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Council on East Asian Studies
at Yale University

Weinstein Dissertation Prize Lecture

***The Nara Court Under Buddhism:
The Religious Side of Political History in Ancient Japan***

LECTURE BY

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In the middle of 748, Queen Consort Kōmyō commissioned one hundred copies—many on fine colored paper—of a relatively obscure work, entitled the Scripture on Saving and Protecting Body and Life. This text promises protection from attacks by demons and sorcerers, as well as from other threats that plague humans living in an era of decline. She also sponsored one hundred copies of the Golden Light Sutra and three copies of the Scripture on Brahma's Spirit Tablets, a divination sutra, at the same time. This talk will place these three projects within the broader historical and cosmological climate of eighth-century Japan. While much scholarship on Buddhism and politics has focused on the way the court controlled the religion and used it to gain legitimacy, I will use these sutra copying projects to depict a world in which kings and queens were haunted by ghastly attacks and answered to celestial kings who threatened to punish the impious. In this environment, ritual was not merely an expressive tool used to justify political authority; Buddhist ideas were themselves an authoritative force that structured codes of conduct at the early Japanese court. Kings reigned through earthly laws, but they were governed by divine justice.

**Room 312
Hall of Graduate Studies
320 York Street**

**Thursday
March 10, 2016
4:00 pm**