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## FARM CULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BULGARIA AND JAPAN: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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### 1. Introduction

After World War II Japan successfully carried out an agrarian reform. Thus the agricultural sector was put on a market ground. At the same time, Bulgaria underwent a process of liquidation of private ownership of land, of the market institutions, and of the traditional farm culture. Today, in a period of post-totalitarian reforms and pro-market economic transformations, one of the problems of Bulgarian society continues to be the re-building of the destroyed traditional value system. Japan is well known for being a country in which the traditions have always been highly respected. This holds true especially of the rural societies and farming communities. Many scholars believe that the specific Japanese way of keeping traditions and at the same time matching them to the new requirements was a key factor for the quick modernization of post-war Japan. The successful post-war development of Japan can serve as an example for Bulgarians in their attempt to carry out social and economic reforms.

### 2. An Outline of the Problems

Farm culture conveys the idea of the “meaning” of farming: the shared communal values on which the farmers’ class identity is based. In this article, farm culture is perceived as a socio-cultural context in which agricultural economic relationships and farming activities exist. Farm culture may be defined as the dominant model of organizing action strategies for coping with agricultural activities. It is the result of social, historic, economical and other determinants. One of the most debated issues in social theory concerns the role of culture in economic life. Some sociologists and social scientists believe that the economic structure of society determines the general character of cultural life. Others argue that ideas, culture, and traditions exercise an independent influence on economic activity. The question is: Is “economic behavior” an essential part

of culture, or are “cultural/symbolic” notions special connotations of general economics?

In this article I will concentrate on the following objectives:

1. To examine Bulgarian and Japanese agriculture in the context of their socio-historical development and the influence of state policy on farming activities.
2. To investigate the socio-economic determinations of farming system and farm culture in Bulgaria and Japan.
3. To analyze farmers' value system and attitudes as well as farm culture's characteristics in both countries.

The theoretical analysis is based on the results from empirical sociological surveys of the Bulgarian and Japanese farmers and rural communities.

### **3. Bulgarian and Japanese Farm Culture in the Context of Historical Development**

Bulgaria is situated on the border between the Western and the Eastern civilizations. Many times in its history the country has served as a bridge between the Eastern and the Western worlds. This has had a very strong influence on the Bulgarian history, society, and culture. At the end of the 14th century Bulgaria was occupied by the Ottoman empire, as a result of which the Bulgarian state institutions were destroyed and the Ottoman feudal system was imposed. Market relations began to develop at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries, but the dominant feudal system continued to create many obstacles. After the 1878 liberation from the Ottoman rule, democratic institutions were instituted in the country and Bulgaria began to develop under the conditions of a bourgeois society. Market relations became dominant in the economy.

Before the communist “collectivization” of the arable land (1945–1958), Bulgarian agriculture was based on the possession of small scattered plots of land. Historically, agricultural development in both Bulgaria and Japan was achieved by means of land-saving and labor intensive technology. Unlike Japan, before the communist “collectivization”, agriculture in Bulgaria was based on the farm-household system. The average size of the land holdings was 3 hectares per farming household (Kanev, 1933, 13–16). The traditional Bulgarian pattern of inheritance aimed at the equal distribution of property between all heirs, which caused a division of the arable land with a rate of 2.15 per cent per year. Before World War II, Bulgaria was one of the poorest

agricultural countries in the world, accounted on the basis of the farming households' annual incomes. Ninety per cent of the arable land was cultivated by its owners, and only 10 per cent was rented. Farming households relied mainly on the labor of their members, and only on rare occasions and in busy agricultural periods on hired labor.

The patriarchal relationships and the territorial rural communes were kept alive by the difficult historic, social, and economical conditions in the country. It was the patriarchal extended family communes (the so called "*zadruga*") and (in more recent times) the mutual aid funds (the "*vzaimospomogatelni kasi*") that supported and helped the Bulgarian farmers in hard times. These informal organizations were established and managed by villagers themselves, without any state intervention, and they functioned on the basis of village self-government. After 1878 these associations served as a basis for the creation of the Bulgarian Agricultural and Credit Bank, which was very helpful to the agricultural co-operatives. The first Agricultural co-operative was established in 1890, and at the beginning of 20th century Bulgaria was the country with the most developed co-operative movement in the Balkan peninsula. Participation in the agricultural co-operatives was voluntary. Land owners joined a co-operative only when they found it corresponding to their interests. Different types of co-operatives were organized according to the specificity of the needs of the farmers. There existed productive, service, credit, purchasing, and market co-operatives, all of them working on the basis of self-management, self-government, voluntariness, and democracy. No pressure on the part of the state was applied. The agricultural co-operatives of that time existed under market economic conditions. Farmers who chose to join them preserved their status of independent land owners. Their participation in the co-operative was a question of free economic decision.

The characteristics of the Bulgarian farm system reflected in the peculiarities of the national farm culture. Hard work and initiative were traditionally highly respected by the Bulgarian people. Since egalitarian values dominated in the country, farmers usually relied on the support of their neighbors, relatives and fellow villagers.

For centuries the Japanese village was a universe where everyone performed a well-defined role according to his own social position. Local politics was the province of the landlord, while village self-government was the territory of the upper-class owner-farmers. The Japanese village communities had a distinctively hierarchical organization that was heavily influenced by the stratification produced by the landlord system. After the Meiji era (1868–1912) a status hierarchy was established. But there were loop-holes for mobility. Farm families could rise and fall within the framework of this hierarchy. In spite of



these changes, the level of social mobility remained low. Village society, in contrast to the Bulgarian one, was not conducive to economical competition. In the pre-war period farmers were generally called “*hyakusho*”, which was almost synonymous with poverty. In our days the “*hyakusho*” image is usually connected with the low social prestige of rural life and the heavy burden of the farming activities. In prewar Japan, the so called “*nohonshugi*” (agrarian fundamentalism) inherited, and in some cases exploited, the tradition of the feudal class system which ranked the farmer second only to the samurai. The ideology sought to compensate the farmer for the low standard of living and the heavy labor he was forced to endure. Farmers in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) were compelled by the system to work hard, though the Japanese village was itself based on a community surveillance system and had communal ethical codes by which villagers had no way of escaping from their toil in everyday life. “Hard working itself is said to have been derived from the traditional Japanese rice farming in a communal situation (*‘mura’* or village) [...]”. The leveling up of the efficiency of work through collaboration among farmers was also achieved thanks to the networked village community structure, where almost all households were tied by some sort of kinship relationships. In such a community-like-society (*Gemeinschaft*), people knew each other rather well, often under the leadership of paternalistic headmen. There existed a strong ‘we-feeling’ among the members, and they were always ready to help others in difficult circumstances. It is no accident that the Japanese term for ‘work’, *‘hataraku’*, literally means ‘to make others around oneself comfortable’” (Nakano, 1992, 60).

