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Relying on Words and Letters

Scripture Recitation in the Japanese Rinzai Tradition

Classical Chan/Zen literature is famous for its ostensive disparagement of scriptural authority. In practice, however, sutra recitation and invocation of *dhāraṇī* have been a significant and influential component of Zen monastic life throughout history. Daily and monthly sutra-recitation services take up more of the monks' time and effort than any other activity. This article examines the liturgical function of Buddhist scriptures within the Japanese Rinzai tradition. It also aims to better understand how Zen practitioners interpret the meaning and purpose of sutra recitation and how they bridge the aforementioned gap between soteriology and practice. I explore the *Kankinbō* chapter of *Goke sanshō yōromon*, written by the eighteenth-century Japanese Rinzai monk Tōrei Enji. Tōrei focuses on the mental and physical benefits of sutra recitation and its power to positively affect natural and supernatural environments. This illustrates the multifaceted understanding of texts as ritual objects, one that challenges strict distinctions between worldly benefits and spiritual cultivation. Tōrei's exegetical efforts to explain the function and justify the legitimacy of sutra recitation attest that the tension between antinomian rhetoric and worship was a major concern for Zen reformers in Edo Japan. Accordingly, I contend that the *Kankinbō* can advance our understanding of the meaning and function of rituals within Edo-period Zen and shed new light on modern interpretations of the tradition.

KEYWORDS: Tōrei Enji—sutra chanting—Zen—ritual—Rinzai—Edo period

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RECITATION IS one of five devotional activities traditionally associated with Buddhist sutras; the other four are receiving and keeping the sutra, reading it, expounding on it, and copying it.¹ According to Mahayana scriptures such as the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, performing these activities will result in immeasurable merit and virtue. The meritorious potential of Buddhist scriptures is derived from their authority as vehicles of the ultimate teaching and the essence of the dharma body (*dharmakāya*) (WU and CHIA 2016, 2–3). Otherwise put, words believed to have been uttered by the Buddha were equally valued for their doctrinal message, as well as for their virtue and power.

Classical Chan/Zen literature contains a strain of rhetoric that seems to undermine this authority as well as its meritorious efficacy. The famous “separate transmission outside the scriptures” aphorism appears to dismiss the authority of written doctrine in favor of “realizing [one’s] nature and becoming a Buddha.”² This devalorization of the merit of scriptures is echoed in many stories of Zen masters abusing, tearing, and even burning Buddhist sutras.³ At the core of

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1. In this article, the terms “scriptures” and “sutras” are used interchangeably to translate the character 經, thereby consciously ignoring the controversy regarding the definition of “sutras” and whether they include the entire Buddhist canon or just a small body of prominent Mahayana sutras, such as the *Lotus Sutra*.

2. Regarding the actual place of the slogan in the historical development of Zen in China during the Song dynasty, see FOULK (1999). The semi-legendary Indian monk Bodhidharma is said to have introduced Zen teachings to China and consequently was recognized as the first patriarch of the Zen tradition. The dialogue between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 is yet another example of Bodhidharma’s dismissal of the traditional Buddhist understanding of merit, in particular, its identification with sutras (*Keitoku dentō roku* T 2076, 51.219a22–28).

3. This standpoint was previewed by the famous Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866/7): “All of these, up to and including the three vehicles’ twelve divisions of teachings, are just so much waste paper to wipe off privy filth” (*Record of Linji*, T 1985, 47.499c19; translated in SASAKI and KIRCHNER 2008, 222). This can be seen in numerous stories of Zen monks tearing sutras or similar in the case of the famous Tang master Deshan Xuanjian 德山宣鑒 (780/2–865) using scriptures as firewood. One visual representation of such an attitude is the painting of the sixth patriarch destroying a sutra (*Liuzu pojing* 六祖破經) by Liang Kai 梁楷 (1140–1210); see the collection of Mitsui Memorial Museum, Tokyo, Japan, available at <https://terebess.hu/zen/liangkai/Huinengi.jpg> (accessed 5 June 2018).

this antinomian approach lies the conviction that members of the Zen lineage are actually living buddhas, and as such, are free to hold any textual or sacramental authority in disdain. In practice, however, incantations and invocations have been a major component of Zen monastic life throughout history, as can be seen in the rules of purity (*qinggui* 清規) and other monastic regulations dating from Song China (960–1279) to Edo Japan (1603–1867). As in other Buddhist schools, the chanting of sutras has been at the core of many Zen traditional ritual functions, including protecting the nation, caring for the dead, and ensuring the health, wealth, and happiness of the living. Accordingly, not only do Zen monks not burn sutras, but in reality, daily and monthly sutra-chanting services (*fugin* 諷經 or *jukyō* 誦經), various offerings (*kuyō* 供養), and prayers (*kitō* 祈禱) take up more of the monks' time and effort than does any other practice, including zazen.⁴

This article examines the ceremonial function of Buddhist scriptures within the Japanese Zen tradition. It aims to show how Zen practitioners interpret the meaning and purpose of sutra recitation in light of the aforementioned tension between soteriology and practice. To this end, the article focuses on the *Kankinbō* 看經榜 (“Reading Sutra Placard”) chapter of *Goke sanshō yōromon* (T 2576, 81.616c22), written by Tōrei Enji 東嶺円慈 (1721–1792).

As a chief disciple of the renowned Hakuin Ekaku 白隱慧鶴 (1686–1769), Tōrei played a prominent role in the Rinzai revival movement of the eighteenth century. He was also a prolific scholar, who did not limit himself to the teaching of his own Rinzai school; in fact, he was well read in Mahayana literature and possessed a deep interest in Confucianism and Shinto.⁵ At the same time, however, Tōrei was not a proselytizer of Buddhism. Unlike other prominent Rinzai masters of the Edo period, he did not promote Zen as moral education for different strata of society, nor did he write pieces in vernacular Japanese (*kana* 仮名) or secular poetry (*zokuyō* 俗謡).⁶ On the contrary, Tōrei's preference for classical Chinese, as well as the technical Buddhist terminology he employed, indicates that his writing was mainly intended for the monastic elite (NISHIMURA 1983, 576).

4. It is worth mentioning that we do have at least some indications of historical Zen masters who took the antinomian soteriology at face value. One such case was the eminent Song master Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), who burned his master Yuanwu Keqin's 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135) copy of the *Blue Cliff Record*; however, these appear to be exceptions rather than the norm (CLEARY and CLEARY 1977, xi–xii).

