

# Parliamentary Opposition under (Post-)One-Party Rule: Japan

TAKASHI INOGUCHI

---

The article first looks at the historical foundations of the contemporary Japanese political system and emphasises the ongoing importance of the country's quasi-federal tradition. It then moves on to characterise the contemporary manifestations of parliamentary politics in three distinctive sub-periods between 1945 and 2007, focusing specifically on the parliamentary opposition in these sub-periods. Lastly, it looks at the future of parliamentary opposition in view of the two strong forces pertaining to it: the growing influence of media, TV and the Internet and the increasing impact of electoral reforms on the outcome of elections.

---

When T.J. Pempel edited a volume entitled *Uncommon Democracies* in 1990, not only Japan but also Italy, Sweden and Israel had a one-party dominant regime. Even Britain and West Germany were regarded as being akin to the regimes covered in the volume.<sup>1</sup> But since then Japan has been the only one-party dominant regime among the advanced industrial democracies, albeit with an 11-month-long out-of-power status registered in 1993–94. Table 1 shows the parliamentary power distribution as of 8 June 2006. The predominant status of the Liberal Democratic Party in the House of Representatives and its less-than-simple majority status in the House of Councillors are clear from the table.

This article gives an account of the Japanese parliamentary opposition which has been a player of a sort under a one-party dominant regime for some half a century. In what follows, first, the historical features of the Japanese political system are briefly summarised to highlight some of the structural conditions that favour a long-standing one-party dominance in a democracy. The time span of this historical summary covers centuries, starting in the late sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The article contends that the floundering of absolutism in late medieval Japan, the quasi-federal arrangements in early modern Japan,

---

Takashi Inoguchi is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Tokyo, Japan and Professor of Political Science at Chuo University, Japan.

I am grateful to John C. Campbell and Tomoaki Iwai for their comments on an earlier draft. Ludger Helms has guided me throughout. To his thoroughness and sense of responsibility as the editor, I send my grattissimo.

The Journal of Legislative Studies, Vol.14, Nos.1/2, March/June 2008, pp.113–132

ISSN 1357-2334 print/1743-9337 online

DOI: 10.1080/13572330801921067 © 2008 Taylor & Francis

TABLE 1  
PARLIAMENTARY POWER DISTRIBUTION IN JAPAN AS OF JUNE 2006

House of Representatives	Party	House of Councillors
292	Liberal Democratic Party	111
113	Democratic Party of Japan + Non-affiliates	–
–	Democratic Party of Japan+ New Green Wind	82
31	New Komei Party	24
9	Japan Communist Party	9
7	Social Democratic Party + Civil League	–
–	Social Democratic Party + Protect Constitution League	6
6	New Nation Party + Japan Party + Non-affiliates	–
–	New Nation Party + New Party Japan + Non-affiliates	5
20	Non-affiliates	5
2	Absent	–
Total	480	242

Source: Narita Norihiko, 'Koakkai (National Diet)', in *IMIDAS, Tokyo: Shueisha, 2007*, p.481.

and the nationwide inclusionary push in modernising Japan have all left their mark on the contemporary Japanese political system. Although it might seem that the historical argument is overstretched, it is very important to address, at least briefly, the nature of Japanese political development before dealing with the parliamentary opposition since 1945. Second, focusing on the post-Second World War period, the article traces the three distinctive sub-periods of Japanese democracy, (1) democracy under military occupation, (2) democracy during state developmentalism and (3) democracy in an era of globalisation. Drawing on the argument made by Ethan Scheiner, it is contended here that one-party dominance was consolidated during the second sub-period of post-war democracy in Japan. Clientelism and the centralised governmental structure were finely tuned during this period. Into the third sub-period the tide of globalisation seems to be eroding some of the key conditions of one-party dominance. Third, we examine the nature of parliamentary opposition in Japan on the basis of the historical evolution of the Japanese political system and its historical and structural settings since 1945.<sup>3</sup>

#### HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS: FLOUNDERED ABSOLUTISM, QUASI-FEDERAL ARRANGEMENTS AND INCLUSIONARY PUSH

The three phrases in the heading above need some explanation: Floundered absolutism refers to the assassination of Nobunaga, a great warrior who put an end to the medieval period in 1582 as he was midway towards military unification of Japan; floundered absolutism means that power in Japan at the time

was decentralised rather than centralised; quasi-federal arrangements mean the early modern rearrangement of the Tokugawa shogun with its monopoly of defence and foreign trade and the provision of semi-autonomy to 300-odd domains for all matters except for the critical one of anti-Tokugawa thought and action; inclusionary push means the nationwide inclusion of the population, abolishing the semi-autonomous domains and the feudal class distinction. The Tokugawa arrangement was a quasi-federal arrangement. Furthermore the Meiji Restoration in 1868 was the inclusionary centralisation by which the nationwide institution and economy were fully created. However, it is important to emphasise that the administrative institution at the highest level, the central bureaucracy, was decentralised to an excessive degree.<sup>4</sup> Once the four feudal class distinctions – warriors, peasants, artisans and merchants – were abolished shortly after the Meiji Restoration, the entire elite corps of warriors lost their jobs. A scramble for jobs took place and the fledgling central bureaucracy accommodated the bulk of them. Those who engineered the Meiji Restoration took the lead and hired like-minded men (who were often men from the same domain) into the central bureaucracy. What happened was that each bureaucratic agency (at least in its early years) was built on the basis of similar domain backgrounds. Hence the strong domination of the Choshu men in the Army, of the Satsuma domain in the Navy, of the Nabeshima domain in the Accounting Office, of men from the Mito, Aizuwakamatsu, and Okazaki domains in the National Police, and so on. The Imperial Constitution dispersed power at all levels under the Emperor whose authority was more symbolic than absolutist. The prime minister was little more than a *primus inter pares*, and any cabinet minister defying him easily caused the fall of the entire cabinet.<sup>5</sup> In this sense the Meiji Restoration inherited much from the early modern Tokugawa arrangements. With its slogan ‘rich nation, strong army’ the Meiji state was seemingly highly centralised on the surface and with regard to the electorate. But at the highest level of the government, it was in fact excessively decentralised with each bureaucratic agency enjoying wide-ranging autonomy and strong veto powers vis-à-vis other rival actors.<sup>6</sup> When the civil service examination system was introduced and meritocratic considerations came to dominate the recruitment processes, the strongly decentralised nature of the central bureaucracy became even more institutionalised.

