constitution should take students beyond the story of the American "constitutional convention" and engage them in an analysis of the players and conditions in Japan that enabled constitutional democracy to take root. In looking at Japan's governmental blueprint, students should be encouraged to look for American influences as well as examine provisions of the document that tie it to other national models and recognize elements that make Japan's 1947 Constitution unique.

For students in government, history, or international relations classes, Article Nine offers a case study of an enduring constitutional issue affecting Japan in the world. The meaning of Article Nine, and the larger question of whether to amend the constitution

regarding this provision, has been brought to the fore repeatedly: during the Korean War, in a 1954 constitutional assembly, during the 1960 U.S.-Japan security treaty protests, and during military build-up in conjunction with the Vietnam War. In the 1990s, the U.S. criticized Japan for limiting its Mideast peacekeeping contributions to financial and humanitarian aid under Article Nine.

Most recently, Article Nine underlies the controversy over Japanese response to the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Factions within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party argue that new global realities call for Japan to sever the reins of Article Nine and revise the constitution. Critics across the political spectrum argue that Article Nine has been bent to the breaking point in 2002 as Japan has redefined its "defensive" role to include sending Self-Defense Forces to aid U.S. forces in the Pacific, carrying munitions, and refueling war equipment. In April 2002, the Koizumi government proposed a set of "emergency-contingency" bills designed to give the national government power in case of foreign military attacks. Critics noted that the bills, initiated in the name of self-defense, would legalize national preparation for war, an arguably offensive measure. While the "emergency-contingency" bills were defeated, controversy over constitutional reform related to Article Nine grows. Students can track this ongoing constitutional issue through online access to English-language Japanese newspapers such as [\*The Japan Times\*](#), [\*The Mainichi Daily News\*](#), and [\*The Asahi Shimbun\*](#).

#### References

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[COMMENTARY]

## Iraq's Microwave Democracy

by  
*Ibrahim Al-Marashi*

In a recent conference held in Istanbul under the title of "Democratization and Security in The Wider Middle East" sponsored by the Ari Movement, I labeled Iraq as a case of a "Microwave Democracy."

A microwave is an oven where after you set the timer for one minute, it cooks food at accelerated speeds, but destroys the taste of a meal. I would argue that Iraq is pursuing democracy at a microwave oven's pace. The "timer" for Iraq to assume sovereignty was set on June 28, 2004, a few months later, it held elections on January 30, 2005 and an interim assembly will have to rush to write a constitution by October 2005, to be voted on by the Iraqi public. The question remains can Iraq serve as a successful democratic model for the Arab World if its own democracy is rushed in an imperfect fashion?

Some of the reasons that Iraq's democratic process is being rushed can be connected to domestic American politics. When no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, Bush had to resell the Iraqi war to avoid the embarrassing fallout among the American public. Soon the occupation of Iraq was marketed as the first step in spreading democracy in the Middle East, which would eventually prevent the emergence of terrorism in region. Bush has specifically articulated this policy goal in June 2004, when he said, "A free Iraq will serve as a catalyst for change in the broader Middle East, which is an important part of winning the war on terror." This statement was a direct admittance that US actions in Iraq are part of a greater design to restructure the manner in which the entire Middle East is governed. A successful democratic Iraq will ultimately serve as a test whether this American policy in the region will fail or succeed.

There were indications prior to the war, that the US would pursue a policy of democratizing the Middle East prior to the 2003 Iraq War. William Kristol is an influential neo-conservative and chairman and co-director of the Project for the New American Century, whose policy is that America should ensure the spread of liberalism in the region. In a television interview with the US program, "Nightline" on March 5, 2003, Kristol explicitly said, that the American presence in Iraq will stretch over a long period, to help it establish a democratic society. He said, "That would be a great, it would be great to help the people of Iraq liberate themselves, for one thing, they've suffered under such a cruel and brutal dictator. And it would be a great thing for the Middle East to have a functioning democratic country right in the middle of that region."

However, architects of such a policy also operated under false myths of Iraqi society and its culture. For example, many of the war planners and those who supported the war effort in the US government also thought the Iraqis would welcome the US as liberators and delivers of democracy. However, a violent Iraqi insurgency erupted almost immediately after the official end of the war, and segments of Iraq's Shia population, oppressed under the dictatorial rule of Saddam Hussein, proved distrustful of the Americans.

Among the myths prevalent in the debate on democracy and the Middle East is that Arab culture is inherently undemocratic and democracy has to be taught to the Iraqis. In other words, one can say that in the beginning, the US administrators of Iraq worked under the assumption that, "At our vision, and our pace, democracy will succeed in Iraq." For example, one belief was that the Iraqi Shia clerics were inherently pro-Iranian and envision an Islamic Republic for Iraq. However, it was from the Shi'a clerics that America feared would try to engineer an Iranian-style theocracy in Iraq that the most strident calls for democracy have emerged. Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the country's most influential Shi'a leader, in March 2004 rejected a US formula to transfer power to the Iraqis via a provisional legislature selected by eighteen regional caucuses.

While Iraq seems to be destined to establish a democracy, there still remain obstacles in the way. Some of the Iraqi parties cooperating with the political process in Iraq remain skeptical of American intentions. For example, while the US proclaimed that the January 2005 elections were a victory, it hid the fact that many of the Iraqi political factions ran on anti-American platforms. Some papers, such as Al-Ufuq were skeptical of the Iraqi elections, and argued that were designed to "give Bush the image of a man who kept his word in achieving democracy in Iraq and turning the country into a model for the Middle East." A statement made on the Iraqi Al-Sharqiyah television station said, "If we choose a legitimate government through democratic elections and if we enable it to restore its national decision, it will be able to ask the foreign forces to leave Iraq as quickly as possible." The Sistani faction has also stressed that successful elections will be the only way to "expel the occupation." In other words, while a large segment of Iraq's population braved the dangers of the ensuing violence to cast their ballots, many hoped that their brave act would install a legitimate government that would be in a position to ask the US military forces to leave Iraq.

Iraqi culture is not inherently undemocratic, but more support needs to be given to Iraqi civil society and non-governmental organizations to teach the Iraqis about democracy, given that most have lived under thirty years of tyranny. For example, on the Iraqi Al-Fayha Television one commentator mentioned that most Iraqis did not know the meaning of words such as "constituency," "political entity," or "unified list." One poll revealed that "the Iraqi thinks he is voting for the President because that is what they are used to." What must be stressed is that Iraqis have to be taught about democracy in a local context by Iraqis. During one trip to Iraq, I attended a seminar in "Governance and Transparency Seminar" given by an American consulting firm. When the American began to lecture an audience on how to operate in a transparent manner, an Iraqi in the audience screamed back, "How dare you lecture us on transparency when the Coalition Provisional Authority and companies like Halliburton and Bechtel operate in a corrupt and secret way." His statement was met by applause by the Iraqis. It was after this lecture, that I realized that many Iraqis would seem suspicious of Americans teaching the Iraqis about democracy, and that this process has to come from local initiatives.

