

PROBLEMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN POSTWAR JAPAN
by

Murray B. Woldman

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by

Murray B. Woldman

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Political
Science 881: Research Seminar in
Japanese Studies.
May 1963

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I propose to discuss in this paper the problems that have arisen in Japan since the end of the Second World War in the field of local government. These problems grow out of two basically interrelated factors which are side effects of, on one hand, Japan's drive to modernize and take her place as a great world power and on the other, of the reforms which the Allied Occupation deemed necessary for the democratization of her recently defeated enemy. The problem may also be viewed as one of form and content or of the emphasis on institutional rather than ideological development. The American authorities believed that an imposition of democratic forms on Japan coupled with a drive to decentralize formal administration and government would inevitably lead to the development of true democracy at all levels of government and popular participation in the political process. In general, however, they did not pay sufficient attention to the problems that might arise from the differences in outlook and historical experience between Japan and the United States. The resulting system of local government given to Japan by the Occupation will be the primary subject matter of this

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inquiry. I intend to discuss first the historical development of local government in Japan from the Meiji Restoration to the end of the Second World War and then to turn to the Occupation's reforms in the local government system and the developments since Japan regained her independence in 1952.

CHAPTER I

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BEFORE THE OCCUPATION

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Only on the examination of the history of local government do we realize what a relatively recent phenomenon it is for Japan. Local government as part of a modern Japanese governmental structure actually has only existed for slightly less than one hundred years. It dates from the Meiji Restoration in which the feudal fiefs of the daimyo, the feudal vassals of the Shogun, were brought together into a coherent national system of government for the first time. In 1868, the former fiefs were reorganized into three fu or imperial provinces and 302 ken or prefectures and the following year, governors for these were appointed from among the former daimyo, thus drawing them into the new system and providing for a continuity with the Tokugawa period and its social and political hierarchy. This adaptive approach would appear to make adjustment to change proceed more smoothly than abrupt breaks with the past. However, in a later period of Japanese history, the Occupation rarely seemed to support this approach. Perhaps the relative success of their reforms may be linked

with their approach. In the years after 1868, the government established a formal administrative structure for the regulation of local affairs. Complete supervision of the fledgling local governments was taken over by the Home Affairs Ministry or Naimusho when it was established November 10, 1873. Among its considerable powers and responsibilities were:

- 1) the encouragement of good behavior
- 2) the establishment, removal, or abolition of local government offices and the appointment or removal of certain officials
- 3) the regulation of local government expenses, offices, and local taxation
- 4) the definition of boundaries of administrative districts
- 5) the reorganization of towns and villages and changes in the names of the same
- 6) the surveying of land
- 7) the regulation of forests
- 8) the lending of money and dispensation of charity
- 9) the building of roads, embankments, and bridges
- 10) the regulation of agricultural schools and societies
- 11) the preservation of records, sites, and buildings of historical importance

12) the establishment of poorhouses and hospitals

13) the establishment of sanitary institutions
and 14) the issuing of orders directly to the people.

Of equal importance was the transfer of the Police Bureau from the Ministry of Justice to the Home Ministry in these early years. This latter change added greatly to the degree of control over Japanese life by the Home Ministry that was utilized to a high degree during the period of the Second World War.¹ These considerable powers were increasingly effective in the centralization process that accelerated in the late 1930's and which reached its climax a few years later. The result was a government which was efficient if not democratic.

In 1878 the government established prefectural assemblies of a purely consultative nature which could be dissolved by the governor of the prefecture. Two years later prefectural councils which could act for the assembly when it was not in session, were set up. At the same time, city, town, and village elective assemblies were established with limited powers and under prefectural control. However, city, town, and village governments did not come into existence until 1886 when a municipal code was promulgated. In the prefec-

ture, the center of power was the governor. He was of chokunin rank, appointed by the Emperor on the recommendation of the Home Minister. Dissolution of the prefectural, city, town, and village assemblies were among his prerogatives. He could ^{override} the actions of these assemblies and approve or disapprove indirect elections of municipal mayors and remove them from office. Approval of ~~the~~ prefectural budget and quasi-control of the city, town, and village budgets were among the considerable financial powers which he held. The relationship of the mayor to his assembly was similar to the role of the governor on the prefectural level, except in the sense that the former was more directly responsible for his actions to the governor than the governor was to his superiors in the Home Ministry in Tokyo.

Except for the creation of the Hokkaido Assembly in 1901, this was the situation at the prefectural and local levels until the period 1940 to 1945.² At the neighborhood level, in the urban areas, the unit of association was the tonarigumi or neighborhood association. Prior to the Meiji Restoration, the tonarigumi had collected taxes and enforced laws under the Tokugawa Shogunate. With the Restoration, the central government assumed these functions. The tonarigumi then became

voluntary associations cooperating in such functions as weddings, funerals, harvesting, and religious ceremonies. Thus, although many of the formal duties of the tonarigumi were assumed by the government, they survived, to be utilized again at a later date. An example of the voluntary aspect of their work can be seen in the case of the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923 in which they organized unofficially as volunteer relief organizations. They also bought commodities in bulk for their members to save them the middleman's profit and participated in charity and neighborhood improvement activities.

During the 1930-1932 depression, the activities of the tonatigumi began to proliferate. In fact, in 1936, various prefectures reported functioning tonarigumi in from twenty-two to thirty-three per cent. of the local communities. The Local Administration Research Institute or Chiho Seido Kenkyujo, which was established by Imperial Ordinance in 1937, proposed legislation to grant legal status to the tonarigumi. However, its recommendations were shelved by the government because it felt that the Diet would not pass such legislation at this time. However, with the birth of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA) in 1940 and as a part

of its organizational structure, town precincts or chonai and hamlets or buraku were organized into groups or chonaikai and burakukai headed by leaders appointed by mayors and headmen, ostensibly to facilitate the flow of communication between the government and the people. The Home Minister, YASUI, ordered cities, towns, and villages divided into suitable areas of administration with burakukai and chonaikai as auxiliary or subsidiary organizations. The leaders of the new local governmental organizations were to be recommended by the buraku and chonai. This required the establishment of the tonarigumi as executive groups under the buraku and chonai and made the latter two structures a part of the governmental and administrative apparatus as they had been before the Restoration.³ So effective was this drive by the Home Ministry that seven months after the initial organization of the groups, the system was in complete operation throughout Japan with 199,700 chonaikai and burakukai and 1,120,000 tonari-⁴gumi agencies functioning.

