

UDC 94(520):329

**THE RIKKENMINSEI-TŌ PARTY: IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING
AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION IN THE POWER STRUCTURE
OF THE JAPANESE EMPIRE, 1927–1940**

Vadym Rubel
DSc (History), Professor
Faculty of History
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
60, Volodymyrska St., Kyiv, 01601, Ukraine
rva@univ.kiev.ua

The Constitutional Democratic Party (*Rikkenminsei-tō*) was founded in Japan on June 1, 1927, after the collapse of the “Three Constitutional Defense Parties” (*Goken sampa naikaku*) government coalition, as a result of the merger of the ruling Constitutional Politics Association (*Ken-sei-kai*), which had lost its status, and the opposition Orthodox Constitutional Friends Party (*Seiyūhon-tō*). Under Japan’s new system of universal suffrage, the liberal centrist *Rikkenminsei-tō* received massive support in the election. However, it did not win a majority in the Diet, so it initially became the most powerful opposition party. In 1929, after a series of corruption scandals forced the resignation of the government of the Association of Friends of Constitutional Government (*Rikkenseiyū-kai*) party, which was supported by the Court, the top government bureaucracy and the military, the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party was able to form its own government and briefly became the ruling party. In November 1930 Hamaguchi Osachi, the head of the party’s Constitutional Democratic Cabinet, was seriously wounded in a terrorist attack and died the following year. His successor as the party and government leader, Wakatsuki Reijirō, was unable to bring to heel the high command of the armed forces and resigned from the government in December 1931 after the military operation to invade Manchuria, which he opposed. From then on *Rikkenminsei-tō*, which maintained the rating of the most popular party among the voters, remained the main opposition party until its forced liquidation in 1940. The method of problem-chronological analysis of factual material allows us to assert that the main reason why *Rikkenminsei-tō* obeyed the government’s order to liquidate itself was its electoral dependence on the “middle class”, which was not ready for uncompromising confrontation with the government. In addition, the former leaders of the Constitutional Democratic Party received important government posts under the new conditions of the single-party political system, which satisfied their personal political ambitions.

Keywords: Constitutional Democratic Party (*Rikkenminsei-tō*); Hamaguchi Osachi; Japan; political history; Wakatsuki Reijirō

Introduction

The Japanese Constitutional Democratic Party (*Rikkenminsei-tō*) is one of the most ideologically elusive party projects in interwar Japanese history. Some scholars classify it as a liberal party not only in domestic, but also in foreign policy [川村 2022c, 74]. They argue that the *Rikkenminsei-tō* in its program documents defended typical liberal ideas such as the fight against excessive social and property inequality, the protection of personal rights and freedoms [村川 1978, 147; 沖田, 櫻田 1989, 冊一, 139; 冊二, 10], and in its foreign policy it dreamed of “harmonious international cooperation” with all countries and peoples. Others recall that this party was created and functioned largely due to

the support of Mitsubishi financial and industrial conglomerate [三井事業史本 2001, 冊 3下, 306; 浜口 2000, 608], as military aircraft (fighters, bombers and torpedo carriers) was one of its production priorities in the interwar period. It is well known how Imperial Japan “harmonized” its international relations with such aircraft up to 1945. This calls into question the sincerity of liberal values proclaimed by Japanese Constitutional Democrats.

The status of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* in terms of power institutions of Japan at that time is ambiguous. On the one hand, the Constitutional Democratic Party was not categorically oppositional and alien to the authorities. Between 1929 and 1931 Japan was ruled by a party government formed by the Constitutional Democrats. At the same time, the *Rikkenminsei-tō* did not become completely pro-government in the eyes of the ruling strata of Japanese politics. As a result, the Constitutional Democratic Cabinet had to resign in December 1931 after failing to bend the Japanese generals to its will. The finale of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party project was its self-dissolution in October 1940 as part of the establishment of a single-party totalitarian regime in Japan. None of the leaders of the eventually liquidated Constitutional Democratic Party dared to oppose it.

What was the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party: liberal or conservative, opposition or pro-government, right or left (or perhaps centrist), ideological or conformist? There is no answer to any of those questions in the available historiography. We can only explain it with absence of proper conceptual approach to the development of the subject. This forces us to turn to the most detailed method of problem and chronological analysis of the available historical facts on this topic. The presented publication is an attempt to resolve the problem of the ideological positioning and electoral basis of the Japanese Constitutional Democratic Party of the interwar period and to clarify the reason for unprecedented, uncomplaining self-liquidation of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* during the political reform of 1940. Its relevance is determined both by the long existence of the party of Japanese Constitutional Democrats (it functioned in the political space of Imperial Japan from 1927 to 1940), and by the rather high popularity of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* among the voters. The latter was confirmed by the results of all parliamentary elections in which the party participated. It is sufficient to cite the consistently high electoral ratings of this party, which have ranged from a record 53 % in the 1930 elections to a minimum of 35 % in the 1932 elections. These results have enabled the Japanese Constitutional Democrats to retain their status as the second and sometimes the first most popular party in the country on a consistent basis.

