MAKING VILLAGE WOMEN INTO "GOOD WIVES AND WISE MOTHERS" IN PREWAR JAPAN

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Abstract: Among the many programs undertaken by the Japanese government between 1868 and 1945 was one designed to make of Japanese women "good wives and wise mothers." The principal vehicle used in the effort to produce paragons of domestic virtue was the school system. The field materials collected in the mid-1930s by Ella Lury Wiswell in the agricultural community of Suye-mura include excellent firsthand information on the degree to which the policy was effective, particularly with respect to reducing the incidence of premarital sexual activity, premarital pregnancy, and divorce.

Anthropologists are often rightly accused of a preference for the actual collecting of field materials over the less exciting task of analyzing them. It thus comes about that many of the results of field research lie untouched for years and that some never appear in published form. Much valuable information about the societies and cultures of the world has been accessioned into archives, where it lies unused, or is simply thrown out after the death of the person who collected it. This paper is based on just such a treasure trove of material, virtually unexploited for the more than forty-five years that have passed since it was gathered.

In the fall of 1935, John Embree, then a graduate student in anthroplogy at the University of Chicago, and his wife Ella[1] went to Japan with their baby daughter. Their plan was to conduct a study of an agricultural community, the first such undertaking by foreigners in that country. They found a house in a village called Suye and during the twelve months they lived there collected more than two thousand pages of typescript field notes and a variety of other materials. In 1939 John Embree published his classic book *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village.*[2] A few other publications on the community appeared, but when his interests turned to Southeast Asia, no further use was made of his notes or the twelve hundred-page journal kept by his wife. Taken together, this body of data is unique in at least one respect, for not since the Embrees left Suye has a married couple of any nationality lived for a year in a Japanese village and jointly conducted anthropological field research.

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[1]John Embree, then 42, and their sixteen-year-old daughter Clare died in December 1950, run down by an automobile while walking on a street in Hamden, Connecticut. Subsequently remarried, Ella Lury Wiswell now lives in Honolulu.

[2]Based on his doctoral dissertation, the book is still in print (Embree, 1939).

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There is a further notable feature of the data that must also be pointed out. Ella Wiswell's family had come to Japan from Russia before World War I. She had grown up there and spoke Japanese, which John Embree did not. There is about her observations of village women and children and her conversations with them, therefore, a richness of texture and detail that is for the most part lacking in his, for he was obliged to use an interpreter. She has given us an account of the daily life of these village women of a sort unmatched in the scholarly literature on Japanese society. We have published the bulk of her journal (Smith and Wiswell, 1982), but here I wish to discuss an issue that we dealt with only in passing in our joint effort. To place that issue in its proper context, it will be necessary to review briefly the changes in Japanese society that occurred between the latter part of the nineteenth century and the mid-thirties.

In 1868, seven centuries of shogunal rule were ended with the Meiji Restoration. The men who led the movement to overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate took as their most pressing priority the assurance of national unity and integrity, for they feared that the country might break up as a consequence of the intrusion of the Western powers. They succeeded in averting disintegration into competing regionally based factions with a rapidity that is a tribute to their adroitness and not a little luck.

Once the integrity of the state had been established, the new government set about redesigning the basic structure of Japanese society. They early initiated universal military conscription for males, established a national system of compulsory education for males and females alike, and dismantled the hierarchal system of social classes established in the early years of the Tokugawa shogunate, two hundred and fifty years before. No effort was made to disguise their intention to create a nation of subjects united in their devotion to the principles of imperial loyalty and filial piety (indeed, the two were said to be an indivisible entity). What had been a disparate series of measures taken from the early 1870s on was crystalized in 1910 in the Ministry of Education's edict announcing that henceforth, the fundamental aim of primary education was instruction in morals and ethics (*shūshin*). The new religion of patriotism was embodied in school texts and curricula, popular exigetical commentaries on the Imperial Rescript on Education, and an uninterrupted flood of materials of all kinds extolling the virtues of the Way of the Subject.

The men who wielded power in the name of the emperor were drawn almost entirely from the old warrior class. It is hardly surprising, then, to find that their conception of morality and ethics owed much to the Japanese reading of Neo-Confucianism that had been the dominant ethical and philosophical system of the Tokugawa period. One of their lesser concerns, with which we are primarily concerned here, was to define the proper position of women in the new society and to specify the criteria for the behavior and attitudes they believed to be appropriate to females. The outcome of their policy decisions was to relegate women to a distinctly secondary position in society.

There was at first little interest in the education of women beyond the level of primary school, if one excepts the efforts of foreign missionaries in the field of education. Women were not enfranchised until after World War II. At the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912) virtually the entire female labor force was engaged in family agriculture. A generation later, women were heavily involved in the textile industry as temporary workers; it was the only sector of Japanese industry in which women outnumbered men—the ratio was about 1.6. These women came from places

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like Suye, were paid poorly, and for the brief period of their employment lived in dormitories attached to the factories where they worked. Some village girls were sold into prostitution by their families.

