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Deliberating Liberty

A Study of Social Freedom among Tea Farmers in Rural Japan

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Abstract

This ethnographic master's thesis was prompted by a fieldwork at the Obubu *tea company in* Wazuka*, a tea farming village in the countryside of Japan. The research method was one of participant observation, primarily by full immersion in the cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, and knowledge dissemination of tea. The village and company were characterized by innovation, openness, informality and spontaneity, giving rise to an impression of social freedom. Very few anthropological studies have ever been done that deal directly with liberty, and even when social scientists employ the term* 'freedom' *their ideas of the concept are seldom made explicitly clear. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the academic and popular discourse on freedom by developing an appropriate analytical framework. The main discussion of the ethnography explores a range of definitions that provide clarity for future debates and research on the topic. In the thesis, episodic descriptions from the fieldnotes spark the exploration of various freedom concepts, whether these pertain to choice, autonomy, spontaneity, or some other definition. While all the concepts are connected, each offers a unique angle. Besides its main theme of social freedom, the thesis also helps to illustrate the diversity of Japan, all the while suggesting that the link between tea and social liberty might be more than a coincidence. The ethnography concludes with the acknowledgement that its list of definitions is not exhaustive, yet it nevertheless offers some of the evaluative tools necessary to recognize patterns of behavior that can be associated with freedom.*

Sipping from a bowl

Of ceremonial tea

A pure reflection

Appears in its profound depths

Of blue skies and azure seas

一服した時に

それは茶碗に点てられた抹茶

同時に感じるだろう

深遠な深さの純粋な反射

青い空と海の青さ

- Poem by tea master *Sen no Rikyu* [author's translation]

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Preface

Through the master's program in Social Anthropology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), students were asked to perform a fieldwork research upon which a thesis would be based. I chose to stay in a rural area of central Japan (or what the Japanese call 'Western Japan') to study tea and the local life. You may be wondering what, if anything, tea has to do with freedom. I will argue that tea is both a catalyst and a medium for the expression of freedom. Social Anthropologist specialize in examining broad questions through a narrow lens, and I have tried to emulate their example. The famous Japanese swordsman and philosopher Miyamoto Musashi said: "From one thing, know ten thousand things" (2010:3). In my case, that 'one thing' is tea.

There are several reasons why tea would be interesting for anthropologists. I mention three, albeit briefly. First, tea has local and national significance, while being a global cultural object. Second, it is at the intersection of history, associated with tradition and modernity alike. Third, it is grown in the countryside, offering some contrast of rural and urban social dynamics.

In both the English and Japanese language, the word 'tea' has colloquially come to refer to a variety of concoctions based on a number of different herbs, such as 'barley tea', 'rooibos', 'chamomile', 'hibiscus tea', etc. In scientific terms, however, the word refers exclusively to the infusion of a specific bush, the *Camellia Sinensis*, otherwise known as the tea plant. Brews made from other plants would be better referred to as infusions or herbal drinks. Any mention of tea in this ethnography refers exclusively to the *Camellia Sinensis* drink, unless stated otherwise. Today, tea has become the second most widespread drink in the world after water, although it is not strictly necessary for our survival (Saberi, 2010). It is a liquid of decidedly social proportions, and as a pervasive cultural object is surely worthy of our attention. At the very least we should be interested in how this ubiquitous product is subject to manifold forms of social expression over time and across regions. In other words, focusing on tea allows for the study of universals and differences between human societies – a comparison which Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) and many others regard as the very *raison d'être* of Social Anthropology. Hence follows my attempt to explain how, in a small community of farmers, social freedom is connected with a seemingly inconspicuous beverage.

I am thankful for the opportunity to present my research. I especially owe a debt to my advisor Svein Ege, who always made a wholehearted effort to help me progress and whose acute insight immediately gained my trust and respect. I am also grateful for the images provided by photographers of unquestionable caliber, Kayleigh Innes, Kevin Sim, Yasuharu Matsumoto, Momo Taniguchi, and Michael Blodgett. Finally, I am filled with appreciation for the time spent and encounters had at Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms. It was a truly unique learning experience that I will surely never forget.

Espen Fikseaunet

May 2016

Innes, Kayleigh. "Espen on the Tea Truck." *(2015). JPG.*

1. Introduction

My investigation of social freedom began when I experienced the innovative and informal manners of tea farmers in a village or small town in Kyoto prefecture. I wanted to explore their lifestyle further, and to understand why I immediately associated their behavior with social freedom. I soon ran into difficulties, however, in pinpointing what exactly it was about their behavior that signified liberty. I realized that I was lacking the conceptual framework for undertaking an analysis of social freedom. The point of this ethnography is precisely to develop such a framework.

Immediately after the conclusion of the fieldwork I sought to plunge into a sea of academic literature on freedom. My search was impeded only by the discovery of one surprising obstacle; the anthropology of freedom doesn't exist. Try as I might, I could not find ethnographic material on social freedom anywhere. Many texts dealt with the topic indirectly. They would discuss power and dominance, for instance, or they would refer to agency, empowerment, and social change. Some even made use of the words 'freedom' and 'liberty' directly, but then only as illusory concepts embedded in a narrative that their informants had constructed in order to maintain a sense of identity. Nowhere did they take patterns of behavior as serious indicators of a real, underlying condition of liberty.

The lack of anthropological studies dealing directly with freedom is strange, considering the extent to which it is implicitly debated. According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, the study of freedom is even the defining characteristic of social theory itself (Laidlaw, 2014:3). Invoking ideas of social contracts, ideological hegemony, capitalism, colonialism, etc. is equivalent to pointing out how individual volition is limited and shaped by social influence.

There can be no doubt, then, about the importance and necessity of studying freedom in the social sciences. James Laidlaw (2014:9) is one among few anthropologist that write on the issue, and argues that the study of freedom should not be a mere subset of anthropology, but should pervade the whole discipline. More than that, 'freedom' should be part of our analytical vocabulary, and not just an ideology to critique. I thoroughly agree, and what follows is an attempt to comply with that exhortation.

The ethnography starts out with an anecdote in the first part of the thesis, just after the introduction. This is followed by a description of the reference material that was used as a foundation for the ethnographic theory. Most of the sources are from philosophical discussions, since there was limited selection of anthropological writings on the subject. The theory section sets down the main concepts to be explored, and explains how they were determined. After that follows an elaboration of the research methods that were employed in the field, and deals with some of the hurdles to the execution of the research.

The second part of the thesis introduces the actual field itself; its setting, its history, and its actors. It is intended to give the reader a 'feel' for the fieldwork experience, and serves as the backdrop for the theoretical discussion. The description first looks at the village in general, before moving on to the tea company where I worked. These are the twin arenas on which research was performed. They evince similar attributes when it comes to social freedom, yet in some ways remain distinct. After their introduction, there is a brief interlude where I reflect on some of the core values that *may* have been contributing factors to the liberty of the social life in the village and within the tea company.

The majority of the second part is reserved for the theoretical discussion on various freedom concepts. Each concept gets its own chapter. All of them are interrelated and overlapping, but I have nevertheless tried to arrange them in a somewhat logical and coherent order, starting with a very basic and crude definition and gradually moving up in complexity and subtleness with each concept. The last chapter of the second part introduces some additional concepts that could merit further consideration, but that have in this case been omitted. A summary of the concepts can be found on pages 8-9.

The third part makes a conclusion that is neither sweeping nor surprising. It reiterates the descriptions of the freedom concepts in turn, before abstracting the main points of their discussion. It also suggests some implications the field observations could have for the study of Japanese society, like the view of a diverse and non-homogenous society that displays innovation, flexibility and spontaneity rather than just uniformity and conformism.

The true hope and purpose of the discussion is to make a contribution to freedom discourse and anthropological research. Perhaps the concepts here developed could even be used for analysis in other contexts and regions of the world. I thought it appropriate to begin the ethnography with the tale of Baisao – a man who sought freedom through tea.

1.1. The Story of Baisao

There is a well-known historical account about an old man who peddled tea in Japan during the late Tokugawa period. His Buddhist name was Gekkai Genshou, but he was called *Baisao* (売茶翁, meaning 'Old Tea Seller'). Born in 1675, he grew up in Kyushu in the southern part of Japan. Kyushu was not far from Nagasaki, the port in which most of Japan's few foreigners were located at a time when the country was enforcing a closed-border policy. Some of the Chinese settlers there established a Buddhist temple based on a Chinese sect. Gekkai became a monk at age 11 in a Japanese temple, and was apparently an excellent and gifted student, but later in life decided to switch his allegiance from the Japanese school of Buddhism to the Chinese temple. (Waddell, 2008:5-7)

In his youth, Gekkai travelled throughout the country for several years to study Zen, especially frequenting Kyoto and Sendai. He continued this lifestyle until his late forties, when the abbot of his temple died. The abbot wanted to appoint Gekkai as his successor. He refused the post however, with the following words: "I live the way I do because I have no wisdom or virtue. I would be ashamed to put on a Dharma robe and live on alms I received from others, as though I was special or somehow superior to them" (Waddell, 2008:13). The abbotship was instead conferred upon one of the younger disciples. Shortly after, the 49-year-old Gekkai decided to leave the temple permanently.

For around ten years, he wandered in central Japan and finally settled down by the Kamo River in Kyoto prefecture. By the time he was sixty years old, he had begun selling tea as a means of livelihood, and came to be known as Baisao. His work business was in direct violation of Buddhist conventions. The clergy believed priests should be forbidden to engage in material pursuits; instead, they were expected to live of alms. Baisao objected to the donations priests received, which he felt ought more rightly be considered materialism in their own right. He felt the Buddhist clergy was accepting not donations, but bribes (Waddell, 2008:17-24).

Basaio also revealed doubts about the path he had chosen for himself. But by working for his own means of subsistence, he felt he was able to lead a lifestyle that maintained his integrity. His refusal to abide by tradition eventually became a symbol of rebellion against the corrupt clergy, and even made him somewhat of a celebrity, inspiring other artisans to adopt names like 'Old Flower Seller', 'Old Vegetable Seller', 'Old Charcoal Seller' (Waddell, 2008:32).

Baisao's interest in tea had started at an early age, as can be seen in some of the poetry he wrote as a youth. He eventually wrote a history of tea, and during his previous pilgrimages visited tea-related areas in and around Kyoto, among them Japan's very first tea garden. His shop was a simple cart with some brewing equipment that he dragged around. He steeped a variety of teas. Some were flower scented, others in brick tea format. The loose-leafed Sencha was a novelty at the time, and Baisao is reputed to have helped make it popular (Waddell, 2008:3).

Japanese society during that era was notorious for its severity and harsh laws. The rule of the Tokugawa family brought peace, or rather the absence of war, for over 250 years. However, this relative peace was accomplished through rule with an iron fist. Elites were quick to mete out punishments to any subjects who transgressed their social limits. Restrictions on commerce and heavy taxation further contributed to the burden of the people (Ebrey & Walthall, 2014:288-313). Kyoto was perhaps an exception to this severity. As an artist's city, it was considered to more free. Baisao interacted with many artists there, some of them quite renowned (Ibid.:32).

He never charged a fixed sum of money for his tea, but always encouraged his customers to pay according to their hearts' desire. Their donations were received in a bamboo cup. One of his poems tells of his attitude: "If you want to drink it for free, that's okay too. I'm only sorry I can't let you have it for less" (Waddell, 2008:33). Among his fans were those who thought him enlightened. They speculated that his otherworldly understanding had lifted him above the rules and problems of the material world. Baisao denied such attributions entirely, and repeatedly pointed out how his life was heavy with restrictions from without and within. Although he took joy in drinking and offering tea, and had chosen his profession freely, he had to endure pain and hardships as a consequence (Ibid.).

The amounts donated were often insufficient for buying food, and Baisao led a severe life of poverty and starvation. In order to survive he would also sell calligraphies and poems, usually relating to either tea or some attributes of the person to whom he was selling. Many of the poems depict his own hardships. Despite his harsh life, he lived to be eighty-eight years old. In the last stages of his life he was so encumbered by back pains that he could no longer peddle tea. He finally passed away quietly in 1763, in the presence of his friends. They had managed to publish some of his poems and writings and were able to show him the work before his passing. Since then, numerous accounts of Baisao have been published and his legacy carries on (Ibid.).

You may be wondering why I have chosen to tell the story of Baisao. In fact, it is connected to my own fieldwork in several ways. The field of my research was located in the heart of Kyoto prefecture, only a few kilometers from where Baisao lived and worked. I do not know the exact location where he settled down on the banks of the Kamo River, but I have passed by that river on many occasions. I have also visited most of the areas that he frequented, and it's more than likely that he sojourned in the village where I performed my research.

The second connection between the field and Baisao's life is, obviously, tea. The village or small-town of Wazuka is a place of tea production in its entirety. I stayed there with a small tea producing company for a brief period of time, studying the social workings of the business and the village. Surrounding us were tea fields on the hillsides, with tea factories and teashops as our neighbors, near rusted tea-harvesting machines that were strewn about at old warehouses, with signposts raised along the streets hailing the village as a birthplace of tea, and green tea noodle dishes or green tea ice creams advertised by the local restaurants. Tea is easily the primary means of subsistence for the locals.

The third connection with the Old Tea Seller and my fieldwork is also the most significant. It relates to the nature of the tea company where I spent most of my time. Life at *Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms* (京都おぶぶ茶苑, henceforth referred to as 'Obubu') constantly reminded me of Baisao's story for one primary reason: they both seemed to reject many social rules and traditions, preferring a sort of freedom. Obubu was characterized by ad hoc solutions, innovation, flexibility, and perhaps a touch of chaos. The company was trying to grow an enterprise in a sometimes deliberately disorganized environment, and in some cases it flat out rejected rules, traditions and social norms. The openness of the company model is not entirely unique, although it is rare. For a company to go against the conventions that the industrial age left as its legacy is uncommon; for a Japanese company to do the same, I was repeatedly reminded by several informants, is completely unheard of! Together with many preconceptions about Japanese work-life went a myriad myths about the Japanese people, its customs, and in particular its supposed otherness. Most of these stereotypes I couldn't recognize at all in the field. Throughout the ethnography, I try to find explanations for why the experience related to me by other visitors to Japan was so very different from my own, and why an area of tea production seemed – at least to my eyes – characterized by a sense of social freedom.

1.2. Ethnographic Theory

I would like to clarify my prior knowledge of the field and the research topic. It was my first time going to Japan, but I felt well prepared for my encounter with the field. I had studied Asian and Japanese history, held discussions with friends who were Japanese or had visited Japan, read blogs and watched vlogs, and learned about Japanese society from ethnographies, novels and a diverse set of sources. I had also studied the language from a Japanese teacher, and lived in a Japanese household for a period of time. What theories I had learned about 'Japanese culture' turned out to be useful, but sometimes surprisingly inaccurate. I will return to this point later on.

Although prepared for the field, I was less ready to tackle the subject of social freedom. My original focus was intended for something completely different, on how natural objects (like the tea plant) become acculturated. But I found in my research a fascinating and perhaps more relevant discovery. I had previously associated tea with rituals, rules of hospitality, customs, traditions, and symbols, but soon discovered that it could also be employed for the opposite purpose: to innovate, to renounce customs and tradition, and express spontaneity. I began to wonder why this village of tea farmers were not only friendly, but casual, informal, frank, and often unbound by rules. They were very sensitive to people around them and careful about their ways and words, yet there was little of the formalities and rigidity in social interaction that I had expected. I started to think about their behavior as uninhibited, or in other words, free. And so in order to understand them better, I would first need to formulate what freedom means.

Due to a dearth of literature on the topic of freedom in anthropology, I have been forced to rely mainly on philosophical sources. Anthropology has innumerable accounts of power, autonomy, and individuality, and these concepts do in fairness give implicit reference to freedom. But few anthropologists are explicitly concerned with social freedom, or its counterpart social *un*freedom. This absence in anthropological theory is notable though not absolute, one exception being a book by James Laidlaw (2014) called "The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and freedom", and another being a small essay by Franz Boas (1942) titled "Liberty Among Primitive People". Beyond these rare examples, I have had to draw upon discussions from philosophy in the pursuit of definitions of social freedom that could be of use analytically. These conceptualizations may differ from the personal views of my informants on the matter, and I make no definitive claims about the emic perspectives.

Certain definitions of freedom appear more relevant to Wazuka and Obubu than others. Because their relevance is context-specific, I never settle for a single overarching concept that I believe trumps the others. In fact, during the analysis of the ethnographic description I intend to employ the various concepts based on their aptitude for that particular situation. In so doing, I allow the concepts to remain in competition with each other and the ethnography discusses them on my behalf. I believe it is a useful approach, as it avoids essentialism and theoretical rigidity.

This thesis aims to analyze the experience of freedom as well as investigate the variety of its definitions. I take a closer look at the *social* dimensions of freedom in particular. I will discuss many approaches to understanding 'social freedom' based on both theoretical material and fieldwork observations. Interspersed throughout the text are parts about the discussion in history on freedom, current academic discourse on the topic, and the sources of their inspiration. The terms 'freedom' and 'liberty' are used interchangeably for stylistic purposes. Although I am aware of arguments that they should be considered semantically distinct from each other, I am equally familiar with arguments that they are identical in meaning. Failing to see the nuances that separate them, I choose to think of them as synonyms.

I have avoided detailed descriptions of my informants and the use of pseudonyms. This impoverishes the text, because it ends up with wordings like "one informant said this, and another informant said that". It is an unfortunate necessity, as the informant base is so small that any personal descriptions make them easily recognizable to anyone who has ever stayed in Wazuka. While the statements of informants did not generally include sensitive content, I am uncertain which utterances they would prefer not to have attributed to them. For that reason, the informants are rendered vague and nondescript. What I can say is that they are from surprisingly diverse national, linguistic, and age backgrounds. Singaporean, Chinese, German, English, American, French, Belgian, Malay, Scottish, Norwegian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Japanese – all feature in the ethnography, directly or indirectly. Most of them are either workers, guests or friends of the Obubu business, while a smaller number are from other venues in the village, such as bakers, farmers, shopkeepers or neighbours. The information I gathered is centered around the Obubu company and thus obviously biased. I may on that account conflate experiences at the company with general descriptions of the village. Experiences from outside the company, however, have often reinforced, complement, and confirmed my impressions at Obubu.

1.2.1. Analytical Concepts of Social Freedom

This is only a very brief overview on the various definitions of social freedom. The concepts are interrelated yet subtly different from each other. The list is not comprehensive, and Isaiah Berlin (1969:2) claims there are more than 200 different ways to define freedom in academia. I nevertheless believe these multitudes can be collected under a small set of broader categories. They descriptions are not authoritative, but merely intended to be analytical tools. Their purpose is to make sense of the data and get more nuanced perspectives on the meaning of freedom.

1) *Freedom-as-mobility*: The evaluation of a person's freedom is based exclusively on his ability to move physically. If the human body is restrained, for example by being chained up, then one is to be considered unfree. If the restraints were imposed upon you by another person, we can say that you are *socially* unfree.

2) *Freedom-as-choice*: A particularly prevalent view where freedom consists in having a range of options in life. It is *social* rather than physical mobility. Freedom is measured by the quantity and also the quality of the opportunities available. Conversely, choice can arguably be considered a burden, and social mobility an unfreedom.

3) *Freedom-as-inconsequence:* A predictive definition, in which one is free to the extent that one may act without getting negative repercussions in the future. If an act is taboo or can be penalized, then one is unfree in that respect.

4) *Freedom-as-knowledge*: Related to our rational capacity, but not exactly the same. Reason is the basis of free will, allowing us to choose whether we wish to do right or wrong. Freedom is here defined as having access to knowledge and being informed. A famous proverb has inversed the concept by claiming that "ignorance is bliss".

5) *Freedom-as-autonomy*: An individualistic notion of freedom, where emancipation lies in cognitive and bodily distance from social influence. The faculty of reason makes one free. By being able to reflect on our habits of thought and on the state of society, we create some distance from them and are in a sense emancipated.

6) *Freedom-as-collective*: Freedom is achieved not by individualism but through collectivism. The individual is helpless on his own. He grows by striving to live after collective moral standards. Society functions as a mirror by which the individual gains awareness, and thus liberation.

7) *Freedom-as-spontaneity*: An idea that may be antithetical to collectivism, where to be free is to be spontaneous. It perhaps better described as a freedom of spirit, where conformity and moralism are to be avoided. It includes the potential for social innovation, but may also be described as flexibility in social roles. One is free inasmuch as one can reject traditions and orthodoxy.

These concepts were not selected at random, however arbitrary they might seem. I arrived at the proposed definitions by extrapolating tendencies from the fieldnotes that I intuitively associate with social freedom. The intuitive definitions were later supplemented with a large body of philosophical and anthropological literature on freedom. The approach is to start out with an intuitive definition of a concept, in this case 'social freedom'. Then we proceed to redefine it through a dialectic between the theory and empirical observations. The theoretical is understood through the empirical, and vice versa.

As the concepts were selected for their pertinence to the data I already had, it is almost certain that another fieldwork elsewhere would necessitate a slightly or greatly altered set of freedom concepts. They are, in other words, context specific. My hope is nevertheless that at least some of them will be useful across different fieldworks, and perhaps even across disciplines. These abbreviated and summarized concepts will later be discussed in depth, each definition with its own chapter.

1.3. Research Methodology

As a master's student of Social Anthropology, my main purpose was to learn about the process of performing anthropological research. The choice of research method was accordingly based on anthropology's longstanding tradition of *participant observation*. The participatory approach can be actualized in a number of ways, some of which are more structured and systematic than others. My own fieldwork was often quite unstructured.

I relied heavily on informal interviews, rather than planned and formal sit-downs. Informal interviews seemed more natural for several reasons. One is that I was part of a tightly knit community with very few occasions to speak in private with any one person. There would inevitably be other people present. Another reason is that the hectic and erratic schedules of my informants made it difficult to set down appointments. Furthermore, the information I was seeking would usually be situation specific, and pertained mostly to the activity that we were currently engaged in rather than any overarching question about social life in the area. Finally, it became challenging to approach my informants in a formal manner after I had already become a full-fledged organization member, coworker, and friend.

James Spradley identifies in his book "Participant Observation" (1980:58-62) several levels of inclusion in the community life that one is studying. On one end of the spectrum are the researchers who remain outside of the local social life of their research subjects, which Spradley dubs a *non-participatory* approach. Those who are slightly more engaged are *passive* or *moderate* participants, and on the opposite end are the *active* participants. Finally, there are those who immerse themselves *completely*. In my case, I was completely active in the field, in many cases for the better and in some cases for the worse.

I arrived as an intern with Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms, a small company that grows, manufactures and distributes tea in Japan and internationally across the globe. The internship included certain duties, some of which I tried to get exempted from, but most of which could not be avoided. In return, the company offered many unique opportunities as a researcher, and helped me penetrate social networks almost immediately and without restriction. This was extremely useful since my fieldwork was very brief, lasting only three months. The time thus gained was offset, on the other hand, by the fact that my role as a participant often superseded that of a researcher.

1.3.1. Limitations to the Research

The major limitation of the study was its duration. I might have understood Wazuka's social life very differently after a longer stay and having become an established member of the local community. But the duration of the stay does not affect my theoretical discussion. The importance of the empirical data in this sense is that it shed light on concepts of freedom, and in performing that function, the data does not become obsolete even though it may be incomplete. The theory in turn elucidates the empirical observations, in effect forming a hermeneutic circle of dialogue between the data and the freedom definitions. The problem lies not so much in exploring ideas on social freedom, but rather in gaining a more profound and realistic understanding of life in Wazuka.

Due to the brevity of the fieldwork and a limited amount of structured interviews, it was furthermore difficult to obtain a firmer grasp on emic perspectives. This is a challenging task from the outset, and even more so when you do not live with the community for extended periods. Most descriptions of emic views in this thesis are speculations derived from an understanding of Zen and Taoism, which are pervasive philosophies in Japan and perhaps especially among tea producers.

Another possibly problematic factor is that as foreigners, we were treated differently from Japanese locals. One of my main arguments is a critique against the Japan is typically described as a collectivist and conformist society, where deviation from social norms in small degrees is enough to render you a social outcast. The threshold is much lower for foreigners, who are not expected to be familiar with the Japanese code of behavior. Non-Japanese may get away with committing taboos that are otherwise unacceptable. I wondered, therefore, whether my impression of 'social freedom' was merely differential treatment on account of my foreign origin. Yet surprisingly, I did not have a feeling that foreigners were treated very differently in Wazuka. People spoke to us as they did to each other, from what I could tell. Interactions were very casual, informal, and sometimes impulsive. During conversations, people were frequently tactful about their questions so as not to make the other party uncomfortable; at the same time, equally many spoke freely and frankly about all manner of topics. As foreigners, the only real difference I noted was that we received more attention and would be interrogated a lot more. However, this could have been an expression for curiosity about newcomers, and not necessarily a 'foreigner versus Japanese' issue.

Being a participant more than an observer further presented obvious difficulties to my research. I was constantly overloaded with tasks pertaining to the work at the tea company, and the nature and urgency of these tasks often left little room for writing, analyzing, and asking the questions I wanted of my own. Although the absence of formal interviews did not necessarily constitute a problem for my fieldwork, this dual role as a worker and a researcher was definitely an issue. The biggest obstacle, in my estimate, was the number of work hours I had to put in as an intern. My schedule also made it difficult to gain informants outside of the workspace or village. There were several occasions on which I was able to overcome this restriction, such as when we visited tea factories or assisted a local baker.

The informants were curious and well read, and some of them came from strong academic traditions. They often asked about the purpose of my research, which I usually struggled to explain. I didn't like to go into specifics about my research question, for the most part because I knew it could be subject to change. Indeed, my topic was eventually altered in several ways, sometimes quite drastically. By giving my informants somewhat vague answers I felt I was able to maintain some space and fluidity for my research topic to develop. I was also concerned about what effect my explanation would have on their replies to my questions and their behavior in general. I'm not sure it would 'bias the sample' – at least I wouldn't phrase it in those terms – but it could have some sort of unforeseen effect. While I kept my answers relatively unspecific, I tried on the other hand to be fair, open, and honest about my position and my intentions.

