

# **Decision-Making Process of Revision to the Basic Act on Education: An Aspect of Politics in Japan, 1999–2006**

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## Abstract

By analyzing revision process of the Basic Act on Education (BAE), this study examined jockeying among political actors in Japan, 1999-2006. Particularly, we discuss this process's meanings to three important political actors, the Diet members' group of the LDP with a special interest in education (Bunkyo-zoku), the structural reformist group of the LDP, and another ruling party, the Komeito Party. This revision to the BAE, believed the most difficult educational reform to coordinate within the LDP and among coalition parties, was resolved with few unpleasant feelings among actors because each received some satisfying benefits. However, from the long-term standpoint, for ruling parties overall, this "achievement" was not necessarily positive. Citizens did not desire such an ideological educational reform as this revision; thus, it pulled many votes from ruling parties. That is to say, the revision's "success" resulted in accelerating diminished approval ratings for ruling parties, especially the LDP.

**Keywords:** political actors, ruling coalition parties, Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe, Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP), election

## Introduction

Globalization's advances have created two domestic trends. The first is creation of markets for neoliberalism and movements toward deregulation. The second is a movement to return to nationalism (Watanabe, 2004, p. 241).

From the 1990s to the 2000s, educational reform has progressed as a result of both these trends' impact. The first was the mainstream educational reform, of which the system of competition among schools is one example. The revision to the Basic Act on Education (BAE) is an example of the second trend.

The differences between the two were not merely their ideological frameworks, but their educational policies' drafting and decision-making process. In the overall scheme of things, the Cabinet Office, especially Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his advisors (Koizumi's structural reformist group), took the initiative in promotion of neoliberalism and deregulation, but the ruling party's will was, for the most part, not reflected. On the other hand, for the trend toward nationalism, the group of National Diet members in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), with special interest in education ("Bunkyo-zoku"), discussed the matter.

This paper examines decision-making process of revision to BAE from the perspective of their support and opposition among three political actors. Based on the analysis, we particularly consider the implication of this process to the actors, "Bunkyo-zoku," the structural reformist group, and another ruling party, the Komeito Party (KP).<sup>1</sup>

Compared to numerous previous studies, for example Ouchi (2003) and Sasaki (2006), emphasizing the revision's "adverse effects," the decision-making process of the BAE revision has received little attention. The analysis of Sasaki (2009), who closely followed the process, garnered some attention. However, upon comparing areas of interest in the former paper with those in the present paper, one cannot help but notice the following limitations.

He treats the LDP as a single actor, but in the Koizumi era (2001-2006), two political actors within the party were overt rivals in the process. One was the structural reformists and the other was insurgents against their reform, for example, Bunkyo-zoku. This fact shows the meaninglessness of treating the ruling party as a

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the terms "structural reformists" for those who desire to incorporate deregulation and market forces into education reform, and "Bunkyo-zoku" for those National Diet members belonging to the LDP with a special interest in education, as well as those desiring to strengthen moral education.

monolith. In addition, he doesn't give particular attention to the KP as an important political actor. As above, comprehension of the era is superficial, so the study is not successful in clarifying the process.

Generally, actors in a political process seek to maximize their interests, which might include obtaining funds or winning an election. In any case, each actor hopes to achieve certain goals, and such achievements guarantee their existence and form their identity (Nishioka, 2009, p. 8).

According to this thinking, only when actors can secure their interests do agreements regarding revisions occur. Therefore, this paper examines conflicts and concessions between them and also sheds light on what they gained in the revision process or, rather, what the process meant to them.

This paper's first section examines the process of forming a path within the LDP in order to revise the BAE and discusses the relationship between structural reformists and conservatives with special interest in education (Bunkyo-zoku). The second section focuses on the Komeito Party's (KP's) interests. The third section considers the words and actions of Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe concerning the revision, and then, finally, discusses the process of getting the revision passed.<sup>2</sup>

## **Forming a Path Within the LDP Toward Revision of the BAE**

### **The LDP's Presidential Election in 1999**

During the 1990s, various criticisms regarding overemphasis on knowledge in education and anxiety over atrocious behaviors among youth have led to an increasing number of voices within the LDP calling for revision of the BAE to strengthen moral education. For example, Hakubun Shimomura, an LDP Diet member, stated the importance of moral education and asserted the need to "amend the act itself" (Shimomura, 1999, p. 33). In August 1999, Takeo Kawamura, chief investigator in an LDP study group on the BAE, declared that there would be "debates [regarding its revision], keeping in mind that it would become a Heisei version of Imperial Rescript on Education" (Takahashi, 2004, p. 36).

