

〔共同研究：小型 V. T. R. の社会学的研究〕

# Communication and Community

—CATV in Japanese New Towns—

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The project team for "The Sociological Studies of VTR" has been discussing various problems of the information society, taking an example of Video Tape Recorder as an important information tool. The following short report on CATV, another important new information tool, is originally written for the conference "Information Societies—Learning from the Japanese and American Experiences" held on Dec. 11th.-14th., 1977 at School of Communications, University of Washington, Seattle, U. S. A., and owes very much to the discussion made among the members of the team mentioned above. Especially, I should like to thank Professor Kunio Goto, the director of the project and an authority on the information society, and Professor Norio Tamura, the initial planner of this project and also an authority on CATV.

In this report, I will talk about some aspects of CATV in Japanese new towns, taking up following topics:

- I. Postwar Japanese Society
  - 1) Rapid democratization — problems of communication left to be solved
  - 2) Rapid industrialization and urbanization — problems of community left to be solved
- II. Development of CATV
- III. New Town and CATV—With a focus on Higashi Ikoma Project
- IV. On the Problems of Community-oriented CATV

## V. Summary and Conclusion—Communication and Community

### I. Postwar Japanese Society

Japanese people have been experiencing a rapid, tremendous change—political, economic, cultural, and social—for more than thirty years since the end of World War II. Followings are the major points of these transitions.

- 1) Rapid democratization — problems of communication left to be solved

We have experienced a drastic change from a totalitarian society to a democratic one under the initiative of the Occupation Army. As this change has been accomplished so rapidly under the pressure from outside, there still remain various problems. Surely, explicit, visible institutions have been democratized. However, there are many implicit, invisible patterns of the human relations which remain the same as before. Seen from the aspect of the sociology of communication, we still keep traditional patterns of communication which have been cultivated during feudalistic or totalitarian period. Characteristics of these patterns can be summarized as follows:

- a) Characteristics of personal communication in Japan

Face-to-face communication in Japan tends to be affective rather than rational, limiting itself to a private theme in a closed group. Nonverbal communication, such as a tacit

consent or emotional unification, is dominant and is sometimes regarded as a virtue even in a decision-making process of a modernized organization. Discussions, which claim to be done on the basis of a democratic rule, are not always substantial and remain formalistic. Subordination or cooperation by the guess to what the leaders or the others might intend or want plays a big role in Japan.

This kind of communication could function in a closed group when the society was stable. These characteristics, however, are contradictory to the idea of democracy which is built on the basis of free discussion. Besides, this type of communication cannot function, when people must have new relations with unknown people as a result of big inflow and outflow of population.

b) Characteristics of mass communication in Japan

As is well known, Japan has the largest newspapers in the Capitalist camp, covering all over Japan and having central office in Tokyo. Each of the leading papers, the Yomiuri and the Asahi, is proud of printing 7,000,000 copies every morning and every evening. And at the same time, we have five strong nation-wide TV networks. At the starting point of commercialized TV in 1953, local viewpoint was expected but as a matter of fact the programs produced by key stations in Tokyo have spread over Japan year by year, reducing local stations virtually to relay stations. We have prefecture-sized papers and TV stations, but these prefecture-sized media are limited in their influence. City or town-sized papers and other publications are now going to hold public attention, but not yet so prosperous as those in U. S. A.

Such characteristics of mass communication in Japanese society is the cause and result of the fact that Japan lacks the tradition of

grass-roots democracy. Japan is very much center-oriented not only politically, economically, but also culturally. We have to admit that democracy in Japan is far from grass-roots type as in U. S. A.

2) Rapid industrialization and urbanization —problems of community left to be solved

In addition to the political change, we have achieved rapid economic growth—so to say Japanese version of “economic miracle” since the middle of 1950’s. It has brought rapid urbanization with various problems in each of the three typically different areas. These are :

- a) A big decrease of population, especially of productive age, in villages and small towns far from metropolis, where the collapse or transformation of old communities is in progress
- b) An excessive concentration of population in metropolitan cities such as Tokyo or Osaka, where also the collapse or transformation of communities is in progress
- c) An endless inflow of new residents in suburban areas where formation or transformation of communities are going on.

