

COMPARING MODERN JAPAN: IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT TO DO?

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Perhaps no other society has been so consistently studied in comparative terms as has modern Japan. The reasons for that lie both in Japan's modern history and in the development of the social sciences (in Japan itself as well as in Europe and North America). A century ago, the most insular of the world's complexly organized and relatively prosperous societies deliberately set about, systematically and selectively, to adapt the institutional, economic, and social practices of Western nations to its own society. That extraordinary choice, which set Japan on its modern course, inserted a comparative consciousness into Japanese decision making and into the very institutions that have marked the new era. Western interest in Japan has also always had a strong comparative element. The sharp increase in Western contacts with Japan came at a time when Western imperialists, merchants, and scholars thought they knew a good deal about China and India; and they tended to comprehend Japan, no matter what their particular mixture of observation and stereotypes, by comparing it with better-known Asian nations. Following World War II, American occupiers, confident of the social and political model they represented, used comparison in assessing what could and should change in Japanese society; and Western social scientists, fascinated with the processes of modernization and development, have provided an extensive framework for systematic comparisons. The resulting scholarship has been so impressive, and the habit of thinking of Japan in comparative terms has become so ingrained, that it becomes reasonable to ask whether further emphasis on comparison is needed and what direction new comparative analyses might take.

This is not the place, and I am certainly not the person, to undertake a review of the extraordinarily rich literature on Japanese society that asks fundamentally comparative questions. Given the extent and quality of this literature, it is obvious that studies of Japan will continue to use comparative frameworks and are likely to compare Japan with a wider range of societies, Asian as well as American and European. In that way study of Japan may lead to new sets of comparative questions and thus have greater importance for the construction of general theories and for social research overall than it has had in the past.

Before speculating about the directions this new literature may take, we

should note the liberation from older preoccupations that has already taken place. Earlier interest in the role of tradition in Japanese society tended to see its importance as paradoxical in a society that had adroitly adjusted to the organizational and commercial requirements of the contemporary world. The questions that followed and the answers given to them tended, even when they proved fruitful, to have an awkward, external and somewhat contrived quality. The assumption that tradition is the antithesis of modernity is now passé. The multiple combinations within Japanese society of old customs, values, and rites with new forms of social organization created to meet changing needs no longer surprises or requires special explanation.

On the other hand, the ways in which specific traditions intersect with and even facilitate new behaviors and attitudes is not only a matter of considerable interest in itself (and a stimulus to anthropological, sociological, cultural, and historical study) but an invitation to comparative analysis. For this employment of tradition for modern purposes in Japan invites comparison with other societies. Can we observe when traditions have the kind of ideological neutrality that makes them readily applicable to new behaviors and when they serve to discourage or inhibit certain kinds of change? The study of Japan may suggest useful answers to those questions because the employment of customary attitudes and behavior to enable change has, perhaps, been more consistent, systematic, and self-conscious in Japan than anywhere else.

Recognition that tradition and modernity should not be thought of as dichotomous has been facilitated by abandonment of so-called modernization theory. It was, of course, never a single theory; and many of the criticisms against it have been unfair (as evidenced by the fact that, although the "theory" is almost universally denounced, a great many of the concepts associated with it continue to be used by its critics). The charge against theories of modernization most relevant here is that they incorporate teleological assumptions using an abstract standard of modernity based on how modernization in the prosperous and democratic nations of Europe and North America ought to work. That limited imaginative comparison because it invited the comparison of Japanese reality with a general standard not subject to comparably close analysis of specific environments and particular needs. Furthermore, if it stimulated seeing Japan in comparative terms, it favored comparison in a single direction, using an invented standard as the basis for questions about Japanese society but not using Japanese experience to ask fresh questions about societies elsewhere (although the axioms of modernization were sometimes challenged). In the case of Japanese studies, the movement away from theories of modernization has followed rather naturally from the repeated evidence that in Japan behaviors and values reasonably called

traditional and dramatically effective forms of modernity cohabit very easily. Even academics cannot sustain surprise when the same discovery is made over and over.

