Development and Community Spirit: A Balancing Act

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1. Introduction

This paper is an updated version of my reflection paper on my field work in Jomalig island last June 2013. When I went to Jomalig Island, I felt their strong sense of community. It made me think that our happiness is not equal to the material wealth we have in our life. In this paper, I discuss this insight more deeply from the whole experiences I had with the ISO to help me understand the factors that influence one's happiness in both developing and developed countries.

2. The Insight I Got in Jomalig

I reflect what I discussed before. I went to JOMALIG Island as a volunteer of the Institute of Social Order on 17th-21th, June, 2013. The following sections detail my reflections of that experience.

2.1 Material Wealth and Happiness

The thought I got from my experiences in Jomalig Island is that material wealth is inversely proportional to the happiness of the people when the level of material wealth is over a certain level. A certain level depends on whether or not one needs help from the other members of his/her community. These are my thoughts from comparing the situation in Jomalig to the situation of provinces in Japan.

Japan is recognized as a developed country. However, this does not mean that Japan has no problems and all of the people who live in Japan are happy. There are also social problems the most glaring of which are poverty, suicide and the widening generational gap. Among these for me, the incidences of suicide and an aging society with low birth rate are the most pressing concerns in Japanese society. It seems that these problems are prevalent in developed countries, especially in Japan. From my experience in Jomalig, I realized the key causes of these problems

During my stay in the island, I felt that the people looked so happy. It seemed that they were enjoying their life. I thought that there are several factors that contribute to this happiness.

The first one is religion. The Filipinos generally have a strong Christian faith which is a big influence on their strong community spirit. On the other hand, in Japan, we have religions such as Buddhism and Shinto, but we generally do not have strong faiths compared to Filipinos. The second is the Filipino culture which, I think, is also because of Christianity. Filipinos have spirits that they enjoy and cherish every day.

Religion and culture are important contributors to happiness. In my opinion, these are one of the biggest reasons why the people in Jomalig have a strong sense of community. Based on my personal observations, it seems that they cannot live without the help of their community members. They earn money through selling products to their neighbor. Despite being a remote island, they have a flourishing economic activity that requires them to rely on one another. I felt that the trust within the community is very strong. For example, the fisher I met sells a portion of his catch to neighbors. This is also the case with the farmer I interviewed who sells his crops to his neighbors.

Compared to people living in urban cities such as Metro Manila, they have limited access to information and transportation. However, in my opinion, these difficulties cause the community to be more strengthened, which, in turn, makes them happy. The community members rely on one another to survive the difficulties they have to encounter every day.

In reality, there are many kinds of happiness but it depends on the individual. Through my experience in Jomalig, I found that living in a developed country such as in Japan does not always result to having a happy life.

In Japan, there are many people who commit suicide. Based on a study, 30,000 people commit suicide annually. This means that, on the average, 82 people commit suicide in a day.[1] There are many causes behind it: poverty, relationship problems especially between husband and wife, and so on. But in my opinion, the root of this problem is loneliness. I think this is uncommon for people in other countries. They might ask ''Why do they commit suicide, when Japan is a rich country?''

I think the suicide problem in Japan is related to material wealth. People in Japan, especially those living in the city can easily get resources and access information. They live such a convenient life, that they get by living each day by their lonesome. They do not have to rely on other people more than necessary. Such is the case with the development of the

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[1]内閣府自殺対策推進室　警察庁生活安全局生活安全企画課 ''平成24年中における自殺の状況''（平成25年３月14日）

Internet. The Japanese resort to communicating with other people online. As a result, it is only very seldom that they can personally communicate with others. These conveniences both have good and bad aspects. Because they live conveniently and depend solely on themselves, they eventually do not rely on other people. In the end, they lost their sense of community that they can rely on for help during times of need.

On the other hand, I believe that there are still communities like Jomailg in the provinces of Japan. They live by helping one another. However, majority of these provinces face a unique problem: a population in decline and an ageing society. Because of the convenient life and the opportunities one finds in the city, the young people from the provinces migrate into the city. As a consequence, the number of communities in the provinces has begun to decrease.

From these view points, I can say that a highly developed life style can be a cause of the disintegration of a community. On the other hand, a less developed life caused by poverty wherein people cannot get enough foods should not be allowed. In my conclusion after the trip, the best life situation is a sustainable life. It does not necessarily have to be convenient. People need to help one another. However, I have to admit that this thought is not realistic, since it is within that nature of human beings to seek a more convenient life. However, the most important thing that people in both developing and developed countries should consider is their happiness. They should realize that a convenient life does not always bring about happiness. To achieve this, they have to have a balance between development and their community.

3. The Traditional Culture of Communities: "Bayanihan"

After the trip, I found that there is a unique Filipino philosophy called "bayanihan" which means working together so that the community will reap and share in a bountiful harvests. Based on my readings, this thought originated in rural areas a long time ago. This old philosophy may be the factor of that sense of community that I saw in Jomalig. "bayanihan" is defined in general as **working together to achieve a common noble purpose and equitably sharing the fruits of labor in the communities**[2]. This is usually depicted in images wherein community members carry the house of another member of their community (see Figure 1). Before Spain colonized the Philippines, the Filipino people lived a nomadic life: hence, basically, they had to move their houses frequently. As it is defined, community members help one another regardless of social ranking and status, leadership roles, and authority.

