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2016 KYOTO LECTURES

Wednesday, December 14th, 18:00h

Matthias Hayek SPEAKER

Arts of Numbers: Fortune-telling Methods in Early Modern Japan

Anyone who has walked through a shopping avenue in Japan knows that fortune-telling parlors are a staple part of the landscape. Divination in Japan is still well alive, and continues to meet a demand from the public. This was, however, even truer during the Edo period (1600-1868), when fortune telling was an essential component of daily life in many more respects. Prolonging a trend already visible during the late Middle Ages, popular diviners and soothsayers appear to have grown exponentially in number alongside the development of cities and the stabilizing of rural areas. *Yamabushi* and village physicians—quite often the same individual—as well as urban fortune-tellers were expected to help people get rid of their ailments, find lost properties or relatives, or chose an auspicious name and/or life partner. To do so, they had a vast array of techniques at their disposal, in part due to the expansion of commercial printing, which allowed for a large diffusion of introductory books. Following the evolution of their contents, format, and authorship can in turn help us to detect the underlying trends of this lore within technical, cosmological, or even religious discourses and practices. The talk will offer a comprehensive picture of these techniques, their users and media, and shed light on the rationale(s) that ran through the “skills and arts of numbers”.

Matthias Hayek is an Associate Professor at Paris Diderot University, and a member of the Research Center of East-Asian Civilizations. His research deals with the history and sociology of Japanese beliefs and knowledges, with a focus on early modern books on divination and magic, their contents, authors and reception. As a Visiting Research Scholar at Nichibunken, he is currently working on late-17th-early-18th century encyclopedias and essays. He has co-edited with Annick Horiuchi *Listen, Copy, Read: Popular Learning in Early Modern Japan* (2014), and his recent publications include “The Eight Trigrams and Their Changes: Divination in Early Modern Japan”, in *Daoism in Japan*, edited par Jeffrey D. Richey (Routledge-Curzon, 2015), and “*Urayasan: chūsei makki no uranai no shosō*”, in *Mō hitotsu no Nihonbugakushi: Muromachi, seiai, jikan*, edited by National Institute of Japanese Literature (2016).

This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room 1, 1st floor).

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