The 1955 System and After : The impact of the last two elections on Japanese politics

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An outstanding feature of Japanese politics is continued one-party predomiance. Since 1955, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has never been ousted from power[1]. However, this tradition of one-party predominance abruptly came to the brink of collapse in the summer of 1989, with the unpredicted revival of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) in the Upper House election. The LDP failed to secure a majority in either House for the first time since its formation in 1955. It is still arguable whether this election was what V. O. Key called a "critical" election rather than a mere event. Key pointed out the significance of elections with clear transformation of party support pattern among voters[2]. As recent polls show, support for the JSP has been declining since 1990's spring, and the LDP seems to have regained its popularity among voters. Moreover, the LDP succeeded in obtaining more than 50 percent of the seats of the Lower House in the last general election in February 1990. It may be, therefore, that no structural change in Japanese voting behavior has yet occurred.

Nevertheless, barring a reorganization of the present party configuration, the predominance of the opposition in the Upper House will continue for at least several more years. For one thing, Upper House elections are held every three years, with no possibility of dissolution as in the Lower House. The next Upper House election will not occur until the summer of 1992. For another, Upper House members serve for six years, and at each election only half the seats are reshuffled. This means that those who will contest the next Upper House election are members elected in 1986, when the LDP won an exceptionally large number of seats. It will be difficult for the LDP to win so many again. At least through the first half of the

1990s, then, the LDP will face a difficult situation in the Diet.

The impact of the last Upper House election was therefore not at all ephemeral. Each party has been groping for a new strategy that will be workable in this unfamiliar environment. Thus, Japanese party politics has entered into an era of transition. This process has not reached its final stage yet. In this report, I will examine this ongoing change and try to find some possible directions. But for a better understanding of this change, we must answer a preceding question : what is changing at all? In my view, the present situation can be seen as the end of the so-called 55-*nen taisei,* the 1955 system of Japanese politics.

The term "1955 system" has been very popular in the world of Japanese political scientists, and has been regarded as epitomizing characteristics of Japanese party politics during a considerable part of the postwar era. But its meaning still remains a bit ambiguous. Needless to say, this term was derived from the fact that two major parties, the LDP and the JSP, were formed almost simultaneously in 1955 and hereby Japanese party configuration became much simpler than in the preceding period. The word "taisei," however, usually connotes "governing mode", "organizing principle", or "regime". In Japan, many people have regarded the 1955 system as more than just a particular party configuration. And the significance of the 1955 system may be found in these connotations. In this report, I will examine the 1955 system at three different levels : first, at the party configuration level ; second, at the legislature level ; and third, at the level of "metarule" of a political game.

In my view, the 1955 system at the latter two levels long survived the collapse of the system at the first level. It was the last Upper House election, along with the great change in Japan's position in the world political economy and international political situation, that brought the 1955 system to its end at all levels.

An overview of the last two elections

As mentioned above, the JSP scored an unpredicted victory in the last Upper House election. Of the 50 proportional representation seats, the JSP won 20, compared to 15 for the LDP. The JSP also defeated the LDP

in the 76 seats allocated to 47 prefectural district. It won 26 seats compared to 21 for the LDP. Beyond these 26, the JSP backed 11 of 12 "Rengo" candidates and 4 progressive independents, all of whom were elected, and later another independent joined up. The JSP camp thus took 62 of 126 seats, compared to only 20 in the previous Upper House election in 1986. This was the first time the JSP had ever finished on top in a national-level election, except for the 1947 general election. The other parties all lost seats. The LDP did worst, losing more than 30 seats. With the 73 seats it carried over from the previous election, it now held only 111 seats, 12 less than a majority in the Upper House. This was the first serious defeat of the LDP since its formation in 1955. Each of the smaller parties lost one to three seats.

The most common explanation for the result of the last Upper House election is to attribute the defeat of the LDP to a coincidence of two issues and one scandal. The most important factor seemed to be a " right-or-wrong" issue with regard to the introduction of the consumption tax. The LDP government's introduction of the new tax system, apparently violating its earlier pledge, was very unpopular among voters. Even small-sized retailers, most of whom had been dependable supporters, were inclined to vote against the LDP.

