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Photos: Theodore C. Bestor
Introduction

In 1991 the Media Production Group (MPG) of the Earlham College Institute for Education on Japan was formed as a collaborative vehicle to produce a new series of television programs and video teaching materials on Japan in cooperation with the National Institute of Multimedia Education in Chiba, Japan.

MPG is a bi-national team of Japan Studies and media professionals most of whom have worked together for twenty years to design and produce materials on Japan for public television and classroom use. They were part of the team which produced the prize-winning 30-program series, "Japan: The Living Tradition," "Japan: The Changing Tradition," which was completed in 1979, and the 1989 award-winning project, "Japan 2000" which included two television programs that update the original series and an interactive video-disc.

Responding to the need in the 1990's for much broader and deeper media coverage of Japan for English-speaking audiences MPG has designed a new series, "Japan: Resources for Understanding." The series includes programs for public broadcast, eight 30-minute studio interviews, titled "Voices of Experience," with distinguished Japan Studies professionals, Video Reports (brief 5 to 8-minute topical presentations) and experimental multi-media materials using an interactive computer/CD ROM format.

"Neighborhood Tokyo" is a 30-minute broadcast program which takes the viewer inside a small community in the metropolis. The program focuses on celebrations of community life throughout the year, on local small-scale businesses and the families that run them, and on the changes in Tokyo's economy and demography that appear to threaten the community's future. This program complements Neighborhood Tokyo, an award-winning ethnography based on Theodore C. Bestor's research in the community since 1979.

Each of these programs is self-contained and is designed for public broadcast as well as for use in the classroom or with civic and business groups. 1/2" VHS cassettes are available for purchase at $35 each plus shipping and handling. Other programs in the series include "Fit Surroundings" which examines the environment and way of life of a shell-fishing village on the coast of Mie Prefecture; "As Iwate Goes...Is Politics Local?"; and "As Iwate Goes...Is Culture Local?" The Iwate programs are complemented by a prize-winning research monograph which expands on the material presented.

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Neighborhood Tokyo
by Theodore C. Bestor
Cornell University

Miyamoto-cho*, the neighborhood featured in this video, is a very ordinary sort of place with little to distinguish it from hundreds of other neighborhoods near the center of Tokyo. It was precisely this ordinariness that I sought out when I first started my research in 1979. My goal was to study the daily community life of an average neighborhood: neither terribly rich nor terribly poor; not so old that the neighborhood was known for its great antiquity as a historical landmark but old enough not to be a new suburb. I was looking for a place of no special prominence: the kind of place that no one would make a special trip to visit, unless they had friends, family, or business there. But I also wanted to find a neighborhood that contained many of the key elements that provide a framework for community life in urban Japan: a shopping street, a local shrine, an elementary school, and active local organizations and institutions.

In Miyamoto-cho, through the introduction of friends, I found just such a place. For two years, between May 1979 and May 1981, my wife and I lived in Miyamoto-cho in a small apartment above a store along the neighborhood's shopping street. I returned for brief visits during the summers of 1984 and 1986, and during 1988-89 my wife and I again lived in Miyamoto-cho for a year, this time with our two-year old son. In the years I have been returning to Miyamoto-cho, the aim of my research has been to understand what the neighborhood means in the daily lives of its residents; how neighbors get along with one another; what kinds of organizations they belong to; and how they create a sense of identity for themselves out of the social stuff of daily life.

*The name Miyamoto-cho is a pseudonym.
Is Miyamoto-cho Typical?

How typical is Miyamoto-cho, and of what? The questions are often asked and, as with any single case study, are hard to answer with any precision. Certainly, in selecting Miyamoto-cho for my research I went to great pains to find a place that had no obvious features that set it apart from its surroundings. Yes, it has a shopping street running down the middle of it, but local shopping streets are common features of Tokyo’s landscape. Yes, it has many self-employed owners of family businesses, but roughly 20 percent of Tokyo’s working population is employed in just such small-scale businesses. Yes, it has a well-kept Shinto shrine at its center, but Tokyo is dotted with hundreds of local shrines. My confidence that there is nothing terribly unusual about the place has also been bolstered over the years by the fact that in conversations and interviews with hundreds of residents of Miyamoto-cho and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as with other Japanese friends, scholars, and officials, not once has anyone suddenly broken their chain of thought and said to me, “You know, the thing that really sets Miyamoto-cho apart is ...”

Another way of thinking about the typicality of Miyamoto-cho is in terms of broad bands of similarity and dissimilarity with other communities in Tokyo. Clearly Miyamoto-cho bears little resemblance to the huge suburban apartment complexes in which many middle-class Tokyoites reside nor is it very similar to the upper middle-class residential districts of walled homes that are found in wealthy sections of the city. In both of these kinds of neighborhoods, anonymity prevails. Miyamoto-cho also differs substantially from many distant suburban sections of the metropolis that have only recently been converted from agricultural to residential purposes, where newcomers and oldtimers (people who until recently farmed the land) are often at odds with one another.

Against this backdrop of what Miyamoto-cho is not characteristic of, it is easier to consider the senses in which it is commonplace. Miyamoto-cho is typical of the older, central sections of Tokyo that were urbanized before World War II, where homes, shops, workshops, and tiny factories are intermingled, where many residents regard the neighborhood as both home and workplace, and where the social institutions of local life remain relatively intact. There are hundreds if not thousands of such neighborhoods in a broad arc around the center of the city, each distinctive in its own local peculiarities of history, geography, demography, and economy but nonetheless broadly similar in the quality of local social life they embody.

