

## Article

# The Catechism of the Gods: Kōyasan's Medieval Buddhist Doctrinal Debates, Dōhan, and *Kami* Worship

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**Abstract:** A survey of the history of medieval Kōyasan, an important mountain-based headquarters for esoteric Shingon Buddhism since the early ninth century, cannot omit significant developments in the worship of *kami* (tutelary and ancestral gods) from the end of the Heian period (794–1185) to the Muromachi period (1333–1573). A fundamental aspect of *kami* worship at Kōyasan was the regular offering to the *kami* (*shinbōraku* 神法楽) of *mondō-kō* 問答講 (catechism/dialogue form, or ‘question and answer’ ‘lectures’) and *rongi* (debate examinations in the form of *mondō*). The relationship between Buddhist scholarship and *kami* worship has not been fully elucidated and such will enrich understanding of both subjects. The identities and meanings of the two oldest *kami* enshrined at Kōyasan, Niu Myōjin 丹生明神 (also called Niutsuhime) and Kariba Myōjin 狩場明神 (also called Kōya Myōjin), were delineated in texts produced by scholar monks (*gakuryō* 学侶) during a period when the debates were re-systematized after a period of sporadicity and decline, so the precise functions of this cinnabar goddess and hunter god in the related ritual offerings deserve attention. In this paper I examine ideas about the Kōyasan *kami* that can be found, specifically, in the institution and development of these *mondō* and *rongi* 論義. Placing them in this context yields new information, and offers new methods of understanding of not only related textual materials, but also of the icons used in the debates, and the related major ceremonies (*hōe* 法会) and individual ritual practices (*gyōbō* 行法) that were involved. Given that the candidates of a major ritual debate examination—to be discussed—that has been practiced from the Muromachi period up to the present day are said to ‘represent’ *kami*, and are even referred to by the names of *kami*, the history of the precise relationship between the *kami* and the debates invites more detailed explanation that has so far been largely lacking in the scholarship.

**Keywords:** Japanese religions; esoteric Buddhism; tantra; Buddhist scholarship; Buddhist education; doctrinal debate; Shinto; *kami*; Dōhan



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## 1. Introduction: Debate in Medieval Buddhist Japan, and at Kōyasan

Ritualized debate and lecture programs were important in Japan from the early Heian period onward in part because promotion within the clerical system was determined by participation in these as a matter of state policy. Debates on Buddhist doctrine had been performed at the imperial palace from the seventh century, but a decree of 798 issued by the Council of State included as requirements for monastic ordination three examinations by the Prelates' Office (Sōgō) in doctrinal knowledge. After ordination the ladder of clerical promotion began with participation as *kōji* 講師 (Lecture Master) in state-sponsored debates and lectures. Best known of these is the *nanto sanne* 南都三会 (the “three Nara Assemblies”): the Yuima-e 維摩会 (Vimalakīrti Assembly), the Misai-e Assembly 御齋会, an imperially-focused ritual based on *The Sovereign Kings of the Sutra of Golden Light*, and the Saishō-e Assembly 最勝会 (also based on this sutra). These were established during the early ninth century. The participants in these debates and in the Sōgō office were rewarded with recognition, political power through control of other monks' careers and contact with the imperial family and aristocratic clans who attended the debates, and landholdings donated by aristocrats to temples, which was a mutually beneficial arrangement since the land

became tax-exempt and the temple amassed estates. The debate arena was centered in Nara, and the Hossō monks of Kōfukuji dominated it. According to records covering the years between 658–1276 and 624–1142 not a single Shingon monk was appointed as Yuima-e Lecture Master or, consequently, to the Sōgō.

Despite its distance from Nara, Kōyasan had its own history of debates and discussions of Dharma (*hōdan rongi*). Although the 1089 *Daishi Ongyōjo shūki* 大師御行狀集記 records a number of debates having taken place during founder Kūkai's 空海lifetime (774–835) (Mizuhara 1928, pp. 88–89), their origins at Kōyasan are conventionally traced back to 835, when the Shingon school was granted three ordinands by the court. However, it was not until the administration of Shinzen (804–891), Kūkai's direct disciple, that the *Denbō-dai-e*, the Rite of Dharma Transmission which included *hōdan rongi*, was implemented first at Tōji temple, and later at Ninnaji (both in Kyoto) and Kōyasan (Takeuchi 1992). From that time on, there were various debate practices, but the *Denbō-e* ceased during the decline of Kōyasan at the start of the tenth century, to be revived only in 1132 by Kakuban (1094–1144). However, disputes between Daidenbōin (founded by Kakuban) and Kongōbuji (head temple of Kōyasan) made the regular practice of this difficult. Scholarship was again revived by Kakukai (1142–1223) and doctrinal study and lectures/debates flourished under his followers.

Of great significance among these followers were Dōhan 道範 (1184–1252) and Hosshō 法性 (?–1245), to whom Kakukai had transmitted the doctrinal teachings on dualism of *funimon* and *ninimon*, which were revived in the Muromachi period by scholar monks Chōkaku 長覚 (1346–1416) and Yūkai 宥快 (1345–1416). While they had taken place before the Kamakura period, Kōyasan's *mondō* were only systematized in the Nanbokuchō (1336–1392) and Muromachi periods. The monthly *Sannōin Rishu Sanmai tsuketari Monkō* 山王院理趣三昧附問講 (dialogue-lecture (*monkō*) accompanied by the (performance of) *Rishu zanmai*)—today's *Sannōin Montō Monkō* 山王院門徒問講 or *Sannōin tsukinami Monkō* 山王院月次附門講—was started between 1262 and 1333 (Mizuhara 1928, pp. 118–19). Then, in 1291, began the *Chigo Mondo-kō* 稚児問答講 for young boy acolytes, which took place at Amanosha shrine at the foot of Kōyasan, a “Shinto” site most closely related to Kongōbuji (and where mountain deities Niu Myōjin and Kariba Myōjin are enshrined). It shortly thereafter moved up to Kōyasan, apparently instituted with the backing of Ninnaji. In 1300 the ritual procedures for the scholar centers of Kangaku'in and Shugaku'in were established and these were supplemented in 1334 on the imperial order of GoDaigo Tennō. This marks the full establishment of Kōyasan's education system (Horita 1972, pp. 193–94) and in 1407 the *Sannō'in Rissei* 山王院豎精 debate (*Rissei Rongī* 豎精論義) examination system was instituted, based on the Yuima-e and Hokke-e (based on the *Lotus Sutra*) Nara assemblies. The Tendai school had its place too, at this time, and may also have provided a model: abbot Jitsudō Ninkū (実導仁空 1309–1388) focused heavily on monastic education and produced debate manuals based on works by the masters of the Chinese Tiantai tradition (Gröner 2011, pp. 238–39).

Kōyasan was clearly lagging behind at that time in terms of a systematized program through which monks' knowledge of doctrine and their skill in presenting and debating could be demonstrated, and upon which clerical advancement could be based, and it looked to Nara for a model. As the name suggests, the *Sannō'in Rissei* was held in the *haiden* hall, (the *Sannō'in*; 'Sannō' means 'Mountain King'), which was situated facing the shrines of the *kami*—not unlike many of the other debates at medieval Kōyasan which were also carried out as offerings to the *kami*.