At the heart of the limitations on the right of women stood the Civil Code of 1898. This code firmly established the institution of the household as the basic unit of Japanese society. Under its provisions the male head of the house exercised almost complete authority over the lives of its other members, including his wife. Firmly rooted in Confucian doctrine, the code is virtually silent with regard to the position of women in the household, thereby guaranteeing the primacy of its male head and his successor in each generation. Although it was generally the custom for the househead to allocate to his wife considerable domestic power, as he was chiefly concerned with other things, her authority lacked the legal legitimacy of his. Since the household was essentially a corporate entity of production and consumption, it follows that in those sectors of the economy where they played a major role in production, as in agricultural households, women enjoyed a somewhat more advantageous position than did those who were members of wage-earning and salaried households.[3]

Nevertheless, the woman was expected to conform to the requirements of an old dictum in Japan: that it was a woman's lot to obey three men in her lifetime, first her father, then her husband, and finally her eldest son. Under the Civil Code a woman was regarded as only quasi-competent legally, and it was required that she secure her husband's permission to enter into important legal relationships of any kind. The household head was given the right to administer any property or assets his wife had brought to the marriage, and it was the husband's prerogative to determine the family's place of residence. Both male and female members of the household had to obtain the permission of the head in order to marry, the former until they were thirty years of age, the latter until age twenty-five. Grounds for divorce by both husband and wife were recognized, but the provision of the code dealing with adultery is particularly relevant to this discussion. A woman could be divorced by her husband for committing adultery; a man could be divorced by his wife only if he had been sentenced to a penalty for unlawful carnal knowledge of any kind.[4] Property passed from the household head to his male successor, and not to his wife, who remained dependent on her son as formerly she had been on her husband.

The postwar Civil Code has changed virtually every aspect of women's position in contemporary Japan, at least legally, but it is not my concern to deal with that more recent period of Japanese history. In 1935, when the Embrees arrived in Suye, the Meiji Civil Code was still in force, and although better educational opportunities were available to women by that time, and some nonfarm occupations other than that of textile worker had been opened to them, in legal terms they remained severely disadvantaged members of society.

It has been argued by most interpreters of the Japanese scene that what the Meiji oligarchs had wrought was a household system that bore far more resemblance to the premodern family system of the old warrior class than it did to that of the family of the old commoner classes of

[3]For an excellent treatment of these matters, see Koyama, 1961.

[4]See Okamura, 1973 and Steiner, 1977. There is a complete translation of the Civil Code (Sebald, 1934). The Criminal Code also deals with adultery in Article 183: "A married woman who has committed adultery shall be punished with penal servitude not exceeding two years. The same (punishment) applies to the other party to the adultery" (Sebald, 1936:132).

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farmer, artisan, and merchant. Kawashima (1948:12) has characterized the farm family as one in which the Confucian patriarch of the families of the warrior class and nobility was not found. In the farm family, he maintains, there was far less emphasis on absolute authority and filial piety and much more on the cooperation of family members in a common enterprise. Each member contributed according to his or her abilities, so that the dominant form of interpersonal relationships was "coordinate" rather than hierarchical. It was of such families that Hozumi Yatsuka, a major figure in the preparation of the Meiji Civil Code, wrote that "The customs of farmers are not to be made general customs—instead we must go by the practice of samurai and nobleman," (Bellah, 1967:3) and suggested that the customs of ordinary people are not really customs at all.[5] A major consequence of the enactment of the code, therefore, was the spread into the population at large of the concept of a patriarchal, patrimonial household system which was in many ways quite alien to their traditions. It is further maintained that the penetration into all segments of Japanese society of the moral and legal norms of the ruling class inevitably *reduced* the power of women in the family (Koyama, 1961:76-97), and provided them with models of behavior quite unlike those of an earlier time.

What were those earlier models of behavior? Between 1917 and 1924, Thomas Elsa Jones (1926) conducted social research in several relatively isolated villages in Japan: Namase in Ibaragi Prefecture, Tatekoshi in Niigata, Shirakawa in Gifu, two villages in the Maki district in Shimane, and several settlements in the Gokanosho district in Kumamoto Prefecture, where Suye is located. His comments on these places are highly relevant to the subject at hand.

