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Publication Date
1988

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— 9/26/88

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DECISION-MAKING IN THE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY

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I. The Two Faces of Japan's Leviathan

Judging from the mounting number of horror stories on the part of businessmen and trade representatives unable to get their message across in Japan, it is obvious that Americans know precious little about how to lobby the Japanese government. Part of the problem may lie in the widespread proclivity to assume that since Japan -- like America -- is an open, "democratic" country, its policies are forged in an identical process. It is often assumed that the legislature (Kokkai or Diet) is the key institution in Japan's policy-making process and that elected politicians are the only noteworthy actors. This might account for the fact that relatively less attention has been focused on the central state bureaucracy in Japan, even though its active and essential role in the country's economic "miracle" has been widely acknowledged.

Indeed, an ongoing debate in Japanese political studies centers around the question of whether or not the country is governed by a "system of bureaucratic rule" (kanryo shudo taisei) or a "system of party rule" (to shudo taisei). Yet even scholars who ascribe to the latter view, cannot deny the deeply rooted influence of the state bureaucracy in the policy-making process. Evidence of this is seen in some of the neologisms that have been invented to describe the system. For example, Inoguchi Takashi characterizes the system as "bureaucracy-led mass-inclusionary pluralism" (kanryo shudo taishu hokatsu gata tagen shugi), while Sato Seizaburo and Matsuzaki Tetsuhisa label it "canalized

pluralism by LDP-bureaucracy compound" (jiminto-kancho kongotai ni hokozukerereta tagen shugi).[1] If nothing else, this sort of perverse nomenclature should serve to warn against underestimating the bureaucracy's pivotal role in the policy-making process. This is especially important in light of the "party-high, bureaucracy-low" (toko kantei) thesis which is the current vogue in Japanese political studies.

Yet the existence of this arcane academic debate should not be surprising, since, whether phrased in specific or in general terms, the subject of "bureaucracy" always seems to elicit contentious reactions. Some see the stability, autonomy, and flexibility of the state bureaucracy as a sine qua non for Japan's economic success story. According to this view, an insulated bureaucratic elite "rules," while elected politicians "reign." Bureaucratic rule, it is argued, permits the maintenance of policy consistency and continuity. Moreover, the fact that the bureaucracy seeks to "manage" -- rather than "control" -- the economy is cited as evidence of its resilience and adaptability. In this sense, the Japanese system stands in marked contrast to socialist systems in which state dominance tends to produce bureaucratism, loss of incentive, corruption,

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[1]These and other recent conceptualizations of the Japanese political order are discussed and citations given in Doi Mitsuo et al, "Gendai Nihon ni okeru seiji katei e no apurochi: dai-ni rincho to kokutetsu mondai" (An Approach to Contemporary Japanese Political Process: The Second Administrative Reform Committee and the National Railways Problem), Handai hogaku 136 (September 1985), p. 190 and passim.

and so on.[2] Yet others deride the Japanese bureaucracy for its unresponsiveness and rigidity. This school is highly critical of the "absolutist" and "transcendental" character of the government bureaucracy, owing to the failure of the American Occupation to dismantle the despotic state apparatus.[3] Not surprisingly, therefore, the literature on the subject reflects two diametrically opposite images. One depicts the bureaucracy as resilient and adaptive, while the other portrays a rigid and rashly autonomous entity.

On a more general level, it is well to recall that Max Weber, who pioneered the field of study, was himself ambivalent about the implications of bureaucracy. He regarded it as the most advanced form of organization for governing a society, yet at the same time he expressed serious reservations about its responsiveness to democratic control. But, while many have censured the bureaucracy for a host of noxious crimes -- its inability to learn from its mistakes, the tendency to displace goals, and so forth -- few can deny that bureaucratic organization is a powerful system of social control. In point of fact, policy failures are just as often attributed to a lack of stable bureaucratic rule based upon consistent and long-term

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[2]A persuasive articulation of this view is found in Chalmers Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975, pp. 3-34 and passim.

[3]The leading figure in this "mainstream" school is Tsuji Kiyoaki, whose ideas are discussed at length in the present essay. A "revisionist" school, led by Muramatsu Michio, is much more positive in its evaluation of the bureaucracy and its responsiveness to popular opinion and political control.

policy priorities as they are to the alleged dysfunctions spawned by an overly assertive bureaucracy. It seems, therefore, that bureaucracy is something of a Janus-faced leviathan.

This essay probes into the inner-workings of Japan's government bureaucracy. The primary focus is the system of authority relations and intraorganizational communication at the level of a ministry (sho) or agency (cho) of the central state bureaucracy. The issues addressed are complex but consequential. How are decisions made in Japan's government bureaucracy? Why and in what ways is the Japanese system similar to, and how does it diverge from, the decision-making systems that characterize Western-style bureaucratic organizations? What are the roles and functions of upper leadership in bureaucratic decision-making? How do the structural characteristics of Japanese bureaucracy--specifically the personnel system and the interaction among intraorganizational administrative strata -- impact upon the decision process? And, finally, what are the points of access through which to lobby the government bureaucracy? In an indirect sense at least, the conclusions drawn from this analysis should serve to demystify some of the allegedly sui generis and culturally-derived aspects of Japanese-style bureaucratic decision-making, and, in so doing, place the study of Japanese decision-making in the appropriate context of organizational analysis and decision theory.[4]

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[4]There are two competing schools of thought purporting to account for the historical roots of the Japanese system of decision-making. One school locates a causal nexus in the

At the outset, it is to be noted that the literature on Japanese bureaucracy has been dominated by a single analytic paradigm, the "ringi" model which was first popularized in the work of Tsuji Kiyoaki. "Ringisei," the system of decision-making depicted in this model, deviates markedly from the ideal typical conception of "modern" bureaucratic organization described in Weber's analysis. Indeed, the disparaging evaluations of Tsuji and others to the effect that Japanese bureaucracy is "feudalistic" and hopelessly "inefficient" are firmly rooted in Weberian logic, and, it should be added, appear to have been formulated in an attempt to explain why it was that Japan embarked upon the reckless course that led to the Pacific War. Yet just how adequate is the Weberian model as an analytic device for evaluating the system of bureaucratic decision-making in Japan or elsewhere? It is to a consideration of this matter to which we shall first train our attention.

II. Autonomy and Resilience in Bureaucratic Decision-Making

A. Defects in the Weberian Design

The organizational form most conducive to stability and autonomous action is embodied in Weber's classic conception of

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country's "unique" culture, while the other views the system as a logical response to organizational imperative. See Nakane Chie, Japanese Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 64-6; and Bernard S. Silberman, "Ringisei--Traditional Values or Organizational Imperatives in the Japanese Upper Civil Service, 1868-1945," Journal of Asian Studies 32 (February 1973): 251-64.

"bureaucracy." Simply defined, a bureaucracy is characterized by: 1) the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas which are ordered by laws or administrative regulations; 2) the principle of office hierarchy and levels of graded authority; and 3) administration based upon written documents that are preserved in their written or draft form.[5]

Three aspects of the Weberian model are relevant to the present discussion. First, the formal system of authority is expressed in the form of a centric hierarchy, with a monocratic authority system marked by asymmetry and transitivity. As Martin Landau and Eva Eagle explain:

> If we picture the usual pyramid with its layers and tiers, label the apex 'A,' the second level 'B,' and the third 'C,' asymmetry refers to an ordering in which B is below A; i.e., A exercises authority over B. B's behavior, therefore, is under the control of A. Transitivity refers to the relation, where if A exercises control over B, and B controls C, then A also controls C -- and so on down the levels. If the ordered relation is transitive, as it is in a hierarchy, then A's authority governs every level of the organization.[6]

Second, the formal, artificial design of the organization -- as depicted in the organizational chart and in the sundry decision rules and standard operating procedures -- is assumed to reflect the actual operation of the organization. Finally, in theory at least, this centralized apparatus constitutes the most powerful known system of organizational control, a system which is capable

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[5]H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 196-7.

[6]Martin Landau and Eva Eagle, "On the Concept of Decentralization," paper prepared for the Project on Managing Decentralization, University of California, Berkeley, March 1981, p. 13.

of dominating all aspects of the socio-economic "task environment" in which it functions.

In spite of its widespread popularily and logical appeal, however, there are critical flaws in at least three mutually-related assumptions of the Weberian conception. The first concerns the matter of a monocratic and omnipotent authority structure. By extending the logic of Herbert Simon's distinction between the factual and valuational elements in a decision, it is clear that the notion of a monocratic authority system in an organization is a pipe dream.[7] Factual statements are empirical claims -- in other words, they are hypotheses and, hence, the extent of their correctness can be ascertained by the test of experience. Valuational statements, on the other hand, express preferences. Their truth value cannot be ascertained empirically, and must be judged according to some set of predetermined axiological rules. The essential point, then, is that fundamentally different criteria of correctness must be employed in order to determine the validity of any given decision, and this condition gives rise to a dual authority structure in every large-scale formal organization. The authority of "incumbency" determines, in a formal sense, who has the right to control decision-making. However, because organizations are frequently confronted with decision problems whose resolution demands highly technical knowledge in a variety

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[7]Herbert A. Simon, Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations (New York: The Free Press, 1961), passim.

of fields, it is essential to employ the services of "specialists" or "experts." This means that the authority of "expertise" will be wielded by those who handle day-to-day matters relating to specific decision issues. Because expertise tends to become diversified according to specialization, this form of authority will be compartmentalized. In sum, the requisites of decision-making dictate the existence of a dual authority structure. An excellent empirical illustration of this phenomenon is seen in the inherent seeds of strife between the "administrators" (jimuya -- the majority of whom are trained in administrative law) and the "technicians" (gijutsuya -- those with an educational background in engineering or in the "hard sciences") in Japan's Construction Ministry.[8]

The second flaw in the Weberian construct relates to the "synoptic" decision strategy that is its logical concomitant. A synoptic decision strategy requires that judgments be made by those occupying the top posts in the formal hierarchy. It is assumed that these administrators possess a clear and stable hierarchy of values -- a "utility function" or preference ordering. Moreover, in order to be effective in practice, all members of the organization must be indoctrinated into embracing and scrupulously adhering to this utility function. Needless to say, the difficulties involved in securing such ideological purity and organizational cohesiveness are monumental, a fact

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[8]This matter is discussed in Brian Woodall, "The Liberal Democratic Party and Public Works Projects: Pork-Barrel Politics and Single-Party Dominance in Japan," forthcoming.

that has not gone unnoticed by students of Leninist regimes.[9] The possibility of decision-makers possessing comprehensive knowledge is inversely proportional to the complexity of the task environment. Invariably, this means that "satisficing" behavior is the rule, and "bounded rationality" is the most to which any administrator may aspire.[10] Thus an "incrementalist" decision strategy is the only realistic alternative in light of these constraints.[11]

The third flaw of the Weberian model construct relates to the logic of a "closed-rational system" upon which the construct is premised.[12] A synoptic decision strategy and a monocratic authority structure require a stable and predictable task environment, and rest upon the assumption that the organization has at its disposal sufficient empirical knowledge to respond effectively to any type of decision situation. The socioeconomic and political milieux in which the organization functions is perceived as scrutable and stable, and the dysfunctions

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[9]See, for example, Kenneth Jowitt, "Inclusion and Mobilization in European Leninist Regimes," World Politics 28 (October 1975): 69-97.

[10]Simon, Administrative Behavior, pp. 80-1 and passim.

[11]Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," Public Administration Review 19 (Spring 1959), pp. 81 and passim. For an insightful discussion of the logic of "incrementalist" decision-making, see Amitai Etzioni, "Mixed Scanning: A 'Third' Approach to Decision-making," Public Administration Review 27 (December 1967), pp. 385-387.

[12]W. Richard Scott, Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), pp. 128-9 and passim.

associated with "premature programming" -- organizational action based upon the mistaken assumption of an adequate grasp of the facts of a decision situation -- are not contemplated.[13] Moreover, the existence of "organizational informalities," such as factionalism, among organizational personnel is ignored. Indeed, factionalism is present to a greater or lesser degree in all large-scale formal organizations, as the case of the "nationalist" and "internationalist" factions in Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry serves to illustrate.[14] Yet an organization that is blind to alterations in its task environment and to the ubiquitous presence of the informal organization is doomed to founder on the shoals of ineffectiveness.

