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Japan: Who Governs?
An Essay on Official Bureaucracy

In a famous essay written over twenty-five years ago, Maruyama Masao tried “to give a rough sketch of the massive ‘system of irresponsibilities’ that constituted Japan’s fascist rule. Three basic types of political personality can be abstracted from this sketch: the Portable Shrine, the Official, and the Outlaw (or rōnin). The Shrine represents authority; the Official, power; and the Outlaw, violence.”1 Although Maruyama was addressing himself to the essence of late military-era politics, his ‘rough sketch’ still contains most of the essential insights that scholars have advanced to account for the nature of modern Japanese politics, either before or after the war: the marked separation between power and authority, the movement of policy initiative from lower statuses upward toward higher statuses (for example, the ringisei), and the alleged system of irresponsibilities that comes to the fore whenever policy goes awry (as, for example, over pollution, land prices, or 1970’s foreign policy).

Maruyama’s tripod also seems to live on into the present, judging from the number of three-fold analytical schemes that students of Japanese politics have advanced. Nagai Yōnosuke endorses it explicitly. He suggests that today the portable shrine is the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) faction leader, held aloft by the bureaucracy, and prodded by the new rōnin—the press, and, he might have added, the emerging forces of consumer protest, residents’ committees, and “reform” (kakushin) mayors.2 In a different formulation,


Taguchi Fukuji refers to "the quasi-monopolistic usurpation of the decision-making function by the 'Triangular League' made up of the top leaders of the ruling party, the senior officers of the government, and the financial tycoons." In Taguchi's view, the financiers (zaikai) are not, of course, rōnin but have in fact gained status, as Maruyama said they would if they played the game. But the entrance of the zaikai into a structured relationship with power and authority seems itself to be a prime cause of the creation of new rōnin. Even the phrase "Japan, Inc.," although derided by American specialists because of its crudity and lack of nuance, appears to owe something to Maruyama's conception. Like a physical tripod, each leg is indispensable for the stability of the structure. It is an endlessly fascinating process to study how each focus of political force interlocks and interpenetrates with the others, but in the end they still must be seen as somehow "incorporated," as Maruyama thought they were, if one is really going to try to answer the question of who governs in Japan.

Two-thirds of the tripod has been reasonably well documented. Good studies exist of both the ruling and opposition parties, and, to a lesser extent, of the interest and pressure groups, including big business, professionals, labor, and a few others. Books on the historical and social background of contemporary politics, as well as on the American occupation, elections, the constitution, local government, and foreign and defense policy, provide much important information for any understanding of the structure. Only the official, the power-holding bureaucrat, remains relatively unscrutinized. In a valuable new introductory survey, J. A. A. Stockwin notes, "There is no comprehensive study in English of the national bureaucracy," a circumstance that may help to explain why the triangular formulations of Maruyama and others do not today elicit universal acceptance.

This lacuna is not one that can be filled in a short essay. My own research commitment is to the study of a single element of the official bureaucracy—the trade and industry officials of the Tsūsanshō (Ministry of International Trade and Industry, or MITI) and its predecessors. I believe that we shall reach an adequate understand-

ing of the official in Japanese politics only when we have studies of the vicissitudes and accomplishments of most of the ministries, agencies, and public enterprises that make up the Japanese government. Research of this sort is possible and is underway. Here I wish to signal the significance of the topic by exploring in various dimensions the controversy that has surrounded the role of the official in Japan from the occupation to the present day. My purpose is neither to support nor to challenge Maruyama's idea of the powerful but unsanctioned official and his vital but ostensibly invisible activities; it is rather to follow up on his and others' efforts, the most provocative and courageous we have, to explain bureaucratic power in Japan. Leaving aside constitutional clichés, Marxist substitutes for thought, and the tautologies of national character studies, practising political scientists, myself included, are not yet prepared to answer who governs in Japan, although we have mountains of evidence, much of it contradictory, to sift on the subject.

I

Two recent and significant books illustrate the controversial nature of available work on Japan's governmental bureaucracy. One is by a group of American and Japanese scholars—Ezra Vogel, editor, *Modern Japanese Organization and Decision-Making*—and the other is by a group of Japanese scholars—Ari Bakuji, Ide Yoshinori, et al., *Gendai gyōsei to kanryōsei* (Modern Administration and the Bureaucratic System). In the first, some of the American scholars approach the subject of officialdom in much the same way that an anthropologist comes to the study of an utterly strange civilization—open-minded, ready to find the secrets of success, and impatient with the premature carplings of the hypercritical or ideological. Albert Craig, in the leading article of the Vogel volume, explicitly adopts the language of functionalism and is properly and insightfully determined to show that the Japanese bureaucracy "works." At times he seems to veer toward normative functionalism—the belief that because a practice occurs it must be functional for something—and to quibble with the facts, but his article is a deliberately administered antidote to the "large literature written by ex-bureaucrats and news-

paper reporters to expose the foibles, failings, formalism, and frustrations of bureaucratic life in Japan."7

By contrast, Ari, Ide, and their colleagues are neither ex-bureaucrats nor newspaper reporters, but their essays are centrally in the stream of critical, reform-minded literature in Japan on the bureaucracy. In the lead-off essay, Kawanaka Nikō deplores the exclusivity and divergence from constitutional stipulations of the bureaucracy's monopoly of policy-planning and observes that, "In Japan, the idea that policy is formulated through discussion with the people is not developed." Kojima Akira challenges the view of foreigners that interministerial agreement is reached on the basis of consensus, and he is alarmed by the fact that it is more efficacious for citizens to approach officialdom through "appeals" (chinjō) than through openly political processes.8

What does this divergence of orientations between two scholarly symposia on more or less the same subject signify? Craig is of course right that too much domestic journalism on the Japanese bureaucracy is facile and insensitive to its accomplishments. When an English commentator on Japan's economy, asked to account for its performance, responds, "Certainly, the very high standard of the civil servants and the fact that they all want Japan to grow," one can only agree.9 It is for the same reason that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development singled out "the efficiency of the administration" in making an optimistic forecast for the Japanese economy just at the time that most other open economies were staggering under the impact of OPEC price hikes and inflation.10 The writings of Matsumoto Seichō, Fukumoto Kunio, and others, including some Westerners, while often suggestive, will not help us to understand why the Japanese governmental bureaucracy is as comparatively small, inexpensive, and effective as it is.11 At the same


8. Kawanaka, "Nihon ni okeru seisaku kettei no seiji katei" (The Political Processes of Policy-making in Japan), Gendai gyōsei 2:3-6, 34-37; and Kojima, "Gendai yosan seiji shiron" (A Sketch of Modern Budgetary Politics), ibid., 2:121-25.


