

2020

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Recommended Citation

Ezekiel, Robert (2020) "Unfortunate Continuity? Imperial Influence in the Postwar Democratization of Japan And Its Effects on the Nation's Modern Democracy," *Vulcan Historical Review*: Vol. 24, Article 8. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol24/iss2020/8>

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UNFORTUNATE CONTINUITY? IMPERIAL INFLUENCE IN THE POSTWAR DEMOCRATIZATION OF JAPAN AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE NATION'S MODERN DEMOCRACY

Robert Ezekiel

Winner of the 2020 Dr. Glenn A. Feldman Memorial Student Writing Award. Many thanks to Ms. Jeannie Feldman for her generous support.

A nation's turn from authoritarian government to democracy has always been fraught with danger. The seeming failure of liberal democracy in Russia and Eastern Europe have spread a dark cloud over democratic promotion the world over. In contrast, the Japanese democratic experience has traditionally been presented as the great success story of advocates of democratic ideals. Before the 1940s, Japan was one of the most authoritarian regimes on Earth. This regime fought a massive war of conquest throughout the Asian-Pacific region until surrendering to Allied forces on board the battleship *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. In the aftermath, the United States instituted a military occupation, and began the task of creating a new Japanese government, ideally one based upon democratic structures and principles. Seven years later, the U.S. withdrew, and the modern Japanese state had emerged. A surface level analysis would seem to indicate that the democratization of Japan has been an unqualified success. The Japanese government is now based upon a bicameral legislative body known as the Diet, broken down into a House of Representatives and House of Councilors. Much like Britain, executive power is vested in a Prime Minister and an associated cabinet. An independent judiciary exists, and the Japanese constitution guarantees Japanese citizens free speech, the right to assemble, a separation between church and state, and the right to not self-incriminate. Given the highly authoritarian government that preceded it, the success of the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces Douglas MacArthur appears unprecedented in the annals of nation-building, especially given the difficulty the United States has experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 21st century.

The appearance of a total change is somewhat illusory, however. Many political structures and groups from the old Imperial government survived the surrender

and played a huge part in the shaping of the postwar Japanese government. While the position of Emperor is the most famous, and controversial of these remnants, it is neither the most widespread, nor the most influential. An examination of the representative branches of the Japanese government shows a continuity between the Imperial government, conservative business factions, and local officials that may come as a shock to many. While the utilization of many members of the Nazi era German government, military, and scientific community is fairly widespread common knowledge, a similar compromise with Japanese remnants is not. Does such continuity stain the accomplishment of SCAP and the occupation? How has such continuity influenced Japanese politics? Is the Japanese miracle real? To answer these questions, we must understand the roots of democratic tradition in Japan, how such traditions evolved, the political situation in Japan and the world during the occupation, and the results that the government constructed at that time have yielded in the present.

The concept of Japan as a modern nation state was birthed in the Boshin War of 1868 to 1869, and the establishment of the Meiji government. The victorious so-called "outside" lords and their supporters sought to reform Japan as a European style nation. In order to accomplish this, they drew upon contract theory and other Western governmental concepts to construct the first Japanese constitution. Proclaimed with the Charter Oath, or *Gokajo No Goseimon*, this constitutional structure was based upon five commitments: The formation of deliberate assemblies, the unification and political engagement of all Japanese no matter their class, the "removal" of class barriers to "aspirations" and class-based "discontent," the revocation of "evil" laws of the past and the creation of new laws "based upon the laws of nature," and the seeking of outside knowledge to enrich and secure

the new empire.¹ While this would seem to indicate the intended construction of a democratic, or at least semi-democratic government as the goal, in truth the victorious lords wished to create a government that was based upon an oligarchic system, with themselves, known as the *genro*, at the center. The result of these efforts was the Meiji Constitution of 1889. This document created a bicameral parliament, with a Prime Minister and cabinet appointed by the Emperor. The power and democratic nature of this new parliament was mostly a mirage; however, as only 5 percent of the Japanese adult male population could vote initially, and most power was invested in the Privy Council that “advised” the Emperor and was made up of members of the *genro*.² The position of the Emperor as grand architect and director of this new state is considered to be mostly fictional by many scholars.³ Since very early in Japanese history, true power in Japan had been wielded in the Emperor’s name by various oligarchic forces, from the Fujiwara family, to the various Shogunates. The *genro* were thus simply the most recent to make use of the Emperor as a figurehead in order to rule from behind the throne. The Emperor was incredibly useful as such a figurehead, as his position was religious as well as political, and most Japanese were raised to revere the Emperor as the descendant of the Shinto sun goddess *Amaterasu*. Emperor Meiji himself seemed quite aware of his position, and almost always approved the “advice” offered to him by his Privy Council.⁴ This structure remained more, or less intact throughout Meiji’s reign.