In practice, therefore, the Weberian construct proves to be a house of cards. A large-scale formal organization cannot function in strict and exclusive adherence to the precepts of hierarchy, and must strike a compromise between the mutually contradictory demands for autonomy and resilience. The organizational form most conducive to predictable, autonomous action is a centric hierarchy, while resilience in the face of complexity is facilitated by a decentralized decision structure. Owing to the inevitability of a bipodal authority structure, the need to adhere to satisficing criteria of decision-making, and

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[13]The notion of "premature programming" is elaborated on in Landau and Eagle, "On the Concept of Decentralization," p. 38.

[14]Peter P. Cheng, "Political Clientalism in Japan: The Case of 'S'" Asian Survey 28 (April 1988): pp. 471-483.

the exigencies of an unstable and heterogenous environment, therefore, decentralization -- in one form or another -- is nothing less than an organizational imperative. Yet if the Weberian construct is inherently flawed, by what analytic standard should bureaucratic decision-making be assessed?

B. A Structural Typology

All large-scale formal organizations -- of which government bureaucracies are but one prominent type -- confront a myriad of decision situations in their day-to-day operations. Because of this, the character of authority relations and the types of procedures governing the processing and communication of information vary according to the specifics of the decision situation at hand. In this regard the often heard but little understood concept known as "clearance" is of particular relevance. The term may be defined as the act of making clear of whatever may obstruct, occupy, encumber, or hinder -- approval or certification as being clear of objection, prohibition, suspicion, or guilt; permission to proceed without objection, check, or reservation. As Andrew Dunsire observes, clearance is accomplished through procedures designed to assure that "the way is now clear for action to be taken in the manner proposed." Clearance is concerned with the matter of who is to participate in the decision-making process. Clearance procedures represent "the most direct control of discretion," and are almost synonymous with terms such as "prior approval," "managerial

discretion," and "monitoring activity."[15] With regard to their decision-making machinery, therefore, all effective organizations are something of a gestalt, capable of bringing to bear a variety of decision structures and clearance procedures in response to different classes of issues.

We would like to propose a simple analytic model that takes into account an array of logically distinct decision structures.[16] In practice, these structures serve to inject decentralization into the decision-making system, which, in a formal sense, is structured as a centric hierarchy. The basic assumption here is that formal institutions and procedures are

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[15]Andrew Dunsire, Implementation in a Bureaucracy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 138. For more on this matter, see Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland, Third Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. xxiv and passim; and David L. Weimer, "A Note on the Optimal Use of Clearance Procedures," Public Choice 34 (1979), p. 463.

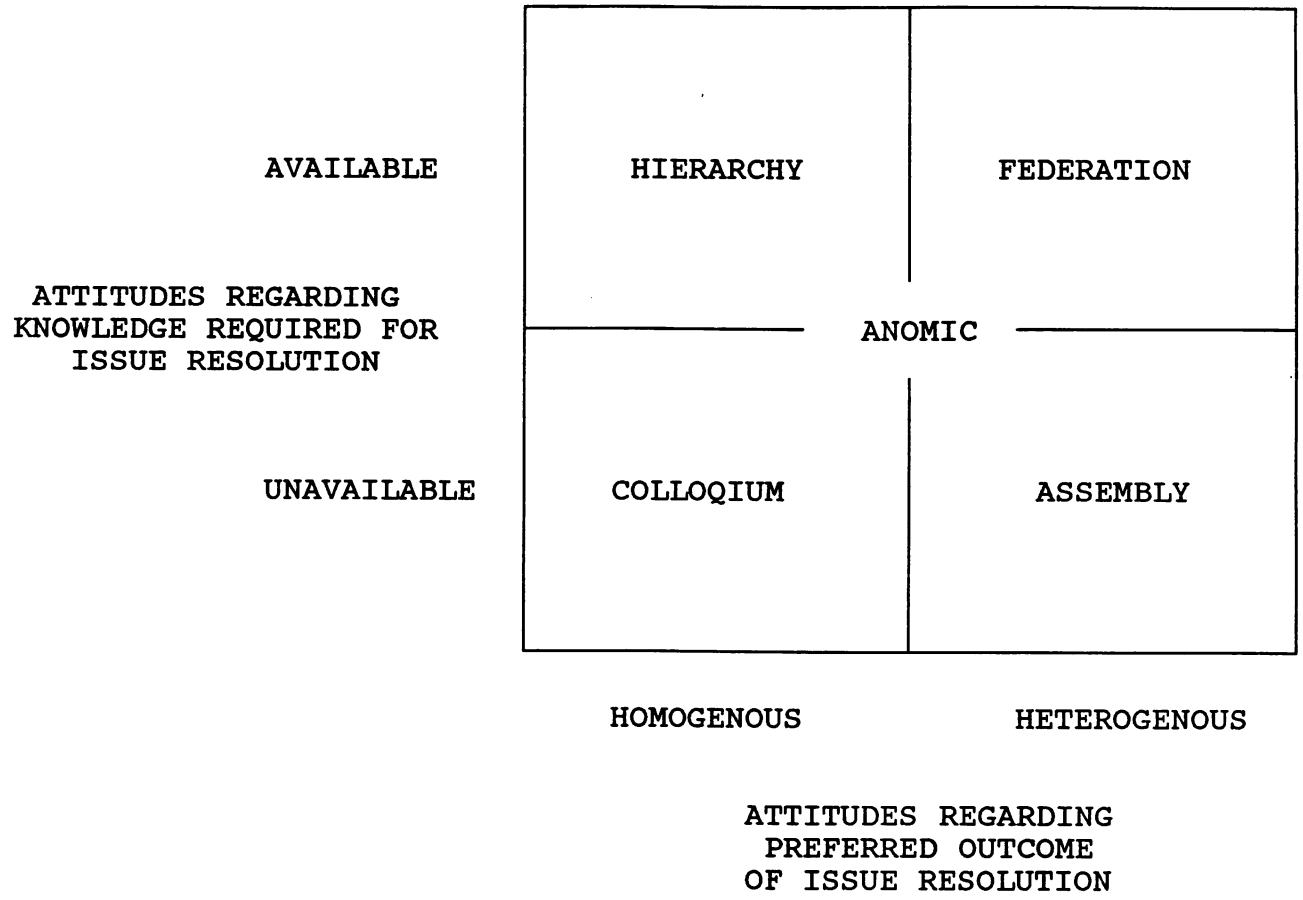
[16]Insights and inspiration for our framework were derived from various sources. Of special note is a seminal essay by James D. Thompson and Arthur Tuden, "Strategies, Structures, and Processes of Organizational Decision," in James D. Thompson (ed.), Comparative Studies in Administration (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1956), pp. 195-216. In our view, while the Thompson/Tuden framework is a powerful explanatory device for doing what it was intended to do -- that is, analyzing "decision situations" -- it tends to present empirical difficulties when employed in institutional analysis. Because it deals explicitly with institutions, therefore, some of the recent work of Aaron Wildavsky -- including his "From Political Economy to Political Culture: Or, Rational People Defend Their Way of Life," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 1984 -- provided important insights. In addition, see Wildavsky, "Models of Political Regimes, or Pluralism Means More Things than One Political Culture at One Time," unpublished manuscript, June 1983; and his "Political Leaders Are a Part of Political Systems: Leadership is a Function of Regime," unpublished manuscript, May 1984.

created in order to serve a purpose. Our point of departure is Simon's notion of a decision as a choice based upon factual and valuational premises. If it is to be effective over time, a bureaucracy must possess a diverse arsenal of decision structures to treat the various categories of decision situations. In other words, the character of authority relations and clearance procedures in a decision structure are contingent upon the nature of the issue confronted. The critical variable in this regard is the extent of consensus or discord concerning the preferred means or ends regarding any given decision issue among participants in the decision-making process. With this in mind, it is possible to derive a typology of decision structures. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

This typology depicts the various categories of decision structures and affords insights into the ways in which decentralized forms are reflected in bureaucratic decision-making. A "hierarchy" is the structural manifestation of the Weberian conception of bureaucracy, which is premised upon a monolithic authority structure and absolute valuational accord. Yet this type of decision structure is effective only in a special and limited set of circumstances, such as data processing, inventory control, and routine clerical tasks. As we shall demonstrate in the pages ahead, a hierarchy is the structure whereby most of the routine decisions are treated in the Japanese bureaucratic system. According to our model, the polar extreme of a hierarchical decision structure is an

FIGURE 1

TYPOLOGY OF DECISION STRUCTURES



"assembly." For obvious reasons, a structure of this type is almost unimaginable in a government bureaucracy with its rigidly prescribed lines of authority and narrowly defined procedures. However, a concrete example of this type of decision structure in a large-scale formal organization is witnessed in the Policy Affairs Research Council of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party.[16] Because of the limited applicability of these diametrically opposite structural forms, therefore, a bureaucracy must treat the vast majority of the decision situations it confronts with structures that blend hierarchical and assembly-type structures.

Contrary to much of the popular wisdom, "federations" and "collegia" are commonly witnessed structures in bureaucratic decision-making. In a federative decision structure, the authority of expertise is centralized and the authority of incumbency is dispersed. A significant degree of individual autonomy is ensured, and disagreements on value decisions are resolved through "bargaining" or "compromise."[17] The clearance process is highly "political," involving negotiation, persuasion, and compromise concerning the underlying objectives behind a proposed course of action.[18] As might be expected, a decision

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[16]This matter is discussed at length in Woodall, "The Liberal Democratic Party and Public Works Projects," passim.

[17]Thompson and Tuden, "Strategies, Structures, and Processes of Organizational Decision," pp. 200-2.

[18]Politically-charged terms such as "compromise," "prolonged negotiation," and "settling differences" have been used to describe the clearance process. See Herbert A. Simon, Donald W.

structure of this sort is prone to bureaucratic delay and stoppage. Finally, a "collegium" is characterized by valuational homogeneity, which is reflected in an emphasis on the priority of group values over individual values. Authority is skewed in this type of decision structure, with the authority of incumbency centralized and authority of expertise more or less dispersed. Tasks are subdivided so as to afford broad and overlapping discretionary powers for expert decision-makers, and clearance and review procedures serve to bring expert judgment to bear on proposals as a check against error.[19] It follows, therefore, that this type of decision-making structure is best suited for making "judgmental" -- or "pragmatic" -- decisions.[20] As we argue in the pages that follow, much of the decision-making the goes on in Japanese bureaucracy is characteristically collegial in structure.

Having identified the crucial flaws in the Weberian model and proposed a typology of our own, we may now turn to a discussion of the Japanese case. Before doing so, however, it

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Smithburg, and Victor Thompson, Public Administration (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), pp. 250 and passim.

[19]This is seen, for example, in the observation made regarding officials of the U.S. State Department, "Cautious men working in a sensitive area try to avoid mistakes by getting as many people as possible to review and initial a decision or a communication before it is allowed to proceed further." Marshall Edward Dimock and Gladys Ogden Dimock, Public Administration, Fourth Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), p. 428.

[20]Thompson and Tuden, "Strategies, Structures, and Processes of Organizational Decision," pp. 199-200.

should be noted that these same faulty assumptions of the Weberian construct comprise the logical undergirding in the existing scholarship on Japanese bureaucratic organization and decision-making. The irony in this situation cries out for a fundamental reassessment of the logic and inner-workings of the Japanese system.

III. Decision-Making in Japan's Government Bureaucracy

As in all national governments, the formal organization of the central state bureaucracy in Japan is hierarchical. Each of the 12 government ministries (sho) and sundry agencies (cho)[21] -- whose headquarters dot the Kasumigaseki District of Tokyo -- is composed of two primary subunits, the bureau (kyoku) and the section (ka).[22] These formal organizational similarities aside, it has been widely argued that the process of decision-making in the Japanese state bureaucracy deviates from the Weberian ideal, and that it is these deviations that spawn the idiosyncratic defects of Japan's bureaucratic system. However, in light of the flawed assumptions of the Weberian model and the inexorable thrust toward decentralization, it appears that the alleged irrationalities and dysfunctions produced by the Japanese system might be misconceived.

A. The Ringi Model and Its Defects

The study of decision-making in Japanese bureaucracy has been dominated by the precepts and assumptions of an analytic construct

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[21]The ministries (sho) include: Justice, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Education, Health and Welfare, Agriculture, International Trade and Industry, Transport, Posts and Telecommunications, Labor, Construction, and Home Affairs. As for the agencies (cho), there are two distinct types -- those under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister (e.g., the Defense Agency) and those under specific ministries (e.g., the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency under MITI). The former are, in essence, "mini-ministries," while the latter are basically overgrown bureaux.

