JAPAN and BRAZIL: Immigrant Literature and Transnational Migration Workshop

This workshop, organized by Yale’s East Asian Languages & Literatures Assistant Professor Seth Jacobowitz and sponsored by the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University, brings together leading specialists in the cultural and literary history of prewar Japanese immigration to South America. Jeffrey Lesser (Emory University) will give the April 9 keynote on constructions of Japanese and Nikkei (Japanese heritage) identities in Brazil as a mirror upon the nation itself. The workshop sessions on April 10 focus on exciting new scholarship into the Japanese literature written in and about Argentina, Brazil and Peru by Edward Mack (University of Washington), Zelideth Rivas (Marshall University), Andrew Leong (Northwestern University), and Seth Jacobowitz (Yale University).

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2015
Room 211, Hall of Graduate Studies, 320 York Street

4:30 PM  KE YNOTE PRESENTATION

Constructing Japan’s Pacific Rim in Brazil’s Atlantic World - Jeffrey Lesser, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of History and Chair, Department of History, Emory University

How were Japanese and Nikkei ethnic identities and perceptions constructed in Brazil during the twenties, thirties and forties, and how did they function as a kind of mirror in which national identity confronted itself? By examining public ethnicity as expressed in the language of the majority in newspapers and books, on the political stage, and in the academy, my presentation suggests that the definitions of virtually all of the components of national identity—ethnicity, class, color, gender, and even the very boundaries of the Brazilian state—were successfully negotiated by Japanese immigrants and their descendants. In doing so, immigrants and Nikkei became critical actors in the formation of many aspects of late twentieth century Brazilian national identity from food to work to sexuality.

Jeffrey Lesser, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of History and Chair, Department of History, studies modern Latin American history, focusing on ethnicity, immigration and race in Brazil. Lesser’s interests surround the construction of national identity, focusing on how minority groups understand their own and national space. He has been a Fulbright Senior Scholar at the University of São Paulo and he has held visiting professorships at the University of Campinas, and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He regularly lectures and publishes in Brazil. Lesser’s newest book, Immigration, Ethnicity and National Identity in Brazil (Cambridge University Press, 2013, forthcoming Editora UNESP, São Paulo) examines the immigration to Brazil of millions of Europeans, Asians, and Middle Easterners beginning in the nineteenth century. He is interested in how these newcomers and their descendants adapted to their new country and how national identity was formed as they became Brazilians along with their children and grandchildren. Lesser argues that immigration cannot be divorced from broader patterns of Brazilian race relations, as most immigrants settled in the decades surrounding the final abolition of slavery in 1888 and their experiences were deeply conditioned by ideas of race and ethnicity formed long before their arrival.
Friday, April 10, 2015
Room 241, Rosenkranz Hall, 115 Prospect Street

8:30 AM  Continental Breakfast

9:00 AM  The Varieties of Literary Experience: Fiction in the Japanese-Language Newspapers of Brazil, 1917-1941 - Edward Mack, University of Washington

Recent scholarship on the Japanese-language literature of Brazil (Hosokawa 2012 and Hosokawa 2013 in particular) has quite understandably focused on original poetry and prose produced in Brazil. This paper, however, will examine the full range of fiction available to Japanese-language newspaper readers during the prewar period, to get a sense of the different options available to that community. While the talk will be discussing the historical particularities of reading Japanese in Brazil, on the supposed periphery, it will also consider the implications of this case to the study of literature in the putative center as well.

Edward Mack is an Associate Professor of modern Japanese literature and culture at the University of Washington. Author of Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature: Publishing, Prizes, and the Ascription of Literary Value, his current research focuses on Japanese-language literary activities in Brazil, 1908-1941.