The year 1940 also marked the beginning of a process the Japanese called 'streamlining' of government at the prefectural level. In the following year, there was a purge of prefectural administrators resulting in

the ouster of eight governors~~and~~ and their replacement by supporters of the government's policies. The further centralization of government was accomplished in June of 1943 when a scheme of regional government based on nine regions, each with a governor or superintendent, was effected. Metropolitan and prefectural governments were then reorganized to fit into this system. When this was accomplished, the following month the Regional Councils were placed under the Prime Minister's control. Previous to that, they had been under the Home Minister. The Cabinet postponed prefectural assembly elections at the same time, all without consulting the Diet which was in session at the time.⁵ It is interesting to note that free elections ceased at this time. Candidacies were limited to the number of posts to be filled, a situation which repeated itself under the democratic election system, but for rather different reasons, undertaken in Japan by the Occupation.

However, the monolithic~~le~~ character of the Home Ministry's control over all aspects of Japanese life which is represented in official Occupation publications⁶ is an oversimplification of the situation. One observer of modern rural Japan reports that even during the war when the burakukaicho or leaders of burakukai were required

to be appointed by village mayors, many buraku continued to appoint their own burakukaicho.⁷ It is also true that while the Home Ministry's powers were many, other Ministries also exercised considerable control over local government, notably the Ministries of Finance, Education, Commerce and Industry, and Welfare, most of which became independent of the Home Ministry during the war.⁸ It might also be pointed out here in this connection that the Political Reorientation of Japan dwells lightly if at all on the voluntary and cooperative functions of the tonarigumi prior to 1940.

This then is the state of local government which prevailed until the end of the war in 1945. Noting the exceptions above, generally speaking, the Home Ministry wielded considerable control over local government and opportunities for local initiative and/or independence of action were few. In the next chapter, we shall see what the Occupation attempted to do in six relatively short years, i.e. to completely change this system and to substitute for it democratic local self-government.

CHAPTER II
THE OCCUPATION AND ITS REFORMS

CHAPTER II

THE OCCUPATION AND ITS REFORMS

The concentration of power and initiative in the central government which was indicated in the last chapter, was viewed by the Occupation as inimical to the development of democratic and decentralized local government. In order "...to guarantee the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, especially freedom, equality, and justice, to introduce direct popular election of executives and legislative officials and to liberate local communities from restrictions previously embodied in laws and custom, the principles of decentral-⁹ization and local self-government were to be applied." In one of the Occupation's first moves, the Regional Councils that had been established during the war, were abolished on September 28, 1945 and Regional Administrative Bureaux to coordinate local government activities and report to the Home Ministry, took their place.

The structure of local government remained unchanged until the new Constitution was adopted. However until that could be accomplished, work was immediately begun on the drafting of four bills which were

submitted to the Diet and enacted afterwards on September 3. The new legislation provided for an increase in local self-government through a decrease in the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs and through the institution of the popular election of chief executives, including governors, mayors, headmen, and ward chiefs. It increased the powers of the assemblies by ensuring their independence of their respective chief executives. As an innovation in addition to the above, local officials were to be paid. During the previous half century of local government, "...the national government /had/ saved billions of yen by cudgeling /most of the administrative staff/...into performing services virtually for nothing." ¹⁰ The powers of initiative and recall were granted to the electorate and fair elections were fostered by the establishment of election administration committees. ¹¹ These basic innovations actually incorporated many of the Occupation's plans for reform which were later embodied in the Local Autonomy Law which will be discussed in detail below.

With this accomplished, the Occupation in its capacity as Supreme Commander ~~for~~ the Allied Powers (SCAP), turned to a screening and purge of local government officials which included assembly members,

governors, mayors, headmen and their deputies, municipal chief accountants, inspection commissioners, electoral administrative committeemen and election officials, and headmen of chonaikai and burakukai. The purge also was carried out on the basis of posts previously held and included those people who had been influential in the local and prefectural branches of the IRAA, members of the Political Association of Great Japan, and those who between July of 1937 and September of 1945 were chiefs of local branches of the Imperial Ex-Servicemen's Association or Teikoku Zaigo Gunjin Kai. People purged from local administration also became unacceptable in national administrative posts and vice versa. All the above were ineligible to be candidates in the coming local elections to be held in 1947. However, they could be appointed to other governmental positions and regained eligibility four years after the elections. Deputy mayors and headmen remained in office until after the elections. The primary purpose of the purge of local elected officials was to encourage the entry into office of 'new blood' who, the Occupation somewhat idealistically assumed, would somehow be untainted by the Japanese people's previous experience with local government. It should

be noted that all candidates for the most important posts were screened before the 1947 elections. A relatively small percentage of them were barred and in a later screening, one-third of the latter, approximately 10,090, were cleared. Over 3000 military officers who had had no training before December 8, 1941, were cleared for candidacy in the projected local elections of 1951.¹² It would appear that even SCAP found it difficult to find enough 'untainted' candidates without relaxing their requirements somewhat.

