

University of Lodz, Faculty of International and Political Studies

Paweł Wiszniuk

### The Citizen and The Power in Contemporary Japan. Challenges for Democracy – Summary

The main purpose of the thesis is to analyze the relationship between the citizen and the power in contemporary Japan in consideration of the quality of local democratic regime. Theoretically, democracy should be the main tool used to regulate these relations, yet it is constantly affected by culture and changing narrations. The thesis is composed of three main chapters.

The aim of chapter one is to clarify theoretical background, starting with theory of democracy. Next, cultural context of citizen-power relations evolution since early-modern era is explained, considering neo-Confucianism, state-shinto tennoism, local reinterpretation of European nationalistic ideas and post-war *nihonjinron* theories. The chapter ends with prognosis pointing out most important problems Japan will face in the nearest future in many different areas (demography, economy, international relations, domestic politics). Japan was the first East Asian country to introduce political, social and economic solutions established in so called "West". Still, Japanese culture developed in the region influenced by different values than ones in European countries. This conflict is constantly affecting the quality of the local regime, which is later analyzed by referring to the theoretical model of exemplary western democracy.

Second chapter analyzes the power in Japan – its position, structure and tools of control. The structure of the power is usually described with the concept of "*triangle of power*", where one dominating political party works closely with bureaucracy and important business representatives. Although network of interests built with personal, financial and regulatory links strengthens the ruling environment, it also generates pathological interrelationships, blocking structural reform initiatives and causing issues with lack of proper internal and external control in business. Tools of social control are examined within two main spheres: system and psychosocial. The system sphere considers issues with electoral process, which should be the most important tool of democracy, used by citizens to control the power. On the contrary, ruling party tries to ignore the issue of malapportionment (understood as vote value discrepancy between constituencies), which is severe enough to influence the distribution of seats in lower and upper house and cause concern of activists and judiciary both. Liberal-Democratic Party gains from inequality between rural and urban districts, thus the will of reform is rather low, despite various rulings defining the imbalance as "*in state of unconstitutionality*". The psychosocial sphere relates to all possibilities of shaping collective imaginations, focusing on political myths in the first place. Two main myths are discussed. First one is the myth of an alien, based mostly on stereotypes and artificially created memory of *sakoku*, closed state of Edo period, which is also challenged within analysis. Alien myth's

importance is represented by its influence. It consolidates unique nation's stereotype impacting national identity and shapes collective fears, affecting immigration policies and attitude towards minorities and foreigners, dependent on their origin and goal of residing in Japan. The second myth is the narration of pacifist nation, explaining the international mission of Japan as to promote peaceful coexistence between nations, constantly struggling for nuclear disarmament. Despite its humanitarian nature, it also has a very handy utility, as a soft-power tool used to shape international public opinion's views on Japan, reinforce internal identity and memory, in the end to justify security policies. The topic is being analyzed with example of Hiroshima, the collective memory site, which is used to shape imaginations on both Japan's history and its present goals.

Chapter three focuses on factors that influence contemporary citizen-power relationship. First part of the chapter covers the analysis of voters' views on political parties and government cabinets over the last fifteen years, focusing on prime ministers who should be considered as personified symbols of power. Main causes of failure, described sometimes in press as "crisis of power", and sources of success, on examples of Koizumi and Abe mostly, are taken into consideration. Next, main contemporary political issues are being examined: lowest voter turnout in history, high level of political indecisiveness within public opinion, with probable root cause as lack of political alternatives and constant weakness of parliamentary opposition, especially since 2012. Other factors like infantile pop-culture and nihilism influencing socialization process may be strengthening political alienation following social change. Still, development of uncontrollable sources of information is treated as the main factor influencing contemporary collective imaginations. Freedom of speech and press is another basic requirement for democracy, however Japanese press market somehow follows traditions developed in pre-war era, with press clubs controlling information flow. Independent journalists are blocked from main information sources and official club members are not always keen on pursuing topics that could be troublesome for their sources. Press clubs links with government and official institutions provide a field for self-censorship and manipulations. The issue goes in line with lack of proper public control regulations, which are explained on example of Fukushima disaster. Considering other examples, it clearly illustrates lack of will from public institutions and business to provide honest and straightforward communication towards concerned citizens, preserving the cultural pathology of hiding uncomfortable issues that could negatively affect the image of the whole group. The shape of public discourse undermines the trust public opinion should put into institutions and development of information technology only strengthens their failure to properly communicate with citizens.

Main conclusions suggest that the concept of Harmony (*Wa*) seems to prevail as the foundation of Japanese identity, and can be considered as a goal towards which tools of democracy should be used. Recent changes in citizen-power relations show growing expectations towards

governments and public institutions to provide more openness regarding their operational background. It does not come without backlash, though. Ruling elites expect public opinion to submit to their proposals, trying to control discourses, being aware there is little to be feared from opposition. Interest groups won't look kindly on organizations and activists challenging their position and lack of public control of their behavior. Japanese democracy seems to be stable, but it also means some issues are petrified, until LDP will see a reason to take the subject and combine it with party's interest.