

JAPAN'S NEW MIDDLE CLASS

Third Edition

Ezra F. Vogel

With a chapter by Suzanne Hall Vogel

Foreword by William W. Kelly

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CONTENTS

Foreword: Looking Backward at a Book That Looked Forward <i>William W. Kelly</i>	xiii
Acknowledgments	xxiii

PART I: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SALARY

1 The Problem and Its Setting	3
The Double Structure	5
The Setting: Mamachi	9
2 The Bureaucratic Setting in Perspective	13
The Successful Businessman	16
The Independent Professional	23
The Shopkeeper	27
The Salary Man	29
3 The Gateway to Salary: Infernal Entrance Examinations	35
Preparing for and Taking Examinations	39
The Family's Contribution: Maternal Involvement	47
The School's Contribution: Teacher Involvement	50
Mitigating the Harshness	52
The Hypertrophy of Examinations	56
Achievement Without Rivalry	58

PART II: THE FAMILY AND OTHER SOCIAL SYSTEMS

4 The Consumer's "Bright New Life"	63
The Ordered Life	65
The Limits of Frugality	69

The Freedom to Shop	74
5 Families View Their Government	77
The National Identity	77
The Role of the Citizen	85
Salary and the Moderation of Alienation	88
6 Community Relationships	91
The Separate Communities of Husbands, Wives, and Children	91
The Narrow World	104
Techniques of Social Control	122
7 Basic Values	127
Loyalty	131
Competence	138
A Major Variation: Aesthetic Values	141
The Moral Basis of the Salary Man	142
 PART III: INTERNAL FAMILY PROCESSES	
8 The Decline of the <i>Ie</i> Ideal	147
The Concept of <i>Ie</i>	147
The Branch	150
The Decline of the <i>Ie</i> Authority and Welfare	152
Symbolic Remnants	158
The Decline of Family Principles	159
9 The Division of Labor in the Home	161
Creeping Co-operation in the Home	162
Housework: The Daily Round	165
Housework: Inglorious and Glorious	168
10 Authority in the Family	173
The Tradition of "Male Dominance"	173
Maintenance of Decentralized Authority	174
The Nature and Exercise of the Husband's Authority	177
The Art of Husband Management	179
The Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law	182
11 Family Solidarity	187
The Household Unit	187
The Basic Alignment: Mother and Children vs. Father	190
Husband and Wife: Increasing Privacy and Intimacy	194
Coalitions with Grandparents	200

12	Child-Rearing	203
	The Basic Relationship: Mutual Dependency of Mother and Child	205
	Variations on a Theme: Birth Order, Sex, and Parentage	212
	The Father	215
	Getting the Child to Understand	217
	Getting the Child's Co-operation in Study	223
PART IV: MAMACHI IN PERSPECTIVE		
13	Order Amidst Rapid Social Change	227
	The Transitional Order	228
	The Nature of the New Order	234
	The Diffusion of the New Order	236
PART V: MAMACHI REVISITED		
14	Beyond Salary	241
	A New Confidence in Old Mamachi	241
	Salary Without Visions	242
	Approaching Affluence	245
	The Growth of National Pride	247
	"My Home-ism": Old Wine in New Bottles	249
15	Beyond Success: Mamachi Thirty Years Later	251
	<i>Suzanne Hall Vogel</i>	
	Economic Progress, National and Family Pride	252
	Predominance of the Salaryman Way of Life	256
	Strains in the Salaryman's Life	257
	Hypertrophy of the Examination System	260
	Ever-Declining <i>Ie</i> : Nuclear Families and Increasing Individualism	265
	Women's Liberation, Mamachi Style	267
	Changing Expectations for Marriage: New Ideas, Old Habits	274
	Child-Training in an Era of Weakened Authority	277
	Beyond Success	279
	Afterword	283
	<i>Ezra F. Vogel</i>	
	Appendix: A Report on the Fieldwork	289
	Notes	301

Selected Bibliography

329

Index

333

FOREWORD

Looking Backward at a Book That Looked Forward

William W. Kelly

Ezra, you are terribly provincial. You have never lived in another culture. How could you understand American society without living in another culture? Before you settle down to teaching, you ought to go abroad to a very different culture and live in and soak up the culture.

