

THE EHESS FRANCE-JAPAN FOUNDATION LECTURE SERIES

"Japanese Politics and Gap Society (Kakusa Shakai): Social Cleavages, New Inequalities and Changes of Power"

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(Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies,
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Monday March 3, 2014 – 7:00pm to 8:30pm

EHESS, 105 bd Raspail 75006 Paris, Room 7

The Conference will be held in English.

□ Summary

In recent years, Japan has been marked by fundamental changes. From the late 1990s onward, a new model of Japan as a divided society has replaced the former model of Japan as a general middle class society with a very high degree of equality regarding chances and outcome. The national elections of 2007 and 2009 resulted in a historical defeat of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and in a government led by the Democratic Party Japan (DPJ). Still, the lower house election of 2012 resulted in a landslide victory of the LDP, which returned to power. Using the framework of social cleavage theory, this paper analyses the relationship between these two changes in a historical perspective. It raises the questions of whether and how the new divided society model is connected to the recent changes of power. Has the ascendance of the divided society model and its establishment as the dominant model and common sense played a role in the changes of government? The main argument is that postwar Japanese politics and over five decades of LDP dominance were marked by a social cleavage between urban and rural areas. While a social cleavage by social class never fully developed in Japanese politics, stable and strong support by rural voters was the main pillar on which the LDP's long success story was based. The new model of Japan as a divided society has played an important role in the changes in power in recent elections. Although this new divided society model has not led to an alignment by social class – as one may have expected – it has resulted in a dealignment in the rural-urban division.

PRESENTATION OF THE SPEAKER



David Chiavacci is Mercator Professor in Social Science of Japan at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His research covers economic sociology, political sociology and sociology of knowledge of contemporary Japan. His publications on social inequality and politics in Japan include: « Divided Society Model and Social Cleavages in Japanese Politics: No Alignment by Social Class, but Dealignment of Rural-Urban Split », *Contemporary Japan*, 22 (automne, 2010), 47-74., and "Immigration and 'Gap Society' in Japan: Are Foreign Workers a New Underclass?", in: Gyorgy Szell and Ute Szell (dir.), *Quality of Life & Working Life in Comparison*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp. 347-368.

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