Introduction

Robert Redfield


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COMMUNITY STUDIES IN JAPAN AND CHINA: A SYMPOSIUM

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT REDFIELD*

University of Chicago

A CIVILIZATION, as distinct from a primitive society, is expressed and recorded in the written works of its reflective and highly creative minds. It develops what simpler forms of living have not: a "great tradition" of the literate and critical few. Beneath and within this high culture live the common people, whose "little tradition" is creator and then creature of the philosophy, science and fine art of the great tradition.

The Orientalist is, by and large, a student of the great traditions; the anthropologist and field-sociologist, of the little traditions. Once the two studied apart: the Orientalist, the written documents and artistic products of the literate few of the great civilizations; the anthropologist, the peoples who live by little traditions only. Now the two kinds of students are about to meet in the Far East. Fei Hsiao-tung, anthropologist, having studied Chinese villages, asks himself, How did the teaching of Confucius and Mencius justify the privileges of the ruling class and affect the life of the Chinese peasant?¹ Americans wanting to understand Japan, an enemy become ally, extend their interest from the history, state religion and formal politics of Japan to the village life of farmers and fishermen. In the civilizations, a village is not to be understood without reference to its great tradition and its state-wide institutions; and a philosophy, an art, a religion or a government is seen afresh and more broadly if one moves to view it, as it now comes to be said, "at the grass-roots."

The form in which the anthropologist or field-sociologist is apt to present his earthy view of a civilization is "the community study." In the following papers Beardsley and Fried make us understand, I think, the reasons why this form of investigation provides important access to understanding of China and of Japan. Simplified, the reasons are two: the community is a natural human whole; and the community study is relevant to many kinds of scholarly, scientific or practical purposes.

*The author is professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago. Among his publications, his most recent is The Primitive World and Its Transformations (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953).
A "community study" of Japan or China follows from "self-conscious concern with the integrated institutional pattern operating within a clearly specified locality" (Fried). It has "the advantage of dealing with a genuine, clearly defined, natural socio-cultural unit large enough to display the full range of aspects of culture...yet small enough to permit close observation of these aspects and their interrelations." (Beardsley). This is to say that in such a study one meets human beings, in their local variety, completely: all of the people and institutions necessary for the carrying on of a common life; and all of the aspects and experiences of that life from birth to death. The community study is therefore a way in which social scientists work that is congenial to the spirit of the humanistic disciplines. It deals with human beings in toto, and without breaking their humanity up into the atomized parts of the more "behavioral" sciences. It preserves the direct perception. At the same time the maker of a community study, while retaining the "holistic" human reality, strives to develop and to use methods that will qualify as scientific: he struggles to define the concepts for the characterization of this human whole, and he refines and submits to examination and criticism his procedures of observation, record and analysis. In the following papers one reads much about the latter: the technical methods. Both Fried and Beardsley tell us about the problems of choosing the community to be studied, about grouping communities in classes, about the nature of the field work, and about the use of formal records, historical documents, interviews, questionnaires and biographies. The Japanese studies, being for the most part recent or current, benefit by very recent developments in field procedure, and by organization and planning of research, as the earlier Chinese studies did not.

These two reviews make reference to many of the kinds of purposes which may shape studies in rural communities. The Japanese, like many Western peoples, assiduously collected disappearing folklore, in part no doubt motivated by interest and pride in their life and past, and in order to preserve and to exhibit it. In the work of Ono, apparently, (Beardsley, footnote 21) historical materials from rural communities have been assembled into a history of typical Japanese village communities, as has been done for English villages by Seebohm, Peake and others, and for Swedish villages by Sigurd Erixon. Or rural studies may be shaped by practical purposes, as Yanagida's investigations were carried on to guide the construction of a truly Japanese legal code. The interest in practical problems in the community propels and guides many rural or urban studies, as in the social survey early used in China (but not introduced into Japan?), or in Buck's study of land use.

