

AARON P. PROFFITT, PH.D.

Associate Professor of Japanese Studies

University at Albany, SUNY

Humanities 241

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Primary Area of Study Medieval (12th-13th Cent.) Japanese Buddhism

Other Areas of Interests Mahayana Buddhism, Pure Land, Tantra, Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, Buddhist Theology, Buddhist Philosophy

EMPLOYMENT

Fall 2021 to Present Associate Professor of Japanese Studies, University at Albany, SUNY

2015 to 2021 Assistant Professor of Japanese Studies, University at Albany, SUNY

EDUCATION

2023 to Present Certificate in Shin Buddhist Studies
Institute for Buddhist Studies-Berkeley, CA

2015 Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Dissertation Title: “Mysteries of Speech and Breath: Dōhan's (1179-1252) *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* 秘密念仏抄 and Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism”
Advisor: Professor Micah L. Auerback

2008 M.A. in Religious Studies
University of Colorado-Boulder

Thesis Title: “Koen the Dragon Bodhisattva: History and Hagiography, a Translation and Analysis of the ‘*Fuso Ryūjinden*’”
Advisor: Professor Terry F. Kleeman

2005 B.A. (Triple Major) in Religious Studies, Japanese Language and Culture, and Asian Studies
University of Colorado-Boulder

Honors Thesis Title: “Religious Nationalism of Japan”
Advisor: Professor George A. Keyworth, III

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Books and Monographs

2023 *Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism*. University of Hawaii Press.

Refereed Journal Articles

2020 “Nenbutsu Orthodoxies in Medieval Japan.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 47.1: 135-160.

2018 “*Dōhan no himitsu nenbutsu shisō: Kenmitsu bunka to Mikkyō Jōdokyō* 道範の秘密念仏思想：顕密文化と密教浄土教.” *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures* 1: 117-138.

Chapters in Edited Volumes and Anthologies

Forthcoming “Other Power in Shingon Buddhism.” *Other Power Anthology*, ed. Kenneth Tanaka.

Forthcoming “Death on the Mantra Path.” *Tantric World*, eds. Hugh Urban, Hillary Langberg, Anya Golokova.

2019 “Taking the Vajrayāna to Sukhāvātī.” In, *Methods in Buddhist Studies: Essays in Honor of Richard Payne*, ed. Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie E. F. Quli, 54-64. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

2019 “Dōhan’s Compendium on the Secret Nenbutsu: Fascicle One.” In *Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts: An Anthology*, ed. Georgios T. Halkias and Richard K. Payne, 269-315. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

Magazine Articles

2022 “The History of Pure Land Buddhism.” *Lion’s Roar Magazine*

2022 “East Asian Esoteric Buddhism: Esoteric Buddhism in China, Japanese Tendai, Japanese Shingon.” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*
Audio lecture transcription delayed due to COVID-19, expected 2022.

2019 “Translating the Lotus Sutra in the University Classroom.” *Dharma World Magazine* 46: 19-23.

2018 “Tiantai, Tendai, and the Lotus Sutra: Religious Diversity and Change.” *Dharma World Magazine* 45: 6-9.

2018 “Who was Kōbō Daishi Kūkai?” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* vol. 27, no. 4: 84-87, 110-112.

Conference Proceedings

- 2022 “On Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism.” *Religious Studies Review* 48.2: 215-217.
- 2019 “Neither Two nor One: Identity and Fluidity in Medieval Japan.” *Pacific World Journal* 20: 377-384.
- 2018 “*Himitsu nenbutsu to Tendai shisō* 秘密念仏と天台思想.” *Tendai Gakuhō tokubetsu gōdainishū* 天台学報特別号第二集: 43-50.
- 2013 “Nenbutsu Mandala Visualization in Dōhan’s Himitsu nenbutsu shō: An Investigation into Medieval Japanese Vajrayāna Pure Land.” *Pacific World Journal* 15: 153-169.

Encyclopedia, Dictionary, and Other Academic Reference Materials

- 2022 “Shingon.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Published Online, Oct. 19, 2022. (Peer Reviewed)
- 2019 “Dōhan.” In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Bowring, Richard and Lucia Dolce, *Volume 2: Lives*, 941-943. Leiden: Brill Publishers.
- 2015 Pronunciation Glossaries for Buddhist Terminology (Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan) in, *Norton Anthology of World Religions: Buddhism*, ed., Lopez, Donald S. Jr. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- 2013 “Bashō,” “Dōhan,” “Godenshō,” “Higashi Honganji: Ōtani-ha,” “Ichinengi,” “Kakuban,” “Kakukai,” “Kūkai,” “Kōyasan,” “Nishi Honganji: Honganji-ha,” “Tanengi,” “Sanmitsu,” “Shingonshū,” Buswell, Robert and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., eds. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 2010 “Dōhan,” Muller, A. C., ed. *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*.

