

## Neighborhood Tokyo



Review Author[s]:  
William W. Kelly

*Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), 192-200.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0095-6848%28199024%2916%3A1%3C192%3ANT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>

*Journal of Japanese Studies* is currently published by The Society for Japanese Studies.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/sjs.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Kasza is shrewd in his attention to the mass media because few other enterprises so closely combine politics and society. The wartime mass media were particularly influential, and compared with industries that continued to decline during the war, the mass media enjoyed a rare and continuous wartime boom by being strongly welcomed by readers, viewers, and listeners, namely, by their audiences as consumers. For this reason, the author's attempt to capture the wartime dynamism between politics and society through an analysis of the mass media, an industry that bore the distinctive mark of wartime, was not only fresh but right. He also makes several remarkable points in his analyses of individual media. To give just one example of a point well taken, the failure to enforce control over major newspapers, says Kasza, made it possible for the state to obtain people's trust of the authority and talent the major newspapers had and thus contributed to helping the state mobilize people more effectively only in the early stage of the war.

*Neighborhood Tokyo.* By Theodore C. Bestor. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1989. xvi, 347 pages. \$35.00.

*Reviewed by*  
WILLIAM W. KELLY  
Yale University

To the casual visitor, much of metropolitan Tokyo beyond the central wards and before the perimeter suburbs is a vast, seamless, and gray urban expanse, a dense hodgepodge of older dwellings, concrete high-rise apartments, small stores, and belching factories. To many residents, however, this same expanse is a patchwork of local organizations and discrete social worlds. It is an accomplishment of this fine volume—and a demonstration of the continuing power of ethnography—that it makes visible and plausible these integuments of neighborly sentiment and residential organization in a seemingly inhospitable cityscape.

It is necessary at the outset, however, to take issue with the publisher's claim that this is the first ethnography of a Japanese urban neighborhood since Ronald Dore's classic *City Life in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958). This is narrowly true, but it misleadingly foreshortens the lineage of urban ethnography between the two. Despite occasional grumblings to the contrary, the study of Japan has been well-served by superb fieldworkers since the Embrees' mid-1930s work in *Suye Mura*.

This is as true for the much-maligned community studies as for ethnographies of individual lives, families, and workplaces. After the war, Dore's protrait of the Tokyo ward of "Shitayama" and the Michigan team's study of the Okayama hamlet of Niiike provided detailed accounts of the social reconstruction of both urban and rural life in the aftermath of extreme dislocations, in the face of shortages, and as a composite process of local effort and state direction.<sup>1</sup> Both were painstakingly set in a larger political and institutional context and fully informed of local historical dynamics. By brilliant counterexample, they mock the all-too-frequent charges that a community study necessarily condemns one to a myopic, historical description of a narrowly local and illusory order.

They were followed ten years later by two books that implicitly took measure of the societal transformation of the 1950s: Ezra Vogel's *Japan's New Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) and David Plath's *The After Hours: Modern Japan and the Search for Enjoyment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964). Vogel realized that what was occurring in the Tokyo fringe neighborhood of Mamachi during the late 1950s was both population displacement and lifestyle displacement. A new middle class of white-collar employees was emerging amidst the shopkeepers, small businesspeople, and professionals of the old middle class to alter the character of Mamachi from urban fringe town to metropolitan bedburb. At the same time, Plath was out in Nagano Prefecture, in the hinterlands of Matsumoto City; predominant among the region's diverse lifeways were those of the farmer, the shopkeeper, and the wage-earner. His book was both an ethnography of those lifeways and also a demonstration of the growing attractiveness of the life and leisure of the urban *sararīman*.

