

The Function and Role of Communities of Practice in the Case of Working Manga

Yuichi MATSUMOTO[†]

Abstract

In this study, we discuss the function and role of communities of practice based on the case of working manga. Learners acquire skills and knowledge by participating in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and they can create knowledge through interactions. In this study, we believe that even manga characters learn through their participation in a community of practice. It is difficult to grow alone, and participation in a community of practice that possesses skills and knowledge is effective to gain experiences that are beneficial to growth. We discuss the process through which participation in a community of practice influences a character's growth by investigating a working manga wherein the character participates in a community of practice. However, we consider that communities of practice not only facilitate learning but also inhibit it. In the following, we first explain why working manga is used, and then explain the theory of community of practice and its mastery. Thereafter, we investigate a working manga, and finally summarize and discuss the findings.

Keywords: communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation, working manga

1. Introduction

In this study, we discuss the function and role of communities of practice based on the case of working manga. Wenger et al. (2002) define communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 33). In other words, it is a “community of learning.” Learners acquire skills and knowledge by participating in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and they can create knowledge through interactions (Wenger et al., 2002). They can also cross boundaries by participating in multiple communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), thereby achieving not only lower-level learning but also higher-level learning, such as the transformation of values and perspectives (Matsumoto, 2019).

However, in working manga, character growth is an important element in the story

[†] Professor, School of Business Administration, Kwansei Gakuin University

(Schodt, 2012). The characters, including the protagonist, grow through various experiences in the manga story. This makes the story more interesting, and in the case of working manga, the growth process generates sympathy among readers, increases the popularity of manga, and leads to the acquisition of knowledge and information among readers (Matsumoto, 2021). In this study, we believe that even manga characters learn through their participation in a community of practice. It is difficult to grow alone, and participation in a community of practice that possesses skills and knowledge is effective to gain experiences that are beneficial to growth (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Herein, we discuss the process through which participation in a community of practice influences a character's growth by investigating a working manga wherein the character participates in a community of practice. Working manga can be used as a case study (Matsumoto, 2018), and some suggestions for management studies can be obtained therein (Matsumoto, 2021). In particular, we consider that communities of practice not only facilitate learning but also inhibit it. In the following, we first explain why working manga is used, and then explain the theory of community of practice and its mastery. Thereafter, we investigate a working manga, and finally summarize and discuss the findings.

2. Theory of community of practice

Communities of practice are groups that have some skills and knowledge, and where knowledge is created, shared, and practiced based on that knowledge. Different points have been raised in the literature (Cox, 2005; Matsumoto, 2019), and one of such issues entails whether the workplace is considered as a community of practice or it is created separately from the workplace. Wenger et al. (2002) suggested that communities of practice could be considered separately from the workplace; however, Lave and Wenger (1991), who first proposed the concept of communities of practice, claimed to consider the workplace as a community of practice by investigating various anthropological cases. The concept of communities of practice that we investigate through working manga is that which regards the workplace itself as such.

Regarding learning in a community of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation." This concept means that the acquisition of skills in an activity, such as work, requires a deepening of participation in the community of practice (which in this paper is almost synonymous with the workplace) that possesses those skills. Taking ceramics artisans as an example (cf. Matsumoto, 2019), even if they have studied at a ceramics school established by a local government, when they join a ceramics manufacturer, they become craftsmen and take the role of a manufacturing team. By deepening their participation in the community of practice as ceramics manufacturers, they learn skills and gain knowledge, and gradually become entrusted with more advanced work.

Legitimate peripheral participation, as proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), includes three concepts: “legitimacy,” “peripherality,” and “participation.” Legitimacy means that it is possible to belong to a community of practice. With the legitimacy to be there, access to the members of the community of practice and various other things, as well as learning, is enhanced. The practice begins at the “periphery” position of the community and gradually deepens into participation. Practicing for full participation is the “trajectory of learning” for learners, as Lave and Wenger (1991) have explained.

However, participation in a community of practice does not always proceed smoothly. It is necessary to ensure the legitimacy of participation and continue the practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that “legitimate peripherality is a complex notion, implicated in social structures involving relations of power” (p. 36). For seniors, new learners may be a threat to their position (e.g., a starter position on a sports team). Thus, seniors may not always support newcomers’ learning and participation, and may even discourage it. This aspect of the power of communities of practice is discussed by Bogenreider and Nooteboom (2004) in one of their three relational risks in communities of practice: career and spillover risk, that is, the risk that others grow and lose their advantage as a result of the interaction. In addition, Roberts (2006) points out that the limitations of the community of practice theory are that it does not pay adequate attention to power relationships within organizations, that power is not determined by proficiency or participation alone, and that it ignores the role of trust in knowledge sharing and the impact of competitive relationships, which do not always ensure legitimacy, even within communities of practice. Pemberton, Mavin, and Stalker (2007) suggest that one of the factors that can lead to dysfunctional communities of practice is the time it takes to get going. The same can be said of the full participation process.