Finally, one can consider whether most contemporary Japanese would recognize the style of local social life in a place like Miyamoto-cho as unique and distinctive or as ordinary. Whether or not they grew up or now live in a neighborhood like Miyamoto-cho, almost every Japanese I have ever talked to about my research has been able immediately to conjure up a fairly accurate picture of the kind of place I have been studying. This I take as cultural confirmation that Miyamoto-cho represents one important and widely recognized variant of urban life, as familiar to people from different walks of life as it is to the people who call Miyamoto-cho home.

But even if Miyamoto-cho is typical of a certain kind of neighborhood that is broadly familiar to many Japanese, it is important to note that this video, like any ethnographic portrayal of a community, is necessarily a selective and partial one. By focusing as it does on a number of special events — such as the festival and the celebration of the New Year’s holidays — and on somewhat unusual occupations — kimono dyers and tobi (construction foremen) — the video may give some viewers the mistaken impression that ordinary daily life in Miyamoto-cho is a constant round of ceremony, ritual, and celebration conducted in archaic costumes. Or viewers may come away with the impression that what sets Miyamoto-cho apart from the rest of Tokyo is its quaint exoticism and that this is what makes the neighborhood a worthy subject of anthropological examination. In reality, the annual rounds of festivity
and communal celebration are as special and separate from daily life for residents as they are attractive to the camera's lens. So what the camera ignores in this case is the rush of commuters to and from the local train stations each morning and evening. As the camera pans down a nearly deserted street on New Year's Day, it is hard to imagine that on most other days the same two blocks may be so choked with noisy, smelly traffic jams that it can take a car twenty minutes to cross a neighborhood that a pedestrian can cross in two. The camera doesn't capture local shoppers stopping to gossip over vegetables at the greengrocer's, and men flipping aimlessly through comics as they wait for the drying cycle to finish at the laundromat. It misses high school kids using the back reaches of the shrine as a clandestine meeting place to flirt with their sweethearts, and drunken businessmen reeling home late at night from the local bars. Often when I have shown this video to audiences—particularly to students who have read things I have written about Miyamoto-cho—reactions divide quite evenly between those who think it is a shabbier place than they had imagined and those who think it is prettier. Aesthetic judgments aside, these reactions harken back to the question of typicality. For those whose images of Japan are that of an economic superpower consumed by materialistic splendor or those who think of thatched roofs, quiet gardens, and exquisite crafts, Miyamoto-cho can indeed be a drab place. Others who think of Tokyo as a futuristic city of robotic regimentation where traces of traditional grace have been eradicated find Miyamoto-cho a charming oasis of greenery and historical memory. Truth hovers somewhere in between these polar views, of course, and the dichotomy is as acutely felt in the musings of Miyamoto-cho's own residents about their community's place in Japanese society as it is in the questions of my students.

**Historical Background**

Miyamoto-cho is about twenty minutes from the heart of Tokyo by commuter railway, in an area of the city that grew up in the aftermath of the great Kanto earthquake that destroyed most of the old city in 1923. The area around what is now Miyamoto-cho was transformed from farming village into city within a very few years by the influx of people displaced by the catastrophe. Although Miyamoto-cho is not part of the old central city—shitamachi (literally "downtown")—it resembles shitamachi in many ways. Shitamachi does not imply "downtown" in a sense of a central business district of large office buildings and fancy shops; rather, in Tokyo shitamachi refers to the old-fashioned neighborhoods of small-scale shopkeepers, petty manufacturers, artisans, and craftspersons who share a subculture loosely derived from the mercantile traditions of pre-industrial Edo (as Tokyo was known before 1868). Residents of shitamachi like to claim that life there is marked by fairly informal, easy-going relations among friends and neighbors, a spirit of communal egalitarianism, and dense interconnections among residents based on strong local institutions, neighborly ties of mutual aid, and the give-and-take of daily life in each others' company. In drawing this portrait of themselves and of the social character of shitamachi, they are also drawing a distinction with yamanote (literally 'the foothills'), the hilly regions to the west of the city that were historically the home of the samurai and are now stereotypically regarded as the province of well-to-do salarymen and their families. Life over there (in the view of shitamachi's partisans) is cold, aloof, and totally lacking in the friendly camaraderie and intricate social ties that bind neighbor to neighbor in places like Miyamoto-cho.

Reality, of course, lies somewhere in between. On the one hand, salarymen, including the many who themselves call Miyamoto-cho home, are hardly as stuck-up as the image suggests. On the other hand, Miyamoto-cho's dense social ties have their critics who regard such neighborhoods as claustrophobic, conformist throwbacks to feudalism. That a place like
Miyamoto-cho could be at all controversial may strike viewers as surprising. But many Japanese regard this kind of neighborhood life in light of the historical legacies of World War II, during which time local institutions like neighborhood associations were major instruments of wartime mobilization and government repression. Experiences of war have left a lingering attitude of distrust toward local community life that continues to color the views of many Japanese. For these people the close-knit social world of neighborhoods like Miyamoto-cho is an uncomfortable reminder of bitter wartime experiences of repression and holds a threat that the social underpinnings of regimentation could easily be resurrected in the future.

