From Festive to Exchange Labor: Changing Cooperative Labor among the Malo, Southwestern Ethiopia[1]

TAKESHI FUJIMOTO

University of Toyama, Japan

Cooperative labor is a common institutional practice found in agricultural societies around the world. This study focuses on cooperative labor among the Malo in southwestern Ethiopia, exploring its types and roles and discussing changes. The Malo are mountain farmers with a population of approximately 40,000–50,000. While they grow diverse crops in small home gardens using household labor, they cultivate cereals and pulses in large outlying fields often utilizing cooperative labor. Many agricultural tasks such as field preparation and weeding are performed during the rainy season from June to September and farmers have to cope with temporary labor scarcity during this time by holding cooperative labor parties. Three types of cooperative labor are known: *dabo*, *kete*, and *zafe*. *Dabo* is a type of festive labor in which prestigious host farmers would summon over 30 workers for help and reward them with lavish food and drinks. Prior to the Ethiopian revolution of 1974–75, it played a major role in the redistribution of host farmers' wealth as well as the enhancement of their prestige, but it has already disappeared. *Kete* is an intermediate type between festive labor and exchange labor. It flourished after the revolution but soon declined by the mid-1980s. *Zafe* is a type of exchange labor organized by a small number (less than 10) of neighboring farmers. A household opens a work party that rotates from household to household. Each household receives labor from other households and provides a modest lunch, after which the same amount of labor is later reciprocated. Although it was long unpopular due to it being the least enjoyable, this exchange labor has become dominant since around the mid-1980s. Thus, cooperative labor among the Malo has significantly changed from festive labor to exchange labor. Recently, however, even exchange labor is on the decline in the highlands where the population is becoming denser. In the neoliberal trend of economic differentiation since the 1990s, increasingly distressed farmers have asked newly wealthy farmers to employ them as wage laborers for farming. This type of wage labor, called *abaale*, is rapidly increasing and more or less eroding cooperative labor in the highlands. This gradual but fundamental change from cooperative to wage labor may be considered a sign of economic development. However, cooperative labor has various roles, such as fostering a sense of companionship and solidarity and the transmission of agricultural knowledge and skills from experienced farmers to young farmers by working together. Wage labor does not seem to take over these social roles, because it is only an economic contract. Although cooperative labor has been examined from economic viewpoints, it needs to be explored more from social perspectives.

Key words: cooperative labor, exchange labor, festive labor, reciprocity, wage labor

1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS COOPERATIVE LABOR?

Cooperative labor is commonly found in agricultural societies around the world. With broad variations, it is largely organized by local people to perform farming or other tasks in a group for a certain

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period. A number of studies have mentioned the phenomenon, by employing similar but various terminologies such as reciprocal labor, exchange labor, communal labor, collective labor, festive labor, mutual assistance (or aid), traditional labor organizations (or institutions), traditional work party, working beer party and so on (e. g., Moore 1975).

Over half a century ago, using data from western South America as well as referring to comparative material from other parts of the world, Erasmus (1956) overviewed the whole phenomenon by terming it "reciprocal labor" in his study and clearly distinguished it between "exchange labor" and "festive labor" using the concrete examples of *ayni* and *minga* from Peru. The distinction has been largely accepted by other scholars such as Moore (1975) who extended the discussion with new case studies and replaced the category of "reciprocal labor" with the term "cooperative labor", which the current study employs.

According to these and other studies, some of the features of this phenomenon can be summarized as follows:

1) Cooperative labor is organized by local people to collectively perform various kinds of farming tasks as well as building and other tasks (Erasmus 1956; Brown 1987). Generally, cooperative labor is used for work on crop fields, building houses, and other areas all belonging to households or individuals rather than to the whole community.[2] The basic unit composing a cooperative labor party is the household or the individual. In the former case, at least one household member would go to farm a host household's field. Although the size (number of participants) of work parties varies from a few households (or individuals) to over one hundred, the basic principle for their membership is residence in a neighborhood. Although the members of any work group usually include some relatives, kinship is not the most important principle (Mayer 1951: 10). In addition, work parties of a smaller size tend to consist of members of the same social order or class in an ethnic group with the same religious affiliation (Erasmus 1956). In labor parties, participants tend to be of a single gender, although they can include both. Quite commonly, male and female labor parties are separately organized to perform different tasks in a society.[3]

2) A cooperative labor party works at a host's field for a day. These cooperative labor groups usually do not work at two or more hosts' fields on the same day nor do they work for the same host on consecutive days until they complete an entire field. The work hours for a day vary between types of labor parties and tasks. A host serves all participants some food and drink, the quality and quantity (in terms of number of meals) of which vary depending on the character of the particular labor organization (Erasmus 1956). It should be emphasized, however, that no cooperative labor is rewarded mainly by cash payment. In most societies where both cooperative labor and wage labor exist, they are differently perceived.

3) Cooperative work parties are organized mostly at peak labor seasons when the labor needed for farming often exceeds the amount of labor a household or an individual alone is able to supply. Agricultural tasks performed by cooperative labor include clearing grass, bush or wood vegetation in fallow lands, tilling or hoeing fields, sowing seeds, transplanting shoots, weeding fields, harvesting crops, and threshing cereals, i.e., almost all agricultural work. However, in each society, not all the farming tasks are undertaken by cooperative labor. Rather, more commonly, only some of such tasks are practiced by cooperative labor and most others by household (or individual) labor. Thus, it can be said that farming is mostly managed by household (or individual) labor and is supplemented by cooperative labor at some critical points.

