

Japanese village in documents of Shōens and comparative approach with Vietnamese village

Phan Hai Linh*

*College of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU
336 Nguyen Trai, Thanh Xuan, Hanoi, Vietnam*

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Abstract. Since 1990s, Japanese Studies in Vietnam have obtained many salient achievements, especially in the studies of economics, politics, culture, history and the relationship between Japan and Vietnam etc. In addition, a comparative approach to the studies of Japan and Vietnam is a highly potential direction.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on analyzing documents of the villages in two Medieval Japanese shōens namely Oyama and Hine, which we have studied quite carefully. The other part provides some initial comparative remarks on Japanese villages and Vietnamese ones under the dynasties of Ly - Tran - Le. On the basis of initial analysis, we have found that documentary comparison (including historical, archeological, geological materials, etc.) on the history of the two countries' villages is a potential study direction, particularly the issues on village's regulations, organizations and the role of management apparatus, the function of the village's agriculture, handicraft and commerce, the role of autonomous villages and combat villages in the wars, and the villages' spiritual lives. However, what matters now is the method of choosing material sources, objects of comparison and study, criteria of space, time, and types... We are in the hope of going on the details of this matter in the coming time.

Since 1990, Japanese Studies in Vietnam have recorded salient achievements, especially in the studies of economics, politics, culture, history and the relationship between Japan and Vietnam etc. In addition, comparative study is considered to be a prospective approach. By analyzing some materials on villages in Japanese shōens in the medieval history and comparing them with some materials on villages of Vietnam under the dynasties of Ly - Tran - Le, this paper proposes some suggestions

for the study of Vietnamese and Japanese villages from a comparative approach.

1. Japanese villages in materials on shōens

The materials used in this paper to study Japanese villages in the medieval history (12th Century - 16th Century) were mainly documents of proprietors and stewards of two shōens: Oyama⁽¹⁾ and Hine⁽²⁾. These were two shōens

⁽¹⁾ Oyama belonged to the Toji in the southern valley of the Oyama mountain in the province of Hyogo. Oyama had existed for about 700 years (845-1508), including

Tel: 84-4-62510658

E-mail: linh_ph@yahoo.com

that had rich materials and their village structures changed slightly from the medieval history until 1960s.

1.1. Village structure

Based on archeological and historiographical analyses, most of Japanese researchers agree that Japanese villages were closely organized in the mid time of Kamakura (19th Century). Cultivators in these villages were local peasants or resident peasants (*Honzaike*) and some "outcast peasants". Outcast peasants were those who came from one village to reside in another village. They had a lower status than local peasants; they had to live in the outskirts of the village and were attached with bad labels such as "person on the other side of the slope". They were usually discriminated and dislocated. Their houses sometimes burned by the shōen stewards or they could be killed at worst. These were described in the *Report of Shōen Steward Minamoto Kanesada* (Hineno village, Hine shōen) on June 4th in the fourth year of Showa (1315): "...there were house burnings and killings; therefore, we had to stop reclamation ..."[1].

At that time, only local peasants were permitted to rent agricultural land and pay tax to the landlords. They were called *nameholders*⁽³⁾. *An Enumeration on Cultivation in Oyama Shōen* on June 22nd in the second year

of Bunpo (1318) documented areas and taxes in detail of each nameholder. The case of the nameholder Umanojo Ieyasu⁽⁴⁾ of the Ichitani village (in Oyama shōen) was a good example: [Ieyasu was given] 8 *tan* 20 *shiro* (about 0.5 hectare), in which 1 *tan* 30 *shiro* was in the upper field with tax of 1 *koku* 2 *to*, 3 *tan* and 30 *shiro* was in the middle-level field with the tax of 2 *koku* 5 *sho* 2 *go*, 3 *tan* and 10 *shiro* was in the lower field with the tax of 1 *koku* 4 *to* 4 *sho*... After the payment to provincial salary budget was subtracted, the tax amount was 4 *koku* 6 *to* and 4 *go*... [2, Document No. 152].

