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## Mantras and Materialities

### Saidaiji Order *Kōmyō Shingon* Practices

Mantra of Light (*kōmyō shingon*) practices have been among the most popular esoteric Buddhist rituals in Japan since the thirteenth century. Chinese scriptures recorded that reciting the mantra and distributing sand empowered by it could erase transgressions and ensure rebirth in the Pure Land. Subsequently, teachings on the significance of the sand empowered by the mantra received a strong boost from lectures and commentaries by Myōe (1173–1232), which many scholars have emphasized in assessing the mantra's spread. This article argues, however, that focus on the sand and such commentarial literature obscures another key to the mantra's popularization in medieval Japan: the annual Mantra of Light assemblies implemented by Eison (1201–1290) at Saidaiji in 1264. In particular, based on both premodern sources and ethnographic observations, the article investigates the Saidaiji order's use of contributor rosters for fundraising, recitation, and iconographic adornment to help illuminate the intertwined social, ritual, and material culture of the assemblies.

KEYWORDS: *kōmyō shingon*—mantra—Myōe—Eison—Shingon Ritsu—Pure Land—Kamakura Buddhism

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PRACTICES CENTERING on the Mantra of Light (*kōmyō shingon* 光明真言) have been among the most popular esoteric Buddhist rituals in Japan since the thirteenth century. The two monastics most responsible for spreading these practices in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), greatly influencing the ongoing life of the mantra from medieval times to the present, were the Kegon-Shingon monk Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232) and Eison 叡尊 (or Eizon; 1201–1290), founder of the Saidaiji 西大寺 order of Shingon Ritsu 真言律 monks and nuns. The two monks and their followers each promoted recitation of the mantra and distribution of sand empowered by it to living followers, the dying, and the dead. In both cases, the practices aimed to erase transgressions, provide protection and other benefits in this life, and ensure rebirth in a pure land after death. Moreover, both monks were pivotal in popularizing the practice among monastics and laypeople, even though, as I will argue, they did so in different ways.

Yet while studies of the Mantra of Light in medieval Japan frequently mention the significance of both Myōe and Eison, analyses of Eison's use of the practice remain scarce compared to those on Myōe's. This article aims to help correct this disparity by analyzing Eison and his order's Mantra of Light assemblies and their contexts. I will spotlight the "lives and afterlives" of the rosters of donors and other contributors to Saidaiji's assemblies, which were held annually as mass ceremonies involving a spectrum of monastic and lay participants. In doing so, I will suggest that the constituents of the rosters and the rosters' uses for fundraising, iconographic adornment, and recitation help illuminate the intertwined social, material, and ritual culture of the Saidaiji order while underscoring lingering gaps in our constructions of medieval Buddhism.

### *The Mantra of Light and Material Culture*

First, a brief exploration of intersections between the Mantra of Light and material culture will help situate the study of this and other mantras within this special issue's focus on "modest materialities."

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As argued most recently and eloquently by Paul COPP (2014, xv, 4–7, 9), the power of mantras and *dhāraṇī* in East Asia derived from much more than the accurate reproduction of Sanskrit sounds that is so commonly foregrounded by scholarly exegetes, past and present. It is not just that fully accurate reproduction of the sound of the Sanskrit syllables is impossible when transliterated or translated into East Asian languages. Rather, the myriad material examples of written *dhāraṇī* “were themselves *dhāraṇīs*, not merely the incidental details of their encoding for future speech” (COPP 2014, 5).

Although Copp’s examples center on *dhāraṇī* in medieval China, the same holds true for the Mantra of Light and other Buddhist spells in medieval Japan; we find such spells inscribed on pagodas and reliquaries, penned into vows inserted in statues, brushed onto paintings of Buddhist deities, and printed on talismans. In some cases, such as the Saidaiji Mantra of Light portable shrine (*zushi* 厨子) from the late-thirteenth to early-fourteenth century, the brushed syllables themselves are paired with or can serve as the main deity (*honzon* 本尊) for the rites.<sup>1</sup>

Moving beyond the written forms of the syllables, we find many other examples of material embodiments of mantras and *dhāraṇī* and broader links to material-visual culture. They transform into light, bodies, and other emanations. They permeate and are transmitted to other material bodies by the wind and water that surround their spoken or written forms. They infuse the paper and other objects onto and around which they are penned, placed, and chanted.

Of course, as my mention of chanting here suggests, many of these embodiments do rely on understandings that the sound of the spell is what is being transformed or doing the empowering. But what is most at stake, I suggest, is the relational character of the sound and the material bodies encountering, echoing, and embracing it.

For the Mantra of Light in Japan, the materiality that has received the most scholarly attention is the sand it empowers. Scholars focusing on this aspect of the mantra have solid scriptural and commentarial basis for their emphasis. For example, in the eighth-century Chinese scripture known as the *Mantra of Light of the Great Consecration of Vairocana Buddha of the Unfailing Rope Snare*, a translation attributed to Amoghavajra (705–774), we find the following passage:

One should empower the sand with the mantra by repeating it 108 times, and the sand should be sprinkled on the corpses in the charnel grounds or on the graves of the deceased; one should sprinkle the sand wherever one encounters

1. See NARA KOKURITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN (1990, plate 49) for a color image of the Mantra of Light shrine. I will briefly address the use of this shrine in the modern assemblies in the penultimate section here.

them. The deceased may be in [the realms of] hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, *asuras* [warring titans], or beasts. However, by means of the divine penetrations and awesome might of the empowered sand of the Mantra of Light of the true original-vow consecration of the unfailing buddha, the unfailing Vairocana Buddha, in accordance with the needs of time and circumstance, they will attain the body of light, have the karmic retribution for their sins eliminated, and discard their suffering bodies. They will be reborn in the Western Land of Bliss [the Pure Land of Amida].

(T 1002, 19.606b24–29; translation adapted from UNNO 2011, 864–65)<sup>2</sup>

Kūkai 空海 (774–835), considered the founder of Shingon in Japan, listed this scripture as one he brought to Japan in 806 (*Goshōrai mokuroku* 御請来目録, TKD 1: 13). Moreover, the inclusion of it in his 823 *Shingonshū shogaku kyōritsuron mokuroku* 真言宗所学経律論目録 (also known as *Sangaku roku* 三学録) suggests that it was one of the scriptures he designated to be studied by Shingon monks stationed at Tōji 東寺 in Kyoto (TKD 1: 53).<sup>3</sup> It apparently took some time for Mantra of Light practices to catch on after that, however, as our earliest Japanese record for actual use of the mantra dates to the end of the ninth century, concerning memorial rites for Emperor Seiwa 清和 (850–880; r. 858–876). There, we find reference to fifty monks reciting the *Lotus Sutra* for the morning rites and the Mantra of Light for the evening rites.<sup>4</sup>

It is not until the late tenth century that we find references to use of the empowered sand. The first can be found in documents composed for the Twenty-Five Samādhi Assembly (*Nijūgo zanmai e* 二十五三昧会), which formed in 986 and was joined a few months later by the renowned scholar-monk Genshin 源信 (942–1017). The Twenty-Five Samādhi Assembly originally constituted a group of monks based at Shuryōgon'in 首楞嚴院 on Mt. Hiei who vowed to meet monthly to forge karmic bonds and assist each other in their *nenbutsu* 念佛 practices, including their preparations for death. For example, article two of the charter pledge known as the *Kishō hachikajō* 起請八箇条 and attributed to the lay literatus Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (d. 1002) indicates that, at

2. On the attribution of the *Bukong juansuo Piluzhena fo daguanding guang zhenyan* 不空羼索毘盧遮那仏大灌頂光真言 to Amoghavajra, see PAYNE (2010, 228, note 3). This scripture corresponds to a section on the Mantra of Light in an earlier eighth-century translation attributed to Bodhiruci, fascicle 27 of the *Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* 不空羼索神變真言經 (Sūtra of the Mantra of Divine Transformations of the Unfailing Rope Snare; T 1092, 20.374c20–379b21).

3. On the scriptures to be studied by Tōji Shingon monks, see the Council of State directive (*daijōkanpu* 太政官符) dated 823/10/10 in *Ruiju* (or *Ruijū*) *sandaikyaku* 類聚三代格 (SZKT 25: 55–56). For the *Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* as one of those scriptures, see HASHIMOTO (1990, 285, 306, note 2).

