

Al Masud Hasanuzzaman

POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT IN POST-WAR JAPAN: AN ANALYSIS

Abstract

Post-war political reform measures in Japan led to the formulation of a new constitution for the country in 1947 characterized by Westminster type of parliamentary democracy and popular sovereignty. Over the years, the post-war system has taken roots along with interplay of representative organs of the state involving both formal and informal role-playing actors and mechanisms in the political system. In the process of legislation, besides the use of legislative devices and participation of the civil bureaucracy and policy affairs research structures (PARC) of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), informal behind-the-scene contacts of the parliamentary parties had been observed. One important feature in the legislative affairs has been a gradual progress toward Diet reform since the 1990s affecting parliamentary behaviour and activism. The LDP dominated the political process and party affairs for about four decades until 1993 when a major political change took place marking the end of the '1955 system' and the LDP rule. Multifarious political reforms introduced since 1993 led to transform the politico-electoral process with an impact on party building, democratic procedures and practices.

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Introduction

The archipelago of Japan with a total area of 377,815 square kilometers kept its isolation and remained distant for centuries from the world's other regions. Geographical separation by surrounding seas served as natural barriers and prevented invasion from outside. Japan had also been characterized by very little proportion of migration and outside infiltration. The country had been featured as a closed society that prevailed until the end of Tokugawa period that is late 1860s.¹ During the Tokugawa era, Japan remained basically a feudal society with an agrarian economy and a quasi-monarchical state which pursued a closed country policy while dealing with foreign countries and external relations.² Such a situation continued until the middle of the nineteenth century when Commodore Mathew Perry led American ships in to Uraga Bay marking the end of Japanese national isolation through her commercial relations with the western world. The subsequent years witnessed an unstable socio-cultural condition and a struggle for power within the domestic realm. However, with the Meiji Restoration in 1868 the feudal characteristics began to erode in the country through a planned policy of modernization.³

The Meiji Restoration ousted the Tokugawa Shogunate and made the Emperor the symbolic power and within a quarter of a century, by driving a course of speedy modernization initiatives, transformed an agrarian feudal Japan into a growing industrial

¹ William R. Farrell, *Crisis and Opportunity in a Changing Japan*, Westport: Connecticut: Quorum Books, 1999.

² Preston, *Understanding Modern Japan*, London: Sage Pub. 2000, p.144

³ S.N. Eisenstadt, *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp.23-30, Masao Miyamoto, M.D. *Strategic Society: An Insider's Irrelevant Views of Bureaucratic Japan*, Tokyo, NY: Kodansha Int. 1994. Jun -Ichi Kyogoku, *The Political Dynamics of Japan*, University of Tokyo Press, 1987, p.3.

power.⁴ It had been the official state policy to adopt western technology to quickly rise to the western level. Morris-Suzuki noted that 'Japan's growing contact with the European powers from the late 18th century onwards exposed the country to the pressures of a quite different world order: an order based upon European notion of nationhood.'⁵ The Meiji state thus took the form of a modern state through the adoption of a constitution in 1889 framed according to European variety and a version of parliamentary system with the Emperor as a constitutional head. Within this framework, the Imperial Diet having legislative authority commenced its functioning in 1890. Although there had been features of modern nation state along western lines, the Meiji state also projected some striking differences as unlike Europe and the United States, the Meiji Oligarchy preserved the traditional Japanese family collectivity and rural community based on loyalty. The Emperor was not only the source of all political power but also represented absolute spiritual authority⁶

In the aftermath of World War I, during the 1920s, the military became much assertive to play active part in politics and administration thwarting the authority of the civilian regime. This led to the establishment of a totalitarian system favouring expansionist course, military adventurism, and ultra-nationalism that eventually culminated in Japan's participation in the Second World War. The War ended in 1945 and following the Japanese defeat, the land had been occupied by the U.S. forces in the name of allied army and they indirectly ruled the country until 1952. During the occupation "the occupied forces under General Douglas MacArthur embarked on

⁴ Almond and Powell, *Comparative Politics Today*, 6th ed. NY: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1996, p.327

⁵ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan Time, Space, Nation*, Armonk NY: M.E.Sharpe An East Gate Book, 1998

⁶ Hitoshi Abe *et al*, *The Government and Politics of Japan*, Tokyo: Tokyo Univ. Press, 1990, pp.5-7

their dual tasks of demilitarization and democratization.”⁷ The reforms which had been instituted by the Allied Forces and the General Headquarters of the Allied Command (GHQ) aimed at dismantling Japan’s pre-war polity and eradicating the features of the Meiji state.⁸ The ultimate outcome of the post-war democratization policies and reform measures had been the promulgation of a new constitution for Japan in 1947 characterized by the supremacy of the parliament and popular sovereignty.⁹

Since its inception, Japan’s post-war parliamentary system modeled after ‘fusion of power’ concept has gradually taken root involving participation of a diverse group of competitive and unequal actors in the political system. As such while analyzing the country’s democratic development, it is imperative to look at the mode of functioning of the representative state organs and involvement of both formal and informal mechanisms in politico-governmental affairs. To this end, this paper aims to discuss the parliamentary and political affairs of Japan focusing on the legislative system and party politics. It is worth mentioning that scholars have developed different viewpoints to explain Japan’s quest for achieving democracy amid its economic greatness and tremendous technological advancement in the post-war period.

Views on Japanese Politics

The various conceptions attempting to set the parameters of analyzing Japanese politics include among others elitist, revisionist, pluralist, “patterned pluralist,” and rationalist views. Stockwin¹⁰

⁷ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat Japan in the Wake of World War II*, W.W. Norton & Company: The New Press, 1999, p.75, Deborah J. Milly, *Poverty, Equality and Growth The Politics of Economic Needs in Postwar Japan*, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 1999, p.100

⁸ Hitoshi Abe et al., *op cit.*, pp.9-10

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ J.A.A. Stockwin, *Governing Japan* 3rd ed. Massachussets: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 218-222

noted that there have been changing perceptions about Japan along with the changes that occurred within its polity at different phases of time. Immediately after Japan's defeat in 1945, the Allied Forces' constitutional and other reforms brought to the fore 'democracy paradigm' concentrating on establishing popular institutions. The following 'modernization paradigm' in the 1960s put emphasis on nurturing complex political structures while attaining high economic growth. At the end of the decade this notion came under fire by the left along the lines of industrial exploitation. The late 1970s witnessed the 'Japan as Number One paradigm' developed by scholars like Erza Vogel who promoted Japanese success stories as a model for the West. In the 1980s, the revisionist scholars led by Chalmers Johnson challenged it by heavily criticizing the country's bureaucracy-regulated policy-making process with an economic system rigged with unfair process. In the same tone, Karel van Wolferen in his well-known volume *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (1989) regarded "the system" as problematic for emulation.

In contrast to revisionist idea was the apologist view that tended to rest on unique cultural traits of Japan in practicing democracy. The political culture approach, therefore, highlighted cultural and behavioural attributes of the Japanese people. Others used socio-ideological view that is shaped by underlying societal and ideological cleavages.¹¹ Elitist writers like Watanabe and Scalapino regarded the process as 'Japan Inc.' referring to involvement of collective mechanisms in nation building. Emphasis on specific cultural dimension thus led to 'Nihonjiron' approach highlighting consensual devices in the process of making decisions and in policy formulation. In the late 1980s, Muramatsu and Krauss tried to explain Japan's political development in terms of pluralist elements where there had been a 'strong state with its autonomous interests and institutionalized accommodation among elites' which they termed 'patterned pluralism'. Unlike its usage in the classical sense,

¹¹ Masaru Kohno, *Japan's Postwar Party Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.15-28

patterned pluralist government “is strong, interest groups sometimes have cooperative relations with the government and with each other, and lobbying is not open-ended because interest groups usually are almost constantly allied with the same parties and bureaucratic agencies”. (p.538)¹² While referring to pluralist elements in Japanese political process, Inoguchi also talked about ‘bureaucracy-led mass-inclusionary pluralism.’¹³ In the 1990s, scholars like Ramseyer and Rosenbluth in their ‘rational choice paradigm’ highlighted political actors’ and politicians’ prime role in state management.¹⁴

The above conceptions differ in their contents, but suggest useful tools to describe Japanese politics. It is worth noting that while explaining Japanese system most Japanologists admit the persistence of societal norms and political values that more or less affect intra and inter-institutional relations and functioning of the representative organs of the state.

