

Japanese Modernization Lecture Series

Chapter 11. Modernization of Japan's Administrative System

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One of the most striking characteristics of Japanese politics from the late nineteenth century until the end of the Second World War was the strength and political influence of its national bureaucracy.

As a latecomer to the industrial revolution, Japan was under fierce pressures to “catch up” with the technically more sophisticated nation-states of the West.

A strong bureaucracy was an essential instrument in efforts to reach this goal.

Section 1: Introduction

Today, I would like to talk about the modernization of Japan's administrative system.

As seen in the way the German sociologist Max Weber described the bureaucracy as a specifically modern form of control, legal and political systems are deeply related to administrative systems.

Accordingly, we will discuss modernization of administrative systems in connection with modernization of law and politics as well.

While the modernization of Japan's administrative system began with the Meiji Restoration, even before then the administrative system of the shogunate and han domains during Tokugawa Era had been objective-rational to some degree.

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In contrast, the Meiji government promoted the development of a European-style administrative system.

During the Taisho era, the government was pressed to provide complex administrative services in order to adapt to societal changes accompanying industrialization.

These included the rise of the railway industry, social policy, and industrial policy, as well as the recovery from the Great Kanto Earthquake.

In this way, this lecture will consider the modernization of administrative systems from the Meiji through the Taisho era.

Video : Ministry of Justice, "Red-Brick Building"

This building is known today as the "Red-Brick Building" of the Ministry of Justice. When it was completed in 1895, it served as the offices of the former Ministry of Justice.

It was designed by the German architects Hermann Ende and Wilhelm Böckmann. Böckmann was a famed German architect, and Ende was his young partner.

The two specialized in designing red-brick buildings.

These two architects proposed a plan to centralize administrative functions in the Kasumigaseki area.

However, this plan itself was not realized, and only this Red-Brick Building and the neighboring Daishin-in, housing the Supreme Court, were built largely in the planned locations.

During the Second World War, all but the exterior walls of this building was lost to fire. The exterior walls did not collapse because they had been reinforced strongly to counter earthquakes.

It was rebuilt and used as government offices after the war, and in recent years it has been restored precisely to its state at the time of construction, including rebuilding of its roof and spires.

Today, government offices are concentrated in the Kasumigaseki area, and this Red-Brick Building stands out conspicuously among the other modern buildings surrounding it.

Probably we could say that this is an example of a valuable architectural heritage that conveys to this day the spirit of 19th-century modernization of Japan's administrative system modeled on Europe.

1-2 Political influence of bureaucracy

Let's return to the subject of bureaucracy.

As this slide shows, the American political scientist Fred W. Riggs saw as an exceptional feature of Japan's modernization the simultaneous formation of a powerful bureaucracy and a constitution to control it.

This view is based on 1960s' modernization theory.

In general, according to this modernization theory, in non-European countries strong bureaucracies were formed and served as powerful, independent political actors, but constitutional constraints developed to control those bureaucracies were insufficient.

However, in Japan's case, bureaucracy and the constitution both were functional and served as checks and balances on each other.

The tension and dilemma between the two, constitution and administration, probably could be said to give a distinctive appearance to the development of the administrative system. It can be said that Japan has learned a lot from the West and followed their lead.

In the West, the relationship between the constitution and the administrative system is one of an equal footing.

From the perspective of the constitution, the administrative system is positioned within it as one of the three separated powers.

However, as seen in the typical example of prerevolutionary France, the state effectively demonstrated administrative functions before the constitutional code was promulgated.

That is, the constitution took shape with the administrative system as a historical precedent.

Then, once the constitutional code was established, the administrative system that already was functional prior to the constitution would be modified to be operated in a manner

consistent with the constitution.

Modern Japan was the first non-Western state to experience this process by which the constitution and the administrative system regulate each other.

Section 2: Distinguishing features of Japan's administrative system

Before we look at the development of Japan's modern administrative system, let's review some distinguishing features of Japan's administrative system.

As this slide shows, they can be summarized by five points.

First, among all the nations in the world with populations of 100 million or more, only China, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Japan are unitary states. All the others have federal systems.

As a liberal developed country that contains the global city of Tokyo, Japan can be said to be a rare example of a nation whose central government needs to carry out advanced, rational administrative activities for a population of more than 100 million.