The second issue was the lifting of protection over agricultural products, especially the impending question of whether to open the door to the rice imports. As is well known, the retail price of rice in Japan is extraordinarily high by international standards, and throwing the Japanese rice market into international competition would be disastrous to Japanese farmers. The American government has long pressured Japan to abolish or loosen its regulations over rice imports to improve the trade imbalance between the two countries. In 1989, the government's determination to resist American pressure appeared to waver, and several LDP leaders mentioned, even though not formally, the possibility of rice import liberalization. Farmers' distrust of the LDP's agricultural policy rapidly grew.

The scandal was the Recruit money-for-favors affair, which involved quite a few LDP politicians. Incidents of corruption are not rare in Japanese politics, and they seldom influence election seriously, although

the Lockheed case almost twenty years ago did have a lasting impact. The Recruit scandal brought resentment or jealousy of how easily politicians seemed to attract money, and according to opinion polls, it strengthened anti-LDP feelings. Thus, responsibility for the Recruit affair became one of the top issues in the election.

The coincidence of these three serious issues no doubt contributed to the remarkable result of the Upper House election. The size of this upheaval demands reconsideration of the traditional wisdom that Japanese voters are not much affected by issues. For example, as has often been pointed out, the vote share of the LDP shrank almost linearly from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, with little apparent impact from any grand controversies among the political parties. Even the LDP government's successful economic policies which brought such high-speed growth, failed to reverse or modify this decline clearly.

Long-term factors such as mobilization through social networks and established party loyalty outweighed such short-term factors as issues and party leaders' images in shaping the political attitudes of most voters. These long-term factors helped the LDP.

On the other hand, the linear decline of the LDP vote suggests that the influence of these favorable long-term determinants gradually weakened during this period. Due to rapid economic growth, Japanese rural society in effect became urbanized, with a corresponding diversification of values. Voting behavior thus became more volatile, a necessary condition for the issue coincidence mentioned above to have a major impact. Flanagan has explained this change very well[3]. What remains unexplained, however, is the victory of the JSP. The other opposition parties all lost in the last Upper House election. This pattern within the opposition persisted through the 1990 general election, although of course the LDP did far better then.

That is, the 1989 election had plunged the LDP into a predicament. Prime Minister Uno resigned and all the potential successors were forced to give up power. Instead, Kaifu, who had never been among the top influentials of the LDP, was nominated as the premier. Many people expected an early dissolution of the Lower House leading to the end of the LDP's one-party rule. Resisting pressure for a quick election, Prime

Minister Kaifu waited for a change of wind, and finally dissolved the Lower House late in January 1990. His strategy proved to be surprisingly successful : the LDP won more than 280 seats to secure a majority not only in the full house but also in all standing committees.

Except for the JSP, the opposition parties found themselves in a gloomy situation after the election. The Japan Communist Party (JCP) and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) almost halved the number of their seats, as they had in the last Upper House election. Since then, the DSP has been struggling just to survive. The JCP also faced serious problems of image, due to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The setback to the Clean Government Party (CGP) was not as severe, but its electoral future is in doubt because the party is based almost exclusively on a Buddhist sect which has long since stopped growing. The number of the JSP's seats, on the contrary, increased by more than 50, allowing the party to surpass all the other opposition parties.

Why did the LDP do so much better in the general election than in the 1989 Upper House election? Flanagan provides a convincing explanation for this seemingly schizophrenic phenomenon. He sees the main factors as (1) the differences in the electoral systems between the two houses, and (2) the disappearance of the short-term effect of the issue coincidence (4).

The first point is that candidates for the Lower House are in closer contact with local social networks and community organizations, which are usually conservative, because their electoral districts are smaller than those for the Upper House. Conservative Lower House candidates can easily use existing social groups even if their reliability in elections is weaker than twenty years ago. In this sense, the LDP is less vulnerable in general elections than in Upper House elections. The second point is that the anti-LDP feeling which surged in the summer of 1989 subsided rapidly. Resentment against corruption did not last long, and voters got used to the new consumption tax. Some retailers who had opposed the consumption tax actually found it profitable to them, and returned to the conservative camp.

