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Japanese Rural Society. By Fukutake Tadashi. Translated by R. P. Dore. Tokyo: Oxford University Press, 1967. Pp. xiv, 230.

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Originally published in Japanese in 1964, *Japanese Rural Society* was translated by Fukutake Tadashi's friend and fellow ethnographer Ronald Dore. The two exchange friendly barbs in their respective prefaces. "In his more polemical moments [Dore] accuses me of 'neo-agrarian fundamentalism'" (p. ix) says Fukutake. Dore retorts, "I suspect that Professor Fukutake overstates his case and overestimates the extent to which farmers are being, or have been, exploited by governments wholly subservient to business interests" (p. xiii). This gentle, academic debate no doubt began when Fukutake and Dore first tramped around Japanese villages together in the late 1940s and continued after Dore presented the positive example of Japanese industry to Western observers in his influential *British Factory, Japanese Factory* (University of California Press, 1973). Already amicable, the tone mellowed even further:

But Professor Fukutake needs sticks to beat his government with as I need sticks for mine. And Japanese politics and politicians, to be sure, are hardly the paragons of rational enlightenment whom I would want to defend from Professor Fukutake (although I might go into battle for the bureaucrats on occasion). (Preface to T. Fukutake, *The Japanese Social Structure*, trans. R. Dore [University of Tokyo Press, 1982], p. xiii)

Thus were the neoliberal trade wars of the 1970s and 1980s debated between these two academics, who shared so much more than they disputed. Restraint is both the glory and the curse of academic life.

Fukutake Tadashi was born in 1917 in Okayama, on the Inland Sea between Kobe and Hiroshima. He entered the Tokyo University Department of Sociology in 1937 and moved on to its graduate school in 1940. Although Fukutake's university status apparently protected him from wartime conscription, he spent the middle war years doing fieldwork in Chinese villages, one of a number of social scientists who did fieldwork in occupied territories, much of it under the auspices of the military. Fukutake had become a member of the department's staff by the time university students began to be drafted (1943) and went on to be successively an assistant (1942–48), an assistant professor (1948–56), associate professor (1956–60), and full professor (1960–77) at Tokyo University.

Occasional excitements punctuated this uneventful career. Fukutake's long-standing Marxism and "the degree of personal trust he enjoyed on all sides" (the phrase is Dore's, in the preface cited above) made him a principal negotiator between students and university authorities during the radical student uprisings of 1969. Fukutake retired from the university in 1977 and

*Another review from 2050 to share with *AJS* readers.—*Ed.*

became, briefly, president of a governmental institution in social welfare. He died in 1989.

Fukutake's productivity was prodigious, perhaps even excessive. He undertook scores of fieldwork projects, in diverse fields. His bibliography numbers dozens of monographs, books, edited volumes, and textbooks, alongside dictionaries, handbooks, and hundreds of minor pieces in scholarly journals, newspapers, and elsewhere. But rural sociology was his love. And for many reasons, the story of Japan during his career was a story of agriculture. The war had driven the Japanese back to the land, both because food was a crucial war resource and because the bombed cities became uninhabitable. (Even as late as 1955, 41% of the Japanese labor force worked in agriculture.) Moreover, agricultural land reform was the cynosure of the Occupation reformers, who were bent on producing yeoman farmers of a kind then vanishing from their own country. And, most important, farmer votes guaranteed the 40-year dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party, although less through Jeffersonian democracy than by a curious transformation of the urban machine politics of prewar America into the rural machine politics that characterized postwar Japan.

Of course, the sequel to this story is well known. Rural Japan would disappear almost completely over the half century after Fukutake's book. By the early 2000s, less than 5% of Japanese workers worked in agriculture, and even that figure reflected liberal counting. A third of the supposed farm households had trivial agricultural income. In half of the others no individual spent more than 60 days a year doing farm work. And of the households with one such worker, half drew less than 50% of their income from farming. There were in fact fewer than half a million households in which at least one member did farm work more than 60 days a year and for which farming provided more than half the household's income, down from 5 or 6 million in the 1950s. The country had become an industrial titan and then moved beyond manufacturing toward postindustrialism.