Japanese modernization was largely due to the Meiji ideology. According to Hideichiro Nakano “The key concept of this ideology was *‘houon’* (repaying the debt one owes to his parents, to his master, or even to the Emperor). In this way a communal morality was established in which people were expected to work hard to compensate for the benevolence they had received from their seniors or the *‘seken’* (community)” (1992, 60). In Bulgaria, as was mentioned above, fellow villagers likewise traditionally supported each other in difficult periods, but everyone remained an independent producer.

The agricultural unit in Japan did not really use to be farming by individual families. It was rather a system of “community farming”, where the whole village maintained its territory and functioned cooperatively. For example, cropping patterns were in effect decided on as a group, according to unspoken social conventions.<sup>1</sup> In Japanese society nobody could be free from some ties with social groups such as family, company, or community, people were often

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<sup>1</sup> This tradition is still alive in Japanese rural community and in our days it is connected with the so called “*tensaku*” policy (see p. 21).

compulsively pushed by their groups, family, village or whatever, toward success. The Japanese work ethic has been very closely related to a communal morality. Japanese farmers have been motivated to work hard by the collective prescriptions rather than by their personal desire or personal interest. The important thing, however, is that there existed a value system which highly valued "hard work".

In Bulgarian society, and specifically in the Bulgarian rural communities, people were motivated to work hard by their own economic interests. Hard work and economic well-being were firstly regarded as an economic necessity, and, in the second place, as a highly valued individual moral obligation and responsibility, including to one's own family. Bulgarian farmers, exactly like their Japanese counterparts, were motivated to work by various human feelings and social relations. As Ruth Benedict formulated it, in Japan, shame ("*haji*") was an important psychological factor in the social behavior of the Japanese (1993, 224–286). Children were taught that failure in their work would be a personal and family's "shame", that they had to try to avoid it. In Bulgaria, as in Japan, shame was an important regulative mechanism of social behavior. But following the Orthodox Christian tradition, shame tended to take the form of a strong feeling of guilt.

Unlike in the Bulgarian village, where peasants were unequal in economic terms but had equal civil rights, under the Japanese local government system till the end of World War II the residents of each district and village did not all have equal rights. Only males over the age of 25 with two years' residence in a given locality and paying two or more yen in local or national taxes were qualified for full citizenship. Only these villagers, representing about 10 per cent of the entire population, could vote. Full citizens, who elected representatives on the village council, were in turn divided into two classes according to the amount of taxes paid. The so-called first class citizens had several times more voting power than the second-class citizens, thereby gaining a firm grip on the council elections. Participation in the local government was never considered a democratic right but a duty or obligation to the state. Isolation from the outside world, the strong sense of belonging to one's own group and the close association between the members of the same community were the main characteristics of social life in the rural areas.

While agriculture was in Bulgaria, until the end of World War II, almost totally an area of the free market relations, in Japan there has always been a tight control on the part of the government. As a result of the Japanese natural conditions, climate, water supply system, land ownership structure, and pattern of rural development, farming was not a question of individual decision but rather an implementation of the state authorities' directions. Till the Meiji-modernization, rice cultivation was almost the only agricultural production.

The growing of other crops was possible after special governmental permission. That rigid regulation was imposed because of the necessity to ensure Japan's food sufficiency. Rice cultivation is the heart of Japanese farming. In 1921 the Rice Law was enacted. It allowed the government to manage the rice market at critical times, to buy and sell rice. Rice prices became the province of governmental decision, and both the collection of crops and its distribution to the consumers came under state control. This system has been preserved to the present day.

The Bulgarian farmers needed co-operative support only for some of the agricultural production activities. In contrast to them, the Japanese farming families were totally dependent on the assistance of the other members of the community. The Agricultural Association Law of 1899 and the Agricultural Cooperatives Law of 1900, introduced on the model of the German legislation, were the most important legislative acts that contributed to the modernization of Japanese agriculture.

#### **4. The Post-war Agrarian Reforms in Bulgaria and Japan: Directions, Goals, and Results**

##### *4.1 The Bulgarian Post-war Socialist Experiment*

Though Bulgaria was not (in contrast to Japan) an occupied country after World War II, the decisions of the Bulgarian government were directly imposed by Moscow. Bulgaria was a satellite country of the Big Brother – the USSR. As a result an agricultural system very similar to the Soviet one was established. The Bulgarian farm system based on family farming was destroyed. As a result the traditional farm culture was ruined too. One of the goals of the totalitarian socialist state was to destroy the traditional attitudes of the Bulgarian peasants towards farming. The strong emotional attachment to the land, etc. were seen by the authorities as something “backward” and “incompatible” with state-regulated agriculture.

The forceful “collectivization” of agrarian property, including land, buildings, machines, farm equipment, cattle, etc., was completed by the end of the 1950s. This process of actual nationalization was called “co-operation”. Agricultural enterprises working under the obligatory state plans were created. The name “co-operatives” was stuck to them as if it were possible for a real co-operative to exist under the conditions of destroyed private ownership. For nearly half a century agriculture developed within a centrally planned state economy. As a result of the total interference of the state in economic life, the interests of the ruling nomenclature dominated over the interests of all other groups in society.

The main form of agricultural economic activity was hired labor, the state being the only possible employer. Peasants became serfs of the state. As they lost their status of land owners, farmers were turned into landless agricultural workers. Their wages were resultant not from the efficiency of their work but from the government's decisions on the matter. Agrarian labor was considered to have lower prestige than industrial work, and agriculture, in contrast to industry, did not enjoy any priority in the development of the socialist economy. That was the reason wages in the agrarian sector were among the lowest in the country. In 1989 the annual income of the agricultural workers was 14 per cent below the annual income for similar labor in the industrial sector (Bulgaria, Crisis and Transition to a Market Economy, 1991, 74).

Peasants worked together under the supervision of an administrative body telling them when to plough, sow, and harvest the crops. The able-bodied rural population gradually decreased in number and the agricultural enterprises got into debts to the state. Due to the low efficiency of the equipment and technologies employed as well as to the ineffective forms of organization of the agricultural production and labor, agriculture became a losing business. The government resorted to the help of the military personnel and the students in harvesting the agricultural production.

The agrarian destruction had not only social, economic, structural and organizational dimensions, but also cultural and psychological parameters. Alienation from land, from agricultural work and farming become characteristic of the farm culture in the post-war period. The centrally planned state economy created an attitude of relying on the state to ensure employment, production and wages. Initiative and the one-time entrepreneurial spirit had been destroyed. Being strongly dependent on the state, the agricultural worker was thus exempted from the necessity of taking risks as a producer.

