ARTICLES

1 Editor’s Introduction
   Esoteric Buddhist Traditions in Medieval Japan
   Matthew D. McMullen

11 Buddhist Temple Networks in Medieval Japan
   Daigoji, Mt. Kōya, and the Miwa Lineage
   Anna Andreeva

43 The Mountain as Mandala
   Kūkai’s Founding of Mt. Kōya
   Ethan Bushelle

85 The Doctrinal Origins of Embryology in the Shingon School
   Kameyama Takahiko

103 “Deviant Teachings”
   The Tachikawa Lineage as a Moving Concept in Japanese Buddhism
   Gaétan Rappo

135 Nenbutsu Orthodoxies in Medieval Japan
   Aaron P. Proffitt

161 The Making of an Esoteric Deity
   Sannō Discourse in the Keiran shūyōshū
   Yeonjoo Park

REVIEWS

177 Gaétan Rappo, Rhétoriques de l’hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne. Le moine Monkan (1278–1357) et sa réputation posthume
   Steven Trenson
Anna Andreeva, *Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan*  

Contributors
The term “esoteric Buddhism” (mikkyō 密教) tends to invoke images often considered obscene to a modern audience. Such popular impressions may include artworks insinuating copulation between wrathful deities that portend to convey a profound and hidden meaning, or mysterious rites involving sexual symbolism and the summoning of otherworldly powers to execute acts of violence on behalf of a patron. Similar to tantric Buddhism elsewhere in Asia, many of the popular representations of such imagery can be dismissed as modern interpretations and constructs (White 2000, 4–5; Wedemeyer 2013, 18–36). However, like its tantric counterpart, such perceptions of esoteric Buddhism in Japan did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, they are continuous with a discourse on orthodoxy dating back a millennium.

The origins of esoteric Buddhism in Japan are often identified with the semi-legendary figure Kūkai 空海 (774–835). According to the historical narrative first outlined in his catalog of imported items, Kūkai introduced the esoteric Buddhist tradition to Japan in 806 after two years of study in the Tang capital. He brought with him a trove of images, ritual implements, and new texts, some of which he called the “esoteric treasury” (mitsuzō 密蔵). With these newly imported technologies of the Buddha’s teaching, he established a ritual system based on consecration rites (kanjō 灌頂) that he learned from a Chinese master named Huiguo 恵果 (746–806), who, according to Kūkai, was a disciple of the esoteric Buddhist patriarch Amoghavajra (705–774) (T 2161, 55.1060b17–26).

Matthew D. McMullen is Senior Research Fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
Esoteric Buddhism was further ingrained into Japanese religion and society through a series of doctrinal treatises in which Kūkai explains how this new form of Buddhism was superior to the other schools in Japan. According to a prevalent view among Shingon scholars, the esoteric teachings succeeded in Japan in no small part due to Kūkai’s articulation of the possibility of becoming a buddha in one’s current body (sokushin jōbutsu 即身成仏) and his propagation of these superior teachings as a new form of samadhi that dramatically shortened the path to buddhahood (Katsumata 1970, 33–48; Fukuda 2000, 106). Thus, the Shingon sectarian narrative locates the beginning of Japanese esoteric Buddhism in the life and works of the patriarch Kūkai.

As an intellectual, artisan, and ritual master, Kūkai continues to be a seminal figure in the study of religion in Japan. However, focusing solely on Kūkai’s doctrinal writings tends to divorce their content from the historical and political context of early ninth-century Japan. Relying on later hagiographical and commentary literature, the sectarian model of scholarship that has long dominated Kūkai Studies understandably emphasizes Kūkai’s role as the central figure in both the intellectual and ritual traditions of the Shingon school.

In Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse (1999), Abé Ryūichi takes a different approach. Contrary to sectarian interpretations that presuppose the superiority of Kūkai’s esoteric teaching over exoteric schools of Buddhism, Abé argues that Kūkai’s main contribution to Japanese Buddhism, and Japanese society and culture in general, lay in his construction of a new discourse on the ritual language of mantra (Abé 1999, 4). According to Abé, Kūkai’s esoteric discourse offered Buddhist clerics—initially in Nara and, later, at monastic centers such as Enryakuji 延暦寺, Daigoji 醍醐寺, Ninnaji 仁和寺, and eventually on Mt. Kōya 高野—the ritual knowledge to wrest power and influence at court from an intelligentsia governed by Confucian political structures and social hierarchies (Abé 1999, 23). Thus, rather than portraying Kūkai as the founder of an independent sect of Buddhism, Abé recast Kūkai’s esoteric Buddhism as a discourse whose construction had social and political implications that reached far beyond Kūkai’s Shingon school.

A parallel historical narrative follows the development of esoteric Buddhism in the Tendai school. According to his own account, Saichō 最澄 (766–822) received initiation into esoteric consecration rites while on his return journey from Mt. Tiantai 天台 (DDZ 4: 381). His disciples later traveled to China for further training in the esoteric teachings and returned with new collections of texts and ritual techniques. In their commentaries and subcommentaries on the esoteric sutras, Tendai exegetes devised their own esoteric discourse that integrated the technology of mantra into Tendai’s all-inclusive singular vehicle (ichijō 一乗) to form the unification of the perfect and esoteric teachings (enmitsu itchi 円密一致) (Mizukami 2008, 3–4).
The role that Tendai institutions and doctrines played in the establishment of an esoteric Buddhist tradition in Japan has long been neglected in Anglophone scholarship (Weinstein 1974, 179–180). This lacuna can, in part, be attributed to the overwhelming body of Japanese scholarship on Kūkai compared to his Tendai counterparts. However, the notion of two distinct esoteric traditions—one stemming from Kūkai’s transmission from China and the other as a component of the Tendai singular vehicle—is premised on an anachronistic sectarian model that took shape throughout the medieval period and culminated in modern sectarian Buddhism.

Such sectarian distinctions are the result of debates over the orthodox form of the esoteric teachings between Shingon and Tendai scholastics, both of whom claimed to be the heirs to the authentic lineage from the Chinese patriarchs. Shingon partisans, eager to establish Kūkai’s school as “purely esoteric” (junmitsu 純密), cast doctrines, practices, and rites that did not adhere to the precedents established in Kūkai’s writings as merely exoteric or, in the case of the Tendai school, “miscellaneously esoteric” (zōmitsu 雑密) (Misaki 1988, 3–4). For their part, Tendai scholastics argued that the esoteric teachings of Kūkai’s Shingon school were premised on his inadequate understanding of the esoteric sutras and their Chinese commentaries. For instance, citing critiques of Kūkai’s taxonomy of teachings, the Tendai pundit Hōjibō Shōshin 宝地房証真 (ca. 1153–1214) accused Kūkai of misinterpreting passages in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra and its commentary to justify the hierarchy of his taxonomy, which relegated Tendai to an inferior position compared to Shingon and even Kegon, an affront to the Chinese Tiantai tradition that Saichō and the Tendai school held in high regard. According to Shōshin, proper training in basic tenets of the Tendai school were required to prevent such errors and to comprehend the true meaning of the esoteric teachings († 2372, 74.419a21–b12, 417a7–a18).

Quibbles over the correct meaning of the esoteric teachings were not limited to Shingon-Tendai partisanship but occurred among intersectarian factions as well. The schism between the so-called “new interpretation” (shingi 新義) and “old interpretation” (kogi 古義) branches of the Shingon school began in the early twelfth century when Kakuban 觉鑁 (1095–1144) relocated the Denbōin 伝法院 from Ninnaji to Mt. Kōya. Initially a rivalry for imperial patronage that occasionally erupted in violence, the two branches eventually came to define their differences in terms of disparate interpretations of Kūkai’s view on the ontology of the Buddha (Adolphson 2000, 39; Tomabechi 2000, 15–18). The “temple” (jimon 寺門) and “mountain” (sanmon 山門) split in Tendai likewise began as a political dispute regarding succession. Later, however, they identified with divergent interpretations of the esoteric teachings and ritual procedures ostensibly stemming from Saichō’s disciples Ennin 円仁 (794–864) and Enchin 円珍 (814–891) (McMullin 1984).
Collectively, these factions constituted what Kuroda Toshio dubbed the "exoteric-esoteric system" (kenmitsu taisei 顕密体制). According to this theory, Kūkai and Saichō introduced a ritual system that combined popular incantations for the prevention of calamities (kaji kitō 加持祈祷) with rites for protecting the state (chingo kokka 鎮護國家). The success of this system came to dominate the scholastic Buddhist schools in Nara. Thus, “all religions and schools were subsumed under the esoteric teachings and formed a unified system” (Kuroda 1996, 252).

As a scholar of political history, Kuroda was primarily concerned with the relationship between religious institutions and the state. His theory was intended to broadly encapsulate the social and political nature of religion, and Buddhism in particular, in early medieval Japan. While a broad view of premodern social and political structures may provide an overview of medieval religious ideology, it can also obscure how the actors involved in shaping this ideology defined their institutions vis-à-vis their rivals—both real and imagined—for religious and political relevance. Rather than a unified kenmitsu orthodoxy, debates over lineage and interpretation of the esoteric teachings suggest that medieval esoteric Buddhism was far from a unified system. Esoteric Buddhist polemics in medieval Japan were necessary precisely because there was not an established orthodoxy.

In the ninth century, at the dawn of esoteric Buddhism in Japan, the dividing line between a Kūkai and a Tendai perfect-esoteric discourse on the esoteric teachings was marginal. When articulating a view on the esoteric teachings, subsequent generations of monks who were initiated into various consecration rites and studied the esoteric sutras and their commentaries borrowed from both Kūkai’s theory of mantra as ritual language and the Tendai doctrinal system (Ōkubo 2004, 293). Therefore, the esoteric discourse that permeated medieval Japanese Buddhism was not limited to Kūkai’s theory of mantra as a ritual language but included a broader spectrum of doctrines and interpretations, some belonging to the Tendai system and others introduced via texts and rituals introduced after Kūkai and Saichō.

It may seem obvious that a classification as nebulous as “esoteric teachings” would be accompanied by a multitude of competing interpretations. Yet, the ways in which an esoteric Buddhist discourse that emerged from Kūkai and Saichō, and how their interpretations and applications of this concept were received and reconceived, are in need of further examination. By exploring how this esoteric discourse developed in later centuries, this special issue seeks to grapple with the many facets of esoteric Buddhism that came to dominate the religious landscape of medieval Japan. Collectively, the articles in this special issue seek to broaden the scope of what constituted esoteric Buddhism in Japan, while each contribution investigates the lineal, geographical, somatic, transgressive, taxonomical, and cosmological features of this discourse surrounding orthodoxy that continues to shape our understanding of the “secret teachings” in Japanese religion.
Overview of Articles

As one might expect from a tradition that claims the mantle of secrecy, esoteric Buddhism was propagated among monastic elites based at ritual centers such as Daigoji and on Mt. Kōya. However, in her article on Buddhist temple networks, Anna Andreeva argues that esoteric Buddhist lineages were also extended to the laity. Focusing on intellectual links between Daigoji monks and localized movements orchestrated by non-elite practitioners, Andreeva explains how esoteric Buddhist teachings were brought to Japan’s countryside during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The article delves into the role that the ascetic Rendōbō Hōkyō 蓮道房宝筐 (ca. 1235) played in creating this network. Although he trained at two major centers of esoteric Buddhism, Rendōbō and his followers were later criticized by the growing Shingon hegemony on Mt. Kōya that attempted to reclaim esoteric Buddhism from “less educated” lineages. However, through a study of recently discovered works, Andreeva has previously demonstrated that Rendōbō and his movement were misunderstood and that his writings on seminal esoteric texts formed the ideological basis of a discourse underlying the practice of esoteric kami worship known as Miwaryū 三輪流 Shinto (Andreeva 2017). Contrary to the perception that esoteric Buddhism was the domain of monastic elites, in this article Andreeva offers a glimpse into its transmission among the laity and how such lineages prospered distant from the capital.

Ethan Bushelle likewise redirects our focus on esoteric Buddhist orthodoxy away from the political center of the capital to the serene but wayward landscape at the periphery of Japan. In his contribution to this issue, Bushelle revisits Abé’s hypothesis that Kūkai never intended to break from the Nara establishment and, instead, proposed a hermeneutic for the integration of doctrine and ritual via the technology of mantra. Bushelle, however, contends that this esoteric discourse was not merely premised on abstract theories of language. Rather, it was the geography of the “mountain temple” and its distance from the capital that created a new form of Buddhism beginning in the early ninth century.

This new form of Buddhism, Bushelle argues, located the source of enlightenment not in the state-sponsored temples of the capital but in the solitude of the mountains. Saichō pioneered this trend when he established his temple on Mt. Hiei 比叡 in 788 as a center for ascetic practice and meditation. Although the capital would later be moved into close proximity of the mountain, at the time Saichō’s mountain temple was remote from the monastic establishment in Nara. Bushelle suggests that Saichō thought of the mountains as a place of Buddhist practice in which one can pacify local kami and spirits who will then protect the nation. Therefore, the mountain temple served a political function as well as a soteriological one.
Following Saichō’s example, Kūkai later established his own mountain temple on Mt. Kōya well to the south of both the old and new capitals. Like Saichō, Kūkai considered the mountains to be central to the goal of universal enlightenment. However, he expressed this idea in slightly different terms. For Kūkai, the mountain landscape of Mt. Kōya was a mandala in which the practitioner could attain union with Mahāvairocana Tathāgata.

The mandalization of the mountain was a novel approach to explaining the power of ascetic practice, but Kūkai’s temple on Mt. Kōya was not unique. In fact, Bushelle contends that the ideal of the mountain temple was already taking shape in the eighth century; Saichō and Kūkai contributed to this tradition by justifying such remote asceticism as a means of harnessing the otherworldly forces abiding in the mountains that can be used to protect the nation.

Esoteric Buddhism concepts such as becoming a buddha in one’s current body and the three secret (sanmitsu 三密) activities that bind the practitioner to the Buddha (nyūga ga’nyū 入我我入) concern the lofty soteriological goals of immanent buddhahood. However, esoteric Buddhist theorists also mused about everyday circumstances, such as the origins of life and the birth process. In his contribution to this issue, Kameyama Takahiko examines embryological theories stemming from the writings of Kakuban, the patriarch of the “new interpretation” branch of the Shingon school.

Discussions of embryology in the writings of medieval Shingon monks have primarily been treated as heresies by early twentieth-century scholars who found the sexual overtones of this language to be unsuitable for a “purely esoteric” tradition based on the teachings of Kūkai. However, as Kameyama notes, esoteric theories on the development of the embryo are rooted in the most prominent works of Kakuban, who since the seventeenth century has been heralded as the “Great Master who Restored the Teachings” (Kōgyō Daishi 興教大師). Moreover, in these works, which were based on lectures given toward the end of his life, Kakuban speculates on the religious significance of conception and gestation in terms of esoteric Buddhist ontology, namely the doctrine of the dependent origination of the six elements (rokudai engi 六大縁起).

Kameyama contends that embryology in Japanese esoteric Buddhism developed as a philosophical musing on the possibility of becoming a buddha in one’s current lifetime and that the dualistic language of “red” (female ovum) and “white” (male sperm) that modern scholars found objectionable was an important metaphorical component to the medieval esoteric discourse on buddhahood. Drawing a parallel to Francis Garrett’s (2008) study of the embryo in Tibetan Buddhism, this article demonstrates that sexual symbolism was not anathema to esoteric Buddhist orthodoxy. On the contrary, it was concomitant with its most fundamental doctrines.
In his contribution to this issue, Gaétan Rappo addresses the alleged problem of heresy in Japanese esoteric Buddhism head on. The so-called “Tachikawa lineage” has long been associated with deviant practices involving both overt and symbolic sexual acts. However, expanding on the recent scholarship of IYANAGA Nobumi (for example, 2018), Rappo traces the development of this narrative as it evolved from an obscure reference to an unknown ritual in early medieval texts to an abominable heresy in modern Shingon historiography.

The Tachikawa “heresy” was primarily a myth concocted by the Mt. Kōya monk Yūkai (1345–1416), the chief advocate of the “old interpretation” branch of the Shingon school. The actual Tachikawa lineage was founded at Daigoji by Ninkan (d. 1114) in the early twelfth century. In an effort to define his own lineage as the heir to Kūkai’s Shingon school, Yūkai included Tachikawa among the various esoteric traditions that he believed deviated from this orthodoxy.

Yūkai’s association of the Tachikawa with sexual practices in particular had a lasting impact on how the lineage was discussed in catalogs and lineage texts. Rappo refers to such works as “Shingon heresiology.” Catalogers of texts such as Kyōi (1564–1630) and Kenshō (1597–1678) as well as compilers of monastic genealogies such as Yūhō (1656–1727) left an imprint on how members of the Tachikawa, along with their attributed writings, have been perceived by subsequent generations. By the early modern period, the label “Tachikawa” became synonymous with “unorthodox,” to the extent that the influence of this discourse can be found in the Jōdo Shin school and even anti-Christian polemics.

Early twentieth-century scholars such as Mizuhara Gyōei (1923) and MORIYAMA Shōshin (1965) interpreted the body of monastic literature on the Tachikawa lineage through the modern category of heresy, which they translated as jakyō. Originally denoting the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of a teaching, in modern Shingon historiography jakyō became the Japanese Buddhist equivalent to the Christian concept of heresy. However, as Rappo demonstrates, such an association was anachronistic and failed to take into account how the Tachikawa lineage was defined as the “other” within the context of medieval Japanese religion.

Taxonomy was one of the main scholastic tools medieval monks employed to compare and critique disparate interpretations of the Buddha’s teachings, and the distinction between esoteric and exoteric meanings of a given teaching was a vital component of Kūkai’s esoteric Buddhist discourse. However, the contents of the “esoteric treasury” was always a matter of dispute. Taxonomies allowed for multiple layers of meaning to be imposed on a given teaching or practice, which in turn could be adapted according to the spiritual capabilities of the practitioner.

In his article, Aaron Proffitt examines how taxonomies were instrumental to the concept of esoteric Buddhist orthodoxy in medieval Japan. Specifically,
he explores the intersection of three taxonomical discourses: the Tendai notion of the fourfold rise and fall (shijūkōhai 四重興廃), the rhetoric of shallow and profound levels of secrecy in Shingon treatises, and various pure land interpretations of the nenbutsu 念仏. The fourfold rise and fall was based on classical Tendai doctrinal concepts, but came to be associated with the Eshin 恵真 lineage of the Tendai school (Stone 1999, 168–175). This four-part hierarchical taxonomy reflects the stages at which one comprehends the Buddha's teachings, which become progressively superior as one “falls” away giving “rise” to another more profound understanding.

The fourfold rise and fall was paradigmatic for an esoteric Buddhist discourse that attempted to integrate the nenbutsu into the esoteric teachings. Proffitt highlights the application of this method in the writings of the Mt. Kōya monk Dōhan 道範 (1179–1252) and the Mt. Hiei chronicler Kōshū 光宗 (1276–1350). By adopting the scholastic language of taxonomy from his Tendai counterparts in the Eshin lineage, Dōhan attempted to establish an esoteric orthodoxy regarding the nenbutsu. A century later, Kōshū integrated Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu into his own nenbutsu typology based on the Tendai comprehensive model of the singular vehicle.

The final article in this special issue by Yeonjoo Park delves further into Kōshū’s contribution to medieval esoteric discourse on orthodoxy by examining the construction of Sannō 山王, the mountain god of Mt. Hiei, as an esoteric deity. In his Keiran shūyōshū, a massive compendium of orally transmitted teachings, Kōshū compiled interpretations on all aspects of Tendai Buddhism from masters on Mt. Hiei and elsewhere. Discussions of Sannō and the deity’s role in guarding and propagating the esoteric teachings is a recurring theme throughout the compilation.

Park traces the evolution of Sannō from a local mountain deity to the ultimate manifestation of Tendai esoteric Buddhist doctrine. Through the source-trace paradigm (honji suijaku 本地垂迹), Sannō became a signifier for the land of the kami, the bodies and teachings of the buddhas, and the entirety of the dharma realm. As the ultimate metonym, Sannō could be used to challenge old doctrines and propose new ones (Grapard 1987, 211–212). Therefore, for Tendai chroniclers such as Kōshū, Sannō was a convenient device for constructing and defining an esoteric orthodoxy in medieval Japanese Buddhism.

Although each of these articles evaluate different sources and utilize a variety of methodologies, they are nonetheless bound by their collective focus on esoteric Buddhism in medieval Japan. Far from a monolithic category, esoteric Buddhism has always been applied to a variety of traditions, practices, and doctrines. This special issue seeks to demonstrate the breadth of this discourse, while offering detailed studies of specific aspects of medieval Japanese Buddhism.
REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


T The SAT Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Text Database. Version 2018. By the SAT Daizōkyō Text Database Committee with approval of Daizō Shuppan. Web resource maintained by the University of Tokyo. http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES

Abé, Ryūichi

Adolphson, Mikael S.

Andreeva, Anna
2017 Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.

Fukuda Ryōsei 福田亮成

Garrett, Frances

Grapard, Allan G.

Iyanaga Nobumi 彌永信美
Katsumata Shunkyō 勝又俊教

Kuroda Toshio

McMullin, Neil

Misaki Ryōshū 三崎良周

Mizukami Fumiyoshi 水原文義

Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖真

Okubo Ryōshun 大久保良峻

Stone, Jacqueline I.

Tomabechi Seichi 苫米地誠一

Wedemeyer, Christian K.

Weinstein, Stanley

White, David Gordon
Anna Andreeva

Buddhist Temple Networks in Medieval Japan
Daigoji, Mt. Köya, and the Miwa Lineage

The intellectual links between medieval esoteric temples and localized Shin-gon movements are still far from being well understood. Although a part of education at major monastic complexes such as Daigoji and Mt. Köya, transmissions of esoteric theories were not uniform and varied depending on their recipients’ social status. A comparative reading of the Yugikyō transmissions imparted by the abbot Jikken of Kongōōin to his official disciple Dōhan and a lesser-known semi-itinerant priest, Rendōbō Hōkyō, from a local training hall at Mt. Miwa in Nara Prefecture shows that during the late twelfth to fourteenth centuries non-elite practitioners in medieval Japan, such as those associated with the local Miwa lineage, did not simply study the Yugikyō teachings but were actively involved in their dissemination. They used theories associated with this sutra as key parts of their own religious capital and transported them from large esoteric temples further afield to Japan’s countryside.


Anna Andreeva is Research Fellow at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, University of Heidelberg.
Throughout the twentieth century, Japan’s medieval history was framed and explored in terms of contrasting dichotomies: imperial court versus military government, Heian capital versus Kamakura, or elite versus popular. While some of these categories may hold for a while longer, increasing access to primary sources has prompted investigations into the finer complexities of Japanese history, namely, the constantly shifting relationships between medieval centers and peripheries (Adolphson et al. 2007), and the impact of these shifts on Japan’s religious forms of expression. New categories of analysis emerging from social and cultural theoretical works also challenge earlier dualistic modes of thinking: the twenty-first-century studies of the history of Japanese religions and culture talk increasingly about the networks of previously overlooked mediators (Latour 2008; Adolphson 2007; 2012; Lowe 2017) and deities (Faure 2016a), hidden histories (Bialock 2007), and the uses of conceptual metaphor (Slingerland 2004; Faure 2016a; 2016b). The impact on Japanese religiosity of people, ideas, and objects, which are constantly on the move, or are in a state of disassembling, breaking up, and disappearing also invites increasing challenges and interests (Reinders and Rambelli 2012). The same goes for traditional interpretations of Japanese medieval modes and models of power, particularly empowerment as a process (Dolce and Matsumoto 2010; Conlan 2011).

This article focuses on little-studied intellectual links between the renowned figures within the Daigoji 醍醐寺 monastic complex in the vicinity of the Heian capital and localized Shingon movements engendered by historically less visible, non-elite practitioners who brought esoteric Buddhist teachings (mikkyō 密教) to Japan’s countryside during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. One such case is a personal teacher-student relationship between a high-ranking cleric associated with the Daigoji sub-temple Kongōōin 金剛王院 and a practitioner linked to a group of semi-itinerant priests and ascetics active around Mt. Miwa 三輪 in Nara Prefecture (the so-called Miwa lineage). This relationship, which in certain aspects must have been typical for medieval temple milieu, has recently

* A previous version of this paper was presented at the international workshop, “Kyoto: New Insights into the Cultural History of Japan’s ‘Ancient’ Capital,” organized by the Institute of East Asian Art History at the University of Heidelberg in July 2016. I thank Melanie Trede for inviting me to present at this workshop. My warmest gratitude goes to Iyanaga Nobumi who first urged me to query the links between Kongōōin and the Miwa lineage in 2008. I thank him also for discussing this and many other topics with me over the years.
become apparent through modern studies of medieval Shinto at Miwa (Andreeva 2017c) and the spread of esoteric teachings loosely linked to the Yugikyō, a sutra that became prominent via a variety of media during the late twelfth to fourteenth centuries (Itō 2003; Dolce 2006–2007; 2010; 2016; Ogawa 2014). Non-elite practitioners in medieval Japan, such as those from Miwa, did not simply study the Yugikyō teachings, but were actively involved in their dissemination. They used this sutra and theories associated with it as key parts of their own religious capital: through the efforts of these otherwise little-noticed historical actors, the Yugikyō theories were exchanged, commented upon, and transported from large esoteric temples further afield to Japan’s countryside.

To clarify the significance of these actors and their movements, it is necessary to address both the official and unofficial temple networks in medieval Japan, with a special emphasis on the processes of education and learning at large esoteric temple complexes, such as Daigoji and Mt. Kōya. Then, the position and actions of non-elite esoteric practitioners who actively sought to enhance their social and religious status through intensive periods of study at such temples can be more easily understood.1

Our primary example will involve the Daigoji abbot Jikken (1176–1249), who resided at Kongōōin during his early monastic career. Jikken’s writings reveal several notions linked to medieval Japanese discourses on the Yugikyō that he may have passed on to his disciples. One was Dōhan (1178–1252), Jikken’s designated transmission heir, favored for his scholastic knowledge. Another was Rendōbō Hōkyō (ca. 1235), an otherwise little-known priest who would later become a leading figure of the local Miwa lineage. To elucidate some undercurrents in Daigoji’s esoteric thought, particularly the transmissions on the Yugikyō, the writings of one of Jikken’s earlier precursors as a Daigoji abbot, Jitsuun (1105–1160), will be briefly considered for the purpose of a better comparison over a long time span. The case of Rendōbō Hōkyō from Miwa who, together with Dōhan, succeeded in receiving certain (but possibly partial) transmissions on the Yugikyō from Jikken will show that within medieval Japanese temples the non-elite, less socially advantaged practitioners had considerable access to important esoteric theories, ritual texts, and doctrines, although with certain limitations. This case study will further confirm a point that is already gaining recognition in the field of medieval Japanese religions, namely, that the Daigoji clerics were involved in disseminating the Yugikyō and

1. Much of what is known about such practitioners often comes from critical, at times even biased, descriptions written by esoteric clerics and scholarly figures at a later date. This issue must be taken into consideration in order to overcome the imbalances in these subsequent descriptions.

2. On the basis of his study of Shinjō’s Juhō yōjinshū (b. 1215) Iyanaga gives Rendōbō’s dates as 1189 [or 1187] to some date after 1233 (Iyanaga 2006, 220).
other esoteric teachings, including, I argue, to the so-called “countryside priests” (Itō 2003; Iyanaga 2006, 212–213, 216; Abe 2006–2007, 98–102; Dolce 2010, 193–195; 2016, 293–297). Even though Rendōbō was criticized by later Shingon figures for allegedly spreading “perverse teachings” (jakyō 邪教) or misinterpreting the doctrines of esoteric Buddhism, the teachings that could be marked as “perverse” during the late fourteenth century had been historically transmitted by the higher echelons of the Daigoji clerical milieu since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Situating Buddhist Temple Networks in Medieval Japanese History

Thus far, the histories of Japan’s largest medieval Buddhist temples, such as Tōdaiji 東大寺, Enryakuji 延暦寺, and Kōfukuji 興福寺, have been approached through the concept of kenmon 権門, or the so-called “gates of power,” based on Kuroda Toshio’s theory (Piggott 1982; McMullin 1987; Kuroda 1996a; 1996b; Grapard 1992, 106–111, 125–137; 1998; Adolphson 2000). These temples built extensive administrative and economic networks spanning both the capital and countryside. Earlier Japanese historical scholarship had focused on the official temple networks, namely, those expressed through “head-subordinate temple” (honmatsuji 本末寺) relations. Such networks were particularly discernible—administratively, politically, and economically—throughout central Japan. Recent investigations have begun to cast more light on the temple networks that also extended beyond the central Yamato region (Batten 2006; Adolphson et al. 2007; Adolphson 2012). On the one hand, a temple’s prestige could be constructed and strengthened through blood ties of their chief clerics to each other and Japan’s elite circles, including the imperial house, leading aristocratic families, or military rulers. Throughout the medieval period, long-established elite temple lineages, especially those specializing in esoteric teachings, acted as major providers of technologies of ritual and symbolic legitimation and empowerment to the emperor, the court, and military clans. For example, one of the key issues in Japanese medieval conceptions of rulership was the ability of Shingon and Tendai clerics to come up with new modifications of esoteric rites, focusing on powerful deities and channeling their efficacies, thus providing the desired support to the elite, in times of both conflict and calm (Ruppert 2000; Matsumoto 2005; Conlan 2011).

On the other hand, kenmon temple networks radiating from a head temple emerged through the securing of lands and wealth donated as gifts, largely in return for divine protection and ritual services or through absorbing property as a result of administrative, economic, or even clandestine takeover. In this way, a few major temples came to own vast estates; through expanding their base and increasing their supporters’ numbers, at times of necessity kenmon
temples could summon considerable military might. This ownership interfered constantly in the political and economic affairs of medieval Japan (McMullin 1987; Friday 1992; Adolphson 2000; 2007). Pilgrimage was another way for the temples and sacred sites associated with them to “develop into a culturally significant landscape” (Blair 2015, 4).

However, the full range of kenmon temples’ economic, administrative, and religious activities—even within their own official estate networks—is far from being sufficiently clear (Bauer 2011). Further consideration is due on the historical impact of the unofficial, personal contacts between the high-ranking clerics residing at kenmon temples and their disciple networks, which resulted in the transmissions of certain teachings from temples’ scholastic study seminars to a variety of local contexts, often without building the official institutional ties. Such individual, teacher-centered networks involved both the clerics’ designated pupils who were personally selected and officially approved to study and further transmit important scholastic theories and “trademark” ritual knowledge of a particular lineage. Less privileged followers also participated in the religious study and transmission of such knowledge, and yet remained on the sidelines of official temple hierarchies. Although such outsiders were less socially advantaged within a given temple milieu, some of them nevertheless succeeded in receiving at least partial ritual transmissions of secret esoteric teachings and went on to form their own ritual study and practice groups, which during the medieval period came to proliferate in the countryside and mountain temples, or private Buddhist facilities (betsuin 別院; bessho 別所) (Adolphson 2007; 2012; Andreeva 2017c, 105–140).

As medieval Japan studies progress, Buddhist sources and historical documents preserved in Japanese temple archives reveal a more nuanced picture of historical transitions and tensions between different modes of religious knowledge production and empowerment. Scholars of Japanese Buddhism have noted that the Insei 院政 period (1086–1192) and its aftermath were marked by an increasing privatization of land and power by different factions within Japan’s social elites and by a fragmentation of Buddhist temple lineages that created an excessively complicated lineage-specific ritual performance. Jacqueline Stone, for instance, has stated that “knowledge, as well as land, wealth, and political power, was becoming privatized” (Stone 1999, 108). For example, the many varieties of the ritualized worship of relics in medieval Japan illustrate such conditions well (Ruppert 2000). What did esoteric knowledge radiating from the established temples and prestigious clerical or scholarly figures within them actually mean? How was it understood, especially by the disciples learning it, and how did it affect the local religious contexts to which these disciples had moved on to, after completing their studies?
Fabio Rambelli has shown that the process of education and esoteric knowledge transmission at Shingon temples could last months or decades, if one were to follow several teachers at different temples in a bid to constantly update and broaden the grasp of esoteric teachings and rituals. In particular, he has noted:

The education of monks was finely tuned according to the class background and the specific hierarchical rank, position, and duties of each student…. Education consisted of listening to the lectures of scholar-monks for three months followed by an individual study period of three months, and at the end of these six months the student would receive the consecration (kanjō 灌頂) by an esoteric Buddhist master (ajari 阿闍梨)…. Esoteric knowledge was transmitted… in a number of separate transmission steps…. Because of the nature of such knowledge, not everyone was entitled to receive it…. Performed at the end of a specific training… consecration rituals functioned as devices to control the meaning of and limit access to knowledge; they were also a means to control legitimacy. (Rambelli 2006, 116–117)

Indeed, the social standing of students mattered. Medieval sources show that practitioners could pursue a sojourn and study at esoteric Buddhist temples such as the Tendai temples of Mt. Hiei 比叡 and Onjōji 園城寺 or the Shingon temples of Daigoji and Mt. Kōya. However, not all of them could easily gain access to their teacher of choice or be accepted by the highest echelons of clergy. Elite masters were in a position to decide on a personalized curriculum of study and supervise students’ progress over the months or years. In fact, finding a qualified or famous teacher and securing their agreement to join their study group was far from being guaranteed a position in the lineage. The question of legitimacy mattered as well. On the one hand, the prestige of an esoteric teacher (at least posthumously) rested on a number of noble or talented students who went on to forge successful careers at his or other temples. But, on the other hand, a cleric in a position of such privilege would have to be careful and discerning as to whom exactly he could select to become his rightful successor in terms of the temple’s most valued intangible property: a particular set of esoteric teachings and rituals, a special “know-how” of a given lineage tradition.

Non-elite Practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism in Medieval Japan

The splitting and multiplication of temple lineages and fragmentation of esoteric knowledge occurring within the esoteric milieu during the Insei and Kamakura (1185–1333) periods were promptly noted by medieval Buddhist observers and commentators. One of them, the scholar-monk Raiyu 頼瑜 (1226–1304), played a key role in configuring the “new meaning” of Shingon doctrine (Shingi Shingon 新義真言) at Mt. Kōya and Negoroji 根来寺. Writing during the second half
of the thirteenth century, he noted that within the Ono 小野 branch of Shingon there proliferated multiple transmissions on major esoteric scriptures and powerful esoteric deities, including the Yugikyō and its central divinity Aizen Myōō 愛染明王. In a collection of notes, Usuzōshi kuketsu, recorded after the exchanges with his own teacher Kenjin 憲深 (1192–1263), Raiyu traced the various Yugikyō theories that were produced during the latter part of the Heian period (794–1185) by the Ono branch founder and other renowned figures: Ningai 仁海 (ca. 951–1046) and two disciples of his follower Seison 成尊 (1012–1074), the Daigoji cleric Gihan 義範 (1023–1088), and his rival Hanjun 範俊 (1038–1112). Consequently, an increasing number of exegetic theories about the deity’s main attributes, its manifestations, and Sanskrit syllables associated with it occurring in the context of different variations of the Aizen rite led to a situation in which, in Raiyu’s words, “various teachers each had a different explanation” (T 2535, 79.264b2–3).

In particular, he noted that some specific theories, such as the “deeply secret transmission” (jinpi no den 深秘之伝) about two Sanskrit syllables constituting a symbolic form of the so-called “human vajra” (ningyō sho 人形杵; Dolce 2016), its appearance, meaning, and the mudra associated with it, had no origin in the mainstream esoteric sutras, but rather in Japan’s very own local interpretations. Most importantly, some of these theories were spread not only by renowned masters from esoteric kenmon temples, but also by local priests, semi-itinerant ascetics, and other low-ranking religious specialists:

Question: From which sutra or ritual manual does the meaning of the “human vajra” come from?

Answer: The august oral transmission says that this theory is not in the correct [mainstream] sutras and ritual manuals. It comes from the deeply secret Raga rite, found in the writings of previous Japanese masters. On this phenomenon, [Kenjin] said that this deity’s [Aizen] mudra and mantra derive from the Yugikyō, but apart from the three mudras, three mantras, and mudra and mantra on the five kinds of association, many of these theories were manufactured by the countryside Shingon priests (inaka shingonshi 田舎真言師) and their ilk. These theories are plagiarized and fake, and must not be trusted. I said: “The theories deriving from sutras and ritual manuals are the ones [propagated] by the

3. Kenjin was appointed as the abbot of Daigoji in 1253 and the founder of the Hōon’in 報恩院 lineage, which also belonged to the Ono branch of Shingon (Ruppert 2000, 350). Both Gihan and Hanjun strove for the Ono branch leadership after the death of Seison; Hanjun performed the Aizen rite for Emperor Shirakawa 白河 (1053–1129) (Ruppert 2000, 332–333).

4. In this case, Raiyu seems to imply that the reasons for this fragmenting of ritual knowledge were somehow inherent in the scripture and practices associated with it.

