

Workshop Abstracts

Kick-off International Workshop
“Religions, Thoughts, and Health in Asia”

ROOM 14 San Sebastiano,
Ca' Foscari University of Venice Tuesday 26 October 2021
9:30:00-18:00 (CET)

Keynote lecture I
(LINK)

Fabio RAMBELLI* (Professor, University of California)

“Music, the Sacred, and Healing: The Gagaku Piece Sokō and a Different Look at the Intellectual Systems of Premodern Japan”

The current pandemic has shown, once again, the interconnectedness among ideas and representations of health, religion, and various intellectual systems. This talk will explore an analogous interconnectedness that can be found in premodern Japan by using music as a lens. For a number of reasons, music only plays a marginal role in modern scholarship on religious studies and intellectual history, but in the medieval and early modern periods music played important roles, including that as a mediator between various dimensions of the cosmos; this was especially true of Gagaku, the ceremonial music of the imperial court and the main temples and shrines of Japan. In my talk, I will discuss especially the position of Gagaku at the intersection of religion, cultural heritage, and various systems of thought as a mediator between individuals and society on the one hand and various invisible agents (including divinities and sources of illnesses) on the other. In particular, I will discuss music's healing power by focusing on an elusive composition, *Sokō*. I will trace its origin in ancient medicinal practices shared across Eurasia, in their adoption within Buddhism, and their transformation with the peculiar metaphysics of Gagaku. While showing the interconnectedness of the premodern Eurasian world, I will also gesture toward the need to expand our academic perspectives by including the sensorium, in which music played a central role.

* Fabio Rambelli (PhD in East Asian Studies, 1992) is a professor of Japanese religions and cultural history and the International Shinto Foundation chair in Shinto Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He works at the intersection of philosophical discourses, material practices, and everyday life in premodern Japan. He is the author of *Buddhist Materiality* (2007), *Buddhism and Iconoclasm in East Asia: A History* (with Eric Reinders, 2012), *A Buddhist Theory of Semiotics* (2013), *Zen Anarchism* (2013), and editor or co-editor of *Buddhas and Kami in Japan* (with Mark Teeuwen, 2003), *The Sea and the Sacred in Japan: Aspects of*

Maritime Religion (2018), *Spirits and Animism in Contemporary Japan: The Invisible Empire* (2019), *Defining Shugendō: Critical Studies on Japanese Mountain Religion* (with Andrea Castiglioni and Carina Roth, 2020), and the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions* (with Erica Baffelli and Andrea Castiglioni, 2021). He also plays music; CDs with his formations include *Yellow Flower* (with Sofar Sonar, 2017) and *Neo Archē* (Fabio Rambelli and Rory Lindsay, 2020).

Keynote lecture II (ZOOM)

9:40-10:30

Michael STANLEY-BAKER** (Assistant Professor, Nanyang Technological University)
“Situating Medicine and Religion in Asia”

“Medicine” and “religion,” or their local analogues, form powerful tools by which actors situate themselves within networks of knowledge, power and authority. They also form common conceptual anchors for comparative study of different Asian regions. Over the last ten to fifteen years, the world has seen heightened research and a burgeoning of conceptual approaches to Religion and Medicine in Asia. Whether it be through the rise of new scholarly terms of historical analysis such as Buddhist or Daoist medicine, or through major research initiatives on yoga, Ayurveda, alchemy, or through new researches into South Asian, Himalayan or East Asian science, scholars across the region are agreed that the European framework of medicine and religion as discrete epistemic domains does not match up to Asian knowledge practices. The division and categorization of knowledge across the region has been undertaken in different terms and conditions in different regions and times.

However, these conversations have been relatively siloed, whether by regional language differences or the different historiographies of the regions. The ability to do in-depth comparison across the region requires a community effort of scholars to achieve both broad scale and philological rigor. While the histories of religions and of medicines across the region are well-established, less has been done to compare how medicine and religion have been “situated” historically in ontopolitical debates—that is, comparing the conditions and terms in which authority, sovereignty and selfhood were negotiated. Through studying local actors and action, and also by comparing the legacy scholarship on those regions, we can come to a better working language for the production of knowledge in Asia, and the methodological critique of colonialist categories.

