Comparing Modern Japan: Are There More Comparisons to Make?[1]

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Abstract: Comparison with other societies is such an ingrained part of the study of Japan that there is reason to ask whether in the future that habit will die out, continue as before, or take new directions. This essay suggests reasons for expecting new uses of comparison. Scholars interested in such current issues as globalization, state making, the social position of women and minorities, and mass culture will be stimulated to look to Japan's record of adaptation and Japan's regional and international influence, making comparisons that start with the Japanese example. Contemporary theoretical work in the social sciences will lead to new comparative questions, focusing on carefully formulated problems. Topics flourishing in work on other societies, including Foucauldian issues of power, gender studies, colonial encounters, and the uses of memory will lead to new investigations of Japanese society and history. At the same time, the familiar topics of comparison in Japanese studies, such as elite formation, religion, and institutions, are likely to take on new life. As an example of some of these possibilities, the essay concludes by comparing the modern histories of Japan and Italy.

Perhaps no other society has been so consistently studied in comparative terms as has modern Japan. The reasons for that lie both in Japan's modern history and in the general development of the social sciences. More than a century ago, the most insular of the world's complexly organized and relatively prosperous societies deliberately set about, systematically and selectively, to adapt the institutional, economic, and social practices of Western nations to its own society. That extraordinary choice, which set Japan on its modern course, inserted a comparative consciousness into Japanese decision making and into its very institutions. Conceptions of what is Japanese and what is foreign, never stable, have been used both to promote change and to denounce it, creating a continuing tension as much a part of

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[1] I first broached this topic at the invitation of Sonoda Hidehiro and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt in an essay written for a symposium in Kyōto held in 1998 and published in the volume they edited, *Japan in a Comparative Perspective* (1999). I am grateful to both of them for that invitation and for the opportunity to learn from the discussions there, and I wish to thank Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit for her suggestion that I revise and extend that essay for publication here.

Japanese culture as the habit of contemplating Japanese society by comparing it to others.[2]

Western interest in Japan has also always had a strong comparative element. Increased Western contacts with Japan came at a time when Western imperialists, merchants, and scholars thought they knew a good deal about China and India; and they tended to comprehend Japan, no matter what their particular mixture of observation and stereotypical assumptions, through two sets of comparisons: Japan compared with other, better-known, Asian nations and Japan compared to "the West." These comparisons became more focused in the twentieth century, weighing differences and similarities in terms of specific institutions and practices. Following World War II, American occupiers, confident of the social and political model they represented, used comparison in assessing what could and should change in Japanese society, and Western social scientists, fascinated with the processes of modernization and development, built an extensive framework for systematic comparisons. The resulting scholarship has been so impressive, and the habit of thinking about Japan in comparative terms has become so ingrained, that it becomes reasonable to ask what direction new comparative analyses might take.

This is not the place, and I am certainly not the person, to undertake a review of the extraordinarily rich literature on Japanese society that asks fundamentally comparative questions. There is reason to think, however, that the uses of comparison in the future may change somewhat, and I propose to speculate on the direction those shifts might take. Where a nation's scholarly literature has paid relatively little analytic attention to experience elsewhere, injecting comparison often has a striking effect. In Japanese studies, however, comparison in and of itself comes as no surprise; and the future importance of comparison in the study of Japan will depend on its capacity to raise questions beyond the familiar ones, identify and redefine problems, shape the research that addresses those problems, and contribute to the formulation of significant theories.[3] Let me speculate on some of the stimuli likely to lead to new comparisons.

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[2] "From the moment the Japanese gave up their voluntary seclusion from the world, comparison with the West has dominated their opinion of themselves," John Whitney Hall: "Changing Conceptions of the Modernization of Japan" (1965: 11); Jansen also notes the consistent self-awareness of the Japanese in his essay on "Changing Japanese Attitudes toward Modernization" (1965: 88–89).

[3] I have argued elsewhere that the four chief purposes of historical comparison are asking questions, defining problems, designing research (which includes building theory), and testing conclusions. Raymond Grew: "The Case for Comparing Histories" (1980b), and reprinted with additions in Aram A. Yengoyan (ed.): *Modes of Comparison* (2003).

I

Current experience always leads to new social research and new questions about the past, and that tendency is reinforced by the fading of older theoretical models. We are still learning to comprehend the present in global terms, and doing so will affect the way Japan is studied. Sociologists and anthropologists tend to reject dramatic accounts of the conflict between global and local cultures as a false dichotomy,[4] and historians are increasingly interested in global history, which extends current awareness of global connection to the study of the past.[5] Japan's capacity to preserve its identity, borrow from others, and adapt to international (global) pressures and opportunities makes it an invaluable source of study.[6] The Japanese experience demonstrates that there is no irony in a culture that includes a strong ideology of uniqueness and purity while also being a model of adaptability, which means there can be neither purity nor total homogeneity.[7] As the most famous (and best studied) case of conscious borrowing, Japanese history makes that process analytically visible, potentially an invaluable aid to understanding the processes of global change. Experiences once treated as essentially unique to Japan may come to be seen as incorporating much that is all but universal, and Japan's much-noted capacity to embrace exogenous influences by domesticating imported ideas and practices may become a kind of model for studying similar processes elsewhere. The self-consciousness, speed, and systematic efficiency of Japan's borrowing, a defining element of Japanese culture, can through comparative analysis reveal a great deal about how globalization takes place.

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[4] An excellent sample of current thinking can be found in Mike Featherstone (ed.): *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (1990); see especially the articles by Johann P. Arnason, Ulf Hannerz, Ronald Robertson, and Anthony D. Smith. See also Arjun Appadurai: *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalizations* (1996), and Roland Robertson: *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992).

[5] On global history, Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens (eds.): *Conceptualizing Global History* (1993), especially in the essays by Mazlish and Wolf Schäfer; my contribution to that volume emphasizes some caveats. Schäfer presents an impressively thoughtful, systematic case in, "The New Global History: Toward a Narrative for Pangaea Two" (2002).

[6] But note the altered emphasis in discussions that begin with Japan in Jeremy Seymour Eades, Tom Gill and Befu Harumi (eds.): *Globalization and Social Change in Contemporary Japan* (2000); and Befu Harumi: "Globalization, Centre-Periphery and Cosmopolitanization: A Lesson from the Japanese Case" (1992).

[7] Although the two elements are an important source of tension. Nishikawa Nagao: "Two Interpretations of Japanese Culture" (1996).

Interpretations of globalization as a long-term historical process emphasize international competition for power, the spread of capitalism as a world system, and the impact of technology (on transport and communication as well as industrial production). How developments in these three areas intersect remains a particularly difficult and controversial issue. The leaders of Japan became increasingly concerned from the mid-nineteenth century on with their nation's international standing, in itself a part of globalization. They identified external trends and pressures, addressed them directly as inescapable realities, and assigned the state a central and active role in a process of adaptation that included the increased circulation of ideas and technologies. More than a victim of international markets' subversive power, Japan illustrates the state's capacity to shape social conditions, culture's capacity to select among external influences, and society's ability to set the terms of transformations. There is therefore no clearer case study of how state policy and a national culture came together, selectively responding to external pressures as an opportunity, despite the threat they posed.[8] Thus comparative study of the particular foreign models chosen and the domestic groups involved helps reveal the process by which nations respond to international economic and military challenges. Although Meiji policies have been much studied, there is more to be done. Much of that literature was written from an institutional perspective that did not have the benefit of current sociology and anthropology, and much of it was conceived when the central preoccupation was to identify what was unique (and often, from the perspective of the 1950s and 1960s, therefore not entirely adequate) in Japanese development. Global history has, I think, something to add to Japanese historiography; more important, Japanese history has a great deal to offer for understanding the play of power, economics, and culture in global historical processes.

