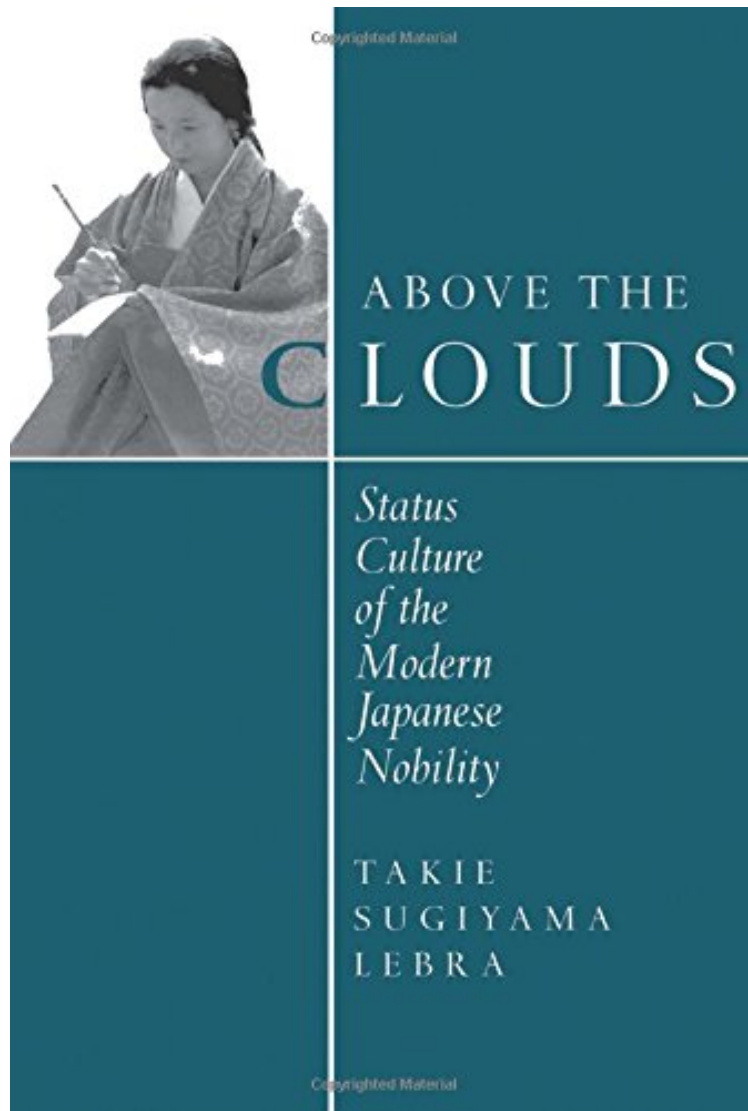


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## Above the Clouds: Status Culture of the Modern Japanese Nobility

*Takie Sugiyama Lebra*  
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**Takie Sugiyama Lebra : Above the Clouds: Status Culture of the Modern Japanese Nobility** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Above the Clouds: Status Culture of the Modern Japanese Nobility:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Shivya An absolutely fascinating read! 30 of 32 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating analysis of Japan's hereditary elite By Jeff Taliaferro Professor Sugayama Lebra presents a fascinating analysis of modern Japan's hereditary elite. The focus of her analysis is the "kazuko" -- Japan's hereditary peerage of the 1871-1947 period. As part of their westernizing reforms, the Meiji

oligarchs merged the Kyoto court nobles ("kuge") and the feudal lords ("daimyo") into a single aristocratic class, explicitly based on the British peerage. The "kazuko" or flowerly lineage served two functions: (1) to fill the non-elective upper chamber of the new parliament, and (2) to provide a social buffer between the revitalized Imperial Court and the rest of Japanese society. The American occupation reforms divested this hereditary elite of much its wealth and the 1947 Japanese constitution formally abolished the peerage. Nonetheless, the aristocratic pedigrees and family ties continue to play an important role in modern Japanese political, social and economic life. Relying on informer interviews, and extensive archival and genealogical research, Sugiyama Lebra recreates the world of this aristocratic class. Topics include: lineage, elite socialization, gender roles, status negotiation, marriage and adoption, professions and status careers, and adjustment to postwar life as common citizens of the new Japan. The book also provides valuable insights into the modern development of the Japanese imperial institution. Professor Sugiyama Lebra's book is a must read for anyone interest in contemporary Japan or the role of traditional elites in modern societies in general. This is an immensely readable book. Although targeted to a scholarly audience, this book is accessible to academics and non-academics alike.

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.

"Anyone who passes up this book on the assumption that it deals with a population best forgotten or that its appeal is limited to those with antiquarian interests is badly mistaken. . . . Do not fail to read this book for you will learn much about both the vanished world of its title and contemporary Japanese society."--Robert J. Smith, "Monumenta Nipponica" About the Author Takie Sugiyama Lebra is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Hawaii. She is the author of *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment* (1984) and *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (1976).