

An Analysis of the Development Process of the Liberal Democratic Party—Taking the Japanese Prime Minister Election as an Example

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This paper combs the development process of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party, and summarizes some characteristics of the Liberal Democratic Party from the development process. The paper holds that the Liberal Democratic Party is historically inherited and conservative, and is affected by external forces in the process of development, including the influence of the United States, the zaibatsu, and other domestic political parties. Within the LDP, there is factional struggle. The LDP simulates the competition between political parties through factional struggle to update policies and realize its own political ideas. This factional struggle is closely related to the zaibatsu. Politicians rely on the zaibatsus to provide themselves with economic support during the election, and make the zaibatsus profitable through policies after they are elected prime minister. Zaibatsus meet their own interests by supporting different factions. There is a deep binding between zaibatsus and politicians. When the power money proposal is too obvious, it will arouse national resentment, lead to a decline in their own support rate, and give other factions and even other political parties an opportunity to take advantage of it.

Keywords: Japanese politics, Liberal Democratic Party, party politics

Introduction

On September 3, 2021, Suga Yoshihide, the 99th Prime Minister of Japan, designated as his successor by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, announced at the Japanese political election conference that he would give up the LDP president election, which is almost equivalent to giving up the subsequent Japanese House of Representatives election and the post of Japanese Prime Minister. On September 29, Fumio Kishida was elected as the new president of the Liberal Democratic Party. According to the custom, he will succeed Suga Yoshihide as prime minister. On October 4, Kishida officially became Japan's 100th prime minister. On November 10, Kishida was elected the 101st Prime Minister of Japan in the naming election of Prime Minister of the house of representatives of the Japanese parliament. In a short period of time, earth-shaking changes have taken place in Japanese politics, like a great earthquake, leaving people with a strong sense of impact like the roar of the sea. Among them: Suga Yoshihide became the Prime Minister of Japan on September 16, 2020, and was driven out of the prime minister's throne after one year in power. Kishida became the 100th prime minister on October 4, but more than a month later, after coming to power and resigning, he was re-elected as the 101st

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prime minister. The term of office of the 100th prime minister was only 37 days, refreshing the shortest term of office of the Japanese Prime Minister.

The reason for the resignation of Suga Yoshihide is, on the face of it, because of its failure to deal with COVID-19 during the prime minister's office, leading to an epidemic out of control. Even when the epidemic was out of control, the Olympic Games were forcibly held, but the officials hosting the Olympic Games were corrupt and embezzled a large amount of funds, resulting in the disappointing results of the Olympic Games and the loss of popular support. But from the perspective of party politics, it may be more understandable why Suga Yoshihide's cabinet is short-lived, and why Kishida could stand out from Japan and replace Suga Yoshihide as the new Prime Minister of Japan. In the process of explaining the above problems, this paper will also explain the reason why the first Kishida cabinet was in power for such a short time and the relationship between Kishida's re-election as Japanese Prime Minister from the perspective of Japanese political party system.

Japan's Political Party System and the Origin of the Liberal Democratic Party

Political Party System in Japan

The current constitution of Japan is the constitution of the Republic of Japan published on November 3, 1946, which was officially implemented on May 3, 1947. Japan's constitution stipulates that Japan is a multi-party country with a responsible cabinet system based on the principle of the separation of legislative, judicial, and administrative powers. The so-called responsible cabinet system, also known as parliamentary cabinet system, refers to the political system in which the cabinet is generated from the majority party in parliament, exercises administrative power, and is responsible for State Administration. Among them, most party leaders serve as the head of the cabinet. Under the constitutional monarchy, formally appointed by the monarch, they become the head of State Administration, responsible for the operation of the administrative affairs of the whole country, but the head of administration is responsible to the parliament. In Japan, the specific performance is that after the Japanese parliamentary election, the leader of the majority party becomes the head of the cabinet and appointed by the emperor as the prime minister. The Prime Minister of Japan is the supreme executive head of Japan. The official name of the Prime Minister of Japan is the Prime Minister of the cabinet (Duan, 1994).

