Tani Satomi. "Political Realignment in Hyogo and Okayama." In *How Electoral Reform Boomeranged,* edited by Otake Hideo. Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1998, 97–127.

CHAPTER 4

Political Realignment in Hyogo and Okayama

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THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LDP) ruled Japan for so long that some people tended to regard the LDP's one-party dominance as the most natural expression of Japanese political culture. The fall of the LDP from power in 1993 was, therefore, to many Japanese much like the 1992 collapse of the Soviet Union was to the international community. Voters, journalists, political scientists, and politicians themselves suddenly realized that no party system lasted forever. Naturally, the possible reorganization of the Japanese party system became the main topic of political arguments and analysis. The recent change of Japan's electoral system intensified speculation about the future configurations of Japanese political parties.

Both the journalistic coverage and the academic analysis of Japanese party politics in the "post-1955 system" have by and large concentrated on events at the national level. It is true that the mass media has paid much attention during the officially designated campaign period to some electoral districts of interest, such as the site of a close contest between the incumbent prime minister and a formidable opponent. But once the results of the first House of Representatives (Lower House) election under the new system were announced, the national media rapidly became indifferent to politics at the local level.

The downfall of the LDP in 1993 did not necessarily occur due to structural reasons, such as a large-scale change in voters' party

identification. It was the defection of many parliamentary members from the LDP that brought an eight-party coalition to power. It is possible that the recent metamorphosis of the Japanese party system will end up being short-lived, if it fails to cause any profound changes in political life at the grass-roots level. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine the impact of the upheaval in Nagatacho, Japan's Capitol Hill, on local politics. The introduction of a new electoral system in 1994 may also have brought change to the local political arena, benefiting some parties and disadvantaging others. If so, this change will more or less define the shape of future party configurations. One of the main purposes of this chapter is to observe the aftereffects at the local level of these two political events, and to make inferences concerning the future party system of this country from the facts observed.

Local Politics and Party Competition

It is widely believed that welfare states have fostered political centralization in many industrialized countries, depriving local political institutions of their autonomy and significance to residents. One could take Britain as a good example of such a tendency (Tani 1979). But we should not underestimate the significance of local politics and the persistence of local systems of governance.

In a less centralized country such as the United States, local politicians play a big role in policymaking at the subnational level. Dahl's research in New Haven, Connecticut, well illustrates how a mayor can shape the public life of a city (Dahl 1961). My research on Britain also suggests that local politicians can have their own raison d'être.

Tarrow's research provides us with further suggestions. Observing mayors of small municipalities in France and Italy, two other highly centralized countries, Tarrow notes that in these countries, the mayor of a small municipality lacks sufficient resources, expertise, and autonomy to initiate policies. But he still has some leeway in reviewing national projects and programs related to local development, and can choose only those that he sees as beneficial to his own community. A mayor is, Tarrow argues, a policy broker standing between the state bureaucracy and his own community (Tarrow 1977, chap. 4 and *passim*).

Tarrow's concept of brokerage is clearly applicable to Japan, as it is widely accepted that mayors, governors, and other local politicians

play a big role in Japanese pork-barrel politics. As a matter of fact, local politicians often ostensibly show their willingness to contribute to their communities by crafting themselves as pipelines to funnel money and programs from the national government to the localities. *Chuo-chokketsu* (connecting a local government directly to the national treasury) is a stock phrase employed by conservative politicians to make themselves look attractive to voters. Obtaining national grants-in-aid, national civil engineering projects, and similar benefits has long been one of the hottest issues in local politics.

Japanese local politicians who promote their ability to get national funds do not devote themselves, however, only to being brokers between national bureaucrats and their community, as Tarrow's French and Italian mayors do. In Japan, a local political actor is said to count on Diet members, especially conservative Lower House members elected from the district including the local politician's home municipality, to obtain grants-in-aid and other benefits from the national government. Each Lower House member is supposed to effectively lobby ministerial bureaucrats concerning some issues, and to voice loudly within the party constituents' wishes concerning others. To ensure that a Lower House member continues to attend to his or her requests, a local politician needs to maintain frequent contact with the only Diet member representing his or her district. In Japan, a stable, lasting human relationship is itself a factor in strengthening mutual trust, so such long-term alliances are advantageous to local politicians.

These alliances are also attractive to Diet members, especially to conservatives. Electoral districts tended to be good-sized under the old electoral system, typically containing several municipalities and covering a population of more than a half million. Prior Japanese election laws strictly restricted the use of mass media for political purposes in these huge constituencies. In the early post–World War II period, the mass media itself was still in its infancy, and politicians could not greatly rely on their parties to assist their election campaigns. Most Japanese political parties, including conservative parties, have never succeeded in forming substantial party organizations with large membership rolls. Moreover, with the former multiseat district system peculiar to Japan, candidates of the LDP, and often those in the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ, the former Japan Socialist Party) as well, were forced to compete with other candidates from the

same party. Their primordial party organization was ill-suited to coordinate, or mitigate, rivalry among member politicians.

It is not easy for most Diet members to induce the masses of voters to even remember their name, let alone to get in contact with them, unless they can find some means of approaching voters. One way is via local politicians and influential residents. Another is to organize voters into a support organization, or *koenkai,* for an individual politician. The former method is said to be most effective in rural areas, while the latter is regarded as beneficial and necessary in urban areas (Curtis 1971).

In rural areas where residents retain traditional social networks and views, local politicians are believed to continue to hold influence over ordinary residents, and to be able to mobilize many voters unconditionally for Diet members, even if the voters have neither met the candidates nor know their election platform. According to a political scientist, local politicians became powerful forces in mobilizing votes in rural areas after World War II, replacing agricultural landlords (Matsushita 1962, 224). Their mobilization strength has naturally been very attractive to Diet members. Those seeking to contest national elections have been forced to vie with one another for the support of local politicians.

In urban areas, where residents are not a part of traditional social networks, the authority of local politicians has largely been eclipsed. More modern, individualistic ways of thinking came to prevail among urban residents during Japan's period of rapid economic growth. The Japan Communist Party (JCP) is the only political party with enough organized members to reach city voters. Voters' party identification itself has grown weaker and more volatile. Diet members usually attempt to overcome such difficulties by encouraging voters to join their koenkai.

Local politicians, especially conservatives, apparently are important players in the activity of most koenkai because many of them join these associations. It is widely believed that local politicians play a major role in gathering votes for Diet members. In return for their assistance, the Diet member secures grants-in-aid and other benefits for them from the central government. A parallel relationship is said to be found between members of municipal assemblies and prefectural assembly members. According to Wakata Kyoji, such a vote-benefit exchange system with alliances among politicians from different

levels plays a critical part in Japanese electoral politics (1981, ch. 7). Local politicians have thus been seen as important actors on the national political stage in Japan.[1]

Municipal and prefectural assembly members are, however, originally elected to conduct local affairs. Japan, with forty-seven prefectures, has approximately 3,300 municipalities. To run these local governments, forty-seven governors, 3,300 mayors, more than 2,500 prefectural assembly members, and some 70,000 municipal assembly members are directly elected by local voters. The fact that they are elected by voters in each municipality or prefecture enhances the legitimacy of local governments making their own decisions, which, if deemed necessary, may contradict the will of the national government. The assurance of local autonomy by the Constitution legitimizes the independent activities of local governments.