With the stage set for the new Constitution and the Local Autonomy Law, the Occupation abolished the tonarigumi system in the Home Ministry January 22, 1947 through Home Ministry Instruction No. 4. Until that date, the system had been utilized for the distribution and rationing of food, clothing, and other necessities and to fulfill the preliminary local government program. With the dissolution of the tonarigumi, governmental functions exercised by them were transferred back to the appropriate government agencies in the cities, towns, villages, and ward offices. At the same time, all the pseudo-tonarigumi associations that sprang up after the abolition of the chonai, buraku, and tonarigumi associations, were ordered to dissolve.¹³

The new Constitution drawn up in early 1947, specified in Chapter 8, Article 92 that there should be enabling legislation on local autonomy and in Article 93, that members of assemblies and chief executive officers of local and prefectural governments should be elected by direct popular vote. Preceding this development, SCAP formulated its local government policy after discussing problems of local government reforms through conferences it held with various government officials and interested groups and through surveys it conducted in the field to test popular reactions to the proposed reforms. In these field surveys, however, it should be noted that SCAP consulted its own military government administrators before the Japanese local government personnel were approached. Within Government Section, the section of SCAP responsible for reforms in Japanese government, there was some disagreement over the desirability of and the need for branch offices of the central government at the prefectural level. One side argued that such a system would inordinately strengthen the central government. It was their view which prevailed. Government Section tried also to coordinate its activities with the Diet and with the Japanese government. They conferred with bureaucrats, especially from

the Home Ministry, political party leaders, women Diet members, especially as representatives of specific electorates within their districts, educators, and Diet committees, specifically the Local Government and Public Safety Committees in each House.¹⁴ With the direction and scope of legislation clearly indicated by SCAP, the final drafting of the legislation was done by a Local Government Investigation Committee which included Diet members. The finished product of all this consultation and investigation, the Law Concerning Local Autonomy (hereafter referred to as LAL) was promulgated April 17, 1947 so that it would become effective at the same time as the new Constitution. It perpetuated most of the provisions of the 1946 interim legislation mentioned above. This legislation represented a radical departure from local government practices of the pre-surrender period. It effectively imposed on Japan a decentralized government with elected responsible chief executives and popularly elected assemblies at the prefectural and local levels.

Concerning the drafting of local autonomy legislation both in the interim period (1945-1947) and afterwards in drafting the LAL, it is charged by one critic of the Occupation's local government policies, that

SCAP was late in getting started on the democratization of local government. This, he suggests, was due to inertia on the part of those advisors in Government Section assigned to local government affairs as well as to an unspecified intersection conflict in General Headquarters which went on for several months. In fact, the decision to press for a revision of the existing German-inspired system was not made until 1947. It seemed that many Occupation officials were really sceptical of decentralization of the administration through a strengthening of local government. They believed that a highly centralized government was not inherently undemocratic, given Japan's economic and geographic limitations.¹⁵ But the prevailing opinion was that only through grass roots government in the tradition of the American frontier could Japan achieve and maintain democratic local government independent of centralized control.

In drafting its reforms, Government Section avoided the advice of trained public administration specialists and political scientists and relied heavily on lawyers, businessmen, and professional army officers, few of whom had had any experience in government at any level. For the most part, they had had no interest in local government until they were assigned to Government Section.

They often knew relatively little of either Japanese conditions, traditions, outlook, or historical experience. Among exceptions to this were Blaine Hoover and the American civil service specialists who worked under him in the Civil Service Division. But they, like the majority of their confreres, in Government Section, were ruthless in the imposition of American civil service techniques and organization on the Japanese bureaucracy. With the actual work of drafting the law having been discussed, we shall now examine the provisions of the LAL which mirror the principles and purposes of the Occupation in local government reform.

Under the LAL, the people received the rights of recall (see Articles 80, 81, 82, 83, and 86) and initiative (see Articles 74 and 75) in relation to the enactment, revision, or repeal of laws and to the investigation of public undertakings. The individual citizen is empowered to bring suit against a local public body for recovery against an illegal action committed by that body (see Amended Article 96) and to sue any official personally for his wrongdoings while acting in an official capacity (see Amended Article 243).¹⁶

On the prefectural level, in relation to the structure and functions of local public entities, cities with

a population of 500,000 or more were granted home rule with rights similar to those of the prefectures vis-à-vis the central government. The Home Minister's right to remove a governor or to annul his acts was abolished. The governor was now responsible to his assembly and the electorate who could remove him respectively by a vote of nonconfidence or by a recall action after one year of service. He could also be removed by the Court of the House of Representatives in the National Diet. While the LAL supposedly freed the governor of control by the central government, it also stipulated that he remained the central government's agent for the execution of certain laws. (see Article 158) The councils which had managed prefectural legislation when assemblies were not in session, often nine to eleven months of the year, were abolished. Also abolished was the exaction of labor and materials from citizens in lieu of taxes except in the event of natural catastrophes such as floods and earthquakes. In regard to the administration of elections, local officials were to be elected by their assemblies. These officials were to have two year terms of office (see Articles 181 and 182) and there were to be no more than two members of the same political party on each committee. To protect the rights of minority

parties, the chairman was empowered to call meetings
on the request of any member.¹⁷

The prefectural governor, now a locally elected official, was to coordinate the administrative offices of the prefectural government. The qualifications for this office specified that a candidate had to be a Japanese citizen of thirty years of age or older and eligible to vote in elections but did not require that the candidate be a resident of the prefecture in question. However, he cannot at the same time be a member of the national Diet (see Article 145). As a prefectural official, he can administer prefectural activities except those assigned to other agencies and appoint, subject to his assembly's approval, a vice governor and other executive personnel and discipline these and other officials not expressly covered by other laws and ordinances. He is empowered to enforce the collection of taxes and to supervise the collection of fees, charges, and rents, subject to the audit of the assembly.

With regard to the assembly itself, he can summon it into session but it can also meet of its own volition. He prepares the budget and submits it to the assembly. He submits messages and bills for the assembly's consideration without, in doing so, precludes the assembly's

right to introduce its own bills with or without his consent. He may temporarily suspend the act of any administrative officer which he considers beyond the officer's legal authority. His veto of the assembly's action can be reversed by a two-thirds vote on their part. He may, if he chooses, dissolve his assembly at which point, a new election is immediately required (see Articles 147, 149, and 156). He may remove a mayor of a city, town or village for cause only (see Article 146). His term of office is four years.

Thus it can be seen that at almost every step, his powers are largely ¹⁸circumscribed, in law, by the powers of the assembly. However, as mentioned above, he also acts as a national official. He may act as the national agent for a competent minister of the national government and is responsible for the execution within the prefectural boundaries, of Diet laws and Cabinet and ministerial orders relating to national affairs (see ¹⁹Article 158). Generally speaking, mayors of cities, towns, and villages have similar duties vis-à-vis their administrative offices and assemblies and the national government. This aspect of their work will be dealt with more systematically below.

