A Guide to the Policy Context of Japan

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The Japanese political system is consisted of a multi-party parliamentary representative democratic Constitutional monarchy. Briefly within this structure, the symbolic Head of state is the Emperor, and the Prime Minister is the Head of government and the Head of Cabinet (Japan Fact Sheet, n.d.). The Diet has the legislative power that is based on the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors (Ware, 1996). Ware (1996) continues stating that the Supreme Court and the lower courts has the judicial power, while the Japanese people are granted with Sovereignty. In other words, Japan can be regarded as a constitutional monarchy with a system of civil law. Within the Legislative branch, the House of Councilors is the upper house of the Japanese Diet, which is composed of 242 members (Japan Fact Sheet, n.d.). According to Japan Fact Sheet (n.d.), the elected members of the upper house is granted a term of six years. The House of Representatives, consisted of 480 members, is considered to be the lower house that is the powerful house in the Diet. Each member of the House of Representatives is granted 4 years of term in office. Citizens of Japan have the right to participate in the election process. On the other hand, the Executive Branch is leaded by the Prime Minister who is the head of the Cabinet (Japan Fact Sheet, n.d.). In addition, the Prime Minister also appoints and dismisses the Ministers of State. The judiciary is independent where the higher judicial members are chosen by the Emperor along with the agreement from the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Japanese judicial system is consisted of several different courts where the Supreme is the final judicial authority (Japan Fact Sheet, n.d.). The only institution that is able to exercise later interpretation of the law is the Supreme Court. The five courts that are within the Japanese political system is the High Court, District Court, Family Court, Summary Court and the Supreme Court. As well as these branches, Japanese political parties play a huge in Japanese politics. Japanese political parties are the actors that do political activities within the parliament system.

Traditionally, the Japanese political system has been dominated by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Since its founding in 1955, the LDP has been in power, except in 1993 and 2009-2012. To elaborate, the LDP is a conservative party that is made up of various conservative, nationalist and centrist factions. In other words, the LDP tends to share political philosophies that are categorized as Right-wing philosophies. The LDP pursues policies of free-trade/market competition and maintains close cooperation with the United States. The opposing main party of the LDP is the social liberal Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The DPJ was founded in 1998 from a collaboration of four previously independent parties that had different ideas to the LDP. The DPJ remains the largest party in the House of Councilors (Ido, n.d.). The DPJ claim themselves to be revolutionary since they head against the status quo and the current governing establishment. One of their arguments is that the bureaucracy and the size of the Japanese government it too inefficient, large and too conservative. First of all, the DPJ seeks to build a transparent just and fair society. The party agrees for free market system in an inclusive society which guarantees security, safety, and fair and equal opportunity. As mentioned before, the party intends to devolve the centralized government in order for equal power for the people. Regarding foreign policy, the DPJ aims for international relations based on self-reliance and mutual coexistence within the international community. Other than these two major parties, the New Kōmeitō party is another political party that traditionally allies with the LDP. In the December 2012 election, the New Kōmeitō party won 31 seats (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2010). Krauss & Pekkanen (2010) claimed that the combined number of seats that the LDP and New Kōmeitō share are in total of 325 votes in the lower house that grants them a “supermajority” in the 480-seat lower house of parliament (Sieg, 2012). The “supermajority” has the ability to override a veto by the upper house due to the notion that it consists of over two-thirds of the seats. Another party, the Japan Restoration Party, a party formed three months before the House of Representatives election in December 2012, was able to win 54 seats (Ware, 1996). There are many other political parties that have participated in the Japanese political system. However, these political parties are minor compared to the top four parties where these minor parties do not have a great influence within Japanese politics.

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