

Regional Revitalisation as Culture, Identity and Citizenship

Promise, Peril and Shared Sacrifice for Shared Investment

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Volume 15, Issue 3 (Discussion paper 4 in 2015). First published in [ejcjs](#) on 13 December 2015.

Abstract

This paper considers regional (re)vitalisation in Japan, viewed in a framework of culture, identity and citizenship. After outlining the background for regional revitalisation policy as of 2015 and presenting relevant views on the framework, the content considers regional revitalisation as related specifically to aspects of culture, identity and citizenship. With regard to the intersection of regional revitalisation and culture and identity, a number of current projects as reported in the media are presented, with the implications that emerge portraying the promise and peril of various projects. Likewise, looking at the intersection of regional revitalisation and citizenship, the content yields questions regarding the notion of shared sacrifice for shared investment as an aspect of contemporary cultural-identity based citizenship. The paper concludes by noting that against such a reality of the promise and perils of regional revitalisation, expectations by rural areas of a shared sacrifice for shared investment by urban Japan for the sake of such revitalisation is natural, if not obligatory. Stated succinctly, the notion of cultural-identity citizenship obligates all Japanese to a shared sacrifice for shared investment in support of contemporary regional revitalisation.

Keywords: Heisei merger, *gappei*, municipal revitalisation.

Introduction

This paper examines *chihō sōsei*, regional vitalisation (herein using the term “regional revitalisation”), a timely and contemporary issue for present-day Japan. The paper will consider regional revitalisation using an evaluative framework reflecting culture, identity and citizenship.¹ As will be outlined herein, considerations of regional revitalisation in Japan highlight a range of tensions regarding culture, identity and citizenship in contemporary society.

Regional Revitalisation and Contemporary Japan

Although an issue facing Japan at present, the reality of regional revitalisation anywhere is that the problematic economic and geographic tensions that create the need for revitalisation emerge in most cases over the long-term, and, as such, their resolution can only be viewed as long-term. Such “long-term” background for the case in Japan was highlighted, albeit indirectly, by Ishiba Shigeru, Minister of the Regional Revitalisation Cabinet, in an April 2015 *Japan News* newspaper article where he noted a number of disturbing fiscal and corporate realities (Abe, 2015). Most important in Ishiba’s mind was Japan’s national debt, which stood at the time at one quadrillion yen, as well as the fact that Japanese corporations with overseas manufacturing facilities showed few signs of returning these to Japan. These “realities” reflect outcomes of long-term policies on the part of government and long-term planning on

the part of the private sector and both will take time to address. Japan's budget deficit and annual debt ballooned with the 2008-09 global recession, which was then followed by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, to where public debt now equals twice annual gross domestic product. Japan's manufacturing sector continues a long-term trend of relocating production overseas, with such offshoring setting a new record in the fourth quarter of 2014 and now approaching one-third of total production, all while movements in the yen rate exert little effect on reversing the trend (Nohara, 2015). Indeed, the logic of locating production facilities overseas appears to have less to do with global finance and exchange rates than with demographics and proximity to customers: a shrinking Japanese population forces businesses to seek overseas markets, forcing overseas production investment to record highs.

The history of regional revitalisation, whether referred to as *chiiki kasseika* or *chihō sōsei*, reflects what Sasaki (2015) asserted is a well-used trick trotted out in one form or another by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) every decade. The LDP has been relying on regional revitalisation (under different names) as a mainstay of domestic policy since the mid-1950s, largely as a means of maintaining a hold on the rural voting blocks. The thematic terminology of such locally directed policy has included industrial decentralisation, nodal development, capital function relocation, corporate headquarters decentralisation, hometown revitalisation and regional core city and wide community area development. Sasaki continues, pointing to recent examples in the Takeshita Cabinet's "100 million yen grants for hometown revitalisation" in 1988, the Obuchi Cabinet's "regional promotion coupons" in 1999 and the Aso Cabinet's "hometown tax system" in 2008, and the Abe Cabinet's present "strategy for regional revitalisation" and "grants for livelihood support."

