

Workshop “Transnational Goddesses and Ritual Transformations in East Asia”

University of Oslo, 6-7 May 2024

12th floor, Niels Treschows hus (see <https://www.uio.no/english/about/getting-around/areas/blindern/bl08/>)

Day 1, Monday 6 May

9.15-9.45 Welcome, introductions, objectives

Part I Premodern maritime connections

9.45-10.45 Emily B. Simpson, Wake Forest University

Who is the Sacred Mother? Investigating the Worship of Mazu and Jingū in Kyushu

10.45-11.00 Break

11.00-12.00 Elke Papelitzky, University of Oslo

Sailing the Waters of East and Southeast Asia: Ming Chinese Navigators and Their Religious Practices

12.00-12.45 Lunch

Part II Kannon in modern imperialism and nationalism

12.45-13.45 Clinton Godart, Tohoku University

Kannon Movements and the Imperial Japanese Navy in Modern Japan

13.45-14.45 Daigengna Duoer, University of California, Santa Barbara

Pan-Asianist Bodhisattvas at the Buddhist Yasukuni: Kōa Kannon and the Post-WWII Remembrance of Transnational Colonial Violence

14.45-15.00 Break

Part III Religious diversity in modern China (and beyond)

15.00-16.00 Daniel Mohseni Kabir Bäckström, University of Oslo (via Zoom)

Nang Tuolani: Goddess of Transnational and Transcosmic Flows

16.00-17.00 Francesca Tarocco, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Guanyin Halls and Vegetarian Sisterhoods in China and Southeast Asia

19.00-21.00 Dinner at Feniqia, Rostockgate 66, Oslo (see <https://www.feniqia.no/>)

Day 2, Tuesday 7 May

Part IV Comparative perspectives from further south

10.00-11.00 Aike P. Rots, University of Oslo
Goddesses of South and Central Vietnam: Mapping the Pantheon

11.00-12.00 Kathinka Frøystad, University of Oslo
Kali's Political Paradox: Notes from a North Indian Temple

12.00-13.00 Lunch

Part V Transnational connections in Japanese popular religion

13.00-14.00 Mark Teeuwen, University of Oslo
Gender Play in the Village Festivals of Rural Mikawa

14.00-15.00 Erica Baffelli, University of Manchester
San'ya's Kannon: Shared Vulnerabilities, Marginalities, and a Connection to Support Each Other

15.00-15.15 Break

Part VI Moving forward

15.15-16.15 Natasha Heller, University of Virginia
Circuits and CO2: An Ecological Reading of Mazu Worship

16.15-17.00 Final discussion: goddess worship, ecology, and transnational flows

17.30-21.00 Drinks and dinner (self-funded; location t.b.d.)

ABSTRACTS

Who is the Sacred Mother? Investigating the Worship of Mazu and Jingū in Kyushu

Emily B. Simpson, Wake Forest University

Due to Empress Jingū's legendary conquest of the Korean peninsula, many Shinto shrines located in Kyushu draw connections to Jingū's journey and enshrine her as a goddess. In particular, several shrines label her the Sacred Mother, drawing on the motifs of her pregnancy with and subsequent birth of Emperor Ōjin. This began in the late medieval period (1333-1600), when shrine-temple origin stories describe Jingū's pregnant body and include details of her labor. Yet, they refer to Jingū as a Buddhist deity: the Sacred Mother Bodhisattva (*seibo daibosatsu* 聖母大菩薩). Though the appellation "sacred mother" was applied to key female figures and deities in China ranging from the Buddha's mother Māyā to Guanyin to Empress Wu Zetian, it is most closely associated today with Mazu, a maritime goddess worshiped largely within the Sinosphere. Nevertheless, shrines venerating Mazu can also be found in Okinawa and Kyushu. In this project, I aim to chart the geographical range of these "sacred mother shrines" in Kyushu and discover the history of their associations with Mazu, Jingū, and possibly both. While preliminary research suggests that sacred mother shrines in northern Kyushu favor Jingū and those in southern Kyushu favor Mazu, I suspect there is some overlap worth exploring further.

