

Japan: Pre-Modern, Modern, Contemporary

September 8-10, 2025

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Center for Japanese Studies

Book of Abstracts

Summary

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13:15-14:15

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14:30-16:00

PHILOSOPHY

Garcia Chambers (Sophia University): *'Getting Along Beautifully': Aidagara and the Aura of Felt Spaces*

Ferenc Takó (Eötvös Loránd University): *Measuring the Difference: Methodological Considerations of Comparative Reception History on the Field of Intellectual History*

Roman Paşca (Akita University): *A Critical Inquiry into the Role of Technology within Environmental Problems*

MEDIA STUDIES

Jose Pedro Gonçalves Silvestre (Lisbon University): *From Paradise Lost to the Throne of Creation: Reimagining the Journey to the Divine through a "Purely" Japanese Identity*

Caroline Sakamoto Yonamine (University of São Paulo): *Performing Humanity: An Intertextual Analysis of Yorushika's Odorouze and Dazai Osamu's No Longer Human*

Ivo Plsek (Uppsala University): *Framing the General: Tojo Hideki on Japanese Screens and the Shifting Politics of Memory*

16:15 - 17:45

CULTURE and SOCIETY

Sofia Rossatelli (University of Milan): *Cure or Stigma? Sociolinguistic Research Applied to the Art Therapies Field in Contemporary Japan: Initial Findings*

Lena Kralikova Hashimoto (Comenius University), Hana Bogdanova (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra): *Self-documentary: Linguistic and Conceptual Gaps*

Edoardo Pieroni (Independent researcher): *Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Political Immunization of Modern Japanese Identity*

Costin Andrei Istrate (Independent Researcher): *Japan's Cultural Profit*

ANTHROPOLOGY

Igor Prusa (University of Vienna & Metropolitan University Prague): *Scandal in Japan: Transgression, Performance and Ritual*

Simone Zirolia (European University Institute): *The Culinary Other in Early Edo Japan*

Laura Cocora (Independent Researcher): *Fermentation as Metaphor and Method: Towards an Ethical Economy of Entanglement*

DAY 2

9:00-11:00

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Yin Yiqun (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): *A Puzzle in Narration: Possibilities to The Setting Sun*

Soumya Ranjan Gahir (Ravenshaw University): *Aesthetic Silences: Literary Erasure of Empire in Postwar Japan*

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11:15-12:45

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Robert Morton (Chuo University): 'The Home of My Heart [??]': *James Kirkup's Love/Hate Relationship with Japan, 1959-1988*

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Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (Nagoya University): *Feeding the Nightmare: Whale Appetite, Species Panic, and the Emotional Conditioning of Children*

Nathan Hopson (University of Bergen): *"Demand for Demand": We have whale meat, now what?*

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KEYNOTE LECTURE

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15:15-16:45

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Joshua Lee Solomon (Hiroaki University): *Siberian Marmots, Plague, and Minor Literature in Japanese-occupied Manchuria*

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Galia Petkova (Eikei University of Hiroshima): *Nenbutsu Geinō in Kyoto: Preservation, Gender, Empowerment*

Oana Năvodaru (Babes-Bolyai University): *Landmarks in Japanese Avant-Garde Photography: Experiment and Provocation*

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Vesna Kuraica (Belgrade University): *Buddhism, Folklore and Japanese Society in the Prose Works of Miyazawa Kenji*

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9:30-11:00

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Ria Taketomi (Kindai University): *Transition of Women's Representation in the Showa-Era Films (1963-1988)*

Lyudmila Georgieva (Tokyo University of the Arts): *The Notion of Failure as a Subversive Strategy in Tabe Mitsuko's Artificial Placenta*

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Yue Cui (University of Leeds): *Double-Edged Affect and Embodiment: Taiwanese Migrants, Layered Selves, and Colonial Biopolitics in Manchuria*

Hirohito Tsuji (University of East Anglia): *The 'Female Miyake' and the Imperial Family of Japan in the Early Modern, Modern and Contemporary Periods: A Case Study of Princess Sumiko of Katsura 1829-1881*

11:15-12:15

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Raluca Maria Ciolcă (The University of Osaka): *Negotiating Beauty through Discourse in Japanese: A Comparative Analysis*

PERFORMING ARTS

Saida Khalmirzaeva (Okayama University): *The Biwa Hōshi Tradition: Storytelling, Ritual, and the Legacy of Heike-related Tales in Kyushu*

Ivan Crascenko (University of Naples L'Orientale): *Why Don't They Laugh? The Decline of "Provincial Kyōgen" in Yamagata Prefecture*

All abstracts

DAY 1

13:15-14:15

Keynote lecture

Dr. William Bradley Horton: TBA

14:30-16:00

PHILOSOPHY

Garcia Chambers (Sophia University): *'Getting Along Beautifully': Aidagara and the Aura of Felt Spaces*

Gernot Böhme's theory of 'felt spaces' offers a new approach to reflect on our everyday social intercourses that can lead to having an aesthetic experience. Moreover, the ethical implications of two or more people acting with consideration for each other and thereby affecting the quality of the ambience they are sharing brings into sharp focus Tetsurō Watsuji's concept, aidagara. For Watsuji, an aesthetic understanding of our between-ness as human beings—our relationality—especially in our everyday lives, has much to contribute to our getting along with each other and flourishing in a world increasingly characterized by divisions and divisive rhetoric. The central aim of this paper is to flesh out the nuances that abound in attempting to theorize the lines of convergence between the sensibility of 'felt spaces' and the betweenness that can both occasion and sustain the individual's social encounters. Applying the resulting theoretical subtleties to selected vignettes of relationships of the protagonist in both Kawabata's *Thousand Cranes* and Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* should bring home forcefully the value of recognizing the interconnectedness of the aesthetic and the ethical in our everyday encounters.

Keywords: aesthetic engagement, aesthetics of atmosphere, aidagara, Gernot Böhme, social aesthetics, negative aesthetics, Tetsurō Watsuji

Ferenc Takó (Eötvös Loránd University): *Measuring the Difference: Methodological Considerations of Comparative Reception History on the Field of Intellectual History*

Research on 'non-Western' intellectual traditions has been applying various kinds of comparison with European concepts for several centuries. By the second half of the 20th century, 'comparative philosophy' had become institutionalised, while diverse closely related, overlapping fields of philosophy were born, such as 'intercultural', 'transcultural', or 'world philosophy'. In the first part of my presentation, I will provide a brief overview of the main branches of comparative philosophy with special emphasis on approaches that use a comparative framework to explain both of the compared traditions (not one of them through the other). In the second part, I will elaborate on 'comparative reception history', the method I am applying in a research project examining Japanese thinkers and their European contemporaries, who are compared based

on their reflection on China and Confucianism as a common denominator of their diverging worldviews. I will conceptualise this approach using Max Weber's (1864–1920) theory of 'ideal types', particularly his explanation of how one should describe a socio-historical phenomenon by examining its similarities with and differences from an ideal type. Weber's method, while justly labelled Euro-centric, points correctly to the fact that the apprehension of 'unknown' concepts always starts with comparison with something we are familiar with. Using Weber's ideal types as a starting point, I will argue that comparative reception history can provide a suitable research framework as long as it is based on a common reference point of the otherwise isolated thinkers. By ensuring an undeniable similarity, i.e., the object of reception by the compared thinkers, it acknowledges the fact that some similarity is a prerequisite of apprehension. At the same time, if further investigation is grounded on the differences of the reception of that common element, in this case, Chinese thought, by the compared thinkers, the risk of Euro-centrism can be minimised.

Roman Paşca (Akita University): *A Critical Inquiry into the Role of Technology within Environmental Problems*

Can environmental technologies help us deal with the current environmental (and existential) crisis? Well, yes and no. Definitely no, if we think of them as the panacea that will bring us salvation from our imminent demise and deliverance from the feelings of powerlessness and guilt. Maybe yes, but only if we see the bigger picture, i.e. we understand that any crisis of the environment is, at the same time, a crisis of humanity.

To reflect on these issues, I draw from the works of Minakata Kumagusu (1867-1941), particularly from the letters he exchanged with his lifelong friend, the Buddhist monk Doki Hōryū (1854-1923). Minakata, who, among other things, rejected the idea of progress as integral to evolution, suggesting that evolution and devolution are in fact two aspects of one single process (not *shinkaron* 進化論, but *shintaikaron* 進退化論), was very critical of anthropocentrism, stating unequivocally that man is not "the master of creation". Drawing from the insights he gained through his work on slime mold, he wrote of the "three ecologies": of biology, of society and of the mind.

I propose that *any* approach to environmental issues (including the development of new technologies) has to take into account these three ecologies, as this might be the only way to get to the root of the problem, which lies within us. In other words, we need to understand that not only are we embedded within the environment, but the other way around as well.

MEDIA STUDIES

Jose Pedro Gonçalves Silvestre (Lisbon University): *From Paradise Lost to the Throne of Creation: Reimagining the Journey to the Divine through a "Purely" Japanese Identity*

I will be looking into an obscure figure in Shintoism and how it is characterized in a Japanese video game by discussing how the visual medium, "Shin Megami Tensei V" (November 11th, 2021), that has not been

marketed as a direct adaptation of "Paradise Lost" (1667, first edition) but uses John Milton's (1608–1674) writing as a source of inspiration to enhance its own interactive experience concerning the Fall of Man through a theomachy. By taking the few details that can be extracted from the personality of that mythological character, both from classical documents and in that visual media, I will further explain on how Tsukuyomi's pattern of behavior used by the game developers mimics real historical events in Japan, such as Christian persecution under the Tokugawa shogunate (banned in 1614), which later influenced the national identity of the national learning during the Meiji period from 1868 to 1912, in order to elucidate the views of Japanese people towards religion as a whole. The plot presented in the fifth entry of this game series, and the conflicts that its parable explores within the ideologies between the different deities, will be compared to the work of literature by the English poet to emphasize the goals of Tsukuyomi as a political power. The choices made by the player affect the ending that can be achieved, with the focus being the type of world that the protagonist wishes to conceive as a newborn God. However, it is possible to identify that a particular religion is portrayed with less favoritism as the narrative progresses. Why is Christianity often seen negatively by these Japanese fictional stories? How are Japanese myths represented with a certain bias, despite the fact, that their people often do not even consider themselves to be true believers in the Western sense of the word? What can be classified as "purely" Japanese and why do such ideas tend to clash with foreign beliefs sooner or later?

