

Quiet Dynamism of Local Communities

- Restructuring of Grassroots Municipalities and Lifelong Learning in Japan -

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Introduction

The lifelong-learning policy and its practice in Japan are now at a turning point. Japan introduced the concept of “lifelong education” in its policy in the beginning of the 1970s. It was introduced essentially, on the one hand, as a concept of lifelong learning promoted by UNESCO and, on the other hand, as a theory of learning society based on recurrent education advocated by OECD. Later, as the concept of lifelong learning was introduced again from UNESCO in the 1980s and the learning organization theory in the United States and other countries was presented, lifelong learning became part of the government’s policies.

Since before the introduction of lifelong learning, however, Japan had been practicing social education as learning activities of its adult and community residents. This social education was promoted by the central and local governments as policy and administrative services. The term “social education” as a policy or administrative term first appeared in 1924, but social education *per se* had been practiced as a policy since the 1880s under the name of “popular education.” Counting the years from that period, we can say that social education and lifelong learning in Japan as administrative policy and practice have a history of more than 130 years.

In Japan, this lifelong learning is now in a critical transition. The transition is caused by the structural changes of Japanese society. The structural changes are caused by changes in demographic structure due to its declining birth rate and aging population, and by changes in the economic structure from the maturation and shrinking of the domestic market. With globalization and the shift toward the service industries, these changes in the economic structure are causing changes in employment structure, and all of those changes are diversifying and decentralizing people’s senses of values. As a result, in Japan, the government is shifting gears from the traditional political and administrative structure aimed at centralized integration of the so-called modern industrial society to a decentralized political and administrative structure assuming the decentralization and diversification of society. This new political and administrative structure seeks diversification and decentralization, but, at the same time, it promotes a new integration of society and encourages people to voluntarily involve themselves in local government and stabilize their lifestyles. What becomes the political focus there is lifelong learning.

The purpose of this paper is to (1) clarify the role of lifelong learning assigned by government policy in Japanese society, which is facing critical structural change, diversification and decentralization; (2) examine how lifelong learning is actually practiced to function effectively in people's lives; and (3) examine how local communities, which underlie the social structure of Japan on the frontline of people's lives, are formed through residents' learning activities. We learn through this examination that, in the local community, the learning activities of residents are bringing a quiet dynamism to community management.

1. The structural changes of Japanese society and lifelong learning

(1) The structure of pre-WWII Japanese society

One hundred and fifty years have passed since Japan was shocked upon encountering the US and other Western societies and started to build itself as a modern state. The Meiji government, formed in 1868, introduced a modern school system four years later, in 1872, mainly based on the French and British models. We cannot discuss Japan's fundamental structure as a modern state without touching on its relationship with the school system.

In building a modern industrial state, the Meiji government abandoned the feudal system of the past and adopted a centralized system, which basically designed the state based on a family registration system (*koseki seido*), which mapped individuals of the populace on the national territory on the basis of the family unit; and a school education system, which forged people into a nation with a unified language and unified view of the state. The government adopted *chōson-sei*, or the municipality system, as a system to educate and forge people into citizens, and to map and identify families, the basic units to which these citizens belonged, on the land space of the state (Akihiko Nishizawa, 2010).

After that, though with some meandering, the school system spread basically smoothly, and, a little more than ten years later, saw about 50% of school-age children attending school. Contributing to this was the tradition of *terakoya*, private popular schools spread nationwide in the Edo period (1600-1868). *Terakoya* started to spread in the 1690s, developed nationwide by the 1830s, and are said to have counted 16,500 or so at the end of the Edo period. Studies show that, in the 1850s, the rate of literacy reached 80% or so among adult men and 40% even among adult women.

It was those *terakoya* that the Meiji government made the most of in promoting the spread of elementary schools. The government made efficient use of existing *terakoya* in regions where building schools was financially difficult, and appointed *terakoya* teachers to become teachers for elementary schools after some training. In the background of Japan's modern state construction was the history of such private popular education in the Edo period that had achieved such a high level of

literacy (Satoshi Takahashi, 2007).

In opening and spreading elementary schools, the Meiji government designated school districts for children. What were created almost overlapping with those school districts were administrative districts called *chōson*, or municipalities, that registered families on land space: The school districts where the state educated its citizens overlapped with the land space that registered those citizens. What was advocated at the time was popular education, the basic purpose of which was to encourage parents and guardians to send children to school, explaining the benefits of schooling in plain language (Takeo Matsuda, 2004).

Later, after the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), Japan formed itself as a modern industrial state. In the process, more workers gathered in the urban areas and significantly changed the aspect of families in the area. Families were now nuclear, made only of the couple and children. The unit of kinship was now an isolated, nuclear family, registered in an urban area. A middle class newly formed, and an individualistic urban culture developed. What was born in urban areas in this period was the unit of resident autonomy called *chōnaikai*, or the neighborhood association. *Chōnaikais* were residents' autonomous organizations basically overlapping with elementary school districts. They rapidly spread nationwide, especially in urban areas, and eventually covered the whole country. The characteristics of the *chōnaikai*, in other words elementary school district, were that, although it was a neighborhood association the residents belonged to on the basis of the household unit, it was demarcated on the state's land space, without overlapping with other *chōnaikais*, and that the total sum of those *chōnaikais* approximately equaled the national territory. The state would make active use of these *chōnaikais* as a tool for governing the people. (Nishizawa, op. cit.)

Thus, Japan came to have a dual structure of government, where citizens belonged to the state through their families and, at the same time, these individuals belonged to *chōnaikais* as residents, which in turn were linked to the state. In other words, *chōnaikais* were formed as an administrative system which was formed on the basis of the districts of schools, that is, a system to forge people into a nation (the national education system), and where residents autonomously and voluntarily elected to belong to the state.

Furthermore, later, on the basis of these *chōnaikais*, local and disaster prevention organizations, such as firefighting teams, men's groups, women's groups, youth groups, self-improvement groups, and school-support groups, were formed based on age and gender and so on, to enhance the autonomous management by residents of the local communities. In addition to this, through the consolidation of local shrines, religious basic units came to overlap with these elementary school districts, or *chōnaikais*. That gave the grassroots government structure in Japan a mechanism of local, disaster-preventing, and religious mutual assistance and

self-management based on elementary school districts called *chōnaikais* or organizations of resident autonomy.

Later, despite the expansion of municipal territories, *chōnaikais*, or organizations of resident autonomy, and school districts were maintained without change until Japan's defeat in WWII (1945). Thus, it was in the 1920s, when those *chōnaikais* became widely spread, that a "society" in its administrative sense was born in Japan. In other words, a structure was born where, instead of linking citizens (families) directly to the state, a "society" made up of organizations of self-management of the local community by residents and their federations, covered the whole country; here, citizens organized their own lives systematically and autonomously as residents, and this in turn promoted the development of an industrial society called Japan. In the process, the popular education aimed at encouraging people to go to school was remodeled as "social education," which was aimed at leading residents to self-government.

