

Community and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Japan: A Re-consideration

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“One evening at the end of March,” Ichikawa Shōemon wrote in his diary, “there was a fire at the house of Mohachi of Arata. But . . . this person did not know a thing about it. I heard the story the next day. Thus, I did not go there at the time.”¹ The failure of his neighbors to communicate the news about the fire clearly frustrated Shōemon. It did not matter that he was seventy-nine years old and in poor health. It was the duty of neighbors, after all, to lend a hand, first in putting out the fire and later in the clearing of the ashes and the rebuilding of the house. They assisted one another, too, when their roofs needed to be re-thatched and in the preparations for funerals, marriages, and coming-of-age ceremonies. They joined together to offer prayers to ward off contagion from the village and to go on pilgrimages to Ōyama to pray for rain. They formed revolving credit associations to provide themselves the funds necessary to sustain or to expand their farm operations.

Shōemon’s experiences, and indeed the experiences of many other farmer diarists, seemingly challenge prevailing wisdom on the conflictual nature of the nineteenth-century village. The works on peasant revolts, for example, portray a rural populace besieged by inequality, discord, and rebellion.² More recently, this view of

the village as conflictual has been articulated forcefully by Irwin Scheiner and Herman Ooms. Scheiner writes about the “myth of community”; he even goes so far as to call portrayals of villagers acting collectively as “imagined communities.”³ Ooms contends that the Tokugawa village is best characterized by strife and discord. He writes, “The frequent description of villages as harmonious and consensual is a misrecognition if not an outright denial of these realities.”⁴ Both writers leave little room for considerations of the nineteenth-century village as communitarian.

According to the Western theoretical literature, this view concerning the absence of community on the eve of Japan’s Meiji transformation seems to make perfect sense. Eminent social scientists such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber, and Talcott Parsons long ago argued that collective behavior and community necessarily decline with the arrival of “modern” society, especially with the onslaught of market forces and bureaucratic centralization. Tönnies viewed this transformation along a spectrum, with *Gemeinschaft* at the one end and *Gesellschaft* at the other. Whereas *Gemeinschaft* is characterized by collective will, folkways, and religious life, its destruction leads to *Gesellschaft*, whereby the growing importance of convention, law, and public opinion culminate in individualism.⁵ Since Japan witnessed remarkable growth in its market economy in the nineteenth century, and because the Meiji state enacted policies that increasingly eroded local autonomy, it seems only natural that collective activity there, too, would decline.

¹ Ichikawa Shōemon, *Ichikawa-ke nikki* (hereinafter IKN), in *Nishitama-gun jinbutsushi, Hō kagami, Minoue ichidaiki, Ichikawa-ke nikki*, Ōme shishi shiryōshū, vol. 46, compiled by Ōme-shi Kyōdo Hakubutsukan, Ōme-shi: Ōme-shi Kyōiku Iinkai, 1996, 219.

² See, for example, Herbert Bix, *Peasant Protest in Japan, 1590-1884*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; Stephen Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; Anne Walthall, *Social Protest and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Japan*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986; James W. White, *Ikki: Social Conflict and Political*

Protest in Early Modern Japan, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

³ Irwin Scheiner, “The Japanese Village: Imagined, Real, Contested,” in Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 69.

⁴ Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 10.

⁵ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft under Gesellschaft)* New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1988, see esp. chapters 4 and 5.

Adding to the general confusion surrounding the issue of rural conflict and cooperation is the fact that ethnographic accounts portray twentieth-century villages where farmers engaged in a host of collective activities and placed a high premium on consensus and harmony. This is clear from the works of John Embree, Robert Smith, and Ronald Dore, for example.⁶ What happened? Was collective behavior something that came into being only in the twentieth century? That seems highly unlikely. Despite the current fascination with “invented traditions,” it is doubtful whether the modern Japanese state and its surrogates could have remolded the Japanese people along communitarian lines out of a cast forged from conflict.

