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From Pork-Barrel Machine to Relevant Policy Communication Platform? Transition of LDP's Personal Support Group Koenkai in the Japanese Political System

Abstract

Koenkai 後援会 individual support group of Japanese politicians has become phenomenon that has no equivalent in any Western democratic country. It emerged on political scene long before introduction of universal suffrage, have spread in the post-war period of rapid democratization due to electoral campaign constraints, and survived until today despite of major evolutions of political environment. The aim of this paper is to show the historical trajectory of individual support groups development and attempt to answer the question if Koenkai's funds distribution function-claimed in previous research remains valid. To prove the above I have examined previous research, utilized data of public opinion pools executed by Akarui Suishin Kyokai (Clean Election League) and financial reports submitted by support groups to electoral commissions in each of 47 prefectures and Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Keywords: *Japan, political system, political parties, Koenkai*

1. Introduction

Koenkai is an individual support group in Japanese political system, established to endorse any individual who stands or intends to stand for the public office, including person in public office, running as a member of political party, other organization, or its branch. From member point of

view Koenkai is an organization that supports specific person to political body in order to efficiently reflect his interest in policy making process (Kabashima & Yamada, 1994, p. 231).

In most of democracies that role is usually appointed to political parties. However, due to the lack of organizational structures, membership advancement and mass involvement in party affairs at grass-root level, individual support organizations filled the gap of lacking party structures. According to the Japanese Public Offices Election Act:

Koenkai is organization that endorse and recommend candidates for public office – including person already in public office, running as a member of political party, other organization, or its branch (Kōshoku senkyo-hō, 2020).

Gerard Curtis (2009, p. 128) perceives Koenkai as the ‘mass membership organization with the function of organizing large numbers of the general electorate on behalf of the Diet candidate’. In most of democracies that role is usually appointed to political parties, however in Japan top-down development of post-war political parties, resulted in lack of organizational structures, membership advancement and mass involvement in party affairs at grass-roots level. Koenkai developed as the auxiliary organization to tackle with all those issues.

In this research I claim that adoption of new rules constituting Japanese political and electoral system, known as package of four laws of political reforms (Seiji kaikaku shihō 政治改革四法,) consisting of Public Offices Election Law, Political Funds Control Act, Act on Granting of Juridical Personality to Political Party Receiving Political Party Grants and Act for Establishment of the Council on the House of Representatives Electoral District, affected Koenkai membership negatively decreasing the number of members since 1994. Furthermore, I hold that decentralization reforms and revised local allocation tax (Chihō kōfu zei – 地方交付税), the system of general-purpose intergovernmental transfers had indeed weakened dependency between local level politicians and individual support group’s members. Above that, I try to elaborate if Koenkai’s funds distribution function-claimed in previous research still remains valid, after nearly a three decades of the most important institutional change initiated by first non-LDP government since 1955.

2. Historical approach

One of the first record of personal support organization belongs to Yukio Ozaki and is dated back to 1912 (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2011, p. 48). Nevertheless, Koenkai activities expanded on large scale not sooner than since election campaign in 1958. In the first decades of Japanese parliamentary democracy only small group of citizens, the highest taxpayers had the suffrage law. In consequence local and national legislatures were dominated by the elite margin of Japanese society.

The most influential, first political parties Seiyukai and Minseito built their electoral support by maintaining strong connections with landlords. Every village had its powerful landlord, affiliated with one of the two parties, either as a member or as a sympathizer in close personal relations with politicians at the prefectural and parliamentary level. As the universal male suffrage for citizens over 25 years old has been introduced in 1925, enlarged groups of electorate eagerly supported candidates who have the closest connection with their landlords (Fukutake, 1967, p. 190). That time, no politician even bothered to address farmers directly in political agenda as the connection with landlords guaranteed politicians foreseeable support at the ballot box.

This stable electoral apparatus of mutual interdependency between landlords and Diet members terminated with results of II World War that brought about two crucial reforms: land reform and rapid democratization (Ouchi, 1966, p. 130). Great majority of tenant farmers became landowners, and under the new constitution eagerly cherished new set of political and personal freedoms that had to be noticed by politicians aspiring to position of the Diet member.

At the same time elected politicians or candidates could not have secure their re-election by maintaining just win-win relationship with local politicians. They couldn't control vote flow as efficiently as pre-war class of the landlords. Additionally, competition within constituency with members of the same political party induced them to seek the support by enlarging elector network among adherents of lower level (e.g., prefectural) politicians. Only this strategy could have guaranteed them re-election in the long run. To receive the sufficient number of votes, Diet politicians did not only take care about sufficient money transfer to local constituencies, but they were also gradually extending network of support incorporating individual support group members into their own Koenkai structure. This

process is perceived by many scientist as the beginning of Koenkai as the widespread organization (Fukutake, 1967, pp. 192–193).

Matsushita Keichi underlined post-war replacement of landlords by new ruling class of local officials as the direct consequence of post-war reform that brought about crucial changes in social structures (Keichi, 1961, p. 519). In the prenatal phase Koenkai were created by incorporation of vote-mobilization organizations belonging to local politicians under the banner of single Diet member. Following, they have been transformed into autonomous organizations with purpose of single diet member constituency *jiban*¹ cultivation, that linked the parliament member and the voters directly bypassing local politicians.