We can say that, administratively, "society" in Japan was based on these *chōnaikais*, or grassroots organizations for self-government of local communities by residents.

(2) Structure of post-war Japanese society

After WWII, Japan was reborn as a democratic, peaceful nation and started building a new country focusing on economic construction and improvement of people's lives. What the central government used in the process to stabilize residents' lifestyles and well-being were those *chōnaikais*. After the war, the nationalistic aspects of *chōnaikais* were removed, but, just as in the pre-war period, firefighting teams, youth groups, women's groups, senior groups, and children's groups deeply linked with school, were organized in school districts, and *chōnaikais* had their own youth education groups: *Chōnaikais* have kept their roles of ensuring the self-government of local communities and mutual assistance by residents. What's more, within its own structure, each *chōnaikai* generally has subgroups of mutual assistance called *kumi*, and is managed by the representatives of these *kumis*. It is this basic mechanism that ensures the autonomy of "society."

Later, municipalities, the grassroots governments of the country, passed thorough successive policy mergers and expanded their administrative territories, but *chōnaikais* were maintained as self-government organizations of residents based on elementary school districts, without which municipalities could no longer work as local governments.

After the 1970s, however, as Japanese society transformed itself from a manufacturing-centered industrial society to an IT-, finance-, and service-driven consumer society and, as population became more mobile and the outflow of rural population accelerated while people's senses of values became more and more diversified and pluralistic, the traditional local networks based on the neighborhood

all started falling apart. Women's groups and youth groups dissolved. Children's groups disappeared. Firefighting teams fell apart. Often, the only organization surviving in an aging district is the senior citizen club. As a result, *chōnaikais* are seeing the rate of participation of their residents rapidly falling and often no longer work as self-governing organizations.

Furthermore, as grassroots municipalities extended their territories through the waves of mergers that swept them from 1999 to 2010, called *the Great Merger of Heisei*, and as the school-choice system was introduced for elementary and junior high schools, relationships among residents based on school districts were broken. Now, the very maintenance of *chōnaikais* is becoming more and more difficult.

(3) End of industrial society and challenges faced by lifelong learning

As a result of the rushed restructuring of the grassroots municipalities through the Great Merger of Heisei, local communities, the base of people's lives, are drastically changing, or even falling apart. These mergers of municipalities meant that decentralization became the political focus. It also indicated that social welfare was becoming dysfunctional. With globalization, the age in which the economy could develop based on the national framework is ending. The cycle of national economy development, which consisted of injecting tax money to improve people's lives, which expanded domestic markets, which promoted economic development, which increased tax revenue, which developed the nation, is going bankrupt. In other words, the system consisting of mobilizing financial resources, enhancing welfare, expanding markets, promoting economic development, and winning people's loyalty, is becoming dysfunctional. Furthermore, realistically speaking, Japan's central and local governments have already issued more than 900 trillion yen of long-term debts (as of May 2012) and no longer can afford to inject tax money to ensure people's livelihood.

We might say that the day has come when the government will be giving up protecting people except for the minimum necessity. What the government is doing instead is to mobilize residents to participate in local management under the slogans of decentralization, lifelong learning, and self-responsibility.

As the social, especially economic, structure of the country drastically changes, the system of residents' autonomy and stable national government, which has developed since the middle of the Meiji period for about 100 years, is falling apart, making it difficult for residents to autonomously stabilize their lifestyles. In Japan, the political framework adopted to form a modern industrial state has had a dual structure: On the one hand, through so-called control and management from above (the central government), namely distribution of benefits, people have been mobilized and integrated into the state framework; on the other hand, based on local community, people have supported their neighborhood to maintain their own lives, and as a result contributed to national unification. As Japan changes from a

modern industrial society to a consumer society, this dual structure is being politically modified.

Lifelong learning was originally introduced into Japan in the early 1970s as a response to a diversification of values, increased cultural needs, and a demand by people to learn how to better use their leisure time, which spread in urban areas as Japan achieved its rapid economic development. Each citizen was challenged to improve him/herself by continuing lifelong learning based on his/her own values, and, by improving him/herself, further contribute to the development of society. Later, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Japan entered the years of its bubble economy which was centered around the financial and service industries, and free-marketeers advocated that even such public services as learning and education, which traditionally had been ensured by the state, should be consumed as merchandise on the market by individuals with different cultural needs. They argued that lifelong learning was something that individuals do when needed and with their own responsibility, and that the task of lifelong-learning policymakers was to pave the way to such consumption, that is to say, to marketize learning.

But, since the end of the 1990s, a little after policymakers started individualizing and marketizing learning, Japanese society has entered into a serious depression. With a huge amount of debts, the government now has difficulty even maintaining the social security system. Further, with individuals becoming more mobile and their social ties more fragile, the social security costs for individuals are increasing, and having individuals bear such costs is becoming more and more difficult.

In such a situation, what is asked from policymakers and governments is to involve citizens and residents in policymaking and local government so they bear their due share and thus alleviate the central and local governments' burdens. To do so, it is essential for residents to learn what their social tasks are, form new networks, and mutually discuss and support one another to accomplish these tasks, and thus stabilize this society.

At this time, the role of the central and local governments has changed drastically: So far, they had been working to create conditions for lifelong learning, but from then – around the turn of the century – onward, their task was to stabilize society through lifelong learning. In other words, throughout the more than 100 years of history of social education and lifelong learning in Japan, the role of the state had been to “distribute” the fruits of economic development, earned in the process of Japan’s formation as a modern industrial state, as administrative services to citizens, or here more appropriately residents, through its basic components called family households, thus enabling residents to self-govern their own communities, which, in turn, stabilized society and maintained the centralist government of the state. On the other hand, what’s happening in Japan since the end of the 1990s is that this system of “distribution,” especially the system of redistribution of wealth, by which the government distributed the fruits of economic development to each citizen, is

becoming dysfunctional and that, in such a context, the government is now asking each citizen not to expect receiving administrative services as before, but instead to consciously involve themselves in local government, replace administrative services with their own work, and accept the disadvantages of the reduced administrative services.

Here, lifelong learning is asked to play a new role. Lifelong learning is no longer a commercial product that individuals would buy and consume. Now, it is redefined as a basic policy, a social task, which enables residents to create social ties themselves.

(4) Lifelong learning as a new policy for social integration

As we have seen, the direct cause that transformed lifelong learning into a new measure for social integration was the large-scale mergers of grassroots municipalities. Pork-barrel politics consisting of mobilizing people's awareness, developing the national economy, and increasing residents' loyalty to the state ended. On the one hand, the state is cutting citizens off from the national security system (discontinuation of pork-barreling), and, on the other hand, it is distributing pain (such as increased taxation) to citizens and forcing them to accept them. Japan is shifting to a disadvantage-distributing society.

Furthermore, as globalization and deregulation progress, streets have more and more closed-down shops, local industries decline, and businesses restructure themselves, freeze hiring, and no longer support people's lifestyles. As society becomes a materially saturated society, people's conscience is becoming more and more separated and diversified. They are losing intermediate groups they once belonged to, and are only culturally tied to a loosely tied whole.

