



DIJ Social Science Study Group

Politicians and Bureaucrats in Contemporary Japan: New Twists in a Tumultuous Relationship

Arnaud Grivaud, a postdoctoral researcher at the French National Institute of Asian Language and Civilisation (INALCO), addressed a session of the DIJ Social Science Study Group in January, at which he talked about the important but often tumultuous relationship between elected politicians and bureaucrats in Japan.

Bureaucrats are often portrayed as a threat to Japanese democracy who act independently of elected representatives. In the decades after the Second World War, a "theory of bureaucratic supremacy" (*kanryō shihai ron*) emerged which held that bureaucrats were in charge. Many bureaucrats saw themselves as true defenders of the national interest, standing above the vested interests of politicians. Over time the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) even began to recruit former bureaucrats as politicians as their expertise was pivotal for establishing solid electoral bases.

In the 1970s, after many years of uninterrupted LDP rule, the "theory of political party supremacy" (*seitō yūi ron*) became dominant. This era saw the emergence of *zoku-giin*, "tribes" of politicians with strong affiliation to a specific sector, such as agriculture and strong links to related bureaucrats and businesses.

A number of reforms were introduced in the 1990s, ostensibly to strengthen the primacy of the prime minister and politicians. This included electoral reform and a reorganization of the ministries. In 2009, a new wave of reforms was implemented after the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was elected on a platform of promoting leadership by politicians. Grivaud's talk examined the changes in the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats which have resulted due to these reforms and other developments.

Grivaud discussed in some detail the 2009 reforms. He suggested that the DPJ made two key mistakes. One, it attempted too much institutional reform too quickly. And two, the DPJ attempted to expel the bureaucrats from positions of authority.



Prime Minister Abe establishes the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs in May 2014

He argued that in fact many bureaucrats were potentially sympathetic to the DPJ after years of LDP dominance, but due to a lack of nuanced understanding of this reality, the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats deteriorated, which affected negatively the effectiveness of the government.

With regard to the current prime minister Shinzo Abe, Grivaud concluded that Abe had learned from these errors, and from his own during his first term in office (2006-2007). Since becoming prime minister again in 2012, he has made a conscious effort to bring bureaucrats into his immediate circle who can keep him up to date on developments within the ministries.

This actually mirrors the strategy of former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi, one of the more charismatic LDP leaders of recent times. A key difference is, however, the establishment in 2014 of the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs (*Naikaku Jinji Kyoku*), which concentrates in the Cabinet the power to nominate nearly 700 senior bureaucrats. This makes possible the political selection of bureaucrats who are likely to be facilitators of government policy. While such decision-making power had previously been possible in theory, Abe is the first prime minister to actually put it into practice.

Grivaud also made clear, that not all changes in the relationship between bureaucrats and politici-

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ans are the result of reform. Already before the reforms of the 1990s, many bureaucrats had come to see themselves as public servants. Today, however, in particular younger bureaucrats regard themselves as leaders of reform.

Answering questions after his talk, Grivaud said that while information (and the ability to leak it) remains one source of power for bureaucrats, their freedom to engage with the private sector, for example, is now more

strictly circumscribed. Among other changes, he noted that a higher proportion of bureaucrats with degrees in economics are being recruited from Keio and Waseda universities, whereas in the past the Law Department of The University of Tokyo dominated the intake. And while more women are being recruited as bureaucrats under the Abe administration, as yet very few are working in senior positions.

China, Japan, and the Contest for 'Asia'

China's recent rediscovery of the Silk Road reaffirms the country's claim to being acknowledged once again in its role as the 'Central Kingdom'. Its ambition is global but at its core is China's position in Asia.

Until the late 19th century, China was at the centre of a tribute system, which hierarchically defined its relations with its neighbours in West and East Asia, including Japan. Japan's rise since the late 19th century, however, triggered a contest for political, economic, and military hegemony in the region. Claims to leadership were also negotiated as political-intellectual debate in the public sphere. In the first decades of the 20th century, this dispute crystallized in the neologism Asianism (*Ajishugi*) which claimed 'Asia for the Asians'. As a new *ism*, it converged existing ideas of Asian commonality ('same script, same race') and conceptually challenged different versions of internationalism, nationalism, and imperialism.