Politics aside, Ito and Yugami (2005) opened a detailed summary of regional employment promotion policy in Japan by noting that overall public investment toward regional industrial development and job creation amounted to 1,000 trillion yen, with 400 trillion being transferred just in the 1990s. They admit that until the 1980s, standardised regional development measures through public investment, largely focusing on social and physical infrastructure, played an important role in creating regional employment opportunity and stability. This changed in the 1990s, as "central government to regional government investment policy" came to yield notably less job creation, citing a 2003 Labour Force Survey showing a decline in the number employed in domestic manufacturing by as many as 3.5 million, from the 15.7 million peak in 1992 to 12.2 million in 2002. They explain that while manufacturing jobs did move to regional areas in the 1980s, due partly to the increased access such infrastructural projects provided, the 1990s brought other factors, largely related to global market access, that forced industry to move factories overseas.

As for the current wave of regional revitalisation specifically, the Abe Cabinet declared in fall 2014 that a long term vision for revitalising rural economies together with measures to address rural population decline was, once again, necessary (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014c). An important component of the government's announced plan was to reduce excessive population concentration in the Tokyo metropolitan area through creation of 300,000 jobs in rural areas. This was to be accomplished partly through preferential tax schemes to encourage firms to relocate some facilities to rural areas together with further development of agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries and tourism services in rural areas. Additional details of the long-term plan emerged in a January 2015 *Japan News* article which outlined that the government would call for a ¥722.5 billion allocation in the fiscal 2015 budget. Through a comprehensive policy strategy based on this fiscal outlay, the government aims to create stable jobs in provincial areas, with ¥175 billion allocated to help people find jobs, ¥64 billion allocated to encourage relocation to rural areas and ¥110 billion to encourage young people to marry and start families (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2015a). Local response to these announcements was clear: according to the *Tōōnippō* newspaper of Aomori prefecture, as of the end of 2014, 36 of 40 Aomori prefectural municipalities had "high expectations" for *chihō sōsei*, with 35 having developed a local "comprehensive strategy" to that end (*Tōōnippō*, 2014).

Culture, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Society

The focus in this paper on the intersection of regional revitalisation and culture, identity and citizenship is timely and appropriate. As Delanty (2002) pointed out, a notable trend in recent political discourse (and research) has been the increasing confluence of culture, identity and citizenship, and, as above, regional revitalisation policy has long been fraught with political, as well as social, implications. Separately, the three terms are used to refer to what are complex, yet dynamic concepts, difficult to define in the abstract as well as isolate within the trends and trajectories

of contemporary society. It is, however, in their combinations that the interpretations and implications relevant to the current consideration of regional revitalisation emerge. Whereas citizenship historically focused on the civic, political and social rights of citizens defined generally by birth or descent, with citizenship acts seen as envisioning and articulating the public good, serving in public office and holding those in office to high standards, and sacrificing for the polity of which one is a member (Madiraju and Brown, 2014), citizens today are largely passive participants of citizenship, convinced that conspicuous consumption, payment of (minimal) taxes and occasional voting are the only citizenship acts required of them. On the other hand, cultural citizenship, as defined by Stevenson's (2001) cultural sociology, stresses the centrality of culture and identity for an understanding of citizenship, where the challenge of conception and practice is to bring identity as a cultural element into the consciousness and act of citizenship. Based on this view, Delanty's (2002) definition of the cultural as cultural resources, cultural identities and cultural presuppositions apply both appropriately and combinatively to the present project. In this view, the intersection of culture and identity imply particular forms of citizenship-engaged agency that are managed both at an individual and a geographically-variable policy level through common experiences, life processes and expectations, and social discourses together with acts of empowerment that result in a triadic conception of "cultural-identity citizenship." "The power to name, create meaning, and construct biographies and narratives by gaining control over the flow of information, goods and cultural processes is an important dimension of citizenship as an active process. In this regard what needs to be stressed is the dimension of citizenship as a constructivist process" (Delanty, 2002, 64). In Japan's contemporary modern trajectory, such emergent cultural identity, and the citizenship acts it encourages, manifest increasingly at a local level—in the preservation of regional nomenclature, the creation of local meanings, and the prioritisation of resident narratives—all of which challenge and in some cases subvert the monolithic and urban (if not Tokyo-centred) construction of modern Japanese cultural identity and citizenship. Given the current global and neo-liberal economic landscape, the question is whether the urban practice of Japanese cultural identity and citizenship acts with its rural counterpart in mind.