It is widely held in previous research, that Koenkai with the organizational framework as an indispensable part of electoral campaign appeared not sooner than in second half of 1950th, when the most important feature of contemporary organization – mass-membership – had developed.

Koenkai as electoral strategy was no different from previous old hierarchical mechanisms, in which entitled to vote citizens entrusted their ballots to the local opinion leaders. Novelty that transformed individual support groups from old hierarchical organization into the modern one was the membership that run in the tens of thousands. Gerald Curtis emphasized mass-membership and function of organizing large number of the electorate on behalf of the particular Diet member candidate as the feature that made Koenkai contemporary institution (Curtis, 2009, pp. 128–129). Nevertheless, there is no secret that most of organizations were run, organized and stimulated solely by no mass electorate but by politicians themselves.

Nobosuke Yasuno (2019, pp. 302–303) noticed a sudden increase in the number of Koenkai preceded by revision of Public Office Law in 1954 that enumerated political organizations as the only permitted to receive donations from individual voters. He claims that uncertain and sudden dissolutions of legislature² forced candidates into seeking new efficient forms of introducing themselves to the constituency voters, whereas current members tried to strengthen their support base before legal campaign was even announced. As acting as a candidate with intention to run in election rally could be considered as illegal pre-campaign act, candidates developed commonly practiced custom of distributing

1 Jap. *jiban* (地盤) literally 'land' in political studies used to refer single politician support base.

2 Jap. *Nukiuchi kaisan* (抜き打ち解散)

occasional gifts and gratitude envelopes with clearly marked name among voters. Before Public Office Law revision all kind of promotional activities were organized -at least officially, not by politicians themselves but by individual persons. 1954's revision of Public Office Law limited all donations into the transfers to political organizations.³ It resulted in directing most of the donations to Koenkai and caused rapid growth in their number.

Ida Hiroshi explained emergence of Koenkai by urbanization that occurred in second half of 20th century (Ida, 1995, pp. 4–8). Between 1920 and 1980 Japanese urban population increased from 10 to 89 million people, between 1950 and 1955 urban population grew by slightly more than 60%,⁴ 1955 was the year that number of people fleeing to the cities surpassed those living in rural areas for the first time in Japanese history. Population shift caused dismantlement of local tight-knit communities, politically cohesive and gathered among the local leaders. To prevent the inevitable slump of support measured by the ballots on the election day, local leaders had to fill the lack of sufficient endorsement base creating individual support associations. This process was accurately described by Matsushita Keiichi (1961, p. 521):

Koenkai is Japanese form of a modern political organization that appeared on the large scale in the post-war period with the expansion of the electorate which fell from grace of the local bosses. It is a substitute for a formal party organization. It is not all feudalistic but, on the contrary, is a technique which inevitably arose as a response to the destruction of the feudalistic order.

Indeed Koenkai had emerged even before the period of democratization but developed after the II World War as the institution that represents democratic regime and reflects the old hierarchical social order.

3. Why Koenkai?

The vast part of researchers perceives roots of the personal support groups in electoral system and strict political campaign rules. It is widely held that electoral rules shape the extent to which individual politicians

3 Allowed were only donations that not exceeded socially accepted level (一般の社交の程度を超えない寄附).

4 However some part of this increase is attributed to expanded number of cities that resulted from the Municipal Amalgamation Act (市町村合併法) in 1953. The number of officially classified cities changed from 254 in 1950 to 496 in 1955.

can benefit electorally developing personal reputation. In many systems strong personal reputation within a limited electoral district is critical to electoral success.

According to the study held by John Carey and Matthew Shugart (1995, pp. 417–439) in which they rank electoral system based on how it affects candidates, the formula used in Japan until 1993 the single non-transferable vote in multi-member district system (SNTV MMD) creates the greatest incentives to cultivate personal reputation and personal vote. Personal vote is referred as ‘portion of candidate’s electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record’ (Cain, 1987, p. 9). Candidates competing with same party nominates had to use any possible method to earn adequate number of votes guarantying the re-election.

Ōtake Hideo (1998, pp. 11–14) claims, that introduction of single seat constituency electoral system surprisingly undermined party discipline and strengthen individual support organizations to that extent, that elections in Japan come to bear an even greater resemblance to the American Congressional Elections, in which single candidates are supported mainly by personal networks than by political party structures.

Another factor that has been stimulating development of Koenkai are extremely strict rules of election campaign stipulated by Public Office Election Law. It imposes extensive restrictions on election rally. According to the act (Kōshoku senkyo-hō, 2020), candidates are permitted to run campaign from the day of the notification to the day before election, accordingly – 17 days to House of Councillors, 14 days in mayoral election, and only 12 days for candidates to House of Representative. Furthermore, there is wide list of strictly prohibited acts: door-to-door canvassing with the intention of soliciting a vote for oneself or another person, provision of food or drinks, signature movement, publishing popularity contest results etc.

