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Japan

Comparative State Systems

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Introduction

Defeating the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the 2009 general election, which ruled Japan for nearly a half century since World War II, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) became the first single opposition party to gain power with an overall majority in the Japanese Diet's lower house. Considering a peaceful turnover of political power as a salient factor of a developed democracy, it is legitimate to regard Japan as one of leading developed democracies in Asia.

Yet, it is still noteworthy that Japanese democracy, unlike French or British one, was not a by-product of endogenous 'bourgeois revolution' but was transplanted by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) during the U.S. occupation following World War II.

Japan is one of few countries that do not retain regular military forces: though Japan has Self-Defense Forces, they are technically considered as a group of civilians, not uniforms. *Article 9 of the Japanese constitution states, "The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes", and also declares, "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained."*

After occupation of Japan, Douglas McArthur - the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers - attempted to make *Japan as the 'Switzerland' of the Far East.* (*Containing the cold war in East Asia: British policies toward Japan, China, and Korea, 1948-1953 by Peter Lowe*) Because General McArthur wanted to prevent the reconstructed Japan from ever becoming another threat to the U.S., he tried to make Japan as a peaceful, democratic country fully dependent upon dairy industry. However, an outbreak of "Korean War" changed everything including McArthur's original plan. The U.S. desperately needed a supply channel in the vicinity of the war-broken Korean peninsula, and reconstruction of Japanese chemical and mechanical industry was strategically important for the U.S. Taking advantage of the economic opportunity brought by

'Korean War,' Japan fully recovered from the war defeat and became the second richest nation in the world.

Then, why did Japan not experience "bourgeois revolution," which could lead to endogenous democratization?

In 1868, Japan experienced a major revolution called "Meiji restoration," which opened up the modernization and industrialization of the country. Like any other revolution, "Meiji restoration" was planned and executed by the group of people who had long been neglected. Yet, in Japan's case, the revolutionary were neither peasants nor bourgeois, but a group of low-ranking samurais – still socially upper-class with conservative natures – who wanted to make Japan stronger. *"Feudalism did arise in Japan, but with heavy stress on loyalty to superiors and a divine ruler."* (*Social origins of dictatorship and democracy, by Barrington Moore, Jr*) The conservative nature represented as the loyalty to superiors and the top-down style industrial revolution eventually hindered democratization of Japan. Using SPECIPIO framework for comparative political analysis, this report will analyze the comparative politics of Japan more deeply.

Stateness

According to the definition of *Max Weber*, a state is an entity that has *"the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a defined territory."* Japan is a well-formed state that *Max Weber's* definition is strictly applied. Japan has maintained the strict weapon law for a long time. The law begins with a statement that *"No-one shall possess a fire-arm or fire-arms or a sword or swords."*

Many ones consider Japan as a nation state with a homogeneous ethnic background and with the same cultural heritage. Then, was Japan created as a nation state? The simple answer to this question might be "Yes," but according to the in-depth analysis, Japan had also become a nation state by the continuous nation-building efforts.

Okinawa might be a good example of Japan's nation-building process. Okinawa where the U.S. military bases are located is one of prefectures of Japan. Yet, before 1879 the year when Japan's Meiji government annexed Okinawa, there existed an independent kingdom called "Ryukyu" with a different language and ethnic background. After the annexation, Meiji government accelerated the state-building process in Okinawa: Residents of Okinawa were forced to use Japanese language and to adopt Japanese cultures. People of Okinawa gradually lost their unique cultures while becoming Japanized. Although there had been independence movement of Okinawa up to early 1970s, now almost all people of Okinawa consider themselves as Japanese citizens.

This report will also examine “the state strength” solely based on “the total tax revenue as percentage of GDP.” If one considers “the total tax revenue as percentage of GDP” as an important source to build a strong welfare state, Japan will be classified as one of weak states out of 30 different OECD countries. According to *the OECD (2008) Revenue Statistics*, Japanese tax revenue per GDP has remained relatively low since 1975. In 2006, Japan became the fourth least taxing country among 30 different OECD countries.

