

DBA THESIS (2008)

OK Baji as an Exemplar of *Phronetic* Leadership



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	10
Phronesis: practical wisdom to serve social good	10
Three elements of phronesis.....	13
Thesis Overview.....	15
Part One: Theoretical basis of phronesis.....	18
Chapter 1 Literature Review	19
1.1 Emerging social awareness	19
1.2 Management and Society	22
1.3 Theory of Knowledge Creation	24
Chapter 2 Methodology	44
2.1 Research procedures	44
2.2 Reliability, Validity and Sources of data	46
2.3 Analysis.....	49
Part Two: Description of OK Baji's way of living.....	51
Chapter 3 OK Baji's Life	52
3.1 OK Baji's first step towards social services.....	53
3.2 OK Baji's pleasure	61
Chapter 4 The Village of Bhalaytar in Eastern Palpa	66
4.1 Bhalaytar	66
4.2 Organizations to improve the villages	78
Chapter 5 Firsthand experience alongside OK Baji.....	83
5.1 First time experiencing OK Baji's social services: The four-day trek of 2001.....	84
5.2 Second time experiencing OK Baji's social services: The seven-day trek of 2004...97	
5.3 OK Baji's busiest morning of 2006	105
5.4 Insights from observing OK Baji's way of living.....	112
Part Three: OK Baji's phronesis	118
Chapter 6 Social good served by OK Baji	119
6.1 Overview of social good served by OK Baji	120
6.2 Medical Support.....	124
6.3 Educational support	134
6.4 Others projects	148
6.5 Nepalese perspectives on the social good served by OK Baji.....	152
6.6 Summary of the social good served by OK Baji.....	159
Chapter 7 OK Baji's virtuous habits for decision-making and taking action	162

7.1	Examples of OK Baji's decisions	162
7.2	Examples of OK Baji's actions	171
Chapter 8	OK Baji's Values and Ethics	186
8.1	Becoming selfless	187
8.2	Becoming useful	195
8.3	Summary of OK Baji's values and ethics	198
Chapter 9	Extension of OK Baji's phronesis	201
9.1	OK Baji's extending influence in Nepal	201
9.2	OK Baji's extending influence in Japan.....	210
9.3	OK Baji's influence on my life	212
9.4	The process of change in my life	219
Chapter 10	Case Study: OK Baji Cup volleyball tournament	223
10.1	Background.....	223
10.2	The first OK Baji Cup.....	231
10.3	The second OK Baji Cup	235
10.4	The third OK Baji Cup.....	239
10.5	The fourth OK Baji Cup	242
10.6	Future tournaments	245
10.7	Extending phronesis through Ba.....	248
Part Four:	Summary and Conclusion.....	253
Chapter 11	Findings and learning from OK Baji.....	254
11.1	A way of life that creates social knowledge to better society	256
11.2	Cultivating phronesis over time	266
11.3	Limitation of thesis and future challenges	269
11.4	Personal takeaways	271
11.5	Conclusion	280
Appendix A:	Unedited Diary Transcripts of the Seven-day Trek of 2004	283
Appendix B:	Projects OK Baji has completed in Eastern Palpa (as of March 2004)	293
Appendix C:	Construction of the Shree Krishna Devi Secondary School	296
Appendix D:	The Collapse of Local NGOs	297
Appendix E:	Sample Applications to the Himal Scholarship Fund	298
Appendix F:	Himal Scholarship Fund Application Data: 2003 to 2007	299

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research in developing my thesis.

Introduction

Phronesis: practical wisdom to serve social good

More than 2,300 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that the knowledge of human beings could be divided into three types: *Episteme*, *Techne*, and *Phronesis*.

Episteme corresponds to science, and *techne* is what is now referred to as technology, but what then is *phronesis*? Most individuals are likely unfamiliar with Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, which can be described by various expressions, but for the purposes of this study it is considered the practical wisdom to serve the common or social (humanitarian) good. Aristotle's three types of knowledge are today known as science (*episteme*), technology (*techne*), and the practical wisdom to serve the common good (*phronesis*).

Thanks to the advancement of science (*episteme*) over the past 2,300 years, we can now predict the future. According to scientific research, one prediction is that five billion years from now the Earth will not exist in the solar system. The Sun is currently generating abundant energy by burning hydrogen through a process of nuclear fusion, leading to an accumulation of helium, a byproduct of this nuclear process. In time, as it consumes its hydrogen reserves and starts to burn accumulated helium, the Sun will expand, bigger and bigger, presumably beyond the orbit of Jupiter, and become a red giant. The Earth will be consumed during this transformation and cease to exist. That is what present scientific

knowledge predicts for our future five billion years from now.

On the other hand, thanks to the advancement of technology (*techne*), human beings can travel to outer space. In several thousand years, we may be able to escape and colonize other planets before the Sun destroys the Earth, or develop new technologies that might prevent the Sun from expanding. Consequently, we might find a way to survive the Earth's doomsday fate thanks to the advancement of technology.

In such an example, we can see the advancement in Aristotle's first two forms of knowledge – science and technology. However, how about the advancement of the third type of knowledge – *phronesis*? Have knowledge to serve the common good advanced over the past 2,300 years? Put another way, will the human race survive long enough to witness the Sun's transformation into a red giant, or will they survive for only another 10,000 years, or perhaps just 100 years?

We have seen so many problems that are of our own making. At this very moment, somewhere on the Earth, civil wars are being fought, children are starving, people are suffering from poverty, more and more individuals are committing suicide, and many other atrocities of human origin are taking place. By looking at these problems, there is doubt whether we will live better in the future or even if we, human beings, will exist in the near future. If what Aristotle said 2,300 years ago was correct, each of us should possess and cultivate *phronesis* as knowledge to serve the common good and live better lives in harmony

with others around us.

Nelson Mandela, who fought apartheid in South Africa and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for his efforts, made a speech at the World Economic Forum in February 2002, where he was asked “Who are your heroes?” He pondered in silence for one minute before delivering the following response:

People who eradicate hunger, they are my heroes.

People who fight crime, they are my heroes.

People who stand up against discrimination, they are my heroes.

People who stand up against injustice, they are my heroes.

People who eradicate poverty, they are my heroes.

People who eradicate ignorance, they are my heroes.

People who fight against disease, they are my heroes.

People who stand up against hate, they are my heroes¹

These heroes are the ones who serve the common good, or the social good, with Aristotle’s *phronesis*, and the ones who will be called *phronetic* leaders. But how can we construct a better understanding of *phronesis*?

On the day in July 2003 when I was officially admitted to the DBA (Doctorate in Business Administration) program at the Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy

¹ Shared by Professor Hirotaka Takeuchi, Dean of the Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy (ICS) at Hitotsubashi University, who attended the forum and heard Nelson Mandela’s speech.

(ICS) at Hitotsubashi University, I met for lunch with the Chair of the DBA program at a restaurant adjacent to ICS. During our meeting, he suggested that the following three individuals could serve as my role models during and even after I completed the DBA: Ms. Sadako Ogata, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Mr. Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize; and Mr. OK Baji, a Japanese social worker based in Nepal. Most people should recognize the first two individuals; they exemplify the heroes described in Mandela's speech. But, what about OK Baji? Most people have not heard of him.

OK Baji has been helping villagers who live in the remote and underdeveloped regions of Nepal since the mid 1990s. His name, "OK Baji," is actually a nickname coined by the villagers in the heart of the Nepalese mountains. For the past seven years I have worked under the tutelage of OK Baji and directly observed the impact of his social works. In this thesis, I will attempt to construct a better understanding of *phronesis* using OK Baji as a living exemplar of an individual who embodies practical wisdom used to serve the common good.

Three elements of phronesis

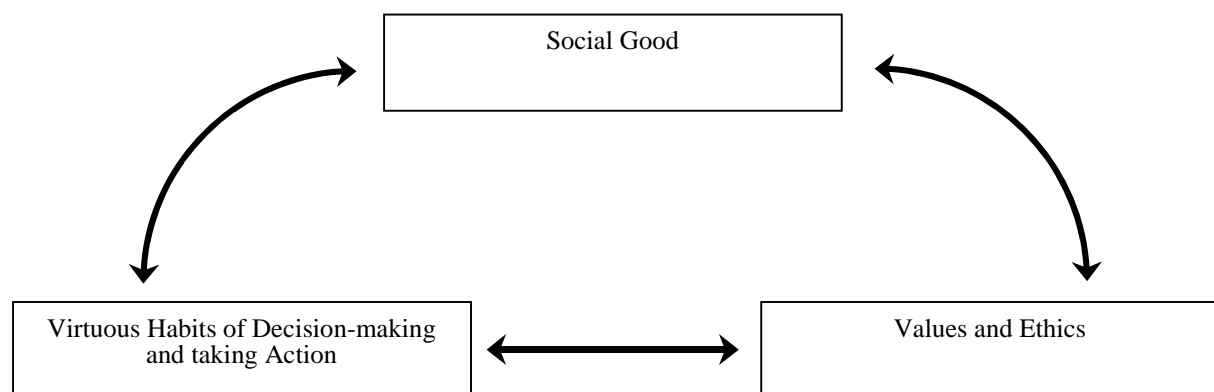
Ikujiro Nonaka, a leading authority on knowledge creation, embedded Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* into the theory of the knowledge creating-company (Nonaka &

Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka & Toyama, 2005) and developed the model of social knowledge creation. In this model of social knowledge creation, Nonaka, Reinmoeller, and Hirose (2007) argue that sharing *phronesis* is key to creating new knowledge in society.

Nonaka and Toyama (2005, 2006, and 2007) and Nonaka et al. (2007) define *phronesis* as virtuous habits of making prudent decisions and taking actions to serve the common good based on values and ethics. By applying this social knowledge creation model, this thesis will identify OK Baji's *phronesis* in his continuous commitment to help disadvantaged villagers in Nepal based on the above definition of *phronesis*.

OK Baji's *phronesis* as knowledge to serve the social good will be examined in detail by dividing it into three elements: (1) social good, (2) virtuous habits of making prudent decisions and taking actions, and (3) values and ethics (Figure 1). Accordingly, by examining OK Baji's *phronesis* along these three elements, this thesis attempts to identify key insights that will help individuals to cultivate their own *phronesis* towards a better world.

Figure 1 Three Elements of *Phronesis*



Thesis Overview

This thesis has 11 chapters grouped into four parts as follows:

Part One: Theoretical description of *phronesis*

Chapter 1 Literature review

Chapter 2 Methodology

Part Two: OK Baji's way of living

Chapter 3 OK Baji's Life

Chapter 4 The village of Bhalaytar in Eastern Palpa

Chapter 5 Firsthand fieldwork experience alongside OK Baji

Part Three: Analysis of OK Baji's *phronesis*

Chapter 6 Social good provided by OK Baji

Chapter 7 OK Baji's virtuous habits for decision-making and taking action

Chapter 8 OK Baji's Values and Ethics

Chapter 9 Extension of OK Baji's *phronesis*

Chapter 10 Case Study: OK Baji Cup volleyball tournament

Part Four: Summary and conclusion

Chapter 11 Findings and learning from OK Baji

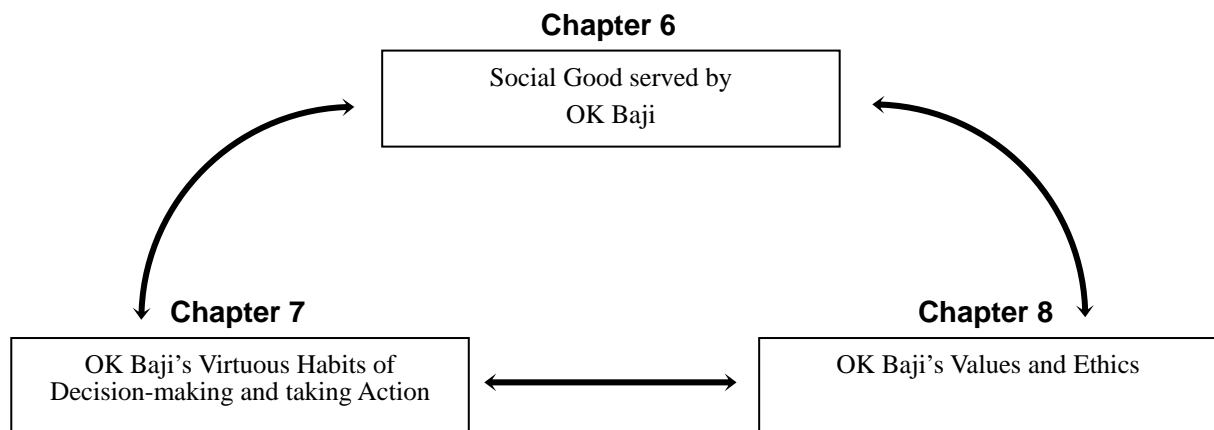
In part one, Chapter 1 starts with a literature review of recent studies related to management and society, followed by a review of the theory of knowledge creation, including concepts such as *Ba*, the SECI process, and *phronesis*, to form the theoretical foundation for the thesis. Chapter 2 introduces the methodology, including the research procedure, materials, and analysis used in the thesis.

In part two, Chapter 3 provides a better understanding of OK Baji's way of living, including a brief overview of his life, starting with 1) how he took his first step towards providing social services in the remote villages of Nepal, followed by 2) a brief overview of

village life in Nepal, and finally looking at 3) his main activities in the villages – walking. Chapter 4, looks at the context where OK Baji conducts his social services by describing the living conditions in the remote village of Bhalaytar. This chapter also looks at the stakeholders OK Baji interacts with, including the government and local non-governmental organization (NGOs) that support his activities. Chapter 5 presents firsthand accounts of fieldwork alongside OK Baji as I helped him perform his social activities, including detailed accounts of two treks we took together in Nepal.

In part three, an analysis of OK Baji's activities is conducted to achieve a better understanding of his *phronesis* as knowledge to serve social good. This analysis will be framed by the three elements of *phronesis*, as shown in Figure 2. Chapter 6 describes the social good served by OK Baji; Chapter 7 depicts his virtuous habits of decision-making and taking actions; Chapter 8 looks at his values and ethics; and Chapter 9 describes the extensions of his *phronesis* along the following three perspectives: 1) OK Baji's expanding influence in Nepal, 2) in Japan, and 3) in my own personal life. Chapter 10 introduces a case study that integrates the extensions of OK Baji's *phronesis* in Japan, in Nepal and on my life. In part four, the final section of the thesis, Chapter 11 concludes with a summary of findings and lessons learned from OK Baji and his visions for the future.

Figure 2 Analysis of the Three Elements of OK Baji's *Phronesis*



Part One: Theoretical basis of *phronesis*

Chapter 1 Literature Review

1.1 *Emerging social awareness*

Global awareness to improve the state of the world along many levels – poverty eradication, environmental protection, access to healthcare, fair trade accords, tackling famine, among others – has elevated. During the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos in 2008, two notable presenters voiced their concerns of the plight facing many “voiceless” individuals across the globe and shed light on some of the initiatives undertaken to help these people.

The first was Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, who announced a US\$306 million commitment to promote small-scale agricultural development in Africa. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which he co-founded together with his wife, provided most of the funding for this initiative with the long-term aim of ending extreme hunger and poverty in Africa through sustainable agricultural endeavors. Bill Gates also announced his shift away as head of Microsoft to focus more intensely on philanthropic activities, a function he considers important yet limited among many business leaders in today’s society. He hoped his foundation could serve as the provider of funds and the shaper of policy by entrusting responsibility for action and implementation to those individual and organizations more skillful and knowledgeable in creating socially minded projects.

The second presenter was Bono, lead singer of the Irish rock band U2 and founder of

DATA, a non-government organization that aims to eradicate debt, AIDS, and unfair trade practices in Africa, who took part in a panel alongside former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, an outspoken environmental awareness activist, to discuss the adverse impact of extreme poverty and climate change on growth and development in Africa. Bono also met with Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda and commented that “Japan is at the heart of world affairs this year,” a reference to the May 2008 Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV), an event held every five years since 1993 to promote dialogue between African leaders and global partners and foster economic and social development programs throughout the African continent (DATA Web site, January 25, 2008).

Despite this emerging awareness and interest in the state of the people of the world, the presence of *phronetic* leaders who inspire others towards positive and constructive change is paramount. As Bill Gates noted, his foundation’s support depends on the competences of those it relies on to implement projects promoting social good. But, the field of social services is not alone in seeking out such *phronetic* leadership. According to Yoshihiko Miyauchi, Chairman and CEO of ORIX Corporation, enhancing corporate profitability and making companies address societal needs is also important:

A corporation is something whose existence is authorized only after it is recognized by society. We must all contribute to society. The best way to do this is by creating wealth in the most efficient way possible. How do we measure if something is

efficient or not? For better or worse, all corporate activity takes place amidst competition, so winning over the competition is one yardstick for measuring efficiency. Another essential measure is profitability. And if we look at returns, we can't help but think that we are measuring a company's usefulness. As a manager, I believe we answer society's needs by increasing profits, growing earnings, and enhancing profitability (Takeuchi, Osono, & Kawada, 2006).

However, profitability alone will not engender companies to foster social good or improve society. This depends on leadership. During the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Symposium held in Tokyo in July 2007, Nobuo Sayama (2007), a leading authority and practitioner of corporate merger and acquisitions (M&A) activity in Japan, stressed the need for leaders to steer companies on the path towards goodness:

Both M&A and CSR are activities that can make create good companies, and those enterprises incompatible with such activities will not survive as good companies for long. But, what is a "good" company? A "good" company is one that addresses the needs of all its stakeholders, including shareholders, management, employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities in which they operate. Then, the next question is who can make a company good? I believe only the company's management can do so (Sayama, 2007).

1.2 *Management and Society*

In the theory of the knowledge creating-company, knowledge is defined as the dynamic process of justified true beliefs (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka also states that “knowledge creation is a process toward common good and ... a way of living.” (Nonaka, 2007). In other words, starting from personal belief, knowledge creation is a process, or a way of living, which improves society. The theory of knowledge creation developed to deal with management has evolved to encompass not just the firm, but society as well.

Likewise, four renowned management scholars recently presented new studies on the positive role corporate management plays in society. The first is Noel M. Tichy, Director of the Global Leadership Program and Professor of Management and Organizations at the University of Michigan Business School, and co-author of *Corporate Global Citizenship* (Tichy, McGill, & Clair, 1997), in which he argues that companies can be model citizens who can make society better by making contributions to global communities; a perspective termed “Corporate Global Citizenship” (Tichy et al., 1997).

The second figure is C.K. Prahalad, also a Professor at the University of Michigan Business School and developer of the concept of core competence, who introduced the concept of learning from the economic “Bottom Of the Pyramid” (BOP). Prahalad points out that over four billion people dwell in the bottom of the economic pyramid – those subsisting on less than \$2 a day – representing a large untapped potential for growth (Prahalad, 2005).

The third figure is Philip Kotler, Professor of International Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University and a leading authority on Marketing, who introduced the “Societal Marketing Concept” in his book *Marketing in the Public Sector* (2006). This concept illustrates how traditional private sector marketing concepts, such as customer segmentation and 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), can be applied in the public sector (Kotler, 2007).

The fourth and final figure is Michael E. Porter, Professor at the Harvard Business School and a leading authority on Competitive Strategy, who suggests in his 2006 *Harvard Business Review* article titled “Strategy and Society: The Link between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility” that two types of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) exist: responsive CSR and strategic CSR. Porter further argues that firms can follow two general approaches to realize strategic CSR: the first is an inside-out approach using a value chain, and the other is an outside-in approach following the diamond framework (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

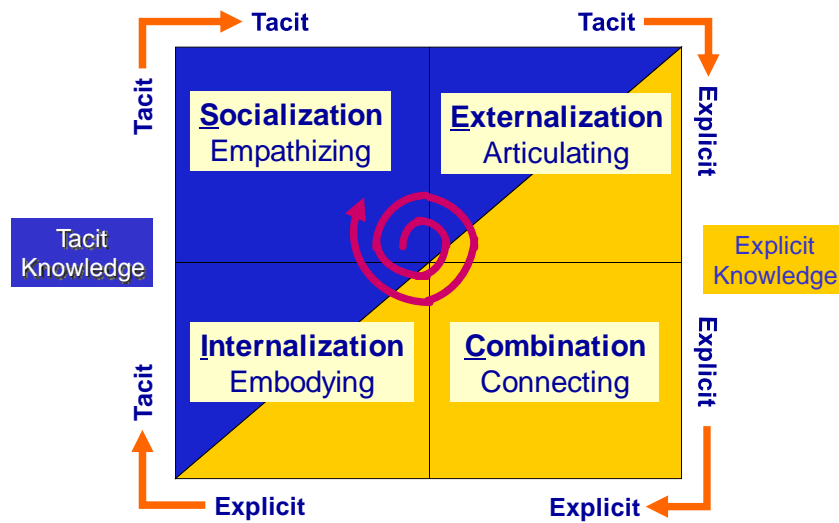
Any one of the four studies mentioned above could contribute to make society better in the future. But while those studies focus on the organizational level in both the public and private sector rather than at a personal level, the knowledge creation theory focuses on the individual, starting with the individual’s own personal beliefs. Recalling the primary goal of this thesis is to better understand *phronesis* at the individual level – OK Baji as a living

exemplar – a theory based on the individual as the unit of analysis represents the most appropriate approach to reach this goal. For that purpose, this thesis will utilize the theory of knowledge creation as the theoretical backbone to illustrate OK Baji’s way of living as a *phronetic* leader toward a better society. The next section explores this aspect of the theory of knowledge creation.

1.3 Theory of Knowledge Creation

“Knowledge creation is a process toward common good and a process for human beings to live better” said Ikujiro Nonaka, a leading authority in knowledge creation theory, during the 2007 Creating Knowledge-Based Management for Asia Seminar sponsored organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Considering that Aristotle’s *phronesis* is the knowledge to serve the social good and to live better, Nonaka’s statement helps explain one way in which knowledge creation is a process to foster *phronesis*. To understand the theoretical basis of such a process, we first turn to the SECI model of knowledge creation.

Figure 1.1 The SECI Model

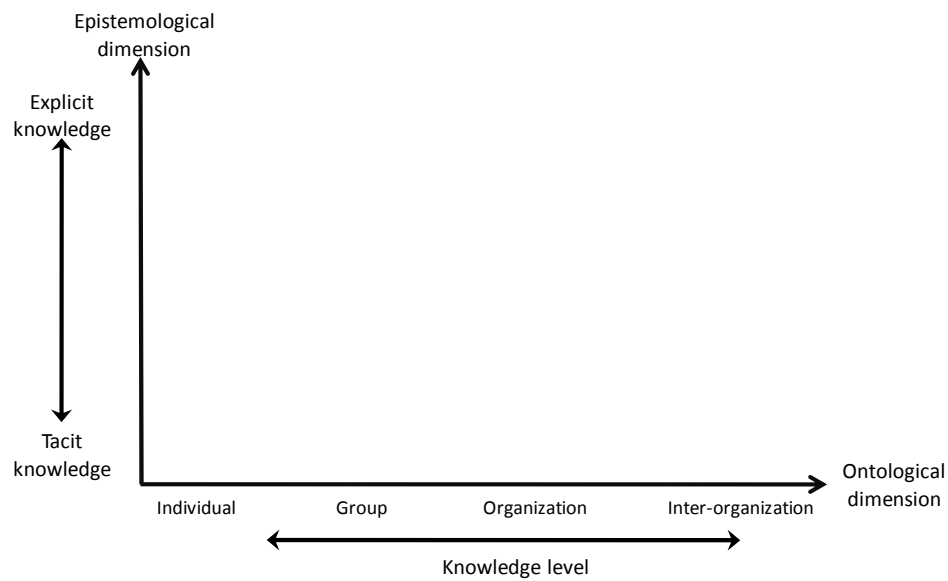


Source: Nonaka, 2007.

1.3.1 SECI Model

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) define knowledge as “justified true belief” in their seminal book, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, where they illustrate the knowledge creation process with a conceptual model called SECI (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization). In this process, converting knowledge (either explicit or tacit) from one form into another creates new knowledge (Figure 1.1) in a process that takes place along two dimensions – the epistemological and the ontological (Figure 1.2).

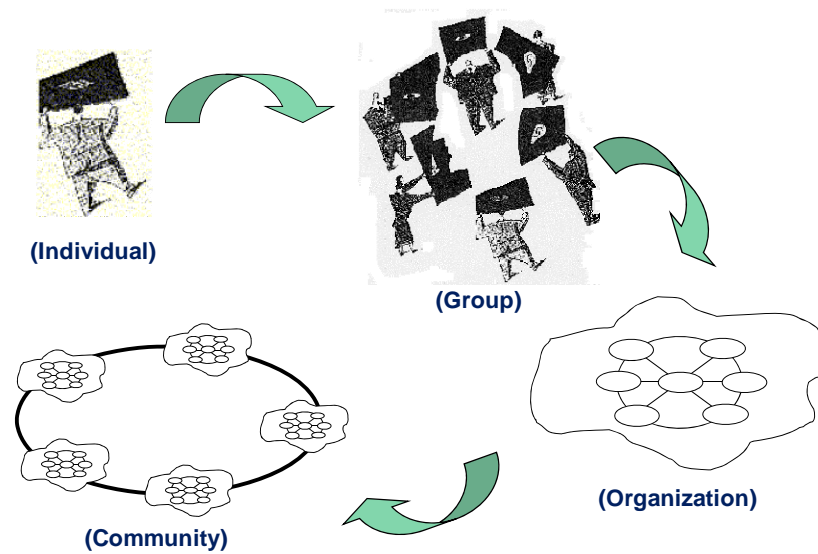
Figure 1.2 The Two Dimensions of the Knowledge Creation Process



Source: Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995): 57.

In the epistemological dimension, knowledge converts from explicit to tacit (or vice versa) in the four phases of SECI process (explained below). Along the ontological dimension, knowledge is amplified (or diffused) across varying sized sets of actors – from the individual (lowest ontological level), to the group, to the organization, and then to the inter-organization or community (highest ontological level, shown in Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.2 Progressively Higher Order Ontological Levels of Knowledge Creation



Source: Takeuchi, 2005.

The key to the knowledge creation process, according to Nonaka and Takeuchi, is that a knowledge spiral emerges (center of Figure 1.1) as the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge elevates dynamically from a lower ontological level to a higher level (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995: 57), and the four steps of the SECI process describe how such a knowledge spiral emerges.

Explicit Knowledge.

Explicit knowledge is objective and rational knowledge that can be expressed using words, sentences, documents, data, or scientific formulas (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Examples of explicit knowledge include textbooks, manuals, architectural drafts, project plans, even sounds and images, all of which can be recorded and stored, for example, on a personal computer's hard disk. One benefit of explicit knowledge is that it can be shared easily through media such as books, video, e-mail, or even web sites on the Internet.

Tacit Knowledge.

Tacit knowledge is knowledge embodied in a person and, unlike explicit knowledge, it is difficult to share. Tacit knowledge is subjective and experiential, and includes personal beliefs, values, ethics, intuition, emotions, or gut-feelings, all of which are difficult to express using words (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Recalling one of Aristotle's three types of knowledge, *techne*, which is equivalent to technology and includes technical skills or know-how like arts and crafts, also falls into the category of tacit knowledge.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) also illustrate how a personal belief transforms into a justified true belief in a company or organization through the following four phases of the SECI knowledge creation process:

Socialization: converting tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge

This is the process where individuals share and create tacit knowledge through direct experiences with other individuals. A person will sense and identify with others and the surrounding environment through these direct experiences. The socialization process can be considered as a way of empathizing and understanding through direct experience (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Externalization: converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge

This is the process to articulate tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through dialogue. Personal tacit knowledge shared and created in the socialization process will be

converted into explicit knowledge in this process of externalization. Utilization of metaphors, analogies, and models helps to articulate such tacit knowledge. Concept creation also takes place in this process. Once tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge in the form of a concept or a prototype, it becomes easier to share with other individuals (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Combination: converting explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge

Connecting the explicit knowledge articulated in the externalization process to other explicit knowledge takes place in this process. Gathering and integrating explicit knowledge existing both inside and outside of the organization will create new explicit knowledge. The combination of explicit knowledge, such as analyzing data, breaking it down into concepts, and finding relationships among them, also takes place in this process. Editing and synthesizing explicit knowledge also creates new explicit knowledge, which can be shared within the organization and even across organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Internalization: converting explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge

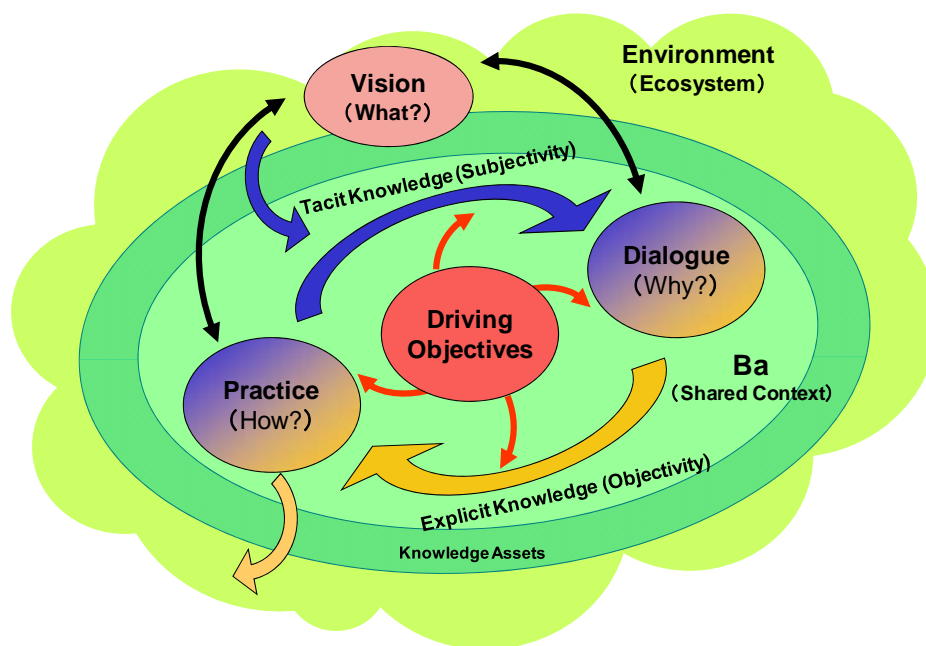
Explicit knowledge created in the combination process is embodied as personal tacit knowledge through action or practice. By putting explicit knowledge into practice, a person can acquire new forms of tacit knowledge. This internalization process can be referred to as “learning by doing.” Practice does not just mean action; reflection in action should also take place, since the knowledge creating activities require individuals to think deeply about the

essential meaning of their actions and the ensuing results, and to reflect on what actions should follow (Nonaka, 2008). Writing a narrative story is one way to embody new tacit knowledge during this process (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

1.3.2 The Dynamic Model of the Knowledge-Creating Company

Integrating the SECI process with other concepts derived from the theory of the knowledge-creating company, Nonaka and Toyama (2005) introduced the dynamic model of the knowledge-creating company (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 The Dynamic Model of the Knowledge-creating Company



Source: Nonaka & Toyama, 2005.

With the concepts of knowledge vision, driving objective, practice, dialogue, *Ba*, knowledge assets, and environment, this model illustrates the dynamic process of knowledge creation in a company. Nonaka and Toyama argue that “knowledge is a dynamic process of

justifying personal belief regarding a truth that is never fixed” (2005: 17). That is to say that knowledge creation is a process of relentless pursuit of truth that might never be reached.

1.3.3 Social knowledge creation model

Nonaka et al. (2006) argue that sharing *phronesis* is the key for social knowledge creation by presenting five cases of social organization in Japan: Kurokawa Onsen, Kitano Yatai, Asahiyama Zoo, Mitaka City, and Albirex Niigata.

The first case is the Kurokawa Onsen, a village with a cluster of small hot springs located on the island of Kyushu in the southern part of Japan. The village once faced a financial crisis due to decreasing customer visits during the early 1990s, but 10 years later was able to revive interest and increase tourism to the village and become one of the most popular hot spring destinations in Japan. Kurokawa’s crisis was overcome in large part through the individual efforts and leadership of the proprietor of a traditional Japanese inn in the village.

The second case is that of Asahiyama Zoo, located Asahikawa City in Hokkaido, in the northern part of Japan, which suffers extreme weather conditions during the winter. The zoo almost closed its doors in the late 1980s, but managed to stave off bankruptcy and become the most popular zoo in Japan, thanks in part to the zoo director’s strong belief that animals, like human beings, should have the freedom to pursue self-actualization (roam freely in exhibits that allowed them to behave naturally).

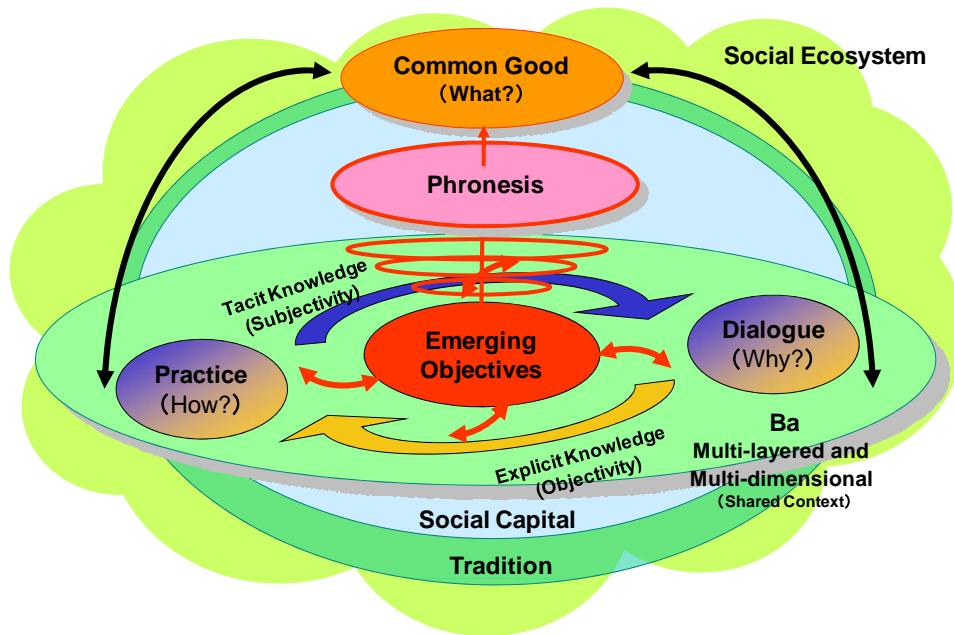
The next case requires some Japanese translation – *Kita no Yatai* means “Food stands of the North.” Obihiro City, in Hokkaido, provided opportunities to its citizens to open small food stands, leading to the revitalization of unused and abandoned city spaces. Led by a small group of local citizens in 2001, a cluster of 18 food stands was established at the site of a former parking adjacent to the central train station. The *Kita no Yatai* cluster has become a tourist magnet, attracting larger numbers of visitors, and a source of inspiration to entrepreneurs, further contributing to the ongoing revitalization of the city.

The fourth case is Mitaka City, a suburb of metropolitan Tokyo, which has become a best practice model of urban management. Mitaka received acclaim for giving its citizens a role in designing its public policy and getting involved in municipal management.

The last case is about Niigata, a prefecture located on the west coast of the country bordering the Sea of Japan, where the entire prefecture was revitalized by adopting the prefecture’s professional soccer team – Albirex Niigata – as the theme for a marketing concept dubbed “Everything for Niigata” (Nonaka et al., 2006).

Based on these cases, Nonaka et al. expanded their dynamic model of the knowledge-creating company into a social knowledge creation model (Figure 1.3) that incorporates the following concepts: the social ecosystem, tradition, social capital, *Ba*, practice, dialogue, emerging objectives, common good, and *phronesis*. In this model, *phronesis* is embedded as knowledge to serve the social good (Nonaka et al., 2006).

Figure 1.3 Social Knowledge Creation Model



Source: Nonaka et al., 2006.

The social knowledge creation model will serve as the main framework for this thesis. Each of the concepts of this model, including *phronesis*, are summarized below.

Social Ecosystem

In the social ecosystem, stakeholders interact to create a comfortable living environment. The stakeholders vary, depending on the region and the context. The social ecosystem underlies the interaction of these stakeholders in a shared context (Nonaka et al., 2006). For example, in the case of Mitaka City, the municipal government, the citizens, the private sector, and the academic institutions are the stakeholders in the context of a suburban town with limited resources. Or, in the case of Asahiyama Zoo, the municipal government, the zoo (including the employees and the animals), and visitors are the stakeholders in the

context of declining attractions under severe weather conditions, especially during the winter season.

In this thesis, villagers, non-government organizations (NGOs), and local governments are the stakeholders interacting with OK Baji, an individual social worker. The context is the underprivileged villages of Eastern Palpa, a remote region in the heart of the Nepalese mountains.

Social Capital

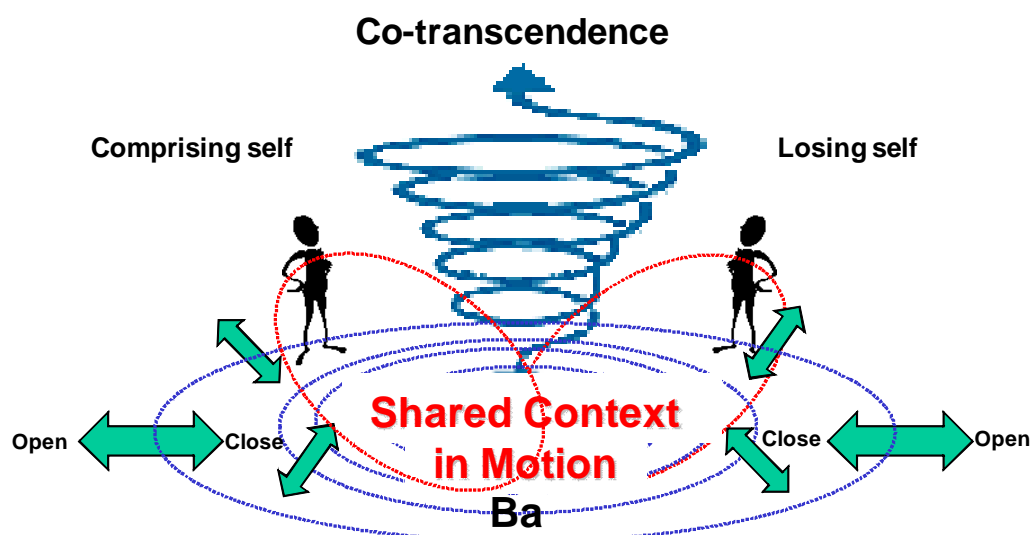
Social capital is the input and output assets of the knowledge creating process. Love, care, trust, and safe-base, or sense of security, are all considered different types of social capital, which arises as empirical knowledge from the interactions between different people. In the SECI process, social capital, which is an indispensable asset to energize the social knowledge creation process, originates in the process of socialization (Nonaka, 2007). In the case of Asahiyama Zoo, love and care between people and animals are referred to as the social capital. In the case of Niigata Albirex, the citizens' love and sense of pride for their community is the fuel underpinning their social knowledge creation process.

In this thesis, the love, care, and trust OK Baji fosters and shares with villagers in Nepal will be described as the social capital that, in his context, energizes the knowledge creation process towards social good.

Ba

The Chinese character for *Ba*, 場, literally means “place, spot, or space.” The concept of *Ba* in the theory of knowledge creation is defined as a shared context in dynamic motion (Nonaka & Toyama, 2005; Nonaka & Toyama, 2007; Nonaka, 2007) where a specific context, defined by time, space, and interpersonal relationships, is essential for knowledge creation. In such a *Ba*, individual contexts are shared and new knowledge is created through their interactions (see Figure 1.4). One characteristic aspect of *Ba* is that it can be either open or closed. Open *Ba* welcomes and shares new contexts. Open *Ba* can also connect to other *Ba*. On the other hand, *Ba* has to be closed in order to capture the specifics, or reality, of a particular context.

Figure 1.4 Concept of *Ba*



Source: Nonaka, 2007.

The arrow-ended spiral in Figure 1.4 shows other key characteristics of *Ba*. The

upwards-pointing arrow at the top end of the spiral captures the direction towards co-transcendence. In *Ba*, individuals can overcome and transcend self-cognitive limits by sharing their contexts with other individuals, who in turn become part of a new *Ba*. This is referred to as comprising the self (or losing the self) into *Ba*. *Ba* also expands as new knowledge is created, and individuals who become part of *Ba* will co-transcend as *Ba* expands.

On the other hand, the downwards-pointing arrow at the bottom of the spiral indicates the direction towards empathy through pure experiences, or nothingness. Pure experience, a concept developed by the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida, is a cognitive state where the subjective and objective are united as one in the individual. As one individual discards the self into a deeper state of empathy with another person or set of actions, he or she contextually approaches the other person or objective. Eventually, the individual achieves a state of pure experience, where nothing exists and only relationships remain (Nishida, 1921). Pure experiences are the essence of *Ba*, and sharing their contexts fosters the creation of new knowledge. For example, when Nishida said, “To love a flower is to unite with the flower, and to love the moon is to unite with the moon,” he argued that, “Knowledge and love are the same mental activity and to know a thing we must love it, and to love a thing we must know it” (Nishida, 1921, p116). Love, as a type of social capital, is indispensable for social knowledge creation. Through pure experiences, such social capital, which underlies the social

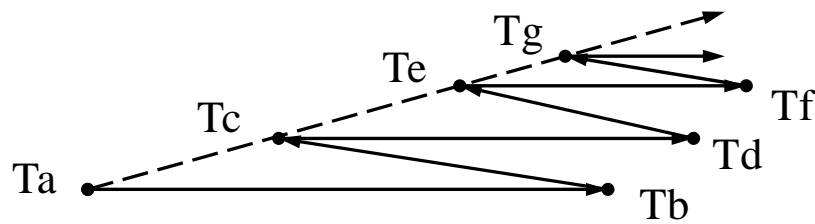
knowledge creation process, will arise.

Dialogue and Practice

The two concepts of dialogue and practice represent the condensed image of the SECI model as well as its knowledge conversion process. In the externalization process, tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge through dialogue. And in the internalization process, explicit knowledge is converted into tacit knowledge through practice. As Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue, knowledge creation is a process to synthesize the personal beliefs of different individuals into “justified true beliefs.” By embracing the diverse perspectives of different individuals, personal subjective knowledge becomes socially synthesized with the knowledge of others and justified.

Dialogue Nonaka and Toyama (2000) state that the synthesis of new knowledge is enabled through a dialectic process, illustrated in Figure 1.5. The conflict of thesis (Ta) and anti-thesis (Tb) can be transcended, through a process of dialogue and synthesis, into a new thesis (Tc), which is a higher state of resolution. Then, with the arrival of a new anti-thesis (Td), a new conflict arises, which is again transcended to create a new thesis (Te). This ongoing dialectic process fosters the creation of new knowledge through the synthesis, using dialogue, of differing and contradictory perspectives.

Figure 1.5 The Dialectic Process



Source: Nonaka, 2007.

Dialogue is a method to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge by taking different perspectives into consideration. Dialogue is also a dialectic thinking process that enables understanding. (Nonaka & Toyama, 2005b). In order to foster a positive dialogue, those involved in the process must mutually respect and openly listen to those around them. Consequently, social capital, such as mutual respect and honesty, is essential to energize productive dialogue.

Practice Practice in the knowledge creation process does not just imply action; it also means reflection. Reflection in action fosters understanding, allowing individuals to revise their actions. One aspect of practice is that it is dialectic in action, whereas dialogue is dialectic in thinking. (Nonaka & Toyama, 2005b). Sometimes, conflict and contradiction cannot be synthesized through objective analysis alone. In such cases, conflict or contradiction must be synthesized through practice, in the form of learning by doing.

In addition, explicit knowledge, such as concepts or hypotheses, can be converted and embodied into personal tacit knowledge through practice. At its most basic level, practice

varies with each particular context. Therefore, only through contextually specific continuous action and reflection, aided by learning techniques like impromptu sensing and modification of the gap separating expectations from reality, is tacit know-how gained. Moreover, in the spiraling SECI process, an individual's practice becomes second nature into what Nonaka calls "creative routines" (Nonaka, 2007). Eventually, such creative routines evolve into virtuous habits, meaning they are embodied in the individual as a high quality tacit knowledge.

1.3.4 Common good and Phronesis

Common good

The first paragraph of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* states that all activities of human beings aim to pursue some type of common good. The paragraph also states that most human beings, in general, agree that the peak of goodness is happiness, even though every individual has a different perspective on the meaning of happiness. A happy human being is often characterized as an individual who is physically and mentally healthy and is faring well in their daily activities or work. On the other hand, knowledge creation is considered a dynamic process of relentless pursuit of truth that is never fixed (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Therefore, in the context of social knowledge creation, the common good can be considered a type of truth or happiness that is relentlessly pursued by human beings. Simply stated, common good or social good is a goal relentlessly pursued to improve how people live.