Christie Kiefer's 1968 dissertation and subsequent articles dealt with the social and psychological dynamics of the then fast-spreading public high-rise complexes, the *danchi*, which became for the would-be *sararīman* of late twentieth-century Tokyo what the *nagaya* tenements were to the laboring classes of early nineteenth-century Edo. Linda Perry followed up this work with a study of the housewives of a Kansai *danchi* in 1970–71. Then in 1977–78, Anne Imamura spent a year in fieldwork in a western Tokyo suburb; its population had tripled in the postwar decades with an influx of corporate and government employees, who found housing in com-

1. On Suye Mura, see John F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939) and Robert J. Smith and Ella Lury Wiswell, *The Women of Suye Mura* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); on Niiike, see Richard K. Beardsley, John W. Hall, and Robert E. Ward, *Village Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

pany apartments, *danchi* complexes, private rental apartments, condominiums, and single-family houses.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s, there have been several more impressive dissertation studies of metropolitan society, including Bestor's study, Robertson's 1985 thesis on the ideology of "community building" in the Tokyo fringe city of Kodaira, and Nussbaum's 1985 ethnography of Tama New Town.<sup>3</sup> Bestor's is the first of what promises to be a series of important books. In short, these and others have provided us with a valuable progression of ethnographic studies of evolving metropolitan life.

Still, it will be to Dore's *City Life in Japan* that Bestor's book will most immediately be compared. It certainly shares a fluid style of presentation. It is a book that will reach a wide and appreciative audience of both colleagues and students. It is neither mindlessly ethnographic nor heartlessly theoretical. Bestor can be informatively chatty (though never gossipy) about neighborhood goings-on, while remaining quietly (though never stridently) assertive about his analytical themes. These themes effectively shape the book, but never extinguish the voices and personalities of Miyamoto-*chō* residents. It is smooth but solid reading.

There is one revealing difference between the two studies. At a time when general knowledge of Japanese society was slight, Dore wrote a sprawling panorama that introduced everything from intimate domestic arrangements to the operation of local schools and town offices. Along the way, he added lengthy and learned disquisitions on the Japanese educational system, the family system, Japanese religion, etc. Bestor's book is deliberately much more circumscribed to the neighborhood and its social patterns. It is an ethnography of urban community, drawn with precision. Given the swamp of palavering about community and *kyōdōtai* in Japan, this is no small feat.

By this I mean that Bestor, to his credit, does not become trapped in a problematic of the presence or absence of community. He avoids a temperature-taking examination of the communal body to determine if it is robust or attenuated—a kind of diagnostics of vital signs to judge if the

2. Christie W. Kiefer, "The *Danchi-zoku* and the Making of the Metropolitan Mind," in Lewis Austin, ed., *Japan: The Paradox of Success* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 279–300; Linda L. Perry, "Being Socially Anomalous: Wives and Mothers without Husbands," in David W. Plath, ed., *Adult Episodes in Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 32–41; and Anne E. Imamura, *Urban Japanese Housewives: At Home and in the Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

3. Jennifer Ellen Robertson, "The Making of Kodaira: Being an Ethnography of a Japanese City's Progress" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1985); Stephen Patrick Nussbaum, "The Residential Community in Modern Japan: An Analysis of a Tokyo Suburban Development" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1985).

communal body survives through natural feeling or whether it is kept alive by artificial means and administrative contrivance. Rather, his animating issue is what kind of arena of interaction and organization is the urban neighborhood.

Miyamoto-*chō* is a neighborhood constructed from closely-monitored participation, class identity, and “tradition,” here meant as the uses of the past to sanction claims in the present. Bestor concludes, in fact, that it constitutes an “alternative social world”:

the vitality and internal complexity of neighborhoods like Miyamoto-*chō* can be seen as a consequence or reflection of Japanese class dynamics. Members of the “old middle class” who lack recognition in a society where status and prestige are generally granted on the basis of education and employment can cordon off a corner of the world in which recognition is based on other criteria—their own criteria. (p. 255)

Now this is hardly class struggle. Rather, it is the assertion of the legitimacy and dignity of local difference, and the book is an account of these differences, of their subtly oppositional effect, and of their bases in class and gender dynamics within the neighborhood.

Miyamoto-*chō* is but a 20-minute train ride and 10-minute walk from central Tokyo, just a kilometer beyond the Yamanote ring line. Its 2,100 residents live in about 750 households (plus two company dormitories for unmarried male workers of large corporations). Its 18 acres form a rough, north-south rectangle, whose busiest street is a one-way, one-lane shopping street (*shōtengai*) that bisects the neighborhood. The slightly elevated “upper” (*kami*) half of the neighborhood, north of the business street, is more residential; the lower (*shimo*) half, which slopes down to a now covered river channel, is more commercial and industrial, a jumble of small factories and machine shops.

