

THIRD NANZAN SEMINAR FOR THE STUDY OF JAPANESE RELIGIONS

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This year's Nanzan Seminar featured presentations from six PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers regarding their dissertation research. Each presentation was followed by comments from six discussants, all of whom are experts in the field of Japanese Religion. The topics of discussion ranged from relic worship in the Kamakura period to the ritualized disposal of Buddhist altars in contemporary Japan.

THE THIRD “Nanzan Seminar for the Study of Japanese Religions” was held at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture on the weekend of 7–8 January 2018. The seminar was a part of the Nagoya University JSPS Core to Core Program 日本学術振興会拠点形成事業, which promotes the development of academic communities for the study of Japan’s cultural heritage and texts, as well as the third Nanzan Seminar, following similar Seminars for international graduate students in 2013 and 2015.

At this year’s seminar, six PhD and post-doctoral researchers from Australia, the United States, and Denmark as well as six commentators from universities in Japan, the Nanzan Institute staff, and scholars of religion from within Japan and from abroad gathered to present and discuss research on Japanese religions. Each presenter was given forty minutes to present his or her research project followed by forty minutes of questions and comments from the discussants.

The seminar opened with remarks from Okuyama Michiaki 奥山倫明 (Permanent Fellow, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture), Kim Seung Chul 金承哲 (Director, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture), and Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎 (Director of the Center for Cultural Heritage and Texts, Nagoya University), all of whom reflected on the success of previous Nanzan Seminars in 2013 and 2015. These opening comments emphasized the special opportunity the seminar offers for international graduate students to present and discuss their research in the Japanese language with scholars in Japan. Finally, they

all expressed their hopes that the third seminar would be just as fruitful and inspiring as in previous years.

Presenters

Hannah Gould (University of Melbourne, Kanazawa University), “Understanding Religious Materiality through Disposal: A Study of Domestic Buddhist Altars in Contemporary Japan.”

Rebecca Mendelson (Duke University, Komazawa University), “Naikan for the Nation? *Kōzengokokukai* and Nation-Protecting Lay Zen in Modern Japan.”

Dana Mirsalis (Harvard University, Kokugakuin University), “Can Female Priests Really Live as Normal Women?”

Lindsey E. DeWitt (Kyūshū University), “World Heritage and Women’s Exclusion at Ōminesan and Okinoshima.”

Julia Cross (Harvard University, Nagoya University), “Communities of Relic Worship in Medieval Japan.”

Esben Petersen (Goethe University, Nanzan University), “A Case Study in the Genealogy of Religion as Expressed in Swiss and German Missionary Literature.”

Discussants

Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎, Nagoya University (Medieval Japanese Literature and Aesthetics, Study of Religious Texts)

Kurita Hidehiko 栗田英彦, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (Religious Studies, Intellectual History of Japan)

Iwata Fumiaki 岩田文昭, Osaka Normal University (Philosophy of Religion)

Kobayashi Naoko 小林奈央子, Aichi Gakuin University (Sociology of Religion, Gender Studies)

Chikamoto Kensuke 近本謙介, Nagoya University (Medieval Japanese Literature and Aesthetics, Study of Religious Texts)

Yulia Burenina, Dōhō University (Modern Japanese Thought, Modern Japanese Religions)

Yoshida Kazuhiko 吉田一彦, Nagoya City University (History of Japanese Religions)

Summaries of Presentations

Hannah Gould *Understanding Religious Materiality through Disposal: A Study of Domestic Buddhist Altars in Contemporary Japan*

Hannah Gould is a PhD candidate from University of Melbourne and is currently affiliated with Kanazawa University. Gould's dissertation examines the meaning and materiality of memorial rites (*kuyō* 供養) for the disposal of sacred objects in both Buddhist and Shinto traditions. For the presentation, she spoke about the disposal of domestic Buddhist altars (*butsudan* 仏壇) in contemporary Japan. Traditionally, she noted, "domestic Buddhist altars have long served as a key ritual center of familial veneration and Buddhist practice," but recently they have increasingly become "surplus goods and even burdens to those disinclined or unable to care for them." In her presentation, Gould examined the processes by which consumers, retailers, and clergy dispose of *butsudan*.

