

Behind the Miracle

Everyday Life in Japan

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The success of Japan's postwar economy has caused many in the West to form a somewhat distorted picture of the Japanese and their society. We envision a land populated almost exclusively by docile industrial workers and driven white-collar "salarymen," bound together by their unstinting loyalty to Japan, Inc.

What this picture ignores is the variety within Japanese society, a society that both sustains and is sustained by ancient cultural traditions. Anthropologist David Plath here discusses the difficulty Westerners have long had in separating images from a more complicated reality. His colleagues look at the various worlds that constitute contemporary Japan. Theodore Bestor examines the workings of the urban family firm. William Kelly explains how the highly venerated rice farmers are adapting to a changing rural economy. And Margaret Lock analyzes Japan's current debate over the health of the family.

As management specialist Peter Drucker recently observed, Japan for the past 35 years has been guided by a social, not an economic, policy. Its aim was, above all, "to protect domestic society, especially domestic employment," and, secondarily, to promote a few export-oriented industries. But economic success, demographic change, and demand from abroad for fair treatment in Japan's domestic market now force Tokyo's leaders to reconsider their policy of social protection. These articles show what is at stake.

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"Samurai Jogger," a contemporary watercolor by Masami Teraoka.

FROM *THE MIKADO* TO *GUNG HO*

IMAGINING THE JAPANESE

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by David W. Plath

Lines of neat script fill the New Year's postcard that came last January from a Japanese colleague. He reports travelling in China four times in 1989 to lecture about economic policy. "In the developing country of China," he goes on to explain, "I am repaying the help I received years ago as a graduate student in the United States. I would be grateful for your guidance."

Like Christmas in Europe and America, only more so, New Year's in Japan is a time to rejuvenate culture, society, and self. Such renewal calls for an exchange of messages among friends and acquaintances. Beneath the printed clichés of a commercial greeting card, one jots down a few words about personal activities, a micro-installment towards an autobiography. And like autobiographical writing anywhere, these words amount to a treatise on one's place amid the larger movements of society—at once a report on things that happened and a plea for things to go on happening.

My colleague's message is open to many interpretations. Perhaps—to take one possibility—he is hoping that his efforts in

China will add points to Japan's tally on the international scoresheet of aid-program altruism, even though he is aware that the Western media tend to view Japan's overseas aid projects as driven more by economic self-interest than by good will.

What matters most to my friend, however, is not that he be seen as a nationalist or an internationalist. What he wants most is to be recognized as a maturely responsible individual, which in Japan means a person who never fails to repay favors that have been bestowed upon him.

The debt he incurred as a graduate student has nothing to do with me personally: I was not his mentor. We are about the same age and became acquainted only in recent years. But as an American, I am an especially appropriate witness to his determination to repay, after 30 years, help received from Americans. Notice that he solicits my advice—though advice about what he doesn't say. The sentence is an invitation to rejuvenate our relationship, with my colleague on the receiving side. He will accept further favors, go deeper into debt. In other words, he intends to expand his capacity for mature obligations. If one wants to understand Japanese character, said Ruth Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum*

and *The Sword*, writing at the end of World War II, one has to begin with the idea that the truly mature individual knows his place within the great web of mutual human indebtedness.

All of this robust attention to the interpersonal, this Japanese concern for civility in an energetically entrepreneurial society, has been rankling the Western mind for decades—indeed, for more than a century. By the middle of the 19th century in Europe and the United States, most apostles of Progress took for granted that “ritualistic” human bonding only delayed the evolution of industrialism. It was wasteful (so much money spent on gifts) and inefficient (so much time spent using go-betweens merely to save face). Thanks to science and technology, the West was rapidly shaking off such “tyrannies of custom,” as they were called. In parts of the Old World and in most of the “timeless” Orient, however, people apparently would need our help in order to extricate themselves from such entangling human alliances.

Since the Japanese were farthest east in the Far East, it was easy to cast them in the role of the West’s logical opposite. British writers referred to Japan as Topsy-Turvy Land. (Except that they don’t walk on their heads, said one, they do everything the reverse from our way.) And yet within a generation the Japanese had outdistanced all other Asian nations and had scrambled several rungs up on the ladder of Progress. To the Western mind this was reassuring historically but confusing geographically. Japan’s experience was evidence that the route to modernity was not accidentally Western but universal. However, did this mean that Topsy-Turvy Land was antipodal—or not?

In his recent study of *Japan in the Victorian Mind* (1987), Toshio Yokoyama traces the curve of change in popular British writings about his homeland from 1850 through the 1880s. During the 1850s, citizens of the most powerful empire of the 19th century looked out figuratively from the Crystal Palace and saw Japan as “singular.” They found the Japanese to be more likable than other Asians they had met. True, the samurai seemed prickly, but the common people were “amiable,” bourgeois, actually rather familiar. Japan might be antipodal, but English writers found parallels—New Year’s there is like Christmas here, and so on—in order to render “quaint” customs and mores less exotic.

Thirty years later the grip of British imperialism had weakened under competition from new industrial powers on the European continent as well as from the United States. Japan itself would not become a rival for another 30 years. But as Yokoyama notes, “The increase in anxiety about British civilization in the minds of British writers on Japan was linked to the development of their sense of remoteness from Japan.”

To put this in my terms, the closer actual Japan drew to Britain in the shape of its modern institutions, the less edifying it became to the British mind. Even though first-hand reports on Japanese life had become plentiful by the 1880s, British writers seemed less interested in them and less inclined to cite European analogues. The British grew increasingly nostalgic about the traditional (antipodal) Japan that had been left behind and began to use it as a hammer of satire against modern British society. The year 1885 saw the pre-

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miere of what has become the most popular English operetta of all time, Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*. Set in the Oriental pomp and circumstance of the ancient Japanese royal court, *The Mikado* parodies the ritualism that lingers, inefficient and outmoded, in industrial England. British writers of the 1880s still spoke of Japan as "singular," Yokoyama concludes, but the emphasis had shifted to the unfamiliar, the antipodal, the "unreal."



A performer in an early staging of Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado.

One hundred years later, the citizens of the most powerful empire of the 20th century took their turn. Now it was up to Americans to reconcile antipodal and actual Japan.

Confident that the postwar Allied occupation had "demilitarized and democratized" the Japanese, Americans of the 1950s were ready to help their erstwhile foes up the next rung of the ladder of Progress. This

task would involve eliminating whatever tyrannies of custom still remained. Industrial experts such as James Abegglen discovered a reason for early postwar Japan's slow growth in productivity. Japanese factories had too many tenured workers, and everybody knows that giving a man job security turns him into a time-server. The Americans coined a term for it—the Lifetime Employment System—there being no label for the phenomenon in the Japanese lexicon. In fact, at the time, Japan's own industrial experts were more troubled by what they perceived as a rate of labor mobility that was too high, not too low.

American research by David McClelland and others in the field of motivational psychology helped reinforce the diagnosis. Americans scored high on a scale that was said to measure Need for Achievement, but low on a scale of Need for Affiliation. Our heroes had always been cowboys—and still were, it seemed. Japanese scores turned out almost the opposite. This indicated a problem for Japan, investigators said, because modernization is driven by a population that values achievement. Affiliation motives are "orthogonal," which in researcher jargon means that they run at cross purposes with achievement.

Thirty years later the argument against affiliation motives had lost its teeth. Instead of retarding Japan's economic growth, it appeared by the 1980s as though those intricate nets of human relations had been sustaining it. Perhaps affiliation was less a need, a primal urge, than a well-shaped human achievement all its own. American business schools suddenly discovered virtues in Japanese styles of management. And Japanese capitalism, unhyphenated up till then, was renamed Confucian capitalism, even though throughout the previous century the Confucian heritage had been de-

nounced as a drag on Progress. The country that our journalists of the 1950s hailed as The New Far West had begun to look Far Eastern after all by the 1980s.

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Americans of the 1980s had to wrestle with a more complicated repertoire of images than the one the British had grappled with a century earlier. Americans, for one, came to see actual Japan as a threat to their economic dominance, something the British had never seen in the actual Japan of the 19th century. To Americans, furthermore, antipodal Japan had fragmented into a collage of images, some suggesting a feudal past full of samurai and shoguns, others evoking a postmodern future filled with robots and workaholics. All of these images appeared in social commentary on American life, but there was little *Mikado*-like spoofing.

In American popular culture, for example, the centennial of the *Mikado* saw the release of the slapstick film *Gung Ho*, directed by Ron Howard and starring Michael Keaton. On the surface, the goats of the story are Japanese auto executives, but they seem to be little more than stand-ins for managers from anywhere, as seen through the eyes of men on the shop floor.

Gung Ho takes place not in the ancient Japanese royal court but in the modern American rust belt, in an antiquated cathedral of once-proud U.S. engineering, an automobile assembly plant. The Japanese managers have come to make the plant efficient once again by imposing their brand of teamwork upon the natives. The managers win—but only by losing. The assembly line

hums once more only after the managers stand aside and let the workers return to their American style of country-boy teamwork, which Detroit's managers had earlier suppressed in their own misguided search for excellence.

The point of *Gung Ho* is that today's tyranny of custom has less to do with culture than with social class. Japanese or American, the yuppie managers have lost touch with the laid-back, localized world of ordinary men, who need to achieve and affiliate on their own terms. The title of the movie says it all: "Gung-ho" is a Chinese phrase for enthusiastic teamwork—a phrase imported into the American vernacular by U.S. Marines who fought alongside Chinese troops against the Japanese enemy in World War II.

The film skewers Japanese managers for misjudging the American gung-ho spirit, a mistake their fathers made during the war. But it indirectly makes the same charge against U.S. executives. The bosses in *Gung Ho* wear company uniforms, not military ones, and the setting is peacetime. The scenario, nevertheless, is familiar to anyone who has sampled one major genre of Hollywood films about the U.S. military. I am thinking of movies in which uptight, rank-proud officers (especially careerists from the military academies) personify a ruling caste whose privileges and powers are not easy to justify in a classless America. G.I. Joe—Bill Bendix, Gary Cooper—shuffles and draws and works in unorthodox ways, but he accomplishes the mission while the officers around him blunder.

Less than flattered by the way it has been depicted in popular productions such as *Gung Ho*, the American managerial class has tended to present another story. It is a story that thrusts actual Japan out towards the antipodes. Emphasis is put on presumed Japanese differences, as evidence of how far Japan deviates from the orthodox

way of running an industrial society. Japan's "low" rates of job turnover are often cited by way of example. In fact, labor mobility in Japan during recent decades has been about the same as in virtually all other industrial nations—the exception being the United States. The "high" American rate, not the "low" Japanese one, is singular.

