



CEDARS-SINAI®

PROGRAM IN THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE SEMINAR SERIES

“The Archaeology of Modern Relaxation: A Tale of Gliding Birds, Twitching Frogs, and Singing Sheep”

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Abstract: Today, in the context of medicine, the word “tension” immediately calls to mind a problem, a pathology. We think right away of stress and hypertension. Relaxation, by contrast, is touted as a desirable state or process that is essential to alleviating this problem. You are tense, we say. You need to relax.



But historically, this represents a remarkable reversal: for most of the Western medical past, from Greek antiquity until the late nineteenth century, tension was regularly invoked as a positive virtue and was associated with strength and psychic presence, whereas relaxation was most often noted as a sign of weakness and vital absence. What does this reversal mean? This talk will excavate the roots of the traditional imagination of tension and trace the transformations that led to the rise of modern relaxation.

Bio: Dr. Kuriyama received his A.B. degree from Harvard's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations in 1977 and an A.M. degree in 1978. After completing acupuncture studies in Tokyo, he entered Harvard's Department of the History of Science, which awarded him a Ph.D. in 1986. He joined the Harvard faculty as Reischauer Professor in 2005 after previously working at the University of New Hampshire, Emory University, and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto, Japan. His book, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (Zone, 1999), received the 2001 William H. Welch Medal of the American Association for the History of Medicine, and has been translated into Chinese, Greek, Spanish, and Korean. His talk is part of a book in progress on "The riddle of presence."

Tuesday, February 19th, 2019

12pm – 1pm

North Conference Tower, Room A

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