

KÄREN WIGEN. *The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750-1920*. University of California Press, 1995.

THE INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY, especially cultural geography, can be seen in theoretical approaches used in many recent works within the discipline of history. But geographical methodology, often viewed as technically cartographic by non-geographers, has been largely overlooked as a way to do history. Kären Wigen, a geographer who teaches in the department of history at Duke University, reminds historians and geographers alike that historical processes have spatial dimensions, and that environments and regions are subject to construction and reconstruction on the basis of changing social, political, and economic factors. Wigen examines one region of Japan and its transformation from a semiautarkic agricultural area, marked by a variety of thriving proto-industries, into an economically dependent periphery within the new configuration of Japan as nation-state and empire. The unit of the "functional (or nodal) region" used in her study consists of "a contiguous area united by a complementarity of economic and political resources, and integrated through the routine interactions among its constituent parts." (p. 16) She argues convincingly that such a regional study incorporating both synchronic and diachronic analyses can significantly modify historical assumptions made upon the basis of more generalized or national studies. Where past scholarship has generalized the nature of economic and political development over time for the whole country, Wigen explores the contingent relationships among regions and their different patterns of development to offer a more complex vision of trends that, taken as a whole, constitute the formation of Japan as a modern nation.

Wigen's study focuses on the area of central Japan called Shimoina, the southern portion of what during the Tokugawa Period (1600-1868) was known as Shinano Province, or present-day Nagano Prefecture. Her central argument is that between 1750 and 1920, Shimoina underwent a series of political, technological, and social revolutions that led to an "inversion" of the economic and social landscape of the area. Where Shimoina had once been a fairly autonomous, self-sufficient economic region, by the turn of the twentieth century it had become a periphery within the new configuration of power whose center lay in Tokyo. Key to this transformation was the development of a local economy based on silk production, where previously a more diversified system combining the small-scale production of luxury goods and an efficient transport network had prevailed. Shimoina's location south of one of Japan's two major highways, the Nakasendō, shaped the process of its proto-industrialization, defined

by Wigen as “the widespread development of rural outwork to produce commodities for distant markets.” (p. 8) The Ina Road which wended through southern Shinano province connected the Tōkaidō and the Nakasendō—the two major highways leading to the capital—and constituted a major packhorse route that did not suffer the same regulation, monitoring, and taxation as the national turnpikes. Wigen emphasizes that political and legal maneuvering were central to the construction of the Ina Road as a major route for the transport and distribution of goods. The laquerware, textile and paper “proto-industries” that developed in Shimoina grew out of a complex variety of environmental, demographic, and economic factors, all facilitated by this accessible and affordable transport system that connected the region to the growing markets beyond its boundaries.

The economic and political events attending the Meiji Restoration of 1868 changed this delicate balance and “peripheralized” what had once been a fairly autonomous economic zone unhampered by heavy-handed directives from the state. Wigen defines “peripheralization” as “incorporat[ion] into larger political and economic circuits in ways that undermined both local autonomy and local accumulation” (p. 13), and suggests that Shimoina was but one region in which this process was taking place. With its “forced entry into the global economy” in the mid-1850s, Japan became part of the worldwide development of capitalism. The opening of Japanese ports to foreign trade and the drastic political reconfigurations that ensued led to the rapid industrialization of the local economy. Shimoina’s transformation centered on silk production, which had grown as a proto-industry alongside papermaking throughout the early nineteenth century. These developments positioned Shimoina to enter the global silk market just as European producers experienced a blight on their silk crops which led to an increased demand for foreign exports of Japanese silk. The resulting intensification of silk production in Shimoina affected the social, economic, and political dynamics of the region. The sudden need for a larger low-cost wage labor force increased the in-migration of young women and girls from the surrounding countryside who worked for only half the wages of men. While Wigen emphasizes the importance of female labor to Shimoina’s silk industry and the economic transformation of the region, she does not analyze the changing roles of female labor with regard to the exigencies of the family economy that created an environment where the market value of women’s and girls’ labor compared so unfavorably to the value of men’s labor. Later, however, she does link the lack of labor activity after the turn of the century to the 1900 Peace Police Law which prohibited women from participating in all political activities. This interpretation contrasts with the preponderance of Japanese pre-

war labor literature which attributes labor quiescence in this period to the “docility” and “ignorance” of the large population of female textile workers.

