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rationalization and nostalgia: cultural dynamics of new middle-class Japan

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shrine talk: coming to terms with modernity

Together with local governments and agricultural cooperatives, the key public organizations in Japanese farming areas are the Land Improvement Districts *(tochikairyōku)*. These have generally been formed from the earlier irrigation cooperatives; their staffs and councils of representatives (elected from the cultivator-members of the district) manage area water affairs and farmland improvement projects. The council of the district where I lived in the late 1970s and 1980s usually holds its special assemblies at the district's shrine to the water spirit *(mizugami)*. This small, wooden Shinto building was recently reconstructed on the high levee of the major river. Perfunctory ritual offerings are made to the water spirit at the beginning of the meetings, and a priest from the plain's major shrine is called in to purify the assembly. In the drinking that follows these meetings, I am told over and over of the "traditional" linkage of hydrology, rice growth, and spiritual energy: the mountain spirit receives the winter snowfall and descends through the rivers in the spring as the water spirit. Proper ritual can entice the water spirit to enter the rice fields as the paddy spirit to bring fertility to the soil and protection to the crops. Inattention can unleash the destructive aspects of this spiritual force: spring flooding, summer droughts, and fall frosts. It was a story told with little conviction but in an affable and distanced tone to instruct the curious guest in local lore.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, most of these special meetings were held to commemorate phases of an ongoing "modernization" of the canal networks and field patterns, designed and financed by state officials of the agriculture and construction ministries. Between the Shinto prayer and the sake swilling, the meetings featured speeches by district staff and ministry technicians lauding the "rationalization of agriculture" that was enabled by these projects. The "backward and inefficient customs" of the past, they declaimed, were now replaced by a "systematized and mechanized" rice farming that promised a prosperous and fully modern future to the region. The representatives listened politely and impassively. It was clear that neither *mizugami* nor ministry inspired their full confidence or incurred their total skepticism.

These meetings were only occasional moments in the regular routine of my fieldwork in this area. I learned much from the informal sake-drinking banter, but quickly tired of the speech-

In the postwar decades, a cultural construction of Japan as a "New Middle Class" society has gained a broad orienting force in the society. New typifications of work, family, and society have provided frames of reference for the redefinition and reorganization of everyday routines. This paper illustrates how the people of one region have come to terms with such typifications in the midst of state programs for the rationalization of its agriculture and national media efforts to sentimentalize its regional culture. Rationalization and nostalgia are shown to reveal fundamental ambivalences in and about the lifeways of contemporary Japan. [Japan, culture, class, industrial society, agricultural development]

making and the spirit stories, and sought the patterns of contemporary life elsewhere. Only recently have I come to appreciate how directly this shrine talk offers insight into these very life patterns. This essay is the result of trying to listen more attentively to such talk.[1]

It is an essay about the shape of modernity in this small region of contemporary Japan. It is about how the people of this region have literally come to terms with post-World War II Japan as a "New Middle Class" society. Its argument proceeds in three stages: how we might properly conceive of Japan as a New Middle Class society, how we might understand the course by which it has come to be so, and how this particular region's coming to terms with its larger society has required maneuvering within and between two seemingly contradictory languages—a language of rationalization and a language of nostalgia. This argument has two corollaries that I will consider at the end of the essay—that rationalization and nostalgia embody ambivalences fundamental to Japan's New Middle Class lifeways, and that their present engagement with the larger society is both enormously useful and highly dangerous for the people of this region.

The region I am concerned with is Shōnai, a coastal plain and surrounding mountains, up in Yamagata Prefecture in the northern part of Japan's main island. Shōnai's several hundred thousand residents fill two cities, a number of smaller towns, and hundreds of village settlements. One hundred and fifty years ago its people were peasant cultivators, town merchants, and samurai retainers of the domain lord to whom the plain was enfeoffed. Fifty years ago they were rice farmers, shopkeepers, and laborers, as well as cautious soldier-citizens of an increasingly aggressive, militarized state. Today a few remain full-time farmers while many more combine part-time farming with jobs in small and large private companies and public agencies; about 25,000 of the 85,000 households identify themselves as "farm households" *(nōka)*. They enjoy many of the amenities of metropolitan infrastructure on the more comfortable scale of a less densely populated region. They are, polls report and people tell me, middle class—and what this means and how they have come to claim this is the ethnographic issue at the heart of my study.

new middle-class Japan

The character and viability and significance of the New Middle Class is at the center of Western social theory of modern societies. It divided Kautsky and Bernstein, vexed Veblen and Burnham and Mills, and now concerns such theorists as the Ehrenreichs, Anthony Giddens, Daniel Bell, and Frank Parkin.[2] Moreover, it is, one may reasonably argue, the masterplot of much of the anthropological and sociological literature on postwar Japan, beginning with the seminal works of Dore (1958), Vogel (1963), and Plath (1964). I do not want to belabor these assertions here, but I do want to suggest that understanding the New Middle Class is best approached as a problem of the *social construction* of industrial societies, *cultural conceptions* of modernity, and the relations between the two. This claim does warrant some elaboration.

For the last 20 years, it has been widely reported in the Japanese media and repeated in Japanese and Western scholarship that 90 percent of the Japanese are middle class.[3] This characterization turns out to signify both more and less than it initially appears. Since the 1950s, a powerful typification of personal growth has popularized a narrow pattern of the meanings of support in family, success in school, and security in work. The discredited prewar ideology of the "family system" *(kazoku seido)* has been replaced by a new, glossy projection of a socially and physically nuclear unit of ricewinner husband, homemaker housewife, and two samurai-student children; full-time, lifetime, large-organization employment *(sararīman)* has become the workplace norm; and mass public education, relentlessly meritocratic and entrance exam oriented, now links home and work, child and adult. This has become the model organization of New Middle Class Japan. For many, it represents a set of mutually confirming aspirations

that orient behavior and judgment. But it is the wide appeal, not universal attainment, of this ideal life trajectory that lies behind the poll-readings of "90 percent middle class." Even for those who reject this cultural model of family, school, and work, it perversely channels their protest by posing the obvious target of resistance. By many conceivable measures, life-chances continue to vary widely, but a Japanese-inflected middle-class consciousness has, for the present moment, given a pervasive homogeneity to standards of achievement and designs for living.