Despite these limitations, there was a positive side to my dual position as both researcher and worker. For one thing, I found myself in a supportive environment surrounded by mostly willing and helpful informants. I was immediately granted easy access to vast amounts of data on the company and the village, which included mountains of video, audio, and photographic material. Some of the documents open to me even included statistical information about the company and Wazuka, descriptions of previous work and the current status of the company, and records of important events. In addition, I was able to participate in a wide array of happenings through the tea company and my other acquaintances. These happenings, although brief, enabled me to interact with many people, both Japanese and foreigners, who gathered out of an interest or passion for tea but had differing views on Japanese society and their experience in the village. From their statements and behaviors, a pattern indicating social freedom began to emerge.

1.3.2. Strengths of the Research

Various languages were used to communicate, roughly half the time in Japanese and the other half in English. A lack of English or Japanese skills for some of the informants forced us communicate in other languages in which I am more or less proficient, such as French or even Sign Language. My English level is roughly equivalent to that of a native speaker, while my Japanese proficiency is on the intermediate level. A lack of fluency surprisingly never posed a real problem when speaking face-to-face with informants. They were patient and creative in communicating, and I always kept a dictionary app at the ready. Thus, we could always arrive at expressing our thoughts and emotions given enough time. We managed by use of synonyms, storytelling, checking the dictionary, using body language and substituting certain parts with English words.

The Obubu company was unique in many ways, not least in that some of its staff possessed high-level English skills. Communication was always an issue, but never a problem. Outside of the office, on the other hand, hardly anyone spoke English. Wazuka is mostly inhabited by senior citizens who still retain a strong dialect that is fading with the younger generations. In many cases, even other Japanese people were unable to understand the seniors.

I spent most of my time in the field writing and working. As an additional project, I agreed to write a very short book on the history of tea, which we later published online. Conversations and experiences in the field were noted in my journal on a daily basis. I also made a sort of index where I would write thick description of objects, places and events. Most of the things described in that index were tea-related. It did not specifically feature topics on social freedom at first, because that was not my original focus of study. Gradually, the data deflected me from my course into another trajectory, resulting in a radical change of the research subject.

My original question was on how these tea farmers were transforming a natural object into a cultural one, i.e. turning tea plants into tea. I wished to see how they conceptualized the nature-culture divide, and witness the becoming of a cultural commodity. The longer I stayed in the field, however, the less relevant this question seemed. I was captured by what I might call an ‘involuntary grounded theory’, as my observations led me increasingly to think in terms of flexibility, spontaneity, and liberty.

Grounded theory is a concept borrowed from sociology, in which the researcher attempts to rid himself of theories and assumptions before entering the field and doing analysis. He is without a hypothesis. Instead, he observes the field and looks for patterns, taking notes for later analysis. During the process of analysis, hopefully a pattern will emerge. This pattern then becomes the hypothesis, which can be either accepted or further investigated in order to verify its validity (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 2011:171-200). In my case, I had a hypothesis and although I expected it to change, I had not prepared for the eventuality that I'd need to dispense with it completely. Yet that is exactly what happened, and so I choose to refer to my grounded theory as 'involuntary'.

As indicated by the title of the ethnography, the patterns that emerged were ones of social freedom. And yet there was really no explicit mention of 'freedom' among my informants; nor did it appear as a collective value towards which they were striving. How can I then justify writing a thesis based on my own subjective experience? In response to that question, I would reply that the purpose of the thesis is precisely to clarify and organize my experience into a set of concepts. These will serve to illustrate what aspects of Wazuka social life that provoked an image of freedom. The episodic descriptions of events in the village are each of them paired with a certain definition of freedom in order to set off the discussion. During the actual fieldwork however, I only formed the intention to write about social freedom by the very end of my stay. The events I put down in writing were the catalyst for this change of focus, just as they are now the catalyst for the theoretical discussion. This is why I consider them 'grounded'.

Besides the important dialectic between empirical observations and theory, a major postmodernist movement in anthropology has been raising an incessant call for *reflexivity*. The postmodernist hope is that increased self-reflection in ethnographies will reveal more clearly the subjectivity of the author, making it easier for the reader to identify bias and draw his own conclusions. This idea, when taken to its extreme, implies that anthropologists only write about themselves. I do not agree with that prospect. Instead, I have attempted to strike a balance between observing social processes and discussing perspectives. I consider stereotypes, whether they were my own or typical descriptions of Japan that I heard from others. I try to be open and reveal my thoughts as to why these stereotypes seemed appropriate or misguided, mainly by reflecting around the social freedom that I observed in a country otherwise known for its social constraints.

2. In the Field

2.1. Wazuka

The mild warmth was almost about to give in to blazing heat when I arrived at Osaka airport. High summer was approaching, and although I had experienced the humidity of other countries during their hottest seasons, I hadn't realized that central Japan would be as intense. I arrived on the same day as another intern at the tea company, and we journeyed together. Although I had acquired an international driver's license, I did not have a car, so we went by train from the airport to Osaka, then the smaller city of Kamo, intending to take the bus from Kamo station to Wazuka. Some of the workers gave us a surprise welcome at the train station, and we drove to the company house together. The stunning landscape of Wazuka remained invisible as the countryside was pitch black at night. I woke up the next morning to discover a soul-stirring view, which I had the privilege of experiencing continually in the months that followed.

Wazuka lies in a small valley at the heart of Kyoto Prefecture. It's located about one hour by car from the major cities of Osaka and Kyoto. Surrounding the village center are mountains on all sides. The first thing you are likely to notice on arrival in the summer is the green landscape. The mountains and hills are clothed with tea fields and darker green forests, while the flatland is covered in rice paddies and small houses. Unlike the view of mountains I'm used to in Norway, the greenery is not mixed with gray rock or white snow caps. The face of the rock only becomes visible in a few locations, usually where there is running water. Some few patches of black stand out from the otherwise verdant fields, where tea plants have been wrapped with dark plastic sheets to shield them from the sunlight. Covering the plants in such a manner has some benefits for the tea production, especially the flavor.

The occasional building or cluster of houses can be seen on the hillside, but most of the buildings are located on the flat ground. The hills surround the village from every side. On the ground level, rice fields lie interspersed with houses, small industrial buildings, old shops and closed down businesses. Some houses are abandoned and long since overtaken by vegetation, but their decaying signs and fading paint still remain. Like with the rest of Japan, the population has been declining. The houses are low, and the roads are narrow. The vehicles are much smaller than what I'm used to in Europe. In Wazuka, as in much of Japan, things seem scaled down.

Blodgett, Michael. "View of Wazuka from Mt. Jubu". *(2015). JPG.*

The idyllic scenery evokes romantic images in the minds of its visitors, even among its long-term residents. A young woman who had been working with tea describes the village's natural features:

> …its unique geographical location makes Wazuka a mysterious and peaceful town, situated in valley, surrounded by mountains and formed by the shape of the lake. The same view would have a different scene and beauty each day due to the weather difference; today it may seem to be sunny, tomorrow it may be filled with fog, showing you another beauty of the same view; yet you can still feel its peacefulness. I believe both factors complement each other and are the basis of Wazuka's harmonious ambience, which is really special to me. It is just like a heavenly paradise descended to earth…[1]

[1] Statement has been slightly edited for clarity.

Paradise or not, the area is well suited for farming. Wazuka (和束) literally means 'the harmonious sheaf'. It is perhaps an indicator of the village's rice cultivating history, as the rice is bundled in sheaves after harvest. The harmony applies not only to rice, but seems to prevail in the social life as well. One of the non-Japanese residents said that "Like its name [suggests], the people in Wazuka are so friendly, helpful and kind which makes you feels just like at home... They help one another" she continues, "[by going] to the forest to chop wood together in preparation for winter." They comment that the harmony extends to the interaction between the people and the environment as well: "During the one year living in Wazuka I could have a close observation of the changes of seasons as well as how Japanese people interact with the four seasons. It's really beautiful." The statement is perhaps a reference to the rhythm of the agricultural work, which indeed changes with the weather and the time of year.

Because of the great seasonal variation, the tea produced is said to have a unique flavor. Rain, mist, warmth, shade, sunlight and cold, all work together to develop layers of flavor in each leaf. One of the tea workers explain that

> the geographical formation provides Wazuka with the best resource to grow and nurture tea trees. The temperature difference between day and night results in the formation of fog that helps to block sunlight from the tea tree, allowing them to retain their natural sweetness. This is also why the tea insiders call Wazuka tea 'the tea with fog scent.'[2]

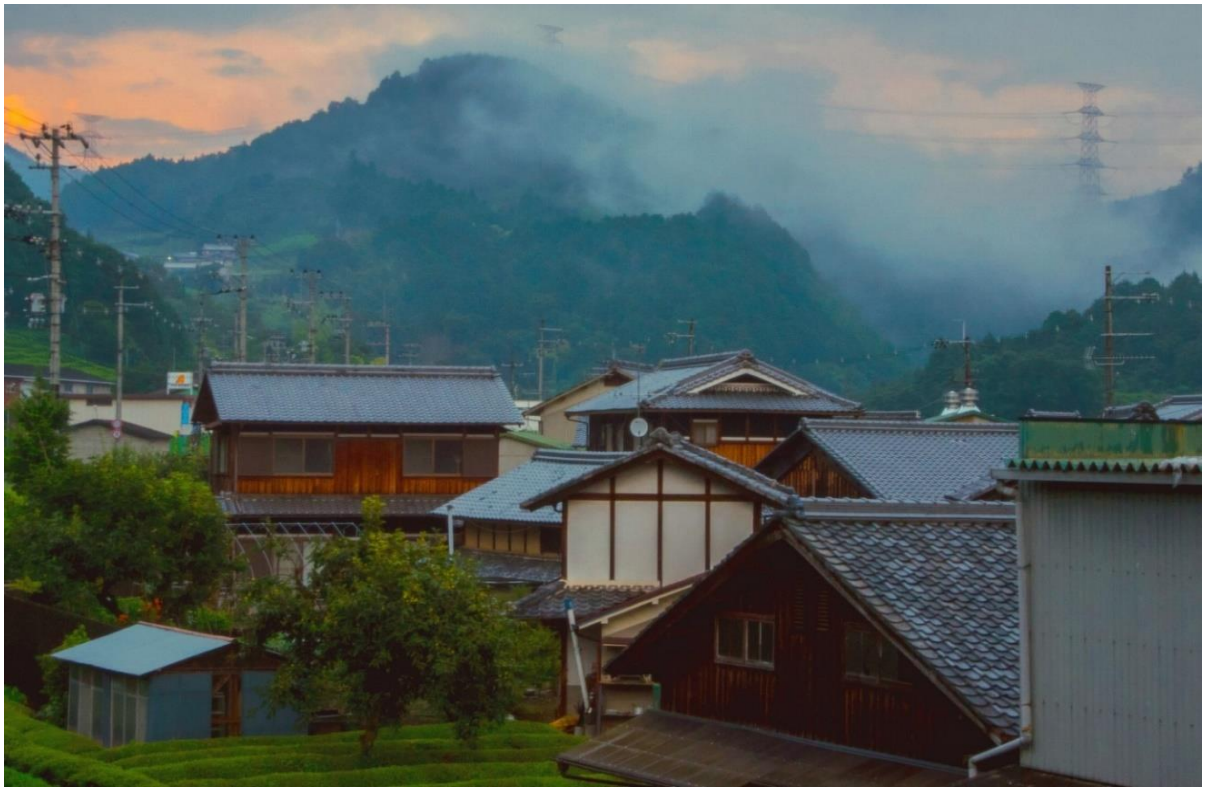
Every day, an announcement system will play polyphonic melodies in the morning at 8am, then again at noon, and finally in the afternoon at 5pm. This is not unique to Wazuka. Many villages and areas in Japan use a similar system. The speakers serve other purposes as well. They are used to make announcements, but some of the messages are so indistinct that I cannot make out what is being said. The speaker system is also used to warn against frost so that tea farmers may protect their crops. Tea plants are in fact very vulnerable to frost, although they can apparently tolerate snow quite well. The frost will damage the plant, but the snow wraps around the leaves and insulates them. When there is a weather forecast indicating frost, the speakers will sound a siren. It sounds similar to the alarm we use to warn against air raids in Norway. I am told by one informant that tea farming features heavily in the local economy, and so it makes sense for the town government to protect their most valuable source of income.

[2] The term '霧の香' literally translates as 'fog incense' or 'mist fragrance'.

Most of the local industry is tea-related, but there is a fair amount of rice cultivation as well. The straws gradually turn from green to yellow during the course of the summer, until they are finally ready for harvesting. You may observe the rice harvests being dried on wooden racks in the early fall, which is a traditional and increasingly less common method. There is usually someone working in at least one of the rice paddies. It is a romantic, almost cliché picture; a bent over grandmother with a straw hat, rubber boots, and a white oversized outfit stands in the pool of water in which the rice needs to grow. She is hunched over as she works, holding a bucket with her tanned, wrinkled hand. In her company is a scarecrow unlike any other I have seen. It carries the head of a Caucasian male, with a strong jawline, blonde hair that looks as if it has just been stylized, and sporting pilot sunglasses that I immediately associate with the outfit of the American tourists I've seen in Japan. You might mistake it for a real human at a distance – in fact, I did just that on several occasions. Virtually every rice field has one, and I can't help but wonder which store is selling these ethnically white scarecrows, and why they're so popular among the farmers.

Another immensely popular thing is the pick-up truck. It surely convenient for farm use, although that alone is not enough to explain its popularity. I suspect it's the low price that makes it attractive. Actually, Wazuka for some reason seems to have a disproportional amount of car dealerships. It has two auto workshops as well, and there always seems to be a car undergoing repairs whenever I pass by. Traffic is not very heavy, although we do hear the occasional ambulance or cargo truck passing by. The roads are extremely narrow, but people seem to have no reservations against speeding. I was somewhat surprised to see that these otherwise law-abiding citizens were prone to risky and illegal driving. Although I found their driving habits unsettling at first, I soon got used to it.

Besides its vehicle-related establishments, Wazuka also boasts five or six restaurants, a butcher, a grocery store, a convenience store, three barbershops, three tea shops, an ice cream place, two department stores, a sports center, a kindergarten, elementary and middle school, a Buddhist temple and many small Shinto shrines, several monuments, numerous vending machines, and of course, the Obubu tea company. The opening hours of most shops are highly irregular. Restaurants are open for just a few hours per day, sometimes only for lunch or in the late evening. The restaurants also double as pubs for some of the thirsty locals.



Innes, Kayleigh. "Mist Over Wazuka Homes." *(2015). JPG.*

Sim, Kevin. "Rural House and Tea Field in Kyoto Prefecture." *(2015). JPG.*

It is my first close-up encounter with rural Japanese architecture. The roofs are low, and their slight curve visually softens the square shape of the house. Their smallness somehow lends the impression that the buildings are closer to nature than the looming giants of the big city. The houses are mostly dark brown mixed with beige, gray or lighter shades of brown. Some few houses seem like they were built a long time ago, although that might be a stylistic feature rather proof of their old age. Most of the houses have a very small garden or at least some greenery in their driveway. Usually, the garden consists of an assortment of various plant species, water, and rocks in different shapes and sizes. I am tall enough to look over their garden wall. Some walls have openings, while others have installed gates that are usually left open. Power lines hang over their roofs. From what I can tell, the power grid doesn't seem to detract from the scenic beauty in the eyes of the locals, but foreign visitors tend to avoid it when taking photos. Water is led through concrete drains along both sides of the road, and most houses are located near running water. A river divides the town from east to west, and an adjoining stream of water partially separates the south side from the north.

We sometimes have to be careful when crossing over the river, since tiny frogs like to hang out on the bridge. It is easy to accidentally step on them, especially at night when it's dark. Animal life here is abundant. Birds, crickets, cranes, snow monkeys, cats, geckos, moth, spiders, snails, dragonflies and snakes are seen or heard at any time of the day. I am used to the quiet days and nights of Norway, where animal sounds are mostly limited to birdsong and the distant barking of dogs. In contrast, the croaks from thousands of frogs in the rice paddies is incessant and powerful. In the late summer, the voices of the crickets fill the night air. Monkeys on the other hand are generally shy and quiet. They are most unwelcome by the locals, as they like to tear up garbage bags in search for food and steal fruits and vegetables from the farmers' crops. Numerous counter-strategies are employed to keep them out. The garbage pickup point is a steel cage roughly one cubic meters in size, with a heavy top lid so that the monkeys cannot get inside it. Many vegetable gardens are also surrounded by cages, but bigger ones that allow people to enter and tend to the plants. I heard one of the locals joke that Wazuka is like a reverse zoo; the animals roam free while the people are encaged. Sometimes we will suddenly hear pops or bangs from the fireworks used to scare off the monkeys and birds that have invaded the fields. One of our neighbors has a dog that he patrols with in his truck. The dog barks while the driver ambulates the area, and this scares the monkeys away.

Just two days after my arrival, we saw a family of monkeys while we were out picking tea. They leave the tea crops alone, although I'm not sure why since the leaves are non-toxic and nutritious. Perhaps it's the caffeine that puts them off. Wild boar however, are quite problematic for the tea farmers. The boar dig up the soil for insects, and many tea plants are uprooted as a result. Some of the fields that lie closest to the forests will have low electric fences surrounding them to prevent boar from entering. I had noticed, as well, that the outskirts of rice and tea fields are often adorned with red flowers. I was later informed that this flower, the Red Spider Lily, serves to keep the boar away because the beasts know that it is toxic.

A more appreciated animal is the *tanuki*, or Japanese Raccoon Dog. I never saw a live specimen, but there were little ceramic versions by the front door of virtually every household. These are more common in Kansai than other parts of Japan, I am told. Perhaps they appeal especially to tea farmers because of the well-known folktale where a tanuki magically transforms himself into a teapot.[3]

Fikseauet, Espen. "Tanuki". *(2015). JPG.*

Taniguchi, Momo. "Butterfly, Tea, and the Red Spider Lily". *(2013). JPG.*

[3] In the story, a poor man rescues a tanuki from danger. The tanuki wants to pay him back, so he transforms into a teapot and lets the man sell him to a monk. The monk takes the 'teapot' home and puts it over the fire; however, the heat soon becomes unbearable to the tanuki, so he quickly transforms back into his true shape. The shocked monk promptly demands his money back, and the man is once again left destitute. Together, the man and the tanuki hatch a plan to perform shows with a dancing teapot. People love the performance, and so the poor man becomes rich.

I've described Wazuka as a village, although in some countries it would have small-town status. As of November 2015, there are 1,729 households within the Wazuka area. An estimated 25% of these households consists of tea farmers (Wazuka Town Hall, 2015). It is typically a family endeavor, and it would not be surprising to see husband and wife farming together. The fact that every fourth household in Wazuka is farming tea is impressive on its own, but if we were to count all those who are otherwise involved in the industry the number would be even higher. Everyone here is involved with tea in some way or another. One of the locals, a Japanese man in his forties, said that "tea and the village are intertwined. They grew together."

The village boasts almost three hundred tea factories, and they mainly produce *aracha*, meaning raw or unblended tea where the stems and leaves are not yet separated. The raw tea is later sold or auctioned to manufacturers, who remove the stems and further process the tea before blending, packaging and selling it to distributors. The distributors then sell it in stores.[4] Over an area of 557.3 hectares, the farmers are able to produce around 1,270 tons of tea every year (Ibid.). This is accomplished not by a major corporation, but by a range of small-scale farmers. It is no wonder that tea is important to the local economy.

Wazuka accounts for nearly 40% of all the tea produced in *Uji*, which is the name of the district where tea was first planted in Japan twelve hundred years ago. In fact, the location of the first Japanese tea planted is only some 50km away from the village. Uji tea has since become known as the region that produces the nation's finest, and the conditions for cultivating here are superb. Farmers are able to harvest the leaves 3-4 times per year. The soil is rich in minerals and other nutrients, while the forests and the river currents give rise to frequent mists. Together with the variance in temperature between daytime and night, the mists and soil help bring out more complex flavors in the leaves (Ibid.).

The tea is sold locally or domestically, and to a lesser extent, internationally. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009:29) reports that 1 % of Japan's total exports consist in green tea, valued at roughly 6.8 billion yen. At the same time, Japan is also importing tea, especially black tea from the tropics and oolong from China and Taiwan in canned or bottled form (Hara, 2001:224).

[4] There are exceptions to this commercial chain. Obubu, for example, will usually cut out the intermediaries entirely and sell directly to customers.

For all its imports, there is an emphasis on local production for local consumption by the Wazuka Town Council. There are several local farmer's markets, and a great deal of the produce is locally grown. However, their policy will likely run into difficulty in the near future as fewer local products become available. Despite the tentative influx of youth moving to the countryside to take up farming, the stronger trend of urbanization is leading to a decline in rural farming. Legal obstacles and failed economic policies have helped push this decline even further. Combined with the urbanization process is also the increasing seniority and negative population growth. The population is getting older, and indeed almost all the tea farmers I met in Wazuka seemed to be past the retirement age. Obubu is an exception, having been founded by two younger outsiders who moved in to Wazuka to start their business. The OECD expects a 30% decrease in the Japanese population within the next thirty years. It is furthermore projected that almost half of the remaining population by that time will have reached age 65. The island nation, already so heavily dependent on, imports seems even less capable of producing for self-sufficiency in the years to come (OECD, 2009:19-20).

The tea industry is obviously touched by the agricultural challenges as well. What the OECD doesn't report is the social framework that prevents the young people from entering the world of farming. The buying and selling of family land is still not common in Japan. Some believe the spirits of their ancestors are intimately tied to the land. Even those who do not hold such strong convictions still prefer to keep the land within the family, out of a sense of duty and respect to the work their ancestors put in. The farm is a heritage, and being a farmer is closely tied to one's sense of identity.

In addition, a complicated legal framework makes it difficult to buy and sell farmland. To give an example, all farmers in Japan need to be certified as such by the official authorities, and they cannot legally farm without a certification. In the Wazuka area, you need to control at least 0.2 hectares of land to get a certificate. Ironically, you cannot acquire those 0.2 ha unless you're already certified. It is a vicious loop that makes it exceedingly difficult for newcomers, especially young ones, to gain access to farmland. Obubu has been somewhat successful in circumventing the obstacles by making friends with local farmers who eventually agreed to rent out their fields. Without establishing close personal ties with the farmers, however, it is unlikely they would have been able to do business.

Fikseaunet, Espen. "Elderly Couple of Tea Farmers". *(2015). JPG.*

2.1.1. Tea History in Wazuka and the World

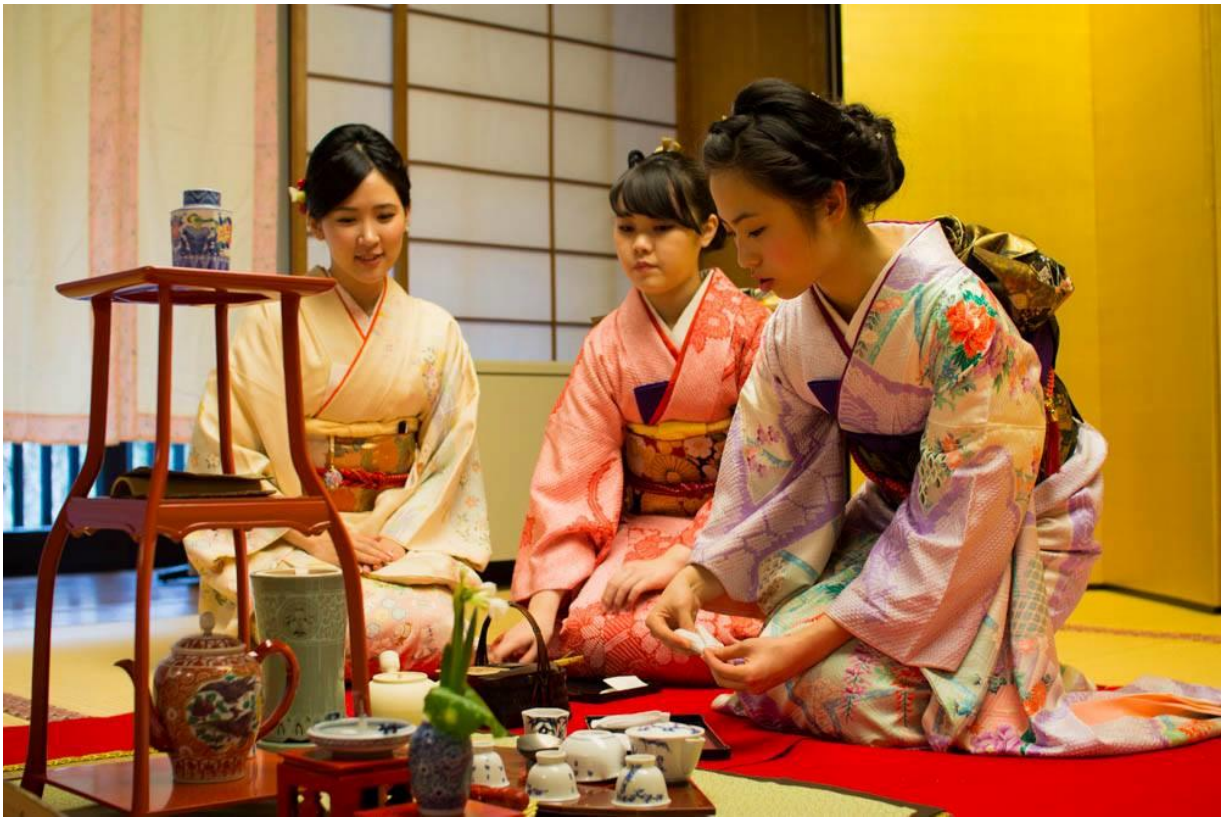
There is a long history of tea cultivation in Wazuka, dating back eight centuries. The following overview which is based on a short history of tea that I wrote while in Japan (see Fikseaunet, 2015). The very first seeds in Japan were brought with a pair of monks who had sojourned in China to study Zen and Buddhist scriptures. They returned with seeds in the years 805 and 806AD, respectively, and planted them at the base of Mt. Hiei in Kyoto prefecture, not far from Wazuka. The drink was not an immediate hit, but gained some popularity with one or two emperors who propagated tea cultivation by issuing edicts to have it planted around Japan. It was soon used in Buddhist rituals, as monks would share a bowl of tea before Bodhidharma images. These rituals later developed into the Japanese tea ceremony (Saberi, 2010:42). As had been the case in China, tea remained mostly within the confines of monastery walls and the social circles of Japanese nobility, and it was largely unfamiliar to commoners except as a medicine. It would take over four hundred years before the seeds were planted on a wider scale across the country.