The post-Second World War political system inherited much of these legacies. In fact, many of the individual components of the ancient regime were brought to perfection. The newly drafted constitution defined the Emperor as the symbol of the nation. The Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, General MacArthur, delegated the entirety of his routine work to the Japanese central bureaucracy after purging some of the conspicuous wartime leaders. Also, universal suffrage was realised immediately after the

start of the military occupation period. All these devices and arrangements were to be given opportunity to blossom when peace and stability dominated Japanese society.

### THREE DISTINCTIVE SUB-PERIODS OF THE POST-WAR POLITICAL SYSTEM

Within our temporal focus, that is, the period between 1945 and 2007, three distinctive sub-periods can be distinguished. During each sub-period, the nature of parliamentary opposition is delineated along with several key features. Having been soundly defeated in the Second World War, Japan was occupied by Allied forces for seven years. The US (specifically General Douglas MacArthur) led the Allies, occupying and reforming Japan by indirect, rather than direct, rule. This choice was based on the perception that the forces were not dealing with the Japanese who had intrepidly resisted throughout a war they had almost no hope of winning, but rather with a Japanese people who welcomed the occupation forces warmly. Moreover, since the US government's top priority was the global confrontation with Communism, it was deemed preferable that as much of the actual governing as possible be turned over to the people of the occupied nation themselves. Few people doubt that the foundations for Japan's contemporary political system were rebuilt during the occupation years.<sup>7</sup> First, the groups in power who had led Japan into war were dissolved and purged. Second, most of the central bureaucrats and personnel, with the exception of war leaders and prominent bureaucrats who conspired with them, were retained nearly *in toto*. Third, the restructuring of the political parties was undertaken mostly by younger bureaucrats who rose to the top during the occupation, middle-aged politicians who were purged as war leaders or conspirators during the war and occupation, and younger politicians who emerged on the scene after the war. This restructuring paved the way for the emergence of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as a centre-right party by 1955. Fourth, freedom of expression, labour unions, and a general election system emerged as part of the new framework put forth under occupation reforms, and the left wing was able to expand its power significantly as well. Fifth, Japanese citizens gradually adapted to the new framework and general elections in particular came to function as a means of conveying public opinion to politicians.

### LDP ADAPTATIONS THROUGH THREE DISTINCT SUB-PERIODS

As the nature of parliamentary opposition in Japan is closely related to the structural features of a one-party dominant regime, we must briefly describe these features. The political priorities during the first sub-period addressed, the years of occupation and reconstruction formed the cornerstone of the

political thinking that later came to be called the Yoshida doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Based on pacifism, this doctrine renounced Japanese participation in war. The Japan–US Security Treaty was designed for the continuation of the military aspects of occupation by Allied forces, leaving Japan markedly dependent on the United States in terms of security. Also devoted to economic growth, the Yoshida doctrine focused on reconstruction to boost Japan to a respected position within the international community. Initially, however, there was an extremely strong domestic opposition to the Yoshida doctrine during the occupation and thereafter, and it took a great deal of work to incorporate this doctrine into the Japanese political structure.

This was an era of intense political conflict in Japan. Immediately after the war, extreme poverty drove a large portion of the population to oppose the government. As recovery and reconstruction gradually began to take hold, the centre-right gained power with strong support from the self-employed. This happened in 1955.<sup>9</sup> The transition to power was instrumental for the founding of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan the same year. The farmland reforms devised under the occupation created a large class of landowning farmers and support for the LDP increased even in outlying rural areas which had been at the heart of the massive pre-war farmers' movement. The growing support from self-employed businessmen in response to government subsidies and other frameworks also fell under this umbrella. Although it is true that the LDP was at times referred to as 'a provincial party', the vast majority of Japan was in fact provincial during the occupation. In this sub-period, policy priorities revolved primarily around economic management policy to ensure economic recovery and reconstruction through government regulation and administrative guidance designed to address various issues: guaranteeing food provisions for the people, guaranteeing energy supplies (coal for thermal power, dams for hydroelectric power, etc.), the processes for obtaining corporate capital from banks and other institutions, and obtaining the foreign currency required to achieve this.

If there was one predominant ministry during this sub-period, it was the Economic Planning Agency (known at the time as the Headquarters for Economic Stabilisation). The driving force behind this agency was the bureaucrats who had graduated from engineering departments and had experienced an economy mobilised for war during the 1930s and 1940s. The low standard of income and the high unemployment rate drove popular opposition to the government. Rising from the ashes was a matter of survival for both the nation and the individual. Based on this popular sentiment against the government, opposition parties enjoyed strong support during this period. Occupation reforms served to strengthen corporate and governmental labour unions, and opposition parties used this energy to their advantage.

Both in the electoral and the parliamentary arena, political conflict was exceptionally intense. There was, more specifically, strong opposition to the country's military relationship with the United States. At the time, factions who felt that welcoming US military bases would embroil Japan in military actions, or serve to invite war against Japan, held greater sway than those who felt it would discourage or prevent Japanese involvement in war. The party that would later become the LDP took the latter stance, while the Japan Socialist Party and the Japanese Communist Party took the former. Another aspect of political contention was the issue of whether building fundamental economic strength to promote national recovery and reconstruction should be given priority or whether greater concern should be given to improving the household finances of Japanese families and individuals. The former was put forth by a group that would later become the LDP, while the Socialist Party and the Communist Party took the latter as their platform.

