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**IS THE *IE* DISAPPEARING IN RURAL JAPAN?  
THE IMPACT OF TOURISM  
ON A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE VILLAGE**

ALTHOUGH the *ie*, or 'household', is widely acknowledged as the basic unit in Japanese society, not many studies have been done with regard to the actual process of its transformation in the face of rapid economic change in the country. Through an analysis of detailed ethnographic materials drawn from one particular village in central Japan the present paper hopes to provide some concrete empirical basis for the discussion of this question, as well as for that of the relation between economic development and social change in general.

Hanasaku is a mountain village located about 800 metres above sea level at the north-eastern end of Gunma prefecture. Before the Second World War, the economy of the village was based mainly on a half-yearly farming of staple food crops such as barley and soybeans, with sericulture as a major supplementary source of cash income. Charcoal burning and timbering were also pursued during the agriculturally slack seasons. As in many other Japanese villages agriculture in Hanasaku has undergone several significant changes since the Second World War, especially the reduction of the total population engaged in the industry.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the post-war decline in the demand for charcoal as a fuel, as well as for nationally produced timber and dry field crops had a serious impact on the economy of mountain villages like Hanasaku.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, many villages under similar circumstances, especially in the north-eastern part of the country, have lost a substantial portion of their population to the urban industrial sector through migration; and by the mid-1960s, the

1. According to Fukutake (1981: 50), the population engaged full time in agriculture has dropped from 18 million in 1950 to about 13.9 million in 1960, and again to 5.3 million in 1980.

2. The proportion of national supply of grain crops decreased from 53 per cent in 1955 to only about one per cent in 1970 (Sugano 1976: 17).

*kasomondai*, the Japanese term for the problems of rural under-population, had already become one of the important issues of rural sociology in Japan.<sup>3</sup>

Events in Hanasaku have followed a somewhat different path from what has happened in other mountain villages, however. During the early 1960s, a ski resort was opened on the village territory, and this resort, together with the subsequently developed shops and country inns (*minshuku*), have provided the people with alternative winter-time occupations. After nearly twenty years these developments seem finally to have curbed the constant outflow of the village population, which had decreased from 1,160 to 881 between 1960 and 1975, since when it has shown a slight increase. The number of households, on the other hand, has increased from 205 to 214 during this period.<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that these statistics closely reflect the ways by which the traditional household organization, the *ie*, adapts itself to the changing economic situation in Hanasaku. To examine this process is the focus of this study.

*Household Succession as Affected by Economic Change: A Comparison between Agricultural and Minshuku Households*

In the past, most households in the village used to function as corporate productive units. Farming of the family estate used to be carried out jointly by household members under the supervision of the household head. The average holding of farmland per household is about three to four acres in this village. The intensive cultivation of this area and the two-yearly croppings of silk worms used to require the labour of the whole household. The pattern was similar for another household enterprise, charcoal burning, which was pursued by most families in Hanasaku until some time after the Second World War. For the construction of the family kiln, for instance, all the members of the household including women and children used to work together, and although the charcoal itself was produced by the male members alone, the women cooperated by making the sacks. The way by which people distributed the trees for charcoal-making also indicates the indivisible character of the household as an economic unit. As in many other parts of Japan the residents of this village used jointly to purchase a part of the state-owned mountain forest each year for charcoal-making. Once trees were purchased in the name of the village, however, their division was always done on the basis of the number of households in the village and never by the number of individuals who were able to pursue the occupation. Depending on the developmental stage of each household, therefore, some may have had no

3. See Kawamoto 1967; Nakayasu 1965; Nōrinshōnōseikyūoku 1967; Kunimoto 1973; Fukutake 1981: 18-22. Although it has been more serious in some remoter areas, the phenomenon of rural-urban exodus has been noted for the country as a whole, and Smith reports (1978: 67) that the ratio of rural to urban population has almost reversed between 1950 and 1975 from 62:38 to 30:70.

4. For a detailed analysis of population changes in Hanasaku, see Kim 1984: ch. 1.

male members to do the job, while others may have had two or three. In such cases, the former usually resold their own share to the latter at a higher price.

