

English Translation Workshop on Japanese Historical Materials: Documents from Kanazawa Bunko

In late 2020, the *Historians' Workshop* (Graduate School of Economics, The University of Tokyo) sponsored the *English Translation Workshop on Japanese Historical Materials: Documents from Kanazawa Bunko*. This workshop focused on the translation and analysis of documents from Kanazawa Bunko 金沢文庫, known in English as the Kanagawa Prefecture Kanazawa Bunko Museum. The workshop took place on December 5 and was organized by Huang Xiaolong, who also served as discussant throughout the program. It featured presentations by Paula R. Curtis (University of California, Los Angeles; previously at Yale University), a scholar of medieval Japanese social and economic history, and three specialists from Kanazawa Bunko: Nikui Hiroe, Miwa Shinji, and Umezawa Megumi. Akae Yūichi (Keio University), a specialist in European medieval history, also offered comparative perspectives on the materials reviewed.

During the workshop, Nukui summarized the history and content of the Kanazawa Bunko document collection and outlined characteristics of the individual records. Dr. Curtis then provided an overview of how Kanazawa Bunko texts have been used (or not used) by Anglophone researchers. This was followed by Dr. Miwa's discussion of several documents as well as his reflections on English language translation drafts produced for the workshop by Dr. Curtis. Honing in on a focused theme from the texts, Umezawa addressed issues surrounding the term *karamono* 唐物 and in-depth explanations of each document. Finally, Dr. Curtis presented her translations, discussing her decisions to use certain words over others, and Dr. Akae provided commentary on technical terms related to document types and religious terminology from the perspective of Western medieval scholarship. This was followed by a lively question and answer period on all the texts and vocabulary discussed.

The content below introduces the history of the Kanazawa Bunko Documents. Transcriptions, modern Japanese translations, and English translations of Documents #1–4, all of which were covered during the course of the workshop, are also provided. Finally, summaries of the main points of discussions that took place during the question and answer session, namely issues surrounding specific terminology across languages, regional specializations, and disciplines, are also included. The first two sections are based on the research and translation presentations, with some minor changes based on subsequent workshop discussions. The final summary is based on the conversations recorded by Dr. Ikeda Maho (Hokkai Gakuen University) and collated by Dr. Huang. All English translations were done by Paula R. Curtis.

About the Kanazawa Bunko Documents

The Kanagawa Prefecture Kanazawa Bunko Museum brings together a variety of Cultural Properties connected to Shōmyōji 称名寺, a temple located in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture. These materials relate to the political, religious, and cultural history of the Kamakura Period (1185–1333). Kanazawa Bunko's history can be traced back to the late twelfth century, when the warrior Hōjō Sanetoki 北条実時 (1224–1276) from the Hōjō regent family of the Kamakura government created a private library (*bunko* 文庫). This library was known as the Kanazawa Bunko.

Among these Cultural Properties, the documents now labeled collectively as the “Kanazawa Bunko Documents” also retain National Treasure status. This compilation includes not only the texts of Hōjō Sanetoki, but also documents from other members of the Kanazawa Hōjō that were bequeathed to Shōmyōji, which was their family temple. With 4,149 documents total, the majority of the texts date to the late Kamakura Period. The collection is a rich source of information on Kamakura history, as it includes letters between the Kanazawa Hōjō and the monks of Shōmyōji, materials related to the management of the temple lands, and documents on the instruction of the temple monks that

were passed from generation to generation.

The heyday of the collection's development was the early fourteenth century, during the lifetime of Kanesawa Sadaaki 金沢貞顕 (1278-1333), the grandson of Sanetoki. After the downfall of the Kanesawa Hōjō, the private library was entrusted to Shōmyōji, though it was gradually scattered and lost. As a result, the documents languished in relative obscurity for centuries.

In the early to mid twentieth century, researchers of Kanazawa Bunko and the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo set out to organize and catalog the Kanazawa Bunko Documents. This task began with recording documents found on the reverse side of Buddhist scriptures transcribed by the monks of Shōmyōji in order to restore them to their original state. Given that many of these materials survived only by virtue of paper reuse, more than half of the Kanazawa Bunko Documents are known today as "reverse-side documents."

Document Types and Their Characteristics

Reverse-side documents

Paper was a precious commodity in premodern Japan. As such, it was often reused repeatedly. Writers would often take advantage of the reverse side (blank side) of any paper that was on hand, using it to compose new texts or copy older ones (such as books, diaries, letters, or scriptures). In the case of the Kanazawa Bunko Documents, a great deal of the reverse-side documents (*shihai monjo* 紙背文書) are spiritual works, such as Buddhist teachings by or for the monks of Shōmyōji.

