

# **The Role of Japanese Local Governments in Implementing International Activities: from the Meiji Restoration to the Post-War Period<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the role of Japanese local governments in implementing international activities, from the Meiji Restoration to the post-war period, by focusing on the factors that have driven Japanese local governments to play a proactive role in implementing international activities and the linkage with the Meiji Restoration period (1868-1912). The theory of “Paradiplomacy” by Alexander Kuznetsov (2015) is applied in the analysis of this research. Based on documentary research and field interviews, this study found that during the Meiji period, the centralized system of government firmly restricted the role of Japanese local authorities in the domestic and international arenas. However in the post-war period, local governments in Japan have been playing a critical role in building multi-layered and friendly international relations in a wide range of fields, fostering mutual international understanding, developing relationships of trust, and promoting Japan’s “brand”. There are four important factors that drive the increasing role of Japanese local governments in implementing international activities: (1) the nation’s constitution and laws; 2) the supportive policies of the central government; (3) economic and social issues; and (4) historical linkages. The legacy of historical linkages from the Meiji restoration period has become a criterion of some Japanese local governments for establishing relations with foreign countries. This can be found in the case of Kusatsu and Beitigheim-Bissingen in Germany; Fukui and New Brunswick in the United States of America; and Yokohama in Scotland. This article fulfills the study of the role of Japanese local governments in implementing international activities in the modern Japan, mainly focusing on the post-war period.

**Keywords:** local governments, international activities, post-war, Meiji restoration, driving factors, paradiplomacy

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## 1. Introduction

Japanese local governments have played an increasingly important role in foreign affairs, especially in the post-World War II era. According to Purnendra Jain (2005), in the beginning of the post-war era (the 1950s-60s) Japan's international activities were mainly focused on international exchanges to develop sister-city relations. The objectives were to establish friendships and mutual understanding, and to promote international peace through language and culture exchange activities for youth, including symbolic activities such as the exchange of local executive official visits. In the 1970s, the number of sister-city affiliations had increased. International activities within sister-city relations not only focus on youth exchanges and exchange of official visits, but also other activities which were not officially included in the sister-city relations such as international development cooperation and international assistance. In response, some Japanese local governments began establishing international exchange associations in their own prefectures during this period. (Jain, 2015)

The 1980s were coined as "the era of locality" as most of Japanese local governments had become strongly linked with foreign countries. (Jain, 2015) The number of sister-city affiliations had continued to increase and Japanese local authorities strategically implemented international activities. International activities implemented under sister-city relations

are not only the exchange of culture and language, but also other projects which provide more tangible benefits such as urban development, environment, health, problem-solving in local communities, etc. Japanese local governments had increasingly begun to establish international exchange associations in their respective prefectures. Japanese local authorities claimed this initiative as their role in fulfilling the cultural diplomacy of the state. Moreover, Japanese local governments participated in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) hosted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Through this cooperation, supportive organizations were established to assist Japanese local governments in the implementation of international activities such as the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), international exchange associations, and information centers. Importantly, CLAIR was established in 1988 in order to provide information, consultation, and services to assist local Japanese governments to facilitate international activities. (CLAIR, n.d.)

From the late 1990s until the present, the number of sister-city affiliations has increased steadily and has spread across many regions around the world. According to CLAIR's May 2019 statistics, local governments in Japan have established sister-city relations with cities in 70 countries around the world for a total of 1,749 affiliations. These numbers are divided as follows: 165

affiliations with prefectures, 1,240 affiliations with cities, 40 affiliations with wards, 265 affiliations with towns, and 39 affiliations with villages.

The international activities of some local governments have focused more on issue-based cooperation, especially within the economic dimensions such as trade, investment, and tourism, aiming to gain mutual economic benefits. At the same time, other international networks were established for important multilateral relations, such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in collaboration with the Seoul Metropolitan Government, and the Delhi Metropolitan Government establishment of the Asian Network of 21 Major Cities (ANMC21)<sup>3</sup> in 2001. Some local governments also set up overseas branch offices, including the Tokyo, Fukuoka and Mie prefectures, to pursue benefits, typically economic, abroad. Some local governments have sent their staff to work abroad to gain international experience and new perspectives. Japanese local governments have created international affairs divisions to focus on the implementation of international activities, and international exchange associations in response to internationalization in local communities. Information centers and other types of

organizations to support international activities have also been established in local areas. In addition, local governments have cooperated with the central government, academic institutions, business groups, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and citizens to operate international activities. Most local governments have even published information about their locality's international activities in foreign languages, especially English.

In the post-war period, the role of these international activities have evolved each decade from diplomatic symbolism under sister-city relations (friendship-oriented model) in the early post-war era to various activities (issue-based cooperation) that have represented strategic engagement in the present (Jain, 2005). Japan has become one of the most active countries in the world in paradiplomatic activities.

Why have local governments in Japan increasingly implemented international activities in the post-war period? In order to fully understand this evolution of the role of Japanese local governments, it is necessary to examine the factors that have driven the Japanese local governments to play a greater role in international activities. Moreover, the

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<sup>3</sup> The Asian Network of Major Cities 21 (ANMC21) is an international network of Asian capital and major cities, undertaking joint projects on common tasks regarding crisis management, environmental countermeasures, and industrial development, as well as strengthening the status of the Asian region in the international arena. Member cities include Bangkok, Delhi, Hanoi, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Tomsk, Ulaan Baatar, and Yangon.

Meiji era (明治 Meiji)<sup>4</sup> in Japan's history was a period of many reformations in terms of economy, society, politics, and administration. It was the beginning of modern Japan and was the foundation for many important developments. Another question is whether the establishment of international activities at the local level during the post-war period can be linked to the Meiji restoration period. This research aims to address both questions.

## 2. Objectives

This paper has two objectives:

2.1) To examine the factors that have driven Japanese local governments to play a greater role in the international activities of modern Japan.

2.2) To explore the local level legacy international activities from the Meiji restoration period.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1) Data collection

This research used two main qualitative methods of collecting relevant data: 1) from major sources such as websites, books, academic journals, government official documents, and other related documents; and 2) in-depth interviews with representatives of Japanese Prefectural Government, namely Fukui and Fukuoka, and experts from an academic institution.