Themes in the Video
This video focuses on just a few aspects of the life of Miyamoto-cho and the lives of its residents. These include: the local Shinto shrine and the annual festival; the role of local institutions in creating a framework for community life; family businesses, and New Year’s celebrations. The following sections provide background information for the material presented in the video. Viewers seeking more detailed information or analysis may wish to consult the list of suggested readings at the end of this guide.

The Shrine and the Festival
The local Shinto shrine stands in the heart of Miyamoto-cho, a block off the busy shopping street. It is at the center of local definitions of identity and tradition because it is one of the few local institutions that is clearly linked to the past. The parish of the shrine includes Miyamoto-cho and six adjacent neighborhoods. It covers the area of what was, until the late 19th century, a single agricultural village. All physical traces of village life disappeared before the Second World War and today Miyamoto-cho and the other neighborhoods merge imperceptibly into the vast metropolis around them.

Nonetheless the shrine symbolizes a distinctly local identity, even if most current residents (many of them newcomers to the area within the past two or three generations) themselves have no family ties to the old village.

The annual holiday of shichi-go-san (“Seven-five-three”), shown near the beginning of the video, is one example of the shrine as a focal point in local residents’ lives. This holiday celebrates children who have turned three (for girls), five (for boys), or seven (again for girls) in a given year, and typically parents take their children to a local shrine for a blessing from the priest and for some commemorative photographs.

On a much larger scale, the shrine is the focus of the annual festival (matsuri) held each year in mid-September. Although it is a festival for the deity enshrined there, few residents care much about the theological significance of the festival, leaving such details to the priest, who often is a solitary technician of the sacred. For local people, what matters most about the festival at the shrine is the carnival held on the shrine grounds where peddlers set up temporary stalls to sell toys, offer chances on games of “skill,” and prepare quick snacks of noodles, cotton candy, and dumplings.

Far more important than these commercial elements are the festival observances held separately by each of the seven neighborhoods in the parish. Each neighborhood owns one or more mikoshi, large portable shrines or palanquins carried throughout each neighborhood by teams of mostly younger residents. Miyamoto-cho’s largest mikoshi was commissioned only a few years ago, at a cost of roughly 10 million yen donated by several hundred neighborhood residents. After the priest installs in it a slip of paper signifying the presence of the deity, the mikoshi is carried around all corners of the neighborhood on three or four circuits during the two day festival. In religious terms, these processions signify that the deity has inspected and blessed each corner of the community; as social events, they demonstrate the boundaries of the community and the connectedness of all who live within them.
It is this local observance of the festival that draws the most participation from Miyamoto-cho's residents, and it is to the performance of this festival — rather than to the activities held at the shrine — that they donate their money and their time. The performance of the festival exhibits many of the features of local social relations. Despite the festival’s overt ideology of egalitarian harmony, hierarchy and status are clearly displayed through the assignment of positions on the festival committee and in the public posting of how much each resident contributes. And competition between neighborhoods is accentuated as each tries to put on the most elaborate, noisiest, and most expensive festival of its own. For example, when Miyamoto-cho’s large new mihoshi was built, it launched a frenzied competition among adjacent neighborhoods to buy or build fancy new mihoshi that might surpass Miyamoto-cho’s.

Although the festival is the product of many people’s labor, the local tobi, Mr. Kato, plays a special if hard-to-define role. Tobi (also called tobishoku) are old-fashioned construction foremen, still found in many older neighborhoods throughout Tokyo. In the modern construction industry, they play an important role in recruiting workmen for construction sites and have particular skills in erecting scaffolding and in framing traditional wooden houses. Typically, tobi have very specific geographical turf, usually an area of one or two neighborhoods, and anyone undertaking construction in an area would normally engage the local tobi as part of the construction team. Along with their customary sovereignty over construction within their domains, however, tobi also have many other customary links to community life. In pre-industrial Edo, tobi and their work crews were critical leaders in fire fighting, since the job of fire fighters was more to dismantle houses in the path of fire than to put out the fire itself; their skills in construction obviously were equally valuable in quick deconstruction as well.

Tobi also acquired customary monopolies over various ritual activities in local life. Some of these continue into the present day and are shown in the video. One is the role that the tobi plays in the preparation, sale, and installation of New Year’s decorations for local residents. Another is the tobi’s role in local festivals. The relationship between tobi and festivals is a complicated one. The most obvious aspect is that tobi have the skill — acquired through their work with scaffolding — to assemble and lash together the complex framework of poles upon which the mihoshi, or festival palanquin, is carried. Equally important is the ability of the tobi to recruit — and control — groups of men to help carry the crushing weight of the mihoshi. It is, therefore, no coincidence that in Miyamoto-cho’s festival, Mr. Kato — the local tobi — holds a permanent position as one of the four festival officials (called wahagashira, or young foremen) responsible for the mihoshi and the behavior of its bearers throughout its rounds of the neighborhood.

Finally, throughout the history of Edo and Tokyo, fire fighters and Shinto shrines have had an affinity for one another; most fire brigades are organized within the territory of a single Shinto tutelary deity. Although Mr. Kato himself is not a member of the local volunteer fire brigade, his position as the local tobi almost automatically accords him a ritually important role in the preparations for and performance of the annual festival.