Like those of Nara, Kōyasan's debates also functioned as a method of qualifying monks for positions within the hierarchical monastic system (*junseki*). For example, the *chigo* acolytes (of the *Chigo Mondo-kō*) were known as the 'loose-haired' (*taregami*), a word that indicates they had not yet become monks and hence had not shaved their heads. This debate, then, was part of the education offered at temples for boys before they officially entered the monkhood, though they may also have included young monks. The monthly *Sannōin Rishu zanmai tsuketari Monkō* was similarly bound to status. The aspects of this

event most directly concerned with *kami* worship (entering the shrines and performing a ritual there) were the responsibility of the *Kengyō Shigyō Dai* ‘Superintendent,’ a monk of status just below the head *Kengyō Hōin*, who occupied the highest rank in the clerical hierarchy of Kōyasan. A clearer scheme of promotion determined by participation in debates was/is operated by the *Rissei Rongi*, which was one of the most important stages in the process of promotion from the status of ‘*Nyuji*’ to ‘*Ajari*’. Its completion bestowed the participants with the titles of School Head of the Left (*sagakuto*) and School Head of the Right (*ugakuto*), membership in the Myōjin-kō (group of Niu Myōjin and Kariba Myōjin *kami* devotees) which was comprised of the heads of each temple at Kōyasan, and theoretically it ultimately resulted in appointment as *Kengyō Hōin*.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Doctrinal Debates and Kami

There are previous studies by Horita (1972), Mizuhara (1928), Toganoo ([1942] 1982), Hinonishi (2004), and Shizuka (2000) that focus on Kōyasan’s debates. However, apart from that undertaken by Hinonishi, none of this research investigates in detail the debates within context of contemporary beliefs about the *kami*. Similarly, little research on *kami* worship at Kōyasan has it in the context of debates. Much such research centers on the shrines prior to the construction of Kongōbuji; the relationship between Amanosha and Kongōbuji; the *engi* (founding legend); Kūkai’s *kami* worship; and his own deification or identification with *kami* (Nakagawa 1933–1934; Nishiki et al. 2003). As icons related to debate rituals, paintings of *kami* and of Kūkai have been mentioned or discussed in the work of Kageyama (1976), Gorai (1976), Kadoya (1991), and Hinonishi (1995). The production and specific function of these paintings remains unclear because of the limited materials currently available. An additional reason why the link between debates and *kami* has not drawn analysis is because debates were performed from an early period as conventional and appropriate offerings to *kami*. The *kami* are thereby elided as a somewhat passive audience, or as subjugated and converted, rather than understood as an incorporated and ‘active’ ritual component.

Along with formalization and ritualization from the Kamakura to Muromachi periods, the debates at Kōyasan are noted to have taken on a deepening character of ancestor worship, which distinguishes them somewhat from the debates of Nara and Kyoto (Yamamoto 2004, p. 11). Naturally, this connects them to *kami* worship, many aspects of which are also peculiar to Kōyasan. From the 13th century on, those who recorded theories about the *kami* were the *gakuryō* (scholar monks)<sup>2</sup> and it was only these monks who were permitted to participate in the debates and to ascend the ladder of ecclesiastical advancement at Kōyasan (Matsunaga 1984, p. 215). Scholar monks, especially those of the Chūin-ryū branch and its sub-branches, were at the center of scholarship between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Those of prominence came to be called *Kōya hakketsu* 高野八傑 (the “eight greats” of Kōyasan)—Dōhan, Hosshō, Shoso, Shinben, Kakuwa, Shinnichi, Shinken and Genkai—and they were first or second generation disciples of Kakukai.<sup>3</sup> During the mid-to-late thirteenth century these monks and their followers were active in producing texts of their branch teachings, which included Kōyasan *engi* accounts and *kami*-related materials (Abe 1983; Abe and Makoto 1999). As I discuss below, at some point Dōhan and his temple came to be a focus for ideas that linked debates with *kami*, and other temples associated with him and Chūin-ryū production were also important sites for debates.

Various explanations about the *kami* and debates can be found in a number of texts and images: for the subject discussed here, a *hyōbyaku* textual prelude to the *mondō* offering (the invocation and declaration of ritual purpose made before a ceremony) by Kakuwa; ritual manuals and procedures; painted icons; and a pilgrimage record of Retired Emperor Go-Uda’in’s experience of a debate at Kōyasan (*Go-Uda’in gokōki*). Information about the *kami* and the *mondō* is also found in temple histories and chronicles compiled in the Edo period (1603–1868), such as the *Kii zoku fudoki Kōyasan no bu* 紀伊続風土記高野山之部 (completed in 1839; hereafter ‘Fudoki’), the *Kōya shunjū hennen shūroku* 高野春秋編年輯録 (1718; hereafter ‘Shunjū’), and the *Kōyasan tsūnenshū* 高野山通念集 (hereafter ‘Tsūnenshū’) (1672). Additionally, records of mystical experiences, oracle transcriptions, exegetical texts,

*setsuwa*, and *engi* provide information about the way the debate participants and scholars interacted with the *kami*.

### 1.2. Early Conceptions of the Kami and Their Relationship to Debates: Historical Sources

According to Horita, “it was through the *mondō-kō* and other debates that monastic status was gained, and the *kami* would rejoice at this, and hence would protect the practitioners (Horita 1972, p.152). It was, then, a kind of *shinbutsu shūgō* [Shinto–Buddhist amalgamation].” However, the interaction between monks and *kami* was more complex than this suggests. The two most important *kami* worshipped at medieval Kōyasan were Niu Myōjin and Kariba Myōjin along with the twelve Ōji 王子 (‘princes’) and their entourage. These *kami* appear in the very earliest *engi* texts, probably written in the tenth century, the *Dajōkanpuan narabi yuigō* 太政官符案并遺告 and *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* 金剛峯寺建立修行緣起 (the oldest source of information about *kami* worship at Kōyasan). In these texts, Kūkai is bestowed land for his community by the *kami*. Summoned to Kōyasan in, it is said, 820, on the third day of the fifth month, the two *kami* were enshrined in front of the Sannō’in. This date was, as we will see, to become significant in debate performances.