The Emergence of the Rikkenminsei-tō Party

The organization of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* as an independent party project was preceded by a certain background that is important for understanding its personnel and ideological content.

Japan’s governmental politics in the second half of the 1920s were characterized by extreme instability. It began with the dramatic death of Prime Minister Katō Takaaki (1860–1926), who died of untreated pneumonia in his office on January 28, 1926 [色川 1980, 88]. The Cabinet that Katō led until the last minute of his life was quite unusual. Firstly, it was the first coalition government in Japanese history, formed on June 24, 1924 [藤原, 吉田, 伊藤 2007, 39], by three parties at once: the “Constitutional Politics Association” (*Kensei-kai*), the “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government” (*Rikken-seiyū-kai*) and the “Reformist Club” (*Kakushin-kurabu*) [河合 2006, 74].

In the political lexicon of that time, this Cabinet was known as the “Tripartite Cabinet for the Defense of the Constitution” (*Goken sampā naikaku*) [大江 1987, 29].

Secondly, with a stable majority in the Diet, it was this three-party Cabinet that initiated and passed through the Diet a watershed law for the political life of the country, establishing universal male suffrage in Japan from the age of 25, without any national,

religious or property restriction [金谷 2014, 220]. Finally, the coalition government of Katō Takaaki, during its short term from 1924 to 1926, settled all disputed territorial issues with the USSR and established diplomatic relations. The government also significantly reduced the army and navy, using the saved funds for modernization and rearmament. Additionally, universal military training was introduced in schools and universities, and a strict “evil” “Law on the Maintenance of Public Safety” (*Chianiji-hō*) [中澤 2012].

Under this law, individuals who violated public order and private property were subject to a 10-year prison sentence.

As we can see, the first coalition government in Japanese history worked smoothly and energetically. However, the sudden death of Premier Katō, who represented the *Kensei-kai* Party in the *Goken sampa naikaku*, led to the collapse of the pro-government cross-party coalition.

After the dramatic death of its former leader, the “Constitutional Politics Association” expectedly nominated its new leader, Wakatsuki Reijirō (1865–1949), to head the Cabinet [色川 1980, 88]. However, the ministers representing the *Rikkenseiyū-kai* and *Kakushin-kurabu* parties in the government refused to recognize the automatic rotation of the premiership within the same *Kensei-kai* party and withdrew from the coalition [安藤 1983, 9]. The Wakatsuki government, now relying solely on the “Constitutional Politics Association” party, lost its majority in the Diet [藤木 1964, 冊三, 420]. It led to a paralysis of the executive, which resulted in inability to pass national budget in 1927. As a result, the Cabinet resigned in April of that year.

The right-wing conservative *Rikkenseiyū-kai* [村川 1978, 146] party formed a new government. The Cabinet was headed by Tanaka Giichi (1863–1929), a staunch supporter of the highly militaristic and openly expansionist doctrine of “positive foreign policy and economic nationalism” [Scalapino 1975, 232]. However, even this Cabinet lacked majority in the Diet and thus proved incapable of governing the country in a stable manner.

The situation around the government became a stalemate. It could not be resolved until the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for February 20, 1928.

Under those circumstances, the idea of creating a powerful party in opposition to the single-party *Rikkenseiyū-kai* Cabinet was born among party politicians who were categorically opposed to the “unjustly” ruling “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government”. Many believed that after winning the upcoming general election, the opposition would be able to regain control of the country. The leaders of the two parties most “offended” by the *Rikkenseiyū-kai* initiated the creation of such a party. The first was the aforementioned “Constitutional Politics Association” (*Kensei-kai*), a former ally of the “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government” in the *Goken sampa naikaku* coalition. The second was a political grouping of former members of the *Rikkenseiyū-kai* who left the “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government” in 1924 to protest against the lack of determination of then leader of the *Rikkenseiyū-kai* Takahashi Korekiyo (1854–1936), to fight the court bureaucracy and the military for the idea of a party government [伊藤 1999, 冊五, 37]. This group proudly called itself the “Orthodox Constitutional Friends Party” (*Seiyūhon-tō*). Its leaders were willing to ally with anyone to prove their political correctness to their former colleagues in the “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government”.

However, at the time of the merger of the *Kensei-kai* and *Seiyūhon-tō* into a new party project, those parties were led by politicians who had not been very successful. The “Constitutional Politics Association” was led by former Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō, a former loser. As for the “Orthodox Constitutional Friends Party”, its formal leader was former Japanese Minister of the Interior Tokonami Takejirō (1867–1935). Only he was a minister for quite a long time (1918–1921). Later he never rose to the highest governmental power, remaining the leader of the *Seiyūhon-tō*, though quite large,