After making some of these points at the conference, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Scott Carpenter who was present at the conference, mentioned that my presentation was biased and unbalanced. However, I was simply relaying the points of the Iraqi people. If I could have found some positive points made by Iraqis about America's role in governing Iraq, I would have included them in my presentation. This is an important point, for most analysts offer their opinions on Iraq, whether they are in the US or Turkey, without ever going through the trouble of discovering what the Iraqis are saying about the affairs of their own country. I found the comments from Carpenter ironic, since many in Turkey have accused me of holding pro-American political views. This was never the case, as I have devoted my life to make the voice of the Iraqis and educate audiences about their dire fate. Their condition was dreadful under Saddam's government, and we have to admit that their conditions continue to be miserable after the US-led war.

A country's democratic process is not a simple commodity that can be packaged and exported to neighboring countries. Nevertheless, I believe Iraq can serve as an inspiration, not a model for the greater Middle East if the Iraqis build the democracy themselves, not under orders from the US.

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ASIA PROGRAM

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## Durable Democracy: Building the Japanese State

**ABSTRACT:** The three essays in this Special Report look at Japanese democracy from a historical perspective, from its roots in the Meiji era to the present day. John Dower of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology examines the virtues and flaws of Japan's democratic system, and reflects on how the Japanese public came to accept and support the postwar reforms. He challenges the oft-made claim that Japanese democracy is inherently "dysfunctional." Donald Robinson of Smith College discusses why state building was so successful in Japan, and what lessons can be applied to similar endeavors elsewhere in the world. He examines the importance of factors from military force to a positive spirit of cooperation. Franziska Seraphim of Boston College explains how the new constitutional democracy became the framework within which different war memories competed. She describes how Japanese people made democracy their own through political participation in the decades following the U.S. occupation.

### Introduction

*Amy McCreedy*

Japan is the most successful case of democratic state building that the world has ever seen. From the rubble of World War II, Americans and Japanese built a constitutional system that is stable, guarantees a wide spectrum of human rights, and is seen as legitimate by virtually all members of society. Thus, the Japanese case is both fascinating and important for anyone who is interested in how democracies take root and grow. The first "non-Western" country to achieve civil liberties and prosperity on par with the world's richest countries, it inevitably has been seen as a role model for developing countries everywhere.

The following essays, which examine Japanese democracy from a historical perspective, touch on many important issues related to the present day. Two of these issues merit special notice. First, these essays explore why the democratic shift in Japan was so successful—and whether the Japanese experience holds lessons for those who hope to effect similar political transitions elsewhere. Though the Japanese case was unique in many ways, studying it can

enrich our understanding of what is involved in the Herculean task of state building.

Second, the essays in this Report can offer insight into current discussion over Japanese governance. In spite of Japan's prosperity and stability, there have always been those who argue that a true democratic consciousness has never developed among the Japanese people. More than ten years of economic stagnation and political deadlock have revived this debate. The essays in this Special Report usefully highlight the legacy of political participation in Japan, which is much more extensive than commonly recognized.

### LESSONS FOR STATE BUILDING

Why was democratic state building in Japan so successful?

First, democratic ideas were not unknown at the time the constitution was written. According to John Dower of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "what pre-1945 Japan experienced was not the absence of democracy, but its failure." Donald Robinson of Smith College points out that Japan had political par-

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ties, universal male suffrage and workers' rights before militarism took hold in the 1930s. The reason that the American occupation authorities supported a parliamentary democracy, as opposed to a "balance of powers" system, was that Japan had been headed in that direction. Franziska Seraphim of Boston College explains that labor and other social movements, fighting for greater participation in the political process, spurred the introduction of parliamentary politics and social legislation. Thus, the Japanese did not go into democracy "cold."

Of the three essayists, Robinson addresses most explicitly the issue of state building, and whether the Japanese case holds lessons for similar endeavors elsewhere. He mentions the importance of factors such as literacy, high levels of education, and a cultural respect for authority. He also mentions the primacy of military force and unity of command. As Robinson points out, no U.S. ally gained leverage over the occupation; the Americans were in complete control, and could quickly set about implementing land reforms, enfranchising women, drafting a constitution, transforming the educational curriculum and purging wartime leaders. Indeed, constitutional democracy was installed under a military dictatorship. Though he does not say it explicitly, Robinson's essay implies that democracy builders must accept the importance that power played in the Japanese case, and ask themselves if such control is possible or desirable in the 21st century.

However, no amount of force would have been successful but for the Japanese people's cooperation.

As Dower mentions, Colonel Charles Kades insisted that no restrictions be placed on amendment of the constitution—and his faith in the Japanese acceptance of democracy was well founded. As Robinson puts it, "Those who intend to build democratic states must trust those they are trying to help." At almost all levels of Japanese society, people genuinely and enthusiastically supported the new constitution, partly because (all three essayists note) they had experienced such terrible repression and suffering. Seraphim maintains that memories of terror experienced under state coercion encouraged Japanese people to define democracy in terms of securing public representation of particular interests.

The success of occupational reforms depended on the skills of an educated elite as well as the cooperation of ordinary people—though the Americans' use of this elite was ironic. Dower explains that the U.S. military chose to govern not as much through the political parties as through the efficient bureaucracy, which they left even stronger than at the peak of the war. The bureaucracy, still powerful, is now blamed as an obstacle to democracy. There is a limit to which the Japanese case can be compared to democracy or state building in other parts of the world; every situation involves different choices and constraints. But an understanding of how ideals were weighed against short-term expediency—and how, therefore, the task is inevitably fraught with irony—is meaningful no matter what the setting.

On the American side, a sincere belief in the universality of democratic ideals was paramount for the project's success, as both Dower and Robinson make clear. Again, there is irony; the Americans did not always support freedom in the sense of opposition to their own authority. But those in charge were generally convinced that nothing in the Japanese culture would prevent pluralistic government. At the time, many considered such an attitude naïve. Japan specialists in the State Department were pessimistic about democracy's chances, and two on the constitutional steering committee maintained that "the Japanese people are not ready for a democracy, and that we are caught in the uncomfortable position of writing a liberal Constitution for a people who still think mystically."<sup>1</sup> But overall, the Americans saw their duty not to impose but (in the words of the Potsdam Declaration of 1945) to "remove all obstacles" to basic democratic tendencies.

## THE ASIA PROGRAM

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## DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY?

As Japan's slump drags on, many people both inside and outside Japan are wondering why the political system seems unable to meaningfully tackle the country's economic problems. There remains no opposition to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that has hope of ruling anytime soon, though the LDP retains the support of only a third of the public.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, only 8 percent of Japanese feel that their opinions are reflected in politics.<sup>3</sup> Why should this be true in a seasoned, educated, media-rich democratic nation? For all its prosperity since World War II, is there something dysfunctional in Japanese democracy that is only now becoming apparent?

Of course, social commentators have advanced a plethora of explanations, both structural and cultural, for Japan's political paralysis. The one most directly refuted in this Special Report is what could be called the "democracy as artificial transplant" explanation—the belief that the Japanese public still has not internalized democracy sufficiently. Many argue that Japanese citizens are passive because they were handed rights by the occupation and never had to struggle for them, as did other peoples that emerged from authoritarian government only gradually. Thus (the theory goes) the Japanese public is dissatisfied with its leaders but has not the political consciousness necessary to "throw the rascals out."

