Ritualized Word: Material Networks in Thirteenth-Century Japan

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Abstract: Ritualized word has a long history in Japan, seemingly predating the introduction of Buddhist practice. This power of word was further emphasized through Buddhist ritual and art. This article examines the interconnectedness of these aspects during the early medieval period, focusing on the depiction of monks reciting the *nenbutsu* 念仏 (Ch. *nian Fo* 念佛), a practice honouring Amida Buddha 阿弥陀 (Skt. Amitābha) through spoken recitation, mental visualization, or both. Although *nenbutsu* practice traces back to the early centuries of Buddhism in Japan, around the beginning of the thirteenth century, artists began to experiment in Buddhist works with how to represent the *nenbutsu* ritualized word and its complex associations. Through an interdisciplinary approach drawing on discussions of societal systems, ritual, and material culture, this study investigates how paintings and sculptures portraying the *nenbutsu* were nexuses situated in intervisual and intertextual networks. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the ways that the materiality of Buddhist works both constructed and revealed trends of ritualized word in the thirteenth century.

Keywords: Amida, sculpture, painting, *nenbutsu*, Pure Land, Kamakura

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Introduction

Just by existing, words beckon us. They implore us to listen, to read, to interpret. Spoken words seek an ear to hear them. Written words wait for eyes to read them. Words have authority—at times legal, others emotive, sometimes didactic, sometimes all these things, and sometimes others.[1] It may then be unsurprising when 'word' is perceived with an extraordinary power and incorporated into ritual practice. In Japan, imagery related to the *nenbutsu* 念仏 (Ch. *nian Fo* 念佛), a practice in which one recites homage to Amida 阿弥陀 (Skt. Amitābha) Buddha, made ritualized word material in many ways in the thirteenth century, when various sculptures and paintings captured at once the actual practice and conceptual aspects underpinning it.[2] Manifestations varied, sometimes being narratives of golden light emitting from the mouth and other times being spoken word formed into shining anthropomorphic bodies or phrases of written script enthroned on lotus pedestals. A scene in the early fourteenth-century handscroll *Yūzū nenbutsu engi* 融通念仏縁起 [An Account of the Origins of the Yūzū nenbutsu Buddhist Sect] (Figure 1) depicts three hanging scroll paintings in an interior space, illustrating the use of *nenbutsu* imagery in ritual practice. Despite abbreviated forms, these paintings within a painting are still identifiable as types. Central is an image of the descent of Amida Buddha. To the right

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[1] I extend my gratitude to Kevin Carr and Erin Brightwell for their input on this work when I was a graduate student and to those who presented at and attended the 2023 Ritual and Materiality in Buddhist and East Asian Religions conference at Princeton University. In particular, many thanks to the organizors (now editors of this journal edition) Shi-Shan Susan Huang and Stephen F. Teiser as well as to Bryan Lowe, who generously shared select feedback both at the conference and via email later. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and *Hualin*'s Executive Editor, Maggie Mitchell, all of whom strengthened this text. Any mistakes remain my own.

[2] In Japan, there were a variety of *nenbutsu* phrases, but eventually the most widely propagated nenbutsu was the six-character 'namu Amida Butsu' 南無阿弥陀仏 (Homage to Amida Buddha).

FIG. 1 Detail of *Yūzū nenbutsu engi* (scroll 2): interior view (death of a nun) of hanging scrolls (left to right) of *nenbutsu*-speaking monk, Amida triad descent, and *myōgō*, early fourteenth century, overall: 30.3 x 1373.5 cm, ink, colour, and gold on paper, Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt, John L. Severance, and Edward L. Whittemore Funds, 1956.87.

is a *myōgō* 名号 (the [buddha's] name) painting, which by this time were already in use as enthroned script signifying a form of (Amida) Buddha in various imagery. The left painting is of a standing figure with a small cloud drifting away from it. To an unfamiliar eye, it may be a little perplexing, but to the period eye, it would likely have been recognizable as someone speaking the *nenbutsu*, which took the form of buddha figures drifting into the air—similar to a painting from approximately a century earlier (Figure 2), which is a focus of this article. In front of the arrangement of the three paintings, two altar tables hold ritual implements.[3] This fourteenth-century scene gives us a glimpse of how these works became embedded in ritual use,

[3] For more on this scene's ritual, see Brock, *The Material Culture of Death*, 144.

FIG. 2 Pure Land patriarch Shandao (Jp. Zendō), first quarter of thirteenth century, Kamakura period, colours and cut-gold foil on silk, 141 x 55 cm, Chionji, Kyoto.

but tracing the development of *nenbutsu* imagery can illustrate for us the intertwined nature of premodern perceptions of ritualized word steeped in material considerations. Though significant individually, *nenbutsu* images of the early thirteenth century reference one another in a network of meaning, memory, and ritual at individual and community levels. In a variety of ways, these layered meanings and references converged in the nexuses that were visual works.[4]

Over the last century, many have theorized what ritual is and how to categorize its great diversity. In fact, some scholars have argued that this diversity means that there cannot be a universal definition of ritual.[5] A core topic in ritual studies historiography has been the mind-body/thought-action dichotomy or attempts at an antithesis, as religious studies scholar Catherine Bell laid out in her seminal book.[6] In different guises within this historiography, this dichotomy has set the intangible (thought/mind) as opposite to the tangible (action/body). Various scholars have perceived ritual as part of that dichotomy with ritual aligning with action while others argued that ritual mediates the two. Bell herself argued for an understanding not of ritual, per se, but of ritualization. In wanting to look at *how* people ritualize rather than specifically the results of said ritualization, Bell focused on people as the actors who shape ideologies. Drawing in part on these various explorations of ritual or, as Bell puts it, ritualization and combining them with aspects of Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (ANT), herein I consider people, ideas, and objects as actors in a network wherein art has the potential to both reflect and shape practice in the process of ritualization through material means.[7] The *nenbutsu* imagery studied in this article provide examples of making the intangible tangible. These Buddhist works presenting word as both source and transmission, largely through the materiality of the objects, allow us to continue to complicate the role of thought and action in ritualization.

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4 Gell, *Art and Agency*.

5 Smith, *Imagining Religion*.

6 Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.

7 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

Despite the variety of objects from this period incorporating *nenbutsu*, I will examine select works, painted and sculpted, depicting two specific monks known for speaking the *nenbutsu*. These depictions illustrate them in the midst of such recitation. While the semiotic complexities are perhaps the initial draw to these works, their materiality is an essential component in understanding semantic and non-semantic content, embodiment, and ritualized experience. Through this study, I trace a part of the dense and layered intertextual, intervisual, and artistic exchanges to illustrate not only the ways that the materiality of ritual was perceived in early thirteenth-century Japan, but also to attempt to examine from within these exchanges the ways that representations of ritualized word complicate the modern perceived binaries of mind and body. Thus, explorations of the materiality of word in these *nenbutsu* images of two specific figures enrich our understanding of ritual practice as a potential avenue for collapsing the tangible and intangible even as studying these ritualized words prompts a more nuanced consideration of materiality in the study of Japanese Buddhism.

