Party system dynamics in post-war Japan: A quantitative content analysis of electoral pledges

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative accounts of Japanese party politics allude to the standard left–right spectrum, but they invariably devote much more space to discussions of foreign policy differences than to socioeconomic conflict. Quantitative estimates of Japanese party positions treat short party responses to newspaper interviews as if they were true manifestos, and fail both to confirm the claims of the qualitative literature and to demonstrate any consistent basis for party differentiation at all. We address both puzzles by applying a text scaling algorithm to electoral pledges to estimate Japanese party positions on three major policy dimensions. Our analysis largely confirms the findings of the qualitative literature, but also offers new insights about party movement and polarization over time.

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1. Introduction

Party competition is a central element of politics in parliamentary democracies. This competition almost everywhere involves parties taking positions on a "left–right" ideological spectrum. One means by which parties do this is by regularly expressing their policy proposals in election manifestos. Over the last 20 years, the efforts of comparative scholars have intensified to measure parties' policy positions in a precise manner from such documents, with the goal of being able to compare party systems over time and across countries (e.g. Budge et al., 1987, 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006). As a consequence, and independent of the measurement approach used, manifestos have become the primary source of data to study changes in party system polarization and the effects of changing ideological conflict between parties on policy outcomes.

In this paper, we study the Japanese party system by examining party statements for both substantive and methodological reasons. First, the development of the Japanese party system in the second half of the 20th century presents a puzzle to students of party politics. Surprisingly, studies of the post-war Japanese party system come to very different conclusions about its development. Qualitative accounts of Japanese party politics typically allude to competition of parties on the standard left–right spectrum, but they invariably devote much more space to discussions of foreign policy differences. Quantitative studies of Japan's party system fail to confirm the claims of the qualitative literature and, indeed, fail to demonstrate any consistent basis for party differentiation at all. Second, Japan offers a particularly interesting case study due to the unusual (but by no means unique) empirical challenges arising from the Japanese 'manifesto' sources. Contrary to what one would expect, the Japanese source texts used by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP), the most comprehensive study of manifestos as sources to infer ideology to date (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006), are not manifestos at all.

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Election manifestos are 'strategic documents written by politically sophisticated party elites' (Laver and Garry, 2000: 620), which 'assess the importance of current political problems, specify the party's position on them, and inform the electorate about the course of action the party will pursue when elected' (Klingemann, 1987: 300). Until 2000, Japanese parties did not produce proper manifestos, so the CMP researchers instead used so-called *kōyaku* (literally 'public promises'). These electoral pledges were short answers extracted from party leaders in rapid-fire pre-election interviews by a national daily newspaper (Inoguchi, 1987).[1] Because they were so short, and because the selection of topics was truncated and selected by the interviewers, these text statements are very different from election manifestos, in which parties can freely choose to emphasize any issues they want. Consequently, Japan's 'manifestos' have the second shortest average text length in the CMP data set (74 sentences on average), and one of the highest proportions of CMP policy categories with zero entries (69% on average).[2] The CMP coding scheme assigns each quasi-sentence in a manifesto to one of 56 policy categories.[3] With text sources that are very short, there are fewer quasi-sentences to assign to categories, meaning many of the categories are left empty.[4] Unsurprisingly in such short documents, parties only address a few of the categories that comprise the CMP coding scheme. A consequence is that all parties in the system look "similar" on issues that none address, but for which the CMP is seeking positions. The challenge is to find a way to estimate positions for Japanese parties from the *kōyaku* to provide insights into the dynamics of the post-war Japanese party system.

Hence, a *substantive puzzle* (what happened in the Japanese party system post World War II?) and an *empirical challenge* (how can we extract ideological information from Japanese electoral pledges?) are motivating this study. Together, they raise the question of whether the inconsistencies between quantitative measures and qualitative assessments can be resolved. If not, then cross-country comparisons that include Japan might be compromised by a severe "apples and oranges" problem, and even longitudinal Japan-specific analyses may suffer from a severe

missing-data problem. We propose to answer these questions by re-examining the Japanese *kōyaku* using an automated content analysis technique that focuses on words rather than sentences as the units of analysis (Slapin and Proksch, 2008), and that therefore should be less sensitive to the brevity of the Japanese party statements. In our reassessment, we do find ideological structure and consistency in Japanese party ideologies that corroborate the qualitative analyses in the literature, but that also add to our understanding of party system changes over time. Our measures show the largest ideological polarization on the foreign policy dimension with greater clarity than the CMP data, and just as qualitative assessments have suggested. On social and economics issues, we find that inter-party differences were never large but that all parties shifted their priorities and positions over time.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we review the literature on the Japanese party system and generate expectations about what we should find in the manifesto data. In section 3, we review previous attempts to treat the Japanese *kōyaku* as comparable to proper manifestos, and the confusing results that they have produced. In section 4, we describe the Wordfish scaling technique and the particular challenges that we faced in applying the technique to Japanese texts. In section 5, we present our results and analyze what they tell us about Japanese party politics between 1960 and 1998. Finally, in section 6, we assess the implications of our study for manifesto analyses more generally, and the effort to compare party positions over time and across countries in meaningful ways.

2. The literature on the Japanese party system

Japan's first post-war elections produced a highly fractured party system. As many as 33 different parties won at least one Diet seat in 1946, but that number diminished quickly over the next several years. The start of the Korean War in 1950 and the end of the Occupation in 1952 helped shift the focus of the political debate from the relative merits of capitalism and socialism to issues of foreign policy (Otake, 1999; Ishikawa, 2004). In 1955, mergers created first the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and then the LDP, and a clear divide between 'left' and 'right' (Scalapino and Masumi, 1962). Over the post-1955 period, both big parties lost popularity, but the LDP managed to hang on to legislative majorities while the opposition splintered.

The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) split from the JSP in 1960. The Clean Government Party (CGP, or *Kōmeitō*) emerged in 1964 not from a party split, but from the grassroots. It entered the Upper House in 1965 and the Lower House in 1967.[5] The Japan Communist Party (JCP) increased its vote share from only 2.5% in 1958 to a relatively consistent 10% by the early 1970s, and won as many as 39 of 511 seats in 1979. Several other parties appeared for an election or two but for all intents and purposes, the LDP, JSP, DSP, CGP, and

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[1] Basically, a topic would be raised, and each party representative would be asked to express his party's position.