Political Values and Practices

Japanese society is characterized by certain distinctive traditional mores. Personal connections, group solidarity, community consciousness, consensus building, non-coercive ways of obtaining popular compliance, and the mode of hierarchical ties are thus significant having intense historical roots. Because of the prevalence of such factors Japan’s ‘rich settings for cultural cohesion, communication and nationalism’ have often been highlighted.¹⁵ Erza Vogel, while referring to Japan’s proclivity for protecting key cultural traits from western influence, noted that “the effort was to

¹² Muramatsu and Krauss, ‘The Conservative Policy Line and the Development of Patterened Pluralism’ in Kozo Yamamura and Yasukichi Yasuba eds. *The Political Economy of Japan* Vol. 1, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993,p.538

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ J.A.A. Stockwin, *op. cit.*,

¹⁵ Ian Inkster and Fumihiko Satofuka eds. *Culture and Technology in Modern Japan*, London & NY: Tauris Publishers, 2000, p.7

try to preserve the Japanese tradition even while bringing to western means".¹⁶ Steven Reed mentioned that "Japan is a unique country, *sui generis*, a country unlike others".¹⁷ John Hendry pointed to the practice of upholding of the community life through the processes of neighbourly interaction.¹⁸ P.W. Preston mentioned that "the Japanese have successfully remade their inherited hierarchies and sustained a widely articulated commitment to harmony over all the long years since the Meiji restoration moved them decisively and distinctly into the modern world."¹⁹

In a Japanese context, political leaders and party stalwarts emphasize the promotion of intra- organizational solidarity and peaceful agreement and tend to maintain support of other groups having mutual conflicting relations. Zhao (1995) mentioned three informal mechanisms namely *Tsukiai*, *Kuromaku*, and *Nemawashi* that significantly influence the Japanese political realm: *Tsukiai* refers to creation of a sense of community which strengthens social links; *Kuromaku* are those politically relevant sections that do not command any formal position or status but often play instrumental role in getting things done behind-the-scene communications; and *Nemawashi* or prior consultation involves consensus building efforts through behind-the-scene pre-decision process.²⁰ The system of *nemawashi* paves the way for avoiding unnecessary conflict by gaining agreement of the participants on decisions taken before formal meetings commence. *Nemawashi* when used in politics enables actors of differing views to alter or adjust their respective opinions beforehand and come to a formal consensual decision.

¹⁶ E.F. Vogel, *Western Spirit and Eastern Means*, M/O Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, 1979, p.3

¹⁷ Steven D. Reed, *Making Common Sense of Japan*, Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1993, p.6

¹⁸ John Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society*, 2nd ed. London & NY: Routledge, 1987, pp.72-73

¹⁹ P.W.Preston, *op. cit.*, pp.216-224

²⁰ Quoted in Linus Hagstrom, 'Diverging Accounts of Japanese Policy-making' Working Paper 102, EIJS, 2001

Richardson mentioned that 'informal consultation between politicians and local groups and community representatives has been frequent.' Although there are instances of intense conflict and competition, attempts are simultaneously made to reduce differences by means of inter-actor consultative ties and informal face-to-face small group contacts creating a mood for integrative political play. Thus, as with other states, Japanese process features both the dual tendencies of conflict and fragmentation and cooperation and integration.²¹

Another aspect of Japanese political practice is the mechanism of 'pork-barrel' politics. Local politicians and peoples' representatives often resort to such politics and thus a 'successful local politician will act as a line of communication between the constituents and decision-makers in Tokyo'.²² Through 'pork-barrel' techniques, parliamentary representatives endeavour to secure state resources for building local infra-structures and, thereby, maintain their local support base which is necessary for their electioneering and electoral purposes. Dietmen have been seen forming numerous personal issue-based support groups or *Koenkai* in their respective areas in order to familiarize themselves with their constituent needs. *Koenkai* groups enable their leaders to undertake necessary measures on the basis of inputs received from the locality. The members of the electorate often judge their representatives on the above criteria and elect those candidates in the national legislature who best serve their requirements.

The Diet and the Legislative System

Japan's national representative body or parliament is designated as the National Diet or *Kokkai* by the post-war constitution that came into force in 1947. The word 'Diet' derives from the Latin

²¹ Bradley Richardson, *Japanese Democracy: Power Coordination and Performances*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, pp.240-241

²² P.W. Preston, *op. cit.*,

expression for an assembly and under the present constitution, the National Diet is the 'highest organ of state power' as per Article 41. Despite the existence of the constitutional principle of separation of powers and checks and balances, the national legislature has precedence over other state organs. The responsibilities of the Diet involve not only formulation of laws but also approval of the national budget and ratification of treaties. It is the sole authority to initiate draft constitutional amendments and exercises powers as per Article 62 to make necessary investigations. The Diet is composed of the directly elected members who represent different political parties playing respective roles in the legislative arena. The prime minister of Japan is required to be chosen by the Diet which can dissolve the executive through a successful motion of no-confidence. The Diet provides for a bicameral setting with lower and upper houses namely the House of Representatives (Shugiin) and the House of Councillors (Sangiin) respectively elected directly by the voters under a parallel voting system.²³ The Japanese Constitution does not specify the number of members of the two chambers. As such the size of the House of Representatives rose from 464 in 1946 to 511 in 1993, and the House of Councillors had 252 seats in 1972. However, after the 2000 election, the size of both lower and upper houses was reduced to 480 and 247 respectively owing to demands from concerned sections.²⁴ The two houses have unequal powers; the lower house predominates in decisions having greater and overriding powers. According to Article 60, the budget is to be placed first in the lower

²³ Elections are supervised by election committees at each administrative level under the general direction of the Central Election Administration Committee. Japan has three types of polls viz., 1) general elections to the lower house held every 4 years unless dissolved earlier; 2) elections to the upper house held every 3 years to choose one-half of its members; and 3) local elections held every 4 years for offices in prefectures, cities, and villages. (source: internet)

²⁴ Ian Neary, *The State and Politics in Japan*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, p.131

house and required to be passed by it for adoption. The organization of the Diet can be seen from Table 1.

Following the "Westminster model," each session of the Diet begins with an opening ceremony in the presence of the titular head, the Emperor of Japan followed by an overall policy speech of the prime minister. The Diet employs a number of legislative devices like interpellations, questions, prime minister's question time, committee scrutiny and other motions to demand executive responsibility. One scholar notes that 'the Constitution, the Diet Law, house rules, and various precedents have enhanced the Diet's organization, authority, and conduct of deliberations and gradual progress towards Diet reform has been seen.'²⁵ The major goals of recent Diet reform are strengthening legislative control over administration, stimulating parliamentary discussion, promoting efficiency in legislative activism, and making the Diet more open and transparent to the general public.²⁶

There are differences of opinion among analysts with regard to the Diet's performance and its real significance in the Japanese political system. Less positive views centering on the Diet's playing a role as merely an approving body of the executive actions stem mostly from its composition characterized by one party (Liberal Democratic Party or LDP) dominance for nearly 38 years and existence of weak parliamentary opposition. In such a context, Wolferen viewed the Diet as an inherently weak institution with little autonomous authority and a 'comparative irrelevance within the total political and governmental structure,'²⁷ However, there are balanced judgments about the Diet's activism incorporating inputs from the systemic environment and effecting necessary legislative measures.

