

PLACE-MAKING UNDER JAPAN'S NEOLIBERAL REGIME:  
ETHICS, LOCALITY, AND COMMUNITY IN RURAL HOKKAIDO

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

How should people live in rural Japan today? And how can they live together in declining communities? As counter-urbanization and the trend of rural revitalization have become a major scene of cultural politics in contemporary Japan, these fundamental questions become more and more important. To respond to the puzzle, it is necessary to re-conceptualize community for the sake of capturing the changing nature of rural society and delineating the current configuration of rural communities. Rather than viewing the countryside as a construct of urban consumerism, the active role and subjective meaning of local advocates of rural revitalization require systematic study. Only with a better understanding of rural community can researchers make a fair evaluation of the practices of place-making in Japan today.

To answer the questions, I conducted a yearlong fieldwork on a rural revitalization project called the BVP in a rural town of Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan. A local non-profit organization, the ODC, sponsors this project, which aims to recruit retired urbanites to settle in their depopulated town to practice pesticide-free farming. During my residency in Hokkaido, I did participant observation in the activities and events of the BVP, and followed the daily practices of the major participants. In addition to that, I also did archival research and in-depth interviews to collect necessary data.

Through the long-term fieldwork, I found that the implementation of the BVP has created a new form of communal life, which I term, a “rhizomatous community.” Urbanite newcomers settle down in different corners of the township via the assistance of the ODC, and work with native residents on the same ground. The ODC members mobilize available resources to realize the BVP, including people, extra income and food, and public assets. In so doing, the BVP grows into a discursive community that does not physically exist but that is substantially constituted by

face-to-face contact, seasonal events, gift exchange, and various interactions with nature. In this respect, the BVP can be imagined as an assembled network that is composed of heterogeneous actors and things. The BVP as a rhizomatous community is embedded in the specific context of a regional society and its natural environment.

The study contributes to community studies by challenging the understandings of community in classical and contemporary theories. A rhizomatous community is neither an interpersonal network existing in a socio-geographic vacuum, nor a traditional or newly invented neighborhood situated in a spatially bounded place. Rather, it is a heterogeneous assemblage discursively constituted through the process of producing locality. It is liberated from while remaining associated with traditional bonds such as family, kinship, and neighborhood.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### Prologue

Walking out of the train station, I took a deep breath of the fresh air mixed with the distinctive smell of the ocean. It was a late Sunday morning in August, and the summer's sunshine was a little too warm even for a Northern town like Oshamambe. The daylight was so bright and the sea breeze blew around me so strongly that I felt like the earth was embracing me. In the dazzling sunlight, I could barely recognize the contours of the downtown—a small settlement located on a narrow plain set against a low green mountain range and facing a grey-blue bay. After stepping out of the station, I took a stroll through the town. The wind sometimes whistled around the houses and made the warped fringes of their rusty roofs creak. However, I saw nobody walking in the neighborhood, not even a dog or a cat. The silent background of emptiness seemed to absorb me until I felt like part of the scenery. Suddenly, I felt a little sadness and a strange sense of loneliness.

As a first-time visitor, my impression of downtown was rather ambivalent. Both sides of the main street were lined with shabby rows of stores and houses roofed with red or blue tin. Most of the buildings had a basically modern façade. Some of them looked newly built, but the rest seemed incongruously tattered, with the paint tarnished and peeling off the walls. The streetscape reminded me of the postwar period of Showa Japan, though it was too quiet and barren here to match such a hopeful era as it is usually depicted in popular images of Showa<sup>1</sup>. Except for the bookstore and the optician, almost every shop had put up its somewhat rustic

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<sup>1</sup> To understand the Japanese nostalgic yearning for the Showa period in popular culture, see the review of Jordan Sand (2007) and Carol Gluck (1990).



shutters. A highway was built along the embankment by the beach to bypass the downtown area, and it isolated the town from the sea. On the sandy shore, driftwood, discarded buoys and nets, fishing gear, and garbage were scattered here and there. Toward the north of downtown, a fishing port sat on the coast, guarded by a cement dike and a line of tetrapods. So far, I had not seen any sign of the farm that I was supposed to visit for my research. On the contrary, the gray, concrete landscape and gravel parking lots did not convey any “organic” or “rural” atmosphere, but more a sense of roughness. “Am I really in Japan now,” I could not help thinking, “a country that is famous for its emphasis on the cultural heritage and nature of rurality?” “So, is this what a rural place is supposed to become after Japan’s thirty-year implementation of rural revitalization?” I kept asking myself.

### **Puzzle**

How should people live in rural Japan today? And how can they live together in declining communities? As rurality and the trend of counterurbanization have become a major scene of cultural politics in contemporary Japan (e.g. Motani and NHK Hiroshima 2013), these fundamental questions become more and more important. However, so far the two questions are not yet studied and answered in a systematic way. Although people in the countryside have suffered from the decline of economy and population continuously, rustic lifestyle and landscape remained one essential subject of Japan’s media, tourism, and cultural industry in the past two to three decades. The popular images of Japan’s rural culture are allegedly the fruits of the mushroomed movement of rural revitalization (*chiiki-okoshi*) emerging in the late 1970s. While the endeavor of rural revitalization has been acutely identified with a market-oriented ideology that pacifies local struggles, scholars who sympathize with the socio-economic predicament of

rural residents still have hope in the potential of rural revitalization to achieve self-empowerment and community identification. Rural communities have to struggle with the enlarging regional inequality and pollution, and, for them, the practices of rural revitalization might be the only available means to reengage in the post-Fordist economy as selling locality has become a common development strategy in the era of globalization (Friedman 1994; Goto 1993: 268-271; Harvey 1991, 1996; Lash and Urry 1994; Robertson 1998; Urry 1995).

However, for the majority of Western scholars who study Japanese society, there is a problematic dimension to rural revitalization: the emphasis on the vanishing tradition that is often understood as *furusato* (the construction of a common “native place,” a spatial representation of the vanishing past that all Japanese people share). According to them, the national fever of rural lifestyle in Japan and the nationalist discourse of Japaneseness are two sides of one coin. The various practices of making *furusato* in rural Japan are actually parts of a conservative project of nation-building sponsored by the state and local authorities (Ivy 1995; Robertson 1991). The symbolic construction of Japan’s traditional life at the local level could undergird the discourse of Japaneseness while generating social exclusion. In this perspective, rural residents are depicted as the subjects allegiant to the nation, an imagined community represented by the lifestyle of rural Japan. As far as the cultural politics is concerned, rural residents should penetrate the “rurality” fabricated by the discourse of nation-culture. Nevertheless, the economic dimension of rural communities concerning livelihood is less addressed in this approach.

A group of Japanese environmental sociologists, who also disagree with the nationalist and fictitious tendency of *furusato*-making, aim to figure out the progressive meanings of studying settlements and lifestyles of rural Japan. They coined the terminology “life-environmentalism” to

refer to the intellectual perspective in which the organically formed way of living with the nature in rural communities are claimed to be the best lesson for their contemporaries. Their findings suggest the agency of rural communities that seems to be less addressed by the critics of rural nationalism mentioned above. Life-environmentalists advocate a progressive way of endogenous development by replacing the large community (nation) with small communities (villages and hamlets) in their discourse of communitarianism (Furukawa 2007; Matsuda and Furukawa 2003). The “small communities” (*chiisana kyōdōtai*) addressed by life-environmentalists are often limited to the historic settlements that still preserve traditional lifestyles (including landscape, livelihoods, ecological system, and customs). However, most of the Japanese countryside (including those smaller cities in rural regions) has been socio-ecologically changed through state intervention, modernization, and globalization since the Meiji period (Kelly 1986, 1990a, 1990b; Miura 2004; Siegenthaler 2008; Wilson 1997). Searching for the cases of traditional communities is thus both methodologically and theoretically suspicious for the purpose of understanding rural Japan today.

Each of the perspectives reviewed above is based on one specific understanding of rural community. For the critics of nationalism, rural communities are the symbolic representation of the Japanese nation that encompasses these small rural villages or tribes. In other words, the small communities are maintained or constructed for the sake of a large, imagined community. For life-environmentalists, rural communities keep a conventional wisdom of living in harmony with nature that does not necessarily justify nationalistic ideology but provides a new possibility of communitarianism. In my view, both perspectives will benefit if they can reconceptualize their ideas of community. On the one hand, the former perspective underestimates the meaning and function of communal development for local residents as if rural communities were merely

the agents in charge of the nation-building project, even though its main focus is about Japanese nation as a political community. On the other hand, life-environmentalists claim to identify communities in which people share the same system of local knowledge or conventional technology, but fall into the dichotomy between traditional community and modern world.

Furthermore, life-environmentalists correctly point out that the small community they define is constructed out of practices that simultaneously involve the history, culture, nature, and environment of the place. Plus, communal traditions are not just a construct of local history. Traditional culture is formed by multiple layers of political economic context, and plays an important role in the performance of identity and subjectivity (Matsuda and Furukawa 2003: 227-234). In other words, they take the approach of practice theory and claim that the specificity of a small community is derived from, borrowing Massey's words, "a particular constellation of social relations" in practice (Massey 1994: 154). However, their analyses do not strictly follow the post-structuralist epistemology of communal studies previously claimed, but often emphasize the daily practices performed by families or communities in common. While sympathizing their approach, I suggest that their analyses can be improved if they can construct a new ontology of community on the basis of a global sense of place and assemblage theory. For example, subject formation in small communities is never a separate local process but penetrated and influenced by global forces. In fact, as neoliberalism becomes a prominent paradigm of governance, community researchers should be vigilant in the new power relations that produce obedient subjects, which is what Nikolas Rose termed "government through community" (Rose 1996, 1999).

To respond to the puzzle, I claim that is necessary to re-conceptualize community for the sake of capturing the changing nature of rural society, and delineating the configuration of rural

communities. Rather than viewing the countryside as an urban construction produced in the process of rural revitalization “with the complicity of the ruralites,” the active role and subjective meaning of local advocates of rural revitalization require systematic study (Clammer 1997: 150). Only with a better understanding of rural community can researchers make a fair evaluation of the practices of place-making in Japan today. Sociology can contribute to the study of rural revitalization with the theoretical conception of community with one of its longstanding subfield: community studies.

## **Theoretical Issues**

### *Community in the Global Context*

So, what is community? This is an issue that has a long history in the discipline of sociology. It is fair to say that the history of community theory in sociology is an ongoing process of defining the form and nature of communities in contemporary society.

For classical sociologists, community represents a natural form of traditional social group against the modern configuration of human life that is usually termed “society.” Unlike the free and open social relationship among individuals in society, community is composed of traditional ties such as blood, kinship, neighborhood that can’t be broken or chosen by individuals. The most well-known example of this perspective is probably Ferdinand Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and Emile Durkheim’s mechanic solidarity and organic solidarity. Although community can be theorized as emotional ties, for theorists in this perspective, community is institutionalized relations that are always bounded to certain locality. In German Ideology, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1970) proposes in a nostalgic tone that community is the only place exempt from capitalist exploitation and alienation, and thus allowing humanist development and

personal freedom of individuals, namely, the realization of species being. Overall, the classical theorists consider community an essentially opposite construct to modern society.

As the modernization of the Western world went into high gear, sociologists also found that they were witnessing a great transformation of communities contextualized by the modern society and capitalism. Scholars first lamented the loss of community in urbanization. Later, the other scholars found that communities are saved and remained in urban context. Finally, sociologists started to argue that communities have been liberated from the limitation of traditional relationships in contemporary society. One critical issue for these sociologists is the changing form of community in the modernized world, especially the metropolitan area. Has the ideal type of traditional community depicted by classical theorists vanished, survived, or transformed in the context of urbanization? Researchers studying migrant neighborhoods in big cities suggest that traditional community still exist today, but those who study suburbia oppose that conclusion. Later, some sociologists reflect on the nature of modern community and conclude that community is symbolically constructed so it can exist in modern society without a institutionalized setting, strong solidarity, and specific location. Modern communities consist of self-determined social relationships rather than of unchangeable ties. In this respect, community has been freed or liberated from the traditional relationships and the spatial boundedness (Wellman 1979).

A key aspect of the paradigm shift in community theory, what Barry Wellman called “community lost,” “community saved,” and “community liberated,” is the changing relationship between places and social groups. That is, modern communities are going through the process of “disembedding”, in which social relations are “lifted out” of local contexts (Giddens 1990: 21). The theoretical understanding of community in sociology changes as the form and quality of

collective life of human beings continue to evolve along with economic and technological development. In classical theories, community is understood as premodern settlements based on inherent bonds. For modern sociologists, community can be a neighborhood located in specific social settings such as big cities. In the urban setting, however, new communities emerge and rapidly grow, and in them, people communicate with each other beyond the limit of physical space. For example, Schmalenbach (1961) argues that modern people have voluntarily formed various communions (*bunds*), in which people disperse spatially but are connected emotionally and ideally, rather than remaining attached to traditional communities composed of primary ties. As a result, the network community, defined by subcultures, translocal ties, and identity, is detached from locality, and becomes a new ideal type of modern sociality in the urban context (Fischer 1975; Maffesoli 1996; Wellman 1979, 2001). The significance and meaning of locality in community studies seems to have been ignored by urban sociologists. Not until recently has the importance of place and locality been re-claimed by some ethnographers, who argue the importance of face-to-face interactions and psychological attachment to places in communal lives (Amit 2002; Low and Altman 1992). In this dissertation, however, I will present a new form of liberated community in rural Japan that is reembedded in the local society (*chiiki*).

### *Globalization, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*

The construction of subjective meaning is a very important element in the case of place-making in Japan. However, such a social process is usually related to its social circumstances and global connections. The mass media in Japan often characterize these activities as domestic or local responses to the economic or social problems of Japan today. Yet, even though the major agents in these phenomena are spatially limited to the Japanese archipelago, it seems naïve to see

them as simply local activities or individual behaviors, since the production and reproduction of social relations are often intertwined in global processes (Arrighi 1999; Harvey 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Ferguson 2002; Tsing 2005). As McMichael (1996) points out, the local diversity is actually crystallized by global processes. Before looking into the issue of locality, it is necessary to recognize the potential influence and presence of global forces, connections and image involved in Japan's production of locality (Burawoy et al. 2000).

After World War II, Japan sought economic and social development and then adopted modes of industrialization from the West. These progressive development projects that started in the 1970s raised a regime of global elites, and thus paved the road for the emerging "global projects" we see today. Thus, so-called globalization is a post-developmental construction, characterized by a different mode of production, flexible accumulation (McMichael 1996; Harvey 1991). Debates on the historical change of state-capital relations in macro-sociology also indicate that we are living in different historical circumstances of globalization compared with those of the first wave of globalization in 1600-1900. What happened in the late twentieth century that initiated the differences was the deflation of social power and the rise of the free market, undergirded by "state minimalist rhetoric." Behind the curtain of the declining Keynesian model of the welfare state, nation-states in fact remain important in the global process, either as active members of trans/supra-national organizations or as middlemen or negotiators in the games of neo-liberal capitalism (Arrighi 1999; Brenner 1999; Tsing 2005). The turn from the Keynesian model to a *laissez-faire* one in economic and public policy is usually understood as a shift to neoliberalism.

In the age of millennial capitalism, according to Comaroff and Comaroff (2000), sovereignty is not monopolized by nation-states anymore. This advanced capitalism and the



neoliberal regime it establishes aim to displace the political sovereignty with an economic one, the sovereignty of “the market.” The free-market logic is very prevalent, and reconstructs not only the ontology of production and consumption, but also the essence of labor, identity and subjectivity in the situated interactions of individuals (333). Accordingly, a new world order is emerging through virtual, financial, and global flows. In this respect, civil society is becoming an empty signifier, a fetishist object.

In Japan, rural revitalization movements are claimed to invent a different idea of the public, which consists of both government that was traditionally identified as the public sector and the individual citizens who used to be considered private actors. To be vigilant about the shadow of neoliberal capitalism, the role of government in rural revitalization movement should be seriously examined. Moreover, what kind of meanings, identities, and imaginings are formed or utilized in these movements and the local economy is another point of investigation.

Indeed, the neoliberal regime governs people not only through political or economic means, but also through a hegemonic worldview that emphasizes the necessity of self-responsible actors in the global era. It then leads to the formation of a kind of subjectivity that can be coherent with the neoliberal economy (Rose 1996; Clarke 2004; Fraser 2003; Brown 2003). Accordingly, the neoliberal economy forms a hegemonic regime requiring rational individuals as the major force of society, and privileging the logic of free market. The idea of society or civil society is either irrelevant or an illusory sign. The privatization and individualization of public and social services are legitimized in this neoliberal regime.

The discussions on neoliberal governmentality and sovereignty remind us of Michel Foucault’s notion of biopolitics and Giorgio Agamben’s concept of bare life. To understand what is “meaningful life” today, it is necessary to reflect on the changing nature of sovereignty that

regulates people's lives, the change from the old sovereignty—to take life or let live—to the new form of power—to make live and let die (Foucault 2003: 239-241). A modern sovereignty, whether possessed by the state or the market, is based not on the right to kill, but on the power to keep people alive. Agamben later makes a further move. He brings the meaning of living and dying to the realm of law and politics. Thus, to live or to die indicates not necessarily only a physical condition, but also the possession or loss of a legal position (Agamben 1998). A change of laws thus implies the transformation of idealizing human subjects.

Community ideologically represents the final retreat for people suffering from market hegemony and neoliberal ethics (Sennett 1998). However, as Zygmunt Bauman (1997, 2001) has commented, the notion of community that most communitarian discourses pursue cannot sustain in the age of neoliberal globalization. Nikolas Rose (1996, 1999) also reminds us that communitarian efforts could have become a means of governance of the neoliberal state to foster self-responsible subjects. In Japanese society, the mainstream theory of community-making (*machizukuri*) claims that to make or remake a community requires the molding of subjects (*hitozukuri*) correspondent to the blueprint of communal life. Such a strategy may be practical for local residents but somehow eschews the accountability of the state. So, to what extent the discourse of community-making and rural revitalization can help provincial Japan relies on careful investigations of the nature of communal life and the process of subject formation in rural communities.

## **The Context**

### *Place-making in Contemporary Japan*

Japan's rural municipalities have practiced a variety of local development strategies in the past three decades in order to survive the uneven development of the Japanese archipelago in the postwar era. These efforts are usually understood and discussed under a rubric of rural revitalization that generally refers to actions and discourses opposing economic and social decline in rural areas of Japan. This rural decline is mainly caused by structural changes such as the free trade of agro-produce, the transnational relocation of factories, the privatization of state-operated businesses, depopulation, and aging. In the discourse of rural revitalization, rural municipalities are expected to sustain local economies by utilizing their own resources and environment creatively. Common municipal practices of rural revitalization may include: introduction of trans-local capital for employment opportunities (to build amusement parks, medical or recreational amenities, outlet malls, wholesale shops, etc.), improvement of transportation to major cities (high-speed railways, highway networks, etc.), commodification and marketing of local specialties (agro-produce, organic food, cuisine, arts and crafts, etc.), organic and recreational agriculture, tourism, and so on. During the past three decades, "successful" cases of rural revitalization have been frequently reported and analyzed. In these reports, the "endogenous development" and creative industrialization of rurality are usually praised and made paradigmatic to inspire followers. However, variation exists between and within different regions of Japan, so researchers have to be very careful not to make hasty generalizations of rural revitalization practices (Knight 1994: 645). Thus, probing into the discursive context of rural revitalization will be the first necessary work before we move on to analysis of a specific case.

There are several Japanese terms that denote the extensive definition of rural revitalization mentioned above, and each of them has several variations. At the beginning of my research, I found two useful Japanese words: *machi-zukuri* and *teinenkinō*. The former is a Japanese version of new urbanism that aims to bring local residents into the decision-making circle of urban planning in a democratic forum. The latter refers to a recent trend of urban Japanese migrating to rural areas to spend their later life doing farming, either organic or conventional. Based on these two ideas, I wrote my initial proposal addressing the interrelated phenomena of town-making (*machi-zukuri*) and farming retirees (*teinenkinō*): how retired urbanites re-settled themselves in the countryside, and how rural residents engaged these aged settlers in their ordinary lives. During my fieldwork, I realized that my informants would rather prefer to say *mura-okoshi* (see below). For them, this term might be a little out of fashion, but it is still quite a precise word to designate their endeavors. For my informants living in the rural areas of Japan, I think that *mura-okoshi* highlights the problem of Japan's uneven development, which has substantially affected their livelihood, and the urban-rural discrepancy is better expressed by it as well. After all, these Japanese words are all directly relevant to the discourses and practices of rural revitalization, and I will briefly explain each of their contexts in the following paragraphs<sup>2</sup>.

The idea of *mura-okoshi* (which literally means village revival) is derived from the local efforts of rural Japan to reverse the socio-economic disadvantage it has seen in post-industrial

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<sup>2</sup> Each of these three words has several variations denoting similar attributes of different subjects and objects. For example, along with *machi-zukuri*, idioms like *mura-zukuri* (village-making) or *chiiki-zukuri* (region-making) are frequently used in similar contexts as well. Alongside *mura-okoshi*, *chiiki-okoshi* (regional revitalization) is also used to designate a wider-ranging activity of revitalization. Finally, media pundits sometimes talk about *seinenkinō* (unemployed youth finding a new career on farms) or *dankaikinō* (baby-boomers going back to farming life) instead of *teinenkinō* in different contexts.

society. The one-sided developmental model adopted by the Japanese state after the Pacific War has caused a series of socio-economic problems in rural areas. In these circumstances, *mura-okoshi* movements have thus come into being both as bottom-up attempts to overcome these problems and the embodiment of the global production of locality, which has ideologically emerged in Japan since the 1980s. It aims at achieving local improvement by summoning subjects who believe in the idea that local communities can and ought to be self-reliant to become entrepreneurs in the changing economy. At its early stage, *mura-okoshi* was often initiated by national or local authorities, though it is considered an autonomous reaction against the city-centered development (Broadbent 1998; Moon 2002).

However, *mura-okoshi* is not simply an economic activity or a promotion of goods, but has various cultural effects. As Okpyo Moon (2002: 228-9) points out, while *mura-okoshi* first started with economic concerns, it came to “adopt the character of an identity movement.” The development of *mura-okoshi* movements shows how communal actions are not limited to economic revitalization, but also touch on the socio-cultural issue of identity that haunts rural Japanese. Constructing a new identity for rural residents is as important as economic revitalization because it helps them to “overcome not only the material disadvantages of rural decline but also their self-conception as losers in industrialized and urbanized modern Japan” (Moon 2002: 229). One critical question Moon did not ask is what the social consequences are when entrepreneurship and an identity movement become one in the practices of *mura-okoshi*. I will get back to this question later.

In today’s Japan, the term *machi-zukuri* (town-making or street-making) is understood as an extremely wide variety of planning practices and techniques, “from downtown redevelopment

to historical preservation to small-scale local improvement efforts” (Sorensen 2002: 308). Therefore, the meaning of *machi-zukuri* is largely vague and context-dependent. Restrictively speaking, this term can be understood as small-scale planning projects that incorporate local residents into the decision-making process (Sorensen 2002: 309). However, it is still not a handy term for my analysis of rural development, not only because of its unsettled usage in the Japanese language, but also because *machi-zukuri* is more often used to refer to planning processes and community activities in a urban context. Today, even though rural municipalities also organize *machi-zukuri* committees to bring the local developmental plans into deliberation, the democratic procedure alone does not break the deadlock of uneven development. In the case of Oshamambe’s *machi-zukuri*, for instance, the vision of the committee and the proposal it made are still limited to over-generalized goals and clichéd slogans, partly because of the restricted budget and resources offered by the local authority. Under these circumstances, the realization of residents’ community-making ideals has to rely on the efforts of local organizations and active citizens.

The idea of *teinenkinō* (retirees’ return to farming) is also relevant to the idea of rural revitalization, and it provides an auxiliary approach to Japan’s rural development that includes counter-urban migration, the aging population, and the agency, identity, and subjectivity of the elderly. This literary word is often used by media pundits who suggest how the retired baby-boomers can make a contribution to depopulated rural Japan by moving to the countryside<sup>3</sup>.

More than half of the participants of the BVP who have re-settled themselves in Oshamambe are

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<sup>3</sup> During my fieldwork, many informants of mine could not understand immediately the meaning of *teinenkinō* when I mentioned this term to them, since it is highly literary and rarely used in daily conversation. On the contrary, *mura-okoshi*, a compound word created in colloquial language, defines more precisely what my informants are doing and how they make sense of their own practices.

in their sixties or seventies, and they did come to rural Hokkaido in search of an idyllic lifestyle. So far, however, *teinenkinō* is more of a catchphrase than a prevalent social phenomenon. Furthermore, *teinenkinō* should be understood as a by-product, rather than the origin, of the omnipresent and multi-faceted yearning for rurality in urban Japan. In Japan's urban culture, rurality is often represented in the rhetoric of the therapeutic, the gastronomic, and the traditional. Such a discourse helps create a shared yearning for country life among urban Japanese. The longing for the rural idyll constructs one of the push factors of rural migration in Japan (cf. Bell 1994; Williams 1973). Meanwhile, many rural localities reform their living environment to fit the urban image of the countryside in order to pull migrants to their communities.

Later, I realized that the booming number of elderly farmers in the past two decades could be an illusion created by mass media. When I visited Kyoto University in 2011, I had a conversation with professor Noriaki Akitsu, a scholar who teaches in the College of Agriculture, Kyoto University. He told me that the rising population statistics of *teinenkinō* cited by agro-lifestyle magazines are actually a myth. Most of the *teinenkinō* people on record, according to him, were originally part-time farmers. They are actually professional farmers who were forced to do sideline jobs to maintain their livelihood, due to the low profit they earned by selling their harvests. They might work as assembly-line workers, day-to-day laborers, or clerks, while doing farm work seasonally. These part-time farmers are usually registered as non-farmers statistically, but their occupational registration changes to full-time farmer after they retire from their second jobs. So, the strong trend of *teinenkinō* in contemporary Japan is to a certain extent fabricated, and the actual number of amateur peasants who have moved to rural life after retirement is relatively low (Akitsu 2010: 134). Moon (2002: 229) also mentioned that “[m]ore than 90 per

cent of Japanese farm households are the so-called *kenkyo nōka*, or part-time farmers, in that they have significant sources of income outside agriculture.”

Throughout this dissertation, I will generally use “rural revitalization” to refer to the civil and governmental attempts to reverse the declining population and economy of rural Japan. Emic words like *mura-okoshi*, *machi-zukuri*, and *teinenkinō* will only be used when specification is necessary. The content of rural revitalization includes all of the *mura-okoshi* activities identified above, and overlaps with some practices that are called *machi-zukuri* or *teinenkinō*. Although here it seems that *mura-okoshi* can be used as a synonym for rural revitalization, using it as an analytic term for a recent example would cause the problem of anachronism, since its origin and heyday are in the eighties. To further explore the historicity of rural revitalization, in the next section I offer a brief review of existing studies on the rural revitalization movement in the postwar era.

### *Rural Revitalization*

There has been plenty of research on modern Japan that has touched on the issue of rurality, but a major strand of these studies is a focus on how the social construction of rurality invents a shared cultural origin for Japanese nationals. Witnessing Japan’s miracle postwar resurgence and the feverish economic expansion during its economic bubble (1986-1991), “trend observers” around the world had become highly curious about what cultural traits of Japan made this nation so successful in the changing world economy. Meanwhile, issues like Japanese uniqueness (i.e. Japaneseness) also came to be fashionable among Japanese nationals, which aroused a domestic enthusiasm for reviewing national history. Such transnational fever of Japanese culture thus drew the attention of Western scholars doing area studies: some of them joined in the construction of



Japaneseness, but the others felt suspicious about it. Many American anthropologists of Japan took the latter stance, and their critiques of Japaneseness eventually led to an overall reflection on Japan's cultural nationalism.

In the academic circle of Japanese studies, a major critique of the enthusiasm for Japanese uniqueness is the nationalist thought that underpins it. Historically, the origin of the Japaneseness discourse can be traced back to the native ethnology of Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), the collector of Japanese folklore and the founding father of Japan's native ethnology. The folkloric works written by Yanagita Kunio and his followers reveal how the oneness of Japan's cultural identity was firstly created by their representation of folk tales in the modern period (Hashimoto 1998; Harootunian 1998). Several anthropologists follow this critique of cultural nationalism in Japan, indicating that the construction of Japanese identity actually intertwines with the social construction of locality (e.g. Kelly 1986; Bestor 1989; Robertson 1991; Ivy 1995). According to their observations, the making and remaking of locality and communal solidarity usually utilize nostalgic elements derived from rural lifestyles or historical relics. Meanwhile, both the state and local authorities endeavored to construct the discourse of *furusato* (hometown or native place) and "the vanishing" that arouses nostalgic sentiments (Robertson 1991; Ivy 1995). Under the circumstances, these nostalgic feelings were transformed into a handy discursive tool by many resourceless municipalities to encourage *mura-okoshi* movements.

The origin of *mura-okoshi* movements can be traced back to the late 1970s, when the Third Comprehensive National Development Plan (CNDP) was established. The Third CNDP opened up an era named the "age of the province." A year later, the wave of "one village, one product" movements (*isson ippin undō*) started to spread through the whole nation after prefectural governor Hiramatsu Morihiko's success in the revitalization of the Oita Prefecture (Broadbent

1998). The “one village, one product” movement can be understood as the beginning and founding paradigm of the *mura-okoshi* movement, aiming to find an alternative way of development for the declining rural areas. After that, more and more followers devoted themselves to the business of rural revitalization, but only a few of them could taste its fruits.

Social anthropologist John Knight (1994) briefly discusses *mura-okoshi* movements by comparing two cases located in the Oita and Wakayama Prefectures. The public rhetoric of *mura-okoshi* movements, according to Knight, is that “of rural self-reliance, of valiant villages drawing on their inner resources in a struggle for survival in the face of large-scale demographic and economic decline” (Knight 1994: 634). Such a self-reliant image seemed to touch Japanese consumers, who bought home village goods commoditized by the rural localities not only for their “safe quality” and nostalgic sentiment, but also out of sympathy for the movements (Knight 1994: 645). One important point made here is that the social construction of *furusato*, or “the vanishing” alone (Ivy 1995), does not provide a comprehensive explanation for the rise of *mura-okoshi* movements. For urban consumers, buying local foods is done not only in recognition of their ideological meanings, but also out of a desire for their materiality (taste, safety, nutrition, etc.) and the social justice they represent. For rural communities, the fashion of *furusato-zukuri* did not simply confirm the Japanese nation, but also provided economic opportunities for declining rural settlements. Moreover, in the global era, the conception of *furusato* culture has gone hand in hand with the economy of glocalization (Robertson 1998).

However, the consumer ethics of supporting depopulated villages does not guarantee the economic success of the *mura-okoshi* movements. As Knight (1994: 645-6) concludes, in general, *mura-okoshi* movements draw on sources of agency from return migration and national or local authorities, whereas self-reliance is highly emphasized in the discourse of *mura-okoshi*. In other

words, despite its ideology, the endogenous development of *mura-okoshi* would not be sustained without external resources and intervention. Indeed, to start a new enterprise, even a small scale one, requires capital. More importantly, investment is always risky and profit cannot be guaranteed, especially for a new local industry. Anthropologist Bridget Love (2007) investigated a case like that in Nishiwaga, a rural township in the northeastern area of Japan. She studied a public-private partnership company called the Kingdom of Mountain Bounty, founded with municipal funds. Love found that this third sector company seemed to create an alternative form of development for Nishiwaga at the beginning, but could not improve its deficit operation for long. The Kingdom eventually fell, after the newly elected mayor of Nishiwaga decided to withdraw the public investment in the company. Love carefully analyzed how this failure and the merger of municipalities affected local residents' identities and the livelihood of employees and contract farmers. What she did not investigate seriously, however, is the bigger structure that caused all of these changes and impacts.

Urban planners Junko Goto (1993) and Shu Kitano (2000; 2009) have also studied *mura-okoshi* in different regions of Japan respectively, and have also reached a similar conclusion, that *mura-okoshi* movements will not be able to revitalize rural Japan as promised. Through her investigation in the Aichi Prefecture, Goto found that the essence of so-called *mura-okoshi* is the “self-commodification” of local resources and environment, a “commodification from within.” She suggested that *mura-okoshi* be understood as an ideology of rural development that pacifies political activists and unleashes market forces on rural Japan. Witnessing the initial development of the *mura-okoshi* movement in the 1980s, Goto was worried by the possibility that many villages would try to copy the success of certain cases and thus lose their originality.

Furthermore, she pointed out that “successful” municipalities usually failed to address the real issues that concern rural Japan, such as declining agriculture, depopulation, and aging.

In Kitano’s doctoral research (2000; 2009) on the Gunma Prefecture, he confirmed Goto’s fears and claimed that practices of *mura-okoshi* could not reverse the trend of aging and depopulation of rural localities even though some of them are making a certain amount of profit. Therefore, Japan’s *mura-okoshi* movements will not be able to attain their target of revitalization and seem to be doomed to failure in the near future. To sum up, all three researchers whose work is summarized above are skeptical about the premise of *mura-okoshi*.

Most of the *mura-okoshi* practices are actions following the logic of a market economy that is largely dominated by urban consumers. Since the *mura-okoshi* movements rely on self-commodification, its practices have to be oriented by the customers of their business. To rebuild rural identity, it is necessary to transform the countryside by utilizing the language of nostalgia that has long existed in the modern image of rurality (Kelly 1986). In many *mura-okoshi* movements, images of rural life were selectively used, and the landscape was even reconstructed, in order to represent urbanites’ ideal vision of the Japanese countryside. As a result, *mura-okoshi* has become an ironic movement that requires rural residents to cater to the taste of urbanites in order to make proper profits (Moon 2002: 241).

### *The Graying of Japan*

The features of demographic change in the Japanese family of the twentieth century can be summarized as: “the decline in mortality, decreased fertility, increased life expectancy, the achievement of a low-growth stable population, urbanization, decreased household size and the

nuclearization of the family” (Long and Littleton 2003: 229). The segment of the population 65 years of age and older accounted for 17.2% of the total in 2000, but this is forecast to rise to 19.6% in 2005, and to 30.4% in 2030 (Long and Littleton 2003; Coulmas 2007). According to modernization theory, these transformative scenes indicate that Japan is becoming a “modern” country, which will bring better quality of life and a brighter future. However, since the 1980s the demographic imbalance has drawn attention and been recognized as a threat. As a result, the state problematized the phenomenon of an aging population, and actively proposed various measures and ordinances to deal with the problem.

According to Debbie Rudman’s study of Canadian retirees (2006), discourses and images of retirement provide morally laden messages that shape people’s possibilities for being and acting. For Rudman, the images of ideal life possessed by Canadian retirees are in fact illusory, since society often demands that these elders be self-reflexive, calculate their own risks, and be responsible for their own lives. Neoliberal discourses have started to penetrate into not only the daily life of Japanese workers, but also that of senior retirees who own certain resources.

Delineating the cultural construction of retirement in Japan will lay out the necessary context to help us understand the subjective experience of practitioners of counter-urbanization.

Older Japanese have made pre-funerals, or living funerals, to celebrate their agency and self-sufficiency in designing the ritual performance. In this process, elders feel that they can steer their later life, and thus attain a certain individuality and independence (Kawano 2004). With the economic resources, Japanese elders are able to design their later lives in accordance with their desire for meaningful experiences. In other words, the Japanese elderly are also enthusiastic about personal life politics in the context of individualization, even though Japan is usually considered a society in which sociocentric personhood, rather than an egocentric one, prevails

(Kawano 2010: 17). Aging is thus addressed as a lifestyle that can be planned and improved by individual efforts. Gerontological concepts such as successful aging, active aging, or productive aging also require individual elders to take their own part actively in the war against a graying society. In the reflective view of critical gerontologists, however, the global promotion of successful aging “[embodies] the neo-liberal principles of containing the costs of eldercare and maximizing individual effort and responsibility for managing risks of disease and decline in later life” (Roanova 2010; see also Lamb 2014 and Moulaert and Biggs 2012).

### **Research Questions**

After reviewing existing literature on Japanese rurality, I found that these studies have some shortcomings that require further research. First, the field site choices of these ethnographers concentrate on the traditional areas of Japan, usually Honshu Island. Marginal areas of modern Japan, such as Hokkaido and Okinawa, have seldom been the focus of research, partly because of the biased idea that these areas are not essentially representative of Japan<sup>4</sup>. Second, they focus on the cultural meanings of rurality and revitalization activities, but ignore their socio-economic background. The state encouraged *mura-okoshi* movements, not only to fabricating a myth of the Japanese nation, but also to help cope with difficulties in governing the

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<sup>4</sup> Junko Goto (1993) studied *chiiki-okoshi* practices in a small township of the Aichi Prefecture, located in central Honshu Island. John Knight (1994) compared two cases of rural revival movement, one from the Wakayama Prefecture (Western Honshu), the other from the Oita Prefecture (Kyushu). Shu Kitano (2000) did interviews for his dissertation in several localities of the Gunma Prefecture (Eastern Honshu). Several anthropologists have published works addressing the decline and revival of local culture in the Tohoku area (see Thompson and Traphagan ed. 2006). The field sites of these ethnographers all belong to the so-called “traditional area” of Japan that has been developed as villages, rice paddies, and farms for centuries. In such places, the national history and the orthodoxy of Japaneseness are the most available resources to be commoditized for attracting tourists.

rural areas in a rapidly changing economy. Third, these studies discuss local dynamics and social interactions in detail, but give much less attention to the structural forces that derive from national development plans or the global economy. Last, as I have asked earlier, a critical question has been left unanswered in existing literature that should be tackled: what are the social consequences of rural revitalization, where economic achievement and the reformation of identity have to be done together as one process? This question brings out the issue of subjectivity that has been highly influenced by market logic since its formation, and thus leads to the Foucauldian problematic of governmentality.

Since Nikolas Rose proposed the idea of “governing through community,” claiming that communitarian ideology and measures have become a means of governance of the neoliberal state, researchers on neoliberalism have come to notice the issue of neoliberalization of communities, for both urban and rural communities (Li 2007; Agrawal 2005; Ilcan and Basok 2004; Cheshire and Lawrence 2005). Japan’s rural revitalization movement arose in the 1980s, opening the door of rural communities to market forces. In the wave of neoliberal reform, the free market’s impact on local areas became even stronger and more direct. For those living in a local community governed by a neoliberal regime, who benefits from the new economy? How do the rest survive its impact and maintain their daily lives? Furthermore, under such a neoliberal regime, where state rationality comes into contact with and intervenes in subject formation at the local level, is alternative subjectivity still possible? To what extent might it be so?

Today, the governance of rural Japan seems to be done in an ambivalent fashion. On the one hand, the state encourages self-reliant localities through legislation and incentives. The autonomy and subjectivity of the local people seem to be enhanced and empowered within this kind of discourse. On the other hand, however, the state has withdrawn regular subsidies and

budgets for public services from rural municipalities, while investing more in the maintenance and improvement of urban environments. As a result, most local communities in Japan have declined rapidly, even though the discourses of community and *furusato* (native place) are omnipresent in the country. Facing problems caused by uneven development and depopulation, how do the local people improvise to survive economically and maintain ethically alternative lives under the governance of a neoliberal state?

Readers may have seen news reports about successful examples of village revival movements, which have become a pervasive myth in contemporary Japan. These stories are usually about how a small settlement figured out a way to preserve its historical lifestyle while making new income for local residents by accommodating guests and visitors. But is this always the case in rural Japan? If not, how do those communities that cannot reach same level of success survive the fiscal crisis created by shrinking budgets and a graying population? How do the local communities' identity and dynamics change after a failed attempt at revitalization?

During its resurgence after the WWII, Japan successfully created miraculous economic development that has become a model case of a “developmental state” for studies on development and industry, but behind this victory came the side effect of uneven regional development. Although Japan's capital, Tokyo, climbed onto the tall and narrow stage belonging to so-called “global cities,” its trade-off was the high concentration of Japan's population and industry in metropolitan areas, especially around Tokyo City. Such an unbalanced allocation of resources pushed urban migrants to leave rural home towns to pursue a better livelihood. Meanwhile, rural localities not only lost their young labor force to big cities, but also had to face stagnation exacerbated by the increased importation of agro-produce that began in the 1980s. As



a result, the number of depopulated rural localities has increased significantly, even though many of them were merged administratively in the 2000s. These mergers led directly to the concentration and uneven deployment of public services and governmental budgets over non-urban areas. To combat the decline in the local quality of life, municipalities have advocated practices of alternative development to rebuild self-reliant local economies since the late 1970s. Since then, these creative ideas have been gradually absorbed into state policies that are implemented in various forms. In other words, the self-reliance of localities has become an important principle of the governmental rationality of the Japanese state, and the promotion of communal industry can be seen in different aspects of everyday life—institutions, media representation, and consumption.

However, while the values of community and rurality have been emphasized for thirty years, the decline of rural Japan continues, and it seems that only a few municipalities have successfully invented a sustainable economy through deliberate self-revitalization. The total number of Japan's localities and rural settlements is still falling, and rural residents' quality of life does not seem to be as wonderful as what is delineated in the mass media's idyllic portrayal. These "unsuccessful cases" of rural revitalization might be easily marked by commentators or media pundits as disqualified challengers to the new economy, contenders who eventually will be eliminated altogether if they cannot adjust themselves to the market. In other words, Japan's rural communities have all entered a competitive market where each community has to figure out its own niche market and then become productive enough to meet its demands. So in this case, what are the consequences of the marketization of communal life? How can local residents create their own communal life without simply accepting the self-commodification paradigm of Japan's rural revitalization while facing the challenge of competition in the market of local specialties?

**To sum up, I asked four theoretical questions concerning the issues of community, locality, and subjectivity in the context of neoliberalism and globalization: what kinds of locality and subjects have been produced in the practices of rural revitalization of contemporary Japan that are consistent with the ideology of neoliberalism? How are rural communities destroyed and transformed by such a neoliberal localism fuelled by global capitalism? In addition to those winners in the market of local specialties, have the diverse practices of rural revitalization eventually created alternative forms of communal life that are resilient to the decline of local economy? What makes such alternative communities possible? What is the relationship between the subjects of alternative community and the neoliberal subjects that believe in the neoliberal ethics, namely, self-responsibility and entrepreneurialism?**

Finally, I will also ask specific questions about my research subjects, the participants of the Bochibochi Village Project (the BVP) in Oshamambe Town of rural Hokkaido. Oshamambe is a small town mainly making its living through dairy farming, fishing, and the service industry; farming (growing rice, vegetables, or fruit) does not make up a significant portion of the local economy because its soil, frigid climate, and relatively short hours of sunshine provide an unfavorable environment for cultivation. However, the sponsors of the BVP have raised a campaign based on organic agricultural practice to recruit immigrants from other parts of Japan. Why do residents of Oshamambe envision small-scale, sustainable farming as the means of their town's revitalization? Why do retired urbanites choose to move to this town for their later lives rather than other places with better environmental qualities, medical resources, or farm conditions? How do the "villagers" of Bochibochi Village, which literally means a village of living slowly, wrestle with the legitimated model of self-commodification as the paradigm of

Japan's place-making efforts today, as the latter emphasizes economic efficiency and profits? Facing the competition and tension of the market of localities, how do the villagers maintain their idea of slow living?

## **Method and Data**

In this section, I conduct a methodological discussion on my site selection, method choice and data collection.

### *Research Method: Doing Fieldwork in Japan*

Ethnography is the best method to serve the purpose of my study on the processes of subject formation under Japan's neoliberal regime and how the alternative ethics became possible in the context of rural community. Compared with quantitative research, qualitative research methods have the advantage of understanding subjective meanings through the contextualized observation of behavior, interactions, and speech of research subjects. Moreover, the processes of subject formation, the various communal activities, and the consequences and influence of structural forces on research subjects can be better understood and illustrated through long-term ethnography.

I conducted the field research in 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011, totaling thirteen months. I did one short-term field trip each to Oshamambe and other field sites within Japan respectively in 2007 and 2011. During 2009-2010, I maintained a yearlong residency in Oshamambe and was a member of the BVP/ODC while staying there. The methods I used to collect my research data include archival research, interview, and participant observation. In addition to published works on relevant topics, I did archival research by using government documents and statistics (e.g. the Japan Population Census), newspaper reports, writings on personal weblogs, and information

from official websites of governments, corporations, and civic organizations such as non-profit organizations.

Participant observation is the major method I used to collect data during my field research. In August 2009, I joined the ODC as a short-term member, and lived there for more than a year while conducting field research. During the year, I joined almost every gathering and communal event of the BVP community, while helping local farmers and residents as a volunteer. I visited the guesthouse of Shaman, the place I considered to be a core of the BVP, and chatted with the hosts and guests gathering there almost every day. As a villager of the BVP, I cultivated my own plot on the BVP farm, and thus had conversations, exchanges, and interactions with other villagers who farmed there naturally. In so doing, I gained the trust of the BVP participants and became their friend.

I revisited Oshamambe in the summer of 2011, five months after the Tohoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear incident. During this three-week trip, I interviewed some newcomers and got updated on the progress of production of locality in Oshamambe. Meanwhile, I learned about the socio-psychological impact of the catastrophe in the local community of Oshamambe. Toward the end of 2011, I visited the University of Kyoto and joined the field research team on a trip to the Kumano area of Mie Prefecture. Although it was only a short investigation, the teamwork and information shared among the research team helped me quickly grasp the social contours and economic development of Kumano. The experience in the state's investigation has also become an important point of reference for my former experience in Hokkaido. In September of 2013, I made a private trip to Oshamambe in order to attend the funeral of one of my major informants. Although I did not do any formal research activities during this visit

(except for archival research in the local library), I learned a lot about the latest developments of the BVP community from my friends there.

### Choosing the field site

To eschew the distraction of nationalist pride pervading the central, traditional area of Japan, I decided to choose a field site on the periphery of Japan, and found Oshamambe in Hokkaido. Hokkaido is a frontier region of Japan, and its connections to the metropolitan areas on the main island (*Honshu*) are weak compared with other prefectures. Historically, Hokkaido was not part of modern Japan until the late nineteenth century, when the Meiji government sent agricultural soldiers there and implemented modern colonial projects on the island. Hokkaido is now active at promoting rural revitalization, eco-tourism, and agricultural production.

Furthermore, the colonial history and exotic agricultural landscape also summon the historical image of its peripheral position and frontier imagery (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Hokkaido is a new colony of Japan, having been part of the nation only since the end of the nineteenth century, and it has been continually depicted as a natural and underdeveloped island full of animals, plants, minerals and other natural resources. So, it is reasonable to assume that settlers who come to Hokkaido from Honshu (the main island of Japan) are looking for something other than the traditional culture of Japan. In sum, Hokkaido is a place that is less relevant to the construction of authentic Japaneseness. Its image among today's Japanese is rather modern, exotic, touristic, and full of nature.

### Gaining Entry to the Community

In the special issue of *Modern Agriculture* in 2006, I found a report on a civic group called the Oshamambe Dream Club (the ODC). By launching a project of civic farming called the BVP, this group publicly recruited urban retirees to their town to join in the development of pesticide-

free farming. Witnessing the socio-economic impacts of rapid depopulation on local life, the ODC members hope to introduce new settlers in order to maintain the social life of their hometown. The case of ODC is fundamentally different from the other cases on the magazine because the discourse of the ODC translates the individualistic concept of *teinenkinō* into a public issue: the decline and revival of rural communities. This feature convinced me that Oshamambe would be a good field site for a sociological study on the interactions between urbanite resettlers and native residents. Finding well-maintained homepage of the Bochibochi Village Project confirming that this civic group remains active, I visited this northern town during my pilot study in the summer of 2007. During my first visit to the ODC, I met the exponents of the BVP, Shira and the Yamas, in Mr. Yama's guesthouse, where they made an informal and impromptu presentation about their project for me, in a passionate and sincere manner. We also drove to the BVP farm and a local café to meet other BVP members. At that time, 26 persons had settled down in Oshamambe via the assistance of the BVP, most of them retirees from metropolitan areas such as Osaka and Tokyo. Meanwhile, more than 60 persons, including native residents and urbanite settlers, had registered for their own plots on the BVP farm. After the visit, I concluded that the BVP implemented in rural Hokkaido, a peripheral region of Japan, would be the proper object of my ethnographic study.

Before I started my fieldwork in Japan, I continuously tracked the official website and forum of the BVP, by which I kept a connection (albeit minimal) with Yama and Shira. When I was receiving language training in Yokohama in 2008-2009, I informed them that I would like to join the BVP for one year in order to do my field research. In the spring of 2009, I applied to Mr. Yama for membership in the BVP, and he welcomed my application. Therefore, I visited

Oshamambe in June 2009 to find an apartment there, and then moved to Oshamambe for my fieldwork in August.

### Interviews

During the fieldwork, I conducted interviews with people who were or had been engaged in the activities of the BVP, including the settlers and the “supporters.” Toward the end of my yearlong residency in Oshamambe, after I had been able to earn BVP participants’ trust in order to enable quality communication with them, I started to conduct in-depth interviews with several major informants. Interviews were usually conducted in the residences of my interviewees, or, if they did not actively invite me to their places, in a consensus public space such as a corner in the local library or a coffee shop of a BVP member. The interviews usually lasted for one to three hours. Since most of my research data were derived from my long-term participant observation and daily conversations with the BVP members and other local residents, I only conducted formal interviews with fourteen key informants in the summer of 2010, and six formal interviews during the fieldtrip in 2011. These key informants varied by education and socio-economic status, but were all engaged (or had engaged) in the making of the BVP community. By formal interview I mean I did semi-structured interviews with informants by focusing on the interview questions I had prepared to a certain extent, but allowed a degree of freedom of conversation with the interviewees for collecting relevant information as much as possible. In so doing, my conversations with each interviewee covered the same general areas of information concerning my research, including: personal life history, reasons for and process of settlement in Oshamambe, and, in particular, the new lifestyle and social relations in the BVP community. All the formal interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, who were told about the purpose of my research and their rights as interviewees in advance. Several informants

refused to give interviews because they disliked the formality of pre-designed interviews, but preferred the form of casual conversation. Since I had had conversations with them frequently, some of them thought that they had provided enough information to me, so there was no need to repeat it in a formal manner of communication. In those cases, I made sure that they understood my identity as a researcher and the way in which the information from them would be used in my dissertation and future publications.

### *Methodology*

Borrowing the methodological insight of Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff's conceptualization of "regime of living" (2004, 2005), I argue that global discourses on lifestyle consumption and the production of locality have provided an ethical "foundation and justification" for the mushrooming of alternative development in Japan. Various practices of alternative lifestyles all over Japan can be seen as "related but distinct regimes of living in diverse sites" (Collier and Lakoff 2005: 32). Therefore, the BVP can be seen as one example among other regimes of living in Japan. By using this concept to examine the story of the BVP, I will concentrate on the unique ethics of the BVP, and the ways in which such ethics have been derived from everyday practices and materiality. To do so, it is necessary to probe into the local operation of the project, and elucidate its distinctive constitution and flows of heterogeneous elements, including food, emotions, labor, and so on. Meanwhile, since "a regime of living assumes concrete, substantive form only in relation to the exigencies of a given situation" (Collier and Lakoff 2005: 32), my investigation also focuses on the history, context, and scope of the exigent situation of the local neighborhoods in Oshamambe.



Although my investigation concentrates on an Oshamambe-based group, the intention of my research is not to write an ethnography of Oshamambe, whether as a township, as locality, or as the nexus of local neighborhoods. Rather, my study began with the BVP, as one of the rural revitalization actions of the Oshamambe Dream Club (the ODC). Through my long-term fieldwork, I gradually realized that the implementation of the BVP has created a discursive community, namely, Bochibochi Village. Learning from extended case method proposed by sociologist Michael Burawoy, I reject the idea derived from conventional ethnographies that would take Oshamambe as a microcosm of Japanese society. According to Burawoy (1991), the extended case method is an offshoot of the ethnographic method, which has close ties to Marxist social anthropology and the early Chicago school. Unlike the Geertzian interpretation of culture, which treats local communities as the representation of the whole culture, the extended case method takes the field as a sphere in which different structural forces are interwoven. In this respect, what the case study of Oshamambe and the BVP can teach us, I claim, is how structural forces (such as alternative lifestyles and neoliberal ideology) can penetrate the rural-urban division and influence the formation of ethical subjects in a local community. That is, I will bring the focus to the local level to elucidate the connecting points between the state's rationality and the practices of local subjects. Through this micro-level discussion, this research will avoid the shortfalls of some discursive analyses of governmentality whose top-down perspective ignores the techniques of power employed at the micro-level (Rose et al. 2006).

Furthermore, the penetration of global forces into local communities challenges the conventional methodology of cultural anthropologists that tend to focus on a bounded community within a spatially limited place. Taking each community as a part that can represent the whole culture or society, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) point out, such an

ethnographic fashion ignores the fact that the ethnographic field sites are constructed socially and globally. To locate “the field” or “the local” as a certain spatial site will always lead back to the ongoing dichotomy of home/field, insider/outsider, or self/other in anthropology. To realize the social construction of locality, ethnographers have to turn their eyes to the political process of the construction of locality rather than its outcomes (a bounded community, a local society, a village, etc.). So, the fieldwork should be more about political locations, rather than a geographical one. Therefore, Marcus (1998: 57-104) claims the necessity of doing multi-sited ethnography in the context of globalization to achieve a more complete understanding of the whole. In my field research, I followed the informants to several neighborhoods and remote settlements of Oshamambe Town, rather than just staying in the downtown area where most BVP members live. Sometimes I travelled with them to other parts of Hokkaido, since motoring tours have been an essential part of the lives of people who live in Hokkaido. By taking the BVP community, Bochibochi Village, as the object of my research, I did not limit myself within the given boundaries of Oshamambe Town.

### *Gender in the Field*

*This is an unconventional funeral held by a local household at the guesthouse of Shaman in downtown Oshamambe. The living room and the rest of the guesthouse were two worlds. Men were sitting around the dining room and talked loudly because of the effect of alcohol. Ladies gathered in the kitchen cooking more food, and prepared drinks for guests in the dining room, who were mostly males. Though I really wanted to stay in the kitchen to escape from the crowded, noisy, and smoky dining room, several ladies pushed me out, saying that this is not the right place for me. I was grabbed by some senior males, who asked me to sit down and eat all the*

*dishes they had saved for me while I was mourning for Sayoko inside. Suddenly, I was confused by the strong sense of incongruity (iwakan) under the circumstances: was this a wake or a party?*

Since housewives have been professionalized as a category of vocation (*sengyō shufu*) in contemporary Japan, ordinary people in Japan often wrap up their gender discourse in the ethics and rhetoric of professionalism. In the kitchen of Shaman, all the females working and chatting there, except for Rie, were either professional housewives, or housewives who also help in the shop of their husbands. They took control of the kitchen because, as a male guest commented for a joke, “they are kitchen experts, and we are drinking experts.” The only two females drinking and chatting with other male guests in the dining room were one senior reporter and one office employee of the local branch of Japan Agricultural Cooperative (JA). Both of them have independent careers and income. Whether these two female usually do housework or not, their self-identity and expected gender performance are distinguishable from professional housewives. According to my male informants, these two females did not help in the kitchen because they are part-time housewives who are not experienced in housework.

For professional housewives, kitchen is the focal place for them to perform their gender role and responsibility, and thus the place to practice their personal ethics. In the second day of the funeral, I heard people in the kitchen whispering about the conflict between Mrs. Sun and Mrs. Nanao in the early morning. However, nobody was willing to explain this gossip to me in Shaman’s kitchen. Several days later, I finally learned a little more about the conflict from Mrs. Oya. She described it in a quite conservative and simplified way, and tried to convince me that the conflict is not really a big deal: “Both of them are used to being the leader in the kitchen, but just had different ways of doing things. ‘You should wash this before cutting it, not the other way around. No, my way is faster and cleaner.’ It’s just some trivial comments like that. Anyway,

they became okay with each other in a short time, so don't worry about them." In the urban context, identification to the ideal gender role of married women often leads to competition between housewives (e.g. Allison 1991), but that kind of competition usually happened on their "front stage" of their presentations of self in everyday life (e.g. making children's lunchboxes or joining a potluck party). Working together in someone's kitchen for a private event is the rare chance for these local housewives to perform their ways of working on the "back stage" on the same site (*genba*).

