



BRILL

# Tantra Ducks and Zen Bunnies

## *Reconsidering Esoteric Buddhism and Zen in Medieval Japan*

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### Abstract

This paper reconsiders the relationship between esoteric or tantric Buddhism and Zen in premodern Japan. Taking the teachings of Enni 圓爾 (1202–1280) and early modern Sōtō lore as its examples, as well as an adapted version of Wittgenstein’s concept of “seeing-as” as its methodological guideline, the paper argues that the categories of “esoteric Buddhism” and “Zen” themselves should be treated as discursively constructed. From this point of view, the scholarly *desideratum* is to undertake the genealogical elucidation of the process of their construction. The paper concludes that “esoteric Zen” should be considered a family of strategic, discursive practices predicated on acts of “seeing-as” and their subsequent sedimentation through repetition.

### Keywords

Esoteric Buddhism – Tantra – Zen – pre-modern Japanese Buddhism – Enni – Sōtō *kirigami* – Ōsu Kannon archive – Shinpukuji

## 1 Introduction

Ben’en 辯圓 (1202–1280), commonly known as Enni 圓爾, was without doubt the most influential teacher of Zen in Kyōto 京都 during the 13th century. Enni enjoyed the patronage of the powerful regent Kujō Michiie 九条道家

(1193–1252), and served as abbot of Tōfukuji 東福寺, a temple complex sponsored by Michiie. Enni also occupied important positions in other Buddhist institutions, for instance serving as manager and fundraiser at the monastic complex Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara 奈良. During the 13th and early 14th centuries, Enni's teachings were considered representative of the new Zen movements, and they were discussed and criticized as such in the works of scholiasts from other traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite his importance for the early history of the Zen movement in Japan, in modern scholarship Enni and his immediate successors have received comparatively little attention. This neglect is likely due to two factors. First, until recently few materials detailing Enni's views on Zen, and especially on Zen's relationship with esoteric Buddhism, have been available. Second, Enni, just like Yōsai (alt. Eisai) 榮西 (1141–1215),<sup>2</sup> the putative founder of the Japanese Rinzai 臨濟 faction to whose lineage Enni succeeded, never broke with the established Buddhist schools. Enni's monastery Tōfukuji contained facilities for the performance of Tendai practices and tantric ritual. Consequently, Enni has long been considered a prime example for the combined or syncretistic practice of Zen and esoteric Buddhism, and hence as a mere preliminary to the history of real, as it were, Japanese Zen.

Over the last decade, this received image of Enni and his legacy has been decisively overturned. A team under the leadership of Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士, Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎, Ishii Shūdō 石井修道, *et al.*, has discovered, edited, and published a veritable treasure trove of medieval Buddhist manuscripts from the Ōsu Kannon 大須観音 archives of Shinpukuji 眞福寺, a temple in Nagoya 名古屋 today belonging to the Chizan 智山 faction of the Shingon 眞言 school. Many of these manuscripts are associated with the Shōichi (alt. Shōitsu) 聖一 lineage deriving from Enni, and especially with both Enni himself and his student Chikotsu Daie 癡兀大慧 (1229–1312). The majority of the newly available materials are commentaries on esoteric scriptures and treatises. Importantly, these materials directly and extensively discuss how esoteric and Zen teachings relate to each other. In particular, they make it clear that both Enni and Chikotsu explicated Zen teachings by drawing on the hermeneutic and dogmatic traditions of esoteric Buddhism. In other words, these

1 Prominent examples include Jōmyō 靜明 (d. 1286) from the Tendai school; Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) in his *Shoshū mondō shō* 諸宗問答抄; and the Hossō scholiast Ryōhen 良遍 (1194–1252) in his *Shinjin yōketsu* 真心要決.

2 Yōsai's name is more commonly read "Eisai," but the oral tradition of his main monastery, Kenninji 建仁寺, favors "Yōsai," and I will honor this precedent.

two masters did not simply “combine” tantric Buddhism and Zen but rather reconstructed the latter through the former. The Shinpukuji materials consequently force us to reconsider the early history of Zen in Japan, and especially its relationship to the then still dominant traditions of esoteric Buddhism.

Despite the quantity of information and level of detail the Shinpukuji materials provide on Enni and his circle, paradoxically they tell us little that would be fundamentally new. Rather, they urge us to re-evaluate what has been in front of our eyes the whole time. The manuscripts that have emerged from the temple archives largely validate the image of Enni and his teachings preserved in sources that Zen scholars often have ignored or otherwise interpreted tendentiously due to their scholastic nature. These sources include, among others, Tendai scholastic materials such as the 14th century collection of oral transmissions, the *Keiran shūyō shū* 溪嵐拾葉集 [Collection of Leaves Gathered from Stormy Ravines], the caustic criticisms of Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282), and the supposedly “syncretistic” writings of Enni’s disciple Mujū 無住 (1227–1312). These voices from outside of what has come to be seen as the orthodox strictures of the Zen traditions often prove themselves to be more reliable witnesses to Enni’s thought than his self-consciously orthodox heirs such as Kokan Shiren 虎關師鍊 (1278–1346), Enni’s literary executor and author of the monumental history of Japanese Buddhism, the *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釋書 [*Buddhist Record of the Genkō Era*], or Nanpo Shōmyō 南浦紹明 (1235–1309), Enni’s nephew who retrospectively is considered the founder of the Ōtōkan 應燈關 lineage of Rinzai Zen.

In the present essay, I consider how these recent manuscript findings, and the new light they shed on previously known materials, change our perspective on, first, Enni as an early medieval Buddhist thinker, and second, the relationship between the tantric and the Zen traditions in pre-modern Japan more broadly. I will argue that this relationship cannot be approached or grasped apart from its contingent, discursive, and necessarily sectarian construction. Consequently, our task as scholars is to render this constructive process, as well as its corollaries of appropriation and sedimentation, transparent. I will proceed in three steps. First, I will outline previous scholarship on Enni and indicate what I consider its limitations. I will, second, investigate how Enni and some of his close disciples considered the relationship between the esoteric and Zen traditions. Third, building on this inquiry into the early medieval construction of the Zen/esoteric Buddhism configuration, I will consider two examples of how the boundary between the esoteric and Zen remained fluid well into the late medieval and early modern periods, and only began to stabilize into its familiar form through the efforts of sectarian reformers. In the

conclusions, I will return to the question of how to make sense of, to borrow William Bodiford's felicitous shorthand for the two traditions' tempestuous yet intimate association, "esoteric Zen."

## 2 Negotiating Enni: Tantra Duck as Zen Bunny

Enni studied with a number of Yōsai's disciples, and succeeded to the latter's esoteric and Zen lineages. This supposedly syncretistic or combinatory approach often has been unfavorably compared to the "pure" Zen of figures such as Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) or the Chinese émigré master Lanxi Daolong 蘭溪道隆 (1213–1278). An influential version of this judgment was rendered by Imaeda Aishin 今枝愛真 (1923–2010), who in his 1963 monograph *Zenshū no rekishi* 禪宗の歴史 [History of the Zen School] distinguished between "combinatory" or "mixed practice Zen" (*kenshū zen* 兼修禪) and "pure" Zen (*junsui zen* 純粹禪). "Combinatory Zen" was considered but a brief intermediary phase on the road to purity. The Zen scholar Furuta Shōkin 古田紹欽 (1911–2001) even suggested that Yōsai's and Enni's use of esoteric Buddhism was but a ruse. These two masters, Furuta argued, always intended to establish the "pure Zen" they supposedly had encountered in China. Yet as circumstances in Japan were not yet ripe, they used esoteric Buddhism as a preliminary means to prepare the ground for the new tradition's eventual success.<sup>3</sup>

This ambiguous and strategic distinction between syncretistic and pure Zen is rooted in the paradigm of so-called Kamakura New Buddhism (*Kamakura shin bukkyō* 鎌倉新佛教), according to which the religious movements that arose during this period (1192–1333) represent a decisive break with a corrupt Buddhist establishment.<sup>4</sup> It was the groundbreaking work of Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄 (1926–1993) that shattered this paradigm by demonstrating that far from being supplanted, the supposedly corrupt Buddhism of the established schools continued to dominate well into the medieval period. Funaoka Makoto 船岡誠 has applied Kuroda's insight to the study of the history of Japanese Zen. Funaoka demonstrated how the emergence of Zen as a movement during the medieval period was by no means a closed "family affair" but rather rooted in, and conditioned by, the long history of meditation practitioners (*zenji* 禪師) in Japanese and especially Japanese Tendai 天台 Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> As the majority of

3 Furuta, "Chūsei zenrin no seiritsu: Enni to Rankei no aida."

4 For a classic formulation of this paradigm, see Washio, *Zenshū shiyō*, 12. Needless to say, "New Kamakura Buddhism" was a self-serving narrative concocted to legitimize the "New Buddhists" of the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912). See also, Klautau, "Against the Ghosts of Recent Past: Meiji Scholarship and the Discourse on Edo Period Buddhist Decadence."

5 Funaoka, *Nihon Zenshū no seiritsu*.

early Zen pioneers began their monastic careers in the Tendai school, the formation of Japanese Zen, in short, was not a simple break, but rather a complex negotiation with the established schools.

In important studies, Katō Michiko 加藤みち子 and Matsunami Naohiro 松波直弘 have developed Funaoka's insights regarding the importance of the established schools for the formation of Japanese Zen in general, and Enni's thought in specific. Whereas Funaoka ends his investigation with the arrival of Yōsai and Song period Chan teachings in Japan, both Katō and Matsunami stress the continued importance of the established schools as defining the context in which Japanese Zen developed. Katō has argued that Enni, far from simply combining the practice of two separate traditions, in fact sought to use the religious knowledge he had learnt on the continent to establish a new Japanese Buddhist synthesis. To this end, Katō maintains, Enni drew on Chinese Chan texts such as the *Zongjinglu* 宗鏡錄 [Record of the Source Mirror] and its emphasis on the one mind (*yixin* 一心) underlying both Chan and the scholastic traditions. Building on this continental precedent, in texts such as the *Jisshū yōdō ki* 十宗要道記 [Record of the Essential Principles of the Ten Schools] Enni argued that the Buddha-mind (*bushhin* 佛心) was the foundation of all Buddhist traditions, including the esoteric tradition. As the term *bushhin*, in the expression "Buddha-mind school" (*bushhin shū* 佛心宗), also is an alternative name for the Chan or Zen traditions, Katō concludes that Enni used Chan or Zen as the basis for the new, unified Buddhism he envisioned. Given that the structure of Enni's Zen thought (*zenshisō* 禪思想) also included esoteric elements, Katō suggests that Enni's Zen-based synthesis might properly be characterized as "esoteric/Zen" (*zenmitsu* 禪密).<sup>6</sup>

Matsunami emphasizes that "Japanese Zen," including but not limited to Enni, arose not from a simple act of transmission, but from the encounter of Song period Chan and established Japanese Buddhist teachings.<sup>7</sup> Japanese Zen, in other words, is no copy or direct continuation of Chinese Chan but rather a tradition *sui generis*. From this point of view, Matsunami argues, Enni should be reconsidered as a (Japanese) Zen monk who also practiced esoteric Buddhism rather than a proponent of "combined" or "mixed" practice.<sup>8</sup> Enni, in other words, used Japanese Buddhist doctrinal thought, including that of esoteric thinkers such as the masterful Tendai scholiast Godai'in Annen 五大院安然 (n.d.), to clarify the meaning of Chan, thereby propelling its transformation into Zen.<sup>9</sup>

6 See Katō, "Enni Zen so saikentō."

7 Matsunami, *Kamakura ki Zenshū shisōshi kenkyū*, 10.

8 *Ibid.*, 24 and 330.

9 *Ibid.*, 184 and 330.

