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**Dividing harvests: Household and property in contemporary
rural Japan**

Hara, Richard Takashi, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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DIVIDING HARVESTS:
HOUSEHOLD AND PROPERTY IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL JAPAN

by

RICHARD TAKASHI HARA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
the City University of New York

1994

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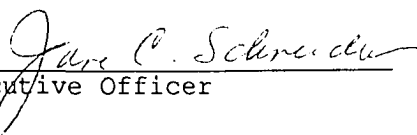
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May 3rd 1994
Date


Chair of Examining Committee

May 4th 1994
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

DIVIDING HARVESTS:
HOUSEHOLD AND PROPERTY IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL JAPAN

by

Richard Takashi Hara

Advisor: Professor Gerald Sider

This dissertation is an anthropological study of part-time farming households in northern Shiga Prefecture, Japan. Based on fieldwork in a rural hamlet, it asks how and why small-scale, family farms still predominate despite efforts on the part of the national government to rationalize the agrarian economy in ways that press for larger enterprises. To a great extent the answers lie in the common response of these individual households to the expanding wage employment opportunities outside of farming and to various state programs, such as land consolidation, that have subsidized local rural development.

The incorporation of these households into a wider political economic context is, however, also mediated by the nature and history of relations between households at the local level. This is particularly underscored for the farming households in this area of Japan by the recent reemergence of

informal land use agreements whereby a household "borrows" the use of another household's land in return for a small share of the rice harvested. This dissertation explores the potentially conflictful and divisive consequences these practices have both within households and between households. Through land lending and borrowing, rights to the use of land and household property are defined according to custom and history, shaping the nature of relations between men and women, between successors and non-successors within the household, as well as between landlord and tenant in the community, in ways that are not amenable to state control.

The unique place of cultural traditions in the Japanese economy generally has been a matter of debate for a number of years between Japan and her trading partners. This study contributes a concrete example of how cultural meaning intersects with economic logic, and to the anthropology of Japan more specifically, an analysis of how notions of property underlie the broader social underpinnings of the Japanese family/household, or *ie*. It also provides a case study of another category of middle farming households which problematizes scenarios of rural differentiation that tend to focus on the polarization of landlord and tenant classes. By examining the centrality of issues of inequality -- and by arguing that their mediation can never be wholly successful -- this dissertation thus contributes to the theoretical literature on peasant and post-peasant societies across different cultures.

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This work is the end result of the patient tutelage of the members of my dissertation committee, Professors Gerald Sider, May Ebihara, Louise Lennihan. Throughout my time at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, they provided not only inspiration but also the practical tools to wed a personal interest in Japanese culture to a set of anthropological issues that had first intrigued me when I was an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins University. I also owe a large measure of debt to Professor Theodore Bestor of Cornell University, for his guidance in the field of Japan studies as a member of my qualifying examinations committee, and for kindly consenting to serve as external reader for this dissertation.

My initial experience of living in Japan came while I was working as an English teacher in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program (1987-1988), organized under the auspices of the Japanese Ministries of Education, Foreign, and Home Affairs. It was my good fortune then to be assigned to Shiga Prefecture, and to be able to acquaint myself, through my duties, with a fairly large area of the northern part of the prefecture. During this time of a single year I met a number of people who later remembered me and responded to my pleas for help when I returned two years afterward to undertake my fieldwork project. I would especially like to

thank Mr. Isamu Takahashi, Superintendant of the Takatsuki Local Board of Education, and Mr. Yojiro Sakai, Principal of Takatsuki Junior High School, for helping me through the initial resettlement phase of my research.

My fieldwork from December 1989 through June of 1991 for this dissertation was funded by an IIE Fulbright Graduate Fellowship through the Japan Fulbright Foundation. Professor Toshinao Yoneyama at Kyoto University and Professor Katsumi Tamura at the National Museum of Ethnology at Senri, Osaka, provided steady counsel after kindly consenting to supervise my activities for my dual host institutions. The latter institutional affiliation was also arranged through the efforts of Dr. Chie Nakane, to whom I must also express my profound gratitude for taking an interest in this project. I would also thank Dr. John Mock, Director of the Japan Center for Michigan Universities in Hikone, Shiga, and his family, for their fellowship and timely words of advice throughout my stay in Japan.

A dissertation year award from the Research Foundation of the City University of New York funded a major portion of the writing of this dissertation, and I am grateful to the university for its support. Thanks also go to Naomi Ono, at the Japan Information Center of the Consulate General of Japan, for her assistance in obtaining published statistical data, and especially to Sally Booth, Dr. Jeffrey Cole, and Susan Farndon, who read earlier drafts of the dissertation

and have always provided comments over the years generously in support of this venture.

My debt to friends and family in Japan, and the people of the village of Karakawa who participated in this study, is of course inestimable. Without the guidance of Susumu Tsuda, who was and will always be my teacher, and without the warmth and generosity of his family, who treated me as a guest but always made me feel like more than that, this work truly would have been impossible. It is therefore dedicated to them.

Note: Japanese names in the text are given surname first in the Japanese style. Romanization of Japanese words and phrases is based on the system employed in the fourth edition of Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary (1974), with the slight alteration of a circumflex instead of a macron being used to indicate long vowels.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: "THE LAND OF SPLENDROUS RICE"

1. Plain Prosperity

The Number Eight National Road is a two-lane arterial linking the north Japan Sea coast with the urban markets of Kyoto and Osaka to the south. Drawing on an anatomical simile, this section of Japan has been likened to the waist of the nation's body, with Lake Biwa centered therein like a navel. While slightly removed from the main corridor of the nation, which lies between Tokyo and Osaka, this is still the narrowest part of the main island of Honshu, the shortest distance between the northern and southern shores. Thus trucks roll day and night out of the mountains to the north, and rumble down the plain along the shores of the lake leading south, on the Number Eight. In the opposite direction, city dwellers flock to the ski slopes in winter and to seaside resorts like Tsuruga on the Japan Sea in

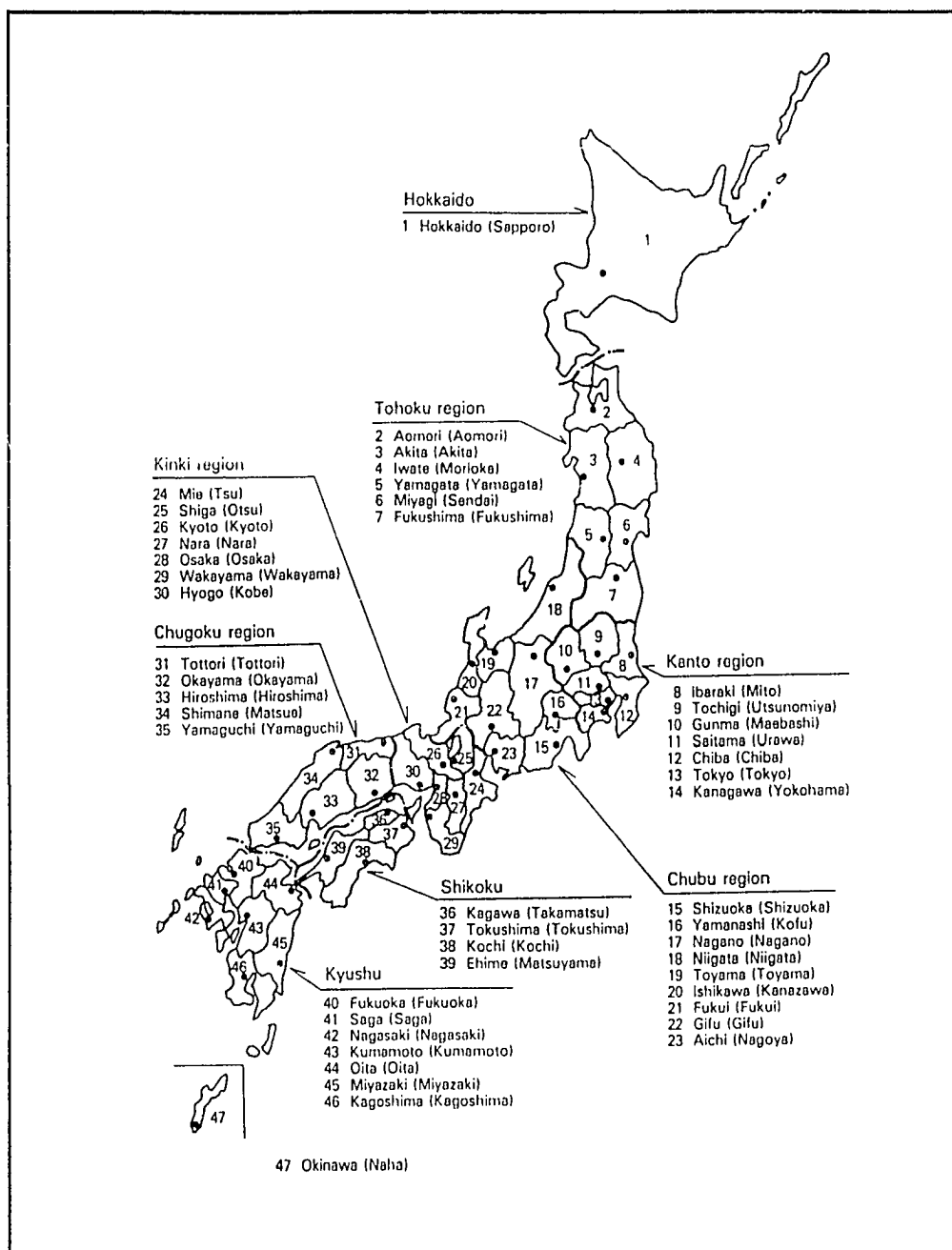
summer, to sun and swim, and -- as is the growing fad -- to wind surf.

Lake Biwa also attracts its share of weekend revellers, but at its northern end tourist development has lagged until recently, partly from a lack of capital and partly out of concern for the environment. The few gas stations, convenience stores -- Seven-Eleven is a recent arrival -- and restaurants there seem designed more to speed travellers on their way than to attract or to hold them. Four townships make up the county here, and together they bring together a wide and thriving range of lives and livelihoods: isolated mountain villages and fishing villages, farming and small manufacture areas, merchants and artisans, day-construction workers and commuting executives.

The township of Takatsuki, with a total population of 10,000, is located in northern Shiga prefecture, on a strip of land with Lake Biwa to the west and bordered by mountains to the north and east (see Map 1). It consists of thirty farming hamlets, with the addition of one larger "town," where the railroad station, banks, supermarkets, and town hall are located. There are, in this downtown of sorts, also a number of small shops handling cosmetics, tobacco, clothing, or stationery. The farming villages or hamlets¹ are much smaller by comparison, ranging from a low of 16 households to a high of 303. These settlements are mainly residential, but small dry-field gardens (*hatake*) front many

Map 1

Prefectures and Prefectural Capitals of Japan
(Source: Foreign Press Center/Japan, 1991)



houses, and one can find a small array of the usual family businesses, including dry-goods stores, hair salons, *sake* and *shōyu* (soy sauce) distributors, dry cleaners, or small workshops that serve as further supplements to household income. Very few families pursue farming as a full-time occupation; most derive their main income from salaried positions in companies, or in the local civil service as teachers or town office administrators.

These hamlets are small, nucleated settlements, surrounded by an orderly patchwork of paddy fields and crosscut by newly-paved roads. Most houses closely abut the roads; some mark off their private space with wood or stone walls, and invest in gates that advertise the status of the house within, but many more simply sit open to the passing traffic. For many of them, the 2-3 feet-wide irrigation canals that run between the houses and roads suffice as borders. The fields also project an openness, a sameness: there are no divisions marking one village's section of paddy field from that of another village, and even the trees that used to serve as geographical markers have been lost to land reorganization and road building. A few village burial grounds dot the fields, stone tomb markers rising up out of them like miniature cities in a sea of green.

The number of passers-by is fairly small. There are always a few cars speeding through the villages, drivers with local knowledge taking a shortcut from the national road to the lakeside parkway. During the week, most of the activity

occurs in the mornings and evenings, as people set out on their daily trek to their job or school and home again later on. The rest of the day, however, one only occasionally passes a neighbor's wife puttering to the supermarket a few kilometers away on a 50cc motorbike, or a grandmother pushing her infant charge in a pram to the cool-shaded air of a shrine playground. Most villages seem to come to life on weekends, when families get together again and attend to matters at home and in the fields.

I first came to this area of Japan as a participant in an English teaching program. With a prior interest in the literature on peasants and rural society, I had specifically requested an assignment in a farming area. Based for a year at the Takatsuki Junior High School, I had many opportunities to visit schools throughout the town and the county (*gun*), and in the course of becoming acquainted with teachers, students, and their parents through homestays, was exposed to the range of communities and lifestyles in the region. This experience, as much as the fortuitious nature of finding myself in this particular part of Japan, shaped the agenda of my subsequent research.

What first attracted my attention was how well off families here seemed to be. They are not, of course, extravagantly affluent, but do appear able to enjoy a higher standard of living -- bigger houses, fresher food at cheaper prices, life at a less frenetic pace -- than their vaunted middle-class counterparts in the cities. Yet most voice

pessimism about maintaining this rural lifestyle, because so few young people are willing to stay, despite the obvious rewards. Reasons for this focused on the many constrictions on behavior in the rural community, on the traditionally "closed" mentality of the older generation which shows little sign of changing. For their part, older people complained that households were becoming cut off from another, asserting that old traditions of communal help were disappearing and that gaps based on wealth separating them were widening, though a number of families, I was told, continued to "lend" land for virtually nothing to one another. What underlies this seemingly contradictory perception of life and society in rural Japan today?

2. Statement of the Problem

Followers of the news are no doubt familiar with the debate over Japan's closed rice market policy and the role of a powerful farm lobby in keeping it that way. While the politics of rice have been viewed by some reporters and social scientists as a measure of the monolithic nature of power in Japan, a rising tide of domestic discontent belies the outward image of unity, particularly the increasingly vocal demands of food and drink manufacturers who use rice to make crackers, sake, and miso, and who are now calling for access to cheaper imported rice (New York Times, August 18, 1992). Although there is widespread recognition of the larger political and economic issues at stake, there is, however,

far less appreciation of how rice growers in Japan themselves view their situation, not only as farmers but also as members of families, of villages, and of a nation, all in transition.

This dissertation asks how and why small-scale farms in Japan still predominate, despite efforts on the part of the national government to rationalize and modernize the agrarian economy in ways that press for the consolidation of land holdings. In order to understand this problem, I will argue that we must focus not only on rural domestic groups and their reproduction through succession and inheritance, but also on the mostly unreported informal land lending and borrowing that occurs among them. Such practices are now of critical importance to households who are struggling to meet the strictures of state policy while preserving the central role of family and community in Japanese agricultural production and rural social organization. Moreover, through their revitalization of traditional cultural patterns, land lending and borrowing have consequences beyond the simply economic: their influence extends into the politics of social status, and the continual reshaping of relations between individual households and the nature of their ties to community and nation at large.

3. Outline of Work

This dissertation is based primarily upon eighteen-months fieldwork in rural northern Shiga Prefecture, Japan, conducted from December of 1989 through June of 1991. It uses

economic and demographic data I compiled from censuses conducted by local government offices, in addition to other materials and data I collected personally through questionnaires, interviews, and participant-observation of daily life in a farming village called Karakawa over a period of eighteen months.

In order to theoretically ground an appreciation of the concrete issues at stake, the second chapter, "Family, Household, and Property," critically reviews the ethnographic literature on rural households with an eye towards how best to shape lines of inquiry. Drawing on cross-cultural research on the family and household, this chapter examines the interconnections between practices of household production and strategies of household reproduction that reflect on the varying role of kinship in economic organization. Noting the methodological difficulties of the household, current anthropological treatments have already incorporated household studies into analyses of the wider context of economic changes and stratification that in turn reshapes gender and kinship relations. By focusing attention on the diachronic and disjunctive aspects of decision making, my main objective is to trace the ways individual interests are reconciled with the limits of collective action, both in theory and in the manifest realities of agricultural production and the reproduction of rural society.

The dynamics of the wider context framing recent changes at the village and individual household level in rural Japan

have been largely determined by government attempts to reorganize what has hitherto been decried as an inefficient sector of the economy. Chapter 3, "Local Improvement: Modernizing and Developing Relations between State and Community," provides a summary of the history of state policy which has, through programs aimed at land reorganization and consolidation, rewritten the political-economic foundations of agriculture in Japan in significant ways and shaped the way rural society has responded to these changes over the last thirty years.

Chapter 4, "Contemporary Japanese Farming Households," then describes the activities of the rural *ie* in their local context, combining fieldwork description with broader economic and demographic profiles drawn from town, prefectural, and national statistical data. The term *ie* conceptually combines principles of familial descent with consideration of the household as an economic, usually property-holding enterprise. This chapter elaborates on general arguments from preceeding chapters that household structure, while unquestionably a reflection of the internal dictates of the household as a unit, is also a function and part of the process of broader social relations. I argue in the following chapter, "Lending and Borrowing Land," that the critical relations are those relations between households that continue to reserve a role for the community in the definition of rights to the use of land, and look to how these relations are maintained over time. The following

summarizes the main points of my description and analysis from these chapters.

My research underscores that, in the current situation of restricted availability of land and labor, Japan's part-time farmers face a particular set of pressing issues. They revolve in main around the roles of family and household in farming, as successor/heirs become harder to find, and the ways households have -- and have not -- looked to the community, agricultural cooperative (*nôkyô*), and state to provide alternative means of access to labor and capital, substituting for what the family increasingly can no longer do. Change in contemporary rural Japan thus involves an extensive set of actors bringing together disparate agendas, a process that is potentially conflictful, interlaced with tensions and contradictions as this dissertation demonstrates in its examination of social relations within and between rural households and their integration with socio-economic structures outside the community.

From the late 1970s, projects to reorganize and consolidate paddyland (*hojô seibi*) were vigorously promoted by national and prefectural offices to make Japanese agriculture more efficient. Their main legacy, however, has been a worsening of the level of rural debt. Income has started to decline, and land remade into larger parcels is more difficult to move in the market. Prior to consolidation a household could sell off or buy small parcels of land as

economic conditions warranted, but economic forces now push them to leave farming altogether.

As the number of farmers rapidly dwindles, more households holding farmland find themselves with ever fewer hands to work their plots. Yet they stubbornly resist selling the land, instead lending it to a neighbor to farm in return for a small portion of the harvest. This informal lending and borrowing of cultivatable land is widespread and virtually underpins the system of agricultural production in the area where I did my fieldwork.

In the farming village that was the focus of the research, here called Karakawa, nearly two thirds of all farm households borrowed or lent land last year. At the end of the year lenders receive between 10 to 15% of the rice harvested from their land, husked but yet unpolished. This rice as rent is called *nengu*, a term meaning simply "ground rent," but it was also used to refer to tribute paid in kind to feudal lords. While lenders may make little money from the arrangement, by keeping the land in productive shape it enables them to quickly resume farming on their own should labor at home become available. Furthermore, they receive a supply of rice to meet not only their annual consumption needs but also to send to relatives living in the city, an important symbolic expression of intrafamilial relations. Borrowers generally have the upper hand as far as making profits goes. Their commitment to farming, an occupation that

ranks low in desirability, however, makes convincing a young couple to take over the farm problematical at best.

Yet ideas have changed seemingly little within the family. Succession remains a process which begins with the naming, then marriage, of the designated successor, further unfolding through the dispersion of his siblings, until the current househead retires. Inheritance continues to be by this single heir. I also discovered that a growing number of designated successors are temporarily living away from home, and slightly more households are adopting in-marrying males as successor/heirs. While both practices are consistent with traditional values, their more frequent occurrence in recent times points to a system coming under increasing stress.

Nevertheless, a coherent order still binds the logic of production with the system of inheritance, the management of land use-rights, and other aspects of the sociological context. The latter part of this dissertation, the last three chapters, is therefore devoted to ways of relating abstract models -- as in analyses of household production and reproduction that rely on the conceptions of logic and economic rationality -- to social practice and more experientially-grounded processes that take the identity and agency of individuals into account. In Chapter 6, "Nice Dependencies: Status in the Community," I try to bring these disparate strands together in an examination of gift giving, and the conduct of ritual ceremonies that illumine the grids of mutuality that continue to hold the rural community together,

even if that hold is slipping, with tensions rising to the surface and breaking out in overt conflict.

Chapter 7, "Adopting a Son-in-law: Family Property and Social Relations in Action," then reviews the major themes of the entire thesis through a narrative mode that analyzes how economy and family, interest and emotion, all intertwine in the complex unfolding of social process in the community, but as part of discourses that are situated in personal and particular, cultural and historical configurations. The chapter traces issues of gender and power from the point of entry of a minor event: an informal, ceremonial welcome given a soon-to-be adopted son-in-law by the village of his bride. While they are far from rare in rural Japan, in-marrying males are "exceptional" to a degree, and their alleged attributes and position in Japanese families and in society at large point to contradictions in such areas as the relations between men and women, and different status groups. Combining arguments drawn from other chapters, my aim is less to present a definitive picture of the adopted son-in-law as an ideal-typical character than it is to see principles of family and property set into motion, regarding the ambiguity of acts and intentions of the actors whose involvement is seen as central to the process.

Chapter 8, "The Development of Village Culture and Economy," concludes this work with an inquiry into the history of Japanese rural society from 1865 to the present, a period which roughly takes as its starting point Japan's

emergence as a "modern" nation-state from feudalism. The main subject is landlord-tenant relations and the history of rent disputes, the principal object being not so much a reformulation of class models or class conflict, nor an inquiry into the nature of feudalism versus capitalism, nor feudalism *into* or *within* capitalism. Instead, it is the aim of the final chapter of this dissertation to attempt to apply the same sort of close examination of social practice characteristic of ethnography to these narratives of change; and likewise to reflect on the ways history, as meta-narrative, is reshaping the discursive practice of anthropology.

4. Significance and Broader Theoretical Issues

The ethnography of Japan, at least through American eyes, began with a village study in the 1930s (Embree 1939), and over the course of the intervening decades a stream of valuable studies of rural Japan has continuously issued forth. The comprehensive community studies of the 1950s and 1960s fruitfully crossed disciplinary lines, as in the work organized by Beardsley (Beardsley, Hall, and Ward 1959) which included contributions from a political scientist and a historian. The new perspective which the latter discipline was opening up in anthropology generally provided perhaps some of the impetus behind a number of studies to appear in the 1970s tracing changes in rural villages over time, for the most part through the postwar period (notably Dore 1978,

Shimpo 1976, and Smith 1978). With the completion of land reform, a revolution of farming technology, an explosion in employment opportunities in the cities and at home in the countryside, and a thoroughgoing reorganization of social relations and practices, the contrast between the late 1940s and the 1970s was great. This, perhaps inevitably, bred a sense that a way of life centuries old was fast receding to the horizon of historical oblivion.

Japan's success in developing as an economic power has since shifted attention away from "regional Japan" -- the local farming or fishing communities (Kelly 1991:412) -- to the cities and, especially, to the workplace. At the same time, a renewed interest in selfhood, and its multiple constructions out of cultural idioms and social relations has also shaped the current agenda of ethnologists of Japan. In studies of rural society, it has yielded works which, through an examination of the lives of women past and present (Smith and Wiswell 1982, Bernstein 1983, Walthall 1991), have raised sensitivity to questions of gender and power in Japan, and grounded analyses of selfhood in the daily experience of home and work.

This dissertation, as an ethnography of contemporary Japanese rural households, seeks to contribute to three distinct yet interrelated areas of analytic significance. To anthropological work on Japan, which constitutes the first area of contribution, this work provides a description of land lending and borrowing in terms of its central role in

broader strategies of preserving rural households as farm -- if not farming -- families. In addition to documenting an aspect of the transformation of rural Japan and the response of actors at the local level as these processes of change now accelerate, this case study of households also addresses recent trends in the conceptualization of the Japanese *ie* that emphasize structural positions defined within its boundaries as the basis for *ie* production and reproduction (particularly Bachnik 1983 and Kondo 1990). By contrast, this work shifts the focus to the nature of property relations, recognizing that internal household dynamics mediate the definition of the *ie* as a property-holding unit but arguing that the reproduction of the *ie* is rather rooted in the relations between households which, through their definition of rights to the use land, must necessarily deny these rights to some and thereby lay the basis for the perpetual creation of potential "outsiders."

This reevaluation of the inter-household underpinnings of *ie* continuity thus brings conflict in the *ie* to center stage, regarding it as more than a simple function, or dysfunction, of the hierarchical structure of authority in a corporate group. Examining the active uses of conflict and its limitations serves as the point of entry for the second area of analytic significance to which this work aims to contribute: the anthropological understanding of peasant and post-peasant social organization.

Beginning with definitions, this dissertation draws from the comparative study of rural populations in advanced industrial countries and considers the extent to which categories such as "peasant-worker" now beginning to be applied to Japan and East Asia (Kelly 1991: 412) are logically related to the plethora of "transitional" groups that have been noted in widely varying rural developmental contexts. Questions surrounding sharecropping's continuing existence in modern capitalist systems despite its origins in feudal modes of production (Robertson 1980), for example, are related to the deeper theoretical controversy over the persistence of labor organized by family and household (rather than being defined by paid wages) in capitalist societies and its mediation of class development in the ethnography of complex societies. Land lending and borrowing, as a form of informal sharecrop agreement, similarly creates new categories of households that force a revision of historical scenarios of rural class development, further highlighting the need to account for the complex proliferation of interstitial positions rather than the direct development of polar categories of capitalist landlord and proletarian laborer (Wells 1984, Netting 1993:212-229).

The existence of a group of "middle" farming households has also been the focal point of the recent historical debate over the nature of landlord-tenant relations and disputes during the inter-war period in Japan, asking whether an emerging middle stratum of farmers were rebelling peasants or

rational entrepreneurial farmers (Smethurst 1986, Bix 1987, Waswo 1988, Nakamura 1988). This debate has covered a host of empirical and theoretical issues so numerous and specialized that only a cursory examination of them is possible in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. From my study of contemporary rural households that lend and borrow land (as a canny response, if not overt resistance to state programs) there are, however, two points of methodological significance that can be fruitfully applied to this historical debate. The first is that categorizations of rural households should not be confined to simple measures such as the scale of operations or the basic organization of work. As Nakamura has put it, any notion of a middling farmer in Japan of the 1920s must be based on the "differentiation between owners, owner-tenants, and tenants" (Nakamura 1988:47), just as in the present day we need to focus on the ties between land lenders and land borrowers, and move past elementary contrasts between full-time and part-time farmers.

The second related point is that these categories of rural households and, by extension, historical distinctions between peasants and farmers, are forged out of wider contexts of political, economic, and ideological subordination, vis-à-vis the policies and actions of the state and industrial capitalism. While the particular contours of this process differ according to time and place -- today's farmers are not the direct descendents of the tenants of the inter-war period, nor were these tenants

themselves 19th century peasants transformed -- an emphasis on local cultural traditions colors the way all these groups or strata are marked off from the larger society, and underscores an historical dynamic that at its heart is concerned with inequalities and their contestation at different levels.²

Relating culture and economy in a historical framework also serves as a bridge to the third area of analysis to which this dissertation seeks to contribute, an area which has been particularly prominent as part of the on-going dialogue between Japan and its trading partners: Is Japan's political economy uniquely inseparable from its cultural traditions? The high price of land around urban areas has been touted by journalists and diplomats as one of the structural impediments to foreign producers trying to engage in local production and enter the Japanese market, by putatively inflating the cost of building and maintaining facilities in Japan to prohibitive levels (see Yamamura 1992:33-34 for an introduction to the domestic and international debates). Sharpening our focus on some of the cultural reasons holding up the unfettered circulation of land leads to a clearer understanding of whether the Japanese tendency towards vague forms of economic settlement, which puts outsiders (read foreigners here) at a disadvantage, is cultural in origin, and offers insights into how to address cultural difference in an international economic context in general.

The "land myth" in Japan, the popular belief that the value of land can only rise, making it the most profitable property to hold and accumulate, has long been of interest to Japan observers. Although few deny that this belief is widely held among the Japanese, some in the West have questioned whether this land myth, and the land problems which have accompanied it, truly stem from aspects of Japanese culture or national character, as some Japanese have asserted (Woodall 1992:122-124). The point of contention may ultimately be whether there is a "unique" mentality or cultural background that accounts for the Japanese attachment to land,³ a position with racist overtones that has been taken by both sides at one time or another. As claim is continually met with counter-claim, the debate drags on. This dissertation cannot answer whether the Japanese emotional attachment to, or identification with land is qualitatively different from those of other nations or peoples. But through an analysis of land lending this study does clearly delineate, beyond simple considerations of the tax structure and political interests, reasons for a practical involvement with land which are grounded in long-term, informal relationships between households, relationships to which many in rural Japan have sustained their commitment.

This conceivably might yield more generalizable insights into the postwar development of the Japanese political economy, touching on, for example, the centrality of cooperative social-exchange relationships in Japan as

Murakami and Rohlen have recently proposed (Murakami and Rohlen 1992). In any case, instead of opposing tradition (as myth) to economics (as fact), this work hopes to bring them together in a better appreciation of social relations as they have been managed and maintained in the rural family and community, in an examination of the plight of farmers trying to survive in a nation originally named "the land of splendrous rice"⁴ by the gods.

Notes

¹Generally, the terms "hamlet" and "village" are used interchangeably here to refer to rural residential settlements. It should be noted, however, that historically the term village, or *mura*, also designated an administrative block composed of a number of hamlets (*buraku*, also *sonraku*). These bureaucratic creations are hereupon referred to specifically as "administrative villages." Presently, the official designations for village or hamlet settlements is *ô-aza*, or *ku*, the latter term also being used in urban contexts to refer to a city ward or neighborhood.

²This theoretical orientation developed out of a line of peasant studies connected with the works of Julian Steward and his students (Silverman 1979, Roseberry 1992), and has since been extended to include analyses of "primitive" societies (Wolf 1982) as well.

³Japan's "uniqueness" has been a defining issue for a number of Japanese social scientists, and produced a body of literature called *nihonjinron*, which attempts to define what it is Japanese, what sets them apart as a people. While drawing much heated criticism from time to time, it is an interesting reversal of "orientalism," viewed from the other side of the looking glass as it were.

⁴In Japanese, the name is *mizuho-no-kuni*. It is recorded in one of Japan's earliest historical chronicles, the *Nihon Shoki* which dates from the eighth century, as being used by

the Sun Goddess Amaterasu-Ômikami to describe "the region which my descendants shall be lords of" (Aston 1972:77); literally, "the land of fair (young and fresh) rice ears."

Chapter Two

FAMILY, HOUSEHOLD, AND PROPERTY

1. Heirs and Other Problems

One afternoon the three daughters of the house, their cousin, and I were watching television, sipping tea. A relative had passed away, and their parents were attending to the various preparations for the wake and funeral, helping to entertain people who would be stopping in throughout the day to pay their respects to the family and to the deceased. With no particular duties themselves aside from making a few formal greetings, the children were free, and quietly chatted away the time. The teenage cousin, a boy, had recently returned to Japan with his parents and sister from the United States, where his father had done a research fellowship at Stanford University, and catching up with him and all that had happened over that time made up for a large part of the conversation.

The three daughters themselves had also spent time living abroad, participating in study programs in China and the United States, and they compared their experiences. In the middle of a discussion of what shores their future careers might eventually take them to, the question of who would stay home to inherit the house suddenly but naturally came up. Of the three young women, one, the oldest, had already found work and moved away from home. The middle daughter was engaged to be married in a few months and was planning to live with her husband-to-be and his parents. The youngest, about to enter college, protested that it didn't necessarily follow that she would have to take responsibility for continuing the family line, by bringing in a husband: in mock supplication, she turned to her young cousin, asking if he would consent to assuming the heirship. Her sisters took to the idea instantly, and pressed it to the young man with good humor, reminding him that as heir he would receive not only a fine house but also paddyfields and dryfield plots in the village. Knowing that he was being teased, he just smiled, finally saying that when he got older he too most likely would be heading elsewhere, maybe California again.

In such unguarded moments one can glimpse the complexities of succession, the ambivalences and conflicts that make up its central role in family life. If the current generation of young men and women see themselves as less bound to certain values or principles, they nevertheless take others for granted or leave them uncontested. So while the

duty to maintain the family line out of respect for ancestors seems nearly forgotten today, at the same time the single-heir principle remains as firmly entrenched -- at least in words -- as ever.

The problem is how to relate these areas of change and non-change. Anthropologists have been well -- and long -- advised not to equate change with innovation nor the status quo with tradition. Yet out of legitimate desires to extract cross-cultural generalizations, certain areas of culture and society which are deemed to be "universal" often wind up being reduced to the synchronic functions of static models. Bender's attempt to refine the concept of the household (1967) noted the importance of first distinguishing family, with kinship as the referent, from household, and then analytically distinguishing between the co-residential group (the household with propinquity as the defining element) and domestic functions. Yet considerations of domestic functions almost inevitably tack back to the family: most conceptions of "domestic" have in some way connections to the functional activities of social reproduction, child bearing and rearing (Yanagisako 1979:166). As adoption in rural Japan demonstrates, they are not necessary conditions for the maintenance or reproduction of the household and continuation of the family line. This is nevertheless often obscured by resort to so-called various givens of the human condition mostly biological in nature: the need to eat for the individual, the necessity to reproduce, for the species.

Why family and household have played such a large role in fulfilling these dictates throughout world history is not the question here. Since Aristotle's discussion of the *oikos*, they have figured prominently in economic studies and our understanding of the relationship between kinship and polity; it would be impossible to summarize the vast literature on the family and household that has come out of such disciplines as economics, history, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. But generally it seems safe to say that while traditional studies sought to define universal features of the family and household, creating formal typologies and evolutionary schema, recent research has questioned the validity of the family or household as bounded units. The focus has instead been on activities and processes related, but not necessarily restricted, to the family and household level, and their connection to historically specific patterns of political and economic organization.