—Florence Kluckhohn

Thus the distinguished sociologist Florence Kluckhohn warned her young research assistant, Ezra Vogel, back in 1957. Vogel had worked for Kluckhohn for three years, and he was just finishing his doctorate in social relations at Harvard. He was shaken by this admonition, and he turned to his friend and mentor Dr. William Caudill for advice. Caudill was an anthropologist with interests in psychology who was teaching in the Department of Social Relations. He had returned from a year of research in Japan in 1954–1955 full of enthusiasm for research in that country; not surprisingly, he urged Vogel to go to Japan. Vogel took a quick reading course from John Pelzel, Harvard's anthropologist of Japan at the time, and a few language lessons from fellow graduate students from Japan. The next year, 1958, he set off for Tokyo with his wife, Suzanne, who was a psychiatric social worker trained in sociology, and their one-year-old son. It was a serendipitous start to an experience that was to result in one of the most enduring books in the ethnography of Japan.

The Vogels were to spend two years in Japan, living in central Tokyo for the first year and moving to an eastern suburb, which they named “Mamachi,” for the second year. Suzanne went as spouse and mother, but by the second year she had become a full-time research partner to Ezra. This book is the major product of their field research. It was authored by Ezra, but he notes the indispensable contributions of Suzanne to the project.

Indeed, the book produced from those two years of joint postdoctoral research was something quite different from what the Vogels originally intended and something quite unexpected, given the initial circumstances. What this book has meant, in hindsight, to the social science of Japan is what I would like to introduce here. I want to suggest why the book was so unexpected, what about it was especially astute, and why, after a half century, it retains such an important place in today’s Japan studies.

The book was a surprising outcome of their research in Japan. The PhD dissertation Ezra had just completed at Harvard was on “The Marital Relationship of Parents and the Emotionally Disturbed Child,” which drew on his participation in the large study of families and mental health directed by Florence Kluckhohn and psychoanalyst John Spiegel. This project tested the relationship between cultural values and mental health by comparing “normal” families and those with a mentally ill member from a sample of Italian American, Irish American, and Anglo-American groups in the Boston area. Initially, the Japan project was intended simply to expand this Kluckhohn-Spiegel rubric of ethnic and mental health variables.

The Vogels’ personal and intellectual connections, too, reinforced this research aim. It was Florence Kluckhohn who arranged the research funding and Bill Caudill who prepped them on Japanese child socialization research. Caudill and his wife met them at Haneda Airport in Tokyo and introduced them to Dr. Takeo Doi, who arranged for them to rent a house next to his. Dr. Doi was already a prominent Japanese physician who had trained in psychiatry; he had spent two periods of study in the United States and was beginning a long and fruitful collaboration with Caudill. After the Vogels undertook a year of intensive language training, the National Institute of Mental Health helped them locate six families with “normal” children and arrange weekly meetings with them. The institute also arranged for them to meet families with emotionally disturbed chil-

dren occasionally and to learn more about them through their medical records.

The plan was for Ezra to interview the husband-fathers and Suzanne to interview the wife-mothers. They did continue this routine, but after a year they moved themselves into the Mamachi neighborhood (where some of the families lived) and spent a second year in what any anthropologist would recognize as more situated participant observation.