but hopelessly oppositional. It is clear that with such leaders it was difficult for the new party project to expect success. The new party needed a new leader. It was one of the influential members of the former “Constitutional Politics Association”, a shabby politician and official, Hamaguchi Osachi (1870–1931) [内閣百年の歩み 1985, 85]. He had extensive ministerial experience as Minister of Finance in the aforementioned coalition government of the “Three Constitutional Defense Parties” led by the late Katō Takaaki, and as Minister of the Interior in the single-party “Constitutional Politics Association” Cabinet led by Wakatsuki Reijirō. Prominent in the formation of the new party were Hamaguchi’s former government and party chief Wakatsuki Reijirō, the well-known journalist and one of the most influential members of the “Constitutional Politics Association” Adachi Kenzō (1864–1948), and a group of former “Orthodox Constitutional Friends Party” leaders. Notable among the latter were Tokonami Takejirō himself, banker Yamamoto Tatsuo (1856–1947) and popular reporter Koizumi Matajirō (1865–1951) [川村 2022b, 35] – the future secretary general of the newly formed party and the grandfather of future Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō (who led the Japanese government from 2001 to 2006).

Saitō Takao (1870–1949), a non-partisan single-member deputy from the Hyōgo prefecture, joined the organizing committee for the creation of the new party. Later, he became famous for his anti-militarist seditious statements against the Japanese aggression in China [沖田, 櫻田 1989, 冊二, 425].

The political party project announced on June 1, 1927 [猪俣 1960, 116], was named *Rikkenminsei-tō* (立憲民政賞 / 立憲民政党) – the Constitutional Democratic Party [日本近現代史辞典 1978, 693].

The author of this name is considered to be one of the founders of the party, a committed Japanese nationalist, and a very ambitious politician, Matsuda Genji (1876–1936) [川村 2022a, 4] – future Minister of Colonial Affairs in the Cabinet of Constitutional Democratic Prime Minister Hamaguchi.

The Rikkenminsei-tō on the Way from Opposition to Power (1927–1929)

The initial objective assigned to the newly formed party by its founders was unambiguous: to establish itself from its previous coalition and party associates in the *Rikken-seiyū-kai*. Not surprisingly, the program of the newly-emerged Japanese “constitutional democrats” appeared fundamentally liberal compared to the openly conservative slogans of the pro-government “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government”. *Rikkenminsei-tō* called for preserving and strengthening the institution of party governments to enhance the “political control” of society over the government to prevent a return to a regime of military-bureaucratic cabinets outside parliamentary control. The newly formed party promised to protect civil rights and freedoms in every possible way. The *Rikkenminsei-tō* aimed to promote social justice by addressing the social and property divisions in Japanese society [沖田, 櫻田 1989, 冊一, 139]. They planned to achieve it by rationalizing production and distributing the resulting wealth fairly [村川 1978, 147]. The newly formed party aimed to strengthen the role of the state in economic development and resource distribution while effectively utilizing the opportunities of free competition [沖田, 櫻田 1989, 冊二, 10]. They advocated for the harmonization of international relations and promised to build friendly relations with China. Additionally, they pledged to prevent war during their rule [沖田, 櫻田 1989, 冊二, 736]. Under universal suffrage, those slogans gained widespread support, particularly among Japan’s emerging urban middle class. The addition of substantial financial support from the Mitsubishi concern gave the newly formed “Constitutional Democratic Party” a good chance of success in the February 20, 1928 parliamentary elections. The Constitutional Democrats in Japan got 43 % of the votes, along with the pro-government *Rikkenseiyū-kai*. As a result, they formed the second-largest faction in the 466-member parliament, with 216 votes.

However, even after such an unqualified electoral success, the Rikkenminsei-tō did not have a stable majority in the Diet. With the support of the Imperial Court, the top bureaucracy and the military, the right-conservative *Rikkenseiyū-kai* party initially maintained control of the government. However, the authority of the single-party government of the “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government” soon began to decline rapidly. Several factors contributed to this decline.

First: in the same year, 1928, Japan made its first attempt to take control of Manchuria by force. This was motivated by the need to ensure the safety of Japanese subjects living in Shandong Province [戦前外交の曲折と満州事変 2001, 104]. However, Tanaka’s government was soon forced to abandon this plan because of the open pressure on Japan from the leading world powers. As a result, the ruling party appeared to be lax in matters of foreign policy expansion, which had a significant impact on its popularity.

Then the press revealed the unpleasant details of Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi’s highly questionable receipt of three million yen from some “donors” after his election as Chairman of the pro-government *Rikkenseiyū-kai* party [前田 2003, 124]. The scandal ended with the resignation of Prime Minister Tanaka and his entire Cabinet on July 2, 1929. The “Association of Friends of Constitutional Government”, discredited by its leader, temporarily lost its ability to form a government. The right to form a new government naturally passed to the country’s second largest party, the *Rikkenminsei-tō*. In this way, the opposition party of the Constitutional Democrats was suddenly given the opportunity to form a government of its own. And they took advantage of it.

On July 2, 1929, Hamaguchi Osachi, the leader of *Rikkenminsei-tō*, became the new Prime Minister of Japan [川村 2022a, 4]. Eight out of 13 ministerial posts in his government were filled by the Constitutional Democrats. Members of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* also held important positions such as the general secretary of the Cabinet (i.e., head of the entire Japanese bureaucracy) and general secretary of the government’s legal department, which were crucial for governing the country.

