

## COMPLETION REPORT

University of Chicago (graduated July 2024)

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Subject of Research Project: **“The Global I-Novel After Naturalism: Literature and the Politics of Quotidian Life in Japan and Beyond, 1927-1970” (original title); “The Life of the Flesh: Transwar Japan and the Crisis of Sensibility” (revised title)**

This dissertation studies a lineage of Japanese writers and intellectuals who turned toward corporeal sensibility as a site of critical potentiality in moments of ideological disorientation. In the aftermath of Japan’s defeat in WWII, the political theorist and intellectual historian Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) wrote of the characteristics of Japanese literature: “[T]he minds of our writers’ cling like leeches to natural, sensual phenomena, and lack a really free flight of the imagination, so in one sense all of our literature is ‘carnal.’” This purported prominence of sensuality over detached scrutiny, Maruyama proceeds, contributed to a lack of critical reflexivity in times of political oppression, ultimately rendering Japan vulnerable to fascism. At once proclaiming Japanese literature’s excellence in capturing corporeal sensibility and decrying its alleged paucity in “ideas,” Maruyama’s cultural essentialism feeds into a plethora of discourses continually reified and contested by both Japanese writers themselves and a global readership that gradually accrued after the war. In lieu of a wholesale dismissal, however, my project recalibrates the affordances, both aesthetic and political, of Japanese literature’s attentiveness to corporeality during the tumultuous early decades of the Shōwa period (1925-1989). I do so by examining the writings of authors who resorted—often at moments of profound political and personal crisis—to corporeal sensibility as a productive site that resists full containment within ideology. Along these lines, I follow three generations of Japanese writers as the question of embodied life (*seikatsu*) became no longer self-evident but took on existential weight during times of intense political and intellectual setbacks. The writers are the modernist Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927); the Marxists Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1933) and Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979); and the postwar democratic thinkers and critics of fascism Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) and Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977). Born roughly a decade apart from one another in the 1890s, the 1900s, and the 1910s, each of the three generations engaged with dominant ideologies of their times. In turn, they each struggled to come to terms with defeat when these ideologies became untenable and risked being “overcome” by new ones: when culturalist modernism (*kyōyōshugi*) was feverishly denounced by the proletarian movement during the transition between the Taishō and Shōwa eras in the late 1920s; when Marxism faced escalating government crackdowns and found itself powerless against the rise of fascism during the 1930s; and when, in the wake of Japan’s surrender, liberal democracy, imposed by the U.S. occupation forces and sustained by what became known as the postwar regime (*sengo taisei*), was believed to have settled accounts with the nation’s fascist past. During these critical moments, as I will demonstrate, the body as the locus of both thinking and feeling—hence a liminal sphere of indistinction between the ideological and the pre-ideological—became for these authors a crucial territory that had to be reconfigured as a vehicle of resistance.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

<p>Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)</p> <p>Date: 2022/5</p> <p>Venue: UCLA, Los Angeles</p> <p>Name of Conference: Association for Japanese Literary Studies (AJLS) 2022 Annual Convention</p> <p>Title: “Tenkō and the Invention of the Quotidian Subject: Parapolitics and the I-Novel Form from Kobayashi Takiji to Nakano Shigeharu”</p> <p>Presenter: Jue Hou</p>
<p>Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)</p> <p><b>“The Life of the Flesh: Transwar Japan and the Crisis of Sensibility”</b></p> <p>University of Chicago Doctoral Dissertation, defended in July 2024</p>
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