



Shin Kanemaru and the Tragedy of Japan's Political System

Uldis Kruze

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Despite the formal appearance of a competitive, working democracy, Japanese politics in reality is dominated by money, informal connections, and collusive practices. The promise of democracy championed by the American Occupation (1945-1952) has been undermined by the informal apparatus of rule by 'fixers' and power brokers. This book is about one of these 'stage managers,' Shin Kanemaru, who played a central role in Japanese politics from the 1970s until the early 1990s. Working behind the scenes, Kanemaru controlled or strongly influenced the administrations of five Japanese Prime Ministers from Nakasone to Miyazawa. Kanemaru's political career exemplifies what can be called the tragedy of Japanese democracy: ostensibly democratic and competitive, but in reality a system based on influence, bribery, collusion, and personal connections. Kanemaru skilfully exploited the weaknesses of this system to enrich himself and his cronies, and in the process discredited the authenticity of Japan's 'democracy' in the eyes of its citizens.

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