



# Administrative Reform and Administrative Responsibility: The Case of Japan

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## Abstract

*The central government of Japan has regularly established ad hoc councils to prepare the comprehensive administrative reform plan. They are the First Extraordinary Administration Research Council (the early 1960s), the Second Extraordinary Administration Research Council (the early 1980s), and the Administrative Reform Council (the late 1990s). The final reports of these councils were based on the recognition of the socio-economic conditions at the time and the views on administrative responsibilities. This article organises the views of the three councils using the concepts of administrative responsibilities derived from the Friedrich and Finer debate. Moreover, I overview administrative reform after the Administrative Reform Council to 2020 and try to extract the views on administrative responsibilities. This study contributes to building methods to understand administrative reform from a normative perspective.*

## Keywords

*Responsibility; Accountability; Administrative Reform; Japan*

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## Introduction

This article considers the historical transition of the views on administrative responsibilities in the administrative reform of Japan.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, I review the final reports of the three councils that were in charge of comprehensive administrative reforms. Additionally, I clarify a recent trend of administrative responsibilities from 2002 to 2020. Advancing this study, I refer to the theories of administrative responsibilities.

The theories of administrative responsibilities are derived from the Friedrich–Finer debate in the 1930s–1940s. The theme of the debate is how administrative responsibility can be assured under an administrative state. On the one hand, Friedrich argued in favor of the new concept of administrative responsibility in which, considering the inability of the legislative body to control administration, administrative organs are required to autonomously fulfil their responsibilities, away from legislative oversight. On the other hand, Finer criticized the concept proposed by Friedrich and emphasised that even if the administrative state is an inevitable phenomenon, we should still stress external control of administrative organs by the legislature. In Japan, researchers have refined Friedrich's concept to equal responsibility and Finer's to equal accountability.

I develop these concepts into three meanings of administrative responsibility: (1) responsibility as ability, (2) responsibility as extent, and (3) accountability. Responsibility as ability is the responsibility of each administrative organ fulfilled by resolving public issues actively and autonomously. Responsibility as extent implies the extent of the entire administration having responsibility for dealing with public issues within society. Accountability is the external type of responsibility in which the public and the congress hold administrative organs accountable for their activity through a formal institution.

From the perspective of these meanings of responsibilities, I review the final reports presented by the three councils handling comprehensive administrative reforms in Japan. They include the First Extraordinary Administration Research Council (the First Council, established from November 1961 to September 1964), the Second Extraordinary Administration Research Council (the Second Council, established from March 1981 to March 1983), and the Administrative Reform Council (established from November 1996 to June 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> I have already studied the views on administrative responsibilities of the First Council, Second Council, and Administrative Reform Council (Kagami, 2019). I write the corresponding part of this article revising my past study. For example, I add the description about the explanation of the public administration of Japan. Moreover, to avoid complicating the discussion, I treat the main points of the reforms without going into its detail.

Considering the views on the administrative responsibilities of each council, I note the influence of socioeconomic contexts. Each council was established under different socioeconomic contexts including the scale of revenue, degree of trust in government, and demands from foreign governments. I show these contexts influenced not only the contents of the reforms but also the views on administrative responsibilities.

Moreover, I overview the perspectives on administrative responsibility after the Administrative Reform Council up to 2020. Although in this period, specific fields of reform (civil service system, administrative organs system, intergovernmental relations, etc.) have been planned and implemented fragmentally by individual councils and administrative organs, there had been no council that dealt with comprehensive administrative reform like the three councils. Additionally, there is inadequate literature on the relationship between socioeconomic environment, administrative reform, and administrative responsibility during this period. So, I confine this study to briefly sketch the main reforms from the three meanings.

## The Three Meanings of Administrative Responsibility

This section develops the three meanings of administrative responsibilities that are used to evaluate the views on the administrative responsibilities of the three councils. In developing the meanings, I refer to the theories of administrative responsibilities that emerged through Carl J. Friedrich and Herman Finer's debate from the late 1930s to the early 1940s (Finer, 1936, 1941; Friedrich, 1935, 1940).

