

Introduction

This course reader features articles from *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (APJ) that address issues relevant to the study of women and Japan's political economy. Echoing feminist activism around the globe, the articles validate the experiences of women and analyze how "the personal is political" in post-WWII and contemporary Japan. The articles also discuss the ways in which women in Japan actively participated in global political developments such as the 1975 U.N. International Women's Year. Following the first Conference on Women held in Mexico City, the General Assembly recognized International Women's Day (already celebrated in many places on March 8) and the U.N. Decade for Women (1976-1985). Feminist lawyers such as Nakajima Michiko along with other women activists worked to pass Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1985.

During the 1980s, university research institutes in Japan published an impressive amount of multi-disciplinary works on women's issues. For example, the Women's History General Research Group in Kyoto produced award-winning essay collections and groundbreaking bibliographies. Japanese feminists participated in "third-wave" criticisms that challenged the centrality of white middle-class Euro-American cultural contexts for defining women's issues globally. From the 1990s through the present-day, the study of women in Japan continues to expand in academic, political, and social spheres. At the 1995 U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, delegates from mainland Japan and Okinawa collaborated with women across Asia on complex issues such as sexual violence in military conflicts. Female activists in 21st century Japan participate in ongoing movements to challenge neoliberal reforms that privilege corporations over the rights of individuals. Contemporary scholars in Japan, but also in the USA, Australia, Britain, and Holland, analyze how Japan's economic restructuring directly affects the position of women in the home, workforce, and general democratic populace. Similarly, researchers have begun to trace the issue of gender equality in the relief, support, and restoration efforts following the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011.

The articles selected for this course packet engage with, contribute to, and intervene in the rich scholarly history on women and political activism in Japan. Some of the main themes discussed include women's rights, gendered labor practices, and female participation in politics. Several authors analyze how the realities of Japan's economic recession affect the everyday lives of female citizens. The articles highlight issues often overlooked in media representations of contemporary Japan including poverty, divorce, activism, militarism, and the long term ramifications of the U.S. Occupation (1945-1952). For example, Mire Koikari's work establishes a crucial historical foundation for understanding how post-WWII constructions of gender must be examined within ever-shifting dynamics of empire, nation, and race in Japan. She argues that American women in the U.S. Occupation employed "imperial feminism" to foster gendered narratives of how Americans "rescued" Japanese women. Featuring the activist work of feminist lawyer Nakajima Michiko, Tomomi Yamaguchi and Norma Field present the 2004 lawsuit by 15 women against the Japanese state to end the deployment of Self-Defense Forces to Iraq. This article shows how the personal life histories of women give meaning to Japan's "Peace Constitution."

Building on the theme of women's rights as articulated in the constitution, Yasuo Takao analyzes women participating in politics as voters, activists, and electoral

candidates. He suggests that despite gendered barriers, women continue to find innovative ways to enhance Japan's participatory democracy. Moving from politics to labor, Charles Weathers provides an overview of gendered employment structures that may limit women workers. He concludes that political and business leaders facing an aging population and a declining birth rate will need to "get serious" about reforming Japan's male-centered employment practices. Chisa Fujiwara focuses on how Japan's welfare reforms fail to help single mothers. She demonstrates that a large percentage of "fatherless families" include women who already participate in the workforce yet cannot overcome gendered structures to achieve economic independence.

Along with each article, this packet features supplementary sources from *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, the URLs of relevant organizational websites, and references to additional scholarly works. The materials selected provide diverse perspectives from both men and women writing in Japan, the USA, and Australia. By creating a space for international scholars to publish articles online, the *APJ* offers original English-language coverage of contemporary developments and historical research. These materials will remain an interactive digital archive of instructional materials for analyses of female political activism and women in Japan's political economy.