Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 46/2: 173–192

dx.doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.46.2.2019.173-192

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Chōgen's Vision of Tōdaiji's Great Buddha as Both Mahāvairocana and Amitābha

The Japanese monk Chōgen (1121–1206) is best known for leading a concerted temple solicitation campaign to finance the reconstruction of Tōdaiji in Nara after its destruction during the nationwide unrest known as the Genpei War. The temple was renowned for its statue of the Great Buddha. While the statue was originally understood to depict the Buddha Vairocana, Chōgen promoted the Great Buddha as two distinct, yet congruent deities, Mahāvairocana and Amitābha. He communicated this message using mobile reliquaries of an esoteric design and statues of Amitābha installed at Pure Land halls at estates that facilitated the temple's reconstruction. Chōgen's rationale was to leverage the estate laborers' understanding of the Pure Land as a postmortem paradise, while simultaneously connecting them to the products of their labors, the Great Buddha statue and Tōdaiji.

KEYWORDS: Chōgen—Tōdaiji—Amitābha—Pure Land—kanjin—Great Buddha

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The Japanese monk Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206) is best known for leading a concerted *kanjin* 勧進 temple solicitation campaign to finance the reconstruction of Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara after its destruction by Taira no Shigehira 平 重衡 (1158–1185) during the nationwide unrest of the Genpei War (1180–1185). Tōdaiji had been founded as the head institution of Emperor Shōmu's 聖武 (r. 724–749) network of provincial temples (*kokubunji* 国分寺) that stretched across the country as a symbol of the dual power of the emperor and the Buddhist faith (*ōbō buppō* 王法仏法).[1] The temple was renowned for its statue of the Great Buddha (Daibutsu 大仏), a nearly fifteen-meter high bronze cast originally understood to depict the Buddha Vairocana when it was constructed along with the temple in the mid-eighth century.[2] Chōgen was tasked with recreating Japan's foremost Buddhist symbols—Tōdaiji and its Great Buddha—by assuming a wide range of responsibilities: fundraising among aristocrats and warriors; managing temple estates (*shōen* 庄園) that donated revenues and raw materials; developing a transportation infrastructure to carry supplies; and finally, overseeing the casters, architects, and builders who would erect the Great Buddha statue and Tōdaiji's halls.[3]

In addition to his practical contributions to the Tōdaiji reconstruction, Chōgen also promoted the theoretical understanding of the Great Buddha as two distinct, yet congruent deities: Mahāvairocana and Amitābha. This understanding cannot be found so much in Chōgen's writings, of which he composed little except a brief list of accomplishments known as the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, but through an analysis of his activities. Chōgen was ordained as a monk in the Shingon Buddhist tradition, which prioritizes Mahāvairocana's role as the *dharmakāya*, the "truth body" (*hosshin* 法身) of the Buddha that manifests all existences, including the bodies of other Buddhas. Although the Great Buddha had

1. Although the term *ōbō buppō* was not formalized until the eleventh century (Kuroda 1996b, 275), the concept is useful for understanding the mutual interdependence of Buddhism and the Japanese state that existed from the adoption of the Ritsuryō 律令 Code.

2. The monk Rōben (Ryōben) 良弁 (689–773) was appointed by Shōmu to oversee the construction of Tōdaiji. Rōben suggested the form of the cosmic Vairocana Buddha from the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* for the statue of the Great Buddha. Vairocana was an appealing choice, since the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* describes him as the origin of all other buddhas, who are merely manifestations of Vairocana, much as the *kokubunji* provincial temples were manifestations of the Japanese emperor's centralized power.

3. Rosenfield (2011), Gomi (1995), and Goodwin (1994) detail various aspects of Chōgen's *kanjin* campaign.

originally been cast as a statue of Vairocana, best known from the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, long before Chōgen's time the statue had come to be seen instead as Mahāvairocana due to the ascendancy of Shingon practice at Tōdaiji. Chōgen also promoted the view of the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana while overseeing the casting of the replacement statue in 1185.

However, Chōgen, like many monks of his day, had divergent interests in Buddhism, and he also propagated the Pure Land faith devoted to Amitābha. In order to facilitate the reconstruction of Tōdaiji, Chōgen built smaller satellite temples (*bessho* 別所) of Tōdaiji on estates that contributed their proceeds or raw materials to the main temple. These satellite temples served the provincial community of donors, estate managers, and laborers essential to the Tōdaiji effort. The satellite temples formed a network of Pure Land institutions across the country, on one hand united by the devotional practices to Amitābha organized there, and on the other hand through their ultimate connection to Tōdaiji, which functioned as the hub of the network.

Chōgen asserted the complementarity of the two deities, Mahāvairocana and Amitābha, through his distribution of Buddhist relics (*shari* 舎利) to his Pure Land satellite temples. Worship of the cremated remains of the Buddha's body, treated as corporeal relics, was a prominent feature of early Buddhist practice in India, and quickly gained traction in Japan, since they were considered to have magical powers that rewarded worshipers. Chōgen inserted relics collected from the emperor and aristocrats into a cavity of the Tōdaiji Great Buddha in order to animate the statue as a living buddha, but he also installed mobile reliquaries of a Shingon design known as "five-element towers" (*gorintō* 五輪塔) at his satellite temples. Typically, relic worship is not associated with Amitābha, a buddha said to reside in another world, the Western Pure Land. Unlike the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, Amitābha did not expire in our world, and so left behind no corporeal remains to worship. Chōgen's idea for the *gorintō* emerged not from orthodox Pure Land practice but Shingon doctrine in which the five tiers of the tower represent the body of Mahāvairocana brought to life in the statue of the Great Buddha. By venerating the *gorintō*, a surrogate for the Great Buddha, alongside Amitābha, Chōgen affirmed the complementarity of the Pure Land faith and Shingon practice, emphasizing that Amitābha devotion was just another form of worshiping Mahāvairocana. In this way, the statue of the Great Buddha was polysemous, expressing the identities of multiple deities in the eyes of divergent audiences. In the context of Shingon rituals at Tōdaiji, the Great Buddha was no doubt viewed as Mahāvairocana, while for the common laborers engaged in Pure Land worship at Chōgen's provincial satellite temples, the Great Buddha represented the object of their spiritual aspirations, Amitābha. Although other Shingon monks prior to or contemporaneous with Chōgen such as Kūkai 空海 (774–835) (Abé 2002), Eikan 永観 (1032–1111) (Ōtani 1993), Kakuban 覚鑁

