Studies on Asia, Series I Volume 4 (1963): 27-41
© 1963 University of Nebraska Press

Network and Corporate Structure:

A Structural Approach to Community Interrelations in Japan

HARUMI BEFU
University of Missouri

INTRODUCTION

Since the time, more than a decade ago, Julian Steward commented on the lack of a methodology for relating the local community with the larger whole of which it is a part,[1] a number of methods have been suggested by various scholars. Redfield has summarized many of these and has offered some of his own.[2] Steward himself has been responsible for developing one of the most useful concepts in this area.[3] He distinguishes between the national institutions and the socio-cultural segments of a culture and divides these segments still further into the local group and the class, occupational, or other categories which usually crosscut localities. Evans-Pritchard's analysis of the Nuer[4] and Starr's of Los Tuxtlas,[5] though somewhat different from each other, both place the local community in the center of a series of concentric units, each of which is wholly contained in successively larger units. Barnes, analyzing the West Norwegian parish of Brennes,[6] has distinguished three types of social field: (1) a territorially based field, which defines essentially concentric circles of administrative units much like those of Starr's; (2) an industrial system, to which people are related through

NOTE: The author would like to thank Dr. Fred E. Katz for his helpful suggestions in working out the theoretical framework for the present paper.

economic activities; and (3) a network of personal relations, which are not included in the first two categories. Redfield's now-famous concept of the great and little tradition[7] is too familiar to require special comment.

In attempting to relate rural communities in Japan to the external world I have found none of these concepts completely satisfactory. Barnes's threefold distinction was most useful but was not formulated with sufficient clarity and rigor. I, therefore, suggest the two concepts of "network" and "corporate structure," for the analysis of Japanese communities in relation to the world outside. Before discussing Japanese communities in their wider context, it is necessary to define and distinguish these terms.

A "network" consists of relationships between individuals which, being of indefinite extent, do not result in permanent social groups with definite boundaries. The basic units of a network are, first, the relationships linking individuals, who occupy the "knots" of the network. Each individual has one or more "personal networks," consisting of a limited number of persons who occupy positions near him and who know him directly. The particular set of individuals included in any given personal network is generally unique. The personal networks of two closely related individuals, to be sure, would overlap considerably; that is, many of the persons included in the two networks tend to be the same. Nonetheless, they usually contain some different persons.

For purposes of analysis we shall regard a personal network as consisting of one homogeneous type of relationship. Thus an individual may have a personal network based on friendship and another based on cognatic kinship, but a given network would not contain two heterogeneous types of relationship. The relation between two different types of network will be discussed later.

Second, although from the individual's point of view his personal network has boundaries, the network itself extends and expands in all directions as one traces the relations of one individual to another. When the personal networks of all the members of a social unit are combined, it is possible, or even likely, that all members of that unit will be found to be connected

in a comprehensive "network formation," which is much more complex than a simple sum total of individuals. Thus *X*'s personal network may include individuals, *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*; *Y*'s network, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E*; and *Z*'s network, *A*, *E*, *M*, and *R*. Thus the summation of all the personal networks will exhibit a form much more complex than is suggested by the phrase, "sum total of individuals." Still, a network formation is homogeneous, being composed of homogeneous personal networks, and may be based on kinship or friendship but not on both.

Finally, as has been said, there may be more than one kind of network relationship in a community or society. Such a group will have as many network formations as there are different types of network relationship–one, for example, based on kinship, another on friendship, and still another on neighborhood ties. These network formations, however, are not independent of one another, for a person usually has groups of kinsmen, friends as well as neighbors. This means that there are three personal networks, and therefore three network formations, which are linked with one another through this person. Since most people have kinsmen, friends, and neighbors, ordinarily there would be a great many "nodules" of linkage between network formations. We shall adopt the term "total network structure" for the sum total of all the network formations in a community or society, linked to one another through all the possible internetwork connections.

Most discussions of network stop at the level of personal network. Barnes's concept implies a structure essentially the same as what I have called the "total network structure." But Barnes does not explicitly conceive of such separate units as the personal network, network formation, and total network structure. These units are important and useful elements in analyzing the relations of the community with the world outside.