Sailing the Waters of East and Southeast Asia: Ming Chinese Navigators and Their Religious Practices

Elke Papelitzky, University of Oslo

In the early modern period, the waters of East and Southeast Asia saw a bustling maritime trade. To conduct this trade, ships needed competent sailors to safely travel between ports. Chinese sources from the Ming period name one person as particularly important: the *huozhang* 火長. Each ship had several of these on board that rotated their duties. The sources also tell us that the *huozhang* were charged to use the compass and employing sailing manuals to guide the direction the ship should take. Aside from technical instructions, these manuals also include information on prayers and sacrifices to be conducted at specific locations, most likely to Mazu. This paper will analyse these mentions of sacrifices to discuss how they played into concrete navigational practices and how goddesses were understood to help navigating safely.

Kannon Movements and the Imperial Japanese Navy in Modern Japan

Clinton Godart, Tohoku University

This talk will provide an overview of modern Buddhist movements centered around Kannon/Kanzeon bodhisattva in modern Japan. In recent decades, there has been a boom in studies on modernist Buddhist movements that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Japan, these studies largely focused on rationalist, philosophical, and modern faith-centered figures (especially of the Pure Land School) who had little interest in bodhisattvas or deities. However, the same period saw a large discourse and growth of movements centered around bodhisattva Kannon. Some aspects of Kannon faith confirm trends of Buddhist modernism while illuminating new dimensions, but much can be seen as not fitting in current master narratives of modern Buddhism. Especially from the Taishō period, there was a rapid growth in publications and groups focused on Kannon faith. Many modernist Kannon interpretations saw Kannon as either an abstract model of the true self, or representing the universe. But we also see the return of miraculous salvation stories. Kannon Buddhism was also mobilized for empire and militarism. Several high-ranking and high-profile officers in the Imperial Japanese Navy, who included Kannon faith in their religious repertoire, promoted a version of Kannon faith in support of a militarist ethos and a maritime empire.

Pan-Asianist Bodhisattvas at the Buddhist Yasukuni: Kōa Kannon and the Post-WWII Remembrance of Transnational Colonial Violence

Daigengna Duoer, University of California, Santa Barbara

This paper explores the historical and ritual significance of the Kōa Kannon site in Atami, Japan, established in 1940 under the patronage of the Japanese Imperial Army general Iwane Matsui (松井石根, 1878-1948) to commemorate the war dead from both sides of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Purportedly facing China and made from earth taken from Nanjing and its surrounding battlefields, the Buddhist statue was named “Avalokitesvara for Asia’s Prosperity” (Kōa Kannon 興亜観音) by Matsui, who was well-known for creating the Greater Asia Association (Dai-Ajia Kyōkai 大亜細亜協会) and his pan-Asianist visions to promote the “liberation” of the Asian peoples from Western imperial powers. By discussing the site’s material culture and ritual practices around the Kōa Kannon, and the usage of the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine of *onshin byōdō* (怨親平等 “enemy and ally as equal”), this paper investigates how the site uses Buddhist symbols and concepts to address colonial violence, war responsibility, and the problem of evil. Three key observations emerge: the site’s nationalist resistance against postwar justice, its necropolitical management of the war dead, and its attempted erasure of colonial violence through the idea of non-discriminatory

compassion and Buddhist universalism. This paper sheds light on the complex nexus of religion, politics, and memory in post-WWII Japan's commemorative practices.

