

**Denbō- Transmitting the Dharma:
A Conference in Honour of Prof. Ōkubo Ryōshun
Oct. 6-8, 2025**

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“Thus I have heard ...” As the common opening of Buddhist scriptures makes clear, concerns of communication and reception are at the core of the Buddhist tradition. This is perhaps most evident in the Tiantai/Tendai and tantric traditions of East Asian Buddhism, both of which base their teachings on the nature of the Buddha’s acts of communication.

This conference brings together young and established scholars of East Asian and specifically Japanese Buddhism, who, in their research, explore the many facets of Buddhist transmissions in and beyond the Tiantai/Tendai and esoteric schools, the Zen lineages, and the often-neglected precepts traditions.

The conference honours Prof. Ōkubo Ryōshun, one of the most distinguished scholars in the field of Tendai and esoteric Buddhism, and himself a consummate transmitter of the Dharma. If we can celebrate the rich present and exciting future of Japanese Buddhist Studies, this is due in no small part to Prof. Ōkubo’s scholarship and teaching.

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Abstracts

- Panel I: Monastic Transmission of Knowledge

Minowa Kenryō

Transmission of Dharma in Japanese Buddhism: Sites of Monastic Training in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Periods

In the Heian period, the term dansho emerged and became widespread to designate a place of training that educated monastics in a new style of learning focused on dangi (discussions and debates). As the names for these centers of learning changed, presumably also the methods of transmitting the Dharma evolved. The scholastic style that developed with the rise of the dansho is particularly important for understanding the transmission of the Dharma from the medieval period onward. As an example of modern-era dansho-style sectarian studies, I will examine the case of the Nakamura Danrin of the Nichiren sect.

Bio

Minowa Kenryō is Professor emeritus of Buddhist Studies at the University of Tōkyō, and currently Professor of Buddhist Studies at Risshō University. His many publications include, Bukkyō meisō ron and Chūsei shoki nanto kairitsu fukkō no kenkyū. He also is a researcher in the Japanese Science and Technology Agency's Moonshot Project, focusing on contemporary applications of Buddhist meditation.

Watanabe Mariko

The Creation and Development of Lecture Notes in the Medieval Tendai School

In medieval Tendai temples, the teachings were transmitted by studying the Lotus Sutra and other scriptures in a form of scholarship known as “dangi” or “oral explanations.” In temples dedicated to the pursuit of scholarship, called dangisho 談義所, professorial monks held lectures which the student monks in attendance recorded and compiled into lecture notes known as dangisho 談義書. The Lotus Sutra, highly revered in the Tendai school, was studied in a great variety of dangi, resulting in the creation of dangisho such as Sonshun's “Jurin shūyō shō” (1514) or Jikkai's “Tetsujin sho.” These various textbooks on the “Lotus Sutra” in both their commonalities and their respective differences reveal the ingenuity of the learned monks on whose lectures they were based. Monks from distant regions gathered at the dangisho, and upon their return to their home institutions brought the textbooks they had studied with them, (cont.)

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(cont. from page 2)

thereby ensuring the latter's wide circulation. In this presentation, I will focus on a number of specific examples of Lotus Sutra textbooks to examine the processes of their creation and development.

Bio

Watanabe Mariko is Professor in Classical Japanese Literature at Taishō University. She specializes in the development of the medieval debate literature of the Tendai school.

Paul Groner

Seizanha and Jitsudō Ninkū (1309-1388)

In keeping with the theme of this conference of the transmission of the Dharma (denbō), I focus on how Hōnen's (1133-1212) major role as the seeming founder of the Jōdoshū and the major transmitter of the Tendai precepts were reconciled. One-hundred years after Hōnen's death, Ninkū emerged as an important exponent of Tendai, Pure Land, Esoteric, and Tendai precepts. His ambiguous role in these traditions is clear in his abbacies of the Tendai temple Rozan kōji. As the temple's title as a debate or lecture temple indicates, it was devoted to Tendai teachings; its works were called "rodan" or conversations at Rozanji. Ninkū was also the abbot of a temple in the western foothills (Nishiyama) of Kyoto called Sankōji or Ōjōin (Hall of rebirth), a name that reflects its Pure Land connections.

A comparison of texts written by Ninkū according to bibliographies compiled fifty years ago and a more recent bibliography reveals that Ninkū is seen in very different ways and published in different venues.

