Is participation to NA duty? -Japanese system of local autonomy and its problems

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RQ: How to maintain our local environment? Who is responsible person? What is difficulty to maintain our clean Japanese environment and society?

Method: Participant observation have been conducted for since 2006. Visited municipal area is 8, NAs are 41. Since 2016, a city located near mega city: Fukuoka, is being observed.

Our Collective Rice-cropping Culture before Modernization.

Japan is covered by rice cropping culture. To maintain effective cropping, they had to share many materials and labors in a village. The biggest issue is managing water supply. It is impossible to keep canal condition by individual effort, and supply schedule is needed to discuss among village people. Every people have own duty, and assigned roles. Simultaneously, every people had own right to express their opinion. Their working area covered cropping ruling, communication, fest, and ceremonies of life events of all members. They also manage their own cemetery and shrine.

An Equal Rule- Scheduled Turn

Member of a NA have a equal duty and right. Typical equality system is scheduled turn. The members are listed and the turn is moved daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. In our society this system is taught in early school. Children are assigned their roles as scheduled, like as “clean-up” turn, “lunch delivery” turn. Such system is also working in NA, so most of Japanese offer a labor to maintain local condition along their scheduled turn.

However, the system is breaking now. Some people cannot work as assigned turn. We may lose the equal system. Many free riders use clean road, gavage station, and street light, without their contribution. I faced to friction between NA members & free riders.

Neighborhood Association- Minimum Local Body

After modernization, villages are rearranged into Neighborhood Associations (NAs). Just after WWII, the UN occupation army prohibited NAs, because their well organized structure were worked as important units to conduct the war.

When the occupation was over, 1952, NAs are rapidly revived and restarted working. Most of municipal government treat NAs as quasi-official local group, and drop some budget and local tasks. Most of people believe that it is a duty to become member and offer a labor to their NA.

Until 1990's NA membership ratio is 90% or so. NA was necessary group for Japanese.

Imagination about Contribution...

Free rider said that they performed duty to pay tax. Their duty is perfect performed? My answer is No. Our society is consist of “invisible duty”. When we live in a area with positive relation to others, we need to perform invisible duty. A example is “Hello” to neighbors.

On the other hand, NA system also needs to become more flexible. Some of them are suffering from withdraw members. They cannot leave from old rigid rules.

I want to keep clean Japan. That is based on imagination sense, about someone's contribution to maintain environment. It is probably maintained with scheduled turn operated by NAs or related groups.

For more information on recent Japanese NA system in English, Pekken (2006) is useful.

Pekkanen, R. (2006) “Japan's Dual Civil Society” US-CA: Stanford University Press, ISBN 978-0804754293.