

Edith Wen-Chu Chen  
Asian American Studies  
California State University  
July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013

## **Incorporating Japanese Studies into the Curriculum-Project Summary**

The enriching experiences during the two weeks training at the Japanese Studies Institute at San Diego State University has provided with content, resources, and insights on how to incorporate Japanese content into three of my current classes. The classes include Introductory to Asian American Studies, Asian American women, and Asian Americans & Health.

For my Introductory to Asian American Studies class, I plan on showing the film, "Only the Brave," which was introduced to us during our two week training session. During our training session, we had the rare opportunity to view the poignant film, followed by an engaging Q & A session with director, writer, and main actor Lane Nishikawa. Through watching the film, students would learn more about the little-known histories of Japanese American segregated infantry 100<sup>th</sup>/442<sup>nd</sup> infantry battalion as well as underscore the contradictory racial dynamics in the U.S. at the time. This film also highlights Japanese American experiences, particularly the section dedicated to their interment. It would also highlight the importance of oral history as a methodology that is often used in Asian American Studies.

For my Asian American women course, one of underlying topics investigates the ways Asian women have had power and influence. A popular held notion is that Japanese women have been traditionally regarded as second class to men. However, as Professors Jan Bardsley and Susan Klein suggested, this has not always been the case. A deeper examination of Japanese history reveals the various ways Japanese women had power, strength, and agency. Long before their European sisters, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Heian period, Japanese daughters had inheritance rights, receive education, and could have several lovers. Japanese folklore is rich with stories of women reappearing as "Angry ghosts," who linger on earth to settle unfinished business, sometimes taken vengeance on those who scorned them during their mortal lives. This common theme is quite different from the Western perception of Asian/Japanese women as submissive and docile. These topics would be further explored in the class.

A new area of teaching and research I am developing is Asian Americans and Health. The class emphasizes the social context of health. Some concepts that would be explored are "Karoshi"=death from overwork, the relationship between household structure and health. (i.e. Could the traditional role of women as housewives help explain Japan's relatively good health?), and the increased consumption of fast food. Additionally, I'd like to compare the health of Japanese to those of Japanese

Americans and the greater Japanese diaspora (i.e. Japanese Brazilians, Japanese Peruvians etc).

Of particular interest are the health of the Okinawan Japanese, who have proportionately the most centenarians in the world. In addition to diet, some of the social cultural context that contribute to their remarkable disease-free longevity are strong friendship groups that endure from childhood through their golden years. However, Japan itself is not immune to the growing global obesity epidemic. Metabolic syndrome-which is linked to obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases is on the rise in Japan. As a result, in 2008, Japan begins a policy mandating limits on waistline sizes for people over 40 in response to the rising problem of metabolic syndrome. Even young Okinawans, have a higher risk of heart disease than their elderly relatives. A modern lifestyle, including eating more processed foods and fast foods than the generation before them is one contributing factor.