In sum, modernization is simply not the interesting question it once was, in part because Japan has so indisputably accomplished it (whatever modernization is taken to be) and done so distinctively but also because developments in South Korea, Spain, and Eastern Europe demonstrate that there are clearly many paths to modern social, economic, and political changes and many societies prepared to follow them. Nor is modernization, as once envisioned, any longer seen as an unalloyed good, and that is a significant gain for the future of comparison. There will be fewer references to “successful” modernization in the future and thus more room for comparison instead in terms of specific goals (whether those consciously chosen by elites or those historians declare to have been implicit) and of, often unintended, consequences. That makes comparison of Japan with other societies all the more valuable.

The earlier emphasis on the miracle of Japanese modernization (independent of modernization theory) is also fading, and “success” (not a good category for analytic comparison) should disappear with it. Future scholarship will certainly continue to compare particular institutions and practices (in schools or the workplace, for example) but is less likely than earlier work to treat that single topic as a mirror for, and basis for comment on, all of Japanese society and culture. Similarly, one can expect fewer comparisons between Japan and an undifferentiated “West.”

Within essentially Western studies, attention to Japan modifies generalizations based primarily on European experience. For students of state making from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, Japanese history challenges the heavy emphasis in the European literature on military need as the impetus for the growth of the state. Similarly, Japan’s parallel development while relatively isolated is troublesome for many of the claims in theories of capitalist expansion through the creation of a world system of trade, division of labor, and dependence.

In themselves all these developments strike me as positive, and they certainly suggest that the well-established practice of looking at Japanese history comparatively will continue, in a sense, on its own momentum, reminding us to expect change from whatever source to be integrated with established culture, to look not for measures of success but for the delineation of process, and to move beyond preoccupation with Japan’s difference and consider what comparison of Japan with other societies can contribute to our general understanding.

II

That does not indicate the new directions likely to be taken. Those will undoubtedly follow from the general preoccupations of current scholarship, and that in itself is significant. It means that the questions central to future comparative scholarship, less involved with explanations of Japan's uniqueness, will use evidence from Japan as a basis for comparison with other in order to refine the generalizations and theories current in writings about society. Applying external categories to new cases can, of course, be a fairly mechanical and dull exercise, but it can also lead to some welcome surprises.

There are, then, some reasons for being optimistic about the benefits to social theory from comparative study of Japan. Take, for example, the use of Foucauldian concepts, like discourse. As most commonly used, they invite attention to the ways in which understanding is shaped and power exercised through the use of supposedly neutral, rational or practical practices and methods of inquiry. Japan, however, offers unusually rich and clear examples of instances in which formal discourse appears to have changed radically but with less alteration in the locus of power or patterns of behavior than might be expected. Studies of various forms of social control in Japan (such as law, education, socialization through the family, and police), which have already proven especially stimulating, provide an opportunity not only for analyzing change but for assessing when different forms of discourse and when various levels of social control have come into play, how discourse and practice have been related, and what effect that relationship has had. We should expect close investigation of Japanese experience to challenge, amend, or refine important analytic concepts hitherto largely based on French, English, and American history.

In a similar way, the study of Japan may have something important to contribute to the literature on colonial encounters. Anthropologists and historians, through highly creative research using concepts of hegemony, insights into orientalism, and the results of subaltern studies have made this one of the most exciting and flourishing areas of scholarship. By its very nature, this work is often more original and penetrating with regard to European interests, ideologies, and misconceptions than it is with respect to the responses of non-European societies. Comparison with Japan offers a chance to look with a fresh eye at the reception of European culture and institutions because Japan selectively adopted Western practices, responding to the pressures carried in encounters with the West without experiencing direct imperial rule. That should make it possible therefore to distinguish more clearly the challenge simply inherent in the internal dynamics of European institutions, capitalism, and culture from the corrosive

effects of the sustained application of European power.

Much the same may also be true for flourishing fields of inquiry like gender studies. If findings based on Western experience are applicable to Japan, then Judeo-Christian attitudes toward sex, gender, and family may be less central to Western practice than commonly assumed. The ways in which Japanese practices have and have not been affected by the great economic and structural changes Japan has experienced can also provide relatively clear indicators of the effects of structural changes and in that way contribute to theories of gender relations. Changes in Japan and contemporary writing about them refer often to generational differences, which may well be especially important and visible in modern Japan. If that is true, this is another universally significant topic about the nature of social change to which comparative study of Japan may have much to add.

