

Comparison of Mutual Help Networks in Japan and Vietnam

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1. Introduction

One way that man maintains a society is through networks of mutual help⁽¹⁾. The purpose of the paper is to show how traditional mutual help persists in Southeast Asia, has been transformed in the transition to modernity and has contributed to the development of selected societies. Vietnamese mutual help can be compared with the already well-studied Japanese case. The author earlier conducted interview surveys in Japan and has essentially replicated them in Vietnam⁽²⁾.

Mutual help was traditionally divided into three types in Japan (Onda, 2005: 2006). One is '*yui*' which refers to reciprocity in helping to plant rice, cut rice and re-roof houses by exchanging labor. The second is '*moyai*' which refers to redistribution. In exchange for the right to get goods from a common store, local people have the obligation to maintain a common pool of resources. Finally, '*tetsudai*' refers to unidirectional support in funeral ceremonies in lieu of labor or monetary exchange, which otherwise would have been expected under '*yui*' rules of reciprocity. We can see mutual help action like '*yui*', '*moyai*' and '*tetsudai*' in other Asian countries.

Vietnamese society has strong solidarity. People say it is this solidarity that enabled Vietnam to win the war against USA (the Vietnam War). It can be found especially in the country's villages and where it is still manifested by, among other phenomena, mutual help networks. There are both territorial and functional organizations for mutual help in a village society. One action of mutual help is '*đổi công*', which refers to the exchange of labor in helping to plant and harvest rice and sugar cane.

This paper discusses the results of an interview survey and fact-finding fieldwork study of the feelings of two populations of Vietnamese concerning mutual help. The

author found that social system of mutual help arising from indigenous conditions has contributed to overcome poverty. The paper concludes that mutual help is a spontaneous occurrence of a social order and modern society might do well to review mutual help networks in search of ways of solving both public and private social problems and assisting in the creation of an 'Asian community' (already proposed by the 2007 ASEAN 10 Conference), but not only for the proposed economic integration but for social integration as well.

2. Mutual Help in Pre-modern Japanese Society

(1) Types of Mutual Help Actions

① Reciprocal action: 'Yui'

We can classify mutual help into three types in Japan (Figure 1). One is 'yui', which mainly refers to the exchange of labor. Many peasants helped in planting rice, cutting rice, and re-roofing houses with Japanese pampas grass, which are all very labor-intensive activities. Many laborers participated on the condition of later receiving help themselves. 'Yui' is reciprocity where one gives labor to another and reaps the reward of the other's labor at another time.

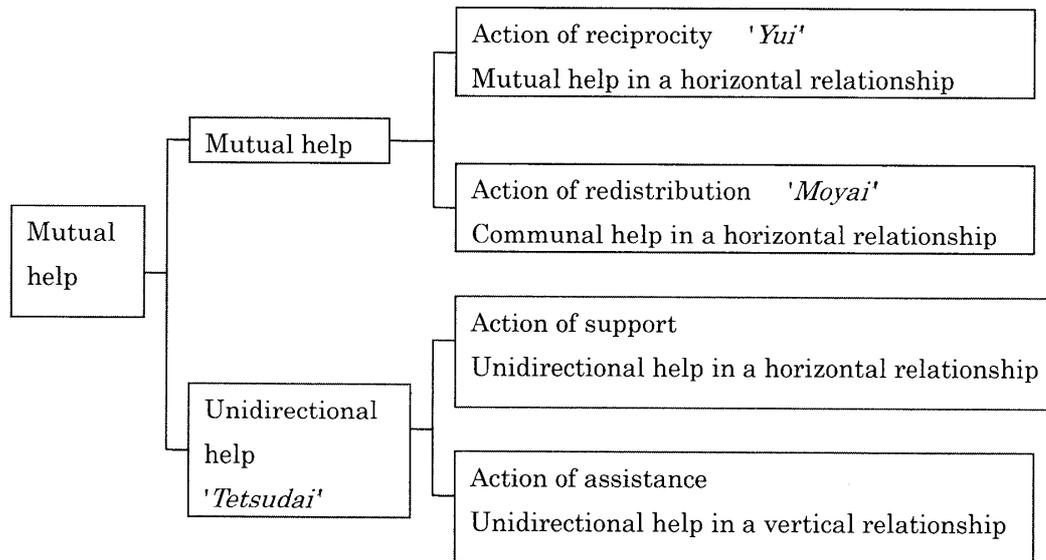


Figure 1: Types of Mutual Help in Japan

The giver always got the same volume and quality of labor in return. Women were supposed to contribute half as much labor as men. It was a rational exchange and the labor unit was the family. Historically, when one family needed a lot of labor to plant and harvest rice, another family helped by providing it. That family then got the right to return labor from the family it helped. Although there are few 'yui' of this type remaining, we can still see 'yui' in the actions among relatives in agricultural villages in Japan.