Book Reviews

- 2024 “Review: Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai, by Paul Groner,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* (2024) 50 (1): 231-235.
- 2021-2022 “Review: Robert F. Rhodes, *Genshin’s Ōjōyōshū and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan*,” *The Eastern Buddhist Journal* 1.1: 2021-2022 (151-158).
- 2020 “Review: Geoffrey C. Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghavajra, the Ruling Elite, and the Emergence of a Tradition*,” *Religious Studies Review* (In Press).

- 2020 “Review: Charles B. Jones, *Chinese Pure Land Buddhism: Understanding a Tradition of Practice*,” *Religious Studies Review* (In Press).
- 2018 “Bernard Faure, *The Fluid Pantheon: Gods of Medieval Japan*, Volume 1; *Protectors and Predators: Gods of Medieval Japan*, Volume 2. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016.” *Journal of Religion in Japan* 7: 1-5.
- 2017 “Multiple Logics and Multiple Paths in Medieval Japanese Deathbed Practice.”
Review of Stone, Jacqueline, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment*
- H-Net Reviews, www.h-net.org

WORKS IN PROGRESS AND FUTURE PROJECTS

Books and Monographs

An Introduction to Esoteric Buddhism

- Drafting stage, three chapters near completion.

Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia: History, Teachings, and Practices

- Drafting stage, five chapters complete.

Refereed Articles

“Emptiness and the Pure Land”

- Preliminary research and drafting.

Edited Volumes

“Dohan and the Mantra of Light.” *The Mantra of Light*, eds. Richard Payne and Mark Unno

Translation

Kenkairon [Clarification of the Precepts]

- I am currently under contract with BDK (Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai/ Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) to translate this classic of early of Japanese Buddhism.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- 11/2024 “Transgressing Tantra”
- Panelist and Panel Organizer, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA
- 10/25/2024 McGill Premodern Japanese Religions Conference
- Conference Respondent, McGill University School of Religious Studies, Montreal, Canada
- 12/09/2023 “Other Power and the Mantra Teachings” (Online)
- Panelist, “Other Power” in Mahayana Buddhism: Its Nature and Role in Buddhist Awakening, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

- 08/05-06/2022 “Pure Land Buddhist Studies” (Session 1), “Dōhan and Pure Land” (Session 2)
- Pacific Seminar, Jōdo Shinshū Center, Berkeley CA
- 12/10/2020 “Death on the Mantra Path” (Online)
- Panelist and Panel Organizer, “Examining the Scholarly Guilds of Shingon Buddhism in Medieval Japan,” American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Boston, MA
- 04/10/2020 “The Vital Breath”
- Daigoji Temple and Shingon Contributions to Japan’s Religious Culture, Sponsored by the Center for Japanese Studies, University of California-Berkeley, and the Institute for Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, CA [Due to COVID-19, postponed until 04/2021]
- 11/25/2019 “On Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism”
- American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA
- 10/14/2019 “The ‘Secret’ History of Tendai Pure Land Buddhist Thought”
- Premodern Japanese Studies Conference, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- 06/30/2019 “From Kōyasan to Sukhāvātī”
- Asian Studies Conference Japan, Saitama University, Japan
- 03/17/2019 “Medieval Kōyasan and Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism in Practice”
- Workshop on Shingon Buddhism, Sponsored by the USC Shinso Ito Center for Japanese Religions and Culture, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA
- 01/19/2019 “Rethinking Esoteric Buddhism: Tendai and the *Himitsu nenbutsu*”
- International Symposium: Medieval Japanese Buddhist Practices and Their Visual Art Expressions, Co-sponsored by the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University and Research Center for Buddhist Cultures in Asia (BARC), Ryūkyō University, Harvard University, Boston, MA
- 09/28/2018 “A Kōbō Daishi Kūkai Deathbed Ritual”
- Buddhism and Ritual Performance in Premodern Japan, Sponsored by the Numata Foundation and BDK (Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, The Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) Canada, and CREOR (Centre for Research on Religion) - McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- 09/28/2018 “On Ritual in Buddhist Studies”
- Respondent: Buddhism and Ritual Performance in Premodern Japan, Sponsored by the Numata Foundation and BDK (Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, The Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) Canada, and CREOR (Centre for Research on Religion) - McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