The historical foundation of this administrative capability in Japan is the advanced civilization that developed over two centuries from the 17th to the 19th centuries, in which Japan experienced no civil wars and international exchange was restricted.

When we consider the fact that during this period Western states as well as India and China experienced civil and international wars, Japan's experience was quite unique.

The subsequent opening of Japan to the outside world stimulated international exchange, as the Meiji government promoted rapid modernization of administrative systems.

However, after Japan lost the Second World War, democratization and modernization of the administrative system based on the American model were advanced.

Later, after Japan became a world economic power through the period of rapid economic growth during the 1960s, Japan would continue administrative reforms in response to deflation and the decreasing of the population in the 21st century.

Section 3: Review of related concepts: From a German to an U.S. model

To begin with, the concept of administration includes a wide range of fields.

These include the administration of the Ministry of Justice noted earlier as well as finance and various aspects of domestic administration.

That is, administration essentially differs from various other concepts because it is multifunctional.

Accordingly, let's start by reviewing the differences in meaning from related concepts.

(i) Modernization

As used here, modernization refers to the objective-rationalization of systems that not only occurred in the 19th century but still continues today.

In the case of administration, modernization is characterized by continual reforms and changes to the system as a whole, without focusing solely on conditions specific to individual policies.

During the 19th century, modernization of administrative systems advanced in Europe in response to the industrial revolution, while in non-Western countries modernization referred to adoption of European models.

In the 20th century, with the formation of administrative state and "big government" as administrative activities expanded in areas such as social welfare and economic policy, modernization would come to refer to what could be called a kind of Americanization, through adoption of the methods of American style of management, such as computerization.

After the end of the Cold War in particular, the modernization of administrative systems targeted by European states was used with this meaning entirely, as seen in the example of e- government.

Please take a look at this slide.

These two reports from Britain and Germany both refer to modernization in the sense of Americanization in 1990s.

In practical terms, administration and bureaucracy are concepts that overlap to a considerable degree.

Administration is a concept characterized by a hierarchical structure, executive agencies, and a technical nature, and, as seen in the use of the term administrative sector in constitutional law, one strongly related to law.

On the other hand, bureaucracy can be described as a sociological concept as a political actor with a hierarchical structure.

In particular, Max Weber argued that society as a whole was undergoing bureaucratization, seeing bureaucracy as a general property of organizations in areas including not only national administration but other areas as well, such as business enterprises, political parties, and labor unions.

The subject of this lecture is administration in the State.

While in one sense the State refers to an actor in international relations, in another sense it refers to an independent authority that is distinct from society in domestic administration and governs it based on rationality, as advocated in the 19th century by the German philosopher Hegel.

The State resolves conflicts in society through administration.

The late-19th-century Austrian scholar of the State Science Lorenz von Stein stressed this nature of the State.

Stein played an important role in preparing the rough draft of the Meiji constitution.

Ito Hirobumi, who visited Stein while working on the preparation of the constitution, learned about the importance of administrative roles from his lecture and then worked on the drafting of the Meiji constitution after returning to Japan.

In this way, German views of administration, which saw an important role for administration in the State, were transferred to Japan.

The German-style administration on which the Meiji government was based was characterized by clear differentiation of authority, administration under the law, and vertical exercise of authority under a hierarchical structure.

Then, after the Second World War, the United States, which advanced democratic reforms as the occupying force, incorporated American-style administration into Japan administrative system.

This resulted in the introduction of decentralized, managerial perspectives such as the concept of efficiency from the business world, horizontal governance of administrative organization by independent agencies, and participatory democracy.

As this slide shows, at the pre-democratic time of imperial Germany, the German sociologist Karl Mannheim criticized the tendency of political issues to be treated as administrative issues in Germany.

This can be applied to the Meiji government and prewar Japan, while postwar Japan attempted to overcome this tendency through democratic reforms.

Section 4: Basic forms of administration

Before looking at the modernization of Japan's administrative system, let's consider the formation of its basic form.

First of all, in order to achieve through the Meiji Restoration, a process of westernization from the Tokugawa Era, the Meiji government transferred authority over land and the public from the han domains, established the family registration system, and built the foundations of a financial system based on a taxation of land.

