Anthropology M155  
Women’s Voices: Their Critique of the Anthropology/History of Japan

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Course Description

Although women have constituted about one half of the population of any society, we recently “discovered” women as an object of analysis. We all know how little are known about (Japanese) women and we lament that invaluable records of women’s lives are irretrievably lost. But we all agree that there is an urgent need for further investigations and there are a number of specific researchable questions to ask about (Japanese) women.

I begin this course with the following thesis popular in the West: Japanese women are believed to be gradually liberated from oppression thanks to the Westernization that the Japanese society has gone through since the late nineteenth century. To challenge this popular view (which I believe is wrong), I will take an historical approach to Japanese women. For this goal, we will first discuss several theoretical frameworks to “think about women.” As we go along the time path- from the medieval era to the present, I will further introduce to you several more frameworks to “think about women.”

At the same time, we try to be skeptical of the very categories we use. In what sense do “women” constitute a legitimate category of the analysis? Can we conceptualize “women” in terms of difference and separateness from the other category of “men”? Have we been bound by the terms of our own discourse? Can we presuppose something called gender, sex or sexuality to be analyzed in any culture? Are we constrained by the existing interpretive frameworks to reach a deeper understanding of women’s lives in Japan? Is “Japan” still a viable unit of analysis in this age of global capitalism? We address these and other questions through case studies and visual works from Japan and theoretical works of anthropology, history, feminism and East Asian studies.

Textbooks

The following are available at ASUCLA bookstore.


A reader- will be available at Copymat (925 Westwood, 824-5276) toward the end of spring break.
**Requirements**
Students are expected to complete the reading and to attend the class regularly and to participate fully in class discussion—this is the most important criteria.

Mid-term paper (on the topic that I will announce in class).

Take-home final essay exam.

To international (Japanese) students: On course materials, I ask you to speak to me in English—I lose a lot in translation.

**Discussion schedule (We will read articles and book chapters in this order, but we may not be able to follow this exact time line.)**

Week 1: Discussion on the Possible Frameworks to Talk about “Women.”

Business

E. Ross & R. Rapp. “Sex and Society: A Research Note from Social History and Anthropology.”

Week 2: From the Origin Myth to the Heian Court

Brazell. Introduction and Book I.

Week 3: Continued.

Brazell. Book II and Book III.

Video: Rashomon (a movie by Kurosawa Akira based on Akutagawa Ryunosuke’s novel set in the Medieval Era).

Week 4:

Video: Rashomon (continued, about 10 minutes more).

Tonomura Hitomi. “Gendering the Flesh in Medieval Japan.”

Week 5: From Feudal (Tokugawa) Period to Modern Japan.

You will submit your mid-term paper in this week (I will announce the topic in class).

Kaibara Ekken. “Women and Wisdom of Japan.”
Takaishi Shingoro. “Introduction” to the above.

Partha Chatterjee. “Colonialism, nationalism, and colonized women: the contest in India”

Week 6: Making of “good wives and wise mothers” and the women’s resistance


Tamanoi. Chapters 2, 3 and 4. “Fieldwork,” “Nursemaids” and “Factory Women.”

Video: Naniwa (Osaka Elegy)

Week 7-8: Early Feminist Movement in Japan and Women in the Wartime

Vera Mackie. “The New Women” and “The HomeFront.”


Week 9-10: Topics from Contemporary Japan

Robert J. Smith. “Gender Inequality in Contemporary Japan.”

Robin LeBlanc. “Toward a Housewifely Movement.”