The Party Government of the Constitutional Democrats (1929–1931) and the Reasons for Its Downfall

The government of the Constitutional Democrats, whose closest business partner was the Mitsubishi Corporation [Henshall 2013, 261], a longtime sponsor of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party, set to work. But already at the turn of 1929–1930, Japan was hit by a massive economic crisis. It happened within the framework of the “Great Depression” that began in the fall of 1929 and affected the entire economic system of the world at that time. For Japan, it meant a decline in industrial production, rising of unemployment and a sharp drop in living standards. In the geopolitical paradigm of the time, the only way out of the crisis was active foreign expansion with the goal of enslaving other nations and conquering their resources and markets. Hamaguchi’s government, however, did not dare to implement this program by force. Moreover, after a sober assessment of Japan’s power potential in relation to its main competitors – the United States, Great Britain and France – Hamaguchi’s Cabinet had to conclude the London Treaty on the Limitation of Naval Fleets in April 1930.

Under this multilateral agreement, the total tonnage of the Japanese navy remained substantially smaller than that of the British and American navies. As a result, in the area of foreign expansion Hamaguchi and his ministers pursued a course of peaceful competition for Japanese goods in world markets and of attracting foreign investment and technology. On the domestic front, in addition to the old slogans of reducing the social and property polarization of society, protecting civil rights and liberties, and preserving the institution of private property, the Constitutional Democrats put forward the ideas of strengthening parliamentary control over the government to eradicate government corruption and stabilizing finances by reducing budgetary expenditures on the army, navy and government bureaucracy.

All these openly liberal slogans were, as expected, well received by the majority of voters. In the 1930 election (held on February 20) the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party received 53 % of the vote and sent 273 of its representatives (out of 466) to parliament. The Constitutional Democrats confidently kept in power their own single-party Cabinet headed by their proven leader, Hamaguchi Osachi.

The implementation of the social, political and economic priorities outlined in the election platform of the Constitutional Democrats provoked the categorical rejection of Japanese ultra-nationalists. It also raised serious concerns among Japan's security forces, who were dissatisfied with the "pacifist" rhetoric of government ministers. The last straw was the proposed drastic reduction in military spending in the 1930 budget. The consequences were not long in coming. On November 14, 1930, Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi was seriously wounded in an assassination attempt on the platform of Tokyo Station by the ultra-nationalist terrorist Sagōya Tomeo (1908–1972) [丹羽 1994, 163].

Sagōya was first sentenced to death, then to life imprisonment. In 1940, he was granted amnesty and even accepted into government service as a patriotic agitator.

Hamaguchi could not regain his health after being severely wounded in the assassination attempt. He died on August 26, 1931.

Before his death, Hamaguchi, a staunch liberal, drafted a bill to grant women the right to vote and submitted it to the Diet [阿部, 佐藤 2000, 82]. However, after the bill passed the elected lower house, the emperor-appointed upper house blocked it.

After Hamaguchi's death, Wakatsuki Reijirō became the leader of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party. He was already experienced in this work.

The first thing the new-old prime minister did was to significantly increase the security of top state officials, starting with himself. As a result, although the Cabinet under the new leader continued to implement the policy course begun during the Hamaguchi era, it became physically impossible to assassinate the new prime minister from the Constitutional Democratic Party. At the same time, the government's policies remained strongly opposed by then leaders of the army, navy and military-industrial complex. This was particularly evident in the vicious insubordination of the Japanese generals. The culmination of the confrontation between the party government of the Constitutional Democrats and the security forces was the military operation by the General of Japanese Kwantung Army Honjō Shigeru (1876–1945) to seize Manchuria, launched in September 1931 against the will of the prime minister.

On behalf of the formally ruling *Rikkenminsei-tō*, whose foreign policy doctrine proclaimed a "policy of non-expansion" [Shin, Sneider 2011, 75], Wakatsuki did not approve Japan's new round of military expansion on the continent. However, this military incident was very effective for the Japanese forces. The hostilities lasted until February 1932 and ended with a complete occupation of Manchuria by the Japanese. Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō, a staunch opponent of the military operation, resigned on December 13, 1931. The party Cabinet of the Constitutional Democrats fell and was replaced by the government formed by the "Association of Friends of Constitutional Government". It was led by the new leader of the *Rikkenseiyū-kai* Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855–1932), who, unlike his predecessor, supported the idea of Japanese occupation of Manchuria.

The Rikkenminsei-tō from the Constructive Opposition to the Involuntary Self-Liquidation (1931–1940)

The rise to power of the government of the "Association of Friends of Constitutional Government", which lacked a parliamentary majority, once again demonstrated the political impotence of the party cabinets of Japan at that time in the face of pressure from the Court, the bureaucracy and the military. However, that Cabinet was unable to pass a budget through the Diet controlled by the *Rikkenminsei-tō*. Only the subsequent parliamentary election on February 20, 1932 resolved the political deadlock.

