

Long-serving mayors in Japan

An alternative leadership?

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ABSTRACT

There are negative images if one particular politician stays for a long period in one public position. Long-serving is usually associated with nepotism, patron-client relations, corruption, low quality of public service and inefficiency.

A survey in two Japanese city halls reveals that civil servants are of the opinion that personnel administration was fair and they were given freedom to implement policies under long-serving mayors. They could keep good relations with local legislative bodies. Thus civil servants did not experience strong pressure from the legislature's members. Long-serving mayors could use their long-serving experience as political resource.

There is an alternative style of leadership at the local government level in Japan. Maybe a bottom-up and consensus-based, i.e., invisible leadership, is old-fashioned. However, an alternative leadership style can provide an alternative, resolving complicated problems through real results.

INTRODUCTION

Japan has experienced frequent changes of its prime ministers since 2006 after Koizumi's premiership. Since 2006, the prime ministers were replaced by new ones. Even the victory in the 2009 general election of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) did not stop it. The current prime minister, Yoshihiko Noda, is a third DPJ prime minister following Hatoyama and Kan.

Of course, not all political leaders are unstable in Japan. At the local government level, long-serving mayors and governors are re-elected several times by the electorate and serve as heads of local governments for years. They enjoy stable support from the people. They can implement their policies with a longer time perspective.

This article argues that long-serving mayors provide an alternative interpretation of leadership. These mayors, in general, cannot determine which appointed officials in the city administration should be promoted. They have allowed young civil servants to be promoted which they believed were good policies. They do not use a top-down approach, but prefer a bottom-up approach. They exercise an invisible leadership. They negotiate and make compromises with the legislative body to reach consensus, but in the end implement the



policies they prefer. Their styles of leadership are unique as currently leaders are required to illustrate visible leadership and solve problems immediately.

NEGATIVE IMAGES OF STAYING IN PUBLIC OFFICE LONGER

There are negative perceptions if one particular politician stays for a long period in one public position, both in Japan and abroad. It is widely believed that a rural and backward political culture allows mayors and governors to serve long terms, which could lead to nepotism, patron-client relations, corruption, low quality public service and inefficiency. Some argue that long-serving mayors and governors can retain power because they can mobilise government resources, such as public works and subsidiaries to buy votes. Others point out that if one person stays in one office too long, there will be fewer innovative or new policies.

There are countries which limit the terms of elected public officials. In the United States, the President cannot serve more than two terms according to Amendment XXII of their Constitution. In Korea, since its Fifth Republic (1980) the President is not eligible for re-election. In the Philippines and in Indonesia, where presidents cannot run for three continuous terms, heads of local governments also face restrictions on re-election. Of course, in some countries powerful politicians can amend laws or make themselves an exception by plebiscite. They can retain power even when they have to leave the office for a while. Early this year (2012) saw Vladimir Putin winning an election to become the Russian President after serving as Prime Minister for four years.

The arguments regarding multiple terms of office affect Japan, too. There are currently arguments that Japan should limit re-electing the heads of local governments, particularly governors (heads of prefectures) and mayors of big cities. The members of the legislature have submitted several bills to limit the number of terms mayors and governors can serve, but these bills have yet to become law.

Interestingly, the Japanese mass media, criticises too frequent change of prime ministers, usually criticises long-serving mayors and governors. In political science, it is argued that a dominant party system can result in one party staying in power for a long period, thus policies become stable and predictable. It is argued that this practice has a positive and negative effect on economic development. However, the positive side of stable governments is rarely mentioned when long-serving mayors are discussed in Japan.

KISHIWADA AND KAIZUKA – TWO CITIES WITH LONG SERVING MAYORS

An overview of two cities, Kishiwada and Kaizuka, is provided. The effects of their long-serving mayors will be analysed later. Kishiwada City is located in the southern part of the Osaka Prefecture. Its population is 199 172 (2010 National Census). Historically it was an industrial city of cotton textiles, but in recent years its main industry has shifted to the production of other textiles and machinery. It is also a commuter town city for Osaka and Sakai.

Noboru Hara (1922–) was its long-serving mayor (1973–2005). Hara was born in an old family and was an army pilot during World War II. After the war, he worked in agriculture for

a while then joined City Hall in 1954. In 1973, when he was director-general, he ran against the incumbent mayor, and won the election with support from the Japan Socialist Party and Japan Communist Party plus some conservative local assembly members. After the 1973 election, citizens of Kishiwada repeatedly re-elected Hara as their mayor, and in 2005, he finally retired after serving as mayor for 32 years.