The post-war decline of the charcoal industry has already been mentioned. Agriculture has suffered a similar decline. The spread of new technology, including farm machinery, chemical fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides and so forth, has been such that the agricultural population has been greatly reduced. Nowadays, most households in Hanasaku have only one or two members working on the land, and most of these are women. For certain tasks such as rice-transplanting or harvesting, the husbands, most of whom now work in one of the wage-earning occupations, sometimes cooperate with their wives, but younger members of the household rarely participate in farm work. These changes in the pattern of the household economy have had some consequences for succession practices.

As has been amply documented by ethnographers on Japan, the *ie* is based on a one-child inheritance system, and the commonest form of household composition in Hanasaku is what one may term a 'stem family', namely a family containing two or more married couples in successive generations with one married couple in each generation. Succession to the household mainly consists of succession to the office of the household head, who assumes the role of manager of the household property and its enterprise, and has responsibility for the ancestor ritual as well as for the aged parents. Although it became necessary in Meiji law to register the property as legally belonging to the household head as an individual (Isono 1964: 40-1; Dore 1958: 101), in practice the property is still conceived of as belonging to the household as a whole, and the household succession also involves the transmission of a large part of its property as well.

Although there are slight regional variations, in general two sets of preferences are observed in the selection of the successor within the household: male rather than female, and older rather than younger. In short, the eldest son is the preferred choice.<sup>5</sup> As Bachnik has recently pointed out (1983: 164), however, in the selection of the successor, the emphasis is always placed on the continuity of the household as a corporate group rather than the continuity of any particular individual within the group. This raises difficulties for the labelling of succession practices in Japanese households by means of conventional anthropological terminology, such as 'patrilineal', 'matrilineal' or 'bilateral', all of which refer to individual continuity rather than corporate continuity. The generally preferred strategy based on male/female and older/younger hierarchies can always be reversed for the greater benefit of the household group. If the eldest son is physically or mentally incompetent, or if he is considered incompatible with the group for various reasons, a younger son may be chosen as the successor, even

5. It is generally agreed that this practice of male primogeniture became widely prevalent only after the promulgation of the Meiji Civil Code in which the rule of inheritance was supposedly modelled after the dominant custom among samurai families. Until the effects of that civil code became pervasive, however, other types of succession were also practised in certain parts of Japan, such as succession by the youngest child or by the first-born regardless of its gender (cf. Takeda 1951; Izumi and Nagashima 1963; Naito 1970; Suecari 1972; Maeda 1976).

when the eldest son wants to remain in the household. Similarly, a daughter or, in theory, a completely unrelated person may also be chosen as the successor. In fact, only about half the present heads of households in Hanasaku are the eldest sons of the previous heads; the rest are either branch households or households succeeded by a junior son, a daughter or an adopted child.<sup>6</sup>

The succession practices in Japanese households thus allow a good deal of scope for flexibility to accommodate a changing situation. Since, theoretically, any of the children may succeed to the household, migration of the young to cities may take place with relatively less disruptive effects on the continuity of their households in the village (cf. also Tauber 1951; Vogel 1967). On the other hand, it may also be stated that the recent increase in economic opportunities other than agriculture has reduced the number of potential successors. In the past, when land was the major means of production, succession to the existing household also meant access to a livelihood. In that situation, therefore, one may assume that the parents were in a better position in choosing a successor than nowadays, when few young people are interested in farming as an occupation. Moreover, even when a child is secured as the successor to the household, the second problem is to recruit his or her spouse to reproduce the household. As already indicated, the recent pattern requires women to work on the land while their husbands may be employed elsewhere. Many of the farm households are therefore having considerable difficulties in finding a daughter-in-law for their successors. One of the consequences is that successors to farm households tend to marry late. To find a man willing to be adopted into the household as husband of the succeeding daughter is similarly difficult. As a married-in member the status of the adopted husband within the household is relatively low. Even in the past, therefore, it was not considered a desirable course for a man. Hence the proverb, 'If you have three measures of rice bran, don't go as an adopted husband' (*Kome nuka sango areba, yōshi ni wa ikunazo*). When other economic opportunities were limited, however, many of the second or third sons had to marry into another household for their livelihood. Moreover, although some young people in Hanasaku work as wage labourers in the ski grounds, in the construction fields or in one of the few local shops and factories, none of these jobs has been stable or prestigious enough to attract young people. As a result, young people who do not want to work on the farm and are not interested in the other occupations available tend to leave the village. Many villages in similar circumstances have either become commuter villages, if they are close to urban centres, or in remoter areas have become underpopulated.