Mr. Kato is important in another way as well. Although Miyamoto-cho itself is a relatively new neighborhood, its festival and the general tenor of the local ideology of community identity and tradition tend to accentuate — or perhaps exaggerate — the continuity between the historical past and the contemporary present. To the extent that Mr. Kato’s position as a tobi just like those found in the venerable shitamachi neighborhoods in more central areas of Tokyo embellishes Miyamoto-cho’s putative links to the past, his presence and his participation in the festival and in New Year’s celebrations are tangible evidence that Miyamoto-cho’s assertions of its traditional identity are valid.
Institutions of Neighborhood Life

Only a few of the many organized groups that are active in the social life of Miyamoto-cho are mentioned in the video, but together such organizations sponsor an enormous array of activities and loom large in defining Miyamoto-cho as a cohesive neighborhood. Chief among local groups is the chokai or chonaikai (neighborhood association), of which Mr. Ando is currently the president. Membership in the chokai is virtually automatic for all of the 700 or so households in the neighborhood, each of which pays a few hundred yen a month in dues. The chokai serves as liaison to local municipal agencies and takes on tasks ranging from sponsoring the local festival to spraying the neighborhood with pesticides during the summer, organizing recycling campaigns, conducting the year-end fire patrol and periodic traffic safety campaigns, assisting elderly residents, and sponsoring activities for local kids.

The chokai owns the neighborhood hall where its local festival is headquartered. It also contributes to the upkeep of the shrine, together with the chokai of the other six neighborhoods that make up the shrine's parish. Throughout the year, the neighborhood hall is the scene of other local activities, some sponsored by the chokai (such as the mochi rice-cake making event for local kids), others sponsored by other affiliated groups (such as the dance classes held for members of the Women's Association, or parties and classes held by the Old People's Club). The local chamber of commerce representing the 40 or so merchants along Miyamoto-cho's shopping street also uses the hall for its meetings. And local residents can rent the hall for a nominal fee for private events; sadly, the most typical such events are the banquets held in connection with wakes and funerals.

Other organizations active in neighborhood life include political clubs organized by supporters of local politicians; PTAs for both the local elementary and junior high schools (both of which happen to be within Miyamoto-cho, although they draw students from a much wider area); and the volunteer fire brigade which traces its history back to village days and whose territory exactly matches the area of the shrine parish. Although these and other groups are institutionally distinct from the chokai, their memberships overlap and interweave, and together with the chokai they create much of the local social framework within which residents get to know and interact with one another in a wide variety of ways.

Family Business

Miyamoto-cho is a community in which many residents are self-employed merchants and craftspeople — like the Ando, Minegishi, and Nakao families who appear in the video. People like them have a real stake in the future of the neighborhood as both a home and a source of their livelihoods. Because of their local businesses, they can and do play leading roles in local events; they are around all day, every day — unlike people who commute to work elsewhere — and so if something comes up in the neighborhood that needs their attention, they often have the flexibility to take care of neighborhood business in the course of their busy lives.

American images of "Japan, Inc." — a society of enormous monolithic corporations and armies of grim-faced businessmen in gray suits — notwithstanding, among the industrialized nations of the world Japan has the highest rates of self-employment and of people who work in family businesses like those in Miyamoto-cho. In American society today, small family-owned businesses are largely an anachronism of small town life or are in the hands of recent immigrant groups for whom the family firm represents a first step in economic advancement. In contemporary Japan, however, the local, family-run shop or workshop remains very common and, as in Miyamoto-cho, it is often a multi-generational operation.

The Ando family operates a business — a kimono factory — that is unusual even in Japan, but their pattern of work as a household that runs its own family business is quite common in urban Japan. All members of the household are involved in some way in the family's business, and sustaining the business is a matter of prime concern. This explains the decision by the current Mr. Ando's parents-in-law to ensure the
continuity of the family and the business when they adopted him as a son-in-law at the time of his marriage to their daughter. Although adopted sons-in-law (mukayoshi) like Mr. Ando are no longer as common as they once were, the practice of adoption to ensure family continuity is an old and established practice in Japanese kinship groups, and it remains relatively common in families like this where the family business and the family itself are almost inseparable.

Where are the Women?

Although women like Mrs. Ando wield immense influence and power within their homes and within their family businesses, women seem conspicuous by their absence from the public life of Miyamoto-cho. In Miyamoto-cho as elsewhere in contemporary Japanese society, social roles and participation are quite clearly demarcated by gender, as well as by age and other social attributes. One dimension along which gendered social roles vary is the continuum between spheres of public versus private participation. Whatever the strength of women inside the home, outside the home women generally assume roles that keep them in the background while men are put on center stage. The more public the event the greater the likelihood that men will occupy most if not all of the prominent positions; if both men and women participate, their roles — and even the physical spaces they occupy — are likely to be quite separate. This is particularly true in religious contexts, reflecting in part Shinto beliefs and practices that link males with purity and females with pollution (in a ritual rather than an environmental sense).

During Miyamoto-cho's festival, women participate in some public spheres, such as the folk dance troupe and escorting the carts that small children pull, more or less separately from men. But the most public roles of festival leadership are held almost exclusively by men. At festival banquets and other community celebrations in which both sexes participate, men and women generally sit separately from one another, as my wife and I learned quite dramatically when we made the mistake of sitting next to one another and watched the room rearrange itself around us so that where we sat came to mark the end of the men's section and the beginning of the women's. Now young women help to carry the festival mikoshi and serve as drummers, but these are recent innovations of the last decade or so, modeled in Miyamoto-cho on similar innovations that have been incorporated in festivals throughout Tokyo in the past generation, especially in the shitamachi regions of the city.