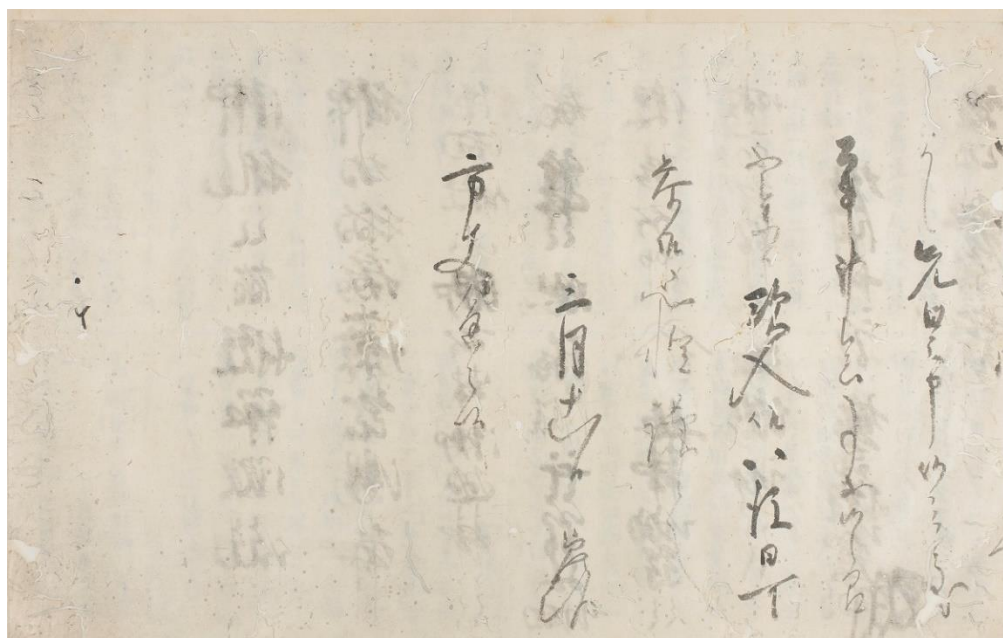
Palimpsests

Documents #1 and #2 below are preserved on the reverse side of the scripture *Hōjushō* 宝寿抄. There are visible traces of the original writing that remain on the paper; because of this, the texts are known as "palimpsests" (*bokuei monjo* 墨映文書). In the Japanese context, where paper is used rather than parchment, as in medieval Europe, palimpsests are created through a process whereby two documents are dampened and the sides with writing pressed together and smoothed out. The ink subsequently blots, obscuring the original text, though some evidence of the residual writing (now reversed) may be discerned from the (now reusable) blank sides. Palimpsests not only reveal to researchers the process of premodern paper recycling but, when studied carefully to discern the original text, also convey information about documents that would have otherwise been lost.

Document Transcriptions and Translations

Document 1: Kanesawa Sadaaki Letter Bunpo 1 (1317) (#601; Kanazawa bunko monjo #283)

史料① 文保元年（1317） （整理番号六〇一、『金沢文庫古文書』番号二八三）



Original text

[]

よし、先日令申候之処、

公事計会事等候之間、

不参候、歎入候、以後日可

参候、恐惶謹言、

（文保元年）三月十八日 貞顕

方丈進之候

（切封墨引）

Transcription

(前欠)よし、先日申さしめ候のところ、公事計会の事等候の間、参らず候。歎き入り候。後日をもって参るべく候。恐惶謹言。

三月十八日 貞顕

方丈これを進らせ候

Modern translation

(前欠)の由を、先日申しましたところ、公務で忙しかったこともあり、(あなた〈称名寺劔阿〉の許に)参上できませんでした。残念なことです。後日に参ります。恐惶謹言。

(文保元年)三月十八日 (金沢)貞顕

方丈(劔阿)に進上します。

English translation

I said yesterday that [text missing], but I was busy with my work duties and was therefore unable to visit you. It was very unfortunate. I will come another day. Respectfully,

[Bunpo 1 (1317)], 3rd month, 20th day [Kanesawa] Sadaaki

I send this letter to [Kenna,] Chief Monk of Shōmyōji.

