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COVID-19 Pandemic and Japan's Political Trend

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English Abstract

The reasons why Japan has been taking rather lax measures in response to COVID-19 are: First, Japan did not upgrade its quarantine system for it had suffered little damage from the SARS and the MERS outbreaks. Second, the Japanese government is circumspect in enforcing the state power within the country after its postwar reflection on nationalism that prevailed during the time of imperialism. The Japanese Constitution still lacks a clause that would address emergency situations. In other words, Japan's measures against epidemic are to respect human rights, yet are bound to be loose. And third, Prime Minister Abe's top-down system failed to act in a timely manner at the outbreak of COVID-19.

Abe's failure to quickly respond to COVID-19, however, does not necessarily correlate with the fall in his approval ratings. The Abe administration's state of affairs is, and will be, more closely related with the dissolution of the House of Representatives. The possibility of dissolving the House of Representatives, however, is low. It is most realistic for Prime Minister Abe to stay in power until the 2021 Olympic and advocate Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) as the next prime minister; such may benefit Abe to secure his influence and serve a practical role as a kingmaker within the Liberal Democratic Party.

The economic policy of the post-Abe administration is likely to undergo changes as the circumstances are likely to point out the limitations of the current Abenomics. It may catalyze province-focused policies and emphasize on helping the weak. Furthermore, the post-Abe administration may be less towards the amendment of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. ♣

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.