



Changing Japanese Suburbia: A Study of Two Present-Day Localities.

Review Author[s]:
William W. Kelly

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In the *tekiya* society I found many aspects that are in fact an extension of the same notions and structures found in milder forms in conventional society. In a way, their society is a mirror image of the general Japanese society. Therefore, one can learn a great deal about conventional society by examining both the conforming and the deviant aspects of the *tekiya* world. (p. 231)

The *noshi awabe* makers from Kuzaki, Mie-ken, reveal a similar attitude in the way they present themselves to the outside (conventional) world, and D. P. Martinez has done fieldwork in this area for a long time. She watches as if from the inside the changes in the manner of presentation when the local old men demonstrate via an NHK team 'to the outside world how Kuzaki was a unique place, part of traditional Japan, and, thus, distinct from its neighbours' (p. 164).

Both these essays allow me to doubt the answers of Japanese respondents in Germany used by Rosemary Breger for purposes of analysis in her paper 'The Discourse on Japan in the German Press.' She sent a questionnaire to three hundred Japanese nationals living in Düsseldorf asking them to rate articles about Japan that appeared in the German press 1980–1985. But can the results of this inquiry really be credible, if 88% of received answers were from managers, or is this just another *tatemaie* for an interested outsider?

But putting my grumbles aside, I consider *Ideology and Practice in Modern Japan* a substantial contribution to our understanding of contemporary Japanese society, its complexity and unpredictability. I recommend this book as stimulating reading for anyone wishing to 'unwrap' the true Japan.

ALEXANDER M. KABANOFF
Institute of Oriental Studies
St Petersburg

Changing Japanese Suburbia: A Study of Two Present-Day Localities. By Eyal Ben-Ari. Kegan Paul International, London, 1991. xvii + 328 pages. £55.00.

THE community study was long a staple of ethnography, but it has fallen into considerable disrepute in anthropological circles. Despite this, Eyal Ben-Ari's important book is one of a recent series of what I would call the 'new' community studies of contemporary Japan. Books such as those of Jackson H. Bailey on Tanohata Village in Iwate, Theodore Bestor on Miyamoto Ward in Tokyo, Okpyo Moon on Hanasaku Village in Gumma, and Jennifer Robertson on Kodaira City, all begin with a healthy skepticism about naturally persisting community sentiment in Japanese neighborhoods and villages. Yet against their own expectations, all eventually do recognize 'community' in their locality—as compelling fiction if not social fact. All of these ethnographers are attuned to the constructed, contingent, and constitutive nature of community sentiment and action. In their different ways, they find community in the cultural politics of local identity, forged through dialectics of memory and power. Like community itself, the demise of community studies was prematurely announced. If further evidence is required, Ben-Ari's book provides it.

Changing Japanese Suburbia is a significant revision and expansion of the author's Cambridge dissertation and is based on several years of fieldwork in the early 1980s in two adjacent localities. Yamanaka is a small village on the southern slopes of Mt Hiei. Part of Ōtsu City and close to Kyoto as well, its formerly agrarian population of 230 now commutes to urban jobs. Hieidaira is a housing estate developed in the late 1960s on a tract of land just above the Yamanaka settlement. Its 700 households (and 2,400 population) are divided into three tidy wards. In their shared location and separate circumstances, they are both distinctively suburban, and for those reasons, then, we would expect to find only attenuated collective sentiments—an eroded community in Yamanaka as old forms of cooperation have become anachronistic, a stillborn community in Hieidaira with its housing-estate artificiality.

What surprised Ben-Ari, and subsequently became the problem to account for, was strong evidence of community identity and collective action. There was a local leadership, there was effective mobilization of residents, and there were organizations and occasions to sustain both political agendas and leisure activities in Yamanaka and Hieidaira. The author expresses this through a concept of what he calls the 'community of limited liability'. Every time I came across the phrase in the text I was reminded of my insurance company's small-print weasel words, but here it is a serviceable enough phrase for what other community ethnographers have also encountered—the constructed, contingent, and constitutive qualities of local organization mentioned above.

