

There has been a paucity of comparative research on Japanese politics. Most Japanese scholars and foreign experts on Japan tend to focus their research on Japan exclusively. One result is that the concepts used to describe Japan are often non-comparative, e.g., the “Meiji Restoration,” “Taisho Democracy,” and the “1955 System.” Another result is that comparative judgments tend to sneak in the back door of research on Japan, without the scholar having subjected comparative reference points to careful scrutiny.

All of my research on Japan has been self-consciously comparative. It is my belief that all people inevitably think comparatively, and scholarship benefits when comparisons are systematic and detailed. My presentation will argue for the desirability of comparative research and give some examples of how a comparative perspective can shed new light on various aspects of Japanese politics.

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