

THE RURAL EXODUS IN JAPAN (2)  
—DISORGANIZATION AND REORGANIZATION  
OF RURAL COMMUNITIES—

By KEIICHI TAKEUCHI\*

I

As we saw in the previous paper<sup>1</sup> the rural exodus phenomena raised several political and social problems after the 1960's. The establishment of the "Law for the Development of Mountain Villages" of 1965 and the "Law for Urgent Measures for Underpopulated Districts" were the legislative solutions to the problem. The basic ideas underlying these legislative measures and other governmental measures may be summarized as follows: With the development of industries in the urban districts and with the progress of urbanization in general, emigration from the districts of marginal agricultural production was accelerated. These districts were generally remoter mountainous village areas. The most notable result of this process was the rising marginal cost of social overhead capital in the depopulated districts. Thus, the problem of underpopulation (*kasō*) is recognized by many experts to be, first of all, that of the deterioration of the living conditions of the inhabitants. This recognition clearly manifests the realization that official recognition of an underpopulated municipality is based on its population decrease rate and the fiscal indices which fairly accurately reflect the degree of its autonomy under the actual centralized regime of present Japan. In this context, the village communities of the marginal *acumene* are considered as being in the phase of disintegration. Hence the most efficient solution of the underpopulation problem are the measures proposed herewith for the reorganization of the disorganized settlement.

We have to point out here some basic characteristics of the argument of this kind. Although official recognition of underpopulated districts is bestowed at the administrative unit level, i.e., on the municipal level, the disintegration of village communities, which is the most serious aspect of the underpopulation problem, is a matter to be discussed at a lower level, i.e., that of the settlement. The settlement (*shuraku*) is not only a sociological or societal unit but also an economic one. For, in the case of an irrigation system or forest land owned in common, the settlement forms a unit creating an external economy in the broader sense for agricultural and forestry production. We do not say that there are no measures for supporting or strengthening the economic bases of the depopulated settlement community; however, apart from such measures as subsidiary policies regarding localization of new manufacturing industries or incentives for differentiated commercialization

---

\* Professor (*Kyōju*) of Social Geography.

<sup>1</sup> Keiichi Takeuchi: The Rural Exodus in Japan (1)—Basic Consideration for International Comparison—*Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1974.

of certain crops, most of measures adopted in underpopulated districts have aimed at improvement of living conditions, such as educational, medical and other administrative facilities. Because depopulation is the expression of the abandonment of productive activities in an unfavourable marginal zone, according to the logic of the predominant argument, remedial measures cannot have much effect on the productive or economic bases of a depopulated area. And if the adoption of measures for the amelioration of living conditions is all but the only possible action to take, it is requisite that the underpopulated settlement be reorganized to obtain the most benefits from administrative expenditure. So settlement reorganization must implicate the physical or morphological reorganization of the settlement, involving, especially, the desertion of a radically depopulated one, transfer of the settlement site, and integration with other communities.

Here we must observe certain fundamental problems which this argument passes over. Have there never been any destructive effects on the productive bases which constituted the "push" rather than the "pull" factor of migration? Is it not necessary, at least, to analyse such complicated sets of correlated factors as the depopulation of administrative services, etc., to discover the main causes of the disorganization of a settlement community? We can remark also that difference of income level can constitute a decisive factor in the migration analysis only under limited or ideal circumstances. And, furthermore, even admitting this circumstance, if the lowering of the income level occurs not only in a relative sense but also in an absolute one, as the result of changing national agrarian or fiscal policies, the disorganization of settlement communities in depopulated districts is not merely a sociological phenomenon. It implicates also the problems of spatial disparity which, in its turn, involves disparity in income allocation.<sup>2</sup>

## II

The Association of Japanese Geographers dedicated one of the symposia held at its general meeting of autumn 1974 to the topic "Transformation and Land Use in Mountain Villages".<sup>3</sup> One of the most discussed problems was that of underpopulation in and deterioration of mountainous life. This topic had been chosen also to meet the practical needs of the time. They discussed the cause and the mechanism of the rural exodus along classic lines that sought an answer according to either the "push" or the "pull" factor as the case might be. Our interpolation made on that occasion was to insist that there exist in present-day Japan only "pull" factors simply because neither urban unemployment nor urban underemployment is observable in this country. We still hold fast to our view; our argument was theoretically properly posed because if we apply the "push-pull" explanation at the individual level of the migrants or at the rural community level, we inevitably fall into subjectivism or agnosticism. The "push-pull" explanation is applicable only at the national economy level; the differences of the population decrease rates among rural communities are to be interpreted as the results of the differential resistance against the overwhelming "pull" impacts of the growing areas. It is undeniable that in the