The debate between Friedrich and Finer is famous in the history of the study of public administration. The theme of the debate was how to ensure the responsibility of public administration. In the 1930s, the federal government of the United States was rapidly becoming an administrative state in which, by virtue of having the technical expertise to resolve public issues, administrative organs had become more powerful than the Congress. Whereas the administrative organs prepared detailed drafts of laws and budgets, the congress was criticized for merely applying a rubber stamp on these rules. Therefore, the traditional method of ensuring administrative responsibility, in which the Congress gave the administrative organs clear legislation and monitored administrative behaviours, did not function well. In this situation, Friedrich and Finer discussed ways of ensuring the responsibility of administrative organs.

Friedrich suggested an autonomous responsibility suited to the administrative state (Friedrich, 1935, 1940). He identified that owing to the increasing complexity and difficulty of public issues, the Congress and the public could not effectively devise laws and budgets, and that administrative organs not only implemented decided policies, but also formulated them. Therefore, he argued that the traditional method was defunct and that there was a need to devise new concepts of administrative responsibility beyond Congressional control. He asserted that in formulating and implementing a programme, an administrative organ performed two responsibilities, thereby fulfilling the responsibility for its autonomous actions. Furthermore, he proposed functional responsibility and political responsibility (Friedrich, 1940, pp. 12-14). The former refers to the responsibility of considering the sum of academic knowledge relating to a public issue; the latter implies the responsibility of considering the opinions and/or feelings of the majority in a community.

In response to Friedrich's argument, Finer emphasised the traditional method of ensuring administrative responsibility (Finer, 1936, 1941). He severely criticized Friedrich's autonomous responsibility for the administrative despotism stemming from its broad discretion (Finer, 1941, p. 12) — widening administrative autonomy increases the risk of public officials disregarding the public interest to realise self-interests. Therefore, he insisted that despite the inevitable emergence of the administrative state, the Congress should formulate detailed laws as much as technically possible (Finer, 1941, p. 7). Exemplifying a successful case of diplomatic policy, he argued that the congress could control administrative organs (Finer, 1941, pp. 17-19). In a concluding remark, he suggested that in a democratic government, autonomous responsibility is only admitted as ancillary (Finer, 1941, p. 25).

Later students developed the concepts of responsibility presented by Friedrich and Finer and established the theories of administrative responsibilities. Among these theories, the studies of accountability and administrative ethics are famous (Cooper, 2012; Kagami, 2019; Yamaya, 1991). On the one hand, certain scholars have propounded sophisticated concepts of accountability (Behn, 2001; Bovens et al. (Eds.), 2014; Mulgan, 2003); they are related to Finer's concept of responsibility because, in principle, accountability implies external control of administrative organs. On the other hand, in the history of the study of public administration, the movement of

New Public Administration occurred and the study of administrative ethics was developed (Cooper, 2012; Frederickson, 1971). These studies are the successors of Friedrich in that they emphasise the significance of autonomous activity and a sense of responsibility of civil servants and administrative organs.

The debate has also influenced the study of public administration in Japan. Japanese scholars had noticed and introduced it by the 1950s, and the theory of administrative responsibilities has been studied ever since in Japan (Tsuji, 1951). Japanese scholars further discussed the concepts of 'responsibility' and 'accountability' (Kagami, 2019; Yamaya, 1991). Responsibility refers to the internal responsibility within administrative organs and is fulfilled if they autonomously resolve public issues using their expertise. Accountability refers to external control of administrative organs in which independent actors (e.g., the public, the Congress, independent committees, etc.) monitor and control their activities and investigate and sanction the staff in charge in case of maladministration. Responsibility derives from Friedrich's argument whereas accountability derives from that of Finer. Each concept is developed by generalising the arguments of Friedrich and Finer based on the context of the actor and the time and place where the debate occurred.

In this article, I use the concepts of responsibility and accountability as understood in Japan to evaluate the views on administrative responsibilities of the three councils, but develop responsibility into two different meanings. The three meanings of administrative responsibility include: (1) responsibility as ability, (2) responsibility as extent, and (3) accountability.