Fukutake's *Japanese Rural Society* captures the moment when the rural world was known to be rapidly changing but was not yet known to be doomed. He does not mourn a passing world, but rather envisions a sturdy rural utopia, one that will owe more to Marx than to Jefferson but that nonetheless will remain a central constituent of a modernizing nation. Reading him therefore reminds us that every descriptive study, no matter how up-to-date its focus on the affairs of its day, ultimately becomes a historical work. The open potentials of the present will inevitably become—in later eyes—nothing more than the fixed narrative steps by which the later present arrived.

The book has five sections. The first provides a general history and description of agricultural practices and economics. The second discusses family and kinship, while the third turns to the organizational structure of hamlet and village. The fourth focuses on political structure in particular, while the fifth considers culture and mentality. Fukutake's surveys of Indian villages in the early 1960s had used a similar design. But the kinship

and economics of village life had fallen to other investigators in those studies, and in the present volume one is therefore not surprised at Fukutake's lovingly detailed analysis of the organizational and political aspects of village life.

The broad resemblance of Fukutake's design to the functionalism characteristic of Western modernization theories, however, seems adventitious. There is no reference to functionalist theory. If there is a theoretical background, it is rather Marxism, but a Marxism without a proletarian party, a powerful state, or an intellectual vanguard. It is a Marxism of class interests and of material determination, to be sure, but at the same time of democracy and of self-actualization. It is closer to Fabian socialism or progressivism than to any form of Western Marxism.

Most important, the book avoids the fallacy of so many Western modernization stories, as indeed of the American Occupation itself. It does not view the past as a long and stable body of tradition. The supposed long-standing feudalism of Japan is proven to be a mirage. The "feudal landlords" against whom the Occupation launched its hugely successful expropriation program turn out to have arisen because of Meiji tax policy. Insistence on cash payment had driven the small farmers into tenancy; their precarious finances could not allow the cash reserves required for scheduled tax payments. For that very reason, even the pre-Occupation Japanese government planned postwar land reform, and the Occupation simply insisted on more extreme standards (tenant-farmed lands were expropriated down to one hectare, not five). The productivity rises thereupon observed simply continue rises that had been steady before the war. (Fukutake doesn't notice it, but his own figures show that 70% of 1965's post-Meiji doubling in rice productivity had been achieved by 1935, under the tenancy system.)

Thus, the postwar landholding changes are merely the latest of a long sequence of transformations in farm organization. They are not the sudden revolution of which the Occupation dreamed and the modernizers wrote.

The same is true of the family system. At the core of the "traditional" Japanese farm family was the *ie* system, in which lands were inherited by primogeniture and the current head of a household acted in theory as trustee for a patrilineage deemed to be the true owner of land, goods, traditions, and so on. The *ie* system, like all such systems, also involved a larger structure capable of adjusting it to the contingencies of lineage evolution: splits, mergers, demographic disasters, and so on. This was the *dozudukan* system, a complex of interdependencies, rights, and obligations governing relations between senior and junior lineages, and extended by numerous fictive kinship relationships.

Yet in Fukutake's discussion, it quickly becomes apparent that the *ie* system was relatively new to Japanese peasantry, a downward transposition of the family structure of the Tokugawa samurai to those rural households able to afford it. The poorer farmers could not afford *ie*-consciousness. Thus, far from being eternal, the "traditional" Japanese family pattern had

its origins in Meiji legal changes aiming at a productive and governable agricultural community. Moreover, the *dozudukan* system was already in considerable motion in Meiji times, being undercut by affinal relations. (Fukutake is an enthusiast for affinal relations rather than lineage relations, as he is for marriages of affection rather than marriages of obligation or strategy. They are all part of his preference for individual choice over social constraint.) The *oyabun-kobun* (roughly, patron-client) relationship that grows out of *dozudukan* had thus already freed itself from purely lineage definition by the immediate postwar and provides yet another steadily changing theme in social relationships.