After the advent of tourism in Hanasaku one of the ways adopted by the people in the village to keep the young at home and thus to ensure the continuity of the household has been to start a *minshuku*. *Minshuku* is a blanket term for all the kinds of inn and small hotel developed in the countryside for the lodging and

entertainment of tourists. The word apparently came into common usage in the early 1960s with the growth of what is known as *rejābūmu*, the Japanese transcription of 'leisure boom'. The literal meaning of *minshuku*, 'staying with the people', seems to have attracted many city-dwellers, especially young people, with its rather romantic idea of learning about country life and mixing with the local people. As the volume of tourism within the country rapidly increased with the general improvement of the country's economic conditions in the early 1960s,<sup>7</sup> many *minshuku* villages appeared in the Japanese countryside. Usually, *minshuku* villages appear in an area where there are already some natural tourist attractions such as well-known mountains, lakes or hot-springs, and so forth. Some more recent ones, however, seem to start *minshuku* first as a means of earning supplementary cash income, and to develop tourist attractions later. The bulletin of the national association for country-inn operators includes some rather bizarre but ingenious inventions such as hot milk baths, perfume baths or herb saunas, and so on. Others concentrate more on local specialities such as special mushroom cooking, mountain vegetable dishes or seafood dishes at the seaside, etc. Another way of attracting the attention of city people is to build sports facilities. Spiritual as well as physical discipline is often strongly emphasised in Japan, and sports seem to provide an effective means toward this end. During the summer, therefore, many young people are encouraged to stay together and to have training for one kind of sport or another. Such an activity is commonly known as *gasshuku*, literally meaning 'staying together', and *gasshuku* teams of young people in large numbers have been one of the major attractions for *minshuku* villages.

*Minshuku* in Hanasaku began to appear immediately after the opening of the Olympia ski resort, so called to signify that it was opened in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics. As the tourists gradually outnumbered the lodging capacity of the Olympia hotel attached to the resort, the owning company and the local branch of the association for commerce and industry encouraged the local people to open *minshuku*, and there are now about sixty *minshuku* altogether in the village. As the business developed the inn operators began to build many sports facilities to attract tourists even during the non-skiing seasons, especially during the summer when the weather remains comparatively cool in this area. There are now in the village two gymnasias, one owned by the Olympia company and the other by the village, sports grounds equipped with electric lights for night games, and numerous tennis courts. Many *minshuku* in the village now own individual tennis courts for their own guests. In addition to the Olympia, two more ski resorts have been opened near the village on the state-owned mountain slopes, and many people from Hanasaku also work there during the winter.

Unlike farm households *minshuku* households have largely maintained the character of the traditional household as an economic unit, due to the nature of their business. Most *minshuku* households in Hanasaku carry on farming as a supplementary occupation to varying degrees. Within the household, therefore,

6. According to Nakane (1980: 16), the authority of the household head was greater in wealthier families. Reports also indicate that a choice other than the eldest son was much more frequent for big merchant and warrior households during the Tokugawa period (Nakano 1964; Takeuchi 1954; R. Moore 1970).

7. For a statistical survey of the national and international tourism of the Japanese, see Tamao 1980.

there is a certain degree of division of labour in carrying out the two 'combined-household' enterprises. In a three-generation household, for instance, the older couple tends to concentrate on farming while the younger couple is mainly in charge of the inn business. The division of labour, however, is not always clear-cut, since there are always tasks to which any member of the household can contribute when required. Such tasks as cleaning up the guest rooms, preparing the beds, washing up in the kitchen, setting the table, cooking, receiving or fetching guests in a car can be done by any of the members. The inn business, therefore, provides far more occasions for the cooperation of household members than does farming. Even children of school age who almost never participate in farm work usually contribute labour to *minshuku* work. Unlike kin employed from outside the household, the members of the household are not paid separate wages, since, as the people put it, they are carrying out 'the work of the house' (*uchi no shigoto*), which is for the household as a whole and not for any particular member of the group.