Phronesis

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that people with *phronesis* can be considered individuals who live a life that is good, not just for themselves, but for those around them. These individuals are also capable of deliberating, or diffusing, the good they create.

Aristotle distinguishes *phronesis* from *episteme* and *techne* in the following way: *Episteme*, or scientific knowledge, is a capacity to demonstrate or prove through analytical analyses, such as through induction or syllogism. In addition, scientific knowledge can be taught, beginning with what is already known. *Techne*, or technology, is a capacity to make or to produce, and is concerned with how something may come into being by contriving and considering. *Phronesis*, or practical wisdom, is a capacity to act or to practice activities that can be good or bad for human beings. After distilling for positive outcomes only, *phronesis* is simply the capacity to practice and foster a common social good. And, while *episteme* can be taught and learned through analytics, creating and cultivating *phronesis* requires experience cultivated over time.

In the context of knowledge creation, Nonaka and Toyama (2007) define *phronesis* as “virtuous habits of making prudent decisions and taking action toward common good based on own values and ethics.” They argue that *phronetic* leaders can identify problems in each particular context by employing refined senses that “see” or “feel” problems and

synthesize mitigating solutions. Recalling that knowledge is created through interactions of human being in *Ba*, and the spiraling SECI process allows an individual's practices to become virtuous habits, it is possible to see how *phronesis* can be cultivated as the result of continuously repeated rotations of the SECI process in *Ba* over time.

Nonaka and Toyama (2007) further argue that the following six abilities constitute *phronesis*: 1) make judgments based on goodness, 2) share contexts with others to create a sense of shared *Ba*, 3) grasp the essence of particular situations and contexts, 4) reconstruct particulars into universals using language/concepts/narratives, 5) use any means necessary to realize concepts for a common good, and 6) foster *phronesis* in others. In other words, a person who possesses *phronesis* should be capable of making the “right” decisions in every particular context, create *Ba*, capture the reality of a context and effectively communicate it to anyone, develop activities that foster a social common good, use personal and political influence to realize such activities, and inspire others to voluntarily strive towards a common good.

Example of a phronetic leader in management

In their article on strategic management as distributed practical wisdom (*phronesis*), Nonaka and Toyama (2007) describe Souichiro Honda, founder of the Honda Motor Company, as a paradigm of *phronetic* leadership. In 1970, when the U.S. Clean Air Act was revised to include more stringent emission standards, Honda began developing a

low-emission engine that could meet the stricter requirements and Souichiro rallied company engineers by declaring their task an opportunity to beat the competition and catapult Honda to a leading position in the auto industry. However, Honda's engineers countered Souichiro, arguing that developing a new engine was a way to ensure the children of the future could breathe clean air. Rebuffed, Souichiro realized he was too old to have such foresight and quit as head of the company, granting Honda's engineers the freedom to successfully develop an industry-leading low-emission engine unconstrained by the drumbeat of "beating the competition." Souichiro's decision to retire and not interfere with engine development is highlighted by Nonaka and Toyama (2007) as an example of a *phronetic* leader whose judgments inspired others to take actions that fostered social good.

1.3.5 Process theory and the *phronetic* way of living

The theory of knowledge creation has recently evolved to include aspects of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. According to Nonaka, Hirata, and Toyama (2007), in order to perceive the dynamism of individuals or groups, including entities like nations or companies, it is necessary to recognize the world as a constantly changing "process." Whitehead's process philosophy perceives the world as a process in which myriad events are constantly generated and vanish, a duality consisting of a constantly moving state and a non-moving state that Nonaka et al. (2007) refer to as "verb" and "noun," respectively. Consequently, even while a process is constantly changing and is difficult to perceive in its

entirety, cutting out an aspect from the process and describing it using a “noun” allows the entire process to be recognized (Nonaka et al., 2007). Along these lines, it is then possible to describe an individual’s way of living as a process using appropriately selected “verbs,” an approach followed in the analysis of OK Baji’s *phronesis* in Chapter 7.

Chapter 2 Methodology

This thesis is based on direct observations of OK Baji, an individual social worker, as he performed his activities in the heart of the Nepalese mountains. This person was chosen as the object of study in order to gain a better understanding of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom to serve a common social good. This chapter describes the research procedures and sources of data used for the analysis presented in this thesis.

2.1 *Research procedures*

According to the *Methodology of Knowledge Creation* (Nonaka & Konno, 2003), field research is a method to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the subject that is under observation by directly witnessing events in particular contexts, such as another culture and geographical location, through on-the-spot investigation and observation. In other words, field research aims to comprehensively grasp details and meaning of events and phenomena by allowing the firsthand witnessing and recording of events as they occur in their own unique contexts.

There are two ways to recognize the meaning of events and phenomena or the reality of a specific location: 1) reality recognized by observation and 2) reality recognized through actions (I. Nonaka, interview, November 6, 2007). By being physically present at the site where events occur, a researcher can recognize reality through observation, where the sense

of sight plays a critical role. On the other hand, an individual can also recognize reality by actively participating in events as they occur onsite, which requires using all five senses. The reality in this case is an experience and an actuality. Nonaka (interview, November 6, 2007) contends that an individual can get closer to reality by actively utilizing all five senses. He also points out that although it is important to be present at the actual site, an observer can still recognize reality through observation alone, but people inadvertently adopt an attitude of expectation, which disrupts their perspective. Therefore, being present at the actual site and actively participating in events should be more a more powerful method to recognize the actuality of phenomena, and this thesis relies on field data gathered using this active-observer approach to analyze and discuss OK Baji's *phronesis*.

I made seven site visits to Nepal over the course of seven years, staying for a combined total of 364 days in the country, during which I followed OK Baji as he visited villages in the central mountainous regions of the country (see Table 2.1). I also acted as a volunteer Math and English teacher at a secondary school in the village of Bhalaytar. During my stays in Nepal, I directly observed OK Baji for a total of 65 days, 19 of which were during four different treks where we hiked from one village to another on foot. During these treks, I observed OK Baji as he interacted with others and performed his services. In turn, I actively participated in several projects designed to encourage social interaction among the children of several Nepalese villages. Through these projects I was able to get a sense of what

OK Baji has experienced and recognize his “reality.”

Table 2.1 Stays in Nepal by Author

Trip	Entry	Departure	Duration (days)	Observing OK Baji	Walking with OK Baji
1	October 5, 2001	January 9, 2002	97	16	4
2	January 2, 2003	February 8, 2003	38	8	-
3	December 21, 2003	March 16, 2004	87	17	7
4	November 19, 2004	January 4, 2005	47	-	-
5	November 23, 2005	December 29, 2005	37	8	-
6	December 1, 2006	December 29, 2006	29	8	3
7	November 29, 2007	December 27, 2007	29	8	5
			364	65	19

Source: Author’s diaries.

2.2 Reliability, Validity and Sources of data

According to Yin (2003), to increase reliability and construct validity, three particular methods are available for a researcher: multiple sources of evidence, a chain of evidence, and to have the draft research reviewed by key informants. In that sense, this thesis attempts to construct reliability and validity first by using the following multiple sources of evidence: my personal diaries and pictures as field notes, interviews, and OK Baji’s autobiography and booklet, and second by maintaining a chain of the evidence. Maintaining a chain of the evidence here means to link the derivation of any of the evidence to OK Baji’s phronetic leadership. In terms of having a review by key informants, OK Baji is the objective

of this study and at the same time he is one of the key informants in this thesis. Consequently he had the opportunity to review deeply the draft of this thesis twice in June 2007 and June 2008.

Field notes: personal diaries and pictures

The primary sources of data for this thesis are my personal accounts recorded in diaries. Nonaka and Konno (2003) mention that keeping well-annotated field notes is essential during the process of field research. Accordingly, I made daily entries into personal diaries while in Nepal (for a combined total of seven volumes). In addition to my written accounts of events, my logs also include personal thoughts and reflections from my daily life in the villages and from my observations of OK Baji's activities. My diary logs are also supplemented by pictures I took during my stays in Nepal, which will be presented throughout the thesis to illustrate the actual conditions encountered in the field.

Interviews

Another primary source of data are interviews I conducted with OK Baji and local villagers in Nepal in 2006 and 2007, resulting in over 50 hours of recorded interviews (40 hours in Nepal and 10 hours in Tokyo).

While in Nepal, I hung a voice recorder from my neck so I could record conversations at a moment's notice. For example, when OK Baji and I visited a villager's home, I continuously taped all verbal exchanges, even during breakfast and dinner. I did the

same when we trekked from one village to another, traveled up and down the mountains, and walked through the forests. When I interviewed OK Baji in Tokyo, I used this approach to record not just the interview, but also all the conversations that spontaneously took place.

Regarding interviews, Singleton & Straits (1999) explain three possible types: unstructured, structured, and semi-structured. An unstructured interview does not follow an agenda, does not have specific objectives, and questions are not prepared in advance. The interviewer asks questions freely, on the spot, during the interview. In contrast, a structured interview takes place in a very controlled environment, with a clear agenda, specific objectives, and a list of questions prepared in advance. The interview proceeds in a linear manner, following what was written beforehand, with no flexibility to alter its course. A semi-structured interview, which is a mixture of both interview types described above, has specific objectives and key questions laid out in advance, but includes some freedom to alter the direction of the interview.

Most of the interviews conducted for this thesis followed an unstructured format. The interview objectives were not specified in advance, and all questions were developed spontaneously during the course of each interview. However, as my field research progressed, I did construct a list of specific questions that guided the course of several interviews. In these cases, the interviews tended to be of the semi-structured type.

OK Baji's autobiography and booklet

A secondary source of data was OK Baji's autobiography, *OK Baji*, in which he describes his experiences in Nepal, including how he started his social services, the difficulties he faced along the way, and his personal thoughts on the way of living in the Nepalese highlands. This autobiography served as a supplemental data source regarding the tough decisions OK Baji faced during his treks in Nepal, which are described in Chapter 7.

Another secondary source of data is a booklet, written in 2004, which compiles the thoughts and feeling of 30 Nepalese villagers who have directly experienced and benefited from OK Baji's services and activities in Nepal.

2.3 Analysis

The analysis consists of four parts, looking at the three elements of *phronesis* (as presented in Figure 2 of the Introduction section) and guided by a series of questions (in Table 2.2) about OK Baji's way of living based on the primary and secondary data sources described above. The first part of the analysis, presented in Chapter 6, looks at the social good served by OK Baji. The second part, in Chapter 7, looks at OK Baji's virtuous habits for decision-making and taking action. The third part, in Chapter 8, looks at OK Baji's values and ethics. The fourth and final part, Chapter 9, looks at the extensions of OK Baji's influence in Nepal, in Japan, and in my own personal life.

Table 2.2 Analysis of OK Baji's *Phronesis*

<i>Phronesis</i> element		Analysis Questions
Social good	Chapter 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outputs towards social good has OK Baji achieved?
Decision-making and actions	Chapter 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What decisions and actions has OK Baji taken to serve towards social good? • What are OK Baji's creative routines that support his efforts to foster social good?
Values and ethics	Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What values and ethics guide OK Baji's decisions and actions to towards a common social good?

Part Two: Description of OK Baji's way of living

Chapter 3 OK Baji's Life

OK Baji's real name is Kazumasa Kakimi (see Figure 3.1). He was born in 1939 in Tokyo, Japan, and was an English teacher at a prominent high school in Tokyo for 23 years prior to moving to Nepal in 1993. But how did he come to be called OK Baji?

In Nepalese, *Baji* means “old man.” When Kakimi moved to Nepal, he could not speak a single word of Nepalese. He communicated, or tried to communicate, using English. Every time a villager requested something from him, he replied, “OK,” and smiled. After repeating this routine, day after day, Kakimi was eventually nicknamed “OK Baji” – the old man who always said “OK.” From that point onwards and at the age of 53, Kazumasa Kakimi became OK Baji.

Figure 3.1 Kazumasa Kakimi, also known as “OK Baji”



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2007.

3.1 *OK Baji's first step towards social services*

OK Baji, known for carrying a pedometer around his neck, walks an average of over 200 days every year, visiting villages in the Nepalese mountains. In December 2007, I joined OK Baji on one of his treks. It was my fourth time doing such a journey. On the first day of our walk, I asked him how many steps he had taken visiting villages. He answered he had taken over 8 million steps, roughly equivalent to 5,800 kilometers in distance, over a period of 18 months – an average of over 10 kilometers per day. Considering OK Baji has been in Nepal for 14 years, he has walked close to 58,000 kilometers – equivalent to one and a half times the Earth's circumference. And with each step he has taken, OK Baji has listened and solved villagers' problems, helping improve their lives one by one.

When OK Baji spoke about his activities as a guest speaker in the Global Citizenship Course at the Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy (ICS) at Hitotsubashi University, one student asked him what had been his greatest challenge in helping the Nepalese villagers the past 14 years. He replied that it was the moment he took his first step. To understand his answer, we need to look at two events, described in his autobiography *OK Baji*, which took place five years before OK Baji moved to Nepal.

3.1.1 *Annapurna avalanche*

In 1988, while OK Baji was a high school English teacher in Tokyo, he visited Nepal for the first time to see the rooftop of the world – Mt. Everest. Two years later in 1990, he

traveled to Nepal once more to see other parts of the Himalayan mountain range.

While in his 40s, OK Baji developed a taste for endurance activities, such as hiking the Japanese Alps and running 26.2-mile marathons, where at the age of 51 he clocked a personal best of 3 hours, 10 minutes, and 13 seconds (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006). Confident of his physical condition, and on the lookout for new challenges, trekking up to the Annapurna Base Camp in Nepal, which is 4,130 meters above sea level, presented a new obstacle he longed to overcome.

In March 1990, OK Baji visited Pokhara, Nepal's second largest, which is close to Katmandu and famed as a portal for Annapurna trekking. Several hiking routes originate from Pokhara, including the one to the Annapurna Base Camp, which required a four to five day hike from Pokhara to the base camp and another three to four days for the return leg. This trekking route offers unhindered views of spectacular mountain scenery that is over 8,000 meters above sea level.

On the fourth morning of his trek to Annapurna, OK Baji woke up and shuffled out of his sleeping bag, which was on a small wooden bed at a trekkers' lodge. The sky was clear with a deep blue hue. He was energized at the prospect of reaching the base camp, which was only a few hours hike away.

He was part of a party of a 10-man party composed of friends from Japan, one guide, and several porters. The party broke camp and headed out towards the base camp, visible in

the distance as a small black point surrounded by a canvas of white. They trudged through the snow packed trail for several hours, reaching the base camp by 1:00 p.m., by which time OK Baji was completely exhausted and snow started falling again. The party had planned on staying in a lodge at the base camp, but to their dismay the lodge was locked. With the continuing snowfall increasing the risk that the accumulated snow would come loose in the rising afternoon temperatures, the party decided to go back to the lodge they left from that morning.

Half an hour later, as the party walked along a frozen riverbank, OK Baji heard a strange and intense sound coming from the other side of the river. For a split second, the snow underneath of his feet started flowing, and before he could react he was swept away by a wave of snow. It was an avalanche. Somehow, he recalled reading in a book that “in case of facing an avalanche, just swim!” He started swimming and started rising above the stream of snow. The avalanche stopped abruptly, and OK Baji sought cover behind a rock. He started counting blessings when a second wave struck, flowing over the rock and burying him. At that moment, as OK Baji thought his life was about to end, he started having flashbacks of his life, and mumbled “Goodbye” to his daughter, Aki, when he thought of her. The avalanche stopped and OK Baji had survived. He had been eighth in line in the party when the avalanche struck. The Nepalese porter who carried OK Baji’s backpack and was last in line was missing and never found. That man’s death made a big impression on OK Baji and he

felt indebted to Nepal.

After the incident, Tilrak Ale, the party's guide, invited OK Baji to his home in the Dholimara village. Following the shock and trauma of the avalanche, OK Baji's stay at Dholimara allowed him to witness a more serene and peaceful Nepal – fields of yellow rape-blossoms, countless fireflies lighting up the evening air, and the endless sparkling of stars in the night sky.

3.1.2 *Back to childhood*

Upon his return to Japan, OK Baji's memories of the natural beauty he beheld while staying in Dholimara never faded. They reminded him of his childhood memories in Japan – a time when he was curious, excited, thrilled by anything, and always looking forward to a new adventure. Unwilling to let this chance slip by, OK Baji decided to leave Japan and live in Nepal. He quit his job as a high school teacher and sold the property he inherited from his parents.

In April 1993, on the eve before departing for Nepal, OK Baji had dinner with his son, Hiroyuki, and daughter, Aki, at a small restaurant in Shinagawa, Tokyo. Hiroyuki asked him why he decided to go to Nepal. OK Baji thought for a moment before replying, "I will go to Nepal to review my childhood." And with that, OK Baji took his first step and left for Dholimara the next morning.

One year later, while OK Baji lived at Dholimara, a letter arrived from his son. In it,

Hiroyuki asked OK Baji had completed his review of his childhood. OK Baji wrote the following back:

Yes, I have. I reviewed the scenery that I saw long and long ago when I was a child by observing starry skies. I saw the Milky Way and the Big Dipper. Also, I went swimming in the river. I saw such full yellow rape-blossoms in the village field as well as peach trees in the warm sunshine. I sang a song that I used to sing a long time ago while I walked around a beautiful path through the village.

It is not only Mother Nature that has fulfilled my heart. The villagers also filled up my heart in a significant way. I have been touched by their beautiful hearts on numerous occasions. This has been my treasure. I so much wonder why these people who worry daily about where they will obtain rice to eat can be cheerful and warm, and provide such hospitality to others. On the other hand, I feel myself that many times I am like an all-talk person even though I say to be patient, selfless, warm and tender to myself. Through various experiences here in the village, I have seen something about myself which I could not see before. I have completed the review of my childhood. However, I have just started to review of human beings (Kakimi, 2001: 20-21).

In closing his letter, OK Baji noted that he had a feeling that he might be able to learn “What is the truly necessary thing for humans?” (Kakimi, 2001: 20). It was something he could not

learn in Japan and his search has been ongoing ever since.

3.1.3 *Bus accident*

One day in October 1994, about two years after OK Baji moved to Dholimara, he was on a bus traveling from Pokhara to Lumbini, renowned as the birthplace of Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Just one week earlier, he had been hosting friends from Japan and taken them trekking to see the Annapurna mountain range. After his friends returned to Japan, OK Baji and his Nepalese friend wanted to visit Lumbini before continuing on their way to Dholimara.

Six hours after the bus had left Pokhara, as the road started winding alongside a valley and OK Baji was dozing off, the sound of breaking glass startled him awake. When he looked up, the last thing he noticed before he lost consciousness was the driver's seat "below" as gravity pulled him and all the pieces of broken glass downwards.

The bus had careened off the winding road and fallen into the bottom of a ravine over 50 meters deep. OK Baji vaguely recalled walking on his own feet, supported by strangers, while his left arm dangled awkwardly from his shoulder, like a marionette without sensation. When he regained consciousness the next morning, he found himself lying on a bed at the United Mission Hospital in Tansen. He had six broken ribs and a crushed left lung, with two spaghetti-shaped tubes plugged into his left chest. At that moment, he lost control of his body and struggled to endure an excruciating pain that lasted three weeks.

His body recovered, but his fear of busses remained. Furthermore, his fear of death started emerging more frequently. However, he felt gratified by the bus accident, from which he had learned three things. One was the pain of accident victims, or, in other words, the pain of human beings. He reflected that a healthy person, like himself, never really understood pain until he experienced the bus accident. During the previous two years he had spent in Eastern Palpa, he had met many people with physical ailments. For example, a blind boy in a village, a deaf girl, an old man with asthma, and a boy who could not walk because of polio. In addition, he had also met an infant whose right hand was burned away and an old woman who had no fingertips due to Hansen's disease. OK Baji says he can empathize with their suffering, even if just a little, as if he becomes like them and feels connected to their plight.

The second lesson from the accident was how miraculous he considered the mobility of his body. Before the accident, he was unaware of the flexibility needed to get out of bed, to lift his arms, to walk, or to go to the bathroom. Since the accident, he was grateful for the miraculous abilities of his body.

The third lesson was the goodwill of people. While OK Baji was hospitalized for three weeks, he was deeply touched by the kindness and affection of so many people. His friend from Dholimara, who had also been injured on the bus and was hospitalized, devotedly cared for OK Baji despite his own injuries. Acquaintances from Katmandu visited OK Baji and expressed their sympathy. Even villagers who had met OK Baji in the past visited and

wished him a speedy recovery. Among them was a seventy-year-old man that OK Baji met during the construction of a literacy school at the old man's village, which was a seven-hour walk away from the hospital. When OK Baji saw the old man, who used a cane, he became overwhelmed with emotion, raised both of his hands into the air, and broke down in tears.

The support, kindness, and goodwill of the villagers helped OK Baji recover from his injuries. The day he was discharged from the hospital, the hospital director's wife came to his room. OK Baji thanked her for all the help and encouragement he received during his three-week recovery. She smiled and replied, "Please do what you have been doing for others" (Kakimi, 2001: 19).

The bus accident was a pivotal moment for OK Baji, in which he narrowly escaped death and realized three important things about life: 1) the pain of human beings, 2) the miraculous abilities of the human body, and 3) the goodwill of human beings. This experience catalyzed his commitment to further pursue his social services.

This reinforcement mirrors Nonaka and Toyama's (2006) notion that *phronesis* can be cultivated through high quality experiences. The Annapurna avalanche and the bus accident certainly qualify as the kind of experiences in which OK Baji's life hung on the balance, allowing him to stare deeply, and learn about, his own self, his life, and his relationships with fellow human beings.

3.2 *OK Baji's pleasure*

Although OK Baji has a house in the village of Dholimara, he rarely stays there. Most days he is on the road, walking from village to village in Eastern Palpa, carrying all he needs – a sleeping bag, a few sets of clothes, notebooks, and writing tools – in an old backpack. He has been doing this for over a decade. Very few individuals in the world live as OK Baji does. Why does he do this?

On those few occasions OK Baji travels back to Japan – something he does for two months every year – he is often asked why he walks so far and invests so much time supporting villagers in a remote country like Nepal. His reply is always the same: he walks for the pleasure of it.

3.2.1 *Village walking tours in Eastern Palpa*

Dholimara village is located in the Palpa district in the central part of Nepal, about 200 kilometers west of Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, and about 100 kilometers south of the Annapurna mountain range. It takes two days to reach Dholimara from Katmandu, starting with a ten-hour bus ride to Tansen, the capital of the district of Palpa, followed by a slow six-hour drive by jeep along a bumpy and winding road through mountainous areas. Dholimara is located on a hillside almost 1,000 meters above sea level, and on a clear day the Annapurna mountain range is visible to the north.

Five hundred and eighty people live in Dholimara, most of them are farmers, a

typical profession for those dwelling in the villages dotting the remote regions of Nepal. OK Baji's home, one of 54 households in Dholimara, was built by the locals as a token of gratitude for his selfless acts over the years. It is about ten square meters in size and has two windows with wooden shutters. The home is OK Baji's base camp, and it is from there he sets out on his treks to other villages.

The villages of Eastern Palpa are located at elevations ranging from 300 to 1,500 meters above sea level. Walking from one village to another sometimes requires going 1,000 meters up a mountainside or following a river for over five hours. OK Baji makes such trips daily, and, along the way, he eats and spends the night at different villager's homes. How can he do this? The reason is that the villagers wait for OK Baji to visit them. They need his help. Some even wait on the trails OK Baji follows. He describes this daily routine as follows:

Recently, there have been many "ambush" district leaders, "ambush" school head masters, and "ambush" village chiefs. When I exchange greetings with villagers along the roads with "Namaste!" they casually ask me "Where are you going today?" I answer with the name of the village where I plan to stay for the night. Then, some of the village leaders, school head masters, or local NGO workers ambush me there and they courteously invite me to their own village, school, or home the next day. Their intentions are to show me that "we have these many problems." Therefore, my present life becomes close to a gypsy's life of "where am I sleeping

tomorrow...?” (Kakimi, 1999: 1).

OK Baji helps villagers deal with problems affecting every aspect of their lives, such as obtaining access to clean water, medical treatment, education, income generation and clothing. He does this work independently, without affiliation to any specific organization. He does received financial support from Japan. When he first started his services in Nepal, he used his own savings. But when word of what he was doing spread, first among his friends in Japan, and then through media outlets, donations started finding their way to OK Baji. For example, a bedridden elderly woman in Japan, inspired after reading about OK Baji in a newspaper article, donated a substantial portion of her savings to his cause with the following message, “I cannot visit Nepal, but please make use of my money” (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

OK Baji considers every donation from Japan “goodwill.” Every time he receives goodwill and uses it, he writes back a thank you letter that includes a report detailing how the donors’ money was used. This simple gesture has increased OK Baji’s profile in Japan because many donors share their experience with others, expanding the network of interest among individuals willing to support his cause. Consequently, the amount of financial support OK Baji receives has increased over the years. OK Baji sees the goodwill coming from Japan as seeds of love, and describes himself as a farmer who sows the seeds in the soil of Nepal.

3.2.2 *Always thinking about supporting the Nepalese villagers*

OK Baji is always thinking about how he can support the villagers in Nepal. For example, when he returns to Japan on his yearly trip to report on his activities, he usually stays at his daughter's home in Chiba prefecture, which is close to Tokyo. Whenever he takes the train to Chiba, he gets off two stations early and walks the rest of the way in order to save 140 yen in train fare. When he visits Tokyo, he walks for two kilometers from Tsukada Station to Funabashi Station to pay a lower train fare. He does this to save money to buy rice for poor villagers in Nepal, where the price of five kilograms of rice is about 140 yen. This means every time he walks between the two stations on his way to and from Tokyo, he saves enough to buy 10 kilograms of rice. In 2006, while OK Baji stayed in Japan for two months, his accumulated savings on train fare funded the purchase of 400 kilograms of rice. He recalled one occasion when he handed over a 50-kilogram sack of rice to a family in one village:

There are six members in this family and they are very poor. It seems they have had only a few chances to eat rice a year. They could not afford even one kilogram of rice. When I brought a sack of rice to this family last year, one child who is about ten years old eagerly jumped out from the house saying "Rice came, Rice came..." and pressed his small body against the sack of rice. I was deeply moved by his uninhibited display of delight (K. Kakimi, interview, December 12, 2006).

3.2.3 *Increase happiness in the midst of decreasing comforts*

While OK Baji is in Japan, he gets many opportunities to speak about his activities. Most of the time, he ends his talk with a personal rendition of the following quote: “The tragedy of human history is decreasing happiness in the midst of increasing comforts,” which OK Baji has modified by substituting “tragedy” with “comedy”, “human” with “OK Baji,” and “decreasing” with “increasing.” The quote then reads, “The comedy of OK Baji’s history is increasing happiness in the midst of decreasing comforts” (Kakimi, 2007).

OK Baji’s version of the quote usually brings laughter to his audience, but at the same time it captures his perspective about life. Indeed, the comforts in OK Baji’s life during his stays in Nepal are considerably primitive compared to those available while he is in Japan. In a village, he rests in an old sleeping bag, sometimes inside a villager’s home when space is available, otherwise outside, where he is exposed to the elements. Despite this, OK Baji says his happiness increases under such discomforts and that is what gives him the most pleasure. Walking from village to village in Eastern Palpa, helping the underprivileged, and finding pleasure in simple comforts – that is the life of OK Baji, in a nutshell.

Chapter 4 The Village of Bhalaytar in Eastern Palpa

This chapter describes the quality of life in the remote villages of Eastern Palpa where OK Baji lives and conducts his social services. One particular village, called Bhalaytar, where I have worked as a volunteer teacher every year since 2001 and is typical of other villages in the region, will serve as a representative example of the type of communal setting where OK Baji has been walking to almost every day. This chapter also presents the stakeholders, including the local government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which interact and support OK Baji.

4.1 *Bhalaytar*

The district of Palpa is one of 75 districts in Nepal and is located in the central region of the country (see Figure 4.1). There are 22 Village Development Committees (VDCs)² in Eastern Palpa, each one consisting of nine villages, and the village of Bhalaytar belongs to the VDC of Gandakot (see Figure 4.2). OK Baji often visits Bhalaytar, which he calls his “second home” after Dholimara.

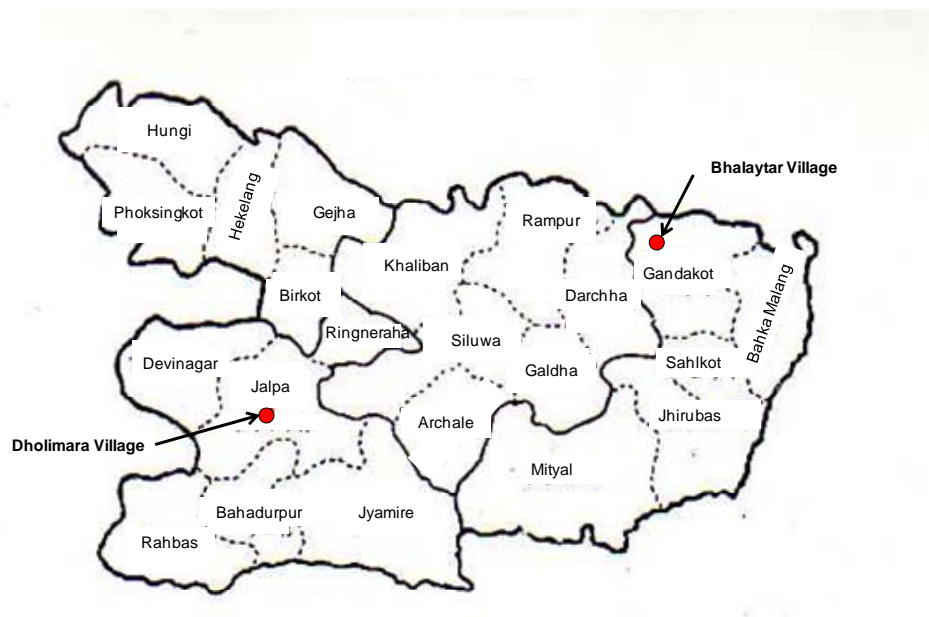
² To have better understanding of a VDC, it should be considered as a geographical unit of the county rather than a committee.

Figure 4.1 Map of Nepal and the Palpa District



Source: Nepal Tourism Board.

Figure 4.2 The 22 Village Development Committees of Eastern Palpa



Source: Adapted from *OK Baji* (Kakimi, 2001: 8).

While most of the villages in Eastern Palpa are located in mountainous regions at altitudes of 500 meters to 1,500 meters, Bhalaytar is just 350 meters above sea level and is

relatively flat. The village is small, stretching just one kilometer from east to west and half as long from north to south. A deep green forest lines the western edge of the village.

Figure 4.3 The view of Bhalaytar towards the west



Source: Photo taken by author, December 2001.

The name “Bhalaytar” originated from two words: “Bhalay,” the name of a plant once harvested in the village a long time ago, and “Tar,” which means flat area in Nepalese. The current residents are descended from the Kumhar (a type of social caste in Nepal), pottery makers and fishers who came to Bhalaytar by navigating the river on boats. Later on, other migrants, the Magar and the Brahman (also different types of social castes), moved into the region. Today, about 70 percent of the villagers living Bhalaytar are descended from the Kumhar, with the rest being of Magar and Brahman, among other more uncommon castes.

Seven hundred people live in Bhalaytar, dwelling in 110 households, and like other villages in the region, most of them are farmers. If the economic level of the households in Eastern Palpa were categorized into three levels ranging from poor to rich, the residents of

Bhalaytar would rank in the middle.

The staple food in Nepal is rice, and those villages located on relatively flat and well irrigated areas, such as those in the VDCs of Rampur and Darchha, are relatively affluent because they produce abundant rice. Meanwhile, villages located on the steep slopes of mountains and lack irrigation, like those in the VDCs of Jhruvash and Mityal, are considered poor by comparison. Although Bhalaytar has several flat fields of crops, it lacks adequate irrigation to fully utilize them, and this is why its families rank in the middle of the economic level.

Two rivers flow by Bhalaytar. One is the Kali Gandaki, which originates from melting ice in the Annapurna mountain range and runs along the south side of the village as it meanders westward across Nepal. The flow of Kali Gandaki is always large, and at its peak during the rainy season, which runs from April to September, the river's width doubles to 100 meters wide. It is possible to cross the river by boat, but only during the dry season. The other river, the Nisdy, runs from the southeast side to the northwest side of Bhalaytar before merging with the Kali Gandaki to north of the village.

Bhalaytar rests on flatland that is 30 to 40 meters above both rivers, making irrigation difficult. As a result, the village is unable to grow the water-intensive rice crop. Instead, only two crops are produced on its flat fields – corn, which is sown from March to April and harvested in October, and soybean, which is sown in September and harvested in

December. Villagers exchange these crops for rice at ratios of three to two (by weight) for corn, and one to one for soybean.

4.1.1 *Income sources*

Besides growing soybeans and corn, about 15 households in Bhalaytar own rice fields in other villages. For example, the Jeevan Pokharel family, who provided me room and board during my first two stays at the village in 2001 and 2003, own several rice fields in Rajigara, a village with abundant irrigation located in the VDC of Darchha. They grow enough rice to sustain their own needs, and Jeevan often commented, “As long as we live here [Bhalaytar], sleeping and eating are no problem.” However, most households in Bhalaytar need supplemental sources of income to sustain their livelihood.

On average, a household with ten family members consumes 200 kilograms of rice over three months. The market price of one kilogram of rice is 22 to 25 RS (Nepalese Rupees). That means each household spends 1,470 to 1,670 RS each month just to buy rice (See Table 4.1 for prices of staple goods in Bhalaytar).

Table 4.1 Prices of staple goods in Bhalaytar in 2006

Item	Price		Unit
	Nepalese Rupee	Japanese Yen	
Salt	10	16.7	Kg
Sugar	40	66.8	Kg
Rice	22-25	36.7-41.8	Kg
Eggs	45	75.2	10 eggs
Potatoes	20	33.4	Kg
Tomatoes	25	41.8	Kg
Cauliflower	30	50.0	Kg
Onion	25	41.8	Kg
Garlic	60	100	Kg
Chili peppers	80	134	Kg
Cooking oil	90	150	Kg
Tea leaves (small package)	20	33.4	
Tea leaves (large package)	70	117	
Chow chow (instant noodle)	25	41.8	3 packages
Beer	75-85	125-142	Bottle
Roksi (local wine)	15	25.0	Bottle
Soap (for clothes)	10	16.7	Piece
Soap (for the body)	25	41.8	Piece
Toothpaste	15-25	25.0	Piece
Clothing (e.g. shirt)	200-500	334-835	Piece
Sandals	70	120	Pair
Stationery:			
Pen	5	8.4	Piece
Notebook	5-10	8.4-16.7	Piece
At a tea shop:			
Chiya (cup of milk tea)	5	8.4	Cup
Chow mein	20	33.4	Bowl
Chow mein (half portion)	10	16.7	Bowl
Noodle soup	20	33.4	Bowl
Samosa	4	6.7	Piece
Roti (donut)	2	3.3	Piece
Boiled Egg	6	10.0	Piece

Note: Nepalese Rupee converted to Japanese Yen at the rate of 1.0 RS = 1.67 JPY.

Source: Compiled by author, December 2006.

Revisiting the economic level categorization of the villagers in Bhalaytar discussed earlier, the three levels can be described as follows:

- Poor families make 2,000 to 3,000 RS per month
- Middle income families make between 5,000 to 6,000 RS per month

- Rich families make from 12,000 RS or higher per month

The majority of households in Bhalaytar do not own any fields where they can grow agricultural products. Most work as laborers at fields owned by other households. Others make a living from selling fish caught in the rivers. Some of the Kumhar and Magar people also generate income by raising and selling livestock like pigs and chickens. A mother pig can breed up to a dozen piglets every year, each one fetching from 1,000 to 1,500 RS at the local market. Chickens sell for 250 to 350 RS each. In 2006, the price of pork in Bhalaytar was 72 RS per kilogram, while chicken meat sold for 140 RS per kilogram. The Brahman people, who traditionally do not consume pork and chicken, eat goat meat instead which can be purchased for 160 RS per kilogram.

Several people work as teachers in village schools, an occupation paying a monthly salary of 1,500 RS for those with three or less years of experience, rising up to 6,000 RS per month for those with ample experience. By comparison, a government certified head teacher at a secondary school earns 11,000 RS per month.

A few villagers receive generous pensions for having served in a foreign army. For example, a veteran of the British Army receives close to 15,000 RS monthly, while a veteran of the Indian Army receives about 5,000 RS per month. These individuals are considered wealthy village residents and many of them can afford to own a motorcycle.

The harsh reality, however, is that secure jobs providing a steady income, like a

teaching position, are very limited. Most men earn a living working whatever temporary day jobs become available, such as carrying stones, digging holes to build a home, or porting goods, and getting paid just 100 to 120 RS per day. On those occasions when temporary jobs are unavailable, most men spend their days hanging out in the village center.

Not surprisingly, a chronic lack of fixed jobs is one problem plaguing the village, and many men migrate in search of work, sometimes going to foreign countries like India, Malaysia, or Saudi Arabia. At Bhalaytar's secondary school, 15 percent of the students have fathers working outside the village. They typically meet their fathers once a year, during Nepal's biggest holiday called Dasain, when many expatriate workers return to Nepal for a short vacation.

4.1.2 *An arduous village life*

A typical day for Mothers and Children

The typical day of villager starts before sunrise. Women usually wake up before 5:00 a.m. and start preparing the feed for livestock, such as buffalos and goats, and collecting water from taps recently installed with the help of OK Baji. Most children help with domestic chores before and after school, which runs from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with those under grade 6 dismissed 90 minutes earlier. However, the most important role of children is that of caretakers of younger infants. It is common for girls aged 8 to 10 to take care of babies, and when called by their mothers to help with other tasks, they call on other girls in the

neighborhood to take over their babysitting duties. The children of Eastern Palpa certainly play a big role keeping the daily household in order (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Village children babysitting (left) and porting (right)



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2007.

Electricity and gas

While electricity is available in some villages of Eastern Palpa, it is not available in Bhalaytar except in a few households that installed solar powered batteries strong enough to power lights during the night. Oil lamps are the most common source of light in the village. Natural gas is not available, so the only source of heat for cooking is firewood collected from the nearby forest. Although it does not snow in the village, the temperature gets chilly during winter. Combined with an over reliance on wood as a heating source, deforestation is becoming a problem and many villagers now face shortages of firewood to keep themselves warm.

Drinking water

In 2005, OK Baji helped install a water supply system in Bhalaytar allowing villagers to access water from taps located within five minutes walking distance from their homes, cutting down the 20-minute walk needed to collect water from a natural source before the system was installed. However, the water supply system does not work year round, and villagers must walk far to collect water during the dry season.

Hot water is not available in Eastern Palpa, and Bhalaytar is no exception. To bathe and wash clothes, the residents of Bhalaytar have to climb down a cliff to reach a river. Yet, in terms of availability and access to water, Bhalaytar is relatively well-off compared to other villages in Eastern Palpa, many of which lack reliable water supplies, forcing residents to walk over 20 minutes just to get water (a 40-minute round trip).

School in the village

Throughout the 22 VDCs of Eastern Palpa there are approximately 200 schools, among which 10 are high schools providing education up to the twelfth grade, and 50 are secondary schools providing education up to the tenth grade (see Table 4.2 for the structure of education in Nepal). There are two secondary schools in the VDC of Gandakot, including the one located in Bhalaytar.

Table 4.2 The Structure of Primary and Secondary Education in Nepal

	Grade	Average Age
Pre-primary Education	-	Under 5
Primary Education	1	5
	2	6
	3	7
	4	8
	5	9
Lower Secondary Education	6	10
	7	11
	8	12
Secondary Education	9	13
	10	14
Higher Secondary Education	11	15
	12	16

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports, *Nepal in Educational Figures 2005*.

OK Baji's biggest impression of Bhalaytar when he first visited in 1997 was the dilapidated state of the primary school in the center of the village – an old five-room school he thought it belonged in a museum. Most walls, made of adobe and stone, were so crumbled and porous that someone standing outside could easily see classes taking place. This was the case for most schools throughout Eastern Palpa. Following its reconstruction in 1998, the school was converted into a secondary school. Almost 80 percent of school-aged children in Bhalaytar attend this school, with the rest unable to go because their parents cannot afford the monthly tuition of 100 RS.

Among the 550 students at the school, 250 live in Bhalaytar and walk to class within 15 minutes. For the rest of the students, the commute to school is a long trek, sometimes over one hour long. For example, about 30 students come from Gajbandi, a village located on the side of a mountain. To get to Bhalaytar they must walk downhill through forests for about 20

minutes and then follow a river for 40 minutes. To get back home they follow the same route, but since it is uphill the commute takes an additional 20 to 30 minutes.

The village hospital

Getting medical treatment in Eastern Palpa is not easy. There is no hospital in the VDC of Gandakot. The closest hospital is at Rampur, a two-hour walk from Bhalaytar. However, when villagers get very ill, they go to the Mission Hospital at Tansen, which is six hours away by bus or jeep. This hospital is staffed with qualified physicians and equipped with advanced medical facilities. In one instance, when a school janitor in Bhalaytar passed out in December 2007, he was driven to the Mission Hospital by jeep. But, in addition to the long drive, the trip itself was expensive – on the order of 1,000 RS – which imposed a huge financial burden on the villagers who pitched in to foot the bill.

It is not surprising that the lack of medical facilities and the logistics required to travel to a hospital often result in misfortune. For example, complications stemming from pneumonia are practically non-existent in a developed country, like Japan, because the condition can be treated quickly and easily. However, in Bhalaytar, contracting pneumonia can be a death sentence. In July 2007, a former student from my English class got a high fever and was taken to a hospital, but it was too late. He had pneumonia and passed away after his lungs filled with fluid. Another example is the rate of stillbirths, which in Japan was 2.8 percent in 2006 (according to Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan). In June

2007, when another former student of mine expected a new baby, it was stillborn five days before the due date.

The lack of medical facilities and qualified doctors is one of the most serious problems plaguing villages like Bhalaytar in Eastern Palpa, but there are signs of hope. Bhalaytar's first pharmaceutical store opened in 2005, operated local villager who is a qualified Community Medical Assistant (CMA). She can prescribe basic medicines to patients and administer injections and intravenous drips. Although the range of medical treatments a CMA provides is limited compared to those of a doctor at a hospital, the increasing number of CMAs represents a significant step forward to expand access to medical treatment for villagers in the region.

4.2 Organizations to improve the villages

There are two types of organizations providing aid and assistance to the remote villages of Eastern Palpa: the local government and local non-government organizations (NGOs). OK Baji has occasionally worked with representatives from both types organizations at the grass root level to help disadvantaged villagers.

4.2.1 Local government

The National Government of Nepal provides each VDC in Eastern Palpa an annual budget of 100,000 RS. It is up to the local government of each VDC to make plans and

allocate funds according to the constraints of this budget. For example, the local government of the VDC of Gandakot has 47 members: one chairperson, one vice-chairperson, and five representatives (one chairperson and four members) from each of nine villages. Besides these 47 members, there is also a VDC secretary tasked with bridging communication between the District Government of Palpa and the local government of the VDC.

While the local government operates according to the budget allocated by the national government, it also interacts with international aid organizations, such as the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) to obtain additional assistance. For example, in 2006, the local government received a subsidy from the UNDP to subsidize 30 solar electric panels for households in the VDC of Gandakot. The price of a solar panel depended on its power output: 8,700 RS for 12 watts, 14,600 RS for 20 watts, and 23,000 RS for 36 watts. The subsidy provided to households getting a solar panel was 6,000 RS.

4.2.2 *Non-government organizations*

There are 103 locally registered NGOs in Eastern Palpa, three of which are the local affiliates of international NGOs from Norway and Finland, and another recently started working with The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The main task of these four foreign-affiliated NGOs is to promote knowledge-sharing to raise awareness about social and infrastructure development among local villagers.

Among the other 99 NGOs, 22 operate at the VDC level in every VDC of Eastern Palpa. For example, one VDC level NGO, known as the Public Welfare Council (PWC), has 56 members, some of whom are also schoolteachers. PWC has hosted events for the entire VDC, including a medical camp, a student drama, and a singing contest. It also manages a medical fund that is financially supported through funds provided by OK Baji. The remaining 77 NGOs operate at either the village or community level. For example, one village level NGO in Bhalaytar, called the Social Welfare Club, consists mainly of village students from the secondary school.

4.3 Social capital in the village

For those people who grew up in an already economically developed country, village life in the Nepalese mountains may seem undeveloped, underprivileged, and harsh. However, to OK Baji, life in Nepal has been invigorating and inspirational:

When I first encountered the sceneries of the village, they were breathtaking and made me recall my primary experience during my childhood. In addition, the life in the villages made me relax and made my heart get rest. I thought I could find a true way of living as a human by nature (Kakimi, 2001).

