

# *Governance of the Developmental State:*

## *Seikai-Tensin in Postwar Japan*

How does state governance differ from one country to another, and how has it changed over time? In light of this, what will state governance in the near and distant future look like? The author addresses these important yet timely questions through the analysis of a distinctive group of Japanese statesmen: Seikai-Tensin (政界転身), literally translated as "transformation into politicians." Specifically, former bureaucrats are mostly young when they enter politics to fill 20-30% of seats in the Japanese Diet and cabinet after the war. Symbolizing the close relationship – sometimes symbiotic, sometimes conflictual – between politics and administration, Seikai-Tensin represents something central to Japanese governance. The higher the level of bureaucratic power, the greater their proportion in the Diet; the higher the level of cabinet power and the ruling party, the lower their proportion. Due to their dual identity as former bureaucrats and incumbent legislators, it is difficult for democratic decision-making to flourish in the national government, despite strong grassroots democracy in local communities. Despite this, it is worthwhile noting that Seikai-Tensin was borne of meritocracy under democracy (i.e., civil service examinations and elections), which qualifies them as even more intriguing key figures in postwar Japanese politics and governance.

There are four distinctive contributions to the field of governance studies made in this book: 1) a time-series analysis of affluent historical data to trace the dynamic pattern of a prototype developmental state, 2) comparative implications for other developmental states, including South Korea and Singapore, to gain a better understanding of themselves, 3) lessons for governance practitioners to achieve a better balance between politics and administration, and 4) knowledgeable perspectives for ordinary citizens to gain a better understanding of meritocracy and democracy.

### **Chapter 1. Introduction: Seikai-Tensin's Political Success in Postwar Japan**

Since the late 20th century, the shift from government to governance has become a realistic description of global transitions as well as an ideal standard of state administration for contemporary democracies. However, democratic regressions, the (prolonged) ruling of conservative political parties, and the increase of state intervention especially after the outbreak of COVID-19 all indicate a new direction, or a regression from governance to government. In Chapter 1, the author addresses the main research theme (i.e., the intertwined relationship between politics and administration), subject (i.e., Seikai-

Tensin: former-bureaucrat legislators), expected implications (e.g., the nature of governance, revisited developmental state theory, elite transformation under democracy and meritocracy).

Specifically, Seikai-Tensin's political success in postwar Japan reveals the nature of Japanese governance consisting of a fine balance between politics and administration. Politicians and bureaucrats both actively participate in the policy-making process, but with different tools and capacities. The complementary nature of politics and administration supports Seikai-Tensin's transformation and political success. Since WWII, 20.2% of Councilors, 16.9% of Representatives, and 36.5% of cabinet members have been classified as Seikai-Tensin politicians. The trend has even extended to the office of the prime ministership. The prolonged Seikai-Tensin phenomenon has proven useful for those who want to switch careers from bureaucrats to politicians; they can continue to engage in policymaking by using their expertise and skills, thus advancing their careers and advancing the public good. From an institutional point of view, Seikai-Tensin's transformation is an effective way to guarantee professionalism in lawmaking; especially, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP hereafter) prefers to nominate former bureaucrats for elected office. In addition, voters regard Seikai-Tensin as qualified for legislation; elite career bureaucrats, likely to be graduates from the University of Tokyo and affiliated with the LDP, fit the general image of a statesman. As such, Seikai-Tensin's perennial political success is well-received in Japanese society at large. Overall, Seikai-Tensin represents the two-fold nature of Japanese policy-making, where politics and administration intertwine. Finally, the book will seek to address the nature of Japanese governance, how it influenced "the Japanese Miracle" in the past, and Japan's political future.

