

Gender Studies and Modern Japanese Literature

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【Abstract】 This paper first considers Women's Studies and Gender Studies in Japan. Then I try to explain my research as a case of Gender Studies on Modern Japanese Literature. I am using the name in the Japanese way, the order of the name having the family name first.

【Key words】 Women's Studies ; Gender Studies ; Modern Japanese Literature

1. Introduction

I would like to introduce a following poem. This poem was originally written by Alice Cary and published in the United States in 1882. In Japan it was partly published in 1889. The following form is the version published in Japan.

The Bridal Veil

1. We're married, they say, and you think you have won me,
Well, take this a white veil and look on me ;
Here's a matter to vex you and matter to grieve you,
Here's doubt to distrust you and faith to believe you,-
I am all, as you see, common earth, and common dew ;
Be wary to mould me to roses, not rue!
Ah! shake out the filmy thing, fold after fold,
And see if you have me to keep and to hold-
Look close on my heart-see the worst of its shining,-
It is not yours to-day for the yesterday's winning,-
The past is not mine-I am too proud to borrow-
You must grow to new heights if I love you to-morrow.
2. We're married! O, pray that our love do not fail!
I have wings flattened down, and hid under my veil,
They are subtle as light-you can undo them,
And swift in their flight-you can never pursue them,
And spite of all clasping, and spite of all bands,

I can slip like a shadow, a dream, from your hands.

3. Nay, call me not cruel and fear not to take me,
 I am yours for my life-time, to be what you make me,
 To wear my awhile veil for a sign or a cover,
 As you shall be proven my lord, or my lover;
 A cover for peace that is dead, or a token
 Of bliss that can never be written or spoken.

This was published in “Jogakuzasshi” or “Woman’s Magazine” in 1889. The editor of the journal named Iwamoto Yoshiharu found the poem copied into the joint diary that he kept with his new wife. It seems he was very impressed by this poem and therefore introduced it in his journal with a short explanation. But there was not the name of the American poet, Alice Cary. So many Japanese had believed that it was written by his bride.

The name of his bride was Wakamatsu Shizuko who became a famous translator. This poem is suggestive of the ways in which Japanese women began to modernize themselves through the influence of Westernization over one hundred years ago.

However, literary interest for modern women has been very different from social modernization and political transformation in Japanese society.

2. Women’s Studies in Japan

In fact, only at the beginning of the 1970’s the women’s liberation movement started in Japan. The movement originated in America, and spread worldwide like a big wave. It began in Japan in the form of “teach-ins” and “gassyuku” or “Japanese seminar camps”. This movement, which was felt to have qualitative differences from the former “Fujin Undô” or “Women’s Issue Movement” was half jokingly reported by the mass media. By the end of the 1980’s, this new field of “women’s studies” born out of the Fujin Undô movement had grown up into an area which could no longer be derided. I think in Japan today many books related to women’s studies have been published and magazines also often feature articles on them. On one hand, the women’s liberation movements and women’s studies spread as grass-roots than as organized movements and have emerged as activities reflected in innumerable small circulation journals. On the other hand, a number of academic societies have been set up and there are signs of government-led activities.

Inoue Teruko described in her book entitled Joseigaku eno Syôtai or Introduction to Women’s Studies (1997, new version).

As I mentioned in the prologue, the issues that the 1970's women's liberation raised were overcoming systematic sexual discrimination, and the movement called for the overall abolition of sexual discrimination that extended into every facet of everyday life, as well as thorough reexamination of "femininity". The Sexual Discrimination Abolition Tertia was epoch-making not only because of changes to the sexual division of labor, but also because it emphasized reforms in customs and culture.