Caroline Sakamoto Yonamine (University of São Paulo): *Performing Humanity: An Intertextual Analysis of Yorushika's Odorouze and Dazai Osamu's No Longer Human*

This study examines Yorushika's 2019 song *Odorouze* as an intertextual and adaptive echo of Dazai Osamu's 1948 novel titled *No Longer Human*, through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and Linda Hutcheon's framework of adaptation. While *No Longer Human* centers around Ōba Yōzō, a man alienated from society and incapable of authentic human connection, *Odorouze* resurrects this psychological dissonance in a musical context, positioning its speaker as a postmodern inheritor of Dazai's despair. Both texts explore the idea of "performing" humanity: Yōzō through the façade of humor and Yorushika's narrator, Amy, through music, which becomes a vessel of both expression and self-erasure. Drawing from Kristeva, the study views *Odorouze* not as a derivative work but as a mosaic of quotations in which Dazai's existential motifs are reconfigured into lyrical form, mediated by contemporary anxieties surrounding art, identity, and authenticity. Hutcheon's theory of adaptation situates the song as a transmedial engagement with literature, revealing how emotional disaffection and suicidal ideation are recontextualized in the aesthetics of J-pop and Japanese youth culture. The song's recurring motifs: disillusionment with the music industry and the desire to quit being human resonate with *No Longer Human*'s central themes of self-negation and the impossibility of sincere existence. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Odorouze* functions as an adaptive intertext that re-performs Dazai's nihilism not to resolve it, but to restage it within a new generation's affective landscape. It is not merely an homage but a continuation of Dazai's psychological inquiry into the limits of expression, sincerity, and human performance. In doing so, Yorushika transforms literary despair into an ephemeral dance: a final performance in the face of silence.

KEYWORDS: Modern Japanese Literature; Dazai Osamu; Intertextuality; Japanese Pop Music; Transmedia Adaptation

Ivo Plsek (Uppsala University): *Framing the General: Tojo Hideki on Japanese Screens and the Shifting Politics of Memory*

Tojo Hideki, Prime Minister of Japan during the height of its wartime expansion, has long occupied a singular position in the iconography of World War II: a figure of blame, vilification, and symbolic culpability. In Western memory, he is frequently equated with figures such as Adolf Hitler—a solitary embodiment of fascist militarism and unrepentant aggression. Yet within Japan, his legacy has been far more ambiguous, shaped by evolving political climates, cultural narratives, and the shifting terrain of postwar memory.

16:15 - 17:45

CULTURE and SOCIETY

Sofia Rossatelli (University of Milan): *Cure or Stigma? Sociolinguistic Research Applied to the Art Therapies Field in Contemporary Japan: Initial Findings*

Recent research has reported that in Japan, the social stigma towards mental illness and related non-pharmacological treatments (e.g. art therapies) still affects approximately 90 per cent of those affected, including children and adults, as well as their caregivers. This phenomenon is also evident in the specialist lexical choices, where Japanese terminology is often supplanted by linguistic borrowings, due to the perception that the former is almost intrinsically stigmatising.

A substantial body of research has already been dedicated to the analysis of specialised language in various domains, including politics, economics, business, and medicine. However, studies on the specific field of art therapies, which is characterised by a lexical basin that intersects medicine, psychological sciences and visual arts or music, are still rare.

The objective of this project is twofold: first, to deepen the understanding of the art therapeutic field from a more inclusive perspective, and second, to address and reduce the stigma associated with such forms of care. This is achieved through an analysis of the use of words of Japanese origin (*wago*), words or expressions derived from English or other foreign languages (*gairaigo*) and neologisms (*shinzogo*). This investigation forms part of a broader research project, the linguistic corpus of which, following the mapping model that has emerged in relevant research conducted in Japanese therapeutic settings over the last decade, includes manuals, sources promoted by the Japanese national art therapy and music therapy associations or similar institutions, previous research and field research (Japanese art and music therapeutic centres). The initial results from this study are reported and analysed using software such as NVivo, which has already been demonstrated to be effective for qualitative research in the humanities.

Lena Kralikova Hashimoto (Comenius University), Hana Bogdanova (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra): *Self-documentary: Linguistic and Conceptual Gaps*

This study examines terminological discrepancies between Japanese and Western conceptualizations of specific audiovisual forms, with a particular focus on the genre known in Japan as self-documentary. While the term is used in Japan, it does not have a direct equivalent in Western discourse. In the Western context, the term is often replaced by related terms, such as first-person documentary, autobiographical documentary, or personal documentary. However, this substitution can lead to misinterpretations, as these terms refer to somewhat related, but different audiovisual genres and forms. These differences can cause misinterpretations or incomplete understandings across cultural and academic boundaries.

The primary objective of this research is to examine and clarify the meaning of self-documentary within the Japanese context by exploring its origins, semantic development, and current usage. In doing so, the study also engages with a broader set of related Japanese terms that describe similar forms of audiovisual expression, prompting a more extensive examination of terminology. This broader inquiry arises from the recognition that terminological inconsistencies are not limited to self-documentary, but reflect a wider linguistic and conceptual asymmetry. Though these terms appear to be direct or near-equivalent translations between Japanese and Western contexts, their actual scope of meaning and the types of audiovisual works they reference diverges. Apparent equivalence may obscure deeper cultural differences, genre conventions, and interpretive practices.

To address these discrepancies, the study adopts a comparative framework to identify terms that correspond directly across both contexts, those that partially overlap but differ in nuance or scope, and those without a direct equivalent term. By mapping these relationships, the study reveals conceptual gaps that complicate cross-cultural discourse in media studies, film theory, and cultural semiotics. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more precise and context-sensitive understanding of the self-documentary genre and promotes clearer academic communication across cultural boundaries.

Keywords: self-documentary, first-person documentary, autobiographical documentary, personal documentary, term origin, term scope

Edoardo Pieroni (Independent researcher): *Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Political Immunization of Modern Japanese Identity*

Fukuzawa Yukichi was a key figure in the bunmei-kaika movement of modernizing Japan. As such, he was a fervent proponent of Western ideas, which he intended to advance in order to elevate Japan from the mire of what he defined half-barbarous and half-civilized conditions. Being a student of Dutch, he became convinced of the efficacy and superiority of Western science, and particularly Western medicine. While drafting his theory of civilization, Fukuzawa did not spare medical metaphors when discussing the degree of Japanese independence vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Crucially, he went as far as defining Japan's

foreign relations as an illness, causing anxiety to the emerging modern Japanese identity. The main scope of my research is to highlight the medical metaphors within Japanese modern political thought and inscribe them in the framework of political immunization. The immunization paradigm has been introduced by Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito. According to Esposito, the construction of identity in the modern subject is dependent upon a process of immunization, which is to protect the self-identity of the individual against the fundamental risk that it will be jeopardized or even lost as a result of exposure to others in the context of being together in a community. My intent is to demonstrate how Japan immunized its own modern identity from two parallel threats: that of a backwards Asia and that of a civilized West.

Costin Andrei Istrate (Independent Researcher): *Japan's Cultural Profit*

Culture, a field that is almost permanently under study, research, and social interest, requires a new approach in the conditions of increasing global economic complexity. The use of terms, usually economic, in association with the cultural field, such as: cultural investments or expenditures, cultural capital, cultural G.D.P., cultural income, cultural production, cultural resource management, cultural tourism, cultural wealth, lead to the completion of the expression of cultural economy, the economy becoming an area related to culture, without which it cannot be preserved and developed. In addition, cultural materialism applied to heritage (as an asset underlying culture in general), generates a surplus that ensures the continuity of the cultural area.

In the sense of what was presented previously, the theme of the paper proposes on the one hand the term cultural profit, both in an economic and social sense, taking into account on the one hand the analogy with the cultural profit determined at the level of economic organizations but also in the meaning of the social benefits resulting from the development of the cultural economy, even if that term may seem in antithesis with the surplus achieved by nonprofit organizations.

The choice of Japan for the study and research of cultural profit is not accidental, Japanese culture and tradition being recognized through UNESCO, its cultural influence being recently considered the strongest in Asia, thus demonstrating its global impact.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Igor Prusa (University of Vienna & Metropolitan University Prague): *Scandal in Japan: Transgression, Performance and Ritual*

Traditionally, Japan has been conceived as a culture defined by consensus and harmony, which becomes reflected in its laws, customs, and manners. In such a conflict-averse environment, one might assume there would be little room for scandal. However, the opposite is true: scandals are a cultural constant in Japan, and both tabloids and social media thrive on the circulation of conflict, controversy, and corruption. Iconic images of scandal reporting—press conferences crowded with hundreds of reporters, incessant camera flashes, and culprits reciting pre-scripted apologies while bowing in tears—immediately come to mind.

These media rituals became normalized, challenging the stereotype of Japan as an entirely harmonious and consensual society.