Meiji’s death in 1912 and the reign of his son Yoshihito, known posthumously as Emperor Taisho, created a crisis for the newly created state. Taisho was considered a weak Emperor, as he suffered from various neurological conditions, and even suffered from mental derangement as he aged. The oligarchs realized that unlike Meiji, Taisho would not be the kind of unifying figurehead that they believed they required.⁵ Much like during the time of their initial development of the post restoration government, the oligarchy decided to make use of western political concepts to maintain legitimacy, in this case by attempting to replace the legitimization provided by a visible figurehead Emperor, with legitimization provided by popular elections.

This was the birth of the legislative branch of the Japanese government. Modern political parties, starting with the *Rikken Seiyukai* in 1900, first formed by competing oligarchs in the last years of Meiji’s reign were used to mobilize “popular” support in the Diet. Many Japanese politicians believed that a two-party system was an inevitability with the advent of constitutional government. Idealistically, they believed that such a system would allow debate and discussion of issues, as well as the creation of a more liberal state, one based upon real popular sovereignty, or at least “popular opinion”⁶ The reality, unfortunately, seemed to belie that hope. The major political parties, the *Seiyukai* and its rival the *Rikken Minseito*, exercised power, not in the name of the Japanese citizenry as a whole, but instead the political, military, and economic oligarchs.⁷ The Meiji constitution itself contained numerous restrictions on the Diet’s power, with the lack of executive force causing the need for support from the Privy Council, and the high cost of election necessitating close connections with one of the powerful economic combines known as the *zaibatsu*.⁸ Despite these setbacks, a much more liberal and effective form of democracy may have emerged from the Taisho period if it was not for destabilization that struck the country in the wake of a series of wars that the nation fought in, starting with the first war against China in 1894-95, continuing with the war against Russia in 1904-05, and ending with World War One. Despite winning, or at least being on the winning side, these wars, the economic cost, as well as the number of casualties, was high. The coming of the Great Depression seemed to signal the death knell for the Taisho Democracy. While it had perhaps been more oligarchic than democratic, it still created an understanding and burgeoning respect and value for the democratic style of government among the Japanese citizenry, and also allowed the legitimization of opposition parties, even if they were guaranteed not to succeed. The massive economic blow of 1929 caused many in the military, as well as the government, to believe that a more centralized form of government was necessary to guarantee the Empire’s future.⁹

By 1931, the Diet’s place in the government had become much less central. The new Emperor, Hirohito, did not suffer from the same ailments as his predecessor and

seemed much more in Meiji's mold. The success of the Japanese aggression in China, as well as numerous terrorist activities committed by radical elements of the military destroyed the political parties' ability to be effective rulers. After the assassination of Prime Minister Tsuyoshi in 1932, non-party members such as military officers and princes began serving as Prime Minister.¹⁰ Power was thus placed in the hands of the military, government bureaucrats, and economic leaders. These new oligarchs revived the Emperor as figurehead concept from its short slumber and used it to justify their rule by claiming to be above politics and ruling at the behest of a benevolent Emperor. They began creating a much more ultranationalist political and social fabric, denigrating liberal democracy as weak, and bringing to the forefront an even more extreme form of imperial ideology than had existed during the preceding Meiji years.¹¹ It was this government, and this political and social fabric, that waged war against the Allies in the Pacific War, and as defeat seemed inevitable faced a conundrum as to how it would react to the coming military occupation.