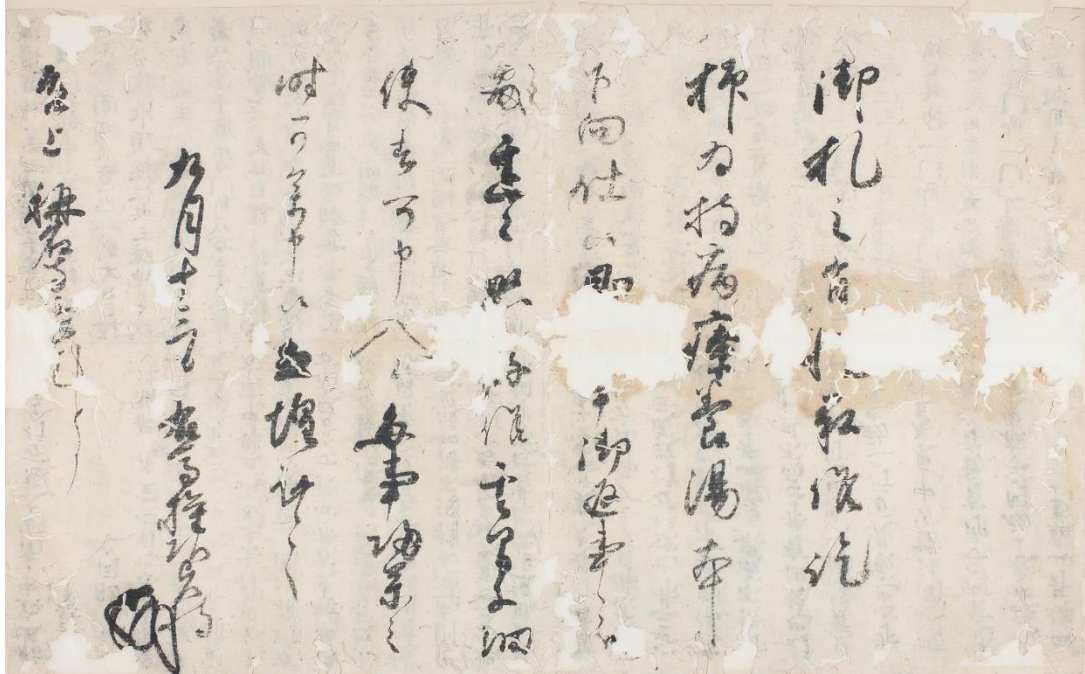
[paper seal and ink mark]*

* Paper seals (*kirifu* 切封) were strips partially cut from the paper of the text to wrap and bind the document. An ink mark (*sumihiki* 墨引) was made across the paper seal to show that the letter had not been opened before reaching the recipient.

Document 2: Kanesawa Sadayuki Letter
bunko monjo #506

Kamakura Period (#777; Kanazawa

史料② 金沢貞将書状 鎌倉時代 (整理番号七七七、『金沢文庫古文書』番号五〇六)



Original text

御札之旨、悦承候訖、
抑、為持病療養、湯本
下向仕候、即口（可）申御返事之
処、遅々恐存候、其間子細
使者可申入候、毎事帰参之
時、可参申候、恐惶謹言、
九月十三日 右馬権頭貞将（花押）
進上 称名寺長老〈御返事〉

Transcription

御札の旨、悦び承り候いおわんぬ。
そもそも、持病療養のため、湯本に下向つかまつり候、すなわち御返事を申す（べきの）ところ、
遅々恐れ存じ候。その間の子細使者申し入るべく候。 毎事帰参の時、参り申すべく候。恐惶謹言。
九月十三日 右馬権頭貞将（花押）
進上 称名寺長老御返事

Modern Translation

(あなた〈称名寺劔阿〉からの) お手紙を喜ばしく拝読いたしました。
さて、(私〈金沢貞将〉は) 持病の療養のために、湯本(箱根)に下向しました。すぐに(あなた
〈劔阿〉へ) お返事を差し上げようとしたところ、(叶わず) 遅くなってしまい恐れ入ります。そ
の間の詳細は(この手紙を届ける) 使者が申し上げます。(私、貞将が鎌倉に) 帰りましたときに、
(あなた〈劔阿〉の許へ) 参ります。恐惶謹言。

九月十三日 (金沢) 右馬権頭貞将 (花押)