I conclude with a consideration of Ninkū's interest in debate and education by focusing on his treatment of the precepts.

Bio

*Paul Groner is Professor Emeritus of Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia. A specialist in medieval Japanese Tendai, his many publications include, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*.*

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- Panel II: Doctrinal Questions: Tiantai/Tendai

Jacqueline Stone

*In the Lineage of Eagle Peak: Time, Timelessness, and
Transmission in Nichiren and Medieval Tendai*

Nichiren's indebtedness to his Chinese Tiantai forebears is well recognized. Less acknowledged are the conceptual structures he shared with his Japanese Tendai contemporaries. Both medieval Tendai thinkers and Nichiren claimed to transmit the heart of the honmon section or latter half of the Lotus Sūtra, in which Śākyamuni reveals himself as the primordially awakened buddha. Both interpreted that revelation as collapsing the temporal gap between practice and enlightenment, to be realized via kanjin ("mind contemplation" or "mind discernment"). A Multivalent category, kanjin for medieval Tendai exegetes often meant the realization of original enlightenment; for Nichiren, it was chanting the daimoku or title of the Lotus Sūtra, Namu Myōhō-enge-kyō. Both held that kanjin afforded direct access to the realm of the primordial buddha and represented it as the Eagle Peak transmission—understood, not as a past event, but as a timeless reality.

Nichiren famously linked the pairing of honmon and kanjin to historical time, asserting that Śākyamuni had specifically intended the daimoku as the "seed of buddhahood" for benighted persons of the Final Dharma age (mappō). Similar claims for a connection between the heart of the honmon section of the Lotus and the Final Dharma age occur in some apocryphal Tendai texts attributed to Saichō. Here, comparison with Nichiren suggests another shared conceptual structure, revalorizing the degenerate age as precisely the time when the vehicle of perfect and immediate enlightenment is revealed.

Bio

Jacqueline Stone is professor emerita in the Religion Department of Princeton University, where she taught Buddhism and Japanese Religions. Her research interests include the reception history of Lotus Sūtra, especially the Tendai and Nichiren Buddhist traditions. She is the author of Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism (1999) and co-author (with Donald S. Lopez Jr.) of Two Buddhas Seated Side by Side: A Guide to the Lotus Sūtra (2019). She currently heads the Kuroda Institute for the Study of Buddhism.

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Ingrid Vera Chirino

Annen and the Making of the Tendai Model of Repentance

This talk examines Annen's view of repentance (*sange*) and its role in establishing the model that shaped later Japanese Tendai discourses and practices. In 883, Annen composed two influential works, the *Futsūju bosatsukai kōshaku* (Extensive Commentary on the Universal Bodhisattva Precepts Ordination) and the *Bodaishin gi shō* (Compendium on the Meaning of the Bodhicitta), through which he reformulated the Chinese Tiantai understanding of repentance. Whereas the Tiantai tradition had linked repentance primarily with contemplation of the mind and visualizations, Annen drew on the *Shinji kangyō* (Scripture on the Contemplation of the Mind Ground) to articulate a threefold model that integrated Tiantai and esoteric elements into a single framework, reinterpreting "the mind" as "the mind ground" and shifting the content of visualization practices toward bodily identifications with Vairocana. In doing so, Annen exemplifies *denbō* as both continuity and transformation: transmitting inherited doctrines while forging a synthesis that became normative in Heian Tendai. His model decisively shaped subsequent discourses and practices, as reflected in Ryōgen's *Kuhon ōjōgi*, Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū*, and the anonymous *Kanjin ryaku yōshū*.

Bio

Ingrid Vera Chirino is a third-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Religion at Princeton University. Her primary field is Japanese Buddhism between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Her research interests include Buddhist discourses and practices of repentance, the thought of the scholar-monk Annen (841-889?), and the reception of tathatā (thusness) doctrines within the Tendai tradition. She holds M.A. degrees from the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies in Tokyo and from the Center for the Study of Asia and Africa at El Colegio de México. She received her B.A. in Philosophy from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Tyler Neenan

