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## SELF-HELP IN JAPAN

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### 1. SELF-HELP GROUPS IN JAPAN

According to a study of international context of self-help (Frolland et al,1983), the countries where self-help movement keeps a great power have some common elements; industrialized economics, democratic values of free association, a great number of persons with chronic health problems, developed forms of social welfare system, professional social work, and so on. Japan surely have all of these elements, and it has a great number of sorts of self-help groups.

But unfortunately, the concept of 'self-help' is not popular in Japan, and there are no directories of self-help groups, the fact being that two directories have already been published about patients groups and women groups.

#### 1.1. Diseases and Impairment

In Japan, a lot of self-help groups are organized about a lot of kinds of diseases and impairment. Being put in alphabetical order, they are aphasia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), allergy, asthma, autism, Behcet disease, blood disease (hypoplastic anemia, thrombocytopenic purpura, etc.), Buerger disease, cancer (including children's cancer), cerebral palsy, cervical cord injury, cleft lip and palate, collagen disease, congenital biliary atresia, congenital limbs impairment, Crohn's disease, diabetes, Down's syndrome, dwarfism, epilepsy, fetal chondrodystrophia, food allergy, gastrectomy, Gaucher disease, gout, Hansen disease, hearing impairment, heart disease, hemophilia, Kawasaki disease (MCLS:mucocutaneous lymph node syndrome), kidney disorders, laryngectomy, learning disability, liver disease, mastectomy, Moyamoya disease (occlusive disease in circle of Willis), mucopolysaccharidosis, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, myasthenia gravis, narcolepsy, nasal allergy, nephrectomy, neuralgia, osteoarthritis(OA), osteogenesis imperfecta, pacemaker, pancreas disease, Parkinson's disease, phenylketonuria, pneumoconiosis, progressive muscular atrophy, pulmonary function, quadriceps muscle contracture of thigh, retinal detachment, speech disorders, spina bifida, spinal injuries, spino-cerebellar degeneration, stammering, stomas, streptomycin ototoxicity, strokes, subacute sclerosing panencephalitis(SSPE), tuberculosis, ulcerative colitis, urinary tract, uterine cancer, visual impairment, whiplash injury and so on.

Probably the most longest movement is of people with visual impairment. In Japan, in the beginning of 14c., the government made a start of a special

bureaucratic system for the blind, who were given a variety of positions in the system. From that time to 1871 when it was ended, clever and rich blind persons were able to enjoy good social lives. And in Japan, traditionally nobody but blind persons had been allowed to make a kind of medical treatment: acupuncture and moxibustion. But, when Japan was beginning to open the door toward the world, the government made a great change in its medical policy. As a result, Japanese blind people's lives had suddenly got poor. Under these social conditions, blind persons were beginning to come together and in 1903, the first national meeting of blind people was held in Tokyo. And five years after, in 1908, a national self-help organization was started for the purpose of making strong social actions to change the government's policy.

One of the oldest patients groups is of Hansen disease patients. One self-help organization was established in 1926. After the World War II, tuberculosis patients took the initiative in starting a national alliance of patients in 1948. It is said that this movement was caused by workers' movement activists who had been put into prisons during the war and got tuberculosis.

In 1960s, people with impairment made a real start of their liberation movement. The most radical groups were of persons with cerebral palsy. Their destigmatizing thoughts have been great influencers on the other self-help movements.

## 1.2. Mental Health and Problems

Japan has a national self-help organization of neurotic persons, which was started in 1957. It has a definite self-help method: "Morita Therapy". Dr. Masatake Morita (1874-1938) is a very famous psychotherapist among Japanese people and he created his own therapy method which puts emphasis on self-help. In fact, he had kept a professionally led self-help group from 1929 to 1937. Using his method, about 5000 members with neurosis are talking together in a form of pure self-help group at over 80 meeting places.

With regard to mental illness, there are numerous self-help groups. The patients' families have a national organization which has 650 self-help groups in communities and 250 self-help groups in hospitals. It has about 100,000 members. Though the patients themselves have fewer groups, in Tokyo, an alliance of twelve self-help groups of patients was started in 1988.