[22]A less prominent organizational subunit, the department (bu), is not discussed in the present essay.

known as the "ringi system" (ringisei). The term "ringi" derives its meaning from Chinese characters that connote "respectfully inquiring of a superior's intention" or "asking one's honorable advice." Most forcefully articulated in the work of Tsuji Kiyoaki[23], the ringi model and the implications derived therefrom have exerted a profound and enduring effect not only on analyses of bureaucratic organization and decision-making, but also on studies of the policy-making process and political leadership in Japan.

The ringi model is, without question, one of the cornerstones of the accepted wisdom of contemporary Japanese political and organizational analysis. It is explicitly embraced, for example, by Misawa Shigeo, who asserts that "(i)n Japan the drafting of a policy is carried out through the ringi system."[24] Another example is seen in Fukui Haruhiro's case studies of Japanese foreign policy-making. Fukui offers his own framework for analyzing

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[23]Tsuji Kiyoaki, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government: A Study of Ringisei," in Robert E. Ward (ed), Political Development in Modern Japan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 457-475. An almost identical version of this article was published in Japanese as "Nihon ni okeru seisaku kettei katei: ringisei ni kanren shite" (The Policy-Making Process in Japan: Concerning the Ringi System), in his Shinpan: Nihon kanryosei no kenkyu (New Edition: Studies in Japanese Bureaucracy) (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1969), pp. 155-72.

[24]Misawa Shigeo, "An Outline of the Policy-Making Process in Japan," in Hiroshi Itoh (ed.), Japanese Politics -- An Inside View: Readings from Japan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 30. This article was originally published as "Seisaku kettei katei no gaikan," in Nenpo seijigaku (The Annals of the Japanese Political Science Association) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967), pp. 5-33.

"critical decision making" involving politically sensitive or controversial policy issues, such as the reversion of Okinawa and the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China.[25] These extraordinary cases are contrasted with the vastly more numerous "noncontroversial" or routine decisions made within the bureaucracy. Fukui rather uncritically appears to assume that the processes used to arrive at decisions concerning such mundane matters are explained by the system described in Tsuji's model.[26]

What is ringisei? According to Tsuji, it is far more than an administrative technique. It is, in his view, a "fundamental characteristic of Japanese administrative behavior, organization, and management."[27] Stated succinctly,

> the ringi system is one whereby administrative plans and decisions are made through the circulation of a document called ringisho. This is drafted in the first instance by an official of low rank. It is then circulated among other officials in the ministry or agency concerned who are required to affix their seals if they agree with the policy proposed. By complex and circuitous paths the document

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[25]In these cases, key decisions were made by task forces composed of a small number of individuals selected by the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister. See Fukui Haruhiro, "Okinawa henken: seifu ni okeru kettei katei" (Okinawa Reversion: Decision-Making in Japanese Government), in The Japanese International Relations Association (ed), International Relations 52 (1974), pp. 97-124; and "Tanaka Goes to Peking: A Case Study in Foreign Policymaking," in T. J. Pempel (ed.), Policymaking in Contemporary Japan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 60-102.

[26]Fukui Haruhiro, "Policy-Making in the Japanese Foreign Ministry," in Robert A. Scalapino (ed.), The Foreign Policy of Modern Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 3-36.

[27]Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," p. 458.

> gradually works its way up to higher and higher administrators, and finally reaches the minister or top executive official. When he approves the ringisho, the decision is made.[28]

There are several core aspects of the ringi process. The ringisho is initially drafted by a lower-level official, who has neither formal authority nor leadership status. Thereafter, the proposed policy is discussed and examined separately by the officials of all relevant bureaus and sections. Significantly, the proposal is not discussed in meetings involving the administrators concerned with the proposal. Notwithstanding the fact that formal legal competence to grant or withhold final approval for the ringisho rests with the highest executive, in actual practice the executive is expected to approve it without change or modification because of the long process of scrutiny by subordinates that has already taken place. Thus, the system is characterized by a "bottom-up" system of authority relations in which de facto decision-making power is exercised by lower officials.[29] The circulation path of the ringisho is depicted in Figure 2.

It is argued that the ringi system -- in conjunction with certain characteristic features of Japanese bureaucracy -- gives rise to several organizational maladies. First, it is alleged that the system contributes to incompetent leadership and an unhealthy dispersion of responsibility. Ringisei is viewed as a system in which the locus of responsibility is vague and executive leadership

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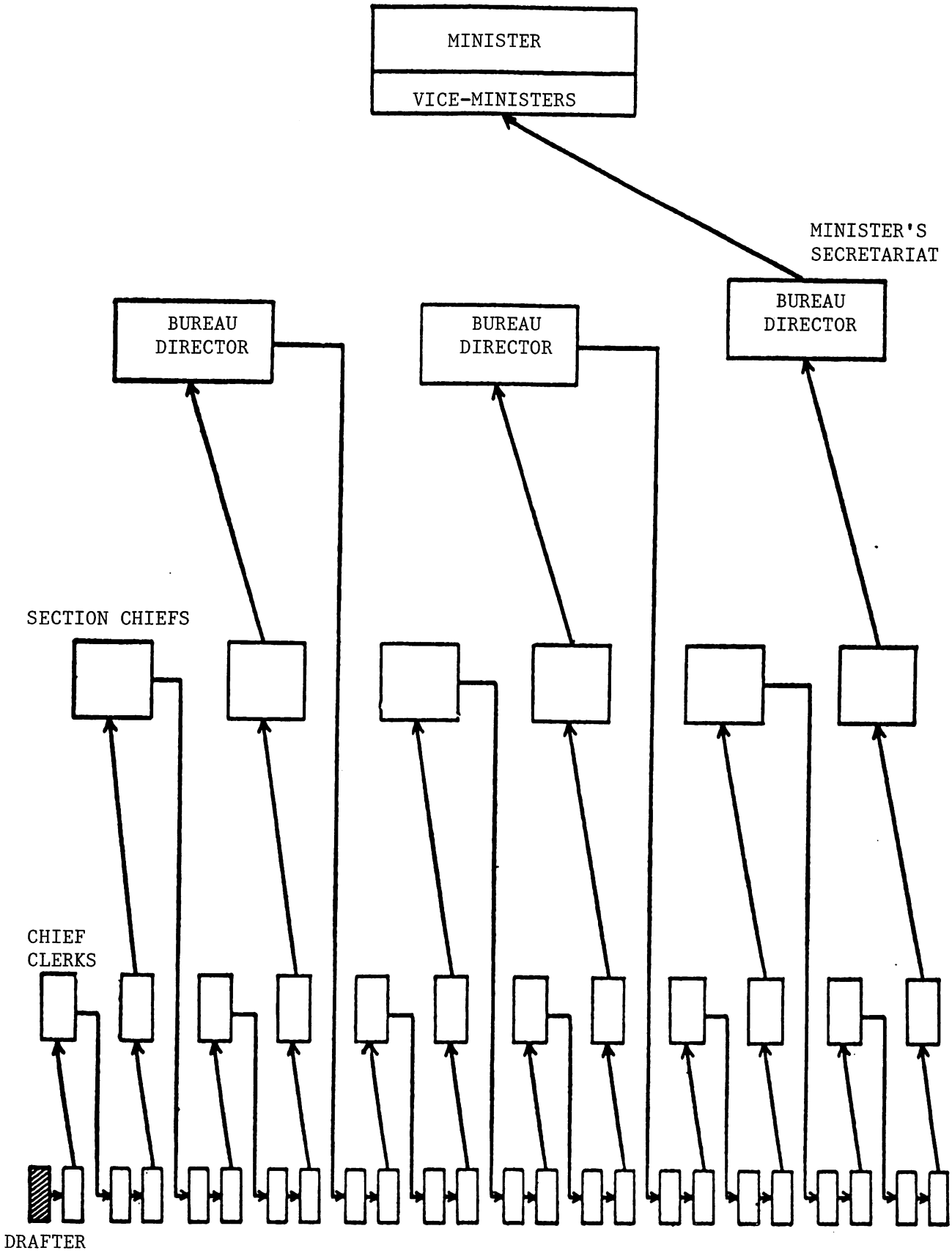
[28]Ibid., p. 457-8.

[29]Ibid., p.458.

FIGURE 2

THE CLEARANCE SYSTEM IN TSUJI'S MODEL*



*Adapted from Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," p. 460.

weak, thus permitting subordinate "experts" to assume de facto power over their "generalist" superiors.[30] It has been argued that under the system even an incompetent higher executive feels he can retain his position, because so many subordinates have already examined and approved the contents of any ringisho that has come to him for action.[31] Indeed, it is argued that the responsibility and competency attached to the classification system in Japan is so unclear, and relations between the executive and subordinates so vague, that the ringi system is sometimes referred to as "administration by subordinate officials" (zokuryo gyosei) or "administration by responsibility evasion" (sekinin kaihi gyosei).[32] In sum, the system embraces an authority system that deviates from the monocratic ideal depicted in Weber's analysis of bureaucratic organization.

Second, it is argued that the system produces suboptimal results because it is a piecemeal approach, rather than a "synoptic" decision strategy. As M.Y. Yoshino explains, under the ringi system there

> is no prior planning to anticipate future decisions. A proposal is prepared and submitted only after the need to make such a decision becomes apparent. Each proposal is not examined against an overall policy or plan, but on a case-by-case basis.[33]

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[30]Ibid., pp. 462-4.

[31]Ibid., p. 464.

[32]"An adequate staff would help [the leaders] in this regard, but Japanese administrators really have no staff, or only an incompetent one if there is any at all." Ibid., p. 465.

[33]M.Y. Yoshino, Japan's Managerial System: Tradition and Innovation (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), p. 259.

Under such a system, therefore, an organization is unlikely to be managed according to a set of consistent, farsighted goals and strategies. A system of this description, to paraphrase Kenneth E. Boulding, forces an organization to stagger through its activities "like a drunk putting one disjointed incremental foot after another."[34] Of course, incrementalism of this sort also stands in violation of one of the central premises of the Weberian model, in this case the assumption of a monocratic authority structure.

Finally, the ringi system is cited as the cause of inefficiency in Japanese bureaucratic organization.[35] As one observer notes, "It is not unusual for a document to require 20-40 seals before gaining final approval from a minister of state or a prefectural governor."[36] Some of the terms used to describe the system's inherent wastefullness include: "red tape administration" (hanbun jokuretsu gyosei), the "piling-up method" (tsumiage hoshiki, to denote the many seals that must be affixed to a ringisho in order for it to gain

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[34]Kenneth E. Boulding in a book review in the American Sociological Review 29 (1964), p. 931.

[35]See, inter alia, Albert M. Craig, "Functional and Dysfunctional Aspects of Government Bureaucracy," in Ezra F. Vogel (ed.), Modern Japanese Organization and Decision-Making (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 28; Ozeki Tsugio, "Ringi seido ni kansuru jakkan no oboegaki" (Some Memoranda on the Ringi System), Toshi Mondai Kenkyu (Research on Urban Problems) 18 (September 1966), p. 85; and Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," pp. 458-459.

[36]Okabe Shiro, "Kanri jidai to ringisei" (The Age of Management and the Ringi System), Toshi Mondai Kenkyu 18 (September 1966), p. 36. For an early critique of Japan's system of bureaucratic decision-making, see Charles A. Beard, The Administration and Politics of Tokyo: A Survey and Opinions (New York: MacMillan, 1923), p. 60 and passim.

final approval), and, simply, "inefficient administration" (hinoritsu gyosei). This inefficiency is further compounded by the life tenure system, a characteristic feature of Japanese government bureaucracy. As Tsuji argues, the fact that an official has life tenure in a ministry makes it exceedingly rational to avoid friction with colleagues in the ministry. Hence, rather than expressing explicit disagreement, there is a tendency for an official who disagrees with a recommendation to intentionally delay its approval.[37]

Judged according to the standards of the Weberian model, therefore, ringisei is indeed "irrational" and might be dubbed "premodern." Among the various organizational dysfunctionalities allegedly spawned by the system is the rampant "sectionalism" (sekushonarizumu) -- that is, when subunits in a large organization pay so much attention to their own particularistic objectives that the effectiveness of the organization itself is compromised -- which is a major structural characteristic of Japanese bureaucracy and government.[38] In addition, it is argued that because so many people are involved in the decision-making process, the ringi system is very

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[37]Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," p. 459-60.

