Magic or Miracle? Rainmaking Ritual in Medieval Japanese Buddhism from a Comparative Perspective[1]

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In facing natural disasters or social crises, Buddhism has never been averse to using the power of ritual. By discussing incidents surrounding a rainmaking ritual conducted in response to severe drought, this paper explores the source of ritual power as conceptualized and practiced in medieval Japanese Buddhist tradition, and as compared alongside Christian rain miracles. A well-preserved, 13th-century rainmaking ritual map, Shinsenen Shōukyō Hōdōjōzu was commissioned and commented upon by Eison, a Buddhist master trained in Buddhist esoteric tradition whose career focused on the study and practice of the Vinaya and precepts.[2] As early Buddhist hagiographies have shown, it is generally accepted that esoteric masters are endowed with certain supernatural powers, a power seen in their conducting of efficacious ritual. However, the attribution of such power—whether to the ritualist or to the ritual itself—is rather ambiguous. By focusing on the historical figure of Eison, I examine the potential connection between ritual efficacy and the ritualist's status in the observation of monastic precepts. The illustrations in the ritual map imply the ritual master's unique vision which sees a virtuous monastic body as the precondition for efficacy in esoteric ritual. The practice of rainmaking ritual demonstrates how the ethical teaching of monastic codes and esotericism can mutually reinforce each other in a most tangible and verifiable way. The virtuous body is the medium connected to the realm of the dragon in charge of weather, and ritual efficacy in turn requires the cultivation of a virtuous monastic order. This vision, and the narratives of rainmaking ritual surrounding Eison, is distinctive in Buddhism; and are comparable to the prayer for rain and the narratives of rain miracles related to saints such as Tertullian, Eusebius, and the miracle of Moses in Christian literature. In both traditions, the vulnerability brought out by the uncertainties of natural disaster provides an opportunity to turn to divine intervention and to attend to self-realization and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: rainmaking ritual, esoteric Buddhism, precepts, Japanese Buddhism, Christian rain miracle

Where is ritual's efficacy located? Is it the intrinsic supernatural power of the ritualist that guarantees the intervention of the divine, or the accurate execution of the ritual itself? When a ritual does not yield the expected result, what kind of adjustment should be applied? And, from the perspective of narratology, why do we need narrative of a failed ritual along with the record of a successful one? This paper explores the source of ritual power as conceptualized and

[1] This paper is derived from a presentation I gave at the conference "Engaging Particularities XVIII" at Boston College, March 21–22, 2021. I must thank Professor Francis Xavier Clooney who initially encouraged me to develop a comparative angle with Christianity. I appreciate Professor Murakami Akiya and Professor Matsuo Kenji for helping me identify some of the key transcriptions in the ritual map. Two anonymous reviewers provided thoughtful comments and numerous detailed suggestions, which prompted me to revise the paper to its current shape. I am responsible for any remaining mistakes in the paper.

[2] The compound term 戒律 (Chi, *jielü*, Jpn. *kairitsu*), "precepts and the Vinaya" is widely used in East Asian Buddhist literature. Any discussion about monastic codes and monastic vow is generally referred to by this term, suggesting the intrinsic connectedness of the two concepts. In this paper, I continue to treat the term as a compound, unless it is necessary to make a distinction between the two.

practiced in medieval Japanese Buddhist tradition and examines it alongside Christian rain miracle narratives.

Abe Masao argues that "interreligious dialogue may adequately and effectively take place if both sides of the dialogue try to grasp the other side's spirituality from within, without imposing [their] own ontological and axiological categories."[3] The explanation regarding rebirth in different realms in terms of karmic retribution and the intricate esoteric rainmaking ritual I discuss in this paper would make little sense in the context of Christianity. Nonetheless, I wish to examine the similarities and differences in the discursive strategies of different traditions, in the hope that these examples speak to and shed new light on how we should further the understanding of magic or miracle derived from rainmaking practices; especially since the appearance of similar narrative indicates striking commonalities across the boundaries of religious traditions.

Before Eison 叡尊 (1201–80) reached the age of thirty-four, esotericism (Jpn. *mikkyō*, or Shingon Buddhism in this context) played a central role in his monkhood. In examining Eison's biographical sources, it becomes clear that Eison's early training and experience as an esoteric monk triggered his concern about the lack of respect for the precepts, and eventually led him to the path of the Vinaya and precepts revival movement along with fellow monks.[4] However, this does not mean that esotericism ceased to be a pivotal part. Below I will analyze an esoteric rainmaking ritual map, commissioned and commented upon by Eison in 1279, when he was seventy-nine years old. From a close reading of this map, we can see how he conceived of the relationship between esotericism and the practice of the Vinaya.

Shinsenen shōukyōhō dōjōzu 神泉苑請雨経法道場図[5] (Rainmaking Sūtra Ritual Map in Shinsenen, hereafter *Dōjōzu*) depicts a rainmaking ritual that took place in Shinsenen pond in

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[3] Abe Masao and Steven Heine, "Beyond Buddhism and Christianity." In *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue: Part One of a Two-volume Sequel to Zen and Western Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 128.

[4] Eison remains one of the best studied figures in Japanese Buddhism, due to his wide influence on Kamakura Buddhism and the abundance of sources related to him, including biographical texts, doctrinal commentaries, personal epistles, commissioned objects of art history, architecture, and other material culture. Among numerous scholars who have worked on Eison, Hosokawa Ryōichi 細川涼一has edited and annotated two central pieces, *Kanjin gakushōki: saidaiji eison no jiden*感身学正記: 西大寺叡尊の自伝 (Tōkyō : Heibonsha, 1999) and *Kantō ōkanki* 関東往還記 (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2011); Matsuo Kenji 松尾剛次has devoted many studies to Eison and his communities from a socio-historical perspective, see *Chūsei eison kyōdan no zenkokuteki tenkai* 中世叡尊教団の全国的展開 (Kyōto: Hōzōkan, 2017), *Kamakura shin bukkyōron to Eison kyōdan* (Kyōto: Hōzōkan, 2019), *Chūsei risshū to shi no bunka* 中世律宗と死の文化 (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2010), and *Eizon, Ninshō: Jikai no seija*叡尊・忍性: 持戒の聖者 (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2004); Eison is the central figure in David Quinter's monograph *From outcasts to emperors: Shingon Ritsu and the Mañjuśrī cult in medieval Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), as well as multiple articles such as "Localizing Strategies: Eison and the Shōtoku Taishi Cult," *Monumenta nipponica,* 2014, 69 (2), 153–98, and Paul Groner has multiple papers on Eison's Vinaya and precepts thinking and activities, see "Tradition and Innovation: Eison's Self-Ordinations and the Establishment of New Orders of Buddhist Practitioners." In *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 210–35, "Reflections on the Movement to Revive the Vinaya: with a focus on Eison's Chōmonshū," *Nihon bukkyō no tenkai to sono zōkei* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2020), 67–91, and "Icons and relics in Eison's religious activities." In *Living images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 114–50.

[5] The ritual map is currently preserved in the Nara National Museum. Since a seal on the map's back reads "*Saidaiji daijiin*" 西大寺大慈院 most likely it originally has belonged to Saidaiji, Eison's base monastery. The map may have

Kyoto.[6] *Dōjōzu* is drawn on a piece of thin mulberry paper measuring 139.3*86.3CM, in which Shinsenen pond is illustrated on the middle-right hand side of the map in ultramarine blue. The waves, rock and island in the pond demonstrate the *yamato-e* style of painting.[7] The main altar is shown on the left side of the pond of Shinsenen, surrounded by thirteen ritual pillars also colored in ultramarine blue, seen through a bird's eye view. The boundaries of the ritual are marked in a rectangle, protecting the ritual realm from external impurity. On the upper right-hand side there are thirteen larger ritual pillars shown at eye level, each with a dragon-shaped pillar and Chinese character (indicating Sanskrit seed letters in *siddham*) on the side.