4. See the entry for 880/12/11 in *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (SZKT 4: 488). My analysis of the early history of Mantra of Light practices in Japan here and below has benefited from the summaries in KUSHIDA (1950, 408) and OGASAWARA (2002, 902–905).

the close of their monthly *nenbutsu* practices, they should practice the esoteric contemplation of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind (*sanmitsu kan* 三密觀); chant the Mantra of Light; and empower the sand that had been placed before the buddha image in the practice hall. The regulations further prescribe that when any member of the group dies, the sand should be sprinkled on their corpses, in keeping with the *Mantra of Light of the Great Consecration of Vairocana Buddha of the Unfailing Rope Snare*, which it quotes (although without specifying by name) at the beginning of the article (*Kishō hachikajō*, in HIEZAN SENSŪIN 1927–1928, 1: 350–51).<sup>5</sup>

As the records for the rites for both Emperor Seiwa and the Twenty-Five Samādhi Assembly suggest, Mantra of Light practices appear to have first centered on nobility and monks in the capital area. Archaeological discoveries show, however, that by at least the mid-twelfth century, the practices had spread to provincial regions.<sup>6</sup> Within commentarial literature on the mantra, emphasis on the sand received a strong boost from texts and lectures attributed to Myōe starting around 1227, in the last five years of his life (SUEKI 1998, 267; UNNO 2004, 34). Myōe, like his younger contemporary Eison, is one of the most renowned representatives of the Nara Buddhist “revival” in the Kamakura period. Moreover, both masters’ syntheses of Shingon esoteric Buddhism with teachings from the Nara schools drew considerable attention in monastic and lay circles from the thirteenth century on.<sup>7</sup> Thus it is possible, as various scholars claim, that Myōe “popularized” the Mantra of Light and the use of sand empowered by it.

However, I suggest that focusing on the sand, and especially commentarial literature on it, as the impetus for the mantra’s popularization casts into shadow another key to its spread in medieval and early modern Japan: the annual assemblies implemented by Eison at Saidaiji in 1264 and carried out at the temple to the

5. The quoted section of the *Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* overlaps with the passage from the scripture translated above and corresponds to T 1002, 19.606b21–29. For good summaries of the deathbed and related practices associated with the Twenty-Five Samādhi Assembly, see STONE (2016, 29–30, 54–59). For a detailed study of the founding of the Twenty-Five Samādhi Assembly and the texts associated with it, including issues concerning their authorship and different versions, see HORTON (2001, chapter 3).

6. For example, a tile-sutra (*kawaragyō* 瓦經) inscription, dated 1144/6/29 and excavated at Gokurakuji 極楽寺 in Harima Province, refers to the widespread sprinkling of sand empowered by the Mantra of Light and by the *Supreme Dhāraṇī [of the Buddha’s Crown]* ([*Butchō*] *sonshō darani* [仏頂]尊勝陀羅尼; *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya-dhāraṇī*). The inscription indicates that this was done both at gravesites for the temple and throughout the province (OGASAWARA 2002, 904). See also KUZE (2015, 188–89) for a description of three wooden grave tablets (*itatōba* 板塔婆) from Saga Prefecture, in northwestern Kyushu, dated to the second half of the twelfth century; the invocation “homage to the Mantra of Light” (*namu kōmyō shingon* 南無光明真言) can be inferred from the legible characters written on the tablets.

7. For an insightful comparison of Myōe and Eison’s soteriological strategies and uses of mantras, see ABÉ (2002–2003).

present day.<sup>8</sup> I do not doubt that Myōe's teachings helped spread concrete Mantra of Light practices, especially as his renown grew after his death, in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For example, Myōe is featured prominently in the likely late fourteenth-century narrative picture scroll (*emaki* 絵巻) known as *Kōmyō shingon kudoku ekotoba* 光明真言功德絵詞.<sup>9</sup> Even here, however, we should recognize that the increasing popularity of Eison's and related Ritsu movements over the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries drew hagiographic and other attention back to such earlier medieval leaders of Nara Buddhism as Myōe and the Hossō monk Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213).<sup>10</sup>

Despite my quibbles, my aim is not to debate which master's activities were *more* pivotal in popularizing the mantra. My argument is simply that both masters were pivotal but in different ways. Myōe was influential especially in theorizing the use of the sand in a relatively accessible manner in diverse commentaries and lectures (that is, in ones that would be accessible to novices or learned laypeople). Eison, on the other hand, was pivotal in transforming Mantra of Light memorial practices from sporadic ones for specific individuals into major dharma assemblies (*hō e* 法会) featuring broad gatherings of monastics and laypeople, not only within the Saidaiji order but across Shingon temples.<sup>11</sup> To understand how Eison and his group did so, in a manner that transcended any simple "return" to earlier memorial practices, we need to shift our focus from the sand to a different materiality: the rosters of people forging karmic bonds (*kechien* 結縁) with the order and the assemblies through their donations of material goods, labor, and other beneficial deeds.

As karma, the bonds may well go beyond the physical, but it is the physical recording and readings of the Mantra of Light rosters that repeatedly seal and reinvoké them. Moreover, the prescribed categories of contributors to be included in the rosters and the evidence we can adduce from the actual names recorded in our earliest surviving roster (1280) attest to the wide-ranging net-

8. Myōe's commentaries and lectures on the Mantra of Light and the empowered sand have been well explored in Mark UNNO's studies of Myōe's practices (1998; 2004). Unno largely characterizes Eison's propagation of the mantra as a return to earlier memorial practices, in contrast to Myōe's more transformational emphasis on the sand (UNNO 2004, 37–38, 41). Yet as he aptly acknowledges, "Within Shingon circles, however, Eison was better known and therefore more renowned for his role in advancing the practice of the mantra" (UNNO 2004, 37).

9. On this text and its images, see UMEZU (1941a; 1941b); MIZUNO (2016); HIRASAWA (2017).

10. See, for example, MAEGAWA (2005, 136–37) and NAKAYAMA (2006, 81–82) on Myōe and SHIMOTSUMA (2002) on Jōkei. See also QUINTER (2015, chapter 5) for an example of the complex interweaving of Eison's and Myōe's lineages in the fourteenth century.

11. See GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO (1982, 5), which notes that, beginning with the Saidaiji branch temple Shōmyōji 称名寺 in Kamakura, the influence of the Saidaiji Mantra of Light assemblies spread widely among Shingon temples, including to such major ones as Tōji 東寺 in Kyoto. See also KUSHIDA (1950, 422–24) on such influence.

work of material and ritual supporters for the assemblies already in place during Eison's lifetime. To see more clearly, then, both the "net" and the "work" that it entailed, let us look closer at the start of the assemblies and the processes of material and ritual exchange attested by the rosters.

### *Saidaiji Order Mantra of Light Assemblies and Rosters*

The Saidaiji order, as its alternative name "Shingon Ritsu" suggests, is well known for its synthesis of esoteric and exoteric Buddhism in the form of Shingon and the study and practice of the *vinaya* (*ritsu* 律) and the precepts. A less-explored aspect of the order's exoteric-esoteric formulations, however, is their connections to what can be called, following Aaron PROFFITT's (2015) recent provocative dissertation on the Shingon monk Dōhan 道範 (1179–1252), "esoteric Pure Land culture." As we have seen, since at least the late ninth century, the Mantra of Light was used within varied exoteric and esoteric circles to ensure rebirth in a pure land, especially Amida's Western Pure Land. Following on the heels of the promotion of the mantra by such older Shingon contemporaries as Myōe and Dōhan, Eison became one of the most renowned practitioners of the mantra in medieval Japan.<sup>12</sup> Thus Eison and his disciples' deep involvement in Mantra of Light practices serve as a powerful example of esoteric Pure Land culture and the Saidaiji order's contributions to the medieval evolution of that culture.

