

Decline of the Ozawa Kingdom

Kazunori Kawamura and Hiroaki Ito

1. Introduction

Japan's 46th general elections (*Shugiin Sosenkyo*) were held in December 2012, resulting in the return of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, *Jiyu Minshu To*) as the ruling party and the defeat of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, *Minshu To*). Underlying the DPJ's sweeping loss was its lack of administrative management ability. Another reason was the widespread defection of DPJ Diet members who had supported Ichiro Ozawa. When Ozawa left the Democratic Party, nearly half of the prefectural assembly legislators and Democratic Diet members in Iwate Prefecture severed ties with him to remain in the DPJ.

Moreover, the Tomorrow Party of Japan (*Nippon Mirai no To*) to which Ozawa had attached himself also suffered a crushing defeat in the 2012 general elections, plummeting from 61 seats before the dissolution of the Diet to only 9 seats. Most of the incumbents who joined Ozawa when he left the DPJ were also defeated, and only Ozawa himself was re-elected in the single-member district system (SMD)¹. In the end, the inherent conflicts within the new hastily assembled party surfaced and the electoral mutual support group formed by the Tomorrow Party in efforts to win the election were fragmented at the beginning of 2013.

If we look at the results of the 2012 general elections, it seems that Ozawa's political base (*jiban*), for all its vaunted cohesion, had apparently weakened. Moreover, it appears that the dismantling of his kingdom was begun, in part, by an

1 *Yomiuri Shimbun* (2012/12/17).

exodus of politicians who had been his protégés. In this paper, we will report on shifts in Ichiro Ozawa's electoral base around the time of the 2012 Lower House elections.

2. History of the Formation of the Ozawa Kingdom

In the old days of the SNTV/MMD (*Chu-Senkyoku sei*) system, Ichiro Ozawa was the Liberal Democratic Party representative for Iwate 2nd District. He was a second-generation politician who had inherited the electoral base of his father, Saeki Ozawa. We will briefly explain how Iwate Prefecture came to be called the "Ozawa Kingdom."

The era of the SNTV/MMD system was an anarchic, feudal period in which LDP representatives fought amongst themselves to expand their power. It was also an era when the internal organization of the LDP was guided by rules of seniority (Tatebayashi, 2002; Scheiner, 2006). At the time, Ozawa was one of the LDP's young up-and-comers, but his influence in Iwate Prefecture was limited, as he was held back by many veteran politicians, including former Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki.

In 1993, Ozawa, along with Tsutomu Hata and others, defected from the LDP under the banner of political reform. This event provided the opportunity for the formation of the Ozawa Kingdom in Iwate Prefecture. In Iwate's gubernatorial election of April 1995, Ozawa supported an official from the Ministry of Construction named Hiroya Masuda, successfully establishing the first "Ozawa-style governor" when Masuda defeated the opposing candidate nominated by the LDP. Ozawa, who was looking to expand his influence, got his foot in the door by sending his own personal secretary to act as Masuda's policy secretary. Ozawa also arranged for independent candidates to be elected one after another in local assembly elections. On the other hand, his activities inside Iwate Prefecture continued to diminish, a trend that intensified after he became the head of the

Liberal Party (*Jiyu To*) and the New Frontier Party (*Shinshin To*). This trend was due to the fact that Ozawa, by then a key figure in the national political arena, could exercise his influence in Iwate politics remotely from his base in Tokyo. Masuda was succeeded by Takuya Tasso, the closest politician to Ichiro Ozawa, and the first of “Ozawa’s children.” With Tasso as Governor of Iwate as Ozawa had planned, the transformation of Iwate into the Ozawa Kingdom was largely complete. By extension, an increase in the number of councilors meant an increase in the number of “Ozawa-style” assembly members. Finally, with the sweep of four constituencies in Iwate Prefecture in the 2009 election, Iwate’s Diet members were those supported by him.

