
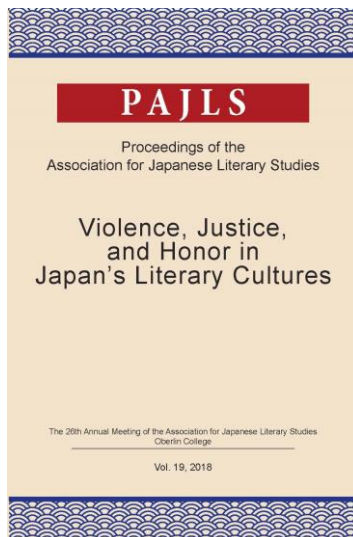


“Speaking Violence in a Repatriation Novel: Miyao Tomiko’s *Shuka*”

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**SPEAKING VIOLENCE IN A REPATRIATION NOVEL:
MIYAO TOMIKO'S *SHUKA***

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Miyao Tomiko (1926–2014), a prolific and well-known popular writer, serialized *Shuka* (Red Summer) from 1980–85. *Red Summer* is a semi-autobiographical I-novel (*shishōsetsu*), part of a four-volume series based on Miyao's life; it is also a work of *hikiage bungaku* (repatriation literature), relating the story of the protagonist's experiences in Manchuria from 1945–46. It tells of her life in a small village near the capital Xinjing (Shinkyō) with her husband and infant, of the hardships they experienced in refugee camps and of their repatriation to Japan.

In Miyao's I-novel series, items of clothing, particularly kimonos, play an important role, conveying various meanings for the characters and plot, and creating intertextual connections among the four volumes. I suggest that in the novel *Red Summer*, kimonos also enable an examination of the violence at the heart of the imperial project, particularly through notions of ownership. By reading through these inanimate yet eloquent objects, we can see different aspects of the loss and trauma explored in the work, especially in the context of the 1980s when the novel was serialized. At that time, the Japanese colonial past had returned to the forefront of national consciousness with media focus on the repatriation of significant numbers of Japanese "orphans left behind in China"² (*Chūgoku zanryū koji*), who sought to locate their families after many decades.

Because *Red Summer* is an I-novel and a work of repatriation literature, Japanese scholars have tended to focus on its content rather than on literary questions such as the use of different narrative techniques.³ Authenticity is considered an important aspect of the work, and thus, even clothes, such as particular kimonos that appear in the text, are understood to be based on "real" items that Miyao possessed. Can such "real" objects play a role in literary interpretation? In her work on "things" in the Victorian novel, Elaine Freedgood suggests that rules for reading objects

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² Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 11.

³ An exception is Fujimoto Chizuko's analysis that the motif of food is used throughout the work as a means to explore Ayako's dependence on others. Fujimoto Chizuko, "Miyao Tomiko *Shuka*: Osanai haha Ayako no Manshū taiken," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 31:5 (May 1986): 119.

in the context of realism “determine that such real things specifically are not interpretable, as reality itself must be recognized. . . as largely devoid of symbolic meaning.” In contrast, a literary object “promoted” to the status of metaphor tends to be abstracted away from the real, losing “most of its qualities in its symbolic servitude.” To solve this problem, Freedgood uses the notion of metonymy to “provide a way out of this impasse” between realism and metaphor. Metonymy, she argues, is a more productive way of thinking about objects and their meanings: while “metaphor defines and stabilizes; metonymy keeps on going, in any and all directions. It threatens: to disrupt categories, to open up too many possibilities, to expose things hidden.”⁴

Metonymy (and its difference from metaphor) is notoriously difficult to define and theorists take different approaches.⁵ In Freedgood’s view metonymy is distinct from metaphor because it is “a figure of contiguity: one object or characteristic calls to mind another with which it is associated.”⁶ It is therefore a concept that affirms a multidirectional way of reading material objects in a text, moving beyond the dichotomy of realism and symbolism. Drawing on Freedgood’s thoughts, I consider kimono through a metonymic view—rejecting the idea that the meaning of objects based on “reality” is limited to authenticity, as well as the idea that literary objects can only symbolize singular, static meanings. I suggest that kimono in this novel are metonymic in the sense that they are multi-vocal and allude to many things through their social and cultural histories as “real” objects, and at the same time develop extensive, related symbolic strands and associations.

In this essay, I do not discuss the full extent of what these garments represent, but focus on a few associative elements in the context of the colonial enterprise. Even in this endeavor, however, the notion of

⁴ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 10, 11, 14, 92.

⁵ See Hugh Bredin, “Metonymy,” *Poetics Today* 5:1 (1984): 45–58. He provides a generic definition of metonymy as “the transfer of the name of a thing to something else that is closely associated with it—such as cause and effect, container and contained, possessor and possessed, and so on” (45), then proceeds to discuss problems with this explanation.

