Book Reviews

Village Japan. Richard K. Beardsley, John W. Hall, and Robert E. Ward. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1959. 498 pp. Illus. $8.75.

Village Japan is the principal report of an extraordinary research project carried out by the University of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies. A rural settlement of only 24 households was observed over a span of 7 years by members of an interdisciplinary research team composed of both Americans and Japanese representing anthropology, history, economics, political science, and geography, to name only the major fields. In studies basically concerned with cultural anthropology, seldom has so much been devoted for so long to so few.

This is not the place for the query "Is the return worth the investment?" In any event, the book is without question the best report on a Japanese village in English or, in my opinion, any other language. It combines great richness of detail with mature reflection and excellent organization. It excels other Western attempts most notably, perhaps, in the sense of history (both recent and traditional) it gives, in its comprehensive treatment of Japan's major rural economy, and in its admirable description and analysis of local government and politics. These merits undoubtedly derive from the fact that interdisciplinary members enlarged the anthropological team. Though the total of rural studies in Japanese, of course, furnishes better documentation, I know of no single, native study that covers as much of the classic, ethnographic catalog in a manner nearly as comprehensive; in addition *Village Japan* lacks the *parti pris*—ideological, disciplinary, or cultural—that so often makes a Japanese work suitable for special, rather than general, use.

One of the study's most welcome contributions is its careful and convincing treatment of recent cultural change. We might assume that the postwar period would have seen a more positive flowering of numerous hitherto only tentative trends born of modernization. Research for this study began late enough (1950) to escape the confusing cross-currents and massive novelties of the immediate postsurrender years, and it lasted late enough (into 1957) to capture whatever set occurred during this era. Here, as in other studies where time and reflection have been given to the viewing, one is impressed by the almost organic continuity of the culture. Erosion, replacement, and addition have come, but they do not appear to have compromised greatly the character of the entity they modify. As the authors put it, the villages "maintain equilibrium, while absorbing fundamental change."

The mechanization of agriculture has increased considerably, but on the whole as a clever, economical complement to traditional tools and techniques. Commercialization has proceeded in depth, but only in a way that proportionately diminishes, but does not undermine, the old base of subsistence. Specialization of occupations, especially in nonrural jobs, has developed to a remarkable degree, but without abruptly divorcing the new workers from their farm families, and only concurrent with a general "rurbanization" that gives the farmer a not unequal role in a developing national, occupational, and cultural system. Communal sharing of labor has virtually disappeared as cash, new tools, and job specialization have provided viable alternatives, but *de facto* primogeniture in inheritance continues as a practical way to handle tiny land holdings. A mass of new administrative and communal organs and procedures, from a parent-teachers association to universal adult suffrage, have come in on the wings of modernity, the Occupation, and government centralization, but they have been incorporated into the traditional system of communalistic decision. The lyric of individualism fills these literate people's ears, but individualism continues to be judged for reality with a traditional, wary consciousness of its implications for cherished collectivistic norms. By contrast, in a matter like that of food habits, only very limited modifications have, in fact, been made. If one has to label this process of change, perhaps its salient characteristics are experimentalism, guided by some form or analogue of rational calculation, with a tenacious aim of fortifying a continuing cultural entity. It is difficult to discover in other sources comparable and systematic data on change in the city, and city change is certainly far more chaotic, in part because invention begins there. One inclines, however, to accept the hypothesis that the basic features which the process of change exhibits in the village are likewise characteristic nationally, and even historically, in modern Japan. The book makes a real contribution toward the solution of this problem.

The authors' treatment of ethnographic areas is almost consistently of high competence. Nonetheless, their treatment of local government and politics is, perhaps, of particular value. Too much opinion about Japan, and unfortunately too many studies both Japanese and Western, have assumed the maximization of personal and class interest in government and for this reason have interpreted even local manifestations as autocratic to an exceptional degree. It is refreshing that the authors feel that to assume the maximization of group interest as a norm and motive allows them to explain, perhaps, more of the relevant Japanese behavior. On this interpretation, one perceives the limitations and responsibilities of leaders, as well as followers, and the dominance of discussion, compromise, and consensus as modes of political operation.

If, to balance the pleasure and profit given by this book, one wants to discover its shortcomings, two points may deserve mention. For one, the title, as well as recurring comments on variation elsewhere in Japan, give the impression that the authors are to a degree generalizing for the rural culture as a whole. Specifically, they both claim and disclaim this intent, and indeed on this point the book deserves their ambivalence. Intuitively, I feel there is enough homogenity to the rural culture to make this a reliable source on most of it. The data reported, however, are almost entirely tied to observation of one settlement, and the comparative remarks tend to be haphazard and, so far as is demonstrated by their specificity and documentation, impressionistic. This seems inappropriate, since there is enough material on rural Japan today to allow empirical generalization for

the country as a whole with respect to a wide range of cultural traits, and some work directed to this end has been and is being done elsewhere. One does not, of course, imply censure of the authors for not adding another prodigious feat to their present one. It is worth emphasizing, however, that this book is not a study of rural Japan as a whole which, to some mild degree, it appears to be; such a study could have been, and still must be, written to complement *Village Japan*.