[2] Japanese party statements are second in brevity only to Israel's average of 51.5 sentences. The median CMP case is Ireland, with an average text length of 303.2 quasi-sentences. Norwegian parties are the most verbose at 1470 quasi-sentences. Only the Israeli and Finnish data have a higher proportion of 'zero' categories, at 76% and 70%, respectively. The Danish (68%) and Swedish (65%) data are also in the same neighborhood. The median proportion is 52%.

[3] The underlying assumption of the CMP approach is that relative emphasis that parties place on certain topics provides information about party ideology. Parties emphasize policies they support to differentiate themselves from their competition. Klingemann et al. (2006) suggest that this approach is theoretically justified by a saliency theory of party competition. Computer-based approaches to estimating party ideology from manifestos' word counts, including Wordfish (Slapin and Proksch, 2008) – the approach used in this paper – rely on the same assumptions regarding relative emphasis.

[4] For a more detailed discussion of the problems with using the CMP scheme to estimate party positions, see the special issue of *Electoral Studies* (Marks, 2007).

[5] The CGP was the political arm of the lay Buddhist organization *Sōka Gakkai*. *Sōka Gakkai* first successfully endorsed candidates in local elections in 1955 (Hrebenar, 1986: 153).

JCP comprised a 'steady-state' five-party Japanese party system between 1967 and the middle of 1993.[6]

Most accounts of post-war Japanese party politics array the parties ideologically from 'left' to 'right'.[7] Because the DSP was formed from the 'right' wing of the JSP, it was seen to stake out a center-left position, with the rump JSP consigned to a more doctrinaire leftist position, outflanked only by the Communists. Kōmeitō, with its emphasis on 'humanitarian socialism' was a little tougher to pigeonhole. The Kōmeitō 'defies classification in conventional conservative-progressive terms' but followed 'a somewhat meandering course away from a position close to the JSP and brought it nearer both in policy terms and in Diet strategy and general political tactics, to the DSP and the LDP' (Curtis, 1988:24–26). The DSP 'consider[ed] itself as being in the center of the spectrum of Japanese politics…while the Kōmeitō's goals have remained vague – anti-militarist and pro-expanded social welfare programs' (Baerwald, 1986:8). Kōmeitō described its own 'stand' as 'middle-of-the-road reformism' (Hrebenar, 1986:170).

But while most observers would agree to this ideological ordering, is there any systematic evidence for it? The standard left–right economic dimension is invoked only in vague terms, and in discussions of voter and interest group supporters of the various parties. Thus, the LDP was backed financially by big business, found its votes disproportionately among farmers and small-business owners (Pempel, 1998), and was closely associated with policies that promoted economic growth and falling tax rates. In these ways, it seemed like a 'party of the right'. The JSP, meanwhile, received votes, candidates, and financing from labor unions, especially those affiliated with the public-sector union federation *Sōhyō*.[8] But the JSP also was beholden to farmers (winning about half as many rural seats as the LDP) as the DSP, CGP, and JCP took root in urban areas. Further muddling the distinction between the supposedly rightist LDP and leftist JSP was that the LDP was often quick to adapt policy for political advantage. For example, the LDP-controlled Diet passed a series of strict anti-pollution laws in 1970, and a large expansion of the welfare state in 1972–1973.[9] These policies appeared to be more centrist, and whether sincere or not, the LDP's welfarist moves complicate our understanding of party ideologies.

As for the other parties, the DSP allied with a new private-sector labor federation, *Dōmei*, soon after its split from the JSP. While the apparent trigger for the split was foreign policy, the *Sōhyō* vs. *Dōmei* aspect of the rivalry seemed to reinforce the appearance of a relatively moderate platform for the DSP. The JCP received a good deal of its support from professionals, especially teachers'

unions (Berton, 1986). Kōmeitō was most successful among lower-middle-class urbanites, especially women (Hrebenar, 1986).

All in all, this description seems to paint the familiar picture of a class-based party system, with the LDP the party of 'capital' and the opposition representing labor and those left behind by the country's rapid economic development. Only the Kōmeitō's religious ties hint at a more complex policy space. One puzzle running through this literature is the question of whether the electorate was in some sense too homogeneous for multiparty democracy or whether the opposition parties were to blame for not finding effective ways to oppose LDP policies, in part because it was hard to argue with prosperity. Curtis (1988:226) writes that 'supporters of Japan's various political parties, despite the wide spectrum of ideologies and programs these parties represent, embrace strikingly similar values and attitudes'. Looking for expressions of class interests or value orientations in party choice is fairly futile'. Hrebenar (1986:22; see also Otake, 1999:4) argues that 'the Japanese electorate is essentially conservative…not in a true ideological sense, but in the sense that it resists fundamental changes'. While opposition parties would prioritize the demands of workers, the fact that growth did not come at the expense of inequality took a lot of steam out of their protests.

If appeals to class-based politics were a losing proposition, how did the opposition challenge the LDP? In scholarly discussions, the issues named are almost invariably in the realm of foreign policy (Otake, 1999). According to Curtis (1988:119), 'the JSP's support of socialism has always been a muted element in the party's public appeal; it would have been more appropriately labeled the 'Japan Peace Party''. Baerwald (1974:44) agrees:

> a deep and seemingly irreconcilable ideological chasm has persisted between the conservatives and progressive 'houses' for the greater part of the post-war period. This chasm was particularly evident with respect to foreign policy problems.

The foreign policy divide centered on the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). The Treaty was ratified in 1952 as a condition to end the Occupation. The LDP championed it as a guarantee of Japan's defense in a Cold War world, while the JCP and JSP objected to the presence of tens of thousands of U.S. troops on Japanese soil, and predicted that it would entangle Japan in American military adventures. The SDF is Japan's military in all but name, and although it is limited to defensive capabilities, the JSP and JCP consistently decried the SDF as unconstitutional. The DSP, by contrast, took a more pragmatic view, calling for acceptance of the Treaty and of the constitutionality of the SDF.

Over time, as the fears of the 'leftist' parties proved unfounded, the Japanese public came to support both the Treaty and the SDF, and therefore the LDP's position. Kōmeitō adjusted its stance accordingly, 'initially…stress[ing] its progressive credentials, taking positions similar to those of the JSP on Japanese rearmament and military alliance with the United States', but by 1981, it had dropped its opposition to the Treaty altogether (Curtis, 1988: 25–26; see also Hrebenar,

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[6] Before 1993, the LDP experienced only one minor split, which produced the New Liberal Club (1976–1986), so the post-1955 fission was almost entirely an opposition phenomenon.