The prefectural and local assemblies, as is the

case with executives at the various levels of prefectural and local government, have similar functions. Every qualified voter of 25 years of age or over eligible for election, except election officials, public procurators, Diet members, and paid officials of assemblies, may be a candidate for election to an assembly for a four year term. There are to be a minimum of forty assemblymen for metropolises, districts, and prefectures with a defined scale of increases commensurate with the degree of population over 100,000 up to one hundred-twenty ^{of} members. The same is the case for cities, towns, and villages. The assemblies may call themselves into session, introduce and pass bills, override the executive veto as described above, confirm or reject executive actions, and by a vote of nonconfidence, remove a chief executive. Further, they may regulate their own affairs, elect their own chairmen and vice chairmen from among their own members, and even discipline and expel their own members for misconduct. In the realm of local affairs, they may conduct investigations with or without hearings, either as the whole assembly or through committees. They have the right to approve or disapprove every governmental financial transaction, including those involving local public property. They fix salaries and allowances

for government personnel, approve loans, and may revise or delete budget items. Except under extraordinary circumstances, they are required to hold open sessions.

Also provided for are standing committees and other special committees, the former to be elected and the latter appointed by the assembly (see Articles 103 to 111).²⁰

This then, is the formal structure implied by the Constitution and laid down by the LAL. Its primary features are a relatively weak responsible chief executive and a powerful assembly which in every way possible is made independent of the central government. However, such a decentralized system requires independent sources of revenue. The local finance system that operated at the beginning of the Occupation with the Finance Ministry at its apex, was, like the local government system, inspired by the Prussian model of the 1880's. "At the time of surrender, the national government controlled almost every phase of local government finance through national laws and regulations administered by national officials who served as executives in local government. Although this system was fairly well adapted to the administration of nation-wide programs, it conflicted directly with basic Occupation policies aimed at the establishment of strong and democratic local governments."²¹

After the surrender, local governments tried to meet local expenses by raising existing local tax rates, by introducing new taxes, by borrowing, and by obtaining larger grants from the national government. But these measures were insufficient to raise adequate revenues. As a result, they resorted to the imposition and collection of involuntary contributions from private citizens. But by mid 1947, with the purge completed and the LAL in effect and with local elections a fait accompli, the Occupation in response to these fiscal problems, turned to the question of local finance. Even though the democratic election of fiscally responsible chief executives was accomplished in 1946 by the interim legislation, "Almost every item in /the local executives'/...budgets was set by national law, policies, and regulations. Moreover, they were poorly prepared psychologically to take full advantage of the fiscal independence they actually possessed. By tradition they looked to higher authority for guidance and specific instructions."²²

With the abolition of the Home Ministry in December of 1947, its local fiscal functions were taken over by the Local Finance Committee, a Cabinet-level body. Not until this time did the Home Ministry's financial control

over local government disappear. However, the local governments' revenues did not increase along with their legislative and executive powers. There was still a great deal of financial dependence on the national government. However the Local Tax Law of 1946, the Local Finance Law of 1948, and the Local Distribution Tax Law of the same year clarified the tax situation somewhat. The Local Tax Law No.110 of 1948 also added to sources of local revenue and provided penalties for tax evasion. Local governments looked for still other revenue sources and in some localities, officially sponsored race tracks were built.²³

In May 1949, the Local Autonomy Agency (hereafter referred to as LAA) was set up in the Prime Minister's office with a director of Cabinet rank. With this development, the Local Finance Commission was abolished and its functions taken over by the Finance Division of the LAA. This division was responsible for assisting the Prime Minister in the exercise of his duties relating to local finance and for assisting the director of the LAA in the performance of his financial duties. More important for the future, it drafted model local budgets and finance laws which like the other model laws drafted by the LAA tended and still tend to be adopted as a matter of routine by local assemblies. More will be said on this subject below. The Finance Division also

directed and coordinated research on local government²⁴ finance problems. To solve the tax problems which in reality still existed in local finance and to remove the obstacles to the Occupation's aim of democratic fiscal systems, i.e. to increase the local governments' sources of revenue, the United States Tax Mission also known as the Shoup Mission after the leader, Carl Shoup, came to Japan from the United States to study the existing tax systems and to try to find new ways to increase local revenues without direct recourse to aid from the national government. In their 1949 report they recommended a substantial increase in local tax revenues and the allocation of definite tax sources to localities, with the bulk of the increases going to cities, towns, and villages rather than to prefectures. They felt that in the interests of local government, the LAA should be dissolved and that its finance functions should be taken over by an independent Local Finance Commission. The LAA was not abolished but in 1950 a Local Finance Commission was established and provisions were made under the Local Finance Equalization Grant Law of 1950 for the increase of outright grants by the national government to localities. The tax bill they recommended met with a great deal of opposition in the

Diet during 1950 and was only pushed through under strong pressure from SCAP in a special July session after it was agreed to postpone enactment of the added value tax portion of the bill until January 1952. It was then passed as the Local Tax Law of July 31, 1950.²⁵ However, the new taxes were regarded as excessive. The press generally characterized them as undesirable but unavoidable. Partially in response to this, SCAP sponsored a re-survey of the tax system by Shoup and three colleagues in August to September of 1950. Their new recommendations were for a substantial reduction in national taxes, a considerable increase in equalization grants to the local governments to avoid increasing local tax rates, and the adoption of an added value tax to take the place of the existing enterprise tax.²⁶

As a result of Shoup's work and the subsequent legislation, "By the end of the fiscal year 1950-51, the newly revised fiscal system of local government had produced more annual tax collections than ever before in the history of Japan."²⁷

The first test of the new system of local government was the local elections of 1947. These elections mirrored the problems inherent in reconciling popular conceptions of politics and the political process with

the spirit of the local government reforms. In many cases, it would appear that the reconciliation had not taken place. In 3,374 municipalities there were no elections because there was only one candidate. Although voter participation in this election was high, with 32,824,953 votes cast in contests for assembly seats, this alone did not necessarily indicate a high level of politicization on the part of the participants. It would appear that for many of them, voting was a duty and not a right or a privilege and that their understanding of the political process of which they were a part, was at best minimal. The Occupation authorities conducted a vigorous campaign to get out the vote and in this they succeeded if not elsewhere.

