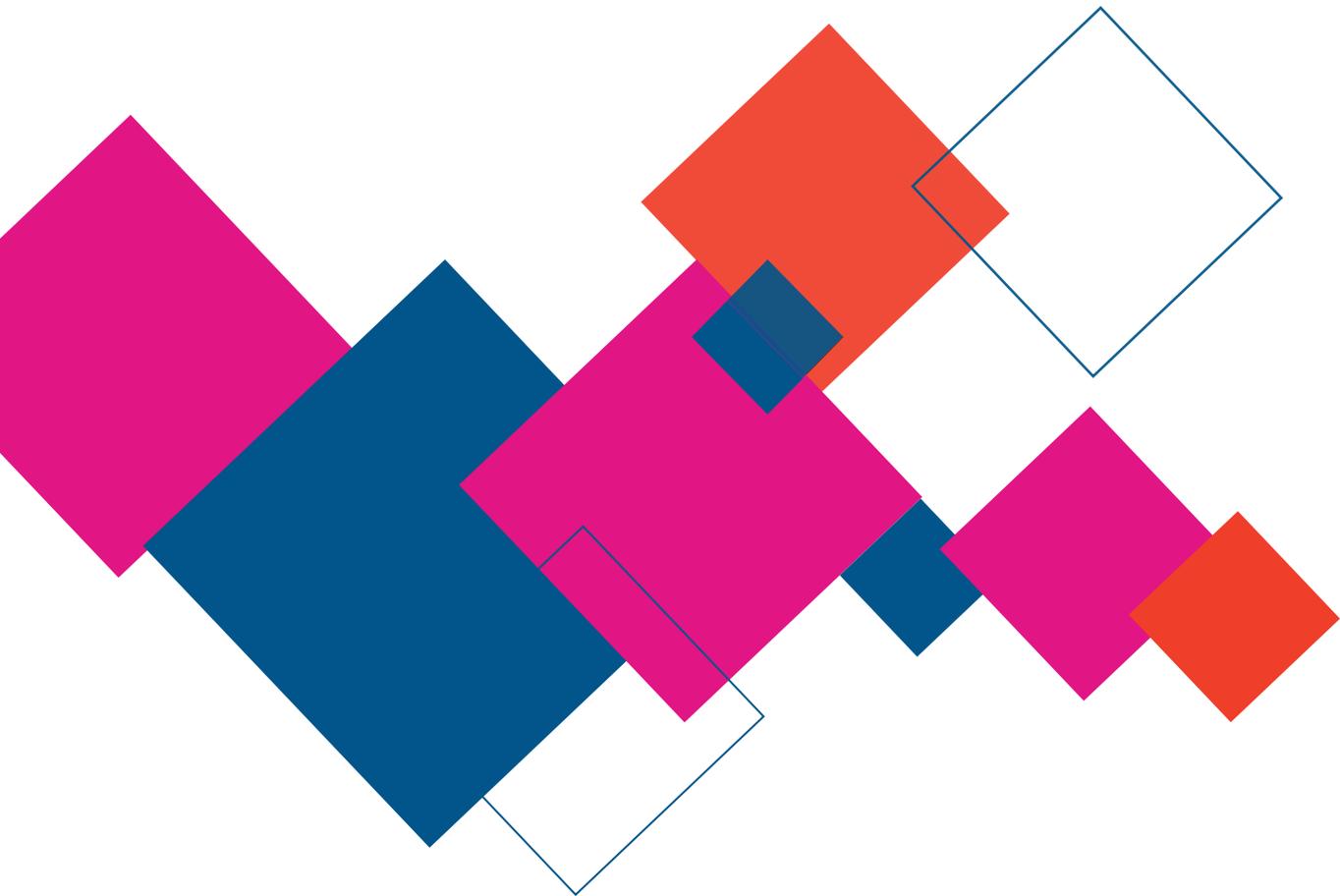


Japan's Democracy: Lessons and Reflections

日本の民主主義の再評価

1st Panel Discussion The Current State of Japan's Democracy



Japan Center for International Exchange

About the Democracy for the Future Project

In 2018, JCIE launched a multipronged initiative to explore and expand Japan's support for democratic governance that is based on the values of liberty, accountability, the rule of law, and individual dignity and empowerment. The initiative, known as "Democracy for the Future," is designed to engage Japanese leaders in dialogue with domestic and overseas experts on ways of strengthening the building blocks of democratic governance in Asia and elsewhere. The program convenes a study group of Japanese experts to identify strategies on how support for these values can be incorporated in Japan's foreign policy and development assistance. These ideas will be shared widely to raise awareness about the importance of democratic governance among policy makers and opinion leaders. The program also engages Japanese Diet members and other senior leaders in international dialogues on issues related to democracy, and it serves as a platform to involve Japanese experts, civil society leaders, and others in international forums on the topic.

As part of Democracy for the Future activities, in June 2021, JCIE launched a new project, "Re-evaluation of Japan's Democracy," to create a platform for Japanese scholars, political and opinion leaders, and the broader Japanese public to reflect on Japan's own experience in building a democratic society post-WWII, examine the resilience of the elements that support democratic governance in Japan today, and identify possible ways to strengthen it further into the future. JCIE has partnered with Dr. Harukata Takenaka, a leading scholar in Japan, to organize a series of three discussions with Japanese scholars and policymakers to conduct this reassessment: This report is a record of the first of these discussions.

About JCIE

Founded in 1970, the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization that works to strengthen US-Japan relations and build international cooperation. Operating with partner organizations in Tokyo and New York (JCIE/USA), JCIE sponsors a wide range of projects in collaboration with institutions around the world. These include policy research and dialogue on cutting-edge issues in international relations, leadership exchanges, and efforts to strengthen the contributions of civil society to domestic and international governance. Through these initiatives, JCIE aims to create opportunities for informed policy discussions that can contribute to a more peaceful and stable world.

Japan's Democracy: Lessons and Reflections

1st Panel Discussion—The Current State of Japan's Democracy

The following is a record of a discussion that was originally conducted in Japanese on August 12, 2021, as part of JCIE's Democracy for the Future Program

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Strengths of Japan's Democracy

Takenaka: There are many arguments that can be made about Japan's democracy. Japan became a formal democracy in 1945, but this was preceded by a number of events, including the enactment of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, the start of party politics that began with the opening of the Imperial Diet, and the formation of the first party cabinet in 1918. And although military intervention occurred in the lead-up to World War II, Japan has had a functioning democracy ever since the system was instituted in 1945.



That being said, I believe various problems do exist. But to begin, I would like to hear what you see as the positive aspects of Japan's democracy, starting with Professor Taniguchi.

Taniguchi: In Japan, the style and systems of democracy were put in place mostly after World War II, with a sound structure enabling all citizens to participate. I think it was beneficial that the state was able to make a stable transition.

Having said that, some researchers these days point to the difficulty of the “simultaneous achievement of economic growth, social welfare, and democracy.” A focus on economic growth means less allocation of resources for social welfare and less distribution of wealth. Many citizens feel that democracy calls for greater distribution of wealth, but this can cause disagreement with others who say doing so stalls economic efficiency. The fact is that it is becoming more difficult to achieve economic

growth, social welfare and services, and democracy all at once.

When Japan was blessed with a stable international environment and steady economic growth, the Japanese people were allocated more of the growing pie. There was no need to pour huge amounts of funds into the social welfare system because of the vestiges of the traditional Japanese family system, known as *ie seido*. In that sense, Japanese society ran extremely efficiently.

Also, Japan's democracy was more form than substance: the national consciousness was not rooted in a democratic mindset. Japan's democracy did not arouse social values like “asserting diverse opinions,” “not worrying about standing out,” or “embracing competition.” Thus, you could say that, even after the establishment of democratic systems, the lack of a solid dispersion of power in society based on democratic values in fact contributed to the increased efficiency in Japanese society.

I am not sure if Japanese politics is fully aware of it, but my sense is that Japanese society has functioned pretty well until now in large part thanks to a favorable international environment as well as efficient economic growth, distribution of wealth, and democracy. But now, I believe, we may be approaching a turning point.

Takenaka: Economic growth made the distribution of wealth possible, which in turn benefited democratic efficiency—does that accurately reflect your thoughts?

Taniguchi: Democracy as a system is well established, but in terms of intrinsic values and whether democracy has truly taken root in the hearts of the Japanese people—that is questionable. In Japan, we have not seen much power dispersion, or power pulling in multiple directions. The result of an efficiently operated representative democracy, therefore, has been positive in terms of efficiency in both economics and politics.

Takenaka: Thank you very much. Those are ideas that tie in with our later discussions on issues in Japanese democracy. Next, can we please hear from Professor McElwain?

McElwain: Listening to Professor Taniguchi speak, I was reminded of a discussion that arose previously in a German research group. They noted that Western governments have begun to discuss the importance of shifting away from GDP as a metric for social development and civic satisfaction, and instead emphasizing “Gross National Happiness,” or the degree to which citizens enjoy overall happiness. The discussion that emerged in the research group was rather cynical, attributing this shift to the governments’ need to divert their citizens’ focus because they can no longer promise economic growth. I think this is one example of the challenges in measuring the success of democracy.

From my experience researching other countries and living in America and Europe, my sense is that Japan has avoided political rivalries that stem from structural social conflicts. As to the question of whether Japanese political parties and actors have purposely avoided such conflicts, or whether they have been averted because there are no such structural differences or central issues to rally around in Japan in the first place, it is hard to show a causal relationship. I believe there is still room for debate on this topic.

When talking of the ideological left and right in political science, the debate often focuses on social class and wealth disparity, and on preferences for big government or small government. But in Japan’s case, rather than focusing on social class, I think the debate is increasingly about regional disparity. What we see is that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in power for a long time, has managed to limit regional disparity to a degree through distributions from the central government to the regions.

There are merits and demerits to this, but in Japan there is clear disparity between the values of votes in different constituencies. Compared to other countries, the rural voice in Japan has had a larger influence on government decisions and policies than its share of the population would suggest. Of course, this varies depending on the problem at hand, but what we have seen in the past 20 years is that economic and regional disparities are clearly growing. Do Japanese people think these are temporary or structural problems, and do they think they can be solved by the type of democracy we

see in Japan today? I think those will be the issues going forward.

Takenaka: You are right—we have perhaps been lucky in Japan that since we put democracy in place and began to work under the political rules of democracy, we have not had any severe structural conflicts.

McElwain: Japan is by no means a large country in terms of land area, but it does have a sizeable population. Looking at how other big countries have dealt with social and structural conflict, I think Japan is a very interesting and rather rare case in the world.