Responsibility as ability refers to the responsibility of each administrative organ fulfilled by autonomously resolving public issues using their expertise. This responsibility derives from the autonomous responsibility of Friedrich and it is a popular usage in the study of public administration in Japan (Kagami, 2019; Nishio, 1990; Yamaya, 1991, 2002). Resolving public issues requires an administrative organ to acquire and maintain relative expertise in a public issue. Moreover, for administrative organs to use their expertise, discretion to ensure free decision-making is required. Therefore, if a reform plan attempts to enhance the expertise of administrative organs, it contributes to an improvement of this responsibility. Additionally, if a reform plan attempts to reduce procedural regulation, this type of responsibility is enhanced.

Responsibility as extent implies the extent to which the entire administration has responsibility for dealing with public issues within society. Each administrative organ implements projects under its jurisdiction, and through them, takes responsibility for resolving specific public issues. From this perspective, responsibility as extent implies the sum of interventions by the projects of administrative organs. Therefore, implementing new projects expands responsibility as extent, and vice versa. Establishing a new administrative organ, that is, implementing projects and increasing budget for projects, also expands it. In Japan, areas of administrative activity are discussed under administrative reforms; behind these discussions are views on how to consider this meaning of responsibility. So, although this meaning is less popular than responsibility as ability, it merits equal focus.

Accountability refers to the external type of responsibility, in which independent actors hold administrative organs accountable for their activities through formal institutions. These actors collect and verify information related to administrative activities, and upon identifying a problem, they seek more documents or summon stakeholders to reveal the truth. Finally, if investigation proves maladministration, they may impose sanctions on administrative organs. Therefore, accountability can be understood as the formal and procedural type of responsibility. If a government establishes an institution or refines existing institutions to improve the quality of the procedure, accountability is enhanced.

Using these meanings of administrative responsibilities, we evaluate the views on the administrative responsibilities of the three councils. Considering the views, I note the influence of socioeconomic contexts. Each council had been established under different socioeconomic contexts, including the scale of revenue, degree of trust in government, and demands from foreign governments. I show that these contexts influenced not only the contents of the reform, but also the views on administrative responsibilities.

Moreover, these concepts relate to trust or distrust of administrative organs (Kagami, 2019, pp. 38-41). Enhancing the two meanings of responsibility widens the discretion and jurisdiction of administrative activities; so, the judgment as to improving them shows trust in their moral stature, abilities, and expertise. On the contrary, accountability implies external control of administrative activities and decreasing administrative discretion. Therefore, these concepts are related to distrust of administrative organs.

## The First Council and Administrative Responsibilities

The First Council was established in 1961 under the Hayato Ikeda Administration (July 1960–November 1964). Its mission was an exhaustive administrative reform to improve the inefficient and old-fashioned administration in place since World War II. The chairperson of this Council was Kiichiro Sato, who was the president of the Mitsui Bank and the vice-president of the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations.<sup>2</sup> The First Council comprised seven council members, including expert council members and examiners. The Council members included two executives of major corporations including Sato; two representatives of central labour unions; one legal professional; one executive of a major newspaper; and one scholar of public administration. In 1964, the First Council submitted the final report to the cabinet and was disbanded.<sup>3</sup>

In the final report, the First Council set six goals: (1) strengthening the coordination function of the cabinet, (2) thoroughly democratising the administration, (3) suppressing expansion of administration and excluding excessive centralisation, (4) modernising and rationalising administrative operations, (5) dealing with new administrative demands, and (6) raising the morale of civil servants. Additionally, it set 16 reform targets and discussed them in terms of the six goals: (1) function of the cabinet, (2) central departments, (3) duplicate functions in departments, (4) distribution of administrative functions, (5) government permissions, (6) elimination and consolidation of administrative organs, (7) public corporations, (8) administration of the capital, (9) regional administration, (10) youth administration, (11) consumer administration, (12) scientific–technical administration, (13) project operation, (14) budget and accounts, (15) procedures for securing fairness in administration, and (16) civil service system.

The final report, analysed on the basis of three meanings of administrative responsibility, clarifies that the First Council emphasised responsibility as ability and extent. The report recommended relaxing regulations and broadening discretion regarding administrative activities to enhance speed and effectiveness. To achieve these, it proposed enabling the reorganisation of bureaus within administrative organs by amending not the law but regulations, and simplifying traditional decision-making procedures requiring many approvals of executives. Additionally, it proposed measures to enhance expertise within administrative organs. For example, it recommended establishing a central research institute on administrative operations to study effective and efficient operations and teach these findings to the staff. Moreover, it recommended thorough training in management skills for directors and managers and preparing a civil services system that can screen and train professional staff better. As confirmed in the previous section, a reform plan enhancing expertise within administrative organs and relaxing regulations contributes to enhancing responsibility as ability.