This, of course, is not an accurate description of the realities of family, school, and work for 90 percent of the Japanese. To the contrary, over 50 percent of married women work and must accommodate that to the domestic ideal; only slightly over half of high school graduates actually continue to college, and only a very small minority pass the exams for entrance into the elite universities; and only 30 percent to 40 percent of workers enjoy full-time, lifetime employment security.

Nor in fact do these idealizations of family, work, and school form a seamless, internally coherent model. There are too many contradictions and paradoxes, as Rohlen (1974, 1983) and Cummings (1980) have shown for education—between the thrust of elementary education and that of high school education, between the public high school classroom that seeks to mute competition and the after-hours cram academies that have proliferated to hone that competitive spirit, between parents' public demands for standardized education and their private ambitions for their children. Contradictions in workplace ideals pit pressures for group cooperation and commitment in a company like Ueda Bank (Rohlen 1974) against the equally essential pruning and selecting that also occurs as a cohort moves up (in a workplace spatial ecology where the glassed corner office is not the executive suite but the outpost of oblivion for the *madogiwa zoku,* the "window watchers").

However, I would argue that, nonetheless, these represent typifications of areas of life that have gained enormous ordering power in the last three decades. Here I use "typification" in a sense similar to Renato Rosaldo (1980:153): "as constructs that serve less to regulate conduct than to provide the terms within which action becomes intelligible." They do not stand as a structural summary of what contemporary Japan is. This New Middle Class folk sociology is but a loose pattern of expectations that require interpretation to be realized. Their social enactment is never simple. It is fitful and it is conflictful, because the interpretations that people choose to make or are forced to accept have depended on their positions in local fields of differential influence.

Thus, that such a momentary societal consensus about certain cultural conceptions of work, family, and schooling as three linked pillars of modern society should have emerged is a particularly fascinating problem. It was by no means inevitable, and yet most discussions of New Middle Class Japan are flatly matter-of-fact about this. Yasusuke Murakami, a noted (if iconoclastic) economist, wrote an article a couple of years ago on the "Age of New Middle Mass Politics," in which he explained that "across all segments of society, life-styles are becoming homogeneous due to high mass consumption, high mass education, and the mass media" (1982:42). In a crude sense, the assertion is incontestable. It is also dangerously misleading because it suggests the automatic operation of impersonal forces. It begs the question of just how the "Shōwa single-digit" generation[4] and its postwar children have given definition to and support for the particular cultural forms of "mass society" that schools and media are now thought to promulgate.

Equally misleading is an argument that these ideals are merely a hegemonic, ideological fog that has descended upon the now mystified masses (Steven 1983). To be sure, it is enormously useful to the general social order and specific economic interests that the women workers of major corporations like Yama Shōji Trading Company (McLendon 1983) and Ueda Bank (Rohlen 1974) accept their truncated five-year "careers" and then retire docilely to their kitchen-cells. And it may be that the part-time farmers of regions like Shōnai are "really" more valuable as a cheap reserve labor pool than as food producers. Still, neither homogenizing institutions

nor hegemonic ideologies work inexorably. It is only through a close reading of individual lives as they embody and animate societal forces that we can understand both the strength of these ideals and their variable and imperfect manifestations in social patterns.

However, even if one accepts that certain typifications of New Middle Class lifeways have gained an ordering force in postwar Japan and that this must be explained through close-grained historical ethnography, one might still wonder what contribution is made by a study of life in a small rural region. Is not Shōnai on the anachronistic margins, part of the 10 percent not yet drawn into the New Middle Class world? I once thought so, but I no longer do. The people of Shōnai, too, are both conditioned by this model and in turn charge it with meanings from their own past experiences. Moreover, their particular accommodations to New Middle Class constructs are both enabled and complicated by the efforts of the larger society to rationalize and to sentimentalize Shōnai life patterns.

That the mutual imaginings of city and countryside oscillate between snobbish condescension and rhapsodizing sentimentality is, of course, a recurring theme of all state societies.[5] Japan is certainly no exception. In the decade following defeat in World War II, the countryside was denigrated as the bastion of residual semi-feudal elements and superstitious custom. It was crude "hicksville" *(inaka),* populated by toiling bumpkins *(hyakushō),* enduring the authoritarian patriarchs *(kafuchō)* of their families. Its life was antithetical to that which was "modern" and "democratic" and desirable. An enthusiasm for "rationalization" *(gōrika)* swept Shōnai and other rural regions as fervently as it reshaped society's center.

Gōrika first gained currency in Japan in the 1920s. Borrowing from post-World War I German policy, Japanese business circles pushed for "industrial rationalization," by which they meant technological and organizational changes in enterprise structure to strengthen management's control of labor and to improve factory efficiency (Gordon 1985:428; for a 1929 example from Shōnai, see Tsuruoka-shi shi hensan iinkai 1975:886–887). Following World War II, the term received far broader applications. For almost 40 years, *gōrika* has proved an ideologically potent and semantically slippery rubric for reform of everything from work rules and school texts to kitchen design, traffic flow, and dietary habits. Perhaps most commonly implied in these multiple usages has been a style of expertise that is empowered by its own formal characteristics: the professionalization of roles, the bureaucratization of institutions, and the systematization of procedures.[6]

Yet even as society's center aimed to transform Shōnai life through its programs of rationalization, it sought to appropriate Shōnai's past as a nostalgic reassurance of its own idealized past. By the late 1960s, the chains of blind custom became the roots of authentic tradition, and the countryside was now upheld as the last reserve of noble virtues. In a flush of rural nostalgia, the cultural institutions and authorities at the society's center have come to fetishize countrysides like Shōnai in travel posters, tourist itineraries, and television specials. Now it is the quaintness of farmhouses, the integrity of farm work, and the bonds of the village community that are celebrated rather than castigated. They are held in moral counterpart to the industrial core of bureaucracy and corporation.

