

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Gary Leupp, *Servants, Laborers, and Shophands in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 237 [264 pages, 36 tables, appendix, notes, index]. \$29.95.)

Kären Wigen

Volume 21, numéro 2, march 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016815ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016815ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Wigen, K. (1993). Compte rendu de [Gary Leupp, *Servants, Laborers, and Shophands in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 237 [264 pages, 36 tables, appendix, notes, index]. \$29.95.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 139–140. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016815ar>

minimum of fuss and cost against a powerless community.

Africville's residents were never properly compensated at the time of the evictions. Proper valuation of their land has been deliberately avoided to permit the administrative fiction that the actions of two decades ago can somehow be explained by the vagaries of the 1960s politics. This book is part of the continuing story of how former Africville residents are dealing with the impact of that decision on their lives. Whether or not further justice can be theirs remains to be seen, but Formac Press is to be congratulated for doing them justice in the production of this magnificent volume. Historians of Canadian urbanization and anyone interested in the consequences of development will read of their lives and their struggle with great profit.

DEL MUISE
Carleton University

Gary Leupp, *Servants, Laborers, and Shophands in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 237 [264 pages, 36 tables, appendix, notes, index]. \$29.95.)

At the turn of the seventeenth century, Japan experienced an urban construction boom believed to be unparalleled in world history. Following unification under the Tokugawa shogunate in 1600, hundreds of urban nuclei—ports, temple towns, post stations, and castle towns—were established or expanded, attracting warriors, merchants, artisans, and rural migrants by the thousands. By the eighteenth century, the shogun's capital of Edo (precursor to present-day Tokyo) had become the largest metropolis in the world, home to a million souls, and fully a sixth of the Japanese populace is estimated to have lived in towns of one sort or another.

In this lively monograph, Tufts University historian Gary Leupp brings to life the diverse population of laborers who inhabited these new urban centers. Urban workers were a varied lot; as suggested by the title, those discussed here include personal servants (employed both by samurai and elite commoners), shophands in mercantile establishments, and casual laborers. (Pedlars, skilled artisans, shopkeepers and others who were essentially self-employed are excluded from the book's purview, as are prostitutes, actors, and beggars.) Drawing on literature, drama, and polemical essays, as well as population surveys, criminal records, and a wide variety of household and business documents, Leupp paints a portrait of the Tokugawa "ur-proletariat" that is at once quantitatively comprehensive and anecdotally vivid.

According to his preface, Leupp originally entered the archives with an ambitious theoretical agenda: "to demonstrate that wage labor—and hence capitalist relations of production in the specific Marxian sense—had developed to a significant extent in Japanese cities during a period commonly described as 'feudal': (p. xi). Considerable evidence to substantiate such a claim may be found in the pages of *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers*, particularly in the first chapter. Here the author demonstrates convincingly that traditional means of mobilizing workers (through lifetime service and corvée) were simply inadequate for the tasks mandated by the new government—namely, building and servicing mansions for all the regional barons in Edo, and performing the myriad tasks associated with an ambitious program of urban construction. Since conscripting peasants for massive and long-term projects would have jeopardized the rice crop, and since a century of pervasive labor shortages rendered lifetime service impractical, the

feudal authorities were forced—against their better judgment—to permit the widespread use of short-term labor contracts. In the process, labor became "commodified", and proletarians became transformed into wage workers. As Leupp concludes, "the Japanese case is perhaps unique in that the feudal ruling class, in resolving its internal conflicts, played so great a role in generating revolutionary change" (p. 28).

Yet having made this case at the outset, Leupp essentially drops it for the remainder of the book. No single argument ties together the rich material brought together in the succeeding chapters; indeed, the author deliberately eschews any overarching theoretical position. (Significantly, his introduction is a mere four pages, and the book has no conclusion save a suggestive three-paragraph afterword.) Instead, he contents himself with the more modest task of "describ[ing] how human relations were radically affected by the tremendous expansion of the money economy during the Tokugawa period" (p. xii).

In this, the book is a resounding success. Three of the remaining five chapters deal specifically with servants. The first gives a careful accounting of servant types and functions, differentiated by gender, employer, and rank. A wide-ranging discussion of master-servant relations follows, yielding revealing passages on sexual liaisons (and abuses) as well as information on wages and other compensation. The section on servants concludes with an analysis of their place in society, interrogating their image in popular literature and drama, their relations with other classes, and their social mobility. The final two chapters of the book, by contrast, are devoted to the rougher world of casual laborers (most of whom were employed in the construction and transport trades), and conclude with an overview of government

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

strategies for their control (notably including a punitive workhouse system).

The sheer wealth of material that Leupp has unearthed makes *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers* an invaluable addition to the slim English-language

literature on early modern Japanese city life. While it would have benefitted from the inclusion of illustrations, the book is marvelously rich in quantitative data as well as fluidly written and comprehensively indexed. For those whose interests in Japan are primarily comparative, the fre-

quent and judicious references to European developments should be particularly useful.

KÄREN WIGEN
Department Of History
Duke University

Notes and Comments / Notes et Commentaires

Request for Help in Locating a Manuscript

Mary Stokes is preparing a dissertation on the history of municipal corporations in Ontario between 1850 and 1880. In the course of her research, she has discovered the existence of a manuscript by T.T.M. Ferris, "The Growth and Financing of Municipal Institutions in Ontario, 1850–1900." Regrettably, the author lent his only copy some time ago. If anyone knows the location of this manuscript, would they please contact Mary Stokes at 18 Ferndale Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M4T 2B3 or 416-927-7929 (home) or 416-925-5344.