

Guidelines for Friday Discussion:
"Will the real Japan please stand up?"

This week's main reading is the book *Memories of Silk and Straw: A Self-Portrait of Small-Town Japan*. Our discussion of it will follow a lecture and slide presentation of modern city life in Tokyo during the 1920s, which depicts one view of Japan at that time. Life in small towns and rural villages throughout provincial Japan—outside the center of city hustle and bustle—contrasts with the "Roaring Twenties" of Ginza cafes, big department stores, dance halls, movie houses, and elusive "modern girls." *Memories of Silk and Straw* taps into this less glitzy lifestyle of interwar period Japan by presenting a diverse spectrum of small-town people and their stories. This apparent clash between the city center and provincial periphery led social critics, writers, and intellectual to ponder what constituted authentic Japanese culture—what was the "real Japan"? We will continue this topic of cultural identity into next week, but we will begin it this Friday through a discussion of *Memories of Silk and Straw*.

For this discussion, I'd like each of you to form a definition of the "real Japan" based on several representative stories from *Memories of Silk and Straw*. Be prepared to explain why you think your selections and definition represent the "real Japan." As you're considering this topic, think deeply and critically about what the concept of authenticity means and how ideas of culture can become political. We will follow up on this particular theme next week.