

BOOK REVIEWS

Japanese Women

New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future

EDITED BY KUMIKO FUJIMURA-FANSELOW
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As a teacher of a course titled "Japanese Culture and Society," I have not found an ideal textbook that covers many areas of the culture and society simultaneously. Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda offer what may be an ideal additional reader/textbook for my course. The primary focus of the book, as the title suggests, is Japanese women and their status in society. It is an excellent introductory book, and all the articles were written in a way that even a novice can easily understand the theoretical, historical, social, and cultural background.

Its interdisciplinary approach covers a variety of topics ranging from history and religion to politics and education. The book deals with how various social institutions weave reality for Japanese women. As is the case with American textbooks, until recently, women's social reality has often been omitted or taken for granted in many books written on Japan.

The vast majority of the articles, written specifically for this volume, are by Japanese women living in Japan. The book thereby closes the gap between women's real experiences and what is actually written and read about them abroad. The book provides current statistics, information, description, and assessment as well as an analysis of the status of Japanese women.

Part One, "Women's Place: Cultural and Historical Perspectives," provides an excellent introduction to a social, historical, and cultural context for understanding Japanese women. Included here are articles on ideological and religious beliefs, the family system, language, literature, and mass culture ("The Struggle for Legal Rights and Reforms," "Women's Image and Place in Japanese Buddhism," "Aspects of Sexism in Language," "Women and Television").

Part Two, "Education," is especially suitable for a section on Japanese education or a course in education in general. The articles point out how sexism and gender stereotyping, as well as socialization, affect equal opportunity of education for Japanese women, which in turn expands to other unequal aspects of public life such as work and economy ("Challenges to Education for Girls and Women in Modern Japan," "Sexism and Gender Stereotyping in Schools").

Part Three, "Marriage, Family, and Sexuality: Changing Values and Practices," is about changes in the institutions of family and marriage, sexual and domestic violence, and changing attitudes of Japanese men. The articles deal with the unique institution of the *ie*, or

"house," system that still prevails in the mentality of the Japanese in their everyday life ("Marriage and Family: Past and Present"). The notion of *ie*, still strong in the areas of filial piety and family registration, is seen in the Japanese government reliance on the family, especially women, to support its "social welfare" system. Care of the elderly and children and running the household are the primary responsibilities of Japanese women whether they are employed or not, and the men's attitudes about sex roles and motherhood, as well as the economic and wage systems, restrict women's full participation in society ("The Mystique of Motherhood," "Care of the Elderly," "The Changing Portrait of Japanese Men"). The articles contained in this section are also useful for courses in law, criminal justice, social work, journalism, and mass communication ("Pornographic Culture and Sexual Violence," "Domestic Violence").

Part Four, "Women at Work," points out inequality in the labor market, trends in women's participation in the labor force, the male-centered work place culture, and other factors which prohibit women's economic advancement. These articles are also useful for courses in economics, business ("Female Workers: An Overview of Past and Current Trends"), family, education ("Work, Education, and the Family"), and even geography ("The Plight of Asian Migrant Women Working in Japan's Sex Industry").

Part Five, "Women's Future: Asserting New Powers," assesses the current status of Japanese women, their endless efforts to change the society as active agents, and introduces cases of Japanese women who have been successful in politics ("Legal Challenges to the Status Quo," "From the Home to the Political Arena," "Profiles of Two Assemblywomen").

Several articles are very useful in understanding the unique contexts and theoretical background for Japanese feminism (e.g., "Women's Studies," "Japan's First Phase of Feminism"). As with other articles, no prior knowledge of Japanese feminism is required here. The Appendix, "Significant Dates in the Recent History of Women," thoroughly covers the events related to women's social issues in Japan from 1871 to 1994.

Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future provides an accurate, overall social reality of Japanese women from feminist points of view. It enables the reader to gain new and refreshing perspectives as well as develop critical thinking facility, not only for social issues in Japan, but also for analyzing their own society. *Japanese Women* complements the teaching materials in virtually every section of my course—history, culture, politics, economy, labor, laws, family, mass media, etc. It closes the gap between the social reality that includes women and the reality depicted in other books written only from the men's perspective. ■

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