[7] See, e.g., Thayer, 1969; Baerwald, 1974, 1986; Hrebenar, 1986; Curtis, 1988; Kohno, 1997.

[8] 'In practice, the JSP has [been] operating as a lobby for public sector unions' (Curtis, 1988: 123).

[9] See McKean, 1981; Reed, 1981; and Rosenbluth and Thies, 2002 on pollution. See Campbell, 1992 and Estévez-Ave, 2008 on welfare.
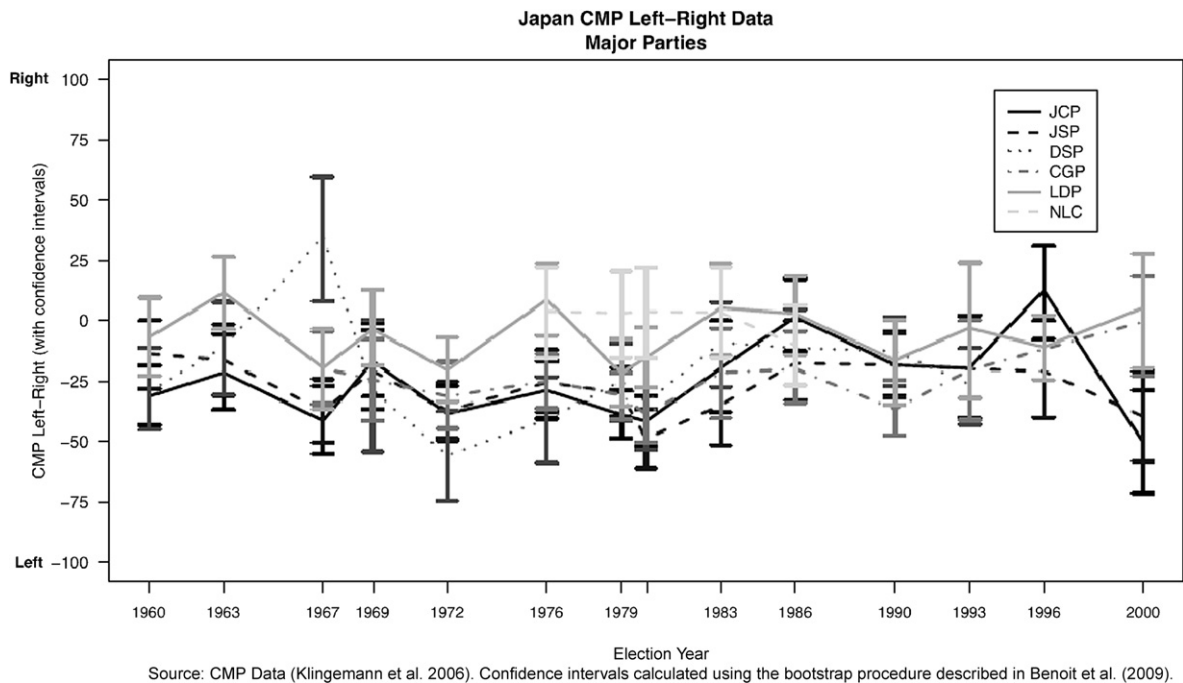
Fig. 1. CMP left–right party positions in Japan, 1960–2000.

1986:174; Baerwald, 1986:9). The JSP did not accept the Treaty or the SDF until 1994, and the JCP still has not done so.

A further claim in the literature is that the polarization of the party system has declined over time. Curtis (1988:227) writes: 'one of the most fundamental changes in the character of the Japanese polity…is the breakdown of the conservative-progressive cleavage'. Partly, this view is explained by the DSP, CGP, and NLC filling the huge ideological space separating the JCP/JSP and the LDP. But some invoke the LDP's practice of co-opting popular opposition policy stances whenever they could, as in the cases of pollution regulation and welfare. Other times, some of the opposition parties might jump on the bandwagon of popular LDP policies. The JSP struggled with the creeping realization that its hard-core leftism was out of touch with the interests of voters, but its reliance on public sector unions and consequent domination by left-wing party activists made ideological change difficult. The CGP had no such anchor, and 'followed an *ad hoc* approach to practical policy making and thus tended to switch policy positions on given issues repeatedly' (Hrebenar, 1986:170). Even the JCP was seen to have mellowed, cutting its ties to China and the Soviet Union, in what Curtis (1988:29) called a 'new Eurocommunist thrust'.

Another bit of evidence for declining polarization is changing legislative behavior. After the late 1950s and early 1960s, when even fisticuffs on the Diet floor were not unheard of, the LDP and opposition were said to have settled into a norm of 'consensus-based' policy making. Despite bicameral majorities, the LDP rarely steamrolled a united opposition to pass its bills. Instead, it preferred to offer enough concessions to obtain the support of some opposition parties to avoid being accused of 'tyranny of the majority'. Kohno (1997:126), following Sato and Matsuzaki (1986), sees one measure of ideological convergence over

time in the increasing percentage of bills co-sponsored by opposition parties. Not surprisingly, the CGP and DSP were more frequent co-sponsors than the JSP or JCP.[10]

3. Quantitative approaches to Japanese party politics

While identifying a party ranking on a left–right socio-economic dimension, the qualitative literature on the post-war Japanese party system agrees that foreign policy, and not socioeconomic policy, was the most salient dimension of conflict. Systematic expert surveys on Japan agree. In a 2002–2003 survey asking 58 scholars to locate Japanese parties on a general left–right dimension, none of the economic policy issues (including deregulation and taxes versus spending) seemed to matter. Instead, the 'local meaning of left and right in Japanese politics seems to have much more to do with social, immigration, environmental, and foreign policy issues than with economics' (Laver and Benoit, 2005, p.198).[11] But if the substantive meaning of 'left–right' varies across countries, this raises the issue of whether inter-country comparisons of parties on the left–right dimensions are valid (*Ibid*.: p.206).

Fig. 1 shows the CMP left–right placements for all major political parties in Japan in the post-war period with

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[10] The consensual norm was enforced by the threat of extra-parliamentary protest activities. Sit-ins, boycotts, and other dilatory tactics produced media spectacles that punished the LDP for flexing its majorities.

