

清水剛、感染症と経営-戦前日本企業は「死の影」といかに向き合ったか中央経済社、2021年5月10日、184pp. ISBN 978-4502377419

Shimizu Takashi, *Infection and business: How prewar Japanese firms faced the “shadow of death”* Chuo Keizaiisha, 2021, 184pp. ISBN 978-4502377419



In *Kansenshō to keiei*, Shimizu Takashi, a specialist of management, business history, and the interplay between business and legal systems, explores the changes in business and society in prewar Japan, when the looming threat of mortality—the *shadow of death*—was acutely felt. Using a variety of sources, ranging from statistical records to works of literature, Shimizu’s preface illustrates the effects of infectious diseases on the lives of people of all ages and social classes. Although the 1918 pandemic H1N1 virus, often referred to as the Spanish flu, claimed many lives, the most common cause of death in the prewar period was tuberculosis. The absence of effective vaccines and antibiotics to control the spread of infection greatly influenced society’s perceptions of death. Moreover, as he asserts, ‘the shadow of death’ also impacted individuals’ long- versus short-term economic choices, namely the decision whether to put aside their savings for an uncertain future or to invest in ventures with immediate returns, but high risks.

Chapter 1, entitled ‘*Death*’ and labor management, investigates labor relations, focuses on how the high turnover rate, which was in part caused by the spread of infectious disease, influenced what was then arguably Japan’s most important industry, textiles. The chapter explores two well-known business leaders, Mutō Sanji (1867-1934), head of Kanegafuchi Bōseki, and Ōhara Magosaburō (1880-1943), who ran Kurashiki Bōseki, and examines their measures to improve the working conditions of their largely female labor forces. Specifically, he considers the reasons for their decisions to introduce welfare benefits and educational activities designed to better the working environment and retain workers. Examples of their practices range from the construction of more spacious women’s dormitories to opportunities for recreation, including sports such as volleyball.

By the 1950s, the fear of the ‘shadow of death’ had begun to fade, thanks to medical breakthroughs, which translated into a gradual increase in the average lifespan of the Japanese. Chapter 2, entitled *Changes in labor management and the birth of Tōyō no Majo (Oriental Witches)*, expands on Chapter 1, through a discussion of the introduction of recreational activities at factories. In this chapter, Shimizu notes the significance of this change by exploring the example of *Tōyō no Majo*, the moniker the mass media gave to the members of Japan’s female volleyball team and winners of a gold medal in the 1964 Tokyo summer Olympic games. The team comprised entirely of factory workers, mainly from Dai Nippon Spinning Company, trained during their recreation recess. Their victory had wider implications for Japanese women, particularly those from modest backgrounds, who lacked the educational and professional opportunities of many of their female peers and were often subject to discrimination. Moreover, the widespread recognition and respect the nation felt for this all-female team represented a breakthrough in the advancement of Japanese women as a whole.

In Chapter 3, *Consumers under the ‘shadow of death’: Why did Mitsukoshi, Fujin no Tomo, and Seikyō come into being?*, the focus shifts from changes in labor management to consumers, namely housewives. As mentioned in the preface, the vagaries of the times caused many consumers to be especially careful with their savings and to avoid unscrupulous businesses. In response to this trend, more affluent housewives shopped at establishments with an unquestioned reputation for offering high quality products (Mitsukoshi Department Store). Women of all ages and classes, however, relied on information collected and disseminated in new publications targeting women, the pioneer being *Fujin no Tomo*, literally The Woman’s Friend, founded in 1903. *Fujin no Tomo* was known for extensively testing popular home products, comparing and analyzing price and quality, the results of which appeared regularly in the magazine. Women as new consumers in society also took advantage of the formation of networks in the form of cooperative associations. The most well-known association, Seikyō, grew in tandem with the spread of mail-order businesses.

As mentioned in the first paragraph, the writer asserts that the ‘shadow of death’ played an important role in economic choices. In Chapter 4, which might be translated as *Firms and shareholder relations: dealing with short termism*, Shimizu identifies two types of shareholders: those who preferred investments with high, quick returns, and those who valued stable, long-term investments. Shimizu notes a tendency towards the former and examines the behavior of different types of firms (zaibatsu versus non-zaibatsu) to attract investors and encourage greater loyalty among shareholders.

In Chapter 5, *Companies operating under ‘the shadow of death,’* the focal point is the firm, which like its stakeholders—labor, consumers, and shareholders—not only had to deal with the various uncertainties of those times but also the threat of bankruptcy. His statistical analysis of the longevity of firms reveals that Japanese companies in the 1920s were relatively resilient, despite the unprecedented market volatility they faced. In this chapter, Shimizu also provides an interesting case study of Ishikawa Takeyoshi (1887-1961), chief editor of the woman’s magazine mentioned above, *Fujin no Tomo*, which still exists today. The writer traces the organizational changes Ishikawa made, which were vital to ensuring the magazine’s survival after his death.

During the 1920s, the term ‘salaryman,’ came into common usage to designate a white-collar employee of a company. The creation of this new term and its widespread acceptance illustrates that by this time, joining and working

for a firm had become a viable, long-term employment possibility for Japanese males. In Chapter 6, *How to avoid being trapped by a company*, the writer looks at the rise of the white-collar worker from the Meiji period, the effects of this type of worker on corporate employment practices, and the changes in labor mobility, then and today.

Shimizu's book appears at a particularly opportune time, as business historians and society as a whole, look to the past for wisdom or perhaps a preview of what might be to come. His chapters end with brief commentaries comparing the prewar period with the current COVID-19 situation. Since its publication in May 2021, his book has received much well-deserved attention in Japan in the form of discussions and book reviews in both scholarly publications and the popular press. The book is relatively short (preface, six chapters, and conclusion) and would be suitable for use as a textbook at Japanese universities, since it provides a new perspective on current events, one that students can easily relate to through their own experiences and observations over the past two years.

The writer argues convincingly that the 'shadow of death' influenced decisions to improve the working and living environments of female factory workers in the prewar textile industry. It is clear that consumer preferences and behavior changed and adapted in a similar way. However, the extent to which the 'shadow of death' impacted the shareholders' preference for long- versus short-term investments is more questionable. The rise of industrial capitalism and Japan's growing role in the global economy created an unprecedented business environment, one characterized by booms, busts, and shocks. The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, although it only directly affected one region, Japan's economic nucleus, Tokyo, and its environs, had significant repercussions for business which would reverberate throughout the nation and its colonial possessions. As arguably one of the most volatile periods of Japanese business and socio-economic history, prewar Japan was confronted with many sources of instability, one of which was deadly infectious diseases. This combination of factors contributed to the general sense of malaise and fatalism to varying degrees. Nonetheless, Shimizu's specific focus on infection and business is original. It should also help to advance the field of business history in Japan, since the outbreak of COVID-19—as much a public health as an economic crisis—is likely to figure prominently in future business history research. Finally, the book shows us that incorporating a new perspective—infectious disease—can enhance the business historian's understanding of prewar society and the many problems its firms faced.

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