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KYOTO LECTURES

Tuesday, November 12th, 18:00h

Michiko Suzuki SPEAKER

Writing Kimono in *Kōda Aya*

Depictions of kimono are prevalent in many works of modern Japanese literature, as descriptions of daily wear and clothing culture. Kimono also serve as key symbols for character or plot, reflect regional and class identity, and subtly articulate social commentary. However, the literary presentation of this complex form of apparel has often been overlooked in scholarship, particularly since the mid twentieth century when the kimono, overtaken by Western wear, became an exotic item requiring esoteric knowledge. By revisiting the representation of kimono in literature, we can expand our understanding of text, the material object and the contexts of literary production.

This talk will focus on *Kimono* (1965-68), an unfinished novel by Kōda Aya (1904-90) that depicts a girl's growing up process through her experiences with kimono in the early decades of the twentieth century. While illustrating the protagonist's development and transformation through prewar dress culture, kimono in this work also serve a variety of other functions. By considering different ways of interpreting the writing of kimono in this text, a new look at the work will be offered, particularly in light of 1950-60s kimono culture and the novel's "after-life," its posthumous publication and revitalization through the writing of Kōda's literary inheritors, daughter Aoki Tama (1929-) and granddaughter Aoki Nao (1963-).

Michiko Suzuki is Associate Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, Bloomington. She is the author of *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2010). Her research on modern Japanese literature particularly focuses on issues of gender and sexuality, as well as the relationship between literary texts and broader cultural discourses. Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Journal of Asian Studies*, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, *Japan Review* and *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Currently she is working on two projects: representations of kimono and material culture in modern Japanese literature and film, and discourses of sex difference in early twentieth century sexology and popular literature.

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

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