5. In Raiyu’s work, the ritual’s title is written with two Sanskrit syllables (ra and ga), which were also used to signify Rāgaraja, the alias of Aizen Myōō (Goepper 1993). Here it denotes the Aizen rite.
seminars at large metropolitan temples (toe dan setsu 都會壇説). Because they are the only ones who know this deity’s secret mudras and mantras and all the secret altar [that is, lineage-specific] transmissions, multiple teachers orally instruct many disciples face-to-face and [allow them to] transmit these teachings further; that is the sign of our times!” (t 2535, 79.264b24–c4)

Raiyu’s teacher Kenjin was active at Daigoji between 1214 and 1263 and during his career had more than fifty disciples. In the quote above, he draws attention to the fact that already in the first half of the thirteenth century esoteric knowledge (in this case, the Yugikyō and additional theories associated with it) was accessible to non-elite practitioners of esoteric Buddhism. In 1268, the priest Shinjō 心定 (b. 1215), knowledgeable about medieval Japan’s esoteric culture, expressed a similar sentiment (Iyanaga 2006, 210–211). Decades later, Kōshū 光宗 (1276–1350), the compiler of the Tendai encyclopedia Keiran shūyōshū, lamented that “the meaning of esoteric teachings is dumbed down and thinly [spread] on the ground for the mundane folk.” He queried if it was indeed possible for them to obtain the “subtle enlightenment” within a certain temple’s study group, noting that even within Tōji 東寺, a major kenmon temple of the Shingon school in Kyoto, the clerics descending from the Fujiwara nobles could not do so. However, Kōshū then remarked that a certain abbot Jikken of Daigoji was able to accomplish this task (t 2410, 76.833c3–7).

It seems apparent that on the one hand, esoteric experts residing at kenmon temples were keen on attracting many disciples, perhaps also for economic reasons. But on the other hand, the unrestrained spread of esoteric teachings and the more recent theories that closely resembled them were a result of further creative reformulation by the less-tightly-controlled practitioners—those residing in the countryside, unhindered by formal temple relations, and highly mobile. This must have presented a problem for the legitimacy of esoteric teachings and reputation of the kenmon temples themselves (Iyanaga 2006, 213–214; 2010).

In 1375, a supporter of the “proper,” thoroughly legitimate esoteric teachings, the Kōya scholar-monk Yūkai 宥快 (1345–1416), came down as particularly zealous in his criticism of the movements he deemed to be on the margins of, or even outside of, the precisely scholarly field of esoteric Buddhism. This was evident from his treatise Hōkyōshō (Vanden Broucke 1992; Iyanaga 2006; Andreeva 2017c, 132–135). Yūkai also left other accounts, in which he gave further indications of what he may have considered to be historical reasons for the blurring

6. For more on Kōshū and the Keiran shūyōshū, see Yeonjoo Park’s (2020) contribution to this special issue.

7. One could press this understudied point further and ask how these possible economic aspects of the teacher-disciple relationship were handled at medieval Japanese temples. I leave it to future studies.
of lines between legitimate esoteric teachings and those that were replete with “perverse meanings” (jagi 邪義) (Moriyama 1965; Manabe 2002; Rinzan 2006; Iyanaga 2011; Dolce 2016). The latter were to be considered suspicious and treated with caution, if not rejected altogether. In the Chūinryū daiji kikigaki, an account of esoteric oral transmissions encountered at Mt. Kōya since the late eleventh century, Yūkai states:

The invention of additional styles (kayō no sata 加様之沙汰) are the dharma-lineages’ [own] exclusive secret essentials. The countryside Shingon practitioners and people from side lineages (bōryū no hito 傍流之人) will not even know such topics. This can be seen from the several oral instructions by Saiin’s precept master Ukyō 宏教. Again, even among the various lineages of the Ono branch of Shingon, such specific items are due to [the lineage’s own] ideas. [Due to excessive details,] they must be learned really well. . . . There are also slightly different “seals of trust” on the Susiddhi at Tōji, that mix up various lines of transmission like a bundle of cotton. . . . The Chūin lineage at Mt. Kōya [also] has a bit of “perverse teachings” mixed in. Some say that various separate places still privilege the old transmissions. However, none of those [enjoy] divine protection. These days, haven’t these [transmissions] been largely redacted, and the perverse lineages discontinued?

(T 2506, 78.911a26–b1, b7–8, c20–22)

Here, Yūkai seems to indicate that it is the kenmon esoteric temples, like Tōji, and sub-temple lineages, like those at Mt. Kōya, that were instrumental in producing the excessive ritual details, manuals, and interpretations that overflowed the intellectual and ritual field of medieval Japan. As shown before, his earlier counterpart Raiyu placed the responsibility for the mushrooming of such extracurricular activities on the less literate practitioners. However, it very well may have been that by the fourteenth century the situation had changed (or Raiyu was not able to admit these facts frankly enough earlier), and the influential kenmon temples had reabsorbed the so-called “perverse” teachings into their own intellectual and ritual domains. The exact historical and epistemic reasons for this still remain to be explored.

And yet, what role did the so-called “countryside Shingon priests” play in this complicated historical context? Is it possible to recover the kinds of ideas that they had inherited from their renowned temple mentors? The significance and yet a somewhat under-appreciated role of non-elite Buddhist practitioners and local institutions in the construction of discourses used and fostered further by the elite Buddhist temples has already been noted (Hori 1958; Gorai 2011). Itinerant holy men (shōnin 上人; hijiri 僧)—some of them affiliated with large monastic complexes, some only temporarily so—mixed with a variety of religious agents, many of whom were also low-ranking, like the dōshū 堂衆 of Kōfukuji
(Adolphson 2012) or the priests from Kinpusen (Blair 2015). They dwelled in semi-permanent seclusion at sacred sites or private religious facilities, traversed both the “centers and peripheries” of medieval Japan, and invented new icons and rituals that linked the distant divinities and complex notions of esoteric Buddhism with familiar local contexts and sacred landscapes of medieval Japan. With time, their unorthodox, “inverted” models of symbolic rulership became incorporated and used by imperial Buddhist temples in late medieval Japan (Andreeva 2017c, 105–140, 217–255). Like their counterparts residing at kenmon temples, many of these men were aware of medieval tantric ideas of embryology used to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment and a status of the divine king that helped the very same non-elite practitioners to obtain power over Japan’s ancient cultic sites enshrining prehistoric rulers (Itō 2003; Dolce 2010; 2016; Ogawa 2014; Andreeva 2016). These new findings suggest yet again that the agency of Buddhist temples and their role in medieval Japanese history must continue to be rigorously considered, this time acknowledging that both the Buddhist kenmon temples and far less institutionally-bound local private facilities were the hubs of knowledge production, and not only of the ritual kind but also of the medical and technological kind (Goble 2011; Andreeva 2017b).

Daigoji Abbot, Jikken

One of Daigoji’s high-ranking clerics, Jikken, mentioned several times above, deserves special attention. Not only was he a prominent figure in medieval esoteric temple milieu, but his influence in the form of teachings that he imparted to his disciples extended seemingly far beyond the premises of Daigoji and its sub-temples, Sanbōin 三宝院 and Kongōōin, where he came to occupy leading posts.

The boy that went on to become a high-ranking cleric was born into a privileged aristocratic family of the Fujiwara. Jikken’s grandfather Yorisuke 賢輔 (1112–1186) was himself a grandson of the regent Fujiwara no Morozane 藤原師実 (1042–1101); he served as a secretary to the Retired Emperor Go Shirakawa 後白河 (1127–1192). Jikken’s father Motosuke 基輔 (d. 1185) had links to the Minamoto 源 clan through his mother. He was an official of the royal court stables and a close retainer of another prominent court figure and political advisor, Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 (1149–1207). While still in his early twenties, Jikken received his first “dharma transmission” from the Sanbōin master Shōken 勝賢 (1138–1196), thus formally entering the ranks of esoteric priesthood.8 A few years later, he formally entered Kongōōin, where his own education took the most formative stage and where he eventually climbed to the position of leadership. Some sources suggest that he acquired an additional study experience on Mt. Kōya and separately,

8. That was the year of 1197 when Kujō Kanezane was dismissed from his position of power as the chief advisor to the emperor (kanpaku 関白).
with a former Kōfukuji scholar-monk, who specialized in the study of Hossō, even receiving some “secret instructions” (hiketsu 秘決) from him during a brief sojourn at a village near Mt. Katsuragi. Indeed, in medieval Shingon commentaries, Jikken is rarely mentioned by name, but instead is called “the grand abbot of Kongōōin” (Kongōōin daisōjō 金剛王院大僧正). In 1236–1238, Jikken was appointed the head of Daigoji and also the chief (chōja 長者) of Tōji, thus acquiring an elevated position within the two most prestigious esoteric temples with historic imperial connections (MDJ, 983).

These high office appointments and his own privileged background undoubtedly provided Jikken with opportunities to lead important ritual ceremonies requested by the imperial court and elite aristocratic families. In the winter of 1240, Jikken performed an esoteric rite dedicated to the wrathful deity Aizen Myōō “as it was performed by the Buddha” (nyohō aizenhō 如法愛染法). This was a highly exclusive rite performed only for the benefit of royal clients; however, it seems that Jikken performed it at one of the Kujō family mansions situated on the Ichijō avenue, possibly that of Kujō Michiie 九条道家 (1193–1252), Kanezane’s grandson.9

In the summer of the same year, Jikken was requested to perform the ritual of “praying for the rain” (shōukyōhō 請雨経法) at the Shinsen' en 神泉苑, the royal palace garden. This rite, too, was of a high significance, as its performance history was deeply entrenched in the demonstrations of state power over the climate as well as the political and economic welfare of the people. On that particular occasion, there was a display of a “miraculous sign” (gen 驚), and the ritual efficacy of Jikken’s esoteric performance was considered to be of the highest caliber. A rare map of the Shinsen’en said to record Jikken’s procedures of 1240 (and again in 1244) is preserved in the Nara National Museum. Copied at Saidaiji in 1279, most plausibly at the request of the Saidaiji leader, the Shingon Ritsu monk Eizon 叡尊 (1201–1290), this map depicts the garden pond with a small island rising in the middle of it. The map also shows a temporary structure where this rite was performed, thirteen poles with streamers, and the rite’s principle image; there are explanatory notes in red and black, positioned throughout the map. In medieval Japan the knowledge of such procedures had to be documented as precisely as possible, reflecting important precedents. It is telling that Jikken’s 1240 rain-making rite became such an example. 10 Following these impressive displays of ritual power, in 1247 the seventy-two-year-old Jikken was appointed as personal...

9. Michiie was a son of Fujiwara no Yoshitsune 良経 (1169–1206; Emperor Go Toba’s prime minister) and a niece of Minamoto no Yoritomo 藤原頼朝 (1147–1199; the first Kamakura shogun). Like his grandfather Kanezane, Michiie, with his ample familial and political links to the Kamakura Bakufu, was a regent to the ruling emperor.
10. Jikken also performed esoteric rites during the solar eclipse of 1246 (MDJ, 983).
protector-monk (gojisō 御持僧) to the ruling emperor and scored yet another high office at Tōji (MDJ, 938).

Not only the emperors and stately lands benefited from Jikken’s mastery of esoteric rites. Aristocratic families in the capital requested that he perform prayers for safe pregnancy and childbirth for several imperial consorts. These rituals fused Indian, Central Asian, Chinese, and Japanese Buddhist divinities and local deities. On the one hand, these rituals experimented with acculturation and assemblage of preexisting religious concepts and practices to suit the immediate needs of the court as well as methodologies of risk alleviation, and, on the other, they were designed to protect noble women’s bodies, conform their pregnancies to the Buddhist notions of time, and provide a platform for ensuring the continuation of Japan’s imperial lineage. The ritual program for safe pregnancy and childbirth (as opposed to individual rites for the same purpose) seems to have fully emerged in the early twelfth century.11 The court protocols known as Osan oinori mokuroku, documenting births given by the imperial consorts and daughters of the aristocracy between 1119 and 1337, provide ample details as to which rituals were performed, in what sequence, and by whom. The programs themselves varied slightly on different occasions, but here is a concise example:

The second year of Daiji 大治 (1127), ninth month. Prayers for the labor of the royal consort Taikenmon’in 待賢門院 (Fujiwara no Shōshi 王子, 1101–1145). The birth of Retired Emperor Go Shirakawa.
The Five Altars, two sets.
The Pole Star, seven altars.
Six Syllable [Kannon], six altars.
King Aizen, two altars. Worthy Star King (Sonshō 宿星王). Worthy of Victory (Sonshō 宿勝). Aizen fire ritual: provisional abbot.
Offerings.

It is notable that during the Insei period the royal childbirth rituals included the Aizen rites (Kojima 1998). The record from 1119 detailing the labor of Taikenmon’in and birth of Emperor Sutoku 崇徳 (1119–1164) might be the earliest one. The example above briefly describes what was done when she gave birth to Go Shirakawa, another ruler-to-be. The court protocols show that such rituals were entrusted only to noble esoteric clerics related to the imperial house.

11. For a comparable court protocol of ritual actions sponsored during an imperial consort’s labor by aristocratic families and the court dating from 1178–1181, see Andreeva (2017a).
by blood (in this particular case, Prince Omuro of Ninna). Jikken’s aforementioned performance of the Aizen rite in 1240 may have also been linked to such an occasion.

In 1247, during the reign of child Emperor Go Fukakusa 後深草 (1243–1304), when it became clear that the consort (chūgū 中宮) of the Retired Emperor Go Saga 後嵯峨 (1220–1272), Ōmiyain 大宮院 (Saionji Kitsushi 西園寺姞子, 1225–1292), was pregnant, Jikken was again invited to conduct this particular rite. This was mostly due to his own noble background and high-ranking clerical position within two major kenmon esoteric temples, but also because he was already known for its performance. The rite was sponsored by Ōmiyain’s father and the then prime minister, Saionji Saneuji 西園寺実氏 (1194–1269). Such invitations were politically desired by both parties; patrons employed the clerics’ ritual skills for minimizing mortal risks for their pregnant daughters, while the rites gave an increased visibility to Buddhist clerics, exposing them to the direct attention of the patrons.12 The 1247 prayers were only partially successful; the royal birth was peaceful, but instead of a boy there appeared a baby girl. However, two years later, Jikken’s mastery was finally rewarded, and Ōmiyain gave birth to the crown prince and Go Saga’s son Tsunehito, who would become Emperor Kameyama 亀山 (1249–1305).

The centerpiece of the said ritual, Aizen Myōō, was an extremely important deity. Japanese aristocracy coveted Aizen Myōō’s esoteric powers as it promised overwhelming love and respect from others, defeat of one’s enemies, and increasing various fortunes in the present life. Several manifestations of this deity were described in the Yugikyō (Goepper 1993; Dolce 2010; Ogawa 2014; Iyanaga 2016). Due to its powers of cutting delusions rooted in desire and activating the seeds of enlightenment hidden within physical bodies, Aizen was invoked in esoteric rites covering all contexts of elite life. Recognized as an authoritative performer of a particular modification of the Aizen rite, Jikken was no doubt well acquainted with the contents of the Yugikyō and medieval interpretations of it produced by esoteric scholar-monks within Daigoji and Mt. Kōya.

Despite such prominence, it is rather unfortunate that only a few written documents authored personally by Jikken have survived. Although mentioned posthumously in compendiums penned by esoteric clerics, his figure still remains a remote silhouette in the intellectual landscape of Japan’s medieval Buddhist milieu. One of the rarities attributed directly to him (via oral instructions [kuden 口伝] recorded by his disciples) is a short text detailing preparations for the initial stages of esoteric training, Jūhachidō kegyō sahō, as practiced at the major sub-temple

12. The clerics involved were granted gifts from the ruling emperor and the consort’s family (Andreeva 2017a).
Sanbōin. In this short record, Jikken laid out basic requirements for aspiring students who planned to undertake their first steps in esoteric practice.

In general, the monks wishing to study Shingon at first amicably follow the school. They devote themselves to their karma [follow a vegetarian diet], do not favor military valor, and do not attach swords to their belts. They constantly adhere to the practice of chanting sutras and wearing monastic robes. Chanting and reading sutras incessantly accumulates merit and produces deep aversion to the seven transgressions of body and speech. They diligently study various exoteric and esoteric teachings (kenmitsu shogyō 顕密諸教), strengthen their faith, and deepen their wisdom. Precisely such people are up to the task: [those who] uphold the precepts, practice meditation, and adhere to the teacher-disciple transmissions (shishi sō 師資相)....

Although it is the midst of the latter days [of the Buddhist Dharma] and the Buddhist rituals are no longer as efficient as befit to the monks and taught by the Buddha, actions such as indulging in alcohol, consuming five bitter [herbs], eating meat, playing string instruments, or gambling and games should be prohibited and rejected by those who seek divine protection. There are detailed records in the commentaries by previous teachers to that effect, composed of quotations from many scriptures. (sz 23: 73)

This record provides fairly straightforward details on certain stipulations and monastic discipline that the Shingon novices were generally expected to uphold, while undertaking specialized education at esoteric temples (Rambelli 2006). One could further assume that this record was based on Jikken’s own experience of initial training at Daigoji, but also that it outlined the standard expectations and admonitions posed to his own students, some of whom, if successful in their initial steps, would also be taught and initiated by him into the deeper layers of esoteric Buddhist teachings.

And indeed, the deeper, more complex issues of esoteric doctrines, not in the least those contained in the Yugikyō, must have been transmitted by Jikken to his disciples during the 1220s–1240s, when he had already finished his own advanced training and enjoyed a high position both within Kongōōin and Daigoji. Such transmissions were recorded by Dōhan, who studied with Jikken at Kongōōin as early as 1218 and also served as his personal scribe at court at least on one occasion before Jikken’s death in 1249. Given Dōhan’s subsequent career

13. The record further notes that a Buddhist monk could play string instruments for his own enjoyment, but only when alone and definitely not during banquets or when entertaining guests.

14. After a period of study in the capital, Dōhan returned to Mt. Kōya in 1234, but later in 1243 he was exiled to Sanuki 赞岐 in Shikoku. This was the aftermath of a drastic division between the Kōya temples Kongōbuji 金剛峰寺 and Daidenbōin 大伝法院 founded by Kakuban 觉鑁 (1095–1143), which resulted in a group of Kakuban’s followers moving to Mt. Negoro 根来. Dōhan spent seven years in exile and was not able to return to Mt. Kōya until Jikken died in 1249.
at both Mt. Kōya and elsewhere (despite years of exile following the conflict at Mt. Kōya) and his closeness to the aging “Grand Abbot of Kongōōin,” it appears that Dōhan was one of Jikken’s favored disciples: perhaps, one of the few officially designated. Recently discovered historical evidence allows us to propose that such Yugikyō theories, at least in their basic or condensed form, were also passed down by Jikken to his other pupils, who were perhaps less illustrious in terms of their temple rank and opportunities for exquisite scholarly training, but who, nevertheless, were able to approach him and study the important tenets of esoteric Buddhism with him.

The Yugikyō Theories of Jikken’s Predecessors and Disciples

The last section of this article will analyze a limited selection of quotes from the transmissions featuring Yugikyō and circulating at Daigoji and Mt. Kōya between the mid-twelfth century and second half of the fourteenth century. In her groundbreaking analysis of medieval Yugikyō commentaries, Lucia Dolce investigates the writings by the Daigoji abbot Jitsuun and Dōhan during the aforementioned period (Dolce 2016, 293–297). While I partially adopt her method here in relation to Yugikyō rhetorical motifs, my aim, however, is different. I wish to delineate—however tentatively—the effect such transmissions stemming from certain Daigoji abbots, specifically Jikken, may have had on the so-called non-elite practitioners of esoteric Buddhism. My study case will feature Rendōbō Hōkyō, the priest from a private study hall near Mt. Miwa (modern-day Nara Prefecture), and his associates.

Let us turn again to Yūkai, the fourteenth-century scholar-monk from Mt. Kōya. In his already mentioned Hōkyōshō, the thirty-year-old Yūkai leaves an assessment of the so-called “perverse teachings” and Rendōbō Hōkyō, specifically. Pol Vanden Broucke’s English translation of Yūkai’s compendium contains these descriptions:

Furthermore, there are many heretical views in the teachings of the writings by Hōkyō Shōnin [Rendōbō] of Miwa in the province of Yamato. The “Compendium of the Single Drop” [Ittekishō] and the like are Tachikawa teachings. (Modified from Vanden Broucke 1992, 28)

Although this quote has already attracted much attention (Moriyama 1965, 579; Iyanaga 2010; Andreeva 2016; 2017c, 133), let us put aside the otherwise important discussions of the Tachikawa lineage and what exactly constituted the notion of “perverse teachings” in medieval Japan and instead focus on the specific details mentioned in it.15 While it is not entirely clear whether Yūkai ascribed the Ittekishō

15. For a study of the historiography on the Tachikawa lineage and their alleged “perverse teachings,” see Gaëtan Rappo’s (2020) contribution to this special issue.
authorship to Rendōbō Hōkyō, the title of this unidentified text provokes further thought. This precise title does not appear in the Taishō canon, and at present, it is not clear if it can even be found among the Tachikawa lineage writings.16

However, the way Ittekishō’s title had been recorded in the modern print version of Yūkai’s compendium may have been the result of a mistake by a copyist. It is notable that a similar, although not exactly identical, notion of “two drops” (niteki 二滴)—especially as a part of a compound of “the two drops merging” (niteki wagō 二滴和合)—appears more often in the Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist treatises, which form a part of the Taishō canon. Namely, the earliest textual evidence of this notion appears in the Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra and Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra. These and other sources, already noted by OGAWA (2014) and DOLCE (2016) in their respective studies of ritual embryology and its imagery, were known to Buddhist scholars in medieval Japan as classical bases of knowledge explaining the mechanisms of conception and fetal gestation and, ultimately, the transmigration of souls;17 they formed a systematic part of educational background at major kenmon temples such as Kōfukuji and Ninnaji. As part of a broader array of rhetorical phrases linked to the Yugikyō, these two expressions were frequently mentioned in medieval transmissions that used conception as a key metaphor for “ritual generation of the perfected bodies” and divine entities (Das 2003; DOLCE 2006–2007; 2010; 2016; OGAWA 2014, 305–307). Thus, it should not be surprising that the notion of “two drops,” signifying the merging of “two vital liquids of men and women” (nannyo niteki wagō 男女二滴和合 or “of fathers and mothers,” bumo 父母), also appeared in medieval transmissions on the Yugikyō, including those from Daigoji. In fact, these notions formed a key part of these transmissions (DOLCE 2010, 170–171).

Below, I briefly trace the use of these expressions in a limited portion of medieval Yugikyō transmissions recorded by Jikken’s two disciples Dōhan and Rendōbō Hōkyō. The purpose is to place the esoteric thought of the Miwa priest and his associates into the historical context in which the esoteric milieu they encountered at Daigoji and Mt. Kōya had operated. Let us first start with Jikken’s transmissions to Dōhan. Since Jikken’s own writings or commentaries have not


17. OGAWA (2014, 305–307) has noted the medieval revival of this notion by Dōhan, specifically in relation to Jikken’s 1241–1242 transmissions at Sanbōin of Daigoji. DOLCE (2010, 193; 2016, 262–270, 274, n. 48) has pointed out that the description of the “two drops, red and white, merging” appears in the seventh fascicle of Tiantai scholar Zhiyi’s 智顗 (538–597) treatise on meditation, Mohezhiguan (t 1911, 46.93b10–11). For its annotated English translation, see SWANSON (2017, 1201–1202). For a discussion of esoteric Buddhist theories of embryology in the Shin-gon school, see KAMEYAMA Taka-hiko’s (2020) contribution to this special issue.
survived, two sets of transmissions linked to this sutra as taught by Jikken of Daigoji were recorded by Dōhan around 1224 and 1242. One, the Kuden, was recorded in 1224. However, in one of the colophons Dōhan suggests that this record was based on the Yugikyō teachings he had received from Jikken a few years earlier in 1218, when forty-two-year-old Jikken still resided at Kongōōin (zsz 7: 134). This particular compendium also refers to the teachings on this sutra by two other Mt. Kōya clerics, Kakukai 覚海 (1142–1223) and Yūgen 融源 (1120–1218), who will be mentioned again shortly. Given Kuden’s relatively short length and clarity of its explanations, one may assume that this may have been indeed an early or perhaps standard group of teachings on the Yugikyō that a designated student was expected to receive from his mentor at Daigoji or Mt. Kōya, as described in the earlier sections of this article. Kuden focuses straightforwardly on each sutra chapter, explains its key notions, and does not exhibit too many divergences into other topics. Importantly, although Kuden refers to some embryological metaphors, including the “five stages in the womb” (tainai goi 胎内五位), it does not include references to the “two drops merging.” Instead, when explaining the terms yuga 瑜伽 (yoga, that is, union with a deity) and yugi 瑜祇 (a yoga practitioner), which appear in the title of the Yugikyō, Dōhan’s 1224 Kuden employs rather neutral notions signifying sexual congress such as the “man and woman’s voices” (otoko no koe 男声, onna no koe 女声) (zsz 7: 93).

Another, more extensive compilation of Jikken’s transmissions, the Kuketsu, also by Dōhan, emerged in a completely different set of social circumstances. During the eleventh month of 1241, the second son of Emperor Go Toba 後鳥羽 (1180–1239) and princely abbot of Omuro at Ninnaji, Dōjo Hōshinnō 道助法親王 (1196–1249), invited the Daigoji abbot Jikken to the imperial temple of Hosshōji 法勝寺 to deliver private lectures on the Yugikyō. These were recorded by Dōhan, who served at the scene as a scholarly witness and scribe, either as Jikken’s rightful and official disciple, or following the personal orders from the Omuro abbot (sz kaidai 解題: 11–12). Jikken’s lectures were noted down and later revised into a document (probably in early 1242), following the princely order. It seems that Dōhan sometimes received such orders from Dōjo, either to lecture on certain treatises or to revise them into written documents, at least before his exile to Sanuki Province in 1243.

Although both Kuden and Kuketsu are based on the same scripture, the circumstances in which they respectively emerged roughly twenty years apart were remarkably different. In contrast to the Kuden (1224), the Kuketsu (1241–1242) is a more extensive, scholarly compendium aimed at a highly educated noble practitioner of esoteric Buddhism, familiar with extensive references to the Yogācāra treatises and esoteric rituals by Indian and Chinese patriarchs, such as Vajrabodhi (ca. 671–741), Amoghavajra (705–774), and Yijing 義浄 (653–713). Such an exquisite royal listener would also be made aware of an earlier
Japanese commentary on the Yugikyō by the Tendai scholar-monk Annen 安然 (841–889/915) and transmissions by Japanese esoteric masters Genkaku 嚴覚 (d.u.), Jitsuhan 実範 (d. 1144), and Kakuban 觉鑑 (1095–1143). It is therefore thought-provoking that the later Kuketsu contains numerous references to a number of terms conceptually parallel or clearly cognizant of the more sexually explicit notion of “the two drops merging.” In the lecture on the introduction to the Yugikyō, Jikken, the lecturer, still used terms such as the “man’s voice” and “woman’s voice” to describe the meanings of the terms yuga and yugi as he had done previously teaching young Dōhan in 1218–1224 (sz 5: 27; zsz 7: 93). Commentaries to Yugikyō’s second chapter, already noted for its reproductive imagery (Ogawa 2014; Dolce 2016), include an explanation of the meaning of a ritual merging of a practitioner and esoteric deity (nyūga ga’nyū 入我我入) and deities Aizen and Sen’ai 染愛. This segment invokes a simile of “lustful desire initially arising between men and women” to explain the esoteric meaning of “lust” (ai 愛) (sz 5: 52). Transmissions reflecting on the Yugikyō’s fifth chapter describing Aizen’s iconography explain the concept of keiai 敬愛 (respect and love) by alluding to the sexual actions of “men and women of the mundane world” (seken nannya 世間男女), Aizen’s divine appearance as consisting of “two [forms of] rūpa, red and white” (shakubyaku nishiki 赤白二色), and “two worthies merging” (nison wagō 二尊和合) to “produce the Adamantine King” (Kongōō to nasu 炎々為金剛王) (sz 5: 56, 58–59).

Elsewhere in the Kuketsu, in a segment on the ritual contemplation of the seed syllable hūṃ included in the explanations to Yugikyō’s tenth chapter, Jikken (and by extension his scribe and disciple Dōhan) invoked the idea of “two drops of principle and wisdom merging” (niteki richi wagō 二滴理智和合), as preceding the first stage of embryonic development (tainai shoi 胎内初位). Furthermore, describing the “yogic consecration” (yugi kanjō 瑜祇灌頂) in the Ono tradition and the Daigoji lineage, he tried to explain metaphysical notions of the “doubly perfect ocean of thusness” (sōen shōkai 双円性海) and non-duality of the two mandalas (ryōbu funi 両部不二) by conjuring a description of the “ocean of thusness [deriving from] the two drops of real men and women merging [in sexual congress],” an act envisioned to be a prerequisite for symbolic acquisition of the “secret womb” (hizō 秘蔵) by an esoteric practitioner. This discussion involved the ideas of “two liquids and two drops” (nisui niteki 二水二滴) and “two drops merging [to achieve] the initial status [of embryo in the womb]” as well as a mention of a certain “transmission on the merging of two roots (nikon 二根) of men and women.” In another part of the same segment, citing the Ono lineage transmissions, “the mixing of two drops” seems to have been invoked more symbolically, to mean the “perfect union of principle and wisdom of the two mandalas” (ryōbu richi myōgō 両部理智冥合). There, the “originally existing two drops” also
represented two Sanskrit syllables and together, a wish-fulfilling gem (*nyoi hōju 如意宝珠*) (sz 5: 109–110).

As seen from these quotations above, during 1241–1242 Jikken did not hesitate to use more explicit sexual metaphors in his explanations of the *Yugikyō*; the discourse on the “two drops merging” appeared most vital and dynamic in his interpretation of the sutra. Most of these expressions, however, were employed by Jikken in order to explain a variety of metaphysical, iconographic, and ritual notions, important for understanding the esoteric teachings. Dōhan’s *Kuketsu* deserves a detailed study from a number of angles, but here one detail must remain underscored: this compendium was produced in the context of Jikken’s extensive oral lectures on the *Yugikyō* aimed at an elite aristocrat from the imperial lineage and a highly-ranked esoteric cleric of utmost prestige and power.

And what of the countryside priest Rendōbō Hōkyō from Miwa? How and through which terms and notions did he encounter and understand the *Yugikyō*? Although it seems that there may have been a chance of him overlapping with Dōhan in terms of location and periods of personal study both at Mt. Kōya and with Jikken at Kongōōin before 1224, it is unclear exactly when such personal meetings could have happened.

Rendōbō Hōkyō’s own records of the *Yugikyō* transmissions are included in his only surviving treatise *Kakugenshō* and two recently rediscovered late medieval copies of *Yugikyō* transmissions recorded by his fellow priest Kōban 弘鑁 (d.u.) preserved at Kanazawa Bunko. Our task of comparison is made particularly complicated by an absence of trustworthy dating for all these materials. If *Kakugenshō* is available in modern print, the other two manuscripts are hard to access and, due to their severely damaged condition, they remain only scarcely, if at all, readable. The current theory has to remain highly speculative, but based on the contents and structure of the *Kakugenshō* as well as the dates of the lives of Rendōbō’s teachers Kakukai and Yūgen, we must suppose that Rendōbō had heard and recorded their lectures in some form at least before or around 1218, that is, before Yūgen’s death. It could have been a time when Dōhan also studied there with the same masters.18 Kakukai in his youth trained with the leading Sanbōin monks at Daigoji and became the chief administrator of Mt. Kōya in 1217, while Yūgen, also a Kōya cleric, had links to the Shin-gon reformer Kakuban, both by blood and as a fellow esoteric practitioner and scholar-monk at the Daidenbōin 大伝法院 (Andreeva 2017c, 136–138). If so, the two Kanazawa Bunko manuscript copies recording the transmissions attributed to Rendōbō and more clearly structured along the lines of the *Yugikyō* chapter contents, which are similar to Dōhan’s 1224 *Kuden* and 1241 *Kuketsu*, could be

---

dated later than 1217–1218. One of these surviving pieces bears the title Yuga yugi kuden Kōban ryakuchū, which appears to mirror the titles of Dōhan’s 1224 collection, but consists of transmissions on only seven of the full twelve sutra chapters. In this piece, the Daigoji abbot Jikken and the Daigoji lineage are clearly cited as vital sources. The second piece is titled Yuga dainana yuga jōjubon kuketsu [Rendo].

Let us briefly survey the terms closest to the notion of the “two drops” in Rendōbō’s writings and transmissions. Kakugenshō features transmissions on Aizen Myōō, one of the key Yugikyō deities, as well as Kakukai and Yūgen’s teachings on the Yugikyō, including its seventh chapter. Among those, Rendōbō records discussions of esoteric deities Shōten 聖天 and two-headed Aizen. The mudra ascribed to Shōten hints at the “utmost secret (saihi 最秘) of congress between male and female devas” (sz 36: 335), while the identity of the two-headed Aizen allegedly appearing in the fifth chapter of the Yugikyō is briefly explained by alluding to the agencies of a male Kongōsatta 金剛薩埵 and a female deity, King Tainted Lust (Nyokei Sen’aiō 女形染愛王), and therefore, to the congress between men and women, or “two heads of a man and a woman” (sz 36: 340). Item fourteen in the second fascicle of Rendōbō’s compendium explains the so-called “hidden horse organ” (meonzō 馬陰蔵) samadhi, an important segment of medieval Yugikyō transmissions which featured in the original sutra text (GOEPPE 1993, 102–105; DOLCE 2010, 163, 169–171; DOLCE 2016, 293–297) and Amoghavajra’s Liqushi, in addition to other Buddhist scriptures. It is here that Rendōbō’s teachers again resort to the allegories of sexual acts between male Kongōsatta and female deities, using expressions such as the “mutual congress between men and women of the mundane world,” or the “five elements (godai 五大) that produced men and women” (sz 36: 342–343; GOEPPE 1993, 52–53; ANDREEVA 2016, 437–439). Elsewhere in his lectures, Yūgen also alerted Rendōbō to the “yogic consecrations at Daigoji” (sz 36: 349).

Significantly, the term “two drops” does not appear in the modern print of the Kakugenshō. Moreover, elsewhere in the discussions of the Rishue 理趣会 and Aizen mandalas, Rendōbō is informed by his teachers about the existing practice of “perverse contemplations” (jagyō jakan 邪行邪観), which involved contemplations on one’s own body as a principle budhha (jishin o honzon to nasu 自身為本尊). According to Rendōbō’s teachers, although befit for a deity, this particular practice of using one’s own body as a principle ritual object during the Rishue

19. I am grateful to the staff of the reading room of the Kanazawa Bunko Library for providing access to the photocopies of ms 293-13 and 82-2.

20. The hidden horse organ samadhi, describing an esoteric meditation of the Buddha, is also mentioned in Xuanzang’s Chinese translation of the Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra and the Flower Garland Sūtra, thus making it a relatively familiar type of meditation across a number of well-known and widely studied Buddhist scriptures (DOLCE 2016, 265, n., 27).
mandala assembly would offer “little achievement of power in the current lifetime.” This brief segment suggests that, despite various claims of secrecy, even non-elite esoteric practitioners like Rendōbō, who came to study at Mt. Kōya, were made aware of the possibility and existence of such practices within Japan’s esoteric temple milieu, but were not taught the exact details, mildly cautioned against it, or discouraged to undertake them altogether (sz 36: 358).

It is in one of the surviving Kanazawa Bunko manuscript copies of Rendōbō’s own transmissions on the Yugikyō, namely, in its seventh chapter focusing on the deity Daishō Kongō 大勝金剛 and known under the short title “On the acquisition of the yogic union” (Yuga jōjubon 瑜伽成就品) that the terms related to the notion of “two drops” actually appear. In some portions of his transmissions, Rendōbō used the terms already familiar to him, such as “merging of worldly men and women,” “man and woman’s five elements [merging into] one body,” or “the non-duality of man and woman’s five elements.” As in his earlier Kakugenshō, these examples occur in relation to the ritual contemplation known as “hidden horse organ” samadhi, which Rendōbō also called the “lotus samadhi” (renge sanmajin 蓮華三摩地). However, in his later explanation, he employed more explicit terms such as the “liquids of men and women” (nannya teki 男女滴) and cited the “merging of two drops, red and white” as a prerequisite to the initial stage of embryo in the womb (kararan 美羅蘭 from the Sanskrit kalala).21 These later transmissions by Rendōbō recorded by Kōban referred to a number of the ideas of sexual intercourse, conception, and their formative biological components, including the notion of the gendered “five elements” of men and women, which Rendōbō already used in his earlier Kakugenshō. However, the “merging of two drops, red and white” is more directly reminiscent of the rhetoric employed by Jikken in his lectures on the Yugikyō presented to Prince Omuro and recorded by Dōhan in 1241–1242.

All of these writings and documents, particularly Rendōbō’s transmissions, require a much more elaborate analysis and comparison in a broader context of medieval Japanese thought on the Yugikyō and other scriptures. This can only be achieved through a long-term detailed study with a broad overlook, which must be left to others. Here, as regards my theory concerning the so-called countryside Shingon priests and their access to important medieval esoteric doctrines and ritual notions, I can only propose a tentative hypothesis. If our dating of his surviving writings (that is, Kakugenshō and the two Yugikyō transmissions) is approximately correct, Rendōbō Hōkyō of Miwa was able to receive some of the teachings on the key portions of the Yugikyō from Kakukai and Yūgen at Mt.