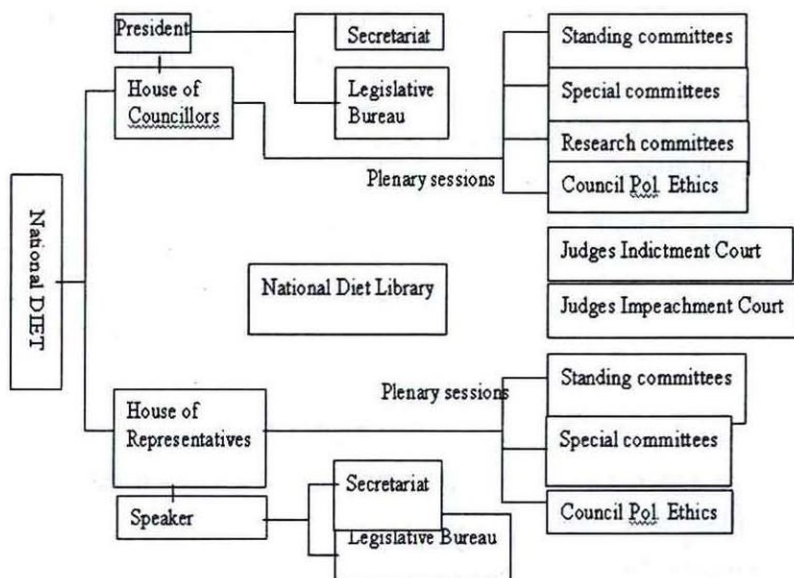
²⁵ Kishimoto Koichi, *Politics in Modern Japan*, 4th edition, Tokyo: Japan Echo. Inc. 1997.p.73

²⁶ 67th IFLA Council and General Conference, August 16-25, 2001

²⁷ Karel Van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, London: Macmillan, 1989, p.210

Table-1

Organization of the National Diet



Source: *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* edited by Richard Bowring and Peter Kornicki, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 287

Richardson's observations on the Diet's multifarious role are worth mentioning; in addition to their job of constituency representation and interest articulation, the Diet members supply required inputs into prospective legislation before bills are tabled on the floor. By using bureaucratic and party channels they have been involved in cross-institutional policy committees and contributed to respective bill process. Their standing as a platform of public opinion formation affects party strategies, intra-institutional policy-making, recruitment of leaders, electoral competition, and both formal and informal behind-the-scene inter-party legislative

compromises.²⁸ Charles Bingham opined that the Diet has made its mark in the national policy formulation process and responded to the need when major new policy measures are warranted. For instance, 'when in the 1960s, the Japanese began to realize what was happening to their environment because of the rapid expansion of heavy industry, the Diet swiftly passed a series of anti-pollution laws, which in many respects, are tougher than in the U.S.A. and other countries.'²⁹

In a parliamentary framework such as in Japan where executive is an extension of the legislature, it is no wonder that the former would take a leading part in the legislative process. As such many of the bills and legislative proposals generally do not originate in the Diet but initiated by the ministries through the cabinet. It was noticed that from 1955 through 1970, approximately sixty per cent of all legislations tabled on the floor came in the form of cabinet bills.³⁰ Consequently, over ninety per cent of all successful bills originated with the executive.³¹

During the 1970s parliamentary behaviour featured compromise and the ruling party's prior dealings with the opposition for smooth passage of bills.³² Mike Mochizuki used the expression 'viscous' in reviewing the Diet process where the party in power was found making various concessions to the parliamentary opposition members for passing desired bills. Although such state of affairs projected Japanese practice of unanimity in rule formulation, the underlying reasons for the ruling party's policy concessions stemmed from the procedures of inadequate time for legislative deliberation

²⁸ Bradley Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128, 140-141

²⁹ Charles F. Bingham, *Japanese Government Leadership and Management*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd 1989, pp. 77-78

³⁰ T.J. Pempel, "The Unbundling of 'Japan, Inc.' The Changing Dynamics of Japanese Policy Formation" in John Ravenhills, ed. *The Political Economy of East Asia*, Vol. I, Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar Pub. Co. 1995, pp. 285-286

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Kishimoto Koichi, *op. cit.*,

and opposition's delaying tactics.³³ Writers like Miyoshi, Johnson, and Okimoto also mentioned the Diet's viscosity in law making and the opposition members' scrutiny of the budget proposal in the midst of the LDP's overwhelming control over the chambers.³⁴

Because of the continued one party domination of the whole show and stereotyped roles of the political actors, some scholars compared the Japanese politics and policy process with a 'kabuki drama' and the "drama was played out according to a script drafted behind the scenes in the Diet committees and party boardrooms."³⁵ Long period of LDP rule since 1955 had also been characterized by backroom dealings and informal agreements between the treasury and the opposition benches performing fixed roles in the legislative process.³⁶ But in spite of these varying opinions, the Diet activism and legislative performance of the Diet members had been influenced considerably not only by the country's on-going socio-political dynamics but also by the formal devices and informal mechanisms involved in the process.

Role of the Parliamentary Committees

The post-war Constitution of Japan while establishing Westminster type of parliamentary system introduced American Congressional committee structure in the Diet for the purpose of effective rule-making with two sets of similar committees for both houses. The system of automatic referral of every bill to a concerned committee meant that the committees would be the nucleus of legislative operations. As such compared to plenary sessions

³³ Mike Mochizuki, *Managing and Influencing the Japanese Legislative Process: The Role of Parties and the National Diet*, Ph.D. Thesis Harvard University, 1982, cited in Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, *Japan's Political Marketplace*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993

³⁴ Cited in Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, *op.cit.*,

³⁵ Purnendra Jain and Takashi Inoguchi eds. *Japanese Politics Today Beyond Karaoke Democracy?* Macmillan edn. Australia Pvt. Ltd. 1997, pp.1-5

³⁶ Kishimoto Koichi, *op. cit.*, p.73

considerable portion of the Diet activities are undertaken in its committees which are categorized into various standing and special committees with every Diet member having to serve on at least one. Normally, the committee membership is distributed among the parliamentary parties according to their numerical strength in the respective houses of the Diet. Of the standing committees that correspond to the jurisdictions of the ministries, the budget committee, the audit committee and the rules and administration committee cover a wide spectrum of governmental activities.³⁷ Currently, there are 21 standing committees in the House of Representatives and 18 in the House of Councillors (see Table-II). In the lower and upper houses the number of committee members has been within the range of 20-25 and 10-45 respectively. Some differences are noticed regarding the nomenclature of committees of the two houses since 1998 but inter-house committee relations remain the same as before.³⁸

Table-II: Standing Committees in the Two Houses of the Diet, 2001

House of Representatives	House of Councillors
Cabinet	General Affairs
Local Administration	Judicial Affairs
Judicial Affairs	Local Admn. & Police Affairs
Foreign Affairs	Foreign Affairs & Defence
Finance	Financial Affairs
Education	Education, Culture & Science
Health and Welfare	Health and Welfare
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Labour and Social Policy
	Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

³⁷ Sir Hugh Cortazzi, *Modern Japan A Concise Survey*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1994, pp.46-50

³⁸ Kentaro Fukumoto, 'Bicameralism in Japan: Are the Two Houses Really Different and Why?' Gakushuin University, Internet, 2004, [www. Cc. gakushuin.ac.jp/~e982440/index-e.htm-5k](http://www.Cc.gakushuin.ac.jp/~e982440/index-e.htm-5k)

Commerce and Industry	Economy and Industry
Transport	Transport, Information, and Telecommunication
Communications	Law and Environment
Labour	Fundamental National policy
Construction	Budget
Security	Audit
Science & Technology	Oversight of Administration
Environment	Rules and Administration
Fundamental National Policies	Discipline
Budget	(Total-18)
Audit and Oversight of Administration	
Rules and Administration	
Discipline	
(Total-21)	

Source: Reiko Oyama, 'Legislative Effect on Committees, Potential and Practice of Parliamentary Committees in Japan' in K.V.Kesavan, ed. *Parliamentary Committees in Japan and India*, New Delhi: Manak, 2003, p.19

Although Article 25 of the Diet Law prescribes that committee chairs are to be elected from the committee members by a vote of the plenary session, in practice the Speaker/President plays a key role in the process considering party strength in each standing committee. During the years of LDP hegemony, the Diet committees remained firmly in its grip including the committee chairs. Later in the 1970s, a mixed committee control had been observed with the LDP's losing numerical strength in the lower house. The procedure of appointing the post of director or *Riji* in each committee, enabled the opposition legislators to obtain some of these posts but they did not have significant numbers to secure committee chairs.³⁹

³⁹ J.A.A. Stockwin, *Governing Japan*, op. cit., p.119

As mentioned earlier, committee system plays central role in the Diet's deliberating over legislation and it is at the committee stage the bills are scrutinized through a process of interpellation, debate, investigation, public hearing, and witnesses. Committee meetings are normally open to the public and media people and the minutes are available in the Diet library. Abe *et al* note that committee proceedings have become the heart of the Diet process with house plenary sessions losing much of their significance.⁴⁰ After successful committee procedures, bills are accepted and their ultimate passage take place through formal approval of each house and the Emperor.