Both Katō and Matsunami undermine the combined practice paradigm by emphasizing the novelty of Enni's Japanese Zen identity as not seamlessly continuous with continental Chan identities. Consequently, Enni's Japanese Zen is not so much combined with an otherwise unrelated esoteric Buddhism, but rather certain esoteric patterns are constitutive elements of Enni's Zen. However, Katō and Matsunami formulated their reappraisal of Enni as a Japanese Zen monk before they had the benefit of the materials discovered at Shinpukuji.<sup>10</sup> These materials, as attributable to Enni, are, first, the *Dainichikyō gishaku kenmon* 大日教義釋見聞 [Exposition of the Commentary on the *Dari jing*], Enni's sub-commentary on Yixing's 一行 (673–727) seminal commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhisūtra* or *-tantra*, one of the root texts of East Asian esoteric Buddhism, and second, a hitherto unknown version of Enni's commentary on the *Jingangfeng louge yiqie yuqie yuqi jing* 金剛峯樓閣一切瑜伽瑜祇經 [Diamond Peak Pavilion of All Yogas and Yogis *Sūtra*], an important, most likely Chinese, tantric source for medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Together with Enni's previously known commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhisūtra*, the *Dainichikyō kenmon* 大日經見聞 [Commentary on the *Dari jing*], these form a trifecta of texts that offer a comprehensive and (mostly) consistent account of Enni's esoteric thought, including his thought on the relationship between the Zen and esoteric traditions. As Sueki Fumihiko has pointed out, these materials can be attributed to Enni with a much higher degree of certainty than the ones Katō and Matsunami base their accounts on. Consequently any investigation of Enni's thought from now on has to be based on this tantric trifecta.

As I shall discuss in detail in the next section, the Enni who emerges from an even cursory pursuit of these materials differs significantly from the one described by Katō and Matsunami. Katō and Matsunami emphasize Enni's use of concepts such as Buddha-mind, one mind, or numinous knowing (*ryōchi* 靈智, alt. 靈知) as foundational in texts such as the *Jisshū yōdō ki*.<sup>11</sup> Katō and Matsunami describe this vocabulary as derived from Chinese Chan sources such as the *Zongjing lu*. Based on this association, they assert the centrality of Zen for Enni's thought. However, the former two terms are also widely used throughout the esoteric exegetical tradition, and as far as I can tell there is no evidence that in his commentaries Enni used them with any *zennesque*, as it were, connotations.<sup>12</sup> Hence, there are no grounds to assert that Enni derived

10 Katō has since joined the team working on the Shinpukuji materials, however does not seem to have revised her understanding of Enni in their light.

11 See Matsunami, 136–162.

12 To give but one example, Yixing's commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi* uses the term *isschin* 一心 no fewer than 48 times, and the term *busschin* 佛心 43 times. Enni

these terms from Zen rather than tantric sources. This in turn undermines the claim that use of these terms indicates Zen's foundational role in Enni's thought. The latter term, numinous knowing, as far as I am aware of is not used in Enni's commentaries at all.

Furthermore, while it is true that Enni did identify Zen with the fundamental self-realization of the Buddha, the Buddha in question was not the progenitor of the Zen lineage, Śākyamuni, but the tantric Mahāvairocana. Consequently, the doctrinal structures on which this identification rests are thoroughly tantric. Finally, even if we consider quantity of textual production alone, Enni's tantric commentaries by far exceed any Zen or Zen-related writings attributed to him in terms of sheer volume.<sup>13</sup> In short, we are perfectly justified to inverse Matsunami's conclusion cited above: Enni was not a Japanese Zen monk also practising esoteric Buddhism, but rather a tantric adept also interested in Zen.

It would appear that Enni was a figure far more difficult to get to grips with than previous research has suggested; too rigorous a thinker in his commentarial efforts to be dismissed as a syncretist, too deeply rooted in tantric traditions to be described as a Zen monk, yet far too interested in Zen to be considered a straightforward *māntrin*. Enni might be said to resemble an optical illusion dear to Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), the duck bunny first published in the German humorous magazine *Fliegende Blätter* in 1892 (Figure 1). This comical figure can be seen as either a duck or a bunny, but not as both at once, nor as, say, a hippopotamus. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein used this figure as a point of departure to elaborate a principal difference between two modes of seeing, namely “seeing-that” and “seeing-as.” In the conclusions, I shall return to a reflection on the role such seeing-as plays in the exploration of the relationship between esoteric Buddhism and Zen in premodern Japan. In specific, I shall urge that rather than seeking exhaustive definitions or stringent classifications, we focus on the discursive strategies through which certain elements – doctrines, rituals, implements, texts, people – came to be seen-as representative of either Zen or esoteric Buddhism, and what kind of ever-shifting relation between the two traditions such ascriptions engender. First, however, let us explore in more detail some concrete examples of these operations, beginning with Enni himself.

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often cites Yixing *verbatim* without acknowledging his source. See for instance *Dari jing shu* 大日經疏, T. 1796: 39.692b26–27, and *Dainichikyō kenmon* 大日經見聞, NDZ 24: 143b.

13 For instance, Enni's *Recorded Sayings* in the Taishō 大正 edition of the Buddhist canon span a meagre six and a half pages, T. 2544: 80.17b28–23a12. The text itself has been compiled by Kokan Shiren from anecdotes collected from among Enni's students. See *Shōichi kokushi goroku* 聖一國師語錄, T. 2544: 80.17b28–c12. In contrast, Enni's commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhīṣambodhi*, the *Dainichikyō kenmon*, runs to 20 fascicles and more than a hundred pages in the *Nihon daizōkyō* edition.

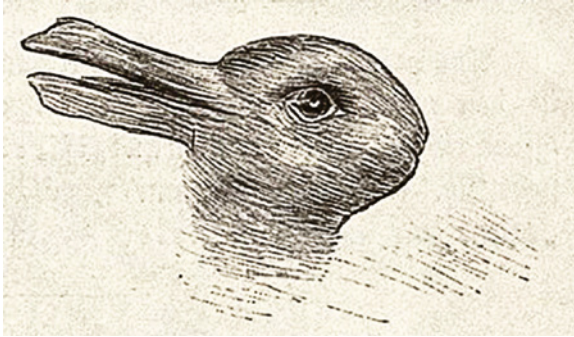


FIGURE 1  
Kaninchen und Ente,  
from *Fliegende Blätter*,  
23rd October 1892  
PUBLIC DOMAIN

### 3 Zen Through the *Maṇḍala*: Enni's Three Mechanisms

Many of the new materials emerging from the Shinpukuji archives are associated with Enni or his disciple Chikotsu. Enni's Shōichi lineage was the second largest of the lineages that eventually came to comprise the Five Mountains institution. One of the most important of these materials associated with Enni is the *Dainichikyō gishaku kenmon*. What makes the discovery of the *Dainichikyō gishaku kenmon* significant is that in it Enni extensively discusses his understanding of the relationship between the tantric and Zen teachings, a discussion mostly absent from his other commentaries. As there is significant uncertainty associated with the other materials attributed to Enni that might shed a light on the question of how he accommodated Zen and esoteric Buddhism,<sup>14</sup> the *Dainichikyō gishaku kenmon* provides us with a unique opportunity to begin a reconsideration of this problem both in Enni and in medieval Japanese Buddhism more generally. In order to do so, we must first familiarize ourselves with Enni's perhaps most prominent so-called Zen teaching.

14 The most important of these materials would be the *Jisshū yōdō ki*, an idiosyncratic discussion of the ten schools of thought of medieval Buddhism. The ten schools are the so-called six schools of Nara 奈良 period (710–784) Buddhism, namely Ritsu 律, Jōjitsu 成實, Kusha 俱舍, Sanron 三論, Hossō 法相, and Kegon 華嚴, to which are added the Shingon 眞言 and Tendai traditions transmitted during the Heian 平安 (794–1185) period, and the medieval Zen and Pure Land 淨土 movements. On the ten schools, see Sueki, “Kenmitsu taisei ron igo no bukkyō kenkyū: Chūsei no shoshūron kara.” Despite its universalist pretensions, the *Jisshū yōdō ki* is clearly an apologetic text, with the Zen tradition given the most extensive and laudatory treatment. The original is lost, and only a single, mid-fifteenth century copy is attested. While this text likely does originate with Enni or one of his disciples, apart from the text's own claims the evidence for this attribution remains circumstantial. See Bielefeldt, “Filling the Zen-Shū: Notes on the *Jisshū Yōdō Ki*.”



### 3.1 *Enni's Three Mechanisms and Their Contexts*

One of the features that differentiates Japanese Zen from its sister traditions on the continent is the use of *kōan* 公案 curricula. Today, such curricula are closely associated with the *kōan* training undertaken in Rinzai lineages, and understood as derived from a fivefold classification of *kōan* attributed to the Tokugawa period reformer Hakuin Ekaku 白隱慧鶴 (1686–1769).<sup>15</sup> In the premodern period, *kōan* curricula, often combined with a graded (and commercialized) system of certification, were used in virtually all lineages of both the Sōtō and the Rinzai factions.<sup>16</sup> Scholarship generally traces these curricula, including Hakuin's, to none other than Enni and his so called three kinds of preliminary means (*sanshu hōben* 三種方便) or three mechanisms (*sanki* 三機).<sup>17</sup>

Enni's three mechanisms, as I will call them, are *richi* 理到, *kikan* 機關, and *kōjō* 向上. Already the earliest of Enni's hagiographies, such as the one contained in Kokan's *Genkō shakusho*, emphasize the three mechanisms' importance.<sup>18</sup> Later materials related to Kokan present Enni's three mechanisms as three classes of *kōan*, or at least three ways of using *kōan*, for example by identifying *richi* with the use of *watō* 話頭 phrases.<sup>19</sup> Enni's nephew Nanpo observed along similar lines that in the Zen tradition there are three kinds of sayings, namely *richi*, *kikan*, and *kōjō*: *richi* are the reasoned words (*ri-go* 理語) of Buddhas and patriarchs; *kikan* their compassionate activities such as wriggling one's nose or twinkling one's eyes, or their words such as "a mud ox flies through space, a stone horse enters the water;" and *kōjō* the "direct explanation" (*jikisetsu* 直說) of the truth.<sup>20</sup> Thus already in the first few generations after Enni the three mechanisms were understood as a typology of Zen sayings. This understanding is reflected in Tokugawa period Zen scholasticism. In his *Shūmon mujintō ron* 宗門無盡燈論, Hakuin's disciple Tōrei Enji 東嶺圓慈 (1721–1792) explained

15 For a brief discussion of Hakuin's scheme, see Mohr, "Emerging from Nonduality: Kōan Practice in the Rinzai Tradition since Hakuin," 265.

16 The most in-depth discussion on medieval *kōan* practices can be found in Andō, *Chūsei Zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, for the Sōtō and Andō, *Chūsei Zenshū ni okeru kōan zen no kenkyū* for the Rinzai faction.

17 For a discussion of some scholarship in this mold, see Davin, "Datsu Kamakura Zen?"

18 See *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釋書, DNBZ 101: 151.

19 See *Butsugo shin ron kuketsu* 佛語心論口決, NDZ 10: 234a–b. I have previously misidentified the *Kuketsu* as Kokan's own commentary on his *Butsugo shin ron* 佛語心論. See Stephan Kigensan Licha, *Esoteric Zen: Zen and the Tantric Teachings in Premodern Japan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023): 184. The actual author is Gizan Chitetsu 岐山智徹 (n.d.). I thank Profs. Didier Davin and Steffen Döll for pointing out this mistake.