Networks, Nexuses, and Ritualized Word

My objects of study are clearly situated within layers of networks such as transcultural trade, temples, and artists. As such, the theoretical frameworks of two scholars in particular have influenced my methodologies. In approaching these Buddhist works of art, I here adapt aspects of Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (hereinafter ANT) and, loosely, Alfred Gell's consideration of art nexus. Latour's emphasis on the '*tracing of associations*' and a '*type of connection*' provides the framework to expand upon studies of intertextuality to consider intervisuality in the layered meanings of these particular spoken *nenbutsu* images.[8] Whereas some premodern Buddhist monks might have found the basic concept of intertextuality appealing, considering the world as a world-text and the entirety of existence

[8] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 5.

equivalent to letters within it, the original use of intertextuality in modern scholarship privileges texts.[9] While these were no doubt integral to Buddhist material culture in early medieval Japan, this framing alone ignores the importance of the materiality of these words and the way that the visual had, by the thirteenth century, become core to Buddhist practice.[10] In the last few decades, scholars have increasingly studied Buddhist materiality in works like Fabio Rambelli's *Buddhist Materiality* or even more specifically, the materiality of texts as seen in Charlotte Eubanks' *Miracles of Book and Body*.[11] Because intertextuality as a concept has since expanded to be used to frame performance art as 'texts', we might now conceive of a term such as intervisuality functioning in a similar way. Applying Latour's ANT prompts a parsing out of the various moving factors that impact pervasive imagery. The flexibility in Latour's concept of networks that frames aspects of society not as context, but as the 'many connecting elements' compels one to think of shifting meanings wherein new factors create different associations.[12]

ANT in some ways dovetails with Alfred Gell's anthropological work on art and agency, which has been received in extremely differing ways.[13] Regardless of the contentions with his work, his concept of the 'nexus' has influenced my study to some degree. Gell articulated an art nexus that encompasses four aspects: creator, agency (index: materials and what they allow), prototype, and recipients. Gell's

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[9] Religious studies scholar Ryuichi Abé has extensively discussed the Buddhist monk Kūkai's 空海 (774–835) semiotic approaches in relation to a 'world-text'. Abé, *Weaving the Mantra*.

[10] Bogel, *With a single glance*.

[11] Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*. Eubanks, *Miracles of Book and Body*. Many other volumes and articles also illustrate this trend within Buddhist studies, not least of which is the recent work by Youn-mi Kim, for example: Han and Kim, 'Forgotten Traces of the Buddhist Incantation Spell Practice from Early Korea'.

[12] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 5–6. This also brings to mind the discussion of con(text) in Bal and Bryson, 'Semiotics and Art History'.

[13] Gell, *Art and Agency*.

conception of art objects as social agents considers them in relation to those four aspects. In some ways the theories of Latour and Gell coexist—even complement—one another while in other ways there is tension between the two. My study here brings together aspects from each theoretical framework. Throughout this article, I use the term 'nexus' to denote a connection between multiple 'things', be they people, objects, places, teachings, or others. My use of the term 'network' might be seen as a spiderweb of these nexuses. However, unlike most spiderwebs that seem at first to create a two-dimensional plane, I rather see the networks for these objects as multi-dimensional, layers of these webs that intersect at various angles. We can break these down into a series of network planes. For example, the artistic networks include, but are not limited to, individual artists, schools, patrons, and art objects such as paintings and sculptures. Textual networks include, among others, Buddhist sūtra texts and commentaries. Temple networks are complicated institutions that are physical structures and places combined with sectarian affiliations that have shifted throughout time and were not always singular for each temple.[14] We could consider the category of community networks more broadly, which would include but are not exclusive to the abovementioned networks. Community networks encompass all three of those and more, layering them together in a complex tapestry of interpersonal relations that may be driven by familial, religious, political, artistic, or combinatory motivations. The works I discuss as nexuses allow us an initial look at examining a larger system—a network—of early medieval Japanese visual use of and perspectives on ritualized word.

In addition to these methodological approaches, this study engages with a growing number of works that explore the place of language in Buddhism. Of note are two relatively recent monographs that

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[14] This article is mainly focusing on Pure Land traditions due to issues of time, space, and the focus on the *nenbutsu*-speaking monks; however, the consideration of the networks of these images can also be expanded out in connection to practices rooted in, for example, Shingon and Tendai Buddhism, as well as a deeper study of the temple contexts.

directly engage with questions relating to philosophies of language in Asia, Richard Payne's 2018 *Language in the Buddhist Tantra of Japan: Indic Roots of Mantra* and Harold Coward's 2019 *Word, Chant and Song*.[15] Coward looks at a range of case studies to explore philosophies of language within various Asian religious traditions, including a chapter on Buddhism and language. Even within his select case studies, language clearly could function within Buddhism in a variety of ways. With an emphasis on illustrating that Buddhism is not, in contrast to Romanticist and neo-Romanticist perspectives, anti-language, Payne similarly explores language ideologies, particularly in relation to what he calls 'extraordinary language', which encompasses the *nenbutsu*. Of course, both Coward and Payne are part of a longer line that has considered the place of language in Buddhist practice—as is clear even in the historiographies that they each present. Over the past decade, the relationship between language and material objects has become a prominent topic of study as exemplified by books like, in the case of China, Paul Copp's *The Body Incantory* and Michelle Wang's *Maṇḍalas in the Making* as well as, in the case of Japan, Halle O'Neal's *Word Embodied*, all of which employ methods and frameworks relevant to this study.[16] Although I am looking at works from the end of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, texts like Bryan Lowe's *Ritualized Writing* establish some important historical contexts for the periods prior to the early medieval. As Lowe wrote of the Nara period (710–794), ritualized writing—in the terms of his study, sūtra copying—brought together practice, meaning, and ethical comportment in the efforts for heavenly protection sponsored by the government. Significantly, though, he also illustrated that such practices spanned a range of social backgrounds from various areas. These conceptions of practices related to language as being imbued with transformative potential continued to

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[15] Coward, *Word, Chant, and Song*; Payne, *Language in the Buddhist Tantra of Japan*.

[16] Copp, *The Body Incantory*; Wang, *Maṇḍalas in the Making*; O'Neal, *Word Embodied*. O'Neal's work is especially relevant as the objects studied, jeweled pagoda maṇḍalas, span the range of time considered in this paper.

the early medieval period among diverse groups. How, then, may one define 'ritual language' and more to the point, how is it employed in this article?

This seemingly straightforward question does not likewise have a perfectly straightforward answer. As Payne discussed, extraordinary language is 'not ordinary language'.[17] Essentially, it is a use of language that is not about communicating linguistic content in a discursive manner, per se, in the way that language is often understood to convey information. That does not mean that information or meaning is not conveyed. Indeed, there are many and varied examples. Payne's extraordinary language can include ritual language. For the parameters of this paper, we can understand ritual as 'part of a dialectic process between bodily practice and the formation of subjects and societies' and ritual language addresses instances where the transformative potential of language plays a key part in this process.[18] Therefore, here I consider the spoken *nenbutsu* as a ritual language, or 'extraordinary language', that functioned at a variety of levels for the practitioner, but at the very least was a series of repeated actions toward a goal, whether that be for protection against ills in this world, birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land, or the realization of Amida's power and presence.[19] The objects addressed in this paper further add to these continuing discussions of the relationships between ritual and language by further exploring language's extraordinary characteristics in a specifically physical format, here most easily seen by the ways that ritual word is materialized in bodily forms within these paintings and sculptures of monks known for their *nenbutsu* practice in early medieval Japan. By placing these objects as rich nexuses, we can further understand the ways that ritual and materiality moved along various networks.

