



Scuola Italiana di Studi
sull'Asia Orientale
ISEAS



École Française
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International
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KYOTO LECTURES

Thursday, April 22nd, 18:00h

Elizabeth Oyler SPEAKER

Poetry, Travel, and Early Medieval *Michiyuki:* Taira on the Tōkaidō in *Tales of the Heike*

The establishment of Japan's first shogunate in Kamakura following the Genpei War of 1180-1185 drastically altered the political and cultural shape of the realm and ushered in the age of the warriors, which would remain in place in one form or another until 1868. This change was culturally momentous enough to inspire Japan's most influential medieval war tale, *Heike monogatari* (Tales of the Heike). And *Heike* in turn provided material for narrative and drama throughout the medieval and modern periods as well. Much of its lasting importance derives from its lyrical rendering of a time of significant historical change, when paradigms of governance, cultural practice, and geography were indelibly transformed.

This lecture focuses on one moment within the *Heike* narrative in which the geo-political meaning of the new warrior capital is addressed. As Taira Shigehira, a leading general of the losing side in the war, is taken along the Tōkaidō to Kamakura for final judgment, he stops at Ikeda post station, where he spends the night and exchanges poems with a woman named Jijū. Through a discussion of this episode and its allusive relationship to a slightly earlier travel narrative, *Kaidōki*, it will be argued that their exchange represents a reinterpretation of the relationship between the capital and the provinces, old and the new, and home and dispossession, subtly framed in the form of a conventional poetry exchange between a man and a woman he meets on the road.

Elizabeth Oyler is Assistant Professor of Japanese at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on medieval narrative and drama, particularly *Heike monogatari* and other works concerning the Genpei War (1180-1185). She is author of *Swords, Oaths, and Prophetic Visions: Authoring Warrior Rule in Medieval Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) and several articles. She is spending January through May 2010 at the National Institute for Japanese Literature in Tachikawa and studying *Heike biwa*, recitation of *Heike monogatari*.

This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room, 1st floor).

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