20 See *Daio kokushi hōgo* 大應國師法語, Mori, *Zenmon hōgo shū*, 2: 12 (no continuous pagination).

that Enni's three mechanisms since medieval times had been used to analyze and organize *kōan* phrases and sayings.<sup>21</sup>

All of the above sources associating Enni's three mechanisms exclusively with *kōan* originate from practitioners with impeccable Zen pedigrees. A somewhat different image emerges from the consummate Lotus fundamentalist Nichiren's 日蓮 (1222–1282) *Shoshū mondō shō* 諸宗問答抄:

What is called *richi* is to make those of inferior roots listen to principles (*dōri* 道理) [i.e. doctrinal teachings], and this is a term for not knowing the Dharma gate of Zen. *Kikan* is those of middling roots answering something like “the oak tree in the garden” when asked, “What is the original face?” and this is the manner of indicating Zen. *Kōjō* is for those of superior roots. This mechanism (*ki* 機) is not transmitted from the ancestral teachers, it is not transmitted from the Buddhas either. It is the mechanism of awakening to the Dharma gate of Zen by oneself.

理致と云うは下根に道理を云いきかせて禪の法門を知らざる名目なり、機關とは中根には何なるか本来の面目と問へば庭前の柏樹子など答えたる様の言づかひをして禪法を示す様なり、向上と云うは上根の者の事なり此の機は祖師よりも傳えず佛よりも傳えず我として禪の法門を悟る機なり。<sup>22</sup>

In Nichiren's telling, *richi* are not *kōan* or other Zen sayings but doctrinal discourses employed to teach those of inferior spiritual faculties. This most basic level has nothing to do with Zen in specific. It is those of middling capacities who engage in the Zen practice of grappling with enigmatic *kōan* phrases. Finally, *kōjō* refers to those who needn't be taught at all, but rather directly awaken to truth by themselves. According to Nichiren, Enni's three mechanisms are an inclusive, hierarchical typology of different means by which to communicate Buddhist truth, not an exclusive system of *kōan*.

A similar understanding emerges from a critical discussion of Enni's Zen teachings presented by the Tendai scholiasts Jōmyō 静明 and recorded in the encyclopedic collection of Tendai oral transmission teachings, the *Keiran shūyō shū*. Jōmyō is often depicted as a convert to Enni's cause and conduit of Zen influence on medieval Tendai thought.<sup>23</sup> The following passage from

21 *Shūmon mujintō ron* 宗門無盡燈論, T. 2575: 81.592a19–21.

22 *Shoshū mondō shō* 諸宗問答鈔, Nichirenshū fukyū kai, *Nichiren zenshū*, 674–675.

23 See for example the discussion in Stone, “Not Mere Written Words: Perspectives on the Language of the Lotus Sutra in Medieval Japan.”

the *Keiran shūyō shū*, on the other hand, paints Jōmyō a much more critical interlocutor:

The use of *kōan* in the Zen school is with regards to mechanisms (*ki* 機) the second kind of mechanism from among the three kinds of mechanisms [...]. The third is the common mechanism of doctrinal study. This is studying the three studies of precept, concentration, and wisdom, and proceeding from teaching via practice to verification. As for the first mechanism, the Zen Record of En says, “The style of the school of turning upward, even the thousand sages cannot explain.”<sup>24</sup> The mechanism of turning upward does not in the least use *kōan* [and instead] makes [one] arrive directly [in the truth]. It is said that this principle not even the thousand sages explain.

宗門用二公案ヲ一。機ハ三類機中ニハ第二類ノ機也。[...] 第三ハ常ノ教學ノ機也。學ニ戒定慧三學ヲ一教行證ヲ修習スル分也。第一機ト者禪錄圓云。向上宗風千聖モ不レ能レ説ト。向上機全ク不レ用二公案ニ直ニ令レ達也。此義ハ千聖モ不レ能レ説ト云也。<sup>25</sup>

Jōmyō’s discussion broadly agrees with Nichiren in describing *richi* as Buddhist doctrine, *kikan* as the use of *kōan*, and *kōjō* as a direct encounter with truth.

Finally, a slightly different but clearly related interpretation emerges from the work of Enni’s disciple Mujū. In the *Shōzai shū* 聖財集 [Collection of the Sages’ Assets], Mujū elaborates as follows:

As for the preliminary means used in the Zen school, there are *richi* and *kikan*. *Richi* are the common Dharma gates of the scholiasts, such as “not arisen, not extinguished.” Although the term *kikan* can also be found among the teachings, these are what in the Zen school is often called, “the oak tree in the garden,” “three pounds of flax,” “the staff and shout.” *Richi* and *kikan* are both direct indication [i.e. *kōjō*]. “Direct” indicates that this preliminary means does not fall into the [different mental] faculties and the mechanisms [addressing them, but] makes [the practitioner] align with the fundamental portion [of their mind]. Although *richi* are the sentences of common teachings, when used by a Zen master, they are direct indication.<sup>26</sup>

24 The source of this saying is unclear. “It might be a paraphrase of one of Enni’s sayings.”

25 T. 2410: 76,531b14–15.

26 *Shōzai shū* 聖財集, Abe, *Mujū shū*, 437a–b.

禪門ノ方便ニ理致機關ト云事アリ。理致ハ常ノ教家不生不滅等ノ法門也。機關ハ是モ名目ハ教ノ中ニモミヘタレトモ、禪家ニ多ク云ヘル、庭前柏樹子、麻三斤、若ハ棒シ若ハ喝スル、是也。理致機關トモニ直示也。直ト云ハ機情不レ落サ、本分ニ相応セシムル方便也。理致ハ常ノ教家ノ教文ナレドモ、禪師ノ用ル時ハ直示也。

Mujū also identifies *richi* as doctrinal discourses, and *kikan* as the preliminary means specific to the Zen school. Interestingly, Mujū discusses *kōjō*, which he calls *jikishi*, not as a separate preliminary means, but rather as a way of using language that is unique to Zen masters: instead of fitting their teaching to student's faculties, they compel the student's mind to conform itself to truth.

Nichiren's, Jōmyō's, and Mujū's depictions of Enni's mechanisms do not portray them as classifying *kōan* but rather as embracing the totality of Buddhist teachings, including *kōan* but also scholasticism. Neither of these men is specifically associated with a Zen lineage. Even Mujū, who studied Zen and tantric teachings with Enni, is best known for his compilations of edifying tales, in which he embraced an expansive vision of a common Mahāyāna Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> In short, it was Enni's self-proclaimed heirs in the Zen lineage who promoted the three mechanisms as a system of *kōan*, whereas Enni's critics, peers, and those of his disciples with more universalist inclinations understood them as different kinds of Buddhist teachings. It was the latter group who proves more faithful to Enni himself.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.2 *The Indication of Mahāvairocana: Zen in a Tantric World*

In the *Keiran shūyō shū*, Jōmyō offers a cryptic suggestion that the three mechanisms might be related to tantric teachings. Jōmyō observes that all Buddhist teachings by their very nature as teachings have to respond to the needs of those to whom they are addressed. The strength of the Tendai school, Jōmyō asserts, is that by establishing appropriate communicative mechanisms (*ki* 機), it makes available to all the innermost wisdom of the Buddha. In the Zen school, on the other hand,

it is commonly said that in turning upward there are no mechanisms. [...] It is from turning downwards that mechanisms are discussed. However, Shōichibō 聖一房 of Tōfukuji [i.e. Enni] has mechanisms in

27 As Mujū observes following the passage quoted above, Zen and the scholastic teachings might differ in their means, but their substantial truth is one. *Shōzai shū*, reference to Abe, *Mujū shū*, 437b.

28 For a more detailed discussion of Enni's Three Mechanisms and their variations, see Licha, *Esoteric Zen*, 57–90.

turning upward. [...] The explanations of common Zen masters and the like that do not establish mechanisms [in turning upward] truly cannot reach Tendai [contemplation teachings]. Those [Zen teachings] that discuss mechanisms in turning upward have a part in common with tantric teachings and Tendai.<sup>29</sup>

宗門ニモ向上ニハ無レ機常ニハ云也。[...] 向下ヲ論トレ機ヲ云也。然トモ東福寺聖一房向上機存スル也。[...] 常ノ禪師等不レ立レ機云説分ハ殊不レ及ニ天台一。向上論レ機分ハ天台眞言同レ之分有レ之。

The Zen traditions, in other words, commonly claim that *kōjō*, the highest of the three mechanisms, is not equipped with communicative mechanisms. However, Jōmyō singles out Enni for establishing communicative mechanisms on the level of *kōjō* itself, and in this regard equalling Tendai *Lotus* and tantric teachings.<sup>30</sup> Jōmyō's discussion of what he portrays as the way in which *kōjō* is generally understood within the Zen faction is congruent with how we saw it defined in the previous section, namely as the direct, immediate encounter of practitioner and reality. Such direct encounter cannot be communicated, as little as can the taste of salt. For this reason, it is associated with the catch phrase, "not even the thousand sages transmit it." According to Jōmyō, Enni found a way around the impossibility of communicating the immediately present by somehow connecting *kōjō* to tantric thought. And indeed, Enni's tantric commentaries bear out Jōmyō's suggestion.

In order to appreciate Enni's tantric hermeneutics of *kōjō*, we first have to understand how Enni considered Zen and the tantric teachings to relate to each other, a problem on which Enni elaborated concisely in his commentary on the *Yūqi jing*, a Chinese apocryphal tantric *sūtra*.<sup>31</sup> According to Enni, the relationship between Zen and the tantric teachings is based upon the relation between the inner, quiescent essence and the outer, illuminative virtue of mind. The opening scene of the *Yūqi jing* describes the *dharmakāya* Buddha as residing within the "palace of [his] luminous mind" (*kōmyōshin den* 光明心殿). In the *Yūgikyō kenmon*, Enni comments as follows:

29 *Keiran shūyō shū* 溪嵐拾葉集, T. 2410: 76.531b17–28.

30 *Keiran shūyō shū*, T. 2410: 76.531b18–19.

31 Enni's commentary has been transmitted in two versions, one that has been previously known and one that has recently emerged from the Shinpukuji archives. I will refer to these two versions as the *Hikyō ketsu* 祕經決 and the *Yūgikyō kenmon* 瑜祇經見聞, respectively.

Luminosity is the virtue of the mind's [outer] characteristics (*shin sōtoku* 心相徳), it is not the nature of the mind's [inner] essence. Therefore, the Zen master [Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135)] says, “Exhausting the great earth, the light of wisdom; when luminosity has not yet arisen, neither Buddha nor sentient being.” [...] The great outline of the esoteric teachings is to explain that from the luminosity of the virtue of the [outer] characteristics of mind are established all dharma.

光明ト者、心ノ相ニ徳也。而ノ非ルニ心ノ体ニ性ニ也。依之ニ、禪ノ祖ニ師ノ云ク、盡一大地、是レ般若ノ光、々未ダ爾レ發フコラ時キハ無クレ佛モニ無シトニ衆生モニ云云。[...] 密教ノ大旨ハ、從リニ此ノ心ノ相ニ徳ノ光明ニ能ク生ズニ一切ノ法ヲ説ク也。<sup>32</sup>

The endarkened inner essence of the Buddha's mind does not differentiate Buddhas and sentient beings. Consequently, it cannot be communicated as a teaching, for teachings by definition are what the Buddhas address to sentient beings. Such teachings directed at given audiences, according to Enni, are established from the outward luminosity of mind. As proof for his exegesis Enni offers a quotation from the *Recorded Sayings* of the Song period Chan master Yuanwu, the celebrated compiler of the *Biyan lu* 碧巖録 [Blue Cliff Record] *gong'an* 公案 collection. Up to this point, it would appear as if Jōmyō's criticism of Zen, namely that it does not allow for compassionate communication to occur within the inner realization of the Buddha's mind, were fully justified. However, in the second version of his commentary, the *Hikyō ketsu* 秘教決 [Dispositions on the Secret Scripture], Enni addresses exactly this problem:

Q: Therefore, the moon disc without of perceptual characteristics, in which not the first sliver of luminous [outer] characteristics has yet arisen, this is the pure fundamental mind of self-nature. This being said, the exoteric teachings make this subtle essence the utmost end. The esoteric teachings [go beyond the exoteric teachings in that they] bring forth in this mind the gate of the syllable *a*, which is the basis of promulgating the teachings. However, at the point when even a single syllable has not yet arisen in this self-nature, is there directly establishing principles [for leading sentient beings] and providing [communicative] mechanisms [to convey these principles]?

