

OYAMA:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE IN POSTWAR
JAPAN

by
HASAN, Eid-UI
March 2015

Dissertation Presented to the Higher Degree Committee
of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Asia Pacific Studies

ABSTRACT

Many rural areas in contemporary Japan face uncertainties on their future: declining population, shrinking economy, aging, lack of successors in the agriculture sector, falling agricultural profit, amalgamation with bigger municipalities, and deteriorating state of environment and tradition. Of course, some localities have successfully preserved their existence by devising alternative ways to development. These areas merit in-depth studies, yet very few ethnographic studies on rural Japan have appeared in the last two decades.

This dissertation frames, describes and explores a total process of rural development and change over time, and their effects on a single rural community Oyama, a South-Western rural town in Japan, and her transformations for more than half a century—from the end of World War II until present—ethnographically. It introduces interesting narratives and observations from the viewpoints of local residents of Oyama in the rural context as well as carefully documents their daily collective activities, which in turn help us understand the process of Oyama's rural development and make the results more experimental and operational for practice of rural development.

In this research, I adopted an ethnographic single case study approach and conducted fieldwork for almost three years—from May 2010 to April 2013 in Oyama. I analyzed the narratives of development and change in Oyama under five periods: (i) postwar reconstruction period (1945-1960); (ii) high speed economic growth period (1960-1970); (iii) bursting of the 'bubble', economic stagnation period (1970-1990); (iv) post-'bubble' economy period (1990-2005); and (v) shrinking economy, graying Japan period (2005-present).

The first period is characterized by Oyama being poor and practicing “subsistence agriculture”, and implementing initiatives that laid the foundation for future development efforts. Oyama’s heyday of development is characterized with the introduction of the three NPC movements where the town transformed from “subsistence agriculture” to “orchard farming” through crop diversification (from rice to plums and chestnuts) from 1960 to 1970. Oyama’s efforts on diversification of crops continued during the following two decades. Farmers of Oyama moved from orchards to more value-added farming such as producing agro-processed products in this period, from 1970 to 1990. The period from 1990 to 2005 is characterized with yet more processing of agri-products and a sudden increase of the service industries. From the early 1990s onwards, farmers of Oyama shifted themselves from “crop diversification” activities to “agro-commodity diversification” activities. They also actively engaged in marketing activities. In other words, Oyama gradually transformed from a “secondary industry” base to a “service industry” base. From 2005 to present, rural development efforts in Oyama are facing challenges related to population decline, aging of farmers, exodus of young people to urban centers, lack of farming successors, effects of dam construction, and loss of identity as independent Oyama (due to amalgamation with neighboring units). However, there are prospects for development even today. Green tourism, landscape tourism, river and forest recreation projects can be alternatives, and the return of young people to their *furusato* (hometown) provide a ray of hope. The future of rural development in Oyama largely depends on how both the young and old generations will involve themselves into the community and how they will desire to see Oyama prosper.