Table 1
Total tax revenue as percentage of GDP

	1975	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2006
Mexico		17.0	17.3	16.7	18.5	19.9	20.6
Turkey	11.9	11.5	14.9	16.8	24.2	24.3	24.5
Korea	15.1	16.4	18.9	19.4	23.6	25.5	26.8
Japan	20.9	27.4	29.1	26.8	27.0	27.4	27.9
United States	25.6	25.6	27.3	27.9	29.9	27.3	28.0
Switzerland	23.9	25.5	25.8	27.7	30.0	29.2	29.6
Slovak Republic					33.8	31.8	29.8
Australia	25.8	28.3	28.5	28.8	31.1	30.8	30.6
Greece	19.4	25.5	26.2	28.9	34.1	31.3	31.3
Ireland	28.7	34.6	33.1	32.5	31.7	30.6	31.9
Canada	32.0	32.5	35.9	35.6	35.6	33.4	33.3
Poland				36.2	31.6	32.9	33.5
Germany ²	34.3	36.1	34.8	37.2	37.2	34.8	35.6
Portugal	19.7	25.2	27.7	31.7	34.1	34.7	35.7
Luxembourg	32.8	39.5	35.7	37.1	39.1	37.8	35.9
Spain ¹	18.4	27.6	32.5	32.1	34.2	35.8	36.6
New Zealand	28.5	31.1	37.4	36.6	33.6	37.5	36.7
Czech Republic				37.5	35.3	37.5	36.9
Hungary				41.3	38.0	37.2	37.1
United Kingdom	35.2	37.6	36.1	34.5	37.1	36.3	37.1
Netherlands ⁴	40.7	42.4	42.9	41.5	39.7	38.8	39.3
Iceland	30.0	28.2	30.9	31.2	37.2	40.7	41.5
Austria	36.7	40.9	39.6	41.2	42.6	42.1	41.7
Italy	25.4	33.6	37.8	40.1	42.3	40.9	42.1
Finland	36.5	39.7	43.5	45.7	47.2	43.9	43.5
Norway	39.2	42.6	41.0	40.9	42.6	43.5	43.9
France ¹	35.4	42.8	42.0	42.9	44.4	43.9	44.2
Belgium	39.5	44.4	42.0	43.6	44.9	44.8	44.5
Sweden	41.2	47.3	52.2	47.5	51.8	49.5	49.1
Denmark ¹	38.4	46.1	46.5	48.8	49.4	50.7	49.1

Source: OECD (2008) Revenue Statistics 1965-2007.

Japan is an island. This geographic salience had insulated Japan for a long time from foreign influence until its encountering of Perry’s black ships. Taking advantage of an island state, Japan effectively prevented Imperial China from meddling into its state’s affairs and strengthened the state control within the territory. On balance, this paper summarizes Japan as a nation state with a strong internal control but with a low rate of taxation.

Political Regime

According to “*the Democracy Index 2008*” published by the Economist, Japan ranked the world 17th democracy, scoring 8.25. Any score between 8 and 10 is considered to be “full democracy.”

It is noteworthy that only Japan and South Korea were classified as full democracies in Asian region, and both countries were heavily influenced by the U.S.

Table 2
The Democracy Index 2008 by the Economist

No.	Location	Index	Category
1	Sweden	9.88	Full democracy
2	Norway	9.68	Full democracy
3	Iceland	9.65	Full democracy
4	Netherlands	9.53	Full democracy
5	Denmark	9.52	Full democracy
6	Finland	9.25	Full democracy
7	New Zealand	9.19	Full democracy
8	Switzerland	9.15	Full democracy
9	Luxembourg	9.1	Full democracy
10	Australia	9.09	Full democracy
11	Canada	9.07	Full democracy
12	Ireland	9.01	Full democracy
13	Germany	8.82	Full democracy
14	Austria	8.49	Full democracy
15	Spain	8.45	Full democracy
16	Malta	8.39	Full democracy
17	Japan	8.25	Full democracy
18	United States	8.22	Full democracy
19	Czech Republic	8.19	Full democracy
20	Belgium	8.16	Full democracy
21	United Kingdom	8.15	Full democracy
22	Greece	8.13	Full democracy
23	Uruguay	8.08	Full democracy
24	France	8.07	Full democracy

25	Portugal	8.05	Full democracy
26	Mauritius	8.04	Full democracy
27	Costa Rica	8.04	Full democracy
28	South Korea	8.01	Full democracy
29	Italy	7.98	Full democracy
30	Slovenia	7.96	Full democracy
31	South Africa	7.91	Flawed democracy