Nameholders in the traditional families whose had a lot of land fields and the *Otona* (elderly people) were nominated to the Council of Village (*satanin* – executives). The Council played an important role in organizing the village's activities such as reclamation, production and irrigation system improvement. It was written in the documents of Nishitai village (Oyama shōen) that the Council of Village negotiated with its neighboring village of Miyada to make a contract for wood-water and land-water exchange in order to maintain their agricultural activities.

"Copy of the contract for water resource.

On land for water exchange.

Including 1 cho and 5 tan of land field with a detailed drawings attached.

The above mentioned land field in the Nishitai village of Oyama shōen belonged to the

three main divisions namely Ichitani, Nishitai and Kamoguki.

⁽²⁾ Hine, located near the city of Izumisano, belonged to the south of Osaka. Hine was property of Fujo family – the royal family and the descendant of Fujiwara family. This manor had existed for about 300 years (1234-1574) and covered four main villages namely Trusuhara, Ihara, Hineno and Iriyamada.

⁽³⁾ Myoden, *seido* was introduced in the 10th Century in all areas under the central government and all shōens. Accordingly, lands were given to wealthy peasants called nameholders with a predetermined tax.

⁽⁴⁾ Ancient Japanese people used to have only first names, no family names. Family names were given to aristocratic families or those who served in the Emperor as titles or job codes, known as *Kabane*. Names of Japanese people in the medieval time became more complicated. They included both titles and positions in the family. For instance, Fujiwara Umanojo Ieyasu: Fujiwara was family name, Ieyasu was first name and Umanojo was re-written from Uemonjo (a ranking title), which meant that this man was from an aristocratic family in the region. In the documents of Oyama shōen, he was also known as Uemon Sahuro (another title), which meant that he was the third child in the family.

Toji. It is difficulty to water this area of land field; therefore, we made this area as a concession to the Miyada shōen in exchange for water line that went through Miyada shōen to our land. This contract, as described in the explanation of the residents in Oyama shōen on April 2nd 1173, based on the precedence that villagers exchanged wood for water with Miyada shōen. Both sides had agreed with their contract. Recently, Miyada shōen and the upper area of the Oyama shōen have been in disagreement. As a result, the wood exploitation and water supply were cancelled. Now, land concession was made and wood exploitation was resumed. Even though contract was made, since the Negoroji and the jito⁽⁵⁾ Motokazu delineated their boundary, the Negoroji has no forest. Therefore, it has to exchange 1 cho 5 tan of land field for water source. If no water is allowed to use, land field must be returned...." [2, Document No.78].

In the medieval time, village's regulations were not systematized as those in the 17th Century to 19th Century but basic regulations were formed such as regulations to classify upper, middle and lower fields, to categorize land in the village including public land for irrigation system of the region; regulations for village security or penalties for offensive crimes... Especially, regulations were institutionalized by edicts of shōens owners or other warriors. These were a basis for regulations of villages in the modern history.

⁽⁵⁾ The term *jito* started at the end of the 9th Century with the meaning of local land and fields. For example, *Jito azukari dokoro* indicated landlords who made land concessions to others and became shōen stewards. Then, this term generally referred to landlords in the 10th and 11th Centuries. In the year of Bunji (1185) Minamoto Yoritomo requested the Emperor to issue the statute to assign *Jito*, the start of *Jitoseido*. Since the 13th Century, *Jito* became a term to refer to warriors who had contribution to the Jōkyū disorder (1221) and were sent to secure shōens and tax collection.

Let's take an example of the edict issued by Kujo Masamoto to villages in the Hine shōen on April 6th in the year of Bunki (1501).

"Edict:

1. *Village officials are not allowed to pretext public duty to pester local residents;*

2. *Those including village officials who steal more than 3 units of currency with clear evidence will be immediately executed;*

3. *Village officials are not allowed to infringe upon wives and maids of other nameholders"* [3, p.12].

1.2. Autonomous village

At the end of Kamakura and the beginning of the Muromachi (14th - 15th Centuries), autonomous villages started in existence in Japan. Village peasants requested landlords to remove the mediate managerial system and replaced it with their own villages' notables. These notables were responsible for land divisions, cultivation activity reports, tax collections and payments to the landlords. This transition was described in the Contract of Land Managerial Rights in the Ichitani village of Oyama shōen on June 14th in the second year of Bunpo (1318).