(1095–1143) (Matsuzaki 2002), and Dōhan 道範 (1179–1252) (Proffitt 2015) had advocated for a combination of Pure Land and esoteric Buddhist practice, Chōgen's rationale for emphasizing the complementarity of the two deities was not ideologically motivated but practical. By installing Amitābha as the central icon of worship at the satellite temples, he leveraged the common understanding of the Pure Land as a postmortem paradise while simultaneously connecting them to the product of their labors: the Great Buddha statue.

The Great Buddha's Transformation into Mahāvairocana

Though the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji initially represented Vairocana, by the early ninth century its identity was already morphing into Mahāvairocana, the central deity of esoteric Buddhism. Chōgen, as a Shingon monk, would follow the tradition of viewing the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana, rather than its earlier incarnation.

The origins of Tōdaiji predate the formation of Shingon studies in Japan. Early monks at Tōdaiji joined the six "study groups" (*shū* 宗) that dominated Japanese Buddhist scholasticism of the time. Kūkai returned from China in 806 as a newly minted master of the Shingon tradition and was appointed the administrative head of Tōdaiji in 810. In 822 he established an *abhiṣeka* (*kanjō* 灌頂) hall there for esoteric ordinations, the first permanent structure for this purpose in Japan. Even after he acquired control over Tōji 東寺 as his main base of operations, the Shingon *abhiṣeka* hall remained at Tōdaiji, where novice monks in the Shingon school would first train (Abé 1999, 10, 54–55). Under Kūkai's leadership, Tōdaiji became the most prominent Shingon center in Nara.

As Shingon Buddhism gained a foothold at Tōdaiji, dual "exoteric-esoteric" ceremonies that combined Shingon with other Buddhist traditions became standard practice, and the Great Buddha, who had been viewed as Vairocana from Emperor Shōmu's time, gradually assumed the identity of the related Shingon deity Mahāvairocana. This change paralleled the hermeneutical ascendancy of Kūkai's Shingon doctrine, which infused worship of Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha mentioned in exoteric texts such as the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Brahma's Net Sutra*, with the ritual programs involving mantra, mudra, and mandala discussed in Shingon esoteric texts. From this point forward, many forms of exoteric Buddhist learning in Japan were accompanied by Shingon ritual, giving rise to the exoteric-esoteric (*kenmitsu* 顯密) Buddhism of the medieval period described by Kuroda Toshio (Kuroda 1996a).

There is evidence of this transformation from rituals at Tōdaiji beginning in the mid-tenth century. For example, in 960 the Tōdaiji abbot Kōchi 光智 (894–979) petitioned the emperor for twenty monks to perform exoteric-esoteric rites for the country at the newly constructed Sonshōin 尊勝院, which became

a prominent sub-temple of Tōdaiji dedicated to Kegon studies. Regarding these rites, Kōchi noted:

> In the beginning, Kegon (the study of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*) was [the primary doctrine studied by] the monks who resided at the [Sonshō]in. Kegon expresses the essence of Mahāvairocana and includes the [ten] vows of Samantabhadra.[4] [These] perfectly interfused principles [of exoteric and esoteric Buddhism] are exceedingly deep and difficult to fathom. (*Tōdaiji zoku yōroku*, 199)

As part of the opening ceremonies for the Sonshōin, Kōchi also summoned "Mahāvairocana; all the buddhas of the past, present, and future in the ten directions; and the deities of heaven and earth" to bless the grounds of the temple (*Tōdaiji zoku yōroku*, 199). Thus, even while Kōchi maintained his predilection for Kegon studies, he described Kegon in terms of its complementarity with the Shingon teachings of Mahāvairocana, and likewise prioritized Mahāvairocana's position vis-à-vis "all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future." While Kōchi's rituals at the Sonshōin sub-temple did not directly reference the Great Buddha, we might suspect that similar exoteric-esoteric ceremonies held at the main temple of Tōdaiji elaborated a ritual context that treated the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana during this period.

By the early twelfth century, the transformation of the Great Buddha into Mahāvairocana appears to have been complete. In 1102, the three senior administrators (*sangō* 三綱) of Tōdaiji authorized the use of the Nagaya 長屋 estate in Yamato 大和 Province to fund multiday repentance rituals specifically dedicated to Mahāvairocana at the Great Buddha Hall. At that time, the abbot of Tōdaiji was Eikan, who had studied a mixture of Shingon and Sanron at the Tōnan'in 東南院, the other prominent Tōdaiji sub-temple (Yokouchi 2008, 532). Thus, judging from ceremonial instructions from abbots of Tōdaiji connected to both the Sonshōin and Tōnan'in—Tōdaiji's two major sub-temples—issued during the one-hundred-fifty-year period between the mid tenth and early twelfth centuries, Tōdaiji leadership appears to have favored the identification of the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana.[5]

4. The ten great vows made by Samantabhadra according to the fortieth chapter of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* are namely to (1) worship all buddhas (*raikyō shobutsu* 礼敬諸仏), (2) praise the tathāgatas (*shōsan nyorai* 称讃如来), (3) make offerings (*kōshu kuyō* 広修供養), (4) repent karmic hindrances (*sange gosshō* 懺悔業障), (5) rejoice in the merits of others (*zuiki kudoku* 隨喜功德), (6) ask the Buddha to lecture (*shōten bōrin* 請転法輪), (7) ask the Buddha to stay in this world (*shōbutsu jūse* 請仏住世), (8) always follow Buddhist learning (*jōzui butsugaku* 常隨仏学), (9) forever consider the needs of sentient beings (*gōjun shūjō* 恒順衆生), and (10) universally transfer merit to others (*fukai ekō* 普皆廻向) (Mochizuki 1958, 2289c).