According to the essays in this Special Report, such an argument does not fit the facts. All three portray the Japanese as active contributors to their governance. Robinson addresses current Japan less than do the other two contributors, but speaks of the Japanese as "partners" and "cooperative local collaborators" in building democracy. Seraphim discusses how Japanese familiarity with the "dynamics of political participation" dates back as far as the mid-Meiji era. In addition, Seraphim covers extensively the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s. She writes of how constitutional democracy served as a "framework" in which historical memories of the war could compete; everyone from left-wing activists to the Association of Shinto Shrines learned to vie for public attention through political channels. As Seraphim points out, movements supporting environmental and consumer protection pushed (and achieved) legislative change, though their successes are too often eclipsed by their more telegenic failures.

Dower is particularly scathing in his criticism of the "fashionable" viewpoint that Japanese democracy is dysfunctional or half-baked. According to Dower, Westerners and Japanese alike too often compare Japan to a near-perfect model of democracy that does not exist in the real world. He maintains that the Japanese political system has considerable flaws, but a critic must also consider its virtues, which include (as in many European countries) a wide spectrum of political opinion in the media and an egalitarian distribution of wealth. Dower points out that all democracy everywhere is "an on-going process and struggle." The U.S. democracy fought World War II with a segregated military and with Japanese-Americans incarcerated in prison camps.

But if the Japanese are active in exercising their democratic rights, and the "artificial transplant" explanation is inadequate, then why is the political system so unresponsive? Is the problem structural? Dower criticizes the United States for encouraging a strong bureaucracy and one-party "conservative hegemony," which are now serious impediments to change. He also points out that the "iron triangle" of the Liberal Democratic Party, bureaucracy, and big business was instrumental in growing the economy—small wonder that it should have become so entrenched. Seraphim complains that citizen's movements were unable to "genuinely revise the way democracy operated," and offers hope that links to the emerging "global public culture" will help Japanese to challenge national power centers.

The three essays in this Special Report tell much of the story of Japan's democracy from the Meiji era to the present day. They provide useful insights into why Japan developed the way it did, and can serve as a springboard for examining current political and democracy-related challenges.

## ENDNOTES

1. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (Norton & New Press, 1999), 217, 372.
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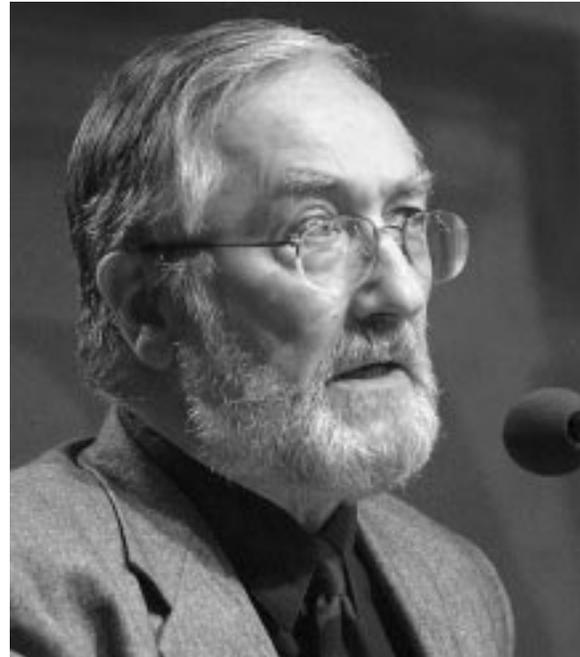
## Democracy in Japan

JOHN W. DOWER

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It is fashionable, these days, to denigrate Japanese democracy. Academics, journalists, and other commentators speak endlessly about bureaucratic strangulation and the shackles of crony capitalism (a phrase that became popular for Asian capitalism in general in the late 1990s). A new book by Roger Bowen, focusing on structural corruption, is titled *Japan's Dysfunctional Democracy*.<sup>1</sup> Yoshi Tsurumi, professor of international business at Baruch College, the City University of New York, recently observed that “Japan is not a democracy, but a kleptocracy, an atrophied form of democracy.”<sup>2</sup> Chalmers Johnson, in his foreword to a recent book on university education, reiterates the argument “that Japan is not a political democracy so much as an economy masquerading as one, and that the Japanese citizen role has been reduced to an individual’s contribution to the economy.”<sup>3</sup> Laurie Anne Freeman’s *Closing the Shop* discusses the damage to democracy wreaked by Japanese information cartels and their cozy relations with elites.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it was not so long ago that Masao Miyoshi, an inimitable critic of Japanese-style postmodernism, offered this gentle observation: “the collective nonindividuals of Japan seem to be leading the whole pack of peoples and nations, in both the West and the Rest, to a fantastic dystopia of self-emptied, idea-vacated, and purpose-lost production, consumption, and day-dreaming.”<sup>5</sup>

Characterizations of Japan that people of my generation were raised on—such as the “vertical society” and the “consensus society”—remain robust and ubiquitous today. Even the perception of the Japanese as an “obedient herd,” which was surely the most popular catchphrase among so-called old Asia hands in the United States and Great Britain during World War II, appears fairly regularly, in one form or another, in the mainstream U.S. media. The Japanese media, in turn, revert to wartime imagery of their own by referring to the current protracted economic slump as the “second



defeat”—a ludicrous analogy that nonetheless reveals a pervasive sense of political as well as economic failure.

Japanese democracy *is* flawed, and academic critiques such as those just mentioned must be taken very seriously. Taken in isolation, however, such criticism becomes problematic. It tends to suggest that a near-perfect model of democracy does in fact exist in the real world; and, all too often, this ideal is equated with a highly romanticized notion of “Western civilization” and its avowed apogee in “democracy in America.”

In fact, “democracy” everywhere is an on-going process and struggle, and the events of just my own lifetime demonstrate that this is as true of the United States as it is of Japan. World War II, the great global struggle for democracy in American eyes, was fought by the United States with a segregated military and Japanese-Americans incarcerated in prison camps solely because of their ethnicity. The civil rights movement that achieved success in the 1960s was a woefully belated and contested step toward

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the realization of genuine democracy in America. When I began teaching at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1970s, the history department there—well known for its “progressive” tradition—had just hired its first tenure-track female professor; and this, as we all well know, was typical of the times. Even the most cursory glance at historical practice (as opposed to abstract theory) reveals that we must take care to avoid stereotypes that portray “America” or “the West” as the great and abiding repository for democracy—stereotypes which intimate that democratic thought and practice are inherently “ours” but not “theirs.”

Actually, in unexpected ways, recent developments in the United States seem to be turning some of the old canards about Japan’s ostensibly peculiar ways upside-down. The collapse of the dot-coms and America’s own economic bubble has prompted journalists to address “the herd behavior of Wall Street,” for instance, while exposure of appalling corporate corruption has brought the once exotic notion of “crony capitalism” home to roost.<sup>6</sup> Money politics, media self-censorship, and the precipitous decline of political liberalism itself have led critics here and abroad to suggest that America’s own democracy may border on being dysfunctional. More and more, we find notions of “consensus,” “loyalty,” and even “groupthink” emerging as integral to understanding political behavior in the United States.