Looking back now, in the 1980's the principal object of Japanese national and local government in relation to women's issues was the abolition of sexual discrimination and flexibility in the sexual division of labor. For the government or local authorities to intervene in sexuality or private relations between men and women, or in everyday practices would be considered to be an unacceptable overextension of their range, and so it is understandable that they focused on rectifying the institutionalized discrimination that was visible, and it is clear that the environment that surrounded women was improved by the involvement of national and local government. However, despite institutionalized reform and restructuring of sexual divisions of labor, the subordinate position in which women are placed has not changed. In this sense, we cannot deny feeling frustrated by these governmental politics.

Taking as a background the political movement of women, it is also difficult to answer the question "What are 'Women's Studies'?" also because the criticism against them have been very hard. Questions like "Why have only women been picked out from the two components-men and women-who constitute the human race, and why must we attach as emphatic a word as 'scholarship' to them?"; criticisms like "Can we honestly ascribe that women's liberation, which is a contemporary phenomenon linked to social movements, can lead to "pure scholarship?" and also the opinion that it is no more than the application of the approach of conventional disciplines such as sociology, politics, cultural anthropology, the history of thought and psychoanalysis-all these have continuously been put forward. However, what we must think about is the necessity for the birth and spread of women's studies in Japan.

How can we define the meaning of the age we are living in? What the definition of 20th century or the second millennium? About ten years ago it was symbolically defined by the nuclear problem, and yet even today after the break up of the Eastern bloc and the end of the Cold War, there is still a sense that the human race is approaching an unprecedented critical point in history. As well as the women, we should not ignore the men who have an advanced awareness of these issues and who seriously tackle such a problematic period, or the profound

interest they have in women's studies. So, let me introduce the thoughts of some of those who have done the most pioneering research in this field, and let me use Inoue Teruko's Lincoln-like definition of women's studies "Learning which aims at the examination of women, for women, by women" (Joseigaku to sono Syûhen or Women's Studies and its Environs, 1980 ; Keisô Shobô)

One of the most eminent scholar in Women's Studies is Fujitani Atsuko. In the preface to Joseigaku eno Syôtai or An Introduction to Women's Studies-The New Dawn of Women's Research (1979 ; Saimaru Press), Fujitani wrote 'Women's Studies Manifesto' in which she states :

Women's studies differ from what was formerly known as "The Woman Question Research" because they aim research not only at the various issues that are related to women but also at women themselves. Consequently "women's studies" has an interdisciplinary nature that extends widely across the areas of cultural anthropology, sociology, literature and so on. At the same time, it focuses on the characteristics and the possibilities of women across the disciplines by developing biological, medical and psychological research which objectifies women themselves. Through this research, it should become possible to remove the major obstacles to women's participation in society until now (prejudice, sexually discriminating laws and social conventions) and also to prepare education and work possibilities that take into account women's wants and special characteristics. The wish of women's studies researchers is for a balanced and new co - optation to be born between the sexes."

And then a few sentences farther on she continues :

Broadly speaking the changes in the conditions of life have been especially remarkable for women, and indeed it is not an exaggeration to say that it is women who hold the key that determines the potential for the prosperity of the human race. In women's studies research this area especially will be a principal point. On the other hand I would like to point out that cultures that until now have been structured to favor men are reaching a point of crisis. Male led societies that achieve by a principle of competition, the killing of other humans and repeated destructive attacks on nature, can hardly coexist with other countries under the tension of this explosive situation. The excessive production that is linked to human alienation is endangering living conditions for the next generation as well as those of people now, and we can only wait for an urgent improvement in this state of affairs.