5. Yet another example of the penetration of Mahāvairocana ideology at Tōdaiji concerns one of the temple's estates, Ushirogawa 後河 in Tanba 丹波 Province. In 1055 the Tanba provincial governor ordered his representatives to seize the estate. Because there was no precedent for the

Chōgen's Layout for the Great Buddha Hall

As with the previous Tōdaiji abbots Kūkai, Kōchi, and Eikan, Chōgen organized performances of dual exoteric-esoteric rituals for the Great Buddha Hall, showing that he continued to view the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana. Chōgen mentions such rites in his *Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, and the *Tōdaiji zōryū kuyōki* describes them in more detail:

> [In the Great Buddha] Hall from long ago exoteric-esoteric rites were always mixed together.... Therefore, in the Great Buddha Hall, for several days, twelve purified Shingon monks performed a ceremony of the two worlds (*ryōbu no hō* 兩部之法, the womb world and diamond world), and thirty exoteric monks of great virtue delivered lectures on the *Golden Light Sutra*. [These ceremonies were performed] for the stability of the court, the longevity of the emperor, peace between the warrior clans, the prosperity of the Kantō 関東 region, the tranquility of the four seas, and the happiness of the common people.
>
> (*Tōdaiji zōryū kuyōki,* 55)

In this case, the exoteric rites involved the *Golden Light Sutra*, long important for state protection. The text implies these rites were combined with others involving the two most important mandalas used in the Shingon tradition.

Another example of Shingon rites at Tōdaiji organized by Chōgen is mentioned in the *Great Buddha Hall Repentance of Transgressions*, copied in 1691, which notes "multiday repentances for the Great Buddha Hall... [that] began in the third year of the Kenkyū 建久 era (1192)" (Yokouchi 2008, 531). During this period, Chōgen was still rebuilding the temple, and probably helped to organize the event. The same text's section on "chanting according to the teaching" (*nyohō nenju* 如法念誦) recommends "homage to the power of the mantra (*shingon*) that protects this temple" (Yokouchi 2008, 533), evidence that Chōgen promoted Shingon rituals likely involving Mahāvairocana at the temple site even before its completion. It is also significant that in the few texts of Chōgen that remain regarding the Great Buddha itself, he praises Mahāvairocana, but never mentions Vairocana, the original incarnation of the statue. This is the case, for instance, in his *ganmon* 願文 prayer for the consecration of the newly completed Great Buddha statue in 1185 (*Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, 68–69). Each of the texts above suggest Chōgen believed he was recasting an image of Mahāvairocana at Tōdaiji, not an image of Vairocana.

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use of such authority on the part of the governor, the estate workers rebelled and Tōdaiji filed an official complaint. The *Heian ibun* records several instances in which the estate workers challenged the governor by asserting that Mahāvairocana had owned the estates and paid wages to the workers for three or four hundred years (Yokouchi 2008, 533). The estate workers in this case referenced Mahāvairocana as the true source of authority at Tōdaiji.

Chōgen's understanding of the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana was clarified by his arrangement of mandalas and flanking-attendant statues installed in the Great Buddha Hall. A diagram of the hall (*Tōdaiji daibutsuden zu*) dated to 1284 shows the hall's layout from this period (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2012, 76). On top of the Great Buddha's lotus pedestal, two tabernacles were erected to the east and west called the Womb World Hall (Taizōkaidō 胎蔵界堂) and Diamond World Hall (Kongōkaidō 金剛界堂). These tabernacles housed the Diamond World Mandala (*Taizōkai mandara* 胎蔵界曼荼羅) and Womb World Mandala (*Kongōkai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅), respectively, both of which feature Mahāvairocana as the primary deity surrounded by various other buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities that emanate from him.[6] The choice of the flanking-attendant statues installed on either side of the Great Buddha, Ākāśagarbha and Cintāmaṇicakra Avalokiteśvara, was based on the Womb World Mandala. Ākāśagarbha is the central bodhisattva of the Hall of Space (Kokūzōin 虚空蔵院), while Cintāmaṇicakra Avalokiteśvara is the central bodhisattva in the Hall of the Lotus (Rengebuin 蓮華部院).[7] Taken together, Ākāśagarbha and Avalokiteśvara express Mahāvairocana's wisdom and compassion, said to be the origin of the Diamond World and Womb World themselves. The flanking attendant statues underscore Chōgen's idea that the Great Buddha Hall should be understood as a three-dimensional representation of the Womb World as described in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, the central text of the Shingon school. By this logic, the Great Buddha sits at the center and must be seen as Mahāvairocana himself.

The Great Buddha's Indeterminate Characteristics

Chōgen's esoteric additions to the Great Buddha Hall appear to have left few doubts concerning the identity of the Great Buddha as Mahāvairocana. Yet Chōgen also hoped to establish a connection between the Great Buddha and Amitābha in the minds of his congregations at the Pure Land satellite temples of Tōdaiji in the provinces, where his devotees were familiar with Amitābha worship.

