



present

**Exit the Heroine: Representations of
Women Assassins and the Emperor System**

by

Chizuko NAITÔ

(Associate Professor Ôtsuma University in Tokyo)

&

**The Pitfall Called the Face of the Nation:
Japan-Korea Currency and the Image of Higuchi Ichiyô**

by

Youngran KÔ

(University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy)

Monday March 23, 2009

6:00 -7:30

Desautel Faculty of Management (Room 451)

The presentations will be given in Japanese, with English language translations of the talks displayed on a screen behind the speakers. English-Japanese interpretation will be provided for the Q&A following the presentations. In order to use our time with the speakers most effectively, we are soliciting general questions in advance. There will be time allowed for impromptu questions during the Q&A, but if you have general questions for Professor Naitô or Dr. Kô, please send them to adrienne.hurley@mcgill.ca so that they may be translated in advance and added to the queue.

**This event supported
by the**



Abstracts

Exit the Heroine: Representations of Women Assassins and the Emperor System

There was once a woman named Kanno Sugako who plotted the assassination of the emperor. Images of her as an “exceptionally bad woman” and the heroine of a scandal steamed up the media world. Her intrigues became known through the High Treason Incident of 1911, an historical case of false accusation in which leading socialists, including Kanno, were sentenced to death. At the time, the incident was consumed as the scandalous tale of the woman who led men to the “depravity” of plotting the emperor’s assassination and who herself was depicted as the sexually “depraved” and alluring protagonist. Subsequently, the figure of the “woman assassin” from this tale with Kanno Sugako as its heroine reemerged in media accounts of the romantic relationship between Ôsugi Sakae and Itô Noe. Furthermore, one can discern significant invocations of this pattern of representation in the structurally homosocial criticism written in the 1990s about Yoshida Kijû’s 1970 film *Eros Plus Massacre*, which takes Ôsugi Sakae and Itô Noe as its protagonists, and the author Nakagami Kenji’s incorporation of the High Treason Incident into the text of a novel. In this presentation, I will discuss a formula evident in stories spun through such reiterations and their relationship to contemporary images of the emperor system by analyzing the representation of female protagonists.

The Pitfall Called the Face of the Nation: Japan-Korea Currency and the Image of Higuchi Ichiyô

A new high denomination paper currency is scheduled to begin circulation in South Korea in 2009. Heated debates developed over the design, created in 2007, which will feature Shin Saimdang as the first woman to have her face appear on South Korean money. The controversy involved the ways in which she is associated with the image of the “good wife, wise mother” in modern Korea. Among the examples cited in debates regarding the adoption of her image was the Higuchi Ichiyô 5,000-yen bank note issued in Japan. The likeness of a woman writer printed on the 5,000-yen note was assigned positive value in Korean discussions both for and against the choice of Shin Saimdang. These debates deemed Shin Saimdang to be an “anachronistic” icon of “patriarchal ideology and the good wife, wise mother” and Higuchi Ichiyô to be an apolitical figure who “anticipated the future” and who represents “culture” and “literary women.” These paper bills, while construed as irreconcilable according to such descriptors, were valued roughly at par based on the exchange rate of the yen and won until recently. However, the relative currency of these two women might be seen as a corollary of the unequal relationship between a “strong yen” and “weak won” in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. In this presentation, I will provide a breakdown and analysis of the process by which these two bank notes were selected and discuss the tangled gender standards and conceptions of national identity at play in the discourses surrounding both cases. Specifically, I will consider the respective controversies over the icons on currency as inextricably linked to debates over the prospects of a woman president in South Korea and woman emperor in Japan and consider the proliferation of questions as to the need for new female images in relation to the powerful activation of national ideology through the “face” of currency.

Presenter Biographies:

Chizuko Naitô is Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature and Media at Ôtsu University in Tokyo. Her critically acclaimed book *Empires and Assassinations* was awarded the 2008 Women’s History Prize. Her research interests include the representation of women’s bodies, Ainu, colonies, and infectious disease in modern Japanese literature and mass media. She also studies contemporary women authors such as Matsuura Rieko, Shôno Yoriko, and Mizumura Minae. Professor Naitô’s faculty profile is accessible here (in Japanese): http://www.lit.otsuma.ac.jp/japanese/Naito_T/index.html. Professor Naitô is also a founding member of the Mars Club, a group of four women scholars committed to the study of contemporary literature written in Japanese. See: <http://www007.upp.so-net.ne.jp/kaseiclub/index.html> (in Japanese).

Youngran Kô is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy and a specialist in modern Japanese literature studies. Contributor to the influential volume entitled *Empires of Discourse* (2000), she has written on subjects ranging from proletarian culture in Korea under Japanese colonization to the relationship between the U.S. empire and images of a “peaceful” Japan in contemporary Japanese fiction. Dr. Kô’s profile and blog are accessible (in Japanese) here: http://utcp.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/members/data/ko_young_ran/. Along with Professor Naitô, Dr. Kô is a founding member of the Mars Club (<http://www007.upp.so-net.ne.jp/kaseiclub/index.html>).