Dilemmas of Adulthood
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As I walked down the broad sidewalk in Tokyo, neck craned upwards to spy “Toyota” above the towering stone entrances, I felt curious, as if in by looking into the life of the woman working nineteen floors above me I would find out something about myself. Of the three Toyota secretaries whom I interviewed in 1993, only Matsui-san had remained at the company, still an “office lady” after twenty-five years of work, but now married with a son. Of all the married Tokyo interviewees in 2004, she alone was still working full-time while raising a child. What motivated and challenged her?

My curiosity was piqued because this was a drama in my life as well—the struggle to maintain a career while raising children. The click of my heels and the whir of the traffic created a rhythm for reminiscence: shifting gears from reading Bourdieu to reading Rumpelstiltskin; falling asleep with the children and then getting up at five a.m. to prepare for class; rushing home after class to care for a child with chicken pox.

No Toyota building yet. How did I do it? I lived far from parents, but my husband was part of child raising—a translator who worked at home and could pinch-hit in the late afternoons. I did not have long commutes. No boss was constantly looking over my shoulder and no coworker felt that s/he had to do more work because I was going home early. On the other hand, I had to write and publish on my own steam in all the cracks of private life. Quite a different arrangement from working as an office lady at Toyota.

I entered Toyota’s marbled interior and asked for a badge to visit Matsui-san. How was she managing to negotiate this divide that fills the life of me and countless other women in late modernity and was integral to her long-term resistance? (Rudd and Descartes 2008).
Questions

Over eleven years, this group of fifty-four women has produced seven full-time working mothers and six part-time working mothers—about a quarter of the whole group and about half of the women with children. In 2006, of mothers in Japan overall 25 percent were employed six months after birth and 46.8 percent at four years after birth. Of these, 22.2 percent were part-timers (Naikakucho 2008, 43). Thus, the statistics in this small sample show a lower employment rate for mothers, but overall their children are still young.

The geographical distribution of these thirteen working women begs for explanation. I expected numbers to be higher in Tokyo, the area of lowest fertility rates and the most cosmopolitan in terms of accepting differences in lifestyles and dreaming to work equally with men. But five of the seven full-time working mothers lived in rural villages, and four of the part-time working mothers lived in northeastern cities.

This fact leads to important questions: How do the conditions in urban, regional, and rural places interact with the contradictions between work, family, and children for women in this ambiguous social movement? Simultaneously, how do questions of class intersect with women’s work-family tension and these geographical differences?

The first part of this chapter delves into the nature of the experiences of six of the full-timers, and the second part the experiences of the six part-timers. Each group has a division within it of mothers working more for self and mothers working mainly for money, a division that reflects two ends of a continuum of motivations for women’s work as well as class differences. I ask: What amplifies and eases tensions for these women? If tensions become particularly high, what solutions do women turn to? In the last part of the chapter my attention turns to an outlier—a mother with three children who works full-time running an organic farm with her husband. Her life on the margins mediates a number of conflicts met by her generation, but also creates others.

Tokyo: A full-time working mother

I met Matsui-san at the top of the elevator. At age forty-five, she was stout with long hair and wearing an orange jacket over a black skirt, very different from the thin-faced woman of thirty-four in blue uniform I had met in 1993. Her demeanor still serious as always, she ushered me into a conference room.
“I was switched into the environment department soon after I got pregnant and was out for a year on maternity leave. That doesn’t happen with women a lot.” She handed me a book she had helped to produce. “I just deal with the materials. Help the men.”

A younger woman brought us tea. “I have a few younger women under me now. Everything has changed. Now all the women in our department are over thirty and single. Now people can take two years of maternity leave! The union pays 15 percent of their salary.”

“Wow—we couldn’t think of that in the U.S.A.”

“The individual has become strong. It goes with the nuclear family. Now we couldn’t think of leaving our families behind and skiing with the whole department. If people don’t want to go out drinking now, they just refuse.”

She got to the point without any prompting.

“I worried about going back to work, but for ‘self’ it is hard to be home all day with the child. I have no friends in the neighborhood. At first he was lonely and cried when I left him at day care, but he has come to enjoy it. He will ask, ‘Do I go today?’ He likes his mother, but he likes his friends, too. The child has his own world.”

“How do you manage every day, working with a child?” I ask. “I’ve done it and I know it isn’t easy.” She nodded, her eyes softening into this question that preoccupied her even as she edited documents.

“I can’t do much overtime work anymore because of the child. He’s six and he is in daycare until six thirty. Then my father picks him up. He and my mother used to go travelling but now they have had to adjust to this. My father especially enjoys it.”

In 1993, her father’s voice had surfaced in her interview forbidding Matsui-san from living alone and chiding her for talking too much and losing her sweetness, yet here he was backing up her work.

“My husband gets home at seven thirty, so he can help too if I have overtime work to do and plan to get home late. He helps with the laundry. He lived alone a long time and can do everything.”

“That’s an advantage of marrying when you are older!” I quipped, and Matsui-san smiled wanly.

“I have no latitude. I usually fall asleep with the child and then awake at about two a.m. and clean up. I stay up until four or five a.m. I can’t sleep. I worry. I always have to rush the child. I’m raising a child who doesn’t see how to care for others (sewa shinai). My friend says to me: ‘Think about this! Is it okay to be doing this?’”
“What do you think?” I ask her.

“I have changed. I used to get attached to things and I was disappointed if I didn’t get clothes I wanted. Now I am not so interested anymore. Before the child, I was alone with my parents as my base, in their shadow. I just thought of my own things. When I married, we were two and it didn’t change much, but with the child, it isn’t just ‘self.’ You have the child and also his parents and your own parents. You come to think about family. And now that my son is ready for school, I am more worried.”

“Really? I always thought if I got the children to school age, I could relax and do my work.”

“It might get worse. Many women quit for elementary school because in summer vacation the child is all alone. And after-school care is only from nine to five. You begin to think it is a burden on the child.”

Sleepless individuality

My surprise at Matsui-san as the only full-time working mother in Tokyo reflected my American expectations. Statistically speaking, urban Japanese women who work in large companies are especially disadvantaged “because of limited prospects for career advancement” (Shirahase 2007, 53). Furthermore, her husband’s income as a banker militated against her working, so she was really working against the statistical odds. What does Matsui-san’s case reveal about her ability—and her struggle—to resist these odds?

