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# *Japanesia* (Yaponesia), the Arc of Ryūkyū, and Shimao Toshio's Cultural Resistance against the Colonial Politics of the Past

A virtual *u: japan lunch lecture* by Shinnosuke Takahashi

Thursday  
2022-06-02  
12:30~14:00



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Shimao Toshio (1917-1986) is probably one of the most celebrated authors in the history of post-war Japanese literature. Shimao's literary works were highly praised by his contemporaries, for example the literary critic Okuno Takeo, who called Shimao a 'master' of surrealist literature. Yet, Shimao's works have also been seen as controversial, especially those related to his concept of *Japanesia*. First appearing in 1961, *Japanesia* is Shimao's re-

Asia and the West. In contrast, Shimao insists on the significance of the Pacific Ocean and island communities as a forgotten bedrock of Japan's cultural life both in the past and present. While this concept is often seen as Shimao's critical intervention in the discourses about Japan's cultural homogeneity through his foregrounding of its deep geo-cultural diversity,

some critics have disapproved, warning us of Shimao's uncritical stance towards Japan's colonial legacies in the Pacific. One of the key issues that have rarely been addressed in this regard is the historical context in which Shimao conceived his concept.

Therefore, this presentation probes Shimao's

cultural politics in light of his community activities and trans-oceanic journeys as well as the content of his texts, especially during his first decade living in Amami-Ōshima. Historical analysis of *Japanesia* will allow us to have a clearer understanding of the criticality and the limit of the concept, which, I argue, is still of some great value to reflect upon today.



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His publications include *Transnational Japan as History: Empire, Migrants, and Social Movements* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and *Transpacific Visions: Connected Histories Across North and South* (Lexington, 2021). He is currently writing up his first monograph, *The Translocal Islands: The Okinawan Struggle and Grassroots Regionalism*.

presentative concept for revisiting the meaning of Japanese nationhood in the course of its historical development, not from the perspective of the centres of power, but from marginalised regions such as the southern islands and north-eastern region. The concept of *Japanesia* also questions Japan's elite cultural orientations which he argues have been centred around the continental worlds, i.e.,

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