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Conflict and Consent: LDP Predominance, *Shimin* Ideology, and the Emergence of State-Society Symbiosis in Postwar Japan

In comparison to the postwar histories of those countries operating within similar political and economic parameters, Japan's is anomalous in that it featured an ostensibly single-party state holding the reins of power for over five decades, despite the spasmodic protests of a restive and frequently confrontational citizenry. In consideration of this historical dichotomy, the historiography of postwar Japan features varied, and oftentimes disparate interpretations of how (or even whether) the state and society influenced one another. Although sporadic and frequently dissimilar, tangible manifestations of civil discontent invariably demonstrate that for decades after its establishment under the "1955 System," the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) faced sustained opposition to its authority.

During the first three decades of LDP rule, nodes of opposition emerged among various segments of civil society, alternatively actualized in both violent and nonviolent forms. As we shall see, the legitimacy of popular protest against the LDP and the state in general relied upon the emergent concept of *shimin* (citizen). According to historian Simon Avenell, *shimin* "encapsulated a vision of individual autonomy beyond the outright control of the state or the established left and within an idealized sphere of human activity they called civil society (*shimin shakai*)."<sup>1</sup>

That the LDP maintained, and in certain respects strengthened its political monopoly amidst moments of intense popular protest, demonstrates that the relationship between state and society in postwar Japan gradually became exceptionally symbiotic. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the LDP frequently reoriented its policies or

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Andrew Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens: Civil Society and the Mythology of the Shimin in Postwar Japan*, University of California Press: 2010, p. 2

reorganized its leadership in response to a variety of popular movements. Thus the LDP's staying power relied upon its political and organizational flexibility. The historiographical implications of this revelation necessarily include a reappraisal of the extent to which various elements of civil society did in fact influence the behavior and conduct of the LDP. In consideration of this, the purpose of this paper shall be to demonstrate the ways in which "civil society"—however loosely defined—fundamentally directed and parameterized LDP policies and how in turn, the LDP shaped popular opinion in its favor.

The political structure and economic necessities of postwar Japan proved especially conducive to the development of an interlocking, and sometimes overlapping "power elite" composed of the most influential members of the LDP, the bureaucracy, and the business community. Although under postwar occupation, "democratization and demilitarization" permeated national discourse, following the "reverse course" in American foreign policy, purge of wartime bureaucrats and the reconstruction of *zaibatsu* reoriented public policy towards unfettered economic growth under the aegis of a single-party dominant state. In his introduction to *Creating Single-Party Democracy: Japan's Postwar Political System*, editor Kataoka Tetsuya argues that "as the 1955 system matured, traits that were only immanent in the original system—the LDP's factionalism, the ascendancy of a new breed of professional politicians, and the so-called money politics—were articulated and institutionalized."<sup>2</sup> Although the effects of these particular LDP characteristics on the relationship between the state and civil society would only become fully evident during the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to note that from its

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<sup>2</sup> Kataoka Tetsuya, ed., *Creating Single-Party Democracy: Japan's Postwar Political System*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University: 1992, p. 13

formation, the party directed its efforts towards broadening its *jiban* (constituency), rather than seeking to circumvent or subvert its constitutional limitations. In this sense, party leaders were fully mindful—if not particularly appreciative—of the democratic values undergirding Japan’s postwar political structure.

Although the “1955 System” consolidated conservative rule at the highest echelons of political and economic power—even while, for nearly a decade, LDP dominance remained precarious—practical and constitutional realities limited the extent to which this emergent “power elite” could direct national policy without the consent of the governed. In practical terms, the LDP confronted intraparty factionalism, a viable albeit weakened political opposition comprised of the JSP and JCP, and a Japanese public that harbored an enduring distrust and sense of outrage towards the state. Especially in its formative years, the success of the LDP depended upon its ability to navigate these and other challenges to its authority. Although the predominance of the LDP precluded purely democratic governance from emerging, public sentiments as well as the legal contours set forth in the postwar constitution prevented the development of authoritarian government in turn.

Manifestations of public opposition, often through extra-governmental channels (i.e., rallies), could evidently have direct influences on the LDP, leading to alterations in the party’s policies and personnel. In this sense, and as we shall see, the Japanese *shimin*, or citizen, played a crucial role in postwar Japan’s political maturation, despite the predominance of the LDP throughout. Although the success of grassroots movements varied considerably, depending upon time and place, the emergence of *shimin* as a

political force in its own right reflects the extent to which military defeat and its aftermath reshaped the social, cultural, and ideological foundations of Japanese society.