<sup>2</sup> We owe this passage to the stimulating booklet of David M. Smith, *The Geography of Social Well-being in the United States. An Introduction to Territorial Social Indicators*, New York, 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the symposium are published in *Chirigaku Hyoron*, Vol. 48, No. 3 1975, pp. 217-240.

very process of the national economy in which the "pull" factors operated, there occurred also the destruction of the economic bases of the rural community. But this is only the result of the lowering of the relative demand for agricultural products in the rapid growth period of the national economy. We have also to take into account, additionally, the further decline of relative agricultural productivity in the mountainous districts compared with that of the plains, and the absolute decrease of the demand for certain agricultural products, as the result of the liberalization of importation.

In other words, it is a matter of coordination of the sociological explanation with the economic theory. When the "pull" factors can be analyzed on the national economy level, it is useless to achieve a sociological balance of the "push" and the "pull" factors on the settlement or region level. The "pull" hypothesis is premised, because of its very nature, on an assumption of the existence of "push" factors. R. Minami has already pointed this out in a statistical examination of the correlation of the migration rate with the business fluctuations since the Meiji period in Japan.<sup>4</sup>

In these respects the recent report by the study group of geographers on "The Formation and the Transformation of Underpopulated Regions under the Impact of the Turnover of the Commodity Productions"<sup>5</sup> is a failure insofar as its fundamental theoretical framework is concerned. The group starts from an assumption which attributed the main cause of underpopulation to the destruction of commodity productions in marginal agricultural districts. In the analyses of the field studies collected in this report, however, we can find that, in many cases, the destruction of the agricultural production base has been caused by the rural exodus. Thus, insofar as they premise increasing employment opportunities in growing areas, their argument is tautological. And, if their purpose is to insist on the "push" factors, their argument falls into a vicious circle.

Perhaps their intention includes also the demonstration of the increasing regional disparity caused by the intersectorial unbalance, namely, the unbalance between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. The verification of this involves however some difficulties. In the rural districts where prevail part-time farmers or farm-households which depend partly or mainly on non-agricultural activities, it is difficult to lay the responsibility for the spatial differential directly on the intersectorial disparity, and especially on the rural-urban relationship. It is still more difficult to find any significant correlation between the population decrease and the agricultural decline. In Table 1, we calculated the correlation coefficient of every prefecture between the population decrease rate of the municipality which showed a decrease of more than 10% in five years and the per capita agricultural income of those who were engaged exclusively in agriculture. This did not reveal any significant correlation; it shows only that, in the regions where employment opportunities in non-agricultural activities are rather limited, we discover the main cause of the rural exodus to be the relative low level of the agricultural income. We must note, however, that merely to come to this tentative conclusion, we have to presume the income level difference to be the main motive of the migration. But even this presumption is hardly to be supported. In a country such

<sup>4</sup> Ryoshin Minami & Akira Ono: *Noka-jinkoïdo no Suisei, 1925-1960* (The Estimates of Farm Household Population Movement, 1925-1960) *Hitotsubashi Ronso*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 6, 1962.

Ryoshin Minami: *Keizaihendo to Rodoryoku no Sangyokanryudosei* (Economic Changes and Redistribution of Labor Force Among Industries) *Hitotsubashi Ronso*, Vol. LI, No. 3, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> Motosuke Ishii (Ed.), *Shohinsakumotsu no Tenkan ni Tomonau "Kaso" Chiiki no Keisei-Hendo*, Tokyo, Kobunsha, 1974.

