REFORMING NATIONAL LEADERSHIP & THE RISE OF A NEW POLITICO-ADMINISTRATIVE INTERFACE IN JAPAN: ENTRENCHING A CABINET CENTRED MODEL OF GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

Leadership is one of the most intensively researched topics in political science as well as in public administration. It has also been a popular theme in business administration. Substantial research data have helped enhance public understanding of this complex issue. This essay may therefore provide only a small addendum to the current large quantity of research. Nevertheless, the paper attempts to look a leadership in a different light. The main purpose of this manuscript is to explore and find answers to the troublesome question of why Japanese governments have often failed to produce effective and enduring leadership. The paper attempts to describe several impediments to reform efforts for "Party Centred" or "Cabinet Focused" government becoming established in Japan's politics.

Key Words: *Leadership, Japan, Party-centred politics, Cabinet-focused government.*

Introduction

The paper starts with a description of six essentials that should be considered critical for model leadership. These are: perspective, patience, persuasion, perseverance and prescriptive and proactive measures. These six requisites represent the essence of what an ideal leader ought to possess. On this issue, this paper examines these attributes in relation to the distressful experiences that the leadership of the then-governing Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), had to meet at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011.

Secondly, the paper focuses exclusively on the Japanese government, in an attempt to disclose several obstacles that have often led to the lack of strong leadership. The paper points to the importance of a high level of factionalism in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which inhibited proficient and long-tenured leadership. The political situation has been changing, however. Since 1994, when a single member electoral system was introduced, Japan's political outlook has undergone a qualitative change. Factionalism within LDP has been in decline, while the political status of the prime minister has been on the rise. Now, the chief government executive frequently takes a command position over critical national issues, primarily as a result of the 1994 reform in the House of Representatives.

In addition to factionalism, the paper explores the government's structural arrangements that may hinder chief executives from having an active leadership role at the centre. In this respect, the subtle relationships between party members and elite bureaucrats may be noted. Many observers have highlighted the traditional "*Bureaucrats Supreme Model*" in Japanese politics, a consolidation of bureaucratic power that appeared so firmly established that no one else would be able to take over its role. However, this long-standing tradition of elite public officials influencing critical policies formulation and implementation has gradually been eroding, as successive LDP governments have tried to curtail the power of bureaucracy. Instead, the Party has been working to consolidate a "Party Centred" or "Cabinet Focused" national government.

Model Leadership: The Need of Six Critical Requisites

When Richard Neustadt first published his classic, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents:*

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The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan in 1960, and a revised version in 1990, he listed several functions that U.S. presidents should be able to perform. Out of those, he stated that the power of persuasion is the most important feature for any chief executive to possess. In a similar manner, this paper also contends that a national leader should possess several political attributes to serve as a capable head of government (Neustadt, 1991).

The first concerns "*Perspective*". A leader should be able to examine an issue from a broad point of view and avoid a narrow focus. This issue was highlighted when Japan was hit by a big earthquake on 11 March 2011. The terrible tremor generated a gigantic tsunami which killed more than 20,000 residents in the northern part of the country. In addition, the same tsunami damaged nuclear power plants and the Fukushima plant began leaking contaminated water into the sea. The unexpected devastation immediately created serious concerns within Japan, as well as in neighbouring countries.

When the accident occurred, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was in power. DPJ had never held office and had formed the Government only two years previously. The inexperienced party did not seem to be well equipped to run conventional government, let alone dealing with wrecked nuclear facilities. At the time of the incident, Kan Naoto was the prime minister, a politician notoriously known as "Impatient Kan", for his irritable behaviour. Added to this trait was his lack of governing experience: Kan was too immersed and narrowly focused on domestic concerns following the nuclear accident, failing to acknowledge international anxieties. China and the Republic of Korea particularly were extremely alarmed by the lack of crisis information from the Japanese government. Such international apprehensions could have been avoided had the prime minister been able to view the issue from a broad perspective and extend diplomatic consideration to the neighbouring countries - an essential attribute of Perspective (Nakamura & Kikuchi, 2011: 893-800; *Asahi Shimbun*, 12.03.2011).