The notion of social equality in terms of property and labor has dominated the social attitudes of the rural population for half a century. These attitudes were related to the totalitarian and ideologically loaded notion of equality in which nobody believed but which nevertheless was officially proclaimed. According to the dominant ideology, in the totalitarian socialist society there existed equality between the classes since the means of production were owned by the state and there were no conditions for the exploitation of man by man. It was impressed on the mentality of the Bulgarian that it was better "to be poor but equal". But the lack of private property was precisely the reason why the ruling nomenclature had at its disposal too much power – both political and economic. It was an open secret that the agrarian nomenclature had free access to the public wealth of the country, from which they could take advantage and derive benefits depending on their position in the hierarchy. There existed

enormous inequalities between this class and the other social groups, classes and strata in society.

#### 4.2 *Japanese Post-war Modernization*

At a time when the Bulgarian authorities kept on destroying the traditional farm system and imposing an alien farm culture, the Japanese authorities established institutions helpful for the development of family farming and suitable to the traditional value system. After Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, the agricultural administration and the occupation army started an agricultural land reform that aimed to abolish the landlord system. After the First Land Reform in 1945 landlords were allowed to keep up to five hectares of cultivated land, stipulating that 40 per cent of the tenant land would be taken from them within five years. During the Second Land Reform in 1946 the state was enabled to buy up land owned by absentee landlords and all rented land exceeding one hectare owned by resident landlords. Land thus acquired by the state was resold at low prices to the tenants. In this way the land reform turned Japanese cultivators into owner-farmers, a process totally opposite to the Bulgarian “collectivization”. A system of family-run owner operational units owning small, scattered plots of land, became the starting point for subsequent farm unit development. The reform also prohibited payment of rents in kind. All rents were to be paid in cash. The 1946 Land Reform directly stimulated higher productivity, because once the farmer owned his land, he was motivated to produce more. Bulgarian peasants, on the contrary, being deprived of their own land were not motivated to work hard in the state conducted agricultural co-operatives, because their efforts could not change their economic status. Following the land reform, higher yields meant an immediate income increase for the Japanese farmers. The reform provided the incentive, and farmers plunged into learning new agricultural technologies into setting up study groups all over the nation. The government established the Agricultural Extension Service. The Japanese post-war Land Reform and the state agricultural policy, contrary to the Bulgarian case, succeeded in combining agricultural modernization with a preservation of the traditional attitudes towards farming.



## **5. Farm Culture in the Face of the New Economic Demands**

### *5.1 The Difficult Revival of the Traditional Bulgarian Farm Culture*

#### *5.1.1 The Bulgarian Agricultural Transformation*

After the collapse of communism in 1989 the agrarian reform issue was set forth as a way out of the crisis and as a means to facilitate the transition to a market oriented agriculture. In 1991 the Bulgarian Parliament passed the Ownership and Use of Farm Land Act, the Rules for Application of this Act, and the Co-operatives Act, which provided the legal basis for the agrarian reform. The main task of these acts was to restore private ownership in agriculture, thus promoting the transition to a free market economy. The accomplishment of this transformation was supposed to contribute to the overcoming of the socioeconomic consequences of the previous centrally planned mode of running agriculture, which are essentially the socioeconomic dimensions of the agrarian crisis.

Bulgarian agriculture, despite the economic crisis and the painful transition to a market economy, was and still is a critical sector in the economy. Bulgaria produces three principal kinds of agricultural products. Meat and animal products account for half of the production; grain, especially wheat, for an eighth of the production. Other crops such as fruits, vegetables, and tobacco are important too. In 1970, the sector produced 46 per cent of the GNP and employed 38 per cent of the labor force. At the end of 1990 Bulgaria's agricultural sector (excluding forestry and agroprocessing) provided 10 per cent of the GNP and employed 22 per cent of the active labor force (Bulgaria, Crisis and Transition to a Market Economy, 1991, 69). Statistical data show that the decline in agricultural production has been a steady tendency in the recent years. For example, compared to 1989, the decrease in cattle-breeding and sheep-breeding in 1992 has amounted to 40 per cent, in poultry-raising to 51 per cent, and in pig-breeding to 38 per cent. For the same period the output of meat has fallen by 40 per cent, of milk by 26 per cent, of eggs by 40 per cent (Statistical Handbook, 1993, 120). The prices of these goods keep on rising, which reflects on the consumption of the lower income groups of the population, which has decreased anyway. In this way the socioeconomic problems of agriculture influence the level of consumption of the population and lead to new social problems connected with the survival of some groups of Bulgarian society.

#### *5.1.2 The Role of the State in the Process of Transformation*

Bulgarian agriculture has been trying to accomplish a transition to a market economy while facing a painful lack of institutions. It is the state that must set forward the new general rules. In the Bulgarian case this process is dictated

not only by the resistance of inherited economic, political and social institutions, not only by government's theoretical persuasion, but also by its ideological, economic and political interests. Of course these are the interests of the ruling political forces. The post-communist Bulgarian governments were enthusiastic in proclaiming the slogans of "transition to a market economy", of a "policy organized around competing interest, justice, private ownership, and equality of opportunities", and of the "restoration of historical fairness". In this social situation "everyone favored the market (that is, not communism), but no social groups seemed to organize, politically or economically, the way market based interests organize" (Ost, 1993, 454). The state has maintained its strong position and politics still rules the market.

The restitution of the arable land collectivized in the past has turned out to be a slow and difficult process. A specific feature of the Bulgarian agrarian transformation is that the properties collectivized in the past are now being restored within their previous real boundaries. Only 59 per cent of the land had been restored by December 1995 (Information of Ministry of Agriculture, 1996, 2). The characteristics of the agrarian property to be restored is that the plots of land are small and dispersed in different places. The Bulgarian pre-war land inheritance pattern resulted in land fragmentation and in a decrease in the earning capacity of the rural population. The data from a National Statistical Institute survey (representative on a national level) show the following picture of the structure of property to be expected to appear in the agrarian sector: 28.9 per cent of the owners will have up to 1.5 hectares of land; 22.3 per cent from 1.6 to 3.0 hectares; 13.4 per cent from 3.1 to 5.0 hectares; 9.7 per cent from 5.1 to 10.0 hectares; 3.1 per cent over 10.0 hectares (Information by The National Statistical Institute about the restitution of arable lands, 1992, 6).