⁶ Freedgood, *Ideas in Things*, 101. For another view of metonymy, see for example, Carole Cavanaugh, “Text and Textile: Unweaving the Female Subject in Heian Writing,” *positions: asia critique* 4:3 (1996): 614. Cavanaugh sees metonymy as “displacement, a movement from one contiguous term to the next, so that one term transfers its intensity to the other.” Although the emphasis is different, the notion that metonymy is more extensive than metaphor is similar. Cavanaugh calls metaphor “substitution. . . the selection of one term for another” (614).

metonymy affords an important framework, opening up possibilities for the interpretation of material objects within the I-novelistic tradition. While these items of clothing contribute to the realism that makes this repatriation story so compelling, Miyao also skillfully uses them to convey various complex ideas in her carefully constructed narrative. Indeed, she has specifically noted that her novel is distinct from so-called repatriation memoirs (“*taikenki*”) written as pure “records” of actual events.⁷

In *Red Summer*, the protagonist Ayako moves to Manchuria with her infant daughter in April 1945 to join her husband who works as a schoolteacher. Although she is advised to only take basic necessities, she ships to her new home all the kimonos that she has brought into her marriage as the daughter of a well-off family. Her image of Manchuria was that of a “peaceful place without air raids” and as a headstrong eighteen-year-old, she wanted to be able to freely express herself, to wear anything that she chose. She did not want to be restricted to just “*monpe*” (traditional Japanese trousers made of kimono fabric), the putative national uniform for female subjects on the mainland.⁸ After settling in the village, Ayako happily wears her various kimonos and, due to her comfortable background, gives some away to those in need. Her kimonos distinguish her not only from the Chinese, but also from the impoverished Japanese settlers and other teachers in terms of class and wealth.

With the news of the Soviet invasion (that would require them to prepare to fight), the teachers and their families decide to leave their clothes and valuables with a prominent Chinese neighbor. After they transport their items to safety, however, Japan’s defeat is announced and they are attacked by a “violent mob” (*bōmin*, 192) and forced to flee to a refugee camp with little more than the clothes on their backs. Ayako believes that her kimonos, essentially portable currency as well as clothing, are safe. However, while living as a refugee in extremely deprived circumstances, she goes to the local market one day and discovers for sale some of their belongings that they had left with the neighbor: her kimono coat and her husband’s suit. Both items have names sewn into the collars so there is no question of mistaking these unique objects.

Ayako assumes the shopkeeper will return them to her and tells her husband to speak to him so she can take them back immediately. Her husband refuses and tells her she is asking the impossible because they

⁷ Miyao Tomiko and Shimaoka Shin, interviewer, “Bungaku igossō—sorewa Manshū taiken kara hajimatta: Miyao Tomiko,” *Subaru* (April 1985): 23.

⁸ Miyao Tomiko, *Shuka*, vol. 3 of *Miyao Tomiko zenshū* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1993), 46–47. For subsequent references to this work, the page numbers will be noted directly in the text. All translations from this work are my own.

don't have any money to buy them back. She cannot understand this reasoning:

“You're wrong!” Ayako became outraged and shouted while grabbing the kimono coat in her right hand, the suit in her left. “The names are evidence, aren't they? There's no better proof that these are mine, are there? I'm certain he'll return them to me if you talk to him.” (256)

Needless to say, she does not get these things back. Although it is ultimately unclear what has happened to her property, she hears that the neighbor who had been safeguarding their belongings also became a victim of a “violent mob” and thus their things were “all stolen” (334). Ayako's collection of kimonos meant to last a lifetime thus disappears into thin air.

Ultimately Ayako is one of the lucky ones, managing eventually to return to Japan with her family intact and without becoming a victim of sexual violence. Her experiences, however, have been traumatic, including illness, starvation, as well as physical and/or psychological attacks by the Soviets, Chinese, and other Japanese. In this context, the lost kimonos appear again and again in Ayako's dreams; they are objects of monetary value, and they are also part of her past and identity that have been stolen from her in Manchuria. In the refugee camps, every object she tries to obtain (such as food, diapers, futon, a needle, thread, a pot for cooking) comes to have enormous significance. Ownership and control over inanimate things become critical to survival and human dignity. The stolen kimonos reinforce her identity as a victim.

