here. For instance, the Institute for Human Development in Delhi has produced a compendium of research in Bihar between 2000 and 2010 which lists 268 papers and publications, including many relevant sources that are not referenced here (Sharma, Datta, and Ghose 2012). The same is true of a number of other village and household surveys that have been carried out in Bihar since the 1970s. A better grounding in existing research would have strengthened the book.

Overall, the research reported in this book includes a variety of interesting findings, not least the provision of new data. Of course, the coverage is far from comprehensive. In a book on inclusive development one could have hoped for more attention to be paid to some other topics, such as gender inequality and rural labor markets. But the volume does contribute to ongoing debates on a number of important aspects of inclusive development in Bihar, and as such is a useful complement to the existing literature.

REFERENCE


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This is a highly productive and well-designed rural development study. Combining rich empirical field data and a clear-cut theoretical framework, the volume has successfully filled a void left by existing rural development literature. The book provides readers with plenty of lively “organizational process” data regarding rural organizations and collective action at the micro level. Other than the development activities introduced by outside agencies, the authors of each chapter, through intensive fieldwork in seven Asian countries, have collected numerous examples of endogenous organizational efforts by villagers themselves. These include examples of mutual aid, pooling resources, asset management, business management, and self-governance, largely omitted in previous rural development literature. Here, I will give a brief overview of each chapter.

This review is a product of the seminar, “Inter-cultural Exchange I” and “Seminar on Human Security VI” in 2015, given by the Department of Area Studies and the Graduate Program in Human Security, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the University of Tokyo. I am very grateful to the participants in the seminar for their reading and for engaging in discussions of this book. The names of participants are Tomoka Doi, Yukari Furukawa, Natsuki Hidaka, Shinnosuke Hojo, Xiaoshuang Huang, and Hidayah Mohamad.

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The introductory chapter offers a critical review of previous work and the research strategy that informs the current volume. Seven case studies, representing seven countries, follow. Part I consists of case studies dealing primarily with the composition of locality groups and their roles as hosts of development organizations. Chapter 2, authored by Shinichi Shigetomi, focuses on the composition of locality groups—administrative villages, indigenous villages, and temple supporter groups—as the basis for local social systems in Thailand. The organizing processes of a rice bank, a cooperative shop, a fish farming project, and saving groups are studied from a comparative perspective between northeast and lower central villages. In Chapter 3, Misaki Iwai takes up a case of a successful poverty reduction program in Vietnam, and demonstrates that social organizations, such as the Women’s Union or the Farmers’ Union, can support the performance of a development project. In Chapter 4, based on data from 33 villages in Myanmar, Ikuko Okamoto demonstrates the different organizing patterns of villages with regard to their different access to resources. She found that villages in Upper Burma were able to adopt a community forestry program in the same way as they carry out other collective activities, while villages in Lower Burma were not capable of doing so.

Part II focuses on the formation and management of development organizations. Chapter 5, authored by Motoko Shimagami, discusses regional variations in organizational responses to a microfinance project that was launched nationwide in Indonesia. Villages in Java and Sulawesi responded differently, due to dissimilar local social systems. In Chapter 6, Atsuko Hayama illustrates how the forms of collective action in a “dyadically woven” social structure have affected the performance of community forestry projects in the Philippines. Chapter 7, coauthored by Akina Venkateswarlu and Shinichi Shigetomi, identifies a unique form of common fund procurement in Indian villages, in which resources are obtained by tapping the profits gained from economic transactions between villagers and outsiders. The Village Development Council, rather than the village panchayat (council), is the main provider of various public works and services. In Chapter 8, Nanae Yamada conceptualizes organizational activities in Chinese villages as “communal resource driven” rural development. She compares the ways in which villages in northern and southern China utilize common land.