In the early years of local self-government, resignations from office were commonplace. According to surveys conducted in 1949, for the period 1947 to 1949, 2,179 of the 10,484 mayors of cities, towns, and villages had resigned. In the prefectures of Kochi, Fukui, Chiba, and Nara, more than one-third of the mayors gave up their offices of their own volition. In the first ~~five~~ months of 1949, forty-one elections were scheduled in Kochi Prefecture, an average of a little over one every four days. It would appear that most

of these resignations were the result of inadequate financial resources in the localities, high rice delivery quotas, and, in some areas, the inability of elected officials to handle direct responsibility. There were also a high number of recall cases, often resulting from friction between the chief executives and their assemblies. Between 1947 and 1948, there were 162 such actions, chiefly in Aomori, Akita, and Ibaraki Prefectures in northern Honshu. In fact, in one Ibaraki village, the headman's difficulties were so great that when the incumbent resigned in January of 1948, no successor could be found and two subsequent elections had to be canceled because no candidate appeared. In Nagano Prefecture, in one-third of the by-elections, only one candidate could be found to succeed a mayor who had resigned or been recalled.²⁸

The record for the years 1948 to 1949 is no better. During this period, assemblies in forty-four cities, towns, and villages voted non-confidence in their chief executives. In ninety cities, all assemblymen resigned. Twenty city mayors and 1,356 village or town headmen resigned from office. In fact, within the shorter period from September 1948 to October 1949, there were twenty recall actions against thirty assemblymen and in

seventy towns and villages, recall actions were begun against headmen. The latter actions resulted in eighteen resignations, thirty-two new elections, and the dismissal of twelve headmen.

In assessing the reasons for this pattern of failure, two major causes can be isolated. These are lack of financial resources and the inability of many of the personnel involved to understand or operate within the new political world they had surely never made. Among the pressing financial problems that had come along with the decentralization of government were the support of education, of local police forces, of public works, agriculture and industry, and social welfare. Added to this in some of the municipalities was the burden of reconstruction of war-damaged property, both public and private. The School Education Law of April 1947 replaced the old system of six years of elementary education, two years of higher secondary education, and five years of middle school with a standard six years of elementary and two secondary schools of three years each, on the American model. Education through the lower secondary schools was made compulsory and free, greatly increasing the financial burden of the local educational systems. Thus the prefectures had to aid the municipalities in

financing the local schools. In 1948, the police system was also decentralized and the National Rural Police and Local Autonomous Police were set up. In effect, the autonomous police were to be maintained by the localities but some of the latter, unable to handle the financial support of their own police forces, relinquished their municipal status to avoid the expense of police recruitment and training.²⁹

Municipal reconstruction necessitated by war damage was restricted by local shortages of funds and materials. The Constitution forbade the Diet voting funds to any single public entity without the consent of the majority of the voters. Laws were passed through this process for the reconstruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However the national government could and did transfer national property to municipalities and aid them in every possible way. Hiroshima and Nagasaki received subsidies of ¥. 180,000,000 and ¥. 90,000,000 respectively. To avoid problems of this sort, Tokyo, both a municipality and a prefecture, was classified a prefecture. However, it had the small staff of a municipality which distributed reconstruction materials, loans, and shares of the equalization grants. Because these were insufficient to meet her needs, in 1950

the Diet passed a National Capital Reconstruction Law to reconstruct Tokyo as a national capital able to discharge its political, economic, and cultural functions.

In an attempt to meet some of these financial problems and in reaction to complaints from the new local governments, that had been voiced as early as 1947, of the infringement on their responsibilities by local branch offices of the national government, the government in the summer of 1949 reduced the number of their personnel in their local branch offices. In the same year, the Local Administration Investigation Committee looked into overlapping authority among the various levels of government and recommended that the LAL be amended "...to delineate very clearly the relations between national and local governments."³⁰ It further recommended "...that the powers delegated to the national government should be clearly stated, leaving to local governments all those not enumerated."³¹ The same should be done, the Committee believed, for the prefectural governments in relation to municipalities. It made many other suggestions for the redistribution of authority and for a lessening of the number of areas in which supervision by the national government was exercised. At the same time, with the professed desire for 'streamlined' government,

Prime Minister YOSHIDA proposed a reduction in the number of prefectural governments, since, he said, such a large number were inappropriate with advanced communication and transport systems. He felt that such a consolidation would reduce the costs of local government and increase its efficiency. However, the strong opposition of local bureaucrats who felt that their powers and authority were threatened, and the great difficulty in changing boundaries established in the early years of the Meiji Restoration, made it impossible for him to reverse the Occupation's blueprints to any great extent.

There has been more 'success' along these lines, however, since the end of the Occupation in Japan. This independent period and the developments that have most closely touched the structure which the Occupation left behind will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDEPENDENT JAPAN

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Since the end of the Allied Occupation in 1952, the trend has been toward an ever increasing degree of centralization of government and of growing dependence, financial and otherwise, on higher levels of government by the localities. By 1952, there were functioning national associations of governors, prefectural assembly chairmen, town and village mayors, city assembly chairmen, and town and village assembly chairmen. Of these, only two had come into being since the war but the activities and importance of all have increased since 1945. This is due in large part to the felt need to develop agencies for cooperative efforts to fill the void created by the abolition of the Home Ministry in 1947. Although membership is voluntary, all eligible officials belong. The year which marked the end of the Occupation was also a period of considerable legislative activity in the direction of centralization of government. With the restraining influence of the guardians from the west gone, the Diet began to act on legislation it had previously been chary of considering. In August, the

Administrative Reform Law was passed. It effected a consolidation of the Local Finance Commission and the National Election Commission with the LAA, with the former becoming a consultative organ of the Agency. In December, the Local Systems Investigation Council was established by law. Its report of October 1953 reflects a series of compromises of the views of the representatives of various levels of government and is vague on important questions.