Regional Revitalisation as Culture and Identity: Promise or Peril?

In addition to the Great Heisei Municipal Mergers (see Rausch 2014, 2012a), the recent history of Japanese rural policy reforms have focused largely on encouraging an increase in agricultural scale so as to improve international competitiveness in the agricultural sector (OECD, 2009), responding to the loss of far-sea fisheries and the "divide and self-regulate" over-exploitation of near-coastal areas by local cooperatives in the fisheries sector (Katsukawa, 2010) and transitioning to an environmentally-oriented "new forestry" approach in the forestry sector (Iwamoto, 2003). However, as espoused by Rausch (2010), such policy reforms do little to capitalise on an additional resource of rural areas: their local culture and local identity. Rausch contends that by recognising the full range of possibilities in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of local cultural commodities, areas can realise greater economic stability through local cultural economies. Against this background of recent policy reform real and ideal, this section examines emergent regional revitalisation policy, identifying elements of culture and identity therein, or lack thereof.

In a newspaper column series (#1~4) presented by *The Japan News* of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* titled "Regionalism Revitalises Japan," the first of two projects outlined the potential for shifting formally under-used forest resources in Okayama prefecture to a new "cross-laminated timber material" for use in construction, constituting re-establishment of historically-utilised local resources and expertise through application of new technology. The other project outlined in the column focused on developing high technology satellite offices in Tokushima prefecture. The idea of such satellite office centres is that information technology-based digital work undertaken by Tokyo-based companies can thus be outsourced to such rural sites and done by technology professionals who want to live in a rural setting, constituting a new dimension in the present rural Labour economy. Other projects introduced in the four columns included activities related to tourism (Hokkaido) and saké brewing (Nagano), as well as enterprises connected with historical geographies of fabric and fashion (Miyagi), agriculture (Fukushima) and commerce (Kobe), along with contemporary education (Oita). While, on the one hand, the range and dimensions of such projects not only reflects an impressive combination, if not integration of old and new, fixed and mobile, local and in-site as well as export-based, the various projects also integrate elements of a particular local cultural identity into regional revitalisation through reviving and energising local traditional consciousness into contemporary economic ventures on the other. However, in a seeming contradiction to the spirit, if not the details, of the central government's interest and support in such undertakings, the column also reported that, "common to all the diverse projects is a reluctance

to accept government money and a bootstrapping determination to place projects on a self-financing basis” (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, n.d.).

Looking at another regional case, but one presented with greater detail and reflecting a fuller range of background and implications inherent in revitalisation strategies being undertaken in rural areas, *The Japan News* published a three part series on regional revitalisation in Aomori prefecture. Focusing on agriculture and fisheries, the three cases presented pointed to the stark contrast of “promise” and “peril” inherent in focusing exclusively on primary industries in revitalisation efforts, even when these are inter-woven into the cultural-identity landscape of the area. The first of the three columns pointed out that some Aomori apple farmers were “struggling for survival with a *Tsugaru Peach*” (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014d). The Tsugaru district of Aomori has long been the top producer of apples in Japan and apples are a dominant and powerful identity brand for Aomori. However, with the gradual impact of climate change taking effect, the feasibility of producing high quality apples was becoming questionable in some locations; hence the gradual transition to peaches—a process that will be years to complete, with eventual competitive success uncertain. The second column referred to the Sea of Japan coastal town of Fukaura “making a name for itself through tuna,” as local fisheries had turned from traditional catches of the area to taking migrating tuna on their northward run up the coastline (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014e). The fine print of the column, however, noted that the (somewhat smaller) tuna taken by Fukaura fisheries had in the past been destined to be taken later in the season by the more northward Oma village, located on northern coast of the Shimokita peninsula and, like the Tsugaru district and apples, famous nationwide for its giant tuna. While the intended objective of these two columns was to highlight the “promise” of local efforts toward revitalisation, through a message of opportunity and flexibility, a starker message of “peril” can also be discerned: centre-piece agricultural commodities are viable only as long as specific (in this case, climate) conditions allow, on the one hand, as in the forced switch for Tsugaru farmers from apples to peaches, and can be snatched away by a nearby competitor on the other, even one from your own prefecture and even in the case where doing so degrades the eventual product, as in the case of Fukaura fisheries versus Oma.

