Foreword

The Problem of Japanese Identity

The questions of who the Japanese are and where they came from have become hot subjects of debate in the 1990s. For example, in September 1993 the Australian National University in Canberra sponsored an international conference called "Stirrups, Sails and Plows." Scholars from Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Indonesia, South Korea, the United States and Japan attended. The Japanese delegation had a good number of members, around forty, from a variety of perspectives—Marxists, leftists and conservatives—all of whom took part in a lively debate on Japanese identity. I can neither speak nor understand English so I do not know exactly what kind of argument was carried on at the conference. But the debate crossed a broad spectrum of topics and fields, from reports in anthropology and archaeology to a report on the Japanese army and "comfort women." The debate about the Japanese army and rape was particularly heated.

The conference organizers gave me the topic of "The Emperor, Rice and Villagers." It seemed that the scholars in attendence from the West were interested in finding out what was the unique substance of the Japanese that made us so different from themselves. The Indonesians and the Koreans, on the other hand, were severely critical of those characteristics of the Japanese people that could support such cruel acts of the Japanese army as mass rape. As a result, the conference stimulated me to think about a number of things, my incomplete understanding of the proceedings notwithstanding. Two years later, the famous French historical journal Annale published its first special issue on Japanese history. No matter how late it comes, this special issue is a sign of the high interest in Japan

that can be found abroad. With such growing interest abroad, the time has come when we Japanese must give serious thought to who the we are. We are undoubtedly being asked this in a state of unprecedented tension. Unfortunately, I have recently come to feel strongly that most Japanese do not accurately understand their own history and society.

Of course, the way Japanese approach their own society and history has undergone some changes. Signs of those changes were clear in the Australian conference. But in general, the dominant belief among Japanese is that Japan is an island nation, isolated from its surroundings and existing as a closed society. One supposed result of that isolation is that Japan has received little influence from others and has developed a unique culture. On the flip side of that coin is the belief that this culture is incomprehensible to foreigners. Both arguments are made to support the belief that Japan is a unique society. The next common assumption is that this culture has been supported by agricultural production that is centered on rice paddies. Building on this, the common notion holds that from the time Yayoi culture entered the Japanese islands (about 300 B.C.) until the Edo period (1600-1867), Japanese society was essentially an agricultural society. Japan only became industrial after the Meiji period, and truly so only from period of High Economic Growth in the 1960s.

The dominant view has been that simply by living in this island nation, the Japanese—with their homogeneous and uniform language, with rice as the basis of their diet in a society based upon wet paddy agriculture—have developed a unique culture in these islands. This view has been dominant not only among ordinary Japanese, but also among the Japanese elite; since the Meiji period, this view of Japanese society has been the basis of political and economic policy. Over time, the human sciences of History, Economics and Political Science have failed to break out

of the framework of this conventional wisdom.

But is this view of Japanese society really correct? I have had doubts about this for some time and have made a number of statements about this. In this book I would like to take up a number of problems and use them to reconsider the shape and history of Japanese society.

The Great Transformation

In my ten years of teaching at a junior college I have encountered many surprises. During the roughly forty years that separate my students from myself, the basic patterns of our everyday lives have completely changed. For example, for the past several years I have been using Miyamoto Tsuneichi's The Forgotten Japanese in my seminar.[1] Reading Miyamoto's book with my students has alerted me to the ways that the students and I approach even the most basic issues from very different perspectives. This is due, I believe, to fundamental changes in the way we live our lives, rather than to superficial differences of generational experience.

Take, as a concrete example, the word "nawashiro" (rice-seedling). I thought that all my students would naturally know the word. But , in fact, no one did. Nor did anyone understood the word "gotoku" (five virtues). None of them had ever seen a horse or cow used for work. They at least knew that cows, such as Holsteins, as give milk, but none of them had ever seen a horse used for anything but riding, such as at a race track.

The word "kattai" or "katai" (leper) also appears occasionally in Miyamoto's book, as does the word "repura" (leper) but none of my students had ever heard of

[1] Miyamoto Tsuneichi, Wasurerareta Nihonjin, Iwanami shoten, 1984.

this disease. Even when I tried using the more common term for the disease, "raibyo" (leprosy) none of them could quite seem to grasp its meaning. Of course, they knew a variety of things about AIDS, but they knew nothing of either the word "leprosy" or the disease itself. They did not even know that people still suffer from this disease, or of the discrimination that accompanies it here in Japan, let alone in the rest of the world.

Confronting these differences has shown me that the relations between Japanese society and its environment are currently undergoing a number of drastic transformations on a variety of levels. The quality of the technology available to much of humanity at present has certainly progressed enormously. The very fact that humanity has extracted from nature the power to exterminate itself possesses tremendous significance. While technological advances raise a number of issues for world history, in the specific context of the history of Japanese society, the current changes have had a major impact. What was considered common knowledge from the Edo Period through Meiji, Taishô and into the early years after World War II is now almost incomprehensible.

