

Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies

ISSN 1710-8268

<https://thecjbs.org/>

Number 14, 2019

Yuima-e 維摩會 in Sixteenth-Century Japan
Recently Acquired Manuscript Now Available in
McGill's Rare Books and Special Collections

Jingjing Li

McGill University

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format, with the exception of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author.

Yuima-e 維摩會 in Sixteenth-Century Japan Recently Acquired Manuscript Now Available in McGill's Rare Books and Special Collections

Jingjing Li
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

This March, a sixteenth-century Japanese manuscript arrived in the Rare Books and Special Collections room of McGill's McLennan Library. The text, which dates back to 1539, documents the Yuima-e 維摩會, a popular ritual conducted among monks in the School of Hossō 法相. On March 8, Prof. Mikaël Bauer, Professor of Japanese Religions, and graduate students from McGill's School of Religious Studies went to view this ancient text. The addition of this manuscript to the collection of rare books at McGill will serve as a resource for future research. Librarians will digitize the text, to preserve the delicate manuscript and make it accessible to the general public.

Prof. Bauer described to the students the fascinating story of how McGill came to acquire this old text. Prior to the Meiji Restoration, these texts were revered in monasteries for centuries. Upon embarking on its modernization, the Japanese government separated Shinto from Buddhism, for the purpose of championing Shinto as its state religion. At the time when Buddhism was persecuted, many preserved texts were sold to private collectors. Last year, after seeing this manuscript in an online

auction, Prof. Bauer contacted the library of McGill University immediately, to inquire if the university would be interested in making a bid. In recognition and appreciation of the text's research value, librarians of the Rare Book collection supported the cause, only to be informed by the auction house in Japan that they would not consider bids made by unlicensed participants. Since McGill did not have the required licence, it was not eligible to participate in the auction. Not being discouraged in the least, the librarians soon contacted a third party in New York City who had the licence and placed the bid on McGill's behalf. Eventually, this sixteenth-century Japanese manuscript, which witnessed the history of Buddhism in Japan from ancient times to the present, made its way to the other side of the Pacific Ocean, travelling through three countries and finding its new home in the city of Montréal.

This text documents several debate sessions during the Yuima-e 維摩會 in Kōfokuji 興福寺. Buddhist monks participated in these debates as part of their monastic training. The question-and-answer sessions would enhance and refine their understanding of Yogācāra doctrine concerning the nature of consciousness. This particular text was written by a Hossō monk Eishun, in homage to *The Mahāyāna Dharma Garden and the Forest of Meaning* (Daijō hōon girinjō 大乘法苑義林章) composed by Kuiji 窺基 (632-682), the first patriarch of the Hossō school. When reading the manuscript, Prof. Bauer and graduate students were surprised to discover that the text, once being composed, was also used for chanting. Despite damage caused by bookworms, phonetic symbols and markers could still be seen on the pages.

For a long time, the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, known as the Hossō School in the Japanese context, has been interpreted as a philosophy of consciousness. This master narrative, however, has flattened out discussions concerning the ritual aspect of Yogācāra Buddhism. As suggested by this recently acquired text, for Yogācāra followers, the doc-

trine of consciousness-only not only served as their doctrinal philosophy, but also set the stage for clerics to conduct a wide range of rituals from debating to chanting. It is the expectation of Prof. Bauer that the newly acquired manuscript will provide researchers with another novel perspective from which to understand Yogācāra Buddhism in Japan.