The fifty member council's membership consisted of seventeen Diet officials, twelve local government officials, five national government scholars, and sixteen 'scholars and men of experience'. Even before their report came out, it was predicted that the findings would reflect a strong bias in favor of prewar local government forms. It appears that many of the members were of Home Ministry or similar background and that the struggle between the city mayors and prefectural officials over the control of the cities, would effectively nullify their influence in the proceedings, giving the upper hand to the national officials and the viewpoint they represented.

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The report reflects two general tendencies. It held that important functions such as police and

education should be concentrated largely in the prefectures whose financial position should be strengthened accordingly. Secondly, the prefecture "...holding an intermediary position between the cities, towns, and villages, and the State, is to be come still more closely linked to the central government."³³ It also proposed "...that a strong central agency undertake overall responsibility for the entire local autonomous system,... that local food, drink, and entertainment taxes be transferred to the central treasury, and that local boards of education be abolished in cities, towns and villages, with members of the remainder becoming appointive."³⁴ However, the Council strongly recommended the continued public election of prefectural governors. Prime Minister YOSHIDA and other high officials went still further, favoring the appointment system over elections, which they characterized as expensive and political campaigning, which they styled a waste of time for governors who, thus engaged, could not attend to their national duties well. Although there is a point of constitutional law involved here (see Constitution Article 93) the Constitution itself is not clear. In fact, in 1952 the Supreme Court did not oppose the abolition of the election of Tokyo ward chiefs by an amendment

to the LAL. A bill on the appointment of governors was to be submitted to the Diet but the opposition parties, the Association of Prefectural Governors, and public opinion were so expressly opposed to it that the bill was withdrawn.³⁵ YOSHIDA also favored a regional administrative system much like the one in effect during the years 1943 to 1945.

The next clearly distinguishable step in this process of the reverse course was the Police Renationalization or Revision Law of 1954. It made possible the abolition of the dual system of National Rural Police and Autonomous Police forces and established a Central Police Board. The head of the latter was to be appointed by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the National Public Safety Commission. The police chief of Tokyo was to be similarly appointed and the prefectural police chiefs were to be appointed by the head of the Central Police Board. With this move, all police chiefs became national officials paid out of the national treasury. The move was justified officially on the grounds that the autonomous system was "...not fitting for Japan" and inefficient because of a lack of coordination between the two levels of police and further, "...that radical activities call for a strengthening

of the law enforcement organization." ³⁶ In the public discussion reflected in the Japanese press during the debate in the Diet on the bill, no less a personage than the Director-General of the National Rural Police, SAITO Noburo, expressed the view that

"Under the present system of two police structures/ responsibility is dispersed. This means that the responsibility of the individual policemen is light. Consequently their activities are liable to become ineffective.

Further developing this line of reasoning, he stated that

...from the standpoint of the present economic condition of Japan, it is an urgent business to cut government expenditure as much as possible. And as to Japan's democratization, it is problematical whether it can be attained by decentralization or not. In the Meiji restoration, the renovation of the decentralized feudal system could be accomplished only by centralization. I am of the opinion that to democratize Japan, a centralized system with democratic guarantee is more suitable.³⁷

The speaker certainly had a vested interest in a more centrally controlled police. However, there is more than a grain of truth in his economic argument. But the democratic guarantee he mentions is not elaborated, a fault of much of the Japanese criticism of decentralization of this character.

The reverse course was carried one step further in 1955 when the remaining municipal police forces of Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Nagoya, Kobe, and Yokohama, were

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incorporated into the prefectural police. In considering this move from an historical standpoint, however, General MacArthur never really convinced the Japanese of the value of a decentralized police system. As early as 1947, the then Prime Minister, KATAZAMA, had proposed a Cabinet minister for the national police. In any event, it was extremely unlikely that the decentralization of police would outlast the Occupation.

Bills were submitted to the Diet in 1955 to limit the activities of the local assemblies and commissions and to augment the control of governors over their assemblies. Although the bills did not pass, they were significant symptoms of the swing of the pendulum toward pre-Occupation conditions that has been a characteristic of independent Japanese government. Speaking against this trend in 1959, OSHIMA Taro, a member of the Social Science Institute of Tokyo University, summarized the developments in the period 1955 to 1959 as follows.

During the past four years, the centralization of local administration machinery has been progressing as seen in such examples as the strengthening of the Prime Minister's supervisory authority, adoption of the appointive system of board of education members, school teachers efficiency rating system, Police Duties Law amendment program and the proposed plan to make prefectural governor ships appointive instead of elective. ...Generally speaking, public indifference to autonomy stems from the people's dependence on administration. 39

The latest major development in this process has been the raising of the LAA to ministry status by the Autonomy Agency Establishment Law Revision Law of May 1960. Surprisingly enough, the Governors' Association and other unspecified leaders' organizations supported the bill.⁴⁰ One newspaper account of the debate on the bill "...which was adopted unilaterally by the Liberal-Democratic Party in the confused Diet session /~~confused~~ because of the debate over the new security treaty with the United States/..." states that the new "...Ministry is given a nickname of 'bilking Ministry'..." and that "Director Ishihara of the /~~Autonomy~~/ Agency⁴¹ says that the public is indifferent to the change." This last charge might also be levelled at the press. In fact, perhaps the former is partially the reason for lack of public concern in this issue. In an examination of available press and magazine summaries for the period of the bill's discussion in the Diet, almost no journalistic coverage is evident except for on the day the bill passed the Lower House, May 17, and the day before and the day of the opening of the new Ministry, June 30 and July 1. But it is also possible that decentralized local government has never really been a concern of the Japanese general public. However, some concern over the ministry

status and its relation to the old Home Ministry was expressed at the time in two separate sources. The Tokyo Shimbun of June 30 pointed out that after the dissolution of the Home Ministry, many of its bureaucrats entered politics and that at the time of writing, thirty Lower and twenty Upper House Diet members, mostly Liberal-Democrats, were of Home Ministry background.⁴² The Asahi of July 1 expressed the fear

that the Autonomy Ministry...may develop into a powerful organ to impede the sound development of local autonomy.

and that

...most of the high-ranking officials of the Autonomy Ministry, as well as those of the local governments, were officials of the defunct Home Ministry.

