

The Sacred, Discrimination, and Spirits of the Dead in Japan

International Research Center for Japanese Studies and Columbia University

5PM on Dec. 5 (Thursday), 2019, in 403 Kent Hall, Columbia University.

Jun'ichi ISOMAE (Nichibunken), "The Sacred, Discrimination and Public Sphere in History of Japanese Religions"

This talk reconsiders discrimination and the public sphere by tracing historical changes in the treatment of outcastes at and around Kiyomizu temple (清水寺). Examination of this sacred site enables analysis of lived experiences revealing the entanglements of the sacred and impure. Focusing on the themes of separation and reunion, I begin in the modern period by exploring national (*kokumin* 国民) and non-national people (*hikokuminn* 非国民). Then, looking back, I continue the exploration of these themes in the Edo period with common people and impure people (*eta* 穢多); the medieval period and humans and non-humans (*hinin* 非人); and finally, to the ancient period and ordinary people and slaves (*nuhi* 奴婢). These considerations problematize the Western conceptions of human rights and democracy in order to reassess the emergent social order and coexisting with the other "without discrimination."

Manami YASUI (Nichibunken), "Imaging the Spirit of a Deceased Pregnant Woman: Towards a Transcultural Study of the Spiritual World"

The spirits of women who die in childbirth are known as *ubume* in the *yōkai* culture of Japan. This paper introduces a selection of *ubume* illustrations dating from the latter half of the 18th century through to contemporary Japan. It sets out to analyze the social and cultural background of *ubume* from the perspectives of folklore and anthropology. I compare and contrast Japanese images of the spirits of women who die in childbirth with examples from other cultures in Asia, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of how different peoples and cultures have approached childbirth and the end of life.

Discussants: Haruo Shirane (EALAC) and Michael Como (Religion/EALAC)

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