[11] This survey was administered more than a decade after the end of the Cold War, and 8–9 years after the JSP renounced its foreign policy platform in 1994. A similar survey 15 or 30 years earlier – the period discussed by the qualitative works reviewed in section 2 – likely would have shown an even stronger focus on foreign policy.
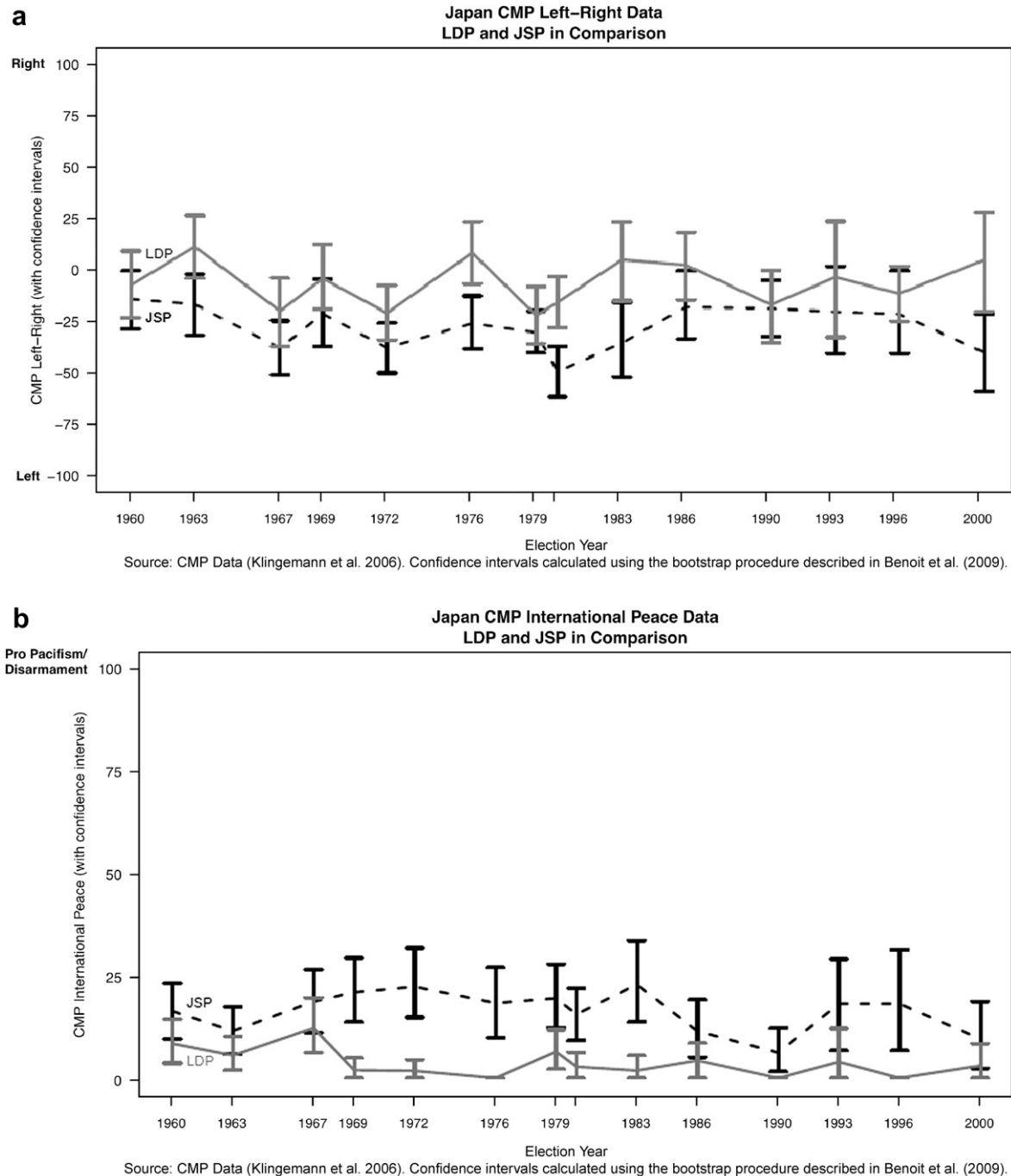
a

Japan CMP Left–Right Data
LDP and JSP in Comparison

Source: CMP Data (Klingemann et al. 2006). Confidence intervals calculated using the bootstrap procedure described in Benoit et al. (2009).

b

Japan CMP International Peace Data
LDP and JSP in Comparison

Source: CMP Data (Klingemann et al. 2006). Confidence intervals calculated using the bootstrap procedure described in Benoit et al. (2009).

Fig. 2. a) CMP left–right party positions in Japan for the LDP and JSP, 1960–2000. b) CMP international peace party positions in Japan for the LDP and JSP, 1960–2000.

confidence intervals.[12] This left–right dimension has been defined on the basis of a socioeconomic conception of

ideological conflict between parties. The plot shows that CMP picture of the Japanese party system is very muddled, with much crisscrossing of parties. In Fig. 2, we focus on the two most important parties, the LDP and JSP. The location of the parties on the theoretically possible −100/+100 left–right scale and the 0/+100 international peace scale suggests that they are hardly distinguishable. On the left–right dimension (Fig. 2a), both parties appear to be centrist,

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[12] We generated the confidence intervals using the procedure suggested by Benoit et al. (2009), taking the value of the 2.5th and 97.5th percentile of bootstrapped positions as the lower and upper limit for the confidence interval.

the confidence intervals on the estimates of their positions overlap in ten of fourteen elections, and we can discern no party movement over time (Fig. 2).

Recall that while Japan experts saw a relatively homogeneous electorate, they agreed that the parties were spread across the ideological spectrum, and that foreign policy was the most divisive issue. The CMP estimates do not confirm this (Fig. 2b). While CMP consistently places the JSP to the left of the LDP, as expected, the confidence intervals for the parties overlap in six of the 14 elections, and come close to overlapping in two more.[13] Moreover, whereas the qualitative literature suggests that the JSP and LDP should be furthest apart at the beginning of the period, the CMP data do not reflect this either. Judging from these two pictures, one would conclude that the Japanese party system was homogeneous and static.[14]

As indicated above, however, we have serious doubts regarding the applicability of the coding scheme to short Japanese electoral pledges. While some scholars continue to use these data in cross-national studies (e.g., Golder, 2006; Tavits, 2007), others exclude the Japanese case or run robustness checks specifically excluding Japan (e.g. Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009; Stoll, 2010). Indeed, the fact that some scholars choose to exclude the Japanese case indicates their skepticism about the validity of using the *kōyaku* within the CMP framework. But can we use Japanese *kōyaku* to infer party positions at all?