At the geographical center of the neighborhood is a shrine, whose parish includes Miyamoto and six surrounding neighborhoods. Because it is located in Miyamoto, residents feel “first among equals” in the parish, and it is from this that Bestor draws his pseudonym. Additionally, a temple, elementary school, junior high school, and a ward branch office are located within Miyamoto-*chō*. Significantly, parish, school, and ward branch boundaries are all different, so each connects Miyamoto to a slightly different set of *chō*.

The book is based primarily on two years of fieldwork in 1979–81, when Bestor and his wife were resident in Miyamoto-*chō*. Perhaps anticipating many readers’ prejudice that present-day urban neighborhoods are but arbitrary administrative containers of anomic and anonymous individuals, Bestor draws a vivid opening portrait of dense neighborly ties and in-

tense social contacts that form a vibrant daily life in this small corner of the vast Tokyo cityscape. The danger he runs, of course, is to tempt the now disarmed reader into the opposite stereotype, of appearing to confirm that, after all, Tokyo, and Edo before it, is an agglomeration of urban villages, an administrative overlay above numerous, small, isolated social worlds, whose integrity is bred of isolation and local tradition. This is certainly what the village-template theory of Japanese social organization would insist. Thus, his next chapter is surprising and significant.

Miyamoto-*chō*, it turns out, is not a survival of the past but a creation of the 1920s, and Bestor sets its appearance in a more general account of the early twentieth-century perimeter sprawl of Tokyo, the massive rural-urban migration and population growth, and administrative reorganizations to incorporate and govern the enlarged city. Prior to the Great Kanto Earthquake, the parish of the Miyamoto shrine was an agricultural hamlet, then incorporated into a village, which was soon elevated to town status (Ebara-*machi*). Only in the 1932 expansion of Tokyo-*shi* did this *machi* become Ebara-*ku*, one of the 20 new wards added to the 15 original central wards.

Especially interesting is Bestor's account of the agricultural landowners in the Miyamoto area, who used cooperatives sanctioned by the Arable Land Adjustment Act (*kōchi seirihō*) to rectangularize their holdings, which they then profitably converted to residential land; these rentals brought capital to begin small businesses and assured them continued prominence in local affairs. The "old middle class" here, it would seem, is neither very old nor very middle. During the war, Ebara-*ku* and adjacent Shinagawa-*ku* were heavily bombed, but Miyamoto itself escaped significant damage. It remains thoroughly and dingily urban. Despite a population decline since the 1960s, it is still a dense 30,000 persons per square kilometer, twice the Tokyo average (p. 21).

The following four chapters (three through six) together convey the contemporary shape of the neighborhood arena, moving back and forth between its formal institutions and informal ties, between its overtly political activities and the underlying social interactions, and between these internal tensions and its external environment. Chapter three emphasizes the inherent conflicts and continual bickerings between neighborhoods like Miyamoto-*chō* and municipal officials. Miyamoto-*chō* is not merely a "political machine" nor an "administrative appendage" (p. 86). The former is clear from the fascinating account of the local ward assemblyman, his support group, and the particular importance of women in these activities (pp. 87–102). The latter is evident in the neighborhood's tepid response to the ward's program of "community-building" or *machi-zukuri*. "*Machi*" is a no doubt deliberately ambiguous term; what the ward really intends is to administer more directly social and cultural activities, such as

an uninspiring Ward Residents' Festival (*kumin matsuri*) that the neighborhood largely ignored (pp. 115–16).

This antagonism contributes in part to the proliferation of formal and informal groups, and chapter four describes community services and neighborhood events such as pesticide spraying, street lights for crime prevention, fire-watch patrols, disaster-preparedness campaigns, recycling, childrens' outings, etc. Organized by the neighborhood association (*chōkai*), the women's auxiliary, the old people's club, the merchants' association, and the volunteer fire brigade, these and other mundane projects are defined and largely accepted as Miyamoto projects, not as delegated municipal services. They are intended to foster sociability as much as to accomplish some more instrumental objective, both culturally, as an ethic of neighborliness (*rentaikan*), and socially, as opportunities for *tsukiai*:

Through the pesticide spraying and a dozen similar projects, the neighborhood can provide some of its own services, more or less on its own terms. The *chōkai*'s ability to offer such services is seen by both leaders and ordinary residents as a measure of its worth and of the neighborhood's integrity as a self-sustaining social unit. (p. 124)

Such activities and the ethic promoted by them are often said to be egalitarian—the bank executive and the lathe operator cooperate as fellow residents in neighborhood events. But there is another side to the neighborhood organizations, which is hierarchical and competitive. This is the subject of the fifth chapter, which discusses membership, leadership, and political dynamics in Miyamoto-*chō*'s major institutions, especially the neighborhood association. Like over three-quarters of such *chōkai* in Tokyo, Miyamoto's postdates 1923. Despite only 750 households, it is an elaborate four-tiered organization with several dozen officers. The proliferation of posts and the politicking necessary to fill them engage many residents in displays and competitions for relative status and for the opportunity to express and mold opinions. Most important in the early 1980s was a generational dispute involving a group of young upstarts (in their late 40s and 50s) who lost control of the *chōkai* to an older generation of leaders (in their late 50s and 60s).

Finally, Bestor turns in chapter six to the informal dimensions of neighborhood life—mutual aid among neighbors, gift-giving at funerals and other occasions, and local social control measures such as the after-dusk patrols by junior high school PTA members during summer school vacations. These both extend social ties well beyond those of the formal organizations, and also because they link residents “on a roughly equal footing . . . lend credibility to the neighborhood's ideology of egalitarianism” (p. 223). The chapter contains a most interesting discussion of the qualities

of these ties, which are usually expressed as *tsukiai*. Bestor interprets them less as mechanical feelings of obligatoriness, preferring to emphasize how they keep open the potentialities of relationships rather than close down possibilities. *Tsukiai* are not friendships, but there is a flexibility and a diversity in the complex patterns of *tsukiai* that motivate their maintenance.

The substantive chapters conclude with a lengthy account (chapter seven) of the annual festival of the Miyamoto shrine, over four days in mid-September. On this occasion, the Shinto deity is called and enticed to the *mikoshi* of each neighborhood to view and review the seven neighborhoods under its protection, but Bestor finds that it is the neighborhood celebrations rather than the shrine rituals themselves that are the more spirited and meaningful to most residents. This is because, in several senses, the festival is more a “community event than religious observance” (p. 234). First, it showcases and enacts principles of association and social relations that are at other times more muted and diffuse such as hierarchy vs. egalitarianism and insiders vs. outsiders. Thus, residents stress the many trivial ways by which they see it as *their* festival, different and apart from significant, adjacent rivals. Second, local festival “traditions” are means toward contemporary pragmatic ends which “imbue Miyamoto with the legitimacy that tradition so amply bestows” (p. 251). Thus, the younger men whose candidate lost the 1981 *chōkai* election immediately mobilized to build a new and bigger *mikoshi*, ostensibly to match that of the bordering neighborhood, but equally to hold ground within Miyamoto. In short, it is the vibrancy of the community that sustains “tradition,” rather than the reverse (p. 253).

Yet tradition is not custom, nor is the past a fixed entity. The new *mikoshi* did not serve the middle-aged youngsters as they expected; being heavier, it required more and even younger bodies and more care in its movements. In the name of tradition, the festival’s character was subtly but significantly altered. These are the points on which Bestor draws from his study several lessons about the multiple relationships of past and present.

Two of these links we might label the transformational and the traditionalist. In the former sense, Miyamoto reminds us of how history shapes present social organization: not as lines of continuity but as social change, which “itself has created many of the features now labeled ‘traditional’ and now thought to represent the survival of the past” (p. 258). It was the outward expansion and social turmoil of twentieth-century Tokyo that produced “institutions and ideologies that metaphorically called upon the ‘traditional’ rural village as a model for urban life” (p. 259). Yet at the same time, the present shapes the past through an ideology of “traditionalism,” that is, the ideological allusions to a past as tradition “to explain, or to make sense of, or to manipulate contemporary social arrangements for contemporary social ends” (p. 260).



