Building Democracy in Japan

How is democracy made real? How does an undemocratic country create new institutions and transform its polity such that democratic values and practices become integral parts of its political culture? These are some of the most pressing questions of our times, and they are the central inquiry of *Building Democracy in Japan*. Using the Japanese experience as a starting point, this book develops a new approach to the study of democratization that examines state–society interactions as a country adjusts its existing political culture to accommodate new democratic values, institutions, and practices. With reference to the country's history, the book focuses on how democracy is experienced in contemporary Japan, highlighting the important role of generational change in facilitating both gradual adjustments as well as dramatic transformation in Japanese politics.

Mary Alice Haddad is an Associate Professor of Government at Wesleyan University. Her publications include *Politics and Volunteering in Japan: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and articles in journals such as *Comparative Political Studies*, *Democratization*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, and *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. She has received numerous grants and fellowships from organizations such as the Institute of International Education (Fulbright), the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, the Japan Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, and the East Asian Institute. She is currently working on a project about environmental politics in East Asia.

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MARY ALICE HADDAD
Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107601697

First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Haddad, Mary Alice, 1973–
Building democracy in Japan / Mary Alice Haddad.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-01407-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-60169-7 (pbk.)
1. Democracy – Japan – History. 2. Democratization – Japan – History.
3. Japan – Politics and government – 1868– I. Title.
JQ1681.H33 2012
320.973–dc23

2011021652

ISBN 978-1-107-01407-7 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-60169-7 Paperback

The publication of this book was generously supported by a grant from the Northeast Asia
Council of the Association of Asian Studies.

For Rami

Who has made so many of my dreams come true.

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Preface

Making Democracy Real

> It isn't just the Constitution that was important. We also needed the sixty years.
>
> – Member of the New Senior Citizens Club, Tokyo 2006[1]

How is democracy made real? How does an undemocratic country create democratic institutions and transform its polity such that democratic values and practices become integral parts of its political culture? These are some of the most pressing questions of our times, and they are the central inquiry of the pages that lie ahead. This book is about the democratization of Japan – the democratization of its polity and politics, not just its government. It is the story of how liberal democratic values, institutions, and practices were laid on top of, and eventually incorporated into, a non-Western political system that predated democracy by hundreds, even thousands, of years.

As the quote opening this preface indicates, making a democracy real is more than a matter of merely adopting a constitution and instituting free elections. As history has demonstrated time and time again around the world, often through social strife and bloodshed, procedurally minimal democracies are not "real" democracies. This has been true whether the impetus for democratization came from outside, such as in Haiti, Nicaragua, and, more recently, Iraq and Afghanistan, or whether those efforts were spurred from within, as they were in Argentina and the former Soviet Union. Although many countries have not (yet) succeeded in their democratization efforts, the past sixty years have also seen some

[1] Interview 149.

extraordinary success stories in every region of the globe, such as Jamaica, Botswana, South Korea, Poland, and the list goes on. What distinguishes those that succeed from those that do not?

Unfortunately, there can be no easy answer to that difficult question. Each new generation of political scientists has proposed their "magic pill" solution, whether it was mass education, economic development, or particular political or legal institutions, but history has demonstrated cases of countries that have followed one or more of their recommendations and yet still failed to consolidate their democracies. This book offers a more holistic perspective on democratization. It argues that the state-in-society approach to democratization is better able to account for the experience of late democratizing countries than those that have been based largely on the experience of Western Europe and North America. This approach offers a framework for understanding how the ideas of democracy are transformed into the practice of democracy, how the practice of democracy transforms the ideas of democracy, and how both ideas and practices shape and are shaped by institutions. Political ideas, practices, and institutions are all historically and geographically situated; they are a function of the time and place where they are created and re-created, and they are in constant motion.

As one of the earliest non-Western, nonwhite, non-Christian countries to adopt a democratic constitution, Japan offers an excellent opportunity for a theory-building case study to explore this process of democratization and uncover some of the important factors that empower a polity to democratize. Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Japan stands as a shining example of how a nation with a political heritage far removed from the European origins of liberal democracy can successfully create a rich, functioning, dynamic democratic polity and government. As the wise woman quoted at the beginning of this preface indicated, the process was a long and a difficult one and required decades of struggle by several generations. And, as is the case for all polities, the struggle is not yet finished. Although Japan's democracy has been made real, it is not perfect. Striving for further improvement will preoccupy citizens, advocates, and politicians for many generations to come.