All this is by way of suggesting that while democracy in Japan faces serious and even fundamental problems, we must keep this in perspective. The Japan of today has advanced a long way from the repressive, militaristic state that lay in ruins in 1945. It *is* a democracy, however flawed. It is not merely prosperous but also more egalitarian in its distribution of wealth than many developed countries, including the United States. The mass media are lively, and offer a considerable range of opinion (certainly as broad, if not broader, than the mainstream U.S. media). However great and unresponsive to popular control bureaucratic and corporate influence may be, no military-industrial complex drives the state. Indeed, where issues of remilitarization are concerned, public opinion still plays a critical role in maintaining constraints that neither Japan’s conservative leaders nor their patrons in Washington endorse.

## THE INDIGENOUS ROOTS OF JAPAN’S POSTWAR DEMOCRACY

It is sometimes argued that Japan’s postwar democracy is an artificial transplant—a system largely imposed by the Americans during the six-plus years of occupation that followed World War II. And, indeed, no one can deny the reformist ardor that the conquerors initially brought to the task of “demilitarizing and democratizing” defeated Japan. They cracked the old regime open in ways that astounded and alarmed the conservative civilian elites—establishing popular sovereignty under a new constitution, enfranchising women, abolishing the peerage, dispossessing the rural landlord class, encouraging a strong labor movement, institutionalizing protection of human rights and women’s equality under the law, revamping the educational system, and even venturing to diversify stockholding in the great *zai-batsu* combines.

While it took the “supreme command” of the victors to initiate these reforms, however, their implementation and survival required the support of Japanese at all levels of society. As the Cold War

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replaced the old war, the Americans themselves abandoned some early reforms. “Demilitarization” was the most conspicuous casualty, but the so-called reverse course also extended to backtracking on labor and economic reforms and promoting the return to power of the old political and corporate elites. What is most striking about the occupation legacy, however, is how much of the democratization agenda has survived, more or less intact, to the present day.

How do we account for this? We can do so in several ways—first of all, by recognizing that democracy was *not* simply grafted onto Japan from outside after World War II. We can trace its roots back to the many hundreds of grassroots protests in the name of social justice that took place during the Tokugawa

period, long before Commodore Perry “opened” Japan to the outside world. We find the seeds of a rudimentary democratization in pronouncements that accompanied the overthrow of the feudal regime in 1868—and, subsequently, in the “liberty and people’s rights” movement of the 1870s and early 1880s, the establishment of constitutional government in the 1890s, the emergence of labor protest and a women’s movement at the turn of the century, and the flourishing of both bourgeois party politics and socialist and communist protest in the era of “Taisho democracy.” When war ended in 1945, there was little need for the Japanese to translate the classic corpus of Western liberal and revolutionary thought; rather, they simply needed to bring back into print all the translations the militarists of the 1930s had suppressed. What pre-1945 Japan experienced was not the absence of democracy, but its failure.

Bone-deep war weariness also contributed enormously to the readiness with which most Japanese embraced the early occupation agendas of demilitarization and democratization. We usually date the era of Imperial Japan’s accelerated aggression abroad and repression at home to 1931—ten years before Pearl Harbor brought war to Americans. Japan’s all-out war against China began in 1937. By August 1945, the death toll on the Japanese side was roughly two million fighting men and another one million civilians—about four percent of the total population. Sixty-six major cities, culminating in

One of the themes emerging in recent historical studies of Japan’s road to war in the 1930s is the *modernity* of many of the forces and developments that abetted Japanese militarism. This is a conspicuous departure from earlier studies emphasizing the backwardness and “feudal remnants” that enabled the militarists to mobilize the populace for war and aggression. And, among other things, this reappraisal of the institutional dynamics of state and society during the war years helps clarify the baseline for postwar accommodations to a more open and reform-oriented society.

Institutions that could be diverted from war to peace were in place. “Renovationist” transformation of the status quo was already a by-word among bureaucrats and technocrats. Great numbers of Japanese trained for war-related tasks were available—and psychologically ready—to turn their talents to peaceful, constructive, “democratic” pursuits. In countless ways, the legacies of war itself, and not just defeat and alien occupation, drove the postwar consolidation of democracy in Japan.<sup>7</sup>

Yoshida Shigeru, Japan’s preeminent conservative politician in the decade following Japan’s defeat, looked back at the occupation reforms with considerable regret after he stepped down as prime minister in 1954. “There was this idea at the back of my mind,” he later wrote, “that, whatever needed to be revised after we regained our independence could be revised then. But once a thing has been decided on, it is not so easy to have it altered.”<sup>8</sup>

Essentially the same notion, albeit from the opposite end of the political spectrum, was espoused by the Americans who directed Yoshida and his compatriots to introduce constitutional revision and other democratic reforms. In a phrase eventually incorporated in the preamble of the new national charter, the Americans argued that “laws of political morality are universal”—and the minutes of their secret deliberations indicate that they sincerely believed this to be true. Colonel Charles Kades, the respected New Dealer who led the committee that wrote the first draft of the constitution, took the position that, whatever Yoshida and his conservative colleagues might argue, there was in fact no gap “between American political ideology and the best or most liberal Japanese constitutional thought.”

Kades also insisted that no restrictions be placed on amendment of the constitution—and his confidence that the Japanese people would welcome a

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Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had been heavily bombed. The economy had been shattered. While this sense of “victimization” blinded many Japanese to the horrors they inflicted on the Chinese and other Asian peoples, it also fostered an almost visceral receptivity to the post-defeat ideal of creating a more open, anti-militaristic society that would never permit such horrors to be repeated.



genuinely democratic charter was not misplaced. The “GHQ constitution” has remained unrevised for more than a half century.<sup>9</sup> Sooner rather than later, this situation is likely to change. The constitution will be revised, particularly to legitimize Japan’s already substantial military forces. But it seems inconceivable that the basic democratic principles and protections established in the present charter will be repudiated.

### PROBLEMS, PROSPECTS, AND NEW MODELS

While democracy was substantially “deepened” in Japan in the wake of defeat, this process in itself was simultaneously flawed and incomplete. The very idea of an “imperial democracy”—a hereditary, non-accountable, patriarchal emperor serving, in the words of the new constitution, as “the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people”—is inherently oxymoranic.

More problematic yet is the bureaucratic legacy of the occupation. From 1945 to 1952, Japan was essentially ruled by an American military dictatorship that, for simple reasons of expediency, governed not through the political parties but through a bureaucratic system that remained essentially intact from the war years. The elimination of the War (Army) and Navy ministries greatly strengthened the influence of the civilian bureaucracy. When the Cold War prompted the United States to divert its Japan policy from reform to economic reconstruction, it was the Americans themselves who further enhanced bureaucratic influence by creating powerful new institutions such as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI, established in 1949). When the occupation ended in 1952, the Japanese bureaucracy—so often criticized as a fundamental impediment to democracy today—was probably even stronger than it had been at the peak of the war.

Well before the occupation ended, it also was clear that conservative politicians such as Yoshida, who had been the *bête noire* of the early reformers, had regained power domestically and were now endorsed by Washington as America’s most reliable Cold War clients in Asia. Yoshida’s resignation late in 1954 paved the way for the creation of the Liberal Democratic Party that has dominated postwar politics ever since.

The so-called iron triangle of the LDP, the bureaucracy, and big business did indeed grow the

economy and spread prosperity throughout the country. At the same time, it also institutionalized a “one-party democracy” of a sort that did not emerge, interestingly enough, in West Germany—the most obvious European counterpart to postwar Japan. The cost of this conservative hegemony, widely bemoaned today, is a political economy of entrenched interests that now appears inflexible, uninspiring, and more than a little corrupt.