11. See Matsumoto Seichō, Gendai kanryō ron (On Modern Bureaucrats), 3 vols. (Bungei Shunjū Sha, 1963-1966); and Fukumoto Kunio, Kanryō (Kō-bundō, 1959). As an example of the popular Marxist writing on Japan in the
time, it cannot be overlooked that while many foreigners study Japanese bureaucracy functionally, the most serious Japanese scholars approach the problem as one of gyōsei kaikaku, or reform of administration. After all the qualifications have been made, there remains a hard core of serious domestic criticism of Japanese officialdom that foreigners are in danger of ignoring—for one way to find out what powers and attributes the bureaucracy possesses is to find out what the Japanese want to reform in their bureaucracy.

From at least February 6, 1948, when the Katayama cabinet set up the Temporary Administrative Structure Reform Deliberation Council (Rinji Gyōsei Kikō Kaikaku Shingikai), to the present, the Japanese government has not been without at least one, and usually several, high-level commissions devoted to reform of the bureaucracy. It is true that most of these bodies have ended up merely trying to check or reduce the inexorable growth of the bureaucracy or to cut through red tape. However, the most important of them did reflect a real sense of crisis and was charged to deal with Maruyama-type issues: how to make the bureaucracy accountable to the groups that the constitution said were authorized to govern. This was the Temporary Administrative Investigation Council (TAIC) (Rinji Gyōsei Chōsa Kai), established February 15, 1962, and made up of the president of the Mitsui Bank, Satō Kiichirō, as chairman, and a Yomiuri vice-president, the chairman of the public employees union, a former procurator general, the president of the Shōwa Denkō corporation, the chairman of Sōhyō, and a distinguished academic specialist—Rōyama Masamichi—as members. Most important, both houses of the Diet authorized the creation of the TAIC and provided it with its own staff of some 21 specialists and 70 researchers. The council presented its report directly to the prime minister on September 29, 1964.12

Since that time at least four successor organizations have been created to implement its findings. The most important of these is the Administrative Supervision Committee (Gyōsei Kanri Inkai), established by law on July 1, 1965, under the chairmanship of the director general of the Administrative Management Agency and known to the officials it was supposed to watch as the “Ometsukeyaku”—an ironic reference to the shogunal watchdogs of the feudal age. This

committee publishes annually the authoritative so-called Administrative Reform Whitepaper (Gyōsei kaikaku no genjō to kadai).

What have been the results? Not many, according to most Japanese observers, except perhaps the dropping of the word 'temporary' (rinji) from the titles of the most recent reform committees. Some simplification of administration has been carried out: the government readjusted and consolidated some 1,641 permissions, approvals, licenses, and so forth (kyoninkakan) that the public previously had to obtain from bureaucratic offices (about 15 per cent of the total of 11,088 statutory permissions identified by the TAIC) and did the same for some 1,636 reports that citizens had to make to ministries and agencies (about 22 per cent of the total of 7,449 such reports). The government also cut the number of deliberation councils (shingikai) from 277 in 1965 to 236 in 1972. But on the main objectives of the TAIC, the Japan Times, not known as a purveyor of leftist exposés, wrote editorially: "No progress whatsoever has been made by the Government in its administration reform efforts, with the sole exception of a hold down on Government personnel increases." It added, "Japan's bureaucratic structure was one aspect of Japanese life which General Douglas MacArthur failed to reform. Instead of chopping away at the base of the bureaucratic pyramid, he simply chopped off the apex, by purging key wartime Government officials. In due course, the pyramid grew a new apex, much like a starfish renewing a dismembered limb and the bureaucracy continued unchanged from the prewar days."

The most devastating critic of the results of gyōsei kaikaku was himself a member of both the TAIC and the Administrative Supervision Committee—Ōta Kaoru, the former secretary general of Sōhyō. In a recent book, he deplores the fact that the main Sōhyō unions, which are made up of government employees, together with the Socialist Party, have done as much to frustrate administrative reform in order to keep their jobs as has the Liberal Democratic Party, with its cadres of former elite bureaucrats. He further suggests that a first measure of reform today would be to abolish the Administrative Management Agency attached to the prime minister's office and says that all members of the Administrative Supervision Committee agreed with this view. He explains that because the officials of the Administrative Management Agency have no power over private businesses and control no public enterprises like those under the supervision of

other ministries, they depend upon recommendations from the influential ministries when it comes time for them to retire and descend from heaven (amakudari). Thus, their official functions of supervising the bureaucracy are contradicted by their need to cultivate the bureaucracy.

Ota supplies innumerable examples of the notorious territorial consciousness (nawabari ishiki)—also known, in some of the Japanese language’s better metaphors, as kakkyo-shugi (hold-one’s-ground-ism), takotsubo-shiki gyōsei (the foxhole method of administration), and simply sekushonarizumu—of the various elements of the bureaucracy and of some of its costs to the citizenry. One example must suffice. For the past ten years governmental committees have been trying to find solutions to the problems of traffic jams and smog in the big cities and of high fares of taxis and the indifferent manners of their drivers. At one time the Ministry of Transportation (which controls the taxi business) and the Police Agency (which controls traffic) had agreed to restrict the number of private cars entering cities, and the MITI (which supervises the automobile manufacturing industry) and the Ministry of Construction (which builds and manages freeways) had dropped their opposition. It failed to come about, however, because the Public Safety Commissions, which had been penetrated by the automotive industry, intervened with the Police Agency, which is under the commissions’ influence, and caused it to change its position. As for taxis, the proposed solution was to allow personally-managed taxis to operate, but this ran into the nawabari (territory) of the Land Transportation Bureau (Rikuun Kyoku) of the Ministry of Transportation. It could not give up its powers of central government control of large taxi companies to local governments, as was suggested, anymore than it could relinquish its powers to approve the location of every bus stop in the country. To do so would mean diminishing the ministry’s jurisdiction, the cardinal taboo governing the lives of all active-duty officials.16


16. Ota, Yakunin o kiru, pp. 106–7. Sahashi Shigeru, a former administrative vice-minister of MITI, 1964–1966, believes that “sectionalism” (his term) is one of the most serious shortcomings of the bureaucracy. He states flatly that “Bureaucrats are officials of the various ministries before they are servants of the nation.” Sahashi, “Kanryō shokun ni chokugen suru” (Straight Talk to the Gentlemen of the Bureaucracy), Bungei shunju, July 1971, p. 108. In an interview with the author in Tokyo, September 5, 1974, Sahashi said further
With regard to the question of who governs, Ota records that the TAIC’s key proposals for bringing the main ministries under the control of at least the cabinet were defeated by ex-bureaucrat politicians. The TAIC recommended that there be established “cabinet assistants” (naikaku hosakan) with powers of general coordination over the ministries, giving the prime minister greater ability to exercise leadership, and a “cabinet members’ budget conference” (yosan kakuryō kaigi), which would remove some of the budgeting powers held exclusively by the Ministry of Finance and place them in the cabinet. The fact that these reforms were defeated is not of as great concern to us here as is the fact that their espousal by the TAIC is good evidence that the Japanese themselves recognize where power really lies.

