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Farmers and Village Life in Twentieth-Century Japan (review)

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may be due not only to the economic recession and the demographic decline in Heisei Japan, but also to the sustained efforts of critics of the system—including McVeigh himself.

Farmers and Village Life in Twentieth-Century Japan. Edited by Ann Waswo and Nishida Yoshiaki. RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2003. xii, 296 pages. \$95.00.

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Based on workshops held in 2000 at Oxford University and the University of Tokyo, this useful volume contains chapters by five non-Japanese and six Japanese specialists on aspects of rural society in Japan during the twentieth century. Today many of the contributors focus on other topics not directly related to Japanese village life; thus the book constitutes a well-crafted retrospective of the field rather than a manifesto for future research.

Coeditor Ann Waswo, noting the great diversity of rural Japan, points out that the writers deliberately skirt questions of state policy and agricultural economics in order to focus on agency in the hands of local cultivators: “we seek to emphasize the actions and attitudes of farmers themselves as they have confronted and coped with new opportunities and new challenges . . . we seek to demonstrate that Japanese farmers played an active and largely positive role in Japan’s modern trajectory” (p. 3). The case studies discussed in this volume are drawn almost entirely from villages in Honshu, mainly east of Osaka. In many chapters, readers will hear familiar echoes of the post-Marxist, postpositivist historiography known as *minshūshi* (people’s history) pioneered by Irokawa Daikichi, Kano Masanao, and others in the 1960s.

Especially valuable is a *mise-en-scène* chapter by coeditor Nishida Yoshiaki, an economist, striking a chord for the whole book. Using fiction, diaries, and abundant statistics, Nishida skillfully sketches the interactions between farmers and the major forces affecting agriculture between 1900 and 1945, then summarizes recent research on how the land reforms of 1947 were implemented locally. The pages on wartime, 1937–45, are gripping. In the wake of the great depression, tenancy disputes, and efforts at rural rehabilitation, tenants particularly benefited from measures to stabilize food production under national mobilization for war starting in 1938. By cooperating with the war effort, tenants in one Niigata village managed to resolve their land-tenure problems, achieving *de facto* land reform by the spring of 1945.

During the American occupation, hamlet-level committees carried out the 1947 land-reform legislation, and food delivery amid severe shortages of foodstuffs depended on residents' cooperation as well. Nishida documents local activities to increase agricultural output in the 1950s. Citing ever-greater farm incomes and land values during 1960–75, he pinpoints the dilemma of Tokyo's crop-diversification policies for paddy lands after 1970: "hardly any other crop could yield more profit than rice . . . all other crops required considerably more time to cultivate successfully than farmers who were simultaneously engaged in non-agricultural employment could possibly manage to provide" (p. 33). Thus, despite the government's efforts to reduce rice acreage, more and more farm households produced only rice—far more of it than was needed to meet steadily declining domestic demand.

Another strong contribution is economist Ōkado Masakatsu's chapter on rural women. He establishes that women have composed about 60 per cent of the primary farm workforce for the past four decades and shows that they "were deeply involved in farm work as well as in housework, and that the role they played, although different from the role played by men, was indispensable to the household" (p. 41) throughout the twentieth century—indeed, in the Edo period too. Using data from Yamagata, he demonstrates that, during wartime, female employment in primary industries greatly increased because of economic necessity, so that on the eve of surrender, about 70 per cent of all farm workers were women (pp. 48–50). Stressing continuities from wartime to postwar, Ōkado rightly connects female experience in wartime agriculture with the emergence of housewife farming in more recent decades.

Mori Takemaro, also an economist, provides a revealing chapter on Japanese colonization in Manchuria, based on a Yamagata village. Japanese residents of Manchuria rose from 200,000 in 1930 to one million in 1940, surpassing the nearly 700,000 in Korea as of 1940. Mori argues that the army and the colonial-affairs ministry, not the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, propelled the resettlement program: "the essence of the emigration policy announced in 1936 lay not in the rescue of impoverished farmers, but in military necessity" (p. 182). Why did farmers comply? Although the Yamagata "distribution of emigrants reflected local economic conditions," other factors came into play, "ranging from personal ties and a local tradition of emigration to the presence of local leaders promoting" (p. 184) resettlement. Ideology, not just economic desperation, was a driving engine in other prefectures as well. But the rate of outmigration slowed after war broke out with China in 1937, and Mori concludes that "Japan's wartime project to promote emigration to Manchuria was a total failure" (p. 197).