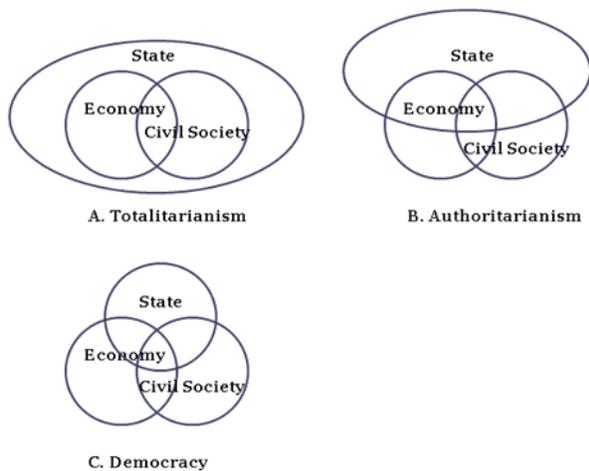
Japan is one of the rare countries that had experienced authoritarian, totalitarian, and democratic regimes in one history. According to *Karl Loewenstein*, a German philosopher, “the term 'Authoritarian' refers to political organization in which the single power holder – a person, an assembly, or a party - monopolizes political power.”

Christopher Hitchens distinguished totalitarianism from authoritarianism by stating “the urge to ban and censor books, silence dissenters, condemn outsiders, invade the private sphere, and invoke an exclusive salvation is the very essence of the totalitarian.”

According to *Orenstein’s venn diagram*, under totalitarianism a state encompasses every economic and social activity, while under authoritarianism a state allows a limited pluralism.

Based on the above definition, the modern Japan’s history can be classified into 3 different sub-periods: 1. Authoritarian Meiji period (1868~1912), 2. Totalitarian Imperial Japan (1926~1945), 3. Democratized Japan (1945~)

Table 3
Dr. Orenstein’s Venn Diagram



Ienaga Saburo, a prominent Japanese historian, wrote of the Meiji Restoration in 1868: "A small elite seized power, crushed the nascent popular reformists and created an absolute state around an emperor system." This truly describes a state under the authoritarianism. If one wants to find a term describing the Meiji authoritarianism more specifically, the appropriate tag may be "authoritarianism under traditional monarchy."

Another historic event showing Japan under totalitarianism is following: In 1933, Tokyo Police arrested Takiji Kobayashi, a Japanese writer for being too proletarian and beat him to death. During the similar period, the entire editorial staffs of the *Kaizo* magazine were arrested and tortured, because they had published articles against the police.

Economic Development

One of the most controversial topics in comparative state systems is the relationship between democracy and economic development.

Lipset argued that there is a strong correlation between GDP per capita and democratization except for some communist countries (Political Man by Lipset, Seymour Martin) Barrington Moore counter argued that after economic development, some wealthy states such as Japan and Germany turned to fascism, instead of democratization. (The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy by Moore, Barrington, Jr.)

On the other hand, *Przeworski argued that there is no discernable correlation between economic development and democratization; however he argued that once democratic countries reach a certain level of income (roughly \$6,000 GDP/capita), they are very*

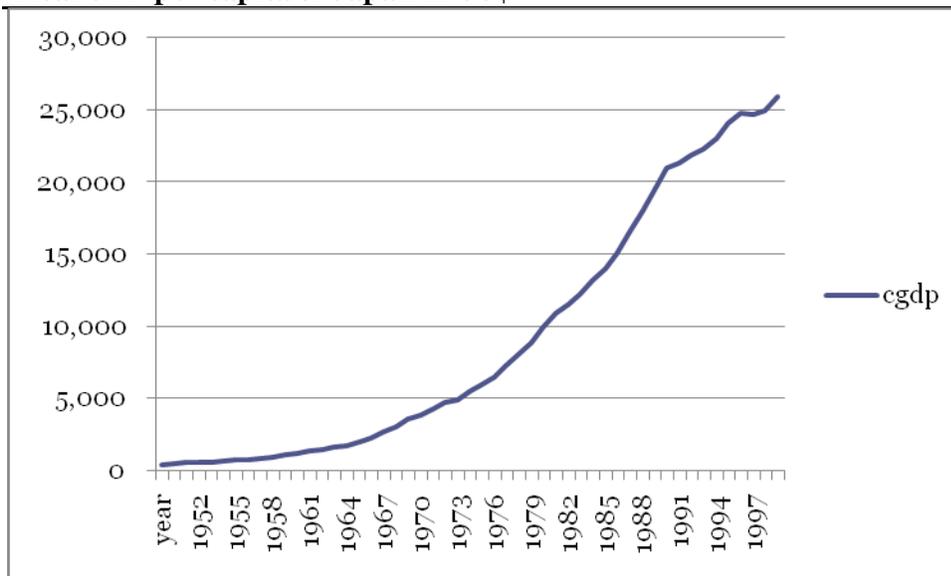
unlikely to revert to undemocratic. (Democracy and Development by Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi)

In reality, Japan's economic growth in late 1800's driven by the top-down style industrialization ended up with fascism.