Although Miyamoto-cho may appear to represent an extremely high degree of gendered segregation, in the context of contemporary Japanese life it is actually a place where interactions between men and women are frequent, relatively informal, and fluid, as in many shitamachi neighborhoods. Whereas the daily spheres of men and women are sharply distinguished in many middle-class families where white-collar husbands go off to work and their wives stay home to tend house and look after their children, in neighborhoods like Miyamoto-cho where many residents are engaged in family businesses, men and women work together throughout the day. And social interactions of daily life outside the home and after work tend to reflect a relatively easy give-and-take between men and women. It is not unusual in Miyamoto-cho for husbands and wives to go out to local bars and restaurants together, for them to know each others' friends, and for women to tease and joke with men outside their families. By American standards these may seem to be trivial indications of "equal" status, but if measured against the rigid conventions of upper middle class Japanese gender roles, the shitamachi version of male and female interaction is relaxed and open.

The New Year

Like other religious or ritual events in the course of the year in Miyamoto-cho, New Year's is a time when the social relationships of life are celebrated. First and foremost, New Year's is a family holiday, a chance for family members to take a few days off and be in one another's company. But it is also a community event.
The fire patrols that the chokai sponsors on the last two nights of the year — like the mikoshi processions during the annual autumn festival — cover every corner of the neighborhood, visibly and vocally marking off the boundaries of the community. Kato-san, the construction foreman who runs the stall selling New Year’s decorations and installs decorations in people’s homes and offices and at the shrine, is not just an enterprising craftsman using the slack construction season to good advantage; he is also a community institution, providing seasonally important ritual services to a community that — in the traditional demarcations of the tobi trade — he controls as his own turf where no construction crew can work without his consent and participation. And, in the final events of the New Year’s holiday, local leaders assemble at the shrine on January 2nd not simply to receive the blessings of the priest but to affirm the ties they share as residents of their own very special, very ordinary place, Miyamoto-cho.

**Does Miyamoto-cho have a Future?**

In the late Spring of 1994, about two years after this video was completed and just as this viewer’s guide was being prepared, I had a chance to return to Miyamoto-cho. The intervening two years had been times of great turmoil on the national level: once again rocked by scandal, the Liberal Democratic Party had finally fallen from power; the second coalition government to follow the LDP was holding office by the most tenuous good luck; the political system was poised on the edge of radical transformation by a new electoral system the results of which no one can predict. Tokyo is now home to tens of thousands of foreign workers who fill the lowest jobs and whose presence shakes Japanese confidence in the supposed homogeneity of their society. And the ‘Bubble Economy’ of the 1980s had definitively burst, driving small, marginal companies out of business and threatening the economic security of employees of some of Japan’s largest companies as well. As I returned to Miyamoto-cho, I wondered what I would find.

After dinner at the Ando’s, in the company of half a dozen other residents of Miyamoto-cho, someone suggested we watch this video (a version with Japanese subtitles). Wondering what reactions they might have, I settled down uncomfortably as the program began. Laughter followed Mr. Nakao’s observation that I seemed to speak English very well. People giggled as their friends, cousins, or grandchildren appeared. My on-screen revelations of the details of the Ando family business were greeted with good natured surprise that I really knew that much. But as the video turned to questions of the future of family business and of the neighborhood, my friends fell quiet. They nodded in silent, sorry agreement when on screen I talked about the problems of finding successors to run businesses and about the impact that large supermarkets and discount stores outside Miyamoto-cho have on local shops. Finally, as the video came to an end, someone mumbled, “ano toki wa natsukashii” — “those were the good old days.”

Of course, in two years things have not changed that much, and the changes that have occurred have been in the works for many more years than two. In the fifteen years since I first started to study Miyamoto-cho, the population has been gradually decreasing and the newcomers generally seem to regard the neighborhood more as a good place to sleep than a good place to socialize. Residing in the fancy new apartments the oldtimers have built when they remodel old homes, the newcomers are likely to think their ties to their neighbors begin and end with their rent payments and make few efforts to put down roots. Since long before the Bubble Economy burst, the number of new shops opening has never quite made up for those that have closed, but after the Bubble, the silence of shuttered shops shouts at passers-by on their way to the large new shopping complex recently completed near the local railway station.

But as I looked around the room, I was suddenly struck by the realization that my friends were also reacting to what seems to them to be a fundamental, perhaps irreversible generational change. When I first came to Miyamoto-cho in 1979, the people I was dining with in 1994 were the young
leaders being groomed to take over positions of community responsibility in the future. At the time, my friends — then in their 30s and 40s, now in their 50s and 60s — saw things differently; they were struggling to wrest control of local life from their parents' generation. Perhaps it was their grooming for leadership that led them to struggle for control; perhaps it was their struggle for control that led their elders to groom them for community leadership. Today my friends bleakly realize that their own adult children — now beginning to approach the ages of their parents when first I met them — no longer view community leadership as a goal either to emulate or usurp.