In another type, the group might have consisted of A, B, and C families. A family got labor from families B and C. The next time, B got it from C and A. Finally C was given labor from A and B. Generally speaking, these actions were recorded in order to confirm the borrowing and lending of labor by others. The return of labor did not always follow immediately. It could be arranged to be done some time in the future.

② Redistributive action: '*Moyai*'

'*Moyai*' refers to the redistribution of goods and services among local people. Historically, those who had commons of mountain, forest and sea distributed resources among themselves. The practice covered not only goods, but also the labor that local people had to provide to maintain the commons. They were bound by the rules of villages to be engaged in public works ('mura shigoto') to clean roads and canals, as well as remove grass from the roads. Local people could then use the roads and canals as a reward for public or communal service through 'mura shigoto'.

'*Moyai*' is redistribution based on the equality of volume and quality. The most common examples occurred when villagers worked together to repair a road or to clean a reservoir, which were duties of villagers who lived together in a regional society. Villagers could use the mountains and sea as the commons. However, the right could be gotten by participating in public work. The work was undertaken by one member of each family. The rewards from the commons were redistributed among the members in a village. If a family did not participate in public works, it was condemned as a destroyer of village order. However, a family or an individual could be excused from this work by paying a monetary penalty. These actions can be still seen in a modern society. This form of '*moyai*' is the process of gathering workers, then distributing rights to the various commons in an equal way.

In another form of '*moyai*', in contrast to gathering labor, money was some times gathered among local people to help the poor and to buy goods. This 'money *moyai*' became popular after the spread of currency in villages. It has remained

especially popular in Okinawa prefecture. However, the purpose of a 'money *moyai*' has sometimes been simply to accumulate funds for some future unstated need. In addition, such commodities as harvested crops, household goods and Japanese pampas grasses for roofing would be gathered to give to people who could not otherwise afford them by themselves. This might be called 'goods *moyai*' which provides basic necessities to the poor. Villagers supported the life of the poor by providing the land of the commons (Onda, 2005: 2006). It meant that villagers could maintain their lives independently.

③ Unidirectional action: '*Tetsudai*'

'*Tetsudai*' is another way of helping people in a village. This mutual help system is structured as 'one-way' or unidirectional aid in which people do not expect reciprocal help from either the poor or people in temporary trouble. However, even people in these categories who were helped would often still try to give goods or labor in return. For this purpose many people who were helped would record the nature and amount of the help given. Those who were aided would serve some food to their helpers. Today, international aid to a developing country from a developed country is termed '*tetsudai*' in Japanese.

'*Tetsudai*', then, refers to help without the expectation of reciprocity. It can especially be seen in wedding or funeral ceremonies. When one died in a regional society, villagers would gather to help with the funeral by caving a tomb or shouldering a coffin. The family of the deceased did not need to provide its own daily maintenance. People brought food ready to cook and help in other ways to prepare for the ceremony. Money was also gathered for the bereft. Villagers' encouragement became vital for the family. In the future the bereaved family would sometimes reciprocate these efforts, occasionally giving '*tetsudai*' a reciprocal cast. These actions were noted in a 'memorandum of unhappiness' of a funeral ceremony. This was done in order not to overlook previous activities in the village.

'*Tetsudai*' operated through two types of social relationships, equal and unequal. Equal or horizontal relationships operated between families of equal social rank. The unequal relationships operated between landowners and '*nago*' (peasants), working as paternalistic, vertical social relationships similar to the patron-apprentice (client) relationships. Both types of '*tetsudai*' can be seen nowadays in not only partnerships, but also vertical, power relationships.

(2) Organizations of Mutual Help

① 'Kumi' and 'Kou'

Historically, mutual help was carried out through two organizations called '*kumi*' and '*kou*' (Onda, 2006). The former was a formal organization for villagers. The latter was an organization focused on certain themes. A '*kumi*' was organized by family, age and sex and active participation was mandatory. The unit constituted the organizational basis of mutual help for '*yui*', '*moyai*', and '*tetsudai*'. A '*yui gumi*' was the work unit for planting rice, cutting rice and re-roofing houses. The '*wakamono gumi*' (a youth group) played an important role in public works at the same time as it taught the rules of a village, turning boys into men.

A '*kou*' would be organized to fulfill a specific purpose. Local people helped a troubled person by collecting money, as well as donating goods and labor. These were also organizations that fulfilled the spirit of local and indigenous religions. They were organizations of micro-finance, but also social and religious activity. '*Kou*' originated from the religious activity of reading Buddhist scripture. A group of believers who gathered to study became an organization of mutual help at the same time. It was also associated with the organization of fundraising to help people. The organization needed money to establish an economic foundation and later to contribute to the relief of the poor materially as well as emotionally. A '*tanomoshi*' was such an organization that lent money to the poor without interest. There was also a '*kou*' organization ('*muzin*') that lent money with interest.