Takenaka: Redistribution of resources from the cities and central areas to the rural areas went rather well, and this had something to do with mitigating the issue of social and structural conflict. This is somewhat linked to the issue of malapportionment, but it is important to note that the pie was divided and redistributed effectively during the period of high economic growth. Next, we would like to hear from Professor Takayasu.

Takayasu: I have four points I would like to raise with regard to the positive aspects of Japan’s democracy. The first relates to what Professor Taniguchi was talking about, and that is the substantial nature of the institutional basis for liberal democracy. An order based on Japan’s constitution, its electoral and voting systems that allow for a great many stakeholders to vote, a system for representation via the Diet, a judicial system that protects human rights,

mechanisms for providing public services through local governments led by the municipalities—these have all taken strong root in Japan. I think it is incredibly significant that the people accepted this kind of liberal democratic order. And I believe that America has had a major role to play at each juncture in these systems becoming established in Japan.

My second point is that postwar Japanese liberal democracy realized democratic control of the police and armed forces. Looking at other countries, some have political control but not democratic control, and others have neither. I believe this relates to Professor Takenaka's initial area of expertise, but the postwar system shows great contrast with the Meiji Constitution system, which ended with the collapse of the existing order at the hands of the army. Therefore, it is an unrealistic fear nowadays to think that powerful organizations could unseat democracy in Japan.

My third point is a comparison with prewar times, when terrorism and assassination were used at critical moments to show opposition to opinions and government, thereby perverting Japan's course of action. Such incidents cannot be dismissed, given that they have occurred in the postwar period too. But I do not believe that their nature has been such that they generate enough influence to pervert the course of liberal democracy.



Finally, my fourth point concerns a comparison of the 75 years before and after 1945. From 1870 to 1945, Japan was consumed by war and people all over the country were suppressed. The political order was shaken and ultimately dismantled. In contrast, in the 75 years from 1945 to 2020, Japan

has not led or proactively participated in a single war. Japan's relations with neighboring countries and regions, although sometimes tense, are stable. There was long a deep-seated sense of hostility and fear toward Japan after the war, not only in Northeast Asia but also in Southeast Asia and even Oceania, and there are many writings on the hostility Japanese people have faced when visiting those areas. However, relations between Japan and those regions today are very good. This has not come about by chance—I believe a very large factor has been the ability to achieve a stable and free domestic order.

This can be seen in the incredibly wide range of places we can safely travel to on a Japanese passport. I think this is a major accomplishment of the past 75 or 76 years.

Takenaka: I would like to clarify one point: in which areas do you feel the American factor plays a part? You talked about the impact at every juncture, but in which areas specifically do you see it as having an impact?

Takayasu: First, at the stage of establishing the postwar order. Without America, we may not have achieved such a strongly democratic and liberal system. This becomes very clear when we compare the constitution that was adopted to the draft that the Japanese government had initially prepared. On the other hand, in terms of security, there have been situations where there was no internal agreement and domestic consensus-building was forced to take a back seat because of demands from America. We have seen this in recent years and also in the case of the reversion of Okinawa. Strong pressure was also applied regarding domestic economic issues, economic measures, deregulation, and income tax reductions, which affected the very character of Japan's economy, not always with positive implications. I think American demands have been particularly strong from the 1990s onward. So, you can see there are both positives and negatives.

Taniguchi: I would like to add something here on relations with America. Professor McElwain also mentioned this, namely the point that the Japanese

party system is not organized on the basis of racial diversity, class conflict, regional conflict, or other social cleavages.

Postwar Japan initially had very limited options. Be it national defense or the economy, there was a need to focus on tactics to survive under American influence. Japan always had to consider its position within the context of America's global strategy, in the context of security, and in the context of East Asia. Even amid friction with America on various fronts, the Japanese people understood the need to adjust and coordinate, and I believe they made the judgment that they could only entrust national politics to a party that could do that. With Japan's options limited in this way, it is difficult to gain widespread support unless you adopt policies like those of the LDP. Also, the governing and opposition parties in Japan have not fought over class conflict or economic issues like European political parties; their disputes have always been about choice of system or the constitution. I think that is part of the reason we hardly ever see the administration change hands.

So, for better or for worse, America has always served as a constraint, or a sort of precondition in Japanese politics.

McElwain: May I ask a question about that? I am not sure if my interpretation is correct or not, but even amid debates, on how far to strengthen relations with America, there have basically never been serious discussions about severing ties with America to side with China, the Soviet Union, or Russia instead, right? Realistically, the discussions were always about the degree of pro-American policies. While some may have preferred to side with the Soviet Union, we do not see those opinions in mainstream politics. In other words, are you saying that only a very small range of options ever existed?

Taniguchi: I have studied the campaign pledges of political parties in the postwar period, and frankly, the LDP's policy stance has changed very little. Also, from an international perspective, the policies of Japan's postwar opposition parties were too left-wing. With the emergence of the New Frontier Party and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)

in the late 1990s, many voters felt they had a real choice of administration for the first time. Japanese voters view their ideology as being, on average, a little right of center. Of course, there are different voices on China relations, taking a neutral position, and keeping a distance from America, but more people perceive themselves as right of center. The LDP's political positioning has always been "a little right of center," so if the opposition does not lean in that direction, it will have a hard time gaining political power. But of course, public opinion is never uniform, and the composition of political parties is diverse.

Takenaka: It is very interesting how animated our discussions have already become just talking about America. In democracy theory, they talk about the transition phase first. Then, we have the issue of how to consolidate democracy once it has been introduced. The next stage is "democratic deepening"—the work to further liberalism and the democratic essence of liberal democracy. In terms of that transition, was the biggest factor in Japan the fact that it implemented its constitution immediately after losing the war? Professor Takayasu, were the defeat and occupation the major factors?

Takayasu: As a point of departure, these were surely incredibly large factors. But in terms of whether it was imposed upon Japan, that is not necessarily the case. Members of the prewar ruling class might have felt that way, but ordinary citizens would have reacted strongly if they had felt like it had been forced upon them. What we see is that the new constitution was quickly accepted, even in the presence of disagreement between the elites and ordinary people. When it looked like it was going to derail, America's presence may have helped prop it up, but the nature of competition among domestic political parties resulted in the preservation of the current system. And even on the conservative side, the ones who viewed it positively or chose to accept it prevailed. This meant no movements for substantial change. America first proposed a prototype for the Constitution of Japan that was built on the pillars of liberalism, democracy, and the principle of international cooperation, which was

subsequently accepted by Japan's political world. That the Constitution of Japan they put forward took root was, I believe, incredibly significant for Japan's liberal democracy.

Takenaka: Professors Taniguchi and McElwain, would you like to respond to any of Professor Takayasu's comments?

McElwain: I think one of the most striking aspects of the Japanese constitution is that, while it provides a general framework for government institutions, many of the details are prescribed by law. This is true for decentralization of power and the nature of the electoral system, and with details on the running of the cabinet and parliament, which, for all intents and purposes, are left to various legislation, such as the Public Office Election Law and Cabinet Act.

In terms of being able to adapt to rapid social and economic change in the postwar period, I think it was good to have this degree of flexibility. Even though there were not all that many changes on how to ameliorate regional disparities or how to distribute authority to local municipalities and prefectural governments, I think it worked for Japan because it maintained a degree of fluidity. Having said that, I am not sure how well Japan's constitution would work if it were instituted in other countries.

Takenaka: This is a truly fascinating discussion. The constitution sets a general framework for Japanese democracy with details for a parliamentary system of government and a bicameral system with the second chamber to be re-elected every three years, but the other issues are left in the hands of the legal system, such as the Cabinet Act and other so-called constitution-related laws. This includes the Diet Act and the electoral system, too. Does that mean the Japanese people were given autonomy over those details?

McElwain: One of the risks of not stipulating institutional rules in constitutions is that when social groups with opposing interests each have their own political party, they may seek to manipulate the rules when they gain control of the administration. That is not an ideal situation because there

is great risk in that kind of instability. It is precisely because Japan does not have much basis for hierarchical conflict that under the "1955 system,"* there has not been much tweaking of rules aimed at retaining political power.

Takenaka: I agree with you. Until the 1990s, the laws pertaining to government structure were basically untouched. Reforming the system of government amounts to constitutional change—that is Professor [Satoshi] Machidori's opinion. It is perhaps quite a novel idea. Professor Taniguchi, Japan accepted the constitution, but what are your thoughts on the substance of the constitution, including the institutions stipulated by the constitution? Could you talk about the issue of what a constitution should cover?

Taniguchi: Through my research on voter's political awareness and conduct, I have become interested in what led to a total about-face and acceptance of a democratic constitution after such widespread mobilization of citizens for war. I wonder how actively regular people's political consciousness was nurtured between the Meiji Restoration and World War II to begin with. Was it common to think about the state of one's country and take action? At the elite level, I think there was competition and confrontation surrounding the direction the country should take, but in the end, after the war, the elites decided to accept the constitution. Perhaps for ordinary citizens it was more a case of the Empire of Japan being defeated by America and thinking, "So this is the next authority we must obey."

Even today I have some doubts about Japanese people's awareness around self-determination. In the past, comparative international research carried out by Western scholars such as [Gabriel] Almond and [Sydney] Verba found Japanese people "to be like subjects, quick to obey authority." However, modern opinion polls suggest the Japanese are more like consumers of government; it is almost like they are saying, "I pay my taxes, so you provide my services." Perhaps we should call it "consumer democracy"? It seems they think democracy is about criticizing the government and making demands. At the extreme, we even see cases of people

8 *The 1955 system refers to the set of political arrangements that persisted from 1955 to 1993, through which the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) dominated Japanese politics. —Trans.

saying, “Politicians and public officials should cut their salaries and give their all to serving the people!”

Another trend we see in opinion polls is a very limited desire among individuals to take action to improve society or politics in some way. They do not show a great deal of interest in voter participation, and when asked if they would fight for the country should Japan come under attack, the answer is no. Self-determination—the idea of people being the sovereign because they uphold their country—has not been developed among the Japanese. Certainly, the citizens of Japan accepted the postwar system. But on the question of whether democratic consciousness has taken root among the Japanese people, I do not feel that is the case.

Takenaka: I understand your points very well. The question is whether people think they have some power to change the country and an awareness that they are sovereign and autonomous actors. Earlier, Professor Taniguchi, you mentioned the importance of a successful resolution of the trilemma of economic growth, social welfare, and democracy, I am not exactly clear on what you mean by the third one, democracy. Do you mean that it is difficult to achieve democracy, growth, and welfare, is this a finding from recent research?