Turning to our second concept, "corporate structure," we may point out, first, that unlike a network structure a corporate structure is characaterized by a clear-cut membership boundary; second, whereas the basic unit of the network is the relationship between individuals who occupy the "knots" in the network, it is the definite group of several individuals rather than the

individual himself which is the basic unit of a corporate structure; third, whereas the network structure is ego-centered and dissolves when ego dies, the corporate structure has permanence, persisting irrespective of the life of the individual members.

A corporate structure may include concentric units, in which successively larger units wholly contain a smaller one. An example would be the administrative structure of Japan: a hamlet is contained in a village, in a prefecture, in the state. The criterion for these structural units is the same, that is, administration.

In a given society or community, there may be several heterogeneous corporate structures, each based on different criteria. For instance, in addition to the administrative structure, there may be an educational structure, in which elementary schools are under the jurisdiction of a board of education, under the prefectural department of education, and under the ministry of education. The concentric circles thus established for the educational structure may coincide with those of the administration, although they need not do so. If they do not, they may be completely independent of one another or they may be linked.

There are two possible ways in which two heterogeneous structures can be linked. The first and the simpler is through an overlapping membership. An individual may be a member of both structures simultaneously; for example, a taxpayer and also a member of the parent-teachers' association. The second type of link between structure of different kinds is an interlocking at the structural level. For instance, one structure may contain an office which is by constitution necessarily also an office of the other. An illustration here would be the presence of representatives from the local parent-teacher's association and the youth association on the advisory board of the local police for the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

These concepts of network and corporate structure are similar to those of network and pattern developed by Nadel.[8] Nadel's concept, however, stops at the level of the personal network. Also, he fails to work out the internal structure of the pattern and the structural relationship between patterns. The utility of the concepts offered here lies in their "transposability."[9] That is, the two types of structure can be recognized in diverse concrete

situations. Two of Barnes's three types of social field mentioned above, namely, the territorially based field and the industrial system, are special examples of the corporate structure. Another type in which the concepts of network and corporate structure are applicable is kinship. The distinction between these two concepts is precisely that between the bilateral, or cognatic, structure and unilineal structure. In the present context we are interested in applying the concepts of network and corporate structure to social situations which include both kinship and other types of relation.

The following discussion of the relation between Japanese hamlets in northern Japan and the external world, illustrates the usefulness of the concepts. Those social systems which constitute networks will be described first, followed by those having corporate structure.

In this paper the community unit of our concern is the *buraku*, the smallest territorial unit in rural Japan, which is socially significant. The term "hamlet" will be used as the translation for *buraku*. "Community" will refer loosely to the hamlet and to any other localized social unit.

The hamlets investigated by the author,[10] which serve as sample communities in the present analysis, are situated on the Sendai Plain in northern Honshu. Their populations ranged from 180 to 491 in 1959. They are primarily rice-growing communities, with some subsidiary economic activities. One is relatively close to a large urban center while the others are far from any large city. There is no reason to believe that they are a-typical Japanese hamlets—at least for the purpose of analysis from the structural point of view proposed here.

NETWORK STRUCTURE

Although network structure is generic to almost any social situation, in the hamlets under consideration it is best seen in the kinship and friendship patterns. Aside from the patrilineal descent rule,[11] the bilateral mode of kinship integration is an important element of the social structure in rural Japan. It is the bilateral kin who come to help in house construction, thatch-

ing of the roof, rice transplantation, weeding, harvest, and other economic activities, though this does not imply that nonkin do not also assist on these occasions. It is also the bilateral kin who pay visits on such ceremonial occasions as the New Year, *o-Bon* (All Souls' Day), and so forth. The kinsmen who come to help or visit include anyone related through blood, marriage, or adoption. Relatives on both paternal and maternal sides are equally regarded. Affinals, such as a man's married daughter's husband's blood relatives or a man's sister's brothers-in-law and their kin, are also likely to be called on for help or to come for visits. Distant kinsmen are, of course, not as likely to participate as closer kin, but the "interaction frequency,"[12] if it can be taken as a method of detecting social structure, does not vary according to the line of descent or consanguinity or affinity.