Japan's story here is told not just as a brief history of a particular democratization process in a unique place. Its story is intended to help us understand the nature of the democratization process itself to enable us to create theories about how democracies are formed so that we may be better able to understand and support democratization efforts around the world. Of course, every polity is unique and carries within its history deep wounds

that must be overcome and hopeful opportunities that can be utilized for progress, and Japan is no different. However, the Japanese experience also offers the opportunity to develop theories and understandings about the democratization process that transcend time and place.

The stories in the pages ahead focus on two broad themes: 1) How does democracy get deepened and expanded at both the political and the societal levels? And 2) how does democracy get fused with long-standing traditions that may themselves be challenging to democratic principles? While many of the stories in this book highlight the "micro" triumphs and struggles of individuals, their experiences contribute to a more "macro" exploration of how state–society interactions shape and are reshaped by the processes of democratization.

Longtime U.S. Senator "Tip" O'Neill once observed that "all politics is local," and the same is true of democratization. Changing national institutions may facilitate the democratization process, but they do not necessarily transform a political culture. To examine how democracy is made real, one needs to examine politics on the ground, in all of its messiness and specificity. Questions that emerge from the examination of micro-level politics in Japan's democratization process include: How do social capital building organizations inculcate and transmit democratic values? How do those social capital linkages lead to the transformation of political culture? How are political leaders groomed? How do people reconcile their independent sense of self with their socially determined community responsibilities and aspirations? How do citizen ideas of citizenship and the ways that they practice their citizenship change through the democratization process? This reading of the stories is one of micro processes leading to macro changes in political culture.

The stories in this book can also be read at a more macro level. Democracy is not achieved by state or society alone, but by both – separately and together in cooperation and contestation. In addition to examining micro processes, this book seeks to ask several macro-level questions about the democratization process, including: What is the role of the state in determining the internal values of citizens? How does that role change across time and space? How are governments (both local and national) made more accountable? What are the circumstances under which national political elites release power to local or even nongovernmental players? How do civil society organizations influence/democratize the policies and practices of the state? How does the state influence/democratize the practices and actions of civil society? This reading of the book offers a broader perspective on the process of democratization and

political change, the nature and extent of state–society interaction in the process, and the possibilities and limitations of wholesale change in political culture.

I argue in this book that all countries form political systems that grow out of their own unique historical experiences. British democracy resembles but is distinct from the democracies found in the United States, Sweden, Australia, Costa Rica, and elsewhere. Japan is no different. The democracy that the Japanese have created for themselves represents a fusion of foreign liberal democratic values, institutions, and practices with indigenous Japanese political values, institutions, and practices. The two philosophical traditions have had different answers to universal political problems. They have had different value systems, and they have different institutional structures that they created as ways to realize those values in concrete terms in functioning polities. Contemporary Japan has reconciled these differences into a vibrant democratic political system, and while many features of that political system can be found in liberal democracies of the West, many others are distinct.

Patterns of political participation in Japanese democracy are different from those found in many Western democracies. When citizens have a problem that requires a governmental solution, they do not take to the streets or go to their politicians to demand a change in the law as their first instinct. Typically, they act through one or more of their local civic organizations, which then approach the most relevant bureaucratic office. The civic leaders and public employees follow up by crafting a solution to the problem (e.g., local crime, truant children, indigent elderly, and trash in public parks). The two sides work together to try to solve the problem. National politicians are brought in only as a last resort. Street protests, legal action, letter writing campaigns, and other public demonstrations are carried out, just as they are in all democracies, but they are not usually the first tools utilized by citizens seeking change. For the most part, citizens approach bureaucrats directly before approaching politicians or rallying mass support among the public. This is as true for municipal service problems as it is for national security issues.[2] Generally, only if these channels of communication and policy making fail do activists seek out other ways to influence government policy.

A core component of a democratic government is that decision makers are held accountable to the public for their policies. In liberal democracies

[2] See Haddad (2004) for a discussion of municipal-level activism and Steinhoff (2008) for an analysis of the protests at the Defense Ministry.

top decision makers are politicians who are held accountable through elections. Of course, contemporary Japanese politicians are also important decision makers who are held accountable through elections. However, as Lily Tsai (2007) has demonstrated in China, there are other ways that citizens can hold decision makers accountable. Interpersonal networks that cross the state–society divide can create informal institutions of moral accountability that act as strong motivators for civil servants to serve their public well. When those mechanisms do not work, formal democratic institutions offer an additional check, but they need not be the only, or even the primary, way in which citizens get their voices heard by the government and keep their public servants accountable. These dual channels of political persuasion and democratic participation are both present in contemporary Japan. They represent the legacies of both imported and indigenous ways of doing politics, and together they contribute to Japan's contemporary democracy.