進上 称名寺長老(劔阿)への御返事

English Translation

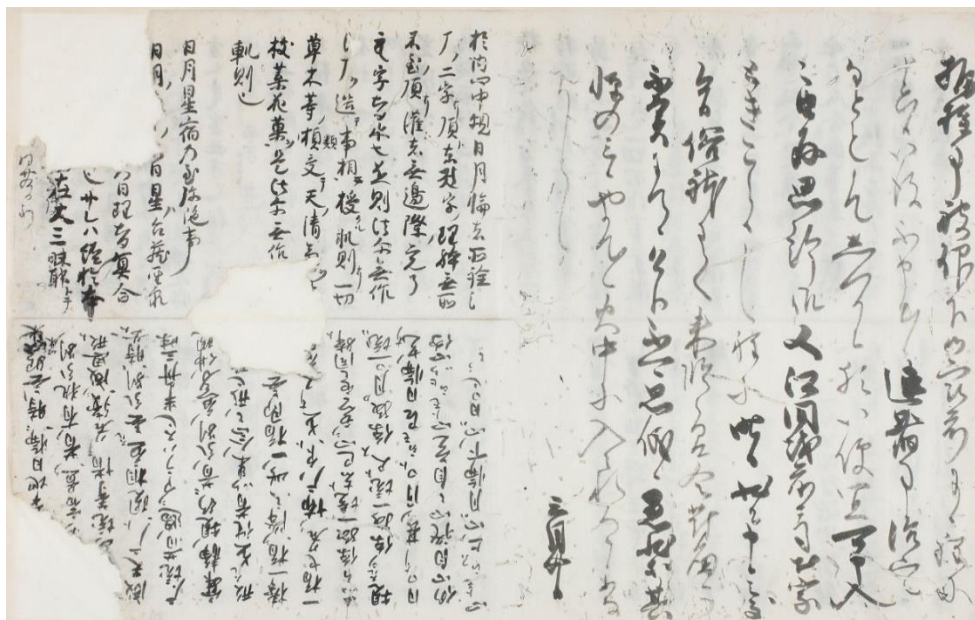
I read your letter with great delight. In any case, I should have responded right away, but I left the capital for Hakone to recuperate from a chronic illness. I am sorry to have been late [in writing you]. In the meantime, I've given the messenger the details. When I return to Kamakura, I'll visit. Respectfully,

9th month 13th day Provisional Director of the Bureau of Horse, Right Division Kanesawa Sadayuki (monogram)

Response to the Senior Monk of Shōmyōji [Kenna]

Document 3: Kanesawa Sadaaki Letter (#672; Kanazawa bunko monjo #375)

史料③ 金沢貞顕書状(整理番号六七二、『金沢文庫古文書』番号三七五)



Original Text

執権事被仰下候、最前に候程に
十六日以後不申出候、連署事治定
なとも候て、しつかニ、猶以便宜可申入
之由、存思給候、又江間越前々司出家
ときこえ候し程に、昨日状〈二〉申候之処、
今日俗体にて来臨之間、令対面候了、
不実にて候けり、不可思儀候、愚状等其
憚のミ候、やかてゝゝゝ火中に入れ候へく候、あな
かしく、

(正中三年) 三月廿日

「□同廿九日到」

Transcription

執権の事仰せ下され候、最前に候程に、十六日以後申し出ださず候、連署の事治定なども候いて、
しづかに猶便宜を以て申し入るべきの由、存じ思し給い候、又、江間越前前司出家ときこえ候し程
に、昨日の状に申し候の処、今日俗体にて来臨の間、対面せしめ候い了んぬ。不実にて候けり。思
儀すべからず候。愚状等其の憚りのみ候。やがてやがて火中に入れられ候べく候。あなかしく。

(正中三年) 三月二十日

「□同廿九日到る」

Modern translation

執権の事を(私貞顕に)仰せ下されました。真っ先にお知らせすべきところ、十六日以降ご連絡差
し上げておりません。連署の事が決定して、落ち着いて手紙をもって申し入れたく存じます。また、
江間越前前司が出家したと聞いていましたので、昨日の手紙で申し上げましたところ、(江間が)
今日俗体でお出でになったので、対面しました。(江間が出家したという噂は)事実ではありません
でした。不思議なことです。私の手紙は憚りがありますので、すぐにでも火中に投じてください。
かしこ。