- 06/12/2018 “Teaching the Lotus Sutra”
- International Lotus Sutra Seminar, Sponsored by Rissho Koseikai International, Tokyo, Japan
- 11/21/2017 “Exo-esoteric Pure Land Buddhism in Early-Medieval Japan”
- American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Boston, MA
- 11/19/2017 “Normativity and Heterogeneity: Rethinking Medieval Japanese Pure Land Buddhism”
- American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Boston, MA
- 09/29/2017 “Book Review and Discussion Presentation: Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū* and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan,” with author, Professor Robert F. Rhodes from Ōtani University, Kyoto, Japan
- The Pure Land in the Nara Schools Conference, Sponsored by the Numata Foundation and BDK (Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, The Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) Canada, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- 09/29/2017 “*Dhāraṇī*, Spells, The Power of Speech, and ‘Kōmitsu’ Approaches to Pure Land Rebirth in the Nara Period”
- The Pure Land in the Nara Schools Conference, Sponsored by the Numata Foundation and BDK (Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, The Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) Canada, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- 06/03/2017 “*Bukkyōgaku to Mikkyō no kindai*” [Buddhist Studies and the Modernization of Esoteric Buddhism]
- Early-Modern Japanese Buddhism Conference, Sendai University, Sendai, Japan
- 05/26/2017 “*Kenmitsu Bukkyō to himitsu nenbutsu*” [Exo-Esoteric Buddhism and the Esoteric Nenbutsu]
- Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures Workshop Conference, Ryūkoku University, Kyoto, Japan
- 05/18/2017 “*Chūsei Nihon Tendai shisō to himitsu nenbutsu*” [Medieval Japanese Tendai Buddhist Thought and the Esoteric Nenbutsu]
- International Tendai Studies Conference, Taisho University, Tokyo, Japan
- 04/02/2016 “The Secret History of Kōyasan”
- Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA
- 11/22/2015 “Beyond Syncretism and Sectarianism: Conceiving Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism”
- Panelist and Panel Organizer: “Conceiving Esoteric Buddhism,” American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA

- 10/29/2014 “*Higashi Ajia no himitsuzō ni okeru Jōdokyō*” [The Pure Land Teachings within the Secret Piṭaka of East Asia]
- Esoteric Buddhist Culture Research Institute Conference, Kōyasan University, Kōyasan, Japan
- 04/13/2013 “Nenbutsu Mandala Visualization in Dōhan’s *Himitsu nenbutsu shō*: An Investigation into Medieval Japanese Vajrayāna Pure Land”
- Graduate Student Symposium, Institute for Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, CA
- 06/01/2013 “This World and/or/as the Pure Land: An Investigation into Tantric Nenbutsu Practice in Medieval Japanese Buddhism”
- International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies Conference, Sponsored by the Robert H. N. Ho Foundation, University of British Columbia in Vancouver, CA
- 04/19/2009 “The Dragon and the Pure Land: Ritual Performance and Hagiography”
- North American Graduate Student Conference in Buddhist Studies, University of California-Berkeley, CA
- 03/28/2008 “Kōen the Dragon Bodhisattva: History and Hagiography, Translation and Analysis of the *Fusō-Ryūjinden*”
- American Academy of Religion Regional Conference at Denver Theological Seminary, Denver, CO
- 03/23/2007 “The Fluidity of Sectarian Boundaries in One Japanese Buddhist Community: The Veneration of Saint Kōen”
- American Academy of Religion Regional Conference at Creighton University, Omaha, NE

INVITED LECTURES

- 11/07/2022 “Buddhism and Family (Part 2)”
- Toronto Buddhist Temple, “Buddhism and...” Speaker Series
- 10/03/2022 “Buddhism and Family (Part 1)”
- Toronto Buddhist Temple, “Buddhism and...” Speaker Series
- 08/19/2022 “Crows are White,” Film Review Panel
- Asian Art Museum, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.
- 04/28/2022 “Pure Land Buddhism: The Mahayana Multiverse”
- Religion for Breakfast YouTube Channel
 - As of 10/19/2022, 178,105 views
- 03/02/2022 “Life and Teachings of Buddha”
- Lecture for Dwight School, an International Private School in NYC, 4th grade class