It is widely held that Japan is an extremely centralized country. According to this conventional wisdom, a local government has little freedom of behavior and is strictly controlled by the national bureaucracy. In fact, evidence suggests that national ministries have various ways of intervening in local affairs. Among these, grants-in-aid are most popular and effective: A local government that is usually short of funds becomes highly compliant to the desires of national ministries when the latter offer some sort of grants. National bureaucrats' frequent issuance of circulars with detailed directives to local governments is another conspicuous example of centralization.

A local government does, however, enjoy some degree of autonomy. First of all, the national government cannot minimize the above-mentioned constitutional legitimacy of the local government. Second, it cannot ignore the amount of funds that are raised locally, even if they are not enough to cover all of the local government's expenses. Generally speaking, local governments are almost always suffering from a shortage of funds. But they still have their own financial resources, including local taxes and administrative fees. Some affluent local governments are minimally dependent on national money. Third, the sheer number of local governments in Japan makes it very difficult for the national government to continually supervise and control local policymaking and implementation. Local governments must be entrusted with responsibility in many areas. Fourth, Japanese local governments spend about 60 percent of the entire public expenditure. This means that the activities of local governments are so large in scale

and broad in scope that the national government could never eliminate local discretion even in the tightly controlled administrative field. Finally, a Japanese local government is allowed by law to do anything but what it is legally prohibited from doing. Muramatsu Michio convincingly argues that Japanese local governments have enjoyed much more autonomy than conventional wisdom would have one believe (1988).

Thanks to local autonomy the local government has been a real political arena. The larger the local government, the more political games are played. After World War II, Japanese political parties began to operate at the prefectural government level and in the larger municipalities. Before long, prefectural assemblies were almost completely dominated by members with political party affiliations. Unlike in higher-level local governments, party labels are exceptional in smaller municipalities, as most mayors and assembly members still prefer to be seen as independent. But the predominance of independent politicians does not necessarily mean the absence of political wrangling. Even in rural village governments, contentions arise over such issues as determining the site of waste disposal plants, the construction of nuclear power facilities, and increases or decreases in social welfare expenditures.

In the late 1960s, the importance of local autonomy was first widely recognized as a political issue. For many years after World War II, conservatives were predominant not only on the national level but also in most local governments. But the rise of new social problems accompanying Japan's rapid economic growth since the mid-1950s provided the opposition with a good opportunity to promote alternative policies to those of the conservatives. Many leftists strategically sought power on the local level, impressing voters with their innovative election platforms for tackling newly arising problems. This was the start of the era of so-called progressive local governments. Due to their success, many moderates decided to join coalitions with leftists, and this greatly influenced Japanese politics in such areas as welfare policy and environmental regulation. The era of progressive local government was brought to an end in the late 1970s by a shift in local alliance strategies by moderate parties (Omori and Sato 1986, 219–229).

An examination of how parties compete and cooperate with each other at the local government level thus helps us understand both

local politics per se and electoral politics in a broader sense. The rest of this chapter will examine how the collapse of LDP dominance and changes in the electoral system affected Japanese politics at the local level, observing the experience of two neighboring prefectures in western Japan. The two prefectures are Hyogo and Okayama. Comparing those prefectures is of interest not only because they differ from each other in industrial composition but also because the two have contrasting political climates.

The Case of Hyogo

Diet Elections and Politics

Hyogo Prefecture is on the western rim of the Kansai region, which was once the political center of Japan. Hyogo is a populous prefecture, with more than five million residents. About 50 percent of the entire population lives in a narrow urban belt on the Seto Inland Sea coast, on the southern border of the prefecture. Kobe, the central city in this metropolitan region, has a population of 1.5 million, and is the prefectural capital. As its nickname, Kobe Inc., suggests, the city has followed an entrepreneurial policy of promoting the development of its economy, at least until it suffered a devastating earthquake in 1995. A developmental policy by a local government is not rare in Japan. What is unique to Kobe is that such a policy continued to be promoted by a sixteen-year leftist administration. The uniqueness and importance of Kobe's city politics has influenced the local politics of Hyogo as a whole in various ways. The rest of the Kobe district is by and large rural and mountainous. Under the new electoral system, this large but underdeveloped area is divided into just a small number of Lower House electoral districts.

Under the old electoral system, Hyogo was divided into five electoral districts, with nineteen Lower House members. In the 1993 Lower House election that led to the formation of the Hosokawa eight-party coalition cabinet, the LDP obtained only four seats out of nineteen. The party's failure in Kobe was particularly notable: All of the five seats allocated to the former First District, which covers all of Kobe proper, went to non-LDP party candidates, as Ishii Hajime, who was elected seven times as the LDP's only viable candidate, defected from

the party to run in the election from the newly formed Japan Renewal Party (JRP), one of the parties that later became part of the New Frontier Party (NFP). In the former Third District, which included urbanized areas west of Kobe, the LDP could not even find a candidate to field in the election.

The predecessor parties of the NFP won a total of eight seats, and the NFP became the strongest force in Hyogo in terms of its share of Lower House seats when it was formed by the merger of four parties in 1994. The SDPJ was nearly as successful in Hyogo in the 1993 Lower House election, electing four endorsed candidates and two affiliated candidates. The Komeito (Clean Government Party) took three seats. The last seat went to the New Party Sakigake (*sakigake* means pioneer). Neither the JCP nor the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) succeeded in winning a seat.

A similar discrepancy between vote totals of the LDP and the NFP was seen in the House of Councillors (Upper House) election held in 1995. In the Upper House election, every prefecture constitutes one electoral district with two to eight seats. Hyogo Prefecture is allocated four Upper House seats, half of which are contested at a time in an Upper House election held every three years. The result of the Upper House election in Hyogo was superficially a tie between the LDP and the NFP, as each won one seat. In terms of shares of votes, however, the LDP was far behind the NFP. The LDP candidate won 24.3 percent, compared with 36.1 percent cast for the NFP candidate. The third-ranking candidate was from the Democratic Reformist Federation (DRF); he garnered 15.9 percent of the total.

Certainly, it can be argued that these results predominately reflect differences in reputation, campaigning skills, and other personal factors among candidates. An index that may more closely represent the real strength of a party in an area are the proportional representation results in the election. In an Upper House election, in addition to the 152 members elected from forty-seven prefecturewide electoral districts, another one hundred members are elected under a proportional representation system that posits the entire country as one electoral block. Each voter is given two ballots, with one to be cast for one of the prefectural candidates and the other for a political party. In Hyogo, 33.0 percent of the voters chose the NFP, 22.1 percent the LDP, 14.9 percent the SDPJ, 11.9 percent the JCP, and 5.2 percent the New Party Sakigake.