### 3.2) Data analysis

To answer the above objectives, this paper employs the conceptual framework of “Paradiplomacy” by Alexander Kuznetsov (2015), which systemizes the existing theoretical and empirical knowledge on paradiplomacy, for analysis of the collected data.

According to Kuznetsov, paradiplomacy means the involvement of local actors in international affairs. This is a growing phenomenon in many countries around the world. To analyze paradiplomacy, it is essential

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<sup>4</sup> The word “Meiji” is translated into English as “Enlightened Rule”. The emperor took the name Meiji as his reigning name. Beginning in 1868, the Emperor's power was restored to the supreme position after the previous power of government fell into the hands of the Shogunate for hundreds years. The great Emperor Mutsuhito had governed this era until his death in 1912. Under the rule of Emperor Mutsuhito and his government, effort was made to modernize the country to the same standard as western countries in an attempt to defend against foreign influence, which led to many reformations. Important operations were acceptance of Western knowledge, strengthening the military, industrial revolution, political institution reform, and infrastructure development. In this era, Japan was able to change its status from an agricultural developing country to a heavy industry country. It had strong armies, rising up as a military empire, with the highest level of economic development in Asia. Educational opportunities were varied and Japanese society improved overall.

to consider the following issues:

### **3.2.1) The Causes of Increased Paradiplomacy**

Kuznetsov explains that the increase of paradiplomacy is due to both external and internal factors. External factors are detailed as follows:

First, globalization has essentially eroded international borders in terms of their economic, social, and cultural dimensions. It also has encouraged local actors to pursue economic opportunities abroad.

Second, Kuznetsov cited Michael Keating who provided a comprehensive analysis of regionalization in three main facets:

- As state policies (top-down policies) that require local governments to participate in the design and implementation of national strategies to increase national and economic status.
- As regional or local policies (bottom-up policies) that require more political, economic, and cultural power.
- As policies of both central and local governments that address various challenges and seek opportunities in the changing world economy.

Third, many countries have transitioned to democracy (democratization). As the implementation of paradiplomacy requires decisions and participation from many sectors, local governments in democratic countries have more opportunities to conduct

international activities than do non-democratic countries.

Fourth, the domestication of foreign policy and internationalization of domestic politics have led to an overlap between domestic policy and foreign policy. This directly impacts the scope of local governments' reach, influencing many to establish an international agenda.

Fifth, the central government is inefficient in its implementation of international affairs. Some local governments actually have more knowledge and experience in this regard because many local problems are related to global problems, such as climate change, environmental conservation, and sustainable development. As the central government has failed to demonstrate political willingness and leadership to solve these problems, paradiplomacy has emerged in response.

Sixth, the asymmetry of constituent units and lack of equal economic growth in each locality has driven local governments to seek opportunities in markets outside the country. Paradiplomacy, then, becomes a supplementary mechanism for the economic development of local governments.

Seventh, the role and political ideology of local leaders and political parties.

Eighth, sharing a common border or geographical proximity can influence local governments to determine their main mission in collaboration with their neighboring countries.

### 3.2.2) The Prominent Motives

First is the economic motive to receive maximum benefits from the world's liberal market atmosphere by interacting with foreign actors.

Second is the incentive to cooperate with foreign actors who have a similar cultural and linguistic identity.

Third, paradiplomacy addresses the political goals of increased authority and autonomy.

Fourth is the desire of local governments to solve cross-border problems that occur regularly, such as environmental issues, transportation, emergency management, and migration. These major problems affect people living in local areas and can cause negative impacts across international borders.

### 3.2.3) The Legal Grounds

To analyze paradiplomacy, it is necessary to examine national constitutions and other legal acts that outline the authority of local governments in the operation of international relations. This includes mechanisms that regulate the interactions between central and local governments and the provisions that allow local governments to create international treaties.

### 3.2.4) The Attitude of the Central Government

The analysis of the central government's attitude towards paradiplomatic action of local governments is important as it can impact the ability of local governments to conduct such international activities.

It can be seen that Alexander Kuznetsov's conceptual framework of "Paradiplomacy" provides factors by which the growth of paradiplomacy in Japanese local governments can be analyzed. The analysis does not only address the causes and motivations of increased paradiplomacy, but also the relevant legal characteristics, including the attitude of the central government towards paradiplomatic activities in the international arena.

## 4. Literature Review

This section examines literature related to the international activities of Japanese local governments.

- Motivations of Japanese Local Governments

Purnendra Jain (2005) argues that the motivation of Japanese local governments in pursuing sister-city relationships is diverse, as is suggested by the broader purpose and geographic reach of these relationships. Economic motivation stems from local governments' limited budget allocations from the central government and their interest in developing economic opportunities for their own localities. Increasing trade opportunities independent of the national government is a primary motivation of paradiplomacy. Jain also mentions other factors that influence the formalizing of local-level linkages into sister-city relationships, such as geographic features, geographic proximity, historical- and

cultural linkages, industry compatibility (e.g. fishing, wine or pearling), and exchange visits for leisure, business, or education.

- Japan-Europe

Clarisse Pham (2014, 2015) assessed the potential for cooperation between Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the European Union in smart city development and business cooperation. Pham argues that opportunities for cooperation between Tokyo and the European Union (EU) are possible in terms of business, joint research, knowledge sharing, and experience. EU companies have the ability to invest in Japan and develop partnerships with Japanese companies to run businesses in smart city development. In addition, cities around the world are developing more smart cities. If Japan and the EU cooperate, it will enhance their international competitiveness.

- Japan-Asia Pacific

Yasuo Takao (2010) examined the sister-city relations between Hyogo Prefecture and the Government of Western Australia. The research findings are that Hyōgo Prefecture had been enthusiastic to establish relations with the Government of Western Australia to share knowledge and experience, get to know each other's cultures, and to build trust and relationships. The geographic distance between the two cities was not a factor in this consideration of a paradiplomatic relationship, and activities from both sides have focused on mutual learning and common problem-solving, namely student exchange, visiting of

executives and staff, and creating epistemic communities.