In order to prepare for the election, the government used all of its administrative and media resources to campaign against the Constitutional Democratic Party. Despite the fact that the party was stripped of its ruling status, it remained popular among voters. The government specifically targeted former Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō and former Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijūrō (1872–1951). They were accused of anti-patriotic pacifism in the Manchurian issue and some shady financial dealings with the Mitsubishi concern [浜口 2000, 608]. As a result, the *Rikkenminsei-tō* lost its majority in parliament in the election of 1932. The Constitutional Democrats were able to form a faction of only 146 members with only 35 % of the vote.

The failure buried Wakatsuki's political authority as party leader. Although he clung maniacally to his status as chairman of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* for nearly three more years, he was forced to resign by his fellow party members in November 1934. In 1935, after much deliberation, Machida Chūji (1863–1946), who had considerable experience in practical ministerial work, was elected as the new head of the Constitutional Democratic Party [Scalapino 1975, 371].

In his earlier years, Machida served as a government official and journalist. He had experience in business and was repeatedly elected to the parliament [荒木 1979, 479]. He served as Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Minister of Trade and Industry, and Minister of Finance. Thus, he made a conscious decision to restore the party's authority with new economic ideas. He radically reoriented the party's platform to support small and medium-sized businesses. He promised voters that, if elected, he would create a special state bank to provide relatively cheap government loans to such entrepreneurs.

To Machida's credit, such a bank (under the protectorate of the Mitsubishi Group, of course) was indeed established on November 30, 1936. It was called "Central Commercial and Industrial Bank" (*Shōkōchūkin*). The main direction of its work was to support small and medium-sized businesses, starting with farmers [農林水産省百年史 1979, 冊四, 614]. The bank has been operating successfully in Japan up to the present...

The effort was worthwhile. At the next election on February 20, 1936, the *Rikkenminsei-tō* got 40 % of the votes and increased its parliamentary group to 205 members. However, this victory was only formal. The Constitutional Democrats still did not have a majority among the deputies, and could not form a coalition with anyone, so they remained in opposition. The government once again became "non-partisan" and thus completely controlled by the military. As a result, Japan openly took the course of preparing for a new full-scale war and signed the "Anti-Comintern Pact" with Hitler's Germany in Berlin on November 25, 1936. When parliamentarians tried to express their disagreement with this decision, the new Prime Minister, General Hayashi Senjūrō (1876–1943), solved the problem in a simple and concise military manner. In February 1937, he ordered the dissolution of the "bad, unpatriotic" parliament, and new election scheduled for March 31.

The decision to dissolve the parliament, which had been elected only a year before and had managed to approve the annual budget presented by the government, albeit with a creak, led to a wave of criticism from party politicians. On the other hand, the dissolution of parliament itself confirmed the political impotence of the party leaders, which could not but affect the mood of the electorate and had a direct impact on the *Rikkenminsei-tō*'s rating. In the 1937 elections, the Constitutional Democrats retained their status as the most popular party among the people, but won 36 % of the vote instead of 40.

The culmination of all this party dithering came in July 1937, when Japan became embroiled in a full-scale military conflict with China.

The war against a neighbor with virtually inexhaustible human resources was a long war, which meant that it quickly became a war of attrition for Japan. Such a war required mobilization of all the country's resources, which was incompatible with the

parliamentary multiparty system. The leadership of the “Land of the Rising Sun” was clearly inclined to the necessity of establishing a totalitarian single-party regime in Japan.

Many party politicians in Japan, realizing the inevitability of the ensuing transformation, quickly capitulated to power. In 1938, the Diet, “reconstituted” by the 1937 elections, passed the Bill to mobilize the country. According to this law, Diet members (including representatives of the *Rikkenminsei-tō*) “voluntarily” relinquished their right to control the government. From then on, the Japanese Cabinet was to exercise its power solely on the basis of imperial decrees. Once such a law was passed, the authorities realized that these intimidated Diet members could no longer be relied upon. It was confirmed by the events of 1940. On October 12, in the atmosphere of lavish celebrations for the 2600th anniversary of the foundation of the Imperial Dynasty, on the initiative of then “bureaucratic” Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro (1891–1945), it was announced in Japan that all the “old” parties were dissolved and officially merged into a new quasi-party structure, the only one of its kind in the country. It was called the “Imperial Aid Association” (*Taiseiyokusan-kai*) [日本近現代史辞典 1978, 322]. The rationale was simple and clear: “The doctrines of economic and political liberalism no longer meet the needs of the industrial age” [Scalapino 1975, 397].

It is noteworthy that some party politicians tried to protest against this “voluntary-coercive” self-liquidation of their parties. The leader of the Socialists, Abe Isoo (1865–1949), showily resigned from politics for a time. Nakajima Chikuhei (1884–1949), the leader of the right-wing conservative *Rikkenseiyū-kai* party, was betrayed by his political associates, lost his status as party leader and went into business. The Japanese Nazis of the “Society of the East” party (*Tōhō-kai*) rejected the government initiative altogether, for which they were subject to repression. As a result, their leader, Nakano Seigō (1886–1943), who wanted to “improve” the existing order in the country by “completing constitutional reform” [井上 2013, 73] in the Hitler’s manner, was first arrested (along with 39 other party members). Then, after his pretrial release, he committed a highly suspicious suicide at home. Only the Constitutional Democrats accepted the authorities’ decision without protest and immediately joined the “Imperial Aid Association”. It once again confirmed their political impotence and extreme vulnerability to direct coercive pressure.