Ironically, the secret to being able to continue working while raising children rests in the very relationship that resisted the experiments with individuation run by Matsui-san and her peers in the first place: the parental generation. Five of the seven full-time working women among the interviewees had parental support. Company maternity leave policies, government day-care policies, and her banker-husband’s willingness to help all supported Matsui-san’s desire to work. But for this woman in a full-time job at a high-flying company in a large city in Japan, her parents and sometimes her husband’s mother and aunt had to fill the gap that remained. The precariousness lay in their elders’ health. A blood vessel pops, a golf cart turns over. In Matsui-san’s case, her parents’ ages as well as her own kept her from having more than one child.

Matsui-san’s sleepless nights cried out to be heard. She was working, but with deep wells of stress that drove her both to continue working and to
consider quitting. Her stress revolved around debates on child raising and mothers’ lives concerned with competition and class, changing views of self, and morality.

Competition is high in large urban centers like Tokyo, particularly for salarymen households and their educated wives with high middle-class consciousness. This case study shows competition both for the woman and the child. Matsui-san’s income helped her family to compete in housing and schooling, but not only that. With her working, Matsui-san and her son could also compete more successfully in the market of individuality that she saw in her Tokyo company as the wave of the present. She maintained “self,” and her son developed a “world of his own.” This discourse of separation between mother and child’s worlds as developing her child’s individuality has sustained Matsui-san’s decision to keep working as part of her long-term resistance.

But a debate raged between this more global-Western idea and the ideals of intimate mother–child skinship (physical closeness) popular in the high economic era (Borovoy 2005, 149). Matsui-san’s job threatened her son’s ability to compete in the educational system if she did not give him adequate support at home and opportunities for extra lessons. It made life less enjoyable for her—enjoyment being a goal of women younger than she and a way of shifting the meaning of the housewife-mother role generationally (Goldstein-Gidoni 2012). On one hand, she thought it was fine that he was playing and hopefully developing in creative ways rather than going to classes five days a week as other children his age were. On the other, she wondered if age made her less capable of playing the game of middle-class mothering appropriately: “I am older than other mothers and my way of thinking is older.” Was she accurately understanding the requirements of urban class status, or was she stuck in generational ideas about self and work that were becoming old-fashioned?

Indeed, surveys show that women who have married in their twenties are more likely to think that mothers should stay home than women who have delayed marrying until later (Shirahase 2007, 41). Class also makes a difference: parents of urban working-class children are not so concerned about children’s progress and, while often emotionally supportive, do not push them toward academic success (Yoder 2004). Rural parents living in a rather depressed economic sphere are also more relaxed than urban middle-class parents.
A changing sense of self within and over generations also discouraged Matsui-san at work. Although the policies were good, her secretarial job was glaringly static. Although she continued because of her original dream in 1993 to “do the work to develop self . . . but not for a career,” now she noticed younger women quitting work earlier. If her own sense of self started to subside in favor of family, and other middle-class mothers were giving up the goal of attaining self via work, then the meaning in her work lessened.

“Is it okay to be doing this?” The words of her friend fueled the child-raising debates simmering in Matsui-san’s head. Mothers in this historical moment needed to encourage their children in individuality, but they also needed to train them in other moral values, here represented by her words “caring for others.” Herein lay the contradictory demands of twenty-first-century motherhood in Japan and elsewhere: in their attempts to maintain their own flexibility as well as to raise morally acceptable, individually strong, and societally competitive children. It was a debate being waged not only with elders but within this generation as Matsui-san’s friend stood in the Panopticon, judging her. Thus, long-term resistance aimed at developing opportunities for women to lead fuller lives also held risks both for their children and for relationships with friends in their generation—all of which pointed once again to the precarious ambivalence of the movement.

This case shows the ongoing debate in which a generation is working out the local meanings of child-raising, work, motherhood, and self for dissatisfied women of the middle class. The discussion implies that, to form the ideal child, day care, and perhaps even Matsui-san’s parents’ care, is not adequate, but rather requires the efforts of a middle-class stay-at-home mother and her ability to shape her individuality to enjoy that life—a verdict that gives Matsui-san nowhere else to turn.

Full-timers across the urban-rural divide

The three women with children in professional, full-time work present us with an opportunity to look at women across geographical areas in Japan. In addition to Matsui-san, the other two are teachers, one in the regional city and one in a small village. What does this ethnography of the particular show about differences and similarities surrounding the ways in which work and mothering are developing in the generational discourse across the urban-regional-rural continuum? How do practices and meanings of these
geographical differences articulate with experiences of mothers struggling with child raising and work?

Many ideas and practices were similar across this geographical continuum. An internalized sense of self vibrated through the stories of Yamada-san in Morioka, Kawahara-san in the village, and Matsui-san in Tokyo in relation to the search for husbands in 1993 and 1998. Kawahara-san said, “For me I have a self. I would like to marry a man who meets with that.” All profited from new government and company policies for maternity leaves, but this strong sense of individualized self drove them back to work. Yamada-san was in the country with her mother for one year and felt competitive: “Is it okay to be here just doing nothing in the middle of the day? I was left behind (torinokosareta)!"

Kawahara-san felt even more strongly. She had married at thirty-eight and undergone fertility treatment to get pregnant. “Public teachers get three years of maternity leave and my husband wanted me to take them, but it was hard for me to stay at home with only my son. After he was a year old, I felt like I couldn’t breathe at night. The doctor said it was the psychological stress of child raising. So I returned to work after two years.”

Kawahara-san laced her story with tales of women who had killed their children. Her saving grace was a day-care center in Morioka where she went with her child and met mothers and grandmothers of all ages who were also experiencing high stress, so she felt “normal.” Indeed, the doctors have medicalized her condition into something speakable in Japan—child-raising neurosis (ikuji noiroze)—for which getting out of the house, though not necessarily back to work, is the treatment (Rosenberger 2001, 220–221).

Unlike Matsui-san in Toyota’s Tokyo office, the teachers up north both felt motivated to continue their work because they found meaning (yarigai) in their work; they were raising citizens for a strong Japan, as Yamada-san said. Yamada-san taught in a private school in Morioka and experienced the stress of a shrinking school population having only six in her first-grade class, while Kawahara-san, in the village public middle school, felt the stress of boys who put down women teachers.

Particularly telling for the generational discourse on mothering and professional work across the urban-regional divide is the fact that all three accepted the idea expressed by Matsui-san: that individuation and separation were good for both parent and child. According to these teachers, parents were too protective. They should “let kids do things alone” and “see their children objectively from a distance . . . respect them in an equal relationship.”
Otherwise the pressures on the children were too great. Yamada-san’s conclusion speaks for all three: “So it is better for me to be out in society.”

