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TAMING THE MANDARIN: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE LOOMING ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN JAPAN

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S. BANJI FAJONYOMI

Giving fast erosion of Japanese bureaucracy's prestige in the eyes of its citizens and the likely focus of impending administrative reforms to cover bureaucratic attitude also as the context, the author identifies and discusses some major reforms issues having a bearing on Japanese bureaucracy's behavioural aspects, such as excessive loyalty to their own department, sectionalism in recruitment and career pattern, resistance to change, predominance in the functioning of government and the need to gear its role to Japan's future needs. For readers' benefit, he also provides additional inputs on selectively relevant conceptual framework of his study, instances of recent bureaucratic failures in Japan, mode of institutionalisation of bureaucracy in Japan with its characteristic features (i.e., *elitism and its small size), and a brief resume on administrative reforms adopted earlier.*

INTRODUCTION

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM is part of the evolution of the governmental system. Since there is no administrative system that is perfect, efforts are made, from time to time, to revise its structure and process to accommodate new governmental and citizen demands. The situation in a country like Japan becomes more problematic when one considers the established image of the public bureaucracy which is considered as one of the most elitist in the world. Ironically, calls are rife from politicians and citizens alike for a reform of this bureaucracy. The evidence that this will be done became glaring when a proposal to this effect was submitted by the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) administrative reform promotion headquarters. This is not the first time that the public bureaucracy will be reorganised after the departure of the Americans, who overhauled it immediately after World War II. Some modifications were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. But since 1981, there have been more committed policies with the establishment of one Provisional Commission for Administrative Reform (PCAR) and three Provisional Councils for Promotion of Administrative Reforms. The recommendations of these bodies have served as guidelines for some of the changes that were witnessed in the bureaucracy in the last 15 years.

Significance of Propsoed Reforms in Japan

The proposed reform is significant in two ways. *One,* it is coming at a time when the public bureaucracy is fast losing its prestige among the citizens. Sheryl Wudunn grasped the current situation when he wrote:

> Kanryo, or 'bureaucrat', has generally been a neutral term in the minds of many Japanese, but in recent months it has become a tainted title. After a spate of colossal mistakes, the national trust in the bureaucracy has collapsed.[1]

Two, the reform envisaged is going to focus attention not only on improving the organisation and procedures of government but also on changing the intra- and inter-organizational attitudes of bureaucrats as a group.

It is no exaggeration that Japan maintains one of the most powerful bureaucracies in the world. This role is bolstered by the contribution of the bureaucracy not only toward what is generally referred to as "the Japanese Miracle", that is, the rapid economic expansion the country witnessed after World War II, but also toward the general welfare of the citizens as a whole. The bureaucracy is the originator of most laws enacted by the Diet; it administers the laws; it coordinates the activities of all sectors of the society (private industry inclusive) through implementation of prescribed rules and regulations; it disburses grants and subsidies, which makes beneficiaries to fear rather than respect it; and finally, it shapes the future of the country through its intensive research and findings.[2] These have earned the organisation the high esteem it enjoys. This notwithstanding, in its process of transmutation, it has slided from "a supposedly rational and efficient system to the one which cannot learn from its errors and has, consequently, become the epitome of rigidity and oppressive control".[3]

Objectives and Conceptual Setting of the Study

It is based on this development that this study sets out to do the following. *One,* examine briefly the essential characteristics of previous reform efforts and their achievements. *Two,* raise and discuss some issues within the public bureaucracy which we feel should demand closer attention of the reformers.

Focus on Institutional and Attitudinal Aspects of Administrative Reforms

This article, because of its scope, will not enter into any debate as regards the definition of the concept of administrative reform. This is because the term, over the years, has generated debates among social scientists and yet there exists no

[1]Sheryl Wudunn, "Japan's Bureaucrats Fumble Away the Traditional Center of Power", *International Herald Tribune,* Tuesday, May 7, 1996, p.4.

[2]S.R. Maheshwari, *The Higher Civil Service in Japan,* New Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1987, p.3.

