

Ganjin: From *Vinaya* Master to Ritsu School Founder

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Introduction

THE monk Ganjin 鑑真 (Ch. Jianzhen, 688–763) holds a prominent place in Japanese Buddhist history.¹ Nowadays, he is venerated as the founder of the Ritsu 律 school, the branch of Japanese Buddhism that focuses on the study of the *vinaya* (Ch. 律; Jp. anglicization *ritsu*), or the laws and precepts of the monastic order. The view that Ganjin was the founder of a distinct school of Buddhism has found expression in textual, material, and visual culture.² Yet Japanese and Western scholarship have both concluded that the Ritsu school was not a distinct sectarian community during Ganjin's lifetime. Indeed, Ganjin did not found the Ritsu school but was designated its founder during the Kamakura 鎌倉 period (1185–1333), a time when founder worship had emerged and flourished.

Modern scholarship on Kamakura Buddhism has been dominated by the founder-centered approach of sectarian scholarship.³ Key figures of this time, such as Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215), and Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282), were regarded as the putative founders of the Pure Land sect 浄土宗, the Pure Land Shin sect 浄土真宗, the Sōtō Zen sect 曹洞宗, the Rinzaï Zen sect 臨濟宗, and the Nichiren sect 日蓮宗, respectively. In addition, Kūkai 空海 (774–835), representative of monastics from the early Heian 平安 period (794–1185), was elevated into an object of founder worship during the Kamakura period.

Although prior scholarship has addressed the phenomenon of founder worship during the Kamakura period, no studies have examined how Ganjin was transformed from an idealized leading figure of the

1 This paper focuses mainly on Japanese sources, therefore, I use his Japanese name, Ganjin, rather than his Chinese name. For other Chinese monks mentioned, I use their Chinese names.

2 Modern Japanese dictionaries, such as *Kokushi daijiten* 国史大辞典 (1983), *Nihon bukkyōshi jiten* 日本仏教史辞典 (1999), *Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 (digital version, 2007), *Nihon jinmei daijiten* 日本人名大辞典 (2001), all concur that Ganjin was the founder of the Ritsu school. In addition, the Nara-period wooden statue of Ganjin is stored and worshiped in the Founder's Hall of Tōshōdaiji.

3 The research on this issue can be found in Christopher Callahan, "Kakuno and the Making of Shinran and Shin Buddhism," PhD dissertation (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2011); Richard K. Payne, *Re-visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); and David Quinter, *From Outcasts to Emperors: Shingon Ritsu and the Mañjuśrī Cult in Medieval Japan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015).

Ritsu study group to a venerated founder. I will argue that the hagiographic texts on Ganjin produced shortly after his death were a critical first step toward the transformation of a monk who was merely a *vinaya* master into a venerated sectarian founder. These works portrayed him as a charismatic monk with countless virtues, and this can be interpreted as an attempt by Ganjin's successors to confirm his authority in the Ritsu community and spread his merits to future generations. This paper examines the process by which Ganjin was promoted from a *vinaya* master to an idealized monk who was later regarded as the leading authority of the Ritsu school. First, I provide a historical overview of the transmission of the *vinaya* to Japan prior to Ganjin's arrival. Second, I discuss the motivations of the Nara 奈良 court (710–794) to demonstrate why a *vinaya* master like Ganjin was regarded as necessary in Japan. Third, I use an analysis of the earliest hagiographies to explore how the received image of Ganjin changed after his death.

The Historical Transmission of the *Vinaya* to Japan

The *vinaya* is concerned with the rules and regulations governing the *sangha*, or monastic community. Five Buddhist canonical texts that contain treatises on the practices of moral discipline (Jp. *ritsuzō* 律藏) were introduced from India to China to provide the basic framework for Chinese Buddhism as it formed its initial interpretation of traditional monastic discipline by the eighth century.⁴ Among these texts, the *Sifen lü* 四分律 is the *vinaya* text that has been used in the ordination ceremony of monks and nuns from the Tang 唐 period (618–907) until the present day. In the early Tang dy-

nasty, the *Sifen lü* rose to prominence over other *vinaya* texts. It was imposed by imperial decree as the only valid *vinaya* in China, a process strongly encouraged by the monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), the founder of what came to be regarded as the Nanshan *lüzong* 南山律宗, or *vinaya* school of Nanshan.⁵ This school particularly promoted the *Sifen lü*. As scholar of Chinese Buddhism Ann Heirman suggests, there were two major factors that contributed to the rise of the *Sifen lü*: first, the eminent monk Daoxuan wrote *vinaya* commentaries with the conviction that the *Sifen lü* ordination procedure had been the model for the first Chinese ordinations; second, the Sui 隋 (581–618) and Tang emperors probably sought unification of the ordination procedure to simplify state control.⁶ As a result, the *Sifen lü* came to be regarded as the orthodox *vinaya* in China, and consequently became the basis of the development of rituals and precepts in Chinese Buddhism as a result of Daoxuan's commentaries on the text. In principle, monks and nuns belonging to every school in China were ordained in accordance with the *Sifen lü*, as it provided clear guidance on how a monk or nun should live.

