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Political elites of Japan towards social and economic reforms in 1953-2009

In his doctoral thesis, author would like to concentrate on an evolution of contemporary elites of Japan and their perception of social and economic reforms adopted after the end of the Occupation period. In his opinion their influence over certain issues seemed to be very different, especially when looking into various historical periods such as reforms of Occupation authorities, Hayato Ikeda Income Doubling Plan, the “Golden Age” in Japanese economy or the cracks visible after the oil shock and economic bubble. Moreover, Japanese postwar elites developed a close relationship with business world, bureaucracy and pressure groups that had also a very important influence on reforms. As author points out, not only internal (elites, pressure groups and other actors of political system), but also external environment (nongovernmental organizations or other countries) had a share in indicating a proper direction of reforms amid globalization and its impact on international economy. Four different hypothesis were distinguished to properly explain the main reason of this doctoral thesis. First of all, we might assume that postwar reforms and direction they went had a pathological impact on the elites behavior (nepotism, corruption, incompetence and creating political dynasties). Secondly, the direction of reforms was strongly affiliated with the elites recruitment and their background. On the other hand there are also pressures from the external environment (countries or nongovernmental organization) that might interfere with decisions made by Japanese elites. Thirdly, we have economic crises and social changes that determined the course upon which specific reform were introduced. Unfortunately, the case of Japan shows us that reforms used to be treated as a part of a pragmatic policy, which focused on fulfilling the needs of a certain group or electorate that favors a winning party. A perfect example illustrating this problem is the “Silver democracy” – voters over 60 years old voting for Liberal Democratic Party, which gave them certain nursing and medical benefits for their

support. Last hypothesis, that will be also proven, shows how functioning of a network linkage between political world, business leader and bureaucracy (sometimes interest groups or unions are mentioned) impact in enacting a legislation favoring not only each of them, but also groups that support them. The “Iron Triangle”, as this relationship is usually called by scholars, is very important in understanding the long lasting rule of Liberal Democratic Party after 1955.

The overall thesis consists of four parts. First focuses on current researches on elites and how they can be shown, while looking into their recruitment, decision-making process and those approaches that include the inner view of Japanese elites. Furthermore author mentions in this part an introduction to specific nuances regarding culture of the region that could be avoided by Western scholars and aspects that focuses on defining reforms and modernization. With the end of this theoretical part, author presents a chronological view of actions taken by elites through the course of time. The consequences of Occupation period, impact of the Korean War on Japanese economy and “Golden Age” (or Japanese economic miracle) of the 60. with the plans purposed by Hayato Ikeda such as an Income Doubling Plan. With the end of prosperity era in Japan, oil shock emerged that slowed down the economy growth leading to awareness of citizen movements that were oriented e.g. on environment issues. Not only they threatened to pull out the support for elites if their demands wouldn't be considered and accepted, but also triggered a need to protect environment. The last period is the “Lost Decade” with the speculation bubble that made the Japanese economy collapse. This is also the time when Jun'ichirō Koizumi – one of the most popular prime minister of Japan – began his tenure with structural reforms, privatization and certain steps that led to change of voters that supported LDP. Within the end of his premiership, some propositions or plans were dropped by his successors: Yasuo Fukuda, Shinzō Abe and Tarō Asō, leaving the decisions made by them more predictive, although the members of their Cabinet were in most cases incompetent. Third part is concentrating strongly on political elites and the role of legislation, reaction of interest groups over the details of reform and political condition that changed after the Occupation period. That, in particular, means unification of conservative camp thus creating Liberal Democratic Party that challenged Japan Socialist Party until 1990s, when it lost not only majority, but also power for a few years. Slowly moving to the “Lost Decade”, another party appeared on the horizon, becoming a real threat in a fight over dominance in the political system. Fourth part represents a novel method. It consists a survey conducted over the Internet, which was made of eleven questions

regarding e.g. the stance of citizens toward Japanese elites and members of Liberal Democratic Party, the influence of external-internal environment and the role of opposition parties. Also it involved the effects of social and economic reforms and changes which occurred after the end of war. The results were acquired from a focus group that consisted of 75 Japanese citizens of different age, sex, education background or place of living that showed how ordinary people see elites and what do they think about changes in contemporary Japan. Author also included a prognosis of a Democratic Party of Japan rule that lasted only three years. What is more, looking into the results of actions taken by three prime ministers from that party: Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda, the most important aspect was to recognize which promises included in the 2009 political manifesto were achieved. It was really significant while taking into account the variable environment both external or internal (also due to the effects of earthquakes such as the one in March 2011).