All registered candidates may ply the streets of electoral districts between 8 am and 8 pm, in the clearly identifiable campaign car or boat, blaring speeches by the microphones – with specified maximal loudness, surrounded by vowing supporters. Multiple private speeches at public facilities without any charge are allowed, however prior notification to Election Administrative Commission is required. Law prohibits candidates in Lower House single seat districts from distributing any sort of writing or illustrations, aside from two types of fliers with a maximum of 70 000 leaflets, and 35 000 postcards. Updating the website or blog is forbidden,

candidates can also hang individual poster with notified content on official campaign bulletin board.

Most political activities before the first day of campaign are prohibited, however politicians using constitutionally guaranteed freedom of political activities can engage in promotion of general political objectives and policy. Koenkai has naturally become dedicated platform for those activities. As there is no restriction imposed on activity within the groups. Japanese politicians don't ask for vote but to join to their individual support groups. They also trying to attract voters by organizing multiple events and trips. Politicians used to mark their presence on all sorts of ceremonies relevant to local communities and individuals, especially important members of local society.

Ray Christensen (1998, pp. 986–1004) is considering those strict restrictions as the main reason that harms development of issue voting in Japan. Having all those law constraints candidates and politicians are seeking to sidestep all restrictions by dividing their activity between official campaign period and non-campaign period. What is more, various organizations with no legally imposed restriction are utilized, among them Koenkai's are the most developed and successful one. In addition, it is widely held that electoral reform from 1994 has made political campaign even more candidate oriented than ever before.

4. Previous research

There is only a few aggregate academic research entirely dedicated to Koenkai. Most of them has been conducted by Japanese and foreign political and electoral studies researchers and can be divided into three following categories: case studies based on field research, theoretical approaches, secondary data analysis based on survey conducted on voters or politicians. In addition, unquestionable position of Liberal Democratic Party attracts many journalists to shed some light on various LDP's organizational structures: factions, PARC, and Koenkai in various publications.

One of the earliest case studies on Koenkai was conducted by Nathaniel Thayer (2015, pp. 88–110), who examined individual support groups of Yasuhiro Nakasone.

Significance of multiple connections between constituency members and politicians under the Koenkai network has been shown in field research

conducted by Gerald Curtis (2009). He delivered valuable insight into everyday work in electoral district as well as electoral campaign in second Oita district in 1967. Study abounds in description of original electoral tactics -unnoticeable by ordinary voter, and methods of building support. Author hasn't made though any attempt to systemize those tactics that may vary according to the constituency specification. His observations reaffirmed informality of individual support groups, which is generally overlooked in analyses based exclusively on membership data. Curtis evoked Yoshimura Tadashi, claiming existence of two different patterns of organization. First are political support groups in a strict sense, officially registered, with office in Tokyo. Second are patchworks of cultural, sports and hobbies groups with politician on the top of the structure, who usually holds honorific function of president. During the electoral rally groups are freely utilized as electoral campaign organizations. Sense of affiliation is accomplished by official membership or unofficial participation in activities organized by those groups over the year. It gives evidence that Koenkai constitutes itself through participation. Ultimately activities within informal groups serve to the main goal of expanding and institutionalizing support among general electorate (Curtis, 2009, pp. 126–211).

Curtis statement that Koenkai is effective electoral platform only 'in fairly small cities' has been denied by Ichiro Miyake, who proved correlation between Konekai's membership rate and level of urbanization. He justified statement that percentage of Koenkai members growth accordingly to the votes needed to obtain a post in particular constituency, that is why membership in more populated areas tends to be higher (Miyake, 1990, pp. 80–97).

Comparative analysis of urban and rural voters, conducted by Toshimasa Moriwaki (1984) in 1987 aimed to asses' political attitudes, altered due to economic growth, depopulation, and economic crisis of rural areas. Basing on relatively small sample, his study showed that migration from rural to urban areas, induced local voters to affect political outcomes by participation in local organizations. Study showed that most of the votes in rural areas are correlated with political effectiveness, addressing local agenda, and lobbying for it on the national level. Allegedly for this reason, affiliation with support associations in rural areas is higher than in urban ones. What is more, connection between voters and politicians in rural area tends to be more frequent and deeper (Moriwaki, 1984, pp. 557–582).

Hitoshi Abe, Muneyuki Shindo, Sadafumi Kawato (1994) acknowledged Koenkai as electoral strategy machine underlining two main reasons of its spread. First was poverty of local administration in the post-war period. It brought about Diet members quite easy access to local politician's supporters. Secondly, merger of conservative parties that intensified electoral competition among candidates, exceptionally severe between LDP members (Abe, Shindo & Kawato, 1994, pp. 170–181). Additionally, findings showed that Koenkai consist of two parts: steadily expanding membership oscillating around doubled or tripled number of votes indispensable for being elected, and external organizational belt composed of structure of local politicians, leaders of occupational groups, and associations or chambers of commerce. They participate in Koekai as representatives of their organization aiming their own organization's goals (Abe, Shindo & Kawato, 1994, p. 171). Research concluded that individual support groups are organization of great importance for both parliament members and citizens and even electoral changes itself would not affect them considerably.