III

Comparisons of specific Japanese institutions with those of other nations have been among the great strengths of the literature. Here, too, the trends are promising. There is, for example, a greater tendency to take Japanese institutions as they are rather than to analyze them in terms of how they do or do not meet the criteria of similar institutions elsewhere. The difficulty comes with the recognition that apparently comparable institutions may in fact serve quite different societal functions in different eras and different countries. Merely comparing institutions that carry the same name can become a form of mistranslation, mistaking their differences for lacunae or the added functions of a Japanese institution as incomplete differentiation or substitutions for something other institutions. Because the literature on such seemingly universal social institutions as labor unions, banks, police, or associations is extensive, sophisticated, and largely based on European and American experience and because the Japanese versions of such institutions are often relatively recent and in fact were often deliberately based on western models, an unintended cultural bias can easily become part of the analysis from the start. The danger is not so much that differences are seen as flaws, most serious scholars are well-armed against such assumptions, it is rather that differences from western models are, first, treated as the surprise to be explained and then, second, all too readily given a broad cultural explanation.

The tension between structural and cultural analysis, which most of us would regret in the abstract as misleading and unrealistic, nevertheless often comes into play because an institutional analysis tends to emphasize specific social functions and their relationship to the larger social structure. When this analysis does not account for actual behavior, the unexpected gaps or accretions are readily

attributable to cultural factors. That may indeed be correct, but it requires its own careful demonstration. The temptation is to have recourse to well-established cultural explanations, and that is dangerous precisely because those explanations are comfortably familiar and likely to pass unchallenged and because, unless newly derived from the evidence at hand, they add little. It is too easy, in short, to treat Japanese institutions like similar institutions elsewhere in order to discover that their peculiarities are like things Japanese, leaving us to discover only what we already knew about the institution and about Japan. Similarity becomes institutional; function, structural; and difference, cultural.

It is tempting to imagine the gains that might come from comparing not institutions but social functions themselves. The difficulty is that, except where there is a very firm theoretical base and/or a very narrow set of functions, a check list is not easily established. The practical solution tends to be to compare institutions in terms of specific attributes, to compare political parties, for example, not in terms of some (western) model of what parties are but in terms of their constituencies, ideologies, use of patronage, organization, ways of selecting leaders, and so forth. That leads, of course, to an assessment of what the parties in question really do, how they connect to political power, and what the boundaries of the political arena are at a given time. This latter, the question of what issues and interests are and are not normally part of public political negotiation, is particularly interesting — and difficult.

A broad institutional focus has produced especially impressive work dealing with such matters as the role of law, education, and the family. Perhaps that could be taken further. One could imagine, for example, a comparative study of what one might call the “sources of cohesion” in different societies at specific times. Taking Japan as the starting point, much of European history could be seen as a series of attempts to achieve — through theories of divine right, religious uniformity, parliamentary representation, ethnic and cultural homogeneity, or mass participation — a quality of cohesiveness and legitimacy that Japan maintained less explicitly and with far less contestation.

IV

Current issues are always a major stimulus to new research, lending a welcome air of relevance and, more important, generating fresh questions to be explored. That may be especially true for comparative study, for new perspectives help encourage explorations beyond traditional boundaries set by the scholarly literature, each academic discipline, and the focus on national states. Because Japan is so important to the modern world, comparison of its social practices

with those of other societies can be expected to become ever more frequent. Japan's prominence in world markets is one obvious stimulus to such comparisons (as is competition itself), and for over a generation specialists have studied the quality and efficiency of industrial production in Japan by placing their studies in a variety of comparative frameworks.

Japan's increasing participation in international economic planning and foreign aid creates new opportunities for comparison. After all, the Japanese economy flourished with national policies quite different from those advocated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Whether or not the policies Japanese governments favor in the future, for themselves and others, will reflect this experience, the opportunities for comparative analysis of trade policies can only increase. Since World War II, international aid for development has come primarily from the Soviet Union, the United States, France, and Great Britain. Some interesting comparisons of the policies of donor countries and of the efficacy of their operations on the scene have been undertaken, and there is certainly room for further research, especially in terms of differences in cultural interaction. More comparison has been made between the programs of governments and of non-governmental agencies. Now, as the Japanese participate more actively in these sorts of programs, the policies they favor and, more interestingly, their relations with local populations should invite some stimulating comparative analysis. Specific issues of policy, in short, should encourage and even necessitate, new comparisons leading to increased understanding of all the affected societies.