Intellectual authority for this new version of antipodal Japan is currently being drawn from the works of "revisionist" Japan-watchers such as James Fallows in the United States and Karel van Wolferen in Europe. Their premise is that Japan has evolved into a species of industrial nation-state fundamentally unlike any other. Hence we must revise the nice-guy assumption that Japan can be dealt with like other countries that play by "our" rules.

While this revisionism does not represent a crude return to racist thinking (the differences are said to be cultural, not racial), it does offer ammunition to Japan-bashers, and it is being widely parroted by op-ed cartoonists and sensation-seeking reporters. Worse yet, it encourages among Americans an undeserved complacency and smugness about their own society. A review of van Wolferen's recent book, *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, in the *Christian Science Monitor* concluded with this dubi-

ous piece of wisdom: "In economics and in politics, we would all be better off if Japan became more like the United States, and not vice-versa."

It is difficult to gauge how widely the American populace shares the revisionist stance. It blurs into a broader current of image-work that has been underway for a generation, creating a new antipodal Japan that I call Jawpen. Fabricated by the wagging of American jaws and the scratching of American pens, Jawpen is a chilling high-tech society of the future, a society that sharply contrasts with the folksy warmth of America's imagined Lake Wobegon past. Jawpen looks like Japan, with the same efficient factories and schools, the same safe streets. But it is made in America, assembled from imported Japanese parts, and styled for our domestic market of ideas.

Above all, it is a rhetorical device that interest groups in the United States employ in their battles not just over trade policy but over the very nature of American domestic life and social institutions—and over who shall define what they are to be. Jawpen becomes what we variously need Japan to be at the moment: a model to emulate when we lament the state of our schools, an unfair player to castigate when we lament the loss of jobs.

East meets West uneasily in Ron Howard's Gung Ho, a comic film about a Japanese take-over of an American auto firm. Here the character played by Michael Keaton argues with his new Japanese boss.



During the 1970s, for example, U.S. management blamed declining productivity on its employees: people deficient in the kind of loyalty and dedication evident in Jawpen. U.S. labor responded in kind, noting that Jawpenese executives had no segregated lunchrooms or toilets, and enjoyed only a fraction of the pay and perks of their American counterparts. Both sides were happy to shift the blame during the 1980s to American teachers and students and *their* lagging productivity. Not being politically mobilized, fifth-graders are now taking the rap.

The trade-war atmosphere that has prevailed for 20 years has encouraged Americans to make the same error about actual Japan that an earlier generation of Americans made during the war. In *War Without Mercy* (1986), his study of the images Japanese and Americans formed of each other during the Pacific conflict, John Dower explains the dual misconceptions: "It was not that the Japanese people were, in actuality, homogeneous and harmonious, devoid of individuality and thoroughly subordinated to the group, but rather that the Japanese ruling groups were constantly exhorting them to become so. Indeed, the government deemed it necessary to draft and propagate a rigid orthodoxy of this sort precisely because the ruling classes were convinced that a great many Japanese did not cherish the more traditional virtues of loyalty What the vast majority of Westerners believed the Japanese to be coincided with what the Japanese ruling elites hoped they would become."

Perhaps the most self-deceiving feature in our fable of Jawpen is the vision of a society in which the corporate-career lifestyle not only holds the high ground but has

triumphed. It is a world where alternative ways of living barely survive (homogeneous Jawpen) or, if they do, need not be taken seriously (harmonious Jawpen). In Jawpen everybody either is on the yuppie fast-track or is scrambling to get on it. And there is no widening gap of unequal opportunity.

That, of course, is no more the reality of most people in actual Japan—the kinds of people you will meet in the essays that follow—than it is of most people in the actual United States. Ordinary Japanese would like to believe that the distance between rich and poor, between fast-track and laid-back, is not so great in their society as it is in America. But they know that the gap exists in their own society, and they fear it may be widening.

The ordinary Japanese in the essays that follow are less enthralled by the fable of Jawpen than Americans seem to be. These merchants, farmers, and housewives do not need the sophisticated critics of post-modernism to tell them that a high-tech, commodified atmosphere is constricting the potential for human diversity everywhere. In their little daily engagements with the large institutions that dominate their world, they are working to preserve niches of variety and civility—to sustain a refuge where they can, like my economist colleague, renew autobiographical confidence at New Year's and reach past parochialism into the more intimidating global arena. We would do well to curb revisionist impulses to erect new intellectual trade barriers. By listening carefully to actual Japanese as they conduct their own domestic discourse on the meanings of modernity, we may come to a better understanding of our own.

TOKYO MOM-AND-POP

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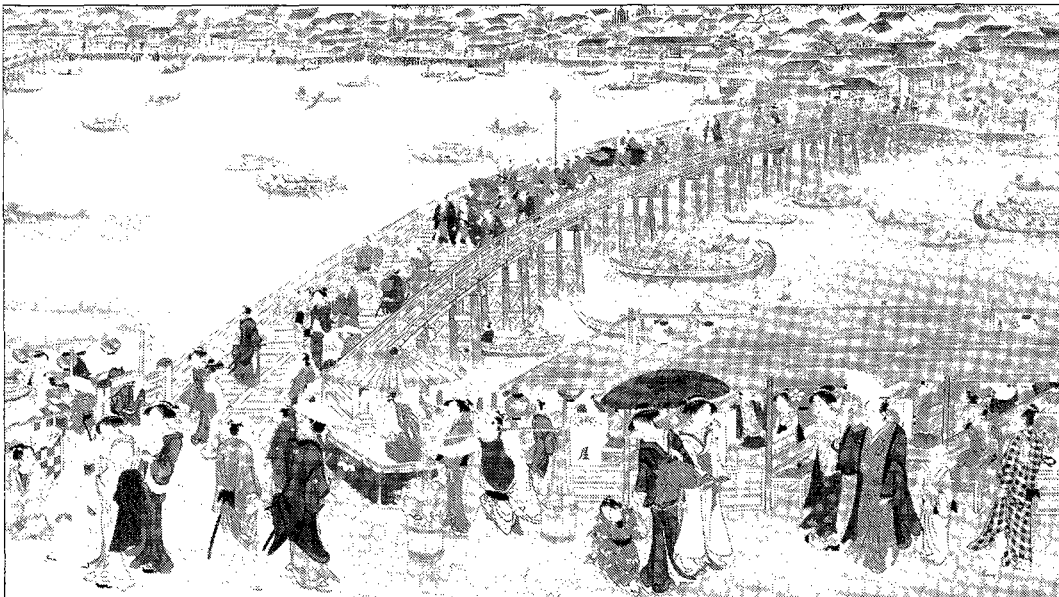
by Theodore C. Bestor

The American bestiary identifies two sub-species of the Japanese economic animal. The more familiar is the company employee, recognizable by its collar (white or blue) connected by a short leash to its employer, Japan, Inc. The second sub-species, only recently discovered, is the small shopkeeper. Its haunts are marked by the little non-tariff trade barriers that these creatures erect around their abodes, the hundreds of thousands of mom-and-pop stores that dot the Japanese landscape. The first species is predatory and most fearsome when, in herds, it stampedes through foreign marketplaces or burrows under otherwise level playing fields; the second is protectionistic and most dangerous when confronted by large stores or foreign products.

To most Americans, the company-employee variant of the economic animal seems familiar in broad outline, if puzzling in behavioral detail. Our society, too, has its large organizations, and the organization man (now joined by woman) is a fixture in our image of modern society. While it may be hard for most Americans to comprehend the docile diligence of the Japanese employee, we still broadly understand what the company employee is about.

The shopkeeper, the proprietor of a family business, is another story. Gone are the days when the family enterprise was a reliable part of the American scene. To most American consumers, particularly those living in or around cities, small shops are increasingly marginal to the business of daily life. They are convenience stores for the occasional last-minute purchase, or they are

Painting of an Edo marketplace at the Ryugoku bridge, by Utagawa Toyoharu (1735-1814).



quaintly ethnic or highly specialized. Most serious retailing takes place in national or regional chains, where consumers deal with branch managers and employees, almost never with proprietors or their kin.

But in Japan, this is not the case. More than in any other advanced industrial society, consumers are likely to do their shopping in tiny, family-run stores, and the proprietors and family workers who operate those businesses constitute a large segment of society. According to one recent analysis, self-employed entrepreneurs and family members who work with them make up almost 20 percent of Japan's urban, private-sector labor force. In 1988, Tokyo had some 178,000 retail and wholesale establishments, of which 117,000—a shade under two-thirds—were tiny shops with four or fewer employees, almost all of them family members. Tokyo, moreover, averages 767 shops per square mile (without counting bars and restaurants), or one shop for every 47 residents of the city.

But Japan's small businesses are significant not simply because there are so many of them. Americans may view small shops as further evidence that Japan is a society organized against consumption. After all, we quickly surmise, they hold that small businesses have on the Japanese economy forces most consumers to forego the conveniences and economies of scale provided by large retail chains and shopping centers.

But the Japanese don't see things this way. Shopkeepers, for one, perceive themselves as upholders of a traditional way of life. At the same time, their existence profoundly affects the quality of life of all Japanese, particularly those living in cities. The social patterns and cultural values that sus-

tain small businesses are deeply woven into the fabric of Japanese life. Indeed a Japan without such firms would be a radically different society.

Firm as Family

Scholarly studies and even popular-culture imports such as Yoshimitsu Morita's film, *The Family Game*, have provided Westerners with the outlines of the stereotypical Japanese family. It is, first of all, a middle-class professional household. The father, a white-collar managerial type, is generally absent; the mother, attentive to the point of monomania on issues of education and domestic management, is always present; the children, well-behaved and obedient, are always in school.

But this compartmentalized life does not characterize the entrepreneurial family. The Onuma household, pseudonymous but real, is a case in point. The Onumas run a small Tokyo textile company that specializes in preparing fabrics for formal kimono. As kimono have become less and less a part of daily life for most Japanese, their business has prospered by handling the brocades that go into the most expensive wedding kimono, some of which rent for thousands of dollars a day.