Aaron P. Proffitt, Ph.D.—Curriculum Vitae

- 10/27 /2021 “Nenbutsu and the Mystery of Breath”
• Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum, Cambridge, MA
- 10/25/2021 “On Being a Scholar-Practitioner”
• Texas State University, Religious Studies Student Group, San Marcos, TX
- 08/14/2021 “Early Japanese Buddhism,” “Esoteric Buddhism in Japan,” “Kamakura Buddhism” (Online)
• Continuing Education for Ministerial Training, Jōdo Shinshū International Office, Berkeley, CA
- 06/12/2021 “Esoteric Buddhism and Jōdo Shinshū” (Online)
• Shinshū Center of America, Los Angeles, CA
- 06/10/2021 “Life and Teachings of the Buddha,” “Mahayana Buddhism,” “Buddhism in East Asia” (Online)
• Continuing Education Ministerial Training, Jōdo Shinshū International Office, Berkeley, CA
- 02/13/2021 “Nenbutsu and the Mystery of Speech” (Online)
• 24th Annual Nembutsu Seminar, San Mateo Buddhist Temple, San Mateo, CA
- 10/05/2019 “Shinran and Pure Land Buddhist Diversity in Medieval Japan”
• American Buddhist Study Center, New York, NY
- 11/09/2016 “Kōyasan and the Shingon Tradition”
• University of Pennsylvania, Religious Studies Colloquium, Philadelphia, PA
- 12/08/2014 “Mysteries of Speech and Breath: Dōhan's (1179-1252) ‘Secret Nenbutsu’”
• Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies, Dōshisha University, Kyoto, Japan
- 10/31/2014 “Chūsei Bukkyō ni okeru ‘himitsu nenbutsu shisō: Ajari Dōhan to mikkyō jōdokyō bunka” [‘Secret Buddha Contemplation’ within Medieval Japanese Buddhism: Ācārya Dōhan and Vajrayāna Pure Land Buddhist Culture]
• Ōtani University, Kyoto, Japan
- 03/02/2008 “Jōdo Shinshū and American Buddhism”
• Longmont Buddhist Temple, Longmont, CO

TEACHING

University at Albany, SUNY (2015 to Present)

- EAS 450 Readings in Buddhist Texts: Nagarjuna's Middle Way
- EAS 450 Readings in Buddhist Texts: *The Lotus Sutra*
- EAS 450 Readings in Buddhist Texts: Mahayana Sutras
- EAS 389: Topics in East Asian History: Buddhism in Medieval Japan
- EAS 389: Topics in East Asian History: Shin Buddhism
- EAS 389: Topics in East Asian History: Tantra and Death
- EAS 389: Topics in East Asian History: Pure Land Buddhism
- EAS 357 Zen Buddhism
- EAS 266 Buddhism in East Asia
- EAS 265 Introduction to Buddhism
- EAS 261 Introduction to the Religions of Japan
- EAS 140 Buddhism and Film
- REL 100 Introduction to the Study of Religions

University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (2008-2014)

Instructor

- East Asian Esoteric Buddhism

Teaching Assistant

- Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor Donald S. Lopez, Jr.
- Introduction to Japanese Civilization
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor Micah L. Auerback
- Introduction to Buddhism
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor Juhn Ahn
- Great Books of Japan
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen
- Zen: History, Culture, & Critique
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor Benjamin Brose

University of Colorado-Boulder (2006-2008)

Teaching Assistant

- East Asian Traditions
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor Rodney Taylor
- Christian Traditions
 - Teaching Assistant to Professor David Valetta

SERVICE

Service to the East Asian Studies Department

- Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (Fall 2018 to Present)
- Korean Studies Search Committee Member (Spring 2017)
- Social Media Coordinator (2016 to the Present)
- Departmental Listserv Manager (2016 to the Present)
- Student Advising (2015 to the Present)
- Guest Lecturer, World of East Asian Studies Living Learning Community
 - 2016 to the Present: “Buddhism in East Asia”

Service to the College of Arts & Sciences

- 2020-2021, Faculty Council, Internal Grant Committee Member
- Guest Lecturer, Introduction to the Study of Religion
 - Spring 2023: Introduction to Buddhism
 - Spring 2022: Introduction to Buddhism
 - Spring 2016: The Buddha
 - Fall 2016: Shintō