Adoption as a criterion of bilateral kinship is also not forgotten. Adoption by a sonless man of a mature male as an heir (*mukoyōshi*) is a well-known custom in Japan. The *mukoyōshi* is married to the man's daughter or to a woman whom the family brings in as a bride.[13] Such an adoption implies from the point of view of patrilineal descent, the severance of the adopted heir's ties with his natal family and his becoming a full-fledged member of the family into which he has been adopted and married. In reality, however, a *mukoyōshi* does not lose his ties with his natal family any more than a bride loses hers after marriage.[14] Rather, a *mukoyōshi* retains his ties with his blood relatives and activates them whenever necessary or convenient. At rice harvest, for example, a man may help his wife's brother who has been adopted out as a *mukoyōshi;* or he may have the *mukoyōshi's* children come and stay with him overnight.

Of course, not all of one's bilateral kin are involved in any single activity or event. Who and how many will be involved will vary, depending on the nature of the events. A large crew would be needed for rice transplantation, but only one or two persons might participate in weeding.

An important point is that the circles of kin who help and visit each other and thus constitute personal networks extend far beyond the boundaries of one's own hamlet. Many relatives live in communities five or six miles away. Suzuki has suggested

that a "sphere of marriage," the region from which brides come and hence the area where ego's affinals are found, includes about 100 square miles.[15] And there is evidence that this sphere is enlarging with the recent trend toward modernization.[16] Thus the network of kinship relations established individually by each member of a hamlet extends to many neighboring communities, constituting one important structural means through which a community relates itself to the outside world.

Consideration of the kinship network should not stop at the individual level. Since every member of a hamlet has his own kinship network, and since some of these members are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, the personal network of these related individuals can be linked. In a hamlet, there are several groups of related individuals, although in the hamlets studied not all members were found to have kinship ties. The personal networks of these related persons are then linked to constitute a network formation. Thus in a hamlet there are several independent kinship network formations. From the point of view of the community's relations with the outside world, it is these network formations, rather than personal networks, which are important.

This type of network structure is not limited to the kinship area; it is observable among friends and neighbors. The fact that the primary school district includes several hamlets is a critical factor here. The ties established among classmates during these primary school years are generally maintained through adulthood, unless one moves entirely away from the area. These friends become confidants in one's love affairs, and they often are the persons from whom one can borrow money in time of financial difficulties. These friends, again, are scattered throughout an area in and around one's hamlet. The network of friendship established by any particular individual during his childhood and maintained in his adulthood does not include all his classmates, but only a few, who are compatible and sympathetic. However, here again, as in a kinship network, because the friendship networks of several individuals overlap, the net effect is an interlocking of many networks which, ramifying in many directions, encompass the whole school district.

Because of the physical isolation of Japanese hamlets, neighborhood ties are, on the whole, limited to relations with other members of the community, and the neighborhood network as such does not generally relate the community to other communities. However, when we remember that one's neighbors are also someone else's friends and still another's relatives, we begin to appreciate the total ramification of the network pattern. Neighborhood ties themselves may not lead to the outside world, but through a neighbor's friends and relatives, relations with surrounding communities are established, entirely apart from one's direct ties with them through one's friends and relatives. Thus all three types of network formation— (1) the kinship networks of all the members of a community in an area including a dozen or more neighboring communities, (2) the friendship networks of all members which may crosscut hamlet boundaries, and finally, (3) the neighborhood ties—all these should then be combined in order to produce an adequate picture of the total network structure of a hamlet in relation to the surrounding communities. The result will be a network structure with a heavy "density" of relationships in and around the hamlet, gradually fading out as one goes outward in all directions but embracing dozens of neighboring hamlets.

CORPORATE STRUCTURE

Aside from the network of personal ties which lead from a given community to its surrounding areas, there are many corporate-structured social systems, for example, the educational system, the agricultural cooperative association, the irrigation cooperative, and so on. The structural arrangements of many of these are duplicates. Therefore, instead of describing all the corporate structures found in the hamlets under consideration, a few which illustrate different structural arrangements will be discussed here.