Since the general decline of agriculture after the Second World War a new pattern of economic diversification has emerged in Hanasaku, and there are now few households in the village which rely solely on farming for a livelihood. In the case of the households which combine farming and other relatively unstable wage-earning jobs, however, the continuity is clearly threatened. On the other hand, by providing their successors not only with land and a house but also with an occupation more attractive than farming, the *minshuku* households are in a much better position to secure a successor than the farm households. Similarly, it can be stated that the ideology of household continuity has played a significant role in determining the pattern of the changing village economy, especially that of the emergence of numerous small-scale country inns as household enterprises.

#### *Changes in the Internal Status Structure of the Household*

A certain change in the status structure of the traditional household is, however, noticeable. In the past, when all the members of the household were engaged in the same economic activities, whether farming, silk-worm raising or charcoal-burning, skills and knowledge largely obtained through experience had always been transmitted from parents to children, from the previous head of the household to the successor. Nowadays, most of the young people have had city experience of varying periods and so accumulated a different kind of knowledge from that of their parents, most of whom have never left the village. Some of the inheriting children of *minshuku* households have had training as professional chefs, while others may have had brief experience working in a hotel in the city. Even without such specific qualifications, the simple fact of youth and urban experience makes the young better suited to the newly developed tourist industry. Most young people have high-school education nowadays and they usually speak standard Japanese. Hanasaku has a fairly strong dialect whose

vocabulary differs substantially from standard Japanese. People of the village, therefore, find it difficult to deal with tourists from Tokyo and surrounding urban areas. Most tourists are young, and the young hotel workers understand them better.

Within the household, therefore, there has been a diffusion of authority. In many of the *minshuku* in Hanasaku the actual head of the household is not always the boss or *oyakata* of the work of the *minshuku*. Even when the parents are still mainly in charge of the business with regard to its major financial transactions, the actual dealings with the guests are often delegated to the younger members of the household. In general, it seems that the opinions of the young are much more respected than before in the running of the household enterprise.

Changes in status structure are even more striking in farming households in the village. Since most men are not fully engaged in farming they are no longer the chief decision-makers within the household either. In many farm households it is the wives, the actual farmers, who decide which crops to cultivate, what area is to be given to each crop, and so forth. It is also these wives who most frequently represent the households in hamlet meetings concerning agricultural matters. Moreover, it is mostly the women who order and purchase fertilizers, seeds, and silk-worm eggs, as well as household goods through the agricultural cooperative. During the harvest all the farm households in each hamlet take turns in recording each day's delivery of crops, another task mostly carried out by women.

Most of all, however, it is knowledge of the new agricultural machinery that enhances women's status within the household in general. To drive the powered cultivator, for instance, one needs a licence, which must be obtained by taking a written and practical examination in a nearby town and which has to be renewed every two years. Most farm household women in the village now have this licence. In addition, most of them are able to manipulate the powered huller, the thresher or the rice mill. Such knowledge is something unknown to the previous generation. In the traditional Japanese household the male head is often referred to as the 'principal pillar' or *daikoku bashira* of the house. Commenting on the increased responsibilities of women and their recent importance in the household, therefore, old people often remark that the *yome*, the daughter-in-law of the house, is nowadays as much a *daikoku bashira* as the household head.

The diversification of farm household economy has also affected the traditional authority of the household head over his successor. In the past the household head was the manager of the household property, the supervisor of the household work-group, and the keeper of the family purse. When land was the only meaningful source of livelihood the authority of the household head was often economically reinforced, especially in his relationship with the potential successor, since the former could always resort to the threat of disinheritance whenever disagreements occurred between the two. As more people have become involved in wage-earning or salaried occupations, however, the economic basis of this authority has also inevitably been undermined. It is in the light of these changes that starting an inn becomes a significant advantage for the parents in consolidating the household unit. Unlike farm households, where successors now inherit merely the household headship, duties for parents and

ancestors, and community obligations, successors to *minshuku* households also inherit the business. Although the latter sometimes involves a certain amount of debt as well, it nevertheless seems to be more appealing to the young, both male and female.