The third column of the three pointed toward the “promise” of what is termed the “sixth sector,” businesses in which primary industries combine with secondary sector (processing) industries and third sector (service and retail) activities, in order to realise the fullest economic gain from a local product for the local economy (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014f). Saitō (2010) focused on the management side of such “sixth sector” industries, stating that “this type of management style allows agricultural entities to take initiative and capitalise on their core competence in order to create new regional industries so as to bring about both greater employment opportunities for local residents and increased incomes to agricultural regions” (90). The *Yomiuri* column, focusing on a sixth-sector approach to fisheries processing on the west coast of the prefecture, noted that Aomori has seen rapid growth in sixth-sector industrialisation initiatives, largely on the basis of central government and prefectural support under a 2011 law whereby such startups can receive interest-free financing for capital investments (this as opposed to the bootstrapping determination to place projects on a self-financing basis with a reluctance to accept government money as highlighted in the “Regionalism Revitalises Japan” columns above). However, despite the success of such sixth-sector industries, upon further examination, a “peril” can be discerned here as well. According to a USDA Foreign Agricultural Service report, trends point less to the locally-owned and operated farms, fisheries and processors using the start-up subsidies and establishing sixth-sector industries than to national or even international profit-driven agricultural corporations and limited liability and stock-based companies capitalising on such programs, with participation by such actors rising more than 70 percent from 2008 to 2013 (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2014).

Such investment-oriented economy of scale realities aside, sixth sector industries do allow for inclusion of local cultural elements through the establishment of “local brands” for local areas. An ongoing reading of any local newspaper in Japan will reveal the level of “local product branding,” the reporting of which constitutes what Rausch (2012b) dubbed local “revitalisation journalism,” and which is often accompanied by the creation of a mascot, or *yurukyara*. Highly indicative of such local efforts to “brand” local culture, Tan (2014) catalogued the number and growth of *yurukyara* mascots over just one year when she discovered that 863 *yurukyara* in 2012 had grown to 1242 by 2013. Naturally, Tokyo claims the most *yurukyara*, with 68, followed by Osaka with 64 and Chiba with 53. Telling for rural revitalisation, however, is the case for Aomori, whose various municipalities, associations and industries have produced 22 mascot characters for local goods and tourism promotion. A fall 2014 *Japan News* article details

the development, and expectations, for one such *yurukyara*. Dubbed “Ichihime,” after the wife of a local prefectural warlord from the Sengoku period, this local *moe-kyara*, or “moe-character,” is expected to help the fortunes of Inakadate village, the home of Tambo Art, which uses rice paddies as a canvas by planting various types of different colored rice to create giant art works, by attracting tourists to the area year-round (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014b). The character was developed by a Tokyo-based company operating a molding factory in the village, and, hopefully, will bring Ichihime fans to the local places that will be linked to the character, as well as generating sales of local goods which will be adorned with her image. Also telling regarding the reality of *yurukyara* at the local level, one of the strategies in the project was to differentiate Ichihime from the many other *yurukyara* of the area, and thus the *moe-kyara* concept—cute, young female characters that can generate a strong fan base—was born. Unfortunately, Tan also concluded that the effectiveness of mascots is questionable, as the power of the *yurukyara* (and presumably *moe-kyara*) as a factor in tourist destinations is weak at best.

Regional Revitalisation and Citizenship: A Shared Investment?

While Delanty (2002), as above, outlined a cultural-identity based notion of citizenship, where citizenship was viewed as a constructivist process of creating meaning and establishing narratives, a more grounded dimension of citizenship that often goes unexplored is consideration of the economics of “shared sacrifice for shared investment” as a principle of citizenship. Under this rubric, citizenship implies a sharing of some sacrifice, most notably through the burden of redistributive taxation, in order to create broad multi-dimensional investments that benefit all. Of course, on a national scale, taxation must reflect fiscal realities, where any budget promises to regional revitalisation must be considered relative to revenue and expenditures, and where transfers of money from one macro-economic sector or geographic area to another must be justified under “shared sacrifice for shared investment.”