In the Maki villages the *bon* dance was dying out. This festive occasion, observed from the thirteenth to the fifteenth of the seventh lunar month in connection with the celebration of the return of the ancestral spirits to their native places, was associated with what he called "sexual irregularities." He found the occasion to be conspicuously less licentiousness in Maki than in the other four areas, and guessed that because the villages were only some twenty miles from the city of Matsue, village men could easily repair to prostitutes and cafe girls rather than to women of the village. In both Namase and Shirakawa the *bon* dance was still practiced, although "leading citizens" opposed it on the grounds that it encouraged widespread sexual misconduct. In one of the hamlets of Namase, indeed, the dance had been banned because it was believed to lead to immoral relations, desertion, runaways, illegitimate births, and quarrels. A careful family, he wrote, would allow its daughters to attend only if accompanied by their mother. In Tatekoshi the *bon* dance was dying out, but in Gokanosho, where it had never caught on, a dance called *o-kagura* was still performed. This dance reenacts the story of the efforts of the deities to lure the Sun Goddess from the cave in which she had concealed herself, and is said to represent the performance of a female diety who danced atop an upturned tub. At length, she bared her genitals, causing such merriment among the onlookers that the Sun Goddess peeked out to see what was going on, and was drawn from her hiding place.

Remarking that in both Tatekoshi and Shirakawa sexual relations were much looser than in the other three places, Jones reports on such matters as premarital intercourse, age at marriage, and illegitimacy. For women in the Maki villages, age at marriage had risen from 17 to 21 in the

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preceding twenty years, and the dowry had increased tenfold. Both changes imply an increase in the stability of marriage, an issue to which I shall return below. In Namase and Shirakawa, he was told, the age at marriage for men was up two years and for women three in the same period of time. In Tatekoshi and Gokanosho, the age at marriage for men was 23 and for women 17 or 18.

The head of the Young Men's Association in Namase estimated that not more than two percent of the unmarried young women were virgins, and the same figure was given him in Tatekoshi. In Namase, it was said of one hamlet that until ten to fifteen years previously, every girl there had had sexual relations before marriage, and the wife of the headman of a village in Gokanosho made the same observation about the young women of that community. Illegitimacy was very common. The hamlet in Namase just referred to was reported to have illegitimate children in every house. Jones was told that "in some cases boys take up the responsibility for their illegitimate children, but in most the trouble is that the father is not identified as the mother had relations with a number of boys. The usual practice is to report the child as born to the daughter's mother" (1926:93). In both Tatekoshi and Gokanosho, where nine percent of males and eight percent of females were technically bastards, it was the rule for the girl's family to care for her illegitimate child unless the father could be persuaded to assume responsibility.

Jones is silent on the issue of divorce, but we do have some evidence on the matter from the early Meiji period. Among the many extraordinary aspects of social change in the period from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 to 1943, the middle year of the Pacific War, is the steady decline in the Japanese divorce rate, whether expressed per thousand population or as the ratio of the number of divorces to the number of marriages. In their classic paper on this phenomenon, Kawashima and Steiner (1960) attributed the decline to the breakdown of the ideology of the household. They argued that at the outset of Japan's modernization the divorce rate was very high because marriage was defined as a means to the end of insuring the continuity of the house, rather than as an end in itself. Women who produced no heir, thus threatening that continuity, or who were incompatible with their husbands and the members of their households, were sent back and a new bride taken. As the ideology of household continuity waned, the emphasis on maintaining the sacred bond between household head and heir faded, and increasing importance was assigned to the conjugal relationship and the definition of marriage as an end in itself. In short, the destabilization of the household during this period led to a decline in the traditionally high rate of divorce.

More recently this formulation has been called into question.[6] Tsubouchi and Tsubouchi (1970) take the position that newly available evidence shows that between 1876 and 1927 the divorce rate among the aristocrats (*kazoku*) was actually lower than that of the commoners, despite the much stronger emphasis on household continuity among the former. They further maintain that before the Meiji Restoration, divorce was less frequent among the warrior class than among the peasants. Yuzawa (1970) suggests that the very high divorce rates of the early Meiji period have little to do with the ideology of the household, and can be explained instead by the extremely casual attitude of the peasants toward both marriage and divorce. It was among the agricultural population, then,

[6] I am indebted to Yohko Tsuji for calling my attention to Tsubouchi and Tsubouchi, 1970, and Yuzawa, 1970.

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that rates of divorce were so high that they skew the national statistics. In Yuzawa's view, two major reforms of the Meiji period produced a drop in the divorce rate in the countryside. One was the introduction of Confucian values into the system of compulsory education; the other was the requirement of the Civil Code of 1898 that marriage and divorce be legally registered. As we shall see, the materials collected in Suye in the mid-1930s strongly support the contention that rural people had once taken marriage and divorce very lightly indeed.

