



Kamikaze Biker: Parody and Anomy in Affluent Japan.

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they cannot admit, he says, that the economic goal of most people is to improve their families' living standards. (I thought that was about all we would admit to.)

As a result of these rather bizarre notions of what economics is about, micro-economic choice is ruled out and farm households necessarily appear as the passive victims of macro forces. 'Mechanization', for example, is regarded as an unstoppable force of capitalist development, rather than as a result of postwar farm households' demanding of machinery producers the kinds of equipment (different from that used in mechanized agriculture elsewhere in the world) that would enable them to take advantage of expanding industrial employment opportunities without giving up farming.

Similarly, the author asserts on a number of occasions that incomes from farming alone declined in the 1950s and '60s and that farmers were thus driven to seek additional off-farm employment. Incomes from agriculture did not rise as fast as industrial ones, but, at the national level at least, given the effects of land reform, government price support, and rapidly growing urban demand for food, they were not falling. But Jussaume presents no data on households' incomes or assets, or on relative or alternative wages and employment opportunities. It is surely as a positive micro-economic choice, admittedly in the face of macro-economic change and under the restraints of prevailing social and political institutions and attitudes, that the almost universal adoption of the part-time farming strategy by farm households can be understood.

It is not easy to see at whom this book is aimed (except thesis examiners). It provides little general background to Japanese agriculture for non-specialists, but it assumes the ability to cope with complex statistical techniques, and a couple of journal articles would probably have made better vehicles for the results of the original research. Still, it is good to see a Japanese case set into a general theoretical framework and to be given an insight, beneath all the somewhat spurious trappings of 'objective science', into the authentic world of Japanese farm families.

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Kamikaze Biker: Parody and Anomy in Affluent Japan. By Ikuya Sato. University of Chicago Press, 1991. xviii + 277 pages. \$34.95.

MANY of us visiting Japanese cities in the 1970s and 1980s caught glimpses of the *bōsōzoku* spectacle, large gangs of motorized James Dean wannabes who sought their thrills by high-speed pack-driving through nighttime urban thoroughfares. They seemed quite out of control, weaving in and out of formation, changing drivers across cars, intimidating ordinary motorists with roaring exhausts and loud horns. Yet, less apparently, I now learn from Sato's book that there was an orderly quality to their shenanigans as well: the routes were usually mapped out in advance, the gang leader's car led the way, there were preplanned breaks to regroup, a line of motorcyclists at the back protected the cars from pursuing police, cross-streets at main intersections were blocked off, etc. In short, the *bōsōzoku* remind me less of Hunter Thompson's Hell's Angels and more of the raucous but studied disorder of a matsuri procession.

What drove them to such abandon, danger, and occasional arrest and serious injury? Experts, both police and academic, have fallen over each other in the last twenty years to diagnose *bōsōzoku* (and other deviant delinquencies) as the products of personal or social malaise, the ingrate of the left-behinds (*ochikobore*) of mass affluence.

The kids themselves, when asked, usually insist they're simply after *spiido* (speed) and *surisu* (thrills). To his credit, Sato took their claims seriously and has produced a captivating account of juvenile irreverence in late Shōwa Japan.

The present book reworks Sato's dissertation in sociology at the University of Chicago (he has also published two books in Japanese on the topic). The point is significant, for Sato follows in the footsteps of several generations of distinguished urban fieldworkers from that department who placed fine-grained ethnography and attention to the diversity of lifeways at the heart of urban sociology. Sato himself studied an extended *bōsōzoku* gang in Kyoto during 1983–1984, near the end of the *bōsō* boom in Kansai. He exhibits a healthy eclecticism in assembling his toolkit of concepts from symbolic anthropology, interactional sociology, and social psychology, although he can't seem to resist the urge to apply them in relentless typologizing. But stripped of the jargon, his sensible interpretation is rich in description and attuned to the larger significance of the phenomenon.

Sato's central theme is the playfulness of *bōsōzoku* antics. The kids are actively and imaginatively creating what we too flatly call their 'identity'. They are not merely acting out psychological frustrations or responding to subcultural imperatives; they are providing themselves with 'intrinsic enjoyment, a heightened sense of reality, and a sense of self-worth' (p. 7). The 'text' of this playful action is his subject in Part 1; the contexts of *bōsōzoku* are taken up in the second and third parts of his book.

