Alien Notion

Intrinsic Equality in Contemporary Japan

Author: Kristina Back

Abstract

Democracy is, in essence, political equality. Egalitarian government appears incompatible with a hierarchically organized society. Yet there are countries today where the two coexist. The theoretical focus of this study is the principle of intrinsic equality – the belief that in a democratically governed state equal consideration should be given to all citizens. Can a widely consolidated belief in this principle be present in a democratic nation where society is organized along hierarchical lines? This question is investigated in the form of a case-study of Japan, a long-term, successful democracy located outside the Western cultural hemisphere. Empirical material from multi-disciplinary sources is used, as it provides a fuller panorama of the case. The theoretical foundation is the empirically valid assumption that formally institutionalized democracies develop a consolidated belief in the principle of intrinsic equality, while informally institutionalized democracies are less likely to. The case study design consists of a broad examination of Dahl's six necessary democratic institutions for large-scale representative democracies. Each democratic institution is investigated as to whether it is primarily formally or informally institutionalized. The study reveals that Japan is a primarily informally institutionalized democracy, indicating that a consolidated belief in intrinsic equality has yet to develop.

Keywords: Japan, democratic theory, intrinsic equality, formal institutionalization, informal institutionalization

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1 Introduction

Democracy can work for the long haul in places where local traditions and practices run counter to democratic principles. Evidently democracy comes with an inherent flexibility, making it possible to combine the egalitarian democratic system of governance even with an authoritarian social organization and still achieve long-term stability. In theory, the end point of flexibility is *intrinsic equality*; a consolidated belief in the principle of political equality for all citizens. It appears unlikely that a democratic society may have a consolidated belief in intrinsic equality while upholding a hierarchical social order, but is it so?

1.1 Statement of purpose

On a fundamental theoretical level hierarchy and egalitarianism are not compatible; nevertheless cases exist where the two are cohabitating. To study the consolidation of intrinsic equality in one such case, a broad examination of democracy, its institutions and its actual processes is warranted, as democratic believes are built from actual experience and evaluation. Furthermore, a wide scope of inquiry accommodates the fact that at this point we do not know exactly what nourishes the development and consolidation of the belief in intrinsic equality. Diamond writes: "Independent from a variety of economic and social factors, including regime performance and the countries level of development, politics determines the growth of legitimacy and other democratic values" (1999 p.20—21).

How then is a satisfying set of democratic institutions determined? Authorities on the subject arrive at the same conclusions. Diamond list 10 necessary components for a *modern liberal democracy* (1999 p. 11—12); Dahl narrows it down to six (2001 p.85). The latter's components will be used to structure the inquiry, as all of Diamonds criteria are covered in Dahl's list of necessary requirements for a modern representative democracy or *polyarchy* (2001 p.90).

The political institutions of modern representative democracy:
Elected officials
Free fair and frequent elections
Freedom of expression
Alternative sources of information
Associational autonomy
Inclusive citizenship

Dahl and Diamond both view *intrinsic equality* as a crucial component in *modern* liberal democracy (Dahl 2001 p.76—80; Diamond 1999 p.12, 14). This concept will be further defined and discussed in the theory section. The overall aim is thus to do a case-study where we first determine what type democracy is at work, so that we thereafter can analyze whether a consolidated belief in the principle of intrinsic equality is present. By examining the six democratic institutions listed we will attempt to answer the following questions about the case:

— In what form is democracy institutionalized and how is it working?
— Is this case a *modern* liberal democracy today?

Japan is one nation that qualifies for such an inquiry. Japan's political system is democratic; its social organization however, is hierarchical. There are three additional reasons as to why Japan may be a rewarding case to study:

- The democratic system has now been in place, uninterrupted, for more than half a century. As will be made evident, there are no alternatives to democracy present in Japan today.

- Japan has achieved a spectacular economic success under democratic governance. In this respect Japan is an example that other nations in the region would like to follow. However, over the last decade Japan has been unable to shake a persistent recession or deal effectively with problems in society. An examination could yield clues to help explain the current flux.

- Japan is not part of the West, culturally, geographically or historically. Democracy originated in the West as did modern political science; both remain embedded with ideas and values that are not always questioned. A study of a seasoned, stable democracy outside the western cultural paradigm could prove instructive.

2 Theory and Method

2.1 The Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Concept of Intrinsic Equality

Modern democracy is based on the fundamental assumption of *intrinsic equality*; meaning that when participating in governing, all citizens should be treated as equals (Dahl 2000 p.64: Diamond 1999 p.11). The notion of intrinsic equality developed during the 20th century when suffrage came to include all able-minded adults. While democracy is an ancient concept, what seems like a principal tenet today is actually a quite recent development. Are there reasons to include intrinsic equality permanently in democratic doctrine?

Robert Dahl argues that there is (2000 p.65—68).

The idea that citizens in a democratic state are political equals, does not imply that all human beings are equal in actuality. Inequality is the rule, not the exception in the world; whether wealth, abilities or opportunities are examined. Intrinsic equality then is a moral judgment on how human beings ought to be regarded in a democracy. Dahl calls it *the principle of intrinsic equality.* To apply this principle when it comes to governing a state, Dahl adds a supplementary principle: "In arriving at decisions, the government must give equal consideration to the good and interests of every person bound by those decisions" (p.65). There are strong imperatives as to why the interests and good of every individual should be of equal importance in a democratic state. One, most moral reasoning and most systems of ethics (religions) hold a similar assumption, for example, the idea that we are all equally God's children is a part of Judaism, Christianity and Islam while Buddhism holds a similar view. Subsequently, for many, the principle of intrinsic equality is already a part of their fundamental ethical beliefs. Two, the alternative principle come with an inherent weakness: There is no reason for those in an inferior group for knowingly consenting to intrinsic superiority once tradition, religion, ideology, myth, mystery and/or brute force are removed. Three, unless permanent privilege is certain, it is a more prudent route to ensure a process where the interests of all be given equal consideration. Four, a process based on the principle of intrinsic equality is more likely to gain wide acceptance and due cooperation even at times when there is no direct benefit for certain groups. Dahl concludes that "intrinsic equality as a principle of government that is

justified on the grounds of morality, prudence and acceptability […] make more sense than any alternative to it" (2000 p.68). Subsequently, according to Dahl, if we are to support *modern* democracy, we must believe in intrinsic equality (ibid).

Ultimately this is a normative statement with far-stretching consequences, requiring further discussion beyond the scope of this paper. Democracy is still developing, in many places, in many forms. Intrinsic equality has so far developed in nations where there was an ethical foundation for it to begin with. Nations with other foundations, be it ethical, cultural or geographical may develop along other paths, achieving democratic stability without consolidating the principle of intrinsic equality. Before permanently include the principle of intrinsic equality in democratic doctrine, more studies are necessary.

The recurring theme of this paper is that intrinsic equality is a fundamentally alien notion to Japanese society. That the egalitarian aspects of modern democracy was an alien notion when the democratic system of governance was first imported into Japan after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 is one thing. As history goes, the full scope of intrinsic equality had not yet arrived in the West. However, Japan—a nation where democracy has brought peace, security, stability and great wealth to its ordinary citizens over the span of half a century—is a choice case to investigate whether the principle of intrinsic equality really is 'a principle tenet' or simply a criteria for a specific type of polyarchy.

2.1.2 Democratic Consolidation

"The essence of democratic consolidation is a behavioral and attitudinal embrace of democratic principles and methods by both elite and mass. These behaviors and attitudes are observable, and attitudes at least can be measured by survey data" writes Diamond (1999 p.20). Consolidation is ultimately the measuring tool used to evaluate present and future endurance for a democratic regime (Schedler 2001 p.69). "If we want to measure democratic consolidation, we have to theorize about democratic stability" writes Schedler (2001 p.68). O'Donnell and Schedler have both questioned the utility of the democratic consolidation concept, pointing to the fact that evaluation is inherently normative and unless norms are made explicit they carry an inherent possibility of implicit bias (O'Donnell 1996 p.34—51; Schedler 2001 p.66—92).