As mentioned before, the making of the BVP community largely relies on existing social institutions, and resources lie idle. A critical element among them is the patriarchic family and the gender roles it installed. Senior females in the BVP often functioned for the community through their practice of motherhood, namely, taking care of weak members by providing food or comfort. Although this seems to be a natural and convenient way to establish social interactions and connections, to what extent such a gender performance aggravates the burden produced by the existing gender structure is still a question. For example, I noticed that senior female members, who are all housewives, always participated in weeding activities actively, such as the voluntary weeding of the flowerbeds by the railway station. Some of them apparently love weeding, compared with their husbands. Some "weeding addicts" even weed the public area or friends' plots on the BVP farm voluntarily. How the BVP members reflect on the power relation existing in their patriarchic structure, while keeping the BVP running, is a necessary topic for my future study.

In Oshamambe, gender remains an important category of social boundaries. The issues of gender boundary thus became a factor in my field research. That is, I got the convenience to interact with male informants in the patriarchal structure on the one hand. On the other hand, I

had to interact with female informants (usually housewives) within certain gender roles (for example, a child) to avoid being too aggressive to them. The necessity of such a role-playing relatively limited the opportunities and topics of my conversations with the female informants.

### *My Identity in the Field*

My identity, including ethnicity and age, helped me adapt to the local community to a great extent. Most informants mistook me for Japanese at first sight, since my appearance is not very different from Japanese people in general, and my fluency in spoken Japanese had improved during my long residency. Within the graying community of Oshamambe, I was easily considered a member of the younger generation. Many informants have children around my age, so they saw me as a kid who had come to learn about the place. In that sense, I was readily incorporated into the patriarchic ideology of family and age hierarchy: on the one hand, these informants felt a responsibility to take care of me; on the other hand, they felt comfortable asking for my help, so I got the opportunity to do them favors and established relationships with them. In daily life, they would tend to talk with me to “teach” me what they know about this place, the ways in which they evaluate the BVP, and their understandings of the local or national culture in Japan.

Most of the local informants showed no knowledge of the American university at which I was pursuing a PhD degree, but asked me about my college education in Taiwan. When I told them that I had graduated from National Taiwan University, one of the former imperial universities established by the Japanese empire in the early twentieth century, most of the informants soon considered me a Taiwanese elite who had received higher education in the United States, even though they had no way to examine the level of my American affiliation. In

Japan, the popular image of Taiwan is that it is a country close to Japan. As I explained how such familiarity is part of the colonial legacy of Japan's military expansion during the imperial period, many of my informants fell silent, and the discussion on my ethnicity terminated. A few major informants, inclining to a leftist position, tried to learn more about the inextricable relations between Japan and Taiwan. Two of them even invited me on a trip to Hakodate to see a Japanese documentary, which is about the Taiwanese generation growing up as Japanese nationals in the colonial period (1895-1945), the way in which Japanese empire disciplined Taiwanese to be subjects of the Japanese emperor, and how the people of this generation had to struggle within the new political system imposing Chinese ethnicity on them since 1949. After seeing the film, the two informants apologized to me about what the Japanese state did to Taiwanese before, and thus established a just and equal basis for our friendship in a post-colonial context.

### **Ethnographic Findings and Theoretical Response**

To respond to the puzzle of how people live together in rural Japan today, I propose a new conception of community that is different from the existing theories, which can be roughly classified as locality-based community and community liberated. I agree with the idea of community liberated theorists that contemporary communities can be in the form of interpersonal ties and social networks that do not necessarily occupy one certain physical space. However, I challenge their understanding of community by suggesting that we need to reexamine the relations between locality and community members. Community today can be not only emotionally attached to a place, but also constituted by the process of making localities. Interpersonal networks do not exist in a geographic vacuum, especially in the rural area. As Japanese countryside has been transformed by modernization and penetrated by global

capitalism, rural communities have been different from the classical ideal type. The local endeavors of rural revitalization also become a bottom-up means of reconstruct the social and symbolic landscape of rural settlements. New ideas and actors can be introduced into the locality and then turn into new elements of the existing community, or give birth to new communities. These new communities are liberated from while remaining associated with traditional bonds such as family, kinship, neighborhood, or guild. I term this kind of community rhizomatous community.

By rhizomatous community I mean a friendship network consisting of interpersonal ties that is rooted in the socio-ecological system of a certain region. That is, the friendship is formed in the specific social milieu and physical environment of certain places. It is composed of settlers and native residents who interact in several meeting places where members become rooted in the ground of local society through everyday practices, which is what I called the process of localization. Through the process of localization, the members of the rhizome community can penetrate the regional territory as lateral shoots into the soil, and form new roots or tubers at intervals. Here, “rooting” is used as a metaphor to refer to the condition in which a person’s everyday practices are intensively involved in the interactions of local residents, economy, and ecological system. Members of a rhizomatous community do not necessarily form a unity, but remain associated individuals. In other words, it is a community beyond unity (Delanty 2010). Rhizomatous community does not exist in the pure form of neighborhood, even though some of the members might be neighbors or spatially proximate. Rhizomatous community members do not necessarily have strong solidarity and might not have strong attachment to the locality at the beginning. However, as they all settled in a certain region and become associated through

communication (whether via face-to-face interaction or communication technology), they are engaged in the daily practices that make them feel familiar with the place.

By implementing the BVP, the ODC transformed from a local organization that played the role of event/festival organizer to a migration agency. The participants of the Bochibochi Village Project (BVP) constitute a rhizomatous community emerging from the specific texture of local livelihood and sociability. Urbanites move to Oshamambe through the help of the Oshamambe Dream Club, and settle down in different corners of the township. In so doing, Bochibochi Village grows into a virtual community (not necessarily on the Internet) that does not physically exist but substantially constituted by face-to-face contact, seasonal events, gift exchange, and various interactions with nature. In this respect, the BVP can be imagined as an assembled network that is composed of heterogeneous actors and things. The BVP as a rhizomatous community is formed and maintained in the specific context of a regional society and its environment. Its members are not spatially bounded but locally rooted.

Overall, practices of rural revitalization and retiree farming are what Anthony Giddens (1991) called life politics, concerning individuals' choices and planning of their lifestyles. How such life politics articulated the politics of freedom in the neoliberal context is the major question with which I wrestle in this dissertation (Rose 1999). Someone who devotes himself/herself to the movement of rural revitalization or chooses to move to the countryside to be a productive farmer is not necessarily driven by the ideology of neoliberalism at the first place, but has to face the social consequences of global capitalism in rural Japan.



## **Contribution and Significance**

My case study extends the understanding of community theory by claiming the importance of culture-nature nexus in the construction of community that was generally ignored by the previous theorists. In other words, I propose an emerging form of community that goes beyond unity in the postmodern condition. This new form of community can be decentralized, processual, heterogeneous, and lack of solid bonds, but its members still remains attached to the locality or a region in various ways. Secondly, my finding suggests that place-making practices in Japan today have been an integral part of Japan's neoliberal globalization while resistant efforts exist at the local level in socially resilient ways. Third, this research is one of the few study on the social impact of neoliberal reform on rural Japan. Fourth, Japan's aging society and the rapid greying of its rural regions have been a great concern for scholars who study sociology of aging and gerontology. My case contributes to this topic by revealing how the two groups of disadvantaged people encounter each other and figure out a way to live together in a severe social climate.

My study is in dialogue with theories of several subfields of sociology. First of all, for community studies, the case of the BVP proposed a hybrid understanding of community that is neither a pure social network without being attached to a certain locality. Plus, the theoretical discussion on community gradually turn to the ideological dimension of this concept, and thus indicates the danger that community-making always requires boundary-making, distinction between in-group and out-group, and thus leads to the potentiality of social exclusion. However, the case of the BVP indicates that to build a local community in rural Japan necessitates the introduction of new members from other parts of the country, especially from metropolitan areas. Therefore, the community of the BVP came into being on the basis of dealing with the differences and daily interactions between natives and newcomers. To include, rather than

exclude, outsiders becomes the major task of the BVP organizers. Second, for rural studies, I found that the unique human-nature assemblage as a form of community is more likely to happen in the countryside since the daily life of urban residents is often separated from natural environment and resources by the system of capitalist production. Third, with regards to gerontology, I claim that countryside is still a way of wrestling with the issue of greying population as long as the state stops pursuing urbanist hyper-growth and cooperates with rural communities by providing necessary (whether financially or institutional) assistance rather than guidelines. Moreover, to echo the insight of critical gerontologists, the idea of successful aging accords with the ideology of neoliberalism that overemphasizes the productivity and economic effects of retirees and the elderly. The unique values and meaning of life of the elderly should be respected and recognized by policy and institution of aging. Fourth, in the context of globalization and neoliberal capitalism, the national boom of local revitalization is consistent with a global form of the production of locality.

## **Chapter Outline**

In Chapter Two, I briefly review the various practices of rural revitalization in today's Japan contextualized within the postwar history. I claim that the social construction of localities in Japan began in the early 1970s, and climaxed gradually in the 1980s and 1990s under the rubric of rural revitalization or regional revitalization, including *machizukuri*, *muraokoshi*, *chiiki shinkō*, and their variations. As the mass media frequently report the “successful” cases of rural revitalization, an ethic of rural revitalization has been gradually formed in Japanese society. In Chapter Three, I introduce the establishment of the Oshamambe Dream Club (the ODC) since the early 1990s, and how its members devoted themselves to the various practices aiming at the

revitalization of the local community socially and economically. I argue that the implementation of the BVP is an inevitable consequence of the previous attempts of the ODC, which eventually all terminated because of their inefficiency in improving the deteriorated local livelihood. Therefore, all the ODC members agreed to assist in the implementation of the BVP because it was the only proposal that seemed to be financially sustainable among others (even though not every one of them was convinced by the proposal of the project). To improve readers' understanding of my fieldwork focusing on the Oshamambe area, I illustrate its landscape and social characteristics in the second half of this chapter. Furthermore, I provide a brief explanation about how the administrative township of Oshamambe has been constructed as an imagined community shared by people living in the neighborhoods within the township. In Chapter Four, I provide a historical review of the socio-economic development of Oshamambe Town in the postwar period, and sketch the recent progress of place branding practiced by local entrepreneurs. Through a diachronic perspective, I claim that the townspeople of Oshamambe have struggled with the changing economic structure of Japan during the postwar period, and developed various strategies to overcome the economic predicament. The early efforts were mostly invitation of external capital and administrative measures oriented by the local authorities. In recent years, however, the developmental strategies have transformed into bottom-up efforts of local entrepreneurs who have devoted themselves to the place branding of Oshamambe. In Chapter Five, I analyze my main ethnographic findings by proposing the theoretical concept of a "rhizomatous" community that shows the solidarity of the BVP members under a discursively constructed Bochibochi Village on the one hand, and explains the individual efforts of becoming rooted in the local context. In Chapter Six, I further analyze the pragmatic ethics supported by the BVP as a regime of living, and how such an ethical belief and way of living conflict with the

moralized concept of neoliberal agency that has penetrated the everyday life of rural Hokkaido. In Chapter Seven, I conclude by pointing out that the BVP is the embodiment of a thoughtful struggle against the predicament of rural Japan that has been exacerbated by the neoliberal reform, and I reflect on the other dimensions of this research that must be further investigated in the future.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NEOLIBERALIZATION OF PLACE-MAKING IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN: THE COMMODIFICATION OF LOCALITIES SINCE THE 1980S

In the previous chapter, I have shown how the concept of *chiiki* (region) has functioned and been reconstructed as a socio-cultural category in the social life of modern Japan. As my analysis suggests, *chiiki* not only refers to the idea of region, but also connotes things belonging to a certain locality. Furthermore, *chiiki* actually represents a Japanese understanding of community composed of human beings, climates, landscape, flora, and fauna. In this chapter, I analyze the formations of a unique mode of capital accumulation, the commodification of locality and place-making in contemporary Japan. By “commodification of locality” I mean the uneven geographical development in Japan, which dispossessed local cultures and natural resources to accumulate capital. Based on a comprehensive survey of the literature and government documents, I claim that *chiiki*, as a crucial motif of Japan’s modernity, has been involved in the post-industrialization of Japanese society in which the commodification of locality came into being. In the wake of neoliberal reforms, rural communities were forced to become entrepreneurs that creatively turn available cultural and natural resources into commodities to compete with each other in a cultural supermarket.

As political mobilization has given way to economic mobilization in postwar Japan, local communities that were used to struggling for resources allocated by the state in the centralized fiscal structure have also turned to self-help ventures in the market economy (Kelly 1992: 87). Thus, rural municipalities opened companies and resorts to make a living. The business ventures of rural communities are usually practiced under the rubric of rural revitalization. Through this type of praxis, Japanese localism has been gradually allied with economic ideologies such as post-developmentalism and neoliberalism. That is, discourses of rural revitalization are

becoming both experientially *reasonable* and economically *promising* for the people living with Japan's late capitalism.

How do Japanese commodify the various kinds of locality? It makes profits from constructing and selling commodities, experience, and services related to agriculture, rurality, or a traditional way of life. The conceptual idea derives from *chiiki*, which is deeply engaged with the everyday life of ordinary Japanese as a fundamental category. The category of *chiiki* derived from the collective representations formed in the great transformation of urban-rural structure during the high growth period. The fever of *furusato* (this term can be translated as native place, hometown, or ancestral village, depending on the context) that involved cherishing the vanishing lifestyle and rurality emerged toward the end of this period, and created a nostalgic trend in urban consumerism. The nostalgia for *chiiki* has been explained in two ways: an internal perspective claimed that the *furusato* fever was an effort to fill the spiritual emptiness of Japanese nationals who over-emphasized economic achievement. Foreign researchers have questioned this popular theory and critically pointed out that the construction of nostalgia is part of a greater project to reaffirm Japanese national identity implicitly. These perspectives partially explain the rise of regional cultures, but both ignore the political economic aspect of it. Only through the perspective of commodification of locality can we really understand similar phenomena all over Japan, while taking native context into consideration.

The phenomenon of cultural commodification in Japan is not globally unique, as cultural industry, ethnic tourism, or eco-tourism has been practiced in other countries for decades. Moreover, many nation-states have trademarked their signature commodities such as French champagne, German cars, and Swiss chocolate (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 120-121). However, place-making, as well as the commodification of locality in Japan, is much more

expansive than those Euro-American cases, and thus has salient sociological meaning. In today's Japan, *chiiki* is a common subject shared by all kinds of cultural forms: high art, literature, manga and anime, mass media, food, daily necessities, etc. In other words, the concern for *chiiki* has extensively penetrated into Japanese people's everyday life rather than being limited to a specific social group or class. So, the *chiiki* culture, or Japanese localism, is not likely to be the result of nationalist ideology such as the postwar discourses of *furusato* and Japanese uniqueness (Robertson 1991; Ivy 1995; Bender 2012). Rather, I argue, localism and its commercial practices are embedded in a specific political economic structure and have a solid socio-historical foundation. The enthusiastic practices of making locality and the emergent business model of selling localness is what I dub the commodification of locality in contemporary Japanese countryside. In fact, commodification of locality has become the orthodoxy of rural governance today.

### **Localism as Commodities: The booming of local specialties**

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, *chiiki* has been highly integrated into Japanese modernity. Through "the system of objects," local foods and rural products have become an indispensable part of consumer society. The love of local flavors has been represented and amplified by city-centered mass media, and then broadcast to the rural communities. However, the overflow of regional cultures is not only a pure product of postmodern consumer society but also partially derived from the custom of premodern society (Oedewald 2009). In the feudal period (1603-1868), a great part of the territory of modern Japan was divided into small countries governed by shoguns and daimyos. At that time, the inter-regional transportation was restricted, and the formation of regional cultures remained relatively independent. These

domains were further constructed as smaller imagined communities within the Japanese nation constructed by the administrative system and mass media in the modern era (see Wigan 1998; Seaton 2007: 153-4). Consequently, Japanese people today celebrate their *chiiki* “on an almost minute scale” (Bestor 2011a: 278).

To realize how *chiiki* is produced, identified, and performed in everyday practices, two cultural forms, *meibutsu* and *omiyage*, have to be introduced first. These two forms have been particularly incorporated by the late capitalism, and so remain crucial for Japanese people’s understanding of *chiiki* today.

*Meibutsu* (local specialties or famous things) are things that mark local characteristics, usually consumed as gourmet food, souvenirs, or gifts<sup>5</sup>. *Meibutsu* are usually distinctive products, sometimes handcrafted, made in certain regions. *Meibutsu* is not merely a social construct, but is also decided by geographical and ecological factors of the region to a certain extent. Japan’s fragmented and mountainous landscape created naturally diverse and socially divided local cultures and foodways due to the difficulties of transportation in premodern times. As a result, food preferences and ingredient selection differ by region (Bestor 2011a: 278-9). Thus, local regions “throughout the country are able to point with pride to distinctive ingredients, idiosyncratic styles of preparation, and regional calendars of seasonalities and festivities marked by specific local foodstuffs” (Bestor 2011: 278a). These allegedly unique characteristics of each location are usually embodied in both material and intangible forms such as food (Bestor 2011a), folkcraft articles (Cox 2010), near foreignness (Graburn 2009), and sometimes wildlife (Kalland 2003). “Thus different areas are known by different events, characteristics and products”

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<sup>5</sup> A great part of *meibutsu* overlaps with the category of regional cuisine (Bestor 2011a). Here I use *meibutsu* as a general term that includes regional cuisine and other local specialties that are considered representative of certain localities.



(Graburn 2009: 22). The uniqueness of places constituted part of local identification, and became the common habitus of local residents through the practice of everyday life. In the making of modern Japan since the Tokugawa period (1603-1867), the distinction of regions also played an important role in the understanding of the Japanese nation (Wigan 1998).

By the same token, local characteristics are also an essential part in Japanese travel culture. “Japanese guidebooks (and travel advertising) emphasize the culinary delights and specialties of particular regions, towns, and villages as essential pleasures of travel. Local ‘famous products’ (*meisan* or *meibutsu*) are today hyper-developed categories of things, often foodstuffs, which almost justify a trip on their own” (Bestor 2011a: 279). In fact, in both the premodern and modern eras, local specialties and their related commodities have formed an indispensable part of the travel experience (Guichard-Anguis 2009: 11-2). In other words, consumption of local specialty foods and goods is a very important ritual for Japanese tourists. For example, whale meat is the *meibutsu* in whaling communities, and people will travel to the communities to eat the local cuisine made using the whale meat. Therefore, whale meat, as a special product of the communities, can become a key tourist attraction, and also part of local identities (Kalland 2003: 76). In other words, for rural municipalities that seek to develop tourism business, the invention of new *meibutsu* or the marketing of existing local specialties is a necessary step.

Depending on its usage, the social meaning of a *meibutsu* can change. Generally speaking, purchasing souvenirs during a trip is not necessarily about individual consumption, as gifting after a trip is a common custom. For instance, a traveler could directly consume the *meibutsu* commodity purchased on a trip, or share it with or give it to other people as a gift or souvenir. In

the latter situation, another cultural label will be attached to the purchased thing, the *omiyage*<sup>6</sup>. Most Japanese people still tend to bring *omiyage* from their trips to their relatives, neighbors, and friends. Meanwhile, Japanese visitors also bring *omiyage* from their hometown to their hosts to show their politeness and sincerity when visiting. The idea of purchasing *omiyages* for a trip (either when paying a visit or coming back from a trip) remains a strong custom for Japanese travelers today, and making souvenir packages has always been a crucial part of Japan's tourism industry. In fact, "this custom has done much to support Japanese cottage industries, which have relied heavily on the trade in souvenirs in the modern period" (Buckley 2002).

*Omiyages* are gifts used to connect home and the journey, or, say, to build a connection between those who stayed home and those who traveled<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the gifts have to be "evocative of place, and appropriate for the season and event," especially in the communities where the manner of gifting is rigid and normative (Kobayashi 2002). By sharing the flavor of a journey with those who were absent from it, the gifting of *omiyage* can link two regions, and sometimes two temporalities<sup>8</sup>. In other words, the business of *omiyage* and *meibutsu* can enhance the social recognition of a specific locality and temporality.

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<sup>6</sup> The compact and plain English translations of *omiyage* that can be found in the literature are souvenir packages (Bestor 2011: 279a), souvenir gifts (Graburn 2009: 25), or return gifts (Guichard-Anguis 2009: 12). Each of these concise translations may miss part of the social meanings this Japanese term represents in the native context.

<sup>7</sup> The origin of *omiyage* gifting is a reciprocal exchange based on a so-called *senbetsu-omiyage* relationship: "When a person or a small group that is part of a larger group goes on a trip, they are given amounts of money or other travel accoutrements as a farewell gift, *senbetsu*, by those who are not travelling...Reciprocally, the traveller must buy gifts, *omiyage*, to take back for those who gave *senbetsu*" (Oedewald 2009: 114).

<sup>8</sup> As the number of Japanese overseas travelers has risen, their hunting down of appropriate souvenirs has contributed to the overseas expansion of the *omiyage* business. "The buying power of Japanese tourists has...significantly shaped an international market in souvenirs heavily weighted towards Japanese taste" (Buckley 2002).

A peculiar sort of locality that is fully constructed by modernity is a railway station (*eki*). Japan is a railway kingdom with a very extensive railway network throughout the Archipelago, and dense networks of railways and metros cover all the metropolitan areas. The development of public and private railways has formed a particular pattern that builds stations to be the center of consumption. That is, stations are also supermarkets, shopping malls, and department stores. Among the shops and restaurants, there are also *omiyage* outlets in the stations where travelers can always purchase souvenirs and *meibutsu* at the last minute of their trip. As trains bring in thousands of passengers, the customers of the shops and restaurants are ensured. In other words, railway stations are localities based on high mobility. However, this does not mean that Japanese stations are only taken as placeless shopping spaces. In addition to the sale of local cuisine and *meibutsu* that help identify the station with the location, there is another form of commodity sold at stations that embodies the unique localness of the station, *ekiben* (Noguchi 1994). *Ekiben* (station box lunches) are usually claimed to be of local culinary style or made with local ingredients. In some cases, *meibutsu* of the region could become *ekiben* of the station, and vice versa. Like *meibutsu*, *ekiben* are sometimes depicted as the materialized extract of local essence in travel literature. Consuming *ekiben* has long been an indispensable element of the journey for railway passengers and tourists. Through the selling of *ekiben*, localities are incorporated into the network of mobility, and join a system of trans-local consumption. As “a representation of collective thought and action,” railway journeys forge identity, not only of the nation, but also for specific local places through the mobile consumption of *ekiben* (Noguchi 1994: 319; cf. Ivy 1995, chapter two).

The story of Mori, a small Hokkaido town to the South of Hakodate, is helpful for understanding the postwar history of *ekiben*. Mori is famous for its *ekiben*, composed of soy-

sauce-flavored squid with rice stuffing (*ikameshi*), for years. As *ekiben* became institutionalized as a part of travel culture in Japan, the flavor of squid rice came to be recognized as the *meibutsu* of Mori by urbanite tourists (Noguchi 1994). In the mid-1960s, Mori's squid rice boxes became the best seller in a national competition of *ekiben* held by Keio Department Store in Tokyo. Since then, Mori's squid rice boxes have quickly risen to fame, and eventually became the only reason for most Japanese citizens to remember this remote place. While Mori's squid rice continues to be regarded as one of the best *ekiben* in Japan today, the town of Mori has been depopulated and aging continuously during the postwar development period. Those young girls who peddled squid rice to train passengers at Mori station have become the elderly, but still sell squid rice boxes, since they have no successors. Taking squid rice as an opportunity for revitalization, local government has also helped local producers promote squid rice and other local delicacies by means of mail order and special events in the cities. Today, Mori's squid rice boxes are much less often consumed by passengers who get on or off the train at Mori Station. Rather, they are sold to those passengers who simply passed Mori by train, or to those tourists who stopped by Mori just for tasting the squid rice. Similar stories have actually happened everywhere in regional Japan (Kelly 1990b).

Japan's urban culture is derived from the trans-local networks of relationship "often based on consumption activities" (Clammer 1997: 35). The peculiar development of tourism in modern Japan has further expanded and enhanced trans-local consumption. Within the networks, localities have been produced and reproduced as commodities and symbols. Western scholars often interpret the presence of localities in consumption as a nostalgic discourse that subordinates to national identity (e.g. Ivy 1995 and Clammer 1997). On the contrary, *chiiki* is sui

generis in Japanese society and cannot be reduced to the construct of nationalism (*furusato*) or capitalism (tourist attraction). In what follows, I will investigate the political and economic systems that have incorporated the regional society (*chiiki shakai*) into late capitalism.

### **How Has the State Coped with *Chiiki*? A brief history of Comprehensive National Development Plans (CNDPs)**

Modern Japan is governed under a centralized political system, and the metropolis has had strong influence on the provincials during the socio-historical process of modernization (cf. Kelly 1986; Kelly 1993). As previous research has pointed out, the state has played a significant role in Japan's postwar development and its high economic performance is characterized by two features: the developmental state and the mode of coordinated market economy (Johnson 1982; Estévez-Abe 2008: 168-170). In the past few decades, Japanese citizens have also actively participated in the public affairs which used to be oriented by the state and corporations (Takao 2007). In such a political-economic context, if a boom in sales of local products and locavorism has been an obvious phenomenon in contemporary Japan, then the following questions become important for researchers on related issues: How does the cultural emphasis on local specialties become integrated into the political economic structure of Japan's late capitalism? What influence has the state exercised on localities and through what mechanism? Did *chiiki* remain a critical subject in the state-oriented development of postwar Japan?

To understand the political-economic aspect of the rise in localism in Japan, we have to give an overview of how the Japanese state bureaucrats coordinate with other economic actors such as firms, capital providers, and workers in terms of regional planning and local economies. This task can be best completed through a historical review on the transformation of the

Comprehensive National Development Plans (CNDPs hereafter), especially on the way in which the CNDPs were conceived and implemented. The history of the CNDPs is important for this research because of its characteristics: first, the CNDPs represent the postwar framework of Japan's national development as well as regional development; second, these plans archived the forethought of Japan's rational bureaucrats that addresses the nation's future beyond their contemporaries (Shimokobe 1994: 18-20); third, the CNDPs are the product of political struggles and negotiations between the state and provincial prefectures<sup>9</sup>. To sum up, the transformation of the CNDPs reveals the way in which the state coped with *chiiki*.

In this section, I will provide a brief review of the CNDPs in order to clarify the way in which local Japan is understood and manipulated by the state. Moreover, I claim that region (*chiiki*) has been always a major administrative concern of Japan's central government throughout the past half century. In the centralized political authority and national voting system, region is an important discursive tool for political struggle and campaigns. By illustrating the changes of development strategy, I argue that region has continued to be an essential subject in every CNDP, but its implementation only benefited the local to a limited extent. By looking at the history of the CNDPs, we will understand why local cultural industry has become the elixir for the rural economies, and what price local Japan has paid during the revival and loss of the national economy. Finally, the history also shows the way in which the coming of neoliberal-style reforms in Japanese politics also played a part of the evolution of the CNDPs that thus affected the already difficult circumstances of rural society.

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<sup>9</sup> The making of developmental plans involves factors of domestic politics featuring the electoral system that weights the political power of provincial Japan with the number of votes. In other words, the developmental plans made by the state have to (or at least pretend to) deal with the demands of provincial politicians and residents.

To reconstruct the country after the WWII, the Japanese government adopted the Keynesian concept of developmental planning that is derived from the New Deal programs of the United States, especially the theory of regional development that undergirded the implementation of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Supervised by the American representatives of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Power (SCAP or the General Headquarters, also known as GHQ in Japanese), Japan's state bureaucrats enacted Comprehensive National Development Law in 1950. The law was amended in 1952 and set as the juridical foundation for the following Comprehensive National Development Plans (Mikuriya 1989: 267-272). The initial concept of "comprehensive development" emphasizes the integral building of infrastructure for production, transportation, and communication. This legislation, however, could not be immediately transformed into a developmental plan that the law aimed to set up, because the statistical data on the national economy were incomplete, and the computing technology of national bureaus was still backward (Shimokobe: 54-5). In fact, the making of the first CNDP took Japanese bureaucrats twelve years until the plan was publicized and implemented in 1962. In other words, the Japanese government had adopted the idea of "comprehensive development" much earlier than the initiation of the first CNDP.

The keynote of the developmental plans in the postwar period was actually set by the young planners working in the Economic Council Agency who wanted to get rid of the developmental strategies derived from the prewar regime. As they proposed "The Concept of Comprehensive Development" to the Yoshida Cabinet in 1954, they aimed to establish an epoch-making project of national land planning that had specific focus and goals. In their proposal, the future of the country was depicted in terms of economic planning. For example, they claimed to

achieve an economic growth rate of 3% by public investment, and set 1965 as the target year of the plan. The goal of their plan was to increase the employment rate and to improve standards of living. Although their proposal was not directly transformed into the first CNDP, their conceptual equation of national land plans with economic planning inspired the following CNDPs that initiated Japan's high-growth economy (Mikuriya 1989: 275-6).

Before the official implementation of the first CNDP, the central government of Japan had documented and put into practice the concept of "comprehensive development" in the 1950s. Based on this concept, the state later initiated the "New Long-term Economic Plan" in 1957 and "Income Doubling Plan" in 1960 in order to guide Japan's domestic development in the takeoff stage of economic growth. These plans, especially the latter, adopt the cutting-edge theory of unbalanced growth in developmental economics of the United States. According to the strategy of unbalanced growth, economic growth is best achieved by economic disequilibrium. In other words, the state should choose one strategic sector and invest in the infrastructure (namely, the "social overhead capital") to create an environment in which the growth of the strategic industry will spur other industries (Kawakami 2008: 50-1). Therefore, the "Income Doubling Plan" designated the Pacific Belt Area (the southern Pacific coast of Honshu Island) as the core of national economic development, where millions of yen from the governmental budget were invested in infrastructure as "social overhead capital." The plan, based on the theory of unbalanced growth, nevertheless overemphasized heavy industry and modern infrastructure (for example, super highways and high-speed railroads) for the sake of economic growth, which has caused various problems such as environmental degradation. The decision to concentrate resources for making the Pacific Belt Area the industrial belt also incurred strong criticism from intellectuals and local municipalities that asked for regional equality.



Plan Title	The Income Doubling Plan	The First CNDP	The Second CNDP	The Third CNDP	The Fourth CNDP
Initial Year	1960	1962	1969	1977	1987
Catchphrases	Pacific Belt Area Social Overhead Capital	New Industrial City Ripple Effect Regional Balance	Large-scale Development Network Future Japan	Human Settlement Stable Growth Ecology	Multi-polar Development World City Tokyo
Theory	Theory of Unbalanced Growth	Growth Pole Theory	Modernization Theory	Limits to Growth	Thatcherism or Neoliberalism
Emphasis	Economic Efficiency	Equal Distribution	Economic Efficiency	Equal Distribution	Economic Efficiency
Industry	Heavy Industries	Heavy Industries	Heavy Industries	Cultural Industry	Information and Technology
Achievement	High Economic Growth	High Economic Growth	Short-term Prosperity	Regional Cultures	Urban Renovations
Main Critique	Overcrowded Metropolises	Environmental Pollution	Land Speculation	Cultural Nationalism	Rising Social Inequality

Figure 2.1 The comparison of the four CNDPs and its forerunner (Kawakami 2008: 64)

### *The Transformation*

The CNDPs represent the state's vision of what *chiiki* should be, and therefore provide researchers an index of developmental strategies and their consequences in postwar Japanese society. Since the First CDNP, how to face the problematic reality of the over-concentration in Tokyo has always been the major motif of CNDP. However, the CNDPs never successfully solved the problem, and never attained more regionally balanced development within Japan's national territory (Honma 1992: 228). According to Kawakami (2008), the reformation of CNDPs is a history fluctuating between the preference for economic efficiency and for regional equality (see Figure 2.1). Until the Fourth CNDP, the odd-numbered CNDPs emphasized

regional equality but slowed down economic growth, and the even-numbered CNDPs pursued economic efficiency but failed to reduce socio-economic discrepancy between regions. The economic fluctuations and leading theoretical models on a global scale largely decided the long-term vacillation of the guiding principle of the CNDPs. The regular pattern of the CNDPs terminated when the GD21, colored by neoclassical economics, came out (Kawakami 2008: 99-116). Facing deteriorated national finances, the GD21 turned to emphasize the agency and autonomy of localities. That is, the GD21 only provided guidelines and suggestions, without making specific plans or a budget for local development.

In this section, I have provided a diachronic perspective on the postwar history of the CNDPs, in which the state invested huge amounts of capital in metropolitan areas for economic growth while failing to rein back the increasing inequality between rurals and urbanites. Until the end of the 1980s, the state kept the subsidies to rural municipalities and the agricultural sector (especially rice farmers) with the revenue earned from industry and urban economy. In so doing, the ruling party LDP was able to maintain the societal balance between the countryside and the city, and thus stabilized the votes they obtained in the general elections for decades. However, the balance has been gradually broken by the neoliberal reforms, which claimed to heal the inefficiency and financial failure of the central and local governments, after the bursting of the bubble economy and the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s.

The neoliberalization of the CNDPs can be seen in its changing principles illustrated above. The main change began with the deliberation of the first grassroots style plan, the Third CNDP. The top-down planning style of the first two CNDPs, which eventually strangled local autonomy while making autonomous municipalities, had actually been mentioned in the plans (Mikuriya

1989: 274). Because of the stagnation caused by the two oil crises in the 1970s, the scale and ambition of public investment became conservative. To sustain local economies, municipalities also had to find new revenue sources by introducing external capital or commodifying local cultures. As an unintended consequence, the Third CNDP initiated the following competitions between local municipalities for resources and investors within Japan's centralized system of distributive politics (Honma 1992: 138-9; Moritomo 1991: 39).

The Nakasone Cabinet, which inaugurated the Fourth CNDP, continuously encouraged inter-local competition through various policies and measures. To accomplish Nakasone's policy of fully utilizing private capital (*minkan katsuryoku no katsuyō*), the Private Sector Resources Utilization Law was enacted in 1986, legalizing the establishment of "the third sector," the public-private partnership<sup>10</sup>. However, this public-private partnership in business ventures often became the final straw that broke the camel's back. The Nakasone Cabinet had already reduced the treasury payments for social security of local municipalities by 10 percent since 1985 as a part of its administrative reforms. So, rural municipal finance deteriorated, and some cities even went bankrupt quickly, as they could not make proper profit from the newly launched tourism business. Following such a development strategy of the Nakasone Cabinet, the Fourth CNDP was designed to set the stage for the competition between municipalities.

Later, Takeshita Noboru, the prime minister succeeding Nakasone, strengthened the local awareness of competitiveness through a new policy. In 1988, the Takeshita Cabinet launched so-

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to that, by the Law for Arranging Integrated Recreational Areas (or Resort Law) enacted in 1987, local governments can utilize regulated areas such as mountains, coasts, and ports for the sake of local revitalization. To do so, local governments can introduce private corporations to the building and running of recreational facilities in the areas. Local governments were also allowed to offer incentives and privileges in terms of tax concessions and preferential treatment to attract private capital.

called “*Furusato Creation*” (*furusato sosei jigyo*) to stimulate autonomous regional revitalization<sup>11</sup>. The idea of “*Furusato Creation*” was simple: the central government distributed a hundred million yen to every municipality, allowing each to democratically decide on creative ways to use the money. To construct new tourist attractions, some municipalities used the hundred million yen to commence festivals or annual events, and some others used it to build grotesque landmarks or public facilities. The rest of the municipalities decided to save the money to make up for the reduced treasury payments from the state. However, the room for creativity in utilizing the one hundred million yen was often limited by the political-economic structure under the regime of the Fourth CNDP, although “*Furusato Creation*” seemingly inherited the concept of the Third CNDP about autonomous locality (Honma 1992: 113-4).

So far, the strategies of regional revitalization of governments have laid stress on “urging an inter-local war” (Yada 1996: 82). One salient manifestation of the rising competition between localities is the phenomenon of an enthusiastic emphasis on *furusato* (literally, “native place,” “hometown,” or “ancestral village”) and rural revitalization (Bender 2012; Creighton 1997; Kelly 1990a; Ivy 1995; Moon 2002; Robertson 1991). The *furusato* movement has been an ideological “exaltation of Japanese folklore and rural nostalgia. A feverish *furusato bumu* (home village boom) idealized country life and country folk as the true exemplars of Japanese values and communal forms<sup>12</sup>” (Kelly 1993: 194). Consequently, the discourse of *furusato* has undergirded Japanese identity and nationalism implicitly. Rural revitalization often involved the “self-commodification” of localities, namely, the “commodification from within” (Goto 1993).

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<sup>11</sup> The official title of “*Furusato Creation*” was “Self-decided and Self-executed Construction of Regions” (*mizukarakangae mizukaraokonau chiikizukuri jigyo*).

<sup>12</sup> “The concept of trends or *bumu* (lit., booms), trivial as it might first appear, is actually an important one in the understanding of Japanese consumer culture” (Clammer 1997: 40).

The rurality craze and the mushrooming of local specialty industries had created commodities branded by locality (*chiiki burando*), and a “cultural supermarket” in which people could shop for local cultures (cf. Mathews 2000). During the long recession of the 1990s, local municipalities were asked to live in a self-reliant manner by developing sustainable local industries.

In the GD21, the last CNDP, “participation” and “collaboration” became the new keywords. The GD21 emphasized the interconnections and the collaboration of autonomous localities as a major means to overcome the problems caused by uneven domestic development. However, bearing rising debts, declining revenue, and aging populations, rural municipalities could hardly enlarge revenues and create sustainable industries from scratch. The early withdrawal of national subsidies to municipalities, and the introduction of a rigid performance appraisal system only made worse the situation of local communities. For example, the state cut the subsidy to local bus lines by detailed criteria of user assessment: “only those bus lines that make three runs a day, conveying more than 15 passengers daily, can be subsidized by the state” (Tsujimoto 2003: 157). Such a policy change apparently weakened the interconnections between rural hamlets, and sped their decline.

To conclude, the GD21 had exerted a great influence on Japan’s regional society (*chiiki shakai*) and regional development despite its lack of rigid plan rationality. The concepts proposed in the GD21 such as urban renovation, inter-regional collaboration, and transnational connections of locality gave birth to the recent policies of urban regeneration, municipal mergers, and a wider-area local government system (*dōshūsei*). The GD21 and the new generation of national land planning, the NLSP, provided a more flexible framework based on the self-responsibility and self-reliance of rural municipalities. I understand this tendency as the

neoliberal turn of Japan's regional policy that has hastened the decline of domestic localities. Through the implementation of these plans, neoliberal policies have been adopted, and a new social imaginary based on individualism and market economy has diffused and penetrated through rural Japan.

### **Japan's Neoliberal Turn: When neoclassical economics met the developmental state**

So far, the word neoliberalism has been used repeatedly, but what is neoliberalism? What does it mean to refer to a political decision as "neoliberal" in the context of the Japanese developmental state? What social effects have neoliberalism caused in contemporary Japan? The main goal of this section is to respond to these questions. In what follows, I will briefly introduce the configuration of neoliberalism in general first, and then illustrate its social diffusion, impact, and influence in contemporary Japan.

Neoliberalism has been a keyword in the social sciences in the past several decades. The common understanding of neoliberalism directly refers to an economic philosophy and the policy complex, which is consistent with this philosophy, usually characterized by advocacy of both a reduction in governmental functions (i.e. social welfare, taxation, and public services), and a laissez-faire environment for the market economy. Although this term has been a crucial keyword in social sciences for decades, referring to something as neoliberal often causes disputes or confusion because of the wide range of meanings it has in current discourses. Following the suggestion of Peter B. Evans and William H. Sewell, Jr. (2013: 36), I will distinguish the four facets of neoliberalism to help in my analyses. According to them, neoliberalism is used to

denote an economic theory, an ideology, a policy paradigm, and a social imaginary undergirded by the first three facets.

The distinction of the four facets helps clarify the embodiment of neoliberalism in cross-cultural and transnational contexts, and thus contributes to a comprehensive critique of it. Considering East Asia's specific political economy, it would be dangerous to assert the universal causes and effects of neoliberalism in this region. For example, the strong tradition of the developmental state (Japan and the four East Asian Tigers) and planned economy (China) have led these regimes to use the free market as a handy tool for accomplishing political missions without eliminating the social democratic institutions (Evans and Sewell 2013: 59-61). Political scientist Lonny E. Carlile (2013: 154) also criticizes the dogmatic interpretation of Japan's administrative reform starting at 1981 (i.e. *Rinchō*) as the beginning step of neoliberalism (i.e. free enterprise and laissez faire government) in postwar Japan<sup>13</sup>. In other words, the progress of neoliberalism could take a relatively different course from what Western scholars have found, so researchers will need more detailed and specific definitions of neoliberalism to operationalize it (e.g. Harvey 2005).

In the 1970s, the negative consequences of Japan's nationwide development guided by the first two CNDPs were subject to severe criticism from those who suffered from land speculation and environmental degradation. Sympathizing with the social suffering such as Minamata disease (from mercury poisoning), critical intellectuals arose in this period, and led public

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<sup>13</sup> For him, the main intention of *Rinchō* is to break Japan's rigid bureaucracy of economic planning to be prepared for the challenging and flexible environment of a post-Fordist economy. That is why he called the will of *Rinchō* "the post-industrialization of the developmental state."

reflection on the modernist model of developmentalism. One conclusion of their deliberation was to cherish the beauty of the natural environment and the culture of ordinary life.

Therefore, the 1970s was also a decade when ideas of alternative development budded. In the mild aftermath of the worldwide rebellions in the late 1960s, economists Tamanoi and Tsurumi each brought up proposals for alternative development. Both of them endeavored to find a socio-culturally specific way for local development without being oppressed by the dominant model of modernization theory. Tamanoi and Tsurumi's theoretical innovation inspired many followers and also strengthened the discursive foundation of the Third CNDP. However, along with the diffusion of neoliberal ideas in the 1980s, their local-centered ideas were transformed into an individualistic perspective of personhood and community, and used to support a new political economic regime in favor of entrepreneurship.

What also happened in the 1970s was the rise of tourism and consumer culture, spurred by the Exposition of 1970 in Osaka. After the Expo, "family holidays apparently emerged as a new form of leisure" (Moon 2002: 231). To continue the high demand for railway service during the exposition, the Japan National Railway (JNR) requested that the major advertising agency Dentsu create a comprehensive media campaign, "Discover Japan", that further stimulated the trend of domestic traveling (Ivy 1993: 251; Yoshimi 2010: 51-2). That is, the year of 1970 not only "symbolized a turning point for Japanese society in the realm of political economy, but also marked the emergence of new consumer culture of post-Fordism" (Koschmann 1993: 417; cf. Ivy 1993). The post-industrialization of Japanese society started as domestic industries transforming from traditional manufacture and heavy industry to value-added industries and information technology in the 1970s.



The societal transformation of Japan starting in the 1970s can be summarized as three points. First of all, like other advanced industrial countries around the world, Japan faced the pressure of economic crisis caused by the changing structure of the global economy. Postwar Japan's high economic growth had begun to slow since 1968-9 (Morris-Suzuki 1988: 50), and the state and enterprises had to cope with the outward migration of factories<sup>14</sup>. The potential solution to the crisis they found was so-called "information capitalism" (Morris-Suzuki (1988)). That is, they embraced new information technologies and the making of an information society as a national strategy for building a new economy. Information capitalism later gave birth to new industries of Japan that lead the world, including its media industry and the lean manufacturing of its motor vehicle industry.

Second, the postwar development of Japan went hand in hand with gradual deregulation of imported agricultural products in the system of the US-Japan alliance. The imports of agricultural products increased significantly during the high economic growth period of Japan (1955-1973), especially wheat, soybean, and other grains. More than forty percent of the imports were from the United States. The growing amount of agro-imports worsened the income of farmhouses, and Japan's self-sufficiency ratio decreased sharply. In 1970, the self-sufficiency

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<sup>14</sup> Japan's "economic miracle" in the postwar period was mainly based on five significant factors, among others, that are intimately connected: low-wages, and a flexible supply of labor that could be drawn from farm families; the large population of the baby-boomer generation was trained to be productive workers; increasing material prosperity encouraged national savings; the access to ready-made technology brought economic efficiency; an accessible, expanding market had been created by the transnational trading systems and the US military actions in Asia (Morris-Suzuki 1988: 43-49). In the 1970s, all these five advantages nevertheless started to collapse: the structure of the population changed; increasing public exposure of pollution disease victims (i.e. Minamata disease) made Japanese citizens aware of the damaging effects of economism and environmental degradation; the changing world order and emerging trade barriers deeply impacted the Japanese economy (Morris-Suzuki 1988: 50-57).

ratio of wheat, soybean, and other grains fell to 9 percent, 4 percent, and 48 percent<sup>15</sup> (Arakawa 2009: 123). In recent official statistics (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries 2010, “Table of food supply and demand in 2009”), the extremely low self-sufficiency ratios of wheat (11 percent) and soybean (6 percent) remain. Both the amount of agro-production and farming households in Japan seriously decreased due to the wholesale importation of crops. Meanwhile, the nature of domestic agriculture of Japan was also changing during this period. On the one hand, the Japanese government encouraged the growing of livestock, vegetables, and fruit while reducing the production of wheat, potatoes, beans and grains. Moreover, the growing stockbreeding consumed much more feed than was domestically produced (Arakawa 2009: 123-4). On the other hand, professional peasants were forced to do part-time jobs to supplement their meager incomes. Those who stuck to agriculture were forced (and encouraged) to modernize their way of farming, so they had to ask banks for loans for buying land, fertilizers, and machines. While their income went down, their risks increased. As a result, the younger generation of farmers left the countryside to make their livelihoods in big cities.

Third, the social foundation of local municipalities seriously weakened, and their dependency on the state increased. This problem was mainly caused by the outward migration of the young population and local business. As mentioned above, the youth of rural areas left their family farms to the elderly, and moved to major cities like Tokyo or Osaka in droves to find jobs after 1955. In 1970, 1,047 municipalities (about 32 percent of all municipalities) were considered underpopulated. In the year 2000, the Japanese government enacted the “Act on Special Measures for Promotion for Independence for Underpopulated Areas” in order to alleviate the depopulation trend in rural Japan (Arakawa 2009: 125). During the high-growth period, the rural

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<sup>15</sup> Japan’s self-sufficiency ratio of grains had been 88 percent in 1955.

farmers were the flexible labor force provider for the modern manufacturing sector. However, such a function gradually diminished in the 1970s, and was filled “particularly by the commercial sector” (Morris-Suzuki 1988: 90). That is, the pivot of the Japanese economy further transferred to the cities. When agriculture stopped being the cushion against depression and unemployment, the resilience of rurality also decreased.

All of these societal transformations delivered a request for a new mode of governance to recompose the seemingly disintegrating social order, especially during the “lost decades” after 1990. Now we know that it was the regime of neoliberalism that won people’s advocacy with the benefit of hindsight.

The neoliberal politics entered the historical stage of capitalism after the mid-1970s by the reforms of the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher and the United States under Ronald Reagan. Meanwhile, as a close friend of Thatcher and Reagan, Japan’s prime minister Nakasone Yasuhiro also began his administrative reform by borrowing neoliberal ideas and experience from his English and American partners. Indeed, as Carlile (2013) has reminded us, we should not assume that Japan’s administrative reforms in the 1980s were an intentional effort to follow the neoliberal dogmas, but rather, they were to cope with the post-industrialization of the global economy. However, it is hard to deny that the aspiration of reforming the outworn model of planned national development eventually became confluent in practice with political measures that can be identified with so-called neoliberalism. Though with a strong tradition of the developmental state, Japanese bureaucrats were still able to adopt flexible and deregulating policies in order to make Japan competitive in the post-industrial economy of globalization. After Nakasone, succeeding prime ministers such as Hashimoto Ryutaro and Koizumi Junichiro

continued the progress of the administrative reform by taking neoliberal measures such as urban renewal, deregulation, and privatization in the name of reformation and national competitiveness (Kawakami 2008: 62, 99-116). The characteristics of Japan's neoliberalization after 1980 can be summarized as follows:

### *1. Privatization and governmental reorganization*

Privatizing government-operated enterprises and public services and property is one of the most important features of neoliberalism. Under the prime ministership of Nakasone, one influential reform was to privatize the public enterprises of Japan National Railway (JNR) and Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT). The reconfiguration of these two major state-managed services did solve the problem of economic inefficiency and debts to a great extent. However, the concomitant dissolution of local branches and spur tracks of the two companies also deeply affected rural communities, both socially and economically.

Prime Minister Koizumi further carried out the neoliberal style reformation of the Japanese government in the early 2000s by privatizing the state-owned Postal Services Agency (Arakawa 2009: 322-3). He also led the great mergers of municipalities, the "Heisei great merger," in order to enhance the competitiveness of municipalities and to promote administrative decentralization (Arakawa 2009: 357-8). However, hundreds of municipalities voted against merging (Arakawa 2009: 359). In the period of the fifth CNDP, Koizumi's neoliberalist reform transformed Japan's embedded liberalism and the model of the developmental state into a neoliberal regime where the shackles of social solidarity and redistributive institutions have been deregulated (Harvey 2005: 11).

The privatization of JNR caused problems because of the uneven nature of regional economies. JR Hokkaido, for example, had to close as many branch lines as possible to barely balance the deficit that had started accumulating in the JNR period. The service they provide today is monopolized because of the poor public transportation services in Hokkaido. Lots of railway accidents have occurred in recent years, as JR Hokkaido took a cost-cutting policy.

## *2. Deregulation and temporary employment*

A variety of deregulation measures have been taken since the 1980s, including financial reform, agricultural corporatization, electricity liberalization, etc. Among them, the liberalization of the electricity market was a noteworthy and influential step of Japan's deregulation process. Ten regional companies each monopolized the electricity service in their respective regions during the postwar period. To improve the competitiveness and economic efficiency of the electric power industry, in 1995 the state deregulated the electricity market by allowing new power providers to enter the market through a bidding system. Cross-regional trading of electricity became legal in the reform of 2000 (Yamaguchi 2007: 3). The electricity liberalization eventually led to the profit-oriented configuration of power industries that has been largely freed from the supervision of the public sector. The problem of the electricity liberalization was not seriously realized until the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011. Until the catastrophe, the public irresponsibility of Tokyo Electric Power Corporation and the predicament of local villagers living near ground zero were not realized and seriously reconsidered.

The other influential case of Japan's deregulation is the legalization of temporary employment (*hiseikikoyō*). Although Japan's labor market allegedly featured a lifetime employment system, its structure changed to a great extent in the past decades through the rise of

temporary employment. The number of temporary employees quickly increased after the enactment of the Labor Dispatch Law in 1985. According to a survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the overall ratio of temporary employees has risen to 35.2 percent in 2012. These temporarily hired part-timers and dispatched workers often suffer from low wages, a precarious livelihood, and the lack of insurance because of the work-based social protection system in Japan (Estévez-Abe 2008). On the last day of 2008, hundreds of homeless temporary workers crowded into the shelters built in Hibiya Park of central Tokyo to participate in a social movement called “Dispatch Workers’ New Year Village” (*Toshikoshi Haken Mura*). The movement successfully drew public attention to the severe condition of the working poor and made later re-regulation of temporary employment possible to a certain extent.

### *3. Free trade and a globalized food system*

To solve the severe trade friction between Japan and the US in the mid-1980s, the Nakasone Cabinet adopted an opening-up policy of agro-products from foreign countries (Arakawa 2009: 252). This move worsened the declining rural economies and thus exacerbated the depopulation of rural areas. Under the free trade regime of the GATT/WTO, the situation of domestic farmers became more and more difficult because of the rising competition with imported food. To take rice, the staple food of Japanese society, as an example, the daily consumption of rice decreased from 360 grams in 1960 to 170 grams in 1996 because of changing eating habits (Cwiertka 2006: 158). The deteriorated demand for rice led to the *gentan* policy that encouraged or forced the reduction of rice paddies. “In 1988, the government forced farmers to reduce land used for rice cultivation by 30 percent” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 17). The situation of stockbreeders and fruit growers was even worse than rice farmers, who received

more subsidies from the state. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (MAFF) in 2011, the self-sufficiency rate of fruits was 38 percent and that of meats 55 percent. MAFF has endeavored to raise food self-sufficiency for decades, but the low self-sufficiency remains.

In other words, contemporary Japanese society is supported by a global food system and therefore exposed to global risks. Since 2000, a series of food scandals were disclosed by mass media, including both domestic food companies and imported foods (e.g. tainted vegetables and eels from China, and American beef contaminated by BSE). In 2008, an incident of food poisoning across two prefectures involving 10 persons who ate the same frozen dumplings imported from China became the last straw (Assmann 2011: 170-1). These incidents and heavy reporting on them in the media have triggered a resurging interest in supposedly safer local ingredients and native foods.

In response to the food crisis, the state proposed a policy of food education (*shokuiku*) to rebuild the domestic food system from the bottom up. This is a nationwide movement that has been institutionalized by the Food Education Basic Law enacted in 2005. In general, the food education policy claims to strengthen the “traditional family” life based on shared household dinners, the conventional gender role of women, and the superiority of Japan’s national cuisine (the “Japanese-style dietary life”) and local ingredients (*chisan chisho*) by emphasizing self-responsibility, individual behavior, and personal awareness (Kimura 2011a: 210-1). Researchers on food education have argued that *shokuiku* should be understood as a new mode of governing public health on an individualistic basis. The implementation of *shokuiku* represents the coming of “a decentralized and personalized view of public health in Japan” (Mah 2010: 393). In this respect, food education in Japan seems to be a corrective to the food crisis caused by neoliberal

globalization at the first glance, but actually functions as an integrated part of the process of neoliberalization (Kimura 2011a, 2011b; Mah 2010).

#### *4. Urban renewal: from managerialism to entrepreneurialism*

In the wake of the neoliberal reforms that spread rapidly in the Western countries, measures of urban renewal became a crucial process, and the re-development of urban waterfronts was a significant one. To survive in the rising inter-urban competition of globalization, the development of the Tokyo Bay Area (i.e. Tokyo Waterfront City or Odaiba, Yokohama Minatomirai 21, and Chiba Makuhari New City) became deemed the new focus of national development in Japan (Kawakami 2008: 62). This development strategy was intended to utilize the unused land in metropolitan areas by constructing infrastructure and a quality built environment (e.g. high value apartments, convention centers, hotels, shopping areas, signature buildings, etc.) through public-private partnership to encourage new investments from local and global capital. This is exactly what David Harvey called “urban entrepreneurialism.”

In the post-industrial economy of late capitalism, Harvey argues, the style of urban governance has gradually transformed from “the managerial practices of earlier decades which primarily focused on the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations” to an entrepreneurial stance that endeavors to explore creative ways to “foster and encourage local development and employment growth” (Harvey 1989: 3). He defines urban entrepreneurialism by its three features:

First, the new entrepreneurialism has...the notion of a “public-private partnership” in which a traditional local boosterism is integrated with the use of local governmental powers to try and attract external sources of funding, new direct investments, or new employment sources...Secondly, the activity of that public-private partnership is entrepreneurial precisely because it is speculative in execution and design and therefore dogged by all the difficulties and dangers which attach to speculative as opposed to



rationally planned and coordinated development... Thirdly, the entrepreneurialism focuses much more closely on the political economy of place rather than of territory (Harvey 1989: 7).

The characteristics of urban entrepreneurialism can be found in Japan's policy of regional development since the 1980s (Toyofuku 2003: 92). What happened in Japan was that the entrepreneurial urbanism has been expanded to become a universal ideology for local development in rural areas. The Nakasone Cabinet used the entrepreneurial thinking to design a solution to the problem of regional unevenness that has haunted postwar Japan for decades. One major argument in this dissertation is that the entrepreneurialism has not only been taken as the principle of urban governance but also has become the hegemony of rural revitalization which, to a certain extent, suppresses the alternative endeavors of local struggles for development.