An often overlooked aspect of the 1990 general election, however, is that the JSP also enjoyed good fortune. In fact, it was the only one party

to increase the number of its seats. The increase was more than 50, a great advance considering the JSP's shabby performance since 1969, when it lost more than 40 seats at one time. In the 1970s and most of the 1980s, the JSP barely kept its head above water in the competition with the other opposition parties, but its importance in Japanese politics was often questioned. As the result of the last two elections, the JSP has regained a substantial lead within the opposition.

Why these successive victories for the socialists? Nearly all analysts stress the popularity of Doi Takako, the chairperson of the JSP. In the era of mass society and mass media, the image or appeal of a party leader is apt to affect voters' decisions even in countries with parliamentary election systems. Even in Japan, recently, the popularity of Prime Minister Nakasone had been one of the major factors in the landslide victory of the LDP in the 1986 "double" election. Doi too is such an attractive leader to voters in a mass society.

But it is somewhat dangerous to attribute the entire victory to a single person, even if he or she is very attractive in voters' eyes. Nakasone, for example, succeeded in appealing to voters through his decisiveness and prominent diplomatic style, and brought victory to the LDP in 1986. However, he failed to gain a safe majority in the 1983 Lower House election. Not only the leader's image, but that of the party itself can affect voting behavior. In 1989-90, the difference of credibility in the eyes of voters' among the opposition parties may have been the key. Perhaps Japanese voters chose the JSP as second best to the LDP, as the most reliable opposition party, if not the ruling one.

In any case, today's Japan has one weakened but still predominant conservative party, one perpetual but revitalized opposition party, plus other now relatively minor parties. The LDP and the JSP combined hold 84 percent of the Lower House seats and 76 percent of the Upper House seats. Seemingly, this party configuration resembles that of the so-called "1955 system." Has Japanese party politics returned to its starting point after a long journey? Before answering this question, we should glance at some key characteristics of the 1955 system.

Three aspects of the 1955 system

In 1955, two major parties were formed almost simultaneously, each unifying formerly centrifugal forces. One was the LDP, and the other was the JSP. No significantly large parties were left. Because this party configuration presented a sharp contrast to the earlier situation, party politics with two parties as the main actors has since been referred to as the "1955 system."

The significance of the "1955 system" is, however, not necessarily clear. The commonest interpretation points to the quasi-two-party system formed in 1955, accompanied by hope for realizing an authentic two-party system, complete with alternation of the governing party. This interpretation is a bit superficial, but useful in stressing the relative stability and simplicity of post-1955 party politics. Needless to say, in the 1955 system, the LDP was always a predominant ruling party and the JSP was a perennial opposition party. Some people, therefore, argued that the 1955 system is in fact the "one-and-a-half party system." The present party configuration is similar to this early 1955 system.

The 1955 system as a party configuration did not last long. First, endemic intraparty struggles in the JSP caused the secession of its right wing in late 1959. It formed the DSP the following year, hoping to be widely accepted by voters as a "sound" social democratic party replacing the JSP. Then, one of the new Buddhist sects, the Soka Gakkai, made its own political party, the CGP, and gained seats in both Houses in the 1960s. Third, the JCP began to recover strength in the same period.

The appearance of these smaller opposition parties in national politics cracked the 1955 system as a party configuration, but did not break it down quickly. The LDP and the JSP still retained much of the power they held in the late 1950s. The first step in the collapse of the 1955 system came with the 1969 general election, when the JSP lost 51 seats overnight, and the CGP and the JCP advanced. The LDP was also losing seats : for example, six in the 1974 Upper House election. The result was the "Hakuchu" era in which the strength of the governing party and that of the opposition as a whole came very close to each other. This trend continued in the 1976 general election, when the LDP lost its majority in

some Lower House standing committees.

The 1955 system as a party configuration thus ended in the first half of the 1970s. Changes in economic structure, society, and culture had turned the LDP-JSP-leading party system into a kind of multi-party system. In spite of this shift, many people found it difficult to answer whether or when the 1955 system had actually ended. For example, the 1979 annual report of the Japan Political Science Association was devoted to a debate about the formation and the collapse of the 1955 system, but we cannot see any agreement as to the end of the system among the contributors[5]. This controversy continued even in the 1980s. This suggests the existence of another aspect of the 1955 system in a broad sense.