During the second sub-period, the years of strong economic growth, Japan was a nation following bureaucracy-driven development. Under this model of development, bureaucrats took the lead in directing the strong momentum behind economic development in an attempt to guarantee the most effective management of the national economy.<sup>10</sup>

It was normal procedure for government agencies to present the general principles of policy drafted by themselves to governing parties and the business community. The fact that government agencies have at times been teased with the adage 'bureaucracy overrules politics' illustrates just how strongly Japanese development was ultimately driven by the bureaucrats in government. However, this bureaucracy-driven political structure hardly marked a completely new feature of government and administration in Japan: its roots lie in the Tokugawa period (1603–1867). It was in the early stages of the Tokugawa period that warriors were disarmed and became bureaucrats living in castle towns.<sup>11</sup> This marked a striking contrast to the historical developments in neighbouring Korea, where the Chosun Dynasty brought men of letters and scholars into the bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup>

Although with the Meiji Restoration the governing unit shifted from the feudal clan to the nation, the bureaucracy-driven regime itself remained almost intact. A parliamentary democracy was introduced in stages after the Meiji Restoration, and politicians came to occupy the political landscape in addition to bureaucrats. Japanese politicians were not necessarily part of the bureaucracy, but had a difficult time taking action without the bureaucrats on their side – as is illustrated by the fact that politicians originally emerged as a force in opposition to government, whereas bureaucrats represented the powers-that-be in the government.<sup>13</sup> Although the Japanese Constitution would seem to indicate that politicians hold a higher position than bureaucrats, this was not necessarily the case in constitutional practice.

It was for this reason that among LDP Diet members some were extolled as 'special interest/issue-specific legislators' who wielded considerable influence over policy due to their career histories and experience in specialised areas of party committees and Diet Committees. Though farmers and self-employed businessmen formed the basis of support for the LDP during this period, a new body of support for the party came from the 'new middle-class masses' which emerged as strong economic growth and the accompanying benefits spread throughout the entire country.<sup>14</sup> In the course of events, the relative importance of farmers and self-employed businessmen among LDP supporters declined steadily, which is reflected in the slight drop of the overall number of Diet seats that the party secured in general elections. However, the structural changes at the level of society did not pose too critical a problem for the LDP, as the majority of the Japanese people considered themselves to be part of the new middle-class masses.

The party's high-priority policies during this sub-period were focused on securing Japan's place among the advanced nations and on achieving a stable and competitive economic management that would enable the country to maintain this position.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, macro-economic management and social policy were the top priorities. While the first aspect needs no further explanation, the LDP gradually became more keenly aware that it would need to bolster its social policies if it were to keep the political and electoral support of the new middle-class masses – a realisation that was driven by the stagnation and downward trend in LDP support. As income levels rose, the majority of the population came to identify themselves as part of the new middle-class masses, and the elderly accounted for only 5–7 per cent of the population.

Given the rise in income levels coupled with a decline in the ratio of workers organised in labour unions, one would expect the opposition parties to lose political and electoral support. However, with extreme fluctuations in the overall strength of government and opposition parties, support for the opposition parties in fact rose considerably during this period. The extreme fluctuation in the rate of support can be attributed to the fact that the opposition parties were able at times to attract a significant portion of the massive block of the new middle-classes. While the opposition parties have moved closer to the political trajectory of the governing parties, it is also true that too much similarity between multiple parties can cause conflicts. It is equally true that the constant appeal by opposition parties for greater emphasis on social policies basically prompted the governing parties to prioritise social policies, and opposition parties' advocacy of pacifism has caused the governing parties to give greater weight in their policies to strengthening ties with other nations than the United States. Though support for the opposition parties traditionally came from the social strata among the new middle

classes that value pacifism and equality, this support declined in more than a few mass production/mass consumption industries that acquired foreign currency as market liberalisation steadily advanced. Pacifism can lead to protectionism, and this tendency diluted the influence of this variety of principled stance. It is, however, the nature of politics that governing parties at times lose to opposition parties. There is no shortage of scandals involving bribes, corruption, and slips of the tongue, and it is these scandals that allow the opposition parties to make significant progress in terms of electoral gains.

The third sub-period to be examined is that of globalisation, which spans roughly from 1985 through to the present. It was in 1985 that the Plaza Accord was signed by the G5 nations. The Plaza Accord was a revolutionary agreement that normalised purchases of one currency in another currency. Before this, goods and service trading had been the norm, with very little currency trading taking place. In the one-year period from 1985 to 1986, however, currency trading was 50 to 100 times higher than goods and service trading, and has remained at this level ever since. Dramatically promoting financial integration on a global scale, the Plaza Accord symbolises the galloping stride of globalisation.<sup>16</sup>

Globalisation ignores national borders, it divides national economies, and it facilitates the merger of the highly competitive. The less competitive gradually slide to lower and lower income levels. This increasing intensity of division and reintegration is what defines the period of globalisation. In its broadest sense, globalisation is constantly occurring. With revolutionary progress in computer technology and goods transported daily by air, the momentum behind this phenomenon gained further strength at the end of the twentieth century.

In an era of globalisation, where does the LDP find its base of support? The Japanese citizens who have supported the LDP during this sub-period were those who sympathised with the resolve of the leaders to take an optimistic and aggressive approach to forging new roads in the face of the future uncertainties presented by globalisation.<sup>17</sup> They have been won over by the enthusiasm and courage of the leaders and their willingness to take risks. The majority of the population has a vague sense that, despite the fact that government deregulation and market liberalisation symbolised by postal privatisation may seriously affect their own lives, Japan will face a difficult future without these changes. This public sentiment has been based on Prime Minister Koizumi's unparalleled enthusiasm and courage in taking on these risks himself, and was further reinforced by the Prime Minister's skill in concisely expressing carefully thought-out ideas during the election campaign. In this sense, the body of support for the LDP comes more from those individuals with a strong belief that Japan should now venture optimistically into the vast uncertainty of the future, rather than from a group of people characterised by similar sociological attributes.