Another important opinion was suggested by Ito Setsu in 1985, "Syosai no Mado" or "The Study Window" devoted the July/August issue to "Women's Studies Today". In the article "Expectations of this country's Women's Studies", Itô Setsu defines herself as a specialist in social and domestic politics, and argues from an older theoretical stance known as "Women's Theory". Considering the new women's studies, she says, "For Japanese Women's Studies, the older "Women's Issue Movement" is unsatisfactory and it is better to construct something new-these "Women's Studies" that absorb the old "Fujin Undô". When this happens, the possibilities for women's studies will be limited if they are not expansive enough to absorb the level of achievement of the previous women's issues movement." She goes on to say : "Women's Studies in Japan were spread as an introduction to American women's studies, but now they should aim at a specifically Japanese development in terms of the differences of the Japanese background, the achievements of the Fujin Undô and Japanese academia compared with America. When I think about this, I hope that the new women's studies does not simply regard the original Fujin Undô as a movement and theory to be neatly labeled and tidied away as "out-dated" or "buried in the role of motherhood", or dismiss it as an essentially non-middle class movement which consists of working class women who collaborate with intellectuals and researchers. Rather, it should value the activities and theories of the former movement for its strong influence on the progress of history from a female perspective. If it does this the contents of women's studies will be enriched."

We should take note of this advocacy of absorbing and making use of the store of experience from the former Fujin Undô, and recognizing what is different and specific to Japan.

This is the argument stressed by Iwao Sumiko in 'My impressions of research into sexual discrimination' in the same journal. Iwao points to the transitional characteristic of women's studies.

Originally, scholarship had to be human studies and not just "men's studies" or "women's studies". Of course in order for there to be human studies, there had to be things that dealt with both men and women. But research in the traditional fields of study, including psychology, until now has been very biased towards men through both the gender of researchers and the objects of research. Furthermore, the theories and hypotheses that have derived from this research have been erroneous and distorted because they have not taken in to consideration the women who constitute half of the human race. The roles of women's studies are to recover the balance and make an effort to correct mistaken interpretations in existing scholarship

and documentation that have shifted the centre of gravity. Such actions should bring about a rise in the status of women which ultimately will benefit the happiness of the human race.

Consequently, it should be clear that women's studies are of no benefit if they are solely concerned with women and if only women researchers participate. Women's studies originally had these characteristics, and yet if male or female researchers in every field looked at the existence of both sexes as constructs of society, and if they treated women's issues with the same gravity as they treat men's as research objects, the importance of women's studies would disappear. In this sense, it is hoped that the life of women's studies will be short.

This special issue includes other papers on 'American Women's Studies and Political Issues-A Report from the Pan American Women's Forum' by Sugimoto Kiyoe who reports on American current affairs, and 'Are Wives Slaves to their Homes?' by Serizawa Shunsuke who argues using I. Illyich's concept of "shadow work".

The consciousness of women's issues we have briefly traced above would finally extend the perspectives of researchers of women's studies, because women's issues and men's issues are the opposite sides of the same coin. Without returning to the accepted methodology of scholarship that has developed according to male logic, men's studies should naturally appear as, to use Illyich's terminology of "shadow studies" of women's studies. Inoue's definition of "Learning which aims at the examination of women, for women, by women" can be thought of as a little narrow. Both sexes should participate in either women's studies or men's studies, and as I mentioned before, men who take part in women's studies already exist. However, I think we should take note of the intention in Inoue's "by women". Because this word asks whether people can have self-reliance and awareness of the issues. The way of thinking of women's studies works like an x-ray that sees through the body and reveals the skeleton of traditional culture. Moreover, because the x-ray works on the researchers themselves, their research may be accompanied by a painful process of self denial and self deconstruction.

3. Gender Studies in Japan

Another important role in Gender Studies has been played by Inoue Teruko. Her present thought appeared in Joseigaku eno Syôtai or Introduction to Women's Studies (1997 new version). The following is my translation.

Women's Studies has analyzed the actual conditions of men and women's

relationships within society using the concept of sexual roles. By applying this sexual role concept, there were many things that became visible. Recently, through the introduction of Marxist Feminism we have come to pay attention to the entire relative structure of the sexual division of labor that penetrates from the home to the labor market.

However, the women's studies program that is concerned with problems to do with sexuality or women's construction of the ego has been slow and is only now beginning. An understanding of the many issues that underlie the profound roots of sexual division of labor should be the objective of the second stage of women's studies.