Similarly, competent leaders should espouse a philosophy or principle, which guides their political conduct constantly. A leader's code of conduct ought not to fluctuate: it must be consistent and clear to followers. In some cases, a leader would instruct deputies to implement the policy that s/he holds dear. However, by the end of the day, the same leader would change one's mind and request the assistants to take an entirely different policy option, which would have little or no resemblance to the previous agenda. If the leader continues to such erratic behaviour, confusion and discontent would surface among the subordinates. Eventually, the followers would begin to lose faith in their boss and discredit her/his leadership quality. Unfortunately, some officials in the DPJ government at the time of the Fukushima accident looked capricious. One such example was an announcement the chief cabinet secretary, a young lawyer and rising star in the party, made on television ten days after the disaster. He suggested that parents avoid using tap water to make up infant formula, thus implying that tap water, especially in the Tokyo metropolitan region, might be contaminated by radioactive fallout. He recommended that families with infants use bottled water to mix formula.

Immediately after this announcement, bottled water disappeared from stores in the metropolitan region. Families with infants became extremely alarmed and frantic in their quest to get safe water, which was no longer available anywhere in the area. Made aware of the mounting panic, the secretary once again appeared on television and said: "Any *family which is unable to obtain bottled water should use tap water to make formula for the baby. There should be no harm to the infant at least for the time being*" (As quoted in *Asahi Shimbun*, 23.03.2011).

This remark was mind boggling for many Japanese, since it completely contradicted his original statement. The inconsistent instruction the DPJ official made naturally aroused public discontent; many families with babies were agitated and angry. This contributed to a sharp

decline of public trust in the DPJ government. A large number of Japanese criticised harshly the DPJ government and its unclear policies, through the mass media. This anger was clearly reflected in the survey taken right after the disaster, which showed that fewer than 2% of Japanese trusted the incumbent government. In retrospect, this low popularity probably marked the beginning of the end of the DPJ rule in December 2012 - an essential attribute of Patience (Kikuchi, 2012).

The third attribute that a model leader should possess is the power of "*Perseverance*". An ideal leader should be able to control anxiety, remain patient and calm in dealing with subordinates, and realise that a host of critical issues must be delegated to deputies. When taking this approach, the leader should remain patient, devolve authority, and allow deputies to manage important policy mandates by themselves. In this regard, Prime Minister Kan's behaviour during the fiasco seemed highly restive. One day after the disaster, not only did he take an impulsive helicopter flight to view the Fukushima accident site, but also abruptly entered the headquarters of the Tokyo Electric and Power Company, shouted at the executives of the firm, and demanded immediate action. This erratic behaviour caused mayhem and delayed responses to the disaster - the quality of Perseverance (National Diet of Japan, Fukushima Nuclear Accident, Independent Investigation Commission, 2012: 290-295).

The ability to take a proactive rather than a reactive stance is another important leadership quality. A good leader should stay put in office, considering alternative options in the event that the ongoing course of action proves unproductive. A proactive leader always remains ready to suggest an alternative course, should the previous one be ineffective - the attribute of Proactiveness. This attribute was nowhere to be seen when the DPJ was overwhelmed by the nuclear accident in March 2011.

The party had won control of government in 2009 mainly because of its popular slogan, "*Reducing bureaucratic control and enlarging party power*". Remaining firm in this doctrine, the DPJ did not trust public officials, even in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. The party failed to seek professional advice and opinions in dealing with the nuclear accident. Although they were non–professional amateurs, party members thought they could surmount the terrible nuclear crisis, alone. This was of course a gross mistake as the accident grew out of control. Becoming frantic, the government reluctantly solicited technical help from the U.S. military forces, as well as expert assistance from within and without - the attribute of Prescriptiveness (Hrebenar & Haraguchi, 2015: 174-188).

Finally, an ideal leader requires rhetorical or oratorial skills to convince others - the power of "Persuasion". As Neustadt suggested, the power of persuasion might be one of the most important qualities for any leader. Unless the leader can convince subordinates, they may not produce the results necessary to help alleviate problems, particularly in a crisis situation. In order to be persuasive, the top of an organisation ought always to be equipped with objective and statistical data. The competent leader should keep the fundamental posture of "let statistics speak for themselves". Statistical and objective data, if they are at hand, would substantially help the leader to improve the power and quality of persuasion. In this respect, Japan was unfortunate not to have an eminent leader with both oratorial and command skills.

Fragile National Leadership in Japan: Factionalism and Electoral Reform

Traditionally, Japanese politics has often failed to provide a stable and strong executive leader. The political reality of the country seems to have been quite different from the ideal model of leadership. A number of reasons may account for this lack of continuity in Japan's leadership. Political culture is one of them: a high incidence of factionalism within the governing party

has been responsible for the short tenure of government leaders. In addition, structural arrangements may also explain the existence of fragile leaders in Japanese politics. As expounded later, by both custom and tradition, the agenda setting of cabinet meetings was for many years left in the hands of top-ranking bureaucrats. Once the agenda was set, not even the prime minister was allowed to amend or add other items for discussion in the cabinet meeting. For these and other reasons, electorates more often observe discontinuity in central leadership; in fact, they frequently witness national governments to change hands every year, contributing to volatile administrations probably unforeseen in other democracies. The friable and discontinued executive leadership produce several disadvantages for the country. This paper tries to shed some light on these issues from a number of perspectives.