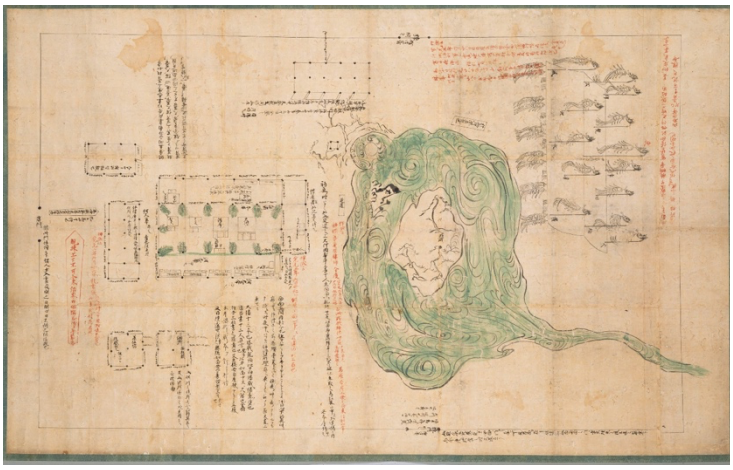

Illustration 1: Rainmaking Sūtra Ritual Map in Shinsenen (*Shinsenen shōukyōhō dōjōzu* 神泉苑請雨経法道場図) commissioned and commented upon by Eison, 1279, Nara National Museum.

remained in Saidaiji after Eison's commission until it fell into the hands of a private collector during the Meiji period. The general background of the map comes from the information provided by http://www.narahaku.go.jp/collection/1151-0.html and Horiike Shunpō's *堀池春峰* "*Eison shosha* no *Shinsenen zu ni tsuite*" 叡尊書写の神泉苑図について. In *Nanto Bukkyō shi no kenkyū* (Kyōto: Hōzōkan, 1982), 492–509.

[6] Studies of note include Brian O. Ruppert, "Buddhist Rainmaking in Early Japan: The Dragon King and the Ritual Careers of Esoteric Monks," *History of Religions*, 2002, 42(2), 143-174; Steven Trenson, "Une analyse critique de l'histoire du Shōukyōhō et du 'Kujakukyōhō': rites ésotériques de la pluie dans le japon de l'époque de Heian," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 2002, 13(1), 455-95 and Sherry Fowler's "In Search of Dragon: Mt. Murō's Sacred Topography," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1997, 24(1/2), 145–61.

Much progress has been made in the study of Tang esotericism including primary texts, manuscripts in multiple languages, rituals, and the transmission of tantric masters, all of which are apparently related to the practice in Japan. Due to the limited scope of the current paper, I make a simplistic restriction here to the primary sources in Japan. For Tang esotericism and religions related to rainmaking ritual, see Capitanio, Joshua, "*Dragon Kings and Thunder Gods: Rainmaking, Magic, and Ritual in Medieval Chinese religion*." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 2008; Charles D. Orzech, Henrik Hjort Sorensen, and Richard Karl Payne. eds. "Vajrabodhi (671-741)" *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 345-350, Michael Loewe, "The Cult of the Dragon and the Invocation for Rain." In *Chinese Ideas about Nature and Society: Studies in Honour of Derk Bodde* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1987), 195–213.Loewe, Michael. 1987.

Several ritual maps bearing similar titles are found in esoteric Buddhist related monasteries' collections such as Tōji, Ninnaji, and Kōsanji dated to Kamakura period. See Uchita Keiichi's examinations of nine rain ritual maps in various collections (2007, 2009). The earliest existing ritual map comes from Ninnaji collection dated 1183 as a reproduction of the ritual performed in 1117. A Tōji (Kanchiin) copy made in 1393 was the rainmaking ritual map originally used by Sengaku 仙覚 in 1273. The constant reproduction of the rainmaking ritual map previously used within esoteric monasteries testifies to its continued importance in the inheritance of the ritual.

[7] *Yamato-e* style, literally "Japanese style," is a painting style contrasting with but also inspired by the *kara-e* style, the imported painting style from Tang China. Popularized in the late Heian period and Kamakura period, *yamato-e* is seen in Japanese picture scrolls and characterized by the use of thick, bright colors, large wisps of clouds separating illustrations, and adaptation of Chinese landscape ink painting.

Eison's signature on the map is authenticated by comparison with samples of his handwriting. The first collections of illustrations were written in black ink, and it appears that illustrations in red ink were added later for supplementary clarification. In his commentary on *Dōjōzu*, Eison summarized the content of the ritual and referred the current map as a copy of a previous map used by Hōin 法印 (n.d.) from Tōji and by Jitsugen 実賢 (1176–1249) from Daigoji, at the time when a severe drought hit the Kyōto area in 1244. Rainmaking ritual map, just like a text, is not a standalone production, but should be conceived of as one part among a series of ritual related materials—including ritual manuals, ritual altar maps, personal notes, diaries, oral transmissions, mandala maps, etc.—that enable the performance of the rainmaking ritual. The fact that Shingon monasteries such as Kōsanji, Ninnaji, and Tōji all preserve large collections of rainmaking ritual related sūtras, manuscripts, spells, illustrations, and material objects, testifies to the popularity of rainmaking ritual in the esoteric tradition in medieval Japan.[8] The rainmaking ritual map, together with ritual related materials, has been duplicated, preserved, and placed in constant use to meet the needs of routinized rainmaking ritual performances.

Shinsenen was an imperial park for social gatherings that was first established at the end of the eighth century. It is remembered in Japanese Buddhist history as the site of Kūkai's 空海 (774-835) successful rainmaking ritual, performed when he was still in the process of establishing Shingon Buddhism after his return from China. According to Jōjin 成尋 (1101-81), Kūkai inherited the esoteric rainmaking ritual from his Chinese master Huiguo 惠果 (746-805).[9] Representing Tōji, Kūkai won the rainmaking competition over Shubin 守敏 (n.d.), who came from Saiji monastery in 828. *Taiheiki* 太平記, a fourteenth century historical literary work, includes a legendary narrative on Kūkai's victory.[10] *Taiheiki* attributed the ritual efficacy to the power of relics worshipped inside the palace and the abhiṣeka ritual performed by inviting a dragon king called Zannyo Ryūō 善女龍王. A femalized deity who appeared from 12th century narratives onward,[11] Zannyo Ryūō was originally called Zannyo Ryūō善如龍王 in earlier sources such as in Kūkai's biographical text of *Goyuigō nijūgo kashō*.[12] Since the two terms are homophones, the transformation of the gender of the deity is convenient. The dragon king came all the way from the snowy area of Northern India to the ritual space through Kūkai's spiritual

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[8] For the Kōsanji collection see *Kōzanji kyōzō komokuroku* 高山寺經藏古目錄, *Kōzanji tenseki bunsho sōgō chōsadan* 高山寺典籍文書綜合調查團. ed. (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1985); Ninnaji's collection is found in *Ninnaji shiryō. Mokuroku hen (kō). Ninnaji gokyōzō shōgyō mokuroku kō* 仁和寺史料. 目錄編[稿]. 仁和寺御経蔵聖教目錄稿, Nara kokuritsu bunkazai kenkyūsho 奈良国立文化財研究所. ed. (Nara: Nara Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, 1998); Tōji collection is found in *Tōji kanchiin kongozō seikyō mokuroku* 東寺觀智院金剛蔵聖教目録, Kyōtofuritsu sōgō shiryokan 京都府立総合資料館. ed. (Kyōto: Kyōtofu kyōiku iinkai, 1975).

[9] *San Tendai godaisan ki* 參天台五台山記, B32.174.399c19–21.