Many studies have emphasized the conflictual nature of rural society, I contend, because the documents they rely on -- materials relating to peasant revolts and intra-village conflict -- have predisposed them to this view. Perhaps because we lack case studies of individual villages, we also have an incomplete understanding of how farmers handled conflict on an everyday level. It is especially important to examine community dynamics over the long term, so as to better ascertain the enduring consequences, if any, of discord and strife. This paper, as well as the broader research project, uses diaries as a major source, not because they are inherently better or tell us more than other types of documents, but because they are attuned to the quotidian, to the structures and rhythms of everyday life. Though oftentimes cryptic, they afford a much better sense of the variety and frequency of collective activity.

Ichikawa Shōemon's diary, covering the period 1859-1897, provides particular insight into the dynamics of community life. Most diaries were written by village elites, the very wealthiest people in rural society, especially headmen and village merchants. Shōemon's diary is unusual in that it was written by a middling farmer. This

⁶ John Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939; Robert J. Smith, *Kurusu: The Price of Progress in a Japanese Village, 1951-1975*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978; and Ronald P. Dore, *Shinohata: A Portrait of a Japanese Village*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

perhaps explains why many of the things he writes about are not found in other diaries, at least not with the same amount of detail. Shōemon lived in a mountain village, Minami-osoki (currently part of Ōme city), in Musashi province.

Much of the diary concerns the collective activities of the villagers and the various relationships among them. Surprisingly, the village itself was not so important. The most important unit for Shōemon was the hamlet or neighborhood. Most collective activity centered around the hamlet, not the village, and the hamlet association (*kumiai*) frequently met to resolve problems. Minami-osoki contained six hamlets, with an average of 27.5 households in each. In this part of the Kantō hamlets were known as *niwaba*; in other parts of Japan, they were known by such terms as *tsubo*, *kona*, and *kaito*.⁷ The fact that the hamlet figures so prominently is an important point, because with the dizzying administrative changes of the Meiji period, the village was continually being reconstituted into larger entities, but the hamlet itself remained unchanged. This might explain the persistence of collective activity well into the twentieth century.

Minami-osoki certainly had its share of troublemakers, but Yoshisaburō was probably the worst of the lot. At the end of 1860, he had been “acting violently,” compelling his father to tie him up. After gnawing away at the ropes, Yoshisaburō escaped, shouting obscenities as he fled. Neighbors rarely intervened in family disputes, but Yoshisaburō's wild and violent behavior demanded immediate action. When Yoshisaburō refused to listen to the suggestions of members of his hamlet association, they convened a meeting (*yoriai*) and decided to put him in their custody. The diary does not tell us more, but we can assume that neighbors housed him

⁷ For a discussion of the role of these hamlets, see Kimura Motoi, *Mura o aruku: Nihonshi firudo nōto*, Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1998, esp. chapter 4; and Takizawa Hiroshi, *Niwaba ni tsuite: mura no naka no chiisana kyōdōtai*, Ōme-shi: Ōme-shi Kyōiku Iinkai, 1992, esp. part 1. Even the *kumigashira*, one of the three positions of village administration, represented the *niwaba*; he was not chosen from among the heads of the *goningumi*. See *Ibid.*, 10-11.

and kept him under their watchful eye until he was back on proper terms with his father. The following evening the hamlet association had to convene yet another meeting. The previous year Yoshisaburō had put into pawn the bell from the local temple. The redemption period was about to expire, but he lacked the money to get it back.⁸ We do not know the outcome, but the association must have raised the money, because the same bell appears several more times in the diary.

In 1862 Yoshisaburō got into a fight with the village ruffian Shōhei, who demanded that he repay a loan. Members of their respective hamlet associations intervened, serving as intermediaries between the two parties. The following day the matter was “settled,” meaning that the two parties had reached an accommodation.⁹

After each incident, Yoshisaburō was not expelled or ostracized but was reintegrated back into the collective life of the community. When the dispute with his father emerged into public view, his neighbors mediated and took measures to restore calm until tempers subsided. When incidents arose involving people from other hamlets, intermediaries from the two sides would arbitrate to bring about an amicable settlement.