5. Similar to other contemporary Buddhist scholars, Tōrei was motivated by his ambition to incorporate these different traditions into one coherent teaching. See, for example, his *Shin-jubutsu sanbō kōkyō kuge*, where Tōrei discusses various expressions of filial piety in Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

6. Among such Edo-period Rinzai masters are Takuan Sōhō 沢庵宗彭 (1573–1645) and Bankei Yōtaku 盤珪永琢 (1622–1693).

Completed in 1788, *Goke sanshō yōromon* is arguably Tōrei's greatest scholarly achievement.⁷ This work is largely based on *Rentian yanmu* (T 2006, 46), composed by the Song dynasty Rinzai master Huiyan Zhizhao 晦巖智昭 (d.u.) in 1188 (ZGD 847a, 998a). As its title indicates, *Goke sanshō yōromon* is a detailed study of the five major schools of Zen that developed in China by the end of the tenth century.⁸ In this work, Tōrei analyzes the differences between the schools based on the lives and teachings of their founders. He concludes by arguing that regardless of any differences in teaching methods or style of practice, the five houses share a common vision of achieving the ultimate goal of Zen practice.⁹ Tōrei's disciple Taikan Bunshu 大觀文殊 (1766–1842),¹⁰ who edited and published the work in 1827, included two additional essays by Tōrei as appendices (*furoku* 附録), namely, *Rōhatsu jishu* 臘八示衆 and *Kankinbō*, on which this article focuses.¹¹ Despite being fairly short, *Kankinbō* is a significant work within contemporary Rinzai monasteries. In fact, guidebooks published by the Rinzai sect rely on *Kankinbō* to explain the logic, as well as the various mental and physical benefits of scripture recitation (*Rinzaishū nōto*, 35–36; *Rinzaishū gendai jūshokugaku kōza*, 258).

Kankinbō derives its name from a large wooden placard used in Zen monasteries for posting the names of the scriptures recited by the assembly.¹² In his *Zenrin shōkisen*, the renowned Rinzai scholar Mujaku Dōchū 無著道忠 (1653–1745) explains the function of the *kankinbō*:¹³

7. Although *Shūmon mujin tōron* (T 2575, 81) is traditionally regarded as Tōrei's magnum opus, it is more of a practice manual than a scholarly work.

8. The “five houses” (*goke* 五家) are Linji 臨濟, Yunmen 雲門, Caodong 曹洞, Guiyang 鴻仰, and Fayan 法眼.

9. Tōrei defines this goal as *kōjōdaiji* 向上大事, which literally means “going beyond the great matter” (that is, enlightenment). Simply put, this concept implies that awakening is an ongoing process. Thus, the purpose of practice is not merely seeing into one's true nature (*kenshō* 見性), but the continuous progression beyond any fixed state of realization. Regarding the importance of this concept in Zen in general and in Tōrei's teaching in particular, see MOHR (2009) and NISHIMURA (1985).

10. This name is often pronounced incorrectly as Daikan or Taikan Monju (MOHR 1993, 324).

11. *Rōhatsu sesshin* 臘八禪心 is a period of intense training in Zen monasteries, which commemorates Śākyamuni Buddha's attainment of awakening. The *Rōhatsu jishū* (instructions for the Rōhatsu assembly) contains Tōrei's transcriptions of Hakuin's sermons during one such session. The sermons emphasize the importance of seeing one's nature and explain the attitude and motivation required from a Zen practitioner. This work is still regarded as a major source of inspiration among contemporary Rinzai monks (MIURA and SASAKI 1966, 360).

12. See, for example, fascicle six of the *Chanyuan qinggui*, where it is referred to as *kankyō daihō* 看經大榜 (x 1245: 538c01).

13. *Zenrin shōkisen* is a comprehensive lexicon of regulations, events, and accouterments pertaining to Zen monastic life. Mujaku's meticulous scholarship, which relies on an extensive list of sources, made this work an invaluable tool for studying the tradition; see LOPEZ and BUSWELL (2014, 1327).

The fifteenth day of the seventh month is the *Ullambana* assembly.¹⁴ On the first day of the lunar month, the rector (*inō* 維那) is entrusted with placing the sutra-reading placard. He should write the inscription and copy the names of the sutras and *dhāraṇī* in rows... and set it in the monks' hall. The monks of the assembly will recite [the scripture] according to their choosing, [and] after finishing, each should write his names on the plaque, under the sutra he had recited. The rector will neatly copy the names [of the monks] and the recited [sutra's title] and on the fifteenth day will proclaim it to the assembly.

(*Zenrin shōkisen*, 620)

This excerpt indicates that *kankinbō* functioned as a kind of roster designed to assign the reciting of scriptures to individual monks, as well as serve as a form of “invoice” issued for the donor, indicating what scriptures were recited and by whom. Initially, the function of this ritual was manifold, from protecting the state to generating merit to an individual donor. Nevertheless, by Tōrei's time the ceremony became almost exclusively identified with caring for the spirits of ancestors and other deceased family members. This can be learned from the fact that Mujaku designates *kankinbō* specifically for the *urabon* assembly, as well as for a monk's funeral.¹⁵ Accordingly, the main focus of this treatise is to reevaluate the ritual performance of scripture as a means of accumulating and transferring merit, particularly for the souls of the deceased.

Kankinbō falls into three fairly distinct sections. In the first section, Tōrei introduces a ritual understanding of sutra reading, which alludes to esoteric Buddhism. The second section specifies the different benefits of reciting scriptures and associates it with the bodhisattva ideal. The third and last section contains an apologetic discussion in which Tōrei defends the place of reciting scriptures, based on famous cases and anecdotes from various Zen records. In what follows, I will examine each of these sections in detail.

The Zen of Sutra Recitation

In his treatise, Tōrei refers to sutra recitation as *kankin*. The literal meaning of the term is “looking (*kan* 看) at sutras (*kyō* or *kin* 經).” In Chinese, *kanshu* 看書 simply means to “read a book.” Nonetheless, Buddhist dictionaries tend to distinguish between two distinctive meanings implied by the term *kankin*. The first is silent reading (*mokudoku* 默読), or contemplation on scripture, and the second is intoning (*jukyō* 誦經), or chanting (*dokuju* 読誦), scriptures aloud. The former is commonly associated with realizing the meaning of scriptures, whereas the

14. *Ullambana* (*urabon* 盂蘭盆) is a Buddhist festival in honor of the spirits of one's ancestors, better known in Japan as *obon*.

15. The passage also mentions that the placard should be used during the New Year Assembly (*shūshō e* 修正会), when offerings are made to the spirits of the Zen patriarchs.

latter is linked to generating merit (NAKAMURA 1975, 187a; UI 1965, 147; ZGD 176d).¹⁶ However, as Griffith Foulk has argued, it appears that a clear distinction between quiet contemplation and oral recitation of scriptures is found neither in the recorded discourse (*yulu* 語錄) nor the various rules of purity. In other words, Chinese Zen literature does not distinguish between ritual performance of scriptures for meritorious purposes and the contemplative study of scriptures for realizing the path (FOULK 2012, 86).

