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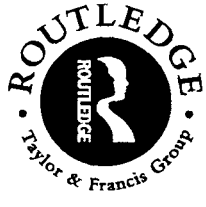
A JAPANESE VILLAGE

Suye Mura

by

JOHN F. EMBREE



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Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

To the memory of Keisuke Aiko—scholar, gentleman, and good judge of wine—who with tragic fitness was the first citizen of Suye to die for the machine age. When returning home one evening in November, 1937, from Menda Town on his three-wheel motor-cycle, he collided with the Hitoyoshi-Yunomae train. That day Suye lost her first motor transportation and her most promising son—and the writer of this book lost his best friend in Japan.

INTRODUCTION

There is an abundance of books on Japan, treating of Japanese life in various aspects. Dr. Embree's book is of a kind that has not hitherto been attempted ; it is a description, based on direct observation, of the life of a Japanese village community. Its chief purpose is to provide material for that comparative study of the forms of human society that is known as social anthropology ; but it should have an appeal to a wider audience of general readers as giving an additional insight from a new angle into Japanese civilization. For, though we may be inclined to judge the civilization of a nation by its literary or artistic production, by the extent of its commerce, or even by its military achievements, if we wish to understand it, we must remember that its roots are in the ordinary life of the common people. Just how the common men and women live together from day to day in a Japanese village is what Dr. Embree has observed and what he has described in this book.

There is a widespread idea that social anthropology is, or should be, concerned only with the simpler societies which we refer to as primitive, savage, or uncivilized, and that the study of the more advanced societies is to be left to historians, economists, and sociologists. It is true that until about fifteen years ago the field researches of social anthropologists were confined to the preliterate peoples of the world. But in recent years, under the leadership of Professor Fay-Cooper Cole, Professor Redfield, and Professor W. Lloyd Warner, social anthropologists of the University of Chicago and of Harvard University have carried out important field studies of communities in Sicily, Mexico, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Ireland, and Quebec. In 1935 it was decided to extend this kind of investigation to the literate peoples of eastern Asia, and Dr. Embree's study of a Japanese village is the first of what was planned as a series of connected researches in that region.

What is now known as social anthropology began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with writers who sought to use the accounts of uncivilized peoples given by travellers for the purpose of gaining insight into the nature of social institutions. But it did not become an established study until the second half of the nineteenth century, and it acquired its

name only some fifty to sixty years ago. Throughout a great part of the nineteenth century the social anthropologists, with a few exceptions, such as Bastian, did not themselves observe the facts with which their theories were concerned but sought them in the accounts of missionaries and travellers. By the beginning of the present century, however, it had come to be recognized that for the progress of the science it was essential that systematic observations of social life should be made by trained observers having in mind the hypotheses to be tested and the problems to be solved. Field research has thus become just as important to social anthropology as laboratory experiments are to physics and chemistry.

Social anthropology has for its aim to discover valid and significant generalizations about human society and its institutions. The only method by which this aim can ever be attained is by the comparison of a sufficient number of sufficiently diverse types of society. The relatively simpler societies of backward peoples are, for several reasons, of extreme importance to the social anthropologist, but his comparative studies must extend over the whole range of known human societies. Therefore, since the kind of knowledge which he requires about the more advanced societies is not otherwise available, he has to extend his field researches to these.

What is required for social anthropology is a knowledge of how individual men, women, and children live within a given social structure. It is only in the everyday life of individuals and in their behaviour in relation to one another that the functioning of social institutions can be directly observed. Hence the kind of research that is most important is the close study for many months of a community which is sufficiently limited in size to permit all the details of its life to be examined.

An assumption, or methodological postulate, that guides those connected researches of which Dr. Embree's is one, is that in social anthropology at the present stage of its development the scientifically most profitable undertaking is the comparative and detailed investigation of forms of social structure. This term—" social structure "—is sometimes used without any clear definition, but is here meant to refer specifically to the network of direct and indirect social relations linking together individual human beings. The method of field anthropology is to investigate the social structure in the concrete observable behaviour of individuals, and this necessitates a close study of

a community of limited size. The result in the present work is a picture of Japanese social structure in the perspective provided by a single village.