The neighbors’ indulgent treatment of Yoshisaburō is well documented in the diary. When he held a meeting in 1863 of a religious confraternity, known as the Hatsuuma Bisha-kō, the diarist Shōemon and his neighbors attended.¹⁰ Similarly, when Yoshisaburō held an untying-of-the-*obi* ceremony for his son, members of his hamlet association went over to assist in the pounding of the rice cakes (*mochi*).¹¹ People were also at his house in 1865 when he had a priest from a nearby village deliver a sermon (*kōshaku*).¹² And when Yoshisaburō went on a group pilgrimage to Ise in 1873, members of his

hamlet association came out to send him off.¹³

The villagers’ patience with errant neighbors is best reflected in their treatment of Seibei’s four sons. Whereas Seibei appears to have been an upstanding member of the village, his sons were ne’er-do-wells. In 1862 Seibei kicked his eldest son Izaemon and his wife out of the house.¹⁴ We meet Izaemon again in 1871, when we learn that he put into pawn the temple bell, the same bell that Yoshisaburō had pawned several years before.¹⁵ Izaemon did not have the money to redeem it, so his hamlet association met to discuss what to do. The matter was especially troublesome, because the domain was sending out officials for an inspection of the territory’s temples and shrines, to ensure that nothing was missing. The association had no choice but to borrow the money to get the bell back.¹⁶

Izaemon makes his next appearance in the diary in 1876. While in a drunken stupor at a memorial service at the local temple, he got into an argument with Tomizō and threw boiling water in his face. His brother Umegorō apprehended him and tied him up, but Izaemon’s rage continued unabated. He shouted obscenities at everyone and finally managed to get loose. With a priest from the local temple and other locals acting as intermediaries, Izaemon later agreed to send a written apology to Tomizō and to reimburse him for his medications. Izaemon also paid the various costs associated with the mediation of the dispute, up until the point of settlement (*rakuchaku*). Both parties, however, paid the costs for the final reconciliation (*teuchi nyūyō*), which took place three days after the incident.¹⁷

The second son Seitarō apparently found much to admire in the conduct of his older brother. His father disinherited him in 1860 and asked the village headman to have him removed from the books (*chōgai*), meaning to expunge him from the population records. The diary does not cite the cause, but it appears to have had

⁸ *IKN*, 74.

⁹ *IKN*, 82.

¹⁰ The Bisha-kō was a religious confraternity celebrating Inari, the deity of agriculture. The members of the confraternity took turns hosting and lodging the other members. They feasted and drink and sometimes invite in a blind female strolling musician (*goze*).

¹¹ *IKN*, 95.

¹² *IKN*, 106-7.

¹³ *IKN*, 159-60.

¹⁴ *IKN*, 81.

¹⁵ Undoubtedly the bell had been put in the custody of the village youth group, or *wakamonogumi*.

¹⁶ *IKN*, 151-52.

¹⁷ *IKN*, 172.

its origins in a loan Seitarō took out. The headman called the son in for questioning and, together with neighbors and other villagers, did everything in his power to get the father to back down. The headman finally worked out a compromise. To save face, the father kept the son in the house but only as a boarder (*heyazumi*), not as heir, and Seitarō agreed to repay the loan.¹⁸

This was hardly the last time that Seitarō caused anguish for his father and Minami-osoki villagers. In 1861 someone came to the village demanding that Seitarō repay a loan, undoubtedly from gambling; when that failed, he asked the hamlet association to intercede. Because there was a difference of opinion concerning the loan, the association refused his request. Also around this time, gamblers and other miscreants came to the village demanding that Seitarō return money he had borrowed, this too the result of a fondness for gambling.¹⁹

In 1862 Seitarō ran off, and his exasperated father brought before the hamlet association the matter of removing him from the books. The association got the father to postpone submitting the request to the headman until members could talk to his son. They were unable to locate him, however, so Seibeī's petition went before the village officials.²⁰ The following month, before the case could be resolved, Seitarō found himself in far more serious difficulty. He had gone to three public baths in the town of Ōme and changed into other people's clothing on the way out. He then ran off to gamble with the money received from their pawn. The hamlet association again got involved, first by talking to the parties concerned and then by raising the money to redeem the clothing.²¹ Six months passed before his father repeated his request that Seitarō be removed from the books, but he was once again talked out of it by various parties, including members of the village youth group (*wakamono-gumi*) and the hamlet association.²² The father

eventually allowed Seitarō to build a house on family property. Despite all of the problems Seitarō caused for his neighbors, he was not at all ostracized. They assisted him, in fact, when his house was being constructed in 1865.²³ They treated him just like everyone else in the community.