Nevertheless, the use of *kan* in the Zen tradition is often associated with uncovering the profound meaning of the scripture and points to its potential to generate an intuitive insight, which transcends the written word. The most relevant example is *kanna Zen* 看話禪 (phrase-observing Zen), where *kan* does not, or at least not ultimately, refer to a contemplative study of the koan, but rather, seeing into its true meaning (HEINE 2017, 6–7). Accordingly, Tōrei's choice of *kankin* rather than *fugin* or *fujū* 諷誦, for example, which are more distinct terms for recitation, testify to his intention to reinterpret the meaning of scripture recitation within his school. At the same time, however, by alluding to classical Zen terminology, Tōrei is able to present his interpretation as restorative rather than innovative.

Tōrei's primary motivation is to challenge the contemporary understanding of scriptures within his own Rinzai school and, more specifically, its exclusive association with producing merit (*kudoku* 功德) and its dedication (*ekō* 回向) as part of mortuary rites.¹⁷ To achieve this goal, he appeals to one of the most fundamental concepts of esoteric Buddhism, that is, the three mysteries (*sanmitsu* 三密).¹⁸ Thus, Tōrei opens his treatise with the following statement:

Shingon teaching is associated with the method of the three mysteries, namely, the correct bright mudra is the mystery of body; the pure bright *dhāraṇī* is the mystery of mouth [that is, speech]. Realizing mandala¹⁹ and one's body as being non-dual is the mystery of the mind. (T 2576, 81.616c23–25)

The historical relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism has been discussed by several scholars and is largely beyond the scope of this article (BODI-

16. MOCHIZUKI and TSUKAMOTO (1954, 1: 467a) argues that the original meaning of the term in the Zen tradition was silent reading, whereas intoning was a later development. The reference to the *Record of Linji* that he provides does not necessarily support this assertion (T 1985, 47.505b27). In fact, nowhere in the *Record of Linji* is it implied that *kankin* refers exclusively to silent reading.

17. Such an association can be seen in monastic regulations from the period; for examples, see *Shoekō shingi* as well as Mujaku Dōchū's *Shōsōrin ryaku shingi*.

18. On the historical development of the three mysteries within Chinese Buddhism, see MCBRIDE (2009). McBride suggests the term “three esoterica” as an alternative to “three mysteries,” but this term has not caught on.

19. *Honzon* 本尊 literally means the main object of veneration. Although commonly used to describe objects of veneration, in esoteric Buddhism it refers to the image of Mahāvairocana, and, in the context of the three mysteries, it is usually translated as “mandala.”

FORD 2010; SUEKI 2013, 579–81). It is sufficient to point out that esoteric elements such as *dhāraṇī*, prayer rituals, and the worship of tantric deities were long ago assimilated into Zen monastic practice. This is not merely a result of syncretism, as suggested by some Japanese scholars,²⁰ since we find a deep esoteric influence even in the fundamental elements of the tradition, such as dharma transmission (*shihō* 嗣法) and initiation documents (*kirigami* 切紙). Accordingly, Tōrei's appeal to esoteric notions of ritual should not come to us as a surprise; as I note later, he himself had received tantric initiation, and had at least some experience in esoteric Buddhist practice.

Nevertheless, Tōrei's usage of the three mysteries is anything but conventional. In fact, he completely extracts the term from its original context, that is, the practitioner attempts to attune his or her physical, verbal, and mental activities to those of a particular deity:

Recitation of scriptures within the Zen tradition also has three mysteries. Straight body, seated erect without emptying the [six sense] faculties, this is the mystery of body. Second, [when] the sonorous sounds penetrate the ear, subject and object are non-dual. This is the mystery of mouth [that is, speech]. Third, [when] eyes and ears correlate in each and every perfect thought moment, this is the mystery of thought. If you are able to penetrate it, and attain great freedom, movement without moving is the essence of nirvana, speech without speaking is truly interpenetration. Thought and no thought are ultimately [seen as] equals. This is the correct method for the patched-robe monk to recite scriptures and chant *dhāraṇī*. (T 2576, 81.616c26–617a2)

One way of understanding this passage is to consider that Tōrei's reference to the three mysteries is merely figurative. That is, he uses the terminology in order to completely deny the value of recitation, arguing instead that meditation is the only “true” practice in the Zen tradition. This kind of reading, though possible, is in contrast with the other parts of the treatise, where Tōrei ascribes various merits to sutra recitation and makes significant efforts to justify this practice.²¹ Alternatively, I believe that Tōrei does not reject the ritual, but instead employs the concept of the three mysteries to construe scripture recitation according to Zen ideas. Accordingly, the mystery of the body is associated with sitting meditation in general, and more specifically, with the correct bodily posture of the person who recites. The mystery of speech refers to the sonorous sounds (*rōshō* 朗声)

20. Japanese scholars often referred to this assimilation as “mixed Zen” (*kenshū zen* 兼修禪) or “esoteric Zen” (*mikkyō zen* 密教禪), which should be distinguished from the so-called “pure Zen” (*junsui zen* 純粹禪); for examples, see SUZUKI and SATO (1934, 80); SUZUKI (1935, 21).

21. Such a reading was applied by Bernard Faure. Although, in fairness, Faure does point out the inconsistency in the fact that “Tōrei's denial of incantation did not prevent him from drawing up a list of the merits acquired for oneself and others by sutra readings” (FAURE 1991, 291).

of recitation, which are capable (if properly perceived) of generating a non-dual experience. Finally, the mystery of the mind is explained as the synchronization between the monk's eyes (as he reads) and ears (as he hears the recitation), which Tōrei describes as a state of perfect presence.

Tōrei's major innovation lies in his emphasis on the state of mind achieved and applied in recitation. Based on the transformative power associated with body, speech, and mind, he reconstructs scripture recitation as a meditative exercise, which is designed to achieve the ultimate goal of awakening. This interpretation seems to be innovative not only when compared to the original understanding of the "three mysteries," but even within the Zen tradition itself. Evidently, monastic regulations, both Chinese and Japanese, only rarely, if at all, mention the spiritual meaning of scripture recitation; instead, they typically focus on the ritual procedures, ascribing what scriptures should be read, when, and by whom.