“ As it prepared to surrender, the oligarchic rulers of wartime Japan did not plan on giving up the reins of power in Japan. ”

As MacArthur and the rest of the occupation authorities prepared to commence with the occupation of Japan, they were faced with a rather complex mission. SCAP had been given several objectives, both civil and military, that he was to achieve during the occupation. These included: removal of restrictions on civil liberties, encouragement of democratic labor organizations, the abolishment of overly restrictive police and civil control mechanisms, destruction of the *zaibatsu*, removal and punishment of militarists, the banning of ultra-nationalist parties and/or politicians, and the establishment of a pacifistic democratic government.¹² According to observers at the time, this could be attempted with one of three methods: (1) a completely foreign effort spearheaded by the

Americans themselves, (2) the formation of a new native Japanese government made up of political outsiders, or (3) making use of the existing structures and officials that seemed not to be tainted by the actions of the wartime government. The first option was deemed unrealistic as the occupation suffered from a lack of expertise, especially linguistically. The second was deemed impractical, as due to the authoritarian nature of the wartime government, no mechanism for quick elections existed, and occupation opinion on Japanese dissident leaders was divided. This meant that SCAP went with the third method. This was to have very significant consequences for the democratization of Japan.¹³

As it prepared to surrender, the oligarchic rulers of wartime Japan did not plan on giving up the reins of power in Japan. They were aware that in any occupation, they would have a massive advantage: possession of the economic and political structures of the government. Any attempt to utilize these existing structures would need their expertise and co-operation, or be doomed to fail, or at least suffer from massive delays.¹⁴ These remnants began instituting several programs that would help them maintain a least some control over occupied Japan. The remnants consisted of three major groups: the heads of the *zaibatsu*, governmental bureaucrats, and members of the defeated Japanese military. It was obvious that the military leaders would be the least useful for this new battleground, as the conflict would shift to civilian and economic matters, and the military had been irrevocably tainted by the war. It was therefore decided that all efforts would be made to protect economic leaders, minor officials and functionaries, and the Emperor. The military leaders would offer themselves up as a sacrifice and shoulder the responsibility for the government's actions.¹⁵ The remaining members would thus be free to volunteer to “help” with the occupation.

To help defend incumbent officials, officials destroyed documents that would incriminate officials or political organizations and staged a massive reshuffling of governmental and law enforcement personnel. 2/3 of police, most prefectural governors, and most school principals were thus relocated, creating the sense that they were “new” officials and could thus not be blamed.¹⁶

The government utilized many different programs to try to protect the economic elites and the *zaibatsus*. First of all, the government relaxed market controls. It then transferred government military budgets to the *zaibatsu* as “war contract indemnities.” This was a massive inflationary stimulus and was designed to devalue the currency as much as possible. Wartime stockpiles of strategic resources such as cotton goods, blankets, uniforms, oil, drugs, batteries, metals, sugar, and paper were also transferred to *zaibatsu* control. Therefore, the *zaibatsus* would then own the majority of industrial and strategic supplies that existed in Japan as the occupation commenced. They would be in a good position to leverage such control to prevent any major reorganization of the Japanese economy that they did not approve of.¹⁷ The old guard thus entrenched itself and awaited the occupation.

Occupation officials were not blind to this effort. While the decision was made to utilize the existing government, this was not to be seen as supporting or approving of such officials. The policy was to “to use the existing form of government in Japan, not to support it.”¹⁸ This policy had advantages, but also major risks. As observers noted as the occupation was winding down: “As far as achieving a peaceful, rapid, and orderly completion of the terms of military surrender was concerned, this decision to use the existing governmental machinery, including the Emperor, proved extremely effective. There remained, however, the question of how the occupation authorities would fare when it came to carrying through the political and economic reforms called for in the basic directive, because they were operating through representatives of the very regime that they were seeking to change.”¹⁹ This decision greatly shaped the government that formed as the occupation continued.

In late 1945 the provisional government that had been formed at the Emperor’s insistence in October dissolved, and SCAP decided to try to hold direct elections. No new constitution had been established, and therefore this was held under the auspices of the pre-war constitution and the political aegis of the occupation authority. Since the beginning of the occupation, SCAP and other officials had been dismayed by the rise of militant labor and left-wing political forces in Japan. This rise was brought about due

