

CHANGING CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN JAPAN AND A FUTURE VIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the features of social and economic change after the 1990s in Japan, specifically in terms of changes in civic consciousness, administrative system, economic and industrial structure, as well as community change. It also looks at the emergence of a new social image corresponding to the incompatibility and conflicts of economic and social system. Three examples of new systems to support community development are compared: Yamato City (ordinance to promote citizen's activity for creating 'new public'; Tsukisara District ('Cheer-up Support Program' to provide opportunities to realize creative and cooperative society); and Kuki City (conversion from centralized administration to collaboration between citizens and administration).

NOTABLE FEATURES OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES OF JAPAN SINCE THE 90s

Changes in the consciousness of citizens

Citizens' consciousness in Japan has greatly changed since the 1990s from dependence on the administrations to independence and autonomy. An inclination toward heavy dependence on the administrative authorities, a marked feature in the way the Japanese behave, has rapidly changed since the 1990s. In the field of community development, a tendency has spread around the country to improve and sustain the quality of community life and environments by the hands of citizens, and citizens with a variety of backgrounds willingly take part in activities everywhere, working to realize the collaboration between community residents and local authorities.

Historically, the power relations between the central and local governments, as well as between administrative authorities and the private, have been understood as vertical ones in Japan where decisions are passed from the former/top to the latter/bottom, something we call the "structure of a vertical society." A conversion from this vertical society to a horizontal social structure was asserted by many citizen movements after the 60s, and the expansion of community development

on the initiative of citizens in the 90s simultaneously fostered the growth of a horizontally-oriented consciousness at a grass roots level.

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, with the relief activities by an estimated one million volunteer people, drastically changed the perception of citizen activities in Japanese society. Prompted by this, the so-called NPOs Law proposed by a group of lawmakers passed the Diet in 1998. The law allows citizens to give nonprofit organizations a legal status as juridical persons. Approximately 17,000 NPOs were founded in the five years after the law took effect, and more than 3,000 have been created every year since, thus creating a new social sector. A sense of reassurance that citizens can create a new sector by their own hands is further accelerating their participation in society.

In the 90s, the idea of a "new public" was born out of localities where citizens made the effort to realize the formation of a "horizontal social structure." Now recognition has spread among citizens that "small publics" are being created in their everyday activities, and they grow to become an "extensive public," against a traditional "public" monopolized by the governments and administrations. The "new public" is a "public" in which citizens, NPOs, businesses and administrative authorities support each other, under an agreement to realize a "horizontal social structure." This idea has quickly penetrated Japanese society since 2000.

The idea of a "new public," combined with the birth of the NPO Law, gives power to citizens working for positive change and prompts the emergence of a new social sector thereby transforming the civil society of Japan.

Features of changes in the communities

Local communities of Japan now stand at a crossroads of revitalization with the following processes:

1) Increase of the rate of senior people

The rate of citizens over 65 years old nationally reached 19.0% in 2003 and is expected to keep growing rapidly to an estimated 22.5% in 2010 and 35.7% in 2050. This change will have a significant influence on communities, whether in cities or in rural areas.

2) Desolation of communities

Desolation of both cities and rural areas is in progress nationwide, accompanied by the deterioration of communities as witnessed in the decrease of population and rapid rise of crime. In some respects, this urban desolation and community deterioration are similar to what a number of cities in America and Europe have experienced since the 60s.

3) Community development for revitalization takes root

To address these situations, management of local communities by communities themselves has become a major concern of citizens. Community development projects by citizens' own initiative as well as the launching of diverse local businesses are flourishing around the country.

4) Emergence of new methods to express citizens' will in the society.

Residents of communities facing difficulties make use of two new methods for the rebirth of their own communities. One is the method of participation including "community development workshops," which became popular in the 90s. The other is the utilization of advanced information technology and information systems, which spread in the late 90s. Both methods have the potential to create horizontal social structures in this vertical society.

In rural, mountain villages and small cities particularly, great efforts are made by residents, overcoming geographical disadvantages, to make full use of natural environments and historical resources to create new community cultures, develop tourist resources, promote exchanges with outside communities and generate diverse business opportunities.

Features of changes in the economic and industrial structures

Since the 90s, the destruction of the local economy caused by the penetration of the global economy has prompted the widening of debilitated areas both in cities and in rural areas. While Japan underwent depopulation in rural and mountainous areas during a period of economic growth (1950 to 75), this nationwide generation of debilitated areas is what the nation has never experienced. To alleviate this, political measures for community revitalization are under exploration.

Attempts of new communal economies intended for the revitalization of communities have been spreading since the late 90s. The interest in small businesses, or "community businesses" as they are called in Japan, is heightening among citizens and NPOs and a wide variety of projects are given a try throughout the country. With this, revaluation, rediscovery and creation of social resources and social capital within communities have become a big concern in citizen activities. Formation of multiple networks on a global scale, made possible by advanced IT, serves to widen the possibility of community revitalization.