##### *5. Growing Tokyo and diminishing provinces*

The predicament of local municipalities and the hyper-growth of Tokyo City are two sides of the same coin. The expansion and growth of the urban economy in the Tokyo area never slowed down, and even sped up in the late 1980s because of the post-industrialization (Yada 1996: 3-4). From 2005 to 2010, according to the national census of 2010, the population growth rate of Tokyo City was 4.6 percent, and the numbers of adjacent prefectures (Chiba, Saitama, and Kanagawa) were all barely above 2 percent, while the national average fell to 0.2 percent<sup>16</sup>. Today, over 40-million people are living in the Greater Tokyo Area, of which 13 million are in Tokyo City; the former figure accounts for approximately one-third of Japan's total population.

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<sup>16</sup> According to the census, the population of Japan's metropolitan areas has increased in 2005-2010. Other than the Greater Tokyo Area, only Aichi Prefecture (where Nagoya City is), Shiga Prefecture (between Nagoya and Osaka-Kyoto-Kobe metropolitan area), Osaka Prefecture, Fukuoka Prefecture (Fukuoka City, the biggest city of Kyushu Island), and Okinawa Prefecture have positive population growth rates (between 0.4 and 2.3).

Most major corporations are headquartered in Tokyo City, and the functions of central government are also concentrated there.

The advantages of having a headquarters in Tokyo were not hard to realize: “the availability of information about competitors and about the business world in general, access to government organizations, and convenience for handling sales and purchases” (Morris-Suzuki 1988: 166). Most of the corporations and enterprises that started their business in regional Japan have eventually moved their headquarters to the Tokyo Area, and left their “*furusato*” behind. The flight of industries worsened the declining local economies and thus contributed to the emergence of vacant downtowns and shuttered shopping streets (*shattā tōri*) in provincial cities (*chihō toshi*) and small towns. The state then enacted the so-called “Three Laws of *Machizukuri*”, considered the elixir for rural revitalization, to incorporate various subjects (residents, local shopkeepers, local civic groups, large-scale retailers, etc.) in the practices of town making (*machizukuri*) while downsizing the scale of provincial cities. For example, state bureaucrats considered Aomori City in the Tohoku Area a great model of urban downsizing in which the local government, the private sector, and local residents coordinated well to overcome the inconvenience caused by the diminishing budget for public services (Kitabatake et al. 2006: 113).

In the transformation of Japan’s industrial structure during the 1980s, city-based industries, such as finance, service, information and high-tech industries, became the highly rewarding forms of business in the changing global economy. Long-term governmental investment in the making of a modern capital city since the Meiji period (1868-1911) has created Tokyo’s advantages of infrastructure, transportation and communication systems, and economies of agglomeration. As long as the centralized political system continues, Tokyo as the capital of Japan is likely to remain the pivot of national development (Yada 1996: 3-9). To combat the

mental depression caused by Japan's long recession during the past decades, investment in urban economies (e.g. the hosting of the Tokyo Olympics in 2020) continues to be considered more heartening, efficient, and rewarding than rural revitalization in the calculation of financial and economic effects. As Western sociologists recognize Tokyo as one of the three global cities, we should not forget the national expense incurred in order that Tokyo could climb to the top rung of the global economy (Sassen 2001).

#### *6. Polarized society: winners vs. losers*

Although Japan's administrative reforms since the 1980s mainly worked on an expanded role for the private sector and the slimming down of government by decentralization, the innovative measures ended up failing to reduce social disparity, instead increasing socio-economic inequalities between persons and regions. From 2001 to 2005, the Koizumi Cabinet inaugurated "The Trinity Reform" (*sanmiittai no kaikaku*) that allegedly decentralized governmental power and increased the autonomy of local governments by raising their internal revenue sources. "The Trinity Reform" included three types of measures: the reduction or abolition of treasury payments to local municipalities, transfer of tax revenue sources to local governments, and the reduction of the tax revenue allocated to local governments<sup>17</sup> (*chihōkōfuzei*). However, the reform worsened the already dire situation of many local municipalities, which were suffering from the centralized structure of developmental policy and

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<sup>17</sup> In the mid-2000s, reformist bureaucrats generally believed that the reduction of national tax money allocated to local governments (*chihōkōfuzei*) could stimulate these local civic servants to further efforts toward rural revitalization and self-reliance (Kitabatake et al. 2006: 106-7).

post-industrial economy that favored metropolises<sup>18</sup>. Ironically, inter-regional inequality has been increased by the new system of decentralization.

Ideologically, the neoliberalization process went hand in hand with the institutional individualization that emphasizes self-responsibility and self-reliance. In 2004, Japanese scholar Yamada Masahiro drew public attention to the polarization of Japanese society with his influential book “The Social Division on Hope” (*Kibō Kakusa Shakai*). In the book, Yamada suggests that Japanese society has been transforming into a risk society, as defined by German sociologist Ulrich Beck. That is, the uncertainty and instability of social life have largely increased with social changes caused by economic recession and neoliberalization in Japan. Meanwhile, the concomitant phenomenon emerging with the risk society was the polarization of the society. Accordingly, Japanese society was divided into two groups, the “winner group” (*kachigumi*) and “loser group” (*makegumi*)<sup>19</sup>. As claimed by Yamada, the disparity (*kakusa*) between these two groups was not merely measured by quantitative indicators such as income and profit. Rather, the two groups were also perceived as qualitatively different in their psychological condition of ontological security and prospects for the future, namely, hope. The

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<sup>18</sup> From 2003 to 2007, the revenue of prefectures and municipalities from local taxes increased to some extent. However, the overall revenue decreased by 3.7 trillion yen during those four years (Fujinami 2010: 76).

<sup>19</sup> These two vogue words became known after the bursting of the economic bubble. Originally, “winner group” used to refer to those corporations that were able to survive the bubble economy and the long recession after that. Likewise, “loser group” referred to the deteriorated and even bankrupted companies. Before long, these buzzwords began to be used to denote the divide of socio-economic life in the post-bubble society of Japan: those professionals and adventurers able to maintain stable income and high status won, and those who suffered from economic fluctuation and barely survived with unstable and low income lost. Gradually, the language further undergirded the dualist concept of social grouping in contemporary Japan (Yamada 2004: 50-1).

younger generation of Japanese were frustrated in their pursuit of affluence that was once promised by the national social system.

The drastic transformation thus shook the traditional values of Japan that were constructed and worshipped during the high growth of the national economy. One characteristic of Japanese culture is allegedly the resistance to a dualist structure of social perception that sharply contrasts two opposite things. That is, “Japanese culture has always been characterized by the avoidance of binary oppositions, thereby emphasizing the model of a three-legged contest or the structure of a circle ‘where none are superior and there are no absolute winners or losers’” (Harootunian 1989: 80). However, the cultural tendency of avoiding binary opposition seemed to be seriously challenged in the waves of neoliberalism, as winners and losers have been clearly distinguished by ordinary people in everyday practices.

Because of the well-recognized tradition of the developmental state in Japan’s economic development, to what extent Japan is a neoliberal state has been an issue in dispute<sup>20</sup>. In this section, I have presented evidence to support my answer to the question that a neoliberal regime has emerged in Japan since the 1980s in the name of administrative reformation, post-industrialization, and internationalization (or globalization in the later period). Furthermore, unlike the archetypal neoliberalism, Japan’s neoliberal reforms were often implemented without completely abandoning plan rationality at the beginning, (i.e. the neoliberalization of the CNDPs;

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, Carlile (2013) claims that Japan’s administrative reforms from the 1980s to the 2000s are not necessarily a means of neoliberalization but the efforts of this imperfect developmental state to cope with the transformation to a post-industrial society. To do so, a “new mode of state industrial management” on post-industrial industries such as information technology and tourism has been created through the reforms (Carlile 2013: 159). He dubs this new approach to developmental policy “the postindustrialization of the developmental state.”

cf. Carlile 2013). Within the neoliberal regime, politicians and bureaucrats were preoccupied by the seemingly innovative ideas of self-reliance and self-responsibility, and painstakingly attempted to create a societal environment consistent with the practice of these values. I do believe that many of these reformists wholeheartedly believed that neoliberal measures were necessary in order to make Japan better. However, as many critics have commented, such a naïve or one-sided reform has benefited some members of the society (the winners) but caused new problems for the weak, who are often the majority of the society (e.g. Harvey 2005, 2006; Evans and Sewell 2013; Yamada 2004). Japan's neoliberalism haunted politicians and state bureaucrats who not only took privatization and deregulation measures but also convinced the citizens to create personal and communal entrepreneurship by devoting themselves to business ventures. In this sense, I claim that neoliberalism presented itself in contemporary Japan as an innovative ideology, a policy paradigm, and a social imaginary.

Before the coming of the neoliberal regime, local societies were striving for redistributed resources for development on an equalitarian basis. Under the neoliberal regime, however, local communities had to endeavor to survive in a market economy. So, what is the situation of local societies (*chiiki shakai*) under neoliberalism? How did rural communities respond to the impact of neoliberalization?

### **Commodification of Localities: Rural struggles under the neoliberal regime**

The mission of balanced development and “rural revitalization” became a hot potato for the central government as the national budget shrunk and debts rose. Under the neoliberal regime, rural revitalization and the issue of *chiiki* had to be addressed in a new rhetoric and logic that could justify the diminishing public service and investment in rural areas. Thus, the new

development strategy of rural revitalization was depicted as a collaboration of the state, the corporations, and the civil society in a style that David Harvey called “entrepreneurialism” (Harvey 1989). The strategy claims to incorporate new local agents (including local authorities, businessmen, and NPOs) who have to be responsible for the revitalization of their hometowns. The ambiguous relationship between the civil society and the state continues in the myth of self-reliance that has become the foundation of rural governance in today’s Japan (Knight 1994; Bestor 2011b; Shibuya 2003). As the state stopped taking the necessary responsibility to balance the uneven development between regions, asking instead for self-responsibility for rural communities, what will happen?

One salient consequence, as I have illustrated above, is that communities are encouraged to transform into rational entrepreneurs to survive the inter-regional competition under the neoliberal regime. Like one of my informants said, “competition is the reality (*genjitsu*) and you have to deal with it. To abstain from competition will only get you nowhere (*nani nimo naranai*).” Most rural residents have accepted the “reality” constructed by the neoliberal regime to a great extent. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly depict common ways in which rural communities and individuals managed to become competitive in the desperate race for market success.

The great rural-urban migration since the 1960s has produced the demographic plight of remote localities. The depopulation of rural Japan created a downward spiral in which many agricultural villages and small rural towns have become impoverished. As a result, the disparities between metropolises and provincial regions have been largely increased during the high economic growth period. The first generation rural-urban migrants often kept connections to

their hometowns and vivid memories of country life, and became potential agents of what Kelly called the “metropolitanization of nostalgia.” This unique urban-rural relationship in postwar Japan formed the background of the political economy of locality.

Since 1980, “culture” has become the keyword of population politics and transformed into an administrative means in the process of post-industrialization (Neki 2001: 36-40). For example, the Nakasone Cabinet’s administrative reform in the late 1980s was also called the “culturalization of administration.” That is, the governments appeal to sentimental rhetoric and symbolic interaction in their governance, such as playing soft background music and displaying art works in the city hall. Moreover, the state proposed policies and laws to maintain the nationally shared nostalgia toward the countryside, which can be a useful element of marketing strategy as well (Robertson 1991: 32-3; Ivy 1995). Since then, the emphasis on local culture and rural entrepreneurialism has become an integral part of rural governance. According to the economic bureaucrats and trend analysts, developing the economic agency of locality not only can help cope with the problem of unequal domestic development, but also becomes a weapon for Japan’s global competitiveness (Nomura Research Institute 2009: 197-237; Kitabatake et al. 2006: 101-110).

The recent confidence of state bureaucrats in the entrepreneurialism for rural revitalization is not surprising, because there have been too many legendized cases of “successful” local entrepreneurship romantically depicted by journalists and economists (Yada 1996: 1-2). In fact, the rural entrepreneurialism came into being as rural communities devoted themselves to the movements of rural revitalization. Among varied revitalization endeavors, the “One-Village One-Product” movement (*isson ippin undō*) constructed a particular business model with wide



influence<sup>21</sup>. A former governor of Oita Prefecture named Hiramatsu Morihiko first proposed this movement as an alternative after rejecting national developmental plans. “The One-village One-product” movement encouraged the manufacture and nationwide sale of traditional village specialty products such as wine, jam, shrimp, mushroom, gourds, roses, bamboo ware, fish dishes, dried sardines, buckwheat liquor, charcoal, and special flavors of *miso*” (Broadbent 1998: 322). This movement has created a paradigm of Japan’s rural revitalization, and continued for 24 years as an official way of development policy in Oita Prefecture until governor Hiramatsu retired in 2003 (Tokuno 2007). Today, “One-Village One-Product” remains influential, and its spirit has been borrowed by foreign bureaucrats of other Asian countries such as China and Taiwan to design policies of rural revitalization and community making.

Hiramatsu had been an elite bureaucrat working for the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) before he became elected as the governor of Oita Prefecture. Being participated in the making of Expo '70, Hiramatsu was very aware of the trend of urban culture. “One-Village One-Product” was a clever move to reconnect the production-oriented agriculture to the transforming urban economy. As the leader of the movement, Hiramatsu “particularly emphasized voluntary participation and the self-help spirit by putting forward such slogans as ‘the prefecture helps those who help themselves’ and by encouraging competition among the villages and towns within a prefecture” (Moon 2002: 233). The “One-Village One-Product” movement did create economic opportunities for rural municipalities, and has spread nationwide. To a great extent, the success of “One-Village One-Product” in Oita should be ascribed to Hiramatsu, who had maintained strong connections with his social network in Tokyo, the center

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<sup>21</sup> Moon (2002: 233-240) classifies different practices of rural revitalization into three types: the economic, the recreational and the environmental. She considers the One-village One-Product type of revitalization movement to be an economic movement.

of political power. In this respect, other rural municipalities that do not have political resources commensurate with those of Hiramatsu cannot fully duplicate the experience of Oita. However, Oita Prefecture under Hiramatsu's governance over-emphasized the research and development of local specialties, and failed to cope with other socio-economic problems of rural villages such as depopulation, aging farming population, and agricultural administration. Consequently, "One-Village One-Product" seemed to achieve the legend of Hiramatsu Morihiko at the expense of farming families that failed to profit from their products of local specialty after decades of trial and error (Tokuno 2007: 98-100).

As One-Village One-Product became the paradigm of rural revitalization, more and more rural municipalities devoted themselves to the mass production of local specialties (*jimoto meibutsu*) in order to save their declining economies. As a result, the invention of local specialties became a national movement, and various means of distributing these commodities to consumers were created as well. To overcome the rural-urban distance, rural municipalities managed to establish so-called "antenna shops" in major metropolises, especially downtown Tokyo. Antenna shops can be a retail outlet or a restaurant, depending on their marketing strategy, where the local farms' products can be purchased, and vernacular cuisines made by local ingredients served (Thompson 2003: 99). Featuring a certain region such as Hokkaido or Kyushu, moreover, rural manufacturers of local specialties set up temporary stalls and booths in trade shows (*bussanten*) held by metropolitan department stores. During this type of commercial events, urban consumers crowded into department stores to have a taste of vernacular foods. Catalogs for mail ordering local specialties are distributed on trains, in supermarkets, and, of course, in post offices. Most of the time, therefore, urban consumers do not even have to leave

the cities they dwell in for the countryside to purchase these local specialty commodities promoted by mass media.

The production, distribution, and consumption of these local products, as I argue in this chapter, have created a new market of local cultures in which localities can be materialized and consumed in varied ways. First of all, local specialties were not always conventional, but were often intentionally invented for the purpose of revitalizing the rural economy. How to process locally available materials and ingredients to make popular commodities, therefore, became the core issue of rural revitalization. The invention of local specialties, though sometimes a task assigned to local civil servants, is usually practiced by municipal associations composed of local businesses (*shōkōkai*) or of those from the same shopping district (*shōtengai*). In some cases, shopkeepers and restaurant owners in the same neighborhood may unite in discussing the future of their hometown. They gather weekly not only to study trial products of local specialties but also organize seasonal events that can gather visitors and a homecoming crowd around the town. In other cases, the invention of a local specialty can be done by individual capitalists, either local or external, who develop their own signature commodities and claim the products to be representative of the locality. All of these local products, including produce, processed food, and native cuisine, are not only sold by department stores, local shops, and restaurants but also offered for sale in airports, railway stations, and roadside service stations (*michinoeki*). The major customers of the local specialty industry, as you might have expected, are urbanites who have purchasing power and mobility. To tempt urban consumers to visit rural towns and snap up these goods, these local groups organize theme festivals (*matsuri*) and utilize historic sites or nature reserves to be new tourist attractions. The tourism industry and historical preservation of

Otaru City in Hokkaido is a perfect example of this sort of development strategy in contemporary Japan.

The prosperous tourism industry of Otaru today can be related to a grassroots movement to preserve Otaru Canal, an obsolete channel falling into disuse after the modern dock facilities of Otaru Port were built. In the 1960s, the city government decided to pave the canal to be a new road. Citizen groups protested against the decision and proposed progressive plans for saving the historic landscape of Otaru Canal District. The canal and the waterfront warehouses were partially preserved by the citizen movement, and adaptively reused as restaurants and souvenir shops. For decades, the renewed canal area has been praised as one of the most successful examples of industrial heritage preservation and town-making (*machizukuri*) in the country. Thanks to the nostalgic charms of the reclaimed canal, thousands of tourists crowd Otaru everyday for taking souvenir photos at this famous riverside area<sup>22</sup>.

After the standard tour along Otaru Canal, many of the visitors then stroll through the historic districts in the neighborhood of the canal such as Sakaimachi. On Sakaimachi Street (*sakaimachi dōri*), new shops and restaurants have mushroomed among old ones and formed a booming shopping district aiming at domestic and international tourists. Thanks to the tourism boom, Sakaimachi has become the most prosperous area in Otaru today. The Shopping District Promotion Cooperative of Sakaimachi Street (*sakaimachi dōri shōtengai shinkōkumiai*), consisting of stores located in the district, has launched community activities such as monthly cleaning of public areas, and invented new events to attract visitors. For example, they inaugurated a neighborhood festival called “Sakaimachi Yukata and Wind Chimes Festival” in

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<sup>22</sup> According to the official statistics of Otaru City, the number of visitors to Otaru at one time reached 9 million per year. After the Tohoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, the number of tourists to Otaru fell to 6 million in 2012.

2010 that has become one of the important annual events and tourist attractions in Otaru<sup>23</sup>. They also created a community version of a map for tourists on which member shops and restaurants were distinctively marked. In so doing, the Cooperative invented a new interpretation and tradition of their community that appeals to outsiders while consolidating local identity. Overall, the touristic development of Sakaimachi can be seen as a standard model of Japan's rural revitalization today that adaptively utilized all the available local heritages as resources and mobilized people in the form of community.

However, the prosperity of Sakaimachi did not mean a victory for the whole of Otaru City. Local shops located away from tourist areas still have difficulty maintaining business, as the population of their local customers has continuously decreased. In fact, the finances of Otaru City have deteriorated for several years, and the city government has suffered from a deficit budget. In addition to that, Otaru City has been designated as one of the “excessively depopulated areas” (*kaso chiiki*) by the state in 2010<sup>24</sup>. The economic ripple effect of nostalgic tourism in the canal area is more limited than usually expected, and other parts of the city have not quite benefited from the touristic economy, directly or indirectly. If millions of visitors per

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<sup>23</sup> Festivals, or *matsuri*, are usually “regarded as events that affirmed religio-communal ties and boundaries” (Bender 2012: 106). Jennifer Robertson acutely pointed out the recent rise of civic festivals (*shimin matsuri*) that should be distinguished from the conventional type of religious celebration, the *Shintō* shrine-centered *matsuri* (Robertson 1991: 38-40). “The meaning of the term *matsuri* has accordingly expanded beyond its formerly strictly religious basis to include the sense that the English term [festival] connotes” (Bender 2012: 107). In other words, the meaning and practice of *matsuri* have been secularized in contemporary Japan. Scholars often understood newly invented *matsuri* as the construction and consumption of Japaneseness (e.g. Ivy 1995; Goldstein-Gidoni 1997). However, considering the diversity and elements of foreignness in Japan's festival boom today, it is fair to say that secularized *matsuri* often goes beyond the symbolic boundary of a homogeneous nation.

<sup>24</sup> From 1980 to 2005, the population of Otaru City decreased from 180,728 to 142,161, and its ratio of population decline is above 21.34 percent, way beyond the legal standard of 17 percent designated by the Law on Special Measures for Activation of Depopulated Areas.

year cannot prevent Otaru City from its downtrend in economy and population, then how can we expect other remote regions to revitalize their communities by tourism industry in a self-reliant manner?

Another common characteristic of rural revitalization is the utilization and exploitation of Nature. The utilization of Nature is the way in which native creatures, plants, and landscape are used as a means of advertising local tourism. In practices of rural revitalization, Nature has been utilized in several ways (Moon 1997: 229-32): the locating and marketing of native endemic species as tourist attractions, the restoration of firefly populations as an ecological indicator of the local environment, and selling the experience of farming and rural life to urbanites by the inauguration of “Nature schools” (*shizenjuku*). These are typical examples of the so-called experience economy practiced in today’s Japan that marks a different mode of capitalism.

The exploitation of Nature refers to agricultural practices that make profits from cultivation and gathering, especially relating to organic farming and so-called natural farming (*shizen nōhō*). Since the 1970s, a variety of such practices have emerged in Japanese society.

One of the earliest cases of rural revitalization through organic agriculture is the Town of Aya in Kyushu. Goda Minoru, the town mayor of Aya, Miyazaki Prefecture, proposed the “One-*Tsubo* Garden” movement since 1967 as an alternative way of local development<sup>25</sup>. In 1966, Goda led a local environmental movement to resist the deforestation plan by the state. To mark the value and significance of Aya’s forest, Goda and the local activists proposed that the glossy-leaved forest of Aya represents the ecological basis of a specific lifeway shared by several East

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<sup>25</sup> *Tsubo* is a Japanese unit of measurement relating to area. One *tsubo* equals about 3.3 square meters.

Asian countries (*shōyōjurin bunka*). In this context, “One-Tsubo Garden” was launched for building Aya as a town of organic agriculture. The movement encouraged local residents to make mini family gardens to produce organic vegetables for daily use. Every spring and autumn, the town hall provided free seeds for local residents to promote the movement. Eventually, Goda aimed at promoting the organic farming style among professional farms. After several decades of efforts, Aya’s organic market has become the center of organic agro-products of the prefecture<sup>26</sup> (Goda and Goda 2005; Takii 2007: 182-9). Moreover, unlike the national trend of rural decline, a significant decrease of local population has not happened in Aya for decades. Overall, the progress made in Aya should be attributed to the leadership of Goda, who plunged the administrative system into the promotion of organic farming.

In the town of Ayabe, Kyoto Prefecture, a writer named Shiomi Naoki has been promoting the lifestyle called “half agriculture, half X” that encourages urbanite professionals to live in the countryside as part-time farmers. Here, Shiomi (2003, 2006) used X to refer to any possible profession or vocation that can be practiced while living outside of the urban environment by subsistence farming. Through his writing and organization, Shiomi has successfully built an Ayabe-based network of organic food culture consisting of resettled urbanites and native residents. Shiomi’s “Half Agriculture, Half X” movement focuses on younger professionals who are capable of commuting to work or making a living by teleworking and correspondence. These people are often good at representing their lifestyle, and willing to learn related knowledge through a variety of media, and can make the agro-network of Ayabe even stronger. The elderly who want to live in the countryside on their pensions, according to him, are not the main group

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<sup>26</sup> It is about a 40-minute drive from downtown Miyazaki, the capital of Miyazaki Prefecture, to Aya. In other words, compared with other remote localities, access to Aya is not so inconvenient as to hinder the development of its organic business.

of people he wanted to recruit. In this respect, it embodied an alternative lifestyle that may only be affordable to specific social groups.

Mass media are also enthusiastic about the promotion of agricultural lifestyles that strengthens the idea that rural revitalization is possible and hopeful<sup>27</sup>. It is very common to see TV stations broadcasting variety shows and in-depth reports about country life with themes relating to agriculture, food, health, and the environment. Among them, NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai), Japan's national public broadcasting network, is a major provider of this sort of TV programs. One of the most popular programs in this genre which NHK has made is the in-depth report on the "miraculous apples" in 2006, which is about the legendary story of Mr. Kimura Akinori, who spent about ten years of trial and error to grow organic apples without using any chemicals and fertilizer. In the sensational program, Kimura was depicted as a master (*tatsujin*) of organic farming who, under heavy social and economic pressure, finally discovered that the rhizobia of soybeans can help apple trees (and other crops as well) grow stronger against pests and weeds in a natural condition. After that, Kimura's organic apples have been sold out every year. Today, Kimura has become nationally well known, and teaches his unique agricultural philosophy and knowledge around the country.

The successful stories of rural revitalization narrated above illustrate a beautiful dream of localism under the neoliberal regime. However, while some localities survived great societal transformation and changes in rural policy, the others are still struggling with the rising inter-

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<sup>27</sup> Publishers like Rural Culture Association (*Nōsangyoson Kyōkai*) have published a series of special issues of "Journal Modern Agriculture" to introduce agriculture and the rural lifestyle to ordinary readers. Reality shows about the rural lifestyle have also been frequently produced and broadcasted by private TV stations.



regional competition nurtured by neoliberal institutions. The so-called *furusato* tax is a good example to reveal the penetration of neoliberal ideas into an institutional environment that increases competition between localities. The *furusato* tax means that citizens (in this case usually urbanites) can arbitrarily donate money to local municipalities, and the amount of donation can be deducted from the annual income tax up to 10 percent of the total amount of the taxes owed. Such a tax regulation seemingly utilizes the current system of taxation and the worshipped freedom of the individual in a creative way to help out rural governments with raising their revenues. However, rural localities that have made high media exposure and well-known specialties are more likely to receive the donations in this system.

To compete for the *furusato* donation, lots of rural municipalities have gifted local products (*tokuten*, usually local agricultural specialties such as rice, meat, fish, fruits, wine, etc.) to their donators in return. The public image of the locality and the *tokuten* it offers often become the key factors for the urban donators to decide to which municipality they want to donate. Today, it is very easy to find Japanese web pages that compare the *tokuten* of each municipality and even rank them by the value and quality of *tokutens*. In other words, in the process of donation, rural municipalities and local identities have been transformed into, or embodied in, the local specialties. Localities are judged and evaluated as if they are commodities on the shelves of a domestic cultural supermarket<sup>28</sup>. Although the *furusato* tax seems to be a clever way

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<sup>28</sup> Recently, anthropologists of globalization have realized that in the global age, cultural identity has become more and more like consumable objects and information that can be selected at one's choice, rather than given cultural traits and mindset (Friedman 1994; Mathews 2000). The transnational set consisting of multiple cultures is termed cultural supermarket by Gordon Mathews. Today, shopping in the cultural supermarket has been integrated into the individual processes of constructing self-identity while contradicting and confusing the cultural identity constructed in a national framework. Mathews' theory is

of balancing regional disparity to some extent, its positive function has been largely cancelled out by the competitiveness of this new system in which winners take all. Besides, regions seem to become a fictitious commodity as the donators compare them in a utilitarian way.

The coming of a domestic supermarket selling regional cultures attaches importance to the making of brands. To attract the attention of customers and build long-term loyalty to their products or services, local farms, service providers, and manufacturers have all managed to create a shared brand named after the region or locality to feature its local specialty. Such an idea is termed regional branding (*chiiki burando*) in Japan. According to the definition provided by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), regional brands relate crops, products, or services provided by a certain region to specific images of the region (including landscape, nature, history, climate, culture, material, etc.) in order to create value-added commodities by distinction. In 2006, the Trademark Act was amended to allow the application of place names and toponyms in the registration of trademarks. That is, Kobe Beef, Kyoto Tofu, Atami Hot Spring, and Yokohama China Town can all be registered as trademarks if the unions of local makers and shops file applications to Japan's Patent Office. Trademarks that consist of a place name and product/service name have come to be recognized as the basic form of regional branding, although the connotation of regional brand is more than that.

The system of regional brands can only be established if regional differences and features of each locality can be well perceived in the society. The social perception of regional differences has been undergirded by the classical discourse of climates (*fūdo*) since the

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especially critical in a cross-country comparison of cultural identities. In the Japanese context, however, the situation seems different.

premodern era. In the postwar period, it has also propagated through the broadcast of popular culture. A good example of that is the prevailing concept of “prefectural character” (*kenminsei*), which claims that vocabulary used in daily conversation, customs, personality, and dispositions will vary by prefecture because of the unique historical contexts and ecological variation of prefectures (Sofue 1973, 2000). Recently, a popular variety show, “*Himitsu No Kenmin Shō*,” especially focuses on the distinction and embodiment of prefectural characters (resembling national characters in a international scale of comparison) and discusses the regional differences in diet, language, mentality, manner, etc. Such a cultural reconstruction further strengthens the public awareness of regional distinctiveness, and lays the foundation of regional branding.

A postmodern example of pursuing regional brands is that a local specialty or tourist



Figure 2.2 The new website entrance of Kagawa Prefecture during the campaign of *Udonken*. The lefthandside entrance is for the official website of Kagawa Prefecture and the righthandside is for *Udon* Prefecture.

attraction becomes so famous that it eventually replaces the name of the place<sup>29</sup>. As a result, prefectures that have similar local specialties will compete for the trademark rights. In 2011, for instance, the official tourism association (*kankōkyōkai*) of Kagawa Prefecture launched an integrated marketing project to promote Kagawa tourism. First of all, they made a new official website of Kagawa on which they fictitiously renamed Kagawa Prefecture as *Udon* Prefecture because Kagawa has been well known for the making and consuming of tasty *udon* (a kind of thick Japanese noodle). Secondly, they assigned Kaname Jun, an actor born and raised in Kagawa, as the lieutenant governor of *Udon* Prefecture. Third, Kaname, as the lieutenant governor, made a public visit to the post office to request that mail to *Udon* Prefecture be correctly delivered to Kagawa Prefecture. With this series of campaigns, the tourism association cleverly made Kagawa a hot topic in Japanese society by utilizing the stereotype of Kagawa: an *udon* place. Finally, Kagawa Prefecture registered *Udonken* (literally *udon* prefecture) as the official trademark shared by local noodle makers and restaurants.

The big success of Kagawa's creative campaign nevertheless led to an unintended consequence. Inspired by Kagawa's marketing strategy, Oita Prefecture filed an application to Japan's Patent Office for using "Hot Spring Prefecture" (*onsenken*) as its trademark of local tourism industry recently. However, Gunma Prefecture, which also has famous hot spring spots, remonstrated against the trademark application because of Oita's attempt to monopolize the popular image of hot springs. Oita Prefecture has withdrawn its trademark application, but

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<sup>29</sup> Renaming a company town (*kigyō jōkamachi*) with the name of the company has sometimes happened in modern Japan. For example, Koromo City was renamed as Toyota City because the citizens voted for renaming the city after the biggest company, Toyota Motor Corporation. However, this kind of case is still different from naming a municipality after its local specialty.

continues claiming on its official website that Oita is the best *onsenken* in Japan. The struggle for symbolic power continues.

The idea that a locality can be renamed with its specialty reverses the original concept of regional brand in an ironic way. The story of competition for a regional trademark reveals the fact that rural municipalities are so desperate for tourists and customers that they are willing to simplify and reify their self-identity. Moreover, it also shows how the urbanite preference is imposed on rural residents whose identities have been changed in the “renegotiation of power relation between the central government and local political leaders regarding the implementation of development policies designed to solve local socioeconomic problems in rural municipalities” (Thompson 2003: 90; see also Moon 2002: 241).



Figure 2.3 The collection of regional mascot characters in Japan as a campaign of Japan Post's New Year cards

Source: <http://yanana87.blog49.fc2.com/blog-entry-370.html>

In Japan, the production of popular culture and regional cultures has become more and more integrated. Japan is known as the kingdom of animation and *manga* (Japanese comics), and its media industry and popular literature are well developed, too. Interestingly, these culture industries often produced cultural goods and contents that deal in nostalgia for the *furusato* and variations on a premodern way of life (Clammer 1997: 139). Recently, manga and animation have stopped being merely a medium of *furusato* ideology. On the contrary, declining municipalities began to utilize the “emotion of attachment to fictitious objects” (*moe*) such as characters in animations, comics, and computer games (Ideguchi 2009). Similarly, places that had been depicted as the background of popular stories (TV dramas, movies, comics, animations, novels, etc.) became as popular among enthusiastic audiences, readers, and fans. The hometowns of famous writers and illustrators built streetscapes or amusement parks with the theme of his/her masterpiece. Furthermore, to feature the allegedly distinctive localness of each locality, municipalities also created their own cartoonish characters as their mascots (*yurukyara*). These mascots (played by persons wearing the costumes) attend local events and exhibitions of local specialty sales in metropolises to improve the public relations of the municipalities. For that purpose, the appearance of these mascots is often designed for advertisement, so they usually resemble local specialties (*meibutsu*) of the municipalities (Figure 2.4). Today, there are more than 800 regional mascot characters in Japan.

As the central government stopped subsidizing local public service and infrastructure, municipalities that cannot afford the ways of rural revitalization listed above have to endure limited budgets and declining public services (while local citizen groups have usually managed to hold festivals and annual events continuously to maintain the community). Others have

appealed to external recognition as a way of attracting tourists and creating a post-industrial economy. For example, in 2011, the Ishigaki Beef Festival set a new record for the longest skewer of meat certificated by the Guinness Book of World Records. The event allegedly brought significant economic effects to local business, and made Ishigaki, a remote island on the Southern border of Japan, world famous. Municipalities with historical or natural sites such as Himeji Castle and Mt. Fuji appealed to be inscribed by UNESCO World Heritage Convention as World Heritage sites. The other localities considered the middle of nowhere can only lobby for the limited public investment remaining in the neoliberal era, such as high-speed railway (*shinkansen*), and hope that the construction and operation of new transportation systems will bring more visitors to local shops. The “full set of public construction” (*ittengōkashugi*) subsidized by the state, usually including a concert hall, a gymnasium, an art gallery, a museum, a library, a community center, etc., is in the past, on the one hand (Yada 1996: 82). On the other hand, those rural localities that want to lure corporations and universities to establish branches have faced great difficulties in the long recession and severe inter-regional competition. Under the neoliberal regime, rural municipalities are expected to actively take responsibility for self-reliance by collaborating with cities or even foreign countries to develop a new market for local goods. The confluence of these local endeavors discussed above has invented a new economic mode of popular culture business that concerns locality.

### *Critiques*

To conclude, local municipalities have been in diversified pursuit of revitalization, and thus have created seemingly energetic development of regional cultures. However, such a development strategy is also problematic and one-sided in the existing structure of Japan’s

regional society. The inter-regional competition and the myth of the economic ripple effect of large-scale commercial facilities has only left weak municipalities worse off (Fujinami 2010; Hisashige 2010). The structure of uneven geographical development continues to worsen the livelihood of local residents in non-urban areas in both subjective and objective respects.

Researcher Okpyo Moon has critically pointed out the problematic essence of rural revitalization in contemporary Japan:

*As cultural hegemony lies within the cities, and with the urban way of life, however, this search for a new identity can only be achieved through a dialogue with the urbanites. The influence of urban people is therefore constantly present at all levels of the village revitalization movements. In fact, though it may sound ironical, the degree of success of regional revitalization movements or any related tourism development efforts seems to depend upon how effectively their efforts are communicated to the urban folks who are the major consumers of rural features nowadays (Moon 2002: 241).*

The paradigm shift from the One-Village One-Product movement to rural tourism or eco-tourism in the 2000s did not improve the deteriorated social condition of agricultural villages (Tokuno 2007; Love 2007a, 2007b, 2013). The hopeful strategies and fancy slogans of new agriculture such as organic cultivation and the “sextiary industry” all have their own limits and difficulties in the current system (Godo 2012). A rush for rural tourism has jeopardized the livelihood, quality of life, and subjectivity of native residents while increasing the burden on the local environment and wild creatures (Morita 2006; Tanaka 2007; Ido 2003; Kawada 2003). Resettlers who maintain their modern lifestyle in the countryside, ironically, might consume more energy than urban counterparts while suffering from over-intensive social connections and norms in village communities (Yoro 2002: 75-7).

The sextiary industry is a term invented and used in Japan that refers to the combination of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. That is, this concept actually implies a theoretical context in which the practitioners of agriculture, fishery, and forestry must start to engage



themselves in the manufacturing, marketing, and serving of their products to customers rather than just being the providers of raw materials and ingredients. On the one hand, this discourse suggests a less alienated mode of production in which farmers or fishermen can utilize their knowledge and skills to introduce their harvests to customers face to face. On the other hand, to sustain the sextiary industry usually requires extra investment in the aestheticization and marketing of products and service. In other words, only a small group of rural communities or local farmhouses own the economic and cultural capital required for the sextiary industry. Besides, to earn a living by organic farming often takes years of efforts in the initial stage for coping with an unbalanced local ecological system, localizing the species, or improving the soil. The concept of the sextiary industry might remind some readers of the idea of multifunctionality in agriculture. Indeed, there is a degree of resemblance between them. However, while the latter suggests justifying domestic agriculture with its non-economic contributions to face the threat of the global food regime, the former emphasizes that these contributions should be utilized for the commodification and marketing of agro-products in the framework of global capitalism and the consumption of localities.

## **Conclusion**

Why is Japanese society, while being criticized for its embrace of ethnic nationalism, as enthusiastic about internal differences by region and local climate as it is about a shared national character? My research answers this question by two points: first of all, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, the idea of local region (*chiiki*) functions as one of the elementary forms of Japanese society that is consistent with its national identity; secondly, the public concerns with *chiiki* have been developed into varied modes of commodification in the societal transformation

toward late capitalism. In the past three decades, the paradigm of production and consumption has shifted, along with national policies of economic development, from the developmental state to neoliberalism. With the neoliberalization of locality, both local communities and individuals have been encouraged to be the providers of value-added commodities and services as the national mechanism of redistribution diminished. Consequently, developing local entrepreneurship and commodifying localness have become the major, and may even be the only, way of rural governance in contemporary Japan.

Rural localities have become a new frontier in Japan's late capitalism. In urban Japan, audiences frequently learn from mass media about domestic farmhouses studying special breeding or developing new processed foods. The media usually depict these farmers as successful entrepreneurs who have professional know-how, extraordinary tenacity, and foresight. In doing so, the mass media have shaped an urban view of the countryside that sees entrepreneurialism as the elixir for rural problems: both the economy and population are declining to the extent that local residents cannot maintain their everyday lives.

The phenomena of Japan's place-making businesses are quite similar to what John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff depicted in *Ethnicity, Inc.*, the globally growing commercial advertisements, commodities, and images that evoke ethnic identity. According to the Comaroffs, *Ethnicity, Inc.* has emerged from two dialectic processes. One is the incorporation of identity, "the rendering of ethnicized populations into corporations of one kind or another;" the other is the commodification of culture, "the creeping commodification of their cultural products and practices" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 21). In Africa and the United States, the authors witnessed cases in which nations, tribes, and ethnic groups have become corporations running

businesses like precious metals, casinos, and amusement parks. These social groups have incorporated themselves by making their own brands with registered trademarks (so-called nation-branding) and making citizens their stakeholders. In so doing, tribe members have commercially participated in and thus identified themselves with these imagined communities. The development of Ethnicity, Inc. is consistent with and guided by the worldview of global neoliberalism, which advocates the universal ethics of entrepreneurialism and self-responsibility.

Rather than Ethnicity, Inc., what has happened in the allegedly mono-ethnic state of Japan seems to be better termed Locality, Inc. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 143). A major difference between Ethnicity, Inc. and Locality Inc. lies in the point that an ethnically constructed community could be less attached to a specific place, land, or natural environment than a local community will be. In *Ethnicity, Inc.*, the authors challenged the conventional critique of ethnic tourism which claims that “the more successful any ethnic population is in commodifying its difference, the faster it will debase whatever made it different to begin with” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 19). Rather, the Comaroffs argue that the original value, or aura, of ethno-commodities may not decrease in their mass reproduction but “may be rediscovered, reanimated, regained” and thus “reaffirmed” ethnic identity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 20). Why? Because the “raw material” of ethno-commodities sold by Ethnicity, Inc. will not be depleted. The mode of production of Ethnicity, Inc. may not alienate the producers but, to the contrary, deepens their sense of individual and group identity. Nevertheless, such an account underestimates the ecological cost of this type of tourism industry, especially in the case of Locality, Inc., or what I call place-making here, and cannot fully address its problems.

As every coin has two sides, finally, the case of commodifying locality has also raised the knotty issue that the Comaroffs wrestled with: on the one hand, Locality Inc. promises to

“unlock new forms of self-realization, sentiment, entitlement, enrichment” and thus seemingly suggests a possible way of emancipation in the age of global capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 139). On the other hand, however, the incorporation of locality legitimizes the hegemony of the free market, exempts the state from the responsibility of redistribution, and strengthens the entrepreneurialism of personhood and for personhood. Such a dilemma is exactly the reason why we should ask further questions: How this worship of locality commodification played a part in the process of Japanese neoliberalization? Who benefits? Who suffers? What kinds of affects and values have been constructed to maintain this new social order in the everyday politics of the regional community (*chiiki shakai*), and how does it cause struggles and conflicts? (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 21). In the following chapters, I will go through the ethnographic study of the Bochibochi Village at Oshamambe, Japan to answer these important questions.

### CHAPTER THREE A PLACE NAMED OSHAMAMBE: FIELDWORK SETTINGS

The original idea of this research was to study the wave of elderly Japanese retirees' returning to the countryside to take up farming (*teinenkinō*), and to investigate how local communities integrate these in-migrants. For a country whose citizens enjoy the longest life expectancy in the world, having the retired elderly take up farming seems a rational way for the country to cope with some of the issues associated with an aging population. The question then arises: what is it about farming and the countryside, in fact or in the popular imagination, that appeals to thousands of seniors? If urban areas provide better welfare and facilities for senior citizens, why are some willing to move to rural areas in their sunset years?

Some Japanese friends of mine thought there were easy answers to these questions. One said: "You know, in Japanese we have a word *iyashi* (healing), meaning the condition of *anshinkan* (a sense of security) that one is given by someone or something. And you know, a country lifestyle was usually considered an *iyashi* place." Another friend answered: "Well, that's interesting. I think that it was just an individual choice of some people. We all have to figure out a new way to live if you retire and leave your *kaisha* (company)." Indeed, "in conditions of high modernity" we are all forced to choose certain lifestyles and make our own life plans because our self-identities have been turned into reflexively manageable projects (Giddens 1991: 32, 81). In this context, some media pundits have proposed the philosophy of downshifting, a career transition to less competitive but more socio-ecologically connected lifestyles, which often emphasizes idyllic practices such as gardening and rural dwelling. Accordingly, the trend of *teinenkinō* in contemporary Japan is simply a global institutional isomorphism of this popular

philosophy of downshifting, or a local embodiment of reflexive modernity that challenges the work ethics derived from its predecessor (Beck et al. 1994; Bauman 1998).

These tentative explanations seem reasonable, but are ultimately unsatisfactory and raise more questions. Individual choices of lifestyle were never made in a social vacuum, but limited and conditioned by various structural forces. In what social conditions, rural lifestyle was constructed as a feasible and desirable option for Japanese urbanites? If these elderly citizens seek healing, what are their wounds? How did they tend their wounds and come to feel secure in rural communities that were unfamiliar to them? What kind of country lives were they pursuing, and what did it mean to them? Finally, how do we, as sociologists, understand their country retirements in the context of the structural forces that channeled their psychological and individualistic needs to a certain locality?

The term *teinenkinō* was coined and popularized in special issues of Modern Agriculture (*Gendai Nōgyō*) magazine, published by the Rural Culture Association (*Nōbunkyō*). In 1998, 2002, and 2006, the Association published special issues of Modern Agriculture addressing the ideals and specific cases of *teinenkinō*. These special issues included many stories of individual practitioners of *teinenkinō* who were fascinated to learn about agricultural production or rustic lifestyles. Taking agriculture as the representative practice of rural lifestyle, the discourse that promotes *teinenkinō* also emphasizes the ways in which elderly migrants to the countryside can contribute to provincial communities by farming. If *teinenkinō* has been recognized as a solution to Japan's rural problem, then rural communities should become an important agent to receive these elderly in-migrants from cities. **However, most projects concerning *teinenkinō* I found in the magazines or on the Internet either address individualistic lifestyle practices, or are**

**oriented to the promotion and sale of rural real estate products in which rural communities do not evidently play an active role.**

In the special issue of 2006, “Alternative Lives in the Provinces,” there is a report on a civic group from Oshamambe, Hokkaido, called the Oshamambe Dream Club. By launching the Bochibochi Village (*bochibochi mura*) project, this group publicly recruited urban retirees to their town to join in the development of pesticide-free farming. Witnessing the socio-economic impacts of rapid depopulation on local life, the Dream Club hopes to introduce new settlers to revitalize their hometown. The case of Oshamambe Dream Club is fundamentally different from the others because the discourse of the Dream Club articulates the individualistic concept of *teinenkinō* to a public issue: the decline and revival of rural communities. This feature convinced me that Oshamambe would be a good field site for a sociological study on the interactions between urbanite resettlers and native residents. Finding well-maintained homepage of the Bochibochi Village Project confirming that this civic group remains active, I visited this northern town during my pilot study in the summer of 2007. After visiting the core members and the farm of the Bochibochi Village Project, I concluded that the project would be the main object of my future study. In August 2009, I joined the Club as a short-term member (*tanki ijūsha*), and lived there for more than a year while conducting field research.

The motivation, behaviors, and the sense of vocation of the Bochibochi Village Project (the BVP hereafter) participants can only be understood in the context of local lives in Oshamambe. In what follows, I will first introduce the Oshamambe Dream Club and its projects, including the “Bochibochi Village Project” that is the main focus of this research. In the second part of the chapter, I will report briefly on the social and geographic setting of my field research,

Oshamambe Town, by emphasizing two lines of narration: first, Oshamambe is a locus where people continued to struggle with the changing structural forces that shaped local lives through the changes of oceanic ecology, transportation network, regional economy, and national policies; second, since 1980, the town hall of Oshamambe has attempted to mold local identity by engaging in cultural administration while individual settlements within the town territory were socio-economically heterogeneous.

### **Oshamambe Dream Club (ODC)**

The Oshamambe Dream Club (*Oshamambe Yume Kurabu*) was inaugurated in 2001. Its forerunner was a temporary local group that managed to bring a theatrical performance (*engeki*) to the town in 1990. In order to invite the Tokyo-based Tōitsu Theater group to perform their show “Wind Blowing to the Hometown” in Oshamambe, more than fifty persons who lived inside or outside Oshamambe organized the “Wind and Its Friends” (*Kaze To Tomo No Kai*) preparatory committee. Members of the committee voluntarily participated in preparatory work, such as contacting the troupe, raising funds, borrowing a concert hall, and drumming up local publicity for the show. These members organized this event at their own cost because, as some of them recalled, they wanted to utilize resources from the public sector to make local life more fun (*omoshiroku suru*). In the end, Wind and its Friends overcame technical problems, and brought the show to the stage for the people of Oshamambe. Allegedly, the first task of “Wind and Its Friends” to entertain the townspeople was a big success.

One founding member of “Wind and its Friends” (and the ODC) commented, “It was so fun that we all worked for the same goal and people came to join us. It seemed to me that if we persisted, then something interesting would happen” (see also Nagao 2006: 237). After the end



of the performance, many preparatory committee members, having enjoyed the experience of engaging in successful collective action, did not wish to dissolve the committee. “It would be a pity to simply dismiss the already gathered local comrades,” they said. Thus, thirty participants agreed to turn the committee into a standing association dedicated to the revitalization of Oshamambe, whose population and economy had been in continuous decline since the 1970s. They turned an unused town house into their office and founded a new association called the Oshamambe Dream Club (ODC hereafter).

The occupations of the ODC’s original members were varied, but many were old middle-class males, meaning small-scale, self-employed shopkeepers, and manufacturers. According to Bestor’s observations in Tokyo of the 1980s, the old middle class were the mainstay of communal life (Bestor 1989: 9). ODC members actively participated in all kinds of communal activities in Oshamambe Town, such as neighborhood associations (*chōnaikai*) and shrine festivals (*matsuri*), and were concerned with the development of the town as a whole. Conditions in Oshamambe were consistent with those observed in Bestor.

Each year, the ODC brought in a couple of theatrical and musical performances for the enjoyment of local residents. From 1991 to 1993, they organized local winter games and summer athletic meets, such as softball games. In 1993, however, the ODC suddenly encountered a new challenge following a strong earthquake on Okushiri Island in southwestern Hokkaido in July, that greatly damaged infrastructure and disrupted the daily routines of people living in Oshamambe area. Helping revive social life emerged as a new challenge for the ODC.

At the end of 1993, the ODC launched a New Year’s countdown event “Firework! 108 shots!” featuring a fireworks display at the local Shinto shrine, Inari Shrine. While the early ODC left few written records, many participants explain that they wished to devote themselves

to organizing events in order to galvanize the civic pride of local residents after the earthquake. In order to hold this event, local people, including the local gentry and shopkeepers, annually endowed the ODC with 10,000 yen per person. The fireworks display cost about three million yen annually (about 3,000 US Dollars), so the ODC had to find hundreds of local sponsors every year. Even though the cost of the fireworks became an ever-heavier burden for local sponsors suffering from the decline, every winter, fund-raisers from the ODC mobilized their social networks to secure supporters. Many ODC members opined that the organization persisted in holding this event because they saw the fireworks celebration as arousing local people's hopes and increasing happiness, and thus improving the community's quality of life.

Indeed, fireworks displays have long been a common feature of summer festivals and tourist events (*ibento*) in contemporary Japan. Although fireworks displays have never been a uniquely Japanese activity, Japanese fireworks (*hanabi*) are now considered to embody both traditional techniques and an important symbol of summer (*natsu no fūbutsushi*). Today, fireworks can be seen as a means of visualizing the four seasons, and thus nature, in Japanese culture (Ackermann 1997). The image of watching a fireworks display on a summer night has been continuously appropriated and reproduced in terms of nostalgic and nationalistic stereotypes by Japan's mass media and sub-cultural industries. Today, most fireworks events in Japan (including Hokkaido) occur during in the summer (July, August, and September); there are far fewer fireworks events held in the winter, and only portion of these feature the countdown to New Year's Eve: a globally-recognized way of celebrating the New Year. Moreover, the high season of domestic tourism in Hokkaido is summer, and international tourists visit only a small number of specific tourist destinations and ski resorts during the cold winter of this northern island. So, debates over whether or not to invest in a winter fireworks display inevitably lead the

common sense conclusion: such an event does not make good business sense. In this respect, the strategy behind Oshamambe's New Year's Eve countdown fireworks display did not simply follow a (invented) tradition tinted with elements of Japanese identity, nor was it based on a purely rational economic choice. Rather, it is better understood as a manifestation of the ODC's subjectivities.

Informants offered various reasons for this arrangement: "Countdown and fireworks displays had become a global trend and we would like to catch up with the fast-moving world"; "The fireworks event could be a good match for local people's first shrine visit on New Year's day (*hatsumōde*)"; "That would be a perfect way for us to gather to look upon the same sky during Hokkaido's long and freezing winter"; "This event will give young men who have left town a good reason to come back for New Year." The "Fireworks! 108 Shots!" display held on New Year's Eve of 2004/2005 was broadcasted by the national TV network NHK. Some informants mentioned how proud they were of being seen by a national audience. All focused on the ways in which this event could contribute to the communal life of Oshamambe, but no one mentioned turning the fireworks event into a business. Although local businesses tried to promote the fireworks display as part of package tour to attract urban visitors, the event never became profitable for the ODC members. Fund-raising for the fireworks event could not continue to cover expenses as local income levels and the number of elderly sponsors both declined. After the fifteenth "Fireworks! 108 Shots!", held at the end of 2007, the ODC brought down the curtain on this annual event. The termination of the annual firework event also signals the end of the first long-term effort at local revitalization by the ODC.

During the fifteen years of the fireworks project, the ODC made several other short-term efforts to galvanize their hometown. For example, they participated in the production of a single

produced by indie musician Takahashi Tadashi that was composed of two songs on Oshamambe (though no one sings these songs today). Text on the cover of the CD reads: “Whether born and raised in this town, or having moved here by chance, we all love this town and want to remain here. Let’s cheer up and hang on, though life here is challenging!” (Translation by the author.) There are two songs on the CD, “Home Village of Shaman” and “Winter’s Fireworks.” “Home Village of Shaman” includes lyrics on how local people adjust to the changing seasons, and referring to the home village Shaman (namely, Oshamambe) as “our *furusato* (hometown or ancestral village).” “Winter’s Fireworks” is akin to the theme song of the fireworks display held by the ODC, and also mentions several local specialties, such as seafood and hot spring (*onsen*). This single CD embodies the ODC’s early efforts to conjure the sense of community by appealing to both native born and migrant residents. The authentic culture of Oshamambe was not defined by certain native residents or certain historical roots, but by natural characteristics and local products (cf. Robertson 1991).

In 1996-1997, the ODC actively participated in the production of an independent film “Clouds of Yesterday,” produced by Tsubokawa Takushi. Tsubokawa was born and raised in Oshamambe. When he learned in the mid-1990s that the historic “Oshamambe Theater,” which closed in the early 1970s, would soon be torn down, Tsubokawa immediately launched a 16mm film production project to be shot, in part, at this old movie theater. “Clouds of Yesterday” was a drama, rather than a documentary. The scenes shot at the theater were only used in the background of the story, and Oshamambe was not really mentioned in the story. The ODC devoted much effort to the making of this film, which was considered a means of preserving something of the site of many of the town’s important collective memories.

Although commercial film or television production has been a common means of rural revitalization in Japan, the making of “Clouds of Yesterday” seems to have contributed little of substance to the revival of Oshamambe. Due to many financial interruptions, it took Tsubokawa nine years to complete the film, which finally wrapped up in 2005, seven years after the Oshamambe Theater was torn down.<sup>30</sup> “Clouds of Yesterday” won the Grand Prix at the Torino Film Festival of Italy immediately after the final cut was released. However, with limited distribution, the film did not bring Oshamambe many visitors from the rest of the country, and by the time I arrived in 2009-2010, both the film and the theme songs had faded from daily conversation.

Fireworks, Oshamambe songs, and filmmaking: none of these projects left any tangible trace in the town, only dim memories. I learned of these activities from participants who, in the course of conversation, would suddenly recall the theater or the CD they kept on a shelf, gathering dust. When I followed up and asked for details, some informants looked somewhat embarrassed, while others laughed, but most said little about these plans from so long ago. As I pieced together a history of ODC projects from documents and the residents’ fragmented, anachronistic narratives, I realized that these past schemes were part of a series of frustrations they encountered as they struggled to keep their community on track by creating distinctive local festivals and events, following a national fashion of the 1980s and 1990s.

ODC activities during the 1990s focused on community building (*machizukuri*), as did the activities of many other municipalities under Nakasone’s regime of cultural administration and the policy paradigm of *furusatozukuri* in the 1980s. However, policies articulated under this

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<sup>30</sup> In early 2008, some of the ODC members and local residents launched a fund-raising campaign to help repay the loan of Tsubokawa’s studio for the overseas distribution of “Clouds of Yesterday.”

paradigm failed to reverse the trends of economic decline and demographic aging over the long run. In the early 2000s, as the first long-term project, “Firework! 108 Shots!”, was becoming financially unsustainable, members of the ODC started to discuss alternatives programs, hoping to hit upon new means of rural revitalization. That is how the “Bochibochi Village” came into being. In order to put the idea behind the “Bochibochi Village” into practice, the ODC had to legally register their association as a non-profit organization (NPO) in 2003.

### **Bochibochi Village Project (BVP)**

“Bochibochi Village” was the second long-term project of the ODC. It aims to encourage urbanites (especially retirees) attracted by the rural lifestyle and environment of Hokkaido to resettle in Oshamambe. The core of the project was the creation of a citizen’s garden (*bochibatake*) for participants, each of whom receives one plot (measuring 30 *tsubo*, about 100 square meters) in the garden. Participants must cultivate their plots without using any pesticides or chemical fertilizers. The ODC offered the necessary assistance and resources to help prospective residents settle down in this remote northern town. First, the ODC provided services of housing, house hunting, and rental assistance to applicants who decided to move to Oshamambe, including affordable housing, and short-term housing. Second, the ODC organized a supporting network of local assistants (*ōendan*) consisting of native residents and affiliated professionals willing to provide consult on local affairs and rural society. Third, after three to four years of development, the ODC created a common area about ten times larger than the individual plots. The ODC planned to grow organic crops collectively on the common area, which could then be sold in city markets and generate income. Migrants who participated in the “Bochibochi Village” Project (BVP hereafter) were required to pay an annual fee (five thousand

yen per year, about US fifty dollars) in membership fees, cultivate their own plots, and join the assistants' network to help future in-migrants.

