

Pork, People, Procedure, or Policy?

What will Reconfigure Japan's Political Party System?

by

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PREFACE

After nearly four decades of painfully predictable electoral politics under what in 1964 Professor Junnosuke Masumi described as Japan's "1955 System," the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) crumbled suddenly through uncontrollable rivalry among its faction leaders, forfeiting its Lower House parliamentary majority in the July 1993 general election. Even more amazing, as the largest parliamentary bloc by far, it then failed to attract the slightly more than thirty members required to form and lead a governing coalition. This institutional suicide began a period of transition likely to continue for the next several years before giving way to a second, more stable postwar political configuration within which parties will compete for power aligned along more predictable political fault lines.

Prudent English language academic writers qualified to assess political events in Japan have been reluctant to commit their thoughts to print in spite of the opportunities for interesting comment and a more attentive public audience these historic changes have created lest the long lead time of academic publishing combine with unanticipated events to render their work outdated even before it appears. Having speculated confidently in print a few years ago on President Bush's foreign policy during his second term, I too am hesitant to forecast the likely configuration of Japan's next political party system. Below instead I undertake the more modest identification of those factors likely to determine the reconfiguration of the political party system, discuss the potential for influence of each, and conclude with a brief discussion of the significance of change in the political party system structure for Japan's domestic politics and behavior in global affairs.

KEY DETERMINANTS OF PARTY SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION

Several factors will determine the reconfiguration of Japan's national political party system during the next few years within the overall context of Japanese political culture and popular attitudes toward government. My list, in order of importance, begins with interaction among leaders of the central political elite, recent changes in the electoral system, and politicization of critical domestic and international issues.

COLLAPSE OF THE 1955 SYSTEM AND CURRENT INTERIM PERIOD

The conservative parties that combined in 1955 to form the Liberal Democratic Party dominated the elected sector of Japan's national government for most of the postwar period.¹ Without exploring the determinants of this long-running occupation of parliament, the premiership and cabinet, the conservatives' accommodation with the national bureaucracy and progressive political opposition gave Japanese politics a stability and predictability that inspired the envy of professional politicians worldwide.

By 1992, however, the failure of the party to institutionalize retirement of its leadership at a reasonable age, eruption of progressively embarrassing public disclosures of routinized political corruption, and the growing impatience of younger candidates for party leadership, combined to engineer the implosion of Japan's permanent ruling party and

¹ Indeed, their influence can be traced well back toward the beginning of this century.

beginning of a period of transition to a new stable political party system made to appear all the more disorderly by comparison with the preceding generations of political calm.

It is significant that the LDP collapsed of its own weight, rather than experience defeat at the hands of a frisky opposition that had mobilized dramatic changes in public sentiment to destroy them. It suffered an *organizational* rather than *electoral* loss.² The LDP wasn't slain, in other words; it committed organizational suicide. The absence of a victor risen from the field of battle prepared to define and command Japan's new party system has affected the course of events during the early period of the transition, and surely will influence the new party system as it coagulates into a more predictable configuration.

Since the organizational meltdown of the LDP under the hapless Kiichi Miyazawa, the Nagatacho Basho has rewarded patient fans with bouts of political conflict that have produced three unusual coalition cabinets within a year. The first spectacle, just after the July 1993 general election, featured the LDP snatching defeat from the jaws of victory as its most prominent disaffected *enfant terrible*, Ichiro Ozawa, organized a coalition of all non-LDP members of parliament – save the Communists – against it that required the presence of an eighteenth generation descendent of a powerful feudal family and grandson of a wartime prime minister, Morihiro Hosokawa, at its head to mask its ideological and institutional heterogeneity.³ The fact that Hosokawa's next-door Mejiro neighbor, Kakuei Tanaka, had sponsored his entrance to politics was omitted from personal biographies and press accounts.

Hosokawa entered office wildly popular with the press and public. It was his only tangible political asset. He represented something different, the embodiment of hope for change that might restore popular credibility and meaning to national politics beyond that of just another spectator sport. But if Hosokawa's status as 1993 political reform/anti-corruption poster boy provided immediate strength, it also rendered him vulnerable to disclosure of past financial indiscretions, reminders of which the LDP soon provided gleefully via other cooperative players and the press. Media revelation of financial lapses of judgment near inconsequential under 1955 System rules of the game smudged Hosokawa's popular image. His public popularity dropped sharply, he took personal offense, and after only eight months in office suddenly announced his decision to leave the *Kantei*, taking with him most of the population's hopes for meaningful political reform.

After some inter-elite wrangling, Tsutomu Hata replaced Hosokawa on April 28, 1994. Hata, son of an important LDP politician whose amiability and personal manner lent credibility to the popular myth he rose from humble beginnings as a tour bus conductor, was expected to compensate for lack of aristocratic pedigree and attendant sense of a transcendental existence "above politics" with warmth of personality and sincerity.

Hata also was closer to the real organizer of the anti-LDP coalition, Ichiro Ozawa, than Hosokawa, and this more practical political arrangement might have endured but for

² See Robert C. Angel, "The People Have Mumbled: Implications of Japan's July 1993 General Election," paper presented 9/26/93 at the Southern Japan Seminar, Panama City Beach, Florida, for a more detailed explanation of this point.

³ I believe the popular perception of Hosokawa as a man "above" the people rather than as a man of the people was the essential ingredient in his immense personal popularity prior to the Sagawa-related revelations. This says little encouraging about Japanese democracy at the popular level.