Beyond the beautiful mountain scenery of the Nepalese villages, social capital, such as love, care, trust and sense of security, must exist in order for OK Baji to feel that he can

“find a true way of living as a human by nature.” These types of social capital can be found in the socially cooperative activities conducted in the villages of the Eastern Palpa. Below, three such activities are described: helping each other, care among children, and respecting parents.

4.3.1 *Helping each other*

Since village life in Bhalaytar revolves around an agrarian-based existence, most villagers are farmers and their year-long activities are dominated by agriculture. However, the labor-intensive nature of farming makes it impossible for a single family to tend their own fields, especially during the busy planting and harvesting seasons. This is when villagers help each other the most.

Several families group together and take turns planting or cultivating rice, corn, or soybean at each family's fields, one by one, until all fields are done. This kind of collective cooperation permeates village life. For example, when a family builds a new home, neighboring villagers help in the construction effort, either by moving stones or digging up the ground, among other activities. Another example is when an elderly woman fainted and needed medical treatment, a group of young men came to her home and helped carry her to nearest hospital.

4.3.2 *Care among children*

In the village, it is common for young children to baby-sit younger infants and babies, as previously mentioned. Since all children grow up in this manner, brought up by

their slightly older counterparts in the community, everyone in the village is considered a “brother” or “sister.” In fact, when children introduce their friends, they always refer to them as, “he is my older brother” or “she is my younger sister.” In this way, each child has at least 10 surrogate brothers and sisters.

4.3.3 *Respecting parents*

In Bhalaytar, where the average family has seven members, children respect their elders, especially their parents, very deeply. For example, although most village girls marry before they turn 20, either to someone of their own choice (love marriage) or to someone their parents chose (arranged marriage), most of them told me they prefer to have an arranged marriage because it reflects and fulfills their parents’ wishes. Girls also hold their parents in such high standing, and respect their wisdom so highly, they believe the parents’ choice for a spouse will ultimately bring harmony and happiness to themselves, and by extension, the rest of their family.

In this chapter, we have looked at the arduous life of underprivileged villagers and the stakeholders who provide them support. This included the social capital embedded in the villagers’ way of living and provides a better contextual understanding of how OK Baji feel connected to the areas where he conducts his social services.

Chapter 5 Firsthand experience alongside OK Baji

The final chapter of part one takes a closer look at OK Baji's social services in Nepal through my firsthand accounts. I started working under OK Baji's tutelage as a volunteer teacher at the secondary school in Bhalaytar; an assignment lasting one to three months which I performed every year starting in 2001. During my stays in Bhalaytar, I frequently interfaced with OK Baji and accompanied him on four treks visiting villages: four days in 2001, seven days in 2004, two days in 2006, and five days in 2007. OK Baji can walk impressive distances for a man of his age. For example, when we visited villages during our five-day trek in December 2007, each day we walked an average of 20,000 to 23,000 steps (roughly 14 to 15.5 kilometers).

This chapter focuses on two of the four walking treks to better illustrate OK Baji's social services in the Nepalese villages, starting with the four-day trek of December 2001, followed by the seven-day trek of January 2004, during which I learned how OK Baji's services fortified, instead of weakened, the villagers' sense of self-sufficiency. This chapter also describes one of OK Baji's busiest mornings in Tansen, a relatively urbanized town and the seat of the district government, which I witnessed while interviewing him at a local hotel in December 2006. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings from my firsthand fieldwork experience alongside OK Baji, and presents a model describing his social services that will be used as an analysis tool in subsequent chapters.

5.1 *First time experiencing OK Baji's social services: The four-day trek of 2001*

I first met OK Baji in Japan in June 2001 when he was a guest speaker in the Global Citizenship course at the ICS MBA program. Four months later, in October, I traveled to Nepal for the first time and met up with OK Baji in Tansen. He was a changed man. His trim and neat appearance from back in Japan had given way to a disheveled, beard-covered face, framed by an old towel wrapped around his neck, a thin and worn yellow T-shirt, and old pants. I came to realize that the person before me was the real OK Baji, one which every villager in Eastern Palpa recognized, and not the “disguised” individual I first met in Tokyo. The next morning, we set off on a four-hour drive by jeep to the village of Dholimara, where OK Baji lives (see Figure 5.1), to deliver dozens of cardboard boxes filled with used clothes from Japan.

Figure 5.1 OK Baji at his home in Dholimara



Source: Picture taken by author, October 2001.

During our second day at the village, OK Baji distributed the used clothes to villagers from the VDC of Jalpa. About 200 villagers, all gathered on a clear field on a hill located about one-hour from Dholimara by foot, took turns coming up to get clothes handed out by OK Baji. The distribution drive was organized in conjunction with the chairman of the local Jalpa VDC government, who took lead in facilitating the event. As the clothes exchanged hands, I began wondering if giving handouts to the villagers was really necessary. Moments later, after spotting disabled children among the crowd of people waiting in line, including a fingerless child due a severe burn injury, a blind girl, and a mute boy, I noticed many of them wore clothes so worn-out they were practically tatters. However, each child's eyes filled with pleasure as they shyly accepted OK Baji's handouts, which, although used, were "new" compared to what they wore. This was my first exposure to OK Baji's selfless

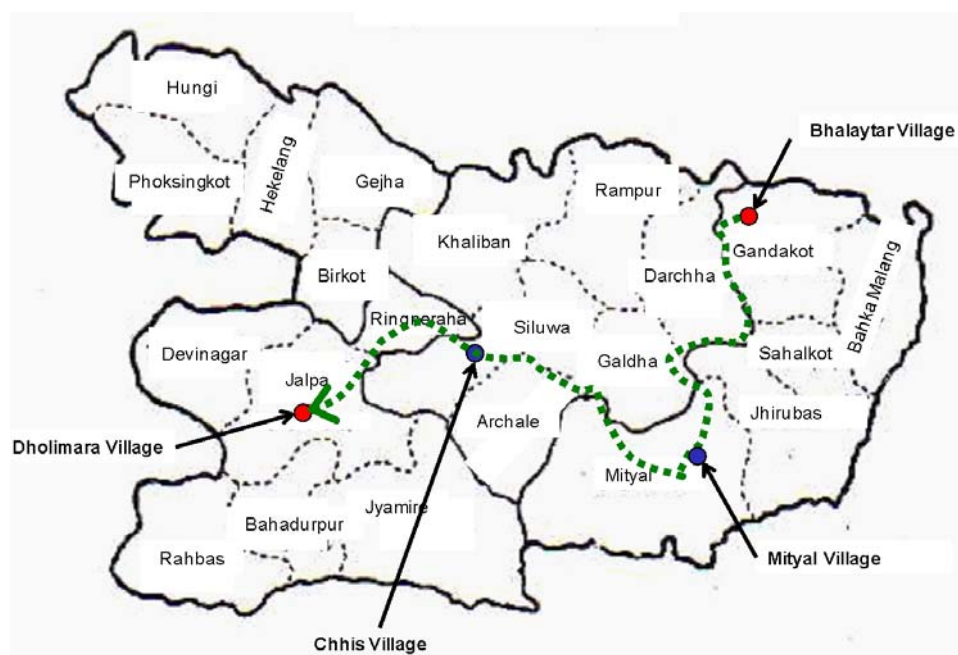
acts to help underprivileged children in Nepal. Two days later, I left for the village of Bhalaytar in the VDC of Gandakot VDC to start my three-month tenure as a volunteer teacher at the secondary school.

5.1.1 *Starting the four-day trek of 2001*

At the end of December 2001, as my tenure as a volunteer teacher came to an end, OK Baji visited me at Bhalaytar. Then, on December 22, 2001, we left together early in the morning, walking a path that followed a river that flowed to the south. As we set off, dozens of my former students saw me off with tear-filled eyes, and when I looked back several minutes later, I could still see their silhouettes waving goodbye from the top of a hill, behind them the white-tipped Annapurna mountains glowing brightly in the morning sunlight. This was an unforgettable end to my first stay in Bhalaytar and an auspicious start to our four-day trek.

On the first day of the trek we walked from Bhalaytar to Mityal, then to Chhis on the next day, where we stayed for one day before proceeding on to Dholimara on the last day (see Figure 5.2). During the course of these four days, we encountered many disabled children and villagers with needs most individuals in urbanized and developed areas take for granted. OK Baji empathized with every individual and listened to his or her problems and needs, treating each one as a member of his own family. I took notes about the event that transpired during each leg of the trek using a diary, as summarized in the following sections.

Figure 5.2 The path of the four-day trek of 2001



5.1.2 1st day: From Bhalaytar to Mityal

About one hour after departing Bhalaytar on the first leg of our four-day trek, we reached the village of Kiltipur, where I met an unforgettable disabled girl. Still emotionally raw from saying farewell to my former students, OK Baji nevertheless asked me, “Do you dare to see true suffering?” I hesitantly nodded and followed him. We walked around to the backside of Kiltipur’s market, through a narrow dark corridor, and into a house’s backyard, where a girl about 10 years old was standing. When I gazed upon her face, I was struck with shock and was momentarily at a loss for words. The girl’s upper face was red and swollen, and a protuberance shaped like a wine bottle cork stuck out from her right eye. I soon realized that it was actually her eyeball that protruded from her face.

OK Baji quietly described that she had skin cancer, suffered from constant pain on her face, and no treatment was available to help her. He once provided her parent 10,000 RS

as financial support to bring her to a hospital in Katmandu, but when they visited a doctor, the prognosis was not good. Later on, the girl told OK Baji that she wished to have a radio to listen to, which he brought her. Over the years, OK Baji kept in touch with her whenever he visited Kiltipur, until she passed away in the summer of 2007.

Half an hour after leaving Kiltipur, on the way to the next village, OK Baji stopped to talk briefly with two villagers, the parents of a boy who passed away years ago. We then climbed a hill and reached another village, where we visited the home of a young man bedridden for 35 years due to muscular dystrophy. Upon recognizing OK Baji, the man smiled warmly and asked if he could get a wheelchair (apparently, a request he made every time OK Baji visited him) so he could visit other places, even though his house stood in a hilly area lined by narrow, bumpy trails. OK Baji replied that he wanted to grant the man's wish, but he could not help just yet. OK Baji still visits the bedridden man whenever he walks by his village, providing him 100 RS every month.

While Bhalaytar is about 350 meters above sea level, Mityal village is about 1,000 meters higher. This meant our walk was also a climb, and after two hours we were very tired and hungry. We stopped for a short lunch of instant noodles before heading off again. After a while, OK Baji complained that he was feeling famished and could not take another step. After all, we both carried full backpacks stuffed with sleeping bags. We shared a pack of chocolate cookies, which helped give OK Baji a boost of energy and continue walking.

One hour later, we arrived at Mityal, where we stayed with the vice chairman of the VDC of Mityal. His house was relatively large, with lights powered by solar batteries, and we could observe the Annapurna mountain range from the balcony.

5.1.3 2nd day: From Mityal to Chhis

On the second morning of our trek, we ate two broiled eggs and *Kodo ko Roti*, millet pancakes, which was OK Baji's favorite Nepalese food. After breakfast, we left Mityal at 8:00 a.m. and headed for the village called Chhis, in the VDC of Silwa. OK Baji described Chhis to be like an isolated island of land worth visiting at least once.

We walked a trail that went up and down for one hour before reaching a hilltop from where we could see almost the entire Himalayan mountain range. After walking for another hour we stopped at a small local restaurant in the village of Dhobhra for a cup of milk tea called *Chiya*. Near the restaurant stood a pre-primary school that was in decrepit condition. The school's thatched roof was decaying and its adobe and stone walls were eroded by years of rain and wind. The school had two classrooms where small children, aged 3 to 5, were taught basic subjects including Nepalese, Math, and English. Six months later, OK Baji, with the support of financial aid from Japan totaling ¥50,000, helped rebuild the school (see Figure 5.3 for before and after pictures).

We also visited the home of a family in Dhobhra OK Baji was well acquainted with. An elderly woman graciously served us roasted, aromatic soybeans, which helped knock a

hole in sense of hunger. Recalling our previous day's experience when we were so hungry and lacked food, I filled the pocket of me fleece jacket with a handful of roasted soybeans. OK Baji, with a knowing smile, did the same. After leaving Dhobhra, we walked to a village called Gorekharaku, which is located on a hillside. Not long after we arrived and took off our backpacks in the yard of a villager's home, a crowd started gathering around OK Baji.

Figure 5.3 The Dhobhra pre-primary school before (left) and after (right) reconstruction



Source: Left picture taken by author, December 2001. Right picture taken by OK Baji.

First, a man whose legs were severely burned came asking for help. Even though I felt uncomfortable looking at the man's severe injuries, OK Baji meticulously inspected his burns, which resulted from the accidental spilling of hot cooking oil. OK Baji then took out a notebook from his backpack, tore off a blank page, wrote something on it, and gave it to the man.

Next, a woman who used an artificial leg came by to show OK Baji how her prosthetic was half broken. OK Baji listened, jotted down a memo in the notebook, and

continued listening, which seemed to be the only thing OK Baji could offer her, given the circumstances.

Then, another man came by and presented his left foot, which had no heel, to OK Baji. Although his condition was quite severe and visibly grotesque, OK Baji calmly explained that his symptom was due to tetanus, which was not uncommon among the villagers of Eastern Palpa. He went on to say that if the man had seen a doctor much earlier, his condition would not have been as severe as it was. But the combination of medical facilities located far from this remote area, the high cost to travel and get treatment at a hospital out of reach to most villagers, and a general lack of knowledge about such diseases, compounded the complications faced by those suffering from otherwise treatable conditions. Once again, OK Baji tore off a blank page from his notebook, wrote something on it, and gave it to the man.

A limping woman then came by to speak with OK Baji. The source of her limp, which I had never seen or heard of before, was elephantitis of her left foot, which was almost three times bigger than her right foot and was covered with hard, cracked, bark-like skin. Again, OK Baji, purposefully wrote a note and gave it her.

On that occasion, I asked OK Baji what the notes he wrote and gave out were for. He explained the notes were actually letters of introduction the recipients could present at the hospital in Tansen in order to receive free medical treatment. Previously, he used to hand out

money intended to pay for treatment, which many recipients spent on food and drinks instead. It was not until the United Mission Hospital at Tansen, after hearing of OK Baji activities and cash handouts, contacted him and arranged a system where villagers could receive treatment at the hospital if they presented a letter with his Japanese signature. The cost of treatment would then be withdrawn from OK Baji's account at the hospital.

The last villager to visit OK Baji was a small girl, about six years old, who came accompanied by her mother, who explained that her daughter suffered from boils on her scalp. Upon noticing the girl's boils were red and festered, I hesitated from taking a closer look. But OK Baji uninhibitedly inspected the girl's scalp, carefully cradling her head in his hands, before taking out and applying medicine on her boils. At that moment, it appeared as if OK Baji would treat each and every child in the village as one of his own.

5.1.4 3rd day: *Chhis village*

Chhis is located on the side of a hill, and to reach it we had to cross a river. Even though the river was not big and seemed calm, two village guides from Gorekharaku insisted on crossing with us on their backs to avoid the hidden rapid torrents we would not be able to find by ourselves. Fortunately, we crossed the river without incident.

Figure 5.4 View of Chhis (left) and Uman Singh's home (right)



Note: In the picture on the right, Uman Singh is the third person from the left.

Source: Left picture taken by author, December 2001. Right picture taken by a villager in Chhis, December, 2001.

After crossing the river, we began climbing a steep hill. After 40 minutes, just as I was getting too exhausted to continue, we reached the village grounds. As in the other villages we had already visited, OK Baji was welcomed with open arms as we arrived at the home of Uman Singh, in whose yard stood a three-room guesthouse OK Baji always stayed in whenever he visited Chhis. The guesthouse was built using financial support from a female Japanese benefactor.

That evening, as we ate a dinner consisting of river fish, duck, vegetable curry, rice, and local wine with Uman Singh's family, an amazing thing happened. While OK Baji and Uman conversed, I noticed an insect crawling on the dirt floor towards me. Just as it got close enough for me to recognize it was a scorpion, Singh's wife stomped on it with her bare foot. Her first attempt did not kill the scorpion, and as it readied its poison tail to strike, she stomped it again and crushed it. I was struck by her calm disposition throughout the entire episode, not to mention the hardness of her heels.

The next day, we inspected the fruits of OK Baji's efforts at Chhis, including a water supply system and a new primary school, built using financial support sourced from Japan.

New water supply system and primary school

In the past, the inhabitants of Chhis obtained water by first walking 20 minutes downhill to a river before climbing back up for 40 minutes. OK Baji, with help from a Japanese NGO, the Japanese Organization for Infants and Children (JOFIC), and funding from the International Volunteer Savings of Ministry of Post and Telecommunications in Japan (currently Japan Post Group), organized the construction of five water taps providing potable river water in Chhis.

When OK Baji first visited Chhis in January 1995, the village had no school, even though there were 55 school-aged children among the 150 people living there. Worsening matters, the village adults were illiterate, so no one was available to teach the children how to read or write, and the nearest school was a three-hour walk away. When OK Baji spoke to residents of Chhis about the lack of a school, he emphasized how their children should have the opportunity to receive an education. Five months later, with additional financial support obtained by OK Baji through the JOFIC, a primary school was built at Chhis.

5.1.5 4th day: From Chhis to Dholimara

A project for future generations

On the last of our trek to Dholimara, OK Baji guided me to a long river near Chhis

to look at a project he had initiated. After climbing down a cliff we reached a small construction site where four men were in the initial stages of building an irrigation channel that would deliver river water to the Chhis rice fields. The project called for the carving of a two-kilometer channel through the rocky mountainside with nothing but chisels and hammers. Their progress was slow, carving at a rate of a few meters per day. I offered one of the workers a pair of cotton gloves to prevent him from working barehanded, but he declined them, stating that my gloves were too weak and would quickly fall apart. His rock-hardened palms reminded me of Singh's wife's feet as she stomped on the scorpion.

Almost 100 meters of the new channel were already carved. Finishing the remaining part within the planned two years seemed a tough goal to meet. However, the workers explained that once the irrigation channel was finished, Chhis would be able to produce an abundant harvest of rice and other crops not just themselves, but for their children, and their children's children. It was a project for the future generation of Chhis.

Figure 5.5 The construction site of the Chhis irrigation channel



Source: Picture taken by OK Baji, December 2001.

Our four-day trek to Dholimara was nearing its end. Before reaching our final destination, we visited three more villages after leaving Chhis, followed by a one-hour uphill climb. As we reached the top of the hill, which afforded a panoramic view of the mountains, I was soaked in sweat from the effort yet felt refreshed, and with just one hour left to go to Dholimara, I reflected on my experiences from the previous four days.

OK Baji is a problem solver

OK Baji could be a role model for those business leaders who relentlessly pursue creating social values in their organizations. The detailed reports OK Baji wrote back to the Japanese providers of financial support and aid clearly enumerated how their donations were used, what benefits were created, and the resulting impact in the villages directly affected. This feedback process strongly impacts the donors, making them feel involved, creates goodwill among them, and enhances their potential to provide further support in the future.

After walking alongside OK Baji from one village to another, I came to understand how he was also like a marketing specialist, working in real time at the frontline, identifying the unique and diverse needs of the villagers he encountered. I felt fortunate to have witnessed him in action firsthand, as it revealed him to be a problem solver who sought to overcome adversity by carefully listening to those around him.

5.2 Second time experiencing OK Baji's social services: The seven-day trek of 2004

I visited Nepal once more in January of 2003, staying for over five weeks, and again in December, this time for almost 13 weeks, during which I had the chance to go on a seven-day trek together with OK Baji where we visited 17 villages (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 Key villages visited during the seven-day trek of 2004



5.2.1 Questioning OK Baji's social services

Having visited Nepal for two years in a row, I was now more interested in the pace of development at each village. The perspective I tended to favor was that self-sufficiency and sustainability was the ideal vision for future development. At the same time, I once more began to question whether “giving out something because the recipient did not have it” was good or not, a doubt that first surfaced back when I first witnessed OK Baji handing out used clothes near Dholimara. I wondered if, at the grass roots level, OK Baji's activities actually deprived villagers of the opportunity to be self-sufficient, forcing them to become dependent on his services for activities they would have otherwise done on their own. In other words, was OK Baji breaking their will to live independently?

On the other hand, I also believed that if I directly observed OK Baji perform his services, I could gain insights into the true meaning of what he strived to achieve, and clarify my doubts concerning the negative impact his work had on the hardiness and self-sufficiency of the villagers. With this aim, I committed myself to observe OK Baji for seven days by taking another trek visiting villages alongside him in January of 2004. Of that entire trip, the most revealing moments occurred on the fifth day, which is described below (see Appendix A for a summary of the other days of this trip).

5.2.2 New perspectives on the 5th day

On the fifth day, we visited two villages at different stages of basic infrastructure

development. The first village, which we visited in the morning, lacked toilet facilities, had no water supply system, and its school lacked sturdy concrete walls. In contrast, the second village, which we visited late in the afternoon, was the complete opposite, with above average infrastructure development relative to other villages in Eastern Palpa. The differences were truly eye opening.

Dhungdhara village

OK Baji and I visited the village of Dhungdhara on January 6, 2004. I was tired. The villagers who hosted us the previous night had kept talking to us well into late hours, continuously disturbing my sleep. I asked OK Baji why they kept talking, and he answered that the villagers did not want us, their guests, to feel alone. Talking was their way of reminding us that they were close by. I suddenly realized that what I took to be disturbing and noisy behavior was actually considered hospitable, warm, and polite in Nepal. This behavior also took different forms, which I experienced after we arrived at Dhungdhara (see Figure 5.7).

Dhungdhara has no toilet facilities. When I asked the village chairman where the “toilet spot” was located, he led me to a shady spot in a nearby forest, pointed at it, and then walked away. As I prepared to use the spot, I noticed the chairman eyeing me a short distance away. When I moved further into the shady forest and out of his sight, he moved as well, never losing sight of me. I was unnerved, and my need for privacy was being pushed to its

limit, until I realized that this was another display of hospitality on behalf of the chairman – his way of letting me know he was near and I was not alone, just like the villagers who spoke to us late into the night.

While at Dhungdhara, OK Baji saw a boy with a broken leg. According to the father, the boy had been treated at a hospital and to pay the bill of 10,000 RS his family borrowed money from a local businessman who charged a high monthly interest rate of 5 percent. The family was unable to repay the loan and was running into trouble. After hearing the father, OK Baji pondered for a moment before writing a personal check for 10,000 RS, which he did not give to the father. Instead, he gave it to the leader of the local NGO, in plain view of all the villagers, and asked the NGO to assume the family's debt and collect payments from them with no interest charges.

As the morning progressed and one group of villagers after another met with OK Baji, I noticed many of the small children suffered from unusually oversized bellies, caused either by poor nutrition, intestinal worms, or both. Then a woman who hobbled around with a broken leg came to speak with OK Baji. After falling from a ledge and breaking her leg, she had gone to see a doctor but it was too late, and her leg had set wrong. OK Baji jotted down a memo about the woman in his already full notebook.

Around 10:00 a.m., at a yard near a villagers' home where we were taken to have lunch, the people of Dhungdhara began preparations to distribute used clothes that OK Baji

had arranged delivered from Japan. The clothes were divided into 60 sets, matching the number village households. Each set, which had three to four articles of clothing, was then placed on a blue plastic sheet. It was a time consuming process that took over one hour just to prepare, and I wondered why they did it in such a slow way. OK Baji explained that the entire process of distributing clothes was considered a kind of village festival, which officially started after OK Baji made a short speech in Nepalese. Representatives from each household then took turns picking a number from bag before taking the correspondingly numbered set of used clothes from the blue plastic sheet – following a sort of lottery system.

Figure 5.7 Dhungdhara village



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

Once the clothes were distributed, villagers started gathering around OK Baji, taking turns talking about their problems or needs. Since it was OK Baji's first visit to the village, many people came forward, and he continuously jotted down memos in his notebook based on their needs. Among those who spoke with him was a family with a little boy whose heart

beat so fast we thought he would not be able to survive much longer without suffering from heart complications.

Sahalkot village

We left Dhungdhara around 2:00 p.m. and climbed a hill towards our next destination. We stopped at two other villages along the way before arriving at Sahalkot at 5:30 p.m. OK Baji was pleased to find that the local NGO had recently completed a project to build 50 toilets in the village.

We visited the local NGO, housed in a newly built three-room office building, where we met the local chairman in an office with a wooden meeting table and six chairs (see Figure 5.8). The chairman showed us a notebook containing several project action plans based on “five Ws” and “one H” (What, When, Where, Who, and How), a planning development process they had learned from a Norwegian NGO.

The chairman then presented the NGO’s list of requests to OK Baji, which included extraordinary items, among them a microscope for the village’s secondary school and solar-powered, battery-operated computers. OK Baji noted their requests, but then discretely mentioned to me that he did not consider their requests as truly necessary. He told the chairman that he would be unable to meet their requests since he had to fulfill higher priority needs at other villages.

Figure 5.8 Office of the local NGO at Sahalkot



Source: Picture taken by author, January 2004.

New perspectives

Unlike the other villages OK Baji and I had visited previously, it seemed that in Sahalkot every basic need, including the availability of drinking water, ample food supplies, toilet facilities, and educational facilities, had been met. During dinner with the chairman of the local NGO, we discussed the challenges a village faced on the road to self-sufficiency once every basic need was fulfilled.

We compared and contrasted Sahalkot to Dhungdhara, where no NGO support had been provided, toilets did not exist, and no one raised their hands asking for aid. Meanwhile, at Sahalkot, the local NGO was very active, 50 toilets had been built, and several projects at different stages of progress were under development. It was remarkable that such differences could exist between two villages so close to each other, not to mention the diversity of need, which greatly varied from one village to the next. At that moment I began to realize that what

OK Baji strived for was meeting the most basic of needs in those places where it was most needed. This was an eye-opening moment, and I finally began to understand the meaning of what OK Baji's activities.

OK Baji was not simply meeting any need, he tended the needs of the underprivileged, the helpless, and the destitute. This explains why he walks from one village to another, searching for those in need of aid. His search results in the tailored and customized provision of support that only someone like himself, who goes and sees with his own eyes, can provide. For example, he helps to cure ill children, provides food to orphans, pays the school fees so children of poor families can get an education, among other things. These are the kind of individual basic needs OK Baji seeks to address. The tragedy is that so many countless children could have been saved if OK Baji had been able to find and help them in time. After all, he is just one man walking in a big and remote countryside.

But there is also another side to OK Baji. He strives to meet the most of basic needs of a village that are stumbling blocks on its path towards self-sufficiency. This means building the infrastructure to provide water and irrigation, or building schools so children do not have to walk for hours to attend class. Once more, only someone like OK Baji, who, after visiting village after village, would be cognizant of the specific needs of each village that stand in the way of them becoming self-sufficient.

OK Baji Festival

March of 2004 marked the 10-year anniversary of OK Baji's activities in Nepal. The villagers of Eastern Palpa who had received his support over the years organized a two-day ceremony, called the "OK Baji Festival," to express their gratitude to OK Baji. The committee in charge of the ceremony, which included representatives from several villages, chose to hold the celebration at Rampur, a village of just under 1,000 inhabitants. However, during the "OK Baji Festival," which took place on March 13, 2004, over 15,000 villagers gathered at Rampur, among them 42 Japanese nationals. The villagers at the festival patiently waited in a long queue as OK Baji greeted all of them, one by one. Each of them told OK Baji the same thing: "Thank you." Among the crowds in Rampur, I saw several familiar faces of people I had met while trekking with OK Baji, including Uman Singh, who had walked for over eight hours from Chhis to join the festivities.

5.3 OK Baji's busiest morning of 2006

In December 2006, I visited Nepal for the sixth time to teach at the secondary school in Bhalaytar. During this trip I also arranged to interface with OK Baji by him writing a letter detailing my impending travel plans and my desire to once more join him on a trek visiting villages. Meeting OK Baji during this trip would be fortuitous, as I was keen on evaluating his activities from the perspective of *phronesis*, which I had become familiar with after

assisting a seminar on knowledge creation the previous month.

My letter went unanswered, and I left for Nepal from Tokyo without knowing if OK Baji had received it. On December 2, I checked into a local hotel in Pokhara, where I met a villager from Bhalaytar with whom I had previously arranged passage. By pure coincidence, I ran right into OK Baji, dressed in his signature worn out jacket and jersey. He had also checked into the same hotel. After greeting each other, I asked him about my letter, which he had not seen, given that he had been out in the field the previous three weeks walking from village to village. I reiterated my desire to walk together with him once more, and although he said his schedule was fully booked in the coming weeks, he agreed to meet up in Bhalaytar, where I would be staying for almost one month. For a busy man, OK Baji was generous with his time. I met him for a total of eight days during my stay, including a two-day trek, during which I kept a record of his spoken comments as we visited several villages together.

During our time together in this trip, two key differences stood out compared to our previous meetings. The first was that whenever we met other people, both young and old, as we walked from one village to another, they always greeted OK Baji with a friendly “Namaste, OK Baji.” It seemed everyone knew who he was. The second difference was the events that transpired at Tansen, where I had arranged to interview OK Baji alongside two former district officers who were familiar with the activities of NGOs in Eastern Palpa. The events of that morning, which are described below, were simply astounding to witness.

OK Baji occasionally visits Tansen, the seat of the Palpa district government, to meet the heads of the local NGOs and government officials, welcome visitors from Japan, and visit the bank to manage his account and withdraw funds. I arrived at Tansen the evening of December 21, the day before I was to interview OK Baji. He was busy meeting people from different villages, going over their issues one by one. These were people he had previously met during his treks, and he had arranged to meet them in Tansen in order to solve their issues and provide financial support to those requiring it. For the villagers, scheduling to meet OK Baji at Tansen had two benefits. First, it freed them from the uncertainty of speaking with him impromptu as he visited the villages. Second, it granted them opportunities to visit the bank and cash the checks OK Baji provided them.

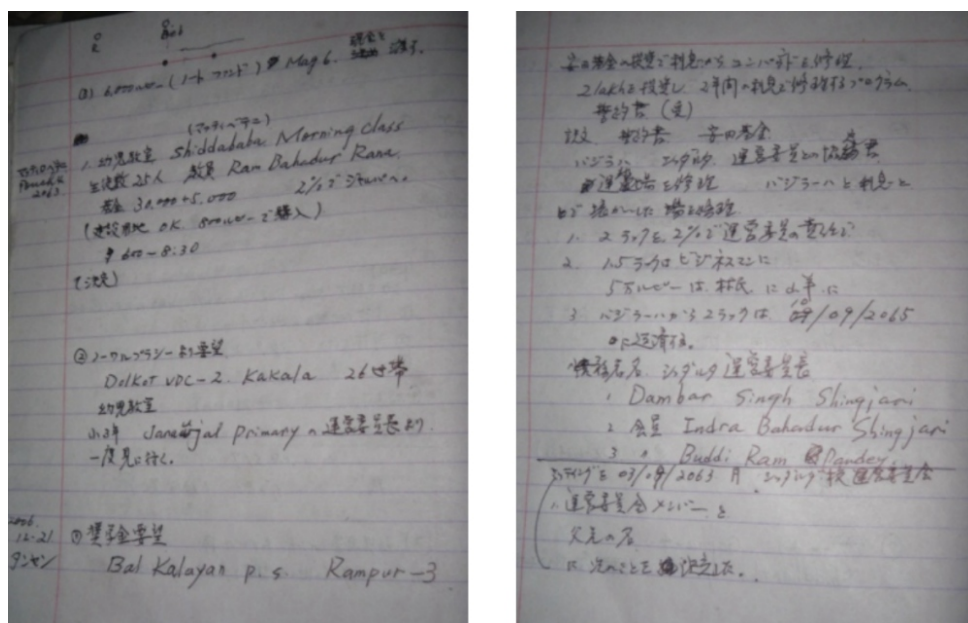
5.3.1 *OK Baji's issue notes*

I knocked on the door to OK Baji's room at 6:30 a.m. the next morning. He was already awake, reviewing the notes from his meetings of the previous night, during which he had met groups from 11 different villages. He wrote a record of each meeting into a notebook, each request noted down as an "issue note," written in both English and Japanese, highlighting the specifics of each issue and the resulting agreements (see Figure 5.9).

For example, one issue note, concerning a request to build a literacy school for children, contained the following information: the issue heading "2. Child Literacy Program," the village and the respective village development committee "Dolkot VDC-2, Kakala," the

number of households “26,” the requested contents for the literacy program, the requestor and the respective affiliation “Chairman of Jannaujal Primary (local NGO),” and OK Baji’s next plan of action “go and see it once” as the last entry (bottom half of the left picture in Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9 Examples of OK Baji’s issue notes



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2006.

A more comprehensive issue note (right picture of Figure 5.9) concerned a two-year project to repair the walls of a school. Financing for the repairs came from donations arranged by OK Baji, sourced from Japan, and included the following conditions: a loan of 200,000 RS from OK Baji to the local NGO, which charged a 2 percent monthly interest on the loan principal. The principal would then be distributed to local businessmen and the villagers where the school was located, at a ratio of 3:1, respectively. The NGO was to use the interest it generated from the loan to fund the repairs of the school. In turn, the villagers

paid off their share of the loan by raising goats, and the local NGO would pay off the entire principal lent by OK Baji by October 9, 2008. This issue note concluded with a list of the three members of the NGO charged with supervising the project.

OK Baji has filled over 40 notebooks with such issues, at a rate of about four books per year. The accumulation of notebooks is like an encyclopedic collection of the multitude of problems the people of Eastern Palpa face everyday, and OK Baji considers the mass of issue notes to be a treasure trove describing the true needs of the underprivileged villagers (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007).

5.3.2 *An unending string of visits*

The 1st visit

After looking at OK Baji's issue notes and listening to his explanations, I began to ask his thoughts on some of the quotes he frequently said, like "being needed" and "nothing is useless" (described in Chapter 8), but a knock at the door interrupted our interview. It was the head of a local NGO from the village of Phoksingkot, to whom OK Baji had previously lent 100,000 RS to establish a fund whose interest (following a financing scheme similar to the one described above concerning the two-year project to repair the walls of a school) would subsidize the purchase of seeds (left picture of Figure 5.10). Since Phoksingkot was located close to a main road, the products grown and harvested by the villagers were being transported to bigger towns and sold for a profit. The project was a success and the head of

the NGO came to OK Baji to ask for a new round of 100,000 RS financing to establish another seed fund. The entire talk lasted about 10 minutes.

The 2nd visit

Less than a minute after the head of the Phoksingkot NGO left, a girl who been waiting outside the door walked in and started talking to OK Baji. She suffered from constant migraines stemming from her poor eyesight. OK Baji had previously arranged for her to see an ophthalmologist at a hospital, where she was given a prescription for a special set of lenses, which OK Baji had used to order glasses from an optician at Tansen. She was there to get the receipt so she could pick up the glasses from the optician.

The 3rd visit

While the girl with poor eyesight spoke with OK Baji, a group of people had begun gathering just outside the hotel room. As soon as the girl left, a woman came in. She explained that her husband had a brain tumor and needed help getting treatment. This was a special case. Of the 103 local NGOs registered in Eastern Palpa, practically none of them provided medical support to individual patients. Consequently, OK Baji typically provided up to 10,000 RS to those suffering from heart, kidney, and brain complications so they could arrange for travel to a hospital and get treatment. However, he had already met the woman's husband on a previous occasion and already provided him 10,000 RS. Now, with her asking for additional financial support on his behalf, OK Baji seemed to face a dilemma. He paused

for a few moments before rejecting her request, explaining that other patients also needed support and his resources were limited.

Figure 5.10 A unending string of visits in Tansen



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2006.

The 4th visit

After the woman left, three members of a local NGO OK Baji had previously worked with came in (right picture of Figure 5.10). A relative of one of the three had suffered a hernia, which cost 20,000 RS to treat at Tansen's Mission Hospital. OK Baji agreed to lend the required funds, not to the patient directly, but to the local NGO, who would be responsible to collect the loan and repay OK Baji by a fixed date. As a final condition, the local NGO had to agree that if it did not repay in time, it would stop receiving OK Baji's services and support in the VDCs in which it operated.

The 5th visit

As the clock struck 7:30 a.m., another group of villagers came into the room.

However, the nature of this visit was different from all the others. While every single previous visit focused on fulfilling a need, this group brought with them a letter of gratitude for the Japanese benefactor who had sponsored a project in their village. OK Baji was to courier the letter back to Japan.

5.3.2 *The last farewell in Nepal*

It was not until this last group left that my interview with OK Baji finally started, affording me a short window of opportunity before he was scheduled to leave at 9:00 a.m. to Pokhara by motorcycle. Raju Kumari, one of just three villagers OK Baji considers as his protégé, waited outside the hotel, his motorcycle ready. OK Baji strapped on a helmet, got onto the back on Raju's bike, and just as they started to speed away, OK Baji looked at me and signed, "See you again," with his right hand. That moment marked the end of my interview, and one phrase came to mind as they drove off into the streets of Tansen: "There goes a great man!"

5.4 *Insights from observing OK Baji's way of living*

The source of inspiration for OK Baji's choice of a way of living as a social worker in Nepal could be his surviving near life and death experiences, like the Annapurna avalanche or the bus accident (described in Chapter 3). Such traumatic events could cause him to reevaluate his priorities and values, as well as his position relative to, and relationships with,

other individuals. It is also possible that these emotionally charged experiences planted the seed of *phronesis* within OK Baji's psyche, which he has since grown and cultivated by offering himself as a provider of social good to those in need, especially the underprivileged in the remote villages of Nepal.

However, in doing so, OK Baji has, over time, become an indispensable part of the fabric of society in Eastern Palpa. He lives as the locals do, is treated as an insider rather than a foreigner, and takes pleasure in the service of helping others. Consequently, the results of his activities reinforce his motivation to do more. This is because what is good for the society of Eastern Palpa has become intertwined with what is good for OK Baji – it is a case of mutually beneficial symbiosis. After seven years of direct observation, I consider this to be a critical characteristic that exemplifies a *phronetic* individual like OK Baji.

From my firsthand observations of OK Baji in the field, I find that his *phronetic* way of living could be broken down into three components: 1) OK Baji's activities promote a process of social knowledge creation, 2) every aspect of OK Baji's lifestyle is geared towards fostering social good for the villagers in Eastern Palpa, and 3) OK Baji employs creative routines in activities stemming from his own adaptation of the knowledge creation process.

5.4.1 Activities to promote a process of social knowledge creation

From the perspective of social knowledge creation (described in Chapter 1), OK Baji's ecosystem is very well defined (see Table 5.1). He operates in the social environment

of Eastern Palpa, and social interactions include links to stakeholders such as the residents of each village, local communities, local NGOs, local governments, schools, and hospitals, not to mention external constituencies, like foreign NGOs, donors, and sponsors, especially those based in Japan. Besides the environment, there is the social capital (and social assets), which facilitates interaction among the stakeholders by fostering understanding and goodwill between them as they endeavor towards the common goal of generating social good.

In OK Baji's case, social capital takes the form of inspiration –he feels he discovers his true self as a human by living as close to nature as possible, by living in the same way as those he is trying to help do, and by caring for everyone around him as if they were his own flesh and blood. Overtime, the bonds connecting him to others in Eastern Palpa grow more numerous and stronger, giving rise to social assets like friendships, cultural understanding, and shared moments both good and bad, all of which reinforce OK Baji's sense of belonging in the social fabric of Nepal.

Table 5.1 OK Baji's social knowledge creation model

Social ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eastern Palpa • Stakeholders including villagers, local government, local NGOs, donors, and international aid agencies and NGOs
Social capital and Social assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for elders, mutual help, care and supervision among children • Hospitality towards OK Baji • Respect the villagers lifestyles • Treat others as if they were his own
Emerging objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct all activities towards helping those in need in Eastern Palpa
Ba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The village/town level • In a villager's home/NGO office/hotel room/etc. • Along the trails between villages
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face interaction with those in need • Face-to-face interaction with local NGOs and volunteers in the villages
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure development (water supply systems, irrigation, toilet facilities, etc.) • Building educational facilities • Providing medical treatment to the ill and disabled • Income generation initiatives

5.4.2 Each component of OK Baji's lifestyle is geared towards fostering social good

It seems OK Baji's entire way of living is designed to address the needs of the villagers of Eastern Palpa. Breaking down his lifestyle into basic process components, it could be described with the following six gerunds: 1) walking, 2) feeling (empathizing), 3)

talking (dialoguing), 4) entrusting, 5) working (collaborating), and 6) writing.

OK Baji walks to visit the villages. This is a source of pleasure for him – he sees the raw nature of mountainous Nepal, witnesses the hardships of the villagers, and is exposed to the elements. As he walks from village to village, he empathizes with those he meets, experiences how they live, and becomes familiar with their unique circumstances and needs. He then talks with those who need help, as well as those who can provide aid, like local NGOs and volunteers at the villages, to articulate their problems and synthesize concrete solutions. Next, he entrusts and supports the local NGOs, volunteers, and villagers as they undertake initiatives and projects designed to mitigate problems and create solutions. Finally, he documents the results of all projects and sends reports to those who have provided support, allowing benefactors to see how their donations bore fruit. The entire process then repeats as OK Baji undertakes a new trek through the villages. These six components of OK Baji's lifestyle will be further explored in the context of *phronesis* in Chapter 7.

5.4.3 OK Baji's creative routines for knowledge creation

As presented in Chapter 1, in the continuous knowledge creation process (SECI spiral), an individual's activities can become second nature when practiced continuously and repetitively, overtime becoming creative routines. In OK Baji's case, from my fieldwork observations, I find he has two key creative routines:

- 1) Walking, from village to village, over and over, again and again.

2) Prolific letter writing villagers, to supporters, and to sponsors.

I believe OK Baji is no longer aware of how routine those two practices have become in his daily activities. He walks an average of 10 kilometers, up and down the steep slopes of Nepal, every day. Meanwhile, he never misses an opportunity to write a letter, which he does anywhere and at anytime. He sends over 500 letters each year, each one personally written to a specific individual or group of people. These two creative routines – walking and writing – may seem mundane and trivial, but they serve as the enablers fueling OK Baji's ongoing process of social knowledge creation.

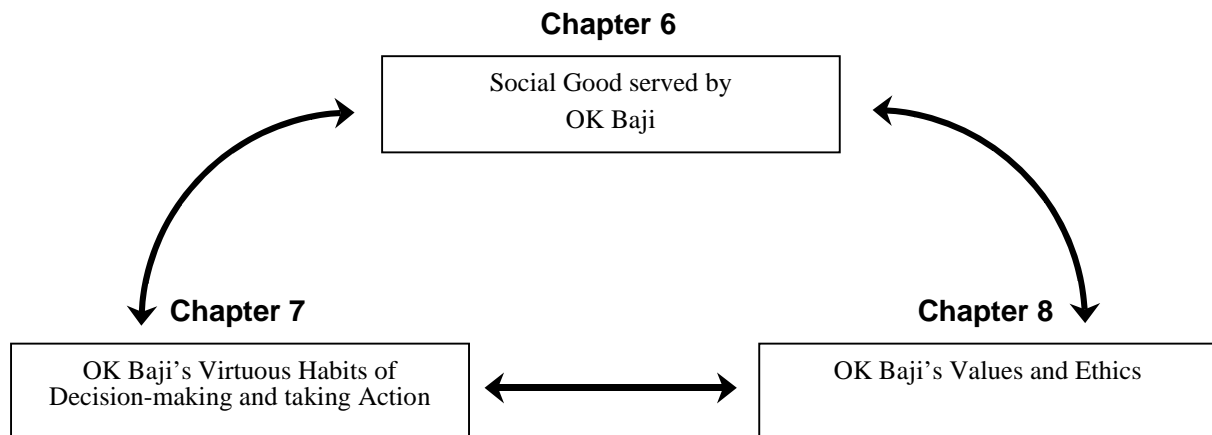
Part Three: OK Baji's *phronesis*

Chapter 6 Social good served by OK Baji

In the previous chapter, OK Baji's lifestyle, or way of living, was broken down into three components: 1) activities to promote a process of social knowledge creation, 2) lifestyle components geared towards fostering social good, and 3) the creative routines for knowledge creation. An individual endowed with these three components is presumed to possess *phronesis*, and the purpose of part three of this thesis is to analyze OK Baji's activities from this perspective based on firsthand fieldwork observations of his social services in Nepal.

In the *Methodology of Knowledge Creation*, Nonaka and Konno (2003) state that field research is the relentless pursuit to articulate the essence of living knowledge potentially hidden in phenomena. Beyond simple observation, field research focuses on creating and testing new hypotheses to deepen the understanding of hidden tacit knowledge in the context of a human (Nonaka and Konno, 2003: 113). This context can be described through storytelling, an approach used extensively in the next three chapters to analyze the three elements (Figure 6.1) of OK Baji's *phronesis*: 1) social good served by OK Baji (Chapter 6), 2) his virtuous habits of decision-making and taking action (Chapter 7), and 3) his values and ethics (Chapter 8).