In this study, we attempt to investigate the negative aspects of the community of practice, that is, the fact that learning and participation are not always necessarily supported by the members of the community of practice, by considering a case of working manga.

3. Why do we use working manga as research materials?

We believe that working manga is useful for research as a document that contains both textual and visual data (Matsumoto, 2021). However, manga is a secondary source, and primary sources collected through direct investigations are more appropriate. Nevertheless, there are three reasons for using working manga in the study of communities of practice in this paper.

First, it is suitable for examining the process of the protagonist’s participation in detail. Participant observation and ethnography are effective research methods, and it is essential to maintain an outsider’s view as a researcher while familiarizing oneself as a member of the organization (May, 2003). This is rather difficult, however, working manga include an

outsider's point of view through interviews conducted by the author and co-creators, and readers can "pseudo-participate" in the community of practice in the manga through the sharing and identification of perspectives (McCloud, 1993). It is a material that includes both the authors' and readers' perspectives.

Second, we consider what is being selected by the author as a document. When studying documents, it is important to focus on what is said and what is *not* said in them (Rapley, 2007). It may be possible to expose events embedded in the document, such as the creation and maintenance of a certain identity (Rapley, 2007), gender, and power (Matanle, Ishiguro and McCann, 2014). Working manga can contain information and knowledge of the business world, yet the author selects content that is sympathetic to working people (Matsumoto, 2021). Analyzing what is said and what is not said in working manga can present useful results, and consequently, we can see what is contained in working manga. Considering the negative aspects of communities of practice, which is the theme of this article, we can determine the factors behind the depictions that are seen as impediments to participation as well as those that are regarded as facilitators of participation.

Third, in terms of the theme of this paper, that is, "What hinders participation and proficiency in a community of practice?", we can establish negative phenomena that would be difficult to observe in a direct observational study as well as positive phenomena. The working manga we focus on in this study is "Natsuko's Sake," which belongs to the genre of "cooking manga" related to food and ingredients. The reason for including this working manga is that, to acquire and master the skills of sake brewing, participating in a community of practice that possesses those skills is strongly required, and the main character actually does so. Such depictions are seen to facilitate the protagonist's participation, while others are seen as disincentives. By focusing on the depictions themselves and what lies behind them (i.e., what is not depicted), it will be possible to draw out material that will be useful in examining the issue. Thus, I will consider participation in a community of practice by investigating working manga.

4. Case study: Protagonist and other participants in the community of practice in "Natsuko's Sake"

4.1 About "Natsuko's Sake"

"Natsuko no Sake" (Natsuko's Sake) is a working manga by Akira Ose, published in a manga magazine *Morning* (Kodansha) from 1988 to 1991. It was published in a total of 12 volumes and was made into a popular TV drama in 1994. Although it does not portray a typical salaryman, it painstakingly depicts work in a specific industry and can be categorized as one of the working manga in this study.

“Natsuko’s Sake” is the story of Natsuko Saeki, the daughter of a sake brewer, who uses the rice seed of the fantastic sake rice “Tatsunishiki” found by her brother, who died young, to grow sufficient sake rice for brewing, while overcoming many difficulties, and finally making new sake. This manga describes not only the sake brewing process but also addresses the problems of modern Japanese sake and its brewing, the real problems of the farmers involved in sake rice cultivation, the problem of agricultural chemicals, the lack of successors, and so on. There is also a bit of romance in the book, but most of the book is about sake brewing. At the end of each book, there is an essay from the author and a thank you note to the collaborators, and at the end of the book, there is an introduction to the actual sake brewery that has been interviewed. From these points, we claim that this working manga is reliable based on interviews.

As previously mentioned, the growth of the main characters is an important element in working manga. The main character, Natsuko, was born as the daughter of a sake brewer, and although she had basic knowledge of sake and an exceptional sake tasting ability, she had neither the knowledge of rice production nor brewing. “Natsuko’s Sake” can also be seen as a story of how Natsuko grows through various experiences, and she decides to become the successor of a sake brewery.



Figure 1. Cover of Volume 1 of “Natsuko’s Sake.”