The other target city, Kaizuka City, lies to the southwest of Kishiwada. Its population is 90 531 (2010 National Census), and its main industry is textiles and is also a commuter town city. Isamu Yoshimichi (1926–) was its mayor from 1970 until 2010. He was a typical Japanese citizen who believed that Japan never lost wars until World War II ended. Shocked by the defeat and the social and economic changes following the war, he joined the Japan Socialist Party and devoted himself to peasant movements and then trade union activities in the second half of the 1940s and 1950s. Yoshimichi became a City Assembly member in 1959, and ran for mayor in 1970 against a local railway company owner who was supported by the Liberal Democratic Party. After narrowly winning the election, he continued as mayor until retiring. Unlike Hara who experienced very tough elections (particularly in 1993 and 2001) (Morimoto 2004), Yoshimichi never faced a serious challenger and sometimes ran unopposed in the mayoral elections.

It is important to note that both cities are industrial cities and at the same time dormitory town cities for Osaka and Sakai. It is difficult to call them rural villages; they still have a rural culture, as is the case with almost all Japanese cities sharing such characteristics.

Both Hara and Yoshimichi were born in old families in each city, but the more important facts are that, at the start of their careers, they challenged conservatives with the support of the Left. The so-called rural political culture theory cannot explain their successes.

LONG-SERVING MAYORS AND CIVIL SERVANTS

The issue is discussed how civil servants think about their bosses, long-serving mayors, and how the existence of long serving mayors affect them. Following is a summary of a survey done in five cities in Osaka Prefecture in November 2010 (cf. annexure). In this survey, the personnel affairs division of each city hall was requested to distribute survey papers to all regular civil servants working in City Hall under the jurisdiction of mayors (i.e. part time workers, those working in separate offices, civil servants working on educational boards; other non-mayor control bodies were excluded) and collected the responses anonymously.

First of all, the questionnaire enquired how civil servants of the two cities felt about the existence of long-serving mayors. Conventionally it was argued that if long-serving mayors exist, mayors decide who should be hired and who should be promoted, so nepotism becomes a problem. However, the result of this survey was the opposite. Civil servants of the two case cities and Ikeda City, where the mayor started his first term in 1995, responded that their personnel administration was fairer than the average.

The questionnaire enquired who had been the most influential person in personnel administration. It is very interesting that the ratio of civil servants of the two case cities who indicated that the mayor had been the most influential person was smaller than in other cities. It should be noted that in Ikeda, the mayor has been regarded as influential both at the time of the survey (2010) and ten years earlier (2000).



Interviews with former mayors and civil servants support these surprising findings. Both mayors responded that it was their policies that mayors should not intervene in personnel administration, particularly in decisions about who should be promoted. Former civil servants confirmed this.

The next question was who has influence on policy related decisions? The results of the survey on who was the most influential person or organisation in the last ten years shows that the ratio of mayors was smaller in Kishiwada, Kaizuka and in Izumiotsu. In these cities, civil servants were more important. On public works, again the ratios of mayors were smaller in long-serving mayors' cities. It could be concluded that in these cities, mayors did not use their powers to spend money on their pet projects. Negative effects of long-serving mayors did not occur in these policy areas.

The interview results of mayors and civil servants again support these findings. It was enquired "what was your most important achievement as mayor?" The mayor responded that he could not specify any projects. What he did was that he listened to many civil servants and citizens, discussed with them and tried to reach a consensus. Civil servants responded that they had relative freedom to decide and implement policies. They also pointed out that mayors gave opportunities to front line officers to express their opinions, and they could bypass middle managers and discuss policies with the mayors directly. Another important effect caused by long-serving mayors resulted from the question on the local assembly and its members. The answers of civil servants of the two case cities show the relatively smaller influence of the local assembly and its members.

Civil servants of Kishiwada City testified that Mayor Hara listened to many different opinions of the assembly members and he conducted careful and long negotiations with all parties in the assembly before he officially submitted bills, approved by personnel. He also made other important policy decisions. Kaizuka officials said that the relation between the mayor and the assembly was not a tight one. Once the mayor answered the questions raised by the assembly members, they could go to the next stage. Mayors responded similarly although from different points of view. Hara said, "There was no big confrontation between the assembly and me. Before submitting bills, we had already made compromises. All bills I submitted were the products of discussions with all assembly parties. I kept good relations with them, even though some of them supported my rivals in elections." Yoshimichi responded that, "As I stayed longer, no assembly members demanded difficult things from me or my officers. They knew that I knew about policies far better than they did."