Many non-Japanese seem to feel that coordination and supervision over the bureaucracy are carried out within the LDP’s Political Affairs Research Council, or in one of the blue-ribbon deliberation councils (shingikai) attached to the cabinet and the various ministries, or through some even less formal channels. The evidence to support such a view is quite thin. It is true that the Political Affairs Research Council significantly increased its intervention into bureaucratic affairs, including the budget, during the early 1970’s and particularly under the Tanaka cabinet. Yet this council has also long been known as the exclusive preserve within the ruling party that no measures of reform of jurisdictional competition have yet been effective. He believes that the combining of ministries into new organizations is useless; it only produces territorial competition among bureaus. He feels that only a wholesale change of attitude among officials will help.

On the other hand, sectionalism may be the most effective restraint on the powers of the bureaucracy. Hollerman argues: “If ‘the government’ of Japan were actually a highly coordinated set of agencies, its powers could be applied with overwhelming force. Instead, partly as a result of sheer ambition for status and partly as a result of divergent interests within the society itself, there is intense rivalry and jealousy among the ruling agencies and their personnel. In competing for power, they tend to neutralize one another’s authority to some extent. It is this offsetting effect, rather than the absence of specific powers of internal control, and also ‘rule by personalities’ as opposed to ‘rule by law,’ which provides the degree of freedom in Japan’s peculiar species of enterprise economy.” Leon Hollerman, *Japan’s Dependency on the World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 160–61.


of former bureaucrats. Even under the Tanaka cabinet, the prime minister’s alleged strong political leadership over the bureaucracy was ambiguous, particularly given the widely acknowledged fact that his ambitious plan for renovating the Japanese islands was drafted by MITI officials.

The disarray within the LDP following Tanaka’s resignation seems unlikely to have strengthened party supervision of the bureaucracy. Instead it brought to the fore—although behind the scenes—the most powerful former bureaucrats in the party: Shiina Etsusaburō, former vice-minister of Commerce and Industry and former vice-minister of Munitions; Fukuda Takeo, who became famous for his performance as Budget Bureau director in the Ministry of Finance, September 1947–September 1948, when he helped bring down the (socialist) Katayama cabinet by refusing to supply funds for a pay increase unless the government raised railroad fares, and then found the funds after the Ashida cabinet had been installed; and Ohira Masayoshi, Ministry of Finance, 1936–1952. These men were the real political leaders of Japan following Tanaka’s downfall and the ones who created the Miki cabinet. There can be no doubt whatsoever about their high capabilities and their devotion to the welfare of Japan, but there can also be no doubt that they are former officials and that they represent both the strengths and dangers of bureaucratic preeminence in the Japanese government.

As for the possibility that shingikai play an important role in controlling the bureaucracy or in policy planning, the opposite is more commonly the case. To take only one example, former MITI vice-minister Sahashi in an interview with this author described MITI’s prestigious Industrial Structure Council as a kakureminō, a fairy’s cape for creating the semblance of official-civilian collaboration. While shingikai undoubtedly perform important communications functions—both from the bureaucracy to civilian groups and vice-versa—they would require a much greater degree of independence, including a separate budget and secretariat, to hold their own


20. Ota, Yakunin o kiru, p. 142.

21. On Fukuda’s fame as a budget bureaucrat, see Fukumoto, Kanryō, pp. 142–143; and Honda Yasuharu, Nihon neo-kanryō ron (Kōdansha, 1974), p. 100.

22. Interview, Tokyo, September 5, 1974. Yamamoto Masao uses the same term, kakureminō, to describe the deliberation councils. Keizai kanryō, p. 21. Also see pp. 46–49, 74–76.
against their sponsoring ministries.\textsuperscript{23} In general, all authorities agree that the most difficult coordinating task in the Japanese policymaking process is among the ministries and agencies themselves; once an interministerial agreement has been reached, the chores of taking the proposal or the bill through the party, cabinet, and Diet stages are relatively less onerous.\textsuperscript{24} The overwhelming weight of cases deemed worth recording in the various collections devoted to postwar policy making concern intra- and inter-ministerial bargaining, particularly with the Ministry of Finance.\textsuperscript{25}

Turning from coordination among rival ministries and the budget to lawmaking itself, we come to the heart of the matter. John Locke’s definition of political power is worth recalling: “Political power, then, I take to be a right of making laws with penalties of death and, consequently, all less penalties for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the common good.”\textsuperscript{26} Dahrendorf agrees: the truly powerful elites are “those who are able, by virtue of their positions, to make laws.”\textsuperscript{27} In Japan, despite the fact that the constitution gives this power exclusively to the elected members of the Diet, it is the bureaucrats who actually initiate and draft virtually all important legislation. They also contribute significantly to the passage of bills within the Diet and possess extralegislative ordinance powers that are almost on a par with the statutes themselves.\textsuperscript{28}

Two leading independent scholars begin their text on Japanese


\textsuperscript{24} Kawanaka, in \textit{Gendai gyōsei to kanryōsei} 2:7.


administration with an account of the postwar attempts at bureaucratic reform; they then append their own list of what they regard as indicators of genuine reform. The first is “establishment of the independence of the Diet in the enactment of legislation.” They write: “Because the Liberal Democratic Party is actually composed of a large extent of former bureaucrats, the policy formulation and enactment of legislation powers, particularly that of initiative, are largely located within the bureaucracy.” They add that the two greatest powers of the bureaucracy are the initiating of legislation and the compilation of the budget. In addition, since the bureaucracy drafts the legislation, it always includes within each bill delegations of ordinance powers to particular agencies; these powers include cabinet orders (seirei), urban prefectural ordinances (furei), ministerial ordinances (shōrei), and rules and regulations (kisoku). Instead of the rule of law (hōchi-shugi), the two authors conclude that Japan employs “administration through law” (hōritsu ni yoru gyōsei).

