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- 1 The study of hereditary politics in a democratic context is experiencing a golden age. Though the phenomenon of political dynasties has been under scrutiny in the American context for quite a while, interest in how power is transmitted through kinship in democratic systems outside the United States did not benefit from intense research until the mid- to late-2000s. Even then, most of the work was either descriptive or too peculiar to a given context to move toward a generalized, comparative theory.
- 2 Daniel M. Smith's *Dynasties and Democracy* is a much-needed remedy to this lack in the literature. Though Smith's book is first and foremost about post-war Japanese politics, the first two chapters provide a comparative framework that makes it essential to anyone interested in hereditary politics. He then covers extensively the three steps of career progression that are the selection to stand for a party, the election to hold office, and the promotion to be part of the cabinet. In the last of the substantive chapters, Smith takes a prudent look at the policy consequences (or output) of choosing legacy candidates.
- 3 In this review, I first provide a broad summary of the author's main contribution to the literature on political representation in general and dynastic politics, in particular. I

then cover each chapter to identify their main strengths and weaknesses. In conclusion, I present a series of thoughts about where to go from there.

- 4 If one has to pick a single idea that follows the reader throughout the book, it is certainly the role institutions play in shaping actors' behaviour in the face of dynastic politics. This is, in itself, a major contribution to the literature and a refreshing statement to contradict folk theory about so-called traditional societies and the frequency of family ties in politics. Culture has been mobilized in the past to explain the presence of dynastic politics in new democracies, but also in traditional societies such as Japan and Ireland. Smith shows that institutions, and especially the electoral system, are a powerful factor that explains why dynasties survive and sometimes even thrive.
- 5 The case of Japan is especially appropriate here since that country has not only experienced an arguably high level of dynastic politics since its democratisation in the 1950s, but also an electoral reform in 1994 that changed completely the rules of the game. Japan (or rather the occupying forces at the time) had originally opted for a Multimember Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV), a system somewhat close to what Ireland has been using since its independence. In such a system, a party can nominate more than one candidate in each district where ministerial (M) seats are up for grab. The plurality rule decides which M candidates are then elected.
- 6 Though there are quite strong incentives to limit the number of candidates a party presents to less than the maximum available (to avoid vote splitting), there are also strong incentives for candidates of the same party to compete with one another and cultivate a personal base, in the hope of finishing at or near the top.
- 7 The 1994 reform had much broader objectives than simply to tame dynastic politics. There was, as Smith notes, a real desire to move toward a Westminster style of politics with alternation between two potentially coherent parties. The new voting system chosen is a Japanese-style Mixed Member Majoritarian (MMM) system where voters give their support to a given candidate in one of close to 300 single member plurality districts and then vote on a closed party list with a second ballot to elect the rest of the House of Representatives using proportional rules (PR) for a total of 465 members. The two modes of election are strictly independent since there is no proportional compensation as found in other democracies such as Germany or New Zealand.
- 8 While the SNTV system creates an environment in which name recognition and incumbency are extremely useful, the new MMM system gave more importance to party affiliation and policy positions. Smith argues that such a change had a negative impact on the prevalence of dynastic politics. He does suggest however that the incumbency advantage has slowed for a while the decline of legacy politicians in Japan.
- 9 Smith's book is divided in eight chapters. In the following paragraphs, I focus on the six substantive chapters, leaving the introduction and the conclusion aside. It is important to note that the book is extremely well integrated, with a series of building blocks that produce a consistent picture.
- 10 Chapter 2 sets the table for what is to follow. It makes use of comparative data to brush a general picture of dynastic politics in twelve established democracies. It suggests a wide variety of contexts, from Japan and Ireland, where at one extreme legacy candidates are very common, to Germany and Canada, where they are much less so. It also shows that the prevalence of dynasties varies across time (it is somewhat

decreasing), but also between ideological families (there is no general pattern but clear differences). The second part of the chapter focuses on the case of Japan. It suggests some general tendencies regarding where legacy candidates are from, their ties to former elected officials, their level of education, their wealth, etc. Again, this is mostly exploratory but it provides a nice segue to the following chapter.