Therefore, it is interesting to compare *Kankinbō* with yet another attempt to reinterpret the ritual of scripture recitation within the Zen tradition. Such an attempt was made by Dōgen Kigen 道元希玄 (1200–1253) in the *Kankin* 看經 fascicle of his monumental *Shōbōgenzō*.²² In *Kankin*, Dōgen aims to rethink the practice of reciting scriptures in light of Zen antinomian soteriology, and resolve the contradiction and controversy concerning the meaning and efficacy of this practice. The understanding of scriptures, as articulated in *Kankin*, relies on Dōgen's association of buddha-nature with the myriad phenomenon, and his assertion that all sentient beings are inseparable from buddha-nature, and do not only possess buddha-nature, but indeed constitute buddha-nature (ABE 1971). Thus, according to *Kankin*, the essence of Buddhist teaching, whether it is transmitted orally by teachers or by scripture, is indistinguishable from the self (*zenjiko* 全自己), that is, the true self, which is buddha-nature. Consequently, argues Dōgen, the teaching of the sutra is always available to us; in fact, "the sutras are transmitted and retained on trees and on rocks, are spread through fields and through villages, are expounded by lands of dust, and are lectured by space" (*Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-eye Treasury*, 1: 342). This is not to say that it is easy to attain the true meaning of the scriptures; on the contrary, according to Dōgen, this requires a very high and, indeed, rare level of understanding, which is compatible only with that of a buddha or a Zen patriarch. Though, when one is endowed with such an understanding, s/he can intuitively realize the message contained in Buddhist scriptures.

22. The essay, which began as a lecture delivered in 1241 at Kōshōhōrinji 興聖宝林寺 in Kyoto, was compiled as fascicle thirty in the seventy-five fascicle version of the *Shōbōgenzō*. For an annotated version of the original text, see *Shōbōgenzō* (1: 329–42).

After establishing the true authority of scriptures, Dōgen turns to survey several famous cases depicting Zen patriarchs responding to requests by their adherents to recite sutras on their behalf. In all of these cases the masters disregard or ridicule the appeal, responding instead with an action or a gesture that invokes a different kind of understanding:

[In the order] of the founding patriarch, Great Master Tōzan Gohon, the story goes, there is a government official who prepares the midday meal, offers a donation, and requests the master to read and recite the whole of the sutras. The Great Master descends from his zazen chair and bows to the official. The official bows to the Great Master, who leads the official once around the zazen chair, then bows to the official [again]. After a while he says to the official, “Do you understand?” The official says, “I do not understand.” The Great Master says, “You and I have read and recited the whole of the sutras. How could you not understand?” (Shōbōgenzō: *The True Dharma-eye Treasury*, 1: 346)

The example above and others like it highlight Dōgen’s rejection of the practice of scripture recitation with the intention of producing merit. Instead, Dōgen stresses that a true understanding of the scripture is far superior to countless recitation. As can be seen, Dōgen is particularly critical of the circumambulation of the Buddhist canon, which became an important part of Zen monastic practice in Song China.²³

Nevertheless, the fact that Dōgen devotes the lion’s share of *Kankin* to articulate the different ritual procedures for reciting scriptures on behalf of a donor clearly indicates that his real motivation is to justify scripture recitation, rather than to reject it. Accordingly, he differentiates between a “right” and “wrong” way of reciting scriptures:

In sum, reading sutras means reading sutras with eyes into which we have drawn together all the Buddhist patriarchs. At just this moment, the Buddhist patriarchs instantly become Buddha, preach Dharma, preach Buddha, and do buddha-action. Without this moment in reading sutras, the brains and faces of Buddhist patriarchs could never exist.

(Shōbōgenzō: *The True Dharma-eye Treasury*, 1: 348)

In what is a typical move for Dōgen, he reasserts the practice of recitation, based on the unity of cultivation and realization (*shushō ittō* 修証一等). Indeed, Dōgen’s view of sutra reading should be understood in light of his general interpretation of Buddhist practice as an expression of buddha-nature, rather than a means of attaining buddhahood. Dōgen regards recitation as a technique that

23. The ceremonial circumambulation of the sutra repository was symbolically associated with turning the dharma wheel, and thus it is considered as an important means of producing merit (WU and CHIA 2016, 68).

emphasizes bodily enactment over intellectual understanding. Therefore, he emphasizes the mindful and dedicated expression of meditative awareness in sutra recitation. For recitation to be effective, it must be performed in a meditative state of single mindedness (*ichijō no nentei* 一條ノ念底) without ulterior motives and in harmony with ongoing realization (T 2582, 82.90a5). Performed in this manner, sutra recitation, much like zazen, is conceived as a complete fulfillment of the Buddhist path, and affirmation of one's original buddha-nature (BIELEFELDT 1988, 121; LEIGHTON 2008).

In her book, *Miracles of Book and Body*, Charlotte Eubanks suggests that Dōgen's text

... pivots on the crucial idea of "turning": turning the sutras' meaning over and over in one's mind, the slow turn of breath coming in and going out, the turning of the sutra scrolls in one's hand, taking a turn around the meditation cushion. Dōgen maps all of these activities onto the same ritual space. All of these various approaches intimate that the movement of the body through space is a physical enactment of reading, and they suggest that the process of turning and turning again results in a fine attenuation of sutra text and the embodied heart-mind. (EUBANKS 2011, 181)

According to Eubanks, it is the emphasis on the embodiment of the text, particularly the internalization of the circular motion traditionally associated with the canon, that makes Dōgen's interpretation unique. Both Dōgen and Tōrei seem to share in the *mikkō* 密教 heritage, which permeated all of medieval Japanese Buddhism; however, their individual interpretations tend to emphasize different aspects of ritual performance. Whereas Dōgen is particularly interested in the physical and spatial expression of scriptures, Tōrei pays more attention to its sonic implementations.

Tōrei's emphasis on the power of sounds is quite typical of Japanese Buddhism, where the act of reading Buddhist scriptures was traditionally more about vocalization than about making grammatical sense of it. As noted by George Tanabe, Japanese Buddhists' choosing to avoid translation created a state in which the recitation of Chinese sutras

... produces sounds that cannot be recognized as regular spoken language. The *Heart Sutra*, for example, is popular in East Asia as a Chinese text about emptiness, a fundamental Mahāyāna teaching, but when it is chanted in Japan, each Chinese character is given a Japanese pronunciation without any change in the Chinese grammatical word order of the text. The audible result is neither Japanese nor Chinese, but a ritual language unto itself. (TANABE 2004, 137)

This complex linguistic situation, where Buddhist texts were not translated but were vocalized phonologically, created a considerable gap between sound and

sense. Accordingly, Tōrei's ritual understanding of scriptures and their function relies on their audible or musical effects, rather than on their textual messages. This embodiment of recitation by producing and receiving sounds is not unique to Tōrei, and is based on the general understanding of scriptures as serving not merely as vehicles for Buddhist teaching, but also as a manifestation of the Buddha's dharma body (WILLIAMS 2009, 177). Nonetheless, what makes Tōrei's interpretation interesting is the unique incorporation of physical, mental, and supernatural benefits he ascribed to the sonic power of recitation.