Additionally, the First Council took a position to broaden responsibility as extent. In the final report, it said “an active administration is the need of this age.” Dr. Masamichi Royama—a council member and a leading scholar at the time—shared that in the First Council; they discussed how to respond to various administrative demands at the time: administration of the capital, regional administration, youth administration, scientific–technical administration, consumer administration, trade administration, administration of economic cooperation, and pollution administration (Sato & Royama, 1964, pp. 14–15). To respond to these demands, it proposed establishing new administrative organs, which led to broadening responsibility as extent.

Compared to the latter two councils, the recommendations of the First Council about accountability were restrained. The institution for accountability that was proposed was no more than the Administrative Procedure Act. As the act required administrative organs to give reasons for their decisions to the other party, it is positioned as an institution of accountability. The First Council not only recommended the introduction of the Act, but also formulated the draft. However, in the formulation process, it had to consider dissenting opinions by the bureaucracy that the introduction of the Act would undermine administrative efficiency (Ezawa et al., 2006, p. 9). So, in the final report, it was added that caution should be exercised regarding the introduction of the Act, and it was, eventually, not enacted.

High economic growth and the lack of infrastructure at the time influenced the view of the administrative responsibilities of the First Council. In the 1960s, the economic growth rate of Japan averaged over 10%. In 1968,

<sup>2</sup> The Japan Federation of Economic Organization is an interest group comprised mainly of large Japanese companies. It has had a significant impact on economic policy in Japan.

<sup>3</sup> The final report of the First Council is published in *Jichi Kenkyu* (Rinji Gyosei Chosa Kai, 1964).

its GNP surpassed that of West Germany to become the second largest in the world. At the same time, the country faced a serious lack of infrastructure related to education, the environment, and transportation. So, the First Council expected the administrative organs actively to improve various infrastructure using the increasing revenue (Muramatsu, 1983, pp. 150-151). This stance contributed to the final report broadening responsibility as extent. Moreover, it also proposed enhancing responsibility as the ability of administrative organs to respond well to these demands. However, issues related to abolishing unnecessary administrative organs that existed prior to World War II and introducing institutions of accountability remained.

## The Second Council and Administrative Responsibilities

The Second Council was established in 1981 under the Zenko Suzuki Administration (July 1980-November 1982). Yasuhiro Nakasone—the secretary of the Administrative Management Agency under the Suzuki Administration and later prime minister—played a leading role in the establishment of this Council. Its main mission was the reduction of fields of administrative activities to deal with the dwindling tax revenue caused by the oil shock. The Council's chairperson was Toshio Doko—president of the Toshiba Corporation and president of the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations. The structure of the Second Council was modeled on the First Council (Masujima, 2003, pp. 11). It comprised nine council members and expert committees in which members were similar to those of the First Council: three executives of major corporations including Doko; two representatives of central labour unions; two ex-executives of administrative organs; one executive of a major newspaper; and one scholar of public administration. In 1983, after submitting its final report to the cabinet, it was disbanded.<sup>4</sup>

The final report comprised eight chapters: (1) administrative organisations, (2) government enterprises and governmental corporations, (3) intergovernmental relations and local administration, (4) subsidies, (5) government permissions, (6) civil servants, (7) budget, accounts, and government investment, and (8) disclosure of information and administrative procedures. Although the targets of reform were similar to the First Council in that they were exhaustive, the contents of the proposals were different. The Second Council thoroughly emphasised rationalisation, clearance, abolishment, cutbacks, privatisation, and decentralisation of administrative organs and their projects in each chapter.

The Second Council was similar to the First Council in that it affirmed the significance of responsibility as ability but different in that it severely reduced responsibility as extent. Its final report said that administrative organs needed to implement actively necessary programmes for national welfare. Moreover, it affirmed the sustaining welfare state and emphasised the ability of administrative organs to achieve it. This stance led to a suggestion of relaxing regulations regarding the reorganisation of administrative organs. As with its predecessor, the Second Council recommended permitting administrative organs to reorganise bureaus within administrative organs by amending not the law but regulations. Accepting this recommendation, the National Government Organization Act was revised (Masujima, 1984a, 1984b).