In terms of the historical transmission of the *vinaya* to Japan prior to Ganjin's arrival, a vague description can be found in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (The Chronicles of Japan, 720), the *Shoku Nihongi* 續日本紀 (The Chronicles of Japan Continued, 797), and some miscellaneous writings by Buddhist monks.⁷ According to the *Nihon shoki*, the earliest transmission of *vinaya* to Japan can be traced back to the sixth century. In 588, Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子 (?–626) invited monks from Paekche and asked them how the precepts were to be received; Zenshin'ni 善信尼 (568–?) and two other nuns were then sent to Paekche to study the *vinaya*.⁸ The next step of the so-called Chinese orthodox *vinaya* transmission to Japan was conducted by the monk Dōkō 道光

4 The five *vinaya* texts include the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (Sk. *Sarvāstivādaśāstikāvinaya*; Eng. *Vinaya of Ten Recitations*), the *Sifen lü* (Sk. *Dharmaguptakāvinaya*; Eng. *Vinaya in Four Parts*), the *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (Sk. *Mahāsamghikāvinaya*; Eng. *Vinaya of Mahāsamghika*), the *Wufen lü* 五分律 (Sk. *Mahīśāsakāvinaya*; Eng. *Vinaya in Five Parts*), and the *Genben Shuoyiqie youbu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (Sk. *Mūlasarvāstivādaśāstikāvinaya*; Eng. *Vinaya of Mulasarvastivada*). For details on these *vinaya* texts in China, see Ann Heirman, "Vinaya from India to China," in *The Spread of Buddhism*, edited by Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 175–9; Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 3–52.

5 Ann Heirman, "Can We Trace the Early Dharmaguptakas?" *T'oung Pao* 88 (2002): 419–23.

6 For a detailed discussion on why the *Sifen lü* eventually became the only *vinaya* used in Chinese ordination ceremony, see Heirman, "Can We Trace the Early Dharmaguptakas?" 396–429.

7 Historian of Buddhism Naobayashi Futai notes that the appearance of distinctly Buddhist historical writing would have to wait until the medieval period. Naobayashi Futai, "Sangoku buppō denzū engi · Genkō shakusho no egaku rikishizō: Nihon kodai no sangaku juyō o megutte," *Nara, Nanto Bukkyō no dentō to kakushin*, edited by Samuel Crowell Morse and Nemoto Seiji (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2010), 14.

8 Kuroda Katsumi, ed., *Nihon shoki*, vol. 2 of *Shintei zōho kokushi taikai* (hereafter, SZK 2) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1964), 130.

(?-694). Based on a passage pertaining to Dōkō in the *Sangoku buppō denzū engi* 三國佛法傳通緣起 (History of the Propagation of Buddhism in India, China, and Japan; hereafter, SBDE; 1311), Dōkō was dispatched by Tenmu Tennō 天武天皇 (?-686) to study the *vinaya* in China. The source also mentions that he brought to Japan Daoxuan's commentary on the *Sifen lü*, the *Sifen lü xingshichao* 四分律行事鈔 (Transcript of the Procedures for the *Sifen lü*, seventh century), which was the most influential work of the *vinaya* school of Nanshan.⁹ Extant, albeit limited, sources indicate that Dōkō was likely the first person it is likely that Dōkō was the first person to introduce the orthodox *vinaya*, the *Sifen lü*, from China to Japan. Although the SBDE is a much later source, the existence of Dōkō can be confirmed in the *Nihon shoki*, where a short passage states “a contribution was sent for the funeral expenses of the *vinaya* master Dōkō.”¹⁰ This information was written down in the official record of Japanese history, suggesting the importance of Dōkō in his own time. Despite this, Dōkō was not included in the lineage of the Ritsu school. A reasonable explanation can be found in the official account on Ganjin in the *Shoku Nihongi*: “The Buddhist law flowed to the east, reaching our country [Japan]. Although we had its teachings, there was no one to transmit them.”¹¹ Thus, the government invited Ganjin to teach the precepts in Japan.