"A report to the Toji on annual tax payment of Ichitani village of Oyama shōen in the province of Tamba.

Including 8 *cho* 3 *tan* and 30 *shiro*, of which:

3 *cho* 3 *tan* was in the upper field with tax rate of 7 to 5 *sho/tan*

3 *cho* 2 *tan* was in the middle field with tax rate of 5 to 7 *sho/tan*

1 *cho* 6 *tan* 30 *shiro* was in the lower field with tax rate of 4 to 5 *cho/tan*

After categorized as upper, middle and lower fields, a part of our land was given to the

Negoroji. Then, the tax rate applied solely was 1 kuko/ton. But there was a bad harvest, the Temple sent its representative to have a check causing both the Negoroji and the village troublesome. Tax rates are applied respectively to each category of the land field as upper, middle and lower field at the request of the masses. Since then, despite bad harvests or droughts, tax payments must be made in the middle of every November...

June 14th second year of Bunpo

Umanojo (signed)

Taira Shoji (initialed)⁽⁵⁾

Meizen (signed) [2, Document No. 152].

During the warring time (mid. 15th Century - mid. 16th Century), the Councils of Village played a very important role in the village defense. At that time, Notables were also the heads of groups of nameholders. They negotiated with the proprietors or other warriors and were responsible for the village security. The report of the head of the Oyama shōen in the forth year of Showa (1315) documented that inhabitants in Nishitai village followed one Notable, Yukioka Nyudo to cooperate with the local warriors for protection.

"Response of the steward of Oyama shōen on problems of the Oyama shōen

Yukioka Nyudo in the Nishitai village and fellows took the fact that they did not have money as a pretext not to pay the tax to the central Emperor...

The villagers requested to use money to pay the tax of rice...

⁽⁵⁾ Ancient and medieval documents were usually sealed by the person who prepared and the person who was responsible for the documents as we sign our documents nowadays. It was common that documents were sealed by the stamps but the medieval Japanese used to sign with the quill pens. These signatures were known as *kaō*. Those who could not write would make a circle instead of signing the documents. These circles were known as *ryakūō*, translated as the initial.

They based on the jitoseido, did not obey the rules and followed the evil gang⁽⁶⁾ Genzo... [2, Document No.137].

If needed, Notables were willing to go to the central government or to the neighboring villages to negotiate for their villages' benefits. Documents of Hineno village recorded an event on September 3rd in the year of Bunki (1501). On hearing that the warriors from the *Negoroji* (belonged to the territory headed by Hatakeyama) prepared to attack Hineno village, its Notables discussed that "this is a moment of deciding our survival. It is necessary to negotiate (with the *Negoroji*) and make a concession (to avoid war)..." [3, p.149]. On the day followed, representatives of Hineno submitted to the *Negoroji* more than 200 *kan* [3, p.154] which was equivalent to their annual tax payment.

1.3. Combat Village

The village militia was very important in autonomous villages in Japan. The militia was responsible for the night patrols, fire and criminal prevention. The documents of Hine shōen showed that the village militia was about 20 strong men, known as *mura no bushi*. Notables in the villages "...chose the elderly to lead the strong youths..." [3, p.258].

During the war time, the militias were main forces to protect their villages. They set up guarding posts, send alarms of enemy to the villages. They helped villagers to evacuate properties and cattle, implement the plan of "empty garden and deserted house". On 26th June in the second year of Bunki (1502), having heard that their village would be attacked, villagers of the Hine shōen decided to take

⁽⁶⁾ This term used by the central government and the Bakufu to refer to local self-armed gangs who did not obey the administration.

advantages of their village's geographical position to set up the battle to defeat the enemy.

"...residents in the eastern part of Hineno left the village and moved up to the mountains. The enemy would attack from Tsuchimaru – a small gate into the village. Other three communes would gather to attack at the Tsuchimaru at the request of the enemy..." [3, p.125].