In spite of such problems, it accomplishes little to deny Japan’s present-day status as one of the world’s major democracies. We Americans get off track, I would suggest, by holding Japan to uniquely high standards—and, indeed, by commonly setting the Japanese case against a highly rarified and romanticized notion of democracy in our own country.

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Indeed, I would go further and suggest that it is more interesting to compare Japan to the major democracies of Europe. Democracy is a process, an on-going struggle that may take different forms. And in many ways, in terms of both recent historical experience and what we might call national temperament, it can be argued that Japan is closer to the great nations of Europe than it is to the United States.

The fit is far from perfect, of course. Germany and other European democracies have more robust two-party systems, and at the same time differ in various ways among themselves. Still, modern Japan does embrace a number of political traditions and attitudes that are closer to the European experience than to the American. These include familiarity with and respect for serious social-democratic ideas; tolerance and even encouragement of responsible state intervention in the political economy; acceptance of labor and leftwing voices as natural and legitimate contributors to political discourse and contention; and a general notion of economic “democracy” that contrasts quite sharply to the winner-take-all capitalism currently in vogue in the United States.

Japan and the great nations of Europe also share the experience of modern war in a manner unfamiliar to the United States. War—and World War II in particular—visited these countries with great savagery. It instilled abiding memories of what Europeans often speak of as the “moral abyss” of organized violence. A great many Japanese—like a great many individuals in Europe and, indeed, elsewhere throughout the world these days—draw upon this dark wellspring of memory in expressing aversion to relying on military solutions to resolve international problems. And, in doing so, they find themselves at odds with the obsessively military thrust of present-day U.S. policy.

Does this have anything to do with democracy? I think it does, albeit in an oblique way. For if we apply the vocabulary of “democracy” to the international realm, this draws our attention to once-valued ideals that now almost seem to have fallen by the wayside—the notion of a meaningful “family of nations,” for example; or, more simply, of “multilateralism” and optimally non-coercive “international cooperation.” In a fractious world dominated by a single superpower, these are obviously utopian ideals—but they remain worth struggling for, just as “democracy” does domestically.

In practice, Japan’s international position ever since the occupation has been one of “subordinate independence” vis-a-vis the United States—a model of hierarchic rather than truly equal relations. Disparity of power is inevitable in this critical relationship. Just as it may be more appropriate to set Japan against Europe in our comparative scrutiny of “democracy,” however, the time may also have come for Japan itself to formulate a more independent and simultaneously truly multilateral role in the world.

#### ENDNOTES

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4. Laurie Anne Freeman, *Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan’s Mass Media* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
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6. Such ironic appropriation of the “obedient herd” rhetoric is commonplace. See, for example, the *Washington Post Weekly* of December 17–23, 2001 (“Wall Street has a herd mentality. Not only do analysts have a bullish bias, but, worse, they have a sheepish bias. They don’t want to stand out from the flock.”) A well-known academic formulation of this is Abhijit V. Banerjee’s 1992 essay on economic decision-making, published in the *Journal of Economics* under the title “A Simple Model of Herd Behavior.”
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## Building a Democratic State in Postwar Japan

DONALD L. ROBINSON

Japan has always prided itself on being able to take the best from the West and yet remain an Asian country. Following Japan's defeat in World War II, the Western Allies demanded that Japan adopt the forms and spirit of liberal democracy. The critical question for Japan was whether it could transform itself into a liberal democracy and still retain its own culture.

Recently the Japanese case has been drawn into comparison with current aspirations to rebuild non-Western nations in the image of liberal democracy. In this context it has become important to understand why those who laid the foundations of constitutional democracy in postwar Japan were successful.

To me, the essence of it lies in the ability of two nations, so recently locked in mortal combat, to become “partners” in the democratization of an Asian nation.

### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

To get to partnership, there were profound differences of national experience and culture to overcome. Let me, very briefly, outline some of these differences.

Basic to the American ideology and experience were commitments to liberty, individualism and equality. Americans are not agreed about what equality means, but they regard it as “self-evident” that all men are created equal. For Japan, the emphasis is rather on harmony, the nation as a family. Related values include a comfort with hierarchy, respect, and a sense of Confucian order.

Second, America sees itself as a new nation. As Abraham Lincoln put it, “our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation,” within living memory. Related to this is the frontier mentality: limitless space, freedom, opportunity, and competition. Japan, by contrast, is a proud, ancient culture. Japanese people exist together, on islands intensely



cultivated. Their prosperity, sometimes their very survival, depends on cooperation.

Third, practically all Americans are immigrants. Among Japanese, there is a sense of having been on those islands forever, children of Amaterasu and Jimmu-tenno.

Finally, Americans emphasize *rights* of citizenship; Japanese stress *duties*.

### WHY NOT A SEPARATION OF POWERS?

Given these profound cultural differences, the challenge for the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) and the Japanese cabinet (“partners” in 1946) was to create a system that

- met American standards of constitutional form (a strengthened legislature, accountable executive, and independent judiciary) and content (renunciation of armed forces and the right to initiate war; an explicit bill of rights) and promised the necessary *change* in transparency.
- satisfied Japanese concerns about maintaining proper respect for the emperor and preserving traditional household arrangements (*ie*), fostered

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religious sentiments, and appealed to the Japanese urge for *continuity*.

It is conventionally said that the United States “imposed” constitutional democracy on Japan. As a political scientist studying Japan’s constitutional foundations, I have always been struck by this little formula. Is it so easy to impose democracy on another people? And further, if we were free to “impose” a constitution on Japan, why did SCAP not design a separation of powers (in which we so deeply believe for ourselves)?

It is not sufficient to reply that, because Japan had a monarchy, the parliamentary (Westminster) system seemed best. MacArthur was indeed determined to preserve the Japanese emperor (*tenno*). But a design based on constitutional monarchy, with a government of separated powers, was not beyond imagining for Japan. The revision could have provided for

Westminster system. The figure of the *tenno*, Hirohito, loomed in the background, dressed in spiritual and constitutional authority, an inviting figure to those in the armed forces and elsewhere who were impatient with the petty transactions of democratic governance. But the politicians were making progress—assembling cabinets and directing government in response to popular elections—and there was strong support for their efforts in the popular culture.

In short, in the 1920s, Japan was on the road to parliamentary democracy.

Then came the worldwide, economic and social disaster known as the Great Depression. The 1930s were a political nightmare, not for Japan alone, but for much of the West as well. Among other calamities, in the rush toward conflict with the West, Japan repressed its liberal politicians and came under the thrall of the armed forces, who used an all-too-willing *tenno* to provide legitimacy for their program of aggression in Asia. The Meiji Constitution lent itself to this development.

After Japan’s surrender in 1945, there was great confusion. Japan itself was practically helpless. But the conquerors, too, were ill-prepared for the staggering challenges of postwar reconstruction. When atomic weapons were dropped on two Japanese cities, the war abruptly ended, sooner than the planners in Washington had expected.

The clearest blueprint for the occupation came from the Potsdam Declaration, proclaimed by the Allies in July, 1945. The key provisions were:

(10) The Japanese Government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. ...

(12) The occupying forces of the Allies shall be withdrawn from Japan as soon as ... there has been established in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese people a peacefully inclined and responsible government.