Thus, “shared citizenship” must ultimately be viewed in terms of the Japanese national budget itself. The 2015 budget, slated to hit a record high of 97 trillion yen, will have to account for 31.5 trillion yen for social security expenditures on an expected rise in revenues to a 24-year high of 54.5 trillion yen, all while cutting bond issuance to a six-year low of 37 trillion yen. The revenue base is expected to emerge from income taxes (17%), corporate taxes (11%) and consumption taxes (18%) on the one hand, bolstered by government bonds (38%) on the other. Servicing the national debt will account for 24 percent of the budget, with an additional 32 percent eaten up by the social security promises referred to above and 16 percent given over to the local allocation tax grants that will, in theory, provide for the local tax incentives offered to businesses to stimulate relocation. Education, national defense and public works round out the top budget items at 5 to 6 percent each.

An example of such “shared sacrifice for shared investment citizenship” at a corporate level is the push for business relocation to rural areas. As detailed above, such measures have been attempted in the past; still a December 2014 *Japan News* article outlined how the central government was proposing corporate tax incentives for companies that relocate head offices or other key facilities from Tokyo and other major urban areas to provincial regions (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014c). The scheme aims to provide momentum for the creation of industrial clusters suited to local conditions in specific regions throughout Japan, with the idea that as vital and prosperous businesses relocate to local areas, other social infrastructure will follow. The December article detailed that to qualify for an incentive, a company will have to apply for programs devised by prefectural and municipal governments, with central government tax revenue allocations to the local government partially offsetting any associated reductions in the local tax revenues.

By summer of 2015, revisions and new conditions to the incentives policy had been introduced. As reported in a July *Japan News* article, a budget of between 150 and 200 billion yen will be allocated to support the incentives offered by local municipalities, but with the stipulation that the central government will examine the actual performance of the local measures considering effectiveness and additional support as deemed necessary (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2015b). In addition, the range of transfer specifications was expanded beyond corporate facilities to include funding for programs establishing continuing care retirement communities together with initiating laws allowing for the transfer of authority on matters such as land-use conversion from the central government to local authorities. In addition, focus has returned to the prospect of relocating governmental functions to outlying areas. As Sasaki (2015) eloquently outlined regarding such initiatives, “(Y)ou can wave the banner of regional revitalisation all you like, but

such policies are unlikely to create an environment that revitalises local industry, produces jobs, and retains young people when all the central, higher-order functions of society—politics, administration, economics, information, education, culture—remain concentrated in Tokyo.” A late-summer *Tōōnippō* newspaper article reported on prefectural responses to such a proposal, with 42 prefectures (*dō, fu, ken*) across Japan expressing interest and 23 among these indicating desired specific national-level agencies (*Tōōnippō*, 2015a).

As alluded to above, public works have often been viewed as a possible way of stimulating not just the economy overall, but specific sectors of an economy and specific regions of the nation as well. However, given Japan’s past use of central government monies for unnecessary infrastructural projects and the political support in outlying areas such funding has yielded, use of public finances for public works has come under harsh scrutiny, if not criticism. This is unfortunate, considering current policy to expand the high speed ground transportation system, the Shinkansen, nationally to Hokkaido in the north and Kyushu in the south. Even before the release of details regarding regional revitalisation, voices speaking against use of state spending to speed up completion of the Shinkansen lines were clear. A fall 2014 *Japan News* opinion article asserted that despite both central and local governments calling for efforts to complete the expansion as one way of revitalising rural areas, “it is questionable whether the nation as a whole needs to enact risky financial schemes to pay for it” (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2014a).

