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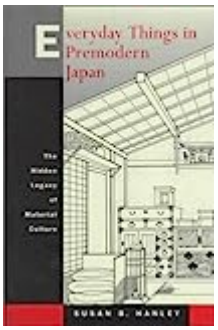

Susan B. Hanley. *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. xiv + 213 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20470-6.

Reviewed by Gail Honda (University of Chicago)

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What do the objects which surround us–the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the homes we live in–tell us about how well we are living? How are they indicative of our health and physical well-being? Can we gauge our progress as a society by observing and analyzing the material world around us?

Susan B. Hanley, in her latest book on Tokugawa (1600-1868) Japan, culls a dazzling array of material evidence to argue that the level of physical well-being of the Japanese rose throughout the Tokugawa period, and that life in Tokugawa Japan was healthful relative to that in industrialized Europe. This high level of physical well-being, which existed on the eve of Japan's industrial revolution (1868-1945), gave rise to a robust and literate labor force which enabled the Japanese to build a powerful industrial nation. Moreover, she argues, what we have come to know as everyday "traditional" Japanese material life, which was cultivated during the 250 years of the Tokugawa period, persisted through the middle of the twentieth century, and provided a foundation of stability which eased the often turbulent transition in government, the economy, and social structure.

With the discerning eye of a master novelist, and an equally engaging literary style, Hanley, Professor of Japanese Studies and History at the University of Washington, takes the reader on a tour of everyday life in Tokugawa Japan, all the while analyzing the objects of consideration and carefully piecing them together in her cogently honed argument. One can almost smell the rough-hewn walls and bare earthen floors of the early Tokugawa one-room commoner homes as she describes their cool, dark interiors and central gathering area for cooking and heating. By the end of the Tokugawa period, she writes, the typical commoner home had several rooms, raised foundations, wooden or tatami (rush mat) floors, and sliding paper doors which enabled the residents to open the interior to the sunshine and warm breezes of the outdoors. All of these changes, Hanley argues, led to a more healthful living environment which raised the level of physical well-being of the Japanese.

She defines the level of physical well-being as "the standard of living [defined as per capita income] plus 'quality factors' that can be positive or negative .... Examples of quality factors are the quality and level of nutrition, incidence of disease, level of general health, number of children per family, the percentage of dependent persons, the size and quality of housing, the kind of heat available, and the many other aspects of life that affect our physical well being" (pp. 10-11). Hanley then analyzes the quality factors by examining what she calls material culture, or "physical objects that people use or consume in their everyday lives, most of which are either

made or else natural objects put to specific use by people ... [She] concentrate[s] on what are considered the basics: food, clothing, and shelter, and concomitant aspects such as hygiene and sanitation. The artifacts of daily life reveal use of resources, the level of technology, how people cooked, what kind of houses they lived in, and levels of comfort, sanitation, and health–in short, how people lived" (p. 12).

Specifically, Hanley finds that Tokugawa Japan's material culture gave rise to many positive quality factors which elevated the the Japanese people's physical well-being to a level higher than the standard of living alone would indicate. To cite a few examples of quality factors from the many intriguing ones she presents: the daily 1900-calorie Tokugawa diet of grains, vegetables, and soybean products was probably not only adequate for the body stature of people at the time (army recruits had an average height of 5'4" in the late-nineteenth century), but was comparable to the late-nineteenth century English commoner diet of bread, porridge, biscuits, vegetables, milk, cheese, and lard. With regard to personal hygiene, Hanley points out that regular bathing was not an important part of Western culture until the nineteenth century, whereas in Japan accounts of public baths and references to bathing regulations indicate that bathing was a widespread custom by the eighteenth century. The Tokugawa water supply and sewage system were also quite healthful relative to systems in Europe because of the custom of collecting urine and night soil for fertilizer. Rather than allow human waste to collect in cesspools where excrement could seep into the subsoil, or to be flushed into rivers which fed into the drinking water supply, as was commonly done in the West, the Japanese assiduously collected, then bought and sold human waste and thereby avoided the problem of water supply contamination. As a result of many of these positive quality factors, life expectancy in Tokugawa Japan, Hanley demonstrates, was similar to that of nineteenth century Europe.

Thus, Hanley's book is a valuable contribution to the literature in economic history, Japanese history, and historical demography in four primary ways: first, it offers plausible reasons and solid evidence for Japan's success in industrializing beginning in the late nineteenth century; second, it stimulates cross-cultural comparisons by presenting evidence which can be reasonably compared across countries; third, it provides insight into and information on the everyday life of Japanese commoners during the Tokugawa period; and fourth, it discusses life expectancy, fertility control, and family structure, all important gauges of the level of physical well-being in Tokugawa Japan. Thoroughly researched and highly readable, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan* will not only be widely used as a reference book, but will surely be savored by many whose interest will be held from cover to cover.

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