** Dr. Stanley-Baker is an assistant professor jointly appointed in History at Nanyang Technological University, and as Medical Humanities lead at the Lee Kong Chian Medical school in Singapore. He also serves as the vice-president of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine (IASTAM). His work focusses on the relationship between

Chinese medicine and religions, both in early imperial China and in the modern period, within China and abroad. This includes the broad spread of healthcare and self-cultivation practices, and how cultural categories such as religion and medicine are used to organize them. He holds a PhD in Medical History from University College London, and a clinical degree in Chinese medicine. He has previously held research appointments at the Wellcome Centre for History of Medicine, the Needham Research Institute, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and the Centre for the History of Knowledge in Berlin, Academia Sinica, and the University of Leipzig. His work has been funded by the Wellcome Trust, the Max Planck Institute, Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, Taiwan Ministry of Education, Taiwan Ministry of Science and Technology, Singapore Ministry of Education, Singapore National Heritage Board, and the Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS.

Presentation 1 (Onsite)

10:40-11:10

Hyojin LEE (Assistant Professor, Ca' Foscari University, Italy)

“Korean Traditional Medicine Met Western Medicine: Transformation of Korean Traditional Medicine Studies during Colonial Period”

Traditional Korean Medicine has still accepted as one mainstream medical treatment in Korea, and Korean Medicine Doctors (KMD) are performing various treatments not only acupuncture but making a diagnosis, physical therapy, and prescript herbal medicine. Since Gwanhyewon (廣惠院, Government Hospital), the first modern hospital, opened in 1885 by Horace N. Allen, many western medicine hospitals were established subsequently. The treatments and theories of traditional medicine were regarded as backward and unscientific medicine and considered as one of the old customs to be replaced by Western Medicine. Not only the external threat, self-reflections and criticisms among Korean scholars also summon the crisis of Eastern medicine. Confronting with Western Medicine and the inner criticisms, enhancement and development were the top priorities to the Eastern doctors. For this, they organized associations and published journals such as *A Bulletin of East and West Medicine* (東西醫學報), *East and West Medicine Research Society Monthly View* (東西醫學研究會月報), and *Eastern Medical Herbs* (東洋醫藥). This presentation explores the discourses between Eastern and Western medicine by examining writing in the journal *East and West Medicine Research Society Monthly View*. Lastly, I will examine the main arguments between two Koreanists Jo Heon-Yeong and Kim Tae-Jun's debates in the Newspaper and seek the development and transformation of Korean medicine during the colonial period.

Presentation 2 (ZOOM)

11:10-11:40

Hyejung Grace KONG (Research Professor, Konyang University College of Medicine)
**“Christianity and Pioneering Women in Modern Medicine: A Comparative Study on
China and Korea”**

This study conducts a comparative historical research on two pioneering female physicians in Korea and China who learned and practiced Western medicine in the United States at the birth of modern medicine and subsequently treated women and children in their native countries: Esther Kim Pak (金點童, 1877—1910) in Korea and Ida Kahn (康成, Kang Cheng, 1873—1930) in China. Pak and Kahn were assisted and supported in obtaining medical education in the United States by two American female missionaries serving for the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS): Rosetta Sherwood Hall (1865—1951) in Korea and Gertrude Howe (1847—1928) in China. The existing scholarship on these two pioneering female physicians and their missionary guardians has not taken a comparative perspective. Thus, the individual lives of these physicians as well as their medical and religious efforts with the WFMS are investigated from a comparative perspective in this study. In doing so, this study shows that Western culture and Christianity introduced by the WFMS missionaries in Korea and China allowed both Pak and Kahn to become “New Women” by overcoming conventional social and cultural norms that have discouraged women from becoming doctors. Both Hall and Howe came from religiously conservative but socially progressive families. Influenced by the Deaconess Movement and inspired by medical missionary work in India, they chose to pursue overseas mission work, that is, “Woman Work for Woman.” Right after Hall and Howe arrived in Korea and China respectively, they developed lifelong family-like relationships and Christian sisterhood with Pak and Kahn. Similarly, both Pak and Kahn came from the lower class and were educated in Christian schools established and managed by American missionary women. As they changed their native names by anglicizing or choosing a baptismal name, they were also accustomed to Western culture and Christianity. With help and support of WFMS missionaries (primarily Hall and Howe), both studied medicine in the United States. While both Hall and Pak were widowed and lost their children, Howe and Kahn were single and adopted children from illness. After returning to their home countries as medical missionaries for the WFMS, Pak and Kahn practiced medicine for women and children. By investigating two pioneering female physicians in Korea and China, this study contributes to the history of medicine, women’s history, and the history of Christianity in Korea and China.

