

---

BY

---

MIKISO

---

HANE

---

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.  
*Lanham • Boulder • New York • Oxford*

---



---

PEASANTS

---

REBELS

---

WOMEN

---

AND

---

OUTCASTS

---

The Underside of Modern Japan

---

Second Edition

---



This Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. edition of *Peasants, Rebels, Women, and Outcastes* is an unabridged republication of the edition first published in New York in 1982, with the addition of a new preface and chapter, and with revisions to the epilogue and index, by the author. It is reprinted by arrangement with the author.

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.

Published in the United States of America  
by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.  
A Member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowmanlittlefield.com

PO Box 317  
Oxford  
OX2 9RU, UK

Originally published in 1982 by Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.  
Reprinted by permission.  
Copyright © 1982 by Mikiso Hane  
New preface and new chapter copyright © 2003 by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Book design by Elissa Ichiyasu  
Maps by Harry Scott

*All rights reserved.* No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hane, Mikiso.

Peasants, rebels, women, and outcastes : the underside of modern Japan / Mikiso Hane.— 2nd ed.

p. cm. — (Asian voices)

Includes bibliographical references and index.


ISBN 978-0-7425-2525-2

1. Japan—Social conditions. 2. Japan—History—19th century. 3. Japan—History—20th century. I. Title. II. Asian voices (Rowman and Littlefield, inc.)

HN723 .H36 2003  
306'.0952—dc21

2002151950

Printed in the United States of America

 The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.



wife—as mistress of the family—played a central role.

Life for a farm family meant arduous work in the fields—and often little more. Farm women were hardly touched by the Westernized products that their counterparts in the cities were beginning to enjoy by the 1920s. The latter had the opportunity to shop in glittering department stores, see movies with glamorous stars, wear Western dresses, get a Western-style permanent wave, find employment as office girls in modern brick office buildings or in modern department stores. All this was as unreal for peasant women as the glamorous Hollywood life depicted in films was for urban working women.

For farm girls and women, life was dull, difficult, restrictive, and Spartan. Taught since childhood not to seek personal happiness and pleasure, they were bound by traditional, feudalistic mores and values. If they remained in the village they were expected to labor just as hard as the men. A city dweller residing temporarily in a farm village recalled that “the people who had gone to help in rice planting all complained of backaches. An old woman put some mulberry tree roots on the brazier, boiled some tea, and talked about the days when she was young. ‘If you worked for a family that was bent on getting ahead economically it was very hard. We worked so hard that we weren’t able to squat in the toilet because our legs were so sore.’”<sup>4</sup>

In villages where the men went to work in nearby factories, women and children were left behind to tend the fields on their own. In 1939, a farmer in Chiba prefecture told an inquiring visitor:

As you can see, this area is governed by the concept of respecting men and holding women in low regard. Women have to do much work. . . . If you look in the fields, you will see mostly women working. From around the late 1890s on, men from this area began to find work in factories making winnowing machines. At first the men went to work during the slack season on the farm, but as the factories got more business their sons began to join them. The women had to stay behind and work hard on the farm. . . . So a woman has to carry a load that weighs fifteen to sixteen *kan* [about twenty-five pounds] on her back. As a result her rear end protrudes and she walks bent over. When she wears a kimono she looks misshapen. Nowadays young men want as wives, good looking girls who don’t work. This makes no sense. In the old days people used to hand the prospective bride a handful of beans [*mame*]. When she stuck out her hand for the beans, [the groom’s family] looked to see if her hands were full of calluses [*mame*]. If so, she was seen as a hardworker who would turn out to be a good young wife. Today few girls work as hard as girls formerly did. They want to imitate the ways of the

well-off city girls who dress and make up nicely. They are thoughtless and worry about keeping their hands and feet from getting coarse.<sup>5</sup>

An old woman in a village in the Kanto region observed in 1945:

In families that are fairly well off, the man has work outside the house and does not do much farm work. So the wife has to take charge of field work and keep everything in order. . . . She works hard at everything. The husband, imitating his mother, treats his wife heartlessly, as if she is a servant, but if we go behind the scenes it soon becomes clear that the wife has the real authority. When you have business with a family, if you give the children presents you can quickly make a deal. The farmer’s wife does a full-time job in the field and somehow finds time to raise her children.<sup>6</sup>

Because the farm woman had her hands full, peasants usually frowned upon any woman interested in culture or “book learning.” Such activities, especially for women and girls, were regarded as time wasters, that led to unrealistic aspirations and discontent. One old woman recalled that whenever her mother caught her reading she would take the book away from her saying, “It’s pretentious for girls to read books.”<sup>7</sup>

The belief that farm girls need not be educated contributed to their low rate of school attendance before the turn of the century. A few years before World War II, a man in a farm community not far from Tokyo told a visitor, “Education? Around here we don’t believe it’s necessary to educate girls. . . . Nowadays some families send their daughters to school to prepare them for marriage. I guess it’s a form of vocationalism.”<sup>8</sup> If a city girl married into a farm family, she was looked upon as a completely useless person because all her “education and culture” did nothing to make her a useful farm worker.

