

Book Review

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Takashi Inoguchi, *Japanese Politics: An Introduction*, Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2005, pp. vii-x, 1-235.¹

As students of contemporary Japanese politics will know, in 1993 the scandal-ridden Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) lost a national election. For the first time since 1955, when the LDP was created, it lost control of the Diet, and was replaced as ruling party by the New Japan Party. Although the New Japan Party (together with its successor, the New Frontier Party) retained power for only one year before being replaced again by the LDP, both the 1955 System and the era of one-party dominance had ended – the post-1993 LDP has remained dependent on coalition partners. Although it was the first coalition partner in the post-1955 System era, the Socialist Party of Japan (SPJ) quickly imploded. When the 2003 election was called, the largest opposition parties were the Democrats and the Liberals; they merged to fight the election on a unified platform. The new Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won an extra 40 seats, while the LDP ended up short of a majority, and was forced to join a coalition government with the Clean Government Party (Kômeitô). The LDP headed a coalition government, with the DJP the largest party in opposition, until the recent election which the LDP lost.

In his latest work, *Japanese Politics: An Introduction*, the well-known and highly respected political scientist Takashi Inoguchi examines the two decades, 1983–1993 and 1994–2004, that sandwich the collapse of the 1955 System. Inoguchi enjoys a unique position in discussing contemporary Japanese politics. Prior to 2005, he was professor of political science at the University of Tokyo. He is editor of the *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, and is founding editor of *International Relations of the Asia Pacific*. His wife, Kuniko Inoguchi, also a well-known political scientist, ran for and won a seat in the House of Representatives in 2005, and was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Conference on Disarmament from 2002 to 2004. When *Japanese Politics* was published, she was Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs. In many respects, then, his is the voice of a true insider. *Japanese Politics* will be read as a result. As will be argued below, however, it is a flawed work that will disappoint loyal readers. I will start with a brief outline of the major arguments.

Inoguchi argues that his examination of the 1983 to 2004 period demonstrates that the second decade, 1994–2004, is characterised by a trend towards the *normalization* of Japanese politics, both at home in Japan and abroad. He attempts to show that the domestic one-party system so characteristic of the 1955 System “is in the process of being replaced by a more pluralistic, less bureaucratic, and more participatory politics” (p. vii). At the same time, he claims that a normalization can be seen in the international arena as well, as Japan adopts an increasingly “pro-active” position and comes to act as a normal state (p. vii). As a result of this normalization, Inoguchi believes that a genuine two-party system will emerge in Japan, and that the Constitution will be revised to allow Japan to use

¹ This review was submitted for publication several years ago, and has been updated to reflect recent changes.

military force as a tool in settling international disputes. The end of the second decade, he claims, marks the start of a new politics; “it is clear that the *ancien regime* characterized by one party politics, the ascendancy of the bureaucracy, state-led developmentalism and rigid alliance with the United States are (*sic*) gone. The general election of November 2003 has ushered in a new era” (p. 177; also see p. 207).

The collapse of the 1955 System was accompanied, and perhaps even triggered, by the end of the Cold War. A significant question for contemporary Japanese politics – and one which Inoguchi attempts to ask – is how Japan will cope with an emerging post-Cold War world in which old assumptions about national security can no longer be taken for granted. The end of the Cold War also saw increasing economic globalization, which has made state-led economic developmentalism increasingly difficult. Moreover, the implosion of the Bubble Economy together with “the end of history” (or at least Cold War ideologies) have functioned to undermine domestic governance, and both will place further pressure on Japanese politics (p. 11). What Inoguchi sees as the foundation stones of post-war politics in Japan – one party dominance, the developmental state and developmentalism at home, combined with reliance on the US for military protection abroad (in other words, the Yoshida Doctrine) – have shifted, and as a consequence “Japanese politics is entering *terra incognita*” (p. 16).

There is no questioning the fact that, for much of the post-war era, Japan has pursued what the Japanese call “one-country pacifism.” Though benefiting from the massive post-war expansion in global trade, Japan avoided any military involvement in post-war wars, and so has largely avoided paying for the maintenance of global order. Not a single member of the Japanese military has died in combat in any of the numerous post-war conflicts across the globe. At home, this pacifism was made possible by the decision to remain dependent on the USA for military protection, and to accept massive American military bases in Japan, and in particular Okinawa. Overseas, Japanese pacifism was made possible through the US’s willingness to shoulder the military burden of maintaining global order. However, with the end of the Cold War, the free ride provided to Japan has come under increasing pressure, and Japan has been forced to re-examine the issue of national security.