The aim of this talk is to analyze these rituals, whose aim is to manifest and manage revealed transgressions in a prescribed way. It illuminates the ritualized means of public apology and the cultural realities of public shaming in Japan. This is important because many scandal denouements in Japan do not get by without a punitive ritual of emotional confession, temporary exclusion, and eventual reintegration. In other words, transgressors confess their “sins” to the public, they are removed from the limelight, and they are eventually allowed to return to society. The talk illustrates how the ritual of confession, exclusion and reintegration is turned into a performative media spectacle. By doing so, it offers an opportunity to see how scandals play out in a liberal democratic system that differs in many respects from the United States and Europe.

Simone Zirolia (European University Institute): *The Culinary Other in Early Edo Japan*

This paper aims at tracking the presence of Iberian style foods in early modern Japan following the turbulent and short presence of the Iberian merchants and missionaries within the archipelago (1549-1639). While Japan closed itself to the outside world for over two centuries (1639-1853) the consumption of Iberian foods continued especially through the elites. In this paper I offer three case studies related to two Japanese daimyō (Hosokawa and Shimazu) and the emperor Gomizuno'o who consumed Iberian style cuisine (namban ryōrisho) on different and several occasions. An exploration of these families' records aims at bringing to surface the echoes of a forgotten culinary encounter and the foods at the centre of it. While, in fact, the Iberians were expelled from Japan (1639), the knowledge of their tastes continued to permeate Japanese diets following the cravings of these influential personalities and their interest in the cuisine of 'the others'. An interest that combined the novelty of unfamiliar tastes with 'culinary' expressions of influence and power. The records I analyse here are between the few sources to testify this aspect including notes on the families' banquets, menus and official culinary gatherings in a span of over two centuries (1600-1800). Focusing on an aspect that is often overlooked by historiography – foods, food habits and culinary exchanges – my paper ultimately reconsiders an early modern intercultural dialogue and its relentless echoes. Echoes that were quietly yet profoundly culinary.

Laura Cocora (Independent Researcher): *Fermentation as Metaphor and Method: Towards an Ethical Economy of Entanglement*

This article explores how Japanese artisanal food producers turn to fermentation for metaphorical and material resources with which to imagine and enact alternative economic forms. Scholars have shown how contemporary economies rely on processes of disentanglement, formatting agencies through separations, extractions, and exclusions. Through an archival and digital ethnography of the reflective practices of Japanese fermenters, I trace how human-microbial collaboration becomes a site of critique and redesign, where entanglement is not a problem to be managed but a condition to cultivate.

Drawing on publications, interviews, and digital content by figures such as Watanabe Itaru (The Rotting Economy) and Terada Keisuke (The Path of Fermentation), I show how this reorientation involves, first, attending to the worlds ignored and damaged by industrialized fermentation and, more broadly, capitalist production. Second, I examine how it unfolds as a form of entrepreneurship rooted in intentional cultural change – rethinking the means and ends of calculative rationality through what I call fermentative reasoning.

Living and fermenting with wild microbes, allowing them to assert their own temporalities and preferences, reflects a politics of affinity. It contests the commodification of life and time embedded in industrial fermentation, which prizes uniformity and preservation, and instead values alterity, coexistence, responsiveness, uncertainty, limits, and co-flourishing. I argue that, for these artisans, microbial collaboration is not only a productive technique, but a form of analysis worthy of theoretical engagement for how it reimagines wellbeing, community, ecology and sustainability through the ethics of entanglement.

DAY 2

9:00-11:00

LITERATURE

Gennaro Pezzone (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): *Generational Clash & Identity Negotiation: An Analysis of Ie and Wakai*

The promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education on October 30, 1890, officially welded together the Confucian notion of loyalty to the Nation with that of filial piety in a manner that strategically served the ideological and political interests of the government in the Meiji period (1868-1912). The authority of the Emperor, around which the modern state was founded, had to be legitimised and the institution of the family proved instrumental in this regard. The 1898 Civil Code institutionalised the family (ie) based on the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) samurai household model, thus granting absolute authority to the father over all family members and turning the idea of loyalty to his authority into a lived practice.

This paternal authority caused tensions within the household, which were expressed in early 20th century literature. The publication of *Futon* (The Quilt) by Tayama Katai (1872-1930) in 1906 marked a watershed in the literary landscape as it partially shifted interest towards autobiographical writings, which would be labeled as *Watakushi-shōsetsu* in the following decades. Among these, *Ie* (The Family, 1911) by Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943) and *Wakai* (Reconciliation, 1916) by Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) stand out for their representation of the tension between father (or his “legacy”) and son. Drawing primarily on the notion of class habitus by Bourdieu (1972) and transposing it to the context of the epistemological and cultural shift of the Meiji period, this presentation, through a comparative analysis of the two texts, examines the ways in which the characters negotiate their identity amid tensions with their fathers and how they attempt to redefine the concept of fatherhood based on their personal experience. As an ancillary aim, it will also try

to discuss whether these two novels were able to produce an alternative discourse to the official one regarding fatherhood in the Meiji and Taishō (1912-1926) periods.

Yin Yiqun (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): *A Puzzle in Narration: Possibilities to The Setting Sun*

I would like to introduce my research plan on Dazai Osamu's *The Setting Sun*. Dazai is among the most famous writers in Japanese literature after World War 2. His most famous work, *No Longer Human*, published in 1948, enjoyed a long-lasting popularity and is considered a modern classic. The first generation of Dazai critics focused on Dazai's personal life and its relation with his works. Indeed, Dazai's private life is a big part of his literature, and even sometime stirs up the debate of if some of his novels are *shishosetsu* or not. For example, Okuno Takeo proposed “下降指向” to understand Dazai's later works: his own decreasing will of living, coupled with Japan's defeat in the war, becomes the overarching theme for his later works, including *The Setting Sun*. Since then, the center of research slowly shifted away from his private life to symbolism in his works. For example, Anto Hiroshi points out that female narrative voice in Dazai's later works should be read as symbol of optimism, in opposite to “writer,” which in Dazai's later works, writers are usually decadent, like Uehara in *The Setting Sun*. In this line of reading, 4 main characters in *The Setting Sun* are each assigned a symbolic meaning, with the protagonist Kazuko being a symbol of the new generation, amoral and energetic. In recent years, reading Dazai's work with narratology becomes increasingly popular. However, most of the efforts are devoted to novels with male narrators, especially if the narrator claims to be the “author” like in *The Flowers of Buffoonery*, while at the same time Dazai's female voice remains largely an enigma. The goal of my research is to develop an alternative reading for *The Setting Sun*, incorporating new developments in understanding narratives.

Soumya Ranjan Gahir (Ravenshaw University): *Aesthetic Silences: Literary Erasure of Empire in Postwar Japan*

This paper explores the phenomenon of aesthetic silence in postwar Japanese literature as a deliberate and strategic mode of disengaging with the nation's imperial past. In contrast to dominant scholarship that foregrounds vocal critiques of militarism and defeat, this study investigates how select postwar literary intellectuals—most notably Yukio Mishima, Abe Kōbō, and Endō Shūsaku—engaged in a poetics of silence, absence, and displacement to repress, sublimate, or mythologize memories of imperial violence. Drawing from memory studies, trauma theory, and poststructuralist philosophy, the paper examines how literary forms—such as allegory, abstraction, and spiritual ambiguity—functioned as sites of non-memory, where the affective residue of empire lingered without direct articulation. Rather than treat silence as passive or apolitical, the paper argues that these omissions were active aesthetic and ideological choices, reflective of complex tensions between cultural nationalism, personal trauma, and the ambivalence of defeat. By analysing textual absences and indirect expressions in novels like *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, *The Woman in the Dunes*, and *Silence*, the study highlights how postwar Japanese literature helped construct a cultural identity predicated not on confrontation but on stylised forgetting. This project

ultimately contributes to a rethinking of postwar intellectual history—not through what was said but through what remained unsaid and why. In doing so, the paper introduces “aesthetic silence” as a critical lens for understanding not only Japanese responses to imperial collapse but also broader global patterns of cultural erasure in the aftermath of historical trauma.

Keywords: Aesthetic Silence, Postwar Japanese Literature, Imperial Memory, Cultural Erasure, Trauma and Non-Memory

Edoardo Occhionero (University of Turin): *From Cosmopolitanism to Cultural Anthropophagy: Kazuko Shiraishi's Poetic Journey*

Kazuko Shiraishi's poetry embodies a fusion of cosmopolitanism and cultural anthropophagy, challenging national and literary boundaries through an eclectic and transnational voice. Born in Vancouver in 1931 and returning to Japan as a child, she navigated multiple layers of belonging, crafting poetry that resisted essentialist notions of identity while embracing a global sensibility. This research examines how her work transcends geographic and cultural determinism. Noriko Mizuta (2018) describes her as possessing a “diasporic identity free from specific citizenship claims and family duties” (p. 137), highlighting her rejection of national constraints. From “Tamago no furu machi” (1951) to “Seinaru insha no kisetsu” (1970), Shiraishi positioned herself outside traditional Japanese literary expectations. Her modernist influences—Kitasono Katue and the experimental group VOU—intertwined with extraterritorial literary currents, including the Beat Generation, Henry Miller, Dylan Thomas, and John Coltrane's jazz improvisations. A key concept in understanding Shiraishi's poetic stance is cultural anthropophagy, borrowed from Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade's “Manifesto antropófago” (1928). While she does not propose a reinvention of Japanese society, her poetry similarly absorbs, translates, and integrates various artistic forms, rejecting Japan-centric literary traditions to construct a universal poetic space. This poetic anthropophagy extends to language as well—Shiraishi frequently incorporated English into her texts, creating a bilingual texture that subverted monolithic notions of Japanese poetry. In “The Orient in Me” (1976), she explicitly rejected nationalism, stating: “I continue to believe that any person who produces genuine work must be cosmopolitan” (p. 196). Methodologically, this study employs textual analysis, historical contextualization, and intertextual readings to examine the theme of cosmopolitanism in Shiraishi's poetry, illustrating how, through cultural anthropophagy and linguistic hybridity, her work transcends national literatures and redefines poetic belonging in a globalized world.