The work involved in sake brewing makes it essential for learners to participate deeply in a community of practice, and in the local community, of the sake brewery as a broader group. Even Natsuko, the daughter of a sake brewer, is also required to do so because she has been working for an advertising agency. However, it is evident that participation is impeded at various times. Considering such descriptions, it is possible to sort out the issues necessary for participation in the community of practice in reverse.

4.2 Legitimacy of participation in sake brewing

Lave and Wenger (1991) point out that participation does not proceed smoothly through this concept of legitimacy, but in Natsuko's *Sake*, it is implied that Natsuko needs to secure three types of legitimacy: legitimacy of participation in the sake brewing process, legitimacy as the successor of the sake brewery, and legitimacy of participation in the local community.

Natsuko was originally employed at an advertising agency in Tokyo. Although she had a passion for sake, she had left her closed-off hometown because there was a successor at that time—her older brother. However, when he died suddenly, Natsuko decided to return home.

Eventually, Natsuko is assigned to work at her parents' brewery, *Saeki Shuzo*, but although she is the daughter of the president, she has no experience in sake brewing, and it is difficult for the artisans involved in the brewing process to initially accept her. However, for Natsuko to acquire practical sake brewing knowledge, it is important for her to secure legitimacy for her participation in the brewing process. A typical scene that illustrates this is when one of the artisans denounces women's entry into the sake brewing process as a nuisance.



Figure 2. Natsuko rejected by craftsman (2-24,25)*

Natsuko is shocked when a sake brewer tells her that women are not allowed to enter the sake brewing site due to traditional customs.

Although there is not a strong sense of discrimination on the artisans, this scene can be read as Natsuko's lack of legitimacy to participate in the sake brewing process. Notwithstanding the influence of her brother's death, to gain experience in the field, she needs to be recognized as a member of the sake brewing team. In this case, the problem was solved by the toji (master brewer), who was the leader of the brewery and had been watching over Natsuko since she was a child. At the same time, she was able to reconcile with the artisans and improve her relationship with them. Thereafter, she is no longer a nuisance at the sake brewing site, and by the end of the story, she participates in the rice processing and important sake brewing activities. However, without the toji, it would have taken a long time for Natsuko to engage in the sake brewing work. This highlights the need for legitimacy in participation in a community of practice. Here, we see the problem of the old consciousness of women not being able to engage in the work of sake brewing, but as the toji explains

* In this study, this means that we quoted from *Natsuko's sake*, vol. 2, pp. 24-25. The same applies hereafter.

later, this is a problem that has been solved now. Instead, this scene points out the necessity of legitimacy in participating in the work of sake brewing by symbolically addressing gender. Conversely, this implies that the community of practice may reject the participation of those who have not gained legitimacy.

4.3 Legitimacy as a successor to the sake brewery

The second is her legitimacy as the successor of the sake brewery. As noted above, Natsuko is the daughter of the owner of her family's Saeki Sake Brewery, and with the death of her brother, she is in the position of a powerful heiress to the brewery by blood. However, as reported by Gersick et al. (1997) and Craig and Moore (2017), the legitimacy of succession in business is not entirely acquired through blood relations. In fact, the father of the current owner of the company reprimands Natsuko for her lack of knowledge about sake brewing, even though she is passionate about learning the process. In this scene, the father tells Natsuko that he will not allow the cultivation of Tatsunishiki, but at the same time, he questions her qualifications as a business owner. It shows that knowledge of the work is the source of legitimacy and that blood relations and strong feelings alone are not sufficient conditions for legitimacy.



Figure 3. Natsuko being reprimanded for her lack of knowledge (2-17,18).

Her father asks how much rice is needed to make a certain amount of sake, and when Natsuko cannot answer, he reprimands her, saying that she cannot make sake without knowledge of brewing, and refuses to allow her to make new sake.

However, although she persisted in cultivating Tatsunishiki, Natsuko was in no hurry to be recognized as the successor of the sake brewery. This was partly because her father, the current owner, was still active in the business, and also because she chose to learn more about sake brewing by participating in the brewery activities. Natsuko's involvement in the sake brewery was deepened through her participation in events related to the brewing process. Figure 4 also shows that Natsuko participates in a peripheral position in the group.