Because of such political institutional arrangements, political parties occupy a vital position in political life. The most influential political parties in Japanese politics are the Liberal Democratic Party, the Communist Party of Japan, the National Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Komeito Party, and the democratic social party. These political parties can be divided into three types: conservative political parties, innovating political parties, and middle political parties according to their political platforms. The representative party of the conservative party is the Liberal Democratic Party, which is also the largest political party in Japan. As an evergreen tree in Japanese politics, it has been in charge of the Japanese government for a long time. Mainly, becoming the president of the Liberal Democratic Party can become Japan's prime minister. The research object of this paper is the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. This paper will sort out the development process of the Liberal Democratic Party, so that readers can better understand Japanese politics.

The Origin of the Liberal Democratic Party

In fact, to study the development process of the LDP, we need to trace back to the Meiji period. On October 17, 1881, the first bourgeois political party in Japanese history, the Liberal Party, was born by Takesuke Itagaki as president. The political proposition of the Liberal Party is to implement the constitutional system and strive

for freedom and democratic rights. On March 4, 1882, Okuma Shigenobu established the constitutional improvement party, advocating “maintaining royal honor and safeguarding people’s happiness”, “expanding the right to vote with social progress” and so on (Yan, 2008). The constitutional improvement party is a more moderate bourgeois party than the Liberal Party. After Japan’s defeat and surrender in 1945, some bourgeois politicians inherited the tradition of pre-war bourgeois political parties and formed the Japanese Liberal Party, the Japanese Progressive Party, and the Japanese Synergy Party respectively. After differentiation and reorganization, these political parties formed two main conservative parties, the Democratic Party of Japan and the Liberal Party, by November 1954. In fact, the Liberal Democratic Party born after the war is largely the inheritance of these political parties, which are the predecessor of the Liberal.

Democratic Party. After the war, the United States occupied Japan alone and transformed Japan into “demilitarized” and “democratized”. Among them, in addition to politically amending the constitution, abolishing the Meiji Constitution (the constitution of the great Japanese Empire), and publishing the new constitution of Japan, it also proposed the transformation measures of dissolving the zaibatsu and implementing agricultural land reform.

Zaibatsu refers to the closed enterprise group owned by the same family, that is, the home collateral consortium. The same family only relies on family assets to implement the form of closed ownership and domination of large-scale and diversified enterprise groups (Zhang, 2006). When Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, there were 10 famous zaibatsus in Japan like Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Yasuda, Nakajima, Asano, Nomura, and so on. According to the “early American policy towards Japan after Japan’s surrender” published on September 22, 1945, the US government clearly put forward the policy of dissolving the zaibatsu. Before the war, the rural areas of Japan were increasingly polarized, and the contradiction between farmers and the landlord class was further intensified. Under the leadership of the Allied forces, Japan’s left-wing political parties and farmers’ trade unions, Japan carried out land reform and formed a new rural pattern with self-employed farmers as the main body. During this period, the United States reformed Japan’s in accordance with its own democratic model and achieved preliminary results. The Socialist Party became the largest party at that time, and the conservative party was also affected and transformed.

But all this changed when the Cold War came, especially when the Korean War broke out. Japan, which is very close to the Korean Peninsula, has become a military base of the United States, and Japan’s position in the global strategy of the United States has changed significantly. Since 1946, war criminals dealt with in accordance with the public service purge order have been lifted one after another; MacArthur also ordered the release of all imprisoned class a war criminal. After the lifting of the purge, the US occupation authorities vigorously supported the Japanese conservative forces and suppressed the development of the revolutionary political party. Some of these war criminals have rejoined Japan’s conservative political parties, such as Nobusuke Kishi. In 1951, Japan completely abolished all decrees to dissolve the zaibatsu, and the zaibatsu that provided economic support for the future development of the Liberal Democratic Party survived. On the front battlefield of political parties, the external force of the socialist party stimulated the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party to unite. In 1955, the two parties merged and the Liberal Democratic Party was born.