Household production has been viewed as a survival from the natural economy of the past, and a continually reconstituted relation of production defined as control over labor. Eventually, however, payment has to be made for this labor in one way or another. Household decisions entail more than costs and benefits -- they involve notions of fairness and right. Important though they may be, relations of labor in production must be complemented with the relations which shape control over resources such as land, that are customary and slightly beyond the reach of civil law. Though this adds

perhaps only a little to Engels' tracing of a world-historical defeat of women (and other dominated people; see Leacock 1979, Collins 1986) through the privatization of property, this recognition of the vital role property plays in household dynamics retains a theoretical place for the household as a unit of analysis commensurate with its continuing social significance. In this connection then, it is my purpose in this chapter to provide the backdrop of a more wide-ranging reappraisal of the theoretical literature on family and household, against which to examine the changes in rural Japan's households as described in following chapters. In particular, I will argue that the breakdown of relations within the family -- presently *and* in the past -- is as crucial to its reproduction as strategies of heirship. Moreover, they are both linked to the operation of the household unit not simply as a unit of production and survival, but also as a unit of appropriation and extinction.

2. The Household Economy as an Anthropological Concept

While modernization and its effects have brought attention on the household as a unit of consumption and reproduction in urban contexts (especially in Latin American studies; see Schmink 1984), in pre-capitalist or non-capitalist societies it is primarily conceived of as a (if not *the*) unit of production. In large part this is due to Sahlin's (1976) influential -- though perhaps not original -- notion of the domestic mode of production. I trace the

genealogy of this "family and labor" paradigm below, and how it undergirds the traditional model of peasant household function.

Confronting the paradox of "pristine affluence" and underproduction in economies organized by domestic group and kinship relations, Sahlins defines the household as the dominant production institution "of its time." Characterized empirically by division of labor by sex, small-scale technology, and production for use (hence anti-surplus), he relates these elements together in a rule of household production first formulated by the Russian economist Chayanov that the intensity of labor per worker increases in direct relation to the domestic ratio of consumers to workers. In addition, Sahlins adds household autonomy in property relations, devotion to its own interests, and consequent tendencies towards anarchy and dispersion as other elements of the domestic mode of production.

Working from this basis, he goes on to put Chayanov's rule into political and social context by examining situations of the intensification of production. In short, superstructures of kinship and politics contradict the infrastructure of domestic production and institutes a "public economy greater than the sum of its parts"; circulation of goods among households and households, through big-men and chiefs, explain the deviations from Chayanov's rule and the surplus production of the village as a whole.

This reformulation of Chayanov in certain respects does him a disservice. Rather than proposing a subsistence theory of peasant production, Chayanov was interested in a theory of agricultural decision making: how cost and benefit are calculated not in terms appropriate to capitalist firms but in terms of the institutional arrangements in which production is carried out. Peasant household production, by definition lacking a category of wage labor, expands only by the sweat of its member's own brows. Conversely, because peasant households cannot lay off their "workers" during economic slumps, they usually increase production in order to maintain their customary standards of living. While the requirements of subsistence are involved, it must be noted that so too are commodity circulation and the dictates of falling market prices. Unfortunately, Chayanov's insight into the importance of household consumer/producer ratios -- and the important role of the family cycle in production and decision making -- was conflated with a logic of subsistence by Sahlins' reformulation.

Critical research on peasant (and simple commodity-producing) households has thus fundamentally centered around the following questions: Are households self-contained and bounded units? Is peasant household production oriented toward reproduction rather than accumulation? Are peasant and simple commodity production outside or resistant to capitalist laws of development?

By all accounts the answer to the first question seems to be no. Any review article on households will cite extensive literature on the problem of the household even simply as a bounded unit of coresidence, which used to be the minimal definition of a household. In production, household members often participate in work groups or forms of organization beyond the household. As for consumption, men and women may keep separate budgets, and food is often lent, shared, or given (Sabeau 1983:164-165). And, as for reproduction, in places such as West Africa for example, men and women frequently divorce and remarry, or there may be extensive fostering of children (see Guyer 1981). Gender differentiation especially appears to compromise the utility of the household as a unit of analysis. Vaughn (1983) points to significant amounts of food transfers and cooperative labor among women, practical aspects of the production process which nevertheless are seldom remarked upon because they fail to fit into cultural expressions of family forms. Oral and written sources thus tend to overemphasize formal structure, neglecting their relationship to socio-economic realities. Yet focusing solely on women may obscure as well the underlying processes of economic change and stratification that themselves shape gender and kinship relations.

Despite its methodological shortcomings, the concept of the household does remain theoretically central to a number of approaches as a locus of domination, an arena of struggle,

and a structure linking local cultural norms with extra-local economic and political power. While some writers point to the economic and status mobility of individual peasant households over time, content to attribute their disparities to family and household developmental cycles and demographic differentiation, there still remains the task of integrating far-ranging analyses of multiple dominations, in terms of the logic of household production and process. A pioneering attempt at the latter is Henry Bernstein's article entitled "Notes on capital and peasantry" (Bernstein 1982). In it Bernstein sets up, as part of a discussion of the relations between capitalism and peasantry, a model which offers insights into the transformation of social formations. At the center of this transformation lies the transition from the natural economy (in which the production of use-values is dominant) to a class-based society, as entailed by incorporation into the circuit of the capitalist world economy. This occurs, Bernstein argues, as a result of the breaking of the cycle of reproduction in the natural economy, in part through the initial monetization of some of its elements (for example, through cash taxes), and the consequent withdrawal of labor from use-value production.

The breaking of this cycle is also effected at the level of the simple reproduction of the unit of production (i.e., the household): as commodities replace items in the sphere of necessary consumption that formerly were produced locally or obtained through simple exchange, the reproduction of the

household becomes a process increasingly penetrated by commodity relations. Necessary consumption includes items of productive consumption, such as tools, seeds, and fertilizer, as well as items of individual consumption -- food, clothing, shelter, and the socially-defined necessities of reproduction, such as bride-price and ceremonial expenses. Aside then from the initial rupture of the cycle of reproduction by the imposition of taxes or the exaction of corvée labor for public works by the state, the substitution of non-indigenous goods for items of production thus serves as an important factor in the process of commoditization, without involving the direct expropriation of the producers.

Once begun, this process is further accelerated by the "logic of subsistence" which, as an element of the natural economy, it would *prima facie* aim to undermine. Bernstein terms this the "simple reproduction squeeze": "as the logic of household economy is determined by the needs of simple reproduction and not by a logic of accumulation regulated at the enterprise level by the operation of prices of production ... falling prices are experienced by the household economy as a deterioration of the the terms of exchange of the commodities it produces relative to those it needs for simple reproduction (the circuit C-M-C), which means a reduction in levels of consumption or an intensification of commodity production, or both simultaneously" (Bernstein 1982:165-166). Since items of necessary consumption are by definition last

to be trimmed from the household budget, commodity production is therefore all the more intensified.

While this provides us with a Chayanovian mechanism to usher differentiation in and along, the model serves mainly to explain the initial stages of the process. Having moved beyond pre-industrial, or non-capitalist societies incorporated into capitalist social formations as in, for example, Africa, we find that in many cases the Leninist vision of the polarization of the peasantry fails to materialize. What are we to make of stratification in rural societies in advanced industrial nations like Japan, that have been steeped in commodity relations for centuries and have seemingly long abandoned, in virtually all practical aspects, a simple logic of subsistence?

3. The Changing Tradition of Family in Japan

As we have seen for contemporary rural Japan, the full-time farming household has virtually disappeared. Those that remain consider themselves professional farmers and are eager to be seen as such. This is consonant with the increasing general emphasis on technological sophistication and rational management strategies. To this end members of a cooperative in Miyagi prefecture recently have organized themselves so as to receive monthly salaries for working set hours, and bonuses twice a year, in order to change their image to resemble that of the much admired corporate "salary-man" (*Asahi Shinbun*, March 25, 1992).

The overwhelming majority of farming households here are part-time ones, however, and the case can be made that agriculture plays only a minor role in post-peasant rural society. With most income coming from off-farm, work and home are divided. Communal traditions like work exchange and circulating credit funds have virtually disappeared or survive in attenuated, ritualistic forms. Schooling determines the course of children's development and lives. With the nuclearization of the family, social work agencies control more and more care for the old.

Japan is now richer than it has ever been, but many bemoan what they see as a spiritual loss. In one respect society has been the loser: formerly, shared poverty compelled neighbors to depend on one another. One woman in her forties recalled that in her childhood firewood was so expensive that a single family couldn't afford to heat bathwater every night, so one would invite over one's neighbors when they did, and use their neighbors' tub on other times, in alternating fashion. Now of course there is no need to practice such economy, but it is regrettable, she concluded, that each household only thinks of its own interests and has turned away from the people next door.

Many see a breakdown of values and practices within the family, or *ie*, as well. There remains of course the age-old struggle between generations, but beyond this there seems to be growing tension between brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives. This may also be so much clucking by the retiring

generation at how young people are turning away from traditional ways, but the juicier tidbits of village gossip revolve around stories of the sisters of successor/heirs demanding cash equivalent of their share of land holdings (as is their legal right), straining household finances to such an alleged extent so as to threaten its survival. The other stories pertain to wives who are unfaithful, in the sense not only of running off with other men or divorcing their husbands and taking the children with them, but also taking away a substantial financial settlement.

Without attributing perhaps undue veracity to these stories, I believe they are instructive in two, related aspects: they focus on women -- sisters or wives -- and their rights to a share of household property. With all the changes of the past thirty years -- rising educational levels and increasing employment of women to cite the most significant -- it seems no accident that character issues boil down not to the kind of work women do, or how they do it, but to their management of relations through which property is controlled. While I have outlined in the preceding the diminishing role of household as an income-producing unit in itself -- a phenomenon documented in post-peasant societies in Europe as well -- it is just as clear that the household retains many of its features as a particular structure of authority. This authority is founded on controlling access to land in particular, and can be restated in processual terms as empowering certain individuals while excluding others. This

is a point that needs to be made not only in terms of theory but also history. That is, a theory of the household which, through a consideration of property and inheritance, of authority and succession, links culture and its vicissitudes to attendant historical processes that begin and end with questions of class and status.

For the moment, however, I want to underscore merely that the tensions contemporary farming households are experiencing are not simply out of changing times and values. In fact, one might argue that they lie at the heart of household reproduction, particularly when impartible inheritance of land is the cultural norm, as it has been in Japan since at least the latter part of the Tokugawa era (Smith 1959:39-41; see also his village study for the period 1717-1830: Smith 1977). While one analyst has argued that the late timing of inheritance may have resulted in a higher number of extended joint households rather than stem families proper (Cornell 1981), there is agreement that "primogeniture inheritance is the quintessential characteristic of the ie system" (Fukutake 1967:42).

4. Systems of Inheritance: General Issues

Generally, when a land holding is passed on to a single heir as a rule in a society (usually at the marriage of the heir), the non-inheriting children must in some way be "dispersed." The timing of deciding the heir, and the complications entailed, can be illustrated by referring to

works responding to, and contesting what is probably the classic anthropological case study of the stem family in anthropology: Arensberg and Kimball's research in Ireland (1968).

Arensberg and Kimball isolated four critical elements in their description of the Irish stem family's course of development: familial role allocation, the match, dispersal, and allocation. The authors focussed on the match, "a contractual marriage made by the parents or families of the marrying parties and involving the disposal of properties" (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:105). The transmission of property -- particularly the impartibility of the land, subdivision of holdings ceasing around the mid-19th century -- served as the virtual linchpin for the Irish small farmer social system, both generating the dispersal of non-inheriting kin, the re-formation of the family groups, and serving as the material base for the ideology of familism.¹ While their recognition of the critical role of property transfer in the operation of this system remains a valuable one, their "framework of long-term customary relationships" (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:301) ultimately depends however on a functionally static vision of family custom and a spatially-circumscribed community.

The revisionist studies that followed questioned the stem family's putatively long history in Ireland, preferring to view it instead as a mainly transitional form. For example, Gibbon and Curtin (1978) point to Arensberg and

Kimball's rejection of larger farmers from their model, and claim that it obscures the stem family's major function in Ireland's adjustment to post-famine migrations: by postponing succession, it delayed the departure of labor from the middle and lower peasantries, who engaged in petty commodity production and were in need of that labor.

Although Gibbon and Curtin's explanation accounts for the concentration of the stem family in petty-commodity medium farm areas, where hired labor could not be afforded, their model was criticized by Varley (1983) on a number of points. In their view, the extension of the family was used as a means of meeting a labor shortage, and that to obtain optimum family labor the medium farm household postponed succession and made use of institutions such as cooring, the exchange of labor services between kin and neighbors, in production. In Varley's opinion, postponing succession only made it more difficult for heirs to marry as well as compensate non-heirs. Encouraging post-mortem as opposed to pre-mortem transmission of property, it did so at the expense of leaving the farm relatively over-supplied with labor. Nor did it free the farm from dependence on reciprocal or wage labor to carry it through periods when the agricultural cycle created demand for labor in excess of what the family could supply.

Male primogeniture is not the only system of inheritance, however. In the early seventies Goldschmidt and Kunkel published an article which examined 46 peasant

communities worldwide in terms of family structure and modes of inheritance, and found them to be associated in the following patterns: 1.) patrilocal stem with patrilineal impartible inheritance, 2.) patrilocal joint with patrilineal partible, and 3.) nuclear with bilateral inheritance.

Following Wolf's suggestion that ecological factors might be an explanation of different modes of inheritance (Wolf 1966), they found land scarcity only weakly associated with impartible inheritance, and concentrated instead on Wolf's other suggestion that the hierarchical social context, "the relation of the domestic group to other, superordinate political and economic institutions and mechanisms" (Wolf 1966:74) are at the root of these patterns. Specifically, they pointed to the historic presence of a strong independent feudal nobility, the relationship between peasant and elite defining in part the position of the household head by "rendering him responsible for the other members of the household" (Goldschmidt and Kunkel 1971:1068). Their work raised issues that in the past have concerned social historians of Europe more than anthropologists, perhaps because the elements involved, restricted resources (primarily land) and a strong center of power, were not addressed until the growth of peasant studies in anthropology.

The relationship between land ownership, inheritance, and social stratification in European peasant society serves as a model for this process in the literature, and has been

concisely stated by Sigrid Khera in the following way:
 assuming that stratification is determined by the
 distribution of landed property, it follows that "the
 relationship between the strata depends to a high degree on
 the regular change in land ownership" (Khera 1973:815),
 change that takes place through sales and in the form of
 inheritance. Regarding inheritance, it is impossible for all
 children in a family to inherit the whole estate; therefore,
 the result must be (or at least tend towards) some or all of
 them descending to a lower economic level.

The consolidation of dispersed property is now
 recognized as an important corollary phase of partible
 inheritance systems in many areas as well. In his study of
 family cycles and inheritance in rural Portugal, O'Neill
 finds that in areas where partible inheritance is the
 practice, one still finds nevertheless a web of strategies
 aimed at keeping the patrimony intact: selection of a
 "favored heir," more equal than others; pre-mortem donation
 of land; and restriction on the marriages of secondary
 siblings (O'Neill 1985). Furthermore, indirect approval of
 non-marital sexuality for these secondary co-heirs creates
 and reproduces a "bastard class" with weak claims to
 patrimonies, who end up occupying the lower ladders of the
 social hierarchy (O'Neill 1987:330-340).

Ruth Behar's defense of the egalitarianism of equal
 inheritance serves as a reminder that there are factors which
 mitigate the stratification process, however. In a Spanish

village, a long history of equal inheritance practices without attendant stratification or social unrest was made possible by the protection and maintenance of common lands. While the cultural preferences for treating all children equally put a strain on family property, newlyweds were able to combine work at their parents' house with other sources of income, borrowing from the community as it were its share of the commons: plots to farm, gleanings, gathering wild plants, kindling and firewood to sell in the deforested lowland villages, enabled couples the economic bases for setting up their own house. The importance of the web of use-rights in the commons for all was evident in the concerted efforts on the part of the community to prevent the loss of these rights when the state began its (fairly late) process of disentanglement in the nineteenth century, the community council buying them back or trying to obtain legal exemptions from sale (Behar 1986).

When marriage does not involve the consolidation of property, modes of inheritance assist the pushing of excluded heirs down the social scale. As one villager put it, in a conversation with Behar about inheritance: "Who are the poor? The children of the rich." Or, one might add, their brothers and sisters. While the process of differentiation is mediated by an ideology of family and household encompassing economic rights and obligations, it is also necessarily linked, through succession, to structures of authority. Though the relation

between modes of inheritance and social organization in ecological and demographic terms ("farming efficiency") continues to be investigated (see Rodgers and Salamon 1983) in ways that ignore history, feminist studies have increased awareness of the domination of women and their labor, in ways that through the extension of property relations enable definition of other axes of domination in the family and household: between elder and junior, inheriting and non-inheriting siblings, mothers and sons-in-law, and brothers-in-law (Sabeian 1984).

A seminal case study that helps draw many of these issues together is Cole and Wolf's research in the Tyrol area of northern Italy, where they compared two villages sharing similar ecological and historical conditions but different ethnic conditions, Romansh and Germanic. Describing domestic group composition in the postwar period, Cole and Wolf found the major Germanic-tradition village, St. Felix, where impartible inheritance was the ideal, inclined towards a preponderance of conjugal families with offspring, and a smaller percentage of joint or extended household units; and a greater number of married women managing their affairs alone in the Romance tradition village of Tret, where partible inheritance was the ideal. However, contrary to expectations, the number of holdings apparently increased over time in St. Felix while remaining fairly constant in Tret. They explain these relatively slight differences partly with reference to the domestic group's developmental cycle,

and the role of restricted marriages as a mechanism for recruiting additional personnel to the local group, but also serving to rid villages of surplus contenders for local marriage and the resources connected with it, while maintaining the holding as a viable unit.

Their most relevant insight for our purposes here, however, is that though all domestic units may form economic entities, it is not so much the form of the unit that determines its course, but the variable relations of members to the operation of that entity. Thus, though the domestic group may pass through phases, each phase defines who may be a member, and what kind of membership he or she holds at any given time. Furthermore: "each phase also involves succession to the pivotal managerial position, through which resources of the household are marshalled and distributed to members, and denied non-members" (Cole and Wolf 1974:238). It is here that one finds the critical difference between St. Felix and Tret:

While the requirement that resources of the household be handled by a single manager is common to both villages, they diverge sharply in the structural and cultural definitions of the managerial role and in its consequences for social relation. In St. Felix, managerial authority is yielded to a single heir, to the exclusion of all other heirs; in Tret decision-making *authority* is vested in one sibling, while other siblings keep an active say in decision-making. This operates synchronically to *exclude* collaterals from influencing decision-making in St. Felix, and to *include* collaterals and also affines in Tret: it also operates diachronically, to structure out exclusive lines of descent in St. Felix, and in contrast, to favor the creation of wide-ranging inclusive networks of kin and affines in Tret (Cole and Wolf 1974:238).

Because the wait to assume authority in St. Felix households was a long one, friction between father and son often resulted in designated heirs foregoing their inheritance, leaving the village or taking up an independent existence somewhere in the fringe of the village. This opened the way for younger siblings to succeed, the possibility of which served as inducement to stay as long as possible, until headship was officially passed on. In Tret separation of managerial control of a holding provided the basis for a single manager to eventually consolidate the ownership of land dispersed among his siblings. Cole and Wolf argue that these thorough-going structural distinctions in social organization between these two villages stem in large part from different types of social relations with other villagers, but also outsiders: in agreement with Goldschmidt and Kunkel, they underline how inheritance produces public outcomes affecting both families and the jural-political relations between peasant and elites.

5. Defining Processes of Stratification

As Berkner has commented, inheritance systems are difficult to define because they refer to laws, customs, or the actual practices which may or may not correspond (Berkner 1976). The form of settlement depends often on types of land tenure or economic conditions, but also on the management of the process by which a successor/heir is designated --

strategies of production versus strategies of heirship. Combining these differing points of view makes clear the ambiguity of labor organization in the family/household in relation to strategies of heirship and succession. In particular, just as important as "means of inclusion" of family expansion, as Smith has put it (Smith 1977:110), are the mechanisms to disperse excess labor--"means of exclusion" such as "divorce, abortion, infanticide, adoption out, sending members out to work, dismissal of servants, or splitting of a branch family" (Smith 1977:111). By reducing the number of potential claimants to family property, these strategies also tie into larger questions of how modes of inheritance, through status stratification, affect the course of succeeding households and the lives of individuals.

Having grounded our view of households theoretically as a locus of fundamental conflict and contention, it should come as no surprise that historical studies have unmasked myths of a uncomplicated golden past for what they are. As Gluck has detailed, the agrarian roots of the Japanese *ie* were idealized in first decade of this century at precisely the moment in Japanese development when the traditional *ie* was disappearing in the countryside and rural migrants to the city were "increasingly living in conjugal units, sundered from both kin and property" (Gluck 1985:187). That the ensuing decades saw a revival of the rural *ie* seems not unconnected to the fact that a burgeoning modern economy

found its needed workforce in just those units sundered from kin and property.²

Drawing a more complete picture of this development trajectory, however, requires data and historical expertise far exceeding what I possess. Nevertheless, taking the foregoing as historical background and theoretical foundation, I hope I have at least outlined the beginning of an argument that while studies of the household may tend to focus on the organization of production and consumption, we should at the same time explore the vital role it plays in the transmission of property and rights held over it.

This is not to say, however, that analyses of household crises of production and reproduction cannot be usefully employed, particularly when they balance ecology and human agency with a keen appreciation of historical process. A fine example of this is Shenton and Lennihan's (1981) case study of Nigerian cotton production, traced from pre-colonial economy through to the development of a cotton lint export industry. Utilizing a notion of a crisis of simple reproduction analogous to Bernstein "subsistence squeeze," the authors refine it by noting the different effects these crises -- details of which cannot be provided here due to considerations of space -- had on different parts of the rural population. "The more prosperous who had weathered both the bad harvest and the necessity to sell grain to pay their taxes with food reserves still intact could turn their cash advances into productive capital by hiring wage labourers,

increasing the size of the following year's crop, and consequently of the next year's advance" (Shenton and Lennihan 1981:59). Smaller, less well-off farmers who found themselves without reserves and a pressing need to purchase food not surprisingly provided this wage labor, hence reducing their use-value production on their own farms.

The increased incidence of wage labor and widened economic differences between rich and poor farmers are a clear indication of changed relations between households. The nature of the change is, however open to debate. While Shenton and Lennihan see this increased relative inequality between households as an indication of incipient rural class formation, it can also be argued that the sources of exploitation lie not in the relations between rural households, but in their external relations to capitalism and the colonial state. There is also, once again, the important consideration, when regarding inequalities among rural households, that these measures implicitly assume the household to be coherent units of residence, production, and consumption, tending to gloss over inequalities in access to and the distribution of resources within the household, between generations and genders.

But class models of rural differentiation do account for the changing relations within households. Shenton and Lennihan (see also Watts 1983:213-222) are careful to describe the changing household structure resulting from commoditization: in practice and ideology large family

farming units declined in importance, as nuclear families became more individualized and isolated due to crises of simple reproduction. These crises changed the types of rights and obligations of household heads and members. The authority of household heads became undermined and decentralized as they were unable to provide for their sons' tax payments, food requirements, and traditional ceremonial expenses. Sons, expected then to provide for their own expenses, became increasingly estranged from the household economy, depending upon off-farm income or their own individual plots and attending to their needs of simple reproduction themselves. Borrowing the needed cash often from women also altered the relations between the sexes. In all, weakened control over household labor and the general weakening of the rights and obligations that bound household members led to increasing individualization and generational conflict; and in turn, the effects of subsequent crises of simple reproduction were magnified for these isolated families, deepening the commoditization of the relations of production.

Studies of the household, production, and class relations continue to yield insights into the developmental trajectory of third world peasantries (recently, see Deere 1990). The unexpected resonance of a number of issues in both early colonial Africa and post-peasant Europe -- the decentralization of household authority and the rising importance of off-farm income for example -- probably has its origins as much in the benefits of allying history with

anthropology as it does in any shared characteristics of rural societies across time and space.

Though my review of the literature on household and inheritance has been selective, it has, I hope, also demonstrated that inheritance systems influence the course of local stratification, but not necessarily in any definitive way. Partible inheritance can produce a dispossessed "bastard class" in combination with other mechanisms which reallocate resources, as they do in O'Neill's Portugese village, as effectively as the more straightforward system of impartible inheritance. Likewise, single-heir systems in most modern societies survive today as a result of concessions made by non-inheriting siblings who stake their futures on jobs, schools, and opportunities far from their natal house and land.

For this reason, it is difficult to state with any finality a relationship between inheritance system and stratification, though clearly the two intersect. Following Wolf and Cole, it is perhaps best simply to recognize that in the structure of familial authority and decision making, succession and inheritance are intertwined with the relations between men and women, older generation and younger, and siblings. They reflect the conflicts within the family-farm enterprise, the interests that differ according to age, gender, or blood relationship, which in Japan seem to deflect, if not displace, the discourse that in other societies centers on class. Or, to slightly shift our

perspective: relationships in the family are mediated through claims and duties which are "summed up in the property relations internal to the family." Systematically analyzing the dynamics of property, then, enables us to see "in what way they give shape to the range of relationships" (Sabeian 1983:171).

When we ask how contradictions of production and appropriation -- the organization of work and the distribution of rewards -- are lived and experienced by individuals, in what ways are they acted upon, we must look to strategies that divide *and* bring those interests together again. The decisive strategy that does so at present in rural Japan is the borrowing and lending of land. Before examining these practices, however, it is necessary to describe their origins in the recent past of government policy, aimed at reshaping the agrarian economy, if not rural society. It also is vital that we recognize the family's definition by, and relationship with, the state. To an appreciation of the domination, conflict, and expropriation that are attached to property ownership -- property as a relationship between individuals, not as a thing (Goody 1962) -- within the family, we must also add a larger system of domination that itself views, and controls, the workings of the family.

Notes

¹In creating a general theory of the stem family, Verdon (1979) notes that impartible inheritance has long been equated with the stem family in sociological theories relating to the evolution of the Western European family, and finds that while this generally holds true across various cultures, the transmission of property is often delayed, the father maintaining control until senility or some other incapacity intervenes. From this tension and ambivalence he argues that stem families are "better understood as nuclear families which reluctantly co-reside because of specific economic and ecologic conditions....stem families cannot be interpreted either as disintegrated extended families or as a transitional form between extended and the nuclear family" (Verdon 1979:100-101).

²Another influence on the dynamics of household composition and the development of the rural ie was the conscription system. According to Hane (1982:19-20), only "heads of households and those in line to succeed to that position -- the family's sole son, and men adopted to carry on the family line -- were exempt from the draft. To prevent their younger sons from being drafted, many parents set up separate households for them or tried to have them adopted into families lacking male heirs."

Chapter Three

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT:

MODERNIZING AND DEVELOPING RELATIONS BETWEEN STATE AND COMMUNITY

1. Working Weekends

Japanese agriculture today produces the most and what they regard as the best rice, per square measure of land, probably of anywhere in the world, anytime in history. The introduction of power machinery has cut the amount of labor necessary for all tasks, from plowing to transplanting, to harvesting and threshing. On a Sunday in late September, for example, one can see the mini-combines at work in the orderly-arranged fields, cutting down the stalks of rice and automatically bagging the threshed grain. A beeper sounds when the 30-kilo bags are full, calling a woman to lug them to the side of the field, where a grandmother and the young children in her charge might be lunching on balls of rice

wrapped in *nori*, washed down with cold barley tea. On a peak day of the season, ten or fifteen of these luxury sedans of the agricultural implement line might be mowing the plain, each owned and operated by single families harvesting their presumably individually-owned plots. At the town "country elevator" where the rice is bought and stored, a winding line of trucks and small tractors inches its way forward, slow as any metropolitan commute.

In this image is one way of defining what has happened to the rural "community" over the years: like stalled commuters, farmers share a collective predicament in pursuit of their separate interests. And despite the long list of changes at the local level that seem to stake off the present from the past, there is continuity in the larger dimensions of local/extralocal relations: namely, that the terms of the relationship are unequal and people with power work to keep them that way. In the following chapter this will be demonstrated through an examination of how the state has pursued a program of modernization in agriculture, and how through its various guises it has operated to undercut local autonomy. On the other side, I will detail the responses of farmers, and the limits of their resistance and their initiatives.

2. Irrigation and Rice Cultivation

Rice cultivation in Japan has changed a great deal since the 1950s. Now tractors exclusively plow the gray spring

soil; traditional rice nurseries have been abandoned for shoots produced in the more easily controlled conditions of special greenhouses, while mechanical transplanters have eliminated the literally back-breaking work of manual transplanting -- though occasionally even technology fails and some shoots have to be fixed by hand. Chemical herbicides and fertilizers are used, despite the recent gain in popularity of "organically" grown produce. Mini-combines harvest the rice, separating the grain from the stalk, bagging the former and grinding up the latter to be plowed back into the earth. Aside from these technological developments, one other aspect of change in farmwork is the timing: with the introduction of new varieties, and to avoid crop damage from typhoons, the agricultural work calendar has been advanced one-half to one month earlier than it used to be.

With the wholesale revolution in production techniques, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how much mechanization has reduced the labor requirements for cultivation in terms of man hours. Since 1960 there has been a steady decline in the average amount of labor time put into paddy and dry-field farming, while productivity has risen. According to the 1990 White Paper on Agriculture (Nôrin Tôkei Kyôkai 1990:9), pegging 1960 levels at a value of 100, by 1990 the index measuring the average labor-time put into the wet-rice cultivation per 10 ares of land (an are being equal to 100 square meters or 119.6 square yards) had fallen to less than

30; productivity, on the other hand, has risen to a level exceeding 130 on this scale. Although mechanization -- which locally began in earnest in the mid-1960s -- represents only one aspect of the wholesale changes affecting agricultural production over the past three decades, its central role in reducing labor-time requirements -- leading to the viability of part-time farming as a household strategy -- is fairly clear.

In the five-year period from 1985 to 1990, there was a movement away from smaller devices of 15 horsepower or less, which declined in number for Shiga prefecture as a whole. This was accompanied by an increase in the number of larger machinery (greater than 15 horsepower), which grew by 22.6%. This increase in scale was accomplished despite the phasing out of individual household dryers for rice and wheat, which have been replaced by much larger ones owned and run by the agricultural cooperative at the town "country elevator." Cultivators (*kôunki*) and tractors have also declined in number slightly (-4.8%). Most growth appears to have occurred in power insecticide sprayers, which run on gasoline and are carried on the back. There is also a category of riding speed sprayers, but they remain fairly few in number.

The overwhelming majority of these agricultural-use machines remain individually, not jointly, owned. For example, in 1985 in Shiga prefecture there were 66,456 individually-owned cultivators and tractors, while only 3,649 were owned jointly; in 1990, these numbers had fallen

slightly to 64,031 and 2,701 respectively, indicating that cooperative efforts, at least at the level of jointly-owned equipment, have been losing ground (Shiga-ken Kigaku-bu Jôhôtôkei-ka 1991:41).

Wet rice cultivation is of course dependent on a sure supply of water, and it is water use that determines the nature of production as a social process. The fields in this area always relied on water from the Takatoki River, in addition to a small amount of well water. Water was diverted from the river by means of dams made of brushwood, earth, and sand (*shibayu*); there were seven dams, each communally owned and used by about ten hamlets. The hamlet of Karakawa shared a dam called *ôyu* with eleven others, divided for management purposes into two groups called *kami-roku-gumi* and *shimo-roku-gumi*, which can be rendered as "the upstream group of six" and the "downstream group of six."

Dams had to be rebuilt each year due to damage from typhoons and through erosion and rot. It is a measure of the unequal rights held by upstream and downstream hamlets that this dam building (*yu-tate*) was performed just by men of the downstream group of six, in return for assurances from the upstream group that water would be made available to the downstream hamlets at times of water shortage. When these shortages were severe, the two groups would work in concert to increase their supply of water by destroying the dams of other hamlets upstream of their own. In this case of dam destruction, or *yu-otoshi*, the upstream group would take the

leading role, first considering the situation, then informing the other hamlets of their decision. Dressed in ceremonial white dress and headbands, shouldering six-foot oak staves, the men who performed this destruction would file in procession led by representatives from each village, accompanied by the clamor of fire bell alarms, to the targeted dams. There they would meet there opposite numbers, also dressed to ranks. The drawn out battles that took place between the groups were mostly for show, as they took place with the understanding of both sides and with a regularity that bordered on the ritualistic. In the end the dam would be brought down and the amount of water available downstream would be increased, for as long as they stayed. Once the attackers left, however, the owners of the destroyed dam would immediately set to work to restore it. Until then, the water flowed.

This arrangement lasted well into the twentieth century. It was not until 1937 that efforts began to combine the brushwood and earth dams and construct a more durable concrete one. This project was subsidized in part by government funds, in addition to a local levy on individual households, and came to about ¥60,000 in total cost. This *gōdō-yu* ("combined dam"), completed in 1940, did not, however, consolidate all dams. Only the majority that were downstream were consolidated, and occasional disputes over water continued. After the Second World War, the national government instituted an Agricultural Water Use Project for

the Northern Lake District (*Kokuei Kohoku Nōgyō Suiri Jigyō*), with the goal of rationalizing the use of water in existing paddy and improving flood control. Most of the main waterways were completed by 1958, bringing additional water from nearby Biwa and Yogo lakes. A new head dam was built on the Takatoki River in 1965, and with that a stable water supply for the areas four townships was secured.

3. The "Hydraulic Society"

There is a large literature in Japanese on the relationship between irrigation and socio-political relations, which has been reviewed in English by Kelly (1982). The description above of conflict based on areal interests echoes the arguments of Shinzawa in the mid-50s,¹ made in response to Marxist-inclined historians who reduced relations in the natural "village community" (*kyōdōtai*) to the domination of a landlord elite in a feudal or quasi-feudal class order, "where production is largely private but is constrained by communal ownership of of certain key means of production" (Kelly 1982:17).

Emphasizing the corporateness of the village community, Tamaki, another respondent to "irrigation feudalists,"² has pointed to the segmentary nature of this kind of irrigation network organization not only as a means of containing inter-village conflict -- subject to shifting alliances depending on the circumstance -- but also promoting solidarity within the village, a balance between "cooperation" and

"communality" (Kelly 1982:43). Yet, as Tamaki recognizes, segmentary organization enabled elites, by virtue of their control of intake works and such, to solidify their positions of influence locally, if not with regard to outside authority.

