

# Local Organizations and Groups in Japan

Chiefly in Neighborhood Associations (Chonaikai · Jichikai)

Manabu Ajisaka

## Introduction

In modern society, our life depends on the administration of the nation state and the local government, but also is restricted by it. We are influenced by modern companies too. On the other hand, family relationships perform important functions for us. In addition to these modern bureaucratic organizations and family-relative groups, we join various local organizations and groups, and organize networks in our neighborhood in order to maintain daily life.

These organizations and groups have studied by the fields of sociology, political science, public administration, and social anthropology in Japan<sup>(1)</sup>. The points of view to discuss these are in relation to ① communal life : living together in community, ② communal authority ; communal administration ③ political function.

Today, 78.1% of Japanese live in urban areas. There are overcrowding problems and pollution, and the scarcity of collective means of consumption. In rural areas, there are problems with depopulation, increasing of elderly persons, decreasing of children, and declining agriculture and forestry.

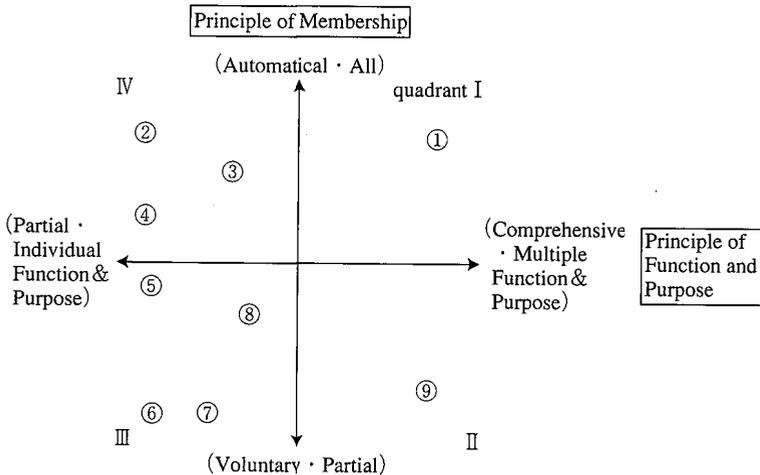
Not only the policies of nation state and local municipalities, but also their grass-roots activities and movements take it upon themselves to solve these problems.

# 1. Types of Local Organizations and Groups in Japan

## (1) Analytical Viewpoints

Many Japanese communities have long histories and many people have been living together in highly dense conditions. Especially, as I mentioned above, I would like to talk about local organizations and groups. To analyze these organizations and groups, I will focus on the relationship between the administration systems of local governments and the people. Furthermore, we need to keep in mind how Japanese people form their organizations and groups, in other words, how they form civil society.

I divide local organizations and groups in Japan into the following two viewpoints. Figure 1 shows the two viewpoints as it's axes. The vertical axis means the difference in principles of membership. On one side of the axis, all people join the organizations automatically. On the other side, part of the people join optionally. The former is the case of people (individuals and households) who live in, and busi-



**Figure 1**

nesses (stores and factories) which stand in a certain place, and are naturally considered as members and all of them are automatically requested to join the organizations. The latter is the case that they can voluntarily join, so that there is only partial entry into the organizations.

Next, the horizontal axis means the difference in principles of purpose and function. On one side of the axis, the organizations have comprehensive functions and multiple purposes. On the other side, the organizations have partial, particular and individual functions. Thus these two axes make four quadrants.

## (2) Types of Local Organizations

### ① Neighborhood Associations [quadrant I]

These are the most popular local organizations in Japan. 70~80% of total Japanese households join it. (Not so many one-person households join.) They have various functions and purposes in local communities. I will explain it later.

### ② Assistance Associations to Administration of Local Municipality [quadrant IV]

In Japan, many assist associations are established in cooperation with each division of nation state and local municipalities.

ex. assist associations for municipalities, Local Councils of Social Welfare, Welfare and Childhood committee, Crime Prevention Association, fire protection, taxpayer's association, athletic activity association, etc.