Japanese society that has been dominated by a single "justice" (Rawls) is falling apart and turning into a society based on pluralistic conflicts. Japan is passing from the society that has distributed benefits to form a consensus, that is, a stable society based on reasonable distribution of assets based on equality among people, to a perpetually disturbed society where politics is plagued by irrationality with conflicting cultures and sentiments, and decision-making is no longer possible.

What compensates for this social cost is the "involvement" of residents in local government. Residents' involvement in government works to have residents feel that the distribution of disadvantages is the result of their own "involvement."

We may say that decentralization is a political move aimed at imposing disadvantages onto grassroots municipalities. Through the reduction of the local allocation tax and subsidies, grassroots municipalities are obliged to accept disadvantages and become no longer capable of mobilizing residents through pork-barreling as they have done so far. All they can do now is to repeat mergers and ask residents to "involve" themselves in local government.

And, maybe in response to such a situation, the central government has advanced the following argument in its discussion on lifelong learning: Lifelong learning should respond to the “demands of society.” “In promoting lifelong learning, it is essential for the government to keep a proper balance between the needs of individuals and the demands of society,” and “it is important for the government to develop individuals who possess a sense of self-reliance as members of society, and, at the same time, to instill a ‘sense of public duties’ in those individuals so they will involve themselves in the development of society on their own initiative” (Lifelong Learning Working Group, Central Education Council, 2004).

Furthermore, the council pointed out that: By nature, lifelong learning requires a comprehensive administrative policy; the efforts of policymakers and related facilities and agencies had not been satisfying the demands of society; and they needed to vitalize local communities by enhancing coordination of the agencies concerned and making efficient use of past achievements. In other words, the argument proposed greatly shifting gears from “community development for lifelong learning” to “community development through lifelong learning,” which meant organizing residents through lifelong learning and involving them in local government. In conclusion, the report states, “municipalities are expected to provide residents with learning opportunities meeting both social demands and the diverse needs of local residents, support their lifelong learning by enhancing library equipment, develop communities through lifelong learning etc., ... in cooperation with local residents and on their own initiative.” (op. cit.)

Later, through the amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education in December 2006, the argument of the central government on lifelong learning policy developed to present the following features: As the image of a desirable society, it proposes a knowledge-based, sustainable society named “knowledge-cycling society,” and, instead of consumer-type learning by individuals, it redefines lifelong learning as learning that satisfies the “demands of individuals” for developing their “ability to respond to changes and survive the challenges of society,” that is, “ability to survive,” thus emphasizing the importance of keeping a good balance with “social demands” (Central Education Council, 2008). Furthermore, the policymakers advocated “the development of self-reliant individuals and reconstruction of ‘social ties’ through learning activities,” which, in turn, would contribute to “the solution of local issues” (Lifelong Learning Working Group, Central Education Council, 2011).

The argument for lifelong learning, once supposed to be activities of free and self-reliant individuals in the consumer market, was now rejected. With the “formation of a self-reliant community” by “self-reliant individuals” linked with a “sustainable society,” it was redefined as a means of developing a “knowledge-cycling society” where “individuals give feedback to society of what they learned from their own needs and thus help society keep improving its educational ability” (Central Education Council, 2008 report, op. cit.). Demands for

self-reliant learning from individuals were now integrated into the demands of local communities. Individuals are now challenged to restructure and reintegrate local communities as their own tasks.

(5) Necessity of community mediating between individuals and society

Nevertheless, such “community development through lifelong learning” urged by the demand of state, so to speak, or, to put it more plainly, those attempts to involve residents in local government using lifelong learning and thus re-integrate municipalities, haven’t been very successful so far. True, gears have been shifted from consumer market-type learning by individuals to learning to respond to “demands of society,” but, despite the intention, the individualization pressure of the consumer market is running wild and is still splitting up the grassroots municipalities.

The problem here is that, even if policymakers shift gears of lifelong learning from learning of individuals as consumers to learning how to respond to the demands of society, it is no longer possible to make individuals turn to society. In other words, where there once was something that mediated between individuals and society, it is now worn out and broken. The policymakers seeking to mobilize residents to lifelong learning haven’t found what that something is.

The term “society” in the expression “demands of society” referred to in the argument of the state, namely the central government, may be read as “the municipality concerned,” and, in policy practice, the government induces the reader to read it as such. We may say that the term is used here as something administratively and institutionally universal, based on a universal concept of “society” .

However, to connect the concrete existence called an individual to the abstract, universal, or administrative notion of space and organization called society and have the individual position him/herself in such society as an entity, that is, as an abstract existence called at the same time a citizen and a resident, and play the role he/she is asked to, there has to be a real, tangible *community* that would mediate between the individual and the abstract / universal, or that would enable this individual to fully position him/herself there as a social existence, so to speak. Superficially, the “something” that mediates between the individual and society is that *community*. However, for an individual, who is a real, flesh-and-blood person, that’s not sufficient. He/she still needs “something” that makes that community a tangible reality, which enables such individuals to recognize and assist one other, that is to say, something that provides the basis of such a *community*.

Such a *community* is only conceivable as an intermediate group, such as family, company, and local community, where individuals meet individuals, and develop face-to-face, implicit relationships of trust. When this intermediate group falls apart

and disappears, people lose a community they can fully position themselves in. They suffer from the ambiguity of their existence, get tired of being themselves, and no longer want to live in the society. Such dissolution of a *community* means that the society no longer works to forge people into the universal, homogenous values called citizens, and position them in the society as residents. Such a society prevents people from fully positioning themselves within it, recognizing their selves in their relationships with others, and understanding themselves as an existence living with others. There, the credo system of the state has already fallen apart, and people no longer position themselves in this society through even the very social activity called labor. What appears there is an unhappy, intolerant society where isolated individuals are in conflict with each other.

What is necessary now is to rebuild *communities* as a basis for people to live in “society.” It also means rebuilding *communities* that enable people, who have lost the places to which they once belonged, such as families or workplaces, to develop relationships with others, and thus regain their own existence. All of those activities lead to the reconstruction of people’s existence. And it is with this rebuilding of *communities* that the practice of lifelong learning is deeply involved.

2. Quiet dynamism of local communities

(1) *Kōminkan* as a dynamic image and local community

Now, we are challenged to create new *communities* that ensure people’s lives and guarantee their survival.

What is at issue here is not the large-scale restructuring of facilities and equipment, nor the redistribution of resources of the local community. It is the possibility of building local communities as a process that keeps producing new values based on mutual relationship with others, where residents, based on relationship of mutual recognition among residents, fully assume their roles in the community. Such restructuring of local communities will create new markets based on mutual trust and credit among people, enable residents to mutually assist and support in production, and develop production activities based on human relationships. Multi-layered, closely woven human networks of mutual concern and attention, and the sense of trust and security enhanced by such an environment will transmute local communities into a more dynamic, more productive economic process.

