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“The Waste of Society as Seen through Women’s Eyes:”: waste, gender, and national belonging in Japan

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Propositions

Propositions from the dissertation "The Waste of Society as Seen through Women's Eyes:" Waste, Gender, and National Belonging in Japan by Rebecca Tompkins

1. 'Waste' is a culturally and socially constructed concept, and what is considered to be waste differs according to social context.

2. In Japan, official and unofficial definitions of waste have changed significantly over the course of the twentieth century, and continue to shift today.

3. Household waste – waste that is generated and discarded by private individuals – is both deeply personal, in that it reveals a wealth of information about an individual's life, and public, in that it is subject to governmental regulations and public management.

4. In Japan, over the course of the twentieth century the role of the full-time housewife was valorized and held up as the ultimate aspiration for women, and remains the standard today.

5. Women and women's groups have chosen to cooperate or comply with government waste management efforts for their own reasons, which may diverge from government aims. Women and women's groups have also opposed and protested against government waste management efforts.

6. In Japan, a mix of structural and cultural factors beginning in the early 20th century led to the widespread adoption of incineration as the primary method of waste disposal. This change prompted the state and local governments to require citizens to actively sort household waste before collection as a necessary step in the waste management system.

7. In Tokyo, social problems arising from municipal waste management emerged frequently during the twentieth century. To help resolve one of these, in 1933 an organization of women suffragists collaborated with Tokyo city authorities in a campaign to raise awareness about correct waste disposal methods. The cooperative "garbage campaign" jointly organized by the Tokyo City

Sanitation Bureau and members of the League for Women's Suffrage in 1933 was beneficial for both parties, but failed to address the concerns of Fukagawa residents impacted by the garbage crisis.

8. During the Second World War, waste reduction and scrap collection was a major form of home-front mobilization in Japan that relied heavily on women's labor both inside and outside the home, and that demonstrated women's agency in using elements of mobilization to shape their relationship with the state.

9. Today, women take on the majority of the household labor necessitated by waste separation requirements (which have been increasing in complexity since in the late 1980s), and local governments rely on proper household separation for the waste management system to function.

10. Household waste separation and disposal, as a form of housework visible to neighbors and the community, can be seen as a public expression of community belonging for women and housewives in particular.