Such a stark opinion by a major newspaper highlights the problematic essence of “shared sacrifice for shared investment” in today’s social consciousness of citizenship: it is deemed questionable for the nation as a whole to underwrite sound, but also timely infrastructural projects that could contribute to regional revitalisation. Recognition of such divided sentiment is evident elsewhere as well. Mullen (2015), writing about the grim future of Japan’s rural areas in the magazine *Tokyo Weekender*, points out that while entrepreneurs and local activists are crafting innovative local solutions to stimulate lagging rural economies, few see such open-minded and open-ended thinking in the government’s policies. Indeed, many perceive just the opposite; they cite Prime Minister Abe’s decision to have smaller municipalities “pitch” their revitalisation ideas in order to secure national subsidies as a way of forcing the weakest areas of Japan into mutual competition, where one’s success signals another’s failure. As quoted in the article, Tohoku University political science professor Kawamura Kazunori holds that Abe is sending a strong message to regions that from now on, they cannot depend on the central government but rather must compete for virtually everything. Also quoted in the article is University of Tokyo political scientist professor Uchiyama Yu, contending that Abe’s policies are backfiring in rural areas, as many agree neither with his agenda nor his approach, and that forcing areas to forego their local identity to create short-term universally-appealing strategy plans will not be beneficial for Japan long-term. Tsuji Takuya of Hitotsubashi University also opined on the divisions that are emerging in Japan’s social consciousness. He notes that, on an individual level, city dwellers tend to think that depopulation and population aging are matters solely for the governments of such depopulating and aging areas and have little or nothing to do with urban life, whereas those in rural areas believe that such trends constitute national issues and are therefore deserving of intensive investment as national policy (Tsuji, 2015). Tsuji continues into more thorny areas of policy, alluding to the conflicts that arise between officials who work with an idealised image of regulatory oversight as the path toward municipalities addressing such issues versus those who advocate deregulation as a means for the people of an area to promote a dynamic, bottom-up and highly locale-specific form of local development.

One area where a sense of “shared sacrifice for shared investment” regarding regional vitalisation and national citizenship would seem favourably to overlap is the *furusato* hometown tax payment (*furusato nōzei*) system. Available primarily for individuals but also with allowances for businesses, this system allows for local tax breaks for individuals choosing to have a portion of their tax payments forwarded to a specific municipality of their choosing. The system, envisioned by the central government in 2009 as a way of addressing wealth disparities between urban cities and towns and villages in rural areas on the basis of decisions made by individuals themselves, is not without its critics (Soble, 2015). Viewed from the perspective the urban municipality that loses tax revenues, Soble cites Doi Takero, Keio University professor, who points out that the urban areas where the donors live end up bearing the costs of the program as tax write-offs subtract from the cities’ revenue. In fiscal 2014, a total of 14 billion yen was diverted from local municipal tax revenues as donations to other municipalities, and with the government doubling the upper limit on tax deductions to 20 percent of the donor’s municipal tax bill, the figure is expected to balloon in the future. Another questionable aspect of how the program has come to operate is that the rural municipalities receiving the tax donations now compete for donors by offering “thank-you gifts” such as local produce, beef or

seafood. Some municipalities have taken the scheme as far as offering tablet computers or, in the case of Toyota city, home of Toyota Motors, free use of an eco-car. The numbers of donors, the amount of revenue diverted and the value of the gifts can be staggering. The village of Hirado has courted 36,000 donors, more than the number of residents, for a total of 1.46 billion yen, accounting for seven percent of its annual budget. The amount that local governments are spending on such “thank-you gifts” can be problematic for municipalities with small budgets. Some towns are allocating as much as 70 to 80 percent of the value of donations back into the gifts, meaning that rich donors can gain a bonanza of gifts, while the two competing municipalities—one urban and the other rural—bear the fiscal burdens of the program. That said, defenders of the system contend that there are specific pluses to the program: donors can both designate funds for specific purposes in the target municipality—child-care subsidies for local residents and computers for local schools are often popular selections—and select the gifts they find most attractive. In the latter aspect, some town and local business leaders contend that the competition this creates for local products encourages local innovation, strengthens local brand profiles, and brings investment to the area.

Conclusion: Promise versus Peril and a Shared Sacrifice

As outlined in the opening, the focus herein is on regional revitalisation, an important and timely issue for Japan, and how current policy approaches to regional revitalisation reflect attitudes, practices and realities regarding culture, identity and citizenship in contemporary Japan.