The notion that the *kami* were protectors of the monks, the mountain, and the Shingon school there is found in the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*. In it, Kūkai is guided to land for the construction of Kongōbuji by a hunter (later deified as Kariba Myōjin), and is granted it by the mountain *kami* (Niu Myōjin). In the *engi* she is presented as seeking salvation of Kūkai, (whom she calls a *bodhisattva*) from her difficult existence as a *kami*, a role for a *kami* that is a typical aspect in *engi*. Land bestowed to her in a previous life by another *kami* is ceded to him. These elements of the *engi* both portray submissions of *kami*/land to Buddhism and also functioned as proofs of land ownership. Later, various other *engi* later termed *chūsei engi* (medieval *engi*) developed, and they accorded new origins to temples, and/or new interpretations (Abe 1983). At the center of the production of these texts were the aforementioned scholar monks of the Chūin-ryū, and the texts were records of esoteric interpretations of the *kami* and the origins of Kongōbuji that they claimed had been transmitted orally and secretly within their branch tradition pre-textualization and had originated in teachings given directly to Shinzen at Kūkai’s *nyūjō* (“entrance to eternal meditation”). Beginning in around the tenth century the *kami* seem to have first appeared in conjunction with the project of temple *shōen* (estate) land expansion and with battles over territorial ownership (Matsunaga 1984, pp. 212–13). Border disputes had arisen between Kongōbuji and Yoshino from around 1142 onward (Wada 1984, p. 177) but from the mid-thirteenth century, Kongōbuji was making more specific and concerted efforts to reclaim what it asserted were its ‘old lands’. Among these efforts was the dissemination of the *Goshuin engi* 御手印緣起 (an origin account purportedly written by Kūkai which emerged in 1159), which was distributed to court and the bakufu government as a legal document and read aloud to imperial and aristocratic pilgrims by a Kōyasan *sendatsu* (pilgrims’ guide). The *kami*, then, played an important role in these temple land disputes and their meaning was disseminated through presentations of the related texts to powerful potential patrons. The texts I examine in this section which evidence conceptual and practical (or ritual) links between *mondō* and *kami* are mainly concerned with Dōhan, who inherited and developed them, and include the *Henmyōin Daishi Myōjin Go-Takusen ki* 遍明院大師明神御託宣記 (hereafter *Takusen ki*), likely written down by him in 1251, and later examples of accounts dating from between the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries of the circumstances which led to the production of the *Takusen ki*, along with accounts of the same period of Dōhan’s *mondō* with *kami* at his sometime residence, Shōchi’in.

The portrayal of *kami* being saved by Buddhism designates for them a passive position. This was one form of *shinbutsu shūgō*, called *shinjin ridatsu* 神身離脱 (“Salvation by the Dharma from the sufferings of a *kami* existence”). However, there was another belief, that *kami* protected the “true Buddhist Dharma” (*shōbō*), and the offering of debates to *kami* was based on this idea (which was in turn related to the notion that *kami* themselves were saved by Buddhism). These ideas are expressed in prayer texts used when Kūkai performed a

ritual to consecrate the land (*kekkaï*) at Kōyasan in 817, the ‘*Kōyasan konryū no hajime no kekkaï no toki no keibyaku bun*’ 高野山建立初結界時啓白文 in *Henjō Hakki Seireishū* 遍照禿揮聖靈集. The *kekkaï* prayer related to the consecration of the Danjo Garan (central complex of halls and pagodas) is quoted in the aforementioned *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*:

In the east, west, south, and north of this compound, in the four intermediate directions and above and below, all the *vināyakas* who destroy the true Dharma, maleficent spirits and deities, every single one here: get out of the area of my sacred precincts . . . If there be beneficent deities and spirits who protect the true Dharma, who will bring advantage to my Buddha Dharma, you may remain in this compound as you please. (Gardiner 2000, p. 129)

At medieval Kōyasan, texts suggest that offerings to *kami* were understood in a context that was less that of *kami* saved by the Buddhist Dharma and more that of Dharma being offered in response to the presence of *kami* and the discipline *they* exacted on (and “advantage” they could bring upon) it. Cartouche inscriptions on two standard icon paintings of the *kami* from the thirteenth century represent the fundamental conception of the *kami* by scholar monks of the time. The sources of the inscriptions are found in Chūin-ryū secret texts, both written by Dōhan and/or his contemporaries, such as *Kōyasan Hiki* 高野山秘記 (Abe 1983, pp. 40–60). Kadoya Atsushi suggests that these paintings were used as *mondō-kō* icons (Kadoya 1991, pp. 40–54). The painting of Niu Myōjin is inscribed with the following text, which I translate here:

Those who vow to stay on this peak will be sent to [a] buddha land.

Even if there are monks who lapse from the precepts it should be felt that this is certainly karma.

I vow I will be a messenger among the monks, awaiting Miroku’s descent, with horns standing on [my] head, using mantras.

The painting thought to be partner to this, of Kariba Myōjin, is inscribed with the following:

Protecting Kōya my legs are always  
torn and bleeding

[It is for] the resident monks who do  
not work and [yet still] receive  
offerings.

[Yet] eating regularly is important everyday.<sup>4</sup>

These texts, which are records of oracles, may seem odd upon first reading, since the *kami* seem to forgive the shortcomings of the monks. However, they indicate that at the time of their creation the primary role of the *kami* at Kōyasan was the protection and instruction of the monks, rather than salvation by them. The text on the painting of Niu Myōjin was, according to the *Fudoki*, committed by monk Nyohō Shōnin to paper and transmitted to his followers as a ‘warning’ (*imashime*) concerning laxity in observance of the precepts. Meanwhile, Kariba Myōjin is described as having injured himself in his efforts to take care of the monks. Another version of this painting at Ryūkōin (a Kōyasan Chūin-ryū) cloister that bears no inscription depicts his blood-stained legs, suggesting the protective efforts of this god were an element of how he was understood. The divine protection was to be maintained until future Buddha Maitreya’s rebirth in the human realm; and it was believed that Kūkai would simultaneously emerge from his state of eternal meditation. As written in his apocryphal Last Testament, “[a]fter I close my eyes, I will without fail be reborn in the Tosotsu heaven where I can serve Miroku Jison. In more than 5.6 billion years I will descend to this realm along with Jison and honor him”.<sup>5</sup> That contact with the land ensured rebirth in a pure land, or ‘buddha land’ as indicated by Niu Myōjin’s oracle, was a belief that had been common knowledge among aristocrats since the time of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1027) and his visit to Kōyasan, and it functioned as a key image for

pilgrims (Wada 1984, p. 184). In sum, the information found in these two inscriptions reveal an ensemble of beliefs about Kūkai, rebirth, and the *kami*, which indicate that the *kami* were perceived by the monastic community primarily as protective and disciplinary powers in the absence of the founder.

### 1.3. Distinguishing Legitimacy and Heresy in Dharma Teachings

Relatedly, and pertinent to the question of the role of *kami* in *mondō* is that *kami* were trusted as capable of distinguishing legitimacy or heresy in texts, doctrine, and branch lineages. Accordingly, in addition to protection and discipline, *kami* had the role of saving and instructing sentient beings. This notion was linked to *mappō*, the notion that the present time was that of the Final Age of the Dharma: *shinkoku* (sacred realm) discourse and the theory of hypostasis (*honji-suijaku*) positioned *kami* as local manifestations of buddhas who appeared to teach and save people during this time (Rambelli 1996, p. 398). This belief also underlies the relationship between *mondō* and *kami* worship. The oracle record, *Takusen ki*, describes its own production and the transcription is attributed to Dōhan (Abe 1983; Tinsley 2010, 2014, 2019). The oracle itself was considered a secret oral transmission (*hiji kuden*) and thereafter *Takusen ki* was designated a sacred text (*shōgyō*) of the Chūin-ryū, and transmitted within the branch as such. Dōhan is not only thought to have been the ‘witness’ to the oracle but also the transcriber and the editor. The text itself describes how, before making a final version of it, he read aloud each article of the oracle from his rough draft before the *kami* (or perhaps an icon) in order to check their accuracy:

As it must be indicated whether this record differs from the oracle, or is wrong, it was read in front of the *yōgō* 影向 [manifestation] and [was ascertained] that each and every [article] was in conformity [with the original oracle]. (*Takusen ki*, vol. 2, article 50 in Abe 1983, p. 84)

This suggests that Dōhan received authorial confirmation that what he had written was faithful to the *kami*’s oracle. The Henmyō’in oracle appears later in texts by Yūkai and by his follower, where it is explained that the oracle was delivered for the specific reason of legitimizing the status of the Jūji (head) of Henmyō’in, a monk named Yūshin (Tinsley 2014, pp. 13–15). It is likely that Yūkai’s standpoint and even his explanation are particular to him, given the historical context and his personal mission (he systematized Shingon in what came to be called ‘Ōei no Taisei’ and endeavored to purge it of heretical elements), but the idea that *kami* were capable of transmitting essential teachings is consistent with other descriptions of the oracle event in other texts. In the entry for Henmyō’in in *Tsūnenshū*, there is a record of the oracle occurrence, which portrays the oracle of the *kami* not as a one-sided message but an exchange between monks and *kami*.

Kōya [i.e., Kariba] Myōjin, you have possessed me, it said, ... each one ... was deeply penetrated, and the things about which the elders were confused or had doubt were queried and were extremely profoundly explicated. (*Tsūnenshū*, pp. 123–24)

In *Fudōki*, *Yasan myōreishū*, and *Shunjū* the encounter is similarly described as having been in a debate-like question and answer format regarding doctrinal and sectarian matters (Tinsley 2019, pp. 189–90). This description of monk–*kami* interaction is not restricted only to sources produced at or related to Kōyasan. The *Shasekishū* (Sand and Pebbles), a late thirteenth century *setsuwa* collection, contains a story that reveals similar ideas. Entitled “The Native Gods Esteem the Sincere Desire for Enlightenment,” it relates a Nara monk’s engagement in a question and answer *mondō* with a *kami*. Upon inquiring into obscure points in the *Yuga-Yuishiki* 瑜伽唯識 (Treatise on Yoga and Mind Only) doctrines, the *kami* provides its answers. However, although the *kami* shows its form and allows its voice to be heard, it refuses to show its face even when induced to do so. The relevant passage is as follows:

In Nara lived a learned priest known as Eichō (1014–95). After years of burning the midnight oil he developed a reputation for being a great scholar. Once when

he was at the Great Kasuga Shrine on a pilgrimage the *kami* spoke to him in a dream. Eichō questioned him about the doctrine...However, the monk was not able to see the face of the *kami*. He said . . . “For many years I have devoted myself to the way of learning, carrying on the Idealist (*yuishiki*) tradition which is the light of the Law, and offering up those rites in which the *kami* delight. As a result, I perceive your form before me and hear the sound of your sublime words . . . and my heart would rejoice if I could likewise view your noble countenance.” The *kami* replied, “Your pursuit of learning is admirable, and because of this I have held discourse with you. But since you have no sincere desire for enlightenment, I do not wish to meet you face to face”. [ . . . ] On this, Mujū remarks: “The conduct of the scholars in the seminaries of Nara and Kyoto has only fame and profit as its objective, and the pursuit of enlightenment is outside its purview.” (Morrell 1985, p. 87)<sup>6</sup>

As the tale indicates, the Nara monk had long studied and transmitted the Hossō school teachings, and had made offerings assiduously to the *kami*.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Kasuga Daimyōjin appeared in his dream to answer his questions about doctrine and to instruct him. This is another clear thirteenth century example of a monk engaging in *mondō* with a *kami*. As Sango points out, Mujū’s criticism of scholar-monks (which is not confined to this example) was not a personal grievance; indeed it was shared by many of the time, and *myōri* (‘doctrinal study for fame and profit’) was especially condemned by reclusive monks, appearing in texts as a kind of anti-establishment trope (Sango 2015, pp. 24–25, 35). In this tale, because he lacks the sincere wish for enlightenment (*dōshin*) the scholar monk’s request to view the *kami*’s face is rebuffed. The appearance of a *kami* as judge of a scholar monk’s virtue is significant, as is the ‘use’ of the *kami* as a resource for clarifying doctrinal understanding. Similar elements appear in a tale about Dōhan that appears in the *Tsūnenshū*, the *Fudoki*, and the *Yasan myōreishū* (though their sources are unclear) and a comparison of the two tales may shed mutual light on their subtexts. In the mid-thirteenth century, Dōhan, it is reported, would frequently engage in *mondō* with Kariba Myōjin (that is, Kōya Myōjin), who would manifest himself on a rock in the garden of Shōchi’in, Dōhan’s residence. The *Yasan myōreishū* describes this as a discussion of esotericism as a chanted or poetic exchange (*mikkyō no shōwa* 密教の唱和). (*Kami* oracles were often recorded as having been delivered as poems, while the debates that take place today are performances of chanting (*shōmyō*), indicating another commonality between ritual debates and communication between monks and *kami*. In fact, there is a genre of *waka* called *mondōka* 問答歌—“dialogue poems”—presumably what is being described here).

The appearance of this particular manifestation of Kariba Myōjin was called ‘Yōgō Myōjin’ 影向明神 and that the ‘Yōgō Myōjin’ painting at Dōhan’s Shōchi’in was based on a prototype (*tehon*) made by Dōhan and based on his perception/vision of the *kami* (*kantoku* 感得). This kind of painting or drawing—which came to be called a ‘*kantoku-zō*’ 感得像—is a type of iconography that differs from conventional Buddhist iconography as it is based on mystical perception. The ‘Yellow Fudō’ of Onjōji is perhaps most representative of this type. The earliest of the records of Dōhan’s *kantoku* is 1672 (in the *Tsūnenshū* temple history), but many mentions of such experiences and their related iconographies survive from his own period: Myōe’s painting of Kasuga Myōjin, for example, was made as a commemoration of its manifestation, and as a show of his gratitude. The *Tsūnenshū* describes Dōhan’s *mondō* in the following way (using yet another name, ‘Kōya Daimyōjin’):

Kōya Daimyōjin would always manifest itself at this temple, and engage in *mondō* with the Ajari Dōhan. Today on the mountain above there remains a ‘Yōgō *iwa*’ and this is the place the Myōjin would always come to, and at this temple the copy of the body of the Myōjin’s manifestation reflects the form of that time. (Tinsley 2019, pp. 328–32)

It is added that:

The image of the manifestation of Kōya Myōjin is based on the model ‘copied’ by Dōhan at this time. (Tinsley 2019, p. 311)

That he was able to depict it suggests that Dōhan had been able to perceive the entirety of the *kami*’s body including its face. The iconography is considerably different to that of other paintings such as that which provides the *kami* with the appearance of a hunter or aristocrat. This new style is said to be related to *mondō-kō*: it has been suggested as having been the icon for the *Chigo Mondō-kō*, and it also seems to be the icon for the *Gohonjiku* 御本地供, a ritual that is necessary for participation in the *Rissei Rongi* debate to be discussed briefly below. Considered in the conceptual and literary context of the *Shasekishū* story, the idea promoted through this record of Dōhan’s encounter and resultant iconography is arguably that perception of the deity was proof of Dōhan’s sincerity and a sign of the *kami*’s approval of Dōhan’s approach to doctrinal study, which could buttress him (or the scholar monks of Kōyasan, for whom he had become representative) against accusations of doctrinal study as merely a means to worldly profit (the alleged transgression of the Nara monks in *Shasekishū*). The tale of Dōhan, then, counterpoints that of the monk of Mujū’s tale, who similarly is a representative (but of Nara monks). Thus, it also suggests, however indirectly, that organized doctrinal study, in its aim to be on a par with that of Nara, was associated with Dōhan. The comparison with Nara is also apparent in the *hyōbyaku* associated with the monthly *mondō* that is addressed below.