To be sure, once Fukutake has introduced the changing phenomena that are *ie* and *dozudukan*, their contingent quality tends to vanish. We enter the serene flow of the modernization narrative, with its implicit fixing of the past. *Ie* and *dozudukan* are emplotted within the steady rhetoric of gradual disappearance, of inevitable decline postponed by meretricious defense, of curious “survivals” driven by local conditions, of the danger lest these forms—to which Fukutake clearly objects—might not survive all the same. But the modernization framing has been undercut from the outset. The older family system itself was produced by political changes and deliberate policy. And, as Fukutake makes clear, it is not some gradual “detraditionalism” that is making it disappear, but new policies and new economic conditions in which preservation of an undivided family farm no longer represents an optimal strategy, even to the most benighted of peasants, and in which one can get more from a city employer than from an *oyabun* patron in one’s village.

Fukutake’s resistance to the normal modernization narrative reaches its apogee in his accounts of the organization of hamlets and of the politics of villages. It is impossible to summarize the baroque complexity of village organization, for Fukutake outdoes himself, tracing survivals not only of Meiji but of Tokugawa politics. There is the *buraku*, the Tokugawa local governmental unit. There is also the village or hamlet itself (not always identical with the *buraku*). There are the bodies for governing hamlet common lands and water. There are the *kumi* or immediate neighborhoods. There are age groups, funeral groups, religious societies, Agricultural Practice Unions, youth groups, fire brigades. Nearly all of these are the relics of this or that governmental intervention: the Tokugawa trying to improve taxation, the Meiji trying to centralize and amalgamate, the wartime militarists trying to use the *kumi* as vectors for national propaganda. It becomes quickly clear that the notion of a “traditional hamlet” is silly.

Yet sometimes Fukutake cannot himself avoid falling into this locution: “The traditional hamlet of the past carried on a unified hamlet social life, in which the hamlet *kumi* played a part as subordinate organs. The hamlet had, however, a variety of social groups apart from the hamlet *kumi*” (p. 102). In this short passage, we see Fukutake’s central problem. Starting out with the modernization rhetoric of a unified, fixed past, within one sentence he finds himself forced to qualify that picture. The hamlet was in fact a

grouping of a few hundred individuals organized into dozens of crosscutting groups: by kinship, by function, by politics, by age, by location. These groupings were of varying historical depth, of varying importance, of varying vulnerability to the new social forces sweeping postwar Japan. The hamlet could not have been further from the stable, enduring, fixed community of the modernizers, as Fukutake's own analysis makes very clear.

In the modernizing rhetoric, anything old must be breaking down, losing force, shedding legitimacy. But while Fukutake describes such changes for many of these systems independently, his own account shows that these various "traditional" systems, of varying depths, are often weakening each other. Their breakdown is triggered as often by some other "tradition" as it is by the forces of modernity, which are present in Fukutake's discussion only as the nebulous "part-time jobs" drawing farmers and younger sons away from full-time farming. Yet many of these jobs were in small local industries. Modernity was not elsewhere, but often close at hand.

Thus, for much of the book, Fukutake avoids the fatal dangers of the modernizing narrative: its gradualism and its presumption of a stable past. But when he enters the realm of culture and values, he surrenders to the modernizing story. This side of the book is quietly but emphatically ideological. Affinal relations are better than lineage. Why? Because they are "horizontal" rather than "vertical" (p. 73). Or consider Fukutake on marriage. After quoting the rural proverb that "Brothers and sisters are like hands and feet, but wives are like a kimono—one can change them" (p. 49), he goes on to tell us that "since the bride had no opportunity to be with her husband before marriage there was no question of their entering on marriage in a spirit of loving intimacy" (p. 49). Or, speaking of the strength of *ie*, he tells us, "It would be much more accurate to say, not that harmony [in the *ie*] was maintained at the cost of brutal sacrifice of the individual ego, but rather that the system did not permit the development of any egos to be sacrificed" (p. 51). These statements are not the views of the social scientist, but of the moralist.