Although the definition of polyarchy lists six democratic institutions that need to be present in some form (Dahl 2000 p.90), many scholars agree that *free, fair, and frequent* (regular) *elections* is the one a democratic system cannot do without and is thus the defining characteristic that separates all democracies from all non-democracies (O'Donnell 1996 p.36). But to take the next step — to make comparisons between polyarchies — O'Donnell argues that developing democracy and consolidation conceptualization needs to acknowledge that as democracy is developing in new places, new varieties are developing too (1996 p.35—38).

The study of democratic consolidation had few objects in the beginning. Democratic countries were located in the Northwestern quarter of the world and

within the same cultural hemisphere. Theories on the consolidation processes were all based on cases sharing the same essential traits. Simply put, these countries were all variation within one type of polyarchy. Since there were no other types at the time, the northwestern type implicitly became the norm by which all later polyarchies are categorized. O'Donnell writes in 'Illusions about Consolidation' (1996) that while surfing the 3rd wave of democratization, consolidation studies got carried away by the momentum of the times. "Somehow, it was felt, this democracy would soon come to resemble the sort of democracy found in admired countries of the North-West — admired for their long-enduring regimes and for their wealth, and because both things seemed to go together" (O'Donnell 1996 p.46). The route after transition went via stabilization, then deeper consolidation, to arrive, eventually, at the endpoint: a full-fledged democracy of Northwestern type where all formal democratic institutions are in place and functioning within proximity to its rules. O'Donnell points to flaws that such a uniform standard brings and discuss ambiguities that this assumed trajectory produces. Many newer polyarchies located outside the Northwestern hemisphere repeatedly receive less positive assessments than newer polyarchies located within that perimeter (1996 p.37—38).

The problem, O'Donnell believes, lies in the yardstick used for the assessment of institutionalization: "These studies presuppose […] a generic and somewhat idealized view of the old polyarchies. The meaning of such a yardstick perplexes me: often it is unclear whether it is something like an average of characteristics observed within the set of old polyarchies, or an ideal type generated from some of these characteristics, or a generalization to the whole set of the characteristics of its members, or a normative statement of preferred traits" (p.38). In addition there is a strong teleological undercurrent to this way of reasoning. Cases that do not 'complete' their institutionalization, or cease to move in this direction are categorized as stunted or protractedly unconsolidated; the implication is that they do not measure up. Such cases are continuously defined for what they have *not* achieved in comparison to polyarchies that adhere closer to the yardstick-criteria. "Negative definitions shift attention away from building typologies of polyarchies on the basis of the specific, positively described traits of each type. Such typologies are needed, among other purposes, for assessing each type's likelihood of endurance, for exploring its patterns of change, and for clarifying the various dimensions on which issues of quality and performance of polyarchy may be discussed and researched" (p.39). "There exist polyarchies [ ] that endure even though they do not function as their formal rules dictate. To understand these cases we need to know what games are really being played, and under what rules."(p.43)

O'Donnell claims that stabilized polyarchies have two important institutions; first, "highly formalized but intermittent: elections" and second, "informal, permanent, and pervasive: particularism (or clientelism, broadly defined)" (p.35). O'Donnell dubs this set "the full institutional package of polyarchy" (ibid).

O'Donnell argues that most commonly used ways to conceptualize democratic institutions focus on formal institutions to an extent where informal

institutions—that may be just as influential—goes virtually unrecognized. Among the many varieties of polyarchies there are cases that are primarily formally institutionalized. Simply put, in such cases there is a "reasonable close fit between formal rules and actual behavior" (p.41). And at the other end of 'the full institutional package' spectrum there are polyarchies that are primarily informally institutionalized.

"If the main criterion for democratic consolidation is more or less explicitly a reasonably close fit between formal rules and actual behavior, then what of countries such as Italy, Japan, and India? These are long-enduring polyarchies where, by all indications, various forms of particularism [clientelism] are rampant. Yet these cases do not appear problematic […]. That they are listed as 'consolidated' (or, at least, not listed as 'un-consolidated') suggests the strength--and the inconsistency--of this view. It attaches the label 'consolidated' to cases that clearly do not fit its arguments but that have endured for a significantly longer period than the new [3rd wave] polyarchies have so far. This is a typical paradigmatic anomaly. It deals with these cases by relegating them to a theoretical limbo, as if, because they are somehow 'consolidated', the big gaps between their formal rules and behavior were irrelevant. This is a pity, because variations that are theoretically and empirically important for the study of the whole set of existing polyarchies are thereby obscured." (O'Donnell 1996 p.40—41)

When using the concept of 'the full institutional package'—formal and informal institutions—we believe it is important that it is used as a set, not a contradictory couple. There is no conceptual gain to be made if informal institutionalization is perceived as the 'evil' Siamese twin, a parasitic phenomenon robbing 'good twin' formal institutionalization of its viability. This does not mean that in some cases it may not be so. However, in other cases, the one at hand to be precise, formal and informal institutions are cohabitating seemingly without the "uneasy tension" O'Donnell writes about (1996 p.35). To complicate matter further, a set of formal and informal is already a fundamental concept in Japanese culture and society (further described in section '2.3.5 Formal and Informal').

Pervasive particularism, delegative rule, and weak horizontal accountability are the typical attributes found in primarily informally institutionalized polyarchies 1996 p.44—45). Furthermore, this form of institutionalization comes saddled with two possible draw-backs writes O'Donnell: One, pre-democratic authoritarian practices are easily reasserted and maintained due to the lack of a control system; two, the shaping and implementation of policy is done with consideration and accommodation to powerful political and economical interests (1996 p.45). From a developing democracy perspective all of the above attributes are hampering influences towards greater democratization. There is as yet, however, little evidence indicating that these attributes necessarily have negative effects on democratic stability. If, as Schedler states (2001 p.69), consolidation is ultimately the measuring tool used to evaluate present and future endurance for a democratic regime, then attributes that promote and/or maintain stability for the democratic system must not be equated with attributes that promote further democratization. Equilibrium (regime stability) in an informally institutionalized type of polyarchy is likely to be different from equilibrium in a primarily formally institutionalized type of polyarchy.

Since Japan is a case where we may suspect that the conceptual tools measuring democratic consolidation will give ambiguous results, it appears to be a prudent course of action to avoid using such tools altogether. Instead, the following two assumptions, drawn from the above discussion and based on empirical assessments, will be utilized as the theoretical basis of the study:

- Formally institutionalized polyarchies (= operating in proximity to its formal democratic rules) are likely to, over time, develop and consolidate the principle of intrinsic equality.

- Informally institutionalized polyarchies (= *not* operating in proximity to its formal democratic rules with the exception of elections) are, over time, less likely to develop and consolidate the principle of intrinsic equality.

The empirical validity of these assumptions is simply that adherence to the democratic rules by essential actors builds support of and belief in democracy, while violations of the rules do not. (Diamond 1999 p.74, 77—78)

2.2   Method

2.2.1 Operationalizing the Inquiry

An empirical case-study was the natural choice of method since we wanted to study "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" with all that this entails in multiple variables of interest and sources of evidence (Yin 2003, p.13—14). The operational route of this case-study design is a) to determine which of the two types of polyarchy defined the case primarily belongs to; and based on that determination we, b) attempt to assess the presence of a consolidated belief in intrinsic equality. The design of the study consists of an examination of six key institutions necessary for a representative large-scale democracy, such as a state or a nation. To approach the first question we investigate the democratic institutions and their processes, making this part of the research a descriptive case-study. Focus is on institutions and processes representative of modern representative democracies rather than specifics representative of Japan. With this approach the pitfalls of a too unique a case will hopefully be avoided and the aim was to make it possible to re-use this structure in a greater multiple-case study. Although we study democracy in Japan and its institutions' presumed influence on the consolidation of the principle of intrinsic equality (or the lack thereof), it is not the quality of Japanese democracy per se that interests us. The study is conducted on classic democratic consolidation theory territory, but for reasons discussed in the theory section, consolidation tools of conceptualization were deliberately put aside. Developing democracy theory was used as a guide, not as a perspective.

Objection to the approach of this inquiry is likely to be that it tries to encompass too much. Still, the aim is increased understanding of intrinsic equality in a hierarchically organized society. A narrower study in this respect may reveal even less.

2.2.2 Research Material

This study makes use of material compiled from many disciplines; history, anthropology, economics as well as political science. Empirical material also includes books on contemporary Japan, newspaper articles and survey data. The political sphere of a country works within in the greater context of society as a whole, thus a multidisciplinary perspective is better suited for this empirical case-study as it will enhance our understanding more easily than a strictly political science perspective would.

