

The Concept of “Self-Government” across Cultures: From the Western World to Japan and China

Donglan HUANG

Department of Chinese Studies, School of Foreign Studies
Aichi Prefectural University
1522-3 Ibaragabasama, Nagakute-shi, Aichi, 480-1198, Japan
huang-dl@for.aichi-pu.ac.jp

Abstract: This paper focuses on the change of the meaning of “self-government” after it was introduced from Western world into East Asia in late 19th and early 20th century. By surveying the process of translation and dissemination of the concept “self-government” as well as the institutionalization of local self-government in Japan and China, the author points out that in Meiji Japan, the meaning of the word “self-government” underwent significant changes from “freedom” which means anti-authoritarianism that was transmitted in the English word “local-government” to sharing the responsibility of national administration as embodied in the German word “Selbstverwaltung” along with the establishment of Prussian modeled local self-government system. In late-Qing China, on the other hand, the term “local-government” was accepted as “self-reliance” as a way to achieve national prosperity and independence by enhancing individuals’ capacity, or “provincial autonomy” as a step to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. Qing government enacted a set of “self-government” laws with reference to Japan’s system, but it turned out to be the same as its traditional counterpart enforced by local elites to offer public services under the profound influence of the Confucian tradition of *xiangguan*(local heads) in ancient China instead of incorporating the local elites into the state administrative system.
Keywords: Self-Government, concept, West World, Meiji Japan, late-Qing China

I. INTRODUCTION

“Self-government”, which literally means “dominating over oneself,” is a term that describes individuals or organizations determining and taking charge of their own affairs as they wish. When associated with physical space, such as villages, towns, and counties, the term obtains another important meaning— “local people are engaged with local affairs”—also known as local autonomy, which, in a common sense, can be defined as “inhabitants of a certain area deciding on public matters related to their benefits by themselves.” Traditional forms of self-government that entails local elites being responsible for local public affairs could be seen in all

countries, but in the process of nation-building, a modern mode of “local self-government” emerges, with integrated and self-regulated local geographic communities and a unified national administrative system being established to ensure an effective and balanced implementation of education, tax, conscription and social welfare policies. Under different historical, social and political conditions, the Western world mainly embraced two types of “local self-government.” One is the Anglo-Saxon-styled “self-government of the people” or “self-government of the civilians” based on parliamentary sovereignty and popular sovereignty; the other one is the Prussian-styled “self-government of organizations,” focusing on the engagement of local public organizations in national administrative affairs.

In the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Western concept of “self-government” was introduced to East Asia along with the spread of European culture. In Japan and China, this concept confronted traditional beliefs and norms dictating these two countries and thus transformed as it was translated, circulated, and institutionalized, not unlike “freedom”, “democracy”, “constitutionalism”, and other notions. Due to the Meiji restoration, a centralized bureaucratic state was founded in Japan with *Haihan-chiken* (abolition of feudal domains and establishment of prefecture). As the central government initiated a range of top-down social reforms, including that of local self-government, in the mid-Meiji period, a local self-government system modeled on the Prussian type was adopted before the opening of the national congress, in which the local notables played the main role. The pivot of this system is to embed local autonomous organizations in a unified central-local structure and enable them to share the administrative affairs of the country. Therefore, much emphasis was placed upon the idea that it is the citizen’s “duty” to be self-governed, which then turned the system into a feasible method of social mobilization during the wartime. In 1947, two years after Japan’s failure in the Second World War, the state enacted the local self-government law, aiming to create a new administrative mode at the local level to “improve the civilians’ wellbeing.” However, since the foundation of the civil society remained weak, local policies were still led by the state rather than local residents (Okita, 1968: 12). As for China, in the early twentieth century, a modern local self-government system was built on the basis of Japan’s experience, which maintained the tradition of self-determination by squires and allowed those local elites to deal with

local “public affairs” that went beyond “the reach of the government.” In the 1910s, a decade of wars and political turbulence, the Movement of Joint-provinces Autonomy was launched by warlords in the south; in the 1920s and the 1930s, a rural autonomy movement swept over some northern areas. After the founding of the Nanjing Nationalist Government, local self-government was enforced at the county level in accordance with Sun Yat-sen’s scheme for the period of political tutelage. Nevertheless, all of them were interrupted by frequent wars. After 1949, local self-government ceased existence in China for a long time under the influence of the Soviet-type social system. Since the 1980s, villagers began to elect Villagers’ Committees as a part of the rural reform carried out by the government.

Examining Japan in the Meiji era and China in the late Qing dynasty, this article analyzes the change of the meaning of “self-government” as a Western concept after it was introduced into East Asia and the underlying reasons for this change mainly from three perspectives. The first perspective lies in the translation and spread of the term “self-government.” That is to say, in modern Japan and China, how were “local government” in English and “Selbstverwaltung” in German translated as “*Jichi*”, “*zizhi*” (self-government) and in what ways did it reach the populace? How did Japan and China’s political and cultural traditions affect the translation of this term? The second perspective is the competition of different versions of “self-government”: on one hand, as opposed to centralized power, “self-government” was usually linked with “freedom” and “democracy”; on the other hand, it suggests that a state should foster the development of local autonomous organizations that could partake in national administration. In this sense, what kind of relations do compete implications of “self-government” embody? What factors contribute to one’s “triumph” over others? The last perspective centers on the institutionalization of “self-government.” In modern Japan and China, when designing a local self-government system, for what reasons did the policy makers choose their Western models, and in return, what impacts did these choices exert on the changing dynamics of this concept?