What may be called the basic structure of any society is constituted by personal relations as they are determined by neighbourhood, kinship or family ties, and sex and age. The most important unit in the social structure of rural Japan seems everywhere to be a limited neighbourhood group which is exemplified by what Dr. Embree describes under the term *buraku*, which we might translate "hamlet". The internal organization of the hamlet, as it still exists in Suye, with its elected headman, and its households linked together by mutual aid in many economic and social activities and by the social conviviality of parties for the drinking of rice wine, in all probability comes down from very ancient times. The kinship system, which links together households belonging to the same or to different hamlets, has taken on a peculiar form in Japan as the result of the widespread custom of adoption in various forms; this also seems to be an ancient and characteristic feature of Japanese life.

The hamlet is part of a much larger and highly complex structure which is and has for some time been undergoing fairly rapid change. The effects or repercussions of these changes, as they are seen in the hamlet and in the lives of its inhabitants, have been excellently described and analysed by Dr. Embree and are summarized in his eighth chapter. In abstract structural terms the hamlet is steadily losing its relative independence, and it as a group and its members as individuals are becoming more and more involved in and dependent upon relations with the wider social environment. The immense increase in the facilities for communication, by roads, railways, omnibuses, bicycles; the consolidation of the hamlets into the organized and centrally controlled village (*mura*); the national consolidation which is being effected through the army, nation-wide associations, and official Shinto and emperor worship; the replacement of the local dialect by standard Japanese—all these and many other of the changes that Dr. Embree has recorded are components of a single process.

This process itself, in the particular form that it has in contemporary Japan, is one example of a general kind that has occurred thousands of times in the course of history and is at the present time observable all over the world. It may reason-

ably be held that it is the constant and most important constituent of social evolution. The relative isolation, autonomy, and independence of small local communities is the distinguishing feature of the simplest and least-developed societies. The concrescence of these into larger and larger social structures by political, economic, religious, or other organizations is the outstanding feature of human history. One of the major problems of social anthropology is the investigation of processes of this kind in order to determine their general character; this can only be done by the comparative study of a considerable number of concrete instances each of which has been carefully observed and analysed. The scientific value of Dr. Embree's monograph as providing important material for such a comparative study should commend it to those who have any interest in the fundamental problems of a science of society.

I have drawn attention to this aspect of Dr. Embree's work because its importance may easily be overlooked. But there is much else in his book that is both of general scientific value and of interest to those who wish to know something of the civilizations of eastern Asia. It gives, to my mind very effectively, a synoptic picture of life in a rural community of a country which it is very desirable that we should all know something about.

A. R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN.

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Oxford.

PREFACE

This book is an attempt to present an integrated social study of a peasant village in rural Japan. While Suye Mura,[1] the village described, cannot be claimed to represent all rural Japan any more than can any other single village, it is at least representative in many respects. Most Japanese villages depend economically on some single product—the commonest economic bases being rice, fish, and silkworms. In addition are the mountain villages, more or less isolated, dependent on timber, mushrooms, and other mountain products for a livelihood. Suye is primarily a rice-growing village with silkworms as a secondary source of income and so is representative of a large part of rural Japan. The countryside of Japan is dotted with small towns of five to ten thousand population, surrounded by clusters of villages. The town, being full of shops and on a railroad, supplies the country with manufactured goods and some amusements, the chief of which are *geisha* houses. The country in turn supplies food and customers for the town and girls for the *geisha* houses. Suye is typical of most villages in being one of a cluster round two small towns (Menda and Taragi).

The main forms of rural Japanese society are much the same all over Japan—co-operation, exchange labour, and a religious festival calendar closely correlated with the agricultural seasons—but each region, even each county, has its own peculiar details of language and custom. For instance, obscene songs are typical of rural festivities in general, but the particular words and sex symbols vary from region to region. Thus, while the basic patterns of Suye are typical of much of rural Japan, the lesser details are characteristic only of Kuma County.