21. Despite its title focusing on the seventh chapter of the Yugikyō, the Kanazawa Bunko manuscript 82-2 comments on the often-transmitted rhetorical expressions deriving from several other chapters of this sutra.
Kōya before Yūgen’s death in 1218. Specifically, Yūgen directed Rendōbō’s attention toward the yogic consecrations practiced at Daigoji (SZ 36: 349); Yūgen’s transmissions on the “hidden horse organ” samadhi were also heard by Dōhan (SZ 7: 101–102, 107–108). Rendōbō had heard other basic theories related to the medieval Japanese discourse on the Yugikyō that circulated at Daigoji, Ninnaji, Mt. Kōya, and Miidera 三井寺 from both of his teachers on Mt. Kōya during the early thirteenth century. It is therefore possible that the two transmissions on the Yugikyō, with their more explicit sexual imagery, may have been transmitted by Rendōbō and recorded by his associate Kōban at some point later between 1218 and Jikken’s passing in 1249, or before 1235 when Rendōbō, Kōban, and another esoteric practitioner called Nyojitsu 如実 gathered at Miwa bessho to exchange esoteric theories and rituals. Jikken had been appointed as the Daigoji abbot in 1236 and, after that, his engagements performing important rituals at the behest of the imperial court, such as the 1240 rain prayers or the Aizen rituals for the safe childbirth of imperial consorts in 1242 and 1247, may have prevented him from direct and frequent communication with his non-elite sideline disciples. Perhaps it was during the period between 1217–1218 and 1235 that Rendōbō may have gotten a chance to study with Jikken at Kongōōin; some indirect evidence suggests that their encounter could have happened earlier.22

The similarity of the transmission titles (Yuga yugi, or Yugy yuga, Kuketsu) and appearance of the rhetoric involving the “two drops” both in Dōhan’s 1241–1242 records of Jikken’s lectures on the Yugikyō to Prince Omuro at Ninnaji and Rendōbō’s own transmission on the seventh chapter of the Yugikyō also suggest a connection. It may be that the discourse on the “two drops” cited in both these records was a particular theory proliferating at medieval Daigoji sub-temples and transmitted by the Daigoji abbot Jikken. Given Jikken’s own engagements, it is possible that he fomented or developed this theory during the mid-1230s to mid-1240s. What may support such a hypothesis? A much earlier collection of the Yugikyō transmissions attributed to another Daigoji abbot, Jitsuuun, may provide clues. Hailing from an elite family linked by blood to Fujiwara no Michinaga and Emperor Horikawa 堀河 (1079–1107), Jitsuuun was a younger brother of the Sanbōin founder and Daigoji abbot Shōkaku 勝覚 (1057–1129). He trained at the imperial temple Kajūji 勧修寺 in Kyoto before himself becoming the Daigoji abbot in 1156. As noted before (Itō 2003; Dolce 2016, 296), the earlier attributions of this particular group of transmissions recorded under the title of Hiketsu to Jitsuuun may not be particularly trustworthy. However, if these transmissions circulated after his death, one could argue that certain theories and vocabulary

22. The Datō hiketsushō suggested that Rendōbō was involved in a study with Jikken as early as 1202 (SZ 23: 287), but this record only indicates that he received transmissions from the Daigoji cleric in a dream (Andreeva 2017c, 137, n. 97).
linked to the commentarial tradition on this sutra had already existed in Daigoji before Jikken’s own time (Andreeva 2016, 429–431); Jikken was active at Daigoji between 1200 and 1249, therefore, he may not have been the sole inventor of such transmissions and rhetoric. What is striking about Hiketsu is that this presumably earlier text contained a wealth of distinct expressions deriving from the notion of the “two drops merging,” which theoretically fitted the descriptions of the so-called “perverse” teachings and the title of the otherwise unknown “Compendium of One Drop” (Ittekishō) cited by Yūkai in his critique of Miwa priest Rendōbō Hōkyō and the Tachikawa lineage.

The expression “two drops” (or “two drops, red and white, merging”) first appears in the Hiketsu in a fascicle explaining the second and fifth chapters of the Yugikyō (sz 5: 14–15). According to Dolce (2016, 296–297), the second sutra chapter, containing a detailed description of what she termed the “meditation on the hidden organ of the horse” and focusing on a process of “ritual generation of a perfected body,” drew especially prominent attention among medieval esoteric practitioners (see also Ogawa 2014). The Hiketsu commentary on this chapter also discussed the so-called internal mandala (nai mandara 内曼荼羅) and gave detailed explanations of the five stages of embryo in the womb complete with hand-drawn images (Dolce 2006–2007, 138–144; 2016, 257–262, 268–270).

The “two drops” appear again in the Hiketsu’s explanations on the sixth chapter of the Yugikyō, which discussed the four means (shishō 四摂) of embracing practices and reaching the status of a bodhisattva. This time, a short note on the four secret passions of Kongōsatta described a case when “the seed of consciousness faces the two drops [arises and hastens quickly to prompt the status of embryo in the womb]” (sz 5: 18). The Hiketsu’s segment corresponding to the Yugikyō’s seventh chapter presents a range of similar concepts, such as “two drops merging on the treasure lotus of non-duality,” “vital drops, red and white,” “two drops, red and white, in the place of a completely perfect twin [representing] non-duality” (sz 5: 18–19). The eleventh chapter of the Hiketsu, discussing the process of initial “merging” in the ritual visualization of the internal mandala, also resorted to an explanation of such a process through the “merging of two drops, red and white” deriving from “the bodies of father and mother” (bumo shin 父母身). Moreover, it gave an additional dimension to this ritual visualization: “The liquids inside the two drops, these two liquids are mixed” (sz 5: 23–24). Judging by the number of times these expressions occur in the Hiketsu attributed to Jitsuun, the discourse on the “two drops merging” attached to the Yugikyō lore may have existed at Daigoji perhaps already during the late twelfth century, or from that time onward. Although the exact timing is difficult to

—

independently verify, one can suppose that by the time of Jikken, active during the first part of the thirteenth century, this discourse (or at least, the use of these key rhetorical phrases) had spread via the Daigoji clerics teaching their versions of esoteric Buddhist sutras and rituals, including those linked to the Yugikyō, to an increasing number of esoteric practitioners, both within the kenmon esoteric temples and countryside, through direct and sideline transmissions. An additional channel of the spread of these teachings must have been available to students of esoteric Buddhism at various practice halls and monastic quarters at Mt. Kōya.

Conclusion

If the respective dating and author attributions of these medieval writings can be considered trustworthy, one may assume that the discourse on the “two drops” and the use of closely resembling metaphoric expressions may have already been known at Daigoji around the middle of the twelfth century, particularly among the top level of high-ranking Daigoji clerics hailing from elite aristocratic families, often with direct links and access to court. This discourse and metaphoric vocabulary were certainly known to the Daigoji abbot Jikken, who delivered lectures on the Yugikyō to his disciple Dōhan in 1218–1224 and 1241–1242, and to his sideline pupil Rendōbō Hōkyō of Miwa, likely during 1218–1235. It is noteworthy that Jikken employed the discourse of “two drops merging” to explain the basic tenets of esoteric Buddhist doctrine to his royal client Prince Omuro of Ninnaji in 1241. The use of this discourse supports the proposal that sexually explicit explanations of ritual contemplations and actions from or inspired by the Yugikyō and similar scriptures were initially transmitted among the elite circles of aristocratic practitioners close to the imperial court.24

The impact of Jikken’s activities and teachings in this respect is still underestimated. Although his scholarly networks can only be reconstructed with effort, it is evident that his disciples included not only ordained monks who went on to forge notable monastic careers, like Dōhan, but also the less historically visible but nevertheless significant figures who came to be known under the titles of shōnin or hijiri. Two such disciples were Miwa Shōnin Rendōbō Hōkyō, and Kamo Shōnin Nyojitsu. The former was involved in spreading the esoteric teachings in the countryside, away from elite temple complexes, and inventing new icons and rituals that formed the basis of what now is known as medieval Shinto (Andreeva 2017c). Around 1235, Rendōbō formed his own lineage that later became known as the Miwa lineage. Nyojitsu, who was not discussed here in detail, was acquainted with Rendōbō and formed

---

24. This phenomenon may also be partially confirmed by the recent scholarship in medieval Japanese literature, focusing on the esoteric literary commentaries, such as Ise monogatari zuinō伊勢物語髄脳 (Klein 2002; Ogawa 2014, 313–316, 494–529).
his own esoteric lineage, the Kamo lineage. They both received esoteric initiations of the Sanbōin, Kongōōin, and possibly Kōmyōsan lineages from Jikken, most likely in the first half of the thirteenth century when Jikken was still based at Kongōōin (Iyanaga 2006, 219–220).

The case of Rendōbō Hōkyō, a semi-itinerant priest from thirteenth-century Miwa bessho, suggests that such figures were far from being completely uneducated in the doctrines and rituals of esoteric Buddhism, as their later critics had tried to claim. On the contrary, even though their status and lack of inclusion in formal esoteric temple hierarchies implied certain limitations in their access to secret teachings transmitted by high-ranking clerics, the non-elite practitioners were nevertheless able to travel freely to large kenmon temple compounds and join the study seminars of those renowned clerics as sideline auditors and disciples. The spread of certain rhetorical markers such as the discourse on the “two drops” seen in selected oral teachings on the Yugikyō confirms that both elite circles and less socially privileged medieval practitioners were involved in intellectual labor and transmission activities in equal measure, even if the contents of these were at times subtly different. Although the impact of Jikken’s teachings on the religious landscape of medieval Japan can only be traced in broad strokes, an investigation of his disciples’ social status and writings helps to understand the itineraries of religious knowledge and cultural change in medieval Japan.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


T  The SAT Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Text Database. Version 2015. By the SAT Daizōkyō Text Database Committee with approval of Daizō Shuppan. Web resource maintained by the University of Tokyo. http://2idzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/


PRIMARY SOURCES


*Huayan jing* 華厳経 (Flower Garland Sūtra). 80 fascs. Trans. Śikṣānanda (ca. 695). T 279, 10.


*Juhō yōjinshū* 受法用心集. Shinjō 心定 (b. 1215). In MORIYAMA 1964, 530–571.


*Usuzōshi kuketsu* 薄草子口決. 20 fascs. Raiyu 頼瑜 (1226–1304). T 2535, 79.


*Yuga dainana yuga jōjubon kuketsu* [Rendō] 瑜伽第七瑜伽成就品口決. Recorded by Köban 弘鑁 (d.u.). Kanazawa Bunko, Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, MS 82-2.


SECONDARY SOURCES


*Adolphson, Mikael*
ADOLPHSON, Mikael, Edward KAMENS, and Stacie MATSUMOTO, eds.  

ANDREEVA, Anna  
2016 Lost in the womb: Conception, reproductive imagery, and gender in the writings and rituals of Japan’s medieval holy men. In ANDREEVA and STEAVU, 420–478.


2017c Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.

ANDREEVA, Anna, and Dominic STEAVU, eds.  

BATTEN, Bruce  

BAUER, Mikaël  

BIAŁOCK, David  

BLAIR, Heather  

CONLAN, Thomas Donald  

DAS, Peter Rahul  
DOLCE, Lucia


DOLCE, Lucia, and MATSUMOTO Ikuyo, eds.

FAURE, Bernard


FRIDAY, Karl

GOBLE, Andrew Edmund

GOEPPER, Roger

GORAI Shigeru 五来重

GRAPARD, Allan


HORI, Ichirō

ITO Satoshi 伊藤聡
2003 Sanbōinryū no gisho: Toku ni Sekishitsu o megutte 三宝院流の偽書—特に「石室」を巡って. In “Gisho” no seisei: Chūseiteki shikō to hyōgen「偽書」
IYANAGA Nobumi 彌永信美

KAMEYAMA Takahiko 亀山隆彦

KOJIMA Yūko 小島裕子

KURODA Toshio


LATOUR, Bruno
Lowe, Bryan

Manabe Shunshō 眞鍋俊照

Matsumoto Ikuyo

McMullin, Neil

Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖真
1965 Tachikawa jakyō to sono shakaiteki haikei no kenkyū 立川邪教とその社会的背景の研究. Tokyo: Rokuyaon.

Ogawa Toyoo 小川豊生

Park, Yeonjoo

Piggott, Joan R.

Rambelli, Fabio

Rappo, Gaétan

Reinders, Eric, and Fabio Rambelli

Rinzan Mayuri 林山まゆり

Ruppert, Brian
Slingerland, Edward  
2004 Conceptual metaphor theory as methodology for comparative religion.  
doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfh002

Stone, Jacqueline I.  

Swanson, Paul L.  
2017 Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight: T’ien-t’ai Chih-i’s Mo-ho chih-kuan. 3 vols.  

Vanden Broucke, Pol  
Ghent: Ghent National University Press.
Ethan Buselle

The Mountain as Mandala
Kūkai’s Founding of Mt. Kōya

This article considers the sociocultural significance of Kūkai’s understanding of Mt. Kōya as a mandala. Locating the context for his formulation of this understanding in his efforts to found Mt. Kōya in the mid-Kōnin era (809–823), it seeks to elucidate its disclosive function. The interpretation is put forward that Kūkai’s mandalic understanding of the mountains disclosed the possibility of a disembedded form of Buddhist life, one in which the human agent is understood to exist outside the social world of the Heian court and the divine cosmos on which it was believed to be grounded. Particular attention is paid to the sociopolitical effects of this disclosure, suggesting specifically that it contributed to the differentiation of religious authority from political power in Japan. To elucidate this process, Kūkai’s founding of Mt. Kōya is situated in a genealogy of monks who founded mountain temples that operated relatively autonomously vis-à-vis the state. Kūkai’s erstwhile collaborator, Saichō, is given special consideration.

KEYWORDS: Kūkai—disembedding—mandala—temple Buddhism—mountain temple

Ethan Buselle is Assistant Professor of East Asian Culture and Religions at Western Washington University.
In a series of letters to the prominent court noble Yoshimine no Yasuyo 良岑安世 (783–830) written between 818 and 819, Kūkai 空海 (774–835) explains his life on Mt. Kōya 高野, which he had just received from the court as the site for a temple complex dedicated to ascetic practice.¹ The first, a poem with a short preface, describes his life as blissful and carefree amid the beauty of the mountains. In the opening to the poem, he writes:

Like a lone cloud with no fixed abode,  
Always have I loved high peaks.  
Not knowing the sun of the human village,  
I gaze up at the moon as I lie under the green pines.  

(Yasuyo, however, was not convinced of Kūkai’s fulsome depiction of mountain life. While Yasuyo’s letters are no longer extant, Kūkai opens his second letter, composed as a dialogue entitled “On the Fascination of Entering the Mountains” (yama ni iru kyō 入山興), with his own rendering of what must have been Yasuyo’s question to him in the previous letter:

Teacher, with what intent do you enter deep into a place so cold [that is, Mt. Kōya]? The precipitous cliffs and steep slopes are entirely unsafe.  
Climbing it is painful and when you descend it is hard.  
And yet, you take the kami of the mountains and the spirits of the trees to be your home.

In reply, Kūkai waxes poetic about the impermanence of life in the capital, describing the scattering of flower blossoms in the Shinsen 神泉 Imperial Gardens and the constant rush of its flowing waters. For this reason, Kūkai tells Yasuyo, to live in the capital is “without merit” (NKBT 71: 173).² He then goes on to extol the natural beauty of Mt. Kōya, depicting it as a constant source of solace and contentment. To conclude his reply, he advises Yasuyo to “shake off” (tosō 斗薮), or renounce, his attachments to life in the capital—the human village mentioned in the first letter—and enter “the village of the dharmakāya” (hosshin sato 法身里), a figure suggesting an understanding of Mt. Kōya as the communal realm of the Buddha’s enlightenment (NKBT 71: 175). Kūkai’s reply thus inverts Yasuyo’s view of remote mountains as the enchanted world of mountain kami and tree spirits: it is so only for the unenlightened. For the true Buddhist seeker,

1. On the date and narrative coherence of the five letters, see Nakatani (2006).
2. For a translation of Kūkai’s letter, see Rabinovitch and Bradstock (2005, 86–88).
the one who has renounced life in the human village, Mt. Kōya is the very realm in which one encounters and identifies with the source of enlightenment. As such, it is, to put it in terms Kūkai uses elsewhere in his writings, a mandala.

This article attempts to clarify the sociocultural significance of Kūkai’s understanding of the mountain landscape as a mandala. I locate the context for his formulation of this understanding specifically in his efforts to build a temple complex on Mt. Kōya in the mid-Kōnin 弘仁 era (810–824).³ Kūkai, I show, conceived his temple complex as a three-dimensional mandala, or something like a karma mandala (katsuma mandara 羈縛曼荼羅). In contrast to the karma mandala he designed for the lecture hall of Tōji 東寺 in the Heian capital, however, the karma mandala of the temple complex extended outward into the natural environment surrounding it.⁴ This mandalization of Mt. Kōya—the transformation of its natural landscape into a mandala—constitutes the focus of this article.

In locating Kūkai’s mandalic understanding of the mountains in its practical context, I seek to elucidate what might be called its disclosive function, that is, how it rendered the ascetic life on the mountain intelligible and, indeed, even compelling. It was Kūkai’s view, I show, that the extraordinary individual, by means of ascetic practice on the mountain, may attain union with the pervading presence of Mahāvairocana’s enlightenment—a union that he construed as the matrix for the personal enlightenment of the practitioner and the universal enlightenment of all living beings, including the malevolent kami and spirits of the mountain. From a sociological point of view, such an understanding of human existence can be interpreted as a disembedding of the human agent from both the social world of the Heian court and the divine cosmos on which it was believed to be grounded.⁵ Disembedded thus, the mountain ascetic lived as a liberated individual in an enlightened cosmos, one in which the enlightenment of Mahāvairocana eclipsed the unpredictable and potentially dangerous powers of the kami and other divine spirits.

I thus argue that Kūkai’s mandalic understanding of the mountains disclosed the possibility of a disembedded form of Buddhist life. Without the disclosure of this possibility, Kūkai’s founding of Mt. Kōya would not have made sense to either the court or the broader monastic community. The disclosive function of

³. I consider Kūkai’s plans to found a temple complex on Mt. Kōya as “the founding of Mt. Kōya,” rather than the founding of Kongōbuji 金剛峯寺, the name that later came to be used to refer to Kūkai’s temple complex, because Kūkai consistently referred to the complex of temple buildings he intended to build by the name of the site it is located, Kōya, meaning, literally, high plains. See, for example, his exposition for his 818 realm-binding rite below. Today, the name Kongōbuji refers not to the entire complex but to a single temple on the mountain.
⁴. On Kūkai’s design of the karma mandala in the Tōji lecture hall, see Bogel (2011).
⁵. See, for example, Charles Taylor (2007, 155) on the co-constitutive relation between social disembedding and cosmic disembedding.
Kūkai’s mandalic understanding of the mountains therefore had concrete socio-political effects. Chief among them, I suggest, was a reconfiguration of power in Japanese society. In conceiving the mountain as a mandala, Kūkai effectively demarcated a sphere of religious authority that the imperial court itself could not reproduce by means of the traditional body of ritual practices it had at its disposal. Indeed, it was only the enlightened ascetic who could establish the mountain as mandala and hence efficaciously pacify the malevolent kami and spirits who were believed to dwell there. For the emperor to support Kūkai’s project, then, he had to concede authority in the religious realm. Hence, I argue that Kūkai’s understanding of the mountains contributed to the differentiation of religious authority from political power in Japan.

In arguing that Kūkai disclosed the possibility of a disembedded form of Buddhist life, I do not mean to suggest he invented it. His founding of Mt. Kōya in 816 is properly understood as a response to the establishment of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei by his erstwhile collaborator Saichō (766–822). More specifically, I consider Saichō’s efforts to found his temple complex on Mt. Hiei as the beginning of a new form of Buddhism, which I call “temple Buddhism,” and situate Kūkai’s founding of Mt. Kōya as an extension and further articulation of this new form of Buddhism. To elucidate the origins and development of temple Buddhism, my discussion begins with a brief analysis of the religious character and socio-political function of the mountain temple in the eighth century.

The Mountain Temple

The formulation “mountain temple” is a modern interpretive category. While the term yamadera (mountain temple) figures prominently in early historical sources such as the Nihon ryōiki (Mifune 2004, 46–50), my use of it is intended to translate the modern Japanese terms sanrin jiin 山林寺院 and sangaku jiin 山岳寺院. Following Uehara Mahito’s (1974) criticism of this category, I use it to designate not the location of a temple but rather its function. Whether located on top of a tall mountain or in the foothills, what distinguishes a mountain temple, according to my use of the term, is that it serves as a base for the practice of mountain asceticism (sanrin shugyō 山林修行). I define mountain temples as those temples that are dedicated to the practice of asceticism in the mountains.

Hongō Masatsugu (2005, 41–46) calls attention to the role mountain temples played in the formation of what he calls sectarian Buddhism (kyōdan Bukkyō 教団仏教) in the late Nara and early Heian periods. By sectarian Buddhism, Hongō means to describe a mode of Buddhist social organization in which temples are not governed by the ritsuryō 律令 code of the classical Japanese state, particularly its body of monastic regulations called the sōniryō 僧尼令. As a historical concept, it thus refers to the form of Buddhism that displaced the form of “state
Buddhism” (kokka Bukkyō 国家仏教) that prevailed in the sixth through eighth centuries, or the classical period of Japanese religious history. Stated positively, sectarian Buddhism represents the development of a form of Buddhism that places emphasis on what Hongō calls its practical function (jissenteki na kinō 実践的な機能): its ability to provide this-worldly benefits such as rainmaking and healing the sick.

Since its official transmission to Japan in the mid-sixth century, Buddhist practice had been highly regarded for being particularly efficacious for the purpose of healing the sick (Gorai 1986). It was not, however, considered to have special efficacy with respect to the kami and spirits of the land. Prior to the rise of sectarian Buddhism, the state relied primarily on kami worship for rainmaking and other this-worldly benefits that concerned the protection of the land and its agricultural cycle (Hongō 2005, 271). Contrary to the way state Buddhism of the classical period is often understood (Hayami 1986), the court did not seek the same kind of “magic” (jujutsu 叟術) from Buddhist ritual as it did from kami worship; Buddhist ritual was privileged in the sphere of healing, whereas kami worship prevailed in land protection. Thus, the ritsuryō state turned to the deities understood to be autochthonous to the land for the help in its efforts to protect that land and its people. As the ritsuryō state developed during the reigns of Emperors Shōmu 聖武 (r. 724–749) and Kōken 孝謙 (r. 749–758; as Shōtoku 称徳, 766–770), Buddhist rituals—and the temples in which they were performed—were made to serve as spectacular displays of the universal religious authority of the emperor; they performed what Hongō calls an impressive function (kankakuteki na kinō 感覚的な機能). It is against this backdrop of the state’s use of temples as monuments to imperial power that mountain temples dedicated to the practical function of land protection began to emerge in the peripheries of Japan, particularly the Hokuriku region, in the early part of the eighth century (Hongō 2005, 136–172).

The practical task of land protection required efficacious intercession with the kami and spirits who were believed to rule the land (jinushigami 地主神). Since the vast majority of agricultural villages in Japan were situated in basins, it was the flat, fertile area of the basins that was understood to be the land rightfully occupied by humans, and the jinushigami were believed to control the surrounding mountains. The jinushigami of the mountains were known to be vengeful and potentially destructive. If not properly worshiped, they exacted vengeance (tatari 崇) in the form of pestilence, drought, lightning storms, and other disruptions to the agricultural life of the village. Ōmononushi no kami 大物主神 of Ōmiwa 大神 Shrine is archetypical. The Kojiki and the Nihon shoki describe

6. For an example of jinushigami, see the tale of Matachi, chieftain of the Yahazu lineage, in the Hitachi fudoki (Breen and Téeuwen 2010, 25).
Ōmononushi as a kami who dwells on Mt. Miwa 三輪, influences the harvest (ASTON 1972, 61, 154), assumes the form of a snake (ASTON 1972, 158), and exacts vengeance when he feels he is not being properly worshiped (HELDT 2014, 83–84). To pacify such vengeful kami (tatarigami 崇神), worship was required, and it was often the chieftain of the village who would serve as the high priest of kami worship. At first, open-air sites of worship (yashiro 社) and later shrines were established at the boundary between the human and divine realm at the foot of the mountain (BREEN and TEEUWEN 2010, 25–26), and entry into the mountains was taboo.

The institution of the mountain temple was grounded on an entirely different understanding of the relationship of human beings to the divine realm of spirits and kami—one in which extraordinary individuals who have gained insight into the truth of the Buddhist teachings have the power to transform vengeful kami into benevolent protector deities. On the basis of this understanding, ascetics broke the traditional taboo on trespassing the sacred domain of the kami and ventured into the mountains in pursuit of enlightenment. In doing so, they not only broke taboos but also reconfigured the very nature of power in Japan.

Under the ritsuryō state, it was the emperor at the national level and provincial officials (kokushi 国司) at the local level who were responsible for coordinating rites for interceding with vengeful kami (OKADA 2019, 234–235; OOMS 2009, 109; PIGGOTT 1997, 208; MILLER 1971). The Buddhist understanding that such kami could be pacified by means of the rituals performed by enlightened mountain ascetics thus challenged the fundamental premise of power in classical Japan. Imbued with religious authority, the enlightened ascetic was able to carve out a sphere of human life that was disembedded not only socially and cosmically but also politically.

The earliest mountain temples described in the sources were founded as “shrine temples” (jingūji 神宮寺 or jinganji 神願寺), or temples attached to pre-existing shrines. Such shrine temples, which first appear in the early eighth century, were founded as places for ascetic practice that led to both the personal enlightenment of the individual ascetic and the universal enlightenment of the

7. We will observe that the association of mountain kami with snakes and also water remained prominent in the Buddhist imagination of Japan’s sacred mountains.
8. For an example of tatarigami, see again the tale of Matachi (BREEN and TEEUWEN 2010, 25). The kami pacified by Matachi were also serpentine; the tale describes them as having the body of snakes with horns on their heads.
9. The taboo is implied by Matachi’s demarcation of the human realm as lying in the land below the mountain. The sense of taboo—or, at least, extreme danger—is also conveyed in numerous tales from the provincial gazetteers that tell of “raging” (araburu 荒) kami who kill travelers passing through mountain valleys and passes (KELSEY 1981, 229–230).
kami on the mountain. Numerous accounts of the founding of such shrine temples follow a common pattern: the kami of the shrine reveals to either a local elite or the ascetic himself—through an oracle, a dream, or a vision—that they are suffering in *samsāra* due to their bad karma. This bad karma is the cause of pestilence, drought, and other disruptions in the agricultural cycle. And so, the kami requests that a shrine temple be built deep in the mountain so that ascetic practitioners may teach them the Buddhist path and thereby liberate them from suffering. Once liberated, the kami are pacified and no longer create disturbances in the agricultural cycle. As Kūkai’s own account of the founding of a shrine temple suggests, the enlightenment of the mountain kami was predicated on the individual pursuit of enlightenment by the ascetic. Hence, in accounts of shrine temples, the enlightened ascetic is presented as the agent of enlightenment for the deluded kami on the mountain.

The activities of ascetics who founded shrine-temples were supported not by the imperial court but by local elites (KAWANE 1976, 275–277). This particular arrangement wherein the local elites offered material support and political endorsement of such activities marks the initial break in the traditional unity of religious authority and political power in classical Japan, at least at the local level. For most of Shōmu’s reign and through the end of Shōtoku’s, the court promoted this practice from afar, conferring “kami ranks” (*shinkai*) to kami enshrined at shrine temples and designating households (*fuko*) to support them (HONGŌ 2005, 93–100). It did not, however, take a leading role in founding such mountain temples. Focusing attention instead on the construction of temples such as Tōdaiji and Saidaiji as monuments to imperial power, the state sought to strengthen the unity of religious authority and political power in the figure of the emperor.

The court’s stance toward mountain temples took a decisive turn after the collapse of the Shōmu-Shōtoku regime. Upon acceding to the throne in 770, Emperor Kōnin 光仁 (r. 770–781) lifted the ban on mountain asceticism that had been put in place by Shōtoku (KT 2: 386). Two years later, he instituted a new system for the appointment of ten meditation masters (*jū zenji*) to serve as healers at the imperial palace. In the edict announcing the system, he describes the meditation masters as “worthy of praise for their observance of the precepts” and “renowned for their healing of illness” (KT 2: 402). The main criterion for selection, he goes on to note, is that the monastic be “one who is pure in practice” (*shōgyō no mono*). Sources indicate that the monastics he appointed

---

10. See, for example, the account of the founding of Kehi Jingūji 氣比神宮寺 in 715 by Fujiwara no Muchimaro 藤原武智麻呂 (680–737) and also the account of the founding of Wakasahiko Jingūji 若狭比古神宮寺 by Yamato no Akamaro 和赤毘 in 717–724 (BAUER 2020, 35, 85). For a classic study of shrine temples and their role in protecting local agricultural communities, see TAMURA (1967, 190–206).
to this post were ascetics who trained at mountain temples. Kōnin’s ten meditation master system thus represents the bureaucratization of mountain asceticism and hence an attempt by the court to manage more systematically the practical function of monastic practice, though with respect only to healing.

Kōnin not only promoted what we might consider a practical turn in the monastic community, he also showed a willingness to concede religious authority to the figure of the monastic. In a 780 edict, he articulates his vision of mutual dependence between the emperor and monastic. He begins by proclaiming that the “Benevolent King,” as he reigns over his realm, should “always remain clear under the light of the Dharma,” while the “Children of the Buddha,” as they spread the Buddhist teachings, should “fan well the winds of wisdom” (kt 2: 456). In other words, whereas the monastic should teach the Dharma, the emperor should follow it. Yet, at the same time, Kōnin makes clear that he expects that, as a consequence of this relation of mutual dependence, “the human and the heavenly will correspond in unity, the harmony of the mysterious and the manifest will contribute to the safety of our state, and there will be no disruptions by the spirits and kami (kijin 鬼神)” (kt 2: 456); in other words, the monastic will perform the practical task of producing this-worldly effects that benefit the state.

Kōnin’s son and successor, Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (r. 781–806), sought to cultivate the dimension of the practical function of Buddhism—the protection of the land and its people—that, up to that point, operated outside state control. In 786, Kanmu founded a temple called Bonshakuji 梵釈寺 in Ōmi 近江 Province to the southwest of Lake Biwa, an area associated with his Tenji 天智 line. Not far from the temple was Sūfukuji 崇福寺, a temple founded by Tenji in 668 but that had since fallen into disrepair. As Bonshakuji was under construction, Kanmu appears to have also renovated this temple. In 798, he designated it as one of ten official temples (jūdaiji 十大寺) (kt 25: 138). It was just three years earlier that the construction of Bonshakuji was completed. In a 795 edict announcing its completion, Kanmu describes the temple as a “meditation temple” and its location as a famed spot among mountains and waters (kt 6: 257). He explains, moreover, that he has appointed ten meditation masters of “pure practice” to reside at the temple.

Kanmu’s 795 edict announcing the completion of Bonshakuji lays out his vision of the ideal relationship between the emperor and the monastic. The

11. Of the ten monks appointed to the post of meditation master, eight appear in other historical sources. Two, Kōtatsu 広達 and Eigyō 永興, appear in the Nihon ryōiki: Kōtatsu is depicted as an ascetic who practices on Kinpusen 金峯山 in Yoshino 吉野 (snkt 30: 249) and Eigyō as a healer who lived in Kumano 熊野 in Kii 紀伊 Province (snkt 30: 262). Moreover, we know from other historical sources that four monks—Shuyū 首勇, Shōjō 清浄, Hōgi 法義, and Kōshin 光信—were disciples of Gyōki from Kumedadera 久米田寺, a mountain temple in Izumi 和泉 Province (dnkm 3: 328). Among those monks about whom we have accounts, none resided at major official temples in the capital.
emperor, he declares, is “the king of the people” who promotes the “true teachings,” while the monastic is “the child of the Buddha” who communicates the essence of those teachings (κτ 6: 257). Kanmu then goes on to argue that his support of the monastic—his “guiding of their virtue” and his “paying of homage” to them—does not undermine the customs of his nation (κτ 6: 257). Buddhist temples should be revered, he suggests, because they universally distribute good karma throughout the realm and thus, ultimately, ensure the continuity of the imperial line itself. For this reason, Kanmu explains, he is able to promote the practice of the Buddhist path, while also fulfilling his ceremonial duties as emperor. “Let us,” he proclaims at the end of the edict, “peer into the mysterious and the manifest and reach out to sentient beings, gaze upon the cloud of compassion and leave behind the path of delusion, and look up to the sun of wisdom and set out on the road to awakening” (κτ 6: 257). Not only does Kanmu here state his intention to promote Buddhist practice, he makes clear that everyone, himself included, should follow the Buddhist teachings and strive to attain awakening.

That Kanmu’s vision of a relation of mutual dependence between the monastic and the emperor was significantly shaped by monastic conceptions of imperial authority can be inferred from a petition to the throne submitted by a monk named Segyō 施曉 (d. 804) in 785. The petition opens by establishing a relation of “nondual,” mutual dependence between emperor and monastic:

The true principle is nondual. The emperor and the [Buddhist] path are one. Although the doctrines they espouse differ, the merit they lay down is the same. Therefore, that which preserves and protects the myriad countries is transformation by the Buddha [Dharma]; that which spreads and promotes the three jewels is none other than the virtue of the emperor. (κτ 6: 312)

The role of the monastic, in other words, is to protect the nation by converting its people to Buddhism, which, it is implied, performs the practical function of promoting peace and security. The emperor fulfills his function of protecting the nation by supporting the monastic in this endeavor. Each “way” is dependent on the other. Without the monastic, the emperor could not fulfill his role, and vice versa.

Segyō then goes on to identify renunciation and the practice of mountain asceticism as the basis for the monastic’s ability to edify and transform others in the Buddhist path:

The śramaṇa disciples of Śākyamuni are travelers in the three realms. They leave their country and leave their families and so are without parents and without family. They sit in the mountain forests and seek the way; they steal away under the pines and practice meditation. (κτ 6: 313)
To borrow a Buddhist distinction that would have been familiar to Segyō, practices such as renunciation and mountain asceticism that are oriented toward benefiting the individual (jiri 自利) are the foundation for the production of benefits for others (rita 利他). Segyō articulates precisely this idea in the next line: “Even though their intention is to turn away from the world and transcend defilements, they do not forget to protect the nation and bring benefits to its people” (KT 6: 313).

Segyō’s petition appears to have been well received by the court. It was only a year after receiving Segyō’s petition that Kanmu founded Bonshakuji. Segyō himself, subsequent to his petition, went on to ascend the ranks of the sōgō 僧綱. In 793, he was appointed preceptor (risshi 律師) (DNBZ 65: 6), and, in 797, he was promoted to minor prelate (shosōzu 少僧都) (KT 3: 9). During this time, it is possible that Segyō even resided at Bonshakuji, as suggested by a legend that first appears in the Honchō kōsō den (DNBZ 63: 43).

Just over a decade after completing the construction of Bonshakuji, Kanmu’s court would go on to look favorably upon the petition of another mountain ascetic. This time, however, the petition would seek to establish even greater autonomy for the monastic. In 806, just months before Kanmu’s death, Saichō submitted a petition signed by members of the sōgō in which he requested Kanmu to grant two annual ordinands to his Tendai school and each of the six Nara schools and, moreover, to give each school the authority to determine the course of instruction (jugō 授業) for their allotted ordinands (DDZ 1: 293). Kanmu accepted, noting that fostering competition among the schools would enhance Buddhism’s fundamental practical function of “serving the imperial throne, protecting [the nation] from calamities, and nourishing fortune” (DDZ 1: 295). Saichō hence achieved autonomy for the monastic community on the premise that it would enhance the practical function of the Buddhist establishment. Kūkai’s Shingon school, too, would later benefit from Saichō’s petition. In 835, just three months before Kūkai’s death, the court granted three annual ordinands to the Shingon school, thus establishing the system of eight schools (hashū 八宗) that was to characterize the Buddhist establishment of Japan’s medieval period.

While Hongō (2005) and Yoshida (2006, 157) have suggested the term “sectarian” to describe the medieval system of Japanese Buddhism, this term in English can be misleading for it implies that the eight schools of the medieval Buddhist establishment did not share a common body of doctrine and ritual. More fundamentally than the “sectarian” independence of each school, what characterizes this system, as Hongō’s analysis makes clear, is its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the state. To call attention to this sociological feature, I propose to term Japan’s medieval Buddhist establishment “temple Buddhism.” In contrast to state Buddhism of the classical period, temple Buddhism established a relation of mutual dependence with the state and hence represents an early step toward
the differentiation of religion from politics in premodern Japan. The section that follows considers Saichō’s founding of a temple complex on Mt. Hiei as a major catalyst for the formation of temple Buddhism.  

**Saichō’s Founding of a Temple Complex on Mt. Hiei**

As Takeuchi Kōzen (2006, 500–507) has shown, Kūkai did not turn his attention to propagating the esoteric teachings and establishing his own school of esoteric Buddhism on Mt. Kōya until after he parted ways with Saichō in the early part of 814. Kūkai’s collaborative relationship with Saichō can be traced back to 809, when Saichō requested copies of esoteric texts from Kūkai and sent one of his disciples to study under him. Kūkai proved to be a trusted source for knowledge of and initiation into the esoteric teachings and their practices. In 812, Saichō even suggested that since both Tendai and esoteric Buddhism are, in essence, identical, Kūkai and he should collaborate in establishing their teachings in Japan (Groener 2000, 81). Later that year, Kūkai granted Saichō’s request to receive a series of initiations into the esoteric teachings. This would mark the height of their collaborative friendship. In the eleventh month of 813, Saichō requested the loan of the *Liqushi jing*, a commentary on the *Liqu jing*, an esoteric sutra that Saichō had brought back from China. In reply, Kūkai declined Saichō’s request and harshly rebuked him for attempting to receive an esoteric transmission via writing. There are varying views on when Kūkai sent the letter and even whether the letter is authentic (Groener 2000, 84–85). Whatever the case may be, it is clear, based on Saichō’s extant letters, that exchange between Saichō and Kūkai began to slow significantly by early 814. Their very last exchange appears to have been in the second month of 816. It was only seven months later that Kūkai submitted his petition requesting Mt. Kōya as a site for his temple complex.

