

早稲田大学大学院アジア太平洋研究科

博士論文審査報告書

論 文 題 目

原題名 Original Title	Resettlement of Young People to the Countryside in Japan Alternative Life Choices in a Changing Society
英訳 In Japanese	日本における若者の田舎への移住 変わりゆく社会における代替的な人生の選択

申 請 者

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2020年 1月

1. Summary

The subject of this thesis is the trend since the 1990s of the resettlement of young people to Japan's countryside at a time of a shrinking demographic and hollowing-out of rural areas in the archipelago. Through archival research as well as through participant-observation and 53 qualitative interviews with young resettlers in seven rural communities between 2011-2015, the author seeks to understand the lifestyles and motivations of these young resettlers. Her main questions concern their motivations toward counter-urbanization, the manners in which they sustain their new lives in practice, and the extent to which relocation enables an alternative form of sociality. Her findings point to three types of youth resettlers: the 'peasant type' who pursue some degree of self-sufficiency and attempt to challenge the typical urban lifestyle as they embody traditional practices of rural life; the 'ordinary' people who leave the cities seeking more affordable and spacious living in the countryside while they perform 'ordinary' salaried jobs, and entrepreneurs who leverage their business expertise from city life to create new business niches in agricultural enterprise.

2. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of 10 chapters of over 141 pages, including appendices and references.

In the Introduction, the author provides the background to her study, an overview of the countryside in Japan today, with discussions of the shrinking population, ageing and the downsizing of the primary sector. This Introduction continues to discuss state policies aimed to revitalize rural areas and attract younger generations, as well as changing perceptions of rural life.

Chapter Two

In this chapter, the author reviews the relevant literature on the current state of the workplace in Japan, on the younger generation in post-bubble Japan and their challenges to stay afloat in a stagnant economy, as well as literature on rural areas, rural revitalization, and counter-urbanization.

Chapter Three

Herein the author explains the aims and significance of her study. She details her research methods, her research subjects, and her field sites. Then she provides her theoretical framework ('risk society' of Ulrich Beck, 2009, and 'edgework' of Lyng, 2005), to illustrate the ways in which economic precarities today influence the ways in which youth choose to lead their lives.

Chapter Four

In the fourth chapter, Kurochkina explains the circumstances her informants faced in the city, before they ventured to relocate to the countryside. She discusses the ways in which city life pushed them to rural areas. In particular, she uses the account of her informant 'Emi' to illustrate the stressful and precarious working environments and power harassment that this informant faced in city life, and then her relief from some of these stresses when she moved to work in an agricultural company in the countryside. She discusses this case as showing the village as an inclusive space for people like Emi, backed all the while by governmental support.

Chapter Five

This chapter is the first of two chapters that reveal and discuss what Kurochikina refers to as the 'Peasant Lifestyle,' wherein the informants celebrate a kind of self-sufficiency by growing, eating and selling their home-made food. In this chapter she introduces the case of 'Hitomi,' whose resettlement came in an effort to look for meaning in life. The processes of growing and eating one's own food, pursuing organic farming and self-sufficiency, are discussed. Through farming for self-sufficiency, the informant Hitomi finds an alternative identity.

Chapter Six

Part 2 of the 'Peasant' lifestyle is the subject of Chapter Six. Herein Kurochkina explains how resettled young farmers embody the practices of rural life and find meaning thereby, including the actual bodily experiences of making a bath with wood fire, handling the dirt in the fields or using an outhouse rather than flush toilet, and connecting with other people through practices of reciprocity. Actions of touch and sense are particularly emphasized.

Chapter Seven

Herein, the author turns to the entrepreneurial lifestyle of some resettlers, in an analysis of two men who started organic farming as businesses

Chapter Eight

This chapter discusses the third type of resettler, 'average' people who seek simple lives without the excitement of a lot of challenge. They seek stable jobs, affordability and 'my home' in the countryside. Unlike the 'peasants,' they care little about self-sufficiency or traditional ways of living. Unlike the entrepreneurs, they are not seeking a business challenge. They simply seek an average, calm and stable life. At the end of the chapter, Kurochkina analyzes tensions between the various types of rural newcomers.

Chapter Nine

In Chapter Nine, the emerging lifestyles of young rural resettlers is analyzed. After summarizing the differences among these three types, Kurochikina discusses to what extent they are confronting modern risks or participating voluntarily in risk-taking. Are they adapting to the dominant socio-economic order, or resisting it?

Chapter Ten

This is the concluding chapter, wherein Kurochikina reminds readers of her major findings, and points to areas of further potential interest. Kurochikina argues that while resettlement to the countryside carries different meanings to different people, all of her informants, facing uncertainty and difficulties in urban life, sought to create a meaningful life with “certainty and connection.” Future research will follow these informants’ lives and those of their families, to see how their lives evolve.

3. The Defense

The dissertation defense was held on 22 April, 2019. Questions/critiques centered on the following issues:

First, we requested that more information about the informants be provided, by way of a chart explaining their backgrounds. In addition, we asked for more background information about the state of the Japanese countryside over the course of the post-war period. And, we asked for more information about the state’s rural revitalisation policies. We noted that the thesis as it stood met but did not much exceed the minimum word count, so the author would have plenty of space to enrich the discussion.

Second, we asked Kurochikina to improve the flow of her narratives by adding classifications or typologies in the text, and adding more cases.

Third, we asked the author to add a bit of comparison to other ‘back to the land’ movements in other parts of the world.

Fourth, we asked the author to add more literature to her theoretical sections, such as Bourdieu, or literatures on embodiment, affect and touch. We also asked her to revise some of her word choices and usage.

4. Evaluation and Result of the Defense

The committee voted unanimously to pass this doctoral dissertation. All four members of the committee agreed that this dissertation was of high quality, based on longterm fieldwork and archival research. The topic is current and

important, given the seriousness of the shrinking of the regions and the diminution of the agricultural sector, as well as the difficulties youth have faced in the decades of economic doldrums as they tried to establish themselves in urban labor markets under very stringent work conditions. How these youth regard resettlement to the countryside, what risks they perceive in urban areas as well as in their new lives, and what this resettlement can tell us about the nature of everyday life for young people in Japan today is of great interest. The committee found the thesis to be compellingly argued, based on the original fieldwork of the author, and appropriately theorized. There are very few extant ethnographic works on this topic. We felt that Kurochkina's meticulous ethnography greatly enhanced our understanding of the lives of youth resettlers in the countryside.

Subsequent to the defense, Ms. Kurochkina has revised the dissertation in accordance with our critiques above, so that the final version reflects well our suggestions for improvement, and we are satisfied with this final version.

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