LANGUAGE and EDUCATION

Iva Lakic (University of Zagreb): *Applying the ARCS Model to Japanese Language Acquisition: The Possibilities of Classical Waka Poetry*

This study explores the integration of the ARCS model of motivational design—Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction—into the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language through classical waka

poetry. Rooted in Japan's literary tradition, waka offers a linguistically dense and culturally rich medium for language acquisition. The study argues that classical poetry can be an effective pedagogical tool for vocabulary building, grammatical analysis, reading comprehension, and cultural literacy at various proficiency levels. By applying the ARCS framework, the paper demonstrates how the aesthetic and semantic features of waka can enhance learner motivation and engagement.

Each ARCS component is examined in the context of instructional strategies: Attention is stimulated through the emotive, metaphorical, and symbolic richness of waka, presented via calligraphy, musical recitation, and visual media. Relevance is established by connecting the themes of love, impermanence, and seasonal change to both contemporary Japanese culture and universal human experience. Confidence is developed through scaffolded interpretation, comparative readings with modern Japanese, and semantic analysis of rethorical forms. Satisfaction is achieved through creative tasks, reflective activities, and opportunities for personal expression and interpretation.

The findings support the view that literary texts such as waka, when framed within a motivational design model, can make classical content accessible and meaningful to modern learners. The paper concludes that integrating classical Japanese poetry with the ARCS model not only improves language skills but also cultivates deeper cultural appreciation and learner autonomy, offering a sustainable and intrinsically motivating path in Japanese language education. The incorporation of the ARCS model provides a systematic and theoretically grounded approach for revitalizing classical texts in the modern classroom, positioning poetry not as a relic of the past, but as a dynamic medium for intercultural understanding and learner development.

Hana Bogdanova (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra), Lena Kralikova Hashimoto (Comenius University): *Japanese Language Instruction in Non-Native Environments*

The optimal development of foreign language competence remains a central concern in language education, particularly in non-native instruction settings where learners have limited access to authentic language environments. This study aims to deepen understanding of how instruction methods relates to the trajectory of language skills acquisition and to inform the design of effective foreign language teaching in contexts with limited natural exposure to the target language.

This study presents the results of a quasi-experiment conducted over the course of one academic year, involving two groups of students receiving different instructional approaches—comprehensible input-based instruction and productive output-based instruction. The primary aim was to examine the learning outcomes associated with each approach. The analysis focused on four components of language competence: overall language performance, formal accuracy, contextual (situational) accuracy, and output production skills.

Beyond comparing group performance, the study also explored the internal cohesion of each group and differences in the nature and distribution of acquired language skills—specifically, which sub-skills were more dominant within each instructional model, as well as which skills students struggled to develop.

Furthermore, the study investigated correlations between the observed language skills, not only at the group level but mainly across different quartiles within each group, offering a more nuanced view of learners' development.

Keywords: Japanese language instruction, Grammatical competence, Language production skills

Tomoko Yamakawa (Bunkyo University): *Dialogue and Negative Capability in Elder Care: A Reconsideration from the Perspective of Plurilingualism and Pluriculturalism*

This presentation explores dialogue in elder care through the lens of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, in connection with Keats's idea of "negative capability"—the ability to remain in uncertainty without rushing to resolve it.

In today's super-aging society, people with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are increasingly involved in medical and caregiving settings. These contexts often reveal value conflicts, making communication difficult. What is required are constructive forms of dialogue that navigate these differences. Just as important is the capacity to endure uncertainty without rushing toward resolution—what Keats called "negative capability."

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, as proposed by the Council of Europe, is not limited to communication between speakers of different languages. It is also effective in dialogue among speakers of the same language, as it emphasizes the layered linguistic and cultural awareness within individuals and encourages mutual respect across diverse value systems. This orientation resonates with healthcare practices in which people share subjective experiences and explore appropriate responses while remaining open to complexity.

The portfolio, commonly used in language education to document and reflect on one's learning process, can also be applied in healthcare contexts. Tools such as "Jinsei notes," in which patients and families record their treatment history and wishes, support more satisfying and shared decision-making.

The process of deepening mutual and self-understanding through such dialogue not only promotes autonomy in elder care but also invites a reconsideration of how language education and healthcare may be meaningfully linked. This presentation aims to offer a point of departure for bridging these domains and cultivating new forms of practical knowledge related to care, communication, and learning.

Sara Librenjak (Juraj Dobrila University of Pula): *Computing Kanji Difficulty for Language Learners*

Despite the central role kanji plays in Japanese literacy, there is no widely accepted standard for measuring individual character difficulty for language learners. Frequency lists and school-grade order offer partial insights but fail to account for cognitive, pedagogical, and visual complexity. This study proposes a

multi-factor model to compute kanji difficulty using a weighted combination of features relevant to second-language acquisition.

The model integrates data from official frequency corpora, stroke count, component familiarity, semantic transparency, and learner error patterns. Each kanji is scored against these dimensions, generating a composite difficulty rating aligned with CEFR-J levels. To validate the model, I compared the computed difficulty scores with learner performance data and textbook progression sequences. Results show strong correlation with common learner errors and teaching intuitions, while highlighting discrepancies in traditional ordering systems.

This approach allows for more responsive curriculum design, personalized study recommendations, and better diagnostic tools. It also accounts for learner-facing variables such as visual confusion between similar kanji and the frequency of compounds vs. single-character use. The model supports teachers and developers in selecting kanji appropriate to learners' proficiency levels, avoiding both under-challenging and overloading them.

Ultimately, this work aims to bridge the gap between kanji pedagogy and real learner data by offering a scalable, transparent metric for kanji difficulty. Future applications include adaptive learning platforms and more nuanced assessment tools for reading and writing skills.

11:15-12:45

LITERATURE

Loris Zevrain (University of Milan): *The Weight of Time: Modern Identity and Existential Estrangement in Ao no Jidai*

This contribution investigates the role of temporality in Mishima Yukio's *Ao no Jidai* (1950), exploring how the novel stages a modern crisis of subjectivity through the temporal disorientation of its protagonist, Kawasaki Makoto. Time is not a neutral backdrop but a narrative agent that exposes the protagonist's existential fracture and his inability to engage harmoniously with life. Obsessed with rational planning, he reduces love, ambition, and even death to predetermined acts, seeking to neutralise the uncertainty of the future. In doing so, he turns time from a space of possibility into a mental prison, as its unpredictability destabilises the rigid control on which Makoto builds his identity.

Although the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Japan's prewar and postwar years, Makoto remains untouched by these major historical events, retreating instead into a state of intellectual detachment. His troubled relationship with time becomes crucial to understanding not only his existential malaise but also the broader disorientation of the modern subject within a rapidly transforming society.

Through close readings of his relationships with Teruko, Otagi, and Yasushi, this contribution explores how temporal experience is constructed within the novel, highlighting the contrasting temporal attitudes embodied by each character and Makoto's tragic incapacity to embrace uncertainty. In this light, the novel offers a profound meditation on the existential experience of time, conceived not as a neutral chronology

but as a deeply subjective dimension that shapes ethical choices, emotional life, and the construction of selfhood. Makoto's compulsion to master time thus emerges as a form of existential isolation, severing him from the spontaneity and unpredictability that animate human life. From this perspective, *Ao no Jidai* is a powerful early articulation of the tension between instinct and restraint, a theme that resonates throughout Mishima's later works and reflects the broader anxieties surrounding modern Japanese identity.

Robert Morton (Chuo University): 'The Home of My Heart [??]': *James Kirkup's Love/Hate Relationship with Japan, 1959-1988*

It is difficult to think of another country that has inspired so much gushing affection along with as much hostility as Japan, particularly during the period from about 1960 to 1990 when it was undergoing dramatic change.

This paper will look at this topic by focusing on a British writer who both loved and hated Japan, James Kirkup, who lived there (with gaps) between 1959 and 1988. Kirkup was unusual among the foreigners there at the time in that he had a substantial literary reputation back home. Very few non-Japanese wrote as well as he did about the country, or indeed as much: four non-fiction books: *These Horned Islands* (1962), *Tokyo* (1966), *Japan Behind the Fan* (1970), *Heaven, Hell and Hara-Kiri* (1974); a novel: *Gaijin on the Ginza* (1991); along with many university textbooks on Japanese themes, countless newspaper and journal articles, and thousands of poems.

Kirkup was deeply ambivalent about the country: 'My opinion of the Japanese changes from day to day. They are extremely complex people.' His writing is consequently full of inconsistencies – he made little effort to create a coherent narrative, giving his work a certain immediacy and authenticity.

This makes him a good guide to how confusing Japan could seem. This paper will attempt to present what he wrote in the context of what was happening in the country at the time and what others were saying about it.

Xiao Yao (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): *The Blurring Boundary between Reality and Fiction in Haruki Murakami's "The Anteater in Musashi-Sakai: Kaho, Part II"*

Haruki Murakami has used various narrative techniques, among which the most distinctive is the parallel storytelling that juxtaposes the real and the unreal. This narrative structure first emerged in his short story "The City and Its Uncertain Walls" (1980) and was fully developed in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985). Since then, it has become a recurring feature in his novels. This narrative device does more than merely present two separate spaces; it foregrounds the tension between reality and fiction as a central concern of Murakami's literature.

However, in more recent works, particularly the novel *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2023), such tension began to dissolve. In his latest short stories "Kaho" (2024) and "The Anteater in Musashi-Sakai: Kaho, Part

II”(2025) the boundary between reality and fiction has become increasingly ambiguous, signaling a shift in Murakami’s narrative orientation, one that moves away from the dialectical tension between dual realms toward a more fluid and integrated narrative space.