to not only the removal of restrictive wartime policy, but also promotion of labor movements by the occupation authority, and the economic damage wrought by the wartime government’s economic reshuffle mentioned above. Due to the rising fear of Soviet influence in Japan, occupation officials had reversed their stance on labor groups that appeared too sympathetic to the Soviets.²⁰ The conservative forces, aware of this turnabout, seized the chance to further ingratiate themselves with the occupation authorities. In late 1945 conservative politicians had formed the Liberal Party. This party contained many former Imperial officials especially from the old *Seiyukai* party and sought to protect the Emperor’s position and maintain as much continuity between the old Japanese regime and the new. This was followed by the formation of the Progressive Party, made up of former members of the old *Minseito* party. Thus, the remnants, drawing upon their experiences in the Taisho years began reforming themselves into a more democratic form that never the less would allow the old guard to maintain control as the regime shifted from authoritarian to democratic.²¹ As the Emperor had seemingly been spared from prosecution for war crimes by MacArthur since the famous meeting at the end of 1945, the Emperor’s new position as “symbolic” and “spiritual” symbol of Japan was mobilized to gather support for the conservatives among the Japanese citizenry.²² The conservatives therefore seemed well prepared to compete in a general election.

However, the new conservative parties did not have to rely upon fair elections. Despite attempts by the occupation to deconstruct coercive imperial political structures, one major structure remained in place. The Imperial Japanese government had instituted a “neighborhood block” system during the early Showa years. This system was designed to allow the government to influence public opinion and support on the grassroots level via informers and advocates positioned in every residential area of the nation. The 1st purge instituted by the occupation had removed many of the old structures but missed this one. As the 1st election approached, the conservative parties enjoyed not only the support of SCAP in the face of rising left-wing sentiment and the influence the Emperor provided but also a preconstructed, coercive

network with which to influence voters.²³

The results of the 1st election in 1946 were, unsurprisingly, a strong victory for the conservatives.²⁴ The new government formed around Ichiro Hatayama, the leader of the Liberal party. Hatayama was a former leader in the *Seiyukai* and given his obvious connection to the former government he was prevented by occupation authorities from assuming the post of Prime Minister, instead, they confirmed another Liberal party official: Shigeru Yoshida. While Yoshida, a former diplomat, was considered pro-America and more moderate than Hatayama, he was still a strong conservative who wished to limit any major changes to Japanese society.²⁵ If one examines the results of various purges and reforms performed by the occupation in preparation for the 1946 election, a mixed grade would have to be presented. On one hand, SCAP had been able to establish liberal forms of civil rights, had purged many high-profile members of the wartime government, established a right to trade union organization, and had expanded the franchise by including women, lowering age requirements, and creating new large constituencies with a plural vote. On the other, the occupation officials had been unable to remove the *zaibatsu's* economic influence, and its governmental purge had been ineffective in removing all illiberal governmental structures.²⁶

As the occupation continued, SCAP advocated for the creation of a new constitution that would replace the old Meiji era document. Occupation leaders hoped that such a document would ensure a long term, and effective democratic government would be established. Unhappy with native Japanese attempts at a new constitution by the Yoshida government, SCAP produced a document known as a "model constitution." SCAP sought to have its model constitution adopted without modification, but Japanese officials attempted to secure numerous changes, the most famous one being the change from a unicameral legislature in the SCAP document to a bicameral one more in line with the previous Meiji era Diet. Despite a few such victories, SCAP's "model constitution" formed the basis of the constitution adopted in 1947, and as such is sometimes derided as a "foreign" constitution forced upon the Japanese and not a native document.²⁷ In spite

of this, the constitution was adopted, enshrining not only several liberal concepts and rights present in the American constitution such as freedom of speech, separation of church and state, and right to due process, but also much more progressive concepts, most famously Article IX, which renounces war as a sovereign right of the Japanese government.

Just before the new constitution went into effect, another general election was held. Further purges had removed the "neighborhood block" system, although some argue it was too late to completely prevent its influence in the elections.²⁸ Despite this, the Japanese Socialist Party emerged as the winner of the elections, making its leader Tetsu Katayama the first Prime Minister of the newly renamed State of Japan.²⁹ Despite this seeming victory for political outsiders, in fact the socialists did not have a majority of seats and were forced to form a coalition government with the new moderate Democratic Party which had formed from the remains of the Progressive party. Conservatives thus maintained a presence in the government, and at the local level had increased their control.³⁰ The Katayama government was in power only until February 1948, at which point defectors from the Democratic Party had merged with the Liberal party and formed the Democratic Liberal Party. Yoshida, who had maintained his leadership of the Liberals became the new Prime Minister as the remaining socialists were unable to rally behind Katayama's successor Hitoshi Ashida. He would remain the prime minister until 1954, when he was replaced by Hatoyama who had been reallocated into the government. The Democratic Liberal Party would rebrand itself back to the Liberal Party in 1950 following a merger with much of the remaining Democratic Party. The new Liberal Party, and the remaining Democratic Party members, both of whom can draw their lineage from the conservative *Seiyukai* and *Minseito* would compete for control of the government, before merging and becoming the ubiquitous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1955. The LDP has since managed to maintain a dominant position in Japanese politics, controlling the Japanese government since its formation except for two brief periods: 1993-94, and 2009-2012. It is therefore considered by many to be the most successful political party in any modern

