

The Idea of Basic Income Guarantee in Rural Japan

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Abstract:

The idea of Basic Income Guarantee (BIG), i.e. universal, unconditional, and lifelong monthly cash transfer for all residents with the amount enough for basic needs, had introduced to Japan by some academics of social policy in the end of 20th century, and became much more popular since then by some advocates and politicians who wanted to show an alternative to conventional policy options to combat with serious unemployment and poverty problems.

A mayor of mountainous village in Japan (Nakagawa-mura, Kami-Ina-gun, Nagano prefecture) became the only one advocate of BIG among 184 village mayors in rural Japan in the year of 2013. The mayor recommended BIG as the best treatment against the depopulation of rural Japan and the best way to revitalize rural community with young people.

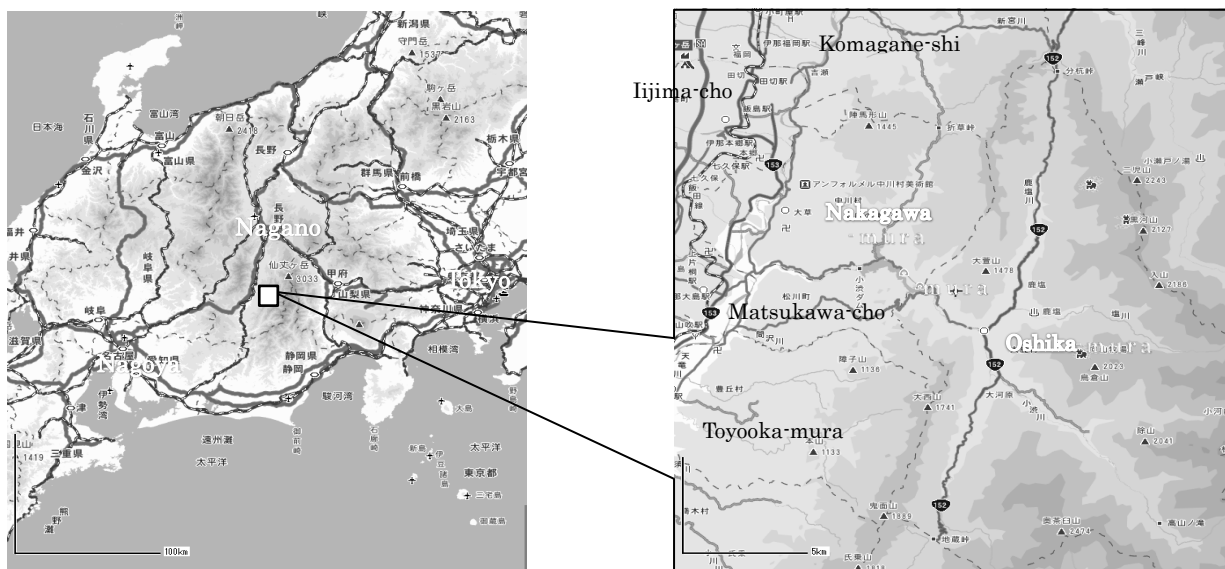
Based on field research in the village and another neighboring village, including interviews with supporters and opponents of BIG, the paper analyses the reason why the mayor supports BIG, and show the potentials of future social movement for BIG by villagers from the public sphere of rural Japan.

1 Introduction (1)

1.1 Nakagawa-mura

1.1.1 History and Geography

Map 1 Map of Central Japan and map of Nakagawa and Oshika Village.