4) Cooperative labor tends to be mobilized for farming in monocropped large fields of cereals (e.g., maize, rice, sorghum) as well as some pulses and root and tuber crops (e.g., Irish potato, yams). In general, cooperative labor is used in the cultivation of major food crops whose harvest is disposed of not only for domestic consumption but also, more or less, for external sale for cash. It is related to surplus production, rather than mere modest production for subsistence use. Additionally, cooperative labor occurs less in gardens where various crops are usually planted side by side in small plots. It is rarely practiced in the cultivation of food crops such as vegetables, fruits, and spices. Also, it is rarely found in the cultivation of non-food crops such as fibers and gum, which is in sharp contrast

to farming labor in plantations.[4]

5) As is noted above, cooperative labor is generally classified into "exchange labor" and "festive labor". The size of groups tends to differ between the two types. While most exchange labor groups contain less than 10 members of households or individuals, "festive work groups run well over ten and sometimes into the hundreds" (Erasmus 1956: 446). Exchange labor is generally organized among farmers with more or less equal small landholdings. The organizations usually have strong obligations to reciprocate. This means that a member household (or individual) should provide all other participant members with precisely the equivalent amount of labor received when he/she was a host. Furthermore, in principle, a member often has to return the obligation with the same task that he/she received (Erasmus 1956: 447; Brown 1987: 228). For example, this means that a member cannot return received weeding labor by providing harvesting labor. Therefore, exchange labor parties normally occur on consecutive days, shifting locations rotationally among member fields day by day.[5] It is considered that exchange labor works on the principle of "balanced reciprocity" (Sahlins 1972).

6) Festive labor usually does not have such a strong reciprocal trait.[6] Festive labor is considered to be loosely reciprocal, based on "generalized reciprocity" (Sahlins 1972) or, rather, to be redistributive (Mitchell 1991). A host holds an ad-hoc festive labor party in which as many participants as possible are attracted by rewards of lavish food and drinks, giving the party an atmosphere of conviviality and enjoyment. There is a tendency for festive labor parties to be held between unequal socioeconomic participants such as the few prestigious host farmers and the majority of client farmers, although anyone can, in theory, assemble them. They can provide a good opportunity for a host to gain more wealth in the end, even if he/she generously redistributes in the form of served food and drinks, as found in *risaga* among the Gusii (Mayer 1951), *kwanza* among the Tembo (Suehara 1983, 2006), *minka* among the Quinuenos, Peru (Mitchell 1991) and *moyai* in Japan (Onda 2006). However, festive labor parties are not always thus restricted. They can work as a socioeconomic leveling mechanism whereby weak or unsuccessful farmers are given much labor, with minimal or even no rewards expected, by neighboring farmers, as in the case of *lukoo* among the Tembo (Suehara 1983, 2006), *nafir* among the Berti in Darfur, western Sudan (Holy 1987), *yanapay* among the Quinuenos (Mitchell 1991) and *tetsudai* in Japan (Onda 2006). Therefore, festive labor may be subdivided into the two: a redistributional type hosted by the wealthy and a relieving type hosted by the needy.

7) Festive labor and exchange labor often co-exist in a society, which means their distribution can overlap (Moore 1975: 273). However, their distribution has some differences. As Moore (1975: 280) noted, "festive labor is especially common in areas of shifting cultivation (for land clearance) and hoe cultivation (for land preparation and weeding)," that is, where population density and land use intensity are generally low. On the other hand, "labor exchange is especially common among farmers ... practicing intensive rice cultivation, but is widely distributed elsewhere." Although previous studies have pointed out the general decline of both festive and exchange labor (e.g., Erasmus 1956; Moore 1975), there seem to be differences between their declines. Festive labor has greatly declined or totally disappeared in many societies due to several socioeconomic changes such as the increasing costs of hosting festive labor (Erasmus 1956; Holy 1987; Mitchell 1991). On the other hand, exchange labor has more or less persisted, although with changes such as reductions in size and frequency (Holy 1987).[7] It has been argued that lack of cash and labor shortages for wage payments are the principal factors in the persistence of exchange labor (Erasmus 1956: 466). On the contrary, exceptions are found to the declining tendency of cooperative labor. A recent rise in, or new emergence of, cooperative labor, has been reported (Mayer 1951; Geschiere 1995; McAllister 2004).[8] Swindell (1985: 138) views cooperative labor as a transitional form between non-capitalist relations of production that heavily relied on slave labor and capitalist relations using hired labor, and suggests its recent development after the decline of slavery in Africa.

In Ethiopia, at least 20 ethnic societies are reported to have cooperative labor institutions (Appendix). Figure 1 shows the location of such societies in the southwestern part of the country. To be sure, there are many other societies with similar institutions. Importantly, most of these reported societies have more than one institution, probably including both types.[9] It is noteworthy that some

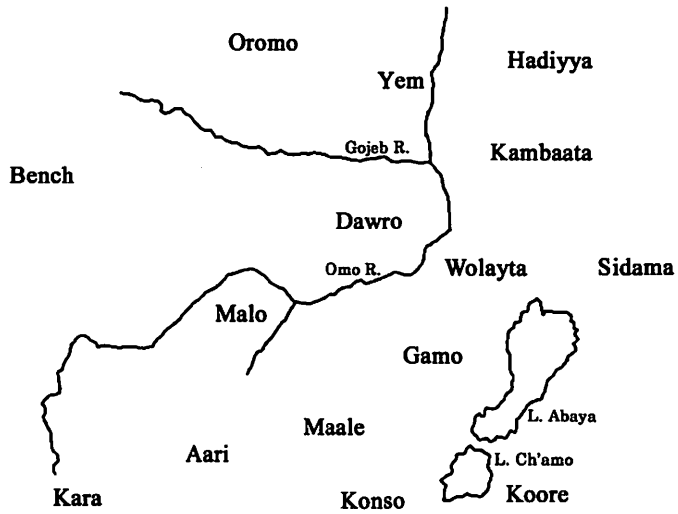

Fig. 1. Ethnic groups with cooperative labor practices in southwestern Ethiopia

exchange labor groups such as *mol'o* among the Maale (Donham 1994a, 1994b) and *mol'a* and *idir* among the Aari (Ari) (Gebre 1994) have a hierarchically ranked organizational structure and leadership, resembling their societies as a whole. While the latter author stressed that *mol'o* association was a miniature of the gerontocratic social structure and a focus of local politics, the former author described the diverse roles of the institutions such as social control, socialization, recreation and entertainment, apart from economic functions. This study describes the types and roles of cooperative labor among the Malo of southwestern Ethiopia, where I have conducted fieldwork since 1993, and considers the implications of changes in cooperative labor.