democracy.³¹

As the occupation was winding down in 1949, East Asia expert T.A. Bison presented his judgement on how effective the occupation was in its initial stated objectives: "In the author's opinion, this country failed to achieve the announced aims of its initial post-surrender policy towards Japan, primarily because those aims could not be achieved through the instrumentality of Japan's old guard."³² Even before the official end of the occupation in 1952 it was obvious to some that a complete break with the old regime was impossible. What effect would this have on the emergent new democratic regime? An examination of the LDP, as well as the Emperor system, the two most prominent political structures with deep roots in the old regime, and how they have affected democracy in Japan, can answer this.

The office of Emperor is the most visible structure that remains from the prewar Japanese government, and easily the most controversial. The fate of the Showa Emperor was the one sticking point in Japan accepting the Potsdam Declaration of 1945, and keeping the Imperial Office was one of the major goals of the conservatives during the occupation.³³ MacArthur's recommendation to not try the Emperor for war crimes has become the subject of much debate, as Hirohito's role in the wartime government vis-à-vis the military, economic, and bureaucratic oligarchs remains murky. What is known is how most Japanese viewed the Emperor. Japanese soldiers viewed him as their sovereign, and Japanese civilians believed that it was in his name that they served the state. Whether or not he was just a figurehead in the Meiji system is irrelevant to these beliefs.³⁴ Because of this, there was, putting aside foreign views on the fate of the Emperor, much internal conflict about whether the Japanese wanted the office to continue. Conservative factions believed that the Emperor was critical to Japanese self-identity. Leftist factions, many of whom had been victims of the regime that ruled in his name, were adamant that democracy could not exist with the Emperor in existence.³⁵ In the end, however, the domestic opinion did not matter. MacArthur's decision, along with support from Japanese legal scholars such as Minobe Tatsukichi, convinced the United States that the Emperor served as an important culturally unifying

position, and therefore the Emperor would remain.³⁶ The decision to retain the Emperor was never in the hands of the Japanese citizenry but was decided upon by the occupation authorities. Once this had been decided upon, a politically limiting role for the Emperor as "symbolic ruler" was established and codified in the Constitution of 1947.

The office of Emperor has thus existed as "symbolic ruler" for over seventy years. What has been the result? Has the Imperial Office been helpful, or harmful to the liberalization and democratization of Japan? As it turns out, The Emperor, as a position, appears to have been mostly benign regarding democracy and Japan.

The initial years were critical in establishing what actual duties and powers the Emperor would have under the new political order. It began with much difficulty and confusion. As Katayama's government collapsed in 1948, he personally reported this fact to the Emperor. Such a display seemed to fly in the face of the Emperor as only a symbolic member of the government, and SCAP was quick to chastise all involved.³⁷ While this was seen as an overreach of what the Emperor's role should be, Hirohito insisted on regular briefings on political issues in effecting the nation, a practice which continues.³⁸ SCAP did not find this threatening. In the end, the development of the position of Emperor came from a curious mixture of two sources: the model of the British monarchy, and what Japanese legal scholars saw as the traditional role of the Emperor in Japan's history. The British monarchy had been in the mind of many of the occupation officials as they crafted their "model constitution," as well as with various Japanese officials as they contemplated what Japanese democracy would exist as. The British model had many benefits, as it was a system that worked in practice, and had allowed tradition to exist alongside democracy for many centuries. A direct copy of this system was, in the end, not palatable to SCAP however, as legal monarchical sovereignty, even constitutionally limited and purely symbolic as exists in Britain, seemed too likely to damage democracy's grasp on Japan, given the events of the Pacific War.³⁹ Therefore the occupation authorities combined the British model's *functioning* structure, instead of its *legal* structure, and crafted the office to be a sort of