One of the founding fathers of the BVP is Shira. In the early 2000s, Shira was employed by a Tokyo-based trade company, working in marketing. Shira was a graduate of Oshamambe High School, but left town for a college education and career in Tokyo. Although he had left Oshamambe several decades before, he maintained connections with his brother and cousin who still lived there. Knowing about recent changes in Oshamambe from them, Shira was highly concerned with the rapid decline of Oshamambe and often thought of ways of revitalizing his hometown.<sup>31</sup> He studied many cases of rural revitalization, thought about the future of rural Japan, and concluded that the most critical issue for the future would be securing safe food. Whenever asked about the origin behind the idea of the “Bochibochi Village,” whether in formal or informal circumstances, Shira always answered with the same story:

*That was the thing happened in a sunny day of 2001. I was in a business trip, sitting in a train running through an unknown country field in China. Suddenly, I noticed that there were small rainbows emerging in the distant field. The rainbows soon disappeared but then appeared again in a stable rhythm. I asked my Chinese colleague: “What’s that?” He simply answered: “You will see.” As our train approached the field, I saw a row of persons, who wore white masks and work clothes, moving forward slowly and constantly sprayed the crops with some kind of mist. The Chinese friend explained to me: “these are scallions for exporting to Japan. The farmers have to use lots of pesticide to prevent them from the damage of insects and diseases.” “Then apparently these scallions will not pass the food inspection,” I immediately replied. “That’s not the problem, because those scallions will be used in processed foods.” He continued to explained: “that’s why in China we called those vegetables that will be exported to Japan ‘poisoned veggie.’ Chinese people will never eat those crops.” The rainbows of pesticide and the dispassionate attitude of the commentator really created an unforgettable scene for me.*

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<sup>31</sup> “Why,” I once asked Shira, “does the shrinking of Oshamambe bother you? Don’t you think that a smaller community can also survive and live well?” “Yes, I do think so.” He answered. “But that won’t be the case if there are only the elderly (*jijibaba*) left in the town.”

Shira's dramatic narration of his experience in China was consistent with national worries over the food safety issue, which often led to the dichotomized distinction between safe domestic foods and problematic imported foods (especially those from China). By repeatedly retelling this story, did Shira, intentionally or unconsciously, construct a narrative of banal nationalism and accept the propaganda of the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA) which claimed that domestic crops were the safest and most delicious? Shira clearly answered: "No, I don't think that eating domestically along will solve the whole problem. Japan's conventional system of agricultural production is very problematic and distorted as well. Do you know that Japan is the country that uses the most pesticides in the world? That is why we should start to grow our own food instead of buying everything from supermarkets." In an effort to save his hometown from decline, Shira wrote up his ideas concerning the BVP and shared it with his cousin, who was still a member of the ODC.

The ODC received Shira's conceptual proposal on the BVP in the early spring of 2002, and held several meetings to discuss and prepare for this seemingly cutting-edge project. One informant, Yama, recalled, "Seven of us held the first discussion in one of the "drive-in" restaurants Kanikani House of Suzuki. In that meeting, we agreed that it is possible to utilize certain vacant land (hardware) in the town for the BVP farm, but the software would be the most difficult problem for us to solve: how to help newcomers settle down, and how to mentor these amateur farmers?" As the vice president of the ODC, Yama is both the advocate and key figure in the execution of the BVP. He admitted that there was much debate about the feasibility and possible effects of the BVP in the meetings. Another ODC member once mentioned his experience of those meetings while complaining about the predicament of the BVP today: "See, I told you so. I didn't think this project would work from the very beginning! The hours of



sunshine are too short to develop [profitable] agriculture here, especially organic agriculture! But they insisted on this idea and I just couldn't change their minds!" In an interview with an agricultural magazine in 2006, Mura, the president of the ODC, recalled: "To be honest, I wasn't very impressed by the proposal at the first sight. While I was joining other shopkeepers to study ways of revitalizing the main street, I didn't really sense the impending crisis. Later, as shops on the main street closed one after another, my business became more and more threatened. Recently, I finally sensed the coming of the crisis and came to understand better the significance of that proposal" (Nagao 2006: 238).

After months of debates, ODC members finally came to an agreement with each other over the BVP, deciding to give it a try even though some members remained concerned about the future prospects of the project. There were several reasons for them to try: first, the ODC did not have any better alternatives against the unrelenting processes of population aging and financial difficulties (whether of ODC members or the town's general population); second, the idea of recruiting migrants seemed to be a relatively new idea not previously implemented by many other municipalities; third, the cost of the BVP (both in terms of capital and human resources) seemed to be much more affordable and sustainable than those annual-event-oriented projects practiced before (such as the countdown fireworks display); fourth, in the meetings many ODC members tended to refrain from direct conflict for as long as possible. Since the BVP's advocates seemed resolute, and more expressive than the opposition, the latter decided to compromise. As a result, the BVP was launched despite underlying discord regarding the feasibility of the project.

To recruit in-migrants, ODC members negotiated with the local government for resources and recognition. The ODC members aimed to acquire the right of reusing abandoned teachers' dormitories after the elementary schools were shut down, and identified vacant municipality-

owned land that could be used for an organic farming project. A civil servant working in the town hall suggested that the ODC register as a NPO (Non-Profit Organization) because doing so would endow the ODC with legal personality and corporate status, enabling the group to manage property and conduct business transactions.<sup>32</sup> In 2003, the ODC registered as a NPO, and changed its title to NPO Oshamambe Dream Club. Afterwards, the ODC continued to negotiate with the town hall in order to make use of vacant public land and dormitories. The group signed two agreements with the municipal government. The first of these allowed the ODC to use and rent property, provided that the ODC undertake the necessary maintenance work; the second agreement allowed the ODC to cultivate the land at an abandoned tree nursery that had been being managed by the district forestry office.<sup>33</sup> In the second agreement that the ODC signed with the municipal government, the right to erect any kind of permanent building on the land is ruled out.

Each BVP member is obliged to pay an annual fee of five thousand yen (about fifty dollars), to cultivate a plot at the BVP farm, a citizens' garden shared by both native residents and newcomers to the town, and to be part of the supporter network of the BVP. Additionally, every first-year member has the right to move into dormitory housing (if available) for little rent (about five thousand to fifteen thousand yen per month, which equals to 50 to 150 US dollar, depending on the type of housing). In the spring of 2005, the BVP was officially launched and Shira resigned to move back to Oshamambe as the first resettler in Bochibochi Village. In 2010, there were 16 households, accounting for 29 persons, who had relocated to Oshamambe via the

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<sup>32</sup> In Japan, NPOs have become a conventional means of incorporating the third sector since civil organizations played an active role in rescue work and reconstruction following the Kobe earthquake in 1995.

<sup>33</sup> The right to borrow vacant farming lots was highly limited before the series of deregulation measures taken after 2000 (Nagao 2006: 240).

BVP. They and native townsfolk cultivated 40 plots of the BVP farm. The registered growers of the BVP farm totaled 60 in 2010, and about half of them were newcomers. According to the ODC, sixty persons were registered as using the garden in 2010, most of whom were over fifty years old.

While half of the in-migrants through the BVP eventually left the town, resettlers found new homes elsewhere in Oshamambe Town after their first year living in the low-rent dormitories. They either bought houses, or rented ones from residents with the assistance of the ODC, usually through Yama's personal network. Many continued to cultivate their own plots in the BVP farm, buying seeds and seedlings from local supermarkets or farms in other municipalities each spring for the coming year's cultivation. Some planted seeds from produce grown on the same land the year before. Since 2008, BVP members have cultivated a common area (*kyōdō eria*) where all volunteer members grow one or two designated crops for sale. According to Shira's plan, the BVP would expand its production of organic vegetables (free of pesticides and chemical fertilizers) and start to make a profit. The tangible achievement (*jisseki*) of doing so, he believes, should enable the BVP to influence other farmers in the town.

## **Introduction to Hokkaido**

Hokkaido is the northernmost, and the second largest, of the major four islands of the Japanese Archipelago (the other three are Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu). As newly appropriated territory of Japan, Hokkaido was often considered to be on the frontier or periphery of the nation. Separated by a wide strait, transportation between Hokkaido and Honshu was long reliant on ferries (the Seikan tunnel that links the two islands today did not open until 1988 and it was only for railway transportation). Overall, Hokkaido's social ties with central Japan are

relatively weak. The cost in time and money for a Tokyo resident to travel to Hokkaido, for example, was not much less than that required for an oversea tour of an adjacent country, such as China, Korea, or Taiwan.

Hokkaido was not officially incorporated into Japanese territory until the beginning of Meiji period (1867-1912). To colonize this northern island and efficiently exploit its rich natural resources, the Meiji government employed American engineers and agricultural specialists. While the rest of Japan's modernization was shaped mainly by West European (especially English) influences, the state did not adopt the same system in the colonization of Hokkaido because similarities between Hokkaido and the United States seemed to necessitate the adoption of a new model. The latitude and climate of Hokkaido Island is actually similar with those of New England: belonging to the cool temperate zone and having long and cold winters but cool summers. The vast forest and undeveloped fields of Hokkaido reminded the Japanese bureaucrats the way in which Americans had settled the North American continent. Thus, the American style of farming and urban planning was adopted in the colonization of Hokkaido. As a result, the rural landscape of Hokkaido looks different from that of Honshu, but similar to scenes of rural America, featuring large-scale cultivation, huge dairy farms, and scattered barns and silos.

These differences were further amplified and transformed, by tourist and cultural industries that cast Hokkaido as a fantastic landscape and attracted many domestic and international tourists. The popular images of Hokkaido can be summarized as followed: diversified landscapes and underdeveloped land that include swaths of wilderness; abundant natural resources (including fertile soils, forests, mineral wealth, energy resources, seafood, wild animals, etc.); populated by hardy, magnanimous, and freethinking people who possess an adventurous,

independent spirit, and the ability to endure bitter cold and severe weather: an exotic and remote region, distinguishable (both socially and naturally) from other regions of Japan; a source of high quality food stuffs that are natural and healthful, namely, frontier imagery.

The industrial structure of Hokkaido's economy has undergone a series of transformations oriented by the state since colonization began in the late nineteenth century. In the colonial period, Hokkaido mainly developed extractive industries such as agriculture, fishery, mining, and forestry in order to fuel the expansion of the Japanese empire. The postwar regime adopted a strategic perspective that cast Hokkaido as a pseudo-colony under the direct supervision of the state, even though it had been administratively designated as a prefecture of Japan. That is, the development of Hokkaido was largely decided by the state. Based on Hokkaido Development Act enacted in 1950, the state was to establish specific bureaus – namely the Hokkaido Bureau and the Hokkaido Regional Development Bureau (HRDB) – to take charge of the development of Hokkaido in the interests of the whole nation. The HRDB's main task was to formulate and promote regional comprehensive development plans by following the principles proposed in the CNDPs. To this end, the HRDB received special funding from the state. Considering the disproportionate ratio between prefectural revenue and the scale of infrastructure required in spacious Hokkaido, the state also subsidized the construction of infrastructure at a higher rate than in other prefectures. During the 2000s, as local autonomy and the decentralization of power increased under neoliberalism, both the influence and budget of the HRDB gradually diminished.

After World War II, Hokkaido accommodated many homeless war refugees from other major islands. With the assistance of the state, greater numbers of in-migrants arrived at assigned colonial sites in Hokkaido, and the demands that accompanied national reconstruction accelerated the extraction and depletion of natural resources via mining, forestry, and fishery.

The prefectural government, following the guidelines of the second CNDP in 1969, launched the Third Hokkaido Comprehensive Development Plan in 1970. The plan stipulated that the government would make Hokkaido an important base of national heavy industries, including iron and steel industry and petrochemical industry. The Winter Olympic Games were successfully hosted by the city of Sapporo in 1970, opening a new possibility for development: the tourism and heritage industry. The previous development plan created a gigantic industrial area in Tomakomai City, and flooded some of the traditional lands of the Ainu people behind dams (e.g. *Nibutani Dam*) that supplied water to the steel and petrochemical factories of Tomakomai. The phase of post-industrialization began as the two oil shocks frustrated plans for developing heavy industry in Hokkaido, underscoring the importance of locality-based, high value-added, and tourism-related industries.

Moreover, Hokkaido's population began to concentrate around Sapporo after 1970, and in response local governments began holding civic festivals and developing regional food cultures to stave off economic decline and outward migration. This resulted in various civic festivals and tourist-oriented events sprouting up in Hokkaido during the 1980s and 1990s, many of which were inspired by the Sapporo Snow Festival, or similar festivals that arose thereafter in major cities of Hokkaido such as Otaru, Asahikawa, or Hakodate. Many of these newly invented festivals were not referencing the ancient origins of the Japanese nation, but appealed to an image of globalized Japan featuring elements of Western style festivals.

Recently, Japanese agriculture has been confronted by a crisis arising from free trade in agro-products. To combat the crisis, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (MAFF) developed the idea of a new mode of tourism known as sextiary industry. Sextiary industry refers to the vertical integration of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries involved in the

creation of certain agro-products. The theory behind sextiary industry encourages farmers and other primary industry workers to process the raw materials they produce, and sell the final product to customers directly. In charge of the biggest agricultural producer in Japan, the Hokkaido prefectural government has also promoted sextiary industry as the way of the future. Under this framework, local farmers were encouraged to pursue advanced studies in farming, manufacturing, and management, while local producers, manufacturers, and chefs were encouraged to collaborate with each other to grow their businesses aiming at tourists. According to the online pamphlet of MAFF, the state aims to increase the market scale of sextiary industry from today's one trillion yen to ten trillion yen (about one thousand million dollars) in 2020.

### **Oshamambe Town: Location and climate**

Oshamambe is a coastal town in southern Hokkaido, located deep in the middle of Uchiura Bay, the biggest bay in Hokkaido, which faces the Pacific Ocean. At a depth of less than 100 meters, Uchiura Bay was an ideal place for scallop farming and fisheries, especially salmon, squid, crab, and right-eye flounder (*karei*). In fact, the name Oshamambe is derived from a phrase in the indigenous Ainu language meaning “the habitat of right-eye flounders.” The climate of Oshamambe and other municipalities of the Uchiura Bay are relatively warmer and less snowy in winter, and rainier in summer, compared with other regions of Hokkaido; by the same token, the number of hours of sunshine in Oshamambe were relatively fewer. Since the colonial period, fishing, rather than agriculture, has been the major primary industry of coastal

Oshamambe,<sup>34</sup> while in mountainous parts of Oshamambe, especially settlements deep in the mountains, such as Warabitai, dairy farming has been the mainstay of the local economy.

Most regions of Oshamambe are mountainous, with only the east coast and river valleys being relatively flat<sup>35</sup>. The main river running through Oshamambe Town is the Oshamambe River, which originates around Mt. Oshamambe and flows to the sea to the east.

Administratively, Oshamambe Town is composed of many rural settlements and a downtown area: coastal settlements such as Kunnui and Shizukari are fishing villages; the economies of mountain settlements, such as Kyoritsu and Warabitai, mainly rely on stock farming. Consisting of several neighborhoods (*chō*), downtown Oshamambe is the major settlement and the administrative, business, and transportation center of the town. Almost all settlements in Oshamambe Town are located in river valleys and along the coast.

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<sup>34</sup> For example, in 1892 the gross output of agriculture was one-sixth of that of fisheries, and half the value of the transportation-related businesses (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 244).

<sup>35</sup> The administrative area of Oshamambe Town is 310 square kilometers (about 120 square miles), and the western mountainous region accounts for 75 percent of the total area (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 3).



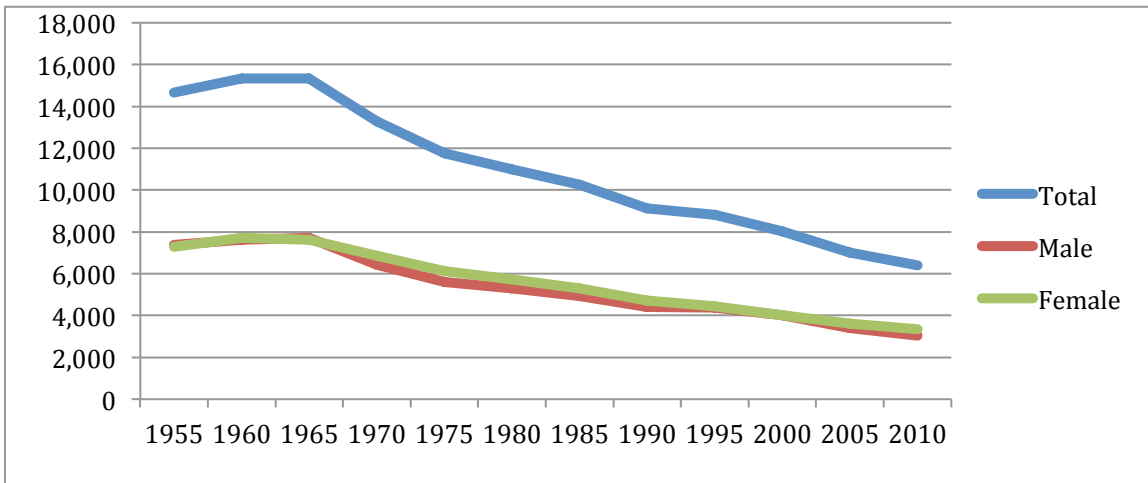


Figure 3.1 The historical change of Oshamambe's population (data from Population Census of Japan)

Oshamambe Town does not fit the stereotype of the Japanese countryside as represented in the mass media, which typically features rice paddies, thatched cottages, and the solidarity of small village communities. Most of the plains around Oshamambe are covered by peaty soil, which is not suitable for growing rice, the main dish of Japanese diet. In fact, there are no rice paddies in Oshamambe, which is rare among Japanese municipalities. Instead, the major primary industries of the town are fishing, livestock products, and forestry. The backbone of its economy is tertiary industries serving the daily demands of fishermen, farm workers and civil service workers (which, before the 1980s, included employees of the national railway company). According to National Surveys, in the 30 years between 1980 and 2010, in Oshamambe the share of the population employed in service industries population remained steady at around 60 percent even as the total population decreased rapidly. Although Oshamambe is located in a rural area, its social economic characteristics are more typical of urbanism than rural communalism.

In 2010, the total population of Oshamambe Town was 6,386 persons, over 2,000 of whom were more than 65 years old (accounting for 35 percent of the total population). Since the population peaked at over 15,000 in the 1960s, Oshamambe Town has lost three-fifth of its

population (Figure 3.1). As such, Oshamambe Town has been designated by the national government as an “excessively depopulated region” (*kasō chiiki*). The declining and aging of the population entailed not only a loss of local customers for businesses, but also a lack of younger residents to participate in communal activities and organizations. In the long run, depopulation disrupted the social fabric of Oshamambe Town.

The development of Oshamambe had been fueled by the modernization of the transportation system and technologies in Hokkaido. Oshamambe was organically shaped by the socio-historical process of colonizing Hokkaido, as a transit point and rest area for resettlers. After the first railway between Oshamambe and Muroran opened, local residents were unhappy about the loss of economic opportunities as many earned a living by providing necessary services to carriage travelers and transportation workers (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 280). In the late Meiji period (from 1891 to 1916), the population of Oshamambe rapidly increased from 803 to 5,134 persons due to migrant flows, and the number of “strangers” (*yosomono*) rapidly rose (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 303). From the beginning, Oshamambe was a community of migrants.

A notable feature of Oshamambe’s political climate has been the absence of political leadership – at least in the conventional sense in Japanese society. The lack of someone to take on the responsibility for making critical decisions gradually led to a conservative style of governance. It is well known that Japan, while transformed into a parliamentary democracy following World War II, continued to be governed by powerful political families and lineages. At the local level, the political situation was not much different. Many Japanese municipalities were dominated by those of noble descent, or were under significant political and economic

influence from aristocratic families derived from the early modern feudal system<sup>36</sup>. This was not the case in Oshamambe. The official history and town residents point out that no powerful, aristocratic family ever occupied or settled in Oshamambe<sup>37</sup>. Early settlers and newcomers were usually people of the middle or lower classes, and while local capitalists may have controlled certain political resources through local elections and the representative system, their leadership in the town could not be taken for granted, and no individual actor had decisive political.. However, a result of this seemingly democratic environment was a greater than usual degree of political strife. Several informants opined that, in the absence of strong leadership, the development of Oshamambe was promoted poorly, there was no clear and definite policy, nor was any daring plan advanced by the public sector.

In addition, Oshamambe was a town relatively free from the strong normative strain of traditional settlements in Hokkaido, and even more free compared with rural villages on Honshu Island. Many other municipalities in Hokkaido that were initially formed by the military or systematic resettlements, and thus consolidated under conventions imported from their previous hometowns in Honshu Island. However, that was not the case in Oshamambe. Newcomers to Oshamambe usually arrived separately or in small groups of less than 10 households, and from a wide range of places. Thus, while settlers brought with them various vernaculars, customs, and cultures from their ancestral villages, in Oshamambe residents had to learn to live with

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<sup>36</sup> Almost all the municipalities where feudal castles located belong to the category mentioned here. In the case of Hokkaido colonization, Date City was probably the best example. This city was named after the samurai Date Kunishige, who served as a retainer of the feudal lord of Sendai Han. After losing the Boshin War with Meiji government after Meiji revolution, Date led his own subordinates to resettle in Usu County of Hokkaido in 1870 and built Date Village, which is today's Date City.

<sup>37</sup> Since there is no authoritative scholarly historiography regarding to the settlements or the township of Oshamambe, here I have no choice but rely on oral history and the town history written by the historiography office of the municipal government.

differences as early as the colonial period (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 303). As a result, even today, Oshamambe remains a place where people are proud of their open-mindedness towards strangers.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Landscapes of Oshamambe**

Oshamambe is a mountainous town in the northeast corner of Oshima Peninsula; the terrain of the region has largely conditioned the socio-economic development of local communities. The topography of the town features a decline in elevation from the mountains in the west to the coast in the east; the rivers flow to the east into Uchiura Bay. Fragmentary plateaus are dotted along the rivers, but account for only a relatively small portion of the area of the town. Most of the settlements in Oshamambe located on the plateaus and therefore along the rivers. Most of the town population was concentrated to the south of the Oshamambe River estuary, and today form the downtown area where major business streets, the railway station, and state offices are located. The town hall is one of the largest, tallest downtown buildings, and employs more people than any other business in Oshamambe.

Settlements away from the downtown area are less populated and their livelihoods are largely determined by the local terrain and location (for example, Shizukari is a fishing village, and the people of Warabitai are ranchers). In modern times, roads and rails were built along the river valleys, connecting dispersed settlements to both downtown Oshamambe and other adjacent municipalities, and some peripheral settlements have stronger ties to other municipalities than to downtown Oshamambe. These peripheral settlements faced even more serious problems of

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<sup>38</sup> Depending on the historical processes of settlement, the strength of communal solidarity and shared norms varied.

marginalization than did downtown Oshamambe. Seven settlements at some distance from downtown, which had their own elementary schools, could be identified as sub-centers of the town. However, six of these schools (Kunnui, Chayakawa, Nakanozawa, Kyoritsu, Futaba, and Warabitai) have already closed due to a lack of students (less than five pupils). In fact, several remote settlements within Oshamambe Town have become, or are becoming, so-called “marginal villages (*genkai shūraku*)”, a concept in Japanese sociology of region (*chiiki shakaigaku*). Sociologist Akira Ono invented this terminology to indicate that depopulation, aging, and economic decline have seriously damaged the social functions of the settlement in rural Japan, and is likely to end the community (Ono 2005).

### *Old Town*

Central Oshamambe can be understood as a place made possible by mobility because the townscape was formed and developed by the changing modes of transportation. Before Japanese colonizers arrived, Oshamambe was a traditional territory of Ainu, an indigenous people who mainly lived by hunting and gathering. In the late nineteenth century, many Japanese settlers from Honshu Island landed Hokkaido at the southern port city Hakodate, and moved north along the east coast of Oshima Peninsula. At that time, migrants mainly traveled on foot or by horse-drawn carriage, which meant proceeding at a much slower pace. Since Oshamambe is a bifurcation point, where travelers branched out to the northeast by traveling along the eastern coast, or turned northwest to settlements along the west coast of Oshima Peninsula, such as Kuromatsunai and Suttsu. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), these travelers’ need for temporary lodging and supplies contributed to the initial prosperity of Oshamambe through the development of the service industry.

The modern transportation infrastructure of Oshamambe, built in the early twentieth century, undermined the lodging business as travelers could pass by the town on the way to larger cities (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977). The public road system and railway connecting the two major cities of Hakodate and Sapporo passed Oshamambe by following the conventional transportation pattern established by carriage travelers: Japan National Route 5 (the main public road) and Hakodate Main Line (railway) transversed the coastal area of Oshamambe from south to north, and turned northwest at the north end of the downtown, and followed the Oshamambe River into the mountains. Another route, including Japan National Route 37 and the Muroran Main Line, starts from downtown Oshamambe and runs northeast along the coast. Other railway branch lines, both national and private, were built to facilitate herring fisheries and coal mines. So, Oshamambe remained a junction, and became even more important in that regard, after the establishment of the modern transportation system. To manage the operation of its two major railway lines in the northern Oshima region, Japan National Railway (JNR) built not only stations, but also a depot and employee dormitories in Oshamambe during its postwar expansion. The coming of JNR and its employees made Oshamambe into a bigger town and brought more customers to local shops.

Oshamambe once thrived during the 1960s and 1970s because of its pivotal location in the railway network of southern Hokkaido (Figure 3.2). At the time, Oshamambe was not only the junction station between the Hokodate Main Line and Muroran Main Line, but also the transfer station for local branch lines such as the Suttsu Line and Setana Line. Both lines were built to service the demands of towns on the western coast during the heyday of the mining industry and herring fishery in the early twentieth century. Train passengers might visit by the downtown to buy seafood or fashionable goods while being transferred at Oshamambe Station. Walking the

main street of the 1960s, you would see fewer cars, but many more people strolling and shopping. JNR employees living in dormitories by Oshamambe Station patronized local restaurants and bars, or crossed the rails to bathe at one of the hot spring hotels. As those natural resources were slowly exhausted in the postwar period, both local lines were abolished, with the Suttu Line abolished in 1972, and Setana Line in 1987. The succeeding private railway company, Japan Railway Hokkaido (JR Hokkaido), did what any profit-seeking corporation would do: low-cost bus lines replaced low-usage train lines, and superfluous employees were dismissed or transferred. Also, the Oshamambe office of JNR was closed during the reorganization of the railway company. In the restructuring of the railway industry in Oshamambe, local economy that was established around the JNR thus faced strong impact.



Figure 3.2 The Location of Oshamambe and its pivotal position in the railway network of JR Hokkaido

In 1980, the town hall held a general town meeting gathering townspeople to discuss the state's privatization plan of JNR (*kokutetsu gōrika*). According to the report filed with Public Information Oshamambe, almost all of the participants opposed the privatization, though the resolution they submitted to the state had no effect. The Nakasone cabinet decided to privatize JNR by dividing the large company into regional corporations. In the liquidation procedure, JNR's land, buildings, equipment, locomotives, and machines in Oshamambe were either torn down or sold, and only a small number of buildings necessary for the streamlined business of JR Hokkaido were retained. Even though some of the property were important part of the heritage of the town, for example, the roundhouse for steam locomotives and the employees' dormitories, all were torn down without encountering notable resistance. "Few townspeople understood the



value of those buildings in those days, and most Japanese people are not used to fight against the authorities,” my major informant Yama commented. With the disappearance of JNR, the socio-economic basis of this remote town evaporated.<sup>39</sup>

At the end of the 1980s, Oshamambe’s role as the pivot of the southern Hokkaido railway network had been seriously weakened. On the one hand, the streamlined JR Hokkaido completely gave up on Oshamambe as a base for trains and personnel. The reduction in the number of scheduled trains made transferring at Oshamambe inconvenient and unnecessary, while the overall decline in the regional economy of Hokkaido lessened the utility of railway transportation. Not only were there fewer passengers overall, but those traveling were less likely to disembark to shop or eat in Oshamambe as they were more likely to be busy travelers moving between the major metropolitan areas of Sapporo and Hakodate. To pull the town out of the depression caused by the retreat of JNR, ODC members started to discuss revitalization strategies and to organize activities to cheer up local residents. Meanwhile, the focus of the post-JNR economy shifted to automobile travelers on national highways.

Japan's National Route 5 was the most important highway for Oshamambe’s residents because, like the railway, the road runs the length of Oshamambe Town, linking most of the settlements in this town. The main street of downtown was once part of Route 5, but was replaced in 1999 by a bypass section traveling along the coast. The elevated bypass physically and ecologically separated the beach from downtown streets, changed the landscape of the coast, and took traffic further away from main street businesses. A couple of convenience stores characterized by bright lighting, clean interiors, and spacious parking lots, were located at the

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<sup>39</sup> In fact, two of the early participants of the BVP moved to the Oshamambe because they bought land from JR Hokkaido. They built their own houses on the land, which was located right by the railway to the south of the station.

two ends of the bypass<sup>40</sup> Consequently, fewer and fewer car travelers ventured downtown, further hallowing out local businesses.

Of all the buildings in Oshamambe Town, the one with the largest volume and capable of gathering the most people inside was probably the town hall (*yakuba*). The town hall is a modernist three-floor building covered in apricot and grey tiles, newly erected in 1998. The administrative center of the town, civil servants working in the town hall constitute the largest cohort of the white-collar working population. The town government's budget is tight and few employees actively participate in public affairs; a civil servant related that their salaries had been reduced several times, and few of them were willing to spend time on anything other than assigned work. Yama also commented that many town hall employees did not really "serve" the townspeople in a broad sense, but simply completed their assigned tasks with the minimum required effort. The air-conditioned interior space of the town hall looks bright and clean decorated with flower arrangements and artistic works, but the relative luxury of the interior of the town hall forms a striking contrast with the usually humble residences of the BVP participants. Stepping from the elevator to the third floor of the town hall, KY grumbles: "This place is way too fancy, especially the third floor that few townspeople would use."

Most houses in Oshamambe are wooden structures of two to three stories, roofed with tinplate or zinc-coated steel sheets that are usually painted blue, red, or green. This type of roofing is economical and easily maintained in the cold, snowy climate of Hokkaido. While the

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<sup>40</sup> There were three convenience stores located at the southern entrance of the bypass (one a Hokkaido-based chain and two national chains), and one 7-11 (one of the biggest convenience store chains in Japan) at the northern end of the main street, which was very close to the junction with Route 5 and Route 37.



Figure 3.3 The logotypic emblem of Oshamambe Town (left) and its application to street furniture design (right; source: <http://gamon.exblog.jp/i2/23/>)

façades look quite similar to those newly built on Honshu Island, the skyline is marked by the varied colors and shapes of roofing (usually gabled, mono pitched, double pitched, or flat roofs, depending on the period in which the structure was erected). In Honshu, private houses (*minka*) are usually gabled and roofed over with thatch, tiles, or shingles.<sup>41</sup> The mass-produced metal roofing in Oshamambe is smooth and lacks texture and character, but gives rural Hokkaido a very different look from that typical of Japanese villages.

The main street shopping district (*shōtengai*) has been the conventional core of downtown Oshamambe. Nowadays, shops open on the main street can still satisfy the daily necessities of most people. There is a clothing store, a photo studio, several grocery stores, a hair salon, a bookstore, two banks, and several restaurants. The street has two paved lanes between two concrete sidewalks, and the street features lamps, poles, and manhole covers well-designed to highlight the local identity – all of which were part of the community-making plan (*machizukuri*) oriented by the town hall (Figure 3.3). Free-standing but adjacent low-rise houses line the two

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<sup>41</sup> In Oshamambe, only certain temples and historic buildings that survived the conflagration of 1934 have traditional tile roofing.

sides of the main street, and most are (or were) individual shops and stores.<sup>42</sup> Every shop front is fitted with well-worn rolling shutters, however, due to the long-term decline of the local economy – the hourly average number of pedestrians on the main street can usually be counted on two hands – many shops have already been shuttered for years, giving the street a cold and cheerless appearance. The muted colors of the streetscape presents an ironical contrast with the warmth of social interactions with local people praised by many in-migrants.

The feeling of loneliness conveyed by the empty streetscape is further strengthened by the absence of animals and any noticeable greenbelt. Stray dogs and cats are very uncommon in the business district, and only a few flocks of birds, such as sparrows, crows, and seagulls, visit while foraging. Such birds gather on rooftops or electric wires in the daytime, and fly back to their habitation on the mountainside before the nightfall. Moreover, the downtown area was largely covered in concrete during the rapid urbanization in the early postwar years. There are only few trees to be found and almost none are taller than the houses, so the business district lacks verdure even in spring. Altogether, the result is a city with all the color of a barren landscape.

While surrounded by beautiful mountains, ocean, and pasturelands, travelers to the downtown area of Oshamambe might feel a sense of incongruity at the sight of the built

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<sup>42</sup> Some informants who have travelled around Japan suggest that Oshamambe's downtown area is relatively crowded compared with other municipalities in rural Hokkaido, although the density of buildings is lower than in Honshu municipalities. Other informants suggest that the current spatial pattern of downtown Oshamambe was formed as this town went through a wave of rapid development in the 1950s. At that time, the fountainhead of local hot spring was accidentally discovered in the downtown area, which resulted in rapid but disordered commercial development. Without careful regulation of building zoning and landscape design, the downtown streets were largely concentrated and covered in concrete.

environment. The artificialized landscape is probably an essential element of that incongruity: there is an artificial streetscape, the concrete structure to stabilize nearby mountain slopes, and lines of tetrapods along the shoreline to protect the subgrade of highway.<sup>43</sup> The beaches along the Oshamambe coast appear untidy and unapproachable at first sight, littered with articles that wash ashore, mostly driftwood and fishery waste.<sup>44</sup> Townspeople and college students clean the beach once or twice a year, but this does little to improve the visual impression made by the beach. The mouth of Oshamambe River, near downtown Oshamambe, is also slightly polluted with floating blobs of oil shining on the surface of water and plastic containers and dark sediment accumulating on the riverbanks.

The railway divides the downtown area into a coastal area and mountainside area, each of which is composed of several neighborhoods. The coastal area was the earliest developed region of town and shows a clear pattern of mixed-use land division. There is a town hall, a police station (*kōban*), a hospital, a fire department, and most of the local businesses intermixed with residential lots in this long, narrow strip of land. In contrast, the mountainside area is generally a residential and educational area (the high school, library, gym, and communal center are found here), but is also the site of the hot spring (*onsengai*) business street.

The hot spring contributes an important element to the local identity, even though other municipalities near Oshamambe have developed hot spring business as well. Oshamambe's hot spring industry, which includes hotels, transportation, restaurants, and other retailers, has helped the local economy to a certain extent in the sixties and seventies. The hot spring street that

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<sup>43</sup> A tetrapod is a four-legged concrete structure used in coastal engineering to dissipate the force of incoming waves.

<sup>44</sup>Local residents explain that all the trash in the bay is washed by ocean currents to Oshamambe, due to the city's location at the innermost part of Uchiura Bay.

parallels the railway to the north of Oshamambe station is composed mainly of seven hot spring hotels and other entertainment business, such as bars and restaurants. The area where hotels are concentrated today was previously a wasteland, with the landscape being completely changed after the springhead was found in the 1950s. Visitors to the hot spring, including JNR employees and railway passengers, patronized local bistros, hot spring hotels, and stores, and thus plugged the local economy into the national economic engine after 1955.

The fountainhead of the Oshamambe hot spring was found accidentally while drilling for gas deposits in February 1955.<sup>45</sup> As soon as the mineral hot spring was found, local residents gathered to utilize the spring, and transformed the site into an open-air bathing place. In a “wild but healthy” manner, people freely visited the springhead to bathe in naturally formed depressions or in oil drums and bathtubs carried to the area for that purpose. The town hall prohibited outdoor bathing at the gas well to maintain “good public morals and sanitation,” but could not stop the hot spring bathing mania (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 627). Therefore, the town hall built a public bath at the site for townspeople in 1956, and their neighborhood was immediately occupied by small businesses, including retailers, restaurants, and bistros, seeking to take advantage of the emerging market. According to the town hall, an average of one thousand six hundred persons crowded into the public bathhouse everyday during

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<sup>45</sup> In 1928, the Goda restaurant in front of Oshamambe Station dug a deep well for water, but accidentally discovered gas along with water. That is the first gas well on record in Oshamambe, but the underground gas was never economically utilized until the 1950s. In 1952, the town hall of Oshamambe was looking for new ways to develop given the difficult economy and costs of postwar reconstruction. After failing to attract corporations to build new factories in town, the town council decided to start a project of drilling for gas deposits. After two years of research, the drill team established the first well near the downtown area in 1953. Digging the well did not reveal anything until they reached 600 meters and, unexpectedly, hot water began gushing from the well, along with some gas (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 625-6).

its first year of operation, making it necessary to pitch tents for waiting guests. The flourishing hot spring business encouraged the town hall to construct a new road and erect streetlamps in the area. In November, just ten months after the spring was discovered, the first hot spring hotels opened. To conclude, the spatial pattern seen today at Hot Spring Street was actually established through a series of accidents during the 1950s. It is noteworthy that, as demonstrated by the history of Hot Spring Street, Oshamambe was socially energetic in the 1950s.

In 1957, the town mayor announced his failure to secure investment in a beet sugar factory to boost the stagnant local economy, and finding an alternate means of economic development became urgent. Development based on local gas deposits and hot springs was considered the most feasible solution, so drilling restarted. This time, however, crude oil emerged along with hot spring water. As such, the well could not be used as another hot spring fountainhead. The town hall decided to drill at two other locations, but the results remained the same (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 638). The plan to expand Hot Spring Street failed, but the oil deposits under Oshamambe suddenly opened up new possibilities. As the news of the discovery of oil spread, many companies came to negotiate with the town hall for permission to drill. The municipal government finally chose to cooperate with Teikoku Oil Corporation (INPEX, or International Petroleum Exploration Corporation, after 2008) for a share of the right to extract and exploit the oil.

However, after a series of geological investigations and test drills, Teikoku Oil Corporation determined that the deposits under Oshamambe were not as rich as the gas deposits, and could not be profitably exploited. The town council passed a resolution to exploit the gas by flotation, and launched the public gas service in 1958. The public bathhouse, gas facilities, and oil drilling eventually dragged down local governmental finances, and induced a financial crisis in the town.

The townspeople organized town meetings to democratically address the crisis: the town hall underwent fiscal reconstruction; the mayor, council members, and certain public officials who concealed administrative errors were dismissed and charged; a new mayor was elected, and sold off the town's forestry lands to make up the deficit. Yama once lamented, "We share a pathetic history [in Oshamambe] in that we found a hot spring when looking for gas, and found oil when drilling for hot springs." Ultimately, the drilling mania brought the town neither new income, nor better employment. Today, the town hall still utilizes the rich gas deposit to run a public gas service for local residents, but the gas service has been operating in the red since 1959.

Today, seven slightly run-down hot spring hotels are still operating on Hot Spring Street. While some of these hotels describe themselves as "*hoteru* (which usually refers to Western style accommodations)", while the others are "*ryokan* (traditional Japanese-style inns)", but in terms of architectural style and interior design, are neither modern and fully-equipped, nor traditional and elegant. There is little to distinguish these hot spring hotels from residential buildings in the town: outmoded style, old, and shabby. They have a certain aesthetic style, but apparently not of a kind that most Japanese tourists appreciate. Some people therefore see the hot springs as a factor that hinders progress in the town. One in-migrant, Mr. Bata, once opined after visiting the public bathing facility of Toyoura Town, to the north of Oshamambe: "Look at this bathhouse! It's clean, convenient, and comfortable. They have various kinds of bathtubs, nice, uniformed staff, a beautiful panoramic sea view, and spacious and well-maintained environment. What do we have in Oshamambe? If we can't do as well, how can we compete? How do we attract visitors? But we will not have this kind of public bathhouse by any means, because that would impede the interests of the hot spring hotels in town!" In my view, design and managerial style of the hot spring resort in Toyoura that follow a global standard and taste embodies what Richard



Wilk called “global structures of local difference,” which allows tourists with different background and preference to experience the local environment (Wilk 1995). For the hotels in Oshamambe, however, they make profits with the existing property without taking the risk to renovate of their old buildings and equipment. Only a certain group of tourists would like to visit those hotels. What Mr. Bata wished, in other words, is the public intervention in the globalization of the commercial landscape of Oshamambe.

### *New Business*

Today, new forms of business created by Japan’s modern, competitive capitalism has dominated commerce in Oshamambe. The convenience stores that occupy the two entrances of downtown Oshamambe present the best representative case. Backed up by the production and logistics systems of their parent corporations, these convenience stores were well supplied with lunch boxes (*bentō*), packaged Japanese side dishes (*sōzai*), printed media, and various kinds of snacks, beverages, cigarettes, and alcohol, and open twenty-four hours a day. Food processors concentrating in the Hakodate area produced all of their delicatessen commodities. Some convenience stores in town sell snacks made by local manufacturers as souvenirs. National convenience store chains (such as 7-11 or Lawson) even provide a variety of services in the form of copy machines, printers, faxes, ATMs, box office and transportation service ticket sales, and so on. In other words, convenience stores not only took the place of those small shops on the main street (*Honchō Dōri*) that served travelers, but also satisfied most of the daily demands of local residents.

Convenience stores are not the only new capitalistic form to replace the functions of the central business street of Oshamambe<sup>46</sup>. Two other large chain stores, a supermarket and a hardware store, supplied local consumers' daily demands as well as the convenience stores. The supermarket, located next to the town hall, probably has the second-largest parking lot in town (the largest parking lot is that at the railway station where the JNR dormitories once stood). As a branch of a major chain supermarket in Hokkaido, this supermarket sells a variety of ingredients and includes a delicatessen. Like in many other supermarkets in Japan, perishables sold here (usually from JA system, or *Nōkyō*) are clearly marked with the prefecture or country where they were produced under the regulation of the national law (Hall 2010). While most of the goods are from Hokkaido – site of most of the agriculture and food industries in Japan – imported fruits and vegetables, or those produced in other prefectures, still occupied part of the shelf space, especially in the winter. Under the free trade regime, as I have explained in Chapter Two, imported vegetables are usually cheaper than domestic produce. Few items on the shelves are produced in Oshamambe.

Many informants complained about the quality, price, or variety of foods sold by the supermarket, especially given how poorly they compared to that available in other cities. A female informant who moved to Oshamambe from Hakodate said: “I found that we could buy vegetables at a little bit lower price and have better variety to choose from in the same supermarket chain's stores in Hakodate City.” However, these residents did not often patronize alternative retailers, such as the smaller grocery shops on the main street, the Farmers' Market on

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<sup>46</sup> Most local shops on the central business street are small family businesses, usually managed without employees. In this respect, I define them as old middle class rather than capitalists. Only a few of them, which are famous producers of local specialties, could hire more than five employees.

Saturday, or the mobile retailer (which visits certain areas of the downtown a couple of times a week to sell vegetables and fruits produced in the Hakodate area) due to concerns over price and convenience. This is understandable because the quality and origin of the vegetables, fruits, and other goods sold in these independent shops are not very different from those found in the supermarket, but are often more expensive than the latter. In other words, as the supermarket generally satisfied local residents' demands, it also introduced a globalized food system to townspeople.

There are a couple of groceries, general stores, and hardware shops on the main street, but none can compete with the big hardware chain store at the southwestern edge of downtown. The hardware retailer is located in the most populated residential area, located about a three-minute drive from the main street. This hardware retailer has created a space where local consumers can buy almost anything they need for daily life in a single store where all commodities are well classified and shelved, and shop clerks dressed in clean uniforms wait to serve customers. To a great extent, its spacious parking lot also helps attract business. To conclude, the convenience stores, supermarket, and hardware retailer outcompete other local businesses because they enjoy three advantages: greater variety and up-to-date of commodities, more rational and modern arrangements of goods, and convenience. As a result, most local residents do their grocery shopping in these three places, which have become the town's public spaces; one is much more likely to run into acquaintances in these large-scale retail stores (*ōgataten*) than while strolling the main street.

To the south of downtown Oshamambe, there is a row of roadside restaurants and shopping centers with large parking lots scattered along the Japan National Route 5. These businesses are

generally known as drive-ins (*doraibuin*) among local residents.<sup>47</sup> These drive-ins were negatively affected when the newly extended expressway redirected most of the passing vehicular traffic. These drive-ins are usually individual restaurants and shops that sell agricultural produce and seafood. After the completion of the Hokkaido Expressway in the mid-2000s, the decreasing traffic density on Route 5 endangered the business of these drive-ins. Today, many of the drive-ins on the Route 5 near Oshamambe have closed, or barely survive.

Nonetheless, engaging long-distance drivers passing through the area continues to be accepted locally as a principal means of making business. Since 1991, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) has been promoting another concept in drive-in design – regional roadside stations (*michinoeki*) – as a means of rural revitalization. The idea behind the roadside station is to combine the functions of rest areas, restaurants, and fancy souvenir shops that sell local specialties into one facility. Ideally, according to MLIT, roadside stations are a space for rural-urban exchanges, a place where drivers who have been driving for a long time can take a rest while engaging with the local economy through the exhibitions, commodities, and services (e.g. hot spring bathing, exhibitions, or other cultural activities) provided in the station.<sup>48</sup> A roadside station of this kind is different from conventional drive-ins

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<sup>47</sup> The Japanese word *doraibuin* is derived from the English word drive-in, but its meaning differs from the English. Rather than referring to a facility that one can visit without leaving one's car, in Japanese, *doraibuin* refers all roadside facilities (especially restaurants) built with large parking lots.

<sup>48</sup> Roadside station is not only considered a successful combination of transportation construction and rural revitalization efforts in Japan, but also internationally believed to be a practical tool of development. Since the early 1990s, more than 1,000 roadside stations have been established throughout the country, with 114 of them in Hokkaido. The rapid spread of roadside stations in Japan has even convinced transnational organizations that roadside stations provide an efficient and integral model for boosting local economies, creating jobs, and developing local communities. In 2004, the World Bank adopted the Japanese concept of the roadside station as one of its global deployment strategies for

in several ways: a roadside station is usually a public facility managed and maintained by local groups (town hall, NPOs, and so on) where multiple restaurants, shops and farms, rather than a single one, sell their products and services (such as dining or bathing); a roadside station not only serves visitors as a rest and shopping area, but also as a space to present and represent the locality to outsiders.<sup>49</sup> That is, a roadside station introduces the municipality to visitors through a space where locality can be symbolically reshaped and reconstructed.

Although roadside stations have become a pervasive feature of the landscape in Hokkaido, Oshamambe has not yet established one of its own. Local residents sometimes travel to adjacent towns to shop in their roadside stations. According to informants, there are several reasons why Oshamambe Town has not established its own roadside station: first, for a poor municipality like Oshamambe, successfully building and maintaining a roadside station requires both a well-capitalized private partner, and professional management capabilities to handle the business and risks, but Oshamambe Town has neither; second, the establishment of a roadside station requires that the town hall play an active role in integrating local businesses, manufacturers, and material resources, but the town hall of Oshamambe is relatively passive and conservative about engaging in such ventures; third, almost all the existing roadside stations in Hokkaido operate at a loss (*akaji*), even those that function well as communal, regional centers. So far the town hall of

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reducing poverty in developing countries from the bottom up (World Bank). To build a roadside station in Japan, the municipality has to cooperate with the administrator of the “road” (usually a highway) to which the station will be connected. After the completion of a station, the municipality usually gives the management commission to a private company or a third-sector group that, in many cases, can subcontract the right to run the station to a private management company.

<sup>49</sup> As a space for consuming locality, a roadside station is usually named after the municipality and emphasizes local features. For instance, the roadside station of Uryu, a rice-growing village, was called “Pastoral Town Uryu” as the rice paddy is a major symbol of the Japanese countryside.

Oshamambe has refused to invest budgetary and public resources in establishing a roadside station in town as an integrated outlet for local specialties, crops, and cuisines. This might be a wise decision considering the tight financial condition of the town.

### **Making an Oshamambe Identity?**

As mentioned above, Oshamambe Town is composed of downtown neighborhoods in the central area and the settlements that are thinly dispersed along the coast and valleys. These settlements are usually seen as smaller, independent communities bounded by certain social and natural boundaries. To group these distinctive settlements as being part of a larger region such as a town, the town hall would have to work closely with other local actors to construct a shared history, and thus a common identity, across the territory (Cresswell 2004: 102). In this section, I will demonstrate how Oshamambe Town has become more and more like an “imagined community” through the administrative works on the common locality.

Of course, going through administrative procedures in the town hall is the most direct way of teaching someone who lives in a territory that he or she is a part of the town. Moving into Oshamambe entails registering at one desk and applying for public services at other desks in the town hall building. Also, each month, many residents visit the town hall to pay for water and gas, and sometimes national health insurance. In addition to these passive interactions, the town hall frequently posts flyers and notifications to inform residents of community events.

Since 1953, the town hall of Oshamambe has published a monthly journal called *Public Information Oshamambe (kōhō)*, and every local household receives one copy for free. The journal records public policies and measures, financial reports, communal activities and events, and other governmental accomplishments. Brief reports on selected events held in the past month,

and the schedule of coming events account for the majority of the content. Detailed demographic information, such as monthly changes in population, obituaries, and the list of newborns are printed on the final page. Today, Public Information Oshamambe accepts advertisements from local business and helps publicize coming events and information on civic groups. Through this monthly journal, everyone learns of the news and changes in Oshamambe Town, and thus is able to feel the rhythm of the local social order via media prepared by the town hall. Although local people do not necessarily read that official journal carefully, I have seen several informants browsed it when they just received the journal, or checked out the obituary and local events of the township.

In terms of civic events, the town hall held an annual sports day and other sports games (such as gateball, or park golf) for townspeople. In an annual sports meeting “Town Olympic for Communion” (*chōmin fureai orinpikku*), local residents from different settlements and neighborhoods form their own regional teams to compete with other settlements in the athletic games. In fact, not only the sports meeting, but the sports park as well, are named after the ideal “*fureai*” (literally means “coming in encounter” or “touching each other”) that encourages mutual and open-hearted interactions between individual residents.<sup>50</sup> These games are, by design, a type of inter-settlement competition that intensifies personal identification with one’s neighborhood. Meanwhile, for those who live in different parts of Oshamambe and seldom meet in daily routines have a chance to get to know each other during the athletic contests. The information these official events aim to deliver is: whether living near the beach, or in the deep

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<sup>50</sup> For more detailed discussion on the concept of *fureai* in the Japanese context, see Ivy (1995: 43) and Thang (2001).

mountain valleys, whatever one's rank in the contest, everyone identifies as a part of townspeople.

Furthermore, following the institution of nation-state system, Oshamambe has designed its own flags, charters, and emblems based on local identity, as did many other municipalities in the postwar period. The logotypic emblem of Oshamambe has been redesigned several times, following changes in the municipality's administrative status. In 1953, to mark the 10th anniversary of Oshamambe Town, and the 80th year since the founding of the Oshamambe settlements, the town hall held a series of events to celebrate the anniversary with public singing, essay, and photography contests, and the choice of a design for Oshamambe Town's emblem. The town emblem was again re-designed by public selection when the town's charter was inaugurated in 1973, upon the 30th anniversary of Oshamambe Town. The town emblem has been used since then, not only in official documents and events, but also in the design of urban landscape (Figure 3.3). The town hall even commissioned a new theme song for Oshamambe Town in 1993, although I could not find any local informants who could sing it. The local authority of Oshamambe town has followed the national model to construct an official local identity.

In Japan's consumer culture of locality, local specialties are often used to represent their of origin. The official website of Oshamambe usually emphasizes several things: the natural hot spring near the downtown, the seafood (including scallops, hairy crabs, and sometimes right-eye flounders), and the *ekiben* of crab rice. These *meibutsus* are depicted as nostalgic emblems of Oshamambe by the tourism association. In an official poster recently made by the OTA, the layout was thematized by a poem on crab rice, articulating the childhood experience of taking a crab rice *ekiben* to the memory of one's grandma. In fact, the thing-locality connection is also



emphasized in the practice of cultural administration (*bunka gyōsei*). In 1983, the town hall designated the floral emblems of the town to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Oshamambe Town: the town flower (*chōka*) is irises, and the town tree (*chōki*) Japanese black pines. Both are common plants in this area, especially the irises, which grow on Kyoritsu Bog, which has been identified as one of the most representative scenic spots in Oshamambe.

As Jennifer Robertson (1991) observed in Kodaira City in the eighties, it became conventional for the local government to publicly design and promulgate an official logo, song, and charter of their municipalities in celebration of the anniversary of the city or township. Such a measure has been a national phenomenon since the early 1980s, under the governance of Nakasone cabinet. The town hall of Oshamambe did the same. The annual routine of civic events and the special celebration of the town's anniversary undertook the work of molding local identity, though its effects remain in question. Many residents might be able to recognize the town tree, flower, and emblem, but they express no particular attachment to such "official" (*kōshiki*) symbols. Many informants of mine did not recognize the emblem of Oshamambe Town, and had no idea about the theme song of the town. As what I demonstrate in the following chapters, identification with the town derives from the lived experience of residents in neighborhoods administratively designated as part of Oshamambe Town.

### **Conclusion: Oshamambe as places**

There is a debate among geographers concerning the fundamental concepts of place and localism (Cresswell 2004: 53-80). In one camp, the Marxist geographer David Harvey criticizes the phenomena of social exclusion in post-industrial society, as seen in the heritage industry, gentrification, and gated communities, and argues that the authenticity of place has been at stake

in the age of globalization: on the one hand, the invested construction and reconstruction of inauthentic localities by the logic of market capitalism have estranged people from the places where they dwell; on the other hand, the memory and identity of dwelling in a certain place might be utilized as a means of standing against the bulldozer of global capitalism would, but could also be penetrated and controlled by more sophisticated forms of capitalism and conservative doctrine, leading to a bounded sense of place based on social exclusion (Harvey 1996). In the other camp, the feminist geographer Doreen Massey claims that researchers should stop seeing place as a closed and stagnant locale, but think of “a global sense of place.” Massey argued that place arises out of a process of interactions that are “constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” across the alleged boundary that demarcated places (Massey 1994: 154).

These two understandings of place led to two very different interpretations of localism: the discourse that prioritizes the meaning and importance of place or locality. For the former, toponophilia and place-centered perspectives are considered conservative and reactionary because they tend to be culturally introspective and socially exclusive<sup>51</sup>. For the latter, localism based on one’s rootedness in a place can be progressive as long as cross-boundary flows and interactions are taken account of in considering the nature of place. Another perspective on place disagrees

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<sup>51</sup> In traditional villages of Japan, villagers who violate communal norms were banished in the informal institution of social ostracism ( *Murahachibu*). Such an informal form of social control survives the process of modernization in rural communities with strong solidarity. For example, in the environmental protest against the landfill plan in Oita Prefecture in the 1970s, a minority of villagers of Kazanashi “who supported the landfill plan were ostracized by the rest of the village for years afterward” (Broadbent 1998: 147). Although the ultimate sanction of this kind of social ostracism “would have considerably less force in an urban area...informal ostracism may well continue” (Hendry 2003: 71). In contemporary Japan, social exclusion of homeless people or newcomers in a civilized manner often goes hand in hand with the practice of community-making (Robertson 1991; Kawabata 2010). In Oshamambe, however, the case of social exclusion is relatively rare in both senses.

with both views, claiming that the coexistence of multiple identities to a place does not necessarily promise a progressive sense of place. Rather, a careful examination of “the ways in which such identities are constructed” was the only way to evaluate the legitimacy of the localism rooted in one specific locus (May 1996: 210). Moreover, Cresswell (2004: 75) points out that Harvey and Massey both took the cities they themselves were dwelling in as exemplary, and the nature of their cases were consistent with their arguments about localism. So, case selection was critical to the argument made.