In fact, the 1955 system has often been called the *ji-sha shudo taisei,* meaning "politics almost exclusively determined by the LDP and the JSP," or *ji-sha nareai taisei,* "politics in which the LDP and the JSP accommodate each other behind the scenes." In these phrases, the 1955 system is seen in terms of management of the legislative process, both in plenary session and in committees. That is, it is argued that the parliamentary process is essentially under the control of the LDP and the JSP, producing what Iwai calls "the 1955 system in the Diet"[6].

One might think that this characterization of the 1955 system at the parliamentary level is nonsensical, given the continuing majority of the LDP. As long as majority rule works, opposition parties would seem to have no opportunity to realize their preferences in the Diet, unless the ruling party would voluntarily grant minority requests. But, as a matter of fact, there are many cases where majority rule does not work perfectly because of what Jean Blondel had called "viscosity" in the parliamentary process[7]. Various procedures, precedents, and norms can constrain the realization of the ruling party's or government's intentions. As Mochizuki argues, the viscosity of the Japanese Diet is quite powerful, so that the opposition can often influence the legislative process in some way or another[8].

The JSP benefited from this viscosity much more than the other oppositon parties. A recent case well illustrates this point. In the extraordinary Diet session in the summer of 1989, the JSP decided to boycott deliberations in the Lower House budget committee, the most important

standing committee, to pressure the government to take full responsibility for the Recruit scandal. Such tactics had often led to various benefits for the JSP. In this case, however, the LDP decided to ignore the JSP's absence. Some LDP influentials proudly talked about their determination to deprive the JSP of any veto power in the Diet. Only one day later, however, the LDP returned to its old Diet management practice of accommodation to the JSP. Apparently it felt curiously uneasy with the JSP excluded.

This episode demonstrates the persistence of at least this aspect of the 1955 system. The LDP and the JSP had established the 1955 system in the Diet, and collaborated to maintain it. But why did the LDP do so, despite its overwhelming performance in most elections? This question must be answered.

To make a long story short, there were two main reasons. First, in the early years of the 1955 system, the JSP had a substantial capacity to mobilize mass movements in order to pressure the government. The party itself thought highly of "outside-the-Diet struggle." Moreover, the LDP lacked the cohesiveness to repel such pressures from the JSP. On occasion, intraparty opponents of the leadership group of the LDP would implicitly ally with the JSP to frustrate the government's wishes. Thus, in order to maintain political stability, it was convenient or sometimes even necessary for the government and the LDP's mainstream to concede some points to the JSP.

Second, in spite of many serious disputes between the LDP and the JSP, many politicians on both sides shared a belief in parliamentary democracy, and idealized the British model of a two-party system. As Robert Dahl has argued, belief in the legitimacy of democracy among influentials is very important in the development and stabilization of democratic politics[9]. Moreover, politicians of both parties began to identify themselves as belonging to the same group of "gikai-jin"(Diet persons) through intensive face-to-face contacts in legislative committees and frequent interparty negotiations at various levels. Face-to-face relationships often raise mutual trust, especially in Japan, and so personal friendships developed between the two camps. Although there remained some stubborn anti-LDP or anti-JSP politicians, there was also a kind of community

consisting of many LDP and JSP politicians. Sometimes, politicians from both parties cooperated to realize a common interest, such as the creation of their own pension system in 1958.

The two parties gradually built up practices of conceding to each other and respecting the rule of reciprocity in the Diet, although the LDP was usually stronger. The revision of the Diet Management Act (Kokkai-ho) in 1958 was a good example of the accommodation between the two parties in those days. In this case, they agreed to restrict extensions of the Diet session, which had the result of increasing the Diet's viscosity even more.

Many regulations, procedures, precedents, and rituals introduced in this way by the two major parties in the early stage of the 1955 system became institutionalized and had a long life, all the more because their accumulation process was gradual and inadvertent[10]. They survived environmental changes and continued to function as standard operating procedures of the LDP-JSP "community," to an extent that often surprised newcomers to the Diet. During the period of nearly equal power in the 1970s and some of the 1980s, the other opposition parties also began to gain some voice in the legislative process, and the LDP became more accommodative to the opposition as a result[11]. The JSP too was forced to listen to other opposition parties. Even in these days, however, the LDP-JSP "community" continued to exist, bringing complaints from smaller parties about the LDP's making too much of the JSP.