Figure 6.1 Analysis of the three elements of OK Baji's *phronesis*



6.1 Overview of social good served by OK Baji

6.1.1 What is social good?

Before describing the social good served by OK Baji, we need to understand what social good is. Based on the literature review in the introduction of this thesis, social good is defined as “something” individuals pursue in order to live better. That is to say, if “something” improves our life, it can be considered a social good. One important distinction is for *us* to live better or to make *our* life better, and not for *me* to live better or to make *my* life better. The plurality matters in this process. As Aristotle says in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, *phronetic* individuals are those who conduct a good life for themselves *and* for others. One corollary of this definition is that “something done” that improves the lives of *others* is a social good. This chapter builds on this corollary to describe what it is OK Baji does to foster social good.

However, we must be cognizant of how to confirm whether or not what OK Baji does has really improved the lives of others. It is possible that only those who have discreetly benefited from OK Baji's activities can verify this, and for this reason this chapter also includes the perspectives of local villagers regarding his social services in Nepal.

6.1.2 *The inception of OK Baji's social services*

OK Baji says he takes pleasure helping the residents of villages he visits in the Nepalese highlands. Was this also the case when he first started his activities? Did he have a clear-cut plan for how to help the villagers? According to him, the answer to both questions is “No” (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007). In 1993, when he started living in Dholimara, his primary aim was to “review his childhood,” a motive also colored by his feelings of indebtedness after surviving the Annapurna avalanche. However, he had no clear vision of his role in Nepal, and the direction of his future path first came to light during one memorable encounter.

After spending several months in Nepal, OK Baji ran across a boy who bled from a knee injury. He treated him by applying a band-aid plaster. This simple gesture marked his first step towards improving the welfare of others in Nepal, and he started contemplating how to provide help based on the rugged and harsh conditions of the village life he witnessed. There were so many ways improvements could be made, but he did not know where or how to start. So, to overcome his indecision, he began asking local residents of Dholimara what he

could do to help the village. Their reply was simple – establish a literacy school.

With a clear goal, OK Baji set out to build a school with the financial support of friends from Japan. Several months later, once construction was finished, residents from Sakine, a village adjacent to Dholimara, came to see the new school and upon discovering OK Baji's role in helping build the facility, invited him to their village to assess the problems existing there. In Sakine, OK Baji discovered a more severe problem – a lack of potable water – that he helped mitigate by arranging for the installation of a water supply system.

Little by little, the rumor that an old Japanese man was helping the villages spread like wildfire throughout Eastern Palpa. Before long, OK Baji was swamped with requests to visit different villages. Starting with that first band-aid on a boy's injured knee, the magnitude of OK Baji's social good slowly grew as he began to make inroads towards improving the lives of other in Nepal.

6.1.3 *OK Baji's social services*

Over the past 14 years, OK Baji has received over ¥50 million in donations from supporters that he funnels towards helping destitute, disabled, and disadvantaged villagers. He writes a letter to donors describing how their donations were used in Nepal. This prolific feedback process, described as one of OK Baji's creative routines in Chapter 5, has resulted in his writing over 5,000 letters the past 14 years.

It is a monumental task to describe the entirety of OK Baji's myriad activities as

reported in his many letters to donors, but a fraction of the results stemming from his activities were once cataloged in the 100-page booklet *Our OK Baji* (Neupane, 2004), which was published for the OK Baji festival of March 2004. This document, first written in Nepalese and later translated into English and Japanese, depicts the perspectives and opinions of 30 villagers who directly experienced OK Baji's social services (a portion of which are summarized in Table 6.1). The booklet's editor noted that the number of projects initiated by OK Baji were so numerous, incorporating all of them would have easily expanded the booklet into a full-sized book (Neupane, 2004).

Table 6.1 OK Baji's Social Services (as described in *Our OK Baji*)

	Quantity
Medical Support*	
Health Post/Clinic Construction	4
Trust Funds (to subsidize medical treatment)	7 (1,080,000 RS) *
Educational Support	
Construction & Repair of Educational Facilities	36
Construction of Pre-primary/Primary Schools	6
Classroom Furniture (desks & chairs)	645 Sets (for 20 Schools)
Trust Funds (for teacher salaries & scholarships)	9 (1,045,000 RS)
Potable Water Supply Systems	4
Income Generation Projects (trust funds)	10 (1,060,000 RS)
Disabled People Support (trust funds)	2
Bridge Constructions	4

*As of December 2004, OK Baji established a 100,000 RS medical fund in each of the 22 Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Eastern Palpa.

Source: Adopted from *Our OK Baji* (Neupane, 2004: 96-100). Refer to Appendix A for the original list.

6.2 *Medical Support*

Although the number of children who have received medical treatment provided through projects initiated by OK Baji is impossible to quantify, that many were saved from an untimely death by gaining access to medical facilities is not in doubt. During our five-day trek visiting villages in December 2007, we encountered four ill children, each with a unique condition or need. The next sections describe the cases of these four children and the projects initiated by OK Baji that improve access to healthcare in Eastern Palpa.

6.2.1 *Four ill children*

A boy paralyzed from the waist down

On the second morning of our 2007 trek, OK Baji and I visited a house in the VDC of Sahalkot where an eight-year-old boy whom OK Baji had first met three months earlier lived with his parents. The boy used to be healthy and active until getting paralyzed from the waist down after taking medicine designed to prevent against elephantitis. This happened just before OK Baji first met him. Several other children had taken the same medicine, but none of them had suffered any side effects. When OK Baji first saw the paralyzed boy, he lay helpless on a straw mat in a small, poorly ventilated, and filthy room, his excrements piling up on the mat. OK Baji had written him a letter of introduction and provided a travel subsidy of 1,000 RS so his family could take him for treatment at the United Mission Hospital in Tansen.

The morning we visited, the boy's eyes brightened upon seeing OK Baji, even with both legs bound in gypsum and propped with a bar between his knees (left picture of Figure 6.2). According to the father, the boy had undergone a series of rehabilitation exercises and was for the first time able to move about slowly by himself since getting paralyzed. In a few months they expected him to make a full recovery and walk on his own around the village (right picture of Figure 6.2). Without OK Baji's intervention, this positive outcome would not have been possible.

Figure 6.2 A paralyzed boy in the VDC of Sahalkot

Paralyzed boy and OK Baji



Outside the boy's home



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2007.

A boy with chronic head pains and fevers

After we departed the paralyzed boy's home and inspected the reconstruction of the village's secondary school, we headed off towards the next village, located on the other side of a pass 300 meters further up the mountain. As we crested the pass, which was 1,400 meters

above sea level, we could see far in the distance below a man hurriedly running towards us through fields of millets. The man carried his son on his back and he asked to meet with us at a nearby villager's home (Figure 6.3).

According to the father, his 11-year-old son had some sort of brain problem and suffered from a constant high fever. He had taken the boy to a hospital once before, presenting OK Baji an X-ray he had received back then. As the father spoke, his son began to weep and complained that his head ached.

Figure 6.3 A father and his son who suffered from chronic head pains and fevers



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2007.

After listening, OK Baji admitted he did not know enough about medicine to recommend treatment for the boy. Instead, he wrote a letter of introduction to the hospital in Tansen and, based on his experiences with a girl from another village who exhibited similar symptoms and was treated in Nepal's capital city, instructed the father to get a referral to see a doctor in Katmandu.

OK Baji then prepared a 1,000 RS cash travel subsidy and wrote a check for 10,000 RS to cover the cost of treatment. But instead of giving these to the boy's father, he entrusted the funds to a village leader with whom OK Baji had worked together with in the past and who would see to it that the funds were used appropriately. The source of funds given out in this manner was a Japanese NPO, and OK Baji played the role of connecting, or bridging, this "goodwill" from Japan to with those who needed it in Nepal.

A baby missing its right eye

A few hours after meeting the father and his son with chronic head pains, we visited Darkesin before continuing on towards Dabura, both villages in the VDC of Jirubash, which is about 1,000 meters above sea level. OK Baji's pedometer indicated we had taken 21,658 steps that day, roughly equivalent to 15.5 kilometers. It was OK Baji's first visit to Dabura in 10 years, and he observed that very little had changed since he first went there.

The following morning, two hours after being rudely awoken at 4:00 a.m. by the banter of 10 chickens caged in the same room where we slept, we inspected the village's small primary literacy school where a young mother asked OK Baji to examine her 10-day-old baby's right eye, which seemed missing. Making matters worse, the baby's face, from the nose to the right eyebrow, was covered in boils. OK Baji instructed the mother to bring her child to the hospital in Tansen and gave her a signed letter of introduction along with a travel subsidy of 1,000 RS.

A girl with cardiac complications

On the fourth day of our 2007 trek, OK Baji and I visited Mityal, where Bhuvan Singh Thapa, another villager whom OK Baji considers a role model, lives. As soon as we arrived, Bhuvan sought a villager whose 17-year-old daughter suffered from cardiac complications (Figure 6.4). The girl's father described how, several months ago, his daughter began getting pains in her joints before getting paralyzed in the legs. Bhuvan had previously helped them go to the hospital in Tansen, where she was diagnosed with a heart condition curable through surgery.

Figure 6.4 OK Baji listening to the needs of villagers in Mityal



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2007.

OK Baji cut a personal check for 10,000 RS and wrote a letter of introduction to the Australian Hospital in Katmandu where a heart specialist whom OK Baji personally knew and had previously treated children who suffered from heart conditions. The price of heart surgery ranged from 50,000 to 100,000 RS, so OK Baji's check would only cover the cost of

taking the girl and a few accompanying adults to Katmandu and the one-time initial diagnosis fee. Nonetheless, OK Baji believed his small subsidy provided the spark that gave hope to the girl and her family. If she was promptly diagnosed and her treatment scheduled, that small spark of hope would motivate her circle of family and friends to help in any way they could.

In practice, heart surgery took place six to 12 months after the initial diagnosis. During this waiting period, her family, relatives, and neighbors could rally together to collect the funds needed to pay for her treatment. For example, they could take a medical certificate issued by the hospital to the Palpa district government office to receive an official certificate certifying the girl's need for surgery, which entitled the family the right to raise funds through donations on her behalf, or they could take loans at a low interest rate from wealthier neighbors. In the end, such efforts would probably not take place without OK Baji's initial spark of aid, which shows how his services catalyze social capital in the form of cooperative endeavors among different groups of individuals in the villages.

6.2.2 *Medical funds*

OK Baji has established 22 medical funds covering each VDC of Eastern Palpa, which collectively support OK Baji's efforts to provide aid to injured, sick, and disabled children. A Japanese NPO, the Children Relief Society (CRS), provided the initial capital used to establish each of these 100,000 RS funds, which were then entrusted to a reliable local NGO in each VDC with which OK Baji has worked with before and established a

trusting partnership over the years. These include the Deep Jyoti Joint Youth Club of Bhuvan Singh Thapa in the VDC of Mityal, the Public Welfare Council (PWC) led by Krishna Kumar Thapa in the VDC of Gandakot, and the Rural Youth Club led by Netra Bahadur in the VDC of Khaliban.

Each local NGO managing a medical fund generates an annual interest of 18,000 RS, which is transferred to OK Baji's bank account, providing a consistent cash flow of 396,000 RS (from the 22 funds) to support activities related to providing healthcare for children. A portion of this cash flow is allocated to OK Baji's account at Tansen's United Mission Hospital to cover expenses stemming from the medical treatment to patients who present a letter of introduction signed by OK Baji. Another portion of the cash flow is used to cover the personal checks OK Baji issues while in the field. According to OK Baji's letters to the CRS, from May 2004 to April 2005 and from May 2006 to April 2007, 104 and 48 children, respectively, received treatment covered by OK Baji's medical funds (CRS, 2005, 2007).³

The history behind the medical funds dates back to early 1993, when OK Baji first witnessed how the inhabitants of the more remote villages on Eastern Palpa lived, but because of his inability to speak Nepalese, he was unable to get a clear picture of their medical needs. Every time he encountered an injured or disabled person, he tried to assess their needs with the help of a villager who spoke English, whenever possible. The reality, however, was that he was oftentimes alone and unable to surmount the existing

³ Information is not available for the period from May 2005 to April 2006.

communication barrier, so he resorted to handing out 5,000 RS from his own pocket in the hope that recipients would use the funds to get treatment. However, with no way to confirm if those he gave money actually needed help, OK Baji sometimes aided the children of well-to-do families, or gave money to ill villagers who spend it on alcoholic drinks instead of medical bills. In such cases, OK Baji regretted not being able to allocate his limited resources to those who really needed it.

A few years later, after OK Baji learned to communicate in Nepalese, he became more confident in his ability to assess the needs of those who sought his help. Learning Nepalese was a watershed moment that allowed him, in 1999, to establish a service allowing villagers to receive subsidized medical treatment at Tansen's United Mission Hospital if they presented a letter of introduction signed by OK Baji. During that first year, he issued a total of 86 such letters.

This service works well for non-critical, non-urgent medical treatment, but how about during those emergencies when OK Baji is not nearby, like a broken arm or leg? In such cases, the injury must be treated promptly to minimize the risk of future complications and disability, but poor villagers, many of them unable to afford pay or borrow money to cover transportation costs, often forgo seeking treatment. This is where the local NGO fills the gap in access to medical treatment by collecting and providing funds used to cover the expenses incurred during such emergencies. The NGO then presents the resulting medical

certificates and a totalized tally of treatment bills to OK Baji, who in turn refunds the NGO – a variation of OK Baji’s “letter of introduction” service that he promotes every time he visits a new village in Eastern Palpa.

To ensure that limited resources are appropriately allocated, OK Baji defined the following three criteria regarding a child’s family that must be met in order to approve the disbursement of funds to get medical treatment:

- 1) The family cannot afford rice for eight months.
- 2) The family is jobless.
- 3) The family cannot receive pension.

These basic criteria, which were developed over time based on trial and error, also allow the local NGOs to make fund allocation decisions whenever OK Baji is out of their reach.

6.2.3 *Health posts*

One of the most serious handicaps in providing medical treatment in Eastern Palpa is a chronic lack of hospitals and doctors, especially in the more remote regions. To overcome this, OK Baji has helped establish several health posts throughout the region with financial support sourced from Japan. Such facilities have proven extremely effective. For example, the health post at Pontei, a village in the VDC of Gandakot, recorded 3,779 visits during the first four months after it opened (CRS, 2006).

Figure 6.5 The health post at Pontei



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2006.

The first health post built with help of OK Baji is located in Sachikol. When he first visited the village in 1994, he asked residents to describe their problems. One woman's story stood out from the others:

There is no health post in this village, so we need to walk to the one in the other village. When my son got sick, I carried him on my back and walked for three hours to the sub-health post in next village, but no one was there at that time unfortunately.

Then I walked to the other health post in the other village. However, my son breathed his last breathe on my back there (Kakimi, 2001: 64).

After hearing the woman relate her story, OK Baji promptly decided to build a health post in Sachikol to prevent others from suffering a similar tragedy.

6.3 *Educational support*

Of OK Baji's activities in the area of educational support, the most frequent request was to build or repair schools and to subsidize the salaries of teaching staff. As of March 2004, OK Baji was involved in 36 school construction/repair projects, three of which are described below.

The first case is about the literacy school in Dholimara and demonstrates how OK Baji's continuously improved his efforts to foster sustainability in the social good he provided. The second case, about the secondary school in Bhalaytar, describes how OK Baji's financial support was used based on expense reports from the school's former head teacher. The third case is about the primary school in Lankuri and shows how unexpected outcomes were achieved after OK Baji bridged the needs of the local community of Nepal using the support from a school based in Japan.

6.3.1 *The literacy school in Dholimara*

When OK Baji first started living in Dholimara in 1993, the first project he worked on was the construction of a new literacy school for women to replace the existing small and dilapidated hut where classes occasionally took place. Believing this to be a simple matter of a facility upgrade, OK Baji provided 500,000 RS of his own money to finance the construction of a completely new building with the expectation that the villagers would organize and conduct the literacy classes by themselves.

Three months after the school was finished, OK Baji discovered classes were not taking place. After inquiring several villagers to investigate the problem, he found out classes had ended just one month after starting, when the teacher stopped coming to the school because his salary was in arrears. Classes were supposed to take place every night, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., with an enrollment of 25 women, each paying a monthly tuition of 20 RS that covered the teacher's monthly salary of 500 RS. But the women could not afford the tuition.

After finding out classes had stopped, OK Baji discussed with villagers ways to make the educational program financially solvent, and the idea of using the interest generated from a pool of invested money to pay teaching staff (akin to a small endowment fund) was floated. OK Baji agreed with this concept and personally established the 30,000 RS fund that generated a monthly interest rate of 2 percent. The resulting cash flow of 600 RS would then cover the teacher's salary, allowing classes to resume and overcome the financial hurdle imposed on the students by the tuition.

However, after six months, attendance to the school declined from 25 students to just three. Apparently, the evening class schedule clashed with the women's long workday, making it hard for them to attend on a consistent basis. To overcome declining attendance and expand use of the school's facilities, OK Baji, after discussing with the villagers once more, initiated morning literacy classes for children aged three to five. A medical doctor from

Dholimara volunteered to teach the village's first pre-primary class, which had an enrollment of 40 children.

A year later, as the pre-primary class grew older, OK Baji conceived the idea of building a completely new primary school, but such an endeavor required a substantial financial commitment the likes of which were beyond his ability to provide on his own. However, after sharing his plan with several old Japanese friends, they banded together to form the OK Baji Supporting Society (OKSS) and organized the collection of donations in Japan on OK Baji's behalf. With OKSS' support, OK Baji was able to fund the construction of a two-story, four-classroom school, with facilities to teach children up to the 2nd grade level.

However, once children finished the 2nd grade, they would have to go to another village to continue their education, which often meant a long walk of several hours to attend school. By 2004, the residents of Dholimara, seeing their children grow, asked OK Baji if he could expand the school into a full-fledged primary school, grades 1st through 5th. OK Baji agreed with the request, and with additional support from OKSS, the local government officially certified Dholimara's first eight-classroom public primary school in April 2005.

Meanwhile, the old building previously used for the women's literacy classes was transformed into a library in 2000 after two Japanese women visited Dholimara to meet OK Baji and experienced life in the village. Hoping to provide opportunities for children to read

picture books, both women donated 100,000 RS to OK Baji, one fourth of which was used to buy 23 books and the rest put into a fund used to buy additional books in the future and cover the librarian's wages of 450 RS per month (compared to 700 RS per paid to the literacy class teacher every month). A graduate of the primary school was hired as a librarian, working two hours everyday sorting books and keeping records. By 2006, the library had expanded its collection to almost 600 books and recorded over 4,000 visits.

The school and library of Dholimara, both the end result of a long string of progress and setbacks, successes and failures, over the course of several years, are testament to OK Baji's relentless pursuit to improve life for the villagers, overcome adversity, and foster social good.

6.3.2 *The Shree Krishna Devi Secondary School in Bhalaytar*

As explained in Chapter 4, OK Baji's biggest impression of Bhalaytar when he first set foot there in 1997 was the dilapidated state of the primary school in the center of the village. Beyond the crumbling state of its adobe and stone walls, the school's roof was severely damaged by a tree felled by strong storm winds. Jeevan Pokharel, head teacher at the time, asked for help to repair the school – a challenging project that turned out to be one of OK Baji's most successful school construction projects.

In 1997, OK Baji's application for assistance to finance the school's reconstruction was accepted by a grassroots human security project sponsored by the Japanese Embassy in

Nepal, and the repair and upgrade effort, including the construction of 10 new classrooms, began in March 1998. The embassy granted funds totaling almost 1.7 million RS for the construction effort. Moreover, about 80 local village residents volunteered to work as laborers, without pay – a contribution equivalent to almost 900,000 RS (based on 111 workdays per volunteer at 100 RS per workday). All total, the budget for the school construction project exceeded 2.5 million RS (see Table 6.2), after including the labor input from the villagers.⁴

Table 6.2. Expense report for the reconstruction of the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school

Fund Accountability Statement (From 12th Falgun, 2054 to 30th Kartik, 2055)*		RS
<u>Income</u>		
Grant from the Embassy of Japan		1,672,465.50
Local contribution		891,024.50
		2,563,490.00
<u>Expenses</u>		
Cement		413,148.00
Blue sheet tin (roof material)		181,790.00
Wood		330,400.80
Other miscellaneous items		57,764.50
Food		62,190.00
Furniture (desks and chairs)		113,637.00
Transportation		91,886.00
Labor		1,310,150.00
- Carpenter and Engineer		(419,125.50)
- Local labor input from the villagers		(891,024.50)
Bank fees		2,523.70
		2,563,490.00

* Dates correspond to March 4, 1998 and November 16, 1999, respectively.

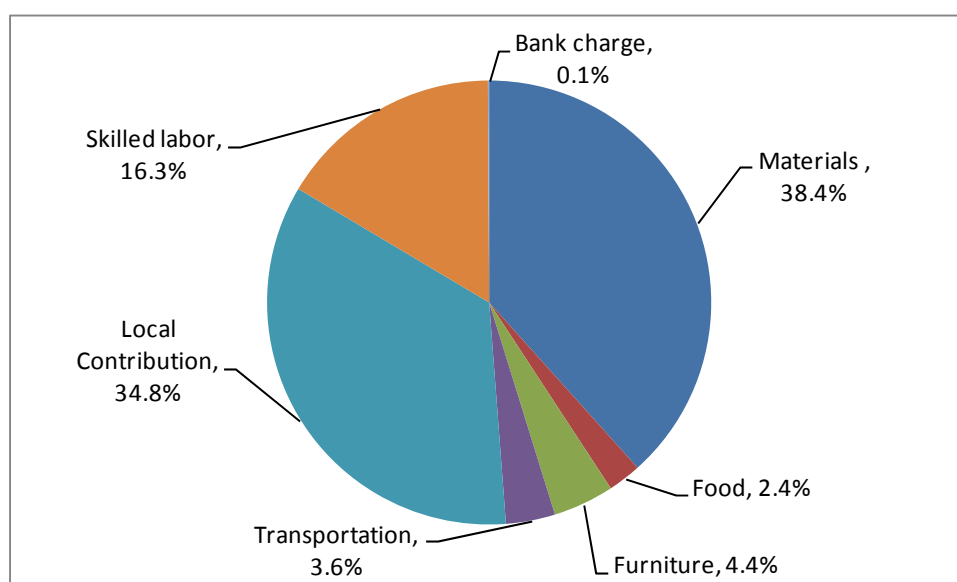
Source: Jeevan Pokharel, former head teacher of the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school.

Of the entire budget, 38 percent was spent on construction materials including cement, blue tin sheet roofing, and wood. Village volunteers brought in stone and gravel, the

⁴ The monetary equivalent of the local labor input (contribution) by the villagers, listed as an income of 891,024.50 RS in Table 6.2, was calculated as follows: 80 laborers, each working 111 days, which totals 8,910 workdays, at a rate of 100 RS per workday. The 240.50 RS discrepancy was added to make the total income round up to the nearest 10 RS.

main building materials, after carving them from a makeshift quarry on the banks of the nearby Nisdy river. Other notable expenses were the use of carpenters and an engineer (almost 420,000 RS) and the transportation of soil and large stones, which required a tractor (almost 92,000 RS) (see Appendix B for pictures of the school reconstruction project). The breakdown of expenses for the entire project, shown in Figure 6.6, shows that local contribution (free labor input) accounted for almost 35 percent of the entire budget – a level OK Baji has since considered as appropriate for projects of this type. The reason for this, according to him, is that a high proportion of local contribution fosters involvement by the community and increases the local villagers' sense of ownership of the facilities they helped create.

Figure 6.6 Breakdown of expenses for the reconstruction of the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school



Correspondingly, the residents of Bhalaytar became strongly attached to their rebuilt

and expanded Shree Krishna Devi secondary school, caring for it as a valued and indispensable part of their community. The school also became a model educational facility in Eastern Palpa, graduating close to 600 students as of December 2007, prompting OK Baji to consider it one of the most successful school reconstruction projects in the region, with the exception of the primary school project in Lankuri.

6.3.3 *The primary school in Lankuri*

In December 2006, I inquired OK Baji about the recent opening ceremony of the Shree Satewati primary school in the village of Lankuri, located in the VDC of Heklang, which he considered one of his most memorable events and the inspiration for one of his favorite quotes, “Like a spring, the beginning of all things is small.” Eight days later, the head teacher of Bhalaytar’s secondary school and I visited Lankuri to see the new school, whose origins can be traced to a school in Tokyo.

Students’ savings

In June 2002, OK Baji was a guest speaker at the Totsuka Daisan elementary school in Shinjuku-ward, Tokyo. Inspired by his presentation about his activities in Nepal, the students of Totsuka Daisan organized a collection whereby each of them contributed ¥100 by not consuming one soft drink. Although Totsuka Daisan is not a big school, with an enrollment of just 150 students, the collection effort eventually gave ¥15,000 to OK Baji before he returned to Nepal.

A postcard from Nepal

With the funds from Totsuka Daisan, OK Baji created a 9,000 RS notebook fund with a 2 percent monthly interest to subsidize the purchase of notebooks for school children in Eastern Palpa. The interest allowed OK Baji to buy 36 notebooks (at 5 RS a piece) every month, which he distributed to students in several villages. As he gave out notebooks, he also took pictures of the students, which he mailed back to the Totsuka Daisan elementary school along with a postcard describing how their donation was being used.

The parents get involved

Back in Tokyo, the head teacher at Totsuka Daisan published a newsletter featuring OK Baji's postcard and pictures on the school's entrance gate along with a collection box to solicit additional support. When OK Baji visited Totsuka Daisan once more in 2003, the school presented him with ¥100,000 donated by parents as they passed by the school's entrance gate. OK Baji used these funds to create two 30,000 RS medical funds for villagers in Eastern Palpa. As before, he kept the school apprised of how their new donation was helping others by sending back letters with pictures of patients who were successfully treated, including a girl who recovered from malnutrition.

The parents' neighbors get involved

The head teacher at Totsuka Daisan made another newsletter, this time highlighting the results of the two medical funds OK Baji established using the last round of donations

from the school, posting it once more on the school's entrance gate along with a collection box. In 2004, when OK Baji visited Totsuka Daisan, he was told that over ¥200,000 had been collected, with donations coming not just from student parents, but from their neighbors as well. School representatives asked OK Baji to use the new donations towards the construction of a new school in Nepal, coincidentally the type of project that he was trying to kick start in Lankuri at the time. The only problem, he told the representatives, was that such an endeavor required up to ¥350,000. Based on this information, the organizers in charge of the collection effort at Totsuka Daisan decided to wait one year to collect the missing amount. In 2005, when OK Baji returned to Tokyo, the school presented him with ¥350,000.

Building a new school

In April 2006, construction of Lankuri's new primary school began at the site of the village's old school – an old building of collapsing adobe and stone walls topped by a leaky and rusty tin roof. In conjunction with a local NGO, OK Baji arranged the purchase of construction materials, including cement, galvanized zinc sheets, and iron rods, for 200,000 RS using the funds from Totsuka Daisan. Lankuri residents contributed an equal amount in the form of unpaid labor input by having each household provide 23 days man-days of labor over the planned six-month construction period. At a rate of 100 RS per day, Lankuri's 90 households would contribute the equivalent of 200,700 RS in the form of "people participation."

Although the term “people participation” sounds ideal, in practice it is a difficult endeavor. The tasks undertaken by villagers included digging soil, flattening foundations, cutting wood using hand powered tools, and, most difficult of all, porting heavy material, including rocks, stones, mud, and sand. In the case of the school construction in Lankuri, villagers had to collect soil, stone, and sand from the banks of a river several hundred meters downhill from the construction site, which was used to create the flat structural foundations and the cement and mortar for the stone walls. Transporting these raw materials took hours of arduous uphill hikes every day.

The new five-classroom school was finished in November 2006 (Figure 6.7), and two weeks later an opening ceremony, attended by four Japanese nationals including OK Baji, Ms Takada, the head master of Totsuka Daisan, Mr. Nakamura, who first invited OK Baji as a guest speaker to Totsuka Daisan, and Mr. Nakamura’s wife, took place. During the ceremony, Ms. Takada led the distribution of used clothes collected at Totsuka Daisan and shipped to Nepal with the help of the Shinjuku Ward Office, which covered the shipping cost (K. Nakamura, interview, June 20, 2007). OK Baji stored the 40 boxes of used clothes and brought them out of storage in time for the Lankuri school opening ceremony. He reflected on this memorable occasion:

When the Japanese visitors attended the school’s opening ceremony I was impressed by how every villager offered them a heartfelt welcome, their faces beaming with

delight. The guests from Japan were touched by this warm hospitality, and when it was time for them to leave, both sides were shaking hands and waving farewell with such emotion, I was deeply moved by the occasion and began to gain a sense of gratification from the entire experience. Lankuri was a perfect example of how people are touched in this way (K. Kakimi, interview, December 13, 2006).

Figure 6.7 The new Shree Satewati primary school at Lankuri



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2006.

Since the school opened its doors, attendance at Lankuri's Shree Satewati primary school has increased from 80 to 120 students (B. B. Karki, interview, December 21, 2006). This is a remarkable feat considering how the entire endeavor snowballed from a simple postcard into a process involving two communities from different countries to produce social good.

6.3.4 Matching funds

Most requests OK Baji receives concerning educational support involve the

construction of schools. The second most frequent request is to fund teacher salaries. There have been many instances when teachers go unpaid, despite the presence of newly constructed schools. In Nepal, a government qualified, secondary school teacher typically earns 7,500 RS per month from the local government. But such qualified teachers are generally not present in the more remote areas of Nepal, and the only options for education depend on those village residents with the highest educational background who volunteer as unpaid teachers.

When the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school was first built in Bhalaytar in 1994, the school was unable to pay its teachers. To overcome this problem, OK Baji introduced the matching fund concept whereby he donated an amount equivalent to the funds collected by the residents of Bhalaytar to finance teacher salaries. The school committee raised 100,000 RS from the student's parents, a contribution matched by OK Baji to create a 200,000 RS fund with a 24 percent annual interest to cover the wages of two teachers at the school.

OK Baji first got the idea of creating matching funds based on his experience in Dholimara, where he found the residents' attitude towards their literacy school lacked enthusiasm or interest, most likely stemming from their minimal involvement in the school's construction and consequent lack of vested interest in seeing it run properly. This was not the case with the matching fund concept, where villagers actively contributed to make the schools in their community a reality.

Since then, OK Baji has created several matching funds, starting with a \$10,000 (about 700,000 RS) donation from a Japanese NGO called 2050, which was parceled into funds of 50,000 and 100,000 RS in size to finance teacher salaries at primary and secondary schools, respectively, throughout Eastern Palpa. As stakeholders, local villagers who contributed to the matching funds tend to be more proactively involved in the educational process by ensuring their children regularly attend school and supporting teacher efforts to instruct their pupils.

6.3.5 *Jhola* funds

In 2006, OK Baji started the *Jhola* (school bag) fund, a type of foster parent program. The idea was that every ¥10,000 (about 6,000 RS) from Japanese donors would sponsor a student in Eastern Palpa. The donation was invested into a fund with a 2 percent monthly interest (generating about 120 RS per month). A selection committee, composed of teachers and parents from the village where the fund was allocated, decided which student would be sponsored. The *Jhola* fund recipient, typically an orphan or a child whose parents were unemployed, received 100 RS every month to cover school fees and buy stationery to write letters sent to the sponsoring “foster family” in Japan. The remaining 20 RS went to the school to pay for pictures of the sponsored student and cover the postage of letters sent to Japan. This arrangement ensured that donations were funneled to cover expenses related to the *Jhola* fund program only.

Different types of foster parent programs organized by other NGOs exist in Palpa, with some collecting ¥8,600 per year (about 5,160 RS) from donors to sponsor one child. The financial structure of such programs includes allocating 1,200 RS to the child and 600 RS to the child's school every year. All total, over 1,000 children have been sponsored in Nepal (as of 2007) under such programs and the demand for additional sponsorships has tapered off, making OK Baji's decision to create a similar program to be at odds with his aim of creating projects that meet unfulfilled needs. But his aims for starting the *Jhola* funds were two-fold.

The first aim was sustainability. Unlike other existing foster parent programs where monetary disbursements exceeded their donation intakes, OK Baji sought to create ongoing perpetuity funds that would last well into the future by limiting disbursements to the amount generated from interest. This ensured the funds would exist even after OK Baji was no longer around. The second aim was flexibility. By allowing the *Jhola* fund selection committee at each village to choose the recipient, the money would be allocated to the student who demonstrated the most need. Oftentimes, during the course of the school year, a student suffered tragedy – a parent died or a home burned down – and his or her need for help suddenly exceeded that of the currently sponsored student. Under such circumstances, the selection committee could choose a new recipient. This contrasted with other foster parent programs that allocated funds to one recipient over several years, disregarding the fluctuating demand for aid of other students in the same village.

In 2006, OK Baji established 70 *Jhola* funds, which he allocated to different villages throughout Eastern Palpa according to their poverty level. He then collected pictures and thank-you letters from sponsored students, which he mailed, together with a personally written letter, to the foster parents in Japan. OK Baji has written upwards of 200 letters related to *Jhola* fund recipients, but he admits that sending more would require getting help from others. Regarding the level of personal attention he devotes to this effort, OK Baji commented: “The Jhola Fund has utilized all the value of what Japanese sponsors donated in good faith. It is very important that I confirm how their donations are used and personally report my findings to each of them” (K. Kakimi, interview, December 12, 2007).

6.4 Others projects

6.4.1 Potable water supply systems

Among the basic needs required for self-sufficiency, including food, shelter, and access to healthcare and education, OK Baji has also prioritized access to potable water – a common demand in many villages of Eastern Palpa. For example, in Bhalaytar, 80 water taps were installed, making water available to 110 households. The circumstances surrounding the construction of a such water supply system, including the one in Chhis (pictured in Figure 6.8), usually follow a set pattern, as described below.

Figure 6.8 Potable water supply tank at Chhis



Source: Picture taken by author, January 2004.

When OK Baji first visits a village, residents repeatedly present him with the same demand: “We need water.” To understand their need, OK Baji accompanies villagers as they fetch water, usually a 30-minute-plus walk to a small fountain from which a tiny trickle springs forth. After filling their containers, the villagers then carry the water back to their homes. After such an ordeal, OK Baji sees how building a water supply system closer to the village would cut the burden of fetching water down from a one-hour endurance trek to a five-minute walk. OK Baji remarked that the benefits of a new water supply system are so great that the mere sight of flowing water near their homes is a cause for celebration among village residents, and newly installed water supply systems are often greeted with much fanfare, almost as if the entire village was suddenly engulfed by a festive atmosphere, and OK Baji often shared in these joyous occasions alongside the villagers.

Figure 6.9 Potable water supply pipe at Barani



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2007.

In December 2007, when OK Baji and I visited Barani, a village in the VDC of Mityal, the construction of a water supply system sponsored by OK Baji was about to start. According to him, the project's budget was 150,000 RS, of which 110,000 RS was already spent on construction materials, including already delivered stacks of water pipes and bags of cement powder. The remaining 40,000 RS would come in the form of labor input from village residents. The project called for the installation of over 2,000 meters of piping connecting a natural water source to a 6,000 liter water tank that fed five water taps, providing access to potable water to the village's 144 residents who lived in 15 households (K. Kakimi, interview, December 12, 2007).

6.4.2 Income generation projects

Another set of initiatives OK Baji established to help villagers too poor to buy food are income generation projects in the form of funds that subsidize the purchase of products

villagers can cultivate and sell for a profit, allowing them to repay the fund over time. As shown in Table 6.1, OK Baji has established a dozen such funds, including one for bee keeping in Sahalkot and another for purchasing agricultural seeds to grow in the fields of Phoksingkot. Since every village has a unique set of resources, e.g. one is better at growing ginger, while another is more efficient at cultivating chili peppers, OK Baji's income generation projects vary in scope from village to village.

6.4.3 Personal loans covering unexpected needs

As OK Baji visits the villages of Eastern Palpa, he usually runs across a local resident who, due to an accidental injury, is strapped for cash and unable to pay for urgently needed medical treatment. On such occasions, OK Baji extends a small personal loan based on the particular needs of the recipients.

For example, a family that lost its thatched-roofed house in a fire hoped to build a new fire-resistant tin-roofed house. To help the family, OK Baji extended an interest-free loan to the local NGO, from which the family could borrow funds needed to start building their new house. This arrangement prevented the family from paying a 24 percent interest rate had it borrowed money from other sources. The local NGO then took charge in collecting the loan and repaying OK Baji.

Another example was that of a boy who contracted a severe ear infection and risked going deaf unless promptly treated at a hospital. OK Baji lent the required amount of funds

for treatment to the local NGO, which in turn lent it to the boy's family. As in the previous example, the local NGO took lead in collecting and repaying OK Baji's loan.

6.5 *Nepalese perspectives on the social good served by OK Baji*

A towel wrapped around the neck, an old rucksack behind, beard covering his face, a mature Baje (old man) does his rounds of five hours of climbing and descending the hills. Leaving behind him Japan, a country like a bird of gold, he has been visiting the remote eastern area of Palpa district. Visiting every house, he makes it a point to inspect every classroom of the schools on the way. With the direction of the wind, every handicapped and underprivileged lot come hurtling to meet him. The villagers take care of the water spouts, the paths and the footpaths, and the bridges and crossovers (Thapa, 2004: 70).

Such is the way OK Baji's activities in Nepal are described in the book *Nepal's Well-wishers in Japan*, published in Nepalese and English, which features 24 Japanese who have contributed to Nepal, including Junko Tabei, the first woman to reach the summit of Mt. Everest, Ken Noguchi, who has collected garbage from Mt. Everest, and Yuichiro Miura, who at 70 years set a world record as the oldest person to climb Mt. Everest. Among this distinguished group, OK Baji is included as an icon of service (Thapa, 2004). In the next two sections we shift to the local Nepalese perspective regarding OK Baji, including those of

former government officials and the Maoist party of Nepal.

6.5.1 *Perspectives of development work government officials in Nepal*

In December 2006, I interviewed two former Palpa government officials previously charged with running development projects at the district and VDC levels and had extensively interfaced with many NGOs operating in Nepal, including OK Baji, over the years. These two individuals, Umanath Atrey and Jhapendra Bhadr, could clearly point out the differences between OK Baji's services from those of other NGOs.

Umanath Atrey, former Officer of the Local District Development Committee of Palpa

I met Umanath Atrey on December 22, 2006 at the office where he worked as Assistant Editor of the *Deorali News* (Figure 6.10) to discuss OK Baji's activities during his tenure as a former officer in Palpa's Local District Development Committee. Mahendra Thapa, the head teacher of Bhalaytar's Shree Krishna Devi secondary school, served as an interpreter during the interview. Umanath described the essence of OK Baji's services in the following manner:

Figure 6.10 Umanath Atrey, Assistant Editor of the *Deorali News*



Source: Left picture taken by author, right picture taken by Mahendra Thapa; December 2006.

OK Baji has a selfless social attitude. He lives like us, and he eats what we eat. He is the leader of village development. Is there any other possible leader like him? I do not see anyone else like him now. (U. Atrey, interview, December 22, 2006).

He also mentioned that OK Baji “sees the exact needs of people” and works “according to the needs of people” while most other NGOs focus on providing development awareness seminars, under the guidance and financial support of international NGOs, and never identify the true needs of the local villagers (U. Atrey, interview, December 22, 2006). In Umanath’s opinion, the only way to increase interest in the development of Palpa was to take action, as OK Baji has done, and not talk, which is what many other NGOs do. He also noted that OK Baji has not just increased the quality of life for villagers in Eastern Palpa, he has also created awareness and fostered self-reliance among them as well.

Umanath then pointed out another major difference between OK Baji and the other

NGOs – namely that while OK Baji allocated his entire capital budget towards village development projects, such as installing potable water systems, building schools and health posts, and establishing funds supporting medical treatment, education, and income generation, other local NGOs would not. According to Umanath, local NGOs often inflated expenses related projects sponsored by international NGOs in a bid to increase their cash flow. For example, if the per participant cost to serve a meal during a seminar was 50 RS, the local NGO would report the cost as 100 RS to the respective international NGO. Such distortions were problematic, and easily led to corruption. As evidence, Umanath noted that something was very wrong when he, a full-time assistant editor at a newspaper, received 3,000 RS per month while the heads of local NGOs, which are supposed to be non-profit operations, got four to five times as much.

Jhapendra Bhadur G.C., the former Chairman of District Development Committee

On the same day as the interview with Umanath, I spoke with Jhapendra Bhadur, the former Chairman of District Development Committee, by phone. Jhapendra was quick to point out how OK Baji distinguished himself from all other NGOs in Eastern Palpa and, like Umanath, also expressed concern about the tenuous operations and collapse of many NGOs in Nepal, which he blamed on their emphasis on seminars and workshops instead of nitty-gritty on-site development initiatives and the inclination by some local NGOs to profit from inflated or falsified expense reports (see Appendix D for additional information

regarding the collapse of local NGOs). According to him, while several NGOs wrote voluminous and excellent-looking reports, they never did any significant projects supporting the villagers. OK Baji, on the other hand, worked directly in the community to foster change, which is why he is considered a friend of all Palpali (those living in the Palpa District) (J. Bhadur G.C., interview, December 22, 2006).

6.5.2 *Perspective of the Maoist Party of Nepal*

Based on its actions with regards to the operations of NGOs in Eastern Palpa, it seems the Maoist Party was well aware of the differences distinguishing OK Baji from other NGOs in the region. In 2005, Maoist party of Nepal forced a halt on the activities of every NGO in Palpa until each provided certified accounting records on their various development projects. The impetus for the crackdown came from international aid agencies, which felt their donations were being diverted or absconded by the local NGOs. For example, a mismatch was identified between the financial records of a foreign NGO and its local affiliate – the financial support coming from outside of Nepal was much higher than the expenses invoiced in village development projects. Such cases of “missing” funds were becoming increasingly common and threatened to undermine the flow of international aid to Nepal if other NGOs halted or scaled back their operations, prompting the Maoist to crackdown on all local NGOs. In this environment, OK Baji was the only individual whose activities continued uninterrupted.

Nonetheless, several Maoist party members did interrogate OK Baji regarding his activities. To their first question, “What is your final goal?” he replied, “I do not understand the meaning of your question.” The members then asked him 12 other equally bewildering questions (listed in Table 6.3), before OK Baji realized that their line of inquiry was based on their negative experiences with other NGOs in the past.

Then, unexpectedly, OK Baji was called in for a meeting with the Palpa district leader of the Maoist party in December 2005. He left Jeevan Pokharel’s home in Bhalaytar before sunrise, traveling through dense fog on the backseat of Mahendra Thapa’s motorcycle, before arriving at the office. Surprisingly, the meeting lasted only five minutes, at the end of which OK Baji was told he could continue his activities in Nepal.

Table 6.3 The twelve questions asked by the Maoist Party of Nepal

Question	OK Baji's reply
1) Is your life in Nepal lavish (e.g. such as a hiring housekeeper) since the cost of living is much lower compared to Japan? We know many foreigners in Nepal who live this way. Are you one of them?	No
2) Are you making a large profit or receiving a high salary from a large NGO in Japan while being provided food and lodging by the local villagers?	No
3) In the past, many Indians came to Nepal and pushed their culture and language onto the Nepalese. Are you trying to do the same thing from Japan? Are you leading a group to take over our nation?	No
4) Are you a secret agent from the United Nations?	No
5) Are you on a mission to promote a specific religion?	No
6) Are you trying to make a profit by prospecting mines while visiting the villages?	No
7) Are you trying to find valuable artifacts from temples or ruins and bring them back to Japan?	No
8) Have you ever exploited people secretly?	No
9) Do you support a large savings account and own a luxurious mansion in Pokhara by using a small portion of the financial support coming from Japan?	No
10) Are you trying to be popular to support a politician and attract votes for him during an election?	No
11) Are you trying to earn money by opening a factory in the near future and hiring Nepalese at low wages?	No
12) Do you secretly have a Nepalese wife?	No

Apparently, in preparation for this meeting, members of the Maoist party had fanned out all over Eastern Palpa and meticulously verified details of each project OK Baji had completed in the villages, including how many people were involved, how much and where was the financial support sourced from, and the extent of participation by local residents in the projects. But unlike other NGOs, which maintained comprehensive records of their

activities, OK Baji did not document the details of his projects, which made the members of the Maoist party suspicious. However, the one record that did exist was the positive impression in the hearts and minds of villagers OK Baji had helped over the years throughout Eastern Palpa, many of which knew him personally.

As OK Baji later found out, many of the villagers interviewed by members of the Maoist party investigating his activities made personal appeals to them not to stop OK Baji's social services, with some even arguing on his behalf to keep already started development projects moving forward. For example, in one village, where the construction of a primary school sponsored by OK Baji was nearing completion and many residents had donated their time as laborers to help build the school, the entire village appealed to members of the Maoist party to allow OK Baji to finish the school, as it would foster a sense of accomplishment in their community and become a source of happiness for their children.