[Source] Made from MapFan Web. <http://www.mapfan.com/m.cgi?MAP=E138.4.39.6N35.40.20.6&ZM=6&SMAP=E137.56.56.8N35.37.53.1>

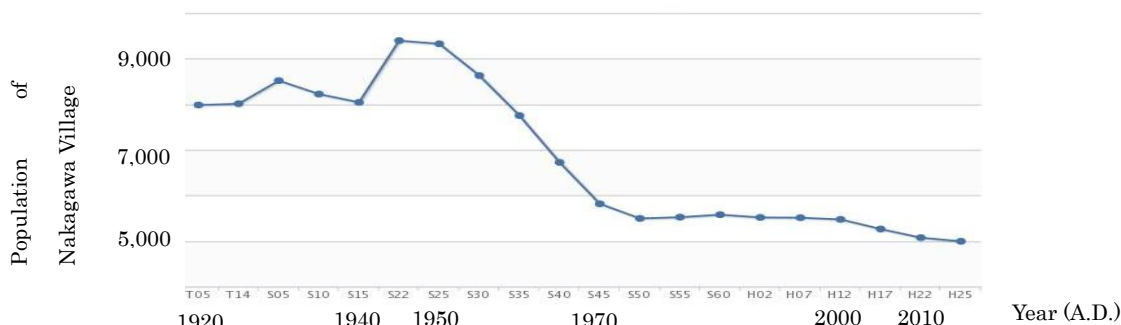
(June 9, 2014).

Although ruins of residence can be found in many archaeological sites dating back to 10,000 B.C., Nakagawa-mura was born in 1958 by a merger of two villages, Katagiri-mura and Minakata-mura. Those two villages were created in 1889 by the local administration reform under the fresh Constitution of the Empire of Japan following the centralized government system of Prussia. Until the end of Edo-era, those two villages had been 7 village communities in the mid-valley of Ina along the river of Tenryu (See the Map 1). The trans-valley railway had been constructed since

1897 and was completed in 1937. In 1961, 18 villagers were killed by mudslide and one village community disappeared, though there were no serious natural disasters since then. The trans-valley highway which connects Nakagawa-mura to Tokyo for 2 hours and to Nagoya for 1 hour, was completed in 1982.

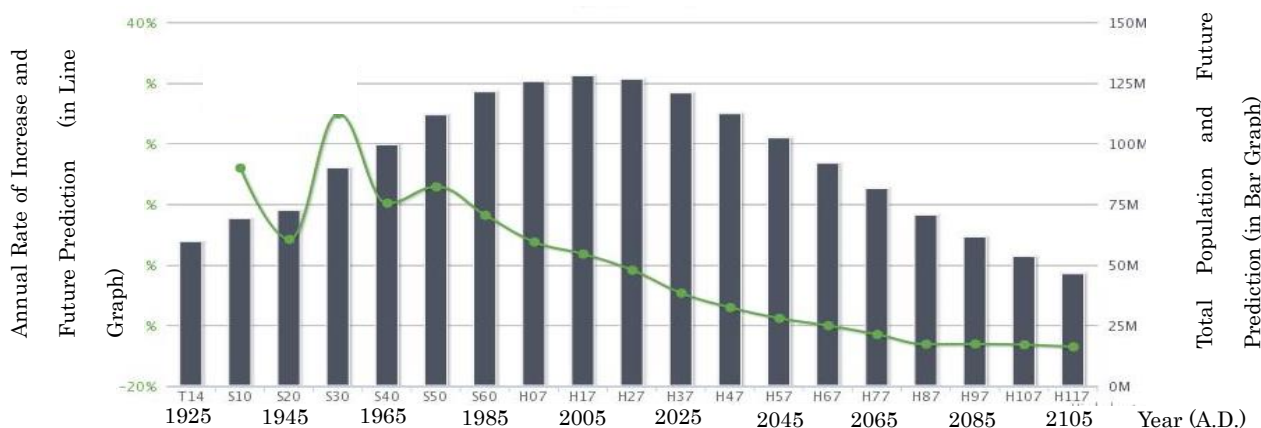
1.1.2 Population; Gender, Age and Ethnicity

Figure 1. Change of Population in Nakagawa Village, 1920-2013



[Source] Made from a figure based on the official statistical data of Japan in <http://demography.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-4668.html> (June 9, 2014).