This also means that local communities themselves are transmuted into dynamic, ever-changing networks of people, that is, a mechanism that keeps its equilibrium as a dynamic process. There, we find an image of a new society. In the following, let us examine an example of such achievements realized by *kōminkan*, or community learning centers (“CLCs”), in the city of Iida, Nagano Prefecture (based on the results of surveys by the author in Iida in 2011 to 2012).

The city of Iida is a municipality with a rich history of practice and achievements in the field of social education accomplished by *kōminkans* (CLCs). The city, a medium-sized municipality with a population of about 100,000 grown through mergers, has a total of 20 CLCs, one in each of the former municipalities, each with a manager dispatched by the city government, and has eagerly pursued decentralization by organizing residents in learning activities and involving them in community renovation projects.

The changes in social and economic structures we have seen above, however, are significantly affecting the social education of this city, too. The fatigue and dissolution of residents' self-government organizations are in progress. To address this problem, residents are trying to find a new form of autonomy. They think that the social education by *kōminkan* would play the key role in developing new actors who will ensure future autonomy.

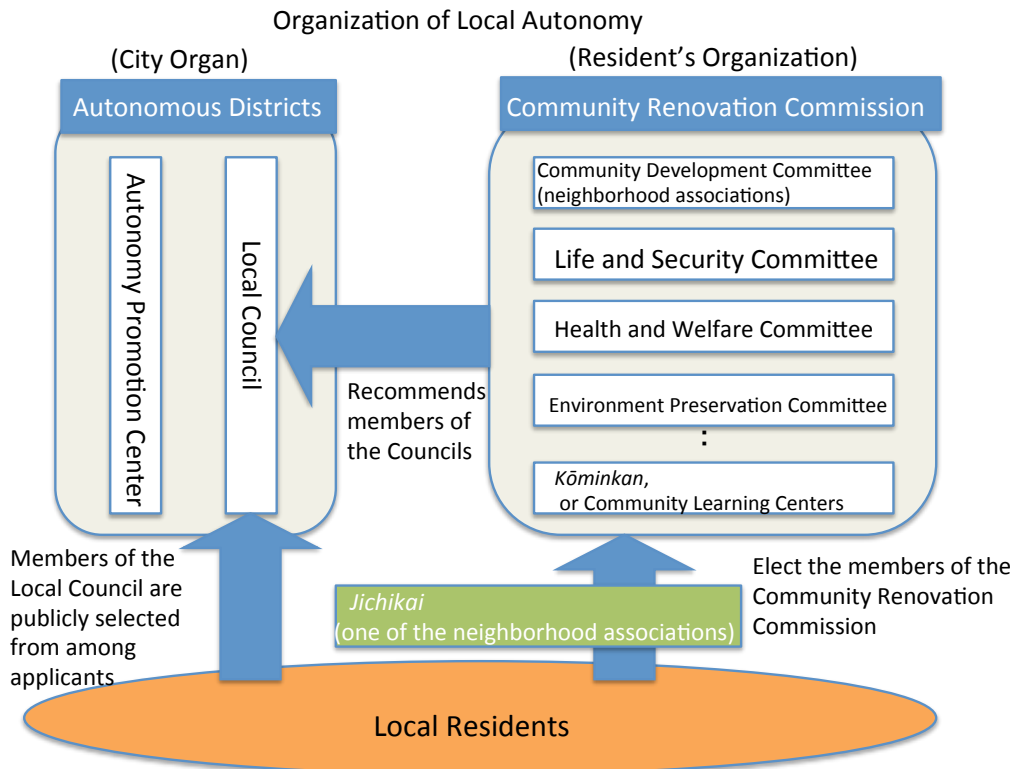
In the city of Iida, the autonomy of each district had been ensured by two networks of organizations existing side by side: One was that of *jichikai*, or neighborhood associations, which were self-government organizations of residents that supported the autonomy of the city; the other was that of *kōminkan*, or community learning centers, which organized residents' learning and addressed local issues. Supplementary to each other, the two networks supported the self-government of each district by residents. Schematically put, in the city of Iida, residents' autonomy had been supported by the two complementary systems: the system of *jichikai* which, in close relationship with the city government, undertook part of the city's administrative services and self-governed respective districts; and the system of *kōminkan* which worked with residents of the district to address and solve everyday issues at the frontline of their lives, as joint efforts of residents and the city government. In a sense, it was a typical example of bidirectional control and autonomy that supported the social structure of Japan.

As the Great Mergers of Heisei progressed, however, the city of Iida, too, was obliged to further merge municipalities around it and promote further decentralization the city to manage the expanded territory through resident autonomy. In 2007, the city adopted a new system of local autonomy, comprised of two types of organizations - Autonomous Districts and Community Renovation Commission - in search of a new form of local autonomy.

The Autonomous Districts are administrative organs each set up in one district and comprised of an Autonomy Promotion Center, an outpost of the city government, and a Local Council, a board of publicly selected representatives of residents, which work together to deliver administrative services to residents of the district. The Community Renovation Commissions, also each set up in a district, are what traditional neighborhood associations are reformed into. Each CRC has under it a Community Development Committee, a Life and Security Committee, a Health and Welfare Committee, an Environment Preservation Committee, etc., each comprised

of staff recruited from among the leaders of neighborhood associations, and tries to address the district's issues through the self-government of residents. *Kōminkans* also are given their seat under the Community Renovation Commission as a Community Learning Center Committee, without changing their traditional organizational system.

In this sense, we can say that *kōminkans* are no longer simple facilities, but an organization, that is, one of the committees under the Community Renovation Commission. Furthermore, *kōminkans* had each their own committees under them involving residents of the district, such as cultural committee, PR committee, sports committee, youth development committee, etc., that deployed a variety of activities for exchanges among residents based on local networks. In Iida, it was all of these activities that residents called collectively *kōminkan*, or community learning centers. For residents, a *kōminkan* did not simply mean facilities, staff, or even a system of ensuring learning opportunities, but an amalgam of human organizations, groups, and activities.



(Fig. 1) Schematic Diagram of Organization of Local Autonomy in the city of Iida

This reform caused concern among some of the city residents as to whether *kōminkan*, now integrated into the Community Renovation Commission, but which had so far worked in a bottom-up approach, could harmoniously work with neighborhood associations, which had worked in close relationship with the city government. Meanwhile, others expected that the integration of *kōminkan* into the Community Renovation Commission might help neighborhood associations to take a more bottom-up approach and thus enhance resident autonomy, which in turn

would give them a new role in a mutually complementary relationship with the Autonomous District.

A question that arose then was how residents could transform the local networks that supported *kōminkan* into a new, open structure, that is, how they could fuse residents' local networks and human networks created by new actors, and thereby bring the self-government of local communities to a higher level.

Kōminkans are no longer simply the facilities, staff, and opportunities of learning and practice that they used to be. Now, as nodes of dynamic networks, they are expected to make local communities, which have been based on traditional local networks, more fluid, by introducing into them a new structure of human networks without destructing such local networks. Now, the question is, how can *kōminkans* serve as the nucleus of future local communities, resistant to social changes?