Our earliest evidence for Eison's use of the Mantra of Light appears in the entry for 1264/9/4 in his autobiography, *Kongō Busshi Eison kanjin gakushōki* 金剛仏子観尊感身学正記 (The Diamond Buddha-disciple Eison's Record of Physical Response and Study of the True; hereafter *Gakushōki*). There, in the typical laconic fashion of his autobiography, he simply notes that "At [monastic] quarters number one (*ichinomuro* 一室), we performed the seven day and night Mantra of Light for the first time" (SEDS, 30). More detailed accounts and documents, widely considered authentic by specialists of the Saidaiji order, can be found in the Genroku-era (1688–1704) chronological record of Eison's activities, *Saidai chokushi Kōshō Bosatsu gyōjitsu nenpu* 西大勅諭興正菩薩行実年譜 (hereafter *Nenpu*). The *Nenpu* entry for the ninth month of 1264 indicates that Eison summoned the order's monastics from the various provinces and reports that the first day of the Mantra of Light assembly was the memorial day for Empress Shōtoku 称徳 (718–770), who founded the temple in 764.<sup>13</sup> The assembly was intended to transfer merit to their deceased dharma-colleagues so that they

12. For summaries of Dōhan's teachings on the mantra in his *Kōmyō shingon shijū shaku* 光明真言四重釈, see TAKAI (1954, 62–64) and PROFFITT (2015, 397–98). For the full text, see HASE (1973, 2: 74–81).

13. The empress is known as Shōtoku for her latter reign, from 764 to 770, and Kōken 孝謙 for her earlier reign, from 749 to 758.

could “fulfill their vows and advance rapidly to enlightenment” and to the temple’s “donors great and small as well as sentient beings throughout the dharmarealm so that they could be liberated from life-and-death and attain birth in a buddha-land” (SEDS, 147–48).

That *Nenpu* account is well supported by the *Saidaiji kōmyō shingon e ganmon* 西大寺光明真言会願文 (Vow for the Saidaiji Mantra of Light Assemblies; hereafter *Vow*) dated the following year (1265/9/4) and preserved in the *Nenpu* and at Saidaiji.<sup>14</sup> Although collectively signed by the “Saidaiji śramaṇas,” referring to the temple’s fully ordained monks, the *Vow* was likely composed by Eison and is treated as such both within the tradition and by modern scholars. Most significant here is that the *Vow* elaborates that members of the order’s five groups of ordained male and female practitioners, those who keep the eight pure precepts (*hassaikai* 八齋戒), the order’s benefactors, and the temple’s great donors will all “have their names recorded in a register of the deceased so that they can look forward to meeting again in a pure buddha-land” (SEDS, 149).

The *Saidaiji uon kakochō* 西大寺有恩過去帳 is the leading surviving example of such a roster from Eison’s own lifetime.<sup>15</sup> The title of the *Saidaiji uon kakochō*, which could be translated as “Register of Deceased Benefactors of Saidaiji” (hereafter *Register of Deceased Benefactors*), shows clearly the assembly’s roots in memorialization of contributors to the order. This and other rosters of people contributing to the Mantra of Light assemblies were widely used as death registers of those who had forged karmic bonds with the order and the assemblies. However, the fact that this text was inserted into the renowned Saidaiji sculpture of Eison, constructed in 1280 when he was eighty years old, alerts us that the scrolls of this and other rosters were sacred objects in their own right, whose very physicality lent itself to diverse iconographic and ritual uses for the order’s *living* participants and audiences.

The Eison image is one of only a few extant sculptures of Buddhist masters from the time that were made while the master was still alive, and it was clearly intended to serve as a “living body” (*shōjin* 生身) that would channel Eison’s salvific power even after his death (NAKAO 1993; BRINKER 1997–1998; GRONER 2001, 142–50). The “afterlife” of this roster in the Eison sculpture effectively ensured that its constituents became part of that living body. Although the *Register of Deceased Benefactors* was just one among many sets of scriptural and roster scrolls, relics, and other deposited items, its presence alongside the other deposits highlights its nature as a sacred object in its own right, both contributing to and enhanced by the iconographic adornment of the sculpture.

14. The *Vow* is printed in SEDS (148–51) and in TANAKA (1978, 81–87), which also includes a *yomikudashi* rendering.

15. See SEDS (348–59) for a published version of the *Saidaiji uon kakochō*.



Among the great many scrolls of Mantra of Light rosters in the Saidaiji order over the centuries, the *Register of Deceased Benefactors* was indeed exceptional for its 1280 insertion into the Eison sculpture.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the vast majority of benefactors could not look forward to being numbered among those particular “blessed dead.” Moreover, the Eison sculpture is enshrined in a different hall than the Saidaiji main hall, where modern performances of the Mantra of Light assembly are held. Thus the extant 1280 roster is not used directly in the modern assemblies. Even so, as we will see, entries in the *Saidaiji mainen nanuka shichiya fudan kōmyō shingon gongyō shiki* 西大寺毎年七日七夜不斷光明真言勤行式 (Procedures for the Practice of the Saidaiji Annual Seven-day and Seven-night Uninterrupted Mantra of Light; hereafter *Procedures*) dated to 1264 (with emendations in 1266) do indicate that those populating such Mantra of Light rosters were memorialized through both iconographic adornment and performative readings during the assemblies themselves. These indications tally well with ethnographic investigations of the modern assemblies.

First, however, to envision better the medieval participants in these material and ritual practices, we need to look at both the prescriptive evidence in the *Procedures* for the names to be recorded and the actual constituents of the 1280 *Register of Deceased Benefactors*. My ensuing exploration of the types of practitioners and contributors in the rosters may seem to take us away from the “materiality” of the rosters and related Mantra of Light practices. But if we are to work with a broader definition of materiality than as a mere synonym for the material or physical, we must first address the social networks that the rosters and assemblies both reflect and help constitute. In short, the medieval participants in these practices include those populating the rosters, and thus those participants—and the Saidaiji order imagining of them—are integral to understanding the rosters’ “materiality.”

#### *Contributors Based on the 1264 “Procedures” Entries*

The categories of contributors for the Mantra of Light rosters are specified in *Procedures* entries recorded by Eison’s disciple and scribe Shōkai 性海 (b. 1235) in accordance with the stipulations of the Saidaiji monastic council held on 1264/9/18, with emendations based on the 1266/9/22 council (SEDS, 253–58).<sup>17</sup> Below, I have grouped the designated contributors into four categories in the

16. This helps explain why, among the approximately ninety-five extant registers of deceased benefactors for the assemblies, the 1280 register is considered the foundational one (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 3).

17. See Shōkai’s colophon in SEDS (258). For convenience, I have referred to this first dated set of entries as the “1264” ones (rather than, say, the “1264/1266” ones), but we should recognize that some parts cited here may reflect emendations made in 1266.

order in which they appear in the text and provided translations and explanations of the stipulations for each category.<sup>18</sup>

#### CATEGORY 1: THE FIVE MONASTIC GROUPS

From the start of the revival of the Ritsu-dharma and thereafter, as for the departed who were members of the same practice, without choosing between the main temple (*senji* 専寺) and other temples, without debating over the monks' groups and nuns' groups, for the five groups, in accordance with what we have heard, we should register them all. (SEDS, 253)

Based on this designation, and the actual names recorded in the rosters, this category refers to the “five groups” of fully ordained and novice male and female practitioners in the Saidaiji order and other lineages closely related to their Ritsu revival movement. Related practitioners include, for example, the Kōfukuji monk Jōkei, who is listed as the “original vow-sponsor of the Ritsu-dharma revival” in the *Register of Deceased Benefactors* (SEDS, 348a), and monastics linked to the Ritsu temple Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺 in Nara, which was initially restored by Eison's close colleague Kakujō 覚盛 (1194–1249).