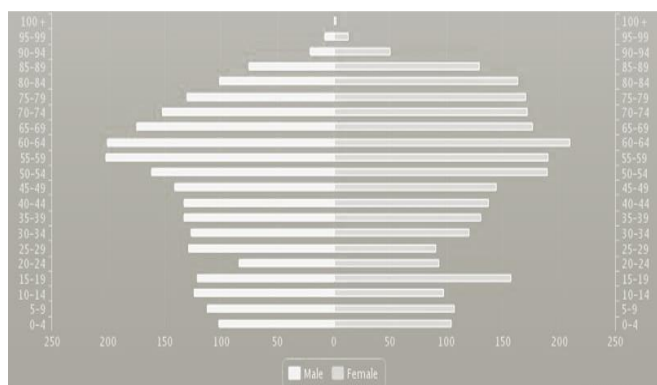
Figure 2. Change of Population and Annual Rate of Increase in Japan including Future Prediction, 1925~2105.



[Source] Made from a figure based on the official statistical data of Japan in <http://demography.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-1044.html> (June 9, 2014).

According to the official website of the village, population of Nakagawa-mura on June 1, 2014 is 5,161 (male:2,466 female:2,695) and number of household is 1,619 which makes average persons in a household 3.2 persons. Population of Nakagawa-mura has been decreasing since 1950; rapidly during 1950-75, almost stable during 1975-2000 and gradually since 2000 (Figure 1). It shows a severe contrast with the trend of Japanese total population, which had been constantly increasing since 1920s until 2005. However, total population of Japan has been decreasing since 2005 like that of Nakagawa-mura and both are anticipated to decrease in future (Figure 2). Distribution by age and sex in Nakagawa-mura (Figure 3) shows also a severe contrast with that of total Japanese population (Figure 4); the lack of young and middle age generations (age of 20s-50s) in Nakagawa-mura, which coincides with many elderly villagers' stories that most of their children went out to big cities like Tokyo or Nagoya for higher education or getting jobs, and stayed there.

Figure 3. Population Distribution by Age and Sex in Nakagawa Village, 2010



[Source] Made from a figure based on the official statistical data of Japan in <http://demography.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-2557.html> (June 9, 2014).

Figure 4. Population Distribution in Japan, by Age and Sex, 2010



[Source] Made from a figure based on the official statistical data of Japan in <http://demography.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-6234.html> (June 9, 2014).

Nakagawa-mura was nominated one of depopulated areas in Japan by the governmental anti-depopulation law in 1970, and since then it has been implementing various anti-depopulation policies including construction of public apartments for young people. Since 1980s especially after better connection of Highways to Tokyo and Nagoya, it has constant inflow of new-comers or returners attracted by clean air and beautiful landscape of the valley surrounded by snowy mountains even in summer time.

Foreign population including the so-called “trainee” workers since 1990s in factories in Nakagawa-mura in December 2013 is 48 (China 28, North or South Korea 1, Philippines 5, Vietnam 4, USA 2, Others 8) (Ministry of Law, Japan, “Statistics of Foreign Residents” http://www.moj.go.jp/housei/toukei/toukei_ichiran_touroku.html June 9, 2014).

1.1.3. Economic and Class Structure (2)

Chairman of the Nakagawa-mura’s Society of Commerce and Industry (Shokokai) has been occupied by the head of two local construction companies (capital of both companies are ¥35 m. and number of employees are 65 and 49) in recent years. Numbers of member companies in 2011 were 124 (Manufacturing 29, Construction 36, Commerce 59). Numbers of all employees in 2009 were 1,502 (Manufacturing 247, Construction and other non-manufacturing industry 358, Commerce 153, other service jobs 589), while the number of agricultural workforce in 2010 was 776 (agriculturalists in nucleus, 557). Therefore, agriculture is the biggest industry in terms of working population. However, within the 557 agriculturalists in nucleus, 411 or 79% are older than 65 years old. Cultivated land are 763ha (rice paddy, 424ha; field for other crops, 339ha), but the abandoned farmlands are 82ha(11%), which shows seriousness of the aging problem in agricultural population.

