

Course Unit for Week 4: Identity Politics of Japanese Women

Nicole Freiner, Bryant University

This unit explores notions of identity including expanding the discussion of Confucian heritages from the previous unit to understand collective identities. Given the onset of modernity, the traditional sources of identity in Asian countries including Japan, India and China are moving from local and family sources to global media and the nation-state. A major focus of this unit is to explore the diverse gender roles of women in Japanese history as a case study for examining identity issues. Moving beyond Orientalist and quiescent characterizations of Japanese women and women's identity will provide students with a specific way in which to explore and apply theories of identity and lenses of Asia that will allow for comparisons across time and between countries. This unit acknowledges the interplay between collective identities and the state's role in fashioning and managing citizen identity. Moreover, this unit allows for useful comparisons between Japan, India and China, the three nation-states that are compared in this course. Units of Chinese and Indian identity will follow this unit on Japan.

This unit will utilize a historical case study on the debate over a female Emperor in the imperial family to examine these issues. The debate over a female emperor serves as a case for understanding modernity and the concomitant differential experiences of this discourse on women. The imperial family is the longest imperial institution in the world, this unit allows students to explore the meaning of the imperial family in Japan that is an understudied aspect of Japanese politics. Specifically students will study the 1889 law against female succession and will then examine newspapers to investigate the debate over female succession that occurred in 2005 in Japan. Students will have a group assignment to examine newspaper sources and to summarize the arguments made on female succession, the government response and web comments online news sources. In preparation for the assignment students will read portions of the Kojiki and an article on the imperial family by Lee Butler.

Assignment

In groups you will investigate the debate of the female emperor, you will be split into group in order to examine newspapers, the government response and web comments made to online newspaper articles. Once you have examined the sources you have chosen and decided on which aspect of the debate you would like to report on, prepare a short 5-10 minute presentation that you will give in class including a one page single-spaced written summary of your findings that will be handed out in class.

Readings:

Butler, Lee. 2002. Emperor and Aristocracy in Japan, 1467-1680: Resilience and Renewal. Harvard: Harvard East Asian Monographs. (selections)

Philippi, Donald L. 1977. Kojiki. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press. (selections)

