
Lisa K. Stein  
*University of Kentucky*  
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/DISCLOSURE.08.12

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Recommended Citation

DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/DISCLOSURE.08.12  
Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol8/iss1/12

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Others entombed in St. Peter’s amongst the three old kings or within crannies of the altar. Perhaps new world Christs saved to bear their own heavy crosses or devils among the tortured, the unforgiven, the sorry damned that have no nationality now.

Each stone, each crafted ornament, from the modest dull chalk frescoes high in the vaulted ceiling to the epitaphs of royal dead gloss time when the living blood tugged south, yanked north to boundaries drawn, redrawn. Faith, too, played politics: More than reformation changes.

The rain stills the ghosts beating, blowing, breathing, scattering dust on history.

Lisa K. Stein

Book Review


In Under the Shadow of Nationalism, Mariko Asano Tamanoi expresses an interest in the way the category “rural women” emerged in the discourse of Japanese nationalism with the onset of the twentieth century and its continuing importance in this discourse. An anthropologist, Tamanoi chose Nagano and its surrounding towns and villages as the site of her investigation, partially because this region was the center of the silk-spinning industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The author chose Nagano not only for its unique role in industrialization but because of the large number of women’s groups that have continued to be formed there since the 1970’s. Tamanoi utilized her membership in these groups as a place to gather unsolicited recollections and memories that the women offered to each other in this forum. Benedict Anderson’s idea, from Language and Power (1990), that changes in consciousness must be
“narrated” and not “remembered” validates Tamanoi’s collection and use of recollections as evidence for her argument. She explains that “the rural women in Nagano did not paint paintings, build monuments, create new rituals, write poems, compose music, or direct films. But they themselves told me their stories, and that is how I ‘remember’ their pasts” (4).

Using Carol Gluck’s theory that there are four main agents of public memory or caretakers of the past in Japan after the war: the progressive intellectuals, the conservative intellectuals, the media and individual memories (“The Past in the Present” 1993), Tamanoi’s argument demands the privileging of the fourth over the other three. She cites Rubie Watson’s words in “Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism: An Introduction” (1994), to support this privileging:

Memory may be a reservoir of history, but it is not the same as history... People maintain personal memories—memories of events and situations that they themselves experienced. These personal memories may remain private; they may be passed on in conversation or storytelling, they may be lost, or they may be written down in the form of diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies. There are also collective or shared memories that are not dependent on a single individual’s direct experience of the past. (7)

Beyond the personal recollections that Tamanoi collects at the meetings of the many women’s groups she attends, she also tries to make sense of native ethnological studies (Nihon minzoku-gaku), such as the work of Yanagita Kunio which covered the years between approximately 1920-40 and which, Tamanoi believes, “suppressed” the voices of rural women of this time period (115-6). She finds additional evidence of the country/city dialectic in the locally published village newspapers of the 1920’s and 1930’s called sanpo or jino. She refers to the discourse of such newspapers as “agrarianism” (139). By carefully examining this evidence, Tamanoi shows that in these village newspapers, “the figure of a ‘truly modern’ woman in the ‘truly cultural’ countryside finally emerges, capturing the sense of modernity of the middling and educated farmers who wrote to these papers” (151). She claims that the male farmers then invited their female counterparts to work alongside them in an attempt to realize village autonomy and to help them build a “truly rural culture.”

Women in rural Nagano worked in several capacities, as nursemaids (komori), domestic servants, factory workers, and farming women. She argues that whatever their line of work, rural Nagano women “became the objects of scrutiny in various genres of nationalist discourse not only because of the importance of their labor to the nation, but also because of their gender and place of residence” (2). The Japanese word jataraki is a term for work which connotes women’s productive and reproductive labor. The jataraki of rural Japanese women became important in the creation of the Japanese nation-state. Thus, Tamanoi argues, the category “rural women” as a subset of “women” became privileged (8).

The Japanese nation-state emerged due to what Benedict Anderson argues in Imagined Communities are “three fortuitous factors”: “the relatively high degree of Japanese ethnocultural homogeneity”; “the unique antiquity of the imperial house... and its indubitable Japanese-ness”; and “the abrupt, massive, and menacing penetration of ‘the barbarians’ in the 1860’s that led the politically aware population to self-defense and nationalism (13). During the period of this emergence in the nineteenth century, the early Meiji period, only upper class, educated women became known as “national subjects.” This Japanese woman was depicted as willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of her nation. Rural women, then, did not arise as such subjects until later in the same century. But why?

Tamanoi argues that the playing out of Anderson’s idea of “imagining a nation” involved two opposing powers in Japan. One such “modernizing force” devalues tradition and replaces it with “urban-based modernity.” The other utilizes tradition in the imagining of the “truly modern national community” (17). For Tamanoi, the countryside of Japan became the site of this “tradition.” Tamanoi rationalizes the countryside as “tradition” two ways. First, she explains that “urban modernity in Japan was ‘Western’” (17). Second, she points out that the burgeoning capitalist state demanded cheap labor which was achieved by rural women, not women of the upper classes. Rural women were then able to supplant upper class women as national subjects in the final years of the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, the author explains that the rural Nagano women of the 1990’s no longer fit the stereotype of the Japanese women of pre-war Japan. However, nationalist discourse, Tamanoi claims, has not decreased but increased since the 1970’s. The disparity between the pre-war image of the Japanese woman as rural woman and the present-day reality has caused a “sense of nation crisis.”