

RIPPLES OF CHANGE

Japanese Women's Search for Self

PRODUCED, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY NANAKO KURIHARA

COLOR, 16 MM/VHS, 57 MINUTES, 1993

IN ENGLISH AND SUBTITLED JAPANESE

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES, INC.
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Viewing films about Asian social movements helps students recognize early indicators of emerging issues, and assists them to understand how relatively weak social forces can stimulate change against powerful resistance. As the movement against the Vietnam War challenged authority in Japan, urban women activists reacted to patriarchal leadership in the antiwar movement by forming separate organizations. Although their subsequent record of victories and defeats is mixed, it is impossible to imagine passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (1986) before Japan felt the impact of the women's movement.

Nanako Kurihara's *Ripples of Change* enables this kind of learning. Documenting the Japanese women's movement from the sixties till the nineties, Kurihara blends personal recollections with reflections in interviews and archival video clips. Having used *Ripples of*

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Change in Japanese Politics, Global Futures, Introduction to World Politics, and Introduction to Political Science courses, I am confident that teachers can make *Ripples of Change* accessible with viewing guides, overhead transparencies, PowerPoint, and orally.

Although the Japanese women's movement allegedly "had run its course by the 1980s," evidence of self-organizing by women at the end of *Ripples of Change* implicitly challenges that assertion. While "the personal is political" and one-on-one interpersonal change may effect societal change, the film suggests more complexly that an adaptive Japanese women's movement has been effective—quietly and contentiously.

Questions for students viewing this film should be geared to course objectives. Having to answer questions silently during a screening alerts students to issues that will be discussed afterwards. My students have discussed questions like the following: To what cultural difference does Kurihara attribute variation between the likely course of change in Japan compared to countries in the West? Is Kurihara's definition of "power" similar to yours? And if you were behind the camera, what questions would you have asked?

With careful advance planning, discussion activities involving students from multiple campuses are possible. For example, my students at the University of Hawai'i (UH) engaged in a lively sixty-minute Web-based large-screen teleconference on *Ripples of Change* with students from Professor Debbie Lunny's women's studies class at Keio University on 16 June 2001. In this exchange, half the Keio cohort was female. The UH students were women; over half were international students from Japan. A Japanese-American student reported that she was "kinda shocked at how Japanese women were treated in Japan." And a Keio woman said, "That film pushed me to study feminism." But according to a male classmate of hers, Kurihara's film "is looking at Japan from an American point of view." Meanwhile, responding to a request for intergenerational comparisons, another Keio woman said, "They probably don't say as much now about how to be girlish to a girl—or to be boyish to a boy—as they used to." Similar online discussions could be carried out synchronously or asynchronously on an extended basis during the academic term with more commonly available technologies. ■

VINCENT KELLY POLLARD, author of *Globalization, Democratization and Asian Leadership: Power Sharing, Foreign Policy and Society in the Philippines and Japan* (Ashgate, 2004), has written twenty-five encyclopedia articles, forty-five reviews of books and films, six essays on pedagogy, and articles in *Japanese Studies* and elsewhere. He edits the *Chinese Cultures Abroad Directory* <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~pollard/chculture.html>.

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