The Western Origins of Modern Japanese Buddhism:
An Aspect of the History of Exchanges between Japan and Europe in the
Nineteenth Century

In many respects, Japanese Buddhism changed dramatically during the first half of
the Meiji Period, i.e. between the 1860s and the 1890s. No longer guaranteed an
automatic livelihood through state patronage in the form of the temple-registration
system, priests now had to address individual followers with a convincing religious
message. The practice of Buddhist homiletics boomed, but a host of other changes
also ensued: Japanese Buddhist homiletics boomed, but a host of other changes
also ensued: Japanese Buddhists went abroad to proselytize for the first time,
transsectarian catechisms were written, social welfare institutions and schools were
established, and the consciousness of being part of a world religion blossomed. In
part, these changes can be traced to the influence of the West, be it through the
exchange of ideas or the impact of the Christian mission in Japan. This impact is
generally acknowledged, but rarely investigated in detail. The lecture will do just
that, by focusing on those Japanese Buddhists that went abroad in the 1870s and
1880s and personally experienced the international exchange of ideas and
practices. The legacies they left behind both in Japan and in Europe will be the
subject of the lecture.