On September 2nd in the year of Bunki (1501), on hearing that the enemy planned to attack the village, the leaders of the village's militia and the Council of Notables gathered to discuss a plan to fight the enemy. *"...(villagers) evacuate their properties, drive their horses and cows... in the early morning the militia pretended to go hunting but they made an ambush for the enemy..."* [3, p.73].

1.4. Inter-village connection

The relationship between villages in the same region was a special feature of Japan in the medieval history. The relationship between Nishita and Miyata was just introduced in the above. Even though they sometimes had troubles in the use of water resource and the wood exploitation, the fact that Nishitai villagers used the water line from the fields of Miyada shōen during the time of Kamakura indicated the cooperation between the two sides.

Documents of Hine also recorded the *kumi no go* - the association among villages during the warring time. They agreed to let off flares as a signal of being attacked to call for help from others. *"When the Negoroji starts to attack one village, there would be a whir. Whenever a whir, other villages in the association would come to help. The whir was winded, all villages immediately came to help... from now on, they will come to help whenever needed..."* [3, p.82-83].

When there was a natural disaster, all villages in the association would cooperate to

overcome it. One good example of this cooperation was the fact that Hine shōen helped Tsuchimura and Shobu of Iriyamada village, which was recorded in the documents of Kujo, one proprietor, on September 1st in the second year of Bunki (1502).

"...It was heard that the flood had swept away the water conduit of Tsuchimura and Shobu to the Nagatuki shōen. A help was offered but they said it was not needed. But it was difficult to repair the water conduit. All people including children and the elderly from four communes of Iriyamada and from Hineno came to help repair the conduit. More than 400 people were unable to complete the task. Therefore, many other people from the neighboring Kami and Nagatuki came to help. The Kami offered many kinds of wines to celebrate their completion of the task..." [3, p.148].

1.5. Cultural and spiritual activities

Many cultural and spiritual activities of Japanese were reflected in the documents of Oyama and Hine shōens. Buddhist pagodas were built in traditional resident areas (*Choanji* of Ichitani and *Ikejiri*) or in important areas of the water resource (*Shipporyuji* of Hineno Iriyamada). Some pagodas were the headquarters of the villages or shōens (*Chofukuji* of Iriyamada). Each family had its own pagoda in the villages such as that of the *Muhenkoji* of the Minamoto family. In addition, each village had its own genie temple (*Oyuseki Temple* in Hineno, *Hachiman* in Ichitani) and many shrines in the borders among villages to worship the earth genies, *sainokami*, *jizo*.

Village festivals were celebrated in four seasons in accordance with agricultural celebrations which greatly influenced by Chinese culture such as the festivals to pray for good harvests and rains, to thank the God of Agriculture etc. Documents of Oyama shōen

did not recorded any of these festivals but those festivals were many times recorded in the documents of Masamoto. One of them was the festival to pray for rain on July 20th in the year of Bunki (1501): "...due to the recent drought, now monks from Shipporyuji of the Inunaki mountain came to pray for rain. If the drought continues, the pray will be held at the Poryuji. If no rain, the pray will be at the Bat Dong Minh Vuong. Still no rain, a bone or a stag head will be thrown into the stream. It is said that if so, rain will not be impossible..." [3, p.56].

One of the biggest festivals of Japanese people was the Urabon⁽⁷⁾. This festival was greatly significant to the people of the Hinc shōen, where they used to face with wars, epidemics, natural disasters. Therefore, it was annually held from the 11th to 16th of the 7th month of the lunar calendar.

"...on the 11th night, Tsuchimaru villagers worship and pray in front of the pagoda. On the 12th night when the moon is clearest, Ogi villagers will take their turn to worship and pray in the front garden... on the 13th night, villagers of Funabuchi come to worship and pray in the garden. After worship and pray, they perform a variety of dances. They perform these activities very well. On seeing these celebrations, (I thought) their skills and talents were so marvelous... on the 15th night, when the moon is clear, villagers of Shohu worship and pray in the garden... on the 16th night Ogi villagers and some of Tsuchimaru villagers continue to worship and pray in the garden while the Tsuchimaru and the Ogi, the Shohu and the Funabuchi are dancing together..." [3, p.55-56].