High priority policies have shifted from macroeconomic management to those designed to alter economic standards and regulations as Japan faces the challenges presented by the irreversible advancement of globalisation. Equally important are policies that address financial relief for the less competitive in society who are left behind in the rough seas of globalisation, as well as programmes to help these people maintain their standard of living without losing hope for the future. In many respects, Japan has yet to establish a welfare safety net, and even in some areas where there would appear to be such a safety net we are beginning to see signs of stress. The social policies (the pension system, social welfare, nursing care, healthcare and the like) put in place during the years of strong economic growth, when young people made up a significant proportion of the country's population, are causing economic strain due to the considerable changes in demographics and the decline of economic growth. The lack of gender equality is striking, and any change must defy social mores and prejudices. It is clear that, first and foremost, revolutionary change in corporate culture is necessary.

Globalisation, however, has brought to the fore a number of issues that had not previously been considered to pose significant problems. Competing in an environment of globalisation without addressing these issues is becoming increasingly difficult. For this reason, with the exception of deregulation and cutting national government expenditure, we are seeing less policy emphasis on the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and other ministries that have traditionally been allocated large portions of the national budget. Naturally, the issues taken up by individual extraordinary ministers within the Cabinet may at times bring certain policies to the fore. This has been the case with the move to postal privatisation endorsed by the Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy and the prominence of the position of Minister of State for Gender Equity and Social Affairs. Only ministers of state can make a particular ministry or agency predominant. At the larger ministries and agencies, bureaucrats offer strong resistance to political manoeuvring, and government agency culture is not conducive to prompt decision-making or swift action. With policy allocation being a matter of long-established routine, it is difficult to marshal the will within agencies to redesign policy. This is another reason why the prime minister and cabinet ministers are taking increasingly prominent roles in driving government policy. The Cabinet and the Prime Minister's office are now more directly in charge than bureaucrats for an increasing number of matters. This process has been prominently referred to as 'presidentialisation'.<sup>18</sup>

There can be no doubt that the cabinet and the prime minister have been the dominant government agencies during the globalisation sub-period.

Although there are significant systemic differences between presidential and prime ministerial systems, globalisation serves to position prime ministers as presidents in countries that have no such elected official. In countries with presidents that merely play a symbolic role, the prime minister may effectively act like a president. In cases of prime ministers playing no more than a symbolic role, ministerial secretaries, campaign strategists, or political consultants work behind the scenes on issues related to globalisation. Against a backdrop of critical public opinion, the slightest statement by a politician is carefully weighed and measured against anticipated negative public reaction. In this particular environment, even the employment of specialists carefully crafting these political statements cannot guarantee success.

During this sub-period of globalisation, where do the opposition parties find their bases of support? The recent transition in the Lower House electoral system from medium-sized to smaller electoral districts marked a significant element of reform that changed the structural parameters under which both governing and opposition parties vie for a single seat in a single electoral district. No less significantly, with government spending strained to the limit, the status quo of granting large-scale public works expenditures and subsidies in the form of local transfers from the central government to local governments, or budgetary subsidies to implement large-scale social policy as an agent of the central government, is no longer viable. In order to obtain public works expenditures or subsidies, in the form of matching funds, local governments must secure budgets equal to or greater than the expenditure disbursed by the central government. Pork barrel spending and other funding schemes will no longer come from the central government, at least not on a regular basis. Voters are no longer enticed by the promises of Diet members to bring money back from the central government (see Table 2).<sup>19</sup>

What is it then that gains a politician the support of voters? Today, much depends on the political message sent out to the electorate. Ozawa Ichiro's slogan in the Chiba by-election, for example, was 'From the line of vision of the people'. To illustrate his point, he spoke on the campaign trail standing on a pile of crates and rode his bicycle around his district to speak directly with the people. He did not emulate Koizumi's much-lauded boldness, skilful rhetoric, or his method of giving speeches to large groups of onlookers from the top of a campaign truck. In fact, Ozawa had a great sense of competition with Koizumi. He pursued a campaign strategy based on face-to-face meetings with each of the organizations in the district. Not long ago, such 'street-side campaigning' was the forte of the LDP, while exaggerated rhetoric was what the opposition parties were known for. Despite the explicit confrontation on political issues, with little chance of opposition parties taking the actual reins of government, these parties were content to stay with grandeur and overstatement, resigning themselves to a permanent position outside

power. Today, however, the situation has changed. The primary support for the sweeping LDP policy vision comes from critical voters and those who are anxious about an uncertain future; to them the party appeals with its rhetoric and an image of courage and energy. The reason for choosing this strategy over detailed explanations of policy on the campaign trail is that the public finds it difficult to comprehend concrete policies in the face of inevitable cut-backs in government spending, increasingly strong signs that the tax rate will rise, and intensifying international competition.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, the opposition parties have forgone the strategic exaggeration that parties resigned to being permanently in opposition have conventionally adopted. Taking advantage of the fact that they are not in charge of government policy today, they have taken up a strategy of setting themselves slightly apart from the realm of day-to-day policy, emphasising instead the human touch: shaking hands and speaking with as many voters as possible throughout their districts,