The final comment is even more simply a lament for what the authors, with their great resources, might have done. The book is fundamentally a thoroughly conventional ethnography, raised to an undoubtedly high level, but still conventional. The consequence that most grieves me is that it leaves one with the curious sense that there were no human individuals in the village. There is excellent generalization of behavior and institutions, but biographies, the delineation of individual motivational situations, or those other vehicles that might have carried to us the sight and sound of the villagers themselves are virtually excluded. A sheaf of good pictures showing normally lively-looking Japanese going about their lives merely compounds the sense of deprivation. More seriously, one gathers that the authors object to culture and personality or national character approaches. It is certainly true, as they assert, that rural social norms severely limit individualism. It may also be true that the villagers in question exhibit, even for rural Japan, a peculiar sense of propriety toward these norms. It may even be true, as is stated in the foreword, that foreigners never become "members of the (small rural) community" in Japan, with the implication that the observers were thus excluded from many intimacies. Nevertheless, unlike many other students of Japan, the authors did not live in the community (a technically debatable procedure), and it is patent that elsewhere many Americans and Japanese have taken one another about as far as possible into their individual lives. It is, after all, the individuals of Niiike who would have enriched the work, didactically as well as empathically. It is scarcely inventive to remind ourselves that much of the efficient logic of culture lies in the interaction of standards and the native individual. Moreover, one can argue that a peculiarly central problem in the study of Japanese culture is the dialectic between social

Kumagai Motoichi. Dolls are arrayed on shelves for Girls' Day. [From *Village Japan*]

norms that are among the world's most rigidly collectivistic and human norms that are among the world's more highly expressive. It is this tension that has overwhelmingly animated a great artistic and literary tradition, yesterday as it continues to do now, at the popular and at the sophisticated level. If the villagers of Niiike do not, in fact, engage strenuously in this dialogue, then one wants proof and discussion of their alienation from the great tradition. This is admittedly gratuitous advice. If Hamlet has been left out of the play which we know is so peculiarly appropriate to him, it is because we are here observing a different dramatization. The public interested in Japan, as well as orientalists and a host of other specialists, will be in deep debt to the authors and their sponsoring Center, for years to come.

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From Galaxies to Man. John Pfeiffer. Random House, New York, 1959. 184 pp. $3.95.

Probably no one has tackled a larger subject since Humboldt started to write his *Cosmos*. Pfeiffer's subject is no less than the history of the entire universe from the beginning into the future. The theme runs through the origins of galaxies, of stars, of the elements, of planetary systems, of life and of man, and on into a final chapter titled "Futures in space." The drama has a cast of billions; it is truly supercolossal.

In so great an undertaking, even a modest success would be praiseworthy. Pfeiffer's success may not be complete, but it is better than modest. He has summarized this vast story in words that anyone can understand; he has conveyed a sense, at times almost breathless, of the excitement of it all; and he has fallen into practically no positive errors. That is indeed a remarkable accomplishment, and one that can be highly recommended.

Such a success has its price, or its qualifications that may be discussed more in commiseration with the author than in criticism of him. For one thing, the logical start is with those awesome words "In the beginning"—and we (as scientists) do not know what was in the beginning, or even whether there was a beginning. Each great segment of the history starts with mystery, with ignorance, with (to be frank) wild guessing. Pfeiffer does not evade this issue or mislead the reader. He stresses, even at times overstresses, the provisional character of hypotheses about origins. He exploits the fascination of beginnings and pays the price that much of the book, therefore, admittedly lacks a solid foundation.

The style of writing also contributes to the success of the book, and also at a certain cost. It is rhetorical (in a good sense), often poetic, sometimes deeply moving. Few books on science are written so well or are more likely to convey humanistic values. The balance and the price may be indicated by two random quotations.

"Particles dart and swerve and bounce off one another, and sometimes stick together. They form shapes and fragments of shapes, Tinker Toy lattices and crosses and branching structures and unclassified patterns resembling the forms in some modern paintings." Something exciting is going on here, but what? In this and many other passages there seems to be more action than information.

"The earliest naked genes may not have been particularly good at making images of themselves. They must have erred frequently. After all, they were new hands at a difficult job. . . ." That is a vivid introduction to what could be a dull topic. Is it, perhaps, just a bit *too* vivid? The stylistic trick of personalization, if overworked, comes close to animism.

Those remarks add up to no more than saying that this is one kind of