It was with an aim toward realisable, meaningful and sustainable revitalisation of regional areas that Rausch (2010) proposed culture, in the form of local cultural commodities, as a primary path of “promise” for regional revitalisation. Given the trend toward generally ubiquitous, globally produced and globally marketable commodities together with universally attractive and easily appreciated tourist sites and experiences, one element of the future economic base for any locale will in part be based on its capability and success in capitalising on its cultural and identity characteristics. If all “products” come to look, feel, and taste the same and all “places” offer generally similar experiences, those that will command a sustainable presence will be those that have maintained and enhanced a specific and unique cultural identity that emerged from and still connects to a set of local cultural and identity resources. The point is that it is only in preserving that cultural identity that local places can sustain themselves.

The primary focus of current regional revitalisation efforts is in the creation of stable jobs in provincial areas through re-development of agricultural, forestry and fisheries industries, ideally through establishment of sixth-sector industries, along with relocation of corporate and government facilities to rural areas and establishment of new business clusters. The specific activities outlined herein that show “promise” focused on re-establishing industries centred on existing local natural resources, developing new regional business centres amenable to specific industries, and re-branding existing local agricultural and fisheries resources under various sixth sector management schemes. In addition, policy plans allowing for tax incentives for corporate relocation to rural areas and designation of municipal tax payments to specific extra-local municipalities were also outlined. A *Tōōnippō* newspaper article reports on the *chihō sōsei* projects designed at the Aomori Prefectural level, revealing how these broad policy directives were operationalised locally (*Tōōnippō*, 2015b). The article indicated a prefectural budget of 1.7 billion yen (from a national budget of 170 billion) along with 241 projects for the 40 municipalities of the prefecture, with the budgets and top three plans indicated for each. Aomori City garnered 212 million yen, followed by Hirosaki City and Hachinohe City at 160 million yen each. Following these “big three,” the municipal budgets ranged from highs of 70 million yen to lows of 20 million yen. “City Promotion/Tourism and Local Product Development” topped the project themes, accounting for approximately 35 percent of those listed. Three groups—“Local Infrastructure and Business Promotion,” together with “Child Welfare and Local Health,” and “Employment and Relocation”—each accounted for approximately 20 percent each, with “Educational and Cultural” projects accounting for the remaining five percent.

Thus, it appears that the focus among municipalities in Aomori Prefecture on “City Promotion/Tourism and Local Product Development” by local municipalities, a local cultural economy based in part on sixth sector industries practices, constitute a notable part of local effort toward revitalisation. The question for any locale, however, is what local attributes provide the basis for its tourism and which local commodities should be developed as local products. In the case of Aomori prefecture’s namesake commodities, the future seems less about activating Tsugaru nuri lacquerware as a potentially national craft commodity and capitalising on Tsugaru shamisen as a potentially global

cultural-music performance than reorganising local agriculture in the face of a changing climate based on the success of other regional agricultural commodities, an approach that, at present, seems to favour peaches over apples. For coastal Aomori, the future seems to be less about establishing an Aomori-wide coastal brand based on sustainable components of its coastal areas and marine habitat than accepting a market-driven race that compromises one nationally known prefectural village, famous for a particular product, for the sake of another. For “sixth-sector industrial” Aomori, a future may emerge that is less a function of a nationally-organised and valourised program of subsidies to ensure that the profits born of local products stay in the area of their origin, than of a deregulated approach whereby economic interests outside the area can “invest” their way into local profits, a reality where, once again, local resources and local Labour are exploited for profits taken elsewhere.

Thus, the reality is that even a strategy of local economies based on local products and tourism faces tensions and risks, the “peril” that accompanies any “promise.” These risks were shown to be “structural,” as when large-scale employment schemes prove ineffective against even larger global consumer trends, “fiscal,” as when local profits are lost to a host area through corporate stock practices or local revenues are lost to municipalities through “tax diversions” and “thank you gifts” as in the *furusato nōzei* system, “market-competitive,” as when one area undercuts another, and “unforeseen,” as when climate change affects the continued potential of local industries generations in the making. The reality of such approaches is ultimately one of winners and losers, whether one local product over another (apples and peaches over lacquerware), one area over another (Fukaura over Oma), or one group of interested parties (non-local stock-holders and corporate entities) over another (local residents as producers and owners).

