

論文要旨

Summary of Dissertation

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| 論文題目 Title | Gender Negotiations: Dialectics and Discourses on Marriage in Contemporary Japan |
| 和訳または英訳 Translation (J->E, or E->J) | ジェンダーをめぐる交渉-現代日本の結婚に関する対話と語り |

There is a growing reassessment of the meaning and role of gender and gender relations in society. This gives higher attention to the power relations between men and women in all domains, from development projects to the workplace and home. It also recognizes that institutions often inefficiently represent women's interests, thus hampering their advancement toward gender parity.

The Japanese society though, recognized as a patriarchal state has been experiencing changes from the female gender over the years. The 1980s and 1990s saw a chain of a broad and far-reaching counter- hegemonic revolutions in this regard. Some of such apparent transformations include changes in the lifestyle choices available to young women and the shifting boundaries between the family and community as well as the shifting roles of the state in present-day Japan.

Contemporary Japanese women are in pursuit of a way of life that goes beyond the options accessible to them at home and work thus leading to a questioning of the basics of what constitutes a real life. These questionings, has birthed and is still birthing **alternative** ways that differ significantly from the generally accepted view of what constitutes a good life.

This thesis focuses on this new generation of Japanese, specifically, the female gender and explores some aspects of these alternative ways viz. Delayed marriage (*Bankonka*), Cohabitation, Life time Singles (*Ohitorisama*) and International marriage. The thesis sets these alternatives against the backdrop of the social changes mentioned above, to explore the life that contemporary Japanese women consider ideal.

It argues that deploying either of these alternatives have become conceivably the most significant means presently at women's disposal to repel gendered expectations of the female life routes in Japan. It proceeds by seeking to answers the following questions.

- To what extent are the institutions of marriage and the Japanese corporate culture grounds for hegemony?
- What are the strategies engaged by modern Japanese women to challenge or circumvent cultural practices that act as limitations in their quest for self-empowerment and gender parity? How well have they fared in their quest?
- To what extent is marriage to non-Japanese men grounds for transcending cultural margins?

These four aspects of alternative lifestyles becomes remarkable due to their centrality in the ongoing gender discourse; the novelty in some of these lifestyles and their relations to the advancement of individualism which is closely tied to "the economics of marriage" (Gary 1974).

Theoretical Framework

In this thesis, gender is conceptualized as a socially constructed unifying belief upon which the relationships between men and women are instituted and maintained. Gender relations are dynamic and open to historical change because changing socio-economic, historical, and cultural factors shape gender.

In the 1980s, feminist anthropology, an aspect of gender studies within anthropology which is swayed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other postmodern discourse, encouraged an evaluation of the politics of representation.

Procedurally, the unifying aspect of feminist anthropology is that it focuses on the role, standing and influences of women within a given culture. Within this framework individual researchers explore a wide range of interests and theoretical models to interpret data. One such model is the concept of practice.

The practice approach can be summarily seen as an approach that answers questions concerning "the impact of the system on practice and the impact of practice on the system". At the core of the system are unambiguous actualities of asymmetry, discrimination and control in a given society. A study of the "functioning aspects of a cultural system through which actors manipulate, interpret, legitimize, and reproduce the patterns of cooperation and conflict that order their social world"(Collier and Rosaldo 1981:311), a sort of "dialectic of control" (Ortner 1975:145)

This brings to the fore, the significance of actors or agency who effectually engage all the "on-the-ground" variable practices, "serious games" (Ortner 1996, 1999) that can shape the systems.

Scope/ Methodology

Scope wise, this research is basically limited to selected wards within the Yokohama area and snippets of other interviews around the Tokyo area. It is worthy to note that study sampled a very tiny fraction of Japanese women within a fraction of Japan as a country thus it is superfluous to authoritatively speak of Japanese women as a whole. However, the lifestyle of this tiny fraction of women represent a trend which can no longer be ignored.

Using the snowballing method, I carried out interview spanning over a period of about 15 months. I used the semi-structured of interview. Beginning first, with question guides, and asking further questions from their answers. The questions were designed to investigate the opinion of young people towards marriage in the present day, the alternatives to marriage and their expectations in marriage or relationships.