- Japan-East Asia

Purnendra Jain (2004) analyzed three major types of linkages that Japanese local governments have developed in China: (1) formalized sister relations; (2) trade promotion; (3) technical and economic cooperation. He found that China is an attractive destination for Japanese local governments in many ways. While China's abundance of cheap labor complements Japan's industrial needs, Japan is relatively rich in the economic and technological capacities that Chinese enterprises need. Therefore, when mutual benefits from trade and investment are strong, numerous offices representing Japanese local governments were established in China to support their local businesses, as well as in other countries in Asia. Jain believes that the establishment of overseas offices by Japanese local governments in China is a constructive way to promote their economic interests in China. In addition, Japan's local governments also aim to provide expert assistance to Chinese local governments to address local problems such as environmental pollution caused by industrial development, waste disposal, and urban development. Japan's local governments are proud to help prevent such problems from spreading to Japan's local communities.

Yirang Im and Tomoyuki Furutani (2015) examined tourism cooperation between



Fukuoka City in Japan and Busan City in Korea based on a policy network of local governments and other actors and focusing on the interactions amongst them. They found that in the pre-project phase, both local governments took the central role. In the project planning phase, the importance of the role of private entrepreneurs increased as their expertise was considered necessary to implement the project. In the project implementation phase, all actors executed the project enthusiastically and equally. For the sustainable development of cooperative projects, the administration should create channels in which the private sector is better able to interact with the various actors and can discuss the direction of the project.

- Japan-Southeast Asia

Nirinthorn Mesupnikom (2018) analyzed the friendship between Fukuoka Prefecture of Japan and Bangkok of Thailand. She found that Fukuoka Prefecture has played a proactive role in building relations with Bangkok since 2006. The motivation and goals of Fukuoka Prefecture include: (1) Japan's tension with China at the state level, resulting in the Fukuoka Prefectural Government's desire to build relations with cities in other countries; (2) Bangkok is the capital of Thailand providing many attractive benefits; (3) Both parties see potential mutual benefits. For Fukuoka Prefecture, this relationship with Bangkok is consistent with their local government policy, which aims to

become a cultural exchange hub of Asia, and to encourage people in Fukuoka Prefecture to adapt to globalization and develop a global perspective. Fukuoka Prefectural Government has established a branch office in Bangkok and signed cooperation agreements with other national government agencies in Thailand, such as the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Board of Investment. These roles of Fukuoka Prefecture in Thailand reflect the new trend of international relations at the local level, which is intended not only to promote friendship and mutual understanding, but also interest-oriented relations.

Tonni Agustiono Kurniawan, Jose Puppim de Oliveira, Dickella G.J. Premakumara, and Masaya Nagaishi (2013) examined the cooperation between the City of Kitakyushu in Fukuoka Prefecture and the City of Surabaya in Indonesia, which was established by the signing of a city-to-city cooperation agreement with a focus on community-based approaches for solid waste management in 2005, and later a sister-city agreement for the development of a green city (Green Sister City) in 2012. The research findings indicate that since signing the cooperation, Kitakyushu had disseminated the knowledge and technical methods of community waste management to create Takakura Home Composting (THC). The result of cooperation on THC during the years 2005-2010 was a reduction of the amount of waste by 30 percent, and increase



of green areas in Surabaya. The cooperation resulted in close cooperation between all sectors, including the public, private, public, and NGOs. In addition, Surabaya has received environmental protection awards at both the national and international levels, as well as encouraging changes in other Indonesian cities and national environmental policies.

Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, Peter J. Marcotullio, and Tetsuo Kidokoro (2006) analyzed city-to-city cooperation between the city of Yokohama and the Penang Island City Council by evaluating the cooperation and academic exchange programs conducted during 1986–1995. The results indicate that the cooperation between these two cities had been successful in bringing forth important ideas about city planning, road management, pedestrian construction, waste reduction, and recycling activities. Although the cooperation provides benefits to the Penang Island City Council, local citizens play a relatively small role in this cooperation; therefore, additional work needs to be established in order to make the development more successful.

As explained above, it is apparent that Japan has received academic attention regarding their practice of international relations at the local level, particularly in the post-war period. The literature examines the international activities of Japanese local governments with foreign cities in Europe and Asia. Most analyses include sister-city relations consisting of international cooperation

and exchange, and issue-based cooperation which provides tangible benefits, such as trade, tourism, technology, urban development, etc. Japanese local governments do not only have relations with foreign local cities, but also central agencies in foreign countries as well, such as in the case of Fukuoka prefecture and Thailand. The literature also describes the features of activities, methods of project evaluation, motivation, and goals. The cooperation at this level has potential to complement national diplomacy. However, none of the literature explores the direct linkages with the Meiji restoration. This article serves to fill the gap in the body of knowledge about paradiplomacy, and to provide a study of modern Japan in order to further disseminate information for academics, practitioners in related organizations, and the general public.

## 5. Research Findings

International activities of Japanese local governments during the Meiji restoration period were less common due to the centralization of power by the central government. According to Hiroshi Ikawa (2008), under the Meiji Constitution, the central government established systems of local administration by forming a system of municipalities (cities, towns and villages) in 1888, and a system of prefectures in 1890. These local governments were not only local governmental bodies, but also local

administrative organs of the central government. Prefectural governors were appointed by the central government and served as central government officials. The head of municipalities implemented the duties of local government as an agent or organ of the central government. In this kind of environment, extensive supervision and control of prefectures and municipalities was enforced by the Minister of the Interior or by prefectural governors; therefore, the system of local autonomy under the Meiji Constitution can be evaluated as a centralized system. Almost all municipal spending was devoted to three items: education, public works, and general administration. The modern Japanese system for local government, both from an administrative and fiscal perspective, was established by a combination of the 1888 municipal administrative laws, the 1890 county and prefectural administrative laws, and the 1889 imperial constitution. (M. Nishikawa, M. Hayashi, & E. Weese, 2018, p.101-2). This implies that Japanese local governments during the Meiji period did not have authority to organize international activities.

