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Review of Tomiko Yoda, Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity.

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Tomiko Yoda, Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity.
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As the title of Tomiko Yoda's book suggests, gender and national literature are imbricated in Japan's construction of its modernity. Central to this construction is the role of vernacular narratives written primarily by women in the Heian period (794-1185), particularly those of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which have long been cornerstones of the Japanese literary canon. Because Chinese, as the lingua franca of East Asia, played a role similar to that of Latin in Europe, much of the surviving output of "literature" as such in early Japan was written in Chinese by male courtiers. However, when scholars in the late nineteenth century sought to delineate the academic field of national literature (*kokubungaku*) indexed by the usage of the national language, the Chinese texts authored by men in the Heian period were swept to the wings, while woman-authored vernacular texts of the period took center stage. Thus the perceived feminine cast of the Japanese language and Japanese literature in their developmental stages has inevitably been a central issue in discourses of the nation-state and national identity in Japan. In addition to the dialectical relationship between China and Japan, which influenced the definition of national identity in early Japan, the framework of modernity further complicated Japan's identity through the introduction of the West as a categorical Other.

The concentration of canonical writings by women in the Heian period has drawn interest from feminist and gender studies critics of the English-speaking world for about two decades now, with Norma Field's *Splendor of Longing in 'The Tale of Genji'*, published in 1987 (Princeton University Press; reprinted by University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 2001), leading the way. Japanese scholars have ventured similarly informed approaches for nearly as long, inspired by and likewise inspiring the academics of the English-speaking sphere. (Here I refer specifically to the *Monogatari Kenkyûkai* -- "Research Group on [Heian] Narratives" -- a Tokyo-based group Yoda examines in Chapter Five.) However, Yoda's book offers the most focused, diachronic critique of the manner in which Japanese scholars have employed gender metaphors to characterize and shape both the literary output of the Heian period and the modern development of the academic field of Japanese literature.

Underlying Yoda's approach to the Heian literary corpus and its place in literary history are the possibility for "feminist scholarship [to] intervene in

the conventional discourse on the national ethos that *already* emphasized feminine qualities in, and to some extent women's contribution to, Japanese culture" (2) and the assumption that "[a]nalyzing the feminization of Japanese culture through Heian literary texts and modern studies of them . . . has broad ramifications for feminist scholarship on Japan" (2), which ironically has been slow to develop. To illustrate the fruits of such interventions, Yoda closely examines, through the lens of gender studies, key moments in Japanese literary history -- that is, particular approaches by selected scholars across the history of Japanese literature -- in order to reveal the specific convergence of gender, history, and ideas of modernity, subjectivity, and the nation-state. Chapters offering such critique of an "invented" tradition are supplemented by other chapters and sections in which Yoda presents her close readings of works of the Heian canon, such as *The Tosa Diary*, *The Tale of Genji*, and *The Kagerô Diary*. These demonstrate ways in which awareness of the factors shaping the reception of literary works -- historical moments in particular -- can lead to more reflexive frameworks "from which to rethink our historically situated knowledge and imagination, to explore our horizon of interpretation that is opaque to us" (18).

The targeted scholars of Yoda's critique are, perhaps unsurprisingly, all men, stretching from the eighteenth-century scholars of National Learning (*Kokugaku*) to "post-1970s revisionist scholars" (9). While the choices present a historically broad and revealing portrait of the development of discourses about Heian literature that are inflected by issues of gender and modernity, further background explanation and historical contextualization of the critics and their theories would be helpful to those outside the field of Japanese literature. Readers should not expect to become familiar with the fine points of reception history on the field of Heian literature within the time frame that Yoda presents, but rather should read Yoda's analysis of these critics and their writings as select instantiations for developing a new feminist poetics.