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[17] Payne, *Language in the Buddhist Tantra of Japan*, 8.

[18] Lowe, *Ritualized Writing*, 13.

[19] Payne and others have discussed the complexities of perspectives on the *nenbutsu* for the different communities that developed *nenbutsu* practices.

An Early Depiction of a Figural *nenbutsu*

A painting (Figure 2) of the Chinese monk Shandao 善導 (613–681), venerated as a central patriarch in Japanese Pure Land traditions and eventually the Pure Land and Shin-Pure Land sects, provides a useful first example of how objects act as nexus points where networks converge and from which new pathways emerge. Perhaps it might have surprised Shandao to find that, centuries after his life, he was a venerated figure in the land beyond the sea in the east. However, since he lived during a time of rich transcultural interaction especially with central and South Asian communities, he may have at least expected that some of his writings could or would travel beyond the borders of his homeland. Figure 2, a copy of a Song-dynasty (960–1279) painting in the collection of Chionji 知恩寺, has layers of associations, including but not limited to: hagiography, patriarch veneration, transcultural exchange, Buddhist revitalization and tensions, the Buddhist textual canon, personal and communal concepts of ritualizing language, and artistic production. Key to these categories are intervisual and intertextual networks, some of which I endeavour to present here.

Shandao's impact on Buddhist communities in Japan was first felt textually. He mainly studied the *Yuima kitsu shosetsu kyō* 維摩詰所説経 (Skt. *Vimalakīrti sūtra*) and the *Bussetsu muryōjukyō* 仏説無量寿経 [Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra] before he happened to attend a lecture on the *Bussetsu kanmuryōjukyō* 仏説観無量寿経 (Skt. *Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra*) given by Daochuo 道綽 (562–645).[20] After this purportedly life-changing lecture, Shandao devoted himself to the study of Pure Land practices. The texts he wrote, such as his *Guan wu liang shou jing shu* 観無量寿経疏 (Jp. *Kanmuryōjukyō sho*, Commentary on the *Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra*) became extremely

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[20] The references for the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, *Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*, and *Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra* texts are, respectively, *T* no. 475, *T* no. 360, and *T* no. 365. In English, the *Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* is called the *Infinite Life Sūtra*. The *Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra* is often called the *Meditation Sūtra* and is widely considered an apocryphal text written originally in Chinese.

influential in China, the Korean peninsula, and Japan.[21] He was an early proponent of using *nenbutsu* practice to achieve salvation through Amida Buddha's name (and thus Amida's power), laying out his theory of salvation via 'other [Amida's] power' (Jp. *tariki* 他力, Ch. *ta li*) in his writings. Shandao's texts were cited by many Buddhist clerics, including the founder of the Pure Land school of Buddhism in Japan, Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), who was particularly inspired by Shandao's *Commentary*. In addition to his commentaries on sūtras, the narratives of Shandao's life in China seem to have made him an especially attractive candidate for Pure Land lineages—this point may indicate the ongoing interest in ritualized word in medieval Japan. Tales of his life recount that when he spoke the *nenbutsu*, golden light emitted from his mouth.[22] This tale emphasized Shandao's ability to visually manifest his dedication to Amida in the natural world and thus his potential for karmic intervention through Amida's power for birth in the Pure Land. It also laid the foundation for identifying Shandao himself as a manifestation of Amida Buddha, first through textual description and later through visual depiction.

In these ways, Shandao became a venerated figure associated with Pure Land practices in Japan. The Chionji painting makes visual these originally textual aspects of Shandao veneration. As one of the most well-known Shandao images, this painting dates to around the beginning of the thirteenth century.[23] It shows Shandao standing on a tiled floor and facing the viewer's right, hands clasped together with prayer beads and face turned upwards. His mouth is open to indicate the action of speaking. Though now badly deteriorated, five 'trans-

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[21] *T* no. 1753.

[22] In fact, reportedly, the Tang Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628–683, r. 649–683) marked such a miraculous occurrence with a plaque for Shandao's temple reading Guangmingsi 光明寺 (Jp. Kōmyōji, 'radiating light temple'). Kyōto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Hōnen shōgai to bijutsu*, 215.

[23] This dating is made based on stylistic evidence, study of the silk construction, and Takama Yukari's tracing of imported Shandao imagery. Takama, 'Chionji shozō jūyō bunkazai Zendō daishi ni tsuite' and Takama, 'Jōdoshū ni okeru Chūgoku butsuga no juyō'.

formation buddha' (Jp. *kebutsu* 化仏) figures float up into the empty space in Shandao's line of sight. The image is clearly a reference to the miraculous ability mentioned in Shandao's biographical narrative, the emission of golden light when he spoke the *nenbutsu*. However, here, the *nenbutsu* is materialized as miniature golden Amida Buddhas rather than simply an emission of light. Though a two-dimensional image contained within the confines of a hanging scroll, its associations as well as artistic and conceptual impacts expand far beyond the picture plane.

To understand this work as a nexus that captures the combined significance of materiality and ritualized practice, one can pull out individual components for close study to trace some of the network strands. The wide acceptance of the Chionji painting as a Song-dynasty copy is drawn partially from the inscription across the top of the painting, which reads:

> Portrait from life of the Tang-dynasty Master Shandao
> Inscribed by the Buddhist monk Yunsheng propagating Buddhism at Siming
>
> When Shandao practices the *nenbutsu*,
> Buddhas then issue forth from his mouth.
> All believers who see this
> Know it is not an illusion.[24]
> It is the mind, it is the Buddha,[25]
> Every person is endowed [with both, i.e. Buddha nature].
> [We] desire to know Shandao,

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[24] The term illusion carries the implication of purposeful deceit, so the inscription is clearly noting that this is not a trick on Shandao's part. The issue of illusory experiences is a prominent thread within Buddhist teachings.

[25] This is a reference to the nonduality of buddha and the human mind (with its buddha-nature, or *bodaishin* 菩提心, Skt. *bodhicitta*, also translated as enlightenment mind in English). In other words, this line with its parallel construction is drawing equations between the mind and the Buddha to illustrate each person's potential—as is made clear in the next line.