After the democratized Japan passed the threshold of \$6,000 GDP per capita in 1976, the Japanese democracy never reverted to authoritarianism or totalitarianism.

Table 4

Real GDP per capita of Japan in US\$



Data Source: http://pwt.econ.upenn.edu/php_site/pwt61_retrieve.php

According to the numerical analysis of Japan's economy, *Przeworski's* argument turned out to be consistent with empirical evidence.

Culture and History

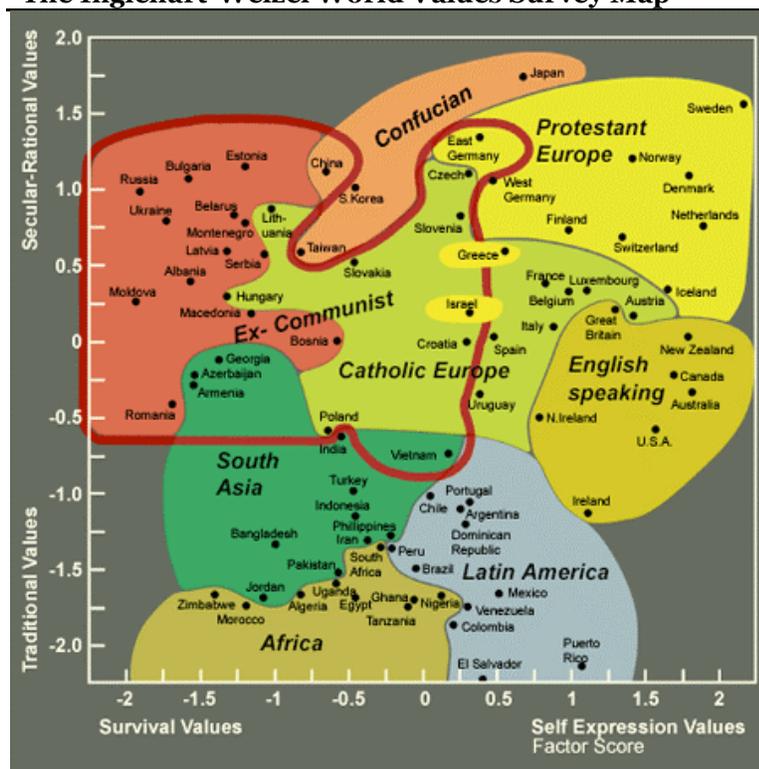
The *Inglehart-Welzel* mapped a number of different countries into two dimensions of the cultural value frameworks represented as "traditional v. secular-rational" and

"survival v. self-expression," and also categorized those countries into several different cultural subgroups.

The "traditional v. secular-rational" dimension demonstrates a spectrum of values ranging from one end in which religion and traditional family values are highly deemed to the other end in which they are not as much important.

On the other hand, the "survival v. self-expression" reflects another spectrum of values ranging from one end in which people still pursue the basic materialistic needs such as food, shelter, and safety to the other end emphasizing the post-materialistic values – individualism, freedom of choice, social tolerance, and social diversity.

Table 5
The Inglehart-Welzel World Values Survey Map



[Data Source: Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005: p. 64 based on the World Values Surveys]

According to the map, Japan is located at which “secular-rational values” are highly deemed but “self expression values” are less highly deemed compared to other “English

speaking countries.” One explanation to this phenomenon might be found in Japanese history.

As explained earlier, Japanese modernization represented as “Meiji Restoration” had been executed not by “Bourgeois” but by Samurais who wanted to protect their nation from the Western Powers by means of the materialistic industrialization. Their eternal aim was not to destroy “Ancien r[e]gime” but to reform the regime.

Under the Japanese “Ancien r[e]gime,” Confucian values such as loyalty, filial piety, and benevolence were highly emphasized, and even among them “selflessness” had always been strongly praised. The “self-expression” was not limited by the social norm. Some remnants of those feudalistic values still remained in Japanese society even after the modernization. The conservative nature of the Japanese revolutionary is clearly found by the historical evidence that the Meiji leaders benchmarked the conservative Prussian constitution, instead of British one, in order to establish a new Meiji constitution. Though there were some scholars such as *Fukuzawa Yukichi* who argued for adoption of more liberal British law, the Meiji rulers rejected his opinion.