Saichō founded his mountain temple, Hieizanji 比叡山寺, in 788, long before he knew Kūkai. The temple, which he would later rename Hieizan Enryakuji 比叡山延暦寺, began as a simple base for ascetic practice. In 785, Saichō abandoned the life of an official monk and went into retreat on Mt. Hiei. In a prayer statement (*ganmon* 願文) he composed that year, he explains his decision, stating that he had renounced life in the social world in order to purify his six faculties.

---

12. I borrow this formulation from Stephen Covell (2005, 4), who proposes the term as an alternative to standard terms to describe the overall form of Buddhism practiced by those schools of Japanese Buddhism that were established before 1600: “established Buddhism” (*kisei Bukkyō* 既成仏教) and “traditional Buddhism” (*dentō Bukkyō* 伝統仏教). Covell is concerned with how that form of Buddhism is lived today. The term, however, is useful for thinking about the formation of the first examples of the main schools of what Covell calls temple Buddhism in the early ninth century. Building on Hongō’s concept of sectarian Buddhism, the term can be used to refer to a form of Buddhism in which the temples, rather than the state, have the authority to govern the monastic community.
(the five senses plus consciousness), realize the absolute, attain wisdom, and lead all beings to enlightenment (Groner 2000, 29). Like Segyō, Saichō thus understood the pursuit of wisdom that leads to personal enlightenment, or self-benefit, as the condition for benefiting others. In 797, after twelve years of ascetic practice on Mt. Hiei, Saichō garnered the attention of the imperial court and was appointed as one of ten meditation masters to serve at the palace (naigubu 内供奉) (Groner 2000, 31). It was after this appointment that his career took off.

Even before his trip to the Tang in 803, Saichō appears to have been intent on establishing his temple complex on Mt. Hiei as a base for the study of Chinese Tiantai. According to Saichō’s biography, the *Eizan Daishi den* (DDZ 5:12), in the fourth month of 802, one night after delivering a lecture on the *Lotus Sūtra* at Takaosanji, Saichō discussed with his benefactor, Wake no Hiroyo 和気広世 (d.u.), how they might go about transmitting the Tiantai teachings in Japan. They arrived at the decision to submit a petition to Kanmu and his court requesting that two students be sent to study Tiantai in Tang China. In the petition, which is cited in the *Eizan Daishi den* (DDZ 5:12), Saichō argues that Hossō and Sanron are “tip-of-the-branch schools” (shimatsu shū 枝末宗) since they only study śāstras, the tips of the branches of the Buddha’s teachings, and neglect its roots (hon 本), the sutras. By contrast, he argues, the Tendai school, since it was based on the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*, represents the original root of the Buddhist teachings. Already, as Paul Groner (2000, 38) has noted in his study of this text, we observe Saichō’s sectarian intention to establish the Tendai school in Japan.

After returning from the Tang in 805, Saichō’s reputation at court only grew, and he was able to take advantage of his reputation to further advance his plans to establish his temple complex as a base for the Tendai teachings. In the first month of 806, he composed his petition proposing the allotment of annual ordnands to his Tendai school and each of the six schools based out of temples in Nara. We have already considered the implications of this petition for the formation of a more autonomous system of Buddhism that centers on the temple institution and noted that the court’s acceptance of the autonomy of this system was predicated on its practical function, that is, its ability to produce this-worldly benefits for the state. That the state recognized the practical function of Saichō’s temple complex on Mt. Hiei is indicated by the fact that in the same year he submitted his petition, the court awarded the kami of Mt. Hiei ten households, the revenue from which would be allocated to the Hiei shrines (KT 27:4). As we observed above, the awarding of kami households was a strategy the court developed to promote shrine temples. It thus suggests that Saichō’s mountain temple was a kind of temple complex that, like shrine temples before it, was concerned with the practical task of pacifying the vengeful *jinushigami* of the mountain. As we shall see, Saichō restructured the shrines on Mt. Hiei as tutelary shrines (chinjusha 鎮守社) dedicated to the protection of the temple. Rather
than a temple attached to a shrine, the shrines of Mt. Hiei were reformulated as shrines attached to temples; they were made to serve, in other words, a subordinate role in relation to the temple complex. In this sense, as Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli (2003, 14) have suggested, Saichō’s temple complex on Mt. Hiei is properly understood as a “temple-shrine complex,” rather than a shrine temple in the strict sense of the term.

It was not until 810, four years after Saichō’s petition, that the court honored its promise of allotting two annual ordinands to Saichō’s Tendai school. With renewed support from the court for his mountain temple, Saichō turned his attention to its expansion and further development. In liturgical texts he composed for rites performed during the Kōnin era (809–823), Saichō expresses his concern for the pacification of the kami and spirits of the mountain. An early example is an 812 prayer statement he composed for a rite in which he formally dedicated his practice of the Lotus to the Hiei kami and other spirits on the mountain. In the opening to the prayer statement, Saichō invokes a vast assembly of Buddhist divinities, from Brahmā and Śakra to Mother Hāritī and various Dragon Kings, as well as deities indigenous to the country of Japan, from the “the Kami of Heaven and Earth (tenjin jigi 天神地祇)” to “the Eight Great Luminous Kami (myōjin 明神)” (ddz 5: 242). He then submits his prayer that “the mountain kings (sannō 山王) of Hiei” and “the spirits and kami (kijin) who unfurl [their presence] in response [to offerings]” on the numerous peaks and waterways of Mt. Hiei will “forever transcend the suffering of the path of karma and enhance the light of their power (ikō 威光)” (ddz 5: 242).13

This passage marks the first instance of “mountain king,” a term that would be used to designate the distinct form of kami-buddha syncretism that took shape on Mt. Hiei over the course of the medieval period. Saichō would later use the term in an exposition (keibyaku 敬白), or opening address, for an 818 prayer statement he composed for an imperially sponsored assembly for the recitation of the Lotus Sūtra. Therein, the term figures as part of a series of terms describing the manifold deities indigenous to “the Great Nation of Japan”:

Kings of Heavenly Kami and Subjects of Heavenly Kami, Kings of Earthly Kami and Subjects of Earthly Kami, Kings of Spirits and Subjects of Spirits, Kings of the Mountain and Subjects of the Mountain, Kings of the Rivers and Subjects of the Rivers, Kings of the Ocean and Subjects of the Ocean, Kings of the Forest and Subjects of the Forest, Kings of the Fields and Subjects of the Fields….

(ddz 1: 534)

13. Yeonjoo Park (2020) discusses the development of the mountain deity Sannō on Mt. Hiei in her contribution to this special issue.
This broader context of the term suggests that the designation “king” describes certain spirits or kami of particular natural features (mountains, rivers, oceans, fields, and forests) who preside over that natural feature and its denizens, or subjects, as would a king. In the Buddhist tradition, we find a similar connotation of the term “king” in the label “dragon king” (ryūō 龍王), which refers to a kind of protector deity who, as we shall see below, pacifies other unenlightened and unruly dragons who dwell in ponds and lakes on mountains. The term “mountain king” can thus be understood as a Buddhist analog to the Shinto concept of a jinushigami. If so, it would imply the kami Ōyamakui 大山咋 who is identified in the Kojiki as the kami who dwells on Mt. Hiei (Heldt 2014, 40).

As both the 812 and 818 expositions indicate, Saichō’s strategy for interceding with the mountain kings centered on the practice of the Lotus Sūtra. By means of this practice, Saichō, as he states in his 812 prayer, aimed to “enhance the light of the power” of the spirits and kami of Mt. Hiei. In this context, the notion of enhancing the light of the kami’s power implies transforming them into “luminous kami,” or myōjin; that is, kami whose actions have been illuminated by the enlightening knowledge of the Dharma. Once thus converted, such kami would serve as more reliable protectors of the temple complex. Hence, after submitting his primary prayer, Saichō adds that he prays that the kami and spirits of the mountain “eternally protect this place of practice” (DDZ 5: 241).

Like the founders of shrine temples before him, Saichō conceived of the local kami and spirits on the mountain to be suffering in samsāra. On this premise, he reasoned that, like all sentient beings, their destructive behavior was caused by delusion, which, in turn, could be remedied by instruction in the Dharma, particularly the Lotus Sūtra. Thus, to conclude his series of prayers, he affirms that recitation of the sutra will help the kami and spirits of the mountain realize their “seeds of buddhahood” (busshu 仏種); in other words, it helps them to become enlightened.

It is by enlightening the mountain kami—by enhancing, as he suggests, the light of their divine power—that Saichō attempts to carry out the practical function of protecting the nation of Japan. In subsequent sections of the prayer statement, he goes on to explain the contribution that he intends “his founding of the Lotus school” to make both to the imperial family and “the nation of Japan” as such (DDZ 5: 243). He first asserts that recitation of the Lotus will guide the ancestral spirits of the imperial family as well as high ministers and officials of the court to rebirth in the pure land and, even, to attainment of the “unsurpassed fruit” of enlightenment. He then avers that “the merit” (kudoku 功徳) derived from his practice of the Lotus will “eternally protect the nation of Japan” (DDZ 5: 243). “Merit,” as he indicates in the subsequent stanza, refers explicitly to the power of the practice of the Lotus to destroy bad karma, instill the bodhi-mind, cultivate the cause of the “perfect” practice of the Tendai school, and guide
living beings to future buddhahood (jōbutsu 成仏) (DDZ 5: 243). Saichō’s aim is thus nothing less than the universal enlightenment of all living beings. In the conclusion to the prayer statement, however, he returns to his central purpose: enlightenment of “the good kami and kings who protect the temple complex.”

Saichō thus conceived of his temple complex on Mt. Hiei as a place for a kind of Buddhist practice that has the power to pacify local kami and spirits and thereby protect the entire nation of Japan. This particular function of the temple complex is enframed by a specific understanding of the natural world of Mt. Hiei as a realm teeming with beings whose potential for enlightenment—and thus pacification—is waiting to be unlocked by the Dharma of the Lotus Sūtra. Throughout his 812 prayer statement, Saichō portrays all living beings, including the mountain kings and other spirits and kami on the mountain, as intrinsically endowed with seeds for buddhahood, or something like buddha-nature (busshō 仏性), and presents recitation of the Lotus on behalf of these beings as an efficacious technique for cultivating and realizing that buddha-potential. Saichō thus recognized the power of the kami and spirits of the mountain but he did not succumb to their enchantment, as it were. Instead, he insisted that, from the perspective of the teachings of the Lotus, even such deluded spirits have the potential for enlightenment. Hence, for Saichō, rather than an enchanted realm, the world of Mt. Hiei was fundamentally enlightened or “enlighten-able.” Once their potential for enlightenment is realized, the kami of Mt. Hiei transform into benevolent protector kami who support the monastic pursuit of enlightenment on the mountain. Insofar as the world of Mt. Hiei is thus “enlighten-able” and enlightening, we can say that it constituted, for Tendai monks on the mountain, a potential matrix of enlightenment.

From a historical materialist point of view, Saichō’s Tendai Buddhist understanding of Mt. Hiei can easily be explained as a post-facto rationalization, or legitimation, of his efforts to promote the status and power of his mountain temple complex. Certainly, it is true that his presentation of his practice of the Lotus on Mt. Hiei and its power to harness the forces of the mountains for the benefit of the state would have appealed to elites at court. Yet, to emphasize only its political effects is to overlook the extent to which Saichō’s founding of Mt. Hiei was predicated on and informed by his Buddhist understanding of the mountain environment.

As Kūkai’s exchange with Yasuyo suggests, powerful figures at court understood the mountains as the inhospitable abode of dangerous kami and spirits. Against this backdrop, in order for ascetic practice on the mountain to make sense, Saichō, like mountain ascetics before him, had to conceive of the mountains entirely differently. In other words, he needed to disembed himself from the enchanted cosmos of kami and spirits on which court society was believed to be grounded. As we have observed, Saichō did so by embracing the Buddhist
view that all beings have the potential for enlightenment. This view was based on the Mahāyāna notion that the bodhisattva attains wisdom for the purpose of saving all beings. Thus, Saichō understood Buddhist practice on the mountain as the most effective technique for attaining wisdom that leads to universal enlightenment of all beings, including even malevolent spirits and kami. To borrow a technical term from the phenomenological tradition, it was this particular Mahāyāna understanding of human existence in the world that formed the “background” for Saichō’s founding of his temple complex on Mt. Hiei. 14 Kūkai’s understanding of the mountain landscape as a mandala is properly understood as a variation of this same basic background understanding, the genealogy of which can be traced all the way back to the early eighth century with the founding of shrine temples in the provinces. 15

**Shōdō’s Founding of a Shrine Temple on Mt. Fudaraku**

In his analysis of Kūkai’s efforts to propagate the esoteric teaching after parting ways with Saichō in early 814, TAKEUCHI (2006, 500–707) calls attention to two documents in particular. The first is the *Kan’ensho* in which Kūkai requests lay and ordained to copy *mikkyō* scriptures for the purpose of spreading the esoteric doctrine (*himitsu hōmon* (TKZ 7: 91–95). 16 The second is Kūkai’s memorial of 816 to the throne requesting permission to build a temple complex on Mt. Kōya. Takeuchi overlooks, however, what was perhaps the first major work Kūkai composed after his relationship with Saichō began to deteriorate: his epitaph for the monk Shōdō, “Śramaṇa Shōdō who Polished his Dark Gem [of Awakening] by Traversing Mountains and Waters: An Epitaph with Preface” composed in the eighth month of 814. 17 As we shall see, Kūkai’s account

14. For a discussion of “background” in the Mahāyāna Buddhist context, see DREYFUS (2017).
15. In a recent article, I offer analysis of the Buddhist understanding of the natural world—or what I call the Buddhist cosmic imaginary—shared by Saichō and Kūkai (BUSHELLE 2018).
16. As TAKEUCHI (2006, 510) notes, Kūkai formulates a rhetoric of the superiority of the esoteric teachings in this text in a manner that resembles his later work, the *Ben kenmitsu nikkō ron*.
17. For an English translation of the original text, see GRAPARD (1978). Kūkai’s epitaph appears to have indeed been inscribed in stone, probably during his own lifetime. It is likely that the stone slab was fist erected as a monument at the Chūgūshi Futarasan Shrine on Mt. Nikkō 日光. In 1705, due to significant damage caused by years of wind and rain, the stone monument was renovated. Kūkai’s epitaph was reinscribed on a copper plate, which was then affixed over a new stone slab. In the Meiji era, in accordance with the Meiji government’s order to separate the kami and buddhas (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離), the copper plate was moved to Chūzenji 中禅寺, a nearby Buddhist temple. The stone monument remained at Chūgūshi, where it still stands today. Over the slab, a new copper plate that reads “Numinous Peak of the Twin Raging Peaks” (*ryōhō futarasan* 霊峰二荒山) has been affixed. Over the course of the twentieth century, the copper plate inscription of Kūkai’s epitaph has been moved several times. It is currently stored at the Treasure Hall of Rinnōji 輪王寺 in Nikkō City (SUDA 1980).
of Shōdō’s founding of a shrine temple on Mt. Fudarakū 補陀洛 舍多罗 舍多罗

Kūkai never met Shōdō in person but was asked to compose the epitaph by a mutual friend, Professor I (I hakushi 伊博士), as he explains in his postscript to the work (nkbt 71: 191). Nor had he ever traveled to Mt. Nikkō. It is likely that Kūkai, once he accepted the request, received extensive notes and accounts from Shōdō of his own life from Professor I, and it is on the basis of these notes that he composed his biographical portrait (SUDA 1980, 25).

In the opening to the preface, Kūkai depicts mountains as the abodes of “extraordinary individuals” (ijin 異人), citing the mythical mountains of Mt. Sumeru and Mt. Grīḍhrakūṭa in India as examples. According to tradition, located on the peak of the former is Tuṣita Heaven, the abode of Maitreya, and on the peak of the latter, the site where Śākyamuni entered into his final nirvana. “Extraordinary individual” here thus refers to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Buddhist traditions who have attained, or are guaranteed to attain, enlightenment. The bodhisattvas who reside on the mountains are not alone, for the waterways of mountains, Kūkai tells us, are the dwelling places of “numinous beings” (ryōbutsu 霊物), particularly dragons. As an example, Kūkai refers to Anavatapta, a mythical lake north of the Himalayas understood to be the source of four great rivers in Jambudvīpa and believed to be controlled by a bodhisattva who transformed into a nāga, or dragon, in order to bring enlightenment to the dragons who dwelled in the lake (Oda 2005, 28). Hence, to open his epitaph, Kūkai establishes that mountains are places where bodhisattvas not only attain personal enlightenment for themselves but bring enlightenment to the numinous beings, particularly dragons, who dwell on the mountain.

Throughout his career, Kūkai showed a consistent interest in the power of Buddhist practice to pacify the dragons who were believed to dwell in mountain waters and to influence thereby the causal forces that make the rain fall. As we shall see below, in his 816 petition to the throne requesting permission to use Mt. Kōya as a site for his temple complex, Kūkai similarly associates dragons with the waterways of the mountains and emphasizes the efficacy of mountain ascetic practice in pacifying and controlling those dragons. He not only advocates for such practice, he was also a skilled practitioner of it. A much celebrated event in Kūkai’s life came in 824 when he is said to have made rain fall by offering prayers to the dragon king Zennyo Ryūō 善女龍王, who was believed to live in the “Dragon Cave” (ryūketsu 龍穴) on Mt. Murō 室生 (Fowler 1997, 154–157). Later in Kūkai’s epitaph, we learn that Shōdō too earned considerable recognition from the court for his efficacious performance of rainmaking rites. This opening passage thus forecasts this important event in Shōdō’s career.
The Buddhist tradition constitutes only one important context for understanding Kūkai’s association of mountains with water, and water with dragons, or serpentine beings. As noted in the previous section, the kami tradition in early Japan understood mountain kami as vengeful beings who control the waterways that made agriculture possible and manifest themselves as snakes to humans who lived in the agricultural communities below. In portraying mountain ascetics as bodhisattvas who bring enlightenment to the numinous dragons of the mountain, Kūkai thus presents ascetic practice on the mountain as a solution to the practical problem of how to pacify the kami and spirits of the mountain and thereby control patterns of precipitation and rainfall.18

Like mountain ascetics before him, Kūkai stresses that the efficacy of Buddhist practice to bring rainfall to agricultural communities is derived from the pursuit of enlightenment. In the next section of his epitaph, he describes the practice of mystically yoking (myōe 冥会) one’s mind (shin 心) with the phenomenal world (kyō 境) as the technique by which the ascetic attains enlightenment, or, as he puts it, “the virtuous power of the path” (dōtoku 道徳) (nkbt 71: 183).

After setting up the Buddhist framework for his epitaph, Kūkai offers an extended account of Shōdō’s life. The first section describes his renunciation. From the age of seven to twenty:

He felt shackled by the productive work of the four occupations [scholar, farmer, artisan, and merchant] and hungered for the extinction of karma [by means of meditation on] the three truths. He detested the hustle and bustle of villages and towns and revered the purity of forests and springs.

(NKBT 71: 183)

Kūkai thus makes clear that Shōdō’s motivation in renouncing life in society was to attain enlightenment. Shōdō, in his account, intends to pursue a way of life that is disciplined and scholarly, studying and practicing abstruse Buddhist teachings, such as the Tendai doctrine of the three truths (santai 三諦).

The main section of Kūkai’s biographical portrait recounts Shōdō’s ascent of Mt. Nantai, to which Kūkai refers as Mt. Fudaraku. Fudaraku is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word, Potalaka, the mythical mountain in South India that is depicted in the Flower Garland Sūtra (t 279, 10.366c3–4, where it is transliterated as Fudaraka 補怛洛迦) as the abode of Avalokiteśvara. Shōdō, Kūkai tells us later in the epitaph, was a devotee of Avalokiteśvara (nkbt 71: 189); it is therefore likely that the name Potalaka suggests Shōdō’s own understanding of the mountain, rather than that of Kūkai. Based on Shōdō’s devotion to Avalokiteśvara and the above description of his practice of the three truths, we can infer,

18. On the social and political importance of rainmaking rites for esoteric Buddhist monks in the Heian period, see RUPPERT (2002).
as Kobayashi Sōjin (2009, 51–52) has suggested, that Shōdō was steeped in the Kegon and Tiantai (that is, pre-Saichō Tendai) traditions. He does not seem to have been interested in, or even aware of, Kūkai’s explicitly esoteric formulation of the Buddhist tradition. This will be important to keep in mind when we attempt to disentangle Kūkai’s interpretation of Shōdō from the man himself.19

The history of the name of Mt. Fudaraku is complicated but important for considering Shōdō’s intention in climbing the mountain. Kanno Tomikazu (2003) has convincingly argued that the original name of the pair of mountains known today as Mt. Nikkō was either Futara or Futaara 二荒 (probably Futarara first, then simplified to Futara); the current name Nikkō was subsequently derived from the Chinese-based reading of the characters for Futara and then assigned new characters to represent the sound. Evidence in support of this interpretation comes from archaeological excavations on the peak of Mt. Nikkō that suggest that the site was an object of religious devotion since at least the Kofun period (ca. 250–538). Based on this evidence, it seems likely that the mountain had the religiously inflected name of Futara prior to Shōdō’s ascent. The name “Futara” is particularly evocative for the purposes of our analysis. Based on the grammatical structure of the name, Kanno infers that it must have been derived from the compound “Futa-arayama,” meaning “twin raging mountains,” referring to the male-female pair of mountains that make up Mt. Nikkō, Mt. Nantai 男体 (“Male Body Mountain”), and Mt. Nyohō 女峰 (“Female Peak Mountain”). A “raging mountain” (arayama 荒山) literally means a mountain wherein raging kami dwell (Kanno 2003, 4). The term is thus associated with fear of the raging kami believed to dwell in remote mountains. We can understand, then, the transformation of the name by means of homophony from “Futara,” twin raging (mountains), to “Fudaraku” (Mt. Potalaka) as symbolic of Shōdō’s intention to domesticate and harness the raging power of the kami and spirits of the mountain by resituating them in the enlightened realm of Avalokiteśvara.

In describing Mt. Fudaraku, Kūkai portrays the mountain as being equal in its awe-inspiring power to the enlightened mountain abodes of bodhisattvas mentioned in the opening to the preface: awesome peaks tower high in the heavens and thunder rolls through the belly of the mountain at regular intervals. If Kanno is right that its original name was Futara, then we glimpse here the feeling of awe that must have been accorded to the mountain well before Shōdō’s

19. On the religious and historical dimensions of Mt. Potalaka, see Läänemets (2006, 304–311). Based on his analysis of the depiction of this mountain in the Flower Garland Sūtra, Läänemets makes the intriguing argument that the mountain may have referred to an actual place and that place was the site of a mixed Hindu-Buddhist mountain cult that worshiped Avalokiteśvara as a Buddhist transformation of a local mountain deity. If so, Shōdō’s practice on Mt. Fudaraku, which similarly is concerned with the worship of Avalokiteśvara as a Buddhist transformation of local mountain deities, would then parallel the origins of the Avalokiteśvara cult in the Indian Buddhist tradition.
“opening” of it. In Kūkai’s depiction, the natural world of the mountain is raw and undomesticated. No one had ever, he stresses, ascended the mountain. Shōdō, however, is no ordinary individual. Admiring Siddhartha’s six years of ascetic practice before he became the Buddha, Shōdō, who grew up near the mountain, became determined to climb it (NKBT 71: 183).

In the fourth month of 767, he attempted his first ascent. The snow, however, was still deep, and mist and fog clouded his view. When it began to thunder, he gave up. Fourteen years later, in 781, Shōdō once again attempted the climb but failed. It was not until his third attempt in the third month of the next year that he succeeded. In preparation for this third attempt, Kūkai tells us, Shōdō copied sutras and drew images of the Buddha “for the sake of the kami.” Then, for seven days at the base of the mountain prior to the ascent, he used these sutras and images to worship the Buddha (NKBT 71: 185). Shōdō’s preparation for the third ascent suggests that he viewed the mountain as an abode for numinous presences, including especially kami, who needed to be appeased. He is clearly apprehensive about his ascent; he does not know what powerful beings await him on the mountains, and so he girds himself with Buddhist images and scripture on the conviction that they have the power to buffer him from these potentially malevolent forces.

After his seven days of worship and sutra recitation, Shōdō addresses the kami, vowing to them that if he should ascend the peak he will offer up to them the sutras and images he himself personally copied. His purpose in doing so, he states, is to “exalt their divine power and transfer blessings to all living beings” (NKBT 71: 185). Kūkai thus makes clear that Shōdō intended his ascent to have a collective benefit. “To exalt their divine power” (shin’i 神威) in the context of the preface, suggests the transformation of the numinous beings of the mountain into benevolent protector deities. Pacification of the vengeful kami on the mountains would have been regarded as beneficial by people living in the villages at its base in particular, for it was widely believed that mountain kami descended to the plains in spring to give life to the rice paddies (in the form of water) and returned to the mountains in autumn after the harvest (Miyake 2005, 46).

Pacification of these mountain kami was, at the same time, crucial to the success of Shōdō’s own ascent. Without their protection, the natural forces of the mountain environment could easily render his climb impossible. For this reason, Shōdō follows up his vow with a prayer requesting not only the “good kami” (zenshin 善神) but also a full range of numinous beings—from the “poisonous dragon” (dokuryū 毒竜) to the “charm of the mountain” (sanbi 山魅)—to assist him in his climb. By addressing these deities and promising them offerings of the Dharma, Shōdō aims to harness their power for the purpose of his ascent. Benefiting those who live below at the base of the mountain is one consequence of this ascent, but it is not its fundamental purpose. After uttering his prayer to the
kami, Shōdō explains his primary aim in climbing the mountain, stating that “If I do not ascend the peak of the mountain, then neither will I attain bodhi” (NKBT 71: 185). It is thus Shōdō’s own individual intention to attain bodhi that, in Kūkai’s account at least, motivated his climb. Benefiting others is portrayed as a kind of by-product of this individualistic aim.

Shōdō’s supplications to the kami, we are told, had their intended effect. He climbed to the peak of Mt. Nantai in three days. Standing atop the mountain, he experienced a kind of ecstasy. “Overwhelmed with joy, I [Shōdō] felt as though I were in a dream…. At once delighted, at once moved, I found it difficult to maintain the spirit of my mind” (NKBT 71: 185). Gazing out from the peak of Mt. Nantai, Shōdō is transfixed. A lake to the south, in particular, captures his attention. Its surface reflects the diverse plants and jagged rock on the side of the mountains surrounding it. Kūkai describes the clear surface of the lake: “The mirror of the lake is without such a thing as an ‘I’; / Of the myriad forms, who could escape it?” (NKBT 71: 187). He then turns the narrator’s gaze to Shōdō. Looking at both the mountain and the water as two reflections in a mirror, he felt something “suddenly cut to the core” of his being. He never grew tired of gazing in all four directions. After clouds came and obscured the view, he decided that he would build his temporary hermitage at this site and perform for the kami the offerings he promised them.

Kūkai’s depiction of this pivotal scene in the narrative can be understood as an illustration of the theme introduced in the opening to the preface: the fusion of self with the world. His illustration hinges on the symbolism of the water and its mirror-like surface. At the end of the opening to the preface, just after his elaboration of the importance of merging the self with the world, he frames his introduction of Shōdō by comparing him to Śākyamuni and Mañjuśrī, characterizing them as enlightened teachers who derived the virtue of benevolence from the mountain and that of wisdom from its waters (NKBT 71: 183). The association of benevolence with the mountains and wisdom with water is based on an oft-cited line from the Analects (KBTK 1: 142). Kūkai here, of course, gives it a Buddhist reinterpretation. These virtues are presented as inherent in the natural world. By drawing on them, the Buddhist teacher “polishes his/her mirror on the stand” and, in doing this, becomes better able to peer into “the water of the faculties” (kisui 機水) of living beings and respond appropriately (NKBT 71: 183). Shōdō, Kūkai tells us, is just such a Buddhist teacher. Hence, at the end of the opening to the preface, Kūkai portrays Shōdō as a paradigm of the enlightened Buddhist who, by aligning with the virtue inherent in the natural forces on the mountains, enhances his insight into the capacities of living beings and thereby augments his own ability to teach and save others. Buddhist practice in the mountains—the pursuit of the rare and exceptional individual, or “extraordinary person”—contributes to the individual’s ability to save others, and it does so
precisely through skillful interaction with elements of nature. This brief section at the end of the opening to the preface, with its many references to water as a metaphor for wisdom, thus foreshadows Shōdō’s vision of the infinite reflection of all forms in the world on the surface of the mirror-like lake. More specifically, since it explicitly endorses the merging of self and world as the means by which one acquires wisdom and virtue, we can read Shōdō’s vision of the mirror-like lake as an experience of union with the natural environment of the mountains.

Kūkai notes that Shōdō made his offerings on the peak of Mt. Nantai in the form of a twenty-one day repentance rite (reisan 礼懺). KOBAYASHI (2009, 64–70) has given careful consideration to the specific kind of repentance rite Shōdō might have performed on the top of Mt. Nantai. For our purposes, however, one feature of the rite stands out in particular; namely, that Shōdō performed it as an offering to the kami. This peculiar context suggests that Shōdō performed the rite on behalf of the kami to repent for their sins. Moreover, since he explicitly stated in the vow he took at the base of the mountain “to exalt the divine power” of the kami, we can understand this act of repentance on their behalf as his way of fulfilling this vow. In analyzing his vow above, we interpreted the expression “to exalt the divine power” of the kami to mean specifically to pacify them so that they would offer Shōdō assistance and protection on his climb. What this, in turn, would mean can be inferred from the description of the first failed attempt: fair weather, clear skies, and no thunder. The logic of Shōdō’s repentance rite for the kami thus resembles the pattern we discerned above in early accounts of the founding of shrine temples. The kami of Mt. Nikkō are suffering in samsāra because of their lack of understanding of the Dharma, and they express their suffering in the form of thunder and other extreme weather patterns. Therefore, the mountain ascetic, in order to climb the mountain, must save the kami from samsāra by preaching the Dharma to them.

Upon completing his twenty-one-day repentance rite, Shōdō descended the mountain. It was not until two years later, in the third month of 784, that he ascended the mountain for a second time. This second time he brought with him two or three fellow monks, and when they made it to the top of the mountain they built a raft and floated across the lake located to the south of Mt. Nantai, known today as Lake Chūzenji 中禅寺. They stayed for a night on an island in the lake and set out again the next day. It was at this time that Shōdō had, according to Kūkai, yet another unitive experience.

The mirror-like reflective surface of the lake once again frames Kūkai’s description of this experience (nkbt 71: 187). He depicts the natural world surrounding the lake as resonant with order and human significance. The pines and oaks form a green canopy, and the sugi 杉 and hinoki 檜 trees an indigo pavilion; the calls of the white cranes are the sound of bells, and the cries of the green ducks, the jingling of jewels; the wind through pines, the strings of the koto 琴
sounding out the five tones, the very music of heaven, and the waves lapping onto shore, the beat of the drum tapping out the rhythm of the flow of pure and clear water possessed of eight qualities. Kūkai then goes on to suggest that the morning sky over the lake manifests the presence of two protector divinities important to pre-Shingon mountain ascetic practice: the clouds obscuring the mountain peaks are curtains drawn by the Dragon King Nanda 難陀 and the twinkle of the stars in the early morning, the sleight of hand of Universal Fragrance (Fukō 普香), a deva-prince who dwells on the planet Venus, and a transformation-body of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha. The resonant order of the natural environment and its protection by benevolent Buddhist divinities further underscores one of the central claims of Kūkai’s epitaph, namely, that Mt. Fudaraku, as the Japanese analog to Mt. Potalaka in India, is, in essence, the enlightened abode of Avalokiteśvara.

Having revealed the fundamentally enlightened nature of the natural environment of Mt. Fudaraku, Kūkai brings his preface to its climax. He describes the state of enlightenment experienced by Shōdō: “Gazing upon the round moon on the pond, Shōdō knew the mirror-like wisdom of Samantabhadra. Looking up at the sun of wisdom high in the sky, he awakened to the pervading wisdom that exists in his own being” (nkbt 71: 187). In his Hannya shingyō hiken, Kūkai depicts Samantabhadra as the personification of the teachings of the Flower Garland Sūtra, particularly its central teaching of interpenetration (HAKEDA 1972, 264, 268). Samantabhadra’s mirror-like wisdom is thus the realization of the perfect interpenetration of Vairocana’s wisdom that universally pervades all things like the light of the sun. Hence, in this climatic scene, Kūkai attempts to show that Shōdō experienced the state of enlightenment described in the Flower Garland Sūtra, an experience of union between the extraordinary individual, or

20. The Dragon King Nanda is one of the eight great dragon kings described in the Lotus Sūtra. He was worshiped at the dragon cave on Mt. Murō, an early site of mountain ascetic practice (KOBAYASHI 2009, 76). Based on the esoteric text by Śubhākarasimha (637–735), the Qian-shou Guanyin zaoci cidi fa yigui that he imported from China, Kūkai identified this Dragon King as one of Avalokiteśvara’s twenty-eight divinities in her retinue. Hence, for Kūkai, Nanda was associated with Avalokiteśvara. This association would have been unknown to Shōdō, but, in the context of the epitaph, it further advances the idea that Mt. Fudaraku is Avalokiteśvara’s enlightened abode.

21. In his description of his own practice of mountain asceticism as a youth in the preface to his Sangō shiiki, Kūkai mentions that he practiced a rite for the recitation of Ākāśagarbha’s dhāraṇī (HAKEDA 1972, 102). Prior to Kūkai, scholar-monks from major temples in Nara, including Dōji 道慈 (d. 744), Gonsō 勤操 (754–827), and Zengi 善議 (729–812), as well as laypeople practiced the rite (ANDREEVA 2019, 130–134). Ākāśagarbha was to figure prominently in medieval mountain ascetic practice. As ANDREEVA (2019, 143–147) has shown, this bodhisattva played a key role in the process by which Mt. Asama 浅間 in present-day Mie Prefecture came to be understood as a mandala.
bodhisattva, and a universal, benevolent wisdom that inheres in the very being of things. As with the first ascent, Shōdō interprets the unitive experience of fusion with the natural landscape of the mountain as a sign that the place where that experience occurred is a “superior location.” It is at this location that Shōdō built a small temple that he called a jingūji, or shrine temple. He resided there for four years.

In the fourth month of 788, Shōdō moved his temple to the north side of the southern lake. Like the location of his initial hermitage and later of his shrine temple, Shōdō is depicted once again to have chosen the site as a consequence of an experience of union with the mountain environment there. Kūkai notes that Shōdō, upon encountering this new location, could not find any Daoist transcendent there, even though it seemed like the kind of place where they would have roamed (nkbt 71: 189). Even the scholar-transcendent Dongfang Shuo (160–93 BCE) does not mention it in his list of famous retreats, and the legendary transcendent Wang Qiao (or Zi Qiao; ca. sixth century BCE), is nowhere to be found. Rather than encountering the paradigms of the Daoist transcendent, Shōdō, we are told, realizes that the mountain itself is the tuft of hair on the Buddha’s third-eye, indeed the very “storehouse of the Lotus” (kezō, the realm of Vairocana’s enlightenment depicted in the Flower Garland Sūtra: “Contemplating the Storehouse of the Lotus in the sea of my mind, / I apprehend the true form [of reality] in the hair-tuft mountain” (nkbt 71: 189).

The last section of Kūkai’s lengthy preface describes Shōdō’s activities off Mt. Fudaraku late in his life. He notes that Shōdō’s fame as a mountain ascetic garnered the attention of Emperor Kanmu. In 795, Kanmu appointed Shōdō as lecturer in the province of Kōzuke. Kūkai also mentions that Shōdō went on to found another temple on Mt. Shiro in present-day Kagoshima City. The last accomplishment Kūkai describes is Shōdō’s successful performance of a rainmaking rite in 807 on Mt. Nantai (nkbt 71: 189). Here, we learn of one specific instance of Shōdō’s ability to create benefits for others. In describing this accomplishment and his other activities off the mountain, Kūkai emphasizes that Shōdō, through his ascetic practice in remote mountains, developed a “mind empty [of discriminations]” (kyoshin) and so was able to “follow [the arising of] things” (mono ni shitagau); it was in this way, Kūkai stresses, that he “benefited others” (nkbt 71: 189). Hence Kūkai portrays the benefits Shōdō was able to share with others as a consequence of his individual ascetic practice.

The epitaph, which is quite short in comparison to the preface, presents us with a picture of Shōdō as a transcendent individual, as precisely the “extraordinary individual” held up as the ideal Buddhist practitioner in the opening to the preface:
Following the path, he shook off [the dust of the social world]
And entered directly into the tall mountains.
Like a leaping dragon, he ascended high peaks;
Like a rising phoenix, he traversed steep mountain passes. (NKBT 71: 189–191)

In the context of Kūkai’s portrait, the figure of the flying dragon implies Shōdō’s pacification of the benighted dragons whom Kūkai counts among the “numinous beings” on the mountain as well as “the Poisonous Dragon” named by Shōdō in his seven days of worship before his third ascent of Mt. Nikkō. This theme of pacification is underscored in the couplet that immediately follows the above: “By the power and protection (igo 威護) of the shining kami (shinmei 神明), he traversed [Mt. Fudaraku] and gazed upon its mountains and waters” (NKBT 71: 191). “Shining kami,” here, like the luminous kami mentioned by Saichō, refers to kami who have been illuminated—indeed, enlightened—by the Buddhist teachings.