Japan’s localism has long been under the shadow of nationalism, and therefore often understood as reactionary or exclusive (Tamanoi 1998; Ivy 1995; Robertson 1991). For instance, neighborhood associations, as an important agency for forging communal solidarity in Japan, were seen as derived from the system of social control created by the Tokugawa government and militarized by the imperial government in Meiji period. With respect to religion, Shinto shrines located in different places in Japan were the religious centers of local life in premodern Japan. In the process of state building, the Meiji government incorporated Shinto shrines throughout the nation as organs of the Japanese empire: the result was called State Shinto. By nationalizing the Shinto shrine, localities in the Japanese countryside became parts of a unitary empire. Through the capillaries of the State Shinto system and neighborhood system, belief in the Emperor of Japan (*tennō*) and the authority of the empire penetrated the everyday lives of ordinary Japanese, wherever they lived in the archipelago<sup>52</sup>. In the postwar period, the nationalized Shinto system

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<sup>52</sup> Although Hokkaido is relatively marginal in the political ideology of Japan, it is still part of Japanese territory governed by the central government. So, saying Hokkaido is a different region from other parts of Japan does not mean that people living in this northern island reject Japanese identity. Most people living Hokkaido nowadays consider themselves Japanese citizens. However, an alternative discourse of Hokkaidoan Independence (*Hokkaidō dokuritsuron*) emerged in the postwar period, and still survives in Hokkaido

was abrogated under the supervision of US army, and neighborhood associations were also become more independent of state control. However, the modern administrative system of municipalities took over the role of forging local identities and promoting solidarity within a framework consistent with national identity. In this respect, Japanese localities were advocates of a “bounded sense of place.”

As introduced in this chapter, Oshamambe Town is an economically diversified community in which each neighborhood/settlement earns a livelihood by one economic activity: dairy farming, fishing, business, etc. Although the town hall created a common identity in the name of Oshamambe Town for everyone living in the administrative territory, settlements away from the downtown area have maintained their own communal identities through festivals and other communal events (for example, the collective pasturing in Warabitai).<sup>53</sup> Except for these conventional understandings of social grouping, new, cross-place tribes have arisen: circles of soba-making, cheese research, gateball, park golf, and so on. Many of these circles used the label of Oshamambe to name themselves (for example, the Oshamambe Dream Club) since it has been the legitimized category that can include all the differences within the territory. The BVP is another attempt to integrate the people, nature, and resources of different parts of Oshamambe

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today (Kuwabara and Kawakami 2008: 338-345). Arakawa Hiroshi, a bestseller cartoonist (*mangaka*) who was born and raised on a dairy farm of Hokkaido, briefly discussed the idea of Hokkaidoan Independence in one of her popular works that introduces the rural lifestyle in Hokkaido. My major informants Yama and Koba also supported the idea of Hokkaidoan Independence against the governance of the state, even though they root for Japanese athletes in international games.

<sup>53</sup> The neighborhood solidarity of these remote and less populated settlements is often stronger than expected. For example, Warabitai, one of the smallest settlements in Oshamambe, held their own regional snow festival as it is the snowiest area in the town. The festival is held in the abandoned wooden school building of Warabitai Elementary because of their attachment to that school. In Shizukari, another fishery village to the north, with a forgotten history of gold mining, local residents celebrate their own shrine festival and school festival (*bunkasai*), held by Shizukari elementary.

Town to help welcome and integrate new settlers. With the assistance of the BVP, these newcomers settled down in different parts of Oshamambe Town, and began to engage with their neighborhoods and make new circles in the everyday lives. However, inter-place interactions are also constructed through the configuration of the BVP as the participants summoned to public service or mutual assistance in different locales. In this sense, the ontological condition of the BVP participants living in Oshamambe seems to be better understood by the theory of Massey: the BVP “constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (Massey 1994: 154).

## **CHAPTER FOUR FROM CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY TO BRANDING: MAKING A NEOLIBERAL LOCALITY**

This chapter will discuss how the town of Oshamambe struggled against the weakening economy in provincial Japan. I argue that the focus of revitalization practices has shifted from identity construction to local branding. That is, rather than pursuing internal solidarity or external recognition, local subjects were more enthusiastic about how some specialized local traits can authorize the quality and value of local commodities. In what follows, I will first discuss the decline of Oshamambe and local authorities' reaction to that. After that, I will review various practices of revitalization in the past two decades, in which a tendency of place branding and neoliberal agency gradually emerged.

Oshamambe used to be a town that served the daily demands of primary industry workers or self-employers and the employees of Japan National Railway (JNR). So, when the primary industry shrank and JNR ceased to exist, how did the population of the service industry maintain their business and livelihood? In this context, the townspeople of Oshamambe began to enter the emerging market of rural revitalization after the late 1980s, when the privatization of JNR was initialized. In other words, Oshamambe was a relative latecomer among the municipal practitioners of rural revitalization, whose history can be traced back to the late 1960s or early 1970s.

### **The Struggles of Oshamambe and Some Top-down Efforts**

Historically, the social economic condition of Oshamambe Town was deeply influenced by the transformation and construction of the transportation system in Hokkaido. Oshamambe was

officially identified on the title of the official website as “the strategic foothold of Southern Hokkaido’s transportation.” As we have seen in the previous chapter, the socio-economic trajectory of Oshamambe Town went up and down through its modern history due to its changing role in regional transportation. Oshamambe lost its prestige as “the JNR Town” (*kokutetsu no machi*) after JNR was dissolved and privatized in the late 1980s. JNR employees were dismissed or transferred in scores, and local railway lines in deficit were abolished. In the post-JNR era, Oshamambe’s main street (*chūō shōtengai* or *honchōdōri*) as an all-night entertainment district has become the past.

Except railway transportation, Oshamambe was a major juncture of Hokkaido’s highway system. The main highway going through Oshamambe was Japan National Route 5 (*kokudo gogō*), a conventional route from Hakodate to Sapporo via Niseko and Otaru. Downtown Oshamambe is located right by the junction of Route 5 and Japan National Route 37/230 that goes north along the coast. The convenient access and critical location of Oshamambe in the highway network benefited the local businesses of the downtown to some extent, and contributed to the emergence of drive-in restaurants and shops along the national route. In the late 1980s, the Hokkaido Regional Development Bureau proposed plans to reduce the traffic congestion of Route 5’s downtown section. After negotiation with local residents, the Bureau finally decided the solution: to build a bypass along the beach for Route 5 that detoured the downtown area. The bypass was completed after ten years and opened for use in 1999. According to the Bureau’s evaluation report, the bypass not only solved the traffic problem, but also improved local residents’ quality of life because of the reduction of noise, air pollution, and traffic (Hokkaido

Regional Development Bureau 2004). Some local shopkeepers, however, complained that their business has been affected by the “over-reduced” traffic.

A similar story happened again as the authorities took measures to further improve the efficiency of land transportation. In 1997, the major super highway of Hokkaido, Hokkaido Expressway, was extended to Oshamambe from Toya, which linked Oshamambe with the capital of Hokkaido, Sapporo. As this was the southern end of the expressway, cars from northern cities heading to the south had to change to the Japan national routes at Oshamambe, so hundreds of cars passed through the town every day. The busy transportation on the expressway fueled the local economy to a certain extent, but the traffic boom changed in a few years. In 2001, the Hokkaido Expressway was extended to Kunnui at the south end of Oshamambe Town. After that, the traffic flow on the Expressway bypassed downtown Oshamambe. In 2006, the southern end of the expressway was further extended to Yakumo, which further marginalized the role of Oshamambe Town in the land transportation.

When the pivotal role of Oshamambe Town shifted from railway to the highway system, new commercial forms emerged for a new market. After the privatization of JNR, local businesses sought new customers from the car travelers on national routes. Several huge restaurants were opened along National Route 5 around 1990, and formed the so-called “Street of Drive-ins” to the south of downtown Oshamambe. These restaurants were huge and their parking lots were spacious. They aimed to attract individual car travelers and package tour groups by offering “all you can eat” service with local specialties such as scallops and hairy crabs. As the expressway brought more traffic away from this section of Route 5, however, their customers and profits decreased rapidly. When I moved to Oshamambe in 2009, one drive-in restaurant invested in by a pan-Hokkaido tourism company was about to close. The retreat of that



investor from Oshamambe was a common but depressing topic of discussion among local residents. They generally believed that the retreat of external capital would worsen local employment, as their acquaintances were dismissed by the closed restaurant.

So, how did the local authorities reacted to economic decline and respond to the pressure from local residents? For decades, the town hall of Oshamambe continued to make efforts aiming to reverse the disadvantage of local developments, following national policies and trends. Those efforts can be roughly classified as three categories: first, invitation of external investment, whether public or private; second, the release or adaptive reuse of public properties; third, other administrative measures encouraged by the state such as municipal merger (*shichōson gappei*). In what follows, I will briefly review the stories of these developmental efforts, which can give readers a sketch of the inactiveness of the local authorities in Oshamambe.

#### *The Coming of the Hokkaido Shinkansen (1973-)*

Cherishing the past glory of “the JNR Town,” the local authorities never gave up the idea of revitalizing Oshamambe by new transportation construction. Among the various means of transportation, the *shinkansen* (high-speed railway) has long been considered the most feasible and profitable public investment that could be made in Oshamambe Town. The first time I visited Oshamambe, I saw a huge yellow billboard hanging by the tracks. On the billboard was written “We all strongly hope the *shinkansen* line will be extended to Sapporo as soon as possible”, with a green bullet train drawn. Later when I was living in the town, I realized that the coming of the *shinkansen* was made a local issue. The town mayor joined the lobbying group for the new *shinkansen* line. In the monthly Oshamambe Public Information, the town hall reported

their efforts toward the design and lobbying of Hokkaido's *shinkansen*. In 2013, the town hall established a new section called "Town-making and *Shinkansen*" (*machizukuri shinkansen ka*) and held a forum series to invite local residents (including TUS students) to talk about Oshamambe's future on the basis of *shinkansen* service.

The initial plan of the Hokkaido *Shinkansen* was made by the central government in 1973, when Oshamambe was expected to transform from a town of stream locomotives (SL) to a town of bullet trains (Hokkaido New 1973.10.3). However, the planning of new *shinkansen* lines was frozen until the late 1990s because of financial difficulties of the state. In the mid-2000s, the construction of the *shinkansen* line between Aomori City and Hakodate City was begun, and the issue of the coming of the *shinkansen* immediately became a hot topic again in Oshamambe. For residents of this former "railway town," a *shinkansen* station at Oshamambe seemed to be a very convincing promise of a reviving economy and future prosperity. Finally, the plan of extending the *shinkansen* line from the Hakodate area to Sapporo was inaugurated in 2013, and Shinkansen Oshamambe Station will be a major transfer station in this section. During the past ten years (2004-2013), the *shinkansen* continued to be depicted as a magic bullet for development in various local forums and conferences. Today, many townspeople are hopefully imagining the potential crowd of customers brought by the track construction that will benefit local businesses.

However, the high-speed railway will bring noise and vibration problems, and will also take more passengers away from Oshamambe station as soon as the Oshamambe-Sapporo section is completed. Most of the participants of the BVP were not so interested in the coming of the *shinkansen*. Some of them preferred the slow tempo of living, and worried that the rapid and convenient service of the *shinkansen* would change the lifestyle and landscape of Hokkaido in the wrong way. Moreover, they did not think that the *shinkansen* would help this town much,

because travelers still need reasons to stop by and visit this town, which would not be automatically created by the coming of bullet trains. The others felt that they were too old to enjoy the *shinkansen* service that would not start in ten years, but would actually be affected by the long construction from now on. The major dissident was Shira. He was the representative of the Oshamambe Dream Club (the ODC hereafter) on the town-making committee in 2009-2010. He complained after every meeting that the discussion of participants was largely oriented by the town hall's topic-setting, and eventually everyone was talking about how the town would be better with a *shinkansen*. "I don't hate the *shinkansen* and I won't fight against its construction," Shira said to me, "but these (committee members) have to understand that the most important thing is beyond the *shinkansen* plan. There is something we must do, with or without the *shinkansen*. So what is that? In my view, Bochibochi Village is the answer!"

### *Building a College Town (1987-)*

One uncommon demographic characteristic of Oshamambe Town is that the official number of its population rose in the spring and went down again in winter every year, because of the coming and leaving of the college students affiliated with the faculty of industrial science and technology of Tokyo University of Science<sup>54</sup> (TUS hereafter). The building of the Oshamambe campus was actually a result derived from a specific context in Japanese economic history. During the period of Japan's economic bubble (1986-1991), many private universities painstakingly use their inflated assets to expand campuses in order to raise enrollment. To do so, they often looked for cooperation with municipalities that were desperate to invite external

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<sup>54</sup> Tokyo University of Science was a private university that owned four other campuses in Tokyo City and the adjacent prefectures (two in Tokyo, one in Chiba, and one in Saitama).

investments to boost local prosperity. Meanwhile, these schools also had to create a distinction between the newly established departments and the old ones, since the majors their faculties could offer were often similar<sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, these private colleges had to offer not only different curricula but also distinctive styles and campus atmospheres to attract prospective students. Under such a specific circumstance, TUS accepted the offer of cheap land and other administrative assistance from Oshamambe Town, and decided to build a new campus featuring the great nature and the frontier spirit of Hokkaido.

The Oshamambe Campus of TUS was a one-year residential college for freshmen majoring in applied electronics, material science and technology, and biological science and technology. Right after their entrance ceremony held at the major Tokyo campus, these freshmen would be brought to the airport for the flight to Hokkaido (in their buzzword, “kidnapped”). In several hours, they would arrive at the New Chitose Airport of Hokkaido and then board buses bound for Oshamambe. As their buses finally passed the main street of Oshamambe in early evening, people who lived in the downtown area, having been informed by the Oshamambe Society of Commerce and Industry in advance, would stand along the two sides of the street and wave small flags to welcome the students. Meanwhile, the society also set off fireworks as part of the welcome ceremony. As soon as these students arrived at the Oshamambe campus, they would be treated with a feast featuring Hokkaido ingredients (namely, seafood, mutton, potatoes, and cheese) and cuisine to start their first-year college life there.

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<sup>55</sup> In the case of Tokyo University of Science, their undergraduate school has two faculties of science, two faculties of engineering, one faculty of science and technology, and one faculty of industrial science and technology. All of these majors looked quite similar, while being offered by four different campuses.

The campus was located on a grassy hill to the south of the BVP farm. It contained several buildings distributed on the flat top of the hill. All the buildings, built in modernist style, were less than three floors, and formed a beautiful scene against the mountains, ocean, and clear sky as the background. Including the new female students' dormitory completed in 2008, buildings of the Oshamambe campus won several awards with its sophisticated design and polished façade. The on-campus dormitories and the dining hall sufficed for students' daily necessities. Students could even take hot spring baths with a sea view in the dormitories. Both the cost and the quality of accommodation on campus were probably better than any hot spring hotels in town. Therefore, unlike college students in urban areas who might spend their time in different corners of the cities, students of Oshamambe campus usually stayed in school. The TUS students might go shopping at convenience stores, restaurants, and karaoke bars, but seldom entered the other parts of town except for specific activities: visits arranged by the college preceptors, festivals, and so on. Most of the time, therefore, the Oshamambe campus was more like a gated community.

Although the freshmen-only policy of Oshamambe Campus limited students' potential for becoming locally rooted, it was undeniable that the 300 college students who registered as local residents for one year did fuel the local economy to a certain extent, as long as they visited local bars and restaurants sometimes. Moreover, the TUS student did participate in local festivals and other events actively. In many cases, the shows and performances by the TUS students were an indispensable part of local events. In a recent interview, the retired chairperson of the town council, Harada Matsuzō, said that he still felt proud of his achievement of bringing in TUS to Oshamambe. He told the reporter that he started the plan of "the Invitation to TUS" (*rikadai yūchi*) in 1982, and the campus started to enroll students in 1987. During those five years, he continuously negotiated with TUS while integrating diverse local voices. In a "town of political

strife” (*seisō no machi*), Harada felt that he had done a pretty nice job (Hokkaido News 2011.3.25).

### *Administrative Mergers (2003-)*

Although it is common sense that communal homogeneity leads to conservatism and resistance to change, what prevented Oshamambe from smooth transformation was seemingly its lack of consensus on many public issues. For example, to form an administrative merger with others was one common move for declining municipalities to take a new strategic position against the impact of economic transformation. The town hall of Oshamambe also made that attempt twice in the mid-2000s<sup>56</sup>. In November of 2003, Oshamambe and four other municipal governments of Northern Oshima Region autonomously launched a joint conference to discuss the possibility of merging their towns into fewer units<sup>57</sup>. Mori and Sawara reached an agreement on their merger and left the conference in a week. Yakumo merged with a neighboring town named Kumaishi later. Yet, Oshamambe eventually left the conference without reaching any decision.

In June 2004, Oshamambe Town discussed their merger with Kuromatsunai, a town to its northwest. Although they hoped to merge in 2006, the negotiation failed after six months. According to Hakodate News, the main reason lay on which town would take the leadership. For example, how to name the new town and where to locate the future town hall were two major

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<sup>56</sup> Historically speaking, Oshamambe was following the national wave of so-called “Great Heisei merger” (*heisei daigappei*) at that time. From the late 1990s to the late 2000s, the state issued special municipal bonds to those newly merged municipalities to encourage autonomous municipal mergers. The total number of municipalities in Japan decreased by half in that period, although it did not reach the target number of 1000 set by the state.

<sup>57</sup> The four municipalities were Sawara, Mori, Yakumo, and Imakane.

issues under debate. In so doing, small communities will only become more dependent on the larger ones, and might lose their political autonomy to a great extent. Such changes strongly jeopardize the place identity and rights of local residents, even though the state claimed that merger is a rational way to lay the foundation of rural revitalization (Love 2007). In fact, the lack of internal consensus inside Oshamambe also caused the withdrawal from the negotiation. The report of Hokkaido News said that in a town meeting of Oshamambe, the opinions about the Northern Oshima mergers were divided into three groups: agree, disagree, and refusing any merger in the future. While some of the local gentry, entrepreneurs, and civil servants in Oshamambe endorsed the plan to merge the two townships, many proponents of the BVP disagreed with this administrative motion. In fact, according to Yama, finding an alternative to the “stupid policy” of merger was one of their motivations for working on the BVP. The merger plan was eventually dropped, since the supporters could not secure a majority in the vote. The failure of the merger meant that Oshamambe Town was ineligible for the special bond from the state that was only offered to the merged municipalities. In a neoliberal ideology of downsizing governmental expenditure, the state offered the financial incentive to encourage municipal mergers in provincial Japan in order to increase the efficiency of redistributing public resources, but ignored the ordinary context of everyday lives at the local level. Some native residents, such as Sun, regretted that indecision, and regarded the refusal to merge as a loss of developmental opportunities that exacerbated local decline.

*Adaptive Reuse of Public Resources (2005-)*

Today, most of the elementary schools in Oshamambe Town have been closed because of the serious decrease in enrolled students<sup>58</sup>. Today, only Oshamambe Elementary and Shizukari Elementary still enroll students. The school buildings and teachers' dormitories were also abandoned as the schools closed. As the ODC launched the BVP in 2005, they borrowed the dormitories of three closed elementary schools to be temporary residences for newcomers. The town hall also lent the ODC the abandoned tree seedling field as a public farm, the BVP farm. The tree seedling field was bought back by the town hall from the District Forestry Office at Yakumo in 1996, as an early investment for the future plan of the *shinkansen*. The land of the seedling field had remained idle until the ODC applied for its reuse. Overall, the ODC launched the BVP mostly with the dormitory houses and the land borrowed by the town hall and the assistance of local volunteers.

The town hall also lent the Nakanosawa elementary school (closed in 2010) to the nearby confectionary Seikado that sought expansion in 2011. In 2013, a newly founded social enterprise called Futaba's Forest (*Futaba No Mori*) opened a respirator factory on the abandoned campus of Futaba Elementary in the mountains. Both cases created employment opportunities for local residents, and thus boosted the local economy to some extent. Futaba's Forest claimed that they hired disabled persons as well. Overall, the socio-economic benefits of these reuse projects are still unclear, and have to be examined in the long run. The local policy of releasing idle properties to civic or private groups reflected the spirit of the new comprehensive national development plan, GD21, that emphasized creativity, flexibility, and cooperation of various

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<sup>58</sup> There were seven elementary schools in the territory of Oshamambe Town: Oshamambe, Shizukari, Kunnui, Nakanosawa, Kyoritsu, Futaba, and Warabitai. Only the elementary schools of Oshamambe and Shizukari are still open today, and the rest were all closed.



subjects (governments, corporations, civic groups, individuals, and so on) in the implementation of rural revitalization.

Overall, the local authorities have been following national policy (i.e. the CNDPs) of rural development as their major strategy for local revitalization in a conservative manner during the past four decades: lobbying for the high-speed railway construction (the second CNDP), attracting a college to settle in the town (the fourth CNDP), attempting municipal mergers for a special subsidy from the state (the GD21), and releasing idle properties for civic or private use (the GD21). Ideologically, these measures and actions were consistent with the paradigm shifts of the CNDPs from a centralized plan to concerted local autonomies. Substantially, the benefits they brought to the town were limited.

### **Raising Oshamambe's Hopes: from Constructing Identity to Branding**

Generally speaking, rural revitalization efforts of Oshamambe emerged in the late 1980s when local people began to feel the threat of JNR's departure. The great earthquake that struck Southern Hokkaido brought another wave of efforts that aimed to ease townspeople who had received a severe shock in the disaster. At this early stage, local identity and communal well-being as a political goal was still the focus. But after 2000, more direct engagement with and feedback from the economic sphere became the target. This is not only related to the further contracted economy throughout Japan in the 1990s and 2000s, the Lost Two Decades (*ushinawareta nijyūnen*), but also caused by the transforming regime of rural governance toward a neoliberal paradigm. Events held in this period simply appealed to the communal well-being, but more flexible, individual, and profit-oriented cases emerged. Before entering the discussion

of these cases of town making and place branding, I have to introduce briefly some important agents that led, guided, or supported these revitalization practices.

A major agent that represented the voice of the local private sector is the regional societies of commerce and industry (*shōkōkai*). Unlike the chambers of commerce and industry that usually concentrated in cities and consisted of larger corporations, societies of commerce and industry were mainly composed of small and medium enterprises (including self-employers) in the territory of a certain municipality<sup>59</sup>. In rural Japan, societies of commerce and industry often played a key role in local life. Due to the interest of its members such as local retailers and manufacturers, societies of commerce and industry were usually an active agent of local revitalization practices. Through the system of societies of commerce and industry, local businesses not only made their own profit individually, but also formed a concerted force to help each other survive economic downturns. Today, most of the Japanese municipalities have their own societies of commerce and industry, whose tasks are to unite local businesses for improving the regional economic environment and communal well-being in general.

The Oshamambe Society of Commerce and Industry (OSCI) was probably one of the most resourceful and active organizations in Oshamambe concerned with the issue of rural revitalization (*chiiki kasseika*). The owners of almost all the major shops and manufacturers in

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<sup>59</sup> In Japan, the chambers of commerce and industry (CCI) and the societies of commerce and industry (SCI) were two different systems: they had different legal bases, and were supervised by different offices of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). While the territories of CCIs and SCIs were mutually exclusive, connections and collaborations between the two systems existed. However, CCIs were vertically integrated into the state system of economic governance at a higher level, while SCIs usually functioned more at the local level. For a more detailed discussion on CCI, see Mouer and Kawanishi (2005, especially chapter 10).

Oshamambe Town, usually male, were their members. Like many other societies of commerce and industry, the OSCI has been constructed as a male-oriented, patrilineal organization. The sons of these members often joined the Youth Section of OSCI (*seinenbu*), and their wives and daughters the Female Section (*joseibu*). In local festivals and events held or supported by the OSCI, the Youth Section and Female Section usually sold freshly made food and snacks to visitors among local restaurants' stalls. The profits from their food stalls were usually used to cover the expense of events. The main duties of OSCI, as far as I observed, could be classified into three kinds of constant activities: first, organizing public relation (PR) activities for local businesses (whether in big cities or locally); second, holding entertainment and seasonal events and public services such as festivals, athletic meets, and others such as blood donation campaigns; third, promoting collective activities of research and development (R&D) such as commodity research groups or business and management lectures for members.

Recently, another local association, Oshamambe Tourism Association (OTA), appeared on the stage of local revitalization. The OTA had been affiliated with the OSCI for years, but, in my view, they started to take new measures of promotion tourism in Oshamambe in 2009. In that year, the OSCI received the national subsidy for improving employment that the town hall had applied for earlier. The OSCI used the money to hire two young employees for the OTA, whose first task was to promote local tourism with a new technology—the Internet. The employees first created a multi-author blog type of website with the help of NPO Hokkaido Club, which provided detailed information about tourist spots and local shops and restaurants<sup>60</sup>. The OTA

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<sup>60</sup> NPO Hokkaido Club was a Sapporo-based non-profit organization that mainly helped design and maintain websites for municipalities or other NPOs in Hokkaido without charge (or doing active maintenance for relatively low charge). Their goal was to help local practices of rural revitalization in Hokkaido by providing information technology support.

employees updated the blog frequently with posts and photos related to Oshamambe through their own interviews and investigations into the locality of this town. Except for official news and notices, posts of the blog were usually written in a style of personal travelogues that led the readers to take a virtual tour in various corners of Oshamambe.

The young OTA's actions changed the township in general gradually. Along with blogging new interpretations of local shops, restaurants, and scenes that seemed too familiar for local residents to feel interested, the OTA also opened an information center next to Oshamambe Station<sup>61</sup>. The center was located at the corner space borrowed from an old restaurant in front of the station, providing tourist information and selling local souvenirs. When I visited the information center one week after they opened, I saw the pair of comic cardboard cutouts (*kaohamekanban*) of the town mascot, Mr. Manbe, sitting in front of the center for visitors and fans to take funny pictures. That was the first time I felt that Oshamambe was developing a tourism industry in a sense that most Japanese tourists will be familiar with today. Although the readership of the OTA website remains unknown, its content did provide local residents an opportunity to "rediscover" Oshamambe (cf. Ivy 1995). Overall, the OSCI assembled various resources to create another active agent to help local revitalization from a different direction.

The active role the OTA played in many rural revitalization practices after 2009 signified the local progress in the strategies of place branding. Reviewing the history of local revitalization in Oshamambe, I argue that the 2000s was a period of transition from town making (*machizukuri*) to brand making (*burandozukuri*). That was concomitant with a wave of neoliberal reforms

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<sup>61</sup> As the OTA started to sell more local commodities and designed more souvenirs featuring Mr. Manbe, the space of the information center became too small. The OTA eventually reached an agreement with JR Hokkaido and moved the souvenir shop into a bigger room in the railway station a year later.

raised by the Koizumi Cabinet that further damaged the government finances of rural Japan. As neoliberal measures exacerbated rural socio-economic conditions, making money in a city-oriented economy became more and more like an objective “reality” (*genjitsu*) accepted by many of my informants. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, they thus believed in a new work ethic, which blended their own working experience with the doctrine of neoliberalism that had dominated governmental propaganda and the mainstream values of mass media since the 1980s. That is, the local entrepreneurs claimed, sticking to the conventional way of making local business without developing new commodities and skills equaled the ignorance of reality and thus was a problematic attitude of living.

### *From Identity to Brand I: Festivals and events*

#### The shrine-based festival

Inari Shrine was the major Shinto Shrine of the Oshamambe area, founded in the colonial period, when its shrine festival (*matsuri*) was held as an important local religious event<sup>62</sup>. The shrine was located west of the downtown, on the side of Mt. Bōzu, a very low ridge traversing the coastal area from north to south. In Oshamambe, the convention of celebrating the shrine

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<sup>62</sup> Settlements away from the downtown area might have their own local shrines and local festivals. For example, there was an Inari Shrine in Shizukari that was a common shrine in Japan where the god of harvest was worshiped. The Inari Shrine in Shizukari was the place where local fishermen preyed for good catches. The festival of the Inari Shrine was on July tenth when a special *mikoshi* parade was practiced, namely *Shizukari kaichūmisogi* (the sea bathing of the portable shrine). The parade is distinctive and fun to watch because its major route was through beach and shallows. So, the OTA also assigned this festival to be one of the must-sees in Oshamambe.

festival annually with a *mikoshi* parade (*mikoshitogyo*) began in the early twentieth century<sup>63</sup> (Oshamambe Town Historiography Office 1977: 172-181). Today, the shrine festival is mainly managed by a local organization for *mikoshi* preservation (*mikoshi hozonkai*) called *Osanokai*, and several people from the ODC are also its members<sup>64</sup>.

One essential experience of the shrine festival was that it demonstrated both the demarcation and unification of local neighborhoods. The first task on the day of the *mikoshi* parade was to prepare the *mikoshi*, and to ask the spirits worshipped in the shrine to transfer to the portable shrine (*mikoshi*). On the day of the *mikoshi* parade (the tenth of August), the members of *Osanokai* and children of the members of local neighborhood associations (*chōkai* or *chōnaikai*) gathered in front of the shrine in the morning<sup>65</sup>. Children lined up one after another to form several lines by their neighborhood associations. Children of the same neighborhood wore their neighborhood's own *hantens* with unique designs and colors like wearing uniforms (*Osanokai* members also had their own *hantens*). The chief priest then led everyone to hold the ritual of transferring the spirits to the *mikoshi*. After the ritual, *Osanokai* members carried the *mikoshi* through the red wooden gate called *torii*, walked down stairs, and loaded a truck with the *mikoshi* there. Their morning duty was completed there. Other trucks that carried the children and one mini *mikoshi* for them were also waiting there. The trucks then carried kids and the

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<sup>63</sup> A *mikoshi* was a portable shrine used in the parade. For being carried in the parade, *mikoshi* was usually fixed on a wooden structure that was composed of thick bars for the carriers to shoulder.

<sup>64</sup> About twenty years ago, according to Yama's remembrance, the chief priest of Inari Shrine invited a group of local people (mostly members of the OSCI) to help hold the annual shrine festival as a means of cheering up local people after an earthquake occurred in this region. Therefore, they established *Osanokai* to organize the shrine festival and gathered local resources to continue the traditional culture (*dentō bunka*) of the town.

<sup>65</sup> For the role of neighborhood associations in communal lives and shrine-based festivals, see Bestor (1988).

*mikoshis* to visit every neighborhood in the downtown that was guarded by the spirits in Iinari Shrine.

The daytime *mikoshi* parade began at two o'clock in the afternoon, starting from Oshamambe Elementary, going through the main street, and stopping in front of the post office. Male carriers shouldered the *mikoshi* and moved forward while yelling "Wassyoi! Wassyoi!" Since the coming of *mikoshi* represented the blessing from the spirits, excited people came out from their shops, standing by the roadside to welcome the *mikoshi*. Many of the crowd were the elderly, but young couples with kids also came back to the hometown for the festival. *Osanokai* members on the truck would throw rice cakes to the crowd as blessed gifts, and people around often scrambled for those.

The *Osanokai* also added a new element to the conventional repertoire of the Iinari Shrine festival: a night parade of the *mikoshi*. Unlike the daytime parade, the carriers of *mikoshi* were naked to the waist<sup>66</sup>, and they carried and displayed the portable shrine in a wilder style to make a carnivalesque atmosphere. Two more *mikoshis* would join the night parades: one carried by the town hall employees, and the other by the TUS students (both in their own *hantens*). The night parade started from the town hall, and stopped in front of the railway station, where members of the local *taiko* team (Japanese drums) and TUS folk dance club would perform on the stage there.

In existing literature, shrine festivals were often depicted as a process of social exclusion and inter-neighborhood competition (Robertson 1991; Bestor 1988: 245-5): strangers and outsiders were usually not allowed to be *mikoshi* carriers because they did not participate in neighborhood activities. However, the experience of the Iinari Shrine Festival was different. Due

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<sup>66</sup> Actually, that seemed to be an improvised decision of the carriers' leader in the 2009 festival in which I participated. In some other years, the carriers wore *hanten* as they did in the daytime parade.

to the shortage of young carriers, any related person who was introduced to Osanokai by a local resident would be able to participate in the parade. For example, a young settler Moto who carried the *mikoshi* of Inari Shrine told me that he had been interested in the shrine-based festival for a long time, but he had had no chance to be a carrier of any *mikoshi* when he was still living in Hakodate City. “I was born and raised in Hakodate City, where you have to keep a close relationship with the neighborhood association so you might have a chance to be a *mikoshi* carrier. Now my dream finally comes true.” Several younger carriers I met were also residents in Sapporo who returned to their hometown of Oshamambe for the festival.

Overall, the organizers of the night parade did not insist on traditional details, but aimed to create a feeling of collective effervescence. Furthermore, the festival reconfirmed the fact that the same spirits and shrine guarded these varied neighborhoods together. Therefore, it strengthened the collective identity of Oshamambe as one community.

### The evolution of hairy crabs

Hairy crabs were a major fishery population in the area of Uchiura Bay, but not the preferred catch for local fishermen before World War II. Due to the postwar scarcity of food, boiled crabs began to be made and sold as a cheap replacement for other seafood in Oshamambe. Later, the chef of a local maker of railway station lunch boxes (*ekiben*) invented the first crab rice (*kani meshi*) as a new lunch box. The crab rice box soon became a big hit among railway workers and passengers, and won the title of bestseller in a sale held in a Tokyo department store. Meanwhile, the taste of hairy crabs also became widely appreciated. Since then, other local restaurants started to make crab rice for incoming orders. In the 1970s, it became common to see customers waiting in a queue to purchase hairy crabs in downtown Oshamambe. As townspeople



realized the need for a local symbol for holding new events to mitigate or reverse the decline after the privatization of JNR, the hairy crab became the top choice.

From 1988 to 2007, the Town Board of Education (affiliated with the town hall) and other local groups held a sports event annually called “Hairy Crab Marathon Race in Oshamambe” (*Kegani Rōdrêsu in Oshamambe*) in late June. The Crab Marathon was a mini marathon with several racing distances (the longest was 10 kilometers), attracting about 1000 runners to participate each year. Divisions for children and wheelchairs were also included, so the participants were diverse, and the atmosphere in general was relaxed. The main section of the course was along the beach so the runners could enjoy the sea view of Uchiura Bay. Every participant could have a rice ball and a cup of crab soup at the end of the course, and the first six runners would get prizes of hairy crabs. After that, runners also had a chance to win local commodities (*meibutsu*) by lottery that the sponsors prepared. Local residents, including many of the ODC members, not only devoted themselves to the traffic control and the maintenance of the course, but also welcomed runners in the venue. These activities made this sport event more like a new kind of festival rather than just a race. Overall, the Crab Marathon successfully introduced the scene and products of Oshamambe to visitors. However, the final years of this event suffered from financial difficulties when the Koizumi cabinet sharply cut state subsidies to rural municipalities as part of the neoliberal reform. The Crab Marathon eventually terminated after 2007.

In 1999, the town hall and the OSCI initiated an annual event featuring Oshamambe’s hairy crabs as a consumable commodity. This new event is called Oshamambe Hairy Crab Festival (*kegani matsuri*), usually held over the weekend in late June or early July. Its venue is the newly built but seldom used Fureai Park by Oshamambe Elementary. On the big stage in the

park, various shows are performed by local youths as entertainment for visitors: students' brass bands, local rock bands, TUS's folk dancing club, the town mascots, and so on. The main show on the stage, however, is the crab eating contests in which participants have to eat as much crab meat as they can in one and a half minutes. Every year there have been one hundred participants registered for the contest, with the prize being winning more crabs. As the participants enter the stage, the master of ceremonies introduces them by their age and residential prefecture. When they find someone from far away such as Honshu Island, the emcee always raises his voice and repeats the place name, to invite the crowd to applaud. Indeed, one point of the festival is to examine the recognition from outside by demonstrating the best of the town, and thus confirm the existence of these people living on this land in the context of contemporary Japan.

The other focus of the festival, however, is less about the local identity and more about economic efficiency. During the festival weekend, the park is transformed into an open-air mall specializing in hairy crabs. The center of the venue in front of the main stage is a giant pot in which hundreds of hairy crabs are boiled for sale. Under the tents encircling the venue, local producers of seafood and crops sell their products for a fair, sometimes amazingly low, price. A special area for the "Summit of Crab Rice" is set up to the left of the stage, and all the crab rice makers in town sell their lunch boxes there. The east corner is the food court, consisting of food stalls. Local food shops, restaurants, and local groups (including OSCI's young and female members) wait to serve freshly made BBQ, fried noodles, and other local cuisines to customers. Like the eating contest, the festival itself is designed to pursue economic efficiency, as the event only lasts for two days. "Why do we spend resources for only two days of sale? Is that economically reasonable?" I asked Mura, a major sponsor of the Hairy Crab Festival. "Well, that's probably true. But it is worth it as long as Japanese people will think about Oshamambe

whenever they see hairy crabs.” That is, making Oshamambe a brand as a crab specialist is more valuable than the amount of two days of sales.

On the other hand, local residents find their own way of participating in this event. As I met an settler, Sudo, in front of the stage, he said to me with a drunk voice: “I always love the Crab Festival! This town is much more fun on these two days. I can lay down on the lawn, watching the young kids performing for me, and drink beer all day long.” Although most visitors from outside (usually other parts of Hokkaido) crowded to the venue mainly for the cheap hairy crabs with limited quantity, several local housewives thought differently. They told me that the best deal is the sea urchins sold by the fishery cooperative<sup>67</sup>. “A bag of sea urchins for only one thousand yen! Don’t you think that it’s a must buy?” “That’s right. I have bought some onions earlier from that old lady’s stall. Her vegetables were beautiful and cheap! Another good deal!” They happily discussed the best deals in the venue as they waited in line in front of the tent of Oshamambe Fishery Cooperative.

*From Identity to Brand II: The life and death of Mr. Manbe, the town mascot*

To celebrate Oshamambe’s 60th anniversary of town administration in 2003, the town hall invited public participation in a contest to design a cartoon “image character” that could represent the town. At that time, creating cartoonish characters (*yurukyara*) to represent localities and highlight regional images and specialties had been a nationwide trend among local municipalities. An Oshamambe High School student who created Mr. Manbe (*Manbe kun*) won

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<sup>67</sup> Sea urchins are an expensive but popular ingredient in Japan.

the second prize of the contest among the top three<sup>68</sup>. Mr. Mambe is a fictitious creature with a human appearance. Mr. Manbe has a red body and two claws (referring to one local specialty, hairy crabs) but two human legs. His cartoonish head features two scallop-like ears (another specialty of the town) and an iris-flower on his head to be his hair (iris flowers were the town flower, and a major plant of the flora in the Shizukari Bog area of Oshamambe). It is fair to say that the appearance of Mr. Manbe successfully reifies the self-image of Oshamambe Town.

Rather than designating one of the three characters as the official representative, the town hall put all three characters on its homepage, open for public use<sup>69</sup>. For several years, these designed mascots remained in the official archive without arousing any creative way of utilizing these symbols, which was probably the fate of most top-down community-making efforts in Japan. However, things started to change right before I moved to Oshamambe for field research.

In early 2009, the OTA adopted Mr. Manbe as the representative of the town to promote local products to urban consumers. To do so, they had a Mr. Manbe costume tailored for a human actor to wear in their public relation (PR) activities in major cities<sup>70</sup>. The costumed actor animated Mr. Manbe, and the PR activities provided him the best stage. After that, Mr. Manbe

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<sup>68</sup> The other two characters were “Scallop Crab” (*hotategani*) and “The Little Iris” (*Airisu chan*).

<sup>69</sup> According to the town hall’s website, the use of these “image characters” (*imējikyarakutā*) is free and legal only if the users formally agree in advance to use these characters in appropriate ways (the inappropriate ways of usage included for commercial advertisement, illegal interests, religious or political campaigns, and other unspecified but “unsuitable” purposes). Like other emblems created in former anniversary celebrations, the three “image characters” were only archived on the town’s official website after that.

<sup>70</sup> I found no official explanation for why Mr. Manbe was selected, but learned from an informant about the possible reasons: first, a wearable costume of Mr. Manbe, which looked like a weird doll or some kind of alien, was probably the easiest to make among the three characters. The appearance of Scallop Crab was a crab, and The Little Iris was a puffy butterfly or a cute baby with four wings. Second, Mr. Manbe represented the greatest number of local specialties in its designed appearance (iris, scallops, and crabs).

came to be known by some urbanite Japanese, after he began to travel with exhibitors and participate frequently in various events. Consequently, Mr. Manbe became more and more like a living (though fictitious) creature rather than remaining a static icon in the official archive.

As the PR activities with Mr. Manbe grew, the public image of Mr. Manbe evolved and became more and more human-like. The staff of the Tourism Association invented a personal profile of Mr. Manbe, as many other Japanese characters had. In the profile, Mr. Manbe was



Figure 4.1 The specifications of Mr. Mambe (from Mr. Manbe's official website)

defined as a male with A-type blood<sup>71</sup>. He loved *ramen* and hated carbon dioxide. His hobby was wandering around and taking a hot spring bath (*onsen*). Mr. Manbe did not get along with dogs, and so on. In addition, the body parts of Mr. Manbe were also defined in a fantasy fiction style: his crab-like abdominal muscles were built through daily workouts; his claws could cut the wicked; and so on (Figure 4.1). With these everyday occurrences and anecdotes created later, Mr. Manbe was fabricated as if he were a living person, distinctive and interesting. Many other municipalities with town characters had practiced such an image management construction. Making the persona has become a necessary step for the making of town characters in contemporary Japan.

Later, the character fabrication of Mr. Manbe was extended to the virtual world on a daily basis, as the use of social networking websites became an integral part of public relation activities. A young local entrepreneur, Sato Kenjiro, who was the relative of the owner of a local confectionery, Seikado, cooperated with the Tourism Association, and signed a brief agreement with the town hall for his promotion of Mr. Manbe via a Twitter account with the id of “Manbe kun”. Manbe kun’s most well-known characteristic was his “biting tongue” (*dokuzetsu*), after he opened “his” Twitter account to express “himself.” *Dokuzetsu*, a person with a spiteful tone, has been one of the stock characters in Japan’s contemporary popular culture. Since expressing one’s real intention in a roundabout way is usually considered an adequate and polite way of social interaction in Japan, a *dokuzetsu* role who criticizes or satirizes things straightforwardly is especially controversial.

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<sup>71</sup> Like horoscope information, blood type is another highly popular way of telling people’s personality and characters in contemporary Japan.

Such a distinct character created by Sato easily gathered both lovers and haters on the Internet in a short time. With a series of malicious tweets, Sato successfully made a distinct image of Manbe kun on the Internet. As a result, a huge group of fans of Manbe kun emerged among netizens. The followers of Manbe kun on Twitter went over 110,000 at peak, the most among all Japanese town characters that maintain Twitter accounts. With the high-rising celebrity of Manbe kun in the virtual world, Mr. Manbe became more and more influential in real life as well. In July of 2011, more than 500 fans of Mr. Manbe/Manbe kun came to Oshamambe to participate in his birthday party, held by the Tourism Association. Several local residents told me that they had not imagined that so many tourists would visit the town simply because of Mr. Manbe, and that they felt Oshamambe would become well-known by the efforts of Mr. Manbe on the Internet. “You know? Mr. Manbe has 0.1 million followers on Twitter! It’s 0.1 million, the most among all the town characters in Japan! [Oshamambe is] the number one! Can you believe that?” one informant said excitedly as I revisited Oshamambe one month after Mr. Manbe’s birthday party in 2011.

However, the controversial tweets of Manbe kun were a double-edged sword in a society where self-representation in public is meant to be maintained in a conservative and refrained manner. In fact, the malicious language of Manbe kun eventually jeopardized the popularity of Mr. Manbe, though in an unexpected way, and thus damaged the cooperation of Sato and the local authorities of Oshamambe. That is, Manbe kun’s vehement criticisms touched a sensitive political issue in the country, Japan’s responsibility for the Pacific War, and went up in flame (*enjō*) in the virtual world. On August 14, 2011, Sato Kenjiro posted several tweets with the account of Manbe kun: “Tomorrow is the anniversary of the end of World War II, so Manbe kun is studying the history of the War!” “3.1 million Japanese were victimized, but Japan also made

20 million foreign victims in Asia.” “I saw the documentary [of World War II] and found that Japan at that time was like [today’s] North Korea.” “In every respect, it was Japan’s aggression which started that [tragedy].” These remarks enraged lots of Japanese netizens, criticizing that Sato should not exploit a public character to make personal comments on national politics. Later, discussions on these comments turned into a “flame” war one night. Although part of Mr. Manbe’s fandom and left-wing netizens defended the “honest” comments and speech freedom of Manbe kun, criticisms of such “irresponsible” and “oversimplified” remarks on major Internet forums seemed to form a stronger voice in Japanese society.

After the incident, the town hall and tourism association of Oshamambe were flooded by thousands of web posts, emails, and phone calls making protests against Manbe kun’s “problematic remarks.” To handle the crisis, the town mayor urgently made a public apology for the disquiet caused by the Twitter posts. In the same statement, the town mayor Shirai Choichi claimed that the “problematic remarks” were not the official opinion of Oshamambe Town, but had been made by Sato’s company that was contracted with the town hall to take care of the public relation (PR) activities of Mr. Manbe. Shirai also announced that the town hall had indefinitely suspended the authorization to use Mr. Manbe in public relation activities that had been given to Sato’s company named M (*emu*). As a result, the official website and the Twitter account of Mr. Manbe managed by Sato Kenjiro were also suspended.

Because of this incident, the scheduled public relation (PR) activities of Mr. Manbe were either cancelled or withdrawn for several months. Not until the end of 2011 did the town hall allow Sato to restart the PR activities with Mr. Manbe’s Twitter account and costume again, with restricted rules of advance screening. Sato’s speech through the persona of Mr. Manbe had to be reviewed first by the chair of the Tourism Association before it went public. Soon, Sato could



not stand the restrained freedom of expression and announced that he would give up the right to play Mr. Manbe. The short “life” of Mr. Manbe died out after Sato quit the job and left it for a successor from the Tourism Association.

*Selling Oshamambe in Tokyo: The antenna restaurants and place branding*

Using the name of Oshamambe, in April of 2012 a Japanese-style bistro (*izakaya*) named Oshamambe Sakaba was opened by Sapporo Lion in Ginza, an upscale area of downtown Tokyo<sup>72</sup>. This kind of restaurant is usually understood as “the local bistro” (*gotōchi sakaba*), has grown into a new type of exotic restaurants in recent years. On the opening day, a ceremony for signing a cooperation agreement was held in the shop. The photo in which the representative of Sapporo Lion shook hand with the town mayor Shiroi, while being surrounded by the mascots of both sides, has become the main image used for the public relations of the restaurant.

Oshamambe Sakaba claims that local farms and businesses of Oshamambe Town supply the ingredients used in the bistro. Titles of Oshamambe’s seafood companies, producers’ associations (including vegetables and fishery), and tourism association are nicely written on wooden signboards hanging on the façade. The posters hung in the restaurant explicitly deliver several pieces of information: first, this restaurant is a joint venture of Sapporo Lion and Oshamambe Town; second, producers and officers of Oshamambe are supporting this restaurant by providing fresh ingredients and special recipes; third, the profit of the restaurant will partially

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<sup>72</sup> Sapporo Lion is a large food service corporation affiliated with Sapporo Beer, one of the biggest beer manufacturers in Japan. Originating from Sapporo City of Hokkaido, Sapporo Lion owns a nationwide network of chain restaurants, including both Japanese and exotic restaurants and bars, located in major cities. In fact, Sapporo Lion can be seen as the representative of Japan’s global food industry that utilized the exoticness of Hokkaido to invent a modern style of Japanese dining space mixing local, regional, and global elements and symbols with congruity.

benefit Oshamambe Town. The decoration of the bistro also incorporates symbols of Oshamambe, especially the well-known Mr. Manbe. Overall, Oshamambe Sakaba represents the image of Oshamambe in a way that is consistent with the limited knowledge Tokyo residents would have about this peripheral town.

According to Yama, however, Sapporo Lion actively approached the town hall of Oshamambe to propose the idea of Oshamambe Sakaba without asking for a subsidy from the local authorities. Apparently, they were confident about the business value of Oshamambe, which had been considered a brand that is helpful for their restaurant chain. Due to the fame of Oshamambe derived from its seafood, local cuisine, and town mascot Mr. Manbe, Sapporo Lion chose Oshamambe to be the second shop of its new series of local style restaurants. After duplicating numerous beer gardens throughout Japan, Sapporo Lion aimed to create a niche market in which consumers looked for not only an exotic image of rural Japan but also quality food endorsed by certain local brands. However, when the local production systems were unable to supply the full demand of the popular restaurants of Sapporo Lion, the corporation committed menu misrepresentation to maintain their business and profit. In November 2013, Sapporo Lion was involved in a series of “deceitful labeling” scandals exposed by mass media that related to the misrepresentation and false labeling of foods and ingredients their restaurants sold. In other words, the places of production of their ingredients were often different from what was noted on the menu, even though the localness of their ingredients was a key feature of the restaurants of Sapporo Lion<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> According to Sapporo Lion’s apologetic news release, 112 commodities sold in their 69 stores were found to be problematic, but Oshamambe Sakaba was not one of them.

### *Branding Hometown: The local efforts*

Individual local residents of Oshamambe were also creative sponsors in the making of a local brand in their various practices.

#### Country of Fireflies

As Moon (2002) noted, the restoration of glowworms was a popular practice of rural revitalization in Japan, since people believed that the existence of firefly populations equals a clean natural environment and water. There is also a firefly garden in Oshamambe called Country of Fireflies (*Hotaru no Sato*). The creator of Country of Fireflies in Oshamambe is a local resident named Izumi, who owns a photo studio in downtown Oshamambe. Izumi's ancestral place was in a remote settlement by the Western border of Oshamambe called Warabitai, where most residents live by their dairy farms. Izumi inherited from his father their family farm (about one hectare) in Warabitai. Izumi's motive for building the Country of Fireflies is that he would like to represent his childhood memory. He told me that when he was living on the farm of Warabitai as a kid, he always saw a lot of glowworms flying on summer nights. That kind of scene, according to him, was no longer seen anymore after he grew up because of the abuse of pesticides and the overgrowth of kuma bamboo grass (*kumazasa*, with which mountains in Southern Hokkaido are overgrown. The overgrowth of kuma bamboo grass is believed to be a factor that prevents young trees from growing up and the forests from expanding). Izumi considered the vanishing of fireflies to be a sign of environmental degradation, and decided to bring them back by restoring the ecological system as soon as he was capable of doing so.

Therefore, the nature of fireflies was taken as an organic indicator that led the direction for the ecological rebuilding of Izumi's childhood memory. In 1996, Izumi organized a group called

“the Oshamambe Firefly Association” with friends. Together, they turned his farm into an ecological garden that is livable for fireflies. They cut the wild bamboos, made ponds, and planted broadleaf trees (e.g. cherry, maples, and oaks) to create an environment for the population of fireflies to grow. After about two decades of efforts, Izumi successfully increased the population of fireflies to more than a thousand. Every summer, the garden Country of Fireflies is open to visitors to watch fireflies for free, and has become a tourist spot of Oshamambe Town. Izumi also arranges an ecological tour to Country of Fireflies for students of TUS and the newcomers of the BVP every August. “We planted the trees to clean the creek, and fireflies will live and grow by the forest and clean water” Izumi explained during a public tour to the firefly garden. He did not look for any direct economic repayment from his firefly garden, but wanted his beautiful homeland to be seen and recognized by visitors from outside.

### Food masters

Some other local businesses had a different philosophy: as local shops, we should focus on our professional skills and develop quality commodities, and thus we can make profit even though the town has been declining. They consciously emphasized their connection to Oshamambe by the ingredients they used. The chef of one local Chinese restaurant, Big Tiger, designed a series of dishes made with local ingredients such as hairy crabs and scallops. As the only Chinese restaurant in the downtown, Big Tiger had been popular among local people but became even more so when the chef invented his crabmeat fried rice, which won a great reputation locally. Later, he wrapped a whole scallop and lots of crabmeat in a shumai to make it a representation of Oshamambe. The cuisine and the following creative dishes brought him fame at a national or even transnational level as he began to be interviewed by variety shows on television. Whenever and wherever we met, he was always busy introducing his recent

achievements with great enthusiasm: the new dishes invented, the amazing sales of Oshamambe shumai in a Tokyo department store, the orders for his new crab cuisine rushing in from all over the country, and so on.

The owner of a local meat shop, Sun Meat, Sun, working with his wife in his small shop for several decades, was the only survivor in the severe competition with five other meat shops in Oshamambe. In addition to fresh meat, he made nice packages of seasoned lamb meat mixed with a local ingredient, victory onions, for making a Hokkaido-style barbecue named Oshamambe *Jingisukan*. He also created well-seasoned intestine packages for barbecue with three different flavors. The owner first won local customers' hearts and wallets, and became widely famous through the reports of mass media more than a decade ago. Sun Meat, like Big Tiger, actively joined the promotion campaigns of Oshamambe products in regional food exhibitions of big cities or by mail order. Both of them were the representatives of successful firms in Oshamambe in the sense that they were able to sell their products to urban markets.

Recently, a restaurant featuring local ingredients and specialties from Oshamambe opened in the most expensive region of downtown Tokyo, Ginza. Sun's BBQ and Big Tiger's shumai have been served to allegedly picky customers there on a daily basis. Both owners were very proud of the fact that their specialties were a hit with city-dwelling foodies, and that their dishes could be served in a place like Ginza. They were very concentrated on their profession, and they were always studying new commodities wherever they were. So they both believed that local businesses can still prosper as long as they work hard enough to enter a bigger market.

#### The common narrative of success

The story of a local confectionary, Seikado, is probably the one among other businesses in Oshamambe that is closest to the archetypal narrative of a rural business venture that has been

reproduced repeatedly as various cultural forms in contemporary Japan: a young man went back to his depopulated hometown from Sapporo to work for his relative's confectionary that had a great amount of debts. As an amateur to confectionary work, he accumulated knowledge by self-study and consulting professionals, and developed his own skills through trial and error. He devoted himself to research on a new sweet night and day. Finally, after numerous failures and ten years of study, he found the right way to make a new cheese cookie with a unique texture from Hokkaido's milk. With his unique sense of marketing, the new commodity soon became a big hit in urban department stores, Hokkaido souvenir shops, and mail order catalogues. When I visited Oshamambe in 2009, Seikado had become one of the most successful local manufacturers.

In the same year, the young entrepreneur, Sato, launched a new marketing project to redesign the package of an old commodity of Seikado, their milky pudding. This time, he adopted a different strategy by cooperating with famous illustrator Nishimata Aoi, who had experience with place branding. In 2008, Nishimata had designed a beautiful female doll in a manga style for the new package of the Akitakomachi rice produced by peasants in Ugo (in Akita Prefecture). The creative and subcultural design of packaging saved declining sales of Akitakomachi rice, and has been considered as one effective way to save the downturn of domestic consumption of Japanese rice hereafter. This time, Nishimata designed two female manga characters for Seikado's pudding<sup>74</sup>. As part of the marketing, Seikado publicly invited consumers to name these two girls and attracted the attention of a great group of consumers. This successful campaign contributed to a new peak of Seikado's total sales.

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<sup>74</sup> These marketing strategies are consistent with the concept of moe, a subculture of those fascinated by fictional (usually female) and cute characters from manga, animation, or video games in Japan.



Figure 4.2 The mascot of Seikado's cookies, "The Heart of Oshamambe" (*Oshamambe no kokoro*), from the official website.