Thus, the people of Shōnai have found themselves consigned to an imaginary past even as they are beckoned to a confident future, and they have had to learn to speak in both a language of rationalization and a language of nostalgia. In an important sense, this has engaged them in a debate about the relevance of the past for the shape of the future, a debate phrased in the everyday issues of work, family, and community life. In the two sections that follow, I would like to illustrate how programs of rationalization and sentiments of rural nostalgia have framed the efforts of a Shōnai household and a Shōnai village to come to terms with New Middle Class Japan.

the rationalization of Shōnai agriculture

Noboru has recently become the head of the Itō household in a settlement in the southern portion of Shōnai Plain, about five miles from the city of Tsuruoka. Born in 1949, Noboru will

be 37 this year. Until 1983, the Itō household had 4 coresident generations: Noboru's grandmother (then 78, born in 1905), her eldest son and Noboru's father, Tokuzō (54, born in 1929), his wife and Noboru's mother (52, born in 1931), Noboru's wife, Keiko (33, born in 1950), and two young children. In 1983, Noboru's grandmother died and his wife gave birth to a third child.

Noboru is the oldest of three siblings, and was born just as the postwar land reform gave his grandfather clear title to the two hectares of rice paddy that the household had tenanted. His grandfather and his parents farmed this land through the 1950s and early 1960s while encouraging the three children to continue through high school. Noboru's younger brother, Shōji, graduated from the regional technical high school and went to work in a Yokohama auto parts factory. He has since quit and has gone through a series of jobs in machine shops in the Kantō area. The daughter, Yumiko, went to the regional commercial high school and found work as a buyer for a Tokyo department store. After living with her boyfriend for a year, she was married in 1982 in a $15,000 ceremony at the Imperial Hotel in downtown Tokyo.

Noboru's own decision to go to the agricultural high school was a difficult one. He had aspirations for music, and played the flute in a city youth orchestra. Yet he was encouraged by his middle school principal "to accept responsibility for the household's farming." He was also impressed by the farm machines that had appeared in Shōnai, machines that seemed destined to replace the horse plough and hand field-labor that was taking its toll on his parents' health. Noboru now in fact farms three hectares of rice paddy by himself, with only a bit of help at transplanting and harvest. In addition, he grows some organic Chinese cabbage, under a contract with a Tokyo consumer cooperative. For the last 10 years, he has worked winters at a book and stationery store in the city.

He and Keiko, a year younger, were married in 1973. She had agreed, with the explicit stipulation that she could continue as a bookkeeper at what was then the only department store on the plain. His parents built them a small, second-story addition to the house where the young couple have a bedroom and living room.

Noboru's father now involves himself with local "good causes"—particularly, school programs and senior citizen activities. He makes a little money as a school crossing guard, an odd job for the town councilman that he is and has been for three two-year terms. Noboru's mother rises most mornings at 5:00 a.m. to solder and sort the bulb-wire assemblages that eventually become the rear lights for Honda automobiles. At 6:30, she stretches her sore back with the exercise program broadcast on state (NHK) radio. She and Keiko prepare breakfast, and she spends much of the remainder of the day watching the three children during Keiko's 5½-day work week.

Noboru's life cycle and the Itōs' recent past intersect with a larger arc of change. Of particular significance was Noboru's coming of age during a time of structural transformation in rice agriculture, a Green Revolution, roughly in the years 1965–80.[7] This was a specific but comprehensive package of programs designed by several ministries of the national government. It was implemented in many rice regions, including Shōnai, with enormous state financial subsidies and technical direction. It is sufficient here to note schematically its four components:

1. Rationalization of water use *(yōsui no gōrika).* After the war, the state became concerned that farmers were wasting water that was sorely needed for expanding municipal uses, hydroelectric generation, and industrial plants. It sponsored multipurpose dams in the headwaters of many rivers, including Shōnai's main river, and financed replacement of the several separate intakes along the river with a single integrated headworks. Further projects straightened, lined, and linked the competing canal networks into a single drainage basin system. Organizationally, legislation was used to reform irrigation cooperatives into Land Improvement Districts with representative councils of water users and large, full-time, technically trained staffs. On the procedural level, the older, ambiguous, contentious "irrigation customs" were replaced by state-issued, fixed-term water permits and master allocation plans.

2. Paddy land adjustment *(hojō seibi).* When the engineers reached the paddy fields themselves, they literally bulldozed them over, resculpturing the paddy landscape into a huge mosaic of large, 0.3 hectare rectangles, each with separate road access and water intake. These projects continued across the plain throughout the 1970s. The state provided the blueprints, the work itself was let to private contractors and earth-moving equipment operators, and at the conclusion, the Land Improvement Districts organized exchanges of parcels to consolidate the holdings of individual households. The special assemblies held at the water-spirit shrine frequently commemorated completion of these project blocks.

3. Mechanization *(kikaika).* This sequence of irrigation-drainage and paddy land projects was intended to permit a total mechanization of rice growing. Statistics demonstrate how, over the last 20 years, a full complement of machines has come to replace handwork in all phases of rice work, from spring tilling through harvest and postharvest. Moreover, fine tuning of water levels and careful, intensive fertilizer applications have allowed monovariety cultivation of new hybrid seeds; 95 percent of the plain acreage is planted in *sasanishiki,* a special variety marketed at premium prices above generic rice.

4. Area development *(chiiki kaihatsu).* A fourth stage of this Green Revolution was more general infrastructural improvements. With local government encouragement, the state took advantage of the suspension of property rights during the paddy field projects to install new telephone lines and water supply and sewage piping, and, above all, to reorganize the regional road grid. This stroke of genius probably singlehandedly defused any potential opposition from the city dwellers and smallholders worried about project cost assessments. In the late 1970s, "bypass" *(bai passu)* was the word on everyone's lips, as they anxiously awaited completion of major arteries that would replace the small lanes that had wound through villages and angled around the patchwork of paddy parcels.

