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The Design of Policy, Governance and Public Service

Title of the paper

Policy Integration in Shrinking Society

---Strategies for Basic Municipalities in Japan ---

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1. Introduction

Depopulation and ageing pose serious challenges for municipal management in Japan. Since the number of taxpayers is decreasing and the number of welfare recipients is increasing, future financial management will be highly unstable. As a result, municipalities will ultimately be unable to provide universal public services. To deal with the issue of municipal dysfunction, several strategies are now being discussed: promoting municipal mergers, regional partnership led by major urban cities, and vertical integration by prefectures.

This paper has two purposes. The first is to describe the current situation in Japan, with a focus on depopulation and institutional arrangements involving municipal management. The second is to analyze the prescriptions proposed to deal with the expected municipal dysfunction. The analysis uses the "policy integration" approach of Michael Howlett and his colleagues.

1.1. Outline

The paper consists of three major sections:

The first section introduces some of the features of local Japanese governance. Included are the current situation with respect to ageing, the role of basic municipalities, institutions involving intergovernmental relations, and past basic municipality reforms.

Next, several current proposals regarding municipal reforms suggested by a study group led by MIC (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) are discussed. The proposals center on three options: municipal mergers, horizontal integration by large urban cities, and vertical integration by prefectures. Some criticisms of the proposals are included in the discussion.

Finally, the proposals offered by the MIC-led study group are examined using a "policy integration" approach. The examination focuses on the "policy portfolio," especially with regard to multiple policy goals and multiple policy dimensions.

2. The Current Situation

In this section, the current situation regarding depopulation and the local government system in Japan are discussed.

2.1. Depopulation and Ageing in Japan

According to statistics, the Japanese population began to decrease in 2008, or roughly ten years ago (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2018a: 2). At that time, the size of the population was approximately 128 million; by 2018, it had fallen to 126 million. It is estimated that the number will further decrease to 111 million by 2040. It is also expected that the number of elderly will reach a peak in 2042 at roughly 39 million (Ibid).

Traditionally, the design of Japanese institutions has been based on the assumption that the country's population would continue to increase. Consequently, as depopulation and ageing progress, these institutions are expected to become severely dysfunctional (Ibid: 3). The Japanese government is now confronted with the urgent task of institutional rearrangements to deal with these social changes.

2.2. The Role of Local Governments

One of the critical areas of concern is municipal management. Japan has a two-tiered local government system. The upper tier consists of the country's 47 prefectures; the lower tier is comprised of municipalities. Municipalities are classified as villages, towns, and cities, basically according to the size of their populations. This paper focuses on municipalities.

Municipalities mainly provide residents with public services that are close to their daily lives (Soga 2019: 146-153). To understand municipal work, it is useful to view prefectural work. Japanese prefectures have three areas of responsibility: communication and coordination affairs relating to municipalities, wide-area affairs, and supplementary affairs for municipalities. In terms of the number of projects, wide-area affairs account for approximately 80 percent of prefectural jobs, while supplementary affairs account for about 20 percent (Ibid: 146). From the perspective of budget and staff size, wide-area affairs are mainly related to the management of infrastructures such as roads and rivers, police, and education (Ibid: 150). On the other hand, municipal work mainly includes the direct provision of welfare and general administration such as residential registration (Ibid: 153).

One of the more notable characteristics of Japanese basic municipalities is the difference in the size of their constituent populations. For example, while Yokohama City, the city with the largest population, has a population of over 3.72 million, the population of Aogashima Village is only 169 (Ibid: ii). As a result, municipalities have different levels of duties and authority. Small municipalities need the supplementary help of the prefectures as they cannot, for example, afford to employ specialists in fields such as architecture or civil engineering. On the other hand, large cities have substantial budgets and authority and enjoy greater autonomy. Ideally, all municipalities should perform a full set of administrative functions and have appropriate facilities.

2.3.Past Reforms of Basic Municipalities

Decentralizations

It is important to understand the central-local relationship in Japan. Akira Amakawa, a Japanese political scientist, offers a framework to describe this relationship. His framework has two criteria: centralization-decentralization and separation-interfusion (Amakawa 1986). The former criterion refers to the ability of local governments to act autonomously in relation to the central government. The latter refers to the degree to which functions are shared between the local and the central governments.