### *5.1.3 The Agricultural Co-operatives in Transformation*

The specific structure of private ownership in Bulgaria determines the preference of the majority of owners for the agricultural co-operatives. Owners of land possess no means of production that could make it possible for them to organize a family farm of their own. Neither do they have the money necessary to buy equipment and new technologies. According to the above mentioned National Statistical Institute information, 49.3 per cent of all agricultural owners and heirs of land intend to join an agricultural co-operative, 14.9 per cent will organize a family farm, and 13.4 per cent will grant it on lease. The statistical data show that by the end of 1995 2815 agricultural co-operatives were established, most of which specialized in grain and cereal production (Information of Ministry of Agriculture, 1996). This type of specialization is determined by the size of the arable land, as well as by the available machinery and



labor management. Paradoxical as it may sound, at the present time the agricultural co-operatives are still administered by the state, which means that the agricultural system which used to dominate in the previous period is still there. Furthermore, the very fact that the agricultural co-operatives, although no more state-owned, are still state-conducted makes them behave more like bureaucratic organizations than like business organizations. In functional terms the new agricultural co-operatives resemble the state conducted agricultural enterprises from the communist past and not the traditional pre-war Bulgarian co-operative associations of free land owners.

In the summer of 1992 I carried out a sociological survey on "The Bulgarian Agricultural Co-operatives in a Period of Transition to a Market Economy". The survey was realized in 13 villages and 30 productive agricultural co-operatives near the city of Plovdiv. Village mayors, co-operatives' leaders, co-operative members and farmers were questioned. Altogether, 152 interviews were conducted. The investigation was realized through case study method, using direct observations, structured and unstructured questions as well as in-depth interviews. The survey also involved statistical data and census information analysis. The results were not representative, they were valid only for the 30 agricultural co-operatives and 13 villages, but they described the recent tendencies in Bulgarian agriculture. The results of the survey showed that the managers of the agricultural co-operatives were still appointed by the state, not by the land owners. These managers behaved more like state officials than as representatives of the land owners. In many cases the state-appointed co-operative managers acted in their own interests. In three of the investigated villages, the co-operative chairmen had even organized their own co-operatives. They had been using free of charge the equipment, labor and services available in the former state co-operatives they managed, which were in the process of transformation. And this was an offence against the law. In five investigated villages the chairmen of the former state conducted agricultural co-operatives took advantage of the process of restitution of arable land. They chose the most fertile plots of land for their own family farms and co-operatives. In three other investigated villages they had bought agricultural machines and equipment from former state-conducted co-operatives at knock-down price.

According to a nationwide public opinion poll conducted by NOEMA, 44 per cent of respondents think that hidden privatization is a very frequent phenomenon in Bulgaria (Monitor of Public Opinion, 1993, 15). Due to the lack of anonymity in rural communities and the relative transparency of village socio-economic life, these processes are no secrets to the public in the rural areas, compared with the urban areas where privatization takes place in a more covert manner.

#### *5.1.4 Differences in Urban and Rural Expectations*

The inhabitants of the rural areas regard the restitution of arable lands as an opportunity to ensure their main employment and principal source of income. However a large number of former agricultural owners and their heirs have long ago migrated to the towns. Some 50 years ago, the collectivization affected a population of 1.5 million people, while nowadays the owners of agricultural lands and their heirs number over 4 million people. The place of residence of owners determines their different expectations and intentions concerning agrarian property that is being restituted. Data from the survey of the National Statistical Institute show that 35 per cent of the agricultural owners living in the urban areas intend to have their land included in agricultural co-operatives, while the same intentions are shared by 63 per cent of the owners living in rural areas (Information of National Statistical Institute, 1992, 8). While 20 per cent of the town inhabitants who are owners of arable land plan to lease it out, only 6.7 per cent of the peasants intend to do so. Inhabitants of urban areas mainly look to the restituted land as a source of extra income. The majority of them intend not to work it themselves or with the help of their families, but rather to make it a source of rent. This is a potential source of disagreement and conflict between them and the rural owners of land, who are not able to ensure their own employment in the villages, as well as the landless village dwellers.

#### *5.1.5 Egalitarian Attitudes and Socioeconomic Differences*

These processes take place against the background of egalitarian and populist attitudes of the rural population, who at the beginning of the reform was averse to agrarian property being restored to those owners who could not work it themselves. Data from a sociological survey, conducted by a research team of the "Alternatives" Club in April 1990 <sup>2</sup> indicated that 72 per cent of the respondents, agricultural workers and specialists, were against giving the land back to those who cannot or will not work it, and 66 per cent considered that in these cases the former owners should not even be allowed to use agrarian property as a source of rent (Chipev and Donchev, 1990, 3). 50 years of state ownership in agriculture as well as communist ideological stereotypes in public consciousness made it difficult for people at the beginning of the reform to accept that a free market economy was impossible without the restoration of private agrarian property. And that it was not possible to transform a failing and ineffective agriculture into a profitable and intensive one without putting

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2 This survey is a typological one, the sample including 1600 agricultural workers and specialists in the co-operative farms of three rural communities.

the agrarian reform into effect. Later on, with the establishment of democratic institutions, with the collapse of communist mythology and the worsening of the social and economic situation, these views and attitudes underwent a change. In spite of this transformation, Bulgarian peasants, like their Japanese counterparts, share rather conservative political values and attitudes. They are reliable voters for the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the former Communist Party).

#### *5.1.6 The Re-establishment of the Family Farms*

In the Bulgarian transformation of agriculture all efforts are concentrated on the problem of land restitution, or in other words, on land reform. But the land reform is only a part of the agrarian reform. The restoration of private land ownership is only one of the prerequisites for a successful transition to a market economy. For marketing and agricultural services the medium and small size land owners depend as a rule either on the market organization or on the co-operatives. This fact contributes to the preservation of the state economic commissions, institutions, and organizations which continue to rule agriculture the way they did before. Thus people who dare start a family farming business become strongly dependent on the state-governed service and marketing organizations.

The establishment of family farms functioning on the basis of private land ownership started at the end of 1989. By 1993, 9847 private family farms where already organized with 21680 farmers working in them (Kapitanski, 1994, 7). The results from an empirical sociological survey show that 12.3 per cent of these farmers do not want to continue their farming activity. 30.3 per cent of the latter said that their decision to stop farming is a result of the unfavorable economic conditions. 24.2 per cent wanted to stop farming because of the lack of legislative norms favoring the development of family farming. 24.2 per cent have big financial problems. 12.1 per cent expressed the opinion that no institutions and organizations help them in marketing and selling agricultural production. They have to sell agricultural products either by themselves or through the mediation of the monopolistic organizations which dictate the conditions for their services.

In Bulgaria people engaged in agriculture traditionally earn a large part of their income by means of extra work on the family plots.<sup>3</sup> Under the conditions of the centrally planned state economy the only form of agrarian economic

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3 Family plots are the parcels of arable land the agricultural co-operatives provide free of charge to all those who wish to satisfy their own needs or to sell the goods produced. Since 1988 the size of the plots given to farmers is unlimited. Their usual size does not exceed 0.5 hectare.

activity which did not involve hired labor was the extra work on the family plots. This type of agricultural employment was typical for many of the former East European socialist countries, and was very popular in Bulgaria too. The auxiliary work on the family plots is a kind of additional agricultural employment. It is practiced mainly by people engaged in the agricultural sector, as well as by those whose main occupations is non-agricultural. In other words, in Bulgaria the tilling at a family plot is a specific form of part time farming.

