Annika A. Culver, University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNC)<br>
“Japanese Women and Rural Settlement in Wartime Manchukuo: Gendered Expressions of Labor and Productivity in Manshu gurafu [Manchuria Graph], 1940-1944”

**Abstract:** After 1938, the Japanese imperial government intensified its propaganda efforts both domestically and throughout the empire during total war—including in Manchukuo, a nominally independent state under Japanese control after 1932. Propaganda media like Manshū gurafu [Manchuria Graph, 1933-1944] linked domestic Japan to its empire, and touted desirable behaviors of Japanese subjects, including women, who were targeted as active participants in the war effort through their labor as workers and mothers. From the mid-thirties to early 1940s, Japanese farmers in distressed areas were encouraged to migrate to Manchukuo. To support imperial Japan’s policy initiatives, pictorials like Manshū gurafu portrayed the region as a utopia for rural families—ensuring prosperity and elevated productivity of crops and future generations. Women hoisted sheaves of grain while carrying smiling babies on their backs in images accompanied by captions reflecting the government’s pro-natalist stance and exhortations to settle the region. Scenes of mothers at work in productive rural villages accompanied by articles praising their selfless sacrifice to the empire revealed desired roles for Japanese women. Advertisements for patent medicines improving women’s reproductive health appeared alongside enthusiastic articles touting the extraordinary production potential and fertility of the land under Japanese auspices. Propaganda magazines such as this one reflected imperial Japanese ambitions to create a utopian paradise as a template for occupied regions throughout Asia. In Manchukuo, Japanese women played a special role as efficient producers of both children and crops, showcasing the success of Japan’s empire during a critical time. As propaganda, these images with accompanying captions and articles elide Japanese military aggression, but leave an important record in the gendered legacy of Japan’s total war.

Stephen Filler, Oakland University

**Abstract:** Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1971), a prominent writer in the Proletarian movement of the 1920s, is best known for the distinctive, individualistic feminism of her fiction, which was often heavily autobiographical. Recent studies of her fiction have noted her use of graphic bodily imagery as a strategy for negotiating political and gender ideologies. This corporeality, though, is contextualized in the space of the larger geographic region and society, and thus in the exploitative relations of class, commerce and national power that are played out in local settings. This paper discusses Hirabayashi’s use of locale, particularly in colonial Manchuria, as the setting for labor, unrest, and rebellion. In her Manchurian stories, Hirabayashi is concerned with the interaction between capitalist employers, laborers, and labor activists, including her own fictional alter-egos. In “Seryōshitusui reppu” (At the charity hospital; 1927), a Japanese female activist in Manchuria experiences cruel treatment at the hospital where she gives birth. In “Fusetsu ressha” (The track-laying train; 1929), the inhumanity of capitalism is shown by the inhumane treatment of Chinese workers by Japanese industrialists. The harsh Manchurian environment, and its effect on the bodies of the laborers, evokes a sense of nature without pity, but also suggests the potential for rage and rebellion. Fragments of Chinese language and other extraliterary elements give an objective quality to the perceptions of the protagonists. Hirabayashi ultimately succeeds in naturalizing the rebellious acts that would conventionally be seen as anti-social or treasonous.

Yumi Soeshima, Stanford University
“Against the Storm: The Postwar Japanese Culture through the Real Voice of Wroking Women, 1946-50”

**Abstract:** The immediate postwar period in Japan was devastating and chaotic. During this time, a Japanese women’s journal “Working Women” (“Hataraku Fujin”) was reissued in 1946. It was originally published in 1932 under the editorship of Miyamoto Yuriko. It, however, was forced to discontinue due to the wartime’s Peace Preservation Law. The reissuance of the journal is an evidence of the postwar Japanese society’s new direction for democracy. The realistic descriptions and the candid self-expressions of ordinary working women manifest the existence of grave social and political problems that Japan faced that time. This paper examines the rhetoric of the expressions of the selected works that the journal solicited from working women. The authors’ occupations vary from school teachers to heavy industry workers, and their literary forms, too, vary from autobiographical narrative to diary, letter, and poetry. What factors determine their literary excellence? Is there any particular rhetoric that they employ to enhance their writings? The authors of the selected pieces are in common regarding rhetorical factors. Utility of rhetoric is not antithetical to spontaneity. They possess objective perspectives of their positions, not being absorbed with their adverse conditions. They give unconventional, detailed, and concrete descriptions to mirror their newly-found realities. And they strive to transform their unique experiences into universal human understandings. While these personal stories reflect enormous challenges of the postwar Japanese culture, they instruct that rhetoric is necessary to enhance literary expressions.

Yasuko Claremont, The University of Sydney
“Who are the Precariats?: Contemporary Japanese Society Mirrored in Literature”

**Abstract:** This paper examines a distinct new literary trend that has emerged in contemporary Japanese literature, in which the predicaments of young working people living in precarious socio-economic conditions in contemporary urban society are vividly portrayed. The authors, for example, Okazaki Yoshihisa (b. 1968) and Nishimura Kenta (b. 1967) are new generation writers. The emergence of a new form of writing for a wage earning class may well be comparable to proletarian literature in Japan in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Naturally differences exist between the two because of different times and social conditions. However, in order to evaluate what this new generation authors are depicting in their art of writing, a comparison with the work of writers in the past generation will highlight the ongoing hardship that sections of the working class face. Dealing indirectly with contemporary social issues, e.g. karoshi (death by overworking), hikikomori (self-imposed isolation), homeless people, freeters, NEET (not in education, employment, or training), working poor, this new literary aspect can become a source of activism for promoting social change, as their predecessors did.