Such a dualistic paradigm of “winners and losers” seems to fit both urbanites’ view of regional revitalisation, as well as the current policy approach of the ruling government, and therein focuses our attention to the relationship between citizenship and regional revitalisation. Residents of Japan’s urban centres seem to view rural problems as the inevitable and irreversibly specific problems of rurality, something distinct and removed from their city life, and the Abe Cabinet appears to favour “competition” and “effectiveness” as the primary means for determining regional revitalisation subsidy recipients. Thus, regarding this relationship between regional revitalisation and citizenship, the question is less one of defining some ideal citizenship than identifying which “citizen” actors to focus on and then defining the desired, appropriate or necessary actions of each. If one views citizenship within the purview of the individual citizen, then perhaps the best we can hope for are voluntary tax transfers to locations one has an interest in through the *furusato* tax payment scheme along with encouraging urban residents to travel to and spend money in rural areas that are in need of revitalisation. If one views citizenship as an act of the national corporation, then, as related to regional revitalisation, relocating offices and facilities to peripheral areas for the “good of the country” becomes a corporate act of citizenship, but an act in which the true burden is borne by the individual employee and his or her family, problematic based on whether individual and family view such a forced move positively or not. If one turns citizenship back on itself, and asks what constitutes acts of citizenship for a government itself, the question devolves into the ideologies and equations of governance: how does a government best serve all its citizens, without prejudice or favour? One view would hold that government operate from a principle of strict equality for all areas and all residents, through uniformly applied regulation and equative subsidy approaches together with organising for a national “shared sacrifice for shared investment” by all. Another view would see a “deregulation and decentralised” government sorting and sifting through various arguments for or against a particular allocation of attention and funds for a particular place or company, under a “best plan” and “effectiveness” approach. Ito and Yugami (2005) note that the historical reality of such approaches has largely been continued, if not increased divergence. Therefore, as a national policy of decentralisation and deregulation signifies that each regional community must advance its own development projects based on its resources, the end-result, contrary to the intended purpose of reducing regional disparities, may in fact be a widening of regional divergences. It is here where “shared sacrifice for shared investment” is vital, if not just in terms of economic stability and growth, then also in providing for non-revenue producing programs—local infrastructure and business promotion, employment and relocation plans, and local health and childcare programs, accounting for as much as 60 percent of Aomori’s revitalisation projects.

With the confluence of culture, identity and citizenship as a guiding principle in the regional revitalisation of contemporary Japan, it may be that revitalisation is ultimately less a multi-dimensional ideal of local economies prioritising their own culture, identity and cultural commodities so as to create an array of independent local cultural economies, than a complex combinative reality that requires a sense of “cultural-identity citizenship,” one that

recognises all the “places” of that nation, local as well as urban. This is a citizenship that accepts and encourages a constructivist process, in the creation and recognition of multiple cultural meanings and narratives, each meaningful and equal (even those that do not realise revitalisation for a region) on the one hand, and one which implies and agrees to “shared sacrifice for shared investment” in support of the very multi-dimensional and multi-geographic cultural identity that constitutes the complexity of modern Japan on the other. It is the regional towns and villages that support the richness of local cultural identity that defines Japan as a vibrant country of both urban and rural dimensions: city and country, skyscraper and forest, factory and farm, museum and festival. The rural continues to provide for the urban—with its natural resources, its agricultural produce, its youth, its access to clear air, clean water and abundant nature, and with a place for urban Japan to return to, whether in reality or merely through sense of nostalgia. This is the citizenship contribution of rural Japan to the cultural identity of urban Japan. The question Japan faces, like many modern nation-states, is the degree to which the urban population must now ensure the continued survival of the rural—through meaningful, sustainable and non-exploitative support of regional economies. This combined obligation to a shared future constitutes Japan’s contemporary “cultural-identity citizenship.”

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Notes

[1] The content of this paper was presented at the 2015 Japanese Studies Association of Canada Annual Conference, organized under the theme of "Culture, Identity and Citizenship in Japan and Canada."

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