Yet the teachers also felt some ambivalence in the moral debate that Matsui-san raised between individuality and care for others. Yamada-san of Morioka said: “There is a mental/spiritual (seishinteki) part of me and my daughter that I want to care for. She has taught me to go slower, that a new house is not so important. My husband wanted to build a new house, but [why go into] debt?—for what? We can eat and sleep here just fine. He agrees. I am thankful.”

A difference between the urban and regional points of view emerges at this point. For Matsui-san and her friend in Tokyo the answer was to return home as a middle-class, nuclear housewife. She herself would be the answer for her child, whom she wanted to be normal and well-balanced, the implication being that a mother’s morality is superior to those of children’s friends or of teachers in the city.

However, women in the regions faced the problem of morality for themselves and their children somewhat differently. The first answer to the moral question for these teachers resided in the trust they had in regional people and culture as being inherently moral; rather than turning to educated experts, they were willing to depend on homespun bearers of wisdom. They believed that adult carers would teach their children concern for others and correct personal habits. Second, they searched for moral answers in existing systems of thought—organized religion and rural life.

Yamada-san, the Morioka teacher who was raised on a farm, found one moral solution to child raising through the elder neighbor woman who watched her daughter during the day. “She teaches her right and wrong. We would spoil her because we aren’t with her all the time. She feeds her good food and advises me on taking her to the doctor. She makes up for the parts I lack.”

Likewise, Kawahara-san listened thoughtfully to the day-care teacher’s advice to be stricter with her son and put him to bed early, and to her mother-in-law’s advice to keep his socks on. She was grateful for the balance these stricter people brought to her child’s upbringing, but she also insisted on her ability to think it through and stuck by her practices of no socks and letting the child go to bed at nine, because “He plays with us after dinner because we don’t see him during the day.” The balance seemed a good one as a bargain with her long-term resistance.

Kawahara-san, who grew up in a neighboring prefecture in the northeast, felt some conflict with her mother-in-law, with whom she will probably live
someday. But she kept it in check, transmuting it into sympathy with her mother-in-law, who had been bullied by her mother-in-law when she was young. Her reference point for this was the other moral answer she brings to the stress of her life—religion. Kawahara-san had chosen to talk to me in a coffee shop in Morioka when she came from the village on the weekend, and quite spontaneously Kawahara-san leaned close toward me over her empty coffee cup and the few crumbs left on her cake plate.

I don’t know if I told you before. I am religious—Buddhism, Shinnyoen.1 We go to a temple here in the city. My husband and his parents and I all go. We pray, and doing that everyone becomes gentle. The priest teaches us how to live and how to correct our hearts (kokoro o tadasu). We shouldn’t struggle. For example, I am busy and my husband is busy. There is lots of housework and we have to care for our son. We know we should cooperate, but I say I am doing too much housework and we struggle. We appreciate each other when we go to Shinnyoen. The priests says to me, “I understand that you are busy but you wanted this child and you got it. You are busy with work but you wanted this work. You need to show appreciation to your husband, your work, and your child.”

This priest had also contacted her dead ancestors and made offerings to them to help her get pregnant. I was cautious. Was the religion piling everything back on her? I remembered that in 1993 she had remarked on the beauty of “devoting yourself to another person,” even as she wanted equal acceptance at work. “What do they say to your husband?” I asked.

“He has also changed. He helps. Last week we struggled once. But this week is good. We say to each other that if we didn’t have this religion, we might divorce.”

She had been in this religion and brought her husband into it with her. “Now he prays more than I do,” she laughed. “We volunteer a lot, like cleaning Morioka train station or the river. It makes us busier but it makes my heart quiet. My work goes better. It is strange, but maybe it is because I am going by the power of Kami-sama [god in Shintoism] and not just by my own power.”

In this new religion Kawahara-san found a systematic philosophy and an expert who urged her to be humble and take responsibility for her position in life. As a new religion, it is inferior in the dominant, middle-class discourse. Giddens (1991) would call this a cocoon in late-modern life in which to hide from the strong changes toward individualism. I prefer to think of it as a way
of working out tensions and using religion to achieve a more stable form of ambivalence between various arenas of life.

Yamada-san found a different moral answer, but she too incorporated parts of an older system into her life. Her idea was to return to the countryside where she had grown up, with its rural practices and values. I talked with Yamada-san inside her chilly schoolroom as the fall dusk settled in and she chuckled as she sipped her warm tea.

“I used to hate living in the country and not having a TV and not going anywhere. I felt poor and couldn’t wait to get out. But now that life looks rich to me. My parents are happy, but they live without things. My mother still makes pickles, miso, and tofu. I want my daughter to learn these old ways before they are lost and to understand these values. I don’t want that culture to die.” Yamada-san dreamed of retiring young and moving to live with her parents and starting a school “to read books, grow plants and not just sit quiet like in school.” She thought that it would help her parents and improve her “psychological balance.”

This exchange reveals the complex meanings of “rural” for this generation in Japan. It represents poverty and boredom, but within the moral debate on child raising and the continued evolution of “self,” it represents values and practices lost in the transition to late modernity. Yamada-san idealized the rurality of her parents’ farm as providing the moral balance to consumption, competition, and hyperindividuality. Here the lower-class life of the rural farm is reinterpreted as an antidote to overconsumption and a symbol of moral superiority; unlike Kawahara-san’s new religion, it has appeal to the urban middle classes as an agrarian discourse (Kelly 1990). This alternative within this generation’s ambiguous long-term resistance reoccurs later in the chapter.

Thus, both Kawahara-san and Yamada-san turn to older belief systems to use as mothers and workers in a late-modern world. They combine them creatively with new ideas to reconceptualize their own selves, and thus reach “psychological balance” for themselves and “moral balance” for their children. It is a process we see around the world in which people re-create and temper global-Western ideas into locally workable and appropriate forms (Appadurai 1996). As with all of the similar attempts in this book (such as Murayama or Yamazaki in Chapter 3), this effort attains to something better than the Western autonomous ideal, aiming toward interdependence, links with the past, and responsibility as part of independence. Gendered tension does not disappear in these discourses, as priestly directives to “not struggle” and “show appreciation to your husband” indicate; they are not unlike the
doctor’s command to Ishii-san (Chapter 5) to give herself to her daughter, though they exist in a broader religious philosophy. But even though the risk of returning to historical and seemingly natural gendered relationships remains, the opportunity does exist to live in the space in-between self and the universe of relationships, choosing the best of local ideas and ways.

Ironically, it is children, the very thing that these “new humans” were afraid would force them to sacrifice their selves, who created the new ambivalences that led them into alternative cultural fields. These women are still creating self-narratives, but improvising as they link their projects of self, which now include children, with older ways of being internalized from their upbringing and still extant in the regions. In their workshop of practical resistance, they are hammering out a strong form of practical ambivalence to live by.