A Japanese leader's short tenure in office poses two questions. Domestically, whenever a head of government has a brief stay in office, it creates untoward effects on the country's economic performance. Recent history makes this point clear: when a prime minister remains in office more than five years, the country's business outlook becomes robust and prosperous.[3]

Under the Sato government, Japan experienced unprecedented economic expansion that by 1966, it became the second largest economy in the world. The Nakasone administration brought about a trade war with the U.S. over auto sales. During his administration, the country's economy became bullish: Japan began to enjoy a short boom period of a "bubble economy", in addition to skyrocketing property values. Under the current Abe government, the country has moved out of a prolonged depression, and his pet theory of "Abenomics" seems to have helped resuscitate the country's business slump.

Similarly, in international relationships, a short tenured leadership often produces severe consequences. When a group of countries meet to discuss a host of issues, as in the G-7 annual conference, Japan is often the only country to send a new and different prime minister to each meeting. Foreign delegations, baffled by the frequent turnover of leaders, see the situation as unstable, and often do not give credence to Japan's leadership. The lack of stability in this respect denotes a decline in Japan's credibility among the G-7 members.

The puzzling question is why Japan produces short-tenured unstable leadership in government. Changing national governments in a short span of time diminishes public confidence and does harm to various dimensions of Japanese politics and society. One answer to this query is found in the factional nature and internal politics of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

For many years, the political landscape and government of Japan was characterised by the dominance of the LDP. Several other mini-parties gyrated around this giant with little or no prospect of replacing it. For approximately six decades, from 1955 to 2009, the LDP single-handedly controlled Japanese politics except for a short period of time from 1993 to 1996 when an anti-LDP coalition took control of government. In the non-socialist domain, the longevity of LDP in government was regarded as an exception. Many pointed to the long tenure of the LDP as a major factor for the country's political stability, also contributing to Japan's post-war economic expansion.

This perception, however interesting, can be misleading. Most importantly, the Liberal Democratic Party has not been a unified and coherent whole. Since the party came into being in 1955, it has been made up of several factions: even at this day, the party is comprised of eight factions. Of these eight, the Hosoda faction, to which the incumbent prime minister

[3] Examples include: Sato Eisaku (November 1964 - July 1972), Nakasone Yasuhiro (November 1982 - November 1987), Koizumi Junichiro (April 2001 - September 2006) and current Abe Shinzo (July 2006 – present).

belongs to, is the largest, with 94 members in the national legislature (The Diet). It is followed by the faction led by the current Treasury minister, Aso Taro, with 59 members; the former Foreign Affairs minister, Kishida Fumio, also leads another major group.[4]

Each faction in the LDP has an office with several secretarial staff. The factions meet at regular intervals to discuss policy and personnel affairs, often clashing with each other over party or cabinet posts as well as pork-barrel issues. Being a rank and file member of a faction brings an important monetary benefit: especially at election times, faction leaders distribute money, donated by big business and by followers, to help finance their campaigns for the coming contest. As these cases indicate, factionalism in the LDP is firmly rooted and institutionalised as one of the most critical components of organisation.

In such a case, if one wants to become leader of the party and thus prime minister of the country, the first step is to form a coalition of several factions. As long as these friendly factions remain attached to and are supportive of the candidate, he can sit in the driver's seat and lead the country's politics. However, when the winning coalition collapses, so does the tenure of the leader. The prime minister of Japan must therefore sit on a precarious coalition of different factions, which could collapse into disarray at any time (Richardson, 1997: 49-73).

As a result of this factionalism, the duration of Japan's leadership terms has been unstable and often extremely short. Administration turnover has been frequent, with an average stay in government of two years and eight months. At one point, the country had a different prime minister every year, creating confusion and dismay in the Japanese electorate. As previously indicated, there are several exceptions: for example, Sato Eisaku stayed in office for seven years and eight months, the longest tenured leader in Japanese political history. This record is followed by the current Prime Minister, Abe Shinzo. He has been in power for six years and five months (as of February 2018). Chances are that Abe could surpass Sato's record and become the longest tenured head of government in the country's history (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2011: 128-153).