The most advanced multilevel research has been conducted by Masahiro Yamada and Yukio Kabashima (1994). Their analysis was based on data set accumulated on surveys conducted consecutively on seven general elections between 1972 and 1995 by *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* (Clean Election League). Study showed significance of Koenkai in Japanese political system over the years. Percentage of voters declaring affiliation with individual support groups had been rising steadily until 1979, when it reached maximum 30%. Since then, rate decreased by half, reaching stable level of 18% in 1983 year's election. Growing number of Koenkai members among supporters of each political party indicates that individual support group's importance had been rising in the 70's, 80's and early 90's. Particularly supporters of Liberal Democratic Party organized in Koenkai used to be remarkably active on the election day. More than half of them constantly supported party's candidates in election. This constitutes the fact that Koenkai plays a role of voting machine for Liberal Democratic Party candidates, and LDP's election strategy in one fourth is based on Koenkai's. Surprisingly though, there is no statistically valid correlation between membership and voters' turnout at the ballot box. It is proved that membership tends to increase all kinds of political mobilization and gathering (participation in meeting and speeches etc.) but not necessarily affects voting behaviour. Statistically justifiable are variables describing potential Koenkai member, who is representant of conservative ideology,

most likely to be male citizen older than 40 years old, lives in rural areas or medium size city -the larger the city is membership rate tends to fall. Data confirmed also, that Koenkai members are typically self-employed or work in commerce industry services, agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry (Kabashima & Yamada, 1994, pp. 217, 228–230).

One of the first scientific attempt to explain Japanese voting behaviour has been made by Joji Watanuki in collective publication: "The Japanese Voter" co-authored with Bradley Richardson, Ichiro Miyake, Scott Flanagan and Shinsaku Kohei (1991). Their analysis used single data set based on survey conducted in 1976 by *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* (Clean Election League). Regarding individual support groups, study underlined correlation between occupation and Konekai membership, which was the highest among commercial and industrial workers. Moreover, study showed that relation between occupation and Koenkai membership varies depending on the regions (1991, pp. 387–406).

Field study conducted by Jean-Marie Bouissou (1992, pp. 515–517) on the sample of more than 40 former and past Diet representatives revealed organizational structure of individual support groups in the beginning of 1990s. Findings showed that core element of each Koenkai consist of permanently hired secretaries – use to be members of local community, who's number varies depending on organizational strategy worked out by single politician and oscillate between 15, up to 30 people in large districts. Some studies pointed that core staff of Koenkai may be outsourced from local companies or organizations favourable to the candidate, which remarkably reduce operating cost. Koenkai's main task is to control and represent Diet member in assigned part of constituency, taking part in local gatherings, reporting local community about performance in the Diet. Secretaries persistently reminds about commitment to the issues of the greatest importance to local communities, as well as constantly underlines bonds that link politician with constituency.

Secondly well developed Koenkai consist of large number of lower-level representatives, such persons in charge *sewanin*, organizers *kanji*, liason agents *renrakunin*, officials *yakunin* performing voluntarily various functions. Each of them is responsible for assigned smaller area of constituency corresponding to Japanese town, district or even smaller. Similarly, to the secretaries, they are responsible for communication with hard cord electorate organized territorially or ideologically. According to Bouissou's findings Koenkai are 'mosaic groups of very dissimilar in nature, name and function' and 'born from parochial identification with a local

community, material interest, personal histories, common likes and other feelings able to forge bonds between human beings' (1991, pp. 517–519). Number of dependent organizations varies but on average single LDP Diet member controls from 50 up to 80 organizations. Bouissou beyond the support providing function distinguished convivial, redistributive, constituency service, mutual help, socializing and democratizing functions of individual support groups.

5. Koenkai's distributive function

Koenkai performs multiple roles for both politician and voters. Apart from informing constituency members about upcoming legislation and policy updates, the main function has been strengthening and expanding support base in single constituency. As it requires both time and enormous money contributions – mainly when operating cost rises and electoral competition getting stronger, phenomenon of funnelling pork to the constituencies has become not uncommon aspect of strengthening electoral support base. The iconic example is Tanaka Kakuei, whose Koenkai structures expanded to historically largest scale. The aim of following part is to illustrate the evolution of Konekai as pork barrel machine platforms.

After the II World War Japanese local government system had been institutionalized in a form that deliberately intertwines political and administrative linkages. Historically LDP used the land reforms of the early post-war period as a way of building clientelist networks in rural areas, taking credit for public projects in a manner not uncommon to the political parties in other democracies.

Mancur Olson in his study *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) proved that individuals establishing any group or organization of common interest further its aim only on condition that it will pursue their own particular interest. Moreover, unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will never act to achieve common or group aim. In addition to that Leon Festinger claimed that 'the attraction of group membership is not so much in sheer belonging, but rather in attaining something by means of this membership' (Festinger, 1953, p. 93).