In sum, I have used these case studies as indications that urban and regional/rural processes of working out the dilemma of simultaneous working and motherhood are more similar than different in their general characteristics. All struggle with the paradox of developing self as women and children as individuals while needing to raise children properly in a moral sense. All refute the postwar, emotional relations of dependency with their children and aim toward honest communication within their marriages. However, the processes here indicate that the urban experience is more affected by the pressure for class-based accomplishment and uncertainty about the adequacy of outside people’s care even as educated experts are consulted; the rural experience exhibits trust in older systems of thought and practice, albeit reinterpreted, in a kind of residual resistance (Williams 1977). These systems can be demanding and are representative of “tradition” or inferior class status, but they also are available to use in innovative ways by professionals like Yamada and Kawahara who integrate them into a broadening of self. In comparison, Matsui’s urban, middle-class project of mothering appears lonely and competitive, raising the question whether, ironically, it isn’t the rural/regional experience that may offer creative options to the current disillusionment with a modern system of institutions and values built around rapid economic growth.

*Working and mothering among the rice fields*

Why do four of the seven full-time working mothers live in a rural village? Regional fertility rates are higher than those in Tokyo, and rural village rates even higher. Gender roles are more conservative than in Tokyo. Why is
it easier for mothers to continue working in the village? On the surface the answer is not different for Tokyo or Morioka: day care and parental help. However, the history lived by grandmothers and mothers, and inherited in the lives of daughters makes all the difference.

An older male teacher, with whom I first taught English when I came to Morioka in the seventies, drove me through pines and stubble of cut rice fields to his home village; he had introduced me to single women here in 1993 and continued to take me to see them. My plan was to visit the three women (other than Kawahara-san), who were full-time working mothers in this village area. All of these women had grown up in the village, one going to university and two going to work in the village right after high school graduation.

At the village hospital I met Shimura-san, a government bookkeeper recently transferred here from the village office, for an interview. In 1993, she had been a high school graduate trained on the job, claiming that she would quit when she married because, having been raised by her grandmother while her mother worked and did laundry at night, she wanted a different life. But here she was in 2004 following her mother’s model, planning to continue her full-time work but with a four-year-old boy in day care. (The only difference in the model was that she and her husband did not live with her in-laws and the child was in day care.) However, because she often worked until seven, and even later at the end of the fiscal year, her husband, also a government worker, picked the child up at five forty and took him to visit with his parents, who lived next door to their house. That night they would all meet there for dinner, not an unusual occurrence. Except for the in-laws, whom she might have to care for someday, Shimura-san would be the envy of her generation.

After the interview at the hospital, Takahashi-san picked me up in her van, her two-year-old in the back seat. Dressed in jeans and denim jacket, with irregularly cut, reddish dyed hair with gray and black roots, she drove me to a coffee shop that had few customers in the off-season between winter skiers and summer golfers. We ordered cake and ice cream, and she fed the ice cream to her son.

“He loves ice cream!” she said in her gravelly voice. “I’m happy to have some time with him because I work most days at the retirement home.” A university graduate, she had worked in Morioka for a year before she came back to the village and started at the retirement home.

“I remember when we first met there. Do you still like your work?”

With an embarrassed laugh, she admitted, “Yes, I like old people. It’s a good job for this village. I work in the daytime now but have to do more office
work. I am satisfied. My mother had to do everything and work outside while my grandmother raised me, so this is easy compared with that.”

The air was thick with things unsaid. Takahashi-san had been full of marriage plans when we first met, but by 1998 she was divorced. Her ex-husband’s parents got custody of her son with almost no visitation for her though they all lived in this area. She had lost much of her characteristic humor, but her rough laughter burst forth when she described her new husband.

“We met playing volleyball. We drank and laughed together. He’s thirty-three and I’m thirty-six. I wasn’t sure about marrying again, but, anyway, a child got made (*dekichatta*), so we married.”

“Congratulations. That’s wonderful.”

“I am happy. I get along well with my husband. We still spend a lot on beer because we both drink at night!” she laughed.

“Who takes care of the child while you work?”

“He spends the day on the dairy farm with my husband and my in-laws. They rebuilt their old house, so we have a duplex right next to his parents. The foyers and kitchens are entirely separate but the boy runs in and out.”

“That sounds perfect,” I said.

“I can’t do things just as I want (*katte ni*) anymore. I have to think of husband and children first, even on my vacations. His father is still in charge and he won’t hire anyone to feed the animals, so we never get a night away. But when my husband becomes the manager, we’ll change some things.” Her raised eyebrows suggested that it was not only women who suffered from the effects of patriarchy in this farming village.

As her son got fidgety, I asked, “Do you ever meet your older son?”

“We meet with him four times a year. You have fun with your older brother, don’t you?” She tousled her son’s hair. “It’s easier now that my ex-husband is with someone else.”

Takahashi-san left me off at the apartment of my next interviewee, with whom she worked at the retirement home. Kawaguchi-san was forty-four and had two boys of six and eight. With only a high school education, she had risen from aide to care manager for home health care (Rosenberger 2001, 216–217).

While the boys played a rowdy mini-badminton game in the next room, her husband sat beside her listening to the interview. At one point her younger boy came in, climbed on her lap, and kept trying to grab her breasts; she just shooed him down gently. Her husband had wanted to meet me, perhaps suspicious of “feminists,” which he asked me about. She supported him without a
hint of his late nights that she had mentioned in 1998. “Japanese don’t usually praise their husbands, but he is one hundred and eighty percent as husband and father. . . . When our children play they call out half for mother and half for father.”

They laughed as the boys’ shouts from the other room interrupted our talk. “Kids can be free here. My husband doesn’t want them to do lessons after school. We want to just go slow and relax (nombiri) when we are all home.”

How did Kawaguchi-san manage to raise her boys and continue working? I knew she had taken a year of maternity leave for both and had been on the line about whether to return to work in 1998. “I am entranced by the life of a ‘full-time housewife,’ ” she had said, using the term popular in the sixties. “But I’d never be able to get a good job like this again around here.” Despite her praise of her husband, it was her mother who had enabled her to remain a working mother. “The boys have been raised more than half by my mother. She lives nearby. Usually the children eat at my mother’s house and then I make something for the two of us here.”

Her husband had retreated to play room volleyball with the boys. She ended the conversation by asserting her late-modern belief in her own right to choose and her insight into the changing history of the family in the village. “My mother had to kill herself, always putting up with things. Now you can go toward your own goal. You may fail, but you can choose.”