2. THE MALO: LAND AND SOCIETY

The Malo people speak Omotic languages of the Afroasiatic phylum. With a population of approximately 40,000–50,000, they live in the mountainous area administered by the Malo Koza District (*woreda*) in Gamo Gofa Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) (Fig. 2).[10]

Their land, extending from northeast to southwest, is marked by the steep topography of the Malo mountain chain that runs through the middle. The area is locally divided into three altitudinal zones: "highland" (*gezze*; above 2,200–2,300 m), "mid-altitude land" (*dollo*; between 2,200–2,300 m and 1,500–1,600 m), and "lowland" (*gad'a*; below 1,500–1,600 m). Almost all of the people inhabit the lands ranging from 1,000 m to 3,000 m in elevation. Currently, roughly half of the population dwells in the highlands alone, although the area suitable for habitation there is much smaller than that in the lowlands.

Most Malo are farmers. Traditionally, primogeniture in which an elder son inherited most of the land and other properties from his father was the norm, and polygamy in which a wealthy man, usually an elder son, had multiple wives was also common. It was not easy for younger brothers to have wives because they had disadvantages in preparing a few cows as marriage payment.

However, situations have greatly changed since the 1970s. In the early 1970s, an evangelical Christian missionary known as Kale Heywot Church reached Malo land and soon gained popularity. Now over half of the people are believers. They strongly denounced primogeniture, simplified marriage payment and prohibited polygamy as well as drinking and smoking. Following the outbreak of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974–75 which ended the imperial state regime, military socialists called

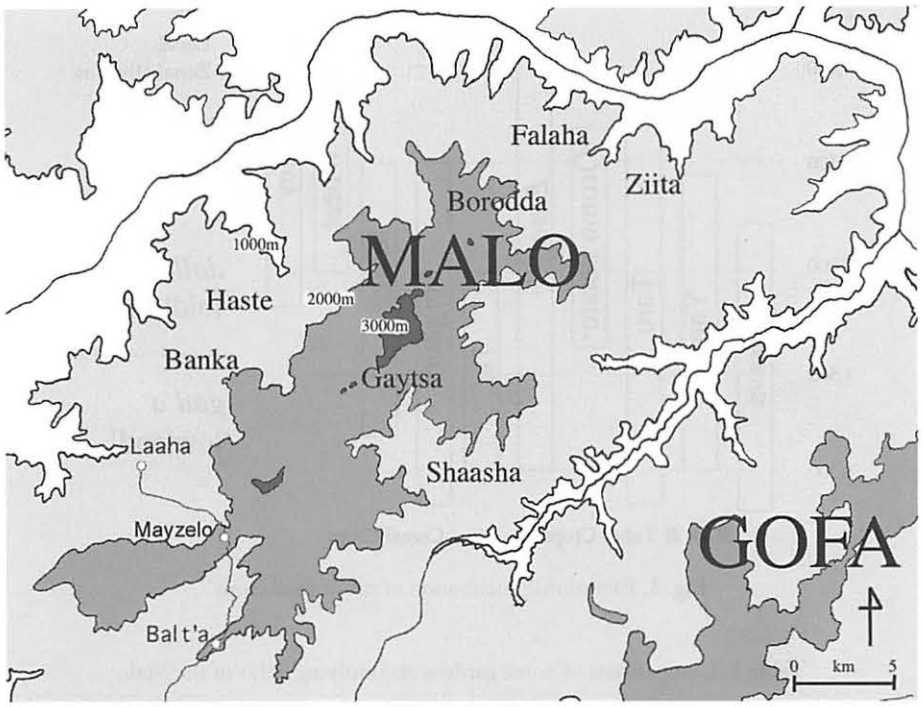

Fig. 2. The Malo area

derg took power. They proclaimed land reform and corrected uneven landholdings through redistribution throughout the country. In Malo land, radical land redistribution did not take place but uneven landholdings were checked and corrected. As a whole, landholding and marriage inequality due to the hierarchical social structure has been greatly reduced over the ensuing decades, although a new economic trend toward differentiation has emerged in the context of the state's neoliberal economic policy following the establishment of the current regime in 1991.

3. MALO AGRICULTURE IN GARDENS AND FIELDS

In this land of wide elevation, the Malo people cultivate a large number of crops, over 100 species. Major food crops of cereals, roots and tubers, are found both in the highlands and the lowlands (Fig. 3). While temperate cereals such as barley and wheat are normally sown in the highlands, locally domesticated teff millet (*Eragrostis tef*) is sown extensively in the lowlands (Fujimoto 2002).

Throughout the area, a concentric pattern of land use is typical, centered on individual homes (*kettsa*) and flat yards (*bale*). Farming areas are largely divided into two kinds: small home gardens (*kara kale*) located immediately surrounding the homes and yards, and extensive outlying fields (*gade*) surrounding the home gardens.