Particularly illustrative is the community's response to Seitarō's arrest and incarceration for participating in the Bushū Uprising of 1866. Ignited by a steep rise in prices brought on by the opening of the ports and increased exactions imposed as a result of bakufu campaigns against Choshu, the Bushū uprising included as many as 100,000 poor farmers in Musashi and Kōzuke provinces. They demanded such things as relief rice, the lowering of interest rates, and the return of pawned items, all of which they considered crucial to their survival as farmers. The reasons for Seitarō's participation, however, are unclear. His primary exploiters, after all, were his gambling cronies, not people of wealth in the Musashi area. At any rate, Seitarō did not return after authorities and peasant militia suppressed the rebellion, so neighbors tried to find out where he was. When they learned that he had been jailed in Hachiōji, they went there to inquire and to seek his release. And when authorities transferred Seitarō to an Edo prison, village representatives went to look after him.²⁴ The expense of all of this must have been enormous. Whenever anyone was jailed, relatives and neighbors had to pay for their food. The cost of lodging the villagers in Hachiōji and Edo, too, must have been considerable. Here, too, we find villagers not ostracizing malcontents but doing whatever possible to bring them back into the fold.

Seibeī's third son, Kesasaburō, like the others, proved to be a most unworthy child. Not long after being designated the heir, in 1864 and again in 1865 he ran off, first to Ashikaga and then to Edo, leaving behind his wife and child.²⁵ In 1867, his father Seibeī asked that he be removed from the books.²⁶ The diary does not tell us more, but we do know that he was disinherited.

¹⁸ *IKN*, 73.

¹⁹ *IKN*, 76.

²⁰ *IKN*, 81.

²¹ *IKN*, 82. When Seitarō finally returned to the village two months later -- with the measles -- another villager took him in; see *IKN*, 84.

²² *IKN*, 90.

²³ *IKN*, 107.

²⁴ *IKN*, 113-16.

²⁵ *IKN*, 104, 109.

²⁶ *IKN*, 119.

With Kesasaburō, too, neighbors treated him as a regular member of the community. When he returned from Edo in 1865 and his father would not let him into the house, the hamlet association intervened and suggested that he write his father a letter of apology.²⁷ When Kesasaburō returned from a shrine pilgrimage to Ōyama in 1866, he was devastated to learn that his son had died. Neighbors made all the arrangements for the funeral, just as they did for everyone else.²⁸

Umegorō, the youngest son, followed proudly in his older brothers' footsteps. He, too, sometimes left the village, abandoning his wife and child.²⁹ When questioned about getting someone pregnant in 1869, he replied "I don't remember a thing."³⁰ In later years, he was arrested several times for gambling.³¹ Just as with the other brothers, neighbors exerted every effort to restore harmony between disputing villagers. When Umegorō got into a fight in 1874 with his brother Seitarō and his friend Yoshisaburō, neighbors intervened and ensured that the two sides reached a reconciliation.³² When he was having problems with his wife in 1876, neighbors served as mediators and worked out a resolution. Umegorō had been running off every day and night on one pleasure trip or another, and he returned one day to find his wife with another man.³³

The above examples suggest that villagers valued harmonious relations and sought to resolve conflict among neighbors. In the literature on the Japanese village, we often read that those violating community sanctions were subject to *mura hachibu*, or ostracism from the life of the village.³⁴ In the case of this community, though, the villagers were remarkably forgiving of trans-

gressors, even going so far as to work for their release from jail.

Some might argue that what neighbors did was required of them as members of the *goningumi*, the five-family mutual responsibility groups, to which all farm families belonged. When Izaemon took the temple bell and put it into pawn, for example, his *goningumi* had to get involved, because all of the members of the group would have been held responsible for its loss. Similarly, they were responsible for redeeming from pawn the clothes that Seitarō had stolen in the baths in Ōme.