Then, it organized the military system through establishment of a system of conscription. Furthermore, it also adopted Western legal systems, accepted Western-style international relations, and attempted to advance negotiations to improve the unequal treaties concluded by the Tokugawa shogunate.

These policies were concerned with the administrative functions of home affairs, finance,

defense, justice, and foreign affairs. While Germany provide the typical example, on Continental Europe, these five administrative functions are referred to as the five "classical" ministries.

The postwar German scholars on public administration Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf, formularized this definition, and described the natures of the five "classical" ministries as shown on this slide.

They are related to constitutional systems and perform coordinating functions within the government, and new administrative areas develop from within the field of home affairs.

Japan's modern administrative organizations were established at largely the same time as the adoption in 1885 of the cabinet system.

At that time, the government's ministries consisted of those of justice, home affairs, finance, foreign affairs, the army, the navy, education, agriculture and commerce, and posts, telecommunications, and transportation.

The six ministries other than those of education, agriculture and commerce, and posts, telecommunications, and transportation can be said to correspond to the five "classical" ministries.

By the way, this slide shows the Japanese government's administrative organization today. The marked ministries are successors to the former Ministry of Home Affairs.

As this slide shows, the number of its successors has expanded considerably.

Video : Doorplate of the Ministry of Finance

This doorplate was posted at the entrance to the head office of the Okurasho, the predecessor to today's Zaimusho.

While both these names are translated into Ministry of Finance in English, in Japanese their meanings differ completely.

The "okura" in Okurasho refers to the national treasury.

This name comes from an organization in the ancient Japanese bureaucracy, and its origins-in particular, the organization name "sho" can be translate to the ancient Chinese

bureaucracy.

As a "restoration," the Meiji government restored the classical name, which was retained in the modern cabinet system.

This shows how Japan's modernization had carried on the Chinese-style classical bureaucracy, assigning its functions to a European-style treasury.

The contemporary name Zaimusho was adopted in the 2001 reforms of government agencies.

This is a businesslike name that expresses only the meaning of overseeing finance.

While the content of its administration does not differ greatly from that of the previous Okurasho, it reflects the government's determination to abandon ancient traditions in today's world of globalization.

Although Böckmann's and Ende's plan to concentrate government agencies in a single area was not realized, the area which covered Kasumigaseki and Nagatacho the area which covered was home to the ministries of the army, navy, foreign affairs, and justice. In contrast, Otemachi was home to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and others.

While this meant that the five "classical" ministries were split into two areas, this division reflected the geographical facts that the former area was centered around the Diet and the latter around the Imperial Palace near Otemachi, where the buildings attached to the cabinet were situated.

The administrative organization could be said to have taken on an elliptical structure.

After the Great Kanto Earthquake, the prime minister's residence was relocated to the Nagatacho area, and the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Finance followed, and the main government ministries came to be concentrated in the Kasumigaseki area as a result.

Section 5: Modernization of administrative systems during the Meiji era

(i) Structure during the Edo Period

But, through what kind of process did this modernization take place?

First, the shogun of the shogunate was at the top of the warrior class and possessed overwhelming political authority.

The emperor, on the other hand, possessed politically symbolic authority but not substantial political influence, and the movement to restore imperial authority at the end of the Tokugawa era would serve as the driving force behind the Meiji Restoration.

Second, territory was divided between shogunal demesnes under the control of shogun families and han territories.

Han rule was left to the han lords. The American local-government researcher Kurt Steiner calls this “centralized feudalism.”

Third, Japanese people were prohibited from traveling overseas or engaging in international trade.

Trade was permitted in Nagasaki only with the Dutch and the Qing Dynasty.

Fourth, taxation was based on a system of rice payments by peasants to the feudal lords.

Han revenues were determined by the total amount of rice payments, and warriors were paid in rice as well.

Under this system, fiscal revenues were fixed and the fiscal structure became rigid.

These four aspects were replaced after the Meiji Restoration.

First, the shogun was abdicated and the new government was formulated under the authority of the emperor.

The hans were abolished, and a centralized state was created.

In addition, the Meiji government became the new center of diplomacy and established diplomatic relations with various countries.

Also, a new system of taxation was introduced under which taxes were based on land and paid in currency.

Comparing the process of modernization after the Meiji Restoration with various other countries, John W. Hall described it as a process that involved no outstanding resistance and promotion of policies with a prospective view.