Their business employs about a dozen people, five of them Onumas. These five represent three of the four generations of Onumas who live together a few steps from the workshop. As with most such household firms, it is difficult to separate family and business, home and workplace. Masao and Chieko Onuma, husband and wife both in their fifties, work together most of the day alongside their 30-year-old son and his

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wife. Grandmother Onuma, in her eighties, packs boxes, answers telephones, cooks meals, and keeps an eye on her two great-granddaughters, the younger Onuma's toddlers who scamper around the bolts of exquisite, expensive silk. The younger Mr. Onuma's day seldom ends before nine or 10 o'clock, when he finally finishes making deliveries in his expensive 4-wheel drive RV. The elder Mr. Onuma's days often last longer, ending



In a Tokyo kimono shop, a customer casts an appraising eye.

with extended drinking bouts with the many suppliers and clients whom he must entertain almost daily.

Theirs is a volatile business. The long period of public restraint that preceded the death of the Shōwa Emperor in January 1989 was a bleak time for the Onumas. Weddings, festivals, and other celebrations were canceled or curtailed. Fortunately, the Imperial wedding in June 1990 set off a minor boom in the kimono business, and the Onumas found themselves busier than ever. But despite their long hours and the uncertainties of their business, the Onumas are almost smug in their feeling of superiority toward the salaried middle classes. They regard company employees as drudges and prize the flexibility and autonomy that comes with running their own business. They smile over the tax breaks self-employment offers. And they take quiet pride in their knowledge of themselves as a special kind of family.

The family of the family firm doesn't figure very prominently in Western images of Japanese life, but it comes closest to fulfilling the ideal of the traditional Japanese family. According to this ideal, young and old live and work together, caring for one another across generations. And for tradi-

tional families, whether the urban mercantile family of today or the peasant family of pre-modern Japan, the business of the family is the family business. Fundamental issues of kinship—marriage, inheritance, succession—are inextricably linked to economic issues of property, capital, and labor.

The matter of inheritance is particularly important because the heir sees to it that the family, its enterprise, and its property are transmitted intact to later generations. Japanese kinship provides several means of ensuring an heir besides the obvious one. For example, the present Onuma line was secured by adoption. Masao, the patriarch of the family, is a *mukoyōshi*, an adopted son-in-law. The eighth of nine children from a poor farm family far to the north of Tokyo, he met Chieko, herself an only child, when he came to Tokyo for college (remarkably enough, on a basketball scholarship). They fell in love and Chieko's parents, recognizing the need for an heir to carry on the family and its business, adopted him. Thus, old grandmother Onuma is, to an American way of thinking, his mother-in-law; in Japanese terms, she is his adoptive mother.

The practice of adopting a son-in-law, old-fashioned but by no means moribund,

is most common today (at least in urban areas) among entrepreneurial households like that of the Onumas. Conventional wisdom is divided on the subject of *mukoyōshi*. Proverbial advice to young men contemplating an adoptive marriage tells them, "If you have even a cup of rice to your name, don't become a *mukoyōshi*." On the benefits to a family, however, the proverb is positive: "Three generations of *mukoyōshi* ensure a family's fortune." The case of the Onumas would seem to confirm this part of the proverb.

Community as Market

Neighborhoods organized as discrete social and economic units date back to pre-industrial Edo (as Tokyo was called before 1868) and to the feudal regulations that kept samurai and craftspeople separate and segregated in distinct areas. A few mercantile districts still retain an identity from Edo: Kiba, the old lumber district, or Tsukudajima, where delicacies of salted, smoked, and pickled fish have been made for centuries. Other areas, whether venerable or not, are known for their contemporary commercial specialities: Jimbo-chō, full of bookshops; Inari-chō, known for Buddhist altars; Akihabara, with its wall-to-wall electronics stores.

But even where a particular occupational or commercial coloration does not exist, Tokyo neighborhoods are economic zones of considerable importance. Unlike most American cities, Tokyo has few exclusively residential areas. Most neighborhoods mix housing with commerce, and what largely distinguishes richer and poorer neighborhoods is the intensity of local industrial activity. This intermingling of commerce and community, however, is less a legacy of pre-industrial guild mercantilism than a reflection of the fact that Tokyo is built on top of a pre-industrial city

that functioned largely without wheels. Most pre-industrial Japanese walked; only an elite few rode horseback or were carried in palanquins. The distances covered in daily life were necessarily short. The narrow, disjointed, suddenly twisting and turning remnants of the Edo street plan give ample evidence of a city based on pedestrian life, and as Tokyo developed in the 20th century, cars never fully demolished this orientation. Streetcars, then trains and subways, became the favored means of public transportation. As a result, Tokyo remains focused on its 500-odd stations and the pedestrian corridors—the shopping arcades—that lead to them.

Even now, with Tokyo's streets clogged to near paralysis with cars, the automobile and the culture of commerce have not merged as they have in much of American life. Car culture exists for the young who consider a trip to Denny's, or to one of its Japanese imitators, a *naoii* ("now-y") experience; for the James Dean look-alikes who cruise in souped-up Mazdas sporting window decals with slogans like "Lonesome Car-Boy"; for the professional truckers who festoon their gleaming chrome rigs with colored lights and hang their cabs with brocade drapes; or for yuppies who buy BMWs and Mercedes with savings that a family of an earlier generation would have spent on buying a house. But for daily life in Tokyo, the car is practically useless. Housewives and other shoppers rely on the neighborhood stores and the local *shotengai*, or shopping arcade. Market researchers report that the average housewife goes shopping at least once a day, on foot or bicycle, and it is a rare neighborhood that cannot provide all daily necessities.

The cluster of shops and arcades around major stations—anchored by one or two large department stores or major discount supermarkets, surrounded by swirls of boutiques, bars, and charge-by-the-hour love

hotels—taper off into tendril-like shopping streets that stretch across the residential landscape of the city. Brightly lit streets and alleys beckon with ornate neon arches, garish cubist street lights, plastic decorations keyed to seasonal motifs, or loudspeakers booming out popular songs and shopping jingles. Sunday excursions to major department stores and trendy boutiques notwithstanding, these shopping arcades are where Japanese consumers consume. One shopping street runs into the next, the only distinction between neighborhoods being the styles of lampposts or arches erected by local merchants.

Subtle though the boundaries are, they are still significant. Within them, local merchants act decisively to protect both their own interests and those of the community. They may oppose or force modifications of plans for a nearby supermarket or discount store. They may assist a neighborhood noodle manufacturer who has fallen on hard times (and count on being repaid in years and years of free noodles). They may match up a local businessman who has been forced out by a *jiageya* (a real-estate speculator) with another family firm located a few blocks away.

In addition to tending to business matters, merchants form the backbone of local community activities, participating in everything from political clubs to volunteer fire brigades, from shrine parish boards to Little League teams. The self-employed entrepreneurs, working according to their own schedules, are always present in their communities—something factory or office workers can never be. Merchants clearly have ulterior motives behind their good works, but as Adam Smith suggested, it is not the butcher's benevolence but his self-interest that makes the world go around, in Tokyo as elsewhere.

With their claims to represent the legacy of Japan's pre-industrial merchant class,

the neighborhood shopkeeper is the bulwark of tradition and the sustainer of cultural identity. His or her presence assures that the communal traditions of the past will continue to give some order and meaning to what often seems a chaotic urban existence. And while there may be some nostalgic myth-making at work here, the myth is still a real force affecting the lives of all local residents, shopkeepers or not.

Market as Community

Throughout Japan, Tsukiji—Tokyo's vast wholesale fish market—conjures up the same images: frenetic morning auctions where the price of a single gigantic tuna may exceed \$10,000; endless sheds housing hundreds of tiny wholesale stalls hawking every conceivable kind of seafood; bustling crowds of fishmongers and sushi chefs carrying off a day's supply of fish. Each year, the market's seven large brokerage houses sell almost 450 varieties of fresh and processed marine products worth over \$5 billion. But despite the scale of the market as a whole, it is a bastion of small family firms. The engines of the market are its dozens of morning auctions, where throngs of wholesalers bid intensely against one another. In turn, the wholesalers—1,100 strong, operators of tiny, family-run stalls in the marketplace—compete fiercely for the patronage of some 14,000 restaurateurs, sushi chefs, and retail fishmongers who purchase their day's supplies at one or another of Tsukiji's 1,677 stalls.

The transactions that make the market—from the bluntly competitive bidding of the auctions to the more subtle haggling that keeps customers returning to the same stalls year after year—are part of the complex social fabric of the marketplace: elaborate rules governing auctions, systems of stall rotations, minutely wrought agreements on credit and settlement, carefully

tended patterns of long-term reciprocation among trading partners, and hundreds of other understandings and agreements.

At Tsukiji, the buying and selling does not pit all 1,100 wholesalers against one another. More limited trading communities exist among the wholesalers and buyers of particular kinds of seafood, whether tuna or shrimp or salted fish or *sushi no tane*, the highest quality products destined for



Selling squid in Tokyo's busy seafood market.

sushi bars. Within these specialized groups of traders, the character of social ties becomes most visible.

For example, the trading communities are organized around the auction arena for a particular commodity—fresh salmon or *kamaboko* fish pâté or live eels—and the rules and techniques for each auction have over time been delicately hammered out by the parties to those auctions. For some

commodities, buyers are expected to top a stated asking price; for others, the auctioneer lowers the price every second or so until a willing buyer is found. Some auctions involve open bidding, verbal or hand signals, while others use secret written bids. The varying forms of auction clearly create different kinds of competitive relationships among rival buyers and different kinds of relationships between auctioneers and buyers. Through adjustment and calibration of the auction rules over time, buyers and sellers are able to maintain stable long-term ties with preferred trade partners and to minimize the tensions that result from competition among buyers to purchase at the lowest prices.

And, indeed, this careful concern to dampen the negative consequences of competition is one hallmark of the market's operations. Almost all wholesalers come away from the day's auctions with something. Few are driven out of the market. Like New York City taxi medallions or seats on the stock exchange, the wholesale licenses required for trading in the market are limited in number and intrinsically valuable. No new slots have been created since the late 1940s. Yet there is little demand for them outside the marketplace. And within the market there has been little competitive pressure leading to concentration; the 1,677 licenses issued to 1,677 firms in the late 1940s still remain in the hands of 1,101 firms, only a handful of which control more than three licenses (and hence three stalls).

The survival of all traders is ensured through a number of mechanisms. For example, at four-year intervals, all 1,677 stall locations are reassigned through a complex system of lotteries. This eventually corrects inequalities resulting from a stall's location in the huge fan-shaped sheds that house the wholesalers. Even to a casual observer, there are clear differences among the stalls.