Characteristics of the Liberal Democratic Party

The LDP has historical inheritance. First of all, this inheritance comes from its own multi-party reorganization. The historical predecessor of the Liberal Democratic Party before its birth has the political gene

of the pre-war party, which is the root of its historical inheritance. Then, under the influence of the United States, the war criminals in World War II were released. These war criminals joined the Liberal Democratic Party, which naturally absorbed and inherited the political ideas of these war criminals. Secondly, the LDP is conservative, which is also the fundamental characteristic of the LDP. From the first point of view, the LDP naturally represents the conservative forces because of its natural political gene. What is more, the establishment of the Liberal Democratic Party is closely related to external promotion. The monopoly of the American team in Japan has had a great impact on Japanese political parties. Even the great development of conservative parties is that the United States is in the forefront of other political parties due to strategic adjustment. In addition to the United States, the development of other political parties also has a significant impact on the LDP, and even the direct factor contributing to the emergence of the LDP. In order to realize their own interests, the zaibatsu s also provide a lot of economic support to the conservative parties. The coalition of the socialist party directly promoted the merger of the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party, resulting in the emergence of the Liberal Democratic Party.

Summary of This Chapter

This chapter mainly introduces that Japan's political party system is based on the principle of the separation of legislative, judicial, and administrative powers, and implements the multi-party system of responsible cabinet system. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is one of many parties in Japan. It is also the largest party and the longest ruling party in Japan. This chapter traces the emergence of the LDP, and analyzes the characteristics of the LDP: historical inheritance, conservatism and the influence of American politics, domestic zaibatsus, and other political parties.

The Liberal Democratic Party Under the “1955 System”

Definition of the “1955 System”

On November 15, 1955, the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party officially merged into the Liberal Democratic Party and became the largest party in Congress. The establishment of the Liberal Democratic Party marks the beginning of the formation of a new political pattern—“the 1955 system”. Since then, Japanese politics has entered a new era. In the early post-war period, the political situation of disorderly establishment of group parties and multi-party disputes was replaced by the opposition and struggle of a few relatively fixed major parties. Among them, the Liberal Democratic Party and the socialist party occupied more than 80% of the seats in the Congress, and the advantage of the Liberal Democratic Party was usually more than twice that of the socialist party, and always occupied the majority in the Congress, thus starting the period of one-party governance of the Liberal Democratic Party. This system lasted until 1993 and existed for 38 years. This system is different from the multi-party system in the general sense, the two-party system in the United States and Britain, and the one party system in developing countries. It has formed a special product under the specific political environment in Japan. It is usually called the “1955 System” in academic circles. In essence, the “1955 System” is the LDP's “one party priority system” (Wang, 1996), which is a variation of the multi-party system. Although the Liberal Democratic Party has occupied an absolute dominant position for a long time, the Japanese Socialist Party and the Communist Party also exist legally and have the right to compete with them in law.

Japanese Prime Minister Election Under the “1955 System”

Under the 38 years of “1955 system”, the development of the LDP has also experienced several stages. At present, the academic circles have no clear conclusion on how to divide it into several stages, but basically

reached a consensus that the LDP has experienced several stages of development: peak-setback-recovery-collapse. During this period, the prime ministers of Japan were all from the Liberal Democratic Party. There were 14 prime ministers, including Ishibashi Tanzan, Kishi Nobusuke, Ikeda Hayato, Sato Eisaku, Tanaka Kakuei, Miki Takeo, Takeo Fukuda, Masayoshi Ohira, Suzuki Yoshiyuki, Nakasone Yasuhiro, Takeshita Noboru, Uno Sosuke, Kaifu Toshiki, and Miyazawa Kiichi, as well as an acting prime minister Ito.