The miracle of Japanese modernization has become a familiar story, which no longer sustains a tone of surprise. Now the spread of economic development in Southeast Asia has drawn the attention of business executives and bankers, economists and journalists around the world. For scholars, that brings increased interest in comparing Japan with its neighbors, creating a regional comparative framework that should lead to reframing questions not only about the relationship between culture and development but also about the importance of specific institutions, groups, politics, and policies. In addition, the current economic slowdown should redirect discussion from breathless and teleological concentration on endless growth or the secrets of Japan's "success." (Success is in any case a

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[8] One of the central themes in Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt: *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View* (1996).

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poor category for comparison.) Together these changes in perspective suggest the possibility of reversing the traditional vector: comparison that instead of beginning from (somewhat mythic) models of development in the West and extending them to Japan begins from Japan's history of development and compares it to patterns of development elsewhere, East and West.[9] That shift becomes all the more natural with the recognition of Japan's influence on other societies.[10] Thus extensive study of Japanese society becomes the intellectual foundation for an excitingly different flow of comparisons.

Current issues are always a major stimulus to scholarship, lending a welcome air of relevance and, more important, a perspective that opens new avenues of research. That may be especially true for comparative study, which has as its aim explorations beyond the familiar intellectual boundaries held in place by the weight of the scholarly literature, by the customs of each academic discipline, and by the habit of working within the framework of national states. Because of Japan's importance in the contemporary world, comparison of its practices with those of other societies can be expected to become ever more frequent. Japan's prominence in world markets is one obvious stimulus to such comparisons (as is competition itself), and for over a generation specialists have studied the quality and efficiency of industrial production in Japan by placing their studies in a variety of comparative frameworks. After all, the Japanese economy flourished with national practices quite different from those advocated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Japan's increasing participation in international economic planning and foreign aid opens additional opportunities for comparison. Whatever policies Japanese governments favor in the future, for themselves and others, the opportunities for comparative analysis can only increase. Since World War II, international aid for development has come primarily from the Soviet Union, the United States, France, and Great Britain. As the Japanese participate more actively in various forms of international aid, there is certainly room for further research into the efficacy of diverse donor policies and the effects of various styles of cultural interaction. The reasons for greater attention to Japan in the assessment of contemporary issues go well beyond international economic and political connections, however.

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[9] Such reversals and the recognition of parallels need not be limited to the modern period; see the impressive discussions in Victor Lieberman (ed.): *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-imagining Eurasia to c. 1830* (1999), especially Lieberman's thought-provoking essay.

[10] See, for example, Marie Söderberg and Ian Reader (eds.): *Japanese Influences and Presences in Asia* (2000).

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The common social problems of modern societies will encourage an increasing incorporation of Japanese instances. Western observers, long drawn to studying Japan's distinctive responses to universal social needs, will find Japanese differences helpful in reconsidering which social needs and problems are in fact common among developed societies. Doing so has implications for social theory. The marginalization of minorities, the sources of alienation and crime, and the cost-effectiveness of social controls are concerns in all modern societies. Building on the writings of the Frankfurt school, of Michel Foucault and his legion of followers, and of Antonio Gramsci and others on cultural hegemony, scholars have produced notably thoughtful work. Its distinctly European preoccupations, conveyed in the currents of thought addressed and the historical examples used, beg to be broadened to fit the wider horizons of the contemporary world. The comparisons that can accomplish that will challenge and refine familiar conceptual frameworks.

Consider the expanding literature on issues of gender, race, and identity. Its strengths include moral engagement and the bulwark of a vibrant theoretical literature. At the same time, it in effect wrestles on every page with European and especially American issues and ideologies. These are also matters of importance in modern Japan, intrinsically and as a result of social change and of Western influence; but their impact and the response to them is shaped by differences that are social, political, institutional and, perhaps most fundamentally, cultural. As comparison concentrates on the problems themselves and is less automatically engrossed with Japan's difference, writings on gender, race, and identity will become more nuanced and the literature enriched. When comparison also moves from Japan to others,[11] we can ask new questions about what societies have gained and suffered from different forms of exclusivity and consensus. Seen from multiple perspectives, including Japan's, the construction of ethnic and national identities everywhere can be rethought.

Another prominent element of modern life, commercial and popular culture has also drawn increasing attention from social scientists. Initially approached as a marker of modern mass society, and for the Frankfurt school as a degenerative effect of capitalism, mass culture came to be associated with Americanization. More recently, by considering popular culture, an expression of values imbedded in daily life, independent of the official culture sponsored by elites, scholars have found creativity,

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[11] Esenbel Selçuk: "The Anguish of Civilized Behavior: The Use of Western Cultural Forms in the Everyday Lives of the Meiji Japanese and the Ottoman Turks During the Nineteenth Century" (1994) builds from Norbert Elias in comparing the adaptation to Western styles in dress, manners, and furnishings.

autonomy, and even resistance in the popular culture that scholarship had largely ignored. The resulting theories of culture combined with greater knowledge have identified an array of well-formulated problems leading to impressive research. Awareness of the malleability of symbols and of the natural ease with which old and new genres blend stimulates a more refined interest in how cultural filters selectively adapt to local needs. That gives the Japanese experience particular importance as one of the clearest demonstrations that the films, popular music, comic strips, clothing, fast foods, and baseball adapted largely (but not exclusively) from American society take on independent meanings, whatever the commercial impulse behind their spread.[12] Furthermore, this research moves questions about Japanese culture from emphasis on the insular and unique to more probing questions about the qualities that in turn give Japanese design, films, animated cartoons, computer games, and sushi bars their widespread appeal – a wonderful opportunity for investigating the qualities that permit particular aspects of a distinctive culture to be embraced around the world.

II

If current issues suggest certain topics of comparison, so current tendencies within the social sciences themselves affect the kinds of questions scholars ask. Over the last quarter century or so, academic attention has shifted direction. One wants to be careful here, for there is a tendency to reject too readily the work of previous generations of scholarship. When doing so becomes mere fashion, much of value can be lost. Nevertheless, a kind of intellectual liberation may result from shedding older preoccupations, and I will mention three broad examples.

The time has passed when an undifferentiated "West" can serve as a basis for comparison. Everyone is now aware of enormous historical variation in the political and economic development within and among the nations of Europe and North America. More fundamentally, the very idea of a Western model to which others can be compared has been challenged on ideological and empirical grounds. In the future, then, there will be fewer

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[12] The work of Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney is a notable example. See especially, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (1993); "We Eat Each Other's Food to Nourish our Body: The Global and the Local as Mutually Constituent Forces" (1999); and *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View.* Cambridge (1984).

comparisons between a homogenized Japan and an undifferentiated "West."