A noteworthy point of the Seikado story is that it appealed to the place brand of Hokkaido that had been well recognized by Japanese in general, but that seldom emphasized Oshamambe. Indeed, Seikado's cookies might not be "local" in a strict sense: the ingredients used for the cookies, such as milk, butter, and flour are all produced in other towns of Hokkaido, and their target market has never been people in Oshamambe. Still, many residents of Oshamambe praised the victory of the locally made cookies, more or less, with a proud look, and sometimes bought the cookies as a local souvenir for gifting. By the same token, Seikado was expected to be proud of the locality (*jimoto*) where it is located. The young entrepreneur in Seikado, Sato, was once asked in an interview if he weakened the role of his hometown through the minimalist design of the cookie's packaging, and he answered with his philosophy of marketing:

*Printing "Oshamambe's Confection" on the wrapping paper alone can't promote the locality to the public. At first, we have to make the commodity look refined (oshare) and valuable enough to be used for gifting. We want you to notice that this*

*is made in Oshamambe after you take it in your hands. We thematized a cow in the illustration of the box, on which we wrote “The Heart of Oshamambe,” which was an effort to make you imagine a town of dairy farming (rakunō no machi). This is sent from Oshamambe. That’s what we insist on. (Hokkaido Shinbun 2011.1.16, my translation).*

The illustration of “The Heart of Oshamambe” represents a pastoral image of dairy farming in an artistic way: peaceful, free, and relaxed. However, the feeling was incongruous with one dark side of Oshamambe that I experienced in the dairy farms for mass production of milk: cows were tied to the narrow enclosures, sometimes kicked or beaten, and for most of the time their freedom was restricted in the cowhouses that were often dark and muggy. In the dairy farm I worked for, I could not even find adult cows that trusted human beings: as someone tried to touch one of the cows, she always dodged about. In this respect, the illustration selectively used local elements, and delivered a sublime image of Oshamambe to the customers. More importantly, Seikado recognized its ethical bond with Oshamambe and their social responsibility to “repay the kindness” (*ongaeshi*) of the local community in some way<sup>75</sup>. According to the interview above, they have tried to engage in another form of local branding: to market the place with local cultural commodities (Rausch 2008a, 2008b). Rather than inventing or reinventing a seemingly traditional or conventional cultural form, however, these local shops produced commodities forged by the principle of market competition and made them new culturally representative things of Oshamambe.

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<sup>75</sup> After moving the factory into the abandoned elementary school building borrowed from the town hall, the president of Seikado said in an interview: “we will figure out a way to repay the kindness of this town that has lent us such a nice place” (Hokkaido Shinbun 2013.1.19, my translation).



## Conclusion

In this respect, the capitalist production of locality in Oshamambe is similar to what John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2009) called *Locality, Inc.* in their book *Ethnicity, Inc.* What makes the case of Oshamambe different from their conception of *Ethnicity, Inc.* is that Oshamambean entrepreneurs do not enrich themselves by exploiting biological traits that are seemingly shared by the local residents or the land and landscape that are sacred for them. Rather, what most of them did is to symbolize local things that can facilitate the marketing of their commodities. An exception to these seemingly neutral commodities is Sun's victory onion barbeque. A major recipe of Sun's meat shop is BBQ mutton mixed with a special wild plant called "victory onion" (or Alpine leek), known as *gyōja niniku* in Japanese. Victory onions take several years to grow into the proper size for eating. Although this wild edible plant can be grown in the field, the cultivated ones do not have the unique, strong smell of the wild ones. Therefore, victory onions are often labeled as a legendary ingredient (*maboroshi no sansai*) in Japan today, and have become a competitive product in the domestic market of local specialties. To maintain the stable production of their BBQ, Sun hires three experienced persons to collect wild victory onions. Since wild victory onions grow slowly, their production is limited compared with other wild edible plants. Sun told me in a chat that the quantity of collectible victory onions has got lower and lower in recent years. The collectors hired by Sun have to go even deeper into the mountains of Oshamambe to find enough victory onions for the meat shop. However, Sun did not seem to realize the damage of such a business activity to the local environment and the

nature of *satoyama* (literally neighborhood mountains) when he was talking with me about his barbeque product<sup>76</sup>.

In this chapter, I have made a broad review of the struggles for development in Oshamambe and the various practices of revitalization. Unlike early events that aimed to summon the identity and emotion toward the town, lately the local subjects of revitalization have become more and more concerned with the place branding of Oshamambe at different levels. Most of them were profit-oriented, but some old middle-class people such as Izumi simply did it for a personal ideal. In the following chapter, I will discuss the practice of the BVP in details, which proposed a different way of producing localities.

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<sup>76</sup> Actually, Sun is not the only local person who seemed to be insensitive to the environmental issue of commodifying victory onion. The BVP exponents also talk about the possibility of making the collection of local wild edible plants (*sansai*) a new business of the BVP. Minami, a BVP supporter and a long-term lodger of Yama's guesthouse, once took them and me to gather victory onions in a *satoyama* for a business sample to a potential customer, an Okinawa-based restaurant. After the collection attempt, people realized that the local vegetation of victory onions cannot sustain such a business; otherwise the natural resources of *satoyama* will be exhausted. Although they can still collect and sell other kinds of local *sansai*, victory onions are the one kind among others that could be competitive enough in the saturated market of *sansai* business.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE FORMATION OF “RHIZOMATOUS” COMMUNITY: RECIPROCITY, VOLUNTARISM, AND INDIVIDUALITY**

This chapter examines the “rhizomatous” nature of the BVP community (the community created by the Bochibochi Village Project), and analyzes the essential social forms by which the locality and belongingness of this community are produced. In what follows, I demonstrate how the implementation of the BVP has created what I will term a rhizomatous community, and how such community has fashioned its unique locality in three essential forms: reciprocity, volunteerism, and individuality. For that purpose, I will respond to the following questions: First, the origin of migrant motive—in what way did the settlers decide to relocate themselves in Oshamambe, and cultivate on the BVP farm? Then, through what kind of socio-cultural process did these newcomers settle themselves in the neighborhoods of Oshamambe? And most important of all, how did they transform themselves into constitutive parts of the local community? That is, how was their sense of belongingness established and maintained? Finally, after discussing how the BVP proponents innovated and collaborated on a rhizomatous community in Oshamambe, I suggest its theoretical significance for traditional community researchers.

Oshamambe is best understood as an official community (Oshamambe Town) that spatially contains many smaller communities, namely, neighborhoods. As a township, Oshamambe is similar to what Benedict Anderson calls imagined communities with legal boundaries constructed by the state through administrative work by the local authorities. In recent years, the content of the imagined community of Oshamambe Town has been enriched through characterization of its history and geography via the branding practices of local businesses. Within the territory of Oshamambe Town, however, there are distinctive neighborhoods such as

fishing villages, dairy farming areas, and a business-oriented downtown. While people of these neighborhoods consider themselves Oshamambean, each neighborhood may have its own way of living in terms of diction, landscape, and livelihood.

The implementation of the BVP has produced an intermediate community that discursively falls between the greater imagined community and little actual communities (Anderson 1991; Redfield 1956). The former refers to political communities that are socially constructed, such as nations, in which the community members who share one collective identity do not necessarily know each other in person, nor interact with each other on a face-to-face basis. The latter is defined as small-scale, cohesive, and self-reliant, in which community members know and frequently interact with each other. The BVP, as a migration project, introduces urbanite settlers to local neighborhoods, and thus forms an emerging community that goes beyond the social and symbolic boundaries between existing neighborhoods. This community is characterized by its social resilience, as it is assembled with reusable assets of the township, natural resources, voluntary residents, and settlers pursuing self-fulfillment. Moreover, the making of the BVP community does not have a clear hierarchy or centralized structure. Finally, its scope and influence expand as constitutive members settle in and make new connections to different local neighborhoods with high mobility and individuality. I found that the nature of the BVP community is different from typical understandings of community in sociology, so I have created a new theoretical category to identify its features that I call a rhizomatous community (to be explained below).

The definition of community has been a classic dispute in social sciences, especially in sociology. In fact, the history of community theory is the history of updating the definition of community (Blackshaw 2010; Day 2006; Delanty 2010). From place-bounded community

(*Gemeinschaft*) to communication community (e.g. virtual neighborhood), the definition of community in sociology has evolved along with the great transformations of society in the past two centuries. In the globalized world where “spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale are not always isomorphic,” the relationships between place, locality, and community have become much more complicated than they used to be (Appadurai 1996: 179; see also Massey 1994). Yet, the diversification of communal practices reveals the fact that community as a fundamental source of belongingness remains indispensable for ordinary people, which justifies the importance of studying community today.

To facilitate the following analysis of local community in a global age, I adopt the definition of Arjun Appadurai (1996: 178-189), who takes neighborhood as the actual form of a situated community, and locality as a structure of feeling shared by the neighborhood. In the model of Appadurai, locality is a phenomenological quality collectively produced by the local subjects dwelling in the neighborhood on a daily basis. The local subjectivity is produced through the process of localization, such as gardening or building houses. Here, I suggest that localization is the process in which settlers get involved with the everydayness of the place, and thus feel that they are rooted in the place. Gardening and farming are elementary practices of installing local subjects, namely, the technology of localization (Appadurai 1996; Williams 1988: 38).

Bochibochi Village (the BVP) is a community that, unlike the village community in the premodern era, exists nowhere. It does not have a specific location or physical setting. It is an implemented project, which means that Bochibochi Village is one of practice and process. The “villagers” of Bochibochi Village can be summoned up for communal affairs from local neighborhoods where they dwell. The villagers are distinguishable from other native residents

who are not engaged in the BVP, but the former are not excluded by the local neighborhoods. I analogize the existence and development of Bochibochi Village to a rhizomatous system, by which I refer to a collective way of living in which communal sentiment and belongingness emerge from the mutual interactions among its members and other heterogeneous elements of its environment. In this respect, the BVP community can also be seen as a heterogeneous network composed of human and nonhuman beings.

The concept of “rhizomatous community” that I coined to refer to the emerging social order of the BVP that is related to but not limited by the social order of Oshamambe Town is an appropriation of the famous metaphor made by Deleuze and Guattari in their “A Thousand Plateaus.” In their book, they use rhizome to identify with their nomad thinking and writing that goes beyond the tree system of Western philosophy. I utilize this metaphor for two reasons:

The first reason is straightforward. I applied the metaphor of rhizome for utilizing its images of decentering, continuously growing, and boundary crossing that has been fully interpreted by Deleuze and Guattari. The second reason to do so is that the metaphoric contrast between tree and rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* can also be applied to the comparison between the traditional and contemporary community structures in Japan. The structure of traditional communities is as hierarchical as the tree system, consisting of ie families, villages, feudal estates, and so on (Torigoe 1993). Until today, certain part of rural Japan is still famous of its strong local solidarity, tight communal organization, and even xenophobia. The case of the BVP in Oshamambe, however, represents a relatively open and nomad attitude and practice toward communal life. Therefore, I think the metaphor of rhizome is proper for describing this newly emerging discursive community.

Then, what composes a rhizomatous community? Here I generalize two forms of sociality to illustrate the elements and nature of this type of community, namely, rhizome and tuber. By rhizome I refer to both social relations and human-nature relationships constructed by actors who develop new connections to, or have feelings for, local residents and surroundings. In the case of the BVP, for instance, when the settlers become emotionally attached to people, animals, or the environment of their neighborhoods, they become “rooted” in the place while enriching the locality. When they establish communications with human or nonhuman actors outside of their own neighborhoods through individual practices or communal arrangement, they send out “shoots” that expand the scope of the rhizomatous community of the BVP. Either way, they develop personal belongingness.

By tuber I refer to a constitutional element of the rhizomatous community that is the “meeting places” located in the region of Oshamambe. I use the word “tuber” to follow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s botanic metaphor of rhizome that I have adopted here (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Each tuber can be understood as a nexus of interactions and reciprocal exchanges that can be located at specific sites within local neighborhoods where locality is performed (*genba*; see Condry 2006: 5-6). The tubers are not necessarily public space in a conventional sense, but places where native residents, newcomers, and natural elements can encounter and interact with each other. During their daily interactions, members become more attached to the local surroundings<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> The tuber I define here might look similar to what Ray Oldenburg (1999, 2002) called the great good places or the third place at the first sight, which refer to neutral spaces separated from home and the workplace. However, Oldenburg’s analysis focuses on the

In the following paragraphs, I analyze ethnographic materials about several “tubers” of the BVP community where processes of localization unfold. First, I provide an ethnographic sketch of Shaman, the guesthouse of the Yamas that is the most important tuber of the BVP community. After that, I discuss three local farms as tubers, and how they operate on the basis of three social forms respectively: reciprocity, voluntarism, and individuality. Finally, I discuss the feature of the rhizomatous community, and how it contributes to the theories of community.

### **One Day in Yama’s Guesthouse**

The following paragraphs introduce the “mother tuber” of the BVP community: the Yamas’ guesthouse, Shaman. Mr. Yama is formally the vice-chairperson of the board of trustees of the ODC (Oshamambe Dream Club), and the opinion leader of the BVP. The implementation the BVP not only relies on the institutional efforts made by its formal organization (the ODC), but also depends heavily on the informal networks of local social ties. For example, the ODC introduced the institution of the supporter group (*ōendan*, meaning cheerleaders in sports games) that has offered essential help for the newcomers to settle down in local neighborhoods. In practice, however, this group consisting of local residents and visitors to Oshamambe was mainly organized by Mr. Yama and other proponents via their own personal networks to persuade their acquaintances to be the supporters and to provide necessary assistance. Today, few supporters still wear the green badge every day, but many people in town are still willing to offer assistance to the newcomers of the BVP voluntarily.

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traditional public space concentrating in the city or town center such as cafés, pubs, taverns, hair salons, etc.



But why is Mr. Yama able to play such a crucial role in creating a rhizomatous community? The answer partly lies in his family business: a lodging guesthouse (*minshuku*). Mr. Yama and his wife Sayoko were in their late fifties when I met them. They opened a guesthouse “The Home of Shaman” (Shaman hereafter), which is named after Oshamambe, on the main street in the downtown area. The building of Shaman is an old regular, flat, colonial two-story Japanese house that usually serves, at a low price, regular travelers, and migrant and seasonal workers who visit the town to work. Because of this lodging business, the Yamas have been in contact with people from various parts of Japan on a regular basis, and established close friendships with long-term lodgers who stay in town to work. Therefore, during the past decade Mr. Yama has invited a variety of acquaintances within and outside of the local region to join the BVP, whether as settlers or supporters. In the respect of the rhizomatous community of the BVP, Shaman plays the role as the mother tuber from which the younger rhizomes and tubers grow.

Indeed, the Yamas and Shaman are pivotal to the operation of the BVP. When I asked my informants “why did you come here?”, I got various answers based on their individual preferences and life plans<sup>78</sup>. However, almost every participant in the BVP agreed that the existence of the Yamas was the key factor that made them decide to move to an unfamiliar, remote place<sup>79</sup>. For example, Koba said:

*The first time I came here by train, Yama and Shira were waiting for me outside of the railway station. As soon as I saw them, I kind of felt like they were someone whom I had known for a long time. That feeling got only stronger as we continued*

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<sup>78</sup> The representative answers include: “It is cheaper to live in the countryside, which is important for pensioners,” “Hokkaido is my *furusato* (place of origin), and I want to come back and make contribution to the land,” “Because I love the great nature of Hokkaido!” “Well, I like fishing and gardening, and I can do both here,” “I prefer the weather here, cooler but not snowy” etc.

<sup>79</sup> Mrs. Yama was often mentioned as an indispensable supplement to Mr. Yama before she passed away in 2013.

*chatting in Shaman, discussing the ideal lifestyle and all kinds of things that had happened here. Sayoko and other people I met there have all been very nice to me. 'Yes, we can be good friends, and I should move here,' I thought at that moment.*

As a major leader of the BVP, Mr. Yama has transformed Shaman into a place where the *rite of passage* for the newcomers happens (Appadurai 1996). All the requests regarding the BVP, either via phone, the Internet, or visits in person, are transferred to Mr. Yama. The Yamas are the reception of the BVP, especially for first-time visitors. Many participants of the BVP mentioned their initial experience of visiting Shaman during the interview, and how that experience influenced their decision to start new lives in Oshamambe. Through their social network and local knowledge, the Yamas could answer questions the settlers asked about this region, including history and nature, or find proper persons or resources to solve their problems. They can be seen as the outstanding experts of locality studies (*jimotogaku*) that Love (2013) discussed. Although the Yamas are so familiar with the region of Oshamambe, later after entering the field I was surprised to learn that they are not native residents there, but migrants from an urban area more than twenty years ago.

If that is the case, then how did the Yamas become native? That is, borrowing the terminology of Appadurai (1996), what was the sociocultural process that transformed them into “local subjects?” “Well, it just happened to us naturally as we worked and lived in town,”

Sayoko said:

*We took over the business of the liquor store from the father of Mr. Oya, who was getting too old to run the business. So, we have become part of the main street shopping district since then. Plus, we became very good friends with the young Oyas, who were our first connection here. Since then, we came to know more people who live in our neighborhood through all kinds of communal events: festivals, activities held by the neighborhood association, connections made via the PTA and schools, and so on.*

On another occasion, Mr. Yama added:

*The business of the liquor shop required us to contact local dwellers on a daily basis. We took orders, including beers and sake, from every corner of this town, and I had to deliver the orders by myself. I carried heavy containers of alcohol every day, either to local institutes where events were held or to native residences. That gave me a chance to make local connections while I built up my body for physical labor, which are both required in living a rural lifestyle.*

Keeping a local shop, in the case of the Yamas, is a type of technology of localization that Appadurai proposed. In order to do trade and delivery for the liquor business, the Yamas “naturally” took the concomitant communal responsibilities and participated in public affairs<sup>80</sup>. Their active participation in local affairs not only converted their mentality and bodies, but also showed solidarity with native residents in the community (cf. Knight 2003).

Although Mr. Yama is one of the shopkeepers of the main street shopping district (*shōtengai*), his class location is a little ambiguous if compared with other trustees of the ODC. Why so? The explanation has to start from the way in which the Yamas started the business of Shaman. As the local economy deteriorated rapidly after the earthquake of Southern Hokkaido in 1993, the Yamas experienced more and more difficulties maintaining the business of their liquor store. Before the millennium came, the Yamas were forced to close the store in order to clear their debt. Koizumi, who owns a photo studio across the street from the liquor store, has rented the Yamas the historic house behind his studio store with a rent that was much lower than the market value. Another neighbor suggested the Yamas open a guesthouse to serve the contract workers and travelers who cannot afford the hot spring hotels. These neighbors were willing to help, according to them, only because they wanted this decent family to continue to be an essential part of their neighborhood. With the assistance from these local connections, the Yamas

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<sup>80</sup> For instance, Mr. Yama has continuously participated in many local associations managing communal or regional affairs, including the main street shopping district association, the shrine festival committee, voluntary firefighters, the Oshamambe Society of Commerce and Industry (OSCI), the ODC, and so on.

were able to re-stabilize their livelihood and lead a humble life in Oshamambe. Even today, Mr. Yama is still paying the same amount of rent for the right to use the house for living and business (the guesthouse). In other words, Shaman as a third place is rooted in the locality of this downtown neighborhood in origin.

The guesthouse Shaman is a pivot of the heterogeneous network of the BVP in many senses. Spatially, the guesthouse is located in the downtown area of Oshamambe, adjacent to a spacious parking lot. Therefore, many BVP members choose Shaman as their first stop in the trip to downtown for other businesses. Materially, Shaman is a hub for circulating and redistributing local resources. The Yamas not only receive and give out gifts frequently, but also share the gifts with the BVP members actively. Personally, the female owner Sayoko served the visitors with coffee, drinks, snacks, and even meals in the dining room (*shokudō*) of Shaman in the afternoon teatime, and she did so in a manner close to the character of female caretaker of a Japanese family. Such a service has made Shaman a “home away from home,” which is especially needed for singles or those who have been separated from their families. Socially, Shaman is one of the best places to meet local people and travelers, and to learn about local knowledge, especially during the afternoon teatime. The dining room of Shaman is what Ray Oldenburg dubbed “the third place,” separated from home and the workplace. In general, the third place is a kind of meeting place where people can spend time and relax (Oldenburg 1999; 2002). Most importantly, this couple devoted themselves to the project as if the BVP were another family business.

During my fieldwork in Oshamambe, Shaman was the only tuber where the making and extension of social connections could be easily accessed and witnessed, and it is certainly an essential one. In this section, I present an ethnographic illustration of sociality in Shaman, which elucidates the social forms that are constitutive of the BVP community. In what follows, I will

describe several snapshot scenes in Shaman as examples of these constitutive forms. These scenes actually did not happen all in one day, but here I patch them together into a narrative in order to present the ideal type of tuber.

*Early one morning, Mr. Muro, a retired fisherman, stepped into the kitchen of Shaman with a big, white Styrofoam box in his hands. He had just finished his voluntary work on his friend's fishing boat at the port of Asahihama, and the thing in this box was part of his reward. He took out a big, beautiful salmon from the shaved ice in the box, and borrowed a kitchen knife and cutting board to fillet the salmon. Muro quickly washed, scaled, and cleaned the fish. He separated the salmon roe before filleting the fish into pieces. During his operation, Muro kept talking about his recommended ways of tasting the different parts of this salmon.*

*Mr. Muro did not bring the Yamas seafood every day, but he did so as long as he got more than the quantity his big family could consume. "Why do you always bring seafood to Shaman, rather than to other friends?" I asked him once. "Well, my friends in Asahihama are fishermen as well, so they have enough seafood to eat. The Yamas are decent people, and I like them a lot. So, I love to share the extra with them. And I know that they won't waste what I give them, but share it with other people [of the BVP]. To people who come a long way to live in our small town, you want them to taste the flavor from our sea here."*

*Later in the morning, Yama drove his old jeep to distribute the fish to some BVP members with Sayoko and me. During the trip, the Yamas were still discussing the list of people who should receive the salmon. We first arrived at the residence of Nanao, a communist town councilperson of Oshamambe. Both Mr. and Mrs. Nanao were in their seventies. "Mrs. Nanao gave us a variety of pickled vegetables she made last week. Remember the pickled radish I gave*

*to you and others? It's tasty, isn't it? That's what we got from Mrs. Nanao. So we should bring them something nice in return," Sayoko explained to me patiently as if she were teaching a child. Mrs. Nanao looked surprised at the beauty of the salmon fillet and roe. She insisted that we should wait here for her, and then returned to the house. When she came back again, she had a big container in her hands. "Here is some of the herring dish that I just made. Taste it, and return the container sometime."*

Muro was working for a pelagic fishery company, and he retired in his fifties. To keep his rhythm of life, he voluntarily helps other fishermen in his neighborhood to discharge caught fishes every morning. The fishermen who receive his assistance always insist on sharing a few of the catch with him as in return. In addition, Muro sometimes gets the fish that cannot be commodified—for example, female crabs that are against the law to catch, or seafood with significant blemishes. According to Muro, these gifts he receives from his friends imply the moral obligation of repaying him, namely, *giri* in Japanese (Clammer 1997; Doi 1986).

On a trip to the BVP farm with Mr. Muro, I did witness how his voluntary sharing got rewarded. One day, Mr. Muro went to the BVP farm with Shira, to pick some *shiso* leaves from Shira's plot. When we arrived at the Farm, several villagers of the BVP happened to be working their plots. When we approached them, Mr. Muro immediately became a hot target. Everybody he met had appreciated the gift of fresh seafood from him, and wanted to give him some self-grown vegetables in return. Mr. Muro ended up going home with a lot of organic vegetables. On the way home, he said to me with a big smile on his face: "wow! This a good catch! I came for some *shiso* but got so many vegetables. You know, I am so satisfied when people tell me how much they enjoyed the fish and crabs. I am so happy."

The Yamas have various sources of receiving food from their social network: gifts from former lodgers, *omiyage* (souvenirs) from friends who returned from travels, shared seafood from local fishermen, fresh crops grown by them or received from other participants of the BVP farm, etc. These foods are not always ready to be eaten or used for cooking. Sayoko spent time and efforts to deal with the seafood, for example, by scaling and cleaning fish scales, or the shells of scallops, and then dispensing the food to friends or other BVP members. As some member leave Oshamambe or celebrate certain festivals, the group gather at the guesthouse to take potluck while local fishermen might contribute fresh, high-value seafood to the party. For individual BVP participants, the Yamas invited close friends to celebrate their birthdays or marriage.

The system of redistribution (more centralized and sometimes one way) and the system of exchange (decentralized practices involving two-way flows of things) have very different ethical bases in Japanese culture. For the Yamas, however, they integrate the former into the latter. When Sayoko received a gift, say, a box of oranges or a basket of flounders, for example, she would consider several groups of people to be the priority for redistributing the gifts: first, those who would enjoy this thing to her knowledge; second, those who gave her gifts recently; third, those who got ill or seldom showed up recently. Since the Yamas did not clearly distinguish gifts and resources for redistribution, they gave away everything they received using the same logic. When redistributing gifts to the BVP members, the Yamas always introduced the gifts in details, especially their origin. In so doing, they built connections between two BVP members who did not have direct contact.

*As I opened the sliding door of Shaman, the wind-bell hanging made some clear ringing sounds. Hearing this, Sayoko went out to check who the visitor was. "Oh, it's Chang san. You are early today. Come on in!" she said, smiling. "Yama is out for a press interview, but Shira san has been here for a while," she added. I found Shira through the glass door separating the entrance and the dining room. He was browsing a newspaper by the table. Reading the evening paper at Shaman has been Shira's daily routine. He especially loves to solve the Sudoku puzzles published serially in that newspaper.*

*Ten minutes later, Koba showed up in the parking lot with his dog, Chanbu. He and Shira visit the guesthouse almost every afternoon. Shira was in his mid-sixties, and Koba was nearly sixty. Koba tied the dog at the bench outside, and then entered the guesthouse. "Good afternoon," he raised his voice while taking off his shoes at the entrance. He came to the table and sat by Shira. While wiping his sweat with a handkerchief, he murmured alone: "It's hot. It is way too hot for Hokkaido." "That's true. It's unusually hot today," Shira answered shortly without even taking his eyes off the newspaper. Koba seemed not to care much about the lack of further response. He simply took out his cigarette box, picked one, and lit it. His face turned softer in expression as he slowly breathed out a swirl of cigarette smoke.*

*A gray tabby cat walked out from the kitchen at a brisk but elegant pace. It is Bucchi, one of the two cats raised by the Yamas. Bucchi jumped up to the bench and curled up between Shira and Koba. Shira said hello to Bucchi, and Koba patted her lower back while repeating her name softly. "Bucchi! You always love that, don't you?" Sayoko said to the cat as she came out from kitchen with a cup of iced coffee on the tray she held. She put the coffee in front of Koba and asked gently: "Good afternoon, Koba san. You might want to have some iced coffee today, right?" "Sure, thanks a lot! It's so hot today," Koba replied and let Sayoko place the coffee by him.*



*Sayoko left us with a sweet smile, and then went back into the living room. Through the chink between the two pieces of curtain hung at the doorway, I saw her sit down in front of a personal computer, and continue the puzzle game she had been playing. In the dining room, Shira kept working on the puzzle, and Koba enjoyed the coffee and Bucchi's company. The guesthouse remained quiet and calm. "Well, another peaceful afternoon," I thought.*

The core of the BVP community is Mr. Yama's group. The group mainly consists of his close friends and lodging guests, who always gather around the guesthouse in the afternoon. A critical factor that cemented their friendship, in my view, is the gender work of Sayoko. At teatime, Sayoko took care of visitors like mother taking care of other family members. She served coffee and sweets for guests, listening to them, and often provided extra food for especially close guests (for dinner or for pet food). The female manager of a bar imitating the role of the mother in a familial context is a common scenario of the Japanese entertainment industry. In hostess bars which serve customers, the head lady is always called *mama-san* or *mom* (Ozawa-de Silva 2006: 132). In Japanese-style inns, the landlady is usually called *okami-san*, which also means housewives, the same as the polite word for Japanese men to address their wives. It thus applies the gender metaphor that refers to the female owner as the mother in a sphere controlled by her, where she is taking care of her guests.

The existence of family pets in Shaman completes the way in which the guesthouse resembles a home. Whether for first-time visitors or regular guests, playing with cats is always one proper way to have fun, to make conversation topics, or a way to stay silent when feeling shy. For the BVP members, interacting with the cats is often a reason for visiting Shaman in the afternoon teatime. The family animals facilitate social interactions within a context resembling family.

The gender role of mother overlaps with the ethics of certain professional work in the business of the accommodation and catering trades, which are usually considered female jobs. Japanese moms bear heavy responsibility of serving food for family members, especially their husbands and children, as a major part of their gender performance (Allison 1991; Kimura 2010b). Therefore, a convenient connection between the professional ethics and the gender role norms can be easily built without much difficulty for ordinary Japanese.

The dining room (*shokudō*) of Shaman is a liminal space between the inside (*uchi*) and the outside (*soto*) of the house of the Yamas. Shaman as a guesthouse is by nature a combination of public and private spaces: it is a lodge for business, but also the residence of the Yamas. As guests gather in the dining room for afternoon tea, they seldom enter the private realm of the Yamas, including their bedroom and living room (*cha no ma*). Although the living room is right by the dining room, the symbolic boundary between the two spaces is clear. The doorway from the dining room via the kitchen to the living room is often left open, but covered by door curtains. Both hosts and guests change their shoes to indoor slippers at the entrance hall, but anyone who wants to enter the living room has to take off the slippers at the door as well. Usually, guests will not step into the living room without permission of the hosts, and friends often have short conversations with the hosts while standing at the doorway. If certain unmindful or ignorant visitors intrude into the living room, then the Yamas implicitly express their sense of inconvenience by speaking in reluctant tone or explicit suggestion to change the place of conversation to the dining room.

Mr. Yama places their personal computer right by the door in the living room. Many times, I have seen them sitting in front of the computer and playing free games on the internet, usually a mahjong solitaire tile game. I cannot remember how many times I saw Mr. or Mrs. Yama staring

at the monitor and moving the mouse silently. Playing games, according to them, is a way of relaxing and thinking of nothing. It is a means for them to recover from the emotional labor of engaging with guests at teatime. “I do not really use my head to play this game. I mean, I have become so familiar with this game, so I follow the simple rules of the game without thinking about anything else. When I play it, I don’t have to think too much, but focus on the search for pairs of mahjong tiles. And that makes me feel relaxed,” Sayoko said. Even though the relationship between Sayoko and those frequent guests is close, taking care of guests, like regular housework, makes Sayoko tired and sometimes exhausted. As a way of relaxing, Sayoko sometimes goes back to the living room for gaming immediately after serving the guests coffee and tea. Sayoko explained: “I just feel a little bored, and want to do something to drift off. I mean, they are very close friends, you know, and I enjoy being with them. But, sometimes you feel tired and just need a break.”

*The silence of the dining room was broken, however, by a bicycle screeching to a stop by the gate of Shaman. Chunbu began to whine loudly in excitement, and thus disturbed the people sitting quietly inside. “Good afternoon,” Rie said, entering the living room and bowing to us. She is a young female in her thirties, who participated in the BVP three years ago. She moved here because of her allergic symptoms of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS or kagakubushitsu kabinsho) that had prevented her from staying in the artificial environment of her hometown, Sapporo. To avoid allergic symptoms, she always wears a long-sleeve shirt, gloves, and a white mask covering her nose and mouth. Rie trained as a chiropractor in Sapporo. After working in a local seafood factory in her first year here, she opened a small therapeutic studio downtown, which has become popular among local laborers and farmers.*

*“Ah, Rie san! It is great that you are here today. There are some cucumbers and white radishes (daikon) for you. We got a bag of them from Mrs. Zaki. She has been so energetic since she recovered from her illness. Plus, there are also some flounders for you that Chang san and Koba san caught this week,” Sayoko came out again to greet Rie. “It’s always so kind of you. I really appreciate that,” Rie made a bow to us again in a humble manner. Because of the illness that bothers her seriously, Rie can only eat fresh seafood and organic produce, which she usually orders online for her daily needs. Eating only organic food is quite costly. So, the BVP members who know her situation well often share self-made food or ingredients with her. In reward for that kindness, Rie always expresses her appreciation in person, and gives discounts to the BVP members who visit her clinic after heavy labor.*

*“No problem, Rie. You are our sensor that helps detect chemical poisons. We really appreciate it,” Shira teased her while keeping a serious face. “Don’t make fun of me,” Rie giggled. “No, I didn’t. Hey, Chang san! Do you know that Rie used to be a Yankee girl when she was in Sapporo<sup>81</sup>?” Shira kept jesting. “Oh, no. Not that old joke again. Please spare me,” Rie looked a little bashful. “Anyway, why don’t you sit down, and try today’s Sudoku puzzle with me.” “Sure.” Rie sat down and began to concentrate on the nine by nine table Shira had copied from the newspaper. Although they sometimes exchanged ideas and tips for solving the puzzle, for most of the time they were thinking quietly. So, the room became silent again except for the irregular barking of Chunbu.*

The target group the BVP aims to attract to the relocation in Oshamambe is retired urbanites. The implementation of the BVP constructs a community that helps these urbanite

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<sup>81</sup> Yankee girls (*yankiionna*) in a Japanese context refers to female juvenile delinquents who imitated American fashion in the postwar period.

settlers live with native residents. Some settlers suffered poverty or illness in their urban lives, so they decided to find a rural place to stay. The BVP recruits the disadvantaged such as elderly pensioners and the ill (suffering conditions such as obesity, allergy, mental illness, etc.), and introduces local volunteers and resources to them, to help them become part of the heterogeneous community constructed by the BVP. The ODC and the supporter group members help them make ties with local residents in a natural mode of social interactions, namely, living in the same neighborhood. Because of its institutional design (low-rate dormitory house and low annual fee) and the rural environment in which it is situated, the BVP attracts both participants from metropolitan areas who are disadvantaged by poverty or illness, and those better-off persons who mainly look for an ideal place for their later years.

The elderly pensioners are not a typical disadvantaged group in today's Japan, since they benefit from the current pension system (that might go broke in the near future), and many of them remain healthy and energetic<sup>82</sup>. Still, they are a relatively unwanted group in the context of rural revitalization. The elderly are usually considered unproductive subjects, because they seem less likely to contribute physical labor as much as younger people can do. So, their contribution

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<sup>82</sup> Japan's public pension system was invented to cope with social problems, but it itself has become a big social issue in Japanese society now. The first problem of the pension system is the intergenerational inequity in terms of contribution and benefit. The 1973 pension reform made the benefits too generous relative to contributions, and the shrinking younger cohort cannot afford the financial burden of the system. Second, the net transfer from the government arising from the pension system is decided in proportion to individual income, which causes unequal redistribution of resources and intra-generational inequity. Third, the aged and women are discouraged from working since they can be exempted from paying pension contributions. Last, the public pension also reduces private savings (Horioka 1999: 297-9). Due to these flaws, the public have lost their trust in the public pension system, and many people from the younger generation refuse to pay the pension contribution. In 2001, the legislature created a corporate pension system called defined contribution (DC) pension, but corporations were reluctant to give up the traditional defined benefit (DB) plans. This lukewarm response was caused by the same lack of confidence and the flawed political process of legislation (McLellan 2005).

to a rural community could be very limited in that sense. Therefore, the elderly are often less preferred as migrants elsewhere<sup>83</sup>. Meanwhile, they face the menaces of aging that change their bodies and experiences every day. A typical reaction to this kind of psychological pressure is be situated in a more relaxed environment and in supportive groups. Finally, the Japanese elderly today are the first generation (*dankaisedai*) in Japan that grew up during the postwar decline of traditional family (*ie*). Accordingly, people of this generation have a stronger sense of the obligation to live independently, whether they like it or not<sup>84</sup>. Overall, the Japanese elderly in general need social support, although they have enjoyed relatively stable economic life compared with the younger generations who suffer from the instability of employment and social security.

Many senior settlers I met in Oshamambe, usually in their sixties and seventies, told me that they decided to move to the town after visiting many other townships. A senior in his seventies even traversed the Japanese Archipelago to find the ideal place to spend his later life. He decided to come to Oshamambe, because there are nice people, public gray housing, and available farm for organic cultivation in this township. According to him, rural villages with strong solidarity are often too closed to outsiders, and many rural townships in Japan aiming at gray migrants only offer planned settlements built for real estate profits. Koba mentioned that he had a similar feeling during his search for a place for his retired life. When he visited some

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<sup>83</sup> In 2007, for instance, I visited a famous counter-urbanization project in a mountain town of Kyoto that had attracted many urbanite professionals to settle their families there. Knowing that I was interested in senior migrants to the countryside, the manager of the project admitted that they mainly recruit younger migrants to their town. The elderly are not the major group they aim to engage with, though they welcome everyone to join them.

<sup>84</sup> When their children face personal or familial problems, such as mental illness, unemployment, or divorce, however, they often chose to share the responsibility and burden with their children.

settlements prepared by the local authorities in Southern Hokkaido, he felt that he would be very lonely if he moved there:

*[The newly built settlement I visited in the southern township] is adjacent to a golf course, built as a resort for sale...a lots of log houses were erected there...that place is about a fifteen-minute drive from the downtown...this is not the place where I want to bury my ashes. [They] just put everybody together in one place, no matter where you are from. Isn't it the same as Tokyo? You don't have any common ground (setten) with the natives there, do you?*

According to my elderly informants, what is critical for their ideal life is to be situated among friends, and to remain connected to the community. For them, human feelings and generosity of the local community are much more important than the material surroundings, because that is the origin of the meaning in their life (*ikigai*). In this respect, they often felt uncomfortable about the planned communities for the gray population that often treat them as one-dimensional consumers.

Rie is much younger than other BVP members, and she moved to Oshamambe to find a shelter for her sensitive body. Suffering from her MCS and the intolerance of her original family, Rie was looking for a rural place to get relief from her allergies. She watched a TV program introducing the BVP, and learned about this project via its website. At the beginning, she wondered if the BVP was a migration project opening to retired people only. She contacted the Yamas anyway, and moved to the town with the little savings in her bank account. Rie struggled in her first year for a living. Since she was too weak to do chiropractic massage at first, she was introduced to part-time jobs in a couple of local packing factories. "I really worried about my livelihood, but Mr. Yama kept telling me that everything will be okay," Rie recalled. As she finally regained her stamina and energy to a certain degree, she started her chiropractic service and became able to live independently in Oshamambe.

Mr. and Mrs. Hasegawa met the Yamas in the guesthouse before they moved into the town. Mrs. Hasegawa had long complained of Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity (EHS or *denjiha*

*kabinsho*) and MCS. Before they came to Shaman to consult with the Yamas in person, they sent a detector of electromagnetic waves to Mr. Yama, and asked him to measure the strength of electromagnetic waves in town for them. Mr. Yama and I thus drove to several places in Oshamambe to make sure that Mrs. Hasegawa's visit to the town would be safe for her. Mr. Yama eventually found a house away from the highway for them to settle in. In practice, the BVP offers an accessible shelter for the disadvantaged and disabled who had a hard time surviving in the city for economic, physical or psychological reasons.

*Chanbu seemed to lose patience after about thirty minutes, and kept whining and jumping excitedly. "Hey, Rie, do you hear that? Chanbu wants to go for a walk with you so badly! He has done that since you came here. Why don't you take him out for a short trip?" Koba said. "Oh, sure, I can do that," Rie answered. "That will be great, thank you. Just the short route you usually take will do," Koba said, and then turned to me: "Mr. Chang! You should go with them. Chanbu has been waiting for you since he found that you are here, too." "Okay, okay. I will go," I went outside to unleash Chanbu immediately, because of the great noise it kept making for attention. "Don't say okay twice [to the elderly. That is disrespectful]!" I heard Koba preach to me about my manners from behind. "Yes, sir!"*

*Chunbu, Rie, and I first walked along the coast, and then turned back to the main street through the highway by the coast. On the way back to Shaman, we stopped by the ramen<sup>85</sup> shop located right behind the guesthouse. The Bata family who run this shop always give some treats to Chunbu. When we arrived, Mrs. Bata was watching three crows pecking at some diced meat*

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<sup>85</sup> Ramen is a Japanese-style noodle soup, a popular and relatively cheap food in the country.



*in front of the shop. When we were busy keeping Chunbu from the birds, Mrs. Bata returned to the kitchen, and a big bone was brought out: “Hi, Chunbu, here you are.” “Wow, why do you want to feed the crows?” Rie couldn’t help asking. “Well, you do know that crows are usually mischievous (itazura), don’t you? They either steal your vegetables or tear the garbage bags to get discarded food. They are like a gang, and I am paying them some protection money to avoid trouble,” Mrs. Bata explained with a smile.*

Several years ago, Mrs. Bata’s son came to Oshamambe to realize his dream of opening his own *ramen* shop. He learned how to cook tasty *ramen* as an apprentice in an Asahikawa-based restaurant, and rented a shop in Oshamambe to open his own one<sup>86</sup>. Worried about their son, Mrs. Bata and Mr. Bata moved to Oshamambe one after the other. Mrs. Bata is a nice lady in her sixties who is benevolent to her neighbors and the surroundings. After the BVP began in 2005, she participated in the project by cultivating a plot on the farm. She had several encounters with crows on the BVP farm which were pecking at her crops. Since the crows downtown are actually the same group of crows living in the shrubbery around the BVP farm, she feels that she has to find a way to coexist with them, even in the urban context<sup>87</sup>.

Although she is a BVP member and a neighbor of the Yamas, Mrs. Bata establishes relationships with BVP members independently through the encounters on the BVP farm, and the mediation of animals (in this case, via Chunbu). As soon as Chunbu learned that it will get

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<sup>86</sup> Asahikawa City is the second largest city in Hokkaido, and a place famous for its ramen cuisine, especially the soy sauce flavored one.

<sup>87</sup> Another young villager, Moto, has had different experiences with crows because of the location of his residence. Moto told me that there is a group of crows living on the hill right behind his house, but they seldom disturb crops he has planted around the house. When asked the reason, he replied: “I don’t know, but I feel that they are used to finding food on the hill rather than in the city, so they just have different foraging habits from their urban brothers.”

delicious meat and bones at the ramen shop, it always rushes to the shop's back door when it approaches the *ramen* shop. Like Rie said: "Chunbu always drags me to the *ramen* shop as we turn the corner, so I have had more chances to talk with Mrs. Bata. She is really nice to me. Sometimes I got self-grown vegetables from her." Mrs. Bata did so because of her family role as the mother, too. She often shared some homemade cuisine with Koba and me, single males living alone that are stereotypically considered care recipients in a family. Once, as I told her that she had given me too much to repay, she smiled and answered: "No problem. You are a young traveler to a foreign land, so you will need these. If my son lived in Taiwan, I am sure that your mom would do the same for him. In that case, I would want him to accept the goodwill to keep himself healthy and strong."

Although the BVP is a brand new project of the ODC, its implementation was not a whole new process of local mobilization. The ODC introduced a new institutional group called the supporter group (*ōendan*), consisting of native residents and professionals from outside of the town. To organize the group, Yama and other proponents of the BVP used their own social networks to invite all the people they could get in touch with to become supporters. Their original idea was to ask all the supporters to wear the badge of the BVP, so BVP members who are looking for certain assistance or resources can recognize the supporters via face-to-face interactions. In so doing, they believed, newcomers would eventually know the supporters in person, and learn where to find them for help. However, only a few supporters were willing to

wear the badge all the time, and that weakened the effect of building connections between the supporters and the newcomers<sup>88</sup>.

Does this mean that the system of the supporters has been a total failure and provided no help to the newcomers? My answer is no. Mrs. Bata helped Rie and me partly because she found that we were young settlers of the BVP, the group needing help most among the newcomers. I realized that the ethical mechanism is similar to Doi's explanation of *giri* and *ninjo* in Japanese culture: *giri* is the vessel and *ninjo* is the content of reciprocity. On the one hand, Mrs. Bata felt obligated to help us, as BVP fellows. On the other hand, she felt like helping young people like us, who reminded her of motherhood.

I argue that the supporter system institutionally justified the mobilization via personal networks of the BVP proponents, especially the BVP organizer Mr. Yama. Most listed members of the supporter group are actually acquaintances of Mr. Yama who live in the neighborhoods of Oshamambe, or people with weak ties to Yama who learned about the BVP during their stays in the town or when browsing online. In practice, the ODC has prepared a group of local agents who will offer their assistance when they meet the settlers. Moreover, the supporters can still be reached via personal communication of Mr. Yama and other proponents of the BVP. Compared with the informal continuation of "the supporter group," the regional currency "The Thank You Coupon" as another attempt of the ODC to promote mutual aid within local neighborhoods has been a real failure, and was terminated after a short time. A key reason for its malfunction, in my view, is that the regional currency operates against the traditional way of expressing mutual

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<sup>88</sup> The reason why the BVP supporters do not keep wearing the badge varies. The most common reason is the inconvenience of wearing it everyday since it is not useful in their daily lives.

dependence between community members via the exchanges of labor and gifts. In other words, the new system conflicted with conventional culture.

*When we arrived at the guesthouse, the dining room had become crowded, noisy, and smoky. Mr. Oya detoured from his business visiting customers to have a cup of coffee in Shaman. The town councilor Nanao and his wife were having spaghetti made by Sayoko. Mr. Yama had come back from his part-time job, a local correspondent serving the regional newspaper company, but seemed to stay in the living room browsing the Internet without joining the guests. Suddenly, almost all the mobile phones carried to the dining room beeped one after another, so everybody was checking their own mobile phone. “Come on! I thought that it was an alert for an earthquake or tsunami so everyone got it. It turns out it’s just the Bochibochi News from Yama,” Koba grunted. Other guests such as Oya echoed Koba, and then discussed which place is the best shelter in the downtown area. Hearing the noise outside, Mr. Yama came out from his living room and apologized: “Oops, my bad. I was just sending out the reminder about next week’s volunteer weeding of the flower bed by the railway station.”*

The rhizomatous community made by the BVP is a type of communication community in a technical sense (Delanty 2010). The solidarity of Bochibochi Village as a community relies on communication technologies as much as face-to-face interactions. A website of Bochibochi Village has been the beginning effort of recruiting people to Oshamambe<sup>89</sup>. Using free services of website hosting and a discussion forum system, Mr. Yama created the website of the BVP to promote the project, and a platform for public discussion among the people involved in the project. As communication technology made rapid progress in the past decade, individual

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<sup>89</sup> <http://bochibochi.s328.xrea.com/>

villagers also utilized smartphones and social networking websites such as Mixi (a Japanese website similar to Facebook), Twitter, and Facebook as new ways to make connections. Moreover, the realization of the BVP is benefited by the mediascapes of contemporary Japan, as several TV programs produced by Hokkaido-based television stations have introduced Bochibochi Village to the regional or national audience.

Generally, villagers are informed about the communal events and festivals of the BVP via mobile phones' email function<sup>90</sup>. In Oshamambe, almost every villager has one mobile phone, so Mr. Yama can easily inform everyone about the updates and events of the BVP with his cell phone. An older style of communication such as sending postcards is also used for formal invitations to important annual events: the Farm Opening, the general meeting of the ODC, the Harvest Festival, and the yearend party<sup>91</sup>. These annual events show solidarity of the BVP community, since they are the few occasions in which a majority of BVP members will gather.

Except for the annual events, the only regular event that will attract a group of BVP members is the voluntary weeding of the roadside flowerbed by the railway station. Usually people in their fifties or older are present at this event, including senior villagers and some wives of the ODC trustees. Weeding attracts more housewives than I could ever have imagined. Most participants in the event say that they join it since they feel it is their responsibility to make the town better, and to give back to this town that supports their livelihood. Their explanation of voluntarism reminds me of the words of Koba in an interview between us. Koba told me that he

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<sup>90</sup> The system of mobile communication established for traditional mobile phones in Japan has replaced the use of texting with regular email systems, affordable for most Japanese.

<sup>91</sup> Since the membership of the ODC is concomitant with the formal participation in the BVP, namely, becoming a villager, every villager has the right to attend the general meeting of the ODC held annually. The function of the general meeting is to publicize the yearly budget, expenditure, and progress of the non-profit organization, and to allow the members to supervise the board of trustees of the ODC.

decided to retire and move to the countryside due to grave health problems. He considered many regions in Japan but he decided to come back to Hokkaido where he was born and raised before college. “It is in return for the favor this region offered to me. It is a natural thing to do, isn’t it?” he said, explaining his decision to spend his later years somewhere in Hokkaido. These two cases of settlers’ ethics conflict with the nationalistic image of rural Japan derived from the campaigns of “Discover Japan” and “Exotic Japan,” which values the rural community as the origin of the Japanese nation (Ivy 1995). Rather, they suggest the way in which the popularity of the counter-urbanization discourse in contemporary Japan relates to the moral obligation of reciprocity that emphasizes mutual dependence between humans, and between humans and the environment, in Japanese culture.

### **The Production of Locality through Farming**

In this section, I introduce three local farms that have been managed in very different ways: Shira Hennerly (*keisha*), Nakagane Dairy Farm (*bokujō*), and the BVP Field (*bochibatake*). The three agricultural *genba* are supported by the practices of voluntarism, reciprocity, and individuality, which characterize the rhizomatous community of the BVP. Like the guesthouse of Shaman, these three farms are tubers of the BVP as well, namely, meeting places. In these places, people of the BVP become involved in the process of producing locality, and the performance of ritual by cooperating in certain agricultural tasks. These tasks are sometimes of farm owners’ personal interests, who will reward the collaborators in direct or indirect ways, immediately or with time lags. Via these tasks, the BVP members realize their connections with the environment and climate of the region as well. Following the theory of Arjun Appadurai, I term these

practices the technology of localization (Appadurai 1996: 179-181). Consequently, they become localized subjects who engage in the production of locality in daily practices.

*Case 1. Shira Hennery: locality based on reciprocity*

One starting point of the reciprocal gift-giving among the BVP members was Shira's hennery. After moving back to Oshamambe, Shira opened a hennery utilizing a small part of his brother's farmland. The hennery included a henhouse and an outdoor run enclosed by wire netting. There were usually about fifty chickens (including five cocks) living in the henhouse where they could eat, drink, rest, and do limited activities such as jumping and laying eggs. In the run, chickens could run and interact with each other in a much wider space, and also peck away at vegetation and worms on the ground. Shira visited the hennery every day to let the chickens out onto the run during the warm days, and prepared the feed for them while they were in the run. By the side of the hennery, Shira grew organic corn by the hennery to feed the chickens. He also added other healthy ingredients to make mixed feed at a low price: dried sardines that had been used for making soup stock, just expired rice cultivated with a reduced amount of pesticide, cabbage leaves from his BVP plot, etc. None of these ingredients were polluted by chemicals, and even Ms. Rie, suffering from MCS, could eat the eggs from Shira Hennery without any allergic symptoms. Therefore, Shira was proud to claim that his chickens were raised naturally (*tenzenshiiku*), which increased the symbolic value of the eggs in the BVP circle.

The eggs of Shira's hens were a local specialty of BochiBochi Village. The eggs were usually not for sale, but were given to the BVP participants for free (as long as the receivers returned the paper egg carton later). BVP villagers admired the taste of the eggs for their

freshness and lack of odor. At a party held in Shaman, people coincidentally talked about the eggs from Shira hennery. Mrs. Zaki explained the quality of the eggs as the other housewives sitting by her echoed agreement:

*We are all lovers of Shira's eggs. He is so kind, regularly delivering eggs to us in person. The eggs he brings us are always warm ones just collected from the hennery, the freshest eggs you can ever get. The yolk is sturdy and elastic, and its color is clear and beautiful. You know, fresh eggs are very important for the Japanese diet: we eat raw eggs on various occasions, such as for dipping the sukiyaki beef slice into the fully mixed raw egg. The way I most love to eat the chicken eggs from Shira is to crack one raw egg on a bowl of steamed rice, and add some soy sauce on it before mixing the egg and the rice. Only fresh eggs will be tasty in this way. You don't want to eat those cheap eggs sold in supermarkets without cooking them first, because they are slightly smelly in that way. Besides, it could be dangerous to eat raw eggs from unfamiliar producers, and I usually want to avoid that.*

Shira's delivery of chicken eggs eventually constructed a "community of food" among the BVP members, a kind of "gastronomic solidarity" (Ikegami et al. 2008). Getting a pack of eggs from Shira and cracking one on hot rice formed part of their collective memory of living in Oshamambe. Through the distribution of the locally produced eggs, Shira constructed a shared experience of the locality of Oshamambe, and strengthened the identity of Bochibochi Village.

The preeminent culture of gift exchange in contemporary Japan, however, plays a critical role in the cultural politics of Japanese society. People who received Shira's eggs often shared their extra food with him in return, but some people felt that occasional gifting was not enough. For example, the Zakis loved the eggs from Shira, but they were one of the few households that insisted on paying for each pack of eggs they got. They claimed that there was no other practical way to thank Shira for his regular delivery, and paying for that was an efficient way of rewarding him. As Clammer (1997: 15-19) pointed out, reciprocity remains as an important dimension of the gift-giving phenomenon in contemporary Japan.



The reaction of the Zakis to Shira's gifting is understandable in the context of the structure of power produced by gift exchange in Japanese culture. In contemporary Japan, gift-giving incurs a moral obligation to repay the favor (*onkaeshi*). That is, a gift-giving action should lead to gift exchange in the long run. So, when you receive a gift from someone, you should express your appreciation and gratitude in a certain form, whether you do it immediately or later. Most of the time, the appreciation is conveyed through gift-giving, namely, a gift in return. Failing to do so could jeopardize your relationship with the gift-giver, and even influence your reputation in the group in an implicit way. The strength and rigidity of this implicit rule varies by region and group. In Oshamambe, at least within the circle of the BVP, this rule stands but is weaker than the urban cases I have learned of. Apparently, the Zakis followed this implicit rule strictly.

Most of the egg receivers expressed their appreciation by responding to Shira's request for assistance. Helping in Shira's hennery was one of the communal activities of the BVP that happened seasonally: in spring, the netting and plastic sheeting of the hennery had to be replaced; in summer, the corn field had to be weeded; in autumn, people gathered in Shira's corn field again to help with its harvest. Yama, as the general manager of the BVP, invited the BVP members to help at Shira's hennery by sending group messages via mobile phones. Usually, more than half of those who had received eggs from Shira would show up in the hennery. During the chatting, most of the attendants, including the Zakis, told me that coming to help Shira was a way to express their thankfulness to him. Rationally speaking, some added, helping Shira to complete the tasks that he could not handle alone was a direct way to ensure a future supply of eggs. Furthermore, working on a chicken farm was an interesting experience for many urbanite settlers in the BVP. As a result, Shira always had enough people to help him and did not have to worry about the problem of free riders.

Shira did not treat these chickens as a commodity or the means of production. Rather, he treated them as if they were his friends or pets. He could easily tell the five cocks apart, and even named them and some of the chickens that caught his attention most. What made his operation different from a professional hennery was that he was concerned with the well-being and “feelings” of the chickens, with which he always tried to sympathize from a human being’s viewpoint. When I visited his hennery, he told stories about each cock and how their personality decided their behavior. Shira spent time to observe his chickens and their interactions with other wild animals such as hawks and foxes. One day when we were working by the chickens’ open run, for example, he informed me that the chickens were getting on guard against a hovering hawk overhead. “Look, all the chickens returned to the corner adjacent to the henhouse, and those cocks were circling the hens to protect them.” Sometimes I felt like I was listening to an amateur researcher of animal behavior.

Moreover, Shira is a great storyteller who loves to share his observations of the hennery, which form part of his identity:

*I call one of the five cocks Boss because he is tall and strong but also has a short temper. The other cocks can’t compete with him for hens if Boss approaches them. When I make their feed ready inside the henhouse and open the entrance doors, all the hens will rush in for the feed. However, the cocks always follow the lady-first rule, and Boss is always the last one to walk into the house. He protects their back and he is the real boss here. These guys are really interesting.*

The details of chicken behaviors were a common topic between Shira and some of the BVP members who received the eggs.

Taking care of these chickens changed Shira's lifestyle to a certain extent as well. His everyday life was largely conditioned by the daily schedule of the chickens. He always gave up the chance of group day-trips to other municipalities for shopping or dining because of the same reason: he had to take regular care of his chickens and was not able to leave town. Sayoko once told me that Shira stopped eating chicken meat after he started his hennery for a while. Shira heard our conversation and corrected her, saying that he still eats chicken now. However, according to my own observation, he did avoid ordering chicken dishes if there was something else to choose when we were eating out together.

Shira's hennery realized an ideal cycle of sustainable breeding. He prepared chicken feed with varied recycled or natural ingredients: he traded his eggs in exchange for the small dried sardines that had been used for making soup stock in a nursing home; he bought rice bran and expired rice at cheap prices from a rice shop; he collected the outer leaves of cabbages on the BVP farm; he dug humus soil from the forest of one of his relatives. Shira mixed these ingredients with the organic corn he planted by the hennery to be the feed for his chickens. Finally, he collected the chicken droppings at a corner outside of the hennery, and waited for three years until they had completely composted (*kyukusei*) to be used as organic fertilizer for the BVP farm. As the organic manure was ready, Mr. Yama sent out an email to ask for helpers who want to utilize the manure. So people gathered in Shira's hennery again, helped package the manure, and took some with them for using in their own gardens.