[10] "*Shinsenen no ji* " 神泉苑の事. In Yamashita Hiroaki 山下宏明. ed. *Taiheiki* 太平記 (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 1980), vol.2, 233–40. The same narrative, with much less elaborate details, is also found in earlier historical works such as *Kojidan* 古事談and Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬. *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釋書. BZ, vol.101, 173, 177.

[11] Examples of the dragon king as a noble lady are found in the narrative of Keien 慶円in "*Miwa shōnin gyōjōshō*" 三輪上人行状抄. ST, vol.2, 21–22 and in *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書. BZ.101,150.

[12] See "*Goyuigō nijūgo kashō* " 御遺告(二十五箇条). In *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai zenshū* 弘法大師著作全集 (Tōkyō: Chikumashobō, 1983), vol.8, 44.

power.[13] Ever since Kūkai's victory, the dragon king is reported to have remained in the pond later called Shinsenen. Accordingly, the location of the dragon king is identified on the ritual map as the center of the pond labelled "the place of that" (Jpn. *kano tokoto* 彼所). Although the map does not depict the dragon in a visible form, the rainmaking ritual is organized to plead for the assistance of this dragon king.

Before analyzing our ritual map, it is necessary to briefly review the textual sources related to the rainmaking ritual, especially in the esoteric Buddhist tradition. As Péter-Dániel Szántó observes, there are two kinds of texts related to Buddhist esoteric ritual in Sanskrit. He makes the distinction between scripture (Skt. *upāyikā*, *upaikā*) and manuals (Skt. *vidhi, vidhāna*), the former being an outline of a ritual procedure, and the latter spelling out the procedure in greater detail.[14] These ritual texts, once translated or incorporated into Chinese written texts, became the foundational texts for esoteric Buddhism in East Asia. In the context of East Asian Buddhism, and the rainmaking ritual in particular, the corresponding terms are altar procedure (Chi. *tanfa* 壇法) and sūtra (which contains explanatory texts in greater detail).[15] I tend to reserve the term "scripture" for a broader reference to Buddhist texts; thus, I will keep the term "altar procedure" as a direct translation, while recognizing that the concept is no different from Szántó's definition. The reason for keeping the term "sūtra" rather than the general category of "ritual manual," is that the esoteric texts in Chinese maintain the format of a Buddhist sūtra, including the term "sūtra" in the title, the opening phrase "Thus have I heard," and a complete narrative frame of a Buddhist sūtra.[16]

The rainmaking ritual (Skt. *varṣāpaṇa*) is a civil esoteric ritual, which is usually performed upon request, normally from a layperson of high social status. This ritual has been in high demand throughout East Asian history, understandably in agrarian societies. Other than the abhiṣeka text used by Kūkai, there are two esoteric texts directly related to the rainmaking ritual readily available in East Asia. They are *(Mahā) Meghasūtra* (*Dayunlun qingyujing* 大雲輪請雨經, T.19.989), and *Mahamāyūrīvidyarājñīsūtra* (*Fomu dakongque mingwang jing* 佛母大孔雀明王經, T.19.982, hereafter *Vidyarājñīsūtra*). *Meghasūtra* has been translated three times into Chinese. Two earlier version are by Narêndrayaśas 那連提耶舍 (517–89) and Jñānayaśas 闍那耶舍 (active 564–72) in the sixth century.[17] Yet, the most popular is that translated by Amoghavajra 不空金剛 (705–74), one of the three most celebrated esoteric masters who traveled to Tang China in the eighth century. The *Meghasūtra* is accompanied by a stand-alone altar procedure text entitled *Dayunjing qiyutanfa* 大雲經祈雨壇法 (T.19.990), translated by Amoghavajra. *Vidyarājñīsūtra* is also

[13] The esoteric text related to this deity, *Ruyibaozhu zhuanlun mimixianshenchengfo jinglun zhouwangjing* 如意寶珠轉輪祕密現身成佛金輪呪王經, T.19.961. The text is translated by Amoghavajra, and dedicated the power to *cintāmaṇi*, the wish fulfilling gem. The passage on Zannyo Ryūō in this text is not related to the rainmaking ritual. However, Kūkai resorted to the power of this deity in his rainmaking ritual.

[14] Péter-Dániel Szántó, "Ritual Texts: South Asia." *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), vol.1, 655-661.

[15] Other scholars of this text may translate it as "ritual manual" or "manual."

[16] Ibid. Szántó (2015) points out that most Buddhist esoteric ritual manuals do have an author, which indicates the authorship of a human being rather than divine revelation.

[17] Narêndrayaśas' translation is *Dayunlun qingyu jing* 大雲輪請雨經, T.19.991. Jñānayaśas' translation is *Dadangdeng dayunjing qingyupin chapter 64* 大方等大雲經請雨品第六十四. T.19.992–93.

translated by Amoghavajra and comes with an altar procedure text called *Foshuo dakongque mingwang huaxiang tanchang yigui* 佛説大孔雀明王畫像壇場儀軌 (T.19.983A). Both were included in the set of Buddhist texts that Kūkai brought back to Japan after his study in China.[18] The major difference between these two esoteric texts is that the *Meghasūtra* only focuses on weather rituals of rainmaking, while *Vidyarājñīsūtra* has much wider applications such as suppressing warfare, disease, famine and so on. Both sūtras contain a significant number of transliterations of Sanskrit spells, which are central portions of the esoteric formula of ritual. As we see in Kūkai's narrative, *Meghasūtra* has been associated with esoteric rainmaking ritual in Shinsenen.[19] By the time of the creation of the ritual map in the thirteenth century, the rain ritual in Shinsenen had been often registered under esoteric masters based on *Meghasūtra*.

As for what is shown in *Dōjōzu,* the ritual center is arranged around a fire altar (Skt. *homa*, Jpn. 護摩). On the northern side of the fire altar hangs a portrait of Mahāmāyūrī-vidya-rājñī (Jpn. *Daikujaku Myōō* 大孔雀明王, the great peacock king of knowledge, often shown in the form of a peacock-riding bodhisattva).[20] Steven Trenson has argued that before 1082 *Vidyarājñīsūtra* was secondary to *Meghasūtra* and was seldom used in rainmaking ritual in Shinsenen, until Daigoji established the rainmaking ritual based on *Vidyarājñīsūtra*. It is highly possible that the installation of the Mahāmāyūrī-vidya-rājñī portrait is a hallmark element initialed in Kamakura period and merged in Kūkai's earlier ritual based on *Meghasūtra.* Next to the portrait of Mahāmāyūrī-vidya-rājñī, a portrait of Kūkai revoking the victorious precedent ritual, is also placed in the center of the ritual space. Incorporating these two portraits, *Dōjōzu* juxtaposes a visualization of the prescription of the esoteric ritual manuals with the salient localization of the esoteric tradition in the history of Shinsenen, making the ritual space a meaningful space for hosting rainmaking ritual in the esoteric tradition.

The historic rainmaking ritual referred to in *Dōjōzu* was performed to relieve a drought in 1244. In the beginning, the ritual was hosted by Nine Sōjō (Archbishop) 仁慧僧正, the new abbot of Tōji, on June 13th.[21] However, after eleven days of continuously performing the rainmaking ritual there was still not a single sign of rain. On June 26th the sūtra chanting group requested that the ritual be extended for the third time, which was unprecedented. This received harsh criticism in *Heikoki* 平戸記, the historical literary work: the limit for the rain ritual given by the Kūkai was nine days, but seven days was the common limit, and it was unheard of to ask for such an extension; in such a case, even if there were rain, it would not be considered the effect of the ritual.[22]

At this critical point, under considerable pressure, sixty-eight-year-old Jitsugen, the owner of the original ritual map, was summoned to take Nine Sōjō's place and perform the ritual.