"Why these books, articles and surveys?" is a relevant question. The writer lived in Tokyo 1997—2004. The material used for facts and references in this paper were chosen from this pretext.

Some of the material used is biased. When objectivity was found wanting or when subjectivity simply revealed more, opposing and/or opinionated views was included. To prevent confusion direct quotes are used on such occasions or the material's bias is made clear from the context. Background material on social organization has been included to facilitate for the reader who has little or no previous knowledge of Japan.

3 Land of Lemmings

3.1 Culture and the Social Order

There are distinctions to Japan's social order and to its culture that makes it highly specific. Some aspects of Japanese culture may have implications on democracy and how it works. Diamond writes: "While habituation reshapes political norms and values to fit democratic institutions, underlying cultural dispositions may slow or accelerate this process" (p.198). Culture does influence, but it should not be over-emphasized as the one dominant explanation. One can imagine it as a filter: It does not change the set-up of institutions or processes, but it defines the perspective of its participants and thus indirectly affects the content.

3.1.1 The Family System

The *family-system* is an ethical as well as an organizational frame-work. It's a sophisticated contraption, linking every single individual to another in a hierarchical system. It was heavily emphasized under the Imperial era. The main characteristic of the family system is the interchange of directive and obedience between authority and subordinate up and down along a simple straight vertical line of command (Maison—Caiger 2001 p.251). Although slowly receding, the family-system is still the foundation of the social order; as a consequence relationships in Japan are formalized to a greater degree than in the West.

3.1.2 The Groupies

One of the most common stereotypes about the Japanese is that they do everything in group, from traveling to suicide. Social anthropologist Chie Nakane analyzed group formation as one of the elements of traditional Japanese social organization that survived both modernization and Western influence (1998 p.8).

In every society individuals form social groups based on attribute and frame. There is a close reciprocal relationship between how attribute and frame are commonly valued and to the values that develop in the social consciousness of people in that society. In Japan, group consciousness depends greatly on the immediate social frame — company, school, association — while in India an attribute — caste — is the chief denominator. Nakane notes: "The Japanese are

not so much concerned with social background as with institutional affiliation" (p.14). This trait has been consistently encouraged by managers and administrators from the beginning of modern Japan and it has, up till the 1990's, been a very successful model. "A cohesive sense of group unity, as demonstrated in the operational mechanisms of household and enterprise, is essential as the foundation of the individual's total emotional participation in the group; it helps to build a closed world and results in strong group independence and isolation" (p.9). In a society organized this way, it is paramount to belong to a group. The importance of group identity is taught throughout the compulsory education system. The pressure to excel in exams is well known internationally, while the constant pressure on students to conform to the group is less known outside Japan. Economist Taichi Sakaiya writes that homogeneity has been continuously and consciously reinforced in basic education by directives from the Ministry of Education. Fear of being cast out of the group becomes ingrained (2000 p.129).

By tradition, the Japanese are not taught to ask questions but to obey and endure for the better of the group (Kerr 2001 p.287—293; Sakaiya 2000 p.129). The education system "which shapes the way people ask questions of themselves and their environment" emphasizes obedience, diligence and endurance, not in so much in content as in practice (Kerr 2001 p.282). To persevere without questioning is regarded as a sign of character. It is weak to give up. To question an assignment or a job is regarded with suspicion, as questioning can be regarded as both rebellious (= disobedience) or inability to perform (= weakness).

3.1.3 Ranking Rules - Hierarchy in Action

Organization within the group is hierarchical. "In general, such groups share a common structure, an internal organization by which members are tied vertically into a delicately graded order" (Nakane 1998 p.10). Groups consist of heterogeneous elements and the vertical organization promotes internal cohesion among members. Differences are leveled out through a ranking process. By vertical ranking, members of the group are either seniors or juniors to one another. Rank rules in formal as well as informal situations. Parallel groups compete for the prize of higher rating. Vertical ranking decides the social order. "It [rank] is applied to all circumstances and to a great extent controls the social life and individual activity. Seniority and merit are the principal criteria for the establishment of a social order and every society employs these criteria, although the weight given to each may differ according to social circumstances" (p.10). In Japan "the provisions for the recognition of merit are weak, and the social order is institutionalized largely by means of seniority" (p.11). "Even among people with the same training, qualifications or status, differences based on rank are always perceptible" (p.10).

3.1.4 The Beauty of Dependency

Japanese society put great emphasis on the emotional element of mutuality. Psychiatrist Takeo Doi defines it as "the principle of mutuality that must be present to guarantee smooth transactions" (1998 p.21). Anthropologist Takie Lebra calls the same concept reciprocity (1976 p.111). "The ranking order that produces delicate differentiations between members of a group develops firm personal links between superior and subordinate" (Nakane 1998 p.11). The junior is dependent on the senior to succeed, but it is not as simple as the master and subordinate roles imply; accomplishing the orders of the senior gives purpose to the junior. Japanese culture traditionally encourages dependency and also encourages single-bonded mutuality based on vertical dependency. Doi claims that dependency is "a key concept for understanding Japanese personality" (1998, p.21).

The bonds between individual group members are emotional and stable. Orders from above are not questioned (Nakane 1998 p.12). Any group, on any level, remains exclusive and retains its solidarity because it is organized vertically. Nakane writes: "Thus, the one-to-one, single bond affiliation, solidly fixed, contributes to the maintenance of order in the over-all structure of society" (p.14). The drawbacks of vertically organized groups lie in poor communication from lower levels to the top, the constant risk of in-fighting and, to quote Nakane again, "the crucial weakness of not permitting cooperation between groups" (p.12).

3.1.5 Formal and Informal –Tatemae and Honne

"Unanimous agreement has a very important social function for the Japanese. It is a token that the mutuality of all the members has been preserved" writes Takeo Doi, "They [the Japanese] simply don't want to have divided opinions" (1998, p.22). Unity in Japan means harmony. Harmony is achieved through consensus. Being deliberately hesitant, ambiguous and evasive about what one actually thinks helps pave the way towards unanimous agreement. As long as all group members respect the form of the unanimous agreement, it is not strictly binding. Paradoxically, as long as group members agree to agree to the formal front, it is not necessary to be in agreement (1998. p.22). This is the concept of *tatemae* (formal front) and *honne* (true intent); the Japanese version of double standard. "For the Japanese themselves there is nothing ambiguous about the double standard of tatemae and honne" writes Doi (1998 p.23). Any discrepancy between formal front and true intention is the way things are and its implied deception is not perceived as morally "bad" (Kerr 2001 p.104). It goes back to a cultural notion where ideal forms take precedence over actual objects or events when they do not measure up to fit the ideal. The crucial characteristic to note is that in Japan formal takes precedence over informal. In Japan, the frame of an institution—its formal administrative structure and organization—is strong. The institutional frame is capable of preserving the group as a whole when it is risks falling apart

from internal troubles. In times of trial, the formal frame takes precedence (Nakane 1998 p.13). Kerr concludes: "*Tatemae* is a charming attitude when it means that everyone should look the other way at guest's faux pas in the tea room; it has dangerous and unpredictable results when applied to corporate balance sheets, drug testing and nuclear power safety reports" (p. 106). The presence of the tatemae/honne-dichotomy in the cultural fabric is likely to have implications on its citizens' expectations of democracy: Discrepancies between formal democratic rules and how the country is actually governed are to be expected.

4   The Case-study

4.1   The Political Institutions: Elected officials

Why are elected officials a requirement for large-scale democratic states?
Elected representation makes it possible for citizens to participate effectively in the political process in spite of great numbers, ideally rendering government both mandate and efficiency. Citizens, on the other hand, retain final control over the agenda through frequently occurring elections. The elected officials are held more or less accountable and may be dismissed in the next election if they are found incompetent, unresponsive or simply not very exciting.

In actuality, meeting these two criteria is very difficult. Dahl finds it to some extent unachievable. He points out that their importance may be "as a standard for evaluating different alternative possibilities and solutions" (2000 p.93). Today, judging from the 200 plus years of experience with democracy, elected representatives, while far from perfect, it is the best solution for large-scale democracy that has developed so far.