[38]An assessment of the possibly efficacious implications of sectionalism is found in Imamura Tsunao, "Shocho-kan no seiji tetsuzuki" (Political Procedures Among Government Ministries), in Nihon Seiji Gakkai (ed.), Gendai Nihon no seiji tetsuzuki (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1986), pp. 123-34.

susceptible to causing factional strife, as well as encouraging fraud and corruption.[39]

In light of the inherent flaws in the Weberian model, however, there is ample reason to question its adequacy as the appropriate standard for evaluating the Japanese case, or any other for that matter. In our view, a more appropriate approach is afforded in exploring the manner in which the thrust toward decentralization is reflected in the system of decision-making in Japan's government bureaucracy.

B. Beyond the "Paper Pictures"

A discrepancy exists between "omote" and "ura" (front and back, visible and invisible) in the decision-making systems of all societies. With regard to the specific case of Japan, Chalmers Johnson observes that

> Diet proceedings, for example, are the omote or the visible side of the political process; they are constitutionally the most important events of Japanese politics because the Diet is the 'highest organ of state power' (Article 41). But the invisible political process, the ura, is much more important for actual decision-making, and it takes place in 'private' if nonetheless institutionalized meetings among bureaucrats, Liberal Democratic Party members, and zaikai [private sector] leaders.[40]

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[39]Yoshino, Japan's Managerial System, p. 262; and Tanaka Mamoru, "Biggu gavuanmento to ringisei" (Big Government and the Ringi System), Toshi Mondai Kenkyu 18 (September 1966), pp. 23-24.

[40]Chalmers Johnson, "Omote (Explicit) and Ura (Implicit): Translating Japanese Political Terms," Journal of Japanese Studies 6 (Winter 1980), pp. 91-2.

In a general sense, the institutionalized procedures that comprise the ringi system represent the "visible" (omote) side of the decision-making process in Japanese bureaucracy. Yet what about the "invisible" (ura) side of the coin? While it is seldom easy to determine precisely how a given decision was made, it is clear that informal meetings among concerned officials and interested parties often serve a critical function. Since this matter is largely ignored in the "paper pictures" on bureaucratic decision-making in Japan, it is necessary to propose an alternative model.[41]

The first matter to be considered concerns the documents (ringisho) that are drafted and circulated in the decision-making process. There are two basic types of documents -- "authorization documents" (kessai bunsho) and "information circulation documents" (kyoran or kyoetsu) -- whose disposition is governed by sets of

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[41]An important source of insights for our analysis is a report prepared by Inoue Seiichi, a former official of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry (MAFF). Even though the empirical support for Inoue's report was derived mainly from its author's experience at MAFF, in our view and in the opinion of Japanese bureaucrats we interviewed, its findings are generally applicable to any ministry or agency of the Japanese state bureaucracy. The report was published as Gyosei Kanri Kenkyu Sentaa, Ringisei hihanron ni tsuite no ichi kosatsu: waga kuni gyosei kikan ni okeru ishi kettei no jissai (A Critical Assessment of the Ringi System: The Realities of the Decision-making Process in Japan), 1981 (hereafter cited as the GKKS Report). An informative elaboration based upon Inoue's work is found in Omori Wataru, "Nihon kanryosei no jian kettei tetsuzuki," (Policy Formulation Procedures in Japan's Bureaucracy) in The Japanese Political Science Association (ed.), Gendai Nihon no seiji tetsuzuki, (The Political Procedures in Contemporary Japan -- The Annals of the Japanese Political Science Association 1985) (Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1986), pp. 87-116.

similar clearance procedures.[42] These documents are drafted by officials at the section (ka) level and are sent to other sections in the ministry for reference or authorization.[43] In addition to being sent upward along the formal lines of authority, the documents are also circulated laterally to other ka. Where a document is sent, therefore, depends upon the nature of the issue involved, a matter decided either by precedent or consultation with the concerned sections within the Minister's Secretariat (daijin kanbo). For this reason, the transfer paths of the ringisho reflect not only who participates in different types of decision-making in the ministry, they also provide insights into the way in which knowledge is distributed and information gathered in the Japanese bureaucracy.

The basic unit of information aggregation and analysis within a government ministry in Japan is the ka, which transmits information throughout the ministry. For this reason, each of the many sections in a ministry embodies the hub of an information processing network. This is seen, for example, in Watanabe Akio's description of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

> Information, in the form of official telegrams and correspondence from diplomatic offices abroad, is the fundamental input for policy-making. Within the ministry, appropriate measures are taken in accordance with the information received. The basic unit of operation in this enterprise is the section of the bureau or department [under] whose jurisdiction [it lies].... The post of section chief (kacho) is the center of all activity...the major part of his work includes the drafting of references used in responding to Diet questioning, and explaining the current state of affairs...to members of the Diet or the

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[42]Omori, "Nihon kanryosei no jian kettei tetsuzuki," p. 92.

[43]Ibid, p. 95.

> organs of the governing party, and, sometimes, even to opposition and private groups (for example business leaders). Apart from these day-to-day activities, [the matters of] projecting a long-term overview of the situation...and managing information by classifying and storing it so that it can be referred to whenever it becomes necessary in the future, are carried out at the discretion of each section and each administrator in charge.[44]

Having delineated the types of ringisho and underlined the pivotal role of the ka in the gathering and transmission of information, we may now turn our analytic attention to the systems and structures of decision-making employed in Japanese bureaucracy. On this score, we shall describe the key features and rationale behind two distinct and rather formalized ringi-type systems and a third, largely informal, decision process.

1. Implementation Ringisei

The formal decision-making procedures in Japanese bureaucracy are more complex than Tsuji's simple construct leads one to believe. In order to be properly understood, it must be recognized that the nature of authority relations and the type of clearance system employed are contingent upon the character of the decision issue. More precisely, two types of ringisei -- "implementation ringi" and "policy ringi" -- are employed in Japanese bureaucratic decision-

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[44]See Watanabe Akio, "Nihon no taigai seisaku keisei no kiko to katei" (The Process and Organization of Foreign Policy-Making in Japan), in Hosoya Chihiro and Watanuki Joji (eds.), Taigai seisaku kettei katei no Nichibei hikaku (Comparing the Foreign Policy-Making Processes of Japan and America) (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1976), pp. 39-41.

making.[45] Both of these decision systems are, it should be noted, at variance with the processes and procedures described in Tsuji's model.[46] In the case of "implementation ringisei," each individual involved in the decision making process affixes his or her seal to the ringisho before sending it on to the next person. With regard to "policy ringisei," an official attached to the section which drafts the ringisho is charged with the task of carrying the proposal around and explaining its contents prior to securing formal authorization.[47] These systems can be contrasted along several dimensions: 1) the manner in which the ringisho is drafted and authorized; 2) the type of issue involved; and 3) the nature of the role played by upper administrators in the process.

The system of implementation ringi has three basic characteristics.[48] First, it involves only officials in the lower echelons of the ministry. As can be seen in Figure 3, the ringisho is drafted by low-ranking officials at the ka level and is approved by the chief clerk (kakari-cho) and by the responsible deputy section

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[45]In essence, these systems correspond with the "sent around" (junji kairan gata) form and the "carried around" (mochi mawari gata) variant described in the GKKS Report.

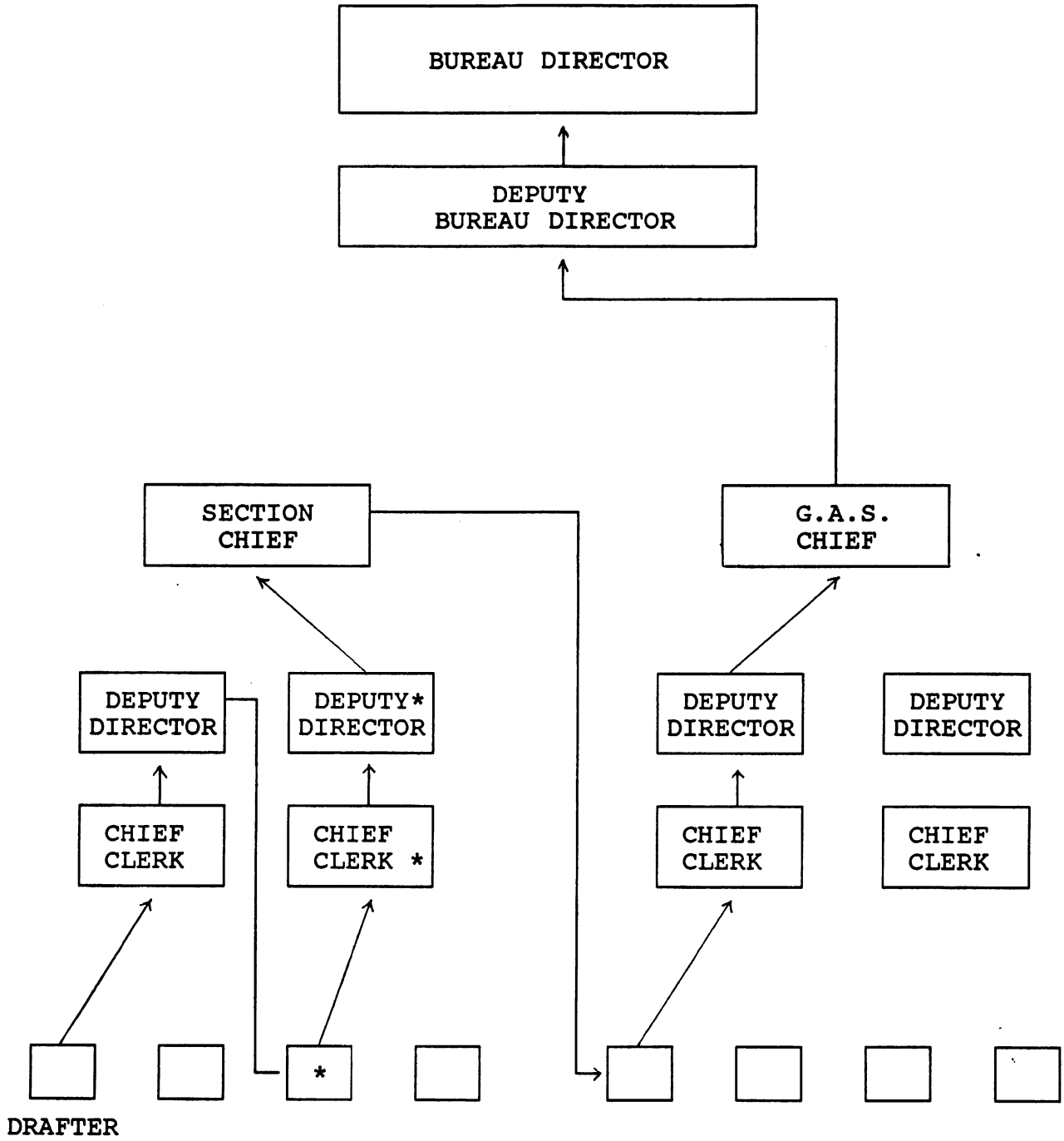
[46]The GKKS Report also discusses two other types of decision procedures, "non-ringi type" and "oral type." We discuss the former later in the essay, while the latter is not relevant to the present study.

[47]GKKS Report, p. 9.

[48]In Omori's scheme, this is termed "clerical (jimu) ringi," while the other variant is labelled "policy (seisaku) ringi." These terms originated in Kyogoku Jun'ichi, Nihon no seiji (Japanese Politics) (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1983).

FIGURE 3

THE CLEARANCE SYSTEM FOR IMPLEMENTATION RINGISEI



* THESE POSITIONS MAY BE BY-PASSED

chief (kacho hosa). On some occasions, the document might be sent through a second vertical clearance path within the ka in order to gain the approval of the deputy chief of legal affairs (or his direct subordinates).[49] The ringisho must also be cleared by the General Affairs Section (somuka or GAS), which is responsible for coordinating matters within the bureau. In essence, the process involved in drafting and securing clearance for this type of document conforms to the contours of a "hierarchical" decision structure as defined in our typology. The ringisho is drafted by officials at the lowest echelons of the bureaucracy and circulates upward along the lines of formal authority until it reaches the bureau director, who has the authority to grant official approval. The procedures involve neither lateral coordination with other ka, nor do they require the authorization of higher-level officials within the ministry. In this process, therefore, the circulation of documents is coterminous with decision-making.