With the state as the most active outside agent of change since the nineteenth century, we should address some of the ways policies formulated at the national government level have been implemented locally, and how both sides have adjusted to the situations that have arisen. Reviewing the modernization of agriculture, a pattern of increasing government control of local affairs emerges. While a water use committee composed of four rotating, elected members nominally adjudicated water disputes, we have seen how in reality they were managed at the local level through *yu-otoshi*. Perhaps the most salient point is that throughout the process, from the appearance of a problem, through consideration of options, mobilization of actors, until the implementation of a solution, is the inextricable presence and use of local structures of authority and inequality: upstream vs. downstream groups, elders and village commoners. The involvement of the national government must then involve some cooptation, or displacement, of these structures.

As we will see in greater detail in Chapter 8, the nature of government intervention at the local level from the late nineteenth century through the early decades of the twentieth centered first on improving agricultural production

techniques, through the formation of cooperative associations. Later, when hard economic times seemed to threaten rural stability, various measures intended to conciliate tenant demands were also enacted, including the 1924 Tenancy Conciliation Law set up to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants, as well as credit and debt relief measures in 1926, 1932, 1933, and 1938; the first provided tenants loans to purchase the land they worked, the second organized projects at the village level to consolidate debts and provide technical aid to farmers, while the third, the 1933 Debt Clearance Unions Act, encouraged the formation of unions for the the purpose of renegotiating terms of debt repayment with creditors, and "provided limited funds for the conversion of debts into government loan at a uniform 6%" (Moore 1990:286-287).

State control took its starkest form during World War Two, when farmers were compelled to produce rice for the war effort (which was the impetus behind many of the infrastructural improvements in the first place). It is the Land Reform at the war's end, however, which consolidated the government's hold over the management of the countryside, principally through its attack on landlord/tenant relations. By looking at these relations as they concretely operated, we can put into perspective some of the broader ideological aims and accomplishments that have been claimed for the Land Reform.

4. Local Landlord-Tenant Relations

During the Meiji period (1868-1911), the general landlord-tenant relationship was established. At the turn of the century the number of tenant households reached roughly 35% of total households in North and South Tominaga, two other administrative villages adjoining Nanasato (the administrative village within which the hamlet of Karakawa was incorporated at the time), but these numbers declined due to increase in day employment and such, in conjunction with prosperity in sericulture and silk reeling industries (one hamlet in fact became famous for its production of silk strings for musical instruments). The number of tenants decreased yet again however after the decline of sericulture in the area, to a figure of roughly 20% in the administrative village of North Tominaga, at the beginning of the Showa period in 1926. This figure was nearly matched by the administrative village of Kohori, which had a rate of pure tenants (that is, tenant who owned no land of their own at all) of 19.4%; but in South Tominaga and Nanasato, rates were 12.8% and 14.3% respectively. For all four administrative villages collectively, the rate was 16.8%.³

In Nanasato in 1926, out of 336 farming households, 160 worked their own land exclusively, 128 combined self-cultivation with tenancy, while 48 households were regarded as pure tenants. The number of pure tenants was halved during the depression of the thirties, but by 1947 had returned to prewar levels. This relatively low rate of tenancy also holds

in comparisons with other former administrative villages in the county. Averaging for townships as they currently exist, the lowest for the period is found in Yogo at 14.8%, while Nishi-Azai checks in at an even 32%; Kinomoto, directly adjacent to Takatsuki, had very similar pure tenancy rate of 16.7% in 1926.

With the end of the Second World War and implementation of a sweeping land reform program which enabled tenants to buy their rented plots at absurdly low prices, pure tenant households were eliminated. In the former South Tominaga and Nanasato administrative villages the scale of management was likewise reduced. Along with these movements in social strata, there were changes in the nature of landlord-tenant relations. In the former North Tominaga, because there weren't large landlords within the administrative village, the relationship on both sides was said to be "harmonious...tenants not raising strife, with matters concerning land rents concluded with just verbal agreements...in times of bad crops they can petition to reduce the rent and generally, with some compromise with the landlord, come to a solution," according to government investigations during the period. As for the rent itself, during the early years of the Meiji period the rent-in-kind for *jōden*, or high-grade land, averaged from 3.5 to 4 *pyō* per *tan* of paddy; for *chūden*, or mid-grade land, 3 to 3.5 *pyō*, and for *kaden*, or low-grade land, 2 to 3 *pyō*. With land expected to produce rough 10 *pyō*, or sacks, per 1 *tan* plot of

land, one can easily calculate what percentage of the harvest was handed over to landlords. By 1924 these rents had been reduced by 20%.

At the turn of the century, the number of people who worked seasonally in cities had increased, making it difficult to obtain workers in the countryside. On account of this, more than expanding the scale of farms and employing workers it was thought more profitable to rent land out to tenants. A comparison of the income and expenditures of tenants and landlords in the former South Tominaga administrative village around 1902 reveals that on average landlords made more than ¥12 profit per *tan* (about 1/10 hectare), while tenants only made ¥4. If the self-supplied labor of tenants were calculated in at the going rate of agricultural day labor, their total profit would be ¥13, but in any case rents would have taken half their income.

The matter of rents and its bearing on landlord-tenant relations went through a number of crises but never exploded in violence as they did elsewhere in Japan during the rice riots of 1918. One response to these disturbances was a steep decline in farm rents in some areas; in other areas where landlords were not considered "large" by nature, tenants were not causing any trouble (*sôgi*), according to a report on tenancy matters that came out at the time.

By the year 1911 in the hamlet of Kumano in Kohori administrative village, for example, tenants had formed their own organization from an agricultural improvement society

(*shōnōkai*). But because there were few pure tenants the activities of this group were weak. Accordingly, tenancy agreements remained verbal; in 1923 60% of the terms of tenancy arrangements were left open, but during the decade there were only three hamlets which experienced rent disputes, and in only one were rents actually reduced.

A similar situation applied in the former Nanasato administrative village during the Taisho period (1912-1925). Tenancy agreements were all verbal, and rents were paid in kind, usually at the rate of 1 *koku* 5 *to* (again, roughly half actual income). In 1923 a suggestion was forwarded to reduce rents an average 2 *to* per *tan* throughout the whole village "on account of a scarcity of tenants during the agricultural recession." Talks between landlords and tenants, mediated by the local ward head, resolved matters for a while and calm prevailed. In September 1934, however, a dispute broke out between 6 landlords and 25 tenants after a typhoon damaged crops. On account of this disaster, the tenants formed a general society, electing five officials and advancing demands for rent reductions or exemptions. The landlords' response to demands that rents be reduced 35%, according to a prefectural report on tenancy, was to steadfastly maintain that rents had to be delivered, no matter what. In actuality, rent payments normally were less than what was demanded, but strife continued until mediation resulted in an official reduction.

With this background we can better appreciate the nature of changes in rural social strata after land reform. At the very least we can discount simplistic pictures of a prewar landlord class dominating tenants. Aside from the existence of a pure tenant group (which in any case was limited in size), and the amount of rents, the fact that large numbers of farmers before the war either farmed their own land exclusively, or combined such cultivation with tenancy, may not be so very remote from contemporary arrangements involving the lending and borrowing of land as it might seem at first glance.

It would be too simple to attribute this to the "survival" of traditions, when so much else has changed. It seems more likely that these continuities of basic land holding and utilization patterns point to certain processes which have long marked local responses to initiatives and projects that originated from outside, and as it were, from "above." While there is some sense of the universal instinct to band together in the face of pressure from outside, the solidarity is less mechanical than organic, to borrow and slightly alter these expressions; that is, the elements making up the local "community" are less independent and equal entities, but rather arrayed in unequal relationships that hold them together all the tighter.

To demonstrate this, I continue with my examination of the recent background to contemporary land lending and borrowing by putting it in the postwar context of this

dynamic between the local and extra-local. Specifically, this refers to the recent land consolidation project: what were its terms as dictated from above, what were its broader effects at the local level, and what do the responses of farmers tell us about the strategies open to them for the long run?

5. Reforming Rural Society and Economy

Japan's defeat in 1945 marked a signal change in the course of government policy. Of all the reforms put into place in the name of the office of the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces (SCAP) -- under the guiding hand of the visionary but autocratic General Douglas MacArthur -- land reform was ultimately deemed the most successful. This reputation was not only based on the real success it had in reducing tenancy, but also its perceived efficacy in containing agrarian unrest that might have precipitated communist or new fascist movements during the unsettled period of nation rebuilding.

In its final form the land reform bill prescribed that all the land of absentee landlords, and all tenanted land beyond 4 chô owned by resident landlords, be made available for purchase. Overseeing these land transfers, as well as controlling land rental, were 13,000 locally-elected Land Commissions comprised of five tenants, three landlords, and two owner cultivators. Limits were set to the amount of land that could be leased out, and rents were fixed at low rates

(it could not exceed 25% of the total value of the crop produced for that year), and were to be in cash (Moore 1990:86-87).

In practice, the transfer of land was accomplished by the government purchasing the land from landowners and reselling it to former tenants, who were then required to repay the government, at low interest, over thirty years. In fact, with the devaluation of the yen from the time when rates of compensation to landowners were set to the time when transfers were actually made, the money paid to landowners ended up to be negligible; reportedly, in some cases an acre of land could be bought for less than the price that a carton of cigarettes fetched on the black market (Hane 1992:348). By August 1950, 2.8 million acres of rice land and 1.95 million acres of upland had changed hands, involving some 2.34 million landowners and 4.75 million tenants and small-owner cultivators. Absentee landlordism was virtually abolished; 12% of total arable remained under tenancy, but the rate of full tenancy was reduced from a figure of 27.7% in 1941 to roughly 5% nationally in 1950 (Hane 1992:348).

As far as these events were played out at the local level, the available figures support the changes in economic strata as summarized above. For Nanasato-mura there was a decline in the number of landless tenant households, from 44 in the year 1930, to 25 in 1940, further falling to 9 households by 1954. The number of independent owner-cultivator households for the period 1930 to 1940 remained

the same at 158 (the total number of farming households declining, however, from 332 to 313), but increased from 158 to 192 households by 1954 (*Shiga-ken Shi-chô-son Enkaku-shi*, p. 686). A gap in the available records on local landholding -- as well as on sources of income -- makes it difficult to state with finality that social strata were converging towards the middle, but there is at least a strong suggestion, based on the diminishing number of landless tenant households noted above, that those households at the bottom of the economic hierarchy were being "lifted" relative to those at the top.

Across the country after World War II, land price fluctuation was only one of a number of unintended consequences of land reform. Among them, increased fragmentation of holdings, a continuing tendency towards small-scale farming enterprises, and the attraction of off-farm employment as the best strategy for increasing household income contributing to a shift part-time farming, created conditions in the rural economy which the government was to address in its legislative revisions of land reform.

The Agricultural Basic Law of 1961 set out for the first time a comprehensive policy for agriculture. It emphasized farming efficiency over the "land to the tillers" policy which had up to that point defined the character of postwar government action. In order to encourage the consolidation of plots, to increase the scale of farms, and to encourage the shift of labor from farming to industry, amendments were made

to the Agricultural Land Act of 1952 in 1962, 1970, and 1980. These amendments removed the upper limits on individual agricultural land ownership and leasing, and for corporations as well. In addition, the 1970 amendment denied tenants rights to compensation if their landlords sold the land they worked, compensation previously valued at half the value of the land (Moore 1990:104).

6. Technological and Infrastructural Improvement

Through the sixties and seventies, farm income fell relative to total household budgets. In this respect the perception grew that farming did not pay, and with the growth of households who only worked their farms part-time the scale of individual holdings steadily decreased. While not wishing to oversimplify or to minimize the extent of change within rural households during this period, the nature of these changes seemed to be basically defined by the broader development of the national economy. Rice consumption began to decline in the 1960s as the Japanese in prosperity turned to Western foods, while crises in international grain (and oil) markets spurred the government to begin to seek stronger ties to foreign producers (Yoshioka 1988:17-22). In addition, for this particular area, the wider decentralization of major industries in Japan meant the founding of factories, in particular two large factories, one connected with a diesel engine and farm equipment manufacturer, the other a glass-works subsidiary of a major electronics firm. The arrival of

these new employment opportunities, along with those burgeoning in nearby urban centers, served as a major factor in the reshaping of the rural sector as a whole. With a shrinking and aging labor force in the countryside, however, and the consequent turn to expensive labor-saving machinery, pressure increased to reform management and make farming more productive. In response, the national and prefectural governments undertook to build a foundation for the modernization of agriculture through a basic reorganization of land, called the *hojô-seibi*.

Paddy fields that had been scattered around in various shapes of about 10 ares in size were pooled and exchanged (*kôkan-bungô*) in order to consolidate them into 30 ares plots. Roads were built every 200 meters to facilitate the entry of cars and machinery. Main roads were six meters in width, side roads about four, and arranged in an orderly grid; this is said to account for an alleged overall 8% loss in arable as a result of the project. In some areas, particularly those with mountain fields, the loss was said to have reached as high as 14%.

This figure has been hard to confirm. According to town records, the total area of agricultural land lost through consolidation measured hamlet by hamlet amounted to 140,280 square meters, or 1.3%. Checking other compilations of statistical data put out by the town, the total decrease in agricultural use land from 1970 to 1975 was 59 hectares (4.3%); from 1975 to 1980, 46 hectares, or another 3.5%. This

perhaps explains the popular conception that land loss was due to the land consolidation project, which was being implemented at roughly the same time. But these figures do not take into account that the loss in area was also a result of increasing conversion of arable into land for housing, which alone came to 58 hectares for the period. This exceeds the 54 hectares that were lost to roadbuilding and irrigation channel construction.

In other parts of the county the helter-skelter arrangement of fields had been maintained from old times, but in the town of Takatsuki rectangular plots had already been the case, so beginning in April of 1972 standard plots of 1 *tan* were bulldozed and combined into 3 *tan* (or 30 ares) plots, each built with irrigation and drainage canals built along their length and breadth. The project was completed Takatsuki in 1987.

The fifteen years it took to complete the project reflected not only the logistics of construction which on average took three years to complete for each hamlet, but also the process of obtaining hamlet by hamlet consensus and approval. A major sticking point was the aforementioned loss of land to roadbuilding. The mere mention of a possible loss of land was enough to make people wary of the project at the start. In Karakawa the loss of paddy came to 12,033 square meters, or just 2.4% of the pre-project amount. This was offset to a certain extent by an increase in dryfield, from 1,841 sq. m. to 6,412 sq. meters.

Another controversial aspect of the reorganization of plots was the effect it would have yields. The layer of topsoil in Takatsuki township is fairly thin -- less than a meter -- compared with other towns in the region. As a result, there was concern that the construction would disturb the underlying clayey alluvial soil and bring down yields until the topsoil layer was rebuilt. This was the case as it turned out, and in most fields it took three years or so before pre-reorganization levels of productivity were restored.

The most contentious part of the project was the consolidation and reallocation of paddy by a committee appointed specifically for the purpose. Perhaps one measure of the remorselessness of the project is how even village burial grounds were not spared the bulldozer and had to be moved to new spots, usually the closest available hillside. The question of receiving land in a new location of equivalent value to former holdings of course went beyond their assessed value. Considerations also included the size and productivity of the formerly held plots, as well as their distance from people's houses. Moreover, many farmers were understandably reluctant to give up land which had been in their families for generations. As in all rural areas around the world, the layout of fields were part of the social map and mind, with each field having its own name and history like any house in a village. Ill feelings were also engendered when some households were awarded new land near

main roads which were later to triple in value because of commercial exploitability. In the case of Karakawa this remains more a possibility on paper, as its fields are fairly removed from the National Road where most development, such as the building of convenience stores and restaurants, is taking place.

In any case, it should be apparent that this process of pooling land and reassigning plots to household was a difficult one. While one cannot dispute that it was achieved through the understanding, cooperation, and the many endeavors of those involved, one must also recognize that not everyone came away satisfied. In fact, there are a few households who never agreed to the disposition of fields. In continuing protest they very publicly refuse to pay their assigned share of the cost of construction.

One of the goals of the project was to enlarge arable, which was partly accomplished in places like Karakawa by reclaiming swampland for dryfield cultivation. The main goals, however, were to make management simpler, by facilitating mechanization and by dividing irrigation and drainage, and to make it easier to grow different crops. These too have been largely met, as individually- and jointly-owned large machinery have been introduced and successfully cut the amount of labor needed to cultivate a field, in some cases to as little as a single hand.

Like elsewhere here and throughout Japan, farmers have tried to find more crops that are more lucrative and less

demanding of labor. One of these is wheat. In former times, wheat was grown as a second crop in paddyfields. Planted right after the rice was harvested, it was virtually left untouched through the winter until June of the following year when it would be harvested, dried, and milled.

Wheat is now grown principally as a second crop to vegetables or beans. The vegetables that are produced in the region are varied, including onion, cabbage, spinach, *daikon* (Japanese white radish), Chinese cabbage, turnip, sweet potato, cucumber, stone leeks, *ingen-mame* (kidney bean), pimento pepper, eggplant, tomato, lettuce, broccoli, and pumpkin. While these are produced mainly for home consumption, a major cash crop of the town -- a specialty or *meibutsu* in fact -- is watermelon. They are mostly grown in hothouses and not in paddyland because, it is said, it takes about eight years for the soil to recover.

The reorganization of paddy laid the groundwork for the establishment of the hamlet-managed crop diversion project in Karakawa. It was decided by local vote to take advantage of the orderly arrangement of fields to set up six blocks of land and a rotating system of crop diversion. In practice this meant that one block would be turned over for the cultivation of soybeans and wheat every year. Under the guidance of a hamlet association set up specifically for the implementation of agricultural initiatives (*nôji-jikkô kumi-ai*), the owners of the land of the block would provide the labor and share in the profits in accord with their land and

labor contribution. In 1990 this association listed in its annual budget report a net profit of ¥1,010,028 (@ ¥130=\$1, about \$7,770), with gross income amounting to ¥15,047,059, with expenditures of ¥14,037,031.

This scheme was conceived in partial response to government guidelines for reduction of the paddy under rice cultivation. While the planting of soybeans and their tending is easily done, harvesting, which entails the piling up of the beans in small piles in the fields to dry, requires some amount of manual labor. As the amount of money gained from the enterprise is minimal, according to some it would be a lot easier to just plant soybeans in the spring and then plow them under in the fall. The goals of crop diversion would then be technically met while saving man-hours of labor. These cynical suggestions, however, have not yet been entertained.

One of the goals of reorganization of paddy was to encourage more rational use of land through "group" efforts. While the crop diversion scheme would seem to have been successful in this respect, a closer look at its operation reveals that the appearance of cooperation is more or less just that. For instance, the organization of labor and land remains strictly on a cash basis, as individual households are remunerated on the basis of how much land they provide and the number of hours they work. The land must be made available to the scheme, but if the household labor is unable -- or unwilling -- to provide the labor, it must pay a small

fine which is deducted from its share of profits at the end of the year.

In this respect the crop diversion has not encouraged group formation and organization. Subsidies which formerly flowed from government offices to individuals are now distributed through hamlet offices, but this has not built solidarity. Rather, it has pointed out growing schisms between local economic strata, as some households end up paying their way out of labor service while others assume, if not the actual status, then the appearance of hired labor.

Another unintended consequence of reorganization has been the effect it has had on land prices and land market activity. With the consolidation of three 10-are plots into a single plot of 30 ares, it is more difficult for farmers to buy and sell land simply because of the greater sums of money involved with such large parcels. Since redividing plots would reverse the gains of the past ten years, there are strong pressures if not outright prohibitions against such a course. Because buyers of farmland are so scarce, this has, as a result, depressed the assessed value of farmland.

Since 30 ares constitutes a major proportion of an average household's land holding (see Table 1, "Scale of Individual Household Land Holdings"), there is the additional pressure against selling in that any decision to do so would be tantamount to abandoning farming as an occupation, no matter how far the transition to part-time status had progressed. Given these developments, it is reasonable to

Table 1
Scale of Individual Household Land Holdings (1990)

Area of Holdings (ha.)	Number of Households	
	Karakawa	Takatsuki
no arable owned	-	6
less than 0.1 ha.	-	9
0.1 ~ 0.3	1	80
0.3 ~ 0.5	10	168
0.5 ~ 1.0	20	418
1.0 ~ 1.5	6	214
1.5 ~ 2.0	-	72
2.0 ~ 2.5	-	13
3.0 ~ 3.5	-	1
3.5 ~ 4.0	-	-
4.0 ~ 5.0	-	2
more than 5 ha.	-	-

Source: 1990-Nen Sekai Nōringyō Sensasu, Shiga-ken

assume that the room to maneuver that these household formerly had -- to sell off bits of land when times were tough and to reacquire them when things improved -- has been considerably reduced. A new strategy has arisen lately, however, in which a household agrees to rent out land for a long period to a developer to build housing, thereby not alienating it entirely; but such opportunities are limited at best at present.

Under the Basic Agricultural Law, the town office has kept detailed records not only on land sold, but also whether it was kept in agricultural use or converted to other uses. While these records go back only to 1970, this period does encompass the land reorganization project. In the Nanasato region, where the project took place from 1977 to 1986 (with most construction taking place in the late seventies through the early eighties), the amount of land sold but kept for agricultural use -- that is, from one farming household to another -- in 1989 was 6426 square meters, slightly more than the 6279 sq. meters in the previous year but slightly less than the 6757 sq. meters in 1985. Prior to reorganization these figures seem to have been substantially higher, about twice as great: in 1965, 12,244 square meters of land, in 1970, 14,229. The contention that land reorganization reduced land transfers among farmers is therefore consistent with this evidence.

The last legacy of the reorganization project, and perhaps the most debilitating one for individual farmers, is

debt. For the hamlet of Karakawa, the cost of consolidating its fields came to ¥391,494,000, or about \$3,011,500 at the 1993 yen/dollar conversion rate. The cost per 10 ares averaged ¥893,618. The capital was provided for the most part by the national and prefectural governments: ¥177,276,000 and ¥128,966,000 respectively. The local contribution came to ¥85,077,000; most of this was on credit.

The hamlet commission on land reorganization put out a projected loan repayment schedule in 1990 which runs for the next twenty years (until the year 2011). By the end of this period the principal of the loan, ¥78,970,704, will be paid off, in addition to the interest which by that time will amount ¥93,493,533. In sum, this means that landholders will have to pay over the next two decades on average ¥415,917 per 10 ares. Spread out over such a long time, the individual yearly payments may not seem much -- about ¥13,000 yen per *tan* in 1990, with payments slowly increasing, not reaching ¥20,000 until after 1995. Since larger landholders possess about ten *tan*, however, their annual payments end up rather large. This debt may not be ruinous in the prosperous rural Japan of today, but it is weighty enough to cause concern, particularly in households that may be hit by unforeseen expenses, or just comfortable with a given standard of living. In any case, these debt repayments attached to the land certainly discourage local farmers from trying to buy much more land and enlarge the scope of their operations as individual producers.

In short then, we have seen that land reconsolidation has affected the larger farming sector in significant intended and unintended ways. Through the unintended effect of freezing up the market in land, by pushing up sale prices and the level of debt, land reconsolidation thus provides an essential context for understanding other changes within the rural household, and how looks to survive in the future.

7. Coping in the Present, Through the Past

Compared to other sectors, agriculture does not account for a large part of the wealth produced annually in Japan. In fact, through price supports and other subsidies, agriculture represents a serious drain on national finances. Yet due to the fact that nearly 30% of the country's people remain connected with a farming household in some way attests to a long history of government's being held to the professed policy to develop agriculture and industry hand in hand, without sacrificing the former for the sake of the latter. This is partly a function of rural electoral power which has never been corrected for the skewed demographics of the early postwar period before the millions who had been relocated to the country during the war began their return to the cities. But it is also a result of how farmers have cannily made the best of government initiatives which may have had very different aims from their own.

The aim of this chapter has been to outline the broader situation in which new categories -- self-cultivator, lender,

and borrower -- of households are now emerging. The strategies of farmers spring from the logic of work and production, but they are also necessary responses to the policies of the national and prefectural governments; in particular, to projects of land reconsolidation (*hojô seibi*) which incidentally in their course plowed over, together with the old paddies, many of the old solidarities that held villagers together in opposition to government control.

As the land reorganization project demonstrates, state policy also often has unintended consequences. If we grant that that the tendency towards small, capital-intensive farming has been checked, we must also grant that the turn to extensive or communal enterprises also envisioned by the state has not come off. As we shall see in the following chapter, rural households and the dynamics of their production and reproduction have, despite certain changes, remained a well-structured, and the *ie* still operates as a group, though not an independent, bounded unit. If mechanization in the sixties and seventies enabled small farming households to continue to work their farms and hold regular wage-paying jobs in offices, lending and borrowing land with neighbors, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, enables these same "farming" households to hold on to their land, seemingly without even working them.

Notes

¹The original source cited by Kelly (1982) is Nôgyô suiri ron (A Theory of Irrigation), 1955, by Shinzawa Kagatô (Tokyo: Tokyo daigagku shuppankai).

²The original sources cited by Kelly are Tochi kairyôku to buraku (The Land Improvement and the Village), 1976, (Tokyo: Nôson chûô kinko kenkyû sentâ), and The Development Theory of Irrigation Agriculture, 1977, (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies), by Tamaki Akira.

³This discussion of local landlord/tenant relations is derived from town and county local histories, the statistical figures primarily from the Shiga-ken Shi-chô-son En-kaku-shi (The History and Development of the Cities, Towns, and Villages of Shiga Prefecture), pp. 651-705.

Chapter Four

CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE FARMING HOUSEHOLDS

1. Introduction

My aim in this chapter is first to provide an outline of the characteristics of the local township and villages, and then within this context to describe the workings of farming households which remain the backbone of life in rural villages. While they have changed radically in key respects over the past twenty years, in many equally important ways these families and households have preserved traditional characteristics and practices. This contradiction, I will suggest at the conclusion of the chapter, forces us to reconsider our notion of households. We must trace the ways households have and have not changed, and consider both processes in a theoretically integrated discussion in order to account for the manifold functions of family and household in rural Japan today.

2. The Waterless River: A Rural Hamlet, Past and Present

The hamlet of Karakawa was built on land reclaimed by drainage, a fact which gave rise to its name: literally, "empty river," in the sense of a river without water. It is located at the southern foot of a small mountain that springs up like an island in a sea of rice fields, affording some protection from the winter winds that sweep down from Siberia across the Japan Sea, often bearing snow.

Archeological excavations of this mountain have discovered the remains of *kofun*, or ancient tombs, dating to the fifth century. Organized paddy plots in the area date from the Great Taika Reform of the late seventh century, while a district office of the imperial government, for local administration, was established around 853 A.D. Though the record for this period is understandably unclear, one can easily appreciate that this part of Japan has long been inhabited and enjoys a deep history. As manorial property (*shōen*), the land here changed hands a number of times before finally coming under the domain of the Hikone fief at the start of the Tokugawa period (mid-sixteenth century). It remained in their hands until the founding of the Meiji period in 1868, which marked Japan's emergence as a modern nation state.

At this time, Karakawa was one of seven distinct nucleated settlements which were, nevertheless, considered collectively and administratively a "village" or *mura* (see

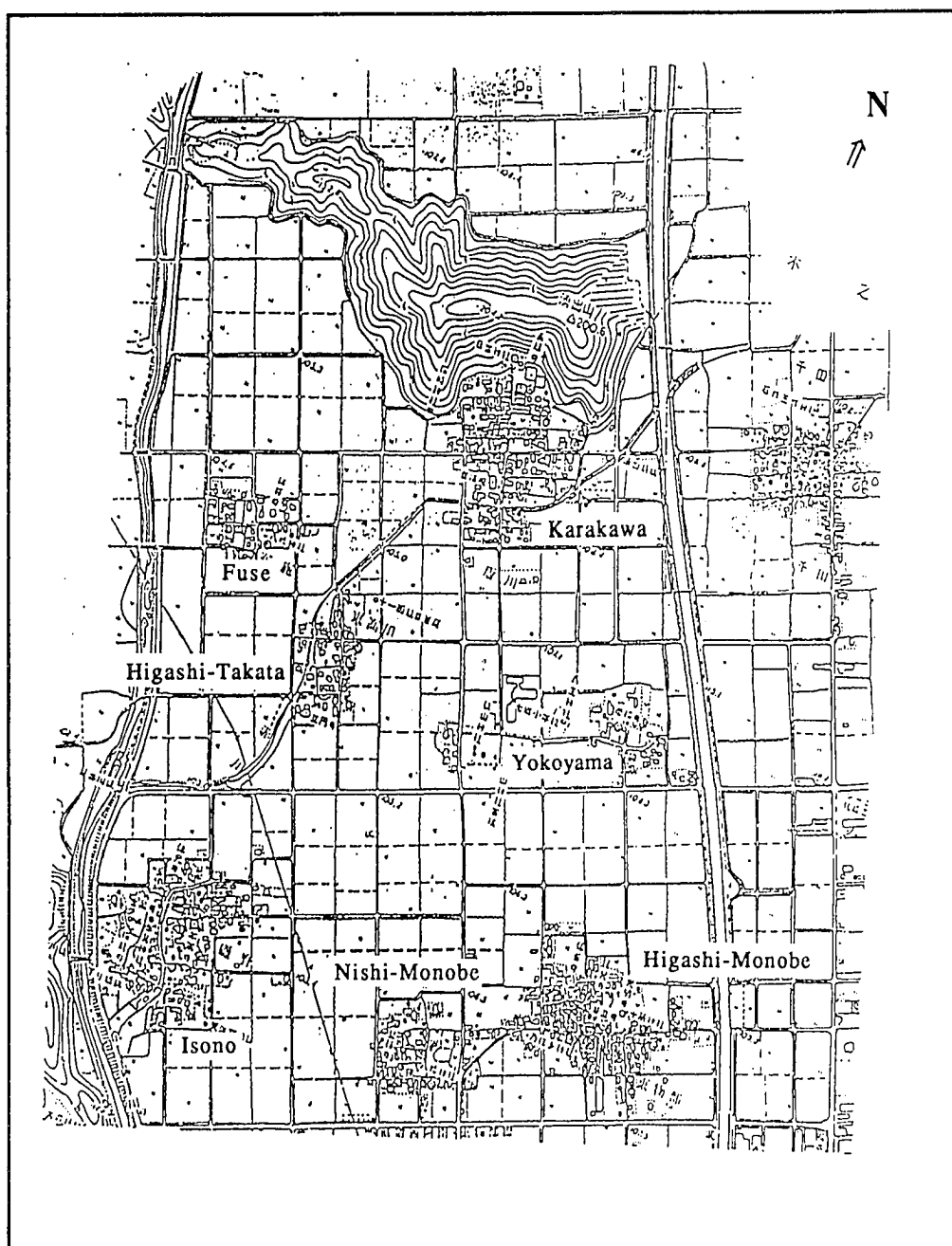
Map 1). It was this "village" which served as the basic unit of political administration: each elected its own officials, collected taxes, etc. While the borders of villages were changed in some cases during this period -- different hamlets being amalgamated into different villages -- by 1885 the village to which Karakawa belonged had taken essential form. It functioned as an independent entity until 1955, when it joined three other administrative villages to create the township of Takatsuki.

Karakawa is thus one hamlet among seven which formerly constituted an administrative village. Of these seven hamlets, arranged in a loose circle, Karakawa is second largest, at 90 households. The largest has 96, while the rest contain 78, 35, 30, 29, and 23 households each. In the three other former administrative villages now making up the township, a similar pattern of two or three larger settlements (of about 100 households) combined with six or seven other hamlets half their size or less can be observed.

In 1987, 43 out of the total of 90 households in Karakawa were "officially" farming households, in that they own arable land and are registered owners of such. This comes out to 47.8 percent, nearly identical to the 47.9 percent rate of farming households to total households for the township as a whole in 1985. In 1960 these figures were 86.2 percent and 83.5 percent for hamlet and township respectively.

Map 2

The seven hamlets today which formerly constituted the administrative village of Nanasato. Karakawa is located at the top, at the southern foot of Yurugi mountain (Source: Takatsuki-chô Town Office, 1988).



Though the number of farming households has fallen significantly, the total number of households has remained steady. In fact, there was an increase of 26.4 percent from 1960 to 1980 for the township as a whole, though much of this is attributable to growth in "downtown" Takatsuki, where a factory producing glass for a major national electronics company was established in 1959 to take advantage of cheaper local labor. The site for this factory was chosen here because land was flat and suited for building. In addition, because of a relatively thin layer of good topsoil, its value as farmland was lower than in other townships and therefore easier to buy.

These days, however, the supply of local labor -- cheap or otherwise -- has dried up. This is evidenced by the factory's importing labor from economically depressed areas of Kyushu (the southernmost island of Japan), even "trainees" from China, which they house in dormitories on company grounds. Though the plant continues to employ local people, most prefer to look elsewhere, in town and in city offices, for jobs and careers. Young people especially look down on "hard, dirty, and dangerous" (*kitsui, kitanai, kiken*) work such as this factory offers, and with good reason, given the other viable alternatives. From 1980 to 1985, 1500 jobs were created in the town, a figure equal to the growth in the number of workers from outside the township (Access Plan 21, p.101). There was a wide range of local manufacturing enterprises, which numbered 64, in 1985. They included, for

example, makers of food products, textiles and clothing, wood, pulp, paper, and printed materials, furniture, masonry items, non-ferrous metals, electrical appliances, and small moving equipment (*Takatsuki-chô Tôkeishiryôhen*, 1987).

A major employer is the township itself, which provides sought-after administrative and clerical jobs in its governmental offices, as well as jobs for teachers in its four elementary schools, single junior high school, and sole nursery school. The general operating budget for the township has varied substantially, but has grown overall for the past fifteen years. It stood at ¥892,850,000 in 1975,¹ ¥1,727,600,000 in 1980, and ¥2,358.250,000 in 1985 (*Takatsuki-chô Tôkeishiryôhen*, 1987). The projected budget for 1991 was ¥3,733,377,000, with an additional ¥1,120,975,000 allotted for special projects such as building sewage and agricultural drainage works, as well as funding health insurance and programs to care for the elderly, according to a special publication put out by the town office in April of 1991. Of the town's total income, 40% is raised from local taxes (levied on both individuals and corporations), while only 4.1% and 5% are provided by the prefectural and national treasuries respectively.²

A recent rise in the amount provided by the state was occasioned by the moving and rebuilding of an elementary school building. The six schools in the township employ 82 teachers and 15 other staff members, attending to the needs of 148 pre-schoolers, 1,044 elementary school pupils, and 523

junior high-schoolers in 1987. Education as a stepladder to success is as much an element of rising expectations here as elsewhere in Japan. Cram schools (*juku*) for all academic subjects throng with junior high students nearly every evening of the week. There is only one senior high school in the whole county, however, a technical-vocational school. As a result, the preponderance of "better" students -- those who score higher on entrance examinations -- all attend high school in small, nearby cities like Nagahama (population ca. 50,000), Maibara, or Hikone. They commute by train from 15 to 30 minutes each way, then the walk or bike ride from station to school. The pattern is not dissimilar to that of their parents and older siblings, who generally commute by car to their jobs in these same cities.