One of the largest self-help organizations in Japan is, probably, of parents of mentally retarded children. They have a national self-help organization with about 441,000 members including about 156,000 parents or carers. It was started by three mothers of mentally retarded children in 1952, and has now 2125 self-help groups. In its national meetings, from 1989, mentally retarded adult children themselves have had a self-help discussion groups with support of volunteers. It keeps two residential care homes, 328 working places, and two weekly radio programs to support the parents.

In addition, there are a lot of self-help groups about depression, senile dementia and so on.

### 1.3. Addiction

In Japan, there are self-help groups of addicts about anorexia nervosa, alcoholism, bulimia nervosa, drug (Narcotics Anonymous and Nal-Anon), gambling (Gamblers Anonymous) and smoking.

It is in 1953 that AA came to be known by Japanese alcoholics in Tokyo. Though they made attempts of keeping to the way of AA, they had not done well. As a result, they could not help creating an Japanese way. They call their groups "Dansyukai (Sobriety Society)". In 1963, their national self-help organization was started. In 1984, there were 393 groups and 640 branches with about 45,000 members, 70 % of who had been in psychiatric hospitals. Each group usually has a meeting over 15 times a month, and from 20 to 50 persons take part in it.

On the other hand, Alcoholics Anonymous was started again in 1975, and now the number of groups is over 200. In 1988, they had over 550 meeting places. Among them, there are special groups ("double closed" groups) such as "young group", "women group", "emotion group" and so on. Al-Anon was started in 1980, and there are over 80 groups. Among them, there are some Alateen groups and adult children's groups.

Probably one of the greatest differences between Japanese Sobriety Society and AA is that the former's meetings are usually held by the alcoholics and their marital partners together. It is probably based on one of Japanese traditional thoughts that marital couples are "one".

### 1.4. Family Problems and Life Cycle

Japan has traditionally had little "date culture", which would give young people chance of meeting each other. In the case of people with stigma, it is causing serious problems. For this reason, in Tokyo, a self-help group of persons with hearing impairment was started in 1955. There is another group of persons with physical disabilities.

If you were a Japanese woman, you might have some troubles after getting married. Though the number of working married women in Japan is greater and greater, working conditions for women are still not very good, and child care services may be not enough. If you made a choice of staying at home as a housewife, you would have feelings of frustration and isolation. You would see why a great number of housewives' self-help groups are working in Japan.

With regard to child care, a lot of self-help groups are working for pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, care of infants, and care of twins. If your child unhappily passed away, a self-help groups of mothers whose children were killed by cancer would give you some help. However, generally speaking, self-help groups about death of children seem to be much fewer in Japan than in Europe.

After their children become adults and make a start of their independent lives, some women take the step of divorce, because they had often put up with their marriage lives only for the purpose of taking good care of their children. A women group has kept a series of lectures for happy divorce, and the about 1000 persons of the lectures' graduates has kept a self-help organization.

After divorce or bereavement, people often become single parents. In Japan, there is a national self-help organization of single parents, which was started in 1982. However, it is much more usual that single fathers and single mothers are separately coming together and have respective organizations. It is probably a result of Confucian tradition.

If you became a widow, you would see that there are an old national self-help organization of widows in Japan, which was started in 1950. And in addition, in some areas, social welfare councils has been helping live-alone elderly persons to have self-help groups.

From old times, as a Japanese tradition, each village and town has a group of elderly persons who were praying for happiness after death. The local governments had given much help to such traditional groups. As a result, there is now a national self-help organization of elderly persons which has 129,600 groups and 8,280,000 members, which are 42.8% of over 60-years-old population. In 1980, the rate was the highest (51.0%). This organization is usually not open to those who are unable to come to meeting places by themselves because of physical and/or mental disabilities. So, you can say that most of the healthy aged are belonging to the organization.

#### 1.5. Life Styles

If you and your family had different cultural backgrounds, you might be in trouble. For example, in Japan, so many businessmen and their families go to foreign countries, and when they come back to Japan, their children often have the idea that it is very hard for them to get used to Japanese school life, which is sometimes full of competitive and conformist airs. Some of their mothers have kept a self-help group and made peer counselling service. And another example is a self-help organization of Japanese persons whose marital partners are foreigners. In addition, there are self-help groups of foreigners who are married to Japanese persons.

Secondly, Japanese people has kept strong traditional thoughts about their family system, which have put women under much pressure. In Tokyo, there are meetings of Female Anonymous, and feminist therapy counselling rooms, and working women's groups who are struggling against sexism.