Those on the narrow front edge of the fan attract buyers making daily visits for small quantities of high-quality, sushi-grade fish. But wholesalers whose business is based on bulk sales to supermarkets find that the back edge of the sheds—farthest from the market entrance for walk-in customers but most convenient to loading docks—is the ideal location. Regardless of specialty, a location at the intersection of two aisles in the market is preferable to a mid-block location, which can be reached only by passing many other stalls.

The quadrennial stall lotteries correct long-term locational inequities, but they also create shorter-term inequalities. To limit those effects, the wholesalers' guild has devised a system of rents and rebates apart from the flat rents charged by the municipal government. The wholesalers' federation grades each stall on its location and assigns each stall-holder a monthly assessment or credit. This amount is paid to (or received from) the association as tax upon (or compensation for) a stall's location. Against a base rent of about \$100 a month, a wholesaler with a good location may pay a surcharge of around \$100 per month for his stall, while the worst situated stall-holder may receive \$600 a month in compensation.

What holds for the wholesalers also holds for the auctioneers. To ensure that monopolies will not accrue to particular auctioneers, the sites and sequencing of the various auctions are also rotated. For example, the stretches of quayside where frozen tuna are auctioned each morning are rotated every few months among the seven auction houses, and the sequence of auctions changes on a daily basis, so that of four auction houses offering the same products for sale, each will sell first once in ev-

ery four days.

The exquisite care with which the rules, alliances, and institutions of the marketplace seek to protect all participants must of course be seen against the fact that the market is a closed system. Insiders are ensured survival; outsiders are denied access. Within the closed system of the Tsukiji marketplace, business is never a zero-sum game. All players go away with something; no one is forced to leave the game.

American trade officials who have been pressing the Japanese to correct "structural impediments" to free trade point to the distribution system, with its multifarious layers of small family firms, as the prime offender. Not only does such a system effectively impede the sale of foreign goods on the Japanese market, it also limits the choice of goods to Japanese consumers and thus keeps prices needlessly high. To date, however, most Japanese consumers have been more willing to put up with higher costs of goods and services than to threaten the institutional and social patterns that sustain the present system. What and how much this social compact gives them in return may at times be unclear, but apparently it is enough.

It is apparent, too, that despite the ferocious competitive strengths of the Japanese economy and its ability to exploit minute increments of efficiency, economics to most Japanese is not ultimately the measure of all things. Rather, as is the case with the survival of the small family business, economic behavior can be understood only within a larger framework of social relationships and obligations, and patterns of reciprocity whose demands are just as telling and just as intractable as the cold logic of economic calculation.

JAPANESE 農 FARMERS 民

by William W. Kelly

One of the several split images we Americans have of Japan is that of city-Japan, country-Japan. Millions of zealous factory and office workers are packed into sprawling cities, while beyond them lie fields of glistening rice, diligently tended by declining numbers of aging farmers. Appreciating such contrasts, many Americans also feel that city and country in Japan have one thing in common: the vigilant protection of the state. Even as it promotes efficient industrial corporations in the international marketplace, the paternal Japanese state shields the highly inefficient farmers from the challenges of the same global market.

Indeed, for over a decade, the principal irritant in U.S.-Japanese economic relations has been Japan's protection of agriculture, particularly its lavish support of rice farmers. Throughout the postwar decades, the government has guaranteed the purchase of all rice produced in the country. Operating through the national agricultural cooperative network, it sets a price that guarantees a profit to farmers. The rice is then marketed to consumers at a somewhat lower price, which is nonetheless many times the world market price. This gap has produced major government deficits and growing reserves of rice. Meanwhile, the average Japanese's appetite for rice has declined from about six bowls per

day in the mid-1960s to about three bowls per day in the late '80s.

The trade friction arises from the repeated and thus far unsuccessful efforts of U.S. rice millers to gain access to the closed Japanese markets. Farmers in the United States and the European Community also enjoy generous government subvention and so are not immune from criticism. But the Japanese case, many Americans feel, is egregious. Current efforts by Japan to limit rice acreage and reduce its price subsidies are judged woefully inadequate. Undersized and overmechanized, the Japanese farms still produce huge surpluses of extremely expensive rice. They are further encouraged to hold on to their plots by laws that prevent consolidation and by a tax code that greatly undertaxes farmland and discourages its conversion to badly needed residential land. Not only would imports of their cheap rice benefit the beleaguered urban consumer, the American millers argue, but the collapse of price supports and reform of the land tax would encourage farmers to sell some of their land. This would drive down astronomical land prices in and around the cities and help many young urban couples to realize the now-impossible dream of home ownership.

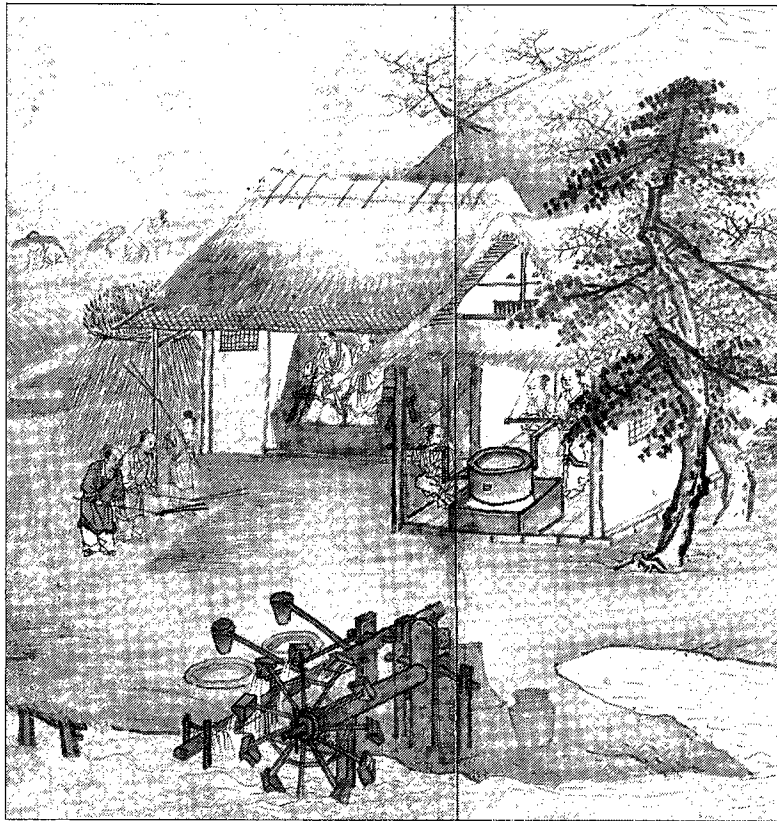
What stands in the way of this market sanity? Ardent defenders of the status quo claim that the obstacle is cultural. Rice is central to Japanese values and Japanese lifeways, and the destruction of Japan's rice

farming would mean the loss of its national identity. The emperor transplanting seedlings each spring in his ceremonial plot within the Tokyo palace grounds is a perennial photo-opportunity for the media. But there is also a skeptical view. According to many critics, the real obstacle is crass politics—namely, the special relationship between the farmers and the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). For 35 years, they argue, the LDP has traded expensive rice prices for the farm vote, vastly overrepresented by postwar districts that have never been redrawn to reflect rural-to-urban migration.

To an American anthropologist with a number of years of experience in rural Japan, both apologists and skeptics seem long on polemics and short on understanding. Their central character, the rice farmer, is generally a stock figure drawn to convenience. And while there is some truth to what the polemicists say about the role of rice both in culture and in domestic politics, the truth is more complicated than they would suggest.

It is certainly easy for any visitor to Japan to elicit a litany of banalities about rice, monsoon society, and Japanese national taste—about rice as the sustenance of the Japanese soul. And it is certainly true that

for 2,000 years, wet-rice has been the mainstay of Japanese farming. However, this is not because of Japan's environment; in fact, in much of the country neither topography nor climate naturally favors rice. Nor is there anything special about the Japanese constitution that makes rice the national staple, despite an argument made several



A scene of village life, in ink and colors, attributed to Kusumi Morikage (c. 1620–90), an artist from Kaga in northern Japan.

years ago by the Japanese agricultural minister in his effort to discourage Australian beef imports. (He maintained that the intestines of the Japanese were shorter than those of Westerners and therefore ill-suited to digesting beef and other staples of the Western diet.)

Political will, rather than geography or physiology, has put rice at the center of Jap-

anese society. The rice paddy is an efficient, albeit labor-intensive, calorie machine. Rice also transports and stores well. For these and other reasons, political elites have for centuries promoted rice cultivation through their tax demands and their allocations of prestige. In the early modern Tokugawa period, for example, taxes for all crops and even for fishing and forest products were calculated and levied in rice. The relative social status of the 250 domain lords was determined by the official rice yields of their lands. Thus postwar agricultural policies promoting rice monoculture reflect a longstanding elite bias. But this bias has always gone against rural wisdom. The cultivators themselves have usually preferred a more diversified agriculture, with rice as only one part of a broader regime of crops and animals.

In fact, the cultural significance of rice to most middle-aged and older people in rural Japan lies elsewhere. Rice for them evokes both pain and pride in their personal memories of the 1930s and '40s, the 15 years of the Pacific War and the American occupation in its aftermath. Their memories are of the often-severe food shortages during those 20 years, the requisitions of farm horses and cooking-pots, the drafting of all able-bodied men, and the farming burdens borne by the women and elderly who were left behind. To have survived, to have kept the paddies producing, has created a tenacious will and a healthy skepticism about their present good fortune. To this day, most Japanese will never leave a single grain of rice in their bowls.

The occupation's land reform had an equally powerful impact, transforming a

countryside of tenants into one of proprietors. In effect, the farmers' life work was enfranchised, and very few Westerners recognize the extent to which this has set farming apart from other postwar occupations. Simply put, most of the latter have been effectively depoliticized. Shorn of fascist patriotism, the incentives of public service and corporate employment are now economic growth, job security, and organizational loyalty. Even the Confucian familial metaphor of the workplace has been pruned of its imperial aspects. The farmer, however, stands as a striking exception. Agricultural work was, in subtle but enduring ways, politicized. The land-reform program itself linked it prominently to democratic principles; the associated Agricultural Cooperative Law of 1947 emphasized a democratic association of independent smallholders; and political party reorganization linked it to a party machine, the LDP. Even if the realities have changed, these associations remain strong, and they explain much of the farmer's reluctance to yield his identity.