Paradoxically, at the same time they refer to Ayako's complicity within the broader violence of empire. On the surface, this story appears to focus on personal suffering and resilience, but through objects it also subtly explores themes of ownership and theft at the heart of colonialization. When the “violent mob” descends on her village, Ayako manages to hide with the help of a Chinese neighbor. The mob swarms the area, attacking people, looting and destroying property. Afterwards Ayako observes that with the removal of material objects from their house, “the Japanese smell was gone and the place returned to being the original mud house built by their owners.” The narrator continues without further explanation that “Ayako felt like she understood the meaning of this riot” (193). *Red Summer* is narrated in third person, with a focus on Ayako's perspectives and internal thoughts. For the most part, this naïve young housewife accepts wartime ideology and does not question her lifestyle.

At times, however, the narrator/implicit author makes subtle interventions, periodically analyzing and trying to comprehend Ayako's thoughts and actions, ostensibly as a kind of older "Ayako" looking back to the past. This dual perspective provides both a raw immediacy and a contemplative quality, allowing an exploration of Ayako's place within the colonial enterprise in different tenors. Here, the narrator seems to suggest that Ayako recognized, deep down, the legitimacy of the mob's desire to erase the Japanese presence from their lands.

While presenting her as a victim of theft, therefore, the text also explores Ayako's role as aggressor. Although she herself does not explicitly consider the fact of empire to be a violation in terms of land and sovereignty, the lost kimonos and their constant absent presence force readers to consider this perspective in the context of the Manchurian settlements. The narrator clearly states that the locals who had been farming had to leave in order to make room for the Japanese settlers "who forcibly came into the area" (69), a description which articulates historical reality. As Louise Young notes, the Japanese took land in Manchuria through "price manipulations, coerced sales, and forced evictions." In 1941, over half of the land in Japanese possession had not been paid for, and the displaced Chinese were also exploited for their labor.⁹

The young Ayako of the novel does not fully understand such aspects of colonial violence in which she herself plays a part. Shocked to see a servant of a Chinese neighbor stealing her mirrored dressing stand in the riots, she can only explain to herself that "petty theft" (*shōtoru* 小盗) is part of the Chinese national culture, not considered a serious crime and therefore "completely different from the sensibilities of the Japanese" (194). As the novel progresses, however, "petty theft" becomes an important means for Ayako and her own family to survive in the refugee camps; the term changes in meaning, from an unthinkable immoral act to "an act that resulted from unbearable hunger" (314), then to a blameless act of "winner takes all" (*bundori gachi*, 373), and finally to an enterprising means of self-realization and expression of agency. When Ayako begins to earn her own money selling snacks made of stolen soybeans, for example, she frees herself from her father's injunction that respectable women should remain in the home and never work for pay. Japanese scholars have interpreted this as Ayako's feminist awakening as a kind of "Nora" figure, the famed character from Henrik Ibsen's (1828–

⁹ Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 401–3.

1906) *A Doll's House* (1879) who resists patriarchal oppression.¹⁰ The celebratory element is undeniable, but we should not miss its implied irony: this business model is based on “petty theft” and a wife’s reliance on her husband’s thieving skills (to steal the soybeans in the first place). Ayako’s relationship to theft is never simple; it is always changing, unfolding within a context where land, property, and even human beings are “owned” by constantly shifting “owners,” highlighting the original sin of colonial violence.

Ayako’s stolen kimonos haunt the text as a spectral presence that marks her loss of innocence, her victimhood and her suffering. At the same time, they reinforce the conundrum that she is also complicit, playing a part in the colonial enterprise that has stolen from other people. In a world where ownership cannot be clearly legitimated or sustained, signs such as a name tag sewn into a kimono coat have little significance, and neither do concepts of one’s own land, home or country.

In a 1985 interview about *Red Summer*, Miyao commented that it was important to continue to demand that the Japanese government take responsibility for the war. But at the same time, she stressed that those who immigrated to Manchuria were not simply victims: “one of the greatest reasons that we went to Manchuria was because it was not being bombed [like the mainland] and people were also paid a sum of money to go. . . . Although we said it was for the nation, we went because Manchuria as a place without air raids was extremely attractive. In a sense it was a way to escape from the interior (*naichi*).”¹¹ Such uncomfortable ideas regarding complicity and accountability of emigres are not directly presented in this novel, but emerge only when we pay attention to objects and the notion of ownership that they explore.

Indeed, Ayako is not the only one who thinks about her wardrobe—other characters have opinions about it too. For some residents in the camps, Ayako’s lost clothes are evidence of her hubris and ample reason for her just deserts. This naïve, spoiled girl has become the poorest among them, owning only a rough cotton kimono and *monpe* to be worn every day, punished by heaven for flaunting her fortune and dressing up in front of the settlers. Although such simplistic views about the stolen kimonos are based on *schadenfreude*, these objects do function as a constant reminder of moral questions beyond individual losses: What does it mean

¹⁰ See Fujimoto, “Miyao Tomiko *Shuka*,” 119; Saga Yūko, “Miyao Tomiko *Shuka* ron,” in *Shōwa bungakushi ni okeru Manshū no mondai*, ed. Sugino Yōkichi (Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku kyōiku gakubu Sugino Yōkichi kenkyūshitsu, 1992), 206.