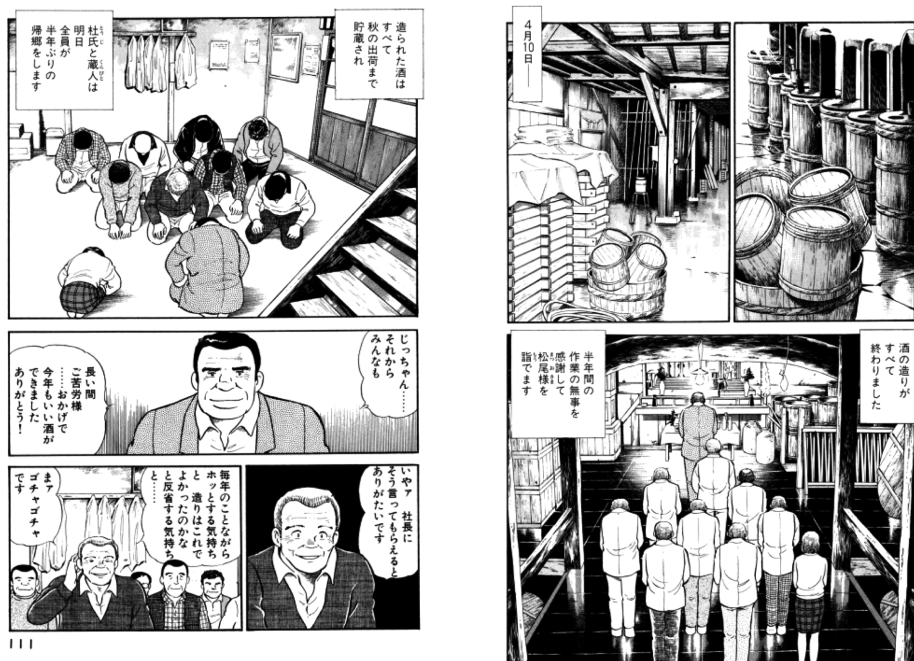


Figure 4. Natsuko participating in an annual event at a sake brewery (2-110, 111).

On the bottom of the right page, Natsuko is in the back row on the right, participating in an event to thank the gods for the completion of a sake brewing year.

Natsuko is at the bottom left of the top frame on the left page. She expresses her gratitude to the artisans who temporarily return to their hometowns after brewing sake.

While Natsuko uses her exceptional sake tasting skills to personally evaluate the quality of new sake, she only takes a peripheral role in the brewing of her family's main product. Although she has to deal with the problem of increasing the amount of Tatsunishiki cultivated, she leaves the actual sake brewing to the toji (master brewer) and the artisans, and focuses on learning the knowledge and skills of sake brewing by observing them. In a sense, Natsuko was able to take charge of a new project (cultivating Tatsunishiki) for a company with limited authority and no demand for short-term results, and she was able to participate in an ideal way to learn about sake brewing and build relationships with the artisans. The strategy of deliberately slowing down her participation in order to gain limited legitimacy as a successor has been successful.

4.4 Participation in the local community

The third is the legitimacy of her participation in the local community. As mentioned above, Natsuko is a so-called U-turn person who leaves her hometown, finds a job in Tokyo, and returns to her hometown. Although she was originally born and raised in her hometown, there were obstacles to reintegration back into the local community. Her friend, Saeko, is depicted as a symbol of this. She was originally a classmate of Natsuko, but she left her closed-off hometown and returned to her hometown after being hurt in the city. She used to work as a sales person at Natsuko's company, and in the early part of the story, she called Natsuko "Lady Natsuko" and treated Natsuko as a loser who failed to succeed in the city. Although no one other than Saeko reacts in such a negative way in the story, the scene of the alumni party indirectly suggests the negative sentiment of the locals toward U-turn personnel by depicting a scene wherein the local classmates who have moved to Tokyo envy Natsuko and simultaneously gossip about Saeko, who has returned to her hometown from the city.



Figure 5. Saeko in conflict with Natsuko (2-70,71).

When Natsuko came to invite her to the alumni party, Saeko pointed that Natsuko left her hometown because it was too closed off, and that there was no need for her to meet local people. Natsuko is now a local person, and when Saeko asks if she is too, Saeko rejects her, and says that one day she intends to move back to Tokyo.

For Natsuko to create her ideal sake, it is important for her to have legitimacy to return to the local community as well as legitimacy to access the sake brewing process. At this point, she does not have that legitimacy and is therefore unable to access the intellectual resources of the community. Natsuko and Saeko are then portrayed as being carried away by a closed region and closed farmers.