The enormous efforts made to resolve conflict imply, however, that other considerations were also at work. Especially important was the desire to ensure that disputes be quickly brought to resolution and that villagers were back on speaking terms. This perhaps explains why almost all serious disputes in the diary utilized the services of intermediaries in their resolution. The diary tells us little about the choice of intermediaries, but there is no evidence to suggest that their selection was dictated by village elites or other village notables. Oftentimes the local priest, if one was available, mediated disputes; many disputes required the services of several intermediaries, especially if they involved people from more than one hamlet. As part of the final resolution, the parties to the disputes paid the expenses associated with mediation. The diary does not tell us what these expenses entailed, but we can assume that the disputants reimbursed the intermediaries for the costs of the food and sake consumed in the process of arbitration. The diary also suggests the importance of the final act of reconciliation. That expenses were associated with the reconciliation suggests that this was a formal affair, bringing together the two parties to raise their sake cups as a symbol of the restoration of harmonious ties.

Shōemon's diary presents many other examples of attempts to resolve conflict and restore harmony to the village. One dispute involved the headman:

Concerning the matter of the village headman Hachirōbei and Hanzō of Himuki and Kōzō of Ōhira, [they were told that] they had to talk over and resolve [the dispute]

²⁷ *IKN*, 109.

²⁸ *IKN*, 114-15.

²⁹ *IKN*, 132.

³⁰ *IKN*, 104, 139-40.

³¹ *IKN*, 201, 212, 220.

³² *IKN*, 167.

³³ *IKN*, 173.

³⁴ See, for example, Smith, *Kurusu*, 236-39; and Robert C. Marshall, *Collective Decision Making in Rural Japan*, Michigan Papers in Japanese Studies No. 11, Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1984, 12-16.

that had left them on bad terms since April of last year, so [these] three people came over [to my house]. After discussing it, both sides came to an agreement and reconciled.³⁵

The diary does not tell us who initiated the process of mediation, but the fact that one of the disputants was the village headman suggests that arbitration was not simply mandated from above. Villagers themselves, or their hamlet associations, took the initiative. This concern with harmonious relations sometimes even extended to one's associations with people in neighboring villages:

Both Chōjirō of Tomioka [village] and Tomizō of Kogaido came over. The gist of their conversation was that since last year Hikoshirō of Tomioka and Shōemon [the author of the diary] have been on bad terms. Recently [Hikoshirō's wife] Okeru passed away. Hamlet association people learned about it and acted as go-betweens. [The above two people] said we must agree [to their mediation] and, moreover, said that we must be [on good terms] as we were in the past. Okeru [was buried] on 9/23, the fall equinox week. I visited her grave.³⁶

In the above example, go-betweens from both villages mediated to ensure that Shōemon was back on good terms with his old friend Hikoshirō. Any rupture of ties immediately brought a response from concerned neighbors.

Not all disputes, of course, were resolved in an amicable way. The dispute over Motoemon's actions is a case in point.³⁷ Motoemon committed a serious breach of village regulations: he had cut down trees on a mountain owned by the village. The hamlet association met to discuss the case and, with two village officials as mediators, forced Motoemon to pay 2 *ryō* to cover miscellaneous costs, presumably relating to the meeting and the mediation, and 2 *ryō* for the cost of the trees. They also had him write a letter of apology to the diarist, who appears to have the over-

seer of the village commons. Shōemon himself, however, could not attend the meeting or take part in the deliberations, because his father was seriously ill.

Furious at the village's decision, Shōemon tossed the letter of apology into the fire. This was not the way these things were supposed to be handled, he fumed. There had been a similar case in the past, and the village had drawn up regulations to ensure that it would not happen again. The fine stipulated in the regulations, he stated, was much harsher than that imposed on Motoemon.

Why was this so important to Shōemon? The land in contention was village commons and thus shared equally by all full-fledged members of the community. Indeed, these lands were vital to their survival as farmers. This is where they gathered grasses and leaves to use as fertilizer or to re-thatch their roofs, where they obtained fodder for their farm animals, where they collected firewood to use as fuel, and where they felled trees to use in the construction of their houses. Villagers could not walk into a village forest and take whatever they pleased. Resources were limited, so villages drew up detailed regulations for their use, including stipulations for when those areas could be entered and how much each family could take out.³⁸ Motoemon was not ostracized from the community, but it was made clear that he had committed a serious infraction. Once settled, however, Motoemon once again became an integral member of the community. When his two children fell ill from an epidemic, villagers joined together in performing the *hyakumanben nenbutsu*, a religious ceremony in which they moved from house to house reciting invocations to the Buddha so as to dispel from the village the evil deity responsible for the contagion.³⁹ Members of his hamlet association saw him off when he went on a pilgrimage to Ise with other villagers.⁴⁰

³⁵ *IKN*, 171.