It may be mentioned that the Diet chambers are currently provided with adequate professional and support services. The secretariat employs 1750 and 1300 persons for the lower and upper house respectively and each house has a legislative bureau with a staff of 70 persons and benefits from a joint national parliamentary library with 850 staffs that includes a research service of 160 researchers.⁴¹ The Diet members are thus entitled to have personal staffs and policy assistants and each standing committee of both houses is assisted by a couple of full time salaried research staffs.

The record of regular meetings of the committees is quite impressive. Both lower and upper house committees sit 'approximately five hundred times per year and their total sitting hours exceed one thousand hours. In 2000, the standing and special committees of the lower house sat 625 times for a total of 1391.51 hours.'⁴²

As observed, the committee activities, on many occasions, are regulated on party lines with partisan attitudes which prevent the

⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid*

⁴¹ OECD Report on Parliamentary Procedures and Relations, September 22, 2000

⁴² Reiko Oyama, 'Legislative Effect on Committees Potential and Practice of Parliamentary Committees in Japan' K.V Kesavan ed. *Parliamentary Committees in Japan and India: Their Functions and Relevance*, New Delhi: Manak, 2003, p.20

Diet from performing a more autonomous role and taking independent steps in legislation and rule formulation. Oyama observed that partisan atmosphere in the committees circumscribed the members' freedom to engage in free discussion on bills and they have to follow party discipline and instructions of their respective parliamentary party groups.⁴³ Partisan interests, however, lead the competing parties to engage in behind-the scene pre-legislative transactions for settling matters and adjustment of views.⁴⁴ Besides the party discipline, the committee members have also encountered the presence of strong bureaucratic structures in the process of their deliberations and rule making.

Bureaucrats in Legislative Process

The Diet's independent courses of action and capacity building have been negatively influenced by the participation of the civil bureaucracy in both input and output sectors of the legislative process. Bureaucrats' enormous accumulation of formal and informal powers dates back to the Meiji era and Japan's quest for modernization. They were the 'institutional heart' and mechanisms in materializing that national goal through employing the country's natural and human resources. Miyamoto mentioned that 'their control was accepted by the people who having just emerged from feudalism, had no experience with authority other than hierarchic rule.'⁴⁵ During the occupation, there had been little dismantling of bureaucratic power as the comprehensive reforms of the Allied GHQ did not fully weaken their structures and they had, in fact, been used by the occupation forces to govern the country.⁴⁶ With the increase of authoritative apparatus the higher bureaucrats assumed an unparalleled power in state business and they have been referred to as '*Kanryo*' i.e, elite class who exercise influence in crucial

⁴³ Asano in Haruhiro Fukui, 'The Japanese Parliamentary Committee System' in Kesavan, *ibid.*, p.10

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.10

⁴⁵ Masao Miyamoto, *Strategic Society*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Hitoshi Abe *et al op. cit.*,

ministries like foreign affairs, finance, trade and industry.⁴⁷ Their place in Japanese system is also strengthened by the oft practice of 'Amakudari' meaning 'descent from heaven' involving a process where retired bureaucrats are employed in the private sectors and move into the upper posts of the industrial establishment formerly under their control. Side by side, the bureaucrats have been seen running for the Diet as LDP candidates. In fact, a number of post-war Japanese prime ministers and cabinet ministers have been former bureaucrats. Bingham noted that for the first 25 years of the post-war period, 18 per cent of the appointed ministers were from the civil service.⁴⁸ The career officials are traditionally the best products of the Tokyo University and are skilled with greater access to wide variety of information that make the ordinary Diet members dependent on their expertise. As such striking bureaucratic influences have been visible in different stages of legislation including very drafting of the bills, parliamentary deliberation and implementation of the rules.⁴⁹ Members of the concerned civil bureaucracy draft most of the government sponsored bills based on a thorough process of inter-departmental dialogue. One estimate shows that during December 1990 to June 2001, that is, from 120th to 151st sessions of the Diet 1287 such government bills had been tabled and of them 97.7 per cent had been approved on the floor.⁵⁰ Bureaucratic indispensability is also observed at the committee stage where they serve as aides to the ministers to respond to standing committee queries and interpellations. Moreover, while carrying out the approved piece of legislation they flesh out the laws by making rules which 'take the concrete form of ordinances (sirei), announcements (kokuji), notifications (tsutasu), and so forth.'⁵¹

⁴⁷ Tadahide Ikuta, *Kanryo: Japan's Hidden Government*, NY: ICG Muse, Inc.1995

⁴⁸ Charles F. Bingham, *Japanese Government. op. cit.*, pp.17-18

⁴⁹ Hitoshi Abe *et al op. cit.*, pp.22-23

⁵⁰ Reiko Oyama, *op. cit.*, p.21

⁵¹ Hitoshi Abe *et al op. cit.*, p.23

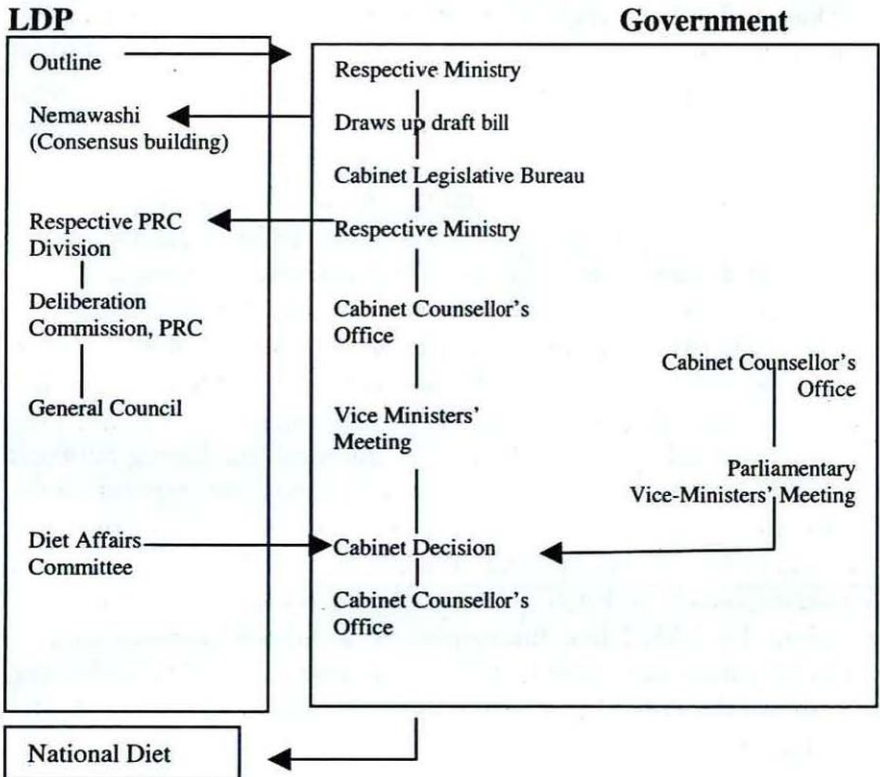
The LDP Structures in Legislation

During the long years of LDP rule, top echelons of its Diet members gradually acquired the necessary knowledge and skill in specific field of state policy by holding significant executive and legislative posts for years. By dint of gathering such expertise along with party seniority these LDP parliamentarians formed the *Zoku* or "policy tribe" sufficiently capable of countering bureaucratic competence and monopoly. Since the 1970s, parliamentary committees became the locus of *Zoku* activities.⁵² Gerald Curtis noted that *Zoku* members (*Zokugiin*) developed specialization in respective departmental performance and examined 'narrow issue area' of the ministries. As such the functions of the *Zokugiin* became compartmentalized and identified with particular ministry and they acted as 'political agents of the special interests' mediating between the civil bureaucracy and interest groups.⁵³ It became imperative for the bureaucrats to consult the concerned *Zokugiin* for preparing draft bills and gaining party approval through the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council or PARC. Alongside the standing committees of the Diet, the PARC has functioned as a shadow cabinet system within the ruling party with its policy initiation power. The following chart shows the flow of legislation and the involvement of the PARC in the rule process.