From among the multitude of slogans, catchwords, and clichés of the prewar period one can be singled out as the most representative of the attitude of the authorities toward women. It is *ryōsai kenbo,* "good wife, wise mother."[7] To produce such paragons was the central purpose of education for women, as Baron Kikuchi, one-time Minister of Education and President of both Tokyo and Kyoto Universities, wrote toward the end of the Meiji period:

> Our female education, then, is based on the assumption that women marry, and that its object is to fit girls to become "good wives and wise mothers." The question naturally arises what constitutes a good wife and wise mother, and the answer to the question requires a knowledge of the position of the wife and mother in the household and the standing of women in society and her status in the State . . . . [The] man goes outside to work to earn his living, to fulfill his duties to the State; it is the wife's part to help him, for the common interests of the house, and as her share of duty to the State, by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking after the household economy, and, above all, tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner (1909:266).

It follows that "female education" emphasized the domestic arts of the homemaker, the requirement of absolute obedience to one's father and husband, the development of a suitably modest demeanor, and the importance of virginity at marriage. A wife was to call her husband "master" and it was among his many onerous duties to train her in the ways of behavior proper to a housewife. To that end, women, like children, might have to be disciplined severely; ultimately, however, they would be grateful to their husbands (and to their mothers-in-law) for taking them so firmly in hand. A woman who failed to bear a child within three years was very likely to be sent back to her natal house, as would one who proved to be recalcitrant or unmanageable, or who failed to learn what were called the ways of the household (*kafū*) of her husband. This definition of compatability, it should be noted, places the burden of adjustment entirely on the shoulders of the wife, who is required not only to please her husband, but the members of his household as well. A divorced woman was free to remarry, although it is said that the majority did not; those who did so almost invariably suffered a decline in social status, for they were viewed as "damaged goods." Therefore, to become a good wife and wise mother was the primary goal of women for whom those rules provided the only security, however precarious, in their adult years.

Is the foregoing dismal picture of women's status in prewar Japan reflected in the materials on the women of Suye? The answer is both yes and no, for there are considerable differences among them that seem to depend on their chronological

[7]Recent research has produced the unexpected finding that this slogan appears not to have been taken from a Confucian text at all, as has long been thought. It was originated by Nakamura Masanao, a Christian intellectual of the Meiji period, and while it encompasses many of the particulars of the Confucian view of woman's proper place, it has its inspiration elsewhere (Sievers 1981:604). I am grateful to Glenda Roberts for calling my attention to Sievers' paper and for other material on the connection between *ryōsai kenbo* and the nineteenth-century American idea of the "cult of domesticity."

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ages. The significant changes in the attitudes and behavior of women were sufficiently marked that the older women of the village frequently commented on them. Let me remind the reader that the Meiji Restoration had occurred some sixty-seven years before, and that the Civil Code had been in effect for only thirty-seven years. The great majority of Suye's grandmothers had been born, grown up, and married somewhere between those two events, and its mothers had been raised by women of other communities (hamlet exogamy being the rule) who were themselves the product of that period.

I shall take the position that we can find in the accounts of the conversations, activities, and marital careers of those women roughly forty years of age and older very good evidence for the existence of an earlier, nonelite pattern. For the life course of younger women, the growing efficacy of the government's policies is apparent, and most of all for girls in their teens. In short, Ella Wiswell has left for us an invaluable record of a time of transition from older customary usages to a new state-inspired orthodoxy.

How had the transformation been brought about? By far the most important vehicle for change was the schools, but there is ample evidence to support the contention that popular magazines and motion pictures played important roles as well. The curriculum designed for girls emphasized homemaking and the desirability of being virginal at marriage and chaste thereafter, in addition to the standard injunction to obey one's parents and one's husband. Like the Civil Code, the educational system created by the Meiji government was heavily Neo-Confucian in its ethical content, and by the 1930s it routinely incorporated into the courses in morals and ethics large amounts of material designed to instruct the young in propriety. Films, while not directly censored by the government, had come increasingly to present a highly normative version of the proper relationships between the sexes, and many of those which Ella Wiswell attended with village women dealt with the contrast between good wives, women who were "truly Japanese," as opposed to bad ones, who were invariably "modern" young women badly infected by foreign ways that rendered them disobedient and selfish. The popular magazines, such *Ie no Hikari* (The Light of the Home), *Fujin Kurabu* (Women's Club), *Shufu no Tomo* (The Housewife's Companion), and the less elevated *Kingu* (King), all contained material designed to be of interest to the homemaker. The latter featured love stores in which the good, Japanese women always won out, albeit not without undergoing severe trials and suffering, and the bad, foreigner-like women paid the price for their liberated behavior. There were also many magazines devoted to motion pictures. These dealt extensively with the lives of movie stars, both Japanese and foreign, highly romanticized but never lurid; for the girls of Suye they provided a rich fund of fantasy that, as we shall see, did not carry over in any degree into their own lives.