4.1.1   Elected Officials in Japan

Who is eligible for public office in Japan?
Constitutionally, any qualified voter of 25 years of age can run for a seat in the Parliament (Diet). In practice, politicians must have a local support base to ensure campaign funds. It is of primary importance to maintain good relations with the local constituency, who as a practice expects favors from their representative who owes his/her position to their votes (Hayes 2001 p.53). "Localism, like regionalism, influenced all political quarters" Maison and Caiger writes of the early modern period 1868-1910 (1997 p.293). The trait of localism survived the Occupation and is the reason for the clientelism which still characterizes the relationship between local voter and elected official today (Hayes 2001 p.56).

The party is the significant variable in the legislative election, meaning that, the voters' influence on policy goes through the voting on a party candidate. Still, party loyalty among voters is quite weak. Independent candidates exist but party affiliation is the most common. (2001 p.53)
Who becomes a politician?
The two significant factors are vocational background and family. The most common background among Diet members over the years have been in the

business sector. The second most common group, though far behind in numbers, is ex-bureaucrats (Hayes 2001 p.53; Okimoto — Rohlen 1998 p.189).

In the 1990 lower house election, 40% of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) candidates had fathers who at some time had been Diet members (Hayes 2001 p.54). This situation was a result of the local support groups' influence in selecting candidates. Candidates approved by local support groups are likelier to win. Support groups are inclined to select a relative of the previous seat-holding candidate. The advantage of family ties is that a politician's relative is in a favorable position to develop and cultivate important contacts in the local district (2001 p.52—54).

4.1.2 The Legislative Organization

Japan is a parliamentary democracy. Before the 1996 election, the Japanese elected their Diet candidates from multiple-member districts. The 1994 electoral reform was made to curb the power of the bureaucracy and party factions as well as remedy poor proportionate representativity. In addition these changes aimed to pave way for a viable two-party system in the future. (Hayes 2001 p.129—130; Freedom House 2003; Foreign Press Center Japan 2005)

In practice, the leaders of the respective house are not chosen by the chambers but selected from senior high ranking members of the LDP. Independence and neutrality is compromised (Hayes 2001 p.55).

Japan has its formal political institutions outlined in the 1947 Constitution, but actual operations are informally based. In informally institutionalized countries there tend to be little or no control over state agencies conducted by other state agencies. Such horizontal accountability, a central but often over-looked aspect of the rule of law, plays an important role in formal institutionalization in that it sets boundaries and accountabilities for state agencies and their officials. (O'Donnell 1996 p.44) Japan, in this respect, displays few examples of horizontal accountability.

4.1.3 The Legislative Procedure

The most important legislation is drafted by the bureaucracy. Drafts are based on carefully created and balanced consensus among party leaders, bureaucrats and relevant groups such as business or industry. Hayes writes: "The legislative process is, for the most part, a ratification of policies formulated outside the Diet" (2001 p.59). Decisions are made after consensus has been reached among government agencies and relevant interest groups. Hayes writes: "Decisions are made within the context of bureaucratic authority and among officials who probably have close personal ties to each other and always a high degree of mutual trust" (2001 p.61). "Important inter-personal connections are maintained by the practice of officials rotating among bureaucracy, business, and politics"

(p.63). In spite of recent reform, senior civil servants play a greater part in shaping policy than do politicians (Freedom House 2003).

Morishima writes about the origin of the bureaucracy's power: "In Confucian political thought those who play the most important roles in society are the bureaucrats" (1998 p.38). In Japan the bureaucrats were the chief architects behind the modernization of society after 1868. Due to language difficulties the Occupation (mainly American troops and administration) left the actual implementation of democracy after 1945 to the state bureaucracy. The traditional power of the bureaucracy was not curtailed nor made more politically responsible. (Hayes 2001 p.37—38) Okimoto argues that one of the LDP's greatest assets have been the steady influx of ex-bureaucrats into the top tiers of the party. The ex-bureaucrats bring "first-hand experience of public administration, intimate knowledge of the policy-making processes, access to the best available information, and extensive contacts with elites in both public and private sectors" and is a chief reason for the long-time dominance of the LDP (1998 p.189—190).

Top ranked members of the LDP are appointed to minister posts, based on seniority, influence and party loyalty. The forming of a new cabinet involves a careful balancing of the factions' respective influence. The majority of ministers must be chosen from the Diet. The time in office is usually less than a year and as a consequence the minister has little personal influence and rarely gains full control over the ministry. Subordinate officials run the office. The PM does not have a mandate to implement a policy agenda. Leadership capacity is significantly hampered. When compared to heads of state in the West or most countries in Asia, the Japanese PM has the least power of them all. (Hayes 2001 p.59—61)

4.1.4 The receding influence of the LDP factions

Japan has de facto been a one-party state for decades. The LDP still dominates the political scene. As inter-party competition for power became irrelevant, competitiveness between different factions within the LDP became its substitute. This situation is changing at present. The factions had close ties to business and industry and benefited from their financial support. In 2000, the disastrous appointment by just a few party leaders of Mori as party president and PM met with severe criticism from within the party. The LDP immediately introduced popular party president elections for its party members. (Foreign Press Center Japan, 2005)

At present popularity among voters has become the most important criterion for candidates competing for the top party and administrative posts. The influence of the faction is of less importance. The election of Koizumi to party president in 2001 paved way for this development. Party grassroots did not vote for former PM Hashimoto who was the professed candidate of LDP's informal leaders, but for Koizumi. Another important factor contributing to factions losing their influence has been the 1994 campaign fund reform. (Okubo 2004) This legislation aimed to make the flow of money from business to politics more transparent.

Blechinger (2000) argues that the money keeps coming, albeit in new ways and the reform therefore failed.

While factions used to recommend members for cabinet posts, PM Koizumi has continuously ignored their suggestions further diminishing their importance. Reflecting the factions receding influence, it has become difficult to find replacements when senior faction leaders resign. In spite of recent developments it is too early to tell whether the factions' influence is receding for good. (Okubo 2004)

4.1.5 Local Government

The Local Autonomy Act in the 1947 Constitution was created to prevent a resurrection of the authoritarian centralized power of the Imperial days. When Japan began to rebuild from the ruins, "the policy of decentralization of political authority was impractical in the Japanese context and it did not survive the Occupation" (Hayes 2001 p.65).

Local governments have little independence since the central government control the tax structure. Local governments can collect only about 30 percent of the revenue needed. As a result, the rest of the local budget is made up of transfers from the national government. Due the bad economy, national and local governments have both been forced to take loans to cover costs.

National government creates policy. Local governments implement it with great efficiency. Although there are great differences socially and economically in the regions, the uniformity of national policy require close adherence and there is little local variation as a result. (2001 p.65)

Measures to decentralize health and welfare have begun to change this situation. Local assemblies can now form policy that better suit the local needs. (Estevez-Abe 2003 p.164) There are additional reforms for decentralization in the pipeline at the Cabinet Office (Cabinet Office 2003). The rapid aging of the population has made it clear that the central government is not capable of coping with health and care alone. Over the last decade civil society interest groups have been taking a more active part in the shaping of local policy and implementation (further elaborated in 'Associational Autonomy').

