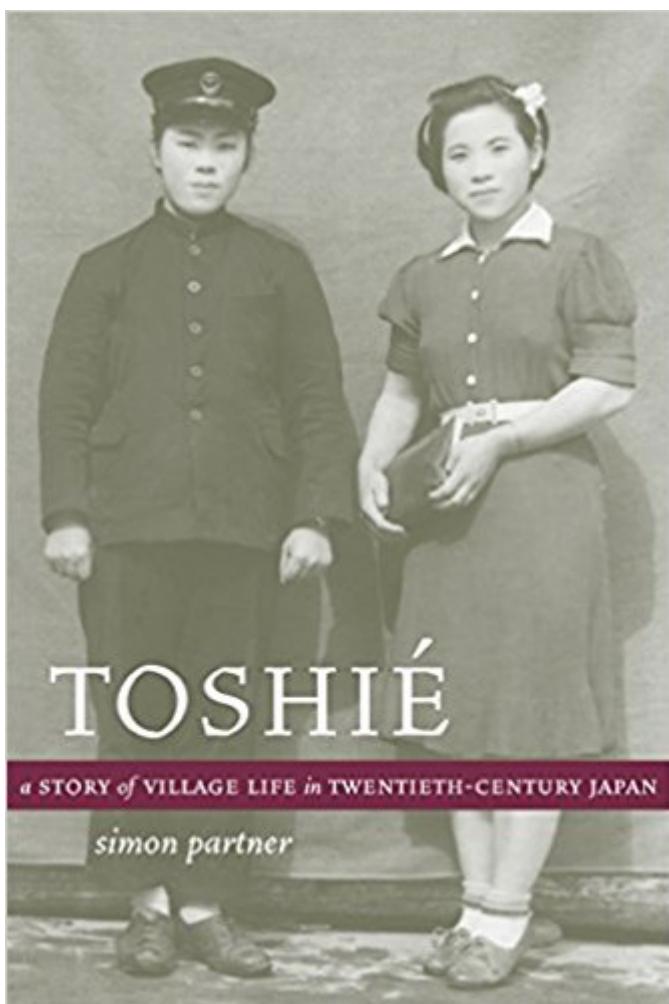


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# Toshié: A Story Of Village Life In Twentieth-Century Japan



## Synopsis

Sakaue Toshi© was born on August 14, 1925, into a family of tenant farmers and day laborers in the hamlet of Kosugi. The world she entered was one of hard labor, poverty, dirt, disease, and frequent early death. By the 1970s, that rural world had changed almost beyond recognition. Toshi© is the story of that extraordinary transformation as witnessed and experienced by Toshi© herself. A sweeping social history of the Japanese countryside in its twentieth-century transition from "peasant" to "consumer" society, the book is also a richly textured account of the life of one village woman and her community caught up in the inexorable march of historical events. Through the lens of Toshi©'s life, Simon Partner shows us the realities of rural Japanese life during the 1930s depression; daily existence under the wartime regime of "spiritual mobilization"; the land reform and its consequences during occupation; and the rapid emergence of a consumer culture against the background of agricultural mechanization during the 1950s and 1960s. In some ways representative and in other ways unique, Toshi©'s narrative raises questions about conventional frameworks of twentieth-century Japanese history, and about the place of individual agency and choice in an era often seen as dominated by the impersonal forces of modernity: technology, state power, and capitalism.

## Book Information

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"Within the lively and often gripping story of Sakaue Toshi© and her world, Partner gives us a sweeping and thought-provoking history of social change in rural Japan and sheds new light on key developments such as war mobilization and US occupation reforms. Fresh, personal, and

engaging."—Steven Ericson, author of *The Sound of the Whistle: Railroads and the State in Meiji Japan*"Partner beautifully tells the story of the life and times of a farm woman from the 1920s to the present. He traverses seamlessly between the often moving details of her life and the large transformations which it exemplifies."—Andrew Gordon, Harvard University

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It isn't believed but I found a story of my country in the foreign publication book. Above all, especially, I was surprised to an author passing in front of my parents' home, by driving a bicycle.

More of a sociological study of a village in Japan...pre-war, during WWII and post-war.

In his book "Toshie", Simon Partner provides a detailed account of village life throughout 20th century Japan. The historical and sociological information is carefully selected; each piece deepens the reader's understanding of the life of Toshie and her fellow villagers. Partner's observations on World War II, village life, and the rise of consumer culture in Japan are all welcome additions to the study of Japanese history. The real strength of the book, however, is Partner's vivid descriptions. From the beginning, one feels as if they are looking over the shoulder of the midwife during the birth of the protagonist, Toshie. These fine descriptions continue throughout the book and one can nearly breathe the fresh village air or sweat alongside the farmers and laborers as they toil into the night. For anyone who is interested in Japanese history, village life, or simply looking for a good read, I highly recommend this book.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book. I am a third generation Japanese American (sansei) born and raised in Hawaii. My grandparents came here from Niigata ken, which is the setting of the book, around the turn of the 20th century. They came as laborers to work in the sugar plantations. Therefore I found the details about village life in Niigata very relevant to their experiences in

America. I have read many accounts of life in the Japanese countryside through the years ("Shinohata", "Village Japan", and "A Far Valley" come to mind). But Partner's book is the best I have read because of the combination of historical and sociological data. It is also filled with sensitivity to the lives of Toshie and others in her village. I recently visited Niigata for the first time. Of course, spending two days there as a tourist did not give me as much of an in-depth look as I would have liked. But I will go back again, partly because Partner's work has increased my level of awareness.

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