Bōsōzoku life comes across as the shedding of the drudgery of the school or work week through the focused 'rush' of high-speed daredevil synchrony. *Bōsō* boys load their vehicles with custom header pipes, shortened coil springs, and a host of illegal modifications to create *shakotan* lowriders; they decorate themselves with their signature *tokkōfuku* uniforms, vague imitations of the wartime suicide pilots. They give their groups bizarre names that mix readings and distort sounds, as in the 怒鬼砲帝, which members pronounce *Donkihōte* to add images of evil, anger, devil, cannon, and emperor to the improbable but not inappropriate 'Don Quijote'.

All of this becomes their style, their subcultural style, which British cultural studies of mods, rockers, and punks have taught us may be outrageous but is seldom mindless. They play with automotive jargon and nationalist symbols to make themselves opaque to the large society, but also to stimulate its curiosity. Their identity combines unintelligibility and notoriety. They want to be seen. *Medachitai!* 'We want to stand out!' they told Sato over and over again.

In doing so, the *bōsō* boys have it both ways—they plug into and tune out of mainstream society and mass media. Sato's account is especially valuable in showing the mutual cultivation of these youthful delinquents and the mass media. The character of the *bōsōzoku* depends greatly on the media's attention, or rather their complicity, in publicizing the youth. Several publishers have made considerable profits in exploiting *bōsōzoku* thirst for notoriety; their picture books and interview magazines are widely read and discussed among the *bōsō* boys. Sato himself was usually taken for such a journalist and was delighted to find such eager informants.

Commercialization and stylization are thus inseparable. Sato argues that the *bōsōzoku* are alternately cast as picaresque villains and as uncompromising *kōha*. The *kōha* are the genus 'tough guys' (including high school baseball players and college cheerleading squads), of which the species *kōha furyō shōnen* are the macho badboys. This suggests, by the way, that Sato's is very much an account of *bōsōzoku* boys. He notes their overt sexism and the undercurrent of violence against the Yankee girls they

pick up, denigrate, and often marry, but we will have to wait for an Anne Campbell to give us the view of the girls in the gang.

Both of these characterizations feed a profound moral ambivalence of mainstream society and *bōsōzoku* youth for one another, which Sato develops in contextualizing their lifestyle in two ways. In the second part of the book, the author places the *bōsōzoku* as a stage of what we might call a life cycle of teen-age delinquency. This usually begins with junior high school troublemaking and truancy. Some of the more defiant take to hanging out on the streets, cultivating elaborate permed hair, dressing flamboyantly, and clacking along atop thin-heeled women's sandals (co-called *pin-hiiru*). These are the Yankees (*yankii*, also known in other regions as *tsuppari*), some of whom get involved in the car/cycle gangs for the remainder of their teen-age years before 'graduating' (a term they use and often mark with a formal celebration) around the age of twenty. And this is usually graduation into legitimate, if low-end, jobs. Sato's informants expressed little sympathy for right-wing groups and no interest in moving into the ranks of the *yakuza*.

This trajectory is hardly surprising, although the finer points of Sato's ethnography of Yankee style are instructive. So, too, are his more important claims about class, the most striking difference from studies of British and American youth gangs, which are uniformly working class or underclass. Most of the Yankees and *bōsō* boys were from middle-class families. It was not class resentment but school disillusionment that sent them to their street hangouts. But it was not that they felt defeated by school, just defiant of its pressures and promises. As one of the kids put it, 'No way! It's the ones who work hard but can't do well at school who have the "complex." We just don't like school work. What we do has no relation to any inferiority complex' (p. 135). I think it is significant that self-employed family backgrounds were overrepresented among the *bōsō* boys, for they are apt to have less committed attitudes to educational credentialing. The boys talked a lot about 'learning a trade' (*te ni shoku o tsukeru*), and knew that, in late Shōwa Japan, even with a juvenile record rather than a high school diploma, they could expect to find work and a livable income in the trades.

Thus the second of Sato's contexts, the social historical, is as crucial as the life historical. The term *bōsōzoku* was first used in official documents in May 1974. A major disturbance at the Kobe Festival in 1976 provided the real spark for public attention and government action. *Bōsōzoku* quickly became a catch-all term for a variety of official fears and press hype. Together with parent-beating (*katei bōryoku*) and teacher-beating (*kōnai bōryoku*), they were alleged to form a third wave of postwar juvenile crime. Sato debunks the many pseudo-statistics that propped up this textbook case of labeling and social control.

In the end, Sato relates villification of *bōsōzoku* to a 'backdrop of vague anxiety and overconfidence' (p. 207) in affluent Japan. Perhaps, but there is also an important measure of deliberate overreaction. Social engineering through pre-emptive response has been a major preoccupation of postwar institutions, and Sato's engaging portrait of lowrider life in downtown Kyoto illustrates both the effectiveness and the tentativeness of this mainstream management.

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