It is as true in Japan as anywhere else that there is a closer relationship between voter and elected officials at the local levels of government. Public opinion is expressed clearly by the ballot box or by other means and officials responsiveness is quicker. However, Japanese politics remain characterized by clientelism. The local levels of government are no exceptions. The local political dialogue reflects narrow interests. Local officials primarily focus on ensuring that their constituents receive their share of government benefits and subsidies. (Hayes 2001 p.65)

4.1.6 The publics' view of elected officials

Transparency is needed to maintain or increase legitimacy. Lack of transparency may fuel suspicion of corruption and helps corrupt practices to thrive. The Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2004 examined the public's perceptions in a number of countries on the extent to which institutions are affected by corruption (1: not at all corrupt, 5: extremely corrupt) (Transparency International 2004). The Japanese view the political parties as the most corrupt (4.3), followed by the police (3.9) then Parliament/Legislature and Medical Services (3.7).When asked to grade national societal problems (1: Not a problem at all, 4: A very big problem) the Japanese perception was that grand or political corruption, unemployment, and insecurity/crime/violence/terrorism was the top three problems with a score of 3.5. These are the perceptions; does reality correspond with these views? Less than 5 percent answered "yes" when asked if they, or someone in their household, had paid a bribe during the previous year. Still, a recurring feature in the national news are "cases of bribery, scandals, unethical political practices, resignations and apologies offered by politicians for their immoral behavior" (Jain 2002). Corruption scandals in Japan tend to include very large sums of money and top level politicians and/or bureaucrats (Blechinger 2000). General distrust of the political establishment hollows out the regime's legitimacy. In contemporary Japan there are no real alternatives to the democratic system. Democracy has served the country very well, creating wealth, social stability and security. What Diamond calls "the belief in the legitimacy of democracy" (1999 p.168), is present on a principle level, while the actual democratic government, indeed the entire political establishment, is enjoying less legitimacy at present. This is hardly a solely Japanese condition and in any case, the Japanese clearly prefer their political system to a nondemocratic regime. (Good Government Study 2001; Transparency International 2004)

Japan has democratically elected officials in its government and so have the required democratic institution of 'Elected Officials' in place. O'Donnell writes: "The combination of institutionalized elections, particularism as a dominant political institution, and a big gap between the formal rules and the way most political institutions actually work makes for a strong affinity with delegative, not representative, notions of political authority" (1996 p.44). Assessing Japan by the facts presented here, the institution of 'Elected Officials' is informally institutionalized at present.

4.2   The Political Institutions: Free, Fair and Frequent Elections

Why are free, fair and frequent elections required in large-scale, representative democracies? If equality of the vote is to be implemented and ensured, elections

must be *free,* meaning that fear of reprisals and other means of coercion must be eliminated; *fair* in that all votes are counted as equal; and *frequent* in order for citizens to possess final control over the agenda (2000 p.95).

4.2.1 Elections in Japan

The Japanese can change their government through fair and frequent elections. Elections are free in the respect that universal adult suffrage is guaranteed in the 1947 Constitution. This right applies to all Japanese nationals, thus including 99 percent of the population. The remaining 1 per cent will be discussed further in 'Inclusive Citizenship'.

There is no coercion involved in elections. In recent years voters have stayed away from the ballot box in increasing numbers, reflecting a widespread disenchantment with the political establishment and its actors. 26.8 per cent of the population never votes as a means to make their voice heard; 53.9 say they vote sometimes; 19.3 per cent vote often or always (Good Government Study 2001) Still, there is nothing at present indicating that elections will not continue regularly in the foreseeable future. Elections are thus fully and formally institutionalized in Japan.

4.2.2 The Party System

According to Hayes, Japan have all the structural elements of a democracy. It is in the manners that the system works that are different. For instance, the multi-party system has not been competitive. The LDP has dominated the political process throughout the postwar period (1955-1993) and still does. (Hayes 2001, p.134; Sakaiya 2000 p.116)

The absence of party competition does not imply that there is no competition for power or that the people have no influence. It has been a characterizing trait of Japanese democracy that the people's will is indirectly evident in governance. The impact of the voters is felt within parties instead. The long time reign of the LDP may have made Japan a one-party state, it never became a one-party dictatorship. The possibility that the voters could oust the LDP was there and in 1993 they did. In that respect, an effective check on the government and its policies was and remains present. (Hayes 2001 p.135)

At present, the LDP's inability to shake Japan out of recession has diminished its popular appeal. The electoral reforms of 1994 has changed the situation in one key area; the increasing importance of popular support (2001 p.142). Voters increasingly vote for a particular politician and no longer leave it up to the parties to select the candidates. (It was not an uncommon practice in the LDP for party members to send in their voting ballots empty to the local LDP support groups office and let the local Diet-man or his staff fill in the candidates name, as the selection had been made higher up in the LDP (2001 p.138). However, reform in state subsidized financial support to parties has not weakened the need for

financial backing by factions and private interest groups (Blechinger 2000; Hayes 2001 p.130).

Japan fulfills the requirement of free, fair and frequent elections. Its citizens have voting equality and retains, albeit indirectly, *control over the agenda*. Japan is a stabilized polyarchy in that elections can be expected to continue in close proximity to its formal rules in the foreseeable future.

4.3 The Political Institutions: Freedom of Expression

Why is freedom of expression important in developing democracy? Freedom of expression is a necessary attribute of modern representative democracy. Without freedom of expression citizens will not be able to participate effectively in political life. To make one's opinions known, making others aware of an issue, be it fellow citizens or political representatives, to work for change or improvement of government or community; it all requires freedom of expression. Just as important, freedom of expression ensures the right to hear what others have to say and learn from it. Freedom of expression helps citizens to get a better, more informed understanding of possible benefits or consequences that government action or policy may bring. In addition it educates citizens in how to take political action by developing civic competence. (Dahl 2000 p. 96—97)

Freedom of expression deepens democratization through citizen enlightenment and participation (Diamond 1999 p.64—73). Citizens' ability to influence the agenda would soon be limited or lost if freedom of expression is not guaranteed. But citizens too, must make use of these liberties. "Authority must be questioned and challenged, but it must also be supported" (Diamond 1999 p.168). Robert Dahl writes: "Silent citizens may be perfect subjects for an authoritarian ruler; they would be a disaster for a democracy" (2000 p.97).

4.3.1 Freedom of Expression in Japan

The perception that the postwar Japanese population is "silent" and obedient is the most commonly encountered in press and literature. It is not an entirely fair assessment. There have been incidents and issues that have mobilized the public on a huge scale. The early 1950s was a time of strikes and union protests. In 1960 the whole political spectrum from the extreme left to the far nationalistic right joined forces, albeit for different reasons, to protest the renewal of the Mutual Security Treaty with the U.S. (The treaty let American military personnel remain on Japanese soil indefinitely). Demonstrations were massive in scale and turned into riots. Order was restored with difficulty, but deep divisions within society remained. To keep order and cohesion differences of opinions were played down by the authorities. The rest of society soon fell back in line; disorder and differences never being a good thing in Japanese culture. Contesting views grew

silent and open public debate stalled, dealing a blow to freedom of expression. (Hayes 2001 p.143; Barshay 2003 p.71—74; Buruma 2003 p.163—165) Still, ordinary citizens' primarily opt to make their voices heard by contacting the media, rather than contact elected officials or work through a political party (Good Government Study 1999-2000).

The social culture emphasizes cohesion and harmony and thus tends to down-play views that differ and may lead to conflict (Nomura 2003). Basic education too, endorses homogeneity (Kerr 2001 p.290; Sakaiya 2000 p.129).

Serious pollution disasters and scandals created a grass-root environmental movement in the 1970's that resulted in some environmental legislation. The legal protection is narrowly focused on health issues, writes Hayes (2001 p.148). In 2001 there was no cancer-risk regulations, meaning there is no legal way to prevent cancer-causing emissions from the industry or from incinerators and no legal environmental-impact assessment framework before new industrial projects are launched. (Kerr 2001 p. 51—76)

There has been a recent surge in advocacy groups after the 1998 Non Profit Organization (NPO) Law was passed. This development has the possibility of increasing expression and participation by civil society groups and associations in the political process as NPO's now can gain legal recognition.

Survey results underscore the potential of this by indicating that for ordinary citizens the other preferred method to make their voices heard goes through participating in voluntary associations (Good Government Study 1999-2000).

After five decades of democracy in Japan there is no natural schooling environment in the democracy-enhancing arts of asking questions, debating, campaigning or protesting. There is however, plenty of opportunity for honing the likewise democracy-enhancing skills of bargaining, accommodation and compromise as these traits are important in consensus-building.

Japan has the formal and institutional structure in place granting freedom of expression for its citizens. Freedom of expression remain weak in Japan; traditionally, culturally and socially. Speaking up against or questioning authority is difficult in any society, but is particularly taboo in Japanese tradition. Culture and social interaction strongly emphasizes consensus. Through a cultured, systematically endorsed homogenous culture these three hampering influences are present at all levels of society; elite, intermediary and mass level as well as on an individual basis.