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[18] See the catalog of Kūkai's imported texts from China, *Go shōrai mokuroku* 御請來目錄, T.55.2161. *Meghasūtra* also appears in the catalogue of imported Buddhist scriptures by Tendai monk Ennin 円仁, see T.55.2167.
[19] "*Shinsenen no ji* 神泉苑の事." *Taiheiki* 太平記 (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 1980), vol.2, 239.
[20] Steven Trenson, *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 2002, 13(1): 455-95.
[21] *Heikoki. Shiryō taisei* 史料大成, edited by Sasagawa, Taneo, and Tarō. Yano (Tōkyō: Naigai Shoseki, 1934), vol.24, 306.
[22] *Heikoki. Shiryō taisei*, vol.24, 310.

Jitsugen was the current abbot (Jpn. *zasu* 座主) of the Shingon monastery Daigoji and had successful experiences in the past. Daigoji has a long tradition of conducting the rainmaking ritual. For instance, the previous abbot Shōgen 勝賢 (1138-96) wrote an entry entitled *Kiuhōnikki* 祈雨法日記 in 1191 on how to perform the rainmaking ritual.[23] Another related text from a slightly later period is Jōken's 成賢 (1162–1231) *Kiunikki* 祈雨日記. Jōken recorded successful rainmaking rituals in Japanese history focusing on Shinsenen and emphasizing the use of esoteric texts such as *Meghasūtra* and *Abhiṣekasūtra.* [24] Coming from the same monastery, Jitsugen would have had access to Shōgen's writing and may well have been trained to perform the same rain ritual. According to *Kiuhōnikki*, a rainmaking ritual was prescribed for the drought in May of 1191, and the ritual itself followed the ritual manuscript of *Āryamahavidyarājñīsūtra,* discussed in the previous section.

Based on *Kiuhōnikki* and *Kiunikki*, performing the rainmaking ritual is the specialty of esoteric ritual masters. Understandably, these two records put more emphasize on predominant successful attempts than occasionally failed ones. This calls our attention to an instance where *Dōjōzu* referred to the first conducted ritual as a failure. This abnormal event and what happened subsequently provide clues to why Eison, after thirty-five years of this specific ritual was conducted, commissioned a copy of the ritual map, and provided comments. According to Uchida Keiichi, Eison's commission of the ritual map was a response to a drought occurred in that same year.[25] Beyond the apparent relevance of this fact, my further hypothesis is that Eison's intentional choice to reproduce the map of the 1240 ritual demonstrates his approach of linking Vinaya practice with the efficaciousness of esoteric ritual, as part of his grand agenda to revive the teaching of the Vinaya within the esoteric tradition.

It must be clarified immediately that the attributed reasons for the ritual efficacy are not singular, but rather a joint effort with multiple causes and conditions. As just mentioned, Kūkai's ritual was successful due to his meditative power which enabled him to find the dragon king in a pond in the snowy north, and to the sincere pleading and presentation of all kinds of offerings in the narrative of *Taiheiki*, while in other cases the performance of the abhiṣeka ritual before the rainmaking ritual enhanced the esoteric power, as illustrated in *Goyuigō*.

For Eison's recount, he commented that after the switch to Jitsugen, the ritual was instantly efficacious. As the rain lasted for a full whole day, a gathering was hosted in the court the next day, in which everyone shed tears of gratitude.[26] As a result, Jitsugen's disciple Shōzon 勝尊 (n.d.) was promoted directly from the position of Gon no Daisōzu (Associate Major Bishop)

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[23] The manuscript is currently preserved in Tokyo National Museum, as an Important Cultural Property, no. B-1918.

[24] The manuscript written in *kobun* is preserved in the library of the Imperial Household Agency in Japan. For the record of *Meghasūtra*, see page 9 of the manuscript of the Imperial Household Agency library. Another manuscript, written in *kuzushiji,* is preserved in the National Institute of Japanese Literature.

[25] Uchita Keiichi. "*Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukanzō shinsenen shōukyōhō dōjōzu ni suite*" 奈良国立博物館蔵神泉苑請雨経法道場図について. *Kairitsu bunka kenkyū*, 2007(3): 48–67, and 2009. "*Kōsanji kyūzō hon shinsenen shōukyōhō dōjōzu ni suite*" 高山寺旧蔵本神泉苑請雨経法道場図について. *Shōwa joshi daigaku bunkashi kenkyū* 昭和女子大学文化史研究, 2009(12): 44-65.

[26] *Heikoki*. *Shiryō taisei*. vol.24, 310–11.

権大僧都to Gon no Daisōjō (Associate Major Archbishop) 権大僧正, the same position held by the failed Tōji abbot. There is no clear evidence to indicate what exact role Shōzon played in the ritual. Given his immediate promotion after the ritual, it is safe to assume that Shōzon's contribution was not minimal. In the commentary in the very center of the map, Eison wrote in red ink:

> The note says: As worship of god: Associate Preceptor (*Go no Risshi*) Sonkō,[27] at this time, the second year of Kangen, June 26th, 1244, the beginning time [of the rainmaking ritual]. In this place, performed the god offering. Ten fascicles were recited, without obtaining [the desired results], and [then] permitted him [*Go no Risshi*] to sit in the upper position, facing east, and the ritual proceeded as usual.
>
> 押紙云：神供尊庚(?)権律師今度寛元二年六月廿六日始行之時於此所般神供以養十巻用之不得意開之為座居其上儀之向東法則如常。

This short message contains significant clues for deciphering Eison's assumption of the cause of ritual efficacy. The position of associate preceptor is the lowest rank in Buddhist ecclesiastics, designating one in charge of the daily disciplinary operation of the monastery who guarantees everything goes according to the prescription of the Vinaya and the local monastic regulations. Here Eison went out of the way to emphasize the role played by the *Go no Risshi*, suggesting a Vinaya master who supposedly observes the Vinaya and precepts. Eison added in small characters that the chanting of the sūtra did not yield the desired result at first. It was only when the Vinaya master was permitted to sit in the upper position of the chanting group that the ritual went on as normal, indicating the rain ritual efficacy of bringing rain. It is imaginable that a minor clergy should not take the central position in the ritual.

We shall compare this with other rainmaking ritual maps to further flesh out the possible interpretation of Eison's commentary. In another ritual map of *Shinsenen shōukyōhō shizu dōjōzu* 神泉苑請雨経法指図道場図,[28] under the same note, *jinku* 神供 (worship of god), it is written: In the illustrated place, worship [the dragon king] in the south direction; the ritual proceeds as usual (Transcribed by Matsumoto Ikuyo)[29] 於件処南向供之作法如常. This map illustrates a rigid hierarchy of ritual specialists—marked by their distinctive kinds of monastic robe and mattress, in which Vinaya monks are at the bottom.[30] We may infer that Eison's inserted comment is an unusual incident, by which Eison made his comment to tie the efficacy of the rainmaking ritual to the Vinaya-observing monk who possessed enough merit to empower it.

The 1244 rainmaking ritual echoes the initial competition between Kūkai and Shubin, while differing in significant way. Kūkai saw his successful execution of the rainmaking ritual in Shinsenen as a symbolic event establishing the authority of the newly imported esoteric

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[27] To my best knowledge, the name of Sonkō does not show up in any other known sources from this period.
[28] This ritual map is preserved in Fujii ekan bunko, dated 1393.
[29] Matsumoto Ikuyo 松本郁代, "*Kamakura jidai no shinsenen shōukyōhō shizu: zaidan hōjin fujii eikan bunko shozō shinsenen shōukyōhō dōjōzu no shōkai* " 鎌倉時代神泉苑請雨経法指図: 財団法人藤井永観文庫所蔵「神泉苑請雨経法道場図」の紹介. *Art Research*, 2005(5): 134–119.
[30] Matsumoto Ikuyo, 2005, 129, 125.

Buddhism.[31] Just as Kūkai achieved his decisive success in Shinsenen more than 400 years earlier, Eison may have seen the similarity with Jitsugen and his group as fervent observers of the Vinaya and precepts. Considering that Eison, Jitsugen, and Shōson are contemporaries, it is highly possible that they had encountered one another and even been acquainted; Eison's designation of Shōson as a Vinaya master may be based on firsthand information.