4. Data and methods: *Kōyaku* and Wordfish

Our approach to examine the electoral pledges is to treat the words as data and to extract policy positions by scaling the word frequencies. For this purpose, we use Wordfish, a document-scaling technique that treats ideology as a latent variable (Slapin and Proksch, 2008).[15] Wordfish has been applied successfully to different text sources (manifestos, legislative speeches, interest group statements) as well as to different languages (Slapin and Proksch, 2008; Proksch and Slapin, 2009, 2010; Klüver, 2009).

4.1. Wordfish – how it works

Wordfish implements a scaling algorithm to place multiple documents within a single policy space by treating words as data. As with other manifesto-based content analytic methods, Wordfish assumes that the responses given by the political parties in the *kōyaku* express a latent political ideology. While ideology is not directly observable, we can estimate it based on actions taken by parties and

their members, such as responding to newspaper queries. Ideology manifests itself in the relative word usage of politicians as they craft their responses to such questions. Unlike other techniques, such as Wordscores (Laver et al., 2003), Wordfish does not require researchers to anchor the ends of the political space by assigning reference texts. It also does not require the creation of dictionaries to specify which words represent the extremes of the political space. The positions of all words, as well as parties, are estimated.[16]

Wordfish assumes that word frequencies are generated by a Poisson process. The systematic component of this process contains four parameters: document (party) positions, document (party) fixed effects, word weights (discriminating parameters), and word fixed effects.[17] Word fixed effects capture the fact that some words need to be used much more often than others in a language. Such words (e.g., conjunctions or articles) may serve a grammatical purpose but have no substantive or ideological meaning. The document-fixed-effect parameters control for the possibility that some documents in the analysis may be significantly longer than others. Of greatest interest are the parameters capturing the positions of the party documents, and the word discrimination parameters.[18] We identify the model by transforming all estimated positions to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. This relative identification can be made absolute by prescribing a direction for the position (e.g., constraining the LDP to be to the right of the JCP in a particular year).

To summarize, the Wordfish approach uses word frequencies as observations and models the data generating process. By contrast, the CMP project uses relative frequencies of quasi-sentences and manually codes them into pre-determined categories. Whereas two human coders may code the same quasi-sentence into two different categories, leading to different party position estimates, the Wordfish algorithm will always produce the same estimates for the same data. Compared with the CMP, the Wordfish technique provides more reliable estimates based upon a more refined use of the same underlying data. Although both approaches measure salience, the concept of salience here is not independent of position. This is why we can compare the position estimates from Wordfish to the estimates from the CMP project.

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[13] The LDP's confidence intervals are generally smaller than the JSP's because the LDP is close to the bounds on this dimension. In the extreme case, when there are no quasi-sentence in the manifesto on this dimension, the non-parametric bootstrap procedure of Benoit et al. (2009) also generates manifestos with zero counts. In other words, if a party does not mention a category, the bootstrap will reflect this and the corresponding confidence interval will in fact have a zero range.

[14] Plots containing estimates for all parties show them frequently crisscrossing and statistically indistinguishable.

[15] Wordfish has been implemented in the *R* statistical language. Current code is available at www.wordfish.org.

[16] Thus, Wordfish works in a similar fashion to scaling techniques such as NOMINATE that estimate legislator's ideologies using roll call votes (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997), and other item-response models that have been used to scale voting choices in legislatures and courts (Clinton et al., 2004; Martin and Quinn, 2002).

[17] Formally, $y_{ijt} \sim \text{Poisson}(\lambda_{ijt})$, where y_{ijt} is the count of word j in party i's document at time t. The lambda parameter has the systematic component $\lambda_{ijt} = e^{\alpha_{it} + \psi_j + \beta_j^* \omega_{it}}$, with α as a set of document (party-election year) fixed effects, ψ as a set of word fixed effects, β as estimates of word specific weights capturing the importance of word j in discriminating between manifestos, and ω as the estimate of party i's position in election year t (therefore *it* indexes one document). See Slapin and Proksch (2008) for a more detailed discussion.

[18] The actual estimation procedure employed by Wordfish is an iterative process called an E-M algorithm. First party parameters are held fixed at a certain value while word parameters are estimated. Then word parameters are held fixed at their new values while the party positions are estimated. This process is repeated until the parameter estimates reach an acceptable level of convergence.

4.2. Preparing the Japanese kōyaku for analysis

While the estimation of policy positions is left to an algorithm, preparing the Japanese documents for computer analysis requires more complex linguistic processing than, say, for English documents. The kōyaku from eleven Lower House elections (1960–1990) and ten Upper House elections (1962–1989) were compiled from a single source (Murakawa, 1998). We added data for the Lower House elections of 1993 and 1996 and the Upper House elections of 1992, 1995, and 1998 from the original *Asahi Shimbun* articles. Since elections for the two chambers were held simultaneously in 1980 and again in 1986, there is only a single set of party statements for each bicameral pair. That leaves us with a data set of 23 sets of party statements over a 40-year period. However, for some reason, the newspaper followed a very different format in 1974, asking each party to lay out something closer to a short version of proper manifesto (not topic-by-topic answers to specific questions). These data were not comparable to the rest of the data set, owing to the different data generating mechanism, so we excluded 1974.

The first step was to scan the hard-copies of the texts using Japanese optical character recognition software. Next, we divided the 22 elections worth of data into 958 individual year-party-topic files. The 'topics' were those named by the newspaper, so they required no subjective intervention by us. We then collapsed these topics into three categories – domestic and social policy, economic policy, and foreign policy.[19] A challenge for examining the Japanese sentences was to separate the words, because written Japanese does not use spaces. Rather than insert spaces by hand, we used a Japanese tokenizer program, essentially a dictionary.[20] Each word was shifted to its own line, followed by its definition and usage. We then deleted the definitions and usage notes and were left with one word per line, suitable for use by the Wordfish program. Most words were written in *kanji* (Chinese characters), but some were written in one or the other Japanese syllabary (*hiragana* or *katakana*). And even kanji-based words often had trailing hiragana, which are used in Japanese for purposes of conjugation and tense. Once we were able to run the analysis to determine what words distinguished one party's statements from another's (or from its own at a different time), we eliminated some words (such as prepositions) that were of no substantive importance but which might differ purely as a matter of style.