The Potsdam Declaration was not unambiguous. What if the Japanese people willed a government that seemed insufficiently “peacefully inclined and responsible” to the occupation? Specifically, what if Japanese opinion insisted upon unimpaired prerogatives for the emperor?

The challenge, then, was to reconcile a reconceived *kokutai* with the forms of constitutional

### *Is it so easy to impose democracy on another people? And why did SCAP not design a separation of powers (in which we so deeply believe for ourselves)?*

separate popular election and fixed terms for the chief executive. (Japan is now reportedly considering such a revision.)

Why did the Americans not do it this way? Partly, I think, because many of MacArthur’s top aides were Anglophiles, well-versed in how parliamentary regimes developed and work. They admired the strength, resiliency and firm democratic accountability of the British system. With strong constitutional revisions—including such un-British elements as an independent judiciary and a written bill of rights—they could imagine Japan operating very much along British lines.

But mainly, the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Allied powers wanted revision to **build on Japanese experience**. Before the war, in the 1920s, Japan had been making progress toward a parliamentary regime, in which dominant parties or coalitions formed cabinets and governed, so long as they could sustain confidence in the Diet. It involved considerable creativity on the part of Japan’s politicians to make a Prussian-style constitution work like the



democracy. They did it, basically, by tethering the *tenno* firmly to the harness of constitutional authority, and by placing all political power in the hands of electorally accountable politicians.

### LESSONS FOR STATE-BUILDING

What are the lessons of Japanese experience for would-be state-builders today? The closer one examines state-building after World War II, the harder it seems to find lessons that can help us as we approach today's responsibilities. Much of what transpired then seems almost miraculous, in retrospect. Nevertheless, I am mindful of Bruce Ackerman's warning that social scientists mustn't speak of miracles. Our job is to understand and explain.

What made it so difficult to rebuild the state in postwar Japan? First of all, the country was blasted and broken by devastating war. Everywhere there was hunger and epidemic disease, and soldiers returning home with crippled bodies and broken spirits—or, in the case of many abandoned on the steppes of Manchuria, not returning at all. In addition, Japan in its agony confronted an unsympathetic world. Not only did the West view Japan with smoldering hostility; her Asian neighbors too regarded Japan as an aggressor-nation.

Another factor was Japan's economic underdevelopment. Even before the Pacific War, Japan had not achieved economic parity with the Western powers. With the harsh setback of war, she now faced a daunting task to achieve the prosperity that many commentators regard as necessary to sustain democracy.

Japan's "partners" in the project of democratization were also not ideally situated for the work ahead. The officers of GHQ were mostly ignorant about Japan. This was particularly true among those who took leadership in the revision of the Japanese constitution, including MacArthur, General Courtney Whitney, Colonel Charles Kades, Commander A. Rodman Hussey, and Lieutenant Milo Rowell. Only Beate Sirota, among the 15 or 20 principal American framers, had lived in Japan any length of time, and she was a 23-year-old translator.

Another problem was sour relations between SCAP (especially MacArthur, Whitney and Kades)

and, first, Konoe Fumimaro and his palace-based commission on revision; then Matsumoto Joji and his cabinet task-force. After the fiasco over Konoe (a noisy quarrel over whether MacArthur had invited him to take charge of constitutional revision), SCAP adopted an almost quixotic attitude toward providing guidance for the Japanese on constitutional revision. Matsumoto's well-documented arrogance compounded the problem.

Given these serious obstacles, what made state-building *possible* in Japan after World War II? Analysts of democratization list several factors that conduce to success, and several of them were present in Japan after the war. First, the Japanese were literate, well-educated people. They had a habit of respect for authority (within bounds, which MacArthur seemed intuitively to understand and respect). They appear to have made a decision to "embrace" defeat, to accept American guidance. They had good experience to build on—practice with meaningful voting and coalition-building in the 1920s.

Another factor was the occupation's purge of military and wartime political leaders, shifting the political center of gravity toward the center. Even after the purge had eliminated perhaps a hundred thousand people from office-holding, there remained an able, legitimate political leadership class.

On the American side, too, there were important advantages. Among them were overwhelming military force and unity of command. No Allies were able to gain leverage over the occupation (though the Soviet Union and Australia tried, in various ways). The Americans were in complete control, as they showed in plowing straight ahead with a thor-

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ough-going program of civic and political reform: enfranchising women, fostering a rejuvenated trade-union movement, demanding land reform, liberalizing education, breaking up *zaibatsu* (financial and industrial conglomerates)—and, most fundamental-



ly, drafting a new constitution. The Americans had no doubt at all that liberal democracy was an ideal of universal applicability, and most of them were confident that the Japanese, rid of “feudalism” and oppression, were capable and willing to support a democratic regime.

Current discussions (of state-building in Afghanistan and Iraq) raise some other questions. Some people warn that the United States is insufficiently prepared to assume direction of such projects in non-Western lands. What part did careful planning play in postwar Japan?

Actually American thinking about the “democratization” of Japan was quite unresolved as the occupation began. In the fall of 1945, there was confusion, even conflict at SCAP about how much “regime change” would be required in Japan, and what role Hirohito should play in it. (Dale Helleger’s recent book, *We the Japanese People: World War II and the Origins of the Japanese Constitution*, offers an instructive account on this point.)

How much did Americans understand of Japanese ways in 1946? Hugh Borton was director of State Department planning for Japan. His important paper, SWNCC 228, reflected profound understanding of the faults of the Meiji system and how to fix them. But communication between the State Department in Washington and SCAP in Tokyo was imperfect. George Atcheson, State’s man at GHQ, was suspect. MacArthur brusquely rebuffed his efforts to provide guidance for Japan’s revisers. As for

SWNCC 228, it got to Tokyo in early January 1946, just in time to serve as a kind of checklist. As such, it was a valuable guide for Kades and his staff of revisers. But it was not viewed as a controlling document by these officers of the occupation. They took their orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In fact few who led SCAP in rebuilding the Japanese state were knowledgeable about Japanese history, culture—or even Japan’s legal language, which by the way was undergoing revolutionary changes at this time.

In sum, the successful democratization of Japanese owes much to circumstances *unique* to Japan in 1946: the uncontested military superiority of the United States; Japanese willingness to be rebuilt (to a point) by the United States; the availability of Japanese officials who had legitimate authority among their fellow-countrymen; the threat posed by the Soviets, dangers similarly perceived by United States and Japan; and shared political ideals, especially after the purge—those of liberal democracy, on a roll.

But in at least one crucial respect, the case of postwar Japan should serve as a model for would-be state builders today. Those who intend to build democratic states must trust those they are trying to help. Democratization cannot be accomplished without indigenous cooperation. If there are no “partners”—no strong local collaborators—it is not possible for a democratic nation to rise from the ashes of conquest.



# Participatory Democracy and Public Memory in Postwar Japan

FRANZISKA SERAPHIM

**H**istorical memory matters in the current rethinking of Japanese democracy, and it is necessarily complex. In part, this is because Japanese experiences with various aspects of “democracy” reflected the different historical contexts in which they emerged, from efforts at modernization in the Meiji period to the articulation of civil rights and citizen political activism, and negotiation of access to resources and consumer goods. Conversely, the establishment of a democratic political system under the Allied occupation (1945–1952) provided a framework in which historical memories, especially of the preceding war, formed and competed. Whether as “text” or as “context,” then, critical discourses about democracy have continuously engaged the problem of memory. In the following, I focus on an aspect of democracy that has been closely bound up with Japanese historical experiences rather than putatively Western concepts, namely the politics of political participation on all levels of society.