The thesis is basically divided into 6 chapters with chapter one introducing the purpose and objectives of the research. Chapter two introduces the background of study. It notes that that Japan is still a marriage society "kekkon shakai".

Chapters three, four and five forms the core of the work with chapter three focusing on delayed marriage and cohabitation.

Employing an amalgam of ethnographic data from the field and official statistical data from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, I argued that there is a clear demonstration of consciousness by contemporary Japanese women towards marriage.

Results from the field also disclose the struggles and dilemma of women as they experiment with different lifestyles to find a more appropriate solution to the challenges posed by the present gender formulations. It is an indication that more and more women do not believe that marriage holds the key to a woman happiness but becomes a "necessary evil" as they grow older to find a secured life in old age.

I however established that, it is safe to conclude that the trend of Bankonka is not likely to wane as there is an equally corresponding high numbers of male Bankon. There is also a surge in the number of non-parasite singles who are both financially and emotionally ready to live independent of their parents and to be responsible for their own welfare in every ramifications. A significant number of ladies are psychologically preparing themselves to remain lifetime singles

In chapter four, I examined the novel concept of *Ohitorisma* as one of these new alternative lifestyle. With the advancement of individualism, this option is progressively becoming a viable one, for individualism "is believed to have undermined commitment to intimate relationships" (Lewis 2001:8).

The argument of *ohitorisama* is that contemporary women possess an expectation and an outlook to life and marriage that goes beyond marriage for marriage sake or marriage for the sake of procreation or financial security. Like Sachiko (life story) said, “men have to change their thinking”. The society has to change its opinion as to the role and status of women in the society.

Relying on Ortner’s concept of “social mobility”, I call attention particularly to a not so new but, promising counter-hegemonic move to the perceived disadvantageous circumstances surrounding gender relations in Japan – international marriage. This phenomenon can be argued to be consistent with the politics of feminine identity and women’s struggle and it is considered relevant in the changing status of women in contemporary Japan.

This chapter explores “multiple dialectics” and “active decision makings” while arguing that besides love, other motivations abound for international marriages that are neither non-political nor non-individualistic. By looking at international marriage from the perspective of the Japanese woman, this chapter argues that gender is a game and irrespective of who gets ‘used’ by whom, the game of gender if dexterously played can crop advantageous results for the women folks in Japan’s patriarchal society.

This approach is enthused in modern studies of gender as performative and negotiated practice, which is most powerful at the margins of cultures and nationalities (Butler, 1990; Ortner 1996).

These women are seen to be literally and metaphorically marrying down the social ladder. Within the loose norms permitted by this hypogamy, they are able to construct and indeed customize the kind of relationship they deem most suitable for them. They sacrifice social acceptability at the altar of social mobility.

These marriages are not without their failings as cultural dissimilarities abound on several grounds. Difficulties and disagreements stem from simple matters like food to issues of taboo and ethics. These can breed tensions and failed expectations that can consequently result in divorce (see the case of Mariko).

Japanese women sometimes inadvertently marry men whose cultural practices are highly patriarchal and sometimes permits polygamy which I suppose is the height of patriarchy. The quality of their relationships becomes questionable when the women demonstrate so much power and autonomy and jettisons the place of the man thus reversing hegemony.

Conclusion

Women have come to realize that the economics of marriage that was financial security and a home in exchange for housekeeping was no longer profitable. Conversely, the solution to the present skewed gender formulations also lies in a change in the present cultural ideologies that borders on gender in Japan.

As “power itself is double-edged, operating from above as domination and from below as resistance” (Ortner 2006:139), the equation becomes even more complex and the result is a continual process of negotiation. This process should be viewed more as a negotiation, an arbitration between domination and resistance. This logic is captured by Ortner as she notes that “the anthropology of “agency” is not only about how social subjects, as empowered or disempowered actors, play the games of their culture, but about laying bare what those cultural games are, about ideological underpinnings, and how the play of the game reproduces or transforms those underpinnings. (2006: 152)