Revitalising rurality under the neoliberal transformation of agriculture: Experiences of re-agrarianisation in Japan

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Rural places are continually experiencing socio-economic change and the conceptual frameworks of re-de-agrarianisation and re-de-peasantisation were devised to explain agrarian transformations in a broad sense. Following empirical studies from other geographical contexts, this paper revisits the concepts of re-de-agrarianisation and re-de-peasantisation through the historical, theoretical, and empirical lens of agrarian and rural change in Japan. After detailing the circumstances of post-WWII agricultural reconstruction and current rural conditions, as well as outlining the development of the field of Japanese agrarian studies and a selection of the endogenous theories within to explain transformations, contemporary examples and a case study are used to provide a rich contextual account of Japan's experiences of re-agrarianisation and re-peasantisation. We find that economic, social, cultural, geopolitical, and biophysical conditions in Japan have shaped the processes of agrarian change and bring into focus particular uniqueness of endogenous responses to de-agrarianisation and neoliberal agricultural trends. In particular, socio-cultural pressure to cooperate and identify with local community and place allows "peasant-like" elements to persist despite the strong push toward entrepreneurial and corporate farming. Understanding these trajectories of the transformation of Japanese agriculture would then challenge and/or validate the applicability of commonly accepted definitions of de-re-agrarianisation and de-re-peasantisation.

1. Introduction

The form and process of agrarian development and transformation is crucially influenced and shaped by social, economic, political, cultural and ecological factors endogenous to each country and region. This is especially true when it comes to understanding and defining the form and characteristics of farm units (whether individuals, families, or communities) and their social relations, where careful attention must be paid to on-the-ground realities, as well as historical and cultural background that is not easy to access or understand from the outside. Recent work has begun to reinterpret widely-accepted frameworks on agrarian change to recognise this contextual heterogeneity (e.g. Hirsch, 2012; Shackleton and Shackleton, 2015; Rasmussen and Reenberg, 2015). Along these lines, a recent study by Van der Ploeg and his colleagues details the peasant nature of China's agriculture and how it is "reproduced and renewed" in the face of newly emerging, yet dominant entrepreneurial and capitalist (corporate) farming trajectories (Ploeg and Ye, 2016). In their analysis, they find “competing paradigms that inspire and inform contrasting developmental trajectories, farming styles, town-countryside relations and institutional arrangements” (Ploeg and Ye, 2016, p. 254). These examples argue for a more nuanced approach to understanding rural transformation that appreciates diverse contexts and does not distil agricultural development processes into simple binary relationships. The tendency to frame agricultural development as, for example, a political and economic drive toward the "modernisation" of agriculture in China (Yan and Chen, 2015) and the developing world, and the spread of low external input agriculture, multifunctional farming and the notion of "farming as an integral part of social life" in Europe or elsewhere in the West (O'Connor et al., 2006; Di Iacovo and O'Connor, 2009), and vice versa, needs to be re-examined.

We argue that the experiences of Japan's agricultural development provide a rich context for this sort of re-examination. Rural change in Japan indicates that the boundaries and inter-relations between the two common development pathways and farming modes — modernisation and industrial agriculture (corporate and entrepreneurial farming) on one hand, and alternative and multifunctional agriculture (peasant-like farming) on the other (Ploeg, 2008) — are varying and blurred. Using...
Japan as a case study, a country that has largely been off the radar of international agrarian scholars, we also revisit the concepts of **re-de-agrarianisation** and **re-de-peasantisation** and offer a nuanced interpretation of the relational nature of these processes. 

Diagnosed from the appearance of the farm and farming practices, it is reasonable to characterise Japan’s agriculture as “peasant-like,” since there remain a large number of small-scale and less-commercial farm households in Japan. However, most peasant-like farmers have been organised by the agricultural cooperatives (Japan Agricultural Cooperatives or “JA”) with the aim of cutting out and maintaining space in the mainstream market via the JA’s collective purchasing and marketing businesses. To a certain extent, one could argue that through the JA, peasant-like farmers have been appropriated and integrated into the corporate agri-food system. In this regard, Japanese agriculture has also experienced a process of **de-peasantisation**, but without the structural transformations that would demonstrate widespread “class differentiation.” This is one reason why we characterise Japanese small-scale farmers as “peasant-like” on the whole, while carefully applying the concept of **de-peasantisation** to the transformation process.

What complicates the categorisation and evaluation of **de-peasantisation** and **re-peasantisation** in Japan is the fact that past and current transformations have been taking place amidst an overall downward trend of agricultural production. When we look at the historical data of food production and food self-sufficiency of post-war Japan, it is clear that Japanese agriculture as a whole has been following a course of shrinking and general decline, a course of **de-agrarianisation**, which has been taken more seriously in domestic discourse than **de-peasantisation**. Japanese food self-sufficiency on a calorie basis (39%) is extremely low compared to other major OECD countries, and food self-sufficiency in grain is 29% (by weight) in 2015. For a country with such a large population and economic significance worldwide, Japan is rather exceptional in terms of its consistent downward trend for food security during the past 50 years. **De-agrarianisation** in Japan, indeed, has come to the point that rural areas are disappearing (**de-ruralisation**), due in large part by abandonment because of the extreme difficulty in making a living through agriculture or other rural activities (e.g. forestry) (Ohno, 2008). Often discussed in the context of disappearance and preservation of traditional agricultural landscapes (Satoymaya), the process of **de-agrarianisation** and **de-ruralisation** also causes a loss of diversity (both biological and cultural) and resilience of rural society, economy and the environment, since many struggling farmers and residents located in hilly and mountainous areas are also the stewards of the ecological and cultural landscapes therein (Takeuchi et al., 2003).

Although it is true that ecological and topological limits as well as exploding affluence throughout the last century made it almost impossible for Japan to be self-sufficient, it should be noted that Japanese food import dependency has been historically and structurally constructed (McMichael, 2000). Japanese food security policy has been built into the U.S. hegemony; and under the ongoing corporate food regime (**de-agrarianisation** and **de-ruralisation**) also causes a loss of diversity (both biological and cultural) and resilience of rural society, economy and the environment, since many struggling farmers and residents located in hilly and mountainous areas are also the stewards of the ecological and cultural landscapes therein (Takeuchi et al., 2003). 