II. “SELF-GOVERNMENT” IN ENGLAND AND PRUSSIA

In the Western context, “self-government” is highly reputed as a cradle

for the democratic spirit. However, it's worth noting that in the process of nation building in the modern era, the conceptualization and implementation of “self-government” were profoundly influenced by the mutual relationship between the aristocracy and the kingship. That's why two types of self-government are of particular importance in investigating the acceptance of this concept introduced from the West into East Asia: the Anglo-Saxon mode, which bases itself on the authority of local assemblies, and the Prussian mode, which takes state governance as its precondition.

In England, the aristocrats overthrew the king in the Revolution of 1688, and since then, borough councils organized by the squires and lesser county gentlemen had become the main subject of local administrative system. After the introduction of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835 and local government reforms in 1888, the county turned out to be the largest geographic unit of self-government with legal personality. The assemblies at the county level had the right to decide on local affairs, to entrust specific business to various committees and to be sponsored by local tax revenues. In the rural area, parish was the most fundamental self-governing organization. Regular meetings were convened and all residents who paid local tax would gather together to discuss public affairs within the parish (Brand, 1974: 11). ¹Although parishes, boroughs, and counties are all placed under the supervision of the parliament, they are by no means “local organs” subordinate to the central government, but the local authority with the “ruling power,” responsible for the education, economy and social welfare of the indigenous society.

The word “self-government” in English is closely related to “freedom” and “democracy” in Western political theories. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, “freedom” stresses individual rights and dignity free from external intervention, and “self-government,” among other things, provides an institutional guarantee for personal “freedom.” What's more, self-government, in practice, must follow the principle of “democracy,” empowering individuals in a certain community to equally participate in the adoption and enforcement of policies. The Irish diplomat and political scientist Viscount James Bryce (1838-1922) summarized the relationship between “self-government” and “democracy” as follows: the right of indigenous inhabitants to govern themselves derives from the so-called “inborn freedom” as their prerogative, and it is none other than self-government at the level of local communities that gives rise to modern

democracy. He also believed that local self-government would serve as an incubator for public spirit and democratic politics and ensured the latter of an eventual success (Bryce, 1921: 129, 132). The charm of “self-government,” he argued, lies in the fact that through a combination of “self-government” and bottom-up “democracy,” people are endowed with faith, ambition, and favorable conditions to acquire their “freedom.”

By contrast, the continental Europeans hardly associated the concept of “self-government” with “freedom” or “democracy” in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, self-government was closely related to state power, as a direct result of the excessive concentration of power on central government, a phenomenon brought by the victory of absolute monarchy over feudalism in the process of nation-building in continental Europe. As for Prussia, a unified local administrative system was established after the eighteenth century due to a series of top-down reforms. In this country, industrialization started relatively late, so it was the government that controlled the integration of social capital. However, as local affairs became more complicated, the central government of Prussia was forced to erect a local self-government system (a local administrative system in actuality) to share the burden of “entrusted tasks”, such as economic development, compulsory education, public healthcare, and social welfares, with local autonomous organizations. Drawing lessons from Napoleon’s conquest, Prussia accelerated its pace of reforms. The Prime Minister Heinrich F. K. von Stein (1757-1831) enacted the City Charter Law in 1808 with reference to Britain’s examples, which stipulated that the “Bürgers” (citizens) who owned land and had a certain amount of income were qualified to elect their own representatives who would then choose among themselves members of the borough council. Before long, Stein’s successors, including Karl A. F. von Hardenberg (1750-1822) and several others, carried out further reforms to put the local self-government system under tight government control (Goodnow, 1889: 652-654). For example, the borough council became the lowest administrative division in Prussia, whose main function was to undertake government-entrusted tasks and to deal with indigenous public affairs. In this connection, assuming official posts and taking responsibility for the council members were considered as part of civil duties. Compared to their counterparts in the Medieval Era, these borough councils remained to be funded by themselves, but were deprived of such functions as policing and jurisprudence (Yamada, 1991: 224-225).

Based on the idea of state sovereignty that prevailed at this time, the Prussian type of “self-government” was officially formulated as opposed to its British counterpart. Since state sovereignty emphasizes the absolute power possessed by the state, local self-government organizations, in this sense, merely have the right of execution rather than administration. In German, the corresponding word of “self-government” is “Selbstverwaltung,” as people did not literally translate “government” into “Regierung” (governance), but instead chose a neutral word “Verwaltung” (administration). On this account, it’s not hard to deduce that the Anglo-Saxon type of “self-government” was intentionally rejected when the concept entered into Germany. As the Prussian scholar Lorenz von Stein (1815-1890) claimed, self-government required local communities to enforce laws passed by the state instead of involving them in the course of law-making. He also believed that the right of self-government for local communities was granted by the state, and therefore only the government could amend relevant laws. Self-government organizations, from his perspective, emerged from elections and were bound by the administrative limits. Placed under the state control, they were subordinate to the central government, performing political duties assigned by the state and at the same time taking charge of their internal affairs. In other words, “Self-government should assist the state administration rather than go against it.” (Stein, 1887: 63-70)

