Monday, 1 February 2016
“Walking the Vimalakīrti Assembly: A Buddhist Monk’s Journey in 12th Century Japan”
Dr Mikael Bauer, University of Leeds

Rigorous study, gradual ritual advancement and safeguarding patronage were an intrinsic part of a monk’s progression from novice to the high position of Lecturer in the grand Vimalakīrti Assembly.

Held on a yearly basis throughout Japan’s classical and medieval periods, this Assembly was part of an elaborate ritual network that connected monastic internal organisation with the complex organisation of the court. In this lecture, I will explore not only the connection between doctrine and praxis, but also explore the mutual relationship between this Buddhist ritual and the socio-political context in which it emerged. Rather than providing a mere theoretical exposition of this Assembly, I will follow in the footsteps of a monk who moved up through the study of doctrine, ritual performance and careful patronage. By examining temple documents, passages from diaries and accounts of doctrinal debates we will thus firsthand experience the Theatre of the State that was the ritual scene of one of pre-modern Japan’s most powerful monastic complexes, Kōfukuji temple.

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