The first two chapters of Yoda's study present critics of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, respectively, who laid the foundations for the traditional view of Heian culture as feminine. The eighteenth-century (or Tokugawa period [1600-1868]) critics selected by Yoda -- Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769), Kagawa Kageki (1768-1843), and Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) -- are those who have been treated widely in English-language scholarship and are key figures in a movement known as National Learning or *Kokugaku*, which developed in response to the then orthodox academic field of *Kangaku* or Chinese Learning. The scholars of this movement came together through their efforts to solidify a sense of community and union during the eighteenth century, when there was growing discontent toward the Neo-Confucian (Chinese-inspired) state orthodoxy of the feudal shogunal government as well as unrest among intellectuals due to the diversity in

cultural experiences produced by rapid urbanization. As Yoda explains, the *Kokugaku* scholars focused on poetry as a means of establishing communal feeling -- that is, poetry as a means for expressing the spirit of the Japanese people in the face of modernity. Although the notion, inspired by Chinese poetics, of the efficacy of poetry as the ultimate vessel for human expression and as a means for establishing social harmony had been accepted since the compilation of the first imperial anthology of vernacular poetry, *Kokinshû*, in 905, the *Kokugaku* scholars rearticulated this idea to forge an idea of community in the face of cultural dispersion. Within this framework of a socially potent poetics, scholars construed an evolutionary and gendered history of Japanese literature in which the Heian period and its poetic production were framed as "feminine" in contrast to the "masculine" earlier periods (specifically the Nara period, 710-794). In her analyses of Mabuchi's, Kageki's, and Norinaga's poetics, Yoda demonstrates how the gender metaphor is construed variously by these critics: to sublate the femininity of Heian poetry as something to be overcome (Mabuchi); to question such essentialized gender metaphors while advocating the development of a poetics for "this" age (Kageki); and to embrace the "negativity of the feminine" (33) as an expression of true human emotion in contrast to the artificiality of the masculinity represented by the orthodox Buddhist and Confucian interpretations of literature (Norinaga).

This gendering of Heian literature by the eighteenth-century *Kokugaku*scholars defined the terms by which the academic field of Japanese literature or *kokubungaku* developed in the nineteenth century or, by Japanese periodization, in the Meiji period (1868-1912), a period marked by the restoration of the powers of the emperor after successive periods of rule by military leaders as well as by Japan's exposure to American and European notions of modernity. In Chapter Two, Yoda provides an overview of the creation of the national university system at this time and the development of the department of *kokubungaku* in 1889. Following the lead of eighteenth-century European literary studies, scholars of Japanese literature affiliated with Tokyo Imperial University, the most elite of these national universities, penned Japanese literary histories and anthologized national/Japanese literature, thereby creating the literary canon. Yoda shows that for these Meiji period studies, "Heian literature was understood as a moment in the evolutionary unfolding of Japanese literary culture" (45). The development of the native, phonetic writing system -- the *kana* -- from abbreviations of Chinese characters and the development of literature written in the *kana*script were heralded by the Meiji scholars as key turning points in the development of Japanese literature. Yoda here notes the parallels between the development of *kana* as interpreted by Meiji scholars and the contemporary *genbun itchi* (unification of speech and writing) movement by which Meiji intellectuals and politicians sought to standardize script and writing style as part of Japan's nation-building. Through the examination of key figures of Meiji period literary studies, such as Haga Yaichi (1867-1927)

and Fujioka Sakutarô (1870-1910), Yoda demonstrates how the feminization of Heian Japanese literature, despite the scholars' unease with the overwhelming representation of woman writers in the corpus, allowed for a discussion of a native Japanese aesthetics, in contrast to the masculine "Other" represented alternately by other periods of Japanese literature, by China, or by the West. (Readers interested in the treatment of a "feminine" Heian period genre, the *joryû nikki bungaku* or women's diary literature, in the Meiji literary histories examined by Yoda will find Tomi Suzuki's "Gender and Genre: Modern Literary Histories and Women's Diary Literature" in *Inventing the Classics* [ed. Haruo Shirane and Suzuki Tomi, Stanford University Press, 2000] a good companion essay for the exploration of the nexus of gender, modernity, nation, and literature.)