### ③ Associations with Generation and Gender [quadrant IV]

ex. children's club, local women's association, old people's club, PTA, youth's association, etc.

### ④ Associations of Business and Occupations [quadrant IV]

ex. association of merchants, commercial and industrial cooperatives, trade associations, craft guilds, etc.

### ⑤ Religious Associations [quadrant III]

ex. religious associations of the sects, Shintoist's associations

⑥ Associations and Groups of Leisure [quadrant III]

ex. hobby groups, sports clubs, etc.

⑦ Voluntary Associations [quadrant III]

ex. urban social movement, Non-Profit Organizations (consumer's cooperative society etc.), Non-Governmental Organizations, volunteer groups, etc.

⑧ Associations of the Class and Stratum [quadrant III]

ex. labor union, employer's association, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Japan Scientist's Association, etc.

⑨ Political Parties [quadrant II]

ex. LDP, DPJ, NK, LP, JCP, SDP, etc.

①~④ are organizations and groups which require all people who live in and businesses (stores and factories) which are located in a certain local community to join as a general rule. Also they have been lasting so long as an organization, so that they are deeply related to the administration of the local municipality. We call them established organizations in the local community, and they have a considerable influence socially and politically in Japanese communities.

## 2. Neighborhood Associations (Chonaikai · Jichikai · Ku)

### (1) Viewpoints for Analysis

Chonaikai · Jichikai works as a centralized organization of established organizations in the local community. Although it doesn't basically have any legal positions, it performs a fixed function in Japanese society. In addition to serving functions for regular neighborhood relationships, it serves a helpful function when disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons occur. Historically, during the World War II, it was used to mobilize people to war.

From these aspects of Chonaikai · Jichikai, there are two opposing viewpoints

about the meaning of its existence. One is a viewpoint whether it is a pre-modern organization or a modern one. The other is a viewpoint whether it is an organization for people's communal life or for administration and authority.

## (2) The History of Chonaikai

The history of Chonaikai has its origin in the autonomous communities in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (the Warring State Period). The autonomous community, called "chou", consisted of 20~30 neighbor-merchants households in old cities as Kyoto. It was a protection for their property and business from plunder. And in the rural area in those days, "mura" was formed as a small village community.

"Chou" and "mura" have developed from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Edo era). "Chou" and "mura" were not only autonomous communities but also marked the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate system.

In 1889, during the Meiji era, as a modern society, a modern local government system was made by the consolidation of small towns ("chou") and villages ("mura"). New cities, towns and villages were established, then "chou" and "mura" become to informal neighborhood organizations.

From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, going through the urbanization, the traditional "chou" changed to Chonaikai. And, in the period of the World War II, Chonaikai was legally positioned to be the end of the local government municipality. The nation state required a Chonaikai to be placed in each small district and to form an associated Chonaikai (Rengo Chonaikai). It consisted of 40~60 Chonaikais.

In 1947, under the occupation after the War, GHQ (general headquarters) ordered to abolish Chonaikai seeing it as a militaristic organization. But in 1952, when Japan become independent again, Chonaikai rose like a phoenix. Especially, in 1953 the Consolidation Act during Showa era was held. After this re-consolidation of towns and villages, the previous area of these towns and villages often became the area for the associated Chonaikai.

In 1960's, Japan experienced high economic growth. During this time, about 20 million people moved from rural areas to metropolitan areas. In most of these new urbanized places, Chonaikai · Jichikai were also organized. In many urban areas, urban social movements occurred against pollution and to demand collective means of consumption.

After 1970's, the nation state and local municipalities have reformed and reinforced local organizations and groups, especially Chonaikai · Jichikai.

Today, the migration of residents and the privatization of Japanese life have been diminishing Chonaikai · Jichikai's functions. But, as I will explain next, Chonaikai · Jichikai still exists as grass-root organizations and groups.