The Benefits of Recitation

In the second part of his treatise, Tōrei describes the various benefits resulting from scripture recitation. To explain the relations between these benefits, he relies on the Mahayana concept of *jiri rita* 自利利他 (self-benefit, benefit others). This is a concise description of the fundamental nature of a bodhisattva's work, that is, to improve oneself so that s/he can help others. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two kinds of benefits should be understood as heuristic, because Mahayana doctrine emphasizes the interconnection of all phenomena. Thus, by developing oneself, the bodhisattva acquires the power to help others, and vice versa. Accordingly, Tōrei identifies four self-benefits and four other-benefits in sutra chanting:

First, [chanting] aids *samadhi*, because [when] the sounds enter the spirit one obtains the faculty of universally penetrating hearing. Second, it annihilates obstructions, because it summons good spirits to ward off evil demons who eerily lurk. Three, it removes diseases, because sounds penetrate the four elements and cause *qi* 氣 to flow in the blood. Four, it perfects one's determination; thus, one [is able] to follow intrinsic nature within [his] daily changing faith. (T 2576, 81.617a4-7)

As can be seen, the four self-benefits seem to be primarily concerned with the Zen practitioner and include the following: 1. meditative concentration or *samadhi* (*sanmai* 三昧); 2. protection from demons and evil spirits; 3. good health; and 4. strengthening one's faith and determination. These self-benefits are aimed at helping one overcome different physical and mental hindrances that are typically encountered along the Buddhist path. Tōrei's understanding of these hindrances, as well as the means to overcome them, seems to be tightly connected to his personal experience. For as we will see below, Tōrei had, on several occasions, witnessed the benefits of recitation, both to his spiritual progress, as well as to his physical health.

Considering Tōrei's understanding of scripture recitation, as presented in the previous section, it should not come as a surprise to us that Tōrei considered single-minded concentration as the primary benefit of recitation. Evidently, Tōrei did not see any contradiction between reading sutras or reciting *dhāraṇī* and engaging

in meditation practice. In fact, at least one of his own awakenings was the outcome of recitation (*Shūmon mujin tōron*, T 2575, 81.594a3–4). In Tōrei's biography, compiled by Taikan Bunshu, we find the following account:

On the first month of the year [1741], he had received from master Dainichi Jisshū oral transmission of the *Rishubun*.²⁴ He first practiced the hundred recitations and next the thousand practices. In the second month he practiced *samadhi* while reciting the *Lotus Sutra* at the Kannon pavilion. During the days he held intensely to the five syllable mantra,²⁵ and during the nights he had performed a thousand bows, determined to obtain a marvelous feeling, which he eventually achieved after one week. (Tōrei oshō nenpu, 89)

In his writings, Tōrei often warns his disciples to be wary of demonic powers that manifest in the form of illusory states of mind and arise from meditation, which might be misinterpreted by the practitioner as enlightenment. In the *Genkyō* 現境 chapter of his *Shūmon mujin tōron* he warns his disciples to be on guard against hallucinatory states that can be caused by either one's own mind or by demons (T 2575, 81.586c19–23). In *Kankinbō* he states that the sound of recitation “annihilates obstructions, as it summons good spirits to ward off evil demons” (T 2576, 81.617a5). In other words, recitation is supplementary to meditation in the sense that it helps one cope with both internal and external obstacles.

According to his biography, in 1741 Tōrei commenced a hundred days of retreat in the seclusion of Mount Kawahigashi 河東 (Aichi Prefecture). There, he was stricken with severe dysentery, and his health deteriorated. In search of aid, he called upon Daijō Kaizen 大乘戒禪 (d.u.) from whom he had previously received instruction. After having learned of Tōrei's condition, Daijō introduced him to various sutra and *dhāraṇī* recitations. With the help of the former, he was able to recover from his sickness in three days and completed his retreat (*Tōrei oshō nenpu*, 90). Accordingly, it is not surprising to find Tōrei attributing therapeutic powers to sutra recitation. According to *Kankinbō*, the sounds cause *qi* to overflow in the blood, thus invigorating and improving one's health (T 2576, 81.617a4–5). It is worth mentioning that Hakuin is well known for incorporating Daoist therapeutic methods for sustaining life and ways of improving health into his teaching. These techniques, which Hakuin had allegedly learned from a mountain hermit named Hakuyūshi 白幽子, helped him cure himself of his Zen malady.²⁶ Accordingly, Tōrei's consideration of recitation as being therapeutic is

24. This is an abbreviation of *Hannya rishubun* 般若理趣分, which is the tenth chapter of Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* (ZGD 1265c).

25. This refers to the mantra of Vairocana for subduing all demons. Each sound represents one of the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind (or air), and space (NAKAMURA 1975, 361b).

26. Zen malady or sickness is a general term for negative physical and spiritual effects that result from rigid attachment to Chan views and practices. This includes, most notably, hallucinatory

not only in accordance with his personal experience; it can also be considered an attempt to integrate elements of Hakuin's teaching into his own innovative interpretation of scripture recitation.

The fourth and final self-benefit refers to the practitioner's commitment and determination to attain awakening. In his *Shūmon mujin tōron*, Tōrei distinguishes between the faculty of faith and the great bodhisattva vow, which is the resolution to achieve the Buddhist goal for the benefit of all sentient beings. The importance of the vow is constantly being stressed as the major source of motivation and as an aid to advance along the path (JOSKOVICH 2015, 323). In *Kankinbō*, Tōrei stresses the importance of sutra recitation for strengthening this mental resolution (*shingan* 心願). When one is endowed with faith and resolution, one can acknowledge the true nature of reality, regardless of the changing circumstances.

From self-benefits, Tōrei moves to describe the four other benefits brought about by the recitation of scriptures:

One, [sutra chanting] brings joy to heaven. It reinforces supernatural powers that support progress [in following the Buddhist path]. Two, it rescues the spirits of the dead. [By] erasing karmic retribution, it raises their aspiration to attain buddhahood. Three, it improves [the faculty] of seeing and hearing [of the Buddha's truth], since [by] casting off evil thoughts the seeds of faith are fostered. Four, it benefits various domesticated animals, as the sounds spread and bring about favorable conditions. (T 2576, 81.617a4–10)

The other-benefits refer mainly to the recitation of scriptures as a means of acquiring benefits for this as well as for future lives. These benefits demonstrate that Tōrei's interpretation of scripture recitation is not exclusive to spiritual cultivation; rather, it synthesizes traditional and innovative understanding of the ritual. In other words, the talismanic power of scripture to affect natural and supernatural reality, which has been traditionally associated with Buddhist scriptures, is not rejected but instead is assimilated into Tōrei's multifaceted interpretation of the ritual. In accordance with the bodhisattva ideal, Tōrei regards recitation as a means to help and support the monk and to advance his spiritual powers, who in turn uses these powers to benefit lay believers.