The odd perspective of an anthropologist as someone who is both (and neither) insider and outsider perhaps allows me to take a longer, more dispassionate view. Certainly, my friends are right that Miyamoto-cho will never be the same kind of neighborhood it was before. Years of prosperity and rising real estate prices have altered the physical layout of the neighborhood, changed its demography, altered the nature of local business, and transformed the attitudes of the younger generation toward the local community as their sphere of activity. The sudden shock of economic downturn — however long or short it ends up being — has suddenly eroded people's ability to invest the time, energy, and money in community affairs that kept the neighborhood atop a rising wave during the boom years.

But the neighborhood remains home and workplace to hundreds of families, most of them likely to remain in place, especially if they own land here near the center of Tokyo. As residents of a densely packed neighborhood, their lives almost inevitably interwine in dozens of mundane ways: from coordinating garbage collection schedules to worrying about the elementary school's PTA; from sharing common concerns over traffic problems to shopping together for daily necessities down the block; from helping each other when typhoons strike Tokyo to campaigning for local assembly elections. None of these will disappear simply because the national economy is shaken, the political system transformed, particular local businesses disappear, or a generation of leaders has not reproduced itself. Residents of Miyamoto-cho will have common cause for a long time to come, and the neighborhood will survive as a community in some form, perhaps a more loosely integrated one.

But what of the festival and of the other activities through which the neighborhood defines itself and expresses its identity as a unit? Can such traditional aspects of local life survive in a less cohesive, less committed community? Yes, because tradition and the activities that are emblematic of it are themselves products of continual transformation and innovation. Undoubtedly the expression of traditional identity in Miyamoto-cho will be transformed, but throughout the years I have studied Miyamoto-cho and in the history of its development since the early part of the twentieth century, such transformations have been the rule not the exception. Nothing, it turns out, is more traditional than innovation.

In Miyamoto-cho — and throughout Japanese society — tradition is not the antithesis of change, but a vocabulary through which identity and distinction can be maintained, bolstered, at times invented. As life in Miyamoto-cho changes, the expression of identity will undoubtedly change along with the distinctions that people want to accentuate between themselves and others, between their neighborhood and the larger society. The festival may grow more elaborate, or less; ritual fire patrols may fade from view; people may come to depend on something other than the local tobi's decorations to make New Year's their own. But the repertoire of Japanese culture symbolism is vast, and as long as residents of Miyamoto-cho find common cause for interaction and cooperation, and feel a need to symbolize themselves as a distinct community, the malleability of tradition will present ample material with which to assert the continued vitality of community life.
The View From This Side of the River

By Ikeda Hajime
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Broadcast Education Development Center
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Just as the view seen from the far shore differs from that seen from this side of the river, I believe there are significant differences in the way "Neighborhood Tokyo" is received by Americans and Japanese. Speaking less as a television producer than as a Japanese, I would like to examine the view that unfolds on the Japanese side of the river. Of course, I do not intend to imply in any way that the view from this side of the river is any more accurate.

The theme of this program is the portrayal of the "good old world" of that distinctively Japanese traditional community known as the tonarikinjo, or "neighborhood," which is rapidly disappearing from present-day industrial society. It is a world in which people become thoroughly acquainted with each other's economic circumstances, families, values, and character, and in which, relying on and accepting each other, they can pass their days with a sense of security. Before the war, this kind of world could be found all over Tokyo and in other urban areas. Even thirty years ago to a significant extent it remained as it had been. It was during the period of high economic growth in the nineteen-sixties that this traditional urban flavor began to disappear rapidly. Accordingly, anyone in their forties or older who was raised in Tokyo has experienced or been exposed to a community like Miyamoto-cho to some degree or another.

But in the eyes of such people, is "neighborhood Tokyo" really seen to be a "good old world"? I have my doubts. Though people may feel a simplistic nostalgia for this bygone world, I don't think they truly regret its passing. Why is this so? Bluntly stated, because they know that behind the 40% merit of the tonarikinjo society of former times lay 60% demerit.

The greater part of the tonarikinjo society's demerit originates in its historical development. The Bakufu, or central military government, of the Edo period (A.D. 1600-1867) reorganized tonarikinjo society, which until then had been an organic phenomenon, into a structured device for the maintenance of the Establishment. It made the tonarikinjo into a unit of collective responsibility. The anti-Establishment behavior of a single member of the tonarikinjo became the responsibility of every member, and all were punished. People were put in the position of having no choice but to monitor each other's behavior. By casting a net of strict mutual surveillance over the entire country, the Bakufu tried to nip any anti-Establishment activity in the bud. The pursuit of responsibility for anti-Establishment behavior eventually led to an intolerance of anything non-Establishment as well, and a stifling, rigidly structured society was created. Through this tonarikinjo structure, most of what was anti- or non-Establishment was quietly but rigorously rooted out while still in its infancy.

It's only fair to add that behind these demerits seen from a macro perspective were merits that can be seen from a micro perspective. Mutual assistance in the tonarikinjo reached an extremely high level. In poverty and illness, of course, but in child-rearing and care for the elderly as well, people were able to turn to the tonarikinjo for a helping hand. That they related to each other as intimately as they did with their own families can be seen in historical materials such as rakugo storytelling and novels of the time that describe the lifestyles of the common people. Tonarikinjo was, it is true, a powerful social support system for individuals and families.