For example, my students no longer know anything of the stench of a toilet. When I was a child, a trip to the bathroom was a frightening experience. But living in today's houses, where there are no longer any dark places, my students have no concept of the fear of the dark that gripped my generation. Fear has now taken other forms, such as AIDS. Even such small changes have far-reaching implications.

Until now, the flow of Japanese history has usually been analyzed by dividing time into a general framework of primitive, archaic, medieval, early modern and modern periods. However, this periodization cannot fully account for the fundamental ways in which the relationship between people and nature has transformed over time. And I believe that we cannot truly comprehend History

unless we take such changes into account.

It has been my conviction that we must come up with alternatives to the usual periodization. In my own work, I have focused on ethnic or civilizational dimensions rather than "social formations" in order to arrive at working periodizations.[2] Whether or not my formulations stand the test of time, the orthodox periodization of Japanese history must be reevaluated in terms of the immense changes that have taken place in the relationship between human society and nature.

How far back can we trace the society in which the basic experiences of my generation are rooted, a society which is in the process of disappearing and being forgotten? Scholars generally agree that its origins go back roughly to the Muromachi Period (1338-1573). That is, the fourteenth century served as a turning point, with the immense transformations that took place in the midst of the chaos of the Northern and Southern Courts resulting in huge differences between the 13th and the 15th centuries. The ways of life practiced since the fifteenth century have shaped my generation's common sense, thus constituting a coherent unit of time. However, when it comes to matters before the thirteenth century, we are dealing with something outside our common sense, a world of a radically different nature.

The current period of transition can, in some ways, be seen as akin to the great changes that occurred during the chaos of the fourteenthth century. Reexamining the meaning of that transformation in light of this present period of

[2]This distinction is probably just as difficult for the lay reader in Japan as it is for the lay reader in the English-speaking world. In part, it is an oblique reference to a long-running debate Amino carried on with another medieval historian, Araki Moriaki. Araki defined the history of social formations as "the necessary, legal development" of a society. As practiced by Araki, this was a macro-level form of historiography that attempted to discern the broad movement of history through a pre-defined set of stages. Amino's reference to "ethnic and civilizational dimensions" is, first of all, a turn to historical specificities over broader generalizations. It is also a gesture toward a history that incorporates insights from the fields of ethnography and anthropology.

transition is, I believe, a significant undertaking, both in terms of the future of humanity and in terms of problems specific to Japanese culture and society. My contribution to this project will be to offer a discussion of the concrete forms in which the changes of the fourteenth century appeared.

Archaeological Evidence of the Establishment of Villages and Towns

To give a concrete illustration of this transition, I would like to make a few prefatory comments about villages and towns, the sites where Japanese live their everyday lives. The great Japanese ethnographer Yanagita Kunio estimated that approximately three-quarters of all Japanese villages have their origins in the Muromachi Period (1338-1573).[3] Further research needs to be done before we can be confident of this figure. But if we examine the results of recent archaeological surveys, it does appear that towns and settlements formed after the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are significantly different from those that had existed up until that time.

According to a recent study by Hirose Kazuo, archaeologists have not yet been able to locate any sites dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that bear a resemblance to the type of village that is most familiar to us today. The kind of settlement that we think of as a village today might more specifically be called a "concentrated village" (*shûson*). It is characterized by the dense concentration of many houses into a compact settlement. It is questionable whether we should even call the settlements of the thirteenth century "villages." Rather, they took the shape of what might be better designated "dispersed settlements" (*sanson*). In fact, the documentary

[3]Yanagita Kunio (1875-1961), is commonly known as the father of modern Japanese folk studies, or native ethnology.

evidence supports Hirose's archaeological data. The word "mura" (meaning "village" today) appears in documents from long ago. But from the ancient through the early medieval eras, the word *mura* was used to describe newly opened rice paddies and fields, or fields not yet officially registered with the government. This is considerably different from the meaning of the word in the Edo period. When we investigate the terminology and form of settlements (*shûraku*) in historical documents, we find "settlements" where there may have been two or three houses in a small valley, or settlements where housing compounds were widely scattered. The type of settlement that was a direct precedent to the Edo period "sôson" (the encompassing village) emerged only around the end of the fourteenth century.

The excavations at Shimofurudate in Tochigi Prefecture provide us with evidence for a similar reconsideration of the history of "towns" (*machi*). The area under excavation was apparently a grassy commons during the Edo period. When the commons were excavated, archaeologists found a fairly wide road passing through the middle of the site, with a kind of settlement, surrounded by deep ditches, on both sides of the road. That ruins of this kind were found beneath a commons is itself thought-provoking.

