

POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN JAPAN: SPECIFICITY AND EXPERIENCE OF COUNTERACTION

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Abstract. *Japan is a significant example of a state with a low level of everyday corruption but constantly facing major corruption scandals. In other words, Japan has a high level of political corruption, despite the low level of corruption in society as a whole. This article describes the main reasons for this situation and the experience of fight against the critical mechanisms of political corruption in Japan.*

Keywords: *Political corruption, political culture, post-war Japan, corruption scandals, Japanese politics.*

Japan is characterized by an intense symbiosis of politicians, officials, and entrepreneurs - the "iron triangle" [1]. In the post-war era (1950-the 1990s, from the establishment of the LDP's hegemony to its completion and the beginning of large-scale reforms), it turned out to be the basis of the country's political system, giving rise to a paradox. In a country with extremely low common corruption, stable mechanisms of political corruption have developed. At the same time, Japan is considered one of the least corrupt countries in the world [2]. This is confirmed by the Corruption Perceptions Index: 19th in a sample of 179 countries for 2020 [3]. Japan is among the countries with the lowest levels of corruption.

The development of corruption in the political sphere of Japan during the "1955 system" was facilitated by the very structure of the political system. Parliament became the main body of power in the country. However, an essential factor in the development of the Japanese political system was the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan in 1955-1994.

Under the conditions of the dominance of one party, the following situation has developed: the candidates for the deputy seat belonged to the same political party. Their political agendas could not have been very different, but in reality, they often reflected the struggle by a faction in the ruling party. Therefore, the chances of success of a particular candidate depended only on the scale of the election campaign [4]. Elections be-

came more and more expensive due to the struggle of factions; politicians could not afford to finance the campaign on their own. Therefore, the practice of resorting to external sources of financing has become widespread: to political funds. It is essential that the 1948 Political Funds Regulation Act laid down this principle of campaign finance. Political foundations raised money for specific politicians. The party itself did not have official solid donation sources. The factions that inevitably emerged within the framework of the only ruling party provided their funding. As a result, by the end of the period under review, the actual races of LDP candidates exceeded the legal limits by 6-13 times and even higher [4].

Therefore, political foundations has become an instrument of influence of big business on politicians. Campaign finance is an essential tool for influencing business policy. This is the basis for building close relationships. The winning candidate provides benefits to sponsors. Politicians lobbied for business interests to finance their activities and future campaigns from the business side. By the beginning of the 90s, the most influential deputies collected funds through 20-50 organizations [5].

For a long time, society was tolerant of the established practice, and the legislation allowed many loopholes. Moreover, for a full-fledged interaction of a Japanese deputy with voters, this also requires severe costs. Following the Japanese political culture, they should organize various events; they are expected to

give gifts to the population and local influence groups. A deputy who does not interact with the population and local influence groups will not fulfill his functions [4].

The spread of corruption in the bureaucratic apparatus was influenced by the peculiarities of the civil service system. Career advancement is slow, and retirement is as early as 64 years old. Reaching the age limit for civil service, high-ranking bureaucrats are sent from the state apparatus to private companies [4]. This practice is called amakudari - "descent from heaven to earth." This is beneficial for companies because they get access to the connections of an official in high circles. This gives them protection and benefits to help them influence decision-making. It is also crucial that young officials honor their senior colleagues [2].

Amakudari leads to inefficient use of funds. There is a practice of creating parastatal companies to receive large sums from the government for retired officials. In 2009, government funding for the Amakudari-supporting corporations totaled 700 billion yen. So it is beneficial for officials as well. The Democratic Party of Japan considers amakudari corruption; this data is provided by it [1].

Amakudari leads to cooperation in government tenders - Kansei Dango. Companies receive non-public information, including offers from their competitors. This scheme blossomed in the post-war era. The construction industry is most affected by it. Officials often viewed such companies as a place for their amakudari. In Japan, the state intervenes in the economy through the allocation of huge funds for public works. For example, for the construction of roads. The private companies that do this are linked to the state [1].

The business became a part of this system as it provided the replenishment of political funds. And politicians in the interests of the company could influence the work of the bureaucracy. This gave the business leverage over the executive and representative authorities. Bureaucrats often occupied critical positions in the party and, therefore, influenced the government course's main priorities, taking into account business interests.

The change in the situation took place precisely under the influence of public opinion. By the beginning of the 90s, a whole series of major corruption scandals had taken place in Japan. They involved not only the political elite but also the bureaucracy. This fact caused intense outrage in public opinion.