By the time the research was completed, they had scrapped the normal-disturbed fulcrum, avoided an even cruder Japan-US comparison, and came to realize that there was another socioeconomic difference of much greater local force: that between a new middle class and old middle classes. The book that Ezra drafted upon returning to the United States thus emerged more from ethnographic discovery than prior prediction. The new subject, Japan's new middle class, referred to what in Japan was known as the "salaryman" and his family, the salaried white-collar employees of large corporations and public agencies. Through the 1950s, Vogel argued, the character of cities, indeed popular aspirations and the institutional shape of the society, was increasingly set by large companies and their white-collar employees. Mamachi, their residential location, was a nondescript neighborhood of modest single-family homes, small shops, local services, and a few small factories on the edge of metropolitan Tokyo. Like many older parts of the metropolitan region, it still lacked flush toilets and sewers. At the time, it was about thirty minutes by train to downtown Tokyo, and it was increasingly home to a new middle class of white-collar salarymen and their families. Employed in corporations and government ministries in increasing numbers, they were emerging in the midst of the still-dominant "old middle class," which included successful independent businessmen running family enterprises (the leading members of the Mamachi community), a few independent professionals like doctors and dentists, small shopkeepers in mom-and-pop operations, and small company employees. In interviewing their sample of families and experiencing life in Mamachi, the Vogels began to appreciate some of the clear differences in the interpersonal relations and styles of living of these occupational types.

Although Vogel used the increasingly popular folk term *salaryman*, the book is not an ethnography of the salarymen at work. For that we would have to wait ten years for Thomas Rohlen's ethnography of the salarymen of Ueda Bank, *For Harmony and Strength* (1973). Mamachi

salarymen left each morning for their downtown companies while Ezra and Suzanne remained in Mamachi, following life and organizations in the neighborhood and interviewing men and women at home. Thus, the book is really about the salaryman as a way of life. It details the class entailments and social consequences of salaried work for the salarymen and their families, for their social relationships, for their communities, and for formal institutions, gleaned through a situated investigation of Mamachi.

I should clarify at this point the term *ethnography*, which I have already used several times. The chosen strategy of most anthropologists has long been the extended case study. We seek to understand the lifeways of a society by spending a lot of time in one small part of that society, detailing the organization of life and the patterns of meaning for its participants. The monograph that we generally produce—an “ethnography”—is both a representation and an analysis of that lifeworld. Now ethnography as research and writing is most closely associated with anthropology, but in Japan studies scholars of other disciplines have contributed importantly to the ethnographic corpus—religious studies scholars like Helen Hardacre and Ian Reader, political scientists like David Apter and Robin LeBlanc, and sociologists like Ronald Dore and Robert Cole. Here, Vogel has written a study of a social category, the salaryman, but he does it through the research medium of intensive, localized fieldwork and with a situated account of the salaryman families of Mamachi. This is ethnography, and it has been foundational for Japan studies.

The book’s significance is based on four fundamental insights that Vogel offers into the meaning of the salaryman. First, Vogel focuses on what was then an emerging socioeconomic class, but he recognized astutely that what distinguished the salaryman was his employment in a large organization rather than his income and occupation per se. It wasn’t the amount of money that made the salarymen who they were and who they were seen to be by the wider society. Rather, the key was the predictability and status in drawing a regular salary under fairly stable conditions and how this found expression in lifestyle standards and aspirations. *Doing* salaryman was essential to *being* a salaryman.

A second insight was that the salaryman could not be analyzed apart from his family relations, friendship patterns, living conditions, and educational credentials. That is, more than previous analysts, Vogel teased out the tight linkages among family, schooling, and workplace that de-

fined and enabled the salaryman life. The salaryman as an occupational type had been around in Japan since the early twentieth century. But just as there were markets before capitalism, the salaryman as a type of employment preceded the moment when it became the archetypal career pathway and began to reshape the institutional contours of society. By the mid-1950s, the salaryman was becoming not just an occupational type but the typification of a lifeway that was gaining broad cultural force, and this is what the Vogels sensed in the ongoing reorganization of everyday Mamachi life.

