

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE SHADOW SHOGUN

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### ABSTRACT

*FEARED BY SOME OR BLAMED BY OTHERS, ICHIRO OZAWA IS KNOWN TO BE ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENT JAPANESE POLITICIANS, OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS. HAVING “THE FATHER OF THE SYSTEM” (JACOB M. SCHLESINGER, 1998: 137) AS HIS MENTOR, HE GREW UP INTO BEING THE MOST POWERFUL PERSON IN JAPAN’S POLITICS WITH TIES THAT SURPASS ANY NATIONAL SUB-SYSTEM BARRIER: ECONOMY, ADMINISTRATION, BUSINESS, SOCIETY, DIPLOMACY, AND SO ON. FOLLOWING A POLICAL ACTIVITY OF MORE THAN 25 YEARS, AT THE END OF 2012, THE SHOGUN OZAWA IS BACK IN BUSINESS AFTER A WELL-MEDIATIZED CORUPTION SCANDIAL, AND HE IS READY TO BECOME A NATIONAL-LIBERAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE LAST “WESTERNALIZATION” MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE KAN OR NODA ADMINISTRATIONS. THE PROBLEM THAT ARISES WHEN WE TALK ABOUT THE “RESSURECTION” OF OZAWA IS WHETHER HIS STRATEGIES REMAIN CONSTANTLY VIABLE OVER TIME AND CAN BE SUPPORTED BY PRACTICE.*

**KEYWORDS:** JAPAN, POLITICS, ZOKU, SHADOW SHOGUN, ICHIRO OZAWA.

### Introduction

Nowadays, the international society is usually characterized by dynamism as we need to explain the dissemination of the consequences at all state levels. Specifically, the national authority attempted to provide an effective response reform to these changes without losing any power. Similarly, Japanese politics, which, for decades, has not achieved the desired stability, is, at present, at a turning point: the years of inner turmoil, which highlighted different factions of one single party and prevented the democratic exercise of inter-party debates, seem to continue without any viable alternative from a political leader. This is due the interconnectivity between *zoku*\*\* which allowed the

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\*\* Family, clan, tribe.

perpetuation of the same personalities as decision makers. Deeply conservative, Japan has demonstrated once again how important it is to maintain the Shinto mentality (respect for *zoku*) and how this is reflected in the current policy: *shadow shoguns*<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. The term was first issued by a Wall Street correspondent and journalist, Jacob M. Schlesinger, when he spoke about the political continuity in the Japan's post-Second World War system: the transmission from father to son of the capacities to coordinate the inside Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) decision. At first, Kakuei Tanaka, and now, Ichiro Ozawa may be simply two names, each designating a strong personality that marked the postwar Japanese politics, and, moreover, which is being responsible for the current system's stillness from which Japan suffers until today.

The present paper aims to address the issue of the *shadow shogun* in terms of re-emergence. More specifically, we would like to see how can be understood the ability of Ichiro Ozawa to politically influence in the year of 2012, as he recently was acquitted from any wrongdoing in a corruption lawsuit that was brought up against him. In this context, we propose to have a brief overview of his specific leadership that had thinned so much the authority held by LDP, causing the lost of elections in favor of the opposition. Our discursive structure will be following all the steps from the past 20 years, expecting to discover patterns that may explain the strategy used by the politician in question. The year 1993, when Ozawa left the LDP to form one of the political parties, Shinseito that represented the foundation of the grandest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), announced the decline in influence of LDP all over Japan. By losing the elections from the next year, LDP's representative persons were facing a painful situation of losing both the support of the most powerful man in Japanese politics, Ichiro Ozawa, but also the electorate's. Nowadays experiences (2012) draw a warning signal over the existing preconditions of repeating the '93 moment: after being exonerated of all charges imputed to him, Ozawa left the ruling party, DPJ, and formed another political faction that seems to threaten the position of his former colleagues. Expert opinions that are discussing whether the *shadow shogun* will determine once again the fall of the now ruling party (to which he once again belonged) are divergent and deserve to be mentioned. In the following, we hope to balance the views which were presented in this direction, by trying, ultimately, to conclude about the capacity and implications of Ichiro Ozawa's return.

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> The term names two personalities of post 1955's Japanese politics: Tanaka Kakuei și Ichiro Ozawa, father and son. They determinate changes in Japan's administration, by being at the origin of the rise, respectively, the fall of LDP, the most important party of all time.

The methodology of drafting this paper is considering the use of electronic sources (specialized articles) chosen due to their actuality, diversity, nationalities, political, geopolitical considerations, and so on, in order to be analyzed, by using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and hoping, in this way, for a properly-documented construction of this essay. We plan to reference to the views of Japanese natives (Keiko Hirata, Tsuyoshi Sunohara, Takashi Inoguchi) or acknowledged specialists (Stephen Day, Alisa, Gaunder, Michael J. Green, Christopher W. Hughes and George Mulgan Aurelia) to provide legitimacy to the assumptions stated below.