Ozawa is not the only veteran politician to have carved out a kingdom (Kawamura, 2011; Shiratori, 2011). This description applies in the DPJ, for example, to Kozo Watanabe (Fukushima Prefecture) and Tsutomu Hata (Nagano Prefecture) (Weiner, 2008). In the LDP, there is also Yoshiro Mori (Ishikawa Prefecture, Figure 1). But among these various “kingdoms” built throughout Japan, the most fully realized was the Ozawa Kingdom—all assembly members elected by the prefecture to the Diet were Ozawa’s, the governor was Ozawa’s protégé, and almost half of the prefectural legislature belonged to his group.

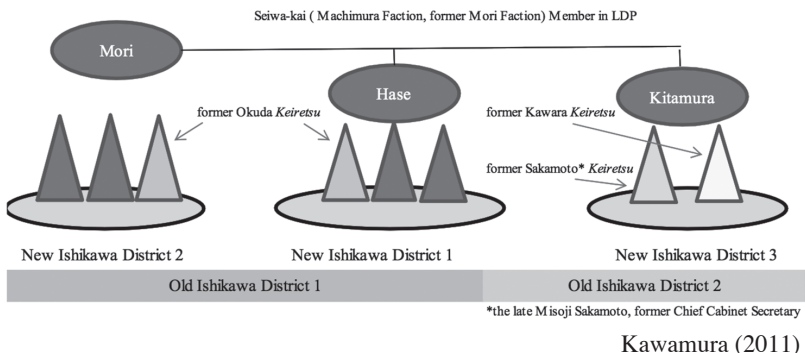


Figure 1. Mori’ s Kingdom (Ishikawa Prefecture)

One feature of the new era of the mixed system is the so-called “zombie” mechanism (*fukkatsu tosen*), whereby one can fail to win an electoral seat in a single-member district, but can still win a seat in a proportionally represented constituency. While this mechanism on one hand prompts a sharp turn to a two-party system (Masuyama, 2013), in the event of continued landslide elections that do not allow for zombie candidates, there is the possibility that “kingdoms” dominated by single parties will become even more rigid, a feature that Ozawa and his allies have used to their advantage.

3. Transformation of the Ozawa Kingdom

In July 2012, Ozawa opposed the consumption tax hike and left the DPJ together with a number of supporters and allies. After the defection, this group formed the “People’s Life First” Party (*Kokumin no Seikatsu ga Daiichi*), then immediately prior to the general election merged with the Shiga Prefecture Governor Yukiko Kada's new party. For Ozawa, the Tomorrow Party of Japan represented the seventh political party to which he had belonged.

While Ozawa alienated many of his peers through this repeated process of forming and then defecting from parties, only his local peers (with the exception of a tiny minority) remained faithful (Iio, 2013). However, at the time of the defections from the DPJ in 2012, many of the Diet members and local assembly members affiliated with the Iwate branch of the DPJ were no longer attuned to Ozawa. Takeshi Shina (House of Representatives, Iwate 1st District), Toru Kikawada (House of Representatives, Iwate 3rd District), and Tatsuo Hirano (House of Councilors, Iwate) remained in the DPJ, meaning that 13 of the 23 Iwate Prefecture legislators who had been “Ozawa’s men” remained in the DPJ. For Kikawada, who had been supported by Ozawa, and other local legislators to distance themselves in this way was unexpected. By defecting from the DPJ, Ozawa had lost much of his organized support.

3.1 Ozawa's Electoral Campaign

Incidentally, we might ask why politicians in Ozawa's circle sought to distance themselves from Ozawa by remaining in the DPJ. There are several reasons for this. One was that they were frustrated with Ozawa, who had not set foot in Iwate Prefecture (that was part of the disaster area) since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. The DPJ, Ozawa's party, had been the ruling party at the time of the earthquake disaster, and many local politicians had high expectations of his political power. There were many voters who wanted him to visit the affected areas of the Sanriku coastline and lend a sympathetic ear to the suffering of the victims. However, even after the passage of an entire year following the earthquake, Ozawa had not made time to visit Iwate Prefecture. This reaction by Ozawa invited dissatisfaction from his supporters, and some local politicians began to distance themselves from Ozawa. In addition, there was also dissatisfaction with Ozawa's decision to break with the DPJ as the ruling party.

