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War and Remembrance

What began as a discussion between two scholars on the centrality of war as a cultural presence during the centuries of samurai rule in Japan has expanded into a daylong symposium at UC Santa Barbara.

On Friday, May 8, an interdisciplinary group of scholars of medieval and early modern Japanese literature, history, religion and performing arts will gather at UCSB for “War and Remembrance: Cultural Imprints of Japan’s Samurai Age.” The researchers will examine cultural responses to events occurring during Japan’s years of military rule (late 12th to the late 19th centuries). Exploring a range of representations and responses to war, participants will address the impacts of war on cultural memory and production.

The symposium begins at 8 a.m. in the Flying A Studios Room of the campus’s University Center. It is free and open to the public.

“With the samurai ruling class, war was a constant feature of both the medieval and early modern periods but in very different ways — actively in medieval Japan and hovering as a defining characteristic in peacetime early-modern Japan,” said Katherine Saltzman-Li, a professor in UCSB’s Department of East Asian Languages & Cultural Studies and the symposium organizer. “We felt that while scholars necessarily specialize in specific periods and sub-periods, there was a value to examining the full sweep of samurai-led centuries to understand the cultural impact of war and its shaping influences.”

The symposium will consist of three panels, with the first, “Narrating and Performing War Memories,” examining ways in which the remembrance of war has been treated in both medieval and early modern performing arts, with specific attention to actual performance practices.

The panel “Siting Memories of the Dead” will look at sites of remembrance for war dead, as presented in papers by two scholars of medieval Japanese literature and of medieval religious studies, respectively. In the final panel, “War and Peace,” three scholars of early modern history, performing arts and literature will examine uses of past war experiences in the period of peacetime samurai rule.

“The symposium’s premise of war’s centrality in cultural production during Japan’s centuries of samurai political control demands interdisciplinarity to make its arguments,” said Saltzman-Li. “If war and remembrance of war was indeed a constant in wartime and in peacetime cultural practices, research and conversation across not only time periods but also disciplines is required.”

Symposium panelists and speakers include scholars from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Southern California, Yale University, Princeton University Kyoto City University of the Arts and Haverford College. Participants from UCSB include Luke Roberts, professor of history; Fabio Rambelli, professor and chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies; and Emily Simpson, a graduate student of pre-modern Japan.

Additional information about the symposium, including a complete schedule of events, can be found at <http://samuraiwarmemories.weebly.com>.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.