The reasons for greater attention to Japan in the discussion of contemporary issues go well beyond international economic and political connections, however. Western observers have long been drawn to study Japanese society's distinctive responses to universal social needs, and that tendency is now reinforced both by the nature of the salient social issues and by the theoretical base on which much of the related research rests. Two quick examples will suffice. Building on the writings of the Frankfurt school, Michel Foucault and his legion of followers, and Gramscian conceptions of hegemony, scholars have produced notably thoughtful work on such pressing social issues such as the marginalization of minorities and crime. These are problems affecting all modern societies, and a strikingly high proportion of the research on them is significantly comparative. The commonality of modern social problems will mean an increasing incorporation of Japanese instances into their study.

That is equally true for quite different sorts of modern issues. Take, for example, the growing scholarly literature on the uses of the past, on the selective and contrived nature of public memory, and on the effects of repressing or

denying the recent past. The twentieth century has given every society much to want to forget, and nationalism everywhere has always made powerful use of mythic and selective histories. Within the last decade, there has been an extraordinary amount of writing on this topic, much of it unsurprising in its revelations of distorted memory but some of it unusually imaginative. Little of it has been comparative. Surely careful study of the differences in what is remembered and what suppressed in different eras and nations should prove revealing. Might it not also be possible to compare the very processes of creating selective collective memory in different societies? If so, the inclusion of Japan should further understanding of ritual, religion, literature, institutions, and politics in establishing memory. The importance of cultural conceptions of time, of the nature of history, and of the direction of historical change, have long been major themes in some of the most admired philosophical, historical, and anthropological writing. Studying these concepts across societies through focused and empirical comparison might avoid the dangers of Orientalism while recapturing something of its power.

V

There is no compelling distinction between research on contemporary social problems and on historical problems except for the origin of the curiosity and the probable conceptual framework within which the research is conducted. The distinction provides a way, however, to make the case that some of the problems that currently engage historians are ones for which Japanese history may have particular value. Western attention to issues of gender, race, and identity benefits from a theoretical literature that can only gain from being tested against the Japanese case. The passionate engagement, which is one of the strengths of this literature, also reflects distinctly European and, especially, American issues and ideologies. This scholarship is, in effect, wrestling on every page with Enlightenment and Judeo-Christian values (and with conflicting interpretations of them). Now, if it is true that modern Japanese civilization rests on and still reflects a very different, non-Axial metaphysics, then comparison should provide the opportunity for an important refinement of theory and of such common categories as gender, race, and class.

The vector of comparison has continued to flow primarily from western experience to Japan, and the implication of these comments is that it might be very fruitful to reverse that vector, to start from a Japanese perspective. Consider the current interest in the construction of ethnic and national identities. If an emphasis on “exclusivity and particularity” has been an important part of

Japanese culture and has served important social purposes, then much may be learned from considering what other societies have suffered or gained from the absence of such an effective consensus. In this light it might be possible to discern more clearly the internal dynamics of France's *mission civilisatrice*, Slavophile concern for the Russian soul; the British sense of liberal, Victorian and imperial order; China's emphasis on ancient and autonomous grandeur, and American exceptionalism and manifest destiny.

Or take the study of European imperialism, one of the liveliest topics in contemporary anthropology, history, and historical sociology. Studies of the operation of imperialism in India, Indonesia, and Africa have not only transformed the understanding of that topic but made fundamental contributions to the analysis of cultural hegemony and class dominance within European societies themselves. This work has stressed the disruptive and disintegrative effects of European intrusions (economic and political and independent of intentions). It has been sensitive to the tragedy of local subalterns, and probed how European misconceptions and prejudices fit with the exercise of power but were also deeply rooted in European culture, formal learning, general culture, and social structure. Much of the writing on imperialism, in short, has had as much and maybe even more to say about Europe and America than about the societies subject to European rule. Japan offers an invaluable contrasting case, in which before World War II, at least, ideas and institutions and practices from the west were not imposed by force but selectively adopted. As writing on imperialism comes to emphasize the study of local response and the capacity of local societies to choose what to adopt and how to adapt to the onslaught of the influences carried by imperialism, comparison with Japan should be essential.