As I mentioned before, an affective private type of communication usable only in a closed circle is, of course, unsuitable as the medium to interact with unknown people in order to create new community or to transform the existent communities through discussions. This type of communication, however, is still internalized in ourselves through the process of socialization, and often disturbs us though many of us are trying to overcome such a defect and to make face-to-face verbal communication function thoroughly. On the other hand, huge nation-wide mass media are

not suitable to take up problems of each community. Therefore, besides intensifying verbal communication on face-to-face bases, we see the necessity of medium-sized communication media to fill up the gap between personal communication and mass communication. In this regard, community papers and community magazines have been highlighted. This is also the reason why CATV is now appearing before the footlights.

## II. Development of CATV

Since the middle of the 1960's, CATV has been adopted in various cities and towns—especially in those areas where radical changes have taken place as I mentioned before. At first, the areas belonging to (a) of the previous chapter began to introduce CATV. The need and possibility to solve the technical difficulties in watching VHF TV caused by geographical features was combined with the desire to reconstruct the community at a crisis caused by the outflow of young people. This is supposed to be the first motive to introduce CATV for the purpose of both retransmission and independent program transmission. Ueda (Nagano Prefecture) and Shimoda (Shizuoka Prefecture) are the good examples of this type. A few of the districts belonging to (b) also set up CATV, but they are not so eager in adopting it in Japan. By contrast, the areas belonging to (c) are now active to bring into use CATV. The need for establishing new community among new residents or the need for bringing closer the old and new residents is of essential necessity for this type of areas. Let us concentrate on this type in the next chapter.

## III. New Town and CATV—Focusing on Higashi Ikoma Project

Many of the Japanese New Town CATV projects are hoping to have a two-way communication or information system, surpassing simple one-way CATV system. But while most of them remain a dream, the following two are prominent, backed by strong financial support including that of central government. These two are Tama Coaxial Cable Information System (Tama CCIS) near Tokyo and Higashi Ikoma Optical Visual Information System (Hi-OVIS) near Osaka. Both of them are experimental projects under the leadership of the government, and various information industries—both hard and soft—have joined in the projects.

In the following, I will have a look at the latter case. The reasons are: (1) As I myself was living in this area, it was easy for me to observe it (2) While many reports have been done on Tama district, there are just a few on Higashi Ikoma to the best of my knowledge (3) Though it is still in the stage of preparation, they have started actively to do test programs with a clear intention for contributing to the community formation. For the sake of contrast, however, let me begin my remarks with the case in Tama.

Tama CCIS under the leadership of Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications has already been serving about 500 monitors since January, 1976. They have various kinds of services—retransmission of VHF TV, transmission of independent programs, TV request, still picture request, newspaper fax and community information fax, etc. Most monitors of Tama CCIS are rather young. They do not intend to settle down in this area and the mobility of the residents is accordingly fairly high because they are living in comparatively narrow rental apartment houses built by the semi-governmental Housing Corporation. Therefore they are not so much

interested in their community and not eager enough to produce their own programs. As Tama New Town is huge in itself, it is rather separated from old towns or villages surrounding it and lacks in contact and conflict with them. So, the experiment of this area seems to have the character of an 'information' system for better living to each family that happens to be living in that experimental area by chance rather than 'communication' system for building community out of individuals or families that are willing to live long in that area.

Hi-OVIS under the initiative of Ministry of International Trade and Industry, on the contrary, is trying to develop itself mainly as a typical case of 'communication' system for community building. Though their actual service has not yet started, 300 monitors have already been selected. The staff at the Hi-OVIS center in the station building of Higashi Ikoma are actively preparing for their start in the next summer with a clear aim mentioned above. Providing each monitor's house with a camera and a microphone, they are going to achieve simultaneous two-way communication on TV screen through a newly developed optical fiber cable. Monitors are also requested to join the committees for policy making, program production, and program evaluation. About 30 citizens are already participating in actual program making—as planners, informants, interviewers, performers and so on. They are now producing test video programs.

