

CHANGING RURAL JAPAN¹

by Takashi Nakano and Keith Brown

1. THE COMMUNITY

Research on changing rural Japan in the 1950's focused primarily on agricultural villages and their adjustments to land reform and other constitutional and administrative reforms introduced after the war. Research in the 1960's, on which this paper concentrates, looked more to the increasing involvement of the rural Japanese people in activities and occupations outside their own hamlets and villages. Assumptions underlying the traditional approach to community studies, that the village may be examined more or less in isolation as a socially distinct and functional whole, are now being questioned. Even the most isolated and remote mountain villages in Japan are participating in the industrializing and urbanizing processes of the larger society, and social scientists must now approach them in that context. This realization is not new (e.g., Ariga 1943, 1956) but of late it has been receiving much more explicit attention.

Radcliffe-Brown (cf. Freedman 1963) believed that the way to understand a large complex society is to do a series of representative community studies. In his introduction to John Embree's *Suye Mura* (1939: xi) Radcliffe-Brown claims that "the kind of research that is most important is the close study for many months of a community which is sufficiently limited in size to permit all the details of its life to be examined." As an entrée into certain aspects of Japanese society and culture, such an approach is quite useful. But it cannot be assumed that all the details of either the life of the villagers or the structure of their community can be understood without giving considerable attention to their larger setting. Much of the life of the villagers is now removed from the context of their own hamlets and villages, and their various social networks and corporate structures (Befu 1963a) extend in many complex and far-reaching ways. Japanese rural society and culture is more than the sum of the social structures and ideologies observable within each of its rural communities.

Even if the idea of an isolated and functional whole community is accepted merely as an analytical model serving heuristic purposes, it nevertheless obscures many of the variables significant to our understanding of rural

life in Japan. Researchers in the 1960's have attempted to document with empirical evidence the precise nature of the internal relationships within rural villages as well as show the relationships with the outside.

A number of Japanese scholars have attempted to redefine such basic concepts as the hamlet (*buraku*), village (*mura*), and village community (*sonraku*). For example, the concept of the "natural village" (*shizen-son*), developed by Suzuki Eitaro (1940), has been pursued more recently by Yoden Hiromichi (1961) in his analysis of Japanese rural society. He has defined the natural village as a closed community with a high degree of replication among its different social relationships. This stacking of ritual, economic, political, and kinship relationships, one on top of the other, produces a campanile effect in the social structure (cf. Cornell 1963) that clearly separates each natural village from the comparable units around it and from the higher levels of social and political organization above it. The basis for the development of each natural village, he says, is the joint use of the same branch of an irrigation system by small groups of households (*ie*).

Two problems arise, however, when we attempt to use the natural village concept to analyze changing rural Japan. First, there are in rural Japan various social entities of different size and scale, e.g., *tonarigumi*, *buraku*, *ku*, *mura*, *ko-aza*, and *ō-aza*. Units with territorial referents may be organized in an administrative hierarchy with a unit at one level consisting of several units of the next lower level. Thus a hamlet (*buraku*) normally consists of several neighborhood groups (*tonarigumi*), and the ward (*ku*) or village (*mura*) includes several hamlets. Each unit at any of the various levels has its own historical tradition and social solidarity. Thus it is difficult, and certainly arbitrary, to assign a priority to any one unit or level as being preminent or basic to rural social organization.

Furthermore, it is difficult to equate the units and levels of organization between different communities of rural Japan. Even those units to which the villagers apply the same generic term—for example, *mura* (cf. Nakano 1967)—differ greatly in size, integration, solidarity, and historical experiences. Also, the many associations and groups to which the villagers now belong do not always coincide with one another. The section (*aza*) and subsection (*ko-aza*) system, for example, may divide the village independent of hamlet and even neighborhood group lines. Such basic organizations as the agricultural cooperative associations and the school districts, so instrumental as symbols of social identity, may also crosscut one another.

Admittedly, there is considerable replication in the membership of various organizations and social units in rural Japan, especially at the hamlet level, as will be seen later. But the replication occurs at several levels, and no one unit clearly emerges as a natural village.