Using responses to newspaper questions rather than manifestos to estimate ideology introduces two problems. First, the party responses to the newspaper questions are usually only a few sentences, meaning we have less data than we would if the parties had written true manifestos. Second, the newspapers set the agenda for the topics discussed. In typical manifestos, parties decide which topics are of greatest importance, and they allocate space accordingly.

Japanese parties were forced to respond to the topics raised by the newspaper, and only to those. Since the CMP technique infers ideological differences from differences in the relative frequency of parties' discussion of various topics, the homogenizing effect of external agenda setting undermines the CMP's identification of differences. If the interviewer did not ask about a topic, then every party remained equally mute, and the CMP infers no differences across parties. Both of these problems are present for all countries for which such sources serve as data.[21] The CMP, however, codes these sources as if they were proper manifestos.

To cope with the first problem, we aggregate the responses across multiple elections. This provides us with more data for each observation, and it helps smooth over any agenda-setting effects of the newspaper. Even if the newspaper had a specific agenda in one election (say, the latest scandal), we can average over the agenda effect by combining that election with the one preceding (or following) it. We therefore estimated positions by grouping the elections into 8 half-decade periods as follows: 1) 1960, 1962, and 1963; 2) 1965, 1967, 1968 and 1969; 3) 1971 and 1972; 4) 1976, 1977 and 1979; 5) 1980 and 1983; 6) 1986, 1989, 1990; 7) 1992 and 1993; and lastly 8) 1995, 1996 and 1998.[22] We then estimated one position for each party per period. The Wordfish approach ameliorates the second problem by allowing us to gauge differences in the words parties used to address the small number of topics contained in a given interview.

5. Results

As discussed above, recent quantitative work on Japanese parties has not confirmed the findings of the qualitative literature. The most commonly used measure of ideology in cross-national time-series research, the CMP left–right score, fails to distinguish even between the two most important parties that by all qualitative accounts should represent the poles of the political spectrum, the LDP and the JSP. Recent surveys confirm that foreign policy differentiates among the parties more so than a traditional left–right economic or social dimension, but surveys cannot produce a sufficiently long time series to uncover the nature of conflict throughout the post-war era. Moreover, since the experts being surveyed were also the primary producers and consumers of the qualitative literature, it is not clear that these surveys do much more than summarize the impressions of that literature. We demonstrate that Wordfish does capture the nature of party politics as discussed in the qualitative literature and provides a more reliable quantitative measure of Japanese party positions than the CMP. Below, we compare the left–right scale provided by the CMP (and bootstrapped by Benoit et al. (2009)) to our Wordfish results. This is the CMP

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[19] Details of the categorization of topics are available from the authors. In nearly all cases, the categorization of an item was unambiguous. For a few topics, such as 'lifestyle' (*seikatsu*), we had to look a little deeper.
[20] MeCab is available at http://mecab.sourceforge.net/.

[21] Newspaper articles have been used exclusively in Israel and Japan, and for some parties in Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Sri Lanka, and Turkey (see CMP codebook).
[22] We do not discriminate between Lower House and Upper House elections. Party statements before any national election should provide the same types of information.
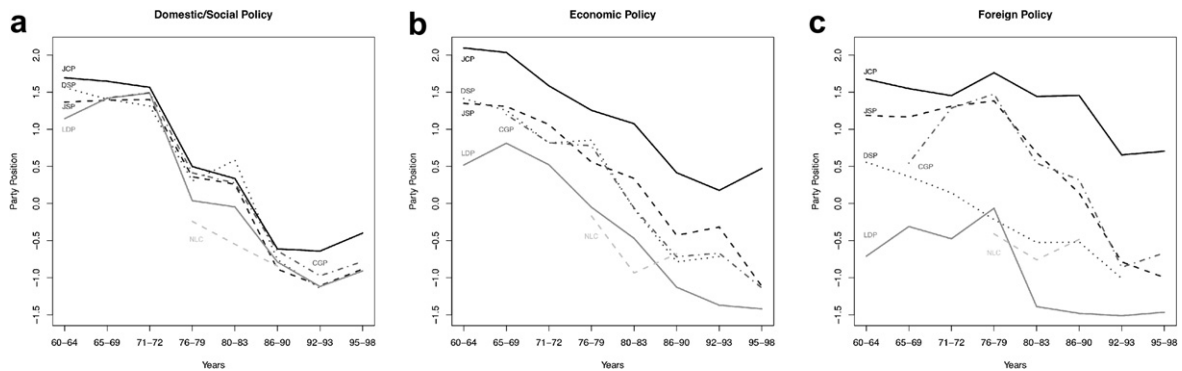
Fig. 3. Party positions in Japan, all parties 1960–1998 (Wordfish estimates). Note: Party position estimates based on: (a) 998 unique words, (b) 880 unique words, and (c) 680 unique words, respectively

scale that scholars typically use in their analyses. While this enables us to compare the results of our approach to the data scholars most commonly use, a fairer comparison re-estimates the CMP left–right scale by aggregating the *kōyaku* just as we do for the Wordfish analysis. We have also constructed the CMP left–right scale in this manner, but the CMP picture remains the same.[23] Parties' confidence intervals continue to overlap and party system still appears chaotic, with the JCP even crossing, implausibly, to the right of the LDP in the late 1990s.

Fig. 3 displays the positions of Japanese parties on three dimensions – domestic and social policy, economic policy, and foreign policy – estimated with Wordfish. In contrast with the muddled estimates produced by the CMP, our estimates tend to square with the qualitative literature in several respects. On all dimensions, the Communists are on the far left relative to all other parties, and the LDP holds down the right.[24] The DSP begins and remains close to its parent JSP on social and economic issues, but starts and stays much closer to the LDP (sometimes looking even more hawkish) on foreign policy. The CGP is consistently centrist, although we cannot confirm the views of Curtis and Hrebenar (cited above) that they moved from the JSP's orbit toward the LDP's position in the 1970s. Of course, since the difference between the JSP and the LDP was so small on issues other than foreign policy, estimating the relative closeness to one or the other of parties inhabiting that small gap is fraught with uncertainty. The overall compactness and rightward drift of the policy space on the domestic/social and economic dimensions is also in line with the hypothesis in the qualitative literature that Japan's rapid, but relatively equitable growth neutralized attacks against the status quo and essentially forced all parties onto the same bandwagon.