[Whose] wondrousness is fully matured.
The waters of [Shandao's] mind are calm
[And the] Buddha-moon [mirrored in his mind] drops down as a reflection.
The winds of karma rouse waves
[And] the seated Buddha [grows] especially distant

The first day of the second month of the *xinsi* [thirty-first] year of Shaoxing [1161]

唐善導和尚真像
四明伝法比丘雲省 讃

善導念仏　　仏従口出
信者皆見　　知非幻術
是心是仏　　人人具足
欲知善導　　妙在純熟
心池水静　　仏月垂影
業風起波　　坐仏殊迥

紹興辛巳二月一日[26]

The inscription and the painting reinforce one another. The text narrates the miraculous effects of Shandao's *nenbutsu* practice: that it manifested Buddha figures that could be seen by 'believers' (信者). In addition to providing a textual testimony of Shandao's connection to the sacred power of Amida Buddha, the inscription expounds on the ability and challenges of individuals to aspire to similar devotion and efficacious actions. Yunsheng's lines of the calm waters of the mind and the reflection of the buddha-moon are somewhat ambiguous in terms of subject. They could, as I have interpreted above, refer to

[26] The English translation is my own, though greatly enriched by the guidance of Erin Brightwell through discussion. The original text is transcribed in two publications: *Hōnen to Shinran: Yukari no Meibutsu*, 337; Takama, 'Chionji shozō jūyō bunkazai Zendō daishi ni tsuite', 1.

the source of Shandao's fully-matured wondrousness—his innate buddha-nature that is enhanced and manifested through *nenbutsu* practice. This interpretation would draw more connections between the inscription and image with a play on the reflection/image (影) dropped down (垂). It aligns with the inner buddha-nature as reflected on the still surface of the waters of the mind, but also resonates with the painted figures of Amida suspended (another way to gloss 垂) in the air in front of Shandao. This layered meaning of these paired lines also plays on the various uses of 影 as image and reflection, among others. However, it is possible for these quatrains to be interpreted, though with a less clear connection to the painted image, as the reader/aspirant needing to make the waters of their mind calm so the buddha-moon will reflect in it. The following lines about the winds of karma and the seated Buddha becoming increasingly distant also simultaneously address both the painted seated Amida figures that drift up and away from the represented figure of Shandao *and* the challenges Buddhists faced during *mappō* 末法 (latter [days] of the dharma).[27]

Overall, the inscription still emphasizes an individual's actions and karmic consequences ('winds of karma', *gōfū* 業風). Yet it also implies that the *nenbutsu* is a technique for abrogating the effects of karmic consequence and lessening the distance between practitioner and Buddha, both in this life (Shandao's manifesting Buddha figures/presence via *nenbutsu*) and beyond (birth in Amida's Pure Land).[28] Both inscription and painting reference sūtra texts and Shandao's

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[27] In Japan, by the early medieval period, most believed *mappō* had started in the year 1052 and the compounded tragedies in the twelfth century seemed to support this belief.

[28] The copy's inscription dates the original to around 1161, which established not only the dating of the original imagery that the Chionji painting copied but also the earliest possible date for the Chionji work. Study of the structure of the Chionji painting's silk supports a date of around forty years following 1161. Takama, 'Chionji shozō jūyō bunkazai Zendō daishi ni tsuite', 2. Takama's text presents the results of a close scientific analysis of the work in combination with previous scholarship.

hagiography. In these ways and more, the work's text and image present the *nenbutsu* as an individual ritual practice drawing from historical precedents that are shown as engaging both the material and conceptual. This is apparent when we further break down aspects of the painting.

The incorporation of gold in the painting can have multifold meanings. It is applied via *kirikane* 截金 (cut gold) to the luxurious fabric of Shandao's clothing.[29] In practical terms, this gold in the image points to the lavish nature of the painting and the availability of the material at the time, indicating networks of material extraction, trade, and use, but it can also illustrate a connection (*kechien* 結縁) between the painted buddha bodies and Shandao. In other words, the buddha emanations and Shandao's physical characteristics are visually and materially joined through this representation of *nenbutsu* practice, which itself manifested Amida's presence. Additionally, this visual connection between buddha and monk may also mark Shandao's identity as a manifestation of Amida Buddha, a belief among Japanese Pure Land practitioners by the thirteenth century. This interpretation becomes more compelling when looking at the iconography of Shandao representations in the following centuries, which consistently illustrate him in monk's robes that are dual coloured, the lighter colour often being executed with gold.

Further, the golden-bodied miniature Amida Buddhas illustrate Shandao's spoken words as miraculous and themselves a form of the Buddha body that may only be revealed to the sight of those, as art historian Mimi Yiengpruksawan described in relation to *saṃbhogakāya* (or the enjoyment/reward body of a buddha), 'who have reached an advanced stage of understanding'.[30] To others not

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[29] This practice of applying cut gold foil in patterns to painted or sculpted images seems to have been imported from Tang-period (618–907) China and was especially well-used in Japan from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. For a brief summary of *kirikane*'s origins, see Katayama, 'Ranshōki no kirikane monyō nitsuite'.

[30] Yiengpruksawan, 'Buddha's Bodies and the Iconographical Turn in Buddhism', 396.

yet so advanced, the *nenbutsu* may be perceived through the faculty of hearing the spoken words. To reiterate the words of Yunsheng from the painting's inscription, 'All believers who see this [buddhas issuing forth from Shandao's mouth] know it is not an illusion'—in other words, we could interpret this as those who can perceive the manifested presence of Amida in *nenbutsu* practice have reached an advanced stage of understanding. The nature of gold as a material can also act to support this concept of selective viewing or understanding in its physical characteristic, with its reflective quality alternately emphasized or not, depending on how light plays over it when looking at the painting.[31] In short, the painting's materials and the materiality of personal ritual practice through the *nenbutsu* have the potential for multifaceted functions of language representation (here, the figural and spoken *nenbutsu*), through which the meanings and depictions of buddha bodies, relationships between venerated and venerator, and the intricacies of perceptive faculties are layered.

Expanding the Network: Images and Artists

The Chionji painting of Shandao exemplifies an early depiction of the *nenbutsu* as ritualized spoken word in figural form, but it was not the only example. In fact, it was embedded in a larger network—take, for example, the fact that the *Yūzū nenbutsu* handscroll scene mentioned earlier illustrates a figure speaking the *nenbutsu* in the same basic composition as Shandao in the Chionji painting. Although there are other artworks related to *nenbutsu* as well as the importance of word, my study focuses on certain related early thirteenth-century examples that followed the Chionji work in the form of sculpted imagery of the monks Shandao and Kūya 空也 (903–972). These works are seemingly connected and further followed by later painted examples. They create, in aggregate, an intervisual network. The

[31] This point is inspired by the input of art historian Brendan McMahon, who himself works on the material qualities of objects and how they contribute to the use and interpretation of works.

sculptural legacy of Shandao seems to have been a bit more lasting and consistent than the Japanese monk Kūya's (sculptures of Shandao were created all the way into the Edo period, 1603–1867), but it is a Kūya sculpture that may be the most famous *nenbutsu* image: the Rokuharamitsuji 六波羅蜜寺 Kūya sculpture (Figures 3 and 4) in Kyoto. Selecting this Rokuharamitsuji Kūya and two early Shandao sculptures, I argue they are evidence of a conception of the power of words that moved within a rich network of artistic production that drew from imported works, antecedents, and interactions with overlapping sets of patrons, artists, and monks. Underlying this confluence of factors was a pervasive desire for and perception of ritualized words as able to affect change, and therefore words were also part of a Buddhist imaginaire that conceived of them in a material sense.