Earlier work emphasized the paradox that although Japanese society adroitly adjusted to the requirements of the contemporary world, tradition nevertheless remained powerful. That perception proved fruitful, and there remains much to be done on the intersection of the new and the old, the indigenous and the exogenous (provided they can in fact be distinguished). The questions and answers that follow from such categories have often had an awkward, external, and somewhat mechanical quality, however. The false assumption that tradition is unchanging and is the antithesis of modernity is now happily passé. Thus the fact of multiple combinations within Japanese society of old customs, values, and rites with new forms of social organization requires no special explanation. Even academics cannot sustain surprise when the same discovery is made again and again. The crucial subject for study is rather how such adaptations take place, and that invites comparative analysis in the humanities as well as the social sciences. The range of useful comparisons reaches from different aspects of Japanese society to new transnational comparisons, all focused on significant historical problems. This research should deepen our understanding of processes of change. The Japanese case – relatively sudden, deliberate, extensive and effective – already well observed by participants and scholars alike, deserves to be central to that more general understanding. There will be new hypotheses to test and fresh questions to ask, from historical ones about the qualities (ideological neutrality? functional differentiation?) that facilitate cultural adaptability to modern and also postmodern conditions. New categories, theories, and findings will evoke further research concerned with that awareness of diversity that comparison creates.

Abandonment of such lumpish categories as tradition or the West has come more readily with the abandonment of much in the approaches referred to as modernization theory. There was, of course, never a single theory, and many of the criticisms against it have been unfair (as evidenced by the fact that, although the "theory" is almost universally denounced, a great many of the concepts associated with it continue to be used by its critics).[13]

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[13] The classic criticism was formulated nearly thirty years ago: Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Study of National Societies: A Critical Perspective" (1973). My own view was presented in Raymond Grew, "Modernization and Its Discontents" (1977), and in "More on Modernization" (1980). Many of those who pioneered in applying concepts of modernization to the study of Japan expressed doubts about its applicability and were keenly aware from the first of the complexities involved (Hall 1965).

The charges against theories of modernization – that the concept was tele-ological (assuming a necessary, unidirectional evolution toward a single model of modernity), that the model was based on an idealized conception of American (and maybe British) society, and that modernization theory was a Cold War weapon meant to combat Marxist interpretations – have some merit. Comparison conducted in that framework suffered from an artificiality that limited insight into how specific societies really function and led to models of limited interest. Study of Japan in particular exposed the weaknesses of rigidly applied theories of modernization.

On the other hand, theories of modernization fostered qualities to be preserved: They were inherently comparative; they stimulated attention to the intersection of different aspects of society (reflecting their Parsonian roots); they encouraged research that cut across disciplinary divides; and they were simultaneously empirical and theoretical. Not surprisingly, the list is long of works based on modernization theory that make lasting contributions to the understanding both of change in Japan and modernizing processes more generally. The conception of multiple modernities seeks to build on these achievements while avoiding the iron escalator of teleology.[14] It does not imply that modernity is an unalloyed good (an acknowledgment contemporary sensibilities demand) and encourages exploration of variety in developed societies. Thus Japan in turn becomes an independent model, prompting the formulation of different historical problems and greater recognition of unintended consequences. These new perspectives are open to postmodern and poststructuralist approaches with their penchant for "a chain of differential traces and floating signifiers – without closure, without origin, and without a privileged center." (Odin 1995: 19)[15]

Taken together, these tendencies clear the ground for new work while highlighting the confusions that emerge from the very different scales on which comparative studies of Japan have operated: comparing whole civilizations, regions (East Asian or the East), late-developing societies, and

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[14] Note its use, in regard to Japan, by both Eisenstadt and also in the sophisticated analysis of Johann Arnason, "Multiple Modernities: Reflections on the Japanese Experience" (1999); and in Johann P. Arnason and Sugimoto Yoshio (eds.): *Japanese Encounters with Postmodernity* (1997). This is also an instance in which contemporary experience (for example, economic and political developments in South Korea, Spain, Eastern Europe, and Turkey) has influenced recognition of multiple paths to modernity.

[15] Ōe Kenzaburō, "Japan, the Dubious and Myself" (1995) is a good example of this sensibility. For more wide-ranging, theoretically based, and skeptical views see Arnason and Sugimoto (eds.): *Japanese Encounters with Postmodernity* (1997).

individual nations; comparing large-scale processes (such as the rise and fall of feudalism, nation building, modernization); and comparing specific institutions and practices. This variety of scale, in itself all to the good, opens the way, however, for a methodological error, unmediated shifts from one scale to another, creating an elasticity of contexts in which the rules of relevance are obscured. A momentary act may be explained by some cultural characteristic or primordial quality, a long-term process can seem to hinge on a minor event. That confusion is not inevitable, and Eisenstadt's study of Japanese civilization can be taken as a model of how to avoid it. Although his analysis begins from the highest level of abstraction (axial/non-axial civilizations), he moves in carefully delineated steps between historical events, analytic problems, and social theory (Eisenstadt 1996: passim).

III

New theoretical directions, which benefit from current concerns and the decomposition of older frameworks, also lead to fresh uses of comparison. That development can be most efficiently illustrated by citing some of the topics to which scholarship is turning. Applying external categories to new cases can, of course, become a fairly mechanical and dull exercise, but it can also lead to some welcome surprises. These should be especially likely to accrue from comparative study of Japan. Take, for example, three of the approaches most prominent in contemporary social science.

As most commonly used, Foucaldian concepts invite attention to how understanding is shaped and power exercised through modes of perception based on methods of inquiry that present themselves as neutral, rational, or merely practical although ways of knowing expressed through discourse serve interests, structure, and power. Japan presents unusually clear examples of radical changes in formal discourse with only modest alterations in the locus of power or patterns of behavior. There are excellent studies of various forms of social control in Japan (through law, education, socialization, and various forms of policing), and their further exploration will provide an opportunity to investigate more closely the role of discourse; when various levels of social control come into play, and how discourse, power, and practice intersect. That further study of Japanese experience can be expected to challenge, amend, and refine concepts hitherto largely based on European and American history.

Similarly, study of Japanese history can make important contributions to the burgeoning literature on colonial encounters. Anthropologists, historians, and historical sociologists have made this – through highly creative re-

search using concepts of hegemony, insights into orientalism, and the results of subaltern studies – an exciting and flourishing field of scholarship. By its very nature, such work has so far been most original and penetrating with regard to European practices and to responses within European colonies. Studies of imperialism in India, Indonesia, and Africa have led to a rethinking of the operation of cultural hegemony and class dominance within European societies themselves. This work has also stressed the disruptive and disintegrative effects of European intrusions, both economic and political, independent of conscious intent. Sensitive to the tragedies (although less impressed by the achievements) of Europeanized natives, this research has probed the ways in which European misconceptions and prejudices, deeply rooted in European culture and social structure, facilitated the exercise of power. Comparison of the effects of Japanese imperialism at home and abroad offers the chance to look with a fresh eye at the reception of Western culture and institutions across East Asia. Japan's relation to the selective adoption of Western influences plus its own techniques of imperialism can put all of this in a different light. Hence, comparative analysis can foster distinctions more obscured about the corrosive effects of imperial power on those who impose it as well as those on whom it is imposed, deepening understanding of the internal dynamics of imperial institutions, international capitalism, and local cultures.