The final aspect of the 1955 system which we should examine can be called "metarules," mainly the constitution and secondary the electoral system[12]. In the late 1950s, the right wing politicians who dominated the conservative camp had tried hard to revise the new constitution introduced to Japan by the American occupation. Their goal was massive rearmament and increasing restrictions on people's rights and freedom. Some even envisaged a return to the prewar regime. If they had been successful, Japanese postwar politics would have been very different.

It was the JSP along with anti-rightist forces in the LDP that prevented the metarules established by GHQ from being changed too much. First, the JSP frustrated the right wing's intentions by securing enough seats in the Lower House to prevent initiation of a constitutional amendment.

Then, when Prime Minister Hatoyama tried to deprive the JSP of most of its seats through modifying the electoral system, liberals in the LDP implicitly assisted the socialists in their struggle for survival and frustrated the premier's ambition. Such a *de facto* alliance between liberals and socialists reappeared several more times to frustrate the right wing's wishes. After 1960, the main stream of the LDP abandoned its attempt to revise the constitution and massively rearmament, leaving the rightists as a minor group within the party.

It took several years for the 1955 system at the metarule level to stabilize itself. In that process, the JSP played a much larger role than one would expect from its electoral performance. Ironically, the institutionalization of this system deprived the JSP of some of its *raison d'être*. That made some socialists cling all the more to their role as "guardian" of the constitution. The situation of rightists in the LDP after 1960 was in a sense similar to that of the JSP. They were not ousted from the party but their ideological claims were often ignored by governments preoccupied by economic policies. In reaction, rightists often demanded that the party leadership return to the old platform's commitment to constitutional revision. These calls naturally brought an overreaction by the JSP. However, unlike the 1950s these were mere skirmishes or even rituals of conflict than real battles that threatened the system seriously.

After 1960, there were sporadic challenges against the 1955 system as metarule, the electoral system as well as the constitution. In 1973, for example, Prime Minister Tanaka attempted to introduce the single-seat-district system into Lower House elections, but he was not even able to introduce the bill to the Diet. Prime Minister Nakasone provides another example. He had been a hard-liner in the LDP, advocating revision of the constitution and the strengthening of Japanese armed forces for many years. But he changed his mind and adopted a more liberal stance after becoming Premier. Such examples well show the longevity of the 1955 system as a political framework or metarule.

The 1955 system and the post-1989 situation

Both at the legislative-process level and at the metarule level, 1955

system basically retained its shape, long after the party configuration of 1955 had been altered. This is not only because the constitution had remained unamended. As Theodore Lowi says, the political system or political regime can change substantially even if the constitution remains the same[13]. In Japan, the main political forces had stakes in maintaining an accommodative relationship, and they continued to believe in the legitimacy or desirability of the political metarule. Inertia contributed as well. At the end of the first section of this paper, I asked whether, as a result of the last two major elections, Japanese politics had returned to its starting point after a long journey. Now that main aspects of the 1955 system have been briefly analyzed, this question must be replaced by a new one : Did the last two elections bring any significant changes to the 1955 system, at each level?

First, looking at party configuration may still give us some useful suggestions, since it was the major transformation in party configuration which signified the starting point of the 1955 system. The combined share of seats of the LDP and the JSP was moved back toward that of the late 1950s, compared with ten years ago. The two parties shared 99 percent of the Lower House seats in the late 1950s, 72 percent in 1981, and 84 percent at present. This seems to mean that Japanese party configuration returned just half way back to a prototypical 1955 system situation. Has this half return strengthened the distinctive LDP-JSP "community" in the Diet again? Does it a reconfirmation of the previous metarule?

Before answering these questions, we have to remember the other feature of the 1955 system at the party configuration level. That is the simple fact that in this system the LDP always secured a majority in both houses. The LDP often suffered from severe intra-party struggles over metarule-related issues, but it was more cohesive over more practical issues. With their perpetual majority, the LDP and the government were able to acomplish most of what they regarded as important to them. As the result of the last Upper House election, however, the LDP lost this satisfactory position. Granted, the LDP-government can get budget bills passed without the support of any opposition party. But almost all budget bills involve revisions of existing laws or the introduction of new laws, which is impossible without securing a majority in the Upper House. The

half-way return of Japanese party configuration to its early phase thus did incorporate an important difference in its contents.