Were it not for the farming households still remaining, the township and its hamlets would not be any different from so-called "bed-towns" that empty by day and nightly harbor a commuter population. Even though the vast majority of these households depend on the majority of their income from salaried jobs elsewhere, home and work still physically overlap in farming and interpenetrate in various ways. This colors the way life runs in the daily round within the household, the way decisions are made about the division of labor by sex and generation, what schools the children ought to go to. Decisions these days also encompass issues such as spending money on satellite television, travelling overseas, or whether to build a wing extension to the house for

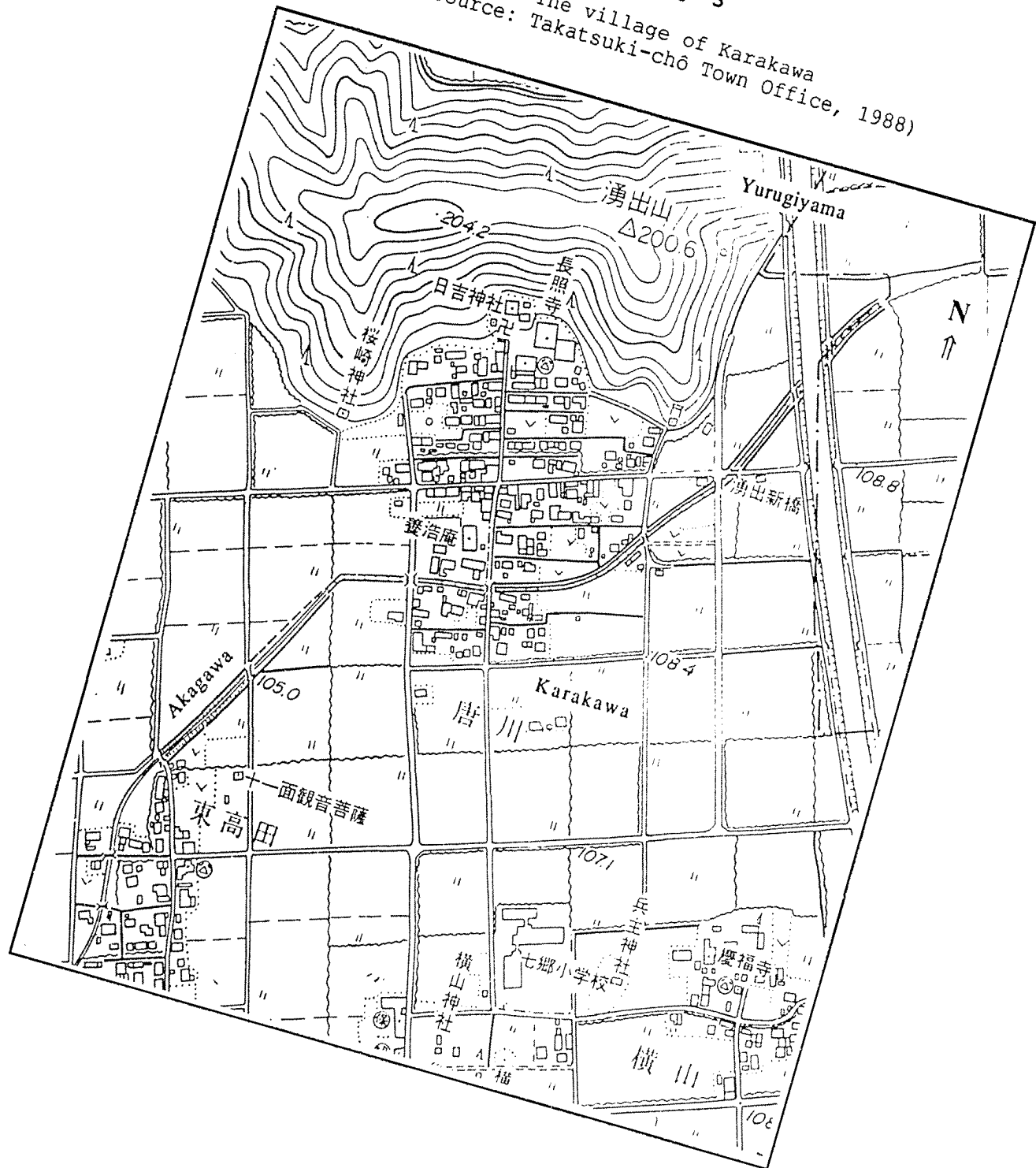
grandmother and grandfather. While it is difficult to say if the process of making decisions is more or less contentious than it was in the past, we must first examine more closely the household functions as a family enterprise, its image and its reality, in order to appreciate the ambiguities and tensions of change, and how this affects relations between households in the community.

Before doing so, however, it might assist the reader to better imagine the setting if we take a brief descriptive tour of our village, Karakawa. Perhaps the easiest would be to look out from the village and through a day in the home lives of the people I stayed with.

Their house sits at the intersection of two main roads -- barely wide enough to accomodate two-way traffic -- which run east to west and south to north (see Map 3). The road running east to west divides that town into unofficial upper and lower sections to help organize the scheduling of village activities and the rotation of household responsibilities for such things as sweeping temple grounds. This road connects with the main highway and thus bears a measure of traffic volume. The road running south to north, however, terminates at the foot of a mountain which marks the northern end of the village; the local temple (affiliated with the Jôdô Shinshû sect of Buddhism) is located here, as is the village Shinto shrine.

The intersection of these roads is a center of sorts for the village, with a newly-built community center abutting a

Map 3
The village of Karakawa
(Source: Takatsuki-chō Town Office, 1988)



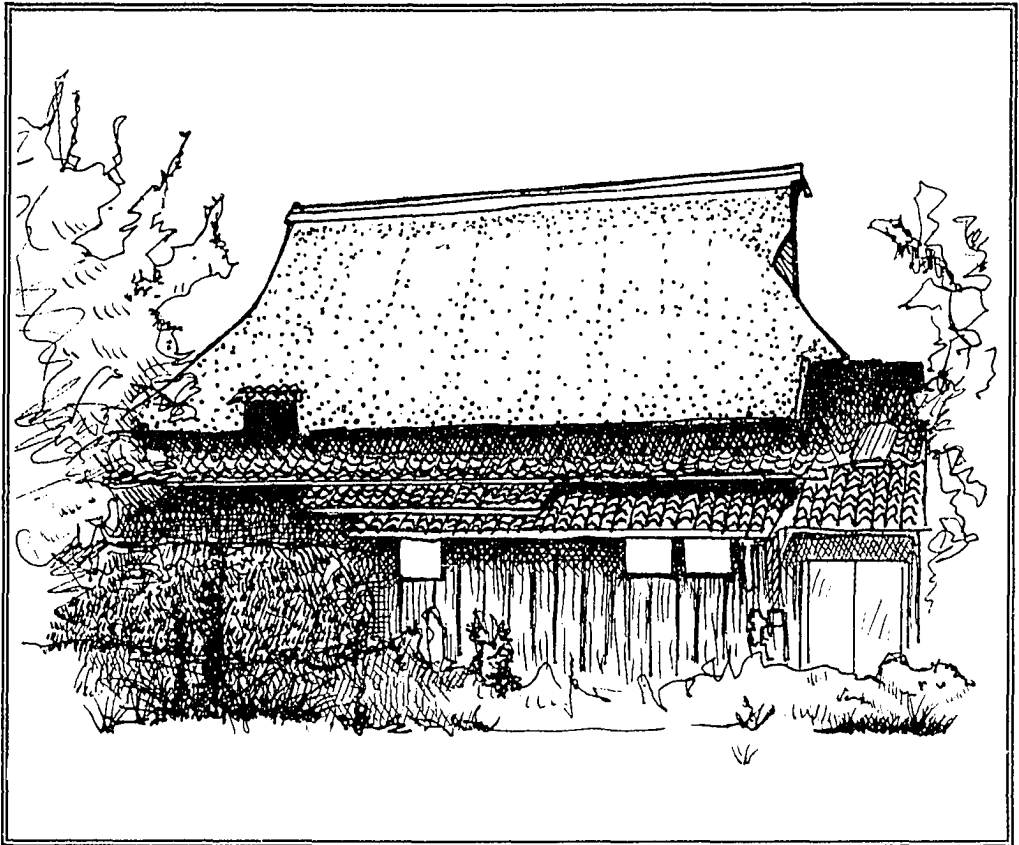
small dry-field garden. There is also a shed housing antiquated fire-fighting equipment here, and the site where household trash and recyclables are collected and picked up once a week. Most houses at the intersection serve double duty, as residences as well as businesses: one is a dry-cleaners, another a tobacconist, yet another a dry-goods store.

A guest of the house would awake in his room in the *inkyō*, a wing off the main house that traditionally served to house the retired househead and his wife. In this house, however, the current househead and his wife, both in their mid-fifties, live in the *inkyō*. The bedroom of the main house (or *honya*) is still occupied by the second wife of the previous househead. The current househead insisted on this arrangement, that she retain this symbol of household authority after his father's death, as an expression of respect and devotion to his stepmother.

The main house is an older-style, thatched-roof (*yoshi-buki-yane*) dwelling (see illustration) consisting essentially of four rooms: an entrance/sitting area; a parlor where the household Buddhist altar is kept; the master bedroom; and a dining area where the television is kept, and where everyone gravitates. Breakfast is prepared by Grandmother, as Mother is getting ready for her job teaching at a junior high school, to which she commutes by motorbike. Father is served his rice and fish, while a high-school age daughter fetches her own cereal from the cupboard and hurries so as to make

Illustration 1

A traditional thatched-roof (*yoshi-buki-yane*) house



the train to her school, a prestigious academic school in a central division of a nearby township, the larger and denser settlements that grow up around railroad stops. Her older sister works as a cashier in a department store and, as her work hours begin and end somewhat later, is nowhere to be seen this early.

Her father is also a teacher, recently transferred to a night school in a city thirty minutes away by car. It is a none-to-subtle hint from the school board administrators that he is getting older and should be preparing to retire, which he does within the year. Quite a few of the other househeads of the village are or were employed in local schools as teachers and administrators, though most work white-collar jobs in corporate or civil service offices; a few independent-minded ones try their hand at running small local shops: metal welding, engine repair, woodworking.

Every morning these wage workers (and also the students) leave behind a village that sits on a plain of green paddy, much like twenty five other villages that, in the mind of bureaucrats, make up a township. The houses crowd together, some separated by only a matter of inches. Their wood exteriors are weathered and unpainted in most places; some feature additions or storehouses that have been enlivened by whitewash or a coat of dull red paint. The older style house with thatched-roof is still common in the area, though the scarcity of both thatch material (a type of reed that used to grow along the banks of Lake Biwa but is now nearly

unobtainable due to pollution) and able craftsmen has made it expensive to maintain these roofs. Many have elected in recent years to simply cover them with red corrugated metal sheeting. Others have simply replaced their old houses with new ones. Some of them are large, two-story buildings with blue tile roofs and other amenities such as sliding-glass windows and modern plumbing, while those perhaps without as much money to spend have built much more modest houses which often are designated as *inkyō* and given over to the retired couple to live in.

There is not a great deal that goes on in the village during the day besides the run of day-to-day household affairs. While one might see an older woman weeding a vegetable garden, a young wife on her way to pick up something at the supermarket, or run into an itinerant salesperson, most activities are confined within the privacy of people's homes. The end of the day seems to be marked in stages, by waves. First, there is the line of returning elementary school children that marches home around three in the afternoon. Their older brothers and sisters in junior and senior high school, on account of club activities and cram school, don't make it back until five or six, while their fathers and mothers, depending on the length of the commute, are not home until seven, eight, or later.

Because schedules are different, dinner is rarely shared by the family as a whole. There is a regular village news announcement piped to each house over a p.a. system about

this time, but few hear it. If there is an evening ritual, it is probably the bath, the long soak in hot water that prepares one for bed, or helps the older men loosen up for "night school," a few rounds of mah-jong with neighborhood friends. The baths empty out into the irrigation canals winding their way through the village, which lends a soapy perfume to the darkness of the street, as the fire watch makes its rounds and cries its warning to everyone before they turn in for the night.

3. Family and Household in Rural Japan

Ethnographies -- especially community studies -- of rural Japan have always regarded the family-household or *ie* as a fundamental unit of their analyses. The emphasis on the family as the center of economic organization in rural society has long been labeled the major dilemma holding back rational development of Japanese agriculture. It has been explained by some as the remnant of a feudal system that bred parasitical landlordism soon after the commercialization of agriculture in the nineteenth century, part of the transition to capitalism and the creation of a rural proletariat which eventually made its way to cities and factories. Others argue that the Japanese peasant³ and his family were, from the beginning, rural capitalists, engaging in "entrepreneurial tenancy" (see Smethurst 1986 for one review of this debate).

Nevertheless, as peasants, these people have been defined since the beginning of the modern period by their

control over a "self-sufficient family holding" which provided a livelihood for a full-time farm family, or *ie* (Fukutake 1972). The *ie* (translated variously as "house," "household," and "family") is, in anthropological terms, a corporate group; it is at once a production-oriented, property-owning enterprise and, given the continuing practice of ancestor worship, a socio-religious group.

As the principal unit of social organization in Japan the *ie* is ideally envisioned as consisting of "co-resident, multi-generational spouse pairs, with norms of a single heir and out-marriage for other siblings" (Kelly 1991:403). In other words, it is a stem family. Its structure is based on two main principles which define the household as a corporate residential group. First is its "stewardship of agricultural, commercial, and/or status capital" (Kelly 1991:404). Second, the *ie* acts as a means of access to and allocation of labor in a particular economic enterprise; as Nakane puts it, the *ie* is a corporate group based on work (cited in Kondo 1990:122). It is this latter aspect of the *ie* that has attracted much attention in discussions of Japanese modernization and development which sees familial symbols and structures transplanted into modern industrial workplaces with great effect. I shall begin with this notion of the domestic organization of work then as a point of entry for considering the role of the household in maintaining today's farms in Japan.

4. Works and Days

As petty agricultural commodity producers, farm households have generally been identified by the way they organize farming labor: one method, tagged "successor-farming" entails the designated successor working as the sole part-time farmer of the household. Much more common, however, is "senior citizen-farming" whereby farm labor is supplied by a single pair of grandparents, while commuter adults work in town factories and their children attend school (see Kelly 1986), and "*san-chan*-farming," which adds the labor of a daughter-in-law/housewife to that of the elderly couple, these three people being the "three little ones" from which it derives its name (Kada and Kada 1985).

The greatest change is that these households now depend on wage labor for the majority of their income and farm only part-time (see Table 2, "Labor Investment in Work Days"). About eight-tenths of total household income comes from the salary-paying jobs of household members as company employees. Farming provides only a supplemental income. The size of this side income, on average, is not particularly large: according to the unofficial tally from the 1990 agricultural census, income from the sale of agricultural produce fell mostly in a range from ¥150,000 or less to ¥1,500,000 (see Table 3), about \$1,035 to \$10,350, at an average exchange rate ¥144.95 = \$1.00).

Table 2

Distribution of Labor Investment in Work Days (1990)

Person-days	Number of Households	
	Karakawa	Takatsuki
less than 49	4	215
50 ~ 99	15	235
100 ~ 199	9	300
200 ~ 299	3	103
300 ~ 499	2	73
500 ~ 699	4	52
700 ~ 999	-	5
more than 1000	-	-

Source: 1990-nen Sekai Nōringyō Sensasu, Shiga-ken

Table 3
Income Distribution from Sale of Agricultural Products (1990)

Income (in ¥10,000)	Number of Households	
	Karakawa	Takatsuki
no income	-	63
less than ¥150,000	4	93
15 ~ 50	11	226
50 ~ 100	12	257
100 ~ 150	7	143
150 ~ 200	-	89
200 ~ 300	2	60
300 ~ 500	-	27
500 ~ 700	1	6
700 ~ 1000	-	9
1000 ~ 1500	-	7
1500 ~ 2000	-	1
2000 ~ 3000	-	2
¥30,000,000+	-	-

Source: 1990-Nen Sekai Nōringyō Sensasu, Shiga-ken

Two households in the village of Karakawa, however, reportedly earn between ¥3,000,000-5,000,000 (\$20,697-\$34,495) from agriculture; and one makes between ¥5,000,000-7,000,000 (\$34,495-\$48,293). While the census lists six households who own 1 to 1.5 hectares of arable land, the highest landowning category in the village, it makes no distinction as to how much land households actually farm, either its own or rented from a neighbor. According to my own census, the three households that farm the most land combine land they own with land rented from neighbors, totaling 4 ha., 2.4 ha., and 2.05 ha. respectively, and figure to be these high-income earning households. The rest cultivate 1 hectare or less.

In terms of national averages, the agricultural income per day of total farm households was found to be 37% of the average wage of a manufacturing job in the fiscal year 1990. Comparing the average salary of small manufacturing firms to that of farmers revealed that the income of farm households with full-time farmers was 60% of that of workers in manufacturing, with farm households having male, full-time core farmers earning 80% as much as manufacturing employees (The Japan Institute of International Affairs 1993:115).

It is interesting to note that despite these relatively lower salaries farmers nevertheless enjoy a standard of living approximately 12% higher than that of non-agricultural workers, based on a comparison of household expenditures. However, the figure for farming households who have male,

full-time core farmers was 14% lower than that of non-agricultural workers, indicating that "the more dependent a farmer is on farming, the lower his standard of living is compared to that of a non-agricultural worker" (Japan Institute of International Affairs 1993:115). This provides yet another measure of how part-time farming has come to be preferred as a household production strategy.

At the outset a number of additional important points thus need to be made about the agricultural economy in general: first, even these households that earn a sizeable income from farming nevertheless still consider themselves part-time farmers, and list something else as their primary occupation (e.g., in printing, in construction). Second, there is no true landlordism: income comes mainly from household labor, not from rent, and there are no tenant farmers who do not own land. The three households that borrow land to cultivate also hold larger-than average plots of their own.

The balance of farming households in this village (about thirty) are three-generation, stem families. Like nuclear families, their exact composition and structure may vary according to the point of the developmental cycle they have attained. As the "ideal" ie form, these stem families demand a closer look, in terms of their operation and how they contrast with other kinds of households.

5. Patterns of Headship, Strategies of Succession

Setting aside for the time being the nature of relations within the household, we can begin with the focal point within the household and its representative to the outside, the househead (*setai-nushi*). The househead is nearly always male, succeeding to the position around the time of his marriage. Only in rare cases, or temporarily, is the househead female, such as when the househead passes away and a male heir is unavailable; until one is obtained, the widow is recognized and acts as househead.

Among the thirty stem families I surveyed, the preponderance of househeads are in their thirties and forties. The oldest househead is 67 years old, and has had the longest tenure as such, 43 years, in the village. The youngest househead is thirty. Except for the 67 year old, all these men list jobs other than farming as their primary occupation. Most are company employees, the remainder work in some capacity for the government or civil service. One man runs a dry cleaning store, one is a teacher; another is a wholesaler of silk goods; and lastly, one man lists himself as self-employed.

One point I wanted to confirm was whether these househeads were the putative ideal choices for the position, namely first sons. Surprisingly, this was the case in 26 out of 30 households. This near coincidence between ideal and practice almost strains credulity. The numbers we are considering are small of course, but these househeads and, by

extension, their households, seem to follow "traditional" patterns, though we remain a long way from explaining why they do so.

There are no second sons who have become househeads of stem families at the present time, but there are two third sons and, interestingly, two sons-in-law who have obtained headship of their adoptive households. We do, however, find second sons heading farming households that consist of two generations, "nuclear" in the loose sense: parents living together with unmarried children in their early twenties. The grandparents may be deceased, but most likely are residing with their first son's family. Though there is of course visiting between households, one sibling usually takes the responsibility of caring for the retired generation; there is little sharing or "rotation" of duties.

Most of these are borne by the wife of the househead, who enters the household and must learn its ways of doing things. As the "Mrs." of the house, she of course is still in the classic situation of a daughter-in-law. The attitude towards her is succinctly expressed by the old Japanese adage *hara-wa karimono*, "a womb is a borrowed thing" (see Sansom 1963:90, and Lebra 1984:160-1): it reduces the value of in-marriage women to their child-rearing capacity, and underscores their identification with "outsiders." In the past, the severing of the daughter's tie with her natal household was symbolized by the ritual breaking of her rice bowl at marriage. But in practical terms connections were

maintained. In particular, at the time of childbirth, women returned "home" to give birth and nurse the child through the first few months.

The status of women as "outsiders" thus seemingly applies from both perspectives, even though the wives of farmers still come from local villages. Given the broadening of employment possibilities, men -- and women -- meet prospective spouses in classrooms and offices in distant cities. Yet only one wife of head of a farming household was born outside the prefecture. About one quarter, however, came to the village from other parts of the prefecture.

Is there a shortage of wives here as has been talked about in the press for other parts of rural Japan?⁴ Certainly not to the extent of some northeastern Japanese villages that have taken to advertising in Tokyo newspapers and sought to import wives from Southeast Asia. The figure that one quarter of wives come from outside the village indicates that even if local women are opting to move out, there are some who are willing to move in. Figures on the migration of women or the ratio of men to women by age tell us little about the path to the present situation or how things will change.

However, there is a perception that as a result of fewer women wanting to become farm wives, there have been shifts in the traditional balance of power. Life in a farming village lacks glamour to say the least; when a women agrees to marry into a farming household, there is an unstated agreement that in return for this measure of "sacrifice" the wife gains

larger autonomy and a greater voice in making decisions affecting the everyday life of both the newlywed couple and the larger family/household. Today, this means that in a few cases a woman can demand that at marriage the newlywed couple will set up a separate household -- in a city apartment perhaps -- for a few years, recognizing that after a period of time the husband, as prospective, designated successor, will have to return home to take over management of the farm. Their recently-won "right" to live away from home, however, reduces their distinction from other siblings, particularly when their finances are handled on a separate basis. Only when the house and land are turned over in name to the single heir -- which remains the practice -- is the succession sealed.

The process of naming and installing a successor is thus one of accommodation between generations and genders. Eldest sons (or, in their absence, oldest daughters) are under the most pressure to succeed as househead, and are most often identified, by themselves and their families, as the prospective *atotori*, or heir. Some consider sons as young as two years old to be slated for eventual headship. Most parents, however, recognize that their children have some say in the matter which, realistically, cannot begin to be tackled until they are in their late teens. In response to official questionnaires (part of the census of farming households performed by prefectures across the country every

five years), fairly few, one quarter, consider the question of who will succeed to be firmly decided.

The aging of Japanese society has raised many uncertainties about the future, and nowhere is concern more deep than in its farming villages. In the township as a whole, 14.2 percent of the total population was 65 or older in 1988, and increasing at a yearly rate 1.5 times the national average (Access Plan 21, p.12). While children attend school and parents work in offices, the older, "retired" generation stays home, and maintain as best they can the lifestyle they have known. That is, men farm, and women run domestic activities -- food preparation, cooking, child-care, and much of the socializing that occurs between households.

Though househeads perform the bulk of hard agricultural labor, the retired generation still maintains its grip on day-to-day farming work (see Table 4, "Farming Population by Age and Sex"). There is a gender division of labor: men concentrate on rice cultivation, women on dry-field. Consequently, the nature of work differs: the former requires intense work for limited periods during the growing cycle, the latter calls for regular daily maintenance. As a result, the hours older women spend every morning weeding in their gardens tends to be underreported in yearly accounts of labor outlays. Thus, even though women outnumber men 2:1 in town statistics on the number of household members who are principally employed in cultivation of their own

Table 4
Farming Population by Age and Sex (1990)

Age	Number of Household Members (who are principally engaged in household farming)	
	Karakawa (m/f)	Takatsuki (m/f)
16 ~ 19	3 (1/2)	49 (27/22)
20 ~ 24	2 (2/-)	15 (6/9)
25 ~ 29	2 (-/2)	12 (1/11)
30 ~ 34	1 (-/1)	22 (1/21)
35 ~ 39	2 (-/2)	43 (5/38)
40 ~ 44	- (-/-)	48 (2/46)
45 ~ 49	2 (-/2)	60 (7/53)
50 ~ 54	2 (-/2)	84 (11/73)
55 ~ 59	4 (-/4)	146 (26/120)
60 ~ 64	14 (4/10)	235 (98/137)
65 ~ 69	9 (3/6)	204 (97/107)
70 ~ 74	7 (5/2)	157 (78/79)
75+	1 (1/-)	132 (67/65)

Source: 1990-nen Sekai Nōringyō Sensasu, Shiga-ken

landholdings, the breakdown favors men when number of days worked is measured.

A new development, however, is that some of the elder generation are left to live alone, singly or in couples, a situation said to be virtually unheard of until recently. There were six households consisting of a single, elderly (over 65 years old) person in the village in 1990, of which two still own farmland. One of these is a 76 year-old woman who holds about 60 ares of paddy, all of which she rents out. Another is a 77 year-old man who also rents out his paddyland, but still farms, growing vegetables for his own consumption on about 5 ares of dryfield, spending about 30 work days a year on the endeavor. Both have sons who support them, but they live and work outside the village. Being around 50 years old, these sons are expected to retire from their jobs eventually, and then return to the village.

There is a strong trend nationally for a growing percentage of single-generation farm households headed by farmers over 65 years of age, and farm households with only one or two family members, on account of dropping birth rates, and because successors have taken jobs elsewhere and moved away from home. The percentage of farm households with one to two family member(s) in 1975 was 12.4% of total farm households. Ten years later, this percentage had grown to 15.9%; and by 1990, to 18.1%. The change in actual numbers for these households is less dramatic, considering in particular that the number of farm households with one or two

family member(s) in 1985 was 674,000, and grew to 693,000 by 1990 (Japan Institute of International Affairs 1993:122).

Returning to our hamlet, three other relatively younger households consist of a husband and wife. Like single elderly households, they elected, on account of age, to give up rice farming and rent out their paddies, but still maintain a dryfield to produce vegetables for their own use. One is childless, but the other two also expect a son currently residing in other prefectures to come home someday to assume headship of the household.

Though town figures have four designated successors living away from home, by my census there are six. Their absence is in some cases explained by the age of the designated successor: one is away at college, another, unmarried, works and lives in a large city. Yet there are a few around fifty years of age who, despite having married and raised their children, still haven't returned to the village. There is a mild amount of social censure for this failure to attend to proper filial behavior, but most recognize that better economic opportunities elsewhere are difficult to resist. In some cases, given the nature of relations between some parents and their children, this also provides an acceptable excuse for avoiding the responsibility of caring for a cantankerous old man who, on his side, values his independence.

6. Production and Procurement

The image of the peasant family as a seemingly autarkic unit of production, reproduction, and consumption in Japan (as elsewhere) has been questioned in both anthropological and historical works. Recent treatments of the *ie* particularly have attempted to reevaluate the role of kinship in the maintenance and reproduction of these households. While the classic works on rural Japanese social organization (see, for example, Johnson 1964, Brown 1966, Nakane 1967) have treated it mainly as a kinship organization defined by its ideology of patrilineal descent, recent writings have instead stressed the positional character of *ie* membership, and the relation of each person to the household rather than to other positions (Bachnik 1983, Kitaoji 1971).

The principal contrast in positions is the dichotomy between permanent and temporary ones. In any given generation there are only two positions of permanence: the designated successor to the office of *ie* headship and his wife. Succession, though ideally defined by the rule of male primogeniture, takes place in a variety of ways: succession by other sons, by the eldest child (male or female), or even by "outsiders" (neither sons nor daughters) who are adopted into the *ie*; in any case, a single heir nearly always inherits land and house. Since the organization of the *ie* is not contingent upon any specific form for the organization of its successors, positions and not personal relationships (i.e., blood ties) provide it with its formal regularity,

though this regularity is still stated in terms of a house genealogy and roster of household ancestors.

This point was in fact articulated in 1962 by Befu in an article distinguishing the *ie* as a kinship unit and as a corporate unit. He proposed that "the primary emphasis in the Japanese family system is not so much on the continuity of the 'blood' from father to oldest son as on the perpetuation of the family as a corporate group through its name and occupation" (Befu 1962:34). He focused attention on the problem of succession to the headship of the family, and on the consequent assumption of the family occupation by the successor, rather than the inheritance of family property, arguing that "the Japanese family may exist without any property to speak of, but it cannot exist without a head" (Befu 1962:35). True though this may be in principle, the existence of the rural *ie* is deeply connected with its holding land, not only as a basis for work (part-time or full-time), but with land, as property, also serving to define and validate the *ie*'s position in the broader community.

Though we now have a much more sophisticated appreciation of the processes that go towards the reproduction of the *ie* we still lack any clear idea of why *ie* preservation matters, and to whom. For example, there are eight farm households in Karakawa that combine two generations living together. As "modern" nuclear families they are made up of a married couple and their children. This

category, however, encompasses a range of types: there is the couple in their fifties with no children caring for an elderly mother; or, the husband and wife in their seventies waiting with their only son to "get" a bride (*yome-wo morau*); or, the parents with sons and daughters in their twenties who are living at home to save money while they establish themselves in their careers or make preparations to marry. It would be naive to reduce this variety of household forms to a simple transition from extended families to nuclear ones, as part of a larger process of modernization.

Theoretically, even when we think in diachronic terms, we assume some vague functionalism at work: economic purpose reinforced by the satisfaction of emotional needs, mediated and expressed by cultural expectations, and so on. Examples of this include the tendency to view the domestic economy as one support in an economic system that kept rural wages low while subsidizing the purchase of manufactured farming equipment, to the benefit of the urban employed; another example might be the view that the three-generation family is instrumental in providing care for the aged, in the absence of a nationally organized welfare system. In any case, the *ie* is viewed principally as a "task performance unit" (Pelzel 1970, cited in Kondo 1990:122).

True though these observations may be, they fail to address the other fundamental aspect of the *ie*: its stewardship of resources. We need to ask what function natural cycles of development play in the continual

interaction between the household, the local "community", and the state. In particular, beyond the management, use or disposition of resources in providing a livelihood for people, we need to examine the social bases of property and the kinds of relations -- the organization of work included -- that they entail, between households but also within them.

In other words, we need to view the family and household not only in terms of production or generative reproduction, but the reproduction of a host of other structures and functions incorporated within them. While we must discard the notion of the household as a bounded unit of production, many questions persist concerning its role in the production and accumulation of wealth, and how this alters the nature of relations between people and groups. For example, within the household, what are the particular relations of production, and how do individual interests conflict with the reproduction of often unequal relations from one generation to the next? How do households mediate these individual interests (and behaviors) with broader processes of history (i.e., changing institutional orders, changing hierarchies of values), and domination, along age, gender, and class lines (cf. Donham 1981).

In this chapter I have pointed to aspects of farming households that have changed such as their reliance on salaried jobs for income, the aging of the farming work force, the growing power of in-marrying women in their new households, and the growing numbers of successors themselves

delaying succession, with the consequence of more elderly living alone. Yet some features -- arguably, the key features -- of stem household dynamics have not changed: succession by first sons when possible, but keeping open a range of options; and most important, maintaining the practice of single-heir inheritance and dispersing non-inheriting siblings.

Having recognized the illusion of the household as a unit of production inherited from a primordial past, we should now integrate this with an analysis of the ideological and material bases of property in structuring interpersonal relations within household. We have already discussed in Chapter Two the theoretical importance of, and the literature on, the rural family as a property-holding unit, as the principal means of access to land, and how systems and strategies of inheritance serve as a means to view the concrete shaping of relations between households in a community over time. The next chapter demonstrates the practical deployment of these issues by examining land lending between households. This practice not only contests the ideal of individual property, but also reveals how the transmission of rights over property through family and household reconstitutes social relations beyond them.

Notes

¹Due to dramatic devaluations of the yen against the dollar in the middle seventies and the late eighties, I have left these figures in yen, my primary aim being to convey a sense of relative annual budgetary growth. Annual exchange rates for the period (yen to the dollar), as calculated by the Federal Reserve, are as follows:

1970.....	357.60
1980.....	226.63
1985.....	238.47
1986.....	168.35
1987.....	144.60
1988.....	128.17
1989.....	138.07
1990.....	145.00
1991.....	134.59
1992, Oct.....	127.31

(Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States:1993)

²Other sources of town income and their proportion of total income are: a local subsidy tax (*chi-hō kōfu-zei*), 12.3%, town loans (*chō-sai*), 11.7%, funds carried over from the previous year (*kuri-ire-kin*), 11.4%, and a local tax on property transfers (*jōyo-zei*), 3.6%, as well as a miscellaneous category comprising 12.1% of total town income; these figures are taken from a publication put out by the Takatsuki Town Office called "*Takatsuki: Kirari-appu, mai-taun*," April 1991.

³The term peasant is problematical, with varying definitions encompassing a range of political-economic and cultural-historical determinants. A more detailed consideration of the abstract category of a "peasantry" appears in Chapter 8.

⁴The supply of marriageable women is by no means exclusively a recent issue. Cornell has written extensively on peasant women, divorce, and remarriage in preindustrial Japan (Cornell 1989, 1990), and has published an article entitled "Why are there no spinsters in Japan?" (Cornell 1984).

Chapter Five

LENDING AND BORROWING LAND

1. Trusting Neighbors

The White Paper on Agriculture put out by the Japanese Government in 1990 revealed startling growth in the practice of households "entrusting" (*itaku*) the cultivation of part or all of their land to another household, in effect lending it to them in return for a varying portion of the crop produced. While one third of farm households were involved in this sort of relationship in 1984, by 1988 this figure had reached 60% (*Nōrin Tōkei Kyōkai* 1990:381). (The area of land actually "entrusted" is less dramatic, however; see *Nōrin Tōkei Kyōkai* 1990:190-191.)

In the view of the government this practice can be seen as part of the general process which entails the transfer (*ryūdō*, circulation or "flow") of agricultural land, particularly resulting with the enlargement of the scale of

holdings. While land lending and borrowing work towards this end in practical terms, the government prefers the consolidation of ownership or the clear delineation of rental agreements to these informal, contractless agreements.

