



MCCLELLAN VISITING FELLOW IN JAPANESE STUDIES

The Buddha's Evil Twin: Another Look at Medieval Japanese Religion

4:30 - 6:00 PM

Thursday, October 13, 2016

Room 351, Loria Center, 190 York Street

Lecture by Bernard Faure

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Unlike early Buddhism, which seems on the whole unconcerned with the question of evil, much of medieval Japanese Buddhism has to do with exorcizing demons. In other words, premodern Japanese Buddhism was above all a demonology. But who were these demons, and why have they been neglected for so long by Buddhist scholarship? The Western distinction between gods and demons, with its moral connotations, is misleading. Most medieval deities were “demonic” (in the Greek sense of *daimon*) rather than “demoniac” (in the Christian sense). A paradigmatic case is that of an elusive deity called *Kōjin*: it reveals how, while Buddhism populated

the outside world with demons, it also interiorized them — finding evil (yet at the same time deliverance) at the innermost heart of human beings.

Demons of obstacles once stood in the way of Awakening and had to be ritually propitiated. Likewise, they stand today in the way of our scholarly understanding of premodern Japanese religion, and have to be paid their dues. The present paper is but a small step in that direction.