The bulk of manufacturing industry (sub-contract production of precision machinery components, etc.), has been a part of “Ina Techno-Valley” industrial area of Nagano prefecture, and it suffered from globalization and recent depression. Value of shipment of manufactured goods in 2010 was ¥3,679m[illion] (¥4,064m in 2003 with 302 employees and ¥1,744m of gross value added, and ¥949m of total salaries) and annual sales turnover of commerce in 2006 was ¥2,091m, while gross agricultural production was ¥1,440m.

The total taxable income amount in 2011 was ¥5,510m (number of taxpayers, 2,101). If we compare these amounts

with annual budget of the village, we could have a proper image of the village economy. The total amount of the village budget of 2014 is ¥3,042m in which revenue from the village economy (residents' tax, etc.) is only 21 % (¥640m), and revenue from the state (including the portion of national tax revenue allocated to local governments, ¥1,615m=53%) is 79% (¥2,417m). State money in the finance of local government is bigger than the amount of gross agricultural production. Such big presence of the state money shows economic dependency of the village to the central government.

Although history of agricultural cooperatives in Nakagawa-mura goes back to the end of 19c as silk producers' cooperatives, present-style agricultural cooperative was formed for each village in 1948. Those 2 village cooperatives merged with 6 other cooperatives in 1972, and such kind of trans-village cooperatives merged again and formed one big cooperative(JA Kami-Ina) for the territory of Kami-Ina-gun in 1996, and since then most of the farmers in Nakagawa-mura became a part of JA Kami-Ina (<http://www.ja-kamiina.iijan.or.jp/about/history/#jakamiina-history> (June 9, 2014)). JA is a nation-wide big conglomerate and most villagers buy agricultural machines, equipment, cars, gas, oil, foods, clothes, etc. at shops of JA group and do financial transactions with JA group financial institutions and sell most of their agricultural products to JA. However, the Japanese government has been talking about liquidation of JA in the process of recent negotiations for TPP (Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement).

1.1.4. Administrative Structure and Politics

In 2001, the village began to negotiate about merger of 4 neighboring local governments. In 2002, 16 village council members (3 Japan Communist Party [JCP] and 13 independent) were elected. In 2004, official committee for merger of 3 local governments(Komagane-shi, Iijima-cho, Nakagawa-mura) established. In February 2005, the result of referendum of the villagers about merger was: For 51.8%, Against 48.2%, while by residents' opinion surveys done at the same time in Komagane and Iijima, majority was against merger (Komagane 56.6%, Iijima 51.7%). Accordingly the committee liquidated in March 2005.

In April 2005, Mr.Itsuro Soga (born in 1955, new-comer since 2002) won the election and became mayor from a candidate of anti-merger movement. In 2006, 10 village council members (2 JCP and 8 independent) were elected. In 2008, the village joined "The Most Beautiful Villages in Japan" (an NPO for promotion of tourism and conservation of traditional life-style and culture; established by 7 small local governments in 2005 including Oshika-mura). In the same year, the mayor joined "Association of Mayors protecting Article 9 of the Constitution", and expressed his opinion on BIG in his "Message from the Mayor" of the official website of the village.

In April 2009, Mr.Soga won the election and became mayor again.

In 2010, he expressed his intention to declare Open City Declaration for the village in solidarity with anti-US military base movement in Okinawa. In April, 10 Village council members (2 JCP and 8 independent) were elected but by no votes.

In February 2011, he lead the anti-TPP rally with 400 villagers organized by the Village Council, local JA, Society of Commerce and Industry, Society of Construction Companies, trade unions, etc., which is very exceptional in rural Japan. In April 2011, he joined the Anti-Nuclear Power Plant Mayors' League after the disaster of Fukushima. In June 2011, he expressed his opinion at the village council meeting why he had never bowed to the national flag, and maintained importance of freedom of belief and expression at public sphere.

In April 2013, he won the election and became mayor once again. The voting rate of the election was lowest in

recent history of all village election, but it was still 82% (Mr.Soga got 1,897 votes against the other candidate's 1,549).