6. For more detail on the iconography of these two mandalas and their use within the Shingon school, see ten Grotenhuis (1999, 35–97). Fujii Keisuke alternatively argues, based on the *Tōdaiji gusho*, that the Womb World Hall and Diamond World Hall did not house actual copies of the Womb World Mandala and the Diamond World Mandala, but only copies of the portraits of the eight esoteric masters of the Shingon school. According to Fujii, the names of the two tabernacles derived from the fact that the Great Buddha should itself be viewed as the Womb World Mandala or Diamond World Mandala from the perspective of each hall (Fujii 1998, 283–84). For the purpose of the argument here, though, it is not crucial to determine whether the mandalas were actually installed in the two halls, or their existence was merely implied via the names of each tabernacle.

7. For further details regarding the composition of these mandalas, see ten Grotenhuis (1999, 33–95).

Typically, statues of Amitābha and Mahāvairocana from this period are noticeably distinct, but by providence, the original eighth-century design for the statue of the Great Buddha was generic, and therefore representative of almost any buddha. Chōgen modeled his replacement Great Buddha after the original. A copy of a drawing of Chōgen's Great Buddha now held at the Chūseiin 中性院 at Tōdaiji provides frontal, profile, and three-quarters views of the statue, confirming that Chōgen's Great Buddha was similar to the current iteration, which was completed in 1691 (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2012, 28). From this we can judge that the features common to tathāgata statues were all present: the fleshy protuberance on the crown (*nikukei* 肉髻); coils of hair on the head (*rahotsu* 螺髪); a curl between the eyebrows (*byakugō* 白毫); brows arched like a crescent moon (*minyo shogachi* 眉如初月); long, rounded earlobes (*nirinjō* 耳輪垂); three wrinkles across the neck, and a robe draped over both shoulders revealing an unadorned chest. These features are present in most statues of Vairocana, Śākyamuni, Amitābha, Bhaiṣajyaguru, and other buddhas. On the other hand, Chōgen's Great Buddha statue lacked any of the features that distinguish images of Mahāvairocana created during the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. These images usually depicted Mahāvairocana's hair tied in a topknot and his head adorned with a crown. He also usually wore a necklace and bracelets around his arms, wrists, and ankles.

Moreover, since the Great Buddha was originally conceived as Vairocana, it did not form the mudras commonly associated with Mahāvairocana. In Japanese statuary of the time, Mahāvairocana was usually depicted performing the knowledge fist mudra (*chiken'in* 智拳印), in which the left hand is clenched except for the raised forefinger, which is grasped by the closed fist of the right hand. This mudra is associated with the sixth of the nine groups in the Diamond World Mandala, the single mudra assembly (*ichiin'e* 一印会),[8] and represents either the one dharma realm, or the wisdom of the "dharma ocean" grasped by the Buddha. Another, less commonly featured mudra of Mahāvairocana statuary is the dharma realm meditation mudra (*hōkai join* 法界定印), in which both hands are placed in the lap, with the palms turned upward, right hand on top of left, and thumbs touching. This mudra is associated with the hall of the central dias eight petals of the Womb World Mandala, and represents Mahāvairocana's meditation.[9] Yet, Chōgen's Great Buddha formed neither of these mudras. Instead,

8. Mahāvairocana also performs this mudra in the four mudra assembly and the perfected body assembly of the Diamond World Mandala.

9. While use of the meditation mudra was more common in Buddhist images across other parts of Asia, in Japan the mudra was not usually featured in images of other buddhas during Chōgen's period. The Zen school later favored images of Śākyamuni performing a meditation mudra, but the position of the hands was reversed. There were also instances of Maitreya and other buddhas forming the meditation mudra, but these postdate Chōgen (Mochizuki 1958, 177b, 3679b, 4559a).

his statue formed the bestowing fearlessness and wish-granting mudra (*semui yogan'in* 施無畏与願印) in which the right hand is held in front of the chest with the fingers extended, and the left hand rests on the left knee with the palm turned upward.[10] This mudra, like the rest of the statue, is thoroughly generic. It was so widely used for images of Śākyamuni, Maitreya, Amoghasiddhi, Bhaiṣajyaguru, and Amitābha, and so on that it became known as the form common to buddhas (*tsubutsuzō* 通仏相). In sum, a medieval Japanese viewer would not have been able to distinguish the identity of the Great Buddha by his adornments or mudra. The indistinguishability of the Great Buddha statue made Chōgen's aforementioned claim about the unity of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha all the more visually plausible.

Shingon Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism

Within the Shingon tradition there was a lineage of commentators who discussed fusing the worship of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha. Chōgen may have been influenced by the monk Kakuban. However, Chinese texts used by Kūkai as well as commentaries written by monks from Tōji and Mt. Kōya 高野, the centers of the Japanese Shingon school, had long sought an inclusive approach that promoted dual worship of the deities.[11] An early example is the *Commentary on the Method of Contemplation and Veneration of Amitābha Tathāgata*, which served as a basis for some of Kūkai's own rituals. According to this text, one can obtain rebirth in the highest level of the highest grade of Amitābha's Pure Land by practicing the three mysteries (*sanmitsu* 三密) of body, speech, and mind (T 930, 19.67c3–8).

During the Heian period, Shingon monks routinely sought rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land upon their deaths. For example, the Tōji abbot Kanken

10. The diagram of the Great Buddha from Chūseiin shows that the positions of the hands of Chōgen's statue were almost identical to the current statue that dates from the Edo period. The positions of the hands in the frontal and profile views in the diagram are slightly different, but the mudra appears to be the same (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2012, 28). Also, studies of the Great Buddha statue have confirmed that the folds of the sleeves and parts of the Buddha's hands still incorporate fragments from the previous statues, suggesting that the current hand positions match those from Chōgen's day (Rosenfield 2011, figure 70).