6.6 *Summary of the social good served by OK Baji*

What started from a simple act of applying a band-aid to an injured boy in Dholimara and grew into an array of social development projects spanning myriad villages throughout Eastern Palpa, OK Baji's acts towards social good all share one commonality – they began from a face-to-face encounter or interaction (see Table 6.4). The social good he has served over the past 14 years potentially indicates that for *phronetic* leaders, activities

(and ensuing results) should exist not just in written records and physical objects, but be fully articulated – each one told in its own story, contained in the hearts and mind of individuals, which others can relate to. This was the case of the villagers who voiced overwhelming support for OK Baji based on their collective experiences with his activities. However, how does such *phronetic* leadership maintain continuity in promoting social good over the long term?

Indeed, the impression the members of the Maoist party got of OK Baji based on their interviews with Palpali villagers demonstrated how deeply ingrained OK Baji had become as a provider of social good in their communities. The way in which his reputation was held in such high regard among so many villagers helped convince government officials that OK Baji was not like the other NGOs. His was a service that stood on its own merits by earning a place in the hearts of those he has directly interacted with and helped in Nepal over the years.

As a matter of fact, it is impossible to find examples of social services that were not initiated without OK Baji's direct interaction with corresponding recipients. The preponderance of face-to-face communication prior to service origination is very likely a strong factor contributing to the sustained longevity of OK Baji's social services relative to other NGOs in the region.

Table 6.4 Examples of the social good served by OK Baji

Social good	Service origination
Medical Support for ...	
a boy paralyzed from the waist down	Face-to-face meeting with boy's father
a boy with chronic head pains and fevers	"
a baby missing its right eye	Face-to-face meeting with baby's mother
a girl with cardiac complications	Face-to-face meeting with girl's father
Medical funds	Interactions with injured and children/adults and local NGOs
establishing medical facilities (health posts)	Face-to-face meeting with mother who lost her son
Educational Support for ...	
the literacy school in Dholimara	Interactions with residents of Dholimara
the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school in Bhalaytar	" of Bhalaytar
the primary school in Lankuri	" of Lankuri
matching funds (to subsidize teacher salaries)	Meetings with secondary school teachers and local NGOs
<i>Jhola</i> funds	Meetings with poor students, school officials, and local NGOs
Potable water supply systems	Meetings with village residents
Income generation projects	"
Personal loans covering unexpected needs	"

Chapter 7 OK Baji's virtuous habits for decision-making and taking action

7.1 *Examples of OK Baji's decisions*

OK Baji's repertoire of social services in Nepal has been greatly influenced by the decisions he has made over time, starting with his "first step" to live in Eastern Palpa to "review his childhood." After moving to Dholimara and realizing that people get distressed from over-fulfilling self-needs, he chose to "be reborn into a new self by letting the old self die," allowing him to "review himself" and become a better person by helping others (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007).

When helping people in Nepal, OK Baji is today a man of swift decisions, adept at tailoring his actions to fit the particular needs of those he encounters in the villagers of Eastern Palpa. This was the case in December 2006 in Dundanda, where I witnessed OK Baji help a family steeped in debt from their son's medical bills by writing a check covering their loan and arranging for the local NGO to manage the repayment process. Or, during our five-day trek in December 2007, during which OK Baji made on-the-spot decisions to help four children, each afflicted with a different ailment or condition. Such swift action has been honed from his years of experience in the field, but along the way he has encountered situations where "right" and "wrong" did not exist and the choice between the "correct" and "best" options was particularly difficult. In the next sections we look at several examples of

these types of situations.

7.1.1 *Provide a scholarship for one or more students?*

OK Baji first started providing educational scholarships in 1995, after discovering that students needed at least 2,500 RS a month to cover living expenses while attending college in the town of Tansen. At first he pondered two options: providing a 2,500 RS monthly stipend for one student, or giving 500 RS monthly stipends to five students.

Most students in Tansen paid for their living expenses in several ways, either by tutoring younger pupils, housekeeping the homes of wealth families, or selling fish caught from nearby rivers or cultivated produce. Based on this, OK Baji opted for the 5x500 RS scholarship option – a choice that became clearer only after he looked at the particular contextual needs of the students and understanding how this partial support would enrich their learning experience because it lightened the time burden spent on activities focusing on generating money to cover living expenses without making them fully dependent on a scholarship to fund their studies.

7.1.2 *Follow the lead of other NGOs or strike his own path?*

A few years after OK Baji started his social services in Nepal, he began doubting the sustainability and effectiveness of his efforts. Compared to other NGOs, whose staff at their Tansen-based offices designed action plan, priorities, and budgets based on information brought in from local village representatives, OK Baji's go-it-alone approach of walking to

each village and issuing help on-the-spot seemed limited in reach and scope, and he pondered adopting the operational standards employed by other more professional NGOs.

To move forward and decide how to improve his activities, OK Baji took into account the unfortunate outcomes of several villagers he had met over the years. For example, he recalled talking to an old man from the VDC of Mityal whose sick grandson died as he carried him to a health post located over five hours away on foot. OK Baji also remembered the widowed husband (from the same village as the old man) whose sick wife also died as he carried her on his back to get treatment at a hospital located in a nearby town. Lastly, OK Baji thought about the emaciated young mother he had helped by bringing her to a hospital in Tansen and providing milk to her infant while she recovered.

Looking back at these experiences, OK Baji recognized one common factor – every time villagers become ill, the mountains they call home transform into their own worst enemy by becoming obstacles on their path towards help (K. Kakimi, 2001: 72). No NGO, regardless of its sophistication, could have overcome the impediment of remoteness and helped the three individuals described above in time without going to the actual site and providing tailored aid, as needed. Based on this realization, OK Baji decided to stick to his own way and provide aid based on what perceived from his five senses while at the frontlines of the Nepalese villages.

7.1.3 *Learning from failures before taking the next step*

Although the first years of OK Baji's social services were filled with positive experiences and outcomes, it had not been an easy road. Many projects OK Baji started, especially those involving tasks he had never done before, like building schools, were fraught with setbacks and failure. For example, during one of his first school construction projects, OK Baji funded the purchase of construction materials based on a proposal prepared by local builders from the village. However, months later he discovered the builders had used inferior grade roofing material in a bid to save cash, inadvertently jeopardizing the durability of the school's roof. From that point onwards, OK Baji shifted the funding structure of school construction projects from an upfront-lump-sum payment of materials to a payment-in-kind system.

OK Baji learned a more poignant lesson – concerning the nature of greed – when he delegated the task of distributing 30 kilograms of used clothes from Japan to a local leader at Dholimara. The leader nominated a group of people to come pick clothes in an orderly fashion, but as soon as the boxes were opened, chaos ensued. Villagers scrambled to pick clothes, discarding items they felt unsuitable, and choosing only those articles they liked or best suited their children. The intended goodwill represented by the donated clothes had completely evaporated during, and OK Baji realized that presenting an overwhelming variety of choice in an area where it was previously non-existent gave rise to greed among an

otherwise non-materialistic group of individuals.

This disappointing experience led OK Baji to question whether his presence in Eastern Palpa negatively influenced the local villagers' sense of self-sufficiency, their dependence on aid from others, and their perspective on life in the mountains. However, OK Baji concluded that every failure he encountered was actually a step in the right direction – a learning opportunity to be exploited. If he could constructively convey the goodwill from Japan to Eastern Palpa, he would be rewarded back in greater amounts of goodwill from the people in Nepal in the form of their joy, happiness, and delight. His task, then, was to return to the villagers of Eastern Palpa the positive goodwill they bestowed onto him through his process of learning by doing.

7.1.4 *What is fair aid? Who should be helped first? When should it end?*

Early on, as OK Baji tried helping villagers in Eastern Palpa, he faced difficulties coping with an ever-increasing flow of people asking for aid that threatened to exceed the limits of his abilities to provide. At that point, his friends in Dholimara advised him to establish a set of basic rules to guide how he distributed assistance and set limits in order to prevent him from getting overwhelmed with requests. But setting limits was not easy. OK Baji wondered how he could prioritize who to help first, what assistance was fair, and for how long should aid be provided. He was not sure if adequate guidelines governing such decisions could be even be made. In his mind, all he could see was an endless string of

villagers pleading him for help.

This was especially the case with physically disabled villagers, which OK Baji hesitated supporting due to their sheer numbers in Nepal. He felt that if he helped one disabled person, a floodgate of requests to help the others would open. Meanwhile, OK Baji doubted if his small contributions of aid had any significant impact on those he tried to help. As OK Baji bounced these self-doubts around in his head, he was reminded of a story he had heard from Japan that offered guidance:

In autumn, a high priest at a temple was sweeping a garden covered by leaves even as new leaves kept falling from the trees to the ground, one after another. A temple novice came to the garden and remarked to the high priest that his efforts were meaningless. The priest calmly replied to the novice that for every swept leaf, the garden became as clean as the space of one leaf (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007).

The key to providing aid was not to focus on what was to come, but on what could be done. In helping the villagers, OK Baji understood that problems could be solved one at a time as long as he kept going, and the crux was for him not to focus on the “constant flow” of help (the falling leaves) but on the “here and now” (each swept leaf). Since then, OK Baji has helped over 80 disabled people throughout Eastern Palpa, and in 2004 chartered a bus to bring 33 of them to receive treatment at a hospital in Katmandu (Kakimi, 2001: 181).

7.1.5 “Give my son a life” – whether or not to help an individual patient

When OK Baji and I visited Sahalkot during the sixth day of our trek of January 2004, we met Niglarga Darlami (Figure 7.1), a boy OK Baji had previously helped. He described the boy’s story as follows:

In December 1995, during a three-week trek, I was heading east out of Dholimara and about to go northwest when I met Yam, Niglarga’s father, on the path. He had been waiting at that spot for three days to ask if I could visit his village. I agreed and we reached his place in Sahalkot around ten o’clock that evening. The next morning, I visited Yam’s house where he presented me with a letter, written in English, explaining how his son’s heart was perforated and needed prompt surgery to fix, otherwise the boy would die before long. The letter closed with the line, “Give my son a life” (K. Kakimi, interview, January 8, 2004).

Nine months later, OK Baji accompanied Niglarga as they traveled to a hospital in Calcutta, India, where the boy’s heart was successfully operated on. After recovering, Niglarga went on to study engineering in Katmandu after graduating from the secondary school in Sahalkot (which was rebuilt with OK Baji’s help). However, this positive outcome might not have materialized had OK Baji hesitated longer than he did to make a choice back in 1995.

Figure 7.1 Niglarse's family at Sahalkot



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

Note: The person on the right is Yam, Niglarse's father; the third person from the right is Niglarse.

When OK Baji first read Yam's letter for help, he was deeply moved and soon became torn between conflicting interests. On the one side, he wanted to help Yam get treatment for his son, but on the other hand, several villagers asked that he prioritize funding the building of schools and health posts to benefit an entire community. The dilemma was difficult – help the individual at the expense of the group or help the group at the expense of the individual – and OK Baji was unable to make up his mind for weeks as he pondered what to do.

Then OK Baji got word from his daughter, Aki, whose son had successfully recovered from surgery to fix a heart defect similar to Niglarse's. After OK Baji told Aki about his dilemma, she pleaded to him to "Please help the boy, I will take care of the expense from the surgery" (Kakimi, 2001: 188). Her words prompted OK Baji into action to help Niglarse. He recalled the moments back in Nepal after returning from Calcutta:

These two persons, a boy [Niglarge] and his father [Yam], believed me and went with me to India. They were the ones who gave me such big sense of joys when his surgery was success. Thanks to these two, I got power and energy. Their figure will remain in my mind forever (Kakimi, 2001: 189).

Looking at the six examples of OK Baji's decision-making presented above we find his process to make decisions observed the following four basic rules:

- Consider the recipient's specific and contextual need.
- Use information gleaned from all five senses at the frontline.
- Learn from past mistakes and failures.
- Act based on what was possible in each particular case.

A common aim underpinning OK Baji's decision-making process is his relentless pursuit to provide social good and improve the villagers' way of life. In pursuing this aim for over 14 years, OK Baji's decision-making process with respect to social good has become second nature to him, a type of creative routine, or virtuous habit, stemming from his repeated process of seeking out those who need help, assessing and identifying their needs, and executing plans to provide aid. Doing this has generated a high level of tacit knowledge regarding how to provide social good, a perspective looked at in Chapter 10. In the next

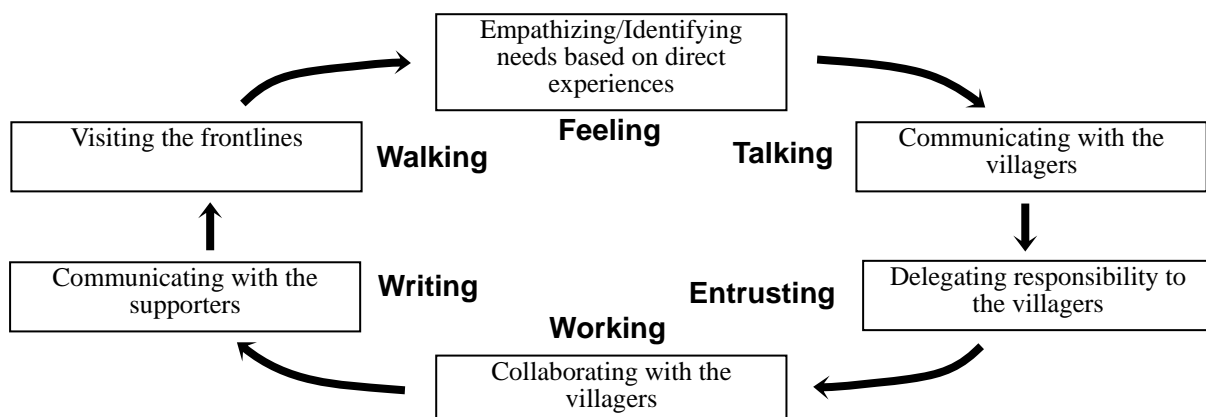
section we look at the actions OK Baji takes as a result of his decision-making process.

7.2 Examples of OK Baji's actions

OK Baji is a man of (inimitable) action. For example, during our five-day trek in December 2007, when we walked over 15 kilometers every day climbing up and down heights spanning from 500 to 1,500 meters above sea level, I could barely keep up with his pace. He was 69 at the time, 27 years older than me (a eight-time full marathon runner).

Despite OK Baji's impressive stamina, he is after all just human, and on occasion has taken ill while trekking the Nepalese highland. Once, in 2005, he was hospitalized for two days after drinking contaminated water. Despite such setbacks, OK Baji has never stopped walking from village to village to provide his social services following a process that, based on my direct observations of his activities, is composed of six gerunds: walking, feeling, talking, entrusting, working, and writing, as shown in Figure 7.1. In the next section we look at each step of this process, starting with walking.

Figure 7.2 OK Baji's process to provide social services



7.2.1 *Walking – visiting the frontlines*

OK Baji visits villages – the most common frontline where he conducts his services – by foot. He claims he can go anywhere by taking the “number 11 bus” – his two legs. This bus once took him on a 12-hour, 50-kilometer trip through rain soaked and muddy trails from Alabanjan to Bhalaytar, to report to the village residents the good news that their request to build a new school had been accepted. This bus also carried him for four hours to meet 10 families whose homes had been lost in a fire. In fact, it could be said that the number 11 bus is the starting point of his social services delivery process.

Walking to see the frontline is also a critical tool in the assessment of project viability. OK Baji recalled responding to a village request for 500,000 RS to improve potable water collection by building a water tank closer to the village, cutting down the time to fetch water from the existing 70-minute trip. However, after walking to the village and surveying the nearest water source with the help of an engineer, OK Baji concluded that a water tank could only be built 50 meters closer, cutting down the time to fetch water by only five minutes. Based on the information gained from the frontline, he decided not to support the village’s request, as it would not have resulted in an efficient allocation of his limited financial resources.

7.2.2 *Feeling – empathizing/identifying needs based on direct experiences*

When OK Baji visits a village, he does not just make decisions based on what he

directly observes, but also relies on what he perceives from his five senses. As described in Chapter 5, when a girl with boils on her scalp asked for his help, OK Baji physically inspected her head, and in so doing could better sense her fear and anxiety, smell her condition, and listen to her voice. At that moment he was able to get a brief yet full picture of her circumstances and make a decision according to that fleeting perspective. Likewise, OK Baji empathizes with villagers by living as they do – he sleeps outside, eats the same food, walks as they do, and is exposed to the same elements. In other words, he understands the suffering, the plight, and the needs of those he meets because he places himself as closely as he can into their shoes. Concerning this empathy, OK Baji remarked:

Humans can be moved by a small nudge and become larger. What motivates us to move is really a simple thing, but this sensitivity varies from one person to another. So, after seeing the same thing, one person will be moved to action while another will not be moved (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007).

Individuals react differently when confronted by the same set of circumstances, and even the same individual may decide differently based on the empathy gained over time. For example, OK Baji recalled how, when he first started walking in Nepal, the only requests that moved him – made him respond – were those delivered to him in English. This stemmed from his inability to speak Nepalese. The problem was that such requests usually originated from the most influential people in the villages, like the chiefs, the VDC heads, and the head

teachers of the schools, and tended to focus on the same things – new schools, getting desks and chairs, building water supply systems, building new roads and bridges, etc. Only after OK Baji was able to talk with villagers in Nepalese did he begin to understand the true needs of the previously “voiceless” group – those who did not know who to speak up to when they did not have enough food to eat, lacked wood to survive the cold winters, or could not access medical treatment for a loved one (K. Kakimi, interview, December 13, 2006). At that point OK Baji began to distinguish the difference between the vocal “requests” and the silent “cries” for help, and he has been trying to identify the true suffering of villagers by directly empathizing with their plight.

7.2.3 *Talking – communicating with the villagers*

OK Baji says he been fortunate to have had others with whom to consult whenever he had to make a difficult decision. Every time he identifies a particularly urgent need in a village, he always talks with someone he trusts. He has at least one such “consultant” in every VDC of Eastern Palpa with whom he clarifies his concerns regarding the problems villagers face and which needs should be addressed first.

One “consultant” is Jeevan Pokharel, who accompanied us during our trek of December 2006 to visit villages near Bhalaytar. As we departed one village and headed towards the next one, OK Baji talked with Jeevan to confirm the economic conditions of the previously visited village and verify if a request, for example to build a new school or a water

supply system, was financially justifiable or even viable. Another “consultant” is Bhuvan Singh Thapa, the leader of the local NGO at Mityal, who helped OK Baji check if any women could provide milk in response to a recently widowed father’s request for help to feed his four-day-old infant.

In the case of providing medical assistance for children, OK Baji consults neighbors to confirm the financial position of the child’s family and verify if they are unable to pay medical expenses by themselves. There have been several cases in which officials from the United Mission Hospital in Tansen have asked OK Baji if they should provide subsidized care to patients who have presented referrals signed by local politicians declaring the patient’s inability to pay due to financial hardship. However, hospital officials have recognized that local politicians sometimes issue such referrals in order to win votes from key constituents, and the only way to confirm the authenticity of a patient’s financial situation is to ask OK Baji directly.

7.2.4 *Entrusting – delegating responsibility to the villagers*

Verifying needs is one thing, getting reliable help to execute projects that require significant supervision is quite another. On this point OK Baji remarked:

Oftentimes, during the discussion with others to create solutions that fulfill certain needs, new problems arise, leading to a new set of unforeseen needs requiring new solutions, which lead to other problems, over and over. Eventually the entire process

turns into whirlwind where only words are produced and no concrete action plans are created. However, by delegating responsibility to the local villagers and entrusting onto them the task of fixing problems, they become the ones who, armed with frontline knowledge of their situations, find concrete ways to fulfill missing needs (K. Kakimi, December 13, 2006).

OK Baji once encountered a group of physically disabled villagers who needed support, but he had no idea how to help them. Rather than engage in a long discussion, he instead presented the local NGO with a 100,000 RS personal check and asked the entire village to collaboratively design and implement their own solutions, financed by his donation, to help their disabled neighbors. The local NGO then took lead in distributing funds based on plans presented by villagers. This approach gave rise to several novel ideas aimed at improving mobility and access throughout the village, many of which were ultimately implemented. OK Baji used this financing scheme in other VDCs, where it was put to use in different ways. For example, one VDC opted to equally distribute financial aid among disabled residents at each of its nine villages, while another provided aid according the severity of the recipient's handicap.

Delegating responsibility in this manner is risky, since the potential to misuse or lose funds, either intentionally in unneeded projects or accidentally into ideas that do not pan out, is high. From experience, OK Baji has learned that providing appropriately designed yet

easy-to-follow guidelines to help local NGOs make funding decisions is critical. This was the case for the 22 medical funds OK Baji established in each VDC of Eastern Palpa, which allowed the local NGOs to operate effectively without OK Baji's supervision. However, when a breach of trust occurs and funds are intentionally misused, OK Baji enforces a ban on all his aid to the entire VDC where the offending local NGO is located. Although such comprehensive bans are harsh, the threat of an aid ban helps keep NGOs from straying from their intended mission of providing aid.

7.2.5 *Working – collaborating together with the villagers*

OK Baji would rather partner with local villagers than teach them (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007). For example, during the construction of the irrigation channel in Chhis, he helped the laborers break hard rock and dig the channel using a hammer, chisel, and shovel. At the same time, OK Baji expects residents to contribute to the projects being implemented in their village, as during the construction of the secondary school in Bhalaytar or the primary school in Lankuri.

OK Baji recalled how, during his first years in Nepal, he scattered financial support from one to village to the next based on the requests he received. Before long, he discovered that when a project was completed without the involvement of the local community, the finished product was treated as someone else's property and not held in high regard. This was the case with the women's literacy school in Dholimara. By contrast, in those projects where

local villagers made a significant contribution, usually in the form of unpaid labor, the results were embraced by the community and treated as a valued part of the village. This was what happened during the reconstruction of the five-classroom primary school in Chendada, a village in the VDC of Sahalkot, where local contribution – 150 man-days from each of 31 village households – constituted 60.8 percent of the project's total budget (or 465,000 RS at 100 RS per man-day). Of all the tasks that made up local contribution, including porting stones, digging ground, and moving soil, the most difficult was fetching sand (to mix with cement) from a riverbank some 700 meters downhill from the construction site. By the time the school was completed, almost 50,000 kilograms of sand has been used, carried in 25-kilogram sacks by the villagers in a physically challenging uphill climb that took almost four hours to complete.

Such intense local involvement in the project fortifies the sense of community among village residents, who both witness and receive the fruits of their own labor. However, such “soft” positive results are impossible to quantify, and OK Baji's approach of using unpaid local labor has been criticized because it does not create real employment in the local community. OK Baji concedes that such criticism is fundamentally correct, but he counter argues that paying salaries for projects that improve the community creates problems of its own. For example, OK Baji once tried to start a construction project and after asking local villagers to join, several dozen volunteers showed up. But after telling them no wages would

be paid, the volunteers left and OK Baji was forced to abandon the project. The reason the villagers did not help was because they had previously worked with an international NGO that paid them a salary, which they naturally expected OK to do as well. As a result, the villagers were not motivated by the notion of helping improve their community, but by the prospect of making money. Even to this day, OK Baji has never paid wages in any of the projects he has helped organize, choosing instead to aid only those villagers who demonstrate the willingness to volunteer their time and effort to help their community.

7.2.6 *Writing – communicating with supporters*

As mentioned in Chapter 5, OK Baji is a prolific letter writer, sending over 500 letters each year to donors who have financially supported his activities in Nepal. Since he spends so much of his time trekking through the villages, OK Baji writes letters whenever the occasion allows – while resting on a trail, before or after a meal, before going to sleep, etc. In them, OK Baji details how the donors' financial support was used and what results were generated. By writing a personalized account to each donor, OK Baji maintains good contacts and keeps them up-to-date concerning his activities (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007).

Yoshiko Sakata, a representative of the Japanese Organization for Infants and Children (JOFIC) and a longtime sponsor of OK Baji, described the experience of receiving letters from OK Baji:

I have received so many letters from him the past 14 years that I have stored them in

two boxes. Each letter is like a report, detailing his work closely, concisely, and precisely. At the same time, he candidly describes his experiences, including any failures on a project, allowing me to relive what he is doing in Nepal, which is a pleasure. I have heard from other Japanese [OK Baji] supporters, some of whom have made donations ranging from ten yen to one million yen, and they have all received equally detailed letters from him. I remember one day in Pokhara, when I was with him, he wrote 24 letters on the spot, each one neatly handwritten and detailed. In a way, his letters symbolize his character (Y. Sakata, interview, January 26, 2007).

OK Baji is very modest when complimented for his activities in Nepal, often saying that what he has done is not special and anyone is capable of doing it. Yet, his son, Hiroyuki Kakimi, believes that only “OK Baji can do what OK Baji has done” (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007). After all, you have to be extremely physically fit, devoted, and diligent to carry out all the services OK Baji provides in the mountains of Nepal.

7.2.7 Small yet inimitable creative routines

OK Baji does not just write letters to donors and supporters; he also writes notes on the spot whenever he meets a villager whose needs he can attend to. As described in Chapter 5, OK Baji routinely issues “letters of introduction” to individuals unable to afford medical treatment, documents problems he encounters in villages into notebooks, and creates “issue

notes” designed to create action plans for ongoing or future development projects. These small acts are second nature to him and can be considered his creative routines. But two other creative routines – living modestly and maximizing the potential of every donation – greatly influence the effectiveness of OK Baji’s services in Nepal, as described below.

Living modestly – saving on everyday things

OK Baji tries to minimize daily expenses as much as possible, for example by reusing every envelope received from Japan or using just one cup of water every morning to brush his teeth, wash his face, and clean his neck – routines he practices even while in Japan. He uses socks to the point of disrepair, rotating how he puts them on so wear-holes are moved to non-critical places on his feet.

Although he prefers to eat at a villager’s home, on those occasions when he does eat out (either in Nepal or in Japan) he chooses inexpensive fast-food restaurants over anything else. And when friends join him for a meal, he convinces them to eat at a cheaper place because the amount each person would “save” (e.g. by eating a ¥600 meal versus a ¥1,000 meal) would be enough to buy a notebook and a pen for up to 40 children in the remote villagers of Eastern Palpa.

OK Baji once recalled walking past a Japanese restaurant in Pokhara that served his favorite dish *Tendon* (bowl of tempura over rice). He was about to order a dish but hesitated to spend the 300 RS for the meal – roughly 10 times the cost of an average meal in Eastern

Palpa. Instead he ate a cheaper meal and spent the remaining amount on a shawl for a recently widowed woman in Dholimara whose husband had perished in a landslide. Over the next three years, the widow thanked OK Baji for the shawl, which she considered a tribute to her late husband.

Lastly, regarding lodging, whenever OK Baji is unable to rest at a villager's home or out in the open in his sleeping, he stays at inexpensive hotels. Twice, in Tansen, where there are several hotels catering to tourists with prices ranging from 400 to 700 RS per person per night, OK Baji and I stayed in a latrine-smelling room with moldy blankets and no running water at a hotel for just 75 RS a night. It was a truly miserable experience, yet OK Baji claimed to be used to it and often stays in such places whenever the occasion calls for it in order to save money.

Maximize the potential of every donation

OK Baji strives to use the entirety of funds received from donors to cover expenses that directly impact the quality of life of villagers in Nepal. While most NGOs allocate budgets for the transportation, lodging, and per diem expenses of local staff, OK Baji does not. Whenever he visits a village, he eats whatever food he is offered by local residents, and sleeps in whatever lodging is provided, when available. He even uses his Japanese pension of ¥300,000 per year to buy roundtrip plane tickets between Japan and Nepal.

OK Baji recalled how, when he first set foot in Nepal, he did not know the true value

of ¥1,000, or how, to a poor family, even ¥100 meant all the difference between starving or having several kilograms of rice. Over the years, however, he has taken great pleasure in discovering ways of increasing the value of funds entrusted to him by donors, such as turning ¥100 into ¥120 or ¥10,000 into ¥12,000 or perhaps even ¥15,000. This way of thinking has, over time, become second nature to OK Baji, but the problem was how to confirm if he really succeeded to increase value or not, beyond the limits imposed by financial metrics. What he discovered, after writing back to donors informing how their donations were used, was that many supporters were surprised, even delighted, to discover how much the outcome of their contributions exceeded their expectations. The value created in this manner was priceless, with one Japanese supporter even praising OK Baji's activities for "brightening the life of cash" (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007).

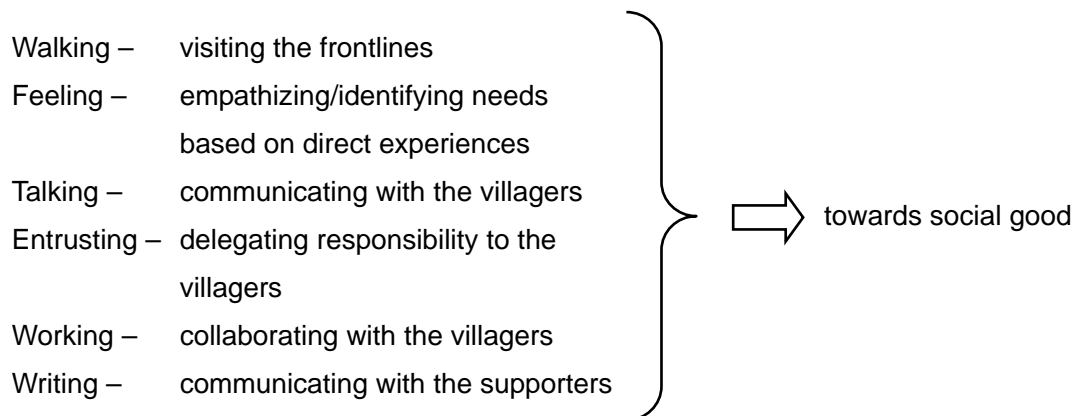
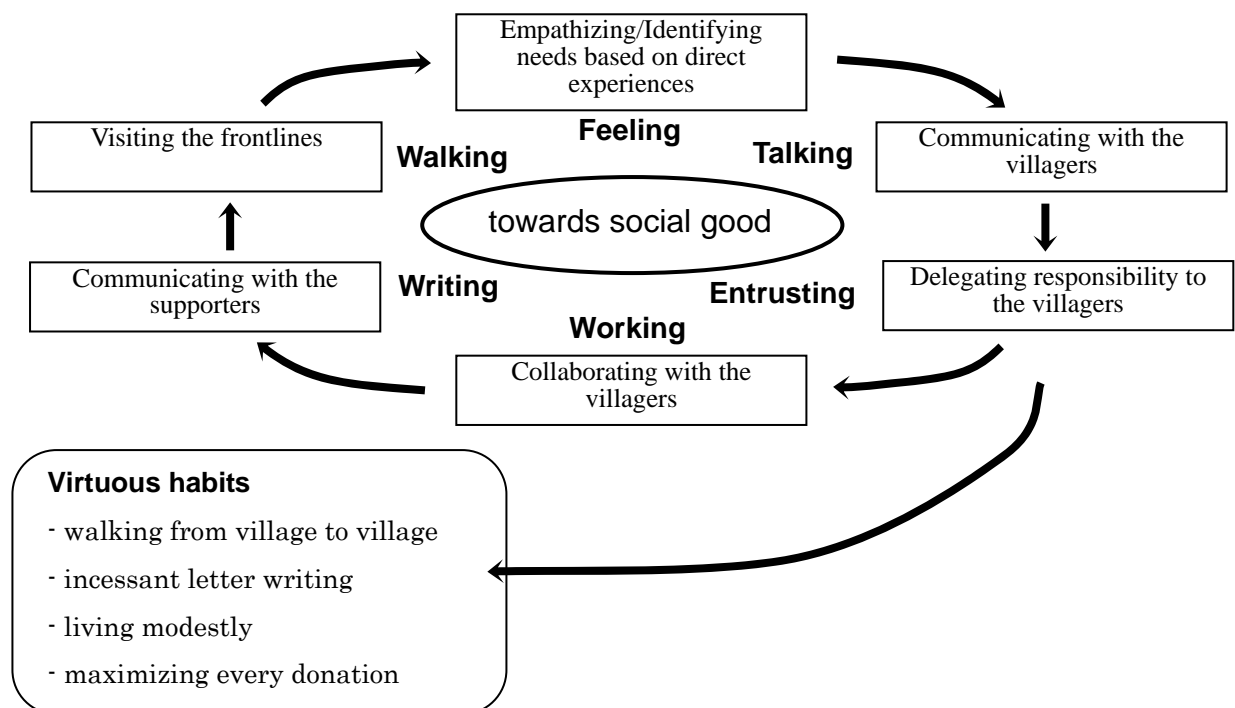
7.3. Summary of OK Baji's virtuous habits of decision-making and taking action

While in Nepal providing his social services, OK Baji has faced many difficult situations that have tested and shaped the way he makes decisions in the field. The six examples of his decisions presented in this chapter, which represent only a fraction of the many choices he has made over the years, exemplify how OK Baji's process to make decisions is guided by the following four principles:

- Make decisions based on an individual's specific and contextual need.

- Make decisions based information gleaned from all five senses at the frontline.
- Make decisions based on lessons from past mistakes and failures.
- Make decisions based on what is possible in each particular case.

One key finding related to these principles is that OK Baji considers his social service to provide social good in Eastern Palpa to be a continuous and endless process – like the sweeping of autumn leaves endlessly raining down from the trees. This process is composed of six sequential steps, embodied by the gerunds of walking, feeling, talking, entrusting, working, and writing (shown in Figure 7.2), each one equally critical towards making the sustained provision of social good a reality (Figure 7.3). After repeatedly performing these six steps, guided by the four principles listed above, OK Baji's actions gave rise to four virtuous habits – walking from village to village, incessant letter writing, living modestly, and maximizing every donation – that have become second nature to him over the years (Figure 7.4). In effect, OK Baji's way of living, his lifestyle, has merged with the six steps of his process to provide social services, and he now relentlessly pursues social good as a way of life – the signature calling card of a *phronetic* leader.

Figure 7.3 Summary of OK Baji's actions**Figure 7.4 OK Baji's decision-making process and virtuous habits towards social good**

Chapter 8 OK Baji's Values and Ethics

This chapter now looks at the third element of OK Baji's *phronesis* – his values, or beliefs about what is right, wrong, and important in life, and his ethics, or moral principles that control or influence his behavior (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2000). I was exposed to OK Baji's values and ethics during our December 2006 trek from Bhalaytar to Panthe, when I expressed my concerns about the plight of three former students I once taught at the secondary school in Bhalaytar. Since finishing their studies (at the 12th grade) they had returned to the school where I was a volunteer teacher and expressed interest in helping me teach and help younger students in the community. The problem, however, was that the monthly salaries they were offered was just 1,500 RS, three times lower than an average teacher's salary, and I felt compelled to pay them extra money to reward their motivated and enthusiastic efforts, but I was not sure if this was the right thing to do. After hearing my doubts, OK Baji offered the following advice:

I suppose the three of them are working hard based on their willingness to help their own community. If that is the case, then they will not be satisfied by a higher salary, even one of 2,000 RS. What is more, if they were given suddenly given such a pay raise, their hearts would be broken (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006).

Although I ultimately followed OK Baji's advice, I could not help but recall how passionate, energetic, and devoted my three former students were as teacher aides. I asked

OK Baji how he could make such a seemingly heartless and cold decision by himself. His reply was simple:

Sometimes I also feel compelled to offer something to someone I feel is deserving, but then I realize I only want to make myself feel better. Although in such situations it really depends on each case, I usually choose not to give (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006).

The wisdom of OK Baji's response was stunning, for I had not considered my own feelings played such a role in wanting to help my former students. OK Baji also mentioned that this happened to anyone who wanted to "look good" or "feel good" by offering aid. On such occasions, the best move was to really think through the reasons for helping. This is a value and an ethic OK Baji has cultivated over time after numerous encounters with a diverse crowd of individuals needing help in the mountains of Eastern Nepal. In the next sections we look at the two principal concepts that guide OK Baji's values and ethics – becoming selfless and becoming useful.

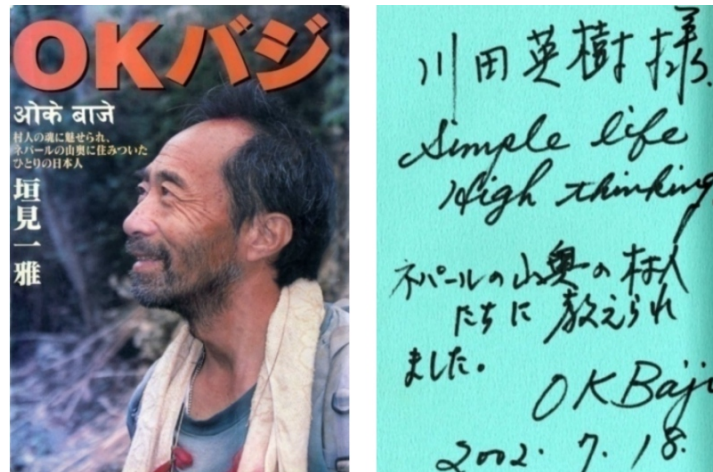
8.1 *Becoming selfless*

8.1.1 *Simple life, high thinking*

In July 2002, when OK Baji was a guest speaker in the Global Citizenship class at Hitotsubashi ICS, I asked him to autograph my copy of his autobiography, *OK Baji*. In

addition to his signature, he wrote the line, “Simple life high thinking,” followed by a memo in Japanese that translates as “Learned from the villagers deep in the mountains” (Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1 The front cover of OK Baji’s autobiography and signed back cover



Source: Scanned by author, July 2002.

Four years later, I asked him the significance of the words “simple life,” to which he replied:

Being in such a place deep in the mountains, “simple life” means to work, to eat, and to sleep. These three things are not complicated yet are very important to me. They represent a good and ideal lifestyle. While I am in the Nepalese villages, to work means to walk. So, I have been “walking,” then “eating,” and finally “sleeping.” That is my “simple life.” It is what I have learned from the villagers, who see these three things as the basis of human beings. It is what they live for. Unlike the more urban areas, life in the villages is not complicated. Working hard, eating and drinking to energize a tired body, and then sleeping fitfully to recover is the simple

life of a villager.

I remember witnessing a man from Katmandu asking a local villager in Eastern Palpa, “How can only three things make you happy? Dogs and cats can do the same thing!” The villager smiled at the man and replied, “This is good enough for me. I am happy living this way.” The man clearly doubted the villager’s sincerity, but the villager kept smiling naturally, and bashfully repeated, “I am satisfied by these three...” (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

OK Baji recalled being impressed by the sincere purity of the villager’s response, which made him realize that living in such simple terms was something worth pursuing. Simplicity in life became a goal and a value OK Baji has sought to achieve ever since.

At the same time, OK Baji noted how different the outlooks on life were between people living in urban areas and those in the mountains:

It seems that the villagers have learned to extract happiness from not knowing, or “unknowing.” Most of them do not know what transpires outside the confines of their village. As long as they are in the village, they can work, eat, and sleep. Meanwhile, those living in urban areas, like Katmandu, perceive themselves to lack something all the time, either a TV or a car, and seek things because they feel “I want this and that.” Despite already having so much, they continue seeking more. On the other hand, the villagers seem happy despite owning so little and as long as they

can work, eat, and sleep, they are happy. (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

I also asked OK Baji what his line “high thinking” meant. According to him, it is the moment when he frees his mind, becomes selfless, and able to empathize with and prioritize others (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006). As an example, he described when he was once invited to see a seriously ill child who lived in a very distant and remote village. Thinking only of himself, he would have hesitated to undertake such a long trek, but after becoming selfless and thinking about the child, he found the inspiration and motivation to walk for hours to reach the distant village. However, he mentioned that the process of becoming selfless was not always easy:

On several occasions, I would hesitate after considering walking such long distances. Even though I was aware of the emotional rewards awaiting me in the end, such prospects did not always outweigh the perceived burden of a two-hour, or even a one-hour walk. It is during those moments that my “self” overwhelms me by saying, “No. I am not going.” But, sometimes, I am able to change my mind and decide to walk. After all, I rarely hesitated or regretted walking for hours on end to visit a village, so why now? Once, a few days after a fire razed 10 households in a village, several of those who had lost their homes came to me asking if I could visit their village. At first, I only thought of the burden of making the two-hour-walk and felt like responding, “No, I am not visiting.” But, after considering their plight, I decided

to go. Then, as we walked up and down the trail towards their village, the feelings of burden gave way to more meaningful thoughts concerning who would be waiting for me what I could do for them. (K. Kakimi, interview. July 12, 2006).

OK Baji equates “high thinking” with rising above the personal to be “selfless” in order to better serve others. “Becoming selfless” by observing a simple life of walking, eating, and sleeping has become a value to OK Baji observes.

8.1.2 *One day, one discard*

The process of becoming selfless, according to OK Baji, is not an easy one. It requires consistent self-sacrifice and self-discipline, as embodied in his four words: “One day, one discard.” I first became aware of the meaning behind these words after visiting OK Baji’s home in Dholimara for the first time in October 2001.

OK Baji’s home – a hut really – was adjacent to a field of yellow rape-blossoms. At five meters in length and width, it was not big, but average in size for one person compared to other village households. Its red walls needed periodic maintenance in the form of new coats of a clay and buffalo dung mixture, and the structure’s only room was sparsely, yet comfortably, furnished with a rectangular wooden table, a long wooden bench that doubled as a narrow bed, a dusty fireplace in one corner, and a backwards facing calendar that hung from one wall. Four lines of handwritten kanji, scrawled on the otherwise calendar’s blank backside, read as follows:

一日一善

一日一謝

一日一禪

一日一捨

The first two lines, pronounced *ichi nich i chi zen* and *ichi nich i chi sha*, translate as “One day one deed” and “One day one appreciation,” respectively. Although the third and fourth lines are pronounced the same way as the first and second lines, their meanings are quite different. While the symbols 善, or *zen*, and 謝, or *sha*, mean “good, virtue, or deed” and “gratitude or appreciation,” respectively, the symbols 禪, also *zen*, and 捨, also *sha*, mean “meditation” and “throw away, or discard.” The four lines then translate to:

One day one deed

One day one appreciation

One day one meditation

One day one discard

The first two lines belong to a common Japanese saying, but the last two lines are OK Baji’s own creation, and symbolize the dream he strives to achieve (K. Kakimi, interview, June 28, 2007).

But what exactly does “One day one discard” mean? OK Baji explained that it is connected with human desires and needs. Although he is content with a simple life composed

of walking, eating, and sleeping, reaching that level of satisfaction required shedding many things, some of which were emotionally difficult to let go of. For example, materialistic needs were the easiest to discard, but emotions and desires stemming from vanity, pride, anger, envy, fear, greed, and jealousy were difficult to isolate, compartmentalize, and strip away.

OK Baji has tried to discard one such basic human emotion or desire every day to free his self from their confining limitations, which he has experienced while trekking through the villages. He recalled one episode when a villager was vocally upset with him and OK Baji held his own temper in check to prevent anger from boiling to the surface, allowing him to stay calm despite the man's tirade. OK Baji also mentioned how he once thought about all the good he had done, but then concluded that boasting his accomplishments was not right (as related to his valuing usefulness higher than success, as explained later in this chapter). These were two examples of the "One day one discard" discipline of making voluntary sacrifices in order to become selfless.

8.1.3 Contentment (*Chi Soku*)

In pursuing a simple(r) life, OK Baji has long considered the villagers of the remote regions of Eastern Palpa the role models who have taught him new perspectives and a new way of living. Despite their simple, rugged, and harsh living conditions, OK Baji has experienced the Palpali to be a happy, hospitable, and generous, reminding him of Mohandas

Karamchand Gandhi's (the liberator of India) quote, "Contentment is the richest treasure I own." OK Baji sees "contentment" as *Chi*, meaning "to know," and *Soku*, meaning "enough or sufficient," in Japanese. *Chi Soku*, a concept preached in Buddhism, literally translates from Japanese as "to perceive the present condition as satisfactory and without complaints" (Shinmura, 2005).

OK Baji has long considered the villagers of Nepal to be endowed with a high level of *Chi Soku*, which he has tried to emulate ever since he first set foot in Nepal. He remembered once walking by several villagers carrying large sacks of rice and stacks of firewood on their shoulders. He asked if they were OK under their heavy loads (some as much as 50 kilograms), and none complained. Then one of them remarked, "This is for us to eat, we need to eat." (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006). Walking and eating was all that mattered to them, everything else was inconsequential. This was a prime example of the value of *Chi Soku* OK Baji strived to practice in his own life.

8.1.4 If I don't have what I like, I like what I have

Another quality common among the villager's of Eastern Palpa that OK Baji considers important is their approach to risk, or more accurately, their lack of contingency planning with regards to risk, which he described as, "If I don't have what I like, I like what I have." In performing his social services, OK Baji often planned ahead by asking "What if?" about many uncertain things, such as "What if funds are insufficient?" or "What if the

shipment is delayed?” However, every time he asked villagers “what if” questions, their answers would invariably be a variation of “Let’s think about now.” Apparently, villagers would only consider “if” scenarios only when they actually happened, but never beforehand.

