Panel proposal: Challenges and Reforms of Politics and Administration in Japan

Summary of the topic to be covered:
From the 1990s, Japan implemented a number of reforms. The most important of these were the electoral reform of 1994, the 2001 reorganization of the cabinet and government agencies and the 2014 civil service reform.

The 1994 electoral reform replaced the system of medium-sized constituencies with a parallel system combining single-seat districts and proportional representation. The administrative reform implemented in 2001 beefed up the prime minister's advisory and support staff while expanding the powers of the prime minister. The 2014 reform created the Bureau of Personal Affairs in the cabinet secretariat and gave power to appoint senior officials of the government agencies.

These reforms expanded prime ministerial power in policy formulation and have brought Japanese parliamentary system closer to the Westminster model.

Electoral reform increased prime minister's power as the head of the party. Because winning election as an independent is more difficult in single-seat districts than in medium-sized districts, party endorsements assumed greater importance under the new electoral system. And since the party’s top leader has final authority when it comes to endorsing candidates, party presidents began to hold more sway within their parties.

At the same time, administrative reforms bolstered the prime minister's influence, particularly in regard to policymaking. The new rules accorded the prime minister the right to float new policies at Cabinet meetings and officially empowered the Cabinet Secretariat to draft legislation.

Finally, the 2014 reform essentially shifted power of appointment of senior officials from ministers to the prime minister, which had made public servants more loyal to the prime minister than before.

This panel examines the nature of the current Japanese parliamentary system as well as causes and effects of these reforms in detail. The panel consists from four papers. The first paper examines how series of reforms has transformed Japanese parliamentary system closer to the Westminster model. The second paper describes the substance of the 2014 civil service reform and explains why the reform became possible. The third paper conducts a case study on the decision making process to delay the tax hike in 2014 to evaluate the current state of prime ministerial power in Japan.