The proportional representation voting was at that time seen as predictive of the shape of party politics in the near future. Immediately after the 1995 Upper House election, six political scientists, including myself, collaborated with a leading national newspaper to simulate the next Lower House election to be held within a few years under the new election system. We first looked at proportional representation voting in every municipality to identify the popularity of the various political parties in each of three hundred Lower House electoral districts. Then we took into account various factors, such as the results of past Lower House elections, the personal popularity of those expected to be candidates, and the ongoing reorganization of politicians' koenkai. In doing the final calculations, we all assumed that the turnout for the upcoming Lower House election would be at least 10 percent above that of the Upper House election, and that a high turnout would basically favor the LDP. Table 1, except for the last column, shows the simulated results for Hyogo Prefecture (*Asahi Shimbun* 1995). The last column shows the actual winning parties in the 1996 Lower House election in each district.

These figures must have appalled the LDP. Even after it became certain that the Lower House would be dissolved within a month, one

Table 1. Shares of Major Parties in Twelve Districts in Hyogo and Simulation Results

District Number	Share of LDP*	Share of NFP	Share of SDPJ/SDP	Share of JCP	Expected Winner	Real Winner
1	19	30	13	18	NFP	NFP
2	17	34	14	18	NFP	NFP
3	15	32	16	16	NFP	DRF‡
4	22	36	14	10	NFP	NFP
5	30	29	17	9	LDP	LDP
6	22	32	16	11	NFP	NFP
7	20	31	15	13	SDP	SDP
8	20	36	14	15	Close†	NFP
9	24	34	15	10	LDP	NFP
10	15	37	16	9	Close	NFP
11	23	36	14	10	LDP	LDP
12	31	31	14	8	LDP	LDP

* Shares are rounded.

† "Close" means that the race was expected to be unpredictably close.

‡ Instead of running its own candidate in the 1996 Lower House election, the NFP supported a DRF candidate who was an ex-JSP right-leaning Lower House member in the Third District.

of the LDP's prefectural leaders could not reject the ominous prediction that his candidates would be swept from office in all the districts in the upcoming Lower House election (*The Hyogo Journal* 1996). The Hyogo LDP managed to field candidates in eleven of the twelve districts, and for the other district backed a candidate from the New Party Sakigake, part of the Murayama administration that came to power in June 1994.

In each district, as in previous elections, it was the candidate himself and his koenkai, not the LDP, that engaged in the real battle with other parties. The party at the prefectural level was poorly manned and funded. Instead of coordinating campaign activities all over the prefecture, the administration bureau of the LDP Hyogo branch expected each candidate to provide fellow candidates running in neighboring districts with a list of his supporters living there, in what was part of his old electoral district but was not included in his new, reduced-size district. A list of supporters and expected supporters has been seen as a powerful weapon in retaining one's strength in the electoral battle. But most of the LDP candidates ignored such party directives and jealously hoarded their lists of supporters.

Taken aback by the dismal predictions of the LDP's performance in the upcoming Lower House election and the party's poor preparation, many local organizations in Hyogo that had long backed the LDP, such as physicians' associations, agricultural interest groups, and small retailers' associations, began to reconsider their relations with the LDP. Many organizations and companies quickly withdrew their support from the LDP, instead cautiously following the interparty competition. Some organizations that had previously backed the LDP decided to support multiple candidates from different parties, while realizing that the new electoral system allowed only one victor in a district. The president of one of these organizations said, "We are insuring our fortunes by backing two candidates from different parties at the same time" (*Kobe Shimbun* 1996). Many abstained from committing to a particular party or candidate, waiting to see how the situation would develop.

Many organizations and companies continued to support LDP politicians, of course, but even among them, some reduced the amount they usually gave as campaign contributions, and some were reluctant to proffer lists of members or employees to campaign offices. In such cases, their show of loyalty to the LDP were often token gestures. Such cracks in the traditional façade of local conservative politics obviously weakened the

electoral competitiveness of the LDP in Hyogo to some extent. The party won in only three out of twelve electoral districts.

In contrast to the troubled LDP, the NFP was victorious in Hyogo. It won seven out of twelve districts, and with its help, the NFP-recommended DRF candidate was able to defeat a first-time LDP candidate in the new Third District. The NFP was created in 1994 by the merger of four parties, the JRP, the DSP, the Japan New Party (JNP), and Komeito. The staff of its Hyogo chapter was at first worried about its election prospects in spite of a fine showing in the 1995 Upper House election, in part because opinion polls revealed that the LDP was enjoying rising popularity, and in part because of inadequate cooperation among its member groups—all of them once independent parties. As with the LDP Hyogo chapter, NFP Hyogo also found it very difficult to build up a unified party organization and a solid financial base.

To make up for these weaknesses, the NFP candidates actively pursued mutual assistance with other candidates. For example, Ishii Hajime of the new First District and Akaba Kazuyoshi of the new Second District exchanged many lists of supporters living in each other's newly created districts. A local newspaper reporter spoke of seeing cardboard boxes full of voters' files carried away from Ishii's campaign headquarters to Akaba's office.[2] Ishii was initially an LDP Lower House member from Hyogo's former First District who was elected seven times. He defected from the LDP to co-found the JRP in 1993, and he then joined the NFP in 1994. Akaba began as a Komeito candidate in the same district as Ishii, and outpolled him in votes garnered in the 1993 Lower House election. Their rivalry under the old electoral system, therefore, made their cooperation all the more surprising. The local branch of Sokagakkai, a religious organization that was the de facto founder of Komeito, even introduced Ishii to thousands of its members at a special conference held in the new First District, and persuaded them to accept him as their own candidate. As the result of their efforts, both Ishii and Akaba won the election. Similar cooperation between candidates was seen in Hyogo, if not to the extent of that between Ishii and Akaba.

To the NFP, support by labor unions was also of great help. The national center of labor unions, Rengo (Japan Trade Union Confederation), had long tried to realize its dream of unifying all non-LDP and non-JCP political forces. But internally, it was suffering from a

schism between its pro-DSP wing and pro-SDPJ wing. The Hosokawa administration, which was the first non-LDP government in thirty-eight years, gave fresh hope to Rengo's aspirations because both the Socialists and the DSP joined the Hosokawa administration. The downfall of the succeeding Hata administration, however, propelled the SDPJ into forming an alliance with the LDP, leaving the DSP in the opposition camp. Rengo was again weakened by the rivalry between the two wings. To maintain its internal unity, Rengo ceased support of a particular party in the Lower House election, allowing member labor unions to behave as they liked in terms of campaign support.

Despite the passive attitude of Rengo's national leaders, its Hyogo branch continued to maintain its original anti-LDP and anti-JCP stance. Rengo Hyogo carefully considered the specific circumstances in each district in examining and screening out would-be candidates. Finally, the branch decided to endorse seven out of nine NFP candidates, one Socialist candidate, and one of two Democratic Party candidates in exchange for their support of its own candidates, who were running with DRF endorsement in the Third and Fifth Districts. In the end, six of the seven NFP candidates that Rengo had backed were elected. In closely contested districts, the support of some conservative organizations was no doubt helpful to the NFP as well.