Compared with Tama New Town, Higashi Ikoma New Town is small in its size and population and is closely surrounded by traditional rural villages. And the residents in this area are living in bigger houses or apartments of their own possession. Therefore, the mobility of population is lower and

the age of the monitors is higher than in Tama. Their sons or daughters are sometimes old enough to participate in making programs. As most of the monitors want to settle down here, it is supposed that Higashi Ikoma monitors are more interested in community building than monitors in Tama. Through participation in program making, new residents seem to be stimulated in their interests in the historical background, the present situation, or the natural environment of their city. In addition to those monitors, some of the residents of old villages are showing interest in this new communication system and taking part in programs, though they are not selected as monitors. This experiment seems to have possibility to offer means for a community formation not only among new residents but also among old and new residents.

#### IV. On the Problems of Community-oriented CATV

So far, I was referring to CATV in new towns, especially to that of Higashi Ikoma, which is aiming to become a community medium. Though at an early stage, you can find needs for a community and a community medium on the side of the residents for one thing, and also the corresponding zeal of the staff to offer the possibility of 'sympathizing each other', 'talking each other', and 'helping each other' (Bulletin of MITI: special number on visual information system, focusing on Hi-OVIS, Sept. 29th, 1977, p. 12) for another. I have the feeling that this zeal is a match for the needs of the residents.

However, we would have to study the following two points, before CATV as a community medium starts to operate on a full scale.

- 1) Past, present and future of communities in Japan

We have to make a clear distinction between the past, present and desirable future of communities in Japan. A future design should be built on the reflection of the backwardness of the community which we have had for years. I was using the English term 'community' so far, but I have to confess we are using the word as it is even in Japanese, because we lack the Japanese expression which is equivalent to it. Therefore, when we Japanese use the word community, we tend to forget the negative aspects of an old Japanese society.

Before 1945 or the end of World War II, we used to have a solid, and stable community both in rural and urban districts. This community was a heartfelt homeland for each resident with its 'sympathizing each other' and 'helping each other'. This was where the characteristics of the personal communications which I mentioned before dominate, and was not the place where 'talking each other' in the full sense could be expected. Even when words were exchanged, it was far from a free discussion in its true meaning and was just the way to confirm unanimity or obedience of the members. Japanese community has had its function not only in supporting the individual member, but at the same time in exercising surveillance over him and in restraining him. Senior people or the older people of the community interfered in the privacy of the young or new members, and thus excluding dissenters from their community, or in the Japanese terminology 'mura-hachibu'. 'Mura', an equivalent to the English word 'village', does not only mean a rural district. Japanese social scientists does understand it as a terminology which indicates the type of human relationship mentioned above. This was to be seen also in urban districts. And this was the

basis for a feudalistic or totalitarian governing system in old Japan.

Post war democratization in Japan was also a process which liberated us Japanese from this kind of restrains, but I have to admit that it has not succeeded completely, namely old patterns are still prevailing in today's Japan. There are many who are hesitant in joining existent community or in forming a new community. Among these people, you can find not only indifference or inwardness but also conscious or unconscious anxiousness about strengthening or rebirth of an old type community. These people might have had a bitter experience with the pressure of this kind of community during the War or they might be enjoying the feeling of being liberated from a still existing 'mura' structure through having moved away from it.

So far I have been mentioning the negative side which a Japanese community has had. The conception of a community on which the project in Higashi Ikoma is based seems to me not to have fully understood these disadvantages. CATV in new towns should be a new medium for a new community of voluntary members with wider perspective.