Another Prussian scholar Rudolf von Gneist (1816-1895) held a slightly different view. Though also hinging on the notion of “state sovereignty,” his argument insisted that local autonomous organizations bridged the gap between state politics and the private matters of individuals or certain groups (e.g. companies) as a “medium” (Zwischenbau) that facilitated communication between the state and the society (Gneist, 1871: 885). As these organizations were claimed to bring “a balanced harmony” (die gleichmäßige Harmonie) (Gneist, 1883: 1-2) to the state and the society, he accordingly enhanced the latter’s status by taking it as an equal of the former. As a consequence, his theory was able to draw great attention from Chinese students who were studying abroad in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century.

III. “SELF-GOVERNMENT” IN JAPAN DURING THE MEIJI ERA

Jichi, the Japanese translation of “self-government,” was created along with other neologisms that transmitted Western Concepts in the early Meiji period. However, this new phrase is by no means a modern invention, but originates from “*wasei-keango*” (Japanese-made Chinese words), a corpus of words coined on the basis of Chinese classics. In modern Japan, the implication of “self-government” experienced a significant change from the Anglo-Saxon-styled liberalism to the Prussian-styled authoritarianism.

Katō Hiroyuki (1836-1916), an eminent political scientist, was the first to render Western monographs on “self-government” into Japanese. In 1876, he translated part of *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* by the German-American jurist Francis Lieber (1798-1872) (Lieber, 1883). The title of this book was transcribed as *Jiyū Jichi (Liberty and Self-Government)*, and the word “civil” was removed from the translation because there used to be no equivalent concept in Japanese as well as in classical Chinese, despite its profound significance in the western context. When *Jiyū Jichi* was published, the Freedom and People’s Right Movement that swept all over Japan was at its height. Owing to the publication of this book, the phrase “*jiyū jichi*” became well-known to the public and was soon adopted by political dissenters as an ideological weapon against the authoritarian regime. In 1884, local peasants of Saitama Prefecture, north of Tokyo, raised a storm of protest at despotism and struggled for reduction of agricultural tax, as was called the Chichibu Incident. Organizers of this protest even created a new reign title “*Jiyū jichi*” to replace the official one, namely “Meiji.” (Ishida, 1998: 16)² Furthermore, with the unfolding of the movement, “*jiyū*” and “*jichi*” became popular names given by parents to their children, For example, in Kouchi Prefecture, it was a widespread practice to name a boy “Jiyūtarō,” “Jiyūkichi,” or “Jichinosuke,” and a girl “Ojiyū” or “Ojichi.” (Ishida, 1998: 16-17)

Under the pressure from the public, in 1875, Emperor Meiji issued an imperial order to draft the constitution. After over ten years’ preparation, the Meiji Constitution came into effect in 1889, and the first national congress was convened one year later, with a local self-government system being developed as part of the reform. More importantly, the commission headed by Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) to study the constitutions of European countries visited Europe from 1882 to 1883, and in the light of their inquiry, they decided to adopt the Prussian-styled constitutional monarchy and model Japan’s local self-government system on its Prussian

counterpart. During their stay in Berlin and Vienna, they were given lessons on European laws and politics by Stein, Gneist, and Gneist's student Albert Mosse (1846-1925), and Stein particularly reminded them that local affairs should not entirely rely on self-governed organizations to be determined, and the ministers of the central government are required to reinforce their supervision over self-government (Shimizu, 1971: 401, 403). Not long after that, Mosse moved to Japan and was appointed as the legal advisor of the Cabinet, responsible for drafting bills as related to local self-government. When he was explaining the theory and practice of local self-government to Japanese officials, he went further to highlight the point that self-government was meant to involve autonomous organizations in the execution of state instructions instead of endowing them with the legislative power, which was exclusive to the government (Mosse, 1988: 83-85). Obviously, Mosse based his interpretation of “self-government” on the German word “Selbstverwaltung” rather than “self-government” or “local self-government” in English. Learning from Itō Hirobumi's experience and Mosse's serial talks, high-ranking officials of the Meiji government reached a consensus that to achieve the goal of “self-government,” the state should help to found local self-government organizations to relieve the burden of local administration and prevent them from posing a threat to the central power. Therefore, in 1888, one year before the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution, the government enacted the *Law for the Organization of Cities* and the *Law for the Organization of Towns and Villages*.