11. Many scholars have noted, more generally, that Buddhist sectarianism was not a feature of Heian and Kamakura Buddhism, despite later sectarian scholarship that tends to overemphasize the influence of "Kamakura New Buddhism." For more on the religious landscape of the period, see Goodwin (1994, 8–9); Kuroda (1980); Taira (1984, 290); Morrell (1985, 9–10). Chōgen's Pure Land Buddhism was the opposite of sectarian in its inclusive approach, but even the so-called sectarian Pure Land groups shared much in common with the *kenmitsu* schools. Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215), the founder of Rinzai Zen, was a close associate of Chōgen and succeeded him as *kanjin hijiri* 勧進聖 for Tōdaiji after Chōgen's death. Even Hōnen's students, Shōkū 証空 (1177–1247) and Benchō 弁長 (1162–1238), advocated esoteric rituals (Proffitt 2015, 377).

寛賢 (853–925) and Mt. Kōya abbot Mukū 無空 (d. 918) practiced the continuous recitation of the *nenbutsu*, while Jōshō 定昭 (906–983)—onetime abbot of Tōji, Kōfukuji 興福寺, and Mt. Kōya—formed mudra and chanted mantra at his death. In each case the practitioners aimed to achieve rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land. Thirty-eight Shingon monks are recorded as attaining Pure Land rebirths in the *Mt. Kōya Records of Rebirth* over the century spanning the lives of the monks Kyōkai 教懐 (1001–1093) to Shōin 証印 (d. 1187) (Abé 2002, 39–40).

From a theoretical perspective, Pure Land Buddhism and Shingon were recapitulated in the writings of the Shingon monk Kakuban. Many of the places Kakuban was active overlapped with Chōgen's activities years later. While Chōgen's sparse writings do not reference Kakuban directly, their shared network of personal relations and common interest in combining Shingon with Pure Land practice may suggest a connection through intermediaries. Chōgen's ideas concerning the complementarity of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha may have been influenced by Kakuban.[12] On the other hand, because the joint practices of Pure Land and esoteric Buddhism were so ubiquitous in the Shingon school by Chōgen's time, it is equally possible that Chōgen read Kakuban's forebears directly.

Kakuban, like his predecessors, emphasized that Shingon and Pure Land thought are ultimately undifferentiated aspects of the same teaching. He writes:

> In the esoteric canon, Mahāvairocana is the one who preaches on [A]mitābha's paradise, and so it should be understood that all the pure lands of the ten directions are the transformation land (*kedo* 化土)[13] of a single buddha. All the tathāgatas are Mahāvairocana for whom "Vairocana" and "Amitābha" are different names for the same body. (Likewise, Amitābha's) Paradise and the *ghana-vyūha* Pure Land (*mitsugon jōdo* 密厳浄土) of Vairocana are different names for the same place. (T 2514, 79. 11a24–27)

12. The connections between Kakuban and Chōgen are visible on a Kōyasan bronze bell dated to 1176 that memorialized Chōgen as the "saint in charge of temple solicitation who visited China three times." The bell was dedicated to the monk Shōkei 聖慶 and Minamoto no Tokifusa 源 時房, both great-grandchildren of Minamoto no Toshifusa 源俊房 (1035–1121) of the Murakami Genji 村上源氏 line (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2006, 70–71). The Murakami Genji remained a steadfast influence in Chōgen's life, and Chōgen may have learned of Kakuban's writings about the congruence of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha through this clan and their support of the Daidenpōin. Of course, Chōgen himself also spent considerable time on Kōyasan, and thus he may have become familiar with Kakuban's writings through a visit to the Daidenpōin of his own accord. A third possibility is that Chōgen encountered Kakuban's writings as a young monk at Daigoji. The Ninnaji monk, Kanjo 寛助 (1057–1125), and the Daigoji Rishōin 理性院 monk Genkaku 賢覚 (1080–1156), were both Kakuban's students. They may have left copies of their master's commentaries in the Daigoji Library to be discovered by Chōgen years later.

13. "Transformation land" here refers to a realm in which a transformed body of a buddha resides in order to preach the dharma and save all sentient beings.

Kakuban also echoes this view in his *Ichigo taiyō himitsushū*:

> The esoteric teachings say that the ten paradises (that is, Pure Lands) are all the territory of one buddha land, and all the tathāgatas are the body of one buddha (that is, Mahāvairocana). This is not different [from saying that] in this *sahā* world we can also see paradise, so why must we differentiate between the ten trillion lands? (*Ichigo taiyō himitsushū,* 1197)

In the first passage, Kakuban makes the claim that Amitābha is an emanation of Mahāvairocana, and Amitābha's Pure Land is identical with Mahāvairocana's Pure Land. In the second passage, he says that there is only one buddha body and only one world, and thus this world of suffering is identical to the Pure Lands of the buddhas and the realm of Mahāvairocana.

Prior to Chōgen, many other monks proposed dual worship of Amitābha's Pure Land and performance of esoteric rites. Shōkai 清海 (d. 1017), for example, organized *nenbutsu* assemblies and used Pure Land *mandara* in coordination with the esoteric Womb World and Diamond World Mandala favored by Kūkai. Eikan, author of *Ōjōjūin*, described Pure Land rebirth through dedicated practice of the *nenbutsu*, but also recommended esoteric *dhāraṇī* practice as a path to rebirth (Proffitt 2015, 267–69). None of these practitioners had advocated the dual worship of Amitābha and relics, however, as we examine in the case of Chōgen below.