By its voting habits, the rural population shows its appreciation of the government's agricultural munificence. Indeed, this symbiosis is the basis of critics' charges that collusion between farmers and politicians has perpetuated a system of subsidized inefficiency. However, the size and power of this voting bloc is exaggerated, as census figures show. In 1950, one in three Japanese households was a "farm family,"* but that proportion dropped rapidly in the 1960s,

*The Japanese term, "farm family" (*nōka*), is the linguistic reverse of our "family farm." Census figures attempt to distinguish between full-time farm families, those part-time farm families whose farm income exceeds their nonfarm income, and those part-time farm families whose nonfarm income exceeds their farm income.

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and by 1985 it had fallen to one in eight. Moreover, in 1985, only 610,000 of the 4,300,000 farm families were full-time—which is to say, 1.6 percent of all Japanese households. These numbers hardly indicate a potent voting bloc.

Karel van Wolferen comes closer to the mark in *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (1989). He observes that the real power lies in the national federation of agricultural cooperatives, the Zenkoku Nōkyō Chūkai, or Zenchū. This federation handles most of the rice marketing, and retails farm and consumer products to its members—virtually all 4.3 million farm households. Through its associated banking network, it provides credit, insurance, and other services to its membership. Indeed, it is by far the largest insurance company in the world. Zenchū is thus a powerful voting machine and lobbying organization. Whatever ambivalence ordinary farmers may feel about agricultural policies, Zenchū's very existence depends on the government's rice programs. For its own survival, van Wolferen argues, Zenchū mobilizes and rewards a large "tribe" of LDP politicians.

But even this view of rural support for the LDP is too cynical. The party's support outside the major cities is much more broadly based and has to do more with public works than with rice prices. Since at least the late 1960s, agricultural mechanization and improvement programs have provided the opportunity for a far wider modernization of regional infrastructure. Directly and indirectly, 25 years of farm aid have permitted a vast program of public works construction: roads, railroads, communications, schools, medical clinics, town offices, and a host of other public facilities.

While it was not their architects' intent, postwar agricultural policies have contributed to a major redistribution of tax revenues from metropolitan Japan to regional Japan. Tokyo remains the political, market,

media, and educational capital of Japan. It attracts—perhaps one should say compels—the best and brightest from all prefectures. However, by a number of indicators—house ownership, car ownership, air quality, per household disposable income, per capita domestic space—rural regions offer better living conditions than do urban areas. The LDP's electoral success and political action derive less from what the LDP has done for Japan's farmers than from what it has done for Japan's regions.

It is not, then, a special Japanese affinity for rice or the LDP's embrace of the farmer that has perpetuated the peculiar pattern of postwar farming. Cultural memory and political calculations are at work in different ways. Yet even this overstates both the distinctiveness and importance of rice in rural Japan. It also overlooks the richer texture of regional lifeways. For the last 15 years, I have been returning periodically to the northern coastal plain of Shōnai, one of the few areas where large-scale rice farming remains viable. For the Itōs, one of the families with whom I live during my Shōnai visits, rice farming is still central, but a short profile of their lives and circumstances may serve to illustrate the new shape of the changing countryside.

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The Itōs have lived for five generations in the 100-family settlement of Watamae, now part of Fujishima Town in the fertile center of Shōnai Plain. Fujishima lies between Shōnai's two rival cities—the old castle town of Tsuruoka, nestled at the southern edge of the plain, and the commercial port of Sakata, an important harbor in the pre-modern sea trade.

Administratively, Fujishima is a small town center surrounded by 3,500 hectares of rice paddyland and about 50 nucleated villages like Watamae. Some 5,000 persons live in the town center, and another 8,500 in the perimeter villages.

In the early 1980s, a fad for renaming swept through the Japanese corporate world. (Americans experienced this as the replacement of the Datsun name with Nissan.) Municipalities across the country joined this "CI (for corporate image) boom" in a rush to gain a slight public-relations advantage over neighboring towns.

corporation. Some 15 years ago, the company bought up rice fields on the edge of Watamae village and has since been gradually expanding the plant. The total output of the plant's 800 employees now exceeds the total value of Fujishima's rice production. What was rural Japan 40 years ago is now more properly regional Japan.

The Itōs are one of those few full-time farm families. Their three-generation household includes an older couple, their son Noboru, his wife Keiko, and the young couple's three school-aged children. Noboru is himself the oldest of three siblings.



Thanks to mechanization, the rice farmers of modern Japan produce more rice than the nation can consume. Government protection and subsidies help keep the highly venerated farmers in business.

Fujishima adopted the slogan "Home of Rice and the Lion Dance," an ironic choice considering that both rice-growing and the traditional ritual Lion Dance are greatly endangered even in this rice bowl. Shōnai-mai, or Shōnai rice, is one of Japan's favorite brands, and 1,500 of Fujishima's 2,800 households still identify themselves as *nōka*, or farm families. However, only 110 of these claim to be full-time farm families. Residents prefer to softpedal the fact that since the mid-1980s the largest contributor to the town's economy has been a factory belonging to a Tokyo-based electrical parts

He was born in 1949, a member of Japan's baby-boom generation. His birth coincided with the postwar land reform that gave his grandfather clear title to the two hectares of rice paddy the household had tenanted. Noboru's grandfather and his parents farmed this land through the 1950s and early 1960s, while encouraging the three children to finish high school.

Noboru's younger brother, Shōji, born in 1950, graduated from the regional technical high school and went to work in a Yokohama auto-parts factory. After a series of machine-shop jobs in the Tokyo area, he

settled into long-term employment with a small pollution control company in Yokohama. He now lives in a public rental apartment with his wife, who works part-time, and their two middle-school children. Like most renters in metropolitan Tokyo, they have all but given up hope of buying a home, although they still enter the periodic lotteries for state-subsidized housing.

Noboru's sister, Yumiko, was born in 1953, and graduated from Shōnai's commercial high school. She left immediately for Tokyo to find work as a buyer for a Tokyo department store. In 1982, after an elaborate Tokyo marriage, she joined her husband in his family's small clothing business. Together they purchased a modest condominium in eastern Tokyo and had a child. In the mid-1980s, however, the business went bankrupt and the couple moved into a small apartment with Yumiko's mother-in-law (who cares for their child during the day). The couple now manages a small pet shop and plan one day to open their own.

Noboru's own decision in the 1960s to go to the agricultural high school was a difficult one, but he has stuck with farming long after most other young men of the settlement have given up. With a full complement of machines, Noboru now handles four hectares of paddyland by himself, an acreage that would have required at least four adults of his parents' generation. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, he had to work half of the year making deliveries for a city bookstore, but he was always trying to come up with ways to make a living by year-round agriculture in a northern climate whose snowy winters allow only a single rice crop. After several experiments, he hit upon a scheme for growing and pickling organic vegetables. Bypassing the agricultural cooperative, he joined with two acquaintances from nearby villages to negotiate a long-term contract with a To-

kyo-area consumer cooperative. For his business, Noboru seasonally hires several older men and women of the village, including his mother.

Noboru and Keiko, a year younger, were married in 1973, after introductions through mutual friends of their parents and a very brief courtship. She agreed to the marriage on the condition that she be able to continue as a full-time salesperson at what was then the only department store on the plain. The Itōs readily accepted. Machines made her labor unnecessary, and her job brought the household a regular cash income. Today, with much of Noboru's farm income going directly to the household account at the Agricultural Coop, Keiko's is the largest cash contribution to the family budget.

After nearly 20 years with the department store, she remains on the sales floor. She was offered advancement to the managerial staff but declined because it would have required taking assignments away from the region. Now heading one of the floor sales units, she is required to work ten, sometimes 12, hours a day, and often more hours at home scheduling her unit's overtime.

Both of Noboru's parents (Grandpa Tokuzō and Grandma Fusae) turn 60 this year. They are members of the "Shōwa single-digit generation", as those born in the first part of Emperor Shōwa's era (1926–1934) are called. This is Japan's equivalent of what sociologist Glen Elder has called our "Children of the Depression," and in the Japanese imagination, it embodies the spirit of postwar Japan—committed, hard-working, both proud and wary of the affluence it has produced. The two older Itōs finished elementary school and worked as adolescent field hands during the war years. Grandma's fondest childhood memory, which she retells over and over, is of receiving the certificate of perfect fourth-

grade attendance, earned despite the long walk to school from her upland home. Mutual in-laws brokered their young marriage just after the war ended, and Grandma entered her husband's household as bride, daughter-in-law, and older sister to several of her husband's six siblings who were still in school and at home.

Grandpa Tokuzō never was enthusiastic about farming—he had a bad back and weak stomach—and his wife still complains that he left much of the field work to her and his father. As soon as Noboru's marriage was arranged and he seemed set on farming, Grandpa turned to his real passion, which is dedication to local "good causes", particularly school programs and senior-citizen activities. In 1990, he finishes his fourth four-year term as a Fujishima town councilman. Such longevity is a considerable achievement, especially because he has consistently refused to engage in the usual practice of vote-buying. He is an indefatigable and thus widely liked small-town politician.

His family, it must be said, is more ambivalent about his public activities. They appreciate the status such involvement brings, but Grandma still suspects her husband is malingering, and the younger Itōs see his generosity as a drain on family finances. More seriously, it has meant delaying for a decade or so their hopes of substantially remodeling their house. Twenty years ago, they were among the first to modernize and enlarge their thatched-roof farm house, but now Noboru and Keiko look enviously at the more contemporary living arrangements and amenities in their neighbors' homes. Not surprisingly, they were delighted when Grandpa announced his decision to retire in the fall of 1990.

In the years since her own contributions to the paddy fields became unnecessary, Noboru's mother Fusae has risen most mornings at five o'clock to earn a bit

of money doing piece work at home. For several years, she did small-wire soldering for the electric parts company; recently she has been doing finish work for girls' clothing at 200 yen per piece. At 6:30, she stretches her sore back with the radio exercise program, and then she and Keiko prepare breakfast. While the children are at school, she tends the family's large vegetable garden and continues her piece work. Grandma Fusae has been generally happy to assume much of the burden of raising her three grandchildren. As a young bride, she had to return to the fields immediately after giving birth to her own three children, who were looked after by her mother-in-law. So now she enjoys this long-delayed chance to be a mother.

Keiko and Noboru's three children all moved up the educational ladder this year. The oldest, a daughter, passed a highly competitive exam to enter Tsuruoka South, the region's preeminent high school; the second, a son and putative household successor, entered Fujishima's junior high school, while the youngest, a second son, began elementary school in Watamae. (Regional public works programs have rebuilt all three schools within the last five years.)

