

## Reviews

J.A.A. Stockwin, *Governing Japan: Divided Politics in a Resurgent Economy*, Fourth edition, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008 (Paperback), \$39.95, ISBN-13: 978-1405154161  
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When I was a student at the National University of Singapore surveying Japanese politics for the very first time, it was indeed a boon to me to read Professor Stockwin's 1982 second edition of *Governing Japan: Divided Politics in a Growth Economy*. This book, in its various editions, has stood the test of time (and the market), and is arguably the gold standard for textbooks on Japanese politics in English.

Devoid of jargon, this book is written clearly and crisply, and peppered with wit and wisdom. The structure of the book is as follows. The introductory chapter makes a strong case of why Japan and its politics matter. The subsequent chapters cover political history, culture, important trends between 1945 and 1989, political reform in the 1990s, the 'New Politics' of then Prime Minister Koizumi, the governing elites, parliament and elections, political parties, some problems of the constitution, issues of domestic political concern, issues of foreign policy and defense, and the analytical challenge of Japanese politics in the conclusion.

It is also refreshing and pleasing to hear the voice of an eminent British scholar on Japanese politics in a field dominated by American and Japanese academics. Rather than compare Japan with the US (an exceptional country), Stockwin would make interesting references to the Westminster-type system of Cabinet government, labeled Koizumi as a 'Thatcherite' radical bent on market deregulation, the *Financial Times* of London, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and Tony Blair. While the text is generally very balanced and fair in its analysis, Stockwin does not mince his words in criticizing the illiberal and rightwing drift of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the tighter integration of Japan into the war fighting defense structure of its US ally in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Stockwin's liberal sympathies are clear: 'The 1946 Constitution was

<sup>1</sup> Stockwin argues: 'In other areas, particularly in foreign policy, not all changes that took place were necessarily beneficial. Moreover, possible consequences of the new system, including the resurgence of a reactionary nationalistic ideology, with adverse implications for human rights and a balanced polity, have begun to emerge. Most crucially, perhaps, a single party that may be seen as a congeries of special interests remains in power as though by right. Until alternation in office becomes a real, not theoretical, possibility, the reforms emerging in the new millennium will not be complete' (Stockwin, *Governing Japan*, p. 155).

On Japan dovetailing with the US security system, Stockwin writes: 'It seems a strange paradox that the most nationalist administrations for many years have become wedded to the one foreign and

based on two main pillars: democracy and pacifism. On both these counts it may be regarded as having served Japan extraordinarily well, whatever its origins.<sup>2</sup>

Given his seminal work on the Japan Socialist Party,<sup>3</sup> once the number one opposition party and now merely a rump one, Stockwin explains very well the one-party-dominant system of Japan by not only looking at the strength of LDP's leadership, policymaking and organizations of power, but also the weaknesses and fragmentation of the opposition parties. He makes at least two very insightful observations. First, the opposition parties (except the communists) tended to appease rather than to oppose the perennial party in power to obtain some concessions and avoid further political marginalization. Second, LDP one-party-dominance was and is not inevitable. The author argues convincingly that even though the party was in power since 1955 (except the months between August 1993 and April 1994) there were a number of occasions when the LDP came close to rupturing. And if the party had been out of power for a longer period, the party might well have suffered additional defections and not stage a political comeback.<sup>4</sup>

This fourth edition highlights the strong leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro between April 2001 and September 2006. It also covers important issues like the insolvent pension system, the controversy over structural and postal reforms of the Koizumi years, Japan's rapidly ageing society and falling fertility rates, the attempts by the LDP rightwing to push their nationalistic agenda, and the LDP's loss of the Upper House in 2007 which led to the resignation of the rightist Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Stockwin also observes that a big change in Japanese politics since the new millennium began was that the power available to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet has markedly increased.

If obliged to criticize the book, I would say that the focus of the book is the state, national level politics, institutions, processes, party system and factions. Little attention is given to civil society, local politics including referenda, maverick governors and mayors, social and environmental movements, and women's political activism at the grassroots. Indeed, some of the most interesting changes in contemporary Japanese politics are happening at the local level. Notwithstanding this comment, I hope that Professor Stockwin will write a fifth edition of his marvelous text and hopefully one that covers the impending demise of the LDP.

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security policy option that seems most likely to restrict the development of policies based on a Japanese perception of national interest' (Ibid., p. 249).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 223. He rightly labeled Nakagawa Shoichi, then Economy, Trade and Industry Minister, a "politician of the extreme right" (Ibid., p. 122). Nakagawa eventually became a national disgrace when he appeared drunk when meeting the press as the Finance Minister at a G7 meeting in 2009.

<sup>3</sup> J.A.A. Stockwin, *The Japanese Socialist Party and Neutralism: A Study of a Political Party and its Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Stockwin also has a tantalizing morsel of information concerning the collapse of the non-LDP ruling coalition in 1994. The JSP quit the coalition in anger and joined hands with its erstwhile enemy the LDP after Ozawa Ichiro formed a single grouping comprising all parties from the ruling coalition except the socialists. Stockwin notes: 'Years later, Ozawa mused that he should have made the same offer to the Socialists.' This implies that if Ozawa did not make this blunder, the LDP might well have been out of power for a longer time and one-party-dominance would have collapsed (see Stockwin, *Governing Japan*, footnote 28, p. 86).