The Mt. Kōya bell dated to 1176 that memorialized Chōgen as the "saint in charge of temple solicitation who visited China three times" serves as one source of concrete evidence of Chōgen's own combinatorial thought about Mahāvairocana and Amitābha. Inscribed on the bell are the Sanskrit seed syllables for the (1) Śākyamuni triad, (2) Amitābha triad, (3) Amitābha Mantra, (4) Golden Light Mantra (*Kōmyō shingon* 光明真言), (5) Lotus Mandala (*Hokke mandara* 法華曼荼羅), and (6) the five elements. This combination of seed syllables appears to subsume Śākyamuni, Amitābha, the *Golden Light Sutra*, and the *Lotus Sutra* under the five elements Kūkai used to represent Mahāvairocana's body. It suggests, following Kakuban, that Chōgen saw the teachings of the most important deities (including Amitābha) and texts as expressions of Mahāvairocana's universal teaching. Chōgen similarly articulated the identity of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha in a *gorintō* placed inside one of the Vajra-wielding Guardians at the southern gate of Tōdaiji. Inscribed on the five wheels of the tower from top to bottom was not the *dhāraṇī* for Mahāvairocana, but the phonetic characters spelling Amitābha's name: "Na, Mu, Ami, Da, Bu" (Naitō 2006, 33).

Worship of Amitābha at Chōgen's Tōdaiji Satellite Temples

As part of his effort to reconstruct Tōdaiji and its Great Buddha, Chōgen built Pure Land satellite temples dedicated to Amitābha in the provinces whose revenues

or raw materials provided for the reconstruction effort. These satellite temples were founded on estates where workers toiled to harvest lumber for Tōdaiji's pillars and beams, fashion shingles for Tōdaiji's roof, and grow rice used as currency to purchase other necessary supplies. Chōgen listed seven satellite temples in his *Collection of Benevolent Deeds*: five in the provinces (Watanabe 渡辺, Iga 伊賀, Harima 播磨, Bitchū 備中, and Suō 周防), as well as one near Tōdaiji and another on Mt. Kōya. The main structure of each satellite temple was a Pure Land hall.[14] As with any Pure Land temple, Chōgen's Pure Land halls used an image of Amitābha as the central object of worship and served as a ceremonial space for the practice of reciting Amitābha's name and other Pure Land rites. The Pure Land halls provided those who worked on or lived near the Tōdaiji estates access to such rites, which they believed would precipitate their salvation in Amitābha's Western Paradise.

Though Chōgen produced no doctrinal works, his *Collection of Benevolent Deeds* record of accomplishments makes clear that he thoroughly embraced Pure Land Buddhism, probably partially due to the influence of Kakuban. This is evident by the selection of statues he donated to Buddhist temples, which were heavily weighted toward Amitābha and other Pure Land deities. According to the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, of the statues Chōgen gave to Tōdaiji-related institutions, 35 percent (23/66) are listed as statues of Amitābha or his two flanking bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Another statue installed at the Bitchū Pure Land Hall is described as a "Śākyamuni triptych, of one statue each, for the Zennan'indō 禅南院堂 (welcoming to the Pure Land)" (*Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, 484). Due to the interlinear note about the Pure Land, we can surmise this statue was a Pure Land form of Śākyamuni, a genre also found elsewhere.[15] Twenty-five entries for "sixteen-foot statues"[16] in the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds* do not specify the statues' identities, but nine are known to have been unfinished statues of Amitābha originally dedicated to a temple in Awa 安房 Province by Taira no Shigeyoshi 平 重能 (d.u.), while the tenth was an esoteric form of Amitābha.[17] Another nine of the twenty-five

14. A Bizen estate under Chōgen's management that provided income for Tōdaiji was also the location of one of Chōgen's Pure Land halls, though for some reason he did not refer to Bizen explicitly as a *bessho* satellite temple (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2006, 278–79).

15. Śākyamuni preaches the three major Pure Land sutras and recommends the worship of Amitābha as a means to attain enlightenment. Other examples of the Pure Land forms of Śākyamuni included paintings at Hōryūji Kondō 法隆寺金堂 depicting the Pure Lands of Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and other buddhas on four walls, each with separate attendants and retinues. Though the paintings were destroyed in 1949, photographs remain at The University of Tokyo Museum.

16. "Sixteen feet" (*jōroku* 丈六) was one of two standard heights for Buddhist sculptures in the Heian period. *Jōroku* statues were usually about 280 centimeters tall (Morse 1993, 98).

17. Taira no Shigeyoshi was one of the culprits who burned down Tōdaiji. Chōgen added the esoteric statue of Amitābha to the other nine Amitābha statues to form one of the first sets of ten

unspecified statues were dedicated to the Kayanomori 栢杜 sanctuary affiliated with Daigoji. Since sets of nine statues of Amitābha were typically created during this period to represent the nine levels of rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land elaborated in the *Contemplation Sutra*, the nine statues at the Kayanomori sanctuary were also probably statues of Amitābha. Following this reasoning, at least 65 percent (43/66) of the statues Chōgen dedicated in the "Tōdaiji" section of the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds* were related to Pure Land Buddhism. That total might even be higher if the identities of all the other statues listed in this section were known (Oka 1983, 8).[18]

Concerning the rituals performed at Chōgen's Pure Land halls at the Tōdaiji satellite temples, the most evidence remains concerning the Pure Land halls at Mt. Kōya, Suō, and Harima. The Pure Land hall on Mt. Kōya was known as the Hall for the Expressed Goal of Rebirth (Senshū Ōjōin 専修往生院), referring to Pure Land practitioners' goal to be reborn in Amitābha's Pure Land. Chōgen's Mt. Kōya Pure Land Hall was of simple construction, consisting of one central bay with surrounding halls on four sides (*ikken yonmen* 一間四面), accompanied by a bath, refectory, and three storied pagoda (Gomi 1995, 103). The bath was used for Pure Land rituals in which devotees chanted the name of Amitābha while washing their bodies, cleansing themselves both physically and spiritually. Some of the baths were only for solitary Buddhist masters (*hijiri* 聖), but a bath at the Watanabe Pure Land Hall was assigned for public use, so perhaps those on Mt. Kōya and other satellite temples had public bathing facilities as well (Goodwin 1994, 94). A Kamakura-period collection of tales (*setsuwa* 説話), the *Hosshinshū*, notes that one of the chief practices at the Mt. Kōya Pure Land Hall was the "unceasing recitation of Amitābha's name" (*fudan nenbutsu* 不断念仏), a ceremony in which practitioners took turns repeating the phrase "Namu amidabutsu" over the course of several days. Records of ceremonies held at the Suō Pure Land Hall, now the site of Amidaji 阿弥陀寺, also mention the performance of a continuous *nenbutsu* ritual (Gomi 1995, 99).

