

BOOK REVIEW

Richard K. Beardsley, John W. Hall, Robert E. Ward: Village Japan. XIV, 488 pp. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1959.

We learn from the foreword that this book contains the results of the study of a small rice growing community, named Niiike, in Okayama Prefecture in Southwestern Honshû. The book does not pretend to contain more than an analysis of all factors, aspects and dynamic forces of the community life of this one hamlet with a population of 130 individuals. Perhaps the title of the book could have been formulated more precisely as: A Study on Niiike, a Japanese Village. In the foreword the authors however make it clear that they are well aware of the differentiations of rural communities in Japan and keep aloof of unfounded generalisations. "Patterns of social organisation are quite different, for example, in the villages of Tôhoku (northeastern Honshû), while the technical problems of farming vary somewhat in any of the areas of reclaimed land." An almost unlimited number of other variations could be cited, both in the economic and in the social life of the village population. We mention here only the great role which forest-economy plays with its by-products in remote mountain villages or fishing in farmers' villages along the sea-coast as additional sources of livelihood. But we can agree with the authors' statements that the living conditions in Niiike will not vary much from those of a major part of the rural population in Japan, provided rice growing is the main basis of subsistence, and that the cultural influence of farming communities has a great bearing on the people of Japan, since a large proportion of the city-dwellers stems from the countryside. The impact of this influence, however, on the Japanese culture as a whole is not the main concern of the book under review.

The research work on Niiike has been carried out by an interdisciplinary team of scholars under the auspices of the University of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies in the years 1950-1954. From among about 50,000 Japanese communities of a similar size they chose Niiike as their field of activity for various reasons. The Inland Sea region was chosen because it has been peopled very early in prehistoric time and was always associated with all major developments in Japanese history and culture. From the eleven prefectures of the Inland Sea

region Okayama Prefecture was chosen because it is primarily a rice growing country with a sizable industrial and commercial sector in its economy and was thus considered fairly well representative of modern Japan. The interactions of cities and villages are indeed lucidly documented throughout the book. Niiike was finally pinpointed after an extensive search based on documents and maps and on the advice of Japanese experts. The hamlet recommended itself by its manageable size and convenient communication system.

In the introduction we learn that in Niiike the hundred and thirty people live in twenty-four households. The community is distinctly Japanese and rural and displays features that are uniquely Niiike. Niiike is only a *buraku*, that is an administrative subdivision of a village. A number of *buraku*, that is hamlets or settlements, are scattered over a large area which forms the village. The small size of the chosen community allowed an exhaustive analysis of all aspects of village life.

First the reader is made familiar with the geographic setting, or the natural conditions of living, and then the historical setting. We learn that the region of Okayama Prefecture had been settled by Japanese already five thousand years ago. Niiike as a community however is not older than three hundred years or so, but still shares the cultural, social and economic heritage of the region. All periods of history, from the oldest Neolithic time on, have left their traces behind there. The kaleidoscopic picture of the past is amazing. The present pattern of village life has been set mainly by the Tokugawa regime (1603-1868) which was rigidly centralized and made itself felt in every corner of the country with its numerous officials and regulations. On the other side, the peacefulness of its several centuries of existence favored a steady development of the countryside in terms of a well organized local administration and of new land reclamations. Also Niiike is a *shinden*, that is a "new field". The Tokugawa reclamation engineers solved efficiently the problems of land and water for irrigation to rice-fields. In modern times new improvements in agriculture and communications also affected Niiike.

A special chapter is given to Physique and Temperament of the population of Niiike. Perhaps this chapter is one of the least typical of a general situation existing in Niiike as the same statements certainly hold true for innumerable other communities of rural Japan. The same can be said about the following chapter with the caption Community Life: Material Goods and Equipment. We find in these matters mostly only local and regional variations of a general pattern applicable all over Japan. But still we are grateful to the authors for having described them, since, to our knowledge, no detailed description exists in a Western language, and the extensive Japanese publications on the farmhouse and the life therein and on farming techniques are not accessible except to only a few readers. In the chapter Land and Water we learn that in Niiike 58% of the land is turned into paddy fields, 10.4% are dry fields and 36.6% are wooded lots. The main concern of the whole community is the water supply for the paddy fields, the construction and maintenance of canals and dams, ponds and draining ditches. The

care for the water is one of the strongest factors that weld the inhabitants together into one solid unit. In Niiike at work we learn about the ingenuity and devotion with which Niiike's farmers try to get the most out of their land, taking care to balance their relative needs for subsistence and cash income. Rice, the foundation of the hamlet's economy, provides about 75% of staple food supply and cash income large enough to cover the crop production costs. The year is divided into a rice-cycle, beginning early in May with the preparation of the seed-beds, ending with the harvest from mid-October on; and a cycle of dry grains and mat rush. Barley and wheat are planted in November immediately after the rice harvest. Other important food crops are vegetables and fruits which are grown throughout the year. Cash income is provided mainly by surplus crops of rice and wheat but does not go much beyond the cost of fertilizer and other expenses of production. Additional cash needs have to be met by the income from sales of mulberry, tobacco, peppermint, pyrethrum, and quality vegetables and fruits. In some way or other, Japanese farmers all over the country know how to secure for themselves additional income, in Izu, for instance, by growing strawberries, horse-radish and mushroom, by tobacco planting (outstanding in Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture), by silk-worm breeding (Nagano Prefecture and elsewhere), by flax growing, and, again in Aizu, by growing trees of Paulownia, the wood of which is used for making *geta* (wooden clogs). Concerning the most up-to-date scientific advances made in agricultural production, the Japanese farmers everywhere are always given council and advice by governmental and private agencies. Old people in Niiike told the authors that during their lifetime, due to modern innovations, the rice-yield has been doubled. Due to land shortage, animal raising is kept down to a minimum.