### **His vision regarding the internal and external policy**

Last two decades which portrays Ichiro Ozawa as the most important policy maker in Japan, showed his progressive evolution, mathematically looking like a parabola. His actions are based, originally on his personal perception of Japanese society and government that the author in question has presented in his book, *Blueprint for a New Japan* (which soon became a best-seller). Ozawa's political program has taken into consideration, on one hand, the internal political modernization of Japan so that the country can get out of its systemic stillness, and, on the other hand, the need of assuming an active external role under the multilateral umbrella of the United Nations (UN).

Internally, because of the changes that took place in the early 1990s, Ozawa imagined the reform of the Japanese electoral system in order to rehabilitate the distorted image of the Japanese politician after multiple corruption scandals. He believed that political stability in Japan can be achieved by implementing the *single-member district* way which would facilitate the alternation in power, and, ultimately, directs towards a two-party system

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\* Ozawa hoped for the implementation of a two-party system model similar with the British and American one.

<sup>1</sup> Steven K. Vogel, "Can Japan disengage Winners and Losers in Japan's Political Economy, and Ties that bind them," *Social Science Japan Journal* 2, 1 (1999): 10, accessed July 05, 2012, doi: 10.1093/ssjj/2.1.3.

to prepare the way for the modernization envisioned by its leader, and succeeded at first, to destabilize any form of opposition. After this success, Ozawa has played another political card in 1998<sup>3</sup>, when he went back for a collaboration with his former party, a move that was too much criticized as a new strategy to destabilize the LDP. The subsequently developments named him responsible for the birth of the second largest political party of Japan, DPJ, whose president he will become in 2000. Even if he did not have the chance to become prime minister, Ichiro Ozawa will persuade to keep the manipulator position of Japanese political elite; like a skilled puppeteer. The decay that he will experience in 2009 when he lost DPJ presidency elections will culminate into this year's corruption scandal, a lawsuit in which the judges will not find him guilty. His rehabilitation is seen as the rebirth of the *shadow shogun*, ready to become once again a alternative for the electorate who is so tired of witnessing all these politicians unable to carry out their political mandates.

As for the external policy, Ozawa promoted the theory of *normalizing*<sup>4</sup> the Japan's position in the international system, closely looking to the Asian region where it had to face the Chinese ascension. By being the representative of a nationalism with liberal tendencies, this politician hope to re-grant his country, the *futsu no kuni*<sup>5</sup> status (normal country), the possibility of making a good use of the attributes as a *powerful state* (according to *hard power* thought), and the ability to maintain armed forces that can be freely detached for external missions. The failure from the early 1990s, when the international opinion blamed the involvement of Japan into the Persian Gulf matter, led to a new Ozawa perception of Japanese foreign policy: in the international society, Japan must articulate a comprehensive policy under UN umbrella, the only one which can provide the wanted legitimacy for acting in the international system (by promoting the concept of *collective defense*<sup>6</sup>). This recognition will cause, by default, the possibility of reviewing the so much-discussed article 9\* from the Japanese Constitution.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob M. Schlesinger, "Shadow shoguns: The origins and crisis of Japan, inc.," *The Washington Quarterly* 21, 2 (1998): 141, accessed July 05, 2012, doi: 10.1080/01636609809550317.

<sup>3</sup> Karol Zakowski, *op.cit.*: 190-191.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's shifting security trajectory and policy system," *The Adelphi Papers* 44, 368-369 (2004): 49-50, accessed July 05, 2012, doi: 10.1080/05679320412331340337.

<sup>5</sup> Keiko Hirata, "Who Shapes the National Security Debate? Divergent Interpretations of Japan's Security Role," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 35, 3 (2008): 139, accessed July 05, doi: 10.3200/AAFS.35.3.123-151.

<sup>6</sup> Kimberley Marten Zisk, "Japan's United Nations Peacekeeping Dilemma," *Asia-Pacific Review* 8, 1 (2001): 26, accessed July 05, 2012, doi: 10.1080/13439000125595.

\* This article from the Japan's Constitution mentions the renunciation to the right of declaring war, as well as, to the capacity of having military personnel that can be considered precondition to a reiterated national rearming, all, with the aim, of avoiding any undesired experience.

In this light, and by taking into account the actual state of worldwide influences, U.S. must continue to be a partner for discussion, but not as important as China must be in the Japanese foreign policy. Even more as the diplomatic tensions have deepened inside the Sino-Japanese relations after September 2010<sup>\*\*</sup>, when it was brought up in discussion the territorial disputes. Ichiro Ozawa remained, consistently, a significant player for the relationship between the two countries, as he has constantly participated in meetings with Chinese officials (e.g. the visit of Premier Wen in 2007<sup>7</sup>). This attitude clearly reflects a pan-Asiatic and unchanged Japanese nationalism that refuses to make any compromise in the process of westernization that is taking place throughout Asia.