The fact that Ozawa's reputation was suffering also provides background to his defection. As a result of the fact that Ozawa's former secretary had been convicted and that Ozawa himself faced indictment, the view that he was "dirty" had begun to circulate even locally. The entrenchment of the image of Ozawa as dirty was a result of the fact that some of the local politicians who felt that he was compromising their own elections no longer a with Ozawa's behavior.

An additional underlying factor was the fact that the strategy of organizing votes by petition that Ozawa had cultivated in the past no longer functioned as effectively as a result of the Koizumi structural reforms. According to the *Asahi Shimbun*², some in Iwate who were of the opinion that "there [were] only a few business leaders left who remained fervent in their support of Ozawa. The idea that support for Ozawa would lead to work was a thing of the past, and it was no longer

2 *Asahi Shimbun (Iwate)* (2012/9/25).

of any practical use to rely on him.”

If we look at candidates that Ozawa has supported in the past, we can see that he has preferred supporting loyalists who would not act against him. Nevertheless, he did little to maintain his organization on the ground in Iwate. For this reason, he was unable to stem the exodus that resulted in the end of the organization.

Notably, there is a significant difference between Ichiro Ozawa as envisioned among his supporters by young people compared with that by older people who remember him from the days of the multi-seat constituencies. For young people, Ichiro Ozawa is “a Tokyo politician born in Iwate” that they “know from newspapers and TV.” This implies that Ozawa’s support was maintained through the charismatic capital of the *koenkai* (i.e., support group) leaders who connected him to his end supporters. By defecting from the DPJ, politicians within his local organization who held potential grievances against him found just cause to break from Ozawa. This distancing by local politicians with potential grievances seems to have induced a voter exodus away from Ozawa

Incidentally, the Tomorrow Party of Japan had lost its presence from the run-up to the general election. Ozawa appeared to have a sense of crisis that many of the defectors had come out in support of local politicians. He arrived in Iwate Prefecture four days before ballots opened and stayed until the final day of the election campaign on December 15, when he gave his final stump speech in his own electoral district. Our colleagues and we initially expected Ozawa to not remain politically active in Iwate Prefecture during the election campaign but instead tour Japan in support of candidates running on the part of the Tomorrow Party of Japan in other prefectures. However, our expectations were betrayed. From the fact that Ozawa concentrated his election campaign activities in Iwate Prefecture, it can be determined that he had given up on victory outside of Iwate. It seems likely that he had anticipated that the Tomorrow Party of Japan would lose most of its incumbents, and that he was therefore searching for “the most graceful

defeat.”

The final speech given by Ozawa in Iwate 4th District was at 5:00 pm in the center of Kitakami City. The reason that Ozawa chose Kitakami rather than his hometown of Oshu was almost surely that he was conscious of Takashi Fujiwara, a rookie LDP candidate. The threat to Ozawa was not his own defeat, but rather the emergence of a representative within Iwate’s four districts that he did not control. The emergence of an LDP Diet member in his own constituency would significantly reduce Ozawa’s own integral power. his final speech was intended to suppress as many votes for Fujiwara as he could, so as to block his proportionate revival.

The introductory speeches, which took place in the rain, included those given in support of Ozawa by local politicians loyal to him across the four Iwate districts. These politicians likely felt that there was a need to demonstrate appeal by showing that local wielders of influence were supporting Ozawa. The scene was symbolic of Ozawa’s election tactics. Notably, his final harangue at that time was chiefly criticism leveled against the DPJ and LDP, but as our colleagues and we also heard him make excuses for his defection from the DPJ.

In the end, Ichiro Ozawa received 78,057 votes in the general election, capturing 45.5% of the vote³, a higher share of votes than was expected for the influence of his final campaign efforts. Nevertheless, the visit to his own constituency as the final stop in his election campaign can be seen to have worked in his favor. However, there are other views. For example, it cannot be ruled out that Ozawa’s high vote share resulted instead from the fact that none of the candidates from the LDP or DPJ who ran against him were very powerful figures.