Ozawa's failure to accurately judge the elasticity of the Socialist component of his coalition. Ozawa made little effort to disguise plans to restructure the ideological makeup of the group by reducing the influence of the Socialists and encouraging defections of more congenial LDP leaders and their followers to the "cause."

This reasonable program exploded in his hands, however, when the Socialists refused to accept publicly recognized near ceremonial status with little influence over coalition governance and bolted, leaving Ozawa and Hata to form a minority cabinet that limped along painfully for only two months.

Indeed, so crude was Ozawa's handling of the Socialists that by the end of June, Nagatacho's fans were rewarded with the even more unusual spectacle of an LDP-dominated coalition presenting as prime minister a left-leaning senior Socialist, Tomiichi Murayama, best known until then for his prominent eyebrows and dogged pursuit during parliamentary debate in 1989 of Prime Minister Takeshita's alleged relationships with *yakuza*.

The readiness of 1955 System adversaries to affiliate in defense of political position, and the relative ease with which at the center they stifled long-advocated ideological positions for the sake of mutual advantage, bound together mainly by mutual abhorrence and fear of the renegade Ozawa, should give all analysts of Japanese politics food for thought. It is ironic that this least conventional of the three post-1955 System cabinet arrangements seems likely to endure longer than either of its predecessors.

INTERACTION AMONG CENTRAL POLITICAL ELITES

Personalistic competition and cooperation among members of the central political elite unrelated to policy or ideological orientation – *Nagatacho politics*, in other words – remains even after collapse of the 1955 System the most important determinant of change in the political party system and of the options presented to Japan's politically attentive public for support or opposition. The maneuvering for position and influence of senior individual politicians and their supporters far outweighs the significance of other factors, including issues and ideological orientation, in the near and medium term.

As noted above, the LDP's implosion was not instigated by voter rejection, or even by disputes over policy or ideology among its leaders. Rather, it was triggered by Ichiro Ozawa's failure to succeed Shin Kanemaru as head of the Takeshita Faction. Ozawa ostentatiously criticized the traditional LDP leadership's lack of zeal for "political reform" as he bolted the party. But he was unlikely to say anything else given the delicacy of his position as churlish defector.

Only a few of Tokyo's context-starved foreign journalists working through layers of Japanese speaking helpers have ever considered Ozawa a genuinely reformist alternative to the corrupt practices of the LDP. If Kakuei Tanaka, the personification of evil for Japan's political reformers, has a living heir, he is Ichiro Ozawa.⁴

⁴ Makiko Tanaka, Director General of the Science & Technology Agency in the Murayama Cabinet, inherited from her father a fortune of staggering proportions and many of the personal characteristics required to play the role of political fixer institutionalized in the 1955 System. But the combination of traditional gender bias and inexperience will give Ozawa the advantage for some time to come. Competition between

The anti-LDP coalition that nominated Morihiro Hosokawa as prime minister just after the July 1993 election was hardly based upon a broad consensus among its members and their local level supporters on issues of policy or political ideology easily distinguishable from the principles espoused by the LDP.

Indeed, the only ideological blush to grace its cheek was steadfast exclusion of the Japan Communist Party (JCP). And JCP absence was as much or more the result of Communist distaste for the coalition as the other way around. Ichiro Ozawa enticed recruits to his anti-LDP coalition not by policy agenda appeals but with the hope that lieutenants of the 1955 System's parliamentary Permanent Opposition hitherto excluded from cabinet service might end the humiliation of profitable mahjong sessions with LDP members of the Diet Steering Committees, and at last enjoy the financial, electoral, and symbolic benefits that accrue from cabinet service, known to the end of their days by the mellifluous appellation "*daijin*." The fall of the LDP and rise of the anti-LDP coalition led by Hosokawa, therefore, provides striking evidence of the influence of interaction within the central political elite.

What then of more recent events that led to the LDP's return to power? Did Japan's voters after nearly a year of observing the new government's revolutionary changes reject them and their policies at the polls? Hardly. First, it is worthy of notice here that no general election was considered necessary before or after this dramatic change of government. And second, even if a general election had been held, Japan's voters would have had difficulty distinguishing the policies of the incumbent coalition from those of its LDP opposition.

The Liberal Democratic Party was not called back into service by a public disillusioned with opposition efforts to change existing policies. Its return was occasioned by much the same configuration of forces that precipitated its departure: miscalculation of a key member of the central political elite in his pursuit of organizational advantage. This time Ichiro Ozawa over-played his hand with the Socialists in much the way LDP Secretary General Seiroku Kajiyama had miscalculated Ozawa's willingness to bolt the LDP in 1993. Kajiyama must have savored the moment.

One might offer Ozawa's effort to exclude the Socialists from his anti-LDP coalition in the wake of Hosokawa's resignation as evidence of the significance of ideology or policy on the course of recent events. But I believe that too would distort the interpretation of history. Ozawa's efforts to manage the anti-LDP coalition in office had been frustrated at times by the fears of his Socialist collaborators for the policy sensitivity of their local supporters, and he surely would have preferred to work with politicians less constrained.

But Ozawa himself was much more interested in crushing the LDP, the one genuine organizational threat to his own ambitions, than in the ideological consistency of his own forces. He hoped by excluding the Socialists to make defection a more attractive option for senior LDP leaders on the verge of jumping ship, and to assure them that his newly fitted political tanker was seaworthy.