Gould began her presentation by reviewing the literature on sacred waste, noting its relevance to Japanese religion. As she explained, "Studying how objects become sacralized and transform in value across their lifecycle has proved to be a fruitful approach of understanding Japanese religious life." One of her central points in her presentation was that recent social transformations have turned the *butsudan* into a burden for many families. Yet, although *butsudan* may have lost their central place in the everyday life of the household, they still cannot be easily discarded. They represent a kind of sacred waste, which are difficult to throw away due to the social obligation to care for these objects. According to Gould, "It is because the *butsudan* continue to generate such feelings that they require treatment as sacred waste."

Gould outlined several disposal practices for *butsudan*, but they can all be conceptualized as types of *kuyō*. As she argued, "*Butsudan* companies commonly refer to the entire process of disposal as *kuyō*. Broadly, the process involves purification, disassembly, and cremation." Although the term *kuyō* is a common Buddhist term meaning "to give offerings," in contemporary Japan it has come to be associated with ancestor veneration and funerals. In her research on *butsudan*, Gould defines this popular usage of the term as "rites of separation."

Although *kuyō* remove supernatural elements from the religious objects, Gould pointed out that these rites "never fully dissolve the ties between people and things." Admittedly, this could also be attributed to many non-religious elements in Japan (as in much of the rest of the East-Asian world), where special items often receive sentimental value. However, Gould believes that, although the *butsudan* seems to have lost much of their relevance in contemporary Japan, they do in fact regain their sacredness when being disposed.

Following Gould's presentation, the discussants were given the floor. Kobayashi was the first to comment. She pointed out that Gould's topic of



research was not only very interesting but also very important for Japanese religious studies in general. She then started a discussion regarding the origin of *butsudan*, arguing that they only recently entered the scheme of Japanese religious history. This subsequently led to a discussion of the idea *mono* 物 (the intersection of objects, people, and spirits) in Japan and whether this category is a recent construction. Abe also commented on the presentation. He pointed out that *kuyō* for dolls was actually a much older tradition than that for *butsudan* and recommended *Mono to kokoro* 物と心 by Ōmori Shōzō 大森莊藏 for a study of *kuyō* and objects.

Another theme of the discussion was the influence of sociological shifts. Several panelists mused over the question of whether economic advancements in Japan over the last century were in part responsible for generating a market for such rites. Gould concluded that the “interrelation between people and things” may be a powerful motivating force behind the continued relevance of sacred objects such as *butsudan* and the need for a proper means of their disposal.

Rebecca Mendelson *Naikan for the Nation? Kōzengokokukai and Nation-Protecting Lay Zen in Modern Japan*

The next presenter was Rebecca Mendelson, a PhD candidate from Duke University and affiliate of Komazawa University in Tokyo. Mendelson researches

innovations in the Japanese Rinzai Zen school from 1868 to 1945. These innovations, according to Mendelson's study, "contributed to Zen's worldwide spread and to democratizing Buddhism." This democratizing of Zen made practice accessible to laypeople, not just clergy. The reform movements that occurred during this period moved Zen out of the monastery and spread Buddhist practice among intellectual and social elites, which, in turn, contributed to the exportation of Zen as an international form of Buddhism. In her research, Mendelson demonstrates that the modern quest for self-improvement, which was "a gendered endeavor often tied to nation-building," influenced the development of lay Buddhism in modern Rinzai Zen.