Contesting the Buddha Body

Exactly 1000 years ago, in what is now the present-day city of Ningbo, China, a dramatic break-up unfolded between the great Song Dynasty Tiantai Buddhist thinker, Siming Zhili, and his brilliant disciple and de facto Dharma-heir, Jingjue Renyue. As legend tells it, sometime in the year 1025, Renyue became violently ill in the middle of a supplication ritual. From this point on, he "renounces all his prior convictions," and begins to (**cont.**)

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(cont. from page 5) openly advocate for a doppelgänger position closely resembling that of the heretical Shanwai faction both of them had spent a good part of the last decade, and spilled a great deal of ink, refuting. In a series of four exchanged polemical texts, Renyue stages a remonstrative intervention with Zhili over the status of a strange body, unique to Tiantai Buddhist Pure Land theory, called “zunte”. This peculiar, errant body leaves an ambiguous, self-contradictory trace in the Classical Tiantai corpus. On the one hand, the de-facto founder of the tradition, Zhiyi sometimes speaks of the zunte body as if it were its own discrete entity, to be placed within or alongside the traditional three bodies of a Buddha (i.e. the response (or born) body, the recompense (or enjoyment) body, and the dharma-body). And yet, on the other, he seems to ascribe *prima facie* mutually contradictory predicates to it, identifying it sometimes as a ‘response’ and sometimes as a ‘recompense’ body. The problem of this strange body and its contested status becomes the fault line along which the doctrinal stakes of Zhili and Renyue’s split come into relief. Renyue and Zhili put flesh out two mutually incompatible envisionings of the zunte body of a Buddha; and concomitantly with each of these respective envisionings, each of Renyue and Zhili gives a wildly divergent reading of the same Tiantai tradition. Along the way, we walk an ever bifurcating path through a series of contested terrains, surrounding problems of triplicity, paradox, and the “Middle” (zhong)—as well as the “relation” between finitude and infinity, and between Nagarjuna’s Two Truths.

Bio

Tyler Neenan is a PhD Candidate in the Philosophy of Religions at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

- Keynote Speech: Strategies of Transmission

Okubō Ryōshun

Ennin's Transmissions: From Reception to Inception

Ennin (794–864) is known for having established the foundation for the unique thought and practice of Japanese Tendai Buddhism. On Mount Hiei, the Tendai school’s headquarters, he trained under Saichō (766–822), completing the Tendai studies (*shikan*) rather than the tantric program. The transmissions he received from various masters during his journey to Tang China directly contributed to the richness of Japanese Tendai. The central position of Japanese Tendai Buddhism within Japanese thought and culture is significantly due to Ennin’s accomplishments.

It is universally acknowledged that the tantric teachings Ennin transmitted from China formed the basis for the development of what is known as Tendai esotericism, (cont.)

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(cont. from page 6) or *taimitsu*. While the general outline of Ennin's transmissions is well known, previous research often relied on a conventional presentation of Ennin's thought that lacks in rigor and detail, so that its doctrinal subtleties and distinctive features often remain obscure.

In this presentation, I will consider the significance of Ennin as both a recipient and disseminator of the Dharma. After discussing his training under Saichō and the results of his receiving and bringing back to Japan the Dharma he received in Tang China, I will discuss his own activities as a transmitter of the Dharma to his Japanese disciples. Additionally, I will touch upon the somewhat complex issues related to the theory of attaining Buddhahood in this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu*) in the context of the doctrinal development from Chinese Tiantai to Japanese Tendai as reflected in the *tōketsu* corpus.

- Panel III: Strategies of Transmission

William Bodiford

Professing the True Dharma Deep in the Wilderness of Northern Japan: How Shōbōji Monastery Localized Dharma Transmission

I examine the diverse strategies — moral, doctrinal, familial, material, and textual — employed by the leaders of Shōbōji in medieval Ōshū to assert local control over Zen dharma transmissions. Their documentary claims for Shōbōji's independence as the headquarters temple for the wildlands of the north expose multiple dimensions of dharma transmission. This one location reveals how the multilayered aspects of dharma transmission reinforce one another in ways that other locations tend to obscure or hide.

Bio

William M. Bodiford is a professor emeritus in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he taught courses on religion in the cultures of Japan and East Asia, and Buddhist Studies. His publications include Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan.