The answer to the question of why the *Rikkenminsei-tō* was so cowardly and uncomplainingly self-liquidating should be sought in the ideological positioning and social backbone of this party.

Let’s start with the ideological positioning. The platform slogans of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party proclaimed at all the election campaigns corresponded to liberal ideals and were very attractive to the emerging “middle class” in Japan at that time. It based on the creative and scientific intellectuals, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, and middle-level civil servants. Those people were sympathetic to the ideas of expanding personal freedoms, respect for the institution of privacy, and relatively free access to education and well-paid work for people in their circles. At the same time, they calmly accepted the fact that, in the paradigm of world political and economic reality at the time, the achievement of those goals had to be accompanied by the colonial robbery of other nations, the seizure of their raw materials, and the strict, often violent, control of foreign markets. Even the possible prospect of war did not frighten the Japanese very much. First, the victorious experience of recent military campaigns (Russo-Japanese and World War I) had instilled in the Land of the Rising Sun a belief in the power of its armed forces. Second, the horrors of the First World War fully affected Europe itself, while Japan suffered relatively little bloodshed during that war. Therefore, unlike the European nations, the war did not produce a psychological shock among the Japanese subjects.

On the other hand, all of the aforementioned social strata on which the *Rikkenminsei-tō* party traditionally relied had something to lose in the event of social unrest. Therefore,

they did not want to get into an uncompromising confrontation with the authorities. They hoped that the public damage caused by the establishment of a totalitarian single-party state would not be too great, and that possible foreign policy success would allow them to develop the domestic economy more successfully and thus raise social standards in Japan itself. That is why, unlike the parties of the left and right, the Japanese constitutional democrats, as ideological centrists, did not even try to object to the authorities about the forced liquidation of any multiparty institutions in the country. The former leaders of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* (starting with Machida Chūji himself) soon were offered highly respected government posts. As expected, they accepted them and successfully integrated themselves into a single-party political system. It was only after Japan's defeat in World War II when Machida Chūji again became an advocate of multiparty politics. He even led the process of rebuilding another centrist party in post-war Japan under the name *Nihon shimpo-tō* (the Japan Progressive Party).

Conclusions

The Japanese Constitutional Democratic Party (*Rikkenminsei-tō*) was founded in 1927 after the collapse of the “Three Constitutional Defense Parties” government coalition, as a result of the merger of the ruling “Constitutional Politics Association” (*Kensei-kai*), which had lost its status, and the opposition “Orthodox Constitutional Friends Party” (*Seiyūhon-tō*). Taking advantage of the formal absence of the Liberal Party proper in Japan's party-political system at the time, the newly formed *Rikkenminsei-tō* successfully occupied the appropriate niche of ideological liberalism and party centrism. It promoted slogans of greater social justice in the distribution of society's accumulated material wealth, full protection of civil rights and freedoms, eradication of corruption, strengthening of the role of parliament and political parties in state-building, aimed at maintaining peace, “harmonization” of international relations. The popularity of the program goals proclaimed by the Constitutional Democrats allowed the *Rikkenminsei-tō* to become the main opposition party in the country. Following the resignation of the Tanaka Giichi's government in 1929, the *Rikkenminsei-tō* even formed its own party government. Nevertheless, the attempt of the Constitutional Democratic Hamaguchi Osachi's Cabinet to realize the endeavor to implement the program of his party encountered resolute opposition from Japanese ultranationalists and security forces. This opposition eventually led to the resignation of the Constitutional Democratic Cabinet in December 1931.

Back in opposition, the *Rikkenminsei-tō*, led by new leader Machida Chūji, slightly re-oriented its program to emphasize increased support for small and medium-sized businesses. This allowed the Constitutional Democrats to further expand their electoral base. However, after the outbreak of Japan's full-scale war with China in 1937, the top leadership of the Japanese bureaucracy, the army and navy commanders, and the Imperial Court were inclined toward the necessity of establishing a totalitarian one-party regime in Japan. In October 1940, the country underwent a political reform in which all the “old” parties were merged into the quasi-party, all-state “Imperial Aid Association” *Taiseiyokusan-kai*.