TABLE 2  
FEATURES OF THE LDP-DOMINATED POLITICAL SYSTEM IN JAPAN IN THREE  
HISTORICAL SUB-PERIODS

---

<i>Military Occupation</i>	
LDP (predecessor) support base	Self-employed farmers, self-employed businessmen
Priority policies	Employment, energy, financing, obtaining foreign currency, industrial infrastructure
Predominant government ministry	Economic Planning Agency
Public sentiment and concerns	Survival
Reasons for supporting opposition parties	Platform for elimination of poverty, removal of military bases
<i>State Developmentalism</i>	
LDP support base	New middle-class masses
Priority policies	Macroeconomic policies, social policies
Predominant government ministries	Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health and Welfare
Public sentiment and concerns	Desire for economic rebuilding
Reason for supporting opposition parties	Platform for peace and equality
<i>Globalisation</i>	
LDP support base	Voters who appreciate optimism in the face of stresses from globalisation
Priority policies	Value of currency, science and technology, gender, population
Predominant government ministries	Prime Minister and his Cabinet
Public sentiment and concerns	Desire for risk-sharing and optimistic approach to future
Reason for supporting opposition parties	Platform for community-based system with a more human touch

---

Source: Rien T. Segers, *A New Japan for the Twenty-First Century: An Inside Overview of Current Fundamental Changes*. London: Routledge, 2008.

listening to their troubles, providing a sympathetic ear, and creating the impression that they are the ones who really represent people and respond to the voice of the people.

#### PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION IN THREE DISTINCTIVE SUB-PERIODS

Having described the historical background and the structural features of the current one-party dominant regime in Japan, we have now come to the point where the parliamentary opposition in Japan can be characterised. The nature, composition, issues and electoral bases of the parliamentary opposition vary considerably between the different sub-periods. Let us compare and contrast them.

The key actors in each period are Miyamoto Kenji, a communist leader, Eda Saburo, a socialist leader who became the leader of structural reform of capitalism *à la* Togliatti in Italy, and Ozawa Ichiro, a leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, a defector from the Liberal Democratic Party (see Table 3). Miyamoto was vehemently anti-American and opposed the Japan–United States Security Treaty. The Communist Party was backed by trade unions and supported broadly by pacifist-leaning men on the street. The parliamentary opposition in the first sub-period often took to the streets against the low wage levels, the Security Treaty, and the government’s moves towards revising the constitution. The Communists were replaced by the United Socialists soon after the military occupation ended. Once independence was achieved and poverty eradication progressed steadily, the electoral support for Communists diminished.

The second sub-period was characterised by state developmentalism and high growth of the economy. Exposed to excessively negative consequences of the high economic growth in the second sub-period, the parliamentary opposition opposed state developmentalism and argued for more equal distribution of income, alleviating environmental aggravation, and reducing

TABLE 3  
FEATURES OF THE OPPOSITION IN JAPAN UNDER THE LDP-DOMINATED  
POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THREE HISTORICAL SUB-PERIODS

	<b>Military rule 1945–52</b>	<b>State developmentalism 1952–85</b>	<b>Globalisation 1985–today</b>
Key actors	Miyamoto Kenji	Eda Saburo	Ozawa Ichiro
Nature	anti-Americanism	anti-state developmentalism	anti-market liberalisation
Composition	Communists Socialists	Socialists Buddhist Sect	Omnibus
Issues	alliance	hazards of growth	hazards of globalisation
Electoral bases	workers, wage earners	new middle-class mass urban	disintegrated new middle mass non-metropolitan

working hours. But, again, once the fruits of high economic growth reached virtually each and every corner of Japanese society, the Socialists and the politically active Buddhists were 'tamed' into the system. The electoral bases of the parliamentary opposition coalesced with what was called the new middle-class masses. The intermittent scandals and mishaps of the government and the governing party occasionally handed the parliamentary opposition centre stage. But their strength was not normally sustained for a prolonged period of time, and much less were they able to capture power.

The third sub-period is one during which the tide of globalisation is steadily permeating Japanese society and some of its effects resulted in protest from those negatively affected. Government deregulation in such areas as the postal service, and market liberalisation in such areas as agriculture and financial service, undermines the electoral bases of the governing party. Only when the government succeeds in striking a chord among the electorate, as in the general election called for by Prime Minister Koizumi who turned the issue of postal privatisation into an issue of confidence in himself, can the governing party win an election overwhelmingly. In contrast to the second sub-period, the electorate is not composed primarily of economic blocs, such as unionised workers, the agricultural sector, the steel sector, the construction sector, self-employed merchants and so on. The electorate of the third sub-period has been marked by multi-dimensional atomisation. The contrast becomes clear when one compares the electoral strength of sectoral interest groups and associations like the postal service, medical doctors, and war veteran families in statistics indicating the number of votes association-backed candidates receive.<sup>21</sup>

#### LEGISLATIVE OPPOSITION

Although the parliamentary opposition in Japan is constrained by the dominance of central bureaucracy in the pre-legislative process, the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party in the National Diet, and the yearning of people for continuity and stability, the opposition still finds some room for manoeuvre and may influence legislative politics. In fact, under one-party dominance the opposition displays its characteristics most clearly in the legislative process.

Apart from the exceptionally close cooperation between the governing party and the numerous bureaucratic agencies on the legislative agenda and schedule, four major features of Japanese legislative politics may be noted: (1) bureaucratic dominance which means that most legislative bills put forward are cabinet-sponsored bills which have been drafted by bureaucratic agencies;<sup>22</sup> (2) the intense scrutiny of bills within the governing party, which marks a rather informal and non-transparent process; (3) the salience of two

parliamentary committees, the committee of National Diet affairs and the committee of Rules and Administration, which deal with the nitty-gritty of parliamentary logrolling and other compromises and confrontation, and whose internal processes are marked by informality and limited transparency; (4) plenary and committee sessions of the National Diet are not centre stages of legislative politics, instead the large majority of issues are settled informally either within the governing party or within the committees of National Diet affairs and Rules and Administration before bills are passed on to the policy area-related committees of the National Diet;<sup>23</sup> and (5) bills sponsored by parliamentary members are few in number and often ill-fated unless they are linked with cabinet-sponsored bills.<sup>24</sup>