32 *Yugikyō kenmon* 瑜祇經見聞, Abe/Sueki, *Kikō zenseki shū zoku*, 558.

A: Not establishing words and letters, directly pointing at the mind is precisely this.<sup>33</sup>

問、所以不<sub>レ</sub>現<sub>一</sub>無<sub>一</sub>分明相<sub>一</sub>之無相<sub>ノ</sub>月輪<sub>ト</sub>者、是自性清淨<sub>ノ</sub>本心也云云。然<sub>ニ</sub>顯<sub>一</sub>教<sub>ハ</sub>、以此心<sub>一</sub>為<sub>ニ</sub>至極終窮妙体<sub>ト</sub>。密教<sub>ハ</sub>、於此心<sub>ニ</sub>、更發<sub>シテ</sub>A<sup>34</sup>字門<sub>一</sub>、以為<sub>ス</sub>布教<sub>ノ</sub>本初<sub>ト</sub>。若又於<sub>テ</sub>是<sub>ニ</sub>是自性<sub>ノ</sub>本心<sub>ニ</sub>、未起<sub>一</sub>字<sub>ヲ</sub>之時、有<sub>リ</sub>直<sub>ニ</sub>立<sub>テ</sub>宗<sub>ヲ</sub>一攝<sub>スル</sub>機<sub>ヲ</sub>一乎。

答、不<sub>ス</sub>シテ<sub>レ</sub>立<sub>レ</sub>文<sub>一</sub>字<sub>ヲ</sub>、直<sub>ニ</sub>指<sub>ス</sub>人心<sub>一</sub>者、則是也云云。

In this remarkable passage, Enni offers a typology of Buddhist teachings based on their communicative capabilities. The exoteric teachings, Enni argues, ultimately are apophatic in that they can recognize the dark, undifferentiated nature of mind, here symbolized by the new moon, but cannot communicate it. The tantric teachings, Enni continues, go beyond the exoteric teachings in that they establish themselves in the luminosity of mind communicated through mantric syllables, the first and most fundamental of which is the syllable *a*. This raises the question of whether the essence of mind also can be communicated directly, before mantric luminosity has yet arisen. Yes, Enni answers, this is the direct indication practiced in the Zen school. Enni thus explicitly affirms what Jōmyō only hinted at, namely that unlike his Zen *confrères* Enni established communicative mechanisms directly in mind itself. Although it is difficult to understand in detail just how Enni thought such communication could work, I would propose, with a certain amount of trepidation, the following heuristic: Both the exoteric and the esoteric teachings, as teachings, seek to communicate the mind based on *semiosis* or the production and use of signs, that is to say either through the words of doctrine or through mantric letters such as *a*. Zen, on the other hand, “does not establish words and letters” but rather “indicates directly;” it does not speak but gesture. Unfortunately, a more thorough investigation of this problem will have to await a later opportunity.

In his sub-commentary on Yixing’s 一行 (683–727) epochal exposition of one of the fundamental scriptures of East Asian tantric Buddhism, the *Darī jing* 大日經, Enni gives the most comprehensive and systematic elaboration of his three mechanisms found anywhere in his *oeuvre*. In the seventh fascicle, Enni explains that the inner self-verification (*jishō* 自證) of the Buddha is without awakening and without attainment of Buddhahood (*mukaku mujō* 無覺無成), and hence beyond all differentiation. Consequently, it transcends

33 *Hikyō ketsu* 秘教決, Abe/Sueki, *Shōichi ha*, 479. For a more detailed discussion of the role of the *Yuqi jing* in Enni’s thought, see Licha, *Esoteric Zen*, 132–135.

34 *Siddham* script in original.

all teachings and Buddhist vehicles. These teachings and vehicles, Enni points out, arise from seeking to communicate the undifferentiated self-verification of awakening. He continues:

That is to say, the gate of the basic principle outside the teachings [i.e. the Zen school] establishes the principle of “simply transmitting direct pointing” in “no awakening, no attainment.” For this reason, the thousand phrases and ten thousand words, the single stimulus and response, all are drained of flavor, drained of reason, and hence it is outside of what can be expressed. In this, *richi* and *kikan* equally are grasping direct indication. [...] Therefore, it is called “not establishing words and letters, a separate transmission outside the teachings.”

The secret teaching of *mantra* [i.e. the tantric traditions] establishes the gate of the path of preliminary means in “no awakening, no attainment.” That is to say, it takes as its principle the letters [of *mantra*], the seals [of *mudrā*], and shapes [of *maṇḍala*].”

所謂教外ノ宗門ハ、於此無覺無成之處ニ一、以單傳直指ヲ一、為宗ト一。故千句滿言、一機一境、皆沒滋味一、沒理致、故言表意外也。是以理致機關同直面ノ提持也。[...] 故云不立文字教外別伝ト一也。

真言秘教ハ於此無覺無成之處ニ一、施設ノ方便ノ道門。所謂以字印形ヲ一為宗是也。<sup>35</sup>

In order to unlock this dense passage, it is important to realize that Enni is extensively borrowing from Yuanwu, one of his main Chan sources. The notion that both *kikan* and *richi* are, when employed correctly, direct apprehension of mind can already be found in one of Yuanwu’s eulogies of the Chan lineage, where he remarks that,

although in the twenty eight generations [of Chan patriarchs in India] after Mahākāśyapa they only sparingly used *kikan* and often used *richi*, when it comes to passing on [the *Buddhadharma*], how could they not grasp direct indication?

雖自迦葉二十八世。少示機關多顯理致。至於付受之際。靡不直面提持。<sup>36</sup>

35 *Dainichikyō gishaku kenmon*, Abe/Sueki, *Kikō zenseki shū*, 486a.

36 See *Yuanwu Foguo Chanshi yulu* 圓悟佛果禪師語錄, T. 1997: 47. 777a1–3.



This remark fits the understanding of *richi* as doctrinal discourse, the dominant genre of Indian treatises, and *kikan* as encounter dialogue, the quintessential feature of Chinese Chan. Furthermore, the notion of grasping reality directly, which Yuanwu here posits as the goal of both *richi* and *kikan*, in his *Recorded Sayings* is closely related to *kōjō*.<sup>37</sup> It should also be noted that this discussion of the three mechanisms (or two mechanisms plus their being used as direct pointing) is virtually identical to the one offered by Mujū, who, despite his questionable Zen credentials, proves himself one of his teacher's most faithful students.

In the passage under consideration, Enni positions this understanding of Zen as the direct indication of mind in relation to the tantric teachings. In this context, we have to differentiate between a more overt, or exegetical, and a more subtle, or hermeneutical, strategy. On the exegetical level, Enni defines both the tantric, or rather mantric, teachings and Zen with regard to the inner verification of the Buddha "without awakening and without attainment." Zen and the tantric teachings arise as functions from the manner in which this inner verification is communicated: Zen indicates it directly by draining doctrinal discourse or encounter dialogue of all meaning, thereby turning the student's mind towards itself; the esoteric teachings instead use the tantric technology of three mysteries practice to lead the practitioner from the outer traces of awakening, that is to say the engagement with *mantra*, *mudrā*, and *maṇḍala*, towards its inner verification.<sup>38</sup> Thus although Enni appears to have considered Zen preliminarily superior to the tantric teachings due to the directness of its communicative strategy, both Zen and the tantric teachings (as well as all other Buddhist traditions including even the lowly vehicle of the hearers) have a common basis in the inner verification transcending them equally.

However, once we shift our attention from the surface level of exegetical discourse to the hermeneutical strategy underlying it, a somewhat different picture of the respective dependencies of Zen and the tantric teachings emerges. As is clear from the above discussion, one key phrase for Enni's understanding of the inner verification of mind is "no awakening and no attainment." This is no neutral phrase but rather one closely associated with the textual tradition of the *Dari jing*, and it was first used by Yixing in his commentary on this tantric root text. In the latter part of the second chapter of the *Dari jing*, the central

37 However, in Yuanwu, as in Chinese Chan sources in general, *kōjō* mostly is not used on its own but rather in the adjectival sense of "superior." In this sense, direct indication is the means to guide those of superior faculties (*xiangshang genqi* 向上根器). See Yuanwu *Foguo Chanshi yulu*, T. 1997: 47.777a17.

38 *Dainichikyō gishaku kenmon*, reference to Abe/Sueki, *Kikō zenseki shū*, 486a.

deity Mahāvairocana declares his awakening to be fundamentally unproduced (*ben bushing* 本不生).<sup>39</sup> On this declaration, Yixing elaborated as follows:

As for “my awakening is fundamentally unproduced,” this means that to awaken to one’s own mind from the very beginning being unproduced is the attainment of Buddhahood. And yet, in truth there is no awakening and no attainment.

我覺本不生者。謂覺自心從本以來不生。即是成佛。而實無覺無成也。<sup>40</sup>

After Yixing, the phrase “no awakening and no attainment” appears almost exclusively in commentarial works on the *Dari jing*. Thus, when Enni explicated Zen as direct indication of the inner verification of the mind, the mind under consideration was the mind of the tantric deity Mahāvairocana.

It was the tantric doctrinal and hermeneutical tradition, specifically of the *Yuqi jing* and the *Dari jing*, that provided Enni with the intellectual framework that allowed him to re-formulate the teachings he had gathered from his Chinese sources into the three mechanisms. In this sense, Enni’s three mechanisms, or at least the version thereof we can trace in his tantric commentaries, are “esoteric Zen” *par excellence*, that is to say a form of Zen that is meaningful in so far as it is explicated in esoteric or tantric terms. However, in the generations after Enni his three mechanisms increasingly came to be seen as a Zen teaching on *kōan* due to figures such as Kokan or Nanpo, who asserted their rights over the image of Enni the Zen master and his Zen teachings. At the same time, dissenting voices such as those of Jōmyō, Nichiren, or Mujū increasingly became excluded from the sources considered authoritative or authentic when it came to understanding Enni’s teachings. It is only thanks to the emergence of materials such as Enni’s sub-commentary on Yixing from the vaults of the Shinpukuji archives, and the re-evaluation of previously known but sidelined sources on Enni that these materials demand, that we have become aware that Enni’s Zen, and by extension a major feature of Japanese *kōan* Zen in general, owns at least as much to tantric hermeneutics as it does to Chinese Chan.

39 See *Dari jing* 大日經, T. 848: 18.9b16.

40 See *Da Pizhena chengfo jing shu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏, T. 1796: 39.646b19–21. On the fundamental role Yixing’s understanding of awakening plays in the structure of Enni’s tantric thought, see Licha, *Esoteric Zen*, 104–110.

#### 4 Incantations of Uncertainty: *Dhāraṇī* in East Asian and Medieval Japanese Buddhism

The recitation of *dhāraṇī* spells is a prominent feature of the rituals conducted at both Zen and esoteric Buddhist institutions. As such, they have in previous scholarship been identified as a prime example of the influence esoteric Buddhism had on Zen. William Bodiford, for instance, explains that,

The *dhāraṇī* [used in the Zen schools] represent the final stage of East Asian esoteric Buddhism. Instead of the so-called mnemonic (*giji* 義持) kinds of *dhāraṇī* found throughout Mahāyāna scriptures, they belong to the genre of fully developed esoteric scriptures, which are accompanied by powerful deities, ritual gestures, hand signs (*mudrā*), circular altars (*maṇḍala*), and visualizations. These spells are precisely those that are widely deemed to be the most efficacious for invoking spiritual resonance (*kannō* 感應) and attaining blessings. Regardless of how one defines esoteric Buddhism, these kinds of *dhāraṇī* must constitute one of its main currents.<sup>41</sup>

According to Bodiford, *dhāraṇī* are an essential and characteristic element of esoteric Buddhism. Consequently, their use in the Zen school represents an influence of tantric practice on Zen. In this section, I will build on Bodiford's analysis to argue that rather than understanding *dhāraṇī* as a straightforward example of tantric influence on Zen, it would be more accurate to treat them as the ground on which the relationship between the two traditions is negotiated. In other words, just like Enni's three mechanisms discussed in the previous section, *dhāraṇī* are neither tantric nor non-tantric but can be appropriated as either. It is in such processes of appropriation that the boundaries between the tantric and the Zen tradition were hashed out in premodern Japan. In order to make this point, I will proceed in two steps. First, I will argue that it is at least questionable whether *dhāraṇī* should be considered as essentially tantric. And second, I will undertake a sampling of early medieval Japanese debates on the use of *dhāraṇī* in Zen and esoteric Buddhism, again beginning with Enni himself.