1.1.5. Structure of Public Sphere

There are no place for direct democracy where all residents can express their opinion as individuals, like town (primary school area) meeting of the Council of All Residents for Self-Government(Jumin-Jichi-kyogikai) which has introduced into Japan since 2002 and introduced in many parts of Nagano in 2006. However, there are some traditional community meetings where head of household can express his/her opinion on community life, festivals, irrigation, etc.

1.2. Oshika-mura

1.2.1. History and Geography;

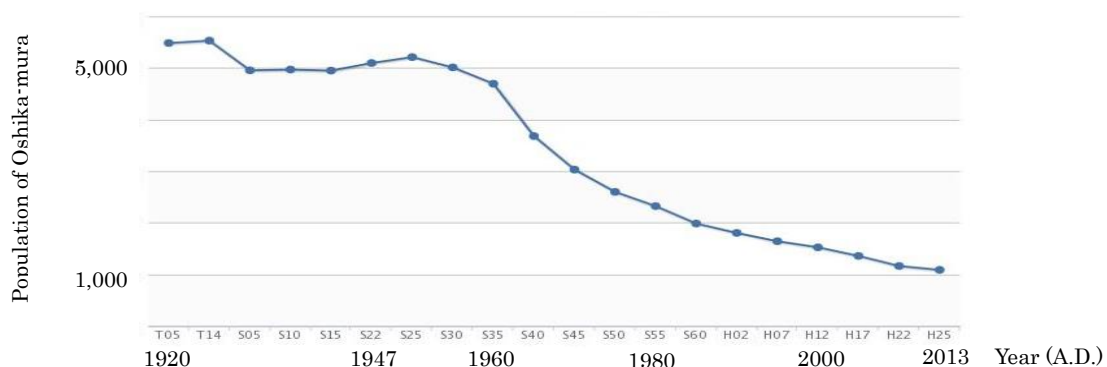
The names of Ogawara and Kashio appears in 1329 in a letter from the ruling Shikken (regent) of Japan's Kamakura Shogunate (Hojo Takatoki) to the two land stewards (Jito) of those places. In the Edo period (1603-1868), those two places were directly ruled by Tokugawa Shogunate. The Tokugawa-era born village Kabuki (Japanese traditional drama) still remains here and attracts many tourists. Those two places became two villages in the second year of the Meiji era (1869). In 1874, two places merged and became Oshika village. In 1882, Oshika village splits again in two, although the two villages merged once again in 1889. In 2003, the village was going to merge with Matsukawa-cho (a neighboring town), but the merging plan was refused by referendum of the villagers in 2004.

It is very mountainous village which developed along deep valleys, and the only way to access the village is by car which takes 1 hour from Nakagawa-mura or Matsukawa Interchange of Chuo-do Highway still now (Map 1). In June 1961, 55 people were killed by mudslide so that one community disappeared.

1.2.2. Population; Gender, Age and Ethnicity

As is shown in Figure 5 & 6, Oshika-mura is also a depopulated village but in much more serious and critical stage than Nakagawa-mura. In 1970s the village accepted a hippie community so that the village became famous in hippie culture in Japan, although it caused some cultural frictions with original villagers. Foreigners in Oshika-mura are almost negligible (China2, North & South Korea1, Philippines1, USA1, Others3, Total8, in December 2013).

Figure 5. Change of Population in Oshika Village, 1920-2013



[Source] Made from a figure based on the official statistical data of Japan in <http://demography.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-4682.html> (June 9, 2014).

Figure 6. Population Distribution by Age and Sex in Oshika Village, 2010



[Source] Made from a figure based on the official statistical data of Japan in <http://demography.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-2571.html> (June 9, 2014) .