⁵² J.A.A. Stockwin, *op.cit.*,

⁵³ Gerald Curtis, *The Logic of Japanese Politics: Leaders, Institutions and Limits of Change*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp.53-55

Flow of Draft Legislation



Source: Albrecht Rothacher, *The Japanese Power Elite*, op. cit., 1993, p.26

Legislative Politics

As indicated earlier, the legislative deliberations of the Diet get prominence in its committee structures which appear as significant forums for inter-party debate and floor politics. In this respect, the largest 50-member Budget Committee attracts great public attention. Since the national budget highly influences the country's political economy and citizens' lives, competing sides enter into serious debate in this committee within both houses making it more meaningful by holding public hearings, involving witnesses and the

like. The deliberations made in this committee often in the presence of the leader of the house, cabinet members and senior bureaucrats are not confined to only budget related issues but also cover a wide spectrum of public policies. As such discussion and “debate in the Budget Committee is the essence of Japanese parliamentary politics at its best.”⁵⁴

As noted, while playing the legislative game the competing parliamentary parties employ their respective strategies and bargaining methods. Unlike other parliamentary systems, the Diet process is characterized by the involvement of certain unique structures regulating the parliamentary behaviour and practice to a considerable extent. The competing sides at the time of their interactions resort to *tatemaie politics* which takes place in both chambers and committees where their debates, criticisms and interpellations reflect each party's official principles, ideals and legislative standings. Another approach of inter-party negotiations is the *Kokutai* technique in which political and legislative dealings are based on ‘the different parties genuine situation.’⁵⁵ Curtis mentioned that *Kokutai* represents a committee within a parliamentary party, each headed by a veteran politician and *Kokutai* strategy involves arriving at understanding to bring forward the legislative process emphasizing informal and implicit procedures. These are done ‘out of public view, in private rooms in expensive restaurants and even in more exhaustive geisha houses in Akasaka and Shimbashi.’⁵⁶ Again, in the organization of the Diet activities the role of parliamentary caucus or *Innai Kaiha* remained very important. *Innai Kaiha* organized separately in each of the two houses was composed of the Diet members of each party registering itself with names of their members. Although there is no direct mentioning of such structure in the Parliamentary or the Diet Law, each *Kaiha* performs disciplinary functions over its members deciding respective position on a bill

⁵⁴ Reiko Oyama, *op.cit.*, p.25

⁵⁵ Minoru Nakano, *The Policy-Making Process in Contemporary Japan*, Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1997, pp.87-88

⁵⁶ Gerald Curtis, *op. cit.*, pp.116-120

before voting takes place. In order to share committee chairs or occupy a place on the Directorate or *Rijikai*, a *Kaiha* requires at least ten or more members at its disposal. One *Kaiha* with 20 members is entitled to table a Diet member bill and requires 50 members to place legislation relating to budget. In the Diet process, attempts have been made by competing parties to bring to their fold independents and smaller parties to enlarge and strengthen their *Kaiha* groups for exercising more power in the legislative domain. The existence of *Kaiha* phenomenon in the Diet indicates that 'the Japanese political system abounds with informal institutions organized in highly formal ways that interact with legally established institutions.'⁵⁷

Recent Reforms in the Diet

Since the 1990s, significant reforms have been made in the Diet structures with the aim of establishing more transparent procedures, building legislative capacity and demanding executive accountability. In January 1998, in both the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors, the Committee on Audit and Oversight of Administration had been established in order to improve and strengthen the quality of legislative supervision. The former Committee on Audit was, thus, transformed through a process of evolutionary reorganization responding to the growing demand for reforms relating to administrative sector. Besides assuming the jurisdiction of its predecessor the new committee on Audit and Oversight of Administration is entitled to analyze government audit and inspection, and perform 'ombudsman-like functions for listening directly to the opinions of citizens and make recommendations to other related public offices concerning matters that are deemed to require improvement in relation to administrative problems that come to light during deliberations.'⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp.173-179

⁵⁸ Tamisuke Watanuki, 'Parliamentary Scrutiny and Oversight Role of the Diet: Report on the Japanese Diet' Second Meeting of the Parliamentary Presidents of G 8 Countries, 9th September, 2003

There are also revisions in the Diet Law and the Rules of the two houses concerning the Diet's information gathering and investigative powers initiated in 1997. The committees of the lower house were thus empowered to ask the Director General of the Research Bureau of the Secretariat and the Director General of the Legislative Bureau to conduct preliminary investigation necessary for scrutiny by the committees.⁵⁹

In addition, in both chambers of the Diet a Committee on Fundamental National Policies had been established in 2000 introducing Westminster type Prime Minister's Question Time that allows the committee members, particularly the opposition parliamentarians to directly interrogate the leader of the Treasury Bench once in a week. As observed, live telecast of the direct prime minister's interpellations are gaining popularity and drawing much attention of the media and the printed world. This is more so due to the spirited exchanges between Prime Minister Koizumi and the opposition leader Okada.

One significant aspect of parliamentary reforms involves gradually reducing bureaucratic participation in the Diet's affairs. As such in recent years the post of junior level ministers called vice-ministers have been created to enable the politicians to increasingly assume parliamentary responsibility. The Diet passed the Basic Law for the Reform of Central Government, Ministries and Agencies in early 1998 with a view to reduce bureaucrats' influence in the policy formulation process in favour of the legislators. This law operative since 2001 also gave more political support to the ministers and their associates by creating 60 new political positions including 12 state ministers, 22 deputy ministers and 26 state affairs officers which helped to increase the efficiency of the political sector in the law and decision making process.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ Javed Masood et al, *Japan: Change and Continuity*, London: Routledge, Curzon, 2002, p.20

Political Party Affairs

Party affairs in post-war Japan are characterized by three distinct phases of functioning. From 1946 up to 1955, the initial multi-party framework was followed by single party LDP domination for 38 years and since 1993 the norm has been alliance of parties for coalition building. The outcome of the recent parliamentary elections demonstrates a two party managed political process and their competition for state power. During the first phase, the major political parties were seen as competing for the Diet membership and forming the cabinets. 'Inter party negotiations in 1947 resulted in an ordinary coalition government made up of progressive and centrist parties.'⁶¹ (Pre-1955 government formation can be seen from Table III) The country's political process during this time remained unstable with intense factionalism in party politics. There were two major contending sides represented by the conservative and progressive forces which initially opposed each other vehemently. However, both of these political camps had sharp internal divisions that led to formal splits and defections. Within the conservative camp, the Liberal Party contended with infighting between its leader Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru and the challenger Ichiro Hatoyama that led to defection and downfall of the Yoshida/Hatoyama cabinet. The cleavages centered around the question of revising the constitution and the issue of U.S-Japan security relations.