Ian Reader and George Tanabe have argued that worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益):

[Are] a normative and central theme in the structure and framework of Japanese religion in Japan—sought through numerous ritual practices, symbolized by various religious objects such as talisman and emulates and affirmed

states of mind, which result from intensive meditation practice (ZGD 701b). On Hakuin's Zen malady, see YAMPOLSKY (1971, 85, 183); WADDELL (1999); and AHN (2008).

in doctrinal terms in various religious organizations as well as through textual traditions. (READER and TANABE 1998, 14)

In this sense, Rinzai Zen, and Tōrei as its representative, are shown to be no exception. Indeed, *Kankinbō* regards spiritual and worldly benefits of recitation as complementary.²⁷ Moreover, seeking practical benefits is not considered as simply or even primarily materialistic; rather, it is one of many layers and themes, such as concentration, faith, and the afterlife, which are interwoven into the incantatory potential of scriptures.

Relying on Tradition

When we consider Tōrei's understanding of sutra chanting as presented above, together with the fact that it has been one of the major practices in Zen temples throughout history, the last part of *Kankinbō* is particularly startling, and sheds new light on Tōrei's interpretation of the practice:

There's an argument suggesting that practicing meditation and seeing one's own nature are the true Zen practice, [whereas] reciting scriptures and worshipping Buddha are merely auxiliary parts of the path. Famous is the tale of [Bodhidharma], who sat nine years in [a cave near] Shaolin monastery, never reciting even a single scripture. Or Huineng, who throughout his life never once took the trouble of worshipping a buddha. Though it is true that these ancient patriarchs went to the extent of minimizing the practice of skillful means, it doesn't necessarily mean they entirely rejected them. (T 2576, 81.617a12–15)

As the excerpt above shows, throughout the last part of his treatise, Tōrei adopted an apologetic stance in the face of antinomian interpretations of Zen. He rejects the assumption that the patriarchs of the tradition had dismissed worship, and he maintains that liturgy and recitation, in particular, have played an important role in the careers of many eminent Zen masters.

Tōrei is not the first Japanese Zen master to feel uneasy with an overly antinomian interpretation of the tradition. In fact, several other Japanese masters, including Myōan Eisai 明菴栄西 (1141–1215), who is credited with introducing the Rinzai school from China to Japan, seemed to share this concern:²⁸

Question: Someone says, “The Zen school insists that it does not set up words out of which to make any dogma. This will make lazy people more disinclined

27. On the problematic nature of the East Asian distinction between *genze riyaku* and *gose riyaku* 後世利益 or *raise riyaku* 来世利益 (benefits in a future life), see SHARF (1994, 292).

28. Similar concerns seem to go back to the early days of the Zen movement in China. One example is the famous Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841), who, according to GREGORY (1991, 19), felt that the Hongzhou school 洪州宗 was dangerously antinomian.

to study the holy teachings and will lead to the extinction of the Buddha-Dharma.”

Answer: *The Buddha Contemplation Samadhi Sutra* (T 643, 15.654–79) says: “My disciples in the future world, if they want to contemplate the Tathāgata, should practice three things. The first is to recite the profound scriptures expounded by the Buddha. The second is to keep the moral precepts and the four basic postures (sitting, standing, walking, and lying down) without transgression. The third is to concentrate [their] thoughts on the essential features of the Tathāgata and not scatter them.”

Therefore, this school studies all the eight treasures, and practices all the six perfections (*pāramitās*). If anyone says that the Zen school advocates the mind as nothing other than the Buddha, and won’t examine the traces of the Buddha’s teachings, how would this be different from a person who, [while traveling] in the night just before dawn when it is not yet bright enough, discards their lamp and thus falls down a rocky precipice?

(*A Treatise on Letting Zen Flourish to Protect the State*, 108)

Nonetheless, what is distinctive about Tōrei’s argument is its appeal to the famous anecdotes and stories from the recorded discourses and lamp histories (*tōshi* 灯史), out of which Zen originally draws its antinomian rhetoric. This is in contrast to Eisai’s reliance on Mahayana sutras, or, better yet, to Dōgen’s reliance on monastic regulations.²⁹ In a long series of examples ranging from the Buddha’s attendant Ānanda, through the semi-legendary masters of Tang China, Huangbo Xiyun 黄檗希運 (d.u.) and Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749–814), to the founder of his own lineage, Kanzan Egen 關山慧玄 (1277–1361), Tōrei establishes that Zen masters have always worshiped and recited scriptures. Moreover, he argues that this practice has actually helped them to achieve the ultimate Buddhist goal. Thus, not only does Tōrei affirm the place of liturgy as an auxiliary, he also argues for its essential place in Zen practice.

The concluding passage of *Kankinbō* demonstrates Tōrei’s awareness of the tension between the major function of scriptures as ritual objects in monastic life and the anti-liturgical rhetoric, as expressed in traditional soteriology:

From all of the above we see that the reciting scriptures service has deep significance and should not be discarded. The founders had rejected and criticized those novices who sought after the Buddha outside of themselves. Some sought prosperity and longevity, and others prayed for profit. They clung in their hearts to mysterious teachings (*myōdō* 妙道), which were not transmitted

29. Dōgen’s references to the discourse records are meant to undermine the practice of sutra recitation, although, as previously mentioned, the lion’s share of *Kankin* is used to introduce and promote the various rituals of sutra recitation, as articulated in the Chinese pure rules (FOULK 2012, 105–106).

by the buddhas and patriarchs, and thus all fell into the various realms of demons. This is the gravest harm to the true spirit of the patriarch's teaching. If all similar kinds [of views] are defeated, internal and external difficulties disappear as the light grows brighter. And it is not long before we [realize] the Buddha's teaching. Thus, master Muin³⁰ said: "My teaching is characterized by the pleasure of ritual and long abidance in the Buddha's teaching. Trainees should pay attention to this." (T 2576, 81. 617b1–9)

Tōrei's attempt to resolve this tension should be understood in light of his audience as well as the particular historical circumstances of Edo Japan. The legal endorsement of the temple household affiliation system (*danka seido* 檀家制度) by the Tokugawa shogunate shifted the power within the Zen establishment from the big monastic centers of Kyoto and Kamakura to local parish temples (*danka dera* 檀家寺). The pastors of these temples served the religious needs of their community in two major ways: first, by performing funerals (*sōgi* 喪儀) and annual memorial services (*nenki* 年忌) aiming to pacify the souls of the deceased and to ensure their fate in the next world; and second, in conducting special prayer services for lay adherents, who sought different worldly benefits.³¹ The increasing specialization of Buddhist priests in mortuary rites attracted critics from other major schools, most notably Confucianism and *kokugaku* 国学 (National Learning), who consequently deemed Buddhism as ceremonial, lifeless, and degenerate. Another major challenge was posed by the arrival of the emigrant Chinese Zen master, Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (Ingen Ryūki; 1592–1673), who, with the support of the shogunate, had established the Ōbaku 黄檗 lineage and introduced Ming-style Buddhist practice to Japan.