The revaluation of social resources and social capital inside communities is giving birth to 'community banks,' financial systems run by citizens, and reutilization of existing local credit unions. The issuance and use of local currencies unique to individual communities is also being tried, thus generating new

networks through which resources within communities are exchanged.

Since the 80s, an assertion has been made by the market sector that Japan, a globally notorious 'bureaucrat-regulated state,' should be changed to an open, market-oriented state with a small government, and political pressures for this change have also intensified. In response, reform has been in progress since the 90s designed to abolish the existing bureaucratic regulations.

In the market sector, recognition of social responsibilities of businesses has been heightening since the 90s and there is a gradually spreading tendency of businesses to engage in social-related activities. Also, appropriate forms are being sought in which businesses willing to take part in the "new public" can work in collaboration with the social sector.

Features of changes in the administrative systems

Since the deterioration of the Japanese "bubble economy" in the early 1990s, it has become apparent that inefficiency and rigidity of the administrative systems make it impossible for the nation to catch up with new global situations and international economic competition.

Due to the failed economic policies of the 90s, the government now faces a situation where it can no longer ignore the huge accumulation of financial deficits. It has proved evident that to solve the problems a small government is the only possible choice. To boost the conversion to a market-oriented state with a small government, the government sector cannot avoid collaboration with social sectors that take care of social services inconsistent with market principles.

Reform for decentralization to transform the centralized, bureaucrat-dominated state has remained a big political issue since the 1950s. The first step was made toward the reform by the enactment of the Comprehensive Decentralization Law in 2000. Prompted by this, waves of establishing the autonomous, self-governing bodies are further spreading. The actual effects of these measures have yet to be proved, however.

As already stated, resulting from the malfunctioning administrative systems and financial shrinkage of both the central and local governments, dependence on the authorities has rapidly lowered in the minds of citizens. The administrations, on the contrary, have become more dependent on NPOs. Some local governments have announced that, in the future, they will curtail the number of personnel by half while giving up a number of jobs, trusting them to citizens and NPOs. Reflecting expanding citizen activities, new social sectors have been mushrooming since the 1990s, while the market sector has at last started to catch up with the changing global economy, as earlier mentioned. The fact that the administrative sector is the most backward one is now recognized by many people.

FORMATION OF A NEW SOCIETY MODEL RESPONDING TO THE EMERGENCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE ISSUE: DIVISION AND STRUGGLE

Resulting from the afore-mentioned notable features of changes, a few new notions have spread among citizens. One notion is that “community” becomes a matter of grave concern for themselves. “A comprehensive issue of community revitalization” is now a major concern shared by a broad scope of people connected with community development. Another is a model for a new economy, a new society, which has been formed in the consciousness of citizens. The model has not necessarily acquired an expression sufficiently accurate to become a shared idea in the society, and therefore has not been distinctly described in its whole image yet. Nevertheless, images and concepts of the several elements that constitute the model, it seems, are graphically inscribed in the minds of citizens. Some of these elements are important particularly for the current stage of Japan, while others are commonly recognized by people in many countries. It can be said the clear image is expressed in various activities of citizens.

The comprehensive issue of community revitalization which encompasses cities and rural areas of the whole country contains some factors that require radical changes in the existing political, administrative, social and economic systems. Faith was lost, as early as in the 90s, in a central government which could provide solutions to all economic and social problems. The solution instead lies in how a given community takes the initiative to discover, create, nurture and utilize social capital, namely networks of people, and latent social resources within itself. This notion has diffused on a broad scale since the late 90s from rural, mountain and fishing villages to communities in major cities.

Several elements that constitute the new society model: their concepts and images

What is recognized by citizens as the goal of community revitalization is a society model of collaboration and symbiosis. The concepts and images of the elements constituting the model are listed as follows:

- Social systems to ensure collaboration on community scenes supported by the principles of “horizontal social structure” and a “new public.”
- Windows of opportunity open to the community which ensures that a variety of citizens are allowed to give full attention to their potential.
- Diverse and multiple networks unique to individual communities which are accessible within and without.
- Creation of sustainable nonprofit communal economies.

- Creation of unique systems to ensure recycling of resources and symbiosis with the environment.
- Assurance that a community life, made by the hands of citizens utilizing the above-mentioned systems and devices, possesses unique and diverse functions, environments and expansion. Also assurance that this community life possesses a sustainable high quality.
- Acquisition of distinct identities, created through the above mentioned means, of which communities can be proud.

Division and struggle between two economies

Stratification of society caused by the global economy, the struggle between the global and local economies within communities, and the underlying conflict between society models are simultaneously the division, struggle and conflicts between participants in community revitalization.

Actors in social and economic activities in Japan over the last two decades were, first, certain groups in the business sector which believe in market principles, and, second, autonomous and independent citizens in the social sector and emerging NPOs as the social organizations they form. The administrative sector, the third central actor, has remained basically a negative one over the same period of time.



