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Premodern Japanese Studies International
Conference at McGill, 10-11 October 2019

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Premodern Japanese Studies
International Conference at McGill
October 10-11, 2019

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The *Premodern Japanese Studies International Conference* took place on October 10-11, 2019 under the auspices of the School of Religious Studies at McGill University, the Council for Research on Religion (CREOR), Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai Canada, and the Japan Foundation.

Seventeen papers on premodern Japan were presented in English and Japanese over two days, and the topics ranged from exchanges between different religious traditions to the interplay between material culture and theoretical doctrine.

On the first day, Ryūichi Abe (Harvard University) presented a reinterpretation of Kūkai's rainmaking legend at the Shinsen-en Lake. He discussed the relationships between the mantric theory of language and rituals, esoteric and exoteric practices, and Buddhism and the court. Haruko Wakabayashi (Rutgers University) continued the theme of reinterpretation, analysing the illustrations in the *Gaki zōshi* 餓鬼草紙 (Scroll of the Hungry Ghosts) as a translation and transmediation of the *Zheng-fa nian-chu jing* 正法念處經 (Scripture of Concentration Abiding in the True

Dharma). Her paper offered a window into the complex dynamics between Buddhism and the Heian social elite. Brian Ruppert (Bates College) concluded the morning session by examining Shingon and Tendai textual sources and monastic lineages. He focused on the transformation of the “Lotus Sutra Rite” in Shingon traditions between the twelfth and fourteenth century.

The afternoon resumed with the Numata panel, which addressed various topics in Pure Land Buddhism. Using the concepts of emptiness and the practice of *ajikan* as examples, Robert Rhodes (Ōtani University) explored the combination of Shingon elements and Sanron philosophy in Yōkan’s Pure Land thought. Chris Callahan (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign) then presented a study of the debate between Kakunyo and Yuizen over *shukuzen* and rebirth in the Pure Land—a debate taking place during the fight over Shinran’s memorial site and illustrating the role of religious discourse in the reformulation of historical narratives.

The discussion continued with Susumu Uejima (Kyoto University), who reconsidered practices combining *kami* and the Buddha during the medieval period’s *dharma* assemblies. Buddhist rituals involved the servicing of Indian gods, and he reflected on the context in which these practices were developed in Japan. Satomi Yamamoto (Waseda University) then discussed the change from the five paths (*godō*) to the six paths (*rokudō*) as well as the development of Asura iconography in medieval depictions of the six paths. She did so by connecting visual imagery with textual representation, referring, for example, to the works of the poet Saigyō. The day ended with Hank Glassman’s (Haverford College) introduction to the first sculptural *gorintō* and its role in mediating the relationships between lay figures and religious relics, Buddhist doctrine, and political power during the eleventh century.

On the second day, Eric Swanson (Loyola Marymount University) highlighted Jien's creation of a ritual programme designed to pacify vengeful spirits. He argued that it is an example of eso-exoteric interactions in medieval Japan, which highlights an underlying concern with the restoration of social order present throughout multiple spheres. Heather Blair (Indiana University Bloomington) followed with a case study of Ōe no Masafusa's *ganmons* and addressed the representation of family ties in Buddhist prayers as well as their importance in the study of Heian religious cultures. The morning session was capped by Aaron Profitt's (the State University of New York at Albany) talk on Tendai *hongaku* Pure Land texts and how they challenge the rigidity present in the current academic approaches to premodern Japanese Buddhism based on sectarian divides and the Kamakura Old versus New School model.

The afternoon session began with two graduate student talks on Shinto. Emanuela Sala (SOAS University of London) showed how lineages specialising in *kami* worship at the Hie shrine used the Buddhist language of Sannō shintō in order to carve out a distinct identity for themselves. Emily Simpson (the University of California, Santa Barbara /Dartmouth College) discussed the multiple identities of Hachiman throughout different shrines and interpreted the flexibility and modularity of *kami* identities as depicted throughout late medieval origin stories and picture scrolls.

The conference then branched out into a variety of topics. Jeffrey Kotyk (McMaster University) surveyed the transmission and development of Sukuyōdō in Japan, a community of astrologer-monks with roots in the continent. Ethan Bushelle (Western Washington University) talked about mountain asceticism and its contribution to the dismemberment of the Buddhist monastic in Nara, Japan along social, moral, and cosmic axes. Vyjayanthi Selinger (Bowdoin College) examined the reception of

the *Rāmāyana* in Japan. She noted that the Buddhist disavowal of violence transformed the themes of conquest and war into a Buddhist quest undertaken by the ideal renunciant. Finally, Mikael Bauer (McGill University) closed the conference with an overview of Kōfukuji's origins, suggesting that the term Yamashina-dera 山階寺 does not point to a historical monument but rather reflects the dynamics between religion and politics in the eighth century.