There were other kinds of state intervention in addition to the schools. In every village there was a Woman's Association (*fujinkai*) whose activities and programs were exclusively planned by men in the central government bureaucracy and passed down through descending levels of administration to the village headman. During the Embrees' stay in Suye, it having been concluded that the women could not handle their association, the headman appointed a male to lead it. There were also separate Young Men's Associations (*seinenkai*) and Young Women's Associations (*shojokai*). Like the Women's Association, the programs of these groups were originated in Tokyo and

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communicated to the membership through the village headman and the local school principal.[8]

Committed as it was to the transformation of the country into a fully modern industrial state that would enjoy the respect of the rest of the world, there were few areas of life with which the central government was unconcerned. Early in the Meiji period it had ordered the removal from public view of phallic images and sculptures depicting sexual intercourse. The *o-kagura* mentioned above was purged of its overtly sexual passages and transformed into a discreet, even stately dance. Public near-nudity was discouraged and mixed bathing was officially frowned upon, although efforts to prohibit it entirely often ended in such half-hearted gestures as putting a rope across the middle of the pool, with men and women on either side. Japan was to become a society in which decorum would be such that no foreign observer would be scandalized. The slogan that encompassed everything from educational policy to the position in which women were delivered was *bunmei kaika*—Civilization and Enlightenment—and the model was a considerably idealized West. The government had rightly guessed that the Western powers were more likely to take Japan more seriously and to treat it as one among equals if its people behaved in ways that met the standards implied by the words of the slogan.

The villagers among whom the Embrees lived in the mid-1930s were both the product of earlier reforms and the target of continuing efforts by the government to transform Japanese society and to shape the thought and behavior of its subjects. Embree (1939:301-305) commented on the general efficacy of its attempts to control structural change in the countryside, and saw in the recently introduced program of economic reconstruction (in fact, one of increasing austerity) the beginnings of even more tightly directed changes that were fundamentally affecting the whole way of life of Japan's rural population.

We are fortunate in having direct testimony on these matters in Ella Wiswell's journal, which she kept faithfully from November, 1935 through October, 1936. Upon occasion I have made use of John Embree's journal as well. The excerpts given below, only lightly edited, are a contemporary account of what the people of Suye were saying about changes in attitudes and behavior that relate particularly to the position of women. These include comments on premarital sex, illegitimacy, relationships between wives and husbands, and divorce. As will become clear at once, they thought that things were very different from the world of mothers and grandmothers of Suye's young women. Young people, said older women and men, are not like us when we were their age. Far from denouncing the youth of the time for their loose sexual morals, their elders found them positively conservative in contrast with themselves when young.

Following the showing of an outdoor movie one night there was a fight between two young men. It had to do with a girl. "The second feature, all about a stolen sword which involved many fights, affected the young men, two of whom began punching each other until they were pulled apart. It is said that they will fight again. Aki got the story out of one of the group of young men who intervened to stop it. Sato Norio had been exchanging letters with a

[8]Another government program required the licensing of midwives. The training courses for these women contained what the Ministry of Health took to be the most up-to-date techniques and methods of prenatal care, delivery, and postnatal care of mother and child. So effective was this program that by some ten years before the Embrees' study, the manner in which the women of Suye gave birth to their children had been completely changed.

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girl from Kakui (presumably the Maeno daughter) and subsequently Irie's son had come between them. The two have been fighting since last year some time. All the boys enjoyed it greatly, and were over at Irie's today, talking about it. Not many people witnessed the fight, having left as soon as the movie ended. I am told that in the old days young men fought a great deal, usually over women. There were fights between hamlets and with groups from other villages. In contrast, said Mrs. Amano, 'Young men and women today are very well-behaved (*otonashiku natte kita*).'"

Not all young people were well-behaved, then, but of a conversation with a middle-aged woman about some local gossip, Ella Wiswell wrote: "She loves to discuss all these affairs, but never fails to register righteous indignation. 'Isn't it awful? It is really shameful for an unmarried woman to bear children.' This reminded her about Mrs. Suzuki Tamezo, who probably did such bad things in her youth, too, because when she married into Suye she brought a little boy with her. (Then she apologizes for gossiping so much.) She thinks that young people today do not go in for free love, although one does hear of a few cases. By and large, young people today are much stricter (*kataku narimashita*) than they were when she was young."

How had they come to be so different from the youth of earlier generations? A man of twenty-eight offered one answer. "He says that the superior morals of young girls today are explained by their better education, which emphasizes the value of virtue and raised the general level of morality. That is why there are fewer bastards today than there were in the old days. He also thinks that girls have more common sense now, due to the efforts of the schools and the Young Women's Association, where they read books and newspaper articles that explain things to them. As a result it is not so easy to get them into trouble any more. In the old days maids, girls of poor education and little common sense, were easy prey for men, but now these girls have learned about the value of chastity and the importance of retaining their virginity until marriage."