Of all the political parties functioning in Japan at the time, only the Constitutional Democrats accepted the authorities' decision without protest. In doing so, they demonstrated their complete political impotence and extreme vulnerability to the direct coercive pressure of the authorities. The extremely conciliatory attitude of the *Rikkenminsei-tō* was due to its social base, which was formed by the emerging “middle class” in Japan at that time. The creative and scientific intelligentsia, small and medium-sized businessmen, and middle-level officials were unwilling to accept an uncompromising confrontation with the authorities. They calmly realized that in the paradigm of the world's political and economic reality at that time, the greatness of the Japanese empire was to be accompanied by the colonial robbery of other nations, the seizure of their raw materials, and the violent

control of foreign markets. The Japanese “middle class”, and with it the party functionaries of the former *Rikkenminsei-tō*, hoped that the public damage from the establishment of a totalitarian one-party model of government would not be too great, and that possible foreign policy successes would allow for a more successful development of the domestic economy and, consequently, a higher social standard of living in Japan itself. That is why the Japanese Constitutional Democrats, as ideological centrists, unlike the parties of the left and right spectrum, did not even try to object to the authorities about the forced abolition of the multiparty system in the country in 1940.

LITERATURE

- Henshall K. (2013), *Historical Dictionary of Japan to 1945*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham (Maryland).
- Scalapino R. A. (1975), *Democracy and the Party Movement in Prewar Japan: The Failure of the First Attempt*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Shin G.-W. and Sneider D. C. (2011), *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia: Divided Memories*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames.
- 阿部 恒久, 佐藤 能丸 (2000), 通史と史料日本近現代女性史, 芙蓉書房出版, 東京.
- 安藤 英男 (1983), 幻の総理大臣: 床次竹二郎の足跡, 學藝書林, 東京.
- 荒木 三作 (1979), 歴代農林大臣: 農政百年史, 日刊農業新聞社, 東京.
- 藤木 邦彦 (1964), 体系日本史叢書, 冊三: 政治史, 山川出版社, 東京.
- 藤原 彰, 吉田 裕, 伊藤 悟 (2007), 天皇の昭和史, 新日本出版社, 東京.
- 浜口 雄幸 (2000), 浜口雄幸集: 論述・講演篇 / 川田 稔, 未来社, 東京.
- 猪俣 敬太郎 (1960), 中野正剛, 吉川弘文館, 東京.
- 井上 敬介 (2013), 立憲民政党と政党改良: 戦前二大政党制の崩壊, 北海道大学出版会, 札幌.
- 伊藤 隆 (1999), 日本の近代, 冊五: 北岡伸一, 中央公論新社, 東京.
- 金谷 俊一郎 (2014), 日本人なら知っておきたい日本史の授業, PHP 研究所, 東京.
- 河合 敦 (2006), 目からウロコの近現代史, PHP 研究所, 京都.
- 川村 一彦 (2022a), 歴史の回想・浜口雄幸, 歴史研究会, 東京.
- 川村 一彦 (2022b), 歴史の回想・立憲民政党, 歴史研究会, 東京.
- 川村 一彦 (2022c), 歴史の回想・上海事変, 歴史研究会, 東京.
- 前田 英昭 (2003), 国会の「機密費」論争, 高文堂出版社, 東京.
- 三井事業史本 (2001), 冊 3 下, 三井文庫, 東京.
- 村川 一郎 (1978), 日本保守党小史: 自由民権と政党政治, 教育社, 東京.
- 内閣百年の歩み (1985), 大巧, 東京.
- 中澤 俊輔 (2012), 治安維持法: なぜ政党政治は「悪法」を生んだか, 中央公論新社, 東京.
- 日本近現代史辞典 (1978), 東洋経済新報社, 東京.
- 丹羽 巖 (1994), 英米法制と日本の政治機構, 成文堂, 東京.
- 農林水産省百年史: 資料編 (1979), 冊四, 神奈川県立川崎図書館, 横浜市.
- 大江 可之 (1987), 元総理三木武夫: 議員五十年史, 日本国体研究院, 東京.
- 沖田 哲也, 櫻田 會 (1989), 総史立憲民政党: 資料編, 冊 一-二, 学陽書房, 東京.
- 戦前外交の曲折と満州事変 (2001), 学校図書出版, 東京.
- 色川 大吉 (1980), 岐路に立つ昭和日本, 三省堂, 東京.

REFERENCES

- Henshall K. (2013), *Historical Dictionary of Japan to 1945*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham (Maryland).
- Scalapino R. A. (1975), *Democracy and the Party Movement in Prewar Japan: The Failure of the First Attempt*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Shin G.-W. and Sneider D. C. (2011), *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia: Divided Memories*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames.
- Abe T. and Satō Y. (2000), *Tsūshi to shiryō Nihon kin gendai josei shi*, Fuyōshobō shuppan, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).