It is difficult to know with certainty to what extent Kūkai’s portrait of Shōdō represents an ideal and to what extent it faithfully portrays Shōdō’s life. As we observed in his description of Shōdō’s enlightenment experience, Kūkai is careful to describe it in terms that would have been familiar to a monk steeped in the teachings of the Flower Garland Sūtra. It seems reasonable to assume that this approach to describing Shōdō’s Buddhist experience on the mountain was based on the notes Kūkai received from Professor I and that, therefore, Kūkai’s preface provides us with a not entirely unreliable picture of Shōdō’s understanding of life on Mt. Fudaraku. For the same reason, we can, with perhaps even more certainty, assume that the main elements of Kūkai’s portrait (Shōdō’s ascent of Mt. Fudaraku, his performance of repentance rites on its summit, his construction of a shrine temple, his appointment as provincial lecturer in 795, and his performance of a rainmaking rite in 807) are mostly factually accurate. Based on Kūkai’s portrait, then, the basic contours of Shōdō’s understanding of the ascetic life on the mountain can be surmised thus. Like Saichō and Kūkai after him, Shōdō believed that by renouncing human society and pursuing ascetic practice on the mountain, one may attain a kind of personal enlightenment that has the power to enlighten and thereby pacify the vengeful spirits and kami on the mountain. In the immediate years following his composition of this piece, Kūkai, as we shall see, would go on to articulate an explicitly mandalic understanding of the mountain. Yet, this mandalic understanding, as I show in the next section, was fundamentally informed by the same set of orientations and understandings that underpinned the practice of Shōdō and the other mountain-temple-founding monks who came before him.

22. On the historicity of Kūkai’s epitaph for Shōdō, see Kobayashi (2009, 88–89).
Kūkai’s Founding of a Temple Complex on Mt. Kōya

Kūkai’s epitaph for Shōdō suggests that Kūkai idealized the monk who builds his mountain temple independently of state support. The approach he himself took to founding his temple complex on Mt. Kōya, however, was quite different. In the sixth month of 816, Kūkai submitted a petition to Saga’s court requesting permission to build a temple complex on Mt. Kōya. The petition shows Kūkai attempting to convince Saga of the relation of mutual dependence he shares with the Buddhist monastic, particularly those who pursue ascetic practice in the mountains. Like Segyō and Saichō before him, Kūkai argues that while the emperor depends on the monastic for the production of this-worldly benefits, the monastic depends on the emperor for material support. Rather than the kind of direct economic support of mountain asceticism requested by Segyō, however, Kūkai, in his petition, seeks political support in the form of imperial permission to open new land and build a temple for ascetic practice.

In making his request, Kūkai explains that for the benefit of the emperor and “those who pursue acetic practice,” he would like to “cut down and clear out the dense thickets” of the mountain forests and build “a temple for the practice of meditation” (nkbt 71: 399). He then follows up his request by underscoring the subordinate status of monastics in the realm of temporal power, affirming that “the rise and fall of the Dharma depends on the mind of the heavenly [sovereign].” He, moreover, even offers scriptural support for the proscription against the unregulated construction of temples by monastics laid out in article five of the sōniryō: “There is a precept in the sutras, ‘The mountains, rivers, earth, and water are all the possession of the sovereign of the nation; if a bhikṣu should make use of something without permission, he commits the sin of theft’” (nkbt 71: 399).23

Prior to making his request, however, in the opening to the petition, Kūkai carefully establishes the importance of Buddhist ascetic practice in the mountains for the production of this-worldly benefits, particularly better control of important sources of freshwater in the country:

[I] Kūkai have heard that where the mountains are high the clouds let fall much rain, thus nourishing vegetation, and that where drops of water accumulate fishes and dragons breed and multiply. Thus it was that the Buddha preached on steep Mount Grdhakūṭa [in North India] and that Avalokiteśvara manifested himself on Mount Potalaka [in South India]. Indeed, these mountains have evoked their presence. Guests [that is, students] of meditation array shoulder to shoulder in the five temples on Mt. Wutai, and comrades in

23. This citation appears to be a variation of a line from the Xindi guan jing (t 159, 3.297c).
concentration stand sleeve to sleeve in the one monastery of Mt. Tiantai. They are the treasures of the nation and the pillars of the people.

(modified from Hakeda 1972, 47; NKBT 71: 397)

Here Kūkai portrays mountains as important sources of freshwater dominated by fishes and dragons. As we observed in his epitaph for Shōdō, by dragons Kūkai means not just a kind of animal or mythological beast but, more specifically, a category of numinous being that controls the waterways of the mountain. Mt. Kōya—or, literally, the high plains mountain—is a high-altitude watershed surrounded by eight mountain peaks. It is therefore natural that Kūkai should associate Mt. Kōya in particular but also mountains more generally with dragons (fishes, here, seem to function metonymically as a related class of water spirit).

In alluding to dragons and fishes, Kūkai suggests that it is precisely their presence that has attracted enlightened figures in the past—from Śākyamuni to Avalokiteśvara—to live and practice in the mountains. The tradition of mountain practice, he furthermore points out, has continued in China, where its most renowned temples are located on mountains. These temples, he concludes, benefit the nation and its people. Based on the broader context in which we find this claim, it can be inferred that they do so precisely by pacifying the malevolent kami and spirits who control the waterways of the mountain. Since both Śākyamuni and Avalokiteśvara are paradigms of Buddhist enlightenment, it can be inferred that Kūkai understood the pacification of mountain spirits to be the work of enlightened humans. As we observed in the case of shrine temples and Saichō’s mountain temple, disruptions in the agricultural cycle occur because the spirits who influence that cycle are deluded: to eliminate the delusion that results in disruptive behavior, such beings need to be enlightened by the Buddhist teachings. This cannot happen, however, without the Buddhist practice of human beings, for it is human beings who are the primary agents of enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition.

Kūkai then goes on to argue that in comparison to the great Buddhist countries of India and China, Japan is inferior. He contends that while the court has given support to the monastic community by building temples across the realm, it has failed to support those monastics who could benefit it most; namely, meditation practitioners. “Few,” he writes, “are the guests [that is, students] of the fourfold meditation on tall mountains and high peaks; rare is the host [that is, teacher] who enters into concentration [that is, samadhi] in the dark groves and mountain caves” (NKBT 71: 399). Thus, he concludes, “the teaching of meditation” (zenkyō 禪教), with which he associates his temple complex, “has not yet been transmitted, and there is no abode in which to pursue union” (sōō 相応) (NKBT 71: 399). Kūkai hence calls on the court to transform its relationship to the monastic community. To put it in terms we have already laid out above, his
petition can be understood as an attempt to persuade the court to abandon its support of temples that serve primarily an impressive function and cultivate instead their practical function by sponsoring the construction of temples on mountains like those on Mt. Wutai and Mt. Tiantai in China.

In his analysis of Kūkai’s rather sharp criticism of state Buddhism in Japan, Takeuchi (2006, 494–497) has called attention to Kūkai’s sense of mission to spread the esoteric teachings to Japan. As we have just observed, Kūkai avoids using the term “esoteric teachings” (mikkyō) in his petition. This does not, however, belie his sectarian intentions; for the term “meditation” (zen) as we saw above, already enjoyed widespread currency at court, and it, therefore, makes sense that he would use a term already familiar to the court to advance his mission rather than burden them with an entirely new taxonomy of the Buddhist teachings. Takeuchi discerns Kūkai’s strong sense of mission a bit later in the petition. After Kūkai states his proposal to clear land on Mt. Kōya to build a temple, he explains that doing so will help him fulfill his “humble vow” (shōgan).

In a letter enclosed in the petition, Kūkai tells the story behind his humble vow. He explains that on his way back to Japan in the eighth month of 806, his boat was lost at sea, and so he made a “humble vow” to the “benevolent kami” that if they should offer him protection and help him return to Japan, he will build a meditation temple and practice asceticism in order to “enhance the light of the power of the various devas, protect the borders of the nation, and save living beings” (TKZ 7: 99–100). Since “the shining kami” did not let “darkness fall over him,” Kūkai states that he does not intend to betray the kami by failing to fulfill this vow. In considering Kūkai’s vow, Takeuchi suggests that the intention behind it—to build a temple for meditation practice—can be traced back further to the final admonition of Kūkai’s esoteric teacher in China, Huiguo (746–805). In his Shōrai mokuroku, Kūkai recounts that Huiguo anointed him to be “the receptacle of the esoteric teachings (mikkyō)” and enjoins him to propagate them in Japan (Hakeda 1972, 148).

In addition to Kūkai’s “humble vow,” Takeuchi (2006, 497) suggests another important context for Kūkai’s petition: Saichō’s establishment of the Tendai school. As mentioned above, it was only two years earlier that Kūkai parted ways with Saichō. By 810, Saichō, thanks to the support of Saga’s court, had begun to develop his temple complex on Mt. Hiei into a full-fledged sectarian organization. Against the backdrop of this emerging school, Kūkai’s petition aims to assert the superiority of his “meditation teachings.” Unlike the other temples

24. Kūkai’s account could, of course, very well be apocryphal. Even if that is the case, it nevertheless demonstrates Kūkai’s sense of mission to propagate the esoteric teachings in Japan already in 806 when he composed the Shōrai mokuroku.
sponsored by the court, his temple, Kūkai argues, will offer the practical benefit of controlling a key source of freshwater in the country.

Even though he refrains from using the term “esoteric,” Kūkai’s petition provides the first piece of textual evidence that he understood Mt. Kōya as a mandala. In explaining the reason he chose Mt. Kōya as the site for his temple complex, Kūkai states that, “According to the teachings of the Dhyāna Sūtra (Zenkyō 禪経), the best place for practicing meditation is on flat ground deep in a mountain” (NKB 71: 399). No sutra named the Dhyāna Sūtra exists in the Buddhist canon. The following passage from chapter 2 of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra corresponds most closely to Kūkai’s scriptural reference:

The practitioner [that is, ācārya], having with a compassionate mind inspired the [disciple], should further encourage him, And when [the disciple] is firmly established and has received the teachings, he should select a flat site. Mountain groves with plentiful flowers and fruits and with agreeable pure springs— These are extolled by the buddhas, and [there] he should perform the deeds of the circular altar. (Giebel 2005, 18–19)

The reference is not exact. Most notably, instead of meditation practice, the verse enjoins the esoteric practitioner to perform the “deeds of the circular altar” (endan ji 円壇事), that is, to build a mandala altar and perform esoteric rites on it.25 While Kūkai avoids esoteric Buddhist terminology, his cryptic allusion to this passage suggests that he understood Mt. Kōya—the “high plains” mountain—to be an ideal environment for the construction of the circular mandala altar.

In the seventh month of 816, just over a month after he submitted his memorial, Saga issued an official proclamation granting the land of Mt. Kōya to Kūkai (TKZ 7: 340–341). Upon receiving permission, Kūkai sent a letter to the Provin- cial Magistrate of Kii Province to notify him that he has acquired imperial permission to build on Mt. Kōya and, moreover, that he is dispatching two disciples, Taihan 泰範 (b. 778) and Jitsue 実恵 (786–847), to build a pair of hermitages (KDDZ 2: 3). At the end of the letter, Kūkai indicates that he himself plans to visit in the fall of the coming year.

25. On the term endan ji, Yixing, in his Dari jing shu, elaborates:
Regarding the performance of the deeds of the circular altar: Among the superior places, mountain forests are best. The extreme tips of peaks are secluded and quiet. But people do not enjoy places without vegetation and flowing water, and so, without these various conditions, [they] dare not reside [there]. Thus, where there are famous flowers and sweet fruits and also pure springs and ponds that are loved and enjoyed [by the people], it is this place that is praised by the Buddha. It is here that the [ācārya] should perform the deeds of the mandala. (T 1796, 39.615b)
It appears that Kūkai did in fact ascend the mountain sometime in the next year. Fascicle nine of the *Shōryōshū* contains two liturgical texts labeled as expositions (*keibyaku* 啓白) for two different “zone-demarcating” (*kekkai* 結界) rites: the first to demarcate the enlightened zone in which the temple complex of “Kōya” was to be constructed and the second to demarcate the enlightened zone in which an altar for esoteric practice in the larger temple complex of Kōya was to be constructed.26 The first tells the backstory behind his founding of Mt. Kōya, and Kūkai indicates there that the rite was performed twelve years after his return from the Tang in 806 (NKBT 71: 409). If we count the year 806 as year one, this note indicates, then, that the rite was performed sometime in 817.

The first exposition sets forth—and then enacts—the purpose of Kūkai’s zone-demarcating rite. It opens by addressing the numinous presences who reside on the mountain: not only all buddhas and Buddhist divinities in “the oceanlike assembly of the twofold great mandalas,” including “the five kinds of *devas*,”27 but also “the kami of heaven and earth in our nation” (*kokuchū* 天神国中) and “all the spirits of earth, water, wind, and air [who reside] on this mountain” (NKBT 71: 409). Like Saichō before him, Kūkai understood the natural world of the mountains to be teeming with powerful kami and spirits. Unlike Saichō, however, he situates these kami and spirits in “the twofold great mandala.”

Kūkai then goes on to elaborate the theoretical framework upon which mandala practice is based: all sentient beings have buddha-nature; buddha-nature is nondual with dharma-nature, the true nature of reality that is often identified with the *dharmakāya*; like the *dharmakāya*, buddha-nature pervades the entire dharma realm, or phenomenal world; for this reason, one’s own being (*jishin* 自身) is one with all others (*tashin* 他身); the individual who has awakened to this truth “sports freely on the pedestal of the five wisdoms” of Mahāvairocana; those who do not “sink into the mud of the triple realm” of *samsāra* (NKBT 71: 409).28

---

26. For a complete translation of both expositions, see Gardiner (1995). The textual history of the *Shōryōshū* is quite complicated. The last three of the ten total fascicles contain numerous works spuriously attributed to Kūkai. The works under examination here, however, appear to be authentic compositions authored by Kūkai (TKZ 8: 412).

27. The five kinds of *devas* are depicted in the outermost court of the womb-realm mandala. They include (1) those who dwell in the two realms of form and formlessness; (2) those who dwell in the heavens above Mt. Sumeru such as Yama, Tuṣita, Nirmāṇa-rati, and Paranirmiita-vaśavartin; (3) those who dwell on the peak of Mt. Sumeru such as the four heavenly kings and the thirty-three *devas* of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three; (4) those who traverse the firmament (the various heavenly bodies of the sun, moon, and other constellations); and (5) those who dwell underground (*nāgas*, *asuras*, and King Yama) (Oda 2005, 576c–577a).

28. As Kūkai explains in the *Ben kenmitsu nikyō ron*, the esoteric teachings are distinguished by the view that the phenomenal world—namely, the three worlds (*sanshu* 三種世間) of the container world, the world of sentient beings (*shujō* 衆生世間), and the world of the
He then gives the genealogy of the esoteric teachings by which this truth came to be known, explaining that

The Great Compassionate Mahāvairocana Thus Come One, delighting in the wondrous flavor of samaya, observed the stains and taints of [sentient beings on] the six paths [of transmigration]; taking pity on them, he shook, with the thunder of his wisdom that is the suchness of reality, the palace of the dharma realm and transmitted to Jambudvipa the secret mandala (himitsu manda).

The secret mandala here refers both to Kūkai’s esoteric teachings, using mandala synecdochally, and to the rationale for his teachings, which is that they represent the true form of reality itself. A mandala, in other words, is not a human representation of reality. It is the true suchness of reality itself, as revealed to humans from the very source of reality, Mahāvairocana. In this formulation, mandala is not, fundamentally, a human-made object but, rather, a natural phenomenon, the manifestation of the true suchness of reality in the world of samsāra. This formulation of mandala supports the central act of the rite: the transformation of a particular part of the natural world of the mountain into a zone of enlightened beings—that is, something like a mandala altar.

While knowledge of the secret mandala was transmitted to Jambudvipa, it was not, Kūkai claims, until the present that it has been properly transmitted to Japan. He notes that the esoteric teachings were transmitted without any interruption from Vajrasattva to Nāgārjuna in India and, then, from Vajrabodhi to Amoghavajra, who brought the teachings to China. “And yet,” Kūkai writes, “here across the broad ocean in Japan, worthy vessels of this teaching had yet to appear and so the teaching has remained hidden in the secret palace of Mahāvairocana without being transmitted to our land” (nkbt 71: 411). Striking a sectarian tone, Kūkai dismisses all prior transmissions of Buddhism as inferior to his authentic esoteric transmission. Everything that came before him was only a partial truth. Kūkai, in transmitting the practice of mandala, now intends to transmit the whole truth.

Kūkai then recounts his trip to China to study the secret of the teachings (kyōhi) that he claims have not yet been transmitted to Japan (nkbt 71: 409). He describes how after he returned from China with the Vajrayāna (kongōjō) teachings of the twofold great mandala, there was no place suitable for practic-

Buddha’s awakened to wisdom (chishōkaku seken) is the body and mind of Vairocana Buddha (t 2427, 77.376c). Vairocana Buddha here refers to the dharmakāya in the absolute state (jishō hosshin) whereby phenomena and buddha exist in a nondual relation. This ontology constitutes the premise for Kūkai’s soteriological conception of the sentient being, which holds that all sentient beings possess intrinsic enlightenment (hongaku) or “buddha-nature” (t 2427, 77.375b). On Kūkai’s theory of buddha-nature, see Takasaki (1985, 112–117).
ing them. Twelve years, however, have passed since then, and, now, Kūkai sug-
gests, the time has come to propagate the Vajrayāna teachings by establishing a
site for their practice.

After narrating his transmission of the Vajrayāna teaching of the twofold
great mandala to Japan, Kūkai next sets forth his intention to “construct the two-
fold great mandala” (NKBT 71: 411). What he means by this can be inferred from
a later text in which he explains his original plans for the design of his temple
complex. In an 834 text that he composed to seek funds for the construction of
Mt. Kōya, Kūkai explains that he “had begun the construction of the two towers
of the body of the dharma realm of Vairocana and the twofold mandalas of the
womb and diamond realms, but it was difficult to build due to a lack of provi-
sions” (NKBT 71: 383). As noted in the Shōryōshū benmō, an annotated edition of
the Shōryōshū composed by the monk Unshō 運敞 (1614–1693), these two tow-
ers are the origins of what came to be known as the Fundamental Great Tower
(Konpon Daitō 根本大塔) and the Western Tower (Saitō 西塔), the former sym-
bolizing the womb-realm and the latter, the diamond (SGSZ 42: 286). Based on
Kūkai’s 834 text, then, we can infer that Kūkai’s statement in his 817 exposition
expresses his intention to construct his temple complex as a twofold mandala.
Yet, as we shall see, the temple complex itself does not constitute the entirety of
the twofold mandala on Mt. Kōya; it is rather only a core constituent element of it.

In setting forth his intention to construct his temple complex as a twofold
mandala, Kūkai first expresses his gratitude to the emperor for “blessing [him]
with His Imperial Beneficence by graciously granting [him] the site [of Mt.
Kōya] for [his] temple” (NKBT 71: 411). He then explains that his purpose in con-
structing his temple complex is twofold: first, “to repay the beneficence of the
buddhas by spreading the esoteric teachings;” and second, “to save living beings
by enhancing the power of the five kinds of devas” (NKBT 71: 411). Both can be
understood to be derived from the mission conferred onto him by his teacher
Huiguo as recounted in the Shōrai mokuroku (Hakeda 1972, 148–149). The first
echoes what we observed above to be a central element in Kūkai’s own sense
of his mission as a Buddhist monk: to fulfill his teacher Huiguo’s injunction to
spread the esoteric teachings to Japan. The second, the corollary to the first,
explicates the practical benefit of spreading the esoteric teachings; namely, to

29. Today, the iconography of the mandala altars housed in each tower mirrors the other.
Whereas the altar inside the Fundamental Great Tower is arranged in an unusual combination of
the womb and diamond realms, with Mahāvairocana of the womb realm as the central Buddha
surrounded by the buddhas of the diamond realms, the Western Tower inverses this layout, with
Mahāvairocana of the diamond realm as the central buddha surrounded by buddhas of the womb
realm. As Kūkai notes in his 834 text, he was not able to ultimately realize his vision of a temple
complex organized around two towers that symbolized the two kinds of mandala. The current ico-
nography of each suggests an arrangement arrived at through compromise by later generations.
save people in Japan. Kūkai states specifically that it is by “enhancing the power of the five devas” that he will save people in Japan. The five devas, as noted above, refer to Buddhist divinities such as Brahmā, Indra, King Yama, and various nāgas and asuras as well as various heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, and the constellations derived from religious cults and cosmological notions indigenous to India. When the power of these divinities is enhanced by the esoteric teachings, these divinities become protectors of the Dharma and, by extension, protectors of the state that supports the Dharma. When the state is thus protected, people will be saved; or, as Kūkai notes in his account of his teacher’s words about the benefits of the esoteric teachings, “the land will know peace, and people everywhere will be content” (Hakeda 1972, 149).

Kūkai thus intends for his temple complex to serve the state by harnessing the power of a variety of Buddhist divinities. This underlying purpose of the temple complex aligns with a fundamental purpose of mandala practice itself: the creation, or demarcation, of a zone of enlightened beings. Kūkai, furthermore, makes clear that the beings who stand to be enlightened by this zone are not only Buddhist divinities but also the kami who dwell on the mountain. After setting forth his purpose in founding Mt. Kōya, Kūkai beseeches not only buddhas and devas but also “benevolent kami” to assist him in his project (nkbt 71: 411). By thus aligning kami and mountain spirits who are not traditionally depicted in mandala with devas who are, Kūkai attempts to bring the kami of Mt. Kōya into the zone of Mahāvairocana’s universal enlightenment and thereby transform them into benevolent protector kami.

To conclude his exposition, Kūkai performs the main ritual action of the zone-demarcating rite: expelling malevolent spirits and inviting benevolent ones to stay and protect the temple complex. “All malevolent spirits and kami to the east, west, south, and north, the four directions in between, above and below, within seven ri, ” he declares, “be gone from this zone I hereby demarcate!” “All benevolent kami and spirits (zenshinki 善神鬼) who can provide benefits,” he continues, “may reside as they please” (nkbt 71: 411). As specified in a variation of this statement in the second exposition, the point from which the seven ri radius extends is his temple complex (kono innai 此院内) (nkbt 71: 413). One ri is one third of a mile. Kūkai thus aims to pacify an area that extends across just over a two-mile radius from the temple complex.

As we observed above, in his 816 petition to the throne, Kūkai alluded to a passage from the Mahāvairocana Sūtra in which the esoteric practitioner is enjoined to perform “the deeds of the circular altar” on a flat site in the mountains; or, as we noted, to build a mandala and perform esoteric rites on it. In light of this allusion, Kūkai’s act of binding an area within a seven-ri radius can be understood as an enactment of this injunction, but one that does so using the mountain landscape itself as the circular altar of the mandala. This suggests an important
point: Kūkai understood not only the temple complex but a wide seven-ri zone surrounding it as a mandala, or circular altar. His 817 exposition thus provides evidence that he not only conceived his temple complex as a mandala but, more precisely, understood it as a core component of a larger mandala altar. In the view he articulates in his exposition, the buildings of the temple complex (specifically, the two towers) correspond to the ritual implements placed on the broader space of a mandala altar, while the mountain landscape represents the mandala altar itself. Thus, the two towers that he mentions in his 834 text constitute the core of the mandala—specifically, the inner courts of the womb and diamond realms—but not its entirety. As we have observed, throughout his exposition, Kūkai is fundamentally concerned with the divinities that dwell on the edges of the mandala—the five devas—as well as those deities on the mountain who correspond to them in terms of their relationship to cosmic forces but are not traditionally depicted in mandalas, namely, the kami and spirits of the mountain. His emphasis on beings who have the potential to operate on the margins of the mandala as protector deities is consistent with the main purpose of the rite: to ensconce the two towers of his temple complex—the inner court of the mandala—in the wider protective circle of the mandala, one that encompasses a seven ri circumference surrounding the two towers.30

Kūkai’s conception of Mt. Kōya as a mandala altar for a temple complex was novel. Even Saichō, who was steeped in the esoteric tradition and who, as we saw above, depicts a vast assembly of Buddhist and local deities in his liturgical writings, does not explicitly invoke the notion that Mt. Hiei is, in essence, a kind of real-world mandala. Nonetheless, in terms of its basic function as well as its relation

---

30. Kūkai’s understanding of Mt. Kōya as a mandala has a long history of reception, and that history too has tended to portray the larger area on the mountain in which the temple is situated as a mandala altar. We observe this interpretation of Mt. Kōya, for example, in an Edoperiod drawing, the Kōyasan renge mandara zu 高野山蓮華曼荼羅図, preserved at the Kōyasan Reihōkan Museum. Specifically, the drawing depicts the temple complex of Kongōbuji inside an eight-petaled lotus flower, with Jison’in 慈尊院 to the west as a paddy leaf stemming from the central eight-petaled flower and Okunoin 奥院 to the east as a separate three-petaled flower. A caption to the right states that Mt. Kōya is composed of the pure lands of the buddhas of the past, present, and future and the twofold mandala of the womb and diamond realms. Today, there is a sign outside Jison’in that features a close reproduction of this image. This image has even served as the basis for an episode of the NHK show, “Buratamori,” aired on 16 September 2017. The notion that Mt. Kōya itself constitutes a mandala is also implied by the present-day term for Kūkai’s Kongōbuji Temple complex: “Monastic park on a mandala altar” (danjō garan 坛上伽藍). It is also often invoked when describing the geography of Mt. Kōya. As mentioned above, the toponym Mt. Kōya refers to high-altitude watershed, or basin, surrounded by eight mountain peaks: Imakimine 今来峰, Hōshumine 宝珠峰, Hachibuseyama 赤伏山, Bentendake 弁天岳, Koyasan 姑射山, Tenjikusan 転軸山, Ōyūsan 楊柳山, and Manisan 摩尼山. These eight peaks are said to correspond to the eight petals of the lotus flower located in the central court of the womb-realm mandala (Matsunaga 2014, 3).
to the surrounding natural environment, Kūkai’s temple complex does not represent a radical break from mountain temples founded by his earlier generations of mountain ascetics. Like Shōdō’s shrine-temple on Mt. Fudaraku and Saichō’s temple complex on Mt. Hiei, Kūkai intended his mountain temple to pacify the kami of the mountain and thereby provide practical, this-worldly benefits. Moreover, like his predecessors, he also emphasized the intention to attain personal enlightenment as the basis for the monastic’s power to pacify the deluded, vengeful kami on the mountain. Given these shared characteristics, Kūkai’s mandalaization of Mt. Kōya is best understood as a further articulation of, or variation on, the understanding first formulated by mountain-temple-founding monks of the Nara period. Although Kūkai did not invent this framework for understanding Buddhist practice, he did contribute to its development in one particular area: the establishment of mutual dependence with the imperial court. Yet, even in this regard, Kūkai was not entirely original; for, as we observed above, articulations of this view can be found in Kōnin’s 780 edict and Segyō’s 785 petition.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this article has contributed to our understanding of the socio-cultural significance of Kūkai’s understanding of the mountain landscape as a mandala. In the forgoing, I have located Kūkai’s mandalic understanding of the mountains in its practical context—namely, his efforts to found Mt. Kōya—and have tried to situate that practice in a genealogy of mountain-temple-founding monks. Kūkai’s mandalic understanding of the mountains should, I have argued, be understood as a further articulation of a background understanding shared

31. Like Saichō’s temple complex on Mt. Hiei, Kūkai’s temple complex on Mt. Kōya was to develop into a temple-shrine complex. Today, on Mt. Kōya there stands a tutelary shrine called Miyashiro 御社 that enshrines Niutsuhime 丹生都比売, a kami associated with worship of Mt. Kōya as a watershed (mikumari 水分) and her son Kōya Myōjin 高野明神, an ancestral deity of hunters on Mt. Kōya who, in legends about the founding of Mt. Kōya, is said to have directed his two dogs to lead Kūkai to the site of Mt. Kōya. It is claimed that this shrine was founded in 819 by Kūkai. On the origins and identity of these kami as well as the founding legend, see Gorai (1976, 28–35). The claim that Kūkai founded a shrine in 819 is based on an exposition attributed to Kūkai in the Kongōbuji zōbun and entitled “Exposition Text for the First Invocation for Protection of the Construction of Kongōbuji” (konryū Kongōbuji saisho kanjō chinju keibyaku mon 建立金剛峰寺最初勧請鎮守啓白文) (KDDZ 2: 15–16). The text is dated 819.5.3. While Sawa Ryūken (1976, 53) treats this text as authentic, the corrupted grammar in places suggests that it was composed by someone who lacked the mastery of Chinese prose for which Kūkai was well known and that is evident in the texts translated above. Other scholars such as Wada Teruo (1976, 99) share my skepticism. Although this text does not appear to have been composed by Kūkai, there is evidence to suggest that it was composed not long after his death. In 859, the Nihon sandai jitsuroku (KT 4: 17) records that Niutsuhime was awarded a kami rank, an honor the court reserved for those kami whose shrines were associated with a temple.
by mountain ascetics of earlier generations, going as far back as Shōmu’s reign in the early Nara period. If we follow Kūkai’s own definition of the esoteric teachings and consider mandala as one of its key distinguishing features, then my argument suggests that Kūkai’s brand of esoteric Buddhism does not represent a radical break with the form of temple Buddhism that began to take shape already in the Nara period and was to find its earliest clear expression in Saichō. This suggestion, of course, has far-reaching implications for how we understand the orthodoxy that was to emerge in the generations after Saichō and Kūkai, particularly as the Tendai school rose to dominance in the mid-to-late ninth century. Since Kuroda Toshio’s groundbreaking work almost half a century ago, the medieval Buddhist establishment has been understood as a “system of exoteric and esoteric schools” (kenmitsu taisei 頭密体制) in which esotericism served as the linchpin (Kuroda 1996). The concept of temple Buddhism that I have used in this article suggests a new, potentially productive line of interpretation, one that describes the medieval orthodoxy of Japanese Buddhism not in terms of sectarian doxographies but rather sociological categories that help us to distinguish transformations in the institution of the Buddhist temple and its relation to the imperial court.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


Primary Sources

Hannya shingyō hiken 般若心経秘鍵. 1 fasc. Kūkai. tkz 3.
Huayan jing 華嚴経 (Flower Garland Sūtra) 80 fascs. Trans. Śikṣānanda (ca. 695). t 279, 10.
Kan’ensho 勧縁疏. 1 fasc. Kūkai. tkz 7.
Kojiki 古事記. In HELDT 2014.
Kongōbuji zōbun 金剛峰寺雑文. 1 fasc. kddz 2.
Nihon ryōiki 日本霊異記. snkt 30.
Nihon sandai jitsuroku 日本三代実録. KT 4.
Nihon shoki 日本書紀. KT 1.
Qianshou Guanyin zaoci cidi fa yigui 千手観音造次第法儀軌. 1 fasc. Trans. Śubhakarasimha (637–735). t 1068, 20.
Ruijū kokushi 類聚国史. KT 5–6.
Ruijū sandai kyaku 類聚三代格. KT 25.
Shoku Nihongi 続日本紀. KT 2.
Shōryōshū 性霊集. 10 fascs. Kūkai. nkbt 71.
Shōryōshū benmō 性霊集便蒙. 10 fascs. Unshō 運敞 (1614–1693). sgsz 42.
Xindi guan jing 生心地観経. 8 fascs. Trans. Prajña (ca. 800). t 159, 3.

Secondary Sources

Andreeva, Anna
2019  To overcome the tyranny of time: Stars, Buddhas, and the arts of perfect

**Aston, William George**


**Bauer, Mikael**


**Bogel, Cynthia**


**Breen, John, and Mark Teeuwen**


**Buschelle, Ethan**


**Covell, Stephen G.**


**Dreyfus, Hubert**


**Fowler, Sherry**


**Gardiner, David**


**Giebel, Rolf W., trans.**

2005 *The Vairocanāsambodhi Sutra.* Berkeley: Numata Center for Translation and Research.

**GORAI Shigeru 五来 重**


**Grapard, Allan**

1978 Kukai: Stone inscription for the sramana Shodo, who crossed mountains

**Groner, Paul**

**Hakeda, Yoshito**

**Hayami Tasuku** 速水 修

**HelDT, Gustav**

**Hongō Masatsugu** 本郷真紹

**Kanno Tomikazu** 神野富一

**Kawane Yoshiyasu** 河音能平

**Kelsey, Michael**

**Kobayashi Sōjin** 小林崇仁
2009 *Nikkō kaisan, shamon Shōdō no jinbutsuzō 日光開山・沙門勝道の人物像.* *Rengeji Bukkyō kenkyūjo kiyō 2:* 43–103.

**Kuroda, Toshio**

**Läänemets, Märk**

**Matsunaga Yūkei** 松長有慶

**Mifune Takayuki** 三舟隆之
Miller, Alan

Miyake Hitoshi

Mori Mizue

Nakatani Masamitsu 中谷征充

Oda Tokunō 織田得能

Okada Shōji 岡田莊司
2019 Daijōsai to kodai no saishi 大嘗祭と古代の祭祀. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.

Ooms, Herman

Park, Yeonjoo

Piggott, Joan

Rabinovitch, Judith N., and Timothy Roland Bradstock

Ruppert, Brian

Sawa Ryūken 佐和隆研

Suda Tetsuo 須田哲夫
TAKASAKI, Jikidō

TAKEUCHI Közen 武内孝善

TAMURA Enchō 田村圓澄

TAYLOR, Charles

TEEUWEN, Mark, and Fabio Rambelli

UEHARA Mahito 上原真人

WADA Akio 和田昭夫

YOSHIDA Kazuhiko
In this article, I discuss the significance of embryological knowledge, such as the red and white drops and the five developmental stages of the embryo, in medieval Shingon esoteric Buddhism. Specifically, I examine the writings of Kakuban, an eminent Shingon Buddhist monk in early medieval Japan, and point out that, according to Kakuban, embryological knowledge was connected with the six elements, which were fundamental to Shingon conceptions of ontology. In other words, by constructing embryological theories, medieval Shingon monks such as Kakuban attempted to make a correlation between abstract and distant cosmologies and the life and death realities of their daily lives.

**KEYWORDS:** esoteric Buddhism—five stages within the womb—red and white drops—Kakuban—*Gorinkuji myō himitsu shaku*—embryology

Kameyama Takahiko is a researcher at the Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures at Ryukoku University.
As early as the twelfth century, esoteric Buddhist priests of both the Shingon and Tendai schools began to develop distinct ideas on the growth and maturation of fetuses in the female womb. Although based on passages in canonical Buddhist texts such as the Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra, Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya, Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra, and Mohezhiguan, as well as esoteric scriptures such as the Luqujing and Yuqijing, Japanese Buddhist scholastics devised unique interpretations regarding the formation of the embryo. Scholars of medieval Japanese Buddhism such as Abe Yasurō (2017), Ogawa Toyoo (2014), and Lucia Dolce (2010) have come to refer to these embryological theories as the “red and white drops” (shakubyaku nitai 赤白二渧) or the “five stages within the womb” (tainai goi 胎内五位). Due to their sexual connotation, these theories have been expunged from modern Japanese Buddhism and are often discredited as “heretical lineages” (jaryū 邪流) and “heretical interpretations” (jagi 邪義) (Moriyama 1965, 74–93, 126–155; Kushida 1964, 329–408; Manabe 1999, 25–40). However, the discourse on the prenatal development of human life, which evolved from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, exerted a considerable influence over the various components of Japanese esoteric Buddhism, ranging from ritual practice to scriptural hermeneutics.

As the title suggests, this article concerns embryological theories cultivated within Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Specifically, I focus on the writings of Kakuban 觉鑁 (1095–1144), who is traditionally held as a reformer of the Shingon school. Furthermore, I consider the theoretical significance of his musings on the development of embryology in medieval Japan.

Scholars active in the early to mid-twentieth century, such as Mizuhara Gyōei (1923), Moriyama Shōshin (1965), and Kushida Ryōkō (1964) discussed medieval embryological theories as the product of heretical teachings. More recent scholars such as Ogawa Toyoo (2014), Lucia Dolce (2010), and James Sanford (1997) have offered new insights into the relation between these embryological theories and the ontological significance of esoteric praxis, such as yoga (yuga 瑜伽) and mandala, as well as for maintaining belief in the principle that one’s own body is originally that of a buddha (jishin honbutsu no dōri 自身本仏之道理). This article builds on these recent studies by exploring key passages from Kakuban’s Gorinkuji, which have not been addressed in the previous

* This article is a translation and adaptation of the author’s original Japanese publication "Rokudai to shakubyaku nitai: Shingon mikkyō shisō ni okeru taiseigakuteki kyōsetsu no igi" 六大と赤白二渧—真言密教思想における胎生学的教説の意義, Shinshū bunka 26 (2017): 129–150.
scholarship, and discusses how this work represents early manifestations of Japanese Buddhist embryology. By doing so, I demonstrate that embryological theories regarding the red and white drops and of the five developmental stages of the embryo are intimately connected to the Shingon esoteric Buddhist ideal of obtaining buddhahood in this very body (sokushin jōbutsu 即身成仏) and the doctrine of dependent origination of the six elements (rokudai engi 六大縁起).