At the same time, the Second Council strongly argued for the reduction of responsibility as extent. The final report highlighted the ineffective and problematic projects and recommended rationalisation, clearance, abolishment, cutbacks, privatisation, or decentralisation of these projects. Particularly, social security, public works, agricultural policy, and education, the budget, staff size, and projects were reduced. Moreover, its argument in the interim report led to the privatisation of three big public corporations: The Japanese National Railways, Nippon Telegraph Telephone Public Corporation, and Japan Tobacco and Salt Public Corporation. Unlike the First Council, the Second Council took measures in which the Council conducted a hearing with the person in charge of the project to be reduced. This close and detailed investigation helped the Second Council overcome resistance from bureaucrats and contributed to the success of reducing responsibility as extent.

In terms of accountability, the recommendations of the Second Council were broader than those of the First one, but remained restrained. It suggested the introduction of the information disclosure institution, the Administrative Procedure Act, and the ombudsperson system. These institutions contribute to the public and Diet by collecting information about administrative activities and controlling administrative organs. However, compared to the proposals of responsibility as extent, these proposals were not considered specifically and in detail. Thus, these institutions were not introduced after the realisation process of the final report.

<sup>4</sup> The final report of the Second Council is available through the following literature (Rinji Gyosei Chosa Kai OB Kai (Ed.), 1983).

Oil shock and a trend of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s influenced the stance of the Second Council, which emphasised reducing responsibility as extent. As with many developed countries, the Central government of Japan faced a serious decrease in tax revenue because of the oil shock. The Masayoshi Ohira Administration (December 1978-June 1980)—the predecessor to the Suzuki Administration—attempted to compensate for the decline in revenue by introducing a consumption tax, which was severely criticized by the public. So, before increasing taxes, the government undertook a reform of administration that was criticised for wasting revenue (Ogata, 1983, pp. 52-54). In addition to the national situation, a global trend of neoliberal reforms exerted influence on the Second Council (Otake, 1997, pp. 45-46). The Thatcher and Reagan administrations were implementing neoliberal reforms aimed at reducing responsibility as extent. Nevertheless, as with the First Council, the introduction of accountability remained an issue.

## The Administrative Reform Council and Administrative Responsibilities

In 1996, under the Ryutaro Hashimoto Administration (January 1996-July 1998), the Administrative Reform Council was established. Its mission was the restoration of trust in the administration of Japan after multiple policy failures and scandals. Hashimoto—responsible for the legislation of recommendations of the Second Council in the Diet and enthusiastic about administrative reform—became chairperson of the Administrative Reform Council (Kanzaki, 2010, pp. 158). The Council comprised 15 members: there were three politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) including Hashimoto; three executives of major corporations; one representative of a central labour union; two executives of a major newspaper and a state-run broadcaster; and six scholars (physics, psychology, international relations, finance, constitutional law, and administrative law). The Administrative Reform Council submitted the final report to the cabinet in 1997 and was disbanded in 1998.<sup>5</sup>

The targets of this Council were exhaustive. The chapters of the final report include: (1) improvement of the functions of the cabinet, (2) reorganisation of the Central government, (3) downsizing of administrative functions, (4) reform of the civil services system, and (5) miscellaneous topics. Three of its proposals are famous: amalgamating a few administrative organs headed by ministers (from one cabinet office, 12 ministries, and 10 agencies into one cabinet office, 10 ministries, and two agencies); establishing incorporated administrative agencies; and introducing the institution of programme evaluation.

In the final report, the Administrative Reform Council took a stance on improving responsibility as ability and reducing responsibility as extent. Unlike the previous two Councils, though, it actively attempted to introduce an institution of accountability. It suggested an improvement of responsibility as ability by separating functions of administrative organs into programme planning and programme implementation; this separation was a goal of the Administrative Reform Council. Under this goal, it suggested the introduction of the institution of incorporated administrative agencies. They are private organisations, and although subject to the supervision of relevant administrative organs in terms of actions and results of their activities, they enjoy considerable discretion in implementing projects. Administrative organs had been mixed with organisations responsible for planning and implementing programmes, but in principle, the latter became incorporated administrative agencies. Through this separation, the functions and goals of administrative organs were clarified (Kobayakawa & Fujita, 1998, p. 35). Consequently, it became easy for administrative organs to define the required expertise and train and recruit staff with that expertise. Moreover, the aim of the proposal to introduce programme evaluation was expertise improvement. Learning from the results of their own activities, administrative organs can confirm information regarding the programme, including its impacts on society and issues to be resolved (Yamaya, 2012, p. 22). So, programme evaluation is a method of improving responsibility as ability.