“breathing symbol” of the state. How they wished this to be interpreted is clear: The Emperor was “no longer the source of any authority whatsoever” and “Can exercise no powers.” He was to operate solely as a “crowning pinnacle” at the top of the government.⁴⁰ This concept of pure symbol received great support from Japanese tradition, as best represented by the defense of the monarchy presented by influential intellectual Sokichi Tsuda. Tsuda was considered an opponent of the old order, and a highly respected scholar of history. His position that the Emperor had traditionally been a cultural, not a political, leader of the Japanese people. If popular sovereignty, democracy in its most basic ideal, was the goal of the new government, then the Emperor was highly useful because if the office was returned to just such a “cultural” position, the Emperor would no longer be the oligarch’s Emperor, but the “People’s Emperor” (*tenno wa warera no tenno*).⁴¹ Tsuda’s concept was inline with the “Functioning British” model that SCAP was suggesting, meaning that it easily served as an excellent buttress to the planned role of the Imperial Household.

Of course, no amount of theoretical modeling could be 100% sure on how the office would be wielded in practice. Given the examples provided by the two people who have held the office, Hirohito and Akihito, it appears that the office’s utility and power vis-à-vis the “political” part of the government varies according to the “style” of the Emperor themselves. Hirohito’s reign was marked with extended controversy as, perhaps due to his training and reign during the old regime, he constantly attempted to reassert some form of Imperial influence in politics, while at the same time claiming that he never had any form of influence or power in the wartime government.⁴² This, combined with actions taken by the ruling LDP party seemed to send ominous signals that the office could be turned into a bulwark of illiberalism used to undermine the constitutional separation of powers. In contrast, Akihito has shown throughout his reign a distinct tact in his wielding of the office, reflecting an understanding that the “cultural” power granted the Emperor can be used to subtly influence events, without overstepping constitutional bounds. Examples such as Akihito’s apologies for the war, his championing of charity, and

his handling of the media shows that the office can work within the confines provided by the constitution, while still having value as a symbol of popular will.⁴³ Using Akihito as an example of a “modern Emperor,” the continuity between the pre-occupation Emperor System and the post-occupation “symbolic” Emperor seems slim. Once someone not raised in the old system was inserted in the office, it lost much of its threat.

If the office of Emperor appears to have successfully transitioned to fall in line with liberal democratic expectations, what of the heirs of the old political oligarchs? As mentioned before, The Liberal Democratic Party can trace its lineage not only to the wartime government but also to the Taisho *Seiyukai* and *Minseitō* parties. Given the actions committed during the occupation in trying to prevent the removal of numerous illiberal structures, can the success of the LDP be seen as a failure of Japan to democratize completely?

The optics would seem to suggest that the LDP has at least some illiberal leanings. Besides the actions taken during the occupation, members of the LDP including Prime Ministers such as Koizumi and Abe, have taken controversial stances regarding the war. Most infamous of these are the visits to Yasakuni Shrine, where several convicted Class-A war criminals are enshrined.⁴⁴ LDP members are also at the center of the textbook controversies regarding Japan’s wartime actions as well as demands for removing Article IX from the Japanese constitution.⁴⁵ Further causing concern is the LDP’s long hold on power. Since the party’s founding, it has held power in Japan for all but two small timeframes.⁴⁶ One of the main signs of liberal democracy is frequent changeover in leadership. The LDP’s near-hegemonic control of the Legislative Branch of the Japanese government would appear to violate this.

In truth, the LDP is not the archconservative monolith it appears to be at first glance. The LDP is an incredibly diverse party, its very domination demanding the loose alliance of numerous factions that vary regarding their platforms on political issues.⁴⁷ The policies brought about during the years of LDP rule run a fairly extensive political range, with progressive policies being implemented by the

very same party that would seem to be the domain of the old guard.