Short and fragile leadership tenure in Japanese government has also been closely associated with the prevalent culture. Unlike countries where individualism is highly valued, group cohesion has been a critical social norm in Japanese society. Japanese specialists in the U.S. and the U.K. have noted that in Japan, decisions are often made by a group for the sake of the group. In their view, "Groupism" is one of the most conspicuous features in the country's policy process. Unfortunately, this group orientation proved ineffective during national emergencies; in fact, it became a liability when the country faced disasters such as the Fukushima nuclear plant damage in March 2011. The traditional practice impeded quick decisions, as it first called for prolonged group discussions to reach a consensus (Stockwin, 2008: 28-47).

A note of caution is in order at this point. In recent years, the traditional convention of seemingly rock-solid factionalism has gradually been plummeting, although it has not been totally eradicated. An important factor for this change was the introduction of a new electoral system in 1994. At that time, the system of the Japanese House of Representatives elections was altered to a single member constituency system, as noted earlier. This system also introduced election by proportional representation for a number of seats in the House. Under this new arrangement, of the total of 465 seats in the House of Representatives, 289 seats are elected through the single member district system, while 176 elected through proportional

[4] On the latest configuration of factions in LDP, see http://home.a07.itscom.net/kazoo/
Regarding the importance of factionalism in the LDP politics, see Stockwin, 2008: 139-142.

representation. For better or worse, this change hit a nerve in one of the most important aspects of LDP politics: party endorsement of the candidates.

Previously, party endorsement was taken care of by various faction leaders. Under the old system, each constituency could elect multiple representatives. For example, the Gunma Third District was eligible to elect four winning candidates, in an organised plan classified as a "Medium Sized Constituency System". In ordinary circumstances, LDP candidates won three seats and the Socialists one, while the fifth candidate, a Communist, had always been the loser. The LDP winners, although each wore the same party hat, were rivals and fought hard among themselves in the constituency, in order to maximise their votes.

In doing this, each LDP candidate in the Gunma district formed a separate support group independent of the local LDP chapter. In the eyes of the conservative candidates, the local chapter was often partial, supporting one specific candidate at the expense of others. In fact, the Gunma Fourth was the home district for Nakasone, Obuchi and Fukuda, each becoming prime ministers of the country at different times. These influential party members tried hard to cultivate their own supporters and attempted to be the first winner among the three LPD candidates in the district.

Aside from being party politicians in Gunma, they played another important nationwide role. As the leaders of different factions, each was responsible to recruit national legislators and encourage them to become members of their faction. One of the effective tools to expand factional power was party endorsement. Utilising this method, faction leaders could expand their sphere of influence, since a candidate endorsed by LDP would appeal to voters as a reliable party politician. On different occasions, prospective candidates visited one of the party big wigs, soliciting a party endorsement. Nakasone kept a firm grip on this mechanism, as did other contending faction leaders. Primarily for these reasons, LDP politics maintained a high level of factionalism.

The new electoral system produced radical modifications to the old system. Party endorsement has increasingly become centralised: instead of faction leaders, LDP headquarters has expanded, so that party leaders now endorse LDP prospective candidates. The party endorses those candidates with personal appeal and achievements. The party even assigns new candidates to different constituencies, which may or may not be their place of birth. The powerful endorsement function has thus been moving away from factions and into party headquarters in Tokyo. The loci of LDP political power have definitely been altered, with party leadership looming large in Japan's recent political landscape (Christensen, 2015: 22-55; Nakakita, 2017).

The elections for the House of Representatives in 2005 seemed to have reflected the change in the electoral system. The major issue in this election was the privatisation of 25,000 post offices in the country. Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro was an ardent proponent of this idea. However, because many post office personnel had been supporting the LDP, there was a vehement opposition to the idea, even within the party. In fact, the House of Councillors had already nullified the bill, and chances of approving Koizumi's preference were substantially lowered in the House of Representatives.

Prime Minister Koizumi responded to this situation with several surprising strategies. He first dissolved the House of Representatives and called for an election. Koizumi then began to send "assassin" candidates to constituencies where anti-Koizumi candidates were contesting the election, some of which were LDP candidates. These "assassins" included popular athletes, TV personalities and young female figures, and they all received LDP endorsement. Their

primary mission was to stand against the old guard, who opposed privatising the national postal units. At the end of the day, Koizumi overwhelmingly won the election and succeeded in privatising the national postal service. This astonishing outcome would not have happened, had the prime minister did not hold the power of party endorsement. Thus, factionalism in the LDP seems to have been substantially diminished, although on such few occasions as reshuffling the cabinet, factionalism again makes headlines in the daily papers (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2011: 235-259).