Diverse crops including staple root and tuber crops such as enset, vegetables, spices and condiments, and tree crops for fruits, leaves, and timber are all planted side by side in the gardens, while most cereals and pulses are sown in the fields. Home gardens are carefully tended through regular fertilization with animal manure and are more or less permanently planted, whereas outlying fields are generally maintained not through manuring but with a short- or long-term fallow period (Table 1). As a primary crop for food and material uses, almost all households, particularly those in the highlands, plant enset around their houses (Fujimoto 1997). In the lowlands, however, almost all households cultivate teff extensively in their outlying fields (Fujimoto 2002). While home gardens

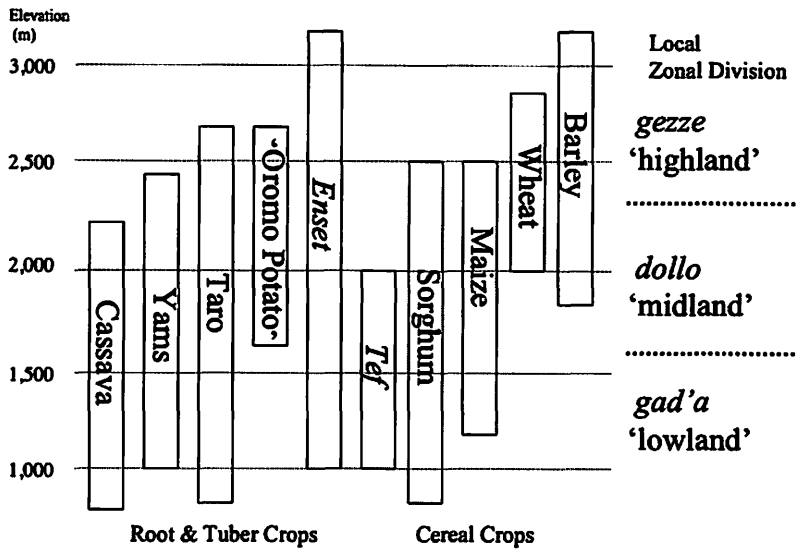

Fig. 3. Elevational distribution of major food crops

Table 1. Comparisons of home gardens and outlying fields of the Malo

	Home gardens (*kara kale*)	Outlying fields (*gade*)
Grown crops	Various crops	Cereals and pulses
Cropping pattern	Polyculture	Monoculture
Land use pattern	Nearly permanent	Short- or long-term fallowing
Manuring	Regularly manured	Not manured
Method of tillage	Digging or hoeing	Digging, hoeing or plowing
Gender	Both male and female	Largely male
Cooperative labor	Rare	Common
Sharecropping	Rare	Common

are generally tended by both male and female household members, outlying fields are mostly farmed by men who often work in organized labor parties. A sharecropping custom, called *kottse,* is contracted between two households for farming cereal crops in outlying fields rather than for cultivating root and tuber crops in home gardens.

Most cereals, with the exception of maize (*Zea mays*), are sown in the main rainy season (June to August) and harvested in the early dry season (November to January) (Fig. 4). Agricultural work for cereal farming, such as field preparation and weeding, is concentrated around the main rainy season called *balgo.* The rainy season is the busiest time of year for farmers and huge amounts of labor are needed for clearing brush, tilling fields (in the highlands), and hoeing grasslands (in the lowlands). To meet these labor needs, labor parties are organized.

4. TYPES OF COOPERATIVE LABOR

The Malo have three types of cooperative labor, which differ in many respects (Table 2).

For the *zafe* type of cooperative labor, work is carried out in the daytime between about 10 am

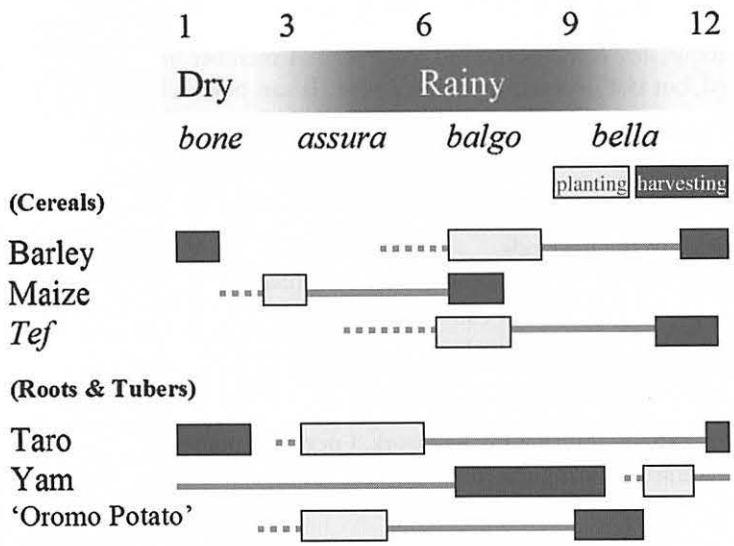

Fig. 4. Agricultural calendar of the Malo

Table 2. Three types of organized labor parties of the Malo

	Zafe	*Kete*	*Dabo*
Work time	Daytime	Daytime	Early morning and daytime
Meal served	Lunch	Lunch and supper	Breakfast, lunch, and supper
Participants	About 3~10	About 10~30	About 30~
Rotation	Strict	Loose	Non-existent
Festivity	Non-existent	Small	Large
Occurrence	Frequent	Rare	Extinct?

and 6 pm. Participants gather in the field appointed by the host of the day bringing with them their agricultural tools such as hoes and digging sticks. The host household serves them with lunch and drinks. The lunch is normally a modest dish of steam-boiled enset corm and cabbage or boiled wheat grains and beans, which is delivered to the field by the host's wife or his daughter around 1 pm and eaten together by the participants beside the worked field, often under a large tree. The beverage carried in pots and served in gourd containers is a decoction from pounded undried coffee leaves with the addition of ground spices and salt called *tukke haye* (literally means 'coffee leaf'). Participants consist of less than 10 neighbors or relatives, usually four to six. Although *zafe* is the smallest work party of the Malo, it is also the most frequently found throughout the area. Because the membership is fixed, the same farmers other than the sick or the injured work together in rotation between member fields for some particular task such as field preparation. Each *zafe* is short-term, mostly for one cropping season, although it is usually renewed the next year. During that period, given labor and received labor have to be strictly balanced between member households. If a household farmer has not yet given back the amount of labor he received from other households, he has to return the same amount of labor, by means of performing similar tasks, as soon as possible. Otherwise he will be accused, penalized and finally removed from the particular *zafe*. This *zafe* type of cooperative labor is considered a reciprocal "exchange labor" institution.