In some sense, the Japanese culture emphasizing “selflessness” certainly helped Japan to accomplish industrialization in a very short period of time.

Because “the self-expression” was severely limited in the pre-war Japan, the bureaucratic technocrats fully concentrated upon the country’s materialistic development without dispersing energy to the other business such as mitigating different voices within the society. However, this kind of traditional value certainly hindered democratization of Japan.

Democratization of Japan under the U.S. occupation awakened Japan to the importance of “self-expression value.” As Japan’s democracy evolved more, the social recognition of the “self-expression value” enhanced.

Compared to English speaking countries on the map, Japan has a relatively short history of democracy; so, it is not irrational to conclude that Japan’s self-expression value will continue to enhance as its democracy develops more.

Institution

After the World War II, Japan has maintained a parliamentary democracy and the constitutional monarchy, where Prime Minister of Japan is the head of government.

Japanese Diet consists of bicameral legislature: the lower house - “the House of Representatives” and the upper house – “the House of Councilors.” Although the Judiciary branch is an independent entity, the central bank of Japan is often criticized for being not fully independent.

With respect to the election system, Japan adopted the mixed member majoritarian system.

The House of Representatives consists of the total 480 members and 300 of them are elected from single seat constituencies by the single member plurality, FPTP system. The rest of 180 are elected from eleven separate electoral colleges under the party list system of proportional representation.

The House of Councillors consists of 242 members and 146 of them are elected from 47 regional constituencies under the single non-transferable vote, and the rest of 96 are elected by party list proportional representation from a single national list.

On balance, Japan’s election system is a mixture between majoritarian and consensus democracies.

Japan maintains three distinct types of elections: 1. General elections to the House of Representatives (every 4 years if it does not encounter an early dissolution), 2. Elections to the House of Councillors (every 3 years) to elect 50% of the total seats. 3. Local elections (every 4 years).

The minimum voting age is twenty years, and any candidate running for the lower house must be at least twenty-five years old, and one should be at least thirty years old to run for the upper house.

Party Families

There are total 9 parties currently represented in the Japanese Diet. Among them, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are considered to be major parties, other 5 parties are regarded as the third parties, and the rest of two parties are thought as the minor.

The Democratic Party (DPJ)

The DPJ is the current ruling party of Japan that retains 308 lower house seats and 109 upper house seats. The party was established in 1998 as a result of merger of several opposition parties. The head of the party is Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. The

ideology of the party is perceived as the center-left, and the party is internationally affiliated with “[the alliance of Democrats](#),” an international club of centrist parties.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

Retaining 119 lower house seats and 82 upper house seats, the LDP is the current opposition party of Japan that had ruled the country for about 54 years since its establishment in 1955. The ideology of the party is perceived as the conservatism, and the party is not affiliated with any international organization.

Table 6
The third parties of Japan

Party	Lower diet seats	Upper diet seats	Ideology	International Affiliation
New Komeito	21	21	Buddhism	None
Japanese Communist Party	9	7	Communism	None
Social Democratic Party	7	5	Social Democracy	Socialist International
People’s New Party	3	4	Conservatism	None
Your Party	5	1	Economic Liberalism	None

International Influences

The modernization of Japan was accomplished by emulating the western world. Major emulation occurred twice in Japan’s history: 1. Japan’s voluntary emulation after “Meiji Restoration,” 2. Direct coercion by the U.S. occupation.

The most symbolic voluntary emulation was the “Iwakura Mission” in 1871. The mission was named after the head of mission Iwakura Tomomi, the extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador, who led four deputy ambassadors and the total 48 men of officials and scholars.

They visited many different western countries including the U.S., Britain, France, Prussia, Belgium, and the Netherlands, in order to learn western technology, military, political and economic structures.

After the mission staffs came back to Japan, they effectively and selectively emulated the western systems, in order to modernize Japan. Among different development models, Japan rigorously pursued the Prussian model in which they found some similarities with Japanese traditions emphasizing hierarchy of a society. Besides, Japan admired the process in which a relatively small Prussia became a major power in a short period time under the rule of Bismarck. Meiji Japan abandoned the British and the U.S. model, because those models take a longer time to come into effect than the Prussian one.

