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International
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KYOTO LECTURES

Thursday, July 14th, 18:00h

Fabio Rambelli

SPEAKER

"The Dharma Preaches Equality and Has No Hierarchy"

Uchiyama Gudō and the Experiment of Buddhist Anarchism

Sōtō Zen priest Uchiyama Gudō (1874-1911) is well known for his participation in the Japanese anarcho-communist movement and his alleged involvement in a terrorist plot to assassinate Emperor Meiji (known as the "High Treason Incident," *taigyaku jiken*), on account of which he was sentenced to death. Authors have tended to consider Uchiyama's texts as almost self-explanatory, and his anarchism has been described as only superficially related to Buddhist politics and ethics. This talk will present a critical discussion of the complex and conflicting relationship between Buddhist teachings and anarchism in Uchiyama's thought and practice, based on a close reading of his own texts. Gudō's writings will be placed within their plural cultural and historical contexts, in particular, modern Buddhism, socialist thought and praxis, and the Edo period Japanese tradition of anti-authoritarian political activism as exemplified by Sakura Sōgorō, Ōshio Heihachirō, and Ninomiya Sontoku (a tradition which draws, among others, upon Daoist elements and the thought of Wang Yangming). Finally, the presentation will point to the lack of substantial Buddhist contributions to progressive political and social movements in Japan; more generally, it will question the actual possibility of formulating explicitly, and specifically, Buddhist political positions in the modern world.

Fabio Rambelli is the Professor of Japanese Religion and Intellectual History and the International Shinto Foundation Chair of Shinto Studies in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, and in the Department of Religious Studies, at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He holds a PhD in East Asian Studies (Italy, 1992). Prior to his current position at UCSB, he taught in Europe, the United States, and Japan. His main research interests concern the history of Buddhism and Shinto in Japan, issues of intercultural representation, and cultural semiotics. He is the author of *Vegetal Buddhas* (2001) and *Buddhist Materiality* (2007), and the co-editor of *Reconfiguring Cultural Semiotics* (Versus, 1999, with Patrizia Violi) and *Buddhas and Kami in Japan* (2003, with Mark Teeuwen). He is currently working on a book on Buddhist semiotic theories; other ongoing projects deal with the representation of India in the cultural imagination of pre-modern Japan and the relations of Buddhism with local cults in Asia.

This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room, 1st floor).

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