Kete also involves working in the daytime. Both lunch and supper are served. Highly preferred teff pancakes (*sollo* in Malo, *injera* in Amharic) with meat or bean stews may be served with beer or

honey drinks. About 10 to 30 farmers participate. In comparison with *zafe*, *kete* is long-term, lasting for years. In principle, *kete* is rotational and reciprocal. A member household has to return as much work as it received, but not necessarily within a year. It can pay back many years later because it is infrequently held when a farming household needs a large amount of labor supply. Member households remember who has debts to whom. However, they cannot accuse or penalize households that work less than others. Thus, in reality, it is not as rotational or reciprocal as *zafe*. Currently, *kete* is found only rarely and held mainly for house construction. For agricultural work, *kete* is held to weed sorghum or teff fields in the lowlands.

The third kind of cooperative labor, known as *dabo*, involves morning work from about 6 to 9 am as well as daytime work. Breakfast, lunch, and supper are all served, and the meals usually contain meat dishes. More than 30 farmers participate. There is no membership with any particular rotation or reciprocity. It is held ad hoc by a wealthy household to collect a large amount of labor or to enhance its prestige. This type of cooperative labor may be redistributive rather than reciprocal. However, *dabo* seems to be already extinct. During my fieldwork, I never encountered this type of labor party. It is said to have been common during the imperial regime, which ended in 1974.

5. ROLES OF COOPERATIVE LABOR

All types of labor parties, both reciprocal and non-reciprocal, work together in a host farmer's field in a single day to perform a task such as field preparation, weeding, or harvesting. If it is a reciprocal form of labor party, i.e., *zafe*, it occurs day after day, shifting locations from one farmer's field to another's and often continues for a week or so until it has rotated through all of the participating farmers' fields. Thus, a farmer's field is not worked on two or more consecutive days even if it is not finished. If unfinished, it is completed by household labor or by a sharecropping partner's *zafe*.[11]

Table 3 shows the approximate occurrence of farming tasks that the different labor parties are mobilized into performing. As already noted, labor parties are organized for farming cereal crops in outlying fields rather than for growing root and tuber crops in home gardens.[12] As is shown in Figure 4, cereal cultivation is more influenced by seasonal sequences than is root crop cultivation. Therefore, a huge amount of labor by work parties is required in a limited time for the former, whereas the latter can be more flexibly managed by household labor. Labor parties are commonly organized for field preparation, particularly for labor-intensive tasks such as clearing long-term fallow fields,

Table 3. Occurrence of labor parties to perform tasks for farming different crops

	Field preparation	Weeding	Harvesting
(Cereal crops)			
Barley	++	+	+
Wheat	++	+	+
Maize	++	++	+
Sorghum	++	+++	+
Teff	+++	+++	++
(Root crops)			
Enset	—	—	—
Taro	+	—	—
Yams	+	—	—

'+', '++', and '+++' indicate rare, occasional and frequent occurrences respectively.

tilling with hoes and digging sticks, and weeding. Weeding is more important in farming maize, sorghum and teff in the lowlands than in farming barley and wheat in the highlands. In the lowlands, both males and females, including young children, work together to weed teff fields, although female participation in work parties for other crop cultivation is rare. In northern Ethiopia, harvesting and threshing cereals are usually the most important farming tasks using cooperative labor; in contrast, preparation and weeding cereal fields are the main tasks here.

The size of labor groups also varies for different tasks in cultivating a single crop. With teff cultivation in the lowlands, for example, tree and shrub clearing work is normally performed by three to five people for over a month from June to July, hoeing after burning dried material by five to seven people for a month around July, and weeding by about 10 people around the end of August. Labor parties are formed not as fixed groups through different tasks but, rather, are flexibly organized using different types of cooperative labor according to the approximate labor demand and the urgency of each task.

By joining work parties, at least reciprocal ones, each farmer is thought to obtain an approximately equal amount of labor to that he provides to other farmers. Thus, from a narrow economic viewpoint, participation does not seem to create individual gains. However, by joining work parties, a farmer can get a huge amount of labor when necessary, especially during periods of peak labor load. Because field conditions differ between different fields and suitable timings for particular tasks rarely coincide, by joining work parties, a farmer can obtain high flexibility in response to his variable labor needs.

6. CHANGES OF COOPERATIVE LABOR

6.1. Old Dominance of Festive Labor Dabo

Cooperative labor among the Malo has persisted with significant changes over the past decades. As already described above, however, *dabo*, one of the three types of cooperative labor in Malo, appears to be extinct. This practice seems to have ceased when the imperial state regime collapsed and the Ethiopian socialist revolution started in 1974. Prior to that, a patrimonial hierarchy was dominant in the society and local elders called *bayra* commonly held *dabo* parties to achieve more power and prestige. During the imperial regime, the vast majority of farmers were deprived of their own lands and, as tenants, they had to depend on few landowners who were mostly local elites or descendants of state settlers called *neftenya* who came from central parts of the country in the early 20th century. Under these highly hierarchical and socially unequal conditions, *dabo* was frequently held by local elite elders to collect labor for their fields. Lavish food and drink including meat dishes and beer were served to attract numerous landless farmers, although the practice seems to have ultimately contributed to increase the elders' wealth and prestige more and more. It was chiefly an opportunity for the host to gain a large labor supply and for participants to provide labor, but it was also an opportunity for the latter to socialize and drink. Old people still remember that they were generously given lavish food and abundant beer, although the fields and harvest were not theirs. During that time, sorghum, the main ingredient of local beer, was the most important cereal in the Malo land.