1 It is important to note that there are topographical and ecological differences between Japan’s varied regions, as well as discrepancies in historical development patterns and cultural legacies tied to agriculture that are difficult to represent fully in a single narrative.

2 Because of the shortage of agricultural production to feed its population and supply to the rapid industrialisation and militarisation in the early 20th Century, Japan colonised (Taiwan) and soybean (Manchuria) among others (Hori, 2009).

3 In addition to being involved in the U.S. hegemony, or the so-called Second Food Regime (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989), the Japanese agricultural sector has also faced pressure from within: the mainstream export-oriented business community, that seek profits from selling goods overseas by offering agriculture as a “sacrifice,” and import cheap agricultural products from abroad (Ito, 1996; Terunou, 2008). As a consequence of these internal and external dynamics, “the Japan-centred East Asia food import complex” emerged with the reorganisation of the agri-food industry at the regional level (McMichael, 2000).
Fig. 1. Key categories of farm households and management entities.
Sourced and adapted from: MAFF (2017a) for the number of Community Farming Enterprises, and MAFF (2015) for other numbers.

Fig. 2. Historical trends of cultivated farmland area and number of farm households in Japan. Left Y-axis: total area (1000 ha) or number of units (1,000) / Right Y-axis: average area (ha).
Source: MAFF (2015)
designated as “deserted” in 2015.

Japanese agriculture is known for its small farm size. The average size of commercial farm households in 2015 was 2.2 ha including Hokkaido prefecture, where the average size is much greater at 23.8 ha. The average farm size would be reduced to 1.6 ha if Hokkaido is excluded. If landholdings by organised management entities (Fig. 1) are factored, the average sizes of the entities are 2.5, 26.5, and 1.8 ha respectively. The number would be reduced to 1.4, 20.5, and 1.0 ha, respectively, if non-commercial (self-sufficient) farm households are included (Fig. 2). Although the decrease of the number of farm households (including non-commercial ones) by 61.8% from 5.66 million to 2.16 million between 1965 and 2015 is theoretically assumed to have been promoted by “structural reforms” for agriculture, the decrease of arable land by 25.0% during the same period hindered the progress of rationalisation. At the same time, larger-scale farms of 100 ha or more in Hokkaido and 20–30 ha or more in other prefectures are rapidly increasing. Nevertheless, in prefectures other than Hokkaido, small-scale farm households of 2 ha or less still account for 80.5% of the total in 2015, not much changed from 86.9% in 1995 and 83.1% as of 2005. Therefore, this slow increase in average farm size can largely be explained by the persistence of “peasant-like” agriculture within the process of de-agrarianisation and de-ruralisation. To put it differently, Japanese agriculture has transformed without going through the process of de-peasantisation.

Further support for this observation is shown by the way in which small-scale farmers in Japan de-emphasise the commercial character of their operations. Fig. 1 lists the number of commercial farm households (hanbai nouka) in 2015 as 1.33 million (62%), and the number of non-commercial farm households (jikyuteki nouka, or self-sufficient farmers’) as 0.83 million (38%). Out of the commercial farm households, 0.44 million (33%) are full-time (sengou nouka), while 0.87 million (67%) are part-time farm households (kengou nouka). Being a full-time farming household does not necessarily mean that income is gained from a solid management base, as the number of ageing and less commercial farmers with their children living somewhere else (urban areas) is increasing in many rural communities.

Since 1995, Japan’s Agricultural Census has employed another way to categorise farm households: business (shugyou nouka), semi-business (jun-shugyou nouka), and side-business (fukugyou nouka), where farming households are categorised according to the share of farm income as a proportion of total household income (business = more than half; semi and side-business = less than half). In addition, it also considers the extent to which household members engage directly in farming operations (business and semi-business = at least one member 65 years old or younger engages in farming for more than 60 days in a year; side-business = no such member).

As we will discuss in the next section in detail, there is a clear and steady trend of increasing incorporated organised management entities that include both agricultural production corporations and non-farm private corporations. Reflecting such a trend, in 2005, MAFF introduced new categories for organised — both incorporated and unincorporated — management entities (soshiki keieitai) as a unit of agricultural production, in addition to those for household-based unit of farms; the latter are then redefined as family-owned farm management entities (kazoku keieitai). Though still limited, the number of organised management entities has increased by 17.4% from 2005 to 2015, and incorporated entities among others increased by 64.2% in the same period. This recent trend could be described as a process of re-agrarianisation via belated de-peasantisation, though its implications and evaluation in the context of Japanese agriculture should be carefully examined.

These changes of the definition and categories of “farms” reflect the shift of agricultural policy towards promoting and supporting more commercially-oriented and incorporated farming. However, such agricultural policy has not successfully and drastically changed the down-trend of the agricultural sector. Indeed, as a result of the overall process of de-agrarianisation, and despite the emerging trend of re-agrarianisation via de-peasantisation, there has been a sharp increase in the population of ageing farmers. The proportion of commercial farm households with income mainly from farming and full-time farmers (engaged in farming for 60 days or more per year) under 65 years of age is only 0.29 million, or 22% of all commercial farming households. The proportion of commercial farmers aged 65 years or over is 65%, making the average age of what MAFF defines as “core farmers” at around 67 years in 2015. Low and falling agricultural incomes are also problematic. The average per-person income of farming households was 74% of that of working households in 2011 (Shimizu, 2013). Earnings from agriculture provided only 28.4% of total commercial farming household income in 2012. Relating to this point, Japanese agriculture is characterised by a lack of agricultural successors. The proportion of commercial farm households with potential successors who are not necessarily engaged in daily farming operations, but are expected to succeed in the future has decreased from 57.3% (for those living together) and 70.4% (living separately) in 2000 to 29.9% and 48.7% in 2015.

Against this background and as closely examined in the following sections, however, a limited but gradually increasing number of new-entry farmers (especially among the relatively younger generations) in recent years is worthy of attention. There are three types of new farmer categories — successors who are newly engaged in their family farm management (shinki jiet nouyou shunousha), agricultural workers who are newly employed by agricultural production corporations or large-scale farms (shinki koyou shunousha), and those who have newly obtained farmland and financing to start self-employed farming by themselves (shinki samyousha) (MAFF, 2017b). Though the total number of new entries is increasing (up 9% from 2007 to 2015) and the first category (family-farm successors) makes up the majority of new entries into farming (76.5% of the 60,150 total in 2016), the share of the remainder — new entries as farm workers (17.8%) and those as self-employed farmers (5.7%) — has been increasing in the past several years. In particular, a relatively younger population under age 50 constitutes the bulk of new farm workers (8170 of 10,680 for 76.5%) and self-employed farmers (2470 of 3440 for 71.8%).