Nang Tuolani: Goddess of Transnational and Transcosmic Flows

Daniel Mohseni Kabir Bäckström, University of Oslo

Worshiped across Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia and Southern China, the earth goddess Nang Tuolani (also known as Nang Thorani, Mae Thorani, and Wathondara), is a testament to a long history of transnational flows. While she is an important goddess from Cambodia to China, among the Blang, a small Austroasiatic speaking group living along the mountainous China-Myanmar border, she aides humans in ways that are undocumented elsewhere. For my Blang friends and interlocutors Nang Tuolani—who they gloss in Chinese as “our Guanyin”—is not just a transnational but a transcosmic goddess, who is able to traverse the chthonic realms and bring merit and blessings for the beings there. This ability is called upon by the monks during certain rituals when merits and blessings are shared with beings in the underworlds, by pointing to the ground with a wooden stick calling upon Nang Tuolani. The origins of this infrastructural technology is located in a local version of the story of the Buddha's enlightenment. Unlike in other Theravada traditions, among the Blang the Buddha is said to have called on Nang Tuolani by placing his monk's staff against the ground. Because the Blang do not write their language, and because writing is impermanent, they also call on Nang Tuolani and other gods to write down their offerings to the Buddha, so that they can be tallied on the positive side of the ledger as they meet Phaya Yum (Yama) in the underworld. Building on this, my presentation will discuss Nang Tuolani's role as a bridge of transnational and transcosmic flows, and how a study of Nang Tuolani can deepen both our knowledge of Southeast Asian history and ritual as a form of infrastructure and information technology between worlds.

Guanyin Halls and Vegetarian Sisterhoods in China and Southeast Asia

Francesca Tarocco, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

This paper investigates the spread of Guanyin Halls in Southern China, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur between the first half of the twentieth century and today.

Goddesses of South and Central Vietnam: Mapping the Pantheon

Aike P. Rots, University of Oslo

Vietnam is home to many goddesses. In recent years, northern Vietnamese Mother Goddess worship (Đạo Mẫu; also known as Religion of the Four Palaces) and related spirit mediumship practices (*lên đồng* or *hầu bóng*) have received ample scholarly attention. By contrast, there has not been much research on the various goddess traditions of central and southern Vietnam. Philip Taylor's *Goddess on the Rise* is a notable exception, but it dates from 2004; little research has been conducted on this topic since. Despite the scarcity of academic attention, southern Vietnam has a great diversity of goddess temples, festivals, devotional movements, and pilgrimage sites, many of which appear to have increased in popularity since the turn of the century. Some of them, such as Dinh Cô in Long Hải, are local women who were deified after their death, comparable to Mazu in Fujian. Others are associated with natural elements (Bà Ngũ Hành) or marine animals (Bà Thủy). Although they have been Vietnamised and incorporated into local and national pantheons, a significant proportion of these goddesses are of Cham (Bà Chúa Ngọc, Bà Vàng, Thiên Y A Na), Khmer (Bà Đen, Bà Chúa Xứ, Thủy Long Thánh Mẫu), Chinese (Quan Âm Nam Hải, Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu), Indian (Bà Thu Bồn), or Middle Eastern (Đức Mẹ Maria) origin. Many of them are associated with bodies of water, such as seas and rivers, or with sacred mountains. In this presentation, I will introduce a number of goddesses I have encountered during my research on Vietnamese popular religion in recent years, and discuss some of the sacred sites and rituals associated with them. What role do these goddesses play in contemporary Vietnamese society, politics, economics, and ecology? Do they all fall under the umbrella of Đạo Mẫu, or is it problematic to consider all these practices as aspects of a single national tradition? To what extent do southern and central Vietnamese goddess rituals correspond to patterns and practices elsewhere in Asia?

Kali's Political Paradox: Notes from a North Indian Temple

Kathinka Frøystad, University of Oslo

As one of India's so-called "fierce" goddesses, Kali is ruthless and unpredictable in her fight against evil. Drawing on mythological texts, her iconography commonly portrays her with the blood-dripping sickle (*khagda*) she used for killing demons, the heads of which adorn her body as a necklace. Across India, Kali still requires sacrificial items in the form of goats, roosters and alcohol to be pacified, though flowers, money, sweets and coconuts normally suffice for everyday purposes. Occasionally Kali possesses people, and if this occurs voluntarily, the possessed person enables the goddess to speak.