Looked at from the opposite point of view—that of the practicing bureaucrat—precisely the same opinion emerges. Former MITI vice-minister Sahashi characterizes the Diet as merely an “extension of the bureaucracy” and agrees that Japan has a “government of administration” rather than a government of laws. He contends that it is absurd to think of Japanese officials as merely the “administrative technicians” of a supreme legislative branch. “The bureaucracy drafts all the laws,” he writes. “All the legislature does is to use its powers of investigation, which for about half the year keeps most of the senior officials cooped up in the Diet.”

Even the investigatory powers of Diet members are used only spasmodically. In his full autobiography, Sahashi notes that members of the ruling party generally do not, as a matter of principle, query bureaucratically-sponsored legislation, and that opposition members can often be brought around or, at least, be persuaded to temper their opposition by supplying them with special information or playing up to their known enthusiasms. A few years ago, Ōta Kaoru complained about what he called these “put-up jobs” (yaochō) in the Diet: opposition Diet members, the largest number of whom his

30. Ibid., p. 18.
31. Sahashi, Bungei shunjū, July 1971, p. 112.
labor federation had elected, would obtain documents from officials in order to question the government in the house, but then the same bureaucrats who had supplied the documents would come forward to answer the questions. There seems no doubt from many accounts that the power of the bureaucracy with regard to legislation goes well beyond the initiation of legislative proposals and includes a degree of managing the bills within the Diet itself.

II

How has this concentration of power in the civil service come about? Did the bureaucracy really manage to circumvent the reforms of the occupation? Is there true continuity between the imperial officials (tennō no kanri) of the prewar period and the national bureaucrats (kokka kōmuin) of today? Opinion is by no means unanimous on these questions. Sahashi Shigeru, a former bureaucrat who reached the highest non-political position in his service, believes that the answer to the last question is yes. He writes that “despite fundamental changes in the society a century after the Meiji Restoration, we still have a Meiji era bureaucratic structure.” A scholar, Misono Hitoshi, disagrees. He finds key differences between the ‘spirit’ of the prewar and postwar officials, and argues that whereas imperial bureaucrats were motivated by a sense of loyalty and diligence to the emperor and his government, national officials only work with an eye toward their early retirement and reemployment in a public or civilian enterprise. Such contradictory opinions could be repeated endlessly.

Certain obvious similarities do exist between the status and powers of the contemporary bureaucracy and those of late Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa officials. In prewar Japan, “government service was the career of greatest prestige,” and it still is. The imperial universities, particularly Tokyo University, were training schools for bureaucrats (kanryō yōsei), and they still are. Bureaucrats used to enter politics after retirement, and they still do, although they no longer enjoy the privilege of imperial appointment to the

33. Ōta, Yakunin o kuru, pp. 164–67.
House of Peers and must be elected. "Out of more than forty prime ministers in modern history, roughly one-third were recruited from high-ranking civil bureaucrats," note Ide and Ishida, although the ratio in the postwar world from Higashikuni to Miki is closer to half than to a third (Shidehara, Ashida, Yoshida, Kishi, Ikeda, and Satō were all former bureaucrats). 37

There is still a marked separation between the higher-level career service—the equivalent of commissioned officers—and those ineligible for promotion to senior, policy-making posts. Isomura and Kuronuma comment that we still see old terms in use, such as "kōtōkan (high officials) dining room" or "kōtōkan bathroom"; it may even be that today's "consciousness of power" (kenryoku ishiki) is greater than the status consciousness of the feudal period. Moreover, although all kanryō (officials, in the sense of both high status and role) were supposed to have been changed into yakunin (officials, in the sense of role only), the separation between national and local officials not only persists but was exacerbated by the policies of the occupation. 38

However, there are also key differences. Postwar officials are paid less, must retire earlier, and probably work harder. Until the war, summer half-day work schedules had been traditional for all but essential services. The former vice-minister and then minister of the old Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the great postwar "senior" (senpai) of all MITI officials, Yoshino Shinji (the brother of Yoshino Sakuzō), records that the current practice of all equals and seniors retiring when one person advances to the vice-minister's chair did not exist before the war; there were officials of longer service working in the ministry when he was vice-minister. It was also unthinkable in the days of his active service for politicians to interfere with the budgets of the bureaucrats, as they attempt to do today. 39

The key difference is that the postwar bureaucracy, at least for the greater part of the postwar period, has had fewer rivals for power than did the prewar bureaucracy. Paradoxically, Maruyama's tripod may be of greater relevance to contemporary Japan than to the

38. Isomura and Kuronuma, Gendai Nihon no gyōsei, p. 3.
period which directly concerned him. John Maki, in one of the earliest articles to draw attention to the problem of the bureaucracy after the war, generalized: "Modern Japan—until the surrender in 1945—was ruled by a combination of three power groups, the militarists (army and navy men and chauvinistic individuals and organizations), the monopoly capitalists (zaibatsu), and the bureaucrats." He might have added that the three groups' share of power was roughly reflected by the order in which he named them.

Before the war national power was divided between the tōsuiken (prerogative of supreme command), which was exercised by the army and navy, and the kokumuken (in essence, the power to pass, promulgate and execute laws), which was exercised by the civilian ministers of state and the bureaucracy. In the course of constitutional development, the former came to take precedence over the latter and, in the minds of many Japanese political scientists, led to the fatal contradictions in the Japanese government that were displayed during the Pacific war. General Tōjō attempted to overcome the contradictions by holding simultaneously the offices of prime minister and minister of war, but he still never gained control over some segments of the bureaucracy nor over the navy. "The causes of Japan's defeat in the Pacific war," writes Shinobu, "are many, but one of the basic causes was the Emperor System state order, which stood in the way of a centrally-controlled direction of the 'total war.'" Today the tōsuiken is no more, and the military rivals to bureaucratic power have passed from the scene.

As for political rivals to bureaucratic power, they existed both before and after the war, but it would require detailed ministry-by-ministry analyses to determine which power was ascendant where in either the prewar or postwar periods. After 1932, with the assassination of Inukai, the political parties began to lose influence and in 1940 were merged and dissolved into the Imperial Rule Assistance Association. This movement promoted the rise of bureaucratic power but it also promoted the rise of military power. The bureaucracy did not really come into its own until defeat and occupation destroyed the military.

