

PREFACE

Japanese politics is notoriously opaque and corrupt. It is not surprising, therefore, that few studies reveal what really goes on in the political lives of Japanese politicians. This is one such exposé, the fruits of intensive research into the public and private political life of a member of the Japanese Diet. It is an extraordinary tale about an ordinary politician who exemplifies what it is to be a parliamentarian affiliated with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in present-day Japan. Like the majority of LDP Diet members, the politician at the centre of this study represents a clutch of special interests whilst striving to direct public resources to his own electorate. As a veteran lawmaker and policy specialist, he also belongs to a 'policy tribe' (*zoku*), regularly intervening in the making of government policy and interfering in the administrative affairs of the bureaucracy. As a tribe Diet member he has achieved the ultimate goal, appointed as minister over the very ministry that he sought to influence from within the ranks of the LDP.

This is a story of political failures and of political successes, a tale of ambition furthered by the successful delivery of benefits to constituents and supporters, but also thwarted by suspicion and allegations of corrupt behaviour. In the brave new world of Japanese politics opened up by Prime Minister Koizumi, such an independent policy entrepreneur and political fixer appeared to represent the old style of LDP politician, whose days might be numbered. However, his accession to the ministry in the first Abe cabinet, as this book went to press, underlines the resilience of traditional patterns of Japanese politics. Only the final chapter of this political life, which is yet to be written, will reveal the extent to which a new model of Japanese politics has taken root.