4.5 Promoting proficiency and participation through rice paddy cultivation for sake rice

When Natsuko returned to her hometown, she found herself in a triple state of “non-participation”: she was not allowed to participate in the sake brewing process at the company, the cultivation of “Tatsunishiki” was not recognized as a legitimate business of the company, and she was treated as an outsider in her hometown. In these situations, Natsuko

began to grow sake rice with passion, but it was an episode of making rice paddies for sake rice that gave her the opportunity to break through the state of non-participation. Natsuko managed to grow enough seedlings for planting and was able to rent out a wasteland owned by Saeko's father to grow rice seeds for sake. She tries to turn the wasteland into a rice field with only a single hoe. Although it is not a very large area, she struggles with the limitations of one person's labor. In the film, Natsuko is portrayed as stubbornly trying to accomplish the task on her own, which implies that both the company and the community have not yet participated as practitioners of sake brewing and its preliminary step of sake rice cultivation, and that they do not have access to local resources.



Figure 6. Natsuko insists on raising rice fields by herself (2-188,189).

Natsuko insists on raising the rice fields on her own, and her father suggests that she uses manpower and farm equipment, but she refuses.

In the end, this problem was quickly solved with the help of a local friend with a tractor, but for Natsuko, it was an event that made her keenly aware of the limitations of growing sake rice on her own, which later led to the establishment of a cultivation group.

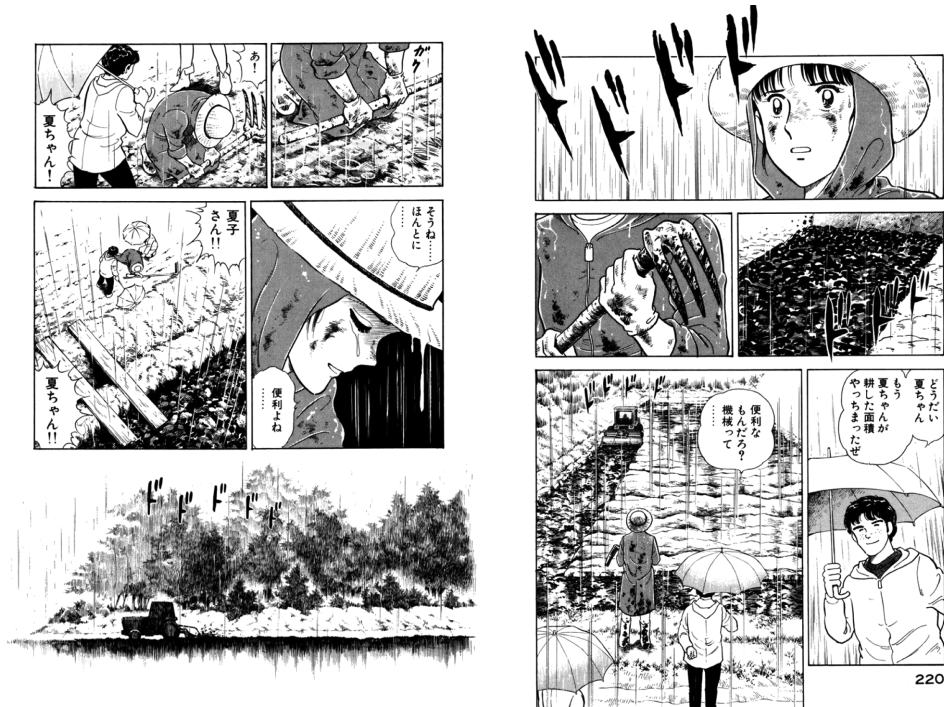


Figure 7. A tractor can be used to prepare rice fields in no time (2-220,221).

The tractor quickly plowed the rice field that Natsuko had spent much time plowing. Natsuko witnesses this, and runs out of energy.

Similarly, it leads the company to recognize that the cultivation of “Tatsunishiki” is a project that they need to be involved in at the company level. Natsuko’s father admonishes her, “You can’t grow rice by yourself,” which encourages her to think about enlisting the help of others. This inspires her to contemplate asking for help from others, and at the same time, it is an opportunity to gain support and interest from the local community. The friend who lends her the tractor shows the power of the local farmers and recognizes Natsuko as a sake rice producer. After this event, people from the company and local friends, who had been watching from afar, began to help Natsuko to grow sake rice. The scene where Natsuko is surrounded by applause when the rice is harvested for the “Tatsunishiki” seed rice is a symbol of this. Natsuko then realizes the limits of her self-reliance and begins to think about the future and how to involve others in her activities.



Figure 8. Company and community members praising Natsuko for the harvesting of “Tatsunishiki” for seed rice (4-182,183).

The local people applaud Natsuko for her success in harvesting rice for seeds with the help of locals. Natsuko thanks all the people who helped her and watch over her.