Together, then, under the rhetorical banner of the "rationalization of agriculture," these four stages produced a radical recasting of the physical and social topography of Shōnai. It is impressive that so many of the announced objectives of this Green Revolution were realized. Yet, because from another angle this rationalization represented a field of structured possibilities to households like the Itōs', it is hardly surprising that it produced some unintended and paradoxical results as well. The mechanization itself offers instructive examples.

The new machines were used by most households to *continue* rice farming rather than *abandon* it. That is, mechanization did not promote the move out of farming so fervently anticipated by the ministries and the consolidation of holdings into a small number of larger, more efficient farming operations. Individuals left farming in great numbers, but most households held on to their land. They used the new machinery—and the generous government price supports—to allow one or several members of the household to continue small-scale farming on a part-time basis at production costs four to five times the world market price of rice.

Mechanization has thus produced several patterns of part-time farming in present-day Japan, depending on which members of the household have remained in agriculture. Cornell (1985) and Brown (1985) describe that we might call *rōjin nōgyō,* or senior citizen farming. In the upland Okayama village of Matsunagi, Cornell finds in the 1980s that the most common farm labor has become a single pair of grandparents, while the commuter adults and the student children spend their days in the town factories and schools. Rototillers, chainsaws, sprayers, and small trucks enable the older couple to handle most of the tasks of vegetable garden, orchard, and woodlot maintenance. In Brown's Mizusawa, too, farming appears to be a kind of elderly "workfare." By contrast, in Shōnai and other primary rice areas, larger machines—tractors, transplanters, combines, and gas dryers—have allowed the young male to assume most of the rice work by himself. It is what locals and bureaucrats have tagged "successor farming" (*segare nōgyō* in common parlance, *kōkeisha nōgyō* in bureaucrats' jargon). A designated successor is the sole (part-time) farmer of the household, and the other adults find other nonagricultural jobs.

Rice mechanization went awry of official intentions in a second sense as well. Initial policy encouraged group ownership, but every one of the eight basic machines has passed through the same sequence. They were initially distributed on an experimental basis to village or multivillage units. When regular assembly production was available, low-interest loans and subsidies were used to finance purchase by multihousehold groups. At first the machines were used by all the households in rotation, but disputes frequently arose about maintenance and about who was able to use them on the (highly desirable) weekend days. Many groups attempted a kind of internal contracting, in which one or two of the larger farm households in the group did all of the tilling, transplanting, and harvesting for the smaller households. This heightened awareness of farm labor time value and reimbursement formulas, but has seldom proved a permanent solution. Instead, all full-time and most part-time households now own a full complement of rice machinery. They complain bitterly about their heavy "machine indebtedness" *(kikai binbō)* even as they enjoy independent work schedules.

At the same time, mechanization has strengthened the role of the local and region-wide Agricultural Cooperatives as the sole channel for state loan programs and credit, as sales outlet for the machines themselves, and as a center for repair and instruction. But the reinforcement of part-time farming has also shifted the constituency of the Agricultural Cooperatives, which are now oriented to the general lifestyle interests, tastes, and needs of these part-time rice farmers. The Agricultural Cooperative has become an inclusive institutional force in Shōnai. For about one-third of Shōnai's population, it is the major bank for savings and credit; the agency for crop, home, and life insurance; the largest machine, implement, and auto dealer; distributor of the essential hybrid seeds; outlet for fertilizer sales and rice farming technical advice; principal political action group for mobilizing the region in the annual lobbying to protect and increase the state's rice price guarantees; supermarket; gasoline station; and even travel agent.

Thus farm rationalization through mechanization failed to fulfill the state ministries' plans for a small core of cooperating, full-time farmers. It has produced instead a regional pattern of noncooperating, part-time monocropping of a single hybrid rice variety. The gross economic inefficiency of this overcapitalized and underscaled agriculture is matched only by the enormous state and local investment in the physical facilities and organizations that sustain the political and social commitment to part-time farming. And it is the social commitment that particularly interests me here, because it involves in large part the work identity of young men like Noboru.

Machines brought and have kept Noboru in farming. They were decisive in his difficult choice to attend agricultural high school. By the mid-1960s, major manufacturers were contributing models of their latest machines to schools such as Noboru's. He and his classmates learned how to operate and repair them—and sensed that these offered a new image and organization of farm work. They graduated in the late 1960s, at a time when their parents were unsure if any of their children would stay behind to continue farming. Mechanization was a quid pro quo for agreeing to stay.

Machines allowed Noboru to create a work routine separate and autonomous from his parents, wife, and children. Tokuzō and his generation understood the magnetic attraction but not the internal workings of these machines. This led to their early withdrawal from farming and a significant reversal in father-son authority relations. Noboru took over farming decision making at age 24, in 1973, and could dismiss his father's occasional advice about cropping matters as uninformed and out-of-date.[8] Significantly, 1973 was also the year in which Noboru married—a time when much publicity was given to the difficulties of farm households in attracting a young bride. Labor-saving machines and a full voice in work matters enhanced Noboru's appeal to Keiko, and now allow them both to encourage their children to concentrate on their school studies.

Furthermore, Noboru now styles his work identity and routine as a "scientific and rational occupation" *(kagakuteki gōriteki shokugyō)*. He could boast to me in the late 1970s that "my

brother may have gone off to Tokyo to build machines, but I own and operate them." And while he may appear as a solitary figure driving his tractor across the fields, he is now tightly bound into a nexus of professional, institutional expertise—extension agents, Coop mechanics, Land Improvement District staff, town officials, government bureaucrats. It is they, not his family and fellow residents, who are part of his daily work life, with whom he constantly interacts in a flow of guidelines, plans, and regulations on production and marketing matters.

To be sure, Noboru feels only too well the precariousness of a work identity built on part-time, subsidized monocropping. Like most of his fellow farmers, he has sought to diversify. He even recognizes the ecological dangers of a petrochemical-intensive "scientific" agriculture. In his own "search for the alchemist's secret" (Dore 1978:118) to turn part-time into full-time farming, he has joined with a few others to open some upland fields for organic cultivation of Chinese cabbage. They have negotiated long-term supply contracts directly with a large Tokyo consumer cooperative, an arrangement cemented by semiannual exchange visits of the farmers to Tokyo and the urban consumers to Shōnai, to stay in the homes and visit the fields. Finally, he readily acknowledges the "underside" of his work life, forced to work at low wages during the winter season in the nearby city (among other reasons, to meet payments on his farm machines). Although his job is only stocking and delivering, he salvages some pride and reaps some benefit from the bookstore, which keeps him supplied with the latest novels and agricultural texts and which allows him to bring home to his children the readers and workbooks that he hopes will give them an edge in grade school.