In *Making Japanese Citizens: Civil Society and the Mythology of the Shimin in Postwar Japan*, Simon Avenell observes that the importance of *shimin* rested upon “the way leading activists actively constructed the mythology of the *shimin* around ideas of spontaneous action, individual autonomy, and democracy, and, more important, how their use of this mythology inspired and mobilized participants in public actions with a stamp of authenticity.”<sup>3</sup> Thus although popular movements sometimes misappropriated *shimin* to bolster their own legitimacy, the “mythology” surrounding citizen action reflects the ubiquity of democratic ideals amongst the Japanese populace.

The balance struck by the LDP, between its own interests and those of a public enraptured by an almost “mythological” conception of *shimin*, reflects both the party’s inherent flexibility as well as the evolution of *shimin*-inspired movements from the 1950s and 60s to the 1970s. The LDP manifested this flexibility in two distinct ways: through occasional policy changes and leadership depositions, and more frequently, through political and economic rewards to supportive or otherwise acquiescent constituencies.

Andrew Gordon’s *Postwar Japan as History* features a number of essays examining LDP longevity despite various obstacles, including Gary Allinson’s “The Structure and Transformation of Conservative Rule, Sheldon Garon’s and Mike Mochizuki’s “Negotiating Social Contracts,” and J. Victor Koschman’s “Intellectuals and Politics.” Taken together, these essays shed light upon the political, social, and economic forces at play in the party’s consolidation of power, and the policies it initiated in pursuit of broader public support, or at the very least, public quiescence.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Andrew Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 4

According to Garon and Mochizuki, “from the dawn of the postwar era the conservatives had to reconcile their objectives for rapid, often wrenching economic growth with the tasks of maintaining social stability and a strong electoral base.”<sup>4</sup> To accomplish this the LDP, in conjunction with the bureaucracy and big business, negotiated a number of “social contracts”—defined by Garon and Mochizuki as “a political exchange relationship between the state and social groups that is mediated by interest organizations and that establishes public-policy parameters that endure over time”<sup>5</sup>—with certain segments of the Japanese populace.

For example, after Ishida Hirohide’s 1963 “[warning] that the LDP would lose its parliamentary majority as a result of rapid urbanization and industrialization unless the party appealed to wage earners,” the party “adopted Ishida’s proposed ‘Labor Charter,’ which committed the ruling party to full employment, improved working conditions, and the promotion of social security.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as Allinson observes, “by the 1960s, and certainly during the 1970s and 1980s, organized societal interests had become a far more influential political force than ever before.”<sup>7</sup> Before “organized societal interests” and “social contracts” characterized the relationship between the state and civil society, however, more “spontaneous,” or rather grassroots forms of civil action—behaviors that conformed, or rather was intended to conform to the *shimin* ideal—emerged as the norm.

Although the latter form of civil protests did not necessarily have a direct effect on the specific ways in which civil society would interact with the LDP and the

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<sup>4</sup> Sheldon Goren and Mike Mochizuki, “Negotiating Social Contracts,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., (University of California Press, 1993), p. 145

<sup>5</sup> Goren and Mochizuki, “Negotiating Social Contracts,” p. 145

<sup>6</sup> Goren and Mochizuki, “Negotiating Social Contracts,” p. 160

<sup>7</sup> Gary Allinson, “The Structure and Transformation of Conservative Rule,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., (University of California Press, 1993), p. 142

bureaucracy by the 1970s and 1980s, *shimin*-inspired movements imbued the Japanese people with a fundamental awareness of their natural and constitutional prerogatives as citizens. In this regard, the anti-ANPO movement of 1960 was a watershed in the evolving relationship between the state and society. Although protesters failed in preventing the passage of the controversial security agreement between Japan and the United States—seen by many as a dangerous turn towards remobilization—their actions did have two important, long-term effects on how the LDP interacted with civil society.

The first effect, the resignation of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, who after being depurged during the “reverse course” played a crucial role in the establishment of the “1955 System”, was important in that it demonstrated that the party leadership could ultimately be held accountable for violations of the public’s trust. The second effect, the politicization of civil society, was arguably of greater consequence in that it galvanized ordinary Japanese men and women into lobbying the government on their own behalf, especially in the absence of a sufficiently strong political opposition to LDP predominance. Although, as Koschmann observes, “movement supporters were by and large not prepared to endanger their livelihood or take serious risks on behalf of the cause,” the anti-ANPO movement nevertheless “marked the beginnings of political action by ordinary citizens who sometimes acted outside existing organizational contexts...”<sup>8</sup>

In *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizen Protests in Postwar Japan*, Wesley Sasaki-Uemura argues that among the factors that spurred the ANPO protests were “the specter” of the Second World War “still prominent in people’s minds,” “new channels for involvement” that emerged “during the 1950s that helped socialize people in political

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<sup>8</sup> J. Victory Koschmann, “Intellectuals and Politics,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., University of California Press: 1993, p. 407

activities,” “the increasing presence of women,” and “the development of a citizen ethos that placed the citizen rather than the proletariat as the subject or agent of historical change.”<sup>9</sup> How then did the emergence of *shimin* “mythology” recast—either directly or indirectly—the relationship between the state and civil society from one in which the latter had little influence on the behavior of the former, as was certainly the case in the prewar period, and to a lesser extent, during the immediate postwar period, to one wherein both acted in relative symbiosis with one another?