Outside the category of "self-cultivation" lies a wide range of arrangements for land use, the provision of labor, and the disposal of produce and profits. As the above figures demonstrate, the informal lending and borrowing of land is preferred by the majority of farming households today. Yet scant attention has been paid to the topic, probably because discussions have always been slanted, for theoretical and political reasons, to examinations of tenancy, particularly its eradication, and to the establishment of independent cultivators through land reform. Marxists and policy makers alike got caught up in the Agrarian Question and Modernization, to the exclusion of so-called aberrant cases.

In the previous chapter I demonstrated the usefulness of looking at processes and the shifting of relations diachronically. By the same token, anthropology can aid historical analysis by revealing the dynamic working out of processes on the ground in detail. While historians and economists have access to a record over time, there are limits to the depths of answers they can provide. Land registers tell us how much land a particular household owned, but not how much it may have left fallow in any given year. Even if this information were available for a given household

and its well-documented activities, more likely than not this would not be true for all households in the village.

Beyond the problem of past investigations not having been interested in the same issues that today's analysts are concerned with, there is also the problem of informants giving false testimony. This is as much a methodological problem for anthropologists as it is for historians. For anthropologists there is the added ethical dilemma of revealing information that somehow might hurt the people who were studied. I should therefore state at the outset that the following numbers I have collected do not match up in all cases with official census records. Given that the data pertain to different though consecutive years, a certain amount of discrepancy should be expected. An additional complication was that there had been significant deregulation of land leasing starting in 1988 (according to Hayami and Yamada 1991:218); a certain amount of awkwardness and guardedness concerning formerly "shady" practices probably lingered through the period of my fieldwork.¹ But the underlying differences in who asked the questions -- the state versus the foreign graduate student, and the nature of their relations to informants -- may also have had a significant effect on the kinds of answers offered, and hence help to explain the difference between official census records and the data I collected.

As the number of farmers rapidly dwindles, more households holding farmland now find themselves bereft of

anyone to work it. Yet they stubbornly resist selling the land, instead lending it to a neighbor to farm in return for a small portion of the harvest. This informal -- and mostly unreported -- lending and borrowing of cultivatable land is widespread and virtually underpins the system of agricultural production in the area where I did my fieldwork. (Regarding its growing prominence in other areas of Japan, see Aikawa 1991, Moore 1991.) In the farming village where I spent the most time, nearly two thirds of all farm households had borrowed or lent land in the previous year. For lenders, the returns are meager in economic terms: at the end of the year these ostensible landlords receive between 10 to 15% of the rice harvested from their land, husked but yet unpolished. This rice as rent is called *nengu*, a term meaning simply "ground rent" but which also referred to tribute paid in kind to feudal lords.

While lenders may make little money from the arrangement, by keeping the land well-tended and in productive shape it enables them to quickly resume farming on their own should labor at home become available. Furthermore, they receive a supply of rice to meet not only their annual consumption needs but also to send to relatives living in the city, an important symbolic expression of intrafamilial relations. Borrowers generally have the upper hand as far as making profits goes; but paradoxically, their commitment to an occupation that ranks low in desirability makes convincing

a young couple to take over the farm all the more difficult, and the future of these households that much more uncertain.

This chapter aims to describe the practices of land lending and borrowing, and to understand them in terms of household strategies of production and property control. Using an examination of these practices as a sort of test case, I hope to examine in concrete terms the theoretical issues discussed in the previous chapter, how the competing paradigms complement and contradict each other, and point our further analysis.

2. A New Typology of Farming Households

In describing farming households we must move away from simple dichotomies such as landlord and tenant, land lender or borrower. One can find representatives for a whole range of combinations of self-cultivating, land-lending, and land-borrowing households in rural Japan today. These include: households that cultivate their own land; that cultivate their own land in addition to borrowed land; that cultivate some of their own land, and lend out a portion; that cultivate some of their own land in addition to land borrowed from another household, as well as lend out a portion of their own land; and households that lend out their land and do not farm for themselves.

Before returning to this typology based on how households control and use land, we should note the categories that are not represented. First, there are no

households that farm only borrowed land, as pure tenants or sharecroppers. A principle underlying farm enterprises in Japan today is that all households involved in farming have title to property of their own which they farm wholly or in part. Thus, there are no households that lend out all their land but cultivate some borrowed from elsewhere.

In the village of Karakawa almost one third of the farming households cultivates their own plots exclusively (12 of a total 42 households). Another third lends out all their land and does not farm (14 households), while the remaining third combines lending or borrowing with self-cultivation in some form. This last group bridges the distinction between self-cultivation and lending/borrowing; depending on with which side one lumps these households, one could say with equal justification that farming in the village depends on self-cultivation, as it does on lending/borrowing (see Table 5).

Are there any systemic distinctions between self-cultivator households and lending/borrowing households? If there are, how do we account for the third residual category? In order to answer these questions, we can begin by employing the models and principles of the Japanese farming household as it has been depicted in the literature (which I have already summarized in an earlier chapter), by checking the ethnographic data against them.

The simplest explanation for land lending and borrowing hinges on taking the household as a unit of organizing labor

Table 5
Household Types by Land Access/Utilization
in Karakawa

Household Type/Description	No. of Households	Average Hshld. Size (persons)
Type A - self-cultivate only.....	12.....	6
Type B - lend land only.....	14.....	4.3
Type C - combine self-cultivation and land lending.....	8.....	5.4
Type D - combine self-cultivation and land borrowing.....	5.....	5.2
Type E - combine self-cultivation, land lending, and land borrowing.....	3.....	6
*Type F - borrow land only.....	0.....	n.a.

and as the principal means of access to land. With this as a baseline, lending and borrowing can be seen as a management strategy aimed at more efficient adjustment of inputs: households with land -- but a lack of hands to farm it -- getting together with households relatively oversupplied with labor, to their mutual benefit. In support of this point of view, I found self-cultivator households (Type A) to be quite larger than households that lend out their land and do not farm (Type B). The former averages 6 household members, the latter 4.3, smallest among all categories of household types.

The other main factor involved in calculations of production are the amounts of land owned, cultivated, and lent. Looking at our baseline groups again, self-cultivators (Type A) tend to own a larger amount of land, roughly three quarters of a hectare, as opposed to lenders (Type B), who possess on average slightly more than half a hectare per household. Why don't lender households reserve a portion of their land to farm themselves? One explanation (suggested by some informants) could be that it just doesn't pay to cultivate less than a certain amount of land. There are households in the village that farm less than a half hectare of their land (.36), while lending out the rest (Type C); they have as much land as self-cultivator (Type A) households, but average fewer household members, 5.4, as compared to six for the former. The group owning the largest amount of land per household are self-cultivator/borrowers (Type D), whose plots amount to nearly a hectare. They also

average six members a household, the same as only self-cultivating households.

It would seem from this summary description that the smaller size of lender households is accompanied by a proportional decrease in the amount of land owned. This further suggests that the ratio of labor to land does not greatly differ between lender and self-cultivator households. Nevertheless, the examples of self-cultivator/lender and self-cultivator/borrower households indicate that the cut-off line for self-cultivation hinges on the labor available, not any absolute amount of land.

While mean size is one gauge of household labor, it is necessary to consider other characteristics of household composition such as the ages of household members, the number of married couples, and so forth. In doing so we may be able to determine if there is any connection between the stages of household development and the practices of self-cultivation versus land lending and borrowing, and help resolve the many questions that studies of stem families in Europe have raised regarding the timing of the dispersal of non-inheriting children, and the loss of their labor.

For example, looking at the structure of self-cultivator (Type A) and of exclusively lender households (Type B), the predominant form of both is the stem family. That is, the majority of both categories of households consist of a central married couple, their children, and either one or both elder parents (who were formerly the household head or

wife). Thus it is fairly clear that while some stem families find self-cultivation practicable, others do not. By examination of individual cases we can detail for each the various reasons: e.g., not enough land, not enough labor. One general difference, however, between the two categories is the average younger age of self-cultivator households heads. These men are all in their thirties or forties, as opposed to the heads of lender households, who are evenly distributed in age over the thirties through the seventies. In fact, in all categories except self-cultivator households, there is a fairly even distribution of househeads by age.

The fact that self-cultivator households tend to be headed by younger men can be explained in terms of fitting productive strategy to stages of household development. Younger househeads, only five to ten years removed from succeeding to the post, have still active parents to do the bulk of daily work maintaining fields, as well as helping to care for grandchildren who are by this time ready to enter school, and no longer require fulltime supervision at home. This also helps free up the time of the househead's wife to take a part-time job or pursue a career of her own such as teaching.

There may be other practical reasons why households at this particular stage of their development may concentrate on cultivating only the land they own. But it seems odd that other land owning and utilization schemes are much more open to variation as to where the household is in its

development. One can find lenders in both early and late stages of their reproductive cycle; this is true also of households that combine self-cultivation with either land lending or borrowing, or both (Types C, D, and E). While there is an undeniable link between the course of household development and how it deploys labor and utilizes land, viewed from a critical distance this explanation leaves many important question unaddressed.

If we put aside for the moment the third of total farming households that practice self-cultivation with limpid logic, the situation of the remaining majority of households engaged in lending and borrowing land is a great deal muddier. Lending land, as we have already described it, yields only a small proportion of the produced rice as gain, roughly 10 to 15% of the total yield; this is much less than the 50% landlords received from tenants before the Second World War or from sharecroppers after. This rice is received after the harvest, husked, dried, but unpolished -- it is stored in large paper bags and polished only prior to cooking to preserve taste and freshness. It is also often sent to relatives living in cities, or given to relatives who are entertaining a large group of people as part of a religious ceremony, for example.

3. Rice and Symbolic Value

People naturally take pride in receiving the best quality rice grown on their land, in addition to the saved

cost of purchasing it for home consumption, which can still amount to a considerable amount of money for a family of five despite the growing displacement of rice by other foods in the diet. In urban areas the consumption of rice, relative to other foods, has fallen among middle- to high-income families to such a degree that a family's average expenditure on rice was 2 percent of its total expenditures, according to a 1989 survey (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:22). However, given the larger size of rural families, and the greater prominence of rice on the daily menu, this figure would be raised for the average rural household.

For example, in 1985 rice consumption per individual was 75 kilos per year (Yoshioka 1988:32). For a family of five, this comes to 375 kilos for a year. Assuming that this figure had not changed a great deal in five years (and is probably understated in any case for a rural family), the expenditure for a year would be ¥187,000 (\$1,293, at \$1 = ¥145), calculated on the basis of ¥500 per kilo in 1990. This price represents that obtainable for higher (though not the highest) quality rice obtainable in Tokyo supermarkets (for exact prices by variety, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:21). The savings that rice as rent represents is therefore not crucial to the financial health of the land-lending household, but neither is it insignificant.

This does not, however, contribute directly to the costs of owning the land and maintaining it: the taxes, the water use, and especially the payments for the recent land

reorganization project which built roads and recombined existing plots into larger ones. By lending land at easy terms and giving away rice of which they have almost too much, lenders try to paint themselves as exploited. This humility, however, does not reach the extent that it makes them look stupid or undercuts the idea of *noblesse oblige*, and their image of status. Borrowers, by the same token, must also downplay their profit in the arrangement. They are "entrusted" with not just the care of paddyfield, but the whole of rural life as symbolized by the use of rice, as diet and as an important gift in cementing social relations.

That these relations are fundamentally unequal is apparent when one observes the care with which they are handled. This goes beyond the unease of having to discuss money matters with neighbors and ostensible friends. Everyone agrees that cash rents are not necessarily bad, only exorbitant rates, and perhaps the attendant interest and meddling of the authorities. But rice as rent carries with it a host of meanings grounded in culture and history.

Ohnuki-Tierney has recently published an examination of rice as a central symbol in the historical construction of the Japanese self, embedded in both folk and elite cosmologies (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). While the crux of her analysis is how "the Japanese self" was defined primarily through discourse with foreign "others" (eg., Chinese and Westerners), and thus lies outside the scope of the present

argument, her chapter on rice as wealth and power provides intriguing background to the issues we have been considering.

Wealth in folklore, particularly wealth bestowed as divine gift, is often equated with rice which originates in some part of a deity's body (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:63-66). This exchange of rice between deities and humans lent a religious character to many political and economic institutions -- such as markets, taxation, and interest -- during Japan's Ancient and Medieval periods. A strong tradition of a barter system (and the use of rice as a medium of exchange) was created that was to delay the development of a cash economy based on metallic currency for a number of centuries, which in any case did not totally supplant rice arguably up until the present day (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:69).

Metallic currency came to be equivalent to rice in that both served as forms of exchange. But as Ohnuki-Tierney explains, one critical difference remained: although money can be "dirty" or "clean," "rice as an item of exchange has always been 'sacred' in the past and remains 'clean' today" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:72). She adds: "The crucial difference between money and rice, then is that money is equivocal whereas rice is unequivocal. Money...can be an important inalienable gift or devilish fetish, whereas rice as an item of exchange is always an inalienable gift exchanged among interdependent individuals; there is no dirty rice currency. The meaning of rice as a medium retains its original

religious, or, to put it more broadly, cosmological meaning" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:73).

This is not to say, however, that other discourses subverting the sacredness of the exchange cannot coexist. As I noted earlier in the chapter, rice as rent in this area of Japan is called *nengu*, which formerly referred to the tribute paid to feudal lords. This connotation appears to have been largely lost these days, or denied: most people, local historians included, simply translate the term as "ground rent." We might note that in written form it incorporates the character *nen* ("year"), which originally meant "annual harvest" and in compounds often expresses the idea of time as cyclical, repetitive and continuing in nature. Without pressing the point too much, having the character for "year" conjoined with the character *gu*, meaning "tribute," at least symbolically expresses the element of time in a particular kind of social and economic relationship.

There is no reason why this should not apply as well to actual practice. For example, one household in the village has borrowed land from another for many years, at least two generations. To be precise, it has had rights take bamboo and wild greens and herbs from a copse of wood -- dryfield gone wild -- in exchange for a variety of rice called *mochigome* which is used only in the making of glutinous cakes. These cakes are eaten primarily on the New Year's holiday, and are also used as offerings to Shinto deities, either at home to the Shinto altar, or at the village shrine as part of various

ritual observances and festivals. For years this household grew this kind of rice on part of its paddyland, but in recent years they have stopped cultivation. In order to meet their obligations for the use of the wood, they have had to buy this rice on the regular market at fairly inflated prices, certainly by rural standards. As a result, when they brought this rice-rent to the lender household, they were profuse in their apologies for and explanations of why this year they were bringing less than always.

I would not venture to try to imagine how the actors involved in this little scenario saw it, nor look beyond their smiles and gracious courtesy to one another for baser agendas. Tensions do seem to come more readily to the surface when it becomes a question of cash, however. There was only one household willing to admit to me that they received cash rent for their land, an elderly woman who, it was explained to me, could not use the rice, neither eat it all herself nor give it away. The implication was that she was a special case, and that the arrangement was made based on rights more related to charity than to property.

One might see in these negotiations the passing of traditional culture, the falling apart of inter-family relations and so on. But why should we tie these ambiguities and tensions solely to the alleged fiscal irrationalities of lending and borrowing land? Why is it that self-cultivator households in our model -- in their use of land and labor --

enjoy a hermetic logic that other types of households are seemingly denied from practicing?

As a preliminary to answering these questions, we might shift our perspective and see the vaunted independence and logic of self-cultivator households as isolation and vulnerability, not so much caught in a "squeeze" as peasant households discussed in the previous chapter, but rather struggling to straddle the widening gaps between households. If these households are dependent only on their own land and labor, they are to a certain extent out of the web of reciprocities, privileges, and obligations in which the other two thirds of farming households in the village participate. This may upset the balance of internal tensions which in certain respects for stem family dynamics are essential to its reproduction -- such as those which encourage the dispersal of non-inheriting siblings. A continuation of traditional patterns of parental authority may now, however, drive away all potential heirs.

In this connection, it is interesting to observe that the proportion of households that have decided who will succeed to household headship is virtually the same for lender as it is for self-cultivator households. This is somewhat surprising, given that self-cultivator are headed by younger men: succession should be for them a far less pressing concern right now. But as one might expect, the named successors of lender and self-cultivator households differ markedly: quite a few of the men tagged to succeed as

heads of lender households are older -- one is fifty, another forty nine, another forty two -- while the planned successors of self-cultivator households are fairly young.

In the case of self-cultivator households, the current househeads recognize the uncertainty of the future of farming and the farming household. They name their oldest son as successor, but usually note that this is more their "hope" and that they have no intention of "forcing" him (*honnin-ni kyōsei-na-koto kangaete-inai*). Since this point was made to me a number of times by different people, there seems to be general consciousness of a "problem" with heirs, and that this problem will more likely have to be resolved in the future by the carrot rather than the stick.

The fact that named successors of lender households tend to be older may be one example of the sort of concessions that current househeads may have to make to keep sons on the farm. These older named successors often work and live, with their wife and children, away from the households they are to inherit. They maintain separate control over their paychecks, as well as the running of their daily lives, which would most likely not be the case if they were to remain in the natal household. Even after formal succession, the retired head often maintains control over the family bank accounts and continues to direct the operation of the paddies, despite his declining actual participation in the work.

4. The Loan: Between Rent and Gift

I would now like to move from this outline description of a system of rice production, in terms of elementary economic considerations and the logic which apparently guides the decision-making process of individual farming households, to broader interpretive questions. They revolve, in main, around why I have labelled these practices of exchanging land use for a share of the harvest as "lending" and "borrowing."

In fact, the Japanese terms used to describe these arrangements, *kashi-dashi* and *kari-ire*, translate simply as "leasing-out" and "renting-in" land. In other contexts they can also mean simple lending and borrowing, and by using these latter terms I may be taking advantage of a certain semantic broadness. But I also think "lending" and "borrowing" better reflect the ambiguity of roles on both sides, as old distinctions between landlords and tenants, between owners and workers, are now being reworked in the process of maintaining some semblance of traditional communal solidarity in the face of outside pressures.

One elementary reason why farmers avoid contractually leasing land is the long-term nature of rental agreements under the law. The Land Lease Law and House Lease Law, enacted in 1921 and strengthened in 1941, heavily protected the rights of tenants and lessees, "making it unlawful for the landlord to evict the lessee or tenant 'without due justifiable cause,' even upon the expiration of the leasehold

or even if the landlord wanted to use the land or house for personal use" (Noguchi 1992:26).

These laws were promulgated with the intent to quell a discontented underclass, particularly during wartime. With courts interpreting "due justifiable cause" so narrowly as to allow lessees or tenants, in many cases, to stay on after their leases have expired, rental agreements have thus become tantamount to ownership rights.² Leasing today has become synonymous with selling land at discount, at least in the view of most landowners. For them it is much more profitable, given the tax structure, to simply hold on to land as an asset than to develop it as a rental property, particularly in urban areas where, of course, the need for land for housing is greatest.

Even if the title to the land changes hands, the new owner inherits the "problem" of existing tenancy agreements. In a village, where the relationships between the parties go beyond just this agreement, there is ample opportunity to frictions to arise between tenants and their new landlords. Even when there is no disagreement regarding the terms of the agreement, rate of rent and such, small issues such as the presence of a dilapidated shed on a property, and whether the landowner can demand -- or even request -- the tenant to fix it or remove it, call for careful negotiations if village harmony is to be maintained.

The most problematical issue, however, for those involved in lending land, rather than renting proper, is why

land lenders should be willing to accept such a small share of the crop, 10 - 15%, when landlords in the early part of this century received up to half the harvest. If you ask them, landowners say that no matter what happens, rice will feed their family. They still recall the lean years of the war and afterward. With the shrinking of the size of families in the postwar period, and a decrease in rice consumption as a result of Westernization of the Japanese diet, 10 - 15% is usually enough to cover a family's needs for a year. This belief in food self-sufficiency in fact reaches all the way up to the central government, which insists on it as a point of national security, especially when pressed by foreign producers to liberalize their agricultural markets.

If there is an element of ambivalence towards land lending and borrowing, this may partly be due to the different subjective evaluations that are recognized to be attached to sharecropping in general. Robertson has noted that "the supplier of labour may choose to regard [sharecropping] as a form of tenancy, while the supplier of land may consider it as a labour hire arrangement" (Robertson 1980:412).

Discussions on the nature of sharecropping by anthropologists and other social scientists have taken two distinct but interrelated tracks. The first takes sharecropping as a premodern and inefficient productive arrangement that should be displaced by capitalist development; its survival and recrudescence, much like the

persistence of "peasants" in advanced industrial nations, is than taken to be problematic (Byres 1983, Pearce 1983). Although the formalist questions over the inefficiency of sharecropping remain debated (Otsuka and Hayami 1988), the main focus of recent ethnographically-oriented studies has been on the structural articulation of rural strata, and the ways ideologies of communality, through sharecropping, confront and crossover a multiplicity of divergent interests (Scott 1976, Wells 1984, Peletz 1988).

Sharecropping, or *kariwake*, which is regarded historically as the most primitive form of rent (Smith 1959:153) in Japan, has generally disappeared from the ordinary vocabulary in the postwar period, perhaps because of its traditional association with impoverished and backward farming areas.³ The tendency of today's land borrowers to avoid identifying themselves as tenants or hired labor stems from similar pejorative prewar connotations.

Land lenders also distance themselves from the prewar landlord-family type. With smaller holdings and the bulk of their income derived from weekday jobs in an office somewhere, they are hardly the power-wielding local patrons they used to be. Many land lending households consist of an elderly couple who have been, temporarily at least, left to fend for themselves by adult children who have migrated to the city to work and raise their own families. Unable to keep the farm going themselves, these aging couples have little alternative, as we have seen, but to practically give land

away to their neighbors to use. This prompts some to grumble ironically that it is the so-called landlords who have been exploited since the end of the war. Nevertheless, their future security depends on the strength of their relationship with their erstwhile clients and the fund of mutual obligations that has been built up over the years.

An indication of the nature of the ideological battle being fought is the use of the word *nengu* to describe the share of the harvest that is turned over to the land lender at the end of the year thay was described earlier. Although the term itself dates back to feudal times, when it referred to the tribute paid by peasants to their lords, and was also used to refer to the rents pre-war landlords received from their tenants, the continued use of this term is not in itself particularly significant; and I would hardly argue that we could, through the survival of this word, trace a continuous line from peasant to the present. The salient point is that the comparison of the present with the past grounds the roles of lender and borrower in a context of local relations and their history. In doing so, it distinguishes the social relationship between lender and borrower from the simply contractual relationship terms like "tenancy," "leaser," or "renter" might imply.

There is a certain flexibility in lending households which allows them to arrange their affairs in such a way as to lessen internal family tensions, and to even help to smooth the way to succession and continuation of the

household. There is no reason to assume, however, that this is the inevitable course of all households, or that it is particular to a stage of their development. Lending and self-cultivator households may have originated simultaneously as responses out of very different concerns and aims. Lending and borrowing households also have relations with one another that clearly differ with the relations they have with self-cultivator households, and the relations self-cultivator households have among themselves. We should therefore keep in mind the possibility that these will have different implications for the future course of inter-household relationships.

We should not, however, simply substitute the logic of another bounded unit -- the "community" -- for that of the household. It is rather to see them both not only in relation to one another, but also to a third party, the state, and the way state power structures relationships at the local level. In order to do this we might set aside, for a moment, ideas about ordering categories of household, vis-à-vis one another, into unilineal cycles of development, or simultaneously seek to outline their historically constant or changing relations in contexts of larger political and economic processes. By this I mean that if we are to see tradition in rural Japan at work today, the place to see it is in the continuing relative powerlessness of rural society in the face of government dictates, and the contestation of this powerlessness through strategies that, while they look

back, in their effects nevertheless move forward, always away from the past.

5. The Larger Stakes

This ethnographic study of farming households and the rural community stands in marked contrast to many studies written from the perspective of varying disciplines, which have used terms like decay and extinction to characterize the state of agriculture in Japan, by emphasizing the active efforts of rural households to maintain the viability of their households and their communities. Admittedly, the number of farmers has been decreasing and will continue to do so. Those who remain face changes, in nature and scope, they are ill-equipped with which to cope. In order to appreciate the limits of strategies like land lending and borrowing, it is essential to consider the broader economic and political frameworks as well. As Karel van Wolferen (1989) has pointed out, the political power of farmers in Japan, despite its frequent coverage by the media, is largely illusory. In addition, what is at stake in the high-profile protests and controversies which make the evening news are more often than not the interests of the national agricultural cooperative system which, together with the Agricultural Ministry, make up the most "spectacularly successful" business conglomeration in postwar Japan (van Wolferen 1989:63).

It should be recognized that the central federation of agricultural cooperatives (*Zenkoku Nōkyō Chūkai*, or *Zenchū*

for short), along with a host of subsidiary companies, sister organizations, specialized federations, and local cooperative offices are, in essence, an agricultural *keiretsu*, or interlocked group of corporations. The government's payment for rice is handled directly by the Central Bank for Agriculture and Forestry (*Nôrin Chûkin*), which then automatically transfers it to the savings accounts of individual farmers via the prefectural credit federations of the cooperative. Bypassing commercial banks not only reduces the costs of transferring these payments, but also pumps money through *nôkyô* (cooperative) corporations in the form of loans for goods or payment for services. *Nôkyô* subsidiaries provide, in addition to all agriculturally-related equipment and material, a wide range of health and welfare services, credit, storage and warehousing services, guidance and instruction. There is also a mutual aid scheme which is classified as a non-profit organization; as such, it is allowed to sell both life insurance and property insurance and, according to van Wolferen, has grown into the largest insurance operation in the world, with assets in the early 1980s exceeding 5.9 trillion yen.

The *Nôrin Chûkin*, or the central *nôkyô* bank referred to above, also reserves roughly half its capital for outside investment. In terms of domestic deposits, it was ranked the sixth largest bank in the country in the late 1980s (C. Smith 1988:34). Surplus funds from local cooperative branches were funneled into the bank as well, a large part being invested

in foreign bonds. Taken as a totality, the entire deposits of the *nōkyō* network stood at the time at 41 trillion yen, exceeding the largest commercial bank.

Cooperatives hold diversified interests in a variety of business areas, and some maintain extensive holdings of their own in banking, insurance, as well as property development. One example is the Farm Cooperative Association of South Yokohama, regarded principally as an urban area. In fact, of its 4000 members less than 350 are full-time farmers, and association members' farms average less than a third of a hectare. Nevertheless, this cooperative's profits were nearly 6.7 trillion yen (US\$44.6 million) in 1987 in banking and insurance alone, while a separate real estate subsidiary did only slightly less business at 6 billion yen in the same year (C. Smith 1988:26), taking advantage of inflated land values and the urban demand for housing by building apartment buildings on paddies and dryfield plots. Without the tax and other privileges connected with farming, this enterprise system would collapse; farming, though marginalized, remains an essential component of the domestic economic structure.

With the stakes being as high as they are, it is no wonder that the future direction of the Japanese agricultural economy is of such domestic and international importance. Yet for the majority of farmers and members of farming households, the workings of the *nōkyō* -- however far-reaching their influence on their lives -- are fairly remote, operating at a distance perhaps comparable to how an average

American views the the deliberations of the Senate Finance Committee.

This is not to say that Japanese farmers are political naifs or backwater rubes, but there are limits to the range to which interests can extend, within which people feel they can effectively act. This sphere for the most part overlaps what are normally perceived as "local" interests. And it is the energy with which they are pursued that contests the charge of hopelessness that has been hung on the neck of rural Japan for the past twenty years.

There is ample evidence that the strategies of farmers in recent years, centering on combining rice cultivation with an outside job -- which eventually turned into the primary occupation for the majority of farmers -- and emphasizing expansion through monoculturization has resulted in numerous contradictions. Land, taken out of cultivation, has not been utilized efficiently and has, allegedly, been degraded by pollution and over-use of chemicals; monoculture, together with the growing flood of imported goods, have caused prices to fall in a descending spiral; the growth in the cost of farm operations have outstripped the rise in farm income nearly three to one, pushing farmers deeper into debt. With regard to the latter, a survey by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries revealed that farmers were indebted to the amount of 15 trillion yen in 1985, which exceeded figures for farming production and sales for that

year, at 13.4 trillion and 11 trillion yen respectively (Ohno 1992:56).

6. The Uses of a Flexible Tradition

One way to approach land lending and borrowing is to see them as strategies of farming households to use land and labor most efficiently, under conditions created by programs of modernization and rationalization. The difficulty is how to define "efficiency." In terms of total productivity, the amount of rice produced per measure of land, Japanese agriculture has exceeded its Asian neighbors since the 19th century. But in recent years its capacity to provide entirely for the country's needs has become a seeming liability in international politics and in domestic forums as well.

While the preferred strategies of land lending and borrowing may work in practice towards the enlargement of the scale of operations, they still remain removed from the dictates of an outside bureaucracy, or at least try to stay that way. As we have seen, modernization programs during this century worked to eliminate social institutions, like *yu-otoshi* through dam building, or landlord-tenant relations through Land Reform, which served as a basis for local order. That land lending and borrowing today bear more than passing similarities to pre-war social arrangements seems to indicate at least some attempt to continue the past configuration of local autonomy.

What I am suggesting is that this practice and the impulse behind it are closely linked to the maintenance of tradition. Not merely in the preservation or reproduction of cultural forms, but in the dialectic of outside domination and local autonomy and in relations of power which lie at the core of what we have come to call peasant society in the theoretical literature. If we strip away the superficial trappings of what we think of as belonging to the inhabitants of rural societies -- their nineteenth century folk crudities or late twentieth century technological sophistication -- we may delineate commonalities that transcend mindset or existential conditions, that make history a social process in which the future is as much at stake as the past.

Tracing the origin of these practices to the dictates of state policy and, indirectly, to a larger political economy, must serve as the foundation to any analysis. In conclusion, I am suggesting that, in the present struggle over terms of exchange, the legitimacy of claims are tied to how relations between households have been negotiated and maintained over a number of generations. To work through different subjective evaluations of the past -- to forgive and forget -- may be more than just a hidden transcript. It can be a vital component in determining the meaning of who now gives, and who now gets.

Notes

¹Selling rice on the "black market" has never been regarded as a particularly serious problem from the point of the view of the government, at least for the past twenty years, and recent deregulation has made for a further liberalization of the market, at least for domestic producers who look to market their produce outside of the government distribution system.

²While these discussions revolve mainly around farmland in urban areas, Patrick and Rohlen (1987) describe identical conditions and a similar dynamic operating in rural areas.

³Smith lists five types of rent: 1) *kariwake*, under which rent was a percentage of the tenant's crop; 2) *kemmi*, under which rent was in kind but fixed annually based on an estimate of the coming crop; 3) *jōmen*, under which rent in kind was fixed for a five year period rather than annually; 4) *daikin*, under which rates were fixed for a number of years, fixed in kind but actually paid in cash; and 5) a real money rent, fixed as well as paid in money (Smith 1959:152).

Chapter Six

NICE DEPENDENCIES: STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY

1. The Value of Form

It is fairly well known that in public surveys, 90% of Japanese polled consistently label themselves as middle class. Whether or not this indicates a lessening of class distinctions -- or the awareness of them -- in Japan today is of course a matter of controversy. Yet it should not be overlooked that these same surveys that report, for example, that 89.9% of Japanese households perceive themselves as middle class (according to the Prime Minister's Office, May 1991), also note that there is a further breakdown of this "mass middle": 7.7% regard themselves as upper middle class, 54.4% as middle middle, and 27.8% as lower middle class.

The ambiguity of class and status in Japan perhaps speaks to their importance in how people view themselves and represent themselves to others. In delineating the contours

of status through a range of determinants -- on the basis of, for example, material wealth, educational background, long established residence in an area, or holding formal and informal positions of authority -- the discourse on status also marks a locus of contestation. Class identities function as "strategic assertions" (Kondo 1990:10) not only of privilege but also of obligation, of rights as well as responsibilities. The ambiguities of these assertions, as they elide contradictions and gloss differences, are a critical link bridging culture and conflict within a local historical context.

Understanding family farms in Japan and their contemporary strategies of survival has, up to this point in this dissertation, raised issues related to the household as a decision-making, productive unit, coping with bureaucracy and responding to the opportunities and limits of local development. Going beyond this foundation, I have suggested that along with the growing prominence of land lending and borrowing we must also examine the historical vicissitudes of land use-rights as they have been shaped through the interplay of local dynamics and state influence. Together with their transmission from one generation to the next within the family itself, we might further look through these processes, together with the discourse on status, to a broader "grid" of customs and controls, the particular cultural and historical matrices of expectations and

practices, which may help to insure the inheritance of power and security by putatively elite groups (see Thompson 1976).

To claim that grids of custom, as an inheritance from the past with certain practical applications in the here and now, solely determine the course of people's decision making would reduce the complexities of human action to formulaic determinism. This applies as much to materialistic explanations as to those which look to the ideological construction and presentation of "self." Rather than steering a middle course I have therefore adopted an approach which tries to incorporate the strength of both poles. We should stay grounded in the limits of what people do, and also what they think they can do, and must do, to create satisfying lives, as members of families and as members of communities. In order to get a sense of the latter, this chapter focuses on some of the values connected with being a member of the rural community in Japan -- how one's standing is expressed and measured, while nevertheless keeping in mind the ambiguities and ambivalences within this arena, that conflicts often remain unresolved and that many things never reach a recognizable conclusion.

Nor perhaps should they. If we do not give up our hold on a utilitarian notion of culture, we can still recognize that if it retains a certain shape over time, it is also continuously changing. If there is a core of traditions that is maintained by people and carried from the past to the present, it may be the ideological and practical field where

the nature of change and the course of the future are also determined.

2. Giving and Getting

With land lending and borrowing we have seen the tension of a principally economic relation being culturally mediated to help hold back divisive forces between households if not necessarily within them. To a certain extent, these loans masquerading as gifts are part of whole set of gift-giving relations that have been a major component of Japanese culture and language. Examining their bases, and some recent attempts at change, will help elucidate the deeper resonances that the strategies of land lending and borrowing have for Japanese farmers.

