



Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society)

By Tomiko Yoda

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Boldly challenging traditional understandings of Heian literature, Tomiko Yoda reveals the connections between gender, nationalism, and cultural representation evident in prevailing interpretations of classic Heian texts. Renowned for the wealth and sophistication of women’s writing, the literature of the Heian period (794–1192) has long been considered central to the Japanese literary canon and Japanese national identity. Yoda historicizes claims about the inherent femininity of this literature by revisiting key moments in the history of Japanese literary scholarship from the eighteenth century to the present. She argues that by foregrounding women’s voices in Heian literature, the discipline has repeatedly enacted the problematic modernizing gesture in which the “feminine” is recognized, canceled, and then contained within a national framework articulated in masculine terms.

Moving back and forth between a critique of modern discourses on Heian literature and close analyses of the Heian texts themselves, Yoda sheds light on some of the most persistent interpretive models underwriting Japanese literary studies, particularly the modern paradigm of a masculine national subject. She proposes new directions for disciplinary critique and suggests that historicized understandings of premodern texts offer significant insights into contemporary feminist theories of subjectivity and agency.

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Editorial Review

Review

“I can think of few other scholarly monographs that have taught us as much about the historical significance of the study of classical ‘literature’ in modernity. The narrative texts of Heian Japan have never received more meticulous and rigorous scrutiny achieved with such sheer intelligence. Tomiko Yoda succeeds in speaking to interdisciplinary and international audiences about why the institution of ‘literature’ had to serve a crucial role in the manufacture of specifically gendered subjects of the nation and how the pronominal categories had to be invented in order to newly designate modern subjects. She has laid a cornerstone in the literary studies of modernity, which the cultural studies of Japan, East Asia, and Europe can no longer ignore. This is a remarkable achievement.”—Naoki Sakai, Cornell University

“Keenly, lucidly, thoroughly, *Gender and National Literature* shows how the modern feminization of Heian literature did not simply parallel the formation of the modern subject in Japan, but proved integral to it. Tomiko Yoda thus issues a profound challenge to the received wisdom about the femininity and the ‘women’ of classical literature. And her response is brilliant: turning to the materiality of the Heian text, Yoda poses new readings that take the question of gender far beyond previous studies of Heian and modern Japanese literature.”—Thomas LaMarre, author of *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription*

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Tomiko Yoda is Associate Professor in the Department of Asian and African Languages and the Program in Literature at Duke University.

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