However, this system was also used by the wartime Establishment during World War II. It then came to be known as the tonarigumi, or "neighborhood group." Just as in the Edo Period, this organization carried a strong implication of mutual surveillance against anti-Establishment and non-Establishment behavior, and Japanese above the age of fifty will never be able to shed the unpleasant memory of this wartime use of the structure. It could even be said that one of the major reasons there was very little anti-war activity or anti-war behavior in wartime Japan lies in the role of mutual surveillance within the tonarigumi. Because the chonaihaki (also called chokai) that appears in this program was, during this period, the higher-level organization under which the tonarigumi were subsumed, the bitter memory of that repressive time that lingers in people's minds make it difficult for many Japanese to think of the chonaihaki as a benign structure.
Post-war Japan, in laying the foundation for a democratic society, rejected the tonarigumi and similar institutions. From the viewpoint of a society that values the free thought of the individual, its merits were judged to be too numerous. The chonaihai survived in form only, but no longer extended its influence over people's lives and was stripped of its repressive functions. For more than forty years since then, the chonaihai has quietly lived on in Japanese society, carrying the burden of the sins of the past, garnering sympathy from no one. In the interval, the tonarigumi and the chonaihai have appeared at the periphery of Japanese society discourse on two occasions. The first was about twenty years ago, when violence and delinquency in the schools among young boys increased suddenly, and society was up in arms about the crisis in education. At the time, people said, "In the old days, children in the chonai played together with both older and younger children learning social rules naturally. Children today are in need of such a community." The other occasion was about ten years ago, when the newspaper began carrying one story after another about the lonely deaths of elderly people living by themselves in big cities. In one case, the body was not discovered until three months after the person died. Those who read such reports said, "In the old days, the eyes of the tonarikinjo were sharp; there was no way such a shocking incident could have occurred." People were reminded again of the 40% merit of the tonarigumi or chonaihai of the old days. Still, people know that they can never return to the past. Further, they have not forgotten the accompanying 60% demerit that went with the benefits.

But there is one more compelling reason that contemporary Japanese are cool to the idea of the community of the tonarigumi or chonaihai in spite of being aware of its merit: the tonarigumi and the chonaihai, to use the terms metaphorically, already exist today within every segment of society and especially in big business and in the civil service. The sarariman ("salaryman"), whether white collar or blue collar, is a member of a tonarigumi or chonaihai within the workplace. Let me explain what I mean.

Segments of Japanese society have always taken on the nominal form of the "family." The relationship between the employer and employee, between the administrator and the subordinate, has been likened to that of the parent and child, and the relationship between fellow workers has been modeled as that of elder and younger sibling. There are specific terms which convey these metaphors. In principle, the one who occupies the lower position in this superior/inferior relationship of authority and submission receives protection and education, in return for which he is expected to deliver his "loyalty." (Of course, it is true that there have been employers who demand only submission from the employee and force them to work under harsh conditions.)

However, through the high economic growth of the nineteen-sixties, the scale of corporations expanded at an incredible pace, doubling and tripling in size every year. An enormous number of people from rural farming and fishing villages flowed into the companies and factories in the cities. In particular, there were a great many young, new company members, fresh out of junior high school. Companies were no longer in a position to control members in terms of family relations.

That all was not reduced to simple wage-for-labor contractual relations indicates the distinctive nature of Japanese corporate management. Managers wanted to establish and maintain the employee loyalty that had existed in the old family-style corporate management at any cost. To this end, the company introduced a structure equivalent to the tonarigumi and chonaihai to its suddenly expanded organization. Within the company were created many small production groups based on collective responsibility. Collective responsibility was naturally accompanied by collective surveillance, which on one level served to prevent decline in productivity and anti-corporate activity. On another level, however, particularly for the lonely youths who had come to the city from the country, it was also a source of relief and positive support. Through collective responsibility, members achieve peace of mind — what one might call a sense of camaraderie — by carrying out collective production under a system in which each person is thoroughly acquainted with the background, school history, current life circumstances, values, and character of the other members of the group. Eventually this system extended out beyond the workplace. In helping and supporting each other with weddings, funerals and moving to a new home, and in times of illness and injury, as well as through recreation that included
family members, people are powerfully and satisfactorily linked to each other. This sort of working environment, like the tonarigumi of old, carries with it a great deal of demerit from the point of view of the worker, but for the company it holds almost nothing but merit. And so companies have succeeded, strengthening the system’s merits by such means as awarding company commendations to work groups as a unit and providing funds for work group recreational activities.

Because salarymen, the largest and most powerful class in contemporary Japan, are already involved in this way in the traditional human relations of the tonarigumi and the chonaikai, and enjoy the merits of those relations, they are not interested in going further by participating in the demerit-ridden community of the chonaikai. This is no doubt one of the major reasons that this larger sense of community in the Japanese city is declining rapidly and irreversibly.

Throughout the world today, the mores of traditional society and the principles of industrialized society are in a confrontational relationship. The overall picture is one in which the two clash, and, though there may be differences in the amount of time it takes, the principles of industrialized society are likely to win an overwhelming victory.

The case of Japan, too, may present the same picture of confrontation to someone standing one the other side of the river, but the view from this side of the river is a different one—one often characterized by a strange sense of harmony or integration between these two seemingly opposed systems.

**Discussion Questions:**

1) Women in Miyamoto-cho do not ordinarily play particularly prominent roles in public events or organizations. At the same time, in family businesses like those that are typical in Miyamoto-cho and elsewhere women play vitally important roles and are widely acknowledged to exert enormous control over both the family and business. In thinking about the status of women in contemporary Japanese life, does this strike you as contradictory or not? How are distinctions between public and private spheres of activity related to gendered relations of power? Do public and private mean the same things in all societies?

