How is agriculture currently being sustained in Japan? What about the future? That seems to be the overall theme of this book, which is a compilation of the recent work of 11 geographers with connections to the University of Tsukuba. The authors take a classical regional approach in their analyses of Japan’s agriculture. A suitable audience for this book would be researchers and university students; it would also be useful as a reference text for a broader audience.

The book is broken down into three sections. The first section looks at Japan overall, focussing on the history and the spatial organization of agriculture, and introducing current farm management. The second section, the longest, describes the different types of agriculture and farm units in each region through detailed case studies. The third section is the most theoretical and once again examines farm management and the bases of agricultural sustainability.

In section 1, the first chapter describes changes to Japanese agriculture since the 1950s from region to region with the assistance of graphs and 16 maps of Japan; the last part of the first chapter introduces a classification of ninaiteti, the bearers of agriculture, and farm assistance policy. The second chapter examines the regional differences of Japanese agriculture, using factor and cluster analyses. The 12 regions examined form the basis for subsequent analyses in the other chapters.

Section 2 consists of 11 chapters totalling over 300 pages and looks at trends in Japanese agriculture and its management. It begins with Chapter 1 on Hokkaido; Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to Tohoku. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the Kanto and Tokai regions. Chapter 6 examines the Tosan region, including Nagano prefecture, and chapter 7 analyzes the adjoining Hokuriku region. Chapter 8 is devoted to the Kinki region, Chapter 9 to Chugoku, and Chapters 10 and 11 examine northern and southern Kyushu respectively, with Chapter 11 also focusing on Shikoku. Each chapter focuses on a theme, e.g., agri-tourism in northeast Tohoku, or Jersey dairy farming in Chugoku, and most chapters address the different types of farmers or farms, e.g., certified farmers, or farm service enterprises. Another common topic is government farm assistance, e.g., subsidizing farm projects. Only one chapter emphasizes theory: social capital and rice farming in the Kinki region.

The third section focuses on agricultural restructuring and the sustainability of farming. Chapter 1 discusses the changing functions of agriculture and its current multifunctionality in Japan. It then examines the reorganization of farming in terms of management, commodification, technology, and leisure and public use. Chapter 2 looks at the regional differences in the management of agriculture in terms of physical geography, economics, society and culture, politics, and individual people; it ends with a discussion of mono-channel and multi-channel agriculture. Finally, the conclusion touches on the future of Japan’s agriculture in a global context and also summarizes each of the 12 regions that were analyzed in the second part of the book.

In terms of geographic coverage, the book methodically describes on a regional basis the character and management of farming in Japan. In section 1, chapter 2 even examines how Japan’s agricultural regions have been mapped out in the past. In section 2, chapter 1 states that Hokkaido makes up one quarter of Japan’s cultivated area, yet the amount of text devoted to Hokkaido is roughly the same as the 11 other regions of analysis. Is its extensive, large-scale farming not worthy of more discussion? There is no analysis of agriculture in Okinawa, which is unfortunate since the climate and some of the crops do differ from the rest of Japan.

The book is well organized, but I would move more of the theoretical discussion, e.g., productivism and post-productivism to the first section of the book before the case studies in section two, which illustrate these theoretical terms. The table of contents is detailed, as are
the subject headings. There is a good index at the back of the book; however, there is, for example, only one page number reference for the term “ninaitai.”

The maps in the book are detailed computer images. Although a small point, it would be helpful when introducing the agriculture of a new region, to always include the map of Japan as an inset, so one can see the relationship between the region and the nation, especially for the non-geographer.

There is an encyclopaedic amount of information about the agricultural geography of Japan in this book with up-to-date statistics and superb visuals. I commend the editors and writers for such a comprehensive, organized, and useful publication. My only hope is that for slow readers of Japanese like me an English edition of this book will appear soon.

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