The new iconography produced by these scholarly encounters between Dōhan and Kariba/Kōya/Yōgō Myōjin was important: it was used in rituals related to the major, systematized, and main debate ritual of the Muromachi period, the *Rissei Rongi*. The ascription of this *mondō*-related god and its iconography to Dōhan also doubtless reflects the importance of Shōchi’in as one of the earliest centers for doctrinal studies and the importance of Dōhan’s contribution to study: it was during his lifetime that the foundations for Shōchi’in as a site for this are said to have been laid (Yamamoto 2004, pp. 7–9). In the Muromachi period, following Yūkai’s systematization of Shingon branches, Shōchi’in was affiliated with the Hōmon school (the other was the Jumon school) indicating clearly that by this time it had become a base for scholar monks (Yamamoto 2004, p. 11). It is unfortunate that very little concrete evidence survives for reconstruction of Shōchi’in’s role as such a site, but its Muromachi and Edo reputation may indicate its earlier stages.

Two further examples will suffice to show that the notion of *kami* as instructors and that the idea that interaction between monk and *kami* was often one of (or resembling) *mondō* were shared among scholar monks at Kōyasan. The *Yūkai Hōin Go Monogatari no koto* 宥快法印御物語之事, by Yūkai’s follower, describes an encounter with a possessed eleven-year-old girl who delivers a stream of oracles. Yūkai fears that during Mappō, oracles may be a deceptive ploy by heretical *kami* and he tests it by asking questions on doctrine. Here, Yūkai’s assumption is that if a *kami* is a ‘true *kami*’ it will be able to explain the difficult Buddhist theories he inquires about in order to test it, an attitude that is a reflection, but also a development, of ideas mentioned above regarding the role of the ‘good *kami*’ as protectors of Buddhism. It also, again, bears a strong similarity to the performance of *mondō*, or debate: it is a test of knowledge. In Yūkai’s 1375 *Hōkyōshō* 宝鏡鈔, his conception of the function of *kami* is again discernible:

There are many heresies in the transmissions of the lineages with the names of Myōchō, Kensei, and others. This was not conjectured by man, but proclaimed by Niu Daimyōjin. The people who have practiced this method have been numerous but they have no arcane protection. For the greater part both the men and the learning became extinct on this mountain. (Vanden Broucke 1992, p. 18)<sup>8</sup>

Yūkai’s aim, here and during much of his monastic career, was to eliminate from Shingon what he deemed its heretical elements and to systematize it. In this context, his interpretation of the *kami* as primarily concerned with accuracy and as able to detect heresy can be seen as an aspect of his overall project. Additionally, considering the fact that he was the Ryūgi-sha candidate (one of the two principle candidates) at the inaugural *Rissei*

*Rongi* debate, and as a figure deeply concerned with doctrinal study, it can be assumed that his thoughts on the *kami* and education exerted significant influence over the mountain community. Elsewhere, Yūkai's student describes a scene in which Yūkai was instructed on *siddham* script by Niu Myōjin:

In the making of the Shitsuji shō there were some unresolved problems. One evening a female *kami* carrying a lantern came and spoke. "I am the female deity of this mountain, Niutsuhime . . ." The *kami* instructed him on each [problem]. (Yūson Hōin kusetsu, Kaigen sōzu ki 宥尊法印口説快玄僧都, p. 108)

Again, the vision is adduced as the origin of new iconography for painted images of Niu Myōjin in the same way that Nyohō Shōnin's and Dōhan's visions and instructions had functioned. In other words, these iconographies are of *kami* in the specific roles of instructing monks on their scholarly studies or giving them advice or disciplinary cautions, and many of these have also been proposed as having been icons for the ritualized *mondō*. It is possible then, to suggest that the 'situational' origins of the iconography—to whom the *kami* manifested and for what reason—relate to their functions in *mondō-kō*. The presence (as embodied in icon or not) of *kami* at the *mondō* replicated the role they had of instructing monks, and—except for Kariba Myōjin (the mountain *kami* depicted as a hunter), who does not seem to have ever been used as a *mondō-kō* icon (Yōgō Myōjin, it appears, filled this role instead)—the roots of the iconography cannot be traced to the usual source cited—the *engi* texts. Furthermore, it seems that it was believed the icon itself possessed a kind of numinous, communicative agency (cf. Sharf and Sharf 2002).

So, it appears that at least by the medieval period, the offering of *mondō* to *kami* was less a way of educating and liberating the *kami*, and rather a performance of one-to-one *mondō* between monks and *kami*; it furthermore most likely involved the notion of *kami* as a strict mode of surveillance of monastic discipline<sup>9</sup> and instructor of monks' doctrinal understanding. Indeed, and I thank the anonymous peer reviewer for drawing this to my attention, the notion that monks educated and liberated *kami* from samsaric suffering is anachronistic when used to explain later historical developments, if not somewhat outdated from the beginning. In the full throes of honji-sujaku theorizing, *kami* are, as this reviewer termed it, "Buddhist agents". The form of Buddhist–*kami* oracle was an appropriate medium then by which teachings could be transmitted, and in the case of the content of *Takusen ki*, as a method of sustaining a lineage in danger of becoming extinct. While the precise procedure by which these specific *Takusen ki* teachings were transmitted is unclear, as shown above, later accounts of the event describe it as a kind of *mondō* between monk and *kami*. Furthermore, the tale of Dōhan's chanted *mondō* with Kōya/Yōgō Myōjin provides an origin for what, at some point, became an icon related to the (chanted and highly choreographed) *Rissei Rongi* debate: underpinning the debate rituals performed by monks was the concept of monks and *kami* engaging together in Buddhist doctrinal debates. What is important here is not that the relationship between monastic communities and the *kami* developed from one of teacher to student (in what is conventionally narrativized as a somewhat subjugating move in order to control rival religious systems through incorporation), but that the scholastic and intellectual and capabilities of the *kami* were added—lauded, even, and seemingly feared—and became a resource for debate preparation and performance. Rambelli's demonstration of the way in which *kami* became punishers of transgressions and arbiters of justice well supports this development in the interactions between *kami* and monks.