These were connected with an organization for small finance (a rotating credit association) that was different from a '*kumi*'. Generally speaking, an organization tended to be called a '*kou*' if it had a religious or an economic purpose. A '*kumi*' might be called an organization that was autonomous from a local government. Nowadays there are still some '*kou*' religious organizations with the purpose of pilgrimage or supporting belief in a local indigenous land god.

② Convivial Organizations and Compulsive Organizations

In a '*mura*' (village) we could find the two types of '*kumi*' organizations. One was a communal organization for mutual help as a spontaneous social phenomenon and was manifested in autonomous organizations for self-reliance, self-help and self-determination in local life. They were not compulsory.

The other type was compelled by the central or local government. It had the further purpose of helping to maintain control over local people who were already used to

participating in similar mutual help structures. The *'gonin-gumi'* (the standard group of five households) and the *'tonari-gumi'* (the group of ten households) were examples. The former was the unit of mutual help with cooperative responsibility in the Edo era (1603-1867) for mutual prosecution among farmers and paying tribute.

The latter unit, which persisted partly through local people's autonomy, was retained by the government and maintained its role of controlling individuals, especially in cases of emergency in the Pacific War (1941-1945). In general, there are relatively few compulsive organizations nowadays. Spontaneous organizations for mutual help have been and continue to be important to local people.

3. Mutual Help in Modern Vietnamese Society

(1) Types of Mutual Help Actions

① *'Đôi công'* and *'Hội'*

Vietnamese society exhibits strong solidarity. We can discover organized examples of this especially in farmers' villages⁽³⁾. Vietnamese villages where people work by hand labor are like Japanese in their pre-modern age. There are also mutual help networks. One is *'đôi công'*, which refers to the exchange of labor. Villagers help each other in planting and harvesting rice and sugar cane. Because they do not have machines, agriculture is extremely labor intensive. Another help network is termed *'đôi tiền'*. Villagers borrow money from colleagues without interest, for they live poor lives. They exchange money, in times of necessity, as well as labor. This demonstrates a symmetrical social relationship, whether the exchange is of goods or money. These two customs operate like the Japanese *'yui'*.

There is another mutual help system, called *'hội'* which is found in the villages of the minority *Muong* people. It is a rotating credit association in which members gather goods or money to help one another. In the case of goods, they give a certain volume of rice at each of the two yearly harvests. Each of 12 persons provides 300kg of rice per year. Any two members who want money to build or repair a house, or buy a motorcycle, for example, can receive the rice from the yearly cycle. At another *Moung* village members of a group also donate 100kg per season. Each in a group consisting of 10 persons provides 200kg per year and the group distributes the rice among members in order of seasonality and other rules.

In the case of money, each of 10 members gives 100,000 VND (Vietnamese *Đồng*) per season. One member can get a total of 2,000,000 VND per year. Who can get the

rice or money? They draw lots represented by cards for turns. Each card has either a 1 or 0 written on it. The person who draws card no.1 can have the right to get rice or money. The aim of this rotating system is not only to give economic help, but also to build friendships among members of the 'hội'.

Members who receive their distributions later get the same volume of rice or money, without additional interest. Generally speaking, in the Japanese system those who got a later distribution also received additional money or goods, because those who had to wait were viewed as having been placed at a relative disadvantage⁽⁴⁾. Naturally, everyone in the Vietnamese system wants to get rice or money first. Drawing lots means that everyone has the equal right to get it. The next person to receive a distribution is also determined by drawing lots or bids. However, in the event that it is recognized that any particular member is especially needy in any round of distribution, he will be given the available distribution without a drawing.

Village members are expected to be engaged in the cooperative effort to repair roads. It is not compulsory but they feel an obligation. The return is volunteer work on their behalf or money. People in a village may also provide labor for paving a dirt road with asphalt without expectation of return. This is the same form of public works that is called 'mura shigoto' in Japan. In addition, villagers are eligible for a payout of 40,000 VND per year after providing such labor for a period of 10 years. Sometimes they pay some money for the materials to repair roads if the government fails to provide the funds. In the case of a village near Hanoi, villagers managed to get repair expenses for a major road by selling a part of the commons. In the case of repairing a minor road, each household paid 500,000 VND according to the unit of some households ('liên gia' as mentioned below) in the village.

Either material or monetary offerings are donated to departed souls. Each family used to give 1 kg of rice or 10,000 VND to a funeral ceremony. Local people tend to give rice in areas where crops are abundant, or they may bring a pig to a house of the chief mourner. Vietnamese who have little land cannot offer rice, but do offer money. People share the sadness by doing so. It is recognized as unidirectional help so recipients do not have to return to the rice or money given by villagers.