1.2.3. Economic and administrative Structure, Politics and Public Sphere

Quarrying, timber industry, cattle farm, and fisheries can be seen other than agriculture. Erosion and flood control works has been continued for long years by nation-wide big general construction companies and local sub-contractors. Productive population in 2010 is 467 and agricultural population is 148. Within 122 agriculturalists in nucleus, 95 or 78% are older than 65 years old. Cultivated land are 207ha (rice paddy, 61ha; field for other crops, 146ha), but the abandoned farmlands are 34ha(16%), which shows seriousness of the aging problem in agricultural population.

In 2003, Oshika-mura started negotiation for merger with Matsukawa-cho, but after referendum in 2004 which was against merger, Oshika stopped it. In 2005, the mayor became one of co-founders of the “The Most Beautiful Villages in Japan”. In 2010, an ambiguous but possibly devastating construction work for Linear-Shinkansen bullet train railway project through Oshika-mura was announced by Japan Railway (JR)-Tokai, and since then, it became a serious political issue in the village. 2014 is the scheduled starting year of the construction work.

2 Theoretical Hypothesis

Theoretical hypothesis of my research is based on Habermasian critical social theory which articulated macro- and micro-sociological perspectives of T. Parsons, G. H. Mead, E. Durkheim, and K. Marx (Habermas 1987).

2.1. Macro-sociological Perspective; Colonization of Life-world by System

As macro-sociological perspective, the thesis of “colonization of life-world by system”(Habermas 1987) can be applied to rural Japan under globalization process since 1980s.

2.1.1. System and Life-world

Depopulation of rural Japan and relating problems in the life-world of the people there can be explained as colonization of the life-world by the sub-system of global Capitalist economy and by the sub-system of so-called neo-liberalist state administration.

2.1.2. Anti-colonial Resistance of Life-world against System

The big Heisei merger movement of rural administrative units during 1999-2010 was challenge of the neo-liberalist state administration sub-system to the life-world according to the transformation of global capitalist economic sub-system. It could reduce the number of Japanese local administrative units almost half, but we could also observe some anti-merger movements which can be explained as anti-colonial resistance of life-world against system.

2.1.3. Macro-sociological Social Change of System and Life-world

Such resistance of life-world can be the main driving force of macro-sociological social change of system; i.e. from the global capitalist society to the society of Global Basic Income Guarantee (Okanouchi 2012). The transition may starts from unconditional cash transfer programs at local level (Alaska, USA since 1982) and national level (Iran since 2010, Mongolia 2010-12), or pilot projects of basic income guarantee at local level (Namibian village 2008-2012, Brazilian village 2008-, Indian villages 2012) or national level. A good review of increasing empirical case studies on newly introduced cash transfer policies since the end of 20th century by development specialists is given in a book with an interesting title: “Just give money to the poor: Development revolution from the global south”(Hanlon, Barrientos & Hulme 2010).

2.2. Micro-sociological Perspective; Potentials of Life-world

The merit of Habermasian micro-sociological perspective is its ability to analyze potentials of life-world.

2.2.1. Structure of Life-world

The structure of life-world is characterized by personality-building of each person through communicative actions, i.e. discussion with other people about the topics of the objective world (environment), and social world (social system).

2.2.2. Structure of Public Sphere

Such discussions among the people themselves become public sphere, and it cannot help generating penetrations on the nature of the system among the people, although its development suffers not only from limitations of time and space for communicative action, caused by “wage slavery” system of capitalist economy, but also from limitations of language and culture, imposed by “traditions” of administrative sub-system (Cf. Willis1976).

2.2.3. Relationship between Objective World and Social World from the Perspective of Life-World

The globalizing capitalist system promotes individualization and fluidization of people on the earth. However, from the perspective of life-world, people who discuss about relationship between objective world and social world will find that small scale residential neighborhood community made of free and economically independent persons (independent, because of the global basic income guarantee) can be a basic unit for alternative administrative sub-system based on direct democracy.

3 Research Setting

3.1. Methodology

This paper is intended to be an interim report of a participatory action research. The research commenced since November 2013 in Nakagawa, and since April 2014 in Oshika. It is still in the first stage of agenda setting for the community people to find some policy ideas in order to solve their problems.