Lastly, long-serving mayors could use their long-serving experience as a resource. They became chairs of the Osaka Prefecture Mayors Association and other key posts of the Kinki Area Mayors Association, National Mayors Association and other public bodies as they stayed in the office longer. They could extend their networks to the prefecture hall and the central government. When they met with a higher authority for negotiations, they could use these networks to gain more financial support and approval for public works and other policies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the research are summarised and the way forward discussed. *Firstly*, it was found that long-serving mayors allowed city officials to study, shape and implement policies as they want. The survey reveals that city officials under them felt that they had more freedom than

city officials of other cities. Long-serving mayors did not intervene in personnel administration (particularly promotion), nor did they use their powers to use the budget or public works for personal goals. Two mayors avoided what we understood as common problems of long-serving politicians. Interviews to former mayors and city officials also supported these findings.

Secondly, long-serving mayors used their long-serving status as a resource. They knew about the city’s problems and administration far better than most local assembly members, but they always tried to keep good relations with legislative bodies through careful negotiations. Even when some assembly members supported other candidates in mayoral elections, the long-serving mayors did not become hostile towards them. Thus, city officials felt less pressure from members of the legislature than other cities.

Thirdly, serving many years made mayors politically more powerful. As they became representatives of mayors associations and other public bodies, they could establish channels to national level politicians and higher level officials at the central and prefectural governments. By these channels, long term serving mayors could gain more grants and support for their policies.

These findings suggest that there is an alternative style of leadership at the local government level in Japan. These findings require an appreciation of what leadership is. Is it particularly a question of how a leader should execute his duties? Should a leader give instructions to government officials or is there no need to do so if officials are doing what he/she wants? This relates to the understanding of the developmental state, which originated in Japan as many of its leaders did not consult the public. Leadership may be not something to express, but something to prepare good working conditions for the subordinates so that policies achieve what they were meant to achieve.

Another question is about whether this alternative style of leadership can be introduced in other levels of government in Japan and other countries now and in the future? As speedy and more open administration is demanded, a bottom-up and consensus-based, i.e. invisible leadership, became old fashioned. However, fast and visible leadership does not always solve problems. The current leaders may only show that leaders are doing something, but not solving problems (Arima 2011). To gain real results to complicated problems, an alternative leadership can provide valuable lessons.

Table 1 Cities and Survey Collection

City	Population 2010 Census	Area 2010 (km ²)	Mayor (November 2010)	Mayor (November 2000)	City Employees	Collected (%)
Kishiwada	199 172	72,32	Kiyoshi Noguchi Dec. 2005 –	Noboru Hara Dec. 1973 – Dec. 2005	511	354 (69,3%)
Ikeda	104 171	22,09	Kaoru Kurata May 1995 – Nov. 2011	Same	311	180 (57,9%)
Izumitsu	77 564	13,26	Noboru Kamitani Sep. 2004 –	Terukazu Chatani Sep. 1992 – Sep. 2004	221	149 (67,4%)
Kaizuka	90 531	43,99	Tatsuo Fujiwara Feb. 2010 –	Isamu Yoshimichi Feb. 1970 – Feb. 2010	327	237 (72,5%)
Neyagawa	238 244	24,73	Yoshihiro Baba May 1999 –	Same	650	274 (42,1%)
Total					2 020	1 194 (59,1%)

Table 2 Who is the most influential person/organisation in personnel administration? (2010)

	Mayor	City Assembly	Each Section/ Division	Prefecture	Central Government	Interest groups	Residents' associations	NPO, Citizens Organizations	Scholars	Others	Do not Know	Not available
Total	433	33	422	1	-	1	-	-	-	47	172	85
(N=1,194)	36,3	2,8	35,3	0,1	-	0,1	-	-	-	3,9	14,4	7,1
Kishiwada	85	8	172	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	57	27
(N=354)	24,0	2,3	48,6	-	-	0,3	-	-	-	1,1	16,1	7,6
Ikeda	85	5	53	1	-	-	-	-	-	4	20	12
(N=180)	47,2	2,8	29,4	0,6	-	-	-	-	-	2,2	11,1	6,7
Izumiotu	72	2	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	14	10
(N=149)	48,3	1,3	17,4	-	-	-	-	-	-	16,8	9,4	6,7
Kaizuka	89	1	87	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	39	17
(N=237)	37,6	0,4	36,7	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,7	16,5	7,2
Neyagawa	102	17	84	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	42	19
(N=274)	37,2	6,2	30,7	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,6	15,3	6,9

