Informal Mechanisms in Japanese Politics

Quansheng Zhao

香港亞太研究所

Informal Mechanisms in
Japanese Politics

Quansheng Zhao

About the author

Dr. Quansheng Zhao is Associate Professor of Political Science at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia; and Associate-in-Research at the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research of Harvard University. For the 1994-95 academic year, he is visiting Associate Professor at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Research Fellow of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is the author of several books on comparative politics and East Asian international relations, dealing mainly with China and Japan, including the recently published *Japanese Policymaking: The Politics Behind Politics* (Praeger, 1993), from which this paper is drawn and updated. His other books include *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 1995), and *Politics of Divided Nations: China, Korea, Germany and Vietnam* (Coeditor, University of Maryland Law School, 1991).

© 1995 Quansheng Zhao
ISBN 962-441-041-0

Informal Mechanisms in Japanese Politics

Abstract

This article analyzes the Japanese policymaking process at three different levels: societal, institutional, and individual. It examines not only regular political institutions, but also the social and cultural environments and differs from the standard, single-faceted treatment of Japanese politics. Policymaking in Japan has a distinctive informal aspect. Informal channels and practice are at least as important as formal ones. Special attention is being paid to three components: social environment and network (*tsukiai*), informal political actors and organizations (*kuromaku*), and the behind-the-scene consensus-building activities (*nemawashi*).

There have been political upheavals on Japan's political scene since the summer of 1993. From August 1993 to June 1994, Japan's prime ministership changed three times. In summer 1993 the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the 38-year ruling party since 1955, was defeated by the opposition alliance. Thus, LDP's Kiichi Miyazawa was replaced by the Japan New Party's Morihiro Hosokawa, backed by the former LDP strongman Ichiro Ozawa, who had withdrawn from the LDP and organized his own opposition party, Shinseito. In spring 1994, Hosokawa was forced to step down as prime minister when opposition LDP Diet members started asking embarrassing questions about his personal finances. Hosokawa was replaced by Shinseito's Tsutomu Hata. Hata's tenure was even shorter — lasted for only 59 days; Hata's downfall took place in late June, when there was a "weird yet convenient marriage" between the conservative LDP and its long time rival, the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ). The formation of a coalition government by the two "strange bedfellows" under the SDPJ's chairman, Tomiichi Murayama, has moved

Japan's political drama to a new high.[1] Nevertheless, opposition parties, including Shinseito, Komeito, the Japan New Party, the Democratic Socialist Party and five minigroups, were forming a political alliance in late 1994 named *Kaikaku* (Reform).[2] This opposition coalition finally established their new party *Shinshinto* in December 1994 with former prime minister Toshiki Kaifu (who quit the LDP in summer 1994) as its head, determined to defeat the LDP-SDPJ joint government and return to power.[3]

This political chaos has brought new challenge to our understanding of Japanese politics and policymaking. It is the author's belief that we should not only examine Japan's formal political structure, but also its behind-the-scene policymaking mechanisms, so that we can know better of the internal workings of Japanese politics.

The mechanisms in Japanese policymaking often appear, as Glen Fisher (1980:34) suggested, "hidden" from outsiders; or as M. Y. Yoshino and Thomas Lifson (1986:6) noticed, they are usually "invisible." In his discussion on political style in Japan, Edwin Reischauer (1988:289) argued that Japan's democracy operates in ways "unfamiliar to Westerners," with "vast amounts of behind-the-scene negotiations among political allies and with opponents." The policymaking mechanisms in Japan involve a broad range of social phenomena including social system and structures, political institutions, and personal connections. The subtle and elusive nature of these policymaking mechanisms in the ever-changing dynamics of Japanese politics deserves closer examination. The main theme of this study is the notion of informal mechanisms, an important characteristic of Japanese policymaking process.

Conventional analyses of policymaking in Japan have often seen the Japanese variant as distinctive in being more "patterned" (Krauss and Muramatsu 1988) or "channelled" (Satō and Matsuzaki 1986), which actually means somewhat more formal structure than in a Western democratic society (these models will be discussed later). In contrast, this article emphasizes that policymaking in Japan has a distinctive informal aspect. By identifying several intuitive Japanese ways of conducting Japan's foreign policy and international activities, it argues that informal channels and practice are at least as important as formal ones in the policymaking process of Japanese politics.

A Notion of Informal Mechanisms

In his classic study *Man, the State and War*, Kenneth Waltz (1959) developed systemic approach on theory of international relations, analyzing the world system at three levels: individual, state, and international system. This innovative method of analysis has had an enormous impact on the study of international affairs and related theories. With a different subject of study, this article attempts to adopt a similar pattern where the method of levels of analysis will be applied.

This article analyzes the Japanese policymaking process at three different levels: (1) the societal level — social system and environment, (2) the institutional level — political actors and organizations, and (3) the individual level — personal connections and consensus-building. It examines not only regular political institutions, but also the social and cultural environments, and differs from the standard, single-faceted treatment of the internal workings of Japanese politics and policymaking. This study is not a general introduction to Japan's political system with an institutional approach, nor a standard stereotype of "Japan as unique" perception using a cultural perspective. And it is certainly not a simple (or more elaborate) restatement of old notions on Japanese politics and society. Rather, it is a multi-foci perception, derived from a comprehensive study of various political mechanisms, thereby providing a fresh and analytical framework in looking into a more complex and sophisticated picture of Japanese policymaking.

The term "informal" means "not formal; irregular; without ceremony or formality" (Hornby 1963:548). In a more specific sense, informal practice refers to a set of informal political activities that take place outside the formal state structures (such as legislative, executive, and judiciary branches); therefore, it may also be called extragovernmental activities.

The concept of policymaking mechanisms means a set of arrangements, actions, norms, values, and behavior patterns and styles that effectively affect policy inputs and outputs. These mechanisms may influence or even control actions of decision-makers and the policymaking process. They are products of the social environment, the political structure, and cultural values. These variables can be examined at different levels with various theoretical notions, such as pluralism and social network, organizational theory, and political culture.

Special attention is being paid to three components: social environment and network (*tsukiai*), informal political actors and organizations (*kuromaku*), and the behind-the-scene consensus-building activities (*nemawashi*). The use of several fairly common Japanese terms in this article, such as *tsukiai*, *kuromaku*, and *nemawashi*, is to let readers get some direct sense of "Japanese flavor," so that the illustration and analyses can be more lively. These terms and their imputed meanings are intriguing and, to some extend, useful to an understanding of Japanese politics and policymaking. However, these Japanese words are not used as analytical concepts and, therefore, cannot be overused. In addition, one may notice that the use of these Japanese terms on many occasions is rather specific, whereas the English equivalents can have a much broader and less concrete meaning. To avoid confusion, especially in the theoretical parts, one may ultimately look into and depend on English definitions (which are more accurate in explaining the concepts) for a better and correct understanding.

The relationship between formal authority and informal activities in Asian societies has long been regarded as an important topic among scholars. In *Asian Power and Politics*, Lucian Pye (1985:285) claimed, "To uncover the actual flow of power, it is

necessary to look through the formal arrangements of authority to the dynamics of the informal relationships." The informal relationships in Asian societies often "generate the substance of power that is ultimately decisive in determining political developments." In a study on status conflict in Japan, Susan Pharr (1984:238) discovered that there was "an extraordinary amount of informal background activity that smoothed the way"; particularly, Pharr noticed the importance of behind-the-scene preparatory work (*nemawashi*) in Japanese negotiating behavior. Donald Hellmann (1988:351) also emphasized extra-institutional practices in Japan that "surround and sustain the formal policymaking of the government." Hellmann claimed that the success of Japan's economic foreign policies "can be understood only by placing the formal governmental processes within the context of this broader, informal, personalized" system. Pye's observation of the actual flow of power through "the dynamics of the informal relationships," Pharr's analysis on "informal background activity," and Hellmann's emphasis of the "extra-institutional practices" are, I believe, some of the most intuitive studies on policymaking mechanisms in Japanese politics.

Anthropologists, sociologists, legal specialists have also studied informal social settings and informal behavior in Japanese society. In *Political Anthropology*, Ted Lewellen (1983:124-125) argued that anthropologists had focused on two elements in Japanese society: the first was the *informal* groups, based on class, interests, age, and education, that function within formal organizations; and the second was the relationship between the organization, the individuals that comprise it, and the wider environment. Legal specialist Frank Upham (1987:166-204) claimed that "social conflict in Japan is characterized by informality and verticality," and that "informality is preferred by every level of government and in all areas of government-citizen contact." According to Joy Hendry (1987:42), informality in Japan may also reflect Japan's traditional values that show differences in behavior, corresponding to the difference between *tatemae* (open statements or expected roles), and *honne* (actual thoughts and

intentions). Chie Nakane (1986:177), a sociologist, explained that Japan's industrialization had produced a new type of organization, the formal structure of which might be closely akin to that found in modern Western societies. However, this did not necessarily accord with changes in the informal structure, in which, as in the case of Japan, the traditional structure survived in large measure.