##### 4.1 *Tantric Uncertainties: Dhāraṇī and Esoteric Buddhism*

The characterization of *dhāraṇī*, or at least a certain kind of *dhāraṇī*, as having an intrinsic connection with the final stage of esoteric Buddhism arguably is an oversimplification of a complex problem. There indeed exists an influential

<sup>41</sup> Bodiford, "Zen and Esoteric Buddhism," 928.

body of scholarship that considers texts and rituals featuring *dhāraṇī* as, to borrow Michel Strickmann's term, "proto-tantric." However, for Strickmann this term seems to imply little more than a concern with deities and worldly benefits, as if such interests were characteristically or exclusively tantric.<sup>42</sup> More recently, Shinohara Koichi has argued that even early *dhāraṇī* materials already display some of the soteriological, ritual, and doctrinal features that would eventually come to form the "broad outline of the developed Esoteric Buddhist rituals."<sup>43</sup> However, even if we accept this tradition of scholarship, *dhāraṇī*, or even just some subset thereof, still would represent not the final stage of East Asian esoteric Buddhism but rather its first stirrings. Furthermore, scholars such as Paul Copp, Richard McBride, II, and George Keyworth have argued, convincingly to my mind, that *dhāraṇī* should be considered not as connected specifically to those doctrinal and ritual traditions that would come to be recognized as defining the mainstream of Japanese esoteric Buddhism, but rather as part of a common East Asian Buddhist heritage.<sup>44</sup> Hence Zen and esoteric Buddhism both use *dhāraṇī* not because the latter has influenced the former, but rather because both are part of the East Asian Buddhist mainstream, within which incantatory practices were and are popular and widespread. In short, it is true that *dhāraṇī* are intrinsic to tantric Buddhism, but that does not mean that they are intrinsically tantric.

It is likely in order to address this difficulty that scholars sometimes introduce the qualification that not all *dhāraṇī* equally represent full-fledged East Asian esoteric Buddhism, but only a specific sub set thereof. These esoteric *dhāraṇī*, it is claimed, are seen as possessing superior spiritual efficacy and therefore being quite different from the mnemonic *dhāraṇī* found in common

42 Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 102–109. In fact, as McBride points out, Strickmann's "proto-tantrism" is but the Japanese esoteric polemic category of "mixed esoteric Buddhism" (*zōmitsu* 雜密). See McBride, "Dhāraṇī and Spells in Medieval Sinitic Buddhism," 95–96, n.33.

43 Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Mandalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals*, xiv. See also Dalton, "How Dhāraṇīs WERE Proto-Tantric: Liturgies, Ritual Manuals, and the Origins of the Tantras." Dalton argues that whereas there is nothing specifically tantric about *dhāraṇī* themselves, the ritual manuals making use of them might be considered as "proto-tantric" not in the loose sense of the term employed by Strickmann but in the sense of being part of the evolution of specifically tantric ritual techniques.

44 See Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*; Keyworth, "Zen and the 'Hero's March Spell' of the Shoulengyan Jing;" McBride, "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?;" McBride, "Dhāraṇī and Spells."

Mahāyāna sources.<sup>45</sup> However, a survey of some of the standard canonical discussions of *dhāraṇī* does not bear out differentiating between mnemonic Mahāyāna and ritually efficacious esoteric Buddhist *dhāraṇī* in this way. “Mnemonic *dhāraṇī*” are one of the four kinds of *dhāraṇī* as defined in the *Bodhisattvabhūmisūtra*, the other three being teaching *dhāraṇī* (*fa tuoluoni* 法陀羅尼; J. *hō darani*), or the power to recollect all teachings verbatim, spellcraft *dhāraṇī* (*zhoushu tuoluoni* 呪術陀羅尼; J. *jujutsu darani*) associated with thaumaturgy, and *dhāraṇī* of forbearance (*ren tuoluoni* 忍陀羅尼; J. *nin darani*), which confirm the practitioner on the long and arduous path of the *bodhisattva*. This fourfold division of *dhāraṇī* is taken up again by the important translator and ritualist Amoghavajra (705–774). In a short text dedicated to the explication of *dhāraṇī*, the *Zongshi tuoluoni yizan* 總釋陀羅尼義讚 [Eulogy on the General Meaning of *Dhāraṇī*], Amoghavajra adds three more sets of incantation types to the *dhāraṇī* found in the *Bodhisattvabhūmisūtra*, namely mantra (*zhenyan* 眞言, J. *shingon*), arcana (*mīyan* 密言, J. *mitsugon*), and luminaries (*mīng* 明, J. *myō*). These three are variations on, or perhaps even just different aspects of, the basic fourfold classification of *dhāraṇī* already found in the *sūtra*. Amoghavajra concludes his discussion as follows:

The above meanings of the *dhāraṇī*, mantra, arcana, and luminaries derive from Sanskrit texts, and, again, they are taught in the exoteric scriptures, or they are taught under these four appellations in the secret teaching of *mantra*. Furthermore, [there are] *mantra* with a single letter, or two letters, or three letters, up to a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand letters. Again, their number is infinite and without limit. All these are called *dhāraṇī*, mantra, arcana, and luminaries. If they resonate with the gate of the three mysteries, they do not incline towards the difficult and burdensome practices [of the common Mahāyāna, which take] eons [to complete], but swiftly and easily overturning determined karma [that leads to future rebirth], they are the speedy way toward the secure bliss of Buddhahood.

如上陀羅尼眞言密言明義依梵文。復於顯教修多羅中稱說。或於眞言密教中說如是四稱。或有一字眞言乃至二字三字乃至百字千字萬字。復過此數乃至無量無邊。皆名陀羅尼眞言密言明。若與三密門相應。不暇多劫難行苦行。能轉定業速疾易成安樂成佛速疾之道。<sup>46</sup>

45 For a critique of this idea and its Japanese sectarian roots, see Misaki “Junmitsu to zōmitsu ni tsuite.”

46 *Zongshi tuoluoni yizan* 總釋陀羅尼義讚, T. 902: 18.898b21–2.

Here, Amoghavajra does not differentiate between two kinds of *dhāraṇī* that belong to “exoteric” or “esoteric” teachings or scriptures. Rather, he claims that all kinds of *dhāraṇī* are taught both in the common Mahāyāna scriptures and in those dedicated to the *mantrayāna*. What separates them is usage, that is to say whether they are employed together with the ritual technology of three mysteries practice (*sanmitsu gyō* 三密行), through which the esoteric adept can align body, speech, and mind with those of esoteric deities. Through such alignment, the tantric practitioner can speedily attain the liberation and dominion that the common Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* must cultivate over countless eons. In short, while certain uses of *dhāraṇī* might have been understood as “esoteric,” the incantations themselves were not. Contention over them is what separates tantric from non-tantric traditions.

#### 4.2 *Appropriating Spells: Dhāraṇī in Zen and Esoteric Buddhism*

As the above discussion suggests, the notion that *dhāraṇī* are intrinsically tantric is at least debatable. It would hence appear to be somewhat rash to argue that their sheer presence in Zen liturgies represents a clear tantric influence. However, both Zen and tantric practitioners did consciously articulate their traditions’ relationship to each other in terms of *dhāraṇī*. *Dhāraṇī*, in other words, belong neither to Zen nor to tantric Buddhism as such, but can be made to be seen as belonging to either.

The ritual procedures followed at Zen temples are full of incantations, and it is none other than Enni who is cast as responsible for this development. As Enni’s student Mujū relates in his *Zōtan shū* 雜談集 [Collection of Discourses on Diverse Topics], in the liturgical program of Enni’s monastery Tōfukuji the recitation of *dhāraṇī* was far more prominent than in Chinese Chan establishments. Due to the importance he accorded *dhāraṇī* practice, apparently at the expense of seated meditation, Enni incurred the criticism of some unnamed elder monks who chided him for claiming to propagate the “Chinese style” (*karayō* 唐様) yet departing from the norms of Song dynasty monasticism. Enni replied that whereas seated meditation was the main style of practice in China, Japanese monks engaged in little of it. If they did not recite *dhāraṇī*, then how could they repay the debt of gratitude they owe to their patrons? Therefore, demands that *zazen* should be practiced in the same manner as on the continent really should stop.<sup>47</sup>

47 *Zōtanshū* 雜談集, Yamada/Miki, *Zōtanshū*, 276. Bodiford interprets this episode differently as an example of Enni’s combined use of seated meditation and incantation as sources of thaumaturgical power. See Bodiford, “Zen and Esoteric Buddhism,” 930.

Mujū enthusiastically endorsed Enni's emphasis on *dhāraṇī*. After relating the above episode, Mujū continued as follows:

The efficacy of the *Śūraṅgama dhāraṇī* has been explained in detail in the *sūtra*. In China and in our country, Zen and *vinaya* cloisters uniformly make *dhāraṇī* the foundation of their practice. They are the secret technique of the ocean of accomplishment, the nectar of inner verification. As they are accompanied by mind contemplation, they are hard to match by ordinary ritual practices. In the last age of the Dharma, only the *ghee* of the subtle medicine of *dhāraṇī* can have benefits.

楞嚴咒ノ功能、經ニ委細ニ説ケリ。漢朝我国、禪院律院ヒトヘニ陀羅尼ヲ宗ト行ズ。果海ノ秘術、内證ノ甘露也。觀心相加シヌレバ尋常ノ事ノ行ニ准ジガタシ。末法ハ醍醐ノ妙藥タル神咒ノミ専ラ利益可シレ有ル。<sup>48</sup>

As discussed in the previous section, Enni had identified Zen with the direct indication of the Mahāvairocana Buddha's inner verification of its own awakening. According to Mujū, *dhāraṇī* likewise draw their power from this source, and hence *dhāraṇī* practice itself can be understood as a kind of mind contemplation. Consequently, it is appropriate as a foundational practice even at Zen or meditation cloisters.

As his further deliberations on the relationship between *dhāraṇī* and the Zen lineages show, Mujū, far from being a simple-minded syncretist, was a careful doctrinal thinker. The Sanmai ryū 三昧流, one of the main lineages of Tendai esoteric teachings, transmitted an oral exposition (*kuketsu* 口決) on *dhāraṇī* entitled, "The Threefold Study of *mantra*" (*shingon sangaku no koto* 眞言三學事). This transmission claims *dhāraṇī* to be of three kinds, namely formed of many letters, formed of a single letter, or without letters. These latter *dhāraṇī* are called, "the principle of complete awakening being without perceptual characteristics" (*engaku musō ri* 圓覺無相理).<sup>49</sup> At first sight, this transmission does not appear to have anything to do with Zen. However, it is quoted by Mujū in his *Shōzai shū*. Mujū's version asserts that this principle of awakening refers to the *Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經 [*Sūtra* of Perfect Awakening], a Chinese apocryphal scripture popular in the Chan school. This *sūtra* contains

48 Yamada/Miki, *Zōtanshū*, 176–177. The whole section is framed by Mujū's denunciation of an unnamed Zen practitioner and long-time follower of Enni who, according to Mujū, misrepresented Enni's teaching by claiming that ritual practice was useless before awakening.