Other than the LDP and the NFP, the only party that was able to elect its candidate in Hyogo was the Social Democratic Party (SDP, the former SDPJ, which changed its English-language name in January 1996), with one successful endorsee. But its success was mainly due to the popularity of the candidate, Doi Takako, the leader of the SDP, not to the popularity of the party itself. The DRF also won one district but, as noted above, the DRF was virtually a wing of the New Frontier Party there. Sakigake failed to reelect its two incumbents. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was newly established just before the election, ran five candidates in vain. The JCP ran candidates in every district, but they never seriously threatened any of the victors.

Consequences for Local-Level Politics

What were the implications in local politics in Hyogo of the end of the LDP's one-party rule and electoral reform, combined with the victory of the NFP in the 1996 Lower House election? Generally speaking, many local interest groups and companies that at one time

withdrew or suspended their support of the LDP have since returned to it, as the LDP and the Hashimoto coalition government have increased their power tremendously since the Lower House election. Moreover, LDP Hyogo secured three seats in proportional representation. The LDP's poor showing in the single-seat districts in the Lower House election does not seem to have prevented the influence of the NFP from declining in Hyogo.

With the exception of the Socialists, there has been no outstanding change among local politicians since the split of the LDP. The defection of two groups from the LDP, and the subsequent formation of the NFP, caused only a tiny ripple on the surface of Hyogo politics. The composition of the prefectural assembly is a case in point. Since 1993, no LDP assembly members have seceded from the party, even though two incumbent Lower House members left the party for the NFP. In the prefectural assembly election in 1995, two NFP-endorsed first-time assembly members won seats, but they have not yet succeeded in forming an NFP intra-assembly grouping because no other members have joined them. As of January 9, 1997, these two, along with one nonaffiliated member, constituted one of the smallest intra-assembly groups.

It may seem strange that Komei (the former Komeito's local arm) has remained intact in the assembly, and has not joined forces with the two NFP members. Actually, Komei has twelve members in the Hyogo Prefectural Assembly, making it the third largest force. However, Komei decided to retain its network of local branches and members as an organized party for the time being when the national-level Komeito agreed to join the newly founded NFP in 1994. Thus, the local Komei organizations are exactly as they were before the dissolution of the national Komeito.

DSP Hyogo adopted a strategy similar to that of Komei, although its national organization decided to disband itself on both the national and local levels. The DSP never grew to become a major party after it was formed in 1960, and it could field successful candidates in just a few prefectures. But it was rather successful in Hyogo, the home of several types of heavy industry dominated by the conservative labor unions that backed the DSP. The local DSP had long cooperated with the right-leaning members of the SDPJ to strengthen labor's political clout, and members wanted to carry on this tradition in the prefectural and the municipal assemblies. Throughout the last decade, the

Hyogo DSP typically could claim seven members in the prefectural assembly. None of the DSP-affiliated members would agree to link up with the NFP members in the prefectural assembly.

The SDPJ was the second largest force in the prefectural assembly for many years and was able to elect many Diet members as well, but it is now on the brink of extinction. The number of SDPJ assembly members decreased, and differences between its right and left wings finally culminated in a split of the prefectural party after the national party joined the LDP to form a coalition administration in June 1994. Two former left-wingers formed a new intra-assembly grouping that they named the New Socialist Party. The other SDPJ members joined the prefectural-level DSP members to form a new group called the Prefectural Citizens Federation of Hyogo.

In contrast to the chaos experienced by the NFP and the SDPJ, the LDP has retained its cohesion in the prefectural assembly since the end of the LDP's one-party rule in 1993. Fifty of the ninety-two members in the prefectural assembly are currently with the LDP. The secret of its strength, as in many prefectures, is the existence of many single-seat districts under the electoral system for the prefectural assembly. In Hyogo, there are twenty-eight single-seat electoral districts, most of which are in rural or semirural areas, and these have provided the LDP with secure seats.

According to local journalists, most of these LDP assembly members are independent or have weak affiliations with LDP Diet members from Hyogo, though there are a few exceptions in the western part of the prefecture. In a Diet election, they usually gather at the campaign offices of one of the LDP candidates, but their vote-mobilization activities tend to remain nominal. The introduction of a new electoral system did not change this situation very much.[3]

As for the governor, he has basically kept an equal distance from the political parties, except for the JCP, because all the parties but the JCP have supported him from the outset. He has simply attended to the desires of the governing parties as necessary in order to influence the behavior of the assembly members. Although the LDP maintains a large majority in the assembly, its apparent strength has long been limited by rivalry between two factions. These factions were irrespective of factions at the national level, as they were formed around two influential assembly members. After one of the two quit the party, the LDP in the assembly became more unified. But the history of this

feud has made the leader of the LDP wary of directing the party arbitrarily. Assembly members usually need strong leadership and solid party cohesion to enable them to take a strong position vis-à-vis the governor. As argued earlier, a governor or mayor is much more powerful than his or her assembly. Moreover, the governor of Hyogo, Kaihara Toshitami, has his own strong koenkai, and he need not rely heavily on any particular party when running for reelection. The most helpful organization in his election campaign was retired employees of the prefectural government, where Kaihara once worked as prefectural secretary, and they continue to lend him strong support.

Since his second term began, Kaihara has worked to strengthen his relations with nonpartisan citizens' organizations, such as the local consumers' association and the prefectural federation of women's organizations. Solid ties with citizens' organizations have certainly left him in a stronger position when dealing with the political parties. He has also made direct appeals to voters, holding frequent open discussion meetings. Generally speaking, therefore, the prefectural assembly of Hyogo is neither a great threat to nor a power base for its governor. The governor of Hyogo has little motivation to meddle in party politics in his prefecture, and his strength and autonomy means that he need not form alliances with particular Diet members, either. According to a local reporter, Kaihara is often described as "the emperor of Hyogo Prefecture."[4]

The political situation of Kobe, the prefectural capital and by far the largest city in Hyogo, is by and large similar to that of the prefecture. Neither the end of the LDP's rule nor the introduction of a new electoral system much changed the power balance among parties in the city. The LDP has been much weaker in Kobe than it has been in Hyogo Prefecture as a whole. At the time of the end of the LDP reign in 1993, the LDP could claim twenty-two of the seventy-two members in the city council. When Ishii Hajime, a Lower House member elected from Kobe, seceded from the LDP, eleven LDP members who had been affiliated with Ishii followed his lead, forming a new assembly grouping, the New Kobe 21. But only two of them, both of whom had worked previously as aides to Ishii and owed their election, in part, to his influence, joined either the NLF or the NFP. No other LDP assembly members defected from the party.

City politics in Kobe have unique dynamics. For one thing, the major parties are not dissimilar from each other. The JSP, Komeito,

and the DSP formerly joined forces to elect a leftward-leaning moderate mayor in the early 1970s. The LDP later joined this governing coalition in Kobe. However, the JSP/SDPJ-DSP-Komeito alliance is still the strongest force in the city council. In addition, due to former mayor Miyazaki Tatsuo's entrepreneurial style of urban development, including the issuance of massive amounts of city bonds and the development of innovative programs, Kobe's dependence on the national treasury has been greatly reduced.