Fig. 4 focuses on the LDP and JSP, and adds confidence intervals. On both the domestic and social policy dimension and the economic policy dimension, the party positions are tightly packed within elections, but move smoothly over time from left to right. The LDP-JSP plots reveal that the two parties' positions were statistically indistinguishable in five of the eight period clusters, clearly differing only at the outset, and again in the late 1970s-early 1980s.[25]

On the foreign policy dimension, parties are much more spread out at each election, but the positions remain more stable over time. The 'left–right' ordering of the parties again matches the expectations of the qualitative literature, with the JCP and the LDP on either extreme, and the other parties in the middle. Turning to Fig. 4c, we see that the LDP and JSP are clearly distinguishable in every period. The convergence of the two parties (really the rightward shift of the JSP) coincides with the timing of the coalition government that the two long time foes formed in 1994. As a condition for handing the premiership to JSP leader Tomiichi Murayama, the LDP obliged Murayama to stand up before the Diet and essentially renounce his party's entire foreign policy platform. He accepted the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and the SDF. He withdrew JSP objections to the national anthem and the Rising Sun flag. The idealistic, pacificist 'Japan Peace Party' changed its foreign policy spots overnight, and this is clearly visible in Fig. 4c.

Next, recall from the review of the qualitative literature on the post-war party system the view that the polarization of the party system seemed to decline over time. What began as a strongly adversarial two-party (or one-and-a-half party) system with a wide gap between left and right was said to have compressed over time, as the LDP and JSP softened their hard edges and the new parties – the DSP, CGP, and NLC – occupied the middle of the spectrum. Turning to the plots, we see that on the domestic/social and economy dimensions, there is more variation in positions by parties over time than across parties within elections. There is no obvious trend of convergence (declining

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[23] An exact comparison is not possible because the CMP did not code *kōyaku* for upper house elections. We attempted to match our Wordfish grouping as closely as possible. Our eight groupings for the CMP aggregation were 1) 1960 and 1963; 2) 1967 and 1969; 3) 1972; 4) 1976 and 1979; 5) 1980 and 1983; 6) 1986 and 1990; 7) 1993; and 8) 1996. Graphs displaying the CMP positions based on the aggregated *kōyaku* are available in a web appendix.

[24] In the figure, 'left' is at the top, and 'right' at the bottom. This is our own interpretation, based on the (safe) assumption that the JCP is consistently 'to the left' of the LDP.

[25] Our data include *kōyaku* for many new, smaller parties competing during the 1990s. We estimate positions for these parties, but because so many lasted for only one or two elections, and because we have combined elections to smooth out year-fixed-effects, we do not include those new parties in our plots.
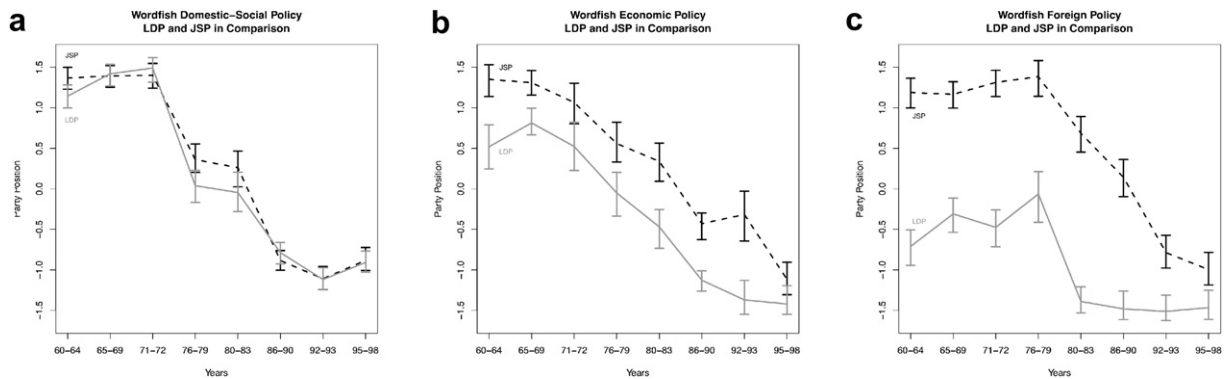
a Wordfish Domestic–Social Policy
LDP and JSP in Comparison

b Wordfish Economic Policy
LDP and JSP in Comparison

c Wordfish Foreign Policy
LDP and JSP in Comparison

Fig. 4. LDP and JSP positions in Japan, 1960–1998 (Wordfish estimates with confidence intervals). Note: Only LDP and JSP estimates are shown for the purpose of clarity, but estimat`s for all parties are available

polarization) because the parties were never that far apart to begin with. On foreign policy, parties differentiate from each other within each election, but do not move as much over time, until the JSP's capitulation in the mid 1990s.

A more subtle picture appears in Fig. 5. Here, we plot the magnitude of the estimated difference between the JSP's position and the LDP's position over time, for each policy dimension. For every period until the 1990s, there is a much larger difference between the JSP on the 'left' and the LDP on the 'right' on the foreign dimension than on the other two dimensions. This provides strong empirical confirmation that most serious conflict among Japanese parties has occurred along a foreign policy dimension, and not along a social or economic left–right dimension. However, we do not see in Fig. 5 any support for the claim that ideological polarization was declining over time, again with the exception of the JSP's late rightward shift on foreign policy.

On the economic dimension, there is almost no change in the distance between the LDP and JSP (and as we saw in Fig. 4b, that difference was negligible in any case). On the domestic/social dimension, the differences between the LDP and JSP positions are even smaller in magnitude, but if anything, seem to increase throughout the 1970s and early 1980s before settling down again to almost nothing in the late 1980s and 1990s. Since the only real action in terms of convergence shows up in the 1990s, our findings do not support the claims in the literature written before that time of declining polarization. Perhaps the parties were cooperating more in the legislature, but before each election, it was business as usual.[26]

Figs. 3 and 4 show another interesting pattern as well. On domestic and social policy and economic policy (and to some degree on foreign policy), party positions trend to the right. It almost looks as though the LDP is running to the right, with the opposition in close pursuit. While there are reasons to believe the rightward movement in the figures captures a true feature of Japanese politics, it is also

possible that it is an artifact of our methodology. The identification strategy we use in Wordfish produces estimated positions that have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. In order to have a standard deviation of one, the parties must take positions that differ from one another or that differ from their own positions over time. If, at a given point of time, all the parties use one set of similar words, but in the next election, they all use a different set of similar words, then the variation will appear across time rather than across party. This is the pattern we see in domestic and social policy as well as economic policy.

