In premodern Japan, the function of literature extended beyond the realms of artistic or recreational pursuits. It frequently served as a means to address religious and political imperatives, assuming a pivotal role in the ceremonial protocols associated with the coronation of new emperors, some of which endure to the present day. This two-hour long conference endeavors to elucidate the historical and contemporary interrelationship between literature and ceremonial rituals in Japan.

Edward Kamens
Yale University, Sumitomo Professor Emeritus of Japanese Studies

Screens and Songs for a New Emperor: The Reiwa Daijōe Edition and its Predecessors (Edward Kamens – Yale University)

This presentation will show how the screens (byōbu), poems (byōbu uta), performance songs (fūzoku maika) and other materials created in 2019 for the most recent instance of the traditional ritual celebrating the accession of a new Emperor of Japan both recapitulate the conventions of the past and introduce variation and innovation. In English, with many images for illustration and the speaker’s translations of poems and songs.

Maral Andassova
Waseda University, Waseda Institute for Advanced Study, Assistant Professor

The words of ritual: the Shinto liturgy of the Izumo high priest

The prayer of the kamuyogoto was held from 716 A.D. to 833 A.D by generations of the Izumo high priest family. This liturgy is aimed to present words of divine congratulation from Izumo deities to the Yamato emperor. Traditionally, the kamuyogoto has been considered a ritual of obedience due to the inauguration of a new Izumo high priest. However, the most recent studies point out that each kamuyogoto presentation was held during the period, close to the Emperor’s enthronement, and was aimed to greet the Emperor. My presentation will analyze the significance of this liturgy by comparing the mythological aspects based on Kojiki and Nihonshoki Izumo Myths.

Hiromi Motohashi
Aichi Prefectural University, Associate Professor

Revealing Rituals in The Tale of Genji

“The Tale of Genji,” authored by Murasaki Shikibu in the early 11th century, offers a vivid portrayal of Heian-era Japanese aristocratic society. Emphasizing the significance of imperial transitions during this period, the narrative intriguingly omits detailed descriptions of accession rituals. This presentation explores the narrative’s selective treatment of rituals, shedding light on its motivations and broader implications. It also contemplates the challenges of representing rituals in fiction. By dissecting the inclusion and exclusion of ritual elements, this analysis enhances our understanding of Murasaki Shikibu’s artistic choices and underscores the intricate interplay between historical accuracy and narrative aesthetics in depicting Heian Japan’s cultural milieu.