

Federations of neighborhood associations and the reorganization of urban groups based on strong regional ties in Showa Japan

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This article examines traditional cities that have existed since late premodern times and were reorganized as municipalities before the end of the Meiji era in 1912, for the purpose of empirically demonstrating a substantial percentage of cases in which elementary school zones served as the geographical unit on which federations of neighborhood associations (*chonaikai rengokai* 町内会連合会; FNA) were organized during the mid-wartime years of the Showa era (1926 - 1989). Even today, “communities” delineated by school zone boundaries are considered important in serving as organizations that create territorial bonds within large municipalities.

Contrary to experts in the field of public administration who argue that it was a report submitted by the Quality of Life Council in 1969 that provided the opportunity to expand the existence of such “communities”, the author is of the opinion that the urban experience during the mid-wartime years of the Showa era should be considered as an important reason why these “communities” have firmly established themselves, although in varying degrees, throughout Japan. Among the larger cities, the federation of traditional urban neighborhoods (*machi* 町) has served several purposes since the Meiji era (1868 - 1912), while in the provincial cities, the development of “communities” based on school zone borders gradually took place during the promotion of the Movement for General Mobilization of the National Spirit and the establishment of the civil air defense administration, both of which were initiated in 1937. Then upon a FNA directive issued by the Home Ministry in 1940, many cities complied, despite the discretionary nature of the provision, and a high percentage of the resulting federations were based on school zone boundaries.

The majority of the cities examined in this article each have more than one hundred neighborhood associations, and among them FNA serve an intermediary role in many aspects of urban life connecting those municipalities with their neighborhood associations for various purposes. In doing so, several advantages existed in using school zones to form the first federations in wartime; and the postwar era sources describe how FNA were reestablished in the provincial cities using school zones from as early as 1955.