Personal relationships and informal aspects in Japan's political life have also drawn the attention of some Japan specialists. In a study on Japan's political parties, Bradley Richardson and Scott Flanagan (1984:100) argued that informal relationships and groups were at times possibly more important than formal structures. Gerald Curtis (1975:46) believed that although not as crucial as many writers contended, "informal contact" between top political and business leaders in Japan "obviously plays a part in structuring business-government communication." In his study on Japanese budget politics, John C. Campbell (1977:118-121) argued that activities of the "unofficial groups" within the ruling LDP were "important as one among several pressure-generating mechanisms."

Although the informal (or extragovernmental) aspects of Japanese politics have drawn the attention of a variety of scholars, they have not often been, as Richard Samuels (1983:13-16) suggested, "the objects of empirical research" and systemic study. Moreover, they have not been examined by putting them into the theoretical context of policymaking mechanisms in Japanese politics. There are reasons for this neglect. In a recent study of Japanese voting behavior, Scott Flanagan (1991:144-145) argued that social environment (such as social network) and interpersonal relationship "have been neglected" in the studies of Japanese politics (such as election politics) and policymaking. He raised three reasons for the inattention: The first reason is a methodological one — when large-scale nationwide survey samples are conducted, the effect of the individual's social context becomes obscured. The second reason comes from the influence of traditional democratic theory, which emphasizes individual decision-making and self-interested choices; external social influence has often been viewed as negative or a less-important element. Thirdly, research on political behavior (voting behavior in particular) in the West has historically been dominated by "models that minimize the role of interpersonal influences." Thus, a study like this may naturally be regarded as an attempt to bridge these theoretical and empirical gaps.

I would like to emphasize that the above statement is not meant to downplay the importance of formal practice, and that informal practice is only one characteristic in Japan's political life. Policymaking in Japan has its decidedly "formal" aspects, and the Japanese process of policy input is in some important respects wide open to public view. It will be wrong if one argues that only informal channels deserve attention and that postwar Japanese politics and policymaking take place only at the informal level. Instead, this article examines organizations, process, norms, and activities which have heretofore received inadequate attention in policy analysis, and it highlights their significance. It attempts to demonstrate that the informal process is a critical factor in Japan's policymaking process and is at least as important as the formal process. It argues that it is more difficult to examine informal mechanisms since they often appear behind-the-scene. Therefore, formal procedures and institutions in the policymaking process, which have been amply examined in many other books, will not be the focus of the analyses in this article although they may time and again be discussed in comparison with informal practice.

An interdisciplinary approach is needed to study informal mechanisms in Japan. This approach seems more important for political scientists since it has been, as Lewellen (1983:124-125) pointed out, less emphasized in the field. More than four decades ago, a pioneering research, using a variety of disciplinary approaches, was conducted on a Japanese village. The investigation was the product of the combined efforts of three members of the University of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies: Richard Beardsley, an anthropologist; John Hall, a historian; and Robert Ward, a political scientist (1959). Their interdisciplinary research

on community associations set up a remarkable model for Japan studies. Taking that as a model, this article focuses on comparative politics, but it also incorporates research efforts from other fields such as sociology, anthropology, and legal studies.

In *Community Power and Political Theory*, Nelson Polsby (1980:4) had tried to use three types of data to distinguish decision-making, which serve as indices of the power of actions. His three categories are: "(1) who participates in decision-making, (2) who gains and who loses from alternative possible outcomes, and (3) who prevails in decision-making." Polsby suggested that identifying the last group would be "the best way to determine which individuals and groups have 'more' power in social life." And in order to investigate "who prevails in decision-making," there needs to be an understanding of political influence and of the mechanisms of policy input in the decision-making process.

The study of policymaking is closely related to the study of democratic societies. T. J. Pempel (1990:14-15) argued that the real key to understanding and differentiating among the industrialized democracies would appear to lie more in locating the collective intersection among political parties and other factors. Pempel asked two questions for further research: "In what ways do political parties and the party system connect, either causally or consequentially, to the other state and societal forces that shape and differentiate public polities within the industrialized democracies? In what way are parties and the party system nested in a country's power structure?" To answer these questions, one has to examine not only political institutions as most political scientists do, but also the influence of the social environment.

One may also place this study in a broader topic — modernization and development, which is a major research topic in comparative politics. According to Lucian Pye (1990:7), the modernization theory predicted that "such developments as economic growth, the spread of science and technology, the acceleration and spread of communications, and the establishment of educational systems would all contribute to political changes." In studying non-Western societies, such as Japan, emphasis has been placed

on making a distinction between modernization and Westernization. An increasing number of scholars have begun to believe that, as Samuel Huntington stated (1987:26-27), "The partnership between modernization and Westernization has been broken."

Indeed, the relationship between modernization and Westernization needs to be addressed when one examines most non-Western societies that have embarked upon modernization. These societies have been brought into closer contact with the West, and with each other, for more than a century by Western colonial expansion and cultural influence. As a major non-Western country, Japan's path to modernization has been examined carefully by a number of social scientists and Japan specialists. And since the beginning of the 1980s, having already achieved an economic miracle, Japan has been striving to become a global political power. The issue of Japan's modernization vis-à-vis Westernization and the nature of Japanese politics and policymaking has become a focus of study among many scholars in international relations and comparative politics. It has also drawn interest from policy-makers, the business community, and the general public.

In the mid-1970s, Japan specialist W. G. Beasley (1975:23) raised a fundamental question: do the differences between non-Western societies chiefly reflect location at different stages along a single path of modern development, or are they primarily to be taken as evidence that variant pre-modern traditions react differently with — and in the end contribute differently to — an entity identifiable as "modern"? Beasley argued that the question was already being asked by the Japanese as early as the Meiji period, and it was now "being posed again by the character of Japanese society." Clearly, the key question here is how modernization relates to traditional values, and how this interrelationship influences the direction of modernization in non-Western societies.

With regard to how tradition has influenced Japanese society today, there are different, and often contradictory, perceptions. One school of thought believes that the Japanese "absorb the new rather than struggle to keep the old, therefore, there is a lack of persistence or stubbornness to Japan's tradition" (Kuwabara

1983:81). On the other hand, one may hear opposite comments that Japan has maintained its own "Eastern spirit" in terms of traditional values (Kamei 1958:906); or that despite an outstanding economic performance, "Japan lags behind in its social and cultural modernization, since it retains many traditional elements" (Befu 1986:168-169).

I believe that, generally speaking, there has been a remarkable combination of modernization and tradition in Japan. This combination has produced a series of fascinating questions and explorations on the nature of Japanese society and politics for foreigners as well as for the Japanese themselves. In his presidential address to the Association of Asian Studies, Robert Smith (1989:715) pointed out, "The history of the study of Japan in the West is in very large part the history of a running debate over the nature and content of tradition and the relative importance of culture, history, and institutions." Along the same line, this study should be regarded as part of this continuing process of intellectual enquiry.

It is true that modernization has made today's formal political and economic systems of Japan essentially similar to that of Western societies. But the influence of political development and traditional social and cultural values has enabled Japan to maintain its own way of political operation in political institutions, social environments, and working styles, in comparison to the West.

As John W. Hall (1965:36) pointed out, the study of the modernization of Japan is that of the interplay of external and indigenous vents. In this sense, this article may also be regarded as an effort to explore the Japanese way of political development and modernization.

This study has explored informal mechanisms in Japan's policymaking. The basic analyses are at three different levels: the societal level, the institutional level, and the individual level. Special emphasis has been placed on Japan's policymaking mechanisms and the interrelationships among political, social, and cultural variables. These characteristics are critical in assessing

and understanding contemporary Japanese politics and policymaking.

Because of the increased complexity in the making of foreign policy in pluralistic democracies, one should examine not only why an action was taken, but also, as Morton Halperin (1974:313) pointed out, "what were the motives, interests, and sources of power of the various participants... which led to the decisions and then to the actions." Concentrating on the examination of informal practice in Japanese politics, this study can be regarded as an effort to study policymaking mechanisms "which led to the decisions and then to the actions."