From the perspective of the community of practice, this episode suggests the importance of ensuring legitimacy and implies that if she prevents participation, she would face certain consequences that can be very costly. The fact that Natsuko was able to secure a rice field, start the rice cultivation process, and reap the first harvest, in contrast to the consequences of her insistence on starting the rice on her own, showed the importance of securing legitimacy and thus access to local resources.

4.6 Establishment of the “Tatsunishiki Cultivation Association” as a community of practice

Upon realizing the limitations of growing “Tatsunishiki” on her own, Natsuko decided to organize farmers who would help her grow the rice and tried to establish a “Tatsunishiki Growers’ Association.” This is shown to be difficult for one person considering the yield of sake rice needed for brewing, but it also shows Natsuko’s desire to organize with the help of the local people. She wants to increase the number of people who are willing to help her to

grow sake rice, not just contract farmers, and this is a community of practice within the region to learn how to grow sake rice.



Figure 9. Concept of “Tatsunishiki Cultivation Association” (3-28, 29).

Natsuko confides in her friend, Jinkichi, about her idea of organizing a “Tatsunishiki Cultivators’ Association” for farmers to grow sake rice, but Jinkichi replies that it would be difficult.

There are two major obstacles to overcome in the cultivation of Tatsunishiki: the first is the practice of organic farming without the use of pesticides, and the second is the cessation of aerial spraying of pesticides by the government. Organic farming is a technical issue, and the cessation of aerial spraying is a political issue that affects the entire community. Neither is a problem that can be solved only by Natsuko. Through the creation of a cultivators’ group, Natsuko is able to organize several people, such as Miyagawa, a rice farmer who has been teaching her how to grow rice from the beginning; Gouda, an organic cultivator; Jinkichi, a friend and rice farmer; and Hirooka, the head of the local agricultural cooperative, as members of the cultivators’ group. The conceptualization of a community of practice called a “cultivators’ group” is an important element that leads to the success of Tatsunishiki cultivation, and the process of involving these people one by one is depicted along with the difficulties they face.

4.7 Development of the “Tatsunishiki Cultivation Association” as a community of practice

As mentioned above, the establishment of the “Tatsunishiki Cultivation Association” became an essential community of practice for Natsuko’s learning, and a key element in enabling the cultivation of Tatsunishiki and, ultimately, the transformation of the local community. This is symbolized in the episode describing the decision-making process to stop the aerial spraying of pesticides in a village.

Natsuko, who intended to grow Tatsunishiki using organic, pesticide-free farming methods, experienced the customary aerial spraying of pesticides by airplanes during the seed cultivation period. However, as the cultivation area was small at that time, she was able to avoid this by covering the rice fields with plastic sheets. Nonetheless, children in the area were affected by the pesticide sprays and had to be taken to the hospital, and some of the people in the area joined a “cultivators’ group” and agreed to grow Tatsunishiki organically. Natsuko tried to stop the aerial spraying itself, but her efforts were difficult due to the interests surrounding pesticide spraying and the manipulation of the majority in favor of pesticide spraying. In response to Natsuko’s desire to grow safe rice, the executive of the agricultural cooperative confronts her with the current situation of aging farmers.



Figure 10. Aging farmers and the dilemma of pesticide spraying (4-7,8).

Natsuko criticizes the breeding of short rice that it is unsafe, but an official of the agricultural cooperative says that tall rice cannot be harvested by machine if it falls over during a typhoon, and must be harvested entirely by hand, and asks her whether she could enforce such a decision on aging farmers. Natsuko is informed that the use of pesticides and their aerial spraying is also a result of such a situation.

At the general meeting of the local association, the members of the cultivation society propose to stop the aerial spraying, but it becomes a political matter as the town office and the agricultural cooperative come to persuade them after meeting. The cultivation of Tatsunishiki is no longer Natsuko's personal dream, but has become a political issue for the community, thereby preventing the expansion of the cultivation group and the participation of local residents in other communities. Her father admonishes her against getting involved, saying that the cultivation of Tatsunishiki is a matter for the farmers and their decisions, but Natsuko, who is strongly committed to pesticide-free cultivation, struggles with the members of the growers' group to bring the community together.