According to Nakamura Hajime, the Buddhist ideal of dependent origination proposes that it is possible to terminate our current “deluded existence as sentient beings” by “closely examining its constituent causes,” the reasons for our “deluded existence as sentient beings,” and then “eliminating these (pre)conditions that lay at its root” (Nakamura 1994, 435). Although previous studies of esoteric Buddhist embryology in Japan do not mention the doctrine of dependent origination, the correlation between theories of pregnancy and childbirth and this fundamental Buddhist doctrine can be found in many early Buddhist writings. Frances Garrett summarizes these sources as follows:

Buddhists throughout history have concerned themselves with describing how change and development occur in the various realms of human experience. Defining such metaphysical concepts and integrating them into systems of thought and practice is central to Buddhism from its earliest origins in India, and embryological narratives turned out to be a compelling means of expressing these difficult concepts. (Garrett 2008, 127)

In the embryological knowledge of classical Buddhism, man and woman combine their ovum and sperm—the so-called “red and white drops”—through sexual intercourse. A zygote, which is called the “harmony” (kararan 羌羅藍, from the Sanskrit kalala), is formed in the womb of the woman as a result of this amalgam. The zygote is then imbued with a consciousness (shiki 識) that exists in the intermediate state (chū u 中有) between rebirths (T 1579, 30.283a1–20). Once imbued with consciousness, conception occurs. Next, the harmony-zygote goes through four phases: forming an embryo (abudon 額部曇, from the Sanskrit arbuda), producing flesh and blood (heishi 閉尸, from the Sanskrit pesī), obtaining a mass (kenman 健南, from the Sanskrit ghana), and developing joints and extremities (harashakya 鉢羅奢佉, from the Sanskrit praśākhā). Having completed the five stages within the womb, a fetus is formed. Finally, the birth of the fetus is referred to as the stage of leaving the womb (taigaii 胎外位) (T 1821, 41.164a8–14). According to Garrett, such embryological knowledge is not merely medical in nature but also functions as an indispensable means through which complex metaphysical concepts such as dependent origination—the “changes and developments” that occur in all sorts of forms “in the various realms of human experience”—can be “[clearly] defined” and, subsequently, “integrated into systems of thought and practice” (Garrett 2008, 127).
Garrett does not discuss embryological theories in Japanese esoteric Buddhism in her study. However, in the embryology of the Shingon school, embryological narratives are likewise connected to the doctrine of dependent origination. Specifically, theories on the development of the embryo are situated within the doctrinal framework of the dependent origination of the six elements, a concept found in the writings of Shingon founder Kūkai 空海 (774–835). In the Gorinkuji, Kakuban offers examples of just how such connections were made. In this work, the three ingredients that come together to form the human body—the masculine white drop (sperm) of the father, the feminine red drop (ovum) of the mother, and the consciousness that exists in the intermediate state of rebirth—correspond to one of three groups in which the six elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness) constituting the cosmos are divided. Furthermore, when one looks at other texts such as the Daikō, it becomes apparent that Kakuban was not alone in positing such connections between the six elements and embryological theories; similar ideas were widely shared by Shingon monks from the twelfth century onward.

Kakuban’s statements concerning conception and childbirth are recorded in two works, the Gorinkuji and Uchigikishū. In the following pages, I closely examine passages in these two works along with the Daikō, a twelfth- or thirteenth-century collection of oral commentary on esoteric teachings, to elucidate the precise connection between embryological thought and the theory of the six elements in Shingon esoteric Buddhism. In contrast to the presumptions of early twentieth-century scholars, a discourse on sexual reproduction was not an anomaly belonging to a heretical strain of esoteric Buddhism. On the contrary, the origins can be found in the recorded thoughts of Kakuban, a seminal figure in the Shingon school, and his interpretations of Kūkai’s writings on esoteric Buddhist doctrine.

The Five Developmental Stages of the Embryo in the Uchigikishū

The Uchigikishū is a written account of Kakuban’s denbōe 伝法会 lectures. From 1130 to 1143, Kakuban delivered approximately fifteen denbōe lectures both at Denbōin 伝法院 and Daidenbōin 大伝法院 on Mt. Kōya 高野, as well as at Bufukuji 豊福寺 on Mt. Negoro 根来. As one of Kakuban’s senior disciples, Shōō 聖応 (d.u.) attended each of these lectures and took detailed notes regarding their content (Fujii 2008, 48–50). The collection of these notes eventually came to be referred to as the Uchigikishū.

As far as can be gleaned from Shōō’s Uchigikishū, the lectures primarily seem to have been concerned with the major writings of Kūkai, such as the Ben kenmitsu nikyō ron, Shōji jissōgi, Sokushin jōbut sugi, and Jūjūshinron, as well as other texts such as the Putixinlun and Shimoheyanlun (Fujii 2008, 16). The
main subject matter of the *denbōe* lecture held on Mt. Kōya in the spring of 1139 was the content of the tenth chapter of Kūkai’s *Jūjūshinron*, “The Mind of Secret Adornments” (*himitsu shōgon shin* 秘密莊嚴心). During this lecture, Kakuban posited an argument concerning embryological knowledge, mentioning details such as the harmony-zygote, the red and white drops, and the five developmental stages of the embryo (KDZ 1: 504–505).

To understand Kakuban’s discussion of embryology in the *Uchigikishū*, it is necessary to consider the historical context of this lecture. According to a biography of Kakuban by his senior disciple Kenkai 兼海 (d.u.), the *Kakuban Shōnin no koto*, Kakuban resigned from his official duties in response to continuing disturbances on Mt. Kōya. Taking up residence in the upper hall of the Mitsugon’in 密厳院, he cut off all exchanges with the outside world and concentrated on the “secret practice of becoming a buddha in one’s own body” (*sokushin jōbutsu no mitsugyō* 即身成仏之密行), which involved a vow of silence (Miura 1942, 1: 338). The date of this lecture (spring of 1139) corresponds exactly to the time when he would have just fulfilled this vow of completing three years of seclusion.¹

According to the analysis by Fujii Sami, the passage in the *Uchigikishū* invoking embryological terminology must have been recorded immediately following a series of oral transmissions (*kuketsu* 口訣) delivered on the seventh day of 1139. According to Fujii, these transmissions concerned the ritual procedure for protecting the body (goshinbō 護身法) and the bell-ringing empowerment (shinrei kaji 振鈴加持), both matters of ritual practice. In a statement attributed to Kakuban, the passage explains the process of transformation from a ritual visualization technique called “seed-symbol-sage” (*shusanzon* 種三尊)—whereby a “seed” (*shuji* 種子) is transformed into a “symbolic form” (*sanmaya gyō* 三昧耶形) and then into an anthropomorphic “full-body form” (*son gyō* 尊形) of a deity—to the five developmental stages of the embryo and its subsequent birth as a fully-formed human (Fujii 2008, 16, 26).

Ogawa Toyoo, however, characterizes the immediate context of the *Uchigikishū* passage as a lecture concerning the notion of generating the body through five aspects (*gosō jōjin* 五相成身) (Ogawa 2014, 448). It is indeed the case that the progression of seed-symbol-sage constitutes the principal object of visualization in a variety of esoteric meditation methods, including this

¹. According to Kenkai’s biography, it was sometime during Kakuban’s four-year period of silence that a rumor began to spread that Kakuban had died and his disciples, including Kenkai, were keeping this fact hidden. It was at that time that Kakuban reappeared at the Daidenbōin and began organizing his lecture on the doctrinal study of esoteric Buddhism (Miura 1942, 1: 338–339). Kushida speculates that Kakuban’s reappearance “probably caused intense excitement and astonishment on Mt. Kōya. For people who had believed Kakuban to be dead, it was a shocking reality, like a lightning bolt from the sky” (Kushida 1975, 359).
visualization (Mikkyō Jiten Hensankai 1983, 1083). If we also consider the fact that there are scattered references to the visualization of generating the body through five aspects proceeding and following the passage in the Uchigikishū (kdz 1: 502–503, 505), it is all too tempting to agree with Ogawa’s observation. However, no immediate references to this visualization are found in the quoted passage itself, aside from the mention of the seed-symbol-sage progression. And there is the possibility that even this reference did not intend to explain the visualization but is simply a gloss on Kūkai’s use of the word “seed” in the tenth chapter of his Jūjūshinron (t 2425, 77360a6–7).2

The passage in the Uchigikishū alluding to embryology does in fact mention the seed, which is the first of the three seed-symbol-sage stages. Through sexual intercourse, the male and female attain “union” (wagō 和合) and, accordingly, so do their respective white and red drops. Eventually, this union results in the formation of the harmony-zygote in the uterus, which is “round-shaped like a dewdrop.” The colors red and white symbolize anger and compassion respectively, and hence the union of the two drops presupposes that “intrinsically pure buddha-nature” is contained within “the unenlightened person as well as in their physical form.” In other words, “within our human bodies fettered” by afflictions, there resides “the seed of the Great Compassionate Tathāgata Vairocana.” According to Kakuban, this seed and the harmony-zygote are the same thing, which is signified by the Siddham syllable vaṃ (kdz 1: 504–505).

This seed-cum-zygote in which the red and white drops have been united then develops through the subsequent four stages of the five developmental stages of the embryo: the embryo, flesh and blood, mass, and joints and extremities. During this process, ever more complex forms gradually transform out of the initially round shape, eventually becoming endowed with four limbs and all essential parts of a physical body. Kakuban likens this result to the symbolic form and bodily form that comes after the seed in the progression of the seed-symbol-sage visualization. Furthermore, he proposes that the Great Compassionate Tathāgata Vairocana is signified by the five-tiered stupa (gorin sotoba 五輪卒塔婆). This symbolic form of the five-tiered stupa becomes more elaborate, eventually resulting in the full-body form of Vairocana Tathāgata, which is the third and final stage of the seed-symbol-sage progression. This stage, the text explains, corresponds to the so-called stage of emerging from the womb when birth occurs after all five developmental stages within the womb have been completed. Therefore, one can clearly see from this passage in the Uchigikishū that, according to Kakuban, the successive transformations of the seed-symbol-sage

2. Even in this passage, the interpretation of the word “seed” has been derived based on the broader context of the text (kdz 1: 494–497).
progression correspond directly to the process of the conception and maturation of the human body that takes place in the womb.³

Embryological Theory in the Gorinkuji

A distinct embryological theory can also be found in Kakuban’s Gorinkuji. Although only briefly mentioned in this work, Kakuban’s concept of the embryo and how it is formed is integral to the broader doctrinal issues addressed in the treatise. Specifically, Kakuban considered the formation of the embryo to be part of a broader discourse in the Shingon school on the possibility of attaining buddhahood within one’s current body.

The date of composition for the Gorinkuji in relation to the Uchigikishū is a matter of debate among twentieth-century scholars. Nasu Seiryū has argued that based on the colophon it was written sometime between the third month of the first year of Eiji 永治 (1141) and the twelfth month of the second year of Kōji 康治 (1144) (Nasu 1970, 4). Moreover, if we follow Kushida Ryōkō’s suggestion that Kakuban devoted himself to the visual contemplation of the so-called “mandala of the five viscera” (gozō mandara 五蔵曼荼羅) during his final years, then it is probable that the Gorinkuji—which expounds on this mandala in detail—was written shortly before his death in 1144.⁴ In other words, this work was probably composed four or five years after the denbōe lectures recorded in the Uchigikishū. Therefore, as previous studies have demonstrated, the Gorinkuji is not only the primary work outlining Kakuban’s thought but it also represents his final efforts as an ascetic monk.

The main topic addressed in the Gorinkuji is apparent in the full title of the work: A Secret Interpretation of the Five Cakras and the Nine-Syllable Incantation. The aim of the Gorinkuji is to provide a secret interpretation of the five elemental cakras (gorin 五輪)—represented by the syllables a, va, ra, ha, and kha—and of the incantation in nine syllables (kujimyō 九字明)—ōṃ a mṛ ta te se ha ra hūṃ. Thus, Kakuban wrote the text primarily to clarify the so-called “secret interpretation” of these two mantras. The main discussion of this “secret interpretation” is found in the second chapter, “Correctly Entering the Gateway

³. Concerning the historical significance of this embryological teaching in the Uchigikishū, Ogawa has proposed that along with a passage from the Ono ruihishō, which is attributed to Kanjin 寛信 (1084–1153), Kakuban’s lecture notes are the earliest instance in which the theory of the five developmental stages of the embryo was committed to writing in Japan (Ogawa 2014, 301–305, 477–481).

⁴. The Kanazawa Bunko repository possesses a drawing of a mandala thought to express the “mandala of the five viscera.” Kushida suggests that Kakuban used this drawing as a “secret object of worship” (hizō honzon 秘蔵本尊) while on his deathbed (Kushida 1979, 842–844). For more details on the concept of the mandala of the five viscera as discussed in the Gorinkuji, see Kameyama (2011; 2012).
of the Secret Mantra” (shōnyū himitsu shingon mon 正入秘密真言門), which also is where Kakuban posits a theory of embryology. As Nasu points out in his study of the text, Kakuban’s main objective for writing this chapter elucidating the secret interpretation was to propose a practice for the visualization of the five cakras and nine syllables as mandala. The significance of this portion of the text is evident by the fact that it takes up the greater half of the main body of the text (NASU 1970, 5).

This visualization of the mandala of the five cakras is often referred to by scholars as “the mandala of the five viscera” (KURIYAMA 1966; TANAKA 1988; YORITOMI 1997). That mandala depicts the correspondences between different sets of five elements in the Buddhist teachings, such as the five viscera (gozō 五臓), five elemental cakras, and the five buddhas (gobutsu 仏仏). The point of this, as Yoritomi Motohiro puts it, is that the mandala “schematizes the idea that there is a similarity between the macrocosm symbolized by the buddhas and the microcosmic body composed of the five viscera and the six organs” (gozō roppu 五臓六腑) (YORITOMI 1997, 83). Kakuban’s treatment of this mandala of the five viscera includes a rather idiosyncratic embryological theory. In other words, it appears that Kakuban’s embryological theory was a part of his visualization practice utilizing a mandala of the five elemental cakras.

According to NASU (1970, 2), Kakuban wrote the second chapter of the Gorinkuji and its discussion of the mandala of the five viscera as commentary on a ritual text attributed to Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735) called the Podiyu yigui. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo has made similar arguments concerning the close connections between the Podiyu yigui and the Gorinkuji. According to Yoshioka, other than a few minor modifications, the “visualization of the five viscera” (gozōkan 五臓観) in the Gorinkuji is based on the Podiyu yigui. Based on the correlation between the two works, Yoshioka stresses that the practice for visualizing the viscera includes a part of his visualization practice.

5. One of the main topics of the Gorinkuji, and arguably Kakuban’s reason for composing it, is the relationship between the two buddhas Amitābha and Mahāvairocana. From the eleventh century onward, there was an extensive debate in both Shingon and Tendai esoteric schools regarding the nature of these two buddhas (KUSHIDA 1964, 181–211; GORAI 1975). Kakuban’s view in the Gorinkuji, which later reflected the mainstream Shingon position, is that according to the esoteric teachings Mahāvairocana is the teacher (kyōshu 教主) in Amitābha’s Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, and, therefore, all tathāgatas are Mahāvairocana. He further asserts that the two buddhas “Mahāvairocana and Amitābha are different names for the same essence” and their respective pure lands, Ultimate Bliss and Secret Adornment, “are different names for the same place” (kdz 2: 1122). This understanding of Amitābha and his pure land differs from that of renowned Pure Land thinkers such as Genshin 源信 (942–1017), who predated Kakuban, Hōnen 法然 (1132–1212), and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263). Aside from his embryological theory, Kakuban’s idiosyncratic views on Amitābha and his pure land also had a considerable impact on later generations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>five viscera (gozō 五臓)</th>
<th>liver 肝</th>
<th>lungs 肺</th>
<th>heart 心</th>
<th>kidneys 臍</th>
<th>spleen 脾</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>five cakras (gorin 五輪)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>va</td>
<td>ra</td>
<td>ha</td>
<td>kha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five elements (godai 五大)</td>
<td>earth 地</td>
<td>water 水</td>
<td>fire 火</td>
<td>wind 風</td>
<td>space 空</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five directions (gohō 五方)</td>
<td>east 東</td>
<td>west 西</td>
<td>south 南</td>
<td>north 北</td>
<td>center 中央</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five viscera</td>
<td>liver</td>
<td>lungs</td>
<td>heart</td>
<td>kidneys</td>
<td>spleen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five phases (gogyō 五行)</td>
<td>wood 木</td>
<td>metal 金</td>
<td>fire 火</td>
<td>water 水</td>
<td>earth 土</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five colors (goshiki 五色)</td>
<td>blue 青</td>
<td>white 白</td>
<td>red 赤</td>
<td>black 黒</td>
<td>yellow 黄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>original enlightenment</td>
<td>hūṃ</td>
<td>hriḥ</td>
<td>trāḥ</td>
<td>aḥ</td>
<td>vaṃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negation of delusion (nōha 能破)</td>
<td>hriḥ</td>
<td>trāḥ</td>
<td>aḥ</td>
<td>vaṃ</td>
<td>hūṃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five buddhas (gobutsu 五仏)</td>
<td>Akṣobhya</td>
<td>Amitābha</td>
<td>Ratnasambhava</td>
<td>Amoghasiddhi</td>
<td>Mahāvairocana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>five wisdoms (gochi 五智)</td>
<td>perfect mirror-like wisdom (daien kyōchi 大円鏡智)</td>
<td>wisdom of wondrous contemplation (myōkan zacchi 妙觀察智)</td>
<td>wisdom of essential identity (byōdo shōchi 平等性智)</td>
<td>unrestricted wisdom of activity (jōsho sachi 成所作智)</td>
<td>wisdom as the essence of the dharma realm (hokkaitai shōchi 法界体性智)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
five viscera was incorporated into the esoteric teachings in China, and, therefore, it was not original to the writings of Kakuban (YOSHIOKA 1989, 136–137). If Yoshioka is correct, then it is possible that the embryological theory of the Gorinkuji comes from this Chinese ritual text and is not specific to the Japanese Shingon school. However, a close examination of the relevant passages in the two texts reveals that there are substantial differences. The embryological theory that is elucidated in Gorinkuji is certainly one component of the practice of visualizing the five viscera, but reference to the formation of the embryo appears to be Kakuban’s addition to ritual text. Both texts prescribe how to contemplate the mandala and its deities arising from the primordial seed syllable represented by the Siddham script \( a \). Kakuban, however, adds the following statement:

When applied to the impurity of the seeds, the earth element as cognition is aware of attachment and can arouse the desire to exist. The elements of wind and space are the body that penetrates (nōbon 能犯), whereas the elements of fire and earth are the gates that are penetrated (shobon 所犯). The elements of water and space are the seeds of the consciousness that descend to take up residence in the uterus, which eventually becomes the five viscera.

\( \text{(KDZ 2: 1139; VAN DER VEERE 2000, 165)} \)

The Podiyu yigui equates the earth element with cognition (shikion 識陰), the fifth classification of the five aggregates (goon 五陰). Kakuban builds on this statement by asserting that the presence of this element can “arouse the desire to exist,” which in turn leads to the formation of an embryo in the uterus. The corresponding passage in the Podiyu yigui lacks such references to seeds in the uterus and the formation of the five viscera (τ 905, 18.909c). Thus, we can conclude that the embryological theory in the Gorinkuji was in fact Kakuban’s innovation.

In the passage quoted above from the Gorinkuji, Kakuban explicates the secret interpretation of the Siddham syllable \( a \) that opens the mantra of the five viscera detailed in the Podiyu yigui as well as the provenance of the text itself are matters of debate. In his study of the Gorinkuji, Hendrik Van der Veere (2000, 163–165) notes that the text was clearly not a translation as it claims to be, nor was it likely to have been written by Šubhakarasiṃha. Rather, he suggests that it may have been composed by Šubhakarasimha’s disciples or compiled from various dhāraṇī texts. Jinhua Chen (2009, 156–179) has argued that the version of the Podiyu yigui attributed to Šubhakarasiṃha in the Taishō (τ 907) was in fact a Japanese apocrypha composed by the Tendai scholastic monk Annen 安然 (b. 841) in order to provide an authoritative source for previous claims made by the founder of the Tendai school, Saichō 最澄 (766–822), to have been initiated into an esoteric lineage. Whether Annen was familiar with this exact version of the text is uncertain. Although he describes the correspondence between the five sounds, five organs, and five phases and refers to the esoteric theory of the body and sexual discourse in his writings, he does not make a correlation between the five wheels, five buddhas, five organs, and so forth as found in the Podiyu yigui.
elemental cakras (gorin shingon 五輪真言). In doing so, he inserts terminology that hints at the process of conception and the formation of an embryo. It should be noted that Kakuban’s objective is to expound on the passage in the Podiyu yigui regarding the practice of visualizing the mandala of the five viscera. Thus, based on this passage alone, it is difficult to specify an embryological theory. However, when considered in conjunction with the passage in the Uchigikishū, a clearer depiction of such a theory begins to come into view.

The Six Elements and Kakuban’s Embryological Theory

The language of the Gorinkuji differs from that of the Uchigikishū. Terms such as the “red and white drops,” the harmony-zygote, or even the notion of the five developmental stages of the embryo do not appear in the Gorinkuji. At first glance, it is not even clear whether or not the passage in question actually concerns the conception and growth of a fetus at all. However, the Shūyōki, a nineteenth-century commentary on the text by the Shingon monk Ryūyu 隆瑜 (1773–1850) provides the following supplementary gloss on the passage in question:

Kakuban’s intent in the above passage is clear. Due to the causes and conditions of intercourse (kōe 交会) between parents, the impure seeds descend into the uterus and become the five viscera. (Fukuda 2006, 140)

In other words, Ryūyu interprets the passage in the Gorinkuji as a statement concerning the process of impregnation, which is based on sexual intercourse between man and woman. Furthermore, he suggests that the correspondence between the six elements is equivalent to the process of conception and development of a fetus.

Nasu also proposes that the passage in the Gorinkuji references the earliest stages of gestation in the womb (takutai 託胎) and attempts to explain the development of a human body as the synthesis of form (shiki 色) and mind (shin 心). In his commentary on this passage, Nasu interprets the term “desire to exist” (ai u 愛有) to denote the process of transmigration in which consciousness (shiki), having entered into an intermediate existence (chū u) after the death of the body, is reborn through sexual intercourse between parents and the subsequent union of the white drop (sperm) and a red drop (ovum). Furthermore, “the body that penetrates” (nōbon no tai 能犯之体) in Kakuban’s comment signifies the father’s semen and the “gates that are penetrated” (shobon no mon 所犯之門) denotes the ova of the mother. Similarly, we can infer that “the elements of water and space are the seeds of consciousness” (suikūshiki shuji 水空識種子) refers to the intermediate existence of consciousness. The copulation of male and female

7. It should be noted that Ryūyu attributes this interpretation to an unknown monk he refers to as “Master Jaku” (Jaku shi 寂師).
give rise to the desire for rebirth (Nasu 1970, 122–123).8 Then, the semen, ovum, and consciousness fuse into a single body, which descends into the uterus and becomes the harmony-zygote.

The passage from the Gorinkuji also refers to the six elements (rokudai 六大) of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness in relation to “the body that penetrates” and the “gates that are penetrated.” The most basic explanation of the six elements can be found in the Sokushin jōbutsugi. In this seminal work traditionally attributed to Kūkai, the six elements are considered to be the “foundation” (tai 体) for the doctrine of attaining buddhahood within this very body. In other words, all phenomena in this universe consists of the six elements without exception. Therefore, this cosmological theory posits that sentient beings are inherently equal to buddhas and, thus, able to rapidly attain buddhahood without further rebirth.

According to Shingon cosmology, which was rooted in this passage in the Sokushin jōbutsugi, the six elements are the “producers” (nōshō 能生) that generate the threefold world (sanju seken 三種世間) inhabited by all buddhas and sentient beings. Moreover, the cosmology of the six elements are identified with the ontology of the fourfold dharma body of the Buddha (shishu hosshin 四種法身) and the symbolism of the fourfold mandala (shishu mandara 四種曼荼羅). Because they are essentially the same as all phenomena in the dharma realm, the Sokushin jōbutsugi refers to the six elements as the “essence of the dharma realm” (hokkai taishō 法界体性; TKZ 3: 19–23).

In the Gorinkuji, Kakuban divides the six elements into three groups: the white drops of the “body that penetrates,” the red drops of the “gates that are penetrated,” and the “seed.” Each of these is associated with two elements: the white drops with wind and space, the red drops with fire and earth, and the seed as water and consciousness. Once these groups are united to form the harmony-zygote, the six elements likewise become a singularity. Subsequently, the zygote grows in the mother’s womb, developing the five viscera of liver, lungs, heart, kidneys, and spleen.

Following his discussion of these three groups and the formation of the zygote, Kakuban further elaborates on the development of the five viscera. He writes:

The real characteristic of the form and mind of all sentient beings is that they are the body of Vairocana that cognizes all things as equal, which is without

8. Nasu’s interpretation differs slightly from my own. He does not view the “body of that penetrates” to be the father or the male but interprets it as the consciousness in the intermediate state that is attempting to enter the mother’s uterus as an “arrow into the womb” (taichūsen 胎中箭). I do not adopt his interpretation because I think it is inconsistent with the understanding found in the Shūyōki.
beginning. “Form” is the aggregate of form, which unfolds as the five cakras. “Mind” is the element of consciousness, which unites the four aggregates. Form and mind are none other than the six elements as the dharma body of the Buddha and the cognition of the dharma realm’s essence…. If form is inseparable from mind, then the five elements are none other than the five kinds of cognition. If mind is inseparable from form, then the five kinds of cognition are none other than the five cakras…. Because form and mind are nondual, the five elements are none other than the five viscera and the five viscera are none other than the five kinds of cognition. (KDZ 2: 1134)

In other words, Kakuban establishes the five viscera as intermediate between physical and mental phenomena thus proclaiming the nonduality of body and mind, which signifies the highest ideals of Shingon esoteric Buddhism. Moreover, in doing so, he identifies the “six elements as the dharma body” with the “body of Vairocana that cognizes all things as equal” (byōdō chishin 平等智身), a phrase describing the activity of Vairocana in the Commentary on Mahāvairocana Sūtra (t 1976, 39.585b).

The correlation between the six elements and embryology also appears in the Daikō, a commentary on the Yuqijing. The commentary briefly refers to embryology in a discussion on the seventh chapter of the Yuqijing (t 867, 18.257c–258a). According to this passage, the six elements are first and foremost the “maternal essence” (boshō 母精), which is also labeled the “affliction of anger” (shin bonnō 瞋煩悩). Furthermore, the six elements themselves can be thought of as being the “essential nature of original enlightenment” (hongakushō 本覚性), and mental phenomena, which “are originally without essence” (tai hon mu 体本无), transmigrate along with the six elements. If the six elements are dispersed, so are mental phenomena. The Daikō also divides the six elements into groups. But, in contrast to the Gorinkuji, the oral transmission only stipulates that there are two categories: earth, fire, and wind as physical phenomena and water, space, and consciousness as mental phenomena. Moreover, the prior group is equated with the red drops from the mother (ova), which constitutes the flesh and blood of

9. A manuscript of this commentary is currently preserved at the Kanazawa Bunko Library that is thought to have been the annotated copy of the Shingon monk Kenna 剱阿 (1261–1338), second abbot of Shōmyōji 名所寺 that has historically been closely connected to the library. According to Kenna’s own annotations concerning the provenance of the work, the Daikō was initially a secret oral transmission from the monk Kōban 弘鑁 (d.u.) of Chisenbō 智泉房, who was a disciple of Keien 慶円 (1140–1223, also known as Hōkyō Shōnin 宝篋上人) from Mt. Miwa 三輪. Thus, it is certain that the work’s compilation dates to the Kamakura period (1185–1333) or later. Therefore, this theory of embryology was transmitted from Keien to his disciple Kōban and eventually to Kenna, whose record has survived to the present (KBSZ 6: 289).
the newly formed human. The white drops from the father (sperm) are paired with the latter group, which are the bones and marrow of the body (kbsz 6: 124).

We may thus conclude that an oral transmission of theories concerning the six elements, the red and white drops, and the correspondence between these two conceptual frameworks were circulating among Shingon monks during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Kakuban’s Gorinkuji similarly describes the correspondence between these two conceptual frameworks. Therefore, we can deduce two hypotheses regarding embryology in the medieval Shingon school: either the oral transmission in the Daikō was directly inspired by the passages in the Gorinkuji, or both texts reflect a broader discourse on the formation of the embryo but these theories are the only surviving records. Either way, based on the extant sources, we can conclude that there was a curiosity among Shingon monks during this period regarding the origin of life and how to account for this origin through orthodox doctrines.

**Conclusion**

In the preceding three sections I have investigated the various embryological theories that appear in the Uchigikishū, Gorinkuji, and Daikō. During a denbōe lecture on the tenth chapter of Kūkai’s Jūjūshinron recorded in the Uchigikishū, Kakuban proposes that the five developmental stages of the embryo, from the harmony-zygote to the formation of the joints and extremities, correspond to the sequence of transformations progressing from a seed—represented by the Siddham bija syllable—into a symbol and finally a fully anthropomorphic entity. In other words, the seed is equivalent to the harmony-zygote, the joints and extremities are the symbols, and birth produces the bodily form.

In the Gorinkuji, Kakuban divides the six elements into three groups: wind and space, fire and earth, water and consciousness. These groups correspond to the white drop (sperm) of the father, the red drop (ovum) of the mother, and consciousness that temporarily exists in an intermediary state between rebirths. During the copulation of mother and father, these three groups merge to form the harmony-zygote, a process during which the six elements simultaneously form a single unit. From this zygote, a complete human body endowed with the five viscera subsequently takes shape. For this reason, Kakuban understands the five viscera as the “body of harmonious wisdom of Vairocana,” in which body and mind are non-dual, and the dharma body of the Buddha as the six elements (rokudai hosshin 六大法身).

In contrast to the Gorinkuji, the Daikō divides the six elements into two groups: earth, fire, wind; water, space, consciousness. The former group corresponds to the red drop of the mother and contains what are called physical phenomena, while the latter corresponds to the white drop of the father and
contains mental phenomena. Moreover, the elements of the first group form the skin, flesh, and circulatory system of the human body, while the latter group forms the skeleton.

These sources demonstrate that there existed an orally transmitted tradition of teachings within the Shingon lineages pertaining to the conception and birth of humans. These theories intimately connected the process of conception and birth to the doctrine of dependent origination as articulated in the theory of the six elements. To borrow Garrett’s wording regarding this doctrine as the foundation of Buddhist embryology, the passages in the Gorinkuji and Daikō aim to “define clearly” an abstract philosophical concept—namely, Kūkai’s interpretation of dependent origination in terms of the six elements—and to “integrate” that concept “into the system of theory and practice” of Shingon esoteric Buddhism. The brief reference to the six elements in the Sokushin jōbutsugi is probably an allusion to an advanced visualization practice as well as an idiosyncratic understanding of dependent origination. Therefore, it is difficult to envision this idea describing “how change and development” might “occur in the various realms of human experience,” let alone the actual conception and birth of a human being (Garrett 2008, 127).

Nonetheless, an accurate understanding of how the human body transforms, develops, and is born was strongly tied to devotion to the principle that one’s own body is originally that of a buddha. In other words, it is intimately connected to the most central doctrine advocated by Shingon esoteric Buddhism, namely that “one becomes a buddha in this very body.” Subsequent generations of Shingon monks, such as Kakuban, attempted to further explore the theoretical possibilities of this concept, interjecting their own musings on the formation of the embryo into this already abstract doctrine of dependent origination of the six elements. Thus, Kakuban’s embryological theory is a mediation between a metaphysical existence and the everyday realities of corporeal existence.

[translated by Bruce Winkelman]

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


PRIMARY SOURCES

Kakuban shōnin no koto 覚鑁上人事. 1 fasc. Kenkai 謹海 (d.u.). In Miura 1942.
Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra. 120 fascs. Trans. Bodhiruci (d. 727). T 310, 11.
Podyu yigui (Sanzhong xidi podiyu zhan yezhang chu sanjie mimi tuoluonifa 三種悉地破地獄轉業障出三界秘密陀羅尼法). 1 fasc. Attributed to Śubhakarasimha (637–735). T 905, 18.
Shimoheyanlun 釈摩訶衍論. Attributed to Nāgārjuna (ca. third century). T 1668, 32.
Shōji jissōgi 声字實相義. 1 fasc. Kūkai. TKZ 3.
Shūyōki (Gorinkuji myō himitsu shaku shūyōki 五輪九字秘密拾要記). 5 fascs.
Ryūyu 降瑜 (1773–1850). In Fukuda 2006.
Sokushin jōbutsuigi 身成仏義. 1 fasc. Kūkai. TKZ 3.
Uchigikishū (Kakuban shōnin denbōe dangi uchigikishū 覚鑁聖人伝法会談義打聞集). Kakuban, recorded by Shōō 聖応 (d.u.). KDJ 1.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎

2017 Gogyō saimon to gozō mandara: Chūsei Nihon no shūkyōteki shintairon no keifu 五形祭文と五蔵曼荼羅—中世日本の宗教的身體論の系譜. In Nihon

Chen, Jinhua

Dolce, Lucia

Fujii Sami 藤井佐美

Fukuda Ryōsei 福田亮成

Garrett, Frances

Gorai Shigeru 五来 重

Kameyama Takahiko 亀山隆彦

Kuriyama Shūjun 栗山秀続

Kushida Ryōkō 櫛田良洪
Manabe Shunsō 真鍋俊照

Mikkyō Jiten Hensankai 密教辞典編纂会, eds.

Miura Akio 三浦章夫

Mizuhara Gyōei 水原廼栄

Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖真
1965 Tachikawa jakyō to sono shakaiteki haikei no kenkyū 立川邪教とその社会的背景の研究. Tokyo: Rokuyaon.

Nakamura Hajime 中村 元

Nasu Seiryū 那須政隆

Ogawa Toyoo 小川豊生

Sanford, James H.

Tanaka Fumio 田中文雄

Van der Veere, Hendrik

Yoritomi Motohiro 頼富本宏
1997 Mikkyō no juyōshita gozōsetsu: Tainai nōnyū bon to Kabukan Gorinkuji myō himitsu shaku o chūshin toshite 密教の受容した五臓説—胎内納入品と覚鏡 『五輪九字密秘釈』を中心として—. Tōhō shūkyō 90: 66–89.

Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊
Gaétan RAPPO

“Deviant Teachings”
The Tachikawa Lineage as a Moving Concept in Japanese Buddhism

In modern studies of esoteric Buddhism in medieval Japan, the so-called Tachikawa lineage has played a central role in defining heretical or heterodox practice. Founded in the early twelfth century, this minor and local lineage of the Shingon school underwent a series of transformations, eventually becoming a model for all heresies in Japan. In medieval Japan, the term “Tachikawa” was irredeemably associated with explicit sexual practices, especially in the writings of the Mt. Kōya monk Yūkai and his successors. These polemical critiques of Tachikawa as a deviant lineage and teaching developed into a tradition of textual study that sought to establish an orthodoxy in the Shingon school. This critique was later applied beyond the Shingon sectarian context to instances of heresy in the Jōdo Shin school and, eventually, Christianity. This heresiological process gradually resulted in a multilayered, “moving concept” of Japanese heresy, which came to fruition during the nineteenth century with the introduction of the Western ideas of religion and heresy.

KEYWORDS: Tachikawa lineage—Shingon school—sexual rites—heresy—religious deviance

Gaétan RAPPO is Hakubi Associate Professor at the Institute for Research in Humanities (Jinbunken), Kyoto University.
The Tachikawa lineage (Tachikawa ryū 流) has long been a symbol of deviant practices within Shingon Buddhism. Allegedly established during the early twelfth century, this branch of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism was known for its dark rituals, where the sexual imagery associated with Tantric Buddhism was not simply working on a symbolic level but was supposedly practiced as a way to attain enlightenment.¹

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, progress has been made on the early history of this lineage—mainly through the work of Iyanaga Nobumi—which demonstrates that the “heretical” version of the Shingon tradition was almost entirely a creation of the Mt. Kōya monk Yūkai (1345–1416) (Iyanaga 2004; 2006; 2010; 2016; 2018). The Tachikawa lineage also played a role in modern debates regarding the nature of religion in Japan. In The Invention of Religion in Japan, Jason Ānanda Josephson examines arguments on religious deviance, or heresy, found in texts criticizing the Tachikawa lineage that were central to a discourse on the rejection of religious differences and widely used in anti-Christian polemics from the second half of the sixteenth century (Josephson 2012, 38–39).² However, little has been written on the Tachikawa lineage discourse in the centuries following Yūkai and his condemnation of the lineage as heretical in the Hōkyōshō and debates over the meaning of religious orthodoxy in modern Japan.

Through an analysis of previously obscure sources, this article builds on recent scholarship to reveal that the Tachikawa lineage not only contributed to the perception of a radical and foreign “other” in Japan but continued to operate as an important concept in Japanese Buddhism itself. While the number of sources dealing with Tachikawa after the fourteenth century—at least, the materials that are currently available—are fewer than what previous research had led us to believe, the theme remained influential. Documents dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that mention the lineage are scarce and seem to

¹ This article was written with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (snsf).