All of the above caused growing unrest among leading Zen monks, and catalyzed the need for reform within the different Zen lineages. Similar to other major Zen reformists of that period, Tōrei sought to present his ideas in accordance with the Neo-Confucian ideal of *fugu* 復古 (restoring the ancient) as a return to the original position of the Rinzai school, rather than innovation.³² To achieve this goal, he needed, on the one hand, to justify the contemporary usage of recitation, and on the other hand, to incorporate new meaning into it. In other words, it would correspond to Hakuin's emphasis on koan practice and the meditative experience of *kenshō*. Nonetheless, unlike Takuan Sōhō, Bankei

30. Muin Sōin 無因宗因 (1326–1419) was a monk of the Rinzai school and the third abbot of Myōshinji 妙心寺.

31. For information on the historical development of Zen in the Edo period, see WILLIAMS (2005) and MOHR (1994).

32. Sōtō Zen reformers, most notably Manzan Dōhaku 卍山道白 (1636–1741) and Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683–1769), were also influenced by Ōbaku notions of monastic discipline; however, like Tōrei they consider their reform movement as a return to the original point of their school, as formalized by Dōgen (MOHR 1994, 344).

Yōtaku and, to a great extent, Hakuin himself, Tōrei's ideas were not primarily aimed at lay adherents. Without a doubt the scriptural exegesis implied in *Kankinbō* is meant to justify the extensive ritual activities within the monastic milieu. Tōrei achieves this goal by ascribing it with multiple layers of meaning, on the one hand, and establishing it within "tradition," on the other. Indeed, Tōrei maintains that ritual is an essential component of Zen practice, and the fact that *Kankinbō* is preceded by a thorough historical study of the Rinzai school only reinforces this argument.

Discussion: Hakuin Zen Revisited

Tōrei was, arguably, the most influential figure in formulating Hakuin's teaching and establishing it as the Rinzai orthodoxy. Accordingly, *Kankinbō* not only reflects Tōrei's understanding of sutra recitation, but it is also important in that it can shed new light on the development of the Rinzai reform movement of the eighteenth century. Although a thorough examination of Hakuin's teaching is beyond the scope of this article, in what follows, I would like to discuss three aspects in which Tōrei's text can enrich our understanding of recitation within what is currently referred to as "Hakuin Zen."

First is the centrality of sutra recitation in the practice of laypeople, as well as monastics. At the core of Hakuin's project lies the intent to return to the source of Rinzai tradition as shaped by the Song and Kamakura period masters. That is, at least according to Hakuin's interpretation, a strong emphasis on the single-minded practice of koan. Koan is regarded as the ultimate catalyst of the Great Doubt (*daigi* 大疑), which is an indispensable factor in realizing one's true nature. Consequently, Hakuin often disparaged other forms of Buddhist practice, including recitation:

If you investigate the Mu or the Three Pounds of Flax or some other koan, to obtain True Reality in your own body should take from two or three months to a year or a year and a half. The efficacy gained from calling the Buddha's name or reciting the sutras will require forty years of strenuous effort. It is all a matter of raising or failing to raise this ball of doubt. It must be understood that this ball of doubt is like a pair of wings that advances you along the way. A man such as Hōnen Shōnin was virtuous, benevolent, righteous, persevering, and courageous. As he read the sacred scriptures in the darkness, if he used to some extent the luminescence of his eye of wisdom, he must, to the extent that this ball of doubt was formed, have attained to the Great Matter in the place where he stood, and have determined for himself his rebirth. What a tragedy it was that the rope was too short, so that he could not draw the water from the bottom of the well.

(YAMPOLSKY 1971, 146)

For Hakuin no other practice can compare to koan in terms of efficacy. Thus, he does not hesitate to criticize even Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) for chanting the scriptures without “true” understanding. At the same time, however, Hakuin is also known as a strong advocate of the practice of reciting the *Enmei jikku Kannon gyō*.³³ The most notable example is Hakuin’s *Yaemugura*, where he provides some fourteen accounts of miracles brought about by the power of this sutra. These stories include detailed visits to hell, escapes from the executioner’s sword, the wrath of a vengeful master, and so on.³⁴ Considering the aforementioned citation, it is rather surprising to find Hakuin promoting the magical power of recitation, let alone through the same sort of stories used by Hōnen and his followers in promoting *nenbutsu* practice.³⁵

In an attempt to bridge the gap between two apparently contradictory aspects of Hakuin’s teaching, Philip Yampolsky argues:

While basing himself on a Chinese tradition, he created a living Zen that would be attractive to the Japanese. Furthermore, he [Hakuin] put much emphasis on the propagation of a popular Buddhism for laymen, a Buddhism acceptable to ordinary farmers, as well as to high-born courtiers or officials. This popular Buddhism was at times quite unrelated to the strict Zen he taught his disciples.

(YAMPOLSKY 1971, 12)

Yampolsky, as well as others, suggests that Hakuin had actually taught two distinctive kinds of Zen, that is, monastic and popular. Whereas the former focused exclusively on koan practice, the latter was oriented towards the lay world; hence, it included “foreign” elements such as sutra recitation. The promotion of popular Zen, according to the argument, was “unrelated” and even secondary to Hakuin’s main interest, which was strict monastic training (YAMPOLSKY 1971, 15–16; WADDELL 1999, xxxv).

33. *Enmei jikku Kannon gyō* 延命十句觀音經 (Life-Extending Ten-Verses of the *Avalokiteśvara Sutra*) is an abbreviated version of the popular *Avalokiteśvara Sutra*. This devotional praise to Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, is comprised of forty-two Chinese characters. Although the text probably originated in Song China, apparently it first came to general use as a short recitation in Japan, mostly owing to its proselytization by Hakuin (WADDELL 1999, 126; ZGD 450b).

34. The stories have enjoyed considerable popularity among Rinzai priests and adherents, as indicated by the fact that at least four different volumes of lectures on Hakuin’s account of the miracles performed by this so-called sutra were published in the late 1920s and 1930s (KOMAZAWA DAIGAKU TOSHOKAN 1962, 166).