The Rokuharamitsuji Kūya is a wooden sculpture of the standing itinerant monk. One foot, clad in straw sandals, is placed forward into the viewer's space and one hand is frozen in the midst of keeping a beat. His neck is stretched out and mouth opened to form words, giving the figure an active appearance in comparison to most sculptures of historical figures completed up to that point. Yet the open mouth is not the sole indication of speech. Six standing figures of Amida Buddha emerge from Kūya's mouth via an attached wire (Figure 4). While clearly illustrative of spoken word, these six figures can also represent the written characters of the six-character *nenbutsu*—one Amida figure for each character. Although the sculpture is a bit less than life size, the viewer may, at first glance, have imagined that they had stumbled across Kūya rhythmically keeping time on the *shōko* 鉦鼓 (small gong) and energetically chanting the *nenbutsu*, leaning forward to encourage others into joining his practice of *nenbutsu* chanting.[32]

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[32] *Shōko* were generally used during the Heian period in *gagaku* 雅楽 (Japanese court music), which could be a hint of his potentially aristocratic parentage. Another reference could be to the monk Chōgen (strong patron of the Kei school). Chōgen used a similar gong with harness in the 1198 Welcoming Ceremonies at the Watanabe *bessho* 別所 (special sanctuaries). Rosenfield, *Portraits of Chōgen*, 258. The gong used by Chōgen was saved as a treasure. For more on

FIG. 3 Statue of Kūya, by Kōshō, between 1207 and 1212, polychromy and wood, height: 116.5 cm, Rokuharamitsuji, Kyoto, Important Cultural Property.

FIG. 4 Detail of Kūya statue, by Kōshō, between 1207 and 1212, painted wood, height: 116.5 cm, Rokuharamitsuji, Kyoto, Important Cultural Property.

According to many transmitted biographies of Kūya, he may have been of aristocratic descent though this perhaps comes more from an interpretation of his demeanour than anything else as he supposedly never spoke of his origins.[33] Part of his training was in the Tendai 天

that, see Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, ed., *Dai kanjin Chōgen*, no. 28 and Tsutsui, *Tōdaiji ronsō*, vol. 1, 269.

[33] The most significant primary source about Kūya dates to the first anniversary of his death (972 CE), establishing the persistent points of information that pervade later texts. This source is the *Kūya rui* 空也誄 [Kūya Memorial] written by Minamoto Tamenori 源為憲 (d. 1011). Tamenori, having apparently interviewed Kūya's disciples in the process of writing the *Kūya rui*, wrote that Kūya did not speak of his birth, parents, hometown, or early childhood. One theory has been—in both sectarian circles and among some scholars—that he was of aristocratic descent as the illegitimate son of the sovereign Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885–930; r. 897–930), however there is no scholarly evidence to verify this claim.

台 school and he became fully ordained in 948. By his time, it was not uncommon for monks with Tendai backgrounds to leave central temples to preach among common laypeople and it seems from the early biography of him that he had done so even before his Tendai training. It was also relatively common for such itinerant monks to have an element of Pure Land veneration and *nenbutsu* performance as part of their proselytizing. Kūya, like other so-called *nenbutsu* sages (*nenbutsu hijiri* 念仏聖), was an alms-begging mendicant who propagated the *nenbutsu* among villagers and provided services to them by performing rites for the dead, healing illnesses, or organizing infrastructural improvements such as digging wells.

Kūya's legacy endured in large part because of the intertextual network in the centuries following his death. He was captured in writing with biographies of him by Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (after 933–1002, alt. Jakushin 寂心) and Minamoto no Tamenori 源為憲 (d. 1011). Yoshishige no Yasutane's late tenth-century text, *Nihon ōjō gokuraki ki* 日本往生極楽記 [Record of Pure Land Births in Japan], promoted Kūya as responsible for the popularity of the *nenbutsu* in Japan.[34] It addressed forty-two individuals believed to have been born in Amida's Paradise. Many copies of this text were made around the end of the twelfth century, illustrating its popularity and perhaps contributing to an increased profile of Kūya that encouraged the development of Kūya imagery throughout the thirteenth century. Kūya was also the subject of an entry in *Ryōjin hishō* 梁塵秘抄 [Treasured Selections of Superb Songs], an 1179 compilation of *imayō* 今様 (contemporary style) poetic verse.[35] Though this compilation

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[34] *Nihon ōjō gokuraki ki*, 38–41. This publication has photographs of an early Kamakura-period manuscript of the text in the collection of Tokyo's Sonkeikaku Bunko 尊経閣文庫.

[35] *Imayō* poetic verse was lyrically sung, often with musical accompaniment, and was extremely popular in the twelfth century. This anthology was compiled personally by Go-Shirakawa Tennō 後白河天皇 (1127–1292, r. 1155–1158), which was unusual as *imayō*, though popular, were considered a plebian form and *waka* verse would have been more standard among aristocratic circles. Another version of the title's English translation is: *Songs to Make the Dust Dance*

circulated only among select elite audiences, it drew from songs that would likely have been popular among even common audiences. The *Hosshinshū* 発心集 [A Collection of Spiritual Awakenings], written by Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1153 or 1155–1216) as a collection of anecdotes about Buddhist 'recluses' who pursued religious awakening or salvation, also contained references to Kūya and his propagation of the *nenbutsu* in Japan.[36] In addition to directly speaking of Kūya's spiritual awakening, Chōmei's text briefly mentions Kūya in other figures' entries and it seems to assume readers would understand such references, indicating the well-known nature of Kūya's legacy by that point. Kūya imagery developed in this textual milieu.

As in the case of Shandao, Kūya's biography may well have been a main force in the rise of his presence in twelfth-century texts and the development of his imagery in the following century. Throughout Kūya's life as an itinerant Buddhist monk, he seems to have consistently employed Buddhist practice to deal with calamity. In the 930s, he reportedly gave the food he begged from the elite to displaced refugees from a revolt. Even the founding of Saikōji 西光寺 (soon after Kūya's lifetime called Rokuharamitsuji, the name used hereinafter), which later nurtured Kūya's renown, appears to be the result

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on the Beams. The use of *ryōjin* 梁塵 (the characters respectively for 'beam' and 'dust') references a Chinese tale of two legendary singers whose voices were so remarkable that they could make the dust dance on the rafters for three days before settling. This hint at the power of words to move (literally) even non-sentient objects such as dust as well as the Buddhist content (塵 or 'dust' in the title references deeper Buddhist meanings as the term was used in Buddhist canon and commentary as a reference for the material world) are quite relevant to this topic, though I do not discuss it in detail here. For more on the study of the *Ryōjin hishō*, see Kim, *Songs to Make the Dust Dance*. For a transcription of the remaining extant parts of the text, see *Ryōjin hishō*, *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei* series.

[36] This text eventually became widely circulated. The compilation is heavily inflected with Pure Land belief and practice, many stories being related to Amida devotion or *nenbutsu* practice. For a transcription of the text, see *Hōjōki, Hosshinshū*. References to Kūya use his name as well as common appelations that had been assigned the monk.

of trying to navigate disaster. Evidence suggests that, in response to epidemics of the time, he organized the copying of a luxurious version of the Buddhist scriptural text *Dai hannya haramitta kyō* 大般若波羅蜜多経 [Large Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra or Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras].[37] Its completion was commemorated with a ceremony in 963, a moment the temple situates as its origin. Like many sites in and around the capital, Rokuharamitsuji experienced damage in the twelfth century with some temple buildings being burnt in 1183. As with the other sites of destruction, there was need for restoration, which frames the historical context for the creation of the Kūya sculpture. This sculptural depiction of Kūya and its context provide a chance to understand ways that human motivations could be enacted via artistic production with a motivated interpretation and leveraging of the past. Considering the relevance of Kūya's using Buddhist practice (such as ritualized sūtra copying or saying the *nenbutsu*) to deal with violent conflict, illness, famine, and displacement, honouring him at the beginning of the thirteenth century may have seemed particularly relevant as similar challenges directly preceded the sculpture's creation.