In contrast, after the end of World War II, the international activities of Japanese local governments increased dramatically in the post-war period. The factors that contributed to the rise of the role of Japanese local governments in the international arena are as follows:

### **5.1) The Nation's Constitution and Laws**

In terms of the nation's constitution and laws, there are many regulations regarding decentralization and the international activities of Japanese local governments. Important laws detailed as follows:

#### **5.1.1) The 1947 Constitution**

The 1947 Constitution contains a chapter on local governments (Chapter 8), which sets out the roles and responsibilities of local governments, as does the 1947 Local Autonomy Law (LAL). The principles of this law involve respect for local governments, their status in relation to the central government, and provides considerable levels of autonomy in the fields of administration, budget, and local legislation. The development of this law was driven by the need for increased autonomy and, more importantly, by the rapid urbanization that followed the country's post-war reconstruction. Although the 1947 Constitution does not mention the international functions of local governments in pursuing their own interests overseas, it established a new status for Japan's local governments by substantially increasing their authority. (CLAIR, n.d.; Jain, 2005; Stevens, n.d.).

#### **5.1.2) The 1988 Local Employees Overseas Dispatch Law**

In 1988, the Local Employees Overseas Dispatch Law was enacted to allow Japanese local government officers to work

outside the country in order to provide technical assistance, work with foreign organizations, collect data, promote local trade and tourism, and deliver natural disaster assistance, among other roles. In addition, this law allows local governments to set up branch offices and other useful institutions abroad in order to create an international network of local governments. It also affirms the relationship between local governments and other related parties, which is beneficial to the expansion of local governments' networks (Jain, 2005, p. 53-4). Executives and officers that work in the overseas offices have the ability to make decisions for their local governments independently of the national government. Although this law allows local governments to set up offices abroad, in practice not all Japanese prefectures are able to open branch offices abroad as they must have sufficient reasons to do so. For example, Aichi Prefecture has large companies around the world, such as Toyota, and therefore there are good reasons for Aichi to open branch offices abroad. (Susumu Yonezawa, interview, March 8, 2016).

### **5.1.3) The Laws for the Promotion of Decentralization**

There have been various decentralization laws in Japan, including "the Decentralization Promotion Law" of 1995, the "Comprehensive Decentralization Law" in 1998, and the 1999 Omnibus Decentralization Act that has given some administra-

tive independence to local governments in managing local affairs. (Jain, 2005, p.54) It also changed the relationship between the central government and local governments from a hierarchy-based relationship to an equally cooperative partnership. In addition, the transfer of authority from the central government to local governments, and from prefectures to municipalities, was declared. There was the deregulation for establishing organizations to increase the efficiency of local government administration. (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, n.d.), and local governments were given the authority and responsibility for all "regional affairs" which includes almost everything that affects people's daily lives, such as public health, social welfare, infrastructure building, etc. Even though local governments now have more autonomy to carry out international activities, they still do not have the authority to sign international treaties (Kiyotaka Yokomichi, interview, March 15, 2016).

The Omnibus Decentralization Act gave more authority and autonomy to local governments to manage local affairs, lay the foundation of public sector participation, and allow other sectors, such as the think-tank institutions, NGOs, etc. to participate in the process of establishing local policies. Although this law has not yet addressed the role of local governments in foreign countries, the emergence of Japanese local governments' paradiplomacy in the post-war period and its

further development can be strongly linked to these processes of decentralization. (Jain, 2005, p.54)

#### 5.1.4) Other Specific Laws

Promoting the role of Japanese local governments in the international arena also appears in specific laws, such as:

The Basic Environmental Law, Section 6, regarding ‘International Cooperation for Global Environmental Conservation’ contains Article 34, which concerns ‘Measures to Promote Activities by Local Governments and Private Organizations’. This law, enacted in Japan in 1993, states that the central government should adopt measures to promote the international environmental cooperation activities of local governments (Ministry of Environment, Japan, n.d). This law was codified after the government of Japan joined the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNECD) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil at which the leaders of the participating countries recognized the importance of local governments and other sectors in contributing to global environmental strategies to protect the environment. (Central Environmental Council, 2005)

The Basic Act for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country was enacted in 2006 following Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s keynote address from 2003 regarding the transformation of Japan to a tourism-oriented country. This Basic Act includes Article 18, No. (2) Promotion of

mutually-beneficial international exchanges, and No. (3) the promotion of international tourism (Japan Tourism Agency [JTA] website, 2016). It states that the national government aims to promote mutual international tourism exchanges and that it shall implement measures that are necessary for the promotion of mutual cooperation with foreign governments, including sister-city relations, and international youth exchange (Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan, 2012). As a result of this Act, Japanese local governments have played a more proactive role in promoting international tourism and include it as a part of their local government strategies. In 2002, there were approximately 5.2 million foreign visitors to Japan; however, after the development of this Act, the number of foreign tourists increased rapidly. In 2018, approximately 31 million foreign tourists visited Japan (JTB Tourism Research and Consulting, 2019).

The role of Japanese local governments in international affairs increased not only because of amendments to the constitution or new laws, but the central government agencies also supported and allowed the implementation of paradiplomacy as a tool Japan’s national policies.

#### 5.2) Supportive Policies of the Central Government

Supportive government policies have made it more effective for local governments to conduct international activities. There are

at least four central government agencies that have played important roles in the support of local governments' international activities:

**5.2.1) The Ministry of Home Affairs or MOHA (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications or MIC)**

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), which changed its name to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) in 2001, is responsible for managing the basic system of the country, both economically and socially. Since the 1980s, it has implemented many supportive policies regarding the international activities of Japanese local governments. It adjusted the organizational structure, created implementation plans, and provided guidance, and recommendations for local governments to follow. It also urged Japanese local governments to establish local international exchange associations to promote grass-roots international activities. As a result, according to a survey conducted by CLAIR (2001), as of June 2001, 972 such associations had been set up by prefectures, designated cities, as well as small- and medium-sized local authorities to host international cultural events (Menju Toshihiro, 2003, p.89).