Gift giving is ubiquitous throughout Japanese life, even if the gift simply amounts to handful of rice crackers, for each office colleague, brought back from a weekend jaunt somewhere. An incredible industry thrives on *omiyage*, local souvenirs that are *de rigueur* for anyone returning from a trip to distribute among family, neighbors, co-workers, and friends. All this giving and receiving, I think, must go beyond the simple pleasure of it, a claim which anyone would be hard pressed to prove. But it is interesting to note the extensive use of verbs of giving and receiving in the Japanese language, particularly in the imperative case, but also in a broad range of situations to indicate action performed by someone for someone else: eg., *tsukutte-kureta*,

literally, "making-gave," (I) made it for (him), in the sense that I did him the favor of doing the work, not simply that I did it for his benefit. With a relative absence of pronouns in ordinary usage, the levels of these verbs play an important function in discourse by pointing to the speaking "Self" through difference in status with "the Other." Yet beyond this commentary on the status of the Other, or whether the Other is a member of an out-group (that is, outside one's *uchi*, the group to which one belongs¹), lies the affirmation that one is linked to others in relations of obligation and in the connectedness of "simply acting" (Kondo 1990:146). It should be underscored that this definition of difference between self and other is thus tied to action, and that value is founded not in abstract categories, but in acts, and in the relationships they create.

The rural household is so enmeshed in such gift giving with neighbors and relatives that hardly a day goes by without someone calling to distribute the fruits of a recent windfall.² Much of this consists of women bringing over vegetables just picked from household gardens, or prepared in various ways including steaming and pickling. More casual than preparing an actual dish with the attendant attention to presentation, these prepared foods also occasionally turn out to be wild plants from nearby hills or fallow dryfield. For the older generation, the taste of the leaves and stalks of *fuki*, a Japanese butterbur, inevitably call forth memories of harder times, such as during the Second World War, when they

were a significant part of the diet. But these memories are tempered by the sentimental haze of the "good old days," and also express pride in knowledge and discernment unavailable to their city cousins.

But in contrast to these informal gifts there are a whole categories of gifts that fall under much stronger terms of what should be exchanged, and how. They are mostly connected with religious ceremonies which used to accompany a wide range of events. These days they are confined mostly to those marking important stages in an individual's life such as birth, marriage, and death, as well as significant household changes such as breaking ground for a new house. Gifts, which can be cash or goods depending on the circumstance, must be presented and reciprocated in such detailed manner that most households keep around a book on proper etiquette, advising how to properly fold a paper envelope or pen an apt message. This attention to niceties is found throughout Japan, but it is the length and depths to which they are followed in rural areas that most younger people point to when they speak of, or rather, complain about the conservatism of their parents.

The older village members for their part are well aware of some of the "backward" aspects of obedience to tradition, especially when carried out to excess. As many households grew richer during the past couple of decades, it was feared that gift giving was getting out of hand as gifts grew in value. Aside from draining capital in "unproductive" ways,

gift giving was thought to be headed in a direction which made for competitive, almost hostile relations between givers and receivers. A hamlet meeting was held to draft an agreement between all households, to put a limit on how much one could give as gifts and how lavish a party one could throw to celebrate a ritual anniversary observance. The impetus for this reform movement appears to have originated at least at the town level, since a number of hamlets passed similar restriction at this time, in 1986.

This "lifestyle improvement" agreement (*seikatsu-kaizen kiyaku*) is, despite its brevity, an overview of general philosophy as well as a detailed program of change. The preamble (see Appendix B for entire text) sets out the goal of the agreement: to look to the next century as one of "broadminded and sincere" communal relations, and to build a basis for them through respect and maintenance of villagers' duties, by self-examination and the practice of good judgement, rather than through sanctions. The body of the agreement is then divided into four sections, each outlining desired items of behavior in the following areas: marriage, birth and illness, memorial services, and building construction.

The section on visits to those ill or who have given birth is the shortest, but captures the tenor of the document. It states:

- 1.) Gifts to celebrate births will be cash enclosed in envelopes (*kin-pū*); return gifts will not be

- made.
- 2.) Gifts to celebrate the naming of a child will be sugar, not to exceed two kilograms in in weight.
 - 3.) The presentation of ceremonial rice cakes (*tanjō-mochi*) will be discontinued.
 - 4.) Visits to the ill are to be marked by cash gifts enclosed in envelopes; return gifts are to be discontinued.

The section on marriage celebrations and memorial services however are more detailed, encompassing such matters as how many dishes may make up a dinner after a formal engagement announcement, and what flower sets are permissible for funerals.

Yet in spite of these clearly defined rules there are a number of loopholes. For example, the *hōji*, or Buddhist memorial services, which mark the thirty-third and fiftieth anniversaries of a death are exempt from the guidelines set forth in the agreement, though it is suggested to keep matters as simple as possible. Only designated years are memorialized; the fiftieth is the last, and only infrequently observed, a specialness which perhaps accounts for the relaxed restrictions on ostentation.

3. Managed Practice: Three Ceremonies and their Exchanges

The first *hōji* I attended happened to be one of these fiftieth anniversaries, at the home of my fieldsite hosts. It was for the younger sister of the current househead who had passed away in early childhood. It was scheduled to begin at around four in the afternoon; when I arrived thirty minutes early six women, relatives, were busy in the kitchen

preparing the food. As the guests started to arrive, the wife of the house left this work to join her husband to welcome them with formal bows and greetings.

The guests all brought, in addition to the gift money in envelopes tied with yellow and white string, embroidered bags containing uncooked rice, wrapped in *furoshiki* (large cloths). Labelled then with narrow strips of paper bearing the donor's family name, these bags (*tsutsumi*) would be returned later with *omochi*, the small cakes made from a pounded glutinous rice. Upon entering the house, the guests made their way to the main room where the *butsudan*, the Buddhist altar, is kept, and in front of which they folded their hands together, wrapping a string of rosary beads around them, and bowed their head in prayer. Sitting on small cushions on the *tatami*, we smoked cigarettes, drank tea, and waited, until the incense at the altar was lit and the priest began to chant sutras.

This went on for forty five minutes. Relief came with a brief intermission, as women served tea. The assembled guests then began to chant sutras, reading them from small books passed out to each. The priest concluded the religious portion of the ceremony with a brief sermon, touching on basic Buddhist principles as well as making some comments on current affairs. He was followed by the the head of the household who, as soon as dinner was served, thanked everyone for coming, and took the opportunity to announce the personal news that he was soon to make a career change. As a sort of

"final send off" this fiftieth memorial service was perhaps less somber than most. The *butsudan* was decorated with flowers in colorful, lively fashion, and the dinner that followed the service was light-hearted, buoyed by open conversation and no small amount of drinking.

Beyond the explicit exemptions to the rules of the agreement, the biggest loophole, curiously, is the omission of any stated limits to the size of cash gifts. These of course vary according to the occasion and to the nature and depth of the relationship between donor and recipient, the basic rule being the closer the blood tie the larger the gift. How much one gives is of course also subject to common sense and to ideas of what is conventional, as outlined in etiquette books and other purported repositories of received wisdom. But perhaps the greatest determinant of the size of a gift are prior exchanges, as one aims to match the amount one received in similar situations.

To this end, households keep written logs of what they receive. This takes place rather publicly, as I was able to witness for myself at a ceremony marking an engagement. With an elder cousin of the household head presiding, a small table was set up just off the main room, where the names of guests and the amount of their gifts were noted on large sheets of rice paper in traditional ink and brush. The keeping of such records adds a touch of gravity to the proceedings, while serving as a kind of map of a household's

relations with other households and a guide to future exchanges.

These records (actually, "notes" or "memoes," *hikae*,) bear the date and the name of the recipient on the cover, and first list the guests invited, arranged according to origin. Those from the hamlet are grouped together, while guests from places outside the hamlet, relatives included, are listed separately. This is followed by a list of guests who actually attended, and the gifts they have brought. In the case of the record of the betrothal ceremony (*yuinô-kô*), these included cash gifts of ¥3,000, ¥5,000, and ¥10,000, as well as bottles of sake and between one and three *sho* of rice (one *sho* is equal to 0.477 U.S. gallon, or 1.8 liter). After listing invitees to the planned wedding, the record adds notes on the families of the engaged couple: the names of father and grandfather, of the natal households of mother and grandmother, and of junior branch households (*bunke*). It concludes with the name and a business-card description of the go-between (*nakôdo*), and finally, a list of expenses including the cost of the food and drink for the celebratory dinner (¥1,600,000), the fiancée's kimono (¥1,550,000), and the thank-you gift to the go-between (¥110,000).

These records fail to note, however, the gifts the prospective groom brought. At the center of these was a diamond engagement ring, complete with certificate of appraised value, arranged on red cloth with mainly symbolic gifts at the *tokonoma*, an alcove area of the main room where

scrolls and such are kept. Unpacked prior to the ceremony from cardboard cases, these gifts represented things associated with prosperity and longevity, such as the pine tree, as well as token amounts of food like dried squid which seem to take forever to consume. Despite their prominent appearance at the ceremony, and the satisfaction of the fiancée's father as to their appropriateness, it is perhaps a measure of the almost tangential nature of the betrothed couple themselves to the proceedings that these gifts fail to make the written record. In fact, aside from a few formal words of greeting made prior to the dinner and as the go-between departed, the couple spent most of their time in a separate wing of the house, having a separate, more relaxed party with siblings and cousins.

We should therefore look at these documents with at least some measure of skepticism as to their completeness. This same household, in preparation for the ceremony, brought out an old memo taken twenty five years ago at the wedding of the younger sister of the head of the household. More than a record of the past, it served as a general template for the present occasion. The record of the present will likewise help in the future to guide the preparation and conduct of a ceremony, in addition to being a souvenir of a happy past.

Despite the existence of hamlet "contracts" and the like, most of these types of ceremonies remain open to interpretation in performance, made up as they go along in a sense. This is evident in the confusion that accompanies most

local festivals. But this confusion is also generated in part by conflicting interests and ideologies. Each event marks if not the ascendance of one over another, then at least the negotiation of the terms of engagement.

4. Religion and Social Worth

The content of religious belief, and the local institutions of temple and shrine, are attendant rather than primary players in the definition of household status. Priests themselves, like farmers, are part-time practitioners, employed during regular working hours as a public school teacher or, in the case of one village priest, owner of an electronic goods store in town where he maintains his main residence. Incidentally, household registration at a temple is not necessarily tied with village residence; due to administrative reorganizations of hamlets and villages in the early part of the century, some temples were moved or consolidated, and left that way after the end of World War II when religion, formerly an arm of the fascist Japanese state, was severed from government control, save for the retention of the emperor as symbolic representative of the nation and its history.

Regular participation at temple-sponsored events does not guarantee high standing for a household in the community, either as a means for obtaining status or as a marker of achieved distinction. Whereas religion was formerly equated with literacy -- the writing skills of local priests lending

them power prestige, as we have seen in the chapter on the history of rural society -- today's educated retiree is more likely to subscribe to a national religious organization which will provide copies of sutras and exegetic materials by mail, to be studied and practiced in the privacy of one's home. For many of the older women especially, their religious devotions are consist of a solitary visit to offer a prayer at a temple dedicated to a special diety such as *Kannon*, the god(dess) of mercy (deities are supposed to be sexless, but nearly all representations of the *Kannon-sama*, as she is respectfully referred to, have a feminine cast to them).

One very public marker of status, however, is the donations households make to local temples and shrines for their building and refurbishment. Being made of wood, they require frequent maintenance; in recognition of contributions, names of contributors are often inscribed on, say, the backs of ceramic tiles replacing an old roof. Larger donations are memorialized more visibly by long, narrow wooden plaques that line the upper reaches of the walls inside the temple, noting the name of the household, and what its donation was used to purchase -- incense burners, lamps, the public address system -- rather than the amount of the donation itself.

As is true of virtually everywhere in Japan, there are a number of festivals through the year that are organized at both the hamlet and township level. In this area of Shiga prefecture, the festival receiving the greatest attention is

the *okonai* which celebrates the advent of spring. Depending on the hamlet, they are held from January through March. There is also variation from hamlet to hamlet as to how these *okonai* are staged, but a common feature is the offering of a very large (2-3 feet in diameter), round cake made of pounded glutinous rice cake at the local Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple. This cake is called *kagami-mochi*, literally "mirror-rice cake," presumably deriving the name from its shape. While originally blending Shinto and Buddhist elements, the festival underwent differentiation and two types came to be identified, one as shrine (*miya*) *okonai* and the other as temple (*tera*) *okonai*, though the content of both continuously maintained a folk character, particularly in the supplication of the gods and spirits for a good harvest.

There is one hamlet which puts on a fairly elaborate festival each year that draws tourists (as well as folklorists and ethnographers) from Kyoto; most, however, are much quieter affairs. The management of these festival rotates among hamlet households from year to year, and while for the more famous *okonai* a measure of prestige is attached to being appointed *tôya*, or ritual offerant, in most hamlets households serve their year as *tôya* as they do in other formal positions in the hamlet: responsibly, observing a duty which must not be shirked, but without expectation of any significant benefit.

One other point that can be added here with regard to religion concerns the household buddhist altar, or *butsudan*.

These are kept in the main household of a family, usually inherited along with the house and house headship, and thus serve as a symbol of *ie* authority. An important function of the altar is housing the spirits and memorial tablets of the dead, family ancestors as well as the more recently deceased. Ancestors are drawn from the line of househead successors and their wives; thus non-successors, Hamabata (1990:74) has noted, tend to fade from *ie* memory and join the ranks of spiritual "outsiders." These unconnected and therefore unhappy spirits visit misfortune upon the living and are "generally suspect" (Plath 1964:304). It is perhaps not a far stretch of the imagination to see in these beliefs an acknowledgement of the inherent potential for conflict within the *ie* generally.

5. The Decline of Communality

In the debate over the "natural village community," much has been written about how shared interests have fostered a form of solidarity balancing communality and cooperation -- or perhaps, to put it better, accomodation. "As long as both the the pursuit of private profit was *possible* within the village framework and the village was *necessary* for that pursuit," claimed Tamaki in 1974 (Kelly 1982:44) "the village would remain a viable and essential unit of irrigation organization." Indeed, this could easily be extended to encompass the whole range of economic and political functions organized by the village. In any case, it has been long

predicted that as the sense of common welfare in irrigation as well as other matters shrank, so too would village function and solidarity. With the pressure to develop housing in many areas, land now has value as real estate, as simply land, not on account of being part of an irrigation network and therefore agriculturally productive. Realizing private profit now means having to go outside the framework of the village.

The decline in village solidarity has been viewed in largely benign terms. There is still a host of committees and offices to maintain control over communal affairs which range from such important matters as levying village taxes based on household income, to the more innocuous tasks of organizing a yearly festival, running the local book-lending service, or making fire-watch rounds in the evenings. There are enough of these jobs to engage virtually all village households, and with their regular rotation no household is able to "escape" fulfilling some role. The greater the position of leadership, the stronger is the desire to escape serving; the responsibilities are not offset by perquisites, and in fact are likely to cost the designated household some expense, particularly when the head of the household is chosen to be section chief (*ku-chō*). This hardship is recognized by the village as a valid excuse for a household experiencing some sort of crisis to miss its turn in the rotation.

This picture of decline in village solidarity and sense of communal interest only indirectly addresses the issue of

conflict in rural society, however. The mechanisms for controlling conflict (mostly sanctions, of which the most severe is expulsion from the village, or *mura-hachibu*) are well documented, as are the inter-village conflicts which take place openly and sometimes violently over issues such as water rights, conflicts which in the paradigm of the natural village community are seen as a means of reinforcing the internal solidarity of a village. Conflicts, or "problems" in rural area thus tend to be linked with village problems. This is especially pertinent to the discrimination of outcaste groups, the former untouchables who were stigmatized by their "unclean" occupations as tanners and butchers and legally set apart as such until the latter part of the nineteenth century. While there are laws now protecting descendants of these former caste groups from discrimination, villages with such an outcaste background (or *dowa* districts) are well-known in local circles, and identification with them handicaps their residents in the search for jobs and the pursuit of greater opportunity, as long as they stay in the area.³ In the public discourse on problems of crime and morals, the tendency is thus to ghetto-ize them, and address them only in terms of set geographical boundaries.

There is much less written, however, about conflicts within villages. As Yoshida has noted on the suppression of open expression of conflict: "Tensions lie below the surface, feelings run deep, grudges persist, but the surface of relations is managed to exhibit harmony" (Yoshida 1984:96-

97). One indirect measure of social disintegration in rural areas which has been used by sociologists has been rates of suicide; in Kurosu's study published in 1991, comparing rates from 47 prefectures over twenty years, found rural rates of suicide not only exceed urban rates, but have increased over time. Without addressing the causes of suicide that Kurosu considers in his paper, it is interesting to note the contrast with Western nations, which tend to have higher suicide rates in urban areas. Assuming a link between social disintegration and propensity to suicide, Kurosu identifies rural areas in Japan as greater trouble areas for social problems in the future (Kurosu 1991:615).

Suicide, however, is an intensely individual expression of conflict. Only rarely do conflicts within villages bubble over, but when they do, they seem to change the face of a village irrevocably. Robert Smith, in his book Kurusu (Smith 1978), a village study spanning some twenty five years, has provided a valuable case study of the open expression of hostilities within a village, an examination of the reasons behind them, and how the community coped in the aftermath.

The incident revolved around a corporation's bid to purchase land to build a factory for processing broiler-chickens -- in essence, a slaughterhouse. It seems incredible, given the extreme cultural distaste for this, that alarm bells did not sound immediately, but an appointed group of village representatives, in concert with the local Land Commission, gave their approval to the project and were

in the midst of negotiating the terms of the agreement with the corporation when a group of village families demanded that the project and all contracts be cancelled.

What apparently caused tempers to really flare was the very public way these families voiced their opposition. They organized a petition drive, and presented it to the town office, staging a protest complete with placards. The press were called to cover the protest and publicize it, while a delegation from this opposition group was dispatched to the prefectural government office to alert the district assemblymen, which required the town office to send their own man down to the governor to present their side of the story (Smith 1978:230-232).

As far as the latent hostilities that might have precipitated the dispute are concerned, Smith learned that the fight was basically between families who had been prewar landlords, and former tenants allied with newly emerging local entrepreneurs. As he notes, there is a certain reversal of roles here, as it is usually the allegedly conservative former landlords who would be expected to oppose rural industrial development, and those households with little stake in farming to favor the promotion of local industry. The land up for sale, however, belonged to these former landlords; by blocking the deal, their former tenants were applying the coup de grâce of the postwar decline and ruin for their former social superiors (Smith 1978:235).

Yet Smith is careful not to reduce the conflict to such formulaic determination. Recognizing that class interests exist, but are normally subordinated to the interests of the village, he reiterates the line of argument that we have already noted about village as a natural unit. Had some consensus been established before negotiating with the corporation, the deal might have gone through; it was the high-handed way the former landlords went about the sale that probably infuriated opponents, as much as or even more than the pollution that the factory was alleged to produce if built. The fact that a successful protest was staged underscores that the nature of class relations in the countryside are not as repressive as has been claimed.

In fact, when questioned, the villagers themselves blamed the incident on two recent social developments in the village, though it is unclear if they have any relation to the economic gains and prosperity of the past couple of decades. The first factor pointed to is the small number of senior males in the village, who could be relied on to diffuse tensions before they reached the stage of open confrontation. The second, offered by some of the older men and women, is that there are too many adopted husbands. These outsiders, it is maintained, know little about local customs, have little feeling for the place, and are primarily driven by considerations of money rather than village harmony. Without the hand of older local men to restrain them, they "pushed things to lethal extremes" (Smith 1978:240).

Smith acknowledges that the villagers are correct to assume the lion's share of responsibility -- for their individual failings so to speak -- for the fiasco that two years later was only beginning to be resolved by compromises on both sides, but prefers to shift the focus to the "larger forces and systemic threats" to the communal order emanating outside its borders. This analytic problem of how to frame conflicts and how the ground continually shifts is one that also resists simple explanation of community and status in Karakawa as well.

At one level a group of so-called elite households takes on the mantle of "community," as an ill-defined collection of neighbors with whom one cooperates in a range of activities of which rituals such as marriage play only a restricted part. These activities form the framework for community by organizing and providing services for the common good. In this connection the practical aspects of local government come most readily to mind: the agricultural co-ops, the women's association, the social work committee, or the children's club. But all of these organizations are vertically integrated, as are their counterparts in other hamlets, with a town bureaucracy that ultimately directs them. The contractualist, universalistic nature of participation also marks the obligatory rotation of duties to cut grass alongside the road, clean irrigation canals, or conduct the firewatch at night, and the system of rules and fines if they are not performed.

But at another level the "community" camouflages a system which preserves the base of a group's local power. As the case of lending and borrowing land between households demonstrates, even though there may be some dispute over who makes out better in the arrangement, the overall effect is still the protection, albeit provisional, of landowner's interests vis-à-vis the state and local non-landholders. Despite democratization since the end of the Second World War there thus remains a status system by which the clout of households is in large part measured according to landed property. The ranking of households is based not simply on how much one holds, but also on the land's history -- when was it acquired, from whom, under what circumstances, and how it has been managed -- which, as we have seen depends on the nature of the household's relation, through its head, with other households, in a whole range of practical and symbolic contexts. Land lending, borrowing, and their attached customary rights and obligations cannot help but play an important role in the operation of this system, and vice versa. With rice as rent, rather than money, one can measure the importance of legacies over rights, and how profound is the endeavor to anchor relationships in history conceived both as tradition and as a particular past.

6. Moving Forward

It is an interesting phenomenon that in Japan villages with tightly-organized hierarchical relations -- where the social structure is dominated by economic- and/or kinship-based patron-client relations -- shifts in status occur relatively less than in villages that are putatively more egalitarian in character. On this basis, Yoshida has argued that in villages where no single structure or relationships dominates⁴ there is a greater potential for structural tension and that, because of cross-cutting loyalties and obligations, these egalitarian villages are "more susceptible to interpersonal and intergroup friction and conflict" (Yoshida 1984:102). With the postwar decline of landlordism and the greater emphasis placed on salary income in determining status, there would seem to be some kind of association between status ambiguity and growing status anxiety for Japan's mass middle class.

The dynamics of class and status are also difficult to pin down because while they ultimately pertain to the definition and the function of groups, class positions and status roles are borne and enacted by individuals (Deere 1990:15). For this reason, an understanding of the determinants of status, along with the lines of cleavage and conflicts that follow, would profit from being complemented by narratives that situate status in the views and acts of an individual actor, a "self" in the process of realizing a

socially-recognized identity. At the same time, these narratives should not totalize but rather problematize.

I have in mind here an adaptation of Plath's (1980) observation that rhetorics of character and maturity may in some sense guide the lives of people, but experience centers on the dislocation between "our culture's ideal pathways and the actual paths we are traveling" (Plath 1980:13). If human consciousness, through these dislocations, is a "compound resultant of the flow of time through persons" (Plath 1980:13) as we live and change (as do those around us), then perhaps through more personalized narratives we might better appreciate how these dislocations are generated by -- and always situated in -- particular cultural and historical conjunctures.

In the next chapter I will try to draw from the arguments of this and previous chapters to depict social practice in ways which incorporate but are not, I hope, confined by psychological or structural-functional explanations. While one might make persuasive cases for each constituent element -- say, the process of creating a self through decision making and action, or the limits and imperatives of bureaucracy and a developing wage economy -- it seems to me that together they do not create a meaningful picture until one adds the ambiguity and openness of social process, in much the same way that negative space contributes to the impression of form in a painting, or how rests sharpen the rhythmic edges of a musical phrase. To borrow from

Alexander Pope, if the part contains the whole, then we must look through the strong connections of the economic frame to the nice dependencies of interest and emotion, to the culture of our lives and what happens when intentions become acts, with their own string of consequences. Like the villagers of Kurusu, I look to the adopted son-in-law as a central figure in a narrative, at a turning point where his changing identity and the social relations constitutive of self are provisionally negotiated.

Notes

¹The terms *uchi* and *ie* overlap to a degree, as when *uchi* refers to "my house" or "my household," but *uchi* can also be used to refer to "I" or "me" alone, or "my group" ("we of X Company") (see Bachnik 1982).

²Befu has summarized the religious origins of gift-giving and how gift-giving practices in rural Japan are embedded in the traditional social structure (Befu 1986), particularly in the reciprocation of gifts between households, the basic social institution in rural Japan as he describes it. Befu also underscores the importance of *giri*, the moral obligation to perform one's duties, such as giving a gift when custom demands, noting "so important is the concept of *giri* in gift-giving that many rural Japanese interpret *giri* to mean strict observance of the etiquette of gift-giving" (Befu 1986:162).

³The population living in *dowa* districts nationally is 2,010,230; in Shiga prefecture it is 38,392, with 65 districts and a total of 10,395 households (Office for Regional Improvement, Management and Coordination Agency 1993:6-7).

⁴Japanese villages have been divided into two types: a "north-eastern", "*dôzoku*", or "underdeveloped" type characterized by a simple occupational structure and wide economic stratification, versus a "south-western", "*kô* and *kumi*", "developed" type of village characterized by greater

occupational opportunities, part-time farming, and mobility between economic strata. As Fukutake has observed, the geographic division is a generalization and exceptions abound (Fukutake 1967:138-143).

Chapter Seven

ADOPTING A SON-IN-LAW: FAMILY PROPERTY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN ACTION

1. Self and Society

Once a staple of ethnographies of "village Japan," studies of the family and household have been largely eclipsed by interest in Japan's postwar industrialization and urbanization, until recently. To provide a background to this economic development, historical demographers have compiled a body of data which focuses on the form and function of the household as an economic unit, with striking similarities to the history of the family in Western Europe (Wolf and Hanley 1985). Another set of studies, which also takes family dynamics as a key component, stresses instead the distinctness of the Japanese *ie*, or stem family, with regard to the psycho-social development of the individual in particular, and are outlined below. The object of this

chapter is to bring these two approaches together, in an analysis which links productive and reproductive processes within domestic groups to the on-going reconstitution of historically-rooted ties between them. To do so requires drawing on arguments that have been presented in previous chapters, to provide the general frame for action, as well as details of time and place which make every situation different and, for that reason perhaps, meaningful.

As Kelly observes in his review article (Kelly 1991), two basic theoretical approaches characterize ethnological writing on the *ie*. The first is concerned with the *ie* as a kinship unit and is dominated by questions revolving around lineality -- is it reckoned patrilineally or bilaterally? -- and the formation of descent groups based on *ie* branching into main and junior households. While the importance and relatively high frequency of adoption and inclusion of non-kin in the *ie* have long been recognized, these aspects of *ie* function and reproduction have slowly been turning attention away from kinship and blood ties to a renewed interest in the *ie* as a corporate residential group first, defined by its control over capital and other resources. A second school of thought has now taken as its central problem how this control over resources, held mainly by the head of the household, is passed from one generation to the next, and how, through a process of "positional succession," this shapes relations within the family and household in general.

Recent studies have thus increased our understanding of the logic of family and household in Japan which, as an ideology, still constitutes a major element of discourses on self-identity. As Kondo demonstrates in her ethnography of a small, family-owned Tokyo factory (Kondo 1990), the deployment of familial idioms in working contexts does not make for a simple accommodation of power and ideology, but may also subvert them by creating dissonances, when discourses open into other areas such as gender. The identification of part-time women workers with maternal roles, for example, reinforces their marginalization in the company as temporary workers, but also empowers them in their relations with the younger male artisans and in the day-to-day management of work on the shop floor.

Also working from the perspective of individual psychology, Lebra looks to the uses of economic interest and self-pride as key motives for the "promiscuous" incidence of successor-adoption among the traditional elite of Japan. By examining how lineal kinship has been perceived as a "ruleless flow of blood" (Lebra 1989), her article outlines how a symbolic system may be reinterpreted in light of real-life exigencies and the kinds of responses to them. Lebra stresses the importance of flexibility in the responses of her elite informants, how critical this is in order to perpetuate the fortunes of individual houses. These open strategies of heirship are also seen as indirectly assisting the preservation of the status of the elite as a group, and

status system in general. This has not been examined in detail, however, since recent work (Lebra's, also Bachnik 1983 and Kondo 1990) has, on account of its psychological bent, tended to focus on individuals, on their interests and actions. Unlike earlier work, which through kinship studies looked to relations outside the *ie* -- to relations with other households in the rural community or urban neighborhood -- today's discussions of group "insideness vs. outsideness" revolve mainly around issues of identity and the relational placement of the "self."

In order to begin to understand the specific mechanisms underlying the reproduction of the elite as a group, and the status system in Japan, we cannot help but return to a paradigm which has inter-*ie* ties as a first priority. This is not to argue, however, that we should dispense with the sophisticated insights of the post-structural analyses that have been emerging in the last few years. In fact, we must maintain a similar sensitivity to the contradictions and tensions that arise when the logic of family and household is translated into the choices of individuals. But we must also set these against an understanding of larger contexts of political economy. Even though they are continually manipulated by individual households, relations between households, and their relations with the state, possess a separate historical dynamic and direction. And these reciprocally provide an additional consideration for our

studies of the development, and reproduction, of the family and household in Japan.

2. The Adopted Son-in-Law in Rural Japan

The *muko-yōshi* is not the ordinary head of the *ie*, the Japanese family/household, but neither is he so rare. With the patriarchal stem family as a model, the ideal was always to have the oldest son inherit title to the house and the land, and succeed to the position of househead. These expectations were frustrated, of course, in cases when marriages simply did not produce any sons, or when the sons were regarded as unfit for the duties of the office. A number of different strategies have thus developed over time for recruiting a successor, such as adopting a child of a relative, an adult in-marrying male, or even a wholly unrelated married couple when a house was totally childless and the resident househead and wife were too old to bring up a prospective heir themselves.

Deviations from supposed rules have been dutifully noted by Japanists through the years; Nakane, for instance, in her 1967 study, came across a number of villages where nearly one-third of housheads were adopted sons or adopted sons-in-law. Yet it is only fairly recently that they have been looked to as more than examples of exigency in an otherwise smooth process of family line continuation. Studies of adoption in Japanese history are now causing many in the field to turn away from an exclusive concern with kinship,

and to refocus on the diversity of strategies of successor recruitment -- on the flexibility inherent in the Japanese household and the large role this "looseness" plays in preserving both individual household enterprises and the *ie* system.

The problems of choosing and holding on to an heir seem to be particularly acute in rural areas. The common perception is that, in addition to all the problems of picking someone competent to head the household, but as close to the paternal bloodline as possible, there is also the burdensome image of a dead-end life in the sticks. This image not only reduces the pool of young men willing to remain, but also the number of women interested in marrying them. This dearth of wives for successors is somewhat sensationalized in the press, which has recently picked up on sorry stories of mail-order brides from Southeast Asia. On the lighter side, the media also cover the occasional publicity caravan of men on tractors and their pilgrimage to the heart of Tokyo, extolling the virtues of country living and advertising for brides. A somewhat more poignant image I saw on television came from a village in northern Japan where, every New Year's Eve, unmarried men make their way to the local temple and pray for wives, by hugging the temple's cold, massive pillars for hours.

Young women as much as men see rural life as devoid of interest and opportunity, but it is all the more difficult for them, as it is they who have to adjust to the "ways of

the house" when they marry and move to the groom's home. As a new member of the household, the status of the young bride is low. Even her prospective capacity to produce a future heir is lightly regarded, if the old expression "the womb is a borrowed thing" (*hara-wa karimono*) is any indication. But as time goes by and as she takes over the day-to-day management of domestic affairs, she can expect to attain an importance -- if not power -- within the household nearly equal to her husband's. It might be noted, too, that her husband, the designated successor, goes through a similar process. Even though marriage usually marks the formal transference of household headship to the heir, in many cases the retiring househead retains a large measure of influence. This stems as much from habit as it does from the fact that the family bank accounts often remain in the name of the retired head, and under his care.

It has been suggested that the position of the *muko-yōshi*, or *iri-muko* (literally, the "entering son-in-law") who marries into a family and takes that family's name, is structurally equivalent to the position of a new bride (Kondo 1990:125). He is also a new member to the household, and, as an outsider, he is of lesser status than an actual son or a blood relative. I had an opportunity to see this structural equivalence very strongly expressed, when a *muko-yōshi* was welcomed to the village of his bride-to-be, just prior to the marriage ceremony.

3. A Village Welcome

It was around eight in the morning when my Japanese tutor called me, asking me if I were interested in seeing a wedding in his village. When I arrived about thirty minutes later, I learned I was not actually invited to the ceremony, which was to take place across the street at a relative's house. But there were many other interesting things to see, I was told, such as the delivery of the groom's gifts, and the formal welcome they would give him to the village.

The marriage was one of an eldest daughter taking a husband who, subsequently, would be adopted into her household. His scheduled arrival at noon was preceded by the delivery of his gifts to the bride's family, which included furniture brought by a special truck with glass walls, so that neighbors could inspect the contents as it drove through the streets. When I arrived, the truck had already been unloaded, its contents carried in on bamboo poles which were just then being smashed. This was to ritually thwart any circumstance that might cause their services to be called for again, such as a divorce, from arising in the future. Large sacks of rice, traditionally enough for a household's one-year needs, also made up part of the "bride-price" on display, but the gift garnering the most attention was parked in the driveway: a sporty white compact car, tied in red and white ribbons and a bow.

These gifts of course express the groom's respect for his soon-to-be in-laws, but their lavishness in this case

also contests the image of the adopted son-in-law as, typically, a non-inheriting younger brother without many better prospects. Despite the fairly common occurrence of this practice, a certain distaste has always been associated with it in the minds of men. One old adage suggests that having just three bowls of rice and his pride should keep a man from going out as an adopted son-in-law. In my hamlet survey, I found out that the older of heads of households who were *muko-yôshi* usually overlooked identifying themselves as such in their responses, while younger ones did not. With this as background, the grand gifts of this particular *muko-yôshi* seemed to make a certain claim to status and, perhaps, independence.

In any case, the crowd which gathered in front of the house to await the groom's arrival was fairly impressed. The word was that he would be coming directly to the house by taxi, but a group of men, older, established heads of households, seemed to decide on their own that he should be greeted at the east gate of the hamlet. I must note here that, prior to the elaborate Western-style wedding/reception held in specially rented halls, a small and relatively private Shintô marriage ceremony is held at the groom's home. And in this village, the custom is to greet the in-marrying woman at the east gate of the hamlet and escort her to her new home.

So a contingent was led to the east gate, traditionally regarded as the entrance to the hamlet, and they waited,

until a taxi, after almost driving past, pulled up. A surprised-looking bridegroom and go-between emerged in their formal black attire. The welcome committee, just then in the process of opening their cans of beers, was also caught off guard. After listening to what the representatives of the group had in mind, the go-between tried to beg-off and proceed directly to the house, as had apparently been planned in advance. The groom stood off to the side, silent. The waiting men, however, insisted.