It further pointed out that

...the friction between local officials and the officials sent from the Autonomy Agency had been hopelessly damaging the efficiency of local administration.⁴³

The press also provides us with an example of the thinking of Finance Minister MIZUTA Mikio on fiscal decentralization as an aspect of the larger problem under discussion here. Speaking on his own plan for financial administration and displaying a novel approach to the subject, he thinks that

...it is better to revise the present system of local finance/ under which prefectures are local

autonomous bodies similar to cities, towns and villages. This system should be changed into one under which prefectural governors come under control of the Cabinet. If the system is so revised, all local branches of the central government will be absorbed into prefectural governments with the result that the business of these organizations will be simplified greatly and a large amount of funds saved. The next step is to make cities, towns and villages completely independent local autonomous bodies and enable them to obtain what money they need freely and independently.⁴⁴

This is a strange interpretation of local autonomy but one which seems popular in conservative circles today. It is, in effect, lip service to the principles of local autonomy with no real commitment to a system which is honored more in the breach than in the observance by national government officials.

Perhaps another insight into the contemporary workings of local autonomy would be an examination of the way government functions at the prefectural and local levels. In assemblies of prefectures and municipalities, a similar process has been at work since the reforms were introduced, to mold the forms to traditional Japanese political and social practices. Legislative programs proposed by the executive are almost always passed with a public show of consensus of view between the executive and his assembly. In public sessions, assemblies tend to discuss and then, to approve. The

actual debate and argument of issues and legislation is carried on prior to the official session in what are known as pre-sessions. In the prefectural legislature, "Assemblymen see themselves as critics rather than law-makers. They look upon the career officials with their education, technical skills and experience as the appropriate persons to formulate policy. ...The Assemblyman continues to accord them habitual deference and in doing so maintains what he would term his 'proper relationships.'" ⁴⁵

The observance of form for form's sake, a Confucian concept, may have some bearing on this phenomenon. The formal legislative procedure legitimizes, as it were, decisions arrived at privately and informally. This practice can be seen in an earlier period in the Meiji reforms that led to a parliamentary form of government, to a great extent as a legitimization of Japan in the eyes of the world powers of the late nineteenth century, as an independent sovereign state able to handle her own affairs. The form at that time also reflected little of the political and social realities of Japanese life. In fact, until the Occupation, there had never been a period of legislative supremacy or anything remotely resembling it. ⁴⁶

It is at the municipal level, in the cities, towns,

and villages, that we find one of the most significant explanations for the relative failure of the Occupation's local government reforms to take root. But given the nature of 'rice roots' politics and the organization of political life, it could hardly have been otherwise. If one would understand developments in local government since the Occupation, one must bear in mind the fact that Occupation reforms and attempts at decentralized democratization were, in a large measure, doomed to frustration by the very nature of the continuing activity and importance of traditional informal groupings, especially the urban neighborhood associations which never actually disappeared and the buraku organizations in the rural areas, and by the nature of the national and prefectural governments' involvement in the local administrative and legislative processes.

In the city of Osaka, for example, as recently as 1960, the local service units of the Red Cross or Niseki Hoshidan performed many of the functions of the tonarigumi after the latter were dissolved by SCAP.

Since they were tightly organized and included the entire population, they were also a practically ideal system for the organization and mobilization of political support. They were in this sense the equivalent of the buraku....Consequently, when SCAP ordered their dissolution in 1947, the system was not allowed to perish. After a brief period of dormancy, the network was resurrected under new auspices, those of the Red Cross. For some years

now, this Red Cross system of block and district organizations has provided one of the most important elements in the organization and conduct of conservative political campaigns in the city of Osaka. The same is said to be true in some other major cities. In the political campaigns of the progressive parties, the major labor unions perform similar functions.⁴⁷

The importance of such city organizations can only grow as the population of Japan continues to move to the cities where, without such organizations, traditional political practices might break down. The likelihood, however, would seem to be a perpetuation in the traditional organization of political activities, even for the non-conservative groups.

Buraku organization has played a vitally important role in the political and social structure of Japan's countryside. The village as an administrative unit actually came into being in the early post-Restoration period and these small communities have remained centers of identification and loyalty for the villager. The buraku organization per se is now extralegal rather than illegal as it was from 1947 to 1952. Before the Restoration, villages were buraku.

The present villages came into being through forced amalgamations which wiped out some 7,300 villages between 1874 and 1886, and an additional 55,000 villages in the course of the two-year period from 1888 to 1889. ...The present village is an artificial unit created in order to deconcentrate

some of the functions of the new central government established during the Meiji Restoration.... the old village was both a unit of government and an association for cooperative living (Seikatsu kyodotai). The mass amalgamation split the governmental and social functions, locating the former in the new villages, while the old communities... retained a feeling of 'exclusiveness' toward neighboring settlements, even in the same administrative units. 48

The buraku plays a major role in political campaigns, especially for assembly seats. It is the real election district for conservative candidates who enjoy a distinct advantage over progressive candidates who must generally appeal to the village as a whole. However, the influence of the buraku in village politics is weakening, especially as its social functional importance decreases. This is mainly ascribable to the weakening of the traditional heirarchical family system. This is not to say that the buraku will not continue to play an important role in village government for some time to come. "Since the end of the war, they have, from the national, prefectural, and village standpoint, proved...covenient as points of contact at the lowest level for the dissemination of information about, and the securing of compliance with, the never-ending stream of legislation, reforms, educational and social programs, etc., flowing from...the government." 49

In the village government, the relationship between the mayor or headman and his assembly is linked in many

ways to the prefectural administrative structure and especially with the Local Affairs Section or Chiho Ji-musho. Regular meetings take place in Okayama Prefecture between the Local Affairs officer assigned to village administrative units known as gun, and village mayors. It is reported that approximately sixty per cent. of the time, the assemblymen from the particular gun attend these meetings. ⁵⁰ They discuss such matters as what portion of village revenues is to be allocated to the village office and to the assembly, and local taxes of a special nature. Thus it is apparent that, as remarked above, in the relations between village and prefectural officials as in the relations of assemblymen with bureaucrats in general, there is a great deal of dependence for advice on many administrative but potentially political matters, on government officials. With the growing importance of the Autonomy Ministry and its linkage with the prefectural governments, this can lead to an increase in the former's influence on village government. The Occupation's failure to distribute and decentralize functions among the various levels of government may be due to its undertaking this process too late in the program of its reforms.