*Continuity in Some of the Socio-Religious Functions of the Household*

I have so far argued that the new economic opportunities created by the advent of tourism in Hanasaku have been incorporated into village society in a way that helps perpetuate household organization in its traditional form, and that the ideology concerning the continuity of the household unit has played a significant role in shaping the newly developed tourist industry in the village. Certain aspects of the people's religious life also support this argument.

The traditional importance of the household in village life is reflected in the numerous rituals centring around the houses and household members. Each house in Hanasaku, for instance, has a tutelary deity of its own known as *yashiki-inari*. This is a small wooden or stone statue contained in a miniature house, usually found at one corner of the back garden. The deity belongs to the house itself and is believed to protect its contents and inmates. In addition to the *yashiki-inari* of the main building there are a number of minor deities for each of the smaller buildings usually found in a farmhouse compound (barn, godown, warehouse, etc.). Most of the farm households in Hanasaku also have their own gods of the fields and water sources somewhere in the mountains. Although no specific rites are performed in relation to any of these gods, except for the daily offering of rice to the *yashiki-inari*, all are annually recognized at the New Year by the offering of a pine branch decorated with some auspicious objects such as dried cuttlefish, sardines and mandarin oranges. The purpose of these ritual decorations is said to be to purify these places for the coming year, and the offering is often preceded by a general cleaning of the house.

Apart from the purificatory New Year decorations of pine branches, the month of January, the least busy month for agriculture, used to be the month devoted to numerous ritual activities centring around the household group. Many rituals such as the 'first fetching of water' rite or the New Year's ceremonial call around the hamlet by household heads, have now disappeared. Similarly, as a consequence of economic diversification and of the changes in the people's work-cycle, some of the rites which are specifically related to certain agricultural enterprises such as silk-worm raising or rice-transplanting are no longer observed either. What is significant in the present context, however, is the recent increase in the volume of rituals by which people can express the relative social status of their households within the community. These rites include the *yakudoshi* feasts and the ancestor memorial services.

The rite of *yakudoshi* is a rite performed for those who in that year reach the ages which are regarded as especially vulnerable and inauspicious. The custom is

widespread in Japan,<sup>8</sup> but the actual years which are considered unlucky vary from area to area. In Hanasaku, these unlucky years or *yakudoshi* are the 19th and 33rd year for a woman and the 25th and 42nd year for a man. These years are considered 'dangerous' because they are the times when people undergo mental and physical changes. To exorcize or drive out possible attack by an evil spirit, therefore, a purification rite is performed by a joint burning of the New Year decorations. Around January 13th, for instance, people take down their decorations, remove the food items and leave them on their doorsteps. The branches are then collected by those who have advanced to unlucky ages in that year, and on the 14th, the members of their households make a bonfire with these branches. During the display, to which all the other hamlet members are invited, the mandarin oranges are distributed and the dried cuttlefish are grilled on the fire and shared among those present. The explanation given is that the burning of pine branches is to 'purify' (*yaku o harau*), and the sharing of food is to share the 'spiritual danger' (*yaku*) which has fallen on one member of the household.

Later in the evening, after the bonfire, the families of the *yakudoshi* people again hold a big feast at their own houses for relatives and neighbours. The idea of 'sharing the spiritual danger' is still prevalent. The occasion, however, also provides an opportunity for social recognition of the respective standing of each household within the community, especially when those who fall in the unlucky years are men, household heads or the would-be successors of the households. When, for instance, it is a daughter or a daughter-in-law who has reached one of the unlucky ages, those who are invited to the household feast include in most cases only the members of one's immediate neighbourhood group and relatives who live within the same hamlet. For succeeding sons and household heads, on the other hand, their guests include the members of all the associations to which the *yakudoshi* person belongs, those of his workplace, those of his age-group, as well as neighbours, relatives and members of the extended household. Relatives living in other hamlets are also supposed to visit. The larger the number of visitors the better, since all the visitors are believed to share the spiritual danger of the person concerned. Since there are usually a number of *yakudoshi* people every year villagers usually make a round of visits during the course of the night, or else different members of the household are sent to different households according to the sex and age of the *yakudoshi* person concerned.

