

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

**by**  
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**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**

## SUMMARY

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. Oyama is also the birthplace of the NPC Movement—the original model of the Oita One Village One Product (OVOP) Movement. The OVOP Movement has attracted enough attention in publications, survey reports, and even mass media. However there is no single ethnographic research on the history of Oyama's rural development. This dissertation fills this paucity by this detailed ethnographic research. 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.

The dissertation has three research questions: (i) what has happened in terms of rural development in Oyama between the post WWII period and today, and why? (ii) how does it affect and change the course of the townspeople's lifestyles? (iii) what

insight can we gain from Oyama on a national or even international level?

In responding to these questions, the research applied an ethnographic single case study approach whereby an in-depth fieldwork for almost three years—from May 2010 to April 2013 was carried out in Oyama. The dissertation describes and analyzes the narratives of development and change in Oyama from the post Second World War to present 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.

Oyama is not blessed with natural resources, and the area of this town is quite small comparing to the neighboring towns. Moreover, it does not have a vast farmland, and the topography is steep with very few flat lands. Except agriculture there were no other industries in this town. The town, in the past, was not prosperous. But Oyama's agriculture was full of wisdoms. Hence, to revive the town, it was necessary to utilize its agriculture. This contradiction is worth studying. If the town were blessed with natural resources with vast land for agriculture, and local products easy to sell, then the rationale of studying the town would be less important. How a small community like Oyama Town has progressed despite the unfavorable conditions has a wider significance in this regard.

In Oyama, many youths joined to the Oyama's rural development—the NPC Movement initiated by Yahata Harumi—after their graduation from agricultural high school and made their efforts for it. Yet, most of their development experiences were embedded in Oyama's development as tacit knowledge. Under such situation this dissertation frames, describes and arranges them properly as practical process of

community based rural development enough for readers to understand and interpret their development experiences more explicitly and thoughtfully and provides a rich store of experiential, operational and practical knowledge for the rural development.