The instances just mentioned are not quite community studies. When the true community study came to be made in numbers and with conscious consideration of the method in both China and Japan in the last fifteen years, it came to be made with three purposes appearing with varying emphasis in
particular studies. The purpose that may perhaps be conceived as central is expressed by the question, What is the general and persisting character of the Japanese (or Chinese) society and culture? Also present is the question, What shall we do (or what did we do) with regard to some practical action? (Fei’s study of the industrialization of rural China; Chen Ta’s study of the effects of emigration; the Raper report.) The third kind of question is that appropriate to the more theoretically minded investigator: What is the general nature of this class of social phenomena? (Embree’s interest in social structure and especially in cooperative work groups; Fried’s question whether the kan-ch’ing relationship is functionally similar to the godparental relationship in medieval Europe or in Spanish-America.) The community study lies on uncommitted ground; it may be used to provide a total context to understand some human phenomenon found in many societies or civilizations, or to test a scientist’s hypothesis as to some limited relationship stated generally. It may provide an understanding to guide the legislator or the social reformer. It may, primarily and centrally, offer itself as standing for or contributing to our comprehension of China or of Japan.

As a contributor to our understanding of China or Japan as a coherent way of life, the community study requires not merely the special procedures that receive so much attention in Fried’s pages that follow, but also a choice of central organizing idea, of a basic concept, for holding in the mind the small community as an analyzable system. Fei’s study, *Earthbound China*, does this in one way by choosing the relations of land, population, occupational specialization and capital formation as a basis for characterizing and classifying Chinese rural communities. Thus the concepts begin to form out of a concern with practical matters that need be dealt with in China. But other studies in China look particularly to familism, or emigration, and for the most part adopt no chosen way of conceiving the community as a whole.

The community studies made in Japan, in contrast, do exhibit a fairly consistent choice of position taken and a corresponding form of thought. The studies made by Westerners, writes Beardsley, “have consistently aimed at one predominant objective...to find common denominators at the grassroots level of Japanese culture.” And the predominant form of thought employed in describing these Japanese communities has been social structure: the community as a system of institutionalized functions and statuses between kinds of people. This bent began with Embree’s study (suggested by Radcliffe-Brown) and continues, on the whole, in the later work, as we may judge from what Beardsley tells us about it. For, among the results already realized, Beardsley includes “the demonstration of the neat dove-tailing of work cycles with cycles of social and ceremonial activity...” the demonstration of equal-

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level relationships in the local system of cooperation and reciprocal obligation, and (in Ishino's study), "the intricate vertical structuring of social relations dominated by distinctive hierarchical patterns." And so, in the Japanese studies, there begins to appear a characterization of the social structure of the Japanese little community, with, now, some understanding of the influences of the industrial-commercial economy upon this structure, and perhaps of the extensions of this structure of the folk society into the life and institutions of modern Japan.  

The American studies made in Japan conceive the little community chiefly as social structure. The worth of this concept, in providing an analysis of a small society, has been shown especially by the British anthropologists (Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Firth and others). We begin to hope for its development as a theoretical basis for the analysis of communities that will include African, Chinese, Japanese and Indian small communities.

In the meantime some will push the conceptualization of community life into "other research levels and interests" (Beardsley). What are some of these? One possibility is the more explicit statement of ecological relationships. In studies of villages in other parts of the world social structure is related to another conception of the small community: the concurrent relationships of man and nature, or the spatial and temporal ordering of peoples and their interrelationships in a rural or rural-urban area. Had the theoretical interest imported to Japan from the West occurred at a slightly earlier time, or through a different scientific leadership, the studies in Japan might have been more concerned with ecology and less with social structure than they are. From what Beardsley writes, one supposes that data as to ecological and demographic matters are to be found in the many writings of the Japanese students of rural life.