The second problem with the natural village concept in understanding

changing rural Japan is that those units which are identified as natural villages by Suzuki and his followers are continuously in a state of flux in response to various internal and external factors. Through processes of fission and fusion they at one time emerge from other units as independent entities and at other times lose their identities in larger consolidations. Village organization in rural Japan has been anything but static. Population growth in the agricultural areas in earlier times, and in the suburbs of towns and cities in recent times, led to the division of older units as they became larger and larger. Also, laws concerning local autonomy and amalgamation, especially those of 1889 and 1947, encouraged the creation of larger political and administrative units, which was sometimes achieved at the expense of the identity and solidarity of the smaller villages. Thus Nakano (cf. 1966; 1967; 1968), following Ariga, suggests that we view the concepts of hamlet (*buraku*) and village (*mura*) in the context of the total social setting so as better to understand the factors involved in the continuing processes of their adaptation and change. The hamlet, for example, may continue to be a very significant social unit, but its boundaries, structure, and functions change with the larger society.

2. CHANGES IN RURAL FAMILY AND VILLAGE LIFE

Japan's phenomenal economic growth in the past quarter of a century has drawn a vast number of rural Japanese into industrial, commercial, and other non-agricultural occupations. No longer can we define rural Japan as agricultural Japan. David Plath (1967: 519-520) notes that "in today's rural Japan not only is the farmer 'half a farmer,' vast numbers of people are not farmers at all—they are merchants, craftsmen, doctors, politicians, teachers, commuters." Johnson (1967: 181), following a theme popular in Japanese social sciences, has noted that "improved agriculture and favorable economic conditions throughout the country [may] . . . turn most hamlets into commuter dormitories." If this does in fact come about, there will be little to distinguish the rural dormitories from those of suburban and urban areas. Occupational identification—full-time farmer, part-time farmer, craftsman, salary man, etc.—may soon be much more important than rural-urban differences. The salary man and his way of life provide the dominant career model for young Japanese throughout the country, rural and urban alike (Plath 1964: 35-37).

Many young people from rural areas come to work in the cities after completing their schooling, and often remain. Such migrations have brought about a decrease in the rural population and households of smaller average size, but until recently have not markedly reduced the total number of rural or agricultural households.

The agricultural labor force has been significantly reduced, both relative

to the nation's entire work force and in absolute terms, by the increasing number of daily commuters. In the *san-chan* (*jii-chan*, *baa-chan*, *kaa-chan*) farming pattern, the adult males commute to the urban centers for wage-earning jobs while grandparents and wives perform the day-to-day farming chores. Mechanization and agricultural cooperatives have made possible a compromise between the attraction of the higher wages in the non-agricultural sector of the economy and the security of maintaining the ancestral farm.

One response to the labor drain from agricultural households has been larger-scale cooperation among the remaining farm population. A number of scholars have encouraged liberalization of the Agricultural Land Law to permit consolidation of small family farms into units larger than the limit imposed by the land reform (Bennett 1967; Fukutake 1967; Ishino 1962). An alternate solution is cooperative farming, where the family retains some rights over its own land but turns many of the activities concerned with its cultivation over to a cooperative.

Thus a number of alternatives exist for the agricultural sector of the rural population, from various forms of migration to forms of agricultural cooperatives, corporations, and other forms of cooperation which increase the scale of farming. We need to explore the factors operating in specific cases that lead to a choice of one alternative over all the others.

In reporting changes in the form of cooperation in rural society, researchers must be careful to identify the nature and analytical order of the changes involved. Bennett (1967: 439-440), for example, carefully observes that, structurally, present-day forms of cooperation use traditional patterns, but that the commercial orientation of the modern farmer gives the cooperatives and other forms of cooperation a new ideological or cultural base. The reverse may also be true.

Ishino and Donoghue (1964) have argued that the incorporation of the Japanese farmer in a vast interpersonal and interorganizational communications network which transcends neighborhood, village, and even prefectural ties mitigates to a considerable extent the disadvantages of small-scale, labor-intensive agriculture. Comparative historical work of considerable depth on selected communities should reveal changes in these intercommunity ties and their relationship to the growth of agricultural productivity and economic development.

