KIMONO IMAGINARIES: POWER, PLAY, AND MURDER

Session A, 8:30-10:00 am, January 16, 2021
Southeast Regional Conference of the Association of Asian Studies
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Welcome to Kimono Imaginaries

Thanks for your interest in our panel.

All four of us are writing books touching on kimono. At the conference, we will each give 10-minute presentations on one aspect of our work. This reserves about 40 minutes for discussion with our attendees. In discussion, we join you in taking up broad issues such as: kimono authority and constraint vs. kimono play; Japaneseness and the kimono; and the kimono as gendered fashion.

This PDF introduces our book projects and explains what issues we will take up in our presentations.

We look forward to talking with you on Saturday, January 16th.
This book project uses men’s fashion and dress to place Japan back into its global history. Though widely assumed cut off from the world by shogunal decrees, Japan remained connected through its fashion trade in cloth, dyestuffs and the technology of fashion. Japan’s “opening” in 1853, then, was no great inflection point. Men continued experimenting with new styles as they had done for centuries. In short, this book aims to show that Japanese dress is far less iconically “Japanese” -- and far more cosmopolitan -- than we might have ever imagined.

Gavin James Campbell is a professor at Doshisha University in Kyoto. He writes, researches and teaches transnational American Studies and Pacific World history, with a special interest in the long US-Japan cultural encounter. His latest publication is “Styling Hirohito: Modernity, Monarchy and ‘Western Clothes’ in Interwar Japan,” Fashion Theory (forthcoming, spring 2021).
Sartorial Diplomacy at the Shogun’s Court

Gavin James Cambell's presentation topic

When the US Consul Townsend Harris finally won an audience with the shogun Tokugawa Iesada in 1858, it came after painful preparatory negotiations. Among the most intractable issues was what everyone should wear. Shogunal officials spent countless hours researching precedents and rummaging through storage, while Harris had brought to Japan the most gilded uniform he could find in Paris. For all their differences, both Harris and Iesada understood that their political legitimacy rested, in part, on the clothes they wore.
The Kimono Tattoo
A novel by Rebecca Copeland

“I jostled her shoulder and noticed when I did that her skin was cold to the touch.... her entire torso was covered in tattoos from her collar bone to the midline of her thighs. All were of kimono motifs—fans, incense burners, peonies, and scrolls.”

This ghastly scene was the last thing Ruth Bennett expected to encounter when she agreed to translate a novel by a long-forgotten Japanese writer. Returning to her childhood home in Kyoto had promised safety, solitude, and diversion from the wounds she encountered in the U.S. But Ruth soon finds the story line in the novel leaking into her everyday life. Fictional characters turn out to be real, and the past catches up with the present in an increasingly threatening way.

Forthcoming from Brother Mockingbird Publishers, June 2021

https://www.brothermockingbird.net/
What happens when a professor of Japanese literature—who loves kimono, Kyoto, and whodunnits—decides to write her own novel?

In this presentation I will discuss some of my inspirations along with a brief reading from the novel.

https://www.rebecca-copeland.com/

Rebecca Copeland is Professor of Japanese Language and Literature at Washington University in St. Louis. Most recently, she co-edited with Linda Ehrlich, *Yamamba: In Search of the Japanese Mountain Witch*, due out in May from Stonebridge Press.
In Kyoto Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Contemporary Kyoto (forthcoming from University of Hawai'i Press), Jennifer Prough draws on ethnographic research to examine the ways that heritage is crafted in twenty-first century Kyoto for a variety of cultural agendas, social purposes, and economic strategies.

Each chapter examines a prominent feature of Kyoto tourism, highlighting the interplay between the romantic desire for heritage tourism and the turn to personal experiences in tourism in Kyoto today.

Kyoto Revisited demonstrates how the past is mobilized in constructing the identity of the city, how that identity shapes understandings of contemporary Japan for domestic and international travelers, and how tourist desires and experiences in Kyoto speak to broader trends in our contemporary moment.

Jennifer Prough is a cultural anthropologist and teaches in Christ College, the interdisciplinary honors college, of Valparaiso University. She is the author of Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).
Kimono Crowds--Performing Heritage in Higashiyama
presentation topic

The boom for seeing Kyoto while wearing kimono is one of the most visible changes in Kyoto tourism over the past decade. In this presentation, Jennifer Prough examines the ways that walking through the heritage district in contemporary Kyoto provides an embodied experience of Kyoto perfect for social media consumption. Tracing the rise of this phenomenon over the past decade, she highlights how this trend exemplifies the ways that the tourist industry promotions and tourists own imaginaries often coalesce in unanticipated ways.
Maiko Masquerade: Crafting Geisha Girlhood in Japan
(UC Press, March 2021) explores Japanese representations of the maiko, or apprentice geisha, in films, manga, and other popular media as an icon of exemplary girlhood.

Jan Bardsley traces how the maiko, long stigmatized as a victim of sexual exploitation, emerges in the 2000s as the chaste keeper of Kyoto’s classical artistic traditions.

Insider accounts by maiko and geisha, their leaders and fans, show pride in the training, challenges, and rewards maiko face. No longer viewed as a toy for men’s amusement, she serves as catalyst for women’s consumer fun. This change inspires stories of ordinary girls—and even one boy—striving to embody the maiko ideal, engaging in masquerades that highlight questions of personal choice, gender performance, and national identity.

Jan Bardsley is Professor Emerita of Asian Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She is the author of Women and Democracy in Cold War Japan and the award-winning The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911–1916.
Maiko Masquerades: Playful Subversion
presentation topic

What happens when tourists, cartoonists, and authors play with the maiko's iconic image just for fun? Jan Bardsley's presentation explores this question by looking at four frankly fake and funny "maiko masquerades." She questions how even these playful disguises can subvert assumptions about the constraints of age, gender, and ethnicity associated with Kyoto's apprentice geisha.