Another source of Kobe's uniqueness is its well-known activist citizens' and consumers' organizations. For example, the Nada Consumers Cooperative is one of the largest associations of its kind in Japan. There are many citizens' groups that study and develop their own local improvement plans. Art or sports associations are also flourishing. In Japan, citizens' organizations tend to be, or pretend to be, neutral in party politics. This tendency is particularly outstanding in Kobe. Most organizations have actively avoided becoming involved in party politics or participating in election campaigning. They have sought direct negotiations and consultation with city hall, bypassing political parties and assembly members. Successive mayors, on the other hand, have made every effort to strengthen their already good relations with these organizations. These citizens' organizations thus, while nonpartisan, cannot be labeled apolitical; they play a significant role in city politics. A leader of the Kobe federation of women's organizations once scornfully said to a female assembly member that her federation's activists made much more of a contribution to the city than did the assembly.[5]

After all, city politics in Kobe became independent of national politics, to a large extent, long before the end of the LDP's one-party rule. According to a local reporter, city hall's autonomous stance has instilled a sense of independence in council members. Their strong pride often incurs resentment in the prefectural assembly, despite members' party affiliations. The city politicians in Kobe tend to play a leading role in the politics of Hyogo Prefecture. City politicians even disparage Diet members, insisting that they are the ones who elect the national politicians.

The earthquake that leveled Kobe on January 17, 1995, certainly burdened the city with an unbearably heavy financial load. Both city hall and the prefectural government required massive assistance from the national government, which was then under the firm control of

the LDP as the largest coalition partner. Kobe's misfortune thus must have seemed to represent a windfall for the city's LDP organization. An LDP member of the city council smugly told me that even if NFP politicians pursued earthquake-related requests, they would never be able to get ministry bureaucrats to listen to them. But the city council election held four months after the quake resulted in no increase in LDP members. The election results suggested that the mayor would be taking a risk if he were to take the LDP too seriously. Kobe will no doubt retain its political uniqueness in the near future.

The Case of Okayama

Diet Elections and Politics

Okayama is immediately west of Hyogo, on the northern coast of the Seto Inland Sea. It is a typical prefecture in many ways, with some rural and depopulated regions and some urbanized areas, with one of the largest industrial parks in western Japan. Its entire population is a little less than two million, ranking about in the middle of Japan's forty-seven prefectures. The Ministry of Home Affairs often sees Okayama as an average prefecture; it has lower social mobility than metropolitan prefectures, but higher mobility than predominantly agricultural ones.

The largest city in Okayama is Okayama City, the prefectural capital. With a population of six hundred thousand, Okayama City is considered a good-sized city, even by Japanese standards, but as it is surrounded by a wide belt of rice paddies and orchards dotted with bedroom communities and ancient hamlets, it is not surprising that traditional practices and social networks can be found in the city. They are also prevalent in Kurashiki, the second largest city. The rest of the prefecture is basically rural.

The LDP and the entire opposition camp typically ran close races in Diet elections. Okayama provided the LDP and the JSP/SDPJ with one safe Upper House seat each for a very long time. Under the old electoral system, Okayama was almost equally divided into two districts, each of which was allocated five Lower House seats. In the old First District, containing Okayama City, it was very difficult for the LDP to secure three seats. In the old Second District, which covered

the western half of the prefecture, including Kurashiki, the LDP consistently claimed three seats, except for one time when an incumbent abruptly retired without designating a successor.

In the Lower House election under the old electoral system in 1993, Okayama's conservatives performed well, winning three seats in each of the two districts. Komeito took one seat in each as usual. In the First District, the remaining seat was won by Eda Satsuki, the leader of the Shaminren (Social Democratic Federation). The Shaminren was a tiny left-leaning moderate party on the national level, but it enjoyed considerable popularity in Okayama. Eda was always the top vote-getter in the First District in every Lower House election that he ran. In the Second District, an independent female candidate affiliated with the Shaminren and the DSP won a seat for the first time. The JCP has seldom been an election threat: It won a seat twice in the First District after World War II, but has been far behind the other parties for the past two decades. It has never elected a candidate in the Second District.

What was most impressive to local residents about the 1993 Lower House election was the defeat of the Socialists. The JSP/SDPJ could consistently secure two seats in each district in Lower House elections held in the first half of the postwar period, producing some leading socialists. But its influence started to decline during the 1970s as the fortunes of Komeito and the Shaminren rose in Okayama. In the 1980s, the Hyogo JSP elected two Lower House and two Upper House members, but it was finally swept out of the Lower House in 1993, although the two socialist candidates garnered an impressive combined total of one hundred ten thousand votes in that election.

While the 1993 Lower House election results pleased the LDP in Okayama, their euphoria did not last long. Soon after the end of the LDP's one-party dominance, one of its leading politicians, Kato Mutsuki, defected from the LDP, and he later joined the JRP. Kato was elected from the Second District of Okayama, and he had served in many positions, including as chairman of the LDP's policy research board, one of the four top positions in the party.

Kato's departure was a profound shock to conservatives in the prefecture. He was influential at the local level as well as in Tokyo, and was reportedly very good at pork-barrel politics. The now out-of-power LDP found it difficult to promote itself to the electorate. As in Hyogo, local companies and interest groups began adopting noncommittal attitudes toward political parties. Some mayors visited the offices of

the coalition parties to ask for government assistance to their municipalities without even paying a call to the office of the LDP. A mayor of a small mountain town on the northern periphery of the prefecture complained that petitioning became more time-consuming because of the large number of parties involved in the coalition government. But he showed no hesitation about courting parties besides the LDP, with whom he had always relied on before 1993.[6]

The LDP's return to power in the summer of 1994 did little to relieve the problems of its Okayama chapter. First of all, the formation of the NFP consolidated three strong political forces in Okayama: the Kato group, Komeito, and the Eda-led Shaminren. The independent female Lower House member elected from the Second District also joined the NFP. The total number of votes obtained in the 1993 Lower House election by five politicians who later joined the NFP almost equaled the votes that had been gained by five LDP candidates. The alliance between Kato and Eda looked especially ominous to the local LDP because Eda was seen as influential not only among voters in the First District but also among those in the Second District, which his father had represented in the Lower House from 1963 until 1977.

The results of the 1995 Upper House election in Okayama did not make the local LDP very happy, either, although its performance in Okayama was much better than that of its cousins in Hyogo. The LDP won 34 percent of the total votes for proportional representation, compared with 31 percent for the NFP, and 18 percent for the SDPJ. But the LDP was dissatisfied because its votes were unevenly spread, with some areas accounting for many more votes than others. The findings in table 2 from the simulation research on the subsequent Lower House election discussed in the previous section clearly explain the cause of their concern.

The simulation conclusions seemed more favorable to the LDP than was warranted because the political scientist who analyzed the situation in Okayama relied not only upon election results but also on such factors as the prevalence of koenkai. The simulation figures themselves implied that the LDP would be defeated by the NFP in three districts out of five in a Lower House election, according to each party's share of the vote only. Those three districts are mainly urban areas where the LDP has often waged an uphill battle. The figures in table 2 must also have looked ominous to the SDPJ. According to the results of the Upper House election, in which the party failed to gain a single seat

Table 2. Projected Shares of Major Parties in Five Districts in Okayama and Simulation Results

District Number	Share of LDP*	Share of NFP	Share of SDPJ/SDP	Share of JCP	Expected Winner	Real Winner
1	29	32	19	9	LDP	LDP
2	29	33	18	9	NFP†	LDP
3	38	27	21	7	LDP	LDP
4	29	36	16	8	LDP	LDP
5	41	27	18	6	LDP	LDP

* Shares are rounded.