Figure 1 Personnel Administration is fair (2010)

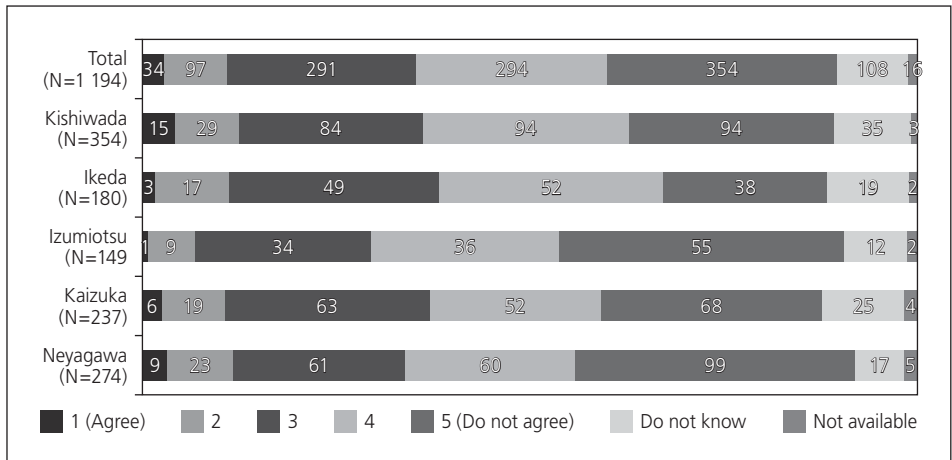


Table 3 Who was the most influential person/organisation in personnel administration? (2000)

	Mayor	City Assembly	Each Section/ Division	Prefecture	Central Government	Interest groups	Residents' associations	NPO, Citizens Organizations	Scholars	Others	Do not Know	Not available
Total	276	54	344	1	-	1	-	-	-	17	196	305
(N=1,194)	23,1	4,5	28,8	0,1	-	0,1	-	-	-	1,4	16,4	25,5
Kishiwada	70	14	120	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	64	82
(N=354)	19,8	4,0	33,9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,1	18,1	23,2
Ikeda	62	10	31	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	26	48
(N=180)	34,4	5,6	17,2	0,6	-	-	-	-	-	1,1	14,4	26,7
Izumiotu	21	5	49	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	25	47
(N=149)	14,1	3,4	32,9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,3	16,8	31,5
Kaizuka	39	-	91	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	35	69
(N=237)	16,5	-	38,4	-	-	0,4	-	-	-	0,8	14,8	29,1
Neyagawa	84	25	53	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	46	59
(N=274)	30,7	9,1	19,3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,6	16,8	21,5

Figure 2 Always paid attention to what assembly demanded (2000)

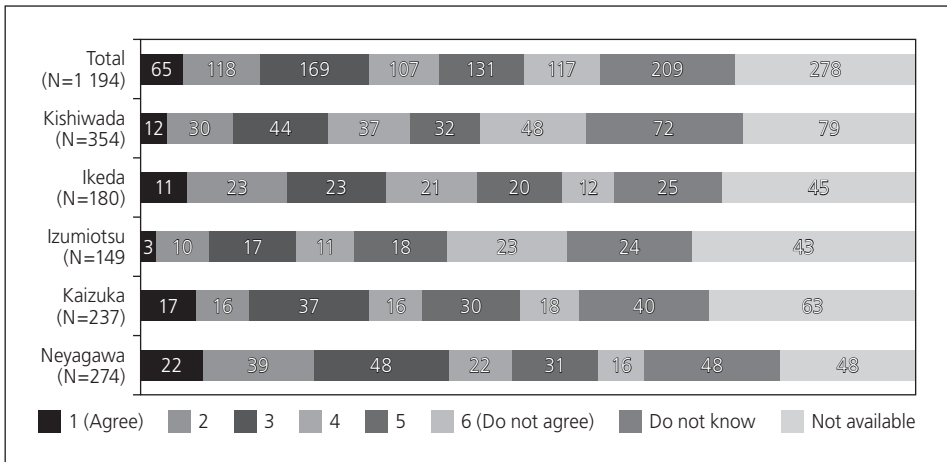


Table 4 Who was the most influential person/organisation in budget? (2000)