From approximately 1948, with the beginning of the occupation's "reverse course," until the conservative merger in 1955, the answer to who governs in Japan is clearly the bureaucracy. After

The case of the economic rivals to bureaucratic power is more

42. Itō Daiichi, "The Bureaucracy: Its Attitudes and Behavior," *The Developing Economies* 6 (1968): 450. While figures broken down for each ministry are not readily available, the total number of departments *(bu)* and bureaus *(kyoku)* throughout the bureaucracy jumped from 160 in 1955 to 173 in 1956, the biggest one-year change between 1952 and 1972 except for 1961–62, when they rose from 187 to 201. (The income-doubling plan and trade liberalization began to be implemented during 1961–62.) These figures do not necessarily support Itō’s point, however, because 1955–56 also saw an across-the-board twenty per cent cut in personnel and sections for all agencies, ordered by the Administrative Management Agency. The total numbers of sections *(ka)* and offices *(shitsu)* dropped from 916 in 1955 to 734 in 1956. No section chiefs were let go; they were retained in newly created positions called "management officers" *(kanrikan)*, of which a total of 459 were established in the government in 1956. For the aggregate figures, see Isomura and Kuronuma, *Gendai Nihon no gyōsei*, p. 338. For the reduction-in-force and establishment of *kanrikan*, see Tsūsanshō Daljin Kanbō Chōsaka, *Tsūshō sangyō shō shijū nen shi* (Tsūsan Shiryō Chōsa Kai, 1965), pp. 681–2, 685–7.

43. Ota, *Yakanin o kuru*, pp. 9, 140–47.

clear-cut. Before the war the bureaucrats failed to bring the zaibatsu under control, and the so-called reform bureaucrats (kakushin kanryō), who allied themselves with the military in order to try to nationalize the zaibatsu, succeeded only in alienating themselves from their anti-militarist colleagues and concentrating the Japanese economy further into zaibatsu hands. We can recognize, today, in the wartime efforts of reform or control bureaucrats such as Kishi Nobusuke (Tōjō’s Minister of Commerce and Industry and the first Vice-minister of Munitions) a movement toward the rationalization of Japan’s industrial structure. For example, between 1939 and 1945, as a result of the government’s amalgamation programs, the number of ordinary banks declined from 338 to 61. Nonetheless, Byron Marshall’s conclusion is supported by all analysts of the pre-1945 “controlled economy”:

The “new economic structure” established by the promulgation of the Major Industries Association Ordinance in the autumn of 1941 merely extended and tightened the system of cartel control that had been created in the early 1930s at the request of the business community itself. True, the control associations were now brought under the direct supervision of government bureaucrats, but the real power remained in the hands of the directors of the respective control organizations, who were for the most part executives of the leading private companies in each field. . . . Despite the elaborate administrative structure that existed on paper during the war years, neither effective centralization nor bureaucratic control was ever fully implemented.45

Ironically, it was during the occupation that the fondest dreams of the wartime “control bureaucrats” (tōsei kanryō) were finally realized. With the militarists gone, the zaibatsu facing dissolution, and SCAP’s (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) decision to try to get the economy back on its feet, the bureaucracy finally found itself working for a tennō who really possessed the attributes of “absolutism” (zettai-shugi). In one area after another, SCAP brought about the conditions of control that had eluded Tōjō and Kishi during the war. On November 19, 1946, for example, the Economic Stabilization Board, following SCAP’s wishes, shifted responsibility for rationing and allocations from the wartime, zaibatsu-dominated control companies to the ministries having jurisdiction over particular industries.

Similarly, during 1947 SCAP encouraged the creation of some 15 kōdan (public corporations), four in the foreign trade sector, eight in the domestic distribution sector, one price adjustment kōdan, and two in the economic rehabilitation sector. One vignette from the kōdan era is revealing. On August 10, 1947, representatives of the match industry petitioned SCAP against establishing a kōdan for their industry. They feared the creation of onerous controls. "The petitioners further contended," reads a SCAP report, "that the kōdans were being established not so much to help industry as to provide jobs for the bureaucrats at the sacrifice of industries. The petition was denied by SCAP on the assumption that the petitioners probably wanted to retain the controls in their own hands."46

Some SCAP officials were aware that in reducing the power of the zaibatsu they were increasing the power of the bureaucracy. A SCAP history records the dilemma posed for the Japanese government by SCAP policy and how the government resolved it: "At this juncture the [Japanese] Government was faced with two conflicting policies. On the one hand, SCAP had ordered the Government to maintain economic controls [SCAPIN 47, September 22, 1945]. On the other hand, the abrogation of wartime economic control legislation was required. A decision was not made until September 1946, when the Diet passed the Temporary Demand and Supply Adjustment Law [Law No. 32, September 30, 1946]."47 This law gave to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and, in 1949, to its suc-

46. Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, *Historical Monographs*, Vol. 10, Part C, "Reform of Business Enterprise: Elimination of Private Control Associations" (Washington: National Archives, 1951), pp. 57, 89, 93. N.B.: This monograph was omitted from the original fifty-five volumes microfilmed and made available to the public by the National Archives. It was retrieved and specially microfilmed for the author by the National Archives on June 4, 1974. The National Archives explained that they had not microfilmed and given it a volume number in the original project because of a handwritten notation on the cover, "This draft was rejected and not included among the finished monographs sent to Washington for publication and it is considered wildly unreliable and misleading. WEH." WEH is presumably William E. Hutchinson, editor of the historical monographs project. From internal evidence the monograph was written by George Tays. In my view this monograph is no more or less reliable than any of the others; it does differ, however, in being by far the most candid of any of the SCAP monographs. It is for this reason, I suspect, that it was rejected. There is also included in the typescript of the monograph a four-page single-spaced letter praising the work. It is signed by MEH, presumably Marvin E. Habel of the historical monographs staff.

cessor, MITI, the kind of hard economic control powers that throughout the war the government had had to share with the zaibatsu.

Regarding the kōdan, SCAP later reflected, "It was evident that kōdans in themselves were dangerous as outcroppings of a wartime Japanese system and disclosed an urge on the part of the Japanese to return to undemocratic governmental operations after the Occupation had ended."48 Undemocratic or not, the occupation allowed the Japanese bureaucracy to assume powers that it had not been able to exercise in earlier periods. During the 1950's, the bureaucracy used these powers to guide the economy toward its heavy industrialization and unprecedented growth. Satō Kiichirō, the head of the Mitsui Bank and in 1962 the chairman of the TAIC, recalls, "During and after the war, . . . Japan’s economy was controlled until it has become second nature with us to uphold a planned, controlled economy."49

Effective direct control always requires a closed economy, which existed in Japan more or less throughout the decade of the 1940's. During the 1950's, the linkages to the rest of the world through foreign trade loosened the controls, and during the 1960's, trade and capital liberalization drastically reduced them. But this did not mean the subordination of the bureaucracy to the zaikai. During the early 1970's the zaikai sometimes acted and more often spoke against official policies, but this trend came to a halt during the pollution, energy, and monetary crises of 1973–75. Japanese industry and commerce are no longer under the direct control of the economic bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy will undoubtedly play a different role in the Japanese economy of the future than it did during the period of high-speed growth. That it has a role to play, however, no one doubts.