### **(3) The Structure and Activities of Chonaikai**

In 1990, the Ministry of Home Affairs researched all the 3,268 municipalities (cities, towns and villages) for their Chonaikai · Jichikais. I will introduce you the structure and activity of Chonaikai · Jichikai with this survey.

First, 84.6% of the municipalities report that Chonaikais are formed in every one of their local precincts. 11.8% have Chonaikais in most local precincts (more than 90%) within their area. 0.7% have no Chonaikais. And then, 89.8% municipalities report that more than 90% households in their precincts join the Chonaikais. 8.6% report that 66~90% households join. Furthermore, we know that a total number of 277,086 Chonaikai · Jichikais exists in the Japanese local society.

As Table 1 shows, 28.6% of Chonaikai · Jichikais were founded before World War II in 1945. In short, more than one fourth of Chonaikai · Jichikais are historically old. 12.0% were started in 1955~64. 10.9% were started after 1975.

Each municipality researches the average size of a Chonaikai. As in Table 2, 33.4% of Chonaikais maintain a membership of 50~100 households. 27.6% keep less than 50 households. 23.4% have 100~200 households. Furthermore, many municipalities have the associated Chonaikai (Rengo Chonaikai), consisted of 30~50

Local Organizations and Groups in Japan

**Table 1** The Time of Foundation [single answer]

	N	%
Before the War	79,215	28.6
End of the War~1954	33,247	12.0
1955~1964	49,798	18.0
1965~1974	30,186	10.9
1975~1984	23,211	8.4
1985~	7,245	2.6
Unknown	54,184	19.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>277,086</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2** The Average Size of Chonaikai in Each Municipality [single answer]

	N	%
less than 50 households	901	27.6
50~99	1,091	33.4
100~199	764	23.4
200~299	230	7.0
300~499	163	5.0
500~999	81	2.5
more than 1000	15	0.4
Unestablished or Unknown	23	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,268</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Chonaikais. The associated Chonaikais are within the elementary school districts or the old-municipality area prior to the consolidation.

88.1% municipalities answer that most Chonaikais collect membership fees. This nation-wide research didn't ask how much they were. According to my personal research, these vary considerably, depending on the locality (urban area or rural area, downtown or suburb). The members pay 2,400 yen~20,000 yen per year. In the Chonaikai in the suburb of Kyoto where I live, the membership fee is 6,000 yen.

Chonaikai · Jichikais in each municipality do various activities, as you can see in Table 3. This research tells us the activities include communication between residents, maintenance of community centers, cleaning of local roads and child parks, making demands and appeals to the municipality, festivals and friendship activities,

**Table 3** The Kind of Chonaikai's Activities (multiple answer)

	N	%
communication between residents (Kairanban, newsletter, etc.)	3,206	98.6
maintenance of community centers	2,993	92.1
cleaning of local roads and child parks	2,949	90.7
repair and maintenance of roads	1,443	44.4
placement of street lights	1,941	59.7
disaster prevention, fire protection	1,905	58.6
traffic safety, crime prevention	1,845	56.8
festivals, events of old people's club, children's club, etc.	2,760	84.9
sports activities (baseball school, etc.)	1,260	38.8
cultural activities (hobby, recreation)	1,639	50.4
support of funerals	1,982	61.0
social welfare activities	454	14.0
demands and appeals to the municipality	2,883	88.7
other	122	3.8

etc.

From my research on the activities of Chonaikai, I present to you the following seven divided functions and purposes.

a. Friendship

eg. sports festivals, local festivals, support of funerals, trips, etc.

b. Safeguard

eg. crime prevention, fire protection, etc.

c. Environmental Maintenance

eg. keeping street lights and roads, cleaning and litter disposal, etc.

d. Assistance to Administrations

eg. distribution of the official notices and announcements, community chests, collection of some kinds of insurance and taxes, etc.

e. Pressure Group

eg. transmission of demands to administrations

→it leads to urban social movements.

f. Coordination of community relations

eg. communication between residents, arrangement of residents' interests, making agreements, etc.

g. Political Functions

eg. commitments to the local government, recommendation of candidates for the local councilor, etc.