## 2. Concepts of the *Kami* in *Mondō* Ritual Texts of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

In order to elucidate the significance of the idea that there is an apparent link between *kami* and *mondō*, and before moving to the *Rissei Rongi* debate, I examine two documents related to systematized *mondō* of the late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries: the account of Go-Uda'in's pilgrimage to Kōyasan (*Go-Uda'in gokōki* 後宇田院御幸記) (1313) and Kakuwa's 1319 *Niu Kōya Ryōsho Daimyōjin Hyōbyaku* 丹生高野兩所大明神表白 (*Invocation*

and *Statement of Ritual Purpose to Niu and Kōya Ryōsho Daimyōjin*). Using these and related contemporary texts I draw attention to the emphasis on *yōgō* of the *kami*, and indications of Kōyasan's self-consciousness regarding its scholarship in contradistinction with Kōfukuji and Hieizan, which it expresses through interpretations of the relationship of the *kami* to the Buddhist entities.

Go-Uda'in was an early attendee of the *Chigo mondō-kō*. The origins of this are obscure. *Shunjū* attributes its foundation to a certain monk of imperial cloister Shinō'in named Kaison 快尊, but Kaison's identity is in turn unclear. The earliest source is the 1313 diary of the royal pilgrimage, but this does not mention Kaison as the founder of the institution. Nonetheless, *Shunjū* records that when Kaison died, this *mondō-kō* became a memorial ceremony for him. The importance of the link with imperial family should be emphasized. *Mondō*, as we have seen, had an established history as the means by which ecclesiastical promotion was organized and attained, and the positions attained thereby led to strong imperial affiliations, and hence political power. The *kami* of Amanosha shrine had risen in rank during the medieval period as reward for its part in defense against the Mongol invasions in 1281, just a decade before institution of the *Chigo mondō-kō*. *Shinkoku* 神國 ("sacred realm") ideology was reinforced by this act of divine intervention; its discourse served, as Kuroda Toshio (1926–1993) has shown, to buttress claims to authority, especially in regard to land ownership (Rambelli 1996, p. 407). At around the same time as the *mondō-kō* of 1313 (attended by Go-Uda'in), Niu Myōjin was also linked by blood to the principal imperial goddess, Amaterasu, through scholar monk theory (such as that by Gahō (?–1317) in *Dado hiketsu shō* 駄都秘決抄 (*Shingonshū zensho* 23, pp. 1932–39). The description of the *mondō-kō* by the author of the Go-Uda'in diary conveys the impressive and mysterious atmosphere of the event, and relates some ideas governing the connection between the *mondō* and *kami* worship. The identity of the *keibyaku* presenter for the offering to the *Chinju Ryōsho* 鎮守兩所 (the temporary manifestations of Niu Myōjin and Kariba/Kōya Myōjin) whose evidently impressive voice is likened to that of Furuna Sonja (Pūrṇa, the most acclaimed orator of Śakyamuni's disciples) was very likely another Chuin-ryū adherent, Kakuwa, who is named elsewhere in the diary as the *Hyōbyaku godōji* for the ceremony held at Okuno'in on the twelfth of the month, and as the Shigyō-Dai (assistant to the top-ranking *kengyō*) at the time. Kakuwa was also the author of the aforementioned *Niu Kōya Ryōsho Daimyōjin Hyōbyaku* which was used in the *mondō* offering to the *kami* held on the sixteenth of the first month in 1319 (*Kōyasan monjo* 3:453). As a text from the period roughly corresponding to the beginnings of systematized *mondō*, this prayer is a useful source for contemporaneous ideas about the *kami* and their conceptual link with scholarship. It is a prayer for the fulfillment of the vows of the monks of the ranks of Jōgo, the School Heads of the Right and the Left, and the scholar monks: the aim of the prayer is clear. In another section we find references to the *kami* involved:

The offering to Yōgō Myōjin

The increase of the authorial light of the Ryōsho Gongen

Protection of the scholar monks in the place where they can achieve *siddhi*

The same merit to all sentient beings of the cosmos. (*Kōyasan monjo* 3:453)

Here, the protection of the success of the monks' attainment of *siddhi* (spiritual, often paranormal, abilities) along with the offerings to Yōgō Myōjin, the increase of the authority and blessing of Ryōsho Gongen (i.e., Niu Myōjin and Kōya Myōjin) and the extension of merit to the *Dharmadhātu* (*hōkai* 法界) and all sentient beings is invoked. It is important to note that Yōgō Myōjin is the entity to which the *hōraku* (Dharma offering) is made, indicating that Yōgō Myōjin (literally, "manifested Myōjin" (but at Kōyasan specifying the particular appearance of Kariba Myōjin) was by now considered a specific object of worship. We may, here, then, discern a connection between the Yōgō Myōjin that Dōhan had engaged with in *mondō*, and the Yōgō Myōjin that is thought to be depicted in the icon painting for the later *Rissei Rongi*.<sup>10</sup> The idea of Yōgō Myōjin current at that time is seen in the Go-Uda'in pilgrimage record as well: "[The *kami*] manifest themselves in various

places, every day there are manifestations [at Kōyasan]” writes his diarist (*Go-Uda'in gokōki*, p. 173). Faith in *yōgō* can also be seen in the aforementioned *Takusen ki*:

[F]rom the door at the north of the Chiban of the Kurin, the Amano Daimyōjin manifests every day. Daishi exits through this door and goes to Amano. (*Takusen ki*, vol. 2, article 10 in Abe 1983, p. 84)

In the description of the debate in Go-Uda'in's diary, we find a similar mention of the manifesting *kami*:

Three-thousand scholar monks are assembled in the garden, all of one heart. And, the Gongen deities of the two tutelary shrines manifest at this site through the *hōden* door . . . Sanchi satta 三地薩埵 in the same way . . . attends this ceremony. (*Go-Uda'in gokōki*, p. 173.)

The two *kami* manifest, and Kūkai (also by now known as ‘Sanchi satta’) attends. In other words, the *kami* to whom the *mondō* is offered are of the specific ‘type’ which is ‘perceptible.’ The *Mondō-kō no honzon* (likely for the *Chigo Mondō-kō*) which depicts, unusually, the triad of Kūkai, Niu, and Kariba/Kōya Myōjin, may well reflect the ‘attendance’ of the three. The idea of ‘Yōgo Myōjin’ that is so closely connected to Dōhan was, then, already quite current within the climate of Kōyasan in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Thus, it is possible that these ideas developed at the time when the *Chigo Mondō-kō* was set up. If so, the fact that a painting of Yōgo Myōjin came to be used in the later, and grander *Rissei Rongji* debate, can also be thought of as an extension of these earlier developments. This will be examined in more detail below.