After the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1912 and under the influence of the First World War, Asianism started to seize the public sphere in East Asia. In this discourse, China as the most populous and largest country contested the most powerful and modern country, Japan, for the role of the representative and leader of Asia. The mono-

graph "Embracing 'Asia' in China and Japan. Asianism Discourse and the Contest for Hegemony, 1912-1933"

(see also page 4) focuses on the period between the publication of a first Asianist pamphlet in China (1912) and the founding of the imperialist Greater Asia Society in Tokyo (1933) to analyze this debate as a contest between solidarity-based, internationalist conceptions and nationalist or imperialist conceptions of Asianism. This transnational

discourse, which involved Chinese, Japanese, and other Asians, flourished during the 1910s and 1920s but eventually facilitated the 'hijacking of Asianism' (Duara) by the Japanese government for imperialist propaganda after the Manchurian Incident of 1931. At the same time, its legacy also influenced the domestic power struggle within China until Japan's surrender. Case studies include Sun Yat-sen's famous Asianism speech in Kobe (1924), the two Pan-Asian Peoples' Conferences of 1926 (Nagasaki) and 1927 (Shanghai), and the influence of pan-European ideas on Asianism. The book demonstrates that while Asianism helped to counter negative Orientalist views held in the West ('Yellow Peril') by establishing self-defined and positive conceptions of Asia, as a transnational project it failed to overcome the contemporary hegemony of imperialism, nationalism, and other political ideologies.



Sun Yat-sen and his interpreter Dai Jitao during Sun's Greater Asianism Speech in Kobe



Cover of the Japanese *Dai Ajiashugi* journal (1933)

Torsten Weber

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(Re)Locating the Tsukiji Central Wholesale Market



Located in the heart of Tokyo, the Tsukiji Wholesale Market is the world's largest seafood market with annual sales of 428 billion yen in 2017. It is most famous for its tuna auctions setting the world market prices, but in addition to seafood, there is also trade in vegetables, fruit, eggs, chicken and processed foods.

The market was founded in the Edo period and stands in its present location since 1935. After decades of political contestation, it is now scheduled to relocate to a modern construction in Toyosu in October.

The debate about the renovation of the market already began in the 1950s – though without plans of relocation back then. In 2001, the then governor Shintaro Ishihara selected Toyosu as new location: an area of reclaimed land in the Tokyo harbor from the 1930s. Soon enough, however, his choice came under intense criticism because of chemical residues contaminating the soil in this former compound of a Tokyo Gas electric power station. As recently as in June 2016, the newly elected governor Yuriko Koike postponed the relocation originally planned for the same year to October 2018 because of safety concerns.

Resistance against the relocation has eased, but many traders fear a decline in revenues because of food

safety concerns as well as the loss of their clientele once the market moves away from its central location. A commute using public transportation is impossible because of the early working hours at the market, and parking for private vehicles is limited. Even though transportation distances will grow as the compound in Toyosu is almost twice as large as in Tsukiji, individual traders will have smaller retail spaces at their disposal. In view of higher rent and the considerable costs of moving and installing new sales booths, a number of smaller traders will likely give up their business entirely with the closure of the Tsukiji market.

These conflicts reflect a fundamental shift in the Japanese distribution system: large supermarket chains have been gaining power since the 1980s and are increasingly bypassing the traditional market system with its many intermediary agents. It is precisely these close-knit and generations-old relations between specialized merchants and inner-city restaurant chefs

and fishmongers, however, that make up the heart and soul of Tsukiji.