6.2. Temporal Growth of Intermediate Kete

When the revolution broke out and the socialist military government known as *Derg* finally took political power in the 1970s, the local situation changed greatly as well. While almost all the alien landowners were ousted and the few local elites lost most of their lands and power, landless farmers regained most of their original lands. Many customs related to the patrimonial hierarchy were strongly denounced and abolished. Before the revolution, most of the land was inherited by the eldest son (*bayra na'a*) just before or after the father's death. Now male descendants could get some land just before or after they got married and equal inheritance between them became the guiding principle. The society became more egalitarian in terms of landholding. Now farmers could work for themselves. In this context of social change, redistributive festive labor *dabo* in favor of powerful elders nearly ceased to exist and more reciprocal cooperative labor gained ground. Until the mid-

1980s, farmers quite commonly formed the intermediate type of cooperative labor, *kete*, which is not as strictly rotational as *zafe* and not as generously served as *dabo*. But this situation seems to have been temporary.

6.3. Recent Development of Exchange Labor Zafe

From around the mid-1980s, *kete* was gradually replaced in importance by *zafe*, the most reciprocal type of cooperative labor. *Zafe* was not new in the land. It already existed in the imperial period but it was unimportant. Providing laborers with the most humble food and drink, it was held between neighboring farmers who worked as tenants for landowners' lands. At that time, *zafe* was regarded as a practice undertaken by poor farmers. Thus, after they regained their lands following the revolution, local farmers chose to organize not *zafe* but *kete*. However, in just a decade, the situation changed. People still prefer *kete* to *zafe*, but in reality, *kete* is rare and *zafe* is common. Two factors may be relevant in understanding this change.

Although people prefer *kete*, they admit that it is now difficult to hold *kete* frequently. To hold one *kete* party, one household has to prepare lavish food and drinks for about 20 people. Most Malo households are still members of *kete*, but they rarely hold *kete* parties, possibly only once in several years for each household. Although it is held for agricultural tasks in the lowlands, it appears to be held only for house construction in the highlands. Farmers explain that they no longer have large harvests enough to often hold *kete* parties as they had before. Local farmers, especially those in the highlands, are aware of the gradual decline of their food production under the population growth.

Another reason is a social change that had started shortly before the socialist revolution took place. Missionary Christianity reached the eastern part of the Malo area in the early 1970s and quickly gained popularity. Now, more than half of the local people are believers. It strongly proscribes alcohol drinking and tobacco smoking as well as polygamy. Importantly, the believers came to organize their own *zafe* separately from farmers of other religious affiliations (*alame*), as they grew in number. They gradually established their own type of *zafe* where strict rotation is the rule and modest food and drinks are simply served for lunch, which is currently the most typical type of labor party here, as described above.[13] Old people remember that more lavish food as well as alcoholic drinks such as local beer (*daana*) were sometimes served, even in *zafe*, before. This suggests that *zafe* has transformed into a more simple or economical type of exchange labor. Due to the near extinction of beer-providing work parties, sorghum cultivation has been greatly reduced.

6.4. Rapid Growth of Wage Labor Abaale

One more recent change has to be noted although it is not precisely cooperative labor. Since the current government came to power in 1991, a neoliberal trend toward economic differentiation has emerged. During my first fieldwork in 1994–95, no wage labor was observed for farming. Wage labor (*kray*) had already existed in the previous *Derg* regime although it involved manual labor provided mostly by the local administration for non-farm works such as road construction and maintenance. Local people strongly disliked *kray* and looked down on wage laborers. However, in 1998–99, I witnessed several farmers worked for farming as wage laborers, employed by wealthy farmers in the highland village Gaytsa. Soon after that, wage labor for farming became common there, especially around the marketplace. This new type of wage labor is called *abaale*. Wealthy farmers now make their livings mainly through trading. Such merchant-like farmers can employ poor farmers in order to maintain the cultivation of their fields and secure food for domestic consumption. In this recent tendency toward economic differentiation, emerging wealthy farmers farm their fields less and less by themselves and depend more and more on wage labor to cultivate their crops.

However, the main reason that wage labor for farming has become common may be the increase of poor farmers who have difficulty making a living by farming in their own land. According to people interviewed, *abaale* is usually contracted in the pre-cropping season when poor farmers go and ask wealthy farmers to employ them. Such farmers are employed in pairs. The reason for this is that they usually work in pairs when they till fields in preparation for planting with digging sticks. The employ-

ing and employed are often neighbors, not relatives. They are normally employed to work for one field preparation period from around May to August, although it can be for a shorter period, such as for a week or for a day. During the period, they work in an employer's fields in the daytime for three or four days a week. For the remaining days of the period, they can work in their own fields, although they do not have enough time to participate in cooperative labor. A simple lunch is sometimes provided by the employer household, though not always. The employer often comes to see their work progress. The employed farmers work in an employer's fields to cultivate cereals and pulses, but not in his home garden. Home gardens surrounding houses are still managed by household members even in the case of wealthy farmers.

In contrast, little wage labor is found in the lowlands where recent economic differentiation has not yet encroached and all farmers still join *zafe* and *kete* work parties to perform agricultural tasks such as weeding. As already noted, weeding millet fields in the lowlands needs to be accomplished with substantial manpower for a short time. This type of tasks cannot be easily replaced by wage laborers who prefer working for a longer period. It may be the case that wage labor is now growing rapidly in several market villages where both *kete* and *zafe* work groups are in decline, more or less undermined by the growth of wage labor. However, it is also true that the distribution and work domains of wage labor are limited while cooperative labor and household labor still persist.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1. From Festive to Exchange Labor: Changing Cooperative Labor among the Malo

As is often the case with other societies, all types of cooperative labor parties among the Malo are largely formed by neighboring households when domestic labor is insufficient to complete urgent tasks. However, these labor groups have different features: non-reciprocal or redistributive (*dabo*), loosely reciprocal, i.e., intermediate (*kete*) and strictly reciprocal (*zafe*). While the latter takes place with a small number (less than 10) of farmers who are served them with minimal food and drink, the former two involve the provision of festivities to a larger number of participants. While the latter is still commonly practiced in the area, the former has already been abandoned. The intermediate *kete* is occasionally practiced in the sparsely populated lowlands although it is apparently no longer implemented for farming in the densely populated highlands. Recently, a new type of wage labor (*abaale*) has begun to spread, eroding cooperative labor in the highland villages. Regarding cooperative labor, it may be summarized that it has changed from non-reciprocal to reciprocal.[15] But why has the change taken place?