The Motivations of the Nara Court

According to the *Sifen lü*, the designated orthodox *vinaya* text, candidates in China who wanted to formally join the monastic community were to receive full ordination after they entered adulthood at the age of twenty. At the ordination ceremony, three superior monks and a minimum of seven witnesses, known as the *sanshi shichishō* 三師七証, should be present.¹² Yet,

even though the basic ideas of the Ritsu school had already been introduced to Japan, there was no qualified master in Japan capable of performing ordination procedures that satisfied these conditions. Since entering the priesthood freed commoners from taxation and labor obligation, large numbers of farmers abandoned their lands and became self-ordained monks, or *shidosō* 私度僧, without official permission. Consequently, revenue declined steeply, posing a danger to the centralized system of government. In order to contain the rapidly swelling numbers of non-officially sanctioned priests, the government decided to invite *vinaya* masters from China to Japan to strengthen religious discipline. As the result, the Chinese *vinaya* master Daoxuan 道璿 (702–760) was invited to come to Japan in 736.¹³ Nevertheless, it appeared that he was not capable of conducting ordinations that his Japanese clients considered sufficiently effective. In 753, the *vinaya* master Ganjin and his disciples finally arrived in Japan after experiencing extreme hardships during five failed attempts to cross the sea, during which Ganjin lost his eyesight.¹⁴ After his arrival in Japan, an adequate number of monks able to perform ordination ceremonies emerged.

Ganjin's activities in Japan were recorded in his earliest hagiographies.¹⁵ When he arrived in the Nara capital in 754, he constructed a temporary ordination platform in front of the Great Buddha Hall, where he conferred the bodhisattva precepts on Shōmu Tennō 聖武天皇 (701–756), then retired; his consort Kōmyō Kōgō 光明皇后 (701–760), the reigning empress, Kōken Tennō 孝謙天皇 (718–770), and 440 monks.¹⁶ Daoxuan's work, *Guanzhong chuangli jietan tu jing* 關中創立戒壇圖經 (Discussion and Diagram of the Ordination Platform in Guanzhong; early seventh cen-

preceptor), who was responsible for judging the qualifications of a postulant; and the *katsumashi* 羯磨師, who recited the *vinaya* texts and instructed their recipient. See Tōno Haruyuki, *Ganjin* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009), 19–20.

9 Gyōnen, *Sangoku buppō denzū engi, Koji ruien: Shūkyō bu*, edited by Jingū Shichō (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1968), 485.

10 SZK. 2, 422. The original text reads: 贈律師道光賜物. For an English translation, see Marcus Bingenheimer, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Japanese Student-Monks of the Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries: Their Travels to China and Their Role in the Transmission of Buddhism* (München: Ludicum, 2001), 96.

11 仏法東流至於本國雖有其教無人伝授. Aoki Kazuo, et al., *Shoku Nihongi 3, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai* (hereafter, SNKBT) 14 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 430.

12 The three teachers were the *kaiwajō* 戒和上, who was responsible for instructing the postulant; the *kyōjushi* 教授師 (the instructional

13 A discussion on Daoxuan's activities in Japan can be found in Paul Groner, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 22–4. Daoxuan 道璿 was the eighth-century monk (who should not be confused with the Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), founder of the *vinaya* school of Nanshan) who is mentioned earlier in this study. In the rest of the paper, “the eighth-century monk Daoxuan” is used to indicate Daoxuan 道璿.

14 SNKBT 14, 430.

15 More explanation is provided in the next section.

16 Ōmi no Mifune, *Tō daiwajō tōseiden*, No. 553 of *Dainihon bukkyō zenshū* (hereafter, DBZ 553), edited by Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1972), 29.

tury), provided an abundance of information on the procedure of ascending the platform to receive the precepts.¹⁷ Ganjin continued Daoxuan's efforts by establishing an official and permanent ordination platform at Tōdaiji. Prior to Ganjin's arrival, there was no fixed location for the ordination ceremony. After his arrival, the court had sought to control the numbers of monks by permitting full ordinations to be performed only on officially recognized precepts platforms (*kaidan* 戒壇).¹⁸ In addition to the platform in Nara, two more platforms were set up in 761 at Yakushiji 薬師寺 in Shimōsa 下総 province (present-day Chiba prefecture), and at Kanzeonji 観世音寺 in Dazaifu 太宰府 on the island of Kyushu.¹⁹ The other significant contribution to the *vinaya* transmission in Japan made by Ganjin was the establishment of Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺 in 759, which is now regarded as the headquarters of the Ritsu school in Japan.