For her presentation, Mendelson focused on the Rinzai cleric Katsumine Daitetsu 勝峰大徹 (1828–1911) and the lay group that he founded, the *Kōzengokokukai* 興禪護国会. She opened her talk with a discussion of Katsumine, giving an overview of his life. She also explained his religious thought, as reflected in the *Naikanhō* 内観法, and discussed his self-cultivation practices (*shūyō* 修養). Rebecca pointed out that Katsumine's writings were twosided. "On the one hand," she noted, "his writings innovatively blended Zen with Daoist-inflected self-cultivation practices and Confucian rhetoric, appealing to a general, modern audience interested in self-cultivation." On the other hand, she continued, "the activities of his group *Kōzengokokukai* were 'traditional' Rinzai Zen monastic practices." These traditional practices, however, were adapted for lay practitioners.

Mendelson then turned to the *Kōzengokokukai*, giving a brief history of the group and how they adapted traditional monastic Rinzai practices. She also positioned the group in the context of a proliferating Zen movement during and after Katsumine's lifetime. By focusing on Katsumine and the *Kōzengokokukai*, Mendelson sought to explain the contradictory nature of blending traditional practice with democratized institutions and how this tendency was related to nationalist self-cultivation.

Burenina was the first to comment on Mendelson's presentation. Drawing on her own research into the nationalist dimension of *Nichiren shugi* 日蓮主義, she suggested Mendelson consider and more carefully define concepts such as "nation protection" (*gokoku* 護国) and "nation" or "state" (*kokka* 国家) and what they mean in her research. Kurita also offered advice on how modern self-cultivation movements were connected to lay Zen and how to ascertain the degree of nationalism in these movements at various historical points.

Kurita's comments shed light on a significant historical aspect of early Meiji lay Zen. Kurita discussed the roles of members of the intelligentsia, particularly the lay Zen practitioners who were also deeply involved with the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動). Such connections are unexplored even in Japanese scholarship, and they provide a crucial link

between Zen and later forms of nationalism. Mendelson responded, noting that “such fundamental issues as defining ‘modernity’ (*kindaisei* 近代性) and the degree to which Katsumine’s form of Zen practice was actually ‘modern’” was an extremely helpful suggestion for her current research project.

Dana Mirsalis *Can Female Priests Really Live as Normal Women?*

The first presenter on the second day of the seminar was Dana Mirsalis, a PhD Candidate at Harvard University and currently affiliated with Kokugakuin University in Tokyo. Mirsalis’s research focuses on female Shinto priests and the construction of gender in the Shinto priesthood during the postwar period. In her presentation, Mirsalis explained the way in which “female priests construct their identities as female priests both through their relations to others (mainly family members) and their adherence (or lack thereof) to gender norms.”

The sources for Mirsalis’s talk included interviews with three different female priests: a head priest (*gūji* 宮司), a vice-head priest (*negi* 禰宜), and an auxiliary vice priest (*gonnegi* 権禰宜, the lowest ranked priest at a shrine). As she summarized each interview, it became clear that the meaning of gendered terms such as “female priest” and “womanhood” varied among the correspondents. The notion of what constitutes a “normal woman,” in particular, seemed to differ. Commenting on her interviewees use of these terms, Mirsalis notes, “I was particularly focused on why the idea of being a ‘normal woman’ elicits such a strong reaction from my research contacts and how the idea of ‘normal womanhood’ is related to the ways priests define their own identities and value to the Shinto world.” Mirsalis discovered that her contacts tended to compare their own lives to the notion of a “normal woman” as a wife and mother. For example, the lowest ranked priest, who was unmarried and without children, told Mirsalis that female priests could not live as “normal women.” On the other hand, the head priest contended that female Shinto priests should live up to this ideal. “Normal womanhood,” Mirsalis concluded, “becomes a measuring stick by which women can explain how and why their lives have deviated from the norm.”