Flourishing fields of inquiry like gender studies will similarly extend and refine findings based on Western experience as they are applied to Japan. Whether assumptions about the Judeo-Christian basis of attitudes toward sex, gender, and family are confirmed or challenged, the results of such comparative study will have significant impact on our theoretical understanding. At the same time, competing emphases on structural or cultural explanations will be tested anew and possibly achieve some interesting resolutions. As with gender relations, so the comparative study of changing generational differences and tensions in Japan will add to a growing international literature and strengthen its theoretical framework.

This applies as well to a range of issues that current theories have brought to the fore. Current attention to the uses of the past, the constructed nature of public memory, and the effects of repressing or denying recent history raises questions important to modern Japan. The twentieth century gave every society much to forget, and nationalism everywhere makes powerful use of mythic and selective histories. Within the last decade, a great deal has been written on memory, much of it unsurprising but some of it unusually imaginative. Little of this work, however, has been systematically comparative. Examples as marked as those in Japanese history could facilitate analysis of the processes by which selective collective

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memory is created.[16] Careful study of what is remembered and what suppressed in different eras and nations seeks to expose underlying values and fears. We learn much more through the inclusion of Japan about the roles of ritual, religion, literature, institutions, and politics in forming memory. Even major themes, long part of some of the most admired philosophical, historical, and anthropological writing such as cultural conceptions of time and of the nature of history will benefit from incorporating Japanese history. Focused and empirical comparison could expand their meaning and alter their content.

IV

These newer interests do not mean abandonment of the classic questions that historical comparison of Japan has centered on. Rather, they will be reconsidered in the light of freshly formulated historical problems suggesting new ways to investigate those familiar and grand topics associated with transnational comparison. Hypotheses about the nature and dynamism of capitalism or the causes and process of state making will continue to take Japan into consideration.[17]

The study of elites, long a mainstay of political science, has with the inclusion of Japan paid more attention to differences in how elites are selected, formed, and recognized – making it more historical.[18] It will remain a major subject of comparative research as it becomes more tightly tied to the study of the nature and development of civil society, a topic of increasing interest in history, political science, and sociology. Influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas,[19] discussions of civil society are often the starting place for historical study of liberalism and democracy. These concerns are all firmly set in the history of Europe; and comparison with Japan offers an invaluable chance to test propositions about how civil society emerges, its essential qualities, and its connection to the state, economic re-

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[16] Yoshino Kasaku puts Japan firmly in the debates on nationalism in "From *Ethnie* to Nation: Theoretical Reflections on Nationalism" (1999).

[17] Just as they have in the past in arguments about the role of feudalism, military needs, demands for justice, and the power of the aristocracy, Peter Duus: *Feudalism in Japan* (1969). Ishii Shirō: "Feudalism and Ie in Japan: Looking for a Virtual Axis for a 'Non-Axial' Society" (1999).

[18] Sidney Verba *et al.*: *Elites and the Idea of Equality: A Comparison of Japan, Sweden, and the United States* (1987). Robert Putnam: *Comparative Study of Political Elites.* (1976). Albrecht Rothacher: *The Japanese Power Elite* (1993).

[19] Jürgen Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1991).

lations, social class, communication, and liberal values.[20] Attention to civil society also recasts the study of community, tolerance, and civil rights, issues that in turn invite reconsideration of their obverse, the genocide and mass murder that remain a perpetual challenge to analyses of twentieth-century modernity. Many have searched for an ultimate moral flaw in European culture, Enlightenment hubris, utopian ideologies, or Christian intolerance; yet Japanese society, built on a different past, also proved capable of community, tolerance, and brutality. Japan shared much else, however, with European facism, from late and rapid industrialization to mass mobilization and ideologies of ethnic exclusivity, and comparison of these differences and similarities will continue to be an essential path to analysis of the recent past.

Comparative religion, as a field of study, has been a pioneer in Japanese studies, creating an erudite and sophisticated literature. That has continued even as attention shifted from formal theology and institutional structure to religious practice and belief in daily life.[21] Japan thereby provides a different perspective on the highly contested concept of secularization. A central theme of social analysis for two centuries, a major element in many leading theories, and long part of the very definition of modernity, the idea of secularization has come under withering challenge. There is disagreement about what the term means or whether it should be used at all.[22] For many social scientists, religious leaders, and conservatives, secularization implies a decline in religious faith, the social and institutional weakening of organized religion, and the spread of rationalism and a preference for scientific explanations. For others, secularization describes the establishment of public spheres from which formal religion is largely excluded but does not necessarily mean a decline in belief (and may even permit more

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[20] Douglas R. Howland: "Society Reified: Herbert Spencer and Political Theory in Early Meiji Japan" (2000) has a fascinating discussion of Japan's adoption of the concept of society and of the shift from ideas of individualism to emphasis on the state in discussions of Spencer.

[21] From Robert N. Bellah: *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-industrial Japan* (1957) to Ian Reader: *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (1990a) and Peter B. Clarke and Jeffrey Somers (eds.): *Japanese New Religions in the West* (1994). The Japanese context points up a number of paradoxes, including the question of whether Japan can be home to fundamentalism. See Winston Davis: "Fundamentalism in Japan: Religious and Political" (1991).

[22] The literature on secularization is huge; Ian Reader: "Returning to Respectability: A Religious Revival in Japan?" (1990b) questions the term as well as its applicability to Japan. Katō Shūichi: "Le Trasformazioni sociali e culturali del Giappone in età Meiji" (1987) sees Japan as having undergone a long process of secularization from the seventeenth century on and considers that a contrast with Italian experience.

demanding standards of religious belief and behavior). In the European and American context, the understanding of secularization involves interpretations of formal theology, deism, the liberal ideal of the neutral state, toleration and pluralism, the public sphere, and political divisions that have been controversial matters at least since the French Revolution. Fundamentalism raises all these issues in even starker terms. Opposed to secularization, fundamentalism is understood by some as the antithesis of modernization and by others as quintessentially modern. Here is an issue loaded with (Western) cultural baggage, a contemporary concern that is important to all the human sciences, and one on which comparison with Japan can be unusually pertinent. A home to distinctive and multiple religions, including fundamentalisms, with lively public rituals can Japanese society be said to be secular? Or is it that the Japanese state sought to secularize religion? Pursuing such questions while refocusing them through comparison will improve our understanding of how social change and religion interact.

The comparison of specific Japanese institutions with those of other nations has long been one of the strengths of the literature. One of its effects has been to demonstrate that seemingly comparable institutions in different societies may serve quite different functions. Merely comparing institutions that carry the same name can become a form of mistranslation that makes differences seem either lacunae (to be lamented) or inappropriate burdens (explained as incomplete differentiation). Because Japanese labor unions, banks, police, schools, state offices, associations, and corporations were often deliberately based on western models, differences deserve special attention. That requires close analysis, eschewing easy answers, either the structural ones that rely on defining the functions an institution is supposed to serve or the conventional cultural ones always ready to hand. Instead, a stronger theoretical base encourages comparing institutions not just by their formal purpose but also in terms of social practice.[23] Thus research turns away from western models of how a given institution should operate and to comparison of the services provided, constituencies served, legitimacy achieved, and so forth.