In addition, implementation ringisei bears two other noteworthy characteristics. The type of issues involved are "standardized" or clerical in nature -- such as for example, the issuing of licenses and permits, and approving petitions. In most cases, issues of this sort can be decided according to standard operating procedures by simply referring to written statutes and policy program documents. Hence, it is well within the discretion of lower-level bureaucrats to draft these ringisho without first obtaining permission from their

[49]See GKKS Report, pp. 14-16.

formal superiors.[50] With the possible exception of the administrator directly responsible for the matter, it is not uncommon for officials to affix their seals without examining the generally mundane content of these documents. Related to this is the third characteristic of implementation ringi -- that is, the absence of any significant leadership on the part of higher bureaucrats. This derives from the fact that there is no need for vertical or lateral coordination prior to the drafting of the ringisho.[51] In short, therefore, the procedures that define the implementation ringi process are ideally adapted for treating routinized -- or "programmed" -- decisions, and conform with our conception of a hierarchical decision structure.

2. Policy Ringisei

In marked contrast, "policy ringisei" involves only upper administrators, those at the level of section chief and above (see Figure 4). In this system, the section chief is responsible for drafting the ringisho, and the circulation process generally involves lateral coordination with other ka -- not only within that particular bureau, but in other bureaux as well. The Administrative Coordination Section (Bunsho Ka) -- or its equivalent -- functions as a staff agency, and final approval is bestowed by the minister and vice-ministers.[52] Despite this relatively long and circuitious

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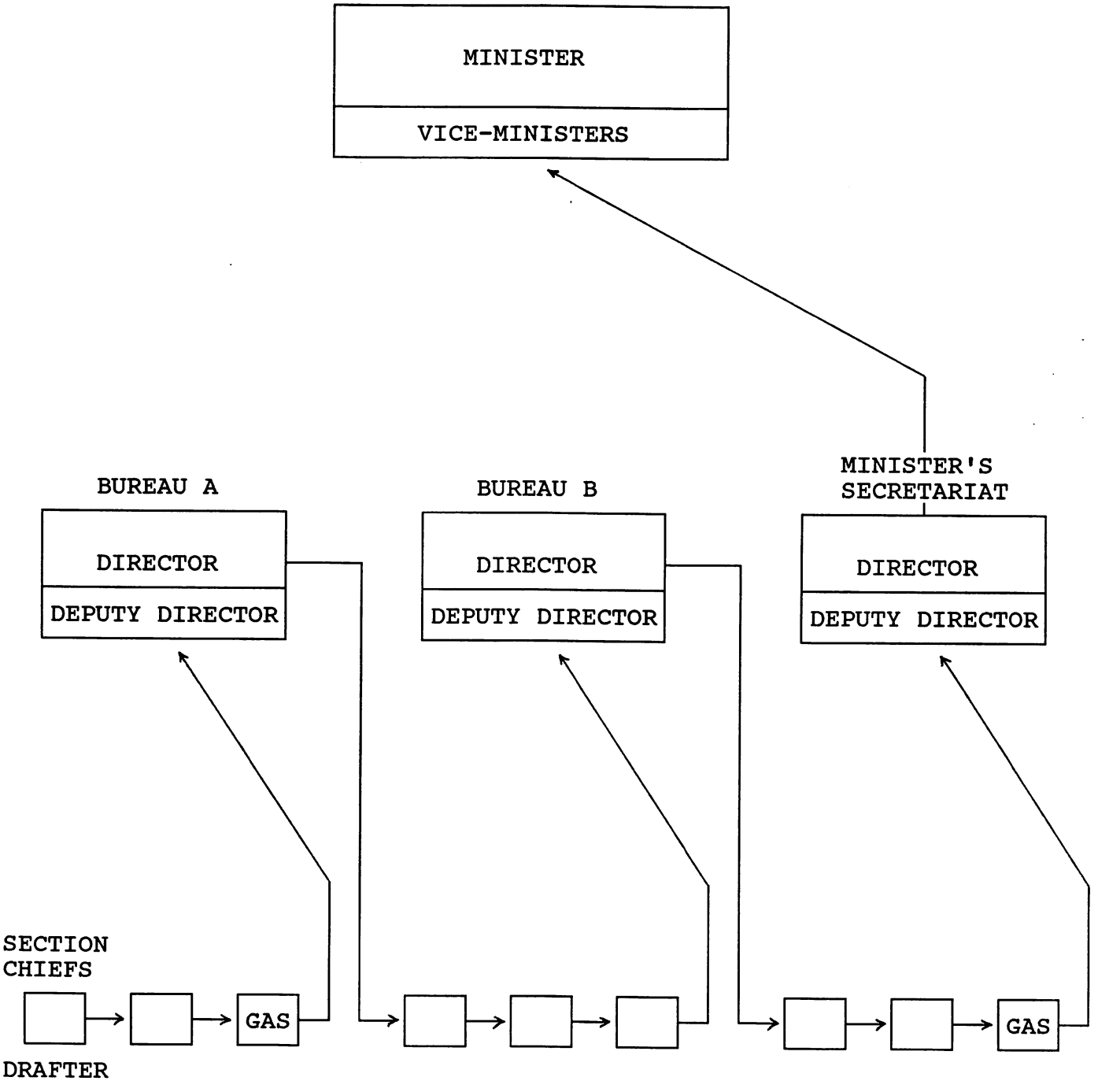
[50]GKKS Report, p. 16.

[51]Ibid., pp. 14-17 and 37-40.

[52]Ibid., pp. 18-19.

FIGURE 4

THE CLEARANCE SYSTEM FOR POLICY RINGISEI



clearance process, officials who disapprove of the contents of the ringisho may indeed delay final authorization.[53] In the event of disagreement regarding the wording or contents of a specific proposal, dissenting officials are entitled to demand revisions. This, of course, contradicts Tsuji's condemnation of the ringi system for the "blind bestowal of approval" (mekuraban) it allegedly spawns. Moreover, lower-ranking bureaucrats are not permitted to initiate the drafting of these proposals without the prior consent of their superiors.[54]

The sorts of issues treated in the system of policy ringi may be described as "non-standardized."[55] Depending upon the specifics of the proposal under consideration, various sections within the ministry play a role in the process, a fact that necessitates both lateral and vertical coordination.[56] When disagreements cannot be ironed out and deadlock ensues, the role of upper-level administrators as arbiters comes into play. In many cases, therefore, the outcome depends less upon formal rules and procedures than upon the personal characteristics and "political" talents of the

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[53]This is because the documents are carried around by officials who answer questions concerning their contents on the spot. If the official required to affix his or her seal is not satisfied, the "courier" will return to his section to contemplate necessary changes in the content or wording of the document.

[54]Ibid., p. 20.

[55]Ibid., pp. 37-40.

[56]Ibid, pp. 21-26.

higher officials themselves. The key differences between implementation and policy ringi are depicted in Table I.

In contrast to Tsuji's simple construct, therefore, it is clear that there is more than one formalized system of decision-making in Japan's government bureaucracy. Implementation ringisei is reflected in processes and procedures in which the leading actors are lower bureaucrats operating in a hierarchical decision structure. Meanwhile, the primary players in the system of policy ringi are higher officials, and the characteristic procedures of this system facilitates lateral coordination intersecting formal lines of authority in the ministry. Those familiar with the clearance and review procedures employed in Western-style bureaucracies will undoubtedly see parallels with these two variants of ringisei.[57] Indeed, these ringi procedures represent the functional equivalent of the clearance process.

Yet Japanese bureaucratic decision-making involves more than the formalized processes and procedures of ringisei, whatever form it may take. In order to understand how the thrust toward decentralization is realized in the Japanese bureaucracy, it is necessary to probe into the policy-making process -- a matter that requires consideration of the "invisible" side of the decision-making system.

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[57]This connection is made, inter alia, in Nakashio Tatsuya, "Kancho ringiseido no tokushitsu" (Traits of the Ringi Syetem in the Governmental Machinery), Toshi mondai kenkyu 18 (September 1966), pp. 70-1.

TABLE I

COMPARING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF RINGISEI*

	TSUJI'S MODEL	IMPLEMENTATION RINGISEI	POLICY RINGISEI
CONTENT OF THE DECISION STANDARDIZED	ALL-ENCOMPASSING	OFFICIAL, STANDARDIZED	POLICY, NON-
RELATIONS WITH OTHER SECTIONS	MANY	NO	YES
PRE-RINGI COORDINATION	NO	YES	NO
LEADERSHIP BY HIGHER OFFICIALS	NO	YES	NO
CIRCULATION METHOD	SENT-AROUND	CARRIED-AROUND	SENT-AROUND
CONVENTIONS TO EXPEDITE PROCESS	NO	YES	YES
TIME REQUIRED	LONG	SHORT	SHORT -- AFTER AGREEMENT IS REACHED

* Adapted from GKKS Report, p. 38

IV. The Invisible Decision-Making Process

Analyses of Japanese bureaucratic decision-making rarely probe beneath the morass of red tape encompassed by the ringi system. Insights into the oftentimes "invisible" set of processes and procedures for deciding controversial issues are afforded by an examination of the "non-ringi" system.[58] In contrast to the ringi system, the processes of decision-making and documentation in the non-ringi system are carried out simultaneously. In some instances formal ringi procedures are employed to ratify a decision already arrived at in formal and informal meetings. This serves to cast doubt upon the alleged insignificance of meetings and the weak role of leadership -- two of the principle tenets in the accepted wisdom on Japanese bureaucratic organization.

A. The Face-To-Face Aspect of Decision-Making

Case studies offer an economical and insightful means of illustrating the functions served by meetings in the decision-making process. Especially instructive are a pair of illustrations: the procedures employed in determining the annual budget of a ministry and the process of setting the government-regulated rice price.

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[58]It may be possible to subdivide the "non-ringi" decision procedures. See GKKS Report, pp. 7-13, 41-68, and 68-69.

The drama of deciding the annual budget of a ministry[59] is played out at three distinct levels -- section, bureau, and ministry -- prior to deliberation within the committees of the ruling party and formal ratification in the Diet. At the outset, the process is bottom-up in character. It begins with the discussion of budgetary requests within the principle subunits (han and kakari) at the section level, where proposals are drafted according to a format specified by the Finance Ministry. After the budgetary request forms (yosan yokyu sho) of each of the various sections are compiled, a succession of formal meetings is convened to scrutinize the specific requests. The first set of meetings is referred to as the "General Affairs Section Hearings" (somu kacho hiaringu).[60] At this time, the director and vice-directors of the GAS meet individually with representatives of the sections, and -- contrary to the widely held view that consensus always reigns supreme in Japan -- heated debates are not uncommon. The GAS side challenges and seeks to clarify proposals by posing questions, proposing alterations, and requesting changes. Meanwhile, the

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[59]This process is discussed in the GKKS Report, pp. 42-55. The best analysis of the budgetary process is found in John Creighton Campbell, Contemporary Japanese Budgetary Politics (University of California Press, 1977), especially Chapter 2. A concise discussion of the matter is offered in the "Japanese Budget Baransu," in Ezra F. Vogel, Modern Japanese Organization and Decision Making (University of California Press, 1975), pp. 71-100, by the same author.

[60]The General Affairs Section may be viewed as primus inter pares among sections within a bureau, and serves the function of a staff division.

representatives of the sections offer the rationale for their budgetary requests.[61]

At the conclusion of these hearings, the General Affairs Section begins its "assessment" (satei). At this time, adjustments are made in the various requests and a preliminary draft of the bureau's budget is compiled. Afterwards, the results of this assessment -- with controversial requests set aside for future resolution in discussions involving higher officials, and, if necessary, key politicians from the ruling party -- are conveyed to the sections. Each section is then allowed to make "revival requests" (fukkatsu yokyu) if its proposals are perceived to have been given short shrift. These requests are examined by the GAS, which proceeds to make a second assessment. In the meantime, informal inquiries and negotiations between the top officials of the GAS and respective sections are held until a "consensus" (konsensasu) is achieved. By custom, it is understood that the sections will refrain from offering further objections and requests after the second revised draft of the GAS's proposal is announced.

The product of this process constitutes the basic proposal for the bureau's budget, and is submitted at the "Bureau Director's Hearings" (kyokucho hiaringu). In this venue, the director and vice-directors of the bureau challenge the proposal, while the directors and vice-directors of the section and GAS assume a

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[61]Discussions are usually restricted to policy expenditures; hearings concerning clerical expenditures are nominal, and -- in reality -- are decided exclusively by the GAS.

defensive posture. Some of the more controversial policy matters are discussed and resolved in these meetings. Participants are free to criticize the proposals of other sections, and alterations are made until the bureau director approves the draft. It is fair to assume that the personal attributes and leadership traits of the bureau director have a direct bearing on the disposition and outcome of these hearings. At this point, the first cycle of the budget process has been completed, and a formal ringisho is circulated to reconfirm this process.[62]

The same basic cycle is repeated in aggregating the budgetary requests of the various bureaus of the ministry. In this case, the hearings bring together representatives of the bureaus (including the director of the GAS), on the one side, and the officials of the Finance Section (Kaikei Ka) of the Minister's Secretariat on the other.[63] Here again, assessments are made and revival sessions are convened. Once an agreement is reached, the process of calculating and compiling the ministry's budgetary request is complete, and a similar process is susequently enacted with representatives of the spending ministry and the Finance Ministry playing the rival roles. Still later, the scene shifts to the inner councils of the LDP, although politicians who occupy key posts within the ruling party's Policy Affairs Research Council will already have been consulted

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[62]GKKS Report, p. 42.