(grass-roots conservatives vs. grass-roots democracy)

### **Conclusion : The Reasons Why Chonaikai Exists in Japan**

Chonaikai exists in most local communities in Japan. It has many and various purposes and functions. Here, I list up the reasons why it exists in this form in Japan.

① The need for an association to keep and coordinate the community and neighborhood relationships.

② The need for an association to maintain the environment and facilities of community.

Nevertheless, the two big consolidations made each municipality's area very wide. (see Table 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4, 4-5)

So, Japanese municipalities can not participate with the local communities.

③ Europe has formed the urban communities in its history and has the tradition of the autonomy within a unit of a whole urban area. But Japan has the tradition of autonomy only with the neighborhood communities "chou".

④ The influence of Japanese behavior patterns such as the tendency to value the group and harmony (which comes from Japanese culture). Japanese tend to be weak in the area of self-independence.

⑤ In Japan, voluntary associations haven't developed enough. In the late of the 60's, the urban social movements occurred. In the 70's~80's, the local cooperative society for consumers were found. In the 90's, the volunteer groups, Non-profit Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations were gradually formed.

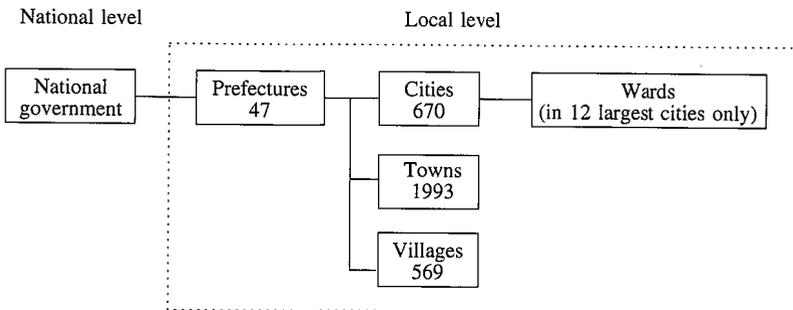
⑥ The nation and the municipalities of Japan traditionally used and mobilized the local organizations whenever they undertake their social policies. On the other hand, residents tend to depend on the administrations.

**Table 4-1** Number of Municipalities (Local Government) in Japan

Year	Cities	Towns	Villages	Total
1883	19	12,194	59,284	71,497
1889	39		15,820	15,859
1922	91	1,242	10,982	12,315
1940	178	1,706	9,614	11,498
1950	235	1,862	8,346	10,443
1955	490	1,854	2,468	4,812
1960	555	1,925	1,030	3,510
1970	578	2,013	684	3,275
1980	646	1,991	618	3,255
1990	655	2,003	587	3,245
1998	670	1,993	569	3,232

Management and Coordination Agency Statistics Bureau (ed.)  
Nihon no Tokei [Japan Statistics] 2000

\*The special wards (23) of Tokyo are uncounted



\*The special wards (23) of Tokyo are uncounted

**Figure 2** Government System by level (1998)

Local Organizations and Groups in Japan

**Table 4-2** Number of Municipalities and Percent of Population by Population Size Groups in Japan

		1950		1980	
	Population size groups	Number of Municipalities	Percent of Population	Number of Municipalities	Percent of Population
City	1,000,000 or more	4	11.3	10	19.9
	500,000-999,999	2	2.0	9	4.9
	300,000-499,999	4	1.6	36	11.7
	200,000-299,999	14	4.0	42	8.8
	100,000-199,999	40	6.5	96	11.1
	50,000-99,999	86	7.2	207	12.1
	30,000-49,999	99	4.6	198	6.6
	Under 30,000	5	0.1	49	1.1
	Total of Cities	254	37.3	647	76.2
Town & Village	30,000 or more	35	1.6	59	1.9
	20,000-29,999	123	3.4	229	4.7
	10,000-19,999	748	11.8	809	9.6
	5,000-9,999	2,658	21.3	964	6.0
	Under 5,000	6,682	24.6	548	1.5
	Total of Towns & Villages	10,246	62.7	2,609	23.8
Total		10,500	100.0	3,256	100.0
Total Population		84.1 million		117.1 million	

\*The special wards (23) of Tokyo are counted as one city.