The Pure Land hall at Harima, also called the "Namu amidabutsuji" 南無阿弥陀仏寺 (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2006, 245), is one of the few

Amitābha statues installed in Japan. A precedent for the set of ten Amitābha exists in a painting at Chionji 知恩寺 (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2006, 198–99), in which one Amitābha makes an esoteric mudra (the same mudra as Amitābha in the Womb World Mandala), while the other nine make mudras resembling those from a transformation painting of the sixteen visualizations thought to be based on an original Chōgen brought from China (Yokouchi 2008, 572).

18. The total of forty-three statues includes twenty-three listed as Amitābha or his attendants, one Pure Land form of Śākyamuni, ten Amitābha statues installed at Awa, and nine Amitābha statues installed at Kayanomori. Although described as a triptych, the Pure Land form of Śākyamuni is only counted once here because the statues are not listed separately in the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds.*

structures built by Chōgen that still exists today. It now goes by the name Jōdoji 浄土寺. A number of items installed at this Pure Land hall by Chōgen still remain, including the original sixteen-foot Amitābha statue and mobile reliquary towers, discussed further below. The ceremonies recorded at this hall were of two main types: group chanting of Amitābha's name, and Descent of Amitābha Assemblies (*raigōe* 来迎会) that celebrated Amitābha's arrival to this world to collect the faithful and take them to his Pure Land upon their deaths. According to the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, a Descent of Amitābha Assembly was first performed at the Watanabe Pure Land Hall in 1197 as a grandiose ceremony attended by the Retired Emperor Go Toba 後鳥羽 (r. 1183–1198) and included twenty-five disciples costumed as attendant bodhisattvas of Amitābha (*Collection of Benevolent Deeds*, 492). These assemblies began in 1200 at the Harima Pure Land Hall and involved an Amitābha statue that was clothed to look like a living Buddha. The statue was brought from the Pure Land Hall, carried across the adjacent pond, and taken to the Bhaiṣajyaguru Hall (Yakushidō 薬師堂), a trip that symbolized Amitābha's journey from his Pure Land to our mundane world (Goodwin 1994, 94). Disciples donned bodhisattva masks and recited Amitābha's name during the procession. A bodhisattva mask that was probably used for one of Chōgen's descent of Amitābha assemblies at the Bitchū Pure Land Hall still remains at the nearby Kibitsu 吉備津 Shrine (Nojiri 2006, 42, 44).

There are many reasons to think that Chōgen's network of donors, managers, and laborers associated with the Pure Land halls at the satellite temples were socially diverse in character, and that many common people thus worshiped at the Pure Land halls. First, many of Chōgen's good works projects (*sazen* 作善) were organized in order to benefit the lives of common people in regions near Chōgen's satellite temples. These projects included the building and repair of roads and bridges to ease the journeys of travelers and protect them from thieves and wild animals (Rosenfield 2011, 228–29), the repair of harbors to ensure the safety of sailors and fisherman, and the renovation of the Sayama 狭山 Reservoir to provide water for crop irrigation (Iwato 2006, 46).[19] The Pure Land ceremonies organized by Chōgen at his satellite temples were almost certainly

19. Chōgen was not just a religious specialist; he studied a variety of fields, including art, architecture, and construction. Chōgen's knowledge was exemplary partially because of his travels to China, where he learned about contemporary continental developments. However, he was not alone in studying subjects apart from Buddhism. From ancient times through the medieval period in Japan, monks were more than religious practitioners. They were also eclectic scholars of the five sciences (*gomyō* 五明), fields of learning in ancient India that also guided the education of Buddhist monks in East Asia. These fields included: (1) grammar and composition (*shōmyō* 声明), (2) arts and mathematics (*kukōmyō* 工巧明), (3) medicine (*ihōmyō* 医方明), (4) logic and epistemology (*inmyō* 因明), and (5) Buddhist philosophy (*naimyō* 内明) (Mochizuki 1958, 1301c). Chōgen's knowledge of engineering and construction added to these traditional fields.

directed partially at the ordinary people who benefited from these good works and lived close by. Second, the spatial dimensions of each Pure Land hall were relatively large, with fewer pillars separating the bays than was routine during the period, thereby affording ample space within the structure for large congregations. Third, Chōgen constructed "regular" bathhouses at his satellite temples in Hakata for use by common people in contrast to some bathhouses he built exclusively for solitary Buddhist masters in short-term residence (Rosenfield 2011, 229). Finally, Chōgen claimed in the *Collection of Benevolent Deeds* to have bestowed unique "Amitābha names" on the rich and poor, high and low. While all the individuals who used these names have been identified as monks, Chōgen clearly suggests that the names were used for persons of all social classes, in turn lending support to the idea that the congregations of Amitābha worshipers at the satellite temples were diverse in composition.