3 The Iwate electoral management committee’s website:
<http://www.pref.iwate.jp/iinkai/senkyo/kekka/index.html> (2014/11/11)

3.2 Electoral Campaign by Other Candidates

The DPJ supported Toshiaki Oikawa while the LDP supported Takashi Fujiwara as rival candidates against Ozawa in Iwate 4th District. Oikawa was a candidate that the DPJ had forced into running in order to strike a clear position against Ozawa, and his candidacy was only announced shortly before the date of the election. Oikawa's election campaign was seen throughout to lack confidence, showing deference to Ozawa; at no point did Oikawa attack Ozawa directly.

In the end, Oikawa received 28,593 votes—a share of 16.67%. This value is not far from the number of votes that the DPJ legislators in Iwate's four districts won in the election of 2011. Although the actual operations corps of the local assembly members remained with the DPJ, Ozawa's defection meant that there was no one left in a command capacity. Furthermore, because personnel familiar with election strategy had left for other parties, they proved unable to produce any organization.

The DPJ candidate Fujiwara came from a legal background. His electoral base was in Kitakami City, where he had graduated from high school. Fujiwara's strong point was his relative youth. Whereas Ozawa was 70 years old, and Oikawa was 56, Fujiwara was only 29. However, his youth was also his weak point: he had a decisive lack of name recognition. Typically, there is no way for candidates to gain name recognition other than to be active inside the constituency. Even then, it is necessary for one to give public speeches, in order to become recognized by voters as a potential candidate.

The campaign that resulted from Fujiwara's initial electoral activities was—for a first-time candidate—dull beyond expectations. In addition, the electoral tactics employed by his supporters were somewhat old-fashioned, such as “blasting the candidate's name, and whenever voters reacted, to hop out of the car and shake hands with them, and in some cases delivering a speech.” His stump speeches were described as “hit-and-miss,” and there were extremely few planned speeches on

his schedule. The reasons for this old-fashioned character of the election campaign were not unrelated to the fact that (1) Ozawa had been elected in a landslide victory that did not allow for the election of zombie candidates through proportional representation, and (2) Ozawa had done all he could to implant politicians loyal to him in the prefectural assembly. In all of Iwate's four electoral districts, there was only one prefectural assembly member from the LDP. The build-up of the LDP's electoral activities had also been severely compromised. Still, in the second half of the campaign, Fujiwara's electoral strategy began to change. This change in strategy was the result of direct leverage by the central committee of the LDP.

Fujiwara received 47,887 votes and managed to be elected through proportional representation as a zombie candidate. The result of Fujiwara's effort was to drive a stake into the heart of the Ozawa Kingdom.

4. Conclusion

When Ichiro Ozawa left the DPJ, more than a few of his allies severed ties with him, so as to remain within the party. Moreover, a great many candidates across the country running on his behalf were defeated in the 2012 general elections. There are those who say that these results signal that "the Ozawa Kingdom has fallen."⁴

However, our colleagues and we take the position that we cannot yet say for sure that "the Ozawa Kingdom has fallen," because it is not impossible for the "little kingdom" of Iwate Prefecture to be rebuilt anew. Although he lost a number of local politicians in the general elections, the governor of Iwate Prefecture remains in his camp. Moreover, although Ozawa's electoral campaign is somewhat outdated, he still has the power to support candidates and carry out effective campaigns. Neither the LDP nor the DPJ have any command posts in Iwate Prefecture in the same sense as Ozawa does. We believe that the fall of the Ozawa Kingdom will only happen when Ozawa himself retires, or when he loses

4 *Sankei Shimbun* (2012/12/17).

his hold over the Iwate prefectural governorship. However, there is no doubt that twilight has fallen on the Ozawa Kingdom. From what we can see from the election campaign, there has been a significant aging of the members who have supported Ozawa's organizational activities, and none to be found who seem likely to succeed him in terms of *savoir-faire*.

We would like to turn the focus of our research to the question of how the Ozawa Kingdom will change.

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