³⁶ *IKN*, 170.

³⁷ *IKN*, 110-11.

³⁸ For a good example, see Ōshima Mario, *Kinsei nōmin shihai to kazoku, kyōdōtai*, rev. ed., Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1993, 381-88.

³⁹ *IKN*, 137.

⁴⁰ *IKN*, 159.

Far more serious was the case involving Jirōkichi.⁴¹ Shōemon referred to Jirōkichi as a “house renter.” This was a very disparaging term, implying that he was not a regular member of the village and thus not to be accorded full rights. A serious problem arose in 1864, when Jirōkichi took in the younger sister of his wife. While in the care of Jirōkichi, she had an affair with someone and was now with child. Jirōkichi wanted the matter settled privately, with only his friend Tokubei assisting. He handed his sister-in-law over to the man responsible and received money from him, perhaps in compensation for the breach to the honor of his house.

The members of the village youth group, the *wakamonogumi*, soon learned of the incident and were outraged. In addition to arranging festivals and plays and other forms of village entertainment, youth groups like the one in Minami-osoki were responsible for protecting the unmarried daughters of the community. When a young woman got pregnant out of wedlock, they would march angrily to her parents’ house and to the house of the man responsible for getting her pregnant. They would demand satisfaction in the form of a monetary settlement, which they would promptly use to have a feast and to drink sake.

Jirōkichi refused to negotiate with the youth group, however. He said that the woman was his wife’s sister and from another village, and thus the case was of no concern to them. To the diarist Shōemon, this was an egregious transgression: Jirōkichi, this “house renter,” was ruining the reputation of the hamlet. Tempers flared on both sides, with each refusing to budge from their respective positions. Infuriated, members of the hamlet association decided to take drastic measures. In addition to ordering Jirōkichi to pack up and leave, they imposed *mura hachibu* on his chief supporter Tokubei, informing him that they would have nothing to do with him henceforth. This was a most extraordinary measure, compelling the village headman and farmers from other parts of the village to intervene. The headman, in particular, was infuriated by the rash actions of the hamlet association. Through the use of in-

termediaries, the various sides to the dispute arrived at a settlement, with Jirōkichi having to pay 1 *ryō* in sake costs.

The incident with Jirōkichi can be seen in several different lights. Obviously, it demonstrates the coercive power of the community. Villagers could not simply do whatever they pleased. There were clear regulations and codes of conduct to follow, and those breaching them faced serious reprimand. The headman’s response to the hamlet association’s decision suggests, however, that expulsion and ostracism were most exceptional forms of community sanction. The imposition of such sanctions brought an immediate response from both the headman and other villagers. At the same time, we must recognize the extraordinary efforts villagers took to resolve the conflict. The neighborhood association held six days of meetings to discuss the case; on three of those days the meeting lasted from the morning until the evening, and a fourth meeting lasted from the afternoon until the early hours of the morning.

The community’s tremendous coercive powers can also be found in its response to Jūzaemon.⁴² Like so many people in late Tokugawa and early Meiji society, Jūzaemon was intensely religious. A problem arose, though, because he had become a follower of the outlawed Nichiren sect and had brought his faith into the public sphere. In 1869 he and other adherents recited prayers at a village assembly. When the youth group expressed its displeasure, villagers ordered Jūzaemon to sign a document stating that he would no longer recite prayers publicly and that he would not lodge Nichiren adherents from other areas. He also had to pay 2 *ryō* for the expenditures involved in the dispute. The measures had little effect. Two months later there was a report that he was continuing to pray in public. Villagers again reprimanded him and ordered him to pay additional expenses for settling the dispute. Another two months later, they went a step further. They tore down the temple he had built for Nichiren adherents.⁴³ This is the last we hear about Jūzaemon in the context of his religious

⁴¹ *IKN*, 99-101.