- 11 Chapter 3 builds on empirical findings from chapter 2 to put in place a comparative theory of dynastic candidate selection. Though rigorous and built on a strong logic, this theory is not formal in the traditional sense. It is instead a series of eight hypotheses followed by a series of predictions for the specific case of Japan. The strongest aspect of this theory is certainly its integration in the current literature. The author indeed makes sure to cover both current expectations from students of political dynasties and blind spots in previous work. It is both comprehensive and coherent. It remains very empirical, however.
- 12 The next three chapters look at the three stages of career progression, which are selection, election, and promotion. Chapter 4 is extremely rich in anecdotes and qualitative details about the selection process by parties in Japan. Smith is clearly aware that a good portion of his readership is not familiar with Japan. He thus explains in detail some of the most surprising aspects of Japanese politics, notably changes of surnames and even adoptions of in-laws and nephews for electoral purposes, but also the three pillars or “*bans*” of success in electoral politics in that country (support base, financial resources, reputation). This chapter is about the selection of candidates, but it sheds light on much broader strategic dilemmas of Japanese electoral politics. Special emphasis is put on the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) but opposition parties are also discussed. Smith shows how the SNTV system influences the whole process by personalizing electoral politics.
- 13 Chapter 5 looks at the election *per se*, with a special focus on the incumbency advantage before and after the 1993 electoral reform. How to measure the incumbency advantage had been a hot topic in political science, especially in the American context but also in Asia. Smith considers systematically the different sources of spuriousness that could explain why legacy candidates who are also incumbents perform well in elections. He concludes that political brand is the definitive factor of success. The author also concludes that, in post-reform Japan, legacy candidates might still benefit from their family ties, but only in the context of an unpopular incumbent party, the LDP in particular. In these cases, name recognition can keep candidates competitive. The chapter also includes traditional survey questions and conjoint survey experiments that suggest that voters are mildly opposed to the presence of political families in Japan in principle, but not in practice.
- 14 Chapter 6 brings in the next step of a politician career progression, namely, the selection to Cabinet. The chapter begins with a great anecdote about Abe Shinzo and his grandfather both giving a speech to the American Congress six decades apart. This is actually a constant in the book, as Smith always finds the right balance between a systematic (quantitative) study of dynastic politics and specific cases that illustrate the point. In any case, this strategy is especially efficient in this chapter as the author focuses on political actors much more powerful in the system than the average legislator. Here, the electoral reform did not change much. It might actually have made things worse. Smith has calculated, using official records and new data, that 61 percent of new LDP appointees to Cabinet since 1994 were members of a legacy. While the

trends in dynastic politics in the House of Representatives and in Cabinets have tended to be highly correlated, this tendency disappears after the reform as legacy politics now focus more on Cabinets. Why this overrepresentation? Smith suggests that legacy politicians enjoy advantages (name recognition resources, connections, etc.) that are especially valued in the Executive branch. Things might change in the future as legacy candidates leave politics, but we are not there yet.

- 15 The last substantive chapter is, in my view, the weakest. It looks at the consequences of dynastic politics for representation. Admittedly, this question is extremely challenging for empirical research. How to measure output of political activities is controversial. And the influence of given individuals on policy is most of the time diffuse. An interesting finding here is that legacy politics might actually improve the descriptive representation of younger cohorts and of female citizens. Though the author admits that his empirical results are exploratory and will need further study, it seems that legacy candidates are somewhat more consistent in terms of policy platform, and that candidates in general are now less consistent than before the 1993 reform. Finally, legacy MPs are slightly more active in terms of legislative activity.
- 16 Finding the right balance between a deep understanding of a given context and a broader perspective on political phenomena is difficult. There is no doubt that Daniel M. Smith succeeds in his book. There are important insights for comparative politics scholars interested in the role of institutions in general, and strategic behaviour in particular. However, Smith does acknowledge the importance of norms and culture in the context of family dynamics.
- 17 The author does not completely achieve his objectives though. Indeed, his theory chapter has some shortcomings. While it is important to provide clear definitions to conceptual terms and hypotheses to test some assumptions, a complete theoretical framework needs more than that. Formal theory would be particularly useful here. The literature on electoral and legislative politics already provides some of the tools necessary for this purpose. Going in that direction would have two main benefits. First, there might be interactions between factors of interest that produce unexpected consequences. Only rigorous mathematical formalisation can look into this. Second, formal theory would open new paths of research in the quest for generalization. Good illustrations of this kind of formalisation is the work of George Tsebelis¹ on institutional decision-making, Gary W. Cox² on strategic behaviour, and Matthew S. Shugart and Rein Taagepera³ on electoral systems. Daniel M. Smith's book is certainly the closest thing we have right now to a comparative theory of dynastic politics, but it is not yet complete.
- 18 I want to conclude by acknowledging the massive work of data collection that was necessary for *Dynasties and Democracy*. This is part of a much broader comparative endeavour that has the potential to reinvent the study of institutionalized political actors. Some scholars are better than others at maximizing the output from such data and Smith is among the best. Quantification will never be enough on its own to understand complex phenomena such as dynastic politics. But it is a necessary step toward a broad comparative understanding of its mechanisms. The author thus deserves our congratulations for doing such a work.

NOTES

1. G. TSEBELIS, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
2. G. W. COX, *Making Votes Count*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
3. M. S. SHUGART & R. TAAGEPERA, *Votes from Seats: Logical Models of Electoral Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.