About Professor Miriam Silverberg

This symposium was originally conceived by Miriam Silverberg, Professor of Japanese History at UCLA. Following Miriam’s retirement in 2005, Miriam’s students, colleagues and friends decided to carry it forward in order to honor her enormous contributions to the study of modern Japan as both a teacher and a scholar.

Miriam received her M.A. at Georgetown University in 1979 and her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1984. She studied in Japan with the political historian and philosopher Fujita Shōzō and worked with numerous other scholars in Japan, including literary scholar Maeda Ai and women’s historian Fujime Yuki. She joined the UCLA faculty in 1990. In her pathbreaking study of poet and cultural critic Nakano Shigeharu, Changing Song: The Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu, Miriam revealed to the field an entirely new face to Japanese modernity and new tools for analyzing it. Changing Song received the 1990 John King Fairbank Prize in East Asian History. A Japanese translation was published 1998. In this work, Miriam established the combination of theoretical depth and materialist grounding that would characterize all of her subsequent work. Changing Song was followed by articles on feminist writer Sata Ineko, on ethnographic approaches to urban modernity in the 1920s and 1930s, on Japanese film, advertising and media culture during the Asia-Pacific War, and on numerous other subjects. Her essays have been without exception surprising, inventive and compelling, drawing on a wide range of sources, and moving freely between the ephemeral and the canonical. Her essay “The Modern Girl as Militant,” published in 1991, remains the definitive work on the modern girl in Japan. The year 2007 saw publication of her second book monograph, Erotic Grotesque Nonsense, a work of tremendous scope that reframes the cultural history of interwar Japan, realizing the promise of the now classic essay she published in 1991, “Constructing a New Cultural History of Prewar Japan,” in which she called for a reappraisal of Japanese modernity from the perspective of Japan’s “consumer-subjects.”

Miriam recognized the significance of the colonial empire to understanding modern Japan well before the emergence of interest in postcolonial studies among scholars in Japanese studies. Her Masters essay at Georgetown dealt with the massacre of Koreans in Tokyo following the earthquake of 1923. At UCLA, her long interest in the history of the empire and in Koreans in the metropole led her to teach courses such as “Race and Culture” and “The Japanese Ideology of Empire,” guiding graduate students toward new studies that brought Japanese and Korean modern experience together, exposing the vast hidden landscape of colonial modernity.

As a scholar, Miriam has consistently pushed the boundaries of the field, posing bold questions and pursuing her own answers with both intellectual rigor and astonishing creative imagination. As a teacher, she has encouraged students to read widely, to think imaginatively, and to write history that is both personally meaningful and meaningful to the world. In recent teaching and writing, she has turned to the problem of how to historicize the subject of intimacy. This symposium thus synthesizes several of the topics and methodological issues that Miriam has done so much over the years to reveal to the field. We hope it will be a first step toward responding to the many challenges she has posed us as scholars of modernity and of imperial Japan.

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Nikkei Bruin Symposium in Honor of Miriam Silverberg

Imperial Japan and Colonial Sensibility: Affect, Object, Embodiment

December 7 & 8, 2007

UCLA
314 Royce Hall

UCLA Paul I. and Hisako Terasaki Center for Japanese Studies

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7

9:00   Coffee and rolls served
9:45   Opening Remarks

PANEL 1: EVERYDAY LIFE

10:00  Helen Lee (University of Florida)
       *Dying as a Daughter of the Empire*

10:30  Jun Uchida (Stanford University)
       *Mapping the World of Japanese Settler Youth in Colonial Korea*

11:00  Jordan Sand (Georgetown University)
       *Tropical Furniture and Bodily Comportment in Colonial Asia*

11:30  Sondra Hale (UCLA), Discussant

11:45  Open discussion

12:00  Lunch Break

PANEL 2: GENDER, LABOR, GENDERED LABOR

2:00   Haeng-ja Sachiko Chung (Hamilton College)
       *Erotic Capital of Korean Nightclub Hostesses in Japan: Performative, Emotional, and Affective Labor*

2:30   Mark Driscoll (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)
       *Empire in Hysteric*

3:00   Kristine Dennehy (California State University Fullerton)
       *Resident Korean Labor “Movements” in Postcolonial Japan: Cinematic and Literary Representations in Hayafune Chiyo’s Foundry Town (Kyūpora no aru machi) and Yang So-gil’s All Night (Yoru o kakete)*

3:30   Esha De (UCLA), Discussant

3:45   Open discussion

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8

9:30   Coffee and rolls served

PANEL 3: RACE AND LANGUAGE

10:00  Todd Henry (Colorado State University)
       *Assimilation’s Racist Sensibilities: Colonized Koreans as “Yobos” and the “Yobo-ization” of Expatriate Japanese*

10:30  Takashi Fujitani (UC San Diego)
       *Bio-politics, Racism, and Late Colonial Sensibilities*

11:00  Serk-Bae Suh (UC Irvine)
       *Blinded by Empathy: Discourse on National Literature and Korea in Postwar Japan*

11:30  Alan Tansman (UC Berkeley), Discussant

11:45  Open discussion

12:00  Lunch Break

PANEL 4: MEMORY

2:00   Leo Ching (Duke University)
       * (Post)-colonial Nostalgia: Japan, Taiwan, and the Discourse of Intimacy*

2:30   Mariko Tamanoi (UCLA)
       *How to Read Wenshi ziliao - the Memoirs of Ordinary Chinese People - Sensibly*

3:00   Seiji Lippit (UCLA), Discussant

3:15   Open discussion

3:30   Open discussion on “Colonial Sensibility”

5:00   Closing Remarks followed by Buffet Dinner