The Administrative Reform Council recommended reducing responsibility as extent following the Second Council. Although it proposed abolishment, downscaling, and decentralisation of administrative organs and their projects, as did the Second Council, its proposal was less detailed and narrower than that of the Second Council. Instead, the Administrative Reform Council suggested using new institutions to reduce the area of administrative activities. For example, because incorporated administrative agencies are not administrative organs, and, in principle, staff are not civil servants, it proposed reducing responsibility as extent by actively replacing a part of

<sup>5</sup> The final report of the Administrative Reform Council is available through the following literature (Gyosei Kaikaku Kaigi Jimukyoku OB Kai, 1998).

administrative organs with incorporated administrative agencies. Moreover, it argued that administrative organs can use the results of programme evaluation to judge unnecessary, ineffective programmes and projects.

Unlike the previous two councils, the Administrative Reform Council was insistent upon the enhancement of accountability. The final report set an improvement in transparency by “disclosure of information about administrative activities and through accountability” as one of the goals of their reform. Based on this perspective, there are many suggestions related to the necessity of disclosing information, checking administrative behaviour, or evaluating the results of administrative activities in the final report. In particular, it argued for the early realization of the information-disclosure Act. Moreover, it demanded establishing the public comment procedure and programme evaluation and disclosing information produced through these institutions. Although the proposals of the previous councils for establishing accountability institutions had not been realised, the Administrative Reform Council’s proposal was realised. As mentioned in the second Section, to ensure accountability, the legislative body and the public need information regarding administrative activities to verify and control administrative organs. So, the above recommendations are placed within improvement of accountability.

As there were criticisms related to opaque administration by foreign governments, administrative failures, scandals, and change of government at the time, the Administrative Reform Council emphasised improvement of accountability.<sup>6</sup> First, it indicated that foreign companies that were denied permission to operate in Japan criticised the unclear and unfair treatment by the administration, and foreign governments also emphasised improvement of transparency in the administration (Fukuda, 1995:, pp. 123-125). Second, in the 1990s, the government failed to respond swiftly to the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake and the HIV-tainted-blood scandal.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there was a series of scandals of bureaucrats, including the arrest of a vice-minister on charges of bribery. Third, in August 1993, the LDP, which had been the party in power from 1955–1993, became an opposition party. When the party was out of government, certain Diet members of the LDP reflected upon the need of the government to heavily rely on bureaucrats. So, after they were back in power in June 1994, they attempted to control administrative organs (Iio, 2011, 387–388). These events led to distrust of administrative organs and triggered the introductions of accountability because, as mentioned above, it was expanded against the background of distrust of the administration.

## Overview of Administrative Responsibilities from the Administrative Reform Council to 2020.

In this section, I overview the perspectives on administrative responsibilities from the Administrative Reform Council to 2020. The Council was disbanded in 1998, and the government has attempted to realise its recommendations and taken new reform. In this period, it should be considered that the Democratic Party of Japan held power from 2009 to 2012, and the LDP was in power for the rest of the duration. As will be discussed later, the Democratic Party government sought to reduce administrative wastage, influencing the perspective of administrative responsibility of the later LDP government.