As this discussion has sought to show, the key to unravelling the secrets of the bureaucracy's rise to power in Japan lies in further

48. Ibid., p. 103.
49. Quoted in Kimpei Shiba and Kenzo Nozue, What Makes Japan Tick (Tokyo: Asahi Evening News Co., 1971), p. 32. Also note the comment of Takahashi Makoto, "The wartime economic controls are of special importance in that through them were established both a state-operated fiscal mechanism in the monetary phase of finance and banking, and a direct system of control. These were continued essentially in the postwar period as 'legacies of the wartime economic controls,' and a structure of state economic control supported mainly by the fiscal mechanism has been reorganized. Direct control, meanwhile, has been modified or gradually abolished along with the reconstruction of capitalism." "The Development of Wartime Economic Controls," The Developing Economies 5 (1967): 650–51.
research on the militarist, wartime, and occupation eras. Allinson's recent comment is certainly warranted:

Far more than historians have yet demonstrated, key aspects of postwar Japanese society took shape during the 1930s. Perhaps the most fundamental change to emerge out of that period was a strong emphasis on rational, comprehensive planning at the national level. The central government had played the major role in determining national policies since the Meiji Restoration, of course, but in the war period central planning assumed a new level of intensity. After 1937 officials formalized central planning by establishing agencies which systematically controlled and distributed the nation's resources. Postwar bodies, such as the Economic Planning Agency and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, carry on the practices implemented during the war years. They symbolize a legacy of planning which stems directly from the 1930s. In the absence of that legacy, Japan's postwar economic history would certainly have followed a different path.50

The most influential article on the subject of the official bureaucracy differs only slightly from Allinson in pointing to the occupation as the period in which the legacy of the thirties came to fruition. In 1958 Tsuji Kiyoaki listed three reasons why the bureaucracy turned out to be the primary political beneficiary of the settlement imposed on Japanese society by the Allied occupation. These were, first, the decision by the Allies to carry out the occupation through indirect government; second, the belief of the Japanese people that their bureaucracy was politically neutral (a belief, we might add, that is held even more strongly by Americans, as a result of the influence of Max Weber and the ubiquitous doctrine of "scientific management" taught in most schools of public or business administration); and third, the absence of experienced politicians in the postwar political parties, a result of the long period of military suppression of party life, which caused the parties to welcome former bureaucratic policy makers into their ranks.51 Tsuji's first reason has long seemed the most compelling. As early as 1947, Maki warned that "the decision taken . . . to retain a Japanese government in power after the surrender, although it was to be completely under

the control of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, meant, in effect, that the bureaucracy would escape the fate to be dealt out to the militarists and the zaibatsu."

SCAP was not unaware of the implications of indirect rule. In its history of the "Reorganization of Civil Service," occupation officials wrote, "The utilization of the Japanese governmental machinery, as desired, was not possible without the existing organization but, while the decision insured effective administration, it entailed the longterm problems of achieving reforms within the bureaucratic system through the bureaucrats themselves." SCAP chose to attempt to reform the bureaucracy nonetheless.

Occupation officials were suspicious of the widespread destruction of personnel records of civil officials and the dissolution of the ministries of Greater East Asia and of Munitions on August 26, 1945, the day before the first occupation soldier arrived in Japan. SCAP therefore included the bureaucracy in the purge directives from the beginning. The directors of the purge removed from office some 11.92 per cent of shinnin and chokunin ranks, with the Ministry of Home Affairs being the hardest hit (slightly more than sixty per cent of its highest officials were purged and the ministry itself was broken up into the present ministries of Home Affairs, Construction, Labor, Health and Welfare, and the Police Agency). SCAP also brought to Japan an advisory commission on the civil service, which drafted the National Public Service Law of 1947. There is no doubt that this law proved ineffective in terms of the aims of the occupation, but this was the result more of bureaucratic subterfuge than of indirect rule. In 1950, a member of the commission commented, "The proposed civil service law was submitted to the Diet in the fall of 1947. Unfortunately, the nucleus of feudalistic, bureaucratic thinking gentlemen within the core of the Japanese Government were [sic] astute enough to see the dangers of any such modern public administration law to their tenure and the subsequent loss of their power. The law which was finally passed by the Diet was a thoroughly and completely emasculated instrument compared with that which had been recommended by the Mission."

Despite this setback, SCAP went ahead with the reexamination

of all the members of the civil service who had not been purged. This process led to the famous "paradise examination" of January 15, 1950, so named because the bureaucrats could take as much time as they wanted, drink tea, eat, and smoke. A few stayed for fifteen hours. However, some 7,432 civil officials were reexamined, and about thirty per cent failed to be reemployed as a result.

The problem was not, it seems to me, with indirect rule or the size of the purges; it was rather the way in which the positive reforms got lost or modified in the context of SCAP's attempts to solve the serious labor problems of 1948 and 1949. The dictates of American national policy and the Japanese economic situation ultimately forced SCAP to abandon its efforts to democratize the bureaucracy in favor of efforts to raise its efficiency.

In order to end the strikes of government railroad workers that plagued the economy throughout 1948, MacArthur personally ordered the government to pass laws banning strikes among civil servants and to separate railroad and a few other categories of workers into public corporations (kōsha). As a result public employees in Japan became divided into three different categories. At the center of the bureaucracy are those officials covered by the National Public Service Law; they have the right to organize (itself a major difference between the prewar and postwar bureaucracies) but not the rights to collective bargaining or to strike. Segregated from them are the public employees covered by the Public Corporations and National Enterprises Labor Relations Law—five government departments and three public corporations—who have the rights to organize and to collective bargaining but not the right to strike (they do so anyway with great frequency). Finally, for no very clear reason, the employees of kōdan and of mixed public-private enterprises, such as Japan Air Lines, are covered by the Trade Union Law, in which all three rights prevail.55

The upshot of these late occupation developments was to break up the solidarity—as well as the communist dominance of public workers' unions—that had developed in the civil service and to reconstitute the higher bureaucracy as an elite service. By mid-1949, SCAP and the Japanese government had taken the decisive measures that would ultimately lead to the rebuilding of the Japanese econ-

Economic growth became a vastly higher priority of the occupation than civil service reform, and the bureaucrats regained their morale and ceased to worry about preserving their positions in the society. This was not necessarily a bad thing, but certainly John Maki’s prediction of 1947 was borne out: “So long as the bureaucrats are not balanced by another strong political group, they will continue to govern Japan as they see fit—not as they did before the surrender, perhaps, but nevertheless as the sole group directing the government.”