For his treks from one village to another, OK Baji carries in his backpack rain gear, stomach medicine, and a flashlight (in addition to a change of clothes, sleeping gear, and notebooks/writing utensils). Meanwhile, villagers who accompany him usually bring nothing at all. Then, on those occasions when it looked like it might rain and OK Baji suggested building a rain cover for everyone, the villagers countered by saying, “Let’s borrow it on the way when rain actually falls” (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006). OK Baji considers the preponderance of such naïve optimism among the people who live in the remote villages Eastern Palpa to be a major reason underpinning their contentment and acceptance of an otherwise primitive and difficult way of life.

8.2 *Becoming useful*

8.2.1 *Being needed – to be useful instead of successful*

OK Baji admitted that his happiest moments were those when he felt needed. This happened most frequently when he visited villagers in Nepal and managed to expose the true needs of “voiceless” individuals. Such moments also energized him to the point that he never felt tired (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006). Along those lines, OK Baji described

two ways to measure the importance, or greatness, of an individual.

The first was measure – success – is based on how many people the individual has led or has working for him or her. According to this measure, the leaders of companies or nations can be considered important individuals. The other measure – usefulness – looks at how many people the individual has helped or served, and OK Baji considers this measure more important than the first. In other words, OK Baji sees more value in “how many people he has have served” compared to “how many people have served for me” (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006). He shared his thought on the differences between success and usefulness:

I used to believe the image that those who led a large number of people were successful, and I once wanted to be like that a long time ago. But, in my mind, that image of success has changed to become the taking of something from others. Usefulness, on the other hand, means being helpful, which I see as giving something to others. Personally I prefer to give than to take, and whenever I am useful, I feel good. Whenever I am needed, I feel happy. Therefore, even though I am not sure how many years I have left, I will continue staying in Nepal where I am needed and useful and, at some point in the future, become a good and happy person (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

OK Baji singles out the school construction projects as examples of endeavors that made him

feel useful after witnessing the excitement and joy each new school brought to the village children. Although he never felt this way during the projects, upon later reflection he could see how he was needed by the villagers and felt useful by being able to address their needs.

8.2.2 *Nothing is useless*

Sometimes, as OK Baji walked from village to village, children would ask him if they could take a picture with him. He never refused such a request. He recalled once meeting a boy who told him, “This is my treasure,” before taking out a worn picture OK Baji had taken of him several years before (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006). These kinds of moments, in OK Baji’s opinion, show how small seemingly insignificant moments can lead to something very meaningful over time. He referred to this as “Nothing is useless,” a value he experienced in the following manner:

It was 11 years ago, on a very rainy day and I needed to travel from Tansen to Bhalaytar with Jeevan Pokharel, the secondary school’s head teacher. We were heading back from Katmandu, where we had submitted documents related to a school construction project. We managed to reach the village of Humin by jeep after a three-hour ride, but there was no other transportation out of there because the steep road from Humin to Rampur, which is just two hours walking distance from Bhalaytar, was too muddy and slippery for vehicles to navigate. Jeevan and I decided to continue on foot, even though it meant walking over 10 hours to reach Bhalaytar.

The road so muddy that along the way I slipped and fell down three times.

After 12 hours we finally made it to Bhalaytar, both of us exhausted and covered in mud. Although several villagers greeted us, most began laughing when they saw our mud-caked figures. I began feeling ashamed, and started doubting why I came to the village in the first place. Then, from among the all the pointing and laughing, one villager said, “OK Baji came here after experiencing such hardship. I can feel how much he loves us.” The villagers stopped laughing at that moment, and I began feeling emotionally rewarded after such a long walk. At that point I told myself, “Nothing is useless” (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006).

8.3 *Summary of OK Baji’s values and ethics*

OK Baji’s values and ethics, or the beliefs about what is right and wrong and the moral principles that guide, control, or influence his behavior, can be summarized into one sentence: Helping others ultimately leads to his own happiness. To this end, the social good provided by his activities and his way of living are based on two fundamental values: becoming selfless and becoming useful. He now recognizes that these values are what allow him, through his social services, to foster social good in Eastern Palpa.

OK Baji’s approach to discard his own needs and desires and become selfless – essentially detach his self from individualistic pursuits – mirrors Nishida’s pure experience

concept whereby a person can more deeply empathize with others by discarding the differences of the self and becoming like the other (Nishida, 1921). In OK Baji's case, the results of such empathy come in the form of positive emotions – joy and happiness – every time he concretely meets the true needs of those need of help. That is to say, when he transcends his self and becomes like the villager or the objective that helps others, the social good he provides also serves a good for him. This is one aspect of the pure experience concept that could be ascribed to a *phronetic* leader and accounts for the longevity and continuity of OK Baji's provision of social services in Nepal.

However, OK Baji's values and ethics are not set in stone and have changed over time. In 1993, when he first moved to Nepal, his primary objective was to “review his childhood” and “help others” in any way he could. Then, with each successive decision and action he made to help the villagers of Eastern Palpa, his initial objectives transformed towards the values of “becoming selfless” and “becoming useful” (see Table 8.1), which he currently pursues to this day.

Table 8.1 The transformation of OK Baji's values and ethics

1993	2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing his own childhood • Help others in any way possible 	<p>Beliefs that promote social good and will makes him happy in the end:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming selfless <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simple life, high thinking ○ One day, one discard ○ Contentment (<i>Chi Soku</i>) ○ If I don't have what I like, I like what I have • Becoming useful <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being needed – useful instead of successful ○ Nothing is useless

Chapter 9 Extension of OK Baji's *phronesis*

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Nonaka and Toyama (2007) argue that one of the six capabilities of a *phronetic* leader is the ability to foster *phronesis* in others. This chapter will highlight how OK Baji's has influenced and inspired others to foster social good by describing extensions of his *phronesis* along three lines: 1) locally in Nepal, 2) internationally in Japan, and 3) personally in my own life.

9.1 *OK Baji's extending influence in Nepal*

The impact of OK Baji's activities is not limited to the residents of villages he has helped. Face-to-face discussions, between residents of neighboring villages and among members of local NGOs from different VDCs, about his social services have inspired and spurred other Nepalese nationals to take action and create solutions that improve their own communities. This section introduces several of these individuals, ranging from single village residents to the leaders of local NGOs.

9.1.1 *A villager's takeaways from OK Baji*

OK Baji had a brief three-minute role in a film, locally produced in Tansen in 2007, about the Magar, a community of farmers who live in the hilly regions of Eastern Palpa. In the film, OK Baji gave the following speech before a group of residents during the opening ceremony of an elementary school recently completed at their village:

Among old Nepalese sayings, there is the phrase, “If a person give his thumb to others, his arm gets eaten.” A new elementary school was built using financial aid from Japan. However, do not expect more aid from Japan. Instead, think about standing on your own feet (K. Kakimi, interview, December 12, 2007).

The issue raised by the movie centered on who would take charge of development in the Magar communities even as they suffered a loss of talent every time educated young males left in search of work in other countries. The movies message, encapsulated by OK Baji’s speech, was that the Magar themselves must take initiative for their own development and not depend on outside aid.

The problems stemming from the growing migration of young males in search of employment is not isolated to the Magar community – it exists in all VDCs of Eastern Palpa – and some villagers are trying to address this issue. Krishna Kumar Thapa, the former head teacher of Bhalaytar’s Shree Krishna Devi secondary school and chairman of the local NGO Public Welfare Council (PWC), is one such individual. Krishna has many years of experience working together with OK Baji, affording him ample opportunities to learn new ways of fostering village level development. He described this learning as follows:

To establish the 100,000 RS medical fund for the VDC of Gandakot, OK Baji had to introduce me to administrators at the Mission Hospital in Tansen as the person who would administer the fund. While in Tansen, OK Baji kept himself so busy visiting

and providing aid to villagers, even before going to the hospital, I realized he did not eat anything the entire day except for an early breakfast. That was when I first witnessed his dedicated approach to helping others, which I have tried to emulate ever since. During that trip he also told me a quote that I will never forget, “Development is not to forward a single man 100 steps, but to forward 100 men one step.” This is now my aim (K. Thapa, interview, December 24, 2006).

Krishna’s latest development project focuses on tackling high unemployment and male migration among Magar villages by utilizing local resources to create jobs. His idea is to make Bardakot (Figure 9.1), one of nine villages in the VDC of Gandakot, an “ethnic” model village to attract outside investment by ensuring every village household belongs to members of the Magar, enhancing their potential to preserve traditional Magar language, dance, cuisine, and culture. Such ethnically homogenous villages are rare throughout Nepal, and only a few exist in Eastern Palpa. Krishna, himself a Magar, hopes Bardakot will become a successful self-sustained village that will inspire other Magar villages in the region to adopt similar development strategies, reduce their dependence on external aid, promote self-reliance, and increase their self-sufficiency.

Figure 9.1 The village of Bardakot



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2007.

Krishna's initiative has begun to gain momentum. He, along with several village leaders from Bardakot and local Gandakot government officials, recently visited a successful model village belonging to the Grung, another ethnic minority in Nepal, to learn from its development. Krishna and Bardakot's leaders also laid out plans to attract outside villagers by holding an opening festival in December 2008 to promote Bardakot as a model village.

9.1.2 *Three Palpali who share OK Baji's values*

Sometimes, when OK Baji is asked about who will succeed him and continue his services in Nepal, he mentions that any candidate must openly share the values of becoming selfless and useful (described in Chapter 8). But from among all the people he has met and interacted with over the years, he singles out three individuals as role models who have demonstrated the potential to be his successor: Bhuvan Singh Thapa, Narayan Prasad

Acharya, and Raju Kumari.

OK Baji so admires the work ethic of these three people he once offered them remuneration. However, all three refused to be paid for performing tasks that improved their own communities, preferring instead to feel rewarded from the pleasure they derived working alongside OK Baji and the goodwill generated after seeing villages flourish and prosper (K. Kakimi, interview, June 22, 2007). The following three sections look more closely at each of these “role” models.

Bhuvan Singh Thapa

OK Baji met Bhuvan Singh Thapa (Figure 9.2), the 160-centimeter tall chairman of the Deep Jyoti Joint Youth Club, a 256-member local NGO in the VDC of Mityal, during the installation of a potable water supply system in Mityal, the first of many projects they would eventually undertake together.

One interesting episode highlighted Bhuvan’s devotion to help others. An international NGO once invited him, along with the heads of other local NGOs, to a development seminar at a high-end hotel in Katmandu where each participant received a 3,000 RS expense allowance. During a Q&A session near the end of the seminar, Bhuvan criticized the event’s sponsors by arguing, “Expenses to hold this seminar cost at least 300,000 RS. If we had spent this money directly in the villages, we could have implemented so many things to help people there” (K. Kakimi, interview, December 14, 2006). Event

organizers did not reply to Bhuvan remarks, and the following year he was not invited to the seminar.

Figure 9.2 OK Baji (left) and Bhuvan Singh Thapa (second from right)



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2007.

OK Baji's most memorable experience collaborating with Bhuvan took place during the reconstruction of a primary school in the remote village of Likote. They both first visited this village in 2006, after responding to requests from local residents to repair the existing school – a small hut with no walls. Upon arriving at Likote they make a startling discovery. Sixteen of the students attending school did so by swimming across a river everyday – a feat possible only during the dry season when the river was at its narrowest. During the rainy season, when the swollen river was impassable, the students' trek to school increased from just over an hour to two-and-a-half hours.

OK Baji and Bhuvan walked to the river to observe how the students made it across. Two physically stronger and more skilled swimmers crossed first and took positions on the

opposite bank further downstream, ready to assist any of the others who got caught in strong currents as they waded across one by one. After witnessing the students' collaborative yet risky journey just to attend school, OK Baji was convinced that rebuilding Likote's school was a worthwhile investment, and Bhuvan single-handedly took charge of the entire 150,000 RS reconstruction project that finished when the new school was inaugurated in September 2007.

Bhuvan contributed an article to the booklet, *Our OK Baji*, in which he described the lessons he learned from working alongside OK Baji, including the importance of being at the right place at the right time and going to the frontlines to identify problems and true needs with your own eyes (Neupane, 2004: 93). I witnessed Bhuvan's self-assured and confident demeanor to help develop the villages of Eastern Palpa and foster social good during my December 2007 trek, when OK Baji asked him, "Are you going to be all right without my help?" to which Bhuvan replied, "Of course, no problem!" (K. Kakimi & B. S. Thapa, interview, December 13, 2007).

Narayan Prasad Acharya

Narayan Prasad Acharya, Chairman of the VDC of Ringneraha and one of the lead organizers of the 2004 OK Baji Festival, is an imposing (180-centimeters tall) yet humble and soft-spoken social worker who has served as OK Baji's personal advisor regarding VDC level matters due to his comprehensive knowledge living conditions at villages throughout

Eastern Palpa. Whenever OK Baji has doubts over how to implement certain social services, he seeks out Narayan's counsel. Like Bhuvan, Narayan also contributed an article to the *Our OK Baji* booklet in which he contrasts OK Baji's efforts with those of other international NGOs. The following excerpt highlights his comparison:

Other foreign NGOs do not visit the villages like OK Baji. They are in the capital or in the district headquarters and pretend to invest in the village. They get on expensive vehicles. They live luxurious life. They only do a few things for the people. OK Baji doesn't like such a comfortable life. He likes to carry loads, walk on foot, climb up and down the hills, and go to the houses of people (Neupane, 2004: 51).

Raju Kumari

Raju Kumari has chauffeured OK Baji on the back of his motorcycle on numerous occasions, including 105 trips during 2005 (39 rides) and 2006 (66 rides) alone. OK Baji first met Raju when he first moved to Nepal in 1994, but the two had no contact until 2003, when OK Baji solicited Raju, who also ran a metal workshop, to bid on a project to supply iron window frames for a school construction project. OK Baji found Raju's services to be so honest and reliable he began placing additional orders from him for similar construction projects. At the same time, Raju began to offer OK Baji transportation throughout Eastern Palpa on his motorcycle.

In 2004, one of OK Baji's Japanese sponsors donated a jeep with the aim of enhancing OK Baji's mobility throughout Nepal. Instead of relegating to personal use, OK Baji converted the jeep into the centerpiece of a service providing inexpensive transportation to villagers requiring medical treatment and in need of passage to hospitals or medical posts. Raju has managed this service since its inception, keeping daily records of the passenger count, fare intake, and operational expenses. He periodically hands over surplus funds generated from the transport of villagers to OK Baji, who in it turn invests these into village development projects. Successfully operating the donated jeep into a ongoing fund generating service far exceeded OK Baji's and the Japanese sponsor's (who donated the jeep) wildest expectations, leading OK Baji to count his blessings for meeting a devoted and diligent worker such as Raju.

Unlike other NGOs that hire staff locally to perform development projects, OK Baji relies on volunteers for help and has at least one villager in each VDC whom he relies on for support while conducting his social services. But from among from these people he has identified Bhuvan, Narayan, and Raju as his protégés. He sees in them the ability to become selfless, become useful, and take pleasure from helping fellow Palpali at the grassroots level. OK Baji credits each one for extending the reach of his social services throughout Eastern Palpa, especially compared to his first years in Nepal when he worked alone and often faced

indecision over how to help others.

9.2 *OK Baji's extending influence in Japan*

The social impact of OK Baji's activities extends beyond the borders of Nepal and has influenced many individuals throughout Japan, most evident in the number of people who have heard him lecture on his social services, the size of donations coming from all over the country, and visits to Nepal by Japanese nationals wishing to see OK Baji activities firsthand, all of which have increased over the years.

In 1999, when OK Baji first asked by a Japanese NGO to talk about his experiences in Nepal, only six people saw his presentation. The next year, 100 people attended. Gradually, the number of seminars he gave increased by five a year to almost 50 during his two-month stay in Japan in 2007. With an average audience size of 50 individuals, close to 2,500 people heard OK Baji speak in 2007 alone. Of his seminars that year, 30 were organized by NGOs, 14 were held at schools, and three took place at companies, the last being a venue he first started appearing in as a guest speaker in 2006 and also the most financially lucrative of his talks in terms of compensation, especially at corporations seeking to expand CSR initiatives issues. OK Baji invests all funds generated from his seminars into development projects in Nepal, mostly into building new schools or potable water supply systems.

In December 2006, OK Baji was featured in a 45-minute Japanese television

program that boosted his profile throughout the country and increased the flow of donations to his cause to the tune of ¥10 million in 2007 alone. This was a far cry from the ¥1 million he spent from his own savings his first years in Nepal. All total, OK Baji has received donations totaling over ¥50 million from Japanese supporters over the past 14 years.

Just as with the donations, visits to Nepal by Japanese nationals interested in witnessing OK Baji's activities also increased from one in 1995 to 100 in 2006. Kunihiro Nakamura, who has helped coordinate OK Baji seminars at Tokyo area elementary schools (including Totsuka Daisan) and is one such visitor, described her reasons for helping:

When I heard OK Baji's seminar, I was shocked. My generation experienced poverty after World War II, an era when Japan was considered an underdeveloped country. Poverty was so rampant I recall feeling, "I might die tomorrow." But, it seems most [Japanese] have already forgotten who to thank for helping us out of the hole. With aid from United States and Europe and from institutions like UNICEF we grew to become the second largest economy in the world. Now, over 50 years since Japan rejoined the United Nations [in 1954], the country has switched from needing support to supporting others. We should be able to find ways to lend others a hand the way OK Baji does (K. Nakamura, interview, June 20, 2007).

9.3 *OK Baji's influence on my life*

I have been visiting Bhalaytar in Nepal every year since 2001, when I first volunteered as a teacher at a local village school. But none of this would have come to pass had I not met OK Baji in June 2001 – an encounter that irrevocably altered the course of my life for years to come. The next three sections describe how this initial contact guided me towards a way of life centered on helping underprivileged villagers in Nepal, beginning with how OK Baji became my role model, my own defining moment and life-altering experience, and the scholarship fund I created for students attending Bhalaytar's Shree Krishna Devi secondary school.

9.3.1 *Role model*

In 2000, I began attending a two-year MBA program at The Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy (ICS) at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan. As was typical for most business-focused students, my goals for getting an MBA included learning the skills to boost a company's competitiveness and profitability by shaping its corporate strategy. After one year of intensive coursework focused on core management, marketing, and finance, I began to refine my own notions of the role businesses play to create economic value by solving problems and meeting unmet needs.

During the second year of the MBA program, ICS provided four options for students to complement their first year studies: 1) an internship at a company, 2) an exchange program

at a MBA program abroad, 3) shadowing a prominent Japanese CEO, or 4) doing volunteer work in a developing country; the last option being an extension of the ICS Global Citizenship class, a course designed to expose students to the need, as espoused by Peter F. Druker (2002), for 21st century managers to solve not only economic problems but social problems as well. From among the four available options, I chose to do volunteer work alongside a Japanese national I had never heard of before – OK Baji. Why did I choose this option? To relive old memories as a child growing up in the city of Hadano, some 60 kilometers southwest of Tokyo and close to the Tanzawa mountain range.

Two months later, OK Baji made a presentation at ICS about his activities in Nepal as a guest speaker at the Global Citizenship class. It was the first time I met the man with whom I would go do volunteer work with, and his message during the class shook me to the core. He first talked about a Nepalese boy who fell from a tree while collecting brushwood and leaves, puncturing his abdomen on an upward pointing branch on the way down (left picture of Figure 9.3). To save the boy, fellow villagers carried him for eight hours to reach an ambulance that transported him to a hospital another two-hours drive away. The cost to save the boy's life: ¥10,000. OK Baji then spoke about Niglarge (right picture of Figure 9.3), the boy he accompanied to Calcutta to undergo surgery to fix his punctured heart (described in Chapter 6).

Figure 9.3 Images from OK Baji's presentation at ICS in June 2001



Source: Adapted from Kazumasa Kakimi's presentation, June 2001.

OK Baji concluded his presentation with two quotes: “You are not here to change Nepal; Nepal is here to change you.” and “Like a spring, the beginning of all things is small.” (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2001). Inspired by these words, I looked forward to my stay in Nepal as a volunteer social worker under the tutelage of OK Baji.

It was while in Nepal that I first witnessed what Professor Hirotaka Takeuchi, the Dean of ICS, called a “professional problem solver.” Observing OK Baji walk from village to village, listening to residents, identifying their true needs, and executing plans designed solve their problems by carefully allocating funds donated from Japan made him, in my eyes, a prototype problem solver who created real value in terms of social change. In addition, his meticulous reporting to supporters and donors, the profound impact of his activities over the years, and his ability to share the joy and hope created in Nepal beyond the confines of the villages, convinced me to consider him a role model for my own life.

After completing my MBA, I rejoined the company that sponsored my studies.

However, I felt different. Although I was eager to implement new action plans geared to improve the company's profitability based on my recently learned MBA skills, I could not shake the longing to relive the moments I experienced as a volunteer teacher at Shree Krishna Devi when the students' eye brightened up at the very moment of understanding and learning something new. That is when I realized that creating social value – like fostering and cultivating more “eureka” moments among the children of Bhalaytar – became a stronger personal calling in my life than the creation of economic value alone.

After consulting with my boss on how to develop a career path allowing me to perform volunteer assignments in Nepal while still fulfilling my responsibilities as a full-time employee, I made the fateful decision to quit my job at the end of 2002 and one month later, in January of 2003, I returned to Bhalaytar.

9.3.2 *A defining moment and life-altering experience*

Some experiences can change lives, overwhelming people with emotions so strong and deep they are moved to a state beyond words. These life-altering experiences often lead individuals to take stock of their lives, reevaluate what is truly valuable, and recognize new direction to further discover their inner selves. My life-altering experience occurred during my first stay in Bhalaytar, just over four months after first meeting OK Baji at ICS in June 2001.

It was near the end of my tenure as a volunteer teacher at the Shree Krishna Devi

secondary school. After interacting with village students for over two months, a sense of longing began to emerge in me. It started after first experiencing that special “eureka” moment when the students’ eyes brightened upon realizing how to solve a math problem, having fun as a group, or discovering something new. Then, in December 2001, one week before my departure from Bhalaytar, almost 50 students from the 9th and 10th grades held a farewell picnic in my honor at a scenic field between a river and deep green forest a half hours walk from the school. To my surprise, several of the older male students brought out and killed a live black goat specially purchased to mark the occasion using funds collected by the group. After cooking and eating the goat in a curry paste, the students gathered around and sat in big circle, myself included, and one by one took turns reciting a farewell speech, either in English or Nepalese, each one had written to me. While one student spoke, the others looked solemnly down, and I noticed tears streaming from their cheeks as their sadness became more pronounced with each successively ending speech. It was then my turn to speak, and as I looked at all of them, their tear-filled eyes staring back at me, and opened my mouth to say a first few words of encouragement, my voice faltered. I just stared back at them, speechless, for several minutes, unable to vocalize the overwhelming flood of emotions that overcame me. Tears started rolling down my cheeks before I broke down and wept. That moment changed me, and ever since I have visit the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school at least once a year to relive the joy of discovery alongside the students.

9.3.3 *The Himal Scholarship Fund*

In Nepal, students who want to study beyond the 10th grade must pass the School Learning Certificate (SLC) exam, a rigorous eight-subject test covering English, Nepalese, math, science, social studies, economics, education, and health population/environmental studies, held once a year during March and April. Students who fail the SLC must wait one year before trying again. This makes preparing for the SLC a grueling and time-consuming process, and it is not uncommon for students to take the exam two or more times before passing.

To pass the SLC, students must score at least 32 points (out of 100) in each of the eight subjects (total maximum score of 800 points), with those failing no more than two subjects getting the chance to take a complementary exam. There are four passing grades, or ranks, for the SLC: 1st division (score of at least 480 points), 2nd division (360 points or higher), 3rd division (256 points or higher), and passed in complementary (for those who failed up to two subjects but passed the complementary exam). The SLC ranks play a such an important role in the Nepalese higher education system that students who pass at the 1st division get preferential access to openings for study at the nation's universities while lower ranked students face more limited educational prospects.

Before I taught at Bhalaytar's Shree Krishna Devi secondary school in 2001, only two students had passed the SLC at the 2nd division since the school had first opened, and

even then not many passed the SLC at the complementary level on their first attempt. What was worse, most residents believed that students from remote villages like Bhalaytar could never pass the SLC at the 1st division. And during my tenure as teacher, I recall hearing several students despair that poverty held them in check and kept them from achieving future goals, with comments like: “I want to go to college but I will not be able to because I am poor,” “Even if I am accepted into college, I will not have time to study because I have to help tend the fields and feed the buffalos,” “I hope to someday visit Japan, but I can’t because I am Nepalese and poor.” These words prompted me to think of ways to help the students of Bhalaytar go to college and fulfill their ambitious goals. Then, during the four-day trek of December 2001 before returning to Japan, I consulted with OK Baji and conceived the idea of creating a scholarship fund to help my former students.

When I returned to Bhalaytar in January 2003, I donated ¥160,000 (100,000 RS) to the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school to establish the Himal Scholarship Fund providing scholarships to 10th grade students who passed the SLC and wished to continue studying at the 11th and 12th grade level. Of the 24,000 RS generated in interest by the fund every year, 18,000 RS would be go to three scholarships recipients (500 RS per month per recipient for two years) and the remainder to the school’s management committee to cover operational costs related to managing the fund and the scholarship. In 2004, my wife and I donated an additional ¥160,000 to the fund.

Candidates for the Hima Scholarship must complete an application form that includes the following three essay questions: 1) What is your aim in your life? 2) What problem do you consider as the most important? 3) What is your distinctive characteristic that differentiates you from the other students? After reviewing every application (see Appendix E for sample applications), I personally consult with Bhalaytar residents to clarify and verify each applicant's financial need, before selecting the final three recipients. The scholarship results are then announced during an awards ceremony that takes place on the anniversary of the school's founding in mid-December – an event I attend every year in order to personally handout the scholarship certificates.

In 2005, for the first time in Shree Krishna Devi's history, two students passed the SLC at the 1st division, followed by one student in 2007. And since the scholarship was established in 2003, 82 students from the school have passed the SLC (as of 2007; see Appendix F for details). While it is not clear if the Hima Scholarship Fund motivated students to better prepare for the SLC exam, many village residents and Shree Krishna Devi teachers have complimented the positive influence it has bestowed on the school's reputation as a model educational facility in the region.

9.4 *The process of change in my life*

Never in my wildest did I envision myself teaching English and math to children

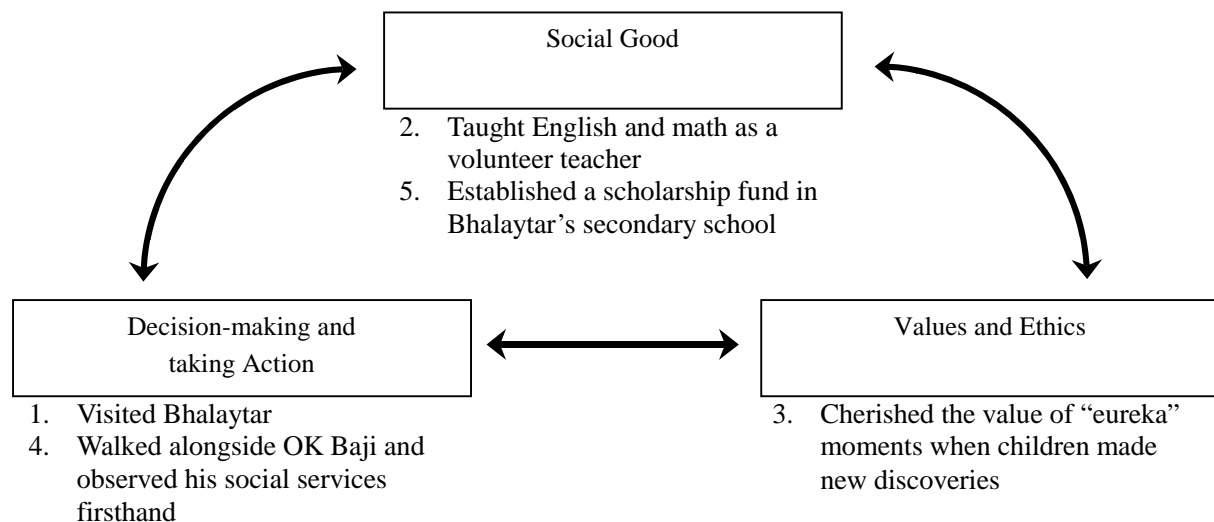
from a small village in the remote mountains of Nepal. But that changed when I first volunteered to help OK Baji, then a Japanese social worker I knew little about, during my MBA program studies. The repercussions from this assignment, and from observing OK Baji activities in the field, reshaped the direction of my life, leading to my establishing a scholarship fund designed to bring students from Bhalaytar one step closer towards fulfilling their dreams of studying at a university. This has been a most rewarding experience for me as an individual, and I consider the endeavor of creating the scholarship my way of fostering social good. The process of change in my life – from MBA student (taker) to social provider (giver) – can be summarized in the following five steps:

1. Visited Bhalaytar
2. Taught English and math as a volunteer teacher
3. Cherished the value of “eureka” moments when children made new discoveries
4. Walked alongside OK Baji and observed his social services firsthand
5. Established a scholarship fund in Bhalaytar’s secondary school

First, after choosing to do volunteer work and getting inspired OK Baji’s presentation about his services in Nepal, I visited Bhalaytar for the first time in 2001. Second, I taught English and math as a volunteer teacher at the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school, where I interfaced with students, their parents, school administrators, and other village residents over a two-month period. Third, during the process of teaching, I started cherishing and realizing value from “eureka” moments – those fleeting instants when the childrens’ eyes brightened at the very moment of understanding and learning something new. And fifth, after

returning to Japan and finishing my MBA, I was inspired to return to Nepal and establish a scholarship fund at Bhalaytar's secondary school with the help of village residents and OK Baji's guidance.

Figure 9.4. OK Baji's influence on my life



Reorganizing these five steps as a process from the perspective of the three elements of *phronesis* (social good, decision-making and taking action, and values and ethics; see Figure 9.4), I find that OK Baji's influence to take action on the direction of my life was strongest during two key events: (1) When I first heard him present at ICS as a guest speaker at the Global Citizenship Class and became motivated to visit Bhalaytar, and (2) when I consulted with him after first conceiving the idea of establishing a scholarship as we walked together in Nepal during our four-day trek of 2001. In both of these cases, the resulting decisions and actions took shape under a shared context (*Ba*) that guided me towards a common social good: Help the children of Bhalaytar. In this way, OK Baji's extending

influence inspired me towards a *phronetic* approach to life.

Chapter 10 Case Study: OK Baji Cup volleyball tournament

In the previous chapter we saw how OK Baji's *phronesis* inspired other individuals to commit to activities fostering social good. This chapter takes a closer look at this phenomenon by describing the creation of the OK Baji Cup, an annual volleyball tournament held every December since 2004, which came into existence after disparate groups of people from Japan and Nepal banded together under one common goal – to enrich the lives of the children of Eastern Palpa by fostering social and competitive interaction among them.

10.1 Background

Although soccer is the most popular sport in Nepal, the people of Eastern Palpa have taken a keen interest in volleyball, which unlike most other team-based sports, does not require a large, smooth, and flat playing field that is rare in the country's mountainous regions. The most critical components are the volleyball itself and makeshift nets strung across poles fashioned from bamboo stalks or tree branches. OK Baji also promoted volleyball throughout Eastern Palpa by occasionally donating used volleyballs from Japan and old produced locally nets.

In Bhalaytar, children and young adults alike enjoy playing impromptu pickup volleyball on an improvised court adjacent to a tea shop near the village's open-air market – a bumpy and slanted field littered with stones and livestock excrement that had to be cleared by hand. Every weekday, around 4:00 pm, high school students gathered by the court, later

joined by young adults as they got off from work, all of them taking turns playing games well into the evening hours, until it was too dark to continue (Figure 10.1). It was common for other villagers to gather around the court and watch the games – one of the few sources of entertainment in the un-electrified village.

Figure 10.1 Playing volleyball in Bhalaytar



Source: Picture taken by author, October 2001.

In March 2003, eight months after returning to Tokyo from my second stay at Bhalaytar, I spoke with Ritsuko Watanabe, an employee at Hitotsubashi ICS and an avid volleyball player who also coached a women's volleyball team at Gakushuin University, about the popularity of volleyball in Eastern Palpa. Ritsuko was intrigued that the sport would catch on in such mountainous areas, and expressed interest in visiting Nepal to see how village children played volleyball.

Three months later, after OK Baji had finished his presentation as a guest speaker in the Global Citizenship class at Hitotsubashi ICS, his third such talk at the university, he

joined me on a five-kilometer jog around the perimeter of the Imperial palace grounds near central Tokyo. As we set off, OK Baji invited me to attend a festival being organized by residents of several Eastern Palpa villagers to celebrate his 10 years in Nepal. He added that although he felt such a ceremony was unnecessary, he agreed to attend after witnessing the enthusiasm of event organizers in their planning of what would be called the OK Baji Festival of March 2004.

As we continued jogging around the palace, I pondered how to contribute to the festival as a guest. During this brainstorm, I recalled Ritsuko's interest to see the children of Nepal play volleyball. Based on this, I suggested to OK Baji bringing together Japanese and Eastern Palpa volleyball players so they could play together. As we tossed this idea back and forth, we refined it to a workable concept: holding a volleyball tournament during the OK Baji Festival with the winning local team playing an exhibition match against a team from Japan.

After finishing our jog, I returned to ICS and told Ritsuko our idea of the volleyball tournament, which she quickly embraced. Over the course of the next week, she contacted over 100 people with whom she had played and coached volleyball over the years, and after two months, she received five replies expressing interest in visiting Nepal. Among them was Yuko Itoi, a high school teacher and long time friend of Ritsuko, for whom volleyball was "The center of my life." She continued, "I love playing volleyball. So when I heard about the

playing in a remote village in Nepal, a place I have never imagined visiting in my life, I was too excited to pass up the chance” (Y. Itoi, interview, March 30, 2005).

One surprise volunteer was 43-year-old Seiko Umekita, the former coach of V-league champions Toray Arrows and member of the Japan Volleyball League (JVL), who single-handedly organized the donation of 100 used volleyballs to the tournament effort. In total, seven Japanese nationals volunteered to take part in the OK Baji Festival volleyball tournament, including Ritsuko Watanabe, Seiko Umekita, Yuko Itoi, Masami Kai (volleyball player), Wakako Tezuka (volleyball player), Naoko Machimura (ICS employee), and Mariko Matsumoto (ICS employee).

10.1.1 Seven Japanese visit Bhalaytar

On March 10, 2004, three days before the OK Baji Festival, I picked up the seven volleyball tournament volunteers from Japan at Katmandu airport. Krishna Thapa, Chairman of the Public Welfare Club (PWC) NGO, and Ganesh Pokharel, both residents of Bhalaytar who would serve as hosts for the Japanese guests during their stay in Nepal, helped arrange passage back to Bhalaytar – a journey Wakako Tezuka, one of the volleyball players from Japan, described as “unimaginably long” (W. Tezuka, interview, March 28, 2005).

It began 5:00 a.m. the next morning, when the group boarded a chartered bust that drove down a winding highway through Katmandu valley for an hour before heading west towards Pokhara, another four hours away. Along the way, the guests from Japan experienced

their first jungle toilet, or open-air toilet surrounded by nature. At 11:00 a.m., the bus reached the hub-town Koireni, where we transferred onto reserved Jeeps capable of handling the rough mountain trails. One hour out of Koireni we passed Bimad, the last town with electricity, and at 1:30 p.m. reached the village of Deorali, where the jeep trail ended. The rest of the journey was on foot.

Six 9th grade boys from Bhalaytar's Shree Krishna Devi secondary school helped carry luggage, including the 100 used volleyballs, as we walked for five hours before finally arriving at Bhalaytar – the end of an exhausting 13-and-a-half hour trip. The tired group of visitors then retired to the respective homes that offered to host them during their stay at the village.

10.1.2 The OK Baji Festival and volleyball tournament

The two-day OK Baji Festival started on March 12, 2004, in the hub town Rampur, a two-hour walk from Bhalaytar. Over 15,000 people attended the festival (Figure 10.2), including 35 Japanese nationals (in addition to the seven volleyball tournament volunteers) who had supported OK Baji (dressed in traditional Nepalese attire) over the years, to personally greet OK Baji face-to-face and express their gratitude one by one (also described in Chapter 5).

Figure 10.2 Visitors to the OK Baji Festival



Source: Picture taken by Naoko Machimura on behalf of the author, March 2004.

The volleyball tournament coincided with the festival, with eight pre-qualified local teams, composed mainly of farmers, local NGO members, or teachers aged 25 to 35, vying for semi-final berths during quarter-final games played on the first day of the festival.

On the second day of the festival, after the morning semi-finals, the two top contenders faced off in an afternoon finals match won by a team representing the VDC of Gandakot. It was then time for the exhibition match between the Japanese team and the local winner – the highlight of the tournament – that took place on a volleyball court adjacent to the festival’s main stage.

So many spectators lined the court (Figure 10.3) to catch a glimpse of the match, Naoko Machimura, one of the volunteers supporting the Japanese team, commented that there no empty space at the sides of the court. “It seemed millions of people flooded into the court

with excitement,” she said of the event. “There was no single opening space found around there. The edges of the rectangular-shaped court were actually formed by the hundreds of spectators’ feet” (N. Machimura, interview, March 30, 2005).

Figure 10.3 The exhibition volleyball match during the OK Baji Festival



Source: Picture taken by Naoko Machimura on behalf of the author, March 2004.

The exhibition game added another layer of excitement to the day’s events, with many of the Nepalese volleyball players and festival attendants greeting the Japanese team members as honored guests (Figure 10.4). This culminated with the planting of several small trees to mark the closing of the festival at a park that is today known as the OK Baji Memorial Park.

Figure 10.4 The team members pose together after the exhibition match



Source: Picture taken by a Neplesese villager on behalf of the author, March 2004.

The next day, Seiko Umekita held a special volleyball coaching session with 18 players he and OK Baji handpicked during the two-day volleyball tournament. He gathered the trainees at a field near Rampur and spent the entire day teaching them the basics of professional volleyball.

10.1.3 Back to Japan

That evening, as we walked back to Bhalaytar accompanied by Krishna and Ganesh, the Japanese volleyball volunteers reflected on the positive and successful outcome of the tournament, which they all agreed had generated a lot of excitement during the festival. They also agreed that the tournament should not be a one-time event, and that it should take place again.

Inspired by such a prospect and as a way to respect and repay the generous hospitality each of them had received during their stay in Bhalaytar, the entire group decided

to establish a fund that would cover the costs of tournaments similar to the one that took place during the OK Baji Festival. The next day, during a farewell dinner at a hotel in Katmandu, the seven Japanese volunteers presented Krishna, who had accompanied them to the capital city, a seed donation of ¥160,000 (¥20,000 from each person, myself included) to support future volleyball tournaments.

10.2 The first OK Baji Cup

Krishna Thapa made plans to hold the first OK Baji Cup volleyball tournament in December 2004. But, in November 2004, as I prepared to visit Nepal to make final arrangements for the upcoming tournament, Krishna warned that the event might be postponed, even cancelled, due to opposition from local Maoist party members. The country was in the throes of *Nepal Banda* threats – forced national strikes lasting two to three days – instigated by communist party members. Services or events operating in violation of the *Nepal Banda* faced attack by the Maoist, and the volleyball tournament was being targeted for dismissal.

10.2.1 Dialogue with the Maoist

On November 24, 2004, five days after returning to Bhalaytar, I was called to meet three Maoist party members in a school at a village near Bhalaytar. Mahendra Thapa, the head teacher of Bhalaytar's secondary school, served as interpreter during the interview,

which started at 4:30 p.m. One of the three Maoist members promptly introduced himself as the regional party leader and began asking about my name, my reason for visiting Nepal, my relationship to OK Baji, my work in Japan, and even my affiliation with the Japanese government. As the questions kept coming, I became nervous, unsure of the direction of the line of inquiry. However, after some time, a crowd of students and residents from Bhalaytar gathered just outside the office where I was being interviewed, and their presence and show of support relived my anxiety.

The interview ended after 90 minutes, at which point the Maoist party members seemed convinced of my role as a volunteer teacher at Bhalaytar. I then asked them if I could ask questions of my own. After getting approval, my first question was their names, since they never introduced themselves during the entire interview. My second question was why had they cancelled the OK Baji Cup, to which the regional party leader replied that he had never heard of the tournament before and asked me to explain more about it. I described the purpose of the OK Baji Cup was to benefit the children of Eastern Palpa by giving them opportunities to meet and play volleyball with their counterparts from neighboring villagers. The regional party leader admitted that although the decision to cancel the tournament had rested on the hands of his subordinate, he saw no reason against it, and granted permission for the OK Baji Cup to take place without further Maoist interference in the eight VDCs of Eastern Palpa under his jurisdiction. With the green light from the Maoist, Krishna was

thrilled to hear the tournament could take place according to his originally planned schedule.

10.2.2 Kicking off the First OK Baji Cup

Nine teams representing schools from eight VDCs took part in the inaugural OK Baji Cup – a three-day volleyball tournament that kicked off the morning of December 23, 2004. Expenses for the event were covered by the 18,000 RS in interest generated from the fund established using seed money donated by the OK Baji festival volleyball tournament volunteers from Japan. Half the expenses were for tournament prizes: shields for the top three teams and a cup for the overall winning team (left picture of Figure 10.5).

Figure 10.5 The Inaugural OK Baji Cup of December 2004



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2004.

The venue for the tournament was a relatively flat and clear field west of Khayarbot, a village adjacent to Bhalaytar and not far from the Nisdy River. Over 100 guests, including students, teachers, and event organizers, attended the tournament, which posed logistical challenges in terms of providing adequate room and board at a village unaccustomed to supporting such a large group of people.

Lodging guests

Most tournament participants came from villages located over three-hours walking distance away and needed accommodation during their stay at Khayarbot. Mahendra Thapa solicited support from local residents to voluntarily open up their homes and offer sleeping spots to outside visitors. Mahendra led this effort by example, allowing the eight Bal Hit secondary school players from the VDC of Sahalkot to stay at his house, with four students sleeping on makeshift beds on a balcony (Figure 10.6) and the rest in the attic of an adjoining buffalo hut.

Figure 10.6 Bal Hit secondary school students resting at Mahendra Thapa's home during the first OK Baji Cup



Source: Picture taken by author, December 2004.

Feeding event participants

The other logistical problem concerned feeding the over 100 guests staying at Khayarbot. The Social Welfare Club (SWC), whose 20 members included female students from Shree Krishna Devi, played a key role on this front. Using funds provided by the PWC,

members of the SWC purchased cooking supplies, rice, potatoes, onions, cauliflower, and soybeans used in meals served daily during the tournament (Figure 10.7). This function was time consuming and required significant preparation, including gathering firewood from nearby forests, fetching water from the closest aquifer, and porting/cleaning the numerous pots, pans, dishes, and utensils used to cook, serve, and eat the meals.

Figure 10.7 Meals prepared by members of the Social Welfare Club



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2004.

OK Baji was unable to attend the tournament because of scheduling conflicts. On the final day of the tournament, after the morning semi-final matches, the team from the Jana Vikas high school in the VDC of Darchha won the final match of the first OK Baji Cup.

10.3 The second OK Baji Cup

10.3.1 The “beginnings” of volleyball

When Seiko Umekita, the JVL volleyball coach, first visited Bhalaytar to attend the

OK Baji Festival, he claims to have rediscovered the “beginnings” of volleyball – the starting point where the sport is enjoyed by anyone anywhere. This occurred when he saw barefoot children enthusiastically playing volleyball on an uneven and bumpy field with an old, misshapen, and rough ball that had lost its smooth skin long ago. Seiko’s attention had also been drawn to two vertical poles in a field at another village near Bhalaytar. Although the poles were rather close, he was impressed by the faint traces of carved grooves on both sides of the poles demarcating a rectangular perimeter, evidence the poles were part of a volleyball court.

These scenes reminded Seiko of his own childhood, when he first played volleyball barefoot on a dirt court in his old hometown. So to once more relive the “beginnings” of volleyball, Seiko visited Bhalaytar three weeks before the second OK Baji Cup to spend a week coaching the village’s local team from the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school (Figure 10.8).

Figure 10.8 Seiko Umekita coaching students from the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2005.

10.3.2 *Preparing Bhalaytar's team*

The Shree Krishna Devi boy's volleyball team hoped to improve their performance from the first OK Baji Cup, where they were knocked out during the first round of the qualifying matches. Their confidence boosted by Seiko's coaching session, the team hoped to further improve their skills by playing a friendly match against the upcoming tournament's strongest contender – the team from the Rada Krishna secondary school in the VDC of Bakamalang and 1st runner-up in the first OK Baji Cup.

