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Roger W. Bowen. *Japan's Dysfunctional Democracy: The Liberal Democratic Party and Structural Corruption.* Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2003. ix + 139 pp. $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7656-1103-1.

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Democracy in Japan?

The argument of this book is that Japan's democracy, though real, is dysfunctional and is plagued by structural corruption (*kozo oshoku*), since it suffers from personalism, favoritism, bribery, cronyism, and money politics (*kinken seiji*). Bowen presents the case for Japanese exceptionalism in terms of its electoral system, as corrupt leaders are often reelected to office by the voters. He also points to declining voting rates, rapid turnover in prime ministers, and increase in independent voters in arguing the case for a political system in considerable crisis. However, with regard to these points, Japanese voting participation does in fact fluctuate (usually ranging from 50 to 67.5 percent–the higher end much higher than the average in the United States). Prime Minister Koizumi was elected with a landslide victory, apparently indicating considerable enthusiasm from the electorate. And, Koizumi Junichiro has remained in power since 2001, although Bowen predicted that he would not last in office, now planning his departure from office in fall 2006. It is not clear why the rise in independent or non-aligned voters would pose a problem for a democratic system, particularly since Bowen laments the dominance of the Liberal Democratic party as a one party system for the last fifty years; as he points out, the party is neither liberal nor democratic. One positive sign related to recent politics in Japan which suggests a degree of democratization is the election of a Diet with one third women in 2005. It also appears that Koizumi has exercised a degree of independent power, perhaps defying the predictions of Bowen and many other Japanologists. Has he been able to overcome the political importance of factions and even if so, will his political heirs be able to continue this trend?-Bowen does point out that despite his touted "new style" of leadership, Koizumi conformed to traditional practice by giving most cabinet seats to his own faction and that of a key political operative, Hashimoto.

Bowen is correct in pointing to the absence of a competing party and ideology to challenge the Liberal Democratic Party's primacy. However, other nations that are universally viewed as democratic, such as Sweden, also have had one-party dominance for a lengthy period of time. Bowen is also on target in analyzing the lack of transparency and openness in the Japanese political system. Occasionally, however, his views verge on conspiracy theory. He alludes to "kingmakers" who are "unclean, powerful people"–*kagemusha*, or "shadow shoguns"(pp. 29-30). It would be useful to have more information about this group–who they are and how they function.

Many of the criticisms that Bowen lodges at the Japanese system–money politics, pork barrel, gerrymandering, discrimination against particular groups of citizens–are also true of the United States and perhaps Italy and other nations. In fact, the book, in a somewhat disconcerting fashion, often jumps back and forth between American and Japanese politics–repeating examples of wrongdoing by American politicians. Among those he cites are Marion Barry, with whom Japanese readers are probably not familiar as the former mayor of Washington, D.C., and John McCain, whose fortunes, like those of many Japanese politicos, have risen again after his earlier misdeeds. Data which suggest that the cost of running for office is greater in Japan than the United States need further refinement and explanation. Bowen's use of the term "iron triangle" to depict the Japanese system–as linking bureaucrats, members of the business community and politicians–was initially coined to describe politics in the United States. What may be more unique to Japan (although perhaps not to a number of European nations) is the dominant role of the bureaucracy. According to Bowen, *zoku* (political tribes) are the glue that hold the triangles together–so the case for bureaucratic control seems weakened by his own argument. Bowen argues its role is antithetical to democracy–but then what can be said of Scandinavian and other nations? One unusual aspect of politics in Japan which

Bowen describes well is the tendency of voters to support the children of corrupt officials at the polls–a distinct form of "legacy" politics. There is certainly a measure of ambiguity that needs to be further explained when examining the role of the voting public in Japan, including its apparent lack of confidence in the political system.

Bowen contends that politics in Japan is more important than law–and that the nation has a government of men (and women?) and not law. It will be interesting to assess the role of factions, future prime ministers, *koenkai* or local support groups, the bureaucracy, and other elements which portend change or more of the same in the post-Koizumi era.

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