What can long-term anthropological observations from a modest Kali temple in northern India tell us about the contemporary politics of Kali? Loosely inspired by Robert Yelle, I will suggest that possession tends to be a threat to any given political order since one never knows what the goddess, whose sovereignty is unmatched, will say. Possession is thus frequently dismissed as superstition or, as in the temple I studied, as money-generating theatrics. But inspired by Nandini Gooptu, I will also argue that, since many followers turned to the goddess with their problems rather than mobilizing vis-à-vis the state, Kali worship also curbs the articulation of political demands. Kali is thus both dangerously political and astonishingly depoliticizing, which is likely to affect her mobility across different social, political and geographical contexts as well as the transformations she undergoes as she moves.

Gender Play in the Village Festivals of Rural Mikawa

Mark Teeuwen, University of Oslo

Villages in the hills of Mikawa (Aichi Prefecture) are known for their mid-winter dancing festivals, called Hanamatsuri. Local ritualists known as *dayū* (“masters”) have played a central role in these festivals up to the present day. Many of these *dayū* preserve documents that go back to the sixteenth century. In this talk, I will draw on ritual texts (*saimon*) from *dayū* chests and lofts, focusing on two aspects. The first is the prominence of foreign realms (notably India and the Dragon Palace) as sources of dangerous “roaming deities” that bring both disease and healing to the village. The second is the appearance of new female gods in *dayū* incantations that seek to soothe these roaming deities and “return them to their original abode”. Deities (typically called “princes”, *ōji*) who retain obvious marks of an earlier masculine identity are feminized and greatly amplified in some of these texts. What is the function of this gender play, and how does it relate to the ritual settings where these incantations were sung?

San’ya’s Kannon: Shared Vulnerabilities, Marginalities, and a Connection to Support Each Other

Erica Baffelli, University of Manchester

This paper will focus on two statues of Kannon (Sanskrit: Avalokiteśvara; Chinese: Guanyin) located in the ground of a small temple in the San’ya neighbourhood of Tokyo. One of them, called Asakusa San’ya Kōjun Kannon あさくさ山谷光潤観音, is encased on a large ossuary

in the cemetery outside the temple and has a rosary on its chest. This ossuary is one of three graves in this cemetery that are not extended-family graves in the conventional term, but are intended to be open to everyone, including people “without connections” in their lives, mainly rough sleepers, but also individuals who have cut their ties with family members, independently of their religious affiliation.

The other statue, called Meishō Kannon 明照觀音, is a large three metres high white marble statue and it was shipped from Vietnam in 2022. The statue is a gift from the family of a young Vietnamese priest who was ordained at the temple in late 2021.

By tracing the history and rituals related to the two statues this paper highlights the developments of networks between the temple, its volunteers, the local community and the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Tokyo. In particular, it will look at how these statues are connected to the concept of *shien* 支縁, cultivated by the head priest at the temple, which combines the idea of (material) support (*shien*, 支援) with the Buddhist notion of *en* 縁, a bond or karmic connection. This “connection of reciprocal support” encompasses the past, through the funeral rituals and the karmic connections. It also connects to the present, assisting people who need material help in their current situation, be it medical help, food, or a shelter. Finally, it offers the promise of a future connection, based on the understanding of mutual interdependence and reciprocal support.

Circuits and CO2: An Ecological Reading of Mazu Worship

Natasha Heller, University of Virginia

This paper attempts to think through the environmental implications of how a god or goddess’s worldly domain is defined, and how the deity moves through it. I will take as a case study Mazu 媽祖, a goddess of great popularity and importance in Taiwan. The ubiquity of her worship should not obscure that there are many Mazu (indeed, not all known primarily as “Mazu”) with different relations to their territory. Within Taiwan, Mazu might have a local, regional, national, or transnational identity. I will examine an example of each, with special attention to how the goddess circuits her territory. In contrast with her initial associations with the sea, and the expansion of her cult through maritime routes, Mazu’s modern transportation is land-based—with one important exception. When Mazu is part of a transnational network, she usually travels by airplane; this results in a far larger carbon footprint than other types of inspection tours. By considering the differing scales and carbon costs of Mazu’s varied circuits, I will argue that attending to the process of a deity’s territorialization helps us understand how religion is, or can be, enmeshed with ecological concerns.