Sharpening divisions had also been equally noticed inside the progressive socialist camp on the questions of U.S- Japan security agreement and the consequent party strategies resulting in formal squabbles within the Japan Socialist Party (JSP). In 1955, qualitative changes took place in the Japanese political order through the merging of the two factions of the JSP followed by the unification of the two conservative parties, namely, the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party to establish a new party called the Liberal Democratic Party or LDP. This merging process is often regarded as the founding of the '1955 System' in Japanese party politics but the

⁶¹ Masaru Kohno, *op. cit.*, p.66

Table- III: Pre-1955 Government Formation

Date	Name	Govt Type (headed by party)
46.5	Yoshida I	Coalition (Lib.+Prog =51.3%)
47.5	Katayama	Coalition (Soc+Dem+Coop = 65.9%)
48.3	Ashida	Coalition (Soc+ Dem+Coop =56.7%)
48.10	Yoshida II	Monority
49.2	Yoshida III	Coalition (Lib+Dem = 72.7%)
52.10	Yoshida IV	Majority (Lib = 51.9%)
53.5	Yoshida V	Minority (Lib = 43.3%)
54.12	Hatoyama I	Minority
55.3	Hatoyama II	Minority (Dem = 39.6%)

Source: Masumi Ishikawa in Kohno, *op. cit.*, p.50

rationale behind the unification process had been the urge for state power and control the Diet.⁶² Jain noted that the formation of the '1955 System' dramatically reduced the earlier instability in governmental coalition and intra and inter-party alliances in the political game. From 1955 onwards, the LDP remained the sole ruling party and at times in 1976 and 1979 when the party registered a decline in its electorate support, it managed to 'secure support from the independent conservatives, enabling it to form a government with relative ease.'⁶³

In the late 1960s, intense political and protest movements by the socialists, students, women and other organizations opposing the U.S.- Japan security treaty, U.S. bases in Japan, nuclear armouring and the like and subsequent passage of the new treaty through a snap vote in the Diet left far reaching consequences in the country's politics. Gordon observed that once the new treaty took effect the

⁶² Masumi Junnosuke, 'The 1955 System: Origin and Transformation' in *Japan Vol. I, op. cit.*,

⁶³ Purnendra Jain and Inoguchi eds. *op. cit.*, pp.16-17

intensity of the political movements gradually weakened which paved the way for political accommodation based on pragmatism. Henceforth, the key voices of the ruling elite deemphasized the need for constitutional revision and sought to win support from political opposition by offering them political and legislative concessions. The result was a positive response especially from the conservative sections of the JSP and union movements that marked the process of adjustments of policies stressing on high economic growth and public welfare.⁶⁴

There are a number of factors that account for the LDP's continued rule for about four decades. The unification of the conservative forces vis-à-vis the socialists in 1955 prompted the state bureaucracy and the big business to extend their material support for the LDP and act under its banner. The members of the state bureaucracy not only offered policy expertise but also intellectual power while the business elites played their role as the chief financier of the conservative LDP candidates.⁶⁵ The close association among the government bureaucrats, leading Japanese big businesses, and the LDP in policy matters has often been regarded as 'iron triangle' of power. Other reasons for the LDP dominance include: 'it inevitably reaped the advantages of presiding over new economic viability and prosperity which most Japanese experienced' (Sims, 2001: 343); its ability to co-opt the agenda of the JSP and other opposition parties, e.g., 1970s environmental policies; its capacity to intelligently ward off and balance intra-party dissension; the ineffective performance of the opposition; and the impact of the then bipolar global scenario that necessitated a conservative government in Japan to serve American interests. In the context of the LDP's success in every general election the country's opposition forces most notably the Japan Socialist Party, the Japan Communist Party, the Democratic Socialist Party, and the Clean Government Party (

⁶⁴ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.270-280

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Komeito) floundered 'helplessly under complete domination of the ruling LDP'. Such one party domination had indeed been unparalleled as 'no other parties in other democracies came close to the LDP in terms of its longevity in power and its complete dominance of the political scene.'⁶⁶ Scholars on Japanese politics, thus, described this as 'uncommon democracy' and opined that 'there is a distinctive Japanese way in which politics operates in Japan.'⁶⁷

In spite of the LDP's capability in steering the wheel of the state for quite a long time, the system of governance and policy matters did not reflect much dynamism. Inoguchi and Jain commented that 'an apt description of the Japanese political system in which prime ministers and cabinets changed while policy directions remained largely unchanged, is karaoke democracy, 'On a karaoke stage, the visible singers come and go, but the songs remain the same, selected from a limited, rarely changed menu.'⁶⁸ In order to remain in power the LDP developed well-organized patronage relations and the LDP politicians kept their own local support groups or *koenkai* by distributing concrete benefits to their constituents. As noted earlier, these support organizations meant for constituency services sustained the mechanism of pork-barreling which induced the politicians to often resort to money politics. As such, there developed the system of *dango* where local authorities had been patronized through granting contracts without normal open tendering procedures.⁶⁹ Farrell cited that the practice of looking after constituency interests at times became outrageous and resulted in corruption and favouritism even at the top level as some former prime ministers e.g., Kakuei Tanaka and Noboru Takeshita allegedly were involved in the process.⁷⁰ Politicians' raising large sums of

⁶⁶ Ray Christensen, *Ending the LDP Hegemony Party Competition in Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998

⁶⁷ Pempel, Curtis in Masaru Kohno, *op. cit.*, p. 4

⁶⁸ Jain and Inoguchi, *op. cit.*, pp.1-5

⁶⁹ J.A.A. Stockwin *op. cit.*, pp.191-192

⁷⁰ William R. Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp.62-63

money and funneling of funds from the businesses in exchange of benefits or favourable policy decisions contributed to produce a collaborative system⁷¹ characterized by a clientelist political structure.⁷²

The above state of affairs and a series of political and bureaucratic scandals coupled with alleged economic mismanagement led to continuous demands for political reforms in the early 1990s that coincided with a decline in the LDP's popular image creating internal strife within its ranks. The then government of Miyazawa began to lose its strength because of the divisions within the Tekeshita faction and subsequently, the reform-minded groups of the LDP's largest faction led by Ichiro Ozawa joined hands with the opposition and successfully passed a no-confidence motion against the Miyazawa cabinet causing the LDP's down fall in 1993.⁷³

The Non-LDP Government and Reform Measures

Soon after the fall of the Miyazawa government the first ever non-LDP coalition cabinet led by Morihiro Hosokawa was formed comprising the two LDP breakaways and five former opposition parties. (see Table-IV). Hosokawa government's major electoral pledge was to introduce much awaited political reforms.⁷⁴ Subsequently, in February 1994 through a negotiation process in both houses of the Diet, four political reform bills had been approved with the provisions for alterations in the electoral system and control of political funding. The major reforms which were introduced

⁷¹ Preston, *op. cit.*, pp.216-224

⁷² Ethan Scheiner, 'The Underlying Roots of Opposition Failure in Japan: Clientilism + Centralism = Local Opposition Failure' Stanford University, Source: Internet, 2004, <http://web.middlebury.edu/NR/rdonlyres/Scheiner Paper.pdf>

⁷³ Richard Sims, *Japanese Political History Since the Meiji Restoration 1868-2000*, London: Hurst and Company, 2001.

⁷⁴ Junko Kato, 'Tax Policy in Japan After the Demise of Conservative Dominance' in Jain and Inoguchi eds. *op. cit.*, p.149

included: reducing the size of the House of Representatives to 500 to be elected through single member districts (300) and proportional representation (200) from 11 regional blocks; establishing neutral commissions for drawing up single seat districts; prohibiting corporate donations to individual politicians but still allowing them to political parties and groups; and introducing a system of state subsidies to political parties.⁷⁵ However, before driving through these reforms the 8-month long 'reform administration' of Morihiro Hosokawa fell from power because of his alleged financial improprieties. It was indeed increasingly difficult for him to keep his coalition partners in a single platform. Otake noted that Hosokawa's reliance on Ozawa's strong leadership 'engendered a tenacious dissonance and distrust among the government parties that ultimately led to eight-party minority coalition's breakdown.'⁷⁶ Hosokawa government was followed by a short-lived coalition cabinet of Tsutomu Hata that lasted from April through June 1994. Subsequently, another coalition which was formed came as a biggest surprise to many observers as the new government had been an inconceivable union of the former arch rivals in Japanese politics namely, the LDP and the Socialist Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) and the Sakigake. Fukui and Fukui commented that such an unprecedented unionization stemmed from the LDP's new political calculation and urge for recovering power even as a co-pilot and its joining hands with the socialists was simply a matter of 'temporary expedient.'⁷⁷ The LDP's yielding to SDPJ conditions coincided with the post-Cold War realities and contributed to lessening great ideological divisions in Japanese party politics as after winning the post of prime ministership the SDPJ abandoned its earlier rigid

⁷⁵ Javed Masood et al . *op. cit.*, pp.10-16. Raymond Christensen, 'The New Japanese Election System' *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 69, No.1, Spring, 1996, pp.49-70