(2) *Kōminkan* as a dynamic nexus

Such a new image of *kōminkan*, or community learning centers, is more vivid at branch centers placed in the subdivisions of those districts, called *ku*, or sub-districts. In Iida, under the districts, where CLCs are operated, are a total of 105 branch centers operated in the lower-level communities. A *ku*, or sub-district, is a living sphere of residents, basically overlapping with the “natural” village developed around a branch Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple before the Meiji Restoration. As associations of inhabitants, the sub-districts often have commons, such as woods and fields, hence an aspect of an independent business operator, while also being the space of self-government by residents. In the course of building a modern nation after the Restoration of Meiji, Japan has developed a system of local autonomy by making use of these living spheres. The facilities called *bunkan*, or branch centers, are also part of the assets of the residents of those sub-districts.

A *bunkan* isn't only facilities, however. It is there that residents hold regular meetings [*jokai*] to discuss the sub-district's issues, train children for performances of the lion dance [*shishimai*] for the shrine's festival, organize a puppet show (*ningyo jyoruri*) preservation group, entertain the elderly, develop specialties using local produce, hold meetings of firefighting teams or men's groups, and elect leaders of self-government organizations. For residents, the *bunkan* is the center of their daily lives, the hub of exchanges among residents, the community's projects themselves, and the residents' exchanges themselves.

When residents talk of *bunkan*, it is with such projects and activities in mind.

In addition, by joining activities around the *bunkan*, residents come to know better their own sub-district, and, through exchanges with other residents, understand the roles they play there, and even to volunteer to be the director or leaders of the *bunkan*, and enjoy their contact with others. As they become more and more

involved in the activities, they take on new roles, win recognition from others, feel like they were reborn in their relationships with others, and understand that such changes are happening to others, too.

The activities in the sub-district may appear to be simply following old lines, based on a seniority system. Actually, *bunkans* often have their own systems for recruiting and training leaders from young members, or they are actively working to rearrange local industries to improve residents' lives. The staff members of the *bunkan* are carefully selected as leaders of the sub-district, and they not only attend the regular meetings of the *bunkan*, but also may be sent to the Community Renovation Commission to discuss the issues of the whole district at a higher level.

In these activities of the *kōminkan*, or community learning center, any project proposed by the leaders to residents and carried out is done so only after it has been discussed, countered, revised, and agreed to by the residents. We see there the ontological rebirth of each member in his/her relationship with others based on mutual recognition, and the development of a new relationship among residents, irrespective of age and sex, brought about by this rebirth.

Thus, for the residents of the sub-district, the *bunkan* is something quite dynamic. Every event organized there, be it a cultural exhibit, sports meet, cherry blossom viewing, or festival, exposes and makes the residents aware of the relationship of mutual recognition and acceptance, their own rebirth, and the dynamic regeneration of which they are usually unaware. The *bunkan* is a place of residents' self-government activities, but at the same time it is the very process of such activities. It represents a dynamic nexus of residents' interactions.

Here we see what "learning" exactly is to the residents of the sub-district. For residents, "learning" doesn't simply mean acquiring knowledge and skills and developing one's potentials. More importantly, it means the perpetual regeneration of each member's self in relation with others, which in turn strongly drives him or her to work with others to build up a new *community*.

(3) "Doing *bunkan*" – Image and system of the *bunkan*

Just as with the community learning center at the district (*chiku-kan*), the word *bunkan*, when uttered by residents of the sub-district, doesn't simply refer to the facilities, but also means the various kinds of activities and events going on around it; *bunkan* is an idea of a space, relationship, and activities. In other words, when local residents talk of the *bunkan*, they mean the branch community learning center they have built and run themselves, their activities running it, the activities of various working groups of the center taking place around it, the learning and exchanges of residents organized around there, thus the communal space those activities revolve in, the relationships among those people, and the way such relationships work. In this sense, *bunkan* doesn't only mean the building. More

importantly, it means the local association, and this association means their own community supporting the city's autonomy. The city's autonomy is supported by those much smaller, yet highly relevant in terms of people's daily lives, collective autonomy units from the bottom.

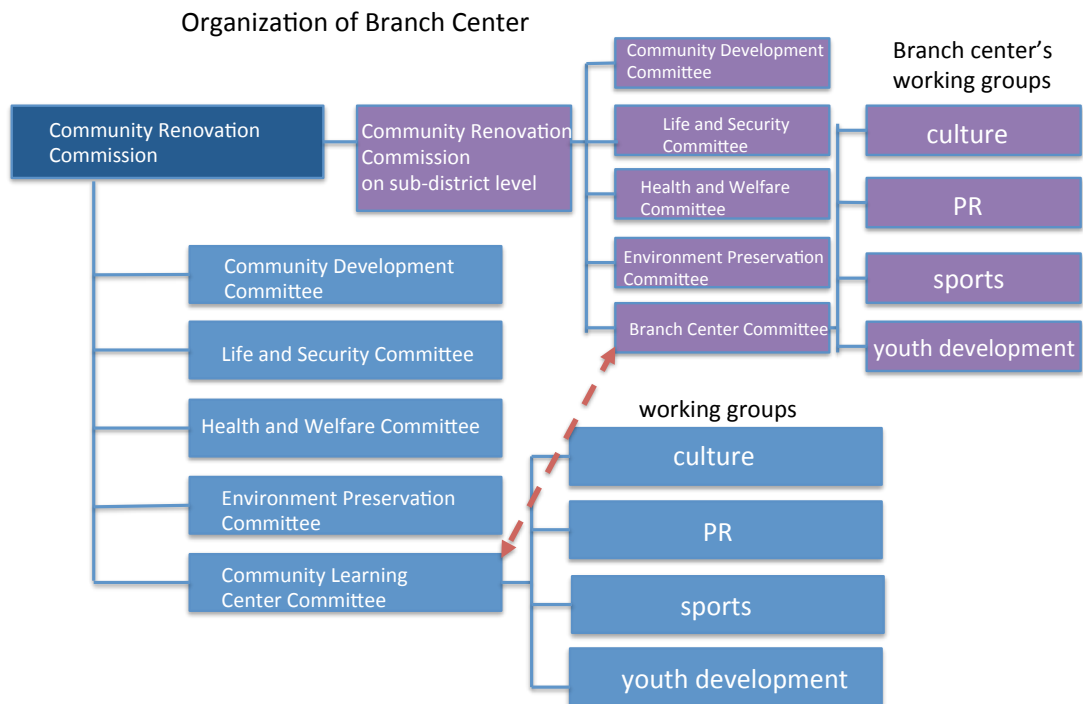
What demonstrates the above fact is the expression “doing *bunkan*” often heard among residents. During the interview surveys, we often heard residents say, “What’s nice from my doing *bunkan* was...” or “You know, when you do *bunkan*, you learn a lot about the community...”

This also shows that the *bunkan*, or branch center, is inextricably linked with the management of the community, that is, successfully handling things related to the branch center directly leads to managing the community autonomously, and helping residents lead stable lifestyles in their mutual relationships.