These local self-government laws drafted by Mosse were so similar to their Prussian counterparts that they were often regarded as “a slavish copy” of the latter (Clement, 1892: 304), which mainly embodied three features. Firstly, there were three levels of local autonomous organizations established by the government, namely the prefecture level, the county level and the level of towns and villages. At bottom, the members of assembly were elected by taxpayers whose fortunes met a certain standard, and in turn, mayors, borough council members, and village heads were chosen among them to implement approved policies. Assemblies at higher levels were also formed via election by representatives of local communities. The governors of prefectures and the magistrates of counties, however, were designated by the central government and empowered to regulate the activities of local self-government organizations. Secondly, it was an obligation for all citizens to be

nominated as heads of towns and villages. The elected person would receive nothing more than temporary subsidies, and if he resigned from the post for reasons other than illness, he would be fined or punished. This kind of semi-compulsory “self-government” was influenced by both the Prussian-styled system and Japan’s own pre-modern tradition (Watanabe, 2001: 29-30; Shiomi, 1957: 49; Gotō, 1922: 226, 380).³ Thirdly, cities, towns, and villages functioned as both autonomous units and the lowest organs of the state administrative agency, not only taking responsibility for the “state-assigned tasks,” but also executing the commands issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, prefectures and counties (Ōshima, 1994: 226, 234).⁴ In Prussia, counties were placed at the bottom of the administrative system, and their magistrates were officially designated to undertake the entrusted tasks from above; villages, on the other hand, were self-governed, merely in charge of their own affairs (Goodnow, 1889: 652-654). In comparison, the Japanese local self-government system centered more on fulfilling state-assigned tasks and less on the freedom of the indigenous.

With the establishment of constitutional monarchy in Japan, the Freedom and People's Rights Movement came to an end and the concept of “self-government” was also deprived of the anarchistic connotation as well as its bond with “freedom.” Shortly after the ratification of the self-government laws, as the *Meiji Constitution* (1889) and the *Imperial Rescript on Education* (1890) were both enacted, “self-government” made its debut in primary school classes and became an important issue of children’s moral education, along with other key notions, such as “order”, “diligence”, “obedience,” and “sanitation.” “Self-government,” in this sense, referred to the capability of self-management, drawing much inspiration from the ideal of “self-cultivation” in Confucianism (Fujita, 1988: 1). Nevertheless, it intended to foster “the spirit of autonomy” and was therefore quite different from its Confucian counterpart. In ancient China, self-cultivation served as the starting point of the literati’s personal achievement, which developed into a strong sense of subjectivity as manifested in such moral teachings as “assuming responsibility for the whole world” and “sharing the power” with monarchs (Yu, 2004: 221). By contrast, “self-cultivation” in the primary education of the Meiji Japan aimed at creating loyal and patriotic subjects by juxtaposing “self-government” with “order” and “obedience”. As a consequence, individuals were closely bound with the Empire, and the Confucian scholars’ pursuit of “governing the state and

pacifying the world” was then replaced by “loyalty” and “patriotism” as the modern nation-state demanded.

IV. “SELF-GOVERNMENT” IN LATE-QING CHINA

Ancient China witnessed the emergence of *Zizhi*(self-government) in the sense of “dominating over oneself” long ago. In the Spring and Autumn Period, Guanzi, the Grand Councilor of Qi, once claimed that “as for the sovereign, if he does not cultivate his own mind, how could he treat his family? If he does not manage his family well, how could he deal with local affairs? If he does not put his hometown in order, how could he govern the state? If he does not pacify the state, how could he embrace the world?” (*Guanzi: On Consolidating the Authority of the Throne*). This kind of thought, among other things, coincides with the Confucian belief that people should “cultivate themselves, then regulate the family, then govern the state, and finally lead the world into peace.” Unlike its Western counterpart that centers on “citizens,” “self-government” in the Chinese context also starts from self-cultivation and ends with the great harmony of the world, which profoundly influenced the way Chinese people accepted the western concept of “self-government” in the late Qing dynasty.

It is still uncertain whether the word “*zizhi*” (self-government) in modern Chinese language came from Japanese or not, but for sure this word, along with “*bianfa*” (reform), “*lixian*” (constitutionalism), “*gonghe*” (republicanism) and other Japanese-made Chinese words, was easy to understand and thus favored by Chinese intellectuals when introduced into China via large amount of translated Japanese books. After its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, China experienced a series of military and diplomatic setbacks, which triggered a nationwide crisis. Subsisting in a world following jungle principles and dominated by imperialist powers, some Chinese intellectuals began to consider how to save China from the fate of being eliminated. Against this background, they naturally embraced the newly-imported concept of “self-government.”

However, as various theories emerged at the same time, people taking divergent political stances usually held different opinions on the meaning of “self-government.” Generally speaking, these opinions can be divided into two major categories. One was presented by Kang Youwei(1858-1927), Liang Qichao(1873-1929), and other reformists as well as the

constitutionalists of later period, who proposed to combine the political tradition of “*xiangzhi*” (self-government in the countryside) with the Western parliamentary system without fundamental changes of the current regime. The other came from the revolutionaries who advocated “self-government” at the provincial level, namely actual independence from the Qing government.