- Andō H. (1983), *Maboroshi-no sōri-daijin: Tokonami Takejirō-no ashiato*, Gakugeyashorin, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Araki S. (1979), *Rekidai nōrin daijin: nōsei hyakunenshi*, Nikkan nōgyō shinbun-sha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Fujiki K. (1964), *Taikei Nippon-shi sōsho*, V. 3: Seiji-shi, Yamakawa shuppansha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Fujiwara A., Yoshida Y. and Itō S. (2007), *Ten'nō-no Shōwa-shi*, Shin Nihon shuppan-sha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Hamaguchi Y. (2000), *Hamaguchi Yūkō shū: ronjutsu • kōen-hen / Kawada Minoru*, Mirai-sha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Inomata K. (1960), *Nakano Seigō*, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Inoue K. (2013), *Rikkenminsei-tō to seitō kairyō: Senzen nidaiseitōsei-no hōkai*, Hokkaidō-daigaku shuppan-kai, Sapporo. (In Japanese).
- Itō T. (1999), *Nihon-no kindai*, V. 5: Kitaoka Shin'ichi, Chūōkōron-shinsha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Kanaya S. (2014), *Nihonjin nara shitte okitai Nipponshi-no jugyō*, PHP Kenkyūjo, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Kawai A. (2006), *Me-kara uroko-no kingendai-shi*, PHP kenkyūsho, Kyōto. (In Japanese).
- Kawamura K. (2022a), *Rekishi no kaisō: Hamaguchi Yūkō*, Rekishi kenkyūkai, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Kawamura K. (2022b), *Rekishi no kaisō: Rikkenminsei-tō*, Rekishi kenkyūkai, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Kawamura K. (2022c), *Rekishi no kaisō: Shanhai jihen*, Rekishi kenkyūkai, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Maeda H. (2003), *Kokkai-no 'kimitsu hi' ronsō*, Kōbundō shuppansha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Mitsui jigyō shi hon* (2001), V. 3-ka, Mitsui bunko, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Murakawa I. (1978), *Nihon hoshutō shōshi: Jiyū minken to seitō seiji*, Kyōiku-sha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Naikaku hyakunen-no ho-mi* (1978), Daikyō, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Nakazawa S. (2012), *Chian iji hō: Naze seitō seiji wa "akuhō"-o unda-ka?*, Chūōkōron shinsha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Nihon kingendaishi jiten* (1978), Tōyō keizai shinpō-sha, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Niwa I. (1994), *Eibei-hō-sei to Nihon-no seiji kikō*, Seibundō, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Nōrinsuisan-shō hyakunen-shi: shiryōhen* (1979), V. 4, Kanagawa kenritsu Kawasaki toshokan, Yokohama. (In Japanese).
- Oe Y. (1987), *Moto sōri Miki Takeo: Giin gojūnen shi*, Nihon kokutai kenkyū-in, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Okita T. and Sakurada A. (1989), *Sōshi Rikkenminsei-tō: Shiryō-hen*, V. 1–2, Gakuyō shobō, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Senzen gaikō-no kyokusetsu to Manshū jihen* (2001), Gakkō tosho shuppan, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).
- Shirakawa D. (1980), *Kiro-ni tatsu Shōwa Nihon*, Sanseidō, Tōkyō. (In Japanese).

В. А. Рубель

Партія Ріккенмінсей-то: ідейне позиціонування і політична еволюція у владній системі Японської імперії 1927–1940 рр.

Конституційно-демократична партія (*Ріккенмінсей-то*) була створена в Японії 1 червня 1927 р. після розпаду урядової коаліції “трьох партій захисту конституції” (*токен сампа найкаку*) внаслідок злиття партії “Конституційний союз” (*Кенсей-кай*), яка втратила статус керівної, та опозиційної Партії справжніх друзів конституції (*Сейюхон-то*). В умовах нещодавно впровадженого в Японії загального виборчого права ліберально-центристська *Ріккенмінсей-то* дістала масову підтримку на виборах, проте не виборола більшості в парламенті, тому спочатку стала найпотужнішою опозиційною партією. 1929 р., коли серія корупційних скандалів змусила до відставки уряд Спілки друзів конституційного правління (*Ріккенсейю-кай*), що спирався на підтримку Двору, вищої державної бюрократії та військових, партія *Ріккенмінсей-то* дістала можливість сформувати власний уряд і ненадовго стала керівною. У листопаді 1930 р. глава партійного кабінету конституційних демократів

Хамагучі Осачі був важко поранений під час теракту і наступного року помер. Його наступник на посаді лідера партії та уряду Вакацукі Рейджіро не зміг привести до покори вище командування збройних сил і після початку не схваленої ним військової операції із захоплення Маньчжурії у грудні 1931 р. пішов з урядом у відставку. Відтоді *Ріккенмінсей-то*, зберігаючи рейтинг найпопулярнішої серед виборців партії, залишалась головною опозиційною партією до примусової ліквідації в 1940 р. Метод проблемно-хронологічного аналізу фактологічного матеріалу дає підстави стверджувати, що головною причиною неремство-покірного виконання партією *Ріккенмінсей-то* урядового наказу про самоліквідацію була її електоральна опора на не готовий до безкомпромісного протистояння з владою “середній клас”. Крім того, колишні керівники Конституційно-демократичної партії в нових умовах однопартійної політичної системи обійняли важливі державні посади, що цілком задовольнило їхні особисті політичні амбіції.

Ключові слова: Вакацукі Рейджіро; Конституційно-демократична партія (*Ріккенмінсей-то*); політична історія; Хамагучі Осачі; Японія

Стаття надійшла до редакції 18.12.2024