This presentation focuses on Murakami’s short story “The Anteater in Musashi-Sakai,” which serves as a sequel to “Kaho”. While the two stories are connected, each also can be read as an independent narrative.

In “The Anteater in Musashi-Sakai”, Kaho, a picture book author, is guided by a pair of anteaters who have fled from Brazil and subsequently relocates to Musashi-Sakai, a neighborhood in west Tokyo. For Kaho, the experiences she has there feel dreamlike — though distinctly not dreams. Through these dreamlike encounters, Musashi-Sakai, a real place located between urban and suburban space, gradually acquires a fictional dimension.

This presentation will examine how these dreamlike experiences disturb the sense of reality within the story, gradually destabilize the boundary between reality and fiction, and ultimately construct a hybrid, fluid space where the two dimensions converge.

CULTURE (Panel)

Symbolic Catch: Japanese Whaling, Heritagization, and Narrative Reinvention

Since the international moratorium on commercial whaling took effect in 1986, Japanese whaling has undergone a series of transformations—both in practice and in meaning. Beyond the shift from commercial to scientific whaling and back again, the launch of a massive new factory ship, and the targeting of new species, the ways in which whaling is represented, justified, and commodified have also evolved significantly. No longer merely an industrial activity, whaling has become a highly charged symbol—entangled with debates over cultural identity, national sovereignty, and Japan’s place in a global regulatory order. This panel investigates how post-moratorium Japan has reimagined and repackaged whaling across historical, literary, and economic domains.

The first paper examines the selective use of premodern whaling imagery, particularly from Taiji, to retroactively construct a narrative of cultural continuity and “traditionality” in defense of modern whaling practices. The second paper shifts the focus to literature, tracing how contemporary fiction contributes to heritage-making by presenting nostalgic visions of the Japanese whaling past. The third paper turns to the political economy of whaling’s afterlife, investigating how government bodies and local actors attempt to manufacture public demand for whale products despite the younger generation’s indifference and declining consumption.

Together, these papers interrogate the shifting meanings of whaling in contemporary Japan’s cultural and political landscape, revealing how a once pragmatic practice has been reconfigured into a polyvalent symbol—at once traditional, modern, nostalgic, and embattled. By examining discursive, aesthetic, and material strategies of reinterpretation, the panel highlights broader tensions between cultural continuity and reinvention, political utility and generational disinterest, symbolic capital and material decline. Ultimately, it examines the efforts of a fading industry to navigate a fraught ideological landscape through historical narrative.

Jay Alabaster (Arizona State University): *Traditionality and Whaling in Japan*

As the net of international regulations tightened around Japanese whaling in the 1970s and 80s, the country's negotiators attempted to navigate a way through. One strategy involved creating a narrative linking Edo-era "traditional" whaling, in which brave whalers on rowboats used hand-thrown spears and nets to catch their prey, and modern whaling, in which motorized ships employ GPS and explosive harpoons. Aboriginal whaling communities had long been granted exceptions to global regulations, and Japan hoped for a similar exclusion, at least for its whaling communities that operated small ships hunting close to shore. Some such communities have centuries-long whaling histories, but the connection to modern whaling was repeatedly rejected by the International Whaling Commission, which a frustrated Japan exited in 2019.

In Japan and abroad, however, this narrative has remained. While some scholars have in recent years rejected the connection, others emphasize it, and it is widely cited in mainstream publications and government documents. Both sides of the debate, however, largely treat Japan's multitudinous "traditional" whaling communities as a single, established entity. This paper will translate into English and compare pre-modern depictions of whale hunts in Taiji, a village in Wakayama Prefecture that has actively hunted cetaceans since at least the 17th century. Research questions include the uniformity of such depictions, to what degree they fit widely used conceptions of pre-modern Japanese whaling, and how they color the "traditionality" narrative around modern whaling in Japan.

Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (Nagoya University): *Feeding the Nightmare: Whale Appetite, Species Panic, and the Emotional Conditioning of Children*

In recent decades, Japanese fictional literature has reimagined whaling, transforming it from a marginal topic to a culturally and politically charged theme. Early depictions of whaling, appearing sporadically from the beginnings of modern Japanese literature through its economic peak in the 1960s, were few and often inspired by American and proletarian literary traditions. These texts were largely devoid of the cultural-nationalist undertones now associated with it.

This dynamic shifted in the post-moratorium era, as Japan faced heightened international criticism of its scientific whaling programs. During this period, literary engagement with whaling surged, accompanied by a genre shift toward historical novels set in premodern Japan. These texts often evoke a mythologized golden age of native whaling, framing it as an enduring cultural tradition and echoing broader anti-anti-whaling discourse. A recurring feature of this literature is its narrow focus on heroic action and stoic, self-sacrificing whalers, accompanied by the marginalization of both women's roles in whaling communities and the more mundane aspects of whaling life. In doing so, they reproduce a gendered nostalgia that aligns with broader discourses of national resilience and cultural purity.

This paper argues that while individual texts often foreground localized heritage, their emergence within this context contributes to a nationalist narrative that idealizes a romanticized past. By analyzing this genre shift and its alignment with political and cultural discourses, it reveals how literature plays a crucial role in

the construction of whaling as an emblem of Japaneseness, blending narratives of tradition, nationalism, and resistance to global criticism.

Nathan Hopson (University of Bergen): *“Demand for Demand”: We have whale meat, now what?*

This presentation examines the problem of “demand for demand” faced by Japan’s commercial whaling industry and erstwhile whaling locales. Whaling has been transformed from a (mostly) local concern into a national “core interest” by political entrepreneurs. Until 2020, this meant generous public subsidies, including ¥1.3 billion annually for Kyōdō Senpaku, the nominally private company accounting for over 90% of domestic whale supply. The boomers are Japan’s “whale generation,” but their children and grandchildren mostly heave a disinterested shrug at the whole business. This is especially significant for an industry that has recently lost several major political backers. Now both Kyōdō Senpaku and former whaling towns struggle to stimulate demand for whale products. The company needs to turn a profit, the municipalities long for the glory days of a once-profitable, now-bygone industry. Both must create or revive demand for whale products. While acknowledging the significance of resonances between this situation and Trumpist nostalgia for extractive-capitalist “golden years,” I simultaneously argue that there is little indication that giving away whale meat, using whale dishes in public school lunches, building whale and whaling museums, and marketing via legacy and social media are significantly moving the needle of public opinion.

14:00-15:00

Keynote lecture

Rina Kikuchi (Shiga University / University of Canberra): Changes and Developments in Modern and Contemporary Japanese Poetry in Translation and Its Contributions

Poetry translation plays a crucial role in making Japanese poetry accessible to international readers. Translation enables Japanese poets to reach broader audiences, situates their work within the context of World Literature, facilitates cultural exchange and literary inspiration in the target languages, and contributes to the development of poetry in the source language.

Yet poetry has long been argued to be untranslatable. Poetry in translation has been described as a copy, an echo, an interpretation, a transcreation, a transmutation, a transplantation, and even a reincarnation. Although the idea of poetry translation as a form of art is now more widely accepted, statements such as “poetry is what gets lost in translation” (attributed to Robert Frost) and “the beauties of poetry cannot be preserved in any language except that in which it was originally written” (attributed to Samuel Johnson) are still often cited. The persistence of such claims reflects lingering skepticism about the translatability of poetry.

This keynote addresses the significance of Japanese poetry in translation by examining who chooses what to translate, for whom, and for what purposes, focusing on the shifts in modern and contemporary Japanese poetry in translation over the past century. By tracing the interaction between Japanese poetry in the source and target languages, this talk explores how they enrich one another and contribute to the evolution of poetry as a whole.

15:15-16:45

LITERATURE (Panel)

Bodies and Borders: Illness, Art, and Literature in the Japanese Empire

The goal of this panel is to bring together thoughtful new approaches to intersections of empire, illness, and non-human animals, especially in the realm of art and literature. Empire is a process which challenges, disrupts, erases, and rewrites borders; and, as it progresses, it shakes loose many of the elements once held within those limits. Empire creates and redirects flows of people, material goods, knowledge, and technology. This process affords the creation of new communities through the introduction of new mobilities in the form of colonists, armies, and tourists, as well as physically displaced natives, and exasperated forced—and migratory—labor markets.

The expansion of the modern Japanese empire was inextricably linked to the adaptation and spread of new knowledge relating to hygiene, disease, and health. So-called underdeveloped societies lacked the physical infrastructure to curb the spread of mosquitos, rats, and other disease-bearing pests. Simultaneously, the physical contact engendered by overpopulation in colonial cities, coupled with interregional flows of bodies and the Japanese military's secret medical experimentation programs, saw disease—a natural force halted neither by political nor bodily borders—threaten the stability of the image of Japanese imperial modernity, and the lives of countless subjects experiencing life within it. Writers and artists concerned with a variety of such illnesses wrote not only from the sidelines, but as doctors and patients with intimate, personal knowledge of them as well.

Irina Holca (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): *Empire of Flies (and Not Only): The Critters' March and the Russo-Japanese War*

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), which displaced hundreds of thousands of people, was a confrontation between two nations—with the support of several other world powers—, but also a fight against the animate and inanimate elements making up the environment of the continent. In Tayama Katai's "One Soldier" (Ippeisotsu, 1908), for instance, we see the protagonist first recuperating from beriberi—a disease caused by improper diet—but then deciding to leave the hospital early and brave the empty sorghum fields alone in order to rejoin his battalion. The description of the hospital latrine giving off a horrible smell and circled by swarms of nasty flies illustrates the unhygienic conditions of the military hospital and justifies the soldier's hasty departure.