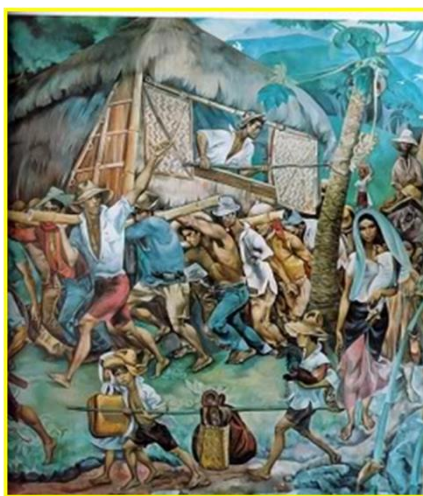[2] PPT: SUSTAINING AND IMPROVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH *BAYANIHAN*

Figure1-How Bayanihan Was Practiced in Rural Areas[3]

(Source: http://www.slideshare.net/jundumaug1/lesson-3-filipino-values-bayanihan)

I could regard the communities I saw in Jomalig with ''bayanihan''. I think ''bayanihan'' is the root of our happiness, since it shows the spirit of helping one another. In other words, it shows an ideal relationship within a community wherein its members have a sense of belonging. I might find our happiness from "bayanihan" in terms of a satisfied heart. That is the reason why I focused on studying this culture.

3.1 Does Bayanihan still Exist?

Does ''bayanihan'' still exist in the Philippines? I investigated whether or not it is still practiced by the Filipinos, especially those living in rural areas. With my Japanese classmates and the ISO, I conducted a survey about ''bayanihan'' to the people of Barangay Cagbalite of the Municipality of Mauban in Quezon Province, that can help me find out how ''bayanihan'' is practiced in their daily life.
The following table is the result of the survey.

Table1: the Result of the Survey in Barangay Cagbalite, Mauban. Quezon

The total number of the surveys	5 respondents
The number of the people who know bayanihan	5 respondents

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[3] "SUSTAINING AND IMPROVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH *BAYANIHAN*" a powerpoint presentation from
http://www.slideshare.net/jundumaug1/lesson-3-filipino-values-bayanihan

The definition of ''bayanihan'' according to the respondents	Working together for free to complete tasks quickly(3 respondents)
	Sympathizing and helping one another(1 respondent)
	Working together for free to complete tasks quickly when someone build his/her house.(1 respondents)
Except for family members, who else can help you in cases of your emergency?	Friends, neighbors
The number of the respondents who have practiced bayanihan before	5 respondents
The number of respondents who has experienced ''bayanihan'' from another community members when he/she　and his/her family is in an emergency situation?	5 respondents

　　As the result shows, all of respondents have experiences to practice ''bayanihan''. All of the respondents mentioned at least 2 stories of "bayanihan". They have recollections of cases where they helped someone and they were helped by someone other than their families. For example, during bad weather, one fisher-respondent had to put their boats to a safe place. So when the waves were very rough, his co-fishers helped him dock his boat to shore. Thus in fishery, bayanihan is often visualized by fishers carrying their boats instead of houses. Another example is when one female respondent was helped by a neighbor when she was pregnant and in critical stuation to give birth. Her neighbor helped to look for a boat that will take her to Mauban.

　From these result, I could tell that bayanihan still exists in the people's life in the rural areas especially during cases of emergency. It surprised me that besides their family members, all of them have someone who can help them in times of need. At least, I did not see any family who was isolated from their community. It is very different from my family's situation in Japan, since our family members do not even know even the names of our neighbors.
　On the contrary, how is bayanihan practiced among the people living in urbanized areas in the Philippines? Even if I did not conduct a survey to those living in urban areas, I could somehow tell from my daily life experiences. In terms of explaining the situation of baynihan in urban areas, I explain it by separating urban poor communities from relatively rich people

in Manila. I found out that the situation is completely different from each other.

 In urban poor communities in Manila, I could see the similar situation with the communities in rural area in terms of the closeness of the community members. I guess because they are really poor, I could see that they are helping one another to survive. I could see that they helped one another to make up for their inconveniences.

 However, in the communities of rich people, the situation is very different. Their lives are relatively similar with our situation in Japan. Of course, I think their relationship is closer than ours in Japan, but from the conversations with people I met in Manila, I can say that the bayanihan is beginning to vanish among the rich people in urban areas. From my conversations with them, they said that they belong to the community but they usually do not talk with their neighbors now. Some of them also have not experienced helping their neighbors in an emergency situation. Some of them said that before, they also had a strong sense of community. Now, they started to drift apart, Once in a while, however the Church sometimes provide venues and events that make people in the community close. Thus I could say that religion also plays an important role uniting community members.