Power of Bureaucrats and Structural Arrangement of the Policy System

Many observers of the Japanese government point to the political prominence of bureaucracy and maintain that the Japanese political system appears to have a "Bureaucracy Dominated Model" of government. They believe that a "Cabinet or Party Focused Model" of government is difficult to establish in Japan.

To state the matter briefly, bureaucratic power began to rise in the aftermath of WWII. Prior to 1945, Japanese politics was split into four important groups: party members, the military, monopoly-capitalists and bureaucrats. Often, the military collaborated with monopoly capitalists and tried to expand Japan's sphere of interests in China and the South East Asian region. At the same time, party members coordinated their efforts with bureaucrats, who, together, attempted to capture the mantle of national power.

However, once the war was over, the Allied Forces began to demilitarise Japan and abolished the entire military establishment. The U.S. led occupation forces attempted to democratise Japanese politics and the economy. Consequently, they purged party members and demolished monopoly capitalism. This American-initiated democratisation left only Japanese bureaucracy untouched, as the Americans needed Japanese public officials to run the country even under occupation.

Until 1952, when Japan regained independence, bureaucrats were the only players able to manage the different national affairs. During the immediate post-war period, the country saw former liberal diplomats lead Japan's central government, which clearly demonstrates the rising power of public officials in the political landscape of that time. Without competition, bureaucrats dominated the government and created a host of rules and regulations required for managing the country. Thus, bureaucratic dominance started in the mid-1940s, and remained important into the 1960s and beyond (Konish, 1997: 67-104).

During these decades, the power of bureaucrats extended even to cabinet affairs. According to rules set by public officials, administrative vice ministers of different ministries were to convene meetings bi-weekly, on Mondays and Thursdays. These highest ranked public officials met twice each week and decided the agendas for cabinet meetings to be held on Tuesdays and Fridays. The administrative vice-ministers' conferences frequently became a platform where they could resolve and iron out diverse interests and conflicts among different national agencies.

After all contested issues were sorted out, the meeting agendas would be sent to the cabinet. Convention dictated that ministers, during the cabinet meetings, would not raise any issues other than those which had been discussed and approved by the administrative vice ministers' meeting convened a day earlier. This unwritten code of conduct was rigid and applied even to the chair of the cabinet meeting, the prime minister of the country. It would not be unusual for some important issues to arise, which would require the immediate attention of the cabinet. However, according to the customary practice, no member of the cabinet - not even the prime minister - would be allowed to place new issues on the table without prior consent of the

administrative vice ministers. Thus, any extemporaneous issue would not be allowed to be included in the agenda for cabinet discussion (Nakamura, 2001: 169-179). This is a lucid example demonstrating the power of bureaucrats and showing the weakness of the executive leadership in government. Another example that highlights the fragile position of the chief executive is that the prime minister would be unable to engage in the affairs of different ministries, including personnel matters. All such issues could only be taken care of by the minister responsible for an agency. On this score, the prime minister is limited to giving advice and guidance to the specific minister in charge. This long-standing tradition, once again, often enfeebled prime ministers.

Against this background, civil service reform has been on the country's political agenda for some time, and in the mid-1980s, public calls for reform intensified, primarily for partisan political reasons. The out-of-power Democratic Party claimed that the ruling Liberal Democrats had long been the puppets of central bureaucrats, and as a result, possessed neither the ability nor the knowledge to formulate their own policy agenda, relying instead on central bureaucrats for policy initiation, implementation and programmes' organisation. The Democratic Party demanded that the LDP government substantially alter the existing civil service system, claiming that total reform of the civil service structure was essential to improve the quality of Japanese politics. They argued that only under a new power configuration would politicians, rather than bureaucrats, be able to assume a leading position in the country's political and social management.

Civil Service Reform and the Declining Power of Public Officials

The Hashimoto administration (1996-1998) of the Liberal Democratic Party was the first to produce an explicit plan to reform Japan's bureaucracy. Unfortunately, many objections surfaced from opposition parties, as well as bureaucrats. It was not until 2015 when the Abe-led LDP government finally succeeded in starting a new personnel management bureau which would come under the direct jurisdiction of the prime minister. For a number of years, the Abe cabinet tried to solidify the "Executive or Cabinet Centred" model of government in Japan's political environment, but the effort eventually ran its course with only limited achievements.