This point of view was shared by many others, including a woman of forty-five: "Although she maintains that she married as a virgin and had no love affairs, her accounts of the behavior of girls of her generation differ somewhat from those given by other women. It was then not so desirable that a girl be a virgin at marriage, and all girls lost their virginity about the age of eighteen. 'That is the best age,' she confided, 'for the later one loses it, the worse it is.' Defloration usually happened during some secret meeting, when the young couple wandered off from a gathering or went out strolling at night. But nowadays girls are different, she says, and are told that they must keep their virginity until marriage. As a rule they do. In her day, she says, few babies resulted from such encounters, but sometimes accidents did happen, which was unfortunate. (I wonder how correct this information is, considering the number of local bastards.)"

The lack of importance attached to virginity in the bride in the old days had other ramifications as well. "There used to be a lot of 'secret babies' because the girls were ignorant, but today there are few. In the same way, there were many divorces and remarriages in the old days, but now things have changed. Formerly the marriage ceremony was extremely simple and did not mean much in itself, so if a girl disliked something or other in her new home, she could go back to her family and start over again. Virginity in a bride did not seem important. That is why you find so many old women who have been married so many times. But now weddings have become elaborate affairs, and so girls

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take them less lightly and do not seek divorce so readily."

By these accounts, it would seem clear that marriage was taken more seriously by young women than it had been by their mothers and grandmothers. John Embree's own journal contains a comment on the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage: "Remarriage is quite common here. A woman in Oade was married once to a man in Hitoyoshi, but left him because she did not like her mother-in-law. Then she married a man in Hamanoue and didn't like her husband—it is said that she would not sleep with him—and finally married a man in Oade by whom she has had six children." Of this case Ella Wiswell wrote, "Today I met Mrs. Maeno. She told me that one of their six children died. Before marrying Maeno, she said with a smile, she had two husbands. The first marriage lasted only six months because she could not stand her mother-in-law's constant criticism, so she left. Her second marriage lasted only a month. She disliked the man and made her bed separately. This third marriage was contracted sight unseen. It is working out fine. Maeno knew about her history but took a chance, she said, and she had decided to start out on a new venture without ever laying eyes on him."

"It seems that the Maeno daughter refused to come here and help serve at our party yesterday, saying, 'I won't do such work.' These girls have a great deal of say-so, which might have some connection with their mother's own strong character, she having left her first two husbands of her own free will."

Unquestionably the record for remarriage is held by old lady Tanno. "She is said to be exceptionally hard to get along with. There is no other like her in Suye. She was once married to someone in Kawaze, but left him and her infant daughter. (This girl eventually married and died without ever seeing her mother again.) Then she married at least ten different men, eventually ending up with Tanno. They say she stays with him because he is so quiet. Said one woman, 'It is seldom that an old woman can have so much to say in a household. I feel sorry for the young wife there. All the children are scared of her because she orders them around so gruffly. It was very hard dealing with her when they were trying to arrange the marriage of the daughter of the house, and she isn't even her real grandmother.' (I have noticed that she always scowls and yells at the kids, and at first thought that she was joking. She is not.)"

"Today I learned that Sasaki's wife was formerly married to Ochiai. She and Ochiai went off to Himeji together, but separated there and returned to Suye at different times. The child was born after they parted, so she kept it. Later I found out that there is talk that Ochiai is going to remarry. When I inquired about the divorce, Mrs. Amano said that his first wife had not wanted to marry him anyway and had left him almost immediately, although she later had his child. Anyway, it was a cousin-marriage, she said, which always go bad."

We must ask how women could remarry with such apparent ease. First, there was no sacred or secular barrier to their doing so, beyond a vague feeling that a woman should remain bound to her husband as long as she lived, even after his death. Clearly that feeling served as no deterrent to remarriage among the agricultural population of Japan. Second, the very structure of the commoners' household and the sexual division of labor within it made it imperative that it contain an able-bodied adult couple. No man could possibly manage on his own to perform all the tasks required to keep a household going, nor could a woman do so. In this sense, wife and husband were absolutely interdependent and should one of them leave, necessity alone was enough to cause the remaining spouse to seek another partner.

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It follows that women and men alike frequently remarked that physical strength and a capable nature were the prime requisites for a good farm wife. If the bride were of an even disposition and virginal as well, so much the better, but it was essential that she be a willing and effective worker.

Everyone agreed that divorce was far less common in 1935 than it had been before. Their impression of the local situation is confirmed by the national statistics, for the rate of divorce per thousand population had fallen from 3.0 in 1885 to 0.7 in 1935, and the ratio of divorces to marriages had declined from 1:2.71 in the period 1884-1888 to 1:11.80 in 1934-1935. There were several explanations for the change. "Mrs. Kato thinks that divorce is less common now and attributes the change to the fact that nowadays young people always have a chance to meet and talk before the wedding. Formerly, because the bride and groom never met until their wedding, they could not work things out between them in advance. She approves of the new system and in fact had her daughter's new husband come out here to meet the girl. In the old days, she said, there might be as many as seven or eight divorces in a family."