	Mayor	City Assembly	Each Section/ Division	Prefecture	Central Government	Interest groups	Residents' associations	NPO, Citizens Organizations	Scholars	Others	Do not Know	Not available
Total	354	39	275	7	-	1	1	-	-	9	196	306
(N=1,194)	29,6	3,3	23,0	0,6	-	0,1	0,1	-	-	0,8	16,4	25,6
Kishiwada	90	13	92	2	3	-	1	-	-	4	68	81
(N=354)	25,4	3,7	26,0	0,6	0,8	-	0,3	-	-	1,1	19,2	22,9
Ikeda	75	4	27	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	23	48
(N=180)	41,7	2,2	15,0	0,6	0,6	-	-	-	-	0,6	12,8	26,7
Izumiotu	29	-	48	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	21	48
(N=149)	19,5	-	32,2	0,7	-	-	-	-	-	1,3	14,1	32,2
Kaizuka	55	9	57	1	2	1	-	-	-	1	41	70
(N=237)	23,2	3,8	24,1	0,4	0,8	0,4	-	-	-	0,4	17,3	29,5
Neyagawa	105	13	51	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	43	59
(N=274)	38,3	4,7	18,6	0,7	-	-	-	-	-	0,4	15,7	21,5

Figure 3 Needed to spend hours and make efforts to coordinate with assembly and its members (2000)

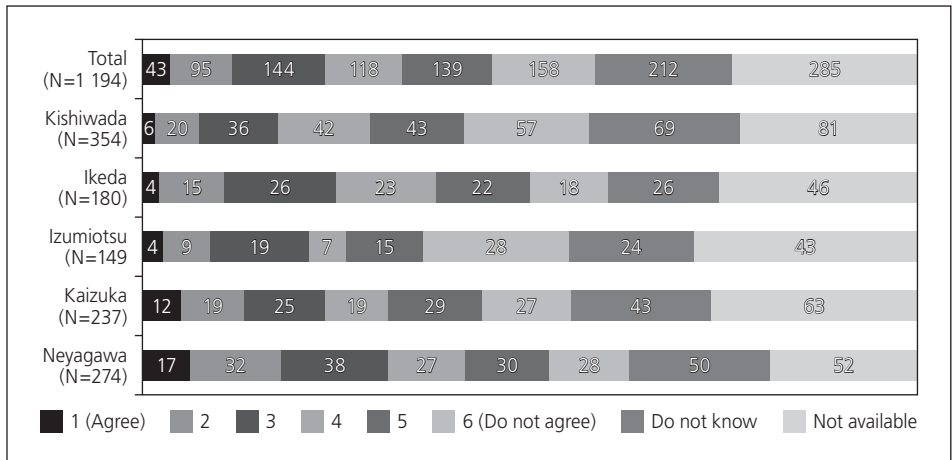


Table 5 Who was the most influential person/organisation in public works? (2000)

	Mayor	City Assembly	Each Section/ Division	Prefecture	Central Government	Interest groups	Residents' associations	NPO, Citizens Organizations	Scholars	Others	Do not Know	Not available
Total	215	57	254	30	–	1	–	–	–	12	277	318
(N=1 194)	18,0	4,8	21,3	2,5	–	0,1	–	–	–	1,0	23,2	26,6
Kishiwada	58	24	64	13	9	4	5	–	–	3	89	85
(N=354)	16,4	6,8	18,1	3,7	2,5	1,1	1,4	–	–	0,8	25,1	24,0
Ikeda	38	9	36	4	1	–	1	–	–	3	36	52
(N=180)	21,1	5,0	20,0	2,2	0,6	–	0,6	–	–	1,7	20,0	28,9
Izumiotu	16	3	46	1	–	–	–	–	–	2	33	48
(N=149)	10,7	2,0	30,9	0,7	–	–	–	–	–	1,3	22,1	32,2
Kaizuka	25	8	65	6	1	–	1	–	–	2	58	71
(N=237)	10,5	3,4	27,4	2,5	0,4	–	0,4	–	–	0,8	24,5	30,0
Neyagawa	78	13	43	6	4	3	2	–	–	2	61	62
(N=274)	28,5	4,7	15,7	2,2	1,5	1,1	0,7	–	–	0,7	22,3	22,6

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