A central advocate of tea was the Zen master Eisai who brought back seeds from China in 1191AD, and later wrote a renowned book about its health benefits. He sent some of the seeds to be planted in among other the *Uji* region, which in the succeeding centuries came to be considered as having some of Japan's highest quality teas. Tea drinking games soon became a pastime. In these games, one would have to distinguish between ordinary tea and Uji tea (which was tellingly called 'real tea') in order to be accepted as a connoisseur (Hoh & Mair, 2009:86-92). The teas of Wazuka are counted as Uji products, and it was at the same time, in the 1200s, that Wazuka saw its first tea cultivation. The usual form of tea at the time was *matcha*, a ground powder made from tealeaves.

At the end of the 16th century, a man called Sen no Rikyu became famous for consolidating the Japanese tea ceremony into an elaborate set of rituals that paradoxically speak of simplicity. They became an embodiment of Zen Buddhism, and included ideas of the uniqueness of each encounter one has in life, of finding beauty in imperfection, and the observance of strict guidelines to accomplish perfection. Building standards increasingly included a tearoom in every home, while teahouses popping up around the country. The tea ceremony became prominent as an artistic endeavor, as well as a sign of social status. It was practiced primarily by aristocrats, such as members of the Samurai class (Hoh & Mair, 2009:94-107). To reiterate the various schools of *chanoyu* and elaborate on its political, religious, economic and social meaning and function in Japanese society would require more space than I can afford it in this ethnography, and many studies have already been done on the ceremony and its symbolic meaning. I will therefore explain only its rudimentary features in this instance.

An invitation to a tea ceremony could not be refused. After walking through a garden path, guests would be forced to crouch down and crawl inside the tearoom as humble equals. In this space, social rank ceased to exist. Even foreigners were permitted to attend. Once inside, food and sweets would be served. Sen no Rikyu started a tradition of changing the room's design with the seasons, and guests were expected to make pleasant comments and small talk on the beauty of the decor. Meanwhile, the host would prepare the tea. A bamboo scoop was used to add *matcha* to an empty bowl. Thereafter, warm water was poured over it. The host used a bamboo whisk at great speed, stirring the tea and making it foam. The bowls of tea were served, and the receiver would turn the bowl so that its beautiful design faced the host. In three great sips, they finished the tea and gave thanks before handing back the bowl (Ibid.).

As the ceremony was associated with high-status lifestyle, it lay primarily within the domain of men. More recent times have witnessed a takeover of the ceremony by women. In addition, tea ceremony and etiquette has gained immense traction outside of Japan. Other ceremonies developed, including the *senchado* which uses *sencha* rather than *matcha*.



Sim, Kevin. "Three Women Perform *Senchado*." (2015). JPG

It was in a village near Wazuka in 1738 that a method for the production of *sencha* was devised. Although the accuracy of Wazuka's history remains uncertain, it seems a high priest of a local temple had received tea seeds in the 1200s from a holy priest who became known as 'the father of the tea industry'. The high priest proceeded to begin cultivation on the foothills of Mt. Juubu. Records state that in the Tenshou years (1573-1592), tea was planted on a 5700 square meter area near Mt. Gouhara in Wazuka, although the methods of cultivation were somewhat primitive. Farmers in the region started specializing in tea production, as it gradually transformed into a proper industry (Wazuka Town Hall, 2015).

Cultural practices surrounding tea drinking in Japan have their source in China, but take on distinct and unique forms in the Japanese context. Like in Korea and to some extent China, tea in Japan was initially used primarily by Buddhist clergy and the nobility. It had been a useful resource for wandering monks and an assistance in meditation practices. At what point hominins in China first began making use of tea is not known, but it may have been as early as 1.7 million years ago (Fikseaunet, 2015:6). Whether they chewed the leaves, boiled or fermented them is not certain. For several population groups in Southeast Asia however, tea was traditionally consumed as a fermented food. Evidence of domesticated tea plants in China has been dated to more than five millennia ago, while written records indicating its use among the Chinese nobility go as far back as 1,000BC (Hoh & Mair, 2009:27-29). Today, tea is known best as a *drink* thanks to its popularization by the Chinese. The tea bush was named *Camellia Sinensis*, and it is the same *Sin* as you find in the word 'sinification', i.e. rendering a thing Chinese.

The ancestor of the tea bush, the *Camellia* genus, came into being at roughly the same time as the mass-extinction of the dinosaurs. It has its roots, so to speak, in an area narrowed down to include parts of the Yunnan province of China, North Myanmar, and the eastern state of Assam in India. The borders of these countries all lie in proximity to each other, and which country it was that contained the very first species of tea bush depends on what book you choose to consult. Most sources agree that China is the motherland of tea, if not as its geographical native home, then at least as the place from which tea became known to the rest of the world (Bendal, 2011:353-360). By the year 1AD, Chinese military campaigns are likely to have promoted tea drinking in Vietnam and Korea (Fikseaunet, 2015:6-7).

Gradually, this medicinal and meditative drink became increasingly intertwined with the two religious movements of Buddhism and Taoism. Interestingly, all three – Taoism, Buddhism, and tea – would together culminate in a sort of hybrid philosophy called *Zen*, in which tea occupies a peculiarly central role. Beginning as a medicine, Taoism and Buddhism had by the fifth century rendered tea into a popular beverage. The Chinese began trading tea surrounding countries, and even with merchants as far away as Egypt. The tea at that time was a fermented cake that you would break and brew piece by piece. Tea manufacturing practices changed over the span of those centuries, and soon came tea in ground powder form, akin to the *matcha* we find in Japan today. The first sip of tea ever enjoyed in Japan would likely have been in the sixth century (Fikseaunet, 2015:8-9).

Tea had been traded along the Silk Road for well over a millennium when it finally reached Europe through maritime trade sometime around 1611AD. Confusion as to whether the first shipment came from China or Japan may be due to the tea being first shipped to Java, and from there to Europe. But accounts agree at least that the Dutch were the first to import tea, and that it grew in popularity from that time on. With black tea being better suited for shipment across greater distances, it became the flavor of choice in Europe. The Dutch were quick to add milk, apparently due to a rumor that milk tea was the drinking style of the Manchu emperor. Meanwhile, the Ming Chinese were improving on the art of black tea production, inventing new brewing tools and experimenting with flower scented teas such as Jasmine or Osmanthus (Ibid.).

The Dutch were soon followed by other European countries in tea import. In Russia, tea had been introduced not by the Chinese but by Mongols. By the end of the 17th century however, the tea trade between Russia and China had become so firmly established that one of their trade routes was called 'the Tea Road'. In 1650AD, tea was brought to the New World where it would later become a catalyst in the struggle for American independence. Americans had hoped to control their own imports, but it soon became evident that the British dominated the tea market. Not only did they monopolize trade with China, but after colonizing India they even inaugurated their own South Asian tea production in the 1870s that superseded the production capacity of China itself (Hoh & Mair, 2009:138-209). It was in the mid-19th century when tea production began on the African continent. Although South Africa was the first country to see a tea plant, it was Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania who took the lead in production. Kenya remains one of the world's biggest producers even to this day (Hoh & Mair, 2009:241-249).

Unique brewing styles evolved wherever tea traveled, and not everyone developed as intimate cultural ties to the drink. Taiwan for instance had weak connections to the tea trade despite its geographic proximity to mainland China, and didn't begin tea cultivation until the 1850s. In fact, it was under Japanese control that the Taiwanese tea industry really flourished (Hoh & Mair, 2009:253). Taiwan is known for its oolong, while the Japanese themselves preferred green tea, of course. They still do, I might add, although black tea consumption is rising since it is the most common choice for bottled or canned iced teas that are mass-produced and mass-imported, and then sold in Japanese convenience stores and vending machines across the country (Hara, 2001:229-234). Branding, along with increased foreign interest in tea, is giving tea products renewed value to the Japanese.

There are seemingly infinite ways to cultivate and process tea, a fact that has led to a great diversity in its categories and products. For simplicity, we can in English classify tea into five main types: green, white, oolong, black, and fermented. They all come from the same plant, and the difference between them lies mainly in their manner of production. The principal way to distinguish between teas is according to the extent to which they are oxidized. Oxidation happens when oxygen molecules bind in the leaves, and this process commences immediately from the moment the leaves are harvested. Green tea is virtually unoxidized, and has been the most common tea in East and Southeast Asia, as well as parts of Africa. Black tea is the most oxidized, and remains the preferred choice in Europe, South Asia, and most of the Middle East. Oolong is primarily a Taiwanese specialty that, along with white tea, lies somewhere in between green and black on the oxidation scale. Fermented teas are oxidized and thereafter exposed to microbes in humid heat over longer periods of time, sometimes for decades.

The main types can be further divided into innumerable subcategories, wherein Japan boasts unique teas that may be rare or nonexistent in other parts of the world. The most common Japanese variety is *sencha*, a green tea made from whole leaves. *Gyokuro* is green tea of particularly high quality. *Houjicha* is green tea that has been roasted. *Koucha*, or black tea, is not nearly as popular in Japan as it is in the Western world. *Matcha* is the ground tea powder used for tea ceremonies. *Genmaicha* is green tea mixed with roasted brown rice, and was historically a poor man's tea as the less affluent would mix it with rice in order to afford more brew. *Kukicha*, (aka. *Karigane*) is made from twigs rather than leaves, and is naturally low in caffeine. There are many more types of Japanese tea, and their classification is in no way standardized. Categories vary between regions, and can be based for instance on the time of harvest, the method of cultivation, or merely the appearance of the final product such as the color of the liquor.

As tea is in many cases a sign of hospitality, it is common to serve it with cakes or pastries in many situations. In China and Japan, the tea may likewise be served with sweets, while it is very frequently drunk on simply its own for the sake of socializing, helping digest a meal, and as a welcome drink for guests, or merely as a refreshment. There are purists whose primary interest in tea is for its health benefits, and who maintain that it should be enjoyed without potentially harmful condiments such as sugar. Tea is occupying an increasingly central role in health movements situated on the Western hemisphere, in Europe and certainly in the United States.

Interestingly, tea is simultaneously losing its foothold in favor of coffee in countries like Japan due to what is sometimes dubbed a 'Westernization of the Eastern diet' (Hara, 2001:228). This does not mean that coffee replaces tea in its role as a symbol of the Japanese national identity. That, I believe, would be impossible. One tea farmer tells me that tea in Japan is almost as ubiquitous as water. This holds even more true in Wazuka. It is a given that tea be served with your meal or when receiving guests. It has become so embedded in the Japanese diet that it is almost ignored; its omnipresence has rendered it virtually invisible. Coffee, on the other hand, is consciously consumed. It is a commodity that came from outside of Japan, and although it is not necessarily viewed as strange or exotic, it is less common than tea and therefore more precious. Until very recently, tea is something that would be automatically served for free in most Japanese restaurants, while coffee is an item on the menu that one would have to order and pay for. Even that is changing, as people are becoming aware of tea and its value. National re-valuation of their prized cultural object is happening as other countries increasingly import and appreciate Japanese tea all around the world.

It is especially the health benefits of tea that have made them attractive to foreign clientele. Tea not only includes beneficial compounds such as Vitamin C, theanine and catechins, but is shown through *in vivo* and *in vitro* experiments to have antioxidant, anti-carcinogenic (cancer), antibacterial, and antiviral effects. It lowers lipids (cholesterol), blood sugar and blood pressure, and has also been found to promote healthy bacterial florae (Hara, 2001:25-161). Small wonder that it is gaining traction within health movements.

The Japanese are influenced by the foreigners' fascination with tea. In a sense, they're rediscovering tea by seeing it through the eyes of the West. Subsequently, there is a newfound pride in working with tea and living in what is locally advertised as a *chagenkyou* (茶源郷) a 'homeland of tea'. Several organizations in Wazuka host various programs for international applicants, usually internships or some sort of cultural exchange. Besides that, there's a few foreigners who live here on a permanent basis from countries like Sri Lanka, China, Germany and the US, and a relatively high number of tourists who come to visit the tea fields every year. Thus, Obubu is not the only institution that receives foreigners in the village. It is unique, however, in how it integrates the foreigners with its innovative and unusual business model, and through them reaches out to tea enthusiasts from across the globe.

2.2. Obubu

I was told that people who see foreigners in Wazuka would probably assume that you're from the Obubu house, and this held true in my experience. The tea company is a reputed establishment frequently visited by travelers and locals alike. I often get questions about my country of origin, although they rarely ask what my business in the village is. I assume they have already deciphered that I'm one of the Obubu people. As a non-Japanese I feel somewhat exposed, but it never puts me in an uncomfortable situation. In fact, it has been a catalyst for many interesting and stimulating conversations. As I walk through the streets of the village, I am invariably greeted in a friendly manner by some of the locals. Many ask questions about where I'm from. When I tell them my country of origin, the often exclaim: "Norway! Ah, salmon!" or "Aurora!" The interactions always feel friendly, and they take great care to show interest in what I have to say. Many nod, bow or wave enthusiastically from inside their vehicles as they drive by. Some just stare. You would think they would be used to foreigners when Wazuka has so many of them, but somehow the locals always evince some surprise or enthusiasm at seeing a non-Japanese.

Fikseaunet, Espen. "The Obubu House". *(2015). JPG.*

The foreigners' impression of Japan is equally characterized by surprise. Their expectations of life and work in Japan are lived up to in some ways, but prove completely incorrect in others. Much of the discrepancy is due to the extraordinary business that is the Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms company, but also result just from the uniqueness of Wazuka village as a whole. They revealed their impressions to me in casual conversations and during interviews.

In formal interviews with two foreigners who had been living in Wazuka, I asked about their preconceived ideas about Japan. Both were from different countries. One of them had lived in the village for a few months, and the other for a few years. The former explained that they thought Japan would be "Restricted, full of politeness, manners and rules." The other remarked in similar terms: "Before I came to Wazuka, I thought Japanese people are a little cold and too-hard-working. But Wazuka people are warm-hearted and know how to enjoy life. I thought it might be very strict and hard to deal with the interpersonal relationships with colleagues in the same office… but my ideas were soon totally changed." When asked about what had changed, they answered as follows:

> I guess it is still full of politeness and manners, just that Obubu and Wazuka is more casual and open. I believe it would be different when it comes to interacting in the *real*[5] Japan business world (based on my observation during business dinner in Japan)… I would like to learn more about their business rules and etiquette.

I immediately recognized what they were saying as it echoed statements I had already heard many times before. It wasn't far from how I would have described it myself, although I would hardly consider Wazuka tea companies as separate from the 'real Japan business world'. In my mind, the unusual lifestyle of villagers and company workers was not an indication that they are removed from the social reality of Japan, but were rather testaments to its diversity and richness.

I suspect their experiences are much colored by the creative style of Obubu itself. Both interviewees had ties to Obubu, although only one of them was working there and the other had a job elsewhere. Referring to the tea producer, one of them said that "unlike other companies in Japan, Obubu has its own unique company culture and operations…The people in Obubu are less formal, more friendly and united to help one another." Informality, friendliness, and helpfulness are not just features of Obubu, but characterize the general atmosphere of Wazuka.

[5] Emphasis added by author.

The Obubu building is only about a two-minute walk from Wazuka's main road. The house is actually one among three separate units, and contains the company's office and the sleeping spaces of temporary workers. The second building is a storage space, while the third is an old dojo converted into a living space. All of the buildings have two floors. They are situated at the top of a small gravel driveway, which lies next to a very small tea field and some greenery. I live in the main house, which is to say the office, together with other temporary and seasonal workers. There is a constant flow of people moving in and out. Many of them don't even belong to the Obubu workforce. The entrance of the office building faces directly west, in the direction of the village center. To the east is a highway, and across from it is a cluster of tea fields. To the north lie the storage and dojo buildings, and beyond that, a large pine grove sheltering several Shinto shrines. To the south is a slightly larger tea field belonging to one of the neighbors, and going further in that direction leads you to through the rest of the neighborhood.

Tatami mats are installed in almost every room of the main building, and there is a mix of Western style furniture and the lower Japanese furnishings. Upstairs is a balcony frequented by monkeys at night when everyone is asleep. Several small bookshelves adorn the walls of the hallway, the living space and the office, with a rich selection in tea-related content. The office space is decked with tea brewing tools, including trays, cups, bowls, whisks, kettles and containers. The inner wall of the office has built-in shelves that house an assortment of office supplies, cardboard boxes (empty or otherwise), folders, organizers, tea processing equipment, and more. Pull-down screens have been installed to hide these shelves in case of visitors, as their content lies helter skelter. Along that wall are desks and office chairs for the temporary workers on one side, fitting maybe four people, and a similar arrangement for the permanent staff on the other. Because the office doubles as a space for receiving visitors, there is a projector with screen for showing slides on tea and tea production.

There is heavy emphasis on the befitting treatment of guests, and the reason for that soon becomes evident as I realize that Obubu gets an impressive amount of visitors. The house is in a quiet neighborhood, but you would hardly believe it from the traffic in and out the office building's front door. Many of the visitors show up unannounced. Locals come just to give a casual greeting or offer us gifts such as vegetables from their garden. Tourists have heard about the company from a TV broadcast, online, or by word of mouth, and come to be entertained. In those cases, we might be required to offer them service without preparation or forewarning.

Weekends or workdays seem to make little difference, as the phones are ringing and guests are coming either way. The irregular but constant stream of visitors can be explained by the amount of attention that the company has garnered in the media. Broadcasts featuring foreigners in Japan are immensely popular, and Obubu gains a lot of public attention by inviting foreign tea enthusiasts to come work at the company. Internship programs are uncommon in Japan; foreign internships even less so. The temporary workers, who are usually non-Japanese, have their own projects that are executed on behalf of the company. In fact, the viability of their personal project is one of the selection criteria to be invited to work at the company.

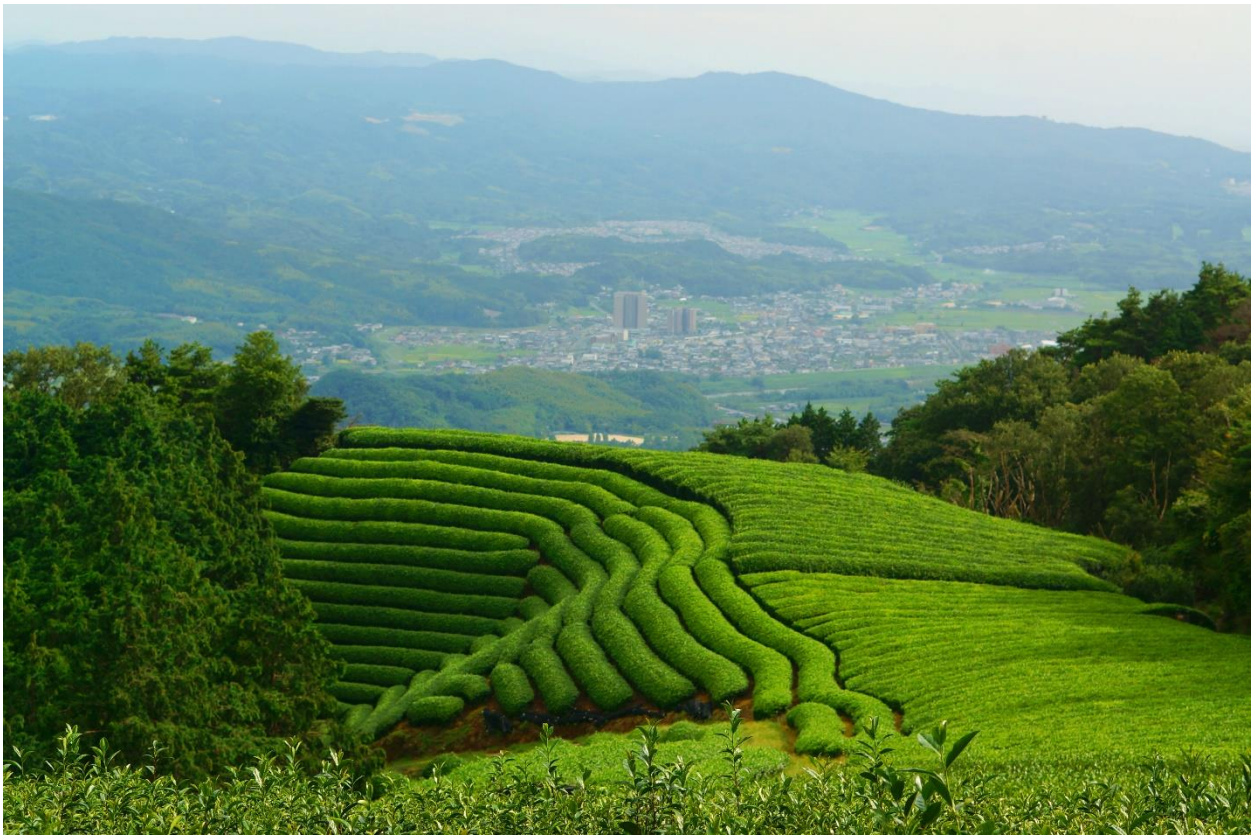
Although I tried to get exempt of many of the duties of foreign workers, I did have a project, namely to write a small history about tea. Other projects at the time were related to agricultural law and social media. Reporters and TV show hosts like to point out this unusual business model, and emphasize the involvement of foreigners with the production of the Japanese national treasure that is tea. While I was there, Obubu broke their sales record just after a program featuring the company was aired. In addition to the broadcasts, the company sends representatives to attend conferences and reaches out to its audience through online media. Their participation in events is partially by invitation, and major corporations sometimes contract the use of Obubu's land and staff in advertising campaigns, documentaries, and the like. During my stay, two major brands visited Wazuka to collaborate with Obubu to film and do photo shoots.

There seemed to be little focus on profits among the company managers. What drives them is their affinity for innovation, fun, and service. They have attempted to strike a balance by combining revenue with "spreading Japanese tea and culture to the world", which is a practice they consider constructive and builds community. Most of their products are sold online or by phone order, while small quantities are sold in actual stores. Beyond that, some of it is auctioned at agricultural conventions taking place each year. At such auctions, teas are pooled according to their grade and then bought by companies who wish to blend and sell them. Their entrepreneurial endeavors keep the small business alive financially, of which two stand out in particular: the *tea club* and the *tea tours*. The tea club is an arrangement where a customer pays for a piece of the tea farm that Obubu says will be under his ownership. Such customers are called 'tea owners'. In return for their payment, the company ships tea to the customer at regular intervals throughout the year. This helps establish a loyal consumer base, and gives some predictability to the company's revenue.

The tea tours are guided tours around the company and its tea fields, hosted in combination by local and temporary staff. Tourists will buy a tea tour package that suits them and then receive an invitation to Obubu. Rice paper walls are set up in advance of the guests' arrival to hide the some of the office's cluttered corners, and create a separate space to allow other workers to continue their office-work with some degree of privacy. Boxes containing different teas, cups, and vessels are placed within reach of the host. The *chagama* (茶釜, lit. 'tea iron pot') is a traditional water kettle filled with boiling water. Pillows are laid out on the tatami next to a low table, and a projector and screen is set up. On arrival, guests are seated and served cold tea as a welcoming gesture. Many more varieties of tea are tasted while staff give presentations on tea's nutritional values, the history of the Obubu company, the different categories of Japanese tea, and its historical role in Japan. The guests learn about some of the projects that Obubu engages in, including a local tea festival held in Wazuka each year in autumn.

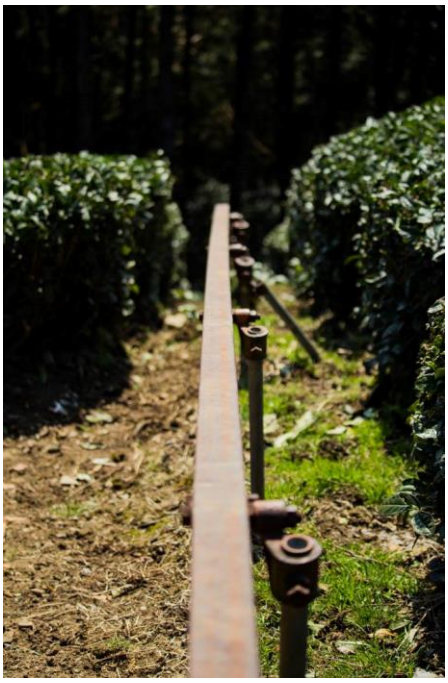
After drinking impressive amounts of tea and asking/answering related questions, the guests are brought by car out to one of Obubu's many fields. Along the way, the guide will explain about Wazuka, such as how rice paddies are located on the flatland while tea is grown in the hills. Guests are usually taken to fields that are easily accessible or have a majestic view, where the process of harvesting and manufacturing is explained. They are then brought for lunch and more tea tasting, before the tour is finished after about four or five hours in total.

