Panel 14: The Role of Place in Perspectives on Conflict in Modern Fiction (October 14: 10:30 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.)

Artem Vorobiev, The Ohio State University

"Images of Kanazawa in Izumi Kyōka’s ‘Yuna no tamashii’"

Abstract: The purpose of this presentation is to explore the issues of space – both terrestrial and otherworldly – in Izumi Kyōka’s short novel, “Yuna no tamashii,” (The Spirit of the Bath Girl). More specifically, I will attempt to scrutinize the role that the Kanazawa region plays in Kyōka’s constructions and reconstructions of space and travel in Meiji-era Japan. Izumi Kyōka is seen in modern philology as a subversive and undermining literary force, a paragon of counter modernity, reliving and reinventing the world of the “old” Japan in his writing. Kyōka’s recourse to and use of the themes of the supernatural is seen as a literary tool of countering the onslaught of the modern age. I will argue in this presentation that the prevailing paradigm is somewhat two-dimensional, and that a more complex picture could be gleaned from some aspects of Kyōka’s writing. I will attempt to show that Kyōka’s treatment of space and movement, his notion and image of Kanazawa as an otherworldly periphery, a spatial antithesis to the modern Tokyo, is suggestive of a more complex relationship with modernity, namely, that it is evocative of a symbiotic, rather than adversarial relationship between modernity and the supernatural. I would like to explore Kyōka’s treatment of Kanazawa as the world where the modern and the old, the physical and the metaphysical, the natural and the supernatural of Kyōka’s world are in a relationship whose nature defies a simplistic two-dimensional characterization of “counter-modern” ; rather, it may be seen as offering new readings – not only of the “old,” but perhaps, of the “modern” itself.

Robert Del Greco, The Ohio State University

“A Failure of De-colonization: Reading the Postcolonial Subject as Double Agent in Kim Sokbom's Karasu no Shi”

Abstract: Kim Sok-bom’s (b. 1925) novel Karasu no shi [The Death of a Crow, 1957] deals with the founding violence of the Korean postcolonial era; specifically the Cheju rebellion, in which the South Korean government ruthlessly slaughtered thousands on this island at the peninsula’s southern margin in the name of defeating communism and ensuring the UN proclaimed division at the 38th parallel. In this study I oppose the widely held notion that this and other writing by first generation Koreans in Japan comprise communist propaganda and rather read Kim’s novel as a critique of the dominant discourse that labeled Cheju islanders as ideological extremists. I approach the novel through close readings grouped in three sections: first deconstructing the novel’s significant positioning of natural imagery as a reflection of history and in opposition to ephemeral political circumstances, second the development of the protagonist’s inner world and the conflict (fundamentally associated with the broader condition of postcoloniality) of maintaining multiple identities, and finally close readings of sections explicitly referencing the political circumstances of the Cheju rebellion. In each of these sections I argue that Kim’s narrative strategy has been to efface the association of Cheju fighters with abstract ideological concerns, and orient it towards understanding their actions in the concrete context of life on Cheju Island in the aftermath of Japanese colonization.

Yongfei Yi, The Ohio State University

“Struggling between Nostalgia and Reality: The Association of Chinese Literature Studies and Takeda Taijun's ‘Fūbaika’”

Abstract: Takeda Taijun (1912-1976) is well-known for his China-related writings. As a former specialist in Chinese literature, he was familiar with Chinese literary traditions and greatly appreciated Chinese culture. Nevertheless, his wartime experience and his involvement in the Association of Chinese Literature Studies reshaped his understanding of China into a complex of philosophical systems formed by his pluralistic views on China. This paper will examine Takeda’s Chinese experience, including his years as a core member of the Association, and analyze how his pluralistic views are shown in his first novel, Fūbaika [Wind-Pollinated Flowers]. Takeda’s first novel, Fūbaika is set in Tokyo in the middle of the Korean War, a time with a very complicated socio-historical background. The novel depicts the activities and thoughts of a group of Japanese intellectuals over a three-day period. Although none of the characters are fully developed, Takeda displays a group of figures who embrace different types of individual awareness about China. Also, I will analyze Takeda’s reflections on China and his wartime experience and how they show an intellectual's concerns about the past and how it relates to Japan’s future. I will also try to discover the meaning of “China” and the Sino-Japanese relationship to postwar Japanese intellectuals. In addition, I will discuss how the use of Chinese literary references enlarges the literary and philosophical dimensions of this politically oriented novel.