Over the years, even LDP members felt that Japan's civil service system needed substantial reorganisation. The former minister in charge of administrative reform and stalwart party member Watanabe Yoshimi was a major proponent of this view, arguing strongly for the overhaul of Japan's central bureaucracy. His position probably echoed the growing public sentiment against elite government officials. In fact, over the last few decades, Japanese voter dissatisfaction with both public officials and central government has grown substantially (Higuchi, 1998: 263-285).[5]

There are several reasons for the rise of distrust in government among the Japanese public, including a series of exposes of mismanagement. In 2004, the Social Insurance Agency, an administrative arm of the Ministry of Health and Labour, disclosed several gross oversights in their policy management. The Agency mishandled individual records and mistakenly disqualified a large number of retirees from social security benefits. Some media accounts speculated that the Agency intentionally rigged or left erroneous information in the payment records of at least 69,000 individuals, and that some Agency officials did so for years simply

[5] A survey conducted in 2011 indicated that 72.1% of respondents showed distrust of government, and 68.7% perceived a lack of professional pride among central public servants. In different research, the World Values Survey showed the same trend: the rate of public distrust in government reached 68.2% in Japan, the second highest (after Germany's 77.4%) among OECD member states. See Meiji University, Centre for Crisis Management, 2012).

to avoid tedious work and to save time. Naturally, such irresponsibility generated much anxiety among the affected retirees, who feared the loss of their social security benefits. At the end of the day, the national government liquidated the agency altogether and created a new one, the Japan Pension Service, in 2010, to look after social welfare issues (Kosei Rodo Sho & Nihon Nenkin Kiko, 2012; Asahi Shimbun, 2007).

In Japanese public administration, small incidents of corruption are extremely rare. Generally, central bureaucrats and local government officials are well-disciplined and resistant to bribery and graft. On average, about a hundred cases of misconduct among national and local government officials are annually reported. Cases of suspension or discharge are more often related to either psychological or mental health problems of individual officials. Occasionally, however, there will be a case of corruption on a grand scale, particularly among top ranking public servants. In one example, the Defence Ministry disclosed that the wife of the highest-ranked Administrative Vice Minister played golf several times a week, while playing fees and meals were routinely covered by a leading Japanese arms dealer. In the same incident, it was revealed that the daughter of this Vice Minister studied in a U.S. college, where her tuition was paid by the same private firm.[6]

In the post-war history of Japan, these misdemeanours among public officials usually create public uproar and often provide a political catalyst for the reform of the country's civil service system. Indeed, several exposés led the central government to initiate civil service reform packages in 1999 and again in 2008. In this regard, a new law enacted in 2008 was significant. This legislation, titled the "Basic Law for the Reform of National Personnel Management", (*Kokka Komuin Seido Kaikaku Kihon Ho*), introduced a substantial change to the personnel management system in the central government. In principle, it projected reform of the current personnel management administration over a three-year period. Once the Act was passed by the national legislature, the government established the Office for the Promotion of Personnel Management Reform, in July 2008, to implement the reforms envisaged in the Act.

The new law had six major reform components. First, it tried to establish the Personnel Policy and Management Bureau in the Office of the Cabinet Secretary in order to strengthen uniform management of the senior civil service. Second, the law attempted to introduce a National Strategy for Staff Policy, which would strengthen the cabinet coordination capacity and weaken the ministerial sectionalism in the national policy making process. Third, the law aimed to introduce a new wage system based on performance beyond seniority and class systems. Fourth, it attempted to eradicate the post-retirement job scheme for restricted numbers of national public officials with the extension of retirement and a more transparent reemployment rule. Fifth, it proposed to change the recruitment system of public officials. The basic idea was to eliminate the current discrimination between the elite first track and other general staff members at the entry point. Finally, the law requested to consider the possible deregulation of limited labour rights of public officials, which included a different collective labour agreement for public officials (Ito, 2013: 27-46).

Many hoped that once these major changes became active, the reform would have a significant impact on the traditional Japanese style of civil service management. However, once the reform plan was made public, there was immediate severe resistance from different interests. The new bureau plan was virtually deadlocked due to delayed functional arrangements with the existing National Personnel Agency, Administrative Management Bureau and Personnel

[6] The record among local government officials shows: during FY2015, a total of 4248 incidents of wrong-doings were reported. Of that total, bribe-takings marked 104 cases. The rest were batteries, traffic accidents, etc. (Soumu Sho, 2018).

and Pension Bureau in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Moreover, the change of government from LDP to DPJ in 2009 made the reform plan less certain, as the DPJ criticized the LDP reform plan in their political manifesto. The civil service reform contrived by the Hashimoto administration therefore had to wait for several years until another LDP government with a solid number of seats in both Houses came to power. It was not until 2012 when the conservative Abe government took control of the government that the reform plan received serious attention (Tanaka, 2006: 1-19).