That, too, invites a flow of comparison from Japan to other societies. Studies of such fundamental Japanese institutions as those associated with the law, education, and the family might well invite research into the

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[23] John Clammer: *Difference and Modernity: Social Theory and Contemporary Japanese Society* (1995) calls for this, and it is nicely exemplified in Peter N. Stearns: *Schools and Students in Industrial Society: Japan and the West, 1870–1940* (1998), where even-handed, thoughtful comments and interesting selections from primary sources explore comparisons of Japanese, French, and American schooling.

"sources of cohesion" in other societies. Perhaps Japan maintained with less effort and with far less contestation the cohesiveness and legitimacy that the West sought through ideas of divine right, religious uniformity, parliamentary representation, ethnic and cultural homogeneity, and mass participation.

Note, however, that these extensions of classic questions about capitalism and state making – expanding the comparative study of elites to consideration of civil society, of religion to secularization, of institutions to their social functions – still revolve around ideas of modernity and continue to benefit from the historical fact of a thoroughly modern society that developed from a cultural and historical base significantly different from the modern societies of Europe and the Americas.

V

Finally, let me illustrate the range of interesting questions that Japanese history can generate about other societies by suggesting a comparison between modern Japan and Italy – between a society famous for efficiency, order, and constraint and one notorious for disorderly spontaneity, one a model of unusual social unity and consensus, the other associated with division and contestation.[24] Comparing whole nations is not, in my view, an effective way to stimulate fresh thinking or new research. Rather, my purpose here is to show how thinking comparatively does raise questions that invite further investigation. That could lead to establishing the kind of clear historical problems that invite careful historical research and are likely to result in important findings.

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[24] Robert E. Ward and Dankward A. Rustow (eds.): *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (1964) remains one of the most systematic comparisons of modern Japan with another nation. The Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council, which sponsored that study, later developed the concept of specific kinds of crises as a basis for such comparison, and an application of that concept to Italy can be found in my essay on Italy in Raymond Grew (ed.): *Crises of Political Development in Europe and the United States* (1978). Cyril E. Black *et al.*: *The Modernization of Japan and Russia: A Comparative Study* (1975) is another significant example and one with a similar set of concerns. The authors' emphasis on the period from 1860 to 1940 as "one of continuous transition" and on the period following 1950 as one of "high modernization" could be applied to Italy as well.

The history of Japan and Italy share some striking similarities.[25] Both nations have essentially natural geographical boundaries. Both are long, narrow, and mountainous, islands or peninsulas largely surrounded by water. In both countries, geography fostered the identification of a national culture and also helped sustain distinctive regional cultures. In both, travel by sea was often easier than by land; yet Italy in contrast to Japan had a premodern tradition of relatively extensive internal movement, and the sea that protected Japan from foreigners was for Italy a major avenue of foreign invasion. Both countries were late modernizers, industrializing and adopting the forms of the modern national state in the second half of the nineteenth century, after models had been well established elsewhere. Each new nation built on a proud and ancient culture (in which the degree of its relevance to the modern world was a sensitive issue). Despite sharply distinct regional dialects, both nations relied in their public life on the common (largely written) language of high culture supported by the state. Social convention was important in both societies, which remained in many ways quite conservative. Paradoxically, however, neither developed a strong political movement of ideological conservatism prior to World War I (although in Italy the Catholic church sometimes provided an effective substitute, a role played by elites in Japan). Parallels continue throughout their national histories.

The Meiji Restoration and the Risorgimento could hardly have been better designed for an experiment in historical comparison, and an ideal test for theories of modernization. The two movements occurred at nearly the same time on opposite sides of the globe, each aimed at creating a new, modern state in an established society. In part a response to external pressure, they were political and social transformations that for the most part kept established elites in place, maintained an older monarchy with ill-defined roles, adopted representative institutions but with limited suffrage and limited power, and relied on a centralized state despite or because of important internal, regional and social divisions. These were major achievements in state making, and initial comparisons are suggestive, pointing up from a Japanese perspective, for example, the greater commitment to political liberalism in Italy and the alienation of state from society, the greater acceptance in Japan of its new constitution by the end of the century and of the relative unimportance of political parties (Baba 1987).

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[25] *Almanacco Statistico Comparato: Giappone Italia Oggi* (1980) contains a remarkably random list of parallels from geography to political and military chronology.

Intensely concerned to establish their nation's place among the great powers, the leaders of both countries were drawn toward Germany in the latter part of the nineteenth century and to dramatic military action against older, weakening empires in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905 and Italy's war against Turkey in 1911–1912. Nationalism in both countries built on the sense of having once been behind in development and of having been taken advantage of by others. In both, there were nationalists who advocated imperial expansion as the way to overcome their country's consignment to the "proletariat" among nations.[26] Both ended up on the winning side in World War I, only to be dissatisfied afterward with what they got from the peace treaties and, more generally, with their treatment by the other victorious powers. At the same time, Marxism achieved considerable prominence in both countries.

Italy then invented fascism, a new political form, and Japan turned to something like it. Not surprisingly, scholars and social critics continually rediscover that, by a widespread if somewhat mythical standard, neither nation experienced the benefits of a "real" revolution. Combining the techniques of mass mobilization with efforts to accelerate change while preserving the established social order required severe social control. In both countries corporatist ideas had strong appeal as a way of reconciling these conflicting aims, and Italian Fascism can be seen in part as an effort to achieve in Italy the sort of consensus characteristic of Japan. The comparison of Italian and Japanese fascism can increase understanding of the general phenomenon while deepening the analysis of either regime.[27] Italian Fascism gained a significant following in Europe and Latin America, and Japan presented itself in Asia as the alternative to Western domination. As their spheres of influence grew and military conquest expanded the territory under their control, Japan and Italy became formal allies through their ties to Nazi Germany. Defeated in World War II, both Italy and Japan were then subject to heavy American political, economic, and social influences.

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[26] That striking term, with its echo of Marxist analysis for imperial purposes, was used by Enrico Corradini in Italy in 1910 and by Kita Ikki in Japan in 1924.

[27] Yet few have attempted it on a large scale. Paul Broker: *The Faces of Fraternalism: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan* (1991) is an outstanding example that focuses primarily, however, on his Durkheimian schema. From a Marxist perspective, Franco Gatti: *Il Fascismo Giapponese* (1983) makes the case that Japan's really was a fascist regime. Despite their common interests, the two regimes pursued independent foreign policies; here, too, it is investigation of the comparison rather than of mutual influence that casts important light on each. See Valdo Ferretti: *Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana, 1939–41* (1983).

More surprisingly perhaps, the political systems of Japan and Italy continue to have much in common, including notoriously short-lived governments.[28] The dominance since World War II of a single political party in what after all are modern democracies has received considerable attention.[29] Both countries have a long tradition of disdaining parties,[30] and Italy's Christian Democratic and Japan's Liberal Democratic Party were both dedicated from their founding to keeping the far left out of power.[31] Their dominance then came apart almost simultaneously, in 1993 in Japan, 1994 in Italy. In both nations, centrist parties of Liberal Democrats and Christian Democrats were marked by personalistic factions and noted for their ability to negotiate with all the nation's established interests; yet both parties collapsed with the end of the Cold War and the shock that came with disclosures of corruption that had been rumored for years. Both economies are experiencing the deregulation and privatization fashionable around the world with the added disruption that comes from the greater contrast between these policies and past practices. In both there is much talk about generational change and curiosity about whether old social networks can hold together (and in both social scientists continue to debate the sources of legitimacy, the nature of identity, and the degree of homogeneity). In both, corruption is said to be a major constraint on economic growth as well as political transparency, and it says something as well about what outside observers are interested in that no other topic has stimulated more comparative references to Italy and Japan.[32]

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[28] The comparison is well set forth in Richard Samuels, "Tracking Democracies: Italy and Japan in Historical Perspective" (1997), who emphasizes the role of leadership in explaining differences.