#### CATEGORY 2: MALE AND FEMALE LAY PRACTITIONERS FOR SAIDAIJI AND ITS BRANCH TEMPLES

Additionally, as for the male and female lay practitioners (*gonjū nannyo* 近住男女) for this temple and its branch temples, because our encounters [with them] are not shallow, we should likewise register them. (SEDS, 253)

*Gonjū* in the Saidaiji order refers to a special category of lay practitioners, those who vow to keep the “eight pure precepts” for extended periods of time, rather than just on the traditional six days of abstinence. The extended periods could be either for particular ritual events, such as the construction of a statue or prayers for rain, or for one's whole life. The incorporation of this category of lay practitioners was a new practice for the time (MINOWA 2008, 145). As the practitioners were also often referred to in Saidaiji order documents as the “eight pure precepts group,” or with various abbreviations of that designation, the term here could be understood as a synonym for “those who keep the eight pure precepts”

18. I have added the numbering and titles for the categories below for ease of reference. Although my explanations of the categories differ in some respects, the categories themselves largely correspond to the fourfold classification in OISHIO (1995, 193–95). They differ slightly, however, from the fivefold one in OGASAWARA (2002, 909), which does not adhere as literally to the presentation in the *Procedures*.

referred to in the *Vow*.<sup>19</sup> But the *Vow*, and accordingly the *Procedures*, may be referring specifically to those who keep the eight precepts for life, based on a later passage in the *Vow* praising such practitioners' great merit in a parallel construction with those who keep all the precepts (that is, the categories of strict lay practitioners and full monastics in the order, respectively).<sup>20</sup>

CATEGORY 3: ASSEMBLED MONASTICS AND LAY  
PRACTITIONERS FOR SAIDAIJI AND JŌSE'IN OUTSIDE THE SEVEN GROUPS

Beyond that are the assembled monastics (*genzen sō* 現前僧) and each member of the Saidaiji and Jōse'in 常施院 lay practitioner groups (*gonjū shu* 近住衆) who gather to participate in the assemblies.<sup>21</sup> Although these benefactors (*onjo* 恩所) are not numbered among the seven groups, because it is hard to remain silent about their beneficial deeds (*onbun* 恩文), we should also register them.  
(SEDS, 253)

This is the most challenging category to parse for a few reasons. The first complication is the designation “assembled monastics.” The designation is ambiguous because, while specifically using the term for “monks” or “monastics,” the ensuing explanation groups them with the Saidaiji and Jōse'in *gonjū* as “not numbered among the seven groups” of male and female monastics and formal lay practitioners. This is therefore clearly a different category of monastics than those in the “five groups” in category 1. However, based on the reference to them gathering to participate in the Saidaiji assemblies, two explanations are plausible.

As OISHIO has suggested (1995, 195), *genzen sō* may refer to *hijiri* 聖 or novice groups or, more specifically, to “fundraising holy people” (*kanjin hijiri* 勧進聖). Oishio's explanation points to itinerant or quasi-monastic groups, who often contributed their services to temple projects, including fundraising campaigns. The Saidaiji order was deeply involved in diverse construction projects and related fundraising campaigns in the Kamakura period and beyond, and the Mantra of Light assemblies quickly became one of their leading fundraising sources.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Oishio's explanation is plausible. However, considering that the

19. On the *gonjū* group in the Saidaiji order, see especially MINOWA (1999, 316–20, 329–30, and 337–38). For a briefer analysis in English, see MINOWA (2008, 146–48).

20. See SEDS (150) for the *Vow* passages and MINOWA (1999, 462–63) on this point.

21. The Jōse'in was a cloister near Saidaiji, said to have been founded by Eison's renowned disciple Ninshō 忍性 (1217–1303).

22. For example, examining the land donations to Saidaiji recorded in the 1298 *Saidaiji den'en mokuroku* 西大寺田園目録 (TAKEUCHI 1971–1997, 26: 231–60 [doc. 19893]) from 1268 to 1290 (when Eison died), Inoue Mitsusada calculates that donations for Mantra of Light services constituted almost 40 percent of the entries, excluding the donations of manors (*shōen* 莊園). Significantly, this period also saw a sharp increase in the annual rate of donations and the start

*Procedures* is a series of stipulations for the practice decreed by successive Saidaiji monastic councils, and thus apparently for internal Saidaiji order use, the designation may simply refer to those outside the orthodox seven groups as recognized by Saidaiji.<sup>23</sup> In other words, *genzen sō* would refer to monastics beyond members of the order and such affiliated new Ritsu lineages as Kakujiō's, but who had similarly gathered to join or even help perform the assemblies. Because such monastics could include the *hijiri* or novice groups that Oishio refers to, while not being limited to them, I have opted for this interpretation as the more inclusive one.

That said, ambiguities remain regarding the *gonjū*, or formal lay practitioners, from Saidaiji and Jōse'in referred to in category 3, because category 2 had already included *gonjū* from Saidaiji. Thus, one possibility is that the lay practitioners here may represent groups to whom Saidaiji is *particularly* indebted. Alternatively, however, based on the narrative flow, the Saidaiji and Jōse'in *gonjū* may refer to practitioners who directly participated in the rites, like the "assembled monastics," with whom they are again grouped in the ensuing summary of the categories to this point:

In sum, the five groups of those who have left the household life [that is, monastics] [will be registered] widely across the temples. The male and female lay practitioners will be limited to those for this temple and its branch temples. As for annotating and registering (*chūsai* 注載) benefactors, that will only be for this temple's assembly combined with the assembled monastics, extending to the male and female lay practitioner groups for this temple and Jōse'in, and that is all. (SEDS, 253)

The parallelism between the "male and female" lay practitioner groups for "this temple and Jōse'in" here is also intriguing, in light of a later entry in the *Procedures* suggesting a distinctive—and distinctively material—role for Jōse'in regarding female practitioners. The entry for the 1273/9 monastic council stipulates that from that point on when the nuns' group and other female practitioners<sup>24</sup> come to the temple for the assemblies, the first-month *dhāraṇī* practices, or other major buddha-rites (*butsuji* 仏事), they should be housed at

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of manor donations to the temple (INOUE 1971, 94–95). Based on the same record, Saeki Shun-gen notes for the thirty years from 1268 to 1298 that the cumulative Mantra of Light donations amounted to just under 73 *chō* 町 of land, or about 215 acres (SAEKI 2006, 43).

23. This would not be unusual in light of the use of the "seven groups" in other texts by Eison or close disciples. A prominent example is Eison's claim to have established the seven groups for the first time in Japan, after he granted full monastic ordinations to twelve nuns at Hokkeji; see the *Gakushōki* entry for 1249/2/6 (SEDS, 22). Note too that OGASAWARA (2002, 909) simply glosses *genzen sō* in this context as referring to monastics outside the Saidaiji order.

24. The phrase used here, *nishu tō* 尼衆等, could also simply be a plural referring to the nuns' groups. However, the narrative context suggests that the phrase was meant to indicate the nuns' group and related female practitioners.

the Jōse'in and should not share the monks' latrine, even when permitted to stay overnight, in order to avoid "transgressions" (*kashitsu* 過失) (SEDS, 260). How early and in what ways Jōse'in may have played related roles for nuns or other female practitioners remain areas for further research. But the 1273 entry does provide additional context for interpreting the paired highlighting of the Saidaiji and Jōse'in lay practitioner groups.

To return to the 1264 entries, although the above summary in the *Procedures* of the contributors to be recorded concludes with "and that is all," it soon becomes clear that that is not all as the text immediately adds another group of benefactors, which I have designated as category 4.

CATEGORY 4: THOSE WHO OFFER LABOR OR FOOD AND OTHER MATERIAL GOODS FOR THE MANTRA OF LIGHT ASSEMBLIES, AS WELL AS THE SAIDAIJI "PURE PEOPLE"

In this manner for these rites (*gyōhō* 行法), our comrades who have transported their good intentions and combined their power, carried out [the provisions of] rice gruel, and offered lamps, as well as this temple's pure people (*jōnin* 淨人), because their karmic bonds are already thick, should also be registered. As for anyone beyond this, they should not be registered.