A peasant community possesses many of the characteristics of a preliterate society, e.g., an intimate local group, strong kinship ties, and periodic gatherings in honour of some deified aspect of the environment. On the other hand, it presents many important differences from the simpler societies; each little peasant group is part of a larger nation which controls its

[1] *Suye* rhymes with *soufflé*; the *y* is scarcely enunciated.

economic life, enforces a code of law from above, and, more recently, requires education in national schools. The economic basis of life is not conditioned entirely by the local requirements but by the nation, through agricultural advisers. The farmer's crop is adjusted to the needs of the state. In religion and ritual there are many outside influences to complicate the simple correlation of rites and social value, festivals and agricultural seasons. While full of local variations, the rituals and festivals are not indigenous to the community nor is the community spiritually self-sufficient. These characteristics make it impossible to regard Suye Mura as comparable to a purely self-contained preliterate society.[1]

The present study is part of a larger research on types of society in eastern Asia being made by the Social Science Division of the University of Chicago under the direction of Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. The recent wars in Asia and the acceptance by Professor Radcliffe-Brown of the chair of anthropology at Oxford have tended to impede the progress of this larger scheme.

In any study such as this the reader has a right to know how and why the particular village was selected and what qualifications the writer has to undertake the study. Both my wife and I had been in Japan for various periods of time before undertaking the investigations on which this report is based. The field work itself lasted a year and a half (August, 1935–December, 1936) and was made possible through a grant from the Social Science Research Committee of the University of Chicago. The period from November, 1935, to November, 1936, was spent in Suye Mura. I had been a fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the same university during the academic year preceding this field study. My knowledge of Japanese is fragmentary, but my wife can speak the language fluently.

On arrival in Japan I visited various persons connected with the Foreign Office, in order to explain the purposes of the

[1] The Japanese peasant village is, however, comparable to other folk communities, using the term "folk" in the sense used by Dr. Redfield in *Tepoztlán* or in *Chan Kom*. Speaking of villages in Yucatan, Redfield says: "These villages are small communities of illiterate agriculturalists, carrying on a homogeneous culture transmitted by oral tradition. They differ from the communities of the preliterate tribesman in that they are politically and economically dependent upon the towns and cities of modern literate civilization and that the villagers are well aware of the townsman and city dweller and in part define their position in the world in terms of these. The peasant is a rustic, and he knows it" (Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa, *Chan Kom: A Maya Village* [Washington, 1934], p. 1).

research, and obtained from the office tacit permission to pursue my studies. I also called on certain professors of Tokyo Imperial University and Waseda University for advice and information. After this some twenty-one villages were visited in order to locate a desirable one for study and, just as important, to gain perspective for the research in the village finally selected.[1]

While it was impossible to determine much about a given village in a brief preliminary visit, Suye was chosen for these reasons :

1. It is relatively small and thus practical for two people to undertake.

2. It does not possess any striking features to make it stand out from the general run of rural communities in Japan. It is not too close to any large city ; it is not a " model " village, that is, one being reconstructed under government supervision into a superefficient farm-production centre, as are many villages in Japan ; it is a rice village and is neither outstandingly rich nor outstandingly poor.

3. Suye is far from any military zone, and thus our work did not come under undue suspicion by the military. In any field work by foreigners in Japan this is an important consideration.

4. In Kumamoto we had a very good introduction to any village through Professor S. Kimura and Mr. R. Kojima. In Suye in particular the headman, Mr. T. Morinaga, was most cordial to us, and his nephew, Keisuke Aiko, the only college graduate living in the village, proved our warmest and most understanding friend. It is to the late Mr. Aiko that this book has been dedicated.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to Professors Shiroshi Nasu and Kunio Yanagida, of Tokyo Imperial University, and Professor Tsubin Odauchi, of Waseda University, for giving me much valuable information and advice ; to Mr. K. Ohkawa, the assistant of Professor Nasu and now himself a professor, who was very helpful and visited several places with me ; and to Professor Eitaro Suzuki, of the Imperial Agricultural College of Gifu, who supplied much valuable information and advice at the outset of the study. From Professor Suzuki I learned most concerning the various village types to be found in Japan. To Professor Shuzo Kimura,

[1] No social studies of Japanese village life have been published in English and very few in Japanese. See Bibliography for some recent Japanese studies.

of Kyushu Imperial University, I owe a very great debt of gratitude for his patience and perseverance in visiting with me three rural communities in Kyushu and in explaining the purpose of my study to officials who were often in some doubt as to the honesty of my intentions. Mr. Kojima, of the Kumamoto Prefectural Office, was also of great assistance in this latter respect. Furthermore, he proved a most jovial friend and introduced me to many aspects of town and city life I might not otherwise have known. Such knowledge helped greatly in understanding rural life and its very sharp contrast in Japan to the life of town and city. The numerous other village and prefectural officials with whom I came in contact, especially during the preliminary survey trip, were without exception extremely helpful, and I cannot be too thankful for the many hours which they gave, and the trouble they went to, in order to assist me.