[63]The actual name of the "budget" section differs according to ministry. The Minister's Secretariat Bureau is primus inter pares of the bureaus and serves as the "staff" unit for the ministry.

by cautious bureaucrats seeking to rally support and avert subsequent delay or modification for their budgetary proposals.[64] Finally, the nation's budget is debated and ratified in the Diet. In this regard it is important to note that, in Japan, budgetary appropriations precede authorizations and that since 1955, with only a few exceptions, the Diet has done little more than "rubber-stamp" the bureaucracy's budget.[65]

Additional insights into the "non-ringi" decision system can be gleaned through a cursory examination of the process whereby the annual "rice price" (beika) -- the price that the government offers to pay Japanese farmers for the rice they harvest -- is determined.[66] The process begins in the Planning Section in the Food Agency (Shokuryo Cho) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), where a basic draft proposal is formulated. Vast amounts of statistical data are gathered and sophisticated calculations are brought to bear in formulating this proposal. At meetings involving the Agency's top officials, each portion of the draft -- the estimated demand for rice, production

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[64]This matter is discussed at length in Woodall, "The Liberal Democratic Party and Public Works Projects," passim.

[65]These exceptions occurred in 1972, 1978, and 1978. Campbell, Contemporary Japanese Budget Politics, pp. 200 and passim; and Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle, p. 10.

[66]This matter is discussed in Michael W. Donnelly, "Setting the Price of Rice: A Study in Political Decisionmaking," in T.J. Pempel (ed.), Policy Making in Contemporary Japan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 102-200; and in his "Political Management of Japan's Rice Economy," doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1978.

costs, the income parity between farmers and industrial workers, the expected effects of the rice price on the national economy and the budget, and so on -- is subjected to painstaking scrutiny.[67] On occasion, officials from the Agency's Planning Section are summoned to appear at these meetings in order to explain the technical rationale behind their estimates.

Inasmuch as the Food Agency must be able to defend its draft proposal under the inevitable attack of affected groups, careful and thorough preparations are essential. If it is to survive the onslaught, the proposal must address the sorts of criticisms likely to be raised by the "economic agencies" -- the powerful and fiscally-conservative Ministry of Finance and the Economic Planning Agency. More vexing, however, is the fact that the proposal must also be able to weather the assaults of agricultural interests, and LDP politicians representing rural electoral districts. As might be expected, both of these groups can be counted on to exert impassioned pressure for an increase in the rice price.[68]

It is clear, therefore, that face-to-face meetings are of pivotal importance in the decision-making process. By serving to reconcile conflicts between the section making the proposal and the

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[67]The officials include the Director General, Deputy Director General, and the Chief of the GAS. See GKKS Report, p. 66.

[68]As Donnelly observes, "(i)n this way, [c]ompetent, technically proficiant staff members of the farm group [are] able to compete with government technicians in analyzing rice prices, meaning that the 'facts' of the Food Agency [are] subject to independent verification and disproof and enabling the farm groups to provide independent, informed advice to politicians who [make] final decisions." Donnelly, "Setting the Rice Price," p. 149.

groups affected by it, these fora facilitate mutual understanding and compromise. During the succession of meetings involving officials at higher and higher levels of the ministry, unresolved issues are gradually whittled down, and any agreements reached along the way stand as final. Those issues incapable of resolution are set aside to be decided by "bargaining" at higher echelons of the ministry and the political realm. However, the agenda of issues deliberated upon by higher officials is not simply dictated to them by their subordinates. Because of the specialized knowledge and information in their grasp concerning policy issues, bureaucrats at the section level tend to phrase the proposals they draft in "technical" terms. In contrast, the upper level administrators whose task it is to interpret policy tend to emphasize the valuational -- or "political" -- aspects of these proposals. Those who preside over the meetings in which policy is shaped must endeavor to secure consensus and to provide basic direction. For this reason, the primary criterion of effective leadership in Japanese bureaucracy is the ability to orchestrate the disparate interests and activities of subordinates, a matter to which we shall now turn our attention.

2. The Role of Leadership

Coordination is especially critical in issues involving pronounced valuational discord -- as in instances in which proposals for broad policy changes overlap the bailiwicks of more than one section or bureau in a ministry. Instances in which

assertive leadership proved indispensible can be seen, for example, in the cases surrounding the enactment of the Basic Agricultural Law (Kihon nogyo ho) in 1961 and the revision of the Banking Law some two decades later.[69] The creation of the Basic Agricultural Law was motivated by a desire to remove the policy infrastructure that undergirded the heavily subsidized postwar agricultural sector in favor of a system based upon rationalized production, multiple crops, and international competition. Importantly, the proposed legislation came in response to a crisis felt within the Ministry of Agriculture after several years of budget cuts.[70] Similarly, the scope of the proposal to revise the Banking Law impinged upon the interests of every sector of the country's financial community. In a technical sense, the Banking Law applies to Japan's 12 "city banks" and 65 local banks. However, its clauses are invoked by other laws governing other financial institutions, including the

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[69]Hashimoto Nobuyuki, "Gyosei-kikan to seisaku tenkan: kodo keisai seicho ki ni okeru nogyo seisaku" (Public Bureaucracy and Policy Change: Agricultural Policy in the High Growth Period), Ho to seiji (The Journal of Law and Politics), Kwansei Gakuin University, Vol 31, No. 1 - Vol 33, No. 1, 1981-82. For a concise summary, see also his "Sengo no nogyo seisaku to sono keisei katei" (Agricultural Policy and the Policy Making Process), in Nihon Seiji Gakkai (ed.), Problems of Policy Sciences (Tokyo; Iwanami Shoten, 1984), pp. 247-263. The issue of the revised Banking Law is examined in Hiwatari Nobuhiro, "Seisaku katei o meguru seiji kozo: gendai Nihon no ginko gyosei no jirei toshite" (Political Structure and Political Processes: Contemporary Japanese Banking Policy as a Case Study), unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Tokyo, 1982, pp. 45-291.

[70]Hashimoto, "Gyosei kikan to seisaku tenkan," chapter 1. Also see, Kato Ichiro & Sakamoto Kusuhiko (ed.), Nihon nosei no tenkai katei (The Development of Japanese Agricultural Policy) (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1967).

long-term credit banks, smaller banks, and the postal savings and securities industries. An overview of the basic points of commonality of these cases provides a shorthand device for understanding the roles and functions of leadership in Japanese bureaucratic decision-making.

In both cases, ad-hoc committees were established to determine the basic policy orientations of the ministries prior to formal interaction with outside interest groups. It was not until after the policy blueprints had been decided that the respective proposals were subitted to the responsible government-sponsored deliberative councils (shingikai) for review and modification. Specifically, in the agriculture case, an outline proposal was drafted by the Basic Agricultural Draft Bill Committee, which included the MAFF's bureau directors and a sub-division known as the Secretariat Committee, which was composed of section chiefs in the ministry. The Committee itself was chaired by Ogura Buichi, and the Policy Division of the Minister's Secretariat Bureau served as the Committee's executive office.[71] In the banking case, a similar ad hoc committee was created by Tokuda Hiromi, the Director of the Bank Bureau. That committee attempted to ameliorate differences of opinion between the representatives of various sectors of the industry and the ministry sections charged with presiding over those jurisdictions.

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[71]This permitted Ogura to create a personal leadership base within the Ministry. Hashimoto, "Gyosei kikan to seisaku tenkan," pp. 152-165.

These commitees served as an arena in which strong and exceptional leadership on the part of intermediate-level officials could be exercised.[72] In both cases, the initiative of prominent bureaucrats proved essential in orchestrating the decision-making process. Since the top administrators in the Agriculture Ministry were reluctant to press for sweeping changes in ministerial policy, the essential initiative and leadership had to come from elsewhere -- in this case, from Ogura, himself a middle-level official. The same was true in the case of the Bank Bureau's formulation of a new policy orientation. By creating a personal advisory committee for the purpose of spelling out the direction of future banking policy, Tokuda was able to overcome the inertia gripping the government's advisory committee. During his two-year tenure, major issues were addressed and basic policy proposals were decided. In both cases the alternatives for policy change were not novel, and had long been advocated by specialists both within and outside the ministries. What had been missing, however, was the opportunity -- and the political leadership -- to invest in such opportunities.[73]

In addition, inasmuch as the proposals demanded modifications in the basic raison d'etre of the sections charged with

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[72]The best known case of this kind is that of Sahashi Shigeru and the abortive Special Measures Bill for the Promotion of Designated Industries. For more on this matter, see Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle, pp. 251-61.

[73]For more on this matter, see Hiwatari, "Seisaku katei o meguru seiji kozo," pp. 80-102, 120-130, 156-79 and passim.

implementing the proposed policies, assertive leadership was necessary. The extent to which policy implementation actually took place was inversely related to the controversiality of the issues at stake. Those within the ministries who perceived change as a threat pressed to render the new policies vague so as to delay or impede strict implementation. In the agriculture case, the land improvement programs -- which did not entail a reorientation of programs and, in fact, called for a budgetary increase -- were implemented without delay.[74] The attitude was quite different on the part of the Agricultural Land Bureau, however, which was reluctant to comply with the changes required by the new law. The reason behind this apparent insubordination was the fact that compliance necessitated a fundamental reorientation in the valuational raison d'etre of the Bureau.[75] Similarly, although agreement ultimately was reached on the controversial "security clause" in the proposed Banking Law, implementation was delayed as

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[74]For a discussion of the implications for land improvement programs in attempting to increase cost efficiency in agriculture through large-scale, capital intensive mechanization, see Hashimoto, "Gyosei kikan to seisaku tenkan," Chapter 4.

[75]In order to realize economies of scale in agricultural production, it was necessary to promote land concentration. This challenged with the basic values of Land Reform -- enacted under the American Occupation -- which were embodied in the Agricultural Land Law. The Law was originally created to protect the middle-sized independent farms by restricting and regulating agricultural land transfer and by prohibiting tenant contracts so that middle-sized farmers would not become either landlord or tenant. Despite several attempts, the Law was not revised until ten years after the Basic Law was enacted. For more on this, see ibid., Chapter 3.

a result of discord among the rival bureaux.[76] At the root of the conflict between the Bank Bureau and the Bond Bureau was a fundamental disagreement regarding the valuational aspects of the issue. Since each bureau controlled its own the governmental advisory council, it is no wonder that the councils submitted contradictory policy proposals to the MOF.[77] Hence, in this case, the root cause of the intraministerial conflict was a valuational conflict whose resolution required astute political judgment and assertive leadership.

3. Characteristics of the Invisible Process

As these several empirical illustrations serve to demonstrate, an appreciation of non-ringi procedures and processes is crucial to an understanding of the system of decision-making in Japanese bureaucracy. Several aspects of the decision process bear recounting. First, the section is the focal point of policy formulation, and meetings are of pivotal importance. Administrative law in Japan ordinarily delegates the authority to execute tasks to the section in charge, with the laws themselves phrased in vague terms. The result is an ambiguous classification

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[76]Hiwatari, "Seisaku katei o meguru seiji kozo," pp. 206-290.