4.4   The Political Institutions: Alternative Sources of Information

Why is free access to alternative sources of information necessary in a representative democratic state? It is vital that information is not under the control of the government or any other dominant party. Access to alternative

sources of information is the one thing that makes it possible for citizens to increase knowledge, deepen understanding, find out the pros and cons of different proposals and come to an informed opinion on political matters that will eventually affect their lives. Dahl simply calls it *enlightened understanding*. Without alternative sources of information, citizens' ability to *participate effectively* is curtailed and their influence over the public agenda is compromised (2000 p.97). What people learn about politics affects their feelings and attitudes, it shapes their beliefs and the conclusions they draw will in turn form their political values and their orientations to action (Diamond, 1999, p.163—217).

4.4.1 The Role of the Media

Hayes writes "the Japanese news media have a relatively small role to play in the political process, and it is especially so at election time" (2001 p.140). Press and television are not in any way as important at elections as they in most other democracies. In many countries the Internet has proven useful for less prominent political candidates in campaigning. In Japan however, after interpreting the antiquated Electoral Law, the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs and Telecommunications' official stance is that Internet is not to be used during election periods. When election campaigns take off, candidates close their home pages or break the law. Freeman writes that the result is that at the time when people want to get information about candidates, there is none to be had (2003 p. 249). Attempts to lift the ban have so far failed. For candidates "the key is having large sums of money to cultivate voters between elections" (Hayes 2001 p.140).

This does not mean that news media are not politically influential; media coverage raises public awareness. The Japanese are by international comparison literate, educated and have a craving for news. The public is generally well informed on the topics that media covers. 93.3 per cent of the population read a newspaper daily. One in three Japanese watch the news on television for up till 30 minutes daily; one in two watches the news for even longer. Most empirical studies and reports focus on the role of the press, not television; subsequently the press' importance in influencing the public's perceptions may be over-emphasized (Good Government Study 2001; Gatzen 2003). "The quality of news coverage is of the highest order" writes Hayes (2001 p.141). Freeman, Gatzen, Kerr and Nomura, as will follow, disagree.

The five largest national daily newspapers have an enormous influence over society (Nomura 2003). *Yomuiri Shimbun* has the largest circulation in the world, 10.3 million copies per day. Compounding the influence of the major newspapers is the fact that they each own one of the five national commercial networks. The editorial outlook of the newspaper is retained in its respective television channel. (Nomura 2003) The presence of these five and their slant of news are pervasive. For example, many Japanese lawmakers as well as senior police officers have put the blame for the sharp rise in crime in recent years on juvenile delinquents and foreign criminals. Experts on criminology on the other hand, after a detailed analysis of crime statistics, claim that the rise in crime is caused by a complex

combination of prolonged economic recession, changing social patterns and inadequate policing structures. The media however, has promoted the authorities view that juvenile delinquents and foreign criminals are solely responsible for the crime wave. Today a large part of the public believes this to be true, although these two groups actually comprise very small numbers in the overall crime figures. (Curtin 2004; Foreign Press Center Japan 2005)

4.4.2 Information Cartels

"Japanese newspapers are almost identical in content" comments Hayes, "there is no distinctive orientation or point of view" (2001 p.141). Nomura states that "Mainstream media enjoy a near monopoly on access to sources and information under the infamous kisha (reporters) club systems" (2003). "The press is essentially a cartel" writes Kerr (2001 p.112). Freeman use the term 'information cartels': "Institutionalized rules and relationships guiding press behavior with sources and with each other that serve to limit the type of news that get reported and the number and makeup of those who do the reporting" (Freeman 2003 p.236). The prewar system of press clubs was originally implemented to keep control over the press. Government ministries, political parties, major institutions, business federations, police etc., all have press clubs attached to them. Journalists work along the traditional path of developing long-term personal ties to their source(s) and to other reporters belonging to the same club. Over time cozy relationships develop. The reporters who are closest to the truth are the least willing to jeopardize their connections to high level officials. Mainstream media impose self-restrictions on reporting to maintain their privileges. The result has been called 'announcement journalism' (Hayes 1999 p.141). Freeman states that controversial or publicly sensitive topics get limited or no coverage. The same is true for activities taking place at the political periphery, within civil society and/or the public sphere (2003 p.237). The club system keeps magazines, free-lance reporters and foreign media at bay, as easy access to vital daily information is the privilege of club members. It is endemic Nomura writes, that "some of the most significant scandals have been uncovered by journalists working outside the press club system" (2003). "One of the most serious issues in Japanese journalism is that mainstream media fail to keep those in power accountable" (ibid). The long dominance of the LDP has underscored the situation. While national broadcasting has its independence guaranteed, its budget is under the government's control. For most of the past five decades, the LDP has been in the position to withhold funds if the party or its more prominent members were too unfavorably scrutinized (Gatzen 2003).

    After decades of lopsided, limited news reporting there is not much of societal inquiry into the political process. The public do not believe that it can initiate political or social change (Freeman 2003 p.236; Good Government Study 2001). Nomura continues: "The mainstream press—as do other elements in Japanese society—places great emphasis on 'harmony' and thus downplays different perspectives that might exist in important issues" (2003). One consequence is that

the opposition parties are largely ignored. The dominant ideology is reinforced and 'the marketplace of ideas' lacks diversity and vitality.

When political scandal breaks it usually do so in the weekly news magazines, tabloid papers known as *shukanshi*. *Shukanshi* reporters are not part of the press club circuit; they do not have direct access to official sources, and so are not dependent on them.

The weeklies make their sales through their headlines. 90 per cent of the weekly newsmagazines are bought at newsstands. The combined circulation of Japanese weekly news magazines was less than 10 million in 1997 but by a conservative estimate, 10 million to 20 million are exposed to their blazing headlines weekly (Watanabe—Gamble 2004, 1st installment). Author and press club critic Tatsuya Iwase, quoted in Japan Media Review, says that "what is interesting in the case of the shukanshi [ ] is that any given issue can include articles that run the gamut of journalistic scruples: from top-notch investigative work to formulaic techniques and bald-faced lies. This range of quality is perhaps matched only by the magazines' range of subject matters. It is in itself dangerous, since it puts the readers of the weeklies in the difficult position of never being sure how much credence to give what they are reading" (Watanabe—Gamble 2004, 2nd installment).

Finally, the Internet: In 2003 over 50 percent of the Japanese adult population was online. More than 80 percent of Japanese households are online and 79.1 percent of businesses. (NUA 2003; New Media Review 2005)

Activists, volunteers and organizations, as elsewhere, now use the Internet to gain support for their activities. It should be noted that the language barrier makes the World Wide Web mainly a domestic affair, limiting the influx of outside ideas and alternative sources of accredited information from abroad.

Journalism professor Takesato Watanabe concludes in a 1996 essay that Japan media are too subject to government controls and too dependent on large corporate sponsors (1996). This set-up has not improved. Today's situation remains that of an entertainment-oriented media unwilling to investigate government and corporate wrongdoings.

In the Japan, the public have no way of knowing whether there is truth to the information they get and if so, to what extent. Accredited information is crucial in that it clarifies political choice. The 'information cartels' have homogenized news and as a consequence, public opinion. Access to genuine alternative sources of information could open up the nation to new ideas and bring much needed energy into the public sphere.

4.5   The Political Institutions: Associational Autonomy

Why is associational autonomy a necessary requirement? Associations is the form through which the public can easily mobilize and unite to protest, support or campaign during elections and to lobby, debate and take an active part on issues that concern them. Independent associations may - and should in a healthy democracy - influence legislators, promote policy, seek appointments and positions that can help advance the issues that mobilized its participants in the first place. Associations are vital in keeping the democratic game open and fair. Dahl argues that autonomous associations are both necessary and desirable. A measure that limits or prevents associations from acting independently impedes citizens' possibilities to participate effectively in the political process (2000 p.98). Independent organizations provide information. In addition, autonomous associations provide citizens with opportunities to discuss, persuade, deliberate, compromise and bargain, thus acquiring political skill and confidence. In short, independent associations may be a great source of civic education and help create better informed opinions and ideas. When in place, this institution helps ensure the democratic criteria of *effective participation*, *enlightened understanding* and *control over the agenda* (Dahl 2000 p.98; Diamond 1999 p.242—243).