[3]Ramashray Roy, "The Quick-sand of Weberian Bureaucracy", in A.D. Pant and Shiva K. Gupta (eds.), *Bureaucracy, Development and Change: Contemporary Perspectives,* Segment Book Distributors, 1990.

consensus on its meaning. According to Caiden:

> The study of administrative reform is handicapped by the absence of a universally accepted definition. The indiscriminate use of the term has led to confusion and to difficulties in setting parameters for research and theorizing. ... The term has been applied, for instance, to all improvements in administration ... to general administrative overhauls in difficult circumstances ... to specific remedies for maladministration...to any suggestion for better government ... and to intentions of self-styled administrative reformers....[4]

For the purpose of this study, we will adapt a simple definition proffered by Jon S.T. Quah,who defines administrative reform as:

> ... a deliberate attempt to change both: *(a)* the structure and procedures of the public bureaucracy *(i.e.*, reorganization or the institutional aspect), and *(b)* the attitudes and behaviour of the public bureaucrats involved *(i.e.*, the attitudinal aspect), in order to promote organizational effectiveness and attain national development goals.[5]

The definition seems to be more pertinent to our objective because of its including institutional and attitudinal aspects of administrative reform which are exactly the central focus of the proposed reforms. Administrative reforms are normally directed at correcting some apparent lacuna in public bureaucracies. This may arise, according to Caiden, whenever: "*(a)* a public body fails to meet the demands placed on it, that is, things do not get done at all or are done below previous or potential standards of performance, *(b)* it collapses under extraordinary demands or unexpected events, *(c)* it cannot adjust to new situations and, being too occupied with the immediate, fails to anticipate future demands, and *(d)* it does not adopt the most effective methods and is out of touch with the latest developments in its field".[6] Of the four reasons advanced here, the first one seems to be fully relevant to the Japanese case while the second and third can also be partially held responsible. In our opinion, the last reason does not apply to the actual situation.

BACKGROUND OF JAPANESE BUREAUCRACY

Instances of Recent Failures

In recent years, the public bureaucracy in Japan has failed to live up to the demands placed on it. Accordingly, it has acted in many cases below the expected performance of an elite bureaucracy. This is evident in a number of errors

[4]Gerald E. Caiden, *Administrative Reform,* London, The Penguin Press, 1969, p.1.

[5]Jon S.T. Quah, "Administrative Reform: A Conceptual Analysis" in Mohammad Mohabbat Khan (ed.), *Administrative Reform: Theoretical Perspective,* Dhacca, Center For Administrative Studies, 1976, p.93.

[6]Gerald E. Caiden, *Public Administration,* Pacific Palisades, (California), Palisades Publishers, 1982 (2nd Edition), p. 93.

committed by the bureaucracy which has seriously embarrassed the government whose reliance on the former in policy formulation is more than 90 per cent. Three instances immediately come to mind. One, in the 1980s, bureaucrats at the Health Ministry disregarded warnings that the heated blood given to hemophiliacs was contaminated with the virus that causes AIDS. The Ministry continued many years after to resist import of sterilized blood and kept on administering the contaminated blood. This mistake has led to the death of many Japanese and many others are left infected with the HIV virus. *Two,* in January 1995, when Japan was hit by the Hanshin Earthquake, the speed at which the emergency services intervened was too slow than expected by the Japansese. This slow response, according to some, accounted for most of the casualties. *Three,* the Ministry of Finance, that was reputed for its strict management approach of the nation's treasury, closed its eyes while banks and mortgage lenders accumulated bad loans totalling about 685 billion yens. The Ministry has now said that the government should use taxpayers' money to help cover losses incurred by the failed mortgage institutions.[7] One of the reasons advanced for these shortcomings is large size of the government and the obstacles imposed by the vertical structure of the administration.[8]