A Western writer says, "The basis of 'the family system' is a unit which does not happily translate as 'family' at all. ... 'Family' in one of the senses used by European aristocracy, of a continuing 'line' requiring a definite heir in each generation, would be close in sense (Hendry,1988, pp.22-23)". Under this family system, it has been legally impossible for married couple to have different surnames, and some women are desiring to

keep their original surname even after marriage. They are now coming together and trying to get the law changed. And some women are rejecting the oppressive airs of it, and saying "No" to the family and marriage system, though they are living with their partners. They are making political actions for their "illegitimate children".

Thirdly, Japan has had very competitive societies. In particular, children have been in such severe competition that Japanese primary and secondary schools are now producing much school-phobia among boys and girls, and not a few of children are rejecting going to school. Some of them and their parents come together and say that children who are rejecting school are neither abnormal nor drop-outs, and they have made a lot of self-help groups and a kind of "free schools".

Lastly, in Tokyo, there are some lesbian groups, one of which are serving peer counselling by telephone. You should keep it in mind that some culture traditionally doesn't see homosexuality as a kind of "sin". It can be said that Japanese people are not very much troubled by the idea of homosexuality. On the other hand, in Japanese TV programs for election campaign, you will often see several representatives of a "political" group of homosexual and lesbian persons. They say they are struggling for sexual liberation.

#### 1.6. Victims

Firstly, there are numerous war victims; during the World War II, many of Japanese cities were bombed by American army, and so many people were killed and wounded. In a national organization of bombed survivors, many of the members are women who were so burned that it was hard for them to find husbands and now they have no family and are isolated with marks of burns. Another much larger organization is made by the survivors of "Hiroshima" and "Nagasaki" atomic bombs. In addition, there is a very large national self-help organization of families of killed soldiers. And just after the end of American army's occupation, the national self-help organization of wounded ex-soldiers was established.

Secondly, there are pollution victims. Because of the rapid industrialization, a great number of Japanese persons have been suffering from damage of chemical substances which were placed in their surroundings by industry. For examples, there are patients of Minamata disease, Itai-itai disease (ouch-ouch disease), industrial asthma, and so on. They have self-help groups and have taken to court. And in addition, there is a self-help organization of persons who are suffering from industrial noise.

Thirdly, there are victims of poisons in medicine or food. For example, SMON (subacute myelo-optico-neuropathy) patients, whose number is 6440, had come together and taken to court. Another example is a self-help organization of parents whose babies were damaged by poised powdered milk. Such babies were found to be 13412 in number, 12368 of who were seen as "patient". 26 % of the patients were hoping to have a relation with the

organization. Unfortunately, Japan has a lot of examples in this kind of self-help.

#### 1.7. Minority

In Japan, there are a lot of Korean people and Ainu people. The latter are aborigines in the northern area of Japan. Both people are severely discriminated still now, and they have a lot of self-help groups.

In addition, in Japan, there are a lot of people who are discriminated because of a lot of kinds of historical backgrounds. About one percent of the population is seen as such people. They have been making strong liberation movements especially since 1922, when their national self-help organization was firstly established.

#### 1.8. Others

There is a national self-help organization of people who rent houses and grounds, which was started in 1967. Before the war, there were a lot of self-help organizations of tenants. In Tokyo, at that time, over 90 % of people were tenants, and they got started a self-help organization with about 100 members in 1922, and the number of members came to be about 10,000 within some years.

In comparison with European self-help movements, you will see that there are no groups about some problems in Japan. For example, there is no self-help groups of AIDS/HIV patients. In 1989, there are 110 patients in Japan. It can be said that their stigma is too strong to be got over.

Another example is about child abuse. Though child abuse is now one of the greatest social problems in Japan, there are no self-help groups of patients nor abused children. Probably one of the reasons is that Japanese families are often keeping their secrets in a strong way. Just recently some voluntary services have been started against child abuse.

## 2. WORKSHOPS ON SELF-HELP

Unfortunately, there is still no self-help clearinghouses in Japan. However, a lot of professionals are now interested in self-help activities. And it can be said that there are at least two streams of self-help workshops in Japan.