Taniguchi: China is not a democratic nation. Authoritarian states are currently growing because they are suppressing democracy as they strive for optimization. That sheds light on the inefficiency of democratic systems.

Takenaka: In a word, the Singapore Model. So, are you suggesting that Japan was able to achieve all three—economic growth, welfare, and democracy—because it had a demographic dividend during the period of high economic growth?

Taniguchi: Yes, that is in addition to the premise that Japan was functioning within America’s international strategy. That enabled Japan to limit the cost of diplomacy and national defense and become competitive enough in economic terms to rival American interests. As you mentioned, postwar growth and population growth played a part, but

I think we were blessed in terms of environment and timing, too. Whether Japan actively restrained



democracy in order to solve the trilemma, I am not sure, but I do not get the feeling that democracy, in the true sense of the word, has been fostered.

Takenaka: On this idea of growth, welfare, and democracy all succeeding, I believe a great deal of effort was expended on welfare. Where does this stem from?

Takayasu: Comparatively speaking, Japan’s social security clearly ranks among some of the lowest. I am not saying nothing is being done, rather questioning whether it has been handled as expected. Japan is not a social security–rich or welfare state; rather, from its spending style, we can call it a construction state. It chose a system of protection of livelihoods through employment, so social security has been done with an extremely light touch.

Takenaka: When you say Japan is light on social security, which parts are you referring to? Healthcare is so good that we rank No. 1 or 2 according to OECD standards.

Takayasu: Healthcare is a success. And I think the division between the public and private sectors is also relatively well done. But Japan only has medical coverage and pensions. In terms of healthcare, it is just barely adequate, and this pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of the system. And there are huge variations in pensions depending on one’s form of employment. While on the one hand childcare has

become a major social issue, public spending on education as a proportion of GDP is among the lowest among OECD countries. And there is scant employment support, such as unemployment and job-seeking assistance.

To put it simply, this pandemic has shown how the system is unable to pinpoint individuals for support. That is not to say there is no social security or that it is all a disaster, rather that there are many issues to overcome, and I feel the nature of the system itself is constantly exacerbating the issue. The trilemma of economic growth, welfare, and democracy is a very big topic, and I am not sure how good of a social security system it would have to be to actually create this trilemma, but I just wanted to add this point for consideration.

Takenaka: So, Japan has put tremendous effort into pensions and medical care, but what you are saying is that Japan's social security system is not all that strong.

McElwain: Support is not always going to the groups that need it. The welfare system was built on a dependence on housewives. They have carried an enormous burden in terms of elder care and child rearing.

Not to return our discussion to the topic of trilemmas, but when talking about a model for democracy plus economic growth plus social security, you have the coordinated market economies of Scandinavia and the European continent and the liberal market economies as seen in North America and the UK. There has long been debate about where Japan sits in comparison to these democratic/economic models and what its distinguishing features are.

MITI and the Japanese Miracle is a frequently mentioned English-language book about Japanese politics that was written by Chalmers Johnson. I think until the 1990s, there was a great deal of discussion on whether there is a Japanese model of democracy. From the texts I was reading during my studies in America, I got the impression that each author proposed a new model to describe Japan: Ellis Krauss and [Michio] Muramatsu's "patterned pluralism," Kent Calder's "crisis and compensation," and "network states" by Daniel Okimoto. It was a time when Japan was riding a wave of success, so

Japanese politics was being analyzed to see how its style of democracy differed from that of other countries and if there were lessons to be learned. But this interest began to decline in the 1990s. One cause was the decline in researchers covering Japanese politics, but the debate around "differences in Japan's form of democracy" essentially disappeared after the bubble burst. It is somewhat disappointing, is it not? There are still research papers, but there has been a steep decline in the number of English-language books on Japanese politics.

Takenaka: Going back to Professor Takayasu's comments about welfare really only being about pensions and medical care, because public spending on individual skill development, unemployment benefits, and public education is extremely low, we may not be able to give Japan a high score on welfare. Professor McElwain, you talked about the relative success of redistribution, but are you referring to redistribution from the cities to rural areas?

McElwain: Yes, that is correct. But I believe that questions remain as to whether that will have a positive or negative impact on long-term growth.

Currently in the United States, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and also Latin America, we see populist politics. They espouse a vision of a virtuous, patriotic citizenry confronting the corrupt elite, which I think is tied to nationalism and nativism. We do not see similar political messages in either national or local politics in Japan.

Some people say that parties like Osaka Ishin no Kai and Tomin First no Kai show populist elements, but populists in other countries are rebelling against the urban, cosmopolitan elite. The focus of confrontation in Japan is different, because these political parties are being created by people from the wealthiest areas. I think that stems from relatively limited inter-regional disparity and the fact that, because there are still not that many people from other countries in Japan, we do not see strong nationalism and opposition to immigrants like in Europe and other places. I believe that limiting major regional disparities has brought about stability in Japan.

Takenaka: That is probably true. Be it the construction state that Professor Takayasu mentioned earlier or public works projects, clearly there has been considerable transfer. This is related to overrepresentation of non-urban regions because Japan's SNTV (single non-transferable vote system) (*chusenkyokusei*) allows three to five candidates to be elected from one district, as well as the fact that the LDP has been extremely strong in rural areas. Whether that was intentional or not, I do not know. Even now, there are people who show some ambiguous sentiment toward the capital, but there has been no major regional-central split.

McElwain: In terms of the construction state, much of the redistribution was inefficient, but one thing I feel far more strongly in Japan than in other countries is how good the roads are even in remote areas. In America, where states are the main actors in many cases, the quality of transportation infrastructure can be quite bad. The way Japan's trains run on time is incredible. A few years ago



in England, when I tried to order something from Amazon, there was only one choice of delivery time: between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. In Japan, you can choose from narrow time windows, and in almost every case, things are delivered as scheduled. This relates to the high quality of private supply chains, but I think it is very much an indication of how well-established basic transportation infrastructure is in Japan.

Taniguchi: National engagement on welfare in postwar Japan got going fast, with the start of

initiatives like national health insurance in the 1960s. But history shows how the LDP and administrations prioritized establishing welfare for the elderly to make a system that, like Professor Takayasu said, has always been regarded as “low-cost, medium-benefit welfare.”

According to the research on welfare by [Gøsta] Esping-Andersen, Japan is somewhere in between the conservative model and the liberal model. As Professor Takayasu said, it is a system that achieves welfare through employment and by considering one household as a unit. Professor McElwain noted how women have carried the burden of childcare and eldercare, allowing households to run so long as men maintain roles in formal employment. Thus, welfare for the elderly was established first and the system has just carried on as such.

However, what surfaced then was the dilemma or trilemma that excellent elderly care had resulted in an aged society, therefore expanding the cost of welfare just as economic growth slowed and the birth rate declined. And that is where we are now.

On the other hand, the LDP prioritized distribution to the rural regions, small and medium business, and real estate and construction business sectors, and managed to maintain control of the administration by making these groups dependent on them. But when the economy stops growing, the pie gets smaller, and you can no longer make those distributions. As Professor Takayasu says, welfare, by nature, should be based on the individual. But in Japan, it has been considered on the basis of family unit, functional unit, or regional unit, which I think led to the impression Professor McElwain mentioned, that “there’s something different about Japan’s democracy.”

Takenaka: That is very informative. It also links to why Japanese-style corporatism was accepted, does it not?

Taniguchi: That is right. Everything came to a standstill, prompting efforts by the former DPJ administration to switch to universalism. Now I think we are in the midst of reconstructing a welfare system based on the individual.

Takayasu: May I say a word connected to what Professors Taniguchi and McElwain have been talking about? Japan had engaged in redistribution—a spatial redistribution—from Kakuei Tanaka’s time onward, but that came to a standstill in the 1990s. There was indeed a link between the changing pattern of competition between political parties and the deadlock in spatial distribution. That is why we saw changes in the leading political parties in the 1990s. Initially, the DPJ represented the urban areas while the Socialist Party and LDP were agrarian political parties of sorts, and so when the latter two parties were the main competitors, there appeared to be a strong bias in the interests being represented on the political stage. They are sometimes referred to as independents, but urban interests were particularly forgotten. That created the opposing axis. However, in practice, when competing with other political parties, there was naturally a need to bring in rural interests as well, causing the DPJ to soften its stance of representing the urban cities. That is what opened up room for the entrance of the Osaka Ishin no Kai and the Kibo no To (Party of Hope). In terms of the wave of populism, this is like Italy’s Lega Nord (Northern League). In order to expand nationwide, the DPJ could not keep on being a Lega Nord, yet it definitely needs to represent people who support a Lega Nord. However, representing those interests without losing other supporters is extremely difficult.

When we talk of populism, for me the most important factor is its character of anti-liberalism. If you remove that core, it is hard to determine what the issue with populism is, so I think we need to be careful about word choice. Often, we focus on the core of a conflict, but the significance of using the word populism is to draw a distinction with conventional partisan friction, political fissures, and political mobilization. Even in Japan, we have people and groups who do not seem to respect a plurality of values—that is one thing we share with other countries that have an issue with populism.

Takenaka: The flow of our conversation has moved to issues facing democracy, which I think shows how the positive aspects also link to the problems. To summarize the discussion thus far, I think our

assessment is that the system was implemented well and became more or less established. Some constitutional laws and regulations were meant to be determined autonomously by the Japanese, but in reality, many aspects were simply accepted precisely because so many citizens have shown little interest in politics.

Many people were accustomed to competitive politics from the prewar days, and I think the transition to and establishment of the new system were possible because those traditions were already there. The fruits of the economy were shared well, but on the welfare front, because it is a low-cost, medium-benefit system, there are some areas where it is still lacking. So, there is no place for great praise there. Finally, I think we can say that the regional transfer of wealth went quite well.

Challenges of Japan’s Democracy

Takenaka: We have begun to touch on this in our discussions already, but I would like to ask again about the challenges facing Japan’s democracy. Professor Taniguchi, can you please go first?

Taniguchi: This relates to something we have already discussed, but I want to mention the point that there were constraints on Japan’s policymaking in the postwar period, as analyses have shown that any policies that were not pro-American or pro-economic growth were never put on the ballot.

Citizens were making choices through representative democracy, also known as indirect democracy, but it is a question of whether that instilled them with a sense of sovereignty. Japan may have been efficient in economic, social, and political terms, but I think in some respects an extremely passive form of democracy was born with people feeling, “I’ll leave it up to the elites” or “I’m fine to either go along with it or complain about it.”

The result has been very little competition between parties and very few changes of administration. It may be stable government, but looking long-term, it has resulted in stagnation. When coupled with slowed economic growth, the government

found itself in a bind, which I believe led it to rush through reforms in the 1990s.