Noboru is not a *sararīman,* and it is hardly apt to consider the Agricultural Cooperative as his "company" despite its pervasive influence in his livelihood and in the life of his household. However, he does see farming in very different terms from those of his father. It is a personal occupation, mechanized and scientific, which engages him with a dense network of fellow agricultural experts, and which, with judicious effort, can offer a modicum of security. Such a work identity has been important to Noboru in several ways: to justify staying in Shōnai when his siblings took more direct and seemingly more glamorous entries into the New Middle Class; to wrest authority from his father; to attract a wife; and to define an occupational role he can present to his children, not to follow but to respect (as he himself could not respect his parents' generation's "old-fashioned" farming).

Keiko, too, is hardly the model homemaker-housewife, although her distance from that ideal is less as a *yome* bride in a multigenerational family than as a woman who must balance full-time office employment with home responsibilities. When she married Noboru, her insistence on continuing her department store job was in part a way of ensuring that she would not be drafted into farm work (she was not convinced the machines would entirely preempt her contribution). It was also a way of separating work and domestic life that would keep her out from under her mother-in-law's supervision. It was not a way of avoiding domestic responsibilities. Keiko continues to assume a prodigious burden of the housework, but her contributions are fitted around her own work schedule and not the direction of her mother-in-law. In fact, Keiko's expertise as a bookkeeper has given her further leverage with her mother-in-law, who soon deferred to Keiko in organizing household accounts at a time when "rationalization" of family budgeting was much discussed in town circulars and women's magazines. Together with Noboru's authority in farming, the younger couple were able to assume full control of the household "purse" in 1983, in their early 30s.

And like the families of their relatives around Tokyo, the Itōs too must confront the contradictory pulls of privacy and *immediacy*. On the one hand, we have seen how distinctions between work and domestic routines have redrawn the boundaries between family and society as sharply for this part-time farm family as for more stereotypically white-collar families. Moreover, new spatial layouts, chore assignments, and leisure patterns reflect a sensitivity to privacy *within* the family as well as between family and society. In several ways, Noboru and Keiko have created *mai hōmu* (my home) within the *ie* (stem family).[9] That is, in physical space (their

own car and their own television and tea kettle upstairs) and social time (after the evening bath and on family trips), they have carved out a nuclear unit within the multigenerational residence group.

At the same time, postwar society's institutions—schools, public agencies, mass media—intrude on family life with a homogenizing force that regularizes the life-cycle experience across occupations and family forms. In their particulars, the life courses of the Itō siblings—Noboru, Shōji, and Yumiko—have diverged, but in their rather synchronized timing of school leaving, work entrance, marriage, and childbearing, they illustrate how life-cycle transitions have become increasingly orderly and uniform.[10] Herein lies the (partial) truth of Murakami's assertion that mass institutions create mass society.

Such a brief discussion as this of the Itō household is not intended to demonstrate conclusively my argument about New Middle-Class Japan. That can only come from much more exhaustive materials that are the subject of my current research and writing. However, it does serve to illustrate concretely the lines of my argument. I wish to emphasize not only that "New Middle-Class Japan" is usefully characterized as a set of compelling cultural constructs and that certain features of the Itōs' lives correspond to these more general notions of work, education, and family. Even more importantly, by growing up within the field of differentially structured possibilities that has been postwar Shōnai, Noboru, the Itōs, and the people of the region have made certain choices that have refashioned the conditions and the meanings of their work, education, and family. Through such programs as the rationalization of farming, people like Noboru and households like the Itōs have come to see themselves among the New Middle Class, and their claims are both created and enforced in their everyday routines of work and household.[11] Their lives thus provide insights into the processes by which these typifications have emerged and gained their orienting force at the present moment.

the sentimentalization of Shōnai culture

In many countrysides, the growing autonomy of the workplace and privacy of the household have eroded the community that once framed work and family cooperation and competition. In Shōnai, efforts to define and reconstruct local community identity in this encounter with mass culture have turned on a novel and subtle juxtaposition of *nōson* (farming village) as both *furusato* (the old homeplace) and *inaka* (the backward boonies). Few of the hundreds of Shōnai settlements have even a significant minority of full-time farmers, but *nōson* remains a common term of self-identity. It is a term that now plays on delicate nuances. As the backward *inaka,* the *nōson* becomes an eligible recipient and appropriate target for the state's generously funded rural development programs that include health centers, highways, and highrise town offices. Indeed, this is reflected in the very title of the current round of subsidized programs: "model projects for the comprehensive reconstruction of farming villages" *(nōson sōgō seibi moderu jigyō).* Locally known as *setsubi zukuri* (facility construction), they have allowed the Itōs' town to build a new junior high school, a clinic for the elderly, an impressive complex of town offices, and a community activities center. In other contexts, as the traditional *furusato, nōson* life provides a rhetorical defense against the felt excesses of the national society its residents otherwise eagerly embrace. What most angered Tokuzō and his wife when they learned that their daughter was living with her boyfriend in Tokyo was how outrageous this behavior would appear to their neighbors in the village.[12]

Even more than the Itōs' town, one of the chief beneficiaries in Shōnai of these projects has been the nearby town of Kushibiki, and one of its settlements, Kurokawa, reveals particularly well these dialectics of community development and rural nostalgia. In Kurokawa, for the last 400 years, on the first few days of the New Year, *nō* drama has been performed as the centerpiece of the village shrine festival, the Ōgi-sai.[13] The shrine support guild is now composed of

about 270 households in 13 settlement clusters surrounding the shrine. This support guild is subdivided into two *nō* drama groups, an upper and lower group. From members of each are drawn the actors, musicians, and chorus for the *nō* plays that total several hundred in active repertory. Programs of these plays, together with processions, competitions, and communal feasts, compose the New Year festival to entertain the spirit of the mountain that rises above the shrine. The festival itself is but the centerpiece of an annual round of ritual events that include preparations, purifications, and other *nō* performances.