Along with identifying the family-school-workplace nexus, Vogel drew out another set of articulations between the social, the cultural, and the psychological, both in terms of institutions and in terms of individual dynamics. In doing this, he effectively amalgamated the perspectives of two scholars who particularly influenced his study, Ronald Dore and Takeo Doi. In the early 1950s, the British sociologist Ronald Dore had studied how a small Tokyo neighborhood struggled to recover from personal loss, family dislocation, and material deprivation. He published his ethnography in 1958 as *City Life in Japan*. Dore happened to be in the Boston area just as the Vogels were leaving for Japan, and he shared with them page proofs of his book. Doi was developing his model of family dynamics and the psychology of the mother-child bond around the concept of *amae*, and this became a lens through which the Vogels analyzed family dynamics. *Japan's New Middle Class* brings together Dore's sociological perspective on how local life was being reshaped by metropolitan and national institutions with Doi's analysis of the psychological textures of social relationships. The book shows us that salary, as culturally valorized and affectively motivating, had a particular social location, with specific entailments for support and security, mobility and merit. Entrance exams shaped student dispositions and school structures. The family formed in the intersection of workplace and schooling demands, shaping certain patterns of separate domestic spheres, gender division of labor, and mother-child dynamics. And all of these had effects on local community life and local economy.

Finally, as expressed in the final section of the book, Vogel sensed that this new middle class was not inciting class antagonisms and displacing the old middle class or the working class, as many conventional class analyses might presume. Rather, the status of salary and the ramifying requirements of salaried employment worked more culturally than politi-

cally, through a diffusion of desires and a cooptation of dissent. The final section of the book was on “the diffusion of the new order,” and it surmised that “because the pattern of the salary man has achieved such prominence and because it has become a symbol of the desirable life, it has an important effect even on those who are not part of large organizations” (267).

The ascendancy of the salaryman and his family as defining the mainstream for decades to come may seem inevitable to us in hindsight, but it was not at all clear in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The ruling conservative party confronted powerful labor union strife and vibrant oppositional politics. The government’s uncertain and often heavy-handed effort to address this was actually producing an angry electorate and a divided economy. But the 1960s took a different turn. The governing Liberal Democratic Party defused the political opposition, parlayed such events as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics into national pride, and pushed “double-your-income” policies that did just that, at least for the aggregate economy. Ten years after the Vogels’ fieldwork, the salaryman lifestyle was the mainstream norm, although it was never the majority career, and twenty years later in the late 1970s, I could recognize Vogel’s formulation even in the life orientations of the rice farmers I worked with in the rural northeast.

There are of course aspects of *Japan’s New Middle Class* that seem dated a half century later, and some dimensions of Mamachi life were overlooked. For instance, there is the slippage between the “Japanese” values so broadly characterized in chapter 7 and the more particular orientations of the Mamachi salaryman families (influence of Doi). We don’t get a strong feel for neighborhood organizations beyond the schools. Nor does the book convey a strong sense of its class and gender dynamics. And that highly politicized atmosphere in late-1950s Tokyo (the labor union actions, mass demonstrations against the government, etc.) is scarcely referenced, but it clearly reached into daily life. Nonetheless, Vogel’s portrayal of the salaryman way of life is richly nuanced, analytically persuasive, and strikingly prescient, and the book is all the more impressive—and implausible—given the project’s serendipitous beginnings and accidental course.

We might say that *Japan’s New Middle Class* was “organically” astute in organizing its chapters to move from work to school to family to community, in characterizing this new middle class as cultural typifica-

tion as well as economic category, and in demonstrating the institutional nexus that channeled aspirations and organized diversity. Much of the ethnographic literature on Japanese society over the next three decades substantiated and built upon this framework. There are lineages of family studies, of schooling studies, of workplace studies, of gender studies, of residential community studies—all of which pass through *Japan's New Middle Class*.

Beyond the situated understanding of the salaryman way of life that is his central contribution, there are several other features of Vogel's book that continue to repay attention. One is that it looks forward rather than backward. For over a century, much ethnography had tried to capture forms of social life that seemed endangered—a loss of community and traditional family forms, threatened customary practices, and so on. We tried to recover this in fieldwork and preserve it in our writing. But the Vogels looked forward, not back, toward that which they sensed was appearing, not disappearing. They turned Japan ethnography in a new direction, and this was to become our predominant orientation—and even later, that of the wider discipline.