The LDP's grasp on power is also not as illiberal as it might appear. The Japanese Diet contains opposition parties. Unlike say the single-party system as it existed in the Soviet Union, there is no institutional barrier for an opposition party to overcome. Competitive elections do take place, and despite the unlikely chance of it occurring, transfers of power have occurred.⁴⁸ The LDP does have certain advantages relative to opposition parties. It has a vast and organized political machine at its back, access to massive fundraising via interest groups, usually the incumbent's advantage in specific races, the advantages it obtained in its early days as the Liberal Party relating to prestige and access to pre-occupation extra-governmental structures, as well as the traditionally conservative nature of Japanese society. However, these advantages can, and have, been overcome in the past.⁴⁹ It appears that the LDP's most illiberal elements are those it shares among most other developed democracies: The influence of money and interest groups, not its status as the heirs of the old parties.

There is great continuity between the old government founded during the Meiji era, and the current post-occupation government, especially among the conservative side of Japanese politics. The continuing controversy surrounding how the Japanese remember and process their actions in the Pacific War means that these continuities are usually brought to the forefront of the media, making them appear incredibly strong and at least somewhat threatening. Japan existed as the greatest exemplar of authoritarianism in Asia during the first half of the 20th century, and that impression will take a long time to fade, especially given the actions of many in the Japanese conservative movement, and the usage of war memory for political purpose in nations such as China. This should not blind us to the fact that despite hiccups during the democratization process and attempts by the old guard to limit the change to a more liberal system, Japan has been able to become a shining beacon of working democracy in East Asia. The reason for this is simple: The effectiveness of Japan's democratic structures.

“ Japan existed as the greatest exemplar of authoritarianism in Asia during the first half of the 20th century, and that impression will take a long time to fade ”

The constitution of Japan is perhaps the single most famous constitution in Asia. It contains extensive protections for civil rights, free expression, and even labor representation. As shown by how the office of the Emperor has evolved, it provides a framework that has allowed even highly theoretical, potentially reactionary political concepts to be merged into a modern democratic state. The constitution constrained Hirohito's attempts to return the office to a position of political leadership, while at the same time empowered Akihito to utilize the symbolic and cultural powers of the office. The constitution's effectiveness has meant that even in the face of extensive plotting, democracy has gained extensive traction in the Japanese political framework. The most famous constitutional battle in modern Japanese politics, the fight over Article IX, shows the power that the constitution holds in constraining illiberal power. Despite the LDP's desire to increase Japanese military strength, they insist that this must be done following the constitution. Unless Article IX is revoked, the LDP feels it is in no position to greatly increase Japanese military capacity. Even among its critics, there is a respect for the constitution. Such respect for liberal democratic political structures means that even if there is a strong continuity between the two governments, the illiberal nature of the pre-occupation government is in no danger of seriously infecting Japan's current democratic system.

ENDNOTES

1 "Charter Oath," Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed April 10th, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Charter-Oath>.

2 "Meiji Constitution," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed on April 10th, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Meiji-Constitution>.

3 Not all scholars accept the position that the Emperor was completely without power. Some have argued that he in fact wielded power in fact as well as name, at least to some degree. The most famous proponents of a more politically active Emperor are Herbert Bix, Akira Fujiwara, and Peter Wetzler. Bix argues that Meiji, and then later Hirohito, exercised much more influence and direction of Japanese politics than what is normally considered to have been the case by making use of private meetings and influence, and that numerous Japanese figures have worked to obfuscate the Emperor's role in pre-war government. I find the "orthodox" explanation more persuasive, as it fits in with not only the Emperor's traditional place in Japanese politics, but also with the testimony of numerous members of the wartime Japanese government, and most persuasively to me, various foreign ambassadors and staff who would have no stake in hiding the Emperor's power. Readers interested in reading the alternative interpretation, however, would do well to read Bix's Pulitzer prize winning biography Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan published in 2000 by Harper Perennial.

4 Kenneth J. Ruoff, *The People's Emperor: Democracy and the Japanese Monarchy, 1945-1995* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), Page 19.

5 Ruoff, *The People's Emperor*, Page 29-30.

6 Peter Duss, *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taisho Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) Page 28-30, 248-249.

7 T.A. Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1949), Page 6.

8 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 5.

9 Murai Ryota, "The Rise and Fall of Taisho Democracy: Party Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," Nippon.com, Accessed April 10th 2019, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a03302/the-rise-and-fall-of-taisho-democracy-party-politics-in-early-twentieth-century-japan.html>.