Asked in what way her research might contribute to the field of Japanese religions, Mirsalis emphasized one major problem within her field: the lack of scholarship on female priests in any language. Pointing out that “the research that exists on gender and Japanese religion mainly focuses on women in New Religious Movements and Buddhism, and the research that exists on modern and contemporary Shinto mainly focuses on the legacy of State Shinto,” Mirsalis’s research seeks to address this neglected topic in the study of Japanese religion. In addition to this new contribution to the field, Mirsalis closed by arguing that the question of whether female priests can live as “normal women” is “worth considering because of the ways female priests’ potential value as

priests is frequently tied to essentialized notions of gender, especially normative motherhood.” This value, she noted, likewise affects the role of female priests in the world of Shinto and Japanese religion.

Kobayashi was the first to comment on Mirsalis’s presentation. She discussed the issues of female priesthood and suggested that it would be better to move beyond her examples of individual female priests and discuss the issue of womanhood in Japan in a more general sense. Furthermore, Kobayashi added, it could also be interesting to investigate the institutional issues at stake, that is, why do the female priests believe that their lives differ from the normative category of motherhood?

Chikamoto followed up with an additional comment. Although he recognized Mirsalis’s problematization of the category of motherhood, he suggested Mirsalis speak more broadly about shifts in the notion of “normal” womanhood. Rather than just focusing on the personal relationships of the female priests, an examination of how this specific case of female priests reflects larger trends of Japanese society would be a major contribution to the study of contemporary Japan in general and the role of women in religion in particular.

Abe also discussed Mirsalis’s presentation. He wanted to know more about the history behind female priests and specifically about the division between *miko* 巫女 and the priests. He also wanted Mirsalis to tell more about the particular roles that woman played in shrines prior to the Meiji era. Following up on this comment, Yoshida talked about how women succeeding the leadership of family shrines, in fact, is a modern phenomenon and how the emergence of female priests is a part of the larger sociological trend of woman taking over family businesses.

Lindsey E. DeWitt *World Heritage and Women’s Exclusion at Ōminesan and Okinoshima*

The next presentation was from Lindsey E. DeWitt, a post-doctoral fellow at Kyushu University. In her research, DeWitt aims to articulate the social and historical dimensions of religion and culture in Japan related to cultural heritage, gender, identity, and the re-envisioning (and revising) of history during the process of “heritagization.” Her presentation for the seminar focused on the modern social and religious history of Ōminesan, a sacred mountain in Nara prefecture and Okinoshima, an island located just off-shore of Kyūshū. Both places have been designated World Heritage Sites, while prohibiting entry to women.

First, DeWitt demonstrated how the “heritagization” of temples, shrines, pilgrimage trails, and other places of worship affect institutional and devotional practices. In other words, her presentation explored what happens to the religious sites when they are presented for World Heritage designation and what

aspects of history and culture are highlighted or softened to create a coherent narrative. Discussing the Japanese government's official application to UNESCO for the sites to be considered World Heritage, DeWitt noted that a heritage designation often depends more on its tradition and authenticity than anything else.

Next, DeWitt asked what role gender should play in World Heritage designations. Can gender be considered or reconfigured in the all-male sites of Ōminesan and Okinoshima? Discussing the arguments proposed by the Bunkacho 文化庁 and the official World Heritage promotional committee, she explained how the sensitive topic of gender discrimination was defended in both cases by arguing that such traditions are necessary for "maintaining the aura of sacred at the places."

Finally, DeWitt discussed whether UNESCO could live up to their own goals of "culture for all" by including Ōminesan and Okinoshima into the World Heritage list. Arguing that not all heritage sites necessarily need to be "positive and ethically sound," DeWitt concluded that "the cases of Ōminesan and Okinoshima challenge the common assumption that designations activities represent a positive and inclusive social practice." The disjuncture between the actual circumstances of male-only sites and their UNESCO World Heritage presentations calls, according to Lindsey, us to question whether "World Heritage truly makes progress in dissolving social and cultural boundaries (as UNESCO expressly aims to) or, on the contrary, reifies existing ones."

