

# **A CASE STUDY ON MUTUAL SUPPORT FOR LIFE IN A MOUNTAINOUS AGING DEPOPULATED VILLAGE**

## **-The role of 'Osusowake' seen in Tonohara Area of Ryujin village, Wakayama prefecture-**

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*Key Words: Aging population, Depopulated village, Self-sufficiency, Mutual aids, 'Osusowake' (food sharing)*

### **1. BACKGROUND AND STUDY OBJECTIVE**

In the intermediate and mountainous area, aging and decreasing of population has been accelerating because of the population outflow and decay of local economy since 60's. Recently, the word 'marginal community' has become a popular term to identify the serious problem of aging depopulated village in rural area. In previous studies, festival and corporate works of road and field maintenance are used as an indicator for measuring the level of community function. Basic elements that form and maintain community are most likely observed in daily life and local environment. It will be needed to know more detail about dairy life and local environment in these areas. In this thesis, to get acknowledge about dairy life in rural area, a field survey was conducted in Tonohara area, Ryujin village, Wakayama prefecture.

### **2. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

From August to December 2008 (5 trip and 29 days), a field survey was conducted to understand basic elements to establish local community in Tonohara area. Information about people's daily life was collected from interview and observation. Once this area was flourished by forest industry, local economy has been decline since hitting by slumping forest industry. Because of this situation, the population has been decreasing since 1955 and the rate of aging population has been increasing up to 46% which is about 20% higher than average. Bus system cannot operate without receiving subsidy from government. At the end of this fiscal year, Tonohara elementary school which is the only one elementary school in this area will be closed. Tonohara area is one of the typical mountainous depopulated areas in Japan.

### **3. RESULTS**

- (1) Even though the rate of aging population has been increasing, most people are self-sufficient by growing vegetables that creates an opportunity to communicate their neighborhood.
- (2) Interaction with neighborhood are very active and they share some of their vegetable and cocked items('Osusowake') each other. And moreover, there is a system of mutual support such as planting, harvesting, cutting weed and caring neighbors who are in illness.
- (3) As it has been depopulated, People feel anxiety and need someone's help. Those feelings have promoted food sharing.
- (4) Sharing vegetables and cocked items among neighborhood are not only an exchange, but it triggers to promote mutual support and good relationship among neighbors.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

Until now, capacity of village has been gradually weakened and not to able to maintain commune-based social life in rural depopulated village, and finally it leads to non-settlement. It is true that commune function is no longer workable, but when it focuses on smaller neighboring community, the situation is not the same. In rural depopulated village like Tonohara area, small scale community relation among neighborhoods is very active and it functions to help each other. From this case, in Tonohara area, food sharing promotes neighborhood relationship and it creates the mutual support among neighbors. This procedure results to maintain people's daily life in Tonohara area.