Ozawa and Tanaka in the future is likely, though, if meaningful change in Japan's political system is delayed long enough to allow Tanaka the time necessary to broaden her personalistic relationships within Nagata-cho.

Ozawa miscalculated. Perhaps, ironically, he even *over*-estimated the ideological commitment of the Socialist leadership and the barrier that commitment constituted to cooperation with their sworn adversaries, the LDP. Perhaps too Ozawa had by then begun the fatal practice of reading his own news clips and had grown so confident of his abilities as a political operator that older and more wily LDP politicians were able to mislead him about their intentions with the Nagata-cho equivalent of a sucker punch. Either way, inter-elite cooperation and competition have been the primary determinants of political events.

If more evidence is needed to support the claim that inter-elite wrangling within Japan's central political elite has been the driving force behind recent political change in Japan, the makeup and performance of the current ruling coalition should fill the gap. Emergence of this bizarre conglomeration of right-leaning members of the LDP and left-leaning members of the SDPJ shocked even Japan's hard-bitten national political reporters, those cynical keepers of tales of political intrigue that never reach the pages of respectable Japanese newspapers and journals.

The willingness of the individuals who represented the 1955 System's left and right wings to stand before the people in political matrimony bound only by mutual distaste for Ichiro Ozawa was deemed unseemly even by Nagata-cho's generous standards of political conduct. How could Japan's legislative institutions fail to appear to the Japanese public--and to the world--as a flimsy screen behind which the national bureaucracy really ran the government?

The sacrilegious LDP-SDPJ alliance makes perfect sense if the main players are seen as a typical "Old Guard" united in opposition to change, struggling to preserve a political representative system that had afforded each of them a comfortable and lucrative existence while the national bureaucracy did all the heavy lifting. Indignant journalists and commentators labeled the coalition an "illicit union," or "shack-up," that represented the worst tendencies of political self preservation among elites intent upon attaining political power for themselves and cynically manipulating public support to that end. Properly democratic editorialists rhetorically questioned how such events could transpire.

But everyone understood it was achieved through a coincidence of fear and loathing of Ichiro Ozawa among those central political players he had defined as impediments rather than opportunities in his grand scheme for political reorganization. Ozawa remained the nation's most prominent proponent of "political reform" as he continued to ruthlessly play the traditional game he had learned at the knees of Kakuei Tanaka and Shin Kanemaru.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFORM

Recently legislated changes in the rules that govern competition for election to the Lower House of the Diet is the second most important source of pressure for change in the re-configuration of Japan's political party system during the next few years of this transition from the 1955 System.⁵

⁵ For a comprehensive, yet readable discussion of electoral reform based on a paper given at the 1993 annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, see Raymond V. Christensen, "Electoral Reform in Ja-

Few lectures on contemporary Japanese politics omit mention of the unusual--though not quite unique--Lower House electoral system. The medium-sized, multi-member, single vote system has been blamed for a variety of political ills, including corruption, the lack of party alternation in power, the relative insignificance of "real issues" in politics, the weakness of political parties at the expense of individual politicians, and the affliction of personalistic factions, to list only the most common.

In the last three decades only one serious commentator, Nathaniel B. Thayer, has described Japan's traditional electoral system to me in other than negative terms.⁶ The discredited system has been reformed at last, providing observers opportunities during the next few years to draw more informed conclusions about its impact on electoral politics, including the political party system.⁷ If our long-espoused assessment of its significance for national politics is correct, revision should matter. Whether it will accomplish all that is expected, and whether all of the change it actually does accomplish will be positive, remains to be seen.

The new system replaces the 129 multi-member, single-vote, medium-sized districts of its predecessor with a combination of 300 constituencies electing a single representative and eleven districts nationwide of varying size that elect an additional 200 representatives through proportional representation. The combination resulted from a last-minute compromise between proponents of small single-member districts and supporters of proportional representation. The majority LDP and its progeny had proposed single-member constituencies for years in response to media and public pressure for reform. This change was opposed by the Socialists and other parties too small to reasonably expect to receive electoral majorities as a means of maintaining some parliamentary representation after the reform. Political reality demanded a compromise solution.

The change of rules under which candidates compete for votes is certain to have some effect on electoral competition, and through that on political parties and the interaction among them that once routinized will constitute the reconfigured political party system. Pro-reform forces now are elated. But reform of the electoral system has been discussed and anticipated for so long and achieved with such difficulty that expectations have risen to the point that they are bound to be discouraged in practice.

After the first and second general elections, *Chuo Koron*, *Sekai*, and *Bungei Shunju* are likely to carry articles that express disappointment and explain why results have failed to satisfy expectations. After the third election, contrarian academics and the ubiquitous *hyoronka* will begin to propose return to the old system, perhaps citing in comparison the immediate postwar fiasco created by forced abandonment of Japan's "traditional" system

pan: How it was Enacted, and Changes it May Bring." *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 7, July 1994, pp. 589-605.

⁶ The electoral system was under especially heavy attack during mid-1993 when *seiji kaikaku* fever was at its peak. Thayer argued at the time that change in the system would be ill-advised because it was the only aspect of the political system the public had confidence in, and that it had endured since the mid-1920s little changed because of that. Personal discussion with Nathaniel Thayer, International House, Tokyo, May 1993.