Not unlike Japan in the early Meiji era, China was also simultaneously exposed to the Western notions of “self-government” and “freedom” at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1895, one year after the end the First Sino-Japanese War, Yan Fu (1854-1921) pointed out in one of his articles that China had to develop itself by enhancing “people’s strength, intelligence and morality” since it was inferior to the West in all these three aspects. ⁵He believed that to make China wealthy and strong, it was necessary for the government to adopt policies that “benefit the common people,” as long as the commoners could “benefit themselves.” Their self-benefiting acts, in turn, were motivated by an awareness of individual “freedom,” which depended on nothing more than “self-government.” (Yan, 1986: 14) “Self-government,” in this connection, derived from the Confucian praxis of “self-cultivation” and refers to “dominating over oneself,” requesting people to obtain “freedom” by improving their morality and capacity. Obviously, it was based neither on the idea of “inborn freedom” proposed by western humanitarians nor on political freedom as demanded by Japanese democrats. What Yan Fu was concerned about was how to achieve national prosperity, and on this account, he thought that if each citizen could rise out of poverty through personal effort, then the state as a whole would thrive too (Huang, 2000: 2-4).⁶ Another highly-reputed reformist Huang Zunxian (1848-1905) also realized the importance of “self-government” and therefore hoped to ease the tension between government officials and the social public by means of political reforms. In 1897, he delivered a speech in Hunan Province and called for “self-government of one’s own life and one’s own hometown.” The “self-government” here, as he mentioned, required indigenous people to take charge of local education, irrigation, commerce, agricultural production, industrialization and public security, which would be “promoted from a county to a province, and from a province to the whole country.” On this basis, people could eventually realize the ideal of “great harmony.” (Huang, 1991: 103)

On the threshold of the twentieth century, some Chinese intellectuals

even ventured to admit that China’s weakness was deeply rooted in the political isolation of the ruling class from the people as well as a lack of social cohesion and attributed the prosperity of Europe and Japan to their local self-government system. That’s why they viewed self-government as a panacea and proposed to set up a special post called *xiangguan* (local heads) to engage the indigenous in the management of local affairs. It was Gu Yanwu(1613-1682) , a famous Confucian scholar of the late Ming dynasty, who claimed that China should restore the *xiangguan* system of the Han dynasty and allow county magistrates to choose local people with moral integrity to be *Xiangguan* so that the administration of the county would be improved (Gu, 2008). Gu’s theory, two centuries later, provided an intellectual context for Chinese men of letters to accept the western concept of “self-government.” In a similar vein, the famous reformist Kang Youwei extolled the self-government system of western countries as it guaranteed each citizen’s right to discuss state affairs and his responsibility to serve the country; on the contrary, among four hundred million Chinese, not a single person would like to fulfill the national duty due to the isolation of the upper class from the lower class and of government officials from the common people. On this account, he suggested to recruit *xiangguan*, as Europe and Japan’s self-government system, in his opinion, was effectively equivalent to the example of *xiangguan* in ancient China (Kang, 1902: v. 5: 38, v. 6: 21).

In contrast, Chinese students who studied abroad in Japan identified more with theories of German scholars on self-government and introduced them back to China, especially the aforementioned Gneist’s interpretation of local self-government organizations as a “medium” between the state and the society. As an overseas student from Jiangsu province argued on the basis of Gneist’s statement, self-government referred to nothing but the conduct of entrusting part of the state administrative duties to self-government organizations (Nai, 1903: 20). Another student even asserted that Gneist’s opinion that “self-government concatenates the state and the society” was “indelible.” (Shi, 1907: 7) For students in favor of reforms, “self-government” that enables indigenous people to take control of local affairs functioned as a supplement to “official administration,” some of whom, in a later period, participated in drafting local self-government laws for the Qing regime.

On the other hand, The Boxer Rebellion in 1900 elicited the opinion of “self-reliance” or “self-government” at the provincial level among the

educated Chinese, who insisted that provinces of China should claim independence from the central government to avoid being partitioned and occupied by imperialist powers. Ou Jujia(1870-1911), as a disciple of Kang Youwei and a native of Guangdong province, published a pamphlet titled *Xin Guangdong (New Canton)* and ushered in the heyday of the proposal of “provincial autonomy,” claiming Guangdong’s political “autonomy” from the Qing government and the natural right of Cantonese people to decide their local affairs since “Canton belongs only to the Cantonese.” (Ou, 1960: 287) This idea eventually evolved into “*Liansheng Zizhi*(Movement of Joint-provinces Autonomy)” after the founding of the Republic of China,” in contradiction with the historical tradition of political unity as a popular trend. As Tongmenghui (The Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) led by Sun Yat-sen was established in Tokyo in 1905, the revolutionaries launched a series of large-scale anti-Manchu movements, publicizing such concepts as “self-government,” “republicanism”, “democracy,” and “separation of powers” in *Minbao (The People’s Journal)* and other periodicals. Chen Tianhua(1875-1905) and Wang Jingwei(1883-1944), as the spokesmen of Tongmenghui, proposed that the Han Chinese should enforce a “fully decentralized” form of “local self-government” to eventually take over the control of the state power (Chen, 1905: 34; Wang, 1906: 16-18). In actuality, they merely regarded local self-government as an abstract notion to resist the rule of the Qing government, showing no concern for either the Anglo-Saxon type of self-government based on local councils or its German and Japanese counterpart that demands local autonomous organizations undertake state-bid tasks.