10 Ruoff, *The People's Emperor*, Page 34.

11 While the concept of "national polity" or kokutai was created during the Meiji years, and consisted of a belief in the cultural and spiritual identity unique to the Japanese, and therefore defined what it meant to be "Japanese," it is during the 1930s that much more chauvinistic and supremacist views begin to take root. This was originally utilized by the various political parties as a weapon against their opponents in the Diet but was soon turned on the very concept of democracy itself. Ruoff, *The People's Emperor*, Page 34.

12 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 17.

13 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 18.

14 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 4-6.

15 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 11-12.

16 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 12.

17 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 12-14.

18 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 18.

19 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 19.

20 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 28-29.

21 "In these matters the occupation was dealing only with the institutional framework of Japanese political life. Beyond this lay the far more fundamental and far more difficult problem presented by the strongly entrenched group interests that had controlled the old regime and were fighting vigorously to establish similar control over the new." - Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 22.

22 "Retention of the Emperor, even with the drastic modifications effected in his formal constitutional powers, has left the cornerstone of the old structure untouched, and facilitated the oligarchy's efforts to preserve its control." - Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 25.

23 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 39.

24 The conservative Liberal Party gained the largest share of seats in the diet with 148 seats. When combined with other conservative parties, this gave the conservatives a comfortable majority. Nohlen, Dieter editor. *Elections in*

21

Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook: Volume II: South East Asia. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Page 381.

25 "As it was, the results of the 1946 election compelled SCAP, during the ensuing year to rely for the fulfillment of its basic reform directives upon a cabinet headed by Shigeru Yoshida, whose close identification with the old ruling oligarchy has been noted, and upon a diet in which the old-guard forces enjoyed an overwhelming majority." - Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 48. It should also be noted that Hatayama would later be allowed to return to government service, serving as Prime Minister for terms between 1954-1956. He was known for both working to further relations with the Soviet Union, as well as working to help parole several prisoners convicted of Class A war crimes at the Tokyo Trials.

26 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 43.

27 Ruoff, *The People's Emperor*, Page 52-55.

28 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 55.

29 The socialists won the most seats with 144. The Liberals won 129. The socialists therefore had to join their seats with the Democratic Party's 132 seats to have a majority, and as future events would prove, the Democrats could hardly be referred to as left wing. Nohlen et al, *Elections in Asia and the Pacific*, Page 381.

30 Bison, *Prospects for Democracy in Japan*, Page 63-72.

31 Ellis S. Krauss and Robert J. Pekkanen, "The Rise and Fall of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 69, No. 1 (February 2010), Page 5. Underscoring this even more is the fact that two years after Krauss and Pekkanen examined the LDP and the apparent end of its domination it had returned to power and remains so to this day.

- 32 Bison, Prospects for Democracy in Japan, Page 130.
- 33 Bison, Prospects for Democracy in Japan, Pages 12, 25.
- 34 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Page 40.
- 35 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Pages 44, 48.
- 36 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Page 43.
- 37 Bison, Prospects for Democracy in Japan, Page 26.
- 38 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Pages 11-12.
- 39 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Page 44.
- 40 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Page 52.
- 41 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Page 47. It is instructive to notice the criticism that Tsuda received at the time of his position's publication. Members of the right criticized his "stripping" of any political power from the office, while the left decried any cultural value that an "outdated" office might hold. The Imperial Household's position in modern Japanese society seems to have confirmed his moderate position as a very clever compromise, skillfully presented with historical precedent.
- 42 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Pages 107-109, 127-128.
- 43 Ruoff, The People's Emperor, Pages 151-155, 212, 218, and 224-233.
- 44 Reuters, "Abe's Offering and Lawmaker's Visit to Yasakuni Shrine for War Dead Rile China, South Korea," South China Morning Post, Accessed on April 21, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2089545/japanese-lawmakers-make-controversial-visit-yasukuni-shrine-war>.
- 45 Reiko Koide, "Critical New Stage in Japan's Textbook Controversy," The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, Accessed on April 21, 2019. <https://apjff.org/2014/12/13/Koide-Reiko/4101/article.html>.
- 46 See Appendix B for a list of all Japanese Prime Ministers since the constitution of 1947.
- 47 Nathaniel B. Thayer, How the Conservatives Rule Japan (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969) Pages 39-42.
- 48 Jose Antonio Crespo, "The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan: Conservative Domination", International Political Science Review Vol. 16 No 2, Page 199.
- 49 Crespo, "The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan," Page 200-203.