PANEL TITLE: FEMINIST THEORY
Discussant: Michael Moon, Professor of American Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Emory University

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:
Keith Vincent, Assistant Professor of Japanese and Comparative Literature, Boston University

Paper title:
“Takemura Kazuko: Feminism and Queer Theory in a Global Context”

Abstract:
In the afterword to her 1999 Japanese translation of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Takemura Kazuko wrote that despite its difficult language, the book spoke "directly, unerringly, and penetratingly of our reality." She encouraged her Japanese readers to get to know Butler slowly, to read her text "yukkiri, jikkuri." Many of them did, and Japanese feminism was radically transformed as a result.

Takemura Kazuko (1954-2011) was a key figure at the intersection of feminist and queer thought in Japan from the 1990s until her death in 2011. As a scholar of American and English literature, Takemura wrote on everything from Virginia Woolf to lesbian pulp fiction, from Greta Garbo to "Thelma and Louise," and from Henry James to Don DeLillo. She followed her translation of *Gender Trouble* with translations of works by Trinh T. Minha, Gayatri Spivak, and other key figures in contemporary feminist and postcolonial theory.

But no matter how far away the source of the text she was working with, her purpose in reading or translating it was to re-imagine and transform gender relations within Japan. This paper will focus on Takemura's posthumously published work *The Challenge of Literary Power: Family, Desire, and Terrorism* [*Bungaku-ryoku no chōsen: Famirii, yokubō, terorizumu*] (2012) as a model of engaged scholarship for those of us doing feminist and queer work in and through translation in a global context.

Sarah Frederick, Co-associate chair, Department of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, Associate Professor of Japanese, Boston University
Paper title: “Edward Carpenter and Queer Internationalism in Japanese Feminism”

Abstract:
Writing about intimacies among girls in the 1920s, popular fiction writer and lesbian Yoshiya Nobuko invoked Edward Carpenter, whose Intermediate Sex (1909) was translated by Yamakawa Kikue. In the face of media panic over recent love suicides among girls, she uses Carpenter’s utopian views of the leveling potential of homosexuality to argue that erotic attachments among shoujo are the ultimate foundation for social ethics.

While some writings on sexuality in Japan have lumped Carpenter with sexologists seen to have brought restrictions upon a pre-modern flexibility about same-sex relations, we see instead a modernist and international queer discourse, to which many connected themselves via references to Oscar Wilde, preference for movie actors with bisexual reputations, or translations of Victor Margueritte’s scandalous novels (La Garçonne by Mochizuki Yuriko; Zette by Yoshiya). Although these observations stem from research on Yoshiya, for this conference I will focus on broader issues for the study of Japanese feminism.

What might be the usefulness of concepts such as “queer internationalism” and cosmopolitanism for analyzing Japanese feminist thought and shoujo culture, including their contemporary transnational moves? How have acts of translation shaped Japanese feminism? What does it mean to seek the “origins” of Japanese feminism (eg. Takamura Itsue’s “Japanese feminism”) or the shoujo (such as Yoshiya as “mother” of shoujo fiction)? In the nascent and interdisciplinary work on shoujo, attention to male homosexuality tends to be associated with postwar yaoi, but I consider ways that such discourses have long intertwined with girl culture and feminism in Japan.

Setsu Shigematsu, Assistant Professor, University of California, Riverside

Paper title: “Reflections on the Women’s Liberation Movement: From the Shadows of its Legacy to its Contested Canonization”

Abstract:
The rise of the 1970s women’s liberation movement – known as ūman ribu – marked a watershed in the history of postwar feminism in Japan. As a grassroots radical feminist movement, the activists of ūman ribu made significant political interventions in the arenas of sexuality, motherhood, the family system and abortion.

Building on my research on ūman ribu, in this paper, I reflect on and refine my analysis of the movement’s political contributions, contradictions and legacy. I revisit the problems of canonization, iconicity and power struggles among the women. What were
some of the internal dynamics and constitutive contradictions of the movement and are they characteristic of unresolved problems across other feminist formations? While ūman ribu became a catalyst for the establishment of women’s studies (Inoue 1992) and lesbian and queer movements in Japan (Welker 2010), this transition from the era of ūman ribu to later forms of feminism (Ehara 1990) was often contested and contradictory.

Through this set of reflections I elaborate a framework for a critical transnational feminism (CTF). I invoke CTF as a means to reflect on the methodologies we utilize to research, represent, and exchange knowledge about Japanese feminism, across the US academy and beyond. CTF aims to facilitate a conversation between Japanese feminism(s) and other feminist discourses, such as third world feminism, women of color feminism and postcolonial feminism. Such dialogues can further illuminate ūman ribu’s differences, contributions, and blindspots compared with other feminist movements as we rethink the history of modern Japanese feminism.

Elizabeth Miles, Department of Anthropology, Yale University

Paper title: “Re-Thinking Feminism, Re-Thinking Sex in Contemporary Japan”

Abstract:
In 2009, international condemnation of RapeLay, an erotic video game (eroge) in which players could rape female characters, appears to have galvanized Japanese feminist activism around the issue of pornography and its linkages with sexual violence. Concurrently, contemporary Japanese female scholars – such as Mori Naoko and Hori Akiko – are exploring the modes of sexual expression in pornography aimed at both male and female consumers, urging readers and scholars alike to look beyond radical feminist critiques to the possibilities of sexual expression within the genre. However, the issue of pornography as a touchstone of feminist debate and activity is often overlooked in the history of modern Japanese feminism.

Yet, since the late 1970s through the early 1990s, culminating in the Women’s Action Group’s (Kōdō suru onnatachi no kai) anti-pornography/anti-censorship activism, Japanese feminists, working primarily within a radical feminist critique pioneered by U.S. legal scholar Catharine Mackinnon, approached pornography as the embodiment of gender inequality and women’s continued sexual subservience to men. Such activism and public debate around pornography was curtailed and eclipsed by equally important issues until the RapeLay incident, with pornography now again at the forefront of contemporary activism.

Drawing on preliminary ethnographic research among various activist Japanese organizations, including the Anti-Pornography and Prostitution Research Group, anti-violence groups, and sex-positive feminists, I situate contemporary modes of feminist activism and scholarship on pornography within current debates on sex and sexuality in
Japan, providing a new angle on issues around gender and sexual equality, as well as Japan’s shifting sexual topography.