

Gross national happiness and Bhutan civilization with introduction of workshop held in 3-4 September, 2012 at Sherubtse College, Bhutan

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Abstract: The depopulation and abandoning farming practices in the rural area of Japan and Bhutan clearly recognized as a serious problem in rural development. It is usually considered that these problems have occurred due to the socioeconomic gap in the development between rural and urban and thus the farmers have migrated from rural to urban area. However, the recent Japanese rural situation has well indicated that these problems are deeply linked with the cultural problems or the total life and social system change in rural area, which can be called the change by replacement of "Rural Civilization" by "Urban Civilization". It is generally accepted that "Civilization" is, at present, equivalent to "Modernization" or "Urban Civilization"; urban life and social system based on the European Civilization. Therefore, before modernization, it is not generally recognized that "Civilization" has existed in the rural area as "Rural Civilization". However, if "Civilization" is a complex integration of cultural and social systems, the rural life and social system itself must be recognized as a "Civilization". It might mean that the change of "Rural Civilization" in Japan has dominantly influenced the local people to accept "Urban Civilization" without building the new "Rural Civilization". In the past of Japanese history, Japanese have experienced Civilization Change several times. For example, the Culture of Tea, Rice, etc. have been introduced in Japan from the main land of China originally, but these components of the Chinese Civilization have been re-built as the Japanese Civilization through being locally internalized in Japan. The replacement of the civilization is recognized as a hidden and essential problem behind depopulation and abandoning farming. Gross National Happiness (GNH) of Bhutan is to show the rural people, particularly, in Japan, alternative possibility to re-vitalize their lives and societies apart from urbanized economic development approach.

Key words: Gross National Happiness, Bhutan Civilization, Rural Development, Depopulation, Abandoning farming.

Introduction

This paper has appeared firstly as a key note speech for the international workshop on "Changing Environment and Development in Rural Communities of Bhutan and other Asian countries" held at the Sherubtse College, Royal University of Bhutan, Kanglung, Tashigang, Bhutan jointly implemented by the Sherubtse College, Bhutan, the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), Japan and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University, Japan on September 3 and 4, 2012. This workshop was organized to disseminate the results of joint studies of the following two research projects, first one namely so-called the High Altitude Project or the Human Life, Aging, and Disease in High-Altitude Environments: Physio-Medical, Ecological and Cultural Adaptation in "Highland Civilizations" project (Project Leader: Dr. Kiyohito Okumiya, RIHN) and the second one is so-called the Bengal Bay Project or the KAKEN (JSPS: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science) Project of International Networking Project to Cope with Natural Hazards on the periphery of Bengal Bay (Project Leader: Dr. Kazuo Ando, CSEAS). The program of the international workshop is attached as an annex of this paper (Annexure 1).

The Japanese research team of the High Altitude Project has conducted the joint socio-economic study in the villages of Kaling Geog, Bhutan with the research team of the Sherubtse College during 2010 and 2011 (Choda 2013). The Japanese research team of the Bengal Bay Project has conducted the socio-economic study in the villages of Hatiya *Upazila* (sub-district) of Bangladesh from 2010 with the research team of an NGO named *DWIP UNNAYON SANGSTHA* (DUS) (Island Development Organization). The workshop has highlighted the midterm results of these two projects and the research experiences of the surrounding countries including Japan with a focus on the changing environment and development in rural communities.

The rural communities have been rapidly changing due to influence of modernization and some attack of natural

hazards etc. In most of the Asian countries, we can observe the large difference between urban and rural. It is generally considered that this gap has occurred due to the unbalanced socio-economic development between urban and rural. However, in this paper, the author tries to account for the de-population and de-farming as the problem of rural civilizations through observation of the foreign travelers in the mid of 19 century in Japan and discussion of essence of civilizations.

The key note speech has appeared as an article in *KUENSEL*, the daily newspaper in Bhutan in November 17, 2012 (Ando, 2012). This paper is the revised version of the *KENSEL* article and the key note presented at the workshop.