On the point of no outstanding resistance, although there was some military resistance to the new government, such as the Satsuma Rebellion, led by Saigo Takamori, who had been a leader in the restoration, these were merely localized military conflicts that did not threaten to split the nation-state in two.

On the subject of its prospective view, an example of an originator of a vision of systematic modernization is Saigo's friend and a co-leader of the restoration, Okubo Toshimichi.

Splitting the 30-year period of state-building after the restoration into three 10-year phases, Okubo described these phases as shown on this slide.

While this is said to be from a discussion right before he was assassinated, it shows that Okubo, as a distinguished leader of the Meiji government, had a clear vision of the future through promotion of industrialization.

ii. Centralization of the Meiji government

Another point made by Hall concerns the way reforms were advanced not through thoroughgoing innovations but through a gradual approach utilizing existing institutional frameworks.

First, the return of han registers to the emperor transferred domain land and authority over the population from the han lords to the new government in 1869.

At that time, the han lords retained their status as han leaders.

Then, when the hans were abolished in 1871, the Meiji government assumed han liabilities, han lords were given status as nobility, and their income was guaranteed.

As new local governments, 305 prefectures were created, and these then gradually were consolidated.

By 1886, a total of 47 prefectures remained. This process represented the start of the formation of a fully centralized State.

Then the family registration system was adopted in 1872 as a system for registration of the public in family units.

These are how the framework for domestic administration was formed.

Next, a nationwide system of land taxation was introduced.

This reform laid the foundation for government finances.

At that time, the Ministry of Finance, under the leadership of Okuma Shigenobu, absorbed domestic administrative functions and developed a system of local government from a fiscal perspective.

However, when in 1873 Okubo Toshimichi, mentioned earlier, reorganized the Ministry of Home Affairs, it came to serve as the center for development of the system of local government and policy advancement to promote industry.

This resulted in a system under which the Ministry of Finance focused on the financial system on the one hand and the Ministry of Home Affairs had authority over domestic administration in general on the other hand.

These two ministries would develop into highly politically influential ministries.

Let's take an overview of the domains of the other five "classical" ministries as well.

In the area of justice, adoption of a Western legal system was advanced. In defense, with the issue in 1873 of the Conscription Ordinance, a system of general conscription was adopted.

In the area of foreign affairs, there was a need to continue the diplomacy begun under the Tokugawa shogunate, and following the establishment of the capital in Edo, newly renamed Tokyo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was formally set up in 1869, with a succession of foreign missions set up in 1870 and envoys posted in major foreign countries.

In this way, modernization began in the administrative functions of home affairs, foreign affairs, finance, justice, and defense.

iii. Administration after the promulgation of the constitution

The Meiji government first commenced the establishment of the basic framework for administration.

Next, we will look in particular at the systems of personnel management for public officials and the administrative organizations.

Prior to the promulgation of the Meiji constitution, a modern cabinet system was established in 1885.

After the constitution was promulgated, the imperial Diet opened in 1890, and then the administrative system once again was reformed to comply with the constitution.

(1) Personnel management system

Looking first at the personnel management system, in 1888 the Higher Civil-Service Examination was established, putting public officials under the merit system in which applicants who had passed the exams were chosen for lower posts by individual agencies.

As a result, the old nepotism was strongly restricted.

Examination subjects focused largely on the law. In 1893, the merit system was expanded so that all applicants for public official posts were required to take the exams, including graduates of Tokyo Imperial University, who previously had been exempted from them.

However, after the Diet was established, annual budget debates led to a strengthening of the influence of political parties, so that parties cooperating with the cabinet began making strong demands for appointment of their members to ministries.

This led to an appointment system under which members of the political parties would be appointed to key posts in the government that were not under the merit system.

In particular, the first Okuma cabinet, which was the first party cabinet, led to fierce opposition to the merit system with the appointment of a huge number of party members.

In this way, in what kinds of posts to permit political appointment became a cause of dispute between political parties and the bureaucracy.

In 1899, the new personnel policy was adopted under which only those who had passed the

qualifying examinations could be appointed to official posts other than a very few specific ones such as those of chief cabinet secretary and private secretaries.