Unlike the “Iwakura Mission,” Japan’s emulation of the West after the World War II was coerced by SCAP or the U.S. As explained earlier, the U.S. permanently disarmed Japan by creating a "Peace Clause" (Article 9), which renounced war and prevented Japan from retaining any military forces.

Economically, SCAP also tore down the industrial, financial monopoly coalitions to promote free market competition in Japanese market. In addition, SCAP successfully executed a major land reform to provide peasants economic freedom and to break down the power structures of the landlords.

One of the most important achievements made by SCAP is democratization of Japan. *"The political project drew much of its inspiration from the US Bill of Rights, New Deal social legislation, the liberal constitutions of several European states and even the Soviet Union... transferred sovereignty from the Emperor to the people in an attempt to depoliticize the Throne and reduce it to the status of a state symbol. Included in the revised charter was the famous 'no war', 'no arms' Article Nine, which outlawed belligerency as an instrument of state policy and the maintenance of a standing army. The 1947 Constitution also enfranchised women, guaranteed fundamental human rights, strengthened the powers of Parliament and the Cabinet, and decentralized the police and local government." (Inside GHQ: The Allied Occupation of Japan and its Legacy by Robert Ricketts and Sebastian Swann)*

Ownership

Because the constitution of Japan abolished the use of all titles of nobility outside the immediate Imperial Family, the legally privileged class disappeared in Japan. Also, under democratic rule, all Japanese citizens enjoy equal political rights by participating in the regular election.

Nonetheless, “the power elite” certainly exists in the Japanese society. According to *“The Power Elite”* written by Charles Wright Mills, it refers to a small group of individuals who can control a disproportionate amount of power and wealth, privilege.

Japanese power elites are produced by the two main routes, 1. The hereditary transmission and 2. The Education.

Hereditary transmission is very salient in Japanese politics. Not only incumbent Prime Minister Hatoyama but also former 3 consecutive Prime Ministers were either sons or grandsons of former Prime Ministers in the past. In addition to the politics, in business world, many descendants of former noble families continue to occupy prominent roles.

The education is more equal route to become an upper class. In Japan, most of the high-ranking government officials or business leaders are graduates of 3 major universities – Tokyo, Waseda, and Keio.

By sharing information through exclusive network, Japanese power elites maintain their influence over the society, while creating some inequality problems.

Conclusions

Based on SPECIPIO framework for comparative political analysis, this report examined the comparative politics of Japan.

In particular, this paper tackled the common notion that Japan is a homogeneous nation state that does not require much of state building effort, by giving an Okinawa example. “Karate,” the Japanese martial arts, was originated in forgotten “Ryukyu Kingdom” in Okinawa to protect its indigenous people from Japanese invasion. It is an irony that Japan now claims “Karate” as its traditional martial arts.

It is noteworthy to remember that Japan is a country that experienced authoritarian, totalitarian, and democratic regimes in its history. Transition from authoritarianism to totalitarianism was caused by the Meiji leader’s adoption of Prussian model while rejecting Anglo model. The Prussian model led to the military expansionism, and the entire country was mobilized under totalitarianism to facilitate the military campaign.

As *Przeworski* predicted, after the democratized Japan passed the threshold of \$6,000 GDP per capita in 1976, the Japanese democracy never reverted to authoritarianism or totalitarianism.

The eternal aim of Japanese modernization represented as “Meiji Restoration” was not to destroy “Ancien r[e]gime” but to reform the regime to make Japan stronger.

Although the modernized Japan highly emphasized “secular-rational values,” “self expression values” were not equally appreciated due to Confucian culture.

Regarding the political system, Japan maintained the mixed member majoritarian system. Members of the House of Representatives are elected by the single member plurality and also by the party list system of proportional representation. The House of Councillors are elected by party list proportional representation from a single national list. The Democratic Party (DPJ), the current ruling party of Japan, is internationally affiliated with “[the alliance of Democrats](#),” an international partnership of centrist parties.

It is also noteworthy that both modernization and democratization of Japan was accomplished under the international influence. In this regard, this paper examined “the Iwakura mission” and accomplishment of SCAP.

Lastly, the ownership analysis found a surprising result that many of Japanese political leaders including former and incumbent prime ministers came into power by exploiting Japanese tradition of the hereditary transmission. In addition, “academic cliques” are also found as another important route to become a member of Japanese power elite group.

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