Informal Mechanisms and Policymaking

Informal mechanisms contain several theoretical components: the notion of political pluralism, organizational theory, and political culture. By conducting three levels of analyses, this study has revealed the critical role of social network, informal political actors and organizations, and behind-the-scene consensus-building in Japan's policymaking process.

Let us first look at social environment and networks, or *tsukiai*. Social networks are some of the most effective mechanisms by which to coordinate different interests and to achieve consensus among political elites. According to a general anthropological theory on norms of behavior, in a given society the growing child soon comes to realize the advantages of conformity in regards to his comfort and in his early struggles for status. He finds himself caught in a net of social relations within which he receives generously only by giving willingly, and if he fails to fit into the norms of behavior he loses out correspondingly. This social give-and-take, often called reciprocity or equivalence, continues throughout life (Keesing 1958:311). In Japan, the norm of conformity and the social give-and-take phenomenon are reflected in the ideas of *tsukiai*.

The result of the confrontation between silkworm farmers and the small-medium sized businesses in favor of the former demonstrates the importance of special network between organized farmers and the LDP (Zhao 1988). Social networking is also used to cultivate political ties internationally, as Tokyo has tried hard to "win the hearts of the Chinese people" through its foreign aid programs throughout the 1980s (Zhao 1993). One can also see from the example of coordination within the Japanese negotiation team for the Sino-Japanese economic agreements, the University of Tokyo network, or *gakubatsu*, served a function in creating a valuable cordial atmosphere among the Japanese delegates (Zhao 1990).

A noteworthy phenomenon is the rising influence of a group of highly-specialized powerful Diet members, known as *zoku*. With their long service within the party, *zoku* have cultivated their own sphere of influence over one or several particular fields. Once one has established himself as a top ranking *zoku*, he has significant influence over his policy field, regardless of whether or not he has had a formal position. The special relationship between the agricultural bureaucrats (Ministry of Agricultural, Forestery and Fishery, MAFF) and the LDP agricultural *zoku* who were backed by farmers was effectively cultivated by silkworm farmers in the raw silk protection.

Next, one should look into the structure of the system at the institutional level. As in any political system there are "formal powers" and "informal powers." This is particularly true in Japanese politics (Inoguchi 1985:14), where there are many informal organizations. Bradley Richardson and Scott Flanagan (1984:100) defined the "informal organization" within political parties as "interpersonal networks of friendship and mutual ideological agreement and other relationships or groups which come to exist within parties and which are not called for by the party's formal organizational plans," and therefore, were often "more important than the parties' formal structures."

In addition, the leader-follower (or inter-factions) relationship is particularly important within the LDP as the inter-factions are main vehicles for the selection of the highest leadership of the party and the state: party president (also Japan's prime minister). There are also issue-oriented organized coalitions or groups in Japanese political parties that are temporary in nature, and they dissolve after each issue is solved. From the case studies on the process of Sino-Japanese rapprochement and the four economic agreements mentioned earlier, we have seen that some of the most active players in the policymaking process were informal political actors and organizations. Satō's "duck diplomacy," opposition parties' *yato gaiko* (diplomacy), and a secret Japanese non-official mission to Beijing after the Tiananmen incident are good examples of informal political actors in action.

Many informal or *ad hoc* organizations of the LDP were involved in the making of China policy. They included the Asian Study Group, Afro-Asian Study Group, Soshinkai, Seirankai and several less formal investigative and special committees, such as the Special Committee on the Silk and Silk Yarn Industries which was organized for raw silk protection. In the early 1970s, the LDP's subcommittee on China and the Council for the Normalization of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations also served as bodies of policy deliberation and forums for opposing opinions. All these organizations held debates within the party and had influence over the directions of the party. None of these groups were formal organizations within the LDP. Rather, their members were from cross-sections of the party, many of whom belonged to different groups at the same time. More importantly, the political influence of these *ad hoc* informal organizations within the LDP is often greater than formal institutions such as the Diet committees due to the *de-facto* one-party rule.[4]

Informal organizations are deviations from formal organizations. They tend to force political activities to shift away from the purely formal system and may often in turn support the formal system, while making modifications to formal goals. This trend may eventually result in the formalization of informal organizations, as one can see in the case of LDP factions which have

gradually been recognized as a normal part of LDP political life. Informal settings have the functions of a catalyst and safety valve for formal political actions.

The third component of informal mechanisms is *nemawashi*, behind-the-scene consensus-building. This working style has its deep roots in Japan's political culture. In Japan's political life, *nemawashi* is widely used within and outside the ruling party and bureaucracy apparatus to coordinate different positions. *Nemawashi* can also be applied to external relations. As in the case of the Sino-Japanese Trade Agreement, Japanese officials made several pre-negotiation *nemawashi* to the Chinese from the division level up to the bureau level, and then on to the ministry level. "Duck diplomacy" used by Prime Minister Satō for trying to open relations with China is a good example not only of informal political actors, but also of the *nemawashi* activities. As explained by the term "duck diplomacy," Japan's action was akin to a duck's: appearing to look calm on the surface while busily using its feet under water. Personal contact and connection are also used to convey Japan's real intentions to related parties, as Tokyo did to both Beijing and Washington during the post-Tiananmen period, when Japan was facing an international dilemma over economic sanctions on China (including Japan's third loan package of 810 billion yen).

In Japan, this phenomenon is called the differences between *tatemae* and *honne*. While openly at odds with Beijing over the issue of Taiwan, the Satō administration had also sent five "ducks," including a top politician, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) bureaucrat, an opposition party Diet member, a non-mainstream LDP leader, and a businessman to contact Beijing, a maneuver which would have been impossible through formal and regular channels. *Yato gaiko* (opposition parties diplomacy) also illustrates *nemawashi* at work in Japanese foreign policy. From the first three Diet members' visit to Beijing in 1952 to the episode of the "Takeiri memo" of 1972, opposition parties played a constructive role in normalizing relations with China.[5]

The behind-the-scene preparations use both explicit and implicit ways of communication. One of them is *haragei*, stomach art or non-verbal communication, an intuitive way to convey messages and to achieve mutual understanding. This was clearly reflected in the case of the LDP's "unwritten rules" that kept the conservative "young hawks" from going to extremes, and the implicit understanding at the National Diet between the ruling and opposition parties. The idea is based on implicit norms of behavior and a non-spoken political trust.

In sum, informal mechanisms in Japan's policymaking have a tripartite character: *tsukiai* contributes appropriate social environment for political activities; *kuromaku* provides political actors and institutions who will informally carry out politically difficult tasks; and *nemawashi* is used as a method to facilitate mutual understanding and to establish political trust at the individual level. A combination of the three constitutes a special political process which enables decision-makers to have broader options, more flexibility for bargaining and compromise, and a reduced risk of offending involved domestic or international actors. Informal contact has often become a prelude for later formal exchange and decisions, and thus may act as both a catalyst and a safety valve. One may conclude that Japanese politics cannot function well without informal mechanisms. On the other hand, it is important to notice that in reality there are often no clear boundaries between formal and informal settings, and the lines between the two may appear blurred.

There are various interpretations of informality in Japanese politics. One may first regard informal mechanisms as a reflection of Japan's own pattern of political development. As a late comer in the world economy, Japan adopted an economic growth-oriented policy. Politicians and bureaucrats alike believed that political stability was the basis for economic growth. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to provide enough channels so that the input of different or even opposite opinions can reach the policymaking organs. Yet pluralistic politics must not lead to social instability and political chaos.

The subsequent path of development for a late comer, as D. Westney (1987:216) argued, would "diverge from that of the advanced countries." Late modernizers like Japan, according to Ellis Krauss and Michio Muramatsu (1988:210), may have to adapt traditions of a strong government bureaucracy and state power to an increasingly pluralistic society with democratic and consumer-oriented values, a differentiated and powerful interest group structure, and a viable principled opposition. Therefore, less formal and more flexible political mechanisms become necessary to adjust various political forces to concentrate on the nation's modernization. Although recent political development towards further pluralization has indicated that the broad public consensus on rapid economic growth "has given way to a much less uniform set of goals that reflects a growing pluralism and a fragmentation of political interests" (Curtis 1988:245), the informal patterns of the Japanese policymaking have largely remained intact.

One other explanation lies in structural characteristics of Japan's parliamentary system that force participants to resort to informal ways. Each Japanese Diet member is provided by the government with funds to cover only two or three parliamentary aides' salaries. These aides are equivalent to administrative assistants in the U.S. Congress, not legislative assistants. They normally do not have the time nor the expertise to draft legislation. Their main tasks are to take care of constituents and make sure their bosses get re-elected in the next campaign. Diet members often hire more aides using their own political funds from both their Tokyo offices and the district offices, but almost all the aides are engaged in administrative work. Because of this structural limitation, Diet members on the one hand rely heavily on the bureaucracy in drafting legislation, on the other hand organize their own "research institutions" in policy research, if they are powerful enough. One such example is the LDP Diet member Takujiro Hamada's Forum of Liberal Society, which runs such programs as "Asian Forum," and "Japan-China Policy Dialogue."