In the 1990s, the MOHA announced a policy under the slogan "From Exchange to Cooperation", which transformed international activities from exchanges, focusing on friendship and mutual understanding, to collaborative activities that would

provide concrete benefits. The MOHA also enacted control measures to determine the most practical model of local governments' international activities. However, diplomacy of Japanese local governments is regulated by the constitution and special laws, not by central-local interactions or top-down policies. There was also a massive allocation of funds to Japanese local governments for international activities through the Law Allocation Tax (LAT), which grants funding to local governments to use according to their own priorities, independently from the central government's control. (Jain, 2005, p.104)

The MIC established the Local Administration Bureau (LAB) to promote the decentralization of local authority. This bureau delineates the roles between the central government and local governments and promotes the initiative of transferring authority from the central government to local governments. These organizations have made it more convenient for local governments to implement international activities. In addition, the LAB also supports the empowerment of communities. For example, the "Regional Power Creation Group" was established to support local government agencies in addressing important local challenges, such as economic recovery, creating vibrant regions, initiating exchange and cooperation between countries at the local level, and promoting localities gain global recognition (MIC, n.d.).

### 5.2.2) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

The MOFA recognizes the importance of internationalization in local communities, which has been increasing since the 1980s, and the role of local governments, NGOs, and other sectors in the global arena to strengthen the MOFA's work in enhancing the Japanese brand in international communities through the building of trust and relationships. Therefore, the MOFA has implemented various measures to support the capacity-building of local actors as international actors:

- In 1971, the MOFA set up a grant program to support prefectural governments to invite technical trainees from developing countries, especially Asian countries and Africa, to spend several months in Japan for training. (Toshihiro, 2003, p.92).

- In 1995, the MOFA announced the new role of local governments as “international contributors” in many roles, including international disaster relief, peace-keeping, technical cooperation programs, the sciences, and commercial development (Jain, 2005).

- In 2006, the MOFA began to realize the significance of a multicultural society in Japan. In response, they arranged a conference to provide guidance on how to take care of foreigners in local communities and released reports that promoted coexistence in a world of multiculturalism.

Nowadays, the MOFA, under the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, has released the “All-Japan” approach to reinforcing Japan's comprehensive diplomatic capacity. To this end, the MOFA engages in various collaborative activities with local governments and communities based on the following priorities:

- Conveying Japan's local attractions to the world,
- Supporting the international initiatives of local governments and communities, especially the promotion of people-to-people exchanges through the JET project,
- Providing extensive information about international exchange,
- Allowing staff from local governments to move to work in the MOFA.

In addition, under the “All-Japan” approach, the MOFA also created various mechanisms to promote the implementation of international activities at the local level; for example:

- Establishing “the Task Force on Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy in Japan”, which also works to strengthen the partnership between Japan's local governments, communities, and foreign countries, further contributing to regional vitalization in Japan.
- Establishing “the Counseling Center for Internationalization” as a unit to answer questions about international project

implementation for local governments and other related sectors.

- Establishing “the Counseling Caravan for Internationalization” to send the MOFA officers to visit local communities to answer their questions about international activities.

- The appointment of the Advisory Committee for Local Governments’ International Cooperation and The Study Committee on Local Government and the Ideal Orientation for International Cooperation together with JICA, researchers, experts and local governments.

(MOFA, n.d.).

### **5.2.3) Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**

JICA was established in 1974 with the mission to provide social and economic development assistance for developing countries through its offices both in Japan and abroad. As one of JICA’s objectives is to encourage local governments, NGOs, and other sectors to participate in the operations of Official Development Assistance (ODA), they initiated policies to support the implementation of cooperation programs at the local level. Moreover, JICA created mechanisms within other organizations as follows:

- In 1999, JICA set up the Domestic Project Department as a unit to support the involvement of Japanese local governments, NGOs, and other network actors

in organizing local and international cooperation activities (Jain, 2005, p.107)

- JICA announced the Fifteen Specific Measures for ODA Reform, which include supporting local agencies, as well as local people, to participate in JICA’s ODA operations.

- JICA increased the number of staff in the position of “Coordinators for International Cooperation” in the fiscal year 2002 to help coordinate between JICA and Japanese local governments, as well as to support the international cooperation programs of local governments and other local sectors. The international cooperation and assistance programs that JICA is working on with local governments focus on assistance in the areas of social development and environmental protection, including forest destruction, pollution control, and intellectual support (JICA Website). These policies do not only provide guidance and support, but they also serve as control measures while remaining consistent with the recognition of local governments’ role in addressing global challenges.

### **5.2.4) Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR)**

CLAIR is a Japanese government-affiliated incorporated foundation established in 1988 to provide information, advice, and facilitation for international activities organized by Japanese local governments (CLAIR documents). In addition,



CLAIR fosters people-to-people exchange through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET<sup>5</sup>) and other international initiatives, supports multiculturalism, and carries out research on local administration. CLAIR has a head office in Tokyo and seven overseas offices<sup>6</sup>, while the staff is mostly made up of Japanese employees from local governments throughout Japan. To implement the JET Program, CLAIR has worked in collaboration with other governmental agencies, namely the MIC, MOFA, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). Between 1987 and 2015, the JET program attracted 4,786 foreigners from 43 countries (CLAIR, n.d.) and is considered one of the largest international exchange programs in the world. Not only does CLAIR support local governments in carrying out international activities, but it also initiates and implements projects by itself, such as the Specialist Dispatch Project, the Local Government Officials Training Program, and various seminars.

From the above listed roles and supportive policies of these governmental agencies, it is apparent that they

see international activities provided by local governments as having a positive impact on the development of national policies and the interest of the nation as a whole. Through these mechanisms of international cooperation, local governments can help to further the central government's mission.