A considerably more pragmatic explanation was offered by a man. "Kubo said that the present elaborate wedding ceremony is more or less an innovation. Formerly they were very simple, and one could get married for five *yen*. That is why divorce was so frequent, for for five *yen* you could go to a restaurant, visit a whorehouse, or get married. As a result, one broke up marriages without too much thought. Now, however, so much money goes into them that one thinks a long time before getting a divorce."

There was much open talk about adultery, and a great deal of complaining by Suye women about the unreliability of men. On one occasion Ella Wiswell asked a group of older women if wives were ever adulterous. The answer was: "'Oh yes, women here often have another man besides their husband. They see him when their husbands are away.' They mentioned a case that sounds like Mrs. Tomokawa, and it was said that she has at least four men. Mrs. Maeno was also discussed as being famous for taking lovers. As I had suspected, her daughter left her job in Taragi because of the jealousy of the wife of her employer. So it seems the daughter is often worthy of the mother."

After some discussion of premarital sex in her day, "Mrs. Tanimoto said that in those days married women often—as they still do—had love affairs. As Wauchi Buichi went by, she called out a greeting to him, and said to me, 'Now there is a nice man, and if I were young, I would send him a note saying to come and see me, and he would.' If the husband finds out about such activities, he gets angry, beats up his wife, and may even get a divorce, but husbands seldom find out. She said that Mrs. Toride is having an affair with two different men right now."

"Of Mrs. Fujita she said that the woman would not keep her first two husbands because she always found someone she liked better, and each of her children is by a different father (the girl is Mori's, the boy is Shimosaka's). There was a third child, who died, by a man who now lives in Taragi. (Much later Mrs. Wauchi pointed out a house in Hitoyoshi where Mrs. Fujita's first husband now lives. 'Is he the father of her children?' I asked. 'Well, with her it is hard so say to whom the children belong,' was the answer.) There is a back room in her house, it seems, to which the men can be admitted directly from the outside."

The young women of Suye were in turn amused and shocked by the conversation and behavior of their elders. In the course of a conversation about marriage, which affords important evidence that arranged

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marriage was not at all a recent practice here, the older women said that having daughters is a real worry unless you can marry them off early, implying that they might otherwise get into trouble. "In her day, she said, the bride saw the groom for the first time at the wedding, but added that they were not particularly worried by this. Mrs. Kawabe said that she did not see her husband until their wedding. Unlike Mrs. Arasaki, she said that one did worry about it, but that after the wedding ceremony everything was all right. Yoshie agreed, saying that she had seen her husband only once and was quite concerned before their wedding day. The old lady Sato said that in the old days it did not matter so much, because there was no electric light, and you did not mind because you could not see the man. Of course, on waking up the next morning, you would see this dreadful man beside you and say, *'Iya da! Iya da!* What a terrible thing!' But in the dark it was all right. All this greatly amused the unmarried girls present."

More often the young were annoyed or embarrassed, especially by the uninhibited behavior of older married women at the many drunken parties that the Embrees attended. One was held in the most isolated hamlet of the village, a place somewhat akin to those surveyed by Jones to which I have already referred. From John Embree's journal: "There were a good many dances. One was done by Mrs. Suzuki, who used a stick of wood as a penis, held it to her vagina and jerked it up and down to the rhythm of the *shamisen* [a three-stringed musical instrument]. This called forth much laughter." Others joined in. "The young woman who had nursed her 'secret baby' throughout most of the party got up to dance. She took a small broom and held it to her front like a penis, doing a jerky dance, and attacking half the company with it. When she retired two women got up and simulated copulation by violently bumping together to the rhythm of the dance. Several younger people did a few of the indecent dances, which one almost never sees in other hamlets of Suye, where they usually just sit by and watch, often obviously embarrassed by the goings on."

The young people did, however, make use of temple and shrine festivals and the *bon* dance as occasions for secret assignations. "Earlier in the evening [of one of the three nights of the *bon* festival] a bunch of young girls gathered on the bridge, singing. Young men in a boat just below them played the harmonica and made jokes. They later came up and joined the girls. If one asks, a girl will say that she went to the bridge 'to cool off.' [The housemaid] was not in this group, although she left the house about the time they assembled. She must have been at her home for a while, but what she did later remain a mystery. 'Went here and there to see the ancestors off,' she said this morning."