⁴² *IKN*, 141.

⁴³ *IKN*, 143.

activities. The villagers had sent him an unmistakable message; they had clearly defined the boundaries of his religious activities.

How typical was this village? Perhaps equally important, how typical was the author of the diary? Undoubtedly, there was a variety of responses to issues relating to conflict and cooperation in the nineteenth-century village. There were differences among regions in the extent of cooperation. Rice cultivation regions, for example, required a much higher degree of collective activity in the fields than dry field forms of agriculture. What diaries reveal most vividly, however, is that villages were populated with very distinct personalities. You see glimpses of these personalities not only in people like Yoshisaburō and Seitarō and Jūzaemon but also in the author of the diary himself, Ichikawa Shōemon. Shōemon displays an extraordinary level of commitment to the community of which he was a part. When neighbors needed assistance, he was always there to lend a helping hand. His diary reminds us that, when historians focus their attention on the “local,” they must keep in mind that the “local” spoke in multiple voices.

At the same time, every village maintained some degree of collective life. In addition to the examples of collective activity mentioned above, farmers joined together in myriad ways. According to the findings of Watanabe Takashi, Suwa area villages took out loans as a unit in times of need; they hired teachers for the local school, as well as doctors to treat their sick. They collectively owned the equipment necessary to fight fires. They maintained storehouses to house their tax rice and officials documents.⁴⁴

Villagers also celebrated together in a host of festivals and religious observances. At festivals for the local guardian deity, they performed plays and held sumō matches. Shōemon's diary and the diaries of other western Musashi farmers attest to the importance of the *himachi* celebration. Literally “waiting for the sun,” the *himachi* had religious origins, but in the late Tokugawa and Meiji it also served as a social gathering, a time

when neighbors celebrated together on particular days of the year or after completing a particular task. Shōemon's diary mentions around ninety-five such occasions.⁴⁵ Kuroyama Gisa-burō's diary contains similar entries: a *himachi* for ritual purification after a body was found dead on the road; a *himachi* held after the lion mask dance festival; another held after finishing the felling of trees on a local mountain; yet another to worship the local guardian deity, to name but a few.⁴⁶ Women, too, frequently held their own *himachi*; they also got together to recite the *nen-butsumu*.⁴⁷

What compelled farmers to cooperate? As with any social practice, origins can be most elusive. In part it stemmed from the very structure of late Tokugawa society. Villages operated within the *muradaka* system, by which authorities assigned them responsibility as a unit for tax collection, corvee, and the maintenance of peace. Authorities, too, imposed regulations on the *gonin gumi* to ensure that farmers dedicated themselves to agriculture and obeyed dictates from above; they held them mutually responsible for transgressions and wrongdoing. Also, villages had no staff to collect taxes, no paid labor to engage in public works projects, no police to maintain the peace. Responsibility for these various tasks rested entirely with the farmers themselves, so most villages devised regulations to ensure an equitable distribution of duties. In every village there were teams for repairing or building roads and bridges or for clearing them of snow. Villagers also had to ensure equitable access to the raw materials necessary for their survival as farmers.

Perhaps, too, a growing need to cooperate appeared with the collapse of patriarchal farm units in the seventeenth century. Small farmers now had to join together to take over the functions once monopolized by families of distinguished lineage. Having won their independence, these smallholders vigorously sought to

⁴⁴ Watanabe Takashi, *Edo jidai no murabitotachi*, Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1996, esp. chapters 2, 3, 5, and 9.

⁴⁵ See, for example, *IKN*, 70.

⁴⁶ *Gisaburō nikki: bakumatsu no motojime, Ansei 6-nen yori Keiō 4-nen made*, comp. Akiruno-shi Itsukaichi Kyōdōkan, Tokyo: Akiruno-shi Kyōiku Inkai, 1998, 40, 44, 46, 48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 59, 82.