The Itōs' present educational concerns focus on the older two. Unlike the graduates of other Shōnai high schools, those of Tsuruoka South are expected to go on to college, but Shōnai's best school is still far from the top of the national pyramid. Personal ambitions and adult expectations push the students to achievement that even Tsuruoka South's regular, fast-paced curriculum cannot prepare them for. This year, fully 120 of the 220 graduating seniors chose to take an extra year for intensive exam preparation, either by themselves (as so-called *rōnin*) or at special academies. As high-school graduates, Keiko and Noboru improved upon their parents' elementary education, and they would be proud—

though also saddened—to see their daughter earn a college degree. While the diploma will be a great honor, it will almost certainly lead to their daughter's leaving the region for work or marriage.

This heightens their anxieties about their older son. Given the three-year junior high system, they have 18 months before they must decide which high school entrance exam he will sit for. Is there a future in the family's farming? Is he interested? Should he be encouraged? Noboru has a new-found enthusiasm for farming and the experience to develop a farming business partially independent of the cooperative network. This still does not give him the confidence to imagine a long-term future for Fujishima agriculture. Like virtually every other parent in Watamae, he will probably urge his son to consider other work.



For the moment, though, rice, and rice farming, remain central to the fortunes and feelings of the Itōs. There are many ways in which Noboru's life has diverged from that of his younger brother and sister in metropolitan Tokyo. However, even to members of this "full-time" farming household, the satisfactions and concerns of daily life are far more broadly defined by their place in regional, not rural, Japan. Grandpa Tokuzō's local good works, Grandma Fusae's efforts to keep working, Keiko's current overtime pressures, the children's educational

choices, the plans for remodeling the house—all are conditioned by, and expressed in, the terms of mainstream Japanese life. This is true even for Noboru's farming and food processing. For economic advantage and ideological satisfaction, his personal occupation remains the family's image. His case demonstrates, however, the anachronism of the notion of a full-time farm family, even for those few who still claim such an identity.

It would be a mistake to conclude from the Itō's lifeways that there is no future for farming in rural Japan. Farmers like Noboru now believe that national overproduction and international demands for rice imports make eventual liberalization of the rice market inevitable. With that will come the collapse of rice-based policies and rice-centered farming. To these farmers, however, the issue is not the stark opposition of cultural sentimentalism or economic rationality posed by urban commentators and foreign critics. The farmers recognize that in postwar Japan, agriculture has been a catalyst in regional development, while rice has carried a heavy symbolic load in defining that agriculture. "Home of Rice and the Lion Dance" is as effective—and misleading—a tug on urban heart-strings as were American news reports of bankruptcy auctions of family farms in the Midwest. The future the farmers now expect only heightens the contradiction they must resolve. If any farming is to remain viable in regional Japan, rice will have to be much less important economically, even while continuing to enjoy cultural preeminence. Both the profits and prestige that farmers need to survive will depend on their ability to manage this paradox.

RESTORING ORDER TO THE HOUSE OF JAPAN

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by Margaret Lock

In a study conducted six years ago, a team of Japanese researchers asked children in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan to draw a picture of a typical evening meal. Although most of the children depicted a family sitting together around a dinner table, a significant number of the Japanese children drew a single child holding a bowl of noodles while seated in front of the television set. These results reinforced a concern already voiced by influential commentators in Japan, including government officials, that the modern family was in trouble, its individual members too occupied with their own activities to find time for each other.

Not everyone shares this concern, of course. Nor does it conform with what many Japanese, from farmers to small business owners, see in their own daily lives. Nevertheless, the sentiment that Japan may be paying too high a human price for its economic "miracle" is certainly in the air.

If, for example, one scans the headlines of newspapers and popular magazines published during the past 15 years or so, one is left with a distinct impression of unease: "More Girls, Housewives Becoming Drug Addicts"; "Schools Reverting to Corporal

Punishment"; "The Dying Family"; "More Family Suicides"; "More Middle-Aged Men Killing Themselves"; "Housewife Anxiety Rate Rises to 98%." In one article that appeared in a 1984 edition of the influential *Asahi* newspaper, "Japanese Youth Unhappiest, Despite Economic Growth," the author worried that young people were part of "a floating generation, without any sense of purpose. And the real problem lies in the family."

Yasuhiko Yuzawa, a sociologist of the family at Tokyo's Ochanomizu University, cautions that the media frequently take statistics out of context, creating the mistaken impression that the family is developing along pathological lines. He claims that the incidence of serious family disorders, including infanticide, parricide, family suicide, illegitimacy, and divorce, has not increased in absolute terms. In his view, the modern Japanese family is not in crisis.

But such voices of moderation are increasingly drowned out by a chorus of high-placed worriers—government bureaucrats, leaders of the long-reigning Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), commentators from various academic disciplines and professions known collectively as *hyōronka* (social critics). In official documents and



Painting of a traditional family scene by Miyagawa Chōshun (1682–1752).

the media, these commentators, mostly conservative, tend to advance a common critique. They charge that the social and psychological maladies that accompany modernization—alienation, depression, assorted neuroses, anti-social and even criminal behavior—have been aggravated, if not caused, by the disappearance of the traditional “extended” family and its replacement by the modern “nuclear” family: a household restricted to parents and children. According to the *hyōronka*, the modern family, by failing to cultivate traditional values, has allowed selfish individualism to erode concern for the well-being of the family group. And without strong group loyalties, the commentators caution, the health of the nation is itself at risk.

Not surprisingly, Japanese mothers receive much of the blame for the family crisis. Social critic Jun Etō offered what may be described as the typical conservative diagnosis in his widely discussed 1979 article, “The Breakdown of Motherhood is Wrecking Our Children.” Etō argued that danger-

ous “ideologues” had encouraged people to think that women who devote their lives to raising children are victims of a “feudalistic, slavish, and humiliating” patriarchal system. If too many women come to accept this ideology, he warned, Japanese children would inevitably suffer.

Critics of the reactionaries, including Yasuhiko Yuzawa, say that the contemporary family deserves praise not blame. In addition to playing a crucial role in Japan’s postwar recovery, it reduced the exploitation and abuse of women and children. Yet other commentators, particularly women critics such as Keiko Higuchi, believe that while the structure of the family has changed, the old gender inequities persist. They endure, they say, because traditional values, particularly notions about women’s “natural” inferiority and subordination, have not significantly changed.

Debate over the family—and women’s role in it—has intensified during the last decade, but it is not new. In some respects, the most recent round began as early as

1868, at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. Setting out to create a modern nation-state, a process already set in motion by the preceding Tokugawa regime, the Meiji leaders at first appeared to commit themselves to certain liberal reforms. The inferior position of women immediately became a bone of contention, and a number of influential Meiji politicians such as Yukichi Fukuzawa and Arinori Mori called for fairer treatment of women and the abandonment of such practices as the keeping of concubines.

Masanao Nakamura, another prominent Meiji statesmen and a Christian convert who traveled extensively in the West, helped popularize in Japan the contemporary European notion of "the affectionate wife, wise mother." Translated as *ryōsai kenbo*, the phrase was used by Nakamura much as it was used in 19th-century Europe: to promote the idea that education would make women better able to nurture and educate their children at home. Nakamura made his position more palatable to conservatives by arguing that such education would emphasize moral values and domestic science. Partly in response to foreign pressure, the Meiji government took steps to implement some of Nakamura's suggestions.

Modest though it may seem, the status accorded the *ryōsai kenbo* represented a vast improvement over that of women in most pre-Meiji samurai and merchant households, a status crudely summed up in the epithet "borrowed womb." At the very least, the good wife and wise mother was able to exercise authority in her own household. She did not exist simply to produce offspring for the paternal line.

Encouraged by such progress, women themselves began to campaign for their

rights, but their efforts soon came up against a rising tide of criticism directed against liberalism and the "unsettling" influences of the West. Conservatives, particularly discontented samurai, gained greater influence within the Meiji leadership, and when the Meiji Civil Code was instituted in 1898, it stripped women of almost all of their gains. Despite liberal-sounding language and certain concessions to the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal, the code effectively denied women any legal standing, relegating them to the same category as the deformed and mentally incompetent. Furthermore, the code imposed on all of Japanese society the family order of the warrior samurai class, an arrangement that gave the male head of the household all power and left women with virtually no control over their lives, property, or families.

Above all, the Meiji Civil Code reflected the regime's growing concern for standardization and social control. Before its adoption, family arrangements had been quite flexible in Japan. Inheritance practices were loose enough to provide for the needs of individual families, and marriage and courtship customs were subject to local variations. People living in some rural areas were allowed to choose their own marriage partners, for example.

But various as Japanese family arrangements had been, all of them could be broadly subsumed under the concept of the *ie* (pronounced *ee-ay*), which roughly translates as "household." Referring both to the house and its residents, the *ie* emphasized the ties of the living family, a property-owning corporate group, both to its ancestors and to the generations to come. The *ie* did not extend lat-

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erally. Only the married couple, their children (biological and adopted), and grandparents lived under one roof. All children except the one designated as heir were expected to marry out of the *ie* and become incorporated into other households, often at some distance from their birthplaces. (Modern Japanese cities are largely populated by descendants of sons who could not expect to inherit property.) Unlike the peasant families of China, in which the division of patrimony gave rise to large, extended clans, Japanese families tended to be small, self-contained economic units. But, again, the make-up of the *ie* varied considerably according to region and class.

To eliminate such variety, the Meiji leaders imposed the rigid discipline and formality of the samurai class on the families of farmers, artisans, and merchants. Inheritance was formally restricted to the eldest son, who, unless he was mentally incompetent, assumed complete responsibility for the stewardship of the family fortune and for the well-being, behavior, and marriages of other family members. Women were no longer allowed any say in choosing a spouse, and were not even secure within a marriage until they had successfully produced a male heir. The Confucian tenets of filial piety and unquestioning loyalty governed family relationships, and the primary obligation of all family members was to preserve the continuity of the *ie*.

Thus organized, the *ie* served as a highly effective tool for the promotion of loyalty and patriotism. By fusing the ethos of emperor worship with the new household ideal, the Meiji rulers fostered the concept of a family-state (*kazoku kokka*). Each *ie* became a microcosm of the nation, the all-encompassing family unit of which the Emperor was the parent figure.

The Meiji strategy of state-building, with the highly formalized *ie* at its center, sur-

vived up until the end of World War II. Not all Japanese families conformed to the samurai *ie*, despite the wide influence of the Meiji bureaucracy, but it is this arrangement that most people have in mind when they talk about the traditional family.

