

In Search of Lost Worlds: Meiji and Taishō Period Elites Remember Their Childhood Reading

Date: Monday, 23 March 2015

Time: 14:30 - 16:00

Venue: AS4/03-28

Speaker: Assoc Prof Melek Ortabasi, World Literature Program, Simon Fraser University

Abstract

This talk will examine the reading experiences of children in Japan in the period 1870-1930, with a focus on the influence of foreign children's literature on domestic markets. Sources include the autobiographies, memoirs, and personal correspondence of well-known authors, translators, and other prominent intellectuals who were children during this period. Given the importance of reading at home and in school in modernizing countries during this period, it is not surprising to encounter a remarkable number of references to what these cosmopolitan elites read as children and youths.

Adaptations and translations from foreign languages constituted a significant proportion of the reading material recollected by elites born between 1870 and 1920. Whether they acquired these texts from their teachers, the local lending library, or as gifts from friends and relatives, the reading choices of these young people were surprisingly international – whether they were aware of it or not. By gathering and comparing recollections from across the entire period – notable authors such as Koganei Kimiko (1871-1956), Terada Torahiko (1878-1935), Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965), Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951), and Dazai Osamu (1909-1948) will be under discussion – I will broaden our understanding of translation's effect on childhood reading at the turn of the last century, and by extension, its role in shaping ideas of (inter)national literary culture in the minds of the young readers who became important writers as adults.

About Speaker

Melek Ortabasi is Associate Professor in the World Literature Program at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. A specialist in Japanese literature and culture, she teaches modern literature, film, and the theory and practice of translation. Her research interests include cultural studies, comparative folklore studies, children's literature, and film and popular culture in contemporary Japan. Her latest book, *The Undiscovered Country: Text, Translation and Modernity in the Work of Yanagita Kunio*, was published in 2014 by Harvard University Asia Center. Inspired by Yanagita's interest in children and education, a topic she examines in her book, she is working on a new project about children's literature and translation.

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