It was immediately apparent that the site was not one of a warrior's home, lacking as it does the earthenworks so often associated with a warrior compound. Archaeologists did not recover a large number of artifacts at the site, but what they did find was unusual, for much of it came from quite distant locales. They found green celadon and white porcelain, such as one usually finds in Kamakura, and they found stone bowls originally made near Sonoki District in Nagasaki that must have been transported all the way to the north Kantô region. The site also turned up pottery from Seto and Tokoname

and round wooden boxes (*magemono*). In addition, the site contains innumerable small square pits lined up in rows which appear to be divided by the main road. In the southwest section of the dig there is a shallow moat surrounding the remains of a small dugout structure—what may have been a Buddhist worship hall. The area nearby is clearly a graveyard. Archaeologists have been able to determine that the site dates from the middle of the Kamakura period because they recovered some wooden tablets that had the date Kôan 8 (1285) written on them. The artifacts uncovered here generally accord with that date.

What kind of remains might these be? There are many archaeologists who argue strongly that the entire site was a graveyard. I feel, however, that this site may be seen as a kind of urban space. I cannot say definitively whether this was a post town or a marketplace. Whatever the case, however, I believe these ruins have an urban character.[4] However, by the early modern period the site disappeared from view, having been abandonded for some reason or another, and the area became a village commons. The abandonment of this site suggests that marketplaces (or post towns) of the early medieval period operated in extremely unstable conditions.

Let us turn to one other, very similar, set of remains, this time in Kasugai city, Aichi Prefecture, near the famous medieval shôen estate of Shinoki. Here, in a place called "the lower market" (*shimoichiba*), archaeologists are excavating remains of an elusive character. Apparently once situated on a riverbank, the site contains a number of foundation stones placed in a circle two meters in diameter, with traces that suggest a fire was burned here. Archaeologists have confirmed that several dugout structures

[4]See the translator's introduction for a discussion of what Amino means by "urban character."

stood to one side of this circle, and from these dugouts they have uncovered the stone bowls from the Sonoki District—bowls which still have not been found at any other site in this region. Archaeologists have also turned up Chinese-made celadons. Thus, this site has produced the kinds of artifacts one never finds in a normal farming village. What is particularly striking is that even though the site is very close to Seto, there are no Seto pottery shards to be found. Nor is there any pottery from nearby Mino. Instead, there are a number of pottery shards from fairly distant places, such as Chita and Tokoname.[5] Although we cannot be absolutely certain, it seems likely that this was also some kind of urban site, perhaps a marketplace. However, this too had completely vanished from sight and memory by the Edo period.

The disappearance of these urban sites, suggests that both "villages" and "towns" of the thirteenth century differed considerably from such settlements after the fifteenth century. In Japan, the harbors and inlets that became ports figured prominently in the establishiment of towns. But there were also many cases where a town developed around a marketplace that was set up on a riverbank, or on an island in the middle of a river, populated by the merchants, craftsmen and performers who gathered there. Since itinerant merchants and craftsmen often based themselves in harbors and anchorages, these sites naturally developed into towns. This trend became most marked from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Settlement patterns are less clear in the case of eastern Japan, since there are fewer surviving documents. But in most of the archipelago it appears that stable settlements that could clearly be called "villages" and "towns" only emerged from the fifteenth century. This coincides with the fairly intuitive

[5]Chita and Tokoname are both also in Aichi Prefecture, but well to the south of Kasugai. They are on the Chita peninsula across the Ise bay from Ise.

assessment by Yanagita Kunio that I mentioned above. These "towns" and "villages" continued to emerge and grow throughout the Edo period, consistently maintaining a self-governing function, and eventually constituting the basic units of Edo period society. Katsumata Shizuo has labeled this development the "town and village system." But for our purposes here, the main point is that this system emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Furthermore, we should note that it was these settlements that formed the prototype of today's hamlets and cities.

So we might next ask ourselves, why was it in *this* period that villages and towns began to appear? The standard explanations have focused on a growing social division of labor and a rise in productive capacity. This is no doubt true, but there are a number of issues related to the appearance of towns and villages that cannot be reduced to a matter of productivity. I believe we should see the emergence of towns and villages as the cumulative effect of major transformations on a variety of levels. The significance of each of these changes needs to be individually investigated. Only when we have done that will we be able to understand the true significance of the growth in productivity.

In the chapters that follow, we will explore these transformations in some of their more specific dimensions: namely, religion, commerce, the status of marginal groups, women and writing. I will also reflect on the relationship of these transformations to the form of the State in Japanese history. With my interest in the cumulative effects, however, the discussion of specific issues will frequently focus on their overlap with other transformations.