In this case, *symbiosis* can best be defined as the mutual benefits that both the state and civil society derived through *accommodation*—a relationship wherein, as Garon and Mochizuki observe, the “social contract became a central feature in the Japanese conception of democracy in the postwar era” because it enabled “the public [to accept] the hegemony of the conservative coalition as long as it seriously negotiated to accommodate the interests of various social organizations and as long as the pain of economic readjustments appeared to be shared equitably throughout society.”<sup>10</sup> Under this arrangement, which by the 1970s fully characterized the relationship between the state and civil society, the LDP-led government proved more receptive to grassroots movements that, as Avenell argues, had shifted its priorities from ideology-driven protests to “proposal-style civic activism.”<sup>11</sup>

For our purposes, it is important to note the direct causal relationship between earlier *shimin*-inspired movements and the subsequent development of more pragmatic—and for the LDP, more palatable—forms of civic action. Just as intellectuals had shaped

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<sup>9</sup> Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizen Protest in Postwar Japan*, University of Hawaii Press: 2001, pgs. 23-4

<sup>10</sup> Garon and Mochizuki, “Negotiating Social Contracts,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon ed., p. 165

<sup>11</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 197



earlier conceptualizations of *shimin* as, among other interpretations, an agent of Marxist revolution or romanticized national “renewal”—those made manifest during the anti-ANPO and anti-Narita movements, for instance—so too did they redefine the “citizen” as an agent of gradual societal progress; at least once the relationship between the state and society had become sufficiently conducive for this reorientation.

As Avenell observes, “historical actors—movement intellectuals—intervened at this moment, articulating a bold new vision of the *shimin* idea as centered on notions of creative, engaged, and financially sustainable activism.”<sup>12</sup> According to Avenell, “movement intellectuals of the ANPO struggle contributed to the formation of a master frame of civic activism” by “[using] the *shimin* idea to articulate a new activist mentality that connected independent political action to private life, self-interest, and the postwar ethos of ‘peace and democracy,’” and by “[attaching] the *shimin* idea to two streams of collective action: one based on conscientious dissent and the other embedded in prosaic local activities.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus although Garon and Mochizuki “attribute the LDP’s remarkable persistence to ‘creative conservatism’—that is, the seemingly unfailing ability of the ruling party, bureaucrats and big business to promote popular policies from above, thus stealing the thunder of the opposition,” it is important to note that the evolution of the “citizen” played a crucial role in the LDP’s move towards accommodation.<sup>14</sup> Although by the 1970s, “Japanese civil society organizations faced a strict regulatory regime under the Civil Code—a legal straightjacket,” increased state intervention into civil society,

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<sup>12</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 197

<sup>13</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 242

<sup>14</sup> Garon and Mochizuki, “Negotiating Social Contracts,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., p. 165

especially after the ANPO protests, was in a certain sense, a victory for the latter.<sup>15</sup> While opponents of the LDP had not succeeded in ousting the party from power, mass discontent spurred the party and the state apparatus into improving their relationship with those members of civil society who did not subscribe to New Left ideology, that is to say, those concerned with democratic ideals as well as “bread and butter” issues, as opposed to revolutionary action.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of political, social, and economic developments laid the groundwork for the emergence of a symbiotic relationship between the LDP and civil society. One of the most important of these developments was the LDP’s Income Doubling Plan, which “established what seemed to be highly ambitious goals for investment and employment levels, production increases, and export volumes.”<sup>16</sup> As Allinson observes, “under the aegis of the Income Doubling Plan, Ikeda [the plan’s architect] and his bureaucratic cohorts then dominating the LDP pursued what we can call a politics of ‘induced compliance,’” a style of governance “with the twin purpose of fostering rapid economic growth and building a majority political coalition.” Thus under the Income Doubling Plan, initiated in late 1960, “paternalistic guardians of the commonwealth set the agenda with a technocratic style.” And although “haughty” and “[having their own interests in mind]” these “paternalistic guardians” were nevertheless “animated enough by a sense of public duty that they pursued policies with broad, national returns.”<sup>17</sup> Although the plan succeeded, spurring Japan’s “economic miracle,” “by the late 1960s the costs of rapid growth had begun to outstrip its benefits in