Study of the Kūya work and its sculptor gives us a nuanced perspective of the networks within which the sculpture was situated. The imagery captures Kūya's personal iconography, which stemmed from his defining practice. In addition to the pilgrimage staff connected to his hagiography, his sandals illustrating his reputation as an itinerant monk, and the gong upon which he keeps a beat for the intoned *nenbutsu*, this figure of Kūya is not only standing, but ostensibly *walking*. With a stance indicative of action, his left foot moves forward into the space of the viewer. Even his *nenbutsu* is depicted as a particularly active form of ritualized words. Kūya's *nenbutsu* was renowned for using rhythm and dance in tandem with speaking the words 'namu Amida Butsu'.[38] Kūya leans forward, the muscles and

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[37] For the sūtra text, see *T* no. 220. For more on this research relating to Kūya, see Rhodes and Payne, *Genshin's Ōjōyōshū and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan*, 64–72.

[38] This is called *odori nenbutsu* 踊念仏 (dancing *nenbutsu*).

tendons of his neck slightly flexed as he vocalizes his chants, made visible by six buddha figures. Although seemingly more active than Shandao's *nenbutsu* in the Chionji painting, in both works the *nenbutsu is* the buddha body materially manifest. With the number of buddha figures differing from the painting of Shandao, the sculpture of Kūya physically illustrates the connection not only between spoken word and buddha, but also *written* word. It had already been established in Buddhist practice, especially Shingon practice, that (in simplified semiotic terms) body and script could explicitly be signifiers for the same signified. Expanding from this, in the Kūya sculpture, figural buddha bodies were polysemic, signifying both written and spoken word, ritual, and Amida Buddha.

The creation of the Kūya sculpture illustrates the movement of imagery within artistic networks as well as the pervasive nature of period ideas and thus the ways that artistic and monastic networks were, to varying degrees, overlaid upon one another. From an inscription on the interior of the sculpture, we know the Kūya work was carved by Kōshō 康勝 (dates unknown, active early thirteenth century) of the Kei School sometime between 1207 and 1212 while he was using that name and rank, thus positioning the sculpture in that period.[39] Written with black ink on the interior of the sculpture, the inscription

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[39] This may well have been coincidental, but Kūya's Buddhist name was Kōshō 光勝. Therefore, Kūya's Buddhist name and the sculptor of the Rokuharamitsuji work's name were homophones, even sharing the second character of their names. With the various active Kei School sculptors at the time, perhaps Kōshō was chosen in part for this connection, which would be yet one more way that auditory sound factored—if indirectly—into the work's creation. Kōshō was the fourth son of the now famous Kei School sculptor Unkei and active until at least around 1232. He is also documented as having worked on an 1198 restoration at Tōji 東寺 with his father and two of his brothers. Kōshō led the 1232 casting of a bronze Amida triad at Hōryūji, a work viewed as a relatively unsuccessful attempt toward a hybrid of the newer trend toward naturalism and an archaic style. This work's extant inscription definitively uses a higher ranking than the Rokuharamitsuji Kūya sculpture. He also carved a wooden sculpture of Kūkai for Tōji's Miedō in 1233.

reads '[the] monk Kōshō' (僧康勝) along with a *kaō* 花押 (stylized signature or mark).[40] By 1212, Kōshō had achieved the higher rank of *hokkyō* 法橋 (Dharma Bridge).[41] With this Kūya sculpture created in the years around 1210, it seems quite possible that Kōshō or other related figures would have seen an image of a *nenbutsu*-speaking Shandao, whether the Chionji painting, the Song-dynasty work that it copied (dated 1161), or another similar depiction of him. Thus, Mōri Hisashi suggested in his study of Kamakura-period sculpture that the depiction of the emerging Amida figures in the Kūya sculpture could have derived from the same source as Kamakura Shandao images.[42]

One possibility is that Kōshō saw a sculpture of a *nenbutsu*-speaking Shandao, such as the one held by Raigōji 来迎寺 in Nara. The Raigōji work is unusual among Shandao sculptures because he is depicted in a seated position, sculpted with one leg bent underneath him and the knee of his other leg raised but drawn in relatively close to his body. His eyes gaze forward with an expression of active attention, and his mouth is open as if caught mid-speech. Examination of the sculpture reveals a hole in the interior of the mouth with evidence that this work originally had a wire armature protruding. This is the same approach seen in the Kōshō Kūya. This hole, along with the Raigōji sculpture's hands being pressed together in prayer as in other imagery of Shandao speaking the *nenbutsu*, make it very likely that the sculpture would have originally had a wire with miniature buddha figures projecting out of the mouth. In other words, like the Kūya sculpture, the Raigōji sculpture physically manifested

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[40] *Zōzō meiki*, 175. Mizuno, *Nihon chōkokushi kiso shiryō shūsei*, 248.

[41] Ibid. This is discerned from a recorded inscription on the lotus pedestal of a Miroku 弥勒 (Skt. Maitreya) image at Kōfukuji (sculpture location, if extant, now unknown). *Hokkyō* rank was the third rank given to Buddhist image makers with *hōin* 法印 (Dharma Seal) and *hōgen* 法眼 (Dharma Eye) being first and second rank, respectively. For further discussion on Kōshō's rank and the use of *sō* to designate *shōbusshi* 少仏師 (lower rank Buddhist image maker), see Mizuno, *Nihon chōkokushi kiso shiryō shūsei*, 249–50.

[42] Mōri, *Unkei to Kamakura chōkoku*, 121. Mōri seems to be the only scholar to explicitly state this, but in a relatively offhand manner.

nenbutsu practice. This is further supported by the fact that the same technique was employed in other, later thirteenth-century sculptures of Shandao and Kūya.

From the current evidence, the Raigōji work appears to be the earliest extant Shandao sculpture in Japan—and likely the earliest *nenbutsu* sculptural image. The interior of the Raigōji sculpture contains inscriptions in two locations that, while not recording the year, give us information to narrow down the date. As art historian Nagaoka Ryūsaku points out, the inscription on the interior side of the figure's back includes names of people who contributed to the creation and dedication of the sculpture.[43] Among those, six of the listed names are also found on an interior inscription of a Fudō Myōō 不道明王 sculpture at Daigōji 醍醐寺. Because the Daigoji sculpture has a recorded year of Kennin 建仁 3 (1203), we know that these six people had joined together to sponsor a sculpture that year. Due to the shared names between the works, one strong possibility is that creation of the Raigōji Shandao sculpture, sponsored by the same people, occurred around the same time. Further, Nagaoka posits that this Raigōji Shandao could have been the central image in a Shandao Enshrinement Hall (Zendō midō 善導御堂) constructed around this time.[44] This hypothesis is based on a set of letters between the monk Hōnen and his disciple Shōkū 証空 (1177–1247) found

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[43] Funding, preparing, and completing deposits for statuary was one way that a person could not only accrue merit, but also establish a connection (*kechien*) with the image and thus the deity. Inscriptions on the interior of sculptures had the potential for *kechien* in a conceptual, but also physical sense. Inscribing one's name on the interior of a sculpture's body created a material, seemingly permanent connection—especially in cases where the statue was considered a living body (*shōjin* 生身). There are also documented reverse examples, where the deity was inscribed on the body of the adherent—either in name or Sanskrit seed syllable. Clearly, the material written word had the power to forge immaterial bonds between human and sacred beings. Nagaoka, *Kaikei*, 240. This entire paragraph draws from Nagaoka's work.