Among them, Ishibashi Tanzan and Kishi Nobusuke are the development stages, Ikeda Hayato and Sato Eisaku are the peak prosperity stages, since then, Tanaka Kakuei, Miki Takeo, and Takeo Fukuda are the frustration stages, and Masayoshi Ohira, Yoshiyuki Suzuki, and Yasuhiro Nakasone are the recovery stages. The Ikuo incident of Takeshita and Nakasone and the Sasakawa emergency incident in Tokyo became the direct fuse for the LDP to step down. Since then, several prime ministers were also in the collapse stage of the “1955 system”.

Ishibashi Tanzan cabinet did not leave any political achievements. However, during Shiqiao's tenure, the Liberal Democratic Party's valve system has made great progress. At the beginning of the establishment of the Liberal Democratic Party, there were 11 factions. In the 1956 presidential election, various factions formed distinct political forces through differentiation and combination, namely, eight factions, such as an Kishi, Sato, Ikeda, Ono, Ishii, Kono, Miki Matsumura, and Ishibashi. Among the eight sects, except Ishibashi, Ishii, and Ono, the other five sects continued until the eve of the end of the “1955 System”. The formation of the eight factions broke the original framework of the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party, and was the product of the re-differentiation and combination of Japanese political forces. In the 38 years of the “1955 System”, factional politics has become a major feature of the LDP's political power. Factional politics often transcends the boundaries of political parties and has become an indispensable basic unit of the LDP. Kishi formed a cabinet twice. During the first cabinet, it effectively restrained the development of the socialist party and passed the new Japan US security treaty during his term of office. The tough color of Kishi's cabinet aroused indignation and criticism from all walks of life at home and abroad. Kishisuke's political priorities from World War II war criminals to Japanese Prime Minister and then during his term of office all show the incompleteness of Japan's transformation of “demilitarization” and “democratization”.

In view of the military and political defeat of Kishi's cabinet, Ikeda and Sato have completely brought the Japanese economy into the fast lane of rapid development. In the 12 years since they came to power, the LDP's long-term and stable rule, reasonable economic policies, appropriate social emergency mechanism, and complete planning system have made Japan's economy from post-war recovery to comprehensive revitalization, and Japan has become a world economic power. Ikeda's “national income doubling plan” and Sato's three major economic plans have time continuity, logical rationality, and the necessity of promoting economic development, which have laid a material foundation for the LDP to achieve a long-term stable political power.

In the 1970s, the United States fell into the quagmire of the Vietnam War. On the other hand, the huge trade surplus brought by Japan's economic development makes the American psychology more unbalanced. In particular, the Sato cabinet failed to make concessions to the United States on the issue of fiber trade. President Nixon suddenly announced his visit to China in July 1971 without notifying Japan in advance. Subsequently, the United States implemented the “new economic policy”, stopped the exchange of US dollars for gold, and imposed a 10% import surcharge. This move forced the yen to appreciate sharply, and Japan's 22 years fixed exchange rate system collapsed. Sato, who was struggling at home and abroad, announced his resignation in June 1972, and Tanaka came to power to become the new Japanese Prime Minister. During his tenure, Tanaka blend made

indelible contributions to the normalization of Sino Japanese diplomatic relations, but his “transformation plan for the Japanese Archipelago” in terms of internal affairs did not meet the objective needs of economic development and played a negative role in hindering economic and social development to some extent. In addition, the “golden power politics” became the direct fuse for Tanaka’s downfall and accelerated the downfall of Tanaka’s cabinet. The Lockheed case after Takeo Miki took office left a deep image of “power money collusion” for the LDP, which entered a period of recession. At the beginning, Miki was prepared to thoroughly investigate the truth of the Lockheed case and expose the collusion between the political and financial circles. However, the “toppling Miki” faction led by Tanaka put Miki’s cabinet in a dilemma. The LDP was worried about threatening its political life and vital interests. The majority isolated Miki and Miki was forced to step down. Fukuda came to power at this stage, but he did not save the LDP’s decline. After Takeo Fukuda came to power, in order to eliminate the financial power system and factional struggle, he established the president public election system, dissolved the chaebol, weakened the power of his faction, and finally stepped down. In the 1970s, the LDP’s seats in Parliament often fluctuated from top to bottom, and the “government and opposition” appeared, and the LDP regime was in danger. This situation has stimulated the ruling orientation of the opposition parties, so they have repeatedly put forward the concept of joint political power excluding the Liberal Democratic Party, but it failed due to their respective ideology and internal contradictions.