† In the Second District, the very popular NFP candidate abruptly pulled out of the race in July 1996 to run in the gubernatorial election, without a replacement who was likely to win.

for the first time, the SDPJ had no hope of winning in the single-seat districts in the next Lower House election. After the defeat, SDPJ Okayama had only one Upper House member left, who had been elected in 1992.

There was another obstacle facing LDP Okayama. It was not necessary to remove any incumbents from its list of candidates for the next Lower House election, because the number of LDP Lower House members was the same as that of the new districts in the prefecture. But assigning a candidate to a specific district caused headaches for the prefectural LDP chapter. All three incumbents elected from the old First District wanted to avoid the new Second District, where the formidable Eda Satsuki was expected to run. Selecting a candidate for the new Fourth District was also a problem, because Kato Mutsuki was expected to run in that district, which was not only his own stronghold but the home of many Sokagakkai members. After lengthy discussion and in-fighting, the dreaded Second District was assigned to a newcomer with the least likely prospects. The new Fourth District was taken by Hashimoto Ryutaro, who had already been elected as prime minister and wanted to show his determination to aggressively challenge the NFP.

In retrospect, Hashimoto's assumption of the office of prime minister in January 1996 was a major turning point in Okayama's electoral politics after the end of the LDP's one-party rule. In Japan, voters in a prime minister's home prefecture or home electoral district tend to support him and his party enthusiastically. A good example was former Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi's Oita Prefecture. Oita, located in northeastern Kyushu, was basically a conservative prefecture. In the 1992 Upper House election, the LDP obtained 41 percent of the total

votes for proportional representation, compared with the SDPJ's 25 percent. But in the 1995 Upper House election, when Murayama was in power as the first Socialist prime minister in forty-seven years, the voting shares of the two parties were almost reversed: The share of the SDPJ jumped to 41 percent, whereas that of the LDP fell to 29 percent. The same phenomenon was about to occur in Okayama when Hashimoto assumed the prime ministership.

When they saw that their prospects were indeed favorable, the entire prefectural LDP organization gained new vitality. This new momentum within the LDP promoted cooperation among incumbent Lower House members who were once bitter rivals. Hashimoto of the new Fourth District and Murata Yoshitaka of the new Fifth District, the two LDP politicians from the old Second District, willingly exchanged lists of their old supporters living outside their new districts.[7] Each is also said to have introduced friends and acquaintances to the other candidate. At some large gatherings, former rivals shook hands on the stage to impress people with the sincerity of their cooperation in their new districts. Some local interest groups and companies, including owners of local semiprivate postal offices and construction companies, worked strenuously and exclusively for LDP candidates. They were said to be particularly effective in mobilizing voters in rural districts, notably in the Third and Fifth Districts. Local construction companies also greatly contributed to Hashimoto, who had to win over the volatile urban residents of Kurashiki, with campaign funds, lists of employees, and campaign workers.

Hashimoto's aides, his family, and his ardent supporters were particularly determined to intensify their campaign activities. They fought fiercely against Kato. According to a local informant, Hashimoto's wife visited many voters' homes, and she even dared to visit the block where Kato himself lived, incurring a severe counterattack by the Kato camp.[8] The mass media and tabloids assiduously reported on the battle between these two influential politicians.

In contrast to the enlivened LDP, the fortunes of the NFP in Okayama were declining. The allocation of NFP candidates to the new electoral districts was not itself very difficult, because the female politician elected in the last Lower House election had run successfully in the 1995 Upper House election as an NFP candidate and one ex-Komeito incumbent soon agreed to be registered in the NFP's proportional representation list. But the party was completely unable to

identify a suitable candidate for the Fifth District. This failure of the NFP allowed the district to become one of the LDP's most secure seats. The party was also beset by disharmony between Sokagakkai and the NFP supporters. Each politician tried to persuade his original supporters who lived outside his new district to back their local NFP candidate. Despite the great efforts of the Eda camp, however, many of Eda's supporters were reluctant to vote for the ex-Komeito candidate of the new First District, covering the western half of Okayama City. In the new Fourth District, on the other hand, the local Komei chapter and its parent organization, Sokagakkai, apparently limited their campaign activities for Kato. It is widely believed in Okayama that Komei-Sokagakkai hoped to have Hashimoto feel obligated to them by refraining from helping Kato, his formidable opponent.

One more major occurrence proved to be a setback to the NFP. In June 1996, the NFP's most winnable politician, Eda Satsuki, abruptly dropped out of the Lower House race to run in the Okayama gubernatorial election, which was to be held in October of that year. Polls conducted immediately before the Lower House election, which was scheduled just a week before the local race, showed that Eda was three to five points ahead of the LDP gubernatorial candidate. But the overwhelming amount of organizational and financial resources mobilized by the LDP for its candidate turned the tide. Eda was defeated by a 0.6 percent margin.

The 1996 Lower House election brought complete victory to the LDP in Okayama: The party won all five seats in the single-seat districts. It fully enjoyed the "prime minister effect" in proportional representation as well, gaining 40 percent of the prefecture's proportional representation votes, compared with 34 percent in the last Upper House election. In the eye-catching Fourth District race, Hashimoto defeated Kato by a vast margin, gathering more than two-thirds of the total votes. Kato himself secured a seat because the NFP had placed his name near the top of its list of proportional representation candidates immediately before the dissolution of the Lower House; the new election law allowed a party to register a candidate in a single-seat district as its candidate for proportional representation at the same time.

Local Implications

How did this rapidly changing electoral situation in Okayama affect the local political world? Most of the local organizations and companies

that once pretended to be unaligned with any political parties have returned to the LDP fold after the formation of the LDP-SDP-Sakigake national coalition. Others remained constant allies. Construction companies, in particular, with their heavy dependence on public engineering works, have tended to be closely tied to the ruling party. Physicians' and dentists' associations had never been attracted by the NFP or its forerunner parties in Okayama, probably because Hashimoto has been one of the most influential politicians in the area of medical and public health policies. In the 1993 Lower House plebiscite, the First District elected a new Lower House member who had been an elite bureaucrat in the Ministry of Public Health and Welfare, and Hashimoto contributed greatly to his election campaign.

