

# Pacifying souls, soothing hearts: Buddhist care for the dead and the living in post- disaster Tohoku

**Maja Veselič (University of Ljubljana)**



**18:30-20:00**

**Dec. 10 (Wed), 2014**

**Room 301, 3F, Building 10,**

**Sophia University**

This talk discusses the ongoing relief and recovery activities of Buddhist priests in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown by examining priests' traditional role as carers for the dead as well as their attempts to address the emotional needs of the tsunami and nuclear evacuees.

The sheer loss of human life, the disruption of or limited access to graves, the destruction or forced abandonment of temples and home altars, have in themselves presented an unprecedented challenge for the performance of the long-established funeral and memorial service duties that befall priests in Japanese temple Buddhism. Offering comfort to the bereaved families of dead parishioners has been an integral, though rarely explicit part of their care work; and one for which they receive no formal training. However, the all-pervasive trauma caused by mass death, displacement and the breaking down of communal bonds left many priests with the sense of responsibility to do more; consequently catalyzing broader Buddhist interest in mental health related practices. By juxtaposing priests' discourses and reflections on their traditional care for the souls of the dead and the recent attention to the psycho-spiritual support for the living, this talk will tease out the shared emphasis on priests as mediators and facilitators of social (re)integration.

**Maja Veselič** (PhD in anthropology) has just concluded her tenure as a JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Comparative Culture, Sophia University, Tokyo. Over the past two years she has conducted research on Buddhist aid provision and recovery support in post-3.11 Tohoku, with a side interest on local disaster storytellers (kataribe). Her previous work has focused on issues of ethnicity and religion in the People's Republic of China, especially with reference to Muslim minorities.

Lecture in English / No prior registration necessary