Nara-period Hagiographies of Ganjin

Essentially, what people throughout Japanese history have known about Ganjin has been grounded mostly on hagiographies composed shortly after his death. They not only provide a record of Ganjin's life, but also create his history, constructing him as an extraordinary, charismatic teacher with countless virtues.

The oldest hagiography on Ganjin is the *Daitō denkaishi sōmeiki daiwajō Ganjin* 大唐传戒師僧名記大和上鑑真伝 (Hagiography of Tang *Vinaya* Transmitter Great Master Ganjin; hereafter, *Kōden* 広伝; sometime before 779). This was written by Ganjin's disciple Situō 思託 (d. 801–806), who accompanied him on all six of his arduous voyages. The second hagiography is the *Tō daiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征伝 (Records of Tang Great Master's Eastern Journey; hereafter, *Tōseiden* 東征伝; 779), which was composed by Ōmi no Mifune 淡海三船 (722–785) at Situō's request. The last is the *Kōsō shamō shakuganjinden* 高僧沙門釋鑑真伝 (Hagiography of the Eminent Monk Ganjin; hereafter, *Ganjin-den* 鑑真伝), collected in the *Enryaku sōroku* 延暦僧錄 (Records of Monks in the Enryaku Era, 788), produced by Situō. The *Tōseiden* is still extant, but only fragments

of Situō's two accounts have been preserved in other historical sources.²⁰

Viewing Situō's dominant role in the production of hagiographical writings on Ganjin, I believe that Situō was motivated by a desire to prevent Ganjin's life story from being cast into obscurity, and to legitimate his role in the Japanese monastic and secular society. This motivation is evident from the fact that he requested Ōmi no Mifune, who was regarded as the preeminent sinophilic literatus of the time, to write a shorter and well-polished version of Ganjin's hagiography based on his own version.²¹ Mifune's version allowed the hagiographies to reach the upper echelons of literate Japanese society, not just the monastic community. Evidence of Situō's intentions is clearly expressed in his autobiography *Jukōsō shamō Shitaku den* 從高僧沙門思託伝 (The Biography of the Junior Eminent Monk Situō, 788): "Situō composed *Wajō gyōki* [the *Kōden*], and requested Ōmi Mabito Genkai to write *Wajō tōgyōsō* [the *Tōseiden*], in order to bring forth [Ganjin's] past virtues and spread his glory to future generations."²²

As Situō had hoped, the production of these hagiographies resulted in increased awareness of Ganjin's merits in later Buddhist literature.²³ It appears that these Nara-period hagiographies were able to provide an example of the holy man of the Ritsu teaching for future generations and convince them of the efficacy of monastic doctrines. A similar view is evinced by the words quoted in the preface of the tenth-century hagiographic collection *Nihon ōjō gokuraku ki* 日本

20 Marcus Bingenheimer suggests the *Enryaku sōroku* was written between 782 and 805. See Marcus Bingenheimer, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Japanese Student-Monks of the Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries: Their Travels to China and Their Role in the Transmission of Buddhism* (München: Ludicum, 2001), 129.

21 In a passage from the *Shoku nihongi*, in the sixth month of the first year of Ten'ō 天応 (781), Ōmi no Mifune and Isonokami no Yakatsugu were described as "the top of the literati" 文人之首. See SNKBT 16, 200.

22 思託述和上行記。兼請淡海真人元開述和上東行傳荃。則揚先德流芳後昆。SZK 31, 80. Translated by Yuzhi Zhou.

23 Ganjin's life story has been well preserved in many later historical sources. These include *Kairitsu den raiki* 戒律傳來記 (History of the *Vinaya* Transmission, 830), *Ganjin wajō san iji* 鑑真和上三異事 (Three Fantastic Things about Ganjin, 831), *Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略記 (A Short History of Japan, 1094), *Tōdaiji yōroku* 東大寺要錄 (Concise History of Tōdaiji Temple, 1106), and *Nihon kōsōden yōmonshō* 日本高僧伝要文抄 (Hagiographies of Japanese Eminent Monks, 1249), *Ganjin wajō tōseiden e engi* 鑑真和上東征伝絵縁起 (Illustrated Scroll of the Great Monk Ganjin's Eastern Journey, 1298), and *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書 (History of Buddhism of the Genko Era, 1323).