Eison's note emphasis on precepts observation as a precondition for conducting esoteric ritual finds support in the textual tradition of esoteric Buddhism. The prescription found in the altar procedure of the *Meghasūtra* says,

> If the ritual expert praying for rain is an ordained monk, he should be fully equipped with Vinaya prescribed etiquette; if the person is a layman, that person should receive the eight precepts. 祈雨之人若是出家苾芻。應具律儀。若俗士應受八戒。[32]

To strengthen the qualifications from the perspective of precepts, the sūtra further adds:

> If there are bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇī [performing the rainmaking ritual], they must keep the precepts pure. If they committed violations of *naiḥsargika-pāyattikāḥ* (rules of forfeiture of the superfluous possessions of a monk or nun) and *śaikṣā* (bad manners to be corrected through training), they must have already sincerely repented for seven days and nights. If there are laypersons [performing the rainmaking ritual], they must have received the *aṣṭâṅga-samanvāgatôpavāsa* every day for seven days and nights. Up until the day of the conducting of the rainmaking ritual, everyone should be pure and devoid of arrogance. 若有比丘及比丘尼必須戒行本來清淨。若曾違犯尼薩耆罪乃至眾學。皆須已前七日七夜殷重懺悔。若在俗人亦須於前七日七夜日。別須受八關齋戒。乃至請雨行道之日。悉須清淨無得懈慢。[33]

This passage requires some interpretation. The two violations of precepts for monastics, namely *naiḥsargika-pāyattikāḥ* and *śaikṣā*, are the most minor offences among the 250 or so rules in the *prātimokṣa* precepts. The passage indicates that if one had committed any more serious offences, one would be considered impure in behavior and would be denied the qualifications for participating in the rain ritual. Even for these minor offenses, the ritual requires an intensive form of repentance. The repentance of seven days and nights is not commonly used for minor offences. This shows an exceptional concern with ethical status in ritual space. The requirement of purification also extends to everyday behavior such as keeping a strict vegetarian diet and personal hygiene.[34] This passage also concentrates on the idea of purity within the ritual space. In *Dōjōzu*, the ritual space is enclosed by boundaries to prevent interruptions by impure people, meaning those who do not observe proper precepts. As for laypersons, a noticeable point is the prescription that they should receive the *aṣṭâṅga-samanvāgatôpavāsa* (Jpn. *hachikansaikai* 八關齋戒, eight precepts of a one-day vow holder) for seven continuous days before the ritual. These are the highest precepts that a layperson may temporarily receive. The strong connection between one's

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[31] "*Daijyōkan fuan hei Yuigō*" 太政官符案并遺告. In *Kōbō daishi chosaku zenshū* 弘法大師著作全集 (Tōkyō: Sankibō Busshori, 1968), vol.7, 343.

[32] *Dayunjing qiyu tanfa* 大雲經祈雨壇法. T19.990.493a15–16.

[33] *Dayunlun qingyujing* 大雲輪請雨經. T19.991.500a9–13.

[34] *Dafangdeng Dayunjing qingyupin diliushisi* 大方等大雲經請雨品第六十四. "One can only eat cheese, yogurt, course rice, fruit and vegetable, and one must take a bath after excretion and urine. 唯得食蘇酪乳糜粳米果菜。大小便竟必須澡浴。" T.19.992.506b24–25.

status in the precepts and qualification as a ritual expert shows an inclination to Buddhism monasticism. Just as Gergely Hidas observes, the Sanskrit transmission of *Vajratuṇḍasamayakalparāja*, a rainmaking manual, contains monastic references such as monastery, robe, and bhikṣu, which may imply that "this textual tradition was composed in a monastic environment and meant to be used by monks."[35]

Differed but not separate from the precondition catering to disciplinary based monasticism, the general ritual logic concerns the relationship between the ritual expert and the deity appealed to. As Lambert Schmithausen points out, in esoteric texts the first and most prominent means of protecting oneself from being bitten by snakes (or rather dragons) is the cultivation and/or declaration of friendliness towards snakes and even all creatures.[36] This attitude of cultivating a universal friendship, including friendship with non-human beings, is rooted in Vedic tradition, and resonated in the esoteric sūtras. I borrow the term "inter-person relationship" from Graham Harvey's inclusive definition of persons, applying not only to humans but to various significant other-than-human beings.[37] Buddhism, like many other religious traditions of Indian origin, contains a tenet recognizing the breadth of inter-person relationality; since within the doctrine of the six paths of existence, human beings only occupy one path, and all six existences are transformative, not definitive. All sentient beings are subject to the same karmic principle, and this indicates that there is no unbridgeable gap between human and non-human.[38]

This view of personhood brings with it the necessity of forging a benign association with non-human-existence, and this is confirmed in the rainmaking sūtras. For instance, the *Meghasūtra* opens with the Buddha's preaching for the dragon kings in a dragon's palace in which dragons are the dominant audience. The topic of the sūtra is driven by the inquiry of the dragon king about the means for all dragons to be free from suffering. The suggested reasoning is that only when all dragons are free from suffering and have gained peace, would dragons grant timely rain to the realm of human beings. Otherwise, they would pause the rain or flood the human realm. The Buddha's answer to the question of the dragon king is to practice great compassion to benefit all sentient beings, followed by a dhāraṇī and a final chanting of the names of Buddha. Since the sūtra is written from the perspective of the dragon and their interaction with the Buddha, the whole sūtra appears at first glance to be uninterested in the welfare of human beings—I would describe it as a non-human-centric text.[39] A surface reading of the sūtra would appear to say that dragons are responsible to being compassionate. However, in the accompanying altar procedure, agency is shifted to ritual experts. It is, after all, humans'

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[35] Gergely Hidas, *A Buddhist Ritual Manual on Agriculture: Vajratuṇḍasamayakalparāja* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019), 23.
[36] Lambert Schmithausen, *Maitrī and Magic: Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude Toward the Dangerous in Nature* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 25.
[37] Graham Harvey. *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017) xxiii-xxv.
[38] This inclusive view of animal-human relationship in Buddhism speaks to philosophers such as Mary Midgley.
[39] Schmithausen convincingly argues that the sūtra is ultimately written in the interest of humans themselves (2000, 59). My concern here is not to question that the esoteric ritual itself benefits human beings, but rather to show that the rhetorical mode of the sūtra clearly affects ritual experts, such as Eison's vision and interpretation of the rain ritual.

responsibility to transfer merit to dragons and to lift them from suffering. The altar procedure closes as follows:

> [The ritual expert should] make a vow to redirect the merit of chanting the sūtra to dragons, should wish them free of suffering, and should [wish them to] arouse the aspiration of enlightenment, to make rain for all sentient beings. 應發願讀經所生功德迴向諸龍。願皆離諸苦難。發無上菩提心。為一切有情降注甘雨。[40]

In this prescription the ritual expert directs merit to dragons and applies the power of the wish toward removing their suffering and helping them cultivate the compassionate mind for sentient beings. The implication is that the real problem behind the lack of rain is that the dragons are also suffering from ignorance and are thus unable to cultivate the mind of compassion for the benefit of sentient beings. Therefore, the remedy is to help them step onto the Buddhist path. The inter-person relationship here is no different in type from that between human beings, which is governed by the rule of karma and compassion. Thus, the logic of the ritual can be interpreted from a moralistic perspective rather than solely on the magic power manifested in a specific altar procedure. Both human and dragon must co-exist in the ritual to guarantee its efficacy. Accordingly, a ritual expert cultivates the power of ritual as twofold: one aspect is the mastery of an accurate altar procedure, the other the maintenance of purity of precepts status. In such a way, the ritual expert can properly generate and reorient merit to dragon kings in charge of rain.