¹¹ Miyao and Shimaoka, “Bungaku igossō,” 24.

to own something in the context of colonialism and what is one's role in the imperial enterprise? What does it mean to be a winner or loser in the settlement and camps, where class, wealth and social norms are redefined daily?

Even though Miyao's initial motivation to become a writer was based on her desire to talk about experiences in Manchuria, she did not write *Red Summer* until the 1980s, about 20 years after she began working professionally as a novelist.¹² And while serializing *Red Summer*, she took considerable time off, explaining that she really hated writing this work.¹³ In spite (or perhaps because) of the increased numbers of repatriates speaking about their experiences, and the constant media presence of "orphans left behind in China," it must have been challenging to tell Ayako's story, part of Japan's taboo past, full of violence, subhuman conditions and the difficult decisions individuals made in such an environment.

Just before Ayako discovers her kimono coat for sale at the market, she recognizes that she still has "something of her own" (*mochimono*, 253) that can be sold: her infant daughter. A Chinese man at the market tries to buy the baby, admiring her healthy size. Ayako and her husband laugh off his proposition, but this feeling of ownership (and their unexpected ability to resist the offer of money) brings them great comfort, and they accept the notion that their infant is a potential "commodity" (*shōhin*, 253), an object of economic exchange. They discuss stories of compatriots who had sold their offspring, and even feel pride in the desirability of Japanese infants, the husband explaining that this is because the Japanese are "an excellent race" (*yūshū na minzoku*, 253). The text presents a shockingly harsh reality in which an inanimate kimono coat and a living child are not dissimilar. It also depicts the mindset of the times, including the problematic belief in Japanese superiority, an ideology foundational to the imperial project.

¹² See Miyao Tomiko, "Subaru to watashi no 25 nen," in *Oharidōgu; Kioku no danpen* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1996), 63; "Miyao Tomiko watashi ga sakka o kokorozashita genten no chi: 52 nen buri ni kyū Manshū o tazunete," *Shūkan Asashi* 103:55 (Nov. 27, 1998): unpaginated photo essay; Miyao Tomiko, "Kyū Manshū kikō: Inbahō 53 nen me no namida," *Shūkan Asashi* 103:55 (Nov. 27, 1998): 152; "Ukishizumi 50 nen," in *Miyao Tomiko zenshū* 14 (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1993), 267; *Hana no kimono*, in *Miyao Tomiko zenshū* 13 (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1993), 345; Miyao and Shimaoka, "Bungaku igossō," 17–19. Miyao also says it was important for her to leave these records for her daughter. Miyao and Shimaoka, "Bungaku igossō," 19; Miyao, "Kyū Manshū kikō," 152.

¹³ Miyao, "Subaru to watashi no 25 nen," 64–65; Miyao and Shimaoka, "Bungaku igossō," 22–23.

Particularly with regard to the idea of children as commodity, the novel presents views of ownership with honesty but without judgment, as part of the tragic situation of the time. Living in the camps with a working husband, Ayako is able to care for her infant, but *Red Summer* is very aware of a reality in which “ownership” of children often did change hands for a variety of reasons, including selling, adoption and abandonment. As Mariko Asano Tamanoi has explained in discussing female settlers in Manchuria: “In order to save the lives of their children, as well as their own lives, thousands of women who had been left to themselves were forced to, in their own words, ‘leave,’ ‘give up,’ ‘abandon,’ ‘sell,’ or ‘entrust’ their loved ones to Chinese families.”¹⁴ Although Ayako never has to make such a difficult decision, and is miraculously able to return to Japan with her baby alive, after the incident in the market she does regularly think about the price her daughter might fetch. In this way, through the careful juxtaposition of valuable things, both inanimate (kimonos) and animate (children), the text underscores individual and national trauma through concepts of ownership and possession.

Spanning more than 400 pages and as one part of a multivolume series, *Red Summer* uses clothing in different ways, connecting characters and episodes, and dramatizing Ayako’s development. In this essay, I have specifically focused on Ayako’s stolen kimonos as multivalent metonyms that critically scrutinize the notion of ownership within the Japanese empire. As items of material value and also repositories of memory and identity, they articulate the complexity of a repatriate’s devastating experiences of colonial violence and its aftermath.

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¹⁴ Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 18.

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