[29] The benefit of this comparison is clear in T. J. Pempel (ed.): *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes* (1990); see four articles in particular: Giuseppe Di Palma: "Establishing Party Dominance: It Ain't Easy;" Inoguchi Takashi: "The Political Economy of Conservative Resurgence and Recession: Public Policies and Political Support in Japan, 1977–1983;" Muramatsu Michio and Ellis S. Kraus: "The Dominant Party and Social Conditions in Japan;" Sidney Tarrow: "Maintaining Hegemony in Italy: The softer they rise, the slower they fall!"

[30] Carol Gluck: *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (1985: 71) notes an "ideological denial of politics." Much the same can be said of the Risorgimento, Raymond Grew: *A Sterner Plan for Italian Unity: The Italian National Society in the Risorgimento* (1964: 465, 467, 472).

[31] Tanaka Kakuei comments on their similar anti-communist (and in the Japanese case anti-socialist) positions, in Chalmers A. Johnson: *Who Governs? The Rise of the Developmental State* (1995: 213).

[32] Karen Pennar: "The Destructive Cost of Greasing Palms" (1993); Gaspar W. Weinberger: "Three Friends in Trouble" (1992), [the United Kingdom is the

There are parallels as well in their economic histories. Both societies were unusually urban prior to industrialization, but both are relatively poor in raw materials. Japan and Italy (along with Russia) can be seen as part of a capitalist semiperiphery, agricultural economies in which land reform accompanied political reform and industrialization. Both nations introduced low tariffs, although Japan's was more a result of foreign pressure; but their capital formation contrasted suggestively, with Italy dependent on foreign capital and Japan largely self-sufficient. Textiles and silk were dominant exports in the nineteenth century, when Italian productivity was higher, and Italy was ahead of Japan in the development of heavy industry, which was closely tied to government in both nations, although Japan invested more in armaments.[33] Both Japan and Italy became centers of emigration, which had economic, cultural, and political consequences that scholars are still exploring; and their fundamental economic transformation at the end of the nineteenth century invites comparison. Once industrialization was under way, the government in both nations had close ties to new industries, particularly shipbuilding and steel; those connections tightened in the 1930s and through World War II, so that they stood out among capitalist societies for the state's direct economic role. (From 1940 until very recently, the Italian state owned a higher proportion of the industrial sector than any other non-communist government.)

These striking parallels in economic development continued in the second half of the twentieth century,[34] and when the comparison is made, the extent of the similarities provokes surprise. In both countries a majority of the working population was employed in agriculture in 1950 and in both that proportion was below ten per cent by 1980. Among industrial nations, Japan and Italy stand out for the large proportion of small and medium-sized firms, for the high level of personal savings, and for a range of structural similarities both overall and in specific industries.[35] Each country

third]; see also Tanaka Kakuei on corruption and the fact that Italy, Japan, and the Netherlands were the three countries most affected by the Lockheed bribery scandal of 1976, in Johnson 1995: 213–214.

[33] Nakamura Masanori: "Accumulazione in agricoltura e sviluppo economico in Giappone (1868–1910)" (1987); Asai Yoshio: "Aspetti comparativi su alcune caratteristiche della revoluzione industriale in Giappone ed in Italia" (1987).

[34] Some of these economic parallels, such as the dependence on imported fuel, continued during the war; but these similarities were overshadowed by Japan's larger population and greater commitment of resources to the war effort. Mark Harrison (ed.): *The Economics of World War II: Six Great Powers in International Comparison* (1998).

[35] See the articles in Rivista Internationale di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali (ed.): *Italy and Japan: Two Economies Compared: A Symposium* (1980), especially

succeeded remarkably in adapting craft traditions that had ancient cultural roots to the needs of international markets, so that Japanese and Italian ceramics, textiles, and furniture were as much in demand as their achievements in design, from printing to architecture.[36] And in the fifty years since 1945, Japan and Italy have had the steadiest rate of high economic growth of any industrial countries. Thus the two societies have undergone fundamental and in many ways parallel social changes. Both now embrace new technology enthusiastically, depend heavily on exports, and excel in industrial design and marketing.

That Japan and Italy have so much in common suggests further opportunities for comparison extending even into the challenging sphere of culture and values. Social psychologists and sociologists have shown the greatest daring in entering such areas, but tend to avoid quagmires by zipping lightly across the past, gathering contemporary data on a single aspect of behavior from many different countries. A more historically grounded focus on so stimulating a pairing as Italy and Japan might well prove uniquely fruitful. Pressure for social conformity has been historically strong in both nations, for example; yet both also have vital theatrical traditions that enlist their audience in mockery and ironic laughter.[37] The larger point is that these societies, with deeply rooted and distinctive cultures but also unusual openness to modern change, invite a close comparison of how social attitudes and values adapt to change, and further, that such comparison could contribute to general theory as well as deeper understanding of each society.[38]

Mario Monti's comparison of financial structures, Lugi Deserti's on small and medium-sized firms, and the articles on specific industries and on exports. For economic comparisons on a broader canvas, including per capita income, the oil crisis, and industrial relations: Fianni Fodella (ed.): *Giappone e Italia: Economie a confronto* (1982). There is less comparison (and more agreement that Japan is "ahead" of Italy) in Carlo Filippini (ed.): *The Italian and Japanese Economies in the '80s* (1994).

[36] John W. Bennett: "Japanese Economic Growth: Background for Social Change" (1967: 44–45) notes that the United States encouraged this development in Japan and comments on the appeal of Japanese goods for the international "snob market."

[37] See the chapters in Ron Jenkins: *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy* (1994), on "Clowns and Popes in Italy" (featuring Dario Fo and Franca Rame) and on "Mocking Conformity in Japan" (noting the stardom of Yo-chan).

[38] As an example of the possible range of such comparisons, consider Marc H. Bornstein, O. Maurice Haynes, and Azuma Hiroshi: "A Cross-National Study of Self-evaluations and Attributions of Parenting" (1998); Alex Inkeles and Peter H. Rossi: "National Comparisons of Occupational Prestige," reprinted in

Indeed, the fact that Japan and Italy have so much in common makes their differences interesting and, with the right questions and solid evidence, potentially significant. Japan sustained the illusion, at least, of essentially autonomous development; Italy has always acknowledged close ties to the rest of Europe. The military played a major role in Japanese modernization but did not in Italy, despite the prominence of the military in Piedmont (Italy's founding state) and the continuing tie between the monarchy and the armed forces. Social classes, differently constituted, played quite different political roles, and it is difficult to find any parallel in Japanese history to the conflicts between church and state that have been a central element of Italian history for centuries. Are differences like these possibly related to other ones, such as the greater efficiency of Japanese administration or Italy's greater ease with protest and disagreement?