*Why the village?*

The processes reflected in these interviews point to answers as to why comparatively more mothers in this group work full-time in the village. The first is economic. Rural villages are poor, left behind in Japan’s modern economic development, lacking employment, with agriculture earning meager profits and agricultural subsidies decreasing, and increasingly starved of tax money by central coffers (*Economist* 2011); so the stark need for money motivated these women to work. Their husbands had lower-paying jobs with local government, farming, or small companies; and women, also facing job limitations, had to covet their jobs once obtained. There were economic upsides, however. With fewer young adults in the village, even women with high school educations could move up at work. Because rural villages have a preponderance of elderly (Traphagan 2000), local governments are extremely generous in granting special allowances for helping families with birth and child raising—the more children, the more money given.
The second answer is cultural and historical. The “feudal” families that contemporary women so assiduously avoided because of strict mother-in-laws and hard work have learned to compromise. The alternative is losing their children to the city (which many have done) or never finding brides for the sons (which some did not). Takahashi-san’s experience of losing her son through divorce shows that the learning process is painful for everyone and the younger generation does not always win. Patriarchal households and relationships have weakened, but because of the ongoing concern for ancestral land and graves their power continues. Both young and old must learn new scripts for living in productive tension with each other—the elders gaining grandchildren, and the younger sharing in the feeling of individualized choice that their generation in Japan has demanded.5

What is fascinating here is that certain aspects of these farming, land-bound, multigenerational families ultimately have adapted more easily to the changes in cultural codes demanded by Japanese women than postwar middle-class urban families. Historically, it was the younger women who worked and the older women who cared for the grandchildren. Now, however, this same arrangement fits the desire of younger women to work and the expectations of grandmothers to raise grandchildren. Most grandmothers have not acquired the habits of hobbies, friends, and travel like middle-class urban women, but the younger women even get to golf and go skiing with their husbands while the grandparents watch their children.

Making space in cross-generational relationships to preserve the semblance of nuclear families as long as possible is part of the new script. Tradeoffs wait in the wings: it is a sure bet that these women will care for and probably live with elders in the future, because all of them married eldest sons.

This rural script that supports full-time working mothers demands a caveat. Living in the village requires women to carry “self” and its pursuits lightly. Looking back at their interviews, they only referred to “self” with the double consciousness of their elders’ view—as selfishness. In relation to getting her own apartment or doing karaoke in the city, for instance, the village woman would simultaneously laugh at herself: “I am selfish!” Takahashi and Kawaguchi both said that men and women should be equal, but they had to put up with male supervisors who thought differently.

Interviewees from Tokyo and Morioka also sometimes couched their self-narratives in words that implied their selfishness (wagamama, katte ni, kimama), but they also shed this and talked freely of self as a worthy goal. Ito-san, the single translator in Chapter 2, for example, never apologized for
her focus on self; and Minami-san, the mother at the beginning of Chapter 5, felt a responsibility to plan for self. If a supervisor was too hierarchical, city women could change jobs.

To stay in the village was to accept emergence as an adult in the midst of practices and values embedded in hierarchical groups. Surely the dispositions they had been raised with made this adjustment easier. Takahashi-san mourned her mother’s death in 2004, admiring her ability to endure (gaman) and live with all her might. Although tensions erupted and both generations fought for its own ways, these village women lived with the practiced double consciousness of ambivalence, pushed for certain changes, and otherwise waited for time to take its course. They will become the elder generation, with the power that entails, and it will be interesting to see what they expect from their children.

The third answer to why more mothers in the village work is related to class. Both insiders and outsiders evaluate rural village life as slower and more relaxed. This is not so much the privilege of tradition as a preference born of the necessity (Bourdieu 1984) of living on the periphery of a rich country. My interviewees labeled it with the word nombiri, implying laid-back and noncompetitive. It is a word that I heard in the 1980s in Morioka, used in relation to children who do not receive tutoring for high school and university exams, generally expressed with a light giggle to distinguish it from the class competition of mainstream Japan. In 2004, rather, these village women claimed nombiri as a kind of cultural capital of rural Japan that in some ways fits the tendency toward more creative play and less mindless devotion to work in the social movement of their generation. Although it places them and their children in a group of people who would not be winners in the larger landscape of Japan, it raises them in a humanistic sense. Urban people come here seeking relaxed nombiri, and rural people feel that they now have an advantage in the debate on morality and the ideal lifestyle that is quietly occurring in Japan. Thus, the long-term resistance of these village women, always accepted as more ambivalent than the urban version, fares well within their rural context of lower class expectations.

Part-time working mothers

Although married women in Japan often prefer part-time work, this group yields only six. In general this trend is highest for women with children in school, and numbers may rise in future interviews. Much like the full-timers,
the motivations and experiences of these part-timers raise issues of class and cultural redefinitions; they revisit the question of orientations to self and family, particularly husbands. Urban-regional issues do not surface as so important in these case studies; four of the six live in the regions (none in the village), but women’s relationships with family vary in similar ways in both Tokyo and the northeast.

Differences in the type of part-time work do emerge as salient in the way that they increase or decrease the contradictions of long-term resistance. One woman is a contract worker with three children in school. The five with younger children are divided between artists and family workers, two categories of work that are acceptable for women. The difference between them, however, is stark: the artists create their own gravity against the “regular world” to keep their artistic talents alive, while the family workers struggle with the irresistible gravity of the family business that not only pulls them in but will determine their economic survival. Both work part-time, but the conversation with self varies tremendously, as do their relationships with husbands, his parents, and her parents.

I concentrate on the heterogeneity of part-time working mothers offered by the three artists and two family workers. The sixth woman, who delivers parcels in the rural northeast, signals the common denominator of tension between work and children that all these women’s experiences take off from. She worries when snowy roads make her late cooking dinner for her three elementary school–age children, yet she finds work necessary because her husband is a farmer and factory laborer, and simultaneously satisfying because it makes her feel normal among her friends and gets her out into the world.

In this section, I explore how long-term resistance via self, generationally defined partly through work, plays out differentially in family workers and artists, and interacts differentially with parents and, to my surprise, especially with husbands. This contrast leads to interesting insights, marking extremes that exist within the overall term part-time working mothers and rendering the category in need of nuanced analysis (Kondo 1990). Two case studies will lay the groundwork for these insights.

Family workers

The two family workers both grew up in the northeast, but one remains there and the other married and lives near Tokyo. Both married into dental families whose businesses are struggling with competition—one is a brother-sister
orthodontist business competing with an overflow of dentists in regional cities, and the other a father-son dental equipment business competing with larger, technologically advanced companies in Tokyo. In 2004 both had small children and lived separately from but quite near their businesses and their in-laws.