Some subtle changes could be sensed in the behavior of local interest groups, however. Agricultural cooperative associations, once the stronghold of the LDP, are not as active in mobilizing votes as they were in the LDP's heyday. According to a conservative council member in a small city north of Kurashiki, neither agricultural organizations nor small retailers' associations provide LDP candidates with substantial assistance in mobilizing votes. Certainly, they still formally recommend LDP candidates, but their actual contributions are feeble at best. The council member said that their interest in pork-barrel largess via Diet members has greatly weakened.[9] However, the construction companies probably represent an important exception to this trend.[10]

As for private companies, they are still contributing money to LDP politicians and providing them with workers for campaign offices and lists of their employees. But the new legal regulations covering election campaigns seem to limit their assistance for politicians to a greater extent. It is interesting that some big companies explicitly supported non-LDP candidates in the two big elections in Okayama last year. For example, the president of one of the leading local machinery manufacturers assumed the chairmanship of the koenkai of a left-leaning DPJ candidate who ran from the new Second District. The nominee declared his candidacy shortly before the start of the official election campaign period, advertising himself as Eda's successor. Thanks to the assistance of Eda's camp and most of the Socialists in the prefecture, he obtained 32 percent of the total votes, securing a seat in proportional representation. In addition, the president of a major chain of clothing stores offered Eda use of a spacious building for a campaign office, at no charge, in the gubernatorial election.

As for the configuration of local party members and politicians, the most outstanding change since 1993 was the split of the SDPJ and the rapid contraction of the party that succeeded it, the SDP. In the prefectural assembly, the SDPJ experienced a major setback in the last prefectural election, reducing its number of elected members to only four. After the party fissured, two left-wingers decided to stay in the SDP. But two other former SDPJ assembly members joined the second largest intra-assembly party, the Democratic Club, linking themselves with the newly formed DPJ Okayama. Many remaining ex-SDPJ city or town council members also defected from the party, joining the DPJ or disdaining any party labels. The only SDPJ member of the Diet also defected from the party and joined the DPJ.

In the last prefectural assembly election, LDP Okayama added a few members to its assembly grouping. Fortunately for the party, no members who were once allied with Kato Mutsuki have defected. Even when the eight-party coalition was in power, one of Kato's former allies who had been elected from Hashimoto's hometown, Kurashiki, frankly confessed that he thought it would be risky to leave the LDP too soon.[11] Later, he said that he had no choice but to stay in the LDP to secure government grants for his constituency (*Asahi Shimbun* 1997).

As a whole, there have as yet been no remarkable changes among LDP members. There has not been much progress in converting politicians' individual koenkai into party organs, or in forging a centralized prefectural party organization. The local politicians' relationships with LDP Lower House members have been formally revised in accordance to the demarcation of single-seat districts, but many members attach greater importance to their old ties.

There has been little significant change in the other preexisting parties. Komeito continues to operate (as Komei) on the local level in Okayama, as it does everywhere else. The DSP disappeared as a party on the local level long before the demise of the LDP's dominance. The number of JCP prefectural assembly members has remained stable in recent years.

At the municipal level, as well, there have not been any outstanding transformations as far as local politicians are concerned. First of all, intra-assembly LDP groupings do not yet exist in municipal councils in Okayama. It is true that there are by far more conservative town and city council members than nonconservatives in the prefecture, with some of them strongly linked to individual LDP Lower House

members. Nonetheless, most of them do not devote themselves exclusively to the LDP. The Okayama city council is a good example. There, the conservatives are a minority, with some twenty members out of fifty-three, and they are divided into three competing groups.[12] Most of them supported LDP candidates in the last Lower House election, but many backed Eda in the gubernatorial election at the same time. In Okayama City, the mayor himself is an old friend of Eda, and he defeated the conservative incumbent backed by the LDP in 1990. In the gubernatorial election, he ostensibly rode on Eda's campaign bandwagon, although he maintained his neutrality in the Lower House election.

Most conservative council members prefer to act independently of party labels rather than join a political party. They themselves are not only indifferent to party affiliation, they know that their supporters may have their own political leanings; some may be alienated and vote for other candidates in local elections if the politician imprudently presses them to vote for a specific Diet member.

This latter inference raises serious doubts about the vote-gathering strength of local politicians. There are a few good examples in Okayama of this weakness. One is the mayoral election in Kurashiki held in February 1996, about two months after Hashimoto was named prime minister. As mentioned above, Kurashiki is politically important to the LDP not only because it is the second largest city of the prefecture, but also because it covers most of the Third District, where Hashimoto and Kato engaged in many fierce battles. When the incumbent mayor of Kurashiki died in January 1996, therefore, the LDP and Hashimoto's supporters quickly decided to run their own candidate in the ensuing mayoral election. The dead mayor himself was a loyal ally of Hashimoto, and he had defeated Kato's aide, the then-incumbent mayor, about ten years before. The local LDP chapter was determined to do whatever it could in the election to burnish Hashimoto's image. They succeeded in securing the support of all but two of the conservative council members. Even many Socialists and moderate members backed the Hashimoto candidate. The opponent candidate backed by Kato, on the other hand, was an ex-vice mayor and a nonpartisan composer of a popular local folk song. He could count only six city council members on his side, including four communists. The local Komei, with five members, was said to have made a double-deal because it officially supported the candidate backed by Kato and the NFP, mobilizing considerable votes for the Hashimoto

candidate in secret. The Komei tried to avoid reprisals from both the competing sides, committing itself to both candidates. The situation should have been overwhelmingly favorable for the Hashimoto ally. Hashimoto did achieve his goal of electing his candidate, but by a shockingly thin margin.

In the 1996 gubernatorial election, Eda obtained sixteen thousand more votes than his LDP opponent in Kurashiki, despite the LDP's landslide victory in the Lower House election held one week earlier, and despite the fact that Eda had no prefectural assembly members to truly rely on in Kurashiki. The main reason for his final defeat in the gubernatorial election was that many unaffiliated voters who formerly voted for him in Okayama City tired of successive election campaigning, and they failed to cast a vote in the second election in two weeks.

The main factors behind the LDP's remarkably improved showing in the Lower House election was the strong backing of individual koenkai and intensified efforts by politicians' aides to mobilize families, relatives, and volunteer activists. As a conservative council member of a small town in western Okayama told me, branch directors and section chiefs of koenkai in each municipality are the real powers behind mobilizing the vote. Certainly, the names of many local politicians can be found on the membership rolls of any koenkai. But their participation in the association, if not completely useless, is not a great help in gathering votes.[13] In the case of the 1996 Lower House election, what has been called the "prime minister effect" has certainly played some role, as well. The results of the three elections described here seem to suggest that the dynamics behind national elections are now discrete from those at work at the local political level in Okayama.

Conclusion

Political realignment on the national level after the end of the LDP's one-party rule does not seem to have caused major changes in the local political scene for either Hyogo or Okayama, except for the de facto breakdown of the SDPJ. The NFP continues to be unable to establish effective local organizations, while the newly created DPJ is still in its infancy in the two prefectures. The introduction of a single-seat district system has brought about shifts in relationships between Diet members and prefectural assembly members in some cases. But

such realignments remain rather nominal. Old relationships formed under the multiseat district system have not yet faded away. Most conservative members of municipal councils outside the major cities still avoid party affiliations. The LDP's efforts to convert politicians' personal koenkai into ordered party-linked organizations have yet to bear fruit. It is still too early to be able to clearly foretell the future shape of party politics on the local level.