The fact that the autonomy of *bunkans* is the basis of the autonomy of each district, that is, the fact that the collective autonomy at the sub-district level provides the basis for the city's resident autonomy, is typically demonstrated by the fact that, while the organization of the *bunkan* is similar to that of the community learning center of the district (*chiku-kan*), the members of the working groups at the CLC are comprised of the delegates of the working groups of the *bunkans* (branch centers). Although the CLC is also called “main center” (*hon-kan*), the activities of the main center are supported by the autonomy of the branch centers.

For example, as we have seen earlier, the organization of local autonomy currently practiced in the city of Iida features Autonomous Districts set up in respective districts as part of the city government, and an Autonomous District is made up of an Autonomy Promotion Center and a Local Council. Meanwhile, to represent the residents, each district has a Community Renovation Commission replacing traditional neighborhood associations, and has under it the Community Development Committee, Life and Security Committee, Health and Welfare Committee, Environment Preservation Committee, etc., plus the Community Learning Center Committee. And, this Community Learning Center Committee has under it such subcommittees as those dealing with culture, PR, and sports (as well as youth development in some districts).

At the sub-district level, there are no sub-organizations coming under the Autonomous District, but, under the Community Renovation Commission, there are community renovation committees of the sub-districts, and under each CRC, there are a community development subcommittee, a life and security subcommittee, a health and welfare subcommittee, an environment preservation subcommittee, and also a community learning center subcommittee, and under the CLCS, there are such working groups as those for culture, PR, and sports (as well as youth development in some cases) (See Fig. 2).



(Fig.2) Organization of Branch Center

The Community Renovation Commission in each district is what the former neighborhood associations were reformed to. The federation of autonomous associations of the sub-districts formed the Community Renovation Commission of each district. With the reform of local autonomous organizations, *kōminkans* were integrated into the organization of neighborhood associations (Community Renovation Commission). Although built in the autonomous organization as a committee, *kōminkans* took over their managing units as they were, and these units formed the Community Learning Center Committee as its working groups. And each working group of the CLCC at the district is comprised of the delegates of the working groups of the *bunkan*, or branch center, of the sub-districts under the district. In this sense, both in the districts and the sub-districts, the community learning center committees form a branch of their own, independent from the Community Renovation Commission. While being a committee under the Community Renovation Commission, the Community Learning Center Committee has a relative independence of its own, like a separate system.

For this reason, in the new organization of local autonomy, the Community Renovation Commissions now offer an increased attraction to local residents, with *kōminkans* built in among the traditional organizations called neighborhood associations with their cultural functions. Thus, CRC are expected to play a key role in reforming local communities into self-governments by residents. In other words, it is the integration of *kōminkans* in the Community Renovation Commission that enables the commission to enhance its autonomous power and work as the key

player in community management.

There, the question before them is: how can they develop human resources to take charge of this kind of community management? The activities of the *bunkan* have a built-in system to develop and recruit such actors at the sub-district level.

3. Base-layer community and *kōminkan*

(1) Organization of *bunkan* and system of development and selection of leaders

As shown in Fig. 2, the organization of a *bunkan* is basically based on a working-group system. Local residents participate in these groups and run the center.

Each working group assumes part of the *bunkan*, but the *bunkan*'s management often involves cultural and sports events in the residents' lives, which deepen the relationships among the residents, and thus enhance the basis of autonomy of the sub-district. In other words, the activities of each working group are closely involved with the daily lives of the local residents. So, to successfully elect leaders of the *bunkan*, such as director, sub-director, group leaders, and group members, each "ku," or sub-district, has made various efforts.

That is to say, there is a kind of unwritten rule for the selection of leaders. Instead of forcing residents to take up the posts of leaders of the *bunkan*, which anyone would feel a burden, by rotation, etc., each *bunkan* has devised a system of its own to elect people to those posts by the consensus of all of the residents.

For example, directors of *bunkan* are generally screened and elected by a screening committee comprised of former directors, or an election committee under the Community Renovation Commission. In other words, directors of *bunkan* are selected from among qualified persons by former leaders or residents at their responsibility, and the consensus is made to approve and support them by the whole community. Here, persons qualified as leaders of the sub-district are elected not by rotation such as in order of seniority, but through discussion among former directors and residents of the *kumis* (*kumis*, or units, are residents' autonomous units below the sub-district), and when asking the candidate to assume the post, by persuading him and asking for his consent, thus delegating powers to him and sharing responsibilities among the leaders of the community. Here is what a former director of *bunkan* testifies: "They never gave up. First, I said no, because I felt I wasn't up to the job, but they came again and again, so, I started feeling sorry for them. In the end, my wife said, 'Hey, darling, they came so many times! Why don't you be nice and say yes? We could no longer face neighbors if you don't accept.' So it's like it's not me who accepted the post but the whole family."

Further, in many *bunkans*, most of the managers, group leaders and sub-leaders are

screened in the discussion of the director and the sub-director and asked to take the posts by the director. This is because people think that, since they appointed them director and sub-director and gave them basically full power to manage the *bunkan*, they should respect their policy and best support them in their management. If so, it's best that these leaders be people the director and sub-director can trust and get along with in running the *bunkan* for the interest of the community.

As for the members of each working group, the general practice is that they are elected from among the members of *kumi* or *kumiai*, or units, which are subdivisions under the sub-district, or the bottommost units of the neighborhood association and are comprised of five to ten households each. They are recommended to the *bunkan*, and the director of the *bunkan* asks them to take the posts. In some cases, persons recommended by a women's group or a PTA may also join the group. As to such working groups as youth development, newsletters, public relations, sports, and culture, they are a mechanism that carry out activities closely involved with residents' lives, mobilizing all residents of the sub-district from the bottommost level, thus driving the whole sub-district in its activities, enhancing its attraction for people, and encouraging people to take part in mutual exchanges.

More interestingly, watching the activities of those groups, the director and former directors are looking for and marking candidates for the next director, sub-director, manager, etc. Thus, working groups of the *bunkan* serve as nurseries for the development and selection of future leaders in the community. An ex-director of *bunkan* tells how that works: "As they continue working in a group, sooner or later you'll know if they have something, however low they keep their profile. Then, they're a candidate for the next group leader. When there are elected leaders, we send them to the working group of the CLC and have them learn how it works at the district level. When they're back, they're a candidate for the next manger or sub-director, and so on. This way, we earmark promising people and arrange their careers so that, little by little, they take more interest, get more motivated, and start feeling that they should accept the proposed posts. That's how posts of the *bunkan* go around."

The way the *bunkan* is run is not by forcing posts on people by order of seniority, nor is it done by influential people controlling posts, It is run by community leaders carefully selecting the right people, training them on the job, and, when assigning them to a post, it is done only through motivation and persuasion. The activities of the *bunkan* are maintained by this elaborate procedure, and it is because they are elected through such an elaborate procedure that those elected want to use their powers for the interest of the local community and improve the management of the local community. It is because of this system that not only community leaders but also all residents support the director of the *bunkan* and other leaders to enhance the activities of the community.