49 See *Keiran shūyō shū*, T. 2410: 76.785a13–16.

the passage, “[The Supreme Dharma king] has a great *dhāraṇī* gate, it is called complete awakening” 有大陀羅尼門。名爲圓覺。<sup>50</sup> As the *Yuanjue jing*, and by implication the Zen tradition, teaches the letterless *dhāraṇī* of complete awakening, yet does not teach the sigils and luminaries (*inmyō* 印明)<sup>51</sup> of tantric three mysteries practice, the exposition concludes, Zen belongs to the “esoteric teachings in theory” (*ri himitsu* 理祕密), a doctrinal category originally established to accommodate the *Lotus Sūtra* in Tendai tantric speculation. Mujū thus consciously employs *dhāraṇī* in order to construct the relationship of Zen to tantric Buddhism. Consequently, we can amend Bodiford’s argument: It is not that *dhāraṇī* were intrinsically tantric and their use forced Zen into a specific relationship with the tantric traditions. It is the case, however, that certain practitioners such as Mujū used tantric teachings on *dhāraṇī* in order to establish such a relationship.

Mujū’s emphasis on the importance and efficacy of *dhāraṇī* or *mantra* likely is rooted in Enni’s own teachings. As Enni elaborates in the *Dainichikyō kenmon*:

Question: What is the correct way of *yoga*?

Answer: That is the practice of seated meditation. Therefore, the text [of the *Dari jing shu*] says, “Constantly delighting in seated meditation and delighting in bringing about accomplishment, in the gate of *mantra* the mind dwells on one object and is not distracted. [...]”<sup>52</sup>

Question: The mind dwelling on one object, what does “one object” refer to?

Answer: “One object” refers to the syllable *a*.

Question: From where does this syllable *a* arise?

Answer: In accordance with the virtue of the self-verification of the thus-come-one, it arises in the mind ground of the Buddha.

問。何正行瑜伽道乎。答。坐禪修行是也。依之文云。常樂坐禪樂作成就者於真言門中心住一境而不散亂。[...] 問。心住一境者。指何物云一境乎。答。指阿一字云一境也。問。此阿字門者從何所來乎。答。從如來自證之德於佛心地而出現。<sup>53</sup>

50 *Yuanjue jing*, T. 842: 17.913b19. The text in square brackets is not cited in the *Shōzai shū*. See *Shōzai shū*, reference to Abe, *Mujū shū*, 440a.

51 The term *in* can refer both to a ritual hand gesture and to the implement by which a deity is represented in their *samayā* form. In the former case, I translate it as “seal,” in the latter as “sigil.”

52 *Dari jing shu*, T. 1796: 39.693b15–16.

53 *Dainichikyō kenmon*, NDZ 24: 66a.



As this passage makes clear, despite his insistence on the ritual incantation of *dhāraṇī*, Enni also held the practice of seated meditation in highest regard. The seated meditation in question, however, was not based on what was propagated in terms of meditative techniques in the Chan or Zen traditions, but rather the quintessentially (Tendai) tantric practice of contemplating the syllable *a*. This syllable, the seed and source of all *mantra* and *dhāraṇī*, according to Enni arises from the inner verification of the Buddha, just as Mujū had explained with regard to the efficacy of *dhāraṇī*.

An appendix to the *Taimitsu keigu shō* 胎密契愚鈔 [A Fool's Account of the Taizōkai Secret Seals] dated to 1285 collects a series of oral transmissions attributed to Yōsai's Yōjō lineage that Enni is said to have received and transmitted in turn. These transmissions also contain more information on the practice of the syllable *a*. Writing in the context of explicating tantric unction, Enni utilizes a common system comprised of four forms or stages of *mantra* recitation: At first, practitioners use the actual sound of the *mantra* as the basis of concentration. As they progress, practitioners cease to actually utter the *mantra* aloud and instead silently move the tip of their tongue alone. Next, practitioners cease to utter the sound of *mantra* completely and instead take the in and out breath itself as *mantra*. These three steps comprise the mundane practice of *mantra*. Finally, during the fourth, supramundane phase, practitioners again utter sounds, recite *mantra*, and form *mudrā* with their bodies, but their mind does not dwell on the form or meaning of the syllables and instead dwells without fixed support, like a bird in the sky without a perch.<sup>54</sup>

Recently, Abe Yasurō, one of the editors-in-chief of the Shinpukuji materials, has published an elusive yet intriguing fragment touching on Enni's *mantra* teachings. The part relevant to our concerns runs as follows:

Again, the [*Mahāvairocana*]sūtra and its commentary [by Yixing] teach the four kinds of mindful incantation [as described in the previous paragraph]. From among these [kinds of] mindful incantation, the third, mindful incantation of outbreath and inbreath, is the supreme mundane mindful recitation. Through this recitation, the fourth, supramundane mindful incantation of mind intention is attained. The mindful incantation of mind intention is the self-verification of the markless three mysteries. This verification in turn verifies the gate of syllables resonating with outbreath and inbreath. For this reason, the mindful incantation of outbreath and inbreath is the essence of Shingon/Zen.<sup>55</sup>

54 *Taimitsu keigu shō* 胎密契愚鈔, Mizukami, *Taimitsu shisō keisei no kenkyū*, 661–662.

55 Untitled fragment. By Enni, copied in 1262. Reference to Abe, *Shūkyō tekisuto bunka isan to shite chiiki jūn shōkyō tenseki*, 27.

又、経充説四種念誦ヲ一。念誦之中ニ第三出入息念誦ヲ為世間最上念誦ト一。以此念誦ヲ一、得第四ノ出世間心意念誦ヲ一。々々々ト者、即无相三密自證也。此證ト者、即還證ス出入息相應字門ヲ一。故出入息念誦ヲ為真言禪ノ躰ト一也。

The key term upon which the interpretation of this passage hinges is the phrase, “Shingon/Zen.” This compound noun can be read in two ways, either as “the Zen of Shingon,” that is to say the meditative or concentration practices (*zenjō* 禪定) of the tantric traditions, or, alternatively, as “Shingon and Zen.” The former reading would be an unusual terminological choice but doctrinally uninteresting. The second reading, however, would be astonishing in asserting that the physical breath of incantation is what unites Zen and tantric practice.

Unfortunately, barring the discovery of the remaining parts of the fragment, there is no way of choosing between these two possible interpretations with any final certainty. Yet some admittedly circumstantial considerations suggest that Abe’s own preference for the second reading cannot be dismissed out of hand. First, although the usage *shingon zen* appears to be rare if not even unique, common ways to refer to the tantric and Zen traditions, often in the context of listing the various schools of Buddhism, include terms such as *shingon zenmon* 真言禪門 and occasionally *shingon zenpō* 真言禪法.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, I have not been able to find any examples of usages such as *shingon zenjō* 真言禪定. And second, the “markless three mysteries” mentioned in this fragment are an important concept in medieval tantric thought, especially in relation to the problem of how to position the Zen *versus* the tantric tradition. The *Shinzen yūshin ki* 真言融心記 [Record on the Aligned Heart of Shingon and Zen] is a text on the relationship between esoteric and Zen teachings widely but spuriously attributed to Yōsai. Here the “separate transmission outside the teachings” of Zen is said to correspond to the practice of the three mysteries without characteristics.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, above I have discussed how Enni construed the Zen slogan of “not establishing words and letters” as indicating the markless moon disc that signifies the Mahāvairocana Buddha’s innermost endarkenment. The wider context of the “markless three mysteries” thus positions the fragment’s discussion of incantation practices within the very conceptual framework in which the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism was being negotiated. These, admittedly circumstantial, factors suggest that the reading of Enni

56 For the former, see for instance, Genkū’s 源空 (1133–1212) *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* 選擇本願念佛集, T. 2608: 83.19a5–6; for the latter the *Keiran shūyō shū*, T. 2410: 76.532a23–24.

57 See Takayanagi, “Den Yōsai cho Shinzen yūshin gi no shingi mondai to sono shisō.”

as discussing Zen and the tantric teachings being equally based on the breath is at least not impossible.

In the thought of Enni and, following in his master's footsteps, Mujū, the theory and practice of *dhāraṇī*, Zen, and esoteric Buddhism were inextricably intertwined. This, however, does not indicate any straightforward influence of esoteric Buddhism on Zen, or even just a straightforward overlap between the two traditions' ritual practices. Rather, Enni and even more so Mujū used *dhāraṇī* as a device to incorporate both esoteric Buddhism and Zen into a larger, unified doctrinal structure. Others, however, sought to use *dhāraṇī* to opposite ends.

#### 4.3 *Invoking Difference: Musō Soseki on Dhāraṇī*

In his *Muchū mondō shū* 夢中問答集 [Collection of Questions and Answers in a Dream] from 1344, the Rinzai master Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351) rejected the suggestion that the use of *dhāraṇī* in the Zen school had anything to do with tantric or esoteric Buddhism. Musō noted that *dhāraṇī* were also used in continental Chan monasteries, though to a lesser degree than in Japan. He continued to rebuke those accusing Zen monks of not offering enough prayers for worldly benefits by pointing out that not only do Zen monks perform three daily worship services, the merit of which is dedicated to the peace of the realm and the safety of their patrons, they also perform special ceremonies such as the “invocation of the sage” (*shukushin* 祝聖), which secures the long life of the ruler and pacifies the realm. Musō closed by asking rhetorically,

the efficaciousness of the *dhāraṇī* of Great Compassion and the *Śūraṅgama dhāraṇī* is explained in the *sūtra*, to which grand, or to which secret method [two ways of conducting esoteric Buddhist rituals] would they be inferior?<sup>58</sup>

大悲咒・楞嚴咒の機能を經中に説けること、何の大法秘法にか劣らむや。

The *dhāraṇī* of Great Compassion and the *Śūraṅgama dhāraṇī* are among those cited by Bodiford as examples of “esoteric Zen.” According to Musō, however, they were not an instance of esoteric or tantric ritual incorporated into the Zen tradition, but rather an alternative source of thaumaturgic power.

Musō's remarks provide the background for the criticism of Zen *dhāraṇī* practices articulated by the famed Shingon scholiast Gōhō (1306–1362) in his *Kaishin shō* 開心抄 [Notes on Opening the Heart] from 1349. In the “Chapter

58 *Muchū mondō shū* 夢中問答集, Kawase, *Muchū mondō shū*, 71–72 and 313.

on Protecting the Country and Benefiting Beings” (*gokoku saishō mon* 護國濟生門) Gōhō takes aim at those who claim that the three worship services carried out in Zen temples were more effective than the “grand and secret methods of the Shingon lineage” (*shingon shū daihō hihō* 真言宗大法祕法). Gōhō observes that in practicing the *Śūraṅgama dhāraṇī* there is a “secret” or “esoteric method” (*hihō* 祕法) using *mudrā* as well as the visualization of seed syllables and deities. This secret method is transmitted in the esoteric traditions, but unknown in Zen lineages.<sup>59</sup> This exchange between the Zen master and the Shingon teacher suggests that in the 14th century *dhāraṇī* recitation was not universally considered either clearly esoteric or non-esoteric, but rather represented a thaumaturgic resource for control over which the two camps competed.

As the above discussion of *dhāraṇī* indicates, it is far from obvious to consider them an instance of influence from esoteric Buddhism on Zen. Rather, as a fundamental component of the East Asian Mahāyāna tradition, they were the common heritage of both Zen and esoteric Buddhism. Enni and Mujū could build on this heritage to integrate both traditions with each other. Musō and Gōhō, on the other hand, used *dhāraṇī* practices to separate esoteric Buddhism from Zen, Musō by stressing their status as an alternative source of thaumaturgic potency, Gōhō by stressing the superiority of three mysteries practice. In short, just like Enni’s three mechanisms, *dhāraṇī* were a battleground on which the lines between tantric and Zen Buddhism were drawn and hence their relationship with each other established.

