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### A SPORTS DAY IN SUBURBAN JAPAN: LEISURE, ARTIFICIAL COMMUNITIES AND THE CREATION OF LOCAL SENTIMENTS

YAMANAKA, a commuter village, and Heidaira, a new housing estate, lie a few kilometres to the east of Kyoto's northern suburbs. The village has a population of about 230 people (62 households), who are organized into extended families of three or four generations. The estate, by contrast, has a local population of 2,500 people (in 600 households) and is made up of mostly young nuclear families and elderly couples. Most of the local work-force—which includes a variety of middle-class occupations such as *sarariiman* (company employees, lit. 'salary-man'), merchants, professionals, teachers and artisans—commute daily to jobs outside the two communities in the nearby cities.

With the construction of a joint school a few years ago, Heidaira and Yamanaka were formally amalgamated into one school or administrative district. This amalgamation, which was the outcome of the initiative and decision of both the two communities and the city and prefectural authorities, has had a number of concrete implications. The most important of these is that there has now come about a new need for the establishment of and co-operation in joint village-estate organizations, such as an alliance of neighbourhood associations, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA), or children's and sports' committees.

In this paper I would like briefly to describe and then analyse an annual event which is organized by the joint Heidaira-Yamanaka sports committee, and which draws to it the greatest number of local residents and representatives of local organizations.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of this, the yearly sports day (*undōkai*) can, I

1. I would like to thank the Trustees of the Otsuki Peace Fellowship, who kindly financed the period of fieldwork on which this work is based.

believe, shed light both on the especially problematic nature of creating a sense of community in modern Japanese communities, and on the relation between such events and the emerging patterns of leisure in present-day Japan.

Over six hundred residents from the estate and the village congregate on the sports day in the school's sports grounds, and participate in a series of events such as public exercises, tugs-of-war, individual runs, relay races, or humorous competitions.<sup>2</sup> These festivities and activities seem to create a special atmosphere among the participants which is suited for indulging in games and contests, for breaking down social barriers, and for people to become familiar with each other. Many people take lunch or drinks together, while others find themselves co-operating in team sports or as fans encouraging their own community representatives. Throughout the day local and city officials give speeches stressing such themes as community unity, good sportsmanship, friendly participation, or the fostering of local ties.

The *undōkai* is organized by over forty volunteers from the school district's sports promotion committee (*taïku shinkō kai*), neighbourhood associations, youth sports teams, women's groups, children's committee, old-folks' clubs, and the PTA. Under the direction of the sports committee, these volunteers take charge of a complex set of preparations and responsibilities that begin weeks before the sports day. These include for example the invitation and reception of city government dignitaries, the mobilization of participants, liaison with community organizations, the management of events, the organization of equipment, the recording of results, the allocation of prizes, and the cleaning of the grounds.

An understanding of the Hiedaira-Yamanaka *undōkai* necessitates, first of all, an attempt to place it within the wider context of the emerging patterns of leisure activities in the country generally. For the efforts at organizing the field-day represent not only the quantitative growth of free time that can be devoted to such affairs. They represent perhaps a subtler but no less important qualitative shift in the emphasis placed on the workplace and its relation to the family and, by extension, to the local residential community.

#### *Leisure and Modernity*

The post-war period has been one marked by the growth of leisure and leisure activities in all of the advanced industrialized societies (Kumar 1978: 284 ff.). Despite the widespread stereotype of Japan as a 'workaholic' nation, these trends are evident in that country as well. Indeed, although the Japanese on average

2. It may be interesting to note that such sports days, which take place throughout the autumn months, can be found all over the country in local communities (Brown 1979: 25; Hendry 1981: 70), as well as in manufacturing and commercial enterprises (Dore 1973: 205; Rohlen 1974: 110-11) and in educational establishments (Dore 1978: 179).

still work more than Americans or Europeans, since the mid-'60s Japan has shown the steepest decline in hours worked (Cole 1979: 230). Within this trend the general pattern has been a move towards the establishment of regular and fixed periods for time off typified by the six-day working week of the salaried employee (Linhart 1975: 200).