3.2. Research Action

Interviews with the villagers of both villages (about 40 persons, including 2 village mayors, 2 village council

members, 8 owners of local hotels, guest houses, and farm inns and their family members, and their friends in various occupations), have been done during Nov. 2-4, 2013, April 5-7, May 1-2, 5-7 2014 in Nakagawa, and during April 18-20, 30, May 1, 2-5, 2014 in Oshika, focusing on the idea of Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) and possibility to introduce an Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) program to their own village as a first step towards the BIG.

4 Analysis

4.1. Analytical Framework

Based on his theoretical hypothesis about class structure of capitalist society and the role of working class as a prime mover of revolutionary change, Paul Willis set two categories, i.e. “penetration” and “limitation”, in order to analyze his interviews with informants in a working class city of England (Willis 1976). Voices which coincide with his hypothesis are classified as “penetrations”, but other voices which contradict his hypothesis are classified as “limitations”. I follow this precedent and analyze my interviews with villagers from the view-point of my theoretical hypothesis.

4.2. Penetrations

The mayor of Nakagawa-mura has expressed his opinion since 2009 in favor of the idea of BIG as a policy option to combat with depopulation problem: “BIG will be able to encourage young villagers to stay at village and to do agriculture and other small businesses, because such constant inflow of cash can give people a sense of security of life as is the case of pensioners.” (Nakagawa Mayor) Such penetration was shared with a rice-cropping farmer who has suffered much from his past experience in investing in dairy and apple farming: “Even a small amount of UCT can be a good remedy for economic instability of agriculture (Rice Farmer and Farm Inn owner; Male; Age 68).

A young organic farmer who is one of new-comers to the village also agrees with it but from another perspective: “We came here to seek for nature. We don’t want money. Here we have plenty of delicious foods because we grow rice and vegetables, and villagers share foods with neighbors. But we need some amount of money necessary for electricity, gas, water, car and rent for housing. Just a small amount of UCT can encourage young people who are interested in organic and subsistence farming to come and live in such a beautiful, but depopulated place.” (Organic Farmer, New Comer since 5years ago: Male: Age 35)

Another reason why mayor recommends BIG is its possible “ability to empower individuals for community development”, which made him famous and unique in Japanese debate on BIG. For the village mayor, individual villagers supported by constant flow of money power, will naturally enjoy their community life, so that they will voluntarily work for community development. But for some sociologists, economists and political scientists opposing to BIG, the money power to individuals only strengthen the present problem of social exclusion (Okanouchi 2014).

The possible ability of BIG or UCT to empower women against patriarchy was pointed out by a wife of a farmer: “Oh, it’s to be allocated directly for each person! Not for each household! It’s good because if it is for household, it will disappear automatically! All women will also be able to have their own plans for future!” (Wife of Farm Inn owner: Female: Age 65)

She even added another aspect: “Young couple might decide to have one more child. Young wives usually have to decide after they got their first baby, whether to work more or to take care of the new-born baby. If that kind of constant money flow were available, they could easily make their future life-plans with one more child.” (Wife of Farm Inn

owner: Female: Age 65)

Regarding vitalization of public sphere, many villagers agree that BIG or even small amount of UCT will be effective: “Such money will inevitably make people think about to do something good for people in the village. Even if we could only start with a small amount of UCT, it would make big difference for villagers’ public opinion and it may give good effect to national-level public opinion.” (Rice Farmer and Farm Inn owner: Males: Age 68) “Such money will create a sense of solidarity among people, and people will express their opinion more about the future of the village and the world.” (Part time worker at museum, New Comer since 8 years ago, Pensioner: Female: Age 68?) Again we should point out common image of good citizens or villagers, who are just too busy for earning money to speak out and to do something good for others.

