

The by-laws and membership of *cho* neighborhood in Kanto region *zaikata-machi* during the first half of the 19th century

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This article is an attempt to clarify the characteristics of Japanese urban communities known as *zaikata-machi* 在方町, which differed from the three metropolises of Edo, Osaka and Kyoto or other castle towns. Many of these towns unaffiliated to castles, which were composed of residents with the status of *hyakusho* 百姓 (commoner) and consisted of several basic township units (*cho* 町 neighborhoods), prospered economically (especially in the Kanto region) beginning in the late 18th century. In this article, the author discusses and analyzes the by-laws indigenous to each *cho* of two Kanto region *zaikata-machi*, *Chichibu* and *Sawara*, in order to reveal some interesting characteristics and functions of these *cho* neighborhoods, contrasting them to their counterparts in the three metropolises and other castle towns.

To begin with, the provisions in the law regarding *cho* membership were extremely few in number and simple in content. Furthermore, there were no provisions delineating special requirements for membership, regulating how residents disposed of their houses and the lots on which they were built or restricting their occupations. Secondly, the resident members of *cho* neighborhoods were composed of not only house-and-lot owners, but also many tenants renting houses or lots. Tenants were also eligible to hold representative and administrative positions in their *cho* neighborhoods.

Based on these facts, the author comes to the conclusion that *cho* neighborhoods in *zaikata-machi* should be considered as organizations through which residents cooperated with one another for their livelihoods and self-defense, on the sole condition of living in a commonly shared space. In this sense, it is possible to argue that *zaikata-machi* were far less restricted and more open to new owners and tenants occupying available houses or lots than the three metropolises or other castle towns.