Regarding administrative reform, no council was in charge of less comprehensive administrative reforms as the previous three. Instead, the government established many councils treating specific fields of reform, including cutback of administrative costs, review of administrative regulations, and decentralisation of the inter-governmental system. Regarding regulatory reform, the Regulatory Reform Council (2007–2010, re-established 2013–2016), the Government Revitalization Unit (2009–2012), and the Regulatory Reform Promotion Council (2016–present) were established. Regarding the cutback of administrative costs, the Government Revitalization Unit and the Administrative Reform Promotion Council (2012–present) were established. Regarding decentralisation, the Committee on Decentralization Reform (2007-2010) and the Local Sovereignty Strategy Council (2009-2013) were established. Moreover, in certain fields, the cabinet took the initiative in planning administrative reforms. This

<sup>6</sup> This perspective was pointed out by Kazuaki Tanaka (Tanaka, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> The earthquake occurred on January 17, 1995, killing 6,434 people, and destroying about 250,000 houses. On the other hand, in the HIV-tainted-blood scandal, the use of the unsterilised blood products contaminated with HIV to treat hemophiliacs caused about 1,400 HIV-infected people. The Health and Welfare Ministry was criticized for not taking appropriate measures despite recognising dangers of the unheated blood products.

section assembles fragmented outcomes of administrative reforms from the perspectives of responsibility as ability, responsibility as extent, and accountability.

First, the government has attempted to enhance responsibility as ability by reforming the civil service system and introducing other methods. The First Shinzo Abe Administration (September 2006–September 2007) amended the National Public Service Act to introduce ability evaluation and performance evaluation of staff within administrative organs in 2007. Additionally, the openness of the civil service system has been improved—it became easy to hire personnel with expertise from the private sector as fixed-term staff. Moreover, the government has introduced mid-career examinations for civil servants. These reforms in the civil service system aim at enhancing expertise within administrative organs through hiring and retaining competent staff. So, they are reforms to improve responsibility as ability. More recently, the government has attempted to change the way of conducting business within administrative organs. For example, the government established the Statistics Reform Promotion Council to diffuse evidence-based policymaking (EBPM) within the government, and has discussed and implemented business process reengineering (BPR) (Tokei Kaikaku Suishin Kaigi, 2017). These methods contribute to enhancing responsibility as ability because establishing the system and training of EBPM enable civil servants to take decisions based on statistical data, and by way of BPR, the appropriate task procedures are standardised and shared within the organisation.

Second, following the Second Council and the Administrative Reform Council, the government has implemented various measures to decrease responsibility as extent. In 2004, national universities became incorporated administrative agencies; they are no longer administrative organs. Thus, decentralisation of authorities has been promoted. These reforms imply a reduction in the number of organisations through which governments intervene in society, leading to a decrease in responsibility as extent. In 2009, there was a change of government from the LDP to the Democratic Party. The latter government was strongly committed to reviewing and reducing administrative costs. It undertook budget screening in which the costs of government projects were reviewed via public hearings by members of the Diet, experts from the private sector, state ministers, and parliamentary vice-ministers in charge of target projects. These tendencies and measures of cutback management have continued even after the change of government from the Democratic Party to the LDP in 2012.

Although the main stream of reform has been decreasing responsibility as extent, it should be noted that the prime ministers have established various administrative organs. In this period, the government established the Japan Tourism Agency (established in October 2008), the Consumer Affairs Agency (established in September 2009), the Reconstruction Agency (established in February 2012), the Japan Sports Agency (established in October 2015), the Acquisition Technology & Logistics Agency (established in October 2015), the Immigration Services Agency (established in April 2019), and the Digital Agency (established in September 2020). As indicated by Kagami, from 1945 to 2002, the government set up administrative agencies to passively and reactively deal with problems of the society; however, from 2002 to 2019, the LDP government actively established agencies to realise ambitious goals set by them (Kagami, 2019). For example, the Yasuo Fukuda Administration (September 2007–September 2008) established the Japan Tourism Agency in order to realise its goal of making Japan a “tourism-oriented country.” The Second Shinzo Abe Administration (December 2012–September 2020) aggressively campaigned to host the Tokyo Olympics and set up the Japan Sports Agency for its implementation. Additionally, the Acquisition Technology & Logistics Agency and the Immigration Services Agency were established to accomplish policies envisioned by Abe. In 2020, Yoshihide Suga became the prime minister; he took the same stance as his predecessor. His Administration (September 2020–October 2021) established the Digital Agency, responsible for the overall digital transformation of the government.

Third, accountability for performance has been systematised. Although, since the beginning of programme evaluation, the method, target, and system of evaluation have been altered, in 2013, the government succeeded in developing a standardised and uniform performance management system (the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2013). Under this system, in principle, all administrative organs must report achievements and progress of their programmes in a uniform format every year. Through this system, Diet members and the public can easily grasp the performance of administrative organs; therefore, it contributes to enhancing accountability.