The situation may be illustrated by the fact that village mayors are usually unable to indicate the

range of independent functions of the village. When they venture an estimate of the percentage of their own time and effort devoted to functions which are assigned by the national government, the figure given is usually about 80 per cent.⁵¹

The mayor, when carrying out national programs, is authorized to override any objections from his assembly. Within the scope of such duties, he and the other executive officials of the village must obey the orders of the prefectural governor and the appropriate national minister. The end result is that present intergovernmental relations are less like the Occupation's plans than like the pre-war situation. If a particular village wishes government subsidies for a special village project, it must apply through the prefectural government which negotiates with the ministry concerned and with the Autonomy Ministry if a village loan is involved. After a decision is made, the village, having had no hand in the process, receives it from above. "All along the line, the village is utterly dependent on the good will of officials of the higher echelons of government. It is customary to entertain these officials as lavishly as circumstances will permit, whenever an opportunity presents itself, and a not insubstantial part of the subsidy is used for this purpose."⁵² Because the Diet has been controlled by conservatives,

the conservative Diet members are considered more likely to succeed in getting subsidies than progressives. For the same reason, a conservative mayor is favored over a progressive because he is more likely to be on good terms with his prefectural 'superiors'. In this system, the local entities tend to be petitioners who would not hold in very high esteem, a mayor who tried to establish the independence of his village from the central government.

Furthermore, most of the present mayors come from the officialdom of the local government office and their careers began long before the occupation and in some cases before the war against China. This being so, it would be folly to assume that by being elected now rather than chosen by the local assembly they have become more democratic. It would be safer to say that if the system had not changed at all, the same men who are now elected at large would have been chosen by the local assembly. As for those holding the office of mayor who were not former officials, by far the largest number comes from the heads of the agricultural cooperatives. These men also represent the old and established influential groups, frequently being former landlords who had experience in marketing and purchasing seed, fertilizer and tools which the ordinary tenant farmer and small independent farmer knew little about. 53

CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS

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It can be easily seen from the material that has been presented that the system of local self-government presented to Japan by the Occupation has not significantly altered the style or content of Japanese political life at the lower levels of government. This is not to say that the authoritarian monolithic state control which some writers characterize as the singular aspect of prewar Japanese government has returned or is soon likely to return. For that matter, however, it is doubtful that even the military government of the war years ever achieved the degree of social control that characterizes the Nazi regime in Germany during the same period. If blame is to be assigned for the failure of the Occupation's local government reforms, their author is due to receive a good share of it. The Occupation assumed that decentralized local self-government was required in a democratic system although Britain and France, smaller nations and in that respect, more like Japan than is the United States, had managed to preserve democratic government under highly centralized unitary

systems. In our own country, had the neophyte public administrators in Government Section cared to observe, the tendency had been toward a greater degree of centralization of government and in local government, toward an appointive city manager-council system more like the traditional Japanese method than the one now in use. The system of administrative boards and commissions which was imposed on Japan was even at the time of its establishment under criticism in United States administrative circles.

The tax system which Japan received, basically ours, included some features which tax experts have never been able to persuade any other government to accept. Japan was used as a testing ground for administrative refinements, a kind of national guinea pig for a system which was in some aspects outmoded and in others untested.

There were elements in Japanese tradition and history relating to local government that could have been utilized by the Occupation. Two prime examples are the tonatigumi and buraku organizations which it found to be functioning widely, at the beginning of the Occupation period. If the Occupation authorities had wished to build a democratic system from

the bottom up, these organizational structures might have been the logical place to begin. By maintaining the traditional structure, with certain necessary modifications, the introduction of democratic government not on the American model but in consonance with Japanese values and outlook, might have succeeded. But they neglected the ideological content of their reforms, concentrating on institutional innovations. They built a library and then proceeded to fill it with books in a language the readers did not understand. Perhaps a less complex travelling omnibus with fewer volumes, printed in Japanese would have been more useful.

This is not to say that Japan is an anti-democratic state today. But the interplay of political groupings, the pluralistic aspects of the system, tends to take place horizontally within the levels of government rather than vertically, among them. The Autonomy Ministry is in many ways a successor to the Home Ministry in regard to local government but it is not alone in its involvement in the local systems. It is not the most powerful Cabinet ministry as the Home Ministry had been, but one of a number whose functions affect localities. One of the political facts of life in the new Japan which acts as a deterrent to the

rebuilding of the prewar power system is public opinion. This is formed and enunciated by a group greatly out of proportion to its size in the population. But this is basically an urban phenomenon and while the population is now statistically over fifty per cent. urban, many of the technically urban areas are rural in character and many of the statistical cities are in reality groupings of small towns and even villages. Additionally, many urban Japanese still have roots in the countryside. It is this atmosphere which nurtures and sustains the traditional rural outlook which still plays a considerable role in shaping political attitudes. This may change in the future as the economic boom that Japan is experiencing spreads with its modernizing influences into the villages and as the political outlook characterized by the family and the buraku break down. It may still be possible that even though the Occupation's hopes for local autonomy have faded, Japan has the capability of evolving her own viable democratic forms. This development may yet come from out of the cultural and political traditions which the Occupation felt so strong a need to replace.

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- 5 Ibid., p.25.
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