One other important factor in the successful accomplishment of the study was the aid of Mr. Toshio Sano, a graduate of Tokyo Language School, who lived with me and acted as my interpreter and translator. For his painstaking translations of lectures and village records and for his patience with my interpreting demands at all hours of the day and night, I am most grateful.

More than to any official or professor, however, I owe thanks to the people of Suye who so cordially received two foreigners in their midst and with whom both my wife and I formed many a warm friendship. International friendship was never at a higher point than during some of Suye's drinking parties of 1935–6.

In the writing of the present descriptive report on life in Suye, I wish to express my gratitude for the advice and counsel of the staff of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, more especially to Professors Fay-Cooper Cole, Robert Redfield, and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. To Professor Radcliffe-Brown belongs any credit for the good points in the pages that follow, for he gave me most of my formal training in searching out the rules of a society. But let no blame for errors fall on his head, for with rare restraint, once he sent me to the field, he did not lay down any rules on what to find or how to find it.

A part of my time as research associate for the University of Hawaii was devoted to the completion of the manuscript for

publication, and I wish to thank Dr. F. M. Keesing of the Department of Anthropology of that institution for kindly granting me this opportunity.

I should also like to thank Mr. Yukuo Uyehara, of the University of Hawaii, for his assistance in the translation of the folk-songs. I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. Gordon T. Bowles, for his careful reading of the manuscript. Acknowledgments are due to *Fortune Magazine* for permission to reprint the description of Japanese countryside (p. 9) and for the use of the photograph of a woman spinning. All photographs in the book, including the one first printed in *Fortune*, were taken by Ella Embree and myself.

JOHN F. EMBREE.

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A JAPANESE VILLAGE

SUYE MURA

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before launching on a description of contemporary rural life in Japan and the changes it is undergoing, it is necessary to sketch in a little of the recent history of the country, especially of the years immediately preceding that great social and economic revolution commonly known as the Meiji Restoration. A historical background, when available, is an essential part of any diachronic study.

For over two hundred years before the Meiji era the Tokugawa feudal regime was in power. Primarily a military government carried on in times of peace, after its initial battles against previous rulers its main purpose was to preserve a feudal and military form of government rigid and unchanging.

The Emperor, as nominal head of the state, continued to keep court in Kyoto, while the Tokugawa regime set up actual government in Tokyo (then called Yedo). The country was divided into feudal fiefs, each with a lord or *daimyō* having absolute right of jurisdiction in his own province, including the right of taxation. The Tokugawa themselves were in reality simply the largest of such *daimyō* with the largest estate and hence the greatest wealth and power, while most of the lesser *daimyō* merely imitated them in their methods of governing the people. To prevent revolution, each *daimyō* had to spend a part of the year in Tokyo and, while at home, was required to leave his wife and children as hostages behind in the capital. The mass of the people were farmers owing taxes to the feudal lords of the respective districts and controlled by military men (*samurai* and *ashigaru*) who owed allegiance to these same lords.

The *shōgun* or feudal head of the state had a government of officers whose functions were often ill defined. One characteristic of this government was that it discouraged initiative. Responsibility was shifted from man to man because the government's high offices were duplicated or their functions discharged

not by individuals but by councils. Its operations were also hampered by a system of rotations under which the elders or councillors of government took turns of duty and were therefore likely to muddle and procrastinate. The system extended right down to the small *kumi*, or group of five persons who formed the unit of rural organization. This was done because it was thought necessary to guard against monopoly of power by one person. This aspect of the government is significant because to-day in rural regions similar features of divided and rotated responsibility are to be found in local non-official affairs. To prevent political troubles, a system of spies was maintained to give reports on conditions in various provinces.