This moralistic explanation—the sufferings of dragons cause natural disaster—might be nothing more than a tying of the very remedy for natural disaster to agentive behavior of human beings. Humans are given the responsibility, and most importantly, the *possibility* of relieving natural disaster. It is truly remarkable that Eison urges, "if each and every one observes the precepts and recites the precious title [of the dragon]" then the good dragon will be empowered to rain in the human realm.[41] Thus, the observance of precepts is considered by Eison to be the precondition and virtue necessary to gain support from the associative heavenly beings. Being ethical is not only related to one's own salvation in this life, but also concerns the welfare of human beings in a collective sense.

It is intriguing that Eison, at the end of the same entry, concludes that drought is not the fault of monastics, nor of current deeds in the human realm, but is rather caused by evil deeds accumulated by human beings in the past,[42] implying that the negative karma generated by human beings is transformed into the cause of natural disaster. Thus, by keeping the precepts and performing rain rituals, Buddhist monastics are saving everyone from an otherwise inevitable karmic retribution. At the same time, Eison moves the burden of responsibility from current society and attributes it to misbehaviors in the past. The practice of rainmaking ritual demonstrates how the ethical teaching of monastic codes and esotericism could mutually reinforce each other in the most tangible and verifiable way. The virtuous body is the medium

[40] *Dayunjing qiyu tanfa* 大雲經祈雨壇法, T.19.990.493a26–28.
[41] "*Kōshō bosatsu go kyōkai chōmonshū*." 興正菩薩御教誡聽聞集. In *Kamakura kyū bukkyō* 鎌倉舊佛教, Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄 and Tanaka Hisao 田中久夫 eds. (Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 1971), (190-226):197.
[42] Ibid., 197.

for connecting with the realm of the dragon in charge of weather, and in turn the ritual efficacy requires the cultivation of a virtuous monastic order.

Five years after making the map in 1284, Eison performed a rainmaking ritual which is found under the title "*Jisai kiu ji* 持齋祈雨事" (Fasting and Praying for Rain). In his preaching notes, he designated the cause of drought as people who committed evil conduct and fell into the realm of asura (demi-gods) as evil spirits such as an evil dragon, who can keep the rain from falling to the human realm.[43] At the same time, he credited the rain to the "good dragon" in the realm of heaven as god. The good dragon refers, as the name indicates, to the one residing in the pond of Shinsenen.

Buddhist study has accumulated scholarship on esoteric Buddhism which has shown it is too simplistic to draw a clear distinctive line between exoteric and esoteric teaching and practice.[44] Therefore, the stereotypical view which takes the Vinaya as exoteric and Shingon as esoteric deserves further reflection. Eison's writings demonstrate the syncretism between exoteric and esoteric teaching, in terms of Shingon teaching cannot exist independently or even function successfully without the teaching of the Vinaya.

It would be difficult to determine which part of the practice of the rainmaking ritual is exoteric or esoteric. One may realize that there are multiple deeply intertwined traditions, each bearing the twofold notion of exoteric and esoteric aspects according to a specific context. As discussed previously, the so-called magical rainmaking ritual is justified and supported by moralistic reasoning. A comparison of failed and successful cases reveals that the power of the ritual may reside outside the ritual procedure, since both ritual masters supposedly inherited the rainmaking ritual from a shared esoteric tradition in Japan. The contrast makes the virtuous body of the ritual expert a crucial variant in the formula. The question is, where exactly does power reside in ritual? In Eison's case, an operating principle has been the corresponding relationship between the dragon, who is in charge of rain, and the ritual expert. Esoteric ritual masters may gain power by mastering the ritual. However, mastering the ritual alone ceases to be adequate when the desired result is not reached. One must also account for the other moralistic principle, which means observing monastic precepts to maintain the purity of the ritual space.

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[43] A ritual procedure attributed to Narêndrayaśas entitled *Qiyu fatan yigui* 祈雨法壇儀規 lists and explains five reasons why rain is blocked, not all of them from the perspective of human morality. It is possible that Eison had access to this text; however, he was only interested in the fifth reason and neglected the previous four reasons.

[44] Matthew Don McMullen points out that Kuroda Toshio's theory of defining medieval Japanese Buddhism as consisted of a unified exoteric-esoteric system is responsible for the common parlance of exoteric-esoteric Buddhism in anglophone scholarship. He also examines the thaumaturgic rites vs. doctrine as underlying denotation of esoteric and exoteric Buddhism is highly problematic. "*The Development of Esoteric Buddhist Scholasticism in Early Medieval Japan*," 2016, Dissertation, UC, Berkeley, 10–13. Kuroda's theory undertook critique from Abé Ryūichi, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press,1999), David Quinter, *From outcasts to emperors: Shingon Ritsu and the Mañjuśrī cult in medieval Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), etc.

This paper attempts to develop a comparative angle with Christianity beyond a superficial notion of merely finding similar cases in both traditions. It is inaccurate to categorize Buddhist esoteric rainmaking ritual as merely magic (which mainly indicates certain supernatural, supermundane powers, and techniques, such as witchcraft, sorcery, folk religion, etc.), while labeling Christian rain prayer as a manifestation of miracle (which primarily suggests something caused by the power of God). As Jacob Neusner has argued, by making the distinction between the work of God and the work of other non-human spirits, the implication is the distinction between "true religion" and magic.[45] This dichotomy, which many scholars of religions have powerfully reflected on and rejected,[46] is derived from a biased view towards non-Christian traditions; the opprobrium shown to outsiders since antiquity. The assumed dichotomy between magic and miracle prohibits us from seeing the ambiguity of these concepts and conceiving how people used them in their historical and religious contexts. This assumed dichotomy is exactly what we should move beyond before engaging in meaningful comparison crossing religious traditions.

In response to the tendency of abandonment of "magic" under the influence of Jonathan Z. Smith, David Frankfurter raises an alternative suggestion to keep "magic" in terms of the use of *mageia* as a flexible and heuristic tool.[47] Either to abandon the term "magic" (for its conventional usage), or to embrace the term (by abandoning the second-order classification) may invite further problems. Although hesitant to choose a side, due to the quality of primary sources I engage in, I am fully in line with Frankfurter in the sense that we should constantly ask "what is gained or lost by describing data with one etic term or another, magic or ritual, religion or tradition, book or Bible, pilgrimage or travel."[48] As I have discussed, the so-called magical rainmaking ritual is justified and supported by moralistic reasoning. Comparing failed with successful case of 1244, the power of ritual may reside outside the ritual procedure, since both ritual masters supposedly inherited the rainmaking ritual from a shared esoteric tradition. The contrast makes the virtuous body of the ritual expert as a Vinaya master a crucial variant in the formula. It is the narrative in an urgent situation of how human behavior would make a difference to the result of the ritual that I regard as a fruitful angle to make comparison.

Among many examples of famous "rain miracles" in Christian hagiographies and historical sources, the earliest documented case of rain miracle (lightening and rain miracles) refers to an unusual event related to Marcus Aurelius' Marcomannic-Sarmatian wars in the Classical period of the Roman Empire. When Marcus found himself desperate straits, he asked a

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[45] Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Freichs, Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher. eds. *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

[46] This is not the place to review the long and complex intellectual history of the study of non-Christian religions. As they have been, implicitly or directly, object of reference to Christianity, and although a comparison remains the fundamental approach in religious studies, it is necessary to be cautious about how far one falls into dichotomic description in the study of non-Christian religions. Scholars of religions who engaged in reflections on theory of comparative religion include Jonathan Zittell Smith, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Fitz John Porter Poole, Barbara Holdrege, Nancy Jay, Stanley J. Tambiah, Morton Smith, and Catherine Bell, just to name a few. The most recent attempts to reflect on the topic of magic/*mageia* are collected in the edited volume, *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, David Frankfurter ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[47] David Frankfurter ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 3-20.

