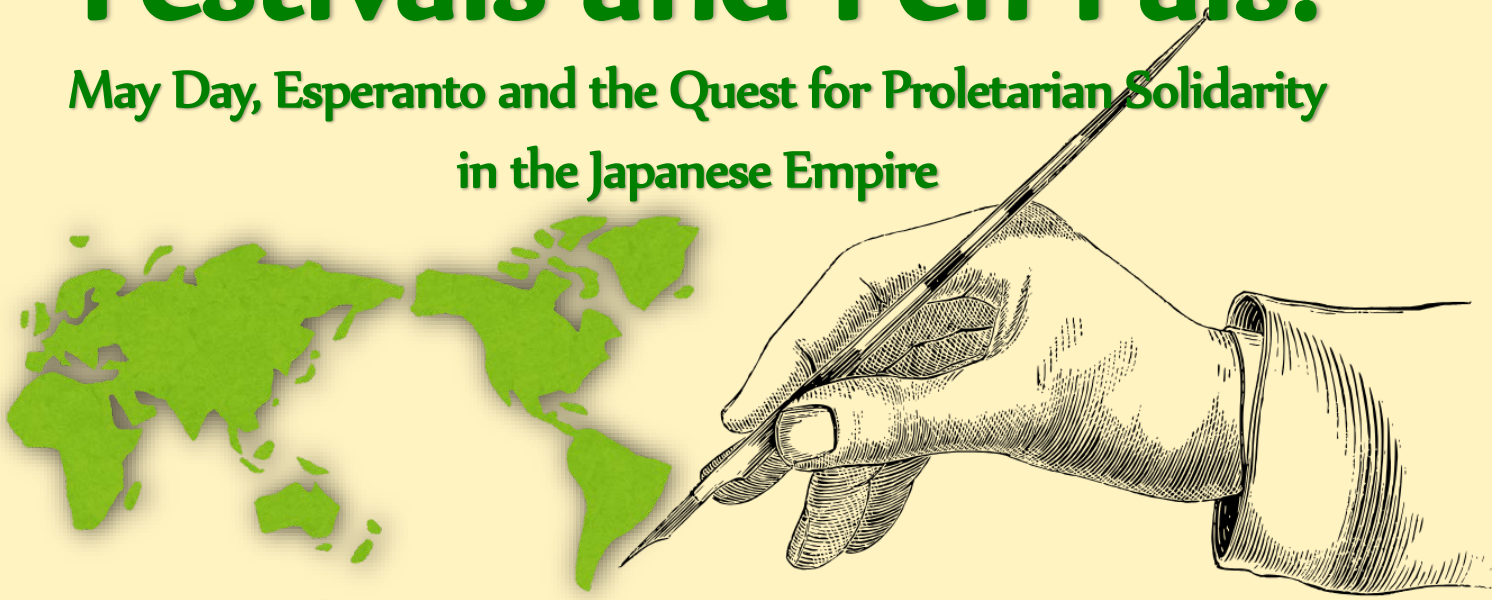
文學院 Faculty of Arts | 日本研究學系 Department of Japanese Studies

日本研究 CUHK Japan Forum

CUHK Japan Forum

Festivals and Pen Pals:

May Day, Esperanto and the Quest for Proletarian Solidarity in the Japanese Empire



Prof. Edwin MICHIELSEN

Assistant Professor, The University of Hong Kong

27 March 2026 (Friday) 11:00 am - 12:00 noon

Room 401, Leung Kau Kui Building, CUHK

In English. No registration required.

All are welcome!

Amid militarization, repression, and economic crisis, demands for emancipation and liberation among working-class and marginalized populations surged across the Japanese empire in the 1920s and early 1930s. This talk examines how proletarian cultural workers mobilized the international workers' day May Day and the international auxiliary language Esperanto to organize solidarity across distance, difference, and multilingual publics. Tracking print and multimedia techniques and cross-border correspondences, I aim to show how May Day demonstrations and Esperanto pen pals enabled shared critiques of Japanese imperialism while revealing frictions of translation and hierarchy. Assembling solidarity emerged not as a finished program but as an experiment, expanding the boundaries of revolutionary subjectivity and rethinking the "proletariat" as a heterogeneous and relational political force.

Edwin Michielsen is an assistant professor in modern Japanese literature and culture at HKU. His book manuscript titled, *Conjunctures of Revolution: Proletarian Literature and International Solidarity in Imperial Japan*, examines theories and practices of international solidarity during the 1920s and 1930s in the Japanese empire found in various proletarian literary writings and cultural activities. Besides his current research, he is interested in exploring postwar and contemporary literature and culture in Japan with a focus on questions surrounding labor practices, ecology, mental health, and technology.

Enquiries: NAGAOKA Misaki (mnagaoka@cuhk.edu.hk)