In the early 20th century, in the manner of Oberammergau, this Kurokawa *nō* was "discovered" by professional *nō* actors, scholars, and journalists from Tokyo. Kurokawans were invited to perform in Tokyo in 1910 and 1936.[14] This enthusiasm for what was believed to be a primitive ur-*nō* has been further inflamed by the recent nostalgia boom. Kurokawa became a media-sanctioned national tourist attraction in 1966 when it was featured in a special issue of *Taiyō* magazine, roughly equivalent to a cover story in *Life*. In 1976, Kurokawa *nō* was elevated by the national Cultural Agency to the status of "important intangible folklore treasure."

Kurokawans themselves are appreciative and dubious in equal measure. They must now fend off a volume of requests to perform within and outside the prefecture. Several of the leading musicians described to me in evident disgust their performance in a high school auditorium in the prefectural capital, where they appeared at the request of the prefectural governor's office before the raucous audience of a national dentists' convention. By the late 1970s, heavy demand by outsiders to view the New Year's *nō* at the shrine itself occasioned heated debates among residents about the propriety of spectators. This has been resolved for the moment by making a few seats available to non-Kurokawans through a lottery selection.

At the same time, this national attention has contributed to the continued interest of Kurokawan youth in learning the performance roles and instruments through lessons with the designated teachers of the group and through group practice sessions. In Kurokawa, as in the Itōs' settlement and most of Shōnai, withdrawal from farming by the older men of the households has compromised their authority over their sons. Both fathers and sons in Kurokawa readily acknowledge that the senior generation's ritual knowledge, aesthetic skills, and control of the *nō* group has been an effective counterweight to the erosion of their farming expertise.

For the moment, most Kurokawans seem willing to risk the dangers of fetishization for the edge that their notoriety gives them in pursuit of state subsidies. Not surprisingly, there is considerable overlap in the officers and directors of the local agricultural cooperative, the town education committee, the shrine guild, the *nō* groups, the *Nō* Preservation Association, and the Kushibiki Town Council. Kurokawa has been particularly successful among Shōnai settlements in its recent *setsubi zukuri*. When Kurokawa *nō* was invited to perform several years ago at the National *Nō* Theatre in Tokyo, one of the principal actors was also, by no coincidence, director of the agricultural cooperative and had been mayor of Kurokawa Village. It was he who led a delegation of residents on their day off to visit their Dietman (Katō Koichi, now head of the National Defense Agency) and national ministry bureaucrats to lobby (successfully, it turned out) for designation as a model "*nōson*" improvement project to begin a municipal sewage treatment plant.

The Kurokawa *nō* organization, in this and other ways, has proven a durable vehicle for political mobilization and economic change as well as cultural memory.[15] Its ability to play the cultural politics of authenticity against the agricultural politics of mechanization poses in especially stark (and unusually successful) terms a drama that is played out much more privately and diffusely in the hundreds of other Shōnai villages—how to formulate a community identity that builds constructively on the imagery of *inaka* and *furusato*.

cultural dynamics of new middle-class Japan

From 1605 to 1868, Tsuruoka, one of Shōnai's two cities, was the castle town of Shōnai Domain, and the ruins of the former domainal castle still define the public center of the city.

To their east and north are Shōnai's leading high school, the regional public broadcasting studios, Shōnai Public Hospital, offices of the Association of Land Improvement Districts, and the new Tsuruoka City Hall. To the south and west of the ruins are to be found a cooperative tourist sales outlet, the city archives and library, a reconstruction of the old domain school, and a folk museum, whose collections are exhibited in a complex of buildings: a large, thatch-roofed farmhouse from the mountains, a merchant's warehouse, a Meiji-era county office building, and a pavilion and garden from the former domain lord's estate. All of these buildings postdate 1950, or, in the case of the museum, were recently moved to the site. This configuration of public space illustrates graphically how rationalization and nostalgia have been the principal idioms by which the state and national society have reincorporated regions like Shōnai in the postwar decades.

In the multiple uses to which they have been put, both of these idioms embody widely felt ambivalences about New Middle Class lifeways. "Rationalization," for example, has been used to imply both the "efficient" (as against the "customary") and the "democratic" (as against the "feudal"). Efficient ends and democratic means have proven as difficult to combine in educational reform as in farm reform. And the rural nostalgia boom, for its part, clouds the relationship of the local and the national. It seeks out particular, authentic "customs" of localities, but it then decontextualizes them in the service of a generalized and homogenized "folk tradition."[16] Imamura's recent prizewinning film *The Ballad of Narayama (Narayamabushi kō)* was set in the central Japan region of Shinshū, but the elderly woman's going to die on "Granny Mountain" is presented (falsely) as a more general peasant custom. The *furusato* "boom" has appropriated the individual's homeplace as the nation's heartland.

When juxtaposed, rationalization and nostalgia reflect further tensions about time and place on multiple levels. They express ambivalences about both sides of the wartime divide. The prewar past is cast as a time of militarism and a time of moralism, both "feudal" *(hōkenteki)* and "traditional" *(dentōteki)*. The postwar decades, then, have brought both political freedoms and individual permissiveness, *minshushugi* and *wagamama*. These temporal tensions also have spatial coordinates. We have seen how rural towns can present themselves as both *inaka* and *furusato*. Similarly, Shōnai is both "native region" *(kyōdo)* and "the provinces" *(chihō)* to the "large metropolises" *(daitokai)*.