TABLE 1. CORRELATION BETWEEN POPULATION DECREASE AND AGRICULTURAL INCOME

Prefecture	1960—65			1965—70		
	Number of Municipalities	$r$	$r^2$	Number of Municipalities	$r$	$r^2$
1 Hokkaido	77	-0.17	2.9	131	-0.08	0.6
2 Aomori	6	0.77	59.3	9	0.44	19.4
3 Iwate	10	0.26	6.8	16	0.25	6.3
4 Miyagi	20	-0.46	21.2	10	0.04	0.2
5 Akita	14	-0.40	16.0	16	0.37	13.7
6 Yamagata	11	-0.48	23.0	11	-0.34	11.6
7 Fukushima	18	-0.57	32.5	24	-0.44	19.4
8 Ibaragi	4	0.10	1.0	8	-0.02	0.0
9 Tochigi	4	-0.99	98.0	2	1.00	100.0
10 Gunma	9	-0.28	7.8	10	-0.19	3.6
11 Saitama	2	-1.00	100.0	2	-1.00	100.0
12 Chiba	6	0.54	29.2	0		
13 Tokyo	5	0.05	0.3	5	-0.33	10.9
14 Kanagawa	0			0		
15 Niigata	20	-0.51	26.0	30	-0.44	19.4
16 Toyama	2	-1.00	100.0	3	-0.77	59.3
17 Ishikawa	6	-0.20	4.0	4	-0.44	19.4
18 Fukui	5	-0.13	1.7	5	0.61	37.2
19 Yamanashi	14	0.30	9.0	12	-0.14	2.0
20 Nagano	32	-0.55	30.3	31	-0.11	1.2
21 Gifu	14	-0.34	11.6	15	-0.41	16.8
22 Shizuoka	4	0.71	50.0	2	1.00	100.0
23 Aichi	9	-0.48	23.0	9	-0.02	0.0
24 Mie	5	-0.47	22.1	6	-0.81	65.6
25 Shiga	2	1.00	100.0	0		
26 Kyoto	8	-0.85	72.3	8	-0.70	49.0
27 Osaka	0			0		
28 Hyogo	11	-0.31	10.0	8	-0.04	0.2
29 Nara	10	0.01	0.0	7	-0.74	54.8
30 Wakayama	12	0.02	0.0	14	-0.08	0.6
31 Tottori	6	-0.37	13.7	6	-0.62	38.4
32 Shimane	37	-0.35	12.3	33	-0.06	0.4
33 Okayama	35	-0.18	3.2	29	-0.26	6.8
34 Hiroshima	48	-0.24	5.8	32	-0.24	5.8
35 Yamaguchi	26	-0.59	34.8	23	-0.53	28.1
36 Tokushima	20	-0.71	50.4	22	-0.43	17.6
37 Kagawa	4	-0.37	13.7	2	-1.00	100.0
38 Ehime	38	-0.48	23.0	35	-0.29	8.4
39 Kochi	33	-0.29	8.4	25	-0.39	15.2
40 Fukuoka	31	-0.08	0.6	22	-0.04	0.2

41 Saga	14	0.20	4.0	12	0.68	46.2
42 Nagasaki	28	-0.20	4.0	33	0.004	0.0
43 Kumamoto	46	-0.20	4.0	44	-0.40	16.0
44 Oita	36	-0.31	9.6	39	-0.22	4.8
45 Miyazaki	25	-0.74	54.8	20	-0.58	28.6
46 Kagoshima	48	-0.63	39.7	68	-0.58	33.6

*Note:* The Pearson's correlation coefficient  $r$  is calculated on the basis of the data regarding municipalities showing population decrease rates above 10% in five years.

*Sources:* Population Census for 1960, 1965 and 1970. Agricultural Income Statistics for 1960 and 1965.

as Japan, where the social security systems are barely developed, the decision to migrate of an individual or of a household depends not only on the income level differential but also on the situation of the immovable properties which constitute the private guarantee of the individual's or household's life security.

Another difficulty which hampers the simplified schematism of the spatial interpretation of the intersectorial disparity is the existence of intrasectorial disparity in non-agricultural activities. There exists a pay differential between the labourers of the large enterprises of the metropolitan or industrial districts and those who find occupations in rural districts on one side; and, on the other, between those who have been engaged in non-agricultural activities since the beginning of their working career and those who gave up agriculture for non-agricultural activities. The latter are forced to take unstable jobs, with marginal wages, as casual labourers or manual labourers of smaller enterprises. Because of these differences in the ways and means of employment, the cynical result is that an economic recession turns out to be the most efficient means of coping with underpopulation problems, since it hits first of all those "pull" factors encouraging rural exodus or the giving up of farming. We shall be able to confirm these paradoxical effects when the population census data of 1975 are published.

### III

The underpopulation problems are generally pointed out as being those problems concerning the disintegration of the settlement community. This phenomenon which appears in sociological form as a result of population decrease cannot be attributed, as we have seen, simply to the decline of the agricultural economy. The first consideration is the naive but fundamental question why the population decrease has not resulted in the increase of the allocations of per capita resources, i.e., the enlargement of the management scale (or farm acreage) of the remaining farmers. This discussion must certainly involve the institutional factors or the whole socio-economic system of present-day Japan. At the same time, we have to deliberate on the fact that the economic base of most Japanese settlement communities no longer consists of primary or land utilizing industries.

