

Institute for Japanese Studies Lecture Series:

Antiquity, Anachronism, and Gender: Thoughts on the Art of Spear Fighting in Mid-19th Century Japan

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Friday, October 7, 2016
10:20 - 11:15 am
Koffolt Lab 131
140 W 19th Ave

Abstract: It is well known that after Commodore Matthew Perry arrived to open up Japan in 1853, governments large and small as well as individuals tried to arm themselves with the latest in Western military technology. Less well known is that some people placed renewed emphasis on traditional martial arts and recalled bygone military practices. While offering some examples of a search through antiquity for aid in dealing with the foreign crisis, I focus on spear fighting. What gave spears and other weapons meaning was not their intrinsic quality as potentially deadly items, but their association with culturally specific practices, in particular the prevalence of schools dedicated to propagating their use with rules and secret traditions, practices that given the turmoil wrought by domestic disorder and foreign pressure as well as the political centralization soon to follow now appear increasingly anachronistic. Unlike the other martial arts at this time, both men and women practiced the art of the spear, or in the case of women, the halberd, another type of pole arm. When women of Aizu took their weapons out of the home in defense of their domain, they raised troubling questions regarding the construction of militarized masculinity.



Bio: Anne Walthall is professor emerita of Japanese History at the University of California, Irvine. She is the author of *Japan: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (2006), *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (1998), *Peasant Uprisings in Japan: A Critical Anthology of Peasant Histories* (1991), and *Social Protest and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century Japan* (1986). In addition she has edited or co-edited *Recreating Japanese Men* (2011), *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History* (2008), *The Human Tradition in Modern Japan* (2002), and *Women and Class in Japanese History* (1999). She has written numerous articles, most recently "Shipwreck! Akita's Local Initiative, Japan's National Debt, 1869-1872" *Journal of Japanese Studies* (2013) and "Do Guns have Gender? Technology and Status in Early Modern Japan," in *Recreating Japanese Men*.

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