

BOOK REPORT

by James Sakoda

Suye Mura by John F. Embree

In reviewing this book I am interested in certain aspects of sociological research, since I am carrying on a research myself. The first is techniques of investigation, which is the first problem which confronts a research worker. He must either know or work out a method of gathering his data. The second is the field of investigation. Faced with a community to study, a worker in the field must have some idea of what he is going to study and somehow must delimit the field of his investigation. The third is the method of organizing and presenting the data gathered. The process of organizing the material itself necessitates a certain amount of interpretation. To what extent interpretation should be attempted in presenting the data is a question. These are some of the major interests that I have in reading a book in the field of sociology and anthropology, and these categories will be used as ~~x~~ convenient guides in discussing the books that I intend to review.

Techniques of investigation John Embree lived in Suye for about a year and a half in order to gather material for his book. To what extent he was able to participate in the life of the village is difficult to say. His need for a translator in order to contact the people was undoubtedly a great handicap, which may account for the lack of people's remarks throughout the book. At some points he clearly seems to show a lack of sympathy for the people, such as their high regard for their Emperor or for their soldiers. This perhaps was not a great handicap in his investigation be-

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because he studied primarily the cultural aspect of the community--the part that changes the most slowly and consequently is not as elusive as other aspects, such as attitudes of the people. He used the method of securing a number of informants who were willing to give him the information he desired. This seems to be necessary in a strange community where an outsider is likely to be looked upon with suspicion. He also had access to some statistical material concerning the village, and used a number of books on Japan in writing the book. He did not use questionnaires, which was undoubtedly wise because their value would have been doubtful in a strange community and might have provoked suspicion toward the author.

One question that might be asked is to what extent he would have been successful in getting a more intimate picture of the feelings and thoughts of the Japanese people. One would imagine that he would have had a difficult time of it if he undertook such a task by himself, unless he resided in the community for a long time. The same task might be assigned to a cooperating resident of the community, but it would have been almost impossible to get a trained research worker in Suye.

Field of Investigation In the introduction Radcliffe-Brown states the field of investigation of Suye Mura and the reason for it: He says:

"An assumption, or methodological postulate, that guides those connected researches of which Dr. Embree's is one, is that in social anthropology at the present stage of its development the scientifically most profitable undertaking is the comparative and detailed investigation of forms of social structure. This term--"social structure"--is sometimes used without any

clear definition, but is here meant to refer specifically to the network of direct and indirect social relations linking together individual human beings. The method of field anthropology is to investigate the social structure in the concrete observable behavior of individuals, and this necessitates a close study of a community of limited size. The result in the present work is a picture of Japanese social structure in the perspective provided by a single village."

(p xi)

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In other words, the field of investigation is the social structure of the village as a whole. What Embree discovered social structure in Suye to be can somehow be gleaned from his table of contents:

- Village organization
- Family Organization
- Cooperation
- Social Classes and Association
- Life History of an Individual
- Religion
- Change in Social Organization

The aim of the study has been to describe in detail the concrete observable behavior of individuals and by this means to investigate the social structure. The field of investigation, then, emphasizes the static and the concrete. The social structure is something that does not seem to change rapidly, and its description in terms of concrete behavior emphasizes the static. For instance, conscription is described as a process which a male passes through at a certain period in his life in terms of the parties he must sit through and the sendoff he receives. How he feels about being conscripted, how others feel about it, how he is expected to feel or to think receives only superficial treatment. This is true throughout the book. The only chapter in which beliefs and attitudes are given extensive treatment is that on religion, and one is given the impression that religion does not play an important part in the life of an ordinary citizen

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of Suye. After reading the book one is left with the feeling that it's all very interesting, but that it leaves a great many points difficult to understand. Why, for instance, are the Japanese stubborn soldiers? How did they acquire their belief about the position of the Emperor? How strong is the authority of the parents over their children? What do children strive for when in school? What is the attitude of one social class against another? What of the eta class? One feels that he has gained a great deal of facts of the community without a corresponding understanding of the people.