According to Amakawa's framework, the Japanese central-local relationship is generally classified as "centralization" and "interfusion." Although reforms for decentralization and separation have been underway for several decades, the reforms stop short of changing this classification based on Amakawa's two criteria.

Municipal Mergers

The history of municipal mergers in Japan is extensive. There have been three principal waves of such mergers: mergers in the Meiji era, mergers in the Showa era, and mergers in the Heisei era (Soga 2019: 158).

The Meiji era mergers, beginning in 1888, were led by the national government, which believed that the natural villages existing before the revolution in 1868 were too small to manage their new tasks as local governments (Ibid: 159-160). The goal set by the central government was that the new municipalities have 300 to 500 households. After the Meiji mergers, the number of municipalities decreased from 71,000 to 15,000, reducing the total by nearly 80 percent. The reformed municipalities were given new responsibilities, including household registration, education, civil engineering, and taxation.

The Showa era mergers were promoted for basically the same reason. At this time, the government required each municipality to have approximately 8,000 residents. The result was a decrease in the number of municipalities to roughly 3,500 during the period from 1945 to 1961 (Ibid: 160-161). This set of mergers also resulted in new responsibilities being assigned to the municipalities, including many services involving welfare and sanitation.

The mergers in the Heisei era began in 1999 (Ibid: 163). The central government encouraged these mergers through several means. For example, the government relaxed the population requirement allowing towns to become cities from 50,000 to 30,000. In addition, the central government did not require the newly-merged municipalities to immediately reduce their number of elected officials. It also did not call for a rapid reduction of tax allocation grants, which are subsidies to local governments, to these municipalities. (Ibid)

According to Kengo Soga, merger in the Heisei era has three characteristics that make it different from previous mergers (Ibid: 164-165). First, it did not give new authority or responsibilities to the municipalities; it only increased their size. Second, the central government did not set goals regarding the number of residents. Third, the number of municipalities that merged differed among regions. In some prefectures, the number of municipalities decreased by over 70 percent, while in other prefectures the number decreased by only 15 to 35 percent, and half of the municipalities have a population below 10,000. Thus, the current number of municipalities differs among prefectures and the size of municipalities has expanded to a greater extent after the Heisei mergers (Ibid).

3.   Proposals of the MIC Study Group and Criticism

The Study Group on Strategies for Local Government in 2040, an MIC-led study group, has proposed a number of measures to tackle the expected municipal dysfunction.

3.1.Proposals of the MIC study group

About the Study Group on Strategies for Local Government in 2040

The Study Group on Strategies for Local Government in 2040 was established in 2017 (Imai 2018a: 1-2). The purpose of the group was first to clarify the problems of administration in 2040. Based on this, the group was to identify prospects for the future and examine prescriptions to deal with the expected problems (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2018a; 2018b). This paper focuses on their prescriptions for administrative reform in local governments.

Proposal of the MIC study group

There are basically three options available to deal with municipal dysfunction in future: municipal mergers, horizontal integrations based on large municipalities, and vertical integrations by prefectures.

The report by the MIC study group does not consider municipal mergers as a viable option. It points out that the municipal mergers in the Heisei era were not effectively implemented in some prefectures. For instance, according to the report, Nara prefecture and Tokushima prefecture have many small municipalities that have various administrative work (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2018a: 39).

Horizontal integration basically involves a regional partnership led by a major urban city. The report describes the group's prescriptions for horizontal integration as "administration based on region (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2018b: 35-36)." "Region" in the report means a wide area composed of one major crossroad and many small municipalities; it is an area generally smaller than a prefecture. According to the report, it will be impossible for all municipalities to have a full set of administrative functions under the conditions of an ageing society. As an alternative to administration based on each municipality, the report proposes administration based on regional units (Ibid). It calls for horizontal integration based on major crossroads. For the appropriate allocation of burdens, it requires municipalities to retain urban function as regions. It also requires the national government to prepare laws that promote policy making on a regional level (Ibid: 36).

Vertical integration means that prefectures perform complementarily in matters of municipal administration. The targets of vertical integration are basically municipalities that have no nearby major crossroad. The report recognizes that there were seven municipalities with populations of less than 500 before the Heisei mergers and that the number will increase to 28 by 2040 (Ibid). According to the report, prefectures should devote more resources to municipalities that cannot rely on horizontal integration with an urban city. In addition, since small municipalities lack human resources, especially experts in the area of infrastructure, it is necessary to flexibly manage these resources beyond the prefectural and municipal organizations (Ibid).