As we could have also notice in Ozawa's vision regarding the Japanese politics, there is a constant tendency to find the right solution for the creation of a favorable framework to support the national development. In this respect, he firstly hoped to resolve the territorial conflict with Russia. Based on *seikei fukabun* strategy<sup>8</sup>, Ozawa went to Moscow, in the early 90's, to launch a proposal for the soviets to concession the disputed islands to Japan in exchange for a financial support of \$ 26 billion<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately for the Japanese, Gorbachev was not impressed by Japanese attempt, which concluded as a failure, and lead to a perpetuation of all disaccords, until today. Kan administration has been unable to articulate a clear policy over the territorial issues, and left a heavy inheritance to his colleague Noda, who *succeeded* in complicating more the Japan's Asian relations by cooling the diplomatic ties with South Korea. In this way, the recall of the ambassadors from China<sup>10</sup> and then, South Korea, are considered to be two movements that transmitted the unavailability to negotiate the bilateral disputes. The passive-aggressive attitude with which the Japanese diplomacy has treated his two Asian neighbors, did not promote, in any way, a positive resolution of the existing issues. In this case, by changing the angle of analysis and the perspective, Ichiro Ozawa, who benefits from his previous experience, may manage to present himself as the right actor to resolve the situation through his

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\*\* The moment when Ozawa lost the party elections from DPJ.

<sup>7</sup> \*\*\*, "Premier Wen Meets Ichiro Ozawa," China.org.cn, July 05, 2007, accessed October, 30, 2012, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/wen/207130.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Randall E. Newnham, "How to Win Friends and Influence People: Japanese Economic Aid Linkage and the Kurile Islands," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 27, 4 (2001): 250, accessed July 05, 2012, doi: 10.1080/00927670109601481.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem: 251.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Fackler, "Under Diplomatic Strain, Japan Recalls Envoy in Dispute With China Over Islands," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2012, accessed October 31, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/16/world/asia/japan-recalls-ambassador-to-china.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/16/world/asia/japan-recalls-ambassador-to-china.html?_r=0).

personal means and influence. The logical question that arises at the moment is how, we can now, in 2012, understand this Japanese politician's power, after he have gone through a period of decay and a corruption scandal that finished with a trial in court.

### ***The resurrection of Ichiro Ozawa?***

Many analysts have seriously questioned, in the studies about the Japanese politics, the possibility of rebirthing from its own ashes of the *shadow shogun*, Ichiro Ozawa, since it was thought that his skills would be so much degraded that it is unlikely the reiteration of the 1993's experience. There are others, however, who do not hesitate to admit that the person in question, despites having aged, has not lost any of its powers. One specialist tried to deconstruct into pieces the Japanese politician's influence in order to describe clearly by which measures one man can handle a whole system: Tomohito Shinoda explains the ability of Ichiro Ozawa through five specific attributes: „1) power base within the ruling party; 2) ties with the bureaucracy; 3) ties with the opposition parties; 4) support from the business community; and 5) support from the US.”<sup>11</sup> If we analyze the successive political mandates from the recent years, we can see that the withdrawal of political support from the Prime Minister's institution was, in particular, due inability of the politician in question to handle arising problems: Hatoyama failed to find a solution to the corruption scandals and Naoto Kan was overwhelmed by the last year's cataclysm.<sup>12</sup> Regarding the Noda administration, we observe the lack of congruence in the political program that ultimately determinate the incapacity to design a national economic recovery plan, a foreign policy that promotes the national interest without the cost-benefit ratio to be disadvantageous for the Japanese state. The famous dispute concerning the increase of the consumption tax regarding which Ichiro Ozawa and his supporters took an aggressive attitude and condemned it, was eventually adopted during the National Diet sessions. Another point on the internal agenda is the issue of energy, mainly nuclear, that now became a really sensitive issue for the people of Japan. One year after the nuclear disaster from Fukushima, and despite any popular protests, the national authority gave signs of taking seriously the discussion of reopening the nuclear plants, being motivated by pragmatic reasons. In the

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<sup>11</sup> Tomohito Shinoda, “Ozawa Ichirō as an actor in foreign policy-making,” *Japan Forum* 16, 1 (2004): 56, accessed July 05, 2012, doi: 10.1080/0955580032000189320.

<sup>12</sup> \*\*\*, “Japan's elections unlikely to end political uncertainties,” *Strategic Comments* 18, 7 (2012): 1, accessed October 27, 2012, doi: 10.1080/13567888.2012.743241.

external policy, the new Transpacific Partnership (TPP) means the acceptance of the Japanese state to modernize its agriculture system in order to renounce state protection which did not allow equal access of foreign products in the market competition.

### **Conclusion**

The present situation exposes the return of Ichiro Ozawa in prim plan, as an alternative for the reparation of all the mistakes made by the previous governments towards the regaining of the national prestige. Japan still has the need for a clear strategy to escape from the economical regression, to revitalize the State's position in the international system hoping, by these means, to solve any bilateral disputes, but, also, the necessity for a sharp vision in order to reform the administrative system which is definitely too old to meet the challenges of global interdependences. Everything can be handled by the careful management of inborn leader whose influence can positively determine the coordination of any administrative project. In fact, the power of Ichiro Ozawa is not so damaged as much as some would like, but the correct issue that can be risen is whether the politician has the needed energies to resume the big political battle.

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