Because Japan is by every standard a very modern society yet one that developed from a cultural base very different from that of most other modern societies, comparison with Japan can lead to some essential discrimination in the analysis of many phenomena associated with modernity. The horrors of the twentieth century, secularization, and commercial culture are three such topics that can serve to illustrate the point and suggest the wide range of subjects in which research can benefit from incorporating comparison with Japan.

Genocide, mass murder, and systematic brutality hang over every interpretation of modernity. Study of fundamentalisms and of the ease with which former communists have switched to being nationalists ready to practice ethnic cleansing strengthens the recognition that there is something inherently modern about all this. But there remains some question, I think, about what those modern elements are beyond the awful opportunities that technology provides. Many believe the brutality apparently characteristic of modernity to be rooted in the

Enlightenment and the development of utopian ideologies that led to institutionalized efforts to remake society. But Japan in the 1930s and '40s invites a search for alternative explanations. Neither Enlightenment nor Judeo-Christian forms of intolerance and hubris were fundamentals of Japanese thinking; yet there, too, the embrace of military values and the high social costs of mobilizing the public for extraordinary sacrifices in the name of common aims opened the way to systematic oppression at home and brutality abroad. Perhaps that is the process that leads to claiming that the community is the only important social actor and makes belonging to the group the essential social test — one which requires a steady escalation in the measures of loyalty from acquiescence to ever-sharper boundaries between us and the Other, and to sacrifice. Ultimately that need to prove total loyalty may make brutality functional. Dehumanizing those outside the group, daring to do the extraordinary and normally unacceptable, and, finally, sharing the resultant guilt may strengthen communal bonds. The history of Japan invites us to test such alternative explanations.

The secularization of modern society has been a central theme of social analysis for two centuries, a subject that has attracted many of the most influential modern thinkers. There is, however, more agreement that secularization has occurred and is fundamentally important than there is about what secularization means. For many social scientists and most committed Christians and conservatives, secularization encompasses a decline in religious faith, the spread of rationalism and a preference for scientific explanations, and the social and institutional weakening of organized religion. For others, secularization describes the establishment of public spheres from which formal religion is largely excluded but does not necessarily indicate a decline in belief (and may even permit more demanding standards of religious belief and behavior). In the European and American context the understanding of secularization involves interpretations of formal theology, deism, the liberal ideal of the neutral state, toleration, the public sphere, and political divisions since the French Revolution.

With all that cultural baggage, comparison with Japan may be especially instructive. Has a kind of secularization taken place in Japan in the last fifty years or more? Many important spheres of Japanese public and private life appear to have been increasingly separated from religious rituals and metaphysical concerns. At the same time, in Japan such secularization is usually not taken to be an attack on religion. As the existing scholarship clearly suggests, further comparison with Japan may help more generally to clarify analysis of the social and organizational bases of secularization, of the importance of custom and ritual as religious expressions, and of the ways in which secularization relates to religious beliefs.

Another important element of modern life that is also a significant

historical problem is the development, spread, and meaning of a commercial popular culture. The habit is to see all this in American terms, as the spread from American society through American enterprise of films, music, comic strips, clothing, and fast foods that become popular with masses around the world. Now the point is not just that Japan has energetically contributed to that popular culture and will continue to do so. Rather, the inclusion of Japan in comparative study can deepen understanding of how cultural filters work, of how the malleability of symbols and the advantages to embrace a genre without the associations it carries in its native land may in fact allow the receiving society to adopt (and reinterpret) imported popular cultures while leaving its own cultural base essentially intact. Some of these filters are built into commercial forms of culture from the start, making foreign restaurants exotic but safe, rock music and the latest styles evocative of youth and liberation yet largely divorced from specific value systems. In addition, each culture has its own filters, allowing the selective incorporation and rejection of the component elements of calculatedly commercial entertainments. The Japanese example is an excellent opportunity to explore these issues and to rethink the meaning of the spread around the world of popular, commercial culture.