The rush of rural people from agriculture into the commercial and industrial world of Japan has had considerable impact on family and kinship organization. Theories developed from the West's experience with industrialization have been used to predict directions of change in Japan, but the empirical test is not yet completed.

For example, increased wage labor by one or several members of a rural family allows greater economic independence from the family corporation

supported by the family farm. The assumption has been that this brings about a reduction in the size of the family. Presumably some members were attached to the family only because of their economic dependence on it, and once they were able to eliminate that dependence they left the feudalistic confines of the authoritarian stem family. The stem family itself is said to be giving way to a more natural and modern nuclear or conjugal family (Goode 1963). Where it persists in its strongest form, namely in those families still most dependent on the farm or other family occupations, the authoritarian qualities of the household head are softened by the new possibilities of independence for the sons and other members of the family.

T. C. Smith (1959), Cornell (1964), and Nakane (1967) have seen in Japanese agricultural history a continuous diminution of the basic economic units. The large units, essentially composed of kin units which acted as economic corporations in the past, gradually shed various subunits on their structural peripheries, leaving only an aggregate of more or less independent stem families with territorial rather than kin or economic ties to one another. Now the stem family is dividing into its nuclear components; a greater sense of individualism is the ultimate stage of the process. Befu (1963b) claims that with the erosion of most of its corporate functions, kinship is more prominent in personal kindreds than in the once prominent descent groups.

The theory of a transition from kinship to territorial principles of organization in the rural villages of Japan was cogently argued by Tadashi Fukutake in his *dōzoku-kogumi* typology (1949). The *dōzoku*, common in northeastern villages, consisted of households of kin and fictive kin, tied together in corporate groups by various economic and other functions. To Fukutake this type of structure represented an earlier stage in the history of Japanese rural society and contrasted with the later southwestern or *kogumi* type in which neighborhood and other essentially territorial bonds characterized village structure.

The greater frequency of *dōzoku* units in the hinterlands and their relative absence in the cities and more commercially oriented sectors of the society support such a theory, but the evidence is not conclusive. Ariga (1947, 1948a, 1948b), for example, has noted that the vertical *dōzoku* and the horizontal *kumi* (called *kogumi* by Fukutake) types of relationships among *ie* are not mutually exclusive. The vertical and horizontal principles of organization can be equally viable in the same village at the same time. However, the relative dominance of one or the other may lead to the characterization of any particular village as being of either the *dōzoku* or *kumi* type. Because these principles operate jointly in relation to other factors within the village, one *buraku* may have strong *dōzoku* organization and another *buraku* nearby may be of the *kumi* type. Similarly, the same *buraku* at one time may be of the *kumi* type and at a later time be of the

dōzoku type, or vice versa.

Therefore, Ariga has rejected the idea of looking at *dōzoku* as a survival from an earlier, feudalistic, or premodern type or organization. Rather, he shows that we must look at *dōzoku* in the context of the modern setting of the *buraku* where it is found. Moreover, the identification of *dōzoku* organization with a particular region in Japan, i.e., the northeast, has also been questioned. *Dōzoku* and *kumi* organizations both exist in the northeast as well as the southwest of Japan.

The argument that *dōzoku* is not functionally obsolete in modern Japan and that greater opportunities for economic independence of the family and individual do not necessarily provide sufficient cause for the dissolution of the larger kinship units is supported by recent research on non-economic functions, such as ritual functions, which such units also serve (cf. Ariga 1962; Brown 1968; Kitano 1962; Nakano 1958; Okada and Kamiya 1960; Takeuchi 1962). Thus, when we look at such institutions as *dōzoku* in rural Japanese society we should not view them as survivals of past social systems, but should examine them in light of their current structure and adaptation to complex and rapidly changing situations.

The stem family in rural Japan should also be investigated in its present context and not as some artifact of a past age. Johnson (1964), for example, suggests that the stem family is adaptive in a wide variety of situations, including a modern industrial economy, and may persist in spite of the increase of individual wages over family farm income.