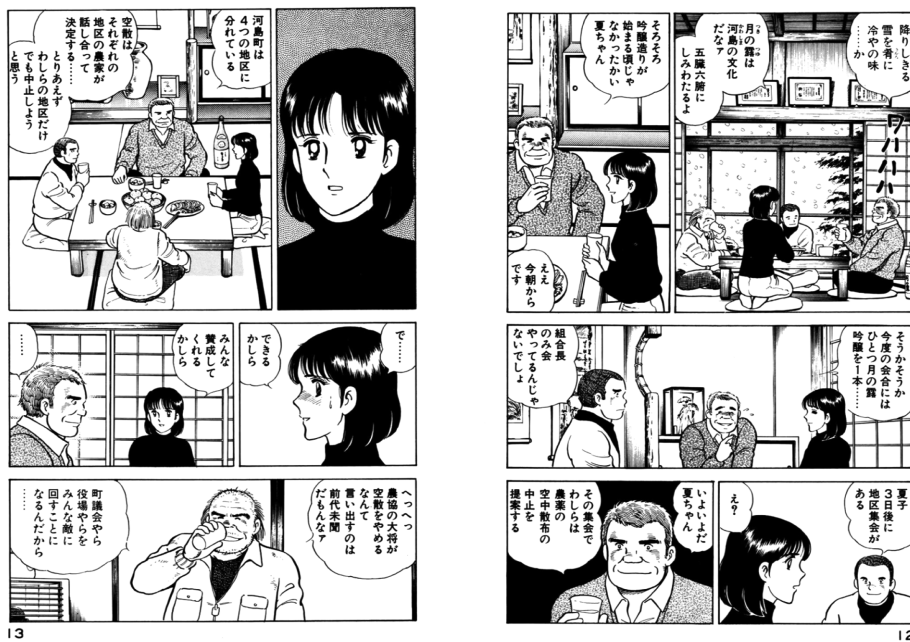


Figure 11. Before the district meeting to persuade the district (6-12, 13).

Before the district meeting, Natsuko is worried about whether the farmers will participate in organic farming, partly due to the persuasive efforts of the pro-pesticide group.

At the district meeting, those in favor of pesticides pressured them, asking if they wanted everyone to experience the hardships of spraying by hand. Natsuko countered with the argument of “the joy of growing rice,” and the union president persuaded some of the members to agree, but some farmers could not achieve the no-pesticide goal. To overcome this situation, the union president proposed an idea to the farmers, with financial incentives by setting a higher price for organic rice. This suggestion worked, and many of the farmers cooperated with the organic farming method to seek financial compensation. Even the officials of the local government and agricultural cooperatives, who had been opposed to the idea, began to cooperate vis-à-vis the incentives, and the district assembly ended up being in favor of pesticide-free farming.



Figure 12. Presentation of financial incentives for organic farming (6-206, 207).

The head of the cooperative offers selling prices and persuades the farmers with added value.

Although she has achieved her initial goal, Natsuko feels that she is a “no winner” because of her original idea of “the joy of growing rice.” However, Yoshida, a member of

the Growers' Association, complained about the current situation of impoverished rice farmers, and rejected her overly idealistic thinking.



Figure 13. Natsuko's idealistic thinking is rejected (6-214, 215).

Natsuko's leadership is questioned by Yoshida, one of the members of the cultivation group, who asks her what is wrong with farmers, who are always in a difficult economic situation, choosing to use pesticides from the perspective of efficiency and selecting rice varieties based on financial incentives.

After this scene, the role of the cultivators' group as a community of practice that promotes Natsuko's learning changes. The cultivation of Tatsunishiki and the management of the cultivators' group became more autonomous among farmers, and Natsuko's influence and participation decreased. Consequently, Natsuko's focus shifts from rice cultivation to sake brewing. The sake brewers, especially her family's Saeki Sake Brewery, take on the role of supporting Natsuko's development, and we rarely see Natsuko's involvement in rice cultivation in the film. Natsuko's involvement in rice cultivation is rarely observed in the film. The cultivators' group becomes an autonomous organization of local farmers.

This implies that participation in a community of practice is not a linear and irreversible

progression toward full participation. Thus, Natsuko faded out of the cultivation group she had begun to organize herself. Although the cultivation of Tatsunishiki itself will continue, and her dream of sake brewing is not affected, at this point, it is possible that the cultivation of Tatsunishiki is interrupted by this event. Participation in a community of practice is developed mutually, and it is determined not only by the practices and thoughts of the learner but also by the other members and communities that surround them.

5. Discussion

We have discussed the issue of how to achieve participation in a community of practice based on the case of working manga. Particularly in culinary manga, it is essential for learners (protagonists) to participate in the community of practice in which they possess their skills. However, in “Natsuko’s Sake,” Natsuko is confronted with factors that hinder her participation, and she ultimately distances herself from the community of practice that she is the central organizer of. Not only in research on communities of practice but also in other case studies, it is inevitable to focus on successful cases, and it is difficult to investigate and present failed cases because of the many obstacles. In this sense, it is meaningful to treat and discuss working manga as one of the cases (Matsumoto, 2018; 2021).