Another structural characteristic is what Junnosuke Masumi called "the 1955 political system" of long-time one-party (LDP)

domination.[6] The LDP was in power continuously for 38 years from 1955 to 1993. Party elder leaders and policy-oriented *zoku* accumulated great power to handle and influence all major decisions during this time. In a political system where one-party dominance makes consensus relatively easy to achieve, Japanese leaders often can afford to wait for consensus to materialize before announcing a new policy. Although seeking consensus is a widely-used strategy by political leaders, the Japanese leaders' inclination towards consensus and their understanding of this process and using it intentionally makes it particularly conspicuous there (Ward 1978:72).

From the organizational perspective, Japan's long-time one-party domination may also have a impact on the party itself. The influential position of party elders may discourage junior LDP Diet members to have their own legislative staff. The political reality of the elders' leadership within the ruling party, the strong bureaucracy, and insufficient funds and incentive for junior Diet members to be experts in legislation all contribute to the informal nature of policymaking in Japanese politics.

Informal mechanisms may also be regarded as a reflection of Japanese political culture, which has been examined by some Japan specialists (Richardson 1974:2-4). In traditional Japanese society, harmony is the ideal, even if this means compromise or ignoring a possible controversy. Emphasizing harmony would mean emphasizing harmonious personal relationships, making informal contacts and using informal organizations all the more important. After having examined Asian political culture, Lucian Pye (1985:285) concluded that "formal structures are given vitality largely through informal relationships, which usually are highly personalized."

Conflict resolution is an important objective of the informal system. In his comparative study of the budgeting process, Aaron Wildavsky (1986:119) noticed that in Japan, "Ministries can practice avoidance. They can sidestep outright conflict by rarely dealing directly with one another." Indirect communication is used to avoid face-to-face confrontation. In Japan, "avoidance" comes

normally through compromises and consultations among related parties. In the case of negotiations for the Sino-Japanese Trade Agreement, there were behind-the-scene bargaining between Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and MOFA over the leadership of the Japanese delegation to Beijing. The bureaucrats of the two ministries made compromises by dividing the six-day trip into two parts: each holding the leadership for three days. Another element that may contribute to the consensus-building process is the homogeneity of the Japanese population and society which can facilitate non-verbal communication and mutual understanding.

Three dimensions of Japan's informal mechanisms have been analyzed above: social environment, political institution, and personal connection and consensus-building. A study of the nature of policymaking can help one to have "a better understanding of the diversity and seeming inconsistency of the goals that national policy must serve" (Hilsman 1967:13). Public policy, as Pendleton Herring (1965:30) defined it, is a concept that "implies a plan of governmental action for promoting the welfare of the whole community."

Above discussion has demonstrated that Japanese policymaking process derives benefits from these mechanisms. A system of informal mechanisms would facilitate a variety of channels for policy and information inputs in the making of public policy. As John Kingdon pointed out (1981:277), the pattern of information inputs into a decision "both affects that decision and determines what kinds of information will not be considered." Therefore, this input pattern is crucial for determining whether or not various opinions can be presented to policymaking organs. Obviously, there are many channels for such inputs in Japan's political system as demonstrated in the case studies of the formation of foreign policy towards China. By adopting an "informal" way, decision-makers also enjoy a wide range of channels. Informal settings may also be "an important element in the way democracies can listen and hear what they might otherwise ignore" (Apter and Sawa 1984:241).

Informal mechanism also has its limitations and disadvantages. Since it is informal, there is no fixed method of operation. It depends heavily on various individuals and different situations. The "duck diplomacy," opposition parties' *yato gaiko*, the secret non-official trip to Beijing two months after the Tiananmen incident, and the different ways of using think-tanks by prime ministers are good examples of this. While informal methods may encourage more individuals and groups to participate in the policymaking process, social connection-based informality, as Frank Upham (1987:166) pointed out, normally stresses "specific issues rather than universal principles," and hence may also limit the scope of participation. The result of the imbalanced political influence caused by different networks within the ruling party and bureaucracy apparatus may protect the interests of certain groups (such as raw silk farmers), but it may also be at the expense of other groups (such as the raw silk industry and import companies). This system may not be open enough for those individuals or groups who do not have appropriate social networks with policymakers.

The idea of consensus-building through informal means has often slowed the process of coordinating positions among policymaking apparatus such as the ruling party and the bureaucracy. Subordinates must brief endlessly while their superiors use their networks of personal associations to know the positions of the other players or try to persuade without confrontation (Fisher 1980:34). Ultimately this process may delay decisions and miss opportunities. It takes time to build up political trust both internally and externally. Internal implicit understanding through personal connection and behind-the-scene preparations often can not be understood by outsiders. Negotiators from other political cultures are unlikely to see through *tatemae* and understand *honne*. The informal way of maneuvering may sometimes provide mixed and uncertain messages externally, thereby creating confusion in communication with foreigners.

The method of informal communications may also make it difficult for the Japanese to deal with foreigners in the interna-

tional setting. As Takao Suzuki (1986:156-157) put it, the Japanese had difficulty when their addressee was not Japanese, making Japan's position hard for foreigners to understand; "That is why Japan is always getting a late start in its foreign negotiations, whether diplomatic, political or economic." The fact that Japan, at one time (not all the time), was criticized from two different directions — Beijing and Washington — regarding its policy towards China in the post-Tiananmen period, illustrates Japan's diplomatic dilemma in defending its true intention in the international community. Furthermore, the Japanese system, in which "each participant anticipates the actions of the other, no one, not even those directly involved, can say who makes the decisions" (Wildavsky 1986:129) may also create an image in the international community that there is ambiguity and a lack of responsibility in Japan's policymaking process.

One other limitation is that informal mechanisms may be used to pursue special interests by political and social groups. Also, because of its informal nature, the operational process of this system is not open enough to the public. *Giri* (obligation) may provide a basis for "structural corruption" which has drawn increasing public attention to recent political developments in Japan. It may also help create an image of what Kent Calder (1988:470-471) called "a deeply rooted antipluralist bias to much of Japanese political structure and culture." The highly personalistic factors of the policymaking process may have retarded "the development of the concept of politics and policies as public goods and inhibited the rise of power of politicians with a broader vision of national interest in the perspective of an increasingly interdependent international community" (Fukai and Fukui 1992:35).

As Japan's economy further develops, the society will advance in the direction of further political pluralization and internationalization. One may expect that popular demand for more active political participation will continue to grow. As the influence of opposition parties and the mass media increases and there will be more diversity and individualistic actions by LDP mem-

bers, Japanese politics will move towards a more inclusive direction. Policy debate in open forums will become more frequent, and special interest groups will be more active and skilful, thereby increasing their political influence. How to respond to the increasing demand from within and without the party will be a real test for the LDP.

Contemporary voters demand more from their political representatives and their demands vary widely as the society goes through more complicated changes in values and expectations. This may facilitate political reforms in the National Diet, allowing Diet members and their aides to spend more time and energy on legislation issues. To respond to the voters efficiently, there may emerge a more structured or formal system to absorb different views from voters, and to debate issues in the Diet hearings, rather than heavily relying on behind-the-scene negotiations. On the other hand, however, change in political structure and political culture is a long process. Informal practice and its role as policymaking mechanisms is expected to continue to be a distinctive characteristic in Japan's political life well into the future.

Political Pluralization as a Foundation

After the discussion on advantages and limitations of informal mechanisms in Japan's policymaking, it is necessary to return to some basic considerations. Informal practice in Japanese politics, the focal point of this study, is not an isolated concept. The foundation of informal mechanisms is political democratization and pluralistic politics.

Today, there are no forces that dominate in Japan's political life. It is highly unlikely that the Self-Defense Force of Japan might, like the pre-war Japanese military, come to claim an independent position free from the control of the Cabinet. The freedom of expression and the election system have provided guarantees for the operation of political parties. This political

setting has provided an institutional base in Japan for social groups and networks to play their political function. This is a key element that many less-developed or developing countries are still lacking.

Democracy is a process of political development, and although there are certain criteria (such as effective participation, voting equality at the decisive stage, and control of agenda priorities) to measure this process, a perfect democratic process and a perfect democratic government might never exist in actuality (Dahl 1989:109). There have been a variety of models and forms of democracy,[7] but one principle is common to all: anti-totalitarian/authoritarian rule and political pluralism.