Among the major achievements of this study, the conceptualization of three types of local social systems is the most prominent: the first type, according to the author of the concluding chapter, is the natural or administrative village that has an institution for building consensus, and another for mobilizing villager participation in collective action. Among the case studies in this volume, this type of system includes upper Myanmar, the Javanese and Torajanese regions of Indonesia, northeast Thailand, central Vietnam, etc. The author asserts that so-called community-based or participatory development programs may be a relevant choice for this type of local social system. In the second type, the natural or administrative village has an institution for building consensus, but lacks an institution for mobilizing villagers’ participation. The cases of India and China represent this type. Under such a local social system, policy that stimulates communal resource procurement and its utilization may work better. In the third type, the administrative village works only as a receiving unit. The cases of lower central Thailand and the Philippines represent this type. Since kin groups or dyadic ties are more salient in this social system, small
organizations with a few members are a better-suited organizational form (pp. 223–24). When dealing with concrete cases hereafter, students of rural development issues or collective action should consult this framework to identify more accurately the local society that he or she is investigating.

A second contribution of the volume is that it provides concrete examples of the interrelationships among local organizational patterns, including administrative villages, indigenous villages, kinship groups, dyadic relations, and other small groups. In previous rural development literature, which, according to the authors, has taken a “reductionist” approach, some of the elements that might affect the performance of collective action are examined independently (p. 8). Thus, earlier approaches have failed to explain the social contexts of successful (or unsuccessful) collective action. The theorization of the three-fold typology of local social systems was possible only through a holistic analysis of local realities.

Third, a methodological merit of the book is that most of the case chapters include internal comparisons of collective action. For instance, regional variations in local organizations are exemplified in northeast vs central Thailand; Magwe, Shan, and Ayeyarwady in Myanmar; Java vs Sulawesi in Indonesia, and northern vs southern China. Focusing on regional variations is vital in the analysis of rural social structures because the comparative view enables researchers to perceive “hidden” elements in specific research sites. In this sense, most of authors consciously employ an internal comparative view to discover elements that can affect collective action. There has been little earlier scholarship that has dealt carefully with this point.

While welcoming the theoretical and empirical contributions described above, readers of this book may simultaneously harbor some questions. First, what are the implications of this book’s chapters about the roles played by outside agencies or outside resources in rural development? Are outside factors assumed as a “precondition” of rural development, or is development ultimately possible even without outside resources? The volume’s findings may suggest that certain organizational forms of local society are more suitable for certain types of development projects. However, what is the case without such exogenous projects or donors? Although the chapters on Thailand, India, and China deal with more cases of indigenous organization than ones led by exogenous actors, there seems to be a tacit agreement to begin research with the development agency’s action. The book as a whole remains silent about the likelihood of self-reliant rural development, which has been a reality in Chinese villages.

Second, how can we evaluate the “needs” of local residents for rural development? Rural life entails a number of problems or issues that should be solved collectively. However, it is normally not so easy for outside observers to identify the issues local residents identify as most urgently in need of remedy. In this regard, I could not judge whether the issues taken up by the chapters in this book are the ones of greatest importance for local villagers. For example, the authors claim that many community forestry projects in Myanmar and the Philippines have failed because the capabilities of the local social system did not allow project plans to go smoothly. However, another interpretation is also possible: that the outputs of the projects were simply irrelevant for local needs. Similarly, though admitting that microfinance projects are helpful for the rural poor, the authors of the chapters on
Vietnam and the Philippines do not explain clearly enough the rationale for choosing these case studies. Is it because microfinance projects were widely implemented by the government or by development agencies? Is it because residents needed them, or were they chosen out of research interest? In my view, rural development studies should start from grassroots basic needs. Otherwise, the most urgent issues may be missed, while some less acute issues for residents are carefully implemented or studied.

Third, international, not solely internal, comparisons of rural development would help to extract more profound implications, especially with regard to political regimes. Although it is not the focus of the present study, political environments outside the small community could greatly affect the way people access outside resources for rural development. Specifically, it would be intriguing to compare China, which has a classic authoritarian political regime, with India, which has a multi-layered competitive electoral regime. In this sense, Chapter 7’s analysis of an Indian case study seems to place too much stress on the internal fund procurement efforts of village leaders, while underestimating the politicians’ role in bringing government resources to rural areas. On the other hand, one can also associate the feature of self-reliant resource-driven rural development in China (Chapter 8), with the lack of competitive elections above village level, which results in villagers being able to rely only on endogenous resources.

The several questions above, however, do not challenge the great value of this work, but are posed with the intention of provoking future debate. I believe this highly recommended and readable book, with its dense description of local collective life in Asia, will gain a broad readership among students and practical workers in rural development and rural society.

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