Eight days before the second OK Baji Cup, I joined the eight-member Shree Krishna Devi team as they prepared to visit Rada Krishna. After unsuccessfully waiting the entire morning to get a lift on any jeeps headed towards Bakamalang, at noon the group set off on foot, hoping to reach the school before sunset in order to play while it was still light out. Three hours and twenty minutes later, after a brisk walk that included spurts of running, we

reached the Rada Krishna secondary school, where the local team was still waiting for the Bhalaytar team to show up. The matches got underway after a brief rest, the sun already setting. By the time the third set started, the sky was almost dark.

The Shree Krishna Devi team lost all three sets. Dejected, the group settled in to rest, spending the night at Bakamalang before returning to Bhalaytar the next morning. During the five-hour walk back, team members shared thoughts about the previous day's games, reflecting on what had worked, what went wrong, and how to improve their game. They also expressed satisfaction at meeting and interacting with students from another school – a rare opportunity in the remote regions of Eastern Palpa.

10.3.3 *The tournament*

The second OK Baji Cup kicked off on December 22, 2005, in the same venue as the first tournament. Participation had grown, from nine to 15 schools, with free lodging once more provided by residents of Khayarbot and daily meals prepared by the Social Welfare Club. This time OK Baji was able to attend the three-day event (Figure 10.9), which culminated with the tournament favorite Rada Krishna team taking 1st place. Meanwhile, in a surprise finish, the Shree Krishna Devi team finished in 3rd place, a significant improvement compared to their previous performance. Then, during the tournament's closing ceremony, event participants positively received a surprise announcement by the event's organizing committee – the next OK Baji Cup would include a girl's division.

Figure 10.9 The second OK Baji Cup of December 2005



Source: Left picture taken by a Neplesese villager on behalf of author,
right picture taken by author; December 2005.

10.4 The third OK Baji Cup

The third OK Baji Cup started on December 7, 2006, two weeks earlier than in previous years (right picture of Figure 10.10). This caused participation to drop, from 15 to nine boy teams, due to an unforeseen schedule conflict with half-year national exams administered in the schools of Eastern Palpa. Despite this, five girl teams took part in the tournament's first girl's division (left picture of Figure 10.10).

Figure 10.10 The third OK Baji Cup of December 2006



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2006.

Unlike previous years, the third OK Baji Cup included aspects of cooperative collaboration, whereby tournament participants received free lodging in exchange for their help with household chores. For example, the volleyball players who stayed at Mahendra Thapa's home helped out by chopping branches into more useful firewood and fetching water everyday from the local aquifer (Figure 10.11).

Figure 10.11 Cooperative collaboration – tournament participants cut wood (left) and fetch water (right)



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2006.

Another interesting development during the third tournament were the spontaneous pickup games that started after the semi-final matches ended and all teams went off to eat lunch. Three village teams, composed of spectators aged 45 and older, got together to play an exhibition tournament against each other. After obtaining permission from the PWC, the event organizers, the “over-45” tournament started, much to the amusement and delight of spectators and players alike (Figure 10.12).

Figure 10.12 The over-45 exhibition tournament



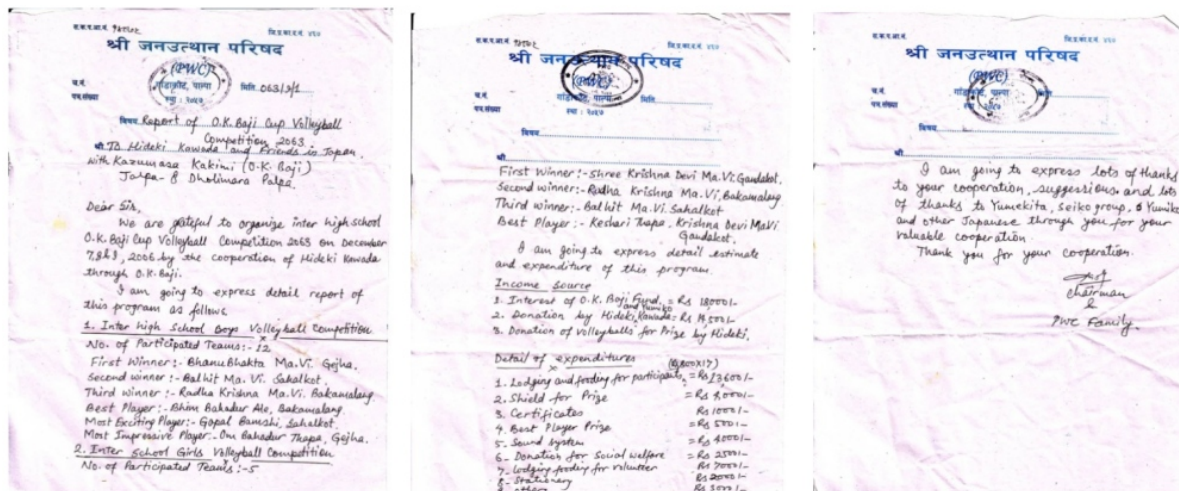
Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2006.

The third OK Baji Cup ended with the team from Bhanu Bhakta secondary school in the VDC of Geja placing first in the boy’s division, and Shree Krishna Devi first in the girl’s division – a surprise result. Another less pleasant surprise was the weak financial position of the fund established to cover costs related to running the tournament. Although the fund itself was solvent, operational expenses had ballooned beyond the budgets initially forecasted due to increasing tournament participation over the years. In a report compiled by the PWC

(Figure 10.13), event organizers detailed the additional capital injected to plug cash shortfalls.

It was clear this issue had to be addressed before the next OK Baji Cup could take place.

Figure 10.13 PWC financial report issued after the third OK Baji Cup



Source: Letters received by author, December 2006.

10.5 The fourth OK Baji Cup

In September 2007, the eight initial seed donors to the fund supporting the OK Baji Cup meet in Tokyo, Japan, to discuss ways of financing the event's increasing expenses. With the help of two other individuals, Yumiko Kawada, who had been to Bhalaytar on two previous occasions, and Naoko Saba, who would make her first visit to the village that October, the group⁵ estimated that infusing an additional ¥80,000 (50,000 RS) to the OK Baji Cup fund would cover the estimated costs of future tournaments.

⁵ Yuko Itoi, Masami Kai, Mariko Matsumoto, Naoko Machimura, Wakako Tezuka, Seiko Umekita, Ritsuko Watanabe, Hideki Kawada, Yumiko Kawada, and Naoko Saba.

Two months later, at a small warehouse near Toyosu station in Tokyo, eight volunteers (including Yukio Itoi, Seiko Umekita, Naoko Saba, Ritsuko Watanabe, three volleyball plays from the university Ritsuko coached at, and myself) got together to help deflate, pack, and ship an unexpected donation from the Japanese Volleyball League (JVL) – 200 practically new volleyballs (Figure 10.14).

Figure 10.14 Deflating and packing JVL donated volleyballs for the fourth OK Baji Cup



Source: Pictures taken by author, November 2007.

This started back in August, after Seiko and I made a brief presentation about the OK Baji Cup to executives from Japan's two leading volleyball manufacturers. Both companies donated four volleyballs to each of 280 JVL premium league matches played between January and April – a total of 1120 volleyballs. After the premium league tournament ended, all donated volleyballs, most of them practically unused, became property of the JVL. After hearing about the OK Baji Cup, the volleyball manufacturers agreed to allocate 200 of their donated premium league balls for future OK Baji Cups, with 50 of these to be used in the

upcoming tournament.

On December 19, 2007, the fourth OK Baji cup started, bringing together 17 boy teams and 8 girl teams from schools in 12 VDCs of Eastern Palpa. As before, the event was held at Khayarbot and organized by the PWC and assisted by the Social Welfare Club, which provided the daily meals (Figure 10.15).

Figure 10.15 Members of the Social Welfare Club fetch water (left) and firewood (right) used to prepare meals during the fourth OK Baji Cup



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2007.

A crowd of over 500 spectators, mostly residents from neighboring villages, came to see the tournament, which featured OK Baji and Seiko participating in the over-45 matches (left picture of Figure 10.16). The Bhanu Bhakta secondary school from the VDC of Geja once more took first place in the boy's division while the Shree Krishna Devi secondary school also won the girl's division for the second year in a row (right picture of Figure 10.16).

Figure 10.16 The fourth OK Baji Cup



Source: Left picture taken by author, right picture taken by a Neplesese villager on behalf of author; December 2007.

10.6 Future tournaments

During the closing ceremony of the fourth OK Baji Cup, the organizing committee announced that future tournaments would be open to all secondary and high schools in the 22 VDCs of Eastern Palpa, which would be evenly split into two regions. In early December, teams would take part in regional tournaments to determine the top four teams from each region that would qualify for the OK Baji Cup held two weeks later.

Final tournament venue

Although plans to expand tournament participation were met with enthusiasm, concerns were raised regarding the location of the final games. The current OK Baji Cup venue at Khayarbot was located on the eastern edge of Eastern Palpa, making it difficult for region two teams (from VDCs on the western half of Eastern Palpa) to attend. One suggestion

was to hold the final tournament in a bigger hub transport town near the middle of the region, such as Rampur, where ample accommodation and facilities also existed.

However, Netra Bahadur Gaha, a former OK Baji Festival organizer and current Chairman of the Rural Youth Club NGO in the VDC of Kaliban, opposed holding the tournament in a larger town or village. As lead organizer of the Region Two tournament, Netra, himself a one-time OK Baji Cup participant with a team from Kaliban, warned against the dangers of hosting the OK Baji Cup in a more urban area:

Of course, we can host a successful tournament in a bigger town, but people living in bigger towns cooperate with the expectation of making a profit for themselves or for their own business. In other words, they will cooperate only because of money. In contrast, people involved in the current tournament site cooperate because they enjoy it. I just experienced my first OK Baji Cup and I could feel the devoted and willing support of the local community. We should maintain this tradition of support in future OK Baji Cups (N. B. Gaha, interview, December 21, 2007).

Netra's arguments resonated with the opinions of most OK Baji Cup attendees, and event organizers decided to continue hosting the OK Baji Cup Final at Khayarbot.

Future hopefuls

The OK Baji Cup, which grew from an exhibition match held during the OK Baji Festival as a way to enrich the lives of the children of Eastern Palpa, has instilled a sense of

hope not just among tournament participants, but in the minds of children still too young to take part in the games.

Eleven-year-old Arjon K. Chetri is one such child. The 5th grader from Khayarbot aspired to be a volleyball player in three years time. Arjon sees his father, who works in Malaysia, just once a year – during the national Dasain Festival – and he spends his morning and afternoons after school doing chores to help the family household makes ends meet. Although this keeps him busy, Arjon spends whatever free time he gets practicing volleyball (left picture of Figure 10.17), encouraged that one day he will play in the OK Baji Cup (A. K. Chetri, interview, December 22, 2007).

Figure 10.17 Arjon K. Chetri (left) and Tilrak Sigdel (right) – future OK Baji Cup participants



Source: Pictures taken by author, December 2007.

Sixteen-year-old Tilrak Sigdel is another individual inspired by the OK Baji Cup. Taken to India by his farther to work when he was a small child, Tilrak returned to Bhalaytar to study at the secondary school, where he attends the 6th grade and four years older than his

classmates. Now at a fatherless home, Tilrak and his older sister, Druga, take care of their mute mother and two younger sisters, often tending fields owned by other villagers in exchange for pay (right picture of Figure 10.17) After seeing the fourth OK Baji Cup, Tilrak predicted that one day he would captain the school's volleyball team and win the tournament (T. Sigdel, interview, December 22, 2007).

10.7 Extending phronesis through Ba

Although the first OK Baji Cup started with financial aid from Japan, hosting the tournament would have been impossible without the support from the local community both in terms of resources (talent to organize the event, lodging, cooking supplies, volleyballs from Japan, etc.) and social capital (villagers welcoming tournament participants into their homes, volunteers willing to help prepare daily meals, Japanese nationals coaching and inspiring others, etc.).

The development of the OK Baji Cup also demonstrates how an increasing number of actors (individuals and organizations) interacted in different *Ba* (shared contexts) interconnected by the common aim of “enriching the lives of the children of Eastern Palpa” – an aspiration that first kicked off the entire process and whose origins can be traced back to OK Baji Festival.

10.7.1 From the OK Baji Festival to the OK Baji Cup

The OK Baji Festival of March 2004, an event held to honor OK Baji's 10 years of

social services in Nepal, attracted a large number of individuals who shared a common appreciation of OK Baji's dedicated and humanitarian efforts to improve life in the remote villages of Eastern Palpa. Although member of local NGOs took initiative to organize the festival, the event also attracted attention in Japan, with donors and supporters traveling to Nepal to partake in the celebration. Among these visitors were the seven Japanese volunteers who hoped to spread the joy of playing volleyball among festival attendants by playing a friendly exhibition match against a local team. Another way of looking at the OK Baji Festival is a shared context (*Ba*) where villagers, members of local NGOs, donors, ICS staff members, and volleyball players from Japan all joined together to support OK Baji's aim of fostering social good.

Although the initial intention of the seven Japanese volleyball volunteers was to spread the joy of playing volleyball, they were moved by the generosity of their less privileged Bhalaytar hosts. Ritsuko Watanabe, one of the volunteers, recalled how her stay at Bhalaytar reminded her of childhood visits to her grandmother:

During my stay at a villager's home in Bhalaytar, where no electricity or gas was available, I felt like I was visiting my grandmother's home where I often visited as child. I remember eating vegetables freshly picked from nearby fields and seeing a chicken killed in the yard just before it was cooked. I also took a bath outside in the open, where my grandmother's home was surrounded by nature. At the same time, I

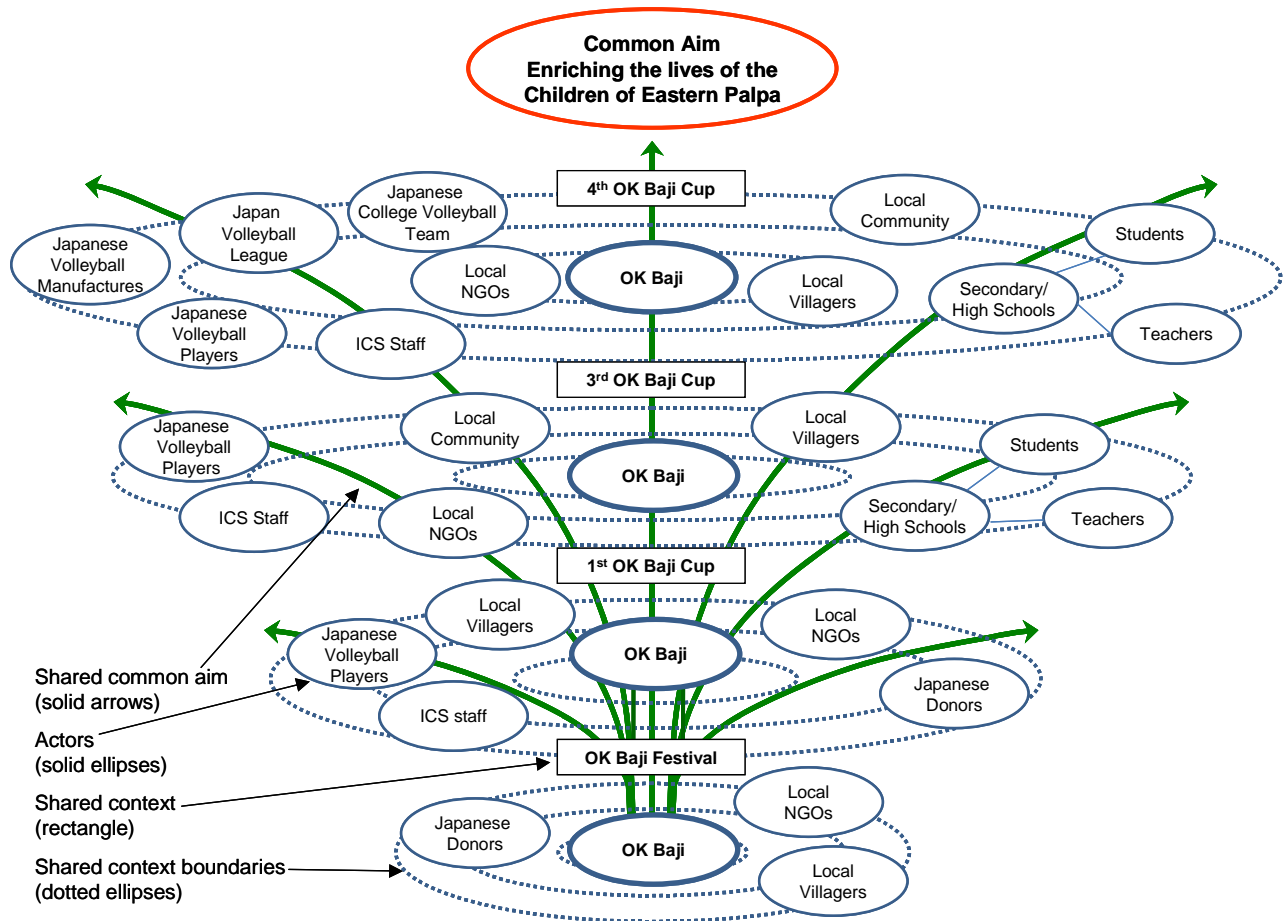
felt comfortable and secure in the presence of my loving grandmother.

During the three nights we stayed in Bhalayatar, our hosts smiled every time they served us a meal. We were even served a pork dinner prepared from a pig the family had been raising for years. We slept outside under the eaves of the house. Although there were none of the comforts typical of Tokyo, I experienced a strong bond with the host family, and their warm hospitality made me feel like it was not my first visit to the village. It felt like I was at my grandmother (Ritsuko Watanabe, interview, March 28, 2005).

Ritsuko's comments regarding the hospitality of her Bhalaytar hosts alludes to pre-existing social capital permeating village life (described in Chapter 4). However, such hospitality towards outsiders would not exist, or would not be as developed, without OK Baji's long history of interactions with village residents. When the seven Japanese volleyball volunteers sought to give something back to Bhalaytar after experiencing the (shared context of the) OK Baji Festival, they embarked on a path built social capital cultivated by OK Baji over the years, eventually giving rise to their shared common aim of "enriching the lives of the Children of Eastern Palpa." This climaxed with the creation of a new, shared context – the first OK Baji Cup. Over time, the boundary of this shared context stretched to encompass new sets of actors, among them members of other local NGOs, secondary and high school students and teachers, volleyball players from Japan, local student clubs, and entire village

communities, all of whom embraced one common aim, as shown in Figure 10.18.

Figure 10.18 OK Baji's *Phronesis* diffused through shared contexts (*Ba*) to ever increasing numbers of actors who all share a common aim



10.7.2 Perpetuating the OK Baji Cup

Nine teams participated in the first OK Baji Cup of 2004. Three week before the OK Baji Cup of 2005, Seiko Umekita visited Bhalaytar to coach students from the village's secondary school. Fifteen teams then took part in that year's tournament. Although the number of teams in the boy's division dropped to nine during the OK Baji Cup of 2006, five teams took part in tournament's first girl's division. And in the OK Baji Cup of 2007,

participation grew to a total of 25 teams (17 boys and 8 girls) representing 12 VDCs of Eastern Palpa. Two former boy team captains served as referees during that year's tournament, which also 50 near-new donated volleyballs packed and shipped to Nepal with the help of Japanese university volleyball players. The OK Baji Cup of 2008 expanded tournament participation to include teams from all of Eastern Palpa's 22 VDCs, and the energy and excitement surrounding the tournament has sparked hope among Nepalese children who look forward to one day take part in the event.

Consequently, the origins of the OK Baji Cup and the shared common aim of “enriching the lives of the children of Eastern Palpa” among an ever growing group of people in Nepal and Japan can be traced to one individual – OK Baji (illustrated by the solid arrows springing upwards from the bottom of Figure 10.18) – demonstrating the influence of a *phronetic* leader to inspire others to embrace a common humanitarian aim and take action to foster social good. And the evolution of the OK Baji Cup, from an friendly exhibition match to inspiring hope among the children of Nepal, is emblematic of OK Baji's favorite quote: “Like a spring, the beginning of all things is small.”

Part Four: Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 11 Findings and learning from OK Baji

According to Aristotle, the activities of human beings are thought to pursue a common good that benefits more than the individual. This study describes such a pursuit, based on observations from over seven years of fieldwork, to understand how an individual actor – OK Baji – can create and cultivate the practical wisdom – *phronesis* – required to serve the social good.

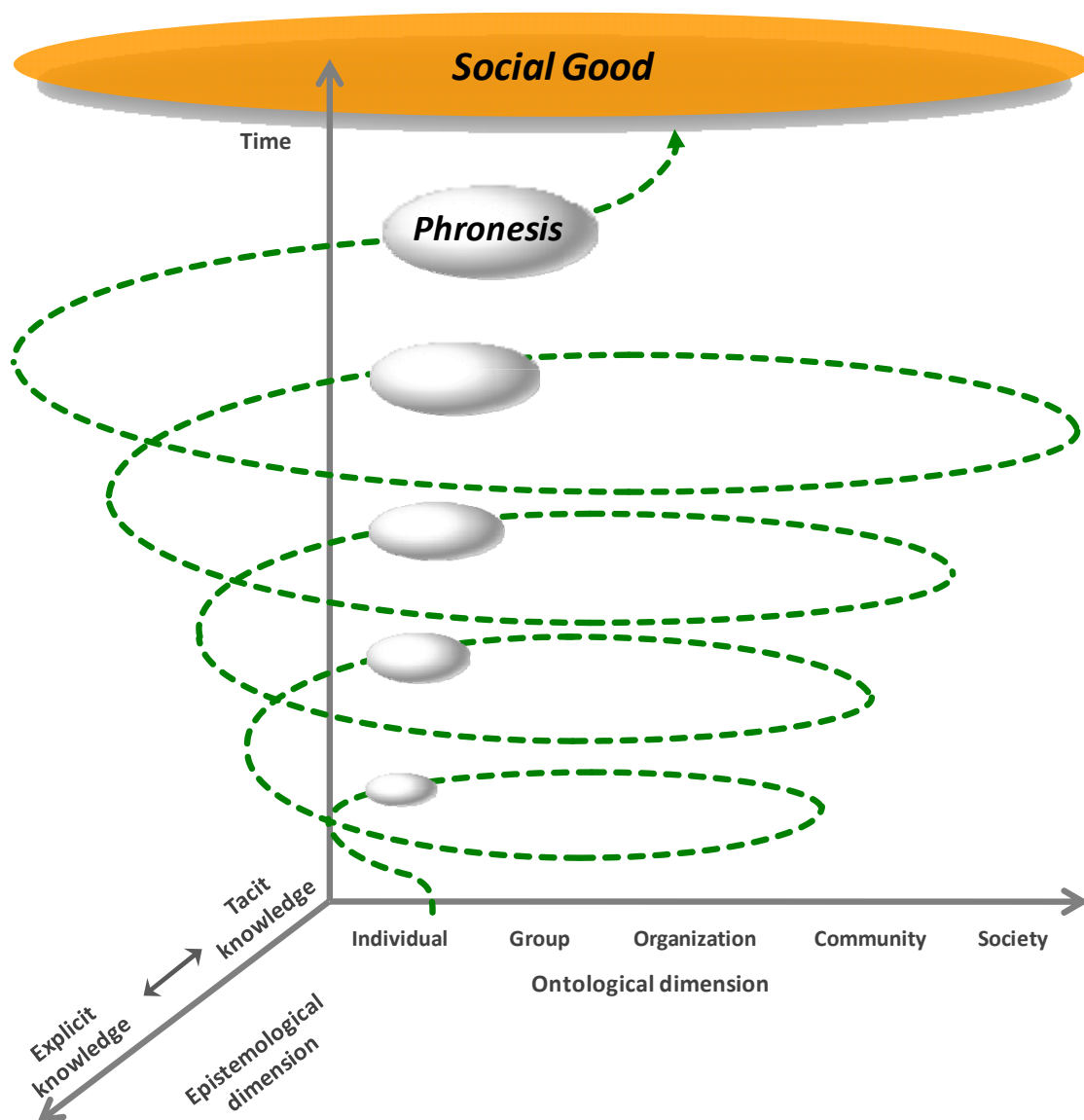
The underlying premise, or theoretical implication, of this study is that *phronetic* leaders, which OK Baji is presumed to be, foster practical wisdom in three ways: 1) by living (practicing) a way of life (process) that creates social knowledge to better society, 2) by cultivating *phronesis* over time, and 3) by extending *phronesis* in others.

The three ways of fostering *phronesis* take place along three dimensions – the epistemological (knowledge), the ontological (number of actors), and the temporal (time). As illustrated in Figure 11.1, the dynamic interaction of different actors along these dimensions gives rise to a spiral as knowledge is created, converted from tacit to explicit (and vice versa), and transferred (diffused) from individuals to groups, organizations, communities, and society (and vice versa). Accordingly, with each loop of the spiral, the level of *phronesis* in the individual grows as experiences accumulate over time.

This chapter focuses on the first two ways of fostering *phronesis* (the third way is described in Chapter 10, where the development of the OK Baji Cup showed how *phronesis*

was ontologically extended to increasingly larger groups of actors), followed by the limitations of the study, future challenges, and personal takeaways regarding OK Baji before concluding the study. The practical implication of this study is derived from these takeaways.

Figure 11.1 The spiraling accumulation of individual *Phronesis* (ellipses) along the Epistemological, Ontological, and Temporal Dimensions

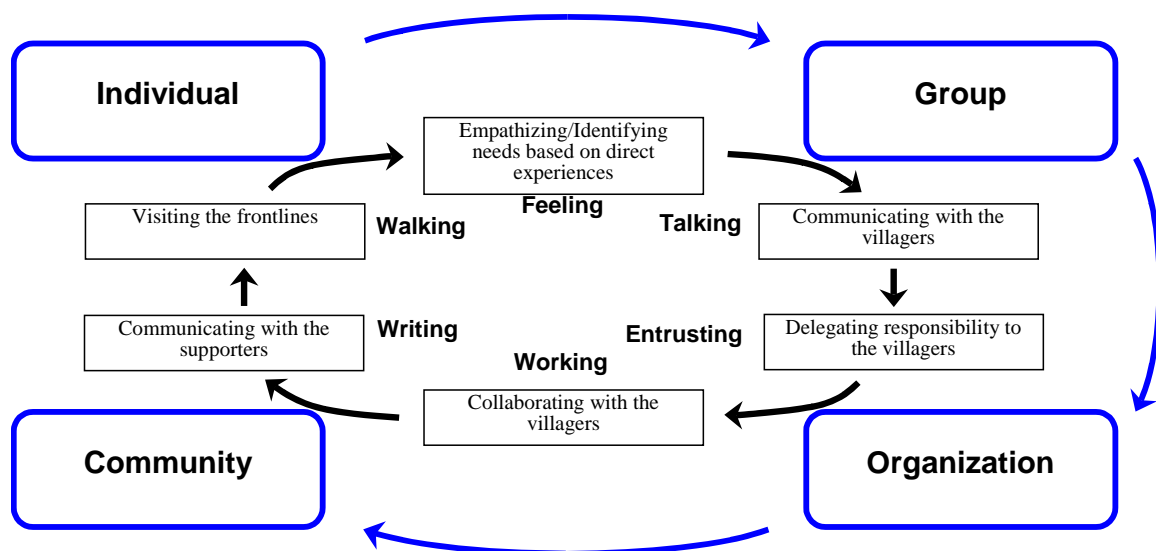


11.1 A way of life that creates social knowledge to better society

The way of living of a *phronetic* leader can be seen as a continuous process of social knowledge creation towards a common good through constant interaction with other individuals. Accordingly, each activity in this process, including the virtuous habits developed to support it, should increase *phronesis* in the leader and, by extension, other individuals who interact with the leader (described in Chapter 5).

In the case of OK Baji, his way of living to aid the people of Eastern Palpa can be articulated (or visualized) as a six-step process of social knowledge creation composed of the following six gerunds: walking, feeling, talking, entrusting, working, and writing. His actions at each step are designed to improve village life in Eastern Palpa, and are related to a common social aim (described in Chapter 7).

Figure 11.2 The four ontological levels of OK Baji's six-step social knowledge creation process



From a knowledge transfer perspective, OK Baji's six-step process spirals from

lower to higher ontological levels as increasingly larger groups of actors receive and diffuse social knowledge as they interact in dynamic shared contexts (Figure 11.2). The relationship between OK Baji's six-step process, the ontological levels (individual, group, organization, and community), and the influence of shared contexts, is described in the next section.

11.1.1 OK Baji's four ontological levels of social knowledge creation

Gaining individual level knowledge

In the six-step process, individual tacit-level knowledge is cultivated in the steps of walking, the starting point of the entire process, and feeling, where needs are identified through direct experiences. These first two steps are described below.

Walking

In its most basic form, knowledge is created by the individual (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995: 59). In OK Baji's case, the starting point of this creative process is when he walks to the frontlines (the villages of Eastern Palpa) and exposes himself to the living conditions of those he is trying to help. He meets villagers in their homes, sits with them on the dirt floor, eats the same food, and sleeps the way they do. He shares in their delights and their hardships, and opens up to them so they can experience his own happiness and sadness in return. By socializing in this manner, OK Baji directly experiences the villagers' way of living and gains a contextually relevant understanding of their predicament – one that varies from person to person, household to household, and village to village. And in the isolated regions of the

Nepalese highlands, the only way to obtain such contextually rich knowledge is by walking to the remote villages and interacting with residents firsthand.

Feeling

When directly interacting with villagers in their specific contexts, OK Baji uses his five senses to recognize their situation and empathize with their plight. This allows him to more accurately identify their true needs, especially the silent “cries” for help from the “voiceless” group (the underprivileged, the helpless, and the destitute).

Recall the case of the little girl from Gorekharaku with boils on her scalp, whom OK Baji gently inspected and treated back in December 2001. Or, while visiting Chhis in January 2004, how he noted the children’s improving educational opportunities paralleled the village’s overall development. Or the very busy morning of December 2006, when OK Baji patiently listened, identified, and tended to the needs of a long string of visitors who stopped by his hotel room in Tansen seeking help. Or, in December 2007, as OK Baji checked the progress of a boy recovering from the accidental vaccination-induced paralysis of the legs, he tapped the boy’s shoulder only to be rewarded with a smile in return. Each of the above cases are examples of how OK Baji used his five senses to empathize with others and identify their true needs.

From individual level to group level knowledge

Talking

The third step in OK Baji's social knowledge creation process is talking, the point where knowledge ontologically transfers from the individual to the group. OK Baji's tacit knowledge, embodied while walking and feeling, becomes articulated (and transformed into explicit form) as he documents the needs of those he meets during his travels from village to village. During the articulation process, OK Baji relies on a comprehensive network of consultants built over the years that covers every VDC of Eastern Palpa, to verify and refine identified needs and design effective solutions.

Jeevan Pokharel is one such consultant, a cooperative relationship that started in 1998 when he helped OK Baji rebuild Bhalaytar's secondary school. In December 2006, when OK Baji met with requests to rebuild run-down children's literacy schools while visiting villages adjacent to Bhalaytar, he confirmed with Jeevan, who joined him on the trek, the educational and economic conditions of each village. This allowed OK Baji to confirm and prioritize school reconstruction projects and estimate the financial support required for each one.

Another consultant is Bhuvan Singh Thapa, who helped OK Baji find a volunteer willing to supply milk to feed a recently widowed father's four-day-old infant. Not satisfied with this short-term solution, OK Baji and Bhuvan discussed longer-term ways of resolving

similar problems, which led to the creation of a fund to subsidize future purchases of powdered baby milk.

These types of contextually specific solutions stem from OK Baji's process of dialogue (talking) with individuals who, compared to him, possess a deeper understanding of local conditions, allowing both sides to articulate and exchange tacit knowledge between each other and with other groups.

The use of metaphors and analogies is also an effective way of transforming tacit knowledge into an explicit form, especially in the dialogue process. OK Baji is an adept user of anecdotes. To explain the importance of self-sufficiency in village development initiatives, he often says, "If a person give his thumb to others, his arm gets eaten." And regarding development, he says, "Development is not to forward a single man 100 steps, but to forward 100 men one step." Such metaphors help elevate the ontological level of his individual knowledge by articulating it into forms that are easier to understand by larger groups of individuals.

From group level to organizational level knowledge

Entrusting

The fourth step in OK Baji's knowledge creation process is entrusting, or delegating responsibility to, others to carry out projects designed to improve their own communities. As more individuals get involved in the projects, individual level knowledge transfers onto larger

groups of actors, diffusing past the group level and onto the organizational level, eventually becoming organizational knowledge.

This is what happened when OK Baji asked residents to design solutions to help disabled members in their villages while he provided the financial support (Chapter 7). The flexibility afforded to the residents to independently create solutions promoted their commingling of group level knowledge, transferring once disparate know-how into organizational level solutions.

However, for entrusting to work, social capital, such as trust and care, must exist among the actors involved in the process. “Everybody likes to be consulted,” said OK Baji (K. Kakimi, interview, June 27, 2007). He recalled those cases when telling villagers what to do caused them to stop thinking for themselves, but when consulted, they expressed opinion, shared experiences, and combined knowledge to find ways to develop their community.

From organizational level to community level knowledge

Working

The fifth step in OK Baji’s social knowledge creation process is working, or the execution of plans developed in the talking and entrusting steps. In this step, organizational knowledge is extended into community level knowledge through collaborative endeavors encompassing entire communities.

For example, in infrastructure development projects requiring large quantities of

manual labor input, such as the construction of a new school, community members make significant contributions by volunteering as free labor. In other cases, such as paying for urgently needed yet costly medical care for a village resident, fellow community members band together to collect the required funds. Both cases work because all available resources (including the knowledge assets possessed at the individual, group, and organizational levels) are leveraged for the benefit of the entire community.

Inter-community level knowledge

Writing

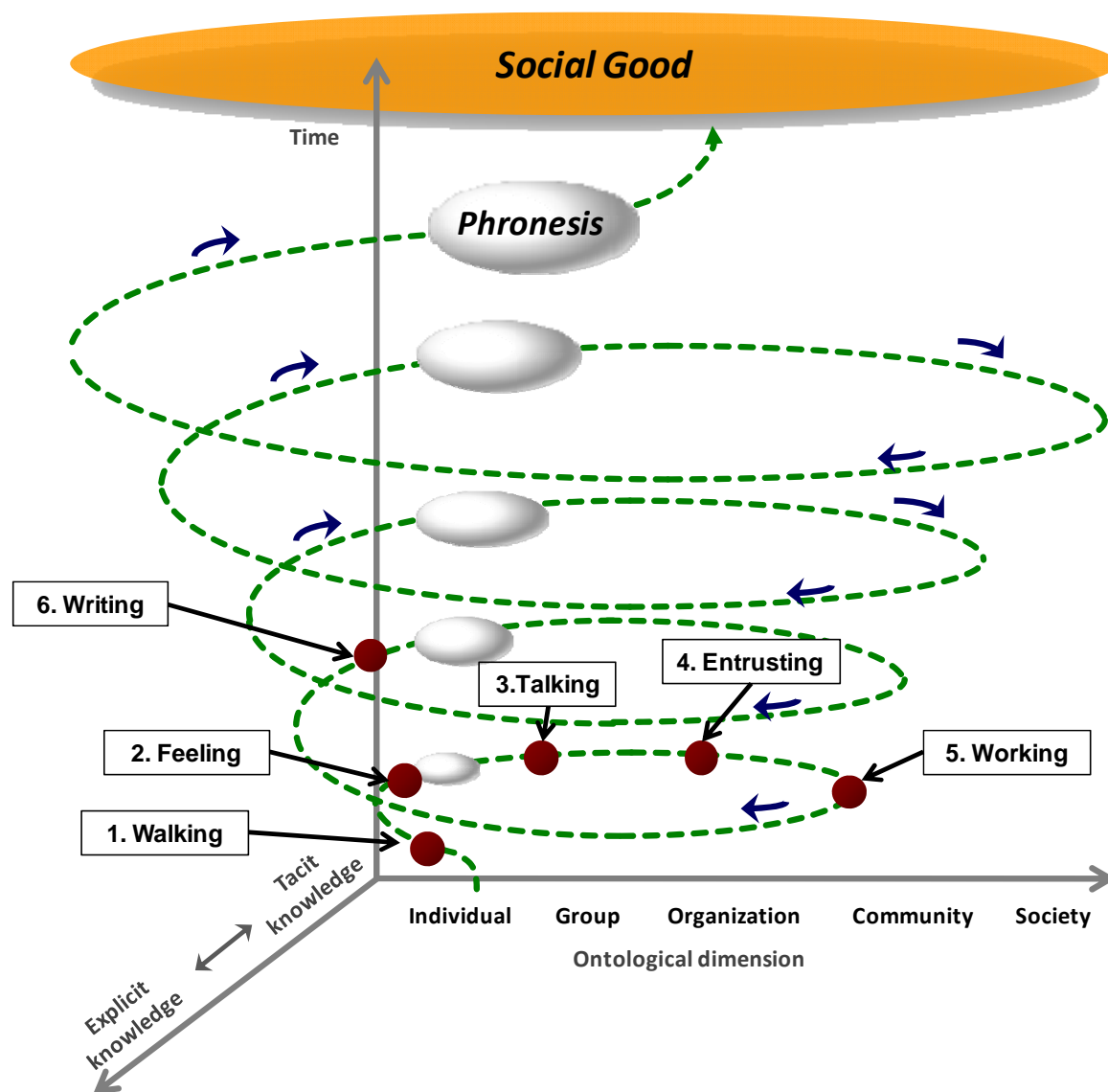
This sixth step in OK Baji's OK Baji's social knowledge creation process is writing – the act of communicating with supporters and donors. While the previous step – working – puts into practice knowledge created during the walking, feeling, talking, and entrusting steps, the writing step is characterized by the reflection and assessment of past undertakings, current endeavors, and achieved/expected results.

OK Baji articulates this reflection and assessment by writing letters describing his experiences in Nepal, a process during which he converts accumulated tacit knowledge into an explicit form that is transferred to other individuals when they read his letters. This process also allows OK Baji's individual level knowledge to transfer across community level boundaries (e.g. from Nepal to Japan).

Letter writing can also be considered the trigger point that elevates the six-step

process to a higher level of social knowledge creation, where knowledge assets accumulate past a threshold and the ontological boundaries of knowledge transfer expand, as shown in Figure 11.3. Eventually, with successively higher levels of the social knowledge creation spiral, knowledge assets will transcend community level limits and diffuse into society at large.

Figure 11.3 Expanding levels of OK Baji's six-step social knowledge creation process



11.1.2 *Dynamic shared contexts created by OK Baji*

At each ontological level of OK Baji's six-step knowledge creation process, shared contexts in motion (*Ba*) allow OK Baji to directly experience, and empathize with, those he is trying to help. This is especially the case during the feeling step, when OK Baji fosters pure experiences by placing himself "in the shoes" of those he meets and identifying their true needs. This is most effective when he successfully mutes all differences (by discarding the self) and "becomes" the person or objective he is trying to experience (from an ontological perspective, two separate beings become one). These kinds of pure experiences are the essence of dynamic shared contexts and the spawning point of new knowledge, and OK Baji creates such *Ba* with village residents by living as they do and experiencing their circumstances using his five senses. It is also possible that his near-death experiences surviving the Annapurna avalanche and the bus accident enabled him to more strongly empathize with others who are coping with pain and loss.

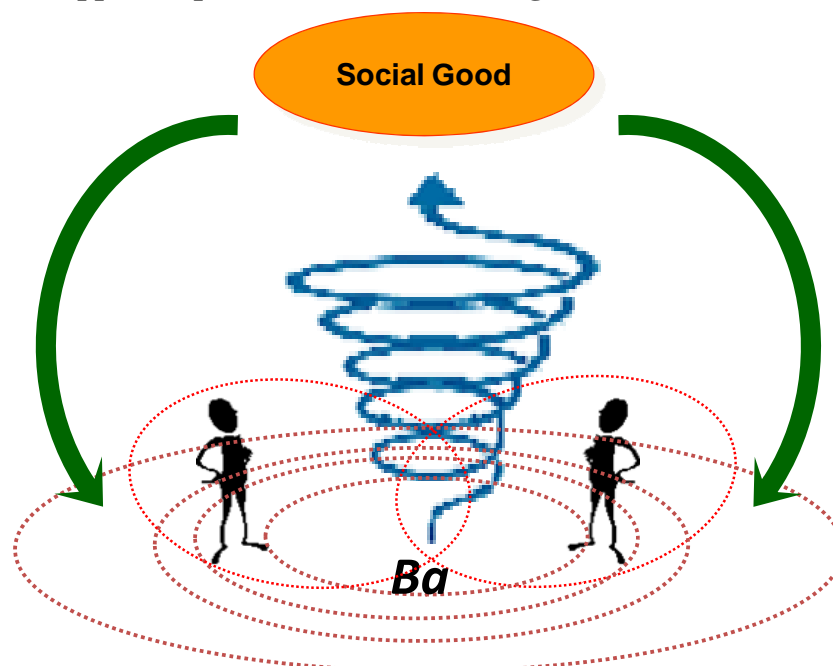
The various *Ba* created during each cycle of OK Baji's six-step social knowledge creation process also fostered social capital that extended the longevity of OK Baji's social services. Although several forms of social capital already existed (love, care, and respect for elders, described in Chapter 4) among the village residents of Eastern Palpa, OK Baji's efforts to improve village life was paid back in kind in other forms of social capital, including love, care and trust, all of which fed his willingness to continue providing aid (and cycle the

six-steps again and again).

11.1.3 *Perpetually serving towards social good*

To understand the link between OK Baji's long record of social services in Nepal and his sustained willingness to continue them, we again turn to the pure experience phenomenon. OK Baji (single actor) takes pleasure from helping others (other actors). Conceptually, endeavors to foster social good create results in feedback to those actors who closely empathize with each other (become one) and share tacit knowledge in a shared context (*Ba*), as shown in Figure 11.4. The feedback engenders goodwill in the actors, allowing them to build new relationships and new perspectives through which acts to help others are perceived as beneficial to the giver as well. In this way, OK Baji experiences his efforts to help the villagers of Eastern Palpa as rewarding in his own life.

Figure 11.4 Social good feedback – Actors who endeavor towards social good (spiral) in *Ba* (overlapped ellipses) are rewarded with goodwill (downward arrows)



11.2 *Cultivating phronesis over time*

OK Baji's *phronesis* is neither static nor set in stone. It has changed over time, evolving with every successive cycle of his six-step process of social knowledge creation. This was described in Chapters 6 to 8 (which describe the three elements of OK Baji's *phronesis*), which showed how OK Baji's *phronesis* transitioned over a 14-year period – from 1993 to 2007. Comparing OK Baji's changing *phronesis* at these two points in time (summarized in Table 11.1), we find that two elements (Social Good and Virtuous Habits of Decision-making and Taking Action) grew in scope and sophistication while the third (Value and Ethics) transformed from one set to another.

For example, in the Social Good element, the scope of OK Baji's social services grew from simple acts of localized aid in 1993 (applying a band-aid to an injured child, rebuilding a woman's literacy school, building a potable water system, and distributing used clothes from Japan) to a portfolio of services in 2007 (addressing medical, educational, and basic self-sufficiency needs) that covered every VDC of Eastern Palpa.

Meanwhile, in the element of Virtuous Habits of Decision-making and Taking Action, OK Baji's approach to his activities became more sophisticated. For example, in 1993, his decision-making/action routine was based almost entirely on the requests of villagers he could communicate with and his endeavors were funded out of his own pocket. By 2007, his

routine had evolved into a comprehensive decision-making process that filtered requests for aid based on specific and contextual need, information gleaned from his five senses at the frontlines, lessons from past mistakes and failures, doing what was possible in each particular case, and taking actions based on his six-step process (walking, feeling, talking, entrusting, working, and writing). The expanding sophistication of this *phronesis* element also gave rise to OK Baji's creative routines of living modestly, and maximizing every donation.

Finally, OK Baji's third *phronesis* element of Values and Ethics has transformed from his original 1993 aims of reviewing his own childhood and helping the villagers of Nepal in any way possible to his 2007 values of "becoming selfless" (Simple life, high thinking; One day, one discard; Contentment (*Chi Soku*); and If I don't have what I like, I like what I have) and "becoming useful" (Being needed instead of successful and Nothing is useless).