These family workers reveal the tensions of giving up work as an activity pursued for self, as imagined by this generation of women, and accepting work as a daily activity embedded in the larger family welfare. The challenge is to do it in a new way. New laws that require that all family workers be paid help, but legislation cannot change family dynamics or the nature of the work. Uchimura-san, the Tokyo woman, went to work Monday through Friday from her nearby apartment and received wages; she sent her son to day care and ate with her parents-in-law for lunches and on Saturday night. Having come to Tokyo originally as a dental technician, she understood the contrast with her generation’s ideal: “Now I am doing work that I didn’t choose. Because it’s our own company, we immediately think of the profit.”

In this case, tension for Uchimura-san did not emerge with parents-in-law directly but with the nature of the nuclear family constructed around the family business. They worried about profits, so having a second child seemed risky. Her chief complaint so far was that there was never time to relax leisurely with her husband because her father-in-law demanded too much in the way of effort (gambaru)—late hours and Saturday all day for her husband. She dreamed of a vacation together and family life after her husband took over the business, because at this point her generational ideal of family life with rich conjugal and father–children relationships was at the mercy of his father and the business.

The northeastern family worker exhibits more clearly the characteristic that I expected for family workers: tension between her “self” and her in-laws. However, the underlying tension with husband, devoted to her but also to his family and business’s profitability, emerged here as well.

Nakamura-san, thirty-nine years old in 2004, lived in a small northeastern city in a tiny apartment where work papers and toys for her two daughters, three and nine months, lay helter-skelter all around. We talked amidst a flurry of activities: breast-feeding, her older daughter’s scribbling in my notebook, phone calls about the account books for her husband’s dentistry business, and changing diapers.

Nakamura-san did not feel a loss of a self actualized through work in the sense that she was already underemployed as a single woman, a four-year
university graduate working as a museum guide. In 1993, she had already reduced her desires for success in the world, saying, “I don’t desire much from life.” However, she had an enjoyable singlehood, travelling and shopping with her widowed mother and sister. By 1998, she was ready to marry even “someone she didn’t dislike” and have children, so marrying into a family business did not seem like a sacrifice.

However, her ambiguous sense of long-term resistance in terms of self sprang up in relation to mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and the business staff. Her mother-in-law lived with them at first, because it was economical, and she worked in the evenings so the new couple could be alone. Her sister-in-law was a dentist in the business and insulted Nakamura-san when she had conflicts with the mother-in-law. The staff resented her because she was brought into the business to work as an emergency dental assistant without training. Nakamura-san expressed herself with a directness I hadn’t heard in her before. “No one here understood my own self (jibun jiko). . . . I had no place to be (iruba).” She brought her will to bear on her husband and they moved to this small apartment. Relationships improved and even softened after children came and she was working from home, but she worried about the future, when they would live above the new dental office now being built.

The family business always mediated her relationship with her husband. Having married at thirty-four, Nakamura-san had trouble getting pregnant, and her husband suggested that they forgo children; as the business was faltering and children were expensive, perhaps they should “bow to fate.” Although she was practicing tacit accommodation in so many ways in her new family, she activated her own desires once again, insisting on fertility treatment and taking time off from the family business to travel frequently to Morioka an hour away.

In sum, both these family workers experienced encroachment into their territories of self and their nuclear family building as a place of rest apart from the work world. The relationship with in-laws was a predictable area of tension and negotiation, but the sticking point was the expected relationship with husband as chief ally and person who understood the wife’s self. The family business infringed upon this relationship and forced the wife to temper her own wishes in relation to her husband and to the family business that was an integral part of him—and increasingly of her. Indeed, even the child rearing had to bend to the needs of the business. The business advanced into the territory of the wives’ selves and their generational expectations, for the part-time work that had been intended to soothe the frustrating double
bids experienced by these Japanese married women actually exacerbated the tensions in their efforts to build their self-narratives.

The artists

The artists exhibit an opposite phenomenon: their worlds of self, nurtured in their talents and creative work, tend to appropriate the worlds of their parents, their children, and even to a great extent their husbands. Especially husbands’ support of their work has diminished the tensions of passing through the dilemmas of marriage and children and has enabled them to maintain their own talents and place in the world.

The most extreme example of this is Nakata-san, a dancer in the northeast who had danced her way “young and free” through university and theaters in Tokyo before returning to teach in Morioka. Her husband, a banker, fell in love with her when he saw her performing, and although he was an elder son with rural parents, he promised Nakata-san that he would let her continue dancing. “With many men it is just talk. But he didn’t lie.” He built her a home lined with wood—a large teaching studio with a locker room below and a sweeping kitchen counter above, and a large bedroom for them and a small bedroom for his parents to stay in when they visited. He did all the accounting work for her business on the computer and she did not have to wait on his parents; in fact, when his parents visited, her students were surprised that she did not run to clean up and greet them, but let them get their own tea. The house was ten minutes from her own parents, who picked up her daughter, fed her, and brought her home dressed in pajamas for bed. At five, she was starting to learn dance. Nakata-san chattered on about her students and the jealousies among dance teachers in the city, but added: “I am greedy (yokubari). At my last concert I told the audience, ‘I talk so much, but I am not the heroine here today. My mother and father are the heroes.’ ” Her art had colonized her relationship with her family members, but her parents were happy and her husband remained devoted. If she felt tension, it was around her body, which at thirty-five was challenging her central meaning for self: “I am tired. I don’t perform much anymore. I’ve gained weight!”

The other two artists have not molded their households to the same extent and experience more tensions with child raising, parents, and husbands. But the shifts that their artistic lives have engendered in their husbands are particularly interesting and indicate the importance of the husbands’ attitudes to women’s negotiation of long-term resistance.
The second artist, a piano teacher since junior college, was raised and still lives in Tokyo. Despite her marriage and daughter, two days a week she returns to her natal home an hour’s distance away to teach piano while her parents care for her now four-year-old daughter. Her parents have their own hobbies and travel, and sometimes complain of the limitations, but they enjoy their granddaughter. Her husband, a salaryman, has always tolerated the arrangement and admired her hobby-cum-work. Perhaps in a similar bid to enjoy his life more, he asked her permission to risk changing jobs to a less secure but less conservative company. She was glad to assent, and he has shifted to companies where he likes the work and can develop his hobby of in-line skating on the side, sometimes with his wife and daughter. In short, this woman’s life of self, expressed as a pianist, has encouraged her husband to find work and hobbies that nurture his self and help him to understand hers.