With a set expression, the groom and go-between then led the procession of men to the house. They walked down the middle of the main road, and exchanged formal greetings with the grandmothers and children who watched the goings-on from the gates in front of their homes. The men who trailed behind were not pleased by the rapid pace, and kept shouting good-naturedly to those in front to slow down. The procession in fact came to a halt a few times, while the men serenaded the groom with a celebratory song. When they finally reached the bride's house, the groom and go-between quietly slipped inside and disappeared from public view until after the ceremony, when the newlywed couple in dress kimono departed for their other, more modern celebration of their vows to each other.

4. Family Interest and Emotion

Afterwards, I spoke with various people about the episode. I cannot be sure of how people felt, what was

running through their minds at the time, but it seems clear that a large measure of the young man's exasperation was due to the one-sided way older members of the community took it upon themselves to run things, without taking the wants of the younger people much into account. I do not know if this is a universal trait of relations between generations, touching somehow on a fundamental aspect of human nature. It certainly cropped up enough in conversations I had with people regarding how the shape of their marriage plans, indeed life plans, were overly dominated by the hands of their parents.

Prior to the Second World War, when it was proverbial that fathers were to be feared as much as earthquakes or fires, the atmosphere of strict authoritarianism at home may have helped stem families to rid themselves of non-heirs, who were, in any case, being lured to cities by promises of independence and better opportunities for themselves. By providing for a range of strategies for succession, the openness of the *ie* system allowed, in principle, for greater competition for the position, and thus tension between siblings. But by delaying the actual naming of the successor, and the departure of non-inheriting brothers, however, the househead -- and by extension, the *ie* -- may have also been able to thereby secure a source of labor during a period of economic development when hireable labor was becoming increasingly scarce in the countryside (a point first made for the stem family in Ireland; see Gibbon and Curtin 1978).

The postwar period has seen the growing lure of the city far outstrip anything the countryside has been able to offer. The structure of authority in rural households, while still built around the head of the household, has as a result been loosening over the past decades. The power of the retired head can be more openly contested these days by their successors, who are better educated and better equipped to cope with the new technology that has been introduced into farming. The shift in power also includes the wives of prospective successors, who now can press for a separate residence, at least for the first few years of the marriage. The recent trend of building a new house for the young couple, adjacent to the old house, attests to a growing recognition of their autonomy, and the willingness of the older generation to accommodate them.

The traditional tensions between brothers also seem to be dissipating. With the expectation that an oldest son would be the eventual successor, his younger brothers were trained from early childhood to defer to him. Even after equal inheritance was stipulated by revisions of the Civil Code in 1948, strong emotional pressure to preserve the integrity of the family enterprise and its resources resulted in many younger brothers sacrificing what legal claims they had to a familial legacy. The situation has since reached the opposite end of the spectrum, however. The son who stays on the farm is now looked on as the one making the sacrifice. With a weakening sense of duty to the ancestors to perpetuate the

family line, expectations for a better future almost all begin with leaving the village.

Given this general process, it is not surprising that the position of the adopted son-in-law has been strengthened, at least as far as his relations with his in-laws are concerned. With marriages largely a matter of choice now, rather than arrangement, parents in search of a successor and heir are grateful to find a son-in-law agreeable to adoption. There is, however, the continued perception that the *muko-yôshi*, as an outsider to the household, is handicapped as an authoritarian figure. The problem is also supposed to be his wife who, by remaining with indulgent parents, never experiences the difficulties of life with a mother-in-law, the crucible in which the character of real motherliness in Japan is supposed to be forged. Interestingly, the weak *muko-yôshi* husband and his self-centered, unsympathetic *muko-tori* -- "husband-taker" -- wife seem to cause the most embarrassment, and resentment, among their children (Lebra 1984:35-36).

Charting the changing position of the adopted son-in-law in rural households gives us valuable insight into the tensions that exist between the genders and between the generations within the individual family/household. But by focussing our attention on the process of household reproduction, we tend to confine our vision, in both popular and academic discourse, largely to the choice and actions of men. And we run the risk of missing the element of this

picture which may be the very reason for the practice of adopting a son-in-law: namely, a deeply-rooted ambiguity, even anxiety, over women holding property.

Thirty, even twenty years ago, the rural household as a farming enterprise may have required the work of male head of household in order to survive. Since then, mechanization has reduced both the amount of physical strength and time required, so that farming is overwhelmingly a part-time affair, accounting for only one-fifth of total household income (Nôrin Tôkei Kyôkai 1990:65). Men today are not being adopted for their labor, but to ensure that family property, mainly in the form of land, is not lost.

When a daughter's husband is adopted as the heir and successor, the traditionally subordinate status of women is contested, as it is the husband who is now the "outsider" struggling to adjust and be incorporated into a new home. Nevertheless, the very existence of the practice of adopting a son-in-law also rests on a desire to keep land out of the hands of women, or at least to confine their control of it to special, temporary circumstances. So while disparities of power and tensions may be addressed in one area, they may, simultaneously, be reinforced and silenced in others.

By shifting our attention to family property, we can also link our analyses of the dynamics and tensions within the household to the continuing role of community, and to the reconstitution of relations between households. If I may return, briefly, to the story of the adopted son-in-law and

the welcome given him to the village: The family that planned to adopt the young man as a son-in-law had made every effort to spare him any undue embarrassment. They had resisted the pressure from others to put on the procession and display which, to be fair, may have had only the most benign symbolic overtones to those present. Certainly, there seemed no hint that the treatment, usually reserved for incoming *brides*, reflected at all on his masculinity. Yet the fact that a small group of core household heads were able to successfully promote their own program, and to put the principal parties in their place, so to speak, underscores how some ties binding groups may be contested, while nevertheless contributing to an overall tightening of the grids of mutuality.

5. Of Rice and Men

Looking inward, the adopted son-in-law, as an alternative choice for househead successor, throws into relief the systemic tensions of the *ie*. I would now like to shift our focus and, through the successor's relations with other heads of household in the hamlet, look outward.

When a son-in-law agrees to be adopted, he severs virtually all ties with his natal family and his prior life. Giving up his name, however, may not be as wrenching to his self-identity as we might think, since within the hamlet terms of reference and address are based on *yagô*, or house names. These are derived from the personal name of the *ie*

founder, not the family name, and are passed from generation to generation. For example, if a household was established by one Tanaka Rokubei, Tanaka being the family name, then the current head of the household would be referred to as Rokubei-san, his wife as *Rokubei no okusan*, "the wife of the Rokubei house," and so on.

House names help reduce confusion, because a number of households within a hamlet may share the same family name, for two basic reasons. The first is that commoners were not allowed to have family names until the right was granted to them in the last century. Many ended up choosing the name of a former lord or similarly powerful local family, or a name which reflected their occupation, or the location of their village.

Household branching over time is the other reason for households sharing a family name. Even though the preference is for a single heir, in the case of wealthy-enough households, a portion of its property can be set aside for the establishment of a junior, branch household. The main rationale is economic diversification. A younger brother might be set up with enough capital to start an enterprise of his own, a shop, or maybe brewing soy sauce. The main household, in principle, retains its authority over the branch household in perpetuity, no matter how successful the branch may become or how much the fortunes of the main house may decline.

The branch was obliged to furnish labor to the main household when needed. This has become a non-issue, however, since land holdings have shrunk and mechanization has become so widespread that most farms require only 100 man-days or less a year to maintain. Most of this labor is concentrated during the planting and harvest seasons, when men take advantage of long holiday weekends to crank up the tractors and mini-combines. Tending the crop through the growing season, weeding by hand or by spray, takes only an occasional weekend's work.

As a result, old practices of labor exchange between neighbors have also steadily declined in importance. The obsolescence or professionalization of craft skills -- like roof thatching, carpentry, and others connected with house building -- have reduced communal interdependence in these traditional spheres to symbolic, celebratory exchanges of gifts. Organized joint efforts today are restricted to annual one-day events such as sweeping the temple grounds, or clearing irrigation canals of mud and soda cans. Skipping them is hardly noticed, though a household will be fined the equivalent of a few dollars at the end of the year for its absence.

This trend towards isolation of individual households has, however, not extended to one very important area of relations between households. As outlined in Chapter 5, while a third of all landholders farm their own land exclusively, the other two thirds lend or borrow land with their

neighbors, entrusting the cultivation (wholly, or a particular task) of a portion, or all, of its land to another household. And again, it must be underscored that in return lenders receive only a small share of the rice harvested, about ten to fifteen percent, in the form of hulled but unpolished rice, called *nengu*, a term which, beyond its straightforward translation as "annual ground rent," is nonetheless heavily freighted, as we have seen, with ideological baggage.

Though this rice as rent formerly served as a concrete measure of the subordinate position of the peasant, vis-à-vis powerful outsiders, today it represents a relatively unstructured but nonetheless effective local resistance to the increasing intervention of the state. Since the late seventies, the national government has tried to rationalize the agricultural sector by promoting projects designed to enlarge the scale of individual enterprises. Most of its subsidies have gone towards land reorganization and consolidation: plowing over old field arrangements, combining scattered holdings into larger, single plots, and providing them with a new system of irrigation and better roads for access. And for younger men, as eventual successors, this rationalization lends an air of professionalism to their chosen occupations, serving as a basis for a modern work identity in which they can take pride (Kelly 1986:610).

The initial response of the majority of farmers in the area was positive, but once implemented tensions that had

been simmering began to heat up anew. In order to consolidate scattered holdings into unified plots, households had to exchange land, in different locations but of equal value, with each other. Memories of land reform immediately following the end of World War II were recalled, as were the lingering resentments some landlords had towards their former tenants, and vice versa. A committee was set up to expedite this naturally contentious task of present-day land consolidation. With the subjective nature of judging the value of a plot of land -- how fertile is the soil, how far is the plot from the house, but also how long had it been "in the family" -- it was perhaps inevitable that perfect adjudications were never reached, leaving one or both parties with complaints.

Construction for the project not only reduced the total area of arable by diverting some for roads and waterworks, but it also disturbed the clay bed underlying the topsoil, reducing yields significantly for a number of years afterward. An additional legacy has been debt, in the form of a twenty-year loan repayment schedule to which every land-owning household must contribute. These loans represent only a minor portion of the total cost of the project, the rest being paid by the state by agreement. Nevertheless, this growing debt burden comes precisely at a time when rural labor is aging and farm income shrinking.

Finally, because of technical difficulties of redividing these larger plots, farm households are unable to sell off

small parts of their holding in order to adjust the amount arable to the number of hands available at home. If pressed financially, the only recourse remains to sell out and leave farming altogether. This is still stubbornly resisted, and not only on account of emotional ties to the past. With plots so large, ordinary farm households cannot obtain the cash to pay for them, which depresses their market value. Selling land held in family trust is bad enough, but selling it undervalued is just as bitter a pill to swallow.

Lending and borrowing land doesn't solve much for rural households now. At best, these practices allow for a slightly more efficient use of land and labor, while delaying a final decision on whether to sell out or hold out. Keeping land under cultivation this way enables a lending household to eke out a small benefit, if not a profit, from their holding, until they are again able to resume farming it themselves. For those more committed to farming as an occupation, it assures access to land on easy terms, at least for the present. But the scheme depends on continuing interdependence between rural households.

We have reviewed these unintended consequences of land reorganization and consolidation in order to situate the personal narrative of prior sections (describing the tensions and contradictions experienced by the adopted son-in-law in forging an identity) within the changing nature of social relations in the community. In particular, the object is to relate the agency of an individual social actor with communal

strategies, with the specific processes by which a community recreates itself against the pressures of the state.

As we have already seen, the key to understanding lending and borrowing land in our particular context lies in the fact that the rent is paid in rice, and not in cash. For those who endured the wartime deprivations, security in an uncertain world is very much linked in their minds with a source of food that is self-produced. More importantly, they are also consciously appropriating for themselves part of the state ideology, as this emphasis on food self-sufficiency in fact reaches all the way up to the central government, which insists on it as a point of national security, especially when pressed by foreign producers to liberalize their agricultural markets. Nevertheless, the drive to keep payments in kind stems in large part from the desire of landowners to maintain as much control over production, and appropriation, as they can for themselves.

At the simplest level, rice payments mean that reported yields can be fudged, income understated, and taxes evaded. But staying slightly beyond the reach of the law may not be the principal object. Since lending agreements are verbal, and depend on a trust between households built upon a history of living and working together, they help block the reification of use rights into material equivalents such as cash. And keeping these rights tied to local social relations puts barriers in the way of the state as it continues to try to intervene at the local level and reorganize agricultural

production. Agreements between households to lend and borrow land are separate from the tenant rights recognized by the government. They are fluid, open to negotiation every year as to terms, and there is no legal basis for them to be unilaterally suspended or rendered into any contracted equivalent.

They also influence the dynamics of household development. These arrangements not only simply protect "local" interests from outside intervention, but also serve to create "outsiders" *within* the local community, and the means to exclude them. An example in concrete terms: a sister of a designated heir flouts convention, demands and receives a share of land. But she then has no home in the hamlet, and must commute from elsewhere to farm the land herself, since any expectations or obligations of neighbors to work it continue only at the discretion of the recognized successor, with whom she is now unlikely to be on good relations. These obstacles are not insurmountable, but they are economically hobbling, and point the way to her eventual permanent departure from the village.

The logic is straightforward. Land lending and borrowing can only be arranged through individual heads of household recognized as legitimate by other landowners in the village. Non-successors may inherit land as property, but only the named, single successor of the household inherits a place in the communal grid of use-rights and claims to labor, a grid

which today has land lending and borrowing as its contemporary expression.

6. Customary Sense

My handling of rural households in Japan is parallel to Goody's (1990) recent analysis of kinship and inheritance among the major states of Eurasia. With a similar focus on adoption and strategies of heirship, I have followed his lead in taking issue with historians of the family in Europe who tend to work from the premise that the West is unique -- uniquely successful, that is. Nevertheless, it is well to question any simple relation between economic change and family variables, as Goody cautions, despite what the occurrence of single-heir inheritance and stem-families in both Japan and England might suggest (Goody 1990:136).

Drawing inspiration from E.P. Thompson's (1976) seminal article on grids of inheritance, this chapter has charted a process that has at its heart the historical and logical transformation of the household as a unit of production to a unit of property control, enmeshed in and helping to reproduce larger social relations. The leap from the forests of Berkshire to the paddyfields of Japan may be a far one, but I believe Thompson's agenda of issues -- particularly the recognition that what is transmitted down the generations through inheritance is not simply property in the land but property in the usufruct, "a place within a complex gradation of coincident use-rights" (Thompson 1976:328) -- is well

suited to the system of land lending and borrowing as I have tried to describe it, in the dense reality of social practice.

Paul Valéry once wrote that the past, as a precise idea, has meaning and value only for the man who has a passion for the future. The English yeomen at the turn of the eighteenth century and today's landholders in Japan share similar aspirations to project forward a grid of legacies to preserve their children's status, despite growing debt burdens. The former banked on breaking up the communal bundle by setting shared land-use rights to market through legal mechanisms, supposedly expecting themselves, or their children, to reap the bulk of the windfall. This was not how things turned out. Their Japanese counterparts today pursue the almost opposite strategy, seeking to preserve their system of use-rights within a context of local use and custom. I do not know if the outcome will be any different; more importantly perhaps, neither do they.

If I part ways with Goody and Thompson, it is thus to suggest that not only can we enlarge our vision beyond the completed pre-industrial past, but we must. Once we put aside our insecurities about Culture -- what it is in essence -- we can better appreciate how culture "straddles and conjoins diverse structurings of the social order" (Sider 1986:94). And we can also convey the sense, if not the belief, that culture is rooted in historically specific forms of the social order. Customs, as a bridge to the past, may provide

an important sense of emotional security and intellectual order, but they are also the loci for intentional, forward-looking actions. By highlighting on-going attempts to reconstitute traditional cultural forms in modern contexts, through customs like son-in-law adoption and land lending for rice, this chapter has attempted to underscore the historically-rooted process of locally negotiating differences of power, and the continuing relevance of culture in determining the character, and future, of rural life and society.

Chapter Eight

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VILLAGE CULTURE AND SOCIETY, FROM 1865 TO THE PRESENT

1. "A Community of Equals"?

In the preceding chapter, I attempted to delineate intersections between theory and experience, employing the situated perspective of an individual as a point of entry. Through a narrative that began with an adopted son-in-law, my main goal was to invest the theoretical points of previous chapters regarding, for example, the logic of household production and reproduction, with a sense of the processual and emergent nature of individual and social practice, and in a way that, as Kondo puts it, "enacts" and "embodies" theory (Kondo 1990:24).

An emphasis on experience, however valuable in itself, does not obviate the need to consider broader issues of more

abstract significance, if only to mark these issues as the discursive products of metanarratives and our own position as narrators (Lyotard 1984:34). This dissertation concludes, therefore, with an inquiry into the history of class relations in rural Japan during the early modern period. My intent is not to use history to explain how events involving Japanese landlords and tenants in the 1920s might tell us why present-day farmers act as they do, nor is it to resolve questions surrounding the theoretical survival of feudal or peasant institutions in an advanced capitalist context. Rather, it is my aim to essay an ethnographic problematization of universalist narrative formats such as class struggle and the world-historical survival of peasants.

Of the people who farm in Japan today, only a small minority can be called farmers proper. The rest work small, family-held plots in their spare time, devoting the bulk of their energy to -- and deriving the core of their identities from -- their lives as, say, a nine-to-five office worker, or a housewife/part-timer at a local supermarket, or a retired grandparent, and so on. While the ranks of protesters publicly decrying the latest government moves to liberalize agricultural markets are filled by full-time farmers, part-time farm households, by contrast, seem satisfied with what they have managed to cobble together out of the years. The husband and wives who head these households, along with their children, seemingly enjoy not only the spoils of consumerism, such as satellite television and luxury sedans, but also

opportunities for education and a broad range of contacts and experiences far removed from what seemed available to their peasant ancestors.

As for their relations with their neighbors, Ann Waswo has succinctly characterized the transformation of rural communities in Japan during this century as follows: "Once hierarchically structured, with local power securely in the hands of the wealthiest households, the hamlet is now essentially a community of equals" (Waswo 1988:542). While the latter part of this statement is untrue, of course, in any literal sense, it cannot be denied that the divide which formerly separated the rich from the poor has narrowed. Waswo's argument centers on whether this process of social transformation began fairly recently, as most Western literature on Japan would have it, looking to post-World War II land reform as its principal instrument, or whether we should seek the background to these changes in deeper evolutionary processes set in motion at the end of the nineteenth century.

By considering this revisionist thesis I hope to profit from a historian's sense of how processes of change and their tensions have influenced the nature of social organization at the village level over time. At the same time, I want to question the models of society -- in particular, models of the rural community -- which seem to be shared by historians who otherwise find themselves opposed regarding various points. Unless we consider the present as more than the

culmination of the past, we will never appreciate that to suggest the rural hamlet today is "essentially a community of equals" is to deny both history and culture.

2. Rural Change and the Historical Role of Middling Farmers in Japan

Waswo's revisionist argument¹ is basically this: Land Reform at the end of World War II, which took titles to land away from landlords and put them in the names of the tenants who worked them, merely marked the logical conclusion to the decline of elite power and the diminishing status of large landowners in the countryside, a process which began soon after Japan's feudal government fell in 1868 and an emergent modern nation state began to implement its new bureaucratic program. Although scholars up until 1960 have tended to regard the years between the First and Second World Wars as a period of pauperization for tenants², fomenting unrest and landlord-tenant disputes, Waswo and others do not see these tenants as resisters of oppression, but rather active pursuers of economic rationality.

Through the first decade of modern nationhood, Waswo asserts the rural hamlet in Japan remained unchanged in most ways. It still maintained the same political structure, though this structure answered to new rulers, and retained control over vital communal property: water for irrigation, and forests for fuel, fodder, and green manure. The first policy of the new Meiji government to significantly impact on

the rural hamlet was the Land Tax Reform (announced in its final version in 1873), which abolished seignorial control of land, establishing private property rights as a basis for a tax system which was no longer to be collected in kind, based on the official output of each community, but was instead collected in cash, based in the assessed value of the land and levied on the individual landowner. With the enactment of these new laws, landlordism became legal. Moreover, existing economic differentiation was widened, as customary rights were no longer recognized: those who had pawned their lands during lean times were unable to recover them, and farmers who had enjoyed permanent tenancy rights were reduced to the status of ordinary tenants.

Land ownership served as a principal, though not an exclusive criterion for household status in the hamlet: "lineage," or house history also played an important role. The status system was essentially divided into three strata. At the top were the *gônô*: large landowners who usually held forestland as well, and who could claim a heritage dating back to the hamlet's original settlers. At the bottom were, as might be expected, the landless farmers who rented all the land they cultivated; these *shônô*, or *hinno* households were either immigrants or poor branch households of older, established hamlet families.

The "middling farmers," or *chûnô*, was perhaps the most heterogeneous stratum. It encompassed households that were self-supporting, but not much beyond. There were, however, a

few prosperous *chûnô* farmers who were indistinguishable from their *gônô* neighbor experiencing delining fortunes. By the same token, there were also *chûnô* households that were recently forced, on account of some unexpected economic hardship, to sell off some of their land, though continuing to work it as tenants. These households might be as well off as the landless tenant farmer who ambitiously worked a larger holding. The lines between strata were blurred in economic terms, as they were when "pedigree" was considered as well: old families could very well find themselves, if not poor, among the less affluent then.

It was this middling stratum which was to question the existing distribution of weath and power in the countryside, and to lead tenant movements which agitated to have their grievances addressed locally. The impetus behind these developments originated with two key policies of the new national government, according to Waswo: one was compulsory elementary education, the other, universal military conscription. Both provided fertile ground for farmers to learn practical skills, while fostering new attitudes in an achievement-oriented atmosphere which were to clash with the system of inherited status in the hamlet.

Whether or not their success in the classroom made the sons of middling farmers less inclined to treat their richer but academically less-adept counterparts with respect is arguable, but it does seem clear that these sons of privilege were better schooled and more literate. This was an important

factor later, considering the literary basis of the tenant movement, which organized unions according to written by-laws, and pressed their claims in documentary petitions which argued on readings of law. With regard to the simple issue of dissatisfaction with social inequality, the case of soldiers returning to their rural homes after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), offers unambiguous evidence that tensions were exacerbated. They enjoyed new prestige that was not a function of their economic standing, but they were still expected to act in ways befitting the inferior status they held before leaving to serve in the army. Reports of veterans not only physically assaulting local officials, but also "squandering" money on "drinking parties and 'fancy' clothing" (Waswo 1988:565) caused such concern at regional and prefectural levels that local veterans clubs were organized to get these troublemakers back under some structure of authority.

3. Prewar Tenant Movements

The tenant movement began in the late 1910s in this psychological climate. It was precipitated by concrete grievances, in particular a series of economic shocks which served to solidify the ranks of tenant farmers who, by this time had differentiated into two groups. One group consisted of "commercial" farmers -- the more affluent tenants, or owner/tenants -- who were to lead the movement, while the other group was made up of "subsistence" farmers -- landless

tenants who farmed only enough to support their family's subsistence needs -- who were to serve as the rank and file.

The first of these shocks was rice inspection and the imposition of quality standards for rent rice. It is extremely important to note that rents continued to be paid in rice throughout the period until the end of World War II. For poorer tenant farmers who worked low grade land, this meant that a fair measure of the rice they produced would not be acceptable as rent. As for the more affluent commercial farmers, the newly imposed standards meant that the share of profits from the sale of rice would now, to that extent, be all the greater for their landlords and less for themselves. So while their interests may have differed, their aspirations to have standards, dropped, lowered, or rewarded if met, united poorer and richer farmers.

The second shock, increased rice prices as a result of the World War I economic boom, had similar effects on the two respective groups of farmers. Subsistence farmers who handed over their crop as either rent or tax, and consequently had to buy rice during the year for their own consumption, found themselves pushed to the margins of survival. Commercial farmers again saw economic gains which they felt by rights should go to themselves being reaped by landlords. They were not to experience, it seems, an actual decline in income until the end of the wartime boom, when the price of agricultural products plunged. By the time of this third economic shock, all tenant farmers were agreed that rent

reduction was the only possible relief available to them, as tax burdens were on the increase, and attempts to raise output had reached their limits.

The tenant movement was not in itself directly responsible for the coming shift of power in rural areas. After the organization of tenant unions in the early 1920s, the number of disputes formally taken up with landlords increased dramatically. The unions pursued a strategy of presenting their claims collectively as a unified front, through the exertion of steady pressure rather than violent demonstrations. Within a decade, however, it seemed the movement was on the wane, even though most of the conditions underlying their grievances had not been addressed. Some unions disbanded, while others were abandoned by members; the nature and scope of tenant demands became progressively restricted, contesting not so much the major principles involved but rather the details of compensation (Waswo 1988:585).

Even though the government was sufficiently alarmed by the tenancy movement to install a formal means for resolving disputes, among other programs, to keep rural conflict in check, its main attention was on the development of a separate but related agrarian movement called *nōhonshugi*, which was uniting the countryside outside of state control. With the the onset of the worldwide economic depression in 1930 tenancy disputes had begun to increase again. More important, however, was the growing impression among farmers

that government measures to respond to the crisis favored cities and industry. This drove the same middle farmers who led the tenancy movement to organize local relief efforts at the hamlet level, and to hone an anti-urban and anti-capitalist ideology which extolled rural communal values.

By coopting this movement, the government was able to kill two birds with one stone. Aside from defusing political instability, by turning away from its earlier efforts to undermine "parochialism" at the hamlet level, the government was able to undertake a program of rural rehabilitation, formally recognizing emerging local organizations as the new principal administrative unit, though they remained integrated with a vertically-structured, nationwide bureaucracy. The purview of hamlet cooperatives was redefined to occupy a greater role in rationalizing and improving agricultural production, bypassing older voluntary associations which tended to be more concerned with mediating landlord-tenant relations.

The policy of the government in filling the leadership ranks of these new smaller-scale, agricultural practice associations was to rely on the "mainstay elements" in the rural population: "individuals who earned their livelihoods from farming and whose lives and values were rooted in the communities in which they lived" (Waswo 1988:599). In practice, this meant middle-status farmers, owner-cultivators and owner-tenants. As government policy shifted in favor of farm operators, rather than landowners, the growing political

status of middling farmers came at the expense of the traditional elite, and marked the most significant element of the restructuring of power in the countryside. When the process was completed, the former political structure, which had been dominated by landlords, was pushed aside in favor of hamlet associations which not only took over the direction of agricultural economy, but also tax collection, "local economic development, improvements in sanitation and health, encouragement of frugality, and promotion of patriotism," (Waswo 1988:601). This last function reminds us that it was, nevertheless, a Faustian pact that was being struck between middling farmers and the state. As petty bosses they helped, however naively, to implement, through a system of bureaucratic control, a technology of fascist nationalism that descended from above.

4. Village Harmony and its Hidden Fissures

The quick demise of the tenancy movement, its substitution by popular agrarianism, and the strengthening of militarist factions within the government during the 1930s were without doubt key events in the transformation of Japanese rural society which has taken place over the last century. Because these developments are interwoven so complexly, it has been necessary to go into detail regarding Waswo's argument. A closer examination of each issue would be useful to better judge the validity of the claim, which revisionist historians have recently offered, that

pauperization and powerlessness in the prewar countryside have been overstated. While offering only some basic observations regarding the kinds of data that are used to support their argument, I hope to raise questions regarding the revisionist model of social relations, particularly as they refer to inequality and domination, and the broader context that an ethnographic analysis suggests would be necessary to better appreciate both their dynamics and development.

Waswo insightfully looks to the continued practice of rents in kind as a key factor increasing tensions between landlords and tenants. As we have already outlined above, the grading of rice that constituted rents in kind served as a lightning rod for economic grievances for both poorer and richer tenant cultivators, in conjunction with "shocks" originating in the broader context of markets and the extra-local economy. Both types of tenants felt squeezed, though in the case of the former group it was their basic subsistence and survival that were threatened, while for the latter, merely their profit margin.

For Waswo, the basis and justification for the collusion of these different tenants stemmed not from a sense of dispute with a common enemy or a third party, but rather a sense of being betrayed by fellow members of their community. Landlords, and by extension, the terms and trappings of status inequality, were labeled by tenants to be the true source of disruption in the hamlet. Equally important,

tenants were moved to act "out of duty and love toward our villages and toward our ancestors who settled those villages originally and brought the land under cultivation," in the words of one union activist (Waswo 1988:586).

It is not merely corrolary to her argument regarding the decline of the tenancy movement that this reemphasis on the corporate quality of rural hamlets would undermine attempts to organize farmers in any way that went beyond the boundaries of the local community. By focusing on the logic of households, and the revival of collective activity along albeit new lines of authority, Waswo essentially frames the decline of the rural elite in terms of a revival of the hamlet as the basic unit of rural society, "a gemeinschaft consisting of interdependent households joined in a common purpose....survival in a world of scarcity" (Waswo 1988:545). While the distinction may be more ideological than practical, as a result of the final shock of a worldwide depression, the geographically-based "natural village," or hamlet, closed ranks, breaking away from the landlord-dominated "administrative village," and recovered some of its former autonomy.

Waswo does make clear in her description of economic stratification in the typical rural hamlet that the structure of relations between these "interdependent" households was rooted in inequality. But in detailing the actual form and expression of status differences, in the form of relations between main and branch houses, between patron and client, or

between landlord and tenant, she argues that they nevertheless functioned, at the end of the nineteenth century, to "mute the hardships of subordination and, for the time being at least, to prevent conflict within the hamlet over the distribution of wealth and power" (Waswo 1988:552). According to this model, communal solidarity and a desire for harmony benefitted both the elite, who did not have their position challenged, as well as the low-status households who, as clients, or tenants, or branch households, had some measure of an insurance policy for difficult times, in the assistance and benevolent guidance of their superiors.

The reluctance of farmers to abandon communal harmony as an ideal in the tenancy movement -- they in fact insisted upon it as a prime motivating factor behind their actions -- is often used to illustrate the conservative nature of their demands. I would therefore suggest that it is not unreasonable to assume that the eventual decline of elite power must somehow then be tied to the reinforcement of household interdependence, a putative tradition capable of reigning in the centrifigul forces of economic differentiation. The sum of the process, for all intents and purposes, is therefore the revival of the closed, corporate peasant community (see Wolf 1957). Differentiation is removed once again to be placed outside the borders of the community. Rather than rich and poor households, there are rich and poor hamlets; and by attributing these differences to variables in

geographic location or soil conditions, economic stratification is thus "naturalized."

As we have seen in previous chapters of this dissertation, the notion of the household as a discrete unit which functions to sustain and reproduce itself must be critically reexamined to take into account differing interests within the household. Gender, as a means of internal differentiation, is a principal axis of difference which contradicts the ideology of household unity, along with other axes such as age. As a first step the historical aspect of these dynamics, we should outline what sorts of lines were drawn according to gender, the tensions they created in both private life and public life, and the ways these tensions were addressed and contained, however imperfectly, during the historical period which we have been considering. The picture we derive will not only raise doubts concerning a significant component of Waswo's and other revisionists' history of rural village development, but possibly also provide the means for rethinking the nature of relations between rural households in general.

5. Tensions Within Family and Household

The *ie*, as a stem family, may have originated in Japan as a practice with the samurai, but during the Meiji Period it became entrenched among rural classes as part of an ideology which stressed its foundation in simple peasant virtues. By law, the household was the property-holding unit,

as far as privately-owned land was concerned, and control over property resided with the household head who was usually male and over twenty years of age (Kawamura 1983:3). The formalized centralization of authority within the household was, without doubt, one element of a larger program on the part of the new national government to convert peasants into countrymen and citizens.

Codifying relations within the home did not necessarily reflect the true historical development of the family system in Japan. It is doubtful whether male primogeniture was the norm, or even the ideal, among peasants during the feudal period. Conversely, if I am to argue that the women's customary control over property was severely limited by the new Meiji Civil Code, I must also acknowledge that the literature treating women's property reflects mainly on the practices of the elite, and that this tendency worsens the farther back in the historical record one travels. Thus, even though it has been documented that the "deterioration in women's property rights and their subsequent subjugation to the increasingly male-centered social structure" was already effected by the end of the fifteenth century among the warrior class (Tonomura 1990:594), there may have been compensations in other areas as actually practiced; and in any case, we are less sure about what was happening with peasants and people whose activities were similarly less well documented.

In order to gauge, however imprecisely, the nature of inequality within the family during the early decades of the Meiji period, we can turn to an issue which figures in the arguments of both the "pauperization-revolution" theorists and the revisionist proponents (like Smethurst and Waswo) of a "middle-farmer-commercialization" analysis of tenancy and differentiation in pre-war Japan: *kôjo*, or "factory girls." The fact that a head of a household could "contract" to have a daughter employed at a textile mill and receive advance payment or loans against her future wages testifies to the restrictions placed even on those daughters who lived away from home. Paying back advance-loans made to their families prevented them from leaving before the contracted term had expired; they were, regardless of working conditions, in effect bound them to their employers. Despite the prospect of hard work, long hours, possible illness or sexual harassment, many young rural women were reportedly eager to volunteer for these arrangements (Tsurumi 1990:61) to help alleviate, and perhaps escape, poverty at home.

Some women, in fact, considered working in factories and living in dormitories an improvement over their former rural existence. There are, of course, a host of problems in measuring the comparative brutality of each. Tsurumi devotes a chapter to a preliminary exploration of the issues: her conclusion is that work in thread factories may have been less arduous than agricultural work and provided slightly better opportunities for education for young women, but there

was less flexibility, variety, or control over work routines in the mills, and they were at greater risk to be exposed to epidemic and non-epidemic diseases, and to be maimed and killed in accidents (Tsurumi 1990: 161-173).

It may be an overstatement to say that without the remittance home of their wages, the families of factory girls would have starved. But it seems to me equally problematical to argue that sending young women and "children to work in cotton mills and silk filatures should not be interpreted as moves taken out of desperation; rather, we should realize that tenants perceived of these jobs as opportunities, as new and welcome ways of climbing further out of poverty" (Smethurst 1986:22). Granted, some women saw in factory work if not better lives for themselves, then at least a way to help their struggling families. Even by 1935, when stories about the degradation in the workplace were well known to rural women, ethnographers found them somewhat ambivalent but still attracted by visions of city splendor and new friends (Smith and Wiswell 1982: xx, 139-143). But one might argue that their sense of relative deprivation stemmed as much from a lack of autonomy at home as much as from depressed standards of living. In any case, depersonalizing the human sacrifice, to reduce it to the economic logic of an entrepreneurial tenant household, conceals the unequal burdens assumed by different members of a family/household as a result of these decisions, and their ultimate roots in the

subordinate role of women in the structure of familial authority and decision making.