McElwain: It is incredibly difficult to measure political knowledge, but surveys often ask people about their feelings on political efficacy by posing the question, “Do you think you can change politics?” Globally, Japan ranks very low in terms of political consciousness. But as seen in the saying “unhappy the land that needs heroes,” boring politics is not necessarily a bad thing. Researchers of African politics have told me that many citizens know the name of their local member of parliament. And that is because if you do not know them, you may not enjoy any benefits.

One thing Japan has been able to manage so far, but that is probably getting more and more difficult to contain, is a sense of social crisis. This is not a uniquely Japanese issue, but declining birthrates and an aging society are having a great impact on various social services and economic growth. One area I am very interested in is differences in values across generations. Of course, our values change based on age and life cycle stage, but the fact is that awareness around gender and sexuality, and attitudes toward foreign countries differ depending on the generation you belong to. Analysis also shows that whether perceptions of future economic prospects and the economic climate are optimistic or pessimistic varies by generation. As a result, even if the government tries to implement policies to overcome deflation, if people from certain generations fundamentally think that deflation is not going to happen, then the policy will not succeed.

This issue of differing values across generations exists in every country, but an additional problem in Japan is generational differences in political participation. Voting rates among people 60 and over have been slowly falling over time, but not all that much. What used to be 80 percent is now more like 70 or 65 percent. Among 20-year-olds, voting rates used to be in the range of 60–70 percent in the 1950s and 1960s, but have fallen below 40 percent. If you consider that politics reflects the voices of voters, when there are more and more elderly people and their voter turnout is high, theirs are the voices that will be reflected. Because there is a difference in the

diversity of values between young and old, I think we will see a further weakening of the sense of political efficacy and a desire to participate in politics.

Takenaka: Thank you. Are you saying that differing thoughts around deflation are based on quite different intergenerational values?

McElwain: There is not a great difference in perceptions of the overall economic climate, but if you look at perceptions of what might change in the future in terms of lifestyle and price fluctuations, there are quite large variations, not just according to age but also by generation.

For example, sentiments about how much the economy will grow differ between people who started working and built families before or during the bubble period of the late 1980s, and people from the “ice age” generation,* and those from the current generation. The job market at the time of hiring has a real long-term effect on income impacting the amount people should save and whether they can afford to get married or not. Those things affect what they expect of the government.

Takenaka: Wages are pretty much frozen right now, are they not? In addition, because of the low voter turnout among young people, their opinions are not being reflected in politics, which then risks, as Professor Taniguchi was saying, even further declines in awareness about self-determination.

McElwain: That is definitely true. To add one further point, there are also differences to a certain extent in terms of gender and male/female political participation. For those under the age of 60, women have higher turnout by a few percentage points, but for those over 65, voter turnout among women is relatively low. And when you get to 80 and over, there is more than a 15 percent difference in voter turnout between men and women. Because young women today come out to vote in higher numbers, I think this inequality will be resolved in one or two generations. However, the problem we have today is that the voices being heard in politics are not necessarily a balanced reflection of members of society.

* The “ice age” generation is the term for those who finished college in the decade after the bubble burst and have had difficulty finding stable employment—Trans.

Takenaka: That is very true. Professor Takayasu, please go ahead.

Takayasu: The issues and challenges can be consolidated in a variety of ways, but I believe the biggest and most immediate problem for Japanese democracy is the dysfunctional nature of competition between political parties. Many constitutional systems rely on competition between parties. Separation of powers and the constitution help balance friction in a society. In a federal system, the counterbalance between the federation's units, or between the commonwealth and states, helps maintain the political social order. In societies where that is not the case, competition between political parties is, in a positive sense, the biggest cause for tension. But when that fails to function, the fear over power changing hands is lost. That then translates into a loss of incentive for those holding power to regulate themselves or to better understand their constituents. In Japan's case, there has been a loosening of constraints on the constitution in the past few years. The fact that people in power have made arbitrary interpretations or changes, I think, reflects what I am talking about here.

Issues arise when you try to curtail power, one of which is that it complicates people's expressions of self-determination. This is because as the reins on those holding political power get loosened, those with power become insensitive to the will of the people and they prioritize matters according to their own wishes. People dismiss the opposition thinking they are not strong enough to take control. People feel less and less that political parties reflect their interests. And there is a risk of a downward spiral in which people think, "It doesn't matter if my opinion isn't heard. It isn't being heard anyway."

The second problem with the representative system is the point about whether parliamentarians are a microcosm of the nation's people. Regional assemblies show similarities and differences to the national Diet, but prefectural representatives have always been incredibly important in national-level politics. The idea of ensuring at least one representative from each prefecture reflects this unusually high awareness.

In contrast, on gender, and particularly the

female-male ratio, just around 9 percent of parliamentarians in the House of Representatives and around 20 percent in the House of Councillors are women. Perhaps this points to the significance of the House of Councillors, but even on age and occupation, it is hard to say it is representative. More specifically, the low ratio of women and high ratio of hereditary Diet members are serious problems indeed. Capability plays a part if a candidate runs in a district outside of where their parent or relative held a seat, but that does not even come into question if it is their parents' constituency. No credence is given to their abilities. The separation between elites and ordinary people can clearly be seen in elected representatives, which goes back to what we were just talking about.

My third point is about pluralism of information in the political world. I think there have been a lot of question marks and concerns raised in the past decade. The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression voiced concerns about the government's direct and indirect pressure on the media, and in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, Japan's ranking dropped dramatically from 11th in 2010 to 72nd in 2017. Criticism of the established media has reached worrying levels. Japan is not alone. Of course, newly emerged internet-based rivals have criticized the established media, which for so long seized the commanding heights of information, but I think diminished readership and thus fewer supporters are also factors.

At the same time, in relation to the issue of politicians attacking the media, the concern must be expressed tirelessly and repeatedly. In the case of newspapers, we are seeing increased divisions between papers. In traditional journalism, the journalists operated together like a village so that, even in the presence of different creeds, if one journalist was attacked, they would all step up to defend that person. That is because an attack on any single journalist by those in power amounts to a loss of press freedom, and society as a whole cannot be served. That solidarity is under attack now to a point that it may be on the verge of being lost. In terms of commercial television stations, the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications has raised Article 4

of the Broadcast Act, stating that programs must be politically fair, which on the surface is about neutral coverage and encouraging media self-restraint, but which looks like an attempt to contain critical coverage and remarks by using legal power.

For NHK, the problems with the governing board are enormous, and it has the added problem of needing its budget to be approved by the National Diet. There is the sense in some quarters that “it serves them right” when journalism comes under attack. Those in power have exploited this social atmosphere and have actually attacked the media. There is a very real fear now of a loss of plurality of information and views provided to the people.

The role of journalism is to pose the tough questions to people in power. But the freedom to ask the tough questions is rapidly disappearing. Journalists are not singling out politicians for criticism; rather, they are questioning whether politicians can fully explain their positions. Politicians must provide explanations to the people, who are sovereign; the people are the ones in need of information since they are forced to accept the outcomes in the end. But for some reason, we see journalists belittled with comments like, “You call yourself professionals?” or “You are just people hired by media companies,” or being described as rude or arrogant. Politicians’ interactions with journalists are not the same as daily conversations. Therefore, we have every reason to be concerned about these attacks on journalists.

Post-democracy is the fourth thing I want to raise. This is similar to what Professor Taniguchi mentioned, so I will keep it brief. We see in countries around the world that democratic institutions are in place, but people are less and less enthusiastic about shouldering responsibility. This is especially so in Japan. I think we call it “*omakase* (I’ll leave it to you) democracy.” It is when people leave policies in the hands of the government. It is the incredibly concerning point that people are reluctant to act even when something absurd happens. I suspect this may be the area from which democracy starts to collapse.

My fifth point is about nationalism and xenophobia, which I feel may have subsided somewhat. Nationalism swept over many countries and regions

prior to World War II, and friction between states extended even to the citizen level. After the war, that nationalism was mostly very well controlled at the elite level. When nationalism is used at the elite level, it gets increasingly difficult to control. This issue is not unique to Japan, but there have been times when I felt situations were headed toward nationalism and even further to xenophobia. If allowed to gain strength, these threaten liberalism and democracy—our themes for this discussion today. So, I thought it best to raise these concerns.

Takenaka: Thank you very much. There are many points in common in what the three of you are saying, and then there is this point that Professor Takayasu has just emphasized. Based on what you have just said, Professor Takayasu, would you say that the government’s power has become quite strong?

Takayasu: That is a difficult point. Perhaps I should say that the checks on power have weakened. I say that because the government has not been successful in containing the pandemic. If they really did have more power, they should have been able to contain the pandemic.

Takenaka: There is an intensive debate on that topic. The issue is that the government was unable to adopt a focused response because the authority to deal with the pandemic was divided. You have three layers of national, prefectural, and then local authorities in different forms—special wards, cities, ordinance-designated cities—making it extremely difficult to coordinate, and I think that is one major reason why the government response to the COVID-19 crisis was not swift and has been lagging.

On the topic of relations with the media, I believe it stems from the reforms put in place to concentrate power at the central government level. And on the issue of competitiveness, I think this perhaps also ties into the increased cohesiveness of the LDP. The structural reforms of the government from the 1990s onward are also related to interparty competition, as is the aggregation of authority at the central level. How do you evaluate the structural reforms that were made?

Takayasu: The purpose of the 1994 government reforms was policy-centered politics and party-centered politics, aimed at transforming diversity (i.e., effective competition) within the LDP to diversity between parties. It is important for political parties to be united in stance, and centralization within the party was one way to achieve that. But unless it guarantees a real competition of a multiparty system (political pluralism), it creates an incredibly dangerous situation. They centralized power but did not properly lay the groundwork for the type of competition between political parties that can provide control of that power. A more basic question about the political reforms is whether you can politically engineer an opposition party in the first place. We already had the hefty LDP. The major issue is, even if you designed it, is it possible to create an opposition party to compete with that track record? Because if not, whether there is one opposition party or many, there is no point to the political reform. In that sense, not only were they extremely dangerous reforms, but their effect is yet to be fully realized. Now it is like a car equipped with only an accelerator and no brake.