During tours, it is explained how the company manages every step of tea cultivation. "Obubu oversees all the parts of the production. Harvesting, processing. It's all processed locally", they explain. The company does not own the tea fields, but rents them in twenty-two different locations. Or at least, I counted twenty-two; no one has really bothered to make an overview. In total, they add up to about 2 hectares. The locations of the fields are often miles away from the office. Each field has a name. Usually it is named after the village or area it is located, although sometimes a more poetic sounding name is selected like the 'Heavenly Tea Field'. Others are simply referred to by their distinguishing characteristics, such as the 'Monorail Tea Field', so called because it has an old monorail used to transport heavy sacks of tea up the steep hill. The fields vary widely in size and are situated at different elevations. Unlike Chinese tea, the elevation at which it is grown in Japan doesn't seem to be an issue. Instead, the quality of the tea is estimated by how early the harvest is, the cultivar used, and the methods of cultivation.



Matsumoto, Yasuharu. "The Heavenly Tea Field." *(2013). JPG.*

Fikseaunet, Espen. "The Steepness of Monorail Tea Field." *(2015). JPG.*



Sim, Kevin. "Monorail." *(2015). JPG.*

Obubu has three harvests per year, in the spring, summer and fall. This is quite common in Japan, while previously the norm was to do four harvests, with one in the winter. The change came about mainly as a result of the rise of capitalism; since earlier harvests are considered to be of the highest quality, it became less profitable to sell late harvests. The spring harvest in particular is considered the best, not just in Japan but in other tea producing countries as well. The spring leaves are younger and more tender, producing a mild yet rich flavor. In the summer and autumn, the leaves grow dark and tough, becoming bitter and sometimes bland. The fourth harvest is in March, but actually belongs to the harvests of the previous year. It is mainly done for the sake of pruning the branches of the bushes that grew over winter so that new leaves can sprout for the spring harvest in May. The winter leaves are subsequently used for compost, although in the Kyoto area they're used for making a low-caffeine tea called *kyobancha*. Farmers in the southern regions of Kyushu and Okinawa may likewise do four harvests. Furthermore, in tropical areas like South and Southeast Asia, harvest is possible even as often as every ten days.

A unique Japanese practice is to shade the tea. Shading means essentially to cover tea bushes under a sheet, as opposed to growing them openly under the sun. The cover was traditionally made of bamboo, while it is now much more common to use rolls of black vinyl. The point of the shading is to block out most of the sunlight, lowering catechins content while increasing theanine and chlorophyll in the plants to give a sweeter flavor. The highest grade teas in Japan are shaded for approximately three weeks before harvest in the spring. Shaded tea is very rare in other countries, and their methods are less extensive; for instance, trees of a separate species are planted in some Sri Lankan tea fields to provide shade for the bushes.

Many of the fields at Obubu are shaded in the spring and summer harvest. On arrival in the field, one therefore begins by detaching and rolling up the covers. After that, an engine-powered trimmer used to cut the leaves must be prepared. The trimmer, or cutter, has an arched shape and is composed of metal and plastic parts, with triangular teeth that scissor back and forth to cut the leaves. The arch is to give the bushes a rounded shape, for both aesthetic and useful purposes; aesthetic because roundness gives an impression of naturalness, and useful because more of the plant can be harvested while allowing sunlight to reach the whole surface area of the bush. We begin by oiling the cutter's teeth. The engine is then refueled, before a sack is attached where the freshly cut leaves will end up. The cutter has a powerful blower that sends the leaves off into the nylon sack, similar to a blow dryer.

Once the sack is about half-full it becomes heavy and must be replaced. The farmer has strategically laid out empty sacks along the rows of tea, calculating the length of the row and the size of the yield by eye-measure. The farmer deftly removes the filled sack and attaches an empty one onto a pair of pegs on the cutter in a matter of seconds.

The cutter is operated by two people, a leader and an assistant. The assistant is most often a seasonal worker or an intern. The leader has the engine starter and controls on his side, and the assistant keeps the machine at stable height. One side of the tea row is shaved f as the farmers pace slowly forward, and then the other half is trimmed on their way back. As the sacks are filled, a third person carries them away to be placed in shade, before finally loading them onto the pickup truck when the harvest is completed. Care is taken that the leaves are not damaged, as that would initiate the oxidization process, effectively making them fit for oolong or black production rather than green. Once the harvest is completed, the yield is driven to the factory immediately so as not to let the leaves oxidize.

Fikseaunet, Espen. "Seasonal Farmer Preparing the Tea Trimmer." (2015). JPG.

The work is not intensive, but it requires endurance. Starting early in the morning takes the brunt off the summer heat, yet even then it's around 30 degrees Celsius and we are wearing protective outfits. The tea fields are located on the hillside, some of which are very steep and require great effort to climb. We take breaks every few hours to have some snacks and drinks. Liquids are essential in this humidity. When rain breaks out we do not harvest, as wet leaves are heavy to carry and difficult to process. Steaming wet leaves would make the color, flavor and breakdown of the leaf's enzymes uneven. On days with only a light drizzle, we can use the cutter to blow-dry the leaves before harvesting. It takes more time, but may be worth the effort since there are many more fields that need harvesting before the roughly two-week season is over. If we wait too long the leaves will grow stale and lose their quality.

I am surprised at the amount of bags you can fit on the small Japanese pickup truck. We somehow manage to squeeze in the workers on top of that. After a drive not for the faint of heart, we arrive at the factory. There are several factories in Wazuka, and almost all of them are communally owned by a collective of well established farmers. In the past, most households would have their own workshop. Most manufacturers specialize in producing one specific type of tea, or at least stick to a single type for the duration of the season. Even the plants themselves are specialized for certain types of tea. They are bred into cultivars, or subspecies, of *Camellia Sinensis,* each with particular physical characteristics and flavor profiles. I have visited several factories, but spent the most time observing *tencha* production. Tencha is the tea from which matcha is made. It is left unrolled, since it will eventually be ground into powder before brewing.

The *tencha* factory is not enormous in areal size, but the roof is quite high. Upon entering, one soon understands why; a wall of heat slams against you as you advance. Had the roof been lower, the heat would surely have been unbearable. Some of the farmers who have just deposited their harvests lie down for a break outside in the shade. I first mistook them for manufacturers, but only about two or three people are actually operating the factory. At first, their choice to sleep on the heated asphalt seems strange, but I soon understand why. Inside the factory are machines operating at about 195 degrees. The brick walls that stand between us and these machines take the brunt of the heat, but it is still overwhelming. The sweltering summer air outside feels pleasant in comparison. One of my companions is holding a camera, but any metal object quickly becomes too hot to hold. Droplets form on our foreheads as our bodies desperately tries to protect itself, and we decide to hurry on to a cooler area, lest we faint.

I have learned that Japan can be extreme on security measures, but the appliances were in full movement and the workers wear no protective gear. I can easily reach out my hand to touch one of the fierce looking machines. Perhaps they do not consider safety an issue since they usually don't admit incompetent people into their facilities. I recognize the function of some of the devices, because the whole complex is built to mimic the traditional forms of tea making done by hand. The leaves get unloaded into large containers by the entrance of the factory. They are moved from there to a conveyor belt that will take them around the room to go through some basic processes, including drying, airing, heating/steaming and packaging, although not necessarily in that order. Teas other than tencha will in addition be rolled. Steaming is done as they pass through a metal tube. A small metal bar is rotating within the tube to redistribute and soften the leaves, while evening their exposure to the steam. They are then blown several meters up into the air in large funnels, before disappearing onto another conveyor that moves deeper into the heart of the factory. Twigs and stems are separated from leaves, before the final product ends up in paper storage bags. Many of these steps are repeated multiple times, at intervals.

Sim, Kevin. "Hand Rolling." *(2015). JPG*

Sim, Kevin. "Factory Machine." *(2015). JPG.*

Obubu prefers raw, unblended tea called *aracha* (荒茶, lit. 'crude tea'). Virtually all tea manufacturers blend their teas, either with fruits and condiments or with other teas/yields. The point of that is to attain a desired flavor, and to keep the product tasting consistently the same over time. Aracha is therefore considered a bit primitive. Whether its crudeness makes it less or more fit for the market is unclear, since there is a fad for unprocessed foods and 'natural' products within a global customer base. Perhaps due to the same fad, Obubu is gradually moving away from pesticide use to make organic teas. No doubt this will make it more appealing to the worldwide market.

For all its global mindset, it is a small office belonging to a small business, and adaptations are frequently made in cases where guests come in larger numbers. Furniture is moved around in order to accommodate guests. Shelves are packed with stuff in no particular arrangement. Perhaps the mess is due to lack of space, or due to the free-spiritedness of the people who work there; or maybe there's simply a lack of will to do anything about it. Interns from abroad are the caretakers of the office building and have responsibility for its maintenance. The house has been organized with a labelling system on shelves, refrigerators, storage spaces, and rooms, which is exactly what I had come to expect, having lived in a Japanese household previously. What is interesting in this case is that the organizing system had been implemented not by Japanese, but by a *foreign* intern.

There is no sign of the infamous Japanese perfectionism said to border on the compulsive (see for instance Lebra, 1983:197-198). That's not to say Obubu does not have high standards, for when guests come the utmost care is taken to make them feel happy and at easy. The spirit of service is repeatedly emphasized and demonstrated by the more experienced workers. What I'm describing is not so much laxness as it is relaxedness. Locals – not just Obubu staff but Wazuka people in general – seem little inclined to formalities and strict organization. I should mention that 'perfection' in the Japanese sense might not hold the same meaning as we immediately assume. In a European context, it tends to be associated with visual symmetry, straightness and repetitive patterns. In Japan however, there is an idea of *wabi-sabi* (侘寂) which means seeing beauty in imperfection. It is a philosophy of aesthetics that takes pleasure in the disordered, unsymmetrical and even the broken. Wabi-sabi has been a central aspect of tea practices such as the ceremony since at least the 1400s, and it is still relevant today (Hoh & Mair, 2009:93).

At the office, there are assortment of mismatching objects that might at first sight be associated with the Japanese appreciation for wabi-sabi, as seen for example in their motley collection of tea wares. Or perhaps the clutter was not a sign of their wabi-sabi mentality, but merely their impulsive and casual nature. It is difficult to justify an analysis of something as simple as tea cups, and claim that they are the product of a five centuries old idea of aesthetics. That being said, the entirety of Wazuka is submerged in tea and its associated ideas. Tea discourse is not merely touched by farming and trade terminology, but is also marked by the philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism.

Obubu has two explicit Zen values formulated in its mission statement, and these were frequently discussed on various occasions. One is the motto *ichigo, ichie* (一期一会), meaning 'one time, one meeting' or 'all encounters are once in a lifetime'. It points out the transience of life, encouraging us to treasure each moment as it is unique and fleeting. For this reason, we should take great care in our words and actions, especially to make sure that those in our company are tended to and have a pleasant experience.

The second principle is *kissako* (喫茶去), which means '[let's] go drink tea'. The phrase is part of a parable, where a Zen master and his disciple were once receiving guests. One day, two monks came to their temple in search of enlightenment. After bidding them welcome, the master proceeded to ask the first guest "Have you been here before?", whereupon the monk answered "Yes." The reply of the master was "Kissako" (go drink tea). The guest promptly moved to another room to drink his tea. Then the master turned his attention to the second guest, asking the same question: "Have you been here before?" Unlike the first monk, the second guest had never visited, and so he replied "No." Again, the master had the same response: "Go drink tea." The second guest had left for the tearoom. The master's disciple wondered at the conversation which had just taken place. If the first monk had visited before, then surely he was informed of Zen and of higher status than the second monk. The disciple decided to ask his master about the meaning of this: "Why did you give the same reply to them both?" To which the master replied "Go drink tea." The meaning of the story is that all guests are to be treated equally and without distinction. This point is stressed by the people at Obubu, just as it has been valued in tea ceremony practices for centuries in Japan. *Ichigo, ichiye* and *kissako* are not just religious codes of conduct, but have come to serve as the mandate for Obubu's business ethic.

2.3. Tea and Tao

There is a connection between Obubu's philosophy and tea, although it may not be immediately evident. A 20th century Japanese author named Okakura Kakuzo (1997) explains the fusion of Tao, Zen and tea in poetic language. His work "The Book of Tea" is a reflexive treatise on Japanese relations to tea intended for a Western audience. Kakuzo writes that tea began as a medicine, then became a part of the Chinese world of poetry, and finally at the time of the arrival of Zen in Japan, it was turned into a religion of aesthetics that he calls 'Teaism'. In this religion, or cult, tea drinking is not only a tool of meditation and inspiration, but can even became a path to Enlightenment. Paradoxically, it is precisely the *un*importance of tea that made it so important. By being mundane and simple, it creates space for introspection. By being beautiful, it induces tranquility to the mind.

Zen was the result of the meeting of Buddhism with Taoism. Buddhism had been founded by a sage named Siddharta Gautama in South Asia around 500BC, and the religion most likely spread to China via Asian trade routes a few centuries later. From the outset, Buddhism had some affiliation with Hindu and Jain beliefs, and as it passed through Southeast Asia it also sometimes adopted local animist deities (Lockard, 2009:20-33). In China, its intercourse with Taoism finally gave birth to *chan* (禅, lit. 'meditative') Buddhism, which in Japan became known as Zen (Grigg, 1999).

Taoism may or may not include the worship of deities, depending on the sect. Central features across Taoist cults include the idea of yin/yang opposites constituting the fundament of the cosmos, the notion of *qi* or life-energy that pervades all things, and the five primary elements of earth, water, fire, air and metal (Towler, 2010:9-26). Taoism furthermore argues that humans are inherently good. Through quietism and allowing oneself spontaneity, people's natural virtues emerge (Eno, 2010:7). All of these basic ideas are tied together in a coherent cosmology, and become expressed in tea traditions.

The ideologies of Zen and Tao are not explicitly present in day-to-day conversations and social interactions in Wazuka. People do not talk about them except when having a philosophical discussion. On the other hand, the Tao and Zen philosophies cannot not be disconnected from even the most banal tea related practices in Wazuka, whether it be drinking, farming, manufacturing or sales.

To elucidate on the underlying influence of Taoism, I wish to relate a conversation I was having with one of my informants, a local farmer who had recently begun cultivating tea.

> Espen: *Do you think it's possible to successfully grow tea in a greenhouse?*
> Informant: *Ah, the tea plant is a tree, so there is no need to put it in a greenhouse…*
> Espen: *What about places like in Norway where the tree could never survive the cold?*
> Informant: *Well, in Japan also it can get very cold, but the trees still survive. Probably in places like Norway there is no tea. Because Norway is cold, so only warm foods will grow there. But tea is a cold food.*

My informant was explaining something similar to what I'd heard several times in the field, that tea is *cold*. Such statements might not make any sense unless you are familiar enough about Chinese Traditional Medicine to recognize the common distinction between cold (yin) and warm (yang) edibles.

The most important principle of Taoism is perhaps the idea that the world exists through the interaction of two primal forces, yin (陰, lit. "dark") and yang (陽, lit. "bright"). Yin is dark, cold, passive, negative, female and still. Yang is bright, warm, active, positive, male and dynamic. Neither is *better* than the other, as they both complement and are constituted by each other. For instance, without darkness light could not be known. The simple dualistic principle of yin and yang has become the foundation of Chinese medicine and diet. Food is classified as yang or yin depending on its effect in the human body. Tea falls in the yin category for its cooling and relaxing effects. At the same time, it's invigorating and stimulating influence suggests it has yang properties.

In the severe heat of the humid Wazuka summer, I was often encouraged by locals to drink tea in order to "cool down". Personally, I always found it made me feel hot, and I wasn't quite convinced of its cooling effects. They insisted, however, that the initial heat is only due to having boiled the water, and that the tea eventually induces chilling energy in the body.

Another example of the conception of hot and cold foods was on one occasion when someone had prepared a local specialty for a small company of people, myself included. The dish was a local phenomenon. In fact, even people from neighboring towns hadn't heard of it.[6]

[6] There is apparently an almost identical dish in Korean cuisine although I have been unable to verify that claim.

The recipe consisted simply of cooked rice, but instead of boiling in water it had been prepared in *houjicha*, a roasted green tea. What is revealing about the dish is its name. Just as we were about to taste it for the first time, the person who cooked it suddenly and enthusiastically proclaimed "Ochanchan!" He kept repeating it with a strange look on his face. I had no idea why, so ignored it and started to. About halfway into the meal, he finally asked "Do you know what means 'Ochanchan'?" I replied in the negative. He explained that it is a local slang for 'vagina'. After a round of bemused looks in the group, I became curious and asked why it had been named thus. He replied "Probably because this is a cold food. You eat it in the summer." When I probed him to elaborate, he said that the name came from the thought that "the vagina is cold, and this food is also cold." I immediately realized he was likely referring to the Taoist principle in which coldness is grouped in the same category as female energies. When interpreted in the light of Taoist principles, his statement made sense, although I am not convinced the others present felt the same way.

I tried to discuss Taoism explicitly with my informants, but couldn't perceive any declarations of personal adherence to its ideology, nor active philosophical interest in its ideas. However, signs of its presence were abundant, especially through their appreciation for Zen. There are many conventions of the Japanese language that reveal Taoist influence in tea practices. Tellingly, the tea ceremony is in Japanese called *chado* (茶道), literally meaning 'the Way of Tea'. The 'Tao' (道) in Taoism also means 'the Way'. It is the name given to the essence and source of existence orders and creates the cosmos (Eno, 2010:6). There are a number of other phrases in the Japanese language using the word 'tea' as synonymous with 'yin'. Someone who acts absurdly, rashly, or with exaggeration is said to be *mucha* (無茶, lit. 'no tea'). Similarly, being messy, disorderly, or wacky may provoke comments that one is *mecha* (滅茶, lit. 'ruined tea'). It appears that tea in this context is equated with yin, as yin signifies stillness, restraint and calm. Ruined or lacking tea becomes synonymous with disturbed or deficient yin. At least, this is one possible interpretation that I propose.

The close association of tea and Taoism, and the apparently close ties between tea farming and social freedom, led me to wonder if it isn't the ideas of Taoist cosmology that have nurtured the spontaneity, the flexibility and the casualness of interaction between people in Wazuka. An analysis of some situations that are indicative of freedom might provide the answer.

There remains the question of why Wazuka is so seemingly different from the rest of Japan, and whether the answer have anything to do with tea. I would argue that the mental flexibility and the tendency to negotiate between tradition and modernity are not uniquely local phenomena. Nevertheless, the level of innovation, informality, and inconsequence are noticeable in Wazuka, particularly within the Obubu company. It may indeed be that tea and tea farming has something to do with Wazuka's special atmosphere. However, it is equally tempting to think that cultural objects have value only because meaning is ascribed to them, and an object's influence on social relations is not unique to the object itself. That is to say, provided the people of Wazuka find the subject meaningful, it shouldn't really matter to their social freedom whether they are engaged in tea, or coffee, or golf, or astronomy for that matter.

In reply to that line of thought, I would argue that the centrality of tea in the locals' lives is not completely arbitrary. Neither water, coffee or alcohol serve the same role as tea in social relations. Moreover, tea has historical ties with Taoism and Zen, and may have helped to consolidate their associated ideas and customs. Just as tea historically was propagated by Buddhists and Taoists, the current trend is that Zen and Taoism are being disseminated through the rising popularity of tea.

More than that, the actual drink itself has an effect on people. It is a stimulant containing caffeine and theanine, which on the one hand brightens the mind and on the other calms it down. One foreigner mentioned that he *only* drank tea over longer periods of time during his stay in Wazuka, saying "It got to the point where I had gone weeks without drinking just water". With the amounts of tea being drunk collectively in the village, it wouldn't surprise me if the aggregate effects of tea has influenced their social life. Finally, tea cultivation has, along with rice and the occasional vegetable garden, oriented local life around agriculture. Rural and agricultural societies look quite different from urban environments, and are often appreciated for their tranquility. Perhaps tea farming is also structuring the social life of the community.

Tea is the backdrop for this thesis. It sets the stage for the various actors of Wazuka. At the same time, tea itself plays the role of both an actor and a prop. While on the surface this narrative of Wazuka life is about tea, the underlying theme and theoretical discussion is on social freedom. As for the question of whether Wazuka is a socially free community, I would reply that it depends on your definition.

2.4. Findings of Freedom

The preceding pages have hopefully provided enough context for a discussion on the analysis of social freedom. I intend to proceed with explaining the aspects of social life in Wazuka and at Obubu that led me to consider the topic of freedom. I consistently use a specific formula in the discussion, where 1) I introduce the type of freedom about to be discussed, 2) describe an empirical situation in which that concept of freedom was observed, and 3) elaborate on the definition of that freedom type to see how the empirical situation fits or doesn't fit the concept. The chapter "2.4.6. Freedom-as-Collective" deviates from this pattern in that it doesn't include an empirical episode, but only discusses the situation of Wazuka in general. To be clear, the list of definitions is not comprehensive and others could certainly be added. We start off with a most basic definition of freedom that I have chosen to call *freedom-as-mobility.*

2.4.1. Freedom-as-Mobility

On my first or second day at Obubu, I was explained the dynamics of office seating protocol. The office consisted of desks and seats for the staff and a section of tatami mats with a table where guests would be received. Most of the permanent staff had fixed seating arrangements, while some did not. Temporary workers did not have fixed seats, although they were free to agree upon which chair and desk belonged to whom. We were told that we were *not* required to stay in our seats as we would have in a typical office environment, and that we could bring our laptops and work wherever we wanted in the building, whether it be the living room, our bedrooms, or the kitchen for that matter. We were furthermore told that it was possible to work elsewhere, outside or at a completely different location. Indeed, there might be times where we were required to do so, as field trips or area investigations could pertain to our personal projects. There would be occasions when our presence in the office was mandatory, such as when receiving guests. Outside of those appointments however, we were 'free' to work wherever we wanted. I soon realized that these statements were not simply idealistic principles to which the company was trying to adapt, but rather the already lived practices of the business which the employees were subsequently explaining to us. The spirit of the company had been extended to something as basic and seemingly trivial as seating arrangements, instituting a sort of physical freedom.

This type of freedom is reminiscent of the most basic conceptualization by Hobbes, as it relates to the allowance of physical mobility. Hobbes stated that freedom is "the absence of… external impediment of motion" (cited in Wertheimer, 1975:337). This means that something has to physically restrain your body for you to be unfree. In the event that you were restrained by some*one* and not some*thing*, you would be characterized as *socially* unfree. Freedom is here measured as an external, tangible, and physical state.

The example I presented suggests that the office workers are free on the account that it is socially acceptable for them to determine their own workspace. However, the example deviates from the Hobbesian view of unfreedom as material restraints, since at no point was anyone physically forced or restricted by another person neither at Obubu nor in Wazuka. In the view of Hobbes, it does not matter whether psychological pressures from society affect your decision-making, even if these pressures have implications for your mobility. What matters to him is the exertion of force by one person on another. It would appear that Hobbes' definition is incomplete, as it is oblivious to the *mental* pressures of the individual that derive from social demands. The physical becomes distinguished as absolutely separate from the psychological influence, with no grey zone in between the two. It ignores the entirety of man's inner life, his consciousness and his social relations.

Furthermore, Hobbes neglects the fact that causality is not always obvious, and so there will be situations in which we are unable to judge whether one person really imposed immobility upon another. For example, if people Obubu had informed me that I was only allowed to sit in one spot in the entire office, I might conceivably consider it an unfreedom. But on whom would I place the blame? The person who instructed me how to act, or the person who instructed him? Or perhaps I should blame other companies who enforce a similar policy for spreading their mode of thought to my workplace. Or perhaps I should look all the way back the causal chain and blame the man who first invented corporations? In a causal line of reasoning, Hobbes' definition soon loses its obvious clarity. Felix Oppenheim (2004:179) attempted to reestablish that clarity through a rule of thumb: the shorter the causal link, the less freedom one has. That is, if I were able to verify that the person who instructed me was to blame, then I would have little freedom. If it were the person who instructed him, I would have comparatively more freedom. But Oppenheim's rule only focuses on a simple form of causality where oppression from other people is easily demarcated from oppression by natural and non-social forces.

Alan Wertheimer (1975:336) likewise argues that social and natural restrictions should indeed be kept separate. He sets liberty apart from ability and opportunity. While liberty is seen as a product of human agency *only*, ability and opportunity are the results of natural events. Ability and opportunity being due to natural conditions, Wertheimer argues they should have nothing to do with social freedom. He writes: "By confining my discussion to social freedom, I am referring to the absence of constraints or interference imposed by persons, and excluding those constraints that may be natural, physical, biological, or psychic." (Ibid.). The idea that Hobbes proposes where bereavement of freedom is a physical act, is what Wertheimer would call a natural inability. But if freedom is physical mobility, as Hobbes states, how should immobility due to human intervention be distinguished from those of natural forces? I would argue that such a distinction is often impossible.

As an example of physical limitation, tea fields are sometimes located very far from the residence of the farmer. The tea is furthermore grown on slopes and hills, making the harvest labor intensive. These challenges can be partially explained by natural causes, as geological formations have developed over time to create the Japanese landscape. One informant insisted that tea is grown on slopes because Japan has a limited flat area. When you look at the Wazuka area alone, that does indeed seem plausible, as it is very mountainous. Rice thrives when standing in water, and thus needs a pool. The tea bush likewise requires lots of water and humidity; however, it should not be immersed in it, as that would drown the plant. Slopes are thus ideal since they allow water to run over its roots without immersing it. Some claim that the flavor of the plant simply develops better in the hills, and Chinese tea farmers grow their tea on the mountaintops for precisely that reason. The temperature of the air there fluctuates, and there is plentiful mist. The air is also thinner, forcing the plant to grow more slowly. The Chinese insist that this allows the plant to develop more rich and complex flavors. Whatever the reason, flat land in the valleys has been reserved for properties and rice cultivation. It was also pointed out to me that a once-flourishing timber industry had grown its trees on the north side, while tea fields are mainly located on the eastern, southern and western inclines. The purpose is to afford the tea plants more sunlight and a more temperate microclimate. It is not an absolute rule that the fields be thus located, but it did often seem to be the case. All of these factors indicate that landscape and other physical elements place restrictions on the tea farmers. But is it really just a simple matter of natural determinism?