This was intended to ensure that party members with low levels of specialization- in the sense that they had not undergone the civil-service exams would not be assigned authority for administration.

2. The system of government offices

Standards were also established for ministerial office organizations and procedures of administrative processing.

Organizational names of offices were standardized together with the introduction of the cabinet system such as minister's secretariats, bureaus, and divisions, in Japanese, kanbo, kyoku, ka.

Procedures of administrative processing were also standardized.

While the legal principles of standardization reflected German influence, the establishment of Minister's Secretariats as organizations to support ministers was patterned on the model of the cabinet organization of France and Belgium, cabinet in French.

While in German government minister's secretariats were small organizations, in France they were relatively large in scale.

The basic pattern of a minister's secretariat in Japan included divisions to manage documents, accounting, and personnel, resulting in organizations similar in size to those in France.

Through the establishment of these large-scale minister's secretariats, a system was established under which administration in ministries was controlled chiefly through the relationship between the minister's secretaries and the ministers.

Regarding procedures for administrative processing, a system was established from the

initial stage in which final decisions were made through the steps of drafting, circulation, and approval.

These standards were created through the preparation of formal rules for individual offices prior to the establishment of the Meiji constitution and its revision in operation under the new constitution was proceeded.

In this way, the personnel management system and organization of government offices were established steadily after the promulgation of the constitution.

Together with this establishment of the basic pattern of administration, basic codes such as the Civil Code and the Commercial Code were also drafted, in addition to basic administrative laws such as the River Act, the Readjustment of the Arable Land Act, and the Fishery Act.

At about the same time as the promulgation of the constitution, the new system of local government was put in place as well, resulting in the strengthening of the authority of prefectural governors, and they were subject to the Minister of Home Affairs.

Furthermore, the movement toward local community improvement after the Russo-Japanese War was led by the Ministry of Home Affairs as a movement toward reform of provision of administrative services by individual municipalities, particularly small towns and villages.

The national government encouraged moves in the directions of maintenance of solidarity in the local communities, practice of thrift, improvements to agricultural work, and protection of tenant farmers.

Section 6: Conclusion: The Taisho Era and later

After the end of the First World War, administrative systems adapted, without undergoing drastic changes, to developments such as transformation in society, globalization and industrialization during the interwar period, and the severe natural disaster of the Great Kanto Earthquake.

As shown on this slide, these changes can be traced through review of the establishment of new administrative organizations.

During the Taisho Period, transformations in society led to the reorganization of agencies to provide new administrative services.

After the Great Kanto Earthquake, in response to increasingly severe labor issues, a succession of agencies was established including the Imperial Metropolitan Reconstruction Agency, the Ministry of Railways to oversee the railway industry, and the Social Welfare Bureau in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In addition, due to the impact of general mobilization by the countries involved in the First World War, consideration was given to the birth of a General Mobilization Bureau, which resulted in the creation of small-scale organizations such as the Cabinet Bureau of Munitions.

However, at that time, these were operated merely on an experimental basis, and they did not take firm root.

It was only after the Sino-Japanese War that such general mobilization agencies would make comprehensive economic plans and vigorously promote them.

In 1925, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry was spun off from the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce.

This ministry would play a central role in the general mobilization structure, and after the Second World War, it would be reorganized into the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, which would propel Japan's rapid economic growth during the 1960s.

While changes to administration during the Taisho Era seem to be precursors of later developments, they probably could be described as the sprouts of future changes.

At the start of this lecture, we noted that contemporary Japan is a centralized, unitary state even though its population exceeds 100 million.

In conclusion as well, let's look back at the process of modernization from the perspective of population once again.

As the graph on this slide shows, from the time of general mobilization, when population growth was a national policy, through Japan's loss in the Second World War and the following period of rapid economic growth, the nation's population was increasing.

Also, after the war, the administrative model shifted from Germany to the United States.

In addition, in the 21st century, Japan has entered a new phase characterized by an aging population and a low birth rate.

This has led to reforms in areas such as information technology, globalization, and transparency successively becoming political issues.

While the modernization of Japan's administrative system occurred under conditions of a growing population, the issues rising to the surface today are those of administrative changes amid a decreasing population.

What kinds of features will these have? While no conclusion is yet apparent, it is likely that modernization will continue along axes such as advances in information technology.