② Participation and Nonparticipation in Mutual Help Networks

One point should be made about the lives of farmers who have very little land. The *Kinh* village (ethnic majority Vietnamese) of this commune do not have the system of 'hội', because they have no surplus rice to give. We interviewed some farmers

who keep cows and pigs but have insufficient land to produce surpluses. One family we interviewed had an annual income of about 6,000,000 VND. Many of them are immigrants from Thailand. Like many of their neighbors, they had emigrated from Vietnam to Thailand to avoid the war against France in 1950's and later returned.

The *Muong* have a lot of land because they have been living in the mountains, where few other Vietnamese are found. Generally speaking, the majority Vietnamese refer to themselves as *Kinh* and comprise about 90% of the country's population. The *Muong* are thought of as Vietnamese only by citizenship, and are 1 among 53 minority groups, according to the government. In the district we studied, (Tân Lạc in Hòa Bình province), the population situation is reversed. Here the *Muong* make up 86% to only 14% *Kinh*. Returning immigrants of *Kinh* from Thailand do not have much land here.

In other words, extremely poor people are not included in '*hỏi*'. However, some mutual help networks do cover them. *Kinh* who have little land are not the only poor in this district. A *Muong* family whose annual income is only 1,000,000 VND (about 63 USD) cannot participate in a rotating credit association. However, they manage to live by exchanging money or labor in planting and harvesting rice and sugar cane. The giver always gets the same volume and quality of labor in return just as in a Japanese '*yui*'. Furthermore women's associations help such poor families. A member can get rice and support of labor from such an organization without expectation of reciprocity.

(2) Organizations of Mutual Help

① Functional Groups of Mutual Help

There are several organizations functioning to maintain mutual help in Vietnam. One is an age-based organization found in *Muong* villages. Young men from 15 to 25 or 27 can participate in this youth association, which resembles Japanese youth groups called ('*wakamono gumi*'). The main activity is to provide labor for repairing roads and houses. Money earned in group labor is given to members who are ill and to provide for funeral ceremonies. By participating in the organization, young people learn village rules on their way to adulthood. Meetings in which all members participate are held once a month. Members discuss how to assist the poor as well as village rules.

After marriage, many women join a women's association that plays an important role in a village by providing mutual assistance in several ways. It gives money to members who fall ill as well as those who give birth. In *Kinh* villages, when a new baby is born the organization will pay 20,000 VND. This association also sometimes

acts as a guarantor for members who borrow money from a rural development bank. Members can borrow up to 2,000,000 VND in 3 years at 0.5% monthly interest. There is also an elderly people's organization for mutual help.

Other mutual help organizations are based on friendship and mutual experience such as veteran's associations, overseas associations and professional farmers' associations. In the veteran's association members give labor to build a new house, fund wedding ceremonies of their children and visit each other's homes during funeral ceremonies. Pensions are given through the central government to veterans of the War against USA (the Vietnam War). Mutual help is also complemented by official government aid as well as borrowing money from a rural development bank.

Overseas associations consist of people whose families emigrated to avoid the War against France and immigrated back to Vietnam after its end. For example, some *Kinh* came back from Thailand to a commune in the Tân Lạc district in Hòa Bình province. As mentioned above, many *Kinh* in this area have very little land on which to live, some perhaps having lost it when they fled the war and then returned. The *Kinh* have long been and remain a minority in this corner of the country. This factor alone, sharing the experiences of minority status in a country, can account for the need to maintain a stronger sense of solidarity.

② Territorial Organizations: '*Liên gia*'

Participation in organizations described above is not compulsory. However, there is an organization in which participation is a duty as a member of regional society. It is called '*liên gia*'. There are a number of these territorial organizations in the Hồng river delta. Each consists of 12 to 15 families. They operate independently from the administrative activities of the government's People's Committee.

If there is trouble in any member family, the entire organization meets to talk about a solution. The organization teaches the rules of both the village and '*liên gia*' society not only to current residents, but also to newcomers. Each member lends or may borrow money inside the group interest free. They visit one another's families when someone becomes sick or dies. Each family pays 20,000 to 30,000 VND toward the funeral ceremony.

Even though participation is compulsory, the organization is created in a way that almost makes it seem to be a spontaneous occurrence of the social order. The members made the organization and participated in it voluntarily. If a household does not join a territorial organization, it is condemned for nonparticipation. In the case of functional organizations, while non-joiners are not condemned, they risk being at

a real disadvantage in regional life. They will not get assistance from those who are members. Therefore, the functional organizations might be called semi-compulsory. Participation in '*liên gia*' is more mandatory. Strong solidarity is created through the territorial organization of mutual help in Vietnamese villages.