To settle these questions concerning changes in the rural family and kin organization, a few selected cases must be intensively examined. Careful and prolonged observation of a few rural families (cf. Vogel 1963), plus a thorough historical exploration of the internal organization and external kin and community relations of these families, should provide the detail with which we can identify more precisely the changes that have occurred and the significant variables responsible for the changes.

Traditional theories of modernization, dating from Maine and Morgan, suggest that differentiation and specialization of modern occupational and other roles result in a decreasing significance of kin and familial principles in social behavior. Toennies, Marx, Durkheim, and Redfield, among others, present theories of lessening community and local group solidarity. Japanese evidence is not available which conclusively supports these theories. Hirabayashi (1962:196), organizing his material within the framework of the folk-urban continuum, noted "a growing weakening of the co-residence principle in the structural picture of the village." Numerous factors which would contribute to such a loss of potency of the local group have been cited. Norbeck (1961, 1962, 1967) has documented a great proliferation of associations within the hamlet. It is not unusual for a villager to belong to twenty or thirty of these associations. To the extent that these

associations crosscut one another, the campanile effect of social relations is lost. Economic diversification, with the emergence of specialized interest groups, also contributes to a decline in community solidarity.

Such an atrophy of local group solidarity has many structural implications. As the local group (once the primary extra-familial entity around which most rural social behavior was oriented) loses its influence and control over the behavior of its members, traditional forms of social sanctions (Smith 1961; Yoshida 1967) lose their potency; leadership roles become functionally specific, and the diffuse authority of the traditional paternalistic headman or landlord dissipates; paternalism in whatever form (Bennett and Ishino 1963) becomes less viable. Egalitarianism seems to be increasing, but Johnson (1968) cautions us against assuming that this is new in rural Japan.

Fukutake (1967) sees the decline of the local group as an essential element in the democratization of rural or village Japan. Growing occupational differentiation provides new, functionally-differentiated strata which crosscut the suppressive, territorially-defined communities of the past. On the political scene, Fukutake would like to see elected officials get their support from a power base other than territorial. The block vote of the traditional hamlet is inconsistent with Fukutake's form of democracy.

Whether rural Japan will ever reach Fukutake's idealized state of a class-differentiated rather than territorially-differentiated society depends on the nature and future of hamlet and local group ties. Numerous studies note the persistence of strong local group solidarity, whether in the neighborhood, hamlet, or village. The hamlet, smaller neighborhood group, or larger village or town may lose some of their functions to each other, but a strong local group still persists. Where the new common-interest associations use the hamlet or village as their local point of reference, local group solidarity and identity may in fact be enhanced. Fukutake himself writes, "despite the progressively heterogeneous differentiation of the residents of the hamlet it preserves something of its holistic character and has not split up into differentiated functional groups" (1967: 216). In local politics "it is still regional interests which are represented, not those of functionally differentiated strata" (1967: 185). "Just as that other important social unit, the *ie*, has not disappeared, so the hamlet too, though headed for disintegration, has still not arrived at that point" (1967: 87). "Egotism cannot exceed the bounds of family egotism and the parochial spirit of hamlet egotism—my hamlet against all comers—has not disappeared. Individualism does not develop because the family economy does not allow it, because productivity has not reached the levels at which an individual family can be independent of the hamlet" (1967: 216).

Fukutake's discussion raises questions concerning changes in the structure and cultural significance of the hamlet and other local groups.

In our study of local groups we cannot assume a vanishing, idealized community structure of the peasant type, but should empirically verify the present and past extent and form of community or *gemeinschaft* in rural Japan. We cannot assume that community is now disappearing just because our models of change, based largely on our perceptions of the Western case, indicate that it once was there. Nor can we rightly assume, without historical and ethnographic verification, that *gesellschaft*, individualism, and the nuclear family are emerging. We can find examples of phenomena on both sides of the folk-urban continuum, in past as well as present-day rural Japan. We now need intensive and historically detailed studies of change in order to identify the significant variables and their dynamics.