Wakata Kyōji (1982, p. 142) argued that nature of an organization depends on what incentives it uses to organize itself. As the leadership succession and

hereditary politician's phenomenon developed in Japanese political system, one of the Konekai's most important function has become providing the easy access to politician and government. When the politician career advances, the value of being a member of sponsorship association moves from 'a system of solidarity to a system of profits' (Kyōji, 1982, p. 142).

The earliest study on Koenkai proving function described by Wakata Kyōji was conducted by Nathaniel Thayer (2015, pp. 88–110), who examined individual support groups of Yasuhiro Nakasone. Through the field research he stated that Koenkai is platform of providing constituency services and introducing the governmental projects with the primary aim of bringing money to constituencies.

Abe, Shindo and Kawato (1994, pp. 170–181) specified three areas of support groups activity. First is receiving feedback from local politicians as well as constituency members and transmitting those needs on national level to the members of the party -mainly to the most influential figures such as factions' leaders or PARC members. Second is dealing with individual and collective, political, unpolitical requests and demands, answering legal questions or doubts, delivering small favours and advices to the constituency members. 'The more personal the problem, the greater effect, the more solid the vote' (Abe, Shindo & Kawato, 1994, p. 179). Third function is providing Koenkai members with all sorts of recreation strictly not linked with politics. It includes organizing cooking classes for housewife's, sport tournaments, trips to nearby hot springs or National Diet and Tokyo, as well as gatherings with lavishly laid tables in luxury hotels.

Fukui, Shigeko (1996, pp. 268–286) described multilevel, vertically organized mechanism of solicitation for local investments. It contains Koenkai network and local politicians support base on the bottom, Diet members serving as the pipelines in the centre, and Nagatacho bureaucratic decision makers on the top. Individual support groups linked with grass roots level associations affiliated to industry and merchants' groups, has been collecting list of projects that require governmental subsidies. Lists are considered by prefectural governments and legislatures. If they get a green light, Diet members take on their shoulders hardship of referring the projects to the central ministries and agencies.⁵ If the referred project receives donations, it automatically reinforces politician support base in his constituency. If it fails lack of sufficient explanation to the constituency members may even terminate political life.

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5 Pork barrel politics, p. 275.

Shigeno Hirano (2006, pp. 77–80) proved in geographical analysis, that both vote shares and distribution of central government transfers tend to be geographically concentrated across regions within constituencies in close distance to home area of LDP Diet members.⁶

Junichiro Wada (1985, pp. 98–115) sought correlation between elected Diet representatives from Liberal Democratic Party and amounts of subsidies directed to each of 47 Japanese prefectures. Result of his findings showed, that in 1980 single elected representative of ruling party was worth 41 trillion yen expressed in subsidies. In comparison, Diet member of opposition party costed only 7 trillion yen.

Kobayashi Yoshiaki (1997, pp. 129–148) delivered the most advanced multi-level analysis showing that special subsidy grants in contrary to ordinary grants allocations are dependent not mainly on economic situation of municipalities but also on influence of single politician. It is measured not by number of electoral successes or even the fact of being Ministry of Infrastructure, but by the period of holding the political or bureaucratic positions. It is striking that same correlation is not valid for any opposition party members, whereas for LDP members it seems to gain on strength year by year. Additionally, Kobayashi proved that LDP members tend to direct pork exactly to their constituencies, which indicates that whole process of transferring local demands to politicians occur exclusively with use of Koenkai network.

In most of cases money from subsidies are funnelled to the three big industries: construction, forestry and fishing and finance.⁷ LDP voters tends to be strictly correlated with forestry and fishing industry. Politicians funnel pork earning the benefits from constituency members directly receiving donation and expanding their support base, or indirectly by advancing careers. This leads to newer ending circle of democratic process disruption and monopolized by Liberal Democratic Party and concreting the predominant party system.

Masaru Kohno and Yoshitaka Nishizawa (1990, pp. 151–166) called into question if general election date is correlated with economic phases. Statistical model based on governmental expenditures for public works and construction (by public corporations and agencies) between 1950s and 1980s showed no correlation of election timing with economic

6 Shigeno Hirano Electoral institutions Hometowns and Favored Minorities Evidence from Japan Electoral Electoral institutions Hometowns Favored Minorities... 74 = 70reforms.

7 農水族、建設族、大蔵族 142.

expansion phases. It proved however, existence of valid correlation with governmental spending on public construction for electoral purposes. Major part of investment covered by public subsidies has been done in election year or period narrowly preceding elections.

Carlson and Reed (2018) presented grass-root organizations involvement in majority of political scandals appearing on the line between business, Japanese politicians, and bureaucrats. As the nature of those scandals, from raw purchase of public policy to abuse of political power altered, Koenkai involvement in illegal practices has changed.

6. Reforms

Rising cost of nurturing electoral support base driven by severe intraparty competition, local budget dependency on governmental subsidies and tightening rules of political funds raising led to series of corruption and bribery scandals. In the most shocking eleven cases occurred between 1947 and 1993 six involved both politicians and bureaucrats, one was primarily a bureaucratic scandal with politicians involved, four were strictly political scandals with minor bureaucratic involvement (Carlson & Reed, 2018, p. 93). Most of the politician's connivance didn't harm LDP's long grip in power because voters could easily switch their preferences to the clear politicians even within the same constituencies. However, the scale of Sagawa Kyubin scandal, with Liberal Democratic Party deputy leader Shin Kanemaru involved forced not only end of Miyazawa cabinet, it finished almost undisturbed LDP's long grip of power and caused fundamental changes of electoral system – revision of Political Funds Control Act and Public Offices Election Law (Otake, 1996, pp. 271–292).