Figure 1. (Left) The selection open to public at the ex-bank building of a hundred years ago. Figure 2. (Right) Farmers’ group explaining their proposal for a food processing business.



Figure 3. (Left) An example of small business: tourists practicing traditional salt manufacturing. Figure 4. (Right) An example of small business: tourists practicing MISO making with soy bean.

Where do powers to create social systems revitalization needs lie? While part of the social systems needed for community revitalization are being created by some innovative forces in the social sector, their powers are still weak and inadequate. While part of the administrative sector, particularly local administrations, are highly interested in revitalization, they are constrained by vertically split administrative systems, remains of the past centralism. Moreover, the grave financial difficulties they suffer are bound to make their roles in revitalization limited ones for a long time to come. Without the assistance of NPOs, the conception and materialization of effective social systems for revitalization by the administrations will not be successful.

In the market sector, there has been a heightening concern for the social responsibility of business as well as for social contribution-oriented activities since the late 80s. Attracting the attention of businesses to community revitalization through appropriate means of promotion is an issue of actual importance. Also as actors in communal economies, businesses presently are the most distinguishable actors in revitalization.

Given the current situation of conflicts and struggles, collaboration between these participants in community revitalization is an issue of vital importance.

EXAMPLES: CREATING NEW SYSTEMS SURROUNDING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Under the afore-mentioned circumstances, a diversity of interesting activities of community development have been carried out everywhere around the country. Appearance of NPOs has increased the social importance of community development. A number of social projects beyond the traditional concept of Machizukuri are mushrooming, and “community businesses,” as community economic development is referred to in Japan, are expanding as a new area of Machizukuri.

The following examples reflect these recent situations – A society of creativity and collaboration born out of the window of opportunity open to community businesses; and collaboration versus division between citizens and the authorities.

Tsukisara Cheer-up Support Program

This is an example where promotion of community businesses was carried out as a means of community development in a semi-mountainous area through the collaboration between the local administration and NPOs.

Ordinance on promotion of citizen activities to create new public: Yamato City

Based on an ordinance adopted through full citizen participation, “authentic collaboration between citizens and the administration,” unprecedented in Japan, has started and social frameworks supporting activities of citizens and NPOs

■都岐沙羅体験観光ネットワークのしくみ

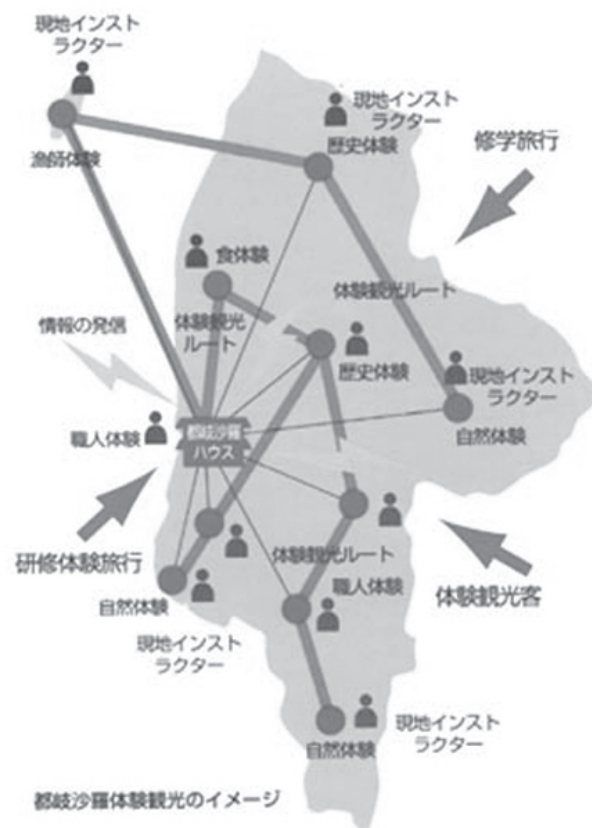


Figure 5. Tourism business; visiting sites of proposers; practicing farm works or shopping for native products.

are steadily taking shape. An example which shows the level that citizen participation in Japan has attained.

Fundamental ordinance on autonomy: City of Kuki

A draft drawn up and put forward by citizens, a product of full participation, was considerably rewritten by an opposing group inside the city hall, thus losing the idea of new autonomy and collaboration proposed by citizens. Here a fundamental issue that the current Japanese administrative systems do not recognize participation as a right of citizens has emerged.

In the contrasting cases of Yamato and Kuki, we see unstable relations between citizens and authorities in community development. At the same time, the reality in Japan is revealed that authorities do not give an appropriate institutional position to the public necessity of citizens' participation as a right of the citizen. Such situations explain the decisions authorities make that surprisingly deviate from citizens' idea in actual communities.