As already indicated, the *yakudoshi* feasts have greatly increased in scale in recent years. Even in one of the six hamlets in Hanasaku, where the largest number of country inns has grown up, and where the purificatory bonfire ceremony was dropped a few years ago owing to poor attendance—January being the busiest skiing season—the *yakudoshi* feasts prosper more than ever before. Another example of a household ritual which has increased in recent years is the ancestor memorial service. In theory, memorial services for ancestors are supposed to be held on the 1st, 3rd, 7th, 13th, 17th, 23rd, 27th, 33rd and

8. For example, David Lewis (in the present volume) reports that *yakudoshi* observances are common among well-educated professionals and white-collar salaried employees in a particular urban area he studied.

finally the 50th calendar year after the death of a person. In former times, however, these services could be held only by the most well-to-do families in this village, and even then only for a limited number of years. They have become much more ubiquitous nowadays, and these household feasts are sometimes used for a political end. For instance, anyone who is interested in local political office often holds as many household feasts as possible to invite neighbours and relatives. While giving out money to the voters is illegal, these activities are considered acceptable. On the whole, with the general improvement in living standards, these household rituals seem to have provided many with a means by which they can translate their newly gained economic prosperity into social influence, and thus enhance their relative status within the community.

In this connection, one may note a similar tendency in new house buildings and new gravestones. In the past, people apparently erected a small gravestone for each of the dead members of the household. Nowadays they often erect a huge gravestone in the name of the household as a whole. At grave sites, therefore, one often finds nowadays huge gravestones with an engraving of the 'House of such-and-such', with a smaller flat stone standing beside it, on which the names of a number of the recently deceased household members are engraved. By its size and shape most people in the village can tell immediately approximately how much such a stone has cost. Like house buildings, therefore, these stones clearly express the relative prosperity of each household. Another relevant example may be the posthumous Buddhist names presented to the dead members of the household. The rank of posthumous names differs with the kind of Chinese characters used (e.g. *tokuingo*, *ingo*, *kengo*, etc.) as well as depending on the number of characters. The rank of one's posthumous name is supposedly determined by one's deeds and achievements during one's lifetime. In reality, however, it more often reflects the worldly success or failure of one's descendants, and for this reason, posthumous names have provided another opportunity by which people could express their relative status.

#### Conclusion

In their attempt to explain the relationship between economic development and social change, those advocating what is commonly known as 'the modernization approach' assume that one can describe the general features of 'traditional' and 'modern' societies and treat development as the transformation of the one type into the other (cf. W. Moore 1963: 89). The change from a traditional to a modern society is conceptualized as entailing the eventual modification or elimination of 'traditional' pattern variables (see also Hoselitz 1960; Eisenstadt 1966, 1970; Dalton 1971; Bennett 1967). The data analysed in this article seriously challenge this generalized view of the unilineal transformation of societies. As has been indicated, many aspects of post-war economic change in Hanasaku match the elements which are believed to affect social transformation:

the mechanization of cultivation techniques, the introduction of cash crops, greater involvement in wage-earning activities, and increased individual mobility. Not only has the wealth in the village greatly increased, but its economy has also considerably diversified over the past twenty-five years, as more people have become involved in small businesses, shops, construction work and the like, with the resultant increase in cash income and general prosperity in the village. These changes in the economic sphere, however, have not brought about concomitant changes in social organization, and particularly so as regards the household unit.

As we have seen, the development of a tourist industry in Hanasaku has provided those of its residents who are faced with a potential crisis in household continuity with a positive adaptive strategy with which they can manipulate the changing economic situation to their advantage. The household still remains the basic unit of social, political and religious life in Hanasaku, and, as I have discussed elsewhere (Kim 1984), its relative stability accounts for many of the persistent features in the village.

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