10:00 AM  Brazil and the Invention of “Immigrant Literature” in 1930s Japan – Seth Jacobowitz, Yale University

From 1908 to 1941, nearly two hundred thousand Japanese emigrated to Brazil, while tens of thousands of others emigrated to Argentina, Peru and elsewhere in South and Latin America. This paper will explore the role of Brazil in the Japanese imperial imagination, particularly through the lens of the nascent literary category of “immigrant literature” (imin bungaku) that emerged in the mid-1930s. Less a popular genre in the sense of the confessional I-novel or detective fiction, it was largely an ideological construct propped up by the literary establishment even as Japan’s international standing dwindled...
following Japan’s invasion of Manchuria (1931) and subsequent departure from the League of Nations (1933). This paper takes as its focus two texts that defined the South American angle of “immigrant literature” and its chief characteristics: Ishikawa Tatsuzō’s novel Sōbō (The Emigrants, 1935) and Shimazaki Tōson’s travelogue Nanbei imin kenchōroku (A Record of South American Immigration, 1937). Although there are crucial literary differences between the former as a work of fiction depicting the hardships faced by migrants making the transoceanic voyage, and the latter as an account of Tōson’s trip to Brazil en route to the International PEN Congress in Buenos Aires in 1936, this paper will primarily attend to the ways in which both the texts and their reception in Japan in the 1930s reflected the heightened importance of South American immigration to the Japanese empire in the years before the onset of WWII.

**Seth Jacobowitz** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University. His book *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan: A Media History of Modern Japanese Literature and Visual Culture* is forthcoming this fall from the Harvard Asia Center. He is currently working on a book entitled *Brazil in the Japanese Imperial Imagination: Immigrant Literature and Transnational Modernity, 1908-1941*.

**11:00 AM**  **Duality in Pre-World War II Tanka Poetry in Colonia Mañ’yōshū – Zelideth Maria Rivas, Marshall University**

Upon arrival to Brazil in 1908, Japanese immigrants began creating a communal Japanese-Brazilian narrative that acts as an alternative to Japanese and Brazilian histories and literatures. Pre-World War II immigrants, bound not only by their immigration experience but also by language, composed *tanka* poetry to capture the community’s experiences vis-à-vis Japan and Brazil. These *tanka* were collected in the 1981 anthology *Koronia mañ’yōshū 』コロニア万葉集 』*. This presentation examines Japanese-Brazilian communal formation through the themes that the immigrants included in their anthology. Rivas argues that as the community began to move beyond an image of itself as a “mini-Japan,” it produced alternative histories and narratives that influence both Brazilian and Japanese national literatures and histories, moving beyond a duality of identity rooted in both countries.

**Zelideth Maria Rivas** is an Assistant Professor of Japanese at Marshall University. Her research focuses on the conception of race through literature written by Asian immigrants in the Americas, as well as the representation of race in Japan in post-World War II literature and film. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Asian American Studies and Comparative Literature Studies*. She is a member of the Executive Council for the Asia in the Americas section of the Latin American Studies Association.

**12:00 PM**  **The Politics and Poetics of Japanese Peruvian Poetry – Andrew Leong, Northwestern University**

To even assert the existence of a “Japanese Peruvian poetry” is a political act, an act that risks imagining a fixed community or colony with a shared poetics that derives from a singular Japanese origin. This paper tests what “Japanese Peruvian poetry” could mean by looking at two texts published within Japanese Peruvian newspapers: a December 1933 series of Japanese-language *tanka* written on the occasion of the birth of Crown Prince Akihito, and “Elógio del refrenamiento,” a March 1999 essay by poet José Watanabe published on the centenary of Japanese immigration to Peru. In contrast to
arguments about the “apolitical” nature of poetic and aesthetic publics in Tokugawa Japan (Ikegami), the 1933 tanka and 1999 essay invite comparisons to poetic forms that, in the Greco-Latin tradition, are explicitly political: panegyrics and eulogies. The concept of Japanese Peruvian poetry thus poses a formal question that is also a political one: what happens when tanka are read as panegyrics, and haiku as eulogies?

Andrew Leong is an Assistant Professor of English and Asian Languages and Cultures at Northwestern University. Leong’s research focuses on Japanese-language literature written and published in the Americas. His translations of two novels by 1920s Los Angeles writer Nagahara Shoson, collected in a single volume as Lament in the Night, received an Outstanding Book award from the Association for Asian American Studies in 2013.