Ecological system and social structure constitute a closely related pair of conceptions for the analysis of a small community. They represent that view of the village which sees it as people in relation to their land and to another. The mind may turn in other directions. One may think of a small community as a kind of human being, a "modal personality," and as a characteristic biography, a typical life-experience, in the course of which such a typical personality is made and lives and dies. Such a view of primitive or, indeed, of national communities appear in recent studies, made in America,

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3Iwao Ishino and John W. Bennett, *The Japanese Labor Boss System: A Description and a Preliminary Sociological Analysis*. Ohio State University Research Foundation and Department of Sociology, Report No. 3, (Columbus, Ohio, April, 1953) second edition; also other publications of this series.

of "personality and culture" or of "national character." Beardsley writes of a "crying need" for data relevant to such a conception for Japan, and Fried remarks on the absence of "psychologically oriented" studies in China (Hsu's book being in part an exception). In so far as China has been conceived as a kind of person, the beginning has been made, not in China, but in the study of Chinese in America.  

The humanistic student of China or of Japan does not ordinarily conceive of those civilizations as ecological system, social structure or modal personality. The materials of the Orientalist being for the most part the written or artistic products of the more creative Chinese and Japanese minds, the civilization is conceived as values and as ideas or forms of thought. The anthropologist or field-sociologist, engaged in developing a theoretical analysis for the small community he studies, is apt to begin with "society"; the Orientalist, historian or philosopher, with "culture." But the two do not and probably cannot stay apart. The small community may be conceived as a system of values, as ways of conceiving existence and norm, as a total outlook on life. Values and world-view of the Chinese villager appear, although not expressed as a considered system, in some of the descriptions of Oriental village life; Beardsley, toward the end of his paper that follows, refers to the "psychological and social orientations" (i.e., values and forms of thought) that may be learned about from reading some of the studies made by Japanese students of Japanese communities. In the further development of community studies in Japan (and, one day, in China!) we may expect serious study of the community as a system of values or a view of the world.

The connection that community studies will make with the studies of the "Great Traditions" of the Orient is indicated, also, in the growing interest


of anthropologists and sociologists in ways to think about and to analyze the relations between the village community and the national state of which that village is but one small part. In the Westerners’ studies of Japanese communities, where the central purpose was to understand the Japanese people and nation as a whole, to enable military men and civil administrators to deal effectively with that people and nation, this problem appeared at once in the question of the “representativeness” of the community chosen: Why choose this village to study? What, of all that is Japan, does this village tell us? “The problem of defining Japanese community types,” writes Beardsley, “... is a long-range project which will require much close study and hard thought from many points of view.” And, in the last sentence of his paper, he says: “The study of a modern nation's many social and cultural levels... calls for substantial borrowing and reciprocal help from social sciences and humanities, in order to make the necessary chain of connections from village to city, from custom to constitution, and from folk to national citizenship....”

Here again methods developed in one part of the world may prove helpful in another. Julian Steward has suggested some conceptions that will be useful in establishing this chain of connections, and with his associates has tried out these conceptions in a forthcoming book on Puerto Rico. Other ways of relating the village community to the town, city and national state have been proposed and applied: for Latin-America and certain other parts of the world by Betty Starr;¹⁰ for Swedish rural communities by Börje Hanssen;¹¹ especially for North American regions by Howard Odum.¹² When these words appear in print there will have recently occurred a discussion by anthropologists and sociologists of concepts and methods as they change and develop in moving from the study of isolated primitive communities to the study of peasants, and of urbanized and more rapidly changing communities.¹³

We are moving toward the development of a wider and better articulated universe of discourse for the comparative study of cultures and civilizations. For one thing, the methods and results of the study of communities in one cultural region are compared with one another. Intensive and exacting comparisons at this level, for studies of native African communities in terms of social structure, are carried on by the British anthropologists; and Fortes, Firth and Evans-Pritchard begin to try to extend the effectiveness of this

organizing concept in small communities lying within civilizations in Europe or in Latin-America. Community studies of India, recently become numerous, have been briefly reported in separate publications too numerous to cite here; they were examined in a meeting of some of those who have recently made such studies.\textsuperscript{14} Now, in the papers that follow this Introduction, a review is made of such studies already made in China and in Japan. We see that the number of published studies in those two countries is yet very small: for China, Fried recognizes eight; for Japan today, in spite of the great deal of work now current or in preparation for the press, there is still only a single published study in English: Embree's \textit{Suye Mura}. The time is not yet come—though soon it may—for the studies of Japanese rural communities to make the sort of abstract characterization of the typical Japanese community and that extended discussion of particular elements of the local culture which have been accomplished for Middle America,\textsuperscript{15} where many more community studies have been made.