She described the new horizons of Gender Research.

From the end of the 1980's when the second stage of women's studies was said to have begun, the number of researchers who have named their field as "Gender Research" instead of "Women's Studies" has increased. There is a shift in perspective that rather than emphasizing women's lifestyles and lives or sexual discrimination, focuses its interests on the structure and order of culture and society that divides people into the genders of men and women.

In the background of the shift of focus from women's studies to gender studies the following new critical awareness has appeared.

She suggested the seven points.

1. Formerly differences between the sexes were tacitly assumed to be unchangeable, genetically because of the different sex chromosome, biologically because of different reproductive functions and physiologically because of the disparity in external appearances and hormone levels. It has become clear that the two sexes are not necessarily strictly divided and more and more that the former division of gender is artificial.
2. As there has become more interest in various areas of gender such as language, body language, the standard of physical value and sexuality which are not necessarily due to sexual division of labor, the concept of "gender" has become more accepted than "sexual roles".
3. Using the phrase of "sexual roles" creates an image of a complementary nature of the relationship between men and women and there is a tendency to overlook frequently the control and domination of the power structure which are included in these relationships. Using the word "gender", we can avoid overlooking the power structures between men and women.
4. Starting with describing and analyzing the various aspects of the gender

phenomenon, research has progressed toward analysis of the social and cultural structures that have given birth to gender divisions.

5. Lives and activities of women who differ in terms of class, race·ethnicity, age and status are not only different, but even between female comrades it became clear that a relationship of mutual oppression appears. So it has become necessary to see the divisions between the sexes less absolutely and understand gender in terms of class and race.
6. The birth of men's studies make it clear that not only women but men are obsessed with gender, and men themselves aspire to self emancipation.
7. A new academic field has been born which criticizes sexual norms of modern society that regards heterosexual love as normal and anything outside as abnormal, and which aims at the self awareness of various sexual tendencies such as gays and lesbians. (Queer studies)

Certainly gender studies are a progression from women's studies that focused on research on sexual roles. But the stage is only just beginning.

4. Research on Modern Japanese Literature from the Gender Perspective in my case

Taking as a background this reconstruction in gender studies, now I come to my own research.

I am researching in several subjects in my field. One of most important subject is the study of Modern Japanese Literature from a gender point of view. Now I would like to introduce briefly my early research related to gender studies from 1982 until 1998.

1982, I began my research in this field with a critical analysis of Viyon no tsuma or The Wife of Villon by Dazai Osamu. In this book we tried to analyze some authorized modern writers from the gender perspective.

In 1986 I wrote an article entitled 'Women's Studies and Research on Literature'.

In 1987 I collaborated on anthology of original text and critical essays entitled Tanpen Joseibungaku Kindai or Short Novels in Modern Women's Literature. At the time the idea of a book focusing totally on women's writing was new and challenging, and although the publisher was initially very worried that project would not be successful, in fact it sold extremely well.

In the preface of this book, there appeared our point of view.

How have modern women writers defined and represented their sexualities, sensibilities, psychologies and the social issues. We investigated these themes in order to look at modern Japanese literature from a different point

of view. We examined twelve short novels, taking the point of view that women's identities are largely determined by the social order and institutions.

All twelve short novels have been written by women writers, and all the commentators are also women. We focused on how women are portrayed in each novel, and considered the women's problems from a contemporary perspective. Of course, there are many issues which relate to women's history and literary history, and we have selected novels which reflect these issues as broadly as possible.

The reason why we concentrated on short stories was because we felt that even if particular extracts from longer works suited our purposes, there was the danger of "scrappiness" and that the novel's own independent world would be destroyed. We believe that presenting complete stories to be read from start to finish as they were written is the best way of seeing the author's intention and the structure of the work.