4. Mutual Help Networks in Asia

(1) Common Style of Mutual Help

① Three Types of Mutual Help Actions

Japan and Vietnam have similar mutual help networks. The specific definitions of such mutual help have described in detail above. '*Yui*', '*moyai*' and '*tetsudai*' are ideal types of Japanese mutual help. '*Yui*' provides for symmetrical action, '*moyai*' is bidirectional from the periphery to the center and *vice versa*, and '*tetsudai*' is most typically unidirectional (non-reciprocal). According to Polanyi, reciprocity, redistribution and exchange are economic actions operating as social actions and exhibit both market and non-market characteristics (Polanyi, 1977). Mutual help action is basically non-market oriented.

We can draw parallels between Japanese mutual help actions and Vietnamese. '*Yui*' parallels '*đổi công*' as labor exchange. '*Moyai*' includes giving labor to the cooperative works in which villagers are bound to be engaged and can be seen not only in Japan but also Vietnam. The mutual benefit is that villagers get better roads. The rotating credit system through which members can gather goods or money is called '*hội*' in Vietnam. After labor, rice or money is gathered to the center, they are distributed to each member. The vector of the action is toward the center from the periphery and *vice versa*. Vietnamese gather money and give labor to funeral ceremonies. This is termed '*tetsudai*' in Japan.

Generally speaking, mutual help actions are divided into three categories (Figure 2). The first is an action of reciprocity in helping to plant rice and re-roof houses by exchanging labor. The action is symmetrical. The second is an action of redistribution. In exchange for the right to get goods from a common store, local people had the obligation to maintain a common pool of resources. This is bidirectional (centripetal and centrifugal) action from the periphery to the center and *vice versa*. Finally, the third is an action of support or assistance. The unidirectional help refers to support in funeral and wedding ceremonies requiring no monetary exchange. This is 'one-way'. Actual mutual help actions are seen mixed among three types (5).

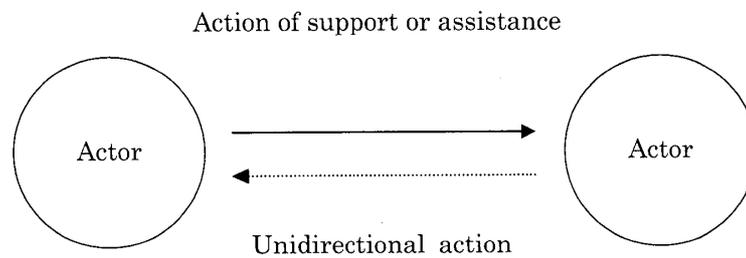
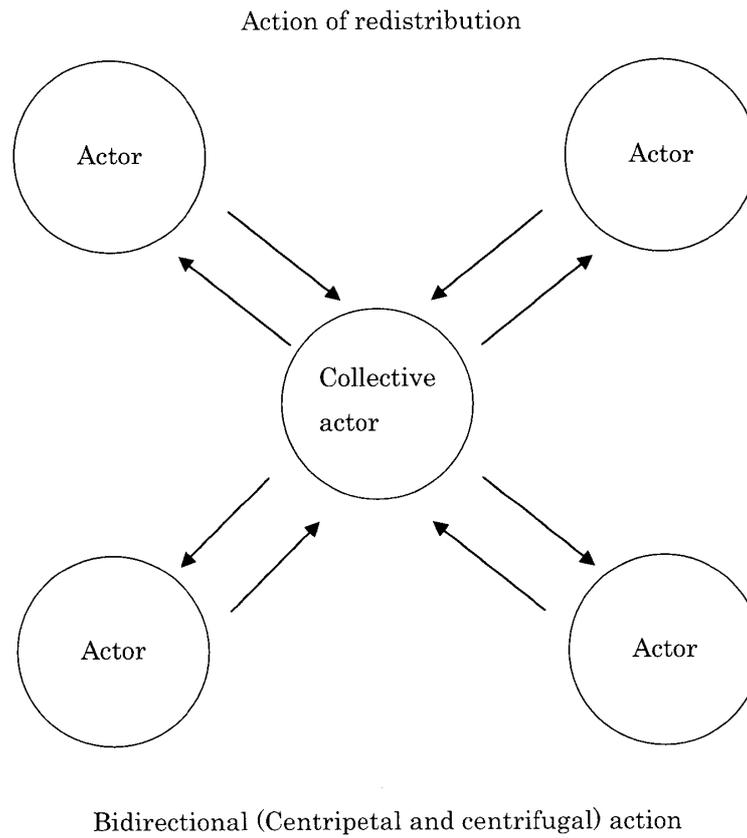
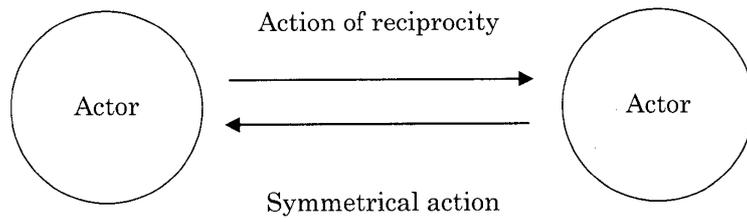


Figure 2: Direction of Mutual Help

② The Organizations of Mutual Help

We could also find similarity between Japan and Vietnam in organizations for mutual help. These functional groups are divided into two types. One is based on the household unit. Family participation is a requirement of village membership. The other is based on the individual participating in an organization according to age or some other qualification. Participation is not compulsory, but the difficult conditions of regional life in a developing country tend to make it semi-compulsory.

