

Two Lectures on Japanese Buddhist Art

(In person only) 15:00-18:00, 27 May (Sat) 2023

Room 301 (3F), Building 10, Yotsuya Campus, Sophia University

Please register: <https://forms.office.com/r/01n3wUDGHd>



Distinguishing the Phoenix: Conceptual Landscapes of Buddhist India in Medieval Japan (15:00-)

Rachel Saunders

Buddhist India, known as “Tenjiku” 天竺 in medieval Japan, was the object of intense focus as the sacred homeland of the Buddha, but from which Japanese Buddhists were irrevocably removed by both time and distance. Devotees sought to bridge this distance by re-configuring the contours of the local landscape through cognitive mapping to the distant, sacred, and unseen. Yet the question remains: when no-one in medieval Japan had seen or experienced the Indian landscape, how was the nature of a thing of which one has only heard tell, but never seen, discerned? This talk examines this question by following in the picto-textual footsteps of the celebrated Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘三藏 (ca. 602–664) through two very different fourteenth century versions of his epic historical journey to India, revealing two contrasting modes of devotional looking that produced sacred place-time in Kamakura Japan.

Rachel Saunders is Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Curator of Asian Art at the Harvard Art Museums. She earned her Ph.D. from Harvard University and is a specialist in medieval narrative painting. Her recent publications include *Painting Edo*, which accompanied the recent special exhibition of the same name, and the co-edited volume *Hābādo Bijutsukan Nambutsu Taishi zō no kenkyū*.

Echoes of the Past: Korean Buddhist Bells that Rang at Shrines in Japan and Ryukyu (16:20-)

Sherry Fowler

Two bells that were cast in the tenth and eleventh century in Korea serve as significant bridges of inter-regional exchange with Japan and Ryukyu. Both bronze bells, adorned with dragons and heavenly imagery, were cast for Buddhist temples in Korea. Both travelled across the sea before the modern era, and both came to reside at Shinto shrines—one in Japan and one in Ryukyu. My study utilizes object biography to analyze the life stories and images of these two bells and also calls upon cultural and materiality studies to address how the bells’ relationships affected humans over time as they pivoted between their varied regional, religious, and literary roles. The talk will also consider how fantastic new narratives were constructed to offer explanations for the purported self-determined relocations of these old bells and how their later depictions travelled far beyond the distance their sounds and physical bodies could ever go.

Sherry Fowler is Professor of Japanese Art History at the University of Kansas. Her publications include *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan and Murōji: Rearranging Art and History at a Japanese Buddhist Temple* and she is currently writing a book on the theme of Buddhist bells, dragons, and water.