



Chinese at the railroad station eating with chopsticks and being observed by young boys.

Photo: The Montana Historical Society. Courtesy of Pat Murdo.

and Chinese immigrants are described and their reasons for coming are succinctly explained.

With the exception of one brief moment when a descendent talks of a Montana senator who stood up for the rights of Japanese, there is little emotion. The cuts are too quick to allow us to get to know the interviewees. This is not necessarily a problem but teachers may be frustrated by a lack of parallelism in the statistics. Numbers are offered, but comparison between them is impossible. For example, viewers are told the Chinese made up ten percent of Montana's population in 1870, but are given no true idea of the extent of their exodus when told only 1,300 remained in 1910.

The relatively short length of the film allows for viewing and debriefing within the same class period. Discussion topics could include labor, immigration, discrimination, and racism, and the role of Japanese and Chinese immigrants. While clearly produced for middle school students, the film is never condescending and has much to offer high school students and even adults who have little or no background in this part of American immigrant history.

The video includes a study guide that details instructional objectives, lists and defines select vocabulary, and suggests questions to ask students prior to and after viewing the film. A study packet with additional resources is available. ■

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Women in Japan

Memories of the Past, Dreams of the Future

English version—Joanne Hershfield/Jan Bardsley
2001. 52:25 Minutes. VHS/DVD. Color.

Web site: <http://womeninJapan.com>
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The stereotype of the Asian woman as subservient, selfless, and obedient to her husband has dominated Western thinking for over 150 years. The video, *Women in Japan: Memories of the Past, Dreams of the Future*, presents quite a different version of the modern woman in Japan. Award-winning filmmaker Joanne Hershfield, Professor of Film and Video Production, and Jan Bardsley, Associate Professor of Japanese Language and Literature Curriculum in Asian Studies, both from the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, undertook this film project, funded in part by UNC-CH and in part by the Japan Foundation, to examine the nature (role) of women in modern-day Japan.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.

The film consists of interviews with an eclectic group of women, some Japanese who have traveled abroad, others non-Japanese, who marry Japanese men and choose to live in Japan. The Japanese interviewees represent leaders in education, international Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), and the arts. A common thread that links the group is their perception of their mothers as classic examples of the selfless Confucian wife and mother, product of a pre-arranged marriage, devoted to husband and family—and their strong-willed independent reaction to that perception. Perhaps the most radical departure from a generation of tradition-bound females is exemplified by the life story of the internationally famous painter Taeko Tomiyama, who not only chooses an unconventional occupation, but also refuses to marry her lover and the father of her children because she does not wish to be subservient to (owned by) his family.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.

This modern-day willful independence is demonstrated in the non-Japanese interviewees, as well. The trend among young Japanese to move from the rural villages to the ever-expanding urban areas has created a



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.

void in marriage-age women in the traditionally agricultural areas of the country. Lourdes Matsumoto, who trained as a professional dancer, ran away from her home in Cebu, Philippines, to work towards a career in Japan, despite the anti-Nippon feelings of her father. Even though she returns home, she makes her Japanese suitor wait five years before marrying him and moving to a small farm town in Japan. Chinese immigrant Rohei Shimada, a multi-degreed university graduate, defies her family's concerns and chooses to marry a Japanese farmer, settling to raise melons and a family rather than pursue an academic career. These foreign brides lead a lifestyle that traditional Japanese women were once made to endure; however, they demonstrate the same self-determination as their Japanese sisters in that they choose to stay out of love for their family and husband, rather than follow the blind devotion of past generations.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.

Women in Japan: Memories of Past, Dreams of the Future seems to imply that freedom of choice is the defining characteristic of the women in modern Japanese society. After generations of stifling subservience, the women of today are free to pursue a more self-fulfilling life. The end of the film touches on the possible consequences of this newly instilled freedom as the interviewers ask members of the next generation about their future plans. Teenage girls, who appear more western in dress and attitude than older Japanese interviewees, may see the struggle for self-fulfillment as being too difficult or costly when they laughingly (?) wish for a future centered on a husband who will take care of them. The next generation of documentary-makers will have to see if this is a generational reaction to the liberation of Asian women, or not.

This video can be a part of a high school class in sociology, world/comparative cultures, or be equally at home in a college sociology, media, or women's studies class. The subtitles make it easy for viewers to follow the documentary. A Web site that complements the film, <http://womeninjapan.com>, gives biographical information on the interviewees and a variety of useful resources for research topics related to Japan, its history, and its culture. The

lesson plans offered on the Web site are geared toward a media class, but are thought provoking and could be used in any writing or discussion setting. ■



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Women in Japan: Memories of the Past, Dreams for the Future

52 minute video documentary

The stories of six women who are
challenging what it means to be a
woman in Japan.

Available for classroom
and library use.

Produced and directed by
Joanne Hershfield and Jan Bardsley

English, Japanese, bi-lingual

to purchase VHS or DVD
visit our website:

www.womeninjapan.com

