

“Shimai-jichitai / Shimai-toshi” (Sister City)

The structure of a “Shimai-jichitai / Shimai-toshi” (Sister City) agreement is not determined by law. Fundamentally, exchange occurs in the interaction between people and in an environment of free will. As a result, it wouldn't seem fitting to apply legal restrictions to such a relationship.

The Japanese dictionary Kojien (published by Iwanami Shoten) defines “Shimai-toshi” (Sister City) as “international cities united for such purposes as cultural exchange and goodwill [the rest of the definition is omitted here].” However it is necessary to establish a minimum set of conditions to define Sister City for the purpose of compiling statistical data. CLAIR recognize a relationship the municipality in question as a “Shimai- jichitai/ Shimai-toshi-teikei” (Sister City affiliation) provided it meets all of the following conditions :

- (1) There is an official agreement signed by the heads of both local authorities
- (2) Exchange is not limited to one specific field
- (3) Consent is received from the local Assembly for any exchange events which are thought to require budgetary steps

Similar affiliations referred to as “Yuko-toshi” (Friendship City) or “Yuko-koryu-toshi” (Friendship Exchange City) will be treated the same as “Shimai-jichitai / Shimai-toshi” only in cases where they fulfill all three conditions in the above.

The statistical work regarding Japanese local government international affiliation agreements (including changes to content and dissolution of the agreement) is carried out based on information gathered from the division responsible for international affairs in each prefecture or designated city. (With the exception of designated cities, information regarding city/special ward/town/village affiliation agreements should be sent to the municipality's respective prefecture.)

*The origin of the word “Shimai-toshi” (Sister City)

“Shimai-toshi” is the direct Japanese translation of the phrase “Sister City” which originated in America. It has been the most commonly used phrase to describe “Sister Cities” in Japan up to the current day.

Instead of “Sister City,” England and Germany use the phrases “Twin City” and “Partnerstadt” respectively. In China, “Yuko-toshi” (Friendship City) is used because the two Chinese characters that make up the word “shimai” (sisters) indicate an older and younger sister relationship which may lead to a misunderstanding regarding which municipality is the younger, and thus subordinate, sister.

As an additional note, an increasing number of local authorities have chosen to form “Yukoteki-na-koryu” (friendly relations) with municipalities and local governments overseas, instead of becoming a “Shimai-toshi” (Sister City) by fulfilling the above conditions.