The family plot is a substantial source of income for the household budget of people engaged in agriculture and in the other branches of the economy. Statistical data show that for people employed in agriculture the income obtained from the family plot is almost equivalent (as a share of the households' gross income<sup>4</sup>) to the household members' salaries. This tendency intensified in recent years and in 1991 the share of income from the family plots in the general structure of the income of the rural population increased to 39.2 per cent, while the share of their salaries rose to 31.1 per cent (Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria 1985–1991, 1992, 23). In 1994 the share of the gross average income per household member in the country coming from the family plot became about 36 times larger than in 1985 (Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria 1985–1994, 1995, 8). It might be expected that in the next several years the restitution of arable lands and the accomplishment of the agrarian reform will make family plots an increasingly important source of income for the Bulgarian households. For the time being it has been a source of income in kind rather than in cash. The lack of a well-developed infrastructure for the purchase and processing of agricultural produce is a significant reason for the as yet small money income received from the family plots. In recent years, due to the intensification of the economic crisis and the rise in prices, especially those of foodstuffs, the in-kind nature of income has remained a permanent characteristic of society.

Part of the agricultural produce from the family plots is used for canning meat, vegetables and fruits, a unique tradition of the Bulgarian households. Another part of the agricultural produce, as well as the home-made preserve jars, is given away to relatives and friends living in the towns and cities and often taking part in the production themselves. This so called "canning economy" is, firstly, a traditional Bulgarian household production aimed at ensuring a self-sufficiency in food. Secondly, it is a kind of natural exchange of agricultural production and labor among those participating in the process of production. Thirdly, it is a substantial support for relatives and friends. And finally it is an important way to preserve kinship and friendship ties.

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4 The households' gross income includes money income plus the estimated income in kind.

Many agricultural workers assert that in the past the main reason for their choice to work in an agricultural enterprise was the possibility to have their own family plots. Their attitudes toward work on the family plots were totally different from their attitudes toward work in the state conducted agricultural enterprises. Peasants were thus able to preserve the traditional Bulgarian work ethics characterized by an emotional attachment to land and agricultural work, by hard work and entrepreneurial spirit. But only in so far as their family plots were concerned. These remains of the one-time rural psychology are now the starting point of a process of reconstruction of the destroyed value system and attitudes towards farming.

#### *5.1.7 Transformation of Agrarian Property and Social Stratification*

In the situation of agrarian land restitution the post-totalitarian state has to create conditions for the restoration of agriculture and the development of rural areas. Among the ways of helping both agriculture and rural communities are the state subventions, subsidies, the appropriate social policy, and increasing autonomy of local governments. Bulgarian agriculture needs modern infrastructure, suitable organization for trade, purchase, and supplying services. Agricultural economic activity should be stimulated by tax concessions and financial help. One of the paradoxes of the transition to a free market economy, typical of both agriculture and the other sectors of society, is that the state has renounced its regulating and social security functions of the past, but has still kept its economic power intact. In practice the state still decides, enforces and manages the organizational structures of the economy. These huge powers, legally protected, inevitably create conditions for corruption as well as for the accumulation of money and wealth in certain social groups. As has been pointed out above, some social groups, availing themselves of the high positions they occupied in the administrative hierarchy of the rural communities and the agricultural sector, were able to take advantage of the state property and accumulate public wealth. The political struggles for power as well as the numerous imperfections of the legal system and the practically untouched power of the former communist party, assisted the rural nomenclature in its efforts to strengthen its economic power and appropriate greater wealth. The former nomenclature transformed the money accumulated over the years and oriented itself towards private business. On the other hand, those who had enriched themselves from their work on the family plots succeeded in buying equipment and the other means of production they needed at still low prices. Many of them also preferred to start their own business. Some state officials, who had displaced the former village nomenclature after the collapse of the totalitarian state, also took advantage of the situation, aided by the laws and



norms regulating the state's powerful interference in agricultural production. Thus a group has been formed, heterogeneous in origin, which has accumulated and continues to accumulate property and money and which will be the core of tomorrow's class of big landowners. The interests of these groups are best served by a delay in the agrarian reform, for in this way they prolong the period of their transformation and increase the opportunities for accumulating power and wealth.

This process, in its turn, causes poverty at the opposite pole of social stratification. Inequalities that remained hidden during previous historical periods became apparent and intensified. In Bulgaria the economic and political conditions do not exist for the creation and development of a rural middle class.

The rural communities, as well as the society as a whole, expected that the agrarian reform would improve the economic and social situation in the rural areas, that it would lead to a rise in agricultural production which would flood the market with a great variety and abundance of agricultural goods. In the final analysis this aim was not achieved and people became disappointed with the reform.

## 5.2 *The Contemporary Japanese Farm Culture*

### 5.2.1 *Japanese Agriculture and Rural Development: Economic Demands and Social Organization.*

In economic terms, the importance of Japan's agriculture has rapidly diminished since around 1960 when the high economic growth period began. This could be seen by the drop in the percentage of GDP accounted for by agricultural production. Its rate decreased from 9.0 for 1960 to 1.7 for 1991. Many farmers have given up and moved into other occupations. The sons of peasant families, apart from the family heir, flowed to the cities. But the families' oldest sons, following Japanese tradition, remained in the villages and continued to cultivate their own land. Gradually the number of part-time farm families and among them secondary part-time farm families,<sup>5</sup> whose income is derived mostly from non-agricultural work, have been increasing. Usually this dual employment, in agriculture and in the off-agricultural sector, as salaried employee and as self-employed, is not only a matter of choice of activity by the individual, but by the household as a whole. The majority of Japanese farm families have

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5 According to the sources of income Japanese farmers are divided into three different types. Full-time farmers receive all their incomes from agriculture while part-timers have also other types of earnings.

become virtually non-farm families. "Most of those engaged in agriculture in Japan are peasants rather than farmers. Accordingly, they need to co-operate with each other both for farming and living, and small family farms or peasants depend much on their groups, communities or co-operatives" (Ogura, 1991, 160).

The decline in the food self-sufficiency rate is a steady tendency, and Japan is the world's biggest importer of agricultural products. With the advances of the cultivation techniques, however, overproduction occurred, and a production adjustment (reduction of cultivated area) was implemented in fiscal year 1971. The fiscal year 1993 reduction in paddy area (implementation of the so called "*gentan*" policy) was 24 per cent, or 676'000 hectares (Japan Almanac, 1994, 131). In Japan there has been consistent investment in the agricultural infrastructure, particularly in land improvement.<sup>6</sup> The government has been subsidizing the production of agricultural products, and has thus been protecting certain agricultural products, mainly rice, from foreign competition. Taxes have been reduced and part-time wage labor opportunities instituted. This has kept farming incomes on a par with urban industrial wages. Foreign agricultural purchases have served as an equalizing factor in the balance of trade for Japan's industrial customers. The Japanese farmer was using more energy per square meter of land than any other farmer in the world, and the dilemma today is how to continue without over investing in mechanization.