A Rise of New Politico-Administrative Landscape

From this vantage point, Abe made a huge mistake with his first cabinet, formed in September 2006. As with other chief executives, he was a fragile leader, weakened without dependable logistic supports. He remained in office only a year and resigned in August 2007. It seems that he learned a lot from this experience and fiasco, including solidifying his leading position over other party members and public officials. In his second cabinet in 2012, the prime minister determined to consolidate his executive position by recruiting competent and confident staff. One example is Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide, who has kept both the LDPers and public officials in check. Suga appears to be a loyal follower of Abe as well as an excellent protector.

The LDP government put forth several reform ideas before the government changed to DPJ in 2009. One proposal was to create a Senior Vice Minister (*Fuku Daijin*) and a Parliamentary Vice Minister (*Seimukan*), two new offices designed to monitor and check the Administrative Vice Minister's activities. In addition, the prime minister would be allowed a number of Special Assistants, some members of the Diet, others public officials. These personnel expansions in and around the prime minister were intended to enhance the power of the chief executive vis-à-vis the opposition parties and bureaucrats.

When Abe Shinzo came into the office the second time in 2012, he seemed to have more clout than any of his predecessors as he had many assistant staff backing him, including Senior Vice Ministers and Parliamentary Vice Ministers, in addition to several Special Assistants. As of 2018, the administration has five special assistants: three LDP legislators and two public officials. Each has a specific assignment: one is accountable for national security including relationships with the U.S., another monitors the growth of rural regions, and still another is in charge of education and declining population. Two assistants with bureaucratic backgrounds are assigned to policy innovation and public affairs, respectively.

One of Abe's major achievements in civil service reform was to create a new Bureau of Personnel Affairs in the Cabinet Office. The prime minister expedited the establishment of this bureau despite open opposition, especially from the National Personnel Authority. Previously, this office, being independent of government, had been responsible for managing all staff members of government, including some elite and first track public officials. Besides, the office has been highly important because since it possessed the authority for carrying out various national civil service examinations (Ida, 2013: 125-135).

Under the new arrangement, the Bureau in the Cabinet Office controls job transfers and promotions of high-ranking personnel. The bureau is liable for the personnel management of approximately 600 elite persons in different agencies of government. The concept holds that the bureau ought to centralise personnel management of those elite officials; so that, the human capacity of government increases. The Office assigns these personnel to different ministers as executive directors or senior managers, in hope that they eventually develop to be all round players. On this score, the Chief of the Cabinet Office has disclosed that the

management of senior staff be carried out without regard to which agencies had originally hired them and where they had worked. A guiding principle would be "the right man for the right post", according to the Secretary.

The new structural arrangement has already generated several unexpected results. Under the renewed set-up, if an elite bureaucrat wishes to move upward in the hierarchical ladder of government, s/he should first and foremost court the support of the prime minister and the chief cabinet secretary. The prospective candidate for a high-ranking position ought to read countenance of these leading political figures of LDP. The enlarging power of party members has contrasted well to the situation a few years back, when both promotions and job transfers of elite personnel came under the control of different ministries and not, under the National Personnel Authority.

At the time of this writing in May 2018, Prime Minister Abe is facing a nagging political issue over licensing and approval powers of government. Abe Shinzo has been under fire from the critical voices of opposing parties. The central issue revolves around an opening of new veterinary college in the rural town remote from the capital. A total of 12 veterinary schools have already existed in the country. In the view of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), there should be no or little demand for an additional school. The ministry therefore was negative extending approval of an additional college of veterinary sciences.

However, a close friend of Abe who owns a number of private schools in different parts of the country intended to open a new veterinary college in one of the municipalities of Shikoku Island. To this request, MEXT initially remained reluctant, the reason being that a new school would not be able to survive due to the lack of demand. To everyone's surprise, nevertheless, in November 2017, the ministry suddenly amended the previous policy stand and approved the proposed college of veterinary sciences. This abrupt change of MEXT aroused suspicion of a political intervention, while an idea of "Anticipated Reactions" (Sontaku) among the elite bureaucrats began to circulate and receive wide public attention. The concept coined by Carl J. Friedrich suggests the importance of potential and latent power. In some occasions, power would not become open and overt; nevertheless, it would generate commanding influence. The prime minister, for instance, would emit strong effect on his subordinates, simply because he is the chief executive of government. The deputies would initiate certain policy action without his instruction or him knowing it (Ford & Zelditch, 1986).

