

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



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Media representations of Okinawa: a postcolonial perspective

In the mid-1990s, Japanese popular culture and mass media experienced a downright Okinawa boom. Japan's southernmost and youngest prefecture has since been marketed as an exotic, peaceful island paradise. In mainland Japanese movies and television series in particular, Okinawa is commonly presented as a place promising "healing" (*iyashi*) from the presumably negative influences of Japanese modernity for mainland visitors. Needless to say, the construction of Okinawa as paradise on earth requires avoiding problems. Never mentioned in mainstream productions are the prefecture's conflict-ridden relationship with mainland Japan which can be traced back to the traumatic Battle of Okinawa, the subsequent U.S. occupation, and the continuing strong military presence on the islands.

By analyzing movies and TV productions made in Okinawa itself, using postcolonial theory, my presentation will focus on decidedly more critical voices from a local perspective. Through surveying themes and topics addressed in these productions and analyzing narrative modes, I will expose the strategies Okinawan media producers develop to express their resistance against mainstream popular cultural images. In a final step, I will discuss the benefits and limitations of a postcolonial approach for dealing with media representations of Okinawa.

Ina Hein is professor for Japanese studies at the University of Vienna (Austria). Her PhD thesis on gender construction in the literature of popular Japanese women writers was granted the Best Dissertation Award of the University of Trier (Germany). Before moving to Vienna, she taught at the Institute for Studies on Modern Japan at Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf (Germany). Ina's research interests are contemporary Japanese literature, cultural studies, and gender studies.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum for young scholars and Ph.D. candidates in the field organized by Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, Susanne Klien and Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but registration (iwata@dijtokyo.org or klien@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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