

SMITH, ROBERT J. and ELLA LURY, WISWELL. *The Women of Suye Mura*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. Xxxvii+293 pages. Photographs, illustrations, glossary, and index. Paper, US\$7.50, ISBN 0-226-76345-5; cloth US\$20.00, ISBN 0-226-76344-1.

This book is the result of collaboration between Ella Lury Wiswell and Robert J. Smith, the author of *Kurusu: The Price of Progress in a Japanese Village* and *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan*. It is based on Wiswell's personal daily journal which she kept during the fieldwork that she and her late husband, John Embree, did in Suye Mura in 1935-1936. Smith edited the journal for publication and added the "Preface." Wiswell wrote a new "Prologue: Suye Mura in Retrospect."

The result is a unique monograph on Japanese women and makes an engaging complement to John Embree's now classical structural analysis *Suye Mura*. It is unique in several ways.

First, it is a valuable account of a Japanese village of some forty-five years ago. Second, it is an intimate record of the life of village women by an American woman who lived among them continuously for over a year and who, having spent much of her childhood in Japan, could communicate with them in Japanese (John Embree used an interpreter). Third, Wiswell was not an anthropologist and was thus unencumbered by then prevalent anthropological frames of interpretation. Although one at times wonders why a particular episode is included and does wish for a general interpretation of the data, the immediacy of the description is appreciated. Perhaps only such a young, married, foreign woman, fluent in Japanese, could have elicited thoughts and feelings on such intimate subjects as sex, adultery, and witchcraft, as well as on more respectable topics, such as marriage, disease, and intra-familial relationships.

This book will interest those who are concerned with the Japanese woman or social change in Japan. Japanese society has undergone radical change during the intervening forty-five years. Those familiar only with present day villages, with their non-farmer or part-time farmer residents who have replaced walking with shiny cars and live in modern houses with all the new appliances, will have difficulty in recognizing the village depicted in this book. Less than fifty years ago most people of Suye lived in rat-infested, small houses with no running water, gas, or indoor toilet facilities. Venereal disease and tuberculosis were quite common. Hygienic, medical, and working conditions were so poor that the average life expectancy was less than fifty years (compared to eighty for modern Japanese women). Children, many of whom were illegitimate, were numerous, whereas an average couple today has only two. Young children were indulged, as they are today, but in Suye of those days young girls might have been sold into prostitution by their "selfish" fathers. Education, particularly for girls, was considered a luxury, so that most women over fifty were said to be functionally illiterate (today illiteracy has been virtually eliminated). Both men and women did not consider it morally wrong for a man to visit a *geisha* house in town. There were few machines to help the farmers in their arduous, time-consuming tasks. The only pleasure allowed to the women of Suye seems to have been the frequent parties where people drank to excess and exchanged risqué jokes.

In sum, a woman's life in the Suye of those days was not enviable. Actually, had this book been published in Japanese, it would probably have upset some image-conscious Japanese who would consider the conditions reported in Suye to be abhorring and shameful. Most Japanese would readily recognize the distance modern living

conditions have come, for change has been dramatic, if somewhat superficial. Yet there is an unmistakable continuity between the Japanese village of forty-five years ago and Japanese society of today. The division of labor between the sexes has not changed. The permissive attitude toward children and the child-centered family (sleeping arrangement, use of baby-talk, discipline, etc.) are the same. The basic notions of male and female are identical. The role of a Japanese woman is still largely that of a housewife (*shufu*, rather than wife) and mother. All this makes one wonder if the lot of today's Japanese women is really so much better and happier than that of the hard-working, but hearty, grandmothers of Suye. With the functions once assigned to the family being taken over by society one by one and with the woman's role remaining restricted to the domestic domain as before, today's women seem to be even more frustrated. Although no one would prefer the crude, harsh life of forty-five years ago, *The Women of Suye Mura* provides us with plenty of food for thought on the meaning of progress, continuity, man and woman, and happiness.

## REFERENCES CITED:

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## KOREA

LEE DUHYUN 李杜鉉. *Han'guk minsokhak non'go* 韓國民俗學論考 [*Essays on Korean Folklore*]. Seoul: Hagyönsa, 1984. 569 pages. Photographs. 8,000 wön. (In Korean)

This book is a collection of articles written by one of Korea's senior folklorists. Professor of Korean Literature at Seoul National University, Lee Duhyun is also a member of the Korean National Academy, which awarded him its Academic Prize in 1985 for this collection of essays. His major interest is Korean folk drama, a topic on which he has already authored several books; but the scope of his folkloristic efforts include research into a broad range of topics as well as attention to the preservation and public presentation of Korean traditions. It is these other concerns, rather than Korean folk drama, to which the present work is devoted.

*Han'guk minsokhak non'go* is divided into three parts. The first of these is an Introduction which briefly surveys the history of Korean folklore scholarship. Professor Lee divides this history into six stages, the first of which he terms the "Beginning Period" and dates to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that Korean folklore scholarship can be traced back to that early date because the writings of the Practical Learning School, a group of Korean literati which flourished during that era, often included descriptions of folkloric material. His second, or "Forma-