

9th of May, 2012 / 4:00-6:00 p.m. /Room:

University of Düsseldorf

Lectures at the department of Modern Japanese Studies:

Okinawan Religion and Self-perception in Tourism and Literature

Japan's postcolonial periphery and trajectories of representation

A close look at recent Japanese popular media reveals that the *Hallyu*, or “Korea Wave,” is still visible. Japan’s popular media led to the rediscovery of Korea as a foreign travel destination and triggered a fresh inter-cultural exchange between the two nations. But whereas the popularity of Korean movies, pop music and soap operas extended beyond Japan and reached China and Taiwan through their respective media, the “Okinawa Boom” was largely confined to Japan’s domestic media between 2000 and 2009.

Prominent authors such as Yoshimoto Banana and Kirino Natsuo staged their novels on the “tropical island paradise” of Okinawa, and movies and *dorama* (Japanese television soap operas) discovered the beautifully different scenery of the Japan’s “southern territory” (*nankoku*), as the region is still referred to in an old colonial formulation. Recently, even the realm of Okinawan literature has entered the Japanese consciousness and the curricula of Japanese universities. Okinawa further emerged as a favorite destination for Japanese mass tourism, which transformed not only the island landscapes, but further altered the self-perception of Okinawans themselves.

How have Okinawan authors depicted these changes in their literary work? How is Okinawa’s indigenous history and religion portrayed by the islands’ inhabitants as well as by Japanese visitors? To what extent can postmodern Okinawan *myths* be understood through models of postcolonial representation? How are these discourses reflected/visualized by Japanese and Okinawan digital and tourist media?

Focusing on these issues, *Prof. Michael Molasky* (Hitotsubashi University) and *Oliver E. Kühne* (University of Tübingen) will discuss select works of Okinawan and mainland Japanese literature and consider diverse approaches to problems of war memory, postcolonial representation, and postmodern plurality.

All listeners are invited to raise questions and engage in discussion with both lecturers after the presentations.

First lecture

Michael S. Molasky / Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo, Japan

War, Memory and Landscape in the Fiction of Medorma Shun

Abstract

MEDORUMA Shun began publishing stories while a student at the University of the Ryukyus, and his work soon gained the attention of local writers and critics. Since that time, he has continued to write about his native Okinawa but publishes in national as well as local forums. He has also branched out into social criticism, in which he lacerates not only Japanese and American policy, but what he views as his fellow Okinawans' tepid response to their own oppression.

In this paper, I will discuss a lesser-known example of MEDORUMA's early work as well as examine "Suiteki" [Droplets], which was awarded the Akutagawa Prize and first brought him to the attention of a national readership. I will then discuss one of his more recent works, focusing on how he deploys deeply entrenched Okinawan spiritual beliefs with struggles over memories of the war and subsequent occupation. In MEDORUMA's work, the lush landscape of Okinawa is invariably haunted by private memories of war, and he remains among Japan's most insightful writers in his ability to reveal the ongoing legacies of war and its impact on everyday life in our present age.

Second lecture

Oliver E. Kühne / University of Tübingen, Germany

The 'Okinawa gaze' of Japanese Authors and the Tourist Industry Between postcolonial mystification and historical amnesia

Abstract

The mystification and extreme affirmation of Okinawa and its 'other Japanese' inhabitants in the Okinawa-boom can be interpreted as symptoms of the healing boom that also promoted the commodity of travel as one of the ways to find relaxation, new perspectives and, first and foremost, happiness (*kōfuku*). Due to the change of characteristic key associations for Okinawa from 'nature' and 'health' to 'comfort' and 'gentleness' since 2000, these 'Southern Islands' even became a famous spot for young Japanese dropouts. Taking questions of postcolonial representation and social changes in Japan as a background, I will analyze the exemplary writings of two Japanese authors who both staged their stories on the islands of Okinawa: YOSHIMOTO Banana's short story collection "Nankurunai" [What will be, will be], published in 2004 and KIRINO Natsuo's novel "Metabora" [Metabola] that was serialized in the Asahi Shinbun between November 2005 and December 2006. Both writers are acclaimed contemporary female authors who are broadly known, but aim an antithetic audience. How do both authors represent Okinawa and how do they incorporate (or, mutatis mutandis, refuse) influences of the healing boom and touristic images? The analyzes of these works will be preceded by a discussion of contemporary touristic media on the internet also to elaborate on the multitude of collective images and narratives that are generally employed when Okinawa is depicted. The theoretical framework is based on postcolonial studies (Homi K. BHABHA, Gayatri C. SPIVAK) and postmodern Japanese theories of *database realism* (AZUMA Hiroki) and *narrative consumption* (ÔTSUKA Eiji).