What makes Ben-Ari's study particularly fascinating is his development of the argument through four extended cases of local community action, and these make up the main body of the text. Hieidaira was shoddily developed, and the developer reneged on understandings to provide roads and other public facilities. Throughout the 1970s, the neighborhood associations of its residents sought redress from him and Ōtsu City officials. They were increasingly fervent and savvy, and were eventually successful in gaining a wide range of schools, social centers, and transportation connections. Ben-Ari's first case traces the residents' evolving sense of determination and forms of empowerment.

The second and third cases deal with apparently more social but still quite political community activities. The former has been rarely described in earlier studies, that is, the network of voluntary welfare workers (the *minsei-iin*) who are local residents recruited and administered by the municipality. The author then discusses the structure and extent of old-folks clubs in the two localities. Common to both cases is the theme of the much-ballyhooed Japanese-style welfare state—the downward delegation of responsibility, the localization of burdens, and the privatization of care. Ben-Ari's treatment of the programs moves beyond the obvious to some of the more subtle consequences for enhancing local webs of consciousness and concern.

The final case is the seemingly innocuous sports day organized annually and jointly by residents of Yamanaka and Hieidaira. As Bestor has shown for Miyamoto's *ma tsuri* and Robertson for Kodaira's civic parade, closer analysis reveals the deeply paradoxical nature of an event such as the *undōkai*. It is an uneasy juxtaposition of the competitive and the ceremonial, the structured and the ludic. It depends on the tightly coordinated contributions of many volunteers in the service and spirit of an entity even more ephemeral than its two constituent units. It is a fitting conclusion to a book that

well expresses several of the limited but nonetheless tenacious bases of community in a society better known now for other institutional frames, especially school, company, and state.

WILLIAM W. KELLY
Yale University

Above the Clouds: Status Culture of the Modern Japanese Nobility. By Takie Sugiyama Lebra. University of California Press, 1993. xvii + 430 pages. \$45.00.

THIS remarkable book poses a challenge to any reviewer who takes seriously the double charge to offer potential readers a guide to its content as well as some appreciation of the sophistication of its analytical strengths. The first of these is rendered difficult by the sheer volume of information on an astonishing variety of topics relating to the nobility (*kazoku*) and their world. The second charge is almost as difficult to meet, for the author's findings have manifold implications for our understanding of many aspects of Japanese society and culture. Anyone who passes up this book on the assumption that it deals with a population best forgotten or that its appeal is limited to those with antiquarian interests is badly mistaken. If you share my belief that the primary goal of the scholar is understanding rather than exposé, you will be as impressed as I by *Above the Clouds*. It will never be duplicated or superseded, for Lebra has been given access to this special world when the last of those who knew it became willing to discuss their lives with an outsider.

It is in some senses a 'salvage ethnography' in that its author and her informants shared an interest in putting on record what could be salvaged of a rapidly vanishing culture. One of Lebra's aims, therefore, was to give at least a partial account of their world, now lost forever. It was a world so remote from contemporary Japanese life that it sometimes strikes even its former inhabitants that it must have been an illusion. It is no wonder! Konoe Fumimaro once told his daughter that his servants so thoroughly cared for him that when he was preparing to attend Gakushūin he had to practice walking by himself. Gossip had it that this extraordinary dependency on personal attendants produced the spectacle of a prince traveling abroad who was at a loss to discover that when he opened his mouth at table there was no one there to feed him.

Putting aside such exotica, I believe it important to point out that this is the only anthropological study of the Japanese (non-business) elite we have in any language. As such, it reveals a great deal about the principles on which Japanese society is structured, for Lebra is particularly concerned with the dualities inherent in stratification in general and in the Japanese hereditary hierarchy in particular. She returns again and again to the fluid, subtle interchanges between symbol and reality, culture and political economy, status and class, prestige and power, ascription and achievement, and hierarchy and equality. A listing of the chapter titles conveys some idea of the range and richness of the book's contents: 'Creating the Modern Nobility: The Historical Legacy'; 'Ancestors: Constructing Inherited Charisma'; 'Successors: Immortalizing the Ancestors'; 'Life-Style: Markers of Status and Hierarchy'; 'Marriage: Realign-