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<sup>15</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 199

<sup>16</sup> Allinson, “Conservative Rule,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., p. 135

<sup>17</sup> Allinson, “Conservative Rule,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., p. 135

the eyes of many, and the groundwork for a new era in Japanese politics was laid.”<sup>18</sup>

During this “new era” the LDP once again refashioned its policies and reshuffled its leadership in an effort to retain power, replacing “induced compliance” with what Allinson terms “competitive negotiation”:

“The bureaucratic elites who presided over the dramatic expansion in the Japanese economy unwittingly and paradoxically contributed to their own demise in many ways. Rapid economic growth had the effect of promoting materialist consumer values on a broad basis in the midst of an ebullient market economy. During the 1960s and after, the values and market orientations of the private sector endowed political relations themselves with the character of a massive, multifaceted exchange relationship. More societal groups found themselves with the resources to organize and bargain politically. Politicians in general and the ruling party in particular had to heed the appeals of such interests.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the LDP’s economic policies, initiated in an effort to expand its support, ironically strengthened pragmatic “societal groups” seeking to extract rewards and concessions from the government, the party’s actions cannot alone account for their emergence. Although improvements in affluence and educational attainment, both partial consequences of LDP policy, “significantly increased the ability of societal interests to organize, develop expertise, conduct lobbying, and pursue their political objectives,” the party’s inattention to a variety of pressing matters, from environmental degradation to elderly care, combined with the demise of the New Left, compelled the Japanese public to petition for increased state intervention.<sup>20</sup> While the fundamental conceptualization of the *shimin* as an agent for positive social and political change did not diminish, its purposes changed drastically as Japan’s rapid economic progress produced both affluence and discord.

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<sup>18</sup> Allinson, “Conservative Rule,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., p. 136

<sup>19</sup> Allinson, “Conservative Rule,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., p. 141

<sup>20</sup> Allinson, “Conservative Rule,” *Postwar Japan as History*, Andrew Gordon, ed., p. 142

According to Avenell, the “politics of proposal” did not only require an intellectual reappraisal of the citizen’s role within the body politic, it also depended upon increased cooperation between the state and civil society. For veterans of the mass protests of the 1950s and 1960s, “radicalism had simply failed and needed to be replaced by strategies that took civic groups inside the state-business nexus from where they could launch a guerilla-style program for fundamental social change.”<sup>21</sup> For its part, the state—herein defined as the LDP, the bureaucracy, and big business—began to recognize its stake in these societal interest groups. As Avenell observes: “in the hands of shrewd officials [citizen participation] also had the potential to become a legitimizing ideology and method for the incorporation and domestication of civic energies.”<sup>22</sup> Thus “attitudes of bureaucrats and corporate elites toward certain forms of activism underwent change at the same time” as civic activists began to adopt more pragmatic, and conciliatory objectives.<sup>23</sup> Hence, while “the new civic movements benefitted greatly from corporate logistical and financial support... state and corporate actors helped to shape civic activism... through a combined strategy of prevention on the one hand and carefully guided empowerment on the other.”<sup>24</sup> Although “state and corporate actors” had ulterior motives in encouraging civic activism, their support nevertheless demonstrates an increased awareness of their obligations to the Japanese public.

Thus although the LDP remained the predominant political force into the 1990s, the inroads it made into civil society after the ANPO protests, including its negotiation of a variety of “social contracts” with labor unions, small businesses, and other “societal

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<sup>21</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 196

<sup>22</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 193-4

<sup>23</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 196

<sup>24</sup> Avenell, *Making Japanese Citizens*, p. 196

interest groups” coalesced, along with the evolution of the *shimin* from revolutionary to pragmatist, into a symbiotic relationship between the party and the Japanese public—the LDP could now claim itself to be the “big tent” party despite its faltering election returns, as acceptance of LDP rule did not translate into active support, while the Japanese people could count on the government to foster material prosperity and maintain its ostensibly democratic integrity.

Although the emergence of this accommodative relationship did not necessarily portend the steady decline of the LDP, it was nevertheless symptomatic of a broader trend in modern Japanese history—the transition from state imperiousness and civil acquiescence, to a far more equitable, and ultimately more sustainable arrangement. Although Japan has experienced its share of economic fragility (i.e., the “lost decades” of the 1980s and 1990s) and political instability (i.e., the Recruit Scandal) since the mid-1970s, the emergence of a more symbiotic relationship between the state and civil society established channels of trust and cooperation that contained the adverse consequences of social, political, and economic upheaval within the contours of a stable, albeit imperfect democratic polity.

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