With the development of non-agricultural activities or economic activities not connected with the technical utilization of land, the spheres with which the members of a settlement community are related have more and more expanded outside of the settlement territory and become superposed, one upon another. The traditional settlement community

as a social unit has already long since become disorganized. So settlement reorganization is not a matter of the physical planning of an individual settlement. Rather, it is a matter of readjustment to the new socio-economic conditions of rural life which have come into being since the land reform following World War II.

If the social relations binding together the elements of a settlement community are merely semi-feudal or pre-modern<sup>6</sup> elements and are hence worth abolishing, there is no reason to take action against the actual settlement reorganization policy. Such a policy might not only raise the administrative efficiency but also contribute to the modernization of rural society and to the social well-being of the rural population. But when we examine the cases in which a settlement community resists the tendency to underpopulation,<sup>7</sup> we are induced to recognize the fact that the elements which cause the so-called underpopulation problems cannot be avoided or eliminated by such settlement reorganization measures. Generally speaking, such resisting rural settlements are characterized economically, especially in the mountainous districts, by multiple agricultural crops and the multiple land use of forest land (timber forestry, stock-rising, *cortinellus shiitake* cultivation, etc.). A high proportion of the farmers engaging exclusively in agriculture does not constitute the resistant factor; sometimes multiple opportunities of casual or fixed employment in secondary and tertiary industries can result in the economic stability of a settlement community. Neither the presence of public investment nor subsidies for agricultural development are decisive factors in the maintenance of community life. Governmental investments and financing policies aim at the enlargement of the management scale and the upraising of the productivity of very select, specialized farmhouseholds; but such measures are hardly successful in mountainous or "marginal" districts. Furthermore, even if realized, they do not necessarily result in the well-being of the settlement community as a whole.

A more remarkable fact is, however, that those settlements which have developed community-sustaining activities have always close social ties between their community members. In countries such as Japan where small owner-cultivators prevail in peasant society, the rural community ties may not be traditional social relations of the kind destined to fade away with the coming of industrialization or the development of capitalist economy. Here, it is necessary to view, from a different standpoint, the role of the settlement community in present Japan in order to understand the characteristics of the settlement resisting the tendency to conditions of underpopulation. What must be recognized is the functional role of the social relations within the settlement community and the fact that the settlement community is not merely a relic of a bygone organization.<sup>8</sup> Its functions are not the same as in past times. When communities bonds are based on the traditional hierarchy of social standings, the social changes of recent years in Japanese rural society could very easily destroy the traditional community organization. We can see many cases in which just

<sup>6</sup> We use with irony these terms which have been commonly used in academic circles in Japan. In fact, "semi-feudal" (*hanhokenteki*) refers only to certain remaining feudal elements and in these cases "feudal" means only "non-capitalistic." Likewise "pre-modern" indicates some thing or event vaguely prior to the modern period with a kind of evolutionistic prejudice.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, the cases reported in: Kichiro Norimoto: *Kaso-shuraku no Doko to Noringyo-taisaku*—*Shimane-ken Kasochiiki no Chosa kara* (Agricultural Development Plan in Sparsely Populated Areas—A Case Study from Shimane Prefecture) *Nogyo-Sogo-Kenkyu*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> In this respect a highly commendable report is: Shiro Morita, *Buraku* (The Settlement Community) *Nihon no Nogyo*, 79, Nosei Chosa Iinkai, Tokyo, 1972.

those settlements having strong hierarchical characteristics showed more violent population decrease than others in recent years after the relatively closed village system had been dissolved.<sup>9</sup> Even the common use of forest land and the regulation of the irrigation system do not always constitute the material bases of the community tie. Even if more individualistic principles are substituted for those bases, there still exists or comes into being the significance of the communities which are organized always on the settlement level. Sometimes they are organizations of a rather cooperative character involving many part-time farmers. Sometimes they pursue an economic scale merit in conditions derived from the overwhelming number of existing small owner-cultivators.

The analyses of the regional differences in the nature of and in the formation process of the new significance of community ties have yet to be made. The first scientific task is to assert the actual existence and the importance of the socio-geographical fundamental unit that is the settlement. The practical difficulty lies in furnishing this spatial unit community with the political and economic efficacy to enable it to resist the rationalization policies promoted in the interest of the centralized system.

---

<sup>9</sup> We find such examples in the report: Kiichiro Norimoto, *Nosanson-chiiki Kaihatsu to Shuraku Saihensei* (The Development of Rural and Mountainous Regions and Settlement Reorganization) *Nihon no Nogyo*, 75, Nosei Chosa Iinkai, Tokyo, 1971.