



# Everyday Life in Traditional Japan

*Charles J. Dunn , Laurence Broderick*

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**Everyday Life in Traditional Japan** Charles J. Dunn , Laurence Broderick

*Everyday Life in Traditional Japan* paints a vivid portrait of Tokugawa Japan, a time when contact with the outside world was deliberately avoided and the daily life of the different classes consolidated the traditions that shaped modern Japan. Authentic samurai, farmers, craftsmen, merchants, courtiers, priests, entertainers and outcasts come to life in this magnificently illustrated portrait of a colorful society.

## Everyday Life in Traditional Japan Details

Date : Published December 15th 1989 by Tuttle Publishing (first published January 1st 1969)

ISBN : 9780804813846

Author : Charles J. Dunn , Laurence Broderick

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, Japan, Nonfiction, Asian Literature, Japanese Literature, Historical

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# From Reader Review *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan* for online ebook

## J.B. Shearman says

The book is informative but its a subject I'm not terribly interested in which made it a pretty boring read.

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## Stef says

The "traditional" Japan of the title is the era of the shoguns, and Dunn describes the living conditions and daily life of people in a variety of roles, from samurai to monks to merchants to farmers.

I watch a lot of Japanese historical movies, and I had picked up a lot of what this book discusses, but it's nice to have some extra detail and context.

There are illustrations. In this edition, the illustrations are pretty small and it's hard to see detail, but I have seen a larger format edition of this book, which might have better illustrations. The illustrations were created by someone with a European-sounding name and rendered in a "Japanese" style. Some aspects of the illustrations depict stereotypes and thus might feel offensive to some.

This book was written in the 1960s and is aimed at an audience of Westerners who don't know much about Japan. Some of the attitudes are outdated.

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## Phillip McCollum says

For an overall view of Tokugawa-era Japan, *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan* is a great start. The book packs quite a bit of information in its 182 pages. The chapters are broken out by social strata, beginning with the revered *samurai* down to the lowly *hinin* (untouchables). Numerous illustrations are included with the text, proving very helpful when trying to visualize day-to-day life during this time period.

To expand and fill in the knowledge gaps, Dunn provides a "Notes on Further Reading" section at the end.

I'd recommend this book to anyone looking for a cursory overview of the period as well as a starting point for deeper research.

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## Adam says

what i learned from this book what i learned was that feudal japan was an interesting place w/ strict caste system in place that was defeat-able i learned that in the winter time the japanese enjoy snowballing whatever that means i learned that the merchants tho considered bottom of the caste barrel indeed rose to enormous heights by way of makin' hella skril i hope i've used this slang correctly all in all the book was

superficially informative but difficult to read in that the author constantly wandered mid paragraph then would take up that subject for a paragraph or two then suddenly pick up where he'd left off at first i was distraught then i found out he's british so i cut him some slack

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## Djaz says

Dunn uses an odd mixture of Japanese and English terms. I think the book would be a bit better, and certainly more uniform, had he used only the Japanese terms. A glossary would have alleviated any issues with comprehension.

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## Michael says

An exploration of the ways of life of the classes of traditional (Edo period) Japan: the nobility, the warriors, the farmers, artisans, merchants and outcasts.

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## Bernie Gourley says

This interesting little book is invaluable for anyone researching what life was like for people in Japan before the Meiji Restoration. While it's an essential volume for a writer of historical fiction, those interested in Japan more generally will find it readable and packed with interesting tidbits of information. For example, I would recommend it for those who study traditional Japanese martial arts (i.e. *kobud*?) to get a better insight into the art they study through knowing the society from which it sprang.

This type of work is relatively rare, but is a writer's dream come true. It's not a history book, but--as the title implies--tells one how people of various classes and occupations lived day in and day out. That is, it's approach is more anthropological than historical.

The range of occupations in Japan's pre-modern period were far fewer than in society as we know it, and so the book takes broad job classes as its primary unit of organization. It begins with the group that undoubtedly draws the most interest, the *samurai*. It proceeds to the occupation which is most numerous in any pre-modern society, the farmers. Beyond that, it covers the lives of skilled craftsmen, merchants, courtiers, priests, doctors, intellectuals, actors and outcasts. The concluding chapter looks specifically at life in the city, and--in particular--life in *Edo*. *Edo* is the city that would become known as Tokyo?, and which became the capital of the Shogunate in 1603 and eventually the nation's capital.