Julia Cross *Communities of Relic Worship in Medieval Japan*

The third presenter of the second day was Julia Cross, a PhD student from Harvard University currently affiliated with Nagoya University. Cross's research addresses relic worship (*shari shinkō* 舍利信仰) in the Kamakura period. In particular, she focuses on nuns and relics at Hokkeji, a Shingon-Risshū nunnery in Nara.

Cross's presentation centered on two questions. First, she asked, "What happened to the relics of the nuns at Hokkeji 法華寺"? Various chronicles related to Eison 叡尊 and the founding of the temple repeatedly mention these relics, but they seem to have vanished from other historical records. Second, Cross wondered why there are no extant reliquaries at the nunnery today. To answer these question, Cross examined chronicles related to the nunnery. She further located texts and reliquaries relevant to her study, particularly three sites in Nara (Hokkeji, Rokuōin 鹿王院, and Kasuga Taisha 春日大社) related to relic worship during the Kamakura period. These three sites were chosen because "each illuminates distinct aspects of relic worship from the twelfth through the fourteenth century." According to Cross, relic worship at Hokkeji and related temples and nunneries, as well as tales and extant reliquaries, proved that nuns during the Kamakura period had more power than they have been tradition-

ally accredited. This power, she argued, was imparted on the nuns through the possession of the relics.

Despite possessing such power, or perhaps because of it, the nuns of Hokkeji eventually lost control of the relics. Cross proposed that they may have been stolen. Pointing to accounts in the chronicles and biography of Eison, she suggested that Eison may have played a role in the relocation of the Hokkeji relics.

After Cross's presentation, Abe was the first to comment. He mentioned a few texts that he thought would be beneficial for Cross to include in her research. Cross briefly discussed the body of scholarship on relics in medieval Europe and proposed that the study of Buddhist relics in medieval Japan fit similar theoretical structures. Abe wanted Cross to give more concrete examples of comparison between Christian and Buddhist relics in her broader definition of relic worship. He then recommended that she dig further into Eison's writings for more information regarding his connection with relics and reliquaries. Finally, Abe suggested Cross consider comparing the Hokkeji relics with records from other temples such as Tennoji 天王寺. Both places were associated with Eison, but Abe inquired whether or not the relics might be represented differently.

Following Abe, Yoshida made a comment. He proposed that the notion of what constituted a relic may have changed over time. In earlier periods, a relic consisted of images imported from the Korean Peninsula and China. Such relics served to legitimize the founding of a temple. The relics alluded to in the Hokkeji chronicles, however, seem to denote images that possess religious power. Perhaps it was the concept of relics that changed rather than the location of the actual relics themselves. Yoshida also noted that biographies of Chinese monks often refer to relics in such a manner and suggested that these textual sources may have influenced origin tales (*engi* 縁起) of temples in Japan.



The last person to comment on Cross's presentation was Chikamoto. He cautioned her not to assume that textual references to an influx in relics meant that such relics actually existed. Rather, he recommended that she consider why these relics were associated with this specific location.

Esben Petersen *The Genealogy of Religion as Expressed in Swiss and German Missionary Literature*

The final presenter was Esben Petersen, a PhD candidate at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main and a visiting research fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. His dissertation examines the historical encounter between liberal-Protestant missionaries belonging to the Swiss and German mission society *Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein* (AEPM) and the Japanese people.

For the presentation, Petersen focused on the missionaries' German-language journal *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* (ZMR). ZMR is interesting, because when it was created in 1886 it was done with the purpose of contributing to "the religious studies in its broadest sense," allowing for some of the earliest comparative writings on Japanese religion in a European context. Furthermore, famous German scholars like Max Müller, Otto Pfleiderer, and Ernst Troeltsch all made contributions to the journal, proving its importance to the development of the study of Japanese religion.