Bruce Winkelman

Formalities Aside: Reimagining Dharma Transmission in Illustrated Hagiographies from Medieval Japan

Dharma transmission (*denbō*) in its narrow sense can be understood as a ritualized, master-to-disciple conferral of authority that is often associated with esoteric initiations and lineage continuity. Yet illustrated hagiographies of Buddhist patriarchs (*soshi eden*) from medieval Japan frequently portray transmissions in imaginative ways that do not (cont.)

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(cont. from page 7) follow this formal model. They show transmission happening through miracles, dreams, or oracular revelations. This paper argues that such texts did not simply depict instances of transmission, but reimagined what Dharma transmission could mean. By comparing several of these texts, the paper shows how they collectively renegotiated the conceptual field of Dharma transmission, broadening the scope of transmitted authority to include forms that went beyond ritualized lineal frameworks. This perspective highlights how hagiographic media shaped perceptions of Dharma transmission, influencing the construction and recognition of Buddhist authority in medieval social and narrative contexts.

Bio

Bruce Winkelman is Assistant Professor in Religious Studies at DePauw University. He specializes in the hagiographical literature of premodern Japanese Buddhism, especially in the esoteric schools.

Asuka Sango

Transmitting the Dharma through Buddhist Debate in Medieval Japan

“Transmission” of religious knowledge has often been theorized as an anthesis of critique, creativity, and originality. Transmit is to pass down a tradition by preserving canons, orthodoxy, and orthopraxis. The idea of transmission as a vehicle of religious conservatism, however, obscures the richness of the medieval culture of Buddhist debate (rongi 論義).

Conducted between scholar monks, a debate was an oral exchange of questions and answers concerning Buddhist texts. Studying this Buddhist dialectic tradition, my argument is twofold. First, the styles of argumentation used in debates were based on scholastic methods—such as citation, gloss, “pro and contra”—foundational to rational reasoning. Second, there is a cultural importance to scholastic method itself: The format of dialogue and its performance were not limited to Buddhism, but also commonly found in literary texts and performance traditions of medieval Japan at large. Some of these various instances were rather serious while others were playful, soliciting both cognitive and affective responses from participants. The medieval culture of debate indicates the complex processes where Buddhist knowledge was transmitted in concert with larger cultural discourses and practices. It compels us to reimagine transmission in its capacity to critique a tradition based on rational reasoning, and to create new knowledge based on multi-sensorial performances.

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Bio

Asuka Sango is the John W. Nason Professor of Asian Studies and Religion at Carleton College. Her publications include The Halo of Golden Light – Imperial Authority and Buddhist Ritual in Heian Japan.

Micah Auerback

Locating the Lineage of the Ten Wholesome Courses of Action in Jiun Onkō (1718-1805)

Marta Sanvido

Equal Yet Different: Ontological Differentiation and the Transformative Power of Precepts in Early Modern Sōtō Zen

Biographies of Sōtō Zen monks and foundational temple tales are often populated by non-human beings—ranging from dragons to local deities—who are portrayed as surrendering to the power of the Dharma upon receiving the precepts. These narratives provide vivid and compelling illustrations of the precepts' transformative power, a theme particularly emphasized in proselytizing efforts directed toward lay audiences during the Edo period (1603–1868). This presentation examines the adaptation of such narratives within the broader discourse on lay precept conferral that emerged in the early modern period. Drawing on treatises and narrative collections from this time, I argue that tales centered on non-human beings in precept education conveyed a twofold message: on the one hand, they affirmed that the precepts could be received by anyone, regardless of ontological status; on the other, they often reinforced distinctions—and, at times, the perceived inferiority—of certain categories of beings.

Bio

Marta Sanvido is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University. She specializes in the history of medieval Sōtō Zen.

- Panel IV: Tantric Knowledge

George Keyworth

On the Shaku makaen ron and the Denbō'e at Amanosan Kongōji: An attempt to locate the textual history of Hōtsubō Kakushin 法仏房覚心 (n.d., ca. 1211-1224) in the library of Kongōji

In terms of the history of medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhism even if viewed from the perspective of somewhat misleading sectarian labels like Shingon (e.g., Tōmitsu) or Tendai (e.g., Taimitsu), both the study of so-called doctrinal learning (kyōgaku) texts including the Shaku (**cont.**)