(SEDS, 253–54)

Here, we have the broadest grouping of contributors to the assemblies and the temple, with little reference to their monastic status (or lack thereof) apart from the "pure people." "Pure people" in the Saidaiji order were a category of lay practitioners below the *gonjū*, but who performed services for the monastic residents. These included such duties as collecting tax and other revenues or carrying arms and protecting the temple precincts (MATSUO 1996, 50), which strict adherence to the precepts would prevent the monastics themselves from doing. The "pure people" can thus be seen alongside the others mentioned here as contributing in very concrete, material ways to the Mantra of Light assemblies and the temple. Keeping this in mind should in turn remind us that the social network for the assemblies and its rosters was as material as the rosters themselves; the network does not exist apart from the actual people and material exchanges constituting it.<sup>25</sup>

The *Procedures*-based evidence on the types of contributors to be recorded was largely prescriptive. This is in keeping both with the nature of the text, as a series of stipulations for the annual assemblies, and with the early dating for the 1264 entries, which, according to the colophon, were initially recorded just after the first assembly. But thanks to the preservation of the 1280 *Register of Deceased*

25. My understanding here of the social in relation to networks has been influenced especially by LATOUR (2005).

*Benefactors* in the Saidaiji Eison sculpture and its excavation after repairs to the sculpture in the twentieth century, we also have a near-contemporary, concrete example of one such Mantra of Light roster and the names it records. This roster thus fleshes out and literally materializes much of the prescriptive evidence.

#### *Contributors Based on the 1280 Register of Deceased Benefactors*

It is informative to compare the categories of contributors in the 1264 entry for the *Procedures* with the 2,310 actual names recorded in the 1280 *Register of Deceased Benefactors*, as OISHIO has done (1995, 193–95). For example, although not spelled out in the prescriptive categories, we find in the beginning portion of the *Register of Deceased Benefactors*, by Oishio's count, the names of eighteen members of the imperial household and other nobles and three relatives of Eison. Oishio therefore treats these names as having a different character than those prescribed in the *Procedures*. To his analysis, we can also add Hosokawa Ryōichi's suggestion that two nuns listed in the roster immediately after Eison's father and mother may actually have been the two female shrine attendants (*miko* 御子), who raised him as successive foster mothers following the death of his birth mother when he was seven.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the two nuns might also be considered part of the group constituting Eison's relatives and having a different character than that spelled out in the *Procedures*. But the concern with those who contributed in very concrete, material ways to the order and the assemblies remains consistent.

Comparing the rest of the names with the categories in the *Procedures* and collating them with other Saidaiji order rosters and records, OISHIO (1995, 195) convincingly argues that the vast majority are actually outside the designated five monastic groups and other people directly connected to Saidaiji, referring instead to the assembled monastics and donors. In addition, even for the unidentified contributors, we find much in common with the types of names found in rosters inserted into other sculptures linked to the Saidaiji order, such as the 1268 Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 image at Gangōji's 元興寺 Gokurakubō 極楽坊.<sup>27</sup>

In both the *Register of Deceased Benefactors* and the Gangōji Shōtoku rosters, we find such deity- and place-name aliases as Jizōme 地藏女, Yakushime 薬師女, Kasuga 春日, Kawachi 河内, and Chikugo 筑後. In medieval Japan, such aliases were often used by female entertainers and courtesans (*asobi* 遊女; also read as *asobime* or *yūjo*), *hinin* 非人 (outcasts), and other so-called special-talent

26. See HOSOKAWA (1999, 18–19) and, for the relevant names in the *Register of Deceased Benefactors*, SEDS (348b).

27. The next paragraph draws on material I previously addressed in my research on Eison's involvement in the Shōtoku Taishi cult (QUINTER 2014, 189–90, 193). See also SUGIYAMA (1991, 186, 211–12) and OISHIO (1995, 196).

(*shokunō* 職能 or *shokushō* 職掌) groups singled out for their livelihoods.<sup>28</sup> The Saidaiji order showed deep and sustained involvement with such special-talent groups in diverse fundraising, construction, and charitable relief activities. For example, documents for the Nara convent Hokkeji 法華寺, the head convent in the Saidaiji temple network, reveal that *asobi* served as donors (MEEKS 2010, 203–207). In addition, Eison reports eliciting pledges to keep the eight precepts on certain days of the month from 1,700 courtesans, or “lewd women” (*injo* 姪女), at An’yōji 安養寺 in Harima Province (*Gakushōki* entry for 1285/8/13, in SEDS, 61). Such examples, coupled with the prevalence of *asobi*-style names in the *Register of Deceased Benefactors*, suggest, as Sugiyama Jirō and Oishio have argued, that *asobi* and related entertainers numbered among the listed benefactors.

Moreover, although OISHIO claims that the *Register of Deceased Benefactors* did not include *hinin* (1995, 196), this is more difficult to state decisively than his analysis suggests. First, in the Kamakura period, *hinin* and related outcast groups also used deity- and place-name aliases, as well as animal or insect names, that appear in the roster. Second, *hinin* leaders, just like *asobi* leaders, could indeed wield financial power in medieval Japan and beyond. Third, *hinin* are known to have served as contributors to Saidaiji-order and closely related temple projects, including the 1258 Tōshōdaiji Śākyamuni and 1267 Hannyaji Mañjuśrī sculptures.<sup>29</sup> Last, the final prescribed category of contributors to be listed in the rosters emphasizes those providing labor, which was a service often provided to temples and shrines by *hinin* and other outcasts at the time. That said, in contrast to the records for the aforementioned Tōshōdaiji and Hannyaji sculptures, *hinin* are not specifically mentioned in the *Register of Deceased Benefactors*. Thus Oishio’s claim that *hinin* did not figure among the contributors listed there may well be correct. But I suggest that we should not discount the possibility so readily.

The *Register of Deceased Benefactors* also clearly included such higher-status contributors as the aforementioned members of the imperial family and courtiers, as well as upper-class warriors. In addition, according to Oishio’s calculations, eleven Buddhist painters and artisans can be identified through collation with other Saidaiji-order records, and the roster includes 464 names with “Ami” 阿弥 names (short for Amida 阿弥陀). In the Kamakura period, the majority of people using Ami names seem to have belonged to the middle-class milieu of

28. The category of *hinin* included not only beggars but those engaged in such professions as removing carcasses and other debris from temple and shrine grounds. On *hinin* and other special-talent groups in medieval Japan, see especially AMINO Yoshihiko’s prolific research (for example, 1978; 1994).

29. A group from the Kitayama 北山 outcast community in Nara was designated in a roster of nearly ten thousand people forming karmic bonds with the Tōshōdaiji sculpture; see HOSOKAWA (2013, chapter 10). On the Kitayama *hinin* providing labor and other services for ceremonies for the Hannyaji sculpture in 1269, see QUINTER (2015, 102–103, 140–41).

estate stewards (*jitō* 地頭) and local lords (*ryōshu* 領主) (MIZUKAMI 1969, 339–87; OISHIO 1995, 195). Other names also likely refer to members of these and such related contributor groups as provincial constables (*shugo* 守護) and local landholders. Again, Oishio’s conclusions on the population of the roster seem apt; the vast majority of contributors were the assembled monastics from outside the Saidaiji order, members of the lay practitioner groups (*gonjū*) that cannot be collated directly with other Saidaiji-order records, and donors from the middle class and below, including commoners (OISHIO 1995, 194–96).

Thus already here, in our earliest preserved roster of contributors to the Mantra of Light assemblies, we see the wide-ranging social appeal that the assemblies held, both within the order and beyond. The *Register of Deceased Benefactors* also provides valuable testimony to the diverse nature of those providing material sustenance to the order and the assemblies, whether in the form of maternal or other familial care for the order’s founder, land income and other donations, physical labor, or humble votive offerings. With this broader understanding of the materiality of the rosters for the assemblies in place, we are now in a better position to understand their performative uses as sacred objects during those assemblies.

#### *Performative and Iconographic Uses of the Rosters in the Assemblies*

The Mantra of Light rosters are significant not only for the information that we can glean from their content—that is, what they tell us about the network of contributors to the assemblies—but for their ritual employment.<sup>30</sup> Here too, our earliest testimony to the rosters, the 1264 entry in the *Procedures*, is valuable, as it foreshadows performative and iconographic uses of the rosters during the assemblies that we can identify from later sources. In the second item of the *Procedures*, immediately following the explanation of the contributors to be included in the rosters that we just examined, the text explains almost apologetically that “Although this may seem like separating intimates and strangers, if we extend [the names] too widely, our brushes and paper could hardly bear it, and unfurling and reading [the scrolls] would be trying” (SEDS, 254). The lament on the limits of brush and paper here may be a trope, but the passage does remind us of the material quality of the roster scrolls themselves and practical issues related to their ritual use.