Perhaps the clearest example of a major contemporary issue that has also become a field of historical research and for which Japanese history has great importance is globalization. Because Japan is the most famous case of conscious borrowing, it makes that process more visible than in societies that may have borrowed as much from their neighbors but did so over a longer period of time and less deliberately. This consciousness makes the Japanese examples singularly important, revealing how adapting the practices and institutions of others may be a way to encourage yet contain change. The rich literature on Meiji policies has a great deal to teach all of us who work on other parts of the world, but there is room for more. Much of that literature was written from an institutional perspective that did not have the benefit of current sociology and anthropology, and much of it was conceived when the central preoccupation was to identify what was unique (and often, from the perspective of the 1950s and 60s, therefore not entirely adequate) in Japanese development.

Global history has, I think, something to add to Japanese historiography; but, more important, Japanese history has a great deal to offer for the understanding of global historical processes. Japanese attention to the nation's international standing from the late nineteenth century to the present can be taken to be a sign of globalization in itself, and it contains a still more significant element. Professor Eisenstadt points out that Japan's precocious encounter with external trends, influences, and pressures was not understood in moral or ideological

terms and therefore did not require some conversion to alien ways which were recognized as a reality to be addressed. That is very close to the worldwide experience of the increased, global circulation of ideas, technologies, and commerce.

Japan can be seen, then, as a pioneer in the adaptation to global connections, and Japanese history clarifies the process of cultural borrowing by revealing the sort of groups that instigate that process, how a given foreign model is chosen, how it is altered and adapted in practice, and how unintended results are understood and dealt with. Historians of globalization, as well as policy makers in every country, would do well to study Japan's responses in the nineteenth century and now to the subversive power of international markets that constrict the state's capacity to shape social conditions and terms of work and challenge the culture's capacity to select among external influences.

VI

Although comparison centered on specific historical problems is preferable to comparisons that attempt to encompass whole societies, I would like to illustrate (in dangerously general terms) the interesting questions that Japanese history can generate about other societies by suggestion a comparison of modern Japan and modern Italy — a society famous for efficiency, order, and constraint with one notorious for disorderly spontaneity, one a model of extraordinary unity and consensus, the other associated with division and contestation.

The two histories share some striking similarities. Both nations have essentially natural geographical boundaries. Both are long and narrow (important for communication) islands or peninsulas largely surrounded by water. Both were late modernizers, industrializing and adopting the forms of the modern state in the second half of the nineteenth century, after the models had been well established elsewhere. Indeed the Meiji Restoration and the Risorgimento have much in common as political and social transformations that for the most part kept established elites in place, that maintained an older monarchy with ill-defined roles, adopted representative institutions but with limited suffrage and limited power, and relied on a centralized state. Not surprisingly, scholars and social critics continually rediscover that, by a widespread if somewhat mythical standard, neither nation experienced the benefits of a "real" revolution.

Parallels continue in their subsequent histories. Social convention was important in both societies, which remained in many ways quite conservative. Paradoxically, however, neither developed a strong ideological, political conservatism (although in Italy the Catholic church sometimes provided an effective

substitute). Intensely concerned to establish their nation's place among the great powers, the leaders of both countries were drawn toward Germany and to dramatic military action against older, weakening empires in the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 and Italy's war against Turkey in 1911-12. Both ended up on the winning side in World War I and were dissatisfied afterward with what they got for their efforts. Both then turned to forms of fascism in an effort to accelerate change and increase social mobilization while maintained social order (and Italian Fascism can be seen in part as an effort to achieve in Italy the sort of consensus Japan had accomplished). Defeated during World War II, both were subject to heavy American political, economic, and social influences.

There are parallels as well in their economic histories. Both societies were unusually urban prior to industrialization, but both are relatively poor in raw materials. Once industrialization was underway, the government in both nations had close ties to new industries, particularly shipbuilding and steel; and in both, those ties grew closer in the 1930s and through World War II so that the direct economic role of the state has been unusually important (since 1940, the Italian state has owned a higher proportion of the national economy than any non-communist government). In both countries a majority of the working population was employed in agriculture in 1950 and in both that proportion was below ten per cent by 1980. And in the fifty years since 1945, Japan and Italy have had the steadiest rate of high economic growth of any industrial countries. Thus the two societies have undergone fundamental and in many ways parallel social changes. Both now embrace new technology enthusiastically; both excel in industrial design and marketing.