Takenaka: I think we are all on the same page, but please allow me to summarize just in case. The reforms to government structure that we are talking about started in 1994 with a shift from the SNTV system to a system involving single-seat districts with plurality voting and seats allocated through proportional representation. This had the effect of weakening the factions within the LDP and enhancing the party leader's ability to exercise leadership. Subsequently, in 2001, ministries and agencies of the central government were reorganized under Prime Minister Hashimoto's administrative reforms, which served to strengthen the prime minister's power. Until that point, the ministers had been the central actors in policymaking, but the changes created an environment that gave the prime minister direct control over policy management, essentially saying, "If there's something you want to achieve as prime minister, you can go it alone." The same person whose power was boosted as the party leader also amassed authority as the prime minister. Such a reform, after all, provided

the ruling parties with much power vis-à-vis opposition parties. Professor Takayasu just mentioned how, even though there are opposition parties to keep the ruling parties in check, it has never functioned adequately. However, prior to these changes, Japan had been criticized for its indecisive politics. In international negotiations, for example, a lack of unity within the government meant both the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) refused to yield. Both got crushed and Japan came back home empty-handed. And in times of crisis like the Gulf War, of course, there was also the issue of constitutional interpretation, but domestic coordination took so much time that ultimately Japan was not able to respond. What are your thoughts around those issues, Professor Takayasu?

Takayasu: When talking about the 1994 political reforms and the 1998 administrative reforms, we often understand them as coexisting, but in terms of how they relate, the political reforms are more important in that they set the groundwork for the administrative reforms. Administrative reforms can be done in many ways, and the Hashimoto reforms were one way to do it. There was a definite need for government-centered leadership and government-wide coordination.

There was a very important dimension in the political reforms, which needed care in order to defend liberal democracy. When changing electoral systems, if you do not create a system that guarantees real competition between parties—the original purpose of the reforms—the result is a single, dominant player.

Prior to the institution of electoral reforms, there was a general tone of apprehension in Japanese politics about the single-seat constituency system. Japanese society is not necessarily divided into two clear groups, so when pushed, or when a hot issue arises, it can move in one direction. I remember renowned American political scientist T.J. Pempel's comment on Japanese politics: "It is like a soccer game without players spreading out across the pitch—everyone is gathered around the ball." And that made so much sense to me. How

do you guarantee interparty competition in a society like that? We need to engineer a system that encourages and reinforces interparty competition. I think that will be the key point in undertaking reforms in the future.

Takenaka: Professor Taniguchi, would you like to add anything here?

Taniguchi: I describe it as having either “horizontal democracy” or “vertical democracy,” and post-war Japan had “horizontal democracy.” The country worked hard to diminish the disparities of the day, such as wealth gaps between classes and gaps between different regions. The administration and the LDP have succeeded in these efforts, which is why I believe they have held power for so long, but the problem has been the consequential sacrifice of “vertical democracy.” By this I mean that the trilemma has been overcome, but only by postponing the negative legacy until the next generation. They increased loans to expand wealth redistribution and passed the bill on to the next generation.

In classes and other settings where I engage with young people, I have always told them, “We are getting around current issues in Japan’s finances, welfare, and economics by delaying them to the future. If the next generation doesn’t wake up to the situation, things are going to get really tough.” However, older generations, including myself, have a lot to reflect on in terms of whether we, realizing that there are generational conflicts, have fostered democratic consciousness in young people.

Takenaka: And how does that relate to the problems of competition between political parties?

Taniguchi: I think the growing power of the prime minister and the executive and tightened controls on the media are the manifestation of a decreased scope to act on the part of both the government and the LDP because of the deteriorating international situation and economic climate. Conflict, including interparty competition, increases when circumstances deteriorate, but when the situation gets even tougher, there will be no room for political contests and power will be centralized even

further in the hands of the government. I think that is how authoritarian systems are born. The current power structures—the structures that allowed the LDP to stay in power for so long—should have been changed much earlier. And in terms of the government changing hands, we need an effective political party that offers a real choice. The reality now, however, is that we have such a wide range of political parties that the question becomes, do we have room for European-style pluralistic politics? Frankly, in the Japan of today, I do not think that is possible anymore.

Takenaka: Professor Taniguchi, you raised the issue of government not changing hands, and I believe you were saying the issue is that the LDP has won the interparty contests too many times.

Taniguchi: That is exactly right. Change should have come about earlier.

Takenaka: And are you suggesting that right now there is no room for Japan to have effective interparty competition?

Taniguchi: The reason I feel it would be difficult to operate a European-style multiparty stable government in Japan relates to something Professor McElwain raised at the outset, and that is that we do not have that kind of cleavage. In the absence of that, trying to change our government, which has been based on a one-party dominant system for so long, requires the development of solid political parties and a total overhaul of our electoral system.

Takenaka: I understand your point about there being no room for a multiparty system. The system designers had in mind a two-party system, but I really want to know how they expected to achieve that while combining a plurality system with a proportional representation system. I hear you saying the LDP is too strong, so instead of a multiparty system, do you picture a two-party system, Professor Taniguchi?

Taniguchi: I am not sure what the right number of parties is, but in the absence of capacity for

competition between parties in a multiparty system, I think we could think about a structure where the components congregate as either two parties or two blocs.

What we saw from the electoral reforms was that in contrast to the LDP, whose policy stance has not changed, the Socialist and Communist parties and Komeito are continuously moving toward the center. And partly because of the electoral system and partly because of circumstances at the time, the changes served to shake off ineffective political parties. Nowadays, the Socialist and Communist parties are increasingly realistic. I think those were the kinds of outcomes we saw from the changes.

Takenaka: Understood. So, before long we might see the realization of a left-of-center bloc strong enough to come into power.

Takayasu: Professor Taniguchi, I do not think you are suggesting there is no need for rivalry between parties, but rather asking what kind of political party system is possible. Is that correct? I, too, am not saying which kind of system would be best; I think we have to just get on with it, whatever the system may be—whether it is a two-bloc or a multiparty system. I am giving no particular opinions about the shape it should take, although I do think we should set our goals high.

Taniguchi: That is correct. I think it is excellent to think about system design with ideals as the starting point, as Professor Takayasu notes. I am thinking about ways to somehow resolve the issues we face today, so my bar is set pretty low.

Takenaka: This is so enlightening. Professor Takayasu spoke earlier about reorganization of the central government as being a separate issue, but I think, at the very least, the COVID-19 crisis has shown quite clearly that the central government is weak when compared to the power of local governments. The objective of the 1994 political reforms was to design the electoral system so that different political parties come to power from time to time. It also assumed that the opposition could sustain strong power to keep government in check. But

in reality, while we have seen the centralization of power within the central government, the opposition parties are still weak and in no position to take power. Which is why it is often pointed out that the LDP feels no pressure. Professor McElwain, do you have any thoughts on this?

McElwain: The challenge in designing a new system and instituting change is that the people with the authority to change the rules have very little incentive to do so because they are the winners from the current system. However, if they become concerned about losing an election and becoming the opposition, then they may be more willing to limit the government's authority.

In terms of government structure, the preferences do not automatically split along governing party–opposition lines. For example, comparatively smaller political parties prefer proportional representation and the multi-seat electoral district system, and parties with their political base in urban areas seem to want further decentralization of power. Put differently, even opposition parties may disagree on the nature and prioritization of reforms. With a majority of the single-member seats, only the LDP can reform the system, if they can just achieve internal consensus. But because the LDP has been in power for so long, it is only logical that the political strategy is one of seeking centralization of power.

The concern is actually the 1955 system. The LDP held power uninterrupted for 38 years, but looking at whether they were all safe wins, the late 1970s shows that several elections were very tight. Each time they were faced with a situation where they thought, “This could be the one we lose.” Then we saw the formation of the New Liberal Club and Komeito. This concern about a possible electoral loss leads to better self-regulation and more awareness of the interests of opposition supporters. There is no guarantee of winning every seat in a given constituency under the multi-seat electoral system, which means redistributed interests need to be shared with other parties to some extent.

Professor Steve Reed at Chuo University often says it takes three elections after electoral reform to reach a new equilibrium. The new electoral system comprised of single-seat constituencies

and multi-seat proportional representation constituencies has been used since 1996, and the DPJ showed strength as the leading opposition party in the 2000 and 2003 elections. And with the DPJ's win in the 2009 election, many thought that a two-party system had been achieved. But that structure has totally collapsed, and it is impossible to predict when we might see a return to that. Linking this to the comments by Professors Taniguchi and Takayasu about what kind of system is best, when the governing party has very little risk of losing, the part of democracy concerned with introducing diverse opinions, rights, and preferences is not functioning well at all.

One main issue raised by Professor Takayasu was the mismatch between parliamentarians and the people. Many have inherited their posts, few are women, and their ages are relatively high. I think Professor Taniguchi would agree, but when conducting survey experiments, no matter how we ask the question, many respond that they “dislike” or “don't like very much” hereditary Diet members, at least in principle. And on the question of whether they prefer female or male candidates, if forced to choose, we see a trend of a small margin of preference for female candidates. But those are not the candidates actually being elected.

Additionally, while the people are choosing which candidates become Diet members, it is party pressure and power that determines who gets to be a candidate in the first place. One issue Columbia University's Daniel Smith emphasizes about hereditary Diet members in his book *Dynasties and Democracy* is the relationship with hometowns. Local support groups (*koenkai*) and chambers of commerce prefer long-term partnerships and bargains, and because it is highly likely that hereditary Diet members will maintain the promises of their predecessors, these groups give them organizational support from early on. Other new Diet members cannot gain the support of local constituents nearly as easily.

One unique aspect of the LDP is that, compared to other political parties, it has very few turf wars. The individual candidates maintain local links through support groups and the like, but there are not all that many party members, so when it comes

to candidate selection, it is typically a matter of inheriting local interests and the previous member's preferences, the result being that constituents can only choose from the choices presented to them. And the issue with that is that there is very little diversity in the choices presented to them.

Takenaka: The point you made about the governing parties, in particular the LDP, that they are confident that they are unlikely to lose, which results in an insufficient air of tension—is the electoral system to blame for that?

McElwain: I think the electoral system has had various detrimental effects. The proportional representation part of the dual system allows minority parties to survive. This is an extreme case, but the Social Democratic Party has survived after the electoral reforms, whereas Minna no To (Your Party) did not last long even though it was quite popular at one point. This battle to survive means it is not always clear, based on political science theory, which parties will stick around.

It is a mystery to me why the opposition cannot reach agreement. I prefer not to use political culture and traditions as explanatory variables or the basis for an argument, but people studying electoral systems have said for a while that “this electoral system probably won't gel with the Japanese people.” It is the idea that if the system has not yet resulted in a two-party system, then the point of equilibrium may not be two major parties, at least as implemented in Japan.

Takenaka: Professor Masaru Kohno and others say that if the same electoral system is not designed in a comprehensive manner from top to bottom, there will be no stable party system. Going further, Professors Yosuke Sunahara and Takayoshi Uekami and others argue that discrepancies between electoral systems at the central and local levels are far too extreme (then you add to that the House of Councillors), which means there are divergent forces at work in each election—those for amalgamation under a two-party system and those for dispersion. This results in a lack of unity in the opposition camp. What do you think about those ideas?

