

AAS 2019 Plan

I. Participants

Discussant:

Joan Piggott (University of Southern California)

Presenters:

Akemi Banse (University of Tokyo)

Jiyoung Kim (Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies, the Academy of Korean Studies)

Liping Mao (Qing Institute of Renmin University of China)

Sachiko Kawai (University of Southern California)

Session Chair/ Organizer:

Sachiko Kawai

II. Panel Topic and Abstract

Topic

Negotiating Tension: Rituals, Gender Scripts, and Court Practices in China, Japan, and Korea, 1100-1700

Panel Abstract (250 words maximum):

The pull of patriarchy was strong in premodern East Asian court societies, and yet daughters played indispensable roles in supporting family honor and prosperity, providing both political and cultural capital. This panel examines how Chinese, Japanese, and Korean royal and aristocratic women served the interests of their families, successfully negotiating existing gender norms, regulations, and power relations during the twelfth through eighteenth centuries. Specifically Akemi Banse challenges the widespread assumption of unfree servants across premodern East Asia, arguing that attendants at twelfth-, thirteenth-, and fourteenth-century royal courts in Japan were free to come and go from court and that their service could improve their families' reputation and their own life opportunities. Sachiko Kawai examines how protocols for birth rituals that welcomed royal and aristocratic children into the world affirmed and subverted socio-cultural expectations and gender roles in Heian and Kamakura Japan (794-1333). Jiyoung Kim demonstrates how marriage rituals for a king's daughter in seventeenth-century Korea did not confirm to Confucian gender norms but rather highlighted her status and roles as a member of the royal family. Liping Mao reveals how changing marital and funeral ritual practices for Qing-dynasty (1644-1911) princesses reflected increasing political tension between their Mongolian husbands' families and the royal court in the era of Qing political consolidation. A key objective of this panel is to stimulate comparative thinking about the tension between prescriptive rules and dynamically changing social conditions in the spheres of gender and power negotiations in East Asia.

III. Kawai's Paper Abstract

What Should A Woman Be: Clues from Birth Celebrations in Early Medieval Japan

Sachiko Kawai

Life-cycle ceremonies for children in Heian and Kamakura times reminded participants of socially prescribed roles and unwritten laws. These rituals suggest how contemporaries viewed and treated young members of their families. By examining celebratory rituals (*ubuyashinai*) held for royal and aristocratic newborns, this paper explores how such rituals reflected, performed, and helped to configure gender scripts. Through close analysis of courtier journals, this study shows that rituals held for both boys and girls were relatively parallel—sons and daughters were both welcomed into the family as indispensable members. Interestingly, however, while aristocratic babies received remarks encouraging them to pursue gender-determined careers—boys should attain high court official posts and girls should become royal wives—royal offspring received gender-neutral remarks during their birth rituals. Even more interestingly, such gender-neutral expectations for royal offspring actually contradicted historical reality, since career paths for royal daughters were by no means equal to those for men. Such ritualistic performances, however, were important for reminding court society of royal daughters' significant status and critical roles in supporting the royal line. In particular ceremonial exhortations for a royal daughter's longevity highlighted her future responsibilities to memorialize deceased family members and to adopt royal children who needed her mentorship and support.