In addition to the growing demand for cheap labor, the intensification of silk production in Shimoina also called for larger amounts of capital to develop the area’s silk filatures. Just as changes within the workforce resulted in new social and demographic configurations in the region, these new demands for capital contributed to drastic changes in Shimoina’s political landscape and ultimately to the peripheralization of the region with respect to the emerging national and provincial centers. Because the new demands for increased capital could not be met by the area’s traditional elite class of wealthy agriculturalists and merchants, Shimoina industrialists and silk entrepreneurs looked outside the region for financing, turning to the state and to the increasingly dominant urban centers. This dependency accentuated the hierarchical relationship between Tokyo and localities such as Shimoina that had been initiated by the newly developing national finance system, the state’s assumption of police functions throughout the country, and its sponsorship of a nationwide telegraph system. By the end of the nineteenth century, Tokyo and the new provincial capital of Nagano City dominated the financing of Shimoina’s silk industry. The Meiji state’s deflationary policies of the 1880s weakened local elites and made them more financially dependent on the center. Furthermore, in 1894 the Shimoina lobby lost its bid for a local station as part of the government-sponsored railroad under construction, dealing the final blow to Shimoina’s status as a trade corridor between the interior and the coastal cities that were now so crucial for foreign trade. These developments made the region increasingly dependent on the national and provincial centers and signaled the decline of Shimoina as a fairly self-sufficient and diversified economic unit.

While Wigen’s narrative of Shimoina is one of decline, she also notes that “while [the silk industry] turned the [Ina] valley into a clearly subordinate periphery of the Japanese state, that very subordination was critical to the contemporary Japanese state’s ability to escape becoming a periphery of the global capitalist system.” (p. 266) Thus, while providing one example of local peripheralization within Japan, Wigen also argues that the subordination of regions such as Shimoina to a strong central core was essential for Japan itself to avoid peripheralization, and in fact “to emerge as a new and privileged core within Asia.” (p. 13) Shimoina, she claims, benefited from the lower prices of agricultural goods coming from Japan’s new colonies, such as Taiwan and Korea, which allowed the region to concentrate on silk production. Thus the process of Japanese imperial expansion played a crucial role in Shimoina’s transformation. Unfortunately, one of the weaknesses of a regional analysis such as this

is that it disallows a more detailed examination of the dynamics of imperialism and the specific ways in which the economic and human impact of those dynamics manifested themselves within Shimoina and Japan more generally.

Nonetheless, this book is one of few works in English examining economic change that attempts to traverse the Tokugawa/Meiji divide. This transition in Japanese history consists of a revolutionary movement from a feudal regime consisting of semiautonomous domains to a modern, centralized nation-state. *The Making of a Japanese Periphery* makes a key contribution with regard to comparative histories of similar transitions, as Wigen's book focuses on elucidating, through the lens of a particular regional analysis, the processes involved in the shift from an "early modern" to a "modern" society. Her findings allow for the questioning of assumptions common in European historiography about this shift that emphasize the prevalence of warfare, foreign trade, and political pluralism in creating the conditions necessary for modernization and industrialization. Wigen finds, in contrast to most European cases, that the features that distinguished this process in Tokugawa Japan included a lack of warfare, sanctions against foreign trade, and a highly centralized form of feudalism in which one ruler, the shogun, "intervene[d] precisely to enforce decentralization." (p. 98)

Wigen's successful use of a regional analysis to provide a coherent picture of the complicated transition from Japan's "early modern" to its "modern" era will hopefully inspire others to investigate the use of similar methodologies. Her willingness to engage with changes spanning the Tokugawa and Meiji eras sheds light on the processual nature of Japan's modern development, and her method contributes to our understanding of how geographical conceptualizations can add complexity to temporal analyses.

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