Introduced in 1994 mixed electoral system put an end to intraparty competition, launching 300 single members districts across the country and 11 proportional representation blocks, with overall number of 200 mandates. Voters has stared casting the ballots in both single member districts -on politicians, and on party in proportional representation block. New electoral system was believed to decrease the 'entry cost' for young politicians and downward spiral of harsh competition between same party candidates in constituencies (Hayashi et al., 2018, p. 232). The main ambition was indeed prevention of excessive bribery and personal character of electoral campaign. It won't be an exaggeration if we assume that reform was the move against the strength of Koenkai structures.

Revised Political Funds Control Act prohibited corporate and group donation to individual politicians. All donations from individuals over 50 000 JPY have to be notified in financial reports. Accordingly, donation to 'another groups' such as Koenkai were limited to 10 million JPY per year (Honma, 1994, pp. 23–38).

Liberal Democratic Party since its commencement has been building strong electoral dominance incessantly controlling money flow to the local governments. Municipalities had been collecting only 30% of the total budget spending, whereas national government controlled as much as 70% through several direct taxes and large number of indirect ones. Even though great majority were divided according to the special LAT grant formula, some part of them could be allocated according to the needs of constituencies, that apply to various investments donation. To maximize budget incomes, vast part of non-partisan local politician maintained bold ties with the most powerful LDP structures in the region – Diet members' Koenkai's (Horiuchi et al., 2015, pp. 99–125).

Nevertheless, this situation has been also terminated by administration of Junichiro Koizumi, who cut particularistic spending and increased autonomy of local municipalities. Far reaching package of decentralization aimed to boost Japan's economy were introduced. Decentralization reforms known as *sanmi ittai kaikaku* (Horiuchi et al., 2011) based on three pillars: overall reduction of subsidies from the central government, transfer of tax revenue sources to local governments and revision of institutional architecture that regulated LAT grants. As the transfers to local constituencies had been reduced, autonomy of local governments increased, diminishing cultivated over years links between local constituencies and influential LDP's Diet members to some degree. During Yuinichiro Koizumi 2001–2006 tenure key pieces of the Japanese clientelist bonds has been cut by reduction of construction projects and agricultural subsidies.

Legal and structural changes mentioned above undoubtedly affected whole political institutions, in greatest degree individual support network of Koenkai.

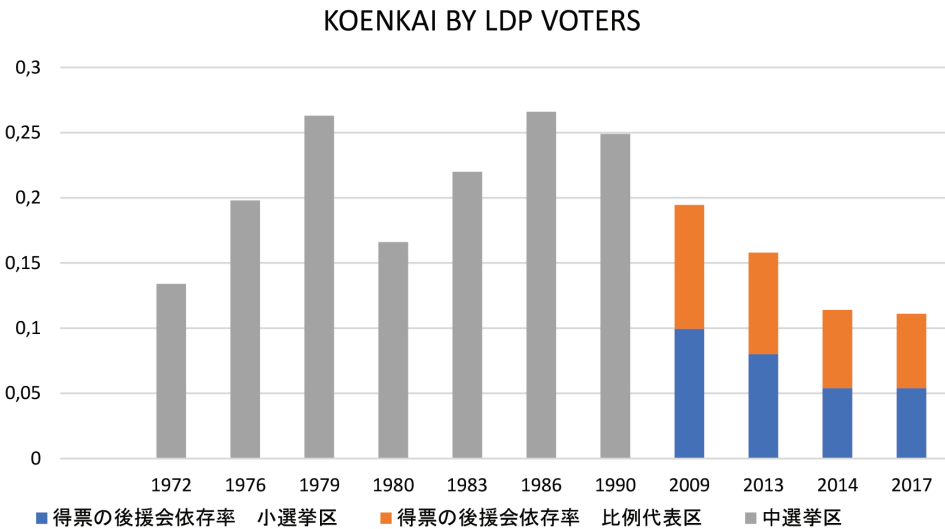
7. Research design and data analysis

Building on previous research I claim that Revision of Public Office Election Law affected Koenkai membership negatively decreasing the number of members since 1994. Moreover, this trend should be visible in recent year even if sharp fall has not appeared soon after the reforms.

Secondly, I hold that decentralization reforms, revised LAT allocation formula weakened dependency between local politicians and Koenkai members, what in addition to tightened restrictions of Political Subsidies Act caused drop in the individual support group’s budgets. Taking into consideration that two points I will try to elaborate if it’s possible that Koenkai’s function of pork barrel platform has been diminished and, if it’s likely that it will lose its importance.