Service to the University at Albany, SUNY

- 2023 to Present, Vice Chair, Faculty Council
- 2017 to the Present, Faculty Advisor, UAlbany Buddhist Student Association
 - 2019, Acquired a library of Buddhist texts for the UAlbany Interfaith Center, donated by the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism (BDK: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai)
 - 2022, Procured a \$2000 grant for student activities from the Buddhist Churches of America
 - Facilitating cultural events, vetting and inviting speakers from local Buddhist communities, leading student workshops, community service at the Friendship Garden of the Delaware Community School, and various experiential learning activities and fieldtrips to local Buddhist centers

Service to the Profession

- External Reviewer
 - Brill, May 2022, *Esoteric Zen*
 - *Journal of Global Buddhism*
 - Pure Land Buddhist Studies Series, University of Hawaii Press
 - Bloomsbury Publishers-Academic
 - *Journal of Japanese Philosophy*
 - *Eastern Buddhist Journal*
 - *Pacific World Journal*

Service to the Community

Ongoing

- American Buddhist Study Center (Online Introduction to Buddhism Series), New York, NY
 - Korean Buddhism (01/15/2025)
 - Diamond Sutra (10/05/2024)
 - Heart Sutra (03/18/2024)
 - Lotus Sutra (10/27/2023)
 - Other Power (07/22/2023)
 - Nichiren Buddhism (01/01/2023)
 - Esoteric Buddhism (10/15/2022)
 - Zen Buddhism (09/24/2022)
 - Tibetan Buddhism (05/26/2022)
 - Chinese Buddhism (06/25/2022)
 - Japanese Buddhism (06/30/2022)
 - Shinran (11/12/2021)
 - Pure Land Buddhism (08/26/21)
 - Mahayana Buddhism (03/05/2022)
 - Introduction to Buddhism (06/09)
- *Kyōgyōshinshō* Reading Group (Fall 2021 to Present)
 - Weekly meeting of international scholars and ministers to read the Japanese Buddhist classic, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in Classical Japanese, *Kanbun*, and English.
- Certified Minister's Assistant, New York Buddhist Church (May 2022 to Present)
- Dharma School Coordinator, Albany Buddhist Sangha (2019 to Present)
- Board Member, Sidney and Beatrice Albert Interfaith Lecture Series, College of St. Rose, Albany, NY (2016 to 2019)
 - Monthly board meetings, bi-annual panels and discussions on religion and American society

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND GRANTS

Aaron P. Proffitt, Ph.D.—Curriculum Vitae

- 2014-2015 Fulbright Foundation International Dissertation Research Fellowship
- Research Fellow, Shin Buddhist Comprehensive Research Institute Ōtani University-Kyoto, Japan
 - Researcher, Esoteric Buddhist Research Institute Kōyasan University-Kōyasan, Japan
 - Researcher, Department of Buddhist Studies Ryūkoku University-Kyoto, Japan
- 2014 Japan Foundation (Declined)
- International Dissertation Fellowship
- 2014 Ito Foundation (Declined)
- International Dissertation Research Scholarship
- 2009-2013 Summer International Research Grants
- University of Michigan Department of Asian Language and Cultures, Center for Japanese Studies, and the International Institute
- 2009-2010 12-month Japanese Language Intensive, Inter-University Center for Japanese Studies (IUC), Yokohama, Japan
- University of Michigan International Institute, Center for Japanese Studies, and Department of Asian Languages and Cultures
- 2007-2008 Foreign Languages and Area Studies Grant (FLAS)
- Summer and Academic Year (Beginner and Intermediate Chinese), University of Colorado

MEMBERSHIPS AND PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Memberships

- American Buddhist Study Center
- International Association for Shin Buddhist Studies
- North American Association for the Study of Religion
- American Academy of Religion
- Association for Asian Studies

Professional Affiliations

- Associate in Research Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- Editorial Advisory Board Member, *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, Berkeley, CA
- Affiliated Researcher, Institute for Esoteric Buddhist Culture, Kōyasan University, Kōyasan, Japan

LANGUAGES

Professional Proficiency

- Japanese

Reading Proficiency

- Classical Japanese (*bungo* and *kanbun*)
- Mandarin Chinese
- Classical Chinese
- Siddham (script for reading Sanskrit mantras)