

PREFACE

James BASKIND

The aims of this annual symposium are to invite resident foreign scholars involved in Japanese studies to Nichibunken in order to share knowledge on their respective research topics, as well as to explore the challenges and problems of researching Japan from an international perspective. In March 2008 foreign and Japanese scholars of Buddhist studies and Japanese religion converged upon Nichibunken for an investigation into the state and future prospects of Buddhist studies in the 21st century. While presenting aspects concerning Buddhism's long and rich past in Japan, the participants considered the future possibilities of Buddhist studies, and the direction the field is moving. A few of the conclusions that emerged are briefly touched upon below.

1. It is well established that when speaking of a pan-Asian religion like Buddhism, it is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss a monolithic Buddhist discourse—we must speak of ‘Buddhisms.’ As much as this applies to Buddhist studies globally, it also does to Japan, with its rich and varied traditions of ritual, textual study, belief, and practice. The varieties of Buddhist expression in Japan attest not only to the adaptability of Buddhism, but also to the accommodating nature of Japanese culture.
2. The field of Buddhist studies has become sufficiently sophisticated that it cannot any longer be restrained by a single discipline, but it rather includes high-level scholarship across the genres of art history, anthropology, literature, religion, and modern history—both in the West as well as the East.

The papers covered a wide and diversified area. Topics included the little-known area of the role of *mondō* (conversations) in regard to Hōnen (Repp); the questioning of whether or not Buddhist studies requires a “Copernican Revolution” (Amstutz) which includes forays into cognitive psychology, tracing the cutting-edge of Buddhist studies. Also discussed was the discourse around authenticity in medieval Shingon Buddhism, examined by focusing on the efforts of monks who attempted to promote their lineages by created narratives (Ruppert). Source material (ephemera) in the study of Japanese religious culture was subjected to a fresh examination within the context of Buddhist pilgrimage, spurring a reconsideration

of this fundamental aspect of religion (Pye). Another presentation examined the perception regarding the Buddha by 16th and 17th century Jesuits (Girard). One of the most important developments in Buddhist studies is the ongoing digitization of Buddhist texts, lexicons, and dictionaries. The presentation on the DBB (Digital Dictionary of Buddhism) provided an in-depth look at the creation and use of this invaluable resource. Technology is playing an ever-larger role across the humanities, and Charles Muller's work represents one of the pioneering efforts that continues to expand and develop possibilities in the field. Also included was the representation of Qing Buddhism as seen in Shanghai pictorials (Augustine). This study revealed the critical stance of certain journalists toward the Buddhist sangha, showing a perspective that has not been emphasized in scholarship to date. The modern perspective was presented by Makoto Hayashi, who discussed the prohibition against religious education and the study of Buddhism in the Meiji era. Another presentation considered Buddhist republican thought and institutions (Rambelli), which traced some of these practices back to Indian Buddhism, highlighting the continuity of Japanese Buddhism with its Indian predecessor. The artistic and ritualistic side of Buddhist studies was highlighted in two presentations, one of which discussed the role of certain Fujiwara courtiers in the production of Shingon iconography during the Insei period (Jamentz), and the other looked at imperial ascension rites and time and space in medieval myths (Matsumoto). The last paper in the volume (Baskind) looks at the discourse of Zen and Pure Land in the early modern period that centered around the Ōbaku school, and how this set the stage for the subsequent development of this thought.

On the occasion of the publication of this volume, we would like to express our gratitude to the speakers, commentators, and administrators who helped make this symposium as enjoyable as it was interesting.