Although the characteristics of informality and the concept of *kuromaku*, *tsukiai*, and *nemawashi* have existed in Japan for centuries, informal mechanisms developed fully only after 1947 when the new constitution came into effect. Only with a democratic base could Japan gradually move away from its authoritarian legacy. It is believed that a democratic movement that resorts to authoritarian methods to gain its objective may not remain a democratic movement for long. In other words, political pluralism cannot last long if the policymaking norms, values, and patterns are authoritarian in nature.

Political pluralism in Japan began to blossom as the bureaucratic dominance over policymaking began to weaken. Both the ruling party and interest groups have gradually increased their influence in the policymaking process. For example, with regard to the Statute on Centralized Control of Imported Raw Silk, both interest groups — silkworm farmers and the small-medium sized businesses — launched lobbying activities and pressed their demand on the LDP and top bureaucracy. The result in favor of the farmers reflected the imbalance of political influence through the players' social connections with key decision-makers. The shift on policies also involved internal negotiations among government agencies such as MAFF, MITI, and MOFA. The final settlement of the raw silk importation issue could be regarded as a compromise by various forces.

The role of political parties, particularly the ruling parties, in the policymaking process is worth our attention. For example, in the early 1970s, leaders of the ruling LDP played a crucial role in Sino-Japanese normalization. An interview with a veteran MOFA official confirmed that during the latter period of the Satō administration, there were considerable pressures from within and without the government bureaucracy to re-examine Japan's China policy, but "everything was meaningless unless Satō and other top politicians came to a decision on the government's basic policy line."[8] It is therefore not too early to assume that the influential role of political parties, vis-à-vis the bureaucracy, has become entrenched in contemporary Japanese politics. There are five reasons for this entrenchment.

First, for 38 years from 1955 to 1993, the LDP maintained its *de facto* one-party rule.[9] The party continued to be the single largest party after its defeat in 1993 and even after the merging of nine opposition parties into one group, *Kaikaku*, then to *Shinshinto*, in late 1994.[10] This allowed senior LDP politicians to play a decisive role in making decisions over highly political and often controversial issues, such as normalizing relations with China.

Secondly, because of its long-time majority or near-majority position, it was, prior to 1993, relatively easy for the LDP to control the legislative branch, the National Diet, as demonstrated in the case of the ratification of the four Sino-Japanese economic agreements. This also made it possible for the LDP's own policymaking organs, notably Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC), to become more powerful than the policy committees of the Diet itself (Valeo and Morrison 1983:29).

Thirdly, one has to pay close attention to the rising influence of *zoku*, powerful LDP Diet members who sit on key committees and other organizations as chairmen and have developed seniority on the committees accumulating expertise and political influence over certain policy areas. Thus, the gap between LDP politicians and the bureaucracy in terms of access to information and specialization has been gradually and significantly reduced.

Until recently, bureaucracy dominated information and expertise on virtually all policy matters; and Diet members had to rely heavily on the bureaucracy in drafting legislation mainly due to the lack of expertise and legislative staff.

The negotiation over the raw silk policy has also demonstrated the close relationship between the bureaucracy and the LDP: more *zoku* members become ministers or parliament vice-ministers, and retired ex-bureaucrats continuously join the party by running for office, and they themselves eventually become *zoku*. For example, thirty percent or more of the LDP Diet members are ex-bureaucrats; and over forty percent of the cabinet members have had bureaucratic backgrounds (Jiyūminshutō 1977:90). Ex-bureaucrats often act as informal intermediaries between the ruling party and the government bureaucracy. It is therefore not enough to push through a policy proposal by only going through the government bureaucracy; one must also persuade the LDP and especially its appropriate *zoku*. As Yung Park (1986:192) argued, "no agency action can be undertaken" without blessings from the LDP and its *zoku*.

Finally, internal rivalry within the bureaucracy has also contributed to the political parties' increasing power. As Japan entered the age of industrialization, socio-economic life became increasingly complex. There are many more issues and interests involved in the policymaking process, further intensifying internal rivals among bureaucrats. It is not unusual for one policy to fall into several different jurisdictions. This has forced bureaucrats to turn to outside forces for arbitration. On most occasions, ruling parties can fit this role. Despite the traditional fear of politician's interference among the governmental bureaucrats, the conflict between MOFA and other ministries increased possibility that MOFA officials would seek support from politicians, particularly the ruling party's Diet members. The involvement of the ruling party's leading members in foreign policy issues became more visible in the early 1990s. LDP party elder Shin Kanemaru's private negotiations with North Korea in September 1990, and then

LDP secretary-general Ichiro Ozawa's attempt to cut an aid-for-islands deal in Moscow in March 1991 just prior to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov's visit to Tokyo are two primary examples.[11]

According to Jōji Watanuki (1977:21-22), the evolution of the ruling political parties to political eminence has several merits. Let us take the LDP as an example. The most important one is the close coordination among the ruling "tripod": the LDP, the higher elite corps of the bureaucracy, and the business community. The second merit is that LDP's effective *koenkai* (association of supporters for Diet members) has played a major role in LDP's longtime rule. Through *koenkai*, "various demands — personal, regional, and occupational — of the populace have been absorbed and satisfied." The third is that LDP Diet members have enjoyed a wide range of freedom to express divergent policy views and even behavior concerning both domestic and foreign policies. This point is demonstrated by the case study of the process of Sino-Japanese rapprochement, during which the pro-Beijing and the pro-Taipei groups had sharply opposing views.

The rising influence of the ruling party gradually broke the policymaking dominance of the bureaucracy. This development has provided more channels for policy input. With regard to highly controversial issues like Japanese foreign policy towards China in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a division of labor between political leaders and the civil service: the LDP gave the general direction, or it set the tone; whereas the initiation and implementation of these policies depended primarily on the government bureaucracy (Kyōgoku 1987:220). The LDP was unable to fulfil the latter function — there were only three staff members, for example, in PARC's Division of Foreign Affairs.[12] In contrast, the bureaucracy was an independent entity with first rate personnel and excellent executive and informational systems. Its traditional influence over policymaking, although diminished, was still strong, and the ruling party's rising influence had not damaged the pluralistic direction of Japan's political development. The overall relationship between the LDP and the bureaucracy was

not necessarily one of "instruction" from LDP to bureaucrats, as one MAFF official suggested, but rather one of "consultation."

We can see further interdependence of the LDP and the bureaucracy (Takabatake 1978:11-14). The interdependence between the two moved towards what Yung Park (1986:186) described as a "party-bureaucracy collaboration and symbiosis." This can be seen from the secret trip to Beijing of the delegation of Liberal Society Forum during the post-Tiananmen period: throughout the trip, there was a well-coordinated relationship between the LDP-led Forum and the foreign affairs ministry bureaucrats. All these institutional settings provided greater room for informal practice to operate.

One of the key elements of the pluralistic nature of Japanese politics is the function of political parties and the National Diet. As Roger Benjamin and Kan Ori (1981:78-79) argued, the political party system in Japan "is the major vehicle for the exercise of political influence." It can be said that the Japanese political parties' function of attaining and maintaining the leadership in political process has replaced the military authority of the pre-war period.

In the 1989 election, the LDP for the first time lost majority seats in the upper house while it managed to maintain its dominant position in the lower house, which was lost in summer 1993. In this situation, the LDP had to compromise on several of its policies with opposition parties and even to establish a coalition with its old rival, the socialist party (SDPJ).

In addition to being ready to replace the ruling LDP prior to 1993, one can see that there are four functions that opposition parties can perform. First, they can provide a different perspective on foreign policy which has often opened new horizons to push the ruling party and foreign affairs bureaucrats to change their mind, as they did on Sino-Japanese rapprochement. Secondly, opposition parties provide information and informal channels which the LDP and the bureaucracy may not have. Thirdly, they use public means such as the press and Diet hearings which are televised and broadcast to change the mood over controversial

issues among the public, the bureaucrats, and the ruling party. Fourthly, they can evaluate and criticize the results of government policies, so that further mistakes and failures can be avoided (Yamamoto 1974:184-188).

Opposition parties in the Diet play an important role in the Japanese policymaking process. Their key role, as veteran LDP member Motoji Suganuma suggested, is "to stabilize politics and to let various opinions be heard," therefore, "together with the ruling party, they are two wheels of a cart."[13] This is especially true when it comes to the informal aspect in Japan's political life. Therefore, informal mechanisms can play a catalytic function in promoting a more pluralistic policymaking in Japan. On the other hand, the new development in Japan has suggested that Japanese politics may move towards, what Ichiro Ozawa has advocated, a Western-style two-party system as a means of dismissing factionalism and offering "real debate" into politics.