What will this twisted situation at the configuration level bring to Japanese politics in the near future? Within the Diet, we can see several interesting developments. A short-lived attempt in 1989 to ally all the opposition parties except for the JCP was one. Most interesting is the fact that, in spite of noisy quarrels over the consumption tax issue, most of the bills presented by the government easily passed the Upper House. The government and the opposition began to accommodate to each other soon after the Upper House election, leaving one symbolic issue, the newly implemented consumption tax, to be fought sharply but superficially between the two camps. The government quickly came to take the interests of the opposition parties into account as much as possible, in order to soften their resistance in the Upper House. For example, the government and the LDP had long opposed the *Ikuji kyugyo ho* (the law granting employees paid leave for infant care), which the opposition had tried to introduce several times. Recently, however, the government and the opposition agreed to pass this bill. Enactment of the *Hibakusha engo ho* (the nuclear-bomb victims assistance law) in 1990 is another example of opposition's success in getting its bill passed the Diet. Before the Upper House election, all the opposition-initiated bills except for a negligible one had been prevented to pass the Diet by the LDP[14].

On the other hand, the opposition's attitude toward bills presented by the government, especially that of the JSP, also became positive. For one thing, because opposition to a bill could paralyze the functioning of government, the JSP and other parties were cautious. For another, they wanted to impress voters as responsible and realistic parties. Thus, in the 116th session (from October to December 1989), 78 percent of the bills presented by the government were passed. In the 118th session (from February to June 1990), the percentage rose to 95[15].

Of course, mutual concessions during the legislative process had been found to some extent in the so-called "hakuchu jidai (the era of nearly even power)" in the 1970s, too. But after 1989, negotiations between the two sides were more open, not just confined to behind-the-scenes accommodations. Moreover, as in the case of the infant-care-leave law, parties

went beyond mutual concessions to engage in substantial cooperation in policy formation. Prime Minister Kaifu even mentioned the desirability of consultation between the government and the opposition over important legislation before it is introduced to the Diet (on March 6, 1990). If the LDP and three opposition parties continue their mutual consultation and collaboration, we may be able to talk about the possibility of a four-party coallition. But the likelihood of such a coalition is low because it is too big to be a "minimum winning coalition." That is, to accommodate the opposition as a whole would cost the LDP too much. Thus, it is natural for the LDP to look for a more restricted and efficient form of cooperation.

One possibility would be to strengthen the old LDP-JSP "community," making the relationship between the two parties more equal. The two parties did try collaboration after the Upper House election. The negotiations between Japan and North Korea to establish diplomatic relations, which started last fall, was a good example. The accumulation of cooperative practice in the Diet made the two parties feel comfortable with each other. Also, the more pragmatic attitude of the JSP toward the government's policy propositions looked to promote further cooperation between the two. The action program approved by the JSP's central executive committee in March, 1990, pointed out the importance of confering with the LDP over various subjects.

If this cooperative relation between the two parties became more established, we might envision the appearance of a new 1955 system in which the LDP-government and the JSP would determine many important issues in the Diet by themselves. At the extreme, such cooperation could develop into a "grand coalition" of the two parties, as in Germany in the mid-1960s. In fact, there were some politicians on both sides who had this idea in mind, although it perhaps was too dramatic an experiment to have much chance of success.

In the event, things did not go that far. The CGP and the DSP resented the JSP's seeming to overshadow them, and began to emphasize differnces between them and the JSP. They knew that the defeat of the LDP in the Upper House election had given them opportunities to make deals. Some influential LDP politicians saw the situation the same way. Thus,

the possibility and desirability of a LDP-CGP-DSP coalition began to be considered. But it was the Gulf crisis that made this scheme look more feasible, though at the same time this crisis brought the old liberal-socialist implicit alliance to the fore.