Institutionalisation of Japanese Bureaucracy and Its Characteristic Feature

Enjoying of 'Assigned Autonomy' Status

One thing is to make recommendations for reforms, another thing is for them to be followed and this has been the bane of many reform efforts. Implementation of reforms is more difficult in institutional than in instrumental bureaucracies.[9] A public bureaucracy can be institutionalised in two major ways: either it is "created as an autonomous entity, free from political control" or it develops "autonomy over time by outlasting several generations of political leaders".[10] In case of Japan, the first way may have led to the institutionalisation of its bureaucracy. During the occupation years, 1945-1952, by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces (SCAF), under the command of the Americans, a comprehensive reform of the bureaucracy was carried out, principally based on the American model. One of the features of this reform was establishment in 1948 of the National Personnel Authority (NPA), modelled after the Civil Service Commission of the United States before 1976. The NPA is non-partisan and highly technical in its approach to personnel issues. It is made up of three commissioners, who enjoy vast powers in administrative and personnel management and are not in any way connected to any political party. To guarantee the integrity of its commissioners, their appointment, though proposed by the cabinet, is subject to approval by both houses of the Diet

[7] *See Japan Times*, Thursday, June 6, 1996, p.1.

[8] Kazumi Yamamoto, "Government and Civil Service in Japan", Kasumi Yamamoto, Kazuhisa Matsui and Toshihiro Kudo, *A Comparison of Government and Civil Service in Asia (Region I)*, Tokyo, Institute of Developing Economies Advanced School (IDEAS), November 1995, p.13.

[9] For the difference between the two, see Wesley E. Bjur and Gerald E. Caiden, "Administrative Reform and Institutional Bureaucracies", in Mohammad Mohabbat Khan (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 109-33.

[10] *Ibid.*, p.118

and confirmation by the Emperor.[11] This process, which is termed "assigned autonomy", is designed with the intention to give the public bureaucracy "a deliberate mandate to develop an independent value position which mediates between competing social interests. It is expected to enforce its own derived values made in the larger public interest, and to see that they are followed. Such assigned autonomy leads fairly quickly to institutional status".[12] The bureaucrats in Japan have a similar conception of their role and have been conducting themselves in like manner. Traditionally, bureaucrats not only formulated desirable policies, but they also constrained both politicians and business leaders to adhere to these. In a research that was carried out in 1984, it was discovered that 27 per cent of higher bureaucrats and 40 per cent of middle bureaucrats consider their specific role to be that of coordinating competing interest and views.[13]

Another characteristic of an institutional bureaucracy, which is particular to Japanese bureaucracy, is elitism. The elitist position is maintained through a highly competitive recruitment procedure,the small size, prohibition of lateral entry to its ranks and carefully indoctrinating its members.[14] The recruitment procedure is best described in the following lines:

> Membership is attained through what is perhaps the most rigorous process of selection anywhere in the world. The process consists of a series of ruthlessly competitive examinations, which may begin indirectly, as early as kindergarten.... From the simple counting tests and parent interviews, which are part of the admission process to a prestigious kindergarten, to the nerve-wracking examinations for university entrance, academic performance is the criterion for advancement at every step. After graduating from a university, a would-be bureaucrat must once again score highly—this time in the ministry's own qualifying examination. Those who succeed are surely the cream of the crop, and it is no wonder that the ministries take such pains in preparing their newly appointed employees for their future leadership role.[15]

Smaller Size

The size of the bureaucracy, if compared to those of the Western countries is relatively small. The number of public employees per 1,000 population is 40. It is 80 in the United Kingdom, 81 in the United States, and 120 in France.[16] And this is bound to decrease further with the proposed reform.

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[11]See Article 5 of the *National Public Service Law*, 1947.

[12]Wesley E. Bjur and Gerald E. Caiden, *op.cit.*, p.118.

[13]For a compreshensive analysis of the result of that research, see Michio Muramatsu and Ellis S. Krauss, "Bureaucrats and Politicians in Policymaking: The Case of Japan", *The Americal Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 1, March 1984, pp.126-46.

[14]These same characteristics have been used to describe the elite character of the civil service of Pakistan by Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, see Wesley E. Bjur and Gerald E. Caiden, *op.cit.*, p.121.

[15]Japan Culture Institute, "The Bureaucracy: Japan's Pool of Leadership", Japan Culture Institute, (ed.), *Politics and Economics in Contemporary Japan*, Tokyo, Japan Culture Institute, 1979, pp.79-80.

[16]Kazumi Yamamoto, *op.cit.*, p.4.

SOME REFORM MEASURES ADOPTED EARLIER

Given the background of this bureaucracy, it is expected that the proposed reform meets with some form of resistance. This, we will examine in the later part of the article. Let us here consider some of the reforms carried out in the preceding years.