When I talk about wider perspective, I have specially Japanese housewives in mind. Their daily interest or topics are polarized in a narrow personal subjects and in popular topics brought to them through mass media. Under these circumstances, it would be desirable that the CATV helps them out of the world of housewives' gossip and allows their interest in comembers and the environment of the community. I will give you a couple of examples. There was a case in Swindon Viewpoint CATV (England) which has given a big influence on Hi-OVIS: a mother appeared on the screen with her handicapped child and appealed to the audience about the

problem they have. This has brought a bigger impression and a more concrete understanding and help which you cannot expect through mass media. I spoke a girl student who is doing voluntarily a test program on the urbanization problem in Ikoma. She and her family are getting more interested in the environment through their discussion for the preparation of the program.

Of course, it is quite possible to start from their surroundings, both human and environmental, and broaden their view step by step even through other media. But TV is the most familiar medium for people ranging from a child to an elderly one, so that appeal of the picture is enormous. On top of that, the simultaneous two-way communication system of Hi-OVIS may have an immense effect. But you should not forget that every coin has two sides. In this case, CATV can combine the strong appeal which the picture has and the dangerous character of simultaneous communication which deprives the audience of the time for deliberation. This combination might bring illogical, emotional unification. We should watch the future of CATV, without forgetting this possible danger.

## 2) Management of CATV—Who and How?

At present, the Hi-OVIS staff is working under the leadership of a producer sent by Fuji VHF TV, one of the five key stations in Tokyo. They are ambitious to produce programs on the history, environment, education, women's activities and so on in and around Higashi Ikoma area, free from the pressure under the audience rating. However, the quality of programs will greatly depend upon the coming management system. At the start of VHF TV about 20 years ago, producers and audience expected to be able to have programs which enable the enlargement of

the people's view through this new medium. But, this hope has faded away. We have a bitter experience of allowing easily made entertainment programs prevail, which attract big audience. It might be said that TV has turned out to be a medium to arouse and maintain pseudo-unification of the people all over Japan through enjoying a common entertainment every night. The main reason which caused such process seems to lie in management problem.

Not only in commercial TV stations but also in public NHK TV, the route of the participation of the audience is very limited. Although the problem of 'media access' draws much attention recently, still the route of participation is limited either to the appearance in the program answering to the request of the staff or to producing a program tentatively for some special 'participation hour' at most. It is far from a substantial participation in policy making or program evaluation. As of now, audience rating is the only way for the audience to 'participate' substantially.

On the contrary, as I mentioned before, the planners of Hi-OVIS are expecting following types of residents' participation (Bulletin of MITI, Sept 29th, 1977, p.15):

- a) Participation in policy making—organizing committee, producing committee, program-evaluating committee
- b) participation in actual program production—joining as staffs, informants, reporters, guests, naraters and so on.

We should take into account that Visual Information Development Association(VISDA) which is running this experimental program is a MITI Juridical Foundation under the sponsorship of both the government and big business. And we should keep watching to what extent this system will be opened for the participation of various citizens. Though

there seems to exist almost no civil movement group in this experimental area, what will happen then, when this kind of system is brought to the districts where many activists live? Even in this seemingly quiet experimental area in Higashi Ikoma, there might be inhabitants who are wondering whether they should neglect it, refuse it, criticize it, participate in it or run it by their own hands. When these people want to participate in the committees mentioned above, Hi-OVIS will not only be an experiment of CATV or communication system, but also an experiment of grass-roots democracy itself.

#### Summary and Conclusion—Community and Communication

I have been discussing some aspects of CATV, in connection with problems of communication and community caused by rapid democratization and industrialization in postwar Japan. I have sketched the case of Higashi Ikoma project, which is a largescale two-way system backed up by the government,

and which shows strong orientation to develop as a communication medium to help community formation. And I have discussed a little bit the problems of the future of this kind of CATV.

Though it might sound too natural, I should like to remind you of the mutual interdependence of the patterns of communities and those of communication. In communities in a feudalistic or totalitarian society where people cannot but live in closed villages or towns depending on their given leaders, the face-to-face communication characterized by vagueness and conformism is dominant. A society lacking democratic grass-roots communities depends mainly on a nation-wide mass communication system. Egalitarian open-minded communities need suitable new patterns of communication. We have to wait and see whether two-way system CATV in new towns in Japan will become a proper medium, both in name and reality, for such a new type of communication.