“Readings” of scriptures and other texts in Japanese Buddhist ceremonies can take many forms, from revolving readings (*tendoku* 転読) entailing a ritualized

30. As contributors to this volume suggest for religious objects of various kinds, the rosters could also be investigated for their potency as physical objects outside this particular ritual context; for example, as sacred or cultural treasures stored in the temple or lent to museums for display. My concern here, however, lies with the ritual context of the assemblies, for which the texts were composed.



unfurling of the scrolls or turning of the pages, to silent readings (*mokudoku* 黙読), to abbreviated or full recitation of the texts' contents. Thus we cannot be certain of the form of "reading" intended when the *Procedures* laments the difficulties of opening and reading overly voluminous rosters of names in the assemblies. But I again suggest that we take that lament as more than a mere trope. For example, we find some descriptive evidence for the roster scrolls (in addition to the prescriptive injunctions) in that second item of the *Procedures*, when it records that, "in order to distinguish the separate ranks" among the seven groups and other monastic and lay practitioners, "[we have] grouped the types and produced ten scrolls." A relatively long interlinear note that follows then provides details on which names are to be read during the assemblies:

Among the ten scrolls, the first nine scrolls should be read in their entirety. Reaching the tenth scroll, as we have progressively recorded the several tens of names of the departed there, it has already become a large scroll. If we wish to [also] read this in its entirety, as time passes, the monastic assembly will become increasingly fatigued. Accordingly, we held a monastic council and decided that from this time on, only those who were recorded [that is, deceased] that year would have their names read. (SEDS, 254)

The note does not clearly specify the categories of practitioners in the different scrolls or sets of scrolls, and given the preceding concern with distinguishing the different ranks of practitioners, the "ten scrolls" indicated here could include different sets for different types of practitioners. For example, a slightly later entry in the *Procedures*, dated to the 1270/9 council, indicates that "as for the nuns' group benefactors (*nishu onjo* 尼衆恩所), in accordance with those temples' authority, a separate register of the deceased should be prepared, and a person from a nearby monks' group should unfurl and read it" (SEDS, 259–60).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, our extant rosters from the medieval period and beyond include both those in which the different ranks of practitioners are mixed, as we saw for the 1280 *Register of Deceased Benefactors*, and those dedicated to specific types, such as the *Saidaiji kōmyō shingon kechien kakochō* 西大寺光明真言結縁過去帳 (Saidaiji Mantra of Light Karmic Affinity Register of the Deceased; hereafter, *Karmic Affinity Register*) for *bhikṣu* (fully ordained monks), discussed below.

The evidence from both types, however, shows the lists proceeding chronologically. It thus seems likely that the first nine scrolls referred to in the note preserved the names of foundational contributors to the Saidaiji order. In turn, the tenth scroll that they had by then reached likely reflected the current, ongoing list of deceased contributors, which would only continue to expand over

31. It is a bit ambiguous whether the "benefactors" indicated here are those for or those from the nuns' group (that is, the nuns themselves), and presumably such a roster could include both. But the designation of it as a separately prepared and read one is clear.

time. Thus the concern shown with the limits of reading each name as the scrolls mounted was a real one. But that very concern speaks to the attention paid to the actual reading of names during the assemblies, which is what is most important here; such reading is one of the performative ways that the monastic performers demonstrated to their living audiences how contributors would be memorialized after death.

My focus in this article is on the medieval Saidaiji Mantra of Light assemblies and the foundational evidence for the rosters' materiality, including their ritual use, which was integral to those assemblies. But we must also recognize the limits of the medieval historical records discovered to date, which do not describe in detail actual performances of the assemblies or their iconographical arrangements. That said, our medieval to modern evidence does attest to the continuously held nature of the annual assemblies (if not all its details) from Eison's time to the present, with a few noted exceptions due to war or other exceptional circumstances.<sup>32</sup> Thus, for additional testimony to the ritual use of the rosters during the assemblies themselves, it is noteworthy that two published investigations of modern performances of the assembly, of the materials used therein, and of textual sources for the assemblies preserved at Saidaiji—coupled with my own ethnographic observations—reinforce much of the prescriptive evidence from the thirteenth-century *Procedures*.

The published investigations were carried out by a team of Japanese researchers in 1980 and 1981, and the preliminary and final results were printed in booklet form in 1981 and 1982. According to the reports, Saidaiji would add the names of each year's departed to their register of the deceased and read those names in their entirety during the ceremony (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1981, 2), which is very much in keeping with the interlinear note in the *Procedures*. The 1982 report in turn shows that this reading would be performed over the course of the now-abbreviated three-day rites (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 15–19).

In the assemblies I observed in 2016 and 2017, the reading was carried out during the three midday performances (held annually on 10/3, 10/4, and 10/5) by a designated monk in the western section (*nishi za* 西座) of the hall, whom I will refer to as the register master. The register master was seated closest to the spectators, in front of a small platform supporting a box of recent registers in bounded book form.<sup>33</sup> He would take out one book at a time and go through the names one by one, very quietly voicing them. Because the readings overlapped vari-

32. For a historical overview of this evidence, including the limits of our medieval sources, see GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO (1982, 1–5).

33. During my observations of the assemblies, I was told that the use of registers in book form, rather than as scrolls, was a relatively recent change, introduced in the past thirty years or so. And indeed, a small black-and-white photo of the opening-day rites in the 1982 report shows a monk holding and reading a register in scroll form (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 9).

ously with the other monks' chanting of the preliminary eulogies (*zensan* 前讚) during the opening-day rites (*kaihaku* 開白) and of the Mantra of Light on the ensuing days, one had to be seated closely and listening carefully to make out the quiet voicing, and the practical reason of not interfering with the chanting can be adduced for this almost-silent reading. In the very simultaneity of the recitations, however, we could say that the eulogies and the mantra are directly empowering the names in the current register and thus the deceased represented therein. At the same time, this is not a one-way street of empowerment; the deceased also lend their names, materially and aurally, to the chanting of the eulogies and the mantra.

While the names in the current register only refer to the more recently deceased, the reading of those registers in the closing-day rites (*kechigan* 結願) dramatically reinforces the communal bonds among all the contributors to the assemblies, past and present. Toward the end of those rites, the Saidaiji elder (serving as the lead officiant, or *dōshi* 道師) gives a signal and the chanting of the Mantra of Light stops. Right at this point, the register master concludes his reading of the current register by pronouncing—this time in a strong voice—the final lines of the register, which report the most recent cumulative number of people who had forged karmic bonds with the assembly over the centuries (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 18; the author's fieldwork October 2016 and 2017). Incredible though it may sound, this number amounts to the billions; for example, by 2005 it had reached 4,501,052,046 people (SAEKI 2006, 48, note 7).

In addition, during the opening ceremonies and thereafter during the midday services, two monks would bring in the two scrolls of the “old register of the deceased,” set on their own small platforms, and present them to “senior monks one and two” (*ichirō, nirō* 一臈・二臈). The two senior monks are seated respectively in the eastern and western sections of the hall, facing each other along with the other seated monks in the two sections. According to the published reports, senior monks one and two would then begin silent readings of those scrolls (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 15). In the actual ceremonies I observed, however, “senior monk one” led chants of the preliminary eulogies and the mantra that were carried out simultaneously. Thus, likely for practical reasons here as well, his part of the silent reading was actually conducted by a third senior monk seated next to him, who performed it much like a typical “revolving reading” for scriptures. Indeed, in both form and treatment, the two aged scrolls of the register appeared very much like scriptures. But most significant here is that even for the silent reading of the old register, we do see a concern with the individual reading of names. Based on the list of items used for the assemblies in the 1982 report and on Matsuo Kenji's analysis, the “old register” used is a copy of the *Karmic Affinity Register*, which shows this concern in its use of pronunciation

indicators (*furigana*) in various places (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 36–37, item no. 35; MATSUO 2006, 80, 82).