During a conversation at lunch, we were discussing why the Chinese grew tea in the heights while the Japanese were satisfied with cultivating at the base of the mountain. Someone suggested the explanation is a Japanese aversion to disturbing the mountain forests because that is where the gods are thought to reside. The explanation refers of course to Shintoism, a term used to describe a conglomerate of Japanese animist beliefs on spirits and deities. Shintoism has particularly been a focus of students of human-environmental relations. The comment on mountain deities is a valid point, and one that has been argued by social scientists and Japanologists as well. For instance, Arne Kalland and Pamela Asquith (1997:1-35) have noted some key concepts in the language that reveal how Shinto beliefs define the relationship with woods and mountains. The term *yama* (山) can mean both 'mountain' and 'wilderness'. It is contrasted to *sato* (里) which means 'village', and is a cultural or civilized space. People are reluctant to enter the wilderness, the authors argue, but prefer to bring natural beauty to their homes in the form of neatly organized gardens. Trekking and hiking into the forest is not as common of an activity in Japan as in many other parts of the world, since the wilderness is removed from the human sphere. It is a liminal place, at once in this material world while partaking in the spiritual realm. The authors further elaborate on Taoism, which proposes the interconnectedness of all things. It sees man as a part of his environment, although man is also separate due to his capacity for reason (Asquith & Kalland, 1997:3-4). Far from being natural forces, these ideas have kept human activities (like tea cultivation) away from the wilderness.

Fikseaunet, Espen. "Shinto Gate in Tea Field". *(2015). JPG.*

Fikseaunet, Espen. "Shinto Shrine in a Tea Field". *(2015). JPG.*

To be fair, I cannot say for certain that Shinto faith is what's kept the fields from being predicated on the mountaintops. There was certainly an abundance of material evidence of Shintoism in Wazuka in the form of shrines located throughout the village, but on the other hand, it was a topic hardly mentioned by locals. Either way, a strong case is made for the argument that physical restrictions cannot easily be separated from the social. Ronen Schnayderman (2013:726) questions why we should differentiate between unfreedom by people as opposed to nature, when the two are causally identical. He claims their difference is *moral*, not causal. Given the empirical example, I can only agree. Hobbes' definition lacks a moral component, and therefore proves inadequate. There are restrictions to the farmers' liberty to cultivate wherever they want, due to both the landscape and laws of physics, as well as tradition and the laws of men. The boundary between natural limitations and human prevention is blurred.

Wertheimer (1975:357) admits that stating differentiating a natural from an artificial form of freedom really depends on your theoretical perspective. But far from seeing the blurred lines as a problem, Wertheimer embraces the obliqueness of the freedom concept. He argues that asking 'when do we decide whether a person is unfree' is an impossible question. Not only that, it is missing the point. Concepts, he points out, are *supposed* to be loose. If they are too specific, they become rigid and useless in most situations. Their very usefulness depends on their versatility (Wertheimer, 1975:356).

I largely agree with Wertheimer, although I find his proposed definition of freedom too vague again. In critique of Hobbes', Wertheimer (Ibid.) has suggested we define freedom as the impossibility or ineligibility of certain opportunities. This conceptualization sounds more plausible, but its lack of specificity makes it difficult to employ analytically, and our quest for definitions of social freedom must continue.

The idea of freedom through mobility naturally calls to mind volition, will, and intention. If you intend to move, and someone else prevents your movement, this is not so much an issue of opposing physical forces but a clash of wills. It suggests that individuals have desires and make choices that are in conflict with each other. Clearly, choices are limited by both the physical and the social environment, and so the discussion of natural capacity versus social opportunity is again relevant. It will be mentioned only briefly however, since the point can grow repetitive and tedious at length. We move on to a discussion on the freedom of choice.

2.4.2. Freedom-as-Choice

In the previous example, I described the possibility to work wherever you want as a form of physical freedom. The definition of freedom-as-mobility proved insufficient, however, and I will now suggest an alternative where being able to work in whatever space you prefer is formulated as a freedom of choice. The following example supplements the previous one of *space*, and illustrates a freedom of *time*. For in addition to being allowed to work where we wanted at Obubu, we also had a relative liberty to work when we wanted. I say 'relative' since there were certain restrictions and requirements to that rule.

The Obubu staff instruct the newcomers in its schedule policy. An online calendar is used to list events, where the phones and computers of the staff are synchronized in order that we might be alerted whenever an event on the agenda was imminent. Being the busy company that it is, there is often a variety of activities listed each day, at least in the tourist high season. I am told it is much calmer in the winter. Workdays are theoretically from 10:00 to 18:00, Monday through Friday, with the requirements that we also attend events outside of that timeframe when necessary. Guests might for instance ask to visit on a Saturday, or we might be needed for some task in the evening or in the early morning. We are explained that the schedule is more need-based than time-based, a principle that in my experience turned out to be true.

Some of the temporary staff told me at the beginning of my stay that Wednesdays were off-days, just like the weekend. I was therefore under the impression that the workweek was four days long. It took about a month and a half before I discovered this information was incorrect. Actually, Wednesdays had been reserved for work on personal projects. Our presence at the office was unnecessary on those days, with the exception that we had to attend to guest on special events regardless of the weekday. It was a time set aside for individual efforts, and not really a holiday as such. I discovered this fact one day as I was planning a day trip to one of the bigger cities nearby. Having told a coworker of my intentions to go on my day off, they replied: "But today is a Wednesday…" and informed me that Wednesdays were really just set aside to work on personal projects. Surprised, I realized that many absences by the temporary staff had not only gone unsanctioned, but unnoticed. This reality alone reveals everything you need to know about the mindset at the company. I can imagine few jobs where no one would realize you are absent 20 % of the time, and even fewer where you would not be reprimanded for your absence.

I have described the flexible schedule as a *relative* freedom, and this is a deliberate choice of words. Flexibility goes both ways, and the staff are constantly required to adapt to situations that occur. Sometimes we are asked to do tasks for which we are ill suited. For instance, some of the least physically capable workers might have to do physically demanding labor. Or our services would be needed at a time when we are otherwise preoccupied with some other pressing task. We are quite often obliged to accommodate unexpected guests or participate in events with little to no forewarning, perhaps being notified the same day or the preceding evening. It would seem that a flexible schedule comes at a price, at least for those individuals who prefer routine and predictability over impulsive adventures.

It is hard to tell what the conditions are like with other businesses in Wazuka, when I only worked at Obubu. There are some clues from my interaction with other locals, however. When walking down the streets of the village, I encounter people along the way. They are mostly senior citizens. Many of them are at work, either in the fields or on their office premises. Some have not started their workday even at lunchtime. Later in the evening, the lights still shine from the window of many an office building, where someone is working after closing hours. This would normally indicate a typical workday for the Japanese working class. And yet, there is something subtly different in the way the work is being performed. The pace is slow and easygoing. No one is rushing, and many find the time for a chat as I pass by. I watch the staff laughing together in the storefront, and the mechanics in the auto-repair shop calmly digging out the tools from a metal box while the radio plays mellow tunes that resound in the entire neighborhood. Most restaurants are open only two or three hours for lunchtime or in the evening, often exclusively on select days of the week. Back at Obubu, a local baker drops by in the middle of the workday. He often brings some cakes or sweets, and then lingers for a chat and a cup of tea. A few of us take a long break to enjoy the pastries. Two of the staff are concentrated on their task, while a few others decide it's a good time to visit the local restaurant for a lunchbreak. Outside, two male employees are playing with a new droid they ordered online.

It appears to me the people of Wazuka work at their own pace. Perhaps this relaxed atmosphere is symptomatic of rural life in general, typically described as a slow contrast to the fast paced urban lifestyle. It is their playfulness, or perhaps simply the unhurried movements of the elderly that lend to this impression. Either way, it stands in stark contradiction with my preconceived idea of work life in Japan as being severe, strict, rigid, and bureaucratic.

2.4.2.1. Choosing to Work Hard

I had been acquainted with countless anecdotes and studies of the Japanese work ethic, all of them in agreement that it is a hardworking nation – or at the very least, that they work hard at trying to look like they work hard. While I was taking a Japanese class at my university, my teacher, who is Japanese, related an incident with the embassy in Norway. As I remember her story, the Norwegian Embassy in Tokyo had attempted to contact the Japanese Embassy in Oslo. However, nobody in Norway would answer the telephone even after several calling attempts. The reason, it turned out, was that the Norwegian office had closed at 16:00 hours and the workers had gone home. Meanwhile, it was midnight in Japan and the staff at the Tokyo embassy were still in their office.

This admirable work ethic may have a dark side as well. Overwork has become a significant problem, to the extent that the government instituted regulations to prevent it. The term *karoushi* (過労死, lit. 'overwork death') has been coined to denote the frequent occurrence of cerebral hemorrhages, heart failure, infarction, hypertension, and arteriosclerosis that are direct results of excessive labour. The concept has also embraced mental fatigue and depression leading to suicide, though not without controversy. These are referred to as *karou-jisatsu* (過労自殺, lit. 'overwork suicide'), and constitute a national issue that is surprisingly little understood in terms of cause and effect. Men are particularly disposed to it, as women are more often housewives or part-time workers, or perhaps just generally less prone to suicide. Statistics from 2006 indicated that about one in three men over the age of 30 were working more than 12 hours a day – at least those employed in private companies (Kanai, 2009:214).

Numerous articles discuss whether the Japanese are really as hardworking as we think, or whether they are just giving the appearance of hard work due to peer pressure (Lund, 2015). These studies second-guess the real productivity of employees, making the case that although Japanese employees work longer hours on paper, they are much less efficient in terms of productivity when compared with other countries. It is common to sleep at your desk to give the impression that you are tired from hard work, or playing around with unrelated things on your computer to look busy. Group mentality compels workers to attend drinking parties with their coworkers and superiors after work. Absence from drinking events would be noted by their colleagues, and likely considered blameworthy.

The reason why people succumb to social pressures is as much a question of psychology as it is of anthropology. A psychological study by Solomon Asch (1955:5) suggests the reasons for resisting or succumbing to conformity vary from one individual to another. Some are confidently independent, while others are tentatively so and eventually become influenced by the majority. Some cave in to the status quo even while they privately disagree with it, whereas others are swayed to change their view.

What is important in this context is to ascertain whether social pressures should be considered a form of unfreedom. If there are social pressures forcing you to appear to work, then the act of faking effort could first of all feel less demanding than actually making effort, and secondly can return a sense of agency to the worker who otherwise feels pushed into a corner by peer pressure. Faking work becomes a fortress, a wall behind which his freedom is protected. Through pretense, the employees are able to regain some sense of control. The loss of control is equivalent to a loss of choice, which is in turn equivalent to a loss of freedom.

This explanation doesn't seem to fit in the case of Obubu and Wazuka, however. There was no sign of pretense. People work at their own pace, and they often choose a pace that seems high, even when no one is there to watch them work. They work intensely one day, and take a sudden day off the next. Instead of routine, their work schedules are flexible, need-based, and achronic. One way to explain their relationship is to see it as a community with farming at its center. Agricultural activity is often oriented around arising needs rather than meetings, deadlines, and hourly schedules. Of course, this reasoning doesn't hold for other organizations in the village like the school, kindergarten, convenience store, and so on. It may also be overly simplistic to explain it as a result of an agrarian lifestyle when other factors may be pertinent.

Obubu did not require overtime work or attending drinking parties. If we were in a big city, I would likely have speculated that I was being treated with leniency because I am non-Japanese. I had learned that the pressure to work overtime, *zangyou* (残業) does not apply equally to foreigners. Companies accept that foreigners subscribe to different values, and recognize (condescendingly or not) that they may not possess the discipline for strenuous labor. The tolerance is even higher for *temporary* workers, as it is understood that they come in the spirit of adventure, are less deserving of serious evaluation, and that whatever deficiencies they have are unlikely to be a longstanding burden on the company.

This line of reasoning makes sense, whether it is an accurate depiction or not, and it might have been a sufficient explanation elsewhere in Japan. But once again, it seems a mismatch with my impression of Wazuka. First of all, I became friends with foreigners at other organizations in the village who were required to work just as hard as the Japanese employees. Little difference was made between locals and non-Japanese. At Obubu as well, the flexibility of workspace and time is equal for all, not just the foreigners, although it is certainly possible that a non-Japanese might be more likely to take advantage of the opportunities for time off. As far as I can tell, there isn't a clear divide between nationalities. Foreigners, even as temporary workers, are considered assets to the company. And while there are requirements for attendance at events, there is no implicit expectation to work overtime, no authoritarian instruction on how to divide your time, nor even any critical judgment on your lack of effort. A meeting once per week is conducted to keep à jour with intern projects, but it is generally characterized by encouragement and consultation for problem solving and rarely an arena for admonishment.

It surprised me that social pressures at Obubu are less stark, and yet the permanent staff still work until late in the evening and on the weekends. In fact, I often found myself doing the same! One informant in particular had vocal and repeated objections to this practice, saying that "overwork is not good." I would express genuine admiration at the tenacity of the other employees, but this informant criticized it. I was surprised at their disapproval. To my mind, being hard working was the defining characteristic of the narrative of Japanese identity, both to outsiders and internally among Japanese. The staff themselves didn't react much to the statement at all, and the frequency with which it was repeated made it clear they had heard the tune before.

I decided to do some research on the topic and see if there was more evidence of conflicting opinions on the importance of overtime. Most of the accounts I read re-affirmed the value of hard work. However, a recent study suggests there are *regional differences* on work ethics across the country. The study created a 'Happy Overtime Point' index (Dinh, 2013) that intersected the number of overtime hours with salary compensation. The higher the index, the fewer hours of overtime required and the more money remunerated. In broad features, northern prefectures were at the bottom of the list, southern ones were around average, and central Japan was at the top, having the lowest overtime and highest paycheck. In first place was Nara, followed by several other prefectures that all have one thing in common: they surround the area of Wazuka.

Having understood that the immediate area surrounding Wazuka is unique in its casual work ethic, I could more easily make sense of the discrepancies in the descriptions of work life in Japan. The representations of the Japanese as stoic and overworked conformists was in fact based on their localized experience. When applied to the nation as a whole, their stories turned from accurate reporting into stereotyping. Clarity settled as I finally grasped why my impression of Japan deviated so extremely from the aggregate of representations I had been fed. Incidentally, the only other place in Japan where I had spent considerable time was Okinawa, which is equally unique and resembles Wazuka in its laid back and informal social life, thus reinforcing my impression even further. I could now consider contradictory statements from informants as supplementary, rather than competing ideas. For instance, during a casual conversation in the kitchen one of the foreigners in Wazuka described his previous experience of working elsewhere in Japan: "Nagoya is completely different [from here]. It is very stiff and formal, and you have to work until late in the evening, or pretend to, and attend all the drinking parties, you know." In short, he had the same expectations as me on his arrival in Wazuka. "No place in Japan", he continued "is like this."

"No place in Japan is like this." The phrase was reminiscent of something very similar I had heard in another discussion with a couple of Japanese, where one of them had said "This area is special," and continued with "it is not like Japan." Everyone present agreed with his statement. I wasn't sure of what they were referring to exactly. Despite my puzzlement, I had the sense to recognize the enormous diversity of personalities, practices and lifestyles within this small area. Animal lovers, new age types, loud people, bashful guys, farmers, innovators, students, deaf, foreign, drunkards half-naked on the street, monks living on the mountainside, and the list goes on. I cannot say that Wazuka is a microcosm of Japan. In fact, I find the prospect unlikely. But I know it contradicts the view of Japan as a homogenous and conformist nation, in its own small scale.

In contrast, Obubu staff will simply not show up for work at times, even on normal weekdays. It turns out they are truly living by the rule of the company to work at their own will. Despite their intermittent absence, I have realized that their average input must nevertheless be quite high. As I spent much time in the office working alongside them, it became clear they are working at least six days per week, often for 12 hours per day.

When and if staff show up at the office is quite unpredictable. Their intermittent presence and the company policy signals a non-surveillance mentality, as the workers are left to choose for themselves what kind of effort they wish to put in. Since it is a small company, there is little opportunity for promotions or advancement. In general, there is less likelihood that someone else at the office will acknowledge or reprimand your efforts. So why, in the absence of social pressures and hopes of recognition, were the staff still working so much?

Until very recently, and in many cases still, assuming one's post is a lifelong commitment. The landscape is shifting slightly, as it is becoming possible to switch jobs mid-career without fear of stigma. This shift is possibly a result of increased mobility, with increased opportunities for international and domestic relocation. The value of loyalty and is certainly still treasured, and employees are often hired with the understanding that they intend to make a lifelong career within the company. Perhaps this would explain why so few companies are interested in setting up internships and programs for temporary workers, like Obubu has done.

While I believe this explanation is plausible, it appears inadequate in the case of Obubu. It seems the staff are living out a *lifestyle* of work, rather than submitting to a rationale of loyalty or peer pressure. We can speculate that perhaps the value of loyalty is merely internalized so deeply that it has become an invisible part of their habitual patterns of behavior. Such an explanation may be valid; however, it is primarily founded in negative enforcers of behavior, while the staff seemed positively inclined to work.

In a book titled 'The Eight Core Values of the Japanese Businessman', there is a chapter on work ethic which notes the following: "The Japanese work hard. Most of them honestly like to work. They see their jobs as their foremost source of meaning of life. To be called a diligent worker is the highest form of praise in Japan." (Sai, 1995:46) The explanation seems to be that they derive much of their life's meaning from work.[7]This fits the profile of Wazuka people much better. I realized that I, too, had been pushing myself to do more at the office. In great part, this was because I have found the work meaningful and enjoyable. The flexibility inspired me to do *more*¸ not less. I was not motivated by any principle of loyalty or status, at least not significantly; what encouraged me to work was the freedom to choose what to do, when to do it, and where.

[7] Of course, finding purpose in work is not a uniquely Japanese value.

The aforementioned book continues by attempting to explain the reasons for Japanese industriousness. One of his suggestions is that since the primary means of subsistence in Japan has historically been rice paddies, the rice farmers have been forced to respond to exigencies during cultivation, or what I have called *need-based* (as opposed to *scheduled*) work. Weather conditions and the growth cycle of the rice offers a very small window to perform the required tasks, otherwise the plant is damaged or rendered useless. In that brief moment of time, the farmer may be forced to work hard against a tight deadline, that if missed can have dire consequences. Sai's second suggestion is that the frequency of famine, poverty, and economic deprivation throughout Japanese history has forced its people to become habitually hardworking. A third explanation is that the teachings of Confucius after their introduction from China have imbued Japanese society with an emphasis on diligence and frugality. These values have been passed on successively and still apply in modern times (Sai, 1995:46-47).

I find the arguments of the book plausible, although it would require a deeper study to verify whether they are sufficient explanations. In any case, an attitude that values hard work is indeed prevalent, and making effort seems to be a conscious and intentional choice for the workers. And the opportunity to choose to work where one wants, and to some extent when one wants, could surely be considered a form of freedom-as-choice.

If we now look back to Hobbes' definition of freedom-as-mobility, we may notice a hidden assumption in his theory; by insisting that an individual is unfree due to his immobility, Hobbes implies that he is free by being able to choose where to move and when. It suggests that freedom consists in having options, and in acting out ones desired choices. This is in fact a very intuitive idea of freedom, and is often advocated by economists such as social economist Martin Van Hees, who states "One has more freedom of choice the more alternatives one has to choose from" (cited in Oppenheim, 2004:179-180).

Plausible as it sounds, the freedom to choose must be dependent on more than simply the number of choices available. Van Hees' definition is incomplete, because it only looks at choice as a quantitative issue. The quantity of options is a factor, but it misses an entire dimension of freedom that deals with preferences, incentives, and interests. The next section considers how the options available are also relevant for the qualitative difference they make to the individual.

2.4.2.2. Quantity and Quality of Choice

Oppenheim (2004:180) criticizes the reductionist idea that multiple options equal more freedom. He goes on to suggest that one is therefore more free when one can choose what one *likes*, rather than having a myriad of options that are not really appealing to the person in question. A major problem, he explains, is that economists may look at the number of choices available without discerning the qualitative difference between those choices. In his example, he suggests that a person is more free if he can choose to travel with either a red train or a red car, than if he had to choose between a red car and a blue car. Hence, being able to choose between three options does not automatically leave you freer than others who have only two. What matters is the nature of the options available and whether they appeal personally to the individual.

According to this logic, the possibility of a flexible schedule at Obubu would not render more freedom unless you have some preference. In other words, if you like to work in the morning just as much as in the evening, it would matter little whether or not you were able to choose between the two. It is therefore difficult to say that Wazuka or Obubu is more *free* than other work environments, even though it may meet the criterion for a very specific form of freedom. Psychologically speaking, having fewer options can even be experienced as more liberating than having manifold choices. Being confronted with an excess of paths to pursue can be confusing and difficult for the individual. This is called "the burden of choice" (Oppenheim, 2004:184).

In Oppenheim's (2004:176) distinction, the liberty of choice does not equal social freedom because the former can be determined by natural forces while the latter only pertains to *human* intervention. As we have already discussed, this is a problematic statement. For one thing, the distinction between the social and the natural is difficult to make. Material and human forces are intertwined in complex and unpredictable ways, and the chain of causality is not necessarily clearly identifiable.

In addition, Oppenheim is conflating social freedom with the ability to choose according to one's likes and dislikes. The concept of freedom becomes confused with other ideas of contentment, happiness or preference, which although related, are not quite the same. Preference lie within the inner realm of man, although they certainly influence and are influenced by social relations.

The classical notion that freedom is attained through the realization of one's desires, is by Isaiah Berlin (1969:128) called *negative* freedom. It is a non-interference from others in relation to your own actions. It belongs to the external world, and fits well with freedom-as-choice. It is dubbed 'negative' because it is freedom *from* something, while positive freedom entails detachment and inner emancipation. In the case of Obubu, the flexible schedule and workspace could be described as a freedom from karoushi, from disease, from a monotonous lifestyle, and from the trending workaholism at the center of the Japanese population decrease. Adherents of the negative freedom mentality tend to operate with concepts of *unfreedom* (negative) as opposed to freedom (positive). Amartya Sen (1999:3-4), an economist and Nobel Prize laureate who writes about the relevance of freedom in the development world, describes unfreedom as tyranny, poor economic opportunities, social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, intolerance, and repressive states. At the same time, he writes of freedom as the opportunity to choose to satisfy hunger, get adequate nutrition, medical remedies, clothing, shelter, and clean water. The latter formulation however, is still an expression of Berlin's negative view, for it implicitly suggests liberty *from* hunger, malnutrition, disease, nakedness, homelessness, and thirst.

In exploring the idea of freedom-as-choice, we quickly discover that it is an inherently individualist conception. As such, it is central to reigning political views in the West, which take inspiration from historically European philosophy. Laidlaw (2014:142-143) notes how a number of authors have located an affinity for freedom of choice at the heart of leftist liberalism. While liberal views may be plural and divergent, they have common features of discourse on human rights, democracy, and individualism – all of which are supposedly more liberating than other ideologies. Berlin (1969:130-131) discusses arguments to the contrary, however, where democratic rule is merely a transferal of the right to oppress from a centralized institution to the populace, without necessitating any form of emancipation for individual citizens.

A major downside of taking only an individualist perspective, it that personal needs are positioned in competition with each other. If I as an Obubu employee am given flexibility, and the same principle applies for my superiors at the workplace, then flexibility is likewise demanded of me. It would seem this 'freedom' comes with a price, namely responsibility and expectations. While we could partially choose at Obubu where and when to work, the others around us had the privilege of choosing to accomplish objectives according to *their* schedules. Thus, the freedom of one can become the oppression of another.

2.4.3. Freedom-as-Inconsequence

Having discussed the usefulness and limitations with defining freedom as choice or opportunity, we are faced with the reality that it comes at a cost. Similar to the setup of a zero-sum-game, one man's choices may be at the expense of others. Moreover, the flexibility that accompanies choice can be just as much a source of social expectations as it is of social privilege. It naturally follows that we reformulate the concept to describe freedom as an absence of social expectations or consequences: freedom-as-inconsequence.

I have previously explained that Obubu demands the assistance of its workers according to exigencies that arise. On one such occasion, I had just woken up a few minutes before I heard a knock on my door. I quickly dressed and came down the stairs, where one of the Obubu workers was waiting at the doorstep. His face was characterized by a sense of urgency. I asked him what was going on, and he replied "we are going to get the tea." Get the tea? I had not the slightest idea what he meant, nor why it was so urgent. At this point, I was starting to get used to all the pressing needs and surprise events of the company, and so did not feel very alarmed at the prospect of another one of those situations. Going along at his pace, I threw on my shoes and skipped breakfast. We got in a car and drove through the village center, and finally ended our trip at an Obubu storehouse which is located on the property of the company president's house. It is a low, dark house with paint peeling off and a sliding door that apparently has not been shut for years. Theft is not a concern in Wazuka, at least not on a wide scale.

On the drive over, I had learned that there was a leak in the roof of the storage, and that we were going to bring all of this year's harvests over to the Obubu estate. The processed leaves need to remain dry, and any humidity can cause them to mold and deteriorate. A few other workers were already there, and had started to load a pickup truck with big brown paper bags containing the tea. We joined in on the action, and I was happy for the opportunity to learn more about the conditions under which the tea is stored and impressed by the amount of product that this small company was managing. We lined up in a human chain where each individual had his task of lifting, moving, or packing the tea. We enjoyed the work, despite the urgency, and engaged in lighthearted conversation under the baking sun for the few hours it took to complete our task. Fortunately, the tea wasn't as bad off as we had been informed. The explanation of another worker on the phone had apparently painted a disastrous picture, but in the end, all but four or five bags of tea had survived intact.