Katai's novella only mentions flies, but battlefield reports in graphic magazines such as Senji Gahō et al often refer to other critters that made life difficult for the soldiers. Rats accompanied them on the sea voyage, while lice kept them awake despite the exhaustion caused by battle; and the attacks of bairin sandflies and scorpions could be deadlier or more unpleasant and surprising than the Russian ones!

This paper analyses visual and textual reports from painters like Kosugi Misei and Ashihara Hiroshi as well as other soldiers contributing to graphic magazines, alongside literary pieces about the war such as those by

Tayama Katai et al, aiming to shed light on the role played by pests in shaping the war behind the lines and in redrawing the line between human and animal.

Joshua Lee Solomon (Hiroshima University): *Siberian Marmots, Plague, and Minor Literature in Japanese-occupied Manchuria*

Manchurian literature was characterized in 1940 by Ōuchi Takao by climatic and ethno-cultural elements. The latter point may be identified with the Manchukuoan slogans of “harmony among the five ethnic groups” (gozoku kyōwa) and the orientalized nostalgia for the “Kingly Way” (ōdō rakudo), and may also be associated with Japanese colonists writing the voices of their imperial others—such as in Aoki Minoru’s sympathetic “Manchu works” (Manjin mono). Conversely, the “climate”—in a broader sense, the natural environment encompassing the land and life within it—often played a more implicit role in Japanese continental writing at the time.

One critical intersection between humans and climate occurred in the form of yersinia pestis: the plague. Its contagious nature threatened the order the Japanese and Manchukuoan states sought to impose on the region, and especially pressing in the recent memory of the Manchurian plague of 1910–1911, which claimed northwards of 50,000 lives. Simultaneously, indigenous cultural practices of eating wild boar and tarbagan meat were recognized as vectors of transmitting the infection. It is unsurprising to encounter works like Toyoda Saburō’s “Pioneers” (kaitakusha), whose protagonist doctor is an avatar-hero of the Japanese state in quelling the plague and spreading modern medicine through the empire. Thus, in the minor writer Takagi Kyōzō’s “Siberian Marmot” (tarubakan), the sardonic depiction of a Japanese sanitation squad in northern Manchuria comes as a shock. This paper focuses on analyzing Takagi’s ironic perspective of Japanese in Manchuria, and their complicating connections to indigenous culture, animal life, and disease.

Kathryn M. Tanaka (University of Hyogo): *Writing from the Margins: Poetry, Disease, and Myth of Inclusion in Imperial Japan*

In 1938, an ambitious Japanese literary project, the Shin Man’yōshū (New , Man’yōshū) was published, featuring 26,783 poems by 6,675 poets across 11 volumes. Inspired by the oldest extant book of Japanese poetry, the new collection aimed to showcase contemporary Japanese tanka poetry from people of all backgrounds living throughout the Japanese empire. Among the contributors were 54 poets diagnosed with Hansen’s disease (leprosy) and undergoing treatment in imperial sanatoria. In 1939, poems by these authors were republished in a slim volume titled The New Man’yōshū and the Poems of Lepers (Shin Man’yōshū to Raisha no tanka). The following year, Ryōyō shūka sanzen-shū (Collection of Three Thousand Masterful Poems of Medical Treatment), a volume featuring poetry by those institutionalized for treatment of Hansen’s disease or tuberculosis across the empire, was released. Together, these volumes reflect the imagined expansion of the Japanese empire, with submissions from as far as Hawai’i. At the same time, they locate diseased bodies within the empire: both poetically performing citizenship while

located on the margins of empire. While their illness excluded them from broad participation in society, their poetry in these volumes paradoxically emphasizes their cultural contributions to the creation of a Japanese imperial identity.

This paper explores these paradoxes of exclusion and inclusion to demonstrate the ways in which literature, and poetry in particular, was used both as a tool to reinforce imperial and medical power structures, and as a means for marginalized poets to assert their own identities and perform belonging and cultural inclusion through their writing.

VISUAL STUDIES

Dario Vuger (University of Osijek): *From Ultraman to Ship's Cat: Consumer Aesthetics and Contemporary Art in Japan*

This presentation aims to phenomenologically analyze the unique position of visual culture in Japan that allows for harmonious coexistence of high and lowbrow art, pop-cultural artefacts and design, sculpture and architectonic of daily life which should not be considered as visually chaotic or kitsch but rather as an expression of a different ontological grounding for visual phenomena in Japan. While European art rests - until very recently - on the groundings provided by metaphysical notion of representation, Japanese art and visibility - with its highly descriptive yet subtle mannerism of expression - can be said to possess an imminent quality of non-representational but also not purely abstract phenomena. Considering this differentiation, the author poses a question: how do contemporary Japanese artists communicate complex ideas about life, society and culture through works that seemingly blend with consumer aesthetics and culture aimed at economization of experience? Taking examples from pop-cultural phenomena like SF narrative of Ultraman to prominent contemporary artists like Kenji Yanobe and Yayoi Kusama and others the author will construct his thesis through visual argumentation as well as phenomenological description of their role in visual landscapes of contemporary Japan as well as global visual culture. Finally, differences in experiencing art - or aesthetic experience - between East and West, provide us with better understanding of visual culture in both places and across historical narratives.

Galia Petkova (Eikei University of Hiroshima): *Nenbutsu Geinō in Kyoto: Preservation, Gender, Empowerment*

Traditional performing arts remain vital in Asia, defining national and local identities, representing traditional values whilst incorporating contemporary elements, including in terms of gender. Japan has preserved well its classical forms - kabuki, bunraku, noh and kyogen - all well-known around the world. Simultaneously, however, there is a rich variety of regional forms that remain relatively unknown - dances, pantomimes, spoken plays, marionette and puppet performances, which play an important part in the life of local communities, maintaining their identity, strengthening inter-generational bonds, attracting visitors, generating income, and very often effectively stimulating the local economy.

This presentation focuses on two regional genres, typical of Kyoto: nenbutsu kyōgen and rokusai nenbutsu. Both originate in the nenbutsu "Buddhist prayer" performance conceived as a means to communicate the Buddhist faith to the common people in early medieval time. Nenbutsu kyōgen consists of short plays, mostly comic, staged as pantomimes or with spoken lines. It is relatively well-known and annually performed at three Buddhist temples. Rokusai nenbutsu presents a dance, accompanied by chanting of prayers, and various other pieces, including lion dance. It is usually staged during Obon, the Festival of Souls, in August, when it also includes door-to-door ritual performances tanakyō, aiming to secure the ancestors' protection and bring prosperity. It is lesser-known and only in recent years has become more actively promoted.

All Kyoto troupes are closely connected with the communities that support them and rely on the involvement of young members. As the majority of traditional performing arts in Japan, both nenbutsu kyogen and rokusai nenbutsu were all-male forms but over the past few decades women have been gradually included. How has this reflected on the representation of women and the female body? What factors are at play in women's participation? My presentation explores aspects of gender and empowerment in these two genres.

Oana Năvodaru (Babes-Bolyai University): *Landmarks in Japanese Avant-Garde Photography: Experiment and Provocation*

The presentation will show landmarks of the post-war Japanese avant-garde in photography, revealing the ideological and artistic positioning of the main local photographic movements and collectives of photographers. During the period marked by the greatest creative expansion in Japan, that of the avant-garde artistic counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, with its continuity in the following decades, in a Japanese cultural context marked by Western influences, photographers act or react through journalistic protest, ideological provocation or artistic performance, depending on their different visions, either radical or realistic. Through multicultural conjugations, intermedia transgressions, iconoclastic revocations and new experiments, but also through theorizations of the medium, from photographic journalism to photography as art, Japanese photographers contributed to the generation of new aesthetics and artistic metamorphoses in the crucible of avant-garde arts. Some conclusions are foreshadowed regarding the effects of this creative tumult, the inspiration and directions drawn by avant-garde photography for future experimentation in the contemporary visual arts and intermedia with photography.

17:00 - 18:00

LITERATURE and RELIGION

Vladlena Fedianina (Moscow City University): *Shōtoku and Tendai Buddhism in Jien's Writings*

This paper focus on the Worship of Shōtoku Taishi, or the cult of Shōtoku Taishi (the Prince of Holy Virtue; c. 573?–622?), in the early 13th century. This study is based on the poetic and prose works of the high-ranking Buddhist monk Jien (1155–1225).

The author briefly outlines the origins of the Shōtoku Taishi cult and its development in early medieval Japan, describing the religious, philosophical and historical contexts for the cult's rise and function in Jien's lifetime. Jien, a monk of the Tendai school and an ideologue of the medieval period, contributed significantly to the dissemination of ideas about Shōtoku Taishi as the progenitor of Japanese Buddhism and as the embodiment of Kannon. The main focus of this paper is to provide the analysis of Jien's poetic and prose works that reflect the cult. These primary sources include the cycle of poems "One Hundred Verses of Naniwa" (Naniwa Hyakushū), the ritual text of chanting in honor of Shōtoku (Kōtaishi Godan Tandoku), the historical work "Records of My Humble Thoughts" (Gukanshō), and the "Prayer Address to Shōtoku Taishi" (Shōtoku Taishi Ganmon).

Textual analysis allows us to highlight features of the Shōtoku cult as reflected in Jien's works and to clarify its theoretical foundations within the framework of the Buddhist methodology of the Tendai school.