2.2. Japanese scholarly arguments on de-peasantisation

Japanese Marxian scholars and political activists in the 1930s and 40s, working from early translations and original language texts by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Kautsky, were dedicated to understanding and identifying the characteristics of Japanese capitalism and possible pathways for revolution (Sakisaka, 1946; Kondo, 1954). They analysed the relations of production (class relations) in agriculture and rural society, which were under the influence of (parasitic) landlords and their extra-economic coercion that, in alignment with a growing capitalist class, constituted Imperial Japan. The outcomes of their theoretical and empirical studies during the harsh, wartime period of suppression laid crucial foundations for post-WWII political economic studies on the changing structure of agriculture and rural society; namely, how to characterise the “class” of peasant owner-farmers newly created by the implementation of Land Reform measures in 1947–1950 as part of the democratisation policies of the Occupation Authorities (GHQ); and how to make sense of the transformation of agriculture and rural society under post-war capitalist development and rapid economic growth (Kondo, 1954; Teruoka, 2008).
Predictably, agrarian political economists tended to pay much attention to minor but clear statistical evidence of the “differentiation” (stratification) of peasant farmers as a result of capital-driven transformation and commodification of production. Although they rightly recognised the particularity of agriculture (vis-a-vis other industries) and Japanese socio-economic context (vis-a-vis other advanced industrial countries), the “logic of capital,” as argued by classical Marxian political economists, was widely believed to have penetrated agricultural and rural structures in Japan at the time, leading to de-peasantisation in a typical and unambiguous way, i.e. the emergence of a polarised class structure made up of large capitalist farms on the one hand and marginalised and dispossessed farmers or farm workers on the other.

There were mainly two schools of thought on de-peasantisation. One of the traditional schools of Marxian political economy of agriculture in Japan (Yamada, 1962; Hoshi, 1975) emphasised the monopoly capitalist exploitation of small-scale peasant farmers. According to them, the process of monopoly capitalist development would expand part-time agriculture and deepen proletarianisation, bringing a crisis to the agricultural sector the extent to which it would become difficult to identify a class of farmers able to take a central role in maintaining and developing agriculture as an industry. They proposed reforming land ownership and usage to reside under the control of the people so that the eventual development of farmer-based agricultural productivity could remain plausible. Although they rightly shed light on the massive exploitation of peasant farmers under the dominance of large companies (monopoly capital) in the farm input and output sectors, as well as non-farm sectors, they were criticised as having an “agentless revolution” perspective, meaning that they failed to look at peasant farmers’ struggles to improve their own productivity and their potential to pursue self-sustaining development (Tashiro, 1982: 281–282; Mishima, 2005: 78–79).

Another group of scholars (Wataya, 1979; Kajii, 1961, 1973) mainly in agricultural economics, on the other hand, focused their attention on the emergence and potential of a class of farmers who could initiate the development of agricultural productivity by taking advantage of production-side resources newly available under the capitalist development of the Japanese economy in the 1960s and early 1970s. They identified a socio-economic differentiation mechanism within peasant agriculture. They explained that while “the logic of capital” (the relations of commodity production) penetrated rural communities and farm households, peasant family members were freed from the “traditional (paternalistic) family system” and could perceive their drudgery as labour to be compensated with a socially and objectively determined living wage, instead of taking their overwork and self-exploitation for granted. This perception of wage labour stimulated peasant farmers to compete for a superior technical and productivity level sufficient enough to earn a decent wage from farming. In the end, this initiated a differentiation process, creating an upper class of farmers who were expected to lead the development and modernisation of Japanese agriculture.

This second school was criticised from agrarian political economists for turning a blind eye to capitalist accumulation occurring alongside agricultural modernisation (Tashiro, 1982), but not in the sense that the first school of de-peasantisation scholars claimed. Tashiro et al. (1975) recognised the complexity of capitalist agrarian transformation, in which capitalism tends to appropriate agriculture via labour, commodity, and land markets in an inconsistent and nonlinear way, and as a result of such variable processes, the theory of peasant differentiation would not appear as predicted. Indeed, as presented throughout this study, evidence of a distinct Japanese process of de-peasantisation is highly contestable.

Another point of criticism against the linear reasoning of de-peasantisation is a focus on the collective and communal nature of farm management and agrarian communities in Japan. When agricultural “modernisation” policy was introduced in the early 1960s, it was mainly aimed at promoting “autonomous family farmers” (or entrepreneurial farmers) with sufficient farm size and solid farm incomes, thereby filling the income gap between the agricultural and industrial sectors. This effort was largely in vain and widely recognised as an “incomplete” project needing to be complemented by “collaborative farming arrangements” as an option for agricultural structural policies. Although Usami (1992, 1995) first expected newly emerging large-scale, corporate-like farms to initiate the development of Japanese agriculture, he found it difficult to see constructive initiatives able to withstand the overall domestic decline of agriculture since the 1990s and turned his attention to the possibility of “rural civil society” including non-farm actors (Usami, 2004). Collaborative farming is a requisite part of paddy-based agriculture as explained later, and peasant farmers in Japan have long been organised into community farming units at the village and hamlet levels. Based on a massive collection of case studies, Tashiro emphasised that community farming functions not only as a production unit, but also as a platform to care for local natural resources and social infrastructure (2011, 2016). According to Tashiro (2016), when functioning as a production unit that provides diverse roles shared amongst community members, who include those unable to sustain their own farms, the de-peasantisation process could be inhibited. At the same time, however, the recent trend of incorporation of community farming enterprises (CFEs) as encouraged by the government could promote de-peasantisation by drawing a boundary line between dedicated members and non-members. Also, functioning as a social/communal platform that provides social services in rural areas, community farming is expected to protect rural local livelihoods against neoliberal globalisation. At the same time, however, community farming also serves neoliberalism to socially integrate (and discipline) rural communities by easing social tensions (Tashiro, 2008) and instilling key values of neoliberalism such as “spontaneous, self-help, and entrepreneurial activity” (Iba and Sakamoto, 2014). In order to avoid being appropriated by the neoliberal mentality, Tashiro (2004) expects community farming units and rural local residents to empower themselves by creating open, public communities with greater individual freedom.