One of village council member also expressed such image of good villagers, and he even mentioned about financial possibility for UCT at village level: “Small amount like ¥5,000 per person per month might be affordable with a slight change of the present village budget.” (Village council member, Farmer: Male: Age 73)

4.3. Limitations

Most villagers seem to have heard about the word “Basic Income” because of the mayor’s speech, but most of them do not really know about the idea of BIG or UCT. One of villagers even had a bad feeling about BIG: “Oh, you are a researcher of BIG!(Laugh) Once the mayor was talking about it frequently, but I said to him ‘Do not go deep into it! It’s too strange. You have much more things to do other than it.’” (Apple Farmer and Farm Inn owner: Male: Age 75)

The idea of “unconditional” transfer can be an obstacle because not all villagers are welcoming new-comers unconditionally: “Environment for agriculture will be destroyed by New-comers who are elderlies and pensioners because they can’t stand with the apple farmer like us who spray pesticides on apple frequently. Good place for housing with nice view and sunshine is also good for apple growing. (Apple Farmer, returner since 4 years ago after 10 years education and work in Tokyo: Male: Age 36) In the case of Oshika village which has a history of accepting Hippy community since 1970s, a kind of xenophobic feeling can be observed: “(If we had BIG or UCT), our village would be invaded by culturally strange, idle New-comers.” (Wife of guest house owner in Oshika: Female: Age 45?)

Conventional criticism against UCT might be found as was happened in Oshika: “Even a newly introduced cash transfer program to every household for community meeting has been sometimes criticized as a sabotage of administration work and a vote-buying behavior.” (Oshika mayor)

Financial feasibility under the controversial Japanese local government system is a big problem. Even the Nakagawa mayor himself clearly denies possibility of BIG: “BIG is totally unaffordable for village budget, it should be a national policy.” (Nakagawa Mayor) Regarding UCT, the mayor seems much more optimistic but still far from implementation: “A kind of unconditional cash transfer program can be introduced but only with by introducing a kind of local money system, as we have already distributing coupons for local shops to all volunteers of fire brigades. But villagers seem not so much interested in it at present.” (Nakagawa Mayor)

5. Conclusion

Time-bombs of depopulation are clearly set in rural Japan. Many villages and rural communities had already disappeared, although it is not so apparent because of the recent big merger movement of local governments. Crisis of the

present local economic and administrative system in rural Japan is deeply rooted in the globalization process of global capitalism. Such crisis in rural Japan seems to be just a necessary evil or victim for the central government in order to achieve survival of the present system.

Resistance to such rule of system from the life-world of rural Japan appears ambiguously in general, even in the case of Oshika-mura where the villagers once clearly denied joining the recent merger movement. The case of Nakagawa-mura, which had the first and the only one all villager's rally against TPP in Japan in 2011, after the resistance against merger movement like Oshika, looks quite exceptional thanks to the unique personality of village mayor who is a new-comer to the village. However, future perspective for alternative system is also ambiguous among villagers in Nakagawa-mura.

From my theoretical perspective about BIG and UCT, mayor's opinion that systemic change caused by national level BIG will be able to create radically revitalized village community, is a symptom of the beginning of macro-sociological global social change. The analysis of my field research shows that, being given proper knowledge about BIG and UCT, and if proper discussions are organized in the public spheres of the village, villagers may promote their own social movement for BIG and UCT in rural Japan.

However, a step to UCT in Japanese village is still a way forward. Serious studies and discussions on BIG and UCT are desperately needed at local, national and global level.

[Notes]

- (1) All the historical data about Nakagawa-mura and Oshika-mura are from the Official Website of those villages (Nakagawa-mura: <http://www.vill.nakagawa.nagano.jp/>, Oshika-mura: <http://www.vill.ooshika.nagano.jp/> (June 9, 2014)).
- (2) Numerical data and other information are based on the official statistics available from the governmental portal site (e-stat <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/eStatTopPortal.do> (June 9, 2014)), the site of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (<http://www.maff.go.jp/> (June 9, 2014)), and official site of Nakagawa-mura Shokokai (<http://www3.ocn.ne.jp/~naka-sci/index.html> and <http://n-nakagawa-sci.info/> (June 9, 2014)).

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