For a minority or workers who are employed in the larger firms and institutions many leisure activities have remained in effect an extension of work. Many of these activities are carried out within the officially sponsored framework of the enterprises concerned—hobby clubs, sports teams or trips and outings. Moreover, for this kind of person, much 'unofficial' socializing is also carried out with workmates (see, for example, Norbeck 1977).

Since the 1960s, however, things have begun to change in this respect. As part of the questioning of the national 'growth first' policy and its implications for the structuring and content of work, doubts have begun to arise. Like workers all over the 'post-industrial' world (Kumar 1978: 318; Eisenstadt 1973: 254; Berger *et al.* 1973: 169), the Japanese have begun to challenge the values of hard work and the encroachment of work-related considerations into their time off (Linhart 1975: 199).

Surveys and opinion polls, as well as detailed studies of specific companies, all point to the emergence of a sense that more flexibility and importance be given to free-time activities and that the enjoyment of leisure become one of the prime purposes of life (Clark 1979: 213 ff.; Economic Planning Agency 1972; Fukutake 1982; Passin 1975). What seems to be emerging is '... a picture of a society where the attitudes towards work and leisure are slowly changing from a very one-sided over-emphasis on work to a more balanced outlook on work and leisure, seeing both as necessary' (Linhart 1975: 206).

The rapid expansion of the post-war 'leisure industries' well mirrors these trends, as well as their relation to the rise of the nation's economic prosperity. Today's Japanese have a staggering array of leisure options from which to choose. For example, even a partial list of these options would include some of the following: the media (radio, television, newspapers and journals); travel (both within and outside the country); family outings; the Sunday drive, shopping, picnics or amusement parks; spectator sports such as baseball or *sumo*; traditional clubs and hobbies—calligraphy, singing or painting; or gambling—*pachinko* parlours and boat, bicycle, horse or motorbike races.

At the same time, however, the expansion of such leisure-oriented concerns has been accompanied by a related development on the local community level. Indeed, since the mid-'60s the host of local groups established throughout the country includes not only voluntary welfare organizations or citizens' political movements. Since that period residents of local neighbourhoods have begun to set up a whole range of what are sometimes called 'cultural organizations' (Yamazaki 1984). These, for example, include some of the following: civic choirs, arts and crafts groups, environmental beautification associations, community colleges, doll-making or pottery clubs, reading or private study circles, local history societies, or traditional song, dance and theatre clubs (for one example see Plath 1969: 148 ff.).

Some of these seem to have been established with the aim of 'regenerating' or 'conserving' traditional mores and customs (Brown 1979). Others seem to have been set up in order to enjoy more modern pursuits. Yet others stress the building of a more pleasant and 'live-able' residential environment. Whatever may be the initial impetus for their establishment, their significance seems to lie, as Yamazaki emphasises (1984: 17; but see also Cornell 1981: 29), in their serving 'as nuclei to encourage residents to identify more closely with their community.'

It is, I think, as part of this trend that the holding of the Hiedaira-Yamanaka *undōkai* should be seen. Along these lines the interpretations offered by two scholars who have discussed *undōkai* in rural localities well indicate the special potential of such events. Thus Hendry (1981: 70), for example, stresses that such activities can contribute to the fostering of local identities. Brown (1979: 30), in a complementary report, writes about the way individuals are integrated into their communities by participating in local sports days.

Yet the creation of 'integration', a 'common identity', or a 'sense of sharing' seems to be especially problematical in modern, artificially created territorial units such as the Hiedaira-Yamanaka school or administrative district. In contrast to rural villages, such communities are marked by the fact that they encompass people with a multitude of diverging interests, orientations, and external social ties. In this sense, communal *undōkai* share many of the problematic features of other modern secular rituals. For it is in such public events that an attempt is made to create a sense of commonality among a combination of strangers (Moore and Myerhoff 1977: 6).

To an extent these are problems shared by artificially created territorial units all over the world. What I argue here is that the Hiedaira-Yamanaka sports day represents a Japanese attempt at meeting these problems.