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<sup>2</sup> As necessary, this paper refers to articles of Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun and Sankei Shimbun. They are "the five national newspapers" in Japan (another is Nihon Keizai Shimbun). We can make sure of important politicians' statements and political situations in the daily papers.

Thus, the momentum toward revising the BAE had begun. However, this “momentum” was nothing more than a prerequisite. Without the necessary alignment between government and party heads, the revision would have been “snuffed out” even before the policy debate stage. Ever since the act’s establishment in 1947, conservatives have continually desired its revision. But this desire never bore fruit beyond the level of internal discussions, and it eventually ended due to lack of alignment. Based on this information, the question arises: What were the conditions that compelled revision forces at the turn of the century?

The key to this question is the LDP’s Presidential election in 1999. Prime Minister and President Keizo Obuchi was aiming for re-election, and in the candidates’ debate, he took a positive stance toward the act’s revision, stating, “I think that the BAE does not necessarily match recent circumstances” (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 1999, September 18). The administrative initiative proposal announced by the Obuchi faction (that dealt with drastic reforms throughout the educational system) was consistent with this notion. The pledge of the current and subsequent LDP leadership was enough to raise demand for revision to the policy deliberation level.

In this election, Secretary General Yoshiro Mori was a powerful candidate who clearly stated that he would continue to support Obuchi’s re-election. In the latter part of August, Mori called for unification of the direction of his faction (the “Seiwakai” or “Mori’s faction”) during the summer study session and closed ranks with the appealing statement that he would “put all efforts into Obuchi’s re-election to maintain order” (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 1999, August 30).

On September 21, 1999, Obuchi, who had won the election, visited Mori’s office and showed his supreme gratitude by stating, “I will not forget your support” (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 1999, September 22). Mori was a leader of the group with special interest in education (Bunkyo-zoku) as well as of his faction, “Seiwakai”. In light of the fact that he was head of the Seiwakai, and a powerful Bunkyo-zoku group within the LDP, it is apparent that the pledge to “examine a revision to the BAE” was Obuchi’s payback to him. This was in stark contrast to Obuchi’s attitude toward Koichi Kato, who also ran in the election. Obuchi said to him, “You tried to bring me down” and then, as retribution, he ignored the desires of the Kochikai (Kato’s faction) in forming his cabinet.

After the beginning of the second Obuchi Cabinet, the “National Commission on Educational Reform” was established to discuss the revision. Obuchi, following Mori’s advice, chose a Mori confidant, Nobutaka Machimura, as the prime minister’s aide to the commission. In this way, the election set politicians on the path toward revising the BAE.

## Two Trends in Education Reform

Just prior to the national commission's establishment, the commission chair Leo Esaki declared his understanding, "The BAE served its purpose, but education must change with the times." Hirofumi Nakasone, Minister of Education, also had the same opinion (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2000, March 20).

Shortly after the commission's initial meeting, Obuchi fell ill. However, even with Mori serendipitously ascending to the position of prime minister, the national commission's interim report of September 2000 indicated its direction by hinting at "national discussions on a review of the BAE." The "National Commission on Education Reform: 17 Proposals for Changing Education," issued as a final report in December, suggested revision in a section titled, "A Basic Act on Education for a New Era."

Notably, the final report gave equal attention to two trends in education reform, "structural reform-type policies such as combined junior high and high schools, grade skipping, diversification in public schools, external assessments, and relaxation of standards for chartering private schools" and "policies of Bunkyo-zoku" (e.g., revising the BAE, strengthening moral education, service activities). Clearly, this occurred because two elements within the LDP Seiwakai faction were each given the task of examining and executing their policies.