McElwain: I can see how that would affect political party strategy. This may be a little off topic, but I think one of the fundamental reasons for the political party system not taking shape, and for why the opposition fails to be competitive, is that electoral campaign periods are far too short. It is just 12 days for the House of Representatives, which makes it extremely difficult to broach big policy issues. A ban on internet-based election campaigning was lifted recently, enabling communication with a wide range of constituents, and yet things have not changed much, and we still see trucks driving around repeatedly calling out a certain candidate's name. The current system is said to have switched the focus of campaigns from the candidate to the party, but there is very little you can achieve in such a short amount of time. It is probably the same in most countries, but I think voters watch very little political news outside election periods.

Takenaka: I see. That raises various issues to be discussed. But on the point about a lack of unity in opposition, system theorists would definitely say the electoral system is to blame. Professor Taniguchi, what do you think based on the surveys you have conducted to date?

Taniguchi: I wonder what kind of empirical evidence there is for this idea of harmonizing the systems for national and local politics. I think you could make the counterargument that a variety of electoral systems yield different logic and that means that different types of candidates and parties are chosen, thereby guaranteeing diversity.

My other concern is that in elections for prefectural assemblies, for example, we see uneven population distribution across urban and non-urban areas, making demarcation increasingly difficult. Municipalities with continuously declining populations are forced to create vast merged districts, while populous urban areas have so many candidates that districts will most likely need to be divided. Be it a single-seat constituency system or multi-seat constituency system, frequent demarcations must be made to avoid disparities in the value of votes between constituencies, increasing the practical difficulty of such a task. Adopting a system

of proportional representation across the board in all prefectures would make things simpler because it would not be necessary to redraw the lines no matter how uneven population distribution is.

However, adoption of such a system in local areas could, for better or for worse, give rise to diverse local political parties. In other words, even if you try to make uniform electoral systems, there is no guarantee of consistency across national and local political party systems.

Takenaka: One other thing we need to discuss is the issue of diversity. Professor Takayasu raised it and Professor McElwain brought up the point about the kinds of candidates that political parties choose to put forward. Professor Taniguchi—what do you think? Japan clearly has very few females in politics.

Taniguchi: We are seeing some diversity in Japan today now that it is easier for young people and women to run in elections for city councils. But it is different for prefectural assemblies and town and village councils, even in non-urban areas. In town and village councils, influential local people partially volunteer to become representatives. And in the case of prefectural assemblies, we see that those elected tend to be the leaders of interest groups, local organizations, or chambers of commerce and industry. This situation makes the hurdle very high for new entrants, so it is hard for young people and women to be chosen as candidates to run in prefectural assemblies or town and village councils. The bar is set even higher in national politics. Left to take its own course in this way, the settings and the need for competitiveness lead to a convergence of candidates with certain attributes. And that is why I think it is best to have institutional interventions such as parity laws.

On the issue of hereditary Diet members, they clearly have an advantage in inheriting the power base of a parent or ancestor. However, it is anticipated that as politics becomes more merit and results-oriented, the number of hereditary Diet members will decline. Until now, the importance of hereditary Diet members has been in their role as mediators for distribution of medium- to long-term interests within Japan's structures for political

and regional distribution, but the pie itself is getting smaller all the time. Further, as the coronavirus pandemic has shown, an inability to properly manage the issues at hand exposes their limits as politicians.

Takenaka: Professor Daniel Smith's research does show a decrease in the number of hereditary Diet members. I would like to ask one further point in connection with self-determination and silver democracy, which we have discussed earlier. You mentioned Verba, as well as consumer democracy and citizen-led democracy, but why is it that Japanese people have such a low sense of sovereignty and efficacy—that awareness that they themselves have the ability to change things as proactive actors?

Taniguchi: What we see from survey results is that Japanese people are essentially very rational people. It is that idea that someone else will do it if I do not, and if it all works out in the end, then that is fine.

I am going a little off topic, but listening to Chinese researchers, they are saying that young people in China today are happy with the current Chinese model because the country's development



has enhanced its international presence and economic growth is improving their lifestyles. Where previously they felt it unfortunate that China did not adopt democracy like all the advanced nations, now they feel increasingly confident.

If we know there is a universal trend to support the current system while the going is good, then Japanese people too will listen to what the government tells them as long as they see results. But just like Professor McElwain was saying, surveys are

showing extremely high levels of dissatisfaction and distrust of politics. Internet surveys, in particular, return results of people in their 60s and 70s now—the kind of former student activists—being active and liberal, whereas younger people are pessimistic and somewhat conservative. There are intergenerational differences like that, but now with the COVID-19 crisis, things are not looking good with the economy and society, and I feel that dissatisfaction is starting to emerge in various ways.

Takenaka: Professor McElwain, you spoke about the silver democracy and how young people are voting in smaller numbers. If everyone was indeed rational, voter turnout should decrease across the board, so how do you explain high turnout among the elderly? Is it because they are being compensated through social welfare?

McElwain: We can demonstrate a clear link with a declining sense of political efficacy, but I think Professor Taniguchi may be more knowledgeable on why that is declining. Surveys often ask about people's sense of efficacy and ideas like, "I can change politics" or "politicians listen to what I have to say." Japan scores lower than other countries, but I sometimes wonder why, on the contrary, other countries score so high. Rationally speaking, it is quite difficult for one person to make much of a substantial change. But believing you have the power to is crucial to the foundation of democracy. I think it really is as Professor Taniguchi said: Japan bends, or should I say, leans toward the rational.

Secretariat: Please allow me to add two questions related to this. The first relates to young people not proactively participating in politics. In 1969, what was then known as the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issued a statement on "Political Education and Political Activities at High Schools," asking schools to instruct their students about the undesirability, from an educational perspective, of engaging in political acculturation and political activities either inside or outside school. This was based on the historical context and the fact that the minimum voting age was 20 at the time. Even if this does not explain everything, I think it had

something to do with people distancing themselves or even avoiding politics. I would like to hear what you think about that.

Second, since the voting age was lowered to 18 in 2016, we are seeing a bigger drive in education circles to cultivate political education for high school students, but what factors should be considered in doing so? I am especially interested in hearing from Professor McElwain and his opinions based on an understanding of the situations in America, the UK, and Japan.

McElwain: I think the first issue it raises is the stage of development at which it is appropriate to start teaching about politics. If you start at the high school level, you miss the minors who do not attend high school, and the same is the case if the education starts at the university level—anyone not attending university would be excluded.

American university campuses are extremely active, and whenever there is some kind of political event, both Democratic and Republican party supporters gather in large plazas and make a lot of noise. In classes too, everyone has a strong opinion. To the point that, as their teacher—and this may come across as rude—I sometimes find it incredible that they can have such strong opinions even though they do not know all that much about politics. In contrast, Japanese students often say that politics is too difficult to understand, and I find myself thinking, “Politics is not as hard as you think, so you should get more involved.” But looking at voter turnout among young people, there are similarities between the United States and Japan. The rates are higher in Europe, but the rates are similarly low among 20-year-olds in America and Japan.

I do not think it is very positive for democracy to have politics be seen as such a lofty thing. It is not that I cannot comprehend the reluctance among constituents to vote, such as leaving it to people who really understand politics, but I think it is a mistake to believe that people who vote are highly knowledgeable about politics. Everyone participates through trial and error, and I think the issue is about getting that message across to young people.

Taniguchi: Efforts were made to educate high

school students in citizenship and the like, but I suspect it was a challenge in postwar Japanese society to carry out activities aimed at fostering people as democracy’s key actors toward a truly democratic society. I found a very interesting Japanese book in the basement of the University of Michigan library. An elementary school girl had written a letter to the editor of a newspaper about the state of elections after the war. It said something along the lines of, “The elections in my village are outrageous. Influential local people press everyone to vote for a certain candidate, so everyone votes for that candidate. After all the constitutional changes and everyone now getting to vote, this is not true democracy at all.” After it was published, the girl’s family was ostracized, and they could no longer live in the village. I think this was in the immediate postwar period, but it gave me a sense of how difficult it must have been to make serious efforts to implement democracy.

We see how it can cause conflict with the working generation when young people gain an interest in politics. Perhaps democracy is about searching for common ground through that division and competition. However, in Japanese society, there is this spirit of efficiency, the idea of “if you can’t beat them, join them,” and a kind of rationalism at work whereby people perceive more benefit in going along with what they are told. This may be the cause for never really making earnest efforts, in both households and schools, to educate the next generation about democracy. As the member of the secretariat just mentioned, it was taboo to broach political issues in educational settings.

This is still the case today. Even though people now have the vote from 18 years of age and high schools need to teach about public education and citizenship, there is always this message of maintaining political neutrality. Japan still has the memory of the war, and as I mentioned earlier, choice of system and constitutional issues all fall on the left-right axis. This makes it very difficult for educators to provide balanced teaching about the system of government and democratic competition. Researchers like us in modern political science and other fields must be realistic and recognize how the diverse dimensions of democracy make it

difficult to maintain and manage, but convey how important it is to protect democracy, nonetheless. The issue is how we go about implementing that at various levels of education.

We hear about problems of young people not taking an interest in politics, but there are some youths who feel that something has to be done. One of the problems with current Japanese politics and government structures, however, is the excessive amount of time it takes for something to become policy. First you need people to get elected, then those people need to form a majority in the Diet, and then they have to build consensus among the administration, political parties, and the Diet... It is such a time-consuming process. Contrast that with ordering something on Amazon and getting it delivered today, and how business has become so convenient. You can see why young people feel it takes far too long when getting a bill passed in parliament is a matter of years. Their sense is that politics has changed far too little and that it is terribly difficult to enact change. They get discouraged because creating new organizations and networks feels like too high a hurdle.

It is because of this that I think we will see greater movement for direct democracy starting at the local government level, in an attempt to gain faster access to government. How do you reflect people's opinions when you do not have a representative system of democracy? We are seeing an increase in political participation through appeals over social media, as well as the collection of electronic signatures. I believe young people can be encouraged to participate through approaches utilizing new mechanisms, tools, and technologies, rather than always defaulting to the mechanisms available now.

Takenaka: I like this idea, going beyond Professor Taniguchi's idea of consumer democracy into a kind of "one-click democracy." While Americans have a stronger sense of political efficacy, Japanese people may behave based on rationality. I think it is precisely because the Japanese do not see themselves as being in a position to empower others and affect politics that they act rationally. Where does this difference come from?