⁷ Italy too made similar changes in their national electoral system in 1993, and for similar reasons. The comparison should prove interesting.

by the foreign Occupation. Structure by then will have adapted adequately to make return to the status quo ante difficult.

The impact of the reforms is most obvious to date in the efforts of individual incumbents and challengers to adapt their campaign organizations to the realities of the new districts. The average electoral district is considerably smaller now with well over twice the number of districts nationwide. But under the only-one-winner rules of the new system, candidates hoping to win will be forced to appeal to voters district wide, and--again on average--to a larger number of votes from a broader, more diverse constituency.

It no longer will be possible to focus one's campaign tightly in a secure corner of the district through traditional *koenkai* politics, or on a few related organizations. Personalistic/clientelistic aspects of *koenkai* politics may not disappear over night. But the new system gradually will force changes in campaign style throughout the country. *Jiban* handed down for generations no longer retain their effectiveness; they must be broadened and strengthened through different strategies to assure victory.

I expect candidates to rely more than before on indirect appeals to the public through the communications media, especially through local television. This will amplify the role of the electronic media in political campaigns, and also benefit those politicians able to project a positive image to the public through television and radio appearances at the expense of their more taciturn, less telegenic opponents.

Television skills have become more important in national Japanese politics during the past two years due to changing styles of television coverage.⁸ Whether expansion of this trend to the local level will help to elect better qualified representatives remains to be seen.⁹ Experience from comparable political systems in industrialized democracies, including the United States Congress, can be presented both for and against the proposition.

Political analysts at least since Duverger have expected single-member, winner-take-all systems to encourage formation of two large ideologically moderate parties, a trend that, all else constant, encourages political stability and maintenance of the status quo. This expectation, combined with anticipation of public funding of parties, has inspired the near-frenzied efforts of the current opposition parties (save the Communists) under the direction of Ichiro Ozawa to form a "new new party," dubbed at the end of September "*Kaikaku*," or "Reform," able to endorse candidates capable of competing in winner-take-all contests with those endorsed by the currently ruling LDP-DSPJ-Sakigake coalition.

Ozawa and his allies seem within striking distance of their dream of a *shin shin to* as of this writing. The prospect of managing distribution of a large portion of the 300 oku yen

⁸ I refer here to a different but related phenomenon, the more confrontational tone of the weekend political news programs that encourage debate among senior politicians invited to appear and explain their positions.

⁹ Consider the differences between Masayoshi Ohira and Yasuhiro Nakasone. Ohira was a lovable mumbler who was a disaster on television, and knew it. Nakasone was the first prime minister (some observers argue that it was Miki) to use television effectively, behaving more like a third-term U.S. House of Representatives hairspray delight than a traditional Japanese "statesman."

(approximately \$300 million) to be released to the parties by the Ministry of Home Affairs in public funding of election campaigning has inspired a more cooperative mood in Tokyo. But, at the local level where politics is not necessarily a full-time calling, and where motivation of participants often is more complex, battles have become even more intense and unpredictable.

How does one explain from Tokyo that age-old enemies must unite in support of candidates who will do battle against age-old friends? And how does one decide which group gets to name the single candidate who will represent the side? This unpredictable political realignment at the local level usually has little to do with issues, and its pursuit may or may not discourage corruption and continuation of personalistic/clientelistic patterns of political interaction.

Under these conditions, is the new system likely to encourage political candidates to compete for popular support on the basis of their ideologies and differences of position on meaningful issues than on the less “national” personalistic appeals characteristic of *koenkai* politics? Will the political import of pork fall and that of policy rise? It seems unlikely that reform of the electoral system alone will achieve that commendable objective.

What, first of all, qualifies as a “meaningful issue,” and who determines the agenda? Television is unlikely to more effectively encourage definition of meaningful issues and facilitate public debate over them during campaigns than the newspapers. Japan’s post-war voters were nearly always presented with sharp ideological alternatives to the policies of the LDP. And even if the new system does encourage formation of two large catch-all parties that battle to dominate the center of the ideological spectrum, this would tend to homogenize meaningful political debate even more than under the LDP-dominated 1955 System.

Finally, will the electoral reform package passed at by the Diet at the end of January 1994 achieve the most important expectation of its supporters and significantly reduce the blatant political corruption that has corroded the relationship between the population and their elected representatives since the dawn of Japan’s parliamentary institutions?

This seems to me unlikely unless the harsher legal penalties and generous government funding of campaigns is accompanied by a decline in the cynicism of the public about their political representatives, and Japan’s prosecutors become emboldened to pursue obvious instances of political corruption by emergence of a truly competitive political party system that will insulate them from political retribution for doing their jobs. Such a change will require more than legislation.

ISSUES

What then of the role of political issues in the reconfiguration of Japan’s party system over the next few years? Issues will matter, but will continue to be of less importance than either inter-elite wrangling over political advantage or the recent reform of the Lower House electoral system. The significance of issues is complicated even further now by the party configuration of the current ruling coalition – and, for that matter, of the Opposition. Ideological diversity has driven coalition agreement on major policy issues to such vague levels of generalization that even those effective in the past have become

virtually meaningless in electoral competition. Both the governing coalition and the opposition end up steadfastly committed to doing good and militantly opposed to evil! The policy statements of both sides have been insipid even by 1955 System standards.