2) What does an anthropologist actually do? Does Bestor’s presence in the video itself detract from the ability of viewers to understand directly the people in Miyamoto-cho? What message would the video convey if Bestor did not appear at all? How does an ethnographic video as a text resemble or differ from a piece of ethnographic writing as a text? What kinds of critical skills do you need to apply in either case?

3) Is Miyamoto-cho typical? What kinds of things would you need to know to determine whether a particular place, or family, or event is typical of a broader category of social activity or structure? Assuming Miyamoto-cho is typical of something, what is the universe of things in Japan that it is typical of, and what things is it definitely not typical of? How do we build up images of an entire society out of fragmentary views of ‘typical’ and ‘unusual’ things?

4) Does Miyamoto-cho have a future? The video suggests several changes that have been occurring over the years that Bestor has been studying the place. One is the value of real estate and the land speculation that was rampant during the 1980s but has largely ended since the economic downturns of the late 80s and early 90s. Another is the decline of local businesses and uncertainties over whether members of the next generation will want to continue their parents’ shops. Does this mean that Miyamoto-cho is doomed to disappear? Does the video suggest any other factors that may enable Miyamoto-cho to retain a sense of community in the future?
Suggested Readings

Miyamoto-cho is the subject of a book and several articles by Theodore Bestor, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Cornell University. Neighborhood Tokyo is a detailed ethnography of the community, based primarily on fieldwork conducted in 1979-1981, 1984, and 1986. Bestor has also written several brief articles on Miyamoto-cho that address themes in the video and that could be used in classes as short supplementary readings. These include: "Tokyo Mom-and-Pop" which discusses small family businesses; "Conflict, Tradition, and Legitimacy in an Urban Japanese Festival" which examines the social organization of Miyamoto-cho's festival and the invention of tradition; "Rediscovering Shitamachi" which analyzes the cultural identity of neighborhoods like Miyamoto-cho; and two articles about local institutions and social ties, "Traditionalism and Identity in a Tokyo Neighborhood" and "Tradition and Japanese Social Organization." Instructors looking for general background perspectives on urban Japan may find two of Bestor's other articles useful overviews: "Urban Life in Japan," and "Lifestyles and Popular Culture in Urban Japan."

Other ethnographic studies of Tokyo life include R.P. Dore's classic study, City Life in Japan, written in the 1950s about a community much like Miyamoto-cho. More recent studies include: Anne Imamura's Urban Japanese Housewives, an examination of women's lives in a Tokyo suburb; Dorinne Kondo's Crafting Selves, about work, gender and identity among employees of small family businesses in a shitamachi neighborhood similar to Miyamoto-cho; and Jennifer Robertson's Native and Newcomer, about the development of a Tokyo suburb and the creation of community identity.

Two books by Edward Seidensticker, Low City, High City and Tokyo Rising, are excellent and highly readable social and cultural histories of Tokyo. The first covers the history of the older shitamachi sections of the city until the 1923 Kanto earthquake; the second carries the city's history up to the late 1980s. Roman Cybriwsky, a geographer, has written a lively book — simply entitled Tokyo — that outlines the physical and social features of the city.


Glossary

Adopted son-in-law (mukayoshi) — a traditional feature of the Japanese kinship system, in which a family without a suitable heir (usually a family without a son) would find a groom to marry their daughter and upon marriage adopt the son-in-law as the heir and successor for their family. Just like a bride joining her husband’s family upon marriage, an adopted son-in-law changes his family name to his spouse’s and for all social purposes becomes a member of the family into which he has married, severing legal ties to the family in which he was born.

chokai or chonai kai — neighborhood associations; organizations that exist in most urban neighborhoods as formal institutions that coordinate municipal services, organize local events, and provide a framework of community social ties.

matsuri — a Shinto festival

mikoshi — a portable shrine or palanquin in which a Shinto deity is carried throughout a community during a festival
Shitamachi — literally, “downtown” — the low-lying regions in the central and Eastern parts of Tokyo that were historically the merchant and artisan neighborhoods of Edo (as Tokyo was known before 1868). Today, shitamachi is stereotypically regarded as the home of the so-called ‘old middle class’ of small-scale shopkeepers and manufacturers (contrast with yamanote).

Tobi or Tobishoku — construction foremen, typically responsible for a wide variety of ritual activities in old-fashioned neighborhoods.

Yamanote — literally, ‘the foothills’ — the hilly regions in the Western part of Tokyo that were historically samurai neighborhoods. Today yamanote refers to the areas of the city where the so-called ‘new middle class’ of white collar salarymen and their families live (contrast with shitamachi).

**Miyamoto-cho 1979-81**
Density of housing is shown for two representatives area of Miyamoto-cho in upper left and lower left. Dark area are shops. Shaded portions are residential areas.

**KEY TO MAP**
- A Shrine  
- B Temple  
- C Roadside Shrine  
- D Police box  
- E Chokai hall  
- F Volunteer fire  
- G Public bath  
- H Shopping street  
- I Paved-over river  
- J Old road  
- K Elementary school  
- L Middle school  
- M Company dormitory  
- N Ward branch  

Map reproduced from *Neighborhood Tokyo* by courtesy of Stanford University Press.