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KYOTO LECTURES

Tuesday, May 30th, 18:00h

Fabio Rambelli SPEAKER

Sea Theologies Elements for a Conceptualization of Maritime Religiosity in Japan

A glaring blind-spot in Japanese religious studies is the lack of attention dedicated to conceptual (and theological) elements in sea-based beliefs and practices. As a consequence, we know very little about the theology of the sea and sea deities dwelling in the abyss. This talk will focus on three different aspects of sea-related cults: the role of the sea in the *Nakatomi no harae* great purification ritual, the status of treasure ships (*takarabune*), and the nature of boat spirits (*funadama*). These three elements are normally treated separately, and are not explored in their theological and philosophical implications, but the talk will show that, when combined, they offer a unique perspective on Japanese maritime religiosity as it was practiced and imagined by different agents and groups: fishing communities (as in the case of *funadama*), ritual specialists and intellectuals (in the commentaries on the *Nakatomi no harae*), and larger communities (as in the images of *takarabune* associated with widespread cults of the seven gods of good fortune or *shichi-fukujin*). It will be argued that these three elements function as semiotic shifters—representations and agents of change, transformation, and movement, all features of maritime religiosity.

Fabio Rambelli is Professor of Japanese Religion and Cultural History and the International Shinto Foundation Chair of Shinto Studies in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, and in the Department of Religious Studies, at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He holds a PhD in East Asian Studies (Italy, 1992). Prior to his current position at UCSB, he taught in Europe, the United States, and Japan. His main research interests concern the history of Buddhism and Shinto in Japan, issues of intercultural representation, and cultural semiotics. His publication include *Vegetal Buddhas* (2001), *Buddhas and Kami in Japan* (2003, edited with Mark Teeuwen), *Buddhist Materiality* (2007), *Buddhism and Iconoclasm in East Asia: A History* (2012, with Eric Reinders), *Buddhist Anarchism* (2013) and *A Buddhist Theory of Semiotics* (2013). He is currently editing a book on sea and religion in Japan and working on the intellectual history of Shinto.

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

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