The government was run partly on Confucian [1] principles with many of its laws ethical in nature. Philosophers were called in to solve economic and other problems of government which they dealt with on ethical rather than practical principles, with the object of preserving unchanged the system of classes. The virtues of loyalty to one's superiors and filial piety were always stressed. Farmers were urged to be industrious, *samurai* to be economical. Even to-day similar exhortations are given to the peasant. Laws were broad in nature and frequently were not comprehended by the people, with different punishments for different classes. "It is good Confucian doctrine that the common people should do what they are told, without asking why; and certainly no Japanese ruler went out of his way to explain his commands to his humblest subjects." [2]

This attitude, not new in the country with the Tokugawa, has given to the peasants of Japan a remarkable docility, which still exists, to all that emanates from government sources.

Below the nobles and lords there was a rigid series of social classes each with its own occupations, forms of dress, and types of law prescribed by the government. The highest of these were the soldiers, or *samurai*, who came eventually to be almost a purely parasitic class. Below them in rank came farmers and artisans, then merchants, and, lowest of all, the pariah class called *eta*, made up of former slaves, Korean prisoners, and workers in tanning and other industries involving killed animals.

The *daimyō*'s income consisted of the rents collected from farmers in his domain. A lord would ordinarily take about

[1] The Confucianism of Japan is that expounded by Chu Hsi (d. 1200) with special emphasis on loyalty and the ideal of a unified empire under "a Son of Heaven" (see Hu Shih, *The Chinese Renaissance* [Chicago, 1934], p. 18).

[2] G. B. Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (London, 1931), p. 451.

50 per cent. of each farmer's rice crop, a portion of which he distributed to *samurai* and other retainers.

Travel from province to province was discouraged, and passports were required to cross fief lines. Each province wished to remain a self-contained unit and not to lose any of its produce or to admit any possible spies. The Tokyo government deliberately left roads and bridges in poor repair, especially those which led to the capital. This was done in part to prevent any sudden attack on the city. Feudal lords often set up border barriers to exact a toll from travellers.

Religion was left to itself so long as it refrained from political activity. In order to check its growing power, the great Shinshū sect was split into two sections (known to-day as East and West Hongwanji). During this period Buddhism continued, as before, to be the dominant religion, overshadowing and at times assimilating the native Shinto. However, after the split of the Shinshū sect, Buddhism fell into a coma, and no outstanding priest or religious reformer appeared during the Tokugawa regime, or since for that matter.[1] The *samurai* as a class cultivated Zen and developed such formalistic aspects of it as the tea ceremony. Christianity, which had gained a foothold in certain sections of Kyushu, was ruthlessly suppressed early in the Tokugawa regime in conjunction with the expulsion of foreigners and the cleansing of the country. The reason for this was that the rulers justly feared political trouble and possible encroachment by foreign powers in the wake of Christian missionaries. Another aspect of this isolation policy was the prohibition of building seaworthy ships, no Japanese being allowed to leave Japan or, once having left, to return on pain of death.[2]

During the Tokugawa regime the merchant class gradually expanded with an increase in internal travel and trade despite all obstacles. Associations of merchants arose at this time and frequently took over roadside toll gates and exacted tolls from rivals, thus creating monopolies. Rice, the usual form of exchange, became too bulky for commercial transactions during

[1] Buddhist beliefs in rural regions to-day are often far removed from any formal Buddhism found in books. The predominant sect, Shinshū, is a special Japanese form of Amida Buddhism, quite unlike the original teachings of Gautama.

[2] This decree came at a time when Japan was just beginning to expand like Elizabethan England, with rovers and settlers in Manila, Java, and Siam. These growing and expanding Japanese outposts all gradually died out after the isolation policy of the Tokugawa went into effect. It is interesting to speculate on the possible colonial empire that might have been Japan's but for the cautious policy of the Tokugawa in 1633 (see Y. Takekoshi, *The Economic Aspects of the History of the Civilization of Japan* [London, 1930], chap. xxxiv).

the early period of the regime, and money came into general use with the merchant classes. *Samurai* continued to receive their incomes in rice, however, and right up to the revolution considered money vulgar and beneath their notice. As time went on the merchant class became more and more influential. Many took to rice brokerage and speculating and by the consequent sharp fluctuations in the price of rice great hardships were imposed on both farmers and *samurai*, whose incomes depended upon it. The feudal lords, including the Tokugawa, felt these economic jolts also, for in the last analysis they depended on rice in their rôles as squires. The early rice brokers were the forerunners of the modern broker to be found in every rural region, a man who is heartily hated by all farmers.