The other function of farm women, aside from working in the fields and on household chores, was to produce children. One old farm woman asserted, “Farmers must have children. Three children are not enough. There must be at least five. If a farmer has too few children, the world will close in on him. If he has too many, he will have trouble supporting them, but there must be at least five working hands in the family.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, most farm families did not limit the number of their offspring. A villager near Tokyo observed, “The women here have lots of children. Eight or nine is not unusual. In the old days infanticide was tacitly permitted by the feudal lord, but after the Meiji restoration two or three villagers were punished for this. People were shocked and abandoned the practice.”<sup>10</sup>







system. "By nature, human beings should be equal." But inequality prevails because of the "entity called emperor."<sup>3</sup> Although their plot may have been simply rhetorical, the authorities accused Kaneko and Pak of scheming to assassinate the emperor. During her interrogation, Kaneko said that to show the people that the emperor was not a god but was like any other human being, she and Pak Yeol thought of throwing a bomb at him to show that he too will die like any other human being. Kaneko and Pak were convicted and sentenced to death. At the last minute, they were told that due to the benevolence of the emperor their death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment. Pak accepted the reprieve, but Kaneko tore up the certificate and later hanged herself in prison.

The third "rebel" who challenged the existing order was Itô Noe, who was eventually murdered by the military police. Itô, like Kanno and Kaneko, was one of the truly remarkable women of modern Japan. In a society where women were expected to suppress their individuality and conform self-effacingly to a feudal, male-centered social code, she began even as a teenager to assert her individuality.

Itô Noe was born into an impoverished working-class family in a village near Fukuoka city in Kyushu. After finishing elementary school, she moved to Tokyo in 1909 to live with her uncle and attend a girls high school. Her courage to challenge conventional mores was fostered at the school.

In August, 1911, Itô's parents arranged her engagement to the son of a family friend. Compelled to wed against her will, eight days after the marriage she left her husband and fled to Tokyo. She became intimate with Tsuji Jun, a teacher at her school, and lived with him for several years.

Itô Noe's first overt act as a rebel against the prevailing social mores was her rejection of an arranged marriage. This experience is discussed in her letter to her cousin, which she published in *Seitô* journal in March, 1914.

## To My Cousin

Right now, two things are mixed up in my mind, and I am bewildered. I can no longer count how many times I have started writing to you, Kimi-chan. But each time I began wondering if what I write will be understood by you correctly without any misconceptions. If you did not understand me it would

be truly unfortunate for you as well as for me, and so each time I abandoned the attempt. But I so much want to write to you. The two things mixed up in my mind are the urge to write to you and the worry that writing to you might produce unfortunate results.

Kimi-chan, what do you think of me? I am sure if you were asked whether I am a good person or a bad person, you would have difficulty answering. Perhaps you think I am a bad person. But I also believe you have many questions about me. These questions are not only important for me, but they are probably important for you too. I am certain that as you read what I am going to write, some things will strike a chord in your mind.

I am sure you do not know everything about my actions. My aunt [Kimi's mother] must think that I am a hopelessly dissolute and selfish young woman. I realize that anyone who views my actions as being far from normal or conventional will feel the same way. But I have my own rationale. And I believe it is the true explanation for my actions. I believe that in all things a particular person's thoughts can be understood only by that person, and by no one else. Isn't this true? Let us assume that you, Kimi-chan, are thinking of something. No matter how hard someone else tries to think of your thoughts they will not be able to understand what you are really thinking about. You alone understand your true thoughts. Other people are only guessing and conjecturing and are wrong.

Applying the same reasoning in my case, my parents, aunts, and others are making assumptions and becoming completely angry or bitter. You probably have heard only the angry words and condemnations that your mother expresses based on these assumptions. But despite this, I believe that you do not have negative feelings about me. Maybe this is an arbitrary assumption on my part and when you read this you may burst out laughing. But I would like you to listen to my true feelings. I believe it would not be completely pointless to have you compare and see the difference between what your mother and others have assumed, and what my true thoughts are.

To begin with, the words that have always been showered on me are the two words, selfish and unfilial. I myself believe that these words about me are accurate. And I can understand the feelings of my parents and others who speak of me this way. They all say that I cause them pain and remain indifferent about it. Far from remaining indifferent, I feel terrible. But no matter how badly I feel, I have to endure it and I have to go forward along my own path. No one thinks at all about the pain I feel deep within my heart. Reason and feelings do not work together. To judge one's parents' actions as right or wrong is something that everyone does, as soon as one is old enough to think for oneself—that is, as soon as one is grown up. But one cannot immediately dislike one's father and treat him like a stranger because he did something