From the point of view of peasant and rural studies, the differentiation theory and de-peasantisation argument have also been critiqued for regarding peasant households simply as units of farm management, rather than as units enabling rural livelihoods, and therefore undervaluing the vitality and resilience of peasant households and their coping strategies to make a living from on- and off-farm diversification (Tama, 1994). Those rural studies scholars also share the view of Tashiro and other contemporary agrarian political economists on the communal nature of farm management and rural communities in Japan, though using different terms.

In her milestone retrospective paper on a research history of the Japanese Association of Rural Studies (JARS), Kumagai (2004) categorised the theory of differentiation and de-peasantisation as a deductive approach, while another theoretical framework employed by rural studies scholars since the birth of JARS in 1953, i.e. the “Ie-Mura” (which literally translates to “family or house” and “rural community or village” respectively) theory, uses a largely inductive approach and focuses on the unique characteristics of traditional and fundamental units of social organisation in rural Japan, such as family or the village community.

One of the principal findings on the Japanese family units, “Ie”, was that they tend to operate as a kind of intergenerational corporation, working together to survive in harsh living conditions and prosper through kinship ties (Torigoe, 1985). Though the theory of “Ie” maintains relevance in understanding the characteristics of Japanese society in general, it seems most helpful in defining the peasant condition. The ultimate goals of “Ie” management were to ensure generational succession, from ancestors to descendants, and remain embedded in the same place (place-embedded) where the farmhouse, farmland and the site of the
family tomb inherited from prior generations were located. In this regard, peasant families (Ie) seemed to change very slightly during the post-War period.

In a similar fashion, “Mura” was identified in this theory as a kind of commune, where peasants who face difficulty surviving individually can manage land in common, take part in reciprocated exchange of labour, and support each other in all aspects of their livelihoods. The strong solidarity or cooperative nature of “Mura” community was partly attributed to the system of paddy field irrigation, which requires community members to work together to manage a water allocation system to ensure equal distribution of water among the scattered plots of paddy fields under different ownership. The “Mura” was also critical as a way to unite and fight neighbouring communities to assure adequate water supply (Akitsu, 1986).

While the post-WWII economic boom pushed young men from farming villages to urban-based industries, national government subsidies in the 1970s encouraged the manufacturing sector to establish factories in rural areas. These developments provided steady employment in rural villages and allowed many adult male farmers to remain in the countryside and work their family farms during the weekend. This was further enabled by the improvement of farm machinery for paddy rice cultivation. Off-farm jobs made it possible for peasant farmers to keep their “Ie” membership mentality. Rural communities (Mura) also survived, as member households continued to farm and could fulfill their various community duties as before. As a result, the differentiation of peasant farmers wasn’t observable in this stage and the notion of “a peasant farmer and factory worker” remained a significant component of rural communities.

A collaborative line of agrarian studies between political economy and sociology, led by Morita (1973, 1975) among others, emerged, claiming that small-scale family farming, or peasant farming, is the best fit and most resilient option for Japanese agriculture. This is due to the long tradition of labour-intensive farming and well-organised landscape management adapted to the unique ecological and climatic conditions of the specific community. Some scholars in this line advocate a kind of new agrarianism (Nouhon shugi) (Ume, 2014), and other proponents established a new association for academics and social activists working against the degradation of family farms and remote rural communities, naming it the “Association of Small-scale Peasant Farming” in 2016.

Whereas the theory of differentiation of peasant farmers lost its usefulness and disappeared gradually among rural sociologists, rural societal change was interpreted using “Ie-Mura” theory as a household-level adaptation to new socio-economic settings or rearrangements of “Mura” formation. On the whole, there was no radical or innovative reconsideration for developing a new paradigm that captured rural transformation until the 1990s (Kumagai, 2004). Kumagai argued that three factors were critical in entering a novel stage or new paradigm of rural transformation in Japan: (1) the settlement mobility of members of family farms and local communities would need to increase, enabling the possibility to move from traditional homelands; (2) agricultural productivity would need to lose its key role as the basis of farm labour, farm management and rural livelihoods; and (3) the all-encompassing social nature of rural communities (“Mura” as a small cosmos) would need to be abandoned (Kumagai, 2004).

Although the JARS community has not yet developed a new, comprehensive paradigm or theory to explain domestic agrarian transformation, we have witnessed an emerging trend of new peasant farmers, including new entry farmers. They are not only placed in their own rural community, but rather being networked beyond the community, which can be categorised as a process of re-peasantisation. Before providing a detailed analysis of such a trend based on our case study, however, we will outline the context of re-agrarianisation against which a hybrid zone between the peasant mode and the corporate mode of agriculture can be uniquely identified.

3. Emerging trend of re-agrarianisation and re-peasantisation

Despite the harsh conditions facing farmers and rural communities in Japan mentioned in section 2, we are now witnessing evidence of trends toward, and the emergence of discourses related to, re-agrarianisation and re-peasantisation. Building from the late 1990s, there is renewed interest among urban consumers and rural residents in a revival of agrarian and rural values (Akitsu, 2009). Public concerns about food insecurity (in light of food price crises in the late 2000s), environmental degradation both at the local and global levels (such as climate change and resource depletion), as well as food safety (in relation to imported food safety scandals, but further complicated by radioactive contamination after the Fukushima nuclear accident in March 2011), are rapidly growing, as clearly confirmed by several public opinion surveys (Cabinet Public Relations Office, 2014; see Hisano, 2015). MAFF’s FY2015 Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas featured an emerging, but embryonic trend of the revitalisation of rural areas and farming communities. One of the key concepts, “Return to Rural”, is used to describe situations such as rural in-migration, new entry farming (i.e. those without a farm family background entering farming), use of local natural and cultural resources for rural revitalisation, and renewal of rural social capital. Although this could explain the recent trend of re-agrarianisation, it is not certain yet whether this can be considered to be a process of re-peasantisation or if it will lead to a reversing of de-agrarianisation. Careful investigation is required to see if and how a “peasant-like” agency, whereby farmers and households are able to strategically interpret their circumstances and create room to manoeuvre on their own (Long et al., 1986), will be enough to counter the deteriorating foundations of agricultural production and rural livelihoods and transform the agriculture sector and society at large. The following points illustrate these issues of contention through a series of rich, contextual examples.