Table 11.1 OK Baji's three *phronesis* elements in 1993 and 2007

	1993	2007
Social Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping an injured child • Rebuilding a literacy school • Building a potable water system • Distributing used clothes from Japan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health post/clinic construction ○ Funds to subsidize medical treatment • Educational support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Construction/repair of educational facilities ○ New primary/secondary schools ○ Classroom Furniture (desks & chairs) ○ Funds for teacher salaries/scholarships • Basic self-sufficiency needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Potable water supply systems ○ Income generation projects (funds) ○ Disabled people support (funds) ○ Bridge constructions
Virtuous Habits for Decision-making and Taking Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make decisions based on ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ villagers' requests and opinions • Take action by ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ visiting villages ○ talking with villagers ○ funding out of pocket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make decisions based on ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ an individual's specific contextual need ○ information gleaned from all five senses at the frontline ○ lessons from past mistakes and failures ○ what is possible in each particular case • Take action by ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ walking to the frontlines ○ feeling to empathize and identify needs ○ talking to the villagers ○ entrusting the villagers ○ working together with the villagers ○ writing to supporters ○ living modestly ○ maximizing every donation
Values and Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing his own childhood • Help others in any way possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming selfless <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simple life, high thinking ○ One day, one discard ○ Contentment (<i>Chi Soku</i>) ○ If I don't have what I like, I like what I have • Becoming useful <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being needed – useful instead of successful ○ Nothing is useless

11.3 *Limitation of thesis and future challenges*

The findings presented in this study rely on data collected over the course of seven years of field research. Due to my high-level of interaction with the observed subjects (OK Baji, members of local NGOs, villagers of Eastern Palpa, donors in Japan, etc.) and direct involvement in development projects during the data collection stages, there are issues regarding the reliability of all collected information.

While I have strived to remain as independent as possible in my observations and interpretations, possible biased views in collecting sources of evidence could have occurred. It is impossible to completely detach the emotions surrounding key events that transpired during my stays in Nepal, like when my former students from Bhalaytar's secondary school recited their farewell speeches during the farewell picnic hosted in my honor back in December 2001. Nevertheless, emotionally-charged events are also pivotal milestones that foster change in individuals (such as surviving a near-death experience or seeing children reach a "eureka" moment) or groups (like witnessing the much-celebrated inauguration of a new potable water supply system, opening of a new school, or attending the OK Baji Cup), and descriptions of such occasions include all innuendos, including subjective emotions, in order to provide as complete a picture as possible.

Another limitation of this study concerns verification and replication of findings. Although it is possible to conduct similar studies based on the three criteria of *phronetic*

leadership (serve towards social good, possess and cultivate the three elements of *phronesis*, and foster *phronesis* in others) on other still-living humanitarians, such as Nelson Mandela, Sadako Ogatu, or Muhammad Yunus, it might be impossible to articulate their way of living as a process because of two reasons: 1) time constraints, and 2) the lack of relationship depth needed to foster shared contexts in which the subject and the observer mutually attain pure experiences. It took years of close contact alongside OK Baji to arrive at the depth of familiarity required to recognize and articulate his way of living, and it is expected to take just as long (if not more) to reach the same level with another subject.

This final point also calls into question the future direction of this study. This study has deeply focused on the fostering of an individual's *phronesis*. This study is a single case study based on one individual's way of living. Meanwhile, in the field of social knowledge creation, there seems to be a number of models (e.g., CSR, NGO, charity, and philanthropy) that have derived to fulfill toward social good. In my next study, I would like to conduct extensive research in such models and compare with the findings of this current study. Focusing, in particular, on how individuals themselves working under such models have been changed in terms of the three elements of *phronesis*.

On the other hand, although pursuing replication (by looking at *phronesis* in another individual) is a possibility, albeit a long-term one, another interesting and shorter-term avenue of exploration is to verify or expand presented findings by looking at how one actor (OK

Baji) inspired independently-operating groups of actors to pursue social good (the expansion of *phronesis*). Potential cases include tracking how the Magar are transforming Bardakot village into a model, ethnically homogenous, self-sustained village, looking at the epistemological/ontological expansion of the OK Baji Cup, or assessing the social impact of increased access to education among Bhalaytar's youth.

11.4 Personal takeaways

There are six takeaways based on my experiences the past seven years alongside OK Baji. These are: 1) my personal social knowledge level, 2) to start small, 3) to entrust others, 4) to create social capital, 5) to become selfless and useful, and 6) to have a clear and distinct vision. A practical implication derived from these takeaways can be stated as follows: start small and think big based on one's own values toward social good.

11.4.1 Social knowledge levels

If I placed OK Baji and myself on the same social knowledge creation spiral (Figure 11.1), OK Baji's position would be at a much higher level relative to mine. This makes sense, since OK Baji has cycled through his six-steps of social knowledge creation process more intensely, more frequently, and for much longer than I have. Consequently, his individual *phronesis* has elevated to a level far above my own.

If *phronesis* in the social knowledge creation spiral were quantized based on my

observations and experiences in Nepal over the years, I contend my *phronesis* to be at the 3rd or 4th level while OK Baji is above the 4th level, as per the following discrete categorizations:

- 0th level: Null state (no awareness of OK Baji or his activities in Nepal)
- 1st level: Awareness of single actor (OK Baji) who strives towards social good
- 2nd level: Actor becomes role model/source of inspiration towards social good
- 3rd level: Social good transcends as source of inspiration towards social good
- 4th level: Become a role model/source of inspiration to other actors who then strive towards social good
- 5th level and higher: Inspire inter-community efforts by groups of disparate actors towards a common social good

I reached the 1st level of the social knowledge spiral in December 2001, after volunteering to teach Bhalaytar's secondary school and witnessing OK Baji perform his social services in the field. I progressed to the 2nd level after getting inspired by OK Baji, who at this point I considered a role model, to take action and help my former students by establishing a scholarship fund in early 2003. Reaching the 3rd level took longer, and the transition started in 2003, when I first spoke with Ritsuko Watanabe and OK Baji about holding an exhibition volleyball match during the OK Baji Festival. This kicked off a series of activities that ultimately led to the first OK Baji Cup – an event created to enrich the lives of the children of Eastern Palpa. Over the course of the four OK Baji Cups (from 2004 to

2007), I reached the 4th level – a stage where new actors (such as the group who donated initial seed money to fund the first OK Baji Cup) become the drivers who inspire others people in the community towards social good.

The 4th level also seems to be the threshold above which the social knowledge spiral (at the 5th level) becomes self-perpetuating by spawning new spirals among other community groups (such as the growth and reorganization of the OK Baji Cup into two geographical regions). Only time will tell whether or not these new spirals will accumulate the inertia needed to make them persist on their own or if they will depend on the original spiral for support.

11.4.2 *Start small*

If we can learn anything from OK Baji, it is that to achieve social good you must start small. OK Baji himself started helping by applying a band-aid on a small boy's knee. The new school built in Lankuri used donations from Japan that only started being collected after OK Baji sent postcard to an elementary school in Tokyo. These achievements would not have taken place without him performing two straightforward acts – walking and writing. Although these are simple activities, walking 5.5 million steps a year across mountainous terrain is the only way to visit the remote villages of Eastern Palpa and offer aid, while writing over 500 letters each year keeps supporters apprised of how their donations were used in a distant country most of them will never see.

Relationships are another area where starting small is important. Strong bonds interconnecting individuals allow them to deeply share experiences and create new knowledge. But forming strong bonds requires people to share a common perspective, one that only appears through dialogue that, in turn, is influenced by pre-existing relationships. Consequently, to amplify knowledge creation, individuals must share their unique experiences with others, and in so doing become connected and build new relationships. This is in line with the notion that “to experience” is equivalent “to create” (Nonaka et al., 2007: 89), and investing to cultivate interpersonal bonds, however small, should reap long-term returns in the form of new knowledge.

11.4.3 *Entrust others*

During my first visits to Nepal, I was often frustrated by the apparent lack of cooperation of village residents, from their frequent and unapologetic failure to honor scheduled meeting times to their vocal, unconstructive, and often contrarian opinion.

For example, while setting up the scholarship fund at Bhalaytar’s secondary school, village residents continuously opposed my suggestions to make recipients repay awarded grants (similar to a long-term, interest-free student loan) even though this would expand the fund’s size and increase the number of future awards. After venting my frustrations to OK Baji, he offered a simple piece of advice: Let the villagers decide for themselves. After all, no one else could claim to better know local village conditions.

It turns out that in Eastern Palpa it is difficult for students to find jobs after they finish secondary school, much less pay back a grant. Village residents knew this, but for a long time I did not. After finding out, I realized I had been the “troublemaker” who, during the scholarship meetings, insisted and argued without a full grasp of all the facts, and I stopped insisting on unrealistic conditions.

However, my biggest test of entrusting others took place the day in December 2004 when my wife (after an 11-day stay) and I (after a 40-day stay) were heading back to Japan from Bhalaytar. We left the village early in the morning, accompanied by seven students and the school’s head teacher, and walked three hours to a hill where a chartered jeep waited to take us to Pokhara. After meeting the jeep driver, he told us that a *Nepal Banda*, announced by the Maoist that morning, had come into force and all transportation services had to be suspended. It seemed our travel plans to Japan had to be scrapped.

After a few minutes, a crowd of villagers, curious about our plight, gathered around us and began discussing with the head teacher about alternative ways of getting us to Pokhara. One villager suggested walking the six hours to the village of Bimad, where we could rent bicycles to travel the remaining 30 kilometers to Pokhara. As the only viable option, we chose to walk to Bimad. But before setting off, another villager showed up, heard about our plight, and told everyone he had seen a jeep coming from Bimad earlier in the day, so our jeep should be able to travel there without government reprisal.

After arriving at Bimad (the students and head teacher also came along), the jeep driver arranged bicycles for us and even offered to pick them up from Pokhara after the *Nepal Banda* ended. But just as we were getting ready to go, a Bimad resident told the driver that a bus had recently arrived from Koireni, a town 10 kilometers in the direction of Pokhara; a sign that the roads to that town were clear to drive. The driver took us to Koireni, and although the flow of traffic was low due to the morning's *Nepal Banda* announcement, there were no signs of armed strike enforcement on the highway leading to Pokhara. The driver decided to go all the way and, to everyone's relief, we arrived at Pokhara without incident and our trip back to Japan continued as planned. This episode really struck home the wisdom of OK Baji's advice of "entrusting" the local villagers and that only those at the frontlines know the real situation.

11.4.4 Create social capital

Before I met OK Baji, my personal and professional goals centered on economic gain: work in a company, solve problems, and earn a living. This changed after seeing OK Baji in action in Eastern Palpa. He was a true problem solver who tackled an array of daunting social challenges armed with just a backpack, a notebook, and a pencil. And in the process of identifying and resolving the true needs of those he encountered, he fostered social capital such as love (among village residents for fruits of their labor, such as projects they helped to make a reality), joy (among children who sought an education), care (for fellow neighbors in need of help during emergencies), security (that water will be available for everyone to drink),

and trust (in OK Baji and other likeminded individuals who seek to improve village life).

I had an epiphany after volunteering as a teacher in Bhalaytar. Experiencing the moments when students' eyes brightened up as they learned new things became a source of value more enriching than the prospect of financial incentives of corporate life. This is why I quit my job, abandoned the security of a steady income, and set out to pursue value by helping the students of Bhalaytar fulfill their dreams of gaining a higher education.

Of course, in today's society, economic capital is indispensable for any humanitarian project to succeed. But after assessing the results of OK Baji's social services over the years, I now understand that social capital will, over time, beget economic capital, and my aim is to pursue endeavors that foster social capital.

11.4.5 *Become selfless and useful*

It is not easy to be like OK Baji. The values he holds dear, formed over many years, are strongly linked to his unique set of experiences and center on two key aims, becoming selfless and becoming useful, as follows:

Becoming selfless:

- Simple life, high thinking
- One day, one discard
- Contentment (*Chi Soku*)
- If I don't have what I like, I like what I have

Becoming useful:

- Being needed – useful instead of successful
- Nothing is useless

A simple life, composed of working, eating, and sleeping, can be pursued anywhere – in a rural village in Nepal or in an urban center like Tokyo. Living simply has allowed me to identify the truly important in my own life. Time spent with my family, especially my daughter, is one such discovery I might not have made had I led a busier and more complicated life.

At the same time, even a simple life can give rise to stressful moments, which I have slowly learned to cope with by trying to discard unconstructive emotions, including anger, impatience, or jealousy. I have also learned to assert greater self-control and think more clearly in a wide variety of situations, and appreciate the present conditions of my life.

It is not easy to become selfless and useful, but over the past seven years I have experienced how helping others ultimately enriched my own life in return. If OK Baji's claim that the people of Eastern Palpa are the "masters of happiness" is true, then his values, derived from village life, should embody the practical wisdom of a happy life.

11.4.6 Have a clear and distinctive vision

My final takeaway concerns OK Baji's vision for the future. To shed light on his vision, I asked him four questions, listed below along with his response to each one:

What future do you hope for Eastern Palpa?

It is simple. Water. I hope every villager in Eastern Palpa can access drinking water in the future. I now know there is plenty of water available yet so many villagers have a hard time accessing it. I would like to help them secure access to water (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

What future do you hope for Nepal?

Independence. A large quantity of international aid is being pumped into Nepal, but I hope the country can become independent of such aid in the future (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

What future do you hope for Japan?

I wish the Japanese could turn back the clock on their living standards by several decades. As living standards in Japan improved, it seems greed among people also expanded. As a result, infrastructure such as water and electricity supply systems were continuously developed to be more efficient and satisfy the expanding wants of the people. It is like a vicious circle where the greed of human beings feeds the upward development of living standards. There is no reason why Japanese cannot lead fulfilling lives with the living standard of older times. I just hope many of them realize the importance of contentment (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

What future do you hope for the world?

Do you know why humans have come to stand on two legs? Humans stand on two legs to lend a hand to others. If more [people] helped by lending a hand to someone who is in trouble or who is facing hardship, the world would change to a better place for everyone (K. Kakimi, interview, July 12, 2006).

Nonaka et al. (2007b) argue that management is a way of living, and values based on questions like “How do we live?” and “What do we live for?” are indispensable to corporations composed of, and in decisions made by, people. From this perspective, OK Baji’s way of living to foster social good and his vision for the future offer insights on how goals and visions should encompass everyone – those who need aid and those who can provide it.

11.5 Conclusion

We can now revisit and respond to the two questions regarding the advancement of *phronesis* posed in the introduction of this thesis.

Has knowledge to serve the common good advanced over the past 2,300 years?

Yes. *Phronesis* – the practical wisdom to serve the common or social (humanitarian) good – has accumulated over time, cultivated by individuals, like OK Baji, who have

succeeded to instill this wisdom in others, generation after generation, through an ontologically expanding, self-perpetuating spiral of social knowledge creation.

Will the human race survive long enough to witness the Sun transform into a red giant, or will they survive for only another 10,000 years, or perhaps just 100 years?

Yes. As long as people continue to cultivate *phronesis*, the human race should eventually discover a way to persevere and overcome every catastrophe, calamity, and disaster it will face in the years to come.

Let us contemplate about the era to come, 10 billion years from now, long after the Sun exhausted its hydrogen and helium deposits, expanded into a red giant, and shrank into a dying ember of its former glory – a densely compressed mass of carbon leftovers fused into a crystallized core. The Earth, along with all traces of past human habitation, was erased some five billion years in the past. Is this the cold, lifeless fate that lies in store for us?

Now take a new perspective. The Sun is no more, fused into a carbon crystal so pure it has melded into a spherical diamond the size of the long gone Earth. The future descendants of the human race will ponder the diamond-relic of their once-bright Sun from the safety of new and unforeseen abodes somewhere distant. Children of the post-apocalyptic Sun, these descendants will embody the knowledge, the wisdom, and the know-how to help each other survive into time without end. And although none of them will remember the names of people like OK Baji, his legacy will remain, embodied as *phronesis* in the decisions

and actions taken towards their evolved notion of social good. This is my vision. And with *phronetic* leadership, it can be achieved.

Appendix A: Unedited Diary Transcripts of the Seven-day Trek of 2004

1st day (January 3, 2004): Chhis to Batasa

On January 3, 2004 January, OK Baji and I departed Chhis village at 8:40 a.m. after having breakfast. It was the beginning of my second round of village walking tour with OK Baji. We scheduled to walk villages after villages for seven days and planed to be back at Bhalaytar on the last day of our village walking tour.

Prior to the beginning of walking tour, OK Baji and I met at Chhis village on New Year day and celebrated the New Year together deep in the mountains. It was our promised plan to meet at Chhis on New Year Day from previous year when we met in Tokyo. I could visit Chhis with the help of a villager from Bhalytar village. He kindly accompanied with me to Chhis village. On the way to Chhis village, while walking on the familiar trail along the river, I could observe an amazing thing on the other side of the river across from where I was walking. One route was vividly constructed and continued as far as it could go in the horizontal direction about five meters above the surface of the river. I was able to realize it at once when I saw it. It was the irrigation channel toward Chhis village. It was such a development in two years. Last time I saw the channel, it was dug about only 100m; though, just two years later, the channel was now dug as far as it could go. I respected gratefully the villagers in Chhis for their endurance, persistence, and continuous efforts for their next generation. I lost my word for a minute to observe such great efforts of human beings and recalled the following phrase that OK Baji one introduced to me; like a spring, every beginning of all things is small.

Figure A.1 Chhis Irrigation channel development over two years



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

As previously planned, I could meet OK Baji at Chhis on January 1, in 2004. After enjoying the slow life at the Chhis for two days, we left the village in the morning of the third day.

Figure A.2 OK Baji at Chhis in 2004



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

We walked down to the river to a stretch from Chhis village. We took off shoes and walked in the river to cross. And then, we walked up a hill to head for a village called Pokharachap. We walked shaded and slippery trail on the hill side and reached Pokharachap at 10:40 am, two hours after we departed Chhis.

My first impression at Pokharachap was that the view of Mt. Machapuchar was supreme. We were invited to a villager's home and we were served a yam with honey, chicken meat, and *Dhal Bhat* for our lunch. Around 12:30 pm, we visited a primary school where 118 students in total studied from first grade to fifth grade. And then, a ceremony to distribute a note book and a pencil, which were purchased by a financial support from Japan, to all students, began. OK Baji handed a note book and I handed a pencil to each student one by one. Each note book and pencil cost RS 5 or 8 yen.

Later at Pokharachap, OK Baji handed his personal check with the amount of RS54,000 to the headmaster of the primary school in front of the other villagers to rebuild school building. There was a boy who lost his parent lately at that time. OK Baji introduced him a fostering program of a Japanese NGO called Saitatama UNESCO, which had worked with OK Baji for several years. We left for next village at 2:40pm.

We arrived at next village called Batasa in Jamire VDC about 80 minutes later they left Pokharachap. There was a lower-secondary school which held from first grade to eighth grade on top of a hill. This school was built by Japanese financial support through a Japanese lady. She initiated a one-yen fund-raising at a junior high school at her home town in Miyagi prefecture in Japan. She donated the raised fund to OK Baji to construct that lower-secondary school. In Batasa villages, there had been no students who passed SLC exam or even no students who completed the eighth grade yet. Among the requests that OK Baji was listening to the villagers in Batasa, there was a request to build a secondary school where students could study up to the tenth grade and could have an opportunity to challenge SLC exam after completing the tenth grade. OK Baji took those requests from the villagers to his notes in detail.

Figure A.3 OK Baji in front of the lower secondary school at Pokharachap



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

Too late to be cured One villager guided us from Pokharachap to Batasa. When we arrived at Batasa, this villager took us to meet his seven year old son. This boy fell from wall around the school building and broke his leg. When OK Baji got to know him, two months already passed. That time his broken bone of leg was already harden and remained as bent as it was. If he was brought up to a hospital right after the accident, his broken leg was easily fixed however it was too late. OK Baji kept telling in different villages as follows. “When something happens, please go to a hospital immediately and collect money for necessary treatments by local NGO at first and bring the bill to OK Baji later” (K. Kakimi, interview, January 3, 2004).

Some of the villagers acted as OK Baji said but that boy at Batasa could not act. It was too late for boy to know what OK Baji told. On that occasion at Batasa, OK Baji briefly shared the history of medical funds at that occasion. During the first year since he started to live in Palpa, he spent almost 100 million yen which was his own pocket money to help invalid villagers. Later, he got to know a Japanese NGO called CRS (Children Relief Society). And then, he could establish one medical fund in each of 18 VDCs with the financial support from them. Each fund was established based on RS100,000 and has generated 24% of interest annually, which became RS24,000 for the annual medical budget in each VDC.

In 2003, the year before then, about 700 million yen gathered at OK Baji as monetary support. Among them, 100 million yen was donated every year from a NPO called OK Baji SS (OK Baji Supporting Society), which consisted of old friends of OK Baji in Japan. Thanks to OK Baji SS, he could utilize this 100 million yen freely to whenever he saw the necessity of supports for villagers. In 2003, he used one third of it to medical supports, another one third of it to educational scholarships and the other one third to emergent supports such as fire, injures, and sudden sicknesses. Because of these Japanese financial supports, OK Baji could hand a check when he saw a villager who was in the emergent needs while he walked villages after villages.

2nd day (January 4, 2004): Batasa to Mudhabus

In the morning at Batasa villages in Jamire VDC, I was trying to find a toilet but no toilet was available in the village. A villager took me about five minute to a point where seemed a natural toilet was available in the forest.

Figure A.4 View of the village of Batasa in the VDC of Jamire



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

Compared with the villages located on relatively lower and flat regions in Eastren Palpa like Bhalaytar village, these villages located on the hill regions of mountains like Batasa seemed to behind in development. The availability of toilet could be one measure of the development level of the villages in Eastern Palpa.

OK Baji and I left Batasa at 8:40 a.m. to head for next destination, a village called Birpani after we had roasted pieces of corn for our breakfast. For the first 30 minutes, one villager from Batasa accompanied with us, but from there, we walked alone on a trail where we could observe Himalaya Montanans on our left side. We walked without talking anything each other for while. It seemed both of us were thinking something individually. One hour later, we arrived at a hill where two villagers from Birpani, our next destination, supposed to meet us. But, the villagers from Birpani were not there. They seemed to return since our arrival was late. Then, we continued to walk on the north-face of a mountain where got less sunlight. I wondered there might be leeches along the trail where two of us walked.

At 10:30 a.m., we arrived at Birpani and a full of yellow rape blossoms welcomed us. We ate *chaw chaw*, instant noodle, as for our lunch. At Birpani village, a construction for new secondary school was underway. The ground was dug and leveled by the villagers' labor, stone walls were about to be composed.

It seemed all of the villagers, men, women, and even small children carried stones in the basket on their back from a river far below the village. OK Baji talked with leaders in the village about the

progress of the construction and confirmed the construction was preceded along with the original plan. Later, he wrote a letter to the donor to report about the progress of the construction.

Figure A.5 School construction site near the village of Birpani



Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

Around noon, we departed Birpani and headed for Mudhabas village in Mityal VDC. The altitude meter on my hand-watch showed that Birpani located at 1,250 meters above sea level. Mudhabas located far below Birpani. We walked down hills at a stretch. Eighty minutes later, we reached at Mudhabas. The altitude meter indicated 550 meters above sea level. We walked down 700 meters at a stretch. Mudhabas was relatively flat and a number of beautiful fields were seen. Mudhabas was rich in water and moist. Ample amount of water ran in the irrigation channels. We attended a ground breaking ceremony for a secondary school which was going to be constructed with RS200,000 which was donated through OK Baji from a Japanese NPO.

Figure A.6 School construction groundbreaking ceremony at the village of Mudhabau



Note: Left picture shows the wooden post piled into the ground as a symbol for the ground breaking ceremony. Source: Pictures taken by author, January 2004.

In the evening at Mudhabas, we stayed at a home of a villager who was qualified as CMA (Community Medical Assistant). One can be qualified as CMA after 18 months of training. That home of CMA was like a clinic in the village. CMA can provide basic medical treatment such as injection and intravenous drip.

3rd Day (January 5, 2004): Mudhabas village to Mityal

We woke up at 6:00 a.m. and had honey, roasted soybeans and a cup of milk tea for our breakfast. And then, we left Mudhabas at 7:30 a.m. and headed to Mityal village. Right after the departure, OK Baji dropped at a villager's home and observed a girl who got hearing disability. From there, we started to climb up a hill. During the climbing up, OK Baji shared his experience of meeting a family live nearby Mudhabas. OK Baji once visited that family, there were only three members, a grandmother, a mother and a girl, and her father was missing. He visited there when the girl of the family was six years old. Since the mother had hearing disability, she could not talk with her child. The grandmother was so much weak to talk to the girl as well. Eventually, that girl was grown up almost without any conversation among the family. When OK Baji met that girl, she was like a girl grown in wild nature and had so much difficulty to communicate with him. He said he realized the importance of mother's role to talk to her child often.

Children and weapons We walked up the hills for about three hours and arrived at Mityal village in Mityal VDC at 1,200 meters above sea level. It was my second time to visit there. We took a brief break at a small local tea shop and had a cup of milk tea. OK Baji went to see a physically disabled villager as soon as he finished the tea while I kept taking a rest there. After a while, OK Baji returned and we went to see an infant school where about twenty small children of three to five years old come to study Nepalese alphabets, basic math and English alphabets. It was about that moment when we left the infant school and headed for a villager's home where we planned to stay over at that night, atmosphere around there suddenly turned tensed. About dozen of people who wore military camouflage fatigues with carrying a rifle or a machine-gun walked up from a trail in front of us. I thought instantly that they were the Maoists. Villagers around there became speechless and just held breathes. It seemed the group of the Maoists noticed the presence of two Japanese, but the group of Maoists kept walking, crossed my front, went down to the other trail and disappeared from the sight. It was a shocking moment and remained in my mind as a clear contrast between little children around there and those weapons that Maoists carried.

After having a full of rice with vegetable curry soup at a villager's home, I was tired by the long uphill walk from Mudhabas to Mityal and took a nap little while, but OK Baji went to see the villagers at a secondary school nearby. OK Baji was inexhaustible at the age of 63. His physical strength and commitment were always amazed me like in that case.

Around 2:30 p.m., I woke up from my good nap and started to read a book at a balcony where a beautiful view of Annapurna Mountain Range at north could be seen. A boy looked about twelve to thirteen years old came close to me and kindly said "please come inside and to get close to a fire place inside of home." The boy said he remembered that I visited there two years ago. I was simply delighted to

hear that the boy also remembered my name. It was such a simple pleasure but I felt that was some essence of the fundamental of human relations. When the boy said he remembered my name by surprise, I thought that our relation was kept being connected. I thought human beings might have such a nature as when a person feels connection to another person, we feel pleasure. In case of OK Baji, every village he goes, every villager greets with smile as “Namaste, OK Baji.” It might be a source for his internal strong energy. In short while, OK Baji returned. We had a dinner then with warmth from the fireplace. Around 19:00, I moved up to second floor and slipped into my sleeping bag to get sleep. OK Baji seemed to go out again for another meeting with villagers.

4th Day (January 6, 2004): Mityal to Gumuling

On January 6, 2004, in the morning at Mityal, when I woke up at 6:20 a.m., I was about to feel homesick for Bhalaytar. But recalling my initial determination to walk with OK Baji for one week and my original expectation as if I walked with OK Baji for one week long together, a new perspective could be found; I decided to continue to walk with OK Baji four more days together. I once again committed and made up my mind to walk with OK Baji according to the original schedule. And then, accordingly and gradually, my expectation to meet new experience, new places, and new people rose higher. After taking good rest in the previous night, my condition was good and ready to walk for next village.

We left the villager’s home at 7:45 a.m. and went to observe the infant school that we visited in the previous day. There were about twenty little children gathered and practiced English Alphabets so lively. The building for this infant school was built with the help of OK Baji. Then, we left Mityal at 9:00 a.m. and walk down the hill to reach next village called Baura. Baura located at 850m above sea level. After observing a school, we dropped at a villager’s home for a lunch.

We left Baura at 1:00 p.m. after finishing chicken meet curry and rice for our lunch. We walked up about ninety minutes from Baura village at 850 meters to Gardal village at 1,400 meters above sea level. At Gardal, they joined the ceremony to distribute used clothes shipped from Japan among villagers. In Gardal, there were 63 households, so the villagers randomly made 63 sets of used clothes and distributed them by drawing to each household. It was fun to watch the ceremony, but at the certain point I started to feel as it would continue forever. The process was slow. I wondered there should be more efficient way to distribute the used cloths in much shorter time. I said to OK Baji that there might be other procedures. OK Baji replied that it was just their way to enjoy this type of ceremony as their festival.

At 4:00 p.m., we were thankfully served chicken again, and then left for next village. OK Baji planned to visit a village called Dundanda, it was his first time to visit there. As a matter of fact, the chairman of the Dundanda village waited patiently till the end of the clothes distribution ceremony without making approaches to OK Baji. The chairman of Dundanda was there to guide OK Baji to his village. However, it was already dark in the evening after they walked about an hour. We decided to stay at a village called Gumuling, it was also the first time for OK Baji to visit there. The view of the evening sunlight from Gumuling was beautiful and impressive. The whole village turned orange with the sunset.

Modest villagers Visiting Dundanda seemed to be so much impressive to OK Baji as well. Whenever I met OK Baji and recalled their mutual experience since then, OK Baji brought the experience at Dundanda as one of the memorable events with me. According to OK Baji, the villagers at Dundanda were so humble that they could not raise their voice of requests regarding their basic needs to the local government like Chhis village. In addition, even though the villagers of Dundanda knew that one Japanese person called OK Baji had been helping underprivileged villagers in the villages of Eastern Palpa, they hesitated to ask OK Baji to come to their village and to see their problems. The villagers of Dundanda deserved OK Baji's visit so much and so long. Their wish finally came true.

OK Baji usually seemed to have not so much difficulty to communicate villagers in his Nepalese language. But, OK Baji said he had difficulty to communicate with the villagers of Dundanda. OK Baji felt that Dundanda was isolated from the other villages for long time and seemingly most of them had difficulty to communicate with someone from outside of the village.

Impressive and warm hospitality On the night at Gumuling before visiting Dhundhara next day was impressive. I came to know warm hospitalities from the villagers. As soon as we arrived at Gumuling, villagers gathered one after another. It seemed villagers who waited OK Baji's arrival at Dundanda also came to Gumuling to meet him. We were assigned to stay overnight at one of the largest homes in the village. That house had an electric fluorescent light powered by solar battery. The room we supposed to have dinner was filled by about dozen of villagers. They kept talking loudly but I felt like being alone quietly due to my weariness. OK Baji said calmly that those villagers should leave the room once we started eating our dinner. Around 7:00 p.m. relatively at late, we were served dinner on the earth floor by the fire place. I expected that those dozen of villagers would let two Japanese eat dinner calmly. However, there was no sign that those villages leave the room. While we were having dinner, those dozen of villages continuously observed us. They kept talking loud and I felt little uneasiness since a number of villagers seemed to look at me and talked how I was eating the Nepalese meal. At around 8:00 p.m., we decided to go sleep and move to behind the room where we had dinner; though, the dozen of villagers were still at the room.

Two wooden beds were available on both sides of the room where was allocated for us. I unfolded his sleeping bag on the one of the beds by the wall and slipped into it. The light was still turned on but I thought I could fall asleep easily and I slept. However, less than 30 minutes, I felt a sign of presence of several people around me and I woke up. I was so surprised when I slowly opened my eyes. Five villagers stared down into my face over my head.

When the five villagers realized that I was still awake, they started asked me if I needed a glass of water. I said no thanks shortly and tried to go back to sleep. The fluorescent light was still on. I closed my eyes but I felt that the five villagers were still there around me and observed me. I kept closing my eyes and tried to get to sleep. But, I could still sense that villagers came around me alternatively and kept observing my sleep. Reluctantly, I opened my eyes again. At once, the villagers around me started

throwing questions such as if I needed drinking water, if I felt cold, or if my pillow was comfortable. I did not understand Nepalese language well but I knew some of words such as *pani* meant water and *jado* meant cold. I could guess what the villagers were saying by those words as well as their gestures. I said “*Tik Cha, Tik Cha,*” meant I was all right and all right, and tried to get to sleep. About an hour later, finally the light was turned off. I felt relief and could fall asleep once but the villages were still there around the fireplace and kept talking with a small light of an oil lump. What I could do was just being patient. When it was around past ten o’clock, OK Baji woke up and spoke to villagers around the fireplace. OK Baji said that both of us could not get to sleep if the villagers kept talking. The villagers turned off the oil lump at last. But what I heard next was sound of pouring some liquid to a cup. It must be the sound of pouring *Roksi*, local wine. The villagers kept whispering. I repeated falling asleep and waking up all night.

5th Day (January 7, 2004): Dundanda to Sahalkot

Described in Chapter 5.

6th Day (January 8, 2004): Sahalkot to Bakamalang

In the morning at Sahalkot, OK Baji and I visited the home of the head teacher at the secondary school in the village. It was the home of the boy whom OK Baji took to Calcutta for the heart surgery. I was able to meet the boy, Niglarge Darlami.

We left Sahalkot and headed for next destination, Bakamalang. It took us two hours to reach there. As soon as we arrived, OK Baji went to see the health post which was constructed by the financial support from Japan through OK Baji. I could see he was delighted once by confirming the building that was constructed beautifully. But, inside of the building was mess and it made him disappointed. OK Baji found a villager who was in charge of the building and asked what had happened and discussed how to improve the situation. I found that it was one of the reasons that OK Baji was visiting villages after villages. He was checking if each building that he helped to construct was used without any problems.

On the night at Bakamalang, we stayed at the home of the former chairman of the local government. It seemed there was not enough space for us to sleep inside the house. I slept on the second floor of a buffalo hut with no walls and four buffalos and several goats were underneath. OK Baji slept under the eaves outside of the house.

7th Day (January 9, 2004): Bakamalang to Bhalaytar

On the seventh day, I returned to Bhalaytar village together with OK Baji. I felt I came back to my second home next to the one in Japan. As soon as I arrived the village’s home where I stayed at, I left my backpack and desperately rushed to Nisdy River to take a bath. Looking back, I did not take any bath or shower since I visited Chhis village back in nine days ago. I jumped into the cold flow of the river. It felt icy cold at the beginning but sooner it became warmer and such pleasant. In the stream of the river, I looked back those days with OK Baji and stared my own reflection.

Compared to the other villages, Bhalaytar was the village where basic needs of the villagers started to be relatively fulfilled. By directly experiencing with OK Baji in previous six days, I started to have strong belief as ‘next step to meeting the basic needs should be to be self-sufficient.’ I thought that the education could be one of the keys for the villagers to be self-sufficient. When I got out from the cold stream of the river, I made strong commitment by myself to support the education for children in the village while OK Baji had put into so many great works to meet the basic needs of the disadvantaged villagers.

Appendix B: Projects OK Baji has completed in Eastern Palpa (as of March 2004)

Schools:

1. Garapati Secondary School, Birkot (2 rooms)
2. Manakamana Primary School, Birkot (6 rooms)
3. Janakalyan Primary School, Birkot (4 rooms)
4. Laxmi Lower Secondary School, Jhirubas (7 rooms), 500,000 RS
5. Chirtung School, Devinagar (3 rooms), 28,500 RS
6. Kafaldanda School, Devinagar (2 rooms), 30,000 RS
7. Mohakal School, Devinagar (3 rooms)
8. Kerauli School, Devinagar (3 rooms)
9. Bolipohkara School, Devinagar (4 rooms)
10. Basarga School, Devinagar, 500,000 RS
11. Sarsara Primary School, Sliuwa
12. Shambhu Primary School, Jalpa (2 rooms)
13. Gaurishankar Secondary School, Mityal, 200,000 RS
14. Krishnadevi Secondary School, Gandakot (10 rooms)
15. Chandrodaya Lower Secondary School, Gandakot (5 rooms)
16. Devasthan morning class, Darchna (2 rooms)
17. Shankar Primary School, Phurkechaur (4 rooms)
18. Janata H.S. School, Tansen, 200,000 RS
19. Udbuddha H.S. School, Ringneraha, 340,000 RS
20. Barahi Primary School, 261,000 RS
21. Annapurna Boarding School, Ringneraha, 500,000 RS
22. Jana Ujjwal L.S. School, Ringneraha, 170,000 RS
23. Brihaspati Primary School, Galdha, 200,000 RS
24. Janashanti Primary School, Khaliwan, 250,000 RS
25. Birendra Primary School, Khaliwan, 200,000 RS

Other Buildings:

1. Gorakhnath Club, Tahoon, 6,000 RS
2. Child Care Center, 2 and 8, BES, Bakamalan, 8,000 RS
3. Health post, Bakamalang, 224,000 RS
4. Memory Health Care Center, Sliuwa, 300,000 RS
5. Janachahana Youth Club, Sliuwa
6. Child Care Center, Jalpa (6 rooms)
7. Gaonghar Clinic, Jalpa (4 rooms)
8. Chhis Sliuwa Community Bulding

Funds In –trust:

<u>Education Funds</u>	<u>Total: 1,045,000 RS</u>
1. Krishnadevi Secondary School, Gandakot, 100,000 RS	
2. Yamagishi Scholarship, Bankamalang, 100,000 RS	
3. Child Education Fund in trust, Siluwa, 45,000 RS	
4. Child Rights Protection Forum, Janabikas H.S. School, Darchha, 100,000 RS	

5. Anshuvarma L.S. School, Sahalkot Teachers pay, 100,000 RS
6. Teacher's pay, Khaliban, 100,000 RS
7. Teacher's pay, Akala Primary School, Archle, 100,000 RS
8. Gaurishankar Secondary School, Mityal, Teacher's pay, 100,000 RS
9. Ganesh Primary School, Archale Teacher's allowance, 300,000 RS

Medical and Healthcare Funds

Total: 1,080,000 RS

1. Helpless Child Health Support Fund Jheskang, 100,000 RS
2. Child Care Center, Darchha, 80,000 RS
3. Community Health Program, Sahalkot, 500,000 RS
4. Medical Fund, Mityal, 100,000 RS
5. Medical Fund, Gandakot, 100,000 RS
6. Medical Fund, Khaliban, 100,000 RS
7. Medical Fund, Archale, 100,000 RS

Disabled Funds

1. Disabled fund in trust, Siluwa, 30,000 RS
2. Disabled allowance (Bajiraha fund)

Income Generation Funds

Total: 1,000,000 RS

1. Gorakhnath, Tahoon, Income generation, 100,000 RS
2. Poverty Reduction Program Jheskang, 100,000 RS
3. BES Saving and Credit Cooperatives Ltd. Bankamalang, 100,000 RS
4. Bee keeping, Sahalkot, 340,000 RS
5. Ginger goats community income generating program, Siluwa, 20,000 RS
6. Siluwa Income Generation, 40,000 RS
7. Income generation programs, Phoksinghkot, 200,000 RS

Other Funds

1. For any activities, Devinagar, 100,000 RS

Classroom Furniture:

1. SitaRam L.S. School, 100,000 RS
2. Radhakrishna Secondary School, Bakamalang 15,000 RS
3. Simli Sarawati Primary School, Devinagar (10 sets)
4. Besarga Primary School, Devinagar (10 sets)
5. Satyakalika Primary School, Devinagar (10 sets)
6. Chirtung Primary School, Devinagar (10 sets)
7. Janamarga Secondars School, Siluwa (10 sets)
8. Manakamana Primary School, Siluwa (50 sets)
9. Sharada Primary School, Siluwa (20 sets)
10. Janakirishna Primary School, Mityal (25 sets)
11. Gaurishankar Primary School, Mityal (30 sets)
12. Different Schools in Gandakot (150 sets)
13. Janashanti Primary School, Khaliban (53 sets)
14. Bhanubhakta Secondary School, Khaliban (30 sets)

15. Ganesh Primary School, Archale (10 sets)
16. Akala Primary School, Archale (30 sets), 30,000 RS
17. Birendra Primary School, Khaliban (22 sets)
18. Tinkanya Primary School, Ringneraha (15 sets)
19. Udbuddha H.S. School, Ringneraha (25 sets)
20. Janaujjawal L.S. School, Ringneraha (20 sets)

Potable Water Systems:

1. Chhahdi Rabsi Drinking Water, Jalpa, 164,000 RS
2. Deurali Drinking Water, Ringneraha, 145,000 RS
3. Dhakare Damara Drinking Water Project, Mityal, 80,000 RS
4. Chhis Siluwa Drinking Water Project

Miscellaneous Projects:

1. Gorakhnath Club, Tahoon, 59 days labour by OK Baji.
2. Gorakhnath Club, Tahoon, child class, 40,000 RS
3. Telephone Service, Jheskang, 50,000 RS
4. Health Post, Jheskang, 50,000 RS
5. Mayalu Child Care Center, Jheskang, 45,000 RS
6. Radhakrishna Secondary School, Bakamalang, 140,000 RS
7. Ganapati Secondary School, Birkot to buy land for making School
8. Lakhan Thapa Primary School, Birkot-3, tin
9. Child Development Society Improvement Center, Devinagar, Library, 10,000 RS
10. Matribhumii Secondary School, Devinagar, Science Equipments, 20,000 RS
11. Roof (plastics) to the Schools in Devinagar, 40,000 RS
12. Matribhumii Secondary School, Devinagar, rebuilding, 146,990 RS
13. Aid to run the library, Devinagar, 10,000 RS
14. Samugha bridge, Siluwa, 70,000 RS
15. Janasiddhi Youth Club, Phoksingkot, Pigtry, 63,000 RS
16. Kisan Primary School, Siluwa, roof, 20,000 RS
17. Shanhu Secondary School, Jalpa to buy land to make School.
18. Jansiddhi Youth Club, Phoksinghkot, ginger farming, 21,000 RS
19. Maina Devi Primary School, Mityal, 40,000 RS
20. Janashanti Primary School, Mityal, 25,000 RS
21. Mityal 7, RCC Bridge
22. Mityal 3, Suspension bridge, 63,600 RS
23. Saraswati Primary School, Khaliban, 4 and half bundle tin.
24. Ganesh Primary School, Archale tin, 42 pieces
25. Jamaleghat suspension bridge, Siluwa 8-Jalpa, 245,000 RS
26. Sahalkot VDC, operation of the heart, 150,000 RS
27. Janasiddhi Youth Club, Phoksinghkot Buffalo Keeping, 76,000 RS

Appendix C: Construction of the Shree Krishna Devi Secondary School from 1998 to 1999



Source: Jeevan Pokharel, former head teacher of the Shree Krishna Devi Secondary School and project leader of the school construction project.

Appendix D: The Collapse of Local NGOs

There are 103 local NGO's in Palpa district. Some of the local NGO's that used to work with OK Baji stopped working with him. They stopped to walk and to sweat with OK Baji to help the villagers at the grassroots level. Instead of walking and sweating, they became to work with personal computers. Those NGO came to Tansen from their local community and opened an office and started to work with foreign NGOs. According to OK Baji, it is understandable that those who received higher education at out of the village would like to find a job with computer or a job to make documents with their English skills in an office. After learning how to write a proposal in English by a personal computer, their job as a NGO became to write a proposal of a local developmental project to other foreign NGO abroad. If a foreign NGO accepts the proposal from the local NGO once, the staff at the local NGO would receive a financial support. Those foreign NGOs often say that supporting local NGO should create local labor at site. However, local NGO staffs become richer by receiving as RS15,000 per month as salary which is almost three times as one school teacher at a secondary school can receive.

Since the staffs of such local NGOs could get such high salary, they stopped to work simply as they used to work for the villagers. Moreover, they became to care like how much they can receive from the foreign NGOs and came to work for the salary not for the villagers anymore. It seemed staffs at such local NGOs at Tansen became to forget about the villagers in the grassroots. Their working objective seemed to change from for the villagers to for the own salary. To open a fine office at Tansen with a leather sofa with a big table become the goal of some of local NGOs. Some of such local NGOs sometimes invited OK Baji to their office to ask financial support from Japan through OK Baji. OK Baji wondered in such case as how come he needed to support a NGO who had such a big office.

Source: Author.

[illegible]

Appendix F: Himal Scholarship Fund Application Data: 2003 to 2007

Number (and rank) of Shree Krishna Devi secondary school students who passed the SLC exam:

Rank	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
1 st division	-	-	2	-	1	3
2 nd division	3	5	2	6	7	23
3 rd division	2	1	-	1	1	5
Passed in Complementary	9	18	6	9	9	51
Total	14	24	10	16	18	82

Categorization of responses to essay questions:

Question 1: What is your aim in your life?

Answers	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Teacher	5	8	4	10	10	37
Doctor	4	4	1		1	10
Social worker / help others (poor people etc.)		2		4	2	8
Nurse	1				2	3
business man	2			1		3
Journalist		2				2
Accountant			2			2
establish private medical		1				1
Engineer			1			1

Question 2: What problem do you consider as the most important?

Answers	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Poverty	10	3	4	11	7	35
Education	3	14	6	6	3	32
No secondary school near/in my village	1	1	1	3	1	7
Healthcare	1	3	1			5
Not enough time to study because of helping parents	2	1		1		4
Environment	1	3				4
Female education	1	2			2	5
Politics	1		1			2
Cast system		2				2
No water supply		1				1

Question 3: What is your distinctive characteristic that differentiates you from the other students?

Answers	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Hard worker	7	2	3	4	4	20
Helpful	5	3	2	5	5	20
Discipline	4	4	1			9
Social	2	1	1	4		8
Honest	3	3		2		8
Do not waste time		3	4			7
Sincere/ earnest	2	1		3		6
Cooperative	3		1	1		5
Serious				4		4
Friendly		2		2		4
Simple	1		1		2	4
Others	4	9	6	4	1	3

Source: Compiled by Author.

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