The share of the farm workers in the total working population has decreased from 26.8 for 1960 to 5.9 for 1991. Their average age has increased, and in fiscal year 1991 the proportion of farm workers aged 65 years or more reached 31.8 per cent (Japan Almanac, 1994, 126). Compared to most other industrialized countries, a higher proportion of the Japanese population is still engaged in farming, though their income has been increasingly supplemented by off-farm work in industry (Kada, 1980, 44). The share of off-farm income exceeded that of farm income in 1963 for the first time. Statistical data confirm that farming is very expensive. On a household expenditure basis (not including housing expenses) farm household's expenditures per person have been exceeding non-farm household expenditures since the 1972 fiscal year.

Japanese agriculture is based on the small-scale family farm system. The average size of farm holding is around one hectare. Farmers are at the same time self-employed and salaried. In the Western type of farming (USA and Western Europe), land and/or capital, labor and management are usually divided

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6 One of the investigated villages, Dainaka, is situated on reclaimed land, constructed by the state-operated reclamation project. Before the reclamation the whole agricultural area was a part of the biggest Japanese lake Biwa.



among the different persons or organizations. In Japan most labor relations involve family members and the rate of land property mobility still remains extremely low. Farming households run two main resources: land received through single heir's inheritance, and labor reproduced and received through household alliances. Japanese agriculture is not a form of husbandry, but rather wifely. According to the 1990 agricultural census, more than half of the agro-families rely on the female members of the family for their subsistence (Abstract of Statistics on Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 1994, 11). Economic bonds between farming households' members are stronger than between those who are not engaged in farming. Members of farming households are very dependent on each other in economic terms and their common economic interests bind them to the land. During the busiest harvesting period farming households rely on the family members' physical labor, and in our days also on their financial help.

### *5.2.2 The Japanese Rural Community: the Principles of Collective Spirit*

For hundreds of years, rural community people in Japan have cooperatively maintained their agricultural production and rural life. The egalitarian principle is the basis of their attitudes even in modern times. Illustration of this can be easily found in such examples as the maintenance of water use and of drainage systems, common rural roads they use in their daily life, and other communal activities such as agriculture related festivals and religious activities. Important values include deep-rooted feelings about the immobility of family and land. The principles of achievement of harmony, integrity and equality among villagers affect the interrelationships among people and groups. The Japanese farm system is strongly dependent on community supporting systems. These community supporting systems are carried out by many traditional social groups such as the irrigation management organizations. Thus the degree of freedom for management is limited. Their decision making cannot be purely economic, but is more balanced with social factors related to the community. This is specially true in paddy-field communities.

Within the October 1994-March 1995 period, I conducted a sociological survey on "Farming Activity and Social Stratification in Japan's Rural Societies". It was carried out in three villages of the Shiga prefecture, in a village near Nagoya and in an another one in the Tamba area, near Kobe. I conducted a total of 30 interviews. Village informal leaders, prefectural, local, and village agricultural co-operative leaders, full time and part time farmers were interviewed. The survey was based on "horizontal" methods for quantitative examination of the problems investigated as well as on the "vertical" method which was a combination of anthropological and sociological approaches. The

former method relied on analysis of statistical, economic, and other available information about investigated villages, agricultural co-operative activities, structure, organization and management. The latter involved qualitative research techniques, direct observations, collection of information in an unstructured way, focussed interviews and in-depth interviews. Information was collected by five different questionnaires according to the respondents' characteristics. The survey was based on the case study method. Its results were of course not representative, but they were helpful for drawing some conclusions about the tendencies of social processes, as well as about the main problems of Japan's agriculture and rural areas. The survey involved investigation of different types of villages (traditional and more industrialized), of different type of farmers (part-time and full-time farmers, traditional and organic farmers), as well as of farmers' successors. The case study provided helpful information and unique data about the importance and influence of different types of motivation in farming, about farmer's self-identification, work ethics and value system.

The survey's results confirmed that decision-making in rural communities in Japan is neither by majority vote, nor by election but rather by unanimous decision making after protracted discussion among all rural community members. This way of decision making is called "Japanese negotiation".

In terms of administration, Japanese rural areas "were considered to have very inefficient organizational structure. Very often rural areas were considered incomprehensible; economically speaking, they were perceived to be traditional, backward, and therefore unreasonable in terms of behavior" (Kada, 1988, 45). The Japanese village is still dominated by the traditional life style. "It is a surprising fact that the last three decades' high economic growth has certainly changed the physical and material life of rural areas, but has not changed the institutional systems and social relationships within the village" (Kada, 1988, 45). Its double social structure is a mixture between a non-official but very powerful social structure, and an official structure. Apart from the official village management there still exists the informal village council headed by the informal village leader, the so-called "*kucho san*". In our days village citizens are divided into two informal groups according to their position in the informal village structure: those with full citizenship, the so-called "*murairi*", and the others without such a citizenship. The Japanese village is a very closed community for foreigners. Only villagers with village membership ("*murairi*") could vote for the households' heads, for the informal village council and for the village headman – "*kucho san*". For the new villagers it is necessary to have two villagers as guarantors to obtain "*murairi*". One of the investigated villages in the Shiga prefecture was very traditional, and there still existed two

households without “*murai*ri”. These households had been living there since World War II.

### 5.2.3 *Land Ownership and Farming in Terms of Contemporary Japanese Farm Culture*

From an economic point of view, land in Japan is a valuable possession because of land prices. But land ownership also defines peasants' social status and their social position in the village community. This status is attached to the household rather than to the individual. All Japanese farmers investigated by me considered land ownership a way of continuing their households' traditions. Both full-time and part-time farmers shared almost equal attitudes and values toward farming and land ownership. They were proud to be land owners. For them land ownership provided a stronger connection with their ancestors' traditions than farming.

All respondents also expressed the opinion that for them it was very important that the family produce their own rice. Rice self-sufficiency in Japanese rural societies (like the “canning” economy in Bulgarian villages) is not only a means to receive income in kind. It could be looked upon also as a part of the rural inhabitant's value system. The importance of the household's rice production, as well as of self-sufficiency in other food products is connected with the farmers' life-style, with their attitudes towards hard work, household integrity, and vitality of kinship ties. It has also to do with their ideas about food safety and about the continuation of the household's traditions. Most of them give a part of their agricultural production (mainly rice) to relatives who are living outside the village.