First of all, the domestic spotlight on rurality comes in the midst of growing concerns about declining and ageing populations, especially in rural areas, to the extent that half of local cities and rural towns across the country may disappear by 2040 (Masuda, 2014). This gloomy prediction was promoted by the Japan Policy Council and a former Minister of Public Management, Hiroya Masuda. Insensitive to any gender-related implications, the calculation was based on the predicted number of women between the ages of 20 and 39 in 896 municipalities expected to drop as much as 50% between 2010 and 2040. Every municipality that qualified was unilaterally named a “disappearing city/town.” Unsurprisingly, this prediction was heavily criticised by agrarian and rural studies scholars (Odagiri, 2015; Okada, 2015), not only for its sensationalism, causing concern and confusion, but for its intention to undermine and dismiss local initiatives and to legitimise the local restructuring policy of the neoliberal government. Still it cannot be denied that this dire prediction has resonated in public and underlined the challenges ahead.

Since the end of the 1990s,7 massive attention has been paid to forms of collaborative production, such as Community Farming Enterprises (CFEs), especially in the context of revitalising rural communities and local agriculture (Tashiro, 2011; Iba and Sakamoto, 2014). CFEs can vary in their creation, but many are organised and managed endogenously by groups of farmers within farming hamlets. Stopping further decline (or disappearance) of local agriculture and rural economies is widely considered difficult without promoting and invigorating CFEs. Involving both a gradually growing but limited number of core farmers and a large majority of small-scale part-time farmers, CFEs are intended to have a dual function as farm management units and social service providers (Iba, 2009). There are an increasing number of successful cases of CFEs able to contribute to revitalising local agriculture and rural economies while struggling to deal with a

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7 The concept of CFEs first appeared in the MAFF’s FY1989 Annual Report.
Table 1
Summarization of farming modes typical to Japan from pre-WWII to the present day and their differentiating characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Market orientation</th>
<th>Pluriactivity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-WWII</td>
<td>Peasant “ayakushe”</td>
<td>place-embedded</td>
<td>Sales only after needs are met</td>
<td>Pluriactivity as livelihood</td>
<td>Historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Day</td>
<td>Peasant-like “JA-linked”</td>
<td>place-networked</td>
<td>Logic of agricultural cooperative (JA)</td>
<td>Off-farm income essential to household (Regrounding)</td>
<td>Close association with JA; Family farm</td>
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<td>Post-WWII</td>
<td>Peasant-like “New entry”</td>
<td>place-networked</td>
<td>Diverse markets (Broadening) Value-added products (Deepening)</td>
<td>Multi-sectoral commercialisation (Deepening &amp; Broadening)</td>
<td>Family or individual farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>disassociated</td>
<td>Commodity production for mainstream markets</td>
<td>New entry of non-farm private corporations (off-farm capital) into agricultural sector</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The hybrid zone indicates where elements of the peasant and entrepreneurial modes of farming are inter-mixed. The processes column portrays the processes of de- and re-agrarisation and peasantisation over time and in relation to the farming modes to the right. Dotted lines indicate where weaker processes are evident. (source: authors).

decreasing and ageing population (Tashiro, 2016). At the same time, an increasing number of CFEs have been incorporated as private limited companies (31% of all CFEs were incorporated by February 2017), seemingly distancing them from the generally understood “peasant mode” of farming characterised by a self-managed resource base, high level of autonomy, and low level of external dependency (Ploeg, 2008). However, incorporation itself does not necessarily affect community-wide collaborative activities. Rather “networking to place” is considered to be a necessary step to make the organisation and activities robust and sustainable.

Table 1 summarizes the most common modes of farming in Japan and how many become hybridized, ranging from more or less “peasant-like” in the ways they orient to mainstream markets or engage in pluriactivity (Ploeg, 2008). These modes have emerged and evolved over time, and after WWII we see a shift from “place-embedded,” indicating a more long-term familial connection (including family graves) to a hamlet or village, to “place-networked” relationships with local rural communities. Despite the shifting prevalence of certain farming modes, the expectation for contributing as a community member does not change. New entry farmers and CFEs face the challenge of integrating with the local community and institutions, but can benefit by accessing local cultural assets for broadening on-farm capacities (tourism, alternative markets) and deepening their product value, as well as labour in the form of local workers.

Across the country in 2015, there were 138,256 farming communities, 43% of which consist of less than 9 farm households and 88% with less than 30 farm households. Within these communities, as of February 2017, the number of CFEs was 15,136 involving 516,817 farm households (24% of the total) in 30,737 farming communities (22% of the total) (MAFF, 2015, 2017a,b). On average per unit, CFEs consist of 34 farm households cultivating or operating on an average of 32.4 hectares, with incorporated CFEs being relatively bigger than their non-incorporated counterparts (Table 2). Farmland areas cultivated by CFEs for their own commercial production (0.39 million hectares) as well as entrusted to CFEs for contract operations for commission (0.10 million hectares) account for about 11% of total farmland area. Thanks to their collective and cooperative nature, 81% of CFEs (in 2015) have members who are actively engaged in community farming activities, 55% of whom are under 65 (cf. 35% for all the core farmers) (MAFF, 2015).

More than 90% of CFEs are established with the aim of “properly” managing farmland and other agricultural resources in the community, and in the case of incorporated CFEs, nearly 50% aim to collectively take care of agriculture in the community and increase farm income by reducing costs and expanding the scope of farm businesses. Main CFE activities include production and sales of agricultural products (76% of all CFEs and 99% of incorporated CFEs), such as direct sales to consumers (23%, 39%), food processing (5%, 11%), and interactions with urban consumers (4%, 8%); shared ownership and use of farm machinery (80%, 88%); joint management of farmland (57%, 72%); and being entrusted with contract operations such as pest control and harvesting (45%, 47%). As observed above, incorporated CFEs are more active in expanding and diversifying their business than non-incorporated ones, but contribute equally to the revitalisation and development of their own communities.