Materials and Methods

This paper has been prepared mainly on the basis of the comments of the foreign visitors who mainly came from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Laos, China, Thailand, India, Pakistan, France, Australia, etc. in the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, Japan and paid visits in the mountainous villages for nearly more than 10 years up to 2011 in Miyama-cho, Nantan-shi, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan and on the basis of observation in rural area of the eastern Bhutan in 2010 and 2011. In Japan, the foreign visitors have sometime directly discussed with the villagers, local administrators, NPO (Non Profitable Organization) members and others through author's translation from Japanese to English or Bengali to English. In Bhutan, the author has communicated with the villagers, local administrators, etc. through my local counterparts of Sherubtse college and local guide etc.

Results and Discussion

Bhutan Boom and mass-migration from rural to urban: In 2011, Bhutan Boom occurred in Japan and, firstly we should think why the boom occurred in Japan. After the visit of the King and the Queen of Bhutan in Japan, the Bhutan Boom has occurred in Japan, particularly, in the rural area where the people try to overcome the depopulation problem and abandoning

farming. This is because the royal couple came to Japan with GNH (Gross National Happiness), the alternative development paradigm instead of “economic and materialism development”.

From the mid of 1960s to the mid of 1970s, the Japanese society could achieve the miracle rapid economic development, which the other countries in the world has never experienced in the world history. During this period, it was roughly estimated that 500,000 people moved from rural to urban every year to work in non-farming sectors and seeking higher education opportunities. Particularly, the young generation migrated to urban. Even though the number of the migrant was not so large as such, the young

people migrated continuously up to 1990s. As a result, at present, there are so many villages where the aged people over 65 years old are majority. To stop the over-migration from rural to urban, the Japanese government has implemented several projects having the policy to remove the gap of the life environment or facilities between rural and urban since the mid of 1960s. However, so far, we cannot find the sustainable effect of those projects (Ando, 2011). In Table 1, the changes of the number of the peasant (farmer) households, the total household and the farmer’s population in Kuga Community, Suo-Oshima cho, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan are shown as a case.

Table 1. Change of number of farming population and household in Kuga Community, Sou-Oshima Cho Yamaguchi Pref., Japan

Year	No. of farmer	Total no. of house hold	No. of full time farm household
1960	4402	999	437
1970	3324	921	256
1980	2487	806	277
1990	1651	583	278
2000	1204	453	132

Source: Gazetter of Kuga Modern: 260

Depopulation problem and general account for its reason: When the villagers were asked by the outsiders about the reason of the depopulation problem, they have always answered the economic problems particularly, gap of the amount of salary and opportunity of the non-farming income-generation between the rural and urban. The agriculture, forestry and fishery cannot give them the enough equivalent income compared to the urban non-farm opportunities. It has been true since the mid of 1960s. Another problem is the education opportunity in rural. However, it does not mean there are no primary school, junior high school and high school in rural area. The villagers have expected their children to go to the famous high schools and the famous universities to get the advantage in the market of job-opportunities in the urban area. Most of the peasants in the villages have felt the difficulty of the household economics for fully depending only on the agriculture, forestry and fishery. The most peasant parents have expected their daughters had better marriage with non-peasant or urban dwellers and their sons also be employed in the non-agriculture sectors including the government jobs, companies etc. The author is an eldest son of a peasant. Therefore, the author understands this dynamics according to his own experience with his parent.

Except opportunities of “good” income generation and “high quality” education, the Japanese government has successfully developed the physical and social infrastructure of rural Japan, including the roads, electrification, telephone line, health services and other governmental services up to the early of 1990s before the stagnation of the economic development in Japan. Therefore, almost all the visitors from the developing countries in Asia, e.g. Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Laos etc. asked me “where are there the villages?”, when the author took them to the rural areas of Kyoto Prefecture,

e.g. Miyama-cho, the mountainous villages. There are the well paved roads and the well constructed houses. The visitors only asked “where are the children or the people of the village?” In rural areas, where the problem of the depopulation and aged people majority has been accelerated, the visitors raised the same opinion.