Japan's relative isolation throughout its early history has made for many intriguing national peculiarities. It's true that Japan's literary, religious, and philosophical systems were greatly influenced by China, but--in all cases--these cultural elements were forged into a uniquely Japanese form. This uniqueness provides many "ah-ha" moments while reading.

One learns why warriors were required to wear extra long *hakama* (a very billowy form of pleated pants that look like a long skirt--though having individual pant legs.) One learns about how one got around on the early highway system in a time when infrastructure (e.g. bridges) were minimal, and who was allowed to use the roads--such as the famous *Tokaido* road. The book tells of how police went about arresting armed *samurai*.

The roles played by women in society are discussed. While this was obviously a patriarchal society, women weren't locked entirely outside the domain of power.

This was a feudal society with the *samurai* owning the land and the farmers toiling in hopes of having a little left over to support their families. While farmers made silk, they were, by law, not allowed to wear it. Farmers sometimes resorted to selling daughters to brothels to make ends meet.

There were many types of craftsmen from *saké* brewers to carpenters to makers of lacquer-ware. Japan has a long history of appreciation for master craftsmanship as is most apparent in sword-making. The Japanese sword was the cutting weapon perfected. Its folded steel design offered a flexible spine with a hard edge that could be honed to razor sharpness.

Merchants were a class that was both looked down upon and increasingly powerful during this period. *Samurai* were often barely making a living then, but merchants were beginning to flourish. Japan's first indigenous money wasn't introduced until 1636. Prior to that Chinese coins were used, much in the same way that some present-day countries use US dollars for currency--thus avoiding inflation that would be inevitable if they had their own currency and governance. There is an extensive discussion of the early sea trade.

Some of the most interesting careers were those more peripheral. Doctors practiced something akin to Traditional Chinese Medicine. There were wandering street performers and holy men of a wide variety.

I'd recommend this book for anyone interested in Japan's history, and would call it indispensable for a writer addressing pre-Meiji Restoration Japan.

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### **Charlie says**

An easy-to-read dive into the lifestyles of the pre-twentieth century Japanese (mainly Tokugawa-era), split into very digestible chapters that tackle each social level individually, from samurai to farmers to merchants to outcasts etc., with a bonus chapter on everyday life in Edo. A good read for anyone interested in social history and Japan, and it's full of wonderful illustrations, too.

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### **Epoch Wolf says**

It's a very broad book. It paints a picture of life in Edo-period Japan. There's a lot of little details but it doesn't go into great depths on any one topic, but the last page mentions the primary sources for the book as suggestions for what to read next.

It reads like a well written text book. It's well edited but it probably could have used another pass. There's a few words used incorrectly but no typos or really bad grammar issues like you'll find in a lot of textbooks. Definitely a quality book.

If you find sociology fascinating, you should love this book. Wikipedia doesn't really give you the full picture. There's so many little things that make Edo-period Japan fun to read about.

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### **Meaghan says**

This book certainly packs a lot of facts between its covers and would probably be good as a textbook for a class on Japanese history. There are also a lot of useful and detailed illustrations. That said, I thought the writing was very dry and though the book was quite short, less than 200 pages including illustrations, I struggled to finish it. I think I would only recommend it to Japanese history buffs or students of the subject.

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### **Jose says**

A classic. Well written account of historical Japan. Highly recommended to read before you travel to Japan. It's easily read and will quickly bring you much cultural background and perspective needed for your visit.

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### **Marci says**

I had this lying around the house. It relates to some of the tea books I've been reading as this is the time period (Tokugawa) when the way of tea was being refined. I picked it up, and it is pretty informative.

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### **Norain says**

An interesting read, almost like a storybook. It described the different layers of classes in Japan during the Tokugawa era (the last of the Shoguns before the power was replaced to the Emperors) and how they conducted their lives. It was written in 1960s so some of the attitude might not be suitable but it was nonetheless a very good historical and cultural reference. The Tokugawa period, after all, left plenty of traditions even today.

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### **Jeremy Land says**

This is a great book about the lives of the various social classes during the Edo period of Tokyo. The writer's penchant for actors and Japanese theatre take over at times, but it is generally an excellent look at an important time for Japanese history.

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### **Jasper says**

The book fails to refer to historic events that (should) serve as the context of the descriptions of everyday life. Also, references to present day life in Japan would be useful for things that are still more or less the

same as they were in traditional Japan.

Nevertheless, if you are interested to know more about everyday life in traditional Japan, including things such as "what did a typical day look like?" "What did houses and cities look like?", then this is a useful book.

In other words: **not a great read, but delivers what the title promises.**

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