Consanguinal relationships are important as local people say that they first talk with their relatives when they are confronted by difficulties in their lives. However, the territorial organization also plays an important helping role in a regional society. A network consists of 10 households or thereabout. Members obey a set of formal rules and help maintain each other's lives. This organization acts independently from the official (government) activities and, despite its compulsory membership, one can consider its effect to be a spontaneous occurrence of the social order.

The positive impact of the activities of the youth associations cannot be overemphasized. They play a central role to help poor people by donating labor to repair houses. They are the successors and keepers of village's customs and values, just as were the Japanese '*wakamono gumi*'. They keep order at the village's regular monthly meetings. While young men's organizations were often separated from young women's in Japan, Vietnamese youth associations include both sexes. The village's next leader will come from among its members.

(2) The Balance between Vertical and Horizontal Mutual Help Networks

① Vertical and Horizontal Mutual Help Networks

Observing the whole of Japanese society, we can see the tradition of both vertical and horizontal mutual networks. The former is vertical such as a patron-client relationship where a man is supported in exchange for service to a master. The latter is horizontal, in which one helps another as a qualified equal. A vertical mutual network is based on the relationship between a head family and a collateral family, man and master. It contains consanguine relationships, semi-consanguine relationships ('*douzoku*'), and quasi-parent-child relationships. A master as parent helps a man as his putative child in daily life by giving room and board in exchange for the service of cooking, cleaning, etc. Although the relationship between landowner and renter is economic, a social relationship sometimes can be seen between them as a quasi-parent-

child relationship. In this social relationship, the assistance is carried out by doing a favor and is a kind of *'tetsudai'* in Japan.

There have been a few horizontal mutual help networks in Japan where land was divided and distributed equally among local people by themselves. The distribution would extend over a period of years and good and poor land would be exchanged yearly. In the Edo Era, while the real purpose was taxation through mutual responsibility, local government divided land among farmers, in the guise of equal distribution. However, even this version of the system of dividing lands equally originated in an older period as a spontaneous phenomenon from 'the wisdom of life'. There was a similar institution of dividing lands in Vietnam.

According to Putnam (1993), vertical networks do not contribute to good governance. However, Japanese society has had both types of mutual networks simultaneously, and vertical mutual help networks complement the horizontal. There were a few influential landowners who helped poor people in a Japanese village. They assisted poor farmers as vertical networkers apart from official aid. There is no influential landowner in Vietnamese villages. Here, the central or local government, which would comprise part of a vertical network, assists local poor people with money to build a new house or the veterans with pensions. The Vietnamese government, having adopting socialism, can be thought of as play an important role as an actor in vertical networks.

② Spontaneous Mutual Help and Socialism

Autonomy plays a role in vertical mutual help networks as public aid and local people are responsible for horizontal mutual networks as communal help in a regional society. Of course self-help is important for communal help. *'Yui'*, *'moyai'*, and *'tetsudai'* as actions of mutual help have been carried out through not only consanguineous relationships, but also regional relationships. It is better for local people anywhere to live with each other through self-reliance, self-help and self-determination than being aided from outside. International aid can be seen as a vertical mutual help network between the donors of developed countries and the donees of developing countries. The aim of international aid is to encourage developing countries to develop by themselves. This does not mean that help by donors is not necessary. It is catalytic support. Balance between vertical and horizontal mutual networks can work well.

Age-related organizations might be called vertical mutual networks in Vietnam, for some of them are connected to the central national organization. Of course, local

people have the right to talk about something equally in every association. However, some of the functional organizations had been involved in official control and have been used as the control unit of socialism in the country. Socialism controls some functional associations through the central organization (Figure 3). In Japan the government had used them to keep a mutual close watch on tax payments in the Edo period and to help maintain local life under the emergency conditions of the Pacific War. In Vietnam some of them are national organizations under socialism. The women's associations have a top-down decision making system.