The task, although slightly demanding, was not unpleasant, and thus I was happy to oblige. When called to action in other cases however, I would be working on other projects and feel some annoyance at being interrupted. One might argue that in a truly free society I should be able to perform my preferred tasks without being pushed to engage in undesirable work. Yet despite the annoyance, I would find non-compliance unthinkable, particularly when faced with requests from desperate people in a vulnerable situation. There are several reasons for this. One is obviously that my disinterest in the plight of others would be considered a selfish act, likely to sour social relations and even meet with equal indifference at some later point in life when I myself require aid. It is a sort of rationalist, economic motivation, where the calculating individual weighs the cost-benefit of expending energy, seemingly for the sake of others but secretly for the ultimate purpose of serving himself. This is a popular – and extremely naïve – conception of how human beings function. It utterly neglects the complexity of human motivations and incentives that social scientists are grappling to understand. Shame, pride, and the powerful rush of joy that comes with altruism are complex emotions and contributing factors in the individual's decision-making process. Whether altruism is truly selfless is of course subject to debate. I do not personally subscribe to the idea that self-serving individualism is either liberating or constitutes the totality of human identity, but the concept does merit consideration inasmuch as it can shed some light on my fieldnotes.

In the situation where I was asked to assist with saving the tea, I probably could have refused. Nevertheless, my refusal would not be without some sort of consequence. Social relationships and self-worth were at stake. As well, the feeling of contributing is powerful and satisfying. It was luckily a voluntary sacrifice on my part, for had it not been voluntary the task would feel all the more difficult. I'm not sure what the consequences had been in the event that I refused to cooperate. Some would perhaps not be able to notice the consequences at all, as direct criticism and personal feuds are uncommon, or I should say, much less explicit in Japan. Problems are addressed with great subtlety, and care is taken to not offend anyone. My experience in Wazuka was largely consistent with this description of Japanese society. This tendency to avoid negative topics and personal attacks is arguably a restriction in some ways, as it requires self-control. Seen from another perspective however, the polite tolerance, whether genuine or not, can in many context be a source of liberation.

2.4.3.1. Inconsequence through Tolerance

Mistakes or unbefitting behavior were usually met with jovial attempts to navigate focus away from the transgression and onto safer waters, to a casual conversation or some task that needed attention. The reluctance for criticism and even gentle admonishment gained my admiration on the one hand, while another part of me found it a little absurd. Yet my encounter with the tactful tenderness of the Wazuka locals whenever I committed a social blunder gradually began to have a strange effect. The less judgmental the ones who surrounded me, the more self-conscious I became. Their unwillingness to correct my mistakes left me oddly even *more* embarrassed. I began to see shame differently, not as the imposed penalty of social stigmatization, but rather as constructive instinct for self-improvement. It created in me incentives that were just as powerful as any other social motivator to act appropriately, if not more so. Shame is in the eyes of many Japanologists a primary formative principle for Japanese identity (see for example Ruth Benedict (1989: pages 65, 69, 90, 95, 169). In my case however, it was a guide to a coherent life in an alien cultural context, rather than the psychologically oppressive giant that it's often made out to be.

The absence of critical commentary, whether formulated as inconsequence or as a gentle consequence, could be seen as conducive to freedom since it did not carry the weight of harsh treatment. I am sure it has a limit; repeated offence against social norms in any society is likely to leave you marginalized. Tolerance is often contingent on the intentions of the actor, and it is arguably harder to remain patient with a reckless act than with a well-intentioned mistake.

The sincerity of their tolerance can be questioned. You might speculate that it is false: an act they put on in order to avoid the discomfort of confrontation. In some cases, I have no doubt that it is an act, and having practiced it for many years the Japanese have become solid actors. I do not believe that to be the case with Obubu on the other hand, for its philosophy of openness and focus on learning rather than focus on failure was repeatedly emphasized by the founders of the company, both in word and in deed. And even if they were hiding their negative impressions behind an iron mask of politeness, the illusion of tolerance could still feel liberating. Freedom-as-inconsequence does not depend on sincerity: it only requires the absence of repercussions such as exclusion from the group, admonitions, loss of privileges, stigmatization, or even corporal punishment.

The display of tolerance was not limited to the tea company, but characterized the atmosphere of Wazuka. There are many other instances to illustrate this same principle at work. One is the story of how the company itself was started. Two young men, who were not from Wazuka and had no background in tea farming, forced their way in to start tea agriculture in the area and later found Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms, much to the chagrin of the Wazuka tea farmer's guild. The guild consists of a collective of seasoned farmers, who resented the settlement of young people with no family ties to tea farming and who were not even from the village. Despite their objections, the two newcomers stood their ground and insisted they had come to stay. One of the founders later told me it was unthinkable, within the framework of Japanese society, to impose oneself in this manner, and that few people would likely do so. Despite the farmers' objections, however, the Obubu founders were gradually able to establish themselves within the village without any significant repercussions, even earning the respect of some of the elder farmers. Inconsequence gave them the liberty to stay in Wazuka.

It may seem strange to speak of inconsequence in a village setting, since social inconspicuousness is usually associated the relative anonymity of the concrete jungle. Urban settings are crowded with stranger, and it follows that individuals may have more leeway in determining their own identity and social role. In the village, one's actions are visible and social interaction occurs for the most part with acquaintances. Villagers are to some extent continually informed of the comings and goings of their neighbors. We therefore expect this social visibility to limit their opportunity for acting without social consequences. At the same time, the expectations are not equal for everyone. With regard to foreigners, for instance, noncompliance with social norms is almost a given.

Interestingly, I discovered a related phenomenon among some of the locals as well, only in the opposite meaning: there was an anticipation of social inconsequence on *their* part when they interacted with foreigners. Not only did many of the Japanese locals assume foreigners would be unable or unwilling to adapt successfully to the standards of Japanese society, but they seemed to be under the impression that, in the company of non-Japanese, they could disregard these norms themselves. Their idea is that foreigners, especially Westerners, were not raised with the same social taboos as the Japanese, and that one may therefore speak to them more freely than with a fellow national. Thus, it sometimes happened in the field that a Japanese would begin to pour out their heart to a foreigner, even as complete strangers.

During a visit to a neighboring town, a young boy of around fifteen approached my group of friends and began to speak of his unpopularity at troubles at school – this after only as little as half a minute of casual conversation. We had barely gotten past introductions when he started reciting his list of complaints. Our group consisted of a handful of non-Japanese, and each person reacted in various ways. Two people quickly abandoned the scene to speak with someone else. One person weaved back and forth between conversations to listen in on my discussion with the boy and the other nearby conversations. After the boy left, there was some laughter and light jokes between the members of the group, not about his plight, but about his bluntness. There was a mixture of sympathetic feelings and annoyance at his rant. My impression was that in the communities and social circles of the group members, the expression of negative emotions is acceptable on the condition that they are presented in a tactful and timely manner, or are exchanged between specific people in whom confidence has been established. The boy failed to meet these criteria, even though he otherwise seemed capable of reading the social signals that should alert you when you are committing a blunder.

As the Japanese are renowned for subtlety and cautiousness in their communication, the boy's blunt directness seemed out of place. Excessive complaining is generally poorly received, since it disturbs the *wa* (和, lit. 'harmony'). Harmony in social relations has been a consistent feature of Japanese values. At one point, the importance of harmony was even noted in the Japanese constitution (Sai, 1995:28). Harmony is maintained through the avoidance of conflict, negativity, and complaints. One tea farmer of Wazuka spoke of it as follows: "If you smile at others, *they* will smile. If you are sad and angry, *they* will be sad and angry."

Most likely, someone had told the boy that there is no need to suppress your complaints with foreigners since they do not operate with the concept of *wa*. Perhaps he thought the consequences of complaining to other Japanese were too significant, and to some degree even oppressive. In his search for the freedom to speak his mind, he intended to lighten his burden with people he had identified as a sort of safe haven, mainly due to misinformation and stereotypes about foreigners. The example highlights contrastive thinking among the locals – not just the contrast between Japanese and foreigner, but also how the needs of the individual placed in opposition to those of the group, or how other Japanese can be highly tolerant of certain social transgressions and completely intolerant of others.

Social inconsequence is strikingly context specific, making freedom-as-inconsequence a concept that is enormously difficult to evaluate. There is no place on earth where actions do not have consequences, and Wazuka is no exception. But is it really correct to say that your free choice today is less free simply because it may affect you negatively tomorrow? Oppenheim (2004:178) attempts to tackle this question by distinguishing social freedom from the freedom of choice. While penalization does not make us unfree in terms of choice, he argues, it does make us unfree socially. Thus, you are unfree only to the extent that you are actually punished, and *not* due to the threat of punishment. And the greater the punishment, the greater the unfreedom.

I think this explanation falls short, since social freedom to my mind means that there is acceptability of one's acts within the group. In the experience of the subject, it may well feel like his freedom is restricted by the consequences of his actions – and if he *feels* that way, then in the social sense, it *is* that way. In my definition of freedom-as-inconsequence, it is the intersubjective (dis)approval of our actions that determines whether or not we are free. And since future reactions to our acts can never be predicted with perfect accuracy, our experience of freedom in the current moment is contingent upon our ability to calculate future consequences. We may think ourselves socially free to perform a specific mode of action that later turns out to be reprehensible in the eyes of others. Social freedom consequently requires the *knowledge* to distinguish the socially unacceptable from the acceptable.

If freedom is measured in the number or quality of choices one has available, then ignorance can prevent us from choosing what we would have liked if we had better insight. Defining freedom-as-inconsequence implies that making socially acceptable choices requires foreknowledge. By lack of foreknowledge our ignorance may lead us to commit socially reprehensible acts, effectively rendering us unfree in that sense as well.

As we move on to the chapter on knowledge, it is important to keep a few points in mind. It should be noted that knowledge is relevant for freedom in different ways. The first point concerning our insight into future consequences has already been mentioned. A second point is that knowledge can affect the individual and his inner sense of liberty. Another way to look at is the lack of knowledge, or ignorance, which can also change the emotional state of the person. Moving beyond the individual level, there is the social and interpersonal. It is relevant for the way it constructs social bonds when knowledge is shared between people.

2.4.4. Freedom-as-Knowledge

Access to learning has widely been considered a both right and a means of freedom. The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus taught that "Knowledge liberates… by automatically eliminating irrational fears and desires" (Berlin, 1969:142). Insight, whether it be ontological or pertaining to the self, is the key to inner freedom.

Opposite to these arguments is the claim that knowledge can itself be oppressive. Kristjan Kristjansson (1996:125) has criticized the idea of the attainment of freedom through knowledge. He argues that knowledge is only liberating insofar as we posit reality as inherently good. If it weren't, we would feel increasingly oppressed the more we get to know said reality. Learning inconvenient truths can feel like a burden and lead to discontent, a prospect that has come to be encapsulated in the well-known adage 'ignorance is bliss.' Kristjansson imagines a hypothetical situation where he is locked in his room. What difference will it make that he knows he is trapped? This information would only throw him into further despair, not liberate him.

While I agree that Kristjansson has a point, I would posit that ignorance can surely also be a great burden. Geoffrey Smith (1977) questions for example the interesting hypothetical case of a contented slave. Will an ignorant but happy slave be truly free, or is he despite his contentment unfree due to his ignorance? Smith suggests that a slave might *feel* free while unwittingly being denied his human rights and the opportunity to have new and positive experiences. He concludes that the contented slave may be psychologically 'free' due to his ignorance of the joys of unenslaved life, but socially speaking he is still unfree. Smith consequently defines freedom as "… the absence of restraint on doing what one chooses or what one would choose to do if he knew that he could" (Smith, 1977:237-238).

All of the examples presented so far are lacking, as they primarily consider the knowledge of the individual alone. To merit the title of 'social' freedom, I feel that we must also consider the collective, relational and interpersonal. Individual knowledge may be a *basis* for social freedom, but it is not a definition thereof. For this reason, I intend to look at freedom as it is achieved through the *sharing of knowledge*. If knowledge and ignorance had any part to play in the social freedom of Wazuka, it would have been through their capacity for building constructive relationships between people.

The various tea related events in Wazuka are about fun, profit, socializing, and not least the dissemination and sharing of knowledge. There are a number of festivals and tea related gatherings arranged by tea enthusiasts in the village. We participated for instance in a fireworks festival in Kizugawa, a nearby town, where we assisted a Wazuka baker in distributing some of the products he had made using tea as a central ingredient. Obubu hosts events like tea picking, where visiting participants learn about the tea production process. Some of the staff also travel to around the country and abroad to collaborate with other farmers, or teach students about making tea. The following example from one of Obubu's tea picking events illustrates how the sharing of knowledge is a key aspect of the company model and the local lifestyle.

One hot day in July, we found ourselves loading the Obubu company van with equipment for manually processing tea. The private cars of other employees were also used for transport. One of the female workers had an inventory with the things we needed to bring to the event location, which was at a communal house at the Wazuka sports centre. In our assortment of appliances were gas tanks, heaters and large metal bowls or frying pans, which would be used for firing the tealeaves. In addition were an assortment of teacups, pots, and utensils, as well as a machine for crushing ice that would be flavored with green tea syrup. We were expecting about thirty guests, most of them Japanese along with a handful of foreigners.

On arrival, we swiftly set up the equipment while various tasks were delegated to the staff. After greeting and seating the guests, one of the company founders took the stage and began to explain the plans for the day's event. We then moved out into the tea field as a group, where instructions were given on how to pick the leaves. The guests were instructed to select the youngest bud and the next two leaves. These would be used to make green tea. For white tea, the youngest buds alone are picked. Picking is done by pinching with your thumb and index finger. Bending the stem, you pull and twist it off while carefully avoiding to injure it with your nails. After each guest has filled a small bamboo basket, we go back to fire the tea, thereby keeping it green. Firing means the heating of the leaves, which kills the enzymes that makes them oxidize. If you let them oxidize without firing, they will become oolong or black tea. In Japan, tea is typically fired by steaming the leaves. The guests were informed that since steaming takes a long time, often more than seven hours, we would stick to the Chinese method of pan-frying the leaves for about two hours.

After elaborating a little on the history of tea and its origin in China, the instructor explained the process further: “First, to stop oxidization we need to heat up to 200 degrees Celsius. Very hot. We need two people. One to come here and hold [the pan], and one person turn the leaves. Fifteen minutes each.” The procedure is roughly the same for all the picking events. Guests gather round the heating element and take turns with roasting the leaves. Using protective gloves, they stir the leaves manually to keep them from burning. The more experienced tea makers rotate their wrists in smooth movements that toss the leaves deftly and evenly. In my own case, like most of the amateur guests, I mostly fumbled around with my hands and hoped for the best.

After one round of frying comes the rolling. The leaves are emptied onto a suitable surface, in this case a woven basket about shoulder width. The instructor deftly gathers the leaves in a pile and applies some pressure to them with his palms, weaving his hands back and forth along with the rest of his body. The movements look more like a Tai Chi exercise than food production. Sometimes he will interject with a few guiding comments, like “we have to be strong but gentle when rolling the tea.” Rolling saps the oils and liquids from the leaves, and shapes them into small bundles or needles. Having completed one round of rolling, the leaves are again placed in a frying pan for a second round. This alternating process is then repeated a few more times. The number of repetitions depends on the tea you wish to produce. One time the instructor joked that in switching back and forth between rolling and firing, you begin to meditate. His point was that tea making takes so long you start to get bored, and this trance-like boredom is equivalent to meditation. Although it was mostly to get the guests to laugh, there was likely some seriousness to his message as well. Watching the truly skilled and experienced masters at work, they do indeed look completely absorbed in their work, as if in a trance.

At the end of the day the leaves are dry and ready for use. Some of them are brewed on the spot, using water at different temperatures for different results in flavor. The rest is divided among the guests as a memento from the event – their very first self-made tea. Having tasted various of Obubu’s products during the course of the day, the guests are offered a sheet with a list of teas that they may buy at a discount price. At some events, they are also asked to provide some feedback about their experience. Gradually, the guests leave and head home or to their next destination. Some of them stay in touch, and a few even make business arrangements with Obubu.

Sim, Kevin. "Pan Firing Tea Leaves." *(2015). JPG.*

Sim, Kevin. "Rolling Baskets." *(2014). JPG.*

As with many farmers and businesses in Wazuka, Obubu's knowledge of tea is specialized, detailed and intimate. Their expertise builds social relations, as the sharing or dissemination of this knowledge served to build a bridge with outsiders. In Obubu's case, they shared information on tea history, international production, its health benefits, and so on. Tea was also a catalyst for global knowledge, as they tied their role in the countryside to the wider context of history, globalization and the world of business. The identities of the tea farmers and the role of their work was defined through sharing stories about the local, regional, national and global importance of tea. For instance, while we were out working in the tea field one day, a Wazuka tea farmer told me that he felt Japanese culture is disappearing, and that he hopes to revive it through his tea farm. He wants to make tea a cool trend, and thinks that while foreigners are increasingly showing interest in Japanese tea, he wants to attract domestic popularity as well. This farmer was far from a unique in formulating complex thoughts on 'Japanese culture' and its position in a global context. In encounters with people of Wazuka, they would often reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese society, advocate the strong points of its traditions to us foreigners, and not least, renegotiate what it means to be Japanese and what Japanese tea *is*. Tea culture is explained by locals as being about refinement, beauty and enjoying life. As such, the fragrance, flavor and visual appeal of the tea fields has become the center of tourism to Wazuka village. Tellingly, tea is often referred to as *nihoncha* (日本茶, lit. 'Japan tea').

Many of the locals are exceedingly geographically literate. When communicating with people who were perhaps less directly interested in tea, they reach out through geographical knowledge, discussing the lakes of Michigan with an American from that state, the location of the house of Edvard Grieg in Bergen with a Norwegian, and the like. Their knowledge is broad, but not necessarily profound. What is important is not the depth of their knowledge, but their ability to use it to bring people closer. For instance, most locals were barely able to associate Norway with the fishing industry, northern lights, and occasionally the midnight sun. Yet, even when they only had passing knowledge about a place they were invariably able to dig up some sort of relevant trivia from the bottom of their brains and engage in discussions on a relevant topic with outsiders. I was often amazed by their ability to small-talk, and how they had developed the skill to not just let conversations happen, but rather direct their flow toward topics that they deemed safe and positive, and that had some sort of relevance to the person with whom they were conversing.

Like with knowledge, ignorance could also a bridge between people. By posing questions as a researcher, for instance, my inquiries led me to become closer to individuals with whom I'd only had a passing connection. Perhaps knowledge and ignorance are two sides of the same coin when it comes to building positive relations, since the sharing of knowledge is only possible when one side is to some extent ignorant. Just as electric currents require voltage to run, or water requires a difference in height to make a stream, knowledge require ignorance in order to flow between people and become a basis for establishing social bonds.

The transferal of tea skills and practices serve as a constructive force for social relations in Wazuka. As guests and hosts form networks and exchange business cards, more options for business and further sharing of knowledge also become available in the future. Studies consider the connection between social networking and the sharing of knowledge, pointing out a somewhat obvious, but yet pertinent truth: "through membership of a network […] the potential for knowledge acquisition is created" (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005:146). The opposite face of that coin is that knowledge sharing builds networks, and is as such a means to the accumulation of social capital.

Through sharing, people become positively disposed toward each other, building tolerance and trust. Some guests at Obubu don't really care about tea as such, but even they are still part of the networking routine. Building trust and tolerance points back to the concept of freedom-as-inconsequence; for as we gain acceptability and credibility within the community, we are presumably less likely to incur negative sanctions from our acquaintances. Knowledge is thus relevant to freedom not only in its own right – as a sort of psychological liberation through insight – but may serve as a catalyst for other forms of liberation as well.

Of course, positive social relations will not always equal more freedom, and may in addition carry with them heavy responsibilities. It is not difficult to imagine that those responsibilities and social expectations might be experienced as a loss of freedom rather than a gain. Moreover, knowledge can be unintentionally incorporated through unconscious mechanisms: it can be passed on through indoctrination, assimilation and even brainwashing. In these cases, it doesn't necessarily make sense to speak of sharing knowledge as a liberating factor, as it is enforced upon others in order to stimulate certain behaviors. For that reason, I consider it necessary to discuss the concept of *freedom-as-autonomy*.

2.4.5. Freedom-as-Autonomy

Identifying the exact meaning of 'autonomy' is difficult. In the context of Obubu, I suppose we could consider the flexible work environment demonstrative of autonomy. After all, freedom-as-mobility and freedom-as-choice are both indications of self-determination. This chapter looks at the independence of the human mind from social influence. It implies that autonomy consists in resisting societal indoctrination, and that said autonomy can be a form of freedom.

We begin by revisiting an example from Geoffrey Smith (1977), on the contented slave and whether or not he should be considered socially free. Throughout the article, Smith argues that the slave's contentment with his own bondage is a result of social conditioning, meaning he is unfree because brainwashed. The only reason he is content is because he has not been able to realize the ways in which he is deprived. To put it in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, we should say that the slave is subject to his *habitus*, the function of which casts freedom and autonomy in doubt.

Pierre Bourdieu (Ibid.) describes the *habitus* as the socialization of the human individual. He theorizes that people internalize the norms and ideas of society, and simultaneously externalize the very values that have been implanted in them. In this way, we perpetuate social structures and practices. As I interpret Bourdieu, this process is neither good nor bad for freedom in the psychological sense, as the indoctrination of ideologies can lead to contentment as well as discontent. Some of the internalized ideas may for instance mismatch with the experience of reality, and in those cases dissonance between perception and experience arises. However, if we look beyond the individual experience of freedom to the impediments and oppressions within societal systems, institutions, and relations, then the *habitus* becomes clearly relevant for determining freedom.

Using Bourdieu's concept, we begin to see how the individual can be a prisoner of his worldview. Societal values can become so deeply ingrained that the indoctrinated individual eventually begins to think himself the freest of men. James Laidlaw summarizes the problem:

> Primitive cultures, where individuals are so thoroughly acculturated that they have no knowledge that there exist any other ways of doing things, and no awareness that what they think of as their own choices are actually imposed on them by 'the cultural pattern' in which they have grown up, are those in which the subjective experience of freedom is most complete. (Laidlaw, 2014:24-25)

According to the preceding arguments, unchallenged values give an illusion of freedom and consolidate unfreedom. Self-proclaimed realists such as Melville Herskovits have therefore concluded that freedom should be defined as the right to let oneself be exploited within the framework of one's own culture (cited in Laidlaw, 2014:24).

An example from Wazuka comes to mind of a practice that can be described as liberated in one sense and oppressive in another: home visiting. I had expected the Japanese home to be a very private and closed-off sphere, partly because that is usually the case for Scandinavian households, and partly because I experienced Japanese people as reserved and private in general. What I found instead was that unplanned visits were frequent, and that visitors would walk in the front door without knocking or ringing the doorbell. Instead, stranger and friend alike would yell "Good day!" or "Hello!" from the hallway until someone walked out to greet them, or even freely enter other rooms in search of people. In the beginning, I assumed this behavior was only usual for visiting public or corporate buildings such as Obubu's, and that the guests simply hadn't realized the house also doubled as a private home for the workers. However, I was later explained by several informants that uninvited entry into private homes is quite common throughout the country, especially in rural areas. Perhaps it was my Norwegian sense of privacy that made unannounced guests felt like an infringement on my privacy and autonomy. From my point of view, they were letting social conventions override their own privacy and comfort. In Herskovits' (Ibid.) words, they were letting themselves be exploited. In their view, however, the possibility of entering private residences on your own accord is perhaps evidence of the safety and freedom of living in rural Japan. In this example again, as with all the others I have presented, freedom is a matter of perspective.

Because indoctrination leads to a sort of blindness, Karl Marx felt that human liberation will occur when people realize that social institutions are neither objective nor inevitable. The individual's disposition is a product of his social class, but by distancing ourselves from our ideologies we are simultaneously emancipated from their control over us (Berlin, 1969:142-143). Unfortunately, I did not stay long enough in Wazuka to observe patterns of social indoctrination, the formation of their *habitus*, or to distinguish the behaviors of people from different socio-economic backgrounds. However, the people I encountered were anything but blind to social forces, and often reflected critically on their own practices.

2.4.5.1. Autonomy through Reason

In the field, I soon noticed a typical pattern of auto-referential discussions among locals. By 'auto-referential' I mean statements made for instance by Japanese on the topic of Japan, or by Wazuka people on the subject of their own village. Wazuka people often discuss what it means to be Japanese, or how life in Wazuka is different from life in other areas of Japan. Many of these discussions were no doubt prompted by the frequent presence of foreigners – discourse triggered by their encounters with the 'Other' – while others were reactionary commentaries on social changes due to modernization, hyper-connectivity, and their impression of accelerated globalizing processes.

If lack of autonomy means the unreflective participation in cultural practices, like Bourdieu, Herskovits, Marx and others argue, then the capacity for reflexive thought around usual customs and ideas must be a logical definition of freedom-as-autonomy. That is, people are free to the extent that they are able to see themselves from new and different points of view. By reflecting on social norms, the locals are distancing themselves from them. And by distancing themselves, they are no longer entrapped by them.

The attainment of freedom through reflection extends beyond the sharing of knowledge, for it also incorporates the human capacity for rational thought, or in other words, the ability to reason. We could have dubbed it 'freedom-as-reason' or some such, and made it a separate definition, but I have chosen instead to set it down as a subcategory of autonomy. Anything that creates cognitive distance from social doctrine can be said to be autonomizing, and the faculty of reason has precisely that effect.

The link between individual autonomy, reason, and freedom might immediately be associated with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, but it has received attention from contemporary thinkers as well. Michel Focault nominates reason as an agent of liberation, stating that "Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (cited in Laidlaw, 2014:102). Kant and Foucault both appear to suggest that the capacity for reflection autonomizes and liberates the individual. Although I acknowledge the potential validity of their arguments, this type of freedom exists within the individual and it is hard to estimate whether we can equate individual detachment with freedom in the social sense.