Kakuwa's *hyōbyaku* provides further information about the links between *kami* and debates:

At this shrine, the Gongen [Niu and Kōya Myōjin] were ordered by our patriarch teacher to settle in the eight-petalled lotus peak and contracted to protect Mikkyō, to maintain the prosperity of Sanmitsu Kongō, and accordingly to protect the scholar monks. And every month at the time when connection can be attained (*yuen no jisetsu*), for one day, a *Musō no kōseki* 無相之講席 is held; an offering to the *kami* is arranged and made. (*Go-Uda'in gokōki*, p. 173)

Additionally, in Kakuwa's *hyōbyaku*, an interesting comparison of the Kōyasan Ryōsho Gongen with Kasuga Gongen (Kōfukuji and its shrine) and Hie Sannō (Hieizan and its shrine) follows, which likely reflects both a rivalry for resources, and the relationships between these powerful esoteric (or Kūkai-related) Buddhist-*kami* sites. Additionally—key to the subject of this paper—such were/are all mountain-based or mountain-linked temples, and major sites for advanced scholarship and grand debates too. They were the models for Kōyasan's *Rissei Rongji*. Kōyasan identifies itself in this *hyōbyaku* as on a par—competing, or even as part of a ‘triad’—with temple complexes that were both major economic and political players and were participants in debates that led to participation in rule-of-the-realm politics. Tendai, in the eleventh century, had been granted by the state (by Go-Sanjo Tennō and Shirakawa Tennō) the *Hokkyō sanne* 北京三會 three debates (the ‘Three Heian (or, Kyoto) Assemblies’ corresponding to and contrasting with the aforementioned three assemblies of Nara) which were more favorable to Tendai, and probably also to the court (Sango 2015, pp. 48–52), and the situation balanced out the fact that Hossō monks (of Kōfukuji) had up to that time dominated the debates and ecclesiastical positions. Tendai's debates were the Hokke-e (Lotus Assembly), Saishō-e (Golden Light Assembly), and the Daijō-e (Mahayana Assembly). In Kōyasan's case, the debate texts were those of Kūkai such as the *Sokushin jōbutsugi*, the *Unjigi*, and the *Hannya shingyō hiketsu*. Yet another of Kongōbuji's most pressing projects at the time was unyoking itself from the authority of Tōji and Ninnaji. Alignment of itself with Hieizan and Kōfukuji may represent shifting alliances and a growing independence. In this comparison with other Buddhist sites, while it is emphasized that the *kami* and buddhas are separate entities, their relationship is also analogized as that of ‘response’ between moon and water. In the case of Kasuga, the relationship is delineated through the link of the *kami* and the light of the moon on

Mount Mikasa, and in the case of Hiei Sannō, the link of the *kami* and the water of the shore of the lake of Shiga no Ura. The *kami* of Kōyasan are introduced into this scheme as operating in a moon–water relationship, which seems to have been drawn from the Tendai school metaphors.

*Honji-suijaku* thought originated in Tendai *Lotus Sutra* exegetical texts. In Japan, the spatially and temporally transcendent Buddhist deities came to be identified with local *kami* and with specific locations in the Nara and Heian periods. As Jacqueline Stone remarks, when the relation between origin and manifestation was applied to the relation between buddhas and *kami* “it became possible to conceive of the deities, not merely as protectors of Buddhism or as suffering beings in need of Buddhist salvation, but as local manifestations of the transcendent buddhas and bodhisattvas, compassionately projected as ‘skillful means’ to lead the people of Japan to enlightenment” (Stone 1999, p. 41). And indeed, in this *hyōbyaku*, the *kami* are conceived within this *honji-suijaku* paradigm as far from “merely protectors” or “suffering beings in need of Buddhist salvation” (as, too, the ideas in this period governing sutras, debates, and lectures as offerings to *kami* would suggest) as has been suggested throughout this paper.

*Institution of the Rissei Rongi, Manifestations of Gods, and the Worship of the Myōjin and Ancestors*

The *Rissei Rongi*, set up in 1407, was also performed as an offering to the *kami*. An account of its establishment is given in *Shunjū* for 1406 and 1407 where it gives as one of its sources the obscure *Yasankenbunshū*:

The Daimyōjin manifests in *suijaku* form. And utters a *takusen* [oracle]. The monks on this whole mountain are lazy (*randa*). Study of practice and doctrine has fallen into decline (*suibi*). I am compelled to ascend to and return to Amanohara. [*Yasankenbunshū* relates: Unrest between the Southern and Northern Courts has [already?] come about. The wisdom study of the mountain monks and the debate place for study of doctrine has gradually fallen into decline. And the worship at the shrines performed by the temple has fallen year by year into decline. At this time the Daimyōjin uttered a *takusen* [ . . . ] So a Great Ceremony held at Sannō’in. A *kami* offering was reverentially prepared.) [ . . . ] The *kami* delivered another *takusen*. Perform the great ceremony at the Sannō’in every third day of the fifth month. There, on that day, there will be some rain. It should be taken as a sign of the protection of the mountain, it [the *takusen*] said.” [The next year, Nara (Nanto) was visited for the study and transmission of the [ . . . ] two great ceremonies. It was named Ryūgi-Seigi. It began to be performed at the Sannō’in. A document says, the first *takusen* was in the third month. The second should be considered as having been in the fifth month]. (*Shunjū*, pp. 225–26)

Indeed, accordingly, in the fifth month, scholar monks were dispatched to study the great debates at Kōfukuji:

Summer, fifth month.

The mountain monks hold a meeting (*shūe*). Chōyo 長譽 (of Muryōjū’in) and Kaizen (of Shakamon’in) are designated. Both monks are ordered to head to Kōfukuji in Nara. And they study and are transmitted [ . . . ] the two great ceremonies [Yuima-e and Hokke-e]. (*Shunjū*, p. 226)

In the following year, on the third day of the fifth month, the new debate takes place:

Summer, fifth month, day three:

[ . . . ] [A]t Sannō’in the Risseigi Dai-e is performed. This is done as a *kami* offering. The Ryūgi is Chōyo Ajari. The Seigi is Yūkai Hōin. The Shōgi (referee) is Kaizen Ajari. (*Shunjū*, p. 226)

The impetus for establishing the debate here is similar to that given of the *Chigo Mondo-kō*: it is by request of the mountain deity, through a manifestation and/or a *takusen*.

Because of the monks' laziness and negligence, (recalling the content of the inscriptions on the *kami* paintings) the deity threatens to cease monastic protection and to return to Amanogahara (Amanosha). According to the Taishō period *Sannō'in Risseigi* 山王院豎精義<sup>11</sup> manual that is used today, the Ryūgi-sha 豎義者 and Seigi-sha, 精義者 which are the appellations for the two main participants in the *Rissei Rongi*, worship one (or possibly both) *kami* for one year. This is undertaken from the third day of the ninth month once a day at the temples of the participants until the same day of the following. They are prohibited from leaving the mountain during the year and observe strict austerities, considered to be "messengers" (*shisha*) of the *kami*. On the third day of the fifth month, the *Rissei Rongi* takes place and on the third of the ninth, the *kami* (icon) is passed from the temple of the worshipper to that of the newly designated candidate. Within a week of this day too, at the temple of the Seigi-sha participant, a *Hirō Myōjin-kō* 披露明神講 (a debut of a *kami*-centered assembly for its new members, both the Ryūgi-sha and the Seigi-sha) is held. These two priests are known during this year as Ryūgi Myōjin and Seigi Myōjin and are understood to represent these *kami* during the debate. The Ryūgi has the role of constructing an argument in response to the subject of debate (*rondai*). Simply put, he is the exam candidate. The Seigi, as the term indicates, was responsible for clarifying that argument through detailed explanation and may be defined as the examiner and the Seigi-sha has the status of a teacher (*shi*) and Ryūgi-sha that of the student/follower (*deshi*).

