

Interpretive Guide for Visitors

All about the Buddhist Precepts and Jianzhen



Important Cultural Property
Eastern Journey of the Priest Jianzhen (*Tōseiden emaki*), Vol. 4 (detail)
By Rengyō (n.d.)
Kamakura period, dated 1298 (Einin 6)
Tōshōdai-ji Temple, Nara
On view April 20-May 16



Who is Jianzhen?
What are the precepts?
Let's look into this together!

National Treasure
Seated Jianzhen (*Ganjin Wajō*)
Nara period, 8th century
Hollow dry-lacquer with pigments
Tōshōdai-ji Temple, Nara
On view for the duration of the exhibition



What are the Buddhist Precepts?

What are the precepts that Jianzhen brought with him to Japan?

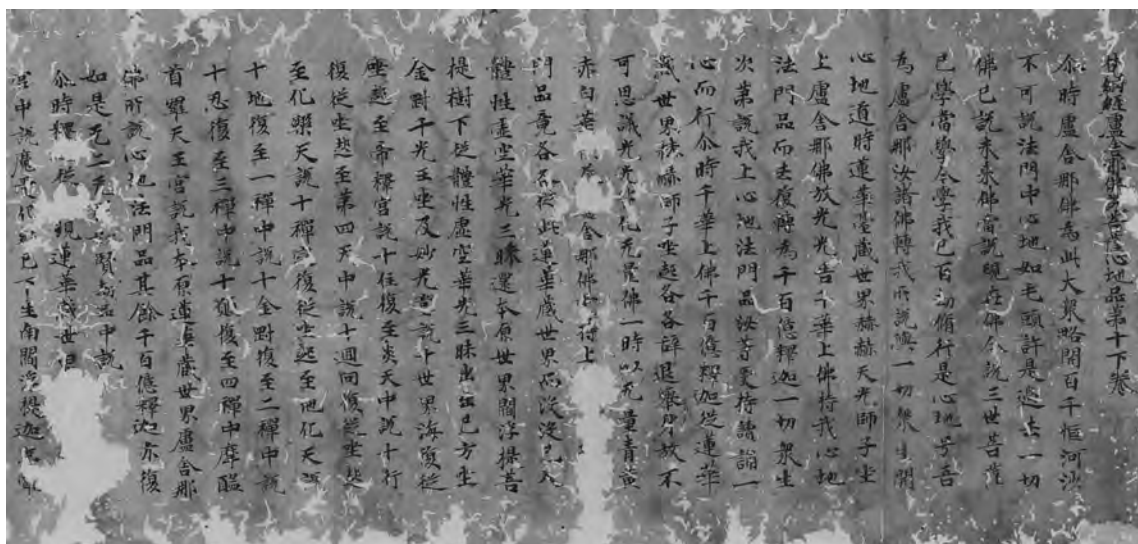
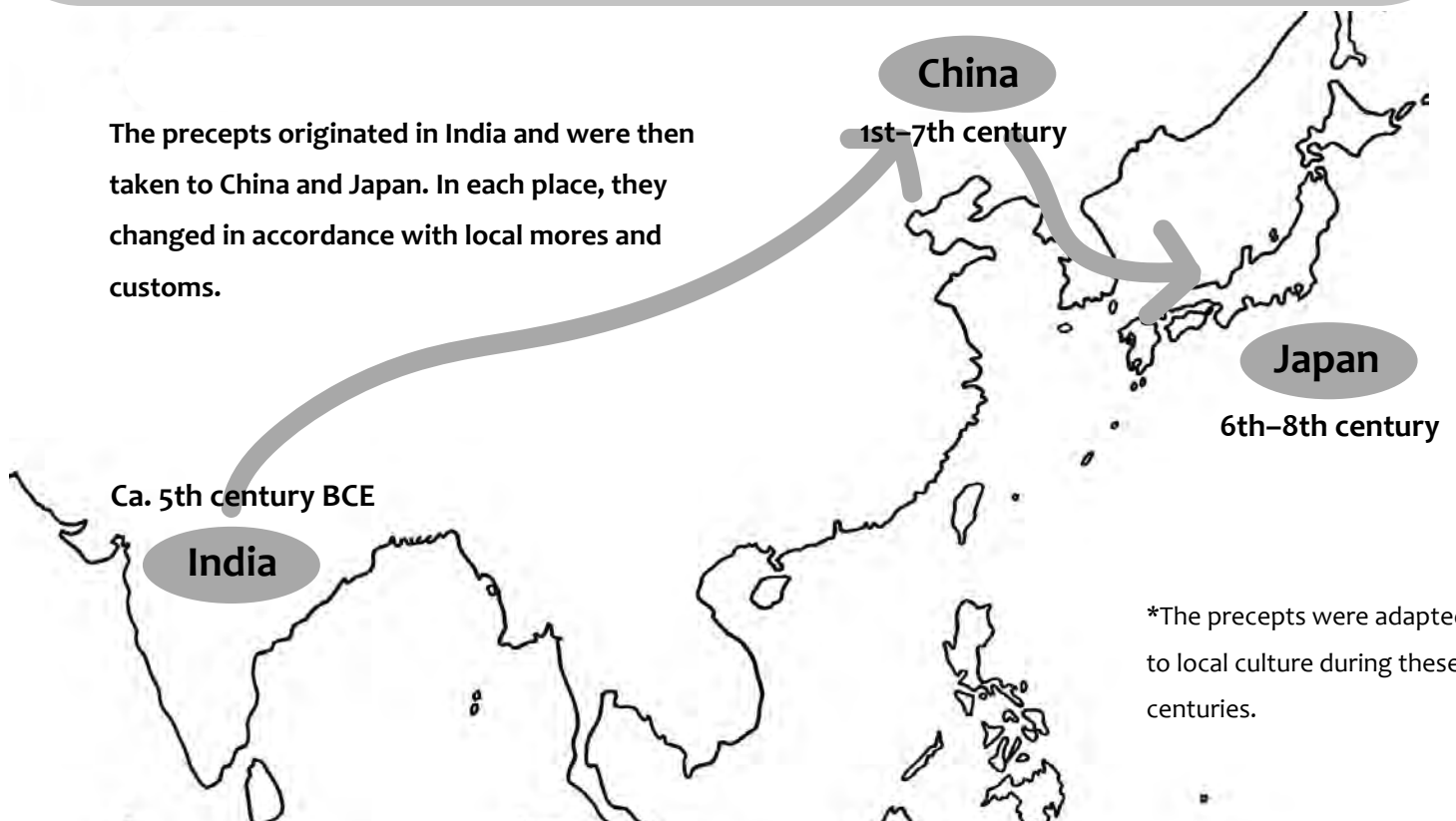
The Japanese term for precepts (*J: kairitsu*) encompasses two concepts from ancient India relating to ethics (*śīla*) and codes of discipline (*vinaya*) for monks and nuns living in monastic order, supposedly stipulated by the Buddha Shakyamuni.