In 1906, the Qing government, under both domestic and foreign pressures, issued the *Proclamation of Preparing for Constitutionalism in Nine Years*, and as a part of the preparation, the legislation of local self-government laws was initiated. Against this background, five ministers, including Duanfang(1861-1911), were sent to Japan, America and European countries to study their political and legal systems. When they visited Japan, they not only met Itō Hirobumi, Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), and several other high-ranking officials, but also investigated the parliament and the Supreme Court. Itō advised them to “leave the authoritative power to the emperor” with reference to Japan’s experience if China wanted to adopt constitutionalism (Zai, 1986: 579, 581). When they returned to China, they suggested the Qing government promulgate the constitution and convene the national congress as soon as possible,

directly following the example of Japan (Anonymous, 1979: 368). In January, 1909, the Qing government enacted *The Statute of Local Self-Government in Cities, Towns and Villages*, which was drafted by the Constitution Compilation Bureau in reference to Japan’s *Law for the Organization of Towns and Villages*. In the next year, *The Statute of Local Self-Government in Prefectures and Counties* also came into force, modeled on Japan’s *Prefecture Regulations*. Henceforth, local assemblymen were elected and self-government offices were set up in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hubei, and some other provinces.

The local self-government system established in the late Qing period turned out to be a facsimile of its Japanese and Prussian counterparts, which stipulated that the state should help to establish self-government organizations at all levels. Among them, those at the prefecture and county level also functioned as a state administrative organ with their heads appointed by the central government and ordered to supervise “local self-government” and fulfill government-imposed administrative tasks. In towns and villages, however, members of self-government organizations were selected among the representatives who were chosen by qualified taxpayers via election. These members would execute the decisions of local councils on public affairs like education, healthcare, charities, and civil services (Anonymous, 1979: 725). In a word, this kind of self-government system enables local elites to take care of “social welfare” under the supervision of government officials. As mentioned above, Japan’s cities, towns, and villages were burdened by both internal “routines” and “state-assigned tasks,” including tax collection and conscription. Nevertheless, the local self-government organizations of late-Qing China were not placed at the bottom of the state’s administrative system, which denotes that the state power had not yet encroached on the rural society and Chinese local elites had not been assimilated into state politics. As for the political and cultural background of this design, the severe challenges confronted by the Qing government both at home and from abroad determined that it was unable to include local elites in its administrative system by exerting strong political power like Prussia and Japan. In this connection, it’s also worth mentioning the consensus that those who were wealthy and respectable should be selected among local people to assist government officials to deal with public affairs, which underlay the traditional system of *xiangyue* (village rules) as well as relevant reforms devoted to recruiting *xiangguan*. This notion of “self-government” based

on the tradition of “supplementing official governance with self-government” was unanimously supported by the reformists, the constitutionalists, and the Qing government and thereupon replaced “self-government at the provincial level” that was the aim of anti-Manchu revolutions.

V. CONCLUSION

In sum, this paper mainly intends to clarify three points. The first point refers to the translation and dissemination of the term “self-government.” *Jichi*, the Japanese translation of “self-government” was originally a “Japanese-made Chinese word” invented by intellectuals of the early Meiji era, which conveyed the political idea of “people performing self-management by following the monarch’s example” in traditional Chinese culture; that is to say, the commoners are authorized to “govern themselves” within the sphere outside the state power. Although it is still uncertain whether the word “*zizhi*” in modern Chinese language came from Japan, the spread of this word throughout China was undoubtedly facilitated as an abundance of Japanese books were translated and publicized in the end of 19th century.

The second point centers on the competition of ramified understandings of “self-government.” It was the Anglo-Saxon type of “self-government” that was first introduced into Japan along with the notion of “freedom”, serving as an intellectual weapon for the activists of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement to resist the authoritarian regime and to call for civil rights. In this process, “self-government” even became a fashionable given name in the folk society. Nevertheless, its meaning underwent significant changes during the establishment of the local self-government system, shifting from anti-authoritarianism that was transmitted in the English word “local-government” to sharing the responsibility of national administration as embodied in the German word “Selbstverwaltung.” What’s more, after the founding of constitutional monarchy in Japan, “self-government” was further endowed with the new implication of encouraging students to develop their “spirit of autonomy” as a part of self-cultivation so that they could grow into loyal and patriotic subjects.

In late-Qing China, on the other hand, there were two political beliefs opposed to each other conveyed by the concept of “self-government” –

reform and revolution. For the reformists, self-government was more connected with the political tradition of China, since they were convinced that China's weakness was deeply rooted in the political isolation of the ruling class as well as a lack of social cohesion and on the contrary, local self-government was essential for Europe, America and Japan to maintain their prosperity and strength. On this basis, they endeavored to achieve national prosperity and independence by enhancing individuals' capacity for self-government or by recruiting *xiangguan* below the county level among indigenous people to deal with local affairs and to assist the official rule. In sharp contrast, the revolutionaries tended to associate “self-government” with “republicanism,” “democracy,” and “separation of powers,” which was employed by them as a necessary step to overthrow the Qing Dynasty in their theories of “provincial autonomy” and “local self-government by the Han people that decentralizes the state power.”

The third point lies in the institutionalization of “local self-government.” Given the examples of European countries, people are inclined to embrace the Anglo-Saxon type of self-government as their idealistic model. Yet in reality, for latecomers to modernization, the Anglo-Saxon system was too difficult to be implanted due to political and historical restraints; in comparison, the Prussian type that stressed local administrative duties imposed by a highly centralized power seemed to be an easier example as testified by Japan's modern experience. This system, in a general sense, was characterized by qualified taxpayers being elected as council members to form local autonomous associations, and these organizations at the city, town and village levels being placed at the bottom of state administrative organs to relieve the burden of local administration. Likewise, in Japan, it was the citizens' obligation to be local heads or assume other “self-government posts.” This semi-compulsory type of “self-government,” from a historical perspective, carried forward Japan's long-existing tradition that wealthy and respectable local residents were required to take care of public affairs in turn.