⁽⁷⁾ Urabon is a translation of Uramabana, meaning the pray for urvan. This is similar to the Buddhist holiday held annually on 15th of the 7th month of the lunar calendar. In Japan, this festival used to be held 13th -15th of the seventh month of the lunar calendar but today it is held differently in various locations and can be in the 7th and 8th month of the lunar calendar.

In the context of unstable life during the warring time, these festivals helped to connect people and reflected immortal living strength of Japanese villagers at that time.

2. Some comparisons with villages in Vietnam

In Vietnam, even though not very many of materials on Vietnamese village's structure, and cultural and spiritual activities in the time of Ly - Tran - Le dynasties were preserved, other materials such as historical books, epitaphs and researches show that Vietnamese villages had many similarities with those of Japan. Some researchers have compared village's regulations and beliefs between Vietnam and Japan [4,5]. The following section is to provide some comparisons between Japanese villages in the medieval history and those of Vietnam under the dynasties of Ly - Tran - Le.

As above analyzed, Japanese village structure was reflected in documents of which served as a forerunner of village legal regulations. Vietnamese village structure was partly reflected in the village regulations and conventions which started in the 14th and 15th Centuries and well developed in the 16th - 19th Centuries. Inhabitant structure was also divided into original or local villagers and outcast villagers. Outcast villagers had a lower status than that of local villagers. The village was managed by the village officialdom which included a village chief (*Xa truong*) and some other posts (*Xa tu*, *Xa giam*). These positions were selected by the villagers and they were prestigious, wealth and literacy like *satanin* in Japan.

In the 15th - 16th Centuries, in Japan, one border territory was established by some nameholders whose lands were close to each other. This border territory was led by a chief who was elderly and had a lot of land. People in

this territory cooperated in cultivation, tax collection and controlled each other. At the first glance, this territory seemed to similar to the *Giap* in Vietnam with male members and its activity went beyond the village administrative boundary. However, *Giap* was a community based on family lineage and its main activity was to cooperate in weddings and funerals; whereas, the border territory in Japan was more inclined to cooperating in productive activities. It is hoped that there would be more materials on the border territory of Japan to compare it with *Giap* in Vietnam.

The economics of the medieval shōens in Japan mainly based on valley agriculture while Vietnamese agriculture at that time based on the large river delta but the function of agricultural villages in both Vietnam and Japan was quite similar. The village was to manage its cultivation, tax collection, reclamation, irrigation, and to overcome natural disasters and to fight against the enemies. In addition, it was also to combine agricultural activities with handicraft and trading activities.

The militia in Japan was *mura no bushi* (young and strong men) led by the *taishu*. The militia in Vietnam was *Tuan dinh, tuan trang* (village guard men), who were at the age of 18 and 45 and formed the *Tuan phien* (village night patrol group). The group was headed by *Xa giam, Khan phu or Truong tuan* [4, p.282-283]. The militias' duties on both Vietnam and Japan were similar. They had to patrol, secure the village and prevent criminals at the peaceful time. At the war time, they were the armed forces to protect their villages.

Autonomous and combat villages were clearly reflected in the documents of both Oyama and Hine shōens and they were also the images of villages in Vietnam. The term "evil gang", existed in the documents of the Oyama shōen in the 14th – 15th Centuries, referred to the

local self-armed group who did not obey the rules and the administration. The Ming also used the same term to refer to the village self-armed groups in Vietnam in the 15th Centuries. It was recorded in *Binh dinh Giao nam luc* of Khau Tuan that "evil gangs emerged like the mushroom after the rain, only Giao Chau was pacified" [6, p.282]. The documents of Hine shōen also recorded the fights between the villagers and the warriors by evacuating people and cattle in the Hineno village. They implemented the plan of "empty garden, deserted house" and enticed the enemy into the mountain of Iriymada to attack the enemy. These pictures of combat villages reminded of combat villages in Vietnam during the Lam Son Uprising such as Mac Village (Loc village, Dong Ninh Commune, Dong Son Dist., Thanh Hoa Province), the home of Nguyen Chich. The Mac Village was the site for the military exercises of the insurgent army and it is well known by the historical relics including Con La co, Con Trai cong, Con Phao, Con Luoi kiem, and the structure of three forces and rearguards that frightened the Ming enemy to death so much that "the enemy did not dare to come to Dong Son" [6, p.183-279].

