



Above the Clouds: Status Culture of the Modern Japanese Nobility

Takie Sugiyama Lebra

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This latest work from Japanese-born anthropologist Takie Sugiyama Lebra is the first ethnographic study of the modern Japanese aristocracy. Established as a class at the beginning of the Meiji period, the *kazoku* ranked directly below the emperor and his family. Officially dissolved in 1947, this group of social elites is still generally perceived as nobility. Lebra gained entry into this tightly knit circle and conducted more than one hundred interviews with its members. She has woven together a reconstructive ethnography from their life histories to create an intimate portrait of a remote and archaic world.

As Lebra explores the culture of the *kazoku*, she places each subject in its historical context. She analyzes the evolution of status boundaries and the indispensable role played by outsiders.

But this book is not simply about the elite. It is also about commoners and how each stratum mirrors the other. Revealing previously unobserved complexities in Japanese society, it also sheds light on the universal problem of social stratification.

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