### 5.3) Economic and Social Factors

Japan experienced substantial economic growth during the 1950s-60s, providing local governments with sufficient funding to allocate for international activities (Hitoshi Yoshida, 1993). Having been granted a degree of autonomy by the 1947 Constitution, local government officials initiated activities to increase awareness and understanding of Japan and its culture internationally through local-level communication and exchanges (Fukui Prefecture, interview, March 8, 2016). During this time Japanese people were fond of the modern culture and society of the United States, which at the time was the most advanced industrialized nation in comparison to other developed countries. This influenced Japanese local governments to seek and maintain close ties with the U.S. through sister city relationships, so much so that over 70

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<sup>5</sup> The Japan Exchange and Teaching or JET Program was initiated in 1986 as a result of Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's policy to use cultural exchanges to conduct international relations. He saw the possibility of supporting the localities as an important mechanism in linking relations with other countries. This project recruits foreigners to work in many positions, namely Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs). These foreigners will work in local Japanese communities to promote internationalization and enhance international understanding.

<sup>6</sup> CLAIR has 7 overseas offices, namely Beijing, London, New York, Paris, Seoul, Singapore, and Sydney.

percent of all sister city affiliations in the 1960s had counterparts in the U.S. (Toshihiro, 2003, p.91). In 1964 Japan hosted the Olympic Games, which was a major factor in motivating the Japanese people to become interested in foreign affairs and eager to join international exchange activities. As a result, Japanese local governments increasingly recognized the necessity to establish relationships with foreign cities. In the late 1960s, the massive expansion of the industrial sector affected the local areas, resulting in water and air pollution among other problems. As many cities internationally were facing similar challenges, the local Japanese governments sought collaboration with foreign countries to discover potential solutions.

In the 1970s local governments increasingly began to contact foreign countries in order to exchange information regarding shared challenges because the central government of Japan could not solve the local problems due to lack of knowledge and information about local needs and interests (Jain, 2005). In this regard, Kitakyushu has played a proactive role in building its international reputation as both eco-friendly and a

reliable provider of environmental technologies (Yokomichi, Interview, March 15, 2016).

The Plaza Accord<sup>7</sup>, signed in 1985, resulted in the rapid appreciation of the Yen currency. Following this accord, Japanese companies relocated production bases to other countries, especially China and Southeast Asian countries, seeking lower wage costs. Local governments in Japan saw the necessity to set up branch offices or support desks to facilitate their local companies abroad so that they could then bring the prosperity back to local communities (Fukuoka Prefecture, interview, November 28, 2016). At the same time, the appreciation of the Yen was an incentive for foreign workers to work in Japan. The number of foreign residents in Japan has increased rapidly and local governments have had to find their own ways of handling the flow of newcomers. For example, in Fukui Prefecture there were many foreigner residents, which resulted in many transnational marriages between Japanese farmers and Chinese or Filipino women. Since this time, the Fukui Prefectural Government has had focused its policy on creating an international society within the local community, establish-

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<sup>7</sup> The 1985 Plaza Accord was the agreement between the five major countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, and Japan, to intervene in the value of the Yen currency of Japan and the Deutsche Mark of West Germany to get more appreciation against the U.S. dollar. The objective was to reduce the trade surplus of Japan and West Germany and to decrease the trade deficits of the U.S. This agreement affected the entire economy of Japan, especially the export sector, because prices of Japanese exports in the form of U.S. dollars were higher, along with higher wages in Japan.

ing the Fukui International Exchange Association in 1989 with the aim to organize activities to encourage interaction with foreigners, to assist foreigners to live more conveniently in the prefecture, and to provide Japanese language classes. Moreover, Fukui Prefecture also has a policy to encourage foreign students to study in Fukui (Fukui Prefecture, interview, March 8, 2016). The increasing numbers of foreign tourists in Japan and the increasing numbers of Japanese tourists going abroad are a strong motivational factor for local governments to establish sister-city relations with cities in foreign countries. These represent local government executives' vision to promote internationalization and multiculturalism in local communities.

The 1980s was also a period in which local governments arranged a lot of international conferences. As they had already established CLAIR in 1988 and formed international exchange associations in local communities with the support of the MOHA, some local governments viewed their sister-city linkage as a starting point for commercial- and other grass roots activities. Local governments' international involvement has been primarily to provide assistance to others outside Japan through the utilization of their own resources, and increasingly through their involvement in national ODA projects that local governments now help to deliver (Jain, 2005).

Since the latter half of the 1990s, Japan has encountered a severe economic

stagnation with the average GDP growth remaining around one percent over two decades (called the Two Lost Decades), as well as social issues, especially the declining population and the increasing number of elderly people. Consequently, in response to the social issues, the central government had to allocate a large amount of the national budget on healthcare and welfare for elderly people and reduced the local governments' budget allocation from 120 billion Yen in 1995 to around 100 billion Yen in 2001 (Jain, 2005, p.54).

Another problem was that most of the international economic cooperation projects implemented by the central government often benefitted large business groups more than small, local companies that were disproportionately affected by increased imports. Additionally, wealth amongst local communities is unequally distributed, particularly between Pacific Rim industrial zones and rural areas, such as the coastal provinces. The central government does not allocate a budget to support rural areas and has been unable to solve these economic and social problems even today, further resulting in negative effects that directly impact local societies (David Arase, 1999). Moreover, Japanese local governments have played a more substantial role in the international arena, challenging the central government's authority, and supporting local governments' determination to gain greater autonomy (Jain, 2015).

External factors also played an important role in local governments' push to go abroad. One such external factor was the varying international social contexts such as the end of the Cold War, which resulted in the utilization of market systems as a global mechanism for the allocation of economic resources; trade liberalization, which resulted in a borderless economy; and advances in technology, communication, and transportation, contributing to globalization. Advances in technology not only help people to travel and communicate more easily, they also increase the possibilities for small businesses and local governments to directly interact with other countries. In addition, Japanese local governments have found that these new challenges are having profound effects on local communities (Arase, 1997; Toshihiro, 2003).

Globalization, especially in its economic manifestation, is a leading factor in the rise of international activities arranged by local Japanese governments. The increasing of the role of the global market and foreign investments, the intensification of the interdependence between countries, and the pressure of economic and social issues brought both important challenges and great opportunities for Japan. Globalization and global competitiveness are the primary accelerators of paradiplomacy in Japanese local governments as Japan's prosperity primarily depends on revenue from tourism, investment, industrial development, and technology.