Many Japanese part-time farmers do not consider themselves farmers but rather land owners. The results from my empirical sociological survey show that farming is grasped as having predominantly an instrumental meaning, while land ownership is rather viewed as being a sign of status. The investigated part-time farmers considered farming as a very important economic strategy for receiving additional income. For them farming was rather an economic strategy of the household than an individual strategy. Usually other family members help the householder in his agricultural activity and there is a division of household labor in farming operations. According to the survey's results farming is also connected with the necessity to follow public opinion's prescriptions. Farming itself is not evaluated as a way to continue the household traditions, but is rather defined as an obligation to the ancestors and to the village community. All investigated full-time farmers consider farming to be not merely a business but something more than business. They cannot imagine

moving to a more profitable economic activity. Farming is something that they like to do, something that they consider worthy and deserving to do. They feel a strong attachment to it and are proud to be farmers. Part-time farmers share the same traditional values as full-time farmers. For them the survival of agriculture is not only and simply an economic question but is rather a moral obligation to keep traditions and the collective spirit alive.

The survey's results show that there is a big discrepancy between farmer's self-perception and their perception by city residents. All interviewed farmers make a very clear distinction between their own social position and the social status of urban inhabitants. It is the common impression of the farmers that urban inhabitants do not understand the importance of farming. Urban inhabitants, as farmers see it, do not want to know much about agriculture and about the problems of farmers. Farmers feel underestimated by urban inhabitants. The investigated farmers always refer to the urban inhabitants as the "others". That is a strong indicator of their cultural self-identification as a distinct social group. Farmers assert that urban inhabitants consider farming a 3 "Ks" job – "*kiken*" (dangerous); "*kitanai*" (dirty); "*kitsui*" (hard). Farming is "*dasai*" (poor work, that is not elegant and worthy to do) and life in rural areas is considered by urban residents (according to the farmers' opinion) to be unpleasant and boring.

According to the respondents, one of the biggest problems for Japanese farmers nowadays is to ensure the continuation of the farming tradition. Contemporary farmers' successors are not disposed to behave like their parents. Many of them have university education and are not engaged in farming. Young people do not like life in the rural areas and prefer to live in the cities. Some of them continue to live with their parents in the villages but work in urban areas. Most of the investigated farmers' successors agree that their generation prefer the off-farming activity and the urban life-style. In some cases young people want to follow the household's traditions but in a somewhat different way. Most of them do not want to do any farming in the future.

Another big problem for rural families as well as for rural communities is how to find brides for young farmers. Young Japanese women do not like to marry them, because the heaviest burden of farming in most cases lies on the wives' shoulders.

#### *5.2.4 Japanese Agricultural Co-operatives Between Market and Traditions*

The above mentioned sociological survey confirms that the agricultural co-operative, the so-called JA, has a very strong influence on farming activities

and rural life. Medium or small sized farming families generally depend on the services of the co-operative, for example credit, purchasing inputs, marketing outputs, storage of agricultural products, etc. The agricultural co-operative in Japan (JA) is often called “service co-operative”, to be distinguished from the production co-operatives in Eastern Europe (including Bulgaria). According to the regulations, the JA’s purposes are to supply goods and materials, to give financial support, to establish saving funds. JA has regular members and associated members. The latter are not farmers but only rural inhabitants. They live in rural areas and use JA banks, gas stations and supermarkets and all other kinds of JA facilities. It is not possible to live in rural communities without JA services. Actually, according to the JA’s regulations, all rural inhabitants, farmers as well as those with other occupations, should be JA members.

Recently, because of the declining importance of agriculture for the Japanese economy, JA’s business has been shifting from agricultural activities to other, non agricultural ones, for example to banking and insurance services. JA is mainly an economic organization, but it is also based on the traditional organizational relationships in the community. JA activities cover the entire rural life. Rural communities control themselves through rice farming. In our days rural communities are organized in JA groups. Of course communities’ groups are independent from JA, but it is through them that JA supports farmers. Rural communities are a unit of farming, customs and religion. Therefore the investigated Japanese farmers highly valued the importance of JA for the rural communities in spheres like customs and religion. The interviewed farmers expressed the opinion that JA is very helpful to farmers, especially to part-time farmers, but they also said that in our days it is also very bureaucratized. The village farming community (the so-called “*nogyokumiai*”) representatives and the farmers’ representatives decide “*tensaku*” policy in the village. “*Tensaku*” policy means the change, the shift of agricultural production from rice to some other production, for example vegetables. The kind of agricultural production which every farmer should produce depends not on his own decision and his own economic interests but rather on the collective interests, expressed by this policy. According to the “*nogyokumiai*” leader in one of the investigated villages, “sometimes ‘*nogyokumiai*’ have to do a rather unpleasant work. The ‘*tensaku*’ policy is not private farmers’ decision, but a question of negotiation.”

JA is controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. The usual way of taking any decision connected to JA is from up to down. Therefore interviewed JA leaders from prefecture and local JA offices expressed the opinion that “JA’s principles of management are not democratic ones. They are based on traditional Japanese negotiation”.



The main purpose of JA in our days is to support farmers in the total process of rice production – from planting and harvesting to selling and marketing the product. On the one hand, JA has to protect rice prices and farmers' economic interests, but on the other hand it must support and promote the government's agricultural policy. This dual position of protecting both the government's and the farmers' interests is not strange for Japanese culture. It is connected with the traditional Japanese value system dominated by the feeling of harmony, integrity, and necessity to follow traditions. The Japanese government's agricultural policy supports farmers in spite of the market requirements and the pressure of international institutions, and Japanese farmers although independent producers follow state agricultural policy prescriptions and restrictions. The Japanese way to manage agriculture is totally opposite to the Bulgarian one. In Bulgaria agriculture does not receive serious state support in the difficult transition to a market economy.

#### *5.2.5 The Government's Agricultural Policy and Japanese Farmers' Political Values and Attitudes*

Rural population was for a long time the basis of the leading conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Farmers and their family members have been dependable and reliable voters for the LDP. Hence, their political power has been very strong in obtaining agricultural protection and support for high prices. However, the situation has been rapidly changing in recent years, as Japanese economy has become one of the superpowers in the world and Japan's agricultural policy has caused enormous trade friction with major trading partners. There seems to be a split of opinion about the treatment of agriculture and the rural areas, and about whether agricultural protection is to be continued or not. Probably one of the most acute examples of this is the case of the rice market opening, which is considered to have an enormous influence upon agricultural production, land use and resource management.