Previous studies generally considered the decline or disappearance of cooperative labor in relation to economic changes, especially, the expansion of monetary economies. In the Malo case, the recent erosion of reciprocal labor, *zafe*, in the highlands may be due to economic changes by which wage labor is increasing in the context of economic differentiation. However, the disappearance of the non-reciprocal type of cooperative labor, *dabo*, and the decline of the intermediate type, *kete*, seem to have more to do with social changes deriving from political and religious changes. Prior to economic differentiation in the 1990s, Malo society changed from a hierarchical to a more egalitarian society after the mid-1970s, following the political upheavals of the central government as well as the local diffusion of evangelical Christianity. In addition, the decline of *kete* since the mid-1980s may be more or less related to a gradual deterioration of life, generally, into poverty owing to population growth. It can be said, therefore, that cooperative labor has significantly changed as the society has changed.

7.2. Role of Cooperative Labor Reconsidered

As noted, cooperative labor has been generally discussed in terms of its economic utility, such as its function as a coping mechanism for seasonal labor fluctuations. However, local Malo farmers emphasize that the essence of cooperative labor is simply to "work (and eat) together." They say that they easily become tired and take frequent breaks when they work by themselves but that they can

accomplish a large amount of work by working together. Although farmers normally do not gain or lose a total amount of labor by joining cooperative work parties, they think it is of vital importance in the sustenance of their livelihood. Certain factors, other than economic utility, may be involved.

First, farmers foster a strong sense of companionship and solidarity by working and eating together, as elaborated by Donham (1994). As already noted, the currently dominant reciprocal labor party, *zafe*, in Malo is short-lived in principle. It normally dissolves before or after the harvest season. Before the next cropping season, however, it is likely to be reorganized with minor or no modifications of member households, because membership is chiefly based on residence in a neighborhood and local farmers rarely move their residences. Therefore, each labor party has more or less substantial continuity. Member households form close mutual relationships through working and eating together. It goes without saying that cooperative labor is of social importance.

Another aspect, which is rarely discussed, can be added. Through close communication, young novice farmers can acquire not only social but also agricultural knowledge from experienced farmers. Because a labor party is usually attended by farmers of different ages and experience, all participants do not always perform the same tasks. Rather, they usually form pairs to do the given tasks divided according to age and experience. However, farmers in different pairs work side-by-side, frequently shifting their positions and roles and checking up on one another's progress. Young novices are advised while working or resting. Through participating, young farmers, generally energetic but untrained, come to learn how to cultivate fields. In fact, they can learn more about field cultivation from neighboring farmers than from their parents.[16] It is obvious, however, that the recently burgeoning wage labor system does not incorporate such social roles. If cooperative labor declines, socially transmitted knowledge and skills for farming may decline as well. This socializing role of cooperative labor surely warrants more attention.[17]

Erasmus (1956: 463) wrote that, "Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of reciprocal labor is the unspecialized nature of the work performed. The use of money, on the other hand, facilitates increased reward and social recognition for special skills by facilitating the division of labor." Indeed, farming tasks may be more or less unspecialized unlike, for example, crafts or artisan work. However, it is also the case that simple wage laborers who do not have trained skills and farming knowledge cannot work well. Farmers, through working and eating together in cooperative labor, share agricultural, social, and other knowledge as well as skills that have been socially transmitted from farmer to farmer. Although cooperative labor has been discussed largely from an economic viewpoint, it should also be considered in social terms as well.

NOTES

(1) An earlier version of the paper titled "Cooperative Farming Labor among the Malo of Southwestern Ethiopia: Forms, Roles, and Changes" appeared in the book edited by Sam Maghimbi, Isaria N. Kimambo, and Kazuhiko Sugimura, published by Dar es Salaam University Press under the title "Comparative Perspectives on Moral Economy: Africa and Southeast Asia" in 2011.

(2) Cooperative labor has also been mobilized in non-farming activities such as in iron ore mining among the Samia in precolonial western Kenya (Dietler *et al.* 2001). Construction of roads and other infrastructure for public welfare may be better understood separately as "communal labor" (Moore 1975: 277), a topic that requires additional consideration and is beyond the scope of this study.

(3) This is, however, not always the case. For example, Suehara (1983, 2006) reported the unique case of *likilimba* among the Tembo in eastern DR Congo (former Zaire) where male and female individuals manage to organize separate *likilimbas* to implement different tasks of shifting cultivation.

(4) As an exception to the rule, a case with the Maka in southeastern Cameroon should be mentioned in which people organize work groups to grow cacao and coffee as cash crops (Geschiere 1995).

(5) Many cases of such labor arrangements have been recorded, including *ayni* in the Andes (Erasmus 1956; Mitchell 1991), *egesangio* and *ekebosano* among the Gusii in western Kenya (Mayer 1951), *likilimba* among the Tembo in eastern DR Congo and *yui* in Japan (Suehara 1983, 2006).

(6) For this reason, Moore (1975: 271) substituted "reciprocal cooperative labor" and "non-reciprocal cooperative labor" for "exchange labor" and "festive labor," respectively.

(7) For example, a traditional festive labor system of *moyket* beer parties has largely declined since the 1960s, while a newly emerged exchange labor system called *fakiyet* has persisted, intertwining with hired labor (*kondaras*) among the Sabiny of eastern Uganda (Shiraishi 2006).