Yet this girl and most of her age-mates stoutly maintained that they were virgins, saying that if one is not a virgin at marriage, the husband will be very angry. Nonetheless, there were two premarital pregnancies in Suye during the year of the Embrees' stay. One of the young women brazened it out, while the other was sent by her family to stay with relatives in the city. Most of the women and men of the village claimed that young people employed as house-servants were far more likely to get into such trouble because they slept in the servants' quarters at some distance from the main house, while the young members of the family usually slept in the same room with or very near one or both of their parents. All were agreed that the number of illegitimate children was far less than it used to be, and tended to blame the parents of girls who got into trouble for their failure to exercise proper supervision of their children.

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The relationship between wives and husbands in Suye did not always conform to the ideal expressed in the official formulations of the government. "Noguchi said that he thinks that John and I get along very well, while Japanese couples are forever quarreling because of disagreements about work and various other misunderstandings. Mrs. Sato confirmed that we seem never to fight, and that we do everything together, even visiting places where there will be women [that is, going to restaurants and parties where *geisha* are in attendance]. She is always remarking on the fact that John takes me along swimming. A local couple that had got along for twenty-five years without a fight was cited as an outstanding exception."

Yet there were happy and compatible couples. "The (newly wed) Kato couple went off to Hitoyoshi by bus for a few days. The relationship between them is very playful. They constantly exchange little jokes and jocular comments. 'You know everything, don't you?' she says, smiling when he instructs her in some matter of which she knows nothing. She calls him *anata*, although it is said that most brides are too bashful to use this familiar term for some time after marriage. She started using this affectionate term earlier than most, they say, because it is her second marriage. . . . Marriage may bring much romance. The couple takes trips, makes visits here and there together, goes on boat excursions on the river, and the like. An unmarried girl hardly ever goes out like this with a fellow. . . ."

Some people who had been married longer also gave the appearance of congeniality. "The pouring rain kept many people at home today, but some are still hiring out for transplanting or weeding in Shoya. Suzuki Tamezo sat at home all day and cooked the rice because his wife was out. As a rule women hire out for transplanting because they are good at it and men consider it hard work. On the following day, a village-wide day of rest, I found him giving his wife a shave. She was stretched out on the *tatami*, her eyes blissfully closed, while he carefully shaved her eyebrows, forehead, cheeks, and around the ears and neck."

Yet, for the most part, "Women do not occupy a very high position here, certainly. While a wife usually speaks to her husband with a certain degree of respect, there is less formality here than in the towns and cities, although they do say 'please.' The husband just demands 'Water!' or 'Rice!' and gets it. Our maid says that it is not customary for a man to say please when talking to a woman, and finds it quite natural that it should be so."

The Embrees afforded the villagers yet another example of conjugal behavior which the women, at least, envied them. "Wauchi came home later from some business in Menda. He stretched out on the floor and began to complain that there were food spots on the *tatami*. Wereupon she grumbled, 'If you would eat with the rest of the family, you would not notice things like that so much.' I begin to wonder if all is quite well in this family [it was not], since in making a joke this afternoon, Mrs. Wauchi had said that she has nothing but shamefully old clothes to wear and has to smoke a cast-off man's pipe. 'It must be nice to have a husband who buys you new things instead of one who only expects you to work and wait on him.'"

We have already seen that many of the village women had exhibited a considerable measure of independence by walking out on unsupportable marriages, but for the most part Ella Wiswell concluded that "the position of a Japanese wife is hardly enviable, with the constant necessity to be doing one type of work or another. She does nothing but cook, sew, wash, and wait on the men of the house all day long. For companionship there is left no room, unless it is a case like the Katos, where the mother does all the work." Yet many

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women denied that Suye women were as submissive as men liked to say they were. The principal cause of the many quarrels that occurred was said to be jealousy, followed by money problems and the refusal of either spouse to perform some assigned task. Women often complained that their husbands simply asked too much of them because the men were lazy or selfish, and gave as the chief reason for not leaving them their fear of losing their children, to whom most of them were obviously devoted.

They were also economically dependent on their husbands, and although some women did manage to accumulate some money for their own use, the village men, unlike their white-collar urban counterparts, did not hand over the household's money for management by their wives. All in all, it seems clear that Suye women generally were cast in the familiar mold of subordinate members of their households, albeit they showed flashes of independence of mind and kinds of public behavior not routinely encountered in the towns and cities of Japan. That they were not yet models of the "good wife and wise mother" is clear from the opinion of them held by the wives of the school teachers and village-office personnel, few of whom were local people. These good women disapproved of the smoking and heavy drinking by the village women, disparaged them as careless in their care of themselves during pregnancy and as irresponsible with respect to proper sanitary practices in caring for their infants. They found the married women of Suye uncouth and unrestrained in their behavior and were sure that the only hope lay with the young, who might yet be taught woman's proper place. As the age at marriage rose and the legal requirements of the Civil Code came to be more stringently enforced, these village women were increasingly bound by marriage to lives that demanded of them degrees of commitment and endurance that their mothers and grandmothers had not known.

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