² It should be noted that, in the sources available today, such discourses on the Tachikawa “heresy” only concern heterosexual practices. Male-male sexuality, while fairly common in Japanese monasteries, is never mentioned. In fact, in some contexts (especially the Tendai school), it was ritualized and doctrinally sanctioned (Porath 2019).

² As Josephson writes, Christianity was in fact called jahō 邪法 (evil ritual, doctrine, or, more broadly, “heresy”), a term that is used to describe the Tachikawa lineage in medieval sources such as the Bateren tsuihō no fumi promulgated by the Tokugawa shogunate in 1614 (NST 25: 420–421). However, I have not found sources directly linking the Tachikawa lineage to Christianity.
rely almost exclusively on Yūkai’s negative depiction. However, a few members of rival Shingon lineages tried to refute his claims. Moreover, throughout the late medieval and early modern periods, Japanese monks gradually added new layers to the Tachikawa lineage construct, turning it into a malleable concept that not only encompassed false interpretations of sexual symbolism in Buddhism but also integrated an expanding network of ideas and individuals into the definition of this supposedly heterodox lineage within the Shingon school.

This amassing of layers regarding what qualifies as the Tachikawa lineage is especially apparent in catalogs of heretical texts, which was an increasingly common genre of Shingon monastic literature in the centuries following Yūkai. This style of heresiology focused not only on ideas but also on individuals and textual transmissions. In the seventeenth century, Shingon heresiology was incorporated into sectarian histories and monastic genealogies. These revisionist works added clearly dubious but highly impactful episodes to the history of the Tachikawa lineage, such as the alleged burning of Tachikawa books in the second half of the fourteenth century.

Although the Tachikawa lineage gradually became a marker of heresy in the Shingon school, this designation was not limited to sectarian writings. There is at least one allusion to the Tachikawa lineage in the Jōdo Shin school. The Isshū gyōgishō, an apocryphon attributed to Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) but probably written at least two centuries later, makes a direct reference to a member of the Tachikawa lineage when explaining the introduction of certain heresies in the Jōdo Shin school and effectively defines it as the root of heresies in Japanese Buddhism. This text was quite influential and widely diffused, and it was even reused by Shingon monks. The Isshū gyōgishō also inserts the Tachikawa lineage into a completely different context in which heresy was not only a problem of sexual intercourse but dealt with issues of respect—or lack thereof—for Japanese deities in pure land practice.

This multilayered construction culminates in pre-World War II Japan, when it acquired new significations as Christian concepts of religion and heresy were imported from the West. In the late nineteenth century, the topic of the Tachikawa lineage reappeared in monastic discourse and academic research—two fields with substantial overlap at the time—and even in literature, where it was treated as the epitome of heresy. Tachikawa was also invoked in response to contemporary issues. Scholar-monks in the Shingon school, whose works are still influential today, applied the alleged heresies of the Tachikawa lineage to a broader discussion of the role of women in Buddhism and clerical celibacy. Other intellectuals took an apologetic approach to the topic and defended the Shingon tradition against criticism by minimizing the influence of the “Tachikawa monks” in the history of their school. In doing so, they also added
new layers to the Tachikawa heresy, which led some publications to describe it as a Japanese equivalent to Christian heresies found in European history.

This heritage of the Tachikawa as a “moving concept” had a deep impact on the perception of the actual Tachikawa lineage and on the way it was—and even still is—described in Japanese scholarship as well as in most Western-language publications (for example, Sanford 1991). The “Tachikawa lineage,” therefore, is not a neutral or merely descriptive term, but rather the result of several layers of meaning accumulated over centuries. The uncritical use of the phrase thus can result in a series of misconceptions that prevent a clear understanding of its original medieval context. By exploring the evolution of the discourse on the Tachikawa lineage in Japanese history, as well as its historiography, it is not my aim to merely emphasize the need for caution when using such terminology. Rather, the heresiological texts that defined and transformed this discourse deeply impacted the development of religious thought in Japan and, more specifically, the rejection of the religious “other.”

The Tachikawa Lineage as a “Deviant Teaching”:
The Discourse on Heresy in Modern Japan

The scholarly discourse on the Tachikawa lineage as we know it today is primarily a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is during this period that Japanese scholars in the Shingon school began to analyze the history of the lineage through the Western (particularly Christian) notion of heresy, which applies the term to heterodox groups or sects adhering to a “deviant teaching.” This can be seen in the titles of three seminal texts that continue to be cited as authoritative studies on Tachikawa: Research into the Deviant Teachings of the Tachikawa Lineage (Jakyō Tachikawaryū no kenkyū, Mizuhara 1923), Research into the Deviant Teachings of Tachikawa and their Sociological Context (Tachikawa jakyō to sono shakaiteki haikei no kenkyū, Moriyama 1965), and Deviant Teachings and the Tachikawa Lineage (Jakyō, Tachikawaryū, Manabe 1999).

All of these studies use the specific word jakyō 邪教 to describe the Tachikawa lineage. This term was uncommon in medieval texts. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and why this term became parlance in modern studies of the

3. I borrow the expression “moving concept” from Christin, Barrat, and Moullier (2010) and the Begriffgeschichte (history of concepts), as proposed by figures such as Reinhard Koselleck.
4. In addition to Rappo (2017a), notable exceptions to this tendency are the works of Iyanaga (2004; 2010; 2018), Köck (2000; 2009; 2016), and Quinter (2015).
5. Stefan Köck (2016, 82) has also remarked on the use of the word jakyō in modern studies, noting that some authors, such as Kōda Yuun, refrain from using it.
lineage, but a passage in a 1936 book on heresy, *The People Deluded by Heresy (Jakyō ni mayohasareta hitobito)* may offer some hints:

While heresies (*jakyō*) were previously limited to cults to fashionable deities (*hayarigami* 流行神), a heresy later emerged as a religious institution with a supposedly menacing doctrine. This was the Tachikawa lineage, which was a part of the Shingon school. (Kōmura 1936, 290)

Here, the author uses the same word, *jakyō*, as it appears in the titles by Shingon scholars. However, the author merges two concepts of heresy when defining this term. The first sentence defines *jakyō* as isolated cults and practices, which was how it was frequently used in late nineteenth-century sources. The second uses this same term to describe a specific organization or group as heretics, which is similar to the European—or rather Christian—concept of heresy. Therefore, the author depicts Tachikawa as the first organized form of heresy in Japan.

There is very little evidence in premodern sources that Tachikawa was considered *jakyō*, either in the sense of an isolated cult or as an organized heresy. While Yūkai, the progenitor of the discourse on the Tachikawa lineage, had a notion of “heresy” or religious “deviance,” which he tended to incorporate into his polemical category of the Tachikawa lineage, he never actually used the expression *jakyō*. In fact, the word *jakyō* never appears in his *Hōkyōshō* or the earliest collection of Tachikawa writings, the *Tachikawa shōgyō mokuroku*. It can be found in extant manuscripts of the *Juhō yōjinshū*, the alleged locus classicus for references to Tachikawa, although only a couple of times (Moriyama 1965, 547–548). Moreover, when the term is used in medieval sources, it does not designate an organized “heresy” or a “heretical group.” In Buddhist texts, *jakyō* generally refers to “bad” or “wrong teaching.” Such teachings led disciples into error, diverting from the path to awakening. In Japan, Kūkai 空海 (774–835) used the word in this sense in his taxonomy of teachings, the *Jūjūshinron* (t 2425, 77.304a6–28, 317b23, 320a10), and similar usage can be found in texts throughout the early medieval period. Thus, the application of the term to a particular group or lineage was clearly a modern innovation.

The transformation of *jakyō* from the Buddhist notion of misunderstanding the Buddha’s teaching to its current usage broadly denoting heretical sects or lineages was a gradual process that took place over the course of centuries. As the dictionary of “moving concepts” (*des concepts nomades*) thoroughly demonstrates, the meaning of concepts and words are in flux and change over

---


7. For example, the Chinese exeget Kuiji 窺基 (632–682) uses the term in regards to misconceptions of the self and causation (t 1830, 43.250b24), and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) chose to use this term in his translation of the *Yogācārabhūmi* when describing someone who has been taught the wrong teaching (t 1579, 30.314a8).
time and in disparate contexts (Christin, Barrat, and Moullier 2010). The first stage of the transformation of jakyō as a moving concept occurred in the early modern period with Japan’s encounter with Christianity, when Christianity began to be referred to as jakyō. However, Christianity was not thought of as a distinct religion but rather as a perverse or evil “lineage” in the predominantly Buddhist framework of the period (Isomae 2014, 99). In the precise wording of anti-Christian polemicists, Christianity was also called jashū (a deviant sect), a term mimicking the division of Buddhist schools (Isomae 2012, 122–123).

The application of this term to Christianity also had a political objective, as Christianity did not fit into the social order of the Tokugawa shogunate and was thus deemed a dangerous and heretical sect that needed to be suppressed. Such usage of the term jakyō was not without precedent. Political control of religious movements, although rare in Japanese history, had occurred prior to the arrival of Christianity, the most notable example being the case of Hōnen (1133–1212) and his disciples. The political use of the word jakyō (read xiejiao in Chinese) was more commonplace in Ming and Qing China (1368–1912), where it described religious movements considered dangerous to the central government such as the millenarian sect of the White Lotus (Bailianjiao 白蓮教) and Christianity (Haar 1992). This notion of jakyō, while it had the nuance of heresy and tended to associate loose morals and sexual elements with groups branded as such, was essentially a political rather than doctrinal concept. While the category of jakyō existed in early modern polemics against Christianity, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the term acquired its institutional meaning. It was at this time that the term began to be used to explicitly discriminate against specific religious groups for posing heterodox views.

A factor in this evolution was the introduction of the Western notion of “religion” to Japan. Translated as shūkyō 宗教 in Japanese, the term for “religion” shares the character kyō 教 with jakyō. Originally, this character was used in Buddhist texts to describe teachings or doctrinal positions and not religious groups or institutions. The association of kyō with an organized faith or doctrine was a byproduct of a new discourse, in part, spawned by the importation of the word shūkyō into modern Japan (Josephson 2012; Isomae 2014). Heresy in Japan was also a component of this discourse on religion. In the 1888 edition of Hepburn’s Japanese-English dictionary, jakyō is defined as “False religion; evil doctrine or teaching” and is listed as a synonym of gedō 外道 (a traditional Buddhist term for non-Buddhist traditions) and itan 異端, the term that became the modern Japanese translation for the Christian notion of heresy (Hepburn 1888, 218). 8

8. The academic usage of the term has, for the most part, adhered to Hepburn’s definition. For example, in the Japanese translation of James Ketelaar’s Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan, “heretics” is translated as jakyō (Ketelaar and Okada 2006).
In politics, *jakyō* followed a similar trajectory to this linguistic shift and took on a general notion of heresy, but this transformation also had practical consequences for how the state treated religious entities. In the process of modernization, the Meiji government sought to suppress what they labeled as the “evils of deviant teachings” (*jakyō inshi* 邪教淫祠). This category designated practices with an “excessive” sexual component, such as phallic cults (*dōsojin* 道祖神), as well as local ceremonies consisting of spirit possession and divination. In other words, the term was broadly applied to any practices considered to consist of superstition or labeled as immoral and antithetical to “civilized” religion (Ishimae 2014, 38–39). By the 1930s when imperial fanaticism (or fascism) was at its peak, the category of *jakyō* was expanded to include religious organizations considered threats to the imperial ideology. Groups such as the Kōdō Ōmoto 皇道大本, a new religion established in the late nineteenth century and later classified as an independent Shinto sect, were targets of repression (Stalker 2008, 97–100, 183–187). Accused of lèse-majesté (*fukeizai* 不敬罪) in official government documents, the Ōmoto group was designated as a *jakyō* that spread among the uneducated masses (Kawamura 2010, 48).

Scholarship on Tachikawa as *jakyō* emerged against this backdrop of political and social strife over the meaning of religious orthodoxy. Perhaps the earliest references to Tachikawa and heresy were published in the Buddhist journal *Hansei zasshi* 反省雑誌, which was produced by Ryukoku University—a Jōdo Shin university—with the aim of spreading the strict practice of Buddhist values in society. In an 1896 article written by someone under the pseudonym Tōzan Itsunō 東山逸衲, the author discusses the presence of “heretical doctrines” (*jagi* 邪義, a term that later acquired a sexual connotation) and sexual rituals in the Shingon school based on Yūkai’s description of the Tachikawa lineage in the *Hōkyōshō* (Tōzan 1896). Three months later, Ōuchi Seiran 大内青巒 (1845–1919) wrote an article in the same journal under the pseudonym of Ai’ai Koji 藹々居士 (1896), lamenting that there was a “heretic” from the Tachikawa lineage in the entourage of Emperor Go Daigo 後醍醐 (1288–1339). Himself a devout imperial loyalist, Ōuchi Seiran tried to defend the emperor, arguing that it was difficult to distinguish the true teachings from “heresy.”

Although both articles highlight the alleged heresies of the Tachikawa lineage, they were also implicit critiques of the Shingon school. Thus, Shingon monks were compelled to respond. The earliest known publication by a scholar from the Shingon school on the Tachikawa problem was written in 1903 by Kojima Shōken (Masanori) 小島昌憲. Kojima published a series of articles in the journal *Rokudai shinpō* 六大新報, which was the Shingon equivalent to Ryukoku’s *Hansei zasshi*. In these articles, he greatly minimizes the importance of the Tachikawa lineage in the history of the Shingon school, thus attempting to disassociate the heretical practices of Tachikawa from the Shingon school as a
whole (Kojima 1903). Similar publications can be found in the same journal over the next decade, but the most influential Shingon scholar on the topic was Mizuhara Gyōei 水原堯栄 (1890–1965), abbot of Shinnōin 親王院 on Mt. Kōya. His aforementioned book, Research into the Deviant Teachings of the Tachikawa Lineage, concludes a series of studies on the subject based on textual materials he had personally collected (Mizuhara 1920; 1921). While his prose can be very difficult to decipher, Mizuhara established the foundation for modern studies on the Tachikawa lineage.

Despite the fact that Mizuhara calls the Tachikawa lineage a jakyō in the title of his book, he does not provide a clear definition of what exactly he means by this term. In fact, the term is seldom found in the book, which relies mostly on premodern sources and their vocabulary. However, both his preface and postface provide hints that allow us to understand why he chose this very contentious term.

Mizuhara’s interest in the Tachikawa lineage appears to have been in response to the persecution of religious practices labeled as the “evil of deviant teachings.” As he states in his preface, his intention for writing the book was not merely out of academic curiosity. Alluding to the inherent sexual nature of human beings, he concludes that the Tachikawa lineage’s original goal was to purify “man’s inherent sexual desire” and use it to attain buddhahood. However, the monks who followed this path failed due to a lack of knowledge and their reliance on superstition (Mizuhara 1923, 1–3). In other words, he defends the Tachikawa lineage, while, at the same time, he admits that it was a jakyō whose main characteristic was the literal implementation of the sexual symbolism found in Tantric Buddhism.

The postface also refers to sexual practices and is a glimpse into the social and political issues Mizuhara faced when he wrote the book. In a discussion of the Shikoku pilgrimage (Shikoku henro 四国遍路), which he claims served as a form of sexual education, Mizuhara indirectly addresses prohibitions on the integration of sex and religion as mandated by the Meiji government (Mizuhara 1923, 168–169).9 Mizuhara’s emphasis on sex and jakyō also reflects the shifting social and legal circumstances on Mt. Kōya at the time, where prohibition against clerical marriage and women on the mountain had been lifted (Rappo 2016, 337–336).10 Therefore, Mizuhara’s scholarship on the Tachikawa lineage was, in part,

---

9. Mizuhara’s very subtle and frequently misunderstood position drew some criticism from other monks of the Shingon school. In a review to his book originally published in the journal Mikkyō bunka 密教文化, he was even called an “experimenter” of the Tachikawa teachings (Mizuhara 1981–1982, 10: 578).

10. Mizuhara was in favor of female clerics in the Shingon school, while still being a proponent of strict religious discipline. His stance is best expressed in his book Josei to Kōyasan in which he conducts a historical survey of the presence of women on the sacred mountain, showing that the prohibition of women (nyonin kinsei 女人禁制) was ahistorical (Mizuhara 1924).
a response to changes in Japanese society as well as an effort to defend the reputation of the Shingon school against negative associations with sexual practices.

Building on Mizuhara’s study, Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖真 (1888–1967)—a Shingon monk of the Hasedera-based Buzan branch—focused his research primarily on the figure Monkan 文観 (1278–1357), who was purported to be the most successful propagator of the Tachikawa lineage (RAPPO 2019, 1052–1053). Moriyama’s research seems to be a direct response to the concerns outlined by Ōuchi Seiran in his 1896 article regarding Monkan’s relationship with Emperor Go Daigo during the split between the northern and southern courts (Brown-Lee 1997, 118–130). In contrast to Ōuchi’s apologetic approach toward Go Daigo’s association with the Tachikawa master, Moriyama argues that Monkan was not a part of a heretical scheme to snare the emperor but was rather a loyal servant to the royalty (kinnōsō 勤王僧) (RAPPO 2017a, 32–45).

In contrast to Mizuhara, Moriyama proposes a definition of jakyō in the preface of his 1965 book. Resembling Mizuhara’s views on sex and religion, Moriyama suggests that jakyō refers to a religious tradition that attempted to satiate one’s natural desires (honnō manzoku 本能満足) in an effort to attain enlightenment. Like Mizuhara, he contends that sexual desire is natural, but that the practitioners of the Tachikawa lineage who “fell” into jakyō did so because they were unable to purify these desires (MORIYAMA 1965, 12). His analysis of texts associated with the Tachikawa lineage applies a similar logic. Regarding Monkan’s commentary on the Rishukyō, a text known for its sexual symbolism, Moriyama contends that interpretations of the commentary that took such symbolism literally were mistaken and failed to grasp the more profound meaning of these teachings (MORIYAMA 1965, 405). Moriyama’s usage of jakyō, like other studies at the time, was ambiguous. However, he does not question the application of this term to the Tachikawa lineage or the texts and practices attributed to it.

Reading the works of Mizuhara and Moriyama leaves one with the impression that these scholar-monks were intentionally vague about the meaning of jakyō. Their understanding of the term seems to assume the conception of “heresy” that developed in the decades after the Meiji Restoration, which designated the practices of local cults, especially those considered to be overtly sexual in nature, as well as religious institutions or movements that were deemed unorthodox by the political authorities, as heretical. However, their use of jakyō also reflects contemporary debates among the Japanese clergy regarding the role of marriage, the presence of women at monastic centers, and changing views regarding sex in general.

Although the scholarship of Mizuhara and Moriyama was seminal to research on the Tachikawa lineage, and Shingon in general, their notion of jakyō and its

---

relevance to medieval esoteric Buddhism was anachronistic. The use of the term to denote a broader category of heresy was the result of a longer tradition of Shingon heresiological texts written mostly after the fourteenth century and is not a reliable description of the medieval Shingon school. In such texts, the “Tachikawa lineage” became the symbol of heretical teachings and an umbrella term under which sectarian polemicists combined various “heretical” elements from diverse, and often specious, sources.

Such so-called heretical elements typically involved sexual imagery or, occasionally, sexual intercourse. However, sexual symbolism was very common in medieval writings. Defining a text as heretical on this basis imposes a set of values accepted in later periods onto historical texts from an older period that did not necessarily share these norms. To tell the story of how the Tachikawa lineage became a moving concept for heresy in Japanese Buddhism, we must start with its origins and outline the historical stages of this construct.

Medieval Origins and Early Reception of the Tachikawa Lineage

According to medieval sources, the Tachikawa lineage was allegedly founded in the early twelfth century by Ninkan 仁寛 (d. 1114), a Daigoji 醍醐寺 monk who was exiled to Izu. Two main sources describe what is today known as the Tachikawa lineage. The Juhō yōjinshū written in 1268 by the monk Shinjō 心定 (ca. 1215–1272) is frequently cited as the earliest source describing sexual heresies in Shingon Buddhism. Iyanaga Nobumi argues that this association of sexual practices described in the Juhō yōjinshū with the Tachikawa lineage is a misconception. The actual Tachikawa lineage starting with Ninkan left only a few documents, most of which are currently held at Kanazawa Bunko. However, these texts do not contain anything particularly out of the ordinary for a medieval esoteric lineage. Moreover, Iyanaga’s close inspection of the Juhō yōjinshū reveals that the association of Tachikawa with sexual heresy cannot be found in the text itself, which criticizes

12. However, in medieval Japan, there were already voices, aside from Yūkai, criticizing certain forms of sexual symbolism. As KAMEYAMA Takahiko (2018) has shown, some of the medieval critics of the alleged Tachikawa lineage actually distinguished appropriate sexual discourse from heresy, but did not dismiss it all together.

13. The main text of the Juhō yōjinshū does in fact mention a sexualized ritual in the context of a story involving a strange group of people who practiced a “certain ritual” (ka no hō 彼ノ法). The text describes this ritual as a sinister rite that incorporates the use of human and animal skulls and the mixing of necromancy with sexual elements. However, as Iyanaga points out, Shinjō does not explicitly link this rite to the Tachikawa lineage. Rather, this association occurred later, and the Haja kenshōshū seems to discuss an altogether different ritual (IYANAGA 2018, 63). While the Kōzanji manuscript was copied in 1313, it is based on an earlier version held on Mt. Kōya and written in 1281. The Haja kenshōshū, a text thought to have originated at Shōchiin 正智院 on Mt. Kōya, was appended to the manuscript either in 1281 or 1313 (SUEKI 2020, 450).
various practices and rituals but does not directly link rites involving sexual intercourse to the Tachikawa lineage. In fact, the earliest source linking Ninkan’s lineage to a sexual ritual is the *Haja kenshōshū*. This work is now lost, but a large excerpt has been added as an appendix to the newly discovered Kōzanji manuscript of the *Juhō yōjinshū* dated to 1313 (Iyanaga 2018, 61–63; Sueki 2019; 2020, 449–450).

The source of this correlation between the sexualized rites and the lineage establishing the heretical image of Tachikawa is the *Hōkyōshō*. Written by the Mt. Kōya monk Yūkai in 1375, the text describes several “deviant” teachings and “heretical” figures, the Tachikawa lineage being preeminent among them. Again, Iyanaga demonstrates that the text forcefully—and without providing a clearly stated rationale—links several distinct elements: the actual Tachikawa lineage, which probably had very little “heretical” content, the skull ritual described by Shinjō, and the writings of his political rivals, such as the Shingon monk Monkan (Iyanaga 2010). Based on recent research concerning the Kōzanji manuscript, the sexual practices outlined in the *Haja kenshōshū* should be added to this list.

In the wake of Yūkai, references to the Tachikawa lineage as a symbol of heresy spread throughout the Shingon school, especially on Mt. Kōya. Some treatises authored by Shingon monks even blended different lineages such as the Kongōōin 金剛王院—known for its sexual symbolism—into the larger category of heresy that had become referred to by the moniker of the Tachikawa lineage (Takahashi 2016, 209–210). Thus, after Yūkai, the Tachikawa lineage took on the status of a heretical faction and became a symbol of deviant practices within the Shingon school. However, very few extant sources show how Yūkai’s work was received over the next two centuries. Some documents discuss specific concepts typically associated with the Tachikawa lineage, such as the union of red and white liquids (*shakubyaku nitai* 赤白二渧), without explicitly labeling them as Tachikawa (Iyanaga 2018, 87–90).

The Shingon monk In’yū 印融 (1439–1515) mentions Yūkai in his *Shoinjin kuketsu*, a text compiled around 1478. In’yū alludes to Yūkai’s text when discussing the authenticity of the Gayūshi, a work that was commonly deemed an apocryphon and a Tachikawa text (Chinen 1997). After asserting that the text was important to the Sanbōin 三宝院 lineage, he adds the following:

However, this text is described as an apocryphon in both the *Hōkyōshō*, which was written by Yūkai, a monk of the Hōshōin 宝性院 on Mt. Kōya, and in the *Shingishō*, a work of Shunkai 俊海 (d.u.), a monk of Sano in the Shimotsuke Province (called Yashū 野州). This claim is completely false. The *Hōkyōshō* and the *Jitsugoshō* praise the An’yōji 安養寺 lineage (the lineage Yūkai belonged to)

and look down on the Sanbōin lineage. This is why they write that almost all of the texts belonging to this lineage are apocrypha. This is a clear case of attacking the other to assert one’s own position (jiritsu taha 自立他破). Who would accept such an attitude? This can only be frowned upon. Shunkai’s attachment to the idea of attacking the other to assert one’s own position knows no bounds. In fact, he describes all texts for which he did not receive a transmission as forgeries. They (Yūkai and Shunkai) are the epitome of narrow-mindedness. Their work should not be used at all. Their work needs to be evaluated carefully from now on. (ZSSZS 25: 487; Itō 2003, 199–200)

In’yū’s reaction was only natural. He was a member of the Sanbōin lineage of Daigoji, the very lineage that Yūkai attacks in his criticism of Monkan. However, despite this attack on Yūkai’s methods, In’yū’s opinion did not represent the majority of the Shingon school. In fact, the second work In’yū mentions, the Shingishō, most certainly relied on Yūkai’s category of Tachikawa-related texts. The Shingishō was just one early example of a long tradition of anti-Tachikawa rhetoric stemming from Yūkai’s polemical claims in the Hōkyōshō.

Members of In’yū’s lineage also sought to distinguish themselves from the construct that was the Tachikawa lineage, which can be seen in the Konkōshō, a text probably written by Kyōga 敎雅 (ca. sixteenth century) or one of his contemporaries. This work describes many so-called heretical concepts that are often linked to the Tachikawa lineage, such as embryology or sexual symbolism. However, the author asserts that the teachings of his lineage should not be confused with Tachikawa: The text states:

People such as Shingyō 真慶 of Tennōji 天王寺 and Rennen 蓮念 of Tachikawa confused the two perspectives of ordinary and of enlightened beings (bonshō niken 凡聖二見), and this led them to finally succumb to heretical views (jaken 邪見). (Fukuda 1995, 62)

The fact that he claims that the Tachikawa lineage failed to consider such practices and concepts from the two perspectives of ordinary and sagely beings—that is, deluded and enlightened or mundane and profound viewpoints—suggests that Kyōga was aware of the similarity between his lineage’s teachings and the heresies criticized by Yūkai. He thus argued that the fundamental difference between members of his lineage and people such as Ninkan (here referred to as Rennen) was that his tradition understood the true meaning of these concepts, while the heretical factions took them literally. However, by using Yūkai’s categories of heretical teachings, Kyōga ultimately recognizes the received view

15. The full text is not available, but according to Itō Satoshi, there is a copy in the Chisan Bunko 智山文庫 collection of the Chishakuin 智積院. The colophon says it was written in 1431 (Itō 2003, 228, n. 5).
of Tachikawa as heretical. Despite Kyōga’s efforts, the Konkōshō would later be labeled as a part of the Tachikawa lineage as defined by Yūkai.\footnote{In addition to Fukuda (1995, 62), see Kameyama (forthcoming) for an analysis of this text and its criticism of Yūkai.}

In his book on Monkan and the Tachikawa lineage, Moriyama Shōshin showcases the Jashō benbetsuki, which he claims was written sometime after the mid-sixteenth century. The full text is unavailable, but Moriyama describes it as having been written in a dialogue style (mondōtai 问答体) by a monk from Mt. Tsukuba 筑波 in Jōshū 常州 (Ibaraki Prefecture).\footnote{Given that the Shingishō was written in nearby Shimotsuke, there might have been a tradition of heresiology inherited from Yūkai in the northern Kanto region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.} The unknown author notes that he found a work called the Fudōson gushō, which he determined to be suspicious. This work is also known by the title Asharagushō, based on the transliteration of the Sanskrit name of Fudō, Acala (Fukuda 1995, 36). Furthermore, the unknown author claims that, since ancient times, it has been confirmed that sexualized rituals were either a part of the Tachikawa lineage or directly transmitted from Monkan. The Jashō benbetsuki thus clearly seeks to attack the descendants of In’yu’s lineage by associating them with the Tachikawa lineage (Moriyama 1965, 172–174, 179).

While the exact date of the composition of this text remains obscure, it may well have been written in the seventeenth century following the first-known printed version of the Hōkyōshō in 1657. Its existence is evidence that Yūkai’s writings spread across Japan and could even be found in remote areas far from Mt. Kōya. This text also proves that the interpretation of the Tachikawa lineage as a heresy and Monkan as a heretic relied almost exclusively on Yūkai. It was with Yūkai’s reading of the Juhō yōjinshū in the Hōkyōshō that we find the criteria that later would be used by his successors for judging a text, practice, or lineage to be heretical (Iyanaga 2018). Such criteria are, in fact, applied in the Jashō benbetsuki to classify the Fudoson gushō as part of the Tachikawa lineage. Therefore, the origins of the medieval and early modern discourse on the Tachikawa lineage as a heretical faction of the Shingon school can be traced to Yūkai and his polemical interpretation of the Juhō yōjinshū.

**Catalogs of Heretical Texts and Textual Studies**

In the absence of the complete text, one should not rely too much on the Jashō benbetsuki. However, based on catalogs of heresiological works compiled during the early modern period, we can surmise that its criteria for classifying a text or rite as heretical had become widespread in the Shingon school (Rappo 2017b). In writing such catalogs, Shingon monks tried to assess the authenticity of...
suspicious texts. In doing so, they did not exclusively focus on the contents of the texts, but were more concerned with lineages and genealogies of monks. Therefore, they were motivated to identify the texts’ origins as well as the individuals involved in their transmission.

Perhaps the most well-known example of such a cataloger was Kyōi 恭畏 (1564–1630), an influential figure of the Shingon school at the time and himself the author of several heresiological works (Kojima 2003, 63; zsszs 25: 353–354). In 1622, he compiled the Misshū kechimyakushō, a complete chronology in three volumes of the main lineages of the Shingon school. Another of his writings, the Gishoron, is published in the Taishō canon. This work consists of a list of texts attributed to monks in the Shingon school, which he deems to be apocrypha (Itō 2003, 228). In the first few lines, Kyōi expressly states that the purpose for making this list is to “destroy the false and reveal the correct” (haja kenshō 破邪顕正). He adds that misinformed people deem such texts as the truth due to the fact that they have not received initiation into the correct lineages (t 2509, 78.915b6–9). This emphasis on lineage in the Gishoron overlaps with the purport of his Misshū kechimyakushō.

Kyōi was extremely erudite and well-informed; he had an in-depth knowledge of various Shingon lineages. He also collected numerous texts, and his name can be found in the colophons of manuscripts that he personally verified (sszs 27: 310). On the whole, Kyōi’s method for classification is a form of textual analysis. He is primarily concerned with the origins of the texts and the trustworthiness of their colophons, especially the dates given in them. This scrutiny over the dates leads him to propose potential authors of the apocrypha and, especially, their lineages. According to Kyōi, if an author belonged to a dubious lineage, that alone was enough to dismiss the entirety of the work. Although the Gishoron never directly mentions the Tachikawa lineage, some of the apocrypha listed in the work would later be associated with its heresies.

This tendency to view lineages as markers of authenticity is even stronger in later catalogs. This is precisely what happens in the Mōsho jahō jagisho mokuroku, a catalog of apocryphal texts that includes heretical doctrines, which was probably compiled by the Ninnaji 仁和寺 monk Kenshō 顕証 (1597–1678).18

18. A complete version of the catalog is unpublished. The manuscript consulted for this study was copied in 1709 by a Ishiyamadera 石山寺 monk named Sonpen 尊遍 (d.u.), who claims he copied it from an original held by the Ninnaji monk Ryōshin 亮深 (d.u.) (Rappo 2017b). Large portions of the text are quoted by Mizuhara Gyōei under another title, Gikyō mokuroku narabi ni jagi kyōron 偽経目六井邪義経論, which is a subtitle used in the manuscript (Mizuhara 1981–1982, 1: 188–210). The text is also discussed in Kōda (1981). Mizuhara mentions Kyōi (he even writes Kyōi Kenshō) as another name for the author. However, given that the Mōsho jahō jagisho mokuroku directly quotes and comments on the Gishoron, Kyōi is probably not the author of both texts. In Fact, Kenshō and Kyōi knew each other (Kimura 2015, 9).
The catalog is an analytical classification of problematic texts in the Shingon school. In the first section on apocryphal sutras, Kenshō directly quotes Kyōi regarding the legitimacy of an alleged sutra:

This is not a true sutra. It is a deluded work made by a perverted individual, who spreads words that are not from the Buddha. Kenshō.

(Mōsho jahō jagisho mokuroku, 3)

Kenshō closes the first section of his catalog by associating the composition of apocryphal sutras with the heretical actions of a deluded individual, reflecting the tendency in Shingon heresiology to focus on individuals and their lineages rather than specific doctrines.

This condemnation of a purported apocryphal sutra functions as Kenshō’s transition into the next section of the catalog, which deals with texts that spread perverse or heretical doctrines (jagi). However, this part of the catalog consists entirely of a quote from the Juhō yōjinshū (RAPPO 2017b, 144–145). Kenshō provides very little information on these heretical doctrines, but his citation of the Juhō yōjinshū creates a narrative of heretical literature that links the textual investigations of his predecessor Kyōi to the broader discourse on the Tachikawa lineage.

In general, Kenshō primarily focuses on individuals rather than ideas. By using the label of the Tachikawa lineage, he strives to establish a network of “heretics” closely resembling the conceptual structure of monastic genealogies. This focus on heresy as a problem of lineage or pedigree rather than doctrine is characteristic of Shingon heresiology. This tendency might be explained by the fact that it was quite difficult to prove that the targets of their criticism actually indulged in sexual practices or other reprehensible acts. In contrast, it was remarkably easier to just link their rivals to others who had already been labeled as culprits in such conduct. Thus, in the early modern period, the Tachikawa lineage had become an epithet for any lineage or members of a lineage that did not meet these catalogers’ criteria of orthodoxy.

The Tachikawa Lineage in Monastic Genealogies

A similar focus on the Tachikawa as a major heretical lineage can be seen in early modern monastic genealogies. One example of a comprehensive genealogy of monks in the Shingon school is the Dentō kōroku authored by the Daigoji monk Yūhō (1656–1727) during the last years of his life. The text is organized into main and auxiliary parts, which consist of a series of monastic genealogies listed from master to disciple along with biographies for a majority of the monks. In this work, Yūhō not only repeated previous accusations against the Tachikawa
lineage but adds new elements to link different threads of heresy mentioned in previous sources or creates content not found elsewhere.

Two of the monastic genealogies specifically reference the Tachikawa lineage. The first concerns Ninkan, the alleged founder of the lineage. Here, Yūhō repeats the adage that Ninkan expounded a “heretical teaching” (jahō) and started his own “lineage” after being exiled to Izu (zsszs 33: 394). The second genealogy deals with Monkan. While he mostly relies on Yūkai’s Hōkyōshō, Yūhō takes his depiction of Monkan a step further by claiming that he was a member of the Tachikawa lineage. Yūhō even states that Monkan was initiated into two branches of the Tachikawa lineage: Ninkan and Shingyō of Tennōji. According to Yūhō, Monkan received the sealed initiation certificate of Shingyō after being initiated into the Daigoji Hōon’in lineage. He then allegedly combined Shingyō’s heretical teaching with the teachings of Ninkan that he had received on Mt. Kōya (zsszs 33: 456). He later transmitted these teachings to Emperor Go Daigo, especially the idea that male-female sexual union (nannyo nikon wagō) was equivalent to a doctrine purported to originate in the Rishukyō stipulating that the five defilements of the senses are the great working of the Buddha (gojin daibutsuji) (t 1003, 19.212b14–15). As a reward, he was made the administrator (bettō) of Tennōji.

The role of Tennōji is crucial in Yūhō’s effort to link Monkan to the Tachikawa lineage. This claim cannot be corroborated by contemporary sources. Thus, the purpose of this reference is to provide a link between Monkan and Shingyō. Shingyō is a fairly obscure figure. He was first associated with heresy in the Shōryū jaryū to naru koto, a text recorded in the Tachikawa shōgyō mokuroku and authored by Yūkai’s master Kaisei (d. 1397). Kaisei is primarily interested in identifying Shingyō’s lineage and notes that “he came to possess heretical views, conduct violent acts, and broke his monastic vows at Tennōji.” The text also situates monks from the Sanbōin and Richiin lineages within Shingyō’s list of descendants, thus declaring “their lineages are probably impure” (Moriyama 1965, 588).

Shingyō also appears in the auxiliary to the Dentō kōroku (zsszs 33: 493–494). Yūhō mostly repeats Kaisei’s accusation of Shingyō’s heretical lineage, but he adds the detail that the monk obtained the title of administrator of Tennōji. However, later in the text, Yūhō adds that Shingyō’s teachings spread to other lineages, including Tendai, and they were used as a justification for marrying and eating meat. After lamenting the spread of such teachings, Yūhō concludes that “in order to clarify the heterodox teachings in Japan (Nihon no gedō), we must examine this lineage up to and including the biography of Monkan” (zsszs 33: 494). This statement at the end of Shingyō’s biography strongly suggests that the biography was actually written with Monkan in mind.
In fact, it was probably designed to further strengthen Yūhō’s claim that Monkan was the intersection of two threads of heresy: Ninkan and Shingyō.