[77]Specifically the Finance System Research Council (Kin'yu Seido Chosa Kai) and the Bonds Exchange Advisory Council (Shoken Torihiki Shingi Kai).

system, which gives rise to overlapping roles within the ministry.[78] This, in turn, fosters an unregulated rhythm in carrying out tasks. In the making of the revised Banking Law, for example, officials of the Bank Bureau were obliged to "rush their tasks, cease all other administrative activities, and give up their holidays."[79]

Second, proposals for fundamental change are discussed in meetings in which top-down authority relations and lateral coordination come into play. Those advocating change -- even high-ranking officials -- tend to emphasize the technical aspects involved. In this regard, Campbell's observation regarding the preparations that go into the preparation of a ministry's budgetary draft are enlightening. He notes that,

> Good research as exemplified in detailed documentation which indicates that the ministry has looked over all the relevant data and considered other alternatives, is helpful. It is also necessary to demonstrate that the proposal has been "fully discussed" in the ministry -- that is, a favorable consensus exists among the officials themselves -- and that concerned clientele groups have been consulted and agree.... In other words, good staff work on the part of the ministry is necessary if the [ministry] is to be confident that the request is sound.... [Moreover,] the official should have a detailed knowledge of the programs he is requesting, and be able to furnish the examiner with the most useful

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[78]This point is raised in Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Bureaucracy," passim. Parallels between the "unregulated rhythm" of work in traditional societies and in Leninist regimes is discussed in Kenneth Jowitt, "An Orgaiizational Response to the Study of Political Culture in Marxist-Leninist Regimes," American Political Science Review 68 (1974), pp. 1175-1185.

[79]Hiwatari, "Seisaku katei o meguru seiji kozo," p. 253. Similar observations have been made regarding preparation of the Special Measures Bill for the Promotion of Designated Industries by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and in the Budget Bureau during the budgetary process. This is discussed in Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle, pp. 242-74.

arrangements in their favor that can in turn be used at higher levels...[80]

Such meetings provide opportunities for upper-level administrators to acquire information concerning the specifics of policy proposals. This is essential in order to promote policies and defend them in front of superiors and concerned outsiders. The meetings also provide occasions for these officials to exercise strong leadership. Controversial matters -- issues upon which there is diagreement among subordinates, or those that are likely to elicit contention later on in the policy process -- are set aside for resolution through bargaining among the top officials of the ministry. Thus top-down authority relations determine whether or not, or the extent to which, the agenda is to be either primarily "technical" or "political" in texture. Even decision issues that are entirely within the jurisdiction of a particular section must secure the understanding of top leaders within the ministry and officials in concerned sections. Officials in the section generating the proposal must offer a convincing factual rationale for their recommendations, yet criticisms of these proposals are usually phrased in valuational terms. In cases that overlap onto the jurisdictions of more than one section, the initiative must come from higher officials, who are obliged to exercise leadership in harmonizing the conflicting interests and perspectives of the sections.

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[80]Ibid., pp. 20-1.

Finally, it is important to note that informal negotiations are interspersed between formal hearings. This process of disjointed collective clearance -- popularly referred to as "nemawashi" (literally meaning "root binding") -- assists in achieving consensus among all involved parties and helps to ensure faithful implementation once a new policy is enacted. In this sense, nemawashi is an exceedingly rational device for securing the enactment and faithful implementation of policy. As Albert M. Craig explains,

> [i]nformal consultations are sometimes called nemawashi. The primary reference of this term is to the preparations made in advance of transplanting a large tree: digging a trench around it, cutting the thick lateral roots, and bending the smaller roots circlularly around the earth clump that will be moved. As applied to bureaucratic practice, it refers to the "spadework" involved in gathering together backing for a measure.[81]

Contrary to some of the prevailing wisdom, nemawashi is not sui generis to Japan. Indeed, lateral clearance in some form or another is a common phenomenon of bureaucratic decision-making whatever the socio-political setting.

Having outlined the salient features of the "visible" and "invisible" sides of the decision-making process in Japanese bureaucratic decision-making, it is necessary to round out this discussion by returning to a question raised at the outset. How do the characteristic features of Japanese bureaucratic organization make their presence felt in the policy-making process? In other words, in what ways do the inherent schisms and lines of conflict in

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[81]Craig, "Aspects of Government Bureaucracy," p. 22.

authority relations within the bureaucracy impact upon policy outcomes? In order to address this issue, it is necesary to probe still deeper into the dynamics of intraministerial power relations, a task that involves examining the implications of the institutionalized promotion system and the interaction among the different levels of administrative strata within a ministry of the government bureaucracy.

IV. Intraministerial Dynamics

The pivotal role played by the state bureaucracy in the policy-making process is not merely a matter of tradition, nor is it simply a legacy of Japan's late-starting industrialization. In order to comprehend how the bureaucracy has been able to acquire and maintain a considerable degree of autonomy within an open, "democratic" political order, it is necessary to analyze the dynamics of intraministerial power relations. Two matters are of particular salience in this regard. First, it is essential to recognize the implications of the career and promotion patterns -- which, in effect, create two competing "camps" within a ministry.[82] And, second, it is necessary to take account of the implications of power relations among the several administrative strata within a ministry.[83]

A. Competing Camps Within the Bureaucracy

The Japanese bureaucracy is an elite meritocracy, whose officials are recuited immediately upon graduation from college through a process of rigorous national examinations and interviews.

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[82]Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," pp. 267-9.

[83]The foremost theoretical perspectives for analyzing power relations within a formal organization have been developed in the work of James Thompson and Michel Crozier. See, James Thompson, Organizations in Action: Social Basis of Administrative Theory, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967); and Michel Crozier, The Bureaucratic Phenomenon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

Ministries compete fiercely to attract the best and brightest of each year's graduating class, a large share of whom are generally graduates of the University of Tokyo and Japan's other top educational institutions.

A clear line of distinction is drawn within the ranks of a ministry's personnel between the "career" (kyaria) bureaucrats -- those who passed the more demanding "advanced" examination and are assured of life-time employment in the ministry -- and the more numerous "non-career" (nonkyaria) officials.[84] Each of these competing camps operates under its own distinct promotion system.[85] With rare exceptions, only career officials are able to attain the position of section chief (kacho) and above, while the non-careers constitute the rank-and-file in a ministry. As a matter of fact, the position of deputy section chief (kacho hosa) -- the highest post for which most non-career officials can aspire -- is usually assumed by career bureaucrats after just a few short years in the ministry. This means that the direct superior and closest associate of a non-career deputy section chief is approximately the same age as the latter's children! At the section level, mutual dependence and conflict defines relations between the "non-careers" and the "careers." The primary role played by the former is in the

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[84]For an insightful discussion of this matter, see Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle, pp. 57-8. See also Kubota Akira, Higher Civil Servants in Postwar Japan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[85]The matter of promotion patterns and the schism between "careers" and "noncareers" is briefly discussed in Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," pp. 467-8.

implementation of policy, while the latter are active operatives in the policy-making process. Of course, each group tenaciously defends the wellsprings of its own power and autonomy.[86]

The power of the non-careers rests largely upon the knowledge they possess concerning the maze of rules, regulations, precedents, and conventions which govern the activities of the ministry.[87] This power of "expertise" is further enhanced by a sensitivity to the specific needs and interests of the ministry's clients, a sensitivity which is acquired through daily interaction with those clients. Since it is both impossible and self-defeating for the career officials to attempt to scrutinize every action taken these non-career subordinates, this store of knowledge enables a significant degree of de facto autonomy in the implementation process.[88] The problem of controlling these low-ranking bureaucrats is exacerbated by the fact that the career officials tend to be "generalists" who rotate from one managerial post to another in relatively short, regular intervals and, hence, are unable to acquire considerable expertise in any given policy area. For these

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[86]Ito Daiichi's rather brilliant description of the power relations that prevail between higher and lower officials in a local tax agency has implications which generally apply to all government ministries in Japan. See his Gendai Nihon kanryo-sei no bunseki (An Analysis of Contemporary Japanese Bureaucracy) (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1980), especially chapter 7.

[87]Tsuji, "Decision-Making in the Japanese Government," passim; and Ito, Gendai Nihon kanryo-sei no bunseki, passim.

[88]For a detailed and thorough discussion of the problems of control and implementation in a bureaucracy, see Dunsire, Implementation, passim.

reasons, career officials are obliged to rely heavily upon the expertise of the non-careers -- not only in matters of policy implementation, but in policy-making as well.

In addition, the expertise of the non-careers grants them leverage over clients. Decrees that run counter to the interests of clients tend to elicit non-compliance. This is seen, for example, in Ito's study of tax administration, where it was found that the compliance of clients cannot be taken for granted.[89] Yet the very fact that laws and regulations are often complex and technical in nature serves to increase the chances of compliance. In order to make accurate estimates of each client's tax burden, it is essential that tax collectors understand the fine points of relevant regulations, as well as the conditions of the local economy. This knowledge bank augments the power position of the official vis-a-vis the client.

The seeds of strife between non-career and career officials at the section-level are always present, at least in latent form. In the case of the non-career bureaucrats, their power of expertise is based upon a thorough knowledge of existing laws and ordinances; hence, they have a stake in protecting and maintaining established laws and procedures. Meanwhile, the authority of "incumbency" wielded by the career officials derives from the central position they occupy in the formal policy-making apparatus. It is the responsibility of these officials to formulate long-term plans and

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[89]Ibid.

interpret the underlying valuational objectives of legislation. The exercise of these powers often requires the enactment of new laws or the modification of existing regulations, which often is tantamount to a direct assault on the power base of the non-career officials.

The systematized promotion pattern of career officials also enables the extensive lateral coordination essential to the system of "policy ringi." All of those who enter a ministry in a particular year are promoted almost simultaneously to positions of equivalent rank. In order to avoid stagnation of personnel, the average length of tenure in a given position for career bureaucrats is two to three years. While virtually everyone is guaranteed to be promoted to the rank of section chief, a selection process goes on among members of an "entering class" to determine who will fill those few, choice leadership positions in the top echelons. The selection process continues until the post of administrative vice-minister (jimu jikan) -- the apex of the formal hierarchy for career bureaucrats in a ministry -- is assumed by a member of the class, at which time the remaining members of the entering class are expected to resign and "descend from heaven" (amakudari) to take positions in the private sector or in quasi-governmental corporations.[90] The institutionalized rotation and promotion

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[90]It is common for bureaucrats to retire between the ages of 55-60, and, thereafter, to "descend from heaven." For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon, see Chalmers Johnson, "The Reemployment of Retired Government Bureaucrats In Japanese Big Business," Asian Survey 14 (November 1974): 953-965.

pattern of career officials serves to create extensive networks of personal and professional ties within the ministry that contribute to effective lateral coordination in the formulation of policy.

Obviously the nature of decision-making in Japanese bureaucracy is shaped in important ways by the promotion system and the two camps it produces among ministerial personnel. Yet career and promotion patterns are not the only interministerial dynamics that impinge upon the decision-making process. Of equal importance are the ramifications of the various levels of administration in a government ministry, a topic to which we shall now turn.

B. Administrative Strata in a Government Ministry

It is possible to discern three distinct subgroups of administrators -- each with its own set of clients and sources of power -- among the career bureaucrats in a ministry. One group is composed of the section heads (kacho), while a second is made up of the administrative vice-minister and bureau directors (kyokucho). In between these two groups is an "elite" group of intermediate-level administrators composed of the deputy bureau directors (jicho and shingikan) and the chief of the General Affairs Sections. The manner in which officials in these administrative strata interact has profound implications vis-a-vis the system of decision-making in Japanese bureaucracy.

The authority of expertise wielded by a section chief derives from a familiarity with broad social conditions and trends, both domestic and international. Much of the information which goes

into this knowledge bank is acquired from the representatives of interest groups and academics, who offer it under the expectation that it will pay dividends in the form of greater influence in shaping policy outcomes.[91] The representatives of the ubiquitous "petition groups" (chinjodan) that descend upon Kasumigaseki to lobby their respective causes perceive the section chief as a key "access point" to the bureaucracy.[92] Generally these chinjodan are headed by a local politician or a prominent local citizen. If additional impact is desired, a Dietmember -- or, more commonly, his or her administrative secretary (hishokan) -- is enlisted to accompany the group to the relevant administrative office.[93] In this regard, the principal role played by the section chief is to identify and harmonize conflicting interests.[94]

This should not be interpreted to mean that the bureaucracy is held captive by interest groups. On the contrary, as Muramatsu discovered in his study of career officials' attitudes, section

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[91]In the banking case, for example, most of the basic research undertaken for Tokuda's "private" committee was performed by researchers working in private commercial banks. In certain cases the banks organized "task forces" and sent them abroad on investigation trips to gather information. Moreover, the major commercial banks provided research personnel to undertake the basic -- but specialized -- research necessary for policy making. On this matter, see Hiwatari, "Seisaku katei o meguru seji kozo," pp. 160-166.

[92]This matter is discussed in Muramatsu Michio, Sengo Nihon no kanryosei (Postwar Japanese Bureaucracy) (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinpo-sha, 1981), pp. 219-222.

[93]This matter is discussed in Woodall, "The Liberal Democratic Party and Public Works Projects," passim.