This strong moral position, with its hint of contempt for the traditional farmer and his culture, broadens in the closing chapters on village life and culture:

The days when farmers were prepared to suppress their desires for the good things of life, when their strength lay in their ability merely to "exist," to be satisfied with the fact that even on a meager piece of land careful tilling would ensure enough food for survival—these days are soon to end. When they are finally no more, then farmers can look forward to "living" in a truly human sense. That new age is already beginning to dawn.

...

A man whose whole life is taken up with work and sleep has little to do with culture. . . . The cultural life of the man who devotes all his time to cultivating the fields is likely to be lived at a very low level. (P. 208)

To be sure, Fukutake does admit that the driving variable producing a new age of farmer culture was neither war nor his own favored variable of class

interest, but rather the Meiji government's need "for men who were to become useful conscripts or play their full part in capitalist factory production" (p. 209), a need that drove that government to universal primary education and universal literacy.

But more disturbing here is the hint that the traditional farmer was in some sense nonhuman, a mere animal. Fukutake tells us: "Consequently, while recognizing that farmers are ceasing to 'exist' and beginning to 'live,' one cannot be wholly optimistic about the future of village culture. . . . Individuals can no longer be prevented from having desires of their own, but nevertheless the *ie* and the 'hamlet' which required the suppression of such individuality are still living concepts" (P. 212).

Among the things Fukutake blames on the *ie* and the hamlet later in this passage are vanity, the need to keep up appearances, and "unnecessary waste." But surely he knows that loveless marriages, personal vanity, waste, and nonindividualized behavior are just as characteristic of modern societies as of traditional ones. "Desires of their own" drove Japanese schoolgirls in the later 20th century to become bywords for sheeplike consumption, and even by the time Fukutake published this book, Japan already had the world's fifth highest level of advertising expenditures per capita. In such a world, what exactly were "desires of their own?" More broadly, modernization's focus on satisfying the current generation rather than the future (as had been required by *ie*-consciousness) led quickly to pollution and ecological deterioration. And the big business Fukutake so much disliked profited as much from the modern world as it had from the village-based one. Why then should one be so hard on the traditional farmers, whose world was rapidly crumbling as Fukutake wrote?

The modern liberal cannot but agree with Fukutake that the Japanese farmer deserved a better life. But how is one to imagine that better life without rejecting the past life as meaningless? More specifically, how is one to imagine a rural life lived as a conscious choice that did not require the sacrifice of many kinds of well-being? And what exactly is the meaning of "conscious choice" when we know that the personality itself is a social phenomenon?

Beyond those questions, however, Fukutake's strong if partial rejection of the modernization narrative poses an even deeper puzzle. Durkheim argued that traditional societies were undifferentiated societies of similar individuals and that these give way to differentiated societies of interdependent but different individuals. But Fukutake's analysis shows that this is merely a difference in what we choose to see. "Traditional" societies have one kind of differentiated interdependent individuals (the people in a hamlet), while modern societies have other kinds of differentiated interdependent individuals (the people in the various occupations, for example). In "modern" societies, geography is seldom the basis for solidarity, which is rather organized around occupations or age-groups or manufactured ethnicities or consumption groups. Is it then simply the case that a modern looks at traditional societies and does not see the difference there? Perhaps the

endless complexities of hamlet politics and social jockeying simply do not interest us, any more than the difference between occupational therapists and physical therapists would interest Fukutake's farmers. Perhaps the much-vaunted complexity of modern societies lies simply in our own inability to see the complexity of other types of societies. Perhaps the much-vaunted changeability of modern societies is simply an ideology, fashion simply something we force on ourselves out of fear that we might descend into stability and prove—perish the thought—to be no less traditional than all those others.

There are in Fukutake two warring tendencies: the gradualist modernizer who has a slight superiority over those he studies, and the contingent historian who sees the perpetual flow of history that sweeps him along with those he studies. It is ultimately not clear which he is. But more than most of his generation, Fukutake recognizes that the supposed historical drift from tradition to modernity was in fact just a modern's way of interpreting a particular synchronic difference. This is a puzzling book, worth much reflection.