The following is what another ex-director says: "At first, my wife was saying, 'Honey,

promise you won't ever take that post of director! You know that'll give us tons of trouble!' But actually, it was she who was the first to be persuaded in the family. She started to say, 'Say yes to them, darling. They are so nice and begging, don't you see you don't have a choice?' That changed the mood in the family. And when I took the post, my seniors told me, 'Hey, buddy, we won't make you fight alone, we'll share your burden, too!' and actually supported me in many ways. And then, I had already worked in various groups in the *bunkan*, so I had ideas of my own about how we might better run the *bunkan*. I also knew who was good for what kind of work, so, when I became the director, I went to see each of them and asked them to work with me. This way, many people in the sub-district helped me and that's how I made some of my ideas happen. That's exciting – to be able to see your ideas happen - It really was! Now, inspirations keep popping up. You're always thinking this and that. Before long, you're addicted to the *bunkan*..."

(2) Activities of *bunkan*

The activities of *kōminkan*, or community learning centers, in the city of Lida may be classified into five types: (a) activities across the city involving all parties concerned, including CLCs and BCs; (b) activities carried out by CLCs; (c) activities carried out by respective working groups, (d) activities carried out by BCs, and (e) activities carried out jointly with local associations. Of the above, the activities of *bunkan* are as follows:

In District A, activities carried out in each *bunkan* are for example as follows: In the *bunkan* A-1, jointly with the Farm Association, the youth development group organizes what they call the Human Contact Farm. According to the Farm, the activities planned and carried out by the farm in 2011 included the following: a general assembly in April, soy-bean sowing and vending products at a Cool of the Summer Evening in July, buckwheat-sowing and a Forget-the-Summer-Heat Party in August, the Harvest Festival (Year End Party) of the Farm Association in November, and the New Year Party (soba-making) and miso-making in January.

In District B, *bunkans* carry out a variety of activities, but cultural activities are particularly active. Most of the sub-districts hold cultural festivals, and many of them art festivals. At cultural festivals, *bunkans* exhibit a variety of painting, sculpture, and handicrafts. The artwork displayed here are said to include many serious works. Activities specific to individual *bunkans* include puppet theater festivals, summer carnivals, and lion dance (*shishimai*) preservation clubs.

The *bunkan* B-1 puts strong efforts to preserve the lion dance, with its newsletters in 2010 and 2011 including an article on lion dance in almost every issue. The *bunkan* B-2 organizes for children rice and vegetable cultivation classes: Children sow seeds, grow them in seedbeds, transplant the seedlings, and weed the fields until the harvesting, watching the rice as it grows day by day. They grow this rice with patience and attention, using neither machines nor agrochemicals. At the cultural

festival and harvesting festival, they enjoy eating the vegetables they grew, pound steamed rice into cakes, or make *goheimochi*¹ and offer them to the elderly and friends. These activities enhance the mutual relationships of local residents, and create a strong bond within the community. A result of these activities, they say, was that volunteers started to make side dishes and distribute them to the elderly in the area.

In addition, each *bunkan* issues newsletters two to four times a year. The *bunkan*'s newsletters play an important role as a source of information on what's happening in the sub-district. As a forum of exchange, friendship, learning, and information, the newsletters encourage residents to actively join activities of the sub-district and help the vitalization of the area. At the same time, reading the newsletters, residents learn more about their own community, and enhance their solidarity.

These activities of the *bunkan* enhance solidarity among the residents of the sub-district, which stimulates exchange among leaders or with other associations, and encourage residents to join various projects.

(3) Quiet, open dynamism

What we learn from the above is that the high level of autonomy and locality of the *kōminkan* (main center in the district) maintained in each of the former municipalities is supported by the activities of the sub-districts, or *ku*, under the district or *chiku*, and of units even lower than the sub-districts called *kumi* or *kumiai*, and that what symbolizes such autonomous activities is the residents' associations developed around the community branch center called the *bunkan*, their activities, their space, and the lives of residents themselves.

It is at this *bunkan* that human resources to work for the community are developed, the relationship of mutual assistance among residents at *kumi* or *kumiai* level are culturally enhanced, and the residents' autonomy in the sub-district is ensured at the daily life level. It is all of the above relationships that support the autonomy of the city of Iida from the very bottom.

The local autonomy in the city of Iida is structured in such a way that the Autonomous Districts and the Community Renovation Commissions are in a parallel with each other. The Autonomous Districts remain the city's efforts to outreach local residents, but the Community Renovation Commissions have a mechanism of their own to outreach sub-districts (*ku*) and to units (*kumi*) along the ladder of former neighborhood associations. With *kōminkans* integrated in the Community Renovation Commission as the Community Learning Center Committee maintaining its former organization, the community learning centers in the districts remain in close human relationships with *bunkans*, and thus introduce culture and daily-life

¹ Local specialty rice cake.

points of view into local autonomy, in addition to economy and welfare issues. More important, such autonomy has at its basis the activities of *kumi*, the bottommost units of neighborhood associations, which support it from the very bottom.

Furthermore, as we have already seen, the *bunkan* has a system of its own to develop human resources in the community, select leaders, have residents support such leaders, and thus manage the community autonomously. While being the matters of managing a branch community learning center, this task overlaps with the management of the community itself. When residents run the *bunkan* on their own, they are running the community on their own. It is for this reason that the election of the director and other leaders of the *bunkan* goes through an elaborate procedure of discussion, consensus, and persuasion. For residents of the sub-district, *doing the bunkan* is never a duty assigned by rotation or by seniority, but is the managing by themselves of their own community, and the sharing of powers and responsibility among themselves.

It is for this reason, too, that the *bunkan* has a built-in system that stimulates residents of the area to carry out the various activities we have seen above, to move around, meet others, and experience a kind of physical contact and relationship of mutual recognition among themselves. It can be said that the *bunkan* is these autonomous activities of the residents at a physical level. In other words, it is the unspoken awareness, or physical-level realization, which residents develop in the course of those activities, that they are mutually supportive and interdependent, that supports these activities in the community. Thus, in *chiku*, there develop unspoken mutual relationships among people. There, people's lives themselves are activities of autonomy; such activities stabilize their lifestyles, create a relationship of mutual recognition among residents, and develop human networks in mutual assistance and attention. Through this relationship, people come and go, join activities, recognize each other, and community leaders grow and get promoted through the process. If leaders are recognized and appreciated, it is because of the actual work they do for the community residents. While supporting those leaders, residents deeply involve themselves in the maintenance and improvement of community life. In these activities, residents support working groups and the groups are deeply involved with residents' lives, and this creates a relationship in which the resident autonomy is the very lives of the residents. In other words, the lives of the residents at the *kumi* level have a quiet dynamism built-in that enables people's perpetual movement to create a steady status.