Having tied the historical foundations of the feminization of Heian literature by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics to modern notions of literature and the nation, Yoda turns from literary history to analyses of Heian texts and the production of literature by women in the remaining four chapters. Drawing upon Thomas LaMarre's study, *Uncovering Heian Japan* (Duke, 2000), and its understanding of the Heian distinctions between *kana* and *mana* writing as being differences in calligraphic style, rather than being cultural (Japan versus China) or gender-based (female practice versus male practice) as commonly argued, Yoda in Chapter Three deconstructs the widely accepted view of Heian women's role in the development of *kana*writing. Following LaMarre's lead, Yoda explains that *kana* in the Heian period was a mode of abbreviated calligraphic writing that was gendered feminine in contradistinction to *mana*, which were characters executed in their full, unabbreviated form. While the flowing, "feminine" appearance of *kana* resulted in its alternatively being called *wonnade* or "women's hand," *kana* was actually used by both men and women during the Heian period. The attribution of *kana* to women's creation is, therefore, a reflection of a desire to mold "women as the figure of native-self" (107) in the national narrative of the development and preservation of native culture. To dispel this notion of the interconnectedness of *kana* writing to women, Yoda provides a reading of *Tosa Diary*. This text is accepted as the first example of women's diary literature -- a *kana* literary genre -- in Japanese literary history, yet it is ironic that it finds a place in this literary genealogy because of the widely held belief that the author is actually the male courtier-poet Ki no Tsurayuki, who has adopted a feminine voice. Tsurayuki's masquerade has given rise to speculations about the literary and social conventions governing female writing during the Heian period, with scholars traditionally hypothesizing that a female persona and *kana* writing allow Tsurayuki access to "feminine topics and sensibility" (94). Arguing against such gendered notions of *kana* writing, Yoda deftly analyzes how the *Tosa Diary* utilizes a female narrator to bolster the legitimacy of Japanese poetry, a genre that was yet overshadowed by the prestige of Chinese poetry in the Japanese court. Chinese poems, Yoda

argues, were usually not written by women and therefore "suppressed" as written text by the "female" narrator of the *Tosa Diary*, while Japanese poems were written by both men and women and therefore represented textually in the diary. It is this textual representation of Japanese poems in the absence of written Chinese poems that allows Tsurayuki to enforce an impression of Japanese poetry as a "*literate* poetic tradition" (101). Ultimately, Yoda's explication demonstrates that the *Tosa Diary* "avoids presupposing a reified link between women and *kana* or *kana*literature" (95) -- a move that specifically characterizes the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars' feminization of *kana* and *kana* literature of the Heian period.

Chapter Four returns to the *Kokugaku* scholar Motoori Norinaga and analyzes the aesthetic of *mono no aware* or the "capacity to feel and be moved by the things and events in the world" (34). This has continued to be the primary, popular characterization of *The Tale of Genji* ever since Norinaga deemed *mono no aware* to be the primary theme of the work, rejecting the didactic readings that were the mainstay of his time. Yoda explains that Norinaga sees the essence of *Genji* in its poetry -- that the poetry of *Genji* could teach, through its enacting of *mono no aware*, a "communal empathy" (115). It was this "emotional realism" (116) that was embraced by the *kokubungaku* establishment in the nineteenth century. In order to show the reaction by postwar (i.e., post World War II) scholars against *kokubungaku* trends, which they saw as being implicated in the nationalist propaganda of militarism and emperor worship, Yoda introduces the argument of Masuda Katsumi (1923-), who in his essay, "*Waka* and Daily Life," argues that the poetry in *Genji* is "unpoetic," in clear contradiction to Norinaga's approach. Masuda characterizes the Heian poetic practice as reflected in the *Genji* as overly ritualized and "prosaic" (121), revealing his definition of "true" poetry to be akin to the romantic notion of a lyric that expresses the individual. Yoda emphasizes Masuda's argument that the poetry of *Genji* does not appear in moments of crisis, because the expressions of poetry had become overly clichéd for true effect/affect in such situations. Yoda then offers several close readings of lovers' poetic exchanges in the *Genji*, showing how the politically motivated interpretations of Norinaga and Masuda (i.e, Noringa's community of shared emotions versus Masuda's dearth of true individual emotion in the ossified Heian poetics) keep them from seeing what Yoda describes as "highly intricate and multilayered portrayals of interpersonal conflicts," "the tensions and negotiations between lovers that the poetic dialogues articulate . . . which cannot be understood through the modern binary between individualism and collectivism or resistance and conformism" (145).