**Table 4-3** France (1979)

	Population size groups	Number of Communes		Percent of Population
		(Approximately)	(%)	
Commune	100,000 or more	40	(0.1)	19.0
	50,000-99,999	60	(0.2)	7.8
	5,000-49,999	900	(3.3)	32.2
	2,000-4,999	2,000	(5.0)	41.0
	700-1,999	6,000	(17.2)	
	500-699	14,000	(74.2)	
	200-499	14,000		
	Under 200	10,000		
	Total	37,000	(100.0)	100.0

Total Population 53.5 million

Local Organizations and Groups in Japan

**Table 4-4** W. Germany (1978)

	Population size groups	Number of Gemeinde	(%)
	Gemeinde	500,000 or more	12
200,000-499,999		21	(0.3)
100,000-199,999		35	(0.4)
50,000-99,999		84	(1.0)
20,000-49,999		332	(3.9)
10,000-19,999		621	(7.3)
5,000-9,999		935	(11.0)
2,000-4,999		1699	(20.0)
1,000-1,999		1631	(19.2)
500-999		1400	(16.4)
Under 500		1748	(20.5)
	Total	8518	(100.0)

Total Population 62.0 million

**Table 4-5** Contemporary Number of Municipalities and Percent of Population by Population Size Groups in Japan

	Population size groups	1995	
		Number of Municipalities	Percent of Population
City	1,000,000 or more	11	20.1
	500,000-999,999	11	5.7
	300,000-499,999	43	13.3
	200,000-299,999	41	8.1
	100,000-199,999	115	12.4
	50,000-99,999	220	12.2
	30,000-49,999	156	4.9
	Under 30,000	68	1.3
	Total of Cities	665	78.1
Town & Village	30,000 or more	113	3.4
	20,000-29,999	218	4.2
	10,000-19,999	701	7.8
	5,000-9,999	859	5
	Under 5,000	677	1.7
Total of Towns & Villages	2568	21.9	
Total		3233	100.0

Management and Coordination Agency Statistics Bureau (ed.) Nihon no Tokei [Japan Statistics] 2000

\*The special wards (23) of Tokyo are counted as one city.

**Reference**

- (1) Bester, Theodore C. *Neighborhood Tokyo* Stanford : Stanford University Press 1989
- Door, R. P. *City life in Japan* Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1958.
- Matsushita, K. *Gendainihon no seijiteki kousei* [Political construction in Japan] Tokyo-daigaku-shuppankai 1962.
- Nakagawa, T. *Chonakai* [Neighborhood associations] Chuokoronsha 1980.
- Ueda, T. *Japanese local organizations : leadership and political function*. "Kansai university review of Law and politics" No. 3 1982.
- Matsudaira, M. *Matsuri no bunka* [Culture of Festival] 1983.
- Iwasaki, N., Ajisaka, M. et al. (ed.) *Chonakai no kenkyu* [Studies on the Neighborhood associations] Ochanomizu-shobou 1989.
- Kurasawa, S., Akimoto, R. (ed.) *Chonakai to Chiikishudan* [Neighborhood associations and local organizations] Minerva-shobou 1990.

**Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank to my colleague Martha Mensendiek for her native check. And my graduate students Atsuko Shimizu helped me in writing this paper.

This is a revised version of the paper read at symposium in Japanese studies centre of Monash university, Melbourne Australia 1999.