Reconsidering the Repatriation Narrative in Postwar Japan
Christina Yi, University of British Columbia

Although the Japanese empire theoretically disappeared off the map in 1945 following Japan’s defeat by the Allied Powers, the competing narratives of place and belonging that had been engendered by Japanese imperialism were not so easily erased; instead, they would continue to configure and dis-figure physical, human, and cultural geographies across the transpacific region. This paper looks at repatriate memoirs, interviews, and fiction published in Japan from the 1940s through the 1960s in order to illuminate the process whereby Japan was reconstituted from “multiethnic empire” to “peaceful nation-state.” It focuses in particular on Fujiwara Tei’s repatriation memoir The Shooting Stars are Alive (Nagareru hoshi wa ikite iru), which was an immediate success when it was published in Japan in 1949 and which has since been translated into multiple languages, including English and Korean. In tracing out how Fujiwara’s memoir has circulated in postwar East Asia and North America, this paper will consider some of the transnational configurations of race, ethnicity, and post(-imperial, -colonial, -war) conditions that continue to shape common understandings of national and world literatures today.

Etsuji Morii: "Pawn or Scapegoat, Saint or Villain" from WWII to 2018
Aloys Fleischmann, University of Alberta

“Pawn or scapegoat, saint or villain, racketeer or philanthropist—Morii was probably all of these.” —Ken Adachi, 1976. Etsuji Morii was Chair of the Japanese Canadian Liaison Committee, directing the uprooting of his fellow Nikkei During WWII. Morii’s position was ambivalent: he was the highest-ranked Nikkei collaborator with the British Columbia Security Commission and a powerful Issei leader; at the same time he was a notorious Japanese Imperial sympathizer and Black Dragon Society Oyabun. During the push for Redress, authors like Joy Kogawa and Gordon Nakayama tended to downplay the extent of Morii’s threat potential in order to present a docile Nikkei stereotype, while historian Ken Adachi emphasized the characteristics that made Morii the perfect Japanese double agent in order to expose the hypocrisy of Internment apologists. After Redress was achieved and the Canadian Nikkei community was more comfortable revisiting the voices of pro-Imperial Issei, Terry Watada exposed a new bombshell about Morii, which comes to a head in his 2018 novel The Three Pleasures: Morii allegedly ran a human trafficking ring that implicated the Japanese Consulate, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Powell Street Nikkei elite in a transnational enterprise based on the exploitation of migrant women’s bodies.
The Alexander Graham Bell Collection of Japanese Masks at the Smithsonian
Robert Pontsioen, Smithsonian Institution

This presentation presents a collection of seven Japanese masks obtained by Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) during his three-month trip to Japan in 1898. The seven extant masks (from an original set of eight, one of which has long been lost or missing) have remained unpublished and in storage ever since Bell donated them to the Smithsonian in 1899. Best known for his invention of the telephone, Alexander Graham Bell also had a decades-long connection to Japan, the nature of which is illuminated by tracing the history of this collection from Bell's previously unstudied travels in Japan to its eventual accession at the Smithsonian. I explore the historic and artistic importance of these highly distinctive and curiously lifelike masks, and their relation to the hyper-realistic, life-size Japanese doll form known as iki ningyō, or "living dolls," that were developed in the 1850s and perfected as a fine art by the time of Bell's visit. An examination of the history of these masks offers a rare glimpse into the artistic world of Meiji Era Japan, and illuminates the previously unknown connections between that cultural milieu and one of North America's most celebrated inventors. This presentation concludes with an exploration of new opportunities for the study and use of legacy collections in museums today, particularly among members of the source communities from which such collections were obtained.