Such studies will enable us to refine our concepts. To say, for example, that individualism is or is not a concomitant of modernization in rural Japan is to say very little. Individualism has many forms. We now need the controlled and detailed historical-ethnographic studies that will uncover the precise nature of such phenomena and their changes.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH NEEDS

Change is History

The study of changing rural Japan is essentially a historical study, as is any study of change. Behavioral scientists in Japan are blessed with a wealth of historical materials which they must exploit in using Japan as a test case for theories of modernization and change. Too often studies of rural change consist of a deductive theory of modernization, such as the folk-urban continuum, applied to a contemporary situation to reconstruct its supposed historical opposite, which is then contrasted with the present circumstances to demonstrate change.

Another common approach is to use an isolated community as a baseline for change. Johnson (1961), Ishino and Donoghue (1960), and Yoshida (1963) have shown, however, that isolation does not necessarily mean historical antiquity or backwardness. The age-area assumption is inappropriate when examining changes within rural Japan; it is equally misleading to use contemporary rural society—whether isolated or not—as a base from which to measure urban change. Ariga (1943, 1948), Nakano (1964), and Smith (1960) make perfectly clear, for example, that modernization in urban Japan has its own tradition requiring its own historical inquiry.

Synchronic studies of social and cultural adaptations to new economic and social environments have been very useful in our understanding of rural Japan, but it is a mistake to assume that these are studies of change. However, a synchronic analysis of the social and cultural factors operating in a particular rural situation, followed by a detailed historical examination of that same situation (cf. Nakano's work on the Noto Peninsula, 1955, 1958,

1968), can provide a rigorous control over the essential variables necessary to understanding the processes of change in rural Japan.

Restudies of Suye, Niiike, and Raper's thirteen villages are already providing useful materials on postwar changes in rural Japan. We would hope that this approach will continue, as it complements and provides a check on original historical studies. Our Japanese colleagues are also providing us with some materials from long-range studies now in progress in certain communities.

Regional Variations

In addition to the historical dimension, regional variations in rural change should be explored. Various types of rural settlements need to be studied; for example, more detailed and controlled comparisons of wet-rice farming, fishing, and mountain villages would be extremely useful. The survey by Seiichi Izumi and his team (cf. Ogyu 1964) has revealed that regional differences and variations in rural Japan are much more complex than the usual northeast-southwest typology would suggest.

One reason that interregional comparisons have been so difficult is that the different analytical orders of materials collected in separate studies are often not comparable. Changes in *structure* found in the study of one area cannot be compared with *ideational* changes found in another study, as these two orders of abstraction may vary independently. For example, Koyano (1964) observed structural changes in the family from a lineal to a nuclear group, but noted that attitudes and behavior changed less rapidly. Cornell (1963) observed that the form of the local group changed, but not its style. Adding a psychological order of abstraction, we can note that Wagatsuma and DeVos (1962) found a disparity between conscious and less-conscious attitudes in a rural Japanese village with respect to acculturative changes in attitudes toward marriage.

Therefore, the approaches using controlled comparison employed by Nakano in Noto Peninsula and Sado Island and by Yoneyama (1967) in Nara and Miyagi Prefectures, which use the same methodology and theoretical framework in different sites, have great promise. Accordingly, we might consider coordinating our activities and select several sites in different regions of Japan for intensive examination from various perspectives. This should not be interdisciplinary, but multidisciplinary. Concepts must not be fused to accommodate everyone but should be sharpened so that comparative work can be more rigorous.

In historical work, especially, it is essential that different orders of abstraction be kept distinct. It is too tempting to contrast a contemporary cultural phenomenon with a past structural form and then infer change from the resultant analytical inconsistency. Historical information on structural matters is much more plentiful than on either cultural or psycho-

logical phenomena. Therefore, structural changes in rural Japan are easier to document. Changes in cultural or psychological phenomena should be inferred directly from structural changes only with extreme caution, if at all.

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NOTES

1. This is a synthesis of separate papers prepared by the two authors for the conference at Houston. Limitations of space require that only selected items from the bibliographies of those two papers be listed here. A more extensive annotated bibliography of the materials used for this paper is being published by the Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Included in that publication is a bibliographic history by Takashi Nakano of recent research by Japanese scholars on changing rural Japan.

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