A major scandal in 1989 ended with the resignation of several deputy ministers. And in 1993, over another scandal, the Minister of National Welfare and several governors were detained. Society was discouraged. For the next five years, there were proceedings on charges against the Ministry of Finance, People's Welfare, Transport, and Communications. In 1998, a particularly revealing scandal led to punishment for abuse of power of 32 officials, the resignation of 5, detention of 4, suicide 1, and penalties from 80 more. The scandals showed the need for change. Corruption has hit the finance ministry the most, which controls taxes, budgets, and finances. Defense and diplomacy were also affected. The 1998 arms trade scandal led to the resignation of 4 people and the punishment of 42 [2].

The laws were vague in their interpretation and did not always imply sanctions for violations. If a politician got into a scandal, he arranged theatrical repentance and resignation, which did not stop his career. Even the figures of the biggest scandals returned to important posts. The existing order suited the LDP, but the opposition was too weak. In addition, the opposition itself adopted such rules of the game. Gift laws and lobbying of budgetary injections into the district kept even burned-out corrupt officials afloat if they were effective in this. The LDP fiercely opposed the reforms, crushing dissenters in the party. Only the defeat in the 1993 elections brought about a change.

The crisis and the removal of the LDP from power led to several coalition governments' formation and impetus to reforms. In 1993-1994, the Political Foundations Law was amended to limit the total funding of individuals by companies. Against this background, the fight against corruption intensified.

In 1994, the electoral system was changed to solve the problem of competition among

party members. The middle districts were abolished, replaced by small communities with one possible party [4].

To solve the problem with political funds, the Law on State Support of Political Parties was developed in 1994, which established budget funding for parties with more than 5 MPs in Parliament or 2% in elections. Half of the party's work, a quarter - for the elections to the two chambers of Parliament. In 1996, the total was 30.9 billion yen. Another step to reduce the cost of elections is to limit the election campaign to 12 days, determines the distribution of campaigning and the number of points. In 1998, a ban on the financing of individual politicians by commercial companies weakened the most substantial lobbying formations in Parliament [5].

To solve the problem with the services of politicians to business, the Law on Punishment for Mediation Services was passed in 2001, prohibiting the activities of deputies and even secretaries in favor of individuals and companies. The ban also affected representatives of the prefectural and municipal authorities-up to 3 years in prison for help in obtaining a lease, contract, purchase, and sale [5].

To solve the gift-giving issue, the Law on the Ethics of Public Service was adopted in 2000. Restrictions on gifts and services from entrepreneurs related to the activities of employees. Monitoring compliance with these standards. The Ethical Investigation Committee is organized within the departments in the Staff Affairs Council. It can investigate and impose penalties. A detailed definition of an interested person and a list of unethical actions to avoid arbitrary interpretations are

given. All violations of ethics are punished [2].

To combat the practice of amakudari, an amendment to the Civil Service Law was passed in 2007 to restrict amakudari. For two years, it is prohibited to hold a position related to the direct benefit of the official's work for five years. Therefore, officials first take another place, wait two years, and then perform amakudari. The Amakudari is tenacious because of the need to dispose of age officials, far fewer than high positions [2].

So, let's summarize.

The merger of big business with politics and bureaucracy in post-war Japan turned out to be natural since, under the conditions of that time, it was the optimal solution to the objective problems of the country's political structure. Society was also very tolerant of the corrupt manifestations of this symbiosis.

The changes took place in the context of a general crisis in the power of the LDP. High-profile corruption scandals were covered by the press and changed public opinion. This forced the government to launch reforms that disabled the fundamental corruption mechanisms of the Iron Triangle.

But this symbiosis has not been eliminated, only complicated. Corruption scandals involving high-ranking officials continue; Japan does not have an independent anti-corruption agency. The government is trying to cover up scandals, behaves softly, and does not close the remaining loopholes in the legislation.

Thus, political corruption has become a powerful phenomenon for natural reasons. And even a developed civil society and decades of anti-corruption measures did not disrupt the work of the mechanisms.

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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ КОРРУПЦИЯ В ЯПОНИИ: СПЕЦИФИКА И ОПЫТ ПРОТИВОДЕЙСТВИЯ

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***Аннотация.** Япония является удивительным примером страны с низким уровнем бытовой коррупции, но постоянно сталкивающейся с крупными коррупционными скандалами. Иными словами, в Японии высокий уровень политической коррупции, несмотря на низкий уровень коррупции в обществе в целом. В этой статье описываются основные причины такой ситуации и опыт борьбы с ключевыми механизмами коррупции в политической сфере Японии.*

***Ключевые слова:** политическая коррупция, политическая культура, послевоенная Япония, коррупционные скандалы, политика Японии.*