Another development from the early 1970s is the increasing participation in politics by scholars, specialists, and the press, as well as interest groups. In the postwar democracy, there has been no governmental censorship except during the Occupation period, and "all the major newspapers and TV networks have been avowed guardians of democracy" (Watanuki 1977:26). Intellectuals and "think-tanks," as I discussed in the cases of Sino-Japanese rapprochement and Japan's aid policy to China before and after the Tiananmen incident, have begun to participate in policy-oriented forums and activities.[14]

The Japanese experience of political development shows the importance of Western influence on Japan. Yet, Western political systems cannot be entirely transplanted into Japan, and they must adapt to "Japanese traditions and circumstances" (Fukutake 1981:159). Over the years in the postwar period, the Japanese have developed their own policymaking mechanism — informal mechanisms. The informality in Japan's political life can be traced back long before World War II. Indeed, the words used in this study such as *tsukiai, kuromaku,* and *nemawashi* have existed for centuries. But, the phenomenon of full scale democratization and plu-

ralization came into being only after the 1947 constitution. Without these basic political foundation and structures that have been receptive and in which democratic principles can operate, informal mechanisms would not have fully developed in Japan.

The break-up of bureaucratic dominance, the rise of the political parties' influence, and the increasing activities of interest groups and the business community have created what Ellis Krauss (1982:110) called "an expansion in the size, scope, and diversity of the real decision-making elite in Japan." This development has further strengthened political pluralization, which is a foundation of Japan's informal mechanisms. On the other hand, as Eva Etzioni-Halevy (1983:44) pointed out, the political system is pluralist not only in its being subject to a plurality of pressures but also in its very structure. The complexity of the state structure affords interest groups multiple access points at which to exert their influence. Informal mechanisms, in providing this access, have supported pluralistic development in Japan. This fact refutes a plausible argument that the appearance of pluralism in Japan is deceptive because of extensive informal activities in the policymaking process. As Samuel Kernell (1991:370) argued, informal mechanisms of political control in Japan "does not mean that the constitutional order has been corrupted or that policymaking has become less democratic."

Informal practice is only one characteristic in Japan's political life. In many cases political operation in Japan is quite "formal," open and public. Yet, the informal aspect of Japan's policymaking has not been systemically examined. The development of the informal mechanisms model in Japan has provided an alternative basis of study for political scientists as well as Asian specialists. It has broader implications beyond Japan's domestic politics and foreign policymaking. The impact of a "Japan model" on other East Asian societies, such as South Korea and Taiwan, has remained an intriguing research topic for scholars to pursue.

International Comparisons

The study cannot be complete without making international comparisons between Japan and other societies. As the interdependence between nations increases, there is greater need for mutual understanding. Misunderstanding will more likely become a primary cause for international conflicts. As a global economic (and a potential political) superpower, Japan has played and will continue to play a significant and, arguably, leading role in world affairs. There is an increasing need to understand Japan in the international community, not only in general terms, but to understand also the Japanese way of policymaking in a comparative picture. This article, nevertheless, is not intended to make a full-fledged comparative study. Since Japan is a society influenced by both the West and the East, this comparison will focus on the informal aspects of Japanese politics and policymaking against the backgrounds of East Asian societies and the United States.

The broader implications for the informal mechanisms model suggest that there are similar patterns of political development in other non-Western societies, especially those of East Asia where rapid economic and political changes have been taking place. In the path to modernization and democratization, each society has its own historical legacy which includes political structure and traditional culture and, therefore, has its own norms and patterns of development. Yet, nations may learn from one another in terms of modernization. The Japanese experience of political development is believed to have special significance for Japan's East Asian neighbors.

As an East Asian country, Japan shares common cultural legacies — Confucianism, for example — with China, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. In studying East Asian politics, many believe that cultural differences make "important contributions to distinctive patterns" of these societies (Richardson 1974:2-4). It is not enough, however, to emphasize only cul-

tural traditions. Political institutions and social structures should also be taken into account.

The move for modernization and democratization in East Asia began as early as the nineteenth century, but actual development in many East Asian nations began in the 1960s and reached a high in the 1980s. One can see economic reforms and political turmoil in China, democratization marked by a dynamic opposition party movement in Taiwan, and a political realignment which created a LDP-type conservative coalition formed in 1990 and continuing mass demonstrations in South Korea. These changes in East Asia differ in means, scope, and strategies of interest groups and ruling elites. One commonality is the basic trend and popular desire for economic development and political democratization.

In this sense, both internal conditions and international environment for most of East Asian societies are at a stable and favorable juncture, providing a golden opportunity for every country in the region to make progress in economic and political development. The Japanese experience is useful to political development in other East Asian societies. For example, the establishment of South Korea's conservative coalition (the Democratic Liberal Party) in early 1990 with the merger of three political parties (despite its controversial nature), was arguably modeled on Japan's ruling LDP. The pre-1993 LDP model, one big party dominance while allowing the existence of opposition parties, has attracted the attention of Japan's neighbors such as South Korea and Taiwan.

When comparing the Japanese with the Chinese political and economic systems, there are obvious differences between capitalist and socialist systems.[15] One also, however, sees similarities in the policymaking mechanisms between the two societies, particularly the informal aspects of the policymaking processes.

A number of China specialists have emphasized informality in China's political life. Andrew Walder (1986:76-80), for example, in his study of China's social structure and workers' politics, emphasized the importance of an "informal network" in Chinese

society. Walder claimed that "informal relationships are the real arena for the pursuit of interests." Indeed, social connections and network are as equally important in Chinese politics as they are in Japan. *Guanxi* is a widely used term referring to social networking and is arguably the equivalent of the Japanese term *tsukiai*.[16] In China, *guanxi* is regarded as a catalyst to increase one's social network and to get things done. Without *guanxi* one would hardly have any significant influence in China's political arena.

Tang Tsou (1986:98) had conducted a specific study on informal groups in Chinese Communist Party politics. He analyzed "informal rules, groups and processes" and how they transformed into formal ones, and described this as "one of the most interesting phenomena in the dynamics of bureaucracy and the political system." Evidence of informality in Chinese politics is abundant. Other than *guanxi*, the counterpart of *tsukiai* discussed above, there is also a Chinese type *kuromaku*, behind-the-scene influential political figures who may not necessarily hold formal positions; and a Chinese style *nemawashi* emphasizing informal contacts for preparation of decisions. While not suggesting that the Japanese and Chinese styles are entirely the same,[17] one finds striking similarity in East Asian political structures and cultures that influence political mechanisms. Looking at the recent experience and developmental patterns of Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, and other societies, one may wonder whether, in spite of different economic and political systems, the direction of development for the East Asian societies may become even more pluralistic, though perhaps, in an "informal" way.

The Japanese political system resembles that of other advanced industrial democracies, as T. J. Pempel (1992:8-9) pointed out, "in most of its political and social institutions and behavioral traits, but it emerges from a non-Western cultural tradition." Hence, Japan has become "a good case study for examining ideal conceptions of democracy in contrast to practical democratic realities." Both in Japan and in the United States, there is no single source of authority and no concentration of power in the sense of the absolutist state. The most striking similarity between the two

countries is the democratic and pluralistic nature of both societies. The institutionalization of political leadership, the determination to form a government with popular consent through elections, and the citizens' basic political rights, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association, have made both Japan and the United States different from authoritarian states. The setting of the democratic political system in both countries has allowed for interest groups to voice their demands, that in turn influence the policymaking process. The role of organized farmers in the case of Japan's raw silk protectionism is similar to many lobbying activities in the United States.

Before turning to differences between Japan and the United States, I should make it clear that comparing a presidential system, such as the one in the United States, and a parliamentary system like Japan's is like comparing apple with pear. Despite similarities in terms of democratic nature of the regimes, there are many differences between the Japanese and the United States systems, particularly with regard to institutional functions and the policymaking process. A Brookings book, *Parallel Politics: Economic Policymaking in Japan and the United States* (Kernell 1991), has extensively compared the two countries' political systems and the policymaking process. In Samuel Kernell's concluding chapter (325-378), he discussed in detail similarities and differences with regard to the party system, election, the legislature, executive leadership (presidents vs. prime ministers, etc.), and the governmental bureaucracy. Since this article is not intended to provide a comprehensive comparison between the two political systems, and I do not want to repeat general arguments presented by previous studies, here I will only discuss a few points related to informal aspect of the policymaking.

