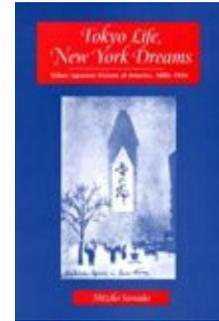


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mitziko Sawada. *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890-1924*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xvii + 268 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-07379-1.

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## A New York State of Mind

In this book Sawada looks at Japanese immigrants in America, and the life they led. She also tries to get inside their minds prior to their arrival in the U.S. Chapters Two and Three look at immigration itself—what backgrounds did the New York Japanese have? What were the immigration policies—particularly, how were the classifications of *imin* (“laborer”) and *hi-imin* (“non-laborer”) used as a means to gain prestige and friendship with the U.S. The later chapters, and the bulk of the book, look at the pre-emigration environment; Japan’s urban development and the rise of the middle-class, as symbolized by Tokyo (Chapter Four), the images of success which motivated these New York immigrants (Chapter Five), the literature and ideas of *tobei netsu*, or “coming to America fever” (Chapter Six), and even ideas about gender relations and the image of Japanese and American women (Chapter Seven). Sawada uses a variety of sources from passport regulations and government documents to interviews she conducted and novels of the period.

The second and third chapters alone justify Sawada’s study. Sawada uses tables compiled from registration figures from the Japanese Consulate in New York (appendix), to point out differences between immigrants in New York and their West Coast counterparts. New York immigrants came from urban areas, almost eighteen percent came from five major cities, most had middle school degrees and many spoke English, and most had more information about the U.S. than their West Coast counterparts—who tended to be laborers from rural areas. To some degree this was a result of Japanese restric-

tions on laborers due to American hostility. However restrictions on immigration were also part of an effort to present an image of world status by encouraging a better class of Japanese emigrant. Sawada notes that encouragement of educated Japanese to emigrate and denigration of the crude laborers that came before became part of the literature on emigration.

The New York immigrant’s lifestyle also differed. Sawada suggests that these immigrants faced less overt hostility than the West Coast immigrants and were more dispersed. Many Japanese lived near the Brooklyn Naval Yard but, Sawada points out, there was not a “Little Tokyo” in New York and there was less community support and fewer agencies for New York Japanese. There was also no evidence of organized recruitment as was evident on the west coast. Sawada’s study shows a different side to Japanese immigration.

The later sections of the book are more interesting to me. The chapter on *tobei netsu* showed me a set of literature I did not know about. Sawada quotes from many magazines, such as *Tobei Shinpo* and *Tobei Annai*, and books which were produced in the U.S. by Japanese and aimed at a young audience in Japan. This literature described a land where more opportunity existed than Japan. It also told little, Sawada notes, about difficult living conditions and discrimination. These publications also included material on passports, jobs, how to continue one’s education, etc. Sawada shows that New York immigrants had a good deal of information about the U.S.

which may have contributed to an abrupt clash with reality. This literature fueled aspirations to a middle-class lifestyle but most New York immigrants wound up being domestic laborers.

The chapters on success and women present interesting ideas but are not tied directly to immigrants nearly as well. Turn-of-the-century Japan was still awash with western ideas and new interpretations about success. The dismantling of status by birth led to an emphasis on education as a means to get ahead. Frustration had begun to set in as young people discovered that suitable jobs were not available. Early Meiji raised expectations, late Meiji and Taisho seemed to dash them. Sawada quotes from the magazines *Seiko* and *Amerika* but while she mentions journals such as *Kokumin no Tomo* in a footnote she does not quote from them. Sawada relies more on secondary works such as Earl Kinmonth's study of the self made man to present the main ideas about success (more than the section on *tobei netsu*). The debate about success is more varied than she presents. Since this is not a book about success *per se*, her basic discussion is acceptable and the main ideas from the period are presented but primary sources such as *Kokumin no Tomo*, *Chuo Koron*, and *Nihonjin* are available as are books such as *Shin Nihon no Seinen (Youth of the New Japan)* and I would have liked to have seen more from them. I applaud Sawada for including novels such as *Ukigumo* to bolster her discussion. I would also recommend Tokutomi Roka's *Footprints in the Snow* because it describes and passes some judgements on possible routes to success, Kunikida Doppo's *The Self Made Man- because the main character uses Smiles' Self Help\_* as a means to success, and Richard Torrance's work on Tokuda Shusei because it presents aspects of the rise of the middle class others neglect. I am sure some readers will have their own favorites to suggest.

I also find Sawada's chapter on women interesting. It is interesting that she suggests that Japanese men might see American women as candidates for a deep love relationship. Her examples however seem to show Japanese men giving in to Japanese standards and abandoning western women for arranged marriages to Japanese. I find the linkage to immigration (most immigrants are single males) rather weak.

Sawada's book tells us a good deal about immigrants in the U.S. but also about the Japan they came from. The connections are at times uneven and since Sawada is tackling complex and wide ranging issues, such as ideas on success, she cannot go into as much depth as some of us might like. This book can inspire exploration of Japan on many fronts, and her bibliography is a good place to start. It also makes me sad as it reminds me that works such as Kinmonth's study of success are out of print.

#### References:

Earl Kinmonth. *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought from Samurai to Salaryman*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

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