3.2 What are the Factors that Keep Bayanihan Alive?
 What are the factors that keep the bayanihan culture alive? Based from my personal and research experiences, I could find 3 possible factors.

①How the Value of Bayanihan Can be Succeeded Between Generations
 It seems that the differences of bayanihan between rural areas and urban areas depend on how bayanihan as a value is succeeded to the next generation. In other words, the cause of the bayanihan being vanished is not because of the situation but because of the individual's value of it has not succeeded. For example, even if people live in urban areas and are rich, they can have a spirit of bayanihan, if they have practiced it before or are familiar with the value. If they are taught or experienced the bayanihan value in their childhood, they might be able to practice bayanihan regardless of their wealth. In the end, how bayanihan affects the people's values is a key to succeed this culture.

②Christian Faith
 Most Filipinos are Christians, and the thoughts of the people are based on Christianity. As I explained, the local churches help local communities unite, and sometimes churches provide activities that make people close. So I can tell Christianity somehow instills a strong

sense of community among the people, and influence them to practice Bayanihan.

③Development Level

As I discussed before, one of the reasons why people from the rural areas can have a strong sense of community is because they lack resources and have limited the access to information. They are put in the situation where they have to rely on one another to live. However, that situation makes people close enough to build relationships where people can actually practice bayanihan. For example, if people can afford to do something by themselves, they do not have to rely on other people more than necessary. Even in case of an emergency, if the social security system is developed in the area, they would choose not to ask their neighbors: they would rather call services like calling an ambulance. If they have enough money, they do not have to ask other people to lend them money. Thus I can say that the degree of development of an area and also the economic level of an individual influences how they would engage in bayanihan.

3.3 What is Bayanihan Again?

From the result of the surveys and my experiences, people practice bayanihan especially during an emergency. Based on this, however, this is actually not a culture unique only to the Philippines because we can see similar cases in other countries. For example in Japan, since the big earthquake and tsunami happened, a lot of volunteers from all over Japan have been helping to revive the affected area until now. In a way, other countries have a similar culture: however, I feel that is stronger in the Philippines. Thus, this community spirit can also be adopted and nurtured in different countries.

4. How Can We Maintain Bayanihan in the Future?

Bayanihan is starting to vanish along with the development of a country. Even if people succeed the value from their parents, in the developed life, it becomes hard to practice bayanihan, because the lifestyle becomes more convenient. People start to forget relying on one another, because they do not have to ask help from other people, and eventually even from their family.

The point from now is how we can continue to nurture bayanihan and the strong spirit of the community, even if our surroundings are developed and convenient. Yes, the situation of the Philippines is different from the one of Japan now. But if Filipinos will forget this spirit along with development of the country, I am certain that the Philippines will also have problems such as suicide, depression, and so on.

I will end this paper by suggesting how Filipinos can continue to have the spirit of bayanihan, even if the environment is developed, since I really want the Filipinos to keep this kind of spirit and show these to other countries like Japan. The spirit to have a strong sense of community and the capacity to form relationships to help each other is really important in our quest for happiness, even if our life will become more convenient.

4.1 Carry Over the Value of ''Bayanihan'' to the Next Generation

① Always talk about bayanihan experiences and give the children the opportunity to practice bayanihan in their childhood

The values of a person are shaped in childhood. In order not to lose the happiness that you have now, you should tell your children how important it is to have a strong sense of community where you can help one another, regardless of how large the community is. If people do not have anyone who they can rely on and also be relied on, people will feel isolated and cannot be happy, even if they have a lot of money. Thus we should really carry over the spirit of bayanihan to the next generations.

② Have immersions in other communities or other countries

An immersion in a different environment is good if we want to reflect on our lives. We can only understand ourselves and our own happiness better if expose ourselves to different situations. I and the students from my class had immersions here in the Philippines. All of us were somehow influenced and could reflect on our own life. It is really important to be immersed in different cultures and values for you to improve your life.

③ Carefully design the development of rural areas like a ''locally produced and consumed city''

Even if the capital is concentrated in the city like Manila, we should keep the life style of locally produced and consumed to make the people stay in the rural area and to minimize the number of people who are already moving to the city. This situation will bring about lack of communities like in Japan. The most important thing to do now for this is to design how the locals develop. In the long term, the local design affects all of sectors in the area such as fishery, agriculture, so not only the local government but also the NGOs who helps the local areas should be part of those who design the whole area, even though NGOs contribute to just one sector in the area. The locals should design their community comprehensively, so that the development of all of sectors in the rural area will be considered well.

As I mentioned, the Filipinos might also lose a nice spirit such as bayanihan unless they exert a lot of effort to keep the spirit.   The greatest thing that I was glad to learn during my

stay in the Philippines is exactly the spirit of the Filipinos. I could find in their spirit the important thing which the Japanese have almost forgotten.   I hope the Filipino people will continue to cherish this spirit called" bayanihan''. I hope that I will be able to feel it when I come back to the Philippines in the future.