Informal practice is an inherent feature of Japan's political life. One reason for the prominent role of informal channels in Japan's legislative politics is due to the structural limitation of the Japanese Diet. Diet members are provided by the government only two or three congressional aides, so that Diet members have to rely heavily on informal channels and advisory groups for policy re-

search, and on bureaucracy in drafting legislation. In contrast, American congressmen have enough funds from the government to hire both administrative and legislative aides. The average number of aides a senator has, for example, is about 25 or more, and the largest number may reach 75. Most legislative aides have higher academic degrees, often Ph.D.s, in their fields and write the draft of legislation without outside help. There are additional staff on the committees and subcommittees. Even when the White House initiates legislation (and ask individual senators or congressmen to sponsor them), it often relies on the help of congressional aides in drafting the legislative proposals. Instead of relying on the bureaucracy as Japanese politicians do, American politicians rely on congressional staff.

Many of the differences between the American and Japanese political systems can be attributed to the informality of Japanese politics. The prominent role played by special social network, informal political actors and organizations, and personal contact in preparing consensus demonstrate distinct mechanisms in exercising political influence. There are differences in terms of attitudes towards authority: Japanese acceptance of *informal* authority as well as *legal* authority is much greater than that in the United States. In Japan, informal channels are widely used to help the ruling party and the government bureaucracy apparatus coordinate different interests in preparing policies. Through these informal and non-legislative means, it is relatively easy for the Japanese to reach a consensus among themselves. Whereas, in the United States, highly publicized political debates and a powerful legislative branch have made some highly-sensitive policy issues more visible.

To be sure, there is also an informal aspect in American politics. In Washington, for example, there are some so-called "super lawyers," who maintain politically influential roles but often exercise their power quietly without appearing in the press. After-work dinners for cultivating political ties are also popular in Washington, and one constantly hears behind-the-scene bargaining, negotiations, and compromise on Capitol Hill and other polit-

ical battleground. "Old boy connections" of Ivy League graduates in the East Coast, who enjoy similar socioeconomic backgrounds, are also important in Washington politics. In this sense, there are similarities between Tokyo and Washington even in the aspect of informal politics.

But when examining Japan's policymaking mechanisms, such as social network (*tsukiai*), informal political actors and organizations (*kuromaku*), and behind-the-scene consensus-building (*nemawashi*), one can sense a difference in scope and degree. For example, although both countries have *gakubatsu*, or "school cliques," within the government bureaucracies, there is a much higher degree of concentration in Japan in a single university (the University of Tokyo) than in the United States. The differences in policymaking mechanisms may often become sources of misunderstanding between the two countries. For example, as Robert Christopher (1989:32) pointed out, Americans are apt to regard the *nemawashi* process as "inordinately time consuming," or even as "a deliberate delaying tactic or mechanism for deceit."

It is true that "informal diplomacy" and "politics behind politics" is not unique to Japan but is common to all political systems. One may hear of "under-the-table-politics" all the time in Tokyo, as well as in Western democracies such as Washington and London.[18] If informal politics simply means that many informal groups (meaning groups without legal jurisdiction over an issue) are involved, then every nation has informal politics. But Japan's informal mechanisms, a tripartite policymaking device, do have their own characteristics. As one looks closely at how widely *kuromaku*, *tsukiai*, and *nemawashi* are used in the policymaking process as shown in the four case studies of the formation of Japanese foreign policy, one can discern a distinct Japanese way of policymaking. Use of social connections for political influence and mobilization is "a common phenomenon in Japan, perhaps a more visible or a more frequent activity there than in any other industrialized country" (Richardson 1991:338). In other words, there is a difference in degree of intensity between Japan and the Western democracies with regard to informal politics.

In sum, compared to the United States, policymaking in Japan often appears less institutionalized and more ambiguous, more dependent on informal means, such as social network and personal connection. Rather than the fundamental difference in the democratic nature of politics, the differences between the two are mainly in structure and decision-making process, political mechanism for policy formation, and working style and method.

Notes

1. For details, see Smith (1994a).
2. See Koseki (1994) and Smith (1994b).
3. *Yazhou Zhoukan*, December 18, 1994, p. 43.
4. For detailed discussions on functions and status of the Diet, see Hans Baerwald's *Party Politics in Japan*. In the concluding chapter, Baerwald asked and answered a question: Is the national assembly (Diet) supreme? (1986:154-158).
5. For a detailed account of informal contacts between Japan and China, see Besshi (1983).
6. The original idea of "the 1955 political system" was first raised by Masumi in his *Seiji taisei*, published in *Shiso*, June 1964. The idea was later elaborated in his *Postwar Politics in Japan, 1945-1955* (1985:329-342).
7. Excellent research is done on this issue in David Held's *Models of Democracy* (1987).
8. Interview with Michihiko Kunihiro, Assistant Vice Minister of the MOFA, June 4, 1986, Tokyo.
9. An excellent study on one-party dominant democracies is presented in *Uncommon Democracies: The One-party Dominant Regimes*, edited by T. J. Pempel (1990).
10. The Diet groupings (in the lower house) in October 1994 are as follows:

LDP	201
Kaikaku	187
SDPJ	73
Sakigake	21

Japanese Communist Party	15
New Democratic Club	4
Independents	8
Total	**509**

See Ueda (1994).

11. See Delfs (1991).

12. Interview with Yukio Nakamaru, staff member of the Division of Foreign Affairs, LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council, August 28, 1986, Tokyo.

13. Interview with Motoji Suganuma, former President of the Tokyo Municipal Assembly, March 6, 1986, Tokyo.

14. For a detailed elaboration of the development of think-tank in Japan see Zhao (1986).

15. For a detailed account of Chinese foreign policymaking system, see Zhao (1992).

16. There are some subtle differences between the Chinese *guanxi* and the Japanese *giri* and *tsukiai*. According to Lucian Pye (1982:91), *giri* implies a more explicit sense of indebtedness and obligation than the diffusely binding Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which may have made the Japanese wary of getting too close to the Chinese. Japanese are much more sensitive to the potential dangers of backlash by a people whose wishes for dependency cannot be gratified.

17. K. John Fukuda, for example, had analyzed the differences between the Chinese and the Japanese in terms of managerial style. Fukuda (1988:113) argued that, "the Chinese pattern of leadership emphasizes rational commitment to the leader, rather than emotional ties as generally found in Japan. Therefore, any attempts at creating a more informal affective atmosphere on the part of subordinates, especially those who do not belong to the clan, are interpreted by Chinese leaders as efforts to undercut leaders' prerogatives.... Unlike Japanese leaders who admit their dependence on subordinates, Chinese leaders attempt to achieve goals through fostering competition among subordinates."

18. One useful account of Washington's political life, for example, is Charles Peter's *How Washington Really Works* (1980).

References

Apter, David, and Nagayo Sawa. 1984. *Against the State: Politics and Social Protest in Japan.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Baerwald, Hans. 1986. *Party Politics in Japan.* Boston: Allen & Unwin.

Beardsley, Richard, John Hall, and Robert Ward. 1959. *Village Japan.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beasley, W. G. 1975. "Modern Japan: An Historian's View." In *Modern Japan: Aspects of History, Literature and Society,* ed. by W. G. Beasley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 13-23.

Befu, Harumi. 1986. "Gift-Giving in a Modernizing Japan." In *Japanese Culture and Behavior,* ed. by Takie Lebra and William Lebra. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 158-170.

Benjamin, Roger, and Kan Ori. 1981. *Tradition and Change in Postindustrial Japan.* New York: Praeger.

Besshi, Yukio. 1983. "Informal Contact-Makers in Japan-China Relations." In *Informal Channels in Japanese Diplomacy.* Tokyo: Japan Association of International Relations, 89-113.

Calder, Kent. 1988. *Crisis and Compensation: Public Policy and Political Stability in Japan, 1949-1986.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Campbell, John C. 1977. *Contemporary Japanese Budget Politics.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Christopher, Robert. 1989. "Culture Dimensions of the U.S.-Japan Relations." In *Destinies Shared: U.S.-Japanese Relations,* ed. by Paul Laurren and Raymond Wylie. Boulder, Colo. and London: Westview Press, 27-40.

Curtis, Gerald. 1975. "Big Business and Political Influence." In *Modern Japanese Organization and Decision-making,* ed. by Ezra Vogel. Berkeley: University of California Press, 33-70.

———. 1988. *The Japanese Way of Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dahl, Robert. 1956. *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1989. *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Delfs, Robert. 1991. "Missing Links: Ministry Realizes It Cannot Function in a Vacuum." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 18: 20-21.