[94]Muramatsu, Sengo Nihon no kanryosei, pp. 102-106.

chiefs regard slavish service to interest groups as deleterious to the national interest which they are committed to uphold.[95] Moreover, the cleavage between the non-career and career camps serves to bolster the autonomy of the section vis-a-vis its clients. An effective section chief must be able to elicit the cooperation of the "expert" non-careers in order to deflect pressure from interest groups.[96] At the same time, the section chief must also be able and willing to summon pressure from exogenous interest groups in attempting to prod the oftentimes reluctant non-careers into accepting change.[97] While this affords a considerable degree of autonomy to the section chiefs, it also fosters incrementalism in decision-making.

A major source of competition for upper bureaucrats in the policy-making realm comes from professional politicans. The most visible and important among them are the minister (daijin) and parliamentary vice-minister (seimu jikan) -- both of whom are political appointees -- as well as members of the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council (seimu chosakai) and Executive Council (somukai). The impact of these politicans breeds yet another cleavage within a ministry: in this case between the top officials

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[95]Ibid., pp. 219-222.

[96]Murakawa Ichiro, Nihon no seisaku kettei katei (The Policy-Making Process in Japan) (Tokyo: Gyosei, 1984), pp. 140 and 208.

[97]Similarly, those at lower levels who are charged with implementing policy are in a position to claim that the requests of individual clients are "policy" matters and, therefore, outside their jurisdiction. Muramatsu, Sengo Nihon no kanryosei, pp. 107-120.

(the administrative vice-minister and bureau directors) and their immediate subordinates.

Higher officials in the ministry possess a different perspective than those in lower echelons, due to the fact that they are charged with representing the ministry as an institution and are obliged to maintain close interaction with politicians. This tends to instill in them a broad perspective on policy matters, and a sensitivity to the implications and political feasibility of policy proposals. These officials are generally not averse to permitting politicians to exercise influence in policy decisions, and are inclined to view the appropriate role of the bureaucracy as confined to the "basic preparation of important policy matters" and the "implementation of policy."[98] More concretely, these high-level administrators tend to view the role of political parties and Diet deliberations in a more important light than do their subordinates. Nonetheless, they perceive the technical and legal facets of policy as their sanctuary and source of power.[99]

In contrast, the intermediate-level administrators -- specifically, the deputy bureau directors (jicho and shingikan) and the chiefs of the general affairs sections (somu kacho) -- constitute a third administrative stratum. The primary role played by this group of officials is to coordinate the proposals of subordinates and to transmit directives from higher officials to

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[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid.

the sections. In cases in which directives impinge upon the baliwicks of several sections, these intermediate-level officials are called upon to perform the function of coordination. Their "elitist" self-perception derives from their unique position in the ministry's organizational apparatus. On the one hand, these officials are charged with evaluating the particular interests of the sections in terms of the larger "public interest," and insisting upon the consistency and integrity of ministerial policy.[100] Conversely, they are in a position to appraise the directives of higher officials on the basis of technical expertise and feasibility. Because the power of the non-career officials who implement policy is served by maintaining the status quo, proposals for change tend to be incremental in nature. Inasmuch as concrete policy recommendations are drafted at the section-level, the primary role played by intermediate administrators is to orchestrate a general consensus through the medium of inter-sectional meetings. Policy proposals are assessed according to the requirements of technical feasibility as well as in terms of policy consistency and the national interest.

By way of summary, officials in each of the three administrative strata have their own sources of influence vis-a-

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[100]The Legal Matters Inspection Committee, composed of GAS chiefs and members of the Minister's Secretariat Bureau, can be seen as the core of such "elitist" coordination in the ministry. According to Omori, this kind of meeting is now held in four ministries (MITI, Conconstruction, Labor, and Home Affairs). The most crucial matters of the ministry are discussed -- that is, the contents of the bills and executive orders. Omori, "Nihon kanryosei no jian kettei tetsuzuki," pp. 99-100.

vis the forging of policy decisions. Upper echelon officials and section chiefs tend to share some of the perspectives of the exogenous groups with which they are called to interact. Meanwhile, the intermediate level officials are in a position of being able to play both sides to the middle. In the shaping of decisions, therefore, officials at each level of the ministry possess a certain degree of autonomy in the policy-making process.

V. Summary and Conclusions

A survey of the literature on the Japanese bureaucratic leviathan produces a Janus-faced image. On the one hand, it has been criticized for the high-and-mighty attitude of its officials, which has spawned the phrase "revere the officials, despise the people" (kanson minpi). The bureaucracy has also been censured for its reluctance to comply with the dictates of popular opinion. This is witnessed, for example, in the belated and grudging response to the outcry during the late-1960s for an environmental protection policy and the demands for an increased social welfare commitment. Yet this same governmental bureaucracy won praise for the prompt and effective dispatch with which it formulated and implemented environmental protection and social welfare policies once new objectives were set forth.[101] This paradox is partially

[101]For more on this matter see McKean, "Pollution and Policymaking," passim; and Steven R. Reed, "Environmental Politics: Some Reflections on the Japanese Case," Comparative Politics 13 (No. 3, 1981), pp. 253-268.

explained by the internal dynamics of the Japanese bureaucracy and the manner in which it reconciles the mutually contradictory demands for autonomy and resilience.

While Tsuji's "ringi" model calls attention to the important role played by lower-ranking officials in the decision-making process, it presents an incomplete and flawed depiction of reality. Indeed, as our model predicts, the decision structures and clearance procedures employed in the state bureaucracy are contingent upon the nature of the decision situation at issue. The system of decision-making employed in Japan's government bureaucracy is multifaceted. Indeed, three distinct subsystems -- implementation ringisei, policy ringisei, and a non-ringi decision process -- can be discerned. A shifting admixture of formal and informal, as well as centralized and decentralized structures and devices, are embodied in these subsystems, and upper leadership plays a much more important role in the decision-making process than is widely believed.

At a high level of generality, the pattern of decentralization displayed in the policy-making activities of a Japanese government ministry bear the traits of a collegial decision structure as defined in our typology. The technical aspects of policy matters are decided almost entirely by non-career specialists in the sections (ka). These officials are knowledgeable regarding the regulations and conventions of a narrow field of administration, and tend to attach a strong sense of importance to the valuational raison d'etre of the section to which they belong. The primary

role of upper leadership is not to dictate, but, rather, to harmonize the conflicting demands of lower units and to search for compromise on controversial issues. This gives rise to a skewed authority structure within the ministry -- the authority of expertise is dispersed and compartmentalized in the ka, while the authority of incumbency is centralized and serves an important symbolic function. The structural expression of this type of decision-making system is a collegium characterized by relative homogeneity regarding policy ends and a multi-level process for deciding the appropriate means for achieving those ends.

The undercurrents of intraministerial power relations demand that the perspectives and interests of the various ka -- the organizational unit responsible for implementing policy -- be taken into account. Drastic policy changes demand assertive leadership as well as concerted pressure from public opinion and exogenous interest groups. Yet faithful implementation necessitates the compliance of officials at ka level. This serves to militate against the success of any bold new departures in administrative policy. One way in which a ministry reconciles the mutually contradictory imperatives for autonomy and resilience is to confine "programmed" decision-making to the lowest echelons of the bureaucracy. At the same time, however, considerable decentralized discretionary power is granted to officials at the section level. Viewed in systemic terms, the result is a state bureaucratic apparatus that wields substantial autonomy relative to outside interests, including its formally authorized political masters.

Still, the central state bureaucracy in Japan is not an impregnable fortress: there are several "windows of vulnerability" through which outside interests may lobby the government. One point of access is through the career officials -- particularly the section chiefs -- in the lower echelons of the ministry. It is here that Japanese petition groups generally go to plead for special concessions, and, on occasion, Dietmembers are pressed into service on behalf of these groups in order to exert even greater pressure on the bureaucracy.[102] In this regard, the creation of long-term, reciprocol relations with career officials in key posts holds the greatest promise for success in attempting to influence the decision process through this point of access.

A second window of vulnerability is embodied in the elected parliamentarians, particularly those in the ruling party. The LDP is a large and complex organization whose members represent a host of interests and embrace a range of views on virutally any conceivable issue. While younger parliamentarians are generally less beholden to the status quo than their seniors, they tend to be concerned with the overriding goal of building support bases to secure reelection. This obliges them to concentrate their efforts on mundane rituals designed to appeal to constituents, and grants them little latitude in pursuing controversial "policy" issues. Veteran members of the ruling party's corps of parliamentarians

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[102]The interaction between zoku politicians and bureaucrats is discussed in Brian Woodall, "The Liberal Democratic Party and Public Works Projects," passim.

-- particularly the so-called "policy specialists" (zoku giin) -- have a wider network of connections in positions of influence, and need not be so preoccupied with constituency service. However, demands that are transmitted through this channel generally require drastic change, and often require considerable persistence on the part of those attempting to influence the policy-making process.

Finally, a third point of access is available to those intent upon influencing the decisions of the bureaucracy -- they might seek to enlist the expert knowledge and personal networks of retired government officials. This, of course, is a well-known tactic used by Japanese companies and pressure groups at home and abroad, especially in the United States. It is a well known fact that some of the best lobbyists in America's capital -- including a host of erstwhile officials in the U.S. government and former top political advisors -- are on the payroll of Japanese interests. A similar approach on the part of American business and political interest groups in Japan might elicit similarly efficacious results.

There are many lessons for American government and business leaders in the tale of decision-making in Japan's government bureaucracy. One is witnessed in the fact that the Japanese bureaucracy is better shielded from political intervention and operates under a longer time horizon than does its counterpart in the United States. Because, by design, greater emphasis is placed upon continuity and incrementalism, the Japanese bureaucracy is relatively less responsive to exogenous pressure. It is only when

exogenous demands stimulate internal tensions and forge a new consensus favoring drastic change, that the bureuacracy will be forced to reorder its policy priorities. Indeed, so-called "booms" (bumu) -- involving widespread protest by citizens' groups and vocal coverage by the mass media -- are often necessary in order to prod reluctant bureaucrats into taking cognizance of societal demands for new policies. Still, such booms are effective in producing the desired change in policy direction only if they mitigate, rather than exacerbate, intraministerial power dynamics.[103]

Japan's state bureaucracy plays a central role in policy-making and policy implementation. In comparison with its American counterpart, the Japanese bureaucracy is relatively autonomous and insulated from its environment. Therefore, amicable personal relations between leaders of Japan and the U.S. -- such as the

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[103]This was evident, for example, in the case of the "Basic Agricultural Law Boom" (kihon noho bumu) which resulted in the initiation of deliberations, but had little effect on the actual policy outcome. For more on this matter, see Hashimoto, "Gyosei kikan to seisaku tenkan," passim. Other noteworthy "booms" are discussed in Hiwatari, "Seisaku katei o meguru seiji kozo," passim; Margaret McKean, "Pollution and Policymaking," in T.J. Pempel (ed.), Policymaking in Contemporary Japan, pp. 201-238; Ellis S. Krauss and B.L. Simcock, "Citizens' Movements: The Growth and Impact of Environment Protest in Japan," in Kurt Stiener et al. (eds), Political Opposition and Local Politics in Japan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980),; and John Creighton Campbell, "The Old People Boom in Japanese Policy Making," Journal of Japanese Studies 5 (Summer 1979), pp. 321-57. For a detailed comparative analysis of the characteristics common to each of these cases, see, Nobuhiro Hiwatari, "A Typology of Policy Processes in Contemporary Japan," unpublished manuscript, 1984.

fabled "Ron and Yasu" relationship[104] and a budding "Ron and Noboru" nexus -- are unlikely to provide sufficient impetus to compel a proud and powerful bureaucracy to meekly comply with the sometimes reckless promises of statesmen. Therefore, the secret to controlling Japan's bureaucracy lies in the skillful manipulation of the inherent strings of intraministerial conflict and cooperation, not in simple comradery between heads of state.

As negotiators for the American side have learned through painful experience in countless encounters, Japan's government bureaucracy can be a stubborn and formidible force with which to be reckoned. In this regard, it is clear that America's government and business leaders do not know how to manipulate internal cleavages or where to apply pressure on the Japanese bureaucracy in order to achieve the desired results. Perhaps the problem is compounded by myopia, lack of policy consistency, and deficient resolve on the part of the Americans. Until the representatives of American interests face up to the realities of dealing with Japan's leviathan in a coherent and informed manner, bilateral relations are destined to sail upon turbulent seas.

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[104]The close personal ties between President Reagan and former Prime Minister Nakasone.

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