

JIAP OBSERVATION

TWO PRINCESS POLITICS

*This was first published in the 12/2-8/01 edition of the **Japan Washington Watch B (JWWB)** a weekly review of important news, reports, opinion, and primary source documents for Japan analysts produced for members of the **Japan Information Access Project** [<http://www.jiaponline.org>]*

Koizumi can now openly practice his “two princess” (the new one and Ms. Tanaka) politics to push forward his political agenda of governmental, diplomatic, and constitutional restructuring. The distractions of both princesses will help Koizumi get on with his economic and political reform. Muted joy will propel the economy, succession will open the back door to the constitutional debate, and spite will reorder Japan’s international relations.

Politically, no better political move would be to encourage the reestablishment of a Japanese empress. With the gender gap widening every day and women’s discontent severely affecting the family structure, the economy, and attitudes toward foreign policy, an appeal to symbolic female empowerment is near brilliant. His current symbol of female power, Tanaka, will help check the LDP and bureaucrats.

As US officials became more frustrated with Koizumi foot-dragging on the economy, it was clear that Koizumi was stalling. He was simply waiting for the baby before working on economic and maybe even constitutional reform. The terrorism legislation was a welcome respite from the real political fights on economic, read political, restructuring. It was also a test of using public opinion to shape the limits of political support. Koizumi knew he had the political support from both within his coalition and mainly from the people for a limited widening of JDA’s peacekeeping operations and strengthening national defense. He also knew from the polls that they could not be permanent.

Constitutional reform is momentarily out of the way. Koizumi essentially made a de facto reinterpretation, albeit temporary and situational, of the “peace” constitution. He cleverly retained the political safety of returning to stricter interpretations. The new princess provides political cover for a future extended discussion and wholesale revision of the Constitution. Although male succession is confirmed in the American-approved Imperial Household Law (needing only a simple Diet vote), it is the American-written Constitution that sanctions the Law. To question one American document, suggests rethinking other postwar American institutions. Imperial succession may not be all that is at stake in making the princess an empress. Japanese opinion polls do find a majority interested in constitutional revision and article 9 is only fifth in what Japanese want to see changed. Yet, Koizumi is wise to note that there are: “few who would refuse a reigning empress. But that is a different issue from the question of amending the law to allow a female member to ascend the Chrysanthemum Throne. This is not a matter which needs to be decided on in a hasty manner.” Not now, but later.

In regard to Tanaka, her days remain numbered but the date has been pushed back. Koizumi needs her money and her political memory [i.e., knowledge of where the bodies are buried]. He also needs her political popularity to continue to end run traditional politics and to marginalize the Foreign Ministry (and foreign policy). To succeed at economic reform and to keep his popularity up he needs to be free of international issues, to keep the American’s at bay, and to remind the bureaucrats of the dangers of their arrogance. Tanaka even had the temerity to question Koizumi, much to the delight of her followers. These are all important agendas for the Japanese voters who form the core of his support.

Koizumi is relying on popular discontent and capturing situational attitudes to help him unhinge traditional power structures, reorder the economy, rearrange Japanese security, and break free of the American imposed constitution. Tanaka is the perfect foil and the discomfort of her by both the American and Japanese foreign policy elites is politically helpful. No bad word can be said about Aiko and she is the perfect symbol of the new Japan. She is finally the “postwar” by being named on December 7. Thus, the princesses (Aiko and Tanaka) are Koizumi’s aces in the hole. You gotta love this guy!

Mindy L. Kotler

Director

Japan Information Access Project

(202) 822-6040, mkotler@jiaponline.org, <http://www.jiaponline.org>

Ms. Kotler holds a MA in International Relations from Yale University and received her BA with high honors in Chinese History and Government from Smith College. She is also among the first classes of girls to attend The Phillips Exeter Academy.