First, the educational system illustrates the organization of a series of homogeneous concentric units from the local level to the national level. The smallest unit of the educational system is of course the school district, which is composed of several

hamlets. Immediately, then, the education of its members brings a hamlet into the orbit of a wider world.

Individual schools are controlled by the board of education of the village, town, or city. Boards of education are in turn under the jurisdiction of the prefectural department of education. Finally, the latter is kept in close check by the Ministry of Education in Tokyo. Ultimately, the influence exerted by the central and local authorities affects school children in such matters as the content of the curricula and the method of teaching.

It is also through this educational channel that the great tradition of the nation is transmitted down to the local level. Children not only learn the three R's and other subjects common throughout Japan, but they also become aware of the larger world. Their consciousness of themselves as members of the Japanese society and as citizens of the nation is first inculcated in elementary school.

The administrative system, the youth association, and a few other organizations have a corporate structure similar to that of the educational system; they are all organized on a multi-hamlet basis in a concentric fashion, their jurisdictional boundaries on the whole coinciding.

Second, the agricultural cooperative is slightly differently organized, at least at higher levels, though not at the local level. In this area, as throughout Japan, the cooperative is territorially organized so that all farmers within a given area must belong to a certain cooperative if they are to belong at all. Almost all the farmers are members of the cooperative of their area. Usually the boundaries of a cooperative's territory follow administrative boundaries. Ideally, there is supposed to be one cooperative per administrative village or town. In reality, however, the administrative unit is often divided into two or three areas, each with its own cooperative. In any case, the territory of each cooperative is occupied by a large number of hamlets, often twenty or thirty.

Cooperatives sell rice and other agricultural products, buy consumer goods for their members, provide banking and financial services, and channel new agronomical knowledge from research institutions to members.[17] Some of them operate warehouses to store surplus rice for the government, the fee for which

is an important source of additional income. The growing importance of the cooperatives is seen in the establishment of auxiliary organizations for youths and housewives sometimes at the expense of doing away with competing independent associations of this sort.

As has been mentioned, the agricultural cooperative is organized on a multi-hamlet basis. It is truly the cooperative effort of all the members of all the hamlets which makes the crucial services available to each member. It should be noted further that cooperatives are organized at regional and national levels to facilitate more effective financing and other operations, and this brings farmers ultimately into the national orbit of Japan. At these higher levels, each of the functional departments of the cooperatives, such as credit, purchase, sale, technical guidance, and so forth, is organized separately, thus providing horizontal ties on a functional basis. There are, for example, prefectural and national associations of cooperative finance, which provide financial services to individual cooperatives. At higher levels, then, the agricultural cooperative is not structured in a concentric fashion, but in horizontal crosscutting divisions.

The two types of structure discussed above illustrate nationwide organization. Many other structures are multi-communal, but stop at a regional level. We give two illustrations: the Shinto institution and the irrigation cooperative.

In rural Japan the Shinto shrine is first and foremost a shrine of the community. The deity enshrined looks after the welfare of a certain territorially defined community and its residents. Earlier there used to be one shrine for each hamlet, and even now many hamlets have their own exclusive shrines. In these, the shrine, by providing supernatural sanctions exclusively for the protection of the members of a hamlet, fosters hamlet solidarity. The recent tendency, however, has been for several Shinto parishes to consolidate under one shrine. The unit of religious solidarity then becomes multi-communal: individual hamlets are not religiously discrete units, but are part of a larger solidarity unit. Generally speaking, Shinto shrines do not have organizational ties with any larger shrines—in sharp contrast to the Buddhist institution, in which temples are hier-

archially organized and controlled by the headquarters in large cities, like Kyoto. For all practical purposes, each Shinto shrine parish is an autonomous unit. Shintoism thus illustrates a structure of intermediate regional level.

The irrigation cooperative in the area studied is also a localized association, like the Shinto parish, but its jurisdictional boundaries are different from any of the structures discussed above.