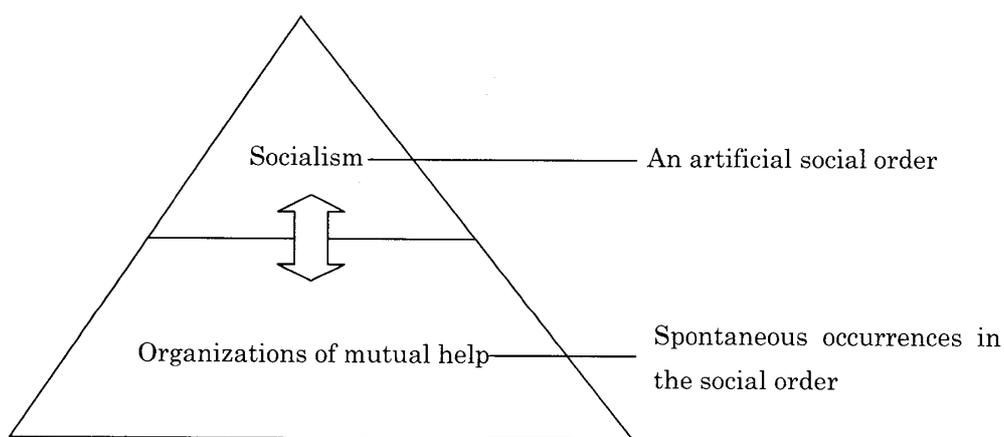


Figure 3: Structure of Mutual Help in Vietnamese Society

However, attention should be paid to the fact that these organizations had existed in villages before artificial socialism was introduced in Vietnam. Youth, women and elderly associations allowed people at different stages of life to participate in spontaneous mutual help. On the other hand, the territorial organizations also have horizontal mutual networks. They play an important role to help through household units. Villagers have long maintained communal mutual help networks outside of central government support.

Age-related organizations work in tandem with territorial organizations for mutual help. A balance between vertical and horizontal mutual help networks have been seen to work well in both Japan and Vietnam. In Vietnam there are no great landowners who support the poor people as there were in Japanese villages. In this sense they share an equal living standard under socialism, although there are differences between those with very little land and those with more, as well as those living in villages and those in cities. The central or local government might be said to have a strong influence in socialism. However, the stronger the vertical control by the central or local government, the more effectively the territorial organization of horizontal mutual

networks would work.

(3) Transformation of Mutual Help Networks through Modernization

① Transformation in Japan

Japanese society has changed as a result of modernization. Japanese tend to be more self-involved than in the past, not only in economic life but also in social life. While the mutual help customs described here have almost disappeared from modern life, there is one aspect of social action that has persisted in Japan, at least in spirit. It has been transformed in the transition from traditional village society to modern urban society in ways that are discussed below.

Development refers to not only economic development, but also social development⁽⁶⁾. Mutual help is a spontaneous occurrence in the social order and plays an especially important role in social development. Participatory social development can reap a rich harvest through mutual help. Mutual help as a social action is non-market oriented. When it becomes fully market-oriented, the spirit of mutual help disappears.

Mechanization and the urban life style have caused mutual help to weaken in villages. In Japan, public aid and commercial mutual help businesses have been making communal help weak. However, nowadays '*moyai*-like' actions have reappeared in the repairing of roads by local people in regional society. The spirit of mutual help will continue in modern Japanese society.

② Transformation in Vietnam

The research shows that, in Vietnam, mutual help networks have clearly remained in modern times. Villagers have confronted modernization by a new movement of '*đổi mới*'. On the one hand, in some cases Vietnamese have stopped exchanging labor in building or re-roofing houses, because houses have changed from traditional style to modern and special craftsmen have been engaged in the work. However, people continue to conquer poverty by helping each other. They are still exchanging labor in planting and harvesting rice and sugar cane, gathering rice and money through '*hội*' and giving money at funeral ceremonies.

Do mutual help networks disappear through modernization? According to the interview survey, Vietnamese still think that mutual help is important and it will continue. However, the actions of villagers who live near Hanoi city are more market oriented⁽⁷⁾, because they are more involved in the life style of the city than villagers in regions farther away. Especially farmers in mountain areas are maintaining a

traditional life style. Mutual help networks support strong solidarity among local people there and strong solidarity makes mutual help networks stable.

The social system of mutual help has contributed to overcome the 'tragedy of the commons'. However, the commons has also become a problem in at least one Vietnamese village. Many villagers have dumped garbage and rubbish here and there in the commons. Of course each individual remains careful with his own land, but no one seems to care about the pollution of the commons environment. Free riders are using the commons as a dump. It seems that such 'dumping' is a big problem not only in this village, but the whole of Vietnam. It should be solved through the spirit of mutual help. If the commons is not maintained carefully, mutual help networks might become instable and weak.

5. Conclusions

This paper has investigated mutual help networks and the transformability and consistency of their spirit in general, by comparing Japanese and Vietnamese agricultural societies⁽⁸⁾. Traditional mutual help networks are important for development as spontaneous elements in an evolving social order. Such indigenous mutual help customs have almost disappeared from modern life in Japan. However, the tradition of mutual help is still manifest in some modern civic activities in the guise of volunteering. Voluntary activities are, in fact, '*tetsudai*' without the expectation of reciprocity. Some people who suffered the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in 1995 helped those afflicted by the Niigata Prefecture earthquake in 2004. People have become conscious of the need for mutual help again. The social system of mutual help arising from indigenous conditions has contributed to overcoming such problems as poverty, 'tragedy of the commons' and 'free riders'. Modern society might do well to review indigenous mutual help networks in search of ways of solving both public and private social problems at home and overseas as well.