If the first two factors discussed above represent the “who” and “how” of Japan’s national politics, “issues” are the “what” – the ultimate justification for the system’s existence. Pluralistically inclined observers judge democratic systems healthiest when political competition is based upon appeals by individuals, groups, and parties for popular support for their positions on issues of genuine significance. This minimizes manipulation of the system by self-interested members of the incumbent government while reducing alienation and increasing popular support with an enhanced sense of public participation.

In any system that bases its legitimacy on the consent of the governed, political competition among individuals, groups, and parties occurs beneath banners emblazoned with “issues” considered salient to key current and potential constituencies. Pursuit of political power for personal reward, symbolic or substantive, may be pervasive, may even be determinant. But, like body order, it is considered vulgar, and society demands it be masked with a perfume up to the task.

Japan is no exception, though Japanese political society seems less demanding in this regard than other industrial democracies. Perhaps because of high public confidence in the national bureaucracy, Japan’s public allows its political representatives considerably more latitude and even seems to associate effective personal aggrandizement via national politics with ability to benefit the district or key constituents at the expense of the national budget.¹⁰

Topics mobilized in pursuit of political support are as diverse in Japan as those in any advanced industrialized democracy and vary considerably over time. But four have been especially prominent during this period of political party system transition and are likely to remain significant for the next few years.

The System Itself

First, and most significant, is the political system itself and the near-universal call for reform mentioned above: not what the political system does, but how it should be doing it. Especially strong is the demand for institutional and procedural changes that will reduce the level of blatant political corruption that erupts regularly like an unsightly boil on the face of Japanese politics.

Pork-barrel politics, or efforts to short-circuit the government’s allocative system in ways that sluice larger than normally allocated servings of the national budget into the troughs of constituents or political supporters, is tolerated in most political systems. But politicians’ accumulation of large stores of personal wealth violates acceptable practice. Public revelation of instances of such behavior, such as recent television footage of police offi-

¹⁰ A noted American specialist on Japanese politics a few years ago described an election rally for a relatively junior LDP politician during the Recruit scandal during which a senior LDP official brought in to support his candidacy told the crowd they shouldn’t think any less of their representative just because he hadn’t yet been named in the scandal.

cials trundling heavy loads identified as boxes of gold bars out of the house of Shin Kanemaru, raises the level of public concern and cynicism. Recent revelation of the \$121 million estate that rural Niigata bumpkin-turned-politician Kakuei Tanaka legally left his heirs also will inspire comment once the public has had time to absorb its significance. Tanaka's hoard would buy nearly 20,000 pounds gold at current rates of exchange!

All elected representatives have now become "reformers," even, as Christensen notes in his *Asian Survey* article, those actively *opposing* reform.¹¹ Such obvious corruption was attributed to factors such as the LDP's long tenure as ruling party and the existence of intra-party competitive factions, which, in turn, was blamed on the multi-member, single-vote electoral system. Legislation that could be described as "political reform" without too much embarrassment had to be passed to maintain the credibility of the system that clothed and fed incumbents in such lavish style. Little thought was given to the idea that corruption thrived earlier in the century as well under a more competitive political party system.

Economic Policy

Japan's political parties in the past have disagreed over interpretation of the appropriate role of government in the national economy: how taxes should be collected; how the tax burden should be distributed throughout the population; and how government funds should be redistributed once collected. These are issues of real significance faced by all industrialized democracies, and Japan's situation differs only in the level of responsibility assumed by national bureaucrats at the expense of elected officials or political appointees.

Under the 1955 System, the ruling LDP leaned toward fiscal conservatism and policies that promoted the efficiency of the national economy through encouragement of big business, while Opposition parties encouraged policies intended to more equitably distribute wealth, such as social welfare spending and progressive methods of taxation that advantaged lower income groups at the expense of large corporations and individuals with higher incomes.

But this fertile issue area of political competition too has been compromised by the party makeup of the current ruling coalition and opposition. With traditional conservatives and traditional progressives combined in each group it is difficult to differentiate their public appeal on the basis of economic policy. Indeed, both camps in their official statements stand four-square behind "improvement of the people's livelihood."

This puzzling homogenization of the public positions of the parties does not mean Japan has achieved a national consensus on economic policy. Rather, the forum within which debate now does occur has been reduced to the small circle of party leaders responsible for maintaining a "coalition consensus" on the issues, hidden to the extent possible from public view and comment. The result reduces the potency of economic issues as a factor in the reconfiguration of the political party system.

¹¹ Christensen, p. 597.

Global Diplo-Military Policy and “Sengo Shori”

A third issue area that in the past has served to differentiate the popular appeals of political parties is Japan’s appropriate role in global diplo-military affairs and the closely related effort to agree on a domestically and internationally acceptable interpretation of Japan’s role in the Pacific War.

Modern Japan has maintained a solid and consistent consensus on the economic aspects of foreign policy. In contrast to the United States, afflicted during the latter half of the twentieth century by the calamitous combination of Cold War Syndrome and neo-classical economics, Japan’s government and politically relevant public has understood at least since the beginning of the Meiji period that Japanese domestic economic development and prosperity depended greatly upon her economic relationship with the rest of the world. Japan must import essential raw materials and technology, and export adequate high labor and technology value-added products to pay for essential imports and improve the quality of life at home. This has meant pursuit of international economic policies that encourage maximization of foreign exchange earnings and domestic policies that advantage those large companies most likely to export.