Firstly, in order to answer the question how political system changes affected scope of membership in Liberal Democratic Party’s Diet members Koenkai I examined data set accumulated on surveys conducted by Clean Election League (*Akarui Suishin Kyokai*) on nation-wide sample, from general election between 1972–1990 under the single non-transferable vote in multi member district, and between 2009 and 2017 hold under new mix-member majoritarian system to the House of Representatives.

Figure 1. Share of votes casted on LDP by Koenkai members (0.1 = 10%)



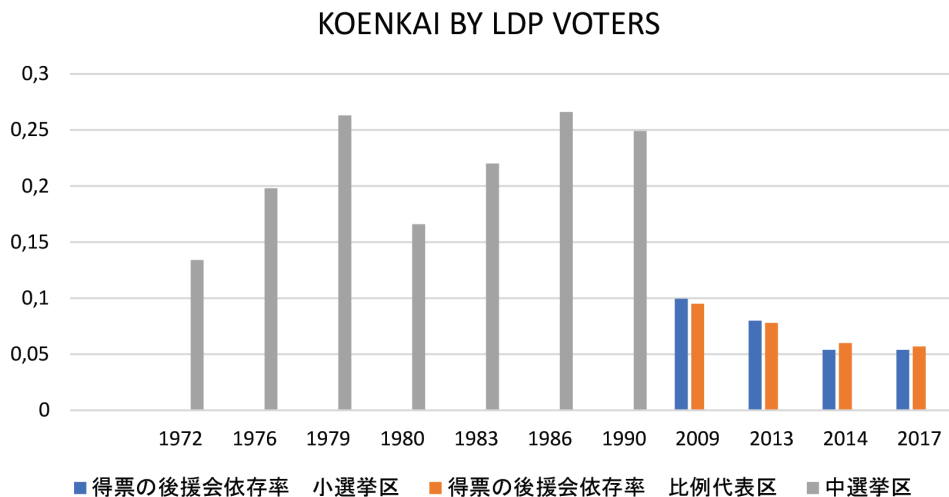
Grey – multi member districts, blue – single member district, orange – pr lists

Source: *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* combined post-election survey for the 1972–2017 House of Representatives Election. Data for this secondary analysis was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

東京大学社会科学研究所附属社会調査・データアーカイブ研究センターSSJデータアーカイブから 衆議院議員総選挙全国意識調査（明るい選挙推進協会）の個票データの提供を受けました。

Figure 1 shows clearly, that Koenkai membership had its peak in 1986, and since then it is gradually decreasing election by election. Continuing downward trend may illustrate that politician facing no intra-party competition are less likely to maintain high membership rate for electoral purposes. This state seems to be reasonable, especially when they were used to covered most of the membership fees by themselves. If the act of being member was usually alleged upon free participation in activities like costly hot spring trips, visible drop could mean that those practices has been to some extent abandoned. Sudden drop in membership to about 15% of Liberal Democratic Party voters may prove new, possible to maintain membership level with limited incentive for membership promotion activities, and after all changes in political system.

Figure 2. Share of votes casted on LDP by Koenkai members (0.1 = 10%)



Grey – multi member districts, blue – single member district, orange – pr lists

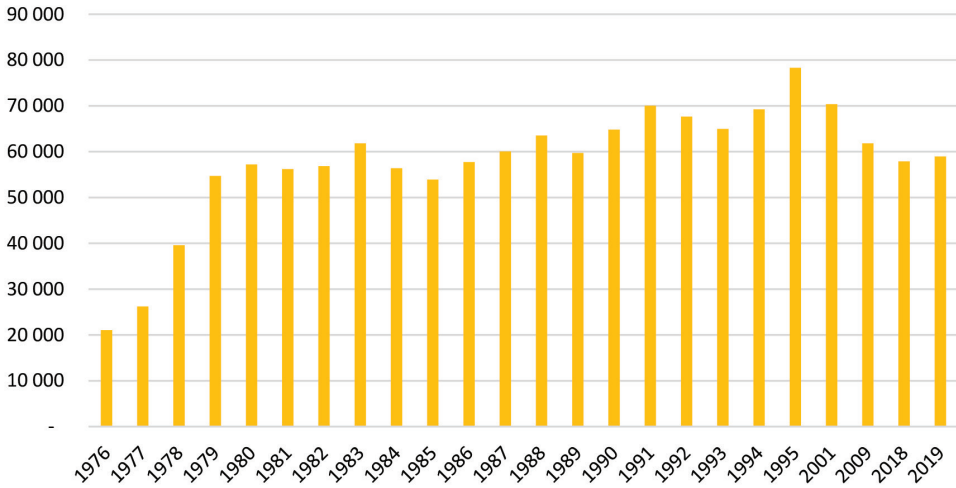
Source: *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* combined post-election survey for the 1972–2017 House of Representatives Election. Data for this secondary analysis was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

東京大学社会科学研究所附属社会調査・データアーカイブ研究センターSSJデータアーカイブから衆議院議員総選挙全国意識調査(明るい選挙推進協会)の個票データの提供を受けました。

Subsequently, in order to examine the number of individual support groups nation-wide, I utilized data from Political Funds Balance Report that notification is required on yearly basis upon Political Funds Control Act.