Peasant farmers had a very rough time. Many got into debt as money became necessary to them for many things which previously they had bartered for rice. Owing to intensified cultivation of the fields, they had to buy such things as manure, agricultural implements, horses, and clothing, with silver, which steadily decreased in purchasing power. Feudal landholders began to exact taxes in money instead of rice at a rate favourable to themselves. Peasants frequently abandoned their farms and went to other regions or cities to avoid their burdens, and frequently they left the lords' fields to go to some temple land or to the manor of a court noble where taxes were less onerous. Infanticide and abortion were freely practised. The government in reaction tried to control rice prices, but without avail. They forced farmers to stay on their homeland and frequently deported them from cities to their native villages. Laws against infanticide were passed, but economic necessity continued stronger than law or parental love.

Many agrarian revolts occurred due to extremes of poverty, frequently the result of increased pressure by impoverished *samurai* and feudal lords. These were often cruelly crushed.

It is worth observing that the poverty of the peasants forced them, in many instances, to surrender their land by sale or pledge to creditors, and there were thus brought into existence two new classes, one of persons who owned land which they did not farm, the other of persons who farmed land which they did not own. This created new hardships for agriculturists and a clash of interests between tenant farmers and landowners (other than feudal lords). The most curious anomalies arose, as for example when a landowner reproved his tenant for producing too much rice, because taxation increased in proportion to the yield, while the tenant objected that

unless the yield were high there was no surplus for his own subsistence. Tenant disputes continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in some parts of Japan they have recurred in quite recent years.[1]

The government realized the importance of agriculture to the state and took great pains to improve it, but little thought was given to the well-being of the farmer as such. He was considered to be stupid and of value only as a rice-producer. " Statesmen thought highly of agriculture, but not of agriculturalists." [2]

In the city during this period the popular theatre—*kabuki*—developed, as did puppet shows and colour prints. The now universal three-stringed musical instrument called *samisen* came into its own. Licensed quarters for prostitution grew and flourished. The merchants, who had plenty of money, were the main patrons of the theatre and the arts as well as of the " dream world " of bath girls and courtesans. When the national exuberance and love of the frivolous and obscene would become too marked, the government would issue repressive laws, but, in spite of all, the gay city recreations continued to increase in quantity and variety. It is interesting to note that the government again to-day is worrying itself about the " morals " of its people by closing dance halls and prohibiting all kinds of sentimental songs.

With the government attempting to control economic forces by fiat, and with the merchants enjoying their wealth in cities while *samurai* and peasant alike suffered, it is clear that the most powerful single factor leading to the Meiji revolution was the change from a purely agricultural to a mercantile economy.

The Shogunate at the beginning of its regime prohibited all foreign trade and all foreigners, except for a little colony of Dutch near Nagasaki, in a desire to keep the country as stable as possible. Thus any new ideas from Europe were excluded. At home, however, a little freedom of research was permitted. It was through this little crack that native scholars gradually realized and spread the idea that the Emperor was the true head of the government and that the *shōguns* were mere usurpers of power. Native Shinto ideas were the better able to make themselves felt with the lowered prestige of Buddhism.

The coming of the West to knock forcibly at Japan's closed

[1] Sansom, op. cit., p. 509. [2] ibid., p. 457.

doors in 1853 added one more strain to a feudal system already weakened by the growth of mercantilism and the increasing conviction of educated men that the feudal lords were usurpers of the Emperor's divine power.

In the years 1867–8 the Tokugawa government resigned, and there was an armed conflict between the Shogunate party and the Emperor's party in which the Shogunates were defeated. Feudalism was abolished and the monarchy restored. In the succeeding years many changes took place. The more important innovations were :

1868. Buddhism and Shinto declared separate. The same researches that led in part to the overthrow of the *shōgun* also exposed the foreign origin of Buddhism and the manner in which it had usurped the place of Shinto. One form of Shinto was made into a state cult.

1868–9. Roads hitherto barred by territorial lords opened for free traffic.

Restrictions on interfief trade and communication removed.

1869. Equality of the four classes—*samurai*, farmer, artisan, and merchant—declared. While technically the merchant had been below the *samurai* and farmer, he held greater actual power for many years before this.

1869. First telegraph built ; first newspaper printed.

1870. First primary schools in Tokyo. It was several years before these reached the countryside. Compulsory education began in 1872.