2.4.5.2. Autonomy through Detachment

The inward and psychological and the outward and social are certainly related, and any distinction between them is difficult to make. Nevertheless, I have argued that there needs to be a conceptual separation of the two in order to make anthropological analysis feasible. The most well known theorist to operate with dual concepts of freedom is Isaiah Berlin (1969). He noted that if freedom lies in the realization of desires, "[we] could increase freedom as effectively by eliminating desires as by satisfying them" (Berlin, 1969:xxxviii).

The negative definition of freedom is akin to freedom-as-choice, and has already been discussed. The *positive* definition holds that freedom consists in being able to act as one's best, true and rational self. Positive freedom lies in self-mastery, and in having power over one's thoughts and passions rather than letting them control us. It supports the idea that liberation can be attained through the removal of desires, irrespective of social and physical circumstances. Being detached from the world, the individual becomes invulnerable to outside influence.

> The tyrant threatens me with the destruction of my property, with imprisonment, with the exile and death of those I love. But if I no longer am attached to my property, no longer care whether or not I am in prison, if I have killed within myself all my natural affections, then he cannot bend me to his will, for all that is left of myself is no longer subject to empirical fears or desires. It is as if I had performed a strategic retreat into an inner citadel… (Berlin, 1969:135)

This suggests that detachment is conducive to freedom. However, it would be extremely difficult to employ detachment as an analytical concept of freedom. The obvious problem manifests when we as anthropologists lack access to our informants' cognitive state – much less their subconscious, to which they hardly have access themselves. Even if we could somehow read minds, it would be nearly impossible to develop a way for objectively measuring their state of contentment – which is equal to their inner state of freedom – and range them on a scientifically designed scale.

Furthermore, while our inner state may be freed we can still remain deprived of liberty in the social sense. Berlin (1969:145) points out that our inner life may feel liberated, but in a society there will nevertheless be clashes between the intentions of different individuals. The question of social liberty involves the interpersonal. Like, Berlin, Smith (1977) also distinguishes the psychological from the social:

> *Contentment, or satisfaction, is a kind of freedom. Indeed, [the contented slave] might even be freer than his master in this sense; and even if he is not, he might still be freer in the sense of being more self-controlled, or… in being personally more dignified and autonomous. But the concession is also usually accompanied by a qualification: these senses of the term are taken to apply only to his psychological condition; as far as his social freedom is concerned he remains as unfree as the next slave.* (Smith, 1977:236)

We might assume that the inner experience of freedom, however valid and relevant, is a sphere of social reality currently unavailable to the tools and methods of anthropology. It merits reflection, but remains aloof from inspection. At least, I had no method of measuring the level of detachment in Wazuka people. However, though it is tempting to suggest that anthropologists should ignore the inner dimension of man in ethnographic analysis, it seems impossible to do so since "… psychological detachment is itself a social relation, created not in the absence of but through certain distinct kinds of interaction" (Laidlaw, 2014:158). Detachment may be individual, but it is simultaneously relational and socially influenced/influencing. I would argue that anthropology must focus primarily on external signs of social freedom, and to the extent possible attempt to infer the inner state of the subjects from behavioral clues.

Berlin's (1969:132-133) double concept of inner versus outer freedom implies the idea that human beings have a lower and higher self – two identities, if you will, that are in competition with each other. This point is important from an anthropological point of view, because it implies that the meaning of freedom is contingent upon the very definition of the self and of human identity. The idea of two separate selves has come under criticism, among other by Kristjan Kristjansson (1996:121, 141-143). If we consider certain actions as pertaining to the lower self, argues Kristjansson, we encourage the paternalistic intervention in our choices as they prevent us from doing things on the grounds that they are not good for us; a prospect with which he is most uncomfortable.

In the next chapter, we consider whether or not Kristjansson's aversion to paternalism is unfounded. Berlin (1969:158) explains that insofar as society prevents you from caving in to your own selfishness, freedom could lie in submission to well-meaning authorities. This proposition moves away from autonomy, suggesting a more relationship-oriented definition of that looks at the group and the community. It considers how being part of a collective can be conducive to freedom.

2.4.6. Freedom-as-Collective

I have suggested that freedom in the social sense is overtly interpersonal. It concerns the relationships between members of a community, or between the individuals and social institutions. While forces of detachment, autonomy, and knowledge acquisition may be conducive to a sense of liberty, it is perhaps more correct to say that they serve as a *basis* for social freedom while they are not *a definition thereof*. I deem it necessary to consider freedom in the relational sense rather than just on the individual, cognitive level.

Japan is typically characterized as a collectivist society, where group needs usually precede individual preferences. Liberals criticize the Japanese group mentality as a loss of individual liberty. However, this understanding is based on the assumption that individualism and collectivism are contrastive and binary. Kobayashi, Kerbo, and Sharp (2010) suggest that the stereotype of a conformist and group dominated Japan is firstly incorrect, and secondly based on the fallacy of using dichotomous terms. Collectivism and individualism, they argue, are not polar opposites but merely different points on a continuum. Moreover, collectivism does not always imply conformism. Instead, they suggest that their target group of Japanese youth are less individualist than for instance American youth, but not necessarily less independent.

In addition to these nuanced observations, we could equally argue *against* individualism as a pathway to liberty. Laidlaw (2014:163-167) discusses how individualist pursuits can be harmful to conditions of freedom. The issue is that individualism creates a sort of moral incoherence, where each person subscribes to principles that are in conflict with that of others. This problem is different from the usual challenges of pluralism, namely that peoples' values are in competition with each other. In this case, it is rather an issue of how the individual's values are created from reactions to his environment. The moral principles thus become inconsistent and emotionally contingent, fluctuating greatly. They are neither expressions of rational reflection in the Kantian sense, nor in collective traditions that have consistency over time. MacIntyre, a freedom-philosopher, argues that "a particularly gloomy version of the view that value pluralism in general, and the especially toxic version he identifies as the 'culture of emotivism' in particular, is a pathology of secular liberal modernity", and that the Japanese in contrast to that are "un-afflicted by the faulty notion of a self that could ever be separable from its social role" (Laidlaw, 2014:165).

MacIntyre's (Ibid.) mention of Japan in this context is not coincidental. Social traditions of Japan are unique, while also drawing heavy influence from Chinese thought in particular. In East Asia, the religio-philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism dealt with freedom as a crucial condition for the well-being of society and its members. Confucius famously established a framework of ethics that impacts the countries of the Asian northeast to this day. And while these teachings are usually noted for their focus on the duties and moral responsibilities of the people and government, they contain elements that are comparable and indeed similar to discourse on freedom in the West (Kim, 2013:34). The proposition that maintaining a harmonious society, necessitates the sacrifice of personal autonomy deserves to be reevaluated. Moreover, a harmonious society is surely just as liberating as possessing personal rights and privileges.

The discussion of autonomy versus collectivism is largely about conformity to social norms. The pressure to conform is not necessarily the same at any stage of life, but may be age-dependent, as Ruth Benedict (1989) points out. Benedict contrasts differences in submission to social norms between Japanese and Americans. She argues that freedom throughout life is afforded at opposite stages of life to Americans as to Japanese. American children first live under heavy boundaries that are gradually relaxed as they grow older. They are most free in the prime of their life, but restrictions are again imposed as they age.

> The arc of life in Japan is plotted in opposite fashion to that in the United States. It is a great shallow U-curve with maximum freedom and indulgence allowed to babies and to the old. Restrictions are slowly increased after babyhood till having one's own way reaches a low just before and after marriage. This low line continues many years during the prime of life, but the arc gradually ascends again until after the age of sixty men and women are almost as unhampered by shame as little children are. (Benedict, 1989:155)

The frank and outspoken spontaneity of Japanese elders here described was also characteristic of Wazuka seniors, although I hesitate to accept Benedict's claim unconditionally. In defining freedom as inconsequence and knowledge, the elderly may indeed be more free than in people their youth. However, the burden of old age comes with a lack of mobility, choice, and autonomy – all of which can serve as definitions of freedom in their own regard. Seniority is usually inversely correlated with independence. Perhaps that is the reason why the steeping of tea is said by Wazuka people to be analogous to life: the first steeping is sweet (childhood), the second is bitter (adulthood), and the third is astringent (old age).

Ferdinand Schoeman (1992:3, 34, 38-39) rejects the idea of freedom in independence and unfreedom in conformity. He suggests instead that liberation is accomplished through the formation of public associations, or in other words through organizing socially. It is not autonomy, but being part of a community, that liberates us. Liberal discourse on freedom describes autonomy and knowledge almost as corrupted by social influence, and Western philosophers likewise position subjectivity and cultural bias as the enemies of truth and freedom. These are said to restrict our individual reason, making it difficult or impossible to discover objective moral values. In Schoeman's argument however, philosophers err in equating cultural influence with moral corruption:

> …being culturally embedded is not the same as ritually and unreflectively mimicking whatever others do… We have no reason whatsoever to think that those who are culturally sensitive are more disposed to morally outrageous conduct than those who are oblivious of cultural norms. Indeed, we have every reason to think otherwise. (Schoeman, 1992:5-6)

The most interesting thing about Schoeman's point is that it makes a beautiful case for the conformism attributed to Japanese society. The imposition of social convention in Japan is very often portrayed as a deficiency and frequently contrasted with the supposedly emancipating democracy and libertarianism of the Western world (Kobayashi, Kerbo, Sharp, 2010). The liberalist mantra inherited from John Stuart Mill – that individuals may live whatever life they want provided they are not harming others – reigns supreme (see Schoeman, 1992:33-34). To Mill, autonomy should ideally never be compromised, and only the most serious transgressions should require intervention. Contrary to this view, Schoeman regards intervention and social reproach as necessary to maintain the efficacy, purpose and structure of the group.

Individualism does not render people immune from social pressures, but rather leaves the whole burden of making moral choices on individual shoulders, in isolation from social support and assistance. In Schoeman's (1992:94-95) view, people benefit from relying on others to help them correct their moral vision. This particular view seems to resonate with the Japanese collectivist values; in Wazuka, at least, there is space for individualism in some senses, while group needs are prioritized in other contexts. If freedom were defined as a product of collectivism, then the Japanese might well have as much freedom, or more, as any other nation or community.

Schoeman (Ibid.) has eloquently proposed that without society as a mirror, the individual would not be able to reason rationally. His opinions would be trapped within the sphere his private reflections. Schoeman's claim is not simply that people in aggregate are automatically morally and rationally superior; rather, he is stating that unity combined with a balance of diversity is required for the successful operation of constructive relationships. The moral reflection of the individual in the mirror of society is made possible by the clash of ideas, and not by fascist uniformity. It is no secret that social collectives are able to commit atrocious moral transgressions, evidenced by the many genocides and racial conflicts throughout human history. What is interesting about these destructive movements is their struggle for totalitarian uniformity of values, while the moral strength of collectivism actually lies instead in its *diversity*. Freedom through collectivism only works when there are pockets of space for individual expression.

Liberal individualism is often idealized through art, discourse and media, while "[c]onformity gets bad press" because it has "neither the romance nor the heroism associated with liberal individualism" (Schoeman, 1992:38). Again, let it be perfectly clear that this does not insinuate the collectivist social model is inherently superior. Nor does it make the case that society somehow has perfect moral vision. It is merely an argument that the imperfections of collectivism do not render it an invalid path to freedom. At the least, it is no less valid than the definitions of freedom as autonomy, choice or knowledge:

> To think that cultures can be disqualified from having authority because of the way they botch important functions is very far from thinking that cultures or everything authoritative earn authority in virtue of promoting proper practices. A person may be disqualified from holding national office because he has repeatedly molested children; yet not molesting children is neither justification nor qualification, let alone authority, for holding office. (Schoeman, 1992:79)

As I interpret this view, the basis of the legitimacy of a cultural institution is not its perfection, but rather the relative extent to which it allows freedom.

Schoeman (1992:80) envisions culture as a bazaar of viewpoints and values, called *microcultures.* Each microculture represents a perspective, and it is the variety and diversity of these that allow for social freedom. Problematic as the term 'culture' might be, this conceptualization actually corresponds well with my observations of Wazuka. The social environment seemed the opposite of conformist, while at the same time showing signs of

collectivism. For instance, eople often asked about customs in various countries to try and ascertain what sort of manners they should adopt when interacting with foreigners. There was a remarkable mental flexibility and willingness to adapt, though of course many of them expected foreigners to have a similar attitude of adapting to Japanese norms as well. Even in that small area and population group I found a rich diversity of personalities, behaviors and values, contrary to what stereotypes of a homogenous Japan will imply. As I see it, the purpose of adapting was to maintain positive relations between individuals. Collectivism made Wazuka *more* diverse, not less. In other words, collectivism does not equal conformity.

Being part of a collective does not have to be oppressive, but can be immensely satisfying. A sense of euphoric freedom can arise from sharing a group's interests and values. Yet there is always a risk of homogeneity and ideological hegemony being enforced. Caroline Humphrey (cited in Laidlaw, 2014:147) uses the example of Russian authorities, who have consistently promoted a sense of 'we' in order to manage and direct the general public. Such practices can be described as brainwashing or propaganda, and are characterized as inherently unfree, at least with regard to knowledge and autonomy. As a reaction to this totalitarianism there arises a number of counter-movements and philosophical criticisms. Laidlaw comments:

> …revulsion at this [totalitarian collectivism] is one of the well-springs of yet another conception of liberty, articulated perhaps most eloquently by Nietzsche, of freedom not as obedience to moral law but as free-spiritedness or spontaneity: acting on the impulse of the moment and without regard to and even scorning consistency. (Laidlaw, 2014:174)

Freedom is here defined as the ability to implement social change without negative repercussions. It describes innovation, spontaneity and cultural flexibility, as a contrast to conservative traditionalism. If we forget all the other definitions of freedom I have mentioned, and only remember this one, it would be sufficient; for it was the image of Wazuka and Obubu as spaces for flexibility and cultural change that left an imprint in my mind and compelled me to analyze their expressions of freedom in the first place. To be clear, the abolition of traditions at Obubu did not appear to be anti-establishment reactions. In fact, they did not seem 'anti' anything. Instead, heir abstention from tea-related traditions and rigid ceremonies was inspired by a desire to create something positive, than to make some sort of criticism on society's status quo. Their flexibility with traditions appeared as an expression of liberty. I have therefore formulated the notion of *freedom-as-spontaneity*.

2.4.7. Freedom-as-Spontaneity

I have defined social freedom as being inherently relational, in that it deals with the relationships of actors with each other and with social institutions. Based on that definition, it is reasonable to postulate freedom as the ability to influence or change said relationships. In this chapter, I will describe social freedom as being about change. There are many theories on how and why social change occurs. Bourdieu (1977:87-95) and his theory about the *habitus* is particularly relevant in this respect. According to Bourdieu, the thought and behavioral structures that are programmed become objective realities in the mind of the subject. These adopted perspectives guide his actions, and leads him and his peers in aggregate to reproduce society. Of course, the subsequent generation never makes an exact copy of the previous paradigm, and various changes are introduced that keep society in a state of change and flux.

It is tempting to assume that resistance to the current norms is the best path that leads to their abolishment. Bourdieu (Ibid.) warns us not to think, however, that social change is accomplished through the rejection of systems or practices that we consider incorrect or obsolete. Quite the contrary, anti-sentiments to current social institutions can in fact be the very force that consolidates and legitimizes their existence. People are not automatons who unreflectively copy and reproduce the information to which they are exposed. They have the ability of critical thinking and reason. This makes them free in the sense that they can make conscious choices (freedom-as-choice), are informed and rational (freedom-as-knowledge), and possess the capacity to go against society (freedom-as-autonomy). It also lets them institute social change, in what we could otherwise call freedom-as-spontaneity.

This form of freedom applies to Wazuka to some extent, but it is especially relevant in the case of Obubu. ‘Spontaneity’ in the usual meaning of the word refers to change, creativity, and informal manners. In this context, the word is additionally employed in a much wider sense, as an umbrella term for invention, innovation, entrepreneurship, and just about any other practice that catalyzes social change and stands in opposition to tradition. This is not to say freedom must consist in modernity and that traditions are automatically oppressive. Rigid social structures and conservative thought are not inherent unfreedoms, but only become oppressive to the extent that they are problematic. The free agent should have the possibility to maintain the state of affairs when doing so is more convenient than implementing change. In fact, Obubu appeared free precisely due to their flexibility in weaving back and forth between modernity and tradition.

2.4.7.1. Mavericks

I was surprised by the flexibility and disorder of Obubu from the beginning, and I still am. I had been fed so many stories about what working at a Japanese company would look like that the experience awaiting me at Obubu was utterly unrecognizable. At the same time, there was something familiar about the company's unconventional approach. A few years prior to my stay in Wazuka, I had seen a TED Talk[8] about a unique Brazilian company called SEMCO, titled "How to Run A Company with Almost No Rules" by Ricardo Semler (2014). Semler was the CEO and creator of that company, and described a business practice that stands out from others in the freedom of its structure. Unlike many other businesses, SEMCO has no dress code. Employees are free to wear whatever they want. There is no overtime work required and office hours are flexible. No managers are there to follow up on the staff, to review their work, or even to make sure they show up for work at all. The staff are allowed to take days off in the middle of the week in order to pursue activities that they find meaningful. Leaders are evaluated and elected anonymously by the people they are leading. Leadership subsequently changes with the times, and even Ricardo himself has been removed from his position as CEO (he makes a point of how this democratic system is good for humbling the ego). At SEMCO, there is no need to put on a pretense of looking busy when their superiors are in the office. That office, by the way, is decentralized into several smaller buildings across the city so that the employees don't have to travel across town every day to go to work. As there are no secretaries, each employee deals with secretarial responsibilities such as making phone calls, photocopying, etc.

SEMCO has almost no official behavioral policies. These have been removed in favor of flexibility and democracy. The model has been derogated as socialist, but Semler prefers to think of it as taking the best elements from various systems and putting them all together. Interestingly, the author associates non-structure with the absence of ego and narcissism. Hierarchical leadership is undermined by the anonymous reviews of leaders by underlings. Semler describes the model in terms of freedom, innovation, and democracy. Everything about Obubu reminded me of SEMCO. It therefore wasn't too surprising when I found a book about SEMCO in Obubu's bookshelf.

[8] TED is a platform for the sharing of knowledge, stories, innovations, and scientific discoveries in lecture format. The lectures are filmed, edited, and uploaded to www.ted.com.

In the book called *"Maverick!: The Success Story Behind the World's Most Unusual Workplace"*, there is an interesting remark made almost in passing about how the unique business model was something SEMCO had been adopted from the Japanese in the first place (Semler, 1993:5). According to the author, the flexibility of the Japanese mindset was an inspiration for the innovative structure of the company. It was perhaps more than a coincidence that I was seeing parallels between the two businesses. One of the foreign interns had already read the book, and knowing my intention to understand more about Obubu and Wazuka, recommended I read it too. By reading it, he said, I will understand better what the founders are trying to accomplish. Whether one disapproves or appreciates the lack of structure at Obubu, it must at least be acknowledged that its spontaneity is probably deliberate. I was starting to suspect that their impromptu habits were intentional, and one episode in particular partially confirmed my conjecture. One of my assignments was to create a database and map out the location, size, and yield of the tea fields. The database was to be used for later reference. It seemed strange to me that such basic data had not been recorded. The only person with full overview of all the tea fields was the company president, who unfortunately was hesitant to be interviewed on the subject. I tried on numerous occasions to bring it up without being pushy, and couldn't understand the reason for his reluctance. Someone finally explained to me that systematization of this information was tantamount to rigidity; it simply didn't suit Obubu's temperament to implement structure and surveillance. I was able to create a database in the end, under the argument that it would be useful for the guests if Obubu had that information on hand.

Another episode to illustrate the ad-hoc mentality of the founders was the time when we saved the harvests from the leak in the storage house. Having moved the tea to a dry and safe place, the group of workers visited the vise-president's house where we lingered for a while, drinking lemonade under shelter from the sun. After discussing the day's dramatic event, the conversation naturally moved toward whether or not it was possible the former storage facility as a small factory for roasting the leaves. As the founders talked about the future of the company, I had a feeling this was an important moment for the company. I privately thought "Ah, so this is how decisions are made within the management." There was no brainstorming session at the office. There was no formally arranged meeting. There was just a couple of guys sitting around the dining table who happened to hang out that morning because they had to save some tea from going bad.

Let it not be implied that the staff of the company are not serious about their work. On the contrary, they are on the whole extremely passionate and dedicated to tea and the business. There is a lot of flexibility in their approach, but they still strive for quality results. Their unconventional industry is by no means symptomatic of half-heartedness. Just the opposite, in fact. Not only does innovation express the unique personalities of the Obubu workers, but it is even a conscious business strategy for reaching out to customers. Their lightheartedness and lack of formalities is a means of making guests feel comfortable when visiting. Perhaps it is also a way of appealing to the youthful population, although this is just speculation on my part.

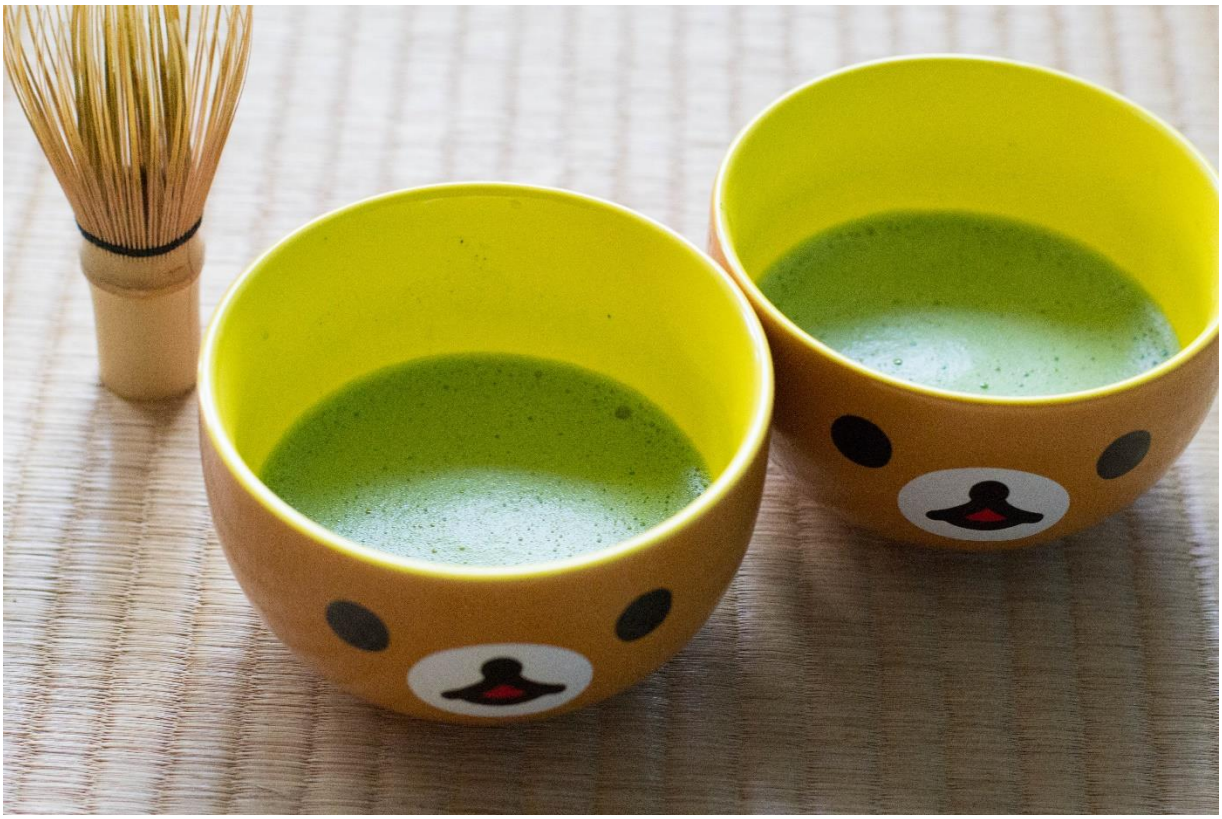
Although there are certainly formalities present in the interaction with guests, such as bowing and acts of humility, yet great effort is made to create a relaxed atmosphere. Not all visitors are as passionate about tea. To these people, the guide will often comment that "all warm beverages are good" or "I like any kind of liquid". As teas of varying quality are presented, the guides invariably emphasize that "there is no 'best' tea, no matter what the price. It's a matter of taste." Likewise, then instructions are given on how to brew the tea for optimal results, they are quick to underline that there is no 'correct' brewing method. It simply depends on one's preferences. One of the staff is an avid coffee fan, while another is happy to ingest low quality tea bags – a heresy for purists who exclusively advocate high-end, loose-weight leaves.

The tea tour guests differ in amount and origin, but all receive the same message. One group consists of seven people, which is considered a big tea tour as there is constricted reception space and limited amount of car seats. They are told that "Today is an authentic, traditional tea tour. But not strict." On another tour, a German couple is told that "we will have traditional tea tasting, but it is not serious. Please be at home." A balance between casual interaction and professionalism is attempted in order to make the guests comfortable. Their casual comportment is especially visible during tea tours.

Their statements reveal conflicting perspectives on tradition. On the one hand, traditions are held synonymous with authenticity. On the other, modernity is flaunted as the company's strength, for instance when they argue how machine picking is vastly more efficient and impressive than hand picking. Claims of tradition and modernity are equally drawn upon to create a friendly environment and spark free conversation. The established Japanese tea related rituals and norms are therefore sometimes rejected.

