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## CONCLUSION

What is it like to be a Japanese politician in the LDP? How do such politicians fill their days? What kinds of issues motivate them? How do they gather support? This book has tried to answer these and other related questions by personalising Japanese politics as a story of an individual politician. Its approach, although superficially similar to a political biography, is very different in purpose. While eschewing generalisation, it has aspired to yield the kind of understanding and insights about Japanese politics that have previously been derived from more general, orthodox studies. Japanese politics lends itself to such analysis because of the prominent role of individual LDP Diet members, which can be seen in several important contexts: in the electoral arena, in the arena of party politics, and in the arena of policymaking.

The book has told the ‘inside story’ of a Japanese politician, Matsuoka Toshikatsu. It is primarily based on what Matsuoka has said about himself and his activities, and what others have said about him. It shows how, as an LDP backbencher, Matsuoka has lived by the unspoken creed of ‘power and pork’. The book details Matsuoka’s early background, career progress, support structures, electoral fortunes, personal connections and policy activities. In doing so, it documents the very public side of Matsuoka’s life as he has strutted the political stage, representing special interests, holding court in his Diet office like a feudal overlord, deliberating on policy measures with other LDP politicians in PARC committees, lobbying the government for certain causes, shaping policy outcomes and traversing the world like a salesman ‘selling’ the cause of Japanese agricultural protection.

At the same time, the book exposes more covert aspects of Matsuoka's political activities, uncovering some of the deals that have been struck and how Matsuoka has 'sold' his services as a political broker in order to secure political funding. Not surprisingly, Matsuoka has been called a 'concession-hunting politician to the marrow'.<sup>1</sup> As mediator and political 'fixer', Matsuoka has established a direct line of influence over public officials, particularly those in the MAFF, which has often skewed the distribution of public resources in favour of his own electorate.

Matsuoka has exemplified the political phenomena of localism, sectionalism and clientelism. Those wanting benefits and favours from the central government either as macro-policies or micro-favours have used Matsuoka as an instrument of delivering collective or personal gains. In turn, Matsuoka has utilised these supplicants and supporters as the means of ensuring his own continuing electoral success and financial strength.

Like politicians everywhere, Matsuoka's overwhelming concern has been the realisation of his personal political ambitions, a goal that has encompassed both electoral survival and career advancement. The details of Matsuoka's political activities in this book show that Matsuoka has been prepared to do practically whatever it takes to achieve his goals. Moreover, given the borderline criminality of a number of his activities, he has been exceedingly fortunate to escape prosecution and political demise. Reading between the lines of the book also reveals evidence of Matsuoka's character and political style—which comes across as rather overbearing, self-important and even rather bullying, but also cowardly when confronted with the prospect of being caught out at underhand activities.

Matsuoka was chosen for this study because he seemed to encapsulate, albeit as an extreme case, many of the archetypal characteristics of LDP politicians, which have been so well documented by other scholars. He is not just any politician. He is a notorious example of a particular 'genre' of politician, obsessed with money, politics, pork barrelling and the unabashed protection of vested interests. Matsuoka deserves 'thick' or 'rich' description because he is so patently illustrative of a certain political type. Matsuoka exemplifies what one might call the 'traditional paradigm' of LDP politician, which further vindicates the approach of the book as a study of Japanese politics through a focus on an individual political actor.

The question that is implicitly raised in this book is whether such a political type can survive in the brave new world of Japanese politics shaped by Prime Minister Koizumi and his successor Abe Shinzô. The projects that have resulted from Matsuoka's kind of mediation have consumed the budgets of national and local governments and wasted tax money. This 'style and structure of politics is old and is increasingly not approved of any longer'.<sup>2</sup> It is 'a way of politics that is now considered "old-fashioned" and is being outlawed, and seen as unpopular with voters'.<sup>3</sup> A shrinking pork barrel is curbing the abilities of Matsuoka and his ilk to manufacture electoral coalitions that are independent of the party by handing out economic bribes as incentives to voters. At the same time, a new policymaking process is gradually being sculpted where *zoku* politicians are being bypassed in favour of a more top-down structure where the prime minister and his enlarged executive are crafting policy initiatives and forcing them on the party and the bureaucracy.

The old LDP, of which Matsuoka is a prime example, is giving way to a new LDP, in which individual backbenchers have to yield to a more centrally directed and cohesive party policy program. The program aims to win voters' hearts and minds, not through appeals to special interests but to various policy causes that will deliver broadly based outcomes affecting all Japanese people and a more equitable distribution of scarcer public resources. Because the future contours of the LDP and its public policy philosophy remain unclear, however, relics of the old LDP such as Matsuoka may survive for a time, even in a new guise as ministers. In order to maintain his political standing and policy influence, Matsuoka has had to reinvent himself in an environment that is increasingly hostile to the old ways.

## NOTES

1 See <http://www.nouminren.ne.jp/dat/200208/2002081202.htm>

2 Hôsei University Professor Igarashi, quoted in <http://www.nouminren.ne.jp/dat/200208/2002081202.htm>

3 *ibid.*