6. Differentiation Within the "Mass Middle"

Dismantling the image of the household as a unitary set of interests, we have seen that inequality is not necessarily restricted to relations between households, to polarities of rich and poor. Similarly, it is likely that the harmony and equality that seem to characterize middling farmers as a political and economic bloc have more than a few cracks behind the facade.

Historians, in describing the nature of landlord-tenant relations, have tended to promote an image of the absentee landlord draining capital from the countryside. While there was a discernible increase in absentee landlordism during the late Meiji and Taisho (i.e., during the early decades of the twentieth century), it is important to note that their holdings still accounted for only 16.6% of paddy and 4.5% of dryfield, based on a survey of nine villages throughout the country. The first nationwide government survey in 1941 calculated a figure of 15% of all arable being owned by non-residents, with 88% being farmed by tenants. Another interesting figure from this latter survey is that tenanted land owned by absentee landlords accounted for 30% of all tenanted land (Waswo 1977:86-7).

Looked at from a different perspective, these figures seem to indicate that a majority of tenanted land belonged to

resident landlords who, moreover, cultivated some land themselves. While there undoubtedly were differences from village to village and hamlet to hamlet, these owner/landlords must have constituted a significant group, yet they are often subsumed in different strata according to the size of their holdings: smaller landholders with middling farmers, larger ones with the capitalist landlord class.

It would be interesting to know how many of these smaller landlords supported their tenant neighbors in disputes with absentee landlords. There is, however, ample indication that their relations with them as landlords were different from those who lived elsewhere. Resident landlords, for example, used oral agreements, while absentee landlords relied on written contracts (Smethurst 1986:302). Most significant, perhaps, was that resident landlords charged higher rents than absentee landlords, the difference being about 10% (Smethurst 1986:308).

Whether or not this was because absentee landlords were softer touches, more inclined to concede to demands under pressure as Waswo and Smethurst assert, is a point which deserves consideration. Nevertheless, even though it has been established that the elite were in decline, we still have not accounted for the continued strength of smaller owner-landlords. The fact that the rate, if not the absolute amount, of expropriation by these local landlords was actually higher suggests at the very least that, if village harmony was in some sense maintained, we must reexamine the

historical process that had reestablished a moral economy for an emerging political one, and indeed what kinds of relations were entailed by this reconstituted moral economy.

There are, of course a number of other theoretical and methodological issues that have been raised in connection with the inter-war emergence of middling farmers in Japan. While I am wary of delving too deeply into a controversy that has occasioned hard words, it is worth pointing out that critics of Smethurst and his focus on the middle stratum have all faulted him for investing a localized case study with too much national significance (Bix 1987:40, Nakamura 1988:38), claiming that sericulture and textile industries in the area drew labor from the area and contributed to the relative absence of an impoverished tenant class (Lie 1988:46). Yet it is precisely this incorporation into contexts of industrialization, however "exceptional" for Smethurst's village in 1920s Yamanashi Prefecture, that serves as a bridge to our consideration of present-day rural households, which takes their incorporation into a wider political economy for granted as an essential framework for their development and their dynamics.

7. Towards a Reappraisal of Rural Class Dynamics

The period beginning with the formation of Japan's modern constitutional government and ending with World War II furnishes the nearest relevant historical background to the subject of this dissertation, contemporary rural society in

Japan. The literature I have just summarized, however, also provides a vantage point from which to look backwards, to peasant society. While there is still considerable debate as to the extent to which capitalism had replaced feudalism as the organizing principle of Japanese political economy by the late nineteenth century, there is little question that commercialization in the countryside had already undergone a century of development by this time.

The problem in terms of theory is that our models of this transformation revolve around set dichotomies. As the histories of landlord/tenant disputes demonstrate, there are two basic paradigms of how peasants are organized and how they behave: the moral-economy model and the political-economy model. The first paints a picture of the peasant as risk-averse, seeking to avoid failure rather than attempting the big kill, by virtue of his central economic dilemma of living close to the subsistence, according to Scott (Scott 1976:4), the model's foremost proponent in political science. In pre-capitalist villages, a "safety first" principle underlies social arrangements that aim to insure a minimum income to all inhabitants. These collective subsistence insurance mechanisms, furthermore, are grounded in and experienced as patterns of moral rights and expectations, pre-eminent among them being ethics of subsistence and reciprocity. The right of the peasant to subsistence was supposed to be assured, and this assurance served as a

standard against which claims by landlords or the state to the peasant's surplus, and his respect, were evaluated.

While Scott emphasizes moral conventions and normative aspects of group dynamic, the political-economy model, in the form of Popkin's response to Scott (Popkin 1979), shifts the focus to the individual and the role of self-interest in determining peasant behavior. Drawing attention to Scott's insufficient appreciation of conflicts between group and individual interests, Popkin also contributes to the study of peasant rebellion by pointing to the political entrepreneurs who lead rebellions. In doing so, Popkin takes up the moral outrage of Scott's betrayed collectives and gives it coherence and direction as a function of "political competence" (Popkin 1979:245).

Studies of Japanese tenancy movements draw inspiration from both paradigms. Since both essentially depend on a principle of economic pragmatism -- albeit differently defined, by group or individual interest -- they seem to translate well across time and space to different cultures. This core vision of peasant social organization, however, deals mainly with relations between the extreme ends of the status scale, rich landlords and impoverished tenants. Granting that, historically, these two groups were becoming marginal at some point, and households intermediate to them were proliferating and growing more dominant in village affairs, the question is: what were relations among this "mass middle" of smallholder/tenants and

smallholder/rentiers, and how did they affect other social relations in general within the village?

The seeming logical coherence of interest, which historical perspective lends, is likely to become more ambiguous the closer we focus on these middle groups. In field studies, such as Scott's more recent work in Malaysia, the moral economy, a concept which originated in historical studies, remains yet removed in time, both practically and ideologically. The contestation of values and rights that goes on in the ethnographic present of Weapons of the Weak (1985) nevertheless has its origins in a system of agricultural production -- dominated, it should be noted, by tenancy arrangements based on sharing paddy -- that is past but not forgotten.

This perhaps is precisely what an ethnography of contemporary rural Japan can provide: an understanding of the tensions, even contradictions, of living as part of this middle, among one's alleged "equals," and of putting logic into practice, but as part of a historical process that is perhaps analogous to other areas of Asia, though at a later, if not more advanced, stage; or as part of a historical process which may be moving in a wholly different direction.

The first part of this dissertation has thus described the basic outlines of contemporary hamlet society in northern Shiga prefecture of west-central Japan, acknowledging that in many respects the people who now live in them, as Waswo claims, do seem to live together as economic and political

equals. There are richer and poorer households, of course, and influential as opposed to marginal ones, but the picture of communal cooperation, dictated as much by economic logic as human fellowship, is not simply the view from outside. Chapters 2 through 5 therefore detailed how the household functions as an economic unit, a domestic budget unit organizing the distribution and use of resources and deciding most production and work issues. Social relations in the hamlet also revolve around interhousehold ties, and demonstrate an analogous structure defined by mutual interests. This is exemplified by the growing practice of informal land lending among hamlet households, which has emerged as a key strategy for coping with the strictures (and exploiting the opportunities) of government programs to rationalize agricultural production.

But these strategies and systems are also driven by other considerations which reveal considerable ambiguity and ambivalence, as the latter parts (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) of this dissertation have argued. One principal arena for these is succession and inheritance, where tradition in the form of single-heir, male inheritance is generally maintained, despite provisions in the Civil Code at the end of the Second World War stipulating equal shares for all children. The explanation is not simply that partible inheritance will not work given the present organization of production, or that disparities in authority or rights according to gender have not been sufficiently contested. It is because the structure

of the social order continually generates these contained, directed conflicts, that inequality cannot be isolated and addressed, but only restructured.

If historians of rural Japan have looked only at the grosser forms of domination and exploitation, thereby missing subtler and finer divisions within hamlet society, observers of the contemporary scene must also guard against the temptation to oversimplify. There remains a great deal of outright discrimination in Japan, on the basis of gender and race; there is poverty and organized crime, and rural areas are by no means exempt despite their images of innocence and tidiness. But this underside does not fully account for the prosperity that does exist, the gains that have been made by some, nor how they have been denied to others. The object is therefore to look beyond the specific issues, and the content of conflicts, to show that they share a dynamic through which the social order is continually rehabilitated, if not reformed.

8. Village Survival and the Renewal of Tradition

With the proliferation of land lending and borrowing, farming households in Japan have demonstrated continuing resiliency in adjusting to changing domestic, and international, policies and economic conditions. Their continued survival rests on maintaining the balance of a whole complex of traditions, like single-heir inheritance, late succession, and institutions of village hierarchy and

status that bring households together to present a united front to the outside.

But this is accomplished by channelling conflict within the village into the most controllable and private channels available, within the family and individual household. Combined with a strategy of exporting its problems to urban areas, these measures have preserved at least the surface appearance of village harmony befitting the prosperity of recent decades, and will probably continue to do so, as long as land has value and there are men and women to fight over it.

Even as agriculture fades as a principal source of income, land will retain its value in some form or another. As property, if not held in common but still controlled by groups, the centrality of land issues suggests a continuing role for family and household as major factors in the mediation of status in the community, construed as either a farming village or some other variant of "neighborhood."

This reproduction of traditional forms of social organization, in fact, forms the nucleus of Bestor's (1989) recent study of a middle-class Tokyo neighborhood. Demonstrating that the historical explanation for these "residual survivals" of the past cannot be stasis but rather settings of major social change, his argument similarly applies to rural Japan: while some forms of social organization may appear simply traditional, their meaning must be evaluated in a context of shifting relations defined

by a history of outside intervention and control. Yet, as Bestor observes, the "complex configurations of ties and institutions that bind neighbors to one another" cannot be reduced to either government creation or the primordial "natural community." Rural hamlets, as much as urban neighborhoods, "develop out of administrative exigency, out of informal patterns of neighborliness, and out of dozens of instrumental and expressive activities sponsored by various organizations at each level in the institutional framework that surrounds local social life." And it is this "juxtaposition of these tangible social relations with the sense of identity and distinctiveness engendered through these ties and activities" that gives the community life (Bestor 1989:267). Even as these hamlets move away from their past functions and fulfill new ones, as communities they combine processes which reproduce and transform the social order.

Japan's feudal background perhaps explains why, as a post-industrial economic power, its recent rural history resembles Europe's more than it does the United States's, whose agricultural development was based on slavery and agribusiness rather than a politically subject but in other respects free rural population. It may not be remarkable to find that urban neighborhoods of Tokyo bear certain similarities with the village dynamic of maintaining cultural continuity in the midst of rapid economic and social change. It is intriguing, however, that some French peasants -- or

rather, their modern descendants -- have also pursued a similar course, maintaining a traditional family system and a viable community in response to larger changes, not in isolation from them. In fact, it was found that present practices are more traditional -- in that they adhered to ideals more strictly -- than those of the past (Rogers 1991).

It is beyond coincidence that the family system operating in this French community is also characterized by stem family households and male primogeniture inheritance, the same distinctive features of the Japanese system. Rogers is quick to note that while the *ostal* family system in France is "but one variant of a kind of family system found in many areas of southern Europe," it may not be necessarily representative of either European families, or even southern European stem families. It does, however, "provide a strategic case insofar as its peculiarities...render the dynamics of change especially visible" (Rogers 1991:260).

The literature on western Europe has also provided the model of the peasant-worker to describe a population composed primarily of male heads of household who combine full-time wage employment and the operation of a family farm. As a relatively recent development tied to the expansion of wage-earning opportunities, participation in the wage economy has been expected to increase the integration of the peasant-worker and their families into the national economy and consumer-oriented culture, thus spelling the end of the

central role of the household as a unit of production, and the existence of peasant-workers, at least as a category.

This picture of a transitional peasant-worker caught between the past and the future has neglected, however, their centuries-old presence in Europe and other areas of the world. It also does not properly appreciate, according to Holmes (1983), the interaction between wage-earning activities and small-scale farming. The peasant-worker strategy is "deeply embedded" in the social dynamics of rural households: in such aspects as fertility patterns, the division of labor, and the separation in space of the household (Holmes 1983:735). And what again appears central to the strategy is the retention of two adult generations within the household: a larger number of adult members to better meet the conflicting demands of wage employment and the family farm, and the important role played by housewives and retirees in filling the gap as domestic labor is drawn into wage employment.

Implicit, but nonetheless essential if this system of production combining small-scale farming and wage-employment is to continue from generation to generation, is the preservation of the farm as family property. The household of two adult generations is as much a function of inheritance and succession strategies as it is of the dictates of a productive system. Why these structures have endured is therefore a question that must be answered to an equally significant extent by an examination of the issues

surrounding household production, as this dissertation has already argued in Chapter 4.

This question of why these kinds of households have endured also serves as a starting point for a deeper cross-cultural inquiry into the nature of peasant society, and its possible importance for anthropology in general. The concept of the peasant, in its broadest sense, is based on the simple idea of "family farms working the same land as their ancestors" (Rogers 1987:57), or in one better elaborated theoretical framework, "family farmers producing for their own subsistence as well as for the support of representatives of superordinate groups" (Roseberry 1983:69). With family so closely connected with the definition of peasantry, it was inevitable that the malleability of family forms, and its lack of any consistent economic or social content, would serve as an argument in undermining the notion of a peasant mode of production. But as Roseberry notes, the statement that "the 'family' is not a natural institution and has no essential form" does not so argue so much for a historical marxist categories, but rather underscores the necessity of historical analysis.

We should expect the results of our investigations to differ then, according to time and place. Thus, while Holmes and Quataert (1986) argue that there is an underlying continuity from the rural laboring groups which marked Western and Central Europe's "protoindustrial" phase to the post World War II part-time farmer, or peasant-worker, the

historical record for other areas such as Japan may well be more uneven or discontinuous.³ However, as a question of ideology, a cycle of vanishing and rebirths may also play a role in providing the symbol of peasants and their existence its deep symbolic power.

The ambivalence with which academics and government planners have viewed peasants -- as guardians of the past and its traditions, for better and for worse -- helps explain the utility of peasant images as part of a discourse managing the cultural diversity of local traditions within a modern, centralized state. Whereas this is a central tension in French society, presenting as it does conflicting views which more or less oppose one another (Rogers 1987:56), in Japan the situation is reversed. The proliferation of local traditions--different but equal--seem almost to cancel each other out, like a spectrum of local color resolving itself into the bland white of nationhood.

If peasants as symbols figure into a larger process balancing national integration and cultural diversity, their recently alleged disappearance may instead signal a transformation of the rural population, rather than their extinction. Moreover, through their ability to integrate national institutions "in ways that preserve their own social and cultural specificity" (Rogers 1987:61), peasants have not passively been reinterpreted and absorbed by the center, but have actively guided the process on their own terms, to a certain extent.

The Japanese rural households that have constituted the core of this dissertation demonstrate, I believe, just this dynamic balance between structure and action, between possibility and constraint. Their emphasis on traditional family forms and familial roles, as an ideal if not always actual practice, and ongoing attempts to continue sets of relations between households through land-lending arrangements while, simultaneously, quietly rewriting the history on which these relations rest, offer valuable insight into the subtleties of culture and historical processes. At the very least, they should disabuse us of any notion of a static rural "folk," clinging to outmoded values and fading ways, and help to provide three decades worth of peasant studies with new value and relevance.

The ability of peasants throughout history to dictate at least some of the terms according to which changes in their society -- and in their relations with the outside -- take place has been a key point distinguishing peasants as a group. From a materialist perspective, limited but real control over land and basic resources is an essential characteristic of peasants, as defined by Wolf (1966). The concept of a household unit of production, as employed in models of both peasant and simple commodity production, also take as given relative control over resources and production by households. In the case of simple commodity producer models, however, the level of integration in market relations, rather than production and consumption, is looked

to as the defining factor for household reproduction (Roseberry 1983:73-74).

The family and household lie at the core of all classic definitions of peasants, Roseberry has asserted, because they are the key to the contradictory position of peasants as controllers of a process of production and subjects of exploitative relations. While the details of balancing consumption needs with demands for rent, putatively guided by a logic of reproduction rather than accumulation, never seemed to match theoretical models, the fact that strategies developed by farming families to reproduce themselves led, in some cases, to the dissolving of some families should not be taken solely as evidence that these definitions of peasants are unsound. Rather, we should expect that the dynamism of relations in and among families in rural society depends on some families breaking apart in one way or another. The nature of these cleavages and how they are addressed, as families and households are reconstituted, are a reflection of the number of roles individuals within families play in a wider society, and as fundamental to the survival of the family as a "peasant" family as the adoption of off-farm work.

Despite the parallels that have been and will probably continue to be drawn in future research from such disparate case studies as Japan and Europe, for cross-cultural studies of the family, it may very well be that family structures "have a kind of essential arbitrariness with respect to

simple materialist or functionalist considerations," as Rogers proposes (Rogers 1991:204). What perhaps draws them together is the suggestion that this arbitrariness is nevertheless linked with the reproduction of socioculturally specific structures, which are themselves embedded in a wider society. If the latter is a cornerstone to "understanding how peasants, as families and individuals, attempt to live in worlds they do not create" (Roseberry 1983:78), the former advances us towards an understanding of the worlds peasants -- indeed all of us -- are striving to create.

Notes

¹Waswo is the principal Western advocate of a position on landlord-tenant relations and disputes which allies her with the Japanese scholars Kurihara Hakuju and Nishida Yoshiaki; for a more extensive list of names associated with the "commercial-production tenant-farming" school, see Waswo 1988:557. The following discussion outlining the development of landlord and tenant relations relies primarily on Waswo's account, except where other sources are cited.

²Representative of this "pauperization-revolution" approach is the work of Hirano Yoshitarô and Yamada Moritarô prior to World War II, and currently, Nakamura Masanori (Smethurst 1986:5). English translation and treatment of Nakamura's work can be found in Hane 1982.

³Farm family by-employments were very common by the early nineteenth century; Smith estimates that in the two provinces of Chôshû Domain in 1843, "the proportion of farm family income earned from non-agricultural production varied from a low of 16 percent to a high of 74, with a median of 43" (T. Smith 1988).

Chapter Nine

CONCLUSION: SMALL MERCIES

*The thousand-handed Kannon
promises that even the dead
tree shall be made to bear
flowers.¹*

--a Japanese proverb

The postwar social order in Japan has been described as "cooptive, contested, and complicit" (Kelly 1991:420). This dissertation has characterized rural households in contemporary Japan and the nature of relations between them in similar terms. The cooptive nature of rural society is most evident in idioms of family, household, and locale that focus on these groups as units of communally-defined interests and purposes. Whether phrased in terms of an *ie*'s survival, village improvement, or the preservation of tradition, it is essential to take mark the particular

cultural contours of a society that conceives itself -- and is often perceived by others -- as the epitome of a group-centered ethos.

In the application of these ideologies to practice, however, gaps continually open between groups and between individuals with their separate interests. Within a single household, there are lines dividing generations and gender, successors from non-successors; between households, there are the differing rights and obligations of land lenders and borrowers. Finally, as far as the purview of this study extends, there are the political-economic programs such as price subsidy and infrastructural improvement projects which define broader agendas regarded as either rural or urban. The tensions inherent in these disjunctures, and the ways they are submerged or addressed, reveal a side of social process where the inclusiveness of values, ideals, and the social order is always being contested.

Lending and borrowing land between rural households is thus not a microcosmic model of the larger society, but rather a nodal point, a site, for viewing the intersection and deployment of discursive and practical strategies. On the surface, as we have seen, there is a sense that the economic and social relations of land use represent a logical response of rural households to recent changes in the agriculture economy, with the declining size and advancing age of the agricultural labor force. These land utilization strategies, however, contribute to the continued existence of *some*, not

necessarily all households. And, as this dissertation has argued, land lending may also eventually serve to exclude women or other potential household and village "outsiders" from gaining access to land; this suggests that we rethink household processes in terms of property -- how property is defined and what kinds of social relations, and tensions, are implied for the community at large.

The opportunity to appreciate the dislocations between values and their practice, through cases of land lending and borrowing, is of equal critical importance to us as social scientists and to the farmers and their families who are living them. The latter part of this dissertation took advantage of this convergence of interest (of the academic and of the social actor) by employing more personal, experientially-based narratives, combining them with the arguments of theoretical models as a way of problematizing them both: for example, as in our consideration of the adopted son-in-law, whom we viewed in terms both of the structural ambiguity of gender identity and his projective class position as a designated househead successor.

The last feature of the social order, complicity, poses the question of whether contesting the social order serves as an effective resistance to power or domination, or if it reproduces social differences, displacing them to different loci of contestation and recasting them in new forms, or old forms made new. Appropriating traditional idioms of group interest and self-reliance, it may be granted, helps to

insulate a community to a certain degree from the intrusions of the state; keeping rents in kind rather than cash, to stay outside the taxman's ken, is one example we have cited. Nevertheless, resistance at one level can have different implications at another, as it does for households within a community where relations are hierarchically-structured in one way or another. As most of the binds between households are founded on some inequality, whether based on local prestige or economic status, one can only wonder if strengthening these binds thus entails an ambivalent accommodation of power -- if not outright complicity.

The goddess of mercy in Japanese Buddhism, or *Kannon*, is often depicted in wooden sculpture as having eleven faces or a thousand arms and hands. Both types abound here in this rural area perched in the northernmost shores of Biwa-ko, the largest lake in Japan; *Kannon-sama* seemingly reside in every village, inside the local temple or on shrine grounds. The nickname for the area is thus, a "hometown of *Kannon*", one which is prominently featured in the poster campaigns aimed at drawing daytrippers from Kyoto and Osaka, which are less than two hours away by ordinary train. While the star attraction is indisputably one *Kannon* in particular designated a national cultural treasure by the government, many of the others, apart from their historical or religious

value, draw their own share of visitors by combining beauty with local color.

One regular visitor was the noted writer Yasushi Inoue, who consequently used northern Shiga prefecture as a setting for one of his novels, *Hoshi-to Matsuri* ("Stars and Festivals"). At one point the story's hero is taken for a little local tour; he is led to the shrine grounds of a village where he is surprised to discover two standing sculptures of *Kannon*. Both of them are nearly black with age and certainly much the worse for the centuries' wear, having been sunk and hidden in a nearby river when soldiers torched local temples around the time of the battle of Shizugatake, four hundred years ago. One sculpture has lost all its hands as well as what adorned the top of its head. Inoue's fictional visitor, impressed, remarks upon the symbolism, of how the *Kannon* takes and bears upon its body the sufferings of mankind.

Of the doubtless thousands who have actually come and prayed to these two *Kannon*, one can only wonder how many had their wishes answered. But twenty years ago a woman came from Nagoya to pray for her ill husband; he subsequently recovered, and one recent spring the elderly couple were there to celebrate the opening of a visitors' rest area towards the building of which they had contributed greatly. The ceremony was a success, despite the day being cool and overcast: villagers turned out in respectable number -- excepting of course those at work at the time -- and

patiently endured innumerable speeches from assorted dignitaries of the day. The many children in attendance ignored most of the proceedings, running riot through them, until the end when things were capped off by *mochimaki*, the tossing of rice cakes for good luck, this taking the form of marked cakes that, if caught, could be exchanged for prizes. All attending households also came away with boxed lunches for the family to enjoy at home.

In the bright white rice cakes raining luck upon outstretched hand, a celebration then, as much meant for the eyes of those looking in that day, as for those of the villagers themselves: a happy tableau of a community building a modern identity out of its cultural heritage. And within the contemplative eye of the novelist, or the heart of the faithful, reside these Christ-like figures of sorrow and redemption. The two wooden figures are known as the *Korori Kannon*, a name which derives, according to town historians, from an alternate, abbreviated reading of the phrase *yaku-wo tenjite, ri-wo hodokosu* -- "turn disaster to good and dispense the largesse" -- both a description of their powers and an injunction for righteousness. The villagers, however, when asked about the origin of the name, answer that it comes from an old belief in their power to release the hopelessly ill, or old, from their pain, through a quick and easy death (*korori-to shineru*).

While not wishing to overstate the importance of this ambiguous legacy I nonetheless argue that it is precisely

these echoes of a harsher past that must be listened for in today's rural Japan, lest we misunderstand what hopes people have for their villages and themselves, what kind of mercy they expect, and the processes that go on to define them.

Notes

¹*Senju-kannon no chikai ni wa karetaru ki ni mo saku* (Ikeda and Keene 1982:311).

APPENDIX A

Weights and Measures

The unit of square measure most commonly employed locally for agricultural land is the *tan*, 1 *tan* = 993 square meters (or .245 acres). This is also roughly equivalent to a tenth of a hectare (that is, 10 ares or 1000 square meters), and the two are informally exchanged for the other in most conversation. A more complete overview of the Japanese system of square measure is as follows:

1 square <i>ken</i>	=1 <i>tsubo</i>	=3.95 sq. yds	=3.31 sq. meters
1 square <i>ken</i>	=1 <i>bu</i>	=3.95 sq. yds	=3.31 sq. meters
30 <i>bu</i>	=1 <i>se</i>	=119 sq. yds	=99.3 sq. meters
10 <i>se</i>	=1 <i>tan</i>	=.245 acres	=993 sq. meters
10 <i>tan</i>	=1 <i>chō</i>	=2.45 acres	=.992 hectares
10 <i>tan</i>	=1 <i>chōbu</i>	=2.45 acres	=.992 hectares

(Source: Nelson 1974:1030)

Rice is most often measured by weight (metric), but newly-harvested rice is usually bagged and measured by cubic volume. These sacks, *hyō* (or *pyō*) weigh about 60 kg., and hold 4 to, 19.2 gallons (U.S.) or 72 liters. The Japanese system of measuring capacity is as follows:

1 <i>shaku</i>		=.0384 pint (U.S.)	=.018 liter
10 <i>shaku</i>	=1 <i>gō</i>	=.384 pint (U.S.)	=.18 liter
10 <i>gō</i>	=1 <i>shō</i>	=1.92 quarts (U.S.)	=1.8 liters
10 <i>shō</i>	=1 <i>to</i>	=4.8 gallons (U.S.)	=18 liters
10 <i>to</i>	=1 <i>oku</i>	=44.8 gallons (U.S.)	=180 liters

(Source: Nelson 1974:1030)

APPENDIX B

Compact for Better Life
(Seikatsu Kaizen Kiyaku)
in Karakawa

Improving our lives means building a foundation for a Karakawa that lives together in sincerity and broadness of spirit, and moving towards the realization of this out of our sense of duty as village residents. It is not our intent here to detail all the particulars of this agreement, nor the penal regulations in the event they are not observed; we trust in and respect to the utmost the judgement and integrity of our village residents.

Marriage Gifts

1. Engagements and marriage gifts are to be cash gifts in envelopes [*kin-pū*].
2. Engagement and wedding dinners (regular dinners) will be restricted to five courses, and to one person per household; *hachimono* [foods served in bowls] are to be eliminated, replaced by pickled vegetables. (The catering at a marriage hall is to be considered a regular dinner.)
3. Special meals prior to the wedding ceremony are to be discontinued, while lunches and dinners are to be kept to three items and pickled vegetables, with *hachimono* discontinued.
4. On the occasion of the bride leaving home, items 2 and 3 apply correspondingly.

5. At the receipt of an incoming bride's goods, the fish served should be dried cuttlefish or *kamaboko* [fish cake].
6. When the relatives of the bride come to pay greetings, at that time dress is unrestricted.
7. Confectionary gifts to the bride upon her entry to the village and first return home are to be discontinued.
8. May and Autumn visits are not to be observed.

Visits at Births and Sickness

1. Gifts to celebrate births will be cash enclosed in envelopes; return gifts will not be made.
2. Gifts to celebrate the naming of a child will be sugar, not to exceed two kilograms in weight.
3. The presentation of ceremonial rice cakes (*tanjô-mochi*) will be discontinued.
4. Visits to the ill are to be marked by cash gifts enclosed in envelopes; return gifts are to be discontinued.

Buddhist Memorial Services

1. Sets of funeral lotus flowers, lanterns, and floral arrangements, are to be kept to one each; gifts above this number are to be stopped. This does not apply to ornaments or decorations which come from one's office, workplace, or other similar places.
2. *Machi-yobi* [town representation] are only for funerals.
3. Gifts for visits during vigils are to be cash in envelopes.

4. The evening meal served at a wake is to be *makizushi* (from plastic packs) served on small dishes (restricted to three of the designated types), soup, pickled vegetables; arrangements for *kuyôbutsu* [take-home gifts] should amount to less than ¥500 for each participating family.

5. Return gifts for condolence presents are no longer to be given.

6. On the seventh day marking the end of mourning, the meal will consist of a three-item dinner, soup, and pickled vegetables. The practice of distributing souvenir gifts is to be discontinued, with the exception of the anniversary marking the end of seven weeks of mourning, in which case they are to be restricted to just tea.

7. From the first to the twenty-seventh memorial anniversary, the previous item (6) applies.

8. From the thirty-third to fiftieth memorial anniversary these restrictions do not apply, but they should be kept as simple as possible, and take-home gifts discontinued.

Building and Construction

1. Gifts marking ridgepole raising are to be cash in envelopes, without return gifts.

2. Requests for helpers in raising the ridge-pole of a new building and such can only come from those who would be the main beneficiary.

Supplemental

This agreement to improve life in our village goes into effect June 1, 1986. In the event of changes in social, economic, or customary conditions, this agreement will be revised with regard to the changes in circumstances, while taking care to retain its original purpose, as approved by the village assembly.

May 30, 1986

Karakawa-ku

GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE TERMS

- atotori* 跡取り : successor/heir
- bunke* 分家 : junior branch household
- buraku* 部落 : hamlet; village
- butsudān* 仏壇 : household Buddhist altar
- chihiō-kōfū-zei* 地方交付税 : taxes subsidizing
local projects
- chō* 町 : see Appendix A
- chō-sai* 町債 : municipal (town) bonds
- chū-den* 中田 : mid-grade paddyfield
- chū-nō* 中農 : the middle stratum of landholders
- daikin* 代金 : ground rent fixed in kind but
actually paid in cash
- giri* 義理 : obligations; a sense of duty
- gōdō-yu* 合同井 : a combined dam
- gōnō* 豪農 : large landowners
- gun* 郡 : county
- hara-wa karimono* 腹は借り物 : "the womb is a
borrowed thing"
- hatake* 畑 : dryfield

hikae 控え : notes/records of gifts received

hinnô 貧農 : landless farmers

hôji 法事 : Buddhist memorial mass

hojô seibi 圃場整備 : land reorganization project

honya 本屋 : main house

hyo (or *pyo*) 俵 : sacks used to measure and
store rice

ie 家 : family/household

inkyô 隠居 : residence of the retired househead
and his wife

iri-muko 入り婿 : see *muko-yoshi*

itaku 委託 : "entrusting" (the cultivation of land)

jôden 上田 : high-grade paddyfield

jômen 定免 : rent in kind fixed for a 5-year
period

jôyô-zei 譲与税 : a local tax on property transfers

kaden 下田 : low-grade paddyfield

kagami-mochi 鏡餅 : a large round rice cake

Kannon 観音 : Buddhist God (dess) of Mercy

kari-ire 借入 : renting-in

kariwake 刈り分け : sharecropping

- kashi-dashi* 貸出 : lending-out
- kemmi* 検見 : rent paid in kind, fixed annually
on projected crop estimates
- kin-pû* 金封 : ceremonial cash gifts
- kofun* 古墳 : ancient tombs
- kôjo* 工女 : "factory girls"
- korori-to shineru* 転りと死ぬる : to die an easy death
- kounki* 耕耘機 : machine cultivator
- ku* 区 : section or ward; neighborhood
- ku-chô* 区長 : section chief; "village head"
- kuri-ire-kin* 繰入金 : funds carried over from the
previous year's budget
- kuyôbutsu* 供養物 : gifts distributed to guests at
a formal ceremony
- kyôdôtai* 協同体 : the "natural" village community
- meibutsu* 名物 : noted local product
- muko-yôshi* 婿養子 : adopted son-in-law
- mura* 村 : "administrative village"
- mura-hachibu* 村八分 : village ostracism
- nakôdo* 仲人 : marriage go-between
- nengu* 年貢 : ground rent; feudal tribute

nôji-jikkô-kumiai 農事実行組合 : hamlet association
for the implementation of agricultural
initiatives

nôkyô 農協 : agricultural cooperative

Nôrin Chûkin 農林中金 : The Central Agricultural
and Forestry Bank

ô-aza 大字 : neighborhood district

okonai おこない : a local (Shiga) spring festival

seikatsu kaizen kiyaku 生活改善規約 : compact for
lifestyle improvements

*senju-kannon-no chikai-ni-wa karetaru-ki-ni-mo
saku* 千手観音の誓いには枯れたる木にも咲く : "The thousand-
handed Kannon promises that even the dead
tree shall be made to bear flowers"

setai-nushi 世帯主 : head of the household

shibayu 柴井 : dams made of brushwood, earth, and
sand

shô 升 : see Appendix A

shôen 荘園 : manor

shônô 小農 : small farmers; peasants

shônôkai 小農会 : agricultural improvement society

sôgi 争議 : (peasant) disturbances

sonraku 村落 : hamlet

tan 反 : see Appendix A

tanjô-mochi 誕生餅 : ceremonial gift rice cakes

to 斗 : see Appendix A

tokonoma 床の間 : display alcove area

tôya 頭家 : household appointed yearly as ritual
offerant in okonai festival

uchi 家/内 : house; household; refers to "I," "me,"
or "my group" generally

yagô 屋号 : house name

yaku-wo tenjite, ri-wo hodokosu 厄を転じて利を施す :
"turn disaster to good and dispense the
largesse"

yoshi-buki-yane 葺き屋根 : thatched roof

yuinô-kô 結納控 : records of engagement
ceremony gifts

yu-otoshi 井落し : dam destruction

yu-tate 井立て : dam building

Zenkoku Nôkyô Chûôkai 全国農協中央会 : Central
Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives

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