The legendary market culture has turned Tsukiji into one of Tokyo's most popular tourist attractions. A food theme park on a small part of the former market area is supposed to continue capitalizing on the touristic potential of the Tsukiji brand, whereas visitors to the Toyosu market will only be able to watch the silenced market action from a glazed gallery. The future utilization of the high-value Tsukiji building grounds in close proximity to the luxurious shopping streets of Ginza remains to be seen – for the time being, it is likely to serve as a transportation depot for the Olympic Games in 2020. — S.G. & A-S.K.



The halls of the Tsukiji Central Wholesale Market (2010)

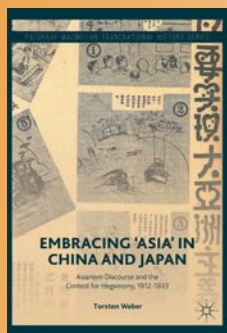


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Recent publications

Torsten Weber



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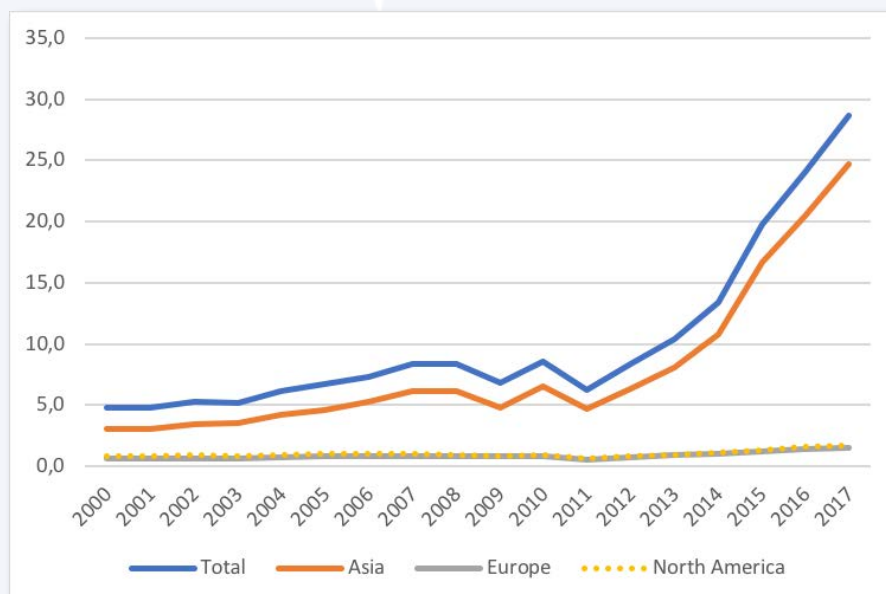
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Inbound Tourism - Japan's new growth market



Source: JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co., <https://www.tourism.jp/en/tourism-database/stats/>, based on statistics of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO).

Visitors from abroad in million persons/year

Since 2012, Japan has been experiencing a veritable tourist boom. More than 28 million residents from abroad visited the country in 2017, four times as many as in 2011.

The money they spent contributed to a 1.8 trillion yen (about 14 billion euro) surplus in Japan's international travel balance. The boom has been driven by travelers from Asia (25 million visitors in 2017). Japan has been a favorite destination for tourists from China (9.6 million, including Hong Kong), followed by South Korea (7.1 million) and Taiwan (4.6 million). With only 196,000 visitors, Germany ranked behind the UK (310,000) and France (267,000). The Japanese government hopes to further increase the number of inbound tourists to 40 million for the Olympic games in 2020. — F.W.

Staff News



Barbara Holthus (PhD 2006 Trier and 2010 University of Hawaii) took up the position of deputy director at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in April 2018, succeeding Phoebe Holdgruen. From 2007 to 2013, Barbara was employed as research fellow at the DIJ. During that time, she served both as deputy director (11/2011 to 3/2013) and head of the Social Science Section (4-11/2013). After she left the DIJ, Barbara joined the Department of East Asian Studies / Japanese Studies at the University of Vienna.

Barbara's research will focus on rural happiness, regional diversity of families, demographic change, as well as on social movements and media discourses.

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