The reader will also be drawn to the remarkable reflection on research methods that appears as the appendix. Ethnographic fieldwork is intensely personal and elusively eclectic in its methods (“deep hanging out” as the anthropologist David Plath once tagged it). Vogel is unusually frank and fulsome in writing about their language skills, their interviewing techniques, their place in the neighborhood, and the representativeness of the families and Mamachi itself. More recent ethnographers have talked much about the need for such an explicit account of method, but this exemplary appendix has seldom been emulated in candor and detail.

Finally, and very significantly, the Vogels remained in touch with the community and its families, and they followed up their initial field research over decades, tracking and analyzing the families, the neighborhood, and the salaryman pattern itself. This too was remarkable. Ethnographers often preach but seldom practice the value of follow-up studies. This third edition includes the update “Beyond Salary” that Ezra authored for the 1971 second edition as well as the second update by Suzanne, “Beyond Success,” which appeared in the 1991 reissue of the second edition. As the titles suggest, the Vogels documented the dimming of initial enthusiasm for the “bright life” and the discontent and frustration with the material rewards and personal costs of the way of the salaryman.

At the same time, as they foresaw, aspirations for the salaryman lifestyle did take hold across the population, and the salaryman style remained firmly embedded in an institutional nexus.

It was actually Suzanne, more than Ezra, who sustained the research connections over the longer term. She wrote her 1993 update based on a year of research and teaching in Tokyo in 1988–1989. After that, she returned every year for clinical work and teaching at a private Tokyo hospital, and this allowed her to extend her friendship across several generations of the original Mamachi families. From this emerged her book, *The Japanese Family in Transition: From the Professional Housewife Ideal to the Dilemmas of Choice*, which uses extended life histories of three of the Mamachi women to trace the arc of women's experience across a half century of change in Japan. Together with this reissue of *Japan's New Middle Class*, this pair of books gives us a unique stereoptic and longitudinal view of contemporary life. Perhaps the closest parallel in the ethnographic literature is the two books that emerged from the first foreign anthropological fieldwork in Japan back in the 1930s—John Embree's 1939 study, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village*, and *The Women of Suye Mura*, which the distinguished anthropologist Robert J. Smith wrote with Ella Wiswell, Embree's wife at the time, from her own rich field journals. Different, of course, but the two pairs of books stand as remarkable and distinctive achievements for Japan ethnography.

But has the prescient become the past? Does the salaryman—and books about salarymen, even as splendid a book as this—still matter? This brings me to my final point. In one sense it appears not to matter anymore. Consider the following small sampling of recent dissertation fieldwork locations in Japan: Osaka day laborers; Iranian migrants; rap music clubs and recording studios; Japanese-Filipina marriages; Japanese Brazilian factory workers; karaoke boxes and bars; funeral companies; sumo wrestling stables; company sports teams; domestic violence shelters; convenience stores; Okinawan women and wartime memories; divorcing couples; rural elder homes; Tohoku whaling hamlets; alcoholic spouse support groups; deaf political organizations; and many, many more. They add up to a much more variegated and inclusive portrait—but there is hardly a salaryman among them! Japan would seem to be beyond salarymen. The center has not held, and the mainstream runs in a narrower course in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps, but reflecting on *Japan's New Middle Class*, I think it too hasty to dismiss the salaryman lifeway. In the real world, it may be passing from dominant formation to residual formation, but we know that any new order bears some imprint of that which it comes to replace, and it would be unwise to consign the salaryman to the dustbin of history. And *Japan's New Middle Class* remains unmatched in its analysis of how and why the salaryman became such a powerful design for living in late-twentieth-century Japan. I have used this book with students throughout the thirty years I have been teaching about Japan, and it has been a touchstone of my own understanding of Japanese society for even longer. It is not a timeless classic, it is a timely text, and it casts its influence on Japan ethnography as forcefully as the figure of the salaryman casts its shadow over contemporary Japan.

I have drawn Ezra's opening quote from his brief recollection, "Japan's Old-Time New Middle Class," which appeared in *Japanese Childrearing*, edited by David W. Shwalb and Barbara J. Shwalb (Guilford Press, 1996). In preparing this foreword, I benefited enormously from the suggestions of Mark Selden, Susan McEachern, and Ezra himself.