⁷⁶ Otake Hideo, *Power Shuffles and Policy Process*, Tokyo: JCIE, 2000, pp. 107-109

⁷⁷ Fukui and Fukui in Farrell, *op.cit.*,

principles and recognized the U.S-Japan security treaty and endorsed policies advanced by the LDP until 1993.⁷⁸

Table- IV: Composition of the Hosokawa Government

Government Parties	Seats	% of Total vote
JSP	70	15.4
Shinseito (Renewal Party)	55	10.1
Komeito	51	8.1
JNP(Japan New Party)	35	8.0
DSP(Democratic Socialist Party)	15	3.5
Sakigake(Harbinger Party)	13	2.6
Shaminren	4	0.7
Independents	30	6.9
Opposition Parties		
LDP	223	36.6
JCP	15	7.7

Source: *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 July, 8 August, 1993 in J.A.A. Stockwin, *Governing Japan* 3rd edition, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 81

The LDP's Return and Japanese Politics

By the end of 1996, it appeared that the LDP's hold on the country's political power had become more solid.⁷⁹ Earlier, the LDP-backed Murayama cabinet served for one and half year and was succeeded by Ryutaro Hashimoto leading a loose three-party coalition. Although the LDP was maintaining a loose alliance with the socialists and the Sakigake, it had managed to gain a majority in the House of Representatives because of the return of the 'formerly disaffected members' to their parent organization. However, Hashimoto's resignation in July 1998 was influenced by the party's weak performance in the upper house elections and his successor was Keizo Obuchi whose government included the Liberal Party

⁷⁸ Otake Hideo, *op. cit.*, pp.102-103

⁷⁹ Farrell, *op.cit.*,

and, later, the New Komeito Party as coalition partners. After Obuchi's sudden demise in April 2000, Yoshiro Mori took over power and formed coalition with the Liberal Party's splinter group, the New Conservative Party and the New Komeito to maintain a majority in the lower house. During his term, Prime Minister Mori faced a decline in intra party support and had to hold an early party presidency poll which saw reform-minded pragmatic politician Junichiro Koizumi victorious. Subsequently, on April 26, 2001 Koizumi was elected as the country's 26th post-war prime minister and promised to materialize his 'structural reform without sanctuaries.' After the dissolution of the parliament in October 2003 Koizumi won the general election again and took over the office as the LDP president and led a 3-party coalition. With the merger of one coalition partner the New Conservative Party with the LDP on November 10, 2003 the present government is a combination of the New Komeito and the LDP.

As mentioned earlier, the political change in 1993 marked the end of '1955 system' and resulted in a transformation of the politico-electoral process which is believed to have a long term consequences for party politics in Japan. Observers believe that the reforms in the electoral system which is now a hybrid of plurality and proportional representation (PR) have created a mixed incentive for smaller political parties.⁸⁰ These produce opportunities for the opposition since they have done better in the PR portion but unlike the LDP they still lack effective local functionaries to perform successfully in the candidate oriented district races.⁸¹ Krauss and Pekkanen observed that 'the LDP is still able to continue being the largest party, for example it can be successful in the 300 SMD-seat portion of the system; it has difficulty remaining the sole government party because the 180-seat PR portion gives incentives for smaller parties to continue to exist and deprive the LDP of a majority of seats, thus,

⁸⁰ Raymond Christensen, *op.cit.*,

⁸¹ Ethan Schiener, *op. cit.*,

producing a limited multi-party system with coalition governments.⁸²

It is a matter of conjecture to what extent the post-1993 transformations affect the role of the political actors and groups so far involved in the electoral and decision processes of Japan. Earlier analyses show that during the long period of one party dominance there was a unique combination of senior ranking bureaucrats, big businesses and the LDP structures including its factions, *Zokugin*, and PARC that produced social institutionalization of these elites.⁸³ But under the changed conditions there are growing public sentiments for more transparent and accountable procedures in state businesses by reducing bureaucratic control including their discretionary authority.⁸⁴ In the mean time some significant measures have been undertaken along with restructuring of the central government offices. As such the office of the prime minister and twenty two ministries and agencies have been reorganized in to one cabinet office and twelve ministries and agencies⁸⁵ and plans are there to reduce the number of national bureaucrats by 25 per cent over a decade.⁸⁶ Moreover, for making transparent procedures, a system of Independent Administrative Institutions or IAIs was introduced in early 2001.⁸⁷

⁸² Ellis S.Krauss and Robert Pekkanen, 'Explaining Party Adaptation to Electoral Reform: The Discreet Charm of the LDP?' *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Winter 2004, p.8

⁸³ Michio Muramatsu and Ellis S. Krauss, 'Bureaucrats and Politicians in Policymaking: the Case of Japan' *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.78, 1984, p.130

⁸⁴ Gerald Curtis, 'Policymaking in Japan: Defining the Role of Politicians' 2002, source: internet, <http://www.jcie.or.jp/books/p/policy.html>

⁸⁵ Morris Low, 'The Reforming of Japan for the People' in Javed Masood et al. *op. cit.*, pp.179-180

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp.20-21

⁸⁷ *Ibid*

There are also discussions with regard to new mode of relationship and adjustments within the LDP structure which is a conglomeration of competitive factions that engage in infighting despite traditional emphasis on harmony and consensus. Amid such divisions, the LDP as a whole tried to tap the inter-factional competition so as to increase the possibility of keeping its majority in the Diet.⁸⁸ This faction system had been closely fitted to the medium sized multi-member election districts where more than one candidate from different LDP factions competed in the same constituency. Under the altered election system, scholars view the weakening status of factions within the LDP and a structural shift away from them 'as the principal channels for funding and as bodies brokering distribution of office.'⁸⁹ Similarly, there are forecasts regarding the roles of the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) acting as its policy arm. During the time of three-party coalition government under Tomiichi Murayama, PARC performed important functions of coordinating policies of the coalition partners.⁹⁰ However, since the late 1990s the growing involvement of the prime minister's office in key decision-making process has negatively affected PARC's assertion.⁹¹ Despite this trend Krauss and Pekkanen believe that PARC's non-electoral roles will continue to remain important; it will exist as a crucial instrument of 'career advancement and specialization of Diet members and a means of training future leadership for the party. It is still seen as a platform for specialized *Zokugin* to function as 'gatekeepers' over policy and legislative agenda of individual members and the bureaucracy in the party's and government's legislative process.'⁹²

⁸⁸ Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79

⁸⁹ J.A.A. Stockwin, 'Reforming Japanese Politics: Highways of Change or Road to Nowhere?' in Jain and Inoguchi, *op. cit.*, p.87

⁹⁰ Gerald Curtis, 2002, *op.cit.*,

⁹¹ William R.Farrell, *op. cit.*,

⁹² Krauss and Pekkanen, 2004, *op. cit.*, p.18, p. 23.

Party Building and the Opposition

The beginning of a coalition era in the post-1993 period rendered an impact on political party arrangements characterized by alliances, counter-alliances, mergers, and formation of new political organizations supporting either the ruling or opposition parties. As observed, political organization building during this time resembled the post-war tradition based on a top-down process where new groups and parties emerged out of intra-party splits and mostly by the LDP dissidents maintaining their respective followings. Since 1993, the major party organizations which were formed include: the Sakigake Party led by Takemura Masayoshi; the Japan Renewal Party (Shinseito) with its reformist leader Ichiro Ozawa; the Liberal Party or Jiyuto by seven LDP Diet members with Kazikawa Koji as their head; the New Vision Party by five LDP renegades; Koshikai Party of Noda Takeshi; and the New Frontier Party (NFP) led by Ozawa acting as an umbrella party of some former opposition parties including Shinseito and LDP renegades. Following the creation of the NFP a number of other opposition organizations grouped themselves under its banner with an intention of participating in the newly introduced electoral process.⁹³ However, the possibility of evolving a two-competitive conservative party system in the country collapsed with the sudden break up of NFP components and its ultimate dissolution at the end of 1997. It may be mentioned that formerly significant post-war opposition the Japan Socialist Party, later known as Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ), gradually lost its importance since making coalition with its rival the LDP and subsequently fared badly in the successive elections.