Shira's hennery was probably the most productive operation of the BVP during my visit to Oshamambe in terms of the monetary value it could possibly create every day. However, even though Shira was the one who proposed the BVP in the first place, claiming that the "villagers" of the BVP could contribute to local revitalization by making and selling their organic produce,

he never proposed any project to brand his organic eggs and selling them to urbanite residents in the name of Oshamambe or the BVP.

*Me: "Why don't you do so? I heard that a box of your eggs could be sold for 500 Yen in cities. Wouldn't it be a good way to make immediate progress of the local branding when the BVP farm still can't produce enough vegetables for sale?"*

*Shira: "Yes, but I can't do that. Or, I should say, I am not capable of doing so. Creating an egg business requires stable production, but my hen friends can't do that. As you have seen [in my work diary], their production of eggs is unstable, depending on the season and weather, and sometimes they don't lay many. I can't take orders from consumers if I can't know when I will have enough eggs to sell."*

*Me: "But that problem can be solved technically. For example, you can accept preorders online and send them the eggs later, as long as your customers are aware of your productive instability."*

*Shira: "Yes, you are right. In that way, however, I won't have enough eggs for myself and my friends if I don't expand the size of the henery. The expansion will require extra land, money, and labor that cannot be provided by the current system (ima no yarikata). My work before retirement was about traveling overseas to check samples and deciding which foreign factory can be the supplier of our company. So, I know very well about the necessity of maintaining the productivity for running a real business. Actually, I love my current pace, at which I can share the eggs with everyone, and I only do so when I have extra eggs at hand. No pressure."*

Shira clearly takes commercialization of the BVP farms as a necessary step for regional revitalization. However, he sets a rigid standard for running a business. He does not want to jump into the market competition before he's ready. This philosophy is actually consistent with his plan for regional revitalization: the BVP mainly invites retirees to join the slow life in Oshamambe. They take it as a major strategy because they believe that these people can (at least) live humble lives here with income from the pension system, and thus have enough resources to avoid the rapid commercialization and competition that might limit the possibility of the BVP

under urgent economic pressure. In other words, BVP's survival is conditional upon extra-local income its participants bring or create.

When I returned to Oshamambe in 2013, I was surprised to learn that Shira had closed his hennery one year earlier. He later explained the reasons why he decided to end his chicken farm. First of all, the source of chicks (*hiyoko*), a major poultry hatchery in the coastal area of Ibaraki Prefecture, was destroyed by the tsunami caused by the earthquake of March 11, 2011. So, Shira could not bring in a younger generation of hens to his hennery. Second, the new administrative rule for preventing bird influenza requires all the poultry farms in Japan to raise chickens in sealed chicken houses, and to increase the population of chickens in each farm, namely, larger-scale farming:

*I got a phone call from a staff member of the JA branch, executing the policy of MAFF, who informed me that the way of raising chickens has been regulated and you have to follow the new regulation: a closed hen-house and large-scale farming. I raised chickens because I dislike their conventional way of raising chickens. So, I decided to give up when they told me about the new policy. I also don't want to make trouble for other chicken farms in the adjacent areas.*

Eventually, Shira sold his chickens and returned the hennery to his brother. Now, he rents a second plot on the BVP farm and grows more vegetables, since he can devote himself to organic farming on the farm now. The eggs from Shira's hennery have become a legendary topic leaving no tangible trace on the reality of local lives.

Shira is representative of the U-turners (a Japanese term which refers to people who left their rural hometown to pursue their careers in metropolises but decided to return to their hometown to live after retirement) in Oshamambe. He utilized local networks and resources to assemble his hennery, and realized his own understanding of chickens' ideal life. Moreover, he made his hens part of the social texture of the rhizomatous community. However, he gave up his hennery due in part to other localist concerns. Overall, he had treated the chickens not as a

profitable business but as new companions, because his family still live in Tokyo in order to get mental health care for his son.

*Case 2. Nakagane Farm: Volunteering and its social meanings*

When I entered my field site in 2009, Yama and Koba had been working voluntarily for the Nakaganes on their dairy farm for six months. In addition to these two major members, a volunteer team of helpers, called the “cow-team” (*chiimu ushi*), also contains a couple of younger people living in Oshamambe who had not found a stable job. A few weeks later, I joined them as part of the cow-team. Usually one or two of the team will arrive at the farm to work, and the other members rest to be ready for the next day’s work. We usually started our work in the early morning (five o’clock in summer, and five-thirty in winter), and completed all the work no later than ten o’clock. The main task of the cow-team is to help Mrs. Nakagane clean the dung accumulated in the cowshed and calf house, and prepare the various forages for the cattle while Mr. Nakagane is operating the tractor, milking equipment, or other machines. In general, the members of the cow-team, especially Yama and Koba, voluntarily work on the private farm for about four hours a day, doing hard labor with lower pay. How are they rewarded? Why don’t they feel exploited?

Nakagane Farm is a dairy farm in northwestern Oshamambe Town. Mr. Nakagane is a graduate of Rakuno Gakuen University (literally “the University of Dairy Farming”), who returned to his hometown and inherited the farm from his father. Since its last owner, Nakagane Farm has been a typical family farm depending on the system of Japanese Agricultural Cooperative (JA) that offers loans and technological assistance to individual farms. That is, this farm embraces the model of modern dairy agriculture that emphasizes the economic efficiency of

milk production on the one hand, but pays less attention to the environment and well-being of the livestock. The inside of its cowshed reveals the tendency toward profit-orientation: the interior space is relatively dark, warm, and humid even though there are several huge ventilation fans installed on the ceiling; the odor of cows' excretions fills the space; each cow is limited by a metal frame on her neck, so the only two moves she can make under the circumstances are standing and lying; pillars and walls are smudged by forage, bodily waste, and cobwebs. Despite managing their farm efficiently, the Nakaganes still owe JA a huge loan that they took out to renew their equipment and machines (e.g. tractors).

The farm of the Nakaganes now suffers from the predicament that most such typical family farms in rural Japan are facing. Both the Nakaganes are close to sixty years old, and none of their children stays in town to help them and take over the farm. Like many other dairy farms in Hokkaido, they lack successors and have to do the routine work with their aging bodies. Mrs. Nakagane even hurt her knees and was forced to undergo surgery because of her years of heavy labor. The assistance of the cow-team gave this couple leeway to recover from the fatigue and the operation. Although they can ask for help from the cooperative organization of dairy farm helpers, they cannot afford it on a daily basis. Hiring a helper to cover one day of work in the cow house costs about ten thousand yen (about one hundred dollars), and there is no half-day service or other flexible options. For the Nakaganes, who are still willing to do the routine work as much as possible, hiring one fulltime helper is not economical. What they need is one or two part-time helpers who can share the burden of physical labor in the morning, but this is not institutionally available. That is why the Nakaganes adopted an informal way to solve the problem by asking Yama for voluntary assistance.

Both Nakagane and Yama are two of the initial members of the ODC, who participated in a project to bring the show of a Tokyo-based theater to Oshamambe. Nakagane played an essential role in the preparatory committee because he had been interested in drama performance since his college years. As the committee transformed into the ODC, Nakagane also became a long-term member of the ODC. After the BVP was started, Nakagane continued to be a major sponsor of the migration project by providing the dairy products of his own farm to the BVP. According to Yama, Nakagane is an important comrade (*daijina nakama*) for him and the BVP in general. Although selling the farm and retiring might be a feasible option to secure their later life, Yama realized that working on the dairy farm has been critical to the self-identity of the Nakaganes, who inherited the farm and the way of breeding cattle from their parents (cf. Kondo 1990). Because of the long-term fellowship built via communal activities, Yama wants to help the Nakagane continue their dairy farm business as long as they want.

However, if we re-examine the story in a Marxist sense, a question emerges: is the strong fellowship the only reason why Yama and other cow-team members are willing to provide labor to Nakagane Farm, without any control of the means of production and a fair share of surplus value? Are the cow-team members simply deceived by a localist ideology so they cannot penetrate the unequal class hierarchy that dominates them?

The answer is yes and no. Yes, on the one hand, because in a strict sense these volunteer helpers only share a small portion of the profit that they helped produce, and they receive a very limited amount of money from Nakagane Farm as a formal reward. Deducting the cost of transportation, the average amount of cash a cow-team member can get for labor per hour could be lower than the hourly wage of a cashier at a convenience store. They also do not enjoy employment insurance or other formal welfare. The incomes of each cow-team member and Mr.



Nakagane, who monopolizes the means of production, are totally disproportionate. No, on the other hand, because class may be a critical dimension for elucidating unequal power relations, but it is not the only one. There are both subjective and objective reasons to explain why the volunteer helpers do not feel unjustly treated or exploited.

First, volunteers on the Nakagane Farm do not think that they and the Nakaganes are in a real employment relationship. Most of the team members have answered my question about power relations by pointing out the fact that they are helping the Nakaganes and not vice versa. Although the Nakaganes are wealthier, they will not be able to maintain their current lifestyle without the voluntary assistance. In contrast, working for the Nakagane Farm is not the only option that cow-team members have for their livelihoods. They do have other options. Rather than being forced to do so, the cow-team want to help the Nakaganes of their own free will. In other words, they think that the Nakaganes, as important collaborators in regional revitalization, are persons worth helping. Does this conclusion lead us back to a commonsensical explanation of friendship?

I think the voluntary activity of the cow-team can only come into being and continue on the basis of a sense of fellowship that is not defined by imagined solidarity such as clan, nation, or ethnicity, but is realized through substantial practices of reciprocity in everyday life. The reciprocity here is not limited to the obliged exchange of resources and labor, but also involves mutual recognition. On the site of laboring (*genba*), the cow-team and the Nakaganes (especially Mrs. Nakagane, who shares the same work) are collaborators working to care for the cows without explicit hierarchical difference: cleaning the cowshed, distributing the forage, milking, and releasing cows for grazing. During the break, they gather to share prepared drinks and cigarettes while chatting with each other about cattle or local news. The Nakaganes do not play

the role of manager in the cow house except for necessary instructions. Instead, it is the cows which often become the judges to evaluate the pace of the volunteer helpers. For example, an inexperienced, slow worker like me sometimes provoked the cows tied in the back part of the cowshed as they saw those in the front part already enjoying the forage I had given them. The cows mooed one after another so loudly that it shook my eardrums and chest, and gave me serious pressure that forced me to speed up.

Second, the Nakaganes actually reward the cow-team members through various forms of gift-giving, including material gifts and entitlement. To thank them for the voluntary work, Mr. Nakagane shares hand-made dairy products such as yogurt and “milky tofu” (*gyūnyū tofu*, actually milk curds) with them frequently. As a major sponsor of the BVP, the Nakaganes also love to provide their dairy products and other dishes to the events held by the ODC. At every gathering, BBQ, and parties of the BVP members, yogurt and “milky tofu” always play a major part of the feast. All the cow-team members are entitled to bring their own container to take raw milk home when they need milk. At year-end (*oseibo*), or when a female calf was born, Mr. Nakagane treats all the voluntary helpers at a restaurant to thank them for their annual assistance to Nakagane Farm. “Without Yama and the cow-team, there would be no Nakagane Farm today! This dinner is our repayment for your kindness (*on kaeshi*) during the year<sup>92</sup>. Please enjoy the food, and drink as much as you can!” Mr. Nakagane said in his passionate toast during a year-end party. In such a process, the relationship between the Nakaganes and the cow-team members

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<sup>92</sup> In a Japanese context, “on” refers to the notion of indebtedness to a superior. The superiority is necessarily prescribed in existing social hierarchies and positions, but also created by the dynamics of social interactions. For example, if someone saves my life, he or she will be called my (*inochi no onjin*), namely, my benefactor who save my life. In this respect, when Nakagane said *onkaeshi*, he adopted humble rhetoric that reverses the hierarchy which usually exists between the employer and employees.

is built and strengthened. That is what Marshall Sahlins called balanced reciprocity (Sahlins 1972: 194-5). In so doing, the cow-team members make sense of volunteering on a private farm in an ethical dimension, and affairs of the farm matter to them.

The Nakaganes are not only led by economic rationality, but also follow a certain simple and naïve ethic. As I refused their payment via Mr. Yama, they insisted that I should take the money because that's what I earned with my labor. Even though I told them that I could not have extra income as I was being funded by the Japanese government during the fieldwork, they still insisted. Eventually, I could only donate the money to the cow-team, who used it to have a sushi feast. When Moto hurt his arm during the cow-team work, the Nakaganes guaranteed that they would take care of any medical costs not covered by national insurance. Although their "good will" can still be explained as the result of self-interest calculations, it is apparent that integrity is part of their concern.

Going back to the Marxist criticism, is the reciprocity that stabilizes the exchanges between the Nakaganes and the cow-team members unequal and unjust? The making of the BVP community plays a role as a third party in the seemingly bilateral relationship of exchange between the dairy farm and the cow-team. In other words, the members of the cow-team are willing to accept the seemingly exploitative relation of production on the dairy farm because of their fellowship, supported by three consensuses: first, we all live in Oshamambe and we want to keep people living here; second, the ideal of mutual aid based on reciprocity; third, we are therefore equals facing the same predicament of declining locality. Here, the locality of Oshamambe played a shared concern beyond the binary relationship between the capitalist and the workers. This cultural logic is what Takie Sugiyama Lebra termed ternary contingency logic

in the construction of Japanese self, which rejects the dualism of self-identity in Western culture (Lebra 2004).

*Case 3. The BVP Farm: Fostering individuality*

The BVP farm is located on the low ridge behind downtown Oshamambe that is best accessed by car. It takes only five minutes to drive to the farm from downtown, but is twenty minutes or longer by bicycle or on foot. The shortest route to the farm by vehicle is to take the asphalt road called *nanbujinyasen* that traverses the ridge by the entrance of Iinari Shrine. Signs to the BVP farm are located at every crossing on the route. After climbing to the top of the ridge, visitors who follow the sign will leave the asphalt pavement, and turn left onto a macadam path. The farm is on the right hand side of the path, with a small space as parking lot that is adjacent to shrubbery. A wooden sign on a thick post at the entrance of the fenceless field reads Dream Square (*yumehiroba*). The farm is divided into smaller sections divided by lanes and walkways. Each section is composed of several plots, and the BVP farm contains 45 plots and an area for collective cultivation that equals 15 plots. The area of one plot is 30 *tsubo*<sup>93</sup>. Both native residents and settlers who participate in the BVP cultivate this farm, with one household working one or more plots.

Cultivating a plot on the BVP farm for at least a year is one of the few conditions that every BVP settler must accept in advance. Farming and gardening are a universal technology of localization (Appadurai 1996: 181-2; Williams 1988: 38). Nearly twenty settlers continue to cultivate their plots after the first year, and become long-term members of the BVP. Therefore,

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<sup>93</sup> A Japanese unit of measurement for floor area that means the size of two tatamis, equal to 118.5 square yards or about 100 square meters.

working on the BVP farm should be a common experience the current villagers all share. That is, the BVP farm can be a social and symbolic center of the BVP community. Before becoming a villager, I thought that the BVP farm was a popular place where growers would encounter each other daily, and thus develop strong solidarity. However, after starting a plot on the farm, I found that it is not the case. As a place where collective practices happen, what the BVP farm embodies is not the collectivity of the members but rather their individuality.

Although the BVP farm is by design a public and sociable space, it also fosters individuality as the growers find their own way to cultivate their plots with distinct schedules and rhythms. Indeed, people do interact with each other on the BVP farm naturally, but the encounters happened less frequently than I had imagined. As Mr. Wakamatsu explained:

*At the beginning, we were always worried about our vegetables, so we came to check them out every day or every other day. Gradually, as we got more experienced in farming, we found that it is unnecessary to come so frequently. As a result, it becomes more and more difficult to meet other people here since everybody comes less often. Now I usually visit the farm once a week to do weeding and fertilizing.*

The location of the BVP farm is away from populated areas, so it is not so convenient to visit it every day. That disadvantage weakens its role of promoting sociality among the participants to some extent. However, the BVP farm still plays other important social functions for the participants, especially as a place that fosters individuality. In fact, the individuality of the BVP participants is a key factor that lowers the chance of encounters: everyone visits the farm at any time they wish, and there is no weekly event to summon people here on a regular basis. The ODC usually invites people to the farm for only two things: the harvest party (*shūkakusai*) and cultivating the collaborative area, four to five times a year.

Individualism has become a constitutive element of Japanese society, and individualization has been an ongoing transformation in today's Japan (Elliott et al. 2012; Suzuki et al. 2010;

Iwasaki 2009). The collectivity of Japanese people has been addressed both in popular Japanology and social-anthropological studies on Japan. In a rural township such as Oshamambe, however, individuality has been a crucial social form that characterizes the BVP community. In what follows, I discuss the way in which individuality is expressed through the practice of non-pesticide farming on the BVP farm. By these examples, I demonstrate how locality is “co-constitutive of a distinctive subjectivity—the sense of place carried within the person that grounds their self-understanding” (Mckay 2006: 199).

*When I climbed up the slope on my old bicycle, jolted over the macadam path, and finally arrived at the BVP farm, quite disappointingly, there was no one in the field. It was three o'clock, not a popular time for visiting the farm. I parked the bicycle by the crude wooden table of the rest area, and walked around the farm to check out plots of other villagers. Most individual plots here were clearly demarcated by stakes and cords, but the boundaries of the rest remained blurred. The field is flat and open. Only beans and yams grown around supportive frames were taller (around 5 to 6 feet). There was no artificial building on the field except for a plastic portable toilet by the entrance, and the hand-made greenhouse standing in the Fujis' plot. By the roof of the greenhouse, a row of fresh white radishes were hanging for air-drying, the seasonal harvest. Daikon radishes, carrots, onions, and potatoes were the most popular crops appearing in almost every plot. While most growers here planted similar crops in orderly rows to a certain extent, the style of cultivation in each plot varied in many aspects: the color of soil, the interval between plants, the height and density of weeds, the fertilizers, the methods of preventing pests, the arrangement of ridges and furrows, etc. It seemed to me that the plots were microcosms revealing the distinctive cosmological beliefs and values of their cultivators.*

While the definition of organic agriculture has been standardized in order to make organic crops a new genre of commodity, the BVP exponents, Shira and Yama, intentionally adopted a vague way of defining their ideal of farming: non-pesticide cultivation (*munōyaku saibai*), by which the freedom of choosing method of cultivation can be maximized. By following only the rule of using no pesticides or chemical fertilizers, the BVP participants are not forced to undergo official inspection of their organic farming, nor do they limit their creativity and beliefs. On the BVP farm, a majority of growers take a production-oriented style of cultivation that is not too different from conventional agriculture except for using no chemicals. Another group of people, including Yama and Koba, take a laissez-faire attitude, providing basic protection (e.g. about one to three sessions of weeding per season) for their crops, but otherwise accept the result of how their crops grow. A few people, who usually do farming with a religious or quasi-religious belief, have unique and relatively complete philosophies on growing crops, such as Moto or Mr. Sudo. All these heterogeneous practices and beliefs can be tolerated under the rubric of non-pesticide farming.

In Japan, there have been several terms referring to the antithesis of modern agriculture, which pursues stable and efficient production of crops by chemicals. Organic farming (*yūki nōgyō*), a popular term which is a direct translation from English, became regulated in Japan after the enactment and amendments of “Act on Promotion of Organic Agriculture” during the 2000s. By law, organic growers are not allowed to use any synthetic chemicals on their crops. Natural farming (*shizen nōhō*) can be classified as several methods invented by practitioners such as Fukuoka Masanobu (Knight 1997), Okada Mokichi, and Kimura Akinori. Each of them has different ideas about plowing, weeding, and the use of fertilizers. There are also a couple of cults of natural farming that combine religious belief and farming practice in distinctive ways,

such as *Shinjishūmeikai* and the Church of Messianity (*Sekaiikyūseikyō*). Compared with these terms mentioned above, non-pesticide farming is a less specific and more inclusive way to refer to these natural styles of agriculture.

Mr. and Mrs. Sudo are followers of one sect of the Church of Messianity, characterized by its emphasis on natural farming and the technique of “purification of the spirit” (*jōrei*). One technological extension of the two feature practices of the Church is “effective microorganisms” (EM)<sup>94</sup>. The biotechnology of “effective microorganisms” was invented by Teruo Higa, an Okinawa-based scientist. Spraying liquid containing EM is believed to help clean not only natural things such as the human body and soil, but also artifacts such as furniture and toilets. Though he believed in the natural teachings of the Church, Mr. Sudo was trained as an engineer and remained enthusiastic about machines and computer technology. In other words, he is not stuck to a holistic way of natural lifestyle. This is reflected in his way of farming. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Sudo spent hours in their garden weeding by hand (they rented four plots in total to grow enough vegetables for their daily demand, and share some with their family and the BVP members).

However, Mr. Sudo also loves mechanical weeding with a string trimmer for public areas. He was so diligent in mechanical weeding that he got into a little trouble when he cut all the grasses he saw in the range of the BVP farm. In 2010, Mr. Sudo was hired by the ODC as the manager of the BVP farm, whose major task was to weed the public areas of the farm, including the road between rows of plots. Mr. Sudo took this job seriously and he loved weeding with his string trimmer. However, the boundaries between the road and the plots were often blurred. As a

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<sup>94</sup> Use of "friendly microorganisms" in decomposing organic matter to promote productivity.



result, Mr. Sudo not only cut all the weeds growing by the roadside, but somehow cut the grass growing in someone's plot. The ODC thus received complaints about the arbitrary weeding, and Yama had to talk to Mr. Sudo to make sure that he would not try to do too much, and to respect other cultivators' preferences.

Moto is a case comparable to Mr. Sudo: he believes in a certain kind of spirituality, but, unlike Mr. Sudo, he tries to avoid the use of technology in his everyday life. Moto is an animist and an environmentalist, and he follows his beliefs strictly in his agricultural practice. On his plots, Moto mainly practices Rudolf Steiner's biodynamic agriculture and the method of natural farming created by Kimura Akinori, who spent years to figure out the way to grow organic apples without using pesticide. Growing up in Hakodate, Moto witnessed how his hometown was transformed into an artificial city as forests were destroyed and replaced by concrete. He resigned from his job as the manager of a small apparel store to pursue his love of nature. He travelled by motorcycle to visit Shinto Shrines throughout the Japanese Archipelago, while doing seasonal work at ski resorts for a living. "Why Shinto Shrines? Because they are the last place in Japan where old trees are protected and survive from the premodern era. They are different from the young forests planted artificially by the forestry bureau. When I walk close to them and touch them with my hand, I can feel the warm power of their age-long existence on the earth." Moto made up his mind to leave the city and practice an environmentally friendly lifestyle in the countryside.

The various practices of non-pesticide farming form a field of agricultural knowledge on the BVP farm in a Bourdieuan sense. One day, I saw Mr. Yanagita mixing lime powder with the soil of his plot. He told me that he learned this technique to adjust the acidity of soil from Shira when he started his garden here. However, Shira has become more and more friendly to natural

farming, as he adopted Moto's way of expelling insects by planting marigolds around the vegetables. Yama told me that Mr. Wakamatsu uses rapeseed oil as fertilizer. He does not think that it is a good choice, but has no specific reason to stop him. As long as the managers find no evidence to prove potential damage of rapeseed oil to soil, the ODC has to recognize the freedom to use private recipes for organic fertilizer.

However, Mrs. Takahashi's family recipe for fertilizer is an exception. Growing up in a seaside neighborhood of Oshamambe, she had witnessed the way her grandparents fertilized their family garden with chopped up starfish. One day, she brought a bucket of dead starfish with her. She placed them along her ridges, chopped them with her spade, and mixed the pieces with her soil. Since her plot was adjacent to mine, I was able to watch her work while listening to her explanation of how fishermen hate starfish as a major predator of hairy crabs:

*People living in fishing neighborhoods like us caught lots of starfish every day. They eat crabs and fish, so we really don't throw them back to the sea. That's why we use their bodies as the fertilizer, to make them useful to us. My grandma always did so when I was a kid, watching her work in our backyard, where she grew big, beautiful vegetables.*

The pieces of starfish were still wet and turned smelly under the sunshine. When we were chatting, Mr. Komachi, another native grower on the farm, came close to us to see what we were doing. His face became serious as he figured out what Mrs. Takahashi was doing, but he kept his tone calm: "You should not use dead starfishes as fertilizer here because that will bring in extra saline to the soil. That is not good for the crops, and, after rain, you might pollute the soil of this field in the long run." Mrs. Takahashi looked very surprised and shy, but she was convinced by the theory of Mr. Komachi. While looking a little embarrassed, she immediately dug out most of the dead starfish. When she was digging them out, she murmured: "I do remember that my grandma did so before. What went wrong?"

The practices of farming bring in personal memories and identities. Besides fertilizers, the choice of crops is also a major category that reveals people's identity. Peter is a Canadian who teaches English at the TUS, and he and his wife are also growers on the BVP farm. Every time I met him on the farm, he always loved to chat with me in English. As he showed me around his garden, I found all kinds of foreign types of vegetable and spices that I used to buy in the United States: pumpkins, tomatoes, parsley, sage, rosemary, peppermint, and so on. He said: "yes, I grow all these vegetables that are hard to find in the local supermarket, so I grow them for my daily meals. Well, Japanese food is tasty, but I still miss the familiar flavors that I used to have in Canada." His words reminded me of a story I had heard from Shira: a BVP member who moved from the Kansai region tried to grow a specific kind of radish derived from Kyoto, but he failed since the climate here is too different from Kansai. His failure was the impetus for him to adapt to local flavor of radishes.

The growers adopt different technologies to protect their crops, too. For example, building a greenhouse is a way to prevent damage by wild animals and the changing climate. The exponents of the BVP such as Yama and Shira always wanted to erect a public green house on the BVP farm, but this ideal has never been realized because of limited funds and contractual obligations. Consequently, growers at the BVP farm use available techniques to replace the function of a professional greenhouse. As a retired carpenter, Mr. Fuji built a simple and crude greenhouse with thin timbers and vinyl sheets. Kado used a gardening set purchased from a home center to make a vinyl tunnel to cover the ridges in his plot. To protect weak plants at the initial stage, Koba used empty and cut-up soda bottles to cover the seedlings that had just been transplanted to his plot. The cultivators of the BVP farm consider no single one of these practices authentic or correct. Rather, they take different technologies as the traits of each participant. For

example, people admire the craftsmanship embodied in the greenhouse of Mr. Fuji, but laughed at my crude work of supporting my eggplants with some dry boughs. “You are a young student, so it is understandable. Well, the eggplants look healthy and solid,” one grower so commented on my terrible work of gardening.

The garden is a source of a sense of accomplishment, and thus the extension of self-identity on the BVP farm (cf. Hendry 1997). After finishing work on their own plots, many growers observe other people’s crops by taking a walk around the field or to the rest area. The condition of others’ plots becomes a topic in daily conversation and helps them understand the owner. So I heard comments like: “Mr. Fuji always grows good pumpkins, probably the pumpkin master of this farm,” or “who is this guy? Amazing! He grows so many Western vegetables that I have only seen in the supermarket.” When I mentioned that someone of the BVP was complaining about his/her failure at growing a certain vegetable (for example, eggplants), Mrs. Zaki said: “Oh, really? It’s weird, huh? I didn’t find that kind of problem in our garden. Our eggplants are growing pretty well this season.” On the one hand, she was providing different information about the growth of eggplant in this area; on the other hand, she tries to conceal of her pride in their successful cultivation of eggplant this year.

The long-term possession of one’s own plot involves an important issue of organic farming in Japan: the making of proper soil for your farm (Knight 1997). Although none of these growers in the BVP really owns the property rights over the plots, they feel like they do as they consider the development of soil. One conflict which arose in the spring of 2010 was that Shira, as a main exponent of the BVP farm, proposed the idea of plowing the entire field of the BVP farm and then reassigning the plots. Many participants stood up to express their dissenting views at the Farm Opening party (*hatakebiraki*): “I have developed my own soil for years, and have no

reason to mix with other soil.” “I like my current plot, and I don’t want a huge change like that to happen.” “I have practiced non-tillage cultivation, and please don’t force me change my method in such a collective way.” The idea of plowing the whole field was abandoned after the discussion. Although the BVP growers do not own the property right of their plots, they still become attached to the land as they spend time and efforts to change it and to adapt to it.

*As I sat down on one of the simple stools made from logs in the rest area, I noticed that there were fewer grasses growing here than other part of the public area of the field. The adjacent plot was of the Oyas, in which I could not find even one weed between the rows of vegetables. There I saw only green crops against the beautiful dark brown soil. “What an effort!” I thought, and remembered that I came today to weed my own plot. Under the heat of the sun in a summer afternoon, I walked toward my garden and started to remove weeds around my potatoes and eggplants. The surroundings were so quiet that I could clearly hear the sound made by the wind blowing through some trees nearby where some crows were cawing.*

Weeding is also one category by which the individuality of cultivators can be expressed and realized. Moreover, the height and density of weeds are a practical way to distinguish the boundary between field and the wilderness, between gardens and lanes. Some people weed their plot frequently, so everyone who passes by can see the beautiful color of the soil through the intervals between vegetables. In one extreme case, Mrs. Oya, who suffered from irregular depression after her father passed away, often took her mom to their plot to weed. Weeding with her mom became one of her few ways of self-healing. “I usually don’t think about anything. My brain goes blank and I just focus on each piece of grass I grab: how much force do I need to use to pull this grass out? How do I completely pull out the long root of this grass? How do I weed

without hurting my seedlings of onions and carrots? My hands solved these questions mechanically.” For Mrs. Oya, weeding is a process of distancing herself from the melancholia of her ordinary life. By repeating the action of pulling out grass, she feels that she is making small but actual progress continuously. “The clean soil and the accumulated pile of removed weeds make me feel that I have done something. Not a big deal, but it is something I actually did with my own hands. That makes me happy.”

I had similar feeling about weeding. There were several kinds of grasses growing in the field. Each of them had a distinctive form and structure of root, some with extensive but shallow roots, some long and deep, the others rhizomatous. The process of weeding was therefore a struggle with these stubborn plants, wrestling with each of them by using different strategies and techniques. Pulling out grasses one after the other seemed to me a series of puzzles that had to be worked out by using both my brain and body. In that process, I concentrated on the ways of pulling out grasses and forgot the flow of time. Weeding my plot could easily consume an afternoon, and my accomplishment was always embodied as the bunch of weeds I uprooted and the “cleanness” of my garden. Weeding is thus a process of recovering an artificial order, in the case of gardening, the ecological order that is (at least visually) similar to the one made by growers by plowing, bedding seedlings, and seeding. Overall, the degree of weeding can be seen as a proof of the extent to which you devote yourself to the garden, namely, how serious you are about your farm. Consequently, the contrast between black soil and green crops highlights the plots of people who are enthusiastic about weeding. Their style of cultivation is neat and clean, which is achieved by careful maintenance.

Some other people, whose plots look much more disorderly but organic, have different ideas toward weeds, or grasses. The Yamas had to deal with the burden of the guesthouse

business, the gifting network, and the affairs of the BVP, so they became less involved in the frequent labor on their own plot. This did not mean that they gave up on their farming, but they chose to apply their limited energy at some critical moments. “We only spent time on weeding at the very beginning stage after seeding or transplanting the seedlings. It is important to protect your young plants before they become strong and tall enough to compete with weeds.” The young idealist settlers Moto only agreed with the philosophy of Yama to some extent. He spent plenty of time on his farm plots partly because of his unique attitude toward weeding<sup>95</sup>: “Weeding? Why should we kill these grasses for our own interests? They are also lives.” “So, what do you do to make sure that your vegetables can grow?” I asked. “Yes, it is necessary to help your seedlings at the initial stage. They need sunshine to grow, and tall grasses prevent them from getting sunshine. So I usually use a scissor or sickle to shorten the grasses around my seedlings. That’s right. I don’t kill them but just make them shorter so they won’t be a threat to my crops,” Moto explained with his innocent smile.

The insistence on the personal style of weeding reflects the way in which growers pursue spiritual consistency with everyday practices. The method of weeding is not merely about productivity or economic efficiency, but also reveals the personality and identity of the cultivators: how should I live? Some growers want to be productive and to prove their own gardening ability. The others devote themselves to weeding because it is a general process of healing for them: through the practice of weeding, they are immersed in a status similar to meditation while doing bodily labor.

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<sup>95</sup> One separate plot of Moto was on the BVP farm, another by his house in Futaba, and another by the closed elementary school of Warabitai.

*By the time I cleaned most of the weeds in my plot, it was almost five o'clock. A wagon entered the field and stopped by the greenhouse. It was the Fujis, an energetic old couple who moved to Oshamambe several years ago. They came to take care of the tomatoes and cucumbers grown inside the greenhouse. I walked toward their greenhouse to chat with them, and learned that they had just come back from a trip to Eastern Hokkaido. "My husband drove more than six hours today to bring us back here before dark. We have a park golf game to play tomorrow. Well, I know it sounds tiring, but our teammates are all expecting us," Mrs. Fuji said. "Hey, come here!" Mr. Fuji yelled to us at the edge of a nearby clump of trees. As we came closer to the small tree he was pointing at, Mr. Fuji explained to me: "This is udo, an edible wild plant (sansai) in Japan. We love its buds and baby leaves, which are only available in spring." "Great! I found it last week, and the buds have finally sprouted," Mrs. Fuji happily said.*

Driving is a paradoxical practice in the context of the BVP. It allows individual settlers to develop their own sense of place and to become rooted in Oshamambe on the one hand, but helps them to do so by freeing the settlers from being bounded in their own neighborhood. Most of the BVP members own at least one car, whether new or used, big or small, expensive or cheap. The resettled pensioners always drive to the BVP farm when they want to weed or harvest their own plots, and only a few growers visit the farm by bicycle (such as Mrs. Bata and Rie). Even environmentalist settlers would agree that having a reliable car is a necessary condition to survive in today's Oshamambe. Several BVP participants, including Shira and Koba, could not drive as they had just moved to Oshamambe. Driving their own cars has actually been the elementary stage of the localization process for the BVP participants. With driving, the settlers gain individual mobility to explore the dispersed township on the one hand, and attain the



capacity to participate in the rhizomatous community featuring a decentralized network and multiple localities.

Although automobiles are usually considered a key technology that facilitates the atomization of society, the use of cars forms the material basis of sociality in the postwar Japanese countryside (Plath 1990). As rural Japan was transformed into a motorized society similar to the United States during the postwar development, private cars have become the necessary means of social interaction (Miura 2004). In the BVP community, driving frees the BVP members from the limit of distance and climate for them to participate in communal events that unfold in different corners of the town (cf. Sugita 2008). To leave home for a gathering on a winter evening, or to help on the farm far from downtown, for example, driving a car is definitely necessary. In other words, the technology of automobiles has become a new method of communication on the basis of individualism, and thus brings a new possibility of solidarity and belongingness.

Another popular view that has been challenged by my fieldwork experience is that the habit of driving is the key factor that prevents local residents from discovering the interesting assets and resources of their hometown. In the discourse of “locality studies” (*jimotogaku*) that encourages native residents to observe and “rediscover” local surroundings, the car-centered lifestyle is an obstacle to “knowing your environment” in detail (Love 2013: 116). This argument does not seem very convincing to me in the context of Oshamambean life: most settlers rely on their own cars, the only familiar and personalized space, to explore the region at the initial stage of their relocation. Since I did not have a car during my fieldwork, many BVP members gave me rides. Many times, they made a detour to a secret place they had found and love: a riverside good for observing salmon migration, a valley to play drums in the mountains, etc. All are inaccessible

places without an automobile. For native residents, “what I saw on the road today” is always an essential topic in daily conversation, and they are keen observers who often find scenes or traces meaningful to them, which could be a funeral held in the Eastern temple or a car accident removed from the highway earlier. It is not the commodification of reflection that locality studies talk about, but a discursive way of constructing locality, which is socially meaningful.

Finally, in the context of Hokkaido, driving is a necessary condition to access nature, and to appropriate natural resources. In the BVP, for example, you can rely on the guide of Mr. Minami, who carries you in his van to explore the deeper forest for various edible wild plants (*sansai*). Or you can drive to search the wild territory around the BVP farm as a beginner’s lesson. Driving a car is a convenient interface between new settlers and the openness and wildness of the natural landscape of Hokkaido, which attracts lots of urbanite settlers to Oshamambe. For them, owning a car brings them a brand new experience of freedom: with a car, it is feasible to detour to the BVP farm for some fresh leaves right before the dinner. They are not restricted by train schedules, or rush hour. In this respect, the ideal of *satoyama* (literally a neighborhood mountain) in Japanese culture, a discourse of utilizing natural resources of a nearby grove or forest, can only be realized with the use of automobile technology for those who do not really live in the mountains.

## **Conclusion**

The birth of Bochibochi Village is the fruit of collective efforts of the ODC members, who maneuver social capital and resources that they can control. As the metaphor of rhizome implies, the BVP’s rhizomatous communities consist of mutual interactions between its members, and between members and the socio-natural environment. As horizontally extending rhizomes, these

human interactions and human-nature communications form the fundamental substance of the rhizomatous community. These social relationships grow like putting out lateral shoots making connections to other communities in a centrifugal manner. Although its initial development began with the mother tuber, it grows into new lives in other locales as well. In the same way as adventitious roots growing at intervals, the rhizomatous body expands its foundation by introducing new members to the community, who settle at locations inside Oshamambe Town. Individuality and personal freedom have been respected and recognized. That is very different from traditional communities in rural Japan.

So, what can we learn from the case of Bochibochi Village? Bochibochi Village reveals the postmodern nature of a rhizomatous community. First, it is a village that does not exist as one settlement or neighborhood in traditional sense. Rather, this village is ontologically discursive, and constructed through practices. In other words, it is a performative community. Second, the naming of Bochibochi Village has suggested that the solidarity of this village is related to a shared ethics toward life and self: *bochibochi* is a Japanese word that refers to a condition of slow unfolding of a thing or a task. The construction of this village is based on an ethical belief in a certain lifestyle: we do things and work slowly, and that is our way of living. In this sense, the heterogeneous network of Bochibochi Village can be understood as a “regime of living” that proposes a peculiar way to respond to the question of “how should one live” (Lakoff and Collier 2004).

The BVP community as a rhizomatous community is a discursively constituted community, which has been addressed by English sociologist Gerard Delanty. After reviewing the long history of community theory, he concludes:

*Community is becoming more discursively constituted...contemporary community may be understood as a communication community based on new kinds of belonging.*

*By this is meant a sense of belonging that is peculiar to the circumstances of modern life and which is expressed in unstable, fluid, very open and highly individualized groups (Delanty 2010: 151).*

The rhizomatous community of the BVP which I discuss here can be seen as a sub-type of the communication communities that Delanty suggests. What distinguishes it from the ideal type of communication community is that a rhizomatous community remains spatially unbounded. Why so? The rhizomatous community is not ideologically confined within a region defined by traditional communal bonds or political institutions alone. The rhizomatous community is by nature an organic collaboration growing out of the regional society since its development does not fully rely on the resources and blueprint offered by the state. Rather, the flows of people, matters, and activities at the local level largely decide the growth and contour of the community. It is situated in and materially and socially supported by a certain region, or distinctive places within the region. Participants in the BVP may feel they belong to the BVP community or to the locality of Oshamambe, which are two sides of the same coin<sup>96</sup>.

A rhizomatous community is also different from the neighborhood in an Appadurain sense. Appadurai understands neighborhoods as actual communities, and he classifies the types of neighborhood as having spatial actuality or virtual actuality (Appadurai 1996: 178-9). The community formed through the implementation of the BVP, however, is neither a single place-based neighborhood, nor a virtual neighborhood that is merely based in communication technologies. Rather, the BVP community is ontologically a mapping between the region of Oshamambe and the assembled social relationships. The primary goal of the BVP is not to create

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<sup>96</sup> Belongingness is the critical element to define a community in late modernity (Blackshaw 2010; Delanty 2010; Day 2006). Here I adopt the definition of Savage et al. to take belonging “as a socially constructed, embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a given site as appropriate given their social trajectory and their position in other fields” (Savage et al. 2004: 12).

a new neighborhood that is consistent with the neoliberal context. What this project aims to achieve is to attract and introduce newcomers to existing neighborhoods within Oshamambe. The success of the project is not limited to the expansion and continuation of the BVP community, but includes the revitalization of neighborhoods in the Oshamambe region.

To sum up, the implementation of the BVP and the concomitant construction of its rhizomatous community are achieved through the informal networks of the proponents. Sentiments toward private relationships are used in this public project. In this sense, the emergence of Bochibochi Village is achieved through the accumulation of trivial efforts which are affordable for local residents. The proponents of the BVP lead urbanite settlers into the local social order, namely, the system of reciprocal exchanges. In so doing, the BVP allows settlers to be localized through quotidian practices, and thus to join the collective performance of locality. The newcomers thus become able to anchor their selves to the place in the lococentric way Augustin Berque suggests, and find their belongingness (Berque 1992; Lebra 2004: 23).

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**THE ETHICAL FRICTION IN THE COMMUNITY:**  
**NEOLIBERAL REALITY AND ROOTED SUBJECTIVITY**

Rose (1996; 1999) has warned us that the ideological emphasis of community could justify the shrinking of social services under a neoliberal regime in the context of advanced liberal democracies. According to him, such communitarianism eventually becomes an accomplice of the economic state that illegitimizes governmental responsibilities such as redistribution and social protection while fostering self-responsible subjects through communal activities. He dubbed this mode of governance “government through community.” Are these civic efforts to revitalize the town simply a conspiracy of neoliberal governmentality? Is the emerging community of the BVP a Japanese example of neoliberal governmentality? This chapter responds to these questions by adopting the methodological insight of Lakoff and Collier (2004), who suggest examining the ethical dimension of social life in the fragmented context caused by globalization.

One criticism of studies of governmentality is that their major data source is from those who govern, so they will ignore what the governed are thinking and doing. Combining the idea of extended case method and governmentality, I will argue that such a problem can be fixed by starting the research from below and seeing how local life is related to the governors. Through the case study of the BVP, I shed light on the context in which neoliberal subjects are fostered, and the process in which neoliberal subjects perform neoliberal governmentality. Liz Bondi (2005: 499) so defines neoliberal subjectivity and explains its political implication:

As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism works by installing a concept of the human subject as an autonomous, individualised, self-directing, decision-making agent at the heart of policy-making. In so far as this vision of the human subject is recognised and assimilated, people are recruited into neoliberal forms of governmentality, even if they also, simultaneously, seek to resist some of its effects.

By this definition of neoliberal subjectivity, the most critical question will be: How are resistance or alternative practices possible? In the following paragraphs, I will explain briefly how alternative subject formation is made locally under the neoliberal regime. **The BVP does not fight against neoliberal discourse directly, but negotiates with it to seek common ground and the possibility of cooperation.**

This chapter deals with the politics of the BVP community. The ethical frictions between the BVP members are the major political issue under the surface of harmonious social interactions. The frictions exist in the interactions between two ethical subjects: the rooted subjects and the neoliberal subjects. For the former, the habitual formation of the local lifestyle in Oshamambe has been their ground for public participation. Though with limits and problems, that is the method to mobilize local people, and to sustain self-identity and livelihood. For the latter, the social reality created by the late capitalism and the politico-economic changes brought by the neoliberal regime made the neoliberal doctrines look more pragmatic than the local way of living. Economic efficiency and the logic of the pay-per-performance system (*seikashugi*) are virtuous principles for neoliberal subjects.

### **Dwelling Poetically in Oshamambe, or On Two Ways of Angling**

In this section, I compare two cases of re-settlement in Oshamambe: Gawa and Koba. Both of them were elite white-collar workers (*sarariiman*) before retiring in their late fifties. They had been longing for a rustic lifestyle since working in a metropolitan area. Gawa is a former villager who joined the BVP in 2004, but has gradually distanced himself from the BVP community over a few years and now focuses on his own garden. Koba, in contrast, has been a firm proponent of the BVP since he began participating in the project in 2008. Koba has been a trustee of the ODC

for many years. During my fieldwork, I did in-depth interviews with Gawa and Koba, and I read the weblogs they had written. Their different attitudes toward Oshamambe and its revitalization via the BVP have been fully expressed in several ways, which is helpful for our understanding of the ethical friction within the BVP community.

By comparing the two urbanite settlers, I discuss two ideal types of ethical subject: neoliberal subject and rooted subject. The former is a subject condition created by the practices of global capitalism discursively and institutionally, with self-responsible and self-governing features (Rose 1996, 1999). The latter is close to the “contingency subject” that is embedded either in the social interactions with others, or in the natural surroundings beyond the self and others (Lebra 2004). I call the latter a “rooted” condition of subject. In reality, neither of these two settlers can be identified with one of these ethical subjects, but each can be understood as inclined to a certain ideal type.

#### *Gawa*

*At the end of my farewell party held on the second floor of Grass, I stayed in the venue until the last minute to say goodbye to every guest. When I finally walked out of the restaurant, the crowd had dispersed, except for a few friends. Then I saw Mr. Gawa waiting for me on the other side of street. He seemed to have something he wanted to say: “Chang san, you were saying at the party that you learned useful experience from the BVP for future development of rural revitalization, right? Let me tell you. You must criticize (hihan) these guys, absolutely. They are doing it wrong. The way they are doing it will never save this town. Well, I am sorry to say that. To be honest, this project has failed. They are doing this wrong, and you have to criticize them rather than accept everything they have told you. You are a budding scholar*



*(gakusha no tamago), right?” Looking at his serious expression, I thanked him first for being willing to stay late to tell me what he thought was important for me. I promised him that as a researcher, I would not take any one-sided opinion as the whole truth about this place. He seemed satisfied with my explanation before leaving for his home.*

I was actually quite surprised during my conversation with Mr. Gawa after the party, not about his strong critique, but the active way he, as a well-educated urbanite, expressed it. In Japan, especially in an urban context, the distinction between front stage (*tatema*) and back stage (*honne*) has been an elementary form of social life, which has been noted by numerous scholars. In this case, Gawa revealed his *honne* to me with emotion, while ignoring other friends standing nearby. Why? A critical reason for this is that he recognized that I, as a researcher, was playing the role of an objective observer in this dispute about the BVP. But what does this dispute really concern?

The seed of the dispute has been planted since Gawa’s participation in the BVP. Gawa is a white collar male retired from a Kansai-based company in his late fifties. Like many other baby boomers in Japan, Gawa had a dream of buying his own summer villa in the countryside. During the 1990s, he experienced the bursting of the economic bubble and the Hanshin Earthquake, and the concomitant sense of ephemerality made him resolve to pursue his own dream. Searching for real estate information throughout the country, he eventually found an item in Oshamambe where the privatized railway company was selling some vacant land left by the national railway company. When I interviewed Gawa and his wife, the first thing he wanted to clarify is that their summer dwelling in Oshamambe has nothing to do with the locality and the BVP, but was totally a personal decision based on historical contingency and rational choice. He said:

*I was not interested in Oshamambe or something like that...I just...you know, this land is close to the rails of JR [Hokkaido], right...When I was in Osaka, the JRs*

*were selling their lands by public auction...Meanwhile, JR Hokkaido offered dozens of pieces of land for sale within Hokkaido...When Japan National Railway became the JRs, the JRs were selling the national properties to fix their deficits. [This lot where my house is located now is one of the items they were selling.] I eventually chose this land because, first of all, this is not enclosed by private properties but is adjacent to public roads. Secondly, tap water, electricity, and sewage are all available on this land. You know, there are many pieces of land they sold that have no access to these services...Plus, this lot is spacious...that is, it is cheap...very cheap...with all these conditions: road, electricity, water supply, and sewage system.*

Gawa purchased this vacant land in 2000, and made his first long stay in Oshamambe as a member of the BVP in 2004, just one year after his retirement. He had the house built on the lot by hiring a local builder introduced by Yama in 2005. In these two years, Gawa, as one of the few initial settlers in Bochibochi Village, cultivated the BVP farm and received media interviews as a representative of the Villagers.

Since the very beginning, however, Gawa had sensed that he does not agree with the “small is beautiful” philosophy of the BVP, and doubted the possibility of its survival in the severe social transformation of Japan. So after moving into his new house and establishing a family garden by the house, Gawa gradually distanced himself from the BVP circle. Gawa confessed to me that he had been bored by the competitiveness of the relationships in the workplace, and now he prefers to stay alone in his own garden rather than chatting with the BVP members. “By farming, I feel that I am healed,” Gawa said. When I met him in 2009, he only participated in meetings and events of the BVP occasionally. Except for driving trips to other parts of Hokkaido, Gawa usually stays alone in his summer villa.

One thing that made Gawa feel disappointed about the BVP is that the BVP exponents failed to recognize what he considers the “correct way” of rural revitalization practices. For Gawa, the key of the BVP lies in its commercialization and expansion of the scale of production. In his rural journals published on his website, Gawa once wrote down his reflection on the BVP

in 2007, and pointed out a feasible way to realize the current “dream” of the ODC, the revitalization of Oshamambe via the BVP. His vision of what the BVP should be is very ambitious and clear about the principles mentioned above. He notes in the journal:

*I have a dream of Bochibochi Village.*

*Short-term dream, long-term dream,  
the dream I describe is an achievable dream,  
that can be done with the current system, realistic principles of action.  
I'm thinking of a lot of things.  
Thinking of such things, which will probably happen next year:*

*A Bochibochi Village that provides safe and trustable food,  
The creation of a brand of Bochibochi Village's vegetables, seafood, meat, and  
cheese,  
The township mobilized to increase production,  
selling the products online,  
More than 3,000 regular subscribers (annual sales of 200 million yen),  
The issuing of regular catalogs and a newsletter,  
The issuing of a guidebook to Bochibochi Village (this is the easiest),  
An Oshamambe real estate guide for migrants (on the Internet),  
The greater influence with local authorities, namely,  
town councilors from among the ODC executives, and a town mayor if possible,  
Becoming a non-profit organization that is called Bochibochi Village, Inc.  
Well, if the scale is so large, go nationwide, sell Bochibochi Village brand  
nationwide, license the brand, aiming for large profit.*

That is, Gawa wants the BVP to become a growing enterprise, which is highly profit-oriented. In his view, this is the only way to success for the BVP. To propose the commercialization of the BVP, Gawa does not mean to use it to achieve his own wealth or fame, but sincerely considers it a feasible way for Oshamambeans to survive in the global economy. However, his view also reflects a polarized logic of success and failure that features neoliberal economy (see Sennett 1998). He embraces the neoliberal ideal of self-reliance and refutes dependency (*amae*) between persons, a classical form of social constitution in Japan (Doi 1986). In a Japanese context, *amae* refers to both naivety and dependency, which have been devalued in the new capitalism today.

Gawa's ethical view is consistent with his estrangement from the native residents in the township. Opposite to other BVP members, who usually appreciate their interactions with native residents, Gawa definitely expressed that he does not really get along with Oshamambeans. I strongly felt the symbolic boundary work performed in Gawa's talk based on his experience (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Born and raised in Hiroshima, Gawa entered a big company for his career after graduating from a prestigious university. After building his summer house in Oshamambe, Gawa comes to town to stay in the house for about six months, from April to October, annually. That is the warm season in Hokkaido, while the summer at his original residence is hot. However, Gawa has seldom interacted with local residents, especially after his fading out of the BVP. As I interviewed the Gawas, I was surprised to find that their way of talking, though mixing with a little Kansai slang, was much easier for me to understand compared with local residents. They spoke to me in formal language in a relatively standard accent, which is polite but with wider social distance, Local people usually talked to me using informal forms of Japanese that are mixed with vernacular expressions. Gawa told me: "You don't understand? Even though I am a Japanese, sometimes I don't really understand their speech. Those local guys, their vocabulary is really... Wow, sometimes I don't even understand a word."

Although Gawa enjoys his summer stays in Oshamambe, he has never loved everything inherent in the region. In his journals written in the initial stage of his transition to Oshamambe, Gawa, as an amateur writer, skillfully conveyed his feelings toward the natural landscape of this place. Being moved by the sunrise scene of Funka Bay is a major reason why he decided to build his summer house in Oshamambe. However, Oshamambe is not the only place in Hokkaido to see that kind of beautiful scene. As Gawa admitted in the interview, his decision is based on

rational calculation, and coming to Oshamambe in particular was a casual coincidence. Gawa not only disagreed with the way the BVP is organized and implemented, but also feels incompatible with the locality of Oshamambe to some extent. For instance, during the interview, the Gawas mentioned:

*Mr. Gawa: "Yama san invites people to live in Oshamambe, saying 'come to live here, Oshamambe is a nice town,' right? That is what was mistaken. [This town] is absolutely no good. Oshamambe is a no good town. Date is a good town. If Date said 'come to live here,' well, as the place with the best climate in Hokkaido, a lot of people would come.*

*Mrs. Gawa: "That's right. That's right."*

*Mr. Gawa: "Because Oshamambe is...terrible in its climate, people don't come...to tempt people to move here with us [is difficult]...for example, knowing that I live in this house elegantly, two of my friends came to search for [purchasable] pieces of land..."*

*Mrs. Gawa: "Nothing."*

*Mr. Gawa: "The climate is...and there is no proper land. Even though they wanted to live in Oshamambe, there is no land or house [to buy]. Available houses here are already tumbling down. Already no normal house..."*

It is hard to make a fair judgment of Oshamambe's climate. It is less snowy than many other parts of Hokkaido, but Date is indeed famous for its sunshine—the Sonan of Hokkaido. Here, in my view, the point the Gawas wanted to make in this conversation was not to belittle the locality of Oshamambe. Rather, they were presenting a seemingly “objective” judgment of localities through an imagined market of rural migration<sup>97</sup>. Apparently, in their view, Oshamambe is an inevitable loser in the competition of localities because of its uncompetitive climate and mistaken strategy of revitalization.

Gawa emphasizes the necessity of a professional real estate broker to circulate local information that can facilitate migration to Oshamambe. He suggests that an online catalogue of

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<sup>97</sup> As Yama wrote in his introduction to Gawa on a social networking website, Gawa is a rationalist (*gorishugisha*) on the one hand. As an amateur writer, Yama added, Gawa is not a cold-blooded calculator but sensitive to the details of human life on the other hand.

local real estate items should be established, which will allow prospective settlers to browse land and houses in Oshamambe freely. Moreover, transferring between Oshamambe and his home in Kansai area annually, Gawa is often concerned by the changes in Oshamambe when he is away. For example, he wanted to know about the condition of his summerhouse and garden in Oshamambe after the great earthquake struck the Tohoku area in 2011, but he found nobody other than the BVP members to help. Gawa also complained on the online forum of the BVP about the inaccessibility of information about any possible nuclear pollution in Oshamambe after the Fukushima nuclear incident. When I met him at his house in the summer of 2011, he showed me a portable radiation detector he carried with him, while complaining: “I can’t believe that no one has this in Oshamambe. When I asked the BVP people about the possible radioactive pollution here in March, no one could give me scientific data to prove it. They only told me that your house and garden look fine, Gawa. Isn’t it amazing?” The measured background radiation in Oshamambe, according to Gawa, was around the national average, so he did not have to worry about the effect of the Fukushima incident to some extent.

Fishing, not only a recreational hobby but also a technology of localization that maintains livelihood, is an example that reveals Gawa’s understanding of and attitude toward the locality of Oshamambe. Gawa loves fishing. Before he retired, he used to enjoy fishing on an inflatable boat with friends like Shin, who purchased the land of JNR and owns a summer villa by Gawa’s in Oshamambe<sup>98</sup>. One of Gawa’s dreams is to live by a lake and angle on a small boat on the lake like described in Henry Thoreau’s *Walden*. The only way Gawa catches fish in Oshamambe, however, is to do boat fishing on the sea. Since flounder are the majority of the fish population in

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<sup>98</sup> Both Gawa and Shin are in their sixties, and they are both BVP members even though they do not cultivate plots on the BVP farm now.

the sea at Oshamambe, fishing for flounder became a common choice for local anglers. Gawa does not like the monotony of having only one major fish species in Oshamambe, but he also does not want to spend time to angle for other kinds of fish if a fruitful result cannot be expected. Consequently, Gawa usually does flounder fishing on a rented boat when he stays in Oshamambe<sup>99</sup>.