Limitations of space force me to curtail the description of the *undōkai* and its prior preparations. Accordingly what is offered in the next two sections is only a highlighting of the ethnographic elements which are relevant to the discussion.

### Preparations

A significant amount of time and effort is devoted to the complex set of preparations for the sports field-day.<sup>3</sup> Organized primarily by the Hiedaira-Yamanaka sports committee, these preparations begin weeks before the sports day itself.

The first item to be decided upon is the *undōkai*'s programme. In its decisions the sports committee is guided by the desire to draw into participation as many segments of the local population as possible. Thus, for example, special competitions are designed for such groups as the elderly, pre-school children,

3. In the description that follows I use the ethnographic present. The actual sports day witnessed took place in October 1982.

married women, or pupils from the primary, middle and high schools that the local children attend.

Members of this committee also solicit contributions from many local businesses and neighbourhood associations in order to cover the costs of the field-day. Such costs include the printing of the programme, the purchase of equipment (balls, or a starting gun, for example), lunch-boxes (for the invited dignitaries) and prizes (for instance pencils and notebooks, toilet deodorizers or disposable chopsticks).

Next, they enter into contact with a number of local organizations which include the PTA, old-folks' clubs (*rōjinkai*), women's and children's committees, and neighbourhood associations. This is done in order to secure the help of representatives from these voluntary groups in the sub-committees which manage the *undōkai* itself. These sub-committees, which are formed only for that specific day, cover the following responsibilities: starting the heats, recording the results, recruiting participants, first-aid, prizes, equipment, and the handling of guests.

In conjunction with the estate-village alliance of neighbourhood associations, the committee sends to the local and city officials formal invitations to attend the *undōkai*. On the city level it is the mayor and his deputy, the city and prefectural assemblymen, the heads of the Board of Education, and the chairman of the city sports promotion committee who all receive invitations. On the local community level the following people are requested to come: the principals of the local school and kindergartens, the heads of the PTAs, the chairman of the old-folks' club, volunteer welfare workers, the head of the voluntary fire brigade, and the chairmen of the neighbourhood associations and of the women's and children's committees.

Finally, the committee mounts an 'advertising' campaign urging the local residents to participate in the sports day. In Yamanaka, the mobilization of contestants as well as 'fans' or supporters poses no problem. Not only are people 'expected' to participate in such events, but the tight networks of kith and kin that cover the whole village ensure that information about the *undōkai* reaches everyone.

It is in Hiedaira that participation seems problematical. For here, as the existence of a majority of non-joiners seems to underline, participation partakes of a much more voluntaristic nature. Indeed, though the non-participants may be labelled as snobbish or as egoistical, no more serious kind of moral censure or social sanction is invoked against them.

Thus much effort is directed at recruiting those who do not usually join through the following 'affirmative' methods (rather than by the use of negative sanctions): hanging up posters all over the estate announcing the *undōkai*; sending the printed programme to all of the households belonging to Hiedaira's neighbourhood association (about 85 per cent of the households), or instructing schoolchildren to 'bring' their parents.

On the Saturday afternoon before the *undōkai*, about forty volunteers converge on the school grounds for the final preparations. A number of these people clean and smooth the grounds and then mark out the running-tracks and outline them

in whitewash. Others begin to set up posters, flags and tents around the tracks, and to arrange in and around them the tables, chairs, benches and the loudspeaker system on loan from the school. Finally, some people prepare the batches of prizes for the next day.

### *The Sports Day*

On the Sunday morning, the organizing volunteers begin to arrive for the last of the preparations at around eight o'clock. An hour later, the first of the city officials and general public begin to drift in. The former arrive dressed in dark business suits and ties. The children come wearing their respective school sports costumes, while the adults wear variously coloured track-suits and tennis shoes.

The invited dignitaries are welcomed by the honorary head of the *undōkai*, who is actually the head of the Heidaira-Yamanaka alliance of neighbourhood associations. They are shown to their place in a special tent and are served wheat tea and rice-crackers. The rest of the crowd, who come with their families or in groups of two or three friends, take their places in or nearby the four tents provided for the village and each of the estates' three wards.