In 1978, Masayoshi Ohama was elected Prime Minister of Japan, but Masayoshi Ohama unfortunately died during his term of office due to illness. Masayoshi Sato acted as prime minister. The death of Masayoshi Ohira won the sympathy of voters. The Liberal Democratic Party won a big victory in the election. The Liberal Democratic Party reversed its previous decline, and Suzuki was elected Prime Minister of Japan. As the support rate of the LDP has declined for a considerable period of time, other political parties see the hope of their own governance, but there are internal divisions, which gives the LDP the opportunity to continue to govern. Yasuhiro Nakasone was elected Prime Minister of Japan after Suzuki Shinyuki. He put forward the slogan of “post-war political final accounts” and the national development goal of Japan to become a “political power” (Xu, 2006). It marks that Japan’s national development strategy has completely moved from the economic era to the political era. Since then, Japan has worked hard to establish an “international country” and realize a “political power” and a military power. The return of conservative politics makes the LDP regime full of confidence in the future after ups and downs.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of “power and money politics” scandals broke out in Japanese politics one after another. The likulut incident of Takeshita and Nakasone and the Sasakawa emergency incident in Tokyo became the direct fuse for the LDP to step down. The likulut incident and the Tokyo Sasakawa emergency incident exposed the irresistible political cancer—“power and money politics” in Japanese party politics, which made the LDP regime lose its trust to the people. In order to refresh domestic politics and eliminate party corruption, the Liberal Democratic Party is determined to carry out political reform. Around the political reform, there were three different forces in the party. Due to the dispute between the faction, the LDP was finally divided, eventually stepped down and lost its ruling position.

Summary of This Chapter

This chapter mainly explains what is the “1955 system” and the ruling process of the Liberal Democratic Party under the “1955 system”. Through a brief description of the ruling process of the Liberal Democratic Party under the “1955 system”, the author finds that the two key words closely related to the development of the Liberal

Democratic Party are “power and money politics” and “faction struggle”. “Power and money politics” refers to the collusion between politicians belonging to the Liberal Democratic Party and zaibatsus. Zaibatsus provides financial support for politicians’ prime minister election, while politicians provide them with political help. “Factional struggle” refers to the formation of different interest factions within the LDP, and the names of the factions are named after the leaders. Although the regime does not flow among multiple parties, it flows among multiple factions with different interest demands within the LDP. Of course, these different factions belong to the LDP, and their political demands are the same in terms of fundamental interests.

The Liberal Democratic Party After the “1955 System”

In the early 1990s, the Japanese political parties appeared a great turbulent situation of differentiation and combination. In the 1993 general election, due to the influence of the “power and money politics” scandal and the factional struggle, the Liberal Democratic Party fell from the throne of the political arena that had been in power for 38 years, and was replaced by the eight party joint regime led by the new Party of Japan. The “1955 System” collapsed, and the development of Japanese politics took a turning point. Since then, the Japanese political arena has entered a complex era of multi-party joint governance.

