



Scuola Italiana di Studi
sull'Asia Orientale
ISEAS



École Française
d'Extrême-Orient
EFEO

CO-HOSTED BY



ecaf
european consortium
for asian field study

KYOTO LECTURES

Tuesday, December 8th, 18:00h

Miri Nakamura SPEAKER

The Robotic Housekeeper

Rethinking Japanese Domesticity through the Image of *Kaseifu*

The figure of the housekeeper has recently become extremely visible in Japan through TV series such as *Kaseifu no Mita* (The housekeeper Mita, 2011) and its 1980s inspiration, *Kaseifu wa mita* (The housekeeper saw, 1983-2008). These shows cast the part-timer, the housekeeper, as the center of the Japanese household, who replaces the mother and takes care of the entire family in her stead.

This talk traces the image of the housekeeper from the immediate postwar through these contemporary works in order to rethink Japanese domesticity. Many scholarships have focused on the importance of the biological mother in the modern family, but from the Meiji era through the war, the Japanese family was comprised of the nuclear family plus at least one live-in maid (*jochū*), and the system shifted to the housekeeper once maids began to disappear. Are these women merely replacements of the mother's tasks, or are they engaged in other work as well? By examining these visual representations of the *kaseifu*, the talk will uncover the affective labor of the housekeepers to show how their labor is tied to the concept of "the zany," a trait of excessive work highly valued in late capitalism.

Miri Nakamura is Associate Professor of Japanese Literature in the College of East Asian Studies at Wesleyan University. Her first book, *Monstrous Bodies: The Rise of the Uncanny in Modern Japan*, was just published from Harvard University East Asia Center Press in July. In it, she traced the image of "modern monsters"—doppelgangers, twins, automata—and argued that these imaginary bodies arose as new scientific discourses like eugenics entered Japan. She is currently working on her second book, *Maid Manifesto*, which looks at the figures of the maid (*jochū*) in the modern era and the housekeeper (*kaseifu*) in the postwar era. This book aims to reveal the functions of affective labor, emotional labor that contrasts to physical, material labor. Nakamura has also co-organized numerous film festivals, literary festivals, and a conference called "Asian Horror Cinema and Beyond." One of her current side projects is an anthology of essays developed from this conference.

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

École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO)
29 Betto-cho Kitashirakawa, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8276 Japan

Italian School of East Asian Studies (ISEAS)
4th Floor, 4 Yoshida Ushinomiya-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8302 Japan

EFEO | T: 075-701-0882 F: 075-701-0883 E: efeo.kyoto@gmail.com

ISEAS | T: 075-751-8132 F: 075-751-8221 E: iseas@iseas-kyoto.org