The question arises, however, of why this traditionalism and not another? Bestor's answer is in his final comments about "traditionalism, community, and the old middle class" (pp. 261–68). If the petite bourgeoisie are still the "mainstays" of most urban neighborhoods, this is not from anachronistic isolation but from antagonistic interaction with the larger society. The insistence on local particularism and the onerous requirements of multiple participation in neighborhood affairs are significant only in terms of "the dynamics of interclass relations" (p. 262). That is, the postwar decades have brought material prosperity to the old middle class (e.g., rising consumer demand, escalating real estate values, generous tax laws), but such people have also lost considerable prestige to the new middle class salaryman. This is the sense in which the neighborhood frequently becomes an "alternative social world," in which old middle class values are played up and old middle class participation is advantaged.

In this light, the book becomes a valuable contribution to recent re-evaluations of the viability and importance of the *chūshō-kigyō* sector, the sector of medium and small firms and businesses. Whether relegated to a semi-feudal, "traditional" half of a "dual economy" model, or seen as a marginal and declining "Old Middle Class," or assessed simply as the compliant subcontractors of the large corporate manufacturers, the *chūshō-kigyō* have been largely discounted in analyses of the postwar economy. Recently, however, an important essay by Hugh Patrick and Thomas Rohlen, books by David Friedman and Kent Calder, and dissertations like those of Dorinne Kondo and Barbara Ito are forcing a fundamental reappraisal of the centrality of small enterprise to Japanese economic organization and strength.<sup>4</sup> Given the prominence of the main shopping street running through *Miyamoto-chō*, these small retailers are especially central to the neighborhood's political and social life. Bestor's account, stressing the retailing sector and its role in defining local idioms of social interaction, is thus a useful complement to this other work.

However, the principal lesson about the 30 years that separate Dore's *Shitayama* and Bestor's *Miyamoto* is that social differences have not disappeared but have been transposed. There has been a remarkable widening of

4. Hugh T. Patrick and Thomas P. Rohlen, "Small-Scale Family Enterprises," in Kozo Yamamura and Yasukichi Yasuba, eds., *The Political Economy of Japan, Volume 1: The Domestic Transformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 331–84; Kent E. Calder, *Crisis and Compensation: Public Policy and Political Stability in Japan, 1949–1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 312–48; David Friedman, *The Misunderstood Miracle: Industrial Development and Political Change in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Dorinne Kay, "Work, Family and the Self: A Cultural Analysis of Japanese Family Enterprise" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982); and Barbara Darlington Ito, "Entrepreneurial Women in Urban Japan: The Role of Personal Networks" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1983).

opportunity and an evening out of material benefits across the society. Yet there remains an equally striking diversity of lifestyles and divergence of life chances between the genders, between the center and the regions, between generations, among occupations. "Traditionalism," to use Bestor's term, has proven a useful idiom to neutralize the disruptive potential of this diversity by casting it as a more innocuous historical contrast of old and new. Yet even as it takes the edge off these differences, it insures their perpetuation because, as Bestor shows, it is an equally useful idiom to lay claim to some measure of what Pierre Bourdieu would call "distinction." The clash of lifestyles, the rivalries among localities, the rifts between generations have insured that life in places like Miyamoto continues to be a product as much of competition as cooperation.

*Educational Thought and Ideology in Modern Japan.* By Teruhisa Horio.  
Edited and translated by Steven Platzer. University of Tokyo Press,  
Tokyo, 1988. 410 pages. \$59.50.

*Reviewed by*  
KENNETH B. PYLE  
University of Washington

The primary purpose of translating this collection of Horio's views on modern Japanese educational development was to convey to a misinformed international audience that the Japanese educational system, far from being a model worthy of emulating, stands in need of "the most drastic types of reform" (p. vii). The levels of achievement and efficiency attained by this system which have been extolled in the West are "better understood as signs of the destruction of education in Japan" (p. xxv). The author has no sympathy for celebrations of national achievement; he has no time for the "values of Japanism which are found in most of the English language literature on Japanese education" (p. viii). The purpose of education is not the "human capital formation" that preoccupies economists, bureaucrats, and nationalists; it is the liberation of the spirit and the nurturing of the capacities of the individual.

These are essays that Horio, Professor of Educational Thought and History and Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Tokyo, has written over the past two decades. Steven Platzer, who is described by the author as "a young American researcher who attended my lectures at the University of Tokyo and participated in the seminars I directed there