It is hardly surprising and not unrelated, then, that Japan in the last 25 years has presented a double image to the rest of the world. There is first the xenophobic theme of cultural uniqueness that runs through its vast *Nihonjin ron* ("Who are we Japanese?") literature, seemingly endless popular and scholarly debates about national character and cultural origins. At the same time, well-attended cosmopolitan initiatives such as the recent Tsukuba International Technology Fair and wildly popular, mass leisure projects like the new Tokyo Disney World are promoted insistently for their "internationalization" *(kokusaika)*, evidence of an advanced industrial nationhood that Japan shares with others.[17] Japan rightly rejects the world's bald stereotyping of a nation of refined aesthetes and economic animals, of tea adepts and factory samurai, yet its own cultural identity crisis is similarly dichotomized. It is in this sense that the terms by which the people of Shōnai have embraced New Middle Class ideals are also the terms in which the larger society has debated its own modernity.

Of course reason and sentiment are hardly unique to modern society, but they have more commonly opposed one another in earlier periods of Japan's history. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, for example, debates about rationalist, intuitive, and sentimental bases of social action divided orthodox neo-Confucianism, Ōyōmei, and Bushidō. But it is perhaps the distinctive modern dilemma that reason and sentiment now combine to detach the past from the present and deny the ways the past penetrates the present. And it is this which makes Shōnai's current engagement with its larger society, while of substantial benefit, also of considerable danger.

"Rationalization" has meant many things in many contexts in postwar Japan, but at its core is a claim for expertise that is justified by its own qualities of formalization and specialization. Experimentation and innovation have long been characteristic of rice farming in Shōnai as elsewhere (Smith 1970; Robertson 1984; Kelly 1986b); many of Japan's hybrid varieties in the early 20th century were first developed by Shōnai cultivators. However, local traditions of scientific farming are seldom acknowledged in the national blueprints and master allocation plans of the Ministry of Agriculture, which are advanced in a universal logic of technical efficiency, bureaucratic impartiality, and professional expertise.[18]

Nostalgia denies the past in its own way. As Anthony Brandt observed, its thrust is "less to preserve the past than to restore it, to bring it back in its original state, as if nothing had happened in the interim" (1978:63). Like Henry Ford's Greenfield Village and the craft demonstrations at Sturbridge Village (Wallace 1981), the folk museum in the center of Tsuruoka and scholars' and actors' fascination for Kurokawa *nō* "exemplify the passion for 'historical authenticity' that seeks to recapture everything except the one thing that matters, the influence of the past on the present" (Lasch 1984:69).[19] The past is frozen history, not living presence. Nostalgia's dangers are as much that it misrepresents the present as that it misrepresents the past.

The people of Shōnai have wrestled against this powerful tendency. They have sought to transform their daily lives through a language of rationalization without flatly denying the contours of the region's past, and have tried to keep alive certain of those traditions without falling prey to a cloying sentimentality. To the degree that they are successful, they can hold to the narrow ground between liberation and deracination that is the challenge modern life presents to us all. For Shōnai households like the Itōs' and Shōnai villages like Kurokawa, to be part of New Middle-Class Japan is both a point of pride and a source of anxiety.

afterword

Occasionally during my stays in Shōnai, I drive with Noboru to a particular coffee shop in the nearby city. We go to get away from the house and the village—for both of us, to escape the pressures of "fieldwork." The coffee shop, squeezed into the corner space of a busy downtown intersection, has a precious Old World decor—lace doilies draped over an old upright player-piano and a number of antique clocks and watches covering the walls and counter space. It is named *Sazanka,* the sasanqua flower, after a popular melancholic song.

Noboru likes to go there, he says, because he used to stop by as a teenager after youth orchestra practices; it was close and congenial. If we happen to be there in the late mornings or midafternoons, there is a steady traffic of young men and women dressed in the uniforms of the adjacent city hall offices and department stores in which they work. Alone or in pairs, they dash in for 10 or 15 minutes for a quick cigarette and coffee.

Noboru knows some of these people—formerly school classmates or orchestra members—and exchanges occasional greetings. When I once asked about them, he explained that although a cup of coffee is not cheap, it is a welcome break from the tensions of the office or the counter. Then he stopped as he was explaining this, and a smile—either sly or shy—flickered across his face as (I believe) he realized the similarities of what we were watching, what he was saying, and what we were doing at that moment.

This essay, then, begins to explicate that smile of complicity, and to interpret the gestures of the Kurokawa actor-farmers, as they perform on their shrine stage to entertain the mountain spirit that it might annually descend to bestow fertility—and to entertain and tame an equally potent and fickle audience that descends by train from the capital. It suggests how much more there was to the formulaic speeches and water-spirit stories at the shrine assemblies than I had initially sensed.

notes

[1]My fieldwork and archival research in this region (Shōnai) began with 20 months from January 1976 to August 1977, and has continued with shorter visits in 1978, 1979, 1983, and 1984. Earlier works have traced Shōnai's incorporation into the tributary polity and mercantile economy that was Tokugawa Japan (Kelly 1982a) and the region's 19th-century transformation as Japan became a constitutional nation-state and capitalist economy (Kelly 1985). The themes of this paper will be treated more extensively in a forthcoming volume. All names of Shōnai persons in this paper are pseudonyms.

[2]Two recent, useful discussions of "middle classes" and "the new middle class" are Agnew (1983) and Abercrombie and Urry (1983). For Japan, compare Murakami (1982) and Tominaga (1979).

[3]These are commentaries on the Survey on the People's Lifestyle *(Kokumin seikatsu chōsa)*, a well-known public opinion survey conducted annually for over 20 years by the Prime Minister's Office. For English-language debate on this poll and its interpretations, see Aoki (1979), Taira (1979), and Murakami (1982:32ff.)

[4]*Shōwa hitoketa*—born in the first nine years of the Shōwa era, (1926–34)—is a term for the generation whose childhood and youth experiences spanned the "dark valley" *(kurai tanima)* of the Depression and the wartime years. David Plath (1980) relates the lives of several men and women of this generation in order to characterize a Japanese conception of selfhood. The *Shōwa hitoketa* is roughly the generational counterpart to Glen Elder's *Children of the Great Depression* (1974).

[5]The most well-known treatment remains Williams' reading of 19th- and early 20th-century English literature (1973; see also 1981:303–323).