The contributors covered by the *Karmic Affinity Register* are restricted in that the document only includes the *bhikṣu* portion of those with karmic bonds to the assemblies. This register was originally published in *Saidaiji kankei shiryō* 西大寺関係史料, volume 1 (NARA KOKURITSU BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1968, 77–97), with entries for the deceased *bhikṣu* from Eison’s lifetime to 1949. Matsuo subsequently published a corrected edition of most of the text in 2006, which is the version I have used here. However, Matsuo’s edition shows that the extant *Saidaiji* copy now ends in the late eighteenth century, and he thus had to rely on the *Saidaiji kankei shiryō* version for the ensuing entries (MATSUO 2006, 118). Even allowing for the limitations of this old register’s silent reading and coverage, however, in combination with the slightly voiced reading of the current register, the great span of those memorialized is clearly on performative and physical display in the assemblies.

Moreover, while many of those named may have once been able to participate in the assemblies through their own physical activities or the aural reading of their names after death, over time, that participation would increasingly depend on the material dimensions of the scrolls and their display in the assemblies. It is perhaps here that we can attest most strongly to the agency of the old roster scrolls as physical objects during the assemblies, as they help bring the deceased into a material community with the living attendees, giving presence to the dead even when their names remain unvoiced. In turn, the aural and material displays of the different registers surely encouraged living audience members to make contributions to the assemblies and ensure that their own names or those of loved ones would be similarly registered and performed after death.<sup>34</sup>

Considered together, the varying material and aural uses of the different Mantra of Light rosters during the assemblies, including their interpenetrations with the chanting of the eulogies and the mantra, help effect and continuously renew a community of the long dead, the recent dead, and the living. I would further argue that the human bodies coming into contact with the rosters during the assemblies—through sound, sight, touch, or even smell—are material constituents of the rosters’ networks. So too, I suggest, for the “mantra” of the Mantra of Light rosters, as its material embodiments in sound, syllable, and sand

34. Although we do not know exactly how the *Saidaiji* procedures for having the names recorded were carried out in premodern times, during the modern three-day rites, ordinary pilgrims can pay a “transfer of merit fee” (*ekō ryō* 回向料) to have their names included (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 18; author’s fieldwork October 2016 and 2017), and it is not hard to imagine a similar process for the premodern assemblies. See also Hashimoto Hatsuko’s investigations of late-fourteenth and fifteenth century records for the Tōji Mantra of Light assemblies for examples of such processes there (HASHIMOTO 1990, 294–301).

overlap, interfuse, and at times compete with the recitative and visual displays of the rosters.

There is, however, another key aspect of the rosters' materiality: their relationship to the many other objects used in the assemblies. Here too we should first recognize the limits of our sources for interpreting the medieval assemblies. We simply do not have detailed testimony to the medieval iconographical arrangements, and the varied images, ritual implements, and other objects used have inevitably changed over time. These changes, much like other aspects of the ceremonies, are due to both physical loss and accumulation as well as human innovation and practical concerns. Even so, there is one final aspect of the correlations between our evidence for the rosters in the 1264 *Procedures* entries and the modern assemblies that I would like to touch on to help illuminate such iconographical aspects.

The third item in the *Procedures* (right after the entry on the preparation of the rosters of the deceased) is a very brief one on the adornment of the sanctuary (*dōjō shōgon* 道場莊嚴), referring to the practice hall in which the assemblies were to be performed. The brevity of the entry should not mislead us, however, because such adornment has long been crucial to esoteric iconography and ritual.<sup>35</sup> Thus it is significant that, while deferring most other details, the entry emphasizes that the roster (or rosters) for the deceased, along with a container with the sand, should be placed near the central esoteric altar (SEDS, 254). In addition, the sixth item in the 1264 *Procedures* entries, which prescribes in broad terms the ritual sequence for the assembly, indicates for the opening rites that, after the monastic groups enter the practice hall (*dōjō*) and are seated, a designated person should read both the vow (*ganmon* 願文) for the ceremonies and the roster of the deceased (SEDS, 255). With slight differences in arrangement, these elements can all be confirmed in the modern assemblies. Thus, examining them in relation to a few other significant aspects of the current iconographical arrangement may be informative.

First, to better envision that arrangement, we need to examine a few major icons not indicated in the *Procedures* prescriptions. We start at the top, with the *honzon* (main deity or icon) for the assemblies. For the modern assemblies, at one level (literally and figuratively), this role is played by the wooden Śākyamuni image commissioned by Eison and originally enshrined in the Four Kings Hall (Shiōdō 四王堂) in 1249. This exquisite sculpture, modeled after Seiryōji's 清涼寺 famed "living Śākyamuni" icon, soon became the main icon for Saidaiji, a role it still plays today. It is now enshrined in the temple's main hall, where the Mantra

35. On the significance of the concept and practice of adornment (*shōgon*) in Shingon, see SHARF (2001, 159, 163–66, 191–92) and GARDINER (2008).

of Light assemblies are held.<sup>36</sup> Thus modern descriptions of the assemblies typically refer to it as the “Śākyamuni *honzon*” or just the *honzon* for short (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982; SAEKI 2006). But our vision of the *honzon* for the modern assemblies is complicated, or perhaps enhanced, by the prominent positioning of the Saidaiji Mantra of Light portable shrine (*zushi*). Typically dated to the late-thirteenth to early-fourteenth century, the portable shrine displays black, brushed-ink Sanskrit syllables of the mantra that were said to have been written by Eison himself. In modern performances of the assembly, the shrine is placed on a small platform on the high altar (*shumidan* 須彌壇) before the Śākyamuni sculpture, which rises above it.

Moving progressively lower and closer to the front of the hall, where the spectators sit, we find directly aligned but at differing heights the Śākyamuni sculpture; the shrine, with a smaller urn for the sand placed before it; and a 1270 gilt bronze reliquary commissioned by Eison, placed on the great altar (*daidan* 大壇) in front of the chief officiant.<sup>37</sup> Thus depending on one’s viewpoint, the syllables iconically arranged in the shrine could also be seen as the *honzon* for the rites, as forming a paired *honzon* with the Śākyamuni image, or as part of a paired or triadic *honzon* with the relics enshrined in the reliquary. Admittedly, this view of the *honzon* for the assemblies is a complicated one; however, to envision the possibilities, it may help to keep in mind that buddha-relics are typically understood as those of Śākyamuni.<sup>38</sup> And such a view, I suggest, is well in keeping with the fluid interpenetration of deities, icons, practitioners, and other material and immaterial objects so characteristic of Shingon and other forms of esoteric Buddhism.<sup>39</sup>

So where, physically, do the rosters fit into this arrangement? Significantly, to see their positioning, we have to move further toward the front of the hall and thus closer to the spectators. The two scrolls of the “old register” are first presented to senior monks one and two during the opening rites. This presentation draws the spectators’ attention to the scrolls, and to their ensuing reading by the senior monks. As mentioned earlier, the two senior monks in charge of the old registers are seated parallel and facing each other in the eastern and western

36. For more on the Saidaiji Śākyamuni sculpture and the Seiryōji one to which it is linked, see MCCALLUM (1996; 1998), GRONER (2001, 121–26), and TSUDA (2010).

37. For more details on the various altars, shrines, icons, and objects and their arrangement in the main hall, see GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO (1982, 9), the diagrams on pages 13–14 there, and SAEKI (2006, 44–45). Here, I am only sketching certain highlights and trying to bring out aspects of the positioning, particularly the vertical arrangement and alignment of these key items, which could be difficult to envision among all the other details.

38. My interpretation has benefited greatly from dialogue with Saeki Shungen of Saidaiji; however, any mistakes here are my responsibility.

39. To name just a few of many studies helping illuminate such interpenetration, see SHARF (2001), RAMBELLI (2007), REIDER (2009), and Steven Trenson’s contribution to this volume.

sections, respectively. Also significant for understanding the positioning of the monks, and hence the roster scrolls, is that they are seated between the chief officiant and the spectators. But closer still to the spectators during those opening rites are two monks who serve as the *ganmon* (vow) and *kakochō* masters—also stationed in parallel positioning in the eastern and western sections (although in this case facing north, like the chief officiant). The *kakochō* master is the monk who performs the readings of the current register of the deceased, both during the opening ceremonies and the ensuing midday rites, as previously described. The *ganmon* portion, by contrast, is only performed during these opening rites. However, a positional and performative pairing of the two is clear all the same.