In addition to CFEs, there also are increasing numbers of incorporated NPOs and organised agriculture and forestry management entities that are engaged in community- and place-based activities. These include agricultural and forestry production, rural tourism, social welfare (e.g. care farming), and natural resource management through networking farmers, non-farmers, residents, stakeholder organisations and municipalities inside and outside of the community. Deriving from the ideas of small business, social enterprises, and sharing economies, some scholars describe these community- and place-based activities as “mura businesses” as a promising way to sustain and revitalise local communities and rural economies (Ikegami, 2015).

Additionally, studies about the possibilities and actual contributions of the entry of non-farm corporations into agriculture and the development of entrepreneurial farm corporations to revitalise local agriculture and rural economies are expanding (Takahashi and Morita, 2013). Under the Abe administration, the Japanese government is aggressively promoting agricultural investments by non-farm corporatis as well as large-scale and capital-intensive agricultural production corps. The so-called “Abenomics agricultural policy” creates and disseminates a discourse of “strong agriculture” and “lucrative agriculture” to persuade the public into believing that Japanese agriculture can overturn its downward trend and survive even under a hyper-free trade regime. Indeed, agri-food business corporations, such as food retailers, food service industry, food processors, agrochemical
companies, and farm machinery companies, as well as local construction and civil engineering companies are actively investing in and organising agricultural production either directly or through contract farming schemes (Table 3).

While still limited in scope, however, they are criticised for tapping into established agricultural resources for their own corporate benefit or to bolster public relations and for being unmotivated to revive rural economies and communities (Sekine and Bonanno, 2016), because they target rural areas and farming communities with ideal growing and logistical conditions (e.g. non-mountainous, well-maintained, accessible to major distribution channels and markets) and produce “high-quality” but limited volumes and varieties of vegetables or rice. In some cases, non-farm corporations, who invested in local agriculture on favourable terms and with financial and institutional support from the local government, eventually pull out from these locations, due to poor returns or a restructuring of business operations (Sekine and Hisano, 2009). There also remain concerns about a loss of “peasant-like” autonomy and multiplicity of local family farmers if they were to become employed by or involved in contract farming with non-farm corporations. As such, their agricultural development perspective is distinctly different from what the re-peasantisation thesis was originally intended to mean. Nevertheless, it is possible to describe the recent trend of increasing agricultural investments by non-farm private corporations as a process of re-agrarianisation, which might be a necessity given the harsh reality of Japanese agriculture and rural economies.

Apart from non-farm private corporations, large-scale and capital-intensive farmers and agricultural production corporations are emerging under national policy promoting a corporate farming model. These operations are located mainly in advantageous regions, but some are located in less-favoured areas supported by local government subsidies. For example, in the Tohoku region (North-eastern Japan), the central government is providing subsidies as a way to rebuild the agricultural production base that was destroyed by the tsunami and affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. Above and beyond their profit-seeking orientation, even these operations can contribute to community development and wellbeing.

For example, GRA Inc. was established as an agricultural production corporation in January 2012 in Yamamoto-cho, Miyagi Prefecture, one of many coastal towns ravaged by disaster in 2011, in order to revive the town as a production centre for strawberries. Their business model aims at developing capital-intensive, cutting-edge, and year-round protected horticulture to produce, market and export super-high-value added fresh and processed strawberries and tomatoes (now expanding to overseas productions). At the same time, they operate several group corporations, such as GRA Agri-Platform, which is aimed to support new entry farmers, and NPO GRA which seeks to create new value in the region through the regeneration of regional industries and educational supports for the next generation. Supporting the recovery in Tohoku aligns with GRA Inc.’s corporate mission, “to bring regional societies sustainable prosperity by making agriculture a strong industry”.

A similar example can be found in the case of Yasai Club (translated as “vegetable club”) in Gunma Prefecture (established in 1992), which has developed from a small group of organic farmers into a joint-stock company, with a network of 70 vegetable farmers (including 14 agricultural production corporations) across Japan. This company is also engaged in developing production and management technologies as well as support programmes for new entry farmers. They produce and market organic or other kinds of certified, high quality products largely through contractual agreements with consumers’ cooperatives, food processors, wholesalers and retailers, while also selling fresh and pickled organic vegetables directly to consumers via the internet. They sell their products, along with the “stories” attached to or behind the products.

Although the examples described above might be exceptional success stories that cannot be duplicated by the majority of farmers and farming communities, some farm management scholars consider that these “advanced farming entities,” including agricultural production corporations, have the potential to not only produce economic value and higher profit as a unit of farm management, but also to contribute to sustaining and revitalising local communities through agricultural resource management and job creation (Oda and Ichida, 2017). In fact, this is the theme of the plenary session at the 2017 Annual Conference of the Agricultural Economics Society of Japan. Further investigation and discussion about what conditions are required to make these “advanced farming entities” or “next-generation agriculture” able to contribute to sustainable rural development in the face of a perceived de-ruralisation and de-agrarianisation crisis is still needed.

4. New peasantries through rural revitalisation initiative in Kyoto

While some aged farmers practicing part-time farming and/or subsistence farming who share characteristics with peasants (hyakushō) from the past do remain, a new, diverse type of peasantry is emerging in the form of new entry farmers who lack a farm family background, having grown up mainly in urban places (Akitsu, 2009; McGreevy, 2012). First appearing in the Japanese countryside in the 1970s, just after the era of university student movements in the late-1960s, these young generation incomers were motivated by the aspirations of recovering the lost connection to nature and communal human relationships, leading many to relocate to remote areas and settle in groups. As student movements waned, the next influx of young settlers came in the middle of the 1980s, inspired by environmental and lifestyle concerns (such as children with serious allergies) to migrate into rural areas and farm organically. In the 1990s, the shortage of young farmers, even those with a family farm background, was the focus of central and local governments, inciting several new policy schemes to encourage those without a family farm background living in urban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>All CFEs</th>
<th>Incorporated</th>
<th>Non-incorporated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of CFEs</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>15,136</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of farming communities</td>
<td>138,256</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>30,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of farm households</td>
<td>2,155,082</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>516,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– average per CFE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland areas (ha) cultivated or operated</td>
<td>4,471,000</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>490,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– average per CFE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total number of farming communities and the total number of farm households are for 2015, while the total farmland area data is for the year 2016.
centres to take up farming. Consulting service centres were founded in urban places to recruit young people and generous funding schemes to support new farmers’ transition into agriculture were introduced at the local level and later expanded in the 2000s after adoption by the central government. In addition, the baby boomer generation was retiring and some of them wished to return to their hometown or move to the countryside to restart their lives as small-scale farmers. In the following paragraphs, we illustrate this emerging peasantry with the example of Ayabe City, Kyoto Prefecture.