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(cont. from page 9) makaen ron (Shi Moheyan lun, Shakuron, Treatise Exposing the Mahāyāna attrib. to Nāgārjuna, T no. 1668) and the transmission of esoteric Buddhist ritual manuals (jisō) demonstrate how a rather obscure figure named Hōtsubō Kakushin (n.d., ca. 1211-1224) seems to have been a particularly important teacher in the early 13th century. In this paper I introduce the history of the Dharma Transmission Assembly (Denbō'e or Denpō'e) held biannually at Amanosan Kongōji (in southern present day Osaka prefecture) and the "heads of the school" (gakutō) there. Kakushin is listed as the second gakutō in sacred teachings documents (shōgyō) that highlight the role that the study of the Shakuron played in the Denbō'e ceremonies and concurrent "discussions at the monastery" (dangi) during the 13th-15th centuries. Next, I provide a brief overview of how the Shakuron commentarial shōgyō reveal what looks to me like a lineage that claims to trace back to Shinkaku (1117-1180/1181), the compiler of the Besson zakki (Miscellaneous Record of Classified Sacred Images, Taishō zuzō, vol. 3). The remainder of the paper focuses on the textual history from Kongōji—and texts that were copied from related medieval libraries including Negoroji, Kōyasan, Daigoji, Ninnaji, and the Shōren'in—to address how the Denbō'e at Kongōji was a setting or occasion to present both ritual and doctrinal learning across the sectarian boundaries that divide the esoteric Buddhist traditions in Japan today.

Bio

George Keyworth is Associate Professor in the History Department at the University of Saskatchewan. He conducts research in the areas of medieval Chinese and Japanese religious history. He has published on and specializes in three areas. (1) Religion, literature, poetry, and history of the Northern Song dynasty in China (960-1127). (2) Buddhist scriptures written or compiled in China and preserved in manuscript form in China (Dunhuang) and Japan. (3) Collections of Buddhist scriptures (yiqie jing, issaikyō) hand-copied for Shintō shrines during the 12th century in Japan.

Yagi Morris

Secret Biwa Transmissions: From Melody to Landscape in the Quest for Imperial Power

This presentation explores the nexus of power and knowledge through the lens of the imperial biwa (lute). Drawing on its significance in the Chinese court, by the 12th century, under the Jimyōin imperial lineage, the biwa became a sacred Buddhist vessel of secret knowledge and a tool of imperial legitimacy. Central to this transformation was the biwa kanjō, a consecration rite transmitting secret melodies that affirmed the emperor's divine status and the sanctity of the imperial line. During the 14th century, Emperor Go-Daigo, of the rival Daikakuji lineage, masterfully (cont.)

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(cont. from page 10) appropriated the biwa's symbolic power. Following his accession, he compelled court biwa masters to initiate him into these secret transmissions, co-opting the Jimyōin's claim to the instrument as a symbol of authority. In 1337 at the Yoshino palace Go-Daigo's trusted guardian monk, Monkan Kōshin, reimagined the biwa within an esoteric Buddhist cosmology and mapped out the southern court's domain as a soundscape at the core of which was the emperor as a Buddhist king. This presentation examines Monkan's integration of the biwa into Buddhist mythological, cosmological and political frameworks during the Nanbokuchō period, illustrating how secret transmissions and sacred objects reinforced imperial claims and redefined sovereignty amidst political upheaval.

Bio

Yagi Morris is a research associate and lecturer at McGill University in the School of Religious Studies. She specializes in medieval Japanese Religions, particularly esoteric Buddhism, and has published several articles on imperial rituals and the Kinpusen cult. Her forthcoming project relates to pilgrimage and pilgrimage replicas with a focus on the Shikoku henro.

Tado Taichi

*The Transmission of the Sanron School in the Middle Ages:
Focusing on Its Relationship with Esoteric Buddhism*

There are various theories regarding the introduction of the Sanron school to Japan, but according to the Daijō sanron shishi den, which is believed to have been compiled by Enshū (?-883) and records the oldest lineage of the Sanron school, there were three lineages: first, Ekan at Gangō-ji, second, Chizō at Hōryū-ji, and, third, Dōji at Daian-ji. Enshū himself is said to have studied under Genkaku. While it is unclear whether these lineages accurately reflect historical reality, their significance lies in the fact that they reflect the understanding of Sanron history during Enshū's lifetime, an understanding which had a profound influence on subsequent transmission narratives.