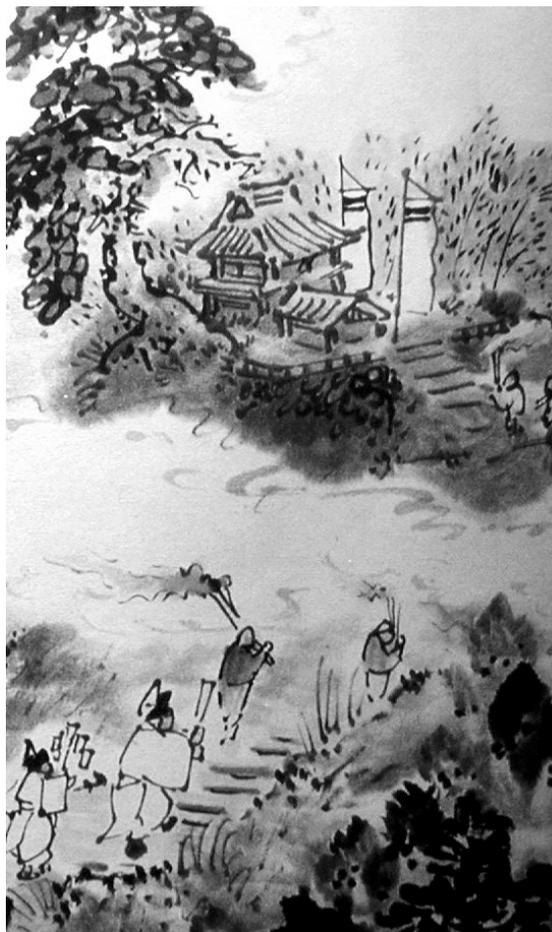
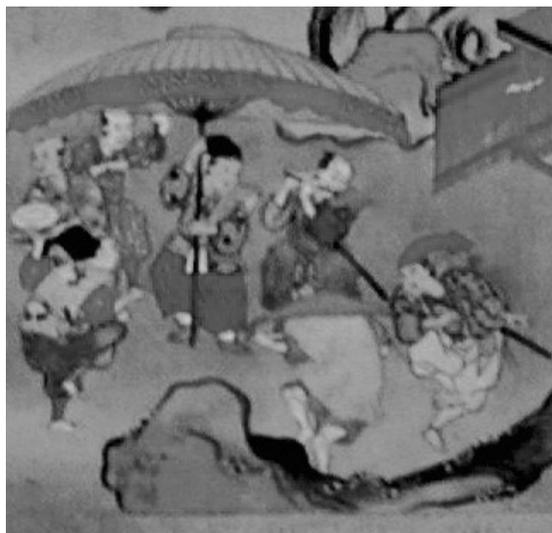
ensure equality of access to the raw materials necessary for their survival as farmers. Their regulations also guaranteed them the labor necessary for house construction and re-thatching, tasks that required more than their families could supply.⁴⁸ Tied together by such means, it is not surprising that farmers found other avenues for cooperation, as well.

It was not my intention here to negate or even to downplay the importance of conflict in nineteenth-century rural life. Anyone who has worked in village archives knows the folly of such an endeavor, because the volume of materials relating to conflict is staggering. This paper, too, reinforces contentions concerning the troubled conditions in rural Japan, especially in the decades bracketing the Meiji Restoration. But it also seems clear that the existence of conflict does not necessarily preclude vibrant collective activity. Indeed, we might even argue that crisis might strengthen the collective impulse all the more. At the same time, rural collective activity should not be eulogized. Farmers' activities came under the close scrutiny of their neighbors and, on some matters, the community had considerable power over an individual's actions.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

As several pages in this issue indicate, EMJ occasionally has need of illustrations that we can use to accompany articles. It would be helpful if we had an archive of photographs and other illustrations on a wide variety of subjects relevant to early modern Japanese studies. If you have, or know of, appropriate material (digital or hard copy) that we might save for future use please contact Philip Brown at the following e-mail: brown.113@osu.edu. If you hold copyright, we would like written permission to use your material (we will, of course, acknowledge your copyright and permission). If you suggest material for which you do not have copyright, it would be helpful if you could provide contact information to obtain copyright for the material.

⁴⁸ Ōshima makes this point in *Kinsei nōmin shihai*, 377-88.



Upper photo is detail from "Prayers for Rain," *Tawara kasane kōsaku emaki*; lower is from the cover of Takahara Saburō, *Oita no amagoi*, Oita-shi: Sōrinsha, 1984. Photos by E. Pratt.