[44] Ibid. This also contributes to an understanding of how Shandao images may have been used (in veneration).

inside an Amida sculpture of Kōzenji 光善寺. Within these letters is a reference to progress on the erection of such a hall around the year Shōji 正治 2 (1200), though it is not clear exactly where this hall was being built. Other clues point to the context of the Raigōji work's creation. One of the named individuals in the Raigōji inscription, a monk called Kin'amidabutsu 金阿弥陀仏 (d.u.) who apparently lived on land neighbouring modern-day Raigōji, is found in other contemporaneous records that connect him with the monk Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206), who was influential and active in Buddhist temple reconstructions and art production of the time.

The Raigōji Shandao does not have a definitive attribution, but some scholars—such as Nagaoka—have suggested a Kei school 慶派 connection. After undergoing repair in recent years, a second inscription was found on the interior of the Raigōji work. The characters 'Sonkei' 尊慶 are written in black ink on the interior surface of the head, bolstering the Kei School hypothesis.[45] Prominent Kei school sculptors were very active in Nara during the time the Raigōji Shandao was made. Furthermore, with a connection between one of the inscribed patrons and Chōgen, who himself was a consistent patron of the Kei school, the possibility that the Raigōji work could be linked to a Kei sculptor is convincing. We may not be able to concretely identify this Raigōji sculpture as a Kei School work or as the image enshrined in the abovementioned hall, but from the evidence at hand it seems reasonable to potentially situate the work's creation between 1200 and 1205.

Such a dating would place the Raigōji work slightly prior to the Rokuharamitsuji sculpture. With the Rokuharamitsuji Kūya being definitively attributed to Kōshō of the Kei School and the high probability of the Raigōji Shandao having a Kei artistic connection, the similar depiction of spoken word in both sculptures could very well have been a result of artistic innovation that was either developed or nurtured through community exchange. It seems to push the boundaries of belief to consider that the two sculptures

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[45] Nagaoka even presents (in question form, thus understandably hedging to some degree) Kaikei as a possibility. Nagaoka, *Kaikei*, 240. We do not yet have details of anyone known as Sonkei outside this work.

were created in isolation from one another, especially as they both represented the spoken *nenbutsu* and were created within the same general time frame and artistic environs. Without precise dating, it is not possible to say for sure which may have been the initial innovation of forming seemingly immaterial words into sculptural material objects via miniature Amida Buddha figures, and they may have also had a common source outside themselves (another object, patron, text, oral tradition, etc.). However, I maintain that the value is not in considering the 'first' as the innovation, per se. Rather, it is apparent that the power of words as material presences was evidently important enough to more than a single artist or patron for such *nenbutsu* representations to be prominent around the turn of the century, indicating a now often obscure network of artists, patrons, and viewers. Further, the successful incorporation of the spoken *nenbutsu* image in works over the following hundred years indicates that such a conception of ritualized language (the *nenbutsu*) and its use as a salvific tool became increasingly employed and recognizable in medieval Buddhist visual culture of Japan.

A sculpture of Shandao at Chion'in 知恩院 (Figure 5), dated broadly to the first half of the thirteenth century, is part of this group of spoken *nenbutsu* images. It not only shows the continued veneration of Shandao and has similarities with both the Rokuharamitsuji Kūya and Raigōji Shandao, but it is a prime example of the activation of sculpted images through both visible and non-visible material means as well as of the ways that practices could spread among networks with material effects. The sculpture represents Shandao standing upright, hands once more pressed together, chin slightly lifted, and mouth open in speech. As in the Raigōji work, there is a hole in the interior of the sculpture's mouth, an indication of original wire armature that would have held miniature buddha figures. Unlike the Raigōji work, though, this sculpture bears some striking similarities to the Chionji painting of Shandao, including the same pose of the figure. In fact, scholars like Asanuma Takeshi suggest that the sculpture is at least partially modeled after the painting.[46] Although very

[46] Kyōto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Hōnen shōgai to bijutsu*, 215–16.

FIG. 5 Statue of Shandao, first half of thirteenth century, Kamakura period, polychromy and wood, height: 96.1 cm, Chion'in, Kyoto, Important cultural property.

little remains of the pigment, the way the clothing falls in the sculpture resembles that of the Chionji painting, though more naturalistically in terms of how textiles lie—possibly a sign of some Kei school sculptural naturalism. The features and expression of the Chion'in sculpture seem to mimic that of the painting unlike, for example, the Raigōji Shandao sculpture. The amount of miniature buddha figures that were on the original, now-lost armature of either the Raigōji or Chion'in sculptures is unknowable, yet both are representative of the perceived power of words.

In addition to the visible activation of words and Shandao's connection to—manifestation of—Amida Buddha, the objects found within the Chion'in sculpture point to a non-visible, yet still material, activation of form. By the thirteenth century, the practice of caching objects within a sculpture (*zōnai nōnyūhin* 像内納入品) was relatively prevalent. Objects placed within statues could include sūtras, paintings, prints, grains, jewels, coins, personal belongings, records of devotees and their devotional activities, and relics—especially Buddha relics, or *śarīra* (*busshari* 仏舎利). Recent scholarship has generally focused on *nōnyūhin* as serving two potential functions: to enliven the image and/or to form a bond between patron and the represented deity.[47] Art historian Pei-Jung Wu outlines that, through text, discussion, and ceremonies, information about the use and function of these materials was relatively widely accessible. For example, public ceremonial caching would have allowed groups of people to witness the process and its significance (through accompanying oral aspects). The Chion'in Shandao is an example of this Kamakura practice of interring objects, however the *nōnyūhin* in this sculpture are a very specific type, exhibiting once more a connection to Chinese prototypes. Facsimiles of internal organs (*gozō roppu* 五臓六腑) were crafted out of silk brocade and braided cord, then interred in this Shandao figure, imbuing it with life through a complex execution of simultaneous mimesis, accuracy, and sacrality. In essence, the model

[47] Relatively recent examples of scholarship on *nōnyūhin* include Nedachi, 'Reigenbutsu to nōnyūhin wo tōshita seisei no ishoku wo megutte'; Brinker, *Secrets of the Sacred*; and Wu, 'Wooden Statues as Living Bodies'.

organs worked to constitute the statue as a 'living body' (*shōjin* 生身). Eison, writing in 1269 about *nōnyūhin* in a different sculpture, connected the merit-accruing interred objects to conceptions of a living body:

> With these accumulated merits to constitute its body [of the statue], who could say this wooden icon with its assemblage of good roots as adornment does not hold the majesty of a living body? 凡厥集功德為體, 誰謂之木像之尊, 積善根成粧, 寧不具生身之威乎.[48]

Although the Japanese *nōnyūhin* practice overall likely originated in China, it developed differently in Japan. In China, interring models of human organs within statues was popular, as we know from extant statues and texts, but this type of *nōnyūhin* was not similarly widespread in Japan.[49] A number of the few such types in Japan actually fall within a lineage stemming from a famous imported tenth-century Chinese work, the Seiryōji 清凉寺 Śākyamuni sculpture.[50] Around the twelfth century, the statue acquired its own legend of being a portrait of the Historical Buddha from India that came to Japan through China. The biography of the legendary *nenbutsu* practitioner Hōnen written by Shunjō 舜昌 (d. ca. 1335?) even mentions the renown of the Seiryōji statue, indicating acceptance

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[48] For the English: Wu, 'Wooden Statues as Living Bodies', 90. For the Japanese text: *Saidaiji Eison denki shūsei*, 156–57.