After the end of World War II, the bureaucracy witnessed radical reorganisation based on the new Constitution and the democratisation process envisaged by the Allied Forces. This led to the enactment of the Cabinet Law of 1945, the National Public Service Law (NPSL) of 1947 and the National Government Organization Law of 1948. The central focus of these laws was how to improve efficiency in government business while at the same time coping with the demands of a vibrant economy. In the sixties, efforts were directed at rationalisation of the administrative structure. This came to a head with the passing into law of the Staff Number Control Law in 1969. Accordingly, the number of national government employees in ministries and agencies has decreased from 899,333 in 1967 to 861,233 in 1993.[17] This staff reduction exercise was further accentuated in the 1980s as a result of the oil crisis of the 1970s.

Process of Reforms Since 1981—Setting up of Provisional Councils for Reform

Since 1981, there has been a steady progress of administrative reforms based on the recommendations of various committees. The first of the committees was the Provisional Commission for Administrative Reform (PCAR) which was inaugurated in March 1981. The Commission declared the fundamental goals of the administration as: (1) Construction of welfare society full of vitality, and (2) Positive contribution to the international community.[18] It went ahead to recommended ways of promoting the necessary administrative reforms: (1) res- ponding to changes, (2) ensuring comprehensiveness, (3) achieving simplification and efficiency, and (4) gaining trust.[19] Three basic philosophies informed these directions. These were movements from: *(a)* a patronal, patriarchal and protective government to a government that is based on principle of citizens' self-help; *(b)* a direct execution or intervention by the government to the privatization and deregulation; and *(c)* the need to transfer the authorities of the central government to the local governments.[20] In its two years of existence, the PCAR submitted five reports which included various recommendations, most of which were subsequently implemented by the national government.

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[17]See Toshiyuki Masujima, "Organization Management, Staff Number Control, and Coordination Mechanism", in Toshiyuki Masujima and Minoru O'uchi (eds.), *The Management and Reform of Japanese Government*, Tokyo, The Institute of Administrative Management, 1995, p.26.

[18]*The Administrative Management and Reform in Japan*, Tokyo, The Institute of Administrative Management, March 1995, p.29.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20]See Toshiyuki Masujima, "The RINCHO Administrative Reform", in Toshiyuki Masujima and Minoru O'uchi (eds.), *op.cit.*, p.189.

It was in the spirit of these initial reforms that the First, Second and Third Provisional Councils for the Promotion of Administrative Reform (PCPAR) were set up in 1983, 1987 and 1990, respectively, to monitor the Reports of the PCAR and make recommendations for further reforms. Between 1981 and March 1994, there were 205 administrative reform laws submitted by the government to the Diet. The aftermaths of this are the various transformations in the administration and government of Japan. Some of the major features of these reforms during this period are: *one*, the privatization of three public corporations (The Big Three), including the Japanese National Railway; *two*, devolution of authority and financial power to local authorities through the elimination of undue interference in local administration; *three*, reorganisation of the administrative structure and manpower control through strengthening of overall coordination mechanisms by creating the Management and Coordination Agency, and reduction in the number of national public employees by about 39,000 between 1982 and 1984; and *four*, improvement in the administrative processes through the enactment of the Administrative Procedure Law and establishment of criterion for disclosure of administrative information.

MAJOR REFORM ISSUES

There are two major issues that should preoccupy the reformers. The first one relates to sectionalism within the bureaucracy. The second issue concerns the question of reinforcing political control.

Checking Extreme Loyalty to Own Department

Japanese bureaucrats are known for extreme loyalty to their individual ministry. Though this "home turf" mentality is not peculiar to Japan, it is its magnitude that is outrageous. Many bureaucrats place their ministries' interests above national interests. As B.C. Koh has rightly pointed out:

> The propensity of Japanese bureaucrats to engage in territorial disputes is by no means unique. Jurisdictional disputes occur among bureaucratic organizations everywhere. What is nonetheless noteworthy is their frequency and scope in Japan. Their manifestation not merely between but also within organisation does seem to be peculiarly Japanese.[21]

This attitude has been attributed to the patterns of behaviour characteristic of th Japanese society. Albert Craig refers to it as the informal system, that is, one of the patterns of social relations that affect official behaviour. He explains that:

> Two aspects of the informal system are so important to the way Japanese government functions that they merit special comment. One is the vertical personal tie; the dysfunction associated with this is cliquism. The other is the

[21]B.C. Koh, *Japan's Administrative Elite*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989, p.262.

