

City Life in Japan : Life in a Tokyo Ward, by R.P. Dore

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There have been so many interesting and important books on Japan in recent years that it is difficult to select the ones to review in this journal. One of the best is "City Life in Japan," an intensive study

of a small area in Tokyo which the author designates by the fictitious name of "Shitayama Cho."

To accomplish his task, which was carried out between March and September 1951, the author, who is

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a British scholar of the University of London and is now a lecturer at the University of British Columbia in Canada, held a meeting with the officials of the local association and secured their agreement to assist him in his study. Following this he was introduced by one of the officials to the current head of each neighborhood group, who was asked to distribute to each of the households in his group a leaflet explaining the scope and purpose of the inquiry. At the same time a small towel was presented as a friendly gesture in initiating the study. Later he accompanied each of the university students on his staff on their first visit to each home.

In addition to information which the author was able to secure from the local food distribution office, (there was still rationing then) and interviews conducted at each household, one hundred suitable individuals over fifteen years of age were selected to give information on such questions as leisure time activities, education and bringing up of children, religious practices and attitudes, political attitudes and

employment.

Of a total of 325 households registered at the Food Office on February, 1951, three refused to cooperate and 25 could not be contacted because of removal or prolonged absences. Thus, the author received information from a total of 297 households. It is interesting to note that two of the three who refused to cooperate had no dealings with their neighbors and did not pay their dues to the local association. The third was a woman living with a mentally deficient brother, whose condition was too pitiful to warrant approaching her on the subjects being studied. In a fourth household the husband refused to cooperate because of resentment over postwar experiences in Malaya, but his wife was willing to answer questions in the absence of the husband.

The book is divided into five sections. Section I is a general Introduction. Section II discusses Standard of Living, including houses and apartments, family income and expenditure, health and security, progress and planning. Section III on the Family deals with the family

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system, the composition of the households, the concept of the "house," and husband-wife relationships. In Section IV on "The Wider World" such subjects are treated as political attitudes, education, leisure, neighbours and friends, and the ward. Section V concerns Religion and Morality, which includes main trends in religious development, the local and national community, family rites, the individual and the kami, present-day religious teachings, beliefs of the uncommitted and society and the individual. One section of the appendix discusses the forms and occasions of Buddhist altar worship, and one on "The Objects of Cults, Buddhism and Shinto, Kami and Hotoke."

The author has collected a great deal of data on the life of the city dweller and gives evidence of a very deep appreciation and understanding of Japanese life and contemporary attitudes. Moreover, he

has added a great deal to the knowledge of Western people about the Japanese people. Nevertheless, there are serious limitations in any attempt to understand the religious life of the people by the interview method which was employed. And although the book is objective and the approach is definitely an understanding one, it seems to this reviewer that it fails to make clear that the religious life in Japan is not to be understood so much in terms of belief in doctrines as in the observance of rites and practices and what may perhaps be best described as something of a mystical religious experience. Finally, no study made during the Occupation by a foreigner could possibly reveal typical conditions. The total situation was too abnormal for this.

In spite of these limitations, however, the author has made a definite contribution to our understanding of city life in Japan and placed the reader in debt to him. (WPW)