Vesna Kuraica (Belgrade University): *Buddhism, Folklore and Japanese Society in the Prose Works of Miyazawa Kenji*

The presentation initially focuses on the figure of Miyazawa Kenji, his life, his work and the region from which he came. Kenji lived in accordance with his ideals of humanity and his fight against poverty, which was widespread in his homeland of Iwate in northern Honshu. The hardship in Iwate was mainly due to the harsh climate: Severe winters and cold winds often destroyed crops. In addition, this region was often the scene of major natural disasters, including earthquakes and tsunamis (Iwate Prefecture was also affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and the Fukushima nuclear disaster). These difficult living conditions caused the financially privileged Kenji to reflect deeply on the meaning of human existence and eventually become a devout Buddhist. The second part of the presentation will analyze Kenji's acceptance and interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism as well as his understanding of religion and the presence of both Buddhist and Christian motifs in his narratives. The analysis will also include elements of folklore and Shintoism as well as aspects of the local cultural heritage preserved in the rituals and festivals described in his works. Kenji felt a deep connection with the land and with everything that nature reminded him of, which he consistently incorporated into his narratives. In conclusion, the presentation argues that harmony with nature is the only path to healing and peace of mind. In Japan, this balance with the universe is fostered through various religions, making the country's religious landscape extremely syncretic, enduring and, above all, intellectually captivating.

TRANSLATION STUDIES

Hiroko Nishiguchi (Waseda University): *Militarism, Education, and Folktales in Japan around 1900*

In Japan, since the Meiji period (1868-1912), education, particularly within the school environment, has placed considerable emphasis on inculcating the values of good citizenship in children. Folktales were employed as a pedagogical instrument to inculcate a sense of patriotism in children. The most renowned example of this phenomenon, adapted and employed in this instance, is “Momotaro”, also referred to as the “Peach Boy”. This tale has been recorded in numerous versions, and its present form has been widely popular since the late Edo period (1600–1868). A number of scholars in the field of folklore, including such prominent figures as Yanagita Kunio and Seki Keigo, have conducted research and published theses on this tale.

Following the publication of the "Common Reading Book for Primary Schools" by the Ministry of Education in 1887, this folktale was repeatedly included in the reading material of a state-issued textbook for primary schools until Japan's surrender. Several publications have already appeared on the metamorphosis of Momotaro and the emphasis on his role as a warrior. A remarkable analysis of this phenomenon can be found in the literary works of Namekawa Michio, in particular in the publication “Momotaro Zo no Hen'yo” from 1981 and in Torigoe Shin's work “Momotaro no Unmei” from 1983, which was reprinted in 2004.

This presentation will examine the transformation of Momotaro. The focus of the study will be the examination and analysis of the transformation as represented in illustrations. Furthermore, the presentation will address the question of why the other well-known folktale "Issun bōshi (One-Inch Boy)" was not selected instead of "Momotaro". It is evident that the protagonist Issun Boshi engages in combat with the antagonists and ultimately prevails, a folktale that bears a striking resemblance to that of “Momotaro”, who confronts and vanquishes the malevolent figure.

Svetlana Mutygullina (Aoyama Gakuin University): *“All Different and All Fine”: A Critical Question on the Translatability of Kaneko Misuzu’s Poetry*

Kaneko Misuzu (1903-1930) is one of the most prominent poets in the genre of dōyō (Japanese children’s songs) from the Taishō period (1912–1926). Her melodious and emotionally nuanced verses are widely known across Japan, where they are read from an early age as part of the school curriculum. One of her most iconic poems, “Watashi to kotori to suzu to” (“Me, a Little Bird, and a Bell”), features the well-known line: “A bell, a little bird, and I—all different, and all fine.” In the original Japanese, this line follows a distinctive 7-7 and 5-7 syllabic rhythm: “Suzu to, kotori to, sore kara watashi/ minna chigatte, minna ii.” This phrase encapsulates the core message of diversity and acceptance found in much of her work and serves as the inspiration for the presentation title.

Many of Misuzu’s poems have been translated into more than 15 languages, contributing to her international recognition. However, while the surface meaning of her poems may appear easily accessible, the melodic and prosodic qualities that are central to her poetic expression pose significant challenges in translation.

This presentation explores the linguistic and aesthetic issues involved in translating Kaneko Misuzu’s dōyō into English, German, Russian and some other languages. By examining selected examples of existing

translations, I analyse how syllabic rhythm (especially, Japanese 5-7; 7-7; 6-8 syllabic patterns), sound symbolism, and emotional tone are preserved or transformed across languages with different phonetic and poetic traditions. Special attention is given to the structural and semantic shifts that occur in the translation process, especially in the context of rendering poetic melody and simplicity without loss of depth. Drawing on approaches from comparative poetics and translation studies, I will identify key difficulties encountered when translating from Japanese into Indo-European languages and propose several strategies for addressing them.

Through this analysis, the presentation aims not only to highlight the complexity of translating dōyō, but also to deepen our understanding of the cross-cultural transmission of Japanese children's poetry and the unique poetic voice of Kaneko Misuzu.

DAY 3

9:30-11:00

VISUAL and LITERARY STUDIES

Chisato Yamada (Nagoya Aoi University): *A Comparative Study on the Representation of Housewives in Translated Books in Early Meiji*

Previous studies have pointed out that how mass media in the latter half of the Meiji period promoted a new ideology of domesticity that centered on the ideal housewife (Ueno 1994, Muta 1996, etc.). However, the fact that the word *Shufu* (housewife/mistress) had already appeared to describe middle-class mistresses in Western countries in some translated books in the early Meiji period has not been sufficiently discussed. Although some recent studies analyse the notion of housewife in popular women's magazines and practical books (Kimura 2010, Murakami 2019), few studies have still focused on the relationship between the formation of the concept of housewife and translated books. Also, these issues have not received little scholarly attention outside of anthropology, home economics, and gender studies. Applying an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of women's media, this paper explores how women were interpellated as housewives in Meiji society. In particular, I would like to examine the description of housewife in translated books including household management or cookery books for women (Kaji Kenyakukun (1874), Kanai Kokoroegusa (1876), etc.) published from the early to middle Meiji era, which have rarely been the subject of research. Specific emphasis will be placed on the extent to which the representation of women's role in the private sphere transformed after the Meiji restoration, which allowed prevalence of Western thought on gender roles in domestic life with the purpose of modernizing Japanese society. The originality and significance of this study lies in assessing translators' translation skills and their achievement in propagation of the notion of housewife by examining how they translated and edited the original texts.

Ria Taketomi (Kindai University): *Transition of Women's Representation in the Showa-Era Films (1963-1988)*

This presentation examines the transition of women's representation in Showa-era films, focusing on video content, primarily high-grossing movies produced in Japan between 1963 and 1988. During the Showa period, particularly from 1963 onward, Japan's media landscape underwent a significant transformation. The widespread adoption of television brought about a surge in popularity for TV dramas and animated series, marking a pivotal moment in entertainment history.

TV dramas predominantly portrayed women as housewives, devoted to supporting their husbands and raising children. As television became a household staple, many women preferred watching dramas with their children at home rather than going to theaters. This shift in audience behavior contributed to a decline in theater attendance, prompting a troubling trend in the film industry. To attract more male consumers and sustain revenue, films increasingly leaned into the sexualization and objectification of women's bodies—often resorting to nudity and explicit content—as a strategy to boost ticket sales and maintain theater audiences. Analyzing the portrayal of women in the Showa-Era films reveals a deeply entrenched and unsettling degree of misogyny.

Lyudmila Georgieva (Tokyo University of the Arts): *The Notion of Failure as a Subversive Strategy in Tabe Mitsuko's Artificial Placenta*

Tabé Mitsuko's 1961 installation, *Artificial Placenta*, is a pioneering feminist artwork. It challenges the conservative status quo of postwar Japan by exposing the power dynamics embedded in the idealized image of motherhood. Through *Artificial Placenta*, Tabé reimagines the disempowered position of the pregnant woman as a potent critique of Japanese postwar society, targeting both the unresolved militaristic past and the expanding capitalist conservatism. Created a decade before the organized feminist movement in Japan, *Artificial Placenta* offers valuable insights into the artistic tactics of dissent employed by the postwar Japanese avant-garde.

The paper proposes the notion of "failure" as Tabé's primary expressive strategy. In *Artificial Placenta*, this strategy unfolds as both a formal failure of representation and a thematic failure of liberation. Formally, the installation fails to depict the artificial placentas as an optimistic scientific innovation. Instead, it reveals the degraded and abjected female body behind the ideal of scientific progress. Thematically, by rendering the female body object, the work exposes the failure of postwar Japanese democracy to fulfill its promises of freedom and equality, instead demanding self-sacrifice and self-abjection for the "common good."

This dialectic of failure and revelation offers an alternative framework to the prevailing male-centered anti-art interpretations of the postwar Japanese avant-garde. In her own writings, Tabé Mitsuko articulates the "aesthetic of defeat" (敗者の美学) as a position that disrupts normative societal structures through weakness and marginalization. Building on Tabé's concept and drawing from Jack Halberstam's theory of failure, the paper brings into focus the potential of weakness, abjection, and vulnerability as postwar subversive strategies existing alongside the anti-art provocative protest demonstrations. In this investigation, *Artificial Placenta* emerges as a pivotal avant-garde artwork that draws its critique from the

intimate entanglement between the private and the collective, revealing societal oppression at the center of personhood.

HISTORY

Carla Melo (Autónoma University of Lisbon): *The Politics of Memory, Trauma, and Identity in Northeast Asia: WWII Memorial Sites as Foreign Policy Tools*

The present PhD project, titled “The Politics of Memory and Trauma in Northeast Asia: WWII Memorial Sites as Foreign Policy Tools” aims to investigate how World War II (WWII) memorial sites in Northeast Asia – namely on China, Japan and South Korea – shape the collective memory, influence national identity, and impact foreign policy decisions of those countries. Additionally, it wishes to examine how those memorial sites work as soft power tools and as geopolitical instruments within the region.