With reference to Japan's local self-government system, the Qing government enacted a set of laws that regulated “self-government” within local communities, demanding local council members be elected among qualified taxpayers and executives of self-government organizations be chosen from these council members to deal with public affairs under the supervision of government officials. In terms of content, the local self-government system of the late Qing Dynasty turned out to be the same

as its traditional counterpart enforced by local elites to offer public services. Due to the fact that the Qing government was too weak to fulfill the task of national unification like Prussia and Japan and it remained to be dictated by the political tradition of “supplementing official governance with self-government,” with the result that local self-government organizations were not incorporated into the state administrative system, nor were local social elites.

In view of the analysis above on “self-government,” it is obvious that this term carried divergent implications in China and Japan as it was introduced into East Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. China and Japan, as latecomers of modernization, both accepted the Prussian type of “self-government” that revolves around the state power; however, China took a different trajectory when accepting this Western concept under the profound influence of the existing tradition of “self-government” in ancient China, namely the proposal of local rites, local agreements and local heads formulated by Confucianism.

Notes

Translated by Liu Chao, School of Foreign Languages, Southeast University.

¹ Britain’s local administrative system operated for almost a century since 1888, but due to economic development and the growth of urban population, the country was forced to launch a campaign of reform in 1974. Some scholars even consider that the local system of 1888 lacked integrity and thus proved to be unsuccessful. See Brand. Jack , *Local Government Reform in England, 1888-1974*. Croom Helm, London, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1974, p.11.

² Before the incident, the farmers signed a covenant with the term “ First Year of Jiyū Jichi” on it. See Takeshi Ishida, *Jichi*, 自治. p. 16.

³ In the Edo period, the smallest administrative unit of Japan were village and *chō*. The head of village and *chō*, namely “*murasoudai*” and “*machiyakunin*” were selected among the rich and other male notables, who, according to the tradition, took charge of such public affairs as security and irrigation, with all the expenses evenly covered by local residents. To know more about Japan’s traditional “self-government,” see Watanabe, Takaki, *Meiji Kokka no Keisei to Chihō Jichi*, 明治国家の形成と地方自治. Tōkyō: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2001, pp. 29-30; Shiomi, Toshitaka, *Nihon no Nōson*, 日本の農村. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1957, p. 49; Gotō, Shinpei, *Edo no Jichisei*, 江戸の自治制. Tōkyō: Nishōdō Shoten, 1922, p. 226, p.380.

⁴ The “assigned tasks” assumed by the heads of boroughs and villages included tax collection, policing, household registration, civil construction, and healthcare, which accounted for 70%-80% of their total workload and normally cost them 70%-80%

of the local budget. Ōshima, Mitsuko, *Meiji Kokka to Chiiki Shakai*, 明治国家と地域社会. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994, p. 226, p.234.

⁵ Yan Fu was a famous translator in modern China. Mill’s book *On Liberty* was translated by him and then published by The Commercial Press in 1903.

⁶ This does not mean that Yan Fu was a nationalist who valued national interest more than the private one. Actually, for him, both sides were of equal importance. Huang Kewu conducts an analysis of this point in his book (Huang, Kewu. *Ziyou de Suoyiran: Yan Fu dui Yueban Mier Sijou Sixiang de Renshi yu Pipan* 自由的所以然——严复对约翰弥尔自由主义思想的认识与批判. Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 2000, pp. 2-4).

References

- Anonymous. “*Chushi Geguo Kaocha Zhengzhi Dacheng Dai Hongci deng Zouqing Gaiding Quanguo Guanzhi yiwei Lixian Yubei Zhe.*” 出使各国考察政治大臣戴鴻慈等奏請改定全国官制以為立憲預備摺. Jul. 6th, 1907, In *Qingmo Choubei Lixian Dang’an Ziliao* (1) 清末筹备立宪档案资料·上. Gugong Bowuyuan Mingqing Dang’anbu, Ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979.
- . “Xianzheng Bianchaguan zou Heyi Chengzhenxiang Difang Zizhi Zhangcheng bing lingni Xuanju Zhangcheng Zhe.” 憲政編查館奏核議城鎮鄉地方自治章程並另擬選舉章程摺, Dec. 27th, 1908, In *Qingmo Choubei Lixian Dang’an Ziliao* (1) 清末筹备立宪档案资料·上. Gugong Bowuyuan Mingqing Dang’anbu, Ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979.
- Brand, Jack. *Local Government Reform in England, 1888-1974*. London: Croom Helm, Hamden: Archon Books, 1974.
- Bryce, Viscount. *Modern Democracies*. New York: Macmillan, 1921.
- Chen, Tianhua (Sihuang). “*Lun Zhongguo yi Gaichuang Minzhu Zhengti.*” 論中國宜改創民主政體. *Minbao* 民報 vol.1, 1905.
- Clement, Ernest. “Local Self-Government in Japan.” *Political Science Quarterly*, 7(2), 1892: 294-306.
- Fujita, Masashi. “*Jichi Gainen no Rekishiteki Kentō: Senzen no Syōgakkō to Sengo no Syō-Chū-Kōtō Gakkōni sokushite*”, 「自治」概念の歴史的検討——戦前の小学校と戦後の小・中・高等学校に即して. *Rikkyō Daigaku Kyōiku Kenkyū Nenppō*, No.42, 1988.
- Gneist, Rudolf. *Der Rechtsstaat*, Berlin: J. Springer, 1872. In Seiji Komatsu, *Kenkokusetsu* 建国説 (or *Hōchi Kokuron* 法治国論) (Trans.), Doitsugaku kyokai, 1883.
- Gneist, Rudolf. *Selfgovernment, Communalverfassung und Verwaltungsgerichte in England*. Berlin: J. Springer, 1871, S.885. In Kohei Yamada, *Kindai Nihon no Kokumin Kokka to Chihō Jichi: Hikakushi Kenkyū*. Nagoya-shi: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1991.
- Goodnow, Frank. “Local Government in Prussia. I”, *Political Science Quarterly*. 4(4), 1889: 648-666.