At about 9.25 the participants are asked to form four columns facing the main tent. At the same time the invited guests and the sports committee take their places facing these columns at the two sides of this tent. All is ready for the opening ceremony.

A few minutes after 9.30 a member of the sports committee ascends the podium placed before the main tent, and declares—in very ceremonious language—that the sports day is formally open. The honorary head of the *undōkai* follows him and gives a short welcoming speech—again in highly formal parlance—which includes a thanks to the organizing volunteers, an acknowledgement of those who have made the effort to come and participate, a hope for good weather, and a stress on the themes of good sportsmanship, the enjoyment of participation and the importance of such events when people from the local communities join together. Next comes the turn of the head of the city's Board of Education. After repeating much the same things he goes on to relate the Heidaira-Yamanaka *undōkai* to such activities that take place all over the city and the country.

Following the introduction of the rest of the guests and a number of other speeches, a series of public exercises (*rajiyō taisō*) are held. Everyone appears to be familiar with these warm-up calisthenics which include body twists, bends and bows, and running and jumping on the spot. Almost everyone participates in this activity, which is accompanied by little of the self-conscious feeling that attends such events in many Western countries.

The general form the *undōkai* takes following these warm-up exercises is one of a series of 'individual' events, which are interspersed by team contests. Four teams participate, one from the village, and one from each of the estate's three wards. In both individual and team events one finds a mix of humorous and more serious

competitions.

The 50-metre races held for the children of primary-school age are an example of an individual event. Here, while the races in which children from the first three years of school consist of simple running, the races intended for children from the last years of primary school involve dribbling a soccer ball over the same distance. Similar contests with varying degrees of difficulty—for example, races mixed with obstacles, basketball shots or running with lit cigarettes—are held for other groups such as middle- or high-school pupils, and for older men.

In all these events the participants who come in one of the first three places are sat down in the middle of the grounds until the end of the heats. Then they are given prizes (differing only slightly in value), according to their position. No further heats are held between these finalists, so that there is no case of someone being the best in the district. The people who do not reach one of the first places do not return empty-handed. They are invariably given consolation prizes for their participation.

Other types of individual events are the 20-metre egg-and-spoon races for the over-60s, and the 30-metre dash for the pre-school children. In these cases, however, no special prizes are given for position. Every participant receives the same prize as everyone else.

Most of the 'team' events are a variety of relay races. In these events each of the four teams—from the village and the estate's wards—fields a number of runners according to categories determined in advance. Thus, for example, one race pits teams made up of children from each of the primary school years, while others are competitions between teams comprised of representatives from different age-groups or local organizations. Other team events include a men's tug-of-war and a women's contest, in which groups of twenty females compete in throwing as many cloth balls as possible into a basket in a set period of time.

In contrast to many of the individual events, where the crowd's attention varies in relation to its closeness to the participants, it is the team events which attract a good deal of the attention. Supporters, often with fans or little flags matching the team colours, are quite vocal in their encouragement. The results of these events—indeed only these team events—are recorded on a big scoreboard next to the main tent.

Although a few of the Heidairates return home for a quick lunch, most of the people eat their midday meal on the grounds. Just about everyone supplements the lunch-boxes they bring with ample amounts of *sake* and beer. During the lunch-break talk often revolves around the 'happenings' of the *undōkai* and life in the local neighbourhoods. A little later, as the food and drink begin to have their effect and people relax, cans or glasses of drink are exchanged and a general atmosphere of familiarity settles over the participants.

The events held in the afternoon are very similar to those held in the morning and end at around three o'clock. At that time—as in the opening ceremony—the crowd is asked to form four columns facing the main tent and to be ready for the closing ceremony. The honorary head of the sports day announces the achievements of each team, and awards victory cups to the first two teams. He then gives a short speech which again includes an expression of gratitude to all of

the organizations and volunteers who had worked to help with the *undōkai*, a stress on the amity and familiarity produced by such events, and a plea for a continuation of such events in the future. A member of the sports committee follows him and asks people to stay on after the ceremony and help with the clearing and cleaning of the grounds. Then in one short sentence he declares the sports day officially closed.