Local governments in Japan viewed foreign countries as opportunities for new export markets, sources of labor, and production sites. Furthermore, there has been decreasing support from local residents regarding international exchanges as symbolic activities. Rather, travelers are important to Fukui prefecture as ambassadors because they will visit and tell others about it later (Fukui Prefecture, interview, November 28, 2016).

Economic incentives have been the most important motivational factor for Japanese local governments to go abroad since the late 1990s. Small and medium-sized businesses are very important to the Japanese local governments because they create jobs, which further facilitate the ability of people to pay taxes. Therefore, local governments have the goal of developing small and medium-sized businesses that are able to expand into foreign countries, including Thailand (Yokomichi, Interview, March 15, 2016). If there is no business there is no tax revenue, and without tax revenue local governments cannot meet their residents' needs and expectations.

All of these factors have pushed local governments to engage in paradiplomacy by focusing on issue-based cooperation as it can provide more tangible benefits. For example, Mie Prefecture's international activities are based on various motivations: (1) the determination to reach the level of global recognition in order to gain more profit from interaction with foreign countries; (2) the wide-reaching

promotion of its various potentials in order to expand business opportunities and foreign investment; and (3) the desire to attract foreign investment. Cooperation based on motivations like these tend to be win-win situations (The Japan Times, 2014).

For economic-oriented tasks, many local governments actively established formal cooperation by signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with various agencies, both national and local organizations, and permanent overseas offices. These MoUs were focused on finding new markets to sell local products, creating incentives to attract foreign investment, promoting tourism, and creating or participating in international networks.

In order avoid chronic economic downturn, the current Japanese government, led by the Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, has announced the Japan Revitalization Strategy, called Abenomics. This plan aims to stimulate the economy and increase its wealth by using various financial and fiscal measures, as well as restructuring the economy for the private sector. Restructuring of the economy for the private sector consists of four main objectives: promoting investment for the private sector, creating new markets, using human resources efficiently, and integrating Japan with the world economy (Government of Japan, n.d.). These central government policies are consistent with the international activities implemented by local governments. Furthermore, as the current Japanese government

has paid attention to local development and local people, it encourages local governments to expand their projects to foreign countries.

Other important events that have occurred in today's global society are internationalization and decentralization. Decentralization of authority to local governments has been taking place in many countries around the world, demonstrating widespread recognition of the important role that local governments can play in problem solving, particularly for topics on the global agenda such as global warming, pollution, and toxicity. These contexts reduce the role of the state and increase the importance of locality. Japanese local governments are also aware of the importance of creating formal structure of cooperation with other countries without relying on the central government for decision-making, information, or resources. Due to the central government's inefficiency, local governments depend on their own local knowledge and expertise.

In addition, many local governments are aware of the importance of adaptation in a changing environment and see the need to adapt to be consistent with internationalization. Therefore, they have encouraged people to participate in language and culture exchange activities with foreigners in order to learn about cultural diversity and have also responded to requests from overseas cities to engage in cooperative problem solving (CLAIR, Tokyo, interview, March 14, 2016).

Japanese local governments also carry out international projects in other dimensions, not only economic. These international cooperation and assistance programs focus on social issues, such as the environment, health, and agriculture. Such activities have been both bilateral and multilateral, some in collaboration with JICA, and some as part of sister city relations. Certainly, these international activities can be analyzed as projects working to expand soft power of Japan.

The conceptual framework of “paradiplomacy” by Kuznetsov is an appropriate theory to utilize in the endeavor to explore the rise of local Japanese governments’ international activities.

#### 5.4) The Historical Linkage

Although the international activities of Japanese local governments emerged more substantially after World War II, their roots can be traced back to the reforms during the Meiji period. This section provides three case studies of relationships that are considered a legacy of the Meiji restoration era.

##### 5.4.1) Kusatsu, and Beitingheim-Bissingen, Germany

The city of Kusatsu in Japan and the city of Beitingheim-Bissingen in Germany established sister-city relations in 1961. The background of the relationship between the two cities began with a German physician, Dr. Erwin von Bälz, who was born in Bietigheim-Bissingen. In 1876, he was invited by the government of Japan

to teach at the Medical College of Tokyo Imperial University (Currently, the Faculty of Medicine, Tokyo University). In addition to teaching at this college, he brought many benefits to the development of medical science in Japan. Due to his influence in Japan, he was known as the “Father of modern Japanese medicine,” but was also an art collector and judo aficionado, credited with introducing the sport to Germany.

During this time, scientific research on Japanese hot springs (Onsen) was flourishing. Dr. Bälz participated in this research with a focus on Kusatsu City, where one of the most famous hot springs resorts and spas in Japan is located. In 1878, Dr. Bälz visited Kusatsu for the first time, and after that he decided to conduct his research there, praising the medical benefits of the hot springs in Kusatsu City in his diary. He found that the mountain air, as well as the mineral waters, were beneficial to a person’s health. After his death in 1913, his son published his diary as a book (published in English as *Awakening Japan: The Diary of a German Doctor*), leading to the release of his research results on the benefits of the hot springs in Kusatsu City. The results were also published in German academic journals, prompting Kusatsu hot springs’ widespread popularity.

Kusatsu’s residents praise Dr. Bälz as a benefactor of the city even today. Kusatsu and Beitingheim-Bissingen used this historical linkage to form a sister-city

relationship in order to foster friendship and mutual understanding. Moreover, the role of Dr. Bllz in Japan was also the beginning of the cooperation and exchange in medical science between Japan and Germany, both at the city-to-city level and between academic institutes, at a later time (Baelz, 1974; British Chamber of Commerce in Japan, 2018; Kast, 2004; Beyer, 2017; Saaler, 2012).

#### **5.4.2) Fukui and New Brunswick, the United States of America**

Kusakabe Tarō, a young samurai from Echizen (now Fukui Prefecture), was the first Japanese person to attend an American university during the Meiji Reformation. He attended Rutgers College in the city of New Brunswick, New Jersey from 1867 until 1870 to study mathematics and science. However, he died of tuberculosis just a few weeks before his graduation and was buried in Willow Grove Cemetery in New Brunswick, New Jersey. After Taro died, the number of Japanese students who have studied in New Brunswick has continuously increased.

