



The Routledge Handbook of Japanese Politics

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HARDBACK

Reviewed by David Potter

Japan's political economy has changed markedly in the past fifteen years. Long-term dominance by the Liberal Democratic Party in alliance with an elite bureaucracy crumbled in the 1990s in the face of unstable party politics and new societal pressures. These changes have been documented and analyzed by scholars, but a comprehensive overview of changes and continuities in Japan's politics had been lacking. The intent of the *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Politics* is to remedy that problem.

The *Handbook* contains thirty-one chapters organized into five parts. Part One, on the formal institutions of domestic politics, contains ten chapters on the main political parties, the cabinet and prime minister, aspects of the election system, the role of law, and local government. Part Two, on civil society, includes chapters on state and civil society, conceptions of citizenship, volunteer and non-governmental organizations, and the labor and women's movements. Part Three, on social and public policy, includes chapters on welfare policy, changing demographics, gender-related policy, immigration policy, and environmental politics. Part Four covers political economy and policymaking, with chapters on the evolution of policymaking, economic reform, public finance, and postal reform. Part Five, international relations and security, includes chapters on Japan's relations with Asia, China, the United States, and the European Union; on the problem of historical memory and relations with neighboring countries; and the interplay of international norms and the creation of national identity. A glossary and bibliography of nearly forty pages complete the volume.

The chapters are written by a combination of veteran and new scholars, all of whom have published work on the subjects they cover in this volume. Chapters are both short, on average ten pages, and usually highly informative. In general, each chapter packs a wealth of information and prior research into a few pages.

There is no introduction to the *Handbook* to indicate its editor's concerns. The temporal focus is on Japan's postwar politics and public policy, and the contributions should be seen as surveys of the whole period. It is clear, however, that this book is concerned with the contemporary political landscape in Japan. Almost all chapters include at least a section on how that institution or policy has changed (or is likely to change) since the Democratic Party of Japan came to power in September 2009. Specific

chapters, such as Patricia Maclachlan's on postal reform and Leonard Schoppa's on aging society, analyze policies especially salient in the past ten years. As such, the *Handbook* is a testament to how much politics has changed in Japan in the last two decades. The Socialist Party, the mainstay of left-wing politics and the main rival of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) during the Cold War, is relegated to cameo appearances here because of its near-complete eclipse since 1994. The confusing welter of new parties and shifting alliances of the 1990s are treated in the *Handbook* briefly and in terms of their contribution to longer-term trends in the institutional landscape of politics. The section on civil society is very much the result of changes in social science perspectives on the relationship between state and society that have occurred in the past two decades. Isa Dücke's chapter on how civil society organizations use (and do not use) the Internet as a tool to advance their causes reflects changes in information technology as much as the formal institutions of politics.

Lam Peng Er's chapter on environmental politics exemplifies the book's combination of historical overview and recent changes. As the momentum in civil society generated by the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s dissipated, the combination of LDP government and ministerial control of energy policy was restored. The meltdown of the Fukushima One nuclear reactor following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan is a vivid reminder of the consequences of long-term elite policy consensus created during the period of Liberal Democratic Party rule. Somewhat differently, Steven Reed's chapter on the Liberal Democratic Party is something of a post-mortem on the party that dominated Japan's politics for nearly six decades.

Students and teachers at different levels of the education system can use the *Handbook* in multiple ways. In general, the book will be of most use to university instructors, undergraduate students, and graduate students wishing to begin research projects. In the latter case, the extensive bibliography, including sources in English and Japanese, provides an excellent starting point for students wishing to pursue research on specific topics included in the volume. For colleagues looking for classroom source material, each chapter's conciseness allows the possibility of combining material here with other readings on specific topics. Teachers may not want to use the book as a textbook for a single class as is. Rather, they may wish to choose selections most relevant to their courses. This is especially so because contributions to the *Handbook* can be fruitfully used not only in courses on Japanese politics but in comparative or regional politics courses as well. For example, J.A.A. Stockwin's chapter "The Rationale for Coalition Government" is a gem of comparative political analysis that would contribute to any comparative politics course covering the process of government formation. It and other chapters are reminders, too, of the relevance of Japan's experiences and practices to the conduct of politics in liberal democracies.