The Seiwakai included not only the Bunkyo-zoku group and their allies (e.g., Yoshiro Mori, Nobutaka Machimura, Nariaki Nakayama, Ryu Shionoya), but also the structural reformist group (e.g., Junichiro Koizumi, Hidenao Nakagawa, Yuriko Koike; some straddled both sides, e.g., Shinzo Abe, Hakubun Shimomura). Of course, both sides had few overlapping points of emphasis with regard to education reform (Seiwa Policy Study Group compilation, 2002).

Factions within the LDP played a substantial role in power struggles over allocation of posts and related contests, as well as finding and developing "up-and-comers." Conversely, factions had only an indirect effect on the LDP's policy creation and decision (Nonaka, 2008, p. 121). Accordingly, having this combination of influences with differing policy orientations within the same faction was not unusual. The following comment by Koizumi (a Seiwakai member) in June 2000, clearly shows the relationship between factions and policy: "I have worked with Mr. Mori on politics, but have worked apart from him in policy" (Nonaka, 2008, p. 76).

In the Koizumi administration beginning in April 2001, structural reformists took top positions in both the cabinet and the party, while they conducted various reforms. As is well known, these "structural reform-type policies" had already been

proposed for twenty years. As Schoppa (1991) points out, however, structural reformists could not break down the structure of policy decision-making closed off by the “lower education government,” which consisted of the Ministry of Education and the Bunkyo-zoku group.

On the other hand, progress on reforms during the Koizumi era was accomplished by ignoring the “lower education government” and garnering “external” support. In other words, short shrift was given to the ruling party’s reviews and prior approvals, which followed the cumulative process ranging from the Policy Division, to the Policy Research Council, to the General Council in the LDP. Instead, cabinet-related groups on the “outside” moved forward on policy proposals and forced them down the party’s throat (Uchiyama, 2007, pp. 18-19).

At the same time, Koizumi was neither cooperative with, nor a hindrance to the BAE’s revision. Of course, this is not to assert that no powerful individuals within the party stood in opposition to revision. When debates were occurring in the national commission, Koichi Kato, a heavyweight in the party, stated, “There is no need for revision.” Secretary General of the LDP Hiromu Nonaka criticized the movement by stating, “We cannot assume the need for revision” (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2000, August 30).

However, in November 2000, the “Kato Rebellion” against the Mori cabinet ended in a misfire, and Kato dramatically lowered his own influence. Koizumi, head of the Seiwakai (Mori’s faction), was instrumental in suppressing this rebellion since he prioritized protecting Mori over friendship between Kato and Koizumi (Takenaka, 2006, p. 136; Uesugi, 2007, pp. 224-225).<sup>3</sup> In addition, Nonaka, who had put the brakes on revision, lost the LDP’s presidential election in 2003, and decided to retire in September that year (Nonaka, 2003, pp. 352-354). The fact that Koizumi forced an opposition proponent to revision into retirement is extremely interesting.

In short, the stream of revising the BAE came about as a product of compromise, through political dynamics among factions in the 1999 presidential election process. However, under the Koizumi administration (2001–2006), revision was removed from the government’s policy issues and any revision development was left to those who were interested at the LDP. In this political situation, the second stage in which the LDP negotiated the revision with the Komeito Party began.

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<sup>3</sup> Kato opened up to Koizumi, whom he believed to be an ally, regarding the secret plan for him “to agree to a no-confidence motion of the opposition party to the cabinet.” Upon hearing this, Koizumi spread news of “Kato’s plan” to Secretary General Hiromu Nonaka and Makoto Koga, Chair of the Committee of the National Diet, which began a spirited purge of Kato by Nonaka and others (Uesugi, 2007, pp. 224-225).

## **Ruling Coalition Komeito Party's Attitude Toward Revising the BAE**

### **From “Opposition” to “Consideration”**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)<sup>4</sup> adopted a nonjudgmental attitude and carefully watched revision discussions. However, as the ministry expected, “It would become easier to secure an education budget,” and undertook to work in lock step with the revisionist group (Mainichi Shimbun Sha, 2001, November 27).