At present, it seems that the rural people of Japan are giving up the desire of overcoming the depopulation problem, because as I said, any efforts by the Japanese government against this problem has seemingly not sustained effectively since the early of 1960s. The government of Japan has implemented many projects with the slogan to fill the gap of the life between the rural and the urban.

What was wrong in rural development in Japan? Nobody in Japan could not answer concretely and clearly, because there was the big gap in terms of physical and social infrastructure between the rural and the urban in the mid of 1960s and the mid of 1970s. However, at present, the gap in life facilities between the rural and urban has been minimized except the income-generation and education. For me, the income generation and education might not be the real reason behind depopulation, because nowadays the first immigrant-generation in the mid of 1960s and the mid of 1970s from the rural to the urban are enjoying the pension or retired life. However, very few of the first migrant-generations have come back to their own village, where their old parents live. The present situation well indicates that the economic development including the physical and social infrastructure development is not the real reason for migration of the rural people.

Opinion of Asian visitors in Japanese mountainous villages: When the author questioned the Asian visitors whether you want the villages of your country to become like that of Japan, every person said “no, we do not want the Japanese type of rural development”. It is much

reasonable. The rural people in Japan have not wanted such a rural development too.

What was the wrong? Last year, Mr. Yezer, a lecturer, Sherubtse College visited Miyama-cho and expressed his frank view on the Japanese rural development. He explained as: *“If the rural development means rural become urban, the villagers should seek the “true urban” instead of the “imitation of the urban”.*

It seems that the people concerned in rural development in Japan have innocently believed that the economical or materialistic life in the urban is better than the rural without consideration of the real value of living in the villages. The comment of Mr. Yezer makes the Japanese such as me be conscious of this. The rural lives may be

inferior in getting the high salary or large income compared to the materialism of the urban lives. However, there was the totality of the life cultures in the reliable village societies to be harmonized with the natural environment in Japan. Before occurring of the serious effectiveness of the depopulation, the landscapes consisted of houses, farm lands, grass lands, forest, river, mountain and sea were really beautiful to the outsiders in each localities, just same as Bhutan still maintains at present. The beautiful rural landscapes with local personality expressed an alternative “civilization”, which was not that of urban. However, in the rural area of Japan, the abandon crop fields and houses are plenty (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Abandoned Rice Terraces in Kuga, Ohshima Township, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan (taken by Author)

Changing of rural civilization: Replace Vs Build:

According to the book titled YUKISHI YONO OMOKAGE or “the image of the passed- Japanese world” by Watanabe (2005) , written in Japanese, the culture can be defined as an each element of the life style or social culture such as a behavior of a greeting like a bow in Japanese, but the civilization is the totality or system of lives and societies as a historical individuality supported by the specific cosmology or values and realization of the individual social structure, customs and life style, reflecting the relationships of human beings with nature and living beings. Watanabe points out that a culture can

sustain with transfiguration among the people but a civilization cannot sustain with transfiguration because of its characteristics. The transfiguration of a civilization means dissolution of the totality or systems of life and societies. Watanabe writes the disappearance of “Japanese civilization” by adopting the Western Civilization to catch up the west countries’ economic development since the mid of nineteen centuries. This opinion can commonly be shared by the Japanese. However, I disagree with him about the reason of the disappearance of the Japanese Civilization.



Fig. 2. Beautiful Rice Terrace landscape in Mongar District, Eastern Bhutan (taken by Author)

The reality of the disappearance of Japanese Civilization is that the Japanese have wanted to catch up the western or materialism life style or society rapidly without transfigure “Western Civilization” into “Japanese Civilization”. How did the Japanese build the “Japanese Civilization” in the Japanese history? The ancestors of Japanese tried to adopt the Chinese Civilization such as Chinese Letters, Chinese Philosophies, Green Tea, etc and the Indian culture such as Buddhism through Chinese Civilization with transfiguration to build the Japanese Civilization not to replace the Japanese Civilization to the another one with spending the long period. The important point is that one civilization will not disappear if it is “built” on the basis of totality or system of their own Civilization. The key word for adopt means not “Replacement” but “Build”.