#### Interpretation

If the *undōkai*—like all public events (Handelman n.d.: 8)—is a construct that somehow operates on the social order of and social relations between the local communities, then an examination of the logic by which it is put together is crucial to an understanding of how it works and what it is able to accomplish. In this respect, the sports day seems to share a number of features with other similarly constructed frameworks or situations that are found in Japan. All of these 'situations' appear to carry a special potential for the creation of group identity and solidarity, and for the exploration of the social ties that bind the group together. More specifically, the *undōkai* seems to be related both to 'traditional' rituals and ceremonies and to drinking 'occasions'.

Like these other types of public event the sports field-day too is marked off from everyday affairs and organized by a number of rules different from those governing mundane activities. The 'special' character of the *undōkai* is found in a variety of interrelated features that have to do with the organization of time and space, the use of clothing and language, the kinds and types of participants, and the order and systematization of the competitions and contests.

Let me recapitulate a few of these features. The school grounds for example are especially spruced up and decorated for the occasion. The *undōkai* is held on a Sunday, that is, set apart from the normal working week, and clearly bounded by declarations of commencement and completion. Finally, the contests and ceremonies themselves are bound by a tight and distinct schedule which forms a highly coherent and orderly series of events.

This 'special' construction of the *undōkai*—again, like the construction of all public events (ibid.: 10)—is predicated upon a selection of themes or messages. These messages of the potential for unity, cohesion or common identity in the area are expressed through a variety of discursive and non-discursive means. This can be seen most obviously in the recurring emphasis, in the speeches given, about such themes as amity, the possibility of people from different backgrounds coming together, or the co-operation of a variety of local residents and organizations in a joint 'project'.

On a non-discursive level these messages are reinforced in some of the following ways: the choice of an officer from the most important joint estate-village organization (the alliance of neighbourhood associations) to fill the role of honorary head of the *undōkai*; the invitation of city officials as a way of

representing an 'external' validation and recognition of some kind of joint Hiedaira-Yamanaka identity; or the invitation of officials from the local educational institutions and from all of the main community-level organizations as an attempt at achieving a full organizational representation of the territorial unit. By the same token again, the holding of events in which almost all of the age, sex and organizational categories of the locals participate, or the awarding of a prize to every participant, underscores the attempt at showing that everyone 'contributes to the cause, and no one is isolated from the group' (Brown 1979: 30).

Such an interpretation of the *undōkai* seems to fall squarely within the discussions found in the literature on sports and ritual (e.g., Birrel 1981: 357 ff.; Stone 1981: 221). For like other public sports events marked by high levels of participation, the *undōkai* appears to provide the experience of a highly charged social gathering through which the inculcation of unity and cohesion is effected.

Such a rendering may provide useful insights, such as the stress on the importance of the emotional rapport needed for the transmission of messages or the essentially dynamic nature of the evocation of such messages. At the same time, however, such an interpretation goes little beyond the more conventional accounts of ritual in 'traditional' villages (Embree 1941). An understanding of the *undōkai* involves coming to terms with another point. For the sports day takes place in an artificially contrived territorial unit which—like many urban and especially suburban localities—is marked by the co-presence of 'strangers' and by a community identity that is problematical.

It is in this regard that the similarity between the sports day and many Japanese drinking 'occasions' is important. For it is in both types of situation that people unfamiliar with each other—or familiar with each other only stereotypically—can potentially get to know one another.

This potential is an outcome of the special rules and expectations that govern behaviour in such situations. Thus both in the *undōkai* and in drinking occasions there is found—for the duration of the frame (Handelman 1977)—a disregard of certain of the external attributes of the participants, their levelling down to an 'equal' footing and the breaking down of many everyday social barriers (Lebra 1974; see also Moeran, in this volume). It is under these kinds of circumstances that people can experiment with or explore the actual or potential ties binding them together. Thus, for example, the boss and his subordinate in a bank (Rohlen 1974: 108 ff.), or the political heads of a small hamlet (cf. Moeran, in this volume), can during drinking bouts engage in a direct and frank discourse about the everyday relations that bind them together.

