

BOOK REVIEW

Sigal Ben-Rafel GALANTI, Nissim OTMAZGIN, and Alon LEVKOWITZ, eds., *Japan's Multilayered Democracy*. Maryland: Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2015. 272 pages. ISBN: 978-1-498502221 (Hardcover). 90.00 USD.

Multilayered Democracy in Japan offers diverse and nuanced insights into Japan's dynamic democracy. The contributors combine close examination of a wide range of perspectives, rooted in Japan's historical experience, to provide the reader with new understandings of the complex and sometimes contradictory ways that Japan has combined imported liberal democratic and market institutions and values with its preexisting political, economic, and social systems.

Joining other recent work, such as Jeff Kingston's *Japan's Quiet Transformation* (RoutledgeCurzon 2004), Yasuo Takeo's *Reinventing Japan* (Palgrave 2007), and Mary Alice Haddad's *Building Democracy in Japan* (Cambridge UP 2012), *Multilayered Democracy in Japan* argues that Japan is a vibrant democracy in which citizens are, like citizens in all democracies, constantly struggling to improve the accountability and responsiveness of their government. The authors explicitly reject the notion that Japan's democracy is somehow incomplete or lesser than other democracies around the world.

After an informative introduction that exposes readers to the argument of the volume and situates it in general democratic theory, the remainder of the volume is organized into three main sections. The first section examines the origins of Japanese democracy in pre-war Japan. Chapters by Lionel Babicz, Kiichi Tachibana, and Kurt Radtke investigate a number of different ways that imported democratic concepts and practices were incorporated into Japan's political institutions and everyday social practices. All three chapters recognize that the roots of Japan's democracy go back to this period and offer insights into which of those roots survived the trauma of the Showa period of fascism and have continued to influence Japan to the present day.

The second section focuses on the democratic transformation of state institutions, particularly those parts of the state that one might expect to be resistant to democracy. Ben-Ami Shillony takes a close look at the evolution of the imperial household, the status and role of the emperor himself, and how the behavior of the members of the royal family and the treatment of the household have changed over time. Sigal Ben-Rafael Galanti investigates the remilitarization of Japan during the Occupation period, and Eyal Ben-Ari brings the story up to the present day through his study of normalization. The section on state institutions wraps up with Wered Ben-Sade's fascinating study of the new Labor Tribunal System, which was put in place in 2004 as part of a broader set of legal reforms intended to increase public participation in the judiciary.

The third section of the book presents a diverse set of perspectives on democratization in political culture and civil society. Nissim Otmazgin teases apart

the relationship between Americanization and democratization in Japanese political culture from the pre-war period until the present. Michal Daliot-Bul studies the legacies of the 1960 student uprisings, and probes the links between democracy and liberalism over time. Ofer Feldman's close study of politicians on TV talk shows offers insights into the role of the media and the ways that politicians frame their interactions with the public. Finally, through the close study of four high-profile politicians, Ayala Klemperer-Markman examines the ways that women's rising role in politics both reflects and influences Japan's dynamic democratic development.

In the volume's conclusion J. A. A. Stockwin takes head on the question of whether or not Japan's democracy is under threat as it faces numerous economic, demographic, and geopolitical challenges. He argues that what is needed is the development of a "responsive radicalism" that can help bring an end to outdated and corrupt practices while pursuing an accountable, responsible government.

Like all good edited volumes, *Multilayered Democracy in Japan* has a number of themes that emerge in multiple chapters, crosscutting the somewhat artificial three-part organization. Three in particular were interesting to me and will be examined in more detail below. All three themes the authors explicitly recognize in their chapters, but there has been no attempt to draw meaningful conclusions about their relationship to democratic development. If I have any criticism of this excellent volume, it is that there were opportunities to go further, to contribute more to our understanding of democracy, that have not been fully explored.

One fascinating recurrent theme is the coexistence of contradictory processes, where some elements were democratic while others were not. We see this in all of the chapters focused on the pre-war period, when Japan was still finding its way to democracy, but it also emerges in several of the post-war period chapters as well. For example, in Shillony's discussion of the imperial household we are forced to recognize that Japan has the last emperor in the world, and imperial households are, in themselves, rather undemocratic institutions. And yet, through a commitment to a pacifist and democratic constitution, the choice of spouses, the management of the household, and the evolving relationship with the public, the reader finds herself recognizing a highly pro-democratic role for Japan's Emperor.

Similarly, when Ayala Klemperer-Markman examines the rise of women in Japanese politics, she finds that many of the most successful women politicians have not won their seats and increased their influence by advocating for women's equality, but rather by championing women as different. These leaders argue that Japan is a better country with them in political office because they are able to see and act in ways that are different from men. To the extent that equality is a democratic value, this outcome is contradictory—equality is gaining by the increase in the proportion of women in the Diet, but that victory is coming precisely because equality is touted as problematic.

All political and social systems are rife with contradictions, and they are highlighted in this volume in nearly every chapter. In some ways there seems to be an unexplored expectation that the ideological contradictions present in the pre-war period should disappear—once democracy is "mature" there should no longer be contradictory tendencies in politics. And yet, after reading this volume, I was

forced to wonder if the opposite might not be true—perhaps one of the reasons that democracies can endure is that they have developed peaceful mechanisms for absorbing and resolving contradiction; thus, ideological contradictions might increase rather than decrease as democracies mature. Since the theme of ideological contradiction is so prominent in so many chapters, I wish the authors had reflected more about its connection to democratic development.

The complex relationship between capitalism and democracy is the second recurrent theme found in a number of the chapters. It is especially prominent in Kurt Radtke's investigation into the difficulty of separating the private from the public sphere in Meiji Japan. Wered Ben-Sade's detailed discussions about the overt conflict between the rights of labor and management highlight just how central to democracy it is to develop a judicial process that can adjudicate those conflicts in a just and peaceful way. Finally, anger about the role that capitalist systems were playing in the political system lay at the root of the 1960s student uprisings covered by Mical Daliot-Bul. While images of students protesting in the streets often capture the essence of democracy in the minds of many, the underlying issues that drove those protesters have in many ways become only more acute in the intervening half century, even as democracy has deepened.

The final theme that I would like to highlight lies at the heart of democracy itself: who are the people and who represents them? Essentially, this is a question about the relationship between ordinary citizens and the elites who hold power and govern the political and economic systems of the country. Whether these elites are imperial, bureaucratic, military, corporate, or elected politicians, they are always acting on behalf of their own personal and collective interests, while at the same time they are called on to represent the people and act on behalf of the public interest. What are the mechanisms through which elites emerge and gain power, and how is that power held in check and transferred to others? Nearly every chapter discusses how these processes work a bit differently in Japan's democracy when compared with democracies found in the West. Wered Ben-Sade's chapter about the Labor Tribunal System is the only chapter that offers explicit lessons, highlighting ways that the West might enhance our own democracies by learning from Japan. As someone who was reading this book not just to learn about Japan, but also to help me think anew about how to improve my own democracy, I wished the authors had explored issues of representation a bit more.

In sum, *Multilayered Democracy in Japan* is a rich and multifaceted book offering important new insights into the complex and dynamic ways that Japanese democracy has developed. It will be a valuable read for students and scholars seeking to learn more about Japan's fascinating political culture.

Mary Alice HADDAD
 Wesleyan University
 mahaddad@wesleyan.edu