Let’s return to the comment of Mr. Yezer, he clearly states that Japanese rural development has followed the urban life by replacement of the rural life. It can be said that the rural development in Japan was the issue of the “civilizations”. The people concerned in rural development e.g. the government, the private efforts have innocently tried to replace the rural into the urban. Therefore, the value of living in the rural in Japan or the “Japanese Rural Civilization” has gradually missed the attraction even to the villagers themselves. If the villagers have been criticized continuously as their life style and society inferior to that of the urban, they have surely and finally accept the criticism for their survival.

Conclusion: Bhutan civilization: The King and Queen showed the rural people the real value of living in the rural

in Japan with the alternative concept of GNH instead of catching up the urban life style and society based on “Western Civilization”. The CHII community development association of MIYAMACHO adopts the declaration that the CHII community becomes Bhutan in Japan in the annual report for 2011.

Rural Development is not the issue of the economic and materialism development but the issue of the value or civilization such as totality of life and society. In this connection, Bhutan is a unique and potential country in the world for giving the hope to the people whose life style and society are recognized as inferior to the modern or the urban. From these views for Rural Development, the Sherubtse College has the important role in Bhutan. The Sherubtse College must build the value of the rural life and society on the basis of the “Bhutan Civilization” as a concept as well as a practice. Bhutan has an advantage in building the value of the civilization such as rural life style, because most of urban dwellers have still experiences of rural lives in childhood and concrete relationship with rural communities. Furthermore, the aged urban dwellers such as the professors and the government officials now become to understand the advantage of rural lives and societies in comparison with their urban lives. If they can return to their own villages and live for several years after retirement to enjoy the rural life with their pensions and “discover” the real value of the rural, the author firmly believe the young generation can open their eyes on the “Bhutan Civilization” by looking the practice of the retired professors and government officials. It is a simple practice

which has never happened in Japan. The author hopes the GNH should be materialized in this way too.

As a conclusion, the author can learn a lot of the new views of the Civilization from the hidden lands such as Arunachal Pradesh, India and Eastern Bhutan, the mountainous lands of the high altitudes, because in the present world, I can say that these area have still strong own "Civilization" because of their geographical location and political history. It can be mentioned that Bangladesh, Laos and Myanmar have also their strong own Civilization. However, frankly speaking, the people of Bangladesh, Laos and Myanmar might have begun to lose a firm belief for the totality and system of their rural life style and society like Japan, so far I feel in these countries. I sincerely request the Bhutan and the Sherubtse College to understand your role in the world history of Civilization and your potentiality as a leader in the alternative development in the world.

The author hopes the scholars among Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar Laos and Japan to exchange their opinion and learn each other about the important issues related the rural development such as changing environment and development in rural communities on the basis of their own finding in their research fields and so we can build the strong network to build our own "Civilizations" instead of its replacement.

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Annexure 1. Program of the International Workshop on Changing Environment & Development in Rural Communities of Bhutan and other Asian countries held at Sherubtse College, Bhutan and in the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, CSEAS, Kyoto University, Japan from 3-4 September, 2012

Day 1

09:30-10:30: Opening session

Welcome Address: Singye Namgyel (Director, Sherubtse College)
Keynote and Acknowledgement: Kazuo Ando (CSEAS, Kyoto University)
Speech of Chief Guest: Dasho Lungten Dorji (District Mayor, Tashigang, Bhutan)

10:30-10:59 : Coffee Break

11:00-12:30: Session 1: Environmental Studies 1
Chair: Dr. Pankaj Thapa (Assistant Professor, Sherubtse College)

- Paper 1. Climate Refuge in the Coastal Areas in Bangladesh - Md. Rafiqul Alam, Dwip Unnayan Sangstha (DUS), Bangladesh.
Paper 2. Pattern of Agricultural Labour Productivity in the Brahmaputra Valley - Bimal Sharma, Department of Geography & Planning, Sherubtse College, Bhutan
Paper 3. Ecology, technology and ethnicity in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam - Haruhisa Asada, Department of geography, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Japan