## PREWAR LEGACIES

To many, the term “democracy” bespeaks a standard of criteria that originated in Europe and a set of institutions introduced largely under the American occupation following the end of World War II. Even when democracy was “new,” however, Japanese people could draw on lessons and legacies in their own long history of creating a vigorous public sphere through which to negotiate conflicting political interests, voice dissent, and engage in the collective production of public discourses. At least since Nakae Chomin’s translation of Rousseau’s *Social Contract* in 1882, public men and women have debated Western concepts of democracy and their meaning for Japan.<sup>1</sup> Japanese historians even reconstructed what they call an “indigenous” democracy pointing to an impressive degree of grassroots political activism in mid-Meiji.<sup>2</sup> After the turn of the century, labor and



other social movements fought for greater participation in the political process and spurred the introduction of parliamentary politics and social legislation.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, these achievements (and their failures) did not make prewar Japan democratic, nor did they last long in light of the fascist turn of the 1930s. But it is important to recognize that Japanese people had extensive experience with the dynamics of political participation, even under authoritarian rule.<sup>4</sup> The memory of both the widening of these possibilities in the 1920s and their detrimental narrowing if not termination during wartime fascism prepared the Japanese public after 1945 to embrace defeat and the American occupation reforms. Since then, democracy has been alternatively celebrated as a postwar achievement and criticized as deeply flawed or at least incomplete, highlighting in the pool of memories those struggles that pitted “citizens” against the “state.”

## WAR MEMORY AND DEMOCRATIC REINVENTION

Meanings of postwar democracy are closely bound up with the memory of World War II, which for

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most Japanese centers on state repression of public life, not war crimes committed by soldiers in foreign lands. Postwar political dislocation, democratic aspirations, and memories of terror (or comfort) experienced under state coercion all combined to urge Japanese people to define postwar democracy in terms of securing public (that is, political) representation of particular interests. Citizen associations proliferated in unprecedented numbers at that time, some later coalescing into powerful interest and pressure groups. The reconstructed Left gained political strength by founding labor unions, agricultural cooperatives, and research groups, or by reviving formerly suppressed organizations. Many professional organizations that had existed during and before the war changed their names and rhetoric to conform to new circumstances. Organizations identified as militarist by occupation forces were ordered to disband but often reestablished themselves in new guises. They all competed for a share of public attention by positioning themselves as leaders of democratic change, targeting as their initial audience “the people” rather than the state. To the extent that a critical public had ceased to operate under the wartime regime, memory—which was immediately embedded in the public discourse about democratic reconstruction—became a factor in the very re-creation of a democratic “public sphere” after the war.

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Japanese people could draw on lessons  
and legacies in their own history.*

One telling example is the reorganization of Shrine Shinto (*Jinja shinto*), also known as State Shinto between 1900 and 1945 and singled out by Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), as the root of wartime militarism and ultra-nationalism. In accordance with SCAP’s Shinto Directive, issued in December 1945, the new leaders of the shrine world founded the Association of Shinto Shrines (*Jinja honcho*) as a private organization in early 1946. This represented an effort to gain new legitimacy for the shrines as “shrines of the people” and custodians of traditional Japanese customs, which were reinterpreted as inherently democratic and pacifist.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Shinto leaders insisted that a reconnection with one’s innermost

qualities—revealed in Shinto—was necessary to reach the new ideal of democracy, surely a soothing message for those who resisted the idea that everything good should come with an American label. Shrine Shinto thereby moved from representing public to private interest, from state support to social promotion of its concerns among a democratic public both free to express views critical of the state and bound by legal constraints to accept the representation of conflicting interests. For only democratic guarantees to grant protection to legal minority views enabled the Shinto world to rebuild Shrine Shinto in the public sphere. Once the occupation authorities left and the government was firmly in conservative hands, the Association of Shinto Shrines lobbied the political elites to once again become a public institution representing a non-negotiable “cultural essence,” but it did so within the legal constraints of the democratic system.

Within the same political context but from a different vantage point, the Japan Teachers’ Union (JTU), founded in 1947, defined and adjusted meanings of democratic change and revolutionary agency as part of a larger public discourse predominantly on the Left. Leaders of the teachers’ union movement styled “the teacher” as the subject and agent of Japan’s imminent bourgeois-democratic revolution. This was a subject still in the making, because in the past, the teacher had been nothing but an object of the militarist education system. The JTU thus urged teachers to discard their political apathy and develop a political consciousness of themselves and their profession by (1) understanding that they had been made into puppets of the state through educational policies originating in the Meiji period, (2) becoming aware of themselves as members of the working class, (3) gaining control over educational policies, and (4) teaching democratic citizenship to the next generation by being active citizens themselves. In these ways, the JTU institutionalized its view of the war and postwar democracy in the context of its emergence as a special interest group affiliated with the Japan Socialist Party and strongly opposed to the conservative governments in power.

#### **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

As John Dower demonstrated in *Embracing Defeat*,<sup>6</sup> democratization was more than a program of foreign authorities in the early postwar years but



actively engaged people from all walks of life and with different political agendas. Nonetheless, this early “participatory” understanding of democracy was significantly qualified with the institutionalization of special interests, in the early 1950s, within the emerging political framework of enduring conservative governments and bureaucracies permanently opposed by the social-democratic and communist Left. It was this “system” of special interest politics, of which the discourse about war memory and democracy had become an integral part, that the largely nonpartisan citizens’ protest of the mid-to-late 1960s confronted.<sup>7</sup> The protesters argued that in the context of high economic growth and the so-called management society of the 1960s, the democratic contest among organized interests competing for public space had become devoid of genuine popular participation. If earlier advocates of democracy critical of the government had warned against the *continuation* of militarist and fascist political practices, the new grassroots citizens’ movements feared a *revival* of Japanese militarism as evidenced, for example, in Japan’s complicity in the U.S. war in Vietnam. In other words, if protesters in the 1950s conceived of Japan as a *failed democracy*, the emphasis in the late 1960s lay on the *failures of democracy*, interpreted by “New Left” activist Oda Makoto as a “sapping of individuality by the state,”<sup>8</sup> (and, conversely, by the conservative Right as the loss of national self-confidence).