> solidarity of the office, which gives rise to interoffice jealousies and struggles over jurisdictions.[22]

In these struggles over jurisdictional boundaries, foreign powers have been used by one ministry to put pressure on the other ministry or agency over ministerial interests. An example of this is the perennial struggle between Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) over who should have the decisive voice on foreign aid issues.[23] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been using the United States pressure as a powerful political weapon in advancing its interest against those of other agencies in the perennial domestic political battles.[24]

Removal of Sectionalism in Recruitment and Career Pattern

This sectionalism is heightened by two factors: the system of recruitment and the career pattern of bureaucrats. The process of recruitment in Japan is very crucial since there exists a tradition of lifetime employment. So every ministry is very strict to those who join their organization.

The principle guiding recruitment can be found in Article 33, paragraph one of the NPSL which states that:

> Appointment of an employee shall ... be made entirely on the basis of the result of his examination and the merit of his performance of duties or other demonstrated abilities.

The relevant recruitment examinations for the national public service, except for foreign service personnel and foreign service experts, are organised by the NPA and open to everybody with equal opportunity. The essence of the examination is to judge the abilities of persons seeking to perform public duties. There are three distinct levels of examinations based on the level of education attained. The highest level, Type I *(Isshu)* since 1985, is meant for graduates of four-year colleges; the intermediate level, Type II *(Nishu)*, is for graduates of junior colleges and the lower level, Type III *(Sanshu)*, is for high school graduates.[25] In the higher (Type I) examination, candidates are required to specialise in one of about 28 subjects provided, from public administration to law, engineering and to the wider sciences. They are subjected to rigorous tests, both multiple choice and essay type on general knowledge and their choice of specialisation. The names and scores of successful candidates are compiled in the order of merit by the NPA in the eligibility list, which is sent to the ministries.

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[22]See Albert M. Craig, "The 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.11.

[23]See Robert M. Orr, Jr., *The Emergence of Japan's Foreign Aid Power*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990.

[24]See T.J. Pempel, "Unbundling 'Japan Inc.': The Changing Dynamics of Japanese Policy Formation", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, p.303.

[25]B.C. Koh, *op.cit.*, p.73.

The ministries and agencies have the final say in recruitment. Each ministry accepts the list, conducts interviews for the candidates and selects the ones it feels are best for their organisation. This process is not without 'favoritism' as each ministry aspires to get the best available candidates. B.C. Koh, for example, writes:

> Government ministries and agencies are known to seek outstanding candidates from time to time, utilizing their *knoe* (connections). *Senpai* (seniors) from the same university, especially from athletic or other clubs, and professors can play the role of match-maker. A candidate who had earned the third highest scores in the higher examination in the mid-1960s, for example, received a phone call from a *senpai*, a former member of Todai's English Speaking Society. Over lunch, the *senpai* made a pitch for the Finance Ministry, which the candidate eventually chose over the Ministry of International Trade and Industry.[26]

The recruitment exercise is so tough that less than 10 per cent of applicants are always successful. Moreover, passing the examination is not a guarantee for employment in the public service. In 1993, for example, only 674 candidates out of 1,863 that passed were actually employed.

Recent attempts by the government to change the recruitment pattern, so that, all career bureaucrats would be hired by one body, compared with the current practice of each ministry hiring separately, is being blocked by bureaucrats.[27]

There is, however, another mode of recruitment which is evaluation *(senko)*. A close examination of the recruitment pattern in recent years shows that more candidates are gaining entry into the public service through this method. Nevertheless, this is rampant with specialised personnels, like educators, health care specialists than with the Administrative Service I positions.

