

Village Japan

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VILLAGE JAPAN. By Richard K. Beardsley, John W. Hall, and Robert E. Ward.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959. XV, 498 pp., 45 figures, glossary,
65 photographs, 37 tables. 8. 75.

This fine ethnography is a compilation of the results of interdisciplinary research conducted under the auspices of the University of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies in Okayama, Japan from April 1950 to July 1954. The authors are, respectively, an anthropologist, an historian, and a political scientist; another major participant was J. D. Eyre, a geographer.

Although the rural community chosen for the study is in a rice-growing area located in the "Core Zone" of the western part of the main Japanese island of Honshū, the authors feel that Niiike (pronounced Nee-ee-ee-keh: a hamlet of 24 households with population of 130) provides "extensive and useful insights into the lives, problems, and attitudes of a major segment of Japan's population." This claim would seem to be well-founded with regard to those parts of rural Japan not characterized by the hierarchical "dōzoku" (kinship-centered) type of community structure (mainly in the "Frontier Zone" of northeastern or extreme southern Japan).

An excellent description of the historical background and the geographical setting of this "buraku" serves as a basis for understanding the genesis of many such small rural settlements. The authors acknowledge that "the occasion for the migration of the first settlers was undoubtedly the completion of certain reclamation projects,.....as reflected in the name Niiike ('New Pond')..... At any rate, Niiike owes its existence to the work of Tokugawa agrarian engineers." (pp. 53-54) But then, on p. 124, the all-pervasive influence of the common irrigation network appears to be ignored when it is stated that, "...it is only personal convenience and a general sense of the fitness of things that brings most land of the buraku together as a unit." It has been demonstrated by Prof. H. Yoden of Kwansai Gakuin University that a crucial influence is exerted upon community life and inter-family relationships in paddy rice cultivation areas by the common reliance upon the irrigation and drainage system. (For this "mizokakari" theory, cf. Hiromichi Yoden, "Nōgyō Sonraku Shakai no Ronri Kōzō" Logical Structure of Rural Agricultural Village Society, Tōkyō: Kōbundō, 1961.)

In this book, the term "kōjū" is used to designate the co-operative group of 24 Niiike households acting as a social community. While this term may be common in Okayama prefecture, a more widely used term is "buraku" (use of which the authors have restricted in this book to references to the community acting as a political unit.) Actually, it is rather rare for a buraku to have only one "kō", as indicated by the statement that "the identity of koju and buraku is not always as close as in Niiike." (p. 255) Questions

of terminology aside, the built-in traditional patterns of co-operation, participation and community involvement observed in Niiike have anticipated by many years some of our Western principles of community development and should prove a valuable resource.

In addition to detailed descriptions of physical and psychological characteristics of the people, their dwellings, equipment, land utilization, water resources, farming operations, household budget, family organization, kinship relations, and the life cycle, there is an excellent analysis of an electoral “jiban”. Of special interest is a section on leadership and decision-making patterns: “One ‘leads’ from within the group by persuasion and indirection.” The joint techniques of recommendation and consensus are “used in such a manner as to produce endless indirect discussion which gradually clarifies the areas of agreement and disagreement and ultimately suggests an acceptable compromise.” (p. 355)

Except for mention of Prof. Kizaemon Ariga’s study of a dōzoku community in the “Frontier Zone,” there is scarcely a reference to collateral Japanese sources. The authors justify this situation by noting that the volume is “so greatly dependent on field observation.” In the absence of a bibliography, one might have hoped for at least the reproduction of the schedules and other tools used. Sources for the data in many of the tables might also have been cited.

Of particular value to social workers are the insights given in this book into patterns of human relations and child training in Niiike families. Of the newly married couple, the authors write, “Both come to the marriage with little instruction, and whatever sexual experience the boy brings is usually wrapped in the context of parties and hired sex partners..... The house is small and..... offers almost no privacy for intimacies..... It seems likely that most women sublimate in love for their children a considerable part of the drives that might otherwise be expressed in sexual relationships..... Her own emotional drives reinforce the established custom that women exist to serve men, and she gladly spends her time giving her boy child every maternal solicitude.... She lets him nurse at the breast long past walking age..... Coupled with her sexlessness in dress and manner before the men of the house, this maternalism sets the boy’s image of what a woman should be in the house. (p. 333)

Re bride and mother-in-law relations, the authors present an incisive analysis based on results of projective tests: “The groom’s mother has two reasons to be critical of the bride: she herself went through a similar introduction to the ways of the home years before and.... she may find it hard not to resent sharing or losing the love of her son, which has been one of her few satisfactions through married life. For the wife’s role competes with her own in many respects; she is a younger mother intended to comfort and serve her husband in a maternal role.” (p. 330)

The main problem cited in Niiike is under-employment. “We could cultivate twice as much as we do now, if we could only get the land.” Further expansion is not possible in the area suitable for paddy cultivation of rice. Diversification of agriculture and reclamation of sizeable areas of sloping bushland for animal husbandry might provide opportunities for creative employment. Some Niiike-ites have chosen to commute to urban employment. Other changes are coming: the lifting of restrictions imposed by land reform upon the

size of landholdings; abolition of the rice requisitioning and price-support systems. A report has been published of a study of the effects upon Niiike of the agricultural mechanization enabled by the Asia Foundation, and further follow-up studies would be most appropriate. (OKADA, Yuzuru, KAMIYA, Keiji and Niiike Survey Committee, “Nihon Nōgyō Kikai-ka no Bunseki” (Analysis of Japanese Agricultural Mechanization). Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1961).