Given the importance of Japan's tradition of coordination between politics and economics, how has Italy compensated for its apparent lack in this regard? How do kinship ties, patron-client relations, and local connections operate in business and politics and through patterns of reciprocity within formal and informal groups? Japanese economic growth owes a lot to skillful long-range planning and to a high degree of decentralization within large corporations given security by protective ties to banks and government. In analyzing Italy's economic growth, economists emphasize the flexibility of many medium-sized and often family-controlled enterprises engaged in the same sector of production and clustered in the same region, where these firms both cooperate and intensely compete. Are these contrasting practices the expression of distinctive cultures or simply alternative responses to different markets?

Comparison of social networks might also explore the sources, the style, and the functions of what outsiders, at least, label corruption, which is thought to be extensive in both countries. Do private arrangements and hidden economic exchanges occur differently in networks based on kinship from those based on institutional connection, region, shared values, or short-term interest? Do these different kinds of networks have different effects on the operations of government, political parties, education, and commerce? In these two societies, the family has been unusually important as a social and an economic unit; yet family relations carry different obligations, and the family itself is differently defined. In short, social networks and family ties, complicated enough within each society, imply

Alex Inkeles, Peter H. Rossi and Sasaki Masamuchi (eds.): *Comparing Nations and Cultures: Readings in a Cross-Disciplinary Perspective* (1996); and the work of Ronald Inglehart, which can be sampled in ibid.

quite different forms of reciprocity in Japan and Italy. Clarifying these differences could be a contribution to social theory.

These topics are closely related, of course, to questions of elite formation; and here the different course the two societies have taken is especially provocative. In the 1880s both relied on a highly selective, quite competitive, and prestigious system of elite education, closely tied to a much-admired national culture. Japan then speedily developed an effective system of universal education, while Italy moved slowly; higher education in Japan became ever more universalistic, competitive, and constraining while in Italy it remained looser, more connected to status than competitive ability, and a less essential filter for individual advancement. Would it be possible to demonstrate what consequences such fundamental differences have had?

One advantage of such comparisons is that they can be reasonably contained within specific cases and periods, empirical comparisons methodologically controlled. Nevertheless, the idea of comparing aspects of two societies inevitably opens the temptation to compare them as a whole. In the light of Eisenstadt's striking study of Japan, it is hard not to think about the fact that Italian civilization is about as axial as civilization can get: ever conscious of its classical roots, for two millennia the center of the most universal of churches, an enthusiastic participant in the universalism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the home of a nationalist ideology that claimed its principles were equally applicable to all peoples, drawn to the universalistic claims of liberalism and then of Marxism, and an enthusiastic supporter of the European Union. The contrast with Japan could hardly be greater. Could we demonstrate some of the specific effects of this contrast?

One always hopes that comparison will challenge received opinion and lead to some refinement of academic commonplaces. Individual studies frequently allege that Japan and Italy have weak public spheres, that something is missing from their civic cultures. Yet comparison reveals that in this regard the characteristics of the two societies are very different, with distinctive weaknesses and strengths. A deeper comparison of Japan and Italy might compel some reconsideration of these terms, justification enough for further comparative study.

Scholars, of course, will be drawn to particular topics by their own interests and background, but the possibilities range so widely that it is surprising that comparison of Japan and Italy have been relatively rare.[39]

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[39] But also difficult: note, for example, Hanami Tadashi and Roger Blaupain, *Industrial Conflict Resolution in Market Economies: A Study of Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Japan, and the USA* (1989). Here is a relatively well-defined, contemporary topic; but the discussions are parallel rather than comparative, partly because differences (in laws, institutions, and practices) are in each

Some general points do emerge from the record so far. The search for direct connections or influence, though full of goodwill, uncovers little beyond the anecdotal. Marco Polo seems to have been aware that Japan existed (he called it Zipangu); in the modern era a few artists, missionaries, and travelers reported on their travels there, but contacts remained limited, even after governments intermittently fostered them.[40] This makes the striking parallels in these nations' modern history all the more interesting, even though awareness of them has been sporadic. Carlo Cattaneo, one of the most important and original thinkers of Italy's Risorgimento, spotted some similarities between two old civilizations but was not well enough informed to undertake serious comparison.[41] A few years later, the Iwakura mission of Japanese experts, which toured the United States and Europe in 1871–72, recognized the interest in comparing Italy and Japan, two newly constituted nations making their way in an industrializing world.[42] They did not pursue the observation, however. Neither did the few books about Italy subsequently printed in Japan (usually based on works written in French or English), beyond noting, as a kind of welcoming gesture, that the Meiji Restoration and the Risorgimento were contemporary and had comparable aims. Such references, even when supplemented with other parallels, both the obvious ones (each country established a new national

case so fundamental and so much a part of larger social systems. Even so, some suggestive comparisons emerge: for the period treated, Italy and Japan were at the two extremes in terms of days lost to strikes but similar in the roles of unions and ideological conflicts, pp. 2, 19.

[40] Maria Sica and Antonio Verde: *Breve Storia dei rapporti culturali italo-giapponese e dell'istituto italiano di cultural di Tokyo* (1999). Romano Ugolini: "I Rapporti tra Italia e Giappone nell'età Meiji" (1987).

[41] Carlo Cattaneo: "Il Giapone Antico e Moderno" (1957), a review article that Cattaneo published in his newspaper, *Il Politecnico*, in 1860. It begins in a comparative framework, "Among all civilized nations, Japan is the only one that in twenty-five centuries was never conquered," and notes along the way a few similarities between Japan and ancient Rome and Italy in the middle ages and even in recent times before coming to Japan's contacts with foreigners, leading Cattaneo, a fervent republican, to his conclusion: "The glory of bringing this nation into the universal society of mankind was reserved to the American republic."

[42] Miyoshita Takaharu: "Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour; tre grandi del Risorgimento Italiano visti dalla Missione Giapponese Iwakura" (1984). Italy, where they stayed for 26 days, was not at the top of the mission's concerns (they spent 205 days in the United States, 122 in England, 70 in France, 33 in Germany, 18 in Russia) and, with regard to Italy, they combined charming misunderstanding and misinformation with some interesting insights, Fujisawa Fusatoshi: "L'immagine dei personaggi Risorgimentali Italiani e dell'Italia nel periodo Meiji" (1984).

capital) and the more dubious ones (finding Garibaldi similar to the Samurai) failed to provoke further exploration.[43] Even the more recent and much more analytical works referred to above have only occasionally proceeded to serious comparison.

This restricted curiosity results from more than the obvious linguistic difficulties; only a few studies established major historical problems as the focus of their comparisons. Economic developments in Japan and Italy have been the most frequent source of interesting and provocative comparisons, but much of that work relies on economic theory more than on historical exploration and aims at recommending policies. Even the less-frequent political comparisons, generally much more attentive to how society functions, tend to revolve around theory-driven definitions that come from elsewhere rather than around new questions about Japan or Italy. Because broad comparisons can too readily lead to circular (and familiar) generalizations, I want to suggest some general criteria for selecting from the histories of these two nations issues worthy of comparative analysis. Once the historical problem is established, the specific topic selected for research should be not only one that exemplifies that problem but also one for which extensive, comparable data is available (or can be generated) for both Japan and Italy. The topic should lend itself to study through a delimited number of instances in a finite time period (which may be different in the two countries, a matter that should be determined by the historical problem in question rather than chronological convention). And the topic should be one that engages important aspects of general theory so that the findings from this limited comparison will have a broader resonance and significance.