2.4.7.2. Rules and Ritual

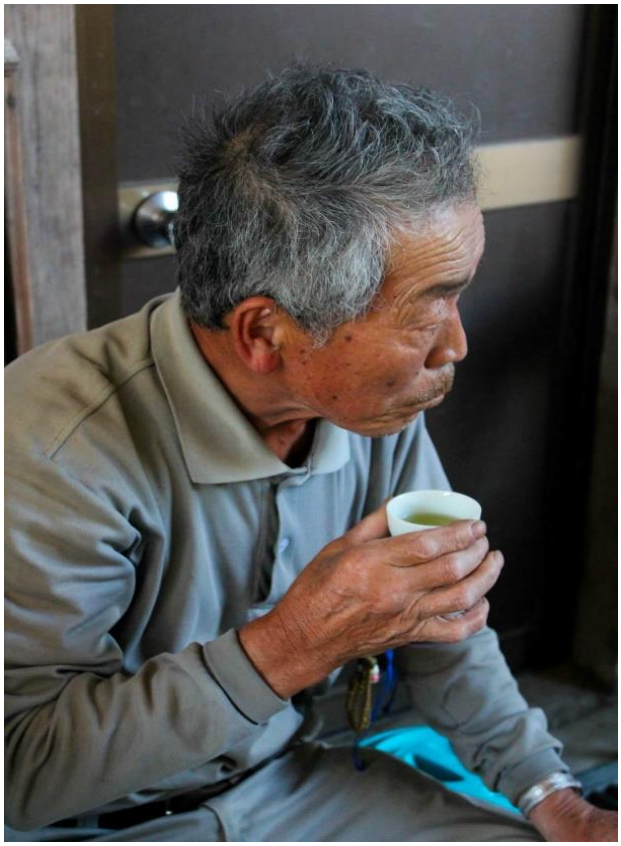
Guests on tea tours often display appreciation for the Japanese tea ceremony, commenting on its beauty and refined qualities. The guides are quick to express how they don't like the ceremony because it has "too many rules". This is why they remind me of Baisao ('the Old Tea Peddler'), who similarly rejected the discipline of *chado*. The tea ceremony requires the host to look elegant and serve with precise, set movements; prostrations made in front of the alcove where a calligraphy and arranged flowers are placed, the seating arrangements of the hosts and guests, avoidance of stepping on the threshold or the borders of the tatami, the handkerchief that is neatly folded a certain way to wipe the utensils in circular motions, the placement of the bamboo ladle on the rim of the iron kettle after pouring water, tapping the tea scoop twice against the bowl to detach traces of powder, etc. The list is long enough to fill volumes. Obubu's tea tour guides may sometimes teach the history of the tea vessels, the correct use of utensils in the tea ceremony, along with the importance of refinement and elegance. However, they also express appreciation for the freedom to choose whatever is most appealing to each person.



Sim, Kevin. "Untraditional *Rilakkuma* Tea Bowls". *(2015). JPG.*

There is another ritual, much less elaborate and much more commonplace than the ceremony, of serving tea to guests when they arrive in one's home. It is probably more reasonable to interpret this custom in functionalistic rather than symbolic terms, since the act of offering tea serves to strengthen social relationships. It is a gesture of warmth and/or politeness. This hospitable act defines social roles, with one party playing the host and the other the role of a guest. The importance of acting the role is affirmed by proverbs, such as "Two things are heavy: chopsticks and the tea bowl." The 'heaviness' they refer to is of course not literal, but implies social responsibilities. Correct behavior is essentialized in this brief and simple statement.

Serving tea as a welcome drink is of course not unique to Japan; enter a Persian, Chinese, British, or an American home, and you are likely to be offered a cup. Some of the Wazuka locals tell me that in Japan, tea is so pervasive it is almost as common as water. But in social interactions, water is not treated with anywhere near the importance of tea. Water is never a welcome drink, unless perhaps it is asked for specifically by the guest. There is no 'water ceremony'. Tea, for whatever reason, is treated differently.



Sim, Kevin. "Tea for the Visitor". (*2015). JPG.*

2.4.7.3. Informality and Improvisation

We can argue that it is the formality of the tea ceremony which makes it unfree. Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1983:198) associates the strict ceremony with tendencies of compulsion, shame and guilt. The relationship between the unyielding rules of the ceremony and personal freedom has even come up for discussion in anthropology. Emilia Kangasjärvi (2012:30) writes in a thesis titled "Codified Tranquility: Ritual and *Communitas* in the Japanese Way of Tea" about the strictness and lack of liberty in *chado*:

> Although students [of the tea ceremony] are able to reflect their own character in Tea, the procedures themselves are both predetermined and highly structured; "in the pursuit of any given Way, the learner has to start by holding strictly to tradition […], the personal freedom of spontaneous activity is actually denied" (Hammitzsch 1980, 8). This lack of freedom in the physical realm constructs a space for the mind to be free.

Her proposition is that social restrictions may be conducive to inner liberty. However, she goes on to argue that these rules are collectivist and conformist, as is typical for Japanese social life. Likewise, there are signs of elitism and hierarchical division in the ceremony, which again reflects the norms of Japanese society as a whole. Kangasjärvi (2012, 30:32) explains for instance how guests are seated next to the alcove, which is raised above the floor of the tea room. The ceremony tools are ascribed different values, with the tea caddy and bamboo scoop being the most prized utensils. The container for wastewater is of the least value, as it holds the impure water used for rinsing the other tools. It is kept out of the tearoom and hidden from the view of the guests. For the students proper, there is similarly a hierarchy of knowledge; initiates are deprived of the knowledge rewarded to practitioners of the highest social rank.

In Wazuka, there is very little evidence of either formalism or hierarchy. Informality is apparent in the lack of suffixes when addressing one another, even though the Japanese are typically strict about honorifics. In the Japanese language, the use of honorifics is essential unless you are speaking with very close friends. This is especially true when a younger person is speaking to someone older, or a woman to a man, or an employee to his boss – in brief, anyone of higher social status should be addressed as *–san* or *–kun*, being the rough equivalents to 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', or 'Ms.' in the English language. For example, strangers or people below my own rank should refer to me as 'Espen-san', while my superiors should properly call me 'Espen-kun', or rarely just 'Espen'. Omission of an honorific is indicative of either privilege or familiarity.

In Wazuka, I can only recall a single person using honorifics consistently; myself. I had been trained by my Japanese teacher to always speak politely to Japanese people, and that included the use of honorifics and formal inflection. All my Japanese acquaintances furthermore stressed the importance of polite speech. I was therefore quite surprised when I saw that honorifics are virtually non-existent in Wazuka. It doesn't matter if we are at the store, the diner, at work, or on a house visit. Japanese has two tenses, the informal and the formal. The vice-president of the company will speak to the president in the formal tense, even though they have been friends and partners for many years – but they never use honorifics. Strangers, colleagues, waiters, managers, old people, neighbors – none of these things appear to make a difference on how you are addressed. At the office, workers speak very frankly and even flat out refuse their 'superiors'. Usually, you are meant to avoid using the word 'no', and find roundabout ways of refusal. This is considered the norm of politeness and civility, according to my Japanese teacher and friends. I had been taught the importance of subservience to superiors, such as to your employer. This practice, too, was absent at Obubu and as far as I could tell in Wazuka.

The exception to Wazuka's informality is when Obubu staff dealt with customers. Customers call to place orders, and when the staff are on the phone they switch to the formal tense. Not only that, they seem to adopt a different persona entirely, one that is very careful, and to my ears, somewhat stiff. It seems there is a boundary of people outside and inside the village, which delineates the need for formal language. This observation is supported by the fact that customers who come as visitors are entertained with much less formality than people on the phone. For visitors, spontaneous fun is often valued over dry professionalism.

The spirit of spontaneity is an attribute of applies some of the locals. Many unique individuals from outside the village have strong personalities that lend an impression of creativity and free-spiritedness. However, I cannot be sure that these traits are typical of Wazuka as a whole. It may be that their presence is so overpowering that they distorted my view of the field, or at least amplified its unconventional aspects. It is therefore difficult to be sure whether my observation of this atypical group of people is indicative of Wazuka's uniqueness. Time would have provided the answer, but unfortunately my stay was very brief, and I only made a few observations of spontaneous expression, pertaining mostly to Obubu. These were nevertheless enough to bring to mind a sense of freedom.

Many of the events at Obubu were unplanned and impulsive. Some of them are due to sudden requests from clients, where we make rapid decisions in order to accommodate them. In other cases, incentives come from within the company. Parties are often thrown on short notice, sometimes to welcome new arrivals or say goodbye to people who were moving out, and other times for no discernable reason. People will come for visits without really having an agenda except they 'felt like it'. At tea tours, there is a script that the guides attempt to memorize, although they are not required to follow it exactly. Here, too, there is room for spur of the moment activities. For example, one time the guide decided to do an improvised chemistry experiment during the middle of the tour presentation. A reagent called DPD (N,N-diethyl-p-phenylenediamine) was mixed with water in a small glass. The water turned a magenta color, indicating significant concentrations of chlorine. The guide then added green tea leaves and stirred, until the solution once again became transparent. It is apparently the Vitamin C in the tea that causes the liquid to regain its natural transparency. The guests observed with interest, and possibly with a little disgust at the thought of the amount of chlorine they ingest every day which had now taken on an ominous shade of purple before their very eyes.

Another unplanned experiment was to illustrate the difference between hard and soft water when brewing tea. The West, it was explained, has mineral rich hard water, while the East has soft water largely devoid of minerals. The difference between them become evident during the brewing process, where the color of the liquor is much darker with hard water than with soft. Tea was brewed separately in glass cups, one using Japanese tap water and the other with bottled mineral water. The experiment was conclusive, and the color difference was indeed significant. The guide claimed that oxidized tea is called 'black' in English because the brew is so dark, while the same tea in the East is more of an auburn color, and so the Chinese and Japanese call it 'red' tea. I am not sure about this explanation, as there may be other historical reasons for the naming of oxidized tea in various languages; nevertheless, the explanation is plausible and the experiment interesting.

Similar experiments are done in private as well, with only the interns and some of the staff of Obubu present. Every week there is a small workshop in the Obubu office, usually with employees and sometimes a few neighbors or friends of staff. The subject of the sessions is often determined on the spot. In sum, spontaneity is at the heart of Obubu.

2.4.7.4. Spontaneity and the Tao

In the view of Raymond Mammarella & Joseph Crescimbeni (1966:524-526), freedom consists of spontaneity, creativity, and free expression. Associated with this argument is that free spirited people switch not only between ideas, but from one social role to another. In this sense, freedom is the ability to flow between social roles, and perhaps even to redefine them. The spirit of spontaneity brings us back to the influence of Taoism, for the basic teaching of philosophical Taoism is the expression of natural inclinations and uncontrived action. To act in the moment, to let movement happen rather than force it through your will, is to follow the flow of the Tao. Taoism is relevant because it has inspired Zen Buddhism, which in turn gave rise to Teaism in Japan and in Wazuka as well as to the business ethics of Obubu in particular.

When Taoism refers to spontaneity, it is in a sense encouraging deculturization. Taoist writings describe man's natural state as intuitive and de-socialized (Eno, 2010:6). The Taoist version of freedom comes mainly from unlearning what in modern terms we can call 'social programming'. This brings us back to the discussion about knowledge, autonomy, and social conformity, and in particular invoces the theories of Bourdieu (1977). I have argued that social indoctrination could prevent freedom by denying access to knowledge, or through the spread of oppressive or false knowledge. In the Taoist sense, however, the impediment of knowledge is not in its content or accessibility, but rather in how it can become a veil for the innate and natural spontaneity of the human being.

Laidlaw (2014:174) remains skeptic to the idea that an ethical system can continue to operate in a free-spirited community, because its unpredictability and inconsistency would make social organization unsustainable. A Taoist might respond by saying that spontaneity is man's natural state, and that in being thus inwardly unconstrained one will naturally find one's place in the world, including his role society. Having never seen such a community successfully functioning, I am nevertheless inclined to understand Laidlaw's reservations. Without defined social roles, it is hard to see how a harmonious society can be built. But I do not reject the Taoist claim, and I would be very curious to see a gathering of people who organize themselves spontaneously. I do not think Wazuka is an example of such a community, even though it has some elements of spontaneity and innovation. To my knowledge, the closest we get to a case that speaks in favor of the Taoist argument, is online communities.

Ko Kuwabara (2000) describes how online groups have evidenced signs of self-ordering. For instance, programmers of the Linux operating system organize themselves through processes that appear automatic and non-hierarchical. Together, they form a collective that works in synergy, without aspirations to be financially compensated for their contribution to the Linux source code. Their incentives vary, but their efforts unite and a relatively harmonious social structuring takes place. It seems that online at least, is possible to have a spontaneous yet functioning collective. If so, we might refer to that collective as being socially free.

Spontaneity at the border between psychological and social freedom. People may be slaves to their passions, to hopes and fears, and to ideologies. By adopting ideas and incorporating them into our identity we are attached to them, and hence become unfree. Imprisonment by ideas is not due to the limitation of their scope, but rather in our attachment to them. Unwilling to let it go, we force all facts to fit our conception and ignore those that don't. Mammarella & Crescimbeni (1966:525) claim that unlike adults, children move freely between ideas. Spontaneity is therefore evidence of detachment.

In Wazuka, it did indeed seem as if people were willing to shift between ideas easily. Tradition is supported in one context and rejected in another. Modernity is treated in the same manner. At tea picking events, woven bamboo baskets and traditional attire for young tea picking girls are glorified almost in the same sentence as the wondrous efficiency of picking machines is exalted. Wazuka people speak proudly of being locals and Japanese in one moment, and then identify as cosmopolitan citizens in the next. It is probably no coincidence that Ricardo Semler described the Japanese as being flexible in thought (Semler, 1993:5).

A problem arises with the realization that anyone who is not as flexible will have to deal with the improvised activities of the spontaneous individuals that surround them. I personally did not always feel 'free', as I lack the mental suppleness to function comfortably in such an ever-changing environment. There are many like me who crave routine, regularity, and stability. Although it is true that variation is the spice of life, the threshold for finding unpredictability a challenge is different with each person, and perhaps with each community. No doubt, spontaneity can be argued to be a liberating state of fluidity, flexibility, and openness for some. Yet to others, it is an oppressive chaos. Once again, I must conclude that the freedom of one can mean the oppression of another.

2.4.8. The Power and Liberty of Tea

In previous chapters, freedom has been related to agency, individualism or collectivism, capacity, ability, choice, influence, and knowledge. In Taoism, liberation is in submission to nature, and to be spontaneous is to be free. Tea is loaded with rules and regulations, and yet is versatile enough to allow freedom of expression. But there are many aspects of freedom that have been overlooked. Other definitions than the ones provided could have been proposed. One example is to define freedom-as-power. It has already been discussed implicitly, through for instance concepts of choice, knowledge and social pressure, but I have not set down an explicit discussion of power, for two reasons. One is that the subject of power in anthropology has been done to death. The other is that conceptualizing social in Wazuka in terms of power structures seems remote from the tranquil life of the villagers. Power is not irrelevant in the analysis of freedom, as even the absence of power structures are evidence of its relevance. However, the concept tends to evoke images of large scale dominance, political moves, and social control. Such grandiose descriptions are relevant in *any* context, yet somehow seem out of place among quiet neighborhoods and tea crops. Whatever power is – and I shall not attempt to define it here – we are clear that it is like freedom, relational. That it is pertinent to the definition of social freedom is undoubtable. In this ethnography however, the subject of power remains implicit.

I have likewise skipped other possible definitions of social freedom. One of my colleagues suggested I define it not as power, but empowerment. Another pointed out that my impressions of social freedom in Wazuka may owe a debt to the safety of the country. Had I been under threat of assault, for instance, I might feel less free. There can be no doubt that the absence of crime and violence makes a difference for the experience of social freedom. The observations of both colleagues have merit, and further discussions would do well to take them into consideration. In this instance however, I have only looked at the definitions of social freedom that intuitively matched my empirical examples in Wazuka. I made no field records of instances of personal empowerment, nor did I note the presence or absence of criminal behavior.[9] It is possible to expand the analytical framework beyond the seven or so definitions that have been proposed, and future analysis would certainly benefit from their addition. Still, with the existing definitions in this thesis I believe the essential groundwork has been laid.

[9] Apart from speeding, there were no signs of criminal behavior.

3. In Conclusion

To conclude, I argue that we need to clarify what we mean when we're talking about freedom. Is it best defined as mobility? Choice? Inconsequence? Knowledge? Autonomy? Collective unity? Innovation and spontaneity? I have hopefully been able to show that what constitutes a free society depends on your definition. The description of Japanese norms as restrictive is likely based on the idea that freedom subsists in choice. I argue that this perspective by no means has a monopoly on defining freedom, and that on its own it would be too simplistic, reductionist, and ethnocentric to be accepted as a universal standard. Instead of settling on a single definition, we can navigate through a number of potential formulations in order to arrive at a more profound and nuanced understanding of the freedom-concept.

In light of this understanding, I feel the descriptions of Japanese society should be reevaluated. Japan is often broadcasted as having repressive, stiff, formal, and controlling norms. The narrative about the oppressiveness of Japanese norms is based on certain assumptions about the meaning of freedom. In contrast to that image, I found indications of diversity, openness, and social liberty. The first step towards a reevaluation of Japanese social life is the elimination of stereotypes, or at least, replacing them with more accurate generalizations. One such idea that needs to be challenged concerns the oppressiveness of Japanese social norms. I have shown, first of all, that these norms are not present everywhere in Japan, Wazuka being in many ways a notable exception. I discovered an extreme flexibility in the community in which I lived, showing that this idea of social rigidity and enforced tradition may not be a complete or accurate depiction of Japan. Certainly metro Tokyo will be very different from rural Wazuka. And both those places are of course changing over the years. Moreover, I have argued that these norms are only oppressive from a certain perspective, and that in another point of view they can feel rewarding and emancipatory. In fact, the Japanese intolerance of criticism, negativity and rudeness were precisely the things I personally found the most liberating about living there. Ironically, their spontaneity and unstructured ways were the most challenging for my ordered and routine-loving mind. This establishes the concept of social freedom as relative and subjective, while simultaneously illustrating the intersection of the psychological and social, which has been another key topic of the ethnography.

While I have not primarily focused on inner freedom, I did find it necessary to discuss as it cannot be completely neglected. Although the main concern was the outward and social aspect of freedom, it has been difficult to distinguish from the inward and psychological sense. Mental and emotional states, knowledge, detachment, and free-spiritedness all have an influence on social relations. At the same time, I have attempted to keep social freedom a distinct concept. Focusing solely on the individual makes sense when considering inner freedom, but for the study of its social definition this focus no longer holds water. Because it deals with the structures and processes of society, it becomes necessary to consider the relational, interpersonal, traditions, norms, customs, and institutions.

I have proposed roughly seven definitions for consideration, which were all relevant for empirical observations of Wazuka and Obubu in some way or another. I say 'roughly' because the definitions are not always easy to separate from each other, and some of them even include subcategories that could potentially stand on their own. To give an example, innovation has been included under spontaneity, although it would have been possible to formulate 'freedom-as-innovation'.

The first concept pertains to mobility, equating freedom with physical movement. It is a very narrow view, and for that reason appears inadequate. It also makes some conceptual distinctions that are not necessarily accurate, separating for instance the physical from the mental, acts from the intentions of the actors, and the causal effect of human actors in contrast to forces of nature. Freedom-as-mobility is interesting, but probably overly simplistic.

The second definition attempts to go beyond the physical, also including human agency and volition. It has to do with the freedom of choice, illustrating how being in a position to choose can be both a privilege and a burden. The concept proved complex, as freedom cannot easily be summarized by the number of choices available to the actor without also factoring in the *qualitative* worth of each option. There is more to freedom-as-choice than we might think.

The third concept is freedom-as-inconsequence, or simply the possibility of getting away with certain behaviors without experiencing negative social repercussions like criticism, stigma, or punishment. It is built on the previous concept, the ability to choose to live as you prefer, but introduces a new dimension of time; what you do today will affect your life tomorrow. Insofar as your community is tolerant of your behavior and preferences, you are considered free.

The fourth definition is both subtle and difficult. It explores several dimensions of knowledge, relating to its content, form, and origin. In terms of content, knowledge can feel both oppressive and liberating. Ignorance is also sometimes said to be both a curse and a blessing. When shared in a spirit of amity, knowledge can reinforce social bonds and enhance the experience of freedom. However, subconscious knowledge structure may dominate our behaviors without our awareness, and it is difficult to consider indoctrinated modes of thinking as conducive to freedom.

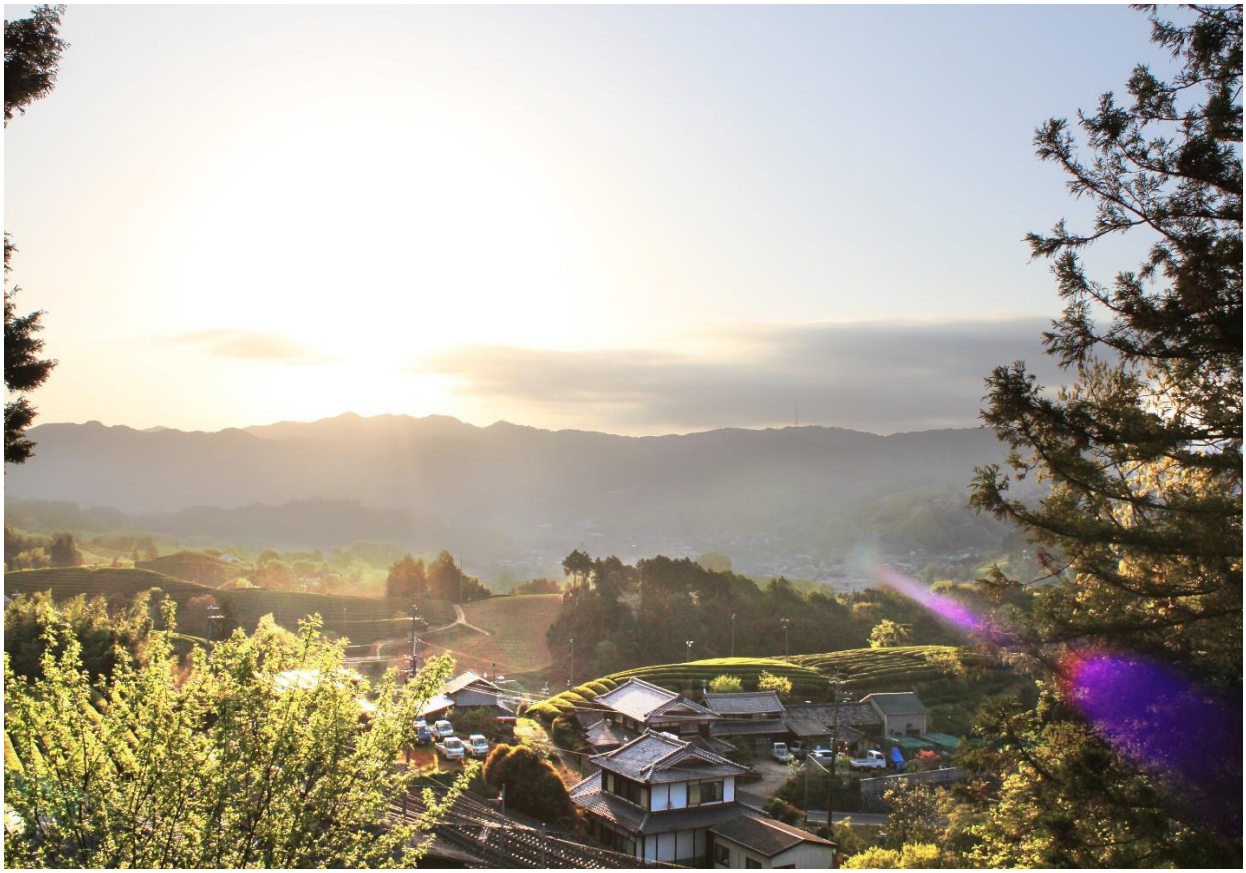
The problematic aspects of the nature of knowledge bring the autonomy of the individual into doubt. If social values are imposed from without, then the individual cannot be said to have any autonomy over his knowledge or actions, and is in a sense unfree. Through rational thought and emotional detachment, the individual may be able to regain some of his autonomy. But even if he has mastery over his own thoughts, his autonomy may still be compromised by the invasion of his privacy in communities where his personal life is part of the public sphere. Japan is said to be a country where collective interests often take precedence over personal preference.

Autonomy can be contrasted to collectivism, but that does not mean the former is inherently liberating and that the latter is necessarily oppressive. There can be freedom through the collective as well. The people around us act as mirrors through whom we gain new understanding. In addition, a harmonious society with well-established rules can feel more liberating than a pluralist community plagued by tension and conflict. Moreover, collectivism does not necessarily entail rigid and unreflective adherence to traditions and norms.

The final definition is one where norms and traditions might be rejected, allowing the freedom to implement change and innovate. Freedom-as-spontaneity is a concept that has been expanded to include informality, innovation and improvisation. ‘Free spiritedness’ becomes the defining feature of social life. All the previous concepts are embedded within this one, for it spontaneity is related to mobility, choice, consequence, knowledge, autonomy, and collective social values. Rules and rituals are sometimes consolidated and other times rejected. Obubu especially displayed innovative and spontaneous tendencies, although similar attributes were observed among other Wazuka residents as well as attested by interviews with some of its foreign residents. Tea is not only the medium through which this spontaneity is expressed, like how Obubu uses tea to reach out to people, but is even in itself a potential catalyst of innovation.

Due to the brevity of the fieldwork, I do not think I have collected sufficient data to determine the extent to which Wazuka should be considered a socially free environment. Instead, I use the examples from the fieldnotes to evaluate the concept of freedom itself. The analytical conceptualizations of social freedom will hopefully be so well developed that further research on freedom is made possible. The focus on tea in this ethnography is incidental, but that does not mean it is arbitrary; even banal, everyday things like tea can have an influence on social life.

The concepts that have been formulated give a deeper understanding of the field, while empirical examples from the tea company and the village in turn offer a clearer perspective on the concepts. I believe the definitions here compiled could serve as analytical tools that are useful for further research and debates. They can be amended, removed, or supplemented with other pertinent formulations, to the aim of creating an analytical framework within anthropology for a fruitful discussion and more profound understanding of social freedom.



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