He highlighted two points in his presentation. First, Petersen discussed how the German authors' understanding of religion in the second half of the nineteenth century was motivated by a belief that all religions carried seeds of a universal truth. Through the modern methodological tools of comparative religion, religious elements from diverse cultures could be studied and compared in terms of these seeds of universal truth. And, second, Petersen inquired how this universalism was founded on a colonial discourse that created a hierarchical approach in the understanding of other religions such as those in Japan.

This colonial discourse was a particular feature of the German comparative writing on Japanese Buddhism in the ZMR. The comparisons were often not very deep or profound, but they helped the missionaries in creating categories of world-religions that supported their own political agenda. According to the German scientists of religion, Buddhism was, on the one hand, unquestionably foreign and archaic, but, on the other, it also contained seeds that were modern. Buddhism came to be viewed as both alien and familiar; its character meticulously philosophical, but immaturely ritualistic; peaceful, but at the same time wrong; its believers at once wise, austere, and indolent. Although contemporary scholars might reject many of the arguments presented in the German writings on Buddhism as shallow and incorrect, their methods and ideas on which they

were founded upon played a central role in the formation of the concept of religion in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Japan.

Finally, Petersen discussed the process of the mutually interactive development of the missionaries' representations of Japanese religion and the Japanese appropriation, reaction, or resistance to such representations. Through the examples of four Japanese scholars (Minami Hajime 三並良, Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治, Inoue Tetsujiro 井上哲次郎, and Kishimoto Nobuta 岸本能武太), he attempted to explain how the discursive formation of religion in Japan happened as an interdependent process in which Japanese intellectuals came to articulate their own identity by utilizing concepts and ideas initially created by the missionaries and, conversely, how the notions of religion articulated by Japanese intellectuals contributed to the modern study of religion in Japan.

Kobayashi was the first to comment on Petersen's presentation, stating that she was uncertain regarding the connection between Max Müller, the ZMR, and Japan. To her knowledge, Max Müller himself had never written anything about religion in Japan. She also wanted an explanation of why the ZMR was interested in Japan in the first place. Petersen responded that, although he did not personally write about Japanese Buddhism, Müller actually had been one of the leading figures in the establishment of the mission society AEPM and their journal ZMR.

Kurita was next to comment and recommended several scholarly works on the universalism of religion among Japanese intellectuals. He also wanted a broader explanation of the relationship between theologians and the missionaries. In response to this question, Kim intervened and pointed out that, when it came to writing on religion, the two groups often had different agendas. Furthermore, Kurita was curious if the ZMR and their views on religion were in any way influenced by their interactions with Japanese people. Petersen stated that if there were any influence it would have been minor. In response, Kurita brought up the topic of colonization and whether the ZMR's view on religion was part of a broader colonialist project.

Burenina asked for more background on the journals. She also wanted more details regarding where ZMR got their views of Buddhism, especially Japanese Buddhism. She suggested Petersen look into Eduard Hartmann's *Religion des Geistes*, which had been a great inspiration for Anesaki's understanding of religion. Finally, she was curious about other issues that the missionaries' may have discussed with Japanese intellectuals, not just religion.

Conclusion

The seminar ended with a concluding discussion. Okuyama yielded the floor to the graduate students, who each one after another gave short formal speeches of appreciation and reflection on what they had learnt during the past two days.

For many of the presenters, the Seminar was the first time to present their own work in Japanese, making it a challenging but also fruitful experience. Next, the discussants reflected on their participation in the Seminar and emphasized the topics discussed during the two-day gathering.

All discussants agreed that the Seminar had been a great success for more than a few reasons, highlighting two points in particular. First, the graduate students showed a high level of preparation and deliverance of their presentations, both in terms of content by producing original research and in terms of their Japanese language abilities. Second, each presenter demonstrated expertise within each of their analytical frameworks (contemporary Japanese religion, modern Japanese Buddhism, gender studies, medieval Buddhism, and transnational history), proving the wide range and importance of Japanese Religious Studies. Finally, Okuyama expressed optimism that next year's Nanzan Seminar will once again attract many brilliant graduate students to the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.