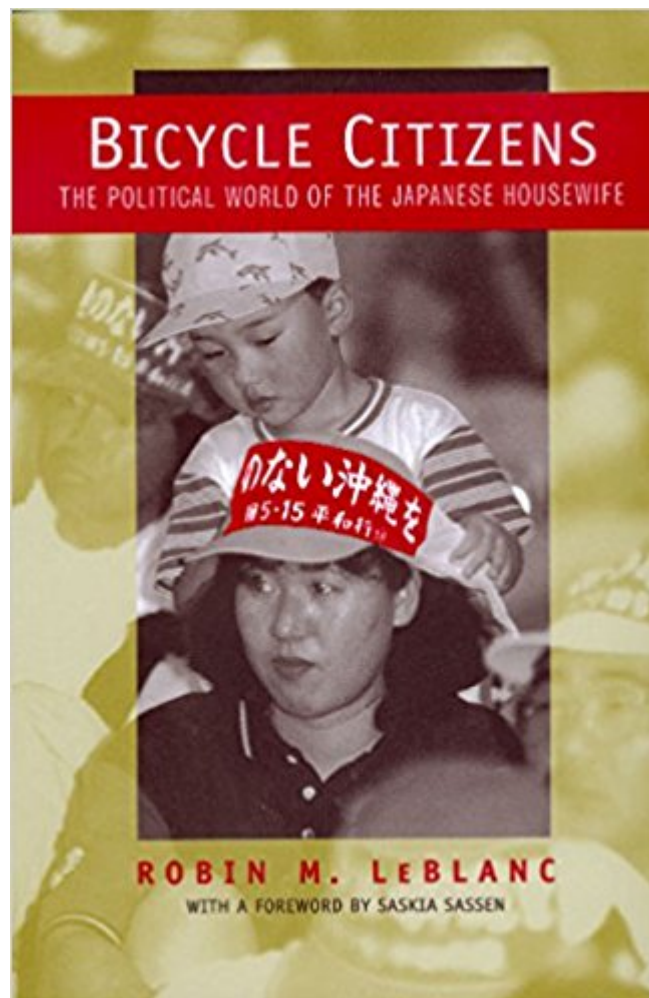




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Bicycle Citizens: The Political World Of The Japanese Housewife (Asia: Local Studies / Global Themes)



Synopsis

While the typical Japanese male politician glides through his district in air-conditioned taxis, the typical female voter trundles along the side streets on a simple bicycle. In this first ethnographic study of the politics of the average female citizen in Japan, Robin LeBlanc argues that this taxi-bicycle contrast reaches deeply into Japanese society. To study the relationship between gender and liberal democratic citizenship, LeBlanc conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in suburban Tokyo among housewives, volunteer groups, consumer cooperative movements, and the members of a committee to reelect a female Diet member who used her own housewife status as the key to victory. LeBlanc argues that contrary to popular perception, Japanese housewives are ultimately not without a political world. Full of new and stimulating material, engagingly written, and deft in its weaving of theoretical perspectives with field research, this study will not only open up new dialogues between gender theory and broader social science concerns but also provide a superb introduction to politics in Japan as a whole.

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Customer Reviews

"A gem of a book. LeBlanc brings the women she studies to life, leading us down the side streets and back alleys of Tokyo suburbia, trundling along on a clunker bicycle, and exploring how homemakers get involved in the grassroots level of politics."—Glenda Roberts, author of *Staying on the Line*

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This is not a book about bicycles. It is a book about Japanese women that is extremely important for any scholar of Japan. A typically Western socio-political analysis of the oppression and marginalization experienced by Japanese women as a result of being excluded from politics. As a book about Japan it is extremely important, however, as a book about women it is less so. In page after page the author drives home the same point that women in Japan are prevented from participating in politics as symbolized by political bosses who are men using automobile transportation on the highway while women are relegated to grocery shopping on bicycles taking side-streets. As a scholarly analysis the book is not without a couple of short-comings. The message of the book could be more plainly said. Few will be able to swim through the oceans of dense terminology and citations that are the hall-mark of professional scholarship. Also the book misses the importance of class. I doubt the wives of rich political bosses ride bicycles through narrow back-streets to go grocery shopping and organizing women-centered neighborhood cooperatives. Whatever its shortcomings the book is invaluable to gaining an understanding of how politics is practiced in modern day Japan in providing outstanding insight. This book is vital to understanding Japanese politics. The oppression of women theme would be augmented by comparative cultural studies, e.g., India and France.

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