The universe of scientific and scholarly discourse widens also to unite students from different disciplines and to bring together the more "scientific" and the more "humanistic" interests and points of view. The sociologist and the anthropologist discussed, last spring at Purdue University, and elsewhere, their common interests in studying communities; "teams" composed of representatives of several disciplines work together in the University of Michigan study at Niiike, Japan. The partnership of psychologist and anthropologist in community studies is now familiar. The more difficult development of that "reciprocal help from social sciences and humanities" for which Beardsley calls, gets some stimulation at the University of Chicago, with the aid of a grant from the Ford Foundation. There the effort is to work "through critical analysis and testing of the methodology of comparative cultural studies, through the exploration by groups of specialists of new methods for making the systems of thought and value of the major civilizations more nearly intelligible to one another, and through the encouragement of original research whose methods are more likely to have a wide cross-cultural applicability..."\textsuperscript{16}

These remarks have borne on questions of method and viewpoint in the understanding of cultures and civilizations through the study of their small communities. There is another interest in the two papers that follow. They also raise questions resulting from a comparison of the course of development of studies of rural life in Japan and in China. They open a possible enquiry into what might become a page in a history of the recent influence of the

\textsuperscript{14}In a seminar at the University of Chicago in the Spring of 1954.

\textsuperscript{15}Sol Tax and others, \textit{Heritage of Conquest}, (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952).

West upon the Orient. The papers, to this writer at least, do not answer the questions, but those they suggest are interesting. Fried regards the "pre-scientific" studies of Chinese life with little favor; Beardsley finds the corresponding early books about Japan "perceptive" and "valuable for the quality of real life they breathe into the picture of Japan." Is this a difference between the judgments of Fried and Beardsley, or is it, for some reason, true that perceptive and valuable accounts, like those of Hearn and the others, were not made by Westerners in China?

The striking difference between Japan and China in regard to the history of rural studies is the great development in Japan by Japanese, before the World Wars, of voluminous, detailed and "untheoretical" studies of folklife, without any corresponding development in China. In this respect Japan did much as, say, Sweden and Norway did: studied rural communities to collect the disappearing folklife, or with reference to some particular social or economic problem, and did not adopt the full community study until after World War II. (I am not aware of any true community study in Sweden until that made, in direct imitation of Middletown and published in 1943.)\(^7\) What were the Chinese writing, about their rural communities, before Kulp came to China and before Radcliffe-Brown and others stimulated them to adopt Western social science? Is this difference between China and Japan in the history of rural studies due to the relatively early acceptance of Western technology and science in Japan, or are there other explanations? One aspect of the difference on which I now comment is the different timing and circumstances of Western-Oriental partnership in the making of rural studies. The Japanese and the Westerners went their separate ways before and of course during the last war, while the Chinese and the Westerners begin rural studies almost hand in hand, first with the social survey and then with the community study. Politics and war then brought about another difference: the Chinese village studies Fried reviews are done, and what goes on now, if anything, in China of that kind is not known or reported. But the Japanese-Western partnership, though a late event, was so forced by war, administration and post-war connections between Japan and America, as to bring about international teams of research workers, and to reverse the policy of the Japanese folklore institute so as to produce nine volumes of community studies (Beardsley, footnote 12). Japanese community studies are a lively field of international cooperation; Chinese studies are in indefinite suspense. Yet Fei and the others, through their books, are still members of the ever widening community of students of communities; we shall continue to include them; the mind and the work of the worker, once recorded, are not severed from one another in lands where minds are free.

\(^7\)Martin S. Allwood and Inga-Britt Ranemark, Medelby, (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers forlag, 1943).