The commentary on each novel is divided into three parts. Before the novel itself there is a brief outline of the author's life and work. The section entitled "people-literature" touches on the main issues and describes the history of the modern period in which a woman's ego was suppressed by the social system, as well as women's struggle within this system. Finally, by analyzing the expressions used and investigating the individual world created by the story, the section entitled "appreciation", we have considered how women are depicted. By reading all three parts, it should be possible to gain an idea of the meaning of each story and its place in the author's work as a whole.

The section entitled "research trends" describes the way in which the various authors and stories have been looked at and appraised before now, and notes the issues which remain for future investigation.

All the commentators are women. The special feature of this book is that women have selected works by women which concentrate on the portrayal of women and have looked at these from a modern perspective. Since the comments have been left to the discretion of the commentators they have been able to display their own awareness of the issues and their own individuality.

Aim of the book was that readers could derive more enjoyment and satisfaction from their reading of novels, as well as helping them to think about the meaning of a woman's perspective in terms of the meaning of literature. In this way we hope to have played our small part in putting forward a new image of women which will enable them to live fulfilled lives now and in the future.

In 1993 I took part in another volume entitled Tanpen Joseibungaku Gendai or Short Novels in Contemporary Women's Literature with other researchers, in response to the popularity of the first volume.

The followings are the contents of these two books.

Tanpen Joseibungaku Kindai or Short Novels in Modern Women's Literature

Edited by Imai Yasuko, Yabu Teiko and Watanabe Sumiko Tokyo : Ôfûsya, 1987

1. Koware Yubiwa (Broken Ring) by Shimizu Shikin reviewed by Imai Yasuko
2. Uramurasaki (Purple of the reverse) by Higuchi Ichiyô
reviewed by Yabu Teiko
3. Ikichi (Fresh Blood) by Tamura Toshiko reviewed by Hasegawa Kei
4. Tanabatasama (The Tanabata Festival) by Nogami Yaeko
reviewed by Watanabe Sumiko
5. Rôgisyô (A Tale of The Old Geisha) by Okamoto Kanoko
reviewed by Yoshikawa Toyoko
6. Kôrogijô (Miss Cricket) by Ozaki Midori reviewed by Kano Keiko
7. Kôfuku (Happiness) by Uno Chiyo reviewed by Oka Nobuko
8. Hibi no Utsuri (Reflections of Everyday Life) by Miyamoto Yuriko
reviewed by Iwabuchi Hiroko
9. Seryôshitsu nite (At A Room in A Hospital) by Hirabayashi Taiko
reviewed by Nakayama Kazuko
10. Bangiku (Dying Chrysanthemum) by Hayashi Fumiko
reviewed by Ogata Akiko
11. Aware (Pity) by Sata Ineko reviewed by Numazawa Kazuko
12. Nise no Enishi Syûi (A Bond for Two Lifetimes-Gleanings) by Enchi Fumiko
reviewed by Itô Hatsuko
13. Modern Women's Literature Watanabe Sumiko
14. Chronological Table Nishida Rika

Tanpen Joseibungaku Gendai or Short Novels in Contemporary Women's Literature

Edited by Imai Yasuko, Yabu Teiko and Watanabe Sumiko Tokyo : Ôfû, 1993

1. Parutai (Partei) by Kurahashi Yumiko reviewed by Imai Yasuko
2. Hone no Niku (Bone Meat) by Kôno Taeko
reviewed by Yoshikawa Toyoko
3. Yamanba no bisyô (The Smile of a Mountain Witch) by Ôba Minako
reviewed by Numazawa Kazuko
4. No ni (In the Field) by Hayashi Kyôko reviewed by Yabu Teiko
5. "Nomori" ("Nomori" or Guard of the Field) by Saegusa Kazuko
reviewed by Nakayama Kazuko