Behaviour during the *undōkai* can be seen along much the same lines. For during the day Hiedairaite and Yamanakaite, truck driver and university lecturer, or simply local residents unfamiliar with each other, can all engage in negotiations about their identities and ties and about the processes by which they can potentially grow closer to each other.

It must be quickly added, however, that the unity and identity and the fostering of local ties are all *potential* states that the *undōkai* comments about or hints at through the participation of the locals. Whether unity or divisiveness,

intimacy or isolation, will in fact come about is dependent on other things such as the political and economic relations between the two communities. In other words, the relationship between participation in the *undōkai* and the larger social context is neither direct nor certain. As Sutton-Smith (1981: 474) eloquently puts it, 'Play potentiates; it does not itself actualize.' What '... may actually happen is determined, even overwhelmed by many other variables.'

What the *undōkai* is, however, is a communicative form that can be understood by many of the locals who were formerly 'just' strangers or who previously knew each other only by stereotypical labels. Thus, to amplify Moeran's point (in this volume) in a slightly different direction, it is precisely because people remember what is said during such situations—that is, they are changed by the experience—that upon a return to everyday life they may make use of what they have learned.

#### Groupism

The emphasis suggested here on the *undōkai* as a potentiating mechanism that shares many features with traditional rituals and drinking occasions has a direct bearing on one of the central theoretical controversies now found in the social science literature on Japan. Essentially, the controversy revolves around the growing questions and doubts that have been raised in relation to the applicability of the group model of Japanese society (Sugimoto and Mouer 1980). In this and the next section I deal with the implications of the present analysis for this theoretical discussion.

The *undōkai* in a newly created territorial unit such as that described here is far from being the only kind of instance in which a potential for the creation of cohesion and familiarity among a group of strangers is found. Vogel (1975: xxi), for example, notes that despite the popular and academic stereotypes of the Japanese as having one overriding allegiance to their closely knit and familiar work-group, Japan offers a range of other cases where such cohesion and familiarity can arise quickly in *ad hoc* groups made up of people previously unknown to each other. He cites the quite widespread but as yet little analysed phenomena of special task forces, study committees, or tour groups that are established by and mediate between different public and private organizations. When compared to such *ad hoc* aggregates in the United States or Europe, Vogel concludes that such impermanent Japanese groups appear to have a number of social mechanisms—drinking, recreation activities, ceremonies—which facilitate the relatively quick and smooth creation of solidarity and a climate suited for close interaction.

It is these same or at least similar mechanisms, I contend, that operate both in the interstitial spaces between different organizations, and in artificially created territorial communities. In both kinds of situation such mechanisms make possible the creation of solidarity and identity among people with different

backgrounds, diverging allegiances and diverse external social ties.

An awareness of the operation of such mechanisms, then, necessitates a modification of the prevalent view of groupism. Befu (1980: 43) hints at this when he rightly notes that groupism may involve a number of definitions of the collective. On perhaps a deeper level, groupism may involve the acquisition of a basic orientation to groups that is the outcome of membership in and links with a great number of concrete groups. Let me try and explain this very briefly.

Very few middle-class Japanese have a primary group (except perhaps the family) to which they remain affiliated for their entire lives (*ibid.*: 39). What does seem to be the case—and this is hinted at both by Kiefer (1970) and Hendry (in this volume)—is that most middle-class Japanese acquire through their socialization a learned capacity to move from and relate to a succession of groups throughout their lifetime. This is related to the complex processes of socialization (direct, anticipatory and vicarious), and to an individual's procession—from childhood to old age—through a whole range of formal and informal groups: play and neighbourhood gangs, kindergarten and various school classes, school and sports teams, student clubs, coteries of friends, task and work groups, and so on.

In rather abstract terms, middle-class Japanese acquire—through a process Bateson (1972: 167) terms deutero- or meta-learning—a capacity to move from one frame (Nakane 1973), *waku* (Plath 1969), or *sō* (Kumon 1982), to another. They learn, then, to relate to groups on a meta-level. That is, they learn to relate to the constant 'idea' or 'construct' of a group although they may move successively or *concurrently* through many concrete or actual groups. The development of a whole gamut of social mechanisms—drinking, ceremonies, rites of passage, the sharing of food etc.—serves on an interpersonal level to facilitate these moves from one group or frame to another.