The career pattern is fashioned after the principle of lifetime employment within single organization. Once employed, bureaucrats pass their entire career in the same ministry. This ministry is considered as an extension of one's family. As C.W. Kiefer has pointed out:

> When a man's occupation directly involves his family... there is little problem of conflicting loyalties, *but if he is a member of a bureaucratic organization,* his employer must have some guarantee of his personal commitment to his job; otherwise, a bureaucracy cannot function. The response to this problem in Japan has been to make use of concepts of loyalty learned in the family; that is, one in which the individual normally commits himself to a job for life.... The paradox of the Japanese bureaucratic system is that it makes *more* demands on members' loyalty..., thus placing the bureaucratic employee in a double

[26]B.C. Koh, *op.cit.*, p.78.

[27]This is an attempt by the government to break the tendency of bureaucrats giving priority to their ministries' goals above national interest. Bureaucrats presume that with the change "civil servants' morale would decline if they were posted to a ministry or agency they do not want to join" and that "the plan would not allow officials to build up expertise in an area". See *The Daily Yomiuru,* May 31, 1996, p.3.

mind, because family loyalty must be extended to the bureaucratic setting without undermining the family itself. Undermining familism would mean undermining the fabric of bureaucracy.[28]

Checking Resistance to Change

The government is not indifferent to this problem. Efforts are made to diffuse tension, though on a small scale, through personnel exchange among ministries and agencies.

In the proposal submitted to the ruling coalition,[29] the project team recommended two ways of reducing, if not scrapping, sectionalism. Firstly, it recommends what it calls a "blanket-hiring formula" which would put the hiring of all career bureaucrats, whatever their ministry, under the control of one body instead of the current practice of allowing each ministry to hire separately. Under this arrangement, the body can post anybody to any ministry where it feels his services may be needed not minding the candidates preference. This will contradict the current dispensation where career bureaucrats prepare for their career in a particular ministry right from their elementary schools. Secondly, it is recommended that officers from the level of Section Chiefs and above should be periodically transferred every five years and that officials should not serve in the same ministry or agency for more that ten years. This measure too, if taken, will be a departure from the actual practice of 'getting married' to single ministry throughout one's career.

As one would expect, bureaucrats have been mounting pressures against the new plans. In a survey of nine ministries and one agency, carried out *Yomiuri Shimbum*, all of them disapproved of the new hiring arrangement. Most of the bureaucrats see it as a way of killing professionalism so as to probably place bureaucracy in a secondary position to politics.[30] This leads us to the second issue.

Diluting Predominance of Bureaucracy to Reinforce Political Control

One other sphere that the reform needs to touch is that of reinforcing political control of the bureaucracy and making it more responsive to citizens demands. The fact that the bureaucracy is the most powerful in Japan cannot be denied. Let us forget the 'ruling triad principle' which postulates that the country's power elite is a triad of conservative politicians, leading businessmen, and high-ranking bureaucrats. The way the system is operated gives bureaucrats the privilege to make most of the country's policies. Ministers facing questions from the Diet are reputed to have said, "Since this is an important issue, I must turn the floor over to the government officials"[31]. Bureaucrats pass their time preparing in advance likely

[28]Christie W. Kiefer, "The Psychological Interdependence of Family, School, and Bureaucracy in Japan", in T.S. Lebra and W.P. Lebra (eds.), *Japanese Culture and Behaviour: Selected Readings*, Honolulu, East-West Center, 1974, p.350.

[29]For some of these recommendations, See "Reform of Government Bureaucracy is a Task that cannot Wait", *The Daily Yomiuri* , June 5, 1996, p.7.

[30]See "Bureaucrats Slam New Hiring Plan", *The Daily Yomiuri*, May 31, 1996, p.3.