Military aspects of foreign policy have proved more controversial. In spite of the high esteem in which the national bureaucracy is held in the area of economic policy, the memory of the government’s disastrous military policies during the 1930s and 1940s remains a persistent stain on the bureaucracy’s overall record. Japan’s participation in World War Two was defined – by the victors – as immoral. “Militarists” were charged with responsibility for that immoral national behavior, identified, and publicly punished through purge, prison, or death.

While unfortunate for that small percentage of the population identified immediately following the war as militarists, the limited scope of assigned responsibility was a relief to the vast majority of the population, and the sense of relief encouraged home support for that historical interpretation of convenience. Militarism, militarists, and anything related to military affairs, especially Japanese military affairs, sold at steep discount in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s, making LDP plans for a more active defense sector worth arguing about.

Part of the price of Japan’s re-admission to international society after World War Two was constitutional renunciation of the use of military force in the settlement of international disputes. This appealed not only to the international community, but also to many Japanese who had been bitterly disappointed with their government’s recent handling of the military aspects of foreign affairs.

Not everyone agreed, however. With the end of the Allied Occupation, some conservatives, a few of them prominent Occupation purgees, began to voice public disagreement with both the letter and spirit of their new constitution’s Article IX. The LDP platform at their encouragement soon included assurance of the Party’s commitment to constitutional revision, especially revision of Article IX that would return Japan to the status of what Ichiro Ozawa would describe in the early 1990s as a “normal nation.”

The Left found opposition to conservative efforts to revise the constitution not only the right thing to do, but also an issue that attracted and consolidated public support, one in-

deed that proved more popular than the economic policies espoused by the progressive parties. Building on the negative image of the military bureaucracy and their record during the war, the Opposition parties incorporated “preservation of the constitution” into their basic platforms, a phrase that meant opposition to revision of Article IX and focused a large share of their public activities on its pursuit. A line of enduring political cleavage had been drawn across Japanese postwar politics in ink.

The price of admission to the most recent LDP cabinet for the Socialist Party, now officially in English the Social Democratic Party of Japan, has yet to include their agreement to revision of Article IX. But under the encouragement of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, Japan’s leading Opposition party under the 1955 System has been persuaded to abandon long-held policies such as opposition to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, rejection of the constitutionality of the Self Defense Forces, and the dispatch of armed – if only lightly – SDF forces abroad.

The effect of this sudden change has had devastating impact on party organization at the local level, the impact of which we must wait until the next general election to observe. Former Opposition parties under the LDP-dominated 1955 System that joined in anti-LDP coalition under Hosokawa’s banner, now struggling to bring “reform” to life to oppose the LDP-DSPJ-Sakigake incumbent coalition in electoral battle, also have been forced to mute their previously strong anti-military views in the spirit of cooperation and mutual political advantage. Only the Japan Communist Party remains disdainfully aloof, nurtured it seems by continued public rejection of their basic political message.

Another related issue is encapsulated in the terse Japanese phrase “*senjo shori*,” or the effort to settle accounts of the postwar period. This too represents genuine differences of opinion within Japan about an issue that today is even more important as Japan moves to multilateralize its diplomacy in the post-Cold War period, and in the process hopes to develop more substantial economic and political ties with other countries of Asia.

Specific topics of debate under *senjo shori* include individual compensation for Japan’s atomic bomb victims, government compensation of foreign women forced into sexual slavery by Japan’s wartime military, interpretation of Japan’s role in the Pacific War in media such as school textbooks, and a variety of less specific issues such as statements by senior government personnel justifying Japan’s military policies during the 1930s and 1940s, official visits to Yasukuni Shrine on days commemorating war dead, recognition of the *Hi no Maru* flag and *Kimi ga Yo* anthem as national symbols, and similar issues.

The common theme running throughout these diverse subjects is the contemporary interpretation of Japan’s recent military history and the implications of that interpretation for current policy. Tension arises between groups and individuals on the one hand who for the distrust of Japan’s military officials described above oppose augmentation of their role in Japanese foreign policy today, joined by traditional pacifists.

Opposed are those who view Japan’s re-integration into postwar global society as incomplete until Japan is willing and able to assume full responsibility for its own national security. For those in the former group the record of the disastrous 1930s and 1940s provides powerful support for their position, and they oppose any effort they believe either legitimates or eradicates memories of those experiences. Their opponents see misguided

interpretations of the 1930s and 1940s as the most serious impediment to their objectives, and either argue for reinterpretation or discourage those who would emphasize its “negative” implications.

The blurring of lines on this issue of *senjo shori* will obstruct Japan’s effort to come to grips with its recent past and continue to adversely affect efforts to improve relations with Asian neighbors during the post-Cold War era of diplomatic diversification. Realization of the negative implications of this situation may eventually encourage a regrouping of political opinion that will affect reconfiguration of the political party system.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTY SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION:

Above I have identified the three factors most likely to influence reconfiguration of Japan’s political party system: central political elite horse-trading; reform of the Lower House electoral system; and politicization of various issues. Will these factors after a few years of transition produce a new party system similar in function to its 1955 System predecessor, only redecorated with a new generation of leaders and different party labels?

Or will they combine to create a significantly different system that more effectively links Japan’s population with the government and gives them a greater sense of responsibility for and influence over political outcomes at the national level? Can Japan escape the trend of popular alienation from government evident in the industrialized democracies of North America and Western Europe? In short, will all of this really matter?