[6]That is, the power of this and related terms (especially *gōriteki,* rational) to simultaneously describe and justify programs and policies in multiple areas of postwar life both depended on and generated a wide range of nuances. These included, narrowly, "efficient," "impersonal," "calculable," and "standardized," and, broadly, "modern," "impartial," "egalitarian," and "democratic." For an example, see Kelly 1982b:15–38. The resonance of postwar *gōrika* with Weberian and neo-Weberian notions of rationalization (Brubaker 1984) is obvious, but the historical influences and theoretical implications are far too complex to pursue in this essay.

[7]This was actually Shōnai's second 20th-century Green Revolution. These are discussed comparatively in Kelly 1986a.

[8]As this implies, the making of the New Middle Class in Shōnai has exacerbated generational conflict, although not always along expected lines of "out-of-touch" old folks and "up-to-date" youngsters. In 1981, for example, as Tokuzō campaigned for town council reelection on his record of promoting agricultural rationalization, his son Noboru was attempting to rekindle "neighborliness" *(rentaikan)* in the settlement by reviving the discontinued annual *shishimai* dances at the Shinto shrine. Tokuzō then purchased a video camera and VCR to record these dance practices and performances. Noboru and Keiko in turn criticized these purchases until they realized that the VCR could also be used to show educational videos to help their children prepare for school.

[9]*Mai hōmu* first appeared in 1955 as an advertising slogan in the *denka būmu* (the "electric boom"), a wave of consumerism for electric household appliances. It was broadened by mass media usage to connote a nuclear family home as well as a fully appointed household (Tada 1978).

[10]The homogenization of the life cycle in industrial societies has been argued, for example, by Anderson (1985) for Britain and by Fuchs (1983) and Hareven (1977) for the United States. To be sure, both work cycles and ritual calendars regularized life experience in these societies' preindustrial pasts. However, these and other scholars have found that life cycle transitions were nonetheless slow and uneven, and work careers erratic and unpredictable. The present century in Britain, the United States, and, I believe, Japan has produced "a marked reduction in the span over which certain life cycle transitions usually occur" (Anderson 1985:86) as well as a more uniform set of institutional markers for such transitions.

[11]This is a claim the adult members of the Itō household have made to me in interviews in several ways. In 1982 and 1983, when I asked them directly and individually the questions on the Prime Minister's Office survey, they provided the "consensus" answers. They are also familiar with media accounts of the "New Middle Class" and are willing to place themselves within it. This paper, however, argues that more important than such structured elicitations are the ways in which such a claim is expressed in their reorganizations of life routines and in the changing vocabulary of everyday life.

[12]Anyone familiar with Smith and Wiswell's account (1982) of the women of Suye Mura in the mid-1930s will recognize how problematic is a notion of "traditional" propriety in village attitudes toward premarital sexuality and cohabitation.

[13]Principal sources on Kurokawa *nō* are Ōse and Saitō (1969), Makabe (1971), and Togawa (1974a, 1974b). Johnson (1980) and Martzel (1975) are Western-language accounts. In the 1960s, NHK, Japanese state television, produced two documentaries, which are available in English from the Japan Society in New York: "Kurokawa—Play from the Past, a Plan for the Future" and "Local Noh Drama and Village Life."

[14]They were invited in 1910 by the Army Officers' Wives Association and in 1936 by the Kanze School, the largest of the five professional *nō* schools. Appreciations and commentaries by a number of the actors and scholars who viewed the 1936 performances were published in the November 1936 issue of *Nōgaku gahō* (see excerpts in Makabe 1971:236–242).

[15]The local dynamics of mobilization and memory are far more inextricably bound than I can discuss here. Kurokawa was one of the centers of widespread popular protest in the 1870s, directed against local headmen and prefectural officials (Kelly 1985:191–197). Shortly after, several households that have become prominent in 20th-century *nō* affairs were instrumental in agitating against an actor household caught extorting *nō* group funds and selling off its masks and robes.

[16]Fashioning a national folk culture from the particular customs of localities has long been the ideological mission and methodological thrust of academic folklore studies in Japan. It was Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) who founded the discipline of folklore in Japan and centered it on a conception of the *jōmin* ("ordinary people"), the villagers whose authentic lifeways and "life attitudes" stood in dialectical relation to the "mountain folk" *(yamabito)* and other wandering marginals and in resistance to the centralizing state elite (Koschmann 1985; Tsurumi 1975). Gluck (1985:157–212, especially 180–183) shows persuasively, however, how Yanagita's rendering of the farm village community in fact reinforced state ideologues' promotion of an agrarian myth and the "spirit of *jichi*" (local self-government). Early 20th-century rural nostalgia was cast in a highly politicized, triple symbolism of the "Way of Agriculture," the harmonious village collectivity, and self-regulating, self-sufficient local government.

[17]It is thus fitting, if unintended, that the EXPO Park for the 1970 Osaka World's Fair should now serve as the grounds for the large National Museum of Ethnology complex. See Minami (1973) and Befu (1984) for informative discussions of the *Nihonjin ron* literature. Befu's formulation of "internationalization" (pp. 71–72) differs somewhat from the contrast suggested here.

[18]Rohlen's commentary on contemporary high school social studies texts provides a very different illustration of the same tendency: their portrait of Japan is "an engineering model [of] a society best run by technocrats who know how to adjust the gauges and valves to maintain the optimal mix" (1983:256).

[19]The potent dangers of imagining a "world we have lost" are emphasized in a number of recent critical studies of nostalgia and authenticity. Two U.S. examples of particular relevance here are Dorst (1983) and Whisnant (1983). For Japan, Moeran (1984) and Bestor (1985) touch on this question in their respective ethnographies of a pottery village caught up in the national fetishization of "folkcrafts" and an older neighborhood of downtown Tokyo. This is also a theme in those cultural critiques of tourism stimulated by MacCannell (1976): for example, Carroll (1980:140–149), Culler (1981). Rosaldo has suggested the seduction of a nostalgic, pastoral mode to ethnographic writing itself in appearing to locate our subjects "beyond domination where neutral ethnographic truth can collect itself" (1986:97).

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