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| 6. Shinkazoku (New Family) by Tomioka Taeko | reviewed by Kano Keiko |
| 7. Imawa no Hana (The Flower of The Last Moments) by Ishimure Michiko | reviewed by Iwabuchi Hiroko |
| 8. Usagi(Rabbits) by Kanai Mieko | reviewed by Kitada Sachie |
| 9. Danmari Ichi (The Silent Traders) by Tsushima Yûko | reviewed by Ogata Akiko |
| 10. Anata e (To You) by Masuda Mizuko | reviewed by Hasegawa Kei |
| 11. Umi no Hô no Ko (A Boy from The Seaside) by Yamada Eimi | reviewed by Egusa Mitsuko |
| 12. Contemporary Women's Literature | Watanabe Sumiko |
| 13. Chronological Table | Nishida Rika |

In 1995, Feminizumu hihyô eno Syôtai or Introduction to Feminist Critics was published. I analyzed Daishichikankai Hôkô or Wandering The Seventh Sense World by Ozaki Midori.

5. FIGS : Expanding the Range

In 1996 we established Fukuoka International Gender Studies Forum (FIGS) in Fukuoka Prefecture. The followings are the objectives, the membership and the titles of speeches until March 1998. These are translated in English by Timothy Leuers.

Objectives

- 1) To collect and assimilate both overseas and domestic gender research
- 2) To exchange the latest gender research through lectures etc.
- 3) To publish, and otherwise disseminate to the general public, cross-disciplinary gender research
- 4) To create a communication network for those based in Fukuoka who are involved in gender research and to promote information exchange.

Membership

Members shall agree with and cooperate in the achievement of the objectives as laid out above and take part in the general management of the Forum. Applications to join the group will be assessed at the general meetings. The members as of October 1997, as detailed in the register, number 26 (15 female, 9 male) and include researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, literature, history, linguistics, jurisprudence, economics and women's history, as well as artists and writers.

FIGS Meetings

1996

- 8th August Stephanie Houghton (English Education)
The British Woman
- 16th September Doba Manabu (Sociology)
Men's Studies Today.
- 21st October Kôno Nobuko (Women's History)
Editing "The Time Space of Men and Women"
- 18th November Iwasa Yô (Biology)
The Biology of Gender-the Evolution of Sex
- 16th December Sasaki Michiko (Family Research)
Changes in Children's attitudes towards Gender Roles
- 1997
- 20th January Satô Norihiko (Physiological Anthropology)
Towards a Physiological Anthropology of Sexual Difference
- 17th February Nagasawa Sumiko (Linguistics)
Gender and Language
- 19th May Sonoda Naoko (Psychology)
Psychological Research on the Japanese and Gender
- 23rd June Timothy Leuers (Cross Cultural Psychology and Mythology)
A Cross Cultural Study of The Prohibited Gaze
- 21st July Harayama Tetsu (Sociology)
Gender and Work
- 15th September Fukuda Mitsuko (Women's History)
Gender and Custom
- 27th October Tachianna Pavrowa (Education)
(Novocivilsk University of Education, Education Theory)
Upheavals in the System and The Women of Russia
- 24th November Tominaga Keiko (Women's History)
Engendering History
- 1998
- 19th January Katada Jun (Anthropology)
The Drinking Patterns of Career Women :
In Comparison to Working Men
- 16th February Yin Zhu
Chinese Women and Work
- 16th March Hiwaki Yuriko (Writer)
The Twilight of the Housewife :
Looking at "Croissant" Magazine and Anti Pyramid
Selling Law

6. Conclusion

I have tried to give a brief informative account on women's studies and gender research in Japan, and also an explanation of my involvement in this field until 1998.

I begun to analyze Modern Japanese Literature from the gender perspective and have expanded the range. I would like to create a communication network of multi disciplinary research involved in gender.

Notes

A version of this paper was presented at Gender, Cultural Differences and Social Justice (LSE Gender Institute) in March 1998. I would like to thank the organizer, Dr.Mallina Calloni. Thanks also to Prof. Fred Murphy for valuable suggestions.