The case study of the third artist shows the change in a husband most clearly. Murai-san, raised and living in Morioka, married a government worker whose attitudes and career transfers made it difficult for her to keep practicing her art as a pianist. Her husband was the “hard” type (katai, strait-laced and old-fashioned) focused on his own work and his evening baseball games, and small regional apartments did not even have pianos in them for her to play. His parents supported his stable career. Her parents were busy artists themselves and gave her mainly moral support and a place to teach a few piano lessons. Even her six-year-old daughter did not like the piano much, perhaps feeling it to be competition for her mother’s attention (Rosenberger 2001, 225–226).

The tensions between child and work were strong, but Murai-san felt compelled to continue her life of piano even if it was “a thin river” when compared to “blooming flowers” of the world of Nakata-san (whom she knew distantly). With her sister, Murai-san occasionally performed pieces that she herself had composed, accompanied musical groups, and taught a few students—but only within the interstices of child raising. Recently she recorded with her sister, but it was in a race with motherhood: “We got the studio to record it at nine thirty a.m. and I had to pick up the child that day at eleven thirty. We had only two hours, and we did it full steam.” When she played in evening concerts, she fed her daughter dinner and raced to the concert hall. She felt “whirled about” by her daughter’s activities, but was determined not to “think too much about children. You just have to do it.” Tensions in her long-term resistance had heightened in spite of having married the man she loved since high school and wanting children.
The change in her husband came as a result of his experiencing international life in New York City on a two-year transfer. Murai-san had spent a year in the United States, where her love of piano had been confirmed, and she urged her husband, who made fun of her “doing just what she wanted” like an American, to work abroad. She had described her husband as a typical northeastern—enduring, allowing himself little luxury, and expecting bad luck. After their return, she said, “He now wants to be a father raising his child and a husband giving an enjoyable time to his wife. I can leave my daughter with him when I have a concert to play in. He even dreams of changing his career to be self-employed.”

This change in Murai-san’s husband attests to the effect of an international experience outside of conservative, northeast Japan, and of the expanding impact of the generational discourse that pushes against confining institutionalized roles of men as well as women. But it also occurred because of the influence of Murai-san’s ambiguous but steady long-term resistance as an artist with an alternative view of life.

In sum, the artists’ part-time work nurtures the link between self and work popular in their generation and mediates the contradictions with marriage and motherhood that they have also chosen. This situation insists on itself to the extent that it can, spreading to and enveloping husbands and households. Respectful of their daughters’ talents, the woman’s own parents are supportive, and in-laws have no choice but to tolerate the situation. Although the artists attempt to expand their selves into their households, the family workers struggle just to stake out a small territory for themselves and their nuclear families in the household, albeit a larger territory than that inhabited by women of past generations. They have less influence on their husbands than most wives of this era, because their husband’s household has staked its future on his work.

These examples show in an exceptionally clear way the contrastive ways that self and relationships can evolve as women tackle the dilemma of choice to marry and have children in the late-modern era. Furthermore, this contrast does not relate to an urban-regional split and its class implications, although socioeconomic differences are relevant in 2004 as family businesses struggle economically more than the salaried households of the artists. These case studies indicate both the mutual influences between husband and wife and the overarching influence of the economic environment as essential ingredients to consider in the long-term resistance of women.
Personal long-term resistance embedded in the organic movement

The case of Tsuchiya-san’s life, committed to the organic farming movement with her husband, stretches the boundaries of her generation’s challenge to the culture code more broadly than others in this book. As an organic farmer, she is part of a collective movement practicing a lifestyle that refuses to cooperate with the capitalistic economic frame of global corporate production and consumption. The social movement practices direct producer–consumer relationships, self-sufficiency for the farmer, and a local organic cycle on the land (Rosenberger in press).7

Tsuchiya-san and her farmer-husband also have resisted the cultural-legal code with respect to marriage requiring that a married couple share the same last name to enter one household registry (koseki)—the manner by which households are established legally in Japan. Joining others in a movement meant to push for changes, they did not marry under state law. Their three children belonged to her registry until recently, when they switched the children to his registry because his parents had no other grandchildren, whereas hers did.

Although neither of these collective movements has brought significant change to the status quo in Japan, they position Tsuchiya-san as someone who clearly understands gendered and economic contradictions in Japan and is not afraid to take chances in order to change things. Indeed, raised by a father who is a Christian minister, she grew up accustomed to taking marginal positions of belief in Japanese society.

Tsuchiya-san is without a doubt part of the long-term resistance of her generation to shift the status quo for women in family and society. The question is: Because of her conscious involvement in other resistance movements, has Tsuchiya-san overcome the ambiguity, ambivalence, and tension that others in her generation experience?

The all-encompassing work of organic farming—and three children

In 2004, Tsuchiya-san stands behind the counter pouring udon noodles made with wheat grown on their own farm from the boiling water into a sieve. Her youngest, a one-year-old son, is pushing soft carrots into his mouth beside me. The rain falls on the rice fields around their house—a rainy day
is best for talking, she had told me, and I jumped on the train for the hour ride from Morioka.

“It’s been ten years now since we came to this rural village and built this house. They are more open to outsiders here than in other places.” Chickens roost on one side and two pigs wait with open mouths to recycle food waste on the other.

“We have no trouble giving parties because we always have lots of food. But it’s busy. When we are planting and cutting, the children see it is terrible and want to help. Now, when they say the food is delicious, we tell them, you can’t eat this in the city!” She smiles broadly.

“So can you basically live without money?”

“No, we need money like for day care and school fees, and now the oldest daughter wants to do some lessons. We deliver boxes of food to people in town in our consumer group.”

Tsuchiya-san’s husband joined us for lunch. They were both muscled from hard work and brown from the sun.

She added: “I didn’t want to send our first daughter to day care because of the foods with pesticides. We would take her [with us] out to the fields. But in the summer we have to use day care now.”

“How do people accept you around here?” I wondered. Tsuchiya-san bounced the baby on her lap while she ate.

“Well, they are glad to have young farmers around. I make natto (fermented soybeans) with a group of older farm wives at the community center. He does the accounting for the farmers’ union. But there is prejudice here. They always want the man to be the representative of the household and the wife to be in the kitchen. Here we do it together.” They glanced at each other.

“One thing they don’t like is that we were never formally married. People here are conservative. The law was almost changed, but lost in the legislature recently,” said her husband.

“It was a popular movement ten years ago, but now [for us it is creating] a problem with life insurance.” Her tone was flat.

Her husband went out to work and Tsuchiya-san put the child to her breast.