*Ganmon* were often written for recitation, as a kind of statement of intentions for the ritual or other offering depicted.<sup>40</sup> The one used in the modern assemblies is Eison's *Vow for the Saidaiji Mantra of Light Assemblies* dated 1265/9/4, and the photographic reproduction of a copy in GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO (1982, 44–48) includes the notational markings, or score (*fu* 譜), for such a recitation. Such a recitative *ganmon* reading was likely what the aforementioned 1264 *Procedures* entry called for. But notable for the modern assemblies is that the recitation of the *Vow* in the opening ceremonies starts in the eastern section concurrently with the reading of the current register of the deceased in the western section (GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1982, 15, 19). The *Vow*, like the current registers, is also supported by its own stand, with the *ganmon* master positioned before the stand. During the assemblies I observed, he would hold up a conspicuously large copy of the *Vow* and recite it almost silently. Resembling use of the current register (and the silent reading of the old register), the *ganmon* recitation overlaps with the other monks' chanting of the preliminary eulogies. In this case, the recitation was even harder for me to discern, but my understanding is that the *ganmon* master subtly voices the *Vow*. Practical reasons could again be adduced for the virtually silent recitation, especially considering that the *ganmon* master was seated very close to senior monk number one, who led the eulogy and mantra chanting. But we should also note that such barely audible recitation is consistent with certain medieval instructions for *ganmon* reading in Shingon traditions specifically.<sup>41</sup>

In this manner, for the opening rites in the modern assemblies, the *ganmon* and roster (*kakochō*) readings that the *Procedures* stipulated be performed by a single person (and thus sequentially) are actually split into two roles and carried out simultaneously. Performatively, however, the simultaneous rendering in the

40. *Hyōbyaku* 表白 could also perform this function, and they were often used in tandem with *ganmon* in dharma assemblies.

41. See ABE (2013, 73) for a clear translation of one such example. I am grateful to Michael Jamentz for pointing out this consistency.

modern assemblies is a powerful one, bringing directly into the ritual present the forward-looking nature of Eison's pledge in the *Vow* to have the names of contributors "recorded in a register of the deceased so that they can look forward to meeting again in a pure buddha-land" (SEDS, 149). Equally important is that the simultaneity and parallelism is effected both visibly and aurally in the opening rites; this is accomplished through the physical presence and spatial positioning of the *Vow*, the rosters, and the monks who perform them. Those material and ritual performances, in turn, are relative to all the other assembled bodies: the Śākyamuni sculpture, the Mantra of Light shrine and Sanskrit syllables it displays, the empowered sand, the many other ritual objects and icons, and the broader gathering of monastics, lay helpers, and spectators. Here, I suggest, we can see the fuller convergence of the social and material networks constituted by the rosters.

### *Conclusions*

The preceding analysis should make clear that the materialities of the Mantra of Light in the Saidaiji order assemblies include but extend well beyond the written forms of the mantra and the sand empowered by the mantra. Indeed, if I started this article by contrasting the sound of the mantra's syllables with the objects and other bodies it encounters, attention to the physical dynamics of reading the rosters and the *Vow* in the ceremonies reminds us of the materiality of sound itself: in the modern ceremonies, the very sounds of the quiet readings number among those encountered bodies, caught up in, but not entirely displaced by, the sound of the chanting of the mantra and the eulogies. Although we do not have such direct access to the sounds of the medieval ceremonies, we can readily imagine a similar encounter of aural bodies then.

More broadly, the assemblies' rosters, including the actual contents of our earliest extant roster (the 1280 *Register*), underscore that the mantra was deeply embedded in a wide-ranging network of exchange. The emphasis on exchanging material goods and labor for ritual services and the generation of merit was nothing new in Buddhism across Asian cultures. I suggest, however, that the particular social, material, and ritual configurations of this exchange in the Saidaiji assemblies were.

As we have seen, the Mantra of Light had been practiced in Japan in various forms since at least the late ninth century, and Eison's promotion of the practice had recent precedent in Myōe's activities. Moreover, the Saidaiji order's wide-ranging use of rosters to establish karmic affinities with and among its supporters had such precedents as the *yūzū nenbutsu* 融通念仏 (circulating *nenbutsu*) activities of Ryōnin 良忍 (1073–1132) and his followers as well as temple fundraising projects that gained steam in the aftermath of the Genpei War



(1180–1185).<sup>42</sup> That said, the order’s combination of the Mantra of Light with such wide-ranging contributor rosters, and their use of the rosters and the mantra in large-scale assemblies of the diverse monastics and lay contributors, was indeed new. Moreover, the prescriptive evidence in the 1264 *Procedures* entries, the pronouncement of the intentions for the ceremonies in Eison’s 1265 *Vow*, and the material and performative uses of the rosters in the assemblies all underscore the living audiences for the rosters.

That participants and other contributors were effectively enjoined in the *Vow* to have their names registered in the rosters “so that they can look forward to meeting again in a pure buddha-land” (SEDS, 149) is again crucial. In short, it shines a new light on the memorial aspect of the assemblies. At the very least, we should recognize the assemblies as also serving as a kind of pre-memorial rite for many participants. But I suggest that we can further contextualize them alongside such other thirteenth-century Pure Land practices as Shinran’s 親鸞 (1173–1262) emphasis on the sense of assuredness that one can attain in this life through faith in the power of Amida’s original vow and the secure knowledge that one will be reborn in Amida’s Pure Land after death.<sup>43</sup>

The network of exchange in the Saidaiji Mantra of Light assemblies was also new simply because that social network—like any social network—depended on its particular members. It was thus inextricable from the actual monastic and lay practitioners and other contributors supporting the Saidaiji order as well as the order’s imagining of the types of contributors. Clearly, both the contributors and their contributions need to be understood within the synchronic contexts of their times and places. Those contexts, however, are not just passively inherited but co-created by the Saidaiji (or any other particular) network. This may seem obvious, but such recognition is particularly important considering frequent portrayals of the activities of Nara, Shingon, and Tendai practitioners in the Kamakura period merely as *reactions to* innovations championed in the so-called “new Kamakura” or “heterodox” movements (namely, the new Pure Land, Zen, and Nichiren lineages).

Portrayals of Myōe’s and Eison’s involvement with the Mantra of Light are no exception, as scholarly commentators often treat that involvement as a response to the burgeoning popularity of new Pure Land practices.<sup>44</sup> But such treatments

42. For a brief but illuminating comparison of Eison’s activities, focusing especially on the Mantra of Light assemblies, and the *yūzū nenbutsu* movement, see UEDA (1973, 108–10). On medieval fundraising projects and the importance of rosters therein, see GOODWIN (1994).

43. Many studies of Shinran and Shin Buddhist thought address his teachings on *shinjin* 信心 (typically rendered as “faith” or “true entrusting”) and related concepts, including their importance for this life. For an accessible and strongly argued example, see MURAKAMI (2001).

44. See, for example, KUSHIDA (1950, 427); GANGŌJI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO (1982, 4–5); SUEKI (1997, 872); and KUZE (2015, 201–202, 204).

also remind us of the limits of synchronic investigation of thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhism, or any other premodern context: what we think we know of those contexts is inevitably influenced by developments over the ensuing centuries (that is, the diachronic context since the time period investigated). Thus we have little choice, in the end, but to return to diachronic contexts. For our purposes here, that means keeping in mind that the popularity of Pure Land practices in Japan was never limited to the more exclusive movements emerging in the Kamakura period. It was, rather, an integral part of esoteric and other pluralistic Buddhist traditions in Japan from at least the mid-Heian period (and quite possibly earlier), continuing to the present. And it is in the context of such continuing elaborations of that broader “esoteric Pure Land culture” in Shingon and the Nara schools, more than competition with other Pure Land traditions, that I suggest we place the contributions of Saidaiji-order Mantra of Light practices.

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- Daijōkanpu* 太政官符. 823/10/10. In *Ruiju* (or *Ruijū*) *sandaikyaku* 類聚三代格. SZKT 25: 55–56.
- Goshōrai mokuroku* 御請来目録. By Kūkai 空海 (774–835). TKD 1: 1–39.
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