Reports are being submitted to the Electoral Commissions on prefectural level and to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. To calculate total number of Koenkai organizations I summed total number of organizations from both ministerial and prefectural annual reports.

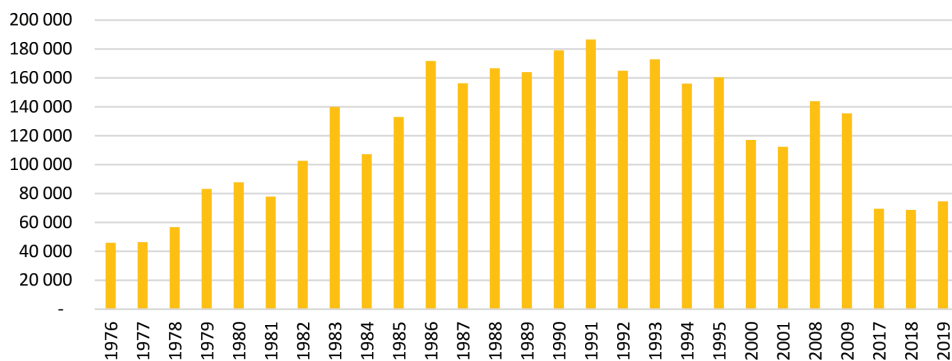
Figure 3. Number of Koenkai ‘other’ political organizations 1976–2019



Source: *Seiji Shikin Zensho, Kōhō, Seiji Shikin Zensho Kanpō 1976–2019*

Accumulated data shows that number of individual support groups had raised to 60 000–70 000 groups nationwide between 1979 and 1994. It peaked once in 1995 which may be the effect of limitations in funding imposed on single organizations in 1994 that resulted in duplication of some structures. Since 2009 number of Koenkai has fallen to level of 57 000–60 000 groups nationwide. More optimistically than the membership rate, total number of organizations seems to stabilize recently on the same level as between 1979 and 1989. It may indicate that Koenkai membership has become more informal, whereas the groups frames exist regardless of membership rate.

To examine the scope of individual support groups activities, I summed total number of incomes submitted by each registered group to prefectural commissions and Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications. Figure 4 presents total accumulated income of all groups across the country. It shows clearly that revenues of political organizations has dropped in last 5 years to the level from 1970s – period preceding Konekai’s beginning of glory.

Figure 4. Total income of political organizations in million JPY

Source: *Seiji Shikin Zensho, Kōhō, Seiji Shikin Zensho Kanpō* 1976–2019

8. Conclusions

Presented in previous part accumulated data of Koenkai membership distinctly indicates that revision of Public Office Election Law altering Japanese electoral system into mix-member majoritarian has led to decrease in the scope of Koenkai membership among LDP voters. It has shrunken significantly over last two elections. The most likely reason standing behind this finding is systemic termination of intra-party competition in the single member districts that lowered degree of electoral mobilization. Moderately higher percentage of membership among voters that casted ballots on LDP candidates on proportional list may indicate continued importance of attracting voters to the individual support groups. Koenkai with large network of followers, could be possibly still perceived as the most efficient electoral strategy of building its own *jiban* and popularity within the party even by the great majority of younger candidates running from proportional representation lists. Share of votes casted on LDP candidates by Koenkai members proves that groups are utilized rather as the platform of maintaining firm but marginal support base among voters, than performing function of electoral mobilization platform on large scale.

Consequently, data revealed visible drop in number of existing Koenkai groups across the country. This trend is clear since 2001 elections, when number of Koenkai organization dropped after reaching its peak in 1995. Data from 2018 and 2019 showed that gentle decreasing trend is constant. Reforms in the smallest degree affected number of Koenkai groups. We

can assume that some of the groups will not be dissolved, even if they lose their primary function.

Interestingly, sharp drop of Koenkai operational incomes proves that intended effects of Political Party Subsidies Act, decentralization reforms, and of LAT grants formula revision have been accomplished. Nor voters, nor any sort of lobbyist or business representatives cannot legally support politicians by enormously generous donations and money transfers. Undoubtedly, reforms mentioned above affected groups in a way that it seems to irretrievably lose its pork-barrel feature. It is also relevant to mention, that nature of political corruption and bribery in Japan also has been changing over last three decades. Yet, reforms and lively public debate enhanced transparency and empowered mass media and public opinion to actively track and discuss any sign of political corruption. As the one of the solidest systems of LDP support base – act of influencing subsidies and directing public works to particular region has been diminished, dependency between local politics and LDP members has irretrievably weakened.

Initiated in 1994 changes of Japanese political system were an attempt to introduce British-party politics to Japan to accord greater emphasis on electoral competition, whereas other reforms were designed to limit corruption and distributive function of money politics. All had its impact on Koenkai – the most important electoral organization of Japanese Diet members. Research proved that individual support group's distributive feature has been marginalized to degree that is very unlikely in future to have any impact on Japanese politics and electoral rules as significant as in the past. Foreseeable social demographic and voting behaviour trends together with evolution of mass communication channels will possibly push Koenkai's under the process of further organizational transformation.

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