Nevertheless, we can identify some interesting political trends at the local level that have not directly resulted from the end of the LDP's dominance and the introduction of the new electoral system. First, koenkai are tending to gradually become more independent of local politicians and local organizations. City council members in the metropolitan areas of Hyogo are increasingly too proud to become willing henchmen of national politicians. Research conducted in Okayama and Kanagawa about fifteen years ago shows the same tendency in such large cities as Yokohama and Kawasaki (Tani 1994, 23).

In rural and small town areas, many local politicians join Diet members' koenkai, often to obtain benefits from the national government by making use of the Diet member's influence. Some researchers see pork-barrel politics as still playing an important role in alliance formation among politicians from different levels (Fukui and Fukai 1996, 269). As in the case of the prefectural assembly member mentioned above who was compelled to stay in the LDP instead of defecting from the party with his ex-boss Kato, a local politician may remain affiliated with a Lower House member in order to receive his slice of pork. But recent experiences in the two prefectures as described in this chapter instead suggest that gifts from the national treasury are not as attractive to local politicians as they were before. Nowadays national politicians tend to offer their pork directly to their constituents, not chop it up into pieces for local politicians. They are also more likely to try to attract voters by themselves, enlarging their koenkai and attending as many gatherings and conferences as possible. An LDP Lower House member elected from Okayama once told me proudly that he discussed policy affairs more than one hundred thirty times in six months with participants in small political gatherings called *mini shukai*, as he sped around his district.[14] Some wives of Diet members organize exclusively female koenkai for their husbands. Finding as many volunteer campaigners as possible is another important part of their election strategy.[15] Local politicians, on the other hand, consider

securing financial assistance and facilities from Tokyo as of little importance in forging an appeal to voters (Tani 1994, 15–16). Most conservative municipal and prefectural politicians I have interviewed denied that they received any substantial help from Diet members, even in their own election campaigns.

A Diet member nonetheless has good reasons for organizing the local politicians in his district. Generally speaking, these local representatives are not a great help to the Diet member's election, but some of them may be able to collect a small number of votes. A Socialist council member in Kobe told me that during a national election, some voters usually visited or called her to ask her for whom to vote. Under the old electoral system, she would offer the name of one of two Socialist candidates in her home district.[16] According to the vice campaign manager of an LDP candidate from Kagawa Prefecture, all Diet members should seek the loyal support of local politicians as a type of insurance.[17] Old-style alliances among politicians from different levels have thus survived changes in the political situation, but their significance in electoral politics in contemporary Japan seems to have greatly decreased.

Another interesting trend is the separation of local politics from national politics. In the early postwar years, local politics in Japan were strongly influenced by politics at the national level. Municipalities and prefectures faced many serious economic restraints and social problems in those days, so local governments were forced to rely heavily on conservative Diet members to help them obtain aid from the central government. Mayors, governors, and assembly members would thus willingly join forces with local Diet members, from whom they may also have expected financial contributions. Diet members themselves, on the other hand, needed help from local politicians in gathering votes. This mutual dependency led to a pyramidal vote-benefit exchange mechanism called a *keiretsu,* or a group of linked politicians. These flourishing exchange networks undoubtedly helped the LDP become entrenched at the grass-roots level during those years.

Later, as the rapid urbanization of Japanese society led to increased social mobility and voters became disengaged from their traditional social networks, the influence of local politicians over their constituents weakened. In addition, the diffusion of principles embodied in the postwar Constitution, what Matsushita Keiichi called the "sense of the new Constitution," gradually eroded the unconditional respect felt by Japanese toward influential people (1962, 44–47).

Local governments increasingly faced new problems, such as poor urban infrastructure, pollution, the continuing necessity to construct new schools, and traffic jams and accidents, that could not necessarily be solved by petitioning the central government for help, because the central government itself did not know how to cope with them very well. In urbanized areas, local governments began to realize the importance of self-management of their communities. So-called progressive local governments understood the positive connotations of this approach. But some advocates of this movement tended to see local power as an effective means of confronting the central government. In that sense, local politics were not separated from national politics in their thinking. Some pioneering cities like Kobe contrived unique urban policies simply to improve their lives.

Today, many adventurous local governments, even in rural areas, have developed their own creative policies that have little to do with trends in national politics. Certainly, Japan is still a centralized country. Local governments have to pay much attention to the programs and ideas of national ministries, and it is unrealistic to regard all local affairs as completely unrelated to national affairs. But the local needs and concerns of contemporary Japan are too diverse and numerous to be controlled by any particular organs, either administrative or political. There are many issues peculiar to local politics. Citizens themselves have come to regard local politics quite differently from national politics. The municipal elections in Kobe and Kurashiki and the gubernatorial election in Okayama that were described in this chapter clearly indicate that electoral politics at the grass-roots level cannot be explained by the same factors as those that influence national politics. Today's local politics are, to a significant degree, separated from national politics.

Notes

1. Wakata's assertion is derived from his empirical research in a few prefectures in the Kansai region. But neither he nor other scholars have answered the question of how tightly politicians on different levels are bound together. We cannot exclude the possibility that the real strength of a pyramidal alliance varies according to region and national politician.

2. Interview with Shibata Daizo, *Kobe Shimbun* reporter, on December 25, 1996.

3. Interview with Shibata in January 1997.

4. Interview with Takashi Kaoru, *Kobe Shimbun* reporter, on April 30, 1997.

5. Interview with Kano Hanae, Kobe City Council member, on December 3, 1996.

6. Interview with Yamana Tadao, mayor of Tessei, on January 16, 1994.

7. The available information is contradictory regarding list exchanges among the three LDP candidates of the old First District.

8. Interview with Itaya Takeshi, *Sanyo Shimbun* reporter, on February 15, 1997.

9. Interview with Tsukimoto Kozo, city council member in Takahashi, on December 11, 1996.

10. Small local construction companies tend to be interested in participating in municipal works projects. Large companies, on the other hand, are more concerned about the profits they can gain from construction projects of the prefectural and national governments.

11. Interview with Furuichi Kenzo, Okayama Prefectural Assembly member, on July 1, 1994.

12. The three groups are Shimpu-kai with eleven members, Seiwa-kai with fifteen members, and the 21 Century Club of Okayama with five members. The rivalry between the two former groups is due to a dispute over the selection of council chairperson. The smallest group consists of freshmen council members. Those young members have been criticizing the "money politics" they have observed in the other two conservative groups. But the main reason that they formed an independent group, it is said, is so they can avoid domination by their seniors.

13. Interview with Tsukimoto.

14. Interview with Murata Yoshitaka, member of the Lower House, on June 19, 1992.

15. The difference between my opinion and that of Fukui and Fukai can be traced to our different focuses. I pay more attention to municipal council members and ordinary members of prefectural assemblies. Fukui and Fukai, on the other hand, tend to focus on higher-level politicians, that is, prefectural assembly members, leaders of prefectural LDP chapters, and Diet members. We should carefully analyze the significance of pork-barrel politics to different kinds of local politicians. Even within a city or town, the interest of the mayor in pork-barrel politics on the national level can differ from that of council members. I plan to do further research on this subject.

16. Interview with Hara Kazumi, Kobe City Council member, on December 3, 1996.

17. Interview with Kobayashi Takaichi, on July 14, 1993.

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