On July 18, 1993, in the 40th general election of Japan’s house of Representatives, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party lost the election, and its seats (223 seats) did not exceed half of the total seats (256 seats), thus losing the advantage of being in power alone. On August 6, the leader of Japan’s new party, Yukio Hosokawa, was elected as Prime Minister of the cabinet, forming a coalition government with the participation of the socialist party, the new party, the Komeito party, the new Party of Japan, the democratic social party, the pioneer new party, the Social Democratic Alliance, and the Federation for democratic reform of the Senate. For the newly elected Prime Minister Hosokawa, as he said in his speech, “it’s like sailing in severe winter and the journey is steep” (Wang, 2008), the future will be full of thorns. Among the cabinet members, other ministers and prime ministers joined the cabinet for the first time except the Deputy Prime Minister and foreign minister who had experience in joining the cabinet. These new faces not only constitute the biggest feature of this government, but also imply the lack of experience and immaturity of this group. Hosokawa implemented the “political reform” during his term of office and changed the existing middle electoral district system into a small constituency proportional representation system. The reform bill was passed after the LDP made a compromise of interests and made concessions in favor of the LDP. However, the substantial concessions made by the Hosokawa cabinet to the LDP have completely lost the effectiveness of the political reform plan to solve the problem of political funds. The political reform requirements expected by the people are only prevaricated and replaced by the reform of the electoral system, and have not really changed the basis of Japan’s conservative politics formed during the “1955 System”. Therefore, it is generally believed that. This reform is only a “conservative reform”, in fact, it has established a new conservative political system. As the Hosokawa cabinet was in power jointly by multiple parties, coupled with its lack of ruling experience, it finally stepped down due to the intensification of contradictions between various party.

After eight months in power, the Liberal Democratic Party regime came to power again. Since then, except that the president of the Democratic Party served as Prime Minister three times from 2009 to 2012, most of the LDP controlled the state power in the form of coalition governance. It can be seen that the position of the Liberal Democratic Party as the dominant party in Congress has not changed greatly. Some scholars even regard the

Japanese political party system after 1996 as “moving forward in the direction of the Liberal Democratic Party’s one-party priority system” (Seizo, 1997). However, compared with the “1955 System”, the Japanese political party system in this period has new characteristics, that is, the political power structure with the Liberal Democratic Party as the core mostly appears in the form of joint governance, and the policy propositions of the ruling and opposition parties tend to converge obviously, and the Japanese political parties are evolving towards the trend of overall conservatism.

Conclusion

To sum up, this paper combs the development process of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party, and summarizes some characteristics of the Liberal Democratic Party from the development process. The paper holds that the Liberal Democratic Party is historically inherited and conservative, and is affected by external forces in the process of development, including the influence of the United States, the zaibatsus, and other domestic political parties. Within the LDP, there is factional struggle. The LDP simulates the competition between political parties through factional struggle to update policies and realize its own political ideas. This factional struggle is closely related to the zaibatsus. Politicians rely on the zaibatsus to provide themselves with economic support during the election, and make the zaibatsus profitable through policies after they are elected prime minister. Zaibatsus meet their own interests by supporting different factions. There is a deep binding between zaibatsus and politicians. When the power money proposal is too obvious, it will arouse national resentment, lead to a decline in their own support rate, and give other factions and even other political parties an opportunity to take advantage of it. Back to the question at the beginning of the paper, Suga Yoshihide’s resignation and Kishida’s are actually the result of factional struggle within the LDP. As Abe’s designated successor, Suga Yoshihide received the support of Abe faction of the Liberal Democratic Party in the early stage of taking office, and also received the support of zaibatsus supporting Abe outside the party. But during his tenure, contrary to expectation, the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic occurred in Japan. Japan is consistent with the United States in epidemic prevention policy. It is not about pursuing science and being politically correct, but it leads to epidemic prevention and the decline in popular support. In order to recover the support rate below, Suga Yoshihide pinned his hope on the results of hosting the Olympic Games and insisted on hosting the Olympic Games regardless of the opposition of the people. Due to the corruption of officials and the embezzlement of funds for the Olympic Games, the Olympic Games was also a mess, resulting in a further decline in the support rate. Finally, in order to reduce losses, Abe’s faction also abandoned Suga Yoshihide, who was forced to resign during his term of office. As a faction of the Liberal Democratic Party, Fumio Kishida seizes the opportunity to win the prime minister election and become the 100th Prime Minister of Japan when Abe faction’s support rate for Suga Yoshihide’s bad policy drops. Finally, after taking over and supplementing the 100th election term in accordance with legal procedures, Fumio Kishida led the cabinet to resign, won the election of the 101st Japanese Prime Minister, and became the 101st Japanese Prime Minister.

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