As resistance was swept away within the LDP, and as MEXT came to accept the revision, the coalition partner, the Komeito Party, was placed in a difficult position. In September 2000, Daisaku Ikeda, a party founder and the Soka Gakkai's president emeritus, who wields enormous influence on the Komeito Party (KP) stated, “Revising the BAE should not be done in haste” (Seikyo Shimbun Sha, 2000, September 29). This sentiment was shared as that of the Soka Gakkai.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the KP was forced to state, “We could not gain supporters' understanding [with respect to discussions that presuppose revision] and therefore could not respond” (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2000, October 2). On the surface, strong opposition to revision would continue for some time.

In May 2003, ruling parties formed a “Council on the BAE” as well as an “Investigative Commission on the BAE” under the council to serve as a forum for substantive considerations. In the council's first meeting, immediately after Secretary General of the LDP Taku Yamasaki greeted the group by declaring “a start to discussions on revision to the BAE,” the KP's Secretary General Tetsuzo Fuyushiba responded by stating, “There should be no ‘revision,’” thus revealing the chasm between the two parties (Asahi Shimbun Sha, 2003, May 13).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In January 2001, the former Ministry of Education and the former Science and Technology Agency merged to become the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

<sup>5</sup> Soka Gakkai is a new Japanese religious group. The vast majority of Komeito members are also members of Soka Gakkai and many “Gakkai” members support the Komeito Party during election campaigns. And Seikyo Shimbun is a newspaper whose publication is owned and operated by Soka Gakkai.

<sup>6</sup> Komei Shimbun is a party newspaper of the Komeito.



However, the KP also faced the issue of how to balance its position as part of the ruling coalition. In the party's board of directors meeting in May, it was simply the natural course of events that caused some to express the following concern: "Contrasting differences in government views with the LDP would force the issue of whether the party should be part of the coalition" (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2003, May 31). The KP was in a dilemma, and it chose the realistic path of prioritizing the coalition ahead of dogma from its power base Soka Gakkai. This choice means that the KP gave priority to being a ruling party, and the party had been assigned profitable cabinet seats under the coalition government.

In assuming that the coalition would be maintained, the option to block revision disappeared. Accordingly, the KP was left with only limited strategies. On the other hand, a path toward revision was implicitly allowed, and the KP searched for points of compromise (revision) that enabled the party to "save face," even as the KP criticized the direction of the LDP, made demands, and placated the KP's power base.

### **The Shift to a Revision-Promoting Path**

The KP used the tactic of protracted attrition, in other words, delaying the conclusion. The reason for the party's somewhat aggressive posture, as stated by a Soka Gakkai leader after the 2003 general election, was due to "the LDP clearly being unable to win the election without the KP's cooperation" (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2003, November 15). As a result, the party likely gained confidence. Of course, upon further examination of the 2004 Upper House election, the LDP leadership's real intention was to avoid any cracks forming in the coalition and their resulting disadvantages during an election period.

In June 2004, approximately a year after the Investigative Commission began its task, the commission issued an interim report on the BAE's proposed revision. However, despite the commission having worked for a year, it had made little progress. For example, it added phrases, such as "loving our homeland and country" (preferred by the LDP) alongside Komeito's "caring for our homeland and country" and other minor changes. After the 2004 Upper House election, the dominant party began to doubt the KP: "The Komeito Party seems to want to slow down on the revision." And Soka Gakkai reprimanded the KP, stating, "We supported the LDP in the Upper House election, and the KP demands should thus be reflected in the policies" (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2004, September 5). At that time, the KP was in a difficult position.

In these circumstances, the KP's attitude began to shift slightly. In September 2004, they formally allowed MEXT to prepare a revision proposal. However, this was under the condition that any portions without consensus, e.g., those regarding patriotism and religious education, would be removed.

It did feel as if time were passing without any progress, but this standstill ended in the summer of 2005. The LDP scored a major victory in the general election. Although national elections had been held for three successive years from 2003 to 2005, 2006 looked like it would be the first year in which no national election would be held for the next four years. These two factors diluted the impact of the "election cooperation" that the KP had previously provided. The party had to shift its position to revision promotion.