The end of World War II was the beginning of the end of the Meiji *ie*. Among the many reforms the Allied Occupation forced the Japanese to adopt were laws and codes affecting the family order and women's rights. The Revised Voting Law of 1945 gave women the right to vote and run for electoral office, and subsequent legislation established the principle (if not the reality) of equal education and equal pay for equal work. The Revised Civil Code of 1947 dealt directly with family matters. It dismantled the legal foundation of the Meiji *ie* by assuring women the right to marry whom they chose, to sue for divorce, and to inherit, own, and control property.

It would be naive to assume that the traditional family disappeared overnight, but change was under way. In certain respects, however, the nuclear family was nothing new. Households had begun to shrink well before World War II. During the 1920s, only about 30 percent of all families had three or more generations living under one roof, compared with 20 percent today. The mean size of households went from five in 1930 to three by the early 1980s, in part because of the growing number of single-family households. As such figures suggest, the transformation of the prewar extended family into the postwar nuclear family was far less dramatic, at least demographically, than conservative rhetoric would lead one to believe.

The "nuclearization" of the family during the postwar years was accompanied by a related phenomenon: the rise of the New Middle Class. Indeed, in the usage of many Japanese social analysts, the modern nuclear family and the New Middle Class have

become almost synonymous. This often makes it difficult to determine what the label refers to—class, family arrangements, values, or all three. Reality and rhetoric are further confused by the fact that, in polls, 90 percent of all Japanese respondents identify themselves as thoroughly middle class. (And while there is much less of an income spread in Japan than in the United States, the gap between the salaries of, say, business executives and factory workers is wide enough to make such survey responses almost meaningless.)

Despite its imprecision, the term New

and Westernized behavioral patterns—all of these, claim the conservative *hyōronka*, have disrupted the traditional forms of control formerly exercised by the powerful head of the *ie*. They point to the fact that the *ie* of old was not only an economic unit but the locus of spiritual values, prominent among which was veneration of the ancestors. The felt presence of the ancestors legitimized the authority of parents and made the fulfillment of parental obligations a sacred duty. The moral and spiritual training of children was considered the most important task not only for parents but also for



The typical nuclear family of Japan's New Middle Class: father, mother, and two children.

Middle Class appears frequently in the media, where, like the *ie* of prewar days, it is taken to mean the living arrangements and the ethos of the majority of the population today. The average New Middle Class household—inevitably suburban—includes a white-collar salaried husband (the “salaryman”), a homemaker wife (an updated good wife and wise mother), and two studious children. And it is this family that commentators point to when they discuss Japan’s declining spiritual health.

Gender equality, liberalization of parent-child relations, egalitarian inheritance laws,

grandparents.

Not so in the modern household, say the *hyōronka*. The elderly have been abandoned, condemned to “dying alone and unwanted.” And without the watchful gaze of the ancestors, young couples, especially wives, are inadequate to the task of raising the future citizens of Japan.

Some Westerners may be surprised to learn that the modern Japanese housewife has been judged so deficient. After all, in our press and even in scholarly studies, the Japanese housewife appears to be the model parent, the real secret behind Ja-

pan's postwar success. In a recent *National Geographic* article, for example, journalist Deborah Fallows reports that "it is a commonplace statement in Japan that the nation's hardworking housewives are its secret weapon . . . the backbone of the nation that enables its men to perform their economic miracle, and the insurance that the next generation of Japanese will behave in the same hardworking way." Many in the West have read that the Japanese mother is impeccable in her housekeeping, tireless in the care and education of her children, and stoical in her acceptance of the fact that she must do all of this on her own. While her husband is gone all day, she scrupulously attends to the family budget, works for the PTA, or drills her children so they can pass the stiff school entrance examinations.

While this image, and the praise that attends it, may still be "commonplace" among some Japanese, the conservative political establishment and a growing number of social critics present the housewife in a far less flattering light. One stereotype that frequently appears in the media is that of the new housewife in her fully automated household, a creature of luxury and ease who enjoys *san shoku hiru ne tsuki* (implying an easy, permanent job with three meals and a nap thrown in). Conservative commentators blame these "professional" housewives for what is called the "feminization" of the family. Modern mothers, they say, are preoccupied with their children and enter into a "symbiotic" relationships with them. Several writers, including the physician Shigemori Kyūtoku, author of the best-selling *Illnesses Caused by Mother* (1979), have suggested that young women have lost their "natural child-rearing instincts" and begun to treat their children like "pets."

By many accounts, suburban mothers themselves are suffering. Prominent Japanese psychologists claim that young moth-

ers are excessively controlling and compulsively fastidious. As a result, they are particularly vulnerable to a host of new *bunmeibyō* (diseases of civilization), including "high-rise apartment neurosis," "moving-day depression," the "kitchen syndrome," and "menopausal syndrome." But, to most *hyōronka*, women's liberation is not the solution. One Tokyo physician explained to me that even though women had become neurotically obsessed with "trying to create a good child," they had also lost their ability to persevere. "They've lost all that since women's lib," he concluded. "They have poor self-control now."

What, then, is a suburban Japanese mother to do? Damned if she stays at home, she is damned if she ventures out. Seeking employment outside the home, most conservative *hyōronka* say, is both unseemly and unnecessary. It leads to the "masculinization" of women. Fortunately, one respectable option now exists: that of the "New Mother." According to professor and author Masatoshi Takada, the "New Mother" skillfully balances part-time work, hobbies, and family life. The "New Mother" is deemed successful if she can negotiate the narrows between selfishness on one side and obsession and loneliness on the other. It remains to be seen whether the "New Mother" will become a workable model of motherhood for future generations of women, but at least it offers a possible escape from the present double-bind.

In some ways, fathers receive even harsher blame for the perceived family pathology. Their greatest fault is absenteeism. Casting what critics call "a thin shadow," modern fathers are seldom at home. When they are, they serve as weak role models, failing to apply discipline when it's needed. Recently, a widely circulated Health and Welfare Ministry document called on men

to demonstrate more masculinity in what it implied were mother-centered families.

The question, of course, is how they will do this. It is difficult, if not impossible, for most salaried employees to spend more time with their families. Their normal days are long, and evening drinking bouts are considered part of an executive's responsibilities. Salarymen are also required by their companies to be away from their homes for extended periods, often for months and, in the case of foreign assignments, for years at a time. (It is widely believed that refusing such assignments jeopardizes one's chances for promotion.) To make matters worse, families are seldom given a relocation allowance, and even if they were, most parents would be reluctant to disrupt their children's schooling. As a result, temporary single-parent families are quite common in Japan. But while many critics lament the problem, few closely scrutinize its connections with the demanding corporate culture that governs the lives of so many Japanese men.

The media are also quick to point to the various "stress-related ailments" afflicting businessmen, including heart problems, loss of appetite, impotence, and insomnia. Again, however, *hyōronka* lay the blame on overwork and "weak personalities." Ridiculed even in the comics, the "worker bee" of today is cast as an incompetent husband and father. Gone, critics suggest, is the controlled samurai masculinity that characterized fathers of earlier generations.

Given their views of modern mothers and fathers, it is hardly surprising that professional critics think that Japanese children are also in trouble. One topic lately receiving wide media attention is the "school-refusal syndrome." A child suffering from this affliction typically remains in bed all day, listless, depressed, and unable to face the challenge of school. While some commentators claim that this syndrome is

rampant, I suspect that its incidence is such that a similar rate would cause little concern in North America.

However widespread, the "school-refusal syndrome" is one of those maladies, so beloved by the media, that crystallize a society's anxieties about itself and its health. The typical school-refusal child comes from a nuclear family; he (for it is nearly always a boy) has an Absent Father and either a Selfish or an Obsessive Mother. He may well be fed pre-packaged food by his mother, and his brain functions poorly as a result of countless hours spent in front of a television. He is bad at playing with other children, does not get on well in groups, "sticks out" inappropriately, and may even be physically weak. His personality is dangerously deficient. He may be stubborn, timid, withdrawn, or egotistical, and he sometimes becomes violent. He suffers from stomach problems, headaches, and even kidney or heart disease.

It is easy to see how the school-refusal child reflects all that is thought to be wrong with the New Middle Class. It is also obvious why the school-refusal syndrome serves as an ideal rhetorical device in the conservative critique of Japan's social ills. Not everybody believes the rhetoric, of course, but very few Japanese dismiss it out of hand, for at least two reasons. First, the rhetoric is used by people in positions of authority, and respect for authority, political as well as professional, is still strong. Second, there is a kernel of truth to it. Modern "professional" housewives do lead lives of comparative ease, certainly more comfortable lives than were led by most women who went before them (with the possible exception of the aristocracy). While most people in Japan—men, employed women, and children—are worked to the limit of their endurance, the housewife has time to play tennis or decorate sugar cubes for her afternoon cup of tea. Even suburban house-

wives confess to some guilt about their condition. When surveyed, such women report that they believe that running the household and raising children is crucial; nevertheless, most of the women I interviewed characterize themselves as being (at times) weak-willed, lacking in self-control, and inferior to their own mothers.

But there is also a third reason why so many people are listening to the worried *hyōronka*. By the year 2025, people 65 and over will make up a remarkable 23.4 percent of the Japanese populace. Government officials view this “graying of Japan” with something close to panic. What, they wonder, will be done with all of these old people if the nuclear family of the New Middle Class makes no place for them?

In recent media discussions of the issue, government and conservative commentators have called for a return to the traditional extended household—the *ie*—with one rather important modification. Instead of the authoritarian father, the good wife and wise mother will be the center of the revived *ie*. Rather than making plastic flowers or decorating sugar cubes, she will become the primary provider of services to her extended family. She will look after her aged parents-in-law and take care of any family members who have chronic illnesses or disabilities. She will continue to invest much of her time caring for and educating her children. And she will practice frugal home economics to accumulate savings that can be used to supplement meager old-age pensions.

What goes generally unacknowledged in the official literature is the fact that many women already do all of these things—and

often hold down jobs in addition. Studies indicate that married couples quite often take in their elderly relatives, usually after their children have married and left the household. Nor does one have to look very far to find a middle-aged woman who has spent years of her life nursing an incontinent parent-in-law.

There is no question, though, that Japan faces the same decision all other modern societies face: It must determine how the burden of caring for dependents such as children, the sick, and the elderly should be divided between the family and the state. Japanese social and economic policy, as promoted for most of the postwar era by the ruling LDP, extracts a large amount of labor from its workers, keeps taxes reasonably low, and carefully limits social services on the assumption that the family should be willing to take up the slack.