That is, soon after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the United States asked the Japanese government to join or contribute to the anti-Iraq coalition. In response, the hawkish group in the LDP insisted on dispatching Japan's defense forces to the Gulf area, probably in order to establish a precedent for sending forces abroad. These right-wingers succeeded in getting Prime Minister Kaifu to introduce the necessary legislation, which caused great controversy not only among the opposition parties but also within the LDP itself. The bill finally died, partly because it proved to be a makeshift, full of defects, and partly because the liberal-socialist implicit alliance had reemerged to maintain the metarule of postwar Japanese politics.

It must be remembered, however, that the liberals in the LDP were not opposed to any sort of help to the United States. In fact, it has been this group which has given priority to maintain the relationship with the United States, relying on the postwar constitution and the Japan-US security treaty. Within this limit, they would not be reluctant to support the United States. After the Upper House election, the JSP itself had started to move toward this position, but the Gulf crisis pushed the party back to its "idealistic" anti-war campaign. This meant that the JSP no longer had any interest in talking with the LDP about practical subjects. The new liberal-socialist alliance had proven to be a temporary phenomenon. After the bill to dispatch defense forces abroad was abandoned by the government, the JSP became isolated in the Diet. Instead of the JSP, the CGP and the DSP began to get most attention as partners of the LDP.

Actually, these three parties have a long history of coalitions at the local level. Around 1970, Japanese local politics had seen a surge of so-called progressive local governments, most of which were based on coalitions of citizen movements and some parties that were in the opposition at the national level. Those progressive local governments had been damaged by the economic setback after the 1973 oil shock. But it was the CGP that finally brought the era of progressive local governments to an

end. In 1976, the CGP decided to switch its main coalition partner at the local level from the JSP to the LDP and DSP. After that, coalitions consisting of these three parties successfully took power in many local governments. The LDP's attempt to lure the CGP and the DSP at the Diet level was bolstered by those experiences.

Here, what counts most is the attitude of the CGP. The DSP had decided to take the LDP side as early as December, 1989, but it is a bit too small to give the LDP a majority in the Upper House. If the CGP were to side with the LDP explicitly, the 1955 system at the Diet level as well as at the party configuration level will be finished at that point. Japanese party politics will enter a new era, in which the LDP and the middle-of-the-road coalition will clearly be opposed to the JSP (and the JCP). An importnat point here is that in spite of its "renaissance," the JSP today no longer has the power to mobilize "out-of-the-Diet" mass movements, as in the late 1950s. This threat for the JSP to force concessions from the ruling coalition is no longer available.

At this moment, it is a bit too early to predict whether the CGP will join the conservative camp decisively or not. Allying with the LDP might impinge on its vaguely pacifist stance as a Buddhist party. Moreover, the party has not a few activists who are very sensitive about Japanese military power. The second demand by the American government just after the beginning of the Gulf War, that Japan should support the effort substantially, and then the LDP-government's quick decision to contribute an additional 9 billion dollars and to dispatch air force planes caused serious problems for the CGP. It is certain, however, that the CGP's present leadership is eager to obtain some posts in the cabinet. In fact, the CGP finally decided to support the LDP's promise to grant 9 billion dollars to America.

Whether it is the transformation of the LDP-JSP "community" or a LDP-CGP-DSP coalition that leads Japanese party politics in the 1990s, the defeat of the LDP seems to be finishing off the 1955 system at the Diet level. How about at the metarule level?

The essence of the 1955 system at the metarule level is the juxtaposition of the postwar constitution and the Japan-US security treaty. Under this regime, Japan had concentrated its energy on economic development

without paying much attention to the rest of the world. As a result, Japan was surprised to find itself the number-two economic power in the world in the 1980s. By the end of that decade, it had become difficult for Japan to do nothing politically beyond passively reacting to environmental change. The LDP's defeat in the Upper House election coincidentally came just at this difficult time. It seems unlikely that the results of the last two elections will lead to a great modification of the 1955 system at the metarule level in the near future. The successful resistance against the revision of the Defense Forces Law last fall well corroborates this inference. But one implication of the 1955 system at the metarule level is that the doctrine of "prosperity in one country" cannot survive much longer.