On the one hand, change in language over time might occur because all parties shift their underlying positions and this shift leads parties to use new, more right-wing vocabulary in their newspaper responses. For example, some immediate post-war issues, such as food and shelter and clothing – real concerns in a devastated economy with wide spread poverty, homelessness, and malnutrition – simply dropped off the agenda as Japan's economy took off.
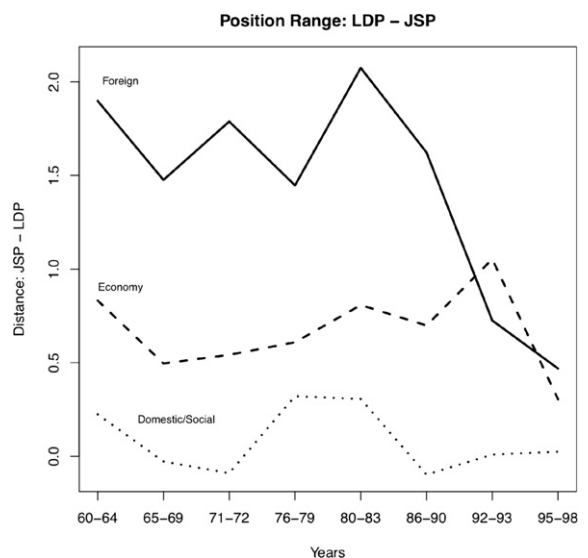
Position Range: LDP – JSP

Fig. 5. Ideological distances between LDP and JSP, 1960–1998. Source: Wordfish Estimation

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[26] The comparison between policy areas is possible because conflict in each area is standardized. We cannot rule out that the latent conflict in one area is greater than in another, but we can be confident that the gap between the LDP and the JSP shrank over time on foreign policy and remained relatively constant in the other two areas.

Insofar as political demands to help the worst-off are the touchstone for leftist parties, the disappearance of such problems from the political debate would appear as a rightward shift by all parties.

On the other hand, language change over time might occur without any ideological shift. If the newspapers ask about some topics in some years, but not in other years, the vocabulary shifts because the agenda of the newspaper has changed. Even if the newspaper's ideological or policy agenda does not shift (assuming it has one), historical events may occur that mean some topics are no longer important while new ones are. This could lead to shifts over time. This concern is not completely baseless. A perusal of the kōyaku reveal that, over time, parties would discuss basically similar issues under ever-changing topic titles. For example, 'political ethics' would appear as a topic one year, and 'political cleansing' another year, and 'Tanaka problem' another year, but in all three, the substance of the statements is about the problems of money politics and corruption.[27] We try to alleviate these problems by aggregating elections, and making sure that topics appear in the newspapers across multiple periods. It is also worth noting that this problem is not unique to our approach, but also plagues the CMP and any other approach that relies on these sorts of newspaper responses. We feel that by aggregating the elections, we stand on more solid ground than comparable CMP analyses.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have used the Japanese case to argue that party systems whose 'policy statements' are too different from manifestos cannot be treated the same as systems with proper full-length manifestos. This problem is not limited to Japan – all countries for which the CMP makes due with 'nearest equivalent' data sources are similarly suspect, especially when data is sparse and zero categories abound. By re-estimating party positions using Wordfish, we have produced estimates that distinguish Japanese parties from one another much more cleanly than in the CMP, and that match the consensus in the qualitative literature by country experts.

As for what we have learned about Japanese politics, it is comforting that our computer-generated estimates generally parallel the received wisdom about the relative ideological ranking of Japanese parties, and in terms of the primacy of the foreign policy dimension in Japanese politics. But we do depart from the standard story in three ways. First, we find foreign policy convergence much later than is often claimed in the literature. Second, we find no evidence of party system convergence on the socio-economic or domestic politics dimensions, mostly because there was not much polarization to reduce. Whether this was because the LDP was successful at co-opting potentially winning opposition policy positions, because opposition parties would

bandwagon on popular LDP positions,[28] or because underlying issues have changed over time is unclear from the 'snapshots' offered by pre-election responses to interviewer questions.

Our third 'Japan finding' is of a secular rightward trend over time on the socioeconomic and domestic politics dimensions that the qualitative literature has missed, and that cries out for explanation. Perhaps the qualitative literature had it half-right: previous authors saw Japan's opposition parties moving toward the LDP's positions over time and declared a decline in polarization. What they missed was that the LDP was moving as well, the governing party was not content with the status quo, but was consistently aiming to push policy to the right.

One question that we cannot address here concerns the massive changes that occurred in the Japanese party system leading to the LDP's split in 1993 and the electoral reform of 1994. Several new parties formed and collapsed over the next decade, and the JSP dwindled to near-irrelevance, to be replaced by first one, then another big-party rival to the LDP. The electoral reform has increased the importance of party ideology (Rosenbluth and Thies, 2010), perhaps the clearest evidence for which has been the move by parties to begin issuing true manifestos. Yet, for all of the reasons explained above, they are not directly comparable to the short, highly circumscribed kōyaku, so estimates of party shifts using one data source for the 'before' period and another for the 'after' would be of dubious value.

Appendix. Supplementary information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2010.09.015.

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[27] This means that the figure cited above of 958 year-topic-party files is inflated by the multiplicity of titles for an actually much smaller number of topics. Since we present our results in terms of broad 'dimensions' of politics, however, this is not a problem as long as renamed topics are coded as being on the same dimension, which they are.

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[28] Some argue that the socioeconomic dimension in Japan was nullified by the economy's rapid (and egalitarian) growth. Class politics is unlikely when everyone thinks they are in the same boat. Even after the stagnation and increasing inequality of the 1990s, more than 90% of Japanese still consider themselves to be 'middle class'. Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. Kokumin Seikatsu Chōsa, http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-ko.html).

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