Śīla (Idealized Buddhist Ethics)

- Moral and behavioural suggestions for Buddhist practitioners
- Values associated with ethical personal conduct in daily life
- Religious ethics instead of legal codes, so no socially imposed penalties if broken

Vinaya (Legal Regulations)

- Monastic rules of conduct
- Legal codes, which might lead to socially imposed penalties if broken



The precepts include such things as not killing living beings and not eating meat.



Important Cultural Property **Brahmā's Net Sutra (Ch: Fanwang jing), Vol. 2** (detail)
 Nara period, dated 757 (Tenpyō Shōhō 9) Kyoto National Museum On view for the duration of the exhibition

What Kind of a Person Was Jianzhen?

What Did He Do?

Jianzhen (Ganjin in Japanese, 688–763) was a Chinese priest of the Tang dynasty from Yangzhou (present day Jiangsu). He arrived in Japan in 753 bringing teachings about the Buddhist precepts (śīla and vinaya). Jianzhen conferred the precepts on those wishing to become Buddhist practitioners in ordination ceremonies (J: *jukai*). To do this, he built the first ordination altar (J: *kaidan*) in Japan. He also established the temple of Tōshōdai-ji as a monastery for the training of disciples.

National Treasure
Seated Jianzhen (Ganjin Wajō)
Nara period, 8th century
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His Dramatic Life

When he was a priest at Daming Temple in China, Jianzhen was visited by two Japanese monks Yōei and Fushō, who had been ordered to go by Emperor Shōmu (701–756). They asked Jianzhen to come to Japan to transmit the correct teachings of Buddha.

Jianzhen, who was already well-known as an eminent figure in China, agreed to leave his high position and make the dangerous voyage. He made five failed attempts to cross the sea and went blind in the process, but he never gave up and finally arrived in Japan. The illustrated handscrolls *Eastern Journey of the Priest Jianzhen* depict Jianzhen's dramatic life.



In this scene, Emperor Shōmu is receiving the precepts in front of the Great Buddha Hall of Tōdai-ji.



Important Cultural Property
Eastern Journey of the Priest Jianzhen (Tōseiden emaki), Vol. 5 (detail)
By Rengyō (n.d.)
Kamakura period, dated 1298 (Einin 6)
Tōshōdai-ji Temple, Nara
On view April 27-May 9



Jianzhen's Influence

What Jianzhen Brought with Him on the Ship

◆Buddhist Objects

- Sutras and sutra commentaries
- Buddhist relics (bodily remains of the Buddha Shakyamuni)
- Buddhist sculptures and paintings
- Buddhist ritual implements

◆Cultural Objects

- Food (miso, noodles, sweets, etc.)
- Aromatics and medicines (sugar, etc.)
- Calligraphy by famous calligraphers (Wang Xizhi, etc.)
- Various books and writings

Who Jianzhen Brought with Him on the Ship

- Monk disciples
- Artisans of various specialties

National Treasure
Standing Shishiku (Simhanāda) Bodhisattva
Nara period, 8th century
Wood
Tōshōdai-ji Temple, Nara
On view for duration of exhibition



Jianzhen brought cutting-edge culture and technology to Japan, didn't he!

This sculpture is believed to date all the way back to the time that Jianzhen first built Tōshōdai-ji Temple. Its sturdy figure and pedestal are carved from a single block of Japanese nutmeg-yew (*kaya*) wood. The carving techniques differ from those found on earlier Japanese statuary, suggesting it was carved by or influenced by a Chinese sculptor who came to Japan with Jianzhen.

History of the Buddhist Precepts

Jianzhen's arrival made it possible for the first time to formally hold precepts ordinations (*jukai*) in Japan. Thinking about the precepts evolved and adapted thereafter in response to social changes. Regardless of such changes, however, the precepts have continually provided incentive to question the meaning of being a Buddhist and the ideals of Buddhism.

Priest Gyōnen 700th Memorial Special Exhibition
The Buddhist Legacy of Jianzhen (Ganjin) and His Successors
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