Furthermore, following the recommendations proposed by the Administrative Reform Council, the Administrative Procedure Act was enacted in 1993 and amended in 2005 to establish the public comment procedure. Moreover, the Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs, which is the information-



disclosure act of Japan, was enacted in 1999. In 2009, the government prepared rules regarding storing administrative documents by enacting the Public Records and Archives Management Act. By introducing these measures, transparency as a grounding for accountability has been strengthened and the public is able to give its opinion on administrative decision-making. However, the Second Abe Administration witnessed certain inappropriate acts by bureaucrats regarding transparency. In the scandals of the Moritomo school, the Kake school, and the cherry blossom-viewing party held by the prime minister, the administrative organs were suspected of favouring groups close to the prime minister. The bureaucrats made a false report that the documents that existed were already disposed of or did not exist. Moreover, they falsified inconvenient public documents. Therefore, further reforms are needed.

## Conclusion

This article considered the historical transition of the views on administrative responsibilities in the administrative reform of Japan. A summary of the discussion follows. It was found that the views on the administrative responsibilities of the three councils were related to the socio-economic condition at the time.

The First Council emphasised responsibility as ability and extent. Owing to high economic growth and the pressing need to improve social infrastructure, the First Council expected administrative organs actively to improve various infrastructures using increasing revenue. For example, regarding responsibility as ability, it recommended abolishing unnecessary procedural regulations within administrative organs and preparing the central research institute for administrative operations. It also argued for establishing various administrative organs to deal with administrative demands arising in modern society.

The Second Council recommended improving responsibility as ability but reducing responsibility as extent. During this period, the Central government of Japan faced the economic downturn due to the oil shock. Referring to neoliberal reforms prevailing in developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom at the time, the government decided to adopt such views to sustain the welfare state. Concretely, the Second Council thoroughly reviewed individual ineffective projects, and then, discussed their rationalisation, clearance, abolishment, cutbacks, privatisation, and decentralisation with their manager-in-charge. In particular, these efforts succeeded in the fields of social security, public works, agricultural policy, and education.

The Administrative Reform Council focused on the introduction of accountability. The reasons for this commitment were the criticisms of opaque administration from other countries, administrative failures, scandals, and the change of government. The Council raised transparency and accountability as the main goals of reform. It recommended an accountability enhancing policy by enacting the public comment procedure and introducing programme evaluation, and publicly disclosing the produced information. Concurrently, following the previous council, it took a stance of reinforcing responsibility as ability and decreasing responsibility as extent.

Finally, I briefly summarised the views on administrative responsibilities from the Administrative Reform Council to 2020. During this period, there was no council in charge of comprehensive administrative reforms. Therefore, I briefly overviewed the outcomes of the main reforms from the perspectives of the three meanings of administrative responsibility. The views of the government during this period on administrative responsibilities are considered to be identical to those of the Administrative Reform Council. That is, it has enhanced responsibility as ability; mainly decreased responsibility as extent despite establishing new administrative organs; and established institutions for accountability.

This study has significance in applying the theories of administrative responsibility to administrative reforms. Although researchers of public administration have implemented various case studies using these theories (Koppell, 2005; Romzek & Dubnick, 1987), there has not been a study on the historical succession of the views on administrative responsibility in a broader context, such as comprehensive administrative reforms. This study presents the theories that can be used for overviewing and sorting out such succession. Moreover, it clarifies the relationship between the socio-economic environments, the views of the councils in charge of administrative reforms, and their contents. These findings contribute to building methods to understand the transformation of administration from a normative perspective.

However, we need to sort out administrative reforms after the Administrative Reform Council and continue observing it under the Fumio Kishida Administration (October 2021-to present). First, although this article briefly overviewed administrative reforms from the Administrative Reform Council to 2020, it is necessary to summarise them from a socioeconomic perspective like the sections considering the First Council, Second Council, and Administrative Reform Council. Considering the socioeconomic conditions and collecting more studies and reports are required. Second, we need to observe the Kishida Administration, as it confronts the issue of administrative reform after experiencing the spread of COVID-19.

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