RELATIONS BETWEEN BUREAUCRATS AND POLITICIANS

Meaningful political change will require transformation of the relationship between Japan’s elected political representatives and the higher civil servants of the career national bureaucracy. Japan’s career bureaucrats today enjoy greater public credibility than do the public’s own elected representatives. The Neo-Confucianist tinted traditional Japanese political culture, historical example, and the structure and operation of the national system of political representation combine to form what Japan’s public expects from their parliamentary representatives and appointed officials on the one hand, and how politicians and career bureaucrats perceive their own governmental roles on the other.

Redefinition of these traditional roles in the postwar constitution has been only one of several factors determining this important relationship. In practice, Diet members are expected by their constituents, and by themselves, to “bring home the bacon”; senior bureaucrats are expected, both by the public and by themselves, to define and pursue the national interest. It is not clear who is expected to assume overall responsibility for the performance of government.

The terms of political competition must change if this relationship upon which the quality of democratic national government so greatly depends is to improve. To strengthen their credibility as government leaders, candidates for office must reduce the extent to which they base appeals for electoral support on their willingness and ability to diddle the national budget process to the advantage of their constituents and of special interest groups who provide their political and/or living expenses. Candidates must increase the extent to which they appeal for popular support through their positions on “real issues” and their qualifications to exercise effective governmental leadership.

The tension produced in any democratic political system by the constitutionally mandated micro and macro expectations inherent in parliamentary representation intensifies this problem. At the micro level, representatives are responsible for defending and promoting the immediate interests of their local constituents. Simultaneously on the macro level they are charged collectively with oversight of the bureaucracy's discharge of its administrative responsibilities, and individually, when selected by their peers, with executive oversight of the ministries and agencies of government. Micro and macro responsibilities may conflict, both at the level of execution and on the campaign trail.

To date, this tension has been resolved in Japan overwhelmingly in favor of micro responsibilities, and this micro orientation explains much of the difficulty in the relationship between Japan's politicians and bureaucrats. Political representatives will continue to experience difficulty meeting their constitutionally mandated macro-level political responsibilities until the electoral recruitment process begins to demand more in the way of governmental effectiveness and local demand for political pork declines.

In addition to changes in popular expectations, this will require a reconfigured party system that will encourage political parties to base their organizational appeals more on macro and less on micro commitments. This is another way of saying that "real issues" must become more important as markers in Japanese political competition and pork-barrel style micro issues less. Japan's proud national bureaucrats will remain little inconvenienced by "political interference" until elected representatives earn a higher level of popular legitimacy and credibility as governmental leaders than they enjoy today.

A change in the macro direction would require a shift from short-term pork-barrel popular political expectations and campaign appeals to campaigns in which candidates and parties appeal to voters on the basis of their broader, longer-term interests and positions on national political issues. Candidates thus elected would have the political clout necessary to exercise their constitutionally mandated bureaucratic oversight responsibilities and assume responsibility for the actions of government.

As long as bureaucrats can defend themselves from politicians' efforts to "interfere" in their conduct of the government with public appeals that imply politicians are untrustworthy, selfish, and corrupt agents of special interests, Japan's elected representatives will never fulfill their constitutionally mandated leadership responsibilities.

Critics of this position may argue that Japan's politicians already have the government well in hand. I disagree and believe that events during the past 18 months have helped to expose the weakness of that counter argument. Critics also may question the distinction between macro and micro responsibilities and issues. That objection has more merit than the first. But I believe the distinction is both valid and significant, more than just a difference of degree. In practice, political campaigns in all systems are a blend of both types of appeal. But the overall system benefits when emphasis shifts toward the macro.

WILL JAPAN BECOME MORE GLOBALLY COOPERATIVE?

Japan's government seems to find it difficult to achieve the delicate balance between competitive and cooperative behavior that effective diplomacy requires. All governments must cooperate, if only to assure the continued participation of their negotiating counterparts. But a posture perceived at home as too cooperative risks alienating domestic inter-

ests upon whose support the representative depends to remain in office. So, they must behave competitively to maintain the confidence and support of politically important interests at home.

Yet, national representatives who arrive at international negotiations in too competitive a mood risk alienating their international counterparts. If the nation represented is important enough, and if its representatives are aggressive enough, such over-competitive behavior risks destruction of the whole negotiation and sabotage of the international agreements and institutions upon which the welfare of all national participants has come to depend. Effective national representatives must be able, therefore, to agree as well as to refuse, to exercise the discretion that allows them to offer and to give as well as demand and take. That level of discretion requires the confidence of national constituents that their representatives will pursue their long-term interests during negotiations even when forced to make short-term concessions.

For reasons not completely clear, Japan's representatives have proven better competitors than cooperators during international negotiations. This, I believe, is not because the Japanese are mean or belligerent by nature, but is yet another disadvantage of a constitutionally democratic political system dominated by bureaucrats rather than elected representatives. Japan's politicians regularly play symbolic representative roles in foreign affairs. But with only rare exceptions (far rarer, in my opinion, than the English language literature on the subject suggests), they behave pretty much as instructed by their bureaucratic "subordinates," and are especially obedient when the role assigned is described by the bureaucracy as important to Japan's national interests.

Why in any system should professional bureaucrats find it more difficult than elected politicians to compromise in international negotiations? Could not the opposite argument be as easily made? Wild-eyed nationalistic politicians depending on the capricious approval of the crowd to maintain their status should be more inclined to "play to the grandstand" at home than career-secure national bureaucrats who can afford the luxury of longer range planning without fear of unemployment. Japan's bureaucrats, on average, are better educated and better informed than politicians, as they are in other industrialized democracies. They should know better!