4.5.1   Associational Autonomy in Japan - The Role of the State

Susan Pharr writes that "the single most important idea reflected in the Japanese governments approach to associational life was a Confucian notion of the proper relation between state and society. Although Liberalism posits a clear division between the two, Confucianism does not" (2003 p.333). State takes precedence over society. State leaders are entrusted to protect and care for society by defining, monitoring and advancing public good. In the Confucian realm there are no equal citizens, it stresses obedience to authority, with bureaucrats at the reigns (ibid).

The Japanese leadership over the past 100 years has continuously chosen to use targeted policies for "promoting business interests that advanced their program [prewar: modernization; postwar: economic growth], while constraining potentially disruptive social forces" (2003 p.332). The preferred method to manage civil society was cooptation and guidance, not suppression (p.326). Despite profound changes in Japan over the past century, this activist state approach has proved a remarkable durability. Popular movements have been incorporated into the state willingly. The loss of autonomy has been balanced by government subsidies. In addition, associations linked to business were encouraged and still are, while associational life in other spheres was not (Estevez-Abe p.157; Pekkanen p.133; Pharr p.335). A more assertive civil society has unquestionably emerged in post-war Japan. Still, many groups that seem autonomous remain de facto intertwined with the state (Garon 2003 p.61).

4.5.2 Associations in Contemporary Japan

Political scientist Yutaka Tsujinaka analyzes the results of a comparative study of associational life in Korea, U.S and Japan and draws the following conclusions: Although size wise the population of civil society organizations are similar in the three countries, their composition is different. The Japanese business associations' dominant position is weaker today than in the 1980's. Today, business associations make up circa 40% of the total and have an even larger share of all associational income. This is a far larger share than found in Korea or the U.S. Japan still displays the characteristics of an developmental state "in that the producer sector (including industry associations, business groups and even labor and agricultural associations) has been overrepresented, at least in comparison to the United States, while civic advocacy groups have been underrepresented and are organizationally and financially weak" (p.114). Meanwhile there has been a steady growth in the 'civic and other' category since the late 1980's, including social clubs, sport/hobby associations and tax-payer associations (p.115). When evaluating when organizations were established, there is a strong correlation in Japan between economic growth and growing numbers of associations, a typical developmental configuration. The growth patterns in Korea and U.S are not linked to the economy in this way (p.114).

There has been a shift over time in the types of associations formed, from the producer sector, then the social service sector and eventually to the advocacy sector. In this respect, the NPO Law of 1998 has facilitated for citizen's advocacy groups to get legal status, which in turn is crucial for recognition and legitimacy. This is indicating that the structure of developmentalism is waning in Japan. (p. 115) Estevez-Abe writes that civic participation took off with the introduction of the Long-Term Care Insurance Program (effective 2001), following a decade of preparations in legislation (The Elderly Welfare Law 1990 and The Golden Plan 1992) (2003 p.164). While drafting local programs, local governments' inability to meet increasing social service needs became evident. While traditional contractors, often semi-governmental corporations, were made more efficient, new partnerships were formed with locally based civil society organizations, mainly in supplying in-home welfare services. (Estevez-Abe 2003 p.164—165)

4.5.3 Civil Society Associations and Democratization

While volunteer participation in diverse associations is on the rise, this does not automatically translate into increased citizen participation in governing. The political parties for instance, have failed to mobilize new members. Neither does increased memberships in civil society organizations guarantee further democratization within the organizations or within the nation as a whole. To fully utilize associational life as a democratic institution change is necessary in a fundamental, difficult and highly sensitive area: the way groups are organized.

The traditional networking is characterized by single hierarchical lines; close vertical ties between individuals; ranking within and between groups; hierarchical

leadership; and group exclusiveness. The Japanese organizational pattern comes with one crucial weakness; it hinders cooperation between groups (Nakane in Okimoto and Rohlen (Ed.), 1988, p.12). Diamond writes: "To the extent that hierarchy and suspicion rule the organization, cooperation becomes difficult, both among members of the organization and between it and other organizations" (1999, p.226).

Social capital in Japan is low by international comparison, although the opposite is often assumed (Good Government Study 2001). A culture which emphasizes long-term personal relationships is expected to have high levels of trust. Robert Putnam writes that social capital and culture are important factors that can promote cooperation and improve efficiency in society (1993 p.167, 173, 177). Social Psychologist Toshio Yamagishi views social capital as two types of strategies; commitment formation (helps people get around) and opportunity seeking (helps people get ahead) (2003 p.295—296). Depending on social context one strategy will be more advantageous than the other. Social intelligence, in this respect, is to know when to choose the most rewarding strategy.

The postwar system promoted and rewarded stable interpersonal and interorganizational relations. The type of social intelligence adapted in this social environment is characterized by an ability to detect relations, generalized distrust and social-risk avoidance. At work, it was more advantageous to form committed relationships within the group as seniority was the base of promotion. The cost of missing outside opportunities was low. The commitment-forming or security seeking type of social intelligence subsequently prospered during the high growth decades. (p.293)

When the economic bubble collapsed in the early 1990's the Japanese postwar system ran into serious trouble. In addition, demographics were changing. The seniority based promotion system is a serious disability in rapidly aging society. The criteria for advantageous social intelligence strategy began to change.

Opportunity-seeking types of social intelligence thrives in social environments where the ability to evaluate character or predict relation-unconstrained behavior and a willingness to take social risks is rewarded. This is characterized by a general trust in others. (p.293) Corporations can no longer afford to offer seniority based promotions to every employee. Employees have become more mobile as the prospect of future higher salary no longer makes long-time corporate commitment advantageous. Companies in turn, can no longer expect their employees to turn down outside opportunities and so invest less in on-the-job training and increasingly hire on spot markets, which in turn increase opportunities for people seeking to change jobs. In Japan, the cost of missing outside opportunities is on the increase. (p.296)

The abundant presence of formalized reciprocity in Japanese society during the high growth decades counterbalanced the lack of interpersonal trust. Cooperation was not affected by low social capital. The goals were clear and the public highly motivated to work for improved general welfare. Cooperation paid off. The material standard of the average Japanese was vastly improved in a few decades. There was ample proof of reciprocity between authority and group, between political leadership and public. Yamagishi writes: "It came to be widely

accepted that this economic success was the product of uniquely Japanese ways of organizing labor and business that derived from a collectivist culture" (p.295).

Today urbanization has weakened extended family and community ties. Recession grinds on. The state has been unable to build a welfare state to fill in where family obligations no longer obliges. The public no longer sense that reciprocity from their leaders that is so important for transactions in Japanese culture. The lack of interpersonal trust has become a problem.

Diamond writes: "Voluntary cooperation is greatly facilitated by interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity and these cultural orientations in turn are fostered by (but also deepen) 'networks of civic engagement', in which citizens are drawn together as equals in 'intense horizontal interaction'" (1999 p.225). The cultural orientations in Japan have facilitated voluntary cooperation through norms of reciprocity. Interpersonal trust has played an insignificant part in this configuration. The Japanese public will continue to build "networks of civic engagement" to quote Diamond, but they will not necessarily be "drawn together as equals in "intense horizontal interaction".

4.6   The Political Institutions: Inclusive Citizenship

The final requirement of a modern representative democracy is inclusive citizenship. It is the logical consequence of intrinsic equality, discussed in the beginning of the paper. In governing the state inclusive citizenship ensures that equal consideration is given to the interests of all. (Dahl 2000 p.98)

4.6.1   Inclusive citizenship in Japan

Inclusive citizenship is granted in the Japanese Constitution of 1947. All able-minded adult Japanese nationals are political equals on Election Day. 99 per cent of the population are Japanese nationals, thus, Japan is close to fulfilling the requirement by including close to the entire adult population.

For the remaining one per cent of the population, however, is not easy to obtain a Japanese citizenship. Although people who have resided in Japan for at least five consecutive years and fulfill a range of other vaguely defined conditions may be eligible to apply for Japanese citizenship, it is a far more complex and time consuming process to actually get such an application approved. Japan does not allow multiple citizenships, which means that new citizens will have to give up their previous citizenship(s) (japan-guide.com 2005). Once the application is approved the new citizen may either choose a Japanese name from a list or translate one's name into katakana, a Japanese script system used especially for foreign imports. In 2003, 15,000 new citizenships were granted, comprising a tiny number out of the total population of 127.4 million (nationmaster.com 2005).

