

Dissertation Abstract (English)	
Dissertation title	Multi-Layered Social Relationships and Women's Life Strategies in Bangladeshi Garo Society
Author	Nobuko Uesawa
<p>The purpose of this study is to examine how the Garos, who are an ethnic and religious minority living in the north-central area of Bangladesh, challenge the "marginality" of ethnic groups by utilizing women's "advantage" of coming from a matrilineal society in everyday life. This is a study of people's history in a village from the women's perspective.</p> <p>Most studies of Bangladeshi ethnic groups have explained that they have been restricted access to public support, are marginalized from "mainstream" society, and cannot get out of poverty because they are seen as "backward" peoples. The reason for this discourse is that the term "frontier," which was given to the residential zones of ethnic groups under British colonial rule, reminds us of geographic and ethnic isolation, and instills the image of "marginality." The Garos, however, have received education and health assistance from missionaries and mission-related aid agencies since the British period. The first question we have to ask here is whether they have gained broad support because they are a marginalized people, or through utilizing the image of "marginality."</p> <p>The second question that requires clarification is in which part of their everyday lives and life courses Garo women exercise "the right of self-determination," and what triggers these practices. Recent studies have considered that, through the filter of the "matrilineal system," Garo women have an "advantage" under the premise of the right of "self-determination." Consequently, they have frequently been compared with women in patrilineal societies. Not all Garo women, however, have "autonomy" or enact "self-determination" in all aspects of their lives. They can either act autonomously or not as the situation demands. Women's situations have also changed through history.</p> <p>Garo women are thus represented by the contradictory discourses of "marginality" as an ethnic group and their "advantage" as women in a matrilineal society. In this thesis, I will examine how they negotiate with influential administrative institutions, churches, and development organizations while using the different discourses. The data discussed here was collected during my ethnographic research in a village near the northern border of Mymensingh District in Bangladesh. This fieldwork was carried out for a few months each year from 2008 to 2019.</p> <p>The dissertation consists of nine chapters including an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, I discuss the position of the thesis relative to previous studies. It is</p>	

also pointed out the importance of qualitative research on the voices of the people.

In the first chapter, I examine the historical situation of ethnic groups in Bangladesh, focusing on policies dealing with ethnic groups from British colonial rule to the current government of Bangladesh and how the Garos have been impacted by these policies. In addition, I review the characteristics of flood disaster in the study area.

In the second chapter, I review the geographical outline, such as the composition of the population, education, livelihood, religion, matrilineal characteristics and so on. The local history of the study village as described by the elderly is also included.

From the third to fifth chapter, I reveal how women negotiate with the administrative institutions, churches, and NGOs. In the third chapter, I focus on the issue of women's land ownership and inheritance in the matrilineal society, and discuss how they negotiate with the local administration and judicial system. It was found that the "customary law" of the "matrilineal system" is rearranged as a tool to justify women's land ownership in land disputes, although the principle of the "matrilineal system" has been collapsing.

In the fourth chapter, I clarify the picture of social relationships based around churches. It is pointed out that Christianity not only functions as a boundary with other religions, but also creates denominational and gender boundaries within the Garo community. Many cases described here show that each woman expects a variety of functions from the churches.

In the fifth chapter, I focus on women's groups into which NGOs incorporate almost every Garo women living in the research village. The research analysis shows that high- and low-income women utilize NGOs' programs in different ways, that non-involvement in NGO women's groups, which some women take, is the strategy of Garo women, and that the matrilineal society influences NGO group formation.

From the sixth to the seventh chapter, I describe the relationship between mothers and daughters, and between the city and rural dwellers focusing on the perspective of succession and transformation. In the sixth chapter, I show the cases of women whom I selected from large, land-owning salaried households and from landless day-labor households where the economic characteristics of the research village are most apparent. The results reveal that their strategies for choosing and using social relationships varies depending on income and generation. Furthermore, male members of both high- and low-income households use women's resources indirectly.

In the seventh chapter, I consider the rural and urban relationship among a matrilineal kin group. Many of Garo women work as beauticians, domestic workers, and nurses in Dhaka. "Being Garo" and "being Christian," which define their minority

status, significantly help them to attain this stable employment. Garo women working in the city send remittances to their family and relatives in rural areas, adopt their sister's daughters, and support village events. In other words, they maintain the relationship with their matrilineal kin groups in their home villages rather than abandoning them.

In the final chapter, after summarizing each chapter, an overall discussion is presented and the future tasks of the study are described. In conclusion, firstly, the image of "marginality" seen from the outside may differ from the lived reality of ethnic groups. In the case of the Garos, especially women, they incorporate other representations into their self-representation. Low-income Garo households have gained broad support because they are a literally marginalized peoples while high-income Garo households utilize the image of "marginality." By "being marginalized people", both families are successful in negotiating with and gaining the support of public institutions. This is the life strategy of Garo women.

Secondly, the above strategy is driven by Garo women's right of self-determination and multi-layered social relationships. The cases in this thesis show that there are many opportunities for asserting self-determination through their life courses and all these constitute women's "advantage."

Another important point is that Garo women have safety nets when they try and fail while asserting their self-determination. This safety net is composed of multi-layered social relationships such as with relatives, churches, and NGOs in Garo society. Garo women have taken advantage of social relationships to deal with various risks resulting from disasters and land issues. The practice of utilizing social relationships itself has triggered Garo women's self-determination.