35. It is important to note, however, that in the last chapter of *Yaemugura* Hakuin dismisses all the tales as unreal and argues instead for the value of *zazen* practice. Nevertheless, if his only agenda was promoting meditation practice, it is difficult to see why he would go to the trouble of introducing these accounts in the first place (*Yaemugura* 76–77).

Many of Hakuin's works remained largely unexplored; thus, it is difficult to evaluate to what extent the above assertion reflects the true nature of his teaching. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to assume that this understanding is deeply immersed in the vision of "pure" or "original" Zen, as advocated by some academic apologists for the Zen tradition in modern Japan. These interpretations share the tendency to purge Zen from any mystical, liturgical elements, which do not coincide with modern and particularly Western thought. In other words, magico-religious elements of Hakuin's teaching, which are not compatible with the modern understanding of Zen, are treated as superfluous or as a downgraded form of Zen meant for superstitious commoners. Nonetheless, Tōrei's treatise, which was originally meant for monastics, indicates that such separation was not as clear-cut as Yampolsky and others imply. Tōrei seems to promote sutra recitation as a multifaceted device designed to affect natural and supernatural realities, to accumulate merit and, at the same time, to aid in spiritual cultivation. In this sense, *Kankinbō* does not deviate but instead follows religiously Hakuin's teaching. As Foulk argues, the Zen reform movements of the Edo period:

[A]imed, on the one hand, at restoring strict monastic practice and observation of the Buddhist precepts, and, on the other hand, at making Zen teachings and practice more accessible to the laity. There was a certain tension between these aims, since laymen could not be expected (or indeed, allowed) to engage in rigorous full-time monastic training alongside of monks. However, both aims may be seen as complementary aspects of one overriding purpose: that of reviving Zen Buddhism and making it into a religion that had something meaningful to offer both to monks and to the laity on whom they depended for support. (FOULK forthcoming, 172)

Moreover, if we consider the institutional reality in which Hakuin's Zen had flourished, that is, provisional temples supported by household and local feudal lords, we realize that the concern for the needs of the masses was a vital part of its existence, and it could by no means be considered secondary.

Second, Tōrei's text illuminates the relations between the Rinzai reform movement and the newly arrived Ōbaku lineage. The common description of Hakuin is as a determined opponent of the Ōbaku lineage, most notably its promotion of *nenbutsu* practice. Although we can observe throughout Tōrei's text a strong affiliation with what he considers the true teaching of the Rinzai school, at the same time, it is hard to ignore the mixture between devotional and introspective practice, which his text endorses. This style of practice was typical of Zen in Ming-dynasty China, and its local representation in the form of Ōbaku practice. The fact that Tōrei was originally a disciple of the notable Kogetsu Zenzai 古月禪材 (1667–1751), a Rinzai master who strongly supported Ōbaku teaching,

seems to reinforce this argument.³⁶ In other words, whether Hakuin was a resolute opponent of incorporating Ōbaku elements into Rinzai practice or not, the reform movement carried out by his predecessors assimilated Ōbaku notions of practice under the banner of “Hakuin Zen.” Accordingly, Tōrei’s text seems to support Michel Mohr’s assertion that Zen sectarian consciousness in its present form is largely a post-Meiji development (MOHR 1994, 364).

Third, *Kankinbō* forces us to reconsider the so-called spiritual value of scripture recitation. Western Zen campaigners often rationalize chanting as a device for focusing the mind in meditative concentration. This typical approach, which is not limited to Rinzai Zen as advocated in the West by D. T. Suzuki and others, tends to disregard any magico-religious elements that contradict scientific rationale and focuses solely on meditation and intuition, leading to realization of the absolute (LEVINE 2017, 37). Accordingly, contemporary discourse on sutra chanting argues that it is fundamentally different from other forms of prayers and invocations:

Zen chanting is another form of *zazen* and therefore differs from the chanting of many other spiritual traditions. Conscious awareness of the meaning of the words is unimportant; this meaning is absorbed on a subconscious level. Of primary importance is the mind-state created by the chanting—namely, absolute oneness to the point of self-forgetfulness. The mealtime chants are an expression of gratitude both toward the many beings whose labors make our meal possible and for the nourishment that the meal provides.

(Chants & Recitation, 7)

This emphasis on the meditative qualities of recitation, together with its function as an “expression of gratitude” and respect, appears to be common within American Zen.³⁷ However, as can be clearly seen from *Kankinbō*, as well as from the references to it within contemporary Rinzai circles in Japan, scripture recitation was and is still considered a means of generating various benefits, ranging from good health to wealth and talismanic protection.

At the same time, however, the meditative value of sutra recitation, as articulated by Tōrei, undermines, at least to some extent, the criticism voiced by some contemporary scholars that any interpretation of sutra chanting as an aid in meditation is essentially modern.³⁸ Rather, *Kankinbō* demonstrates that any attempt to discern between the instructive, spiritual, and talismanic benefits of sutra recitation reflects, more than anything else, a tendency to project Western notions of religion—or, rather, what it should be—onto East Asian cultures.

36. Kogetsu was a dharma successor of Kengan Zen’etsu 賢巖禪悅 (1618–1696), who had close relations with several Chinese Ōbaku immigrants (MOHR 1994, 352).

37. For examples, see YASUTANI (n.d.) and BURK (n.d.).

38. See, for example, FOULK (forthcoming, 269).

To conclude, whereas Zen soteriology might disregard scriptures as sources of religious authority, it most stubbornly relies on them as ritual artifacts. As *Kankinbō* clearly exemplifies, the talismanic power of words and sounds, and their efficacy in transforming the mental, natural, and supernatural worlds is highly appreciated in the Rinzai tradition. In this sense, Zen has much more in common with other Buddhist schools, indeed with Japanese religion in general. Nevertheless, the question still remains: why does Tōrei feel compelled to justify scripture recitation, a practice that has always been a part of tradition? Does he fend off attacks from within or outside the Rinzai establishment? By whom? And how are these attacks related to the intellectual atmosphere of the late Edo period in particular and Zen modernization in general? Another intriguing question is how original and perhaps “modern” is Tōrei’s theory of rituals within the Zen tradition, and how does it refer to other attempts made throughout history to bridge the gap previously discussed? I expect that a further study of both Hakuin and Tōrei’s works will provide better answers to these important questions.

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- ZGD *Zengaku daijiten* 禪學大辭典. Ed. Zengaku Daijiten Hensano 禪學大辭典編纂所. Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten, 1985.
- X *Shinsan Dainihon Zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本統藏經. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai. CBETA Electronic Tripitaka Collection (2016). <http://www.cbeta.org>.

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