Vaccination encouraged. Smallpox epidemics, previously fairly common, have practically disappeared in Japan since this time.

1871. Postal service established.

Men's hair allowed to be cut as they pleased and social distinctions in dress abolished. This had a great levelling influence.

Choice of crops to be grown made free.

1872. Sunday adopted as a legal holiday.

Choice of trades and professions declared to be free.

1873. Gregorian calendar adopted.

Conscription law passed : " While the spirit of this law had its source primarily in the ancient imperial policy that in an emergency all men shall become soldiers and when the emergency passes they shall again become farmers, the form it now took was based upon Western models." [1]

1874. Political parties formed.

Public speaking commenced by Fukuzawa.[2] This was an

[1] Inazo Nitobe *et al.*, *Western Influences in Modern Japan* (Chicago, 1931), p. 384.

[2] The *Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi* gives an excellent insight into the life of this transition period. Besides the radical innovation of lectures, Fukuzawa also founded the first newspaper and the first university (Keio) in Japan.

important event. Since then the government has adopted lectures as a branch of its public education. The mass of the peasants, who do not read newspapers, are periodically assembled in a village schoolhouse or lecture-hall and given a two- or three-hour talk by some itinerant government official on new forms of agriculture, on patriotism, or on morality.

1877. Saigō Rebellion. Saigō, a lord of Satsuma in southern Kyushu, dissatisfied with the government's pacific attitude towards Korea, led a revolt against the government. The newly formed conscript army of commoners received its first real test and won when Saigō was defeated at Kumamoto. This was the last counter-revolutionary move on the part of old feudal lords and *samurai*.

In ensuing years railroads were built and gas engines and electricity introduced.

In addition to these foreign introductions, native law was also changed. The chief motive for this, as well as for several other reforms, was that Japan had concluded several unequal treaties with Western nations and wished at the earliest possible moment to revise them. The feeling of inferiority engendered by these treaties and by the superior mechanical culture of the West gave rise to a virulent nationalism which has, if anything, increased with the years.

With all these radical changes several significant features of life remained unchanged, or merely appeared in a new form :

1. A spy system all over the country to report on conditions.
2. The law code, though supposedly fixed, could by means of certain statutes be broadly interpreted to crush any form of activity including speech and writing which might disturb the ruling powers. Furthermore, in addition to the code, Imperial edicts, laws in themselves, were (and are) issued from time to time. These, while issued in the name of the Emperor were (and are) usually composed not by the Emperor himself but by a clique in power.
3. Continuance, after a brief interval, of military men as actual governors of the country.
4. Education calculated to keep people in their place and serve their Emperor (rather than feudal lord) in time of war.

Professor Hu Shih has referred to the " cultural response " of Japan to Western civilization as one of centralized control as against the " diffused assimilation " response of China. He says :

What has happened in Japan during these seventy years of modernization only represents one peculiar type [of cultural response], which

we may call the type of " centralized control ". Such orderly and efficient progress in a gigantic task of nation-wide reformation is only possible under such exceptional circumstances as have been described above. Its advantages are most apparent, but it is not without very important disadvantages. The Japanese leaders undertook this rapid transformation at so early a time even the most far-sighted of them could only see and understand certain superficial phases of the Western civilization. Many other phases have escaped their attention, and in their anxiety to preserve their national heritage and to strengthen the hold of the dynasty over the people, they have carefully protected a great many elements of the traditional Japan from the penetration of the new civilization. One of the most evident examples is the state patronage and protection of the Shinto religion. The peculiar extra-constitutional powers of the military caste in the government is another example of compromise. The position of women may also be cited. In short, the rapid cultural transformation in Japan has been achieved with too great a speed and at too early a date to allow sufficient time for the new ideas and influences to penetrate into the native institutions and attain a more thorough cultural readjustment. The whole affair has assumed the form of ingrafting an alien culture on the stock of traditional Japan. Much of the traditional medieval culture is artificially protected by a strong shell of militant modernity. Much that is preserved is of great beauty and permanent value; but not a little of it is primitive and pregnant of grave dangers of volcanic eruption.[1]

Since the Meiji revolution, Japan has become one of the great nations, with ships sailing the seven seas; meanwhile the rural communities have maintained a remarkable stability through all these changes in the capital and other cities of the country. The following pages are devoted to the society as it is found to-day in one of these rural communities, Suye Mura, and the changes occurring in its local social system.