Not surprisingly descriptions of the most recent changes in Japan and Italy also sound similar. The long dominance of a single political party came apart, in 1993 in Japan, 1994 in Italy. Both are experiencing the deregulation and privatization fashionable around the world with the added shock that comes from the greater contrast between these policies and past practices. In both there is much talk about generational change and curiosity about whether old social networks can hold together.

That Japan and Italy have so much in common makes their differences interesting. Japan sustained the illusion, at least, of essentially autonomous development; Italy has always acknowledged close ties to the rest of Europe. The military played a major role in Japanese modernization but did not in Italy, despite the prominence of the military in Piedmont (Italy's founding state) and the continuing tie between the monarchy and the armed forces. It is difficult to find any parallel in Japanese history to the conflicts between Church and State that have been a central element of Italian history for centuries. Are differences

like these possibly related to the most obvious ones, to the greater efficiency of Japanese administration or relative ineffectiveness of law enforcement in Italy?

Comparison between Japan and Italy, then, opens a series of questions any one of which might be the basis for substantial comparative research. In particular they seem likely to open fresh perspectives on Italian society. Given the contrast between Japan's tradition of considering economic growth in the service of the nation and the country's high degree of political and economic coordination, how has Italy compensated for its apparent lack in these areas? It would be worthwhile comparing how social (and political and institutional) networks function in the two countries, comparing the use of kinship ties in business and politics, the reciprocal relations of formal and informal groups, and so forth. Japanese economic growth owes a lot to skillful long-range planning and a high degree of decentralization within large corporations given security by protective ties to banks and government. In analyzing Italy's economic growth, economists emphasize the flexibility of many medium-sized and often family-controlled enterprises engaged in the same or sector of production and clustered in the same region where these firms both cooperate and intensely compete. Are these differences fundamental, the contrasting practices of distinctive cultures, responses to different markets, or merely alternative means of achieving similar ends?

Comparison of social networks might also explore the sources, the style, and the functions of what outsiders, at least, label corruption, which is believed to be considerable in both countries. Do private arrangements and hidden economic exchanges occur differently in networks based on kinship, from those based on institutional connection, region, shared values, or short-term interest? Do these different kinds of networks have different effects in the operations of government, political parties, education, and commerce? What does comparison of Japan and Italy suggest about the relative importance of these different sorts of networks.

These topics are closely related, of course, to questions of elite formation; and here the different course the two societies have taken is especially provocative. In the 1880s both relied on a highly selective, quite competitive, and prestigious system of elite education, closely tied to a much-admired national culture. Japan then speedily developed an effective system of universal education, while Italy moved slowly; higher education in Japan became ever more universalistic, competitive, and constraining while in Italy it remained looser, more connected to status than competitive ability, and a less essential filter for individual advancement. Would it be possible to demonstrate what consequences such fundamental differences have had?

The argument for such comparisons is that they can be reasonably con-

tained in specific cases and periods, methodologically controlled comparisons that use empirical evidence. Nevertheless, the idea of comparing aspects of two societies inevitably opens the temptation to compare them as a whole. In the light of Professor Eisenstadt's striking study of Japan, it is hard not to think about the fact that Italian civilization is about as Axial as civilization can get: ever conscious of its classical roots, for two millenia the center of the most universal of churches, an enthusiastic participant in the universalism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the home of a nationalist ideology that claimed its principles were equally applicable to all peoples, drawn to the universalistic claims of liberalism and then of Marxism, and currently the most enthusiastic supporter of the European Union in terms of its stated principles as well as its immediate benefits. The contrast with Japan could hardly be greater. Could we show in any particular sphere of activity at a particular time how this difference has mattered?

One always hopes that comparison will challenge received opinion and lead to some refinement of academic commonplaces. Individual studies often allege that Japan and Italy have weak public spheres, that something is missing from their civic cultures. Yet comparison reveals the characteristics of the two societies in this regard are very different and that by any definition they have equally different weaknesses (and strengths). Perhaps a deeper comparison of Japan and Italy would compel some rethinking of these terms (once we determined what the evidence should look like). Rethinking of that sort would be justification enough for further comparative study.