The goal of the comparison should be clear. It may simply be to raise fresh questions, to refine the conception of established problems (in which case the use of the extant scholarly literature will be more systematic), to work out a design for future research, or to test formal hypotheses which may be either well known or newly formed. Obviously, these uses of using comparison can overlap, but the emphasis on one or the other will determine much about how the comparison is conducted. As an illustration, let me suggest five topics for comparative study that match these criteria, lend themselves to controlled comparison, allow different uses of comparison, and follow from this brief discussion of Japanese and Italian history. The first is perhaps the most obvious. The fact of imported political institutions has been a central theme of writing on Japan and an important one

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[43] Thomas Fuller wrote a provocative short article in the *Italy Daily* (a supplement of the Italian edition of the *International Herald Tribune*) in June, 2001, comparing Italy, Japan, and California.

mentioned without surprise in the case of Italy (especially with regard to the period of the French Revolution to the constitution and to the administrative centralization of united Italy).[44] Both nations looked primarily to Great Britain, France, and Germany as modern models and found in them parallels to their own history, needs, and goals. Comparative study of what Japan and Italy chose to borrow, from whom, and with what adaptations might reveal a great deal about the ideologies and interests underlying their legal and administrative systems and parliamentary practices. Such studies could also contribute to a broader analysis of institutional borrowing by developing nations.

Civil-military relations, a classic topic of comparative sociology a generation ago, produced a sizable empirical literature. Systematically developed and theoretically interesting, it found in civil-military relations a key to understanding the interconnections that made states strong, bureaucracies efficient, and economic growth compatible with or antithetical to civil liberties. The comparison of Japan and Italy invites reconsidering that literature, now largely neglected. In both countries, military interests were central to the government's role in nineteenth-century industrialization. In both, the military were formally more responsible to the monarch than to any other institution and not subject to any very clear constitutional constraints. Because of its role in the Risorgimento and its close ties to the House of Savoy and the Piedmontese nobility, the political position of the Italian army might have been expected to be even stronger and more independent of civilian control than that of the Japanese military. Instead, the opposite was the case, for civilian dominance was quickly established in Italy and essentially maintained not only during the period of the liberal monarchy but even under fascism, despite the Savoy kings' remaining prerogatives and continuing attachment to the military. Thus important questions emerge about the institutional and cultural factors that shape the role of the military in modernizing societies.

Initially, an observer is more likely to be impressed by the differences than any similarities between Japan and Italy with regard to religion.[45] Monotheistic Roman Catholicism, with a formal and exclusive theology, hierarchically organized in parishes and dioceses, its regular and secular

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[44] D. Eleanor Westney: *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns in Meiji Japan* (1987); Filippo Sabetti: *The Search for Good Government: Understanding the Paradox of Italian Democracy* (2000).

[45] I am influenced by Ian Reader's rejection of the tendency to view Japan as a special case in religious studies, "Ready Assimilation: Buddhism and Japanese Religion" (1999: 59); see also Ian Reader and George Tanabe: *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (1998) and Johann P. Arnason: *Social Theory and Japanese Experience: The Dual Civilization* (1997).

clergy all obedient to a pope in Rome, enjoys within Italy an almost total monopoly of religious life. That contrasts sharply with the looser patchwork of Shintō and Buddhist temples across Japan. And these great differences make the similarities all the more interesting. There are striking parallels between Japan and Italy in the way ritual observances intersect with communal and family life; in the (historically declining) role of monasteries in intellectual, economic, and political life; in the complex ambiguity of relations between the state and religion; and in the ease with which in their daily lives the laity shift between apparent indifference to religion and elaborate observance. These differences and similarities, then, create a laboratory for exploring conceptions of secularization and the increasingly challenged corollary that secularization is a trend necessarily associated with modernity.

Voluntary associations, which Tocqueville considered a backbone of civil society and democracy, have again become a focus of scholarly interest. A major element in the blossoming theoretical literature on the development of civil society, they are the subject of an extraordinary body of recent research on various historical periods in Europe and Asia. Japan and Italy are particularly interesting in the light of this research and have something to contribute to it. In the historiography of both countries there is some controversy about the formation of civil society and about its nature, particularly about its autonomy, given the existence of strong social networks based on ties of kinship and status. In both countries, local aristocracies have often provided the principal links (and sometimes inhibit the formation of such links) between urban and rural society; in both, artisans have been unusually numerous and economically important. The histories of both countries thus raise questions important to the general study of voluntary associations, questions about their relationship to social class and about the distinctions between voluntary and regional or occupational associations. Having undergone rapid and basic economic and political change, these societies provide a rare chance to test propositions about the tendency of voluntary associations to imitate in their own structure the organization of the state itself and about the relationship between associational life and the way the economy is organized and operated. Topics such as trust and informal cooperation, so important to ideas of civil society, might be usefully refined through the comparison of Japan and Italy.

Finally, questions about voluntary association connect directly to interest in the public sphere, which has become central to a post-Marxian debate about liberalism, social class, and western political development. The history of Japan and Italy seems not to fit many of the assumptions prominent in much of the writing about the public sphere. Although few would

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deny its presence and importance, there is little consensus about its emergence and autonomy in either nation. In these countries, gentry and aristocracy appear historically to have been as active as the bourgeoisie in forming civil society through newspapers, periodicals, salons, and academies; but that raises the question as to whether civil society was as independent of state, aristocracy, and specific interests as the concept demands. Analysts of both Japanese and Italian society have noted the difficulty of finding a clear demarcation between public and private spheres. In the case of Japan, Eisenstadt has argued for the necessity of understanding institutional performance in terms of a social nexus that incorporates informal ties, networks, and customs that reach beyond and are prior to the institution itself. Something similar (however different its historical roots) has obtained in Italy. The ceremonial traditions of both countries created opportunities for indirect participation in the public sphere through ceremony and protest. At the same time, the histories of both countries may indicate that discussions of the public sphere need to pay attention to the nature of the state as a determinant of whether the public sphere can acquire the openness and the association with political power necessary to its sustained development. Comparisons of Japan and Italy can help to clarify the ways in which the development of a public sphere is facilitated or hindered by regional and class differences, by the exclusion of women, by strong ties across extended families and clans, and by differing forms of associational life.

Taken together, the shifts in scholarly interests mentioned in this essay suggest that in the future there will be fewer comparisons between a homogenized Japan and an undifferentiated "West" but that the well-established practice of looking at Japanese history comparatively will continue, in a sense, on its own momentum. We will acknowledge that historical change, whatever its origins, tends to be integrated with the established culture, and we will look not for measures of success but for the delineation of process, moving beyond preoccupation with Japan's difference to search for what comparison of Japan with other societies contributes both to the resolution of historical problems and the formulation of broader theories. Further comparative study involving Japan has the potential to pose fresh questions and to enrich the social sciences, a prospect that warrants expanding a mode of thought that happily has become a habit.

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