In 2006, both parties increased their synchronization. Initially, in January, the LDP removed Hirofumi Nakasone, the strongest advocate for including the word "patriotism," from both the council and the investigative commission. In March, another party also showed a more realistic stance, stating that there should be clearer expression for the concept of "love of one's country," which did not include the term "government structure" (Komeito Kikanshi Kyoku, 2006, March 16).<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in an investigative commission meeting on April 12, all parties agreed on the proposal by Commission Head Tadamori Oshima. In reference to patriotism, the phrase "in addition to loving our country and homeland" was adopted. Furthermore, they agreed to retain the phrase "[education] is not to submit to unreasonable dominion" (Asahi Shimbun Sha, 2006, April 13).

Why did the KP change its position to a progressive one? We explain why, although the reason might slightly overlap what has been argued thus far.

First, the LDP's overwhelming victory in the 2005 general election caused the KP to become anxious that its influence was waning. If the party and the Soka Gakkai had continued objecting to the revision, undesirable phrases for them might have been included in the proposal. This realization caused them to become more flexible.

Second, the LDP revolt was growing rapidly. Reality aside, Nariaki Nakayama, the previous Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, stated, "Our party could bring the bill to the Diet on our own" (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2006, April 13). Thus, it was likely decided that further delays were not prudent for the coalition's face saving.

Third, the KP was negotiating with the LDP on various policies. After the 2005 election, the KP publicly pledged to “expand benefits for children” and was successful in including these in the 2006 budgeting process. In contrast, the party made a concession to the LDP on the BAE revision and the issue of raising the Defense Agency to full ministerial status (Asahi Shimbun Sha, 2005, December 7).

As explained above, changes in the political scene brought about by the 2005 general election made it necessary for the KP to take a more favorable stance on the revision. The party’s situation was one factor in defining its timing.

### **An Issue that the Komeito Party Wanted to Erase**

The “ruling party’s draft about the BAE” announced on April 13, 2006, proceeded mostly “as-is” through the cabinet and was submitted to the National Diet as a bill. It passed the Lower House on November 16, and the Upper House on December 15, after which it was entered into law. What significance did it have for the Komeito Party?

Among conservatives, the ruling party draft and the Revised Basic Act on Education (RBAE) left many dissatisfied. Upon seeing the published ruling party draft, some National Diet members of the LDP criticized it as “diluting patriotism” (Sankei Shimbun Sha, 2006, April 13). Michiyoshi Hayashi, who played the part of a conservative controversialist, wryly noted, “Revision on which we had to rely on the KP will certainly be negative and worse”(Hayashi, 2006, p. 249).

Bachrach and Baratz (1962) noted that power has two sides: “power that is solely reflected in concrete decisions” and “power that creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts,” which “confines the scope of decision-making to relatively ‘safe’ issues.” Over the course of a few years, the KP was concerned over the possibility that arguments over revision or difficult negotiations might cause the power base to wonder “whether the coalition should be dissolved.” The party deeply feared that this turned a point of dispute between the Soka Gakkai and the KP that subsequently came to the forefront, the party.

To put it plainly, conservatives’ heavy criticism after the draft’s submission was a very desirable outcome for the KP: The Soka Gakkai would perceive the draft submission as symbolic of the coalition and cooperation with the ministerial party, while criticism would be perceived as “the Komeito Party biting the bullet in regard to the LDP, particularly those conservatives running amok as members of the coalition.” Within the Komeito’s power base of Soka Gakkai, party policy chief Tetsuo Saito’s assertion was seen as a true sentiment given the context: “The bill is very

well crafted, precisely because we were in the coalition” (Komeito Kikanshi Kyoku, 2006, November 18). It also served to lower feelings of dissatisfaction of more than a few toward the party.

At first glance, the KP’s actions in the revision process appear to have been an exercise of “decision-making power” that caused opposition and forced compromises from the LDP. However, the political group did not continue its negotiations with the LDP to change the party’s mind. That the KP had been prioritizing the coalition and their exercise of power was due to what might be called “non-actualized power” that “minimized points of contention between the Soka Gakkai and the Komeito Party.”