17 Yifa, *The Origins*, 26.

18 Groner, *Saichō*, 26.

19 Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500–1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 88.

往生極樂記 (Biographies of People who Attained Birth in the Pure Land, 986) that “most people, foolish and of limited intellect, are unable to understand the logic of Amitābha’s salvation. Without accounts of actual instances of salvation, it is impossible to convince people and bring them to believe.”²⁴ Concerning Ganjin, consolidation of his role as a source of authority within the Ritsu community emerged during the Heian period. Appreciation of his glorious deeds and great achievements recorded in his earliest hagiographies is demonstrated by his designation as the founder of the Ritsu school in the Kamakura period, which was strongly promoted by the Tōdaiji monk Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321). These hagiographies from earlier times could thus be used as an effective way to legitimate the esteemed monk’s authority within the community, and to propagate his teachings.

As a third-generation disciple of Daoxuan, Ganjin is commonly credited as the first *vinaya* transmitter in Japan. This assertion can be traced to the *Kairitsu den raiki* 戒律傳來記 (History of the *Vinaya* Transmission, 830) written by the monk Buan 豐安 (?–840). It is the first history of *vinaya* transmission written in Japan. On the introduction of the *vinaya* to Japan, Buan wrote: “The first *vinaya* transmitter is Ganjin, who constructed the first ordination platform to transmit the *vinaya* in Japan.”²⁵ Even though the *vinaya* had already been introduced to Japan before Ganjin’s arrival, Buan still asserts that Ganjin was the first person to transmit the *vinaya* to Japan, probably because he was the first to construct an ordination platform at Tōshōdaiji. Meanwhile, Ganjin’s charisma may have also contributed to this declaration, since the rest of the text is filled with the glorification of Ganjin’s merits, mostly borrowed from the Nara-period hagiographies. Buan also composed a hagiography on Ganjin entitled *Ganjin wajo san iji* 鑑真和上三異事 (Three Fantastic Things about Ganjin, 831), an abridged version of the earlier texts.

The Kamakura period witnessed widespread acceptance of Ganjin’s importance, resulting in his veneration as the founder of the Ritsu school. Gyōnen played a pivotal role in establishing the Ritsu school in Ganjin’s

name in his writings. Ganjin was described as “the first patriarch” (*daiichi so* 第一祖), “the founding patriarch of the *vinaya* in Japan” (*Nihonkoku kairitsu shiso* 日本國戒律始祖), and “the founding patriarch of the Ritsu school in Japan” (*Nihon risshū no shiso* 日本律宗之始祖) by Gyōnen in his doxographies, namely the *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 (The Essentials of the *Vinaya* Tradition, 1306), the *Bonmōkai honsho nisshushō* 梵網戒本疏日珠鈔 (Annotation to the Commentary on Brahmajala Sutra, late thirteenth century), and the *Kegon gogyōshō tsūroki* 華嚴五教章通路記 (Commentary on Saddharma-pundarika Sutra, late thirteenth century).²⁶ Nichiren considered Ganjin to be the founder of the Ritsu school (*ganso* 元祖) in his work *Hōonshō* 報恩抄 (On Repaying Debts of Gratitude, 1276).²⁷ Since then, Ganjin’s image as the founder has been broadly accepted in Japanese Buddhist history.

Conclusion

The *vinaya* had been introduced to Japan far earlier than Ganjin’s arrival, but the Japanese court felt that there was no one qualified to supervise ordination rituals. Therefore, despite their efforts to transmit *vinaya* to Japan, people like Dōkō and the eighth-century monk Daoxuan are not included in the lineage of the Ritsu school. When Ganjin came to Japan, he took major steps to develop what later became the Ritsu school in Japan by establishing an ordination platform at Tōshōdaiji. Shortly after his death, Ganjin’s disciple Situo and the renowned literatus Ōmi no Mifune composed hagiographies about him in order to communicate his merits and glory to future generations. These early hagiographies served to establish Ganjin as the founder of the Ritsu school during the Kamakura period.

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24 Yoshishige no Yasutane, *Nihon ōjō gokuraku ki*, *Nihon shisō taikai* 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 11. English translation is quoted from Kazuo Kasahara, ed., *A History of Japanese Religion* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2009), 161.

25 初述傳戒法者。謂鑑真大和上入界始建壇場而傳戒法。T.2347.74.3c. Translated by Yuzhi Zhou.

26 T.2348.74.18c; T.2247.62.5a; T.2339.72.367b.
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