Chōgen's Use of Relics to Connect the Great Buddha and Amitābha

Chōgen sought a method to underscore the relationship between the Tōdaiji Great Buddha, for which his provincial workforce toiled, and the Pure Land halls where the same workers worshiped Amitābha. His solution was the distribution of Buddhist relics. Chōgen secreted more than eighty relics inside a cavity of the Great Buddha before the cast was complete in order to animate the statue as a living Buddha, capable of transferring his merit upon worshipers. At the same time, Chōgen installed reliquaries at his Pure Land halls, creating a network between his Pure Land congregations and the Tōdaiji Great Buddha. The form of the reliquaries Chōgen used was significant, as they unmistakably referenced the body of Mahāvairocana and, by extension, the Great Buddha statue.

For the reliquaries Chōgen installed at his Pure Land halls, he used an esoteric design known as *gorintō* (five element towers).[20] "Five elements" refers to the five divisions, or "wheels," that compose the tower's structure, each representative of one of the five elements (*godai* 五大) thought to form all matter in ancient Indian thought. The five elements were earth, water, fire, wind, and space, each of which constituted one layer of the cosmological structure of the world. The five element tower represents the elements starting with earth as the square base, followed by water as a round sphere, fire as a triangular pyramid, wind as a half-sphere, and space as a jewel-shaped sphere on top (Naitō 2006, 32). The five elements were linked to the esoteric Buddhist theory of the Shingon founder Kūkai, who related each element to an aspect of emptiness (*kū* 空): namely, originally not arising (earth), transcendent of designations (water), free from taint (fire), lacking primary cause (wind), and formless (space). Kūkai intended his

20. For an image of Chōgen's extant *gorintō*, see Naitō (2012, 160–61) and Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan (2006, 167–74).

identification between the five elements and aspects of emptiness to symbolize reality from the perspective of the Buddha's enlightenment, also understood in Shingon thought as the body of Mahāvairocana (Abé 1999, 281). This symbolism is captured in the design of the *gorintō* used by Chōgen. His five element towers evoke Mahāvairocana, brought to life by the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji. By introducing veneration of the *gorintō*, a surrogate for the Great Buddha, alongside worship of Amitābha at the Pure Land halls, Chōgen affirmed the identity of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha without recourse to the sort of complex doctrinal commentaries composed by Kakuban, which would have proven unintelligible to a workforce that was probably mostly illiterate. Chōgen's message was simple: Amitābha devotion was just another form of worshiping Mahāvairocana, the origin of all other buddhas.

Chōgen's message integrating Mahāvairocana and Amitābha also aimed to reduce cognitive dissonance and create the sense of a shared objective on the part of his laborers. With no framework in place to understand the relation between Mahāvairocana and Amitābha, working to rebuild a statue of Mahāvairocana for the benefit of an elite audience in the capital region may have seemed divorced from the laborers' personal spiritual quest to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha. Identifying Amitābha with Mahāvairocana solved this discordance, implying that work to rebuild the Great Buddha, nominatively a statue of Mahāvairocana, would in fact be rewarded by Amitābha for whom the Great Buddha also embodied. No longer was the provincial workforce alienated from the religious value of their labor; they could receive the same benefits enjoyed by the elites who worshiped before the Great Buddha at Tōdaiji via the reliquary towers installed remotely at the satellite temples, all the while working toward their goal of Pure Land rebirth. This probably created a sense of shared purpose on the part of the workforce, with the practical aim of lifting morale and productivity. Chōgen's identification of the Great Buddha as both Amitābha and Mahāvairocana thus served both spiritual and mundane objectives simultaneously.

Conclusions

Chōgen deployed religious artworks from both the esoteric and Pure Land traditions in order to assert the complementarity of the two approaches to Buddhism by identifying the primary deities worshiped therein, Mahāvairocana and Amitābha. He employed several methods to this end. After reconstructing the statue of the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji, he made clear through an arrangement of esoteric mandalas and flanking-attendant statues in the Great Buddha Hall that the Great Buddha should be understood as Mahāvairocana, superseding previous notions. At the same time, because the statue was modeled closely after the original—which had few distinguishing characteristics apart from the iconography

of the lotus dais—Chōgen could simultaneously assert the statue's complementarity with Amitābha. This Amitābha identification was achieved through a unique deployment of Buddhist relics. In addition to secreting relics inside the Great Buddha to animate the statue as a living Buddha, Chōgen also installed *gorintō*, an esoteric variety of mobile reliquary that represented Mahāvairocana's *dharmakāya* body, in Pure Land satellite temples located on the Tōdaiji estates across Japan. Installing the *gorintō* alongside images of Amitābha affirmed the congruence of Pure Land faith and esoteric practice, emphasizing that Amitābha devotion was just another form of worshiping Mahāvairocana.

Chōgen's method for advocating a combination of both Pure Land and esoteric Buddhism differed from his Shingon predecessors. Though the efficacy of Pure Land Buddhist worship and the complementarity of Amitābha and Mahāvairocana were discussed theoretically by a range of early Shingon monks, including Kūkai himself, Chōgen never put forth an ideologically conceived argument equating the two deities, at least as far as we know. Chōgen instead relied on implicit, or symbolic, statements using Amitābha statuary and *gorintō* installed at the Pure Land halls in his satellite temples to convey his message.

Chōgen's method befitted his objectives as the head temple solicitor for reconstructing Tōdaiji. Rather than composing commentaries affirming dual Amitābha-Mahāvairocana worship, commentaries that would only have appealed to a select few, Buddhist-savvy readers, Chōgen chose a communications strategy with intuitive and broad appeal particularly aimed at the working class on the Tōdaiji estates. In this way, he motivated his provincial workforce by emphasizing that their labor would accrue the benefits bestowed by the Tōdaiji Great Buddha, while also earning the Pure Land rebirth promised by Amitābha.

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