In the framework of legislative politics in Japan, the opposition has a few devices at their disposal that may be used to influence the legislative process and its outcomes. (1) The Japanese polity operates a bicameral system in which the House of Representatives is the more powerful chamber in legislative politics. Even if the House of Councillors votes down a bill, the House of Representatives can override its veto in a second round of voting. This notwithstanding, the House of Councillors is an important player in Japanese legislative politics. Withheld support for a bill may inflict major damage to the government's legislative agenda, as bills may be lost, if not for good, at least for the current legislative session. The parliamentary process in the Diet is based on the principle of legislative discontinuity, that is, draft bills which have not been voted upon within a given parliamentary session are abandoned and must start from scratch in the following session (except in those cases where draft bills are voted on with some added agendas for discussion). This system gives some space to the opposition as well as to dissenters within the governing party as prolonging or even blocking the committee and plenary sessions concerned would obviously delay the government's legislative schedule and potentially jeopardise its legislative priorities.

Since the House of Councillors is mostly elected on the basis of a PR system which tends to give some advantages to the opposition parties, the latter tend to be better represented in the House of Councillors than in the House of Representatives whose members are primarily elected on the basis of an Anglo-American-style plurality system. In Japan's one-party dominant system, the major governing party tends to retain a majority in the House of Representatives.<sup>25</sup> In the House of Councillors, the primarily PR-based selection of members has tended to create a power configuration in which the governing parties have rarely held a clear-cut majority.

Legislative proceedings under the pre-war Imperial Constitution focused on the parliamentary plenary session. It was modelled after the British system. The first reading of a draft bill was conducted in the plenary session. The second reading took place in a special committee set up for

each bill. It was here where the opposition had space and time to oppose or amend the (mostly cabinet-sponsored) bills under consideration. The third reading, to be followed by the final vote, was conducted in the plenary session. Using the American system as a role model, the post-war constitution strengthened the parliamentary committees. However, whereas the American model has been marked by a combination of powerful legislative committees and a constitutional separation-of-powers structure in which the bulk of legislation does not directly involve the executive, and power within the legislative branches tends to be dispersed, the Japanese system is still a genuinely parliamentary regime with a fusion-of-power structure that is based on the governing parties' parliamentary majority.

In the committees, this role involves putting down cabinet-sponsored bills. Often the opposition is very constructive to the legislative process, in that it helps to clarify agenda setting for a bill as well as monitoring the administrative process associated with the implementation of a given bill. Also, in the plenary the opposition's role does not exactly involve aggressively challenging the government. With the fairly strict party discipline imposed on the parliamentarians' voting, the passage or non-passage of bills is highly predictable.<sup>26</sup>

The typology of legislatures proposed by F.E. Loake, as applied by Sone Yasunori and Iwai Tomoaki,<sup>27</sup> is helpful for a better understanding of the Japanese legislative opposition. Loake's key concepts are responsiveness and effectiveness. Responsiveness refers to the legislature's key task of forming the collective preference of the electorate's deputies called parliamentarians. Its key role is to debate and its prototype is Great Britain. Through parliamentary debates, policy agendas are made clearer, and also the implementation of government policies are being monitored. By effectiveness Loake means ensuring swift and efficient policy decisions. The legislature's key role is to legislate and its prime example is considered to be the United States.

Overall, the Japanese legislature looks more like that of Great Britain. Yet the major difference between the legislatures of Japan and Great Britain is that the cabinet and the governing party retain their respective autonomy in Japan whereas in Britain the cabinet and the governing party are one and the same (at least compared to the situation in Japan). The Japanese cabinet is tied very closely to the central bureaucracy that, for its part, has retained a high degree of autonomy. The governing party plays the role of articulating societal interests and aggregating them in harmony with government policy as much as possible through the governing party's committees, the Policy Affairs council and the General Affairs council. The coordinating role is formally played by the secretary general of the governing party and the chief cabinet secretary of the government. In such a system the role of the opposition is bound to be

limited. Opposition parties essentially focus on challenging cabinet-sponsored bills in the plenary and committee sessions in ways that would undermine the government's popularity and maximise their own electoral fortunes. In doing so, opposition parties have to try to take advantage of the fairly brief period of the ordinary session held for 150 days a year. Given the normally overcrowded legislative needs, prolonging committee sessions, and especially the budget committee session, is the strategy most easily resorted to by the opposition.

There have been several recent changes at the level of legislative politics that seem worth noting. To begin with, the electoral support structure of both the governing and opposition parties is no longer based primarily on certain economic and social sectors but has become much more complex.<sup>28</sup> Electorates have many faces whereby they identify themselves. They are atomised and have multiple loyalties. Similarly, the political agendas of parliamentarians have become much more complex. Members of Parliament have multiple interests and beliefs to defend and advance in the legislative process. Those parliamentarians who specialise in guarding or advancing the interests of one policy area are referred to as 'legislative tribes'. Construction, agriculture, transport, health and welfare, education, science and technology, and finance are among those policy areas that have formed the basis of legislative tribe building. The governing party set the principle of each parliamentarian affiliated with one policy committee of the governing party, which facilitated the growth of legislative tribes with a specialised policy expertise.<sup>29</sup> However globalisation permeates; parliamentarians increasingly want to belong to a number of policy committees and, responding to growing pressure, the governing party has allowed them to hold multiple memberships.