(正中三年) 三月二十日

「同(三月)二十九日に到来した。」

English translation

I was ordered to the position of shogunal regent. I meant to write to you but have been unable to since

the sixteenth. I'd like to write [again] once the [appointment of a] regent co-signer is settled and I've collected myself. Also, yesterday I sent you a letter about having heard that Ema, the former Echizen provincial governor, took the tonsure [in protest of my appointment]. But today when I saw him face-to-face, he appeared to be a layman, so [this rumor] was untrue. How strange. My [last] letter was regretful, so please cast it into the fire at once. Regards,

[Shōchū 3 (1326)] 3rd month 20th day

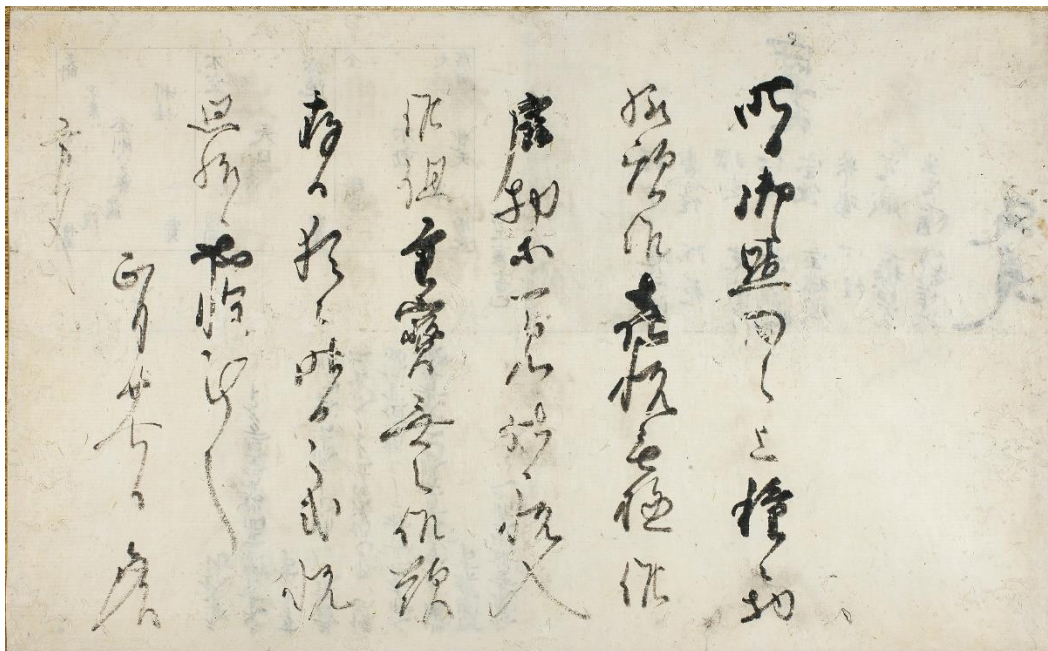
[external note] Arrived on the 29th day of this month.

* Prior to appointment to regent, Sadaaki occupied the position of regent co-signer (*rensho* 連署). In the Kamakura period, the *rensho* assisted the regent with government duties and placed his signature next to that of the regent on official directives. Now that Sadaaki has been appointed regent, his previous post as co-signer is vacant.

Document 4: Kanesawa Sadaaki Letter

(#597; Kanazawa bunko monjo #279)

史料④ 金沢貞顕書状（整理番号五九七、『金沢文庫古文書』番号二七九）



Original text

昨日御点心之上、種々物
給預候、喜悅無極候、
唐物等一見仕候、悦入
候、但重宝無之候、歎

存候、猶々昨日之式、悦
思給候、恐惶謹言、

正月廿七日 貞顯

方丈

Transcription

昨日御点心の上、種々の物給わり預かり候。喜悅極まりなく候。唐物等一見仕り候。悦び入り候。
但し重宝之なく候。歎き存じ候。猶々昨日の式、悦び思し給い候。恐惶謹言。

正月廿七日 貞顯

方丈

Modern translation

昨日は点心をいただいた上、種々の物をいただき預かりました。喜ばしいことこの上ありません。唐物などを拝見いたしました。うれしく思います。ただし珍しいものではありませんでした。残念に思っております。なお、昨日のことは喜ばしく思っております。恐れながら謹んで申し上げます。

正月二十七日 (金沢) 貞顯

方丈 (劔阿) へ

English translation

Yesterday, not only did you provide me with refreshments but also bestowed upon me all sorts of items. There is nothing more delightful. I am so pleased to have viewed foreign goods from the continent,* but it was unfortunate that there were no great treasures [among them]. Nevertheless, I was very happy about yesterday. Respectfully,

1st month, 27th day

Sadaaki

To the Chief Monk [Kenna]

* *Karamono* 唐物, literally “Chinese goods.” It is important to note that “China” in the modern sense of a nation state did not exist at this time, and the category of *karamono* had a broad meaning close to “Chinese things” that could encompass a wide variety of objects originating from various locations and times, including the Song, Yuan, or Ming dynasties, the Korean peninsula, or even from Silk Road exchange. *Karamono* was akin to an aesthetic category that characterized a range of continental imports, regardless of specific origin or maker. Some scholars have also emphasized their function in invoking nostalgia for an imagined past and place, particularly in the case of Chinese goods.