## **Two Prime Ministers: Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe**

### **Junichiro Koizumi’s Personality**

Before the revision could become law, a period of six years was required from the time of the national investigative commission (December 2000) and three and a half years from formation of the ruling parties’ discussion (May 2003). The reason for such a long time period was not simply that required for the KP to realize a strategy for party interests. Thus, this section focuses on Junichiro Koizumi’s words and actions, considering these as key factors for the considerable amount of time. The focus on Koizumi arises because most of this time period overlaps with his service as prime minister (April 2001 to September 2006). How did he approach issues of revision? By identifying this, one aspect of why the situation was delayed for so long may be clarified.

In a policy speech given directly after becoming prime minister, Koizumi declared, “A broad national discussion will be made for the review of the BAE” (Lower House session, May 7, 2001). Again, in an administrative policy address given in January 2006 (his last year as prime minister), he emphasized, “We are assiduously working toward quick revision” (Lower House session, January 20, 2006). In formal settings, he consistently mentioned his enthusiasm for revision. However, a Mainichi Shimbun editorial noted, “The prime minister does not appear to have a high level of interest. Actually, he has merely left the details of the revision draft to the ruling parties” (Mainichi Shimbun Sha, 2006, April 27). Koizumi truly did leave everything to those in the party interested in the issue, and he maintained the attitude that revision was not his concern. At a different time, Koizumi debated “whether it was necessary for the state to get involved with education more than necessary,” in response to a Bunkyo-zoku group member who fervently discussed revision to the BAE (Fujino, 2006, p. 233).

Koizumi's passive stance did not change at all, even after the revision bill passed through the cabinet and was shuffled into the 164th ordinary session of the Diet on April 28, 2006. On the evening of June 14, he provided the following "formal view": "I am of the opinion that we must differentiate between those bills that must be urgently passed and those which should take time to go through the Diet after a certain amount of deliberation. The bill for the revision to the BAE is the latter" (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2006, June 15).

Political scientist Hideo Otake believed that "Koizumi's articles of faith do not include strong elements of Japanese customs or traditional elements such as respect for the emperor. Even on defense and education policies, he is not particularly right-wing" (Otake, 2003, p. 104). Koizumi enjoyed activities such as drinking wine and going to the opera, and his tolerance for a matrilineal emperor was in line with these sensibilities. He made almost no comments during debates regarding moral education and the revision, and in the final stages, passion was clearly lacking. It was apparent that Koizumi was neither opposed nor in favor of the revision to the BAE. Instead, he was merely disinterested, a reflection of his personality.

### **The Abe Government and the Revision to the Basic Act on Education**

The revision to the BAE that Koizumi had allowed to slide was passed to his successor when he vacated the prime minister's position and the LDP's top spot in September 2006. Shinzo Abe was an overwhelmingly strong candidate following Koizumi's departure.

Abe unhesitatingly professed his favorable position toward revision. On September 1, 2006, when he announced his intent to run for party head, he strongly stated, "Of course, we will have revision to the BAE, and a review of the overall education system" (Asahi Shimbun Sha, 2006, September 2). Moreover, in an interview directly following the LDP president's selection, Abe clearly stated that he would "work on revision as the most important bill" in the upcoming extraordinary Diet session (Asahi Shimbun Sha, 2006, September 21).

The extraordinary session convened on September 26. On October 6, in the Diet session, Abe expressed a desire to pass the bill, and Minister of Transportation Tetsuzo Fuyushiba (of the coalition's Komeito) agreed by stating, "I would like to pass this bill" (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2006, October 7). On October 23, coalition leaders, for instance, Diet Affairs Committee Chair Toshihiro Nikai, received direction from Abe that "The Revised Basic Act on Education bill was the top priority." Subsequently, these Diet members conferred and decided actually to place top priority on the revision (Yomiuri Shimbun Sha, 2006, October 24).

Ruling parties had more than two-thirds of the Lower House seats, and as long as they began proceedings without showing any internal discord, they could expect to pass the bill by quietly following a formal process. It appeared as if the Abe cabinet was “sailing smoothly.”