What is important to note about the Shishiden is that it quotes Kūkai's (774-835) Jūjūshinron when presenting Nāgārjuna as the founder of various lineages, including esoteric Buddhism and Sanron. Furthermore, based on Kūkai's "Kozō sōjō kinsō daitoku eisan heijō", esoteric Buddhism and the Sanron school are presented as brother lineages under their common Indian progenitor. The Shishiden thus clearly illustrates that Sanron scholars were acutely aware of esoteric Buddhism. Of particular importance in examining the relationship between the Sanron (cont.)

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(cont. from page 11) school and esoteric Buddhism is Shōhō (832–909), who founded Daigo-ji in 876 and renamed Tōdai-ji's Saeki-in "Tōnan-in" in 905, establishing it as the headquarters of the Sanron school. As the Kamakura period scholiast Gyōnen (1240–1321) noted in his history of Japanese Buddhism, the *Sangoku buppō denzū engi*, "The directorship of the Tōnan-in has passed through eighteen generations from the time of Shōhō to the present. They studied both exoteric and esoteric Buddhism and became the head of the school. (Only Shōgen studied just esoteric Buddhism.)" As Gyōnen pointed out, after Shōhō, the practice of "combined exoteric and esoteric studies"—that is, the concurrent study of the Sanron school and esoteric Buddhism—became the norm at Tōnan-in. Consequently, the Sanron school's teachings inevitably came to be transmitted not only at Tōdai-ji but also at other esoteric Buddhist institutions such as Daigo-ji Temple and Kanjū-ji Temple.

Bio

Tado Taichi teaches courses on Buddhism at Waseda University, Tōyō University and the International Institute of Advanced Buddhist Studies. He specializes in the medieval Sanron and esoteric traditions. His publications include, Chūsei tōmitsu kyōgaku keisei ron.

Eric Haruki Swanson

Subjugation and the Embodiment of Enlightenment: From Annen (841–915?) to Jien (1155–1225)

This presentation seeks to illustrate the interplay of ritual subjugation and the immediacy of enlightenment in the esoteric Buddhist tradition of Japan, as articulated in the works by Annen (841–915?) and Jien (1155–1225). Focusing first on sections from Annen's *Shingonshū kyōjigi*, it will analyze the discussion of the "subjugation of evil" (Jp. *gōma*) and highlight how Annen conceptualized and underscored the meditative practice of ritual subjugation as concrete examples of the "application" of Shingon esoteric Buddhist teachings. For Annen, the "subjugation of evil" in the context of esoteric teachings was grounded on a radically different understanding of suchness (Skt. *tathatā*; Jp. *shinnyo*) that recognized the presence of subtler forms of "evil" and necessitated alternative modes of practice. In other words, the "subjugation of evil" was a key element in Annen's articulation of the defining characteristic and identity of the esoteric teachings, which he sought to distinguish from other forms of Buddhist teachings in the Heian period. The presentation will then turn to Jien (1155–1225) and his articulation of the subjugation of vengeful spirits (*onryō*) in Kamakura Japan as a central concern in the establishment of his exoteric-esoteric ritual center, *Daisenpōin*. It will illustrate how Jien's engagement with ritual subjugation, while presented as a response (cont.)

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(cont. from page 12) to the historically situated “evils” of the Kamakura period, was also grounded on Annen’s worldview of the radical interconnectedness and oneness of all beings, both enlightened and not. While writing in vastly different historical contexts, both Annen and Jien emphasized the importance of identifying “evil” and viewed the practice of its ritual subjugation as a key feature of their understanding of esoteric Buddhism. In other words, the paper seeks to illustrate a “transmission” of an esoteric worldview from Annen to Jien, in which the violent act of subjugating evil was understood and negotiated as a necessary ritual process that enabled the embodiment of enlightenment and could bring peace to the world.

Bio

Eric Haruki Swanson is an Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University. He is a historian of religion who studies religious traditions of Japan through the examination of literature, visual material, ritual practices, and performance arts, and considers the role of religious institutions and its actors within broader cultural patterns, political agendas, and expressions of religious identity. His current projects include a study of scholar-monk Jien (1155-1225) and his establishment of Buddhist ritual programs for the restoration of social order in the Kamakura period (1185-1333), and discourses on “peace of mind” (anjin) and the negotiation of salvation among Shingon Buddhist priests within the rapidly changing social landscape of Meiji Japan (1868-1912).