Oda Makoto, prolific writer, relentless critic of the postwar state, and most conspicuous leader of the New Left in 1960s Japan, urged his fellow citizens to embrace “participatory democracy” in the sense of *individual* commitment to political action. Rather than seeking to gain measurable political power in Nagata-cho through the institutionalized process of democratic contest via well-established organizations, he sought to capture grassroots political energies in order to overcome the complicity of a silent and politically uninvolved majority. At a time when Japanese from all sectors of society reflected upon two decades of postwar democracy, whether celebratory or critically, and moreover in the context of major foreign policy challenges, Oda saw the complacency of the Japanese people in political affairs as a legacy of war victimization. “Our grasp of the universalistic principles introduced during the American Occupation was seriously hindered by a failure to recognize our complicity in the war effort

as victimizers as well as victims.”<sup>9</sup> Simply blaming the state or the military for what had gone wrong could not, in his view, translate into the personal responsibility that a genuine democracy required. A representative example for the kind of democratic political activism he and others envisioned was the loosely structured but highly visible organization Beheiren (the Committee for Peace in Vietnam), under whose umbrella activists and groups from all walks of life came together for nonviolent demonstrations and teach-ins across the country as well as abroad.<sup>10</sup>

New citizens’ movements such as these quite consciously participated in an international public culture intent on exploring different understandings of authority. But even if their dynamism captured the imagination of the broader public via the mass media at the time, no fundamental change in the structures of Japan’s democracy resulted from it. This failure, as it were, to genuinely revise the way democracy operated (and war memory functioned politically) in postwar Japan left an important legacy for the Left as well as for the Right, and one that is relevant even today within a broader context. The 1970s saw a resurgence of grassroots political activism working through local and municipal channels and focusing on concrete issues of social injustice as they affected the daily lives of individuals and groups. These so-called residents’ movements (*jumin undo*) interpreted democracy not personally but practically, pushing for legislative change in areas of public life in which the democratic process was clearly lacking (such as in environmental pollution cases, women’s employment, or consumer protection).

At the same time, however, well-established rightwing interest groups such as the Association of Shinto Shrines and the Association of Bereaved Families (*Nihon izoku kai*) also actively developed “grassroots” movements devoted to specific issues, such as the campaign to revive official ceremonies for the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine. The repeated failure in the Diet of the controversial Yasukuni Shrine Bill (*Yasukuni hoan*) motivated its proponents to organize popular support movements in the style of leftwing citizens’ groups.<sup>11</sup> They argued in effect that the state’s failure to nationalize the shrine amounted to a violation of the civil rights of ordinary Japanese, who longed for the official celebration of the spirits of the war dead, an inversion of

the more popular (leftwing) argument that efforts to bring Yasukuni under state protection was an undemocratic abuse of state power. Clearly, this was interest politics in the guise of grassroots democracy—highly charged, moreover, because the “civil rights” at stake here reflected conflicting memories of war and competing ideas of the role of the state in representing a unified national memory where there clearly was none.

### DEMOCRACY UNDER A GLOBAL GAZE

In the past decade, both the parliamentary and participatory aspects of Japanese democracy have come under public scrutiny, linked again to shifts in the public presence of war and postwar memory. These debates necessarily reflected both the breakup of the political framework, domestic and international, which had proven remarkably durable since the early 1950s, and the new challenges of economic recession, Asian regionalism, and the diverse forces of globalization. Of particular importance among these multilayered contextual changes appears to be

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the emergence of a global public culture, in which transnational networks combine with older local ones and challenge national power centers by applying global standards that chip away at the insularity of national elites. Meanings of Japanese democracy continue to be negotiated publicly, but these negotiations are much less confined to domestic politics than they once were. Rights-based and other social movements now operate in an international environment of growing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs), which have begun to take over political functions formerly performed by national governments. The

international movement in the early 1990s to acknowledge and seek redress for the so-called comfort women, who were forced to serve the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War, foreshadowed this development in important ways. Since then, individuals and groups in countries around the world have demanded compensation payments for past injustices once considered settled through state-to-state negotiations, and these demands make their way through domestic as well as international legal systems.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary observers have tried to capture these developments and understand their implications in different ways. Fujiwara Kiichi speaks of an emerging new order that might be called the “empire of democracy,” characterized not by power balancing between nations, but by the limiting of national power on the basis of universally accepted standards of justice and civil society. “If ideals have universal resonance and are broadly subscribed to by the peoples of the world, and if governments are willing to take on the task of building that civil society, then nonintervention in other countries’ domestic affairs ceases to be an ironclad principle, and the line between domestic and foreign policy becomes blurred.”<sup>13</sup> Gerrit Gong, on the other hand, stresses the potentially vast conflicts that such an “empire of democracy” unleashes as evidenced by the “clash of histories” we are witnessing in East Asia today. Central to the ways in which economic, political, and security relations will hence be negotiated, he argues, is the “revolution in perception management,” which, “unlike the revolutions in military affairs and financial affairs ...will depend most on non-material psychological and perceptual factors ...will reflect divergent histories, cultures, and national purposes.”<sup>14</sup> Japan as the most seasoned democracy in East Asia occupies a central position in this re-negotiation of regional and global relations on the terrain of historical memory, precisely because Japan’s domestic struggles over meanings of the war and the postwar do not, under today’s global gaze, entirely satisfy the civil-rights standards of a democracy.

In conclusion, contemporary debates about Japanese democracy reflect multiple and often conflicting lessons and legacies of past experiences with efforts to create a politically viable “public.” One complicating factor is the existence of a dynamic



public sphere in Japan under prewar authoritarianism, interpreted by some as evidence of an indigent democracy. Another is the foreign origin of Japan's postwar democratic institutions under the American occupation and their easy acceptance by the Japanese people at the time. Both the political Right and the Left have struggled with this legacy; the Right saw in it a painful loss of national dignity, while the Left regretted that the foreign occupiers had deprived the Japanese people of the opportunity to bring about a democratic revolution themselves. A third factor is the mixed record of various postwar citizens' movements, whose long-term successes tend to be eclipsed in public memory by their short-term (and more photogenic) failures at the hands of a state intolerant of public dissent. A fourth consideration is the recent expansion of public life beyond national borders which has empowered people from across the political spectrum to bring experiences with democracy worldwide to bear on domestic struggles, whether through transnational organizations or simply by being inspired by rights-based activism elsewhere. More fundamentally, however, meanings of Japanese democracy will continue to be bound up with the memory of World War II as long as Japan (and Asia) consider that war to be the common reference point for the domestic as well as international political structures of the present.

## ENDNOTES

1. A delightful, tongue-in-cheek example of this is Nakae Chomin, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* (Weatherhill, 1984).

2. See Carol Gluck, "The People in History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38, no. 1 (1978): 25-50.

3. Andrew Gordon coined the term "imperial democracy" to highlight the contradictions inherent in these democratic movements, which nevertheless accepted the imperial and imperialist framework of contemporary politics, in *Labor and Imperial*

*Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

4. For a provocative discussion see Mary Elizabeth Berry, "Public Life in Authoritarian Japan," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998).

5. "Sokan No Ji," *Jinja shinpo*, July 8, 1946.

6. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton/The New Press, 1999).

7. J. Victor Koschmann, ed., *Authority and the Individual in Japan: Citizen Protest in Historical Perspective* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1978).

8. Makoto Oda, "The Ethics of Peace," *Authority and the Individual* (orig. 1968), 154-170.

9. Oda, 156.

10. The most detailed account and analysis of Beheiren activism is Thomas R.H. Havens, *Fire across the Sea: The Vietnam War and Japan, 1965-1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

11. The best known of these new organizations was *Eirei ni kotaeru kai* (Association to Answer the Heroic Spirits of the War Dead), established in June 1976.

12. See, for example, Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000).

13. Fujiwara Kiichi, "Memory as Deterrence: The Moralization of International Politics" (??)

14. Gerrit W. Gong, ed., *Memory and History in East and Southeast Asia: Issues of Identity in International Relations, Significant Issues Series* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Strategic and International Studies, 2001), 29-30.



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