And, what visualizes this dynamism that enables perpetual movement to stabilize lifestyles, and what makes people aware of their physical presence, and thereby transform this dynamism into awareness at the physical level, is the holding of communal events. Various events organized by each sub-district (*ku*) and unit (*kumi*) serve to make this quiet, usually invisible dynamism surface in the mutual relationships of the residents, and bring the physical-level mutuality to a visible level

of awareness. And when this visualized awareness supports the physical mutuality, the *bunkan* is actualized as autonomous activities by actively involved local residents, that is, community management by residents who, mutually recognizing others, are continuing their pursuit of a better life. This is the reason why it is important that the *bunkan* is visualized as a building, that is, a facility.

At a glance, local communities may look monotonous, conservative, and basically intent on sticking to tradition, but actually, they have this built-in mechanism running that develops the relationship of mutual recognition among residents at a physical level, stimulates people to move around dynamically, and keep their quiet daily lives running in mutual assistance.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that this kind of unspoken rationality at physical level tends to get customary, and eventually become a routine. What's necessary to avoid such a situation is to verbalize the physical rationality, exchange this understanding with others through language, while keeping one's physical being exposed to others, and keeping oneself awake. What is required of local autonomy is to keep the dynamism of the *bunkan* constantly activated, to come up with a mechanism to make it possible. It is here that the *chiku-kan*, or district community learning center, comes in. It is quite significant that CLCs have a system of human resource development in which CLCs receive leaders of the BCs as member of their working groups, put them in contact with those from other BCs to stimulate them, and, back to their sub-district, those leaders get promoted to director of *bunkan*, etc.

Here, the arrival of strangers as a gust of fresh wind may show ways for the *bunkan* to further bloom its landscape. That will create a new relationship at the level of *bunkan*: Not only connecting with others in the rationality of nature at the physical level, they cycle themselves by constantly stimulating this nature at the physical level in contact with differences and restructuring such rationality, with the result that the cycling creates new rationality. Here, we see the quiet dynamism of the *bunkan* constantly re-transforming itself into an ever-self-innovating, “quiet, open dynamism.”

Such self-controlling local communities based on resident-led, lifelong learning activities are being formed not only in the city of Iida, but also in many local governments in Japan and in a variety of ways. We call a society made up of such communities a *learning-based society*.

Conclusion – From a static system to a dynamic system

Challenges facing lifelong learning in Japan do not simply mean the acquisition of competency as often discussed in Western countries. More importantly, they are about how we can link learning activities, which are developing as residents' autonomy in the bottommost living sphere of society, to the formation of a new

community.

What is required of us is the restructuring of the static government system based on the distribution of knowledge, technology, and money, that is, a system for managing people, to a dynamic community where, because of this dynamism, people living in the local community fully play their roles, mutually recognizing their existence in their relationships with others, fully live their lives, and, by all of the above, keep the community in constant change, a process of relationships, so to speak. What is required of us is to seek how we can build up a community that creates a constant equilibrium by being dynamic, ensures the lifestyle of community residents by changing itself, recognizes their human dignity, and keeps recognizing their existence, including the look and feel of the community.

This *community* is not the unstable market society where free and lone individuals, freed from the regulation of the community, repeat production and consumption in faceless markets. In the new community, people feel that they are fully positioned in the community, freely and fully live in their relationships with others, and pursue their activities for a better life, and it is all of these activities that are called production and consumption. In other words, when people keep regenerating their selves in their relationships with others and changing themselves, there grows a cycle that links economy, welfare, and culture together and supports people's lives in their existence. This community also creates a dynamism that keeps helping residents to improve their lives and makes this dynamism its own asset.

This *community* is close to what is called *association* or *society* in English. It is not a *civic society* or *community* of objection to be developed in the public sphere of politics, but not closely involved with economy, as discussed by Robert Putnam or communitarians (Putnam, 2000). Rather, it is something which, while remaining in the existing political and economic spheres, is generated anew by people at the level of the residents' lives by restructuring them into a sphere with a new social structure. In other words, the *civic society* and *community* as discussed by Putnam and communitarians may be understood to assume the political distribution of rights in a sphere dominated by uniform disciplines under the *state*, but the *community* as discussed here is a community where, as a result of revising such uniform disciplines, the political and economic spheres are formed as a new sphere dominated by multiplicity. In this sense, this community is not a sphere that requires the political distribution of rights at the level of people's lives based on the dichotomy of the public and the private. It is an intermediate sphere perpetually reborn as a communal sphere that mediates between the public and the private, breathing amidst the relationships of people, so it is perpetually dynamically changing, and involves the economic sphere closely linked with people's household finance.

To seek for and create such a *community*, it is essential for us to explore the role of lifelong learning ensuring learning to residents and developing an infrastructure for

this learning. Stated differently, what local communities are now being challenged with is to reposition citizens, which have been a universal and general notion, as specific, diverse, and individual residents, and administratively help them change themselves as new beings, that is to say, help them in their “learning.” Here, “learning” no longer means distributing rights to education through a uniform school education system. Now, it means that the activities pursued by residents, who are each specific and individual beings, recreating themselves as the main player of their lives in relationships with other residents, who are also specific and individual beings. What local governments are now being challenged with is to help each resident’s activity to develop his/her self which, while being individual and specific, remains in relationships with others, that is to say, help them in their “learning.”

This also means that it is necessary to build up a new sphere on the frontline of people's daily lives, that, despite the contradiction of the private sphere of individuals' lives being the subject of the public sphere called policy issues, intervenes in one’s relationship with others, or the development of self in the community, a “common” sphere, so to speak, and thereby being private becomes at the same time being public. In other words, it means the need to transform the traditional static social structure based on distribution into a dynamic structure based on regeneration. There, “learning” has become the government’s critical task in the field of residents’ autonomy.

Questions:

1. Do the policies and practice on lifelong learning in Japanese society, which is in the process of decentralization, diversification, and multiplication, offer good reference to other countries?
2. Through activities for the development of local community through residents’ lifelong learning, Japanese society is transforming itself into a diversified, conflictive society based on self-control and networks of local communities. Is such a trend a universal, worldwide one, or is it specific to Japan? And can such a trend present the image of a new society to come?
3. Is such development of lifelong learning based on the local community effective in helping people survive their lives proactively in response to globalization and the trend toward a consumer society?
4. Theoretically, this kind of development of lifelong learning based on local community will modify the way society is structured from a society based on distribution to a society based on regeneration. What kind of politics and administration will such theoretical strategy bring about?

Glossary:

Chōson-sei: Municipality system

Koseki-seido: Family register system

Terakoya: Private popular schools in the Edo period

Chōson: Towns and villages, or municipalities

Chōnaikai: Neighborhood association(s)
Kōminkan: Community learning center(s) or CLC, also called *chiku-kan*, or district center, and *honkan* or main center.
Bunkan: Branch (community) center(s) or BC
CRC: Community Renovation Commission(s)
AD: Autonomous District(s)
Chiku: District(s), usually overlapping with the territory of a former municipality
Ku: Sub-district(s). Subdivision under the *Chiku*
Kumi or *kumiai*: Unit(s), bottommost group of residents under the *ku*

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