However, in a Lower House special committee for the Basic Act on Education held on October 31, the Communist Party’s Chizuko Takahashi exhibited a public record titled, “A Town Hall Meeting in Hachinohe on Education Reform,” and noted that it had staged questions. Meanwhile, Committee Chair Mayumi Moriyama was dismayed and stopped the meeting’s minutes. The news completely surprised Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology Fumiaki Ibuki (Uesugi, 2007, pp. 80-81). Thereafter, the government responded to the issue, while being forced to revise the BAE. As November arrived, many facts of injustice came to light.

In spite of these circumstances, Abe maintained the “bullish” stance that he “wanted a quick passage” and discussed the revision bill’s passage in the Lower House that week. The bill did pass that week, right on schedule. For Abe, who had been implacable from initial stages of getting the revision passed, the issue was a gift left by Koizumi, in that it was an opportunity to gain passage through his cabinet’s work. However, he also left Abe with the burden of dealing with the pre-arranged questions’ aftermath. The town hall meetings as well as the staged questions, occurred during the Koizumi era.

After Koizumi’s exit, through August 2009, or the so-called end of the LDP government, latent issues of Koizumi’s reforms became apparent. This caused a great deal of repetition in the LDP government’s dealings with various corrections and responses. The post-Koizumi Abe government already had to work through the process of passing the BAE revision, actually his initial work.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined decision-making process of passing the BAE revision. It revealed that the process of creating the bill and getting it passed required a different logic from the so-called “education reform under the Koizumi government.”

First, LDP legislators with ties to educational interests (Bunkyo-zoku) played primary roles. In the Koizumi era, the “engine of reform” was cabinet-related groups, and, essentially, they did not touch the revision. This was primarily because Koizumi was apathetic to moral education’s enhancement.

Second, the political situation directly influenced the revision. Politics generally drives policy implementation, but this issue stood out in particular. The path to revision was a product of political posturing among factions in the LDP's presidential election. And election results and election plans continually disrupted the passage process.

The revision's policy-decision process included the previously mentioned characteristics, but what significance did the process have for each actor involved?

Although Bunkyo-zoku, LDP members with special interest in education certainly did not have their demands completely met, they were able to "realize the creation of this act on their own" for the first time. In the words of Abe himself, this was truly "the fondest wish since the LDP was established" (Asahi Shimbun, 2006, October 31).

The LDP's structural reformist group was perhaps the greatest beneficiary. This group provided an obstruction that forced legislators with ties to educational interests to focus entirely on "the revision," while structural reformists could move forward, to a certain extent, with deregulating education. The difficulty negotiating with the KP, and the drawn-out timeline worked in their favor.

The Komeito Party did not wish for the revision themselves, but they successfully steered to give the dominant party and the Soka Gakkai credit, thus at least strengthening party officials' pride. Policy bartering brought about a number of benefits, for instance, incorporation of demands into public pledges' execution and the new BAE.

Thus, for each actor, although there was some amount of dissatisfaction, there were also some satisfying benefits. This is why the revision to BAE, thought to be the most difficult education reform to coordinate within the LDP and among the coalition parties, was resolved with few unpleasant feelings within the ruling parties themselves. However, from the long-term standpoint, for the ruling parties overall, the "achievement" of the passage of the revision did not necessarily act positively.

The Abe government experienced duality; as a successor to Koizumi's, it received high expectations from structural reform supporters, and conservatives had high hopes due to Shinzo Abe's personality. Just after Abe ascended to the LDP's top spot (and the prime minister position), he first had to satisfy conservatives by prioritizing the BAE revision. However, this ended as a betrayal of electorates desiring structural reform. By putting off the reform, not only did he disappoint them, but his procrastination also cast doubt on the LDP's path to structural reform itself.

This circumstance accelerated the diminished approval ratings for ruling parties, especially the LDP.

Citizens who voted for the LDP in the 2005 general election, but did not vote for the LDP in the 2007 Upper House election did not think well of Abe's efforts toward education (Sugawara, 2009, pp. 112-113). They did not like Abe's conservative ideology regarding "rebuilding education," and their dislike pulled many votes from him. By the time the Revised Basic Act on Education was passed and the Abe government attempted to take action to placate structural reformists, the cabinet had already lost the support of many of them.



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