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2015 KYOTO LECTURES

Wednesday, June 6th, 18:00h

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney

SPEAKER

Many Meanings of Cherry Blossoms Communicative Opacity in Political Spaces

Using a number of visual images, this talk will outline the extraordinarily rich array of meanings, often contradictory to one another, assigned to cherry blossoms in Japanese culture from the ancient period to the present. A particular focus will be given on their deployment as the symbol of *yamatodamashii* since the end of the 19th century when the cherry blossom became the master trope for the soldiers' sacrifice for the emperor—"thou shall fall like beautiful cherry petals"—culminating in the *tokkōtai* (*kamikaze*) operations. The tragic fate of the flower, however, is now reversed with cherry blossoms again given the meaning of life and offering consolation and hope to the victims of the Fukushima tragedies. As a problem in the study of symbolism, the role played by the polyvocality of the flower and how it leads to the absence of symbolic communication will be explored. The Japanese historical experience will be placed in broader comparative perspectives.

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney is William F. Vilas Research Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her books on Japan include: *Illness and Healing among the Sakhalin Ainu*; *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan*; *The Monkey as Mirror*; *Rice as Self*; *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms and Nationalisms*; *Kamikaze Diaries: Reflections of Student Soldiers*. She has held several visiting positions as Distinguished Chair of Modern Culture at the Library of Congress, Fellow at the Institut d'Études Avancées, Paris, the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton, the Center for Advanced Study at Stanford, the Bellagio Rockefeller Center, and visiting professorships at Oxford, Harvard, Michigan, Heidelberg, Manchester and the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan. Currently, she is a visiting research scholar at the International Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto.

This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room 1, 1st floor).

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