- Goto, Shinpei. *Edo no Jichisei*. 江戸の自治制. Tokyo: Nishōdō Shoten, 1922.
- Gu, Yanwu. “Junxian Lun (2).” 郡县论 (二). In *Gu Tinglin Shi Wen Ji: Tinglin Wen Ji, vol.1*. 顾亭林文集·亭林文集 卷一. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008.
- Ishida, Takeshi. *Jichi* 自治. Tokyo: Sanseido, 1998.
- Kang, Youwei (Mingyi). “Gongmin Zizhi Pian.” 公民自治篇. *Xin min cong bao* (5); (6) 新民叢報, 1902,
- Lieber, Francis. *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government*. Ed. Theodore D. Woolsey. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and CO., the third edition, 1883.
- Mosse, Albert. “Mosse shi Jichiron.” Dec. 1886., In *Kokugakuin Daigaku Nihon Bunka Kenkyusyo*. Ed. *Kindai Nihon Hōsei Shiryōshū* 近代日本法政資料集(10). Kokugakuin Daigaku, 1988.
- Nai, Xuan. “Zizhi Shiyi.” 自治制釋義. *Jiangsu* (4) 江蘇. 1903.
- Okita, Tetsuya. *Chihō Jichi Yōron: Rinen, Kōikisei, Senkyo*. 地方自治要論——理念・広域制・選挙. Tokyo: Nippon Hyōron-sha, 1968.
- Ōshima, Mitsuko. *Meiji Kokka to Chiiki Shakai*. 明治国家と地域社会. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994.
- Ou, Juja. “Xin Guangdong.” 新廣東. In *Xinbai Geming qian Shinianjian Shilun Xuanji* (1) 辛亥革命前十年间时论选集, 第一卷. Zhang, Nan and Wang, Renzhi, Eds. Beijing: Shenghuo · Dushu · Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 1960.
- Shi, Yan. “Lun Jiu Zhongguo moshanyu Difang Zizhi.” 論救中國莫善于地方自治. *Yong bao* (2) 庸報, 1907.
- Shimizu, Shin. *Meiji Kenpō Seitei Shi*. 明治憲法制定史. Tokyo: HaraShobō, 1971.
- Shiomi, Toshitaka. *Nihon no Nōson*, 日本の農村. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957.
- Stein, Lorenz. *Handbuch der Verwaltungslehre und des Verwaltungsrechts: mit Vergleichung der Literatur und Gesetzgebung von Frankreich, England und Deutschland*, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1870. cited in Renkichi Watanabe, *Gyōseigaku* 行政学(Trans.), Tokyo: Chamber of Elders, 1887.
- Wang, Zhaoming (Jingwei). “Manzhou Lixian yu Guomin Geming.” 滿洲立憲與國民革命. *Minbao* (8) 民報, 1906.
- Watanabe, Takaki. *Meiji Kokka no Keisei to Chihō Jichi*. 明治国家の形成と地方自治. Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 2001.
- Yan, Fu. *Yuan Qiang* 原强. in *Yan Fu Ji* 严复集. Wang, Shi. Ed., Beijing: Chunghua Shuju, 1986.
- Yamada, Kohei. *Kindai Nihon no Kokumin Kokka to Chihō Jichi: Hikakushi Kenkyū*. 近代日本の国民国家と地方自治——比較史研究. Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1991.
- Yu, Yingshi. *Zhu Xi de Lisbi Shijie: Songdai Shidafu Zhengzhi Wenhua de Yanjiu*, 朱熹的历史世界——宋代士大夫政治文化的研究, vol. 1. Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2004.
- Zai, Ze. “Kaocha Zhengzhi Riji.” 考察政治日記. In *Zouxiang Shijie Congshu* 走向世界

叢書, Zhong, Shuhe, Ed. Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1986.

Huang, Zunxian . “Huang Gongdu Liangfang Diyici ji Dierci Jiangyi: Lun Zhengti Gongsi bi Ziren Chishi”, 黄公度廉访第一次暨第二次讲义——论政体公私必自任其事, Zheng, Hailin and Zhang, Weixiong. Eds. *Huang Zunxian Wenji*, Kyoto: Chūbun Syuppansya, 1991.