The combat villages were found in the epitaphs in the villages of Yen So and Dac So (formerly known as Ke Gia or Co So in Hoai Duc, Ha Tay). The epitaphs documented rich information about the combat villages. Since the 6th Century, in the uprising of Ly Bi, Ke Gia was well-known with the General Ly Phuc Man who made a great contribution to the national liberalization against the Liang enemy in the year of 524 and battles in Cuu Duc (Nghe Tinh) and Duong Lam (Ba Vi, Ha Tay). After his death, the 10th of March was taken to celebrate Hoi Gia festival which demonstrated the participation of villagers in Ly Phuc Man's battles. In the 13th Century, in the Tran Dynasty's resistances against the Mongols, Ke

Gia became the frontier. The Complete Annals of Dai Viet documented that "in the period of Nien Phong (1251-1258) of the Tran Dynasty, the Thai Dai (the Mongolians) invaded the country; when entered this area [Ke Gia], their horses could not move and they were defeated by the villagers. In the period of Trung Hung (1258-1293), the enemy invaded the country again. They destroyed everything and everywhere but that area [Ke Gia] was static" [7]. Epitaphs in Quan Gia also characterized the battle against the Mongol as such "the enemy was surrounded by the fire circle which got more and more closed and destroyed the enemy..." [8]. Located several dozens of kilometers from the Thang Long Palace and with brilliant tactics, Ke Gia people bravely kept the enemy out of the village and defeated them.

Documents of Hine shōen recorded the associations of villages known as *kumi no go* in one region. The *kumi no go* was also founded in Vietnam but it was called the *inter-village association*. In the resistance against the Ming enemy, these inter-village associations actively participated in weapon and food transportation and attacking the enemy. The good example was the association of five villages namely Yen Hoa, Ha Vi, Nam Xuong, Dong Nham and Chau Xuyen (in Bac Giang town). These villages participated in surrounding the Xuong Gian citadel of the enemy for six months and defeated it 10 days before their military aid arrived [6, p.288].

Cultural and spiritual activity in villages of the Hine shōen is also an interesting topic and it has similarities with that of Vietnamese villages. The system of temples of deities, Buddhist pagodas, and shrines was a special characteristic of Japanese belief system but it also had many similarities with the system of village's temples, Buddhist pagodas and shrines of ancient villages in Vietnam.

Village festivals and agricultural ceremonials were popular images to the people of the water rice agriculture. The *Shusei* festival in every January for luckiness and good harvests in Japan was similar to the *Khai ha* festival in Northern villages of Vietnam; the *Shen Nong* festival and *Sekimai* festival in April of Japan were similar to the *Ha Dien* festival in June of Vietnam. The Lunar July full-moon day for "pardoning homeless souls" in Vietnam and Japan are both Chinese original; the *New Rice* festival is celebrated in August in Vietnam and in September in Japan; both *Hotaki* festival of Japan and *Thuong Dien* festival of Vietnam are celebrated in November. For the recover from natural disasters, both Vietnam and Japan have their own festivals such as *Praying for Rain* festival in Japan or *Nhuong thu* festival in Vietnam.

In a nutshell, the comparison of villages in Vietnam and Japan shows that villages in both countries were influenced by the agricultural land possession in the Oriental system including possessions of the governments, villages and individuals. The structure, function, activity and regulation of villages in both Vietnam and Japan are similar. Particularly, the functions of production, reclamation, irrigation system improvement and of fighting the outside enemies were very clearly documented. However, Japanese villages since the 14th Century had a higher autonomy and independence and the individualization of agricultural land possessions strongly developed as a result of shōen system in the medieval history. Whereas, the governmental and collective possessions remained in a long period, the individual possessions were mainly landowners and the relationship between the landowners and the tenant farmers.

The above are some initial discussions of the paper in the study of villages in Japan's shōens in reference with villages in Vietnam.

The comparative study of villages in Japan and Vietnam is considered as a highly potential approach. The paper welcomes comments and discussion from researchers and those who are interested in this topic.

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