“We used to do everything half and half, and we still make decisions together. I say what I think and we argue. We don’t talk for a while and then figure it out. But it’s getting harder to share everything. I feel my energy lessening with this third child, so I can’t work in the rice field.”

“Can the children help some now?”
“Yes, the oldest is eight and she helps care for the baby in the summer. We want them to be part of the farm, not just separate like in the city.” The child had fallen asleep.

“What do you think as you look back over your life?” I asked.

“I think if I had done this or that, I would have a different life. But I made that decision according to that time (sono toki) and I understand why I chose that way. There is no help for it. I think back and then resolve to look toward the future.”

“What are your dreams for the future?”

She hesitated. “I wasn’t expecting that question! What have others said?”

“Some people talk about jobs and travel, and some don’t want to answer it yet!”

“Well, I am searching for that,” she said slowly. “We have reached our dream of ten years ago. We sometimes want to be more self-sufficient, but we would just get busier. We want to play with the children some. What will we do when the children want to do extracurricular activities? It’ll take time and money. The oldest does piano and wants to do swimming. She’s in a community play and they pulled me into taking a part—just this once. I would like to do more plays, but I have to choose. I can’t do everything.” she chuckled as if counseling herself.

“I try to think with a bigger vision, but I have trouble doing it because I am in the middle of everything. But I am very happy to be eating our own food that we have raised.”

What kind of long-term resistance?

Has Tsuchiya-san overcome the ambiguity, ambivalence, and tension that others in her generation are experiencing? The answer has to be no. She is a full participant in her generation’s experiences despite her work toward larger change, carrying feelings of ambivalence similar to those of other women. More than most she has passed through various dilemmas of choice as university-grad-turned-farmer, but even as she expresses continuing enthusiasm for her choices of safe food and the rural life, she experiences tension and a hint of ambivalent postdecisional regret. Tsuchiya-san is consciously writing a new script along with her husband and their allies in the organic social movement, but she still runs up against contradictions as a wife, a mother, a rural community member, and a citizen of a nation organized around consumerism and competition for personal success.
First, the organic movement devotes no explicit attention to making gender relations more equal. Although her husband, same-age female allies, and even some of the older couples attempt to practice equal gender relations, their practices remain implicit within the organic farming movement, which at times reflects typical hierarchical gender relations (Rosenberger 2011).

Second, both Tsuchiya-san and her husband have been raised in middle-class Japan and have internalized some middle-class ideals about the gendered division of labor. As the wife, she bears, breast-feeds, and feeds the children, and also takes major responsibility for the inside of the house. To also be an equal participant in farming with three children is impossible, and so she has had to step back from equal work while trying to remain equal with her husband in decision making. Even though this is organic farming, it is also like a family business, with all its financial and managerial difficulties that intersect with family life and conjugal relations; it takes effort not to give in to the default mode of male leadership.

Third, Tsuchiya-san’s middle-class ideals of university education and extracurricular activities also contribute tension to her life. In addition to the values she conveys to her children through living on the land, eating their own organic food, and moving about freely without fear of urban crime, she wants them to have the opportunities she had to develop themselves through school and town activities and to receive university educations that are a leg up, if not a middle-class necessity, in today’s Japan of winners and losers, even for organic farmers like themselves. She and her husband do not demand that the children follow them into organic farming and do not want to penalize them for following other paths. They need money to make all of this possible, which means working harder on the farm and collides with the time they need to take children back and forth to their activities. Tsuchiya-san herself realizes as she ages that her busy life as a farmer and her limited financial resources also impinge on her own desires to develop herself outside of farm and family, for example by acting in local theater productions and meeting with other female organic farmers around the country with whom she has special bonds. Like most people making their individualistic way in late-modern Japan, she reaches out for allies to make her way. Hints of a double bind arise in her interview as she wonders what the future opportunities for her children and herself will be.

Fourth, Tsuchiya-san has chosen to live in a very rural area in Tohoku, where gender relations are quite traditional. Even if she would like to represent her household in various village organizations, her husband is the
appropriate representative and she is seen only as a substitute. Furthermore, village women’s organizations consist of women in their sixties and seventies; the younger women have either left or opt for the dominant lifestyle of their generation, commuting to jobs in nearby towns. Tsuchiya-san teamed with the older women to make traditional food (such as natto) for a while, but has stopped. Almost all of the neighboring farms are conventional, nonorganic, and run by elderly people with part-time help from children. Many risks lie in this attempt to marry residual traditions with new ideas of ecology, gender equality, and life outside the market.

Thus, Tsuchiya-san experiences ambivalence and tension just like others in her generation and is a bona fide member of this ambiguous long-term resistance that is trying to write new scripts. This said, her life does overcome some contradictions that are key in late-modern Japan. As a cosmopolitan, educated person, her life reaches across the urban-rural divide, bringing a new meaning to rural life and offering a viable alternative to younger people who are disillusioned with consumption-oriented, middle-class urban life. She traverses class because she carries the idealistic hopes of the middle class for a meaningful life into self-chosen poverty. And, more than most, her work, play, and family form a coherent space in which to some extent she can grow as the self she wants to be. Yet, on the ground and in person, Tsuchiya-san still retains the ambivalence of her generation.

Conclusion

In sum, the processes in the lives of these working mothers show that women in this category have varied experiences. Urban full-time working mothers have a harder time than full-time working mothers in the village, where grandparents often care full-time for young children. Wives working part-time in family businesses have more difficulty seeing work as contributing to their long-term resistance as selves than those working as artists or in nonfamily pursuits. In all cases, these women try to shift the ground of their marriages in order to be able to value their own work as part of their long-term resistance and selfhood, but the women who do work that is more professional (teachers) or more self-actualizing (artists) are more successful than family workers and the Tokyo woman whose husband works in a prestigious bank in getting their husbands to help them balance work and family. However, mothers working for money also strive to express themselves and have personal time with their
husbands in their marriages; in the case of family businesses or farms, this sharing bleeds over into scheming with husbands to change the nature of the business itself after he takes charge from his father or, for the organic farmer, holding on to the wife’s decision-making role in the farm.

Overall, working mothers showed less concern about developing an emotional relationship of security and dependence for their children than stay-at-home mothers. All assumed that children would be somewhat separate from themselves. However, they were all active in the debate about how to raise children who would be individuals and also cooperative, moral beings. While the middle-class urban mother turned to herself in the role of mother-at-home as the answer, working mothers in the regions thoughtfully turned to reinterpreted versions of rurality and chosen aspects of the agrarian ideal that has shaped the psychosocial ideology of postwar Japan as the answer for them and their children.