Gawa does flounder fishing in Oshamambe about twice per year. On every outing, he tries his best to catch as many fish as he can. Gawa told me his calculation: hiring a boat for fishing once will cost you a lot, but if you can catch more than one hundred flounders on a trip, the average cost for each will still be cheap enough. He showed me the measure with his hands at his farewell party: “A flounder this big is worth 100 yen, and one this long is worth 1000 yen. I caught 250 flounders in total by going boat fishing twice this year. It’s a fortune, isn’t it? My freezer is full of frozen flounders and I have to eat one almost every day to consume them before I leave here. My wife complained about eating only flounders as she visited me in summer.” “Don’t we have any other choice for boat fishing here?” I asked. “Yes, there is. You can also catch cuttlefish, depending on the season. The experience of eating the freshest raw cuttlefish on the boat is wonderful,” Yama said. This suggestion did not seem very attractive to Gawa: “the

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<sup>99</sup> In my own experience, angling on a rented fishing boat is a relatively easy way of catching flounders. When I did angling at the port of Oshamambe, I would catch only one or even none in the course of several hours. However, even though I am an unskillful angler, I caught more than thirty flounders on my first trip taking a local fishing boat with other BVP anglers. Why? The professional fishing boat is always equipped with sonar that can detect the movement of the schools of flounder in the sea. The captain will stop the boat right above the focused school of flounders, and then inform the anglers on the boat to fish. If the flounders move, the captain moves the boat again so the anglers can always have a great chance to catch fish. This kind of fishing is very economical and practical for many people, including Gawa.

cuttlefishes in the supermarket here are extremely cheap and delicious, so there's no need to fish for cuttlefishes by oneself."

### *Koba*

Koba was the deputy editor of a major newspaper, one of the most important printed media outlets for sports journalism in Japan. He entered the company as a reporter after he graduated from a top university in Tokyo, and kept working hard in the company. He enjoyed his job very much, but the night shift schedule killed his health. "I loved doing my job before I quit, or retired," Koba said to me, "but my doctor told me that I either had to stop working like that or I would die very soon." After long consideration, Koba decided to retire and returned to Hokkaido, the prefecture where he grew up before college. He did not return to the village where he was born because his attachment to that place was not strong enough. He explained: "my family moved within Hokkaido several times, and I spent each stage of my childhood in a different city. When I decided to move back to Hokkaido, I decided to choose a place that looks attractive to me rather than a place I used to live." After moving to Oshamambe, Koba has changed his diet and biological clock to adapt himself to the new environment and schedule. His medical issue was thus relieved.

Koba is a typical proponent settler of Bochibochi Village who played a crucial role in the rhizomatous community of the BVP by his active participation in communal events and voluntary work. In so doing, Koba has become rooted through the technologies of localization: cultivation, dairy farming, fishing, and walking his dog. Since the health issue had been the reason that Koba retired and moved to rural Hokkaido, he and other BVP members intentionally



found these local activities for him to exercise and build his body. Koba used to be an athlete in college, so he regained his basic stamina in a relatively short time.

The initial step of Koba's localization was to cultivate his own plot in the BVP farm. His personal garden in the field anchors his position in this community. When he met other growers in the BVP farm, he could make conversation by identifying his plot and the crops he had grown. He observes adjacent plots to learn how to grow certain vegetables, and what crops flourish in the local climate. Plowing and weeding his plot is the first fitness lesson he went through in Oshamambe, which has improved his physical condition to a great extent.

The second fitness lesson for Koba is to take care of his pets, a dog and a small cat. In the spring of 2008, when Koba moved to Oshamambe alone, he was away from his original family living in Northern Hokkaido, and his colleagues and close friends in Tokyo. His social activity concentrated in the guesthouse of Shaman. Other guests in Shaman worried about his lack of companionship, and wanted to find him a dog, which he had claimed he wanted to adopt but never succeeded. Koba wanted to have a Shiba, a native breed among the other five that were named as natural symbols of Japan in the prewar era. He called the animal rescue team at Hokodate, but received a disappointing answer. Sayoko told him that an abused mongrel was now protected by the municipal government, and waiting for adoption. Koba immediately refused the suggestion: "No, thanks. If I went to see him eye to eye, I won't be able to leave him there but will take him home. Unfortunately, what I am really looking for is a Shiba."

A couple days later, Koba was invited by Yama and other members of the "Oldies' Band" to join a BBQ party at their studio, which was actually an unused storehouse of the Takano Family. As Koba arrived, he was surprised to see a mongrel eye to eye. "Mr. Takano, [the security guard of the municipal government,] has been keeping this abused dog for the municipal

government for three days, and he will keep the dog until someone adopts him,” Yama explained, “Why don’t you keep him?” As a result, Koba took him out when the dog needed to answer nature’s call, and, eventually, took him back home. Koba recalled:

*I didn’t even have one [outdoor] doghouse for it. So, I let him into my house at first. The dog lay down to rest immediately, because he had been so tired and now he had me on its side. However, he couldn’t fall asleep, but kept staring at me until I went to bed at 1 AM. As I spread my futon on the tatami, it came closer to me and turned his body over to let me touch his abdomen. From the second I patted his belly, [we] became attached [to each other].*

Later Koba decide to name this dog Chunbu, the reverse reading of the nickname of the Yamas’ cat. Since Chunbu joined the Koba family (*ie*), Koba’s lifestyle also had to change. As an ex-editor of a sports media, one of Koba’s major hobbies is to watch games and read about reviews of athletes and games, whether online or on television. After bringing Chanbu home, he had to further reduce the time he spent on his couch or in front of the computer desk because he has to take care of the physical and mental needs of the dog. Koba often complained: “Chanbu whined outside of my veranda for a walk for more than one hour. It was so noisy that I had to yield to his begging, and stopped what I was doing to go out with him.”

Koba was a man of chubby build as I met him, but he was even more so when he just arrived in Oshamambe according to the Yamas: “he looked much weaker than he does now. When he walked from the parking lot into the guesthouse, a thirty-second walk, he got out of breath already.” Changing his diet and daily schedule in Oshamambe, Koba soon lowered his weight and other major health numbers such as blood pressure, glucose, and lipids. Taking a walk with Chanbu in town every day also made Koba familiar with native residents, and thus he made local connections. Mrs. Bata of the *ramen* shop was the first friend that Chunbu made on his walks. She offers bones and pork to Chunbu, and sometimes shares some dishes or ingredients with Koba as well. Reciprocal gifting between Koba and Mrs. Bata has become

normal, which strengthens their social tie. In 2013, Mrs. Bata shared one of the kittens she adopted with Koba. The cat named Sora thus became the third member of Koba's alternative family.

In other words, Chunbu often plays a bridge between people. Joining the afternoon tea at the guesthouse, Shaman has been part of Koba's daily routine since he moved to Oshamambe. When Koba goes to Shaman, Chunbu is always begging to be his company. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Chunbu urges people in the guesthouse to take it for a walk by whining and barking loudly. Guests in Shaman would thus take Chunbu to stroll in the streets, and therefore encountered people from local neighborhoods. "The dog you are walking," in my own experience, has been a good topic to start conversation with strangers.

Koba's alternative family have brought him closer to other people as well. For example, a lady named Namiko walks Chunbu voluntarily on a regular basis, because she likes Chunbu a lot. She is a friend of Mrs. Oya and Sayoko, who planned to introduce her to Koba for match-making. The match does not seem to have worked out, but Namiko became closer to Koba's alternative family, especially the dog Chunbu. Every week, she visits Koba's house and takes Chunbu for a walk. She does so without contacting Koba, but simply parks her car in front of his house and takes Chunbu with her. In so doing, Namiko shares the burden of Koba, who occasionally suffers from physical problems caused by his heavy labor on the Nakagane Farm.

The third fitness lesson of Koba is his voluntary work on the Nakagane Dairy Farm. For Koba, working voluntarily on Nakagane Farm has been a major way of making himself rooted in the social networks and environment of Oshamambe. Since 2009, when Koba could afford hours of physical labor, he has continued to work on the Nakagane Farm every other morning. Through the volunteer labor, Koba became a good friend of the Nakaganes. By the same token, Koba has

been involved in the exchange based on reciprocity, rather than on the direct commodification of labor force conditioned by market forces, between the Nakaganes and the voluntary helpers. For an urbanite settler like Koba, doing a local job is a great opportunity to become rooted in the regional society (*chiiki shakai*). Namely, to be able to settle down in the local community, and pursue meaningful life. The localization of Koba lies in the fusion of his personal life and communal life, and his subject formation and participation in locality formation are co-constituted.

Koba is a lover of fishing, and his ways of fishing reveal his local rootedness. Koba does fishing at various spots in Oshamambe, introduced by different fishing friends he met via the BVP. Sai, an amateur angler and the vocalist in the “Oldies’ Band,” is a master of sea angling. He introduced Koba to the way of fishing in the local fishing ports and on the rocks. Shira accompanies Koba to spend an afternoon angling on the beautiful beach at Oshamambe while napping. Hashi is a local senior, a regular of Shaman, who knows very well about angling by the creeks. In the third year of Koba’s settlement in Oshamambe, he finally learned a couple of secret spots for creek fishing from Hashi. Finally, after working for Nakagane Farm voluntarily, Koba became entitled to angle by the creek on the ranch of the Nakagane. When his former colleagues come to visit him, Koba loves to show them his secret spots of angling, because the knowledge is evidence that he has adapted to living there.

Koba has a philosophy about rural resettlement that distinguishes him from other elite resettlers. He believes that it is ethical to adapt himself to the local society, rather than expecting native residents to accept the way he used to be. In an interview by a radio program that introduces rural Hokkaido, Koba was asked to give advice to prospective rural migrants. He wrote down his response on his website:

*First of all, you should visit the places you are considering moving to several times. The key factor is “people” (hito). Rather than the infrastructure of the land, social relations (ningenkankei) are the most important. Compared with the administrative promotion of migration, such as “we provide cheap land for you,” civic accommodation of migrants is better. Why? Because the administration system won’t serve you twenty-four hours a day. Here in Oshamambe, you can always find someone in the supporter group to help you.*

*Second, you should do your best to become a town citizen (chomin), namely, with active participation in the gatherings, and to keep good relations with local people in every way. Rural people are nice, so it is okay to eat the vegetables, pickles, and fish they offer. Don’t come for a resort place. You will get bored in three years.*

*Third, do not slander or criticize (warukuchi) others behind their backs. Your words travel fast in a small township. Of course, you won’t have a comfortable life after that.*

*Fourth, you should reward the township. After you move in, do something that is useful for the town, such as volunteering to pick up trash or maintain public flowerbeds.*

Koba practices these principles which he believes in, and he has become a rooted subject. Unlike Gawa, who dislike, the vernacular and the drinking and smoking habits of local residents, Koba seems to be habitually suited for the local community. He joined the routine afternoon teatime at Shaman, and he smoked while chatting with other guests there. Many other settlers of the BVP do not often visit Shaman, because of the differences of lifestyle such as smoking. Even in those cases, many of these settlers still develop their own local rootedness elsewhere in town. For Yama and Shira, this is what they love to see: newcomers find their own places in the local neighborhoods, rather than becoming a homogeneous unity. These BVP exponents want to build a heterogeneous community in Oshamambe, because that is closer to the Oshamambe Town they used to know.

Overall, the subjective disposition of Gawa is more inclined to neoliberal ethics, and that of Koba rooted ethics. However, every individual could have multiple subject-positions.

Although here I suggest the major subject-position of each settler, I claim that no one is purely neoliberal or totally local. Finally, though this might not be any individual's fault but historical contingency, Gawa's current practice of his dream life is directly derived from the liquidation of JNR, which has been identified as a major cause of the unstoppable decline of Oshamambe, the former "JNR Town." **Ironically, Gawa's flourishing and the suffering of Oshamambeans have a common origin.**

### **Appropriation of Neoliberal Rhetoric**

In the case of the BVP, commercial rhetoric and concepts are appropriated for promotion of the non-profit project. Interestingly, the exponents of the BVP utilize the language of capitalism, which is consistent with neoliberal ideology, to serve a goal that is tuned to the local cultural logic.

Shira, a major exponent of the BVP, uses both illustrations and rhetoric of marketing to explain his concept of the BVP to his target audience, including settlers, native residents, and bureaucrats. As Figure 6.1 shows, in this flyer for the promotion of the BVP that circulated throughout the town in 2010, Shira claims that population decline will damage the market for local business (*sangyōkiban*) in Oshamambe, so local actions to mitigate the effects of depopulation have to be taken. He also explains the five stages of the development of the BVP. His drawing shows that the current BVP has just moved to its middle stage, and tentative sale of the farm produce should be started at this stage. In the illustration on the top, Shira depicts his vision of the successful branding of the BVP. As soon as Bochibochi Village becomes a brand representing Oshamambe Town, Oshamambeans can develop an organic farming industry and organic cuisine restaurants, attract corporations to invest in food processing factories in town, and finally create job opportunities for the younger generation. In so doing, Oshamambe will

become a desirable destination for tourists traveling on the high-speed railway (*shinkansen*) that is under construction now, rather than a meaningless en route stop on their railway journey. For Shira, this is the substantial way of remaking Oshamambe that has been ignored by the town-making committee of Oshamambe Town. So far, Shira's picture is not very different from Gawa's.

Yama shares with Shira a similar understanding of the expected progress of the BVP, even though he does not quite believe in Shira's stage of growth theory, especially the part about regional branding. For him, the common ground between them is the revitalization of Oshamambe on the basis of respecting its locality or localities. Although Shira appropriated business language, there is one thing hidden from his drawing: he expects these changes to happen over a longer period of time. In the left hand side of the top illustration, Shira wrote that he expects food corporations will rush into Oshamambe for licensing the regional brand and to establish local factories in 2040, which is thirty years from the time when he drew this flyer. On the homepage or online forum, Yama also clearly notifies readers that in their original conception, the BVP will take at least twenty years to accomplish the ideal picture of Oshamambe they depict. The exponents of the BVP did not expect to achieve their goal in a short time, nor do they want to set an easier goal. Rather, they claim to accumulate small efforts that they can make in the everyday context, and want to believe that such a collective life plan will eventually realize the revitalization of the local community.

At the top of the flyer, Shira wrote: "We want you to participate in our making of a pesticide-free town; please lend a helping hand...to create a population base that can allow the younger generation to earn a living for raising their kids." Appealing to the elderly as autonomous subjects is actually a common strategy of a neoliberal regime to foster neoliberal subjects in

contemporary Japan (Shibuya 2003: 46-67). The encouraging language Shira and Yama used thus attracts enthusiastic participants to the BVP, but they often failed to communicate with them about the non-neoliberal nature of the local culture the BVP has lived by.

### **Ethical Frictions: The fissure in the common ground of the BVP**

The problem of Oshamambe, according to Gawa, is an economic one. Therefore, he claims that the revitalization of Oshamambe is an issue of succeeding in Japan's emerging market of rural lifestyle contextualized by the global mediascapes and ideoscapes of LOHAS, namely, the lifestyles of health and sustainability. In other words, the ODC must establish a self-sustaining enterprise that not only can survive in rural Hokkaido, but also can compete with other corporations in the Japanese global city, Tokyo. So, Gawa feels that the media exposure of the BVP so far, which has been focused on Hokkaido-based media that have no national influence, is too limited and thus cannot expand the scale of the project. In this view, in a place that lacks competitive socio-geographic conditions such as Oshamambe, a revitalization project based on the logic of local culture is unrealistic and thus problematic. Other dissident voices in the BVP more or less echo Gawa's view: the BVP has to be implemented not in a local context but in a global one.

Such an assertion leads to the simple conclusion that the BVP has to be managed as an enterprise, and the Bochibochi villagers must work together for the goal of revitalization as the employees of Bochibochi Inc. Therefore, the implementation of the BVP must emphasize and be examined by capitalist morals such as competition and entrepreneurialism. In this section, I analyze ethnographic data to show how capitalist virtues have penetrated the common sense of the BVP members, who are unsatisfied by the powerlessness of the BVP to change the socio-



# 「若者が子育てできる産業基盤を創ろう！」

**ボチボチ村は無農薬の町を目指してネット販売を拡大します。  
あなたも参加しませんか？あなたの力を貸してください！**

おしゃまんべの名前が欲しい  
企業はむいからやります。

食品加工会社が進出してくる。  
2040年ごろです。

**無農薬素材が  
いっぱいになれば**

無農薬素材の  
「長万部定食」  
があります。

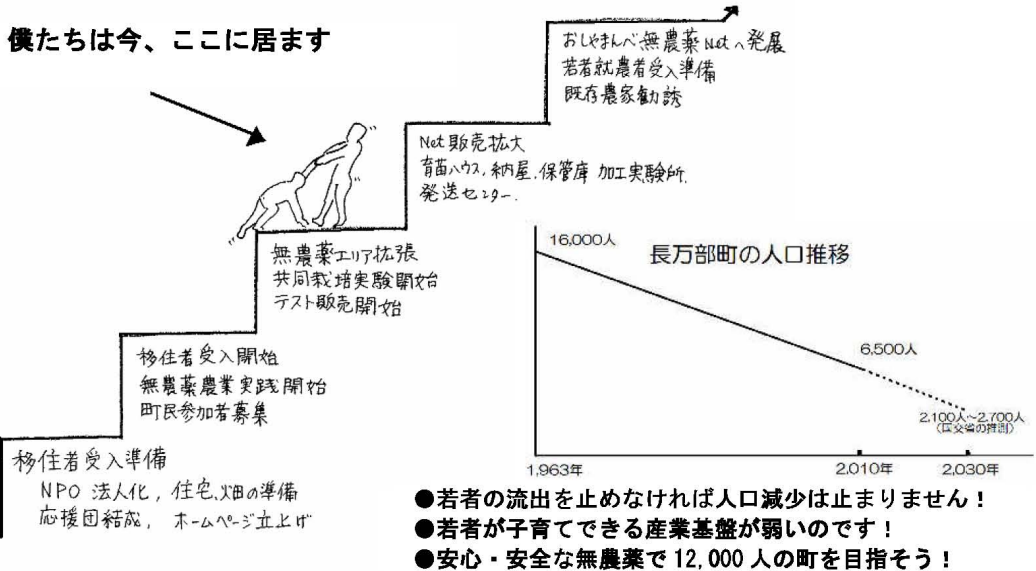
食事は長万部コースが  
あります。おいしい。

無農薬の町を  
訪ねる旅行者が  
やってくる。

新幹線の目的地に  
なります。

若者が  
子育てできる  
農業です

加工、販売流通にも  
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〒049-3521 北海道山越郡長万部町大町 30-2 01377-2-4666  
<http://www.botiboti.net> (ボチボチ村で検索)



Figure 6.1 A handmade flyer of the BVP that illustrates the vision of a “pesticide-free” Oshamambe

economic reality of Oshamambe efficiently. Such discontent has become the major cause of the ethical frictions between the BVP members.

### *Competition*

*In a monthly meeting of the ODC trustees, a group of old men were sitting around the table in the office of the ODC. As usual, they were discussing things on the agenda, while enjoying beer and sake. Before closing the proceedings, Zaki proposed a motion that the ODC should design and make some containers and cartons for organic crops for the use of future business. Since online sale of the BVP produce had been one middle-range goal of the BVP, Zaki's motion made much sense. However, Shira had a different idea. Packaging was not the issue the ODC should work on at this point, he said, because the BVP farm had not reached the threshold of commercial production. Zaki did not buy this argument. For him, proper wrapping and package design are commonsensically the essence of commodification, so it is a critical first step for the development of the BVP. The dispute continued for more than ten minutes, and the two camps still insisted on their own opinions. To cool down the atmosphere that had begun to heat up, the chairperson Mura suggested postponing this motion until the commodifiable crops are harvested, and to close the proceeding for now. Most trustees immediately agreed to the idea, and the meeting ended, with Zaki still complaining about the disrespect and ignorance of the other trustees after leaving the office.*

The playful attitude of Yama and some other ODC members made the formal procedure of the organization much more informal. Yama emphasized to me as we attended the trustee meetings of the ODC: “we are a delinquent group who always discuss official questions while enjoying alcohol and cigarettes together. That has been our terrible way of doing things together

since the very beginning of the ODC.” Yama introduced the nature of the ODC’s board of trustees in an ambiguous manner: on the one hand, Yama seemed a little modest or even self-deprecating in their seemingly “untrustworthy” behavior as the “trustees;” on the other hand, he looked a little proud about this “brotherhood” shared by his comrades (*nakama*) and himself.

In a presentation to the group of town councilors from a township in northern Hokkaido, Zaki presided over the meeting. On that day, he wore a formal suit that made him look like a councilor as well. Meanwhile, all other representatives of the BVP, including Yama, Shira, Koba, and I, were wearing casual blazers or white shirts only. As the meeting began, Zaki followed the agenda made by Yama, and announced the beginning of the meeting in a very formal way: “Here I announce the conference for the inspection team of Naka Town council open, now!” After the meeting, I heard Shira poking fun at Zaki, who was no longer present: “Did you see what Zaki was doing at the opening? He spoke big in that tone. He just made it too serious! That’s awkward,” Shira laughed. Shira’s mocking of Zaki, on the one hand, could be understood as the distinction made by cultural capital; on the other hand, however, Shira disagreed with and challenged Zaki’s self-identity as an ODC trustee. For Shira, playing the role of an ODC trustee in front of councilors should not be too different from the way he usually is in everyday life.

Such playful ethics of Yama and Shira sometimes provoked other ODC trustees, especially those who raise critical questions that require serious discussion. Zaki’s motion about packaging is a good example of this. Zaki had been frustrated about the slow progress of the BVP, and he felt even more so as his proposal of packaging for a brand was implicitly rejected. Several BVP members expressed their disagreement with the current way of doing the BVP, who define the success of the BVP as the realization of making a self-reliant community on the basis of profitable organic agriculture in a few years. Each of the dissidents emphasizes a different aspect

as the solution to the “stagnation” of the BVP. For Zaki, the operation of the ODC must be formalized and the members should discipline themselves to implement the BVP more efficiently in the Japanese manner of corporate governance. The ODC trustees should devote themselves to the meetings and tasks of the organization while being able to have a drink at bars after hours. For Gawa, as mentioned above, the ODC members must be ambitious enough to make Bochibochi Village a growing enterprise and thus a profitable brand. For Shin, he worried that the lack of formal institution and younger successors of the BVP might become a fatal flaw of the project. In Yanagi’s view, the BVP exponents should devote themselves to the election of town councilors and mayor to seize political power and resources for speeding up the BVP. He always said: “Now all is well [in Bochibochi Village], but what if Mr. Yama got sick...or Mrs. Yama got sick? Shira might fall ill someday, right? People here are getting older and older, and this kind of things could happen! If that happens, then the BVP will not be able to continue!” To fix the problem, according to him, the scale of the BVP farm should be expanded to the extent that it can afford to hire young employees. While Shira and Yama had discussions with them on these issues, they could not reach a consensus of opinion. For the exponents of the BVP such as Shira and Yama, the corporatization of the BVP is not practical or achievable at the current stage. The dissidents in the BVP often took such a response as the rejection of reformation. Later in another monthly meeting, Zaki’s discontent with the exponents of the BVP was aggravated by a careless suggestion of Yama.

*It was about eight o’clock in the evening, right before the trustee meeting started. The participants were still passing snacks and drinks around. Yama, as the vice chairperson of the board of trustees who often presides over the ODC meetings, said casually: “Hey, everybody, let’s not make today’s meeting too long, okay? The second-to-last episode of a wonderful TV*

*series will be broadcast tonight at ten, and I really want to watch it with my wife. It is a deep, deep drama that seriously discusses the ethics and nature of motherhood. I have learned a lot from this series, and you should all watch it.” After the meeting, Zaki told Tori: “he said let’s end this meeting at ten as the meeting began. When I heard that, I thought that ‘okay, so it’s fine. I don’t have to say anything,’ and ‘well, we’d better shut up.’”*

About two weeks after, as I interviewed him and Mrs. Zaki at their place, Zaki mentioned this episode, and complained about it with a little anger. Although I had heard Zaki’s complaint about this right after that meeting was dismissed, I had mistaken it for an expression of Zaki’s obstinacy. Not until I reviewed the content of the interview did I realize that his discontent was caused by the ethical friction, which is about the distinction between the formal and the informal, or between the public and the private. Zaki felt disrespected because Yama seemed to equate the importance of watching a TV program with that of formal discussion of the future of the township<sup>100</sup>. In Zaki’s view, discussion in a meeting is a formal and public thing, but watching an interesting TV program is a private thing that pales in significance. For Yama, however, the two things are often inseparable: working for the non-profit organization is part of his personal life, and vice versa. Yama often writes down personal comments on the official website of the BVP, and preaches his understanding of love and peace to other trustees in the meetings. For him, to recommend a good TV series before the meeting is never a big deal<sup>101</sup>. That is why Yama can devote himself (and even his family and property) to the management of the BVP full heartedly.

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<sup>100</sup> In addition, Yama had joined their after-meeting gatherings less and less frequently, which showed his inactiveness in maintaining the group solidarity. In Zaki’s view, going drinking together is an informal way of communication by which people are more likely to disclose their own real intentions.

<sup>101</sup> Moreover, according to my own record between 2009 and 2010, the regular meetings of the ODC trustees usually broke up before ten o’clock.

In other words, the casual and self-determined attitude is a necessary condition for Yama to execute organizational tasks voluntarily. If he did not make it part of his relaxed daily life, he would not be able to do so much for the community. In Zaki and other critics' view, however, such an unprofessional attitude of working prevents the development of the BVP, because the BVP exponents do not understand that "reality bites" in the outside world (*genjitsu no kibishisa*). To express his anxiety about the future of the BVP, Zaki so criticized: "It has been almost five years! What have we made? Nothing! If you are asked to run a project for your company, and accomplish so little in a couple of years, what will happen? You will be fired! Who will give you five years to do that?"

Even Moto, a radical environmentalist settler in the BVP, accepts the principle of competition while criticizing the informal form of communal mobilization to a certain degree. He once made a comment on the afternoon tea group gathering at Shaman every day: "That group, I think they should just disband, and not gather there daily." "Why? What's wrong with them?" "Can't you tell, Chang san? They go the same place every day, drink the same coffee every day, smoke the same cigarette every day, and talk about the same idea every day. If they keep doing so, then the BVP won't go anywhere. They should use that energy to explore the outside world and learn something new, something they will never see within Oshamambe." What I want to problematize in his words is not that he suggested that the Yama group should learn and imitate a better model, but the way he justified his argument: "You know, there are so many organic farming groups in Japan now. The BVP won't be able to compete with them if the ODC don't change their way of doing things." Here Moto justifies his argument by citing the principle of competition. Even though Moto pursues an eco-friendly life that is not dominated by capitalism, he still takes competition as part of the nature of environmental groups.

*During my chatting with the Suns, I happened to mention the existence of what Yama and Shira called “the settlers we did not mean to recruit” (motometakunai ijūsha). By it they referred to a household, including a couple and their two daughters, who suddenly showed up in town with all of their property, without application or notice in advance, forcing the ODC to help with their settlement while not necessary fulfilling the obligations as Bochibochi villagers. The reason they did so was still unclear, but it presumably involved financial trouble. These settlers eventually settled in Oshamambe via the assistance of the ODC, but they refused to move out of the low-rate housing of the BVP after one year. So, Yama took charge of looking for other public housing for them in order to get back the dormitory house for future settlers. Listening to the story, Sun kept shaking his head and sighed.*

*Sun’s wife finally gave me a wry smile and said: “I really do not know how Yama san always finds those incapable persons. Can people like them really revitalize this township? I don’t mean to criticize them in person, but their coming simply adds to our burden. Let me tell you a story: there was a young lady who went to Yama, saying that she is an artist, a potter, who really wants to settle in this town. I don’t know why she is an artist, since I never saw any of her pottery works. Anyway, after moving into the cheap housing that the ODC managed, she still needed a job to survive in Oshamambe. Yama worked very hard to find working opportunities for her through his personal network. First she went to work for the post office, but she quit after a short time. So Yama had to beg us to give her a job in our shop, but she quit in a few days again! She changed several jobs in this manner, because she felt that all those jobs didn’t suit her. Both Yama and people who helped her were exhausted. Isn’t it terrible? I really don’t know whether [the ODC] is a revitalization group or a charity!”*

*Sun criticized the crops from the BVP farm: “did they grow anything special? I don’t think so. Do you know the family living right behind our house, close to the mouth of the river? That guy grows vegetables in his family garden using no pesticide. He and his wife weed the garden often, and chop the weeds into little pieces as the fertilizer, you know? They share their vegetables sometimes. Their daikon radishes were huge, and their cabbages were bigger than those in supermarkets. When I bit into them, wow, they were all sweet and juicy! They were so tasty and delicious! That’s a master of organic farming. Do they (the BVP) grow anything like that? You tell me! How do they sell their produce, with so many organic farms in the market?”*

Again, the way the Suns evaluate the BVP is by the degree to which it can revitalize the local economy, which is part of Shira’s discourse. **The achievement of helping settlers, however, is not considered a contribution to a self-sustaining business of organic farming.** The organizational competitiveness remains the most important standard for judging the efforts of the BVP. Newcomers who cannot contribute to the final accomplishment will be unnecessary, especially when they are making trouble.

### *Entrepreneurialism*

As I have delineated in the previous chapter, local entrepreneurs who successfully created a share in an urban food or souvenir market have manufactured a locality with narratives used for their branding. Such a locality has no specific connection to any single neighborhood in Oshamambe, but lies in a general stereotype of Oshamambe symbolically characterized by special local products: crabs, scallops, dairy farms, or the exotic place name of the township<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> It is interesting that right-eyed flounders (*karei*) are not one of these local symbols. As mentioned before, the place name of Oshamambe is derived from the naming of this place



For Yama or other BVP exponents, these enterprises could be their partners, since they all live in the same town, sometimes even in the same neighborhood. For the BVP exponents, living together can be a common ground for people who are willing to communicate with others across the symbolic boundaries drawn by socio-economic status, religion, or other personal traits. However, these local entrepreneurs usually have no interest in collaborating with the BVP, since they cannot see any economic potential or sustainability in the project.

To keep the organization competitive, these local critics all agree that the BVP should be implemented as a commercial project. The ODC should borrow money to buy equipment and hire professionals in order to create a profitable enterprise. Local entrepreneurs, along with retired managers who settle in the town, especially support this idea because that kind of thinking is part of their everyday life.

*One day, I suddenly got a call from Mr. Sun. I felt surprised, because we seldom call each other. He wanted to introduce Yama and me to a successful character, the president of a seafood company based in a nearby township. This person's company just passed the examination of the MAFF to be one of the limited agricultural exporters funded by the state. His subsidy-winning proposal illustrates the plan of selling the seafood produced in Southern Hokkaido to the global market, by extending its distribution channel to China via its local trade partner there. Sun was enthusiastic about presenting this businessman to us, because he believed that this connection could be useful for both my research and the future development of the BVP. Although the*

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by Ainu people, meaning "a place with right-eyed flounders." A commonsensical explanation for their absence in the recent construction of Oshamambean locality is that the right-eyed flounder is a common species of fish in Japan that is ugly, cheap, and stinky. If the majority of the fish population were left-eyed flounders (*hirame*), a high-value fish in Japan, then maybe the story would be totally different.

*president kindly shared a lot of ideas and stories with us, I found that Yama was trying his best to be polite, but actually looked bored by his talk.*

*In the last evening of the shrine festival in Oshamambe, I met Sun at the edge of the square in front of the railway station. While everybody in the square was there to watch the shows of the festival, Sun, riding a foldable bike, looked into the air as if he were drifting in his thought. When I said hello to him, he seemed like he was just waking up from a dream, and then he asked me: “Oh, Chang san, it’s you...I have a question for you. You are from Taiwan, right? From a Taiwanese viewpoint, what is the way of cooking that can make intestines tasty?” His question out of the blue took me by surprise, and I answered his question at my best. Listening to my words, Sun was lost in thought again, though the square was bustling with performers and the audience of the shrine festival.*

One salient characteristic of the “successful” local entrepreneurs in Oshamambe whom I have met is: they seemed to think about improving their expertise and skills incessantly, because they all believe that their professional efforts are the key to their success. Meanwhile, they also emphasize the importance of social relationships in the expansion of their businesses. In other words, they usually seek business partnership, whether equal or unequal: not only friendship but also “alliances that should be based on market rationality” (Gershon 2011: 540). By the same token, many of them do not feel much sympathy for people who fail to develop their own expertise. They believe that these people should be responsible for their predicaments. In their view, Yama and the BVP members are just playing a farming game, not seriously developing an enterprise of organic farming or regional revitalization.

Sun questions seriously the practicability of the Bochibochi village project. He especially criticizes the fact that the participants did not buy their own farmland but simply borrowed some

from the local government. Sun: “It is problematic that they do not have their own land [for the BVP]. They are cultivating soil [on the borrowed land], right? If they finally develop their own good quality soil but the municipal government decides to take back the land, what can they do? Nothing!” Without the possession of the farmland, he argues, the arable soil you have painstakingly nurtured could be gone in one day, as soon as the government decides to take it back.

As these two narratives show, Sun spends a lot of time and effort considering how to improve his business, whether by making business alliances or by developing more competitive products. In the case of Sun, improving his profit and products are inseparable from his personal life as well. For Yama, however, the BVP is never an enterprise, but a belief and an attitude toward life: the BVP members should make small efforts every day to build a new community that can support more people who want to dwell in the town. Thus, though he criticizes the way Yama manages the BVP, Sun also admitted that both Yama and he are necessary figures for this township. “Yama can do something I can never do for this town, and vice versa,” Sun said. What makes them different is the ethics they practice respectively. While Yama is more inclined to be a rooted subject in terms of his way of living, Sun is rather more like a neoliberal subject the governing authorities would expect to see. Even though Sun and Yama are both friends and neighbors, they are separated by an ethical boundary. When I asked Sun if he would like to sponsor the BVP to launch their business, he quickly rejected this: “No, not at all. How can I sponsor a group that is totally not serious about their own project? They are not doing business. They are just playing (*asobi*).”

What I saw in Oshamambe is a severe socio-economic environment that had seriously degraded as a result of Japan's globalization, for which the governmental budget and human resources are centralized in the global locales in Japan, including global cities (Tokyo, Osaka, etc.) and translocal sites (such as airports' shopping malls or international tourist spots). As a local high school graduate told me, for the younger generation in the township, they either go to the city for a career, or you have to become very competitive by starting a business in the town. Being competitive has been justified by the local reality of a declining economy and graying population, and is becoming the moral principle in rural towns like Oshamambe.

### **Conclusion: Competition and the locality of Hokkaido**

A representative practice installed by the neoliberal governmentality of senility in Japan is gateball, or Japanese croquet. It is a popular ball game among older Japanese that is promoted by the Japanese government as a way to keep senior citizens active and healthy via their autonomous practices (see Traphagan 1998, 2000). Although gateball has been constructed as a national hobby for the Japanese elderly, and there are also gateball teams in Oshamambe, almost none of the BVP settlers play this game in Oshamambe to my knowledge. What fascinates the BVP members is instead a ball game invented in Hokkaido in the early 1980s called park golf. Park golf is a game resembling golf, but played on a much smaller course that can be integrated into a communal park. The equipment and rules are simplified (using only one club and a bigger ball for nine holes in a round), and the necessary technique is thus different from that for golf. In Oshamambe, there is a beautiful park golf course built in the 1990s where local residents can play for a discounted price (300 yen a day, about three dollars). Many more locals play park golf than gateball in the township.

I asked Zaki, one of the most enthusiastic players of park golf among the BVP settlers, along with the Fujis, why he plays park golf but not gateball at all. He said: “Gateball is played on a narrow lawn, and I don’t like that. I prefer to play in a relaxing open space. It is nice to play park golf in Hokkaido, where we can easily enjoy an open panoramic view of the grandeur of nature with fresh air on the course.” To sum up, park golf is a local invention that fully utilizes the features of the natural surroundings in Hokkaido. So it is different from gateball, which is suitable for crowded areas. It is fair to say that the practice of park golf embodies the locality of Hokkaido.

Similar to the understanding of Zaki, Shira further interpreted the differences between these two kinds of ball games, especially the ways in which the basis of competition differs:

*Shira: To play gateball, you and your teammates have to keep using your brain to come up with strategies and tactics directly against your opponents in every encounter, right? So, playing gateball makes you think [about how to beat the opponents]. On the court of park golf, however, you only focus on solving problems: where should I stop the ball for the next shot? Which route should I take? A safer one, or a risky but high-rewarding play? How can I make the shot as planned? Why did I fail on the last one? Only things like that.*

*Me: So, you mean that park golfers are working on themselves more than on their opponents?*

*Shirai: That’s right! Don’t think about beating your opponents, but just focus on what you can do, decide your goal, and give your best shot. Life is like that.*

Ten years ago, Shira analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of Oshamambe, and proposed the BVP as a possible solution to the local predicament. For him, the current way of implementing the BVP is the only way to change the local community with the few resources and capital that the ODC can access or control. Therefore, it is natural if the BVP is not as competitive or efficient as many participants expect. “That has been the best we can do for now,” Yama said.

What is noteworthy is that several retired settlers mentioned that gardening or nature is a healing process for them, that can cure their psychological wounds left from their career of dealing with human relationships (*ningen kankei*). When I interviewed Gawa, he mentioned that he is not interested in any kind of sports, because that kind of game always involves human relationships. He explained:

*It's about human relationships, whether competition between people, or getting along with people around you... (Mrs. Gawa: he just doesn't like that.) Well, competition...competition for the lead in a certain technology is the pride of [professionals, which is fine.] The problem is the relationship, which I have dealt with for decades in my career. I am tired of that. I just want to be away from that to stay quite alone, so I am tranquil enough to watch the moon.*

Among the urbanite settlers in the BVP, Yanagi also expressed feelings similar to what Gawa stated here, that they want to renounce the world and stand aloof from worldly affairs. Their common reason for doing so is that they have had enough during their careers, and they want to cut their connections to that kind of life through retirement and a rural lifestyle. Ironically, however, these people belong to the group that seriously criticizes the slow pace of BVP development taken by the BVP proponents.

To return the question I proposed earlier: why do Gawa and others reveal strong emotions of indignation toward the BVP? If they have enjoyed their rural lives in Oshamambe, which is more or less with the help of the BVP community, then why are they still emotionally concerned with the improvement or commercialization of the BVP? In other words, why have some urbanite settlers flourished locally but suffered ethically? Is it simply because their suggestions and advice were not adopted by the BVP exponents?

In my view, they are feeling moral indignation against the way of living that the current BVP system has proposed. They have internalized the neoliberal ethics involving wanting to achieve self-reliance and the existing model of rural revitalization that apparently makes more

sense in the context of city-centered capitalism. The way of the BVP now might be ethically okay for individuals who prefer slow living, but seems “morally” wrong for those who devoted themselves to the project in pursuit of local revitalization (Amable 2010; Rose 1999: 191-3). The BVP proponents are responsible for the mobilization of local people and resources, but their refusal to adopt a more “reasonable” way of running the BVP outrages the self-governing subjects fostered under neoliberalism.

## CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION

As smartphones and the Internet have become the core of personal life in today's Japan, constructing numerous virtual neighborhoods in the digital space, discussion on the conventional concept of community based on face-to-face interaction and sense of place seems unfashionable. The mutual aids and cooperation among neighbors in traditional neighborhoods that anthropologists such as Bestor (1989) vividly recorded have become less and less relevant in the contemporary context characterized by a global economy. What is becoming critical for sustaining a place-based community now is how to create recognizable festivals or cultural events that attract not only local residents, but also international tourists and capital. In Hokkaido, for example, businesses aiming at Australian or Taiwanese tourists have been opened in several tourist spots. However, can these emerging businesses that seize the niche market support their neighborhood socio-economically? How is local life maintained in such a competitive but insecure context? As I have discussed in Chapter Two, today Japan's national policy of regional development and devolution of power do not respond to these essential questions. Rather, the state encourages a neoliberal discourse of local empowerment on the one hand, in which individuals, civic groups, and local authorities in provincial regions are identified with entrepreneurial actors with the ability to do rational calculation, to form strategic alliances, and to take the risk of business ventures. Therefore, rural communities are responsible for their own social and financial sustainability. On the other hand, state bureaucrats and politicians continuously proposed development plans based on urban economy and global capitalism, such as the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020, to boost the economy of Japan that has suffered from the long-term recession of the Lost Two Decades (*ushinawareta nijūnen*).



After the late 1990s, the neoliberal reform concomitant with the devolution of responsibility has weakened the fiscal redistribution system by deducting the portion of national tax revenue allocated to local governments. As a result, the local authorities of rural townships reduce the expenditure of public service by measures such as downsizing public hospitals and closing elementary schools in shrinking neighborhoods. These measures look reasonable, but have significant social consequences. For example, the town hospital of Oshamambe has lost too many physicians, nurses, and equipment to fulfill the medical demands of the graying population of the township. Local patients with catastrophic illness or chronic illness can only receive simple treatment and routine care for their illness in town, and usually have to commute to the larger hospital in the adjacent township, or received prolonged hospitalization in Sapporo. However, the town hall provides no assistance to senior patients who have to visit another town for proper medical treatments. To help the local elderly overcome the difficulty of accessing medical resources away from them, a voluntary group, The Friends (*tomo no kai*), was eventually organized to offer shuttle service between the public hospital of Yakumo Town and local neighborhoods several years ago<sup>103</sup>. That is, a more flexible regional medical network, which was supposed to replace the inefficient system of public medical service in the countryside, has not been completed until some autonomous citizens stepped in.

Such a social landscape of rural Japan is the reality the BVP members have to face in their everyday life. When the state gave up its role of redistribution of national incomes to wrestle with the imbalance between metropolitan areas and the provincial regions, the BVP established a new redistribution network by utilizing a cultural system of reciprocal exchange of local

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<sup>103</sup> The Friends has hired Mr. Zaki, who was a taxi driver before he retired and moved to Oshamambe, as a part-time shuttle bus driver.

neighborhoods. Such a network supports their recruitment of new settlers to local neighborhoods.

**The BVP thus makes up for the state's malfunction in terms of redistribution and social services to a certain extent. However, the BVP exponents do not promote a self-responsible subjectivity that is encouraged by the neoliberal state, but try to create an environment where multiple subject-positions could be realized by individual participants.**

The planning and promotion of the BVP do not assume the locality of Oshamambe in general, nor do they utilize local specialties as commodifiable communal symbols. Rather, the BVP admits the insufficiency of the current construction of “the” locality of Oshamambe, and proposes the way to improve it via the practice of pesticide-free farming in addition to the diverse ways of producing localities within local neighborhoods. They depict the future of Oshamambe based on global values, such as sustainability and natural diversity, after deep deliberation of the initial members of the ODC, but intentionally find ways to “articulate” those values to the habitus of local living.

This research engages in dialogues with intellectual traditions of three disciplines. In community studies, the case of the BVP suggests an emerging form of community that is different from those described by existing community theories: a rhizomatous community, which is neither detached from neighborhood, nor bounded by neighborhood, neither existing only in virtual space, nor fully relying on socio-spatial proximity, and neither homogeneous but exclusive, nor heterogeneous but atomized. People living within a rhizomatous community are thus able to have support and resources to negotiate with the governance of neoliberal regime and (quasi-)communitarian discourses, while co-existing with them to a certain degree. In transnational studies, the problem of locality in a global context has been addressed in an interdisciplinary manner (Massey 1994: 146-156; Harvey 1996: 291-326; Appadurai 1996: 178-

199; Gille and Ó Riain 2002: 277-9). A place is actually a “meeting place” in a global sense, and the locality is constructed via everyday actions of people. Such kinds of localities are thus open and progressive, and so the places can become the locales for a “militant particularism.” What I want to emphasize through the demonstration of the BVP’s case is that these people who intersect at locales in a rural context will eventually be anchored to the natural surroundings directly or indirectly, via individual practices or the cultural system of reciprocal exchange. Such connections form the material basis for attachment and belongingness. In gerontology, I echo the critical gerontologists who reveal the problematic assumption underlying the neoliberal paradigm of active, productive, or successful aging (Moulaert and Biggs 2012; Rozanova 2010; Lamb 2014). All these theoretical explorations are contextualized by an overarching discourse: neoliberalism. They thus empirically answer a shared core question in distinctive ways: being situated in the countryside that is under the shadow of neoliberalism, how should one live, and how does one live with other people there?

In my view, the case of the BVP forms a new perspective of aging that can be called “meaningful aging”, by which I mean the elderly are free to follow their will to pursue their meaning of life (*ikigai*) in their interactions with friends or nature (Mathews 1996; Bell 1994). Some want to be away from sociable activities while wanting to be recognized as a poetic character dwelling in nature. Others have left the neighborhood context of their former urban residences, and established new relationships with people in both the BVP and the local neighborhoods in Oshamambe. Whether through individual or collective practices, these senior settlers have redefined their later lives in a way they intentionally chose, which has brought them freedom in a Kantian sense: “a human being and generally every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means for the discretionary use for this or that will, but must in all its

actions, whether directed towards itself or also to other rational beings, always be considered at the same time as an end” (Kant .2012: 40). The current system of the BVP, while being criticized for being unrealistic and inefficient, treats the recruited settlers “not merely” as a means of rural revitalization, but also as an end of it. As Shira said: “the foundation of a township is people, not capital.”

## **Coda**

Here, I want to close this dissertation with some funeral scenes, which reveal the affects and connections underlying this ethnography. One day in the early autumn of 2013, I stepped down off an express train at Oshamambe Station and returned to the town. Two years had passed since my previous visit here, when I was doing an ethnographic revisit. This time, however, I came for a personal reason: to attend the funeral of Sayoko, and to console her husband, Mr. Yama, for his loss. Sayoko was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer one day after the Tohoku Earthquake, and this news was as shocking as the catastrophe for people of the BVP circle. Since then, Sayoko was often hospitalized in Sapporo City, and Mr. Yama often stayed in hospital, or travelled between Sapporo and Oshamambe. When both of them were away, the guesthouse and the cats were taken care of by their close friends such as the Oyas, Koba, and Shira. To help Yama through the long stays in the hospital ward, a BVP member, Riru, shared her apartment for Mr. Yama to take showers and sleep, even when she was away. Fortunately, most of the cost of treatment was covered by the public and private medical insurance of the Yamas. In this way, the Yamas figured out a means of dealing with the cancer, but eventually met the limits of medicine. Until several months later, I realized the ways in which the funeral of Sayoko embodied the solidarity and belongingness of the BVP community.

*Wearing a black suit, I walked into Shaman. Sayoko had passed away the day before and tonight her family would hold a wake by her body (otsuya) to pray for the wellbeing of the deceased. Two familiar faces, Koba and Oya, set a reception table by the entrance, and let visitors sign in and received their monetary offerings to the departed soul (kōden). Both the kitchen and the dining room were full of people, but I immediately saw the apparent gender boundary: almost all the housewives were working or chatting in the kitchen, while all the men were drinking and laughing in the dining room as if there was a party. My arrival immediately became big news among those friends and acquaintances gathering in the guesthouse. Almost everyone saluted me with a smile, so I had to keep returning small smiles, and chatted with some of them. Most of them looked very glad to see me, and talked to me in a merry voice.*

As a researcher, my relationship with the Yamas was ambiguous. The Yamas were two of my major informants in Oshamambe, who not only helped me settle in as a BVP member but also provided me all kinds of assistance for my research. To further understand the nature of the BVP and the ways people communicated with each other, I visited Shaman almost every day throughout my stay in Oshamambe. During the last month of my fieldwork, I moved into Shaman, since my apartment contract had expired. In that month, my relationship with the Yamas became even more intensive since we lived under the same roof, and often ate rice from the same pot. Since I often joined the Yamas to do all kinds of services, many people we met asked the Yamas who I was, and often made a guess at my relationship with them: is this your son? Although this is not a difficult question to explain, frequent encounters with such a question seemed to become a psychological hint for all of us. At some moments, I almost felt that there were familial bonds between us. I tried to treat them as nicely as I usually do to my own parents, which was, for me, a natural way to return their care (*oseiwa*) and favor (*on*).

Such an implicit emotional bond, however, cannot stand rationalist challenges at all. A couple of days before I left the town, I visited the meat shop of the Suns with Sayoko, who went to buy some meat for a coming event. Mrs. Sun chatted with us when the shop assistant was packaging what we purchased. When I told her that I was going to leave Oshamambe soon, Mrs. Sun accidentally made a comment that made me feel as dumb as a fish: “Oh, that’s terrible. You are like son and mother, and you have come this far to become so close, like a family. But now you are leaving and Sayoko will feel lonely. What a pity.” I could not respond to her comment at first, but Sayoko responded right after a pause. She looked at me and said: “That’s OK. Changsan has his own mother in Taiwan.” I opened my mouth but did not know how to answer these two females standing in front of me. I felt embarrassed and a little guilty.

*It took me five minutes to pass through the dining room and the kitchen, and entered the living room where I finally met Mr. Yama. He and his relatives gathered in front of the temporary shrine for Sayoko’s funeral, and most of them were in deep sorrow. Mr. Yama hugged me tightly with tears: “You have come. You’ve come a long way for us.” I was speechless, but held him tight and told him how sorry I felt. I lit up a stick of incense, and offered it to the shrine of Sayoko quietly, following the instruction of the undertaker. After bowing to Mr. Yama and his family, including his three sons, I left the living room to leave the space for their chanting of sutras.*

Mrs. Sun seemed to fear that I learned a wrong impression about rites of Japanese funerals, emphasized to me that the way Mr. Yama did the funeral of Sayoko is a peculiar one among ordinary Japanese. *Yujinso* is a form of funeral that is fully assisted and sponsored by friends of the family of the deceased, and I heard this term over and over again since the first day I arrived at Shaman. Japanese funerals usually last for several days, sometimes a week in some regions,

but the one of Sayoko ended in only a couple of days. Japanese funerals today often cost lots of money, and the amount of the cost could easily pass the cost of a wedding ceremony. “The Yamas live among their friends, and have been supported by their friends, even when one of them passed away. That’s really their style,” one informant so commented.

The meaning of Sayoko to the BVP community is multiple and thus essential. Sayoko played an ideal role of a mother who took care of people in this community, and she was a master of redistributing food and resources. Sayoko remembered the preferences and needs of each person, so she could often suggest that Mr. Yama bring them the right thing at the right time. She not only mentally supported Mr. Yama to establish and maintain the BVP community, but was also involved in the BVP activities substantially. So, this was a real loss for the BVP community. Meanwhile, her early death brought uncertainty and anxiety to the senior participants, as several other senior members also passed away in recent years. Such ambiguous emotions often confused the villagers of the BVP, who believed that they are contributing to Japanese society while pursuing their own ideal life. **“How to realize the ideal goal before we become too old to farm” has been a core question bothering the participants of the BVP, who living in a graying township.**

At the end of the conclusion, I will address the way in which this research can make dialogue with social gerontology on the understanding to aging. So, how does my research contribute to the studies of aging and gerontological theory from a Japanese point of view? To answer this question, I will begin with the engagement of my research with a major discourse of current scholarship of gerontology, active aging (or successful aging).

Generally speaking, active aging emerged as an antithesis to the passive and dependent stereotype of the elderly in the system of welfare state in the postwar period. Such position is similar to the rise of neoliberalism as a reform of society that was governed by Keynesian economics and strong state government. According to gerontologist Alan Walker, European discourse on active aging (or successful aging) emphasizes health, social participation, and well-being, but American discourse on active aging (or productive aging) prioritizes economic productivity (Walker 2009). However, in practice, European policies that are under the rubric of active aging are “predominantly in the productivist mold” (Walker 2009: 75). According to the research of critical gerontologists, the overweighted productivity in aging theory goes hand in hand with the progress of neoliberal agenda in Western countries.

The conceptual preference of productivity in the theory of aging can also be seen in Japanese gerontology and popular discourses of Japan’s graying society. For example, Masaharu Kumashiro’s study (1999) on the strategy of productive aging represents one extreme example of the productivist perspective in Japanese context, which focuses on the improvement of productivity of the elderly with strong concerns about expected economic problems caused by the aging population of the nation. Kumashiro is a scholar of ergonomics and industrial ecology, who aims to find out the ideal way of managing aging workforce for corporations. For evaluating the work capacity and productivity of elderly workers, Kumashiro builds an assessment model by evaluating productivity with work ability (accumulated skills, knowledge and experience related to the jobs to be performed), functional age (the various physiological functions most closely related to the work) and work motivation (the degree to which one is “self-motivated” to work) of the elderly workers. In this model, therefore, an old person has to be capable and willing to work to be considered active or positive.



Similar logic can be found in other Japanese studies. Ohno et al. (2000) find that the diet of animal proteins and vitamins are strongly associated with social activeness in old age, compared with traditional Japanese diet such as rice, noodle, pickle and soybean paste (miso). Therefore, they suggest that Japanese people should lead a healthier lifestyle by changing their dietary customs, in order to achieve successful aging and continue to contribute to the society in the later life (Ohno et al. 2000). This argument ironically contradicts the popular discourse about Japanese people noted for their longevity. Such a paradox indicates that aging strategy is culturally relevant: people from different cultures might have very different ideas of defining an active or successful later life (Torres 1999). For example, in East Asian societies, the practice of filial piety (known as *kō* in Japanese, or *xiao* in Chinese, a core concept of Confucian ethics claiming that the younger generation are obliged to support and take care of their parents since the youths should repay the latter for the labor of raising them) and the ability to depend on the younger generation could have been considered as an essential criterion of well-being among the elderly (see also Chong et al. 2006).

Since the 1970s, Japanese government has proposed the idea of constructing a “Japanese-style welfare society” (*nihongata fukushi shakai*) that claims that family and community should be part of the national welfare system. Prime minister Koizumi Junichiro further extended this rhetoric in an ironically individualistic way by emphasizing the “spirit of self-help and self-sufficiency” for the intended construction of a new welfare system within a neoliberal framework (Goodman 2002: 23). Parallel to the policy paradigm transition happening between the Third and the Fourth CNDP mentioned in Chapter 2, there was also a shift in the localized welfare system of postwar Japan. The welfare policy of the 1970s taken from Western

institutions values the social participation of the elderly. Since the eighties, however, the policy began to identify social participation with labor (Shibuya 2003: 54-60).

A critical question will be asked before accepting a major argument of this paper: if the governance of Japan (including its social welfare policy) has been undergoing a process of neoliberalization (initiated in the 1980s and peaked in the Koizumi Cabinet during the early 2000s), then why did the state still design and implement the program of long-term care insurance for the elderly throughout the 1990s (including the *Gold Plan* of 1990, the *New Gold Plan* of 1994, and the *Gold Plan 21* of 2000)? To answer this question, it is required to re-examine and re-contextualize the definition of neoliberalism in East Asia carefully.

First of all, the post-development model of Japan is the so-called developmental state, which means that a strong state government and a group of elite bureaucrats set economic plans and regulations for the country to guide the development of national economy (Johnson 1982). In such a political-economic context, the Western theories based on North-South dichotomy or nation-state might not be an efficient conceptual tool. For example, Peter Evans and William Sewell criticized David Harvey for his persisting in the approach of neoliberal state to explain the great changes that happened in China (see Harvey 2005). According to them, Harvey ignores “the continued central and powerful role of state and party in the allocation of resources and the formulation of economic strategy” (Evans and Sewell 2013: 59). To avoid the problem, as Aihwa Ong (2006: 12) suggests, neoliberalism should be understood as a changing set of mobile technologies that are applied to make political exceptions to established norm and rules. In other words, neoliberal measures can be flexibly implemented in various political settings without the command of a coherently neoliberal state. Secondly, Japan and the East Asian Tigers did not really build their own welfare state in the course of postwar development, but adopting Western

welfare institutions selectively. This explains why South Korea and Taiwan have launched their own public health insurance systems and national pension systems in the wave of neoliberalism (cf. Evans and Sewell 2013: 60-1). By the same token, the recently implemented long-term care insurance in Japan or the continuation of national pension system can not be simply understood as an evidence that disproves Japan's neoliberalization.

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