In the summer of 1986, there was the World Conference of International Council on Social Welfare in Tokyo. A Canadian professional self-help supporter got in touch with me before coming to take part in the conference. I gave her name to a group of professionals who were much interested in self-help and planning to have a workshop. As a result, the first "Self-Help Group Seminar" was held in Tokyo on August 26, 1986, and the main speakers were the Canadian supporter and a Canadian professor. The Japanese two planners of the "Seminar" were a researcher on nursing and a university professor on social work.

On March 21, 1988, the second "Self-Help Group Seminar" was held in Kagawa Prefecture. At this meeting, the main speakers were contact-persons of self-help groups: stammerers, travellers on wheel-chairs, users of artificial anus, cancer patients, mastectomy survivors, alcoholics, and so on. The theme was "Self-Help Group's Meanings for Me". On April 2, 1989, the third "Self-Help Group Seminar" was held in Tokyo. The main speakers were professional self-help supporters, and the seminar's theme was "What are Supporters of Self-Help Groups?". Though the fourth "Seminar" was held in Tokyo on December 3, 1990, this meeting was different from the previous ones in that it had nothing but a two hours symposium with four speakers, who were talking about "informed consent", which was the theme of the "Seminar".

Another stream is in Osaka City. My colleagues and I had regularly had meetings and talked about self-help since 1985. And on January 31 and February 7, 1988, we firstly had "Self Help Research Seminar" with several leaders of self-help groups of alcoholics, people with disability, foster parents, kidney disease patients, blind students, myasthenia gravis patients, epilepsy patients, Behcet disease patients, and hearts disease patients. On February 25 and 26, 1989, the second "Seminar" was held, where the special issue was "Self-Help Groups and Professionals". In this meeting, a lot of medical case workers took part. On December 17, 1989, the third "Seminar" was held with a clear goal of starting a self-help clearinghouse, which has not yet been started.

The Osaka group, many of whose members are social work professionals, is going to start a self-help clearinghouse in one of the biggest volunteer centres in Japan. They see it as the most serious problem to find proper persons working at the clearinghouse and get enough financial resources. Unfortunately the local government and any foundation have so far seemed to have no interest in such a plan as ours. For this reason, the group is planning to collect money from self-help organizations and professionals. In Japan, a lot of volunteer centres have been developed like this, at least, in the beginning points.

### 3. SOCIAL POLICY ON SELF-HELP

Peer counsellors has since long been supported by the government. For example, in Shizuoka Prefecture, in 1960, some dozens of physically handicapped persons became counsellors by request of the local government, and since 1967, physically handicapped peer counsellors have been working by request of the government all over the country. Among wounded ex-soldiers, as well, a lot of peer counsellors have been selected through their national self-help organization by the government since 1965. In 1989, 940 peer counsellors are supporting 142,345 persons who are seen as wounded ex-soldiers by the government. Similar peer counsellors have been working for single mothers and parents of mentally retarded children by request of the government.

It is to be given attention that these peer counsellors are, at the same time, often the leaders of a self-help organization, which is usually the biggest one and seen as the representative of self-helpers by the local government. And in addition, while the government make selection of the counsellors with support of the self-help organization, the latter is requested to give training to the counsellors by the former. In this way, the local government and the self-help organizations seem to keep a good relation, though this sometimes makes it possible to find a self help organization's "monopolization" of public financial resources.

You can say that there are "vertical forms of self-help support" for several very large self-help organizations in Japan. But unfortunately there have been no "horizontal forms" so far (Braun & Greiwe,1989).

#### 4. SELF-HELP AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

##### 4.1. S.Smiles and Japanese People of the Past

It can be said that Japanese people has a strong tradition of self-help. While some authors see S.Smiles (1882-1904) as a very great writer on self-help, one of his books, probably the most famous one, "Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct" was a very popular book among Japanese men just after Japan was beginning to open its doors toward the world about one hundred years ago. It is said that one million copies of the book were sold in Japan, while Japan had 30 million population at that time. It has been found that Smiles' thoughts on self-help had a lot of things which were in good harmony with Japanese traditional ways of thinking.

##### 4.2. Familial Self-Help

Though European people might have the idea that Norhteast Asia people have a general structure in family system, it is not the case. While Chinese and Korean people have often kept extended families, Japanese people have few ones. It is not a result of industrialization. Several historians say that Japanese extended family system was ended by the second half of 17th century.