The historian Sandra Wilson adds a chapter on farmers and Manchurian settlement during 1931–33, arguing that military and strategic motives underlay the official rhetoric promoting emigration as a panacea for village

poverty: “the call for emigrants was openly linked with abstract nationalist rhetoric that encouraged settlers to see themselves as vital contributors to the preservation of the homeland and the expansion of Japanese influence abroad” (p. 157).

Three contributions examine efforts to improve rural life between the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the outbreak of World War II. Tsutsui Masao, an economist, reviews the historiography of the local improvement movement (*chihō kairyō undō*) of 1908–11 with fresh perspective on common lands and on how both cultivating landlords and large owner-farmers participated in hamlet-level formal organizations at “the lower reaches of the power structure” (p. 76). Ann Waswo, a historian, reprints her classic “In Search of Equity: Japanese Tenant Unions in the 1920s,” originally published in Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1982). The historian Kerry Smith uses a Fukushima village to illustrate farmers’ initiative in the economic revitalization campaign (*nōsangyoson keizai kōsei undō*) of 1932–41. At the local level, this government-led movement required “the reform of existing village institutions” (p. 143), and it “overlapped with a significant and real transformation in farming practices and outcomes” (p. 146) simultaneously taking place. Corroborating that revitalization and wartime mobilization benefited Fukushima, as elsewhere, Smith suggests how local innovations anticipated the more sweeping land reforms of 1947.

Four chapters address changes in Japanese farm life since the American occupation. The rural sociologist Raymond A. Jussaume Jr. describes how part-time farming, which had ample prewar precedents, accelerated in importance until by the mid-1970s “two thirds of Japanese farm households earned more than half of their income from non-agricultural sources” (p. 211), with important implications for the age and gender composition of the rural workforce. Iwamoto Noriaki, an agricultural economist, writes on the postwar land reform and local conceptions of land use, especially in relation to the family and hamlet as social institutions. He argues, with mixed success, that the idea of land ownership introduced by the 1947 reforms did not fare well in subsequent years (p. 228). But he is correct that “it was the dramatic increase in all land prices during the postwar era that exerted the most profound impact on farmers’ attitudes toward their land” (p. 232).

Kase Kazutoshi, a specialist on labor and construction, contributes a study of farmers’ changing attitudes since 1945 toward rural public works, which were mainly intended to improve existing farmlands. Achieving “unanimous support within the community was viewed as essential” (p. 245) because farmers had to pay for the projects. Then, outlooks shifted in the 1970s and 1980s as certain fields became more valuable for nonagricultural purposes than for farming. The vast programs of deficit spending on

local construction carried out since 1993 to pump up the national economy have complicated farmers' attitudes still further. John Knight, an anthropologist, includes a chapter on organic farming in Wakayama, a depopulated region where ex-urban settlers have built a would-be self-sufficient agricultural community, with predictable mutual frictions as well as benefits in interactions between natives and newcomers.

The Nishida, Ōkado, and Mori contributions seem especially fresh conceptually as well as empirically. The most interesting sections of the volume deal with depression and wartime, highlighting the long-term structural and institutional continuities in Japanese society despite wartime disruptions. The coeditors are right that farmers have played an active role in Japan's modern trajectory, but nobody can deny the sense of crisis plaguing villagers and national officials today. Close to 500 hamlets disappear each year (135,179 remained in 2000), paddy-field acreage decreased by 19 per cent between 1963 and 1993, and self-sufficiency in food on a calorie basis fell from 79 per cent in 1960 to 40 per cent in 1999—lower, apparently, than any European country. In short, Japan's is the "industrial/post-industrial world's most precariously marginalized agricultural sector" (p. 291).