Ayabe City, located 70 km northwest of Kyoto City, is like many provincial towns in Japan suffering from depopulation (down 10% to 33,821 since 2005) and ageing (37% of the population is over 65 years old), with little in the way of economic opportunity. Unexpectedly, the city appears to be an attractive place to move to for the younger generation from outside. The city was made famous by a local writer who portrayed a livelihood characterised (eg. Brun and Fuller, 2001; Jussaume, 1991) of living called “Half Farmer, Half X” (Han-nou Han-X) where pursuits work half of their time as farmers, and half in another vocation (Shiomi, 2003). Naoki Shiomi, the originator for Han-nou Han-X, quit his mail order company job in Kobe in his 30s, returned to his hometown of Ayabe and took up a pluriactive agricultural lifestyle. His book, which coined the phrase Han-nou Han-X, has inspired many young people to leave urban places and take up farming in rural villages. This new entry pluriactive trend is one example of re-peasantisation in Japan semi-consistent with traditional notions of peasant or hyakushō styles. The Japanese term hyakushō literally translates to “someone with hundreds of jobs,” portraying a livelihood characterised by pluriactivity, based on small-scale farming and a diversity of other off-farm jobs necessary for country living.

In a district of Ayabe dominated by farm fields and mountains called Shigasato (pop. 1268 in 508 households), a cluster of new entry farmers has settled to practice small-scale farming and pluriactive lifestyles. The total of 183 people in 67 households are incomer farmers, encouraged to settle via the municipal governments’ consultation centre or through a local programme, called “Kodakara Netto,” created by the Shigasato community itself.

Kodakara Netto, meaning “children are treasures network,” was launched by an U-turner who was afraid that the local primary school might introduce combined-aged classes because of the lack of school age children. The programme has two distinct features: 1) it invites only young couples or individuals, who already have or are expected to have children to be pupils in the primary school; 2) and its organisation consists of a mixture of people with local ties and new settlers. A total of 183 people in 67 households are incomer farmers, encouraged to settle via the municipal governments’ consultation centre or through a local programme, called “Kodakara Netto,” created by the Shigasato community itself.

Kodakara Netto was purposefully mixes membership to include locals and established settlers in order to build more empathic communication with candidates from cities, which can be a source of frustration for incomers. The households listed in Table 4 are new settlers who consulted with Kodakara Netto at the beginning stage of their migration process and account for 43% of the total number of new settlers into Shigasato over the past twenty years. The contribution of the new settlers is remarkable in terms of its contribution in establishing a population of young people — almost half of the local primary school is populated by members from new settler families and the school has not had to combine classes.

There is a mixture of lifestyles seen in Table 4 with varying degrees of pluriactivity and level of engagement in farming. Some households (No. 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 19) derive their livelihood predominantly through farming, while 17 other households perform part-time farming or subsistence farming, which mostly includes small-scale wet rice cultivation and vegetable gardening. Most of the full-time farmers have not adopted conventional farming methods, but tend to practice organic or low-input rice, fruit, and vegetable cultivation, and also process their produce to diversify and secure their income.

One couple, Mr. K and Ms. K, (No. 3 in Table 3), has played an important role in attracting candidate settlers by guiding them to the unique atmosphere of human communication in the countryside and by managing Kodakara Netto. While they knew each other previously, Ms. K came to live in Shigasato alone to start subsistence farming, and after a few years Mr. K came to live with her and work as a carpenter using traditional wooden frame techniques. They bought an old farmhouse and repaired it by themselves. Ms. K is in charge of wet rice farming and does food processing (e.g. Miso paste), which is sold or given to their friends and neighbors. Mr. K earns his income from carpentry, but also devotes himself to catching wild animals, such as wild boar and deer, with hunting traps. The latter activity is not only his hobby, but also has important social meaning because wildlife damage to crops has become a major problem in remote rural areas. In addition to these activities, they started running a farm inn last year where wild meat is often served to the guests.

Mr. K has been a member of Kodakara Netto from the beginning. He graduated from a national university in forestry science, worked as an engineer in an overseas corporation, and in the end, obtained his carpentry skills under the tutelage of an expert. He has broad social networks with those who are interested in rural livelihoods, because of his open-minded character and his history of wandering rural places. Some of the new settlers in Table 4 were attracted by his character and made the decision of in-migrating because of his presence in the community. Mr. K function as an intermediary between long-term residents and new settlers, even after some time in the community. They have held several home parties, inviting both groups together in order to encourage mutual understanding among them. Expectations for rural lifestyles and ways of farming can create conflict among residents and settlers (McGrevey, 2012). However, experiences on the ground suggest that such struggles for interpretation, and the adjustment and rearrangement of social expectations helps in the expansion and long-term survival of new peasantries.

Despite this progress, farmers in Ayabe City, and most rural areas facing the contemporary mix of socio-economic difficulties in agriculture that Japan currently does, employ three strategies for surviving: 1) engaging in pluriactivity, the likes of which was prevalent in the
post-war modernization period; 2) adopting unique farming or sales methods, such as direct sales of premium priced organic produce to repeater customers; 3) in the more extreme examples, decouple their lives from the capitalist economy and become largely self-sufficient, living off of local natural resources for most of their household needs. Even family farm successors with extensive farm assets cannot help but take similar strategies in order to persist. For example, large-scale rice farmers with 15–20 ha under cultivation in Ayabe City are able to survive through direct sales of products using environmentally-friendly methods because of the deterioration of the price of rice in the market. Of course, the exact nature of these shifts toward peasant-like farming depends on farm location, the physical condition of farm fields and assets, and the choice of crops.

5. Conclusion

Through the descriptions and examples presented in this paper we see the varied ways de-agrarianisation in Japan is being countered by new and re-invented forms of agricultural production. While it is beyond the scope of this analysis to speculate on whether this vanguard of CFEs, non-farm private corporations, agricultural production corporations, and new entry part-time farmers will be enough to slow down the process of de-agrarianisation, they do represent distinct responses uniquely tailored to the historical and cultural backgrounds of the rural crisis facing Japan. Likewise, it is difficult to predict if these peasant-like responses will ignite a process of re-peasantisation; or whether the initiatives themselves will maintain certain elements of peasant farming, or, as is most likely from the descriptions above, walk the border zone between peasant, entrepreneur, and capitalist farming modes (Ploeg, 2008: 37).