(8) Among the Gusii in Kenya, for example, owing to the recent introduction of plowing, large landholding farmers came to cultivate larger areas, bringing about an increasing demand for festive labor (*risaga*) for weeding (Mayer 1951).

(9) That is, *dado* among the Macha Oromo (Bartels 1975), *koda* among the Yem (Getachew 1995), *baji* among the Bench (Girmaye 1993), *zewe* among the Dawro (Data 1997), *tikie* and *zaye* among the Wolayta (Berhanu 1995), *zafe* among the Malo (Fujimoto, this study), *lega* among the Koore (Fujimoto, not published), *helma* and *mol'o* among the Maale (Donham 1994a, 1994b), and *aldi*, *mol'a*, and *idir* among the Aari (Gebre 1994) are regarded as exchange labor institutions, whereas *dabo* (Bartels 1977), *dawo* (Getachew 1995), *dab* (Girmaye 1993), *dago* (Data 1997), *dagua* (Berihanu 1995), *kete* and *dabo* (Fujimoto, this study), *hayle* among the Koore (Fujimoto, not published), *dabo* (Donham 1994a, 1994b), and *wod* (Gebre 1994) are regarded as festive labor groupings.

(10) Fieldwork among the Malo has been conducted by the author as a visiting researcher of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University since 1993. Expenses have been funded by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as government subsidies for promoting scientific research.

(11) Among the Malo, sharecropping, called *kottse*, is commonly practiced in farming cereal fields, raising cattle and other livestock, and managing beehives for honey. When a field is sharecropped, two households agree to farm one field for one cropping season. Normally, one household provides land for the field and the other provides seeds to sow there. They call one another *kottse abbo* (sharecropping father) and consider themselves to be equal partners. Ideally, both farmers labor for equivalent amounts of time on the field and take an equal share of the harvests, although they rarely work together. Because the two households often belong to different labor parties, they can mobilize their own labor parties into their sharecropped field alternately. In general, sharecropping is contracted between wealthy landholders and poor landless households, and sharecroppers are commonly considered to be an exploited lower social class. However, among the Malo, sharecropping does not entail the concept of social class. Landless farmers are nearly non-existent and farmers who hold their own land commonly sharecrop with other farmers. This practice has an advantage for rich households because they gain access to more labor. At the same time, it also benefits poor households that cannot subsist on crops grown on their own land by giving them access to a wider area for cultivation. It is also commonly believed that this system has another merit: if a farmer were to lose his seeds or crops, they can easily be regained without involving any monetary transactions at markets.

(12) The most typical is enset. The Malo grow it, as their primary crop, totally through domestic labor, although this is not always the case in all enset-growing societies of southern Ethiopia. The Gurage, for example, mobilize labor parties for tilling enset plots with digging sticks near their dwellings in the dry season.

(13) A similar phenomenon occurred among the Gusii of western Kenya when the adherents of Seventh Day Adventist Christianity increased. They simply adapted by substituting sweet gruel for the customary beer (Mayer 1951: 15).

(14) Saul (1983) also discusses the hierarchical character of cooperative labor in the Sahelian village of Betenga where less labor is provided by seniors for juniors.

(15) It may be useful to refer to Sahlins' three types of reciprocity: "generalized reciprocity", "balanced reciprocity", and "negative reciprocity" (Sahlins 1972). As already noted, exchange labor *zafe* is considered to be based on the principle of "balanced reciprocity". On the other hand, festive labor, *dabo*, relies on that of "generalized reciprocity" and intermediate *kete* on that between the two types of reciprocity. In addition, the newly burgeoning wage labor system, *abaale*, works on the principle of "negative reciprocity". Therefore, in terms of Sahlins' classifications of reciprocity, the principle of agricultural labor among the Malo is considered to have changed from that of "generalized reciprocity" to that of "balanced reciprocity" since the mid-1980s and to that of "negative reciprocity" since the mid-1990s.

(16) On the other hand, most agricultural knowledge regarding root and tuber crops, which are tended by households, is considered to be inherited from one's parents.

(17) Weil (1973) mentions this point as well with regard to the case of Mandinka rice farmers in Gambia.

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Appendix

Major Ethnicities in Ethiopia Holding Cooperative Labor Institutions (from north to south)

Ethnicity	Cooperative labor institution	Reference
Amhara	*däbo, jiggie, wobera, wonfel, gibbo*	Yitfessah 1988, McCann 1995, Getie 2000
Agaw	*woberi, wofel*	Bekalu 1994
Gumuz	*melekie, lantsia, jiowa*	Kuls 1962, Gebre 1996, Wallmark 1981
Oromo	*gege, dabo, dado, korre, galgale, sai*	Temesgien 1957, Bartels 1975, 1977
Hadiyya	*gezima, seera*	Gebre 1996, Braukämper 2005
Kambaata	*seera*	Braukämper 1983
Yem	*koda, dawo*	Getachew 1995
Bench	*baji, dab*	Girmaye 1993
Majangir	*gamat, dadu*	Stauder 1971
Dawro	*zewe, dago*	Data 1997
Wolayta	*tikie, zaye, dagua*	Berhanu 1995
Sidama	*diyi, mahabar*	Hamer 1987
Malo	*zafe, kete, dabo*	Fujimoto (this study)
Gamo	*ts'ire, zurra*	Freeman 2002
Koore	*lega, hayle*	Fujimoto (n.d.)
Maale	*helma, mol'o, dabo*	Donham 1994a, 1994b
Aari	*aldi, mol'a (molaa), idir, wod*	Gebre 1994, 1996
Konso	*parka, marpara, fadeta, koda kanta, koda kaffa*	Watson 2009
Hoor	*haila*	Miyawaki 2006
Kara	*parsho aila*	Matsuda 1996

TAKESHI FUJIMOTO: *Faculty of Humanities, University of Toyama, 3190 Gofuku, Toyama , 930-8555, Japan.*