

(UPDATED) Call for Abstracts for Graduate and ECR Symposium

Theme: Writing the Supernatural into History in Pre-Modern East Asia.

Deadline: 31 December 2020

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There is an explosion at a gunpowder factory in seventeenth-century Beijing; late-Ming historians describe it as a divine harbinger of dynastic decline. An emperor dies and his enemies establish a new regime; the writers of the *Taiheiki* (Record of Great Peace) see his vengeful ghost as haunting his usurpers, sowing chaos and disorder. The war god, Guandi manifests on the battlefield, bringing victory to the Ming and Joseon soldiers against the Japanese invaders; or at least this is how it is explained in the *Imjin Nok* (Record of the Imjin War). Extraordinary planetary movements in the skies of 1524 are read as an omen of armed rebellion; the emperor issues a decree claiming responsibility for the celestial disquiet, and pledging rectification.

The supernatural features in history and historiography as a phenomenon, an omen, a cause or consequence, a tool, or a re-purposing of historical memory. It can also be a silence, omitted through censorship or disbelief. In these diverse ways, the supernatural was an integral part of the pre-modern East Asian worldview.

This one-day symposium aims to bring together graduate students and early-career researchers who are interested in history, historiography, and the role that the supernatural plays in shaping both. The hope is to promote discussion about how we as scholars talk about the supernatural, how we juxtapose ‘fact’ against ‘fiction’, and how we study the supernatural in national and regional contexts.

Potential topics include:

- The pivotal role accorded to supernatural entities in narratives of historical events.
- The development of historical figures into otherworldly beings, whether demons, ghosts, or deities.

- The historical use of the supernatural to justify actions and outcomes, such as the establishment of a new regime.
- The writing of extraordinary events into historical narratives.
- The collection and organisation of information about the supernatural in context of the historical past.
- How the state censors certain activities, organisations, or figures by labelling them heterodox or magical.
- How scholars write about the supernatural in relation to history, write over the supernatural by privileging rational explanations of events, or write it out entirely by ignoring so-called unreliable or fictionalised accounts.
- How concepts such as ‘religion’, ‘magic’, ‘witchcraft’, ‘supernatural’, and ‘demonological worldview’ apply to pre-modern East Asia.

Graduate students at all stages of their research, and early-career researchers are welcome to submit abstracts of **250 words** for presentations of 15-20 minutes. We also invite panel proposals of **750 words** that explain the contributions of each panellist (three at most) and the panel as a whole. Submissions focusing on East Asia before 1900 are preferred, but other historical periods and geographical regions are also welcome for the perspective they provide.

Please submit abstracts to gradaeas@gmail.com. The submission deadline is **31st December 2020**. Results will be announced in late January 2021.

The symposium will be held online via Zoom in April 2021.

Sincerely,

The Graduate Association of East Asian Studies.

(GAEAS is an informal association of graduate students interested in East Asian history at Oxford and Cambridge.)

Image: “The Lightning Bolt” by Utagawa Yoshitsuya, c. 1865. Depicts the Emperor Sutoku as a vengeful spirit after his abdication and eventual death in exile. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.