3.2.Criticism

There have been a number of criticisms of these proposals, mainly focused on the fact that the policy goals of the proposals seem to be set solely from the perspective of the national government. Critics argue that the proposals are problematic from the viewpoint of the municipalities, as they ignore the autonomy of citizens in local government reform. According to these critics, the proposals violate the autonomy of the citizens and the principles of subsidiarity.

Starting point of the proposal

The first criticism concerns the starting point of the report. Akira Imai points out that the report's starting argument is based on the recognition that there is "a crisis of domestic administration in our country (Imai 2018a: 8)." The report asserts that the crisis is the result of a depopulation that will place serious constraints on the labor supply, and proceeds to focus on prescriptions involving national economic policies such as labor, employment, and industrial policy.

Imai's point is that the report does not seem to care about problems in the local communities or local governments; rather, it demands that local governments contribute to the economic policies mentioned above (Ibid). He suspects that the report is urging municipalities to follow its proposals by noting the predicted population in each municipality (Ibid: 9). However, according to Imai, the report confuses depopulation at the national level with depopulation at the municipal level. These two problems have different characteristics, and the prescriptions to address them are different as well (Ibid).

Yoshihiro Katayama has said that the essence of local autonomy is that local communities deal with their own tasks with their own will and responsibility (Katayama 2018: 15). Of course, there are tasks that municipalities are incapable of dealing with and where supplementary efforts by prefectures or the central government are necessary. Katayama's point is that the starting point for local autonomy is in the will and responsibility of the lower tiers (Ibid: 16). In contrast, claims Katayama, the MIC report seems to specify

the role of municipal governments and set the framework for the municipalities to follow (Ibid). In his view, there seems to be an underlying assumption that the national governments should be the central actor to manage local autonomy.

Need for a national standard of municipal administration

Others criticize the study group report by arguing that the capacity of municipal government should not be standardized (Imai 2018b). These critics assert that the report makes an assumption that all municipal governments need to have a full set of administrative functions and facilities (Ibid: 21). According to Imai, this assumption comes from the idea that municipal governments are actors that supply national minimum public services in each local community (Ibid: 22).

Imai gives an alternative view of the role of municipal governments. He states that municipalities are not necessarily the sole providers of national minimum services (Ibid). It is possible, he argues, that other actors provide public services in local communities. Indeed, he says, a combination of actors is the key to providing these services and that the appropriate combination is likely to be different in the various municipalities as situations and citizens' demands vary by community. It is desirable that each municipal government is capable of reflecting the demand of its citizens for public services.

The argument is that it is inappropriate to set a standard to provide national minimum services. According to this argument, such a standardization will divide "capable municipalities" and "incapable municipalities" and disturb independent and autonomous municipal management (Ibid).

Management of "Regions"

The third point is a question of how and who will manage "regional administration." As noted above, Japanese local government is composed of prefectures and municipalities. In the report, "regions" are made up of one or a few major city governments and many smaller

municipalities. They are smaller than prefectures and larger than municipalities. The current Japanese local government system does not provide for how and what ruling institutions will work for regional management.

It is a concern that the regional management called for here might be undemocratic. Large city governments could be expected to mainly reflect their values and interests in regional management, and the voices of smaller member municipalities might be ignored (Niikawa 2018: 27-28). If this occurs, the smaller municipalities would no longer be able to ensure local autonomy (Ibid).

Tatsuro Niikawa questions how institutions involved in municipal reforms can remove the doubt concerning undemocratic regional management (Ibid). He proposes that democratic governance for regional management requires parliamentary democracy and the political participation of various socio-economic actors. He also recommends that the next study group discusses how to ensure democratic processes at the regional level.

Multiple Policy Goals

In summary, this chapter introduces proposals by the MIC study group and some criticisms. This paper does not intend to support either side of argument. Rather, it indicates that several possible policies and two policy goals are conflicting about Japanese municipal reforms, and it is desirable to coordinate these conflicting factors.