The *Handbook* is a welcome addition to recent specialized work on Japanese politics. As the confusion of Japan's post-Cold War realignment, most evident in the highly fluid nature of party politics in the 1990s, has evolved into somewhat more stable institutional arrangements, it is possible to look back and discern the

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continuities and changes between postwar politics and events that are more recent. Each contribution has focused on a particular institution, policy, or process, but collectively the chapters give a sense of those changes and continuities. The *Handbook's* most important contribution is to sum up and present clearly the past and current state of Japanese politics and policymaking. It has accomplished this task well. The *Handbook of Japanese Politics* will serve as a handy and much-needed reference on current Japanese politics.

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Teaching the Daode Jing

GARY D. DEANGELIS AND WARREN G. FRISINA, EDITORS
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Reviewed by David Jones

Why the *Daode Jing* is a special text comes out clearly in *Teaching the Daode Jing*. In general, this volume will be more useful to college/university nonspecialists than high school teachers. Some essays, however, will be more helpful than others for teachers such as those by Judith Berling, Geoffrey Foy, and John Thompson, which offer more “nuts and bolts” classroom scenarios: “Letting the *Daode Jing* Teach”; “Gender and the *Daode Jing*”; and “The *Daode Jing*: An Exercise in How Interpretations Change.” Of these essays, Berling’s is most rewarding. Of special note is Hans-Georg Moeller’s “Introduction,” which pulls the book’s diverse voices together. All authors share deep passion, despite their different approaches, to this magnificent text.

Like other edited volumes, this collection has an unevenness to it, which is bound to be the case when such established scholars as Livia Kohn and Harold Roth are included in the project. As one might expect, the book tries to cover the range of terrain from the scholarly to the practical. If there is a criticism to be found, it would be this book tries to do too much in its attempt to include

both ends of the spectrum.

In “Third-Person and First-Person Approaches to the *Laozi*,” Harold Roth strikes a compromise between attentiveness to historical accuracy (third person) and being critical (first person). Roth’s solution is to bring students into experiential learning modes through breathing exercises, which he calls “reconstructive meditation” and represents a “critical first-person” way of understanding. Although students will receive some understanding of the text, there are few passages directly germane to breathing and meditating, and such exercises may be more successful with college/university students. Nevertheless, this is one of the volume’s best essays for bridging the scholarly/practical divide.

In “The Reception of Laozi,” Livia Kohn contends that Daoism is primarily a religion and refocuses attention from its philosophical dimensions. Those who approach texts with a certain philosophical acuity may find this approach to be somewhat narrow. Kohn, however, argues her point well that the *Daode Jing* had for centuries been used for meditation and liturgy, ordinations of priests, and advancement of lay followers (137). Another strong chapter is Russell Kirkland’s “Hermeneutics and Pedagogy” where he reminds students the text was written for another culture. Do not “colonize the *Daode Jing*” is his warning. This approach is indisputably valuable, but students will always bring their cultural moorings forward, and these preconceptions can be put to good service with ideas being lifted from their historical context for present-day creative philosophizing and religious understanding. Kirkland is aware of this because he challenges “students to question cherished beliefs” (158).

Another helpful chapter is Robert G. Henricks’ “The *Dao* and the Field,” where he employs the “model of a *field of wildflowers passing through the seasons*” for *dao*. We can grasp “the nature of *Dao* in its totality [because] we can see it . . . prior to, during, and after creation” (35). In winter, there’s no indication of the soil’s fecundity even if we were to dig down, all we would find is its stillness, silence, and emptiness in the “one, undifferentiated, homogeneous earth” (36). The cycles are present and the flowers will be replaced by other flowers and so on. In contrast to flowers, “people can and do go against the natural way of things [by turning] their backs on the mother and [becoming] uprooted” (37). This analogy will be effective for classroom use.

Norman J. Girardot and Michael LaFargue both offer some enjoyable reads. Girardot’s “My Way: Teaching the *Daode Jing*” takes up popular “Dao-Lite” cultural expressions (107). In this somewhat autobiographical account, there are interesting, insightful, and amusing anecdotes about politics, counterculture, and economics (108). For those new to teaching this text, it’s inevitable the “new-age Daoism” criticized by Girardot will surface. Michael LaFargue’s “Hermeneutics and Pedagogy: Gimme That Old-Time Historicism” is given the notable position of having the last word and with reason. The gulf between contemporary America and ancient China is taken up with the question of audience—what it meant to its original audience and what it can mean to contemporary readers. Following hermeneutical leads, LaFargue argues that understanding a text in its otherness is an appropriate beginning point. In this way, readers empower themselves to challenge the messages texts offer. He offers helpful strategies that