William Griffis, tutor and friend of Tarō, who later became a professor at Rutgers, was invited by Matsudaira Shungaku, Lord of the Echizen-Fukui Domain, in 1870 to teach and develop modern education for schools in Fukui. Although Griffis spent only ten months living in Fukui, he was able to achieve many goals. For example, he established a modern scientific laboratory and encouraged many students to take part

in the development of Japan. Griffis was considered a leading American expert on Japan at the time, publishing the book “Mikado’s Empire” in 1876. This represents an important historical linkage between Fukui and New Brunswick, Griffis’s birthplace. Since 1982, Fukui and New Brunswick have been sister cities, offering the city-to-city exchange of education and culture, executive officers, and other related sectors (Bradshaw, 2015 & 2017; Lamiell, 2008; Sister Cities International, 2017; Watson, 2013; Zimmerli Art Museum, n.d.).

#### **5.4.3) Yokohama and Scotland**

The Scottish government and the city of Yokohama signed a joint declaration on collaboration in July, 2018. This agreement is designed to strengthen the ties between Scotland and Yokohama, which were forged in the early Meiji Restoration period when Richard Henry Brunton, a Scottish engineer, was hired by the Japanese government. He went to Japan in 1868 and lived in Yokohama for eight years, building the first iron bridge in the country (in Yokohama); planned its sewage treatment systems; built roads, lighthouses, gas lights and telegraph systems; and drew the first detailed maps of Yokohama. He also founded the first engineering school in Japan. One hundred and fifty years later, many of the lighthouses that he built are still being used, thus proving his capabilities. In addition, the other objectives of this agreement were to exchange knowledge and



expertise regarding education, culture, tourism, the marine and subsea industries, and sports under the principle of “growing together” (British Chamber of Commerce in Japan, 2018; Maloney, 2017).

These three cases are evidence that the founding of relationships between Japan and international localities further represent a relationship that is linked to past, particularly the Meiji restoration era. These affiliations were formed in different decades, but they used historical linkages as a basis for choosing sister-cities.

## 6. Conclusion

During the Meiji period, the highly centralized system of government tightly restricted the role of Japanese local authorities in the domestic and international arenas. The active involvement of Japanese local governments in international activities started in the early years of the post-war period (1950s). There are many factors that drove the substantial increase in local governments' international cooperation.

First, one of the most crucial factors is the nation's constitution and other legal acts. They play a vital role because they not only confirm the role of local governments and secure their competence in implementing international activities, but also serve as the primary mechanisms of intergovernmental interactions between the central and local levels on all matters related to international activities. Japan's local governments can act

independently in the international arena, but only in accordance with the constitutional, provided that such actions do not contradict national policies.

Second, the supportive policies of governmental agencies are also one of the crucial factors. They demonstrate that the central government certainly views the paradiplomacy of Japanese local governments as a positive contribution to the development of the whole nation. These policies supplement Japan's foreign policies making them even more efficient, and promote Japan's image internationally. This provides more benefits than risks to the Japanese nation. Moreover, these supportive policies reflect a strong link between the central government and local governments in foreign affairs. Nevertheless, these paradiplomatic actions do not only consist of the independent initiatives of Japanese local governments, but also include many programs that were launched, funded, and supervised by the central government through the MOFA, MIC, and JICA. The MOHA (formerly the MIC) facilitated the formation of supportive organizations, particularly the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) and international exchange associations, to further handle international activities. All of these examples testify to the idea that both local and national governments' policies seek to address various challenges and search for opportunities in the changing world.

Third, economic and social issues are another predominant driving factor of Japanese local governments to go abroad. Trends of globalization and internationalization have driven local governments to seek international opportunities, as well as to play an increasing role in international cooperative problem-solving on a global scale. Responding to the pressure of globalization over the last 20 years, Japanese local governments have actively tried to diversify their regional economies by developing value-added activities in areas such as tourism, investment, and technology. Since the late 1990s, paradiplomacy has been primarily shaped by economic motivation, serving as an additional source of economic opportunities for local communities, further benefiting the whole nation.

These driving factors can be considered as strong variables that have contributed to the changes in Japanese local governments' international outreach. The role of local governments in arranging such activities has been constantly evolving, as this article has explored. Not only by increasing the numbers of sister-city affiliations, but also the engagement in international cooperation for common problem-solving and development assistance. Japanese local governments have proactively initiated a broad range of exchanges in many fields, such as youth development, environmental protection, culture, and tourism; and have worked in partnership with many sectors, both public

and private. Japanese local governments not only deal with local governments abroad, but also with the central governments in various countries; for example, Fukuoka and Mie prefectures' relationships with Thailand's governmental organizations. Such international activities are not implemented as an option, but have been arranged to address the necessity of collecting local taxes and becoming self-sufficient without having to rely on the budget allocated by the central government. Japan's local governments; therefore, have used paradiplomacy as a method to achieve economic, cultural, and political benefits.

Finally, some local governments in Japan used the historical linkage with the Meiji period as a criterion for choosing a foreign city with which to establish a formal relationship. Hiring foreigners to help modernize the country during the Meiji Restoration period facilitated international relations at the local level. This can be seen in the sister-city relations of Fukui and New Brunswick, U.S.A., and Kusatsu and Beitigheim-Bissingen, Germany. These linkages were not only a contributing factor in city-to-city relations, but also in local-to-central government relations, such as the case of Yokohama and Scotland.

This study proves that the explanatory framework of paradiplomacy proposed by Alexander Kuznetsov (2015) is an efficient methodological instrument for analyzing of the rising role of Japanese local governments in international affairs by using qualitative

methodology paradigms, as it offers potential variables that determine the growth of such activities. Kuznetsov (2015) describes four sets of motives: economic, political, linguistic, and cultural. However, this research finds that in spite of comprehensive guidance, there is still a gap in the knowledge. Additionally, the paradiplomacy framework proposed by Kuznetsov does not consider historical linkages or internationalization as potential factors of the increased paradiplomatic actions of Japanese local governments.

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