Furthermore, according to Gorai Shigeru, the ritual practice involved in this debate is part of a process of promotion to the highest rank at Kōyasan and seen as the role of 'substitute' of Kūkai. This, he says, is an example of his 'three-deities-three-aspects' theory that he deems common to mountain cults (Gorai 1989, p. 126). However, it is also possible that this suggests that the two roles embodied are of the *kami* (as 'teachers') and Kūkai (as 'student'). An example of an aspect of the debate ritual that may support this idea is the '*nanado-han*' 七度半 (lit. 'seven and a half'). As is described in the *Sannō'in Risseigi* manual, immediately before the commencement of the debate, the Ryūgi-sha and Seigi-sha arrive at the Danjō Garan (central complex at Kōyasan), whereby the Seigi-sha proceeds to the Miedō Hall and the Seigi-sha to the Sannō'in. A monk assisting the Ryūgi-sha then advances toward and retreats seven and a half times (hence the name) from a monk assisting the Seigi-sha. According to oral tradition, the *Sannō'in Risseigi* reports, this was/is called the "Daishi Myōjin no Mondō" and is (a representation of) the *kami* (or Myōjin) 'meeting' Daishi (i.e., Kūkai) ("*Myōjinsama ga Daishisama wo mukaeru*" (*Sannoin Risseigi*, p. 114), although it is not perfectly clear at this point which figure represents the *kami* and which Kūkai, if indeed a meeting between the two is what is being performed. After this the Seigi-sha leaves the Miedō Hall and enters Sannō'in for the debate itself.

### 3. Conclusions

I have tried to draw attention to the concepts informing the connection between debates and *kami* at medieval Kōyasan. Participation in debates was an important stage in the monastic ranking system and hence in the administration of the temple complex. Given the organizational importance of such a system, the role of *kami* requires investigation. In the restoration and systematization of the *mondō* that took place between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, *kami* seem to have been conceived of not only as 'protectors of' Dharma, but also as teachers or transmitters of it. Sources suggest that this transmission could be accomplished through oracles, or through *mondō* with monks. Also found is the idea that the ability to see the form and face of a *kami* was a measure of a monk's efforts in his doctrinal study, as well the integrity of his motives, and so the 'copying' of a *kami*'s form/face; that is, its depiction in a drawing or painting, was related to matters such as orthodox and ethical scholarship, and it also depended on the monk's *mondō*-type communication with *kami*. In other words, icons based on *kantoku* are more than merely records of mystical experiences; they signify the recipient of the vision as being orthodox in his interpretation of the doctrine. It should be added that such authority could be invested in the *kami* in part because of the significant role they also played in

punishing transgressions (cf. Rambelli 2002). The origins of the icon of the *Gohonjiku* pre-debate practice can be traced back to concepts current in the thirteenth century and ideas surrounding Dōhan's *mondō* exchanges with Kariba/Kōya/Yōgō Myōjin which were part of a trope of contemporaneous concepts about visibility and perception, scholarly virtue, and, of course, the relationship between monk and *kami*.

An investigation of how the *kami* functioned in the *Chigo mondō-kō* and *Rissei Rongi* reveals that the institutions of these debates were framed textually and visually as mystical, and according to a sudden request of a *kami* who cautions against inadequate study and worship. It may be surmised that such institutions, and other new forms of worship, were necessary to counter decline in education and bolster Kōyasan's authority. Their necessity, then, points to the existence of some unstable situation. Aspects of the *Rissei Rongi* structure suggest that it was an enactment by the monks in some way of Kūkai (as ancestor/ancestral god) and the *kami*, but the precise nature of this enactment remains unclear. Both Gorai and Hinonishi write that the monk occupying the highest-ranking role in Kōya's ecclesiastical system—that of the *Hōin-kengyō* 法印檢校—was acting as a stand-in (*migawari*) for the absent Kūkai (Hininishi 1998, pp. 1–37).

Finally, this hypothesis challenges views that doctrinal study declined during the medieval period becoming 'mere' ritual. In this paper, it is suggested that the ritualization of debates does not necessarily have a correlative relation to the decline or prosperity of doctrinal scholarship. Rather, the ritualization reflects the function of *kami* in the scholastic arena and it may be said that, in its replication of communication with *kami*, debate at Kōyasan was, itself, ritual.

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## Abbreviations

|      |   |
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| NKBT | <i>Nihon koten bungaku taikei</i> 日本古典文學大系. Edited by Takagi Ichinosuke 高木市之助 et al. 102 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1957–1967.                                |
| T    | <i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 et al. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932. |

## Notes

- At Kōyasan today, there are two monthly debates (*tsukinami monkō*): the *Sannō'in Rishu Sanmai tsuketari monkō* on the sixteenth and a debate at the Miedo on the nineteenth. The *Rissei Rongi* takes place as an annual ceremony on the third day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar. Other lecture/debates include the *Kangaku-e*, the *Uchidangi Rongi*, and the *Misaisho-kō*.
- The *gakuryō* comprised one component of the '*Kōya sangata*,' a three-part composition of members of the monastic community formed by the late Heian period.
- Aaron Proffitt's forthcoming monographic work on Dōhan (Proffitt 2022, University of Hawai'i Press) is an important one that, while not including Dōhan's interest in and interaction with the *kami*, provides an excellent background to Dōhan as prolific and influential scholar monk. Proffitt has also published several papers on Dōhan's scholastic and projects (Proffitt 2013, 2015, 2018). For a broader examination in English of Kōyasan's educational endeavors, especially among scholar monks, see also William Londo (2004), Matthew McCullen (2016), and Elizabeth Tinsley (2010, 2014, 2019). For these, please refer to the bibliography.
- The *Fudōki* gives a fuller version of this text and its context, and attributes it to a text *Amano-miya Shinnichi Kiroku* 天野宮信日記録 as having been part of a vision of the *shugenja* (mountain ascetic monk) Nichizō Shōnin, but it also appears as a *kirigami* ("cut paper" document) from Sanbōin at Kōyasan (kept now in Kōyasan library), dated Kenji 2 (1276) and attributed to Dōhan.
- Translation by Moerman (2007), p. 252.
- Translation slightly amended.

- 7 Incidentally, it is quite possible that the offerings referred to were the ascetic rites undertaken by monks in preparation for participation in debates on Hossō doctrine, mentioned, for example, in Kōfukuji's *Daijōin jisha zōjiki* 大乘院寺社雜記.
- 8 For this passage I used the English translation provided by Pol Vanden Broucke.
- 9 For example, *Takusen ki*, vol. 1, article 24. See [Abe 1983](#), p. 105.
- 10 Viewing of the painting(s) is not permitted by anyone other than the two principal debate participants.
- 11 Unpublished; I consulted a copy from a head priest of a Kōyasan temple.

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