- Panel IV: Paradoxes of Transmission

Brook Ziporyn

How to Bestow What Everyone Has: Spreading the Dharma of Buddha-nature in Zhanran’s Diamond Scalpel (Jin’gangpi)

Jingxi Zhanran’s Diamond Scalpel is a classic of Tiantai doctrinal literature, notable not only for its famous doctrine of the Buddha-nature of insentient beings but also for its formal structure: the sole non-commentarial work in Zhanran’s extensive corpus, it is written in the form of an imaginary dialogue with a stranger taking place in a dream. The convergence of dialogue and soliloquy built into this format is thematized at the very end of the work when the topic turns away from the detailed explication of the intricacies of Tiantai Buddha-nature theory to the practical question of how the preceding teaching is to be communicated to others: how do you teach another sentient being this doctrine about the Buddha-nature that pervades all sentient and insentient beings like space, that no being has ever lacked, that not only is possessed by the prospective student, but which, so Zhanran claims, actually constitutes their entire delusional (cont.)

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(cont. from page 13) and karmic being, which is identical to every iota of their mental and physical being without exception—which means, which is also fully present and, he claims, fully operative, precisely as their delusion that there is no Buddha-nature, or that it is only possessed by sentient beings, residing only inside them? In this talk I will walk through the practical advice Zhanran offers to address this tricky upayic challenge.

Bio

Brook Ziporyn is the Mircea Eliade Professor of Chinese Religion, Philosophy, and Comparative Thought in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. He is a scholar of ancient and medieval Chinese religion and philosophy. His many publications include most recently, Experiments in Mystical Atheism.

Stephan Kigensan Licha

What the Buddhas and Ancestors Do Not Transmit: The Aporia of Transmitting the Teachings

Writing in the late Meiji (1868–1912) period, the True Pure Land scholar Maeda Eun (1857–1930) identified the dharma gate of original awakening taught in the medieval Tendai Eshin lineage of oral transmissions as the common basis of Tendai, Zen, and tantric teachings, and linked it to a specific method of exegetical free-style. In this way, Eun, perhaps unwittingly, identified a constitutive problems of original awakening thought, namely the tension between ontology and semiology. As this presentation will demonstrate, medieval Zen, esoteric, and Tendai lineages all wrestled with this conundrum, thereby generating new theoretical models and semiotic strategies for transmitting what is impossible to pass on or inherit.

Bio

Stephan Kigensan Licha is Assistant Professor of Japanese Buddhism and the History of Religions at the University of Chicago. He specializes in the intellectual history of pre-modern Japanese Buddhism. His publications include Esoteric Zen: Zen and the Tantric Teachings in Premodern Japan.

Lucia Dolce

When the Master is not Needed: Self-Consecration, Mind Transmission and the Taimitsu Rituals of Inner Awakening

In the Tantric system of practice, advanced consecrations constitute sophisticated rituals wherein accomplished practitioners deploy internal visualization techniques that render the human body itself the (cont.)

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(cont. from page 14) site of performance. An advanced consecration that emerged and gained remarkable prominence in Japan throughout the medieval period was the so-called yogin abhiseka (*yugi kanjō*). Profoundly shaped by Annen's hermeneutics, this ritual challenged the conventional view of initiatory practices by instituting transmission through a protocol of self-consecrations. According to the interpretation of some Taimitsu lineages, the presence of a master was not necessary to bestow authority. The yogin abhiseka reconceptualized initiation as "mind consecration," predicated upon the inherent buddha-status of sentient beings and designed to engender awakening as innate and spontaneous condition. This presentation examines two ritual sources from the Taimitsu Renge lineage, which elaborate on the meaning of the yogin abhiseka through a distinct language focusing on identity and origins, resonating with other contemporary Tendai interpretations.

Bio

Lucia Dolce is Numata Professor of Japanese Buddhism at SOAS University of London and Chair of the SOAS Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions. Her research interests include the hermeneutical practices of East Asian Buddhism, in particular the Lotus Sutra tradition and the Tantric schools, and the ritual and visual dimension of religion in Japan. Her current research project maps out the role of the body in the Tantric landscape of medieval Japan.