[49] Tanabe, 'Zōnai nōnyuhin zakki'; Shimizu, 'Gozō rokufu no aru Sōdai mokuzō bosatsu hanka zō'. Pei-jung Wu also has written further on the different deposit styles: Wu, 'Zhongguo yu Riben foxiang naru pin zhi bijiao: Yi Qingliangsi yu Xidasi Shijia xiang wei li'.

[50] The documentary evidence surrounding this sculpture is very strong, including an inscription on the interior dating it and providing the names of the two sculptors. For more on the Seiryōji sculpture, particularly its *nōnyūhin*, see Oku, 'Seiryōji shaka nyorai zō'. It is now a hidden image (*hibutsu* 秘仏), therefore images are not taken or circulated of it. Images of sculptures from the Seiryōji lineage are usually presented as a stand-in for visualizing the discussion of its characteristics.

of its status among *nenbutsu* practitioners.[51] The objects deposited inside the Seiryōji Śākyamuni include, among many other things, a textile set of human organ models.[52] This is, therefore, an example of a Chinese work illustrating the practice of interior-deposited model organs as well as the transmission of such a practice to Japan.

The Chion'in sculpture is one of the very few examples of interred human organs outside the direct Seiryōji Śākyamuni statue lineage.[53] Art historian Helmut Brinker makes a brief argument that the deposits of the Seiryōji sculpture may have affected the practice in the thirteenth century, questioning the conclusion that it was mainly limited to the Seiryōji tradition.[54] Brinker convincingly presents evidence that there was a familiarity with the deposits of the Seiryōji sculpture that led to other works in the Seiryōji lineage imitating not only the external characteristics, but also the internal via similar interred objects. There are two potential explanations for the contents of the Seiryōji sculpture being known. Either the work was opened at some point during the early thirteenth century and enough people had access to the contents to be able to replicate the organs for a work in the Seiryōji statue lineage (now at Jōrakuin 常楽院) and thus allowing for the Chion'in work to similarly model its interred organs modeled after it, or there were accurate records of the Seiryōji deposits that are now lost.[55] Either scenario suggests that knowledge

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[51] For the English tranlsation of this part, see Shunjō, *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching*, vol. 1, 143. For the Japanese, see *idem*, *Hōnen shōnin eden jō*, 172. This episode of the narrative is from scroll 4.

[52] Mizuno, *Nihon chōkokushi kiso shiryō shūsei: Heian jidai zōzō meiki hen,* vol. 1, 42–65. Kurata Bunsaku, *Jūyō bunkazai bekkan*, 124–27 (and colour plate 10 and monochrome plates of number 56). The earliest English text specifically on this statue is Henderson and Hurvitz, 'The Buddha of Seiryōji'.

[53] For more on this, see McCallum, 'The Saidaiji Lineage of the Seiryōji Shaka Tradition'.

[54] Brinker, *Secrets of the Sacred*, 41–42. Extant evidence does not currently support this, but it is a possibility.

[55] As far as modern scholars currently know, the documents related to the Seiryōji sculpture were all deposited within it by Chōnen, the one who commis-

of the Seiryōji's simulacra organs and their part in constituting the work as a living image would have been known in the thirteenth century at least among those producing and sacralizing Buddhist imagery. This opens up the intriguing possibility that the makers or patrons of the Chion'in sculpture may have included textile viscera as a result of knowledge about the Seiryōji Buddha's *nōnyūhin* and a desire to increase the efficacy and presence of the Chion'in work. For the material meanings of the Chion'in work, in short this would mean that these interior, non-visible objects activate this 'body' of Shandao, potentially heightening the ability of the sculpted figure itself to 'breathe life' into the Buddha figures that emerge from the sculpture's mouth. In terms of strands of networks, I argue that the Chion'in example's use of this viscera facsimile, especially being a work outside the Seiryōji lineage, strongly suggests that the material techniques and meanings of Buddhist art in the thirteenth century spread among monks and image makers regardless of specific temple connections.

The spread of imagery seems to have continued, and *nenbutsu*-speaking monks were the subject of continued depictions throughout the thirteenth century, including what appear to be three copies of the Rokuharamitsuji work as well as another Shandao sculpture from Zendōin 善導院. Subsequent imagery of Shandao and Kūya persisted in painted handscrolls both as narratives of these monks and also illustrations representing ritual use of paintings done after the image of the Chionji painting such as in the aforementioned scene from the *Yūzū nenbutsu engi* (Figure 1) showing Ryōnin 良忍 (1072–1132) similar to the Chionji Shandao.[56] As shown, these images developed in rich networks, the strands of which pulled from texts, popularized practice, patron/artist exchanges, and more.

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sioned it and took detailed notes of the process and *nōnyūhin*.

[56] An interesting shift with Ryōnin's interpretation of the *nenbutsu* is the emphasis on the interconnected nature of *nenbutsu* practice with other phenomena—instead of a personal ritual, it was assuredly a communal ritual in that *nenbutsu* recitation benefitted everyone.

Conclusion

Charlotte Eubanks wrote that the Rokuharamitsuji Kūya statue is a 'multidimensional statement of theology and that, like setsuwa [説話 explanatory tales], it can be read for clues concerning medieval Buddhist conceptions of corporeality and textuality'.[57] Each of the works discussed herein can be read for clues of corporeality and textuality individually, but are especially revealing in conversation with one another. They bring to the fore a more vivid understanding of the complex networks that situate objects as nexuses, nodes in intertextual and intervisual systems that bring together the Buddhist canon, artistic production, and understandings of the ways that ritual could work in a very material—though specifically a Kamakura materiality—sense.

To summarize, the earliest extant works depicting embodied *nenbutsu* seem to have been created in close temporal proximity and almost surely within a social network of artists and patrons that intersected with one another, connected to the Kei school and other key figures working to revitalize Buddhist sites. The conceptual and, in relation to the sculpted *nenbutsu*, technical similarities of the works also support this hypothesis. Further, they were created within the same general context of the rising popularity of Pure Land practice and Hōnen's proselytization, which included veneration of Shandao as a patriarch. In the decades following, sculptures of Shandao and Kūya performing the *nenbutsu* continued to be created, seemingly based on the images created at the beginning of the century. Overall, these various sculpted works exhibited for their viewers the workings of ritualized word that activated sacred presence within Buddhist art. In making immaterial and fleeting auditory objects *material* and visible, these sculptures illustrate not only the dynamic potential of words to be imbued with the power of sacred beings such as buddhas, but also for them to manifest and *be* buddhas themselves. Each work illustrating the *nenbutsu* can thus be seen as a nexus, layered with meaning, materiality, and (intertextual/intervisual) memory that continues to provide rich associations even today.

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[57] Eubanks, *Miracles of Book and Body*, 135.

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