12:30-13:59 : Lunch Break

14:00-15:00: Session 2: Environmental Studies 2
Chair: Dr. Kazuo Ando, Associate Professor, CSEAS, Kyoto University, Japan

- Paper 4. Regional and Seasonal Variability of Rainfall Characteristics in the Himalayan region - Azusa Fukushima, Kobe Gakuin University, Japan
Paper 5. Historical Tribe Migration and Land Development around the Eastern Himalaya- Shinji Miyamoto, Faculty of Biosphere-Geosphere Science, Okayama University of Science, Japan

15:00-15:29 : Coffee Break

15:30-17:00: Session 3: Bhutan Studies 1
Chair: Dr. Akinobu Kawai, Professor, The Open University of Japan

- Paper 6. Patterns of Rural Out Migration in Khaling Gewog - Jamyang Choda, Department of Population and Development Studies, Sherubtse College, Bhutan
Paper 7. Brief History of Khaling - Sumjay Tshering, Department of History, Sherubtse College, Bhutan
Paper 8. A study on rural income and risk of losing indigenous agricultural practices: case of Khaling gewog - Ngawang Dendup, Department of Economics, Sherubtse College, Jamyang Thinley, Kezang Gayden (3rd yrs BA Eco/Geography)

Day 2

09:30-11:00 Session 4: Bhutan Studies 2
Chair: Dr. Khin Lay Shwe, Ex-Pro-Lector, Yezin Agriculture University, UNDP, Myanmar

- Paper 9. Assessment of Ecosystem Services in Khaling Gewog, Bhutan - Kuenzang Tshering, Department of Zoology, Sherubtse College, Bhutan
Paper 10. Agricultural History and Current Rural Life in Khaling Gewog - Yoshio Akamatsu, Ehime University, Japan
Paper 11. Agricultural Area Classification of Bhutan using Multivariate Analysis - Haruo Uchida, Western Region Agricultural Research Center, Japan

11:00-11:29 : Coffee Break
11:30-13:00 Session 5: Developmental Studies 1
Chair: Karma Wangchuck, Lecturer, Sherubtse College, Bhutan

- Paper 12. Demographic Trend of Farming Population in Japan: a retrospect - Akinobu Kawai, The Open University of Japan
- Paper 13. Living and consciousness of the people in the suburbs of the megacity in Japan - Satoshi Wakebe, Ori Medical Clinic
- Paper 14. Development with animal conservation using the traditional farming practices in Japan - Nobuhiro Ohnishi, Faculty of Bioenvironmental Science, Kyotogakuen University, Japan

13:00-13:59 : Lunch Break

14:00-15:30 Session 6: Developmental Studies 2
Chair: Sangay Dorji, Lecturer, Sherubtse College, Bhutan

- Paper 15. Upland and hill agriculture in Myanmar - Khin Lay Shwe, Rtd. Pro-Rector, Yezin Agricultural University, National Consultant (Climate Change) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Myanmar
- Paper 16. Conservation of Lao tradition and culture in Thajampa - Inthong Somphou, Faculty of Agriculture, National University of Laos, Lao P.D.R.
- Paper 17. Necessity for Alternative Paradigm for Rural and Agricultural Development - Lesson from Japan and Bhutan & Arunachal Pradesh - Kazuo Ando, CSEAS, Kyoto University, Japan

15:30-15:59 : Coffee Break

16:00-17:00 General Discussion
Chair: Yezer, Lecturer, Sherubtse College, bhutan & Kazuo Ando, Associate Professor, CSEAS, Kyoto University, Japan

17:00-17:15 Closing Session
Concluding Remarks & Vote of Thanks - Sonam Chhogyel, Sherubtse College, Bhutan

Dinner Party (KC Hotel, Tashigang)

MC: Sonam Chhogyel (Sherubtse College)