In “Natsuko’s Sake,” the protagonist, Natsuko, is expected to participate in her family’s sake brewery, the local community, and the community of practice, the cultivation group that she has organized. As a U-turn, Natsuko was not initially accepted as a successor by the brewery nor was she allowed to engage in the sake brewing business. Natsuko, who left her hometown once, was not initially recognized by the brewery as a successor and was not allowed to be involved in the sake brewing business; thus, she was forced to participate in the brewery’s annual events from the most peripheral level. Her participation in the local community is also hampered by the closed nature of the community, as symbolized by Saeko’s reluctance to return, and Natsuko’s own determination, thereby forcing her to cultivate the rice on her own. As for the organization of the cultivators’ group, Natsuko steadily expands it by involving one person at a time, but local political issues impede, which eventually leads to the unintended fading out of the group. Regardless of her passion for making new sake, her status as a blood relative, and her talent for sake tasting, Natsuko struggles to grow rice and even brew new sake, but her hardships imply that participation in a community of practice has many factors that inhibit it.

Based on the discussion so far, we would like to present two implications regarding the acquisition of legitimacy of participation in communities of practice and the promotion of participation by overcoming impediments.

First, we discuss the “central involvement in peripheral practices.” In the framework of

legitimacy peripheral participation, it is important for learning to deepen participation in the practices there, but, conversely, there is more than one practice. In the same way that in a company, there are flashy and less flashy jobs, as well as mainstream jobs and sidelines in the organizational chart, the practices are diverse. At Natsuko's family's sake brewery, the main business is the brewing of sake as the primary product, and Natsuko struggles with many obstacles when she first sets out to join the brewery. However, Natsuko became the person in charge of the new project of cultivating "Tatsunishiki" and brewing new sake using it, and she was able to engage in the practice proactively and not rush to participate in the production of the main product from a peripheral standpoint, thus enabling both proactive participation and peripheral learning. We believe that an important way to determine the existence of diverse practices in a community of practice and making good choices is a roundabout approach to ensure legitimacy.

The second issue is the change of the coordinator of the community of practice. In research on communities of practice, there are many successful cases, and there are no cases where the degree of participation declines. This is one of the reasons why we employ working manga for management research. Natsuko was initially involved in the management of the community of practice and the cultivation society, and she aimed to expand it. Initially, Natsuko was proactively involved in the management of a community of practice called a cultivators' group and aimed to expand it. However, several complicated problems, such as political issues and local conditions, hampered expansion. The problem was solved by the head of the local cooperative, who brought the community together by offering financial incentives and the future potential of organic farming. Although Natsuko and the head of the cooperative had completely different directions, they both achieved their goals, and Natsuko faded away from the management of the cultivation group. She then shifted to participating in her family's sake brewery and became deeply involved in the practice of making new sake. From the theory of community of practice, this is a change of coordinator, and the difference in direction is overcome by this change. Consequently, the cultivation of Tatsunishiki returned on track. This implies that a change of the coordinator of a community of practice can be effective as a measure to revitalize a community of practice that has come to a standstill.

Third, we would like to mention "the effectiveness of manga as a case study." Even if it is difficult to investigate and present as an actual case, a manga story that is carefully researched and presented as a manga work can be analyzed as a story that reflects a certain reality and can win the sympathy of readers (Matsumoto, 2021). In addition to the positive aspects of sake brewing and the passion of the people involved, "Natsuko's Sake" also depicts the negative aspects of the closed nature of the countryside, problems related to agriculture, and social issues surrounding sake. The medium of manga makes it possible to

make a convincing case through pictures and words, while ensuring anonymity; in this case, it is possible to describe the negative aspects of the impediments to a community of practice. It is possible to describe the negative aspects of the impediments to the community of practice. If we consider that this has won the sympathy of the readers, it is considered to have a certain validity as an object of analysis.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we have used the working manga “Natsuko’s Sake” as a case study to examine the factors that hinder participation in a community of practice. The main character is not always able to easily participate in various communities of practice, and I believe that I have obtained some suggestions for solving this problem.

To discuss the factors that hinder the participation of the community of practice, I focused on the beginning and middle of the story. Sake brewing itself is carried out by a team led by the brewery’s toji, and Natsuko is the leader of the new sake brewing at the brewery, with the help of many people. Considering the sake brewery as a community of practice, Natsuko leads a large number of people, and as the coordinator of the community of practice in a broader sense, involving the local community and other sake breweries, she leads the new sake production to success after much hardship. This point will be addressed in a future study.

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