This incongruity is explained by examining the nature of Japan's bureaucrats and politicians and the relationship between them. As Michael Blaker argues persuasively in *Japanese International Negotiating Style*, Japan's inter-agency competition results in such prolonged and tortured domestic negotiations to reach agreement on positions to be presented at international conferences that it is difficult for their presenters to adapt their stands to the needs of the negotiation once agreed upon.¹² This sharply reduces the discretion of Japanese representatives while abroad. And, not surprisingly, it usually is easier to reach agreement among highly competitive agencies beforehand on an aggressive position than on one more conciliatory.

This leads me to conclude that Japanese diplomacy would benefit from institutional transformation that increased the influence of politicians over bureaucrats and made those political representatives more responsible to the Japanese public for their conduct

¹² Michael Blaker, *Japanese International Negotiating Style*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

of national affairs. More credible members of parliament will select from among their ranks prime ministers who enjoy greater public confidence and cabinets able to mobilize that public confidence into more effective central coordination of governmental affairs, including foreign relations. There is evidence that once things settle down, change in that direction may result from the collapse of the Liberal Democratic Party and resulting re-configuration the political party structure that have entertained Japan and the world with a colorful parade of prime ministers during the past few months.¹³

To succeed, Japan's political leaders will have to integrate the Japanese population into the foreign policy processes more effectively than they have in the past by disseminating a more realistic interpretation of Japan's position in the world to the Japanese public. That optimistic prediction has yet to be verified by events, and Japan continues along with a political system that adapts to important changes in its international environment only with great difficulty, reduced to embarrassing and dysfunctional reliance on *gai-atsu* to achieve domestic consensus on changes that nearly all participants as individuals can accept as inevitable to protect Japan's longer-term interests. A political party system re-configured to provide Japan's public with more meaningful electoral choices would, therefore, benefit not only Japan, but Japan's international negotiating partners as well.

NEAR AND MEDIUM-TERM PROSPECTS

Japan's political party system continues to wrestle with changes in political culture and popular attitudes/expectations toward government created by education of two generations of Japanese under the new postwar constitution, the social impact of the shift from an industrial to post-industrial economy, and collapse of the Cold War bipolar global order abroad. The current period of transition is likely to continue for some time before a more predictable configuration of parties competing across sharper political cleavages will replace the venerable 1955 System and successfully challenge the national bureaucracy for control of government.

During the fluid period up to the next general election, at least, central parliamentary forces are likely to remain arrayed in their current Ozawa – anti-Ozawa configuration. After furnishing the hostility and sense of threat adequate to bring the LDP and SDPJ together in coalition adequate to form a cabinet, Ozawa at the end of September managed to herd the disparate “*Kyosanto Nozoku*” [All But the Communists] crowd of ten parties and organizations into a bloc labeled *Kaikaku*, or Reform. Under this configuration, the LDP, Socialists and Sakigake together claim 295 of the Lower House's 511 seats, and the Reform Bloc 187.

Ozawa's group has yet to reach consensus on its policies or platform beyond the universally espoused “promotion of unspecified political reforms, public welfare, and international cooperation,” or even agreement on which of the three participating former prime ministers (Kaifu, Hosokawa, or Hata) will be given the honor of fronting for Ozawa while he manages the coalition in good *bakufu* fashion from the less visible position of Kanjicho.

¹³ Consensus on this point within the academic community falls something short of unanimity. This is not the place to introduce the argument in detail. See my forthcoming book on the postwar evolution of the premiership and cabinet in Japan's national policy processes for a fuller presentation.

The participants have agreed to vote in parliament against the incumbent LDP-SDPJ-Sakigake anti-Ozawa coalition under the baton of Tomiichi Murayama, and to form a real party by the end of the year. Their first significant public act was boycott of Murayama's prime ministerial policy speech on September 30, creating the spectacle of a prime minister speaking to a half-empty Diet chamber for the first time since Murayama and his Socialist colleagues boycotted Eisaku Sato's keynote speech in 1966.

This Ozawa – Anti-Ozawa cleavage makes sense during the current period of transition, but has little to recommend it as the enduring configuration of the new party system. The ruling coalition represents, above all else, opposition to Ozawa's effort to disturb the comfortable arrangements of the 1955 system by its most prominent organizational players. It has yet to absorb the impact of local organizational confusion created by conflict over endorsement of candidates in the new electoral districts for the next general election.

Ozawa's "*kaikaku*" group is a bit more programmatic and has suggested (without inter-group consensus) some changes in domestic and international policy. But at core it represents Ozawa's determination to smash the LDP's parliamentary monopoly. It too will suffer organizational chaos during candidate endorsement slugfests in preparation for the next election.

Many Japanese also have grave doubts about the direction of their proposals, illustrated by the vigorous debate within the Japanese language media over the desirability of Japan assuming permanent UN Security Council membership. Perhaps most important, Ozawa's employment of the most repugnant tactics of the 1955 System in pursuit of "reform" has greatly tainted his effort in the eyes of the communications media and public. Add to this Ozawa's delicate personal health and the possibility that an emboldened Prosecutor's Office may become more interested in Ozawa's past and current financial affairs. The new "reform" bloc, in sum, seems to me inherently unstable. It will be several more years before the aftershocks of the Great Nagatacho Quake of 1993 subside and Japan's national political landscape returns to "normal."