This book offers a broad overview of Japanese democratization. It combines historical, statistical, and experiential data sources to tell its stories. To give the reader a "feel" for Japanese democracy, it tells the story of Japanese democratization from several different angles – from the government side, from the perspective of civil society (both traditional and newer types of groups), and from the points of view of individuals. Its focus is primarily on capturing democracy as it functions in Japan today with reference to the past to understand how it has come to be the way that it is.

Who makes democracies? How do they make them "real"? Individual citizens, working with others at the grassroots and elite levels of politics, make democracies, and they make and remake them "real" through small changes intended to address the ever-evolving needs of society. These small changes then multiply over time and space, resulting in massive transformations in political culture. This process has occurred and is occurring in a multitude of polities across the globe. Democracy is no longer a rare form of government found in only a handful of countries; democracies can now be found on nearly every continent. It is time for ways of thinking about democracy and democratization to broaden to reflect and explain non-European/American experiences.

Democracy thus becomes a concept that is no longer uniform. Measures of democracy must be pluralized to recognize its multiple forms. When examining a democratizing country, the question should not be how much liberal democracy has "made it" into the newly constructed political system, but rather how the indigenous political system has been transformed by its introduction and how liberal democratic ideas and practices

have likewise been transformed through their encounter with indigenous political culture. Democratization is a process whereby liberal democratic values, institutions, and practices are harmonized with indigenous political values, institutions, and practices to create a new political system in which the government is directed by and held accountable to its polity. One would expect the new democratic political systems that are created out of these processes to be as diverse as the societies from which they emerge.

Before continuing I offer a brief note on methodology. A more detailed explanation of research design and methodology can be found in Appendix A, and a more detailed breakdown of the interviews can be found in Appendix B. Please note that interviews cited in the text will include a reference number; the reader may refer to Table B.3 in Appendix B to match the interview number with a few more details about that particular person.

Much of the data for this book were gathered from archives in both the United States and Japan. The most compelling data were not gathered in libraries or from the Internet, however. They were drawn from the experiences and opinions of individual Japanese. Over the course of several lengthy trips to Japan (in 1995–1996, 1998–1999, 2001–2002, and summer of 2006) I interviewed approximately 200 people, and nearly all of the interviews were conducted in Japanese. Most of the research for this project draws on the 180+ interviews carried out after 2000. The interviewees represent a wide range of ordinary citizens, civic activists, volunteers, and governmental employees, of which the volunteers and activists were the largest group. The interviews took place in ten different municipalities in six different prefectures, but the bulk of the research was concentrated in five municipalities: Tokyo, three medium-sized cities (populations of about 100,000), and one smaller city (population about 20,000).

The interviews do not represent a statistical sample. Aside from the interviews in the three medium-sized cities in 2001–2002, which were collected to be matched case studies for my first book, *Politics and Volunteering in Japan* (2007), most others were collected through the introduction of friends and acquaintances in an attempt to capture a range of traditional and new-style activists and volunteers as well as government employees. In general, among the interviewees there is a slight bias toward higher education levels because nearly two-thirds of the people I spoke with were in leadership positions of one kind or another. Men are overrepresented in the sample (75 percent). This is largely because nearly all of the volunteer firefighters and almost all of the government employees with whom I spoke were men. The gender distribution was more equal

for the other organizations. There is a large bias toward older people because most of the people in leadership positions as well as a sizable proportion of the others were older Japanese who had the time and inclination to talk with me; the majority of my interviews were with people in their sixties and seventies, although I spoke with people from every age bracket.