Presentation 2 (ZOOM)

11:10-11:40

Sujung KIM (Associate Professor, DePauw University)

“Battle Royal and Healing: Gu Talismans in Korea”

Gu poisoning 蠱毒 (Kr. kodok), one of the most ancient poisoning methods that originated in southern China, had a long-lasting imprint on the art of killing and healing in Korea. Gu poisoning was by far the most wanted and persecuted practice in East Asia, and due to its versatility and virulence the Chosŏn court even had to legalize the practice during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). This was also the time during which Korean religious specialists utilized gu talismans as a major antidote to the infamous toxin. The paper examines this largely ignored material, talismans, especially talismans used against gu poisoning. By linking the broader historical, cultural, and ritual practices around the use of gu talismans in East Asia to particular Korean historical contexts, the paper aims at explaining how gu talismans came to be both a therapeutic application and a deadly “poison” itself. Contrary to the common, simplistic labeling of gu poisoning and talismanic practice as “folk medicine” or “black magic,” the paper locates gu talismans in the history of medicine in Asia while emphasizing their dual functionality: on the one hand, these talismans blur the thin line between poisoning and healing, and, on the other hand, they operate as an interface that allowed for the assimilation and assertion of different strains of esoteric thought and practices across Buddhist, Daoist, and shamanic culture in Korea.

Presentation 4 (ZOOM)

15:00-15:30

Celine CODEREY (Research Fellow, Tembusu College National University of Singapore)

“Contested yet Immortal: The Exceptional Potency of Burmese Alchemy”

Gold ash’ (shway pya), a substance Burmese alchemists produce through a complex process of the combination and burning of metals, is considered by many Burmese as the most potent medical ingredient existing in the country. In this article, I explore the factors underpinning its exceptional potency. Grounding my analysis on ethnography conducted in Myanmar since 2004, and more specifically on the case study of Master U Shein (1926-2014), the most well-known alchemist of the country, I illustrate the multiple facets of gold medicine’s potency and show how they emerged from the dialogue between the substance and the layers of meanings it has come to acquire by its existence within a specific social and political space. In particular, I show how gold medicine has come to occupy a controversial position given that it both contrasts with the biomedical paradigm and is perceived as a threat to state power. I argue that although this controversial position limits its growth, it also provides it with a specific political power, which, alongside the medical and spiritual power traditionally attributed to it, allows it to circulate in that inimical space. I also show that such resilience has been aided by the blurriness and weakness of the regulatory system as well as the great inadequacy and inaccessibility of the biomedical system.

Presentation 5 (Onsite)

15:30-16:00

Carmen **SIMIOLI** (Research fellow, L'Orientale, University of Napoli)

Epidemics According to Tibetan Medieval Medicine

Gold ash' (shway pya), a substance Burmese alchemists produce through a complex process of the combination and burning of metals, is considered by many Burmese as the most potent medical ingredient existing in the country. In this article, I explore the factors underpinning its exceptional potency. Grounding my analysis on ethnography conducted in Myanmar since 2004, and more specifically on the case study of Master U Shein (1926-2014), the most well-known alchemist of the country, I illustrate the multiple facets of gold medicine's potency and show how they emerged from the dialogue between the substance and the layers of meanings it has come to acquire by its existence within a specific social and political space. In particular, I show how gold medicine has come to occupy a controversial position given that it both contrasts with the biomedical paradigm and is perceived as a threat to state power. I argue that although this controversial position limits its growth, it also provides it with a specific political power, which, alongside the medical and spiritual power traditionally attributed to it, allows it to circulate in that inimical space. I also show that such resilience has been aided by the blurriness and weakness of the regulatory system as well as the great inadequacy and inaccessibility of the biomedical system.