[31]See Sheryl Wudunn, *op.cit.*

questions to be asked in the Diet and their answers. This statement explains the actual situation. According to Kazumi Yamamoto:

> ... when the government is about to prepare important policies, they set up advisory councils. To give the impression that a national consensus is being formed, the councils consist of representatives of the major parties, business, labor, powerful interest groups, academia, and the general public. After the government receives the report, policies are implemented. In actuality, the report is often drafted by bureaucrats and is generally approved along lines the bureaucracy desires.[32]

This type of relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is born out of the fact that during the occupation years, the principal rivals of bureaucrats, the military and the *Zabaitsu* were disbanded. The bureaucracy, with the belief that it would serve as a basis for building a new Japan, was left in tact by the Allied Forces. In one word, the bureaucracy in modern Japan predates democracy. Ministerial control of the bureaucracy is strictly restricted. Majority of laws, unlike in the United States, are drafted by bureaucrats. According to Kazumi Yamamoto:

> Between 1947 and 1988, cabinet submissions (of bills) accounted for 68% of all bills submitted, and members' bills accounted for the remaining 32%. Of the bills passed, 85% were cabinet submissions and only 15% were members' bills.[33]

Since most of the cabinet bills are drafted by bureaucrats, it goes without exaggeration that the bureaucracy is too predominant in political affairs. This fact is buttressed by the fact that the Ministry of Health officials were able to cover up the HIV blood contamination scandal for many years until recently when Naoto Kan, the minister, exposed it. The responsibility for the scandal has been ironically bureaucratic rather than political.

The pre-eminence of bureaucrats was further accentuated by the fact that:

> ... a national consensus regarding the primacy of development goals, which, along with an institutional legacy of the prewar and wartime era, helped to sustain a "developmental state". The adoption of an "industrial policy" and the use of "market-conforming methods of state intervention" in the economy, including "administrative guidance", were further sources, or perhaps symptoms, of the formidable power of Japan's administrative elite.[34]

Though there are speculations that this influence may have dwindled as a result of

[32]Kazumi Yamamoto, *op.cit.*, p.10.
[33]*Ibid.*
[34]B.C. Koh, *op.cit.*, pp. 256-7.

the know-how acquired by politicians since the mid-1970s, evidence abounds that bureaucrats guide their privileges jealously.

Gearing Role of Bureaucracy to Changed Needs

Unfortunately, the modern Japanese society, and especially, the international economic system, no longer warrant that type of role for government bureaucracies. The post-war economic boom is currently in recession and there have been international criticisms of Japanese trade surpluses and regulatory schemes. We are now in the era of an open market economy. As one commentator remarked:

> A market economy means leaving the task of coordinating conflicting interests to market forces. No matter how bright bureaucrats are, they can no longer deal with the complexity of entangled interests. It is even more difficult to set national goals that will be supported by the public.[35]

Given the current dispensation, let us look at what role should be envisaged for the bureaucrats in Japan. According to Nakamura, there are three. These are one, collection of accurate and detailed information on the economy, politics, foreign affairs and military matters that can guide the choice of citizens in election periods and that of businessmen in market situations; two, modification and close monitoring of competition rules in the market economy in accordance with world trends; and three, presentation of policy options for the future.

To reduce bureaucrats to this role is surely not going to be a paper work in the form of administrative reform. It demands a change of attitudes from the political class too. As Weber points out:

> Political leaders, concerned as they are with policy-making, must contend for supremacy not only in elections and legislatures but also in bureaucracy. Without an effective control over administrative organs, success in the struggle for votes and in legislative decision-making can be elusive.... If political leaders fail in exercising control over day-to-day administration, bureaucracy may usurp the power of political decision-making and turn problems of politics into problems of administration.[36]

CONCLUSION

What we have done in this article is to examine the possible direction of the proposed administrative reform in Japan. We have only concentrated our efforts on the attitudinal aspects of the reform. This is because, whatever structural changes that may take place, without an accompanying behavioural modification of the concerned actors, it may not achieve any concrete goals. In this regard, we have picked on the bureaucracy, which, based on the opinion of many Japanese, needs

[35] Jin Nakamura, *The Daily Yomiuri*, June 5, 1996, p.7.

[36] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, New York, Harcourt Brace Co., 1948, p.108.

certain basic modifications. It is the belief of this author that these modifications would be better if directed toward: *one*, reducing sectionalism within and among ministries through a revaluation of the recruitment system and career pattern, and *two*, a reinforcement of political control over bureaucracy, to make the organization more responsive to the actual social and economic situation in the country. This, for sure, may be difficult to do, but it seems to be the most reasonable step to take given the morale of the public. With elections likely to come up within the next one year, the reform may be used as an electoral joker by the Liberal Democratic Party.