On the other hand, the JSP's victory in 1989 is at least partly attributable to the Recruit scandal, which clearly demonstrated the fact that the Japanese electoral system requires politicians to spend huge amounts of money in their constituencies. Thus, after the election, revision of the electoral system returned to the agenda. The electoral system can be seen as a metarule of the political game, and changing it would amount to a transformation of the political framework. Of course, changing the electoral system would have differnt implications for each party. The LDP insists on the introduction of a single-seat district system, but this system would seriously hurt the opposition parties, especially the smaller ones. Moreover, most individual LDP Diet members are very nervous about even a slight modification of their constituencies. Judging from the reluctance of all the parties over this issue, it will be very difficult to carry out any substantial reform of the present electoral system within a few years. Still, it is important that since the Upper House election, all the parties have agreed at least on the necessity of a drastic change of the electoral system, even if agreement on what to do were a distant prospect.

Concluding remark

The 1955 system got its name simply because two major parties, the LDP and the JSP, were founded in 1955. But some important features engendered by the birth of the 1955 system long survived major transitions in party configuration, and continued to affect Japanese politics. I

do not mean to say that these features defined all the important political events and decisions. In order to explain Japanese politics, the roles played by the bureaucracy and the LDP factions, anticipated reactions to coming elections, and many other factors must also be analyzed.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that the long life of the 1955 system as a framework or metarule helped make Japanese politics quite stable, and set reasonable limits on most of the behavior of the important political actors. The 1955 system at the Diet level can also be seen as stabilizing Japanese politics, by ritualizing the fierce "battles" between the two camps. This system underwent some modification in the period of nearly even power but the LDP-JSP "community" continued to structure the legislative process until the Upper House election.

In my view, the 1989 Upper House election was the first event which might lead to the end of the 1955 system. But it also opened a door, if only slightly, to develop the 1955 system into a true two-party system. At present, we can see some contradictory trends coexisting. In any case, it is almost certain that the opposition parties will continue to outnumber the LDP in the Upper House for several more years. This situation may encourage the formation of a new system. Whatever that may be, however, the new system will be heavily overshadowed by the 1955 system.

Notes

(1) Exactly speaking, the LDP was forced to concede a small part of its control to the New Liberal Club(NLC) for a time in the 1980s. Retrospectively, however, this coalition between two conservative parties was a mere episode in the long period of the LDP predominance. In fact, the NLC, which had split from the LDP in 1976, never succeeded in growing to be more than a tiny group of reckless younger conservatives, and was destined to be absorbed again by the LDP in 1986. The one-party predominance system was, therefore, continuous in substance even in the period of the conservative coalition experiments.

(2) V. O. Key Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 17, 1955.

(3) Scott C. Flanagan, "The Changing Japanese Voter and the 1989 and

1990 election," an unpublished paper, 1990.

(4) *Ibid.*

(5) Nihon seiji gakkai, *Gojugonen taisei no keisei to hokai*, Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1979.

(6) Iwai Tomoaki, *Rippo Katei*, Tokyo, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1988.

(7) Jean Blondel, "Legislative Behavior : Some Steps towards a Cross-National Measurement," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 5, 1969.

(8) Mike Mochizuki, *Managing and Influencing the Japanese Legislative Process : The Role of Parties and the National Diet*, a doctoral thesis presented to Harvard Uiversity, 1982.

(9) Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy*, Yale University Press, 1971, ch.8.

(10) The significance of institution in political life is well examined by March and Olson. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institution : The Organizational Basis of Politics*, New York, The Free Press, 1989.

(11) Cf. Ellis S. Krauss, "Japanese Parties and Parliament : Changing Leadership Roles and Role Conflict," in Terry E. MacDougall ed., *Political Leadership in Contemporary Japan*, Ann Arbor, MI, Center for Japanese Studies, 1982.

(12) Ryuji Miyazaki, "Nihon ni okeru 'sengo demokurasi' no koteika," Kazuo Indo *et al.*, ed., *Sengo demokurasi no seiritsu*, Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1988.

(13) Theodore Lowi, *The End of the Liberalism*, New York, Norton, 1979.

(14) Seizaburo Sato and Tetsuhisa Matsuzaki, *Jiminto seiken*, Tokyo, Chuo koronsha, 1986, pp.280-1.

(15) The 117th session was dissolved before substantial deliberation began.

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