Inoguchi notes that, with the end of the Cold War, Japan began to assume a greater role in terms of managing (or at least helping the US to manage) the international economy. However, he continues, “[t]his often had negative ramifications for Japan’s own economy” (p. 68). Just as the end of the Cold War brought down the curtain on “one-country pacifism,” it also ended the period of “one-country prosperity.” Pressure on Japan to open its markets will only increase in the future. Needless to say, how Japan manages the political impact of calls for further market liberalization will remain a test of its ability to adapt to new global realities.

Japanese politics has already started to adjust. Tentative steps to rehabilitate the military and revise the Constitution have been taken, and calls have strengthened from within Japan to reform the overly centralized, heavily bureaucratized, and producer-friendly (consumer-unfriendly) economy. Although the political situation has been complicated by the collapse of the Bubble Economy and the onset of Japan’s longest post-war recession, the Heisei Recession, progress has indeed been made in terms of reform both internationally and domestically. Inoguchi’s touchstones of success in terms of political adjustment can be summarized in terms of a Japanese military build-up and further economic liberalization.

The period Inoguchi discusses is also characterized by the emergence of a new patriotic confidence (Inoguchi's term is "nationalism"). "By the early 1990s, over half a century after the end of the Second World War, Japan had begun to regain its self-confidence. Nationalism re-emerged as a backdrop to the politics of economic superpower" (p. 113). Japan's emerging nationalism clashed with the Yoshida Doctrine, the position that Japan ought to pursue economic growth but avoid an international political presence and rely on the US for national security. Increasing American demands that Japan take more responsibility for its own security, the shift in the foundation stones of Japanese politics, the globalizing push towards economic reform, and emerging Japanese patriotism will combine to end the Yoshida Doctrine.

The above is a summary of the major argument of Inoguchi's book. Elsewhere, he discusses, among others, the major political positions of the early 1955 System as embodied in the two major political parties of the period, the LDP and the SPJ. Both political parties drew on the ideologies of the occupation. The LDP adhered to the realistic and pragmatic policies of the post-reverse course occupation, and thus emphasized the anti-communist alliance with the US. The SPJ, on the other hand, remained loyal to the utopian dreams and ideals of the early occupation, and refused to acknowledge either the brutalities of the communist world or the realities of the Cold War. Even after 1960, when the Japan-United States Security Treaty was revised, and the bilateral relationship emerged, to a far greater extent, as one between equals, the SPJ continued to insist that the pacifist Constitution was more important than the alliance. These positions, Inoguchi suggests, continued to dominate Japanese politics right through to the collapse of the 1955 System.

While Inoguchi's book is certainly one to be read, it is also one to be quarrelled with. Although he does develop his arguments with a light touch and makes many valid points, one could dispute some of them – such as the claim that Constitutional revision is imminent. As noted above, moreover, *Japanese Politics* is flawed. According to Inoguchi, "[t]here are two primary weaknesses in the approaches of those who study the contemporary Japanese political system" (p. 132). First, historical continuities are ignored. Japanese politics are approached as if history began in 1945. Second, Japanese *realities* are compared to Western *ideals*. He thus argues "that it is necessary to position the modern Japanese political system in a more appropriate historical context, and distance ourselves from a research methodology that compares the Japanese system with an idealized and historically decontextualized political conception based on North American and European political experience" (p. 134). The claim that some, if not many, accounts of Japanese politics overlook history is valid. An analysis of Meiji and Taishō precedents is crucial to any full understanding of later political developments. And a much longer book than Inoguchi's might mention Tokugawa legacies. This reviewer fully agrees with the above. Nevertheless, in a short introductory text of only 200 or so pages, to mention, however briefly, prehistoric Jōmon and Yayoi periods is a self-indulgence that should have been stoically resisted (p. 20). The bibliography at the end of the book is a mess, and the in-text citations leave much to be desired (citing given name rather than surname [Watanuki Jōji, p. 61], for instance, or citing works, such as Bitō Masahide, p. 56 and elsewhere, in the text that are not in the bibliography). These faults, however, pale into insignificance when compared with the repetitive nature of Inoguchi's book. The original was obviously based on a number of independent papers, where repetition is only to be expected. However, these repetitions cry out for the editorial pen; in such a short work, readers do not need

to be provided with page after page of identical text. The result is a book that reads much better as a collection of independent papers than as a single monograph that attempts to develop a sustained argument. Given Inoguchi's stature, *Japanese Politics* will be read. It could, however, have been read with less frustration had it been reworked before publication.