4. Policy Integration

This thesis analyzes the above policy circumstances through the framework of the "policy integration" approach (Howlett and Rayner 2007; 2013). Three characteristics make this approach suitable for analyzing strategies and policy goals in arrangement of governance in shrinking societies. First, policy integration is useful for analyzing several proposals involving organizational policy instruments, including reforms of local governments and governance (Howlett 2011). Second, it promotes problem-solving in complex governance

situations, such as coordination of multi-level governance (Howlett, Vince, and del Rio 2017). Third, it presents three criteria by which to clearly evaluate complicated policy situations: goals, policies, and policy dimensions (Howlett and del Rio 2015).

4.1.Policy Instruments

This section classifies the proposal by the MIC study group based on the framework of Michael Howlett's policy design theory.

Policy design based on instruments

Howlett's policy design theory is a guideline for deliberative efforts to achieve policy goals. It recommends that policy actors connect their policy goals with policy instruments. that end, it presents a list of policy instruments with detailed characteristics. This list is based on *Tools of Government* by Christopher Hood (Howlett 2011; cf. Hood 1986). Hood's taxonomy is drawn from the resources of government: information, authority, treasure, and organization. Howlett's theory also includes these four types of policy instruments.

Hood's taxonomy is also characterized by a focus on tools with direct influence on society. Howlett's theory calls these "substantive policy instruments," and adds "procedural policy instruments" to Hood's taxonomy. Procedural instruments are consensus-building tools to help formulate and implement substantive policy instruments (Howlett 2000 ; 2011). They are also classified based on the resources of government: information, authority, treasure, and organization. Therefore, Howlett's policy design theory includes eight types of policy instruments.

Table 1.   Taxonomy of Policy Instruments（Howlett 2011: 53）

	Information	Authority	Treasure	Organization
Substantive	Public Information Campaigns	Independent regulatory agencies	Subsidies and grants	Public enterprise
Procedural	Official secret acts	Administrative advisory committees	Interest-group funding	Government reorganizations

Organizational instrument

This section details the report by the MIC study group according to Howlett's taxonomy. The report proposes two types of integration for small municipalities: horizontal integration between municipalities, and vertical integration between municipalities and prefectures. Horizontal integration is reported to be desirable for municipalities near a major crossroads. If horizontal integration is challenging, the report calls for prefectures to promote integrations with small municipalities.

Both proposals can be classified as "substantive organizational instruments," instruments that arrange governmental institutions for effective administration or cost reduction. The MIC study group assumes that a certain extent of budgetary capacity is necessary for independent municipal management. Based on this assumption, it recommends that municipalities lacking this capacity be integrated with capable municipalities or prefectures. These proposals thus fit the characteristics of substantive organizational instruments.

To successfully formulate substantive instruments, governments and policy designers often use procedural policy instruments. For example, the Japanese government promoted past municipal mergers by allowing special municipal bonds. This may be regarded as a financial procedural or an authoritative instrument. Procedural instruments are also employed in the current reforms. First, establishing a study group to promote a reform is classified as a

procedural organizational instrument. Second, spreading information to persuade target populations is a procedural information-based instrument. Both work toward smooth consensus-building to formulate and implement substantive policy tools.

4.2.Policy Integration

This section examines the direction in which governments and policy designers should utilize policy design theory. It focuses on the policy integration approach, which suggests proper instrumental arrangement under complex governance situations.

Policy portfolio approach

Governments usually implement multiple policy instruments at the same time. However, these policy instruments are often contradictory. In some cases, different departments of government pursue different goals. In others, policy goals and contexts change and diverge with the passing of time.

Policy integration helps to identify such contradictions, and offers preventative measures against them. Howlett and Rayner present three criteria for checking policy mixes: coherence, consistency, and congruence (Howlett and Rayner 2007; 2013). Coherence concerns whether policy goals are harmonized or conflicting. Consistency concerns the relationship among policy instruments. Congruence concerns whether multiple organizations are involved and whether they are aligned. When goals, instruments, and policy-related agencies are similarly oriented, policy mixes are regarded as "integrated."

Policy integration is a useful approach for effective and efficient implementation of policy. Howlett and del Rio provide a detailed list with three parameters to check policy mixes (Howlett and del Rio 2015). The list asks policy designers whether policy goals, policies, and policy agencies are multiple. If so, it also asks whether each policy factor is contradictory. By referring to the questions, policy experts can clarify the characteristics of

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policy mixes and identify likely points of conflict or inefficiency. Howlett and del Rio recommend that policy designers arrange policy factors so that they reinforce each other.

