Lecture 19  

**Women Under Feudalism**

Giri vs. ninjo:
Giri: duty/obligation to one’s family, class, society; general sense of honor
But society can’t be based entirely on obligations; there must be room for feelings.
Obligations alone don’t create an orderly, harmonious society; must be tempered by
human feeling and expression. So, giri and ninjo balance each other out, somewhat, in
creating a relatively harmonious human society.

Women’s status evolved over different periods – Kamakura, Muramachi/Sengoku, and
Tokugawa eras.

**Kamakura**
Women had rights to own property. Marriages are slightly less political than later (more
prominent in the era between Muromachi and Tokugawa); there’s more freedom, though
they’re still fairly strict. Divorce was allowed if there was a basis in the law.

**Muromachi**
Feudal relationships highly emphasized: lord-vassal, parent-children, husband-wife.
Lord-vassal becomes predominant; determines many things, including interpersonal
things like marriages.

(between periods)
political marriages more prevalent
Men almost always determined divorces.
A widow or a divorced woman was highly stigmatized.

**Tokugawa**
Strict moral codes for women
Major function: having children/heirs. After they’ve had kids, they’re pretty disposable.

What are the big differences you’ve found between samurai woman and
merchant/courtesan women?

- samurai women are much less outspoken, because their world is more governed
  by the strict Confucian relationships. Merchant/courtesan women can be more
  outspoken because their social structure is not organized in the same way.

[film – *Samurai Rebellion*]