If you had an extended family, you could support a family member with a serious disease or disability in the familial support system. One of the reasons why Japanese people now have a lot of self-help groups is probably that Japanese small families cannot easily support patients or people with disabilities without outside help.

In Japan, still now, familial self-help is often much stronger than individual self-help. As a result, while AA or Al-anon is made of individuals, Japanese Sobriety Society sometimes seems to be a group of married couples.

If you do self-help activities in a small family with a disable person, the brothers or sisters have special responsibility for support of them like the parents. It is for this reason that there is a self-help organization of

brothers and sisters of people with disabilities in Japan, which might be few in individualistic societies.

Without such an extended family system as some of the other Asian people are enjoying, and without such a communal tradition as some of European people have in their histories, Japanese small families, especially in big cities, seem to be much isolated in community while their neighborhood societies are no longer working well.

#### 4.3. Traditional Mutual Help Organizations

Japanese people's main food has been rice, and most of people had been working in rice field. However, Japanese weather is generally much colder and less rainy than in southeast Asia where rice had come from, and it means that Japanese farmers had necessarily needed very strong mutual aid system for work. In addition, Japan has little plain ground for rice field, and so the people of the past had kept mutual help organizations to keep very complicated channel systems to get enough water.

This kind of tradition is still now found in many organizations of Japan, even though most of them no longer have anything to do with water. Even in big cities like Tokyo, in almost every district, there is a kind of mutual help organization, to which all the families (not persons) living in the district are automatically or naturally belonging. Those organizations, which we call "Chonaikai (neighborhood society)", have no support from the government.

Some of "Chonaikai" have a self-help groups of elderly people as a subgroup. In that case, all the elderly persons living in the district automatically or naturally become members of the self-help group.

Some of self-help organizations of physically handicapped persons, wounded ex-soldiers, and killed soldiers' families have kept similar systems for their membership. Such a system may have had a preventive effect on social welfare problems in a sense that every person with the problem would be given information about social welfare services through newsletters. Nevertheless, I should add that this sort of self-help organizations has been declining in number and in power.

#### 4.4. Religious Backgrounds

In comparison with Japanese people, it seems to me that European people have a greater number of self-help groups which are talking about family member's separation by death. Probably it is because many of Japanese people have kept a tradition of talking with the dead every day before their family Buddhist tables, where they believe that their dead family members have rest. Japanese Buddhism gives much value to life-after-death. Though Christian persons are given his/her Christian names while living, Japanese Buddhist persons are given Buddhist ones after death. And most of Japanese people are of Buddhism.

And sexual behaviour is surely influenced by religious backgrounds.

Confucian traditions have probably kept a lot of single mothers' groups and single fathers' ones separate from each other in Japan, because its teachings say that men and women should be separate from each other after being 7 years-old. And homosexuality is not seen as a religious sin in Japan, though it doesn't mean that homosexual persons are free from stigma.

#### 4.5. Centralized Government and Lack of Pluralism

The heart of the question on Japanese self-help is probably that Japan seems not to have enough pluralism. Many of Japanese people seem to have the belief that Japan would have the monistic culture; one race, one language, one religion and so on, though a lot of Korean and Ainu (aborigine) people are living there.

Before 1871, Japan had been made of over 300 countries. However once the unified nation was established, the government got started its strong centralization. As a result, whenever making social actions to the government, people have often been in need to get a nationwide organization started and make contact with the centralized government in Tokyo. Unnecessary unification of people and their groups, even if they have common problems, seems not to be in harmony with self-help groups' ways of thinking, which is based on pluralism and decentralism in principle.

Though the government has given a lot of money to several great self-help organizations, almost all of them can be seen as results of the social policies of the centralized government. For example, there are the nationally unified self-help organization among elderly persons, and another among physically handicapped persons. In fact, however, there seem to be numerous self-help groups outside of their umbrellas, which groups are often unable to get any financial support from the government at all. Some groups are kept from the national organization because of their radicalism. It seems to me that Japanese policy of giving financial support to the nationally unified organizations have some latent functions of keeping status quo and keeping down the radicalism of some self-help groups.

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(Though I made use of a lot of reference books when I write this report, I cannot put down the complete list of them because of the space limit. And so only English and German books are taken here).