Of special interest for folklorists is the authors' elaboration on Leisure and Ceremony. They say that the traditional folk customs and activities in Japan which used to interrupt the long sequence of working days in the annual cycle nowadays are vanishing. Farmers now find relief from the monotony of labor in the fields in increasingly new kinds of recreation and amusements. Calendrical ceremonies renew ties with the supernatural world, at the same time they satisfy the farmers' need for a change of pace and reinforce their solidarity as a community. A few Buddhist occasions, involving single households, set apart traditional ceremonies which aim at preserving and promoting harmony with nature, an aim typical of agricultural communities. On a non-Buddhist festival day the family head or his delegate, with or without his family, visits the village shrine where he joins the members of other families. Dancing and the playing of special games frequently occur. Religious practices are thus a strong social factor. The Catalogue of Annual Ceremonies offers us an insight into the religious convictions and obligations of the rural population, again not only for Niiike but for all of Japan, at least in many if not in most respects.

In the chapter on Income and Expenditure the authors state that Niiike "has been able to diversify its economic base and to adjust

reasonably well to the economic problems and opportunities of modern Japan." The next chapter deals with The Household, both from an economic as a sociological point of view. For anthropologists may be of special interest the elaboration on the role played by religion towards support of the vertical orientation of loyalty and obligation of which household hierarchy is one expression. It is found that local Shintô worship in Niiike stresses primarily communal cohesion, whereas Buddhism, Confucianism and State Shintô as it existed until the end of the Pacific War, have reinforced the household hierarchy. Modern civil law gave further support to a rigidly patriarchal household structure. Religious motivations work also in the community as a co-operative group which is called *kôjû*. This term meant originally a Buddhist association or confraternity, but nowadays its meaning includes also purely social functions. It is characterized by an equal-level relationship between the households upon which it is based. The original religious nature of the confraternity becomes evident when its members gather at regular intervals for a religious service. Most of its functions however are secular.

In 59 pages the traditional age grades and their associated ceremonies are described through many details. The chapter The Community and Local Government shows us that within a hamlet the sphere of formal legal relationship is weakened, associations on a traditional and voluntary basis having more importance. From the chapter The Community and the Political Process we learn that in a village, social and economic leadership are far more important than their political leadership. In Chapter 14: Religious Institutions and Concepts (24 pages) the religious structure of village people is made evident. Religion, which works in annual festivals and ceremonies either family-wise or community-wise, is either Buddhist or Shintoist. Most villagers participate in ceremonies of both creeds. Each family is affiliated with a Buddhist temple. Both Buddhist thought and worship are almost exclusively orientated toward the otherworld and go together with ancestor worship. The central Shintoist shrine is that of the *ujigami*, that is the guardian-god of the hamlet, concerned with the well-being of the people in the present world. What religion means to the people in Niiike, our authors have summarized as follows: "Shintô and Buddhist worship together offer a satisfying combination for the religious wants of the villagers which, most of them feel, neither religion could offer by itself. Shintô, full of the pleasure of living, lends its assurance of health and sunny prosperity; it is a shield from adversity for the living. Buddhism, with its gentle knowledge of the all-compassionate Buddha, provides comfort in the presence of death. The people of Niiike are sober, responsible, and religious; their religion does not bring about their sobriety, but it comforts and reassures them of order in the world." The question arises here, but not ventilated by the authors, as to why Christianity is making so little headway in rural Japan. In our opinion the chief obstacle is the very nature of Christianity itself. It is God-centered, and not man-centered, as Shintô and Buddhism are; it requires complete subordination of the individual's personal conduct under the

Ten Commandments and the Laws of the Church, it presupposes instruction of an intensity which goes far beyond the average religious knowledge of Buddhist and Shintoist believers; and it is obstructed by the traditionalism of the rural population.

In final conclusions (chapt. 15), the authors find that the traditional forces of village life are strong enough to prevent a headlong plunge into new ways of life under the impact of military defeat of the nation, occupation and new constitution. A respected old villager told the visiting anthropologist: "...To me, anyhow, our way looks like a reasonable way of fitting human nature to the circumstances. So why change things all around just because there is a new constitution? We're not living by constitutions, most of us, but by human nature and circumstances. And our way of doing it makes pretty good sense, if only you people would stop to think about it!"

Whatever may be said about the advisability of concentrating so much work on the study of just one Japanese hamlet, and then of writing a book on "Village Japan", we must admit that the job has been splendidly done. Provided the reader peruses the book with the discretion that the factors examined of Japanese village life have here produced only the one single hamlet Niiike and that elsewhere these same factors, in different combinations and interactions, will produce different results, he is given a lucid insight into the manifold structural components of a rural community of Japan. People in Western countries are used to thinking of Japan in terms of modern technology and industrialisation. "Village Japan" fills in a gap by presenting us the Japanese farmer with all his admirable and sympathetic traits.

M.E.