Another important changing feature of legislative politics in contemporary Japan relates to the issue of party discipline in parliamentary voting, and the informal mechanism installed to achieve high levels of party discipline. The governing party has held very strictly to the principle of party discipline in parliamentary voting. To achieve the highest possible party cohesion in parliamentary voting, the informal stages of the legislative process within the governing party (to be managed by its General Affairs Council) have been designed to produce a broad consensus, or in fact unanimity, on any bill considered. But this principle was broken in May 2005 when the LDP held a vote on the postal privatisation bill, and some dissenting voices were suppressed in a call for the overall positive effects of the measure. It looks as if the key principle of achieving consensus in the General Affairs Council of the governing party has been broken since.<sup>30</sup> This is one symptom of the globalisation age when national consensus has become much more difficult to achieve since the forces of globalisation fragment the previously well-integrated national economy and its various sectors.



As to the opposition parties, the legislative tribes within the opposition camp have largely ceased to exist. Those who single-mindedly focused on the protection of Article 9 of the constitution stipulating no use of force and the full protection of union rights have become increasingly feeble. Also, the party discipline in parliamentary voting among the opposition parties has weakened. Where party discipline is imposed strictly, it only increases the likelihood that dissenters will consider the exit option. On the whole, legislative opposition in Japan has been relatively moderate. During the second sub-period, the largest opposition party, the Japan Socialist Party, registered some 70 per cent of voting, together with the Liberal Democratic Party, for cabinet-sponsored bills. During the third period, the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan registered an even much higher rate of voting for cabinet-sponsored bills.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions emerge from the analysis above. Conclusion one is that parliamentary opposition in Japan has been somewhat structurally weak, which is to some considerable extent a direct result of the government's strength. The major governing party has been able to benefit from the strong ties with the central bureaucracy. Although curiously decentralised at the pinnacle of the government, the central bureaucracy exercises enormous power in legislation and implementation of policy. Furthermore, the governing party is a party of politicians mostly from districts. Their clientelism brings a folksy touch to the electorates and constitutes its power base.

Conclusion two is that parliamentary opposition in Japan has nevertheless been able to exercise some influence on the legislative process and outcomes of parliamentary legislation, which is to some extent due to the basic institutional features of the legislature. Key components include the relatively short parliamentary sessions and the principle of parliamentary discontinuity, both of which may possibly jeopardise the legislative priorities of the government whose legislative schedule is usually tight and sensitive to any sort of delaying tactics or parliamentary obstruction. Aside from the parliamentary opposition, the role of extra-parliamentary opposition cannot be underestimated. If it touches a resonant chord in the mass media, the opposition has occasionally been strengthened to a considerable degree.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, it would seem worthwhile to consider, if very briefly, the future of the parliamentary opposition. Despite all the institutional and structural weaknesses of parliamentary opposition, two developments seem to give some hope for the future of parliamentary opposition in Japan: the growing influence of the media, and the gradually felt impact of electoral reforms (implemented in 1984 and in 1994). The mass media, in particular television,

have been increasingly powerful in conveying the style, message and atmosphere of politicians. Whereas the prime minister is at the core of the media's interest, parliament has not been excluded from media attention. The major parliamentary sessions are often televised live. In addition, the strict prohibition of the Internet for electoral campaigning, as stipulated in the current electoral campaign law, might be relaxed in the future. As the tide of globalisation permeates each and every part of Japanese society, with electorates being increasingly atomised, media influence is bound to grow further. The question is who will be able to capture the audience through calculated and well-crafted style and message.

The other major driving force of (possible) change is the consolidation of the mixed electoral system which was completed in 1994. The Anglo-American small district system and the Continental European proportional representation system are combined in Japan (and in most East and Southeast Asian democracies for that matter).<sup>33</sup> With the accumulation of several general elections, after some 10 to 15 years of trial and error, many believe that the time has come for the opposition to capture power.<sup>34</sup> The increasing blurring of electorates in terms of socioeconomic affiliations is likely to effect a large swing, if such a swing is still moderated by the very mixed nature of the two different electoral systems.

#### NOTES

1. T.J. Pempel (ed.), *Uncommon Democracies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). On Japan, see T. Inoguchi, 'The Political Economy of Conservative Resurgence under Recession: Public Policies and Political Support in Japan, 1977–1983', in T.J. Pempel, *Uncommon Democracies*, pp.189–225.
2. T. Inoguchi, *Japanese Politics: An Introduction* (Melbourne: TransPacificPress, 2005); T. Inoguchi, 'Tanegashima Tokitaka kara Plaza Gouji made' [From Lord Tokitaka of Tanegashima to the Plaza Accord of 1985], *Gakushikaiho: koenkai tokushu*, November 1997.
3. E. Scheiner, *Democracy without Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Portions of section three derive primarily from T. Inoguchi, 'Japanese Politics: Towards a New Interpretation', in R. Segers (Ed) *A New Japan for the Twenty-First Century: An Inside Overview of Current Fundamental Changes* (London: Routledge, 2008).
4. This point has been overlooked – mostly by western accounts of modern Japanese history – largely because the early modern period is often left out of these accounts of modern Japanese history whether they start in 1868 or in 1945.
5. Army ministers often toppled the cabinet primarily because the Army's demand for an increased budget was not fully accommodated by the cabinet.
6. 'Shoueki atte, kokueki nashi' or 'what we have is agency interests, not national interests' is the saying to denote this feature.
7. M. Iokibe, *Beikoku no Nihon senryo seisaku* [United States Occupation Policy in Japan] (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1985).
8. For the historical evolution of the Japanese foreign policy line since 1945, placing the Yoshida doctrine in perspective, see T. Inoguchi and P. Bacon, 'Japan's Emerging Role as a Global Ordinary Power', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 6 (2006), pp.1–21.
9. M. Junnosuke, *Nihon Seijishi* [Japanese Political History], 4 vols. (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1988).

