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Ray Christensen. *Ending the LDP Hegemony: Party Cooperation in Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. vii + 228 pp. $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-2295-8; $52.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-2230-9.

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This concise study of party politics in Japan is an important contribution to the literature not only on Japan, but on comparative politics in general. Ray Christensen correctly observes that there is a clear bias in favor of winners in all competitive relationships. This is nowhere more evident than in politics where losers are dismissed as flawed, incompetent, or worse. Most studies of parties and elections focus on the winners and analyze the reasons for their success. Christensen's purpose is to correct this bias by focusing primarily on opposition parties in Japan's postwar political history.

In 1955, the Liberal and Democratic parties joined forces to become the Liberal Democratic Party. The LDP dominated Japanese politics, winning all elections and making cabinet appointments, until 1989. During the nearly four decades of LDP hegemony, the four main opposition parties–the Japan Socialist Party, the Japan Communist Party, the Democratic Socialist Party, and the Clean Government Party–were never able to effectively challenge the LDP's control of the machinery of government, either alone or in combination. In 1989, the LDP lost control of the upper house of parliament, the House of Councilors. In 1993, the LPD lost control of the more important lower house, the House of Representatives. After a brief period during which a coalition of seven opposition parties controlled the House of Representatives, the LDP returned as the dominant political party. At first, the LDP was dependent upon a coalition with the Socialists but by 1996 it was close to a majority.

This study focuses upon cooperative efforts among parties to maximize their electoral success. The emphasis is upon the opposition parties, but efforts to fashion cooperative relationships by the LDP are also considered. Much of the literature on Japanese parties and elections contends opposition parties have failed to effectively challenge the LDP because of poor leadership and misguided electoral strategies. One reason why opposition parties have not ousted the LDP is because, with the exception of the Communists, none of them have entered enough candidates in the various contests so that if all had won they would have had a majority in parliament. They seemed content to remain in permanent opposition. Efforts have been made from time to time to cooperate with each other so as to increase their election efficiency. They also sought a measure of power through participation in coalition governments on those occasions when the LDP was unable to capture a clear parliamentary majority.

Christensen contends the opposition parties were more successful than the record would indicate. Their inability to attain majority status has been a function of the nature of the electoral system and the problems that this system has created for cooperation among them. Until the electoral reforms of 1994, elections to the lower house of parliament were conducted in districts with three to five seats each. This meant parties had to be careful not to run too many candidates in each district for fear they might dilute the vote to such an extent that they would fail to capture a single seat.

Among the characteristics of Japanese political parties is their general weakness. Parties are not linked to voters by a sharing of ideological or policy positions. Partisanship overall is limited except for parties on the left. Communist party loyalists are the most wedded to an ideological blueprint. Instead voters support candidates because of the efforts by candidate support groups working directly with voters. Many opposition parties have exploited connections with labor unions. Also, voting behavior is strongly influenced by friends, family, and coworkers.

Party campaigns have not been characterized by efforts to mobilize voters through an appeal to their expectations. Information manipulation, especially by means of television, is constrained by law. Instead party politics have involved maneuvering on the part of individual politicians for control of party organization. In the LDP, this has taken the form of factionalism that to some de-

gree has followed policy lines but mostly involves leader-follower relationships. Such relationships are governed by the ability of the leader to raise money for the benefit of followers who use it in turn to curry favor among the voters. Among other things, this results in an electoral system where the people collectively have less impact on government and public policy than is the case in more partisan electoral systems. There is little opportunity for a popular mandate since the voters are not presented with, nor do they seek, clearly drawn alternatives.

Despite its ability to retain control of the government, the LDP has not had a commanding lead in public opinion. By means of a detailed review of the history of party cooperation, Christensen observes the opposition came close on several occasions in the 1970s and 1980s to facilitating a breakup in the LDP. Failure to do so can be attributed to several factors operating in combination. One is complacency among politicians who seem satisfied with the perks of office and who lack the drive to gain control of the policy making machinery of government. Another factor is ideology that frequently resulted in bitter squabbles within and among parties, especially those on the left. The Socialist Party split over ideology. In the 1990s, when it tried to refurbish its image, it failed and has largely gone out of business. Opposition parties are also disadvantaged by being out of power, since they have limited opportunity to take action welcomed by constituents.

On January 24, 1994, parliament approved legislation that dramatically reformed the electoral system. A combination of single-member districts and proportional representation replaced the multiple-member district arrangement. It is generally assumed single-member districts encourage a two-party system. But so far an enduring second party to challenge the LDP has not emerged. Some, such as the New Frontier Party, appeared briefly to be poised to assume the role of viable opposition to the LDP. But defections and fragmentation ended the NFP challenge. Christensen anticipates little stability in the party system in the short run. When an election occurs, "there will be a flurry of coalitions, alliances and mergers as parties and candidates respond to the incentives created by single-member districts" (p. 192). In time, however, the party system should assume more stable patterns. Christensen also sees a measure of success on the horizon for the Communist Party. The Communists may inherit Socialist Party voters and may even enter into cooperative relationships with other parties.

There is no guarantee that the LDP will continue its success in the future. Defections and realignments will continue to be a feature of Japan's party system for some time. The "potential for alliances or political reformulations remains high" (p. 194). The alliance potential is augmented by a growing trend among voters to act independently, what Christensen calls "floating voters." This dynamic in the electoral system expands the opportunity for parties to appeal directly to voters rather than through candidate organizations.

This volume will be welcomed by both the general reader as well as specialists in the fields of Japanese politics and comparative political parties. The text is well organized and clearly written. It is free of technical jargon and the author has used statistics, charts, and graphs sparingly. The professional will be rewarded by the contribution this study makes toward an understanding of political parties, especially those perpetually in opposition. The author touches here and there on theoretical matters such as his fairly extensive consideration of electoral efficiency. Overall this is a balanced approach.

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