It is important for us to reconsider mutualism in modern times. The global spread of mutual help could make different societies stable and improve conviviality in the world. Conviviality means not only living together, but also the self-reliance of both individuals and groups. Mutual help action itself originated from non-market human relations. It may be said to be rational, considering that the 'wisdom of life' in Japanese traditional villages and Vietnamese modern villages have both been compatible with market-oriented action. However, the strong influence of a market-

oriented action on local people has been expelling the spirit of mutual help from villages in Japan. The mutual help networks of Vietnam might become something like the present Japan.

Modernization has weakened the mutual help networks in not only Japan, but also Vietnam, and these institutions have all but disappeared in recent years in Japanese villages. However, the spirit of mutual help has revived whenever there has been a disaster, such as an earthquake in Japan. Points to which special attention should be paid are that the spirit of mutual help would persist in modern times, that we could learn the wisdom of solving the problems from local people in a developing country and that we need to reconsider mutual help in the age of Globalization. The revival of the communal help should be emphasized. We might well understand the importance of building mutual help networks, which could be commonly seen in Asian countries, from the 'wisdom of life' based on the traditional action of local people if we would realize an ideal society of 'Asian community'.

Notes

- (1) Societies are divided into micro-society (social action) and macro-society of social groups as natural groups (family and ethnic groups), as functional groups (organizations and states), and regional (geographical) society (villages, cities and national society).
- (2) The comparative research is based partly on a qualitative study that was carried out by interviewing local Japanese in villages and country towns from 2003 to 2006 and Vietnamese in villages in 2005 and 2007. The interviews were conducted with a series of prepared questions about mutual help and lasted about 30 minutes to an hour. I targeted smaller island communities including Okinawa, Amami, Hirado, Oki and Sado and in Vietnam we interviewed local people in communes including Đông Lai, Thanh Hối and Trong Hoa in Hòa Bình province and Tam Sơn in Bắc Ninh province. Mail surveys would have been very difficult to conduct because Vietnamese have little incentive to respond to such questionnaires.
- (3) I conducted the interview survey in cooperation with staff members of the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities of Vietnam at the end of March in 2007. This survey was conducted using two types of instruments. One was a fixed multiple-choice questionnaire. The other was designed to be more-in depth, using questionnaires that allowed free responses. The following results are from the second type.
- (4) In the Japanese rotating credit system, making a bid of additional money in order to receive an immediate payment was and is popular. For example, if there are 10 members, each may pay 10,000 yen per month. A person who wants money immediately because of current problems can get the total (100,000 yen). Who can get the money the next

month? There are two methods of paying extra (a fee for the privilege of immediate access) for this purpose. One is adding some money to the standard 10,000 yen. Whoever bids the highest amount over 10,000 yen in a particular month can receive the month's total contribution, including any additional funds bid by others trying for that month's payout, but must continue future payments at the higher rate that won him the payout, until the end of the 10 month cycle. The other method is to receive a less-than-full-payout, but continue to pay the standard amount (10,000) until the end of the cycle. Because all 10 members will receive a payout sooner or later, those who wait stand to get larger sums. In the Vietnamese system, in contrast, every person in the '*hội*' can get or give only the same volume of money or rice.

- (5) Whether this typology could be adapted to not only these two countries but other Asian countries is an interesting theme. A typical case is a 'rice bank', which is villagers' cooperative that lends farmers rice gathered by member contributions, voluntary donations and a communal rice crop from common land. A 'water buffalo bank' of villagers' donations was established in Thailand to lend water buffalos to farmers too poor to own one (Phongphit, 1988). These may be said to be mutual help systems of the '*moyai*' type.
- (6) Social development consists of the improvement of life-infrastructure, community development, and human development (Onda, 2001). The improvement of life-infrastructure means to develop human services such as medicine, health and sanitation and education. Community development refers to changing a traditional community into a modern community by organizing groups and acquiring new behavior. Human development is the process of awakening people's consciousness in ways that create a sense of empowerment. The process of social development is based on mutual help as a spontaneous occurrence of the social order.
- (7) The offered interview fee was 10,000 VND, payable at the end of the interviewing. However, some villagers who live near Hanoi city asked for it before interviewing. They are likely to be market-oriented.
- (8) The hypothesis that mutual help networks can be seen in other Asian countries and the West is the subject of a future study. What kind of social structure engenders mutual help networks? The relationship between mutual help and prevailing social structure is also an interesting theme.

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