Yūhō’s depiction of Monkan as a heretic is even stronger in the last part of his biography for this monk. According to Yūhō, after Emperor Go Murakami 後村上 (1328–1368) returned to Kyoto in 1351, Monkan’s works were analyzed by renowned scholar-monks of the Shingon school such as Gōhō 杲宝 (1303–1362). More than a thousand volumes of Monkan’s texts were branded as “secret precepts of Tachikawa” (Tachikawa ga hiketsu 立河ガ秘訣) and were burned near Saga (zsszs 33: 459). In this passage, Yūhō builds on a similar claim found in Yūkai’s Hōkyōshō (t 2456, 77.850b26–27). However, while Yūkai was just reporting a rumor that many of Monkan’s works were lost when burned near Saga, Yūhō turns this scene into an inquisitive court, where the most revered experts of Shingon doctrine allegedly determined that Monkan’s texts belonged to the Tachikawa lineage.

There are no other documents that prove both Yūkai’s story and Yūhō’s further elaboration of it. In fact, book or scroll burnings were very rare in Japan, at least before the arrival of Christianity (Kornicki 1998, 12). In telling this episode in his biography of Shingyō in the auxiliary to the Dentō kōroku, Yūhō accomplishes two things. First, he explicitly allocates Monkan’s work to the Tachikawa lineage, a claim that Yūkai insinuates but does not make directly. Second, he associates Monkan and the Tachikawa lineage with an idea of heresy that had become commonplace in Yūhō’s time, thus making the Tachikawa lineage discourse relevant to the concerns regarding heresy in the early modern period. By juxtaposing Yūkai’s broad condemnation of heresy in his Hōkyōshō and Yūhō’s situating of the Tachikawa lineage into the biographies of specific monks, the gradual transformation of the Tachikawa lineage from a small Shingon lineage located in the countryside to a catchall phrase for sexual heresies in Shingon Buddhism was complete.

**Tachikawa Beyond Shingon: The Isshū gyōgishō and the Jōdo Shin School**

Even prior to Yūhō, the association of the Tachikawa lineage with heresy had spread beyond the sectarian boundaries of the Shingon school. As a moving concept, Tachikawa was broadly applied as a polemic against religious heterodoxy in early modern Japan. Such heresies were not limited to sexualized rituals or violations of the monastic precepts but included controversial doctrines of the Jōdo Shin school as well.

20. SANFORD (1991, 4) mentions the burning of Tachikawa texts that happened both in Kyoto and on Mt. Kōya during the 1470s, but without providing a reference. I have been unable to find any mention of this in known sources.
In the *Isshū gyōgishō*, a Jōdo Shin text apocryphally attributed to Shinran, we find a reference to Tachikawa as a symbol of heresy. The objective of this work was to criticize radical Amidism, which denotes an influential interpretation of Shinran’s thought that rejected all religious practice other than the chanting of the *nenbutsu* 念仏. The reference to Tachikawa appears in the first volume, which sets the tone for the remainder of the text. In a story recounting the origins of a monk named Chorenbō 長連坊 (probably a fictional character) and his alleged disciples Zenshaku 善綽 (d. 1207) and Jūren 住蓮 (d. 1207), the *Isshū gyōgishō* asserts that he was a master of the Tachikawa lineage. According to this tale, Chōrenbō lived in Echigo Province where he spread heterodox teachings that discouraged people from revering the buddhas. In an effort to propagate these teachings, his disciples moved to the capital where they encountered Hōnen, the founder of the Jōdo school. They requested that he teach them the *nenbutsu*. Although he granted their request, according to the text they misconstrued his teachings. Instead of faithfully following Hōnen’s *nenbutsu* practice, they continued to preach heterodox doctrines and claimed that Hōnen instructed them that it was only necessary to venerate Amitābha Buddha in one’s mind without vocalizing the name of the Buddha to attain rebirth in the Buddha’s Pure Land (SST 36: 135).

As a caricature of a Tachikawa master, Chōrenbō is prominently featured in the *Isshū gyōgishō* as the main target of the author’s criticism. This criticism primarily focuses on radical interpretations of Jōdo Shin doctrine, but Chōrenbō and his disciples are also accused of violating monastic precepts. Statements attributed to the fictional Tachikawa master or his disciples proclaim that it is acceptable to eat meat, marry, have sex, and generally to be in contact with impurities (Rambelli 2003, 186–188).

This link between heresies in the Jōdo Shin school and the Tachikawa lineage allows the author to create a web of associations—both explicit and implied—around the issue of sex. This was a crucial problem for the Jōdo Shin school, because the clergy were permitted to marry. Although only briefly referenced in the text, this story of Chōrenbō takes place in the context of Hōnen’s exile and the execution of his disciples in 1207, which is one of the few cases of political authorities taking action against a specific religious group in medieval Japan (Brotons 2011).

21. Kuroda Toshio dates the composition of the original text to the late Kamakura period and attempts to analyze its contents within this context (Kuroda 1995, 273–276). Takayanagi Kōei mentions a possible reference to it in a source related to Rennyo (Takayanagi 1932, 145, 147, n. 9). However, the source does not clearly mention the *Isshū gyōgishō*. In fact, it may well have been composed shortly before the publication of the first known printed edition in 1647.

22. This mention of Echigo may be a reference to Shinjō, who was from nearby Echizen, and related to how he found dubious doctrines in the region (Moriyama 1965, 561–562).
Most details of the executions were recorded in the *Gukanshō* by the Tendai monk Jien 慈円 (1155–1225) in 1219, just a few years after the event. Jien notes that among the members of Hōnen’s group there was a man named Anrakubō Junsai 安楽坊遵西 (d. 1207). Together with the monk Jūren, he organized a ritual called the *Rokuji raisan* 六時礼讃, which consisted of six daily praises to Amitābha Buddha. These ceremonies were extremely popular, and Anraku and Jūren were joined not only by noblemen or monks but also by nuns and noblewomen. Anraku and Jūren purportedly took advantage of this situation. Arguing that the practice of the *nenbutsu* alone was sufficient to be reborn in the Amitābha’s Pure Land regardless of one’s deeds during his lifetime, they preached that it was actually acceptable for monastics to indulge in eating meat and have sexual intercourse. According to Jien, the two monks used this argument to justify spending the night in the homes of several nuns and noblewomen. He concludes his account of these events by documenting that Anraku and Jūren were put to death as a consequence of these actions, while Hōnen along with his disciple Shinran and others were exiled (Brown and Ishida 1979, 171–172).

As some studies have shown, sexual transgression was probably not excessively important to Jien (Faure 1998, 154–156). However, the case of Jūren and Anraku is significant as it was seen as providing concrete proof for accusations that members of the traditional Buddhist schools had been making for years: Hōnen’s teaching was not only a problem on a soteriological level, but it was also a disruption to public morality. The Hossō monk Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1212), for example, had already made this argument in his petition against Hōnen, the *Kōfukuji sōjō*, drafted in 1205. According to Jōkei, Hōnen and his disciples claimed that eating meat and having sex with women did not prevent one from being reborn in the Pure Land (Morrell 1987, 77). The heretic Chörenbō is thus seen as the inspiration behind these heresies, and he is portrayed in the *Isshū gyōgishō* as advocating precisely the heterodoxies for which monks such as Jōkei criticized Hōnen’s disciples.

The tale of Chörenbō and his propagation of immoral teachings in the *Isshū gyōgishō* also hints at another underlying debate over orthodoxy in medieval Japan. In the passage recounting Jūren and Zenshaku’s misinterpretation of Hōnen’s teaching on the *nenbutsu*, the *Isshū gyōgishō* tells of an encounter the disciples had with shrine attendants at the Gion Assembly (Gion’e 祇園会). According to this story, the two heretics questioned the value of such an event dedicated to mere “local manifestations” (*suijaku* 垂跡) of the Buddha, while the

---

23. Anraku’s execution is also depicted in the illustrated scroll *Hōnen shōnin eden* 法然上人絵伝. For an interpretation of the scene, see Bialock (2007, 232–233). On the execution itself, see Nakano (1981). While Jien makes no mention of Zenshaku, this name can be found in the list of monks executed in 1207 given in the appendix to the BDK translation of the *Tannishō* (1980, 26).
“original form” (honji 本地) of the Buddha had been made known to them. It is in this exchange that Jūren and Zenshaku misconstrue Hōnen’s teaching, telling the attendants that “it is unnecessary to even say the nenbutsu aloud and just reciting it in your mind is sufficient” and imploring them to “behave as you like, for prohibitions and impurities will not hinder you” (sst 36: 136).

This episode offers some details regarding the teachings that Jūren and Zenshaku may have received from Chōrenbō. Their words to the shrine attendants not only reveal that the disciples had a simple view of the nenbutsu and rebirth in Amitābha’s Pure Land but also that they showed a profound disdain for the veneration of Japanese gods. As initiates in the Tachikawa lineage, Jūren and Zenshaku not only represented the heretical views of the lineage in their display of impropriety but also committed blasphemy by disrespecting the local deities. It was this antisocial act that ultimately led to their execution and the exile of Hōnen.

The shunning of worshiping gods at local shrines is the primary topic of critique in the Isshū gyōgishō. However, when and how this view became a heresy in the Jōdo Shin school is unclear. Shinran himself was ambivalent on this issue. He advocated both for disregarding the gods (jingi fuhyō 神祇不憑) and the idea that Japanese gods were in fact protectors of nenbutsu practitioners (jingi gonen 神祇護念) (Fukuma 1963; Nose 1989; Lee 2007, 126–128). Under the leadership of Rennyo 蘭如 (1415–1499), when the school began to develop into the institution that exists today, deity worship was generally accepted (Fukuma 1963; Blum and Yasutomi 2006, 55). Rennyo himself tended to accommodate the gods in his writings, even asserting that local deities were all encompassed within Amitābha Buddha (Weinstein 2006, 54). The fact that the condemnation of such practices is deemed a heresy in the Isshū gyōgishō reflects, on this particular issue, the orthodox Jōdo Shin position following Rennyo; the text, thus, also functions as a polemical tool used against exclusivist groups within the school at the time.24

Parallels between the Jōdō Shin school and the Tachikawa lineage can also be found in the igishū 異義集 (heterodox/unorthodox collections) volume of the Shinshū taikei. These texts were mostly considered heretical. The heterodox views and practices discussed in these works are similar to those associated with the Tachikawa lineage except for the fact that they focus specifically on nenbutsu practice.

One example of an igishū text is the Hachimanchō no nukigaki ajikan no honmi, another apocryphon attributed to Shinran. The author of the text poses a doctrinal argument for nenbutsu practice that utilizes the metaphor of hetero-

24. As Kuroda (1995, 276) points out, the Isshū gyōgishō itself very strongly recommends that its readers follow the cult of the gods (for example sst 36: 132–133). Some of the positions advocated by the text regarding the practice of nenbutsu can be seen as unorthodox, but they were, in fact, regularly followed in Rennyo’s time (Takayanagi 1932, 145–147).
sexual intercourse (Rambelli 2003, 181–182). Specifically, this theory of nenbutsu applies masculine and feminine aspects to the formula of Namu Amida Butsu, which involved the generation of life through copulation. Such doctrines were typically associated with secret groups (hiji hōmon 秘事法門) that formed outside of the Jōdo Shin establishment, which had adopted esoteric rites and interpretations from the Shingon tradition (Sanford 2005, 184–188).25

Descriptions of Chōrenbō and his disciples in the Isshū gyōgishō were probably influenced by such texts and used as foils for explaining Jōdo Shin orthodoxy. Although the example from the igishū explicitly deals with sexual imagery, Chōrenbō’s teachings are not limited to this heresy but it includes meat-eating and other violations of the monastic precepts. In other words, Chōrenbō and his ilk are caricatures of the “evil monks” of the Tachikawa lineage. The precedent for this negative portrayal is found in the Taiheiki depiction of Monkan as an arrogant, extravagant figure, who was fond of weapons and paraded with his henchmen through the capital (Rappo 2017a, 97–103). By constructing a fictional character based on the archetype of Monkan, the author of the Isshū gyōgishō employs a rhetoric of heresy to achieve three objectives: condemn the sexualization of the nenbutsu in the igishū texts, attribute the 1207 scandal to external elements thus exonerating Hōnen and Shinran from charges of heresy, and attack the radical fringes of the school who rejected the worship of Japanese gods.26

The story in the Isshū gyōgishō, which drew from anti-Tachikawa polemics in the Shingon school, would, in turn, be referenced in Shingon texts. This is the case of the Mōsho jahō jagisho mokuroku. In a section titled “On Heresy” (Jahō no koto 邪法事), the text extensively quotes the tale of the “Tachikawa master” Chōrenbō. This allusion suggests that its author relied on the Isshū gyōgishō, probably the printed 1647 version (Rappo 2017b, 148–149; Mōsho jahō jagisho mokuroku, 44–45). Moreover, this quote suggests that the Tachikawa lineage had become a synonym for heretical—and especially sexual—practices or teachings, even outside the Shingon school. As a result, sectarian disputes over orthodoxy in the medieval period gradually emerged as a broader discourse on religious deviance in early modern and modern Japan.

25. In general, the term “Tachikawa lineage” is used by scholars to describe a series of “materialistic” or “sexual” conceptions of ritual, embryology, or even cosmology (Rambelli 2013, 164–165). Such sexualized interpretations of the nenbutsu may have been influenced by the thought of Dōhan 道範 (1178–1252), another figure linked to the Tachikawa lineage, and his esoteric nenbutsu (Proffitt 2015; 2020). Such interpretations of nenbutsu can also be found in the Gochizō hishō (Abe, Yoneda, and Itô 2011, 34–35; Dolce 2016).

26. While the ideas found in the Isshū gyōgishō were already quite common in Rennyo’s time, there is also a possibility that the author belonged to a heterodox sub-group of the school. In that case, the double discourse found in the text, both creating an external enemy for the school and depicting itself as a form of orthodoxy, likely had another purpose. It allowed the author and the group to which he belonged to claim a certain form of legitimacy inside the school.
Heresy and the Tachikawa Lineage: Deciphering the Layers of a Moving Concept

The notion of the Tachikawa lineage as a metonym for heresy still looms large in the popular imagination. The Tachikawa lineage became so strongly associated with sexual heresies that when a history of the town of Tachikawa was compiled in 1968 an entire chapter was dedicated to this issue. The chapter strongly stresses that this “illusionary heresy” (maboroshi no jakyō まぼろしの邪教) was never transmitted to temples in the region of the actual town of Tachikawa and concludes by stating that no more should be said regarding this matter (Tachikawashi Shi Hensan Iinkai 1968, 653, 658–659).

Despite the lack of a connection between the so-called Tachikawa lineage with the name of the town, the fact that the authors of this local history felt obligated to include a chapter on the subject shows how powerful the rhetoric of heresy had become. They could have simply ignored it, yet they felt that it was necessary to affirm that the heretical lineage had nothing to do with their city.

While this story regarding perceived challenges to the reputation of the town of Tachikawa is anecdotal, it actually demonstrates how far the image of the heresy of Tachikawa had spread among the general public. This enduring image has created even more acute problems for academics. For example, in the conclusion to an article on the topic, Stefan Köck notes the dangers of using the term jakyō: “Basically, by using the term jakyō one evaluates and adopts the standpoint of Yūkai from the second half of the fourteenth century. But as this article has shown, he was only one voice, and in his attempt to extinguish the school not a very reliable one” (Köck 2000, 82). The second part of this quote is especially true when we think about how In’yū and the members of his lineage tried to refute Yūkai’s claims but fell into the trap of using his concept of Tachikawa in an attempt to distances themselves from this alleged heresy.

I would go even further and argue that the use of this term is not limited to Yūkai’s polemical depiction. The term “Tachikawa lineage” became a symbol for heresy during the centuries that followed him. From its conception, due to Yūkai’s writings on the lineage and his treatment of the Juhō yōjinshū, the Tachikawa lineage was considered a heretical group within the Shingon school with its own unique set of perverse teachings. Gradually, the term was expanded to include heresy in general, as is the case in the Mōsho jahō jagisho mokuroku. This concept was further systematized in the early modern period, especially through the writings of Yūhō. While the Tachikawa lineage began as a polemic within the Shingon school, it eventually blended with various discourses rejecting religious otherness in Japan. This would not only have an impact on depictions of Christianity, but also allowed the label of Tachikawa to be reused by other schools, such as the Jōdo Shin school. In the Isshū gyōgishō, the lineage is still depicted as a heresy involving sex. However, it is also used as an imaginary
antagonist to divert the blame of the execution of Hōnen’s disciple in 1207 to a Tachikawa culprit and to allow the Jōdo Shin school—or, at least, the group to which its author belonged—to impose a new orthodoxy regarding the worship of local gods by turning proponents of exclusivism into extreme heretics. By calling this lineage jakyō, one adds yet another layer of meaning to this historical construction. In the modern context, the Tachikawa lineage has come to denote a form of organized heresy.

The Shingon monk Yūkai created the heresy of the Tachikawa lineage mainly to expand his influence within his own school. This allowed him and his successors to define themselves as Shingon orthodoxy (at least on Mt. Kōya). In doing so, they both drew on canonical sources and on older, largely diffuse images of monastic deviance such as meat-eating and, especially, sexual intercourse. Perhaps they were too successful. By declaring the Tachikawa lineage a symbol of heresy, monks like Yūkai inadvertently created a label that could be broadly applied beyond its original polemical context within the Shingon school. It also permanently tainted Shingon as the school that introduced heresy in Japan.

Heresies are always gradual constructions, and when writing about them it is necessary to clearly distinguish between the historical circumstances in which a given “heresy” emerged and the context of later interpretations. To understand the “real” Tachikawa lineage, we must be careful not to assume anachronistic definitions such as those implied by the expression “Tachikawa jakyō.” However, this does not detract from the historical value of heresiological texts. On the contrary, we must continue to study them as products of a very specific thought process, which clearly had a major impact on the definition of the “other” in Japanese religion.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NDZ</td>
<td><em>Nihon daizōkyō</em> 日本大蔵経. 100 vols.</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NST</td>
<td><em>Nihon shisō taikei</em> 日本思想体系</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>67 vols. 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SST</td>
<td><em>Shinshū taikei</em> 真宗大系. 37 vols.</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSSS</td>
<td><em>Shingonshū zensho</em> 真言宗全書. 42 vols.</td>
<td>Kyoto</td>
<td>2004, Reprint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td><em>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</em> 大正新修大蔵経. 85 vols.</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>1924–1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZSSS</td>
<td><em>Zoku Shingonshū zensho</em> 続真言宗全書. 42 vols.</td>
<td>Kyoto</td>
<td>2008, Reprint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRIMARY SOURCES

Asharagushō 阿舍羅愚抄. Alternative title for the Fudōson gushō.


Gochizô hishô 五智蔵秘抄. In Abe, Yoneda, and Itô 2011.


Hajia kenshôshû 破邪顕正集. No longer extant.


Môsho jahô jagisho mokuroku 謀書邪法邪義書目録. Kenshô 顕証 (1597–1678). Ishiyamadera 石山寺 manuscript.


Shinjûshô 真偽抄. Shunkai 俊海 (d.u.). No longer extant.


SECONDARY SOURCES

ABE Yasurô 阿部泰郎, YONEDA Mariko 米田真理子, and IRÔ Satoshi 伊藤聡, eds.
Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai.

AI’AI Koji 藻々居士

ASTLEY, Ian

BIALOCK, David T.

BLUM, Mark Laurence, and SHIN’YA YASUTOMI, eds.

BROTONS, Arnaud

BROWN, Delmer Myers, and Ichirō ISHIDA, eds.

BROWNLEE, John S.

CHIBA Tadashi 千葉 正

CHINEN Satoru 知念 理

CHRISTIN, Olivier, RaphaëL BARRAT, and Igor MOULLIER, eds.

DOLCE, Lucia
2016 The embryonic generation of the perfect body: Ritual embryology from

FAURE, Bernard


FUKUDA Ryōsei 福田亮成


FUKUMA Kōchō 福間光超


HAAR, Barend J. Ter.


HEPBURN, James Curtis


ISOMAE Jun’ichi 磯前順一


ÌTÔ Satoshi 伊藤 聡


IYANAGA Nobumi 彌永信美


Josephson, Jason Ånanda

Kameyama Takahiko 龜山隆彦
2018 Chūsei Nihon mikkyō ni okeru taiseigakuteki kyōsetsu to “jagi” 中世日本密教における胎生学的教説と「邪義」. Mikkyō bunka 241: 23–43.

Forthcoming The red and white drops and “wrong views” in the Konkō shō: The significance of the sexual and embryological discourses in early modern Shingon Buddhism. Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū.

Kawamura Kunimitsu 川村邦光

Ketelaar, James Edward, and Okada Masahiko 岡田正彦, trans.

Kimura Michiko 木村迪子

Köck, Stefan


甲田宥吽

小島昌憲
1903 立川流真言宗 1–5. Rokudai shinpō, August–November.

小島裕子

好村春基
1936 邪教に迷はされた人々—被害実話. Daitō Shuppansha.

Peter F. Kornicki

黒田俊雄

Kenneth Doo Young Lee

真鍋俊照

Helen C. McCullough

水原堯栄
1920 Tachikawaryū seitō mokuroku to genson shōgyō no niyō ni tsuite 立川流聖典目録と現存聖教の内容に就て. Mikkyō bunka 4: 71–104.

Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖真
1965 Tachikawa jakyō to sono shakai-teki haiei no kenkyū 立川邪教とその社会的背景の研究. Tokyo: Rokuyaon.

Morrell, Robert E.

Nakano Masaaki 中野正明

Nose Eisui 野世英水

Porath, Or

Proffitt, Aaron P.

Quinter, David

Rambelli, Fabio

Rappo, Gaétan
2016 Kindai no Tachikawaryū kenkyū no tansho: Inoue Kichijirō cho Monkan
shōnin no tanjō no haikei o Mizuhara Gyōei to no kōryū kara yomitoku
近代の立川流研究の端緒—井上吉次郎著『文観上人』の誕生の背景を水原

2017a  Rhétoriques de l’hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne: Le moine
Monkan (1278–1357) et sa réputation posthume. Préface de Philippe

2017b Heresy and heresiology in Shingon Buddhism: Reading the catalogues of
doi.org/10.3406/asi.2017.1494

A. Silk, Richard Bowring, Vincent Eltschinger, and Michael Radich, eds.,

SANFORD, James H.
doi.org/10.2307/2385144


STALKER, Nancy K.
2008 Prophet Motive: Deguchi Onisaburō, Oomoto, and the Rise of New Religions
in Imperial Japan. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

SUEKI Fumihiko 末木文美士
2009 Kōzanji bon Juhō yōjinshū no honkoku kenkyū 高山寺本 『受法用心集』の
翻刻研究 2. In Kōzanji tenseki monjo sōgō chōsadan kenkyū hōkokuron-
shū 高山寺典籍文書綜合調査団研究報告論集, Heisei 20, 46–75. Sapporo:
Kōzanji Tenseki Monjo Sōgō Chōsadan.

2019 Kōzanji bon Juhō yōjinshū to Tachikawaryū 高山寺本 『受法用心集』と立川
流. In Kōzanji tenseki monjo sōgō chōsadan kenkyū hōkokuronshū, Heisei

2020 Kōzanji Juhō yōjinshū kaidai, honkoku 高山寺本 『受法用心集』解題・翻刻.
In Kōzanji kyōzō no keisei to denshō 高山寺経蔵の形成と伝承, ed. Kōzanji
Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin.

TACHIKAWASHI SHI HENSAN IINKAI 立川市史編纂委員会, ed.

TAKAHASHI Yūsuke 高橋悠介
2016  Den Kenjin hen Kanjō inmyō kuketsu to Kūkanbō Nyojitsu 伝憲

TAKAYANAGI Kōei 髙柳恒栄
1932  Renshī jidai ni okeru mushin shōmyō setsu 仏師時代に於ける無信称名說.
In Rennyo Shōnin no kenkyū 銀如上人研究, ed. Kusaka Murin 白川薰,</doc>
Tōzan Itsunō 東山逸衲

Vanden Broucke, Pol

Weinstein, Stanley
New approaches to Buddhist doctrine and practice flourished within and across diverse lineages and sub-lineages in early medieval Japan. The early-modern and modern sectarianization of Japanese Buddhism, however, has tended to obscure the complex ways that the very idea of orthodoxy functioned in this fluid medieval environment. In this article, I explore attempts to account for the diversity of views regarding nenbutsu orthodoxy in treatises composed by scholars monks affiliated with Mt. Kōya and Mt. Hiei. In particular, this article contextualizes how these monks constructed the idea of an esoteric nenbutsu by drawing upon earlier taxonomies developed in the Tendai school as well as the East Asian esoteric Buddhist corpus. Ultimately, this study concludes that the esoteric nenbutsu was not the provenance of a particular school or sect, but rather served as a polemical construct designed to subsume the diversity of approaches to nenbutsu praxis as monks in diverse lineages competed with one another to define esoteric Buddhism in the early medieval context.

KEYWORDS: esoteric Buddhism—pure land—esoteric nenbutsu—orthodoxy—Dōhan
This article explores how the _nenbutsu_ 念仏 functioned within the evolving conceptions of orthodoxy in medieval Japan and the practice of constructing taxonomies as a dynamic form of Buddhist study and practice. In particular, this study examines the work of the scholar-monks Dōhan 道範 (1179–1252) of Mt. Kōya 高野 and Kōshū 光宗 (1276–1350) of Mt. Hiei 比叡 to consider how each defined and employed the idea of an esoteric _nenbutsu_ (himitsu nenbutsu 秘密念仏) within their respective taxonomic projects. I argue that the esoteric _nenbutsu_ functioned neither as one distinct kind of _nenbutsu_, nor the _nenbutsu_ of a particular school of Buddhism. Rather, the esoteric _nenbutsu_ was a polemical heuristic construct—a taxonomic tool—employed to participate in the ongoing evolution and contestation of orthodoxy in medieval Japan.

Ritual lineages derived from the Indian tantras—commonly labeled as esoteric Buddhism—flourished at the highest echelon of Tang dynasty (618–907) ritual culture. By the early ninth century, esoteric rites emerged as a foundational aspect of Japanese religion as well, characterized by the coordinated recitation of mantras, the performance of mudras, and the choreographed visualization of mandalic depictions of deities. In medieval Japan, scholar-monks drew upon and participated in diverse ritual regimes and areas of doctrinal study as lineages and sub-lineages vied for patronage, prestige, and power. Therein, the performance of esoteric ritual was widely used to achieve a variety of this-worldly and other-worldly ends, including one of the most sought-after soteriological goals of East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhist culture: postmortem rebirth in Sukhāvatī, the pure land of Amitābha Buddha. One of the most popular methods employed by premodern Japanese Buddhists in pursuit of rebirth in the pure land was devotion to Amitābha and the recitation of the Buddha's name in the form _Namo Amida Butsu_ 南無阿弥陀仏, which is commonly referred to as _nenbutsu_. Although esoteric ritual culture and pure land soteriology were pervasive in premodern Japanese religion, little attention has been paid to the way in which these overlapping repertoires mutually functioned.

Just as scholars like Isomae Junichi have argued against essentialist conceptions of Japaneseness and religion as _sui generis_ concepts (ISOMAE 2005), so too have scholars of Japanese Buddhism reflected critically on the potentially distorting effects that sectarianism as a default model may carry with it. In addition to the imposition of a sectarian framework or taxonomy over the diversity of Japanese Buddhism and East Asian Buddhism, these sects are also generally categorized according to a periodization system: Nara Buddhism (710–794), Heian...
Buddhism (794–1185), Kamakura Buddhism (1185–1333), and so on (Stone 1999, 217–233; Abe 1999, 399–428). In Japan today, the largest schools of Buddhism are those affiliated with Jōdo Shin, Zen, and Nichiren traditions. As a result, scholars associated with these schools have been able to define the contours of the historiography of Japanese Buddhism as a whole and have exerted significant influence on the study of East Asian Buddhist studies more broadly (Yu 2013, 116–117). Because the founders associated with the Jōdo, Zen, and Nichiren lineages lived during the Kamakura period, scholars affiliated with these schools have generally promoted a Kamakura-centric view of Japanese Buddhist history often at the expense of the Tendai and Shingon schools, which were transmitted to Japan during the early ninth century.¹

This academic and sectarian orthodoxy was somewhat destabilized by scholars such as Kuroda Toshio, who established that in the early-medieval period Japanese religion remained dominated by temple-shrine complexes like Tōdaiji 東大寺 and Kōfukuji 興福寺 in the old capital in Nara, Enryakuji 延暦寺 and Onjōji 园城寺 on and near Mt. Hiei, and Ninnaji 仁和寺 and Daigoji 醍醐寺 in the Heian capital. As doctrinal and ritual lineages and sub-lineages based within these institutions often overlapped, intersected, and competed with one another, Kuroda and his interpreters contended that a cohesive orthodoxy emerged that served as ideological justification for the elite religio-political order. Drawing upon terminology used in medieval texts, Kuroda (1996, 233–235) coined the term “exo-esoteric system” (kenmitsu seido 顕密制度) to refer to this dominant medieval orthodoxy comprised of diverse esoteric ritual lineages and exoteric doctrinal lineages. As scholarship on medieval Japan has shifted away from the Kamakura founder-sect taxonomy, the idea of an exo-esoteric orthodoxy has

¹. The sectarianization of Japanese Buddhism developed over time and is not an essential quality of Buddhism in Japan. The way we understand shū 宗 to indicate a sectarian organization with an established lineage, set orthodoxy, and hierarchically organized institutional structure is a product of political and legal developments in early-modern Japan. Hikino and Williams have examined the early-modern transformation of the Jōdo and Sōtō Zen schools respectively, explaining that, following the protracted period of unrest in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, the Tokugawa regime issued a series of edicts in the seventeenth century that established rigid top-down state control of Buddhism and required temple networks to create for themselves clearly defined sectarian and institutional boundaries, refrain from competition or mixing, and focus exclusively on the teachings and practices associated with particular founders and lineages (Hikino and Morris 2011; Williams 2009). Jacqueline Stone and Abe Ryūichi have noted that this sudden shift in the geography of early-modern Japanese Buddhism ultimately led to the transformation of a relatively fluid and competitive Buddhist environment into hierarchically organized sectarian institutions with clear distinctions between lineages, prescribed areas of study, regimented curricula for monks, and so on. In the modern period, with the introduction of European-style universities, Tokugawa sectarian academies were transformed into sectarian universities and seminaries, and this ultimately cemented the sectarian taxonomic approach to the study of Japanese Buddhism (Stone 1999, 217–233; Abe 1999, 399–428).
taken root. Jacqueline Stone and David Quinter, however, have suggested that scholars must continue to critique received knowledge in the field of medieval Japanese Buddhist studies, lest the idea of an exo-esoteric orthodoxy emerge as a *sui generis* construct that prevents us from seeing the diversity and fluidity of medieval Japanese religion (Stone 1999, 62; Quinter 2006, 19–20, 30–31).

Somewhat surprisingly, there is relatively little scholarship on the question of how the *nenbutsu* functioned in this exo-esoteric orthodoxy. Terms like *himitsu* (secret or esoteric) are generally associated with the Shingon or Tendai schools of so-called “Heian Buddhism,” while the *nenbutsu* is associated more with the pure land schools of Kamakura Buddhism. In the esoteric *nenbutsu* these categories collide, and through the study of this collision an opportunity arises to tell a different story about early medieval Japanese Buddhism. Scholars who study the exo-esoteric system tend to focus on institutional histories of major temple-shrine complexes, while scholars who study the *nenbutsu* tend to focus on the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin traditions founded by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), respectively. However, in the early-medieval period, the *nenbutsu* was widely practiced across doctrinal and ritual lineages and contexts. Therein, diverse perspectives on the nature of the pure land, how exactly rebirth in the pure land should be understood, and various methods of practicing the *nenbutsu* proliferated. From one perspective, the esoteric *nenbutsu* may be thought of as the orthodox exo-esoteric *nenbutsu*. Indeed, the esoteric *nenbutsu* arose through the confluence of esoteric Mt. Kōya and Mt. Hiei doctrinal and ritual lineages, which were themselves embedded in lineages connected to Nara- and Kyoto-based temple complexes. However, closer examination of the various threads that came together to compose the esoteric *nenbutsu* reveals that the very idea of orthodoxy was actually a major area of contention.

In this article, I first examine how the esoteric *nenbutsu* has been understood as a taxonomic tool within modern and contemporary scholarship. At times, this scholarship relies upon contemporary sectarian categories, and thus sometimes loses the context and nuance for the taxonomical projects of monks like Dōhan and Kōshū. The view proposed in this essay is that while early-modern Japan saw the rise of sectarian institutions as distinct sociologically identifiable entities, and therefore modern Japanese Buddhism may be divided into distinct sects, in premodern Japan, however, those traditions, practices, and teachings we tend to group together under such categories as pure land Buddhism, esoteric Buddhism, Shingon, Tendai, and so on, functioned as intersecting disciplines or areas of study and inquiry that could be pursued across diverse institutions, lineages, and sub-lineages.

I also consider the prominent role that Mt. Hiei lineages played in the development of esoteric discourse and pure land soteriology and in particular consider exegetical strategies referred to as the fourfold rise and fall (shijūkōhai 四重興廃) and the three truths of a-mi-da (Amida santai setsu 阿弥陀三諦説). These taxonomical paradigms were fundamental to Dōhan’s treatment of nenbutsu in the preface to his Himitsu nenbutsu shō (SAZ 2: 225–266), a compendium of sources concerning the practice of nenbutsu. Dōhan’s preface established a fourfold nenbutsu taxonomy built upon the fourfold rise and fall, the three truths of a-mi-da, and earlier Chinese and Japanese esoteric taxonomies.

Finally, I turn to Kōshū’s four-fold nenbutsu taxonomy as found in the Keiran shūyōshū. At first glance, it appears that Kōshū simply relegates Dōhan’s thought to the category of Shingon nenbutsu. However, just as Dōhan’s nenbutsu taxonomy incorporates various perspectives into his own taxonomical scheme, Kōshū incorporates Dōhan’s perspective into his own comprehensive analysis of nenbutsu. Rather than revealing the esoteric nenbutsu to be the nenbutsu of the exo-esoteric orthodoxy or the nenbutsu of a particular school of Buddhism, this article ultimately demonstrates that the esoteric nenbutsu was a nexus for dialogue and debate as monks in specific contexts vied with one another and their shared doctrinal inheritance for mastery over the esoteric.

**Defining the Esoteric Nenbutsu**

In order to fully appreciate how the esoteric nenbutsu functioned within the taxonomic conceptions of the nenbutsu in medieval Japan, we must first look to the ways in which scholarship has generally defined terms like “esoteric Buddhism” and “pure land Buddhism.” The concept of an esoteric nenbutsu subverts certain taxonomies currently in use within the study of Japanese religion. Moreover, in my own anecdotal experience, while some scholars find the term “esoteric nenbutsu,” or esoteric pure land, to be a very useful concept for approaching ritual and doctrinal repertoires that converged in medieval Japan, others take grave offense to the very idea that an esoteric approach to the pure land even exists precisely because it seems to challenge how they have conceived of the contours of their own disciplines or traditions. However, for those scholars who have examined the esoteric nenbutsu, there are generally three distinct approaches.

First, some scholars have suggested that the esoteric nenbutsu is a product of the syncretism of esoteric Buddhism and pure land Buddhism. According to this view, esoteric Buddhism is defined primarily by the sectarian historiography of the Shingon school and the teaching that esoteric ritual practice leads to attaining buddhahood in this very body (sokushin jōbutsu 即身成仏). Meanwhile, pure land Buddhism is defined primarily by a postmortem soteriology wherein one attains rebirth in the pure land after death through reliance on the power of Amitābha.
That these seemingly diametrically opposed kinds of Buddhism may have intermingled in the chaos of the medieval period is, according to this perspective, nothing more than a brief concession to heterodox peasant religion. The Shingon scholar-priest Kushida Ryōkō is responsible for the first major investigation into the esoteric nenbutsu. Therein, Kushida identifies the esoteric nenbutsu as evolving suddenly as a result of the syncretism of the newly arisen pure land movement with esoteric Buddhism, especially in peripheral sites like Mt. Kōya. While Kushida does note the broad range of traditions that led to the development of the esoteric nenbutsu, and even identifies the way the esoteric nenbutsu impacted later traditions like Zen, Jōdo Shin, and Tendai, he nevertheless returns to the rhetoric of syncretism belying the assumption that esoteric Buddhism and pure land Buddhism are two inherently distinct traditions (Kushida 1963). Kushida’s view emerged in the same postwar context as the scholarship of Inoue Mitsusada, an influential historian of Japanese pure land Buddhism who also considers the esoteric nenbutsu as an expression of the syncretism of esoteric Buddhism and pure land Buddhism (Inoue 1956, 335–365). James Sanford draws heavily upon Kushida in his articles on the esoteric nenbutsu (Sanford 2006). Like Kushida and Inoue, Sanford relies on the sectarian taxonomy that presents esoteric Buddhism and pure land Buddhism as sui generis schools of Buddhism with inherently distinct doctrinal and ritual positions.

Second, moving beyond the syncretism model, some scholars have acknowledged that, in fact, esoteric texts and rituals often deal with pure land rebirth, and there have been many figures associated with the Shingon school who regularly employed pure land-oriented practices as part of their broader religious program. These scholars generally identify the esoteric nenbutsu as the orthodox Shingon school approach to the nenbutsu. Indeed, as pure lands are a generic feature of Mahāyāna Buddhist cosmology throughout the sutras, it would only make sense that the Shingon tradition, as a Japanese Mahāyāna lineage, may have something to say on the matter. Mt. Kōya, a mountain monastic complex associated with the Shingon school and the cult of Kūkai, was a vibrant locale where monks and aristocrats made pilgrimages and where a diverse esoