

HSI Report: Social Change – Gender Studies

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Students from across the globe participated in a three-day series of intensive classes on gender roles and identities, and how they affect every aspect of the world – politics, education, caregiving, media, violence, and sexuality, to name just a few. Conducted from August 1 to August 3, 2023, the seminar titled *Social Change: Gender Studies* was offered for the first time as part of the Hokkaido Summer Institute (HSI), under its *Global Liberal Arts Course* series of courses.



Professor Lynne Nakano delivering the lecture with empathy. (Photo: Aprilia Agatha Gunawan)

Professor Lynne Yukie Nakano, Department of Japanese Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, was the main lecturer of this course, while Associate Professor Ka Shing Ng, Faculty of Humanities and Human Sciences from Hokkaido University, acted as the coordinator. Together, they were able to relay the importance of studying gender and how it relates to everybody – not just women –

and why even people who benefit from the patriarchal system should take a look at it. “Gender studies is not only about women. It’s about women, men, and all genders. It is about how everybody is affected by gender categories on almost every level, even if we don’t recognize it. Understanding that helps us to move forward in the world in a more effective way,” explains Nakano. “Gender is often unspoken and assumed. It’s something that is a part of the way that we’re raised and socialized in families and schools. Being aware of how people of different genders experience the same world differently allows us to be kinder as human beings.”

The course introduced its students to theoretical and methodological approaches, highlighting how they can use gender studies to understand the world around them. The students also conducted their own short independent research and presented it in class. “It was a happy surprise to see that some groups managed to prepare sample surveys, gather multiple responses, and analyze the data in a nuanced manner in a very small amount of time. It felt good to see students actively participating in class and employing the tools they learnt for their projects,” remarked Nakano.



Over the course of three days, student groups of 3-5 members conducted research on topics related to the syllabus and presented their results in front of the class. (Photo: Aprilia Agatha Gunawan)

Classroom discussions were an integral part of this course. After every topic, the class was divided into groups of 4–5 students and given thought-provoking questions. Having students from diverse backgrounds led to interesting conversations and exchange of ideas. For Gris Luo, a Journalism bachelor student from Sichuan University, China, it was one of the highlights of the course — “What

I liked the most about these classes was having both teachers and students respect your ideas, even if you are not fluent in English.”



Vibrant discussions took place after every major topic. The students were encouraged to talk to new people each time, thus exposing themselves to ideas from all over the world. (Photo: Aprilia Agatha Gunawan)

Xu Yiyan, a Literature student also from Sichuan University, commented, “There have been many heated discussions about feminism on the Internet in China, which aroused my interest in gender studies. However, I have never studied it systematically. I hope this course can set up a framework for my understanding of gender and feminism.” Her sentiments were shared by many students. In some countries, discussions on gender and sexuality are not encouraged, so courses like *Gender Studies* offered by HSI gave many students a safe platform to talk about their experiences. Xu also shared that she was almost moved to tears several times during the class — a testament to the impact of this course on students.



Many questions were put to the class, giving students the chance to share their thoughts and beliefs. The classroom was filled with healthy debates and a safe, open-minded atmosphere was created for discussions. (Photo: Aprilia Agatha Gunawan)

Gender studies is a toolkit and a perspective for understanding the world. Participants in this course were encouraged to evaluate how

theories and approaches used in gender studies can be used to study other subjects. Using contemporary social issues from inside and outside of Japan, the course showed how assumptions are made about each gender in different situations and how that can massively change life experiences. The class raised questions about how these assumptions were created, who was making these assertions, how they shaped the past and the present, and how we can use that knowledge to change the future for the better.

A Taiwanese medical student from National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Wu Chia Yen commented, “As a man, I don’t get a lot of opportunities to talk about gender issues, so I am happy I took this class. I liked how Professor Nakano delivered the course with a very broad understanding of gender studies.”

With the Hokkaido Summer Institute courses running until October, students are enjoying this summer season by opting for multiple subjects. The complete course catalog for 2023 can be found [here](#) .



Social Change: Gender Studies saw healthy participation from both Hokkaido University and its partner universities. (Photo: Aprilia Agatha Gunawan)

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