Experience of the High-Economic-Growth Period in Suburban Rural Villages: Through an Analysis of Residents' Employment Histories and the Hirasesen Lace House Journal "Mutsumi"

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The Iruma region in Saitama Prefecture grew as one of the foremost cotton fabric production regions in Japan during the period from the end of Edo Period to the Meiji and Taisho Periods. The Family of Hiraoka Sentaro, a powerful textile manufacturing family in the Iruma fabric production region, focused attention on the lace industry at the end of Taisho Era and established the Hirasesen Lace Factory in Bushi, Iruma City. The Hirasesen Lace Factory became one of the foremost factories in Japan in terms of quantity of production, especially after World War II. Along with business expansion after 1960, branch factories were established in the surrounding rural villages. The plants continued operating until 1985. With the establishment of the Hirasesen Lace Factory and its branch factories, quite a few people in the areas experienced a change from rural village life to factory-based life or company-based life.

The purpose of this article is to clarify these changes in people's lives and communities in suburban rural villages through interview about residents' experiences and employment histories and the house journal "Mutsumi" as a record of the times. The result is summarized as follows:

In the Iruma fabric production region and its neighboring or surrounding areas, the Hirasesen Lace Factory itself was deeply connected with the residents' experiences in the high-economic-growth period. More specifically, the first experience was that they worked at plants with machines. This experience was common to women employees coming from neighboring rural villages and people in the surrounding rural villages where branch factories were located. The second experience was that they came to know new values and new things through their dormitory life. In dormitory life, which was completely different from rural life, they realized through general-education courses that a new era had come, and they used sewing machines and flush toilets and touched lace and wedding dresses. In the records of the time and through interviews with women employees who started working at the lace factories after graduating from junior high school, this experience is clearly conveyed. The third experience was the transformation from the agricultural and forestry industries to the manufacturing industry. This was especially experienced by people who lived in the surrounding rural villages where the branch factories were located, and their employment histories were closely related to the change in regional industrial structure in which the forestry industry was declining and the manufacturing
industry appeared as an alternative.

In this article, in order to further study the significance of these experiences and the regional changes from the viewpoint of the local people, with a focus on Nagurimura where a branch factory was located, the residents' employment history is studied through interview. Every person who was interviewed as a case example was concerned with the Hirasen Lace Factory in their employment history and experienced the whole regional industrial transformation from the forestry, agricultural, and sericultural industries to the lace manufacturing industry as a concrete change in employment. Looking at their experiences in detail, however, aspects of the change from the people's standpoint were not so simple. Their change from agricultural and forestry workers to factory workers resulted in clear changes in employment form, wages, life cycle, and required skills, while their attitude to and awareness of the tasks and efforts for improvement of skills were continuously maintained in the midst of the transformation to a different industry. The continuity supported the Hirasen Lace Factory. It means that the process of change of the conventional community and life to a new community and life was progressing while involving both the aspects of discontinuity and continuity, which influence each other.

Key words: suburban rural village, high-economic-growth period, employment history, forestry industry, lace industry