Chapter Five turns to the issue of subjectivity through the introduction of the linguist Tokieda Motoki (1900-1967) and his influence on the postwar revisionist literary critics of the 1970s. While scholars in the field

of *kokugogaku* or national language studies were adopting the theories and methodologies of European linguistics, Tokieda distinguished himself through "antimodernist" stances in which he emphasized devising a theory of language based on the specific qualities of the Japanese language. As characterized by Yoda, Tokieda "saw language as a process activated by the subjective function of a speaker communicating in a particular context, and he argued that the Japanese language was uniquely suited to making the fundamental nature of language explicit" (150). His most influential theory, the language process theory (*gengo katei setsu*), argues that "language is apprehended dynamically" (153) and that the discursive subject of Japanese language is not marked by the presence of a grammatical subject but by a specific context of communication. Yoda points out that, ironically, the claim of the absence of a grammatical subject by which Tokieda establishes an antimodernist, unique stance for the Japanese language is dependent on the negation -- and thereby the recognition of -- the European linguistic models he tries to overcome. After introducing Tokieda's linguistic model, Yoda turns to Mitani Kuniaki, Fujii Sakadazu, and Takahashi Tôru, all postwar revisionist critics of the 1970s who are founding members of the aforementioned Tokyo-based *Monogatari Kenkyûkai*, formed in 1971. The *Monogatari Kenkyûkai* was founded by young scholars to provide a forum for developing new ways of approaching Heian literary texts, distinct from the conservative hierarchies and orthodoxies of the university system. These scholars applied the structuralist approaches of European literary theory and wedded these to the particularities of Japanese language discourse as articulated by Tokieda. In her critique, Yoda shows that, like Tokieda, these modern scholars' observations about the uniqueness of the narratorial voice in Heian narratives are uncomfortably bound within the distinctions of European linguistic models in their very attempts to establish difference and alterity, that is, the terms of Heian narrative discourse.

In the final chapter, Yoda presents her own attempt to analyze the discourse of *The Kagerô Diary*, a vernacular narrative of the mid-tenth century that traditionally has been read through the persona of the attributed author, Michitsuna's Mother. Here, Yoda proposes jettisoning the conventional interpretation of this work as a first-person narrative, a characterization that she attributes to European-influenced, *kokubungaku* notions, and considers instead the ways in which pronouns that might be considered first-person markers in a European linguistic framework (*ware*, *waga*) might refer to other subjectivities than those of the first person. She argues that these instances of first-person markers in their socially situated significance are used to indicate the isolation and distinction of a self, not necessarily the first-person narrator, from others. While her readings of these first-person pronoun usages productively illustrate the effect of isolation in the narrating voice, or "estranged voice" as Yoda terms it, it is unclear how this effect may be different from the distinctions in voice not infrequently generated by autobiographical narratives that distinguish between the historical author and

the voices of the narrator and narrated "I"(s). While Yoda presents the "estranged voice" as distinct from a first-person narrator (it is a "voice that has no fixed place in the story-world" [213], explains Yoda), the argument for the subjectivity that she locates in this voice remains unexplained and unsubstantiated as being particular to Heian narrative or to the *Kagerô Diary*.

In the Epilogue to her book, Yoda addresses the issue of subjectivity and gender as critiqued by contemporary feminist theories. She specifically assesses the approaches of Judith Butler, seeing in her analyses a blindness to the specific "historicity and sociality of the subject" (229) -- an issue which Yoda tries to tackle in her reading of *Kagerô Diary*'s "estranged voice." Overall, Yoda provides a highly instructive and ambitious analysis of the development and creation of the field of Heian literature under the influence of modernization, and she convincingly explicates how gender metaphors were central to the development of national narratives of Japanese literary history. While Yoda's engagements with the *Kagerô Diary* fail to demonstrate fully the exegetical benefits of a proper historically and socially situated feminist reading of a Heian text, her analysis does provide a valuable heuristic framework by which her readers can test the viability of modern feminist theory or any other contemporary theory in the interpretation of classical or non-contemporary texts.