III

One legacy from early Shōwa politics that contemporary officials have inherited is the whole complex world of public enterprises—what Isomura and Kuronuma call the problem of “quasi-administration” (ese-gyōsei) and what others deride as the privileged sanctuaries of the “migratory birds” of the bureaucracy, i.e., “retired” officials who join and retire, with a large retirement bonus at each stage, from one or more of the 113 “special status companies” that the bureaucrats themselves have created, funded, and supervise. Even though non-Japanese scholars have hardly touched this subject in their research, no appreciation of the full extent of the bureaucracy’s powers is complete without mention of it. Prewar Japan had many “mixed enterprises”—corporations in which the government owned a large part of the equity and participated extensively in the management—but there was simply nothing comparable to the contemporary maze of kōsha, kōdan, jigyōdan, kōko, kinko, and ei-dan. Undoubtedly the traditions of governmental initiative from the Meiji era, combined with the precedents of wartime and occupied Japan, condition the Japanese people to accept these forms. It is also true that the largest of them (the Japanese National Railways, the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation, and the Japan Monopoly Corporation—that is, the three kōsha) comprise natural or public monopolies (although there are also private rail

56. See Chalmers Johnson, Conspiracy at Matsukawa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), Chaps. 1 and 2.
58. Gendai Nihon no gyōsei, p. 12; and Yamamoto, Keizai kanryō, pp. 185–204.
lines) and are therefore comparable to public enterprises found in all open, mixed economies.

Nonetheless, some aspects of the proliferation of such entities in Japan are not normally encountered in other countries and greatly disturb Japanese specialists on national and local government. One aspect is the degree to which public corporations have become prime landing spots for amakudari (descended from heaven) bureaucrats, particularly from the Ministry of Finance. Former MITI vice-minister Sahashi has charged that the ministries have deliberately established many special status companies for no other reasons than to expand their jurisdictions and to provide employment for their retired officials. Another cause of concern is the tendency for public corporations to preempt the functions of local governments in many areas. More and more aspects of daily life have been drawn back under the control of the central government, which has given rise to the cynical remark sanwari jichi—local government is only thirty per cent independent of the national government.

A third problem concerns the extent to which Japan’s kōdan, kōko, and so forth are free from political or ministerial interference. Such independence is supposed to be one of the main strengths of the public corporate form. Some Japanese writers fear that the public corporations are actually extensions of bureaucratic power but with little or no bureaucratic responsibility. A fourth concern is the way the enterprises are financed. The Ministry of Finance’s Fiscal Investment and Loan Plan (Zaisei Tōyūshi Keikaku)—the so-called second budget—is the actual basis for allocating to the corporations the large funds available from postal savings, compulsory old-age pension funds, appropriations, and other sources. This “plan,” drawn up by officials of the Ministry of Finance in consultation with other ministries, the staffs of the public corporations, local authorities, interest groups, and other bodies with access to this most powerful of Japanese ministries, is the only part of the national budget that does not require Diet approval.

Japanese law recognizes many different kinds of “juridical persons,” such as joint stock companies, limited joint stock companies, limited partnerships, unlimited partnerships, private limited companies, mutual companies, incorporated foundations and associations, and juridical persons established under special laws (tokushu hōjin).

60. Bungei shunjū, July 1971, p. 115.
The last category, itself very broad and including banks, religious and educational corporations, is the one of immediate concern here. Within the classification of tokushu hōjin, we find kōsha, which are primarily wholly publicly owned utilities. Private utility enterprises subject to government regulation, such as the electric companies and private railroads, are not kōsha, although they too maintain close relationships with their supervisory ministries and accept ama-kudari bureaucrats into the ranks of their executives.

Differing from kōsha in slight ways, including the laws that regulate their labor relations, kōdan are government corporations engaged primarily in construction work. Jigyōdan differ from kōdan only in that they seem to engage in everything except construction and are smaller. Kōko are public finance corporations in which all the capital is supplied by the government, whereas kinko are public finance corporations in which the capital for their loans is supplied cooperatively. A kikin seems to be the same thing as a kōko, only smaller. There is only one eidan (although there were many during the war): the Teito Rapid Transit Authority (that is, the subway) in the Tokyo metropolitan region. Still in the category of tokushu hōjin but differing from all the above public entities are the special companies (tokushu kaisha), which are genuine mixed public-private joint stock companies. There are over ten of them, including the Electric Power Development Company, Japan Air Lines, the Tohoku District Development Company, the Kokusai Denshin Denwa Company (KDD—literally international telegraph and telephone company but known officially by its Japanese name in order to avoid confusion with ITT—and an obvious exception to the generalization that all public utilities are kōsha), and many others.62

Except for one or two kinko, all of the above were established after the war (between 1906 and 1949 the Japanese National Railways were managed as a government department). Some were spun off from ministries under SCAP pressure; others were established to increase efficiency or to assist in a particular activity (for example, the Kaigai Keizai Kyōryoku Kikin, Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, or the Kaigai Iju Jigyōdan, Overseas Immigration Service). Some public enterprises have been set up by the Diet as a way of

getting around the bureaucrats’ resistance to administrative reform, since they are allegedly more efficient than the ministries. Others were created to overcome problems of ministerial jurisdictional competition, although the experience during 1974 of the Nihon Genshisen Kaihatsu Jigyōdan (Japan Nuclear Ship Development Agency), which the Science and Technology Agency, MITI, and the Ministry of Transportation all disowned when its ship Mutsu broke down at sea, suggests that the strategem does not always work. Best known are the big construction kōdan—Japan Housing Corporation, Japan Highway Public Corporation, Forest Development Corporation, New Tokyo International Airport Corporation, Honshu-Shikoku Bridge Authority—that spend huge sums of public trust funds and affect the lives of most citizens.