## 5 Ghosts and Flowers: Zen and Esoteric Buddhism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Sources

As the last two sections have demonstrated, during the early medieval period the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism was a fluid one in which the very same doctrinal or ritual elements could be appropriated by members of either tradition. As these acts of appropriations were repeated and eventually sedimented in the discourse, sectarian identities became more clearly circumscribed and sectarian boundaries less porous. The religious policies implemented by the military government of the Tokugawa 徳川 (1603–1867)

59 See *Kaishin shō* 開心抄, T. 2450: 77.740c29–741a2. Bodiford cites another of Gōhō’s criticisms, namely that Zen practitioners mispronounce *dhāraṇī*. “Zen and Esoteric Buddhism,” 930. As Paul Copp has observed, supposedly correct pronunciation is an obsession shared by esoteric scholiasts and modern philologist. See Copp, 3–6.

period favoured this process of stabilization by demanding Buddhist lineages organize themselves into centralized, hierarchical networks. In response, various reform movements arose that sought to establish unified sectarian identities, often by drawing on the supposed legacies of their respective founders. Within the Zen schools, the most prominent reform movements were the drive to reform Rinzai *kōan* practice associated with Hakuin Ekaku 白隠慧鶴 (1686–1769), and Manzan Dōhaku's 叡山道白 (1635–1715) reform of Sōtō Dharma transmission practices.

Especially in the case of the Sōtō reform movement, attempts to articulate a sectarian identity based on Dōgen involved purging what was perceived as tantric contaminations or, when excision proved inconvenient, re-establishing supposedly proper ritual procedure. What kindled Sōtō reformers' puritanical ambitions was, among other factors, the rich and complex tradition of orally transmitted, secret or esoteric, knowledge the medieval and early modern Sōtō school had developed. The textual substratum of this lore comprised curricula of *kōan* and their standardized interpretations known as *monsan* 門參 [Lineage Attendances], as well as much shorter documents treating sundry doctrinal, ritual, thaumaturgical, or mythological matters known as *kirigami* 切紙 [Paper Slips], which often contained charts or illustrations that graphically summarized the oral transmissions with which they were associated. This esoteric lore freely drew on elements from all areas of medieval religious life, and especially on, often sexual or embryological, tantric teachings.

In the present section, I will first discuss one example of Sōtō esoteric transmission lore which formed, almost exactly like Wittgenstein's duck/rabbit, from seeing a tantric syllable-*qua*-Buddha body as a Zen transmission, thereby demonstrating how fluid the boundaries between Zen and tantric Buddhism remained even during the late medieval and early modern period. Finally, the ghost feeding rituals to be discussed in the second half of this section will illustrate the processes which ended this fluidity and ushered in an age in which Zen and tantric Buddhism came to be seen as clearly differentiated, and indeed oppositional, forms of Buddhism.

### 5.1 *Seeing Śākyamuni: From Tantric Ritual to Zen Lore*

The *Shaka go hangyō* 釋迦御判形 [*Seal of Śākyamuni*] is a *kirigami* dating to the mid-seventeenth century. This document consists of but a strange squiggly shape without any further explanation (see Figure 2), and there is certainly nothing to suggest that this “seal,” however it might have been used, would be connected to tantric practice.<sup>60</sup> A second, undated *kirigami* document, this

60 Also published in Ishikawa, *Zenshū sōden shiryō no kenkyū*, 2: 397.



FIGURE 2  
*Shaka go hangyō*  
 SKETCH BY ELENA BERNARDINI,  
 USED WITH PERMISSION

one entitled *Shakamuni butsu shinshu kahan* 釋迦牟尼佛親手花判 [Flower Imprint of the Śākyamuni Buddha's Own Hand] contains a similar figure.<sup>61</sup> In this document, the squiggle is accompanied by the following poem:

Crane king and tortoise shape, dominion does not stop;  
 The writings and letters of the five sovereigns, demons and gods are  
 distressed.  
 Not one among Confucius' disciples understands;  
 The blue-eyed monk laughing nods his head.

鶴王龜形勢未休、  
 五天文字鬼紙愁、  
 孔門弟子無人識、  
 碧眼胡僧笑點頭。

Despite containing a number of copy errors, this poem can still be identified as part of a composition by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (712–756), *Fojiao fanwen anzi* 佛教梵文唵字 [On the Buddhist Sanskrit Letter *Am*] which is contained in various Chan and Zen phrase collections.<sup>62</sup> Xuanzong was a patron of esoteric Buddhism, which flowered during his reign due to the activities of Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735), Vajrabodhi (671–741) and Amoghavajra, one of whom likely is the happily giggling blue-eyed monk.

The syllable *am* mentioned in the title of the emperor's poem is one of the four variations derived from the fundamental mantric seed syllable *a* by adding diacritic marks. In the hermeneutical tradition of the *Dari jing* as also inherited by Enni's tantric lineage, *a* itself represents the fundamentally unproduced and innately awakened nature of mind, whereas its variations represent

61 Published in Izuka/Tsuchiya, "Rinka Sōtō shū ni okeru sōden shiryō kenkyū josetsu (6)," 176.  
 62 Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, 516.



FIGURE 3  
Human body as syllable *am*  
SKETCH BY ELENA BERNARDINI,  
USED WITH PERMISSION

the process by which the practitioner gradually attains and realizes the nature of his own mind as it truly is. In this process, *am* stands for the level of engaging in spiritual practice. As Ōno Shunran has shown, the body of the tantric practitioner itself sometimes was represented as the syllable *am*, thereby creating a kind of syllabic body *maṇḍala*. In this case, the syllable is drawn so as to resemble an, admittedly highly stylized and abstract, human body (Figure 3). This syllabic body also appears to have been closely related to initiation into the teachings of the *Yuqi jing*, which in medieval Japan had developed into a soteriological embryology according to which the practitioner's body was recreated through the reenactment of the ontogenetic process of gestation during the consecration ritual.<sup>63</sup> As discussed above, the *Yuqi jing* is also an important source for Enni's understanding of the relationship between Zen and tantric Buddhism. Most importantly, however, this syllable qua body bears a striking likeness to, yet is not identical with, the squiggly figure of the *Shaka go hangyō*.

While the *Shaka go hangyō* at first appears inexplicable and unrelated to any tantric context, its genealogy in fact can be traced back very precisely to a specific tradition of tantric thought and practice associated with the *Dari jing* and the *Yuqi jing*. The presence of Xuanzong's poem on the virtue of the syllable *am* in the *Shakamuni butsu shinshu kahan* suggests that at least initially the Sōtō Zen esotericist(s) who transmitted this sigil retained an awareness of its origin in *siddham* physiology. Of course, we do not know which oral explanations might have accompanied the transmission of such documents, yet it would appear save to suggest that any awareness of the sigil's tantric origin

63 See Ōno, "Aji kan to anji kan," 31–33; as well as Ōno, "Mandara no hōsenhō to fuji kan ni tsuite," 41. For other symbolic constructions of the body in medieval tantric Buddhism, including other syllabic bodies, see Dolce, "Duality and the 'Kami': The Ritual Iconography and Visual Constructions of Medieval Shintō;" and Dolce, "The Embryonic Generation of the Perfect Body: Ritual Embryology from Japanese Tantric Sources."

was lost over time, resulting in the confounding curlicue that is the *Shaka gohangyō*. In short, a tantric way of seeing the body had come to be seen as a Zen oral transmission.<sup>64</sup>

### 5.2 *Ghosts of Esoteric Buddhism: The Ghost Feeding Ritual*

Examples of tantric rituals used in the Sōtō school given in modern scholarship often include the ghost feeding liturgy.<sup>65</sup> As we shall see in this section, just like the supposedly tantric temptations of *dhāraṇī*, this is a trick of perspective and the result of imposing the sectarian categories that emerged during the Tokugawa period backwards onto the more complex and fluid medieval Buddhist *tableaux*.

The liturgy for feeding hungry ghosts used in many pre-modern Sōtō Zen lineages and recorded, for instance, in the *Keizan shingi* 瑩山清規 [Monastic Regulations of Keizan],<sup>66</sup> is based on the *Huanzhu an quinggui* 幻住庵清規 [Monastic Regulations of Huanzhu Hermitage], a Chinese monastic code of impeccable Chan or Zen pedigree. As Bodiford has pointed out, this ritual has been compiled from many different, disparate sources.<sup>67</sup> As such, it differs significantly from the ghost feeding liturgies described in both the representative Tendai liturgical collection *Asaba shō* 阿娑縛抄 [A, Sa, and Va Syllable Anthology] and its Shingon counterpart, the *Kakuzen shō* 覺禪抄 [Kakuzen Anthology].<sup>68</sup> In short, although the rite uses short *dhāraṇī* and ritual hand gestures, the names of which cannot be found in other sources, there is little to suggest that the ghost feeding liturgy as performed in medieval Zen lineages was, or even should have been, seen as an esoteric rite.

This suggestion is borne out by an intriguing remark concerning the ghost feeding liturgy contained in the *Asaba shō*. The text notes that, “although this [ghost feeding ritual] is not a secret [or esoteric] method, it should not be taught to beginners” 雖レ非ストニ祕法ニ、初心者不レ可レ授レ之ヲ<sup>69</sup>. This seems to imply that for the performance of the ghost feeding ritual no initiation was necessary,<sup>70</sup> and in this sense the rite did not belong to the tantric ritual sphere

64 See also the discussion of these materials in Licha, *Esoteric Zen*, 294–297.

65 Bodiford, “Zen and Esoteric Buddhism,” 931–933.

66 See T. 2589: 82.446a10–447a4.

67 Bodiford, “Zen and Esoteric Buddhism,” 931.

68 See *Asaba shō* 阿娑縛抄, DNBZ 40: 314b–322a. Also *Kakuzen shō* 覺禪抄, DNBZ 50: 84a–106b.

69 *Asaba shō*, DNBZ 40: 314b.

70 On rituals reserved for those who have received *denbō kanjō* 傳法灌頂 (Dharma transmission consecration), see for instance *Asaba shō*, DNBZ 40: 337a. One other possible interpretation would be that the ghost feeding ritual is not “secret” in the sense of being available to all who have received *denbō kanjō* 傳法灌頂, whereas rituals connected



proper. Along similar lines, Sōtō Zen practitioners themselves do not seem to have considered the ghost feeding liturgy a tantric ritual until well into the early modern period. The *Segaki shōkō sahō* 施餓鬼焼香作法 [Procedures for Offering Incense When Feeding the Hungry Ghosts] is part of the Sōtō faction's oral transmission materials. The text, which is undated but likely was copied in the first half of the 18th century,<sup>71</sup> instructs on the proper procedures of the ghost feeding liturgy, including phrases that are to be silently recited at certain points during the ritual as well as the hand gestures to be formed when reciting various *dhāraṇī*. However, the text does not invoke a tantric master, rite, or text, as source of these procedures, but none other than “the founder of Eihei-ji” (*Eihei-ji kaisan* 永平寺開山), Dōgen. By casting the ghost feeding liturgy as part of Dōgen's own legacy, it certainly was above suspicions of representing any foreign influences.

In sum, there is significant evidence to suggest that during the medieval and into the early modern period, ghost feeding rituals were not universally considered esoteric in the strict sense of tantric ritual, but at best in a loose sense of advanced thaumaturgy. The ghost feeding ritual performed in the Sōtō school today, on the other hand, explicitly and consciously has been derived from a Shingon lineage by the Tokugawa period Sōtō reformer Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683–1769). In the afterword to his revised liturgy, the *Kanrōmon* 甘露門 [Gate of Sweet Nectar], Menzan criticized his predecessors for losing the correct rite and replacing it with spurious hocus-pocus. He concludes:

The methods of the ritual procedure [used] in the gate [of] my [school] appear to be incomplete. For this reason, [I] have sought out the secret procedures and inquired with esoteric masters, and have received a direct transmission of the spells and gestures; I have supplemented the deficiencies [of the old ritual used in the Soto school].<sup>72</sup>

我カ門ノ行事、其ノ法似リレ不ルニニ悉ク備ラニ、是ノ故ニ尋ニ釋シ秘軌ヲニ、請ニ益シ密師ニニ、且ツ面ニ授シテ呪印ヲニ、補ニ其ノ不ヲニ足ラ。

Rather than invoking the mythical authority of Dōgen, as the roughly contemporary *Segaki shōkō sahō* did, Menzan reconstituted the ghost feeding

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with, for instance, the deity Aizen 愛染 were subject to further initiatory restrictions and hence hidden (*hi* 祕). However, as the *Asaba shō* does not usually see fit to explicitly declare other common rituals “not secret” in this sense, I consider this reading less likely.

71 See Ishikawa, *Zenshū sōden*, 2: 967–968.

72 See *Kanrōmon* 甘露門, manuscript at Waseda university library, call number 31.E0988, 120.

liturgy based on tantric teachings. Tantric practitioners had long criticized the Zen schools for their lack of proper ritual procedures. From the 17th century onwards these attacks escalated, and detailed criticisms of what was considered the deficient nature of Zen liturgies, including the ghost feeding liturgy, spread. Menzan's own rewritten liturgy shows signs of having been composed under the influence of these criticisms.<sup>73</sup> Thus Menzan, obsessed as he was with orthodoxy, canonicity, and correct lineage, retrospectively came to see the only loosely esoteric medieval ghost feeding ritual as a deficiently tantric one.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, the reason for the presence of a (mostly) tantric ghost feeding ritual in contemporary Sōtō Zen is not that there is anything inherently tantric or esoteric about these liturgies, but rather that Menzan imposed his own sectarian lines on a much differently patterned medieval ritual landscape.

The strange squiggle of the *Shaka go hangyō* and the ghost feeding liturgy are indicative of the complex relationship between the Zen and tantric traditions even during the early modern period of incipient sectarian reform. In a sense, these two examples are opposites of each other: whereas in the *Shaka go hangyō* a tantric syllabic body *maṇḍala* came to be seen as a Zen esoteric transmission, in Menzan's treatment of the ghost feeding liturgy a non-tantric rite based in impeccably orthodox Zen sources came to be seen as an insufficiently tantric one, and hence had to be corrected drawing on tantric Buddhist sources.

## 6 Conclusion

After having been consigned to a preliminary status in the history of medieval Japanese Buddhism due to his supposed promotion of a syncretistic or mixed form of Zen, over the last decade the importance of figures like Enni, who operated in the borderlands between the esoteric and Zen traditions, increasingly has come to be recognized. Scholars such as Katō or Matsunami have repositioned Enni as a representative of Japanese Zen, a tradition they argue should be seen as distinct from its Chinese Chan forebear due to its entwinement with the established forms of Japanese Buddhism, notably the Tendai esoteric tradition.

The discovery of the Shinpukuji materials has simultaneously vindicated and undermined these efforts. On the one hand, these new materials detailing

73 Ozaki, "Segaki e ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu 2: Shingonshū to no hikaku wo tōshite."

74 However, even accounting for the latter's plurality Menzan's ritual in the *Kanrōmon* is not entirely identical with Shingon ghost feeding rituals, either.

the views of Enni and some of his disciples have underlined their unique and pivotal role in the history of Japanese Zen and indeed Japanese Buddhism in general. On the other hand, they have also critically undercut any endeavor to cast Enni as primarily a Zen practitioner. Enni certainly came to be seen as such retrospectively from early on, notably through the efforts of Kokan. However, as our discussion of Enni's tantric thought in relation to his three mechanisms and the practice of *dhāraṇī* has indicated, it is equally if not more justified to consider Enni a tantric practitioner interested in integrating Zen teachings into an esoterically grounded, unified, and universal Buddhist doctrinal framework. In short, Enni can be seen both as a tantric adept and as a Zen practitioner, but reduced to neither. Rather, it was this protean complexity of Enni's Buddhism that provided the ground upon which the relationship between esoteric and Zen teachings could be negotiated. Hence Nanpo could appropriate Enni's three mechanisms as *kōan*, whereas Musō and Gōhō each could claim *dhāraṇī* for their own tradition's thaumaturgic purposes. As I have repeatedly pointed out, it was the often-neglected Mujū who appears to have remained closest to Enni's own thought. The importance of the Shinpukuji materials lies in bringing about this change of perspective: By foregrounding Enni the *māntrin*, they allow us to look beyond Enni the Zen monk, and hence to re-discover a multifaceted and fluid medieval religious landscape that was, in a sense, in front of our noses all the time. As our investigations of the transformation of the body *maṇḍala* of the syllable *aṃ* into a Sōtō Zen esoteric transmission, as well as of the medieval ghost feeding liturgy have indicated, this fluidity remained characteristic of the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism well into the early modern period. Ironically, even Menzan's attempts at restoring Zen orthodoxy remain grounded in the very ambiguities they seek to eradicate.

This leaves us with the question of how best to approach the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism still unanswered. In one of the few scholarly treatments of the two traditions' relationship published in English, Zen historian William Bodiford comments as follows:

Rather than describing the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism (a description that necessarily renders religious judgments outside the realm of objective scholarship), this essay surveys a few historical examples to illustrate the many ways that Zen and esoteric Buddhism have and continue to overlap in Japan.<sup>75</sup>

75 Bodiford, "Zen and Esoteric Buddhism," 925.

According to Bodiford, the proper response to the complexity of the relationship between esoteric and Zen Buddhism is to bracket the problem as one that necessarily involves religious judgements and instead restrict ourselves to the objective indication of overlaps. The problem with this approach is twofold. First, much of what Bodiford identifies as overlaps between the two traditions on closer inspection turns out not to be such in any straightforward sense. For instance, Bodiford identifies both *dhāraṇī* and ghost feeding liturgies as tantric elements within Zen. As we have seen above, neither of these ritual elements is intrinsically tantric. Rather, they are examples of how certain ritual elements can be appropriated as belonging to either the esoteric or the Zen Buddhist tradition, and hence constitute the sites upon which the relationship between the two movements is negotiated.<sup>76</sup> To consider them overlaps or instances of monodirectional influence is to fall prey to a trick of perspective, as it were. And second, doctrinal structures such as Enni's three mechanisms clearly are significant to any consideration of the relationship between esoteric Buddhism and Zen. They are not, however, an overlap between the two traditions.

In the light of these findings, I would suggest that we reverse Bodiford's recommendation and focus on the discursive construction of the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism, that is to say on the plural discursive strategies by which this relationship is established, navigated, or undermined in concrete instances. Bodiford is certainly correct in asserting that scholars cannot render normative judgments on the two movements' relationship. Scholars have neither direct insight into the subject matter of these traditions, nor exhaustive definitions by which they might be compared like mathematical objects. However, if the implication of this is taken to be that this inability to render normative judgments also entails an inability to talk about the relationship between esoteric Buddhism and Zen in a scholarly manner at all, then this appears to be false, for the relationships between esoteric Buddhism and Zen, and indeed these very categories themselves, are discursively constructed. In other words, "esoteric Buddhism" and "Zen" are not simple, given facts or objects of inquiry. Nor are they transparent analytical categories available to guide our inquiry. On the contrary, their historical formation and transformation themselves are a proper object of scholarly interest, for "esoteric

76 Another element Bodiford considers a tantric presence within the (Sōtō) Zen tradition are initiation rituals, such as Dharma transmission. As I have shown elsewhere, these rituals are primarily related to Tendai precept initiations, not tantric unction. See Licha, "Dharma Transmission Rituals in Sōtō Zen Buddhism." Bodiford specifically singles out the mixing of bodily fluids, specifically blood, as a tantric ritual element. However, this does not appear to have been practiced in Japanese esoteric Buddhism.

Buddhism” and “Zen” arise but from the claims made for and about them, from the cycles of appropriation and sedimentation that constitute traditions. In consequence, there is no esoteric Buddhism and no Zen apart from specific practitioners construing a certain religious configuration as esoteric Buddhism or Zen in a specified manner. As this essay has shown, Japanese Buddhists have been perfectly if querulously loquacious in making such judgments and claims. These statements can be discussed, if not in terms of their objective truth, then in terms of their inner consistencies, textual dependencies, and doctrinal orientations.

Taking inspiration from Wittgenstein and his thought experiment on the duck-rabbit as a model of seeing-as, I would like to suggest that one, but certainly not the only, way in which we can approach the discursive construction of the relationship between, or differentiation of, Zen and esoteric Buddhism is to investigate how (certain) rituals, doctrines, texts, or even people came to be construed as, seen as, or appropriated as belonging to one tradition or the other. Each such act of seeing-as and appropriating-as creates a specific constellation, a specific relation of separation, between the two movements, which, as it becomes reproduced and finally sediments in the discourse, eventually contributes to the production of more stable, but still plural and contingent, identities.

The case studies presented in the present paper suggest that such discursive construction and appropriation can be undertaken in a plurality of ways. In Enni’s and Mujū’s thought we witnessed the careful doctrinal integration of Zen into a fundamentally tantric world based on the exegetic traditions of the *Dari jing* and the *Yuqi jing*.<sup>77</sup> This integration found its concrete expression in Enni’s teaching of the three mechanisms or Mujū’s meditations on *dhāraṇī*, which in turn drew on his teacher’s legacies. For later thinkers such as Kokan, Nenpo, Musō, or Gōhō these very same *topoi*, on the other hand, came to mark the separation of Zen from the esoteric traditions.

In the *Shaka go hangyō* we were confronted with an entirely different relationship between esoteric and Zen traditions in which a tantric body *maṇḍala* literally came to be seen-as esoteric Zen lore. Note, however, that in this case the relation between the two traditions was not based on systematic doctrinal integration, as in the case of Enni, but rather on an interplay of forgetting and

77 To anticipate a possible criticism, the Zen and tantric traditions as apparent in Enni of course themselves are the contingent product of processes of seeing-as, of appropriation and sedimentation. Neither Zen nor the tantric traditions exist apart from such processes, they exist simply by virtue of their repeated appropriations. Or to put it differently, what makes something “tantric” is not a specific content, but rather its successful appropriation as tantric.

appropriation. Such interplay hints at the fluidity of the boundaries between traditions during the late medieval and early modern periods. However, it is also important to note that the body *maṇḍala* of the syllable *aṃ*, when integrated into Sōtō esoteric lore, loses its tantric character and comes to be seen as a Zen teaching. In other words, although Zen and tantric traditions drew on a common or shared stock of motifs and practices, these are almost always encoded as either Zen or tantric teachings.

In Menzan, finally, we begin to approach a constellation of Zen and the tantric traditions that is close to that still prevailing today, both among sectarian thinkers and some scholars. According to Menzan, ritual elements such as the *dhāraṇī* and hand gestures of the ghost feeding liturgy cannot be seen but as tantric. Consequently, if the esoteric transmissions of his own lineage diverge from a supposed tantric orthodoxy, then they have to be corrected according to the latter. *Dhāraṇī* and ritual hand gestures, in other words, came to be seen as tantric elements contained within Zen.

As the above considerations indicate, the importance of the Shinpukuji materials far exceeds simply throwing new light on obscure and hitherto little studied corners of Japanese Buddhism. By revealing the complex religiosity of figures such as Enni they force us to fundamentally reconsider the way in which we have approached the relationship between Zen and esoteric Buddhism. We can now situate this problem in a genealogy of discursive construction and appropriation, or in a history of seeing-as; we finally learn to see the tantra duck as/or the Zen bunny.

### Abbreviations

- DNBZ = *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho*; Bussho kankōkai 1912–1922.  
 NDZ = *Nihon daizōkyō*; Nihon daizōkyō hensankai 1914–1922.  
 T = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*; Takakusu/Watanabe 1924–1932.

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