

“And now for your moment of Zen Flute: Performance and Ethics in History of the Shakuhachi”

Komosō, “Grassmat Monks,” wandered the roads and market towns of fifteenth century Japan, eking a living from begging and playing the shakuhachi, an end-blown bamboo flute. Within about a century and a half, their name was changed to Komusō, “Emptiness Monks,” capitalizing on the Buddhist associations of śūnyatā, or “emptiness.” The revision may reflect actual social change for these mendicants, including recognition by the Tokugawa shogunate and official ties to important Zen institutions, but it also certainly reflects a spectrum of beliefs regarding the shakuhachi and its relation to religious practice and ethical value. This talk will explore the late medieval practices of shakuhachi mendicants and the reconsideration of their religious and musical practices.