Presentation 6 (ZOOM)

16:15-16:45

Anna **ANDREEVA** (Ghent University)

“Protective Talismans for Childbirth and Women's Reproductive Health in Premodern Japan”

Childbirth was considered an unpredictable and risky affair in medieval Japan. Prone to interferences by hungry ghosts and disruptions by demons, pregnancy and childbirth required meticulous preparation and serious material and ritual assistance. Both women' and infants' mortality was quite high and, according to Buddhist beliefs, death in childbirth was one of the outcomes that could lead to rebirth in the Blood Pool Hell; no doubt, a fearsome prospect for many women. Politically savvy elite, including the noble and warrior households, thus invested considerable resources in fostering the different kinds of expertise that helped their daughters and wives to safely go through with their pregnancies. Non-elite women, too, certainly had basic knowledge of how to avoid risks and used charms against infertility and birth complications.

Drawing on previously unpublished Buddhist manuscripts and surviving historical sources, my paper will investigate medieval Japanese talismans for women, which were designed to safeguard their bodies and their gestating fetuses throughout the months of pregnancy, unpredictable hours of labor, and critical moments of childbirth. These talismans were drawn in black or vermilion ink on strips of paper, and then plastered on a woman's abdomen, or burnt and their ashes ingested, or used as an intravaginal unguent. The talismans were reinforced with potent spells written in Sanskrit seed syllables or Daoist characters; some were derived from Indian and Buddhist paradigms of knowledge, whereas others can be traced back to Chinese Daoist and medical ways of learning. By tracing the talisman elements to these culturally different paradigms and gendered ways of knowing, I will argue that these modest strips of paper used by women could be understood as repositories of coded knowledge aimed to mitigate several specific uncertainty gaps and represented shared gendered knowledge which was transculturally and transregionally adopted throughout medieval Japan and broader East Asia.

Presentation 7 (ZOOM)

16:45-17:15

Andrew **MACOMBER** (Assistant Professor, Oberlin College)

“Everything Evil in You: Metapersonal Irritants in the Buddhist Immune System”

Certain traditions of ritual healing in Buddhism have long been understood to operate upon the notion that disease arises when external demons attack or invade the body. Although the centrality of demonology to much Buddhist healing is indeed beyond dispute, to emphasize an ontological distinction between demonic disease agent and passive human victim is to risk obscuring the extent to which these two were often imagined to be deeply intertwined, both physically and morally. This paper addresses the entanglement of pathogen and patient by turning a light on the prominent place in Buddhist medical discourse of pathological “metapersons,” those largely unseen and malicious entities thought to afflict the living, often by influencing the latter's desires and conduct. In particular, I examine the place of demons, māras, body worms, and corpse-worms within a healing ritual created by medieval Japanese monks of the Jimon branch of the Tendai school for the treatment of “corpse-vector disease” (denshibyō). Focusing on how these metapersons figure in the monks' account of this contagious and fatal illness, I uncover an etiological logic that, rather than merely exteriorizing causation, in fact distributes agency across the divide between disease-bringer and disease-sufferer. This distributed notion of disease causation, I argue, is a consequence of what we might call the Buddhist “immune system,” a decidedly physiomoral view of the human body that by constitution gravitates toward illness and its moral catalysts just as stubbornly as it tries to resist them. The resulting picture diverges from traditional images of external demonic invasion. Instead, we observe a partially auto-immune process in which pathological metapersons and patients act in tandem as co-producers of a vicious cycle of desire, disease, contagion, and death.