To begin with, it is important to reemphasize that the de-peasantisation process typical to the development of a stratified agriculture was largely avoided in Japan. Due to biophysical conditions and the expansion of industrial wage-labour into rural areas as well as the government’s protective agricultural policy (e.g. the rice price support system that functioned until the 1980s), the usual factors that drive de-peasantisation, such as farm scale increase and technical innovation, did not compel rice farming communities into competition, but rather allowed a shift toward greater pluriactivity and part-time farming, which has extended the life of the Japanese peasantry. De-peasantisation was also inhibited by mutually supportive community-based institutions and social infrastructures and functions that are endemic to rural Japanese villages. This isn’t to say that other agrarian communities over the world do not carry out community-based work for their mutual benefit, but the sense of strict commitment and all-encompassing social influence of relationships to maintain autonomy and survival in times of need, this place-embeddedness can serve as an intricate and supportive web of local natural resources for most of their household needs. Therefore, the social ties that accompany regular collective labour and close living proximity. On the one hand, this place-embeddedness can serve as an intricate and supportive web of relationships to maintain autonomy and survival in times of need, but it can also serve as a defensive measure against outside influence.

However, there is general agreement among Japanese agrarian scholars, agricultural policy makers, and rural communities themselves that the severity of the crisis conditions facing the countryside threaten rural places and Japanese rurality to such an extent that countermeasures to preserve agricultural productive capacity, no matter the form or potential political economic ramifications, are desperately needed. This “re-agrarianisation at all costs” approach has fostered an environment where established notions of individual farming units (namely, full-time and part-time farm households) have evolved into the various corporate, collective, and community-based “entities” we see in Table 1. These new associations don’t easily translate into familiar forms and are instead hybridised constructs of both endogenous and exogenous resources and ideas. For example, CFEs tend to be organised and run by formalised associations of resident farmers, but
seem to operate according to economic logics and practices that run counter to their peasant-mode roots. At the same time, they resist a full adoption of neo-liberal values by creating commitments to place, ensuring that the local resource base is maintained and community obligations are met. It will be curious to see if these “advanced farming entities” have the wherewithal to remain in these hybridised, seemingly contradictory forms as conditions change in the future. In addition, more detailed and comparative analyses of the same entities is needed to determine to what degree they represent something new or outside of what is considered “new peasantries” in international scholarship (Ploeg, 2008).

Whether it be the deep cultural legacies of Ie-Mura social arrangements, active resistance to neoliberal encroachment, or a more practical strategy that simply reflects the realities of contemporary rural Japan, the capacity for cooperation is consistently present among all of the re-agrarianising examples mentioned in this paper. Japanese scholars such as Tashiro and Usami predicted the necessity of this quality for the future development of Japanese agriculture when coining the terms “collaborative farm arrangements” and “collective farm organisations.” We can even find examples of agricultural production corporations that aim to contribute to community development and the long-term survival of their region as local partners, despite their for-profit orientation. Ploeg (2008) mentions the importance of patterns of cooperation amongst peasants in their struggle for greater autonomy and reproduction of a viable resource base. Furthermore, he emphasises that autonomy is “often constructed at higher levels of aggregation,” in mutually reinforcing and beneficial relationships that bind communities or collective-based production enterprises, as opposed to individual farming units exclusively (Ploeg, 2008, p.34). This bodes well for the idea that maintenance of some elements of a peasant orientation will remain in rural Japan in some form or another.

What is less certain is the long-term viability of the pluriactive, part-time farmer approach to production, illustrated by the Han-nou Han-X example in Ayabe City. By most interpretations, this approach would be considered the most “peasant-like,” in that the farmers employ a variety of means to achieve autonomy, regrind the mobilisation of on-farm resources, deepen the quality of production and means of distribution, and broaden their farming operations beyond mere production (Ploeg et al., 2000). But as some studies have pointed out (McGreery, 2012), new entry farmers face more than challenges of resource mobilisation (both material and economic), but also a myriad of socio-cultural trials to be accepted within the community, which are ultimately critical if they are to achieve their sought-after autonomy.

While this study has opened up a space to explore the realities of Japanese agrarian change through theory, many questions remain for future research. Is there evidence of an alternative paradigm emerging that describes rural change in Japan as Kumagai framed it (2004)? Although we see the settlement mobility of new entry farmers with no direct ties to place, those with residential roots are reluctant to loosen their grip. One could argue that the maintenance of pluriactive life-styles (Han Hou Han X) demonstrates that rural places can be and have always been more than sites of agricultural production, but the concerted push and general consensus around the need to stop de-agrarianisation is so strong that it is too early to decide either way. There also doesn’t seem to be evidence that Mura life has transformed away from being “a small cosmos,” in that the inescapability of community ties is even felt by new profit-oriented farming entities who strive to contribute to the welfare of their locality.

The Japanese case presented here further supports the re-interpretation of frameworks on agrarian change (e.g. Hirsch, 2012; Shackleton and Shackleton, 2015; Rasmussen and Reenberg, 2015), where the revitalisation of rurality itself has begun to redefine what it means to be a peasant or farm in a peasant mode. The conceptual dividing line between what is an entrepreneurial farmer and what is a peasant has become blurred with the influx of new forms of cooperative farming and new, hybridized approaches to meeting on-farm economic needs and the reproduction of local community. While we recognise that the peasant mode of farming has always existed on a continuum, the evidence presented here questions how small-scale agriculture should be conceptualized in a new-liberal world. In what ways will farmer agency change within the drive toward more corporate farming? Does a proliferation of corporate farming necessarily lead to a complete repatterning by “empire” (Ploeg, 2008) or do the examples presented here show an alternative possibility with certain peasant-like elements remaining in place? Can the bonds of place persist in rural communities under the overarching trend of neoliberalism? In the end, the revitalisation of rurality in Japan, and elsewhere, may very well depend upon new forms and new combinations of peasant-like elements the likes of which we have yet to witness.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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