Media suspected that Abe's friendship with the owner of the school might have been an important ingredient of the change on MEXT's policy orientation. Many media have rumoured that the public officials close to the prime minister put pressure upon MEXT and forced the agency to alter their policy position. From the view of the media, the public officials took these actions for the sake of the prime minister perhaps because they would want to gain confidence of their boss. In the eyes of the critiques, a growing indication has been pointing to the fact that the MEXT officials surmised the prime minister's friendship with the school owner's and facilitated the approval of the newly planned college. The mass media contended that "Anticipated Reaction" worked and helped the MEXT to license the new school, although the prospect of the school remains dubious. The series of events around the new veterinary school seem to demonstrate the rising power of cabinet members and the declining stature of high ranking officials (*Mainichi Shimbun*, 14.11.2017).

The Abe Shinzo government has been in office for over five years. For all intents and purposes, his tenure should stretch for another several years making him the longest tenured chief executive in Japanese history. The prime minister has been tenacious on some foreign issues.

He has been critically concerned to maintain a close relationship with the U.S. Similarly, he is also insistent on a constitutional amendment and changing the status of the Self-Defence Force perhaps to a full-fledged military. On several scores, Abe seems different from his predecessors: he appears to be a strong executive leader, which Japanese politics has not seen in a recent memory. However, it is perhaps too early to assess Abe's contribution to institutionalise a strong chief executive. Despite his efforts, at any given moment, his leadership could once again become weakened. Should he be implicated in any political scandal such as the one described above, political fortune could turn against him, and the systemisation of a strong prime minister could once again disappear. This is a subtle issue and needs close observation.

Conclusion

This paper has presupposed that at this point in history, the study of leadership calls for a new approach and a renewed attention. In many countries including the U.S.A. and France, in addition to a host of developing economies such as Malaysia and Thailand, the issue of leadership has often become the central loci of political debate and discussion. Especially in America, for better or worse, the election of President Trump seems to have evolved a new concept of presidency. For some, his behaviour looks unpredictable and unstable, while for others, he is the champion of good cause that his predecessors have for long overlooked. Similarly, in many countries in the South-Eastern Asian region, the government leaders look often fragile and unsteady, but in others, they appear strong but dictatorial.

Taking these volatile situations into consideration, the paper has first tried to delineate six important ingredients of model leadership. They are: perspective, patience, persuasion, perseverance, prescription and proactivity. These essential requites sketch the outline of ideal leaders. However, as the Japanese case demonstrates, personality often hinders producing effective leadership, while culture would likewise impinge greatly on the production of stable leader. In some regions, collectivism or group consensus would stay as a social norm. If this is the case, a domineering leader is more often socially unacceptable and avoided. Institutional arrangements, too, induce a major discrepancy. In a country where a parliamentary system of government is the basic format, the leader should often share power with members of parliament. Under the presidential system, chances loom large that the president tends to initiate actions irrespective of the will of congress.

This paper has taken Japan as one of the cases to examine the various hypotheses. The country has traditionally produced a large number of prime ministers who did not command strong executive powers. The average tenure of Japanese prime minster has been less than three years. The paper has highlighted the importance of factionalism within the governing party that has been the root cause for a short tenure of Japanese prime minister. Japan's prime minister has historically presided over a precarious coalition of different cliques. As result, as soon as factional alignments would collapse, so did the post of prime minister.

Nevertheless, the wind of change has been in the making in Japan's factional nature of politics. Since the new election system of single member district was introduced in 1994, LDP's factionalism has been in demise; instead, the party endorsement has become centralised around the prime minister. This has helped increase the power of the chief executive in the LDP politics. Likewise, the conservative party has worked to initiate several measures to reduce the political influence of high-ranking public officials. Out of many attempts, one of the most significant has been the establishment of a new Bureau of Personnel Affairs in the Cabinet Office. This arrangement has contributed to centralise the power of government around the prime minister and the chief cabinet secretary. Due mostly to the inducement of

the new Bureau, the power configuration between party members and elite bureaucrats has increasingly helped to shift to the "Cabinet Cantered Model" of government.

Although the political stature once appeared entrenched, the incumbent Abe government has been exposing weaknesses in recent years as one mismanagement after another has come to surface. The case of a new veterinary college is one of them. Under the current circumstances, the future prospect of the incumbent Abe government has remained uncertain. However, Prime Minister Abe and his courtiers in LDP might be remembered as a group of political leaders who intended to reduce the power of bureaucrats and foster the "Party Dominant Model" of politics. This is one of the major achievements that the Abe cabinet has so far scored.

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