But in any postmodern society, particularly one that is rapidly “graying,” such a system leaves many people uncared for. If present trends continue, it is estimated that by the year 2008, the number of full-time housewives will equal the number of elderly suffering from senile dementia or other serious infirmities. This doesn’t sound like the harmonious extended *ie* that the ideologues invoke when they call for a return to the “good” old days. Nor does the rhetoric square with the fact that at present the majority of women work out of economic necessity and that many men are deprived of a family life altogether. It is little wonder that a growing number of people are beginning to wonder what economic growth and development are really all about, and for whose benefit they race blindly on.

BACKGROUND BOOKS

EVERYDAY LIFE IN JAPAN

Japanese culture may ultimately thwart Western efforts to comprehend it, but the Western urge to "read" Japanese society has become, if anything, even keener during recent years. The reason is obvious. Americans and Europeans want to understand the engine that has powered Japan's economic ascent during the postwar era.

Anyone curious about the workings of this complex social machine would do well to start with the late Edwin O. Reischauer's **Japanese Today: Change and Continuity** (Harvard Univ., 1988). Reischauer, who was a Harvard professor of history and served as U.S. ambassador to Tokyo, was born in Japan, the son of a Protestant missionary. His knowledge of his subject is intimate, almost familial. But while his view of Japanese "otherness" is more sympathetic than that of the current "revisionist" scholars, he pulls no punches when he treats Japanese foibles and follies: "It is not easy for them to give up their past cozy life, safely insulated by their language barrier and thriving economy, for a more adventurous life dealing with the problems of world peace and the global economy. To put it in dramatic terms, they find it hard to join the human race. For one thing, they still have inadequate skills of communication. More seriously, they have a strong sense of separateness." This extensive revision of his earlier book, **The Japanese** (Harvard, 1977), provides a survey of Japanese history from the third century A.D. through the late 1970s and a shrewd discussion of contemporary political and economic life. Reischauer is at his best, however, when decoding the intangible qualities of Japanese society—interpersonal relationships and values.

Unlike Reischauer, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict never lived in Japan. Her knowledge of the culture was based on extensive reading and on interviews with Japanese-Americans. But though she treated her subject from afar, her book, **Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture** (Houghton Mifflin, 1946; 1989), has become an indispensable introduction to the complexities of the Japanese people. Writing around the end of World

War II, Benedict set out to interpret the contradictions suggested by her book's title: How could a people of such sensitivity and aesthetic refinement also sustain a cult of the sword? To find answers, she explored Japan's hierarchical social system, the importance of reciprocal obligations in relationships, the power of shame, and the related necessity of clearing one's name through revenge or suicide. Self-discipline, Benedict discovered, was the true "sword" of Japanese character: "Japanese of all classes judge themselves and others in terms of a whole set of concepts which depend upon their notion of generalized technical self-control and self-governance."

Scholars generally agree that the strength of Benedict's book is her interpretation of traditional society, but many fault her efforts to show how traditional notions continued to shape modern Japan. Here, clearly, her lack of direct contact proved to be a handicap. Fortunately, it is not one that has afflicted most postwar Western students of Japanese life and culture. Perhaps the best single introduction to their work is Robert J. Smith's **Japanese Society: Tradition, Self, and the Social Order** (Cambridge Univ., 1983). In four masterful lectures, Smith, a Cornell anthropologist, explains how modern Japan became a mass industrial society significantly different from its Western counterparts. Traditional values, including the urge to create a "perfect society," are decisive, he argues. The great difference between Japan and the West "lies less in its organization and institutions than in the way all of its history shows how the Japanese think about man and society and the relationship between the two."

The people who have come to typify the postwar Japanese are, of course, the members of the New Middle Class. During the 1950s, Harvard sociologist Ezra Vogel studied five families in suburban Tokyo, and though his work is now somewhat dated, **Japan's New Middle Class: The Salary Man and his Family in a Tokyo Suburb** (Univ. of Calif., 1963; 1971) remains a valuable portrait of white-collar employees (government and corporate) and their "nuclear" families. Vogel's dissection of chang-

ing family relationships is particularly astute: "It may seem paradoxical that even though the salaried family represents the most radical departure from tradition in many ways, the opportunity of the wife of the salary man to be home and devoted to the children has made the mutual dependency of the mother and child even stronger in the salary-man families than in other occupational groups." For a more extensive (and recent) look at these middle-class housewives, one may turn to Anne E. Imamura's **Urban Japanese Housewives: At Home and in the Community** (Univ. of Hawaii, 1987).

A book that succeeds brilliantly in tracing the lifeways of individuals who were born and raised in prewar and wartime Japan but came to maturity during the postwar years is David W. Plath's **Long Engagements: Maturity in Modern Japan** (Stanford Univ., 1980). Plath, an anthropologist at the University of Illinois, mixes oral autobiographies of four middle-aged men and women residing in the Osaka-Kōbe area with stories from four contemporary novels and short essays bearing on Japanese society. For each of his subjects, including a former "suicide cadet," he shows the sustaining power of "long engagements"—relationships with friends, co-workers, and relatives. Plath's book is most instructive about the ways in which people preserve meaning and individuality as they age, even in a culture so often perceived as group-dominated and conformist.

Other excellent ethnographic studies point

to a similar variety within Japanese society, a diversity stemming from regional as well as occupational differences. To understand the changes in rural Japan during the last 60 years, one should begin with John Embree's **Suye Mura: A Japanese Village** (Univ. of Chicago, 1939; 1964). Embree, the only Western anthropologist to conduct fieldwork in prewar Japan,

produced this study after spending a year in a southern Kyūshū farming village with his wife, Ella Lury Wiswell. During that year, Wiswell kept an extensive journal, rich in details about women's lives. More than 40 years later, Robert J. Smith organized these notes into **The Women of Suye Mura** (Chicago, 1982). One finds no delicate flowers here. The hard-drinking, independent farm women of Suye Mura long resisted Meiji-inspired efforts to make Japanese women into submissive housekeepers. Two other noteworthy studies of rural Japan are Ronald P. Dore's **Shinohata: Portrait of a Japanese Village** (Pantheon, 1978), a wittily drawn portrait of the central Honshū farming village that the author, a British sociologist, visited several times between 1955 and 1975, and **Haru-**

ko's World: A Japanese Farm Woman and Her Community (Stanford, 1983) by Gail Lee Bernstein, a professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona. Both show how mechanization, modernization, and growing prosperity have altered the work habits and outlooks of the nation's highly respected farmers.

When one thinks of Japan's postwar boom,



one thinks primarily of the cities. Today, 31 million people, or roughly one quarter of all Japanese, live in metropolitan Tokyo alone. The growth of the suburbs has been steady, but so far this centrifugal pressure has not killed the inner cities. A resilient urban culture still shapes the lives of many Japanese, providing a sense of order and tradition amid the commercialism and congestion. Theodore C. Bestor, a Columbia University anthropologist, details the daily workings of a middle-class residential and commercial district in **Neighborhood Tokyo** (Stanford, 1989) to show just how vital neighborhood life remains. His book nicely complements Ronald Dore's earlier study of the life in a lower-middle-class neighborhood, **City Life in Japan: A Study of a Tokyo Ward** (Calif., 1958).

Bestor's book shows how the family firm merges work and family life in ways reminiscent of the traditional home. But for most other Japanese, work takes place in spheres completely separate from the household. In **Japanese Blue Collar: The Changing Tradition** (Calif., 1971), based partly on his own experience as an employee in two Japanese factories, sociologist Robert E. Cole deals with everything from wage-scales and promotion to the paternalistic style of company-worker relations. A worker's-eye view of life within a public corporation can be found in Paul H. Noguchi's **Delayed Departures, Overdue Arrivals** (Hawaii, 1990). Noguchi, a Japanese-American, hired on with the Japanese National Railways shortly before it was broken up into several private corporations. His novel approach to Japanese corporate life explains what daily reality is like for someone whose greatest ambition is to rise to the position of stationmaster. To succeed requires not only high examination scores but prodigious stamina: Assistant stationmasters routinely work the 24-hour *tetsuya* shift, which includes only four hours of sleep.

The Japanese work hard, but they do occasionally break for other rituals of everyday life, including marriage. In premodern Japan, weddings were modest household ceremonies that sealed what were often arranged marriages. But today more than 90 percent of all unions,

whether arranged or elected, take place in "wedding palaces," complete with Shinto or even Christian trappings. Walter Edwards, another Japanese-American ethnographer, worked for a time in one of these palaces. His **Modern Japan Through Its Weddings: Gender, Person, and Society in Ritual Portrayal** (Stanford, 1989) shows how commercialization affects, and reflects, the changing symbolic content of the Japanese wedding. His analysis of ceremony leads Edwards to conclusions about the meaning of marriage to contemporary Japanese: "Thus while the legal form of the *ie* [the traditional family extending across generations] has been abolished, its underlying principles of hierarchy and harmonious interdependence—principles that inevitably deny the autonomy of the individual—survive in its successor as basic [husband-wife] unit."

Before work or marriage comes schooling, and a vast literature on Japanese education now exists. One book that probes beyond the clichés and generalizations about the nation's postwar educational triumphs is **Japan's High Schools** by Thomas P. Rohlen (Calif., 1983). The author, a Stanford anthropologist, investigated five different high schools in the industrial port city of Kōbe. As well as describing school organization, classroom instruction, teacher and union politics, textbooks, and extracurricular activities, Rohlen reveals the chasm separating a fast-track prep school at the top of Kōbe system from a technical school at the bottom. One leaves this book with a keen appreciation of the extent to which examinations are fate in modern Japan.

The competitiveness bred in Japanese schools translates well into economic competitiveness in the global marketplace. But as many of these books suggest, competitiveness can foster individualism, and a too-powerful individualism threatens the very core of Japanese values: the group loyalties expressed through powerful connections with family, neighborhood, region, and nation. For all of Japan's differences, then, its fate is not so different from that of other nations that have achieved prosperity and global influence. It must avoid becoming the victim of its own success.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This bibliography was put together with the assistance of Frank Joseph Shulman, author of Japan, Vol. 103, World Bibliographical Series (ABC Clio, 1989).

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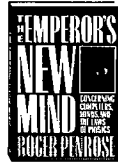
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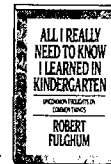


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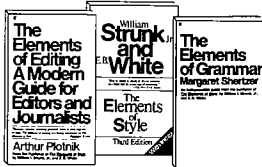
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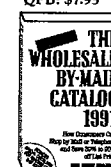
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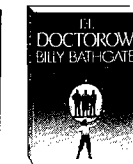
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