“The Serial Killer: Making Sense of War and Defeat in Occupied Japan (1945-1952)”

While much has been written about the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952), surprisingly little scholarly attention has been paid to one of the most notorious criminals who captivated Japanese public attention during that period. In August 1946, ex-soldier Kodaira Yoshio was arrested and charged for the murder of seven young women during the last months of the war and the first year of the occupation. Subsequent public debates attempted to explain his crimes in connection to Kodaira’s wartime experience in China, thus underscoring the importance for Japan to fully extirpate its wartime past. Another stream of thought, however, located the crimes in the context of the chaos and breakdown in social order still afflicting Japanese society in the wake of defeat. These debates, coming so soon after Japan’s surrender, helped lay the first building block of postwar Japanese memories of the war and understandings of defeat.