Table 2.   Detailed List to Evaluate Policy Portofolio（Howlett and del Rio 2015: 1237）

Types								
Dimension	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Multilevel	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-policy	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Multi-goal	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
	Simple Single-level Instrument Mix	Complex Single-level Instrument Mix	Simple Single-level Policy mix	Complex Single-level Policy mix	Simple Multilevel Instrument Mix	Complex Multilevel Instrument Mix	Simple Multilevel Policy mix	Complex Multilevel policy mix

This strategy is applicable to a situation involving multiple government actors. According to Howlett, Vince, and del Rio, two conditions are required for the likely success of policy mixes under multi-level governance (Howlett, Vince, and del Rio 2017). The first condition is development of an institutional framework in the policy design phase. The second is use of procedural policy instruments. This affects various policy actors and aids in policy integration. In summary, the policy integration approach offers methods for effective and efficient policy design by utilizing various policy instruments, including procedural instruments.

Application to the report by the MIC study group

This section analyzes the proposal of the MIC study group based on policy integration. First, the proposal and its criticism show that multiple government agencies are involved in administrative reforms. The report suggests horizontal integration between municipalities or vertical integration between municipalities and prefectures; in both cases, the national government should play a role in promoting the administrative integration.

Governmental agencies can be classified into four types. First is the national government, which promotes integrations and standardizes administrative capacity at the levels of large independent cities, regions surrounding large cities, or prefectures supporting small municipalities. Second is large cities, which maintain their administrative capacity, and are sometimes asked to integrate with surrounding municipalities. Third is prefectures, which are similar to large city governments in that they do not face pressure from the national government, and may be asked to support small municipalities through vertical integration.

The fourth and final type is small municipalities, the main targets of the proposal. The report calls for small municipalities to be integrated with major crossroads or prefectures. The MIC study group suggests that small municipalities will be incapable of supporting a full set of administrative functions. Therefore, these municipalities are likely to enjoy less independence and autonomy. For instance, if city planning is conducted on regional level, individual municipalities may not establish facilities like a library independently. Additionally, it remains ambiguous how major crossroads and small municipalities will make decisions after integration.

With respect to multiple policies, the report includes to: horizontal and vertical integrations. The two types are distinguished by differences in the locational characteristics of target municipalities. Generally, the report promotes horizontal integrations between large cities and small municipalities, and vertical integrations for municipalities without a large city government nearby. Therefore, although two policies are included in the proposal, they are complementary rather than conflicting.

Finally, evaluation of multiple goals is difficult. However, the MIC study group report has one goal: that residents in Japan continue to receive a certain level of administrative services in the shrinking society. In this sense, the proposal seems likely to succeed. However, critics argue that the essence of local autonomy is self-determination by local residents and

municipalities. This implies that national standardization of administrative capacity is unimportant, and that the standards of administrative capacity can differ across municipalities. In this context, it is possible to interpret the existence of two contradicting goals, which makes policy success difficult.

The implications of the report by the MIC study group change according to which perspective should be taken by policy design theory and the policy integration approach.

4.3.Implications for Policy Design Theory

Policy integration recommends building consensus when faced with conflicting goals and government agencies with different policy preferences. This paper examines how the policy integration approach integrates different factors into a cohesive whole.

Linder and Peters argue that normative evaluation of policy goals is not the role of policy designers (Linder and Peters 1984). Policy experts must express restraint, concentrating only on matching given policy goals with appropriate policy instruments. The policy goals are given in the view of policy expertise in this case. Accordingly, the policy goals policy designers pursue should be determined by which government is their client.

Other theorists propose that policy designers should act as facilitators indifferent to value judgment (Bobrow and Dryzek 1987). If this theory treats national and municipal governments as ordinary policy actors, policy designers may need to coordinate different interests and preferences among governments.

Regardless of what stance policy design theories should support, it is important to clarify their perspective or normative position. In a shrinking society, policy integration, which identifies conflicts of interest and preferences among national and municipal governments, is useful for considering the assumptions underlying policy design activities.

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