PANEL TITLE: MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY
Discussant: Pamela Scully, Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Professor of WGSS and African Studies

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:
Hillary Maxson, Department of History, University of Oregon

Paper title: “From ‘Motherhood in the Interest of the State’ to Motherhood in the Interest of Mothers: Rethinking the First Mothers’ Congress”

Abstract:
In the aftermath of World War II, many Japanese women felt impelled to exorcise “martial motherhood,” an ideal constructed by the state throughout the early twentieth century. At the Mothers’ Congress of 1955, mothers from across the country gathered to reclaim motherhood from the state and began to redefine motherhood for themselves in the postwar era. Building on the work of historians and scholars of Japanese feminism, I argue that the Mothers’ Congress represented a moment of transition from the wartime concept of “motherhood in the interest of the state” to the postwar idea of motherhood in the interest of mothers.

My paper argues that the first manifesto of the Mothers’ Congress signified a strong response to the state’s construction of the stoic, tearless, child-sacrificing martial mother ideal. Members of the Mothers’ Congress repudiated the demands the wartime state made on mothers, but more importantly, the Congress began making demands of their own. The manifesto clearly articulated a major shift in power between motherhood and the state. Although the Mothers’ Congress did not explicitly identify as feminist, the movement’s denunciation of state-constructed martial motherhood and promotion of a motherhood defined by women was a victory for feminism in postwar Japan. Furthermore, the construction of feminine ideals, both by the state and the Mothers’ Congress, remain relevant to current debates surrounding motherhood in present day feminism.

Laura Dales, Assistant Professor, Asian Studies, University of Western Australia
Paper title: “Friends and lovers: Women’s intimate relationships outside marriage”

Abstract:
The average age of first marriage in Japan has steadily increased over the last century, as has the likelihood of never marrying for both women and men. In conjunction with the decline in average length of marriage – a result of greater divorce and later marriage – these patterns suggest that Japanese people are spending more of their lives outside marriage.

Japanese feminists have advocated for a reconsideration of women’s unmarried (single, divorced, widowed) life as liberating, interesting and inevitable (Haruka 2001; Sakai, 2003; Ueno 2007, 2009). In the context of demographic shifts, friendships, romantic relationships outside marriage, and work relationships represent possible support structures in a period of economic uncertainty.

But what of the emotional benefits of extra-familial relationships? What do platonic or romantic relationships outside the family offer women, when marriage is no longer inevitable or enduring? Feminist literature in other societies suggests that relationships outside the nuclear reproductive family may constitute a “set of counter-heteronormative relationship practices...in which sexual/love relationships are decentred, and friendship is prioritized” (Roseneil 2010: 79-80). Does this suggestion also hold in the Japanese context? And how do Japanese feminists propose engagement with these shifts?

In this paper I use recent fieldwork to explore the affective and practical implications of intimate relationships outside the family for women. In particular, I examine the ways that extra-familial relationships of intimacy support or destabilize the reproductive family, and the meaning attributed to these relationships by Japanese women.

Dina Lowy, Associate Professor of History, Gettysburg College

Paper title: “Sex(y) Scandal?: Kamichika Ichiko and the 1916 Hikage Teahouse Incident”

Abstract:
In the early 20th century the officially defined roles for women in Japan were summed up in the phrase “good wife, wise mother”. Some women embraced these roles as a means of gaining respect, status and education for women. Others – usually targeted as “New Women” – rejected the restrictive and unequal marriage laws and pursued alternative paths. These New Women experimented with ‘non-traditional’ ways of expressing their sexuality – love partnership, love marriage, free love. These experiments were very personal in nature, but also connected with ideas of freedom, equality, rights, and what it meant to be modern.
This paper will focus on one experiment in free love and its consequences. In 1916, feminists Kamichika Ichiko and Ito Noe were romantically involved with the same man, radical Osugi Sakae. On November 10th, Kamichika in a fit of passion and frustration stabbed Osugi in the neck. Osugi lived and Kamichika went to jail. Five months later she published her account of the incident. How did she explain her actions, her thoughts, her desires? There were ‘rules’ to this relationship. Who set them? With what purpose? Who broke them? What went wrong? What, if anything, went right? This incident offers insights into the intersection of personal choices and political agendas in early 20th century Japan.

Hikari Hori, Assistant Professor of Japanese Film and Visual Culture, Columbia University


Abstract: Examination of the genre of shojo manga and its presentation of women’s issues in the 1970s and 1980s is essential for rethinking the transmission and reception of feminism in contemporary Japanese cultural history. It is noteworthy that the huge circulation of the manga magazines, which rose to millions, demonstrates the genre’s enthusiastic support by female readers. Popular works of manga have narrativized and reconfigured contemporary women’s desires, anxieties, and social predicaments. Ueno Chizuko correctly commented on the genre’s treatment of sexuality as a ‘large-scale philosophical attempt’ [sôdai na shisôteki na kito] that experimented with narrative devices to explore egalitarian romance and sexual relationships (Ueno 1989).

The work of Hagio Moto (b. 1949; debuted in 1969), one of the most prominent and commercially successful shojo manga artists, is particularly important to understand women’s culture in postwar Japan for two reasons. First, through women’s eyes it epitomizes the cultural shift from the sentiments of the 1960s “season of politics” [seiji no kisetsu] to the 1970s, seen as the era of postmodern consumerism and the emergence of otaku culture. Second, Hagio’s work is closely linked to contemporary feminist philosophy. This paper explores her science fiction manga of the 1970s and ‘80s, in particular Marginal, which implicitly registers a female cultural dissent from New Left politics by caricaturing violent male-male homosocial bonds. But at the same time Marginal re-examines mythologized notions of motherhood, reproduction, and women’s bodies in response to contemporary feminist discourse, voiced by both the Women’s Lib communities and the newly emerging discipline of Women’s Studies.