Etzioni-Halevy, Eva. 1983. *Bureaucracy and Democracy*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Fenno, Richard. 1973. *Congressmen in Committee*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Fisher, Glen. 1980. *International Negotiation*. Chicago: Intercultural Press.

Flanagan, Scott. 1991. "Mechanisms of Social Network Influence in Japanese Voting Behavior." In *The Japanese Voter*, ed. by Scott Flanagan, Shinsaku Kohei, Ichirō Miyake, Bradley Richardson, and Jōji Watanuki. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 143-197.

Fukai, Shigeko, and Haruhiro Fukui. 1992. "Elite Recruitment and Political Leadership." In *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35 (1): 25-36.

Fukuda, K. John. 1988. *Japanese-Style Management Transferred: The Experience of East Asia*. London and New York: Routledge.

Fukutake, Tadashi. 1981. *Japanese Society Today*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Hall, John Whitney. 1965. "Changing Conceptions of the Modernization of Japan." In *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. by Marius Jansen. Rutland, Vt., and Tokyo: Charles Tuttle, 7-41.

Halperin, Morton. 1974. *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

Held, David. 1987. *Models of Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hellmann, Donald. 1988. "Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy: Elitist Democracy Within an American Greenhouse." In *The Political Economy of Japan Vol. 2: The Changing International Context*, ed. by Takashi Inoguchi and Daniel Okimoto. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 345-380.

Hendry, Joy. 1987. *Understanding Japanese Society*. London and New York: Croom Helm.

Herring, Pendleton. 1965. *The Politics of Democracy*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Hilsman, Roger. 1967. *To Move a Nation*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co.

Hornby, A. S. 1963. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. London: Oxford University Press.

Huntington, Samuel. 1987. "The Goals of Development." In *Understanding Political Development*, ed. by Myron Weiner and Samuel Huntington. Boston: Little, Brown, 3-32.

Inoguchi, Takashi. 1985. *Kokusai kankei no seiji keizaigaku* [Political economy of international relations]. Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai.

Jiyūminshutō (Liberal Democratic Party), ed. 1977. *Nihon no seitō* [Political parties in Japan]. Tokyo: Jiyūminshutō Kōhō Iinkai Shuppan Kyoku.

Kamei, Katsuichirō. 1958. "Return to the East." In *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, compiled by Ryusaku Tsunoda, W. T. Bary, and Donald Keene. New York: Columbia University Press, 900-906.

Keesing, Felix. 1958. *Cultural Anthropology: The Science of Custom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Kernell, Samuel, ed. 1991. *Parallel Politics: Economic Policymaking in Japan and the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

Kingdon, John. 1981. *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*. New York: Harper & Row.

Koseki, Mari. 1994. "New Opposition's Platform Won't Look at Constitution." *The Japan Times* (weekly international edition), October 31-November 6: 5.

Krauss, Ellis. 1982. "Japanese Parties and Parliament: Changing Leadership Role and Role Conflict." In *Political Leadership in Contemporary Japan*, ed. by Terry MacDougall. Michigan Papers in Japanese Studies, no. 1. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 93-114.

Krauss, Ellis, and Michio Muramatsu. 1988. "Japanese Political Economy Today: The Patterned Pluralist Model." In *Inside the Japanese System*, ed. by Daniel Okimoto and Thomas Rohlen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 208-210.

Kuwabara, Takeo. 1983. *Japan and Western Civilization*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Kyōgoku, Jun-ichi. 1987. *The Political Dynamics of Japan*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lewellen, Ted. 1983. *Political Anthropology*. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Masumi, Junnosuke. 1985. *Postwar Politics in Japan, 1945-1955*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley.

Nakane, Chie. 1986. "Criteria of Group Formation." In *Japanese Culture and Behaviour*, ed. by Takie Lebra and William Lebra. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 171-187.

Park, Yung. 1986. *Bureaucrats and Ministers in Contemporary Japanese Government*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley.

Pempel, T. J. 1990. "Introduction." In *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, ed. by T. J. Pempel. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1-32.

———. 1992. "Japanese Democracy and Political Culture: A Comparative Perspective." In *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35 (1): 5-12.

Peter, Charles. 1980. *How Washington Really Works*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Pharr, Susan. 1984. "Status Conflict: The Rebellion of the Tea Pourers." In *Conflict in Japan*, ed. by Ellis Krauss, Thomas Rohlen and Patrician Steinhoff. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 214-240.

Polsby, Nelson. 1980. *Community Power and Political Theory*. 2nd ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Pye, Lucian. 1982. *Chinese Commercial Negotiating Style*. Cambridge, Mass.: Oelegeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers.

———. 1985. *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

———. 1990. "Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism." *American Political Science Review* 84, no. 1 (March): 3-19.

Reischauer, Edwin. 1988. *The Japanese Today*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Richardson, Bradley. 1974. *The Political Culture of Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 1991. "Social Networks, Influence Communications, and the Vote." In *The Japanese Voter*, ed. by Scott Flanagan, Shinsaku Kohei, Ichirō Miyake, Bradley Richardson, and Jōji Watanuki. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 332-366.

Richardson, Bradley, and Scott Flanagan. 1984. *Politics in Japan*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Samuels, Richard. 1983. *The Politics of Regional Policy in Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 1990. "Japan in 1989: Changing Times." *Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (January): 42-51.

Satō, Seizaburō, and Tetsuhisa Matsuzaki. 1986. *Jimintō Seiken* [Politics and power of the LDP]. Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha.

Smith, Charles. 1994a. "Strange Bedfellows." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 14: 22-23.

———. 1994b. "Honeymoon's End: Prime Minister Murayama Suddenly Looks Vulnerable." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 13: 28-29.

Smith, Robert. 1989. "Presidential Address: Something Old, Something New — Tradition and Culture in the Study of Japan." *Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (November): 715-723.

Suzuki, Takao. 1986. "Language and Behavior in Japan: The Conceptualization of Personal Relations." In *Japanese Culture and Behavior*, ed. by Takie Lebra and William Lebra. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 142-187.

Takabatake, Michitoshi. 1978. *Gendai nihon no seiji 72-77* [Contemporary Japanese politics 1972-1977]. Tokyo: San-ichi Shobō.

Tsou, Tang. 1986. *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tsurutani, Taketsugu. 1977. *Political Change in Japan.* New York: David McKay Co.

Ueda, Takahiko. 1994. "Opposition Shuns Murayama's Diet Speech." *The Japan Times* (weekly international edition), October 10-16: 1 and 6.

Upham, Frank. 1987. *Law and Social Change in Postwar Japan.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Valeo, Francis, and Charles Morrison, eds. 1983. *The Japanese Diet and the U.S. Congress.* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Walder, Andrew. 1986. *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Waltz, Kenneth. 1959. *Man, the State and War.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Ward, Robert. 1978. *Japan's Political System.* 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Watanuki, Jōji. 1977. *Politics in Postwar Japanese Society.* Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Westney, D. Eleanor. 1987. *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Wildavsky, Aaron. 1986. *Budgeting, A Comparative Theory of Budgetary Processes.* Revised ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction.

Yamamoto, Mitsuru. 1974. *Jishu gaikō no gensō* [Fantasy of independent diplomacy]. Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha.

Yoshino, M. Y., and Thomas Lifson. 1986. *The Invisible Link: Japan's Sōgō shōsha and the Organization of Trade.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Zhao, Quansheng. 1986. "Xuezhe he zhinangtuan" [Scholars and think-tanks]. *Riben Wenti* [Japan Issues] 9 (October): 68-70.

———. 1988. "The Making of Public Policy in Japan: Protectionism in Raw Silk Importation." *Asian Survey* 28, no. 9 (September): 926-944.

———. 1990. "Politics of Japan-China Trade Negotiations." *Asian Profile* 18, no. 2 (April): 97-115.

———. 1992. "Domestic Factors of Chinese Foreign Policy: From Vertical to Horizontal Authoritarianism." *The Annals* (the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences) 519 (January), special editor, Allen Whiting, 159-176.

———. 1993. "Japan's Aid Diplomacy with China." In *Japan's Foreign Aid: Power and Policy in a New Era*, ed. by Bruce Koppel and Robert Orr. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 163-187.

日本政治中的非正規機制

趙全勝

（中文摘要）

本文從社會、機構與個人三個不同的層次研究日本的政策制定過程。研究對象除官方機構外，亦包括社會與文化環境，因而與以往只注重官方與正規機制的研究不同。在日本的政治生活中，非正規機制的重要性不下於正規機制，從而值得注意。本文特別研究了三個組成部分：社會環境與網絡（"付合"）、非官方政治人物與組織（"黑幕"），以及幕後建立共識的活動（"根回"）。