The numbers of governmental special corporations have expanded continuously since independence, except for 1968 after the Šatō government applied the brakes to their creation (see table one).

| TABLE I |
| Changes in the Numbers of Special Legal Entities |
| 1946—1972 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>25 (+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>33 (+8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>39 (+6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>44 (+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>53 (+9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>61 (+8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>65 (+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>71 (+6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>81 (+10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>94 (+14 -1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>99 (+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>105 (+8 -2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>108 (+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>113 (+8 -3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>109 (+1 -5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>110 (+2 -1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>112 (+5 -3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>112 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>113 (+4 -3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


One widely acknowledged reason for this growth is the need to provide employment for retired bureaucrats, although the Council of Governmental Special Corporation Employees denounces the practice and many retired officials themselves are distressed by the need to amakudari. 63 Nonetheless, active-duty officials are often

praised for creating them, and there is considerable evidence that Ministry of Finance, MITI, Ministry of Construction, and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry bureaucrats devote a good deal of time to thinking of new ones and of ways to generate Diet support for them. Hiramatsu Morihiko, while on active duty with MITI in the late 1960's, gained the reputation of being a politically astute official for having created three public corporations: the Japan Electronic Computer Corporation (Nihon Denshi Keisan K.K.), the Pollution Prevention Corporation (Kōgai Bōshi Jigyōdan), and the Overseas Petroleum Development Corporation (Kaigai Sekiyu Kaisatsu Kōdan). The senior officials of virtually all public enterprises are former bureaucrats.

Most of the public corporations provide important services and would exist even if the problems of the early retirement of civil servants were solved. Many operate in sectors where the capital requirements or risks are so high that no group other than the government could think of entering. Beyond organizational feather-bedding, the main complaint against them is that they are too tightly controlled by the central government and that the central government is unresponsive to the real needs of citizens. For example, it is charged that the Ministry of Construction (one of the few ministries in which technical officials rise to the highest non-political post in the service) is indifferent to the problems of urban housing and river pollution, and devotes most of the funds of its corporations to highway construction, regional development, and industrial support facilities. At the same time, the central government will not release public funds directly to local entities to build what they need. Control over the corporations is clearly in the hands of the ministries: even mixed enterprises cannot issue bonds, dispose of profits, or change rates without the approval of the minister concerned. Many Japanese see this as preferable, however, to political supervision: the budgets of kōsha and kōko must be approved by the Diet, which is one reason why the Japanese National Railways do not operate profitably, since politicians do not like to raise fares.

Public corporations constitute only a segment of the total power position of the Japanese bureaucracy. As in many other areas of Japanese government, these organizations reveal a discrepancy be-

64. Seisaku Jihō Sha, Tsūsanshō, sono hito to soshiki (Seisaku Jihō Sha, 1968) contains a short biography and comments on the reputation of every official in MITI at the rank of section chief and above. For Hiramatsu Morihiko, see p. 149.

65. See the list in Yamamoto, Keizai kanryō, pp. 205–216.
tween the authority under which they operate—Diet-enacted legis-
lation—and the actual locus of power which guides them—the 
bureaucracy. In addition, critics charge that the bureaucracy is most 
responsive to interests with special access to it or to its own organiza-
tional imperatives. It is these conditions, which are comparable in 
form if not in seriousness to those identified by Maruyama for the 
prewar period, not the functions that the bureaucracy and the corpo-
rations perform comparatively well, that continue to generate con-
troversy in Japan today.

IV

In a 1973 nationwide public opinion poll on the bureaucracy, 
conducted by the secretariat of the prime minister’s office, members 
of the public were asked whether over the previous two years any 
of them had had some contact with an office of a city, prefectural, 
or the national government. Out of a sample 2,445 people, some 
67.9 per cent had had such contact—60.6 per cent with a local 
organ, 6.1 per cent with a regional organ, and 1.3 per cent with a 
national organ. Some 32.1 per cent had no such contact. When 
asked to state what image they held of the bureaucracy, in which no 
preset choice was offered but all answers were recorded, some 20.2 
per cent replied that the bureaucracy was “serious” (majime), 20.5 
per cent used the word “hard” (katai), 9.2 per cent said “arrogant” 
(ōhei), 12.7 per cent said “inefficient” (nōritsu ga warui), 16.4 
per cent included the phrase “unadaptable” (yūzū ga kikanai), 14.4 
per cent thought the bureaucracy “lacked a feeling of service” (sabisu 
kokoro ga nai), and 12.5 per cent thought bureaucrats were 
“friendly” (shinsetsu). Only 2.7 per cent used the term “elite” 
(kanryō erito), and only 2.9 per cent mentioned amakudari (al-
though 5.4 per cent of the respondents who were residents of Tokyo 
raised this). Some 24.3 per cent had no thoughts at all on the sub-
ject. By a ratio of 35.2 per cent to 19.0 per cent more people thought 
the bureaucrats’ abilities were on balance superior rather than inferior 
(6.5 per cent thought they were clearly superior, 3.2 per cent thought 
they were clearly inferior, and 36.1 per cent did not know).66

None of this is very surprising. Japan is an open, democratic 
society, although it has a long authoritarian past. Bureaucracy is a 
permanent part of the Japanese scene, and the poll does not record 
any citizen mentioning the need for administrative reform (gyōsei

66. Naikaku Sōri-daijin Kanbō Kōhō-shitsu, Kōmin ni kan suru seron 
chōsa (Public Opinion Poll Concerning Public Officials) (September 1973), 
kaikaku). Some knowledgeable people believe that reform is necessary, as we have sought to show, but no one suggests that bureaucracy can or should be eliminated. What this suggests to me is the need to conceptualize bureaucracy in Japan (and in many other societies as well) as a constant contender for political power and to eschew further speculation on whether a reform of the Diet, the LDP, or the opposition parties is the "answer" to bureaucratic preeminence.

One conceptualization proposed by Randall Bartlett argues that today's open societies have four main protagonists in the "market" instead of the classical two: consumers seeking utility maximization, producers seeking profit maximization, politicians seeking vote maximization, and bureaucrats seeking security maximization. Whether this formulation is adequate, it does point to the reality of "bureaucratic interests" and moves away from the excessive concern of public administration specialists with the rationality or functions of bureaucracy. For example, it allows Bartlett to contend that "it is only when the recommendations of the bureaucracy present an obvious possibility of damaging vote positions that they will be rigorously checked by government." 67

Official bureaucracy was not established in Japan for scientific reasons but by the Meiji oligarchs to prevent the nascent political parties from placing their supporters in the administration. There are grounds for criticizing the bureaucracy's performance over the past seventy-five years, but it has certainly been equal or superior to that of such groups as the military, the politicians, and the economic leaders. With regard to the future, all of the envisaged solutions to the problems facing Japan and comparable societies are likely to entail an enlargement of official bureaucracy. Given its experience with bureaucracy and its alertness to the political problems of bureaucracy, Japan may adjust to the consequences of such an enlargement better than some other open societies. The bureaucracy does not rule in a vacuum in Japan, but it does hold an ascendant position and is likely to continue to do so. Political scientists or political reformers who ignore the bureaucratic dimension are likely to misconceive the true capabilities and limitations of the Japanese government.

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