Party building took a new turn in 1998 when a group of reform-minded political leaders most notably from the former Democratic Party, the Good Governance Party, the New Frontier Party, and the Democratic Reform Party came forward to form a genuine opposition organization for the purpose of challenging and taking over state power from the LDP-led governing coalition. This newly

⁹³ Jain and Inoguchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

established political party became known as the Democratic Party of Japan or DPJ. The political personalities who had been instrumental in forming this opposition forum were former Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata, and leaders like Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan and current president of the DPJ Katsuya Okada. Ever since its formation, the DPJ has grown in size and significance attracting cross sections of the population within its support base. A new impetus in this respect was added in 2003 through its merger with the Liberal Party led by Ichiro Ozawa. The DPJ's electoral success in the successive national elections has made it the largest ever post war parliamentary opposition party with increasing number of seats in both houses of the Diet as can be seen in the following tables.

Table-V: Strength of Parties in the House of Representatives (as of June 2004)

Name of Party	Number of Seats
LDP	294 (9)*
DPJ and Club of independents	178 (16)
New Komeito	34 (4)
Japan Communist Party (JCP)	9 (2)
Socialist Democratic Party (SDP)	6 (3)
Independents	4 (0)
Incumbents	480 (34)
Membership	480

*Figures in parentheses show the number of women members.

Source: compiled from the information gathered from internet, 2004

Table –VI: The Diet House of Councillors Elections, 2004

Party	Total Won	Electoral Districts	PR	Uncontested	Total	strength
LDP	49	34	15	66	115	(116)
DPJ	50	31	19	32	82	(70)
New Komeito	11	3	8	13	24	(23)
JCP	4	0	4	5	9	(20)
SDP	2	0	2	3	5	(5)
Others	5	5	0	2	7	(11)
Total	121	73	48	121	242	(245)*

(pre-election strength) * Three vacancies

Source: *The Japan Times*, July 13, 2004

The above figures show the astounding electoral accomplishments of the DPJ which obtained 4 million more proportional representation votes in the upper house polls. While establishing itself as an effective official opposition, the DPJ has endeavoured to increase its organizational and parliamentary skills through developing such structures as the Policy Research Council chaired by Yoshiro Sengoku, the Diet Affairs Committee, and the formation of a twenty-one-member Shadow Cabinet on September 13, 2004. The DPJ also initiated a party programmatic approach and manifesto in the recent electoral politics that encouraged considerable debate and discussion on crucial national policy issues. Unlike the LDP, the DPJ's party composition is dominated by young professionals and it is known that because of the dominance of second and third generation politicians in the LDP (in the late 1980s it was 40%), an increasing number of experienced aspirant bureaucrats are seeking nomination as DPJ candidates.⁹⁴ The DPJ has been vocal in both the plenary and committee sessions of the Diet trying to discredit the government's ongoing policy programmes. During mid-June of 2004, it tabled a no-confidence motion against the ruling cabinet and raised objections to quick

⁹⁴ Masahiro Kashima; oral interview by author, Kanazawa University, February, 2005

passage of controversial pension reform bills through the Diet without proper parliamentary discussion and explained the issue before the public.⁹⁵ It can be said that the party's future political and electoral performances depend on keeping the ongoing tempo and effectively building its organizational strength and attracting the electorate to alternative government with a clear policy agenda and vision.

Koizumi's Reforms and Present Process

Upon taking office in April 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi has been engaged in enacting his promises based on structural reforms and in the mean time has taken steps to streamline the administrative sector and to create more space for the politicians in governance. In the economic sphere, measures are underway to ensure moderate fiscal consolidation, reduce expenditure on public works, and cut government subsidies to public corporations. Since 2003, more emphasis is placed on privatizing postal services and public highway corporations and bringing about extensive deregulation. The target of economic recovery plans goes parallel with 'no pain, no gain' reforms. There are now claims of growth of the economy, unemployment going down to 4.7 per cent and rallying of stock prices.⁹⁶ During the first half of 2004, the GDP of the country had expanded by about 6 per cent⁹⁷ with signs of a moderate economic recovery on the horizon for 2006, better prospects than several past years.⁹⁸ The government has succeeded on the security issue through the passage of national emergencies legislation and legislation on Self Defence Force's greater external roles.⁹⁹ As the president of the LDP, Koizumi's approach is to mend internal factional divisions seemingly following a policy of distancing and he has made a great

⁹⁵ *The Japan Times*, 16 June 2004.

⁹⁶ *The Japan Times*, 10 July 2004.

⁹⁷ *Newsweek*, 31 May 2004

⁹⁸ Ian Neary, 'Parliamentary Democracy in Japan', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol.57, No.3, 2004

⁹⁹ *The Asahi Shimbun*, 8 December 2004

deal of political capital out of his decision not to appoint people to cabinet posts simply to maintain a factional balance.¹⁰⁰ However, he has had to manage resistance both from his own party ranks and bureaucratic structures in the reform process. Some scholars regard Koizumi as a maverick politician who has accomplished a certain degree of control over the political system as exemplified by his increasing political and legislative performances.¹⁰¹ One example of his sensible activity outside the formal procedures has been apprising the people of his ongoing actions and policies through the 'Koizumi Cabinet E-Mail Magazine' of which he is the General Editor. He is evaluated as the most 'presidential' of Japan's modern leaders who has strengthened the prime minister's office and put scores to younger law-makers into office.¹⁰²

On the other hand, some critics find fault with the reform process pointing to the diminishing vigour of the postal services and highway system privatization plans and their uncertain effects on the citizens. Again, no positive correlations so far have been found between the upward trend of the economy and Koizumi's structural reforms. They view that stepped-up corporate restructuring and surging exports to the United States and the PRC along with a combinations of positive cyclical factors have brought on the recovery.¹⁰³ But despite such criticisms, it cannot be denied that the prime minister has been able to create a broad consensus for structural reforms. In order to remain in power and implement the proposed reforms the Koizumi administration needs to design efficacious political and electoral strategies for the next lower house elections and to keep the LDP's ruling partner, the New Komeito in good confidence.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ian Neary, 2004, *op. cit.*,

¹⁰¹ J.A.A. Stockwin, 'Reshaping of Japanese Politics and the Question of Democracy', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol.9, No.1, 2002
Newsweek, 31 May 2004

¹⁰² *The Japan Times*, 10 July 2004

¹⁰⁴ *The Japan Times*, 18 November 2004

Concluding Remarks

In the post-World War II period the democratization of Japanese society and polity took place on the basis of the GHQ initiated the "MacArthur Constitution". Since then the operations of the political and legislative systems have been shaped by the country's ongoing socio-economic and political dynamics. In the process, the nation has witnessed various sorts of competitions, alliances, and strategic interactions among the political actors and the role played by different political institutions. During the long LDP rule the Diet process developed legislative compromise and viscosity in law formulation. Legislative behaviour and inter-party competitions had been influenced by formal as well as informal mechanisms and the Diet members' resorting to implicit procedures both in and outside the National Diet. The bill process involved respective party strategy and the use of bureaucratic and party structures by the LDP politicians. The performance of the Diet committees and their deliberations had been influenced by party discipline and strong bureaucratic presence. The political party affairs in post-war Japan had been featured by the LDP's domination over the political processes until its downfall in 1993. Since the collapse of the '1955 System' and the end of sole LDP rule, there had been multifarious reforms in the political and electoral system introducing a hybrid of plurality and proportional representation (PR), limiting corporate donations to contestants, and making state subsidies to political parties. Simultaneous reforms in the political and bureaucratic structures, thus, have initiated significant transformations in democratic practices and procedures that have had a profound effect on the institutional performance, the interplay of parties and power relationships. Proportional representation as such has created avenues for parties including the smaller ones to function within a multi-party framework. The above reforms are expected to influence intra-party structures of the LDP including its factions, Zokugiins, and PARC and the role of the civil bureaucracy. In the meantime, there are greater public voices for a more constructive politics involving transparent procedures and civic participation both in

political and legislative affairs. This would mean reduced bureaucratic control in parliamentary and state businesses, policy formulation through an open inter-party debate or competition rather than through informal behind-the-scene communications, and more popular inputs in the Diet process and party management.