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2011 KYOTO LECTURES

Thursday, June 16th, 18:00h

Scot Hislop SPEAKER

Traces of the Gods Writing and Hirata Atsutane's Imagining of the "Illustrious Imperial Land"

From the middle of the 18th century until the end of the 19th, scholars of Kokugaku (National Learning) vigorously debated about whether there had been a writing system in Japan before the arrival of Chinese characters. This talk will take up Hirata Atsutane's (1776-1843) treatise on the script of the gods, *Kanna hifumi den*. Although Atsutane is widely considered one of the four most important Kokugaku thinkers, he relies on faith-based assumptions and weak reasoning in this treatise and thereby arrives at the patently false conclusion that the Japanese gods invented a writing system. For this reason, *Kanna hifumi den* has been largely ignored. The thought of Naoki Sakai, however, can be used to show that Atsutane's treatise is an important instance of proto-nationalist discourse since it is addressed to a particular (rather than a universal) audience. This audience, however, cannot be simply conflated with "Japan" or even "Nihon". It is better understood as the "Illustrious Imperial Land" (Sumera Ōmikuni).

Scot Hislop is a lecturer in the Department of Japanese Studies at the National University of Singapore. His research focuses on Tokugawa (1600-1868) literature and intellectual history. He has published on Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) ("Summer Grasses: Memory and the Construction of Landscape in *Oku no Hosomichi*", in *Perspectives on Social Memory in Japan*, ed. by Tsu Yun Hui, Jan van Bremen, and Eyal Ben-Ari, 2005) and linked verse ("The Evening Banter of Two Tanuki: Reading the Tobi Hiyoro Sequence," *Early Modern Japan*, 11-2, 2003), and is currently working on a manuscript on the poetry, prose, and poetics of Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827).

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

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