10. C. Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982).
11. E. Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
12. S. Sato, 'Response to the West: Korean and Japanese Patterns', in A.M. Craig (ed.), *Japan: A Comparative View* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp.105–29.
13. Y. Shimizu, *Seito to kanryo no kindai* [The Search for Modernity Competed between Two Political Parties and Bureaucracy] (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 2007).
14. M. Yasusuke, *Shin chukan taishu* [The New Middle Mass] (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 1984).
15. T. Inoguchi and D. Okimoto (eds.), *The Political Economy of Japan. Vol. 2: The Changing International Context* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).
16. R. O'Brien, *Financial Globalization: The End of Geography* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992).
17. D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
18. E. Krauss and B. Nyblade, "'Presidentialization" in Japan? The Prime Minister, Media and Elections in Japan', *British Journal of Political Science*, 35 (2005), pp.357–68. For an account of the players in the Koizumi administration, see I. Iijima, *Koizumi kantei hiroku* [A Secret History of Prime Minister Koizumi's Office] (Tokyo: Nihonkeizai Shimposha, 2006); H. Takenaka, *kozo kaikaku no shinjitsu* [Truth about Structural Reform] (Tokyo: Nihonkeizai Shimposha, 2006).
19. T. Inoguchi and T. Iwai, *Zoku giin no kenkyu* [A Study of Legislative Tribes] (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shimbunsha, 1987); T. Inoguchi and T. Iwai, 'The Growth of Zoku: Legislative Tribes in Japan', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, 1984.
20. I. Kabashima, T. Takeshita, and Y. Seriyama, *Media to Seiji* [Mass Media and Politics] (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 2007).
21. See 'Kanryo yori jimae koho' [LDP Candidates Better Recruited from Those Sectors Concerned than Those Bureaucratic Agencies], *Asahi shimbun*, 15 Nov. 2006, p.4.

**Candidates Pushed Back by Associations in the House of Councillors Proportional Representation Scheme**

Sectoral Interest Associations	2001	2004	Bureaucratic Origins of Candidates
construction	278,521	253,738	X
war veterans	295,613	101,651	
medical doctors	227,042	250,426	
war veterans' families	264,888	171,945	
land improvement	207,867	167,350	X
pharmaceutical	156,380	96,463	X
dental/medical doctors	104,581	–	
dental engineers	–	82,146	
nurses	174,517	152,685	
transport	94,332	196,499	X
local governments	156,656	105,737	X
facilities for the aged	–	199,510	
agriculture and fisheries	166,070	118,540	
food	–	51,664	X
fishermen	–	–	

22. While cabinet-sponsored bills accounted for 60 per cent of bills introduced in the 64th ordinary session of the National Diet (20 Jan.–18 June 2006), cabinet-sponsored bills constituted 85 per cent of bills passed in the same session.
23. In 2005, the number of days of both the ordinary and extraordinary sessions of the National Diet was 242 days. But the amount of time for the plenary sessions of both houses combined is 103 hours and 21 minutes! Most time was spent for committees. Furthermore, much more

- substantial and substantive time was spent at the committees of the governing party which parallel to those committees in both houses of the National Diet.
24. M. Nakajima, *Rippogaku* [Legislative Studies] (Kyoto: Horitsu bunkasha, 2004). The figures for bills put forward and raised are taken from N. Narita, 'Koakkai (National Diet)', in IMIDAS (Tokyo: Shueisha, 2007), p.486; the figures for the amount of time spent for the plenary sessions of both Houses are taken from N. Narita, p.487.
  25. S. Reed, *Japanese Electoral Policies* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
  26. M. Nakajima, *Rippogaku*. For the Japanese legislature, see also A. Miyoshi, 'The Diet in Japan', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 4 (1998), pp.83–102; M. Masuyama and B. Nyblade, 'Is the Japanese Diet Consensual?', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 11 (2004), pp.250–62. For the American and British legislatures and their changing features, see C.C. Campbell and R.H. Davidson, 'US Congressional Committees: Changing Legislature Workshops', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 4 (1998), pp. 124–42; J.E. Owens, 'From Committee Government to Party Government: Arranging Opportunities for Amendment Sponsors in the US House of Representatives: 1945–98', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 5 (1999), pp.75–103; P. Norton, 'Nascent Institutionalization: Committees in the British Government', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 4 (1998), pp.143–62. The combination of the parliamentary form of government with strong parliamentary committees as found in Japan, is also typical of such parliamentary democracies as Scandinavia, Germany or Italy.
  27. Y. Sone and T. Iwai, 'Seisaku katei ni okeru gikai no yakuwari' [The Role of the Legislative in the Policy Process], *Nempo Seiji Gaku* [Annals of Political Science], 35 (1987).
  28. 'Kanryo yori jimae koho', [LDP Candidates Better Recruited from Those Sectors Concerned than Those Bureaucratic Agencies], *Asahi Shimbun*, 16 Nov. 2006, p.4.
  29. Inoguchi and Iwai, *Zoku giin no kenkyu*.
  30. H. Takenaka, *Shusho shihai* [Prime Minister's Control] (Tokyo: Chuokoron shinsha, 2006).
  31. Author's interview with T. Ikenaga, Professor of Political Science at Nihon University and an expert on legislative politics, Tokyo, 24 Jan. 2007.
  32. E.S. Krauss, 'The Mass Media and Japanese Politics: Effects and Consequences', in S.J. Pharr and E.S. Krauss (eds.), *Media and Politics in Japan* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p.360; I. Kabashima, T. Takeshita and Y. Seriyama, *Media to Seiji*; see also the special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 8/1 (2007), on mass media and politics, edited by I. Kabashima and S. Popkin.
  33. A. Hicken and Y. Kasuya, 'A Guide to the Constitutional Structures and Electoral Systems of East, South, and Southeast Asia', *Electoral Studies*, 22 (2003), pp.121–51.
  34. S. Reed and M. Thies, 'The Consequences of Electoral Reform in Japan', in M. Soberg and M.P. Wattenberg (eds.), *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.380–403.

Copyright of *Journal of Legislative Studies* is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.