## **Chapter 2. Seikai-Tensin and Japanese Developmental State**

This chapter introduces the Developmental State Theory (DST) as a classic, yet still relevant theoretical framework for illustrating the relationship between politics and administration. According to Johnson (1982), the state bureaucracy's political autonomy and embeddedness in society is a pre-eminent characteristic of state economic development in the postwar era. The author of this book, however, presents a different view of Japanese governance than the DST. As aforementioned, the DST identifies the state with the bureaucracy; a strong bureaucracy wields power and guides society in developing the Japanese state economy. In contrast, other political/governmental institutions, like the National Diet, are often overlooked. Seikai-Tensin reveals, however, the complementary nature of politics and administration. As part of Japan's political system, bureaucrats draft legislation, while politicians set the policy priorities that determine the direction the government takes with policy drafts. It is true that Japanese bureaucrats have an important effect on the policy process in terms of their policy expertise, and politicians

need their assistance in addressing policy issues, leading to a substantial limit on bureaucratic autonomy by political decisions. When policy issues are considered important, politicians involve themselves heavily in policymaking; otherwise, they delegate a substantial part of policymaking to bureaucrats. As a result, bureaucrats and politicians are influenced by each other to varying degrees, depending on the circumstances. While the power inherent in the Diet limits bureaucratic authority, the Diet's limited policy expertise, lacking in detail, provides opportunities for bureaucratic empowerment. I do not wish to deny, however, the power of the Japanese bureaucracy and its contribution to the miracle of Japanese economic development. Rather, Seikai-Tensin's transformation and political success were fundamentally shaped by the ability of the bureaucracy to govern society and politics. Even so, Seikai-Tensin's persistence, i.e., the continued flow of ex-bureaucrats into the Diet throughout the postwar period, sheds light on the nature of Japanese governance, namely, how politics and administration are complementary. In that regard, Japan's political process can be viewed as a complex interaction between politicians and bureaucrats, as well as Seikai-Tensin.

### **Chapter 3. Transforming Elites: Seikai-Tensin's Election to the Diet**

Chapter 3 focuses on Seikai-Tensin's election to the Diet, the beginning of his political career. An analysis of historical data shows that bureaucratic and ministerial experiences significantly increase the probability of an election. Political affiliations, especially with the LDP, have the biggest impact on election results. There is no significant influence of legislative activities on the election; activities outside the floor, including committee activities, may contribute to (re)election, but their significance is fairly low. Although education is generally unimportant for an election, a graduate from the University of Tokyo may be electorally advantageous if he or she also has other elite attributes such as bureaucratic experience or membership in the LDP. Consequently, Seikai-Tensin's multiple elite qualities help them become elected, transforming them from the bureaucratic elite to the political elite. So, in that sense, an elite quality begets another, which together form and shape an elite.

### **Chapter 4. Racing to the Top: Seikai-Tensin in the Cabinet**

Chapter 4 continues the story of Seikai-Tensin's political success in the cabinet. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the effect of bureaucratic background on 1) the likelihood of legislators in both houses getting first ministerships and subsequent appointments, and 2) the duration of their service in the cabinet after being appointed. Above all, an individual's bureaucratic background has the biggest influence on cabinet appointments. The author argues that Representatives and Councilors have a greater chance of holding ministerial posts than those without Seikai-Tensin backgrounds in their first

appointments, and that ministers with bureaucratic backgrounds would also have an upper hand in following appointments. Despite this, the Seikai-Tensin ministers did not last long in any cabinet largely due to other factors, either internal or external to the cabinet. However, if we look at their career over the length of their tenure, the "Seikai-Tensin effect" would remain strong in cabinet appointments and tenure. The Seikai-Tensin (3.51 posts) would hold more ministerial posts than non-Seikai-Tensin (2.91 posts), and their total days in the cabinet are 494 longer on average than non-Seikai-Tensin.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusion: Japanese Governance with Intertwined Politics and Administration**

The Developmental State Theory is indeed a very powerful theoretical framework to understand the Japanese bureaucracy and its achievements, but it ignores the role of the Diet and how it interacts with the government. By focusing on Seikai-Tensin, this book fills the lacuna. In pursuit of political success, Seikai-Tensin builds multiple networks and places themselves in an intermediate position between bureaucracy and party. Because of their educational and bureaucratic backgrounds, Seikai-Tensin does not create an exclusive group in Japanese politics, but rather is deeply embedded and adapted to the existing system as an intermediary between major political parties or network clusters. Even though the chapters of this book consistently indicate that memberships in political parties matter more than other identities, this has become especially apparent in recent years, Seikai-Tensin's role as a bridge-builder is not forgotten. Their functional importance (which exceeds the scope of this book) is set to increase as the post-1955 system with multiple active parties takes hold.