This case history of a village community is presumably going to be useful in indicating the process of social change. To serve this purpose it would seem that attitudes of individuals should be described as well as the social structure. We should know how a person in one social class feels towards another in some other class, besides knowing what classes exist, if we are to get an insight into the dynamics of the situation. This is brought out rather clearly in the chapter on social change, the most illuminating in the whole book. The breakdown of the cooperative system is explained, not in terms of structure alone, but also by a corresponding change in attitude towards money:

"The essential nature of the change brought about by the increased use of money is the change from regarding money as handy tool for buying and selling, i.e., exchange, to regarding money as a desirable thing in itself. The shopkeepers all have this latter attitude and are characterized by stinginess. When a group of people becomes like that, even though they be farmers, they can no longer co-operate trustfully, and the close integration of a buraku based on labor ~~exchange~~ exchange and rotating kumi breaks down. A man who, perhaps, indicates the direction of future change in this aspect of buraku social forms is the pear-orchard proprietor mentioned in chapter iv. He has located himself on a border between two buraku and so belongs to neither. Though he could easily associate himself to one or the

other by a gift of wine or a "face-showing" party, he chooses to remain aloof." (p 307)

Embree in this chapter stresses the importance of the individual, and says:

"It is well to keep in mind the conception of society as a network of relations, with individuals as units, in discussing the organization of Suye Mura and the changes it is undergoing. We shall thus avoid the fallacy of thinking of the community as having a substance independent of its constituent members." (p 299)

It might be added that the role of the individual cannot be adequately covered by the description only of their static relationship with others. The function of education, for instance, would become clearer if we knew how the people felt about education and people with education, instead of knowing only that children were required to go to school and that the teachers were educated. The ~~social structure~~ ~~XXXXXXXX~~ undoubtedly constitutes the foundation for the study of a community. It is something that cannot be ignored. But wherever possible the role of the individual in maintaining these social relationships should be revealed.

In making his study Embree does not limit himself to a particular problem and thus avoids trying to prove a pet theory. This seems to be characteristic of studies in the field of anthropology. This does not mean, however, that the writer does not show bias in his study. He looks for certain things, such as religion, family life, crisis rites, which anthropologists have been studying up to the present time, and overlooks other. It should be pointed out that when the time comes to draw conclusions the more dynamic factors, such as attitudes, will not be on hand. Consequently, just as the historian tends to attribute happenings to past events, there would be a tendency to explain events in terms

of culture and social structure, since this is the material which has been gathered.

Method of organization Suye Mura is written up as a case history of a community with the possibility of being compared with other communities in other parts of the world. For this purpose the material gathered is organized under different topics with a minimum amount of interpretation. The material presented is not the raw data gathered, but a summary of what Dr. Embree believes to be applicable to Suye Mura as a whole.

One can ask this question of the fundamental postulate of the study: Will it be feasible to compare different communities studied by different individuals, under different conditions? To what extent will it be possible to draw valid conclusions from such a comparison? Comparison is undoubtedly one of the most powerful methods in social sciences in arriving at conclusions. But in the comparison of different communities studied under widely differing conditions one is faced with the problem of how to control the differing conditions. The comparison of a large number of different communities selected at random will overcome this handicap to some extent. Another is to compare two similar communities in similar situations, such as one in China with one in Japan. Another is to ~~study~~ study the same village after a lapse of time. However, all of these comparisons entail the undertaking of another* study, which would introduce factors difficult to control--such as the time factor. One comparison that seemed fairly significant in the book was that between the shopkeeper's buraku and the more common paddy buraku. From this comparison Embree was

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able to draw a conclusion concerning the role of money in the breakdown of the cooperative system. It would seem that the advantages of this sort of comparison within the same community are great and should be made use of in studying a community. The value of a study lies not in its comprehensiveness, but in the number of valid conclusions it can offer.

In organizing his material Embree uses the following chapter headings:

- Village Organization
- Family and Household
- Forms of Co-operation
- Social Classes and Associations
- The Life History of the Individual
- Religion
- Changes Observable in the Social Organization of Suye Mura

Just offhand it is difficult to find any uniformity in the choice of the topics. Village organization, social classes, change in social organization refer primarily to relationship between individuals--i.e. to social structure. The other chapters deal largely with types of activities. The life history of the individual deals not with the individual so much as the crisis rites through which he must pass in the course of his life. Obviously to discover the social structure of a community the activities going on within the community must be described, but the writer has not shown that his choice of topics under which to organize his material is a logical one. It should also be noted that certain types of activities rather unrelated to actual human relationship, such as the type of food consumed or rituals and superstitions which are observed without much thought, are given extensive treatment. Other activities, such as education, hardly receive any treatment at all, although the amount of

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education gained and the type of teaching learned probably have more to do with the establishment of social relationship than, say, the degree of religiousness of an individual or the rituals which he observes. It seems to me that the study of Suze Mura was approached with a primitive culture in mind and that the more modern aspects, such as education, were overlooked.

What could be done in making a study of a community is to observe all types of activities going on within that community, and then try to abstract the social relationship indicated by the observations. Then in presenting the material the process can be reversed: the social relationship presented first, and their effectiveness in all types of activities shown later. In this way the existence of a social relationship can be established. This is probably what Embree has done, but his description of activities are not organized under topics which are logical and include all types of major human activities, and sometimes his descriptions of activities seem to have little reference to social relationship.

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