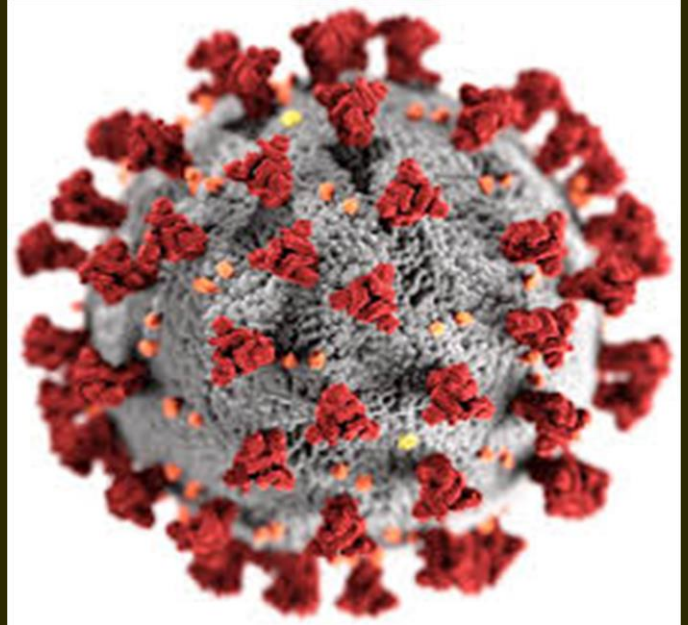


*Japan in East Asia*  
*Lecture Series*  
*University of Tokyo*

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**PANDEMICS AND  
JAPANESE  
POPULAR FICTION:  
FROM CHOLERA  
TO CORONA**  
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NOV. 12, 2020  
19:00-20:30 (JST)

THE TALK WILL BE HELD ON ZOOM



Illness has always been a part of the human experience, and when it arrives—whether an acute pandemic or a chronic condition—it changes daily life patterns, on individual and societal levels. And these changes are reflected in popular culture, specifically in pop literature and its many forms. This presentation traces how literature has reflected the experience of illness, and how illness changes life in Japan. It touches on the intersections of illness and literature in Japanese history, including cholera, tuberculosis, and Hansen’s disease before focusing on the present global COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, I introduce Kodansha’s online, trilingual (Japanese, English, and Chinese) literary project “After April 1st” to explore the continuities of online flash fiction, or short-short stories, with older Japanese literary forms and pop culture. This presentation argues that the “After April 1st” project can be understood as part of a longstanding tradition of literary responses to pandemics, and should be considered an important part of a broader, global pop culture response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Kathryn Tanaka is a scholar of illness and literature, particularly Hansen’s disease literature. She received her PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations in 2012.

She was the recipient of a Fulbright research grant to complete her research for her dissertation, *Through the Hospital Gates: Hansen’s Disease and Modern Japanese Literature*. Upon graduating, she received a post-doctoral research fellowship from the Japan Society of the Promotion of Science before joining the faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies at Otemae University in 2014. She has contributed chapters to several books, and her articles have appeared in *Japanese Studies* (2016 & 2019), and the *US-Japan Women’s Journal* (2016), among others. She is currently completing her book, *The Gendered Experience of Hansen’s Disease in Literature and Public Discourse*.