Summaries of Select Discussions

On the translation of “karamono”

Over the course of the workshop, opinions were divided on the image elicited by the character 唐 in the word *karamono*. Some participants suggested that the term evoked an idea akin to “exotica,” referring to something that would have been new to medieval peoples. On the other hand, Dr. Curtis pointed out that the scope of the translation she used, “foreign goods,” was quite wide and could include that suggestion, though some believed that this phrase might obscure the sense of these items as highly valued, and so suggested “exotic objects” or “foreign novelties” as potential alternatives. The issue of subjectivity also emerged, as whether the idea of “foreign” also implies “valuable” is an interpretation that changes from reader to reader. Dr. Curtis also noted that many English translations default to “Chinese goods,” or “Chinese imports,” though these items were not necessarily all from China, and so participants discussed the possibility of avoiding these phrases unless the context specifically called for it, and instead consider translations like “goods imported from the continent” or “foreign goods imported from the continent” when using these phrases would not be too clumsy.

On the translation of “sōryo” and “shukke 出家”

Dr. Akae addressed the translation of the term *sōryo* by discussing the distinction between “monks” and “priests” in the context of Western history, explaining that while someone who is a priest (secular cleric) is characterized by their duties looking after ordinary people, monks are identified by their adherence to certain precepts while living in particular spaces. While a monk could be ordained as a priest (monk-priest) by a bishop, monks (including monk-priests) do not become secular (diocesan) priests, and vice versa. Participants commented that one reason why “monk” has proliferated as a common translation in English for Buddhist practitioners may be the popularity of Zen Buddhism. Dr. Curtis noted that many scholars in the Anglophone world often use “priests” when referring to Shinto and “monks” when referring to Buddhism, though the precise reason why this habit emerged in English language writing is unclear. *Sōryo* in Japan may have been closer to that of a “secular canon,” a phrase used in scholarship to describe Western medieval practice that is somewhat in between that of a “monk” and a “priest.”

Another topic of great interest was how to refer to the intermediate stage of entry into formal Buddhist practice, particularly the cutting of one’s hair to indicate that one has become a novice (*shami* 沙弥). In English, the term for this process, *shukke*, is generally treated using the set phrase “to take the tonsure.” A more literal translation would be to “shave one’s head.” Participants debated whether this phrase could function in the same way as “taking the tonsure.”

Though *shami* is often translated as “novice” in English, in the context of Western historical studies, a “novice” refers specifically to a person who has yet to take their formal religious vows to become a monk. Therefore, if “novice” appears in the Western contexts it indicates someone who will inevitably become a monk. In the discussion it was suggested that rather than emphasizing the process of becoming a monk, the goal in translation should be to emphasize the renunciation of worldly things and from this perspective too, “to take the tonsure” or “shave one’s head” seem appropriate translations to express “becoming a *shami*.”

The possibility of translating *shami* as “lay religious” was also proposed.

On the translation of “shihai monjo” and “bokuei monjo”

Dr. Akae also offered commentary on the translation of terms like the aforementioned *shihai monjo* and *bokuei monjo*. In English, technical vocabulary such as “recto” and “verso” exist to refer to

medieval manuscripts in the Western world, but both Dr. Akae and Dr. Curtis asserted that since Japanese manuscripts are constructed and read differently, these words are not particularly applicable in the context of historical Japanese material, and the use of “reverse-side documents” as a translation for *shihai monjo* was a better choice than attempting to create a one-to-one parallel with Western manuscript studies.

In a similar vein, Dr. Akae also had reservations about broadening the use of the word “palimpsest” as a translation for *bokuei monjo*, but Dr. Curtis believed that because “palimpsest” is used in both concrete and abstract modes to denote residual traces of texts or other content, in this way it might be used (and has already been used by some Anglophone scholars) as a translation for *bokuei monjo*.