[1] Op. cit., pp. 23–4.

CHAPTER II

VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

Geographical Orientation

To reach Suye Mura from Tokyo, one boards an express train at 3 p.m. for Shimonoseki. The view from the train window is predominantly rural—groups of farmers, men and women, transplanting rice if it is spring, family groups gathering it if the month is October. As the train passes through the prefectures of Hiroshima and Yamaguchi, the farmhouses change in shape, the methods of stacking rice vary, and even the type of straw hat the farmer wears changes from region to region.

The fact that Japan is a small, heavily populated nation is reflected in the short distances between settlements, the old well-worn paths, and the scarcity of waste land.

> There are other signs for those who look to see them.
>
> There are the roads, always narrow and mostly at the wood's edge or the river's.
>
> There is the straw, piled on brushwood bridges off the loam and the trees only growing at the god's house, never in the fields.
>
> There are the whole plains empty of roofs, squared into flats of water, no inch for walking but the dike backs, not so much as a green weed at the foot of the telegraph poles or a corner patch gone wild.
>
> There are the fields, empty of crows after harvest: thin picking for black wings after cloth ones.
>
> There are the men under moonlight in the mountain villages breaking the winter snowdrifts on the paddies to save days of spring.
>
> There are the forest floors swept clean and the sweepings bundled in careful, valuable piles.
>
> There are the houses without dogs, the farms without grass-eating cattle. . . .
>
> Japan is the country where the stones show human finger-prints: where the pressure of men on the earth has worn through to the iron rock.
>
> There is nothing in Japan but the volcanoes and the volcanic wastes that men have not handled. There is no getting away from men anywhere: from the sight of men in the open houses or from the shape of their work in the made fields or from the smell of their dung in the paddy water.[1]

From Tokyo to Shimonoseki is sixteen hours by train.

[1] From "Of Many Men on Little Land", *Fortune Magazine*, September, 1936.

Crossing the straits of Moji and thence again by rail to Yatsushiro is another eight hours. On this trip the train passes through the industrial region of Fukuoka, near which is Yahata, the great munitions centre, where no foreigner sets foot. South of Fukuoka is Kumamoto City, primarily important as a rice centre, the prefecture of which it is the capital producing some of the best rice in Japan. Kumamoto was also the capital of the old feudal lord and famous anti-Christian Kato Kiyomasa.

Yatsushiro is a small city two hours south of Kumamoto. Here one changes trains and waits an hour for the Hitoyoshi train. During this hour most passengers sit huddled over their bulky hand baggage, and the mothers among them sit patiently as they suckle their babies. A few more adventurous travellers walk out in the town to spend the time drinking *sake* or beer in a little restaurant which, catering to transients, has poor service and anything but pretty waitresses. The rather miserable wait in Yatsushiro is more than compensated for by the gorgeous scenery on the two-hour trip to Hitoyoshi. The railroad runs along the edge of the Kuma River, which has cut a deep gorge in this region. The rapids of this river are famous all over Japan, and tourists often come to Hitoyoshi from Tokyo for the sole purpose of riding down them in summer. Now and then the train passes a little settlement perched precariously between the rough side of the canyon and the rushing torrent. The men of these villages eke out a livelihood at lumbering. About 5 p.m. Hitoyoshi, the capital of Kuma County, is reached. This is a town of about ten thousand people, fifty-four miles south of Kumamoto and eight hundred and sixty miles distant from Tokyo by rail. Here are a few rather pathetic hot springs and some small hotels.

A traveller to Suye Mura has now the choice of a bus direct to the village or a train to Menda or Taragi, neighbouring towns. The train is cheaper but involves a walk of half an hour or so from the station to the village.

The train runs up the middle of Hitoyoshi basin while the bus runs along the northern edge, passing through numerous villages which lie half in the plain, half in the mountains. After forty-five minutes and a distance of twelve miles, one comes to the end of the bus line and finds oneself in the little *buraku* of Kakui in the agricultural *mura* of Suye.[1]

Here there is neither hotel nor restaurant. Whoever leaves

[1] For definitions of *buraku* and *mura* see p. 16.