I have followed the Western convention for all names, with the given name first and the family name second. Name usage in a society reflects power relations, and this tendency is particularly prevalent in Japanese society. Rather than unifying name usage I have retained differences to help give the reader a sense of the power dynamics that were at play in particular circumstances of the interview as well as to illuminate my relationship with the speaker. The primary determinant of name selection is made according to age; family names are used with older people, whereas given names are used with contemporaries or younger people. An additional consideration is social intimacy, so close friends are called by their given names while family names are used with acquaintances and strangers; higher-status people are called by their family name as well as their occupational or organizational title (e.g., Chief Tanaka), or sometimes just by their title. A final factor is gender; I am more likely to use a first name when talking with a woman than with a man. For the most part, I have used real names for public officials and prominent activists and pseudonyms for private individuals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the product of more than ten years of research and nearly forty years of relationships in Japan. Everything in it has come to me through someone else either directly, such as an interlocutor offering insight into an unseen pattern, or indirectly, such as the hard work and diligence of a research assistant combing the Internet for obscure government documents. I am increasingly humbled by the process of researching and writing books. In these brief paragraphs, which in no way do justice to the assistance received, I offer my gratitude to those who have helped me along the way.

My largest debt is to the hundreds of Japanese who have shared their homes, their meals, and their ideas with me over the past two decades. I have done my best to honor their dedication and hard work and convey my admiration throughout these pages. Of particular assistance in Japan have been Jiro and Keiko Hayashi, Kanae Shioji and her family, Shyōji Kanaya, Ikuo Kume, Makoto Iokibe, Robert Eldridge, Hiromi Nagano,

John and Donna Vandenbrink, and one dear friend in Tokyo who knows who she is.

This book could not have happened without the generous support of a number of institutions that funded various stages of the project. The National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Research Stipend was indispensable in financing a research trip during the summer of 2006. A postdoctoral fellowship from the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies allowed me to complete most of the research and begin writing during the 2006–2007 academic year. Two project grants from Wesleyan University enabled me to hire excellent research assistants who facilitated the completion of the project and speeded the writing process. A Mellon Summer Stipend in 2008 enabled me to complete the research and writing of the manuscript. The quality of this book has been dramatically enhanced by two author's conferences, the first generously supported by the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies in the spring of 2008, and the second sponsored by the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life at Wesleyan University in January 2009.

In the United States, numerous scholars have taken time away from their own work to wrestle with my questions, offer advice, and provide support. At the Harvard Academy author's conference, Ted Bestor, Shin Fujihira, Robin LeBlanc, Sherry Martin, Susan Pharr, Jun Saito, and Yutaka Tsujinaka all read nearly an entire draft and offered their comments. Tsujinaka-sensei is deserving of special thanks because he traveled all the way from Japan for the event. Jun Saito has my deep gratitude for sharing his original data about government ministers with me. He also served double duty, traveling again to Wesleyan for a second author's conference, where he was joined by Steve Angle, Bill Johnston, Dave Leheny, Don Moon, Mike Nelson, Peter Rutland, and Yoshiko Samuel. Steve Heydemann and Masami Imai were unable to attend the conferences but followed up with detailed comments. I am particularly grateful to Steve Angle for introducing me to Confucian thought and for taking the time to explain it to me over, and over, and over again, and for Tu Weiming for deepening my understanding of the tradition. Additionally, I thank Tom Berger, Mary Brinton, Sharon Domier, Bill Grimes, Joel Migdal, T.J. Pempel, Dick Samuels, Sherrill Stroschein, and Kellee Tsai for offering invaluable insight and advice at various stages of the project. I also gratefully acknowledge the generosity of Ellis Krauss and Robert Pekkanen for sharing data about Japanese ministers from their J-LOD dataset with me. The final manuscript was considerably enhanced by thoughtful and helpful comments from two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press.

This project would not be nearly as nuanced or as timely without the help of a number of incredibly able research assistants who did everything from comb obscure National Diet Library archives to crunch Excel spreadsheets. At Harvard, Eiko Saeki and Ippei Kamae helped me at early stages of the project. At Wesleyan, John Chisholm, Michelle Le, Haru Mitani, Yushi Ohmori, Kohei Saito, and Yuki Shiraji assisted at later stages. This project has been significantly improved through their contributions.

Finally, I thank my family. This book could not have been written without the help of my parents, who provided much emotional support as well as hundreds of hours of child care during research and writing. I also thank my husband, Rami, for enduring the hard parts of our journey together and for joining me to celebrate our love and joy along the way. This book is dedicated to him. Finally, a huge thank you to our sons, Tammer and Reja, who have brought us untold joy. Their laughter and energy remind me every day that life is a blessing, and they continue to teach me how to live life with enthusiasm and gratitude.