Because of the highly homogenous composition of the population and relative isolation, being a Japanese national simply means being Japanese. There has been

international pressure on the Japanese government to increase the number of new citizens and so make full citizens out of the many thousand foreigners with permanent residence status. However, the conservative political leadership and the broad public have been in agreement to keep the status quo. "Japan is not a country that celebrates diversity", writes Schwartz (2003 p.4). An influx of foreigners threatens the homogeneity of society. In addition there is the widely shared belief mentioned earlier that foreigners are responsible for the rise in crime. The debate over the voting rights of non-Japanese nationals in local election is not new. Still, a growing number of Japanese, especially among the younger generation, now agree that foreigners living permanently in Japan should be given the right to vote. This remains an emotional issue however, particularly so when the issue is voting rights for prewar immigrant groups. The total number of Asians in this group is about 500,000 people. Currently they have special permanent resident status. There has been no encouragement from officials or the general public for them to acquire Japanese citizenship. (Kakuchi 2000)

4.6.2 Demographic Challenges

According to United Nations projections, Japan is set to diminish its population by a quarter over the next forty years if the current fertility rate of 1.39 children per woman remains unchanged (nationmaster.com 2005). The potential consequences of the population implosion are challenging indeed. There is a strong link between economic growth and population. Journalist Michael Meyer writes: "Demographic change magnifies all of a country's problems, social as well as economic" (2004 p.46). The political leadership in Japan as well as the general public is acutely aware of the difficulties ahead due to the aging society and the low birth rates (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 1999). In coming decades Japan will need increasing services from nurses and health care workers. Changes in the population's age composition suggest health care personnel will have to come from abroad. Managers in the manufacturing sector will face shortages in laborers as well. While the need for imported labor rises, so will anxiety over immigration. "Along with the increased labor shortages, there will be an erosion of the nation's savings surplus and a reversal of the trade surplus. The labor shortage issue will only be able to be dealt with by relocating an ever-increasing amount of industry abroad, or by importing, on a massive scale, foreign workers" predicts Hiroshi Ueda, of the World Health Organization Kobe Centre, quoted in J@pan.Inc Magazine (Al-Badri 2005). Insecurity over the future is taking its toll; depression and suicide rates are skyrocketing while birth rates are at an all-time low. (Curtin 2004b; nationmaster.com 2005) Over the next few decades Japan and its inhabitants will need to review their stance on foreign immigration and citizenship or face the disintegration of society that demographic developments will bring.

5   Conclusion

In the introduction of the case-study we set out to study six institutions essential to large-sale democratic states. The case-study revealed that all six institutions are in place and at work, albeit not necessarily in proximity to the formal democratic rules. The difficult last ten years have not introduced new actors on the political arena promoting alternative systems of government. The system of governance remains stable, indicating that even as the present political system is facing serious challenges it works well enough.

O'Donnell writes that pervasive particularism (clientelism), delegative rule, and weak horizontal accountability are the typical attributes found in primarily informally institutionalized polyarchies (1996 p.45). Assessing Japan by the facts we have presented here, Japan is a mainly informally institutionalized polyarchy. The two possible draw-backs O'Donnell mentions: reasserted and maintained pre-democratic authoritarian practices due to the lack of a control system; and, that powerful political and economical interests get preferential consideration and accommodation when policy is shaped and implemented are both present.

Summing up in short some of the characteristics of the six democratic institutions in Japan today: In recent years new laws (Election and Campaign Fund Reforms 1994; NPO Law 1998) have been passed aiming for greater democratization. The new laws affects the institutions of *Elected Officials; Free, Fair and Frequent Elections;* and *Associational Autonomy*. Although Electoral and Campaign Fund Reform so far made little difference, the NPO Law is showing results. These reforms were initiated by the Diet, that is, by elected officials, suggesting that a democratic political culture is present among the political elite in Japan. However, the creation of new laws in these areas can also be viewed as a measure of self-preservation by the polity in times of wide-spread voter alienation. Survey data clearly indicates that a democratic political culture is present on a mass level. The political process works in a non-transparent, unresponsive and unaccountable manner and remains the exclusive domain of a small elite. The political establishment is informally organized and institutionalized.

A trait shared among primarily informally institutionalized polyarchies is the actual weak standing of civil rights and liberties as well as low levels of citizen participation in the political sphere writes O'Donnell (1996 p.46). The examination of *Freedom of Expression* and *Alternative Sources of Information* revealed precisely that. *Freedom of Expression* is not utilized as a tool that can bring about political change. There is little public debate on political issues. Media does not provide the public with a forum where policy may be discussed and questioned. Access to *Alternative Sources of Information* is limited through the use of press clubs. There is little display of a variety of opinions in mainstream

media. Differences tend to be played down, as harmony and consensus are highly emphasized virtues in Japanese culture.

Finally, the institution of *Inclusive Citizenship* has never truly been challenged in Japan. Formally Inclusive Citizenship is in place. However, in the presence of an overwhelming majority—99 per cent of the population—and an officially sanctioned national culture, national identity and its implications have never been questioned. A Japanese national and a Japanese citizen have remained one and the same thing. A nationalistic perception linking origin and citizenship remains unchallenged.

We set out to inquire if Japan is a *modern* democracy in that we attempted to find out whether the principle of intrinsic equality is consolidated among its citizens. We found that under democratic governance Japan became immensely economically successful over a span of only two decades, earning the political leadership mandate and solid legitimacy. The democratic system became stabilized in the form it had. The prompt and abundant delivery of wealth and security removed the impetus for greater citizen participation in the political process. Further democratization developments ceased early on: Compared to the situation under the earlier imperial regime, affluence was served up with extensive civil liberties.

Japan has changed tremendously from the Occupation till today. Wealth was methodically distributed during the high growth decades resulting in a society where the majority was middle-class. Today this middle majority is rapidly disappearing. The gap in income between the poor and the wealthy is increasing with growing tensions in society as a consequence. Unemployment and an aging population are adding additional strain.

On another level Japan has changed very little, namely in the way society is organized socially. The very clear boundaries of this island nation, the one people that lives within its borders and the cultivated homogeneity in culture and practices have left Japan relatively insulated to influences and ideas from outside. In addition, there has been little immigration, thus further isolating the Japanese from exposure to other ideas, people and cultures. The traditions and practices which organize social interaction when it comes to groups as well as individuals have remained virtually untouched. If anything, the social organizational pattern has been reinforced throughout the postwar period and still is. The officially endorsed form of social organization has resulted in a trained and culturally valued obedience enabling traditional pre-democratic authoritarianism to continue in practice and habit. The political leadership, as this study have made evident, have remained in the hand of a small elite and in some cases handed down from one generation to the next. In addition, the initial democratic regimes' performances were astounding. The economic success was accredited to the particulars of Japanese group oriented culture and so the organizational pattern with its virtues of obedience, diligence and endurance became a source of great national pride. Any tampering with this proven formula for success is a hard sell.

From a developing democracy point of view some aspects of Japanese democracy is *tatemae*, but to the Japanese that is the way things are. *Tatemae*

democracy is not perceived as a lesser form of democracy by Japanese citizens; it is simply democracy.

The theoretical focus of this paper has been the principle of Intrinsic Equality; the assumption that in a representative democracy all able-minded citizens are political equals when it comes to governing, regardless of wealth, religion, sex, ethnic origin or any other trait or characteristic. Throughout the examination of the case we have encountered examples revealing that the democratic system has had little effect on the way society is organized in Japan. The initial democracy supporting conditions of one country, one people, one culture, does not appear to have facilitated consolidation of *the principle of intrinsic equality* in Japan, as the traditional hierarchically ordered social order has, so far, not been questioned or challenged. The organizational pattern remains hierarchical, authoritarian and group-oriented, thus, does not nurture the assumption of individual intrinsic equality. Furthermore, the tatemae/honne concept may hamper development of a truly consolidated principle of intrinsic equality in that there is unanimous agreement on the formal democratic framework. Intrinsic equality is a constitutional fact; how it is really utilized and/or protected is beside the point in a Japanese context.

Based on the empirical evidence presented here, we argue that *Intrinsic Equality* remain an alien notion to the Japanese. Consequently, if intrinsic equality is a defining characteristic of *modern* representative democracy as Dahl and Diamond claim, then at present, Japan is not a modern democracy.

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