Taniguchi: I think that is exactly right. Japan is a society in which the individual is not dominant. Just like the example I gave earlier of the village level with influential people imposing their views about candidates and people voting along those lines, I think there is an element of hardship living in a community or area unless you defer to others. On the other hand, there is a sense that in areas of high mobility, like cities, constraints on the individual are very loose and it is easy to get by without relying on politics or the government. Even so, I think we see a continuation of the situation in which people feel there is no need to change politics as long as they are living a comfortable life, and so they do not participate in the political process.

Takayasu: Can I just say something about the electoral system here? I feel that the changes in the system have been pretty major. I have heard about high school teachers commenting that lowering the voting age from 20 to 18 actually made it harder to teach citizenship education in high schools. In other words, when the voting age was 20, there was



still time to compare the policies of different parties and debate possible positive and negative impacts. But with the age lowered to 18, teachers worry about being criticized for bias during policy comparison, leaving them with nothing more to teach besides the electoral system itself. That is not to say it was a mistake to lower the age, but I think doing so turned the students into constituents, thereby complicating deep discussions on content in the school setting.

My other point is about where the sense of political efficacy comes from. I think Japanese schools are starting to change, but in extracurricular activities, for example, there is a very strong culture of doing as you are told rather than being encouraged to come up with something yourself. Which means we have very few experiences of something changing through our own actions. Even in university classes, we can see how students' commitment to classes and seminars is strengthened through actual experiences of student voices being heard and effecting change.

Takenaka: Thank you for adding those very important points. I think it is true that there are very few times in daily life where a proposal from an individual is simply accepted. About 15 years ago, I was speaking with a friend who had returned from America about this topic of the sense of efficacy. My friend mentioned how, in Japan, you rarely get what you want when asking for your meal to be prepared a specific way, but in America the immediate response is "Oh, sure!" Even in that sense, Japan may be a society that offers very little sense of individual efficacy.

McElwain: I never went to school in Japan, so may I ask, are student representatives—class leaders and committee leaders—elected to those roles? Or do the teachers choose them?

Takenaka: They are elected. But people do not put their hands up, so I think often the teacher goes around beforehand asking students if they will stand as candidates.

McElwain: It seems to me that outside politics, Japanese people have relatively few experiences of choosing something through an election process. When you hold an election in a small group, such as in a village election, there may be strong societal pressure. But citizenship education is a gradual accumulative process. I think having few experiences where it is possible to be either the elector or the person eligible for elected office can have an impact on the formation of values when you are young.

Takenaka: We have not fully covered this topic, but I would like to move on to the issue of the media. First, regarding the "attacks on the media" that Professor Takayasu raised earlier, are you referring to media being attacked by those with political power? It is true that recently newspapers have been taking quite strong positions. What is the reason for this phenomenon? And this aggression—is this because those in power are stronger and there is little opposition to rein them in?

A friend of mine is researching what circumstances strengthen the independence of the American judiciary, and her research shows that it is when the legislature is "divided" or "twisted." What this means is that, because the rivalry is fierce, even if the judiciary takes a certain stance, someone else will stand up to defend it. There is no way for the media in authoritarian states to take a position, because if they went on the offensive, they would be crushed immediately. People hold all kinds of opinions, but the reason the media is free to say various things is because there are people in power willing to protect them. I think that is how they maintain a neutral position. Would you agree with that?

Takayasu: This is only anecdotal, but until the 2000s, there were many television programs bringing people from various political parties together on one platform. However, we no longer see those kinds of programs on television whether they are entertainment shows or news, though they seem to be making a comeback on broadcast satellite television recently. I think this has had an impact on the fact that, from the 1990s to 2000s, when asked to name promising politicians, people could easily name more than a few, but since the 2010s, people are hard-pressed to think of any names. I think this has been influenced by the reduction in programs where politicians can speak in their own words.

Takenaka: I wonder why that is. It would seem perfectly possible for the LDP to send any number of individual politicians to appear on those kinds of shows.

Takayasu: Perhaps there are political parties making it harder for their Diet members to appear freely on such programs.

Takenaka: And there are the newspapers, too. Some of their positions have become much clearer. What caused such changes to occur?

Takayasu: The presence of a variety of newspapers is, I think, the same in other countries around the world. What I hope makes everyone stop in their tracks is related to the idea mentioned earlier that everyone in journalism belongs to a “journalism village,” where they are expected to support one another when attacked politically, even when they have different viewpoints. This has started to fade in recent years. It is the idea that, for instance, an issue with Asahi Shimbun amounts to an attack not only on that newspaper but all the others, too. I am concerned about the shortage of the kind of pride in being a journalist that goes beyond one’s own company.

McElwain: I agree 100 percent with what Professor Takayasu said. The fact that journalists do not make the need to protect journalism, including even their competitors, their top priority is a major issue in terms of the impact on democracy and journalism’s *raison d’être*.

I also firmly agree that the media may not be as critical of the government if the opposition is weak. Governments show restraint when they believe that if they break any norms or rules, they can expect voter backlash. The government risks losing votes if opposition parties can credibly claim that it is turning a blind eye to inconvenient media reports or ignoring adverse court judgments. But that risk is limited if the opposition’s reputation is poor or if voters feel it has limited capacity to hold power. The basic assumption, therefore, is that the presence of an opposition is not enough; the opposition needs to have real potential to win for the media to exercise its oversight role. The converse of this is that in the absence of an opposition to protect it, the administration can attack the media without negative outcomes. It seems to me that the administration will just keep mounting attacks if it knows there are no penalties for doing so.

Takenaka: That is right. Professor Taniguchi, would you like to add anything on these points?

Taniguchi: According to Freedom House and other surveys, freedom of expression by the media and freedom of the press is deteriorating the world over. Japan is no different.

I do think there are some unique elements to Japan’s media situation though. I think it is quite rare to have television stations and newspapers providing coverage for an entire country’s citizens. Japan’s newspaper readership is extremely high, and we have commercial television stations with national networks. An exchange student from a small European country said there are not many television stations or programs in their country anyway, so most young people get their information via the internet. On the other hand, when I asked a Southeast Asian exchange student, they told me that party leaders each have their own television stations and other media outlets through which they only share favorable press.

Japan offers a lot of choice in terms of information media, and different generations obtain different information based on their sources: the elderly tend to read newspapers, middle-aged people prefer television, and younger generations frequently refer to the internet. It goes without saying that this decreases the power of journalism to influence overall public sentiment in Japan. This is because people like YouTubers and others doing live broadcasts, and even politicians, are free to share whatever information they like.

What has long been feared in America is the polarization of opinions that occurs when people only seek out information they want to hear and band together with likeminded people. It is not just about different choices in television station or newspaper; if the media tools are different, so are the regions, party affiliations, and generations. We are seeing division in the information sphere because people go where they want for the specific information they want. I think it is important for journalism as a whole to cooperate and raise the quality of media and information. And I really want young people to acquire information through diverse sources. If they only seek information to their liking, they

will be surrounded by similar information or more pronounced, more extreme versions of it. That is how people end up believing fake news and misinformation. I hope they will form judgments about information based on many factors, including confirmation of the authenticity of the news. It is fine to source information through the internet, and I think the sites produced by the newspaper companies are well-substantiated and credible, but I really hope young people will talk with their parents, teachers, and others around them as well. I just do not want them to base their judgments solely on information they have sought for themselves.

Takenaka: That is the idea of “living in silos.” It is clear how important this issue of the media is.

How to Strengthen Japan’s Democracy

Takenaka: Thus far we have focused on the issues. So now I would like to turn our discussions to what we can do to make things better. Professor Taniguchi, please lead the way.

Taniguchi: We must bear in mind the kinds of social trends I just mentioned if we want to improve our current situation. I am thinking about increasing directness, demanding faster action, and accelerating diversity in society. But it takes courage to create and test totally new mechanisms.

Even if this is hard at the national level, I understand there are various experiments underway at the local government level. One example is the creation of more mechanisms for collecting residents’ opinions. There is a lack of willing candidates for local assembly positions and voter turnout is even lower than national politics, so democracy at the local level faces a more immediate crisis than at the national level. There is even some debate over whether local assemblies are really necessary.

Even if citizens have opinions about national politics, things cannot be changed right away. But with an issue in your local municipality, there is a much higher likelihood that the opinions and ideas of your group will be implemented. We talked

earlier about citizenship education and the education of children, but without first discussing issues experienced personally in one’s own region, junior high and high school students will struggle when suddenly told to consider issues of diplomacy and national defense.

My view, therefore, is that we must first strengthen democracy from the local level. And I think we should try out lots of new things at that level. One suggestion is to create a forum for broad expression of opinions that includes people who do not get to vote, like children and foreign residents, so they are no longer excluded from having a say about the state of affairs in their locality.

Further, right now we are undergoing digitization in various aspects of society, but the process is far too slow, and politics and the government are being left behind by the business sector. Olympic operations were successfully managed by throwing people at the problem because Japanese people are generally highly capable. But Japan’s extremely low ability to systematize was demonstrated by the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Japan has gotten where it is now through faith in people, not in systems, but there is no room for that anymore. That is why I believe that we should experiment with initiatives starting from the local level, even on issues that have not seemed feasible before.

Takenaka: Straight off the bat, you have some very innovative ideas. This shows how in touch you are with the times, Professor Taniguchi. Can we hear about your ideas for improvements now, Professor McElwain?

McElwain: I would like to raise two points related to the institutional aspects of election operations. The first is the relaxation of restrictions on election campaigning. Few democracies limit by law what you can and cannot do before and after elections are declared and candidates are announced. Of course, some aspects related to rules on political funding and how much money can be spent should remain, but there must be more opportunities for contact between voters, candidates, and political parties.

My second point is somewhat technical, but it relates to Professor Taniguchi’s point about how the

system cannot keep up with the need for frequent demarcation of districts for local elections and single-seat constituencies. This is already a problem at the national government level. In practice, the disparity of one vote must be held below a factor of 2, so each re-demarcation reduces it to 1.9 or 1.8. But we have this cycle so that, by the time the next national election rolls around, it has already exceeded the statutory levels. The boundaries have changed for every national election in the recent past, sometimes affecting as many as 30-40 percent of electorates. This makes it harder for voters to compare one candidate's policies and capabilities across multiple elections, which in turn makes it difficult to call into question the political responsibility and accountability of incumbents. It is not simply about rectifying the disparity of one vote; we must fundamentally change the very rules governing how demarcation is determined.

Takenaka: And by extension, there is the debate that if we continue on this path, in the end, everyone will be in Tokyo. This is a bit of an exaggeration. A long time ago, I did not think it was much of a problem, but I realize now that something has to be done, including with the House of Councillors electoral system, because urban areas have become so heavily populated. Professor Takayasu, can you please share your suggestions for improvements?