Investigated farmers' expectations and anticipations of the future of Japan's agriculture were strongly linked with the agricultural policy of the government. They thought that the government's agricultural policy would determine Japan's agricultural future. For a successful execution of their farming activities, they relied on the government for help and support and they would prefer to be more supported and protected by its policy. Farmers were not too afraid by the opening of Japan's agricultural market to foreign products. They expressed the opinion that it is was unavoidable and necessary. But, according to them, the government should help them meet this new market situation. Farmers evaluated government support as "not sufficient". All interviewed expected the importance of agriculture for the Japanese economic development to decline,

but they insisted on the necessity of preserving the rice production. For them, the continuation of rice production, irrespective of market pressures, is a prerequisite for following traditions. Japanese traditional farm culture is centered around the sacred meaning of rice and rice production. Most of the thanksgiving festivals all over Japan and other cultural activities are even now connected with the peoples' desire for a good harvest of rice. The value of the cultural heritage, based on rice, paddy fields, and rural communities, is still alive and vital for contemporary Japan, in spite of visible modernization (Kada 1988, 47).

Considering the household's economic strategy, the attitudes towards farming, and the influence on the political decision-making process, it is possible to distinguish four basic types of farm households in contemporary rural Japan.

Firstly, there are the households of the full-time farmers who believe agriculture is the only important family business to be continued over generations. Although the number of these farms is very small and still shrinking in the overall agricultural population, they are the "real farmers", undertaking modern, capital-intensive types of agriculture which makes them important for the overall scheme of Japanese agricultural production. The problem is, however, that because of their small numbers they do not possess much political power in the decision-making processes.

The second group comprises the part-time farming households which represent the majority of rural households. They depend heavily on outside incomes, and time allocation to non-agricultural activity has tended to shift their concerns toward urban and modern things. But the important point is that when it comes to the issues of agricultural land use and rural community problems, their attitudes are still very conservative, and they try to maintain the traditional functions of the community. This is largely due to their way of thinking about the possession and succession of assets and status-holding within rural communities.

The third group embraces the farm households of elderly people running a subsistence agriculture. Statistically speaking, about 10 per cent of the total of farm households are classified in this category, but the category is not important in agricultural production terms or as far as political power in rural areas is concerned. However, as the age structure of rural areas shifts to a structure in which the share of the elderly is increased, the importance of this category of farmers will grow in the future. There are more and more middle-aged and retired persons who are returning to the rural areas, taking up again the farm households which they had left in their younger days (concerning these three types of farming households see Kada, 1988, 47).



The fourth group comprises the farm households of the so-called “new farmers”. For them farming is more a way to realize their ideas about harmonious life than a continuation of the household’s farming tradition. Usually they are full-time organic farmers. Their number is still very small. Politically they are connected with some ecological organizations, and their popularity has recently been increasing, specially among young people. All interviewed organic farmers regard organic farming not only as a way of agricultural production but also as a social movement. They see the importance of food safety and environmental safety as well as the importance of an ecological way of production and of ecological consciousness. They try to develop large and vital networks of consumer groups and are very active in such relationships. Their organic farming is a source of self-confidence. All investigated organic farmers have university education and few of them do not have farming origins. They were born in the cities but they have chosen to be organic farmers because of their environmental convictions. Of course they are a very rare case for the rural areas. The problem of pollution is considered a serious one also by non-organic, traditional farmers. But they think nothing can be done about it. It is difficult to produce without using agricultural chemicals and medicines. At that point there is a considerable difference between the opinion of organic farmer and that of others.

## **6. Conclusion: Some Generalizations about Bulgarian and Japanese Farm Cultures’ Peculiarities**

Bulgarian and Japanese agriculture, as well as Bulgarian and Japanese rural communities, have been developing in totally different historic, social, political, and economical settings. Their problems have different origins, characteristics and expressions. Japanese agriculture faces difficulties which are totally different from those facing Bulgarian agriculture. The two countries have different types of farm cultures and traditions, as well as different attitudes towards agriculture and rural life. But apart from the obvious national, economical, social and cultural particularities, there also exist significant common features.

In both countries, land ownership structures consist of small and scattered plots of land, the average age of the farm workers has been increasing, and the agricultural sector relies mainly on female labor forces. Most Japanese farmers are part-timers, the same economical strategy being also very popular in Bulgaria. Farming is a household rather than an individual activity, and the economic bonds between parents and children are usually stronger in the rural households than in the urban ones. Farming is evaluated in Japan not only and mainly in

terms of economic profit and business, as it is in most occasions in Bulgaria, but rather within the framework of obligations and traditions. In both countries farmers frequently support their relatives and friends with agricultural products and respectively rely on the help of the latter too. Kinship ties are still very strong in rural Bulgaria and Japan.

Following the classical Weberian tradition the Japanese society, value system, and culture are usually defined (in opposition to the Western type of society viewed as organized along the principles of “Western rationality”) as based on “Eastern emotionality”. Egalitarianism is the basis of both the Bulgarian and the Japanese farm culture but in the two countries egalitarianism is grasped in different ways. The building blocks of Japanese farm culture are a collective spirit, a strong “we-feeling”, principles of harmony and integrity. Bulgarian farm culture, even during the period of totalitarianism, was dominated by an individualistic value system which was in conflict with the imposed communist collectivism. Furthermore, during that period, the traditional Bulgarian custom of collective support and help among fellow villagers was destroyed.

In some cases Japanese state policy tries to match up economic demands with the farm culture’s peculiarities, the resistance to the agricultural market opening to foreign agricultural product, specially to imported rice, being an example of this. In other cases state agricultural policy did succeed to match up farm culture’s peculiarities with the new economic demands – for example in rice field reduction (“*gentaku*”) policy. State agricultural policy tries to balance economic demands and traditional values. The purpose of this policy is to put economic and social development in harmony with the Japanese mind and spirit.

As we have already seen, the Bulgarian road of social and particularly rural development is totally different. In the case of Bulgaria, the political and economic interests of the ruling party have priority over the interests of farming and farm cultures’ peculiarities.

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# Alleineltern und Eineltern

In der Diskussion über die «neue Armut» ist stets auch von sogenannten «Alleinerziehenden» und ihren Kindern die Rede. Die Meinungen darüber, in welchen Lebenslagen sich diese Familien heutzutage befinden, gehen allerdings auseinander.

Auf Grund der Resultate einer Befragung von über achthundert Alleineltern und Eineltern diskutieren die Autoren verschiedene damit verbundene Fragen. Thematisiert werden die Verknüpfungen zwischen Familie und Beruf, das Einkommen, die Nutzung sozialer Einrichtungen, soziale Beziehungen und Unterstützungen, die Wohnverhältnisse und die familiäre Situation.

Mit zahlreichen Daten werden die Aussagen beleuchtet, aus denen die Autoren abschliessend Verbesserungsvorschläge und sozialpolitische Postulate ableiten.



Das Werk gibt zudem einen Überblick über den aktuellen Forschungsstand und setzt sich mit den begrifflichen Aspekten des Themas auseinander.

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