Such a view does not and should not negate or de-emphasise the place of the individual. For people in Japan—like people everywhere—are constantly growing and developing their own unique 'maturity' (Plath 1980). It is these processes of growth and development, and in the conflicts and choices individuals face within them, that an important limit to the group model can be seen most clearly. And it is to an examination of this that I now turn.

#### Individualism and Community

An examination of the social context within which the *undōkai* takes place leads the argument back to the wider patterns of leisure in modern Japan. For crucial to an understanding of the *undōkai* is the realization that the act of taking part in the day—as an organizer, or simply as a participant—is basically an elective act. That there are quite a few people who choose not to participate is one indicator of this. True, taking part in the sports day involves being subject to a whole complex of organizational and social codes and regulations. But to overstress this aspect is

to fail to be aware of the large measure of choice at the base of such activities.<sup>4</sup>

This is not to deny that at times joining a community organization, or participating in a local event like the sports day, takes on a certain obligatory character. Thus, for example, for some men the act of going to the *undōkai* is but an extension of Sunday's family service (*katei sābisu*), i.e. a time devoted not to the company or workplace but to one's wife and children (Linhart 1975, and also in this volume).

What should be stressed, however, is that the holding of such activities on the local neighbourhood level is to be taken within the context of the post-war growth of leisure alternatives which the individual faces. These options may include more private or solitary pursuits such as gardening or collecting, or they may encompass family or small group activities like outings or clubs. The point is that the sports day *represents* the community-level alternative or option. Moreover, even on the community level, the *undōkai* is one out of a series of options, which include membership in other local voluntary groups or participation in different locality-based activities.

Some Japanese social critics see in the growing discretion of individuals during their free time a turning away from work towards an egoistic individualism that is sweeping the country (Linhart 1975: 205). Others see this trend as an outgrowth of the 'my-homism' phenomenon and its stress on protecting people's individuality and integrity as against the workplace (Tada 1978: 211). Yet others see all of this as an attempt at finding a balance between the company and private life (Clark 1979: 217).

One can, however, see in the exploration of the new variety of leisure alternatives a search for meaningful and worthwhile guidelines within post-industrial Japan. As Plath puts it (1969: 128; see also Rohlen 1976: 141), the '... search is not some simple craving for personal or social paroxysm, though that may be part of it. It is a search for forms of play that an adult can take seriously. It is a continuing search for traditions.'

In this respect the *undōkai*—or for that matter participation in any local community organization and activity—represents one kind of search for creating and living in a new, 'live-able', residential environment. This is not to de-emphasise the difficulties of the search for community alternatives, nor to over-emphasise the prevalence of the search. Rather, this is to stress two further points.

The first is that community options or choices continue to be in constant competition with the possibilities offered by both the workplace and more private concerns (see Bellah 1971: 403). Thus, while we are witnessing a surge in the search for the potential of the new urban community, this search does not spell a return to the close-knit villages of the past. Rather, we are seeing the emergence of local communities that are marked by partial participation,

4. Turner (1977: 42), perhaps with a hint of overstatement, brings this out when he observes: 'Football, chess, and mountaineering are undoubtedly exacting and governed by rules and routines at least as stringent as those of the work situation, but being optional, they remain part of the individual's freedom, of his growing self-mastery, even self-transcendence.'

voluntarism and a greater respect for individual preferences (Yamazaki 1984: 12-17).

The second point is theoretical. It has been suggested that one of the major challenges facing those who would develop new models of Japanese society is that of handling or treating conflict as one of the main features of this society (Sugimoto and Mouer 1980). Along the lines discussed here—and hinted at in a number of recent works (Cummings 1980: 196; Smith 1983: 116)—of no less importance is the development of analytical tools for dealing with the scope, and limits, of the freedom, choice and will of individuals.

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