Takayasu: First and foremost, it is the political parties who must make the greatest effort. To make this happen, I believe we have the social infrastructure for competition between political parties. For instance, it is about expanding opportunities to interact with constituents, as Professor McElwain just mentioned. Prohibiting personal visits secures an ongoing advantage for incumbents.

We also talked earlier about the campaign period: in terms of number of days from dissolution to election day for the House of Representatives, it was 40 in 2009 and just 23 in 2014, showing how dramatically the political context changes. It is important for the voters to have time to gather information, understand the choices, and make decisions.

Regarding political funding, it is just like that card game Daihinmin (literally, Grand Pauper,

also known as Tycoon) where the first person to get rid of all their cards wins and gets an advantage in the next round. Big money flows to the victors, so rather than encouraging competition between political parties, the system supports the winners. At present, it is also possible that it provides a boost to political parties that would normally not survive.

I think that any discussion of improving the system needs to come from the perspective of promoting competition between political parties. Based on such conditions, parties are expected to come up



with good policies and good leaders. I probably should have raised this in the earlier session on issues in Japan's democracy, but I am concerned about the quality of leaders. Talk of leader quality may not be favored in mainstream political science, but I am talking about leaders who can approach issues according to "first principles" reasoning. The mechanisms for fostering and selecting leaders like that are lacking.

Takenaka: What is this "first principles thinking" that you mention?

Takayasu: First principle is a practice for investigating problems whereby you go back as far as you can to determine the fundamental value before working on a solution. I do not think Japanese leaders adopt this way of thinking. When a problem occurs, their first thought is, "How do we respond?" probably because they have never been properly trained in getting to the bottom of an issue. Perhaps there is an even bigger issue at play, but I find it hard to believe that we are choosing truly capable

individuals in elections. Attractive leaders are not the ones who create a buzz, but leaders who can really think—people who have the capacity to think through, listen to opinions, and clearly express those ideas. Those are the kinds of leaders I want political parties to be producing.

Naturally, using first principles thinking is about discovering policies to address the problem and raising an array of possible solutions. Even in Japan, we see policy transfer taking place all over the place. And while things seem a bit slower recently, we have been seeing very active policy research. If you have the kind of leader I am talking about, then it is possible to see good policies, which is why our hopes must rest with the parties.

My second point is the media. The media supplies diverse and highly trustworthy information. In addition to being aware of the issues shouldered by the established media, we must recognize the value of its role to society and protect that. Maybe it was problematic when the established media acted arrogantly, but that is not where we are anymore. Not at the organization level but at the individual journalist level, their presence is crucial in gathering suitable information and disseminating it. We cannot take that for granted. I think it is important for us to be cognizant of and respect those costs.

Third, and this is what we discussed here today, it is essential that people have many experiences participating in various spheres and sharing opinions. I would like to see a society in which people have those experiences from an early age.

Takenaka: Thank you very much. That all relates to the importance of educational and social experiences to establish a sense of efficacy around leaders and the media. I would just like to ask Professor Taniguchi about digitization in the government and in local assemblies. How are these issues related to areas for improvement?

Taniguchi: One of the reasons for digitization falling behind in politics and government is that, traditionally, the people focusing on mechanisms of politics and government have been researchers in the disciplines of political science, public administration, and law, as well as bureaucrats from

the field of humanities. The Science Council of Japan's subcommittee on political processes hosted a symposium on internet voting, and the presenters included not only political scientists, but also business experts. Political scientists are so consumed by the issues with internet voting, but people from science backgrounds and other fields are saying, "Why can't we make this happen faster? You've done the groundwork, yet you're still not prepared to take the leap." Perhaps we are the ones who have been too closed off to these ideas. When assessing structures



and mechanisms, we must be aware of the possibilities brought about by cutting-edge technology and systems and understand what issues remain.

With more frequent disasters and the COVID-19 crisis, people in rural Japan are concerned with digitizing assemblies and considering all the options by developing internet infrastructure, distributing tablet computers to members, surveying members and their executive office organizations, and investigating the voting process for members and committees. I really believe the pandemic served as the impetus for a digitization breakthrough. We are seeing cases where the digital divide is being overcome, with children engaging in online classes, and universities being forced to go online as well. We need to seize this opportunity and take positive steps to engage in experiments in broad spheres in society.

Takenaka: I feel the things Professor Taniguchi just mentioned are being strongly reflected in her current research environment. Next, I would like to ask Professor McElwain about electoral deposits.

McElwain: The issue around electoral deposits is a big one indeed. Many countries have abolished them. In Ireland, where I come from, it was equivalent to ¥50,000 long ago, but now it is zero.

Takenaka: That sounds like a pretty low amount. In Japan it is ¥6,000,000, so it can only be seen as a barrier to entry.

McElwain: That is absolutely right. According to research by Columbia University's Daniel Smith and Masayuki Harada at Fukuoka University, electoral deposits do little to deter fringe candidates. That said, abolishing electoral deposits would lower the hurdles for new candidates. Whether it has an impact is one criterion for evaluation, but for me, the problem lies with the very concept of electoral deposits and its mismatch with the character of democracy. I do understand the concern about the disruption that frivolous candidates could create if electoral deposits were not required, but more importantly, I believe it is more of a values issue: we should not limit who can stand as candidates.

Takenaka: And lastly, Professor Takayasu. I understand completely your ideas about leaders as a theory on what ought to be done, but would you mind giving some more specific examples?

Takayasu: The mechanisms in political society for producing a succession of political elites differ by country. Some do it well, others not at all. I think in some respects, it is difficult to say that historically Japan has been successful in this regard. In particular, at election time, it has typically been about giving candidacies to people who might win a district or who might be able to gather funds. Instead, we should choose people who deserve to be put forward. After all, while it is the voters who choose the representatives, it is the parties that select the candidates. I think the issues come back to the idea about political parties being responsible for that task.

McElwain: It is difficult to explain to people overseas what distinguishes Japanese politicians in official posts. In attempting to answer questions about why people defer to a certain politician, or why they are so influential, often it has nothing to do with policy knowledge or communication capabilities and can only be explained in terms of relationships and historical background. Professor Takayasu talked about politicians not having the capacity to employ first principles thinking to problem solving, and when constituents look at those politicians, they cannot comprehend why those people hold sway over their livelihoods. Frankly, I do not understand it either. This is a problem that we see in the people at the highest level of politics.

Takenaka: I think assessments are essentially based on someone's coordination skills. What I am about to say is probably going to invoke criticism as ridiculing Japan, but I feel that, for better or for worse, the expectations on our country are sometimes too high. The Glorious Revolution in England took place in 1688–1689, and the French Revolution occurred in 1789. Japanese people decided to open the national assembly for the first time in 1889 with the introduction of the Meiji Constitution, so from that perspective, Japan has worked extremely hard to get to this point. Nevertheless, on the question of whether we should make improvements, of course we must. Many issues remain, but my feeling is that Japan is doing pretty well.

Takayasu: These are exactly the kinds of situations where we need to raise the bar! (laughs)

Takenaka: Understood! I apologize (laughs). Thank you all very much for your valuable time today.

1st Panel Participants



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Harukata Takenaka is currently a professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo, where he specializes in comparative politics and international political economy, with a particular interest in democratization in prewar Japan and changes in the Japanese parliamentary system. His recent publications include *Korona Kiki no Seiji: Abe Seiken vs. Chiji* [Politics of the COVID-19 Crisis: The Abe Administration vs Governors] (2020) and *Failed Democratization in Prewar Japan: Breakdown of a Hybrid Regime* (2014). Professor Takenaka formerly served in the Ministry of Finance between 1993 and 1995, and later joined the Headquarters for the Reorganization of the Government in 1998. He joined GRIPS in 1999 first as an assistant professor, and then taught as an associate professor until assuming his current position in 2010. He received his BA from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo, and his MA and PhD in Political Science from Stanford University.



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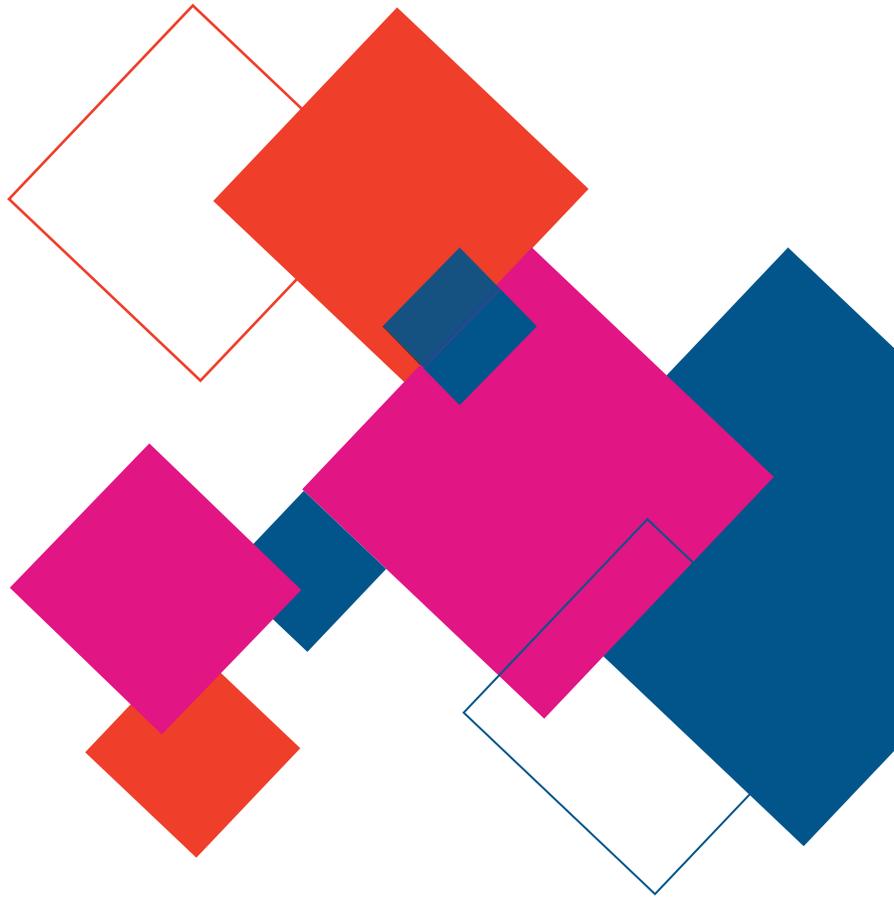
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