



Scuola Italiana di Studi
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École Française
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KYOTO LECTURES

Friday, October 20th, 18:00h

David Quinter SPEAKER

Mantras for the Masses

The Saidaiji Order and the Spread of *Kōmyō Shingon* Practices in Medieval Japan

This talk explores the popularization of Mantra of Light (*kōmyō shingon*) practices in medieval Japan, focusing on the activities of Eison (1201-90) and his Saidaiji order of Shingon Ritsu monks and nuns. Such Chinese scriptures as the *Mantra of Light of the Great Consecration of Vairocana Buddha of the Unfailing Rope Snare*, attributed to Amoghavajra (705-74) and brought to Japan by Kūkai (774-835), taught that reciting the mantra and sprinkling sand empowered by it on corpses or graves could erase transgressions and ensure rebirth in a pure land. We thus find references to uses of the mantra at funerary rites in Japan from the late ninth century. Subsequently, teachings on the sand received a strong boost from lectures and commentaries by the Kego-Shingon monk Myōe (1173-1232), which various scholars have emphasized in assessing the mantra's popularization. This talk argues, however, that focus on the sand and such commentarial literature casts into shadow another key to the mantra's spread: the annual Mantra of Light assemblies implemented by Eison at Saidaiji in 1264 and carried out there to the present. In particular, based on both premodern sources and ethnographic observations, the talk investigates the order's use of rosters of contributors to the assemblies for fundraising, recitation, and iconographic adornment and the wideranging network of exchange they attest.

David Quinter is Associate Professor of East Asian Religions at the University of Alberta. He earned his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Stanford University in 2006 and is currently a Foreign Research Scholar at the University of Tokyo Historiographical Institute. His research interests center on medieval Nara Buddhism, devotional cults, and the interplay of textual, visual, and material culture in East Asian religions. He is the author of *From Outcasts to Emperors: Shingon Ritsu and the Mañjuśrī Cult in Medieval Japan* (Brill, 2015) and is now working on a monograph on Eison and his involvement in diverse devotional cults. Recent articles include "Materializing and Performing *Prajñā*: Jōkei's Mañjuśrī Faith and the Kasagidera Restoration" (*Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 43, no. 1, 2016) and "Localizing Strategies: Eison and the Shōtoku Taishi Cult" (*Monumenta Nipponica* 69, no. 2, 2014).

Please note that this lecture will be held at the Kyoto centre of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient

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