Yue Cui (University of Leeds): *Double-Edged Affect and Embodiment: Taiwanese Migrants, Layered Selves, and Colonial Biopolitics in Manchuria*

This paper examines the complex affective and embodied experiences of Taiwanese migrants in Japanese-occupied Manchuria through oral histories. Positioned as both colonial subjects and marginal agents of empire within Manchuria, their testimonies reveal a diasporic subjectivity shaped by grief, longing, bodily suffering, and a profound sense of not belonging in Manchuria. Their narratives, recorded decades after their experiences in Manchuria, offer a crucial counter-archive to official colonial accounts of Manchuria, illuminating submerged emotional worlds and embodied memories of a unique colonial encounter in Manchuria.

As intermediaries of empire in Manchuria, Taiwanese settlers faced racialised hierarchies and precarious labour, their bodies becoming sites of both imperial control and personal vulnerability (malnutrition, displacement, trauma) in Manchuria. Multilingual recollections of linguistic alienation, scarcity, and encounters with specific substances in Manchuria reveal how emotional and physical dissonance contributed to the formation of their layered identities within the Manchurian context.

Drawing on diaspora, affect, and memory studies, this paper analyses how Japanese imperial migration and biopolitical regulation reshaped Taiwanese identities within Manchuria. It further considers the role of colonial technologies and structural systems in managing these populations and shaping their daily lives in Manchuria. By exploring these oral, embodied, and multilingual "affective archives," this research complicates dominant narratives of empire and resistance within the specific historical context of Japanese colonialism in Manchuria and the lived experiences of Taiwanese migrants in Manchuria.

Hirohito Tsuji (University of East Anglia): *The 'Female Miyake' and the Imperial Family of Japan in the Early Modern, Modern and Contemporary Periods: A Case Study of Princess Sumiko of Katsura 1829-1881* / 近世・近代・現代の皇室制度と「女性宮家」: 桂宮淑子内親王を事例に

The miyake are branch families of the Imperial House of Japan and have played an essential role in succession to the Chrysanthemum Throne. In Japanese history, three emperors have come from miyake lineages. Today, there are only three living princes in Japan, raising concerns that stable and continuous imperial succession may become difficult in the future. Currently, the Government of Japan is considering establishing a system of “female miyake,” or reinstating former miyake families. In short, the miyake continue to play a vital role in supporting the imperial succession and are central to contemporary discussions on this issue. The only historical case of a princess inheriting a miyake is the appointment of Princess Sumiko as the 12th head of the Katsura-no-Miya family in 1863. This case has received little attention in academic circles. Several factors contribute to this neglect, including the difficulty of accessing primary sources written in kuzushi-ji, the challenges posed by the Marxist historical framework—which tends to separate Early Modern and Modern periods—and the broader lack of clarity surrounding the four shinnōke during the Edo period. However, the case of Princess Sumiko is significant not only for understanding the position and function of the miyake during the transition from the Early Modern to the Modern era but also as a potential precedent for the concept of “female miyake” currently under consideration. This presentation draws on historical archives and social anthropological methods to explore the significance of Princess Sumiko’s inheritance. Key focus areas include the differences between early modern, modern, and contemporary imperial systems, and the dual structure of the traditional Japanese concept of family, comprising uji (clan) and ie (household).

11:15-12:15

LINGUISTICS

Chiara Manno (Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University): *A Contrastive Analysis of Backchannels in Japanese and French*

This study presents a contrastive analysis of backchannels in Japanese and French languages, focusing on their verbal and non-verbal manifestations and pragmatic roles. Backchannels, such as "hai," "n," and "naruhodo" in Japanese or "oui (yes)," "mh (hm)," and "c'est ça (that's it)" in French, along with non-verbal cues like nodding, significantly contribute to the structuring, supporting, and regulating of conversations. The primary objective is to examine similarities and differences between these linguistic elements to better understand their distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics.

The initial hypothesis posits that backchannels differ in type, frequency, pragmatic function, and discourse positioning, influenced by cultural perceptions and communicative practices specific to each language. In Japanese, backchannels—or aizuchi—are notably prevalent and culturally embedded, widely recognized beyond linguistic circles and commonly addressed in everyday discourse. On the other hand, in French, their use is comparatively less structured and predominantly explored within academic contexts.

Differences also exist in the perception of empathy: while frequent backchanneling in Japanese signals attentiveness and considerate interaction, French speakers may perceive similar frequency as intrusive.

To investigate these dynamics, the research adopts a conversation analysis framework integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The study's corpus includes ten spontaneous dyadic interactions among university students, recorded in Paris and Kobe. These interactions were annotated using ELAN software to systematically identify and categorize backchannel types, frequencies, discourse placements, and pragmatic functions.

The findings reveal subtle yet significant differences in the types and pragmatic functions of backchannels between the two languages. Despite these differences, the overall frequency of backchannel usage remains comparable, underscoring the essential role that both verbal and non-verbal backchannels play in maintaining conversational fluidity and signalling participant engagement in both French and Japanese. Furthermore, cultural values shape the ways in which speakers use backchannels, reflecting distinct communicative norms in French and Japanese discourse.

Raluca Maria Ciolcă (The University of Osaka): *Negotiating Beauty through Discourse in Japanese: A Comparative Analysis*

This presentation investigates the ways in which beauty standards are reflected in the Japanese language, aiming to shed light on the extent to which linguistic expression can shape-shift to accommodate those standards.

The presentation centers around one of the most well-known terms used to refer to beauty or, to be more precise, beautiful women in Japanese: *bijin*. A compound form of the term, namely *masuku-bijin* ('beautiful woman with a mask on'), became widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan, in the context of masks serving as a type of "beauty aid" for women. However, while perhaps not as popular as *masuku-bijin*, there are many more compound forms of *bijin* available in the Japanese language: *megane-bijin* ('beautiful woman with eyeglasses on'), *kimono-bijin* ('beautiful woman with a kimono on'), and so on.

The discussion will start from a brief inventory of such compound terms, focusing on their structural properties. Then, the analysis will shift towards real-world examples to explore their semantic properties. By placing emphasis on the wider context in which each example was produced, it will be demonstrated that, despite structural similarities, there are striking differences when it comes to the ways in which the compounds in question illustrate the idea of beauty.

Thus, through the lens of sociolinguistics, the presentation will explore the reasons and mechanisms behind certain linguistic items being used and sometimes redefined to reflect norms related to beauty and, on a larger scale, gender in Japan.

PERFORMING ARTS

Saida Khalmirzaeva (Okayama University): *The Biwa Hōshi Tradition: Storytelling, Ritual, and the Legacy of Heike-related Tales in Kyushu*

The tradition of performing songs and narrating tales to the accompaniment of lute-like instruments has existed on the continent since ancient times. However, it remains unclear how biwa-accompanied storytelling was first introduced to Japan. Literary and historical records only begin mentioning blind biwa players, known as biwa hōshi, from the Heian period onward.

Biwa hōshi were not only storytellers who recited narratives such as Heike Monogatari and Sōga Monogatari; they also played ritualistic roles, engaging in fortune-telling, spirit pacification, and the veneration of water and earth deities. Over time, two distinct groups of blind biwa players emerged from this tradition: heike zatō and jijin mōsō. While biwa hōshi in urban settings, organized under tōdō-za, a professional guild of biwa hōshi established in Kyoto, developed their craft into a performing art, mōsō, who remained in rural villages, retained their shamanistic and religious practices.

According to a traditional account, the blind biwa tradition in Kyushu originated in the second year of the Empō era (1674), when Funahashi Kengyō traveled from Kyoto to Kumamoto at the request of Lord Hosokawa. There, he performed Heike recitations and composed several tales on local historical themes, which he then taught to the local blind biwa players.

This paper traces the origin and development of the blind biwa tradition and examines the relationship between the two groups of blind biwa players, heike zatō and mōsō, with a particular focus on the Heike-related tales, which became an essential part of the repertory of blind biwa players in Kyushu.

Ivan Crascenko (University of Naples L'Orientale): *Why Don't They Laugh? The Decline of "Provincial Kyōgen" in Yamagata Prefecture*

This presentation analyses from a cultural and historical perspective the causes that led to the decline of the three "Provincial Kyōgen" (Chihō Kyōgen 地方狂言) traditions in the Shōnai region (Yamagata Prefecture) by looking at local historical accounts and the contemporary state of these traditions. Furthermore, drawing on data produced through participant observation and qualitative interviews conducted between February and June 2025, I examine the strategies adopted by local Kyōgen actors in response to the decline of interest in Kyōgen, depopulation and critical transmission issues.

"Provincial Kyōgen" is a term coined by Miyao Shigeo and refers to a series of heterodox traditions of Kyōgen theatre that came to life across the Edo periods along with Nō in numerous feudal domains. While the official counterparts thrived in the world of the daimyō and shōgun, the "provincial" traditions flourished mostly in rural villages and small provincial towns embedded in a communitarian spirit where the locals are both actors and participants to this day. This shift led to the uprise of numerous heterodoxies characterised by heterogeneous performative techniques, unique aesthetic choices, and the social context that surrounds them.

Despite the existence of various and well-known examples of "Provincial Kyōgen" all over Japan, the traditions in the Shōnai region faced and are still facing major difficulties in their development and

transmission, striving to survive in the face of cultural hegemony from “Provincial Nō” (Chihō Nō 地方能), a sustained low birth rate, and rural-to-urban migration. Compared to their “Provincial Nō” counterparts, namely Kurokawa Nō, Matsuyama Nō and Yamato Nō, both the Kurokawa Kyōgen and Matsuyama Kyōgen live in the shade of their respective Nō traditions and are considered as elements of them, whereas Yamato Kyōgen either went extinct or was never born at all.