An area irrigated by a given body of water is a unit which has one vital common interest. When the irrigation system serves only a single hamlet, it is a powerful factor in hamlet integration. When, on the other hand, it serves a wider area, as it does in the Sendai Plain where our hamlets are located, it unifies this wider area at the expense of weakening the autonomy and self-sufficiency of each individual hamlet. A recent survey of all rural settlements in Japan shows that only 18.3 per cent of all settlements on plains have exclusive irrigation systems, others share water with other settlements.[18] Since the concept of settlement may be roughly equated with that of buraku, interhamlet cooperation induced by the factor of irrigation is rather common in Japan, for each area served by an irrigation system is organized into a cooperative for the maintenance and improvement of the irrigation facilities.

The jurisdictional area of an irrigation cooperative is necessarily determined by the extent of its irrigation system, whereas other organizations, such as the school system, need not and often do not follow the same boundaries. The boundaries of one of the irrigation cooperatives investigated only partially overlapped with the systems of administration, education, and so forth.

Irrigation cooperatives generally do not have structural links of any sort among themselves; they are independent organizations. They serve to unite the hamlets using the same irrigation system, but the structure stops at this level without any wider structural tie-up with the rest of the world.

The structures discussed so far all are characterized by having a territorially discrete unit, at least at the hamlet level. That is, in all these the whole hamlet is the minimal unit of organization; it is not broken up into smaller units. There may perhaps be

nonmembers of a cooperative in a hamlet; but there is no one who belongs to another cooperative. The Buddhist institution provides us with an example in which the hamlet is split into several groups, each affiliated with a different temple.

Buddhism being a religion of the family rather than the community, different families in a hamlet may and do belong to temples of different sects. If so, the temple generally has a hamlet representative who organizes the families of the hamlet belonging to the temple into a unit. Buddhism thus divides the hamlet membership into separate units. This does not mean that dozens of different Buddhist sects are represented in a hamlet. There is a tendency for families to belong to one or the other of a small number of sects, perhaps three or four, which have temples within walking distance. These temples are usually in some other hamlet than one's own, necessitating travel outside one's community in order to perform religious duties. Even if the temple is within the hamlet boundaries, and even if all the families of the hamlet belong to the temple, the temple is still open to outsiders, to families in surrounding hamlets.

Buddhism thus tends to undermine hamlet unity by splitting it into different sect groups and to bring about its integration in a larger territorial unit by including in its parish several hamlets.[19]

We noted earlier in our theoretical discussion that different structures can be linked in either of two ways, through an overlapping membership or by an interlocking at the structural level. It is obvious that the concrete structures in the hamlet—educational system, irrigation cooperative, Shinto parish, and so forth—are linked through participation of the same hamlet members, but these structures are generally not linked through interlocking offices. Such structural interlocking seems to be extremely rare, though not completely absent. For instance, the offices of the association for the prevention of crime, organized on the basis of the local police district, are representatives from the youth association, the parent-teacher's association, hamlet association, and a few other formally organized bodies of the hamlet. This, however, is one of the rare cases of structural interlocking and is of minor importance.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this paper we defined the concepts of network and corporate structure with some care and, in the subsequent sections, illustrated their utility in analyzing the interrelations of Japanese hamlets and the outside world. We have seen that the personal networks of kinship or friendship interlock to form a complex network formation, and that network formations of different types are linked in a complex network structure. The result is a tightly knit system of personal relations radiating from the hamlet in all directions, the "density" of relations decreasing with the distance from the hamlet.

Although Bott,[20] Barnes,[21] and others have used this concept of network in their analysis of human relations, their concepts stop at the level of the personal network. No one to my knowledge has suggested the notion of the network formation as a combination of homogeneous personal networks and of the total network structure as linked network formations. These are useful concepts in analyzing not only the community's relations with the outside world but many other types of social relations as well.

This type of structural relation based on personal ties contrasts sharply with the corporate structure. In the latter, as we have seen, a hamlet is involved in many structures. Some of these are a part of national organizations—administration, agricultural cooperative, and so forth; others, like Shintoism and the irrigation cooperative, have organizations which stop at a regional level. Although in most structures the hamlet as a whole serves as a unit, in some, for example, in the Buddhist institution, the hamlet is split up into several subunits.

The model of concentric units, each entirely containing successively smaller units, is not adequate in describing the situation in Japan, which is exceedingly complex. In Japan, the boundaries of structure, in terms both of membership and jurisdictional territories, crosscut one another. For example, the irrigation cooperative's boundaries do not necessarily follow that of the school district, and the latter, in turn, may only partially overlap with the Shinto parish.

This analysis of community relations in Japan in terms of two types of structures—network and corporate—demonstrates the two entirely different ways in which a community is related to the world outside. This approach is not offered as the only valid method of analysis of the problem; other approaches are, of course, equally legitimate. In fact, no one approach can adequately indicate all the different ways in which a community is related to the external world. I believe, however, that the structural approach is both useful and essential for an adequate understanding of the situation in Japan. Moreover, the methodological value of the particular structural approach used here lies in the possibility of wide application. Not merely in the context of the rural society, but in kinship organization, urban setting, or industrial plant, social relations of many types can be analyzed in terms of the two types of structures discussed.

NOTES

1. Julian H. Steward, "Area Research, Theory and Practice" *Social Science Research Council Bulletin 63*, (New York, 1950), p. 50.
2. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago, 1960), pp. 113–31; *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago, 1960), pp. 23–59.
3. Julian H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change* (Urbana, 1955), pp. 43–63.
4. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford, 1940).
5. Betty W. Starr, "Levels of Communal Relations," *American Journal of Sociology*, LX (1954), 125–35.
6. J. A. Barnes, "Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish," *Human Relations*, VII (1954), 39–58.
7. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, pp. 23–59.
8. S. F. Nadel, *The Theory of Social Structure* (Glencoe, 1957), pp. 14–19.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–7.
10. Harumi Befu, *Hamlet in a Nation: The Place of Three Japanese Rural Communities in Their Broader Social Context* (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1962).
11. Harumi Befu, "Corporate Emphasis and Patterns of Descent in the Japanese Family," in Richard K. Beardsley and Robert J. Smith, eds., *Japanese Culture: Development and Characteristics* (Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, 1963, in press).
12. Eliot D. Chapple and Charleton S. Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (New York, 1942), pp. 36–41.
13. For discussions of this custom, see John F. Embree, *Suye Mura* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 82–85; Richard K. Beardsley, John W. Hall, and Robert E. Ward, *Village Japan* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 237–38.

14. In fact, in the eyes of the natives, the *mukoyōshi's* status in the household is in many respects analogous to that of a bride. The similarity of the status carries over from the relations within the family to the relations, vis-a-vis, the natal family.
15. Eitarō Suzuki, *Nihon Nōson Shakaigaku Yōron* (Principles of Japanese Rural Sociology) (Tokyo, 1949), p. 233.
16. Takashi Koyama, "Tsūkonken no imisuru mono" (Significance of the Marriage Sphere"), Kentaro Komatsu, ed., *Shakaigaku no Shomondai* (Problems in Sociology) (Tokyo, 1954), pp. 393–408.
17. These multi-purpose cooperatives should be distinguished from cooperatives which specialize in certain lines of products, such as dairy or fruits. Their functions and organization differ considerably from the type of cooperatives discussed here.
18. Kyōichi Sonoda, "Sonraku Shakai no Kōzō" ("Structure of the Rural Society"), Tadashi Fukutake, ed., *Nihon no shakai* (Japanese Society) (Tokyo, 1961), p. 109.
19. To be more accurate, in contrast to Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples have no geographically discrete parishes; Buddhist members are scattered throughout the area around the temple. The organizational difference between Shintoism and Buddhism may be likened to that between the Catholic parish and Protestant church membership.
20. Elizabeth Bott, "Urban Families: Conjugal Roles and Social Network," *Human Relations*, VIII (1955), 345–84.
21. Barnes, *op. cit.*