[48] David Frankfurter ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 11.

legion of soldiers from Melitene, who all worshipped Christ, to pray to their God. When the soldiers had prayed, God immediately responded with a thunderbolt and a sequential shower of rain. Marcus was greatly astonished and rewarded the Christians with honor. Tertullian (c.155–c.240?) and Eusebius (b. about 260; d. before 341) are among the first Christian theologians who recorded this rain miracle as part of Christian history. This Christian rain miracle is found first in two works of Tertullian: *Apologeticum* (written in 195) and *Ad Scapulam* (written between 211–213). Cassius Dio has provided a pagan version of the rain miracle which is known only through Xiphilinus' excerpt (260, 6–262, 5), and which attributes the miracle to the aid of an Egyptian magician. The narratives surrounding this rain miracle went through fascinating variations throughout Christian history, and efforts to date the two miracles became the focus of much previous scholarship, which, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this paper. I would like to draw attention to three incidents containing rain miracles, one is the forged epistle of Marcus,[49] the second is Eusebius' recounting of the miracle based on Tertullian's writings, and the third is Cassius Dio's pagan version of the rain miracle.

In the forged epistle addressing the Roman Senate (dated to the fourth century), Marcus describes the devastating situation of facing enemy scouts with only a handful of soldiers. Marcus quickly evaluates the situation and applies himself "to prayer to the gods of my country." No specific god is identified in the epistle; however, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* contains a prayer for rain to Jupiter, who might be one possible deity to resort to under the uncertain and dangerous circumstances.[50] Receiving no response after his own prayer, Marcus summoned "Christians" in his army for help. Christian solders threw themselves to the ground to pray and "simultaneously with their casting themselves on the ground and praying to God (a God of whom I am ignorant), water poured from heaven, upon us most refreshingly cool, but upon the enemies of Rome a withering hail."[51] The miraculous story testifies to "the presence of God following on the prayer—a God unconquerable and indestructible."[52]

This narrative shares a similar structure with the narratives in Japan (both Kūkai and Jitsugen): the emperor is facing great danger of famine, drought, or siege; the emperor asks first for a solution to the natural disaster, which does not work; the emperor turns to the second solution which immediately works. The plots of these narratives resemble each other in the sense that these events are remembered in a similar way. The urgent situation and failure of the first attempt are necessary elements to highlight the success of the second solution.

The upshot of the narrative is that one side claims victory over the other by bringing about the instant result of rain. This can be interpreted either through the lens of sectarian division or the faith of that of the Christian God over pagan gods. A reading of the incident derived from a sectarian point of view would be similar to that which sees the branch of esoteric

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[49] The question of Marcus' epistle has generated heated argument among scholars. Some attributed the epistle to Tertullian. See Péter Kovács' *Marcus Aurelius' rain miracle and the Marcomannic wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 25–26. I use Kovács's translation of the epistle, 51–53.

[50] Moore, James, and Michael Silverthorne. *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008).

[51] Péter Kovács, 53.

[52] Péter Kovács, 53.

Buddhism presented by Tōji ritual experts as less efficacious than those from Daigoji.[53] As Robert Sharf has remined scholars not to exaggerate the differences between Shingon initiatory lineage,[54] a sectarian interpretation might be counterfactual, given the fact that many cases such as Jōgen from Daigoji assumed the title of "*Tōji śramaṇa*" 東寺沙門 in his own writing of *Shōu zamhiki* 請雨雜秘記 (Daigoji collection, no.145:6), showing a shared identity between these two monasteries.[55] Even if we accept the fact that there were self-conscious sectarian divisions within the esoteric community,[56] it is still problematic to attribute the success to one branch. Jitsugen, the leading ritual expert of the 1244 ritual, was not always successful in performing the ritual. The same ritual he performed in 1240 took sixteen days to be efficacious, and the ritual in 1247 only admitted failure after fourteen days.[57] Particularly, Jitsugen was addressed as the abbot of Tōji, which may indicate the fluidity of abbotship between these two monasteries in the 1247 case.

Back to the epistle, the Christians succeeded merely because they are Christian, just like in Kūkai's narrative that he succeeded merely because he is a superior ritual expert. While Kūkai's victory justifies his status as the founder of Shingon school, the pragmatic purpose of forging the epistle could have been nothing more than the desire to establish the legitimacy of Christendom in the Roman Empire. The winning side no doubt also won the royal patronage. There is nothing necessarily erroneous in such an interpretation, although it invites the danger of reducing religious incidents and experiences to pure practical calculation. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the efficacy of the ritual together with the virtue of the ritual expert, I propose to explore the mechanism further by looking the subtle relationship between the non-human power and human initiation.

Eusebius recounts the same incident in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia Ecclesiastica*) around 312. In his retelling of the story, Eusebius establishes a clear request-response relationship between the Christian prayers and the immediately following lightning and storm. The occurrence is thus confirmed as a simple and artless act in response to the Christian prayers.[58] This interpretation speaks to the Christian principle of *ex opere operato* "done because of the deed," which literally means that a ritual specialist performs prescribed actions, and the result follows. The overall pre-condition for the ritual efficacy is that God has agreed to produce certain effects or to bestow certain graces.[59] Therefore, the correlation or association between human deeds and

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[53] Matsumoto Ikuyo, 2005, 123.
[54] Robert Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 2003, 26(1): 51-96.
[55] Kamakura period witnesses the formation of community identity (Tōji, Daigoji, Ninnaji)centered around Tōji. Similar expressions include *Tōji ryū* 東寺流 (branch of Tōji), *Tōji sueba* 東寺末葉 (descendent of Tōji), see Nishi Yayoi西弥生, "*Chūsei jiin syakai ni okeru tōji ishiki"*中世寺院社会における「東寺」意識. *Shigaku*史学, 2012 (18): 61–81.
[56] Steve Trenson attached a chart of branches of esoteric Buddhism in Japan in his article of rainmaking ritual, which shows how the division of Shingon Buddhism was conceived around the 12th century. 2002, 495.
[57] Sasagawa, Taneo. and Tarō. Yano. eds. 1934. *Heikoki* 平戸記. *Shiryō taisei* 史料大成. Tōkyō: Naigai Shoseki, vol.24–25, 59, 71. Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai 続群書類従完成会. ed. 2004. *Yōkōki* 葉黄記. *Shiryō sanshū* 史料纂集, vol.141(2). Tōkyō: Heibunsha, 67, 70.
[58] Péter Kovács, 45–47.
[59] I am in debt to Professor Mark Jordan for providing an accurate interpretation of the term "*ex opere operato*."

the grace of God are unified in the on-going action of ritual. Eusebius also comments that from a pagan perspective, the incident may be understood differently; however, his reasoning is based on the very way the prayer is performed: soldiers "kneeled on the ground, as is our custom in prayer, and engaged in supplications to God."[60] In this sense, the method of conducting the prayer on the part of humans is an inseparable component of the principle of *ex opere operato*. If we recognize that the moral status on the human part does not directly impact the efficacy of deeds in the context of Christianity, the principle of *ex opere operato* would be compatible to the case of Kūkai, who simply performed a more powerful esoteric ritual than his opponent, uninfluenced by his ethical status. However, this would not justify what puzzled many authors in the medieval period; namely, why the same rainmaking ritual might yield different results at different times. A deeper concern, or even fear, is that the causal relationship between ritual and rain is merely random. This explains why we observe that extra measure (changing of ritual experts, redemption of sinners, providing offering to deities etc.) are often devised when rituals fail to yield a desired result to strengthen a causal relationship.

The third version of the rain miracle differs drastically from the two above. Through Xiphilinus' recounting of Caddius Dio, the miracle is described as follows:

> The Romans, accordingly, were in a terrible plight from fatigue, wounds, the heat of the sun, and thirst, and so could neither fight nor retreat, but were standing in line and at their several posts, scorched by the heat, when suddenly many clouds gathered and a mighty rain, not without divine interposition, burst upon them. Indeed, there is a story to the effect that Arnuphis, an Egyptian magician, who was a companion of Marcus, had invoked by means of enchantments various deities and in particular Mercury, the god of the air, and by this means attracted the rain. (Translated by Earnest Cary).[61]

In Dio's version, there is neither failed attempt nor a sequence of victorious Christian prayers showing the division among the soldiers. Here we have the only case in which Mercury appears as the god of the air. Mercury's power resembles that of the dragon king, and we will notice that the prayer is associated with magic in this account. Xiphilinus considers these intentional errors, denying the power of Arnuphis and the possibility that Marcus was in the company of "magicians" or "witchcraft."[62] From the contrast between the Christian and pagan narratives of the same rain miracle, we clearly discern the deep-rooted and long-lasting analogy made between Christianity vs. pagan and miracle vs. magic. Thus, scholars of non-Christian traditions should be particularly cautious about the connotation of such dichotomy.

Another oft-related and well-known tradition in Christianity is the miracles which Moses performed in difficult situations (Exodus 17: 1–-6 and Numbers 20: 2–13). Also facing a dire lack of water, Moses, following the instruction of God in Exodus 17, takes a staff and strikes the rock, upon which water pours out. The intriguing and ambiguous detail here is Moses' failure to demonstrate his belief in God before he performs the miracle and thus receives rebuke from God in Numbers 20. It is not at all clear what went wrong. It could be that he improperly struck the

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[60] Péter Kovács, 46.
[61] Cassius Dio, *Roman History IX*. With an English translation by Earnest Cary with Herbert B. Foster. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 26–33.
[62] Ibid, 31.

rock twice (as God did not instruct how many times Moses should struck in Exodus 17); that he should not have struck the rock at all (as shown in Numbers 20:6-8, God commands Moses to take the staff, speak to the rock); or that he did not have faith in God while striking the rock. Nonetheless, the miracle seems to work in terms of bringing water to the assembly. One may ask if Moses is condemned by God for not having faith, then why is the miracle nonetheless was granted?

There are at least two potential interpretations of these two accounts. One is that Moses was rebuked by God because he failed to comply to the exact instruction, as in Number 20, he was told to "speak to rock" but instead he struck the rock, twice. The other merciful interpretation is that regardless of Moses' imperfections, God granted the miracle by extraordinary grace to demonstrate that an imperfect ritual expert can still successfully perform a ritual. Both interpretations appear to be counterintuitive to the principle of *ex opere operato*. If a ritual expert fails to follow the instruction, it should not yield a desired result. The miracles indicate that while logic of faith may outshine the logic of ritual, even though the logic of ritual still plays a vital part.

The following example, although outside of the Christian tradition, may provide a third reference point. In this exceptional passage, the Jewish scholar Honi the Circle-Drawer (Mishnah Taanit 3/ Numabas 8) asks God to give an exact amount of rain as if a son importuned a father to act according to his will. The salient detail is that Honi first prays for rain, but no rain falls. He then draws a circle on the ground and stands within it, swearing not to leave until it rains. Furthermore, he has other specific requirements, all of which are responded to by God. It is unclear why the prayer did not work while the circle and blatant negotiation did. Even though we may group these three examples together under the label "rain prayers," their distinctions represent obstacles to conceptualizing them according to a standard principle or formula. Rather, we may simply extract a shared plot from all these narratives of rainmaking ritual (except for the case of Moses): the first attempt does not work, but the second attempt immediately works due to verified human actions, including Honi's exceptional ability to negotiate with God.

Do these three traditions agree upon where power resides in rainmaking ritual? If we confine ourselves to the principle of *ex opere operato*, the power lies in the grace bestowed by God on condition that a certain prescription is precisely performed by the human. In the case of medieval Japan, an operating principle has been the corresponding relationship between the deity and ritual specialists, whose esoteric power is no doubt revealed through the performance of ritual; just as the Christian examples involve two parties, and thus should not be reduced to a miracle involving God alone. On the one hand, Kūkai's esoteric ritual logic, containing ritual procedure and the agreement to bestow ritual efficacy, implies a built-in principle like *ex opere operato*, in which the ethical status of the ritual expert is by no means a decisive variant. On the other hand, in Eison's reflective understanding of a historical case, the power of Buddhist rainmaking ritual is not entirely derived from esoteric ritual procedure for mastering the miraculous ritual alone is not enough, as one must account for the precondition moral rectitude in the ritual specialist. Eison's interpretation, at the expense of potentially going against the ritual logic of the esoteric tradition, is buried in carefully selected ritual details.

The Jewish example represents a third possibility, in which the communication with God appears to be negotiable and highly personal, without clear qualifications for such an interaction. It represents a possibly that the communication with the divine is individual based and not replicable by another. Beyond the often-accepted stereotypical differences between Christianity and Buddhism, the boundaries between miracle and magic are not always as clear and neat as they appear to be. In these cases, we spot seemingly abnormal elements that go against the conceptual framework to which they are assigned. The problematic part is certainly not the cases, but rather the framework we are accustomed to.

Perilous times of natural disaster may always trigger the need to seek help from non-human power. In the Moses miracle, the prescribed action is enough to life him and his followers out of a dangerous situation, but the attributed lack of accompanying faith blocks further grace. In the case of the rainmaking ritual that drew the attention of Eison, the same essential ritual is not enough to bring out the immediate result, and the moral status of the ritual master is given a nuanced importance.

If we agree that the source of power in the esoteric ritual tradition could be interpretated as relating to the virtuous ethical status of the ritual master, separable from the techniques of the ritual itself, while *ex opere operato* does not imply a mechanical relationship between human and God, these still leaves us with the questions as: Are the preconditions of ethical status in ritual prescriptions detrimental to the ritual logic itself? Does a moralistic interpretation push our understanding ritually-based esoteric Buddhism further away from or closer to the divine? And, correspondingly, what is the role of human mediacy, and what is the implication when exceptional grace overrises the principle of *ex opere operato*?

As Jonathan Z. Smith has reminded us, the habit of "giving precedence to similarity and contiguity at the expense of difference, is deeply embedded in Western discourse."[63] It takes mental power to reject the impulse to tag magic or miracle to the effort of rainmaking. When we compare Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish practices of rainmaking, we are struck with the repeating theme in which the vulnerability brought out by the uncertainties of natural disasters provides an opportunity to turn to non-human intervention. This opportunity, in turn, leads to a richness of interpretation and interaction in diversity. Whether they beseech a good dragon or God, human beings are urged by the embedded tradition to communicate with the non-human in the suitable way. In their sharing of the same narrative structure, these many stories show failure successfully warded off, with the narrative ending in a triumph for the human being. The rich and complex process of pleading directly with non-human forces fuels scholastic and theoretical ramifications that flow from it. The immediately verifiable features of the rainmaking ritual intensify to the social drama and give rise to diversified interpretations of human and non-human relationality which can be seen in all religious traditions.

[63] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Epilogue: the 'End' of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification." In *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 238.

Abbreviation

B *Dazangjing bubian* 大藏經補編. Taipei: Huayu chubanshe, 1985.

BZ *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書. 100 vols. Edited by Bussho kankōkai 佛書刊行會. Tokyo: Bussho kankōkai, 1912–22.

ST *Shintō taikei* 神道大系. 120 vols. Edited by Shintō taikei hensankai 神道大系編纂會. Tokyo: Shintō taikei hensankai, 1977–94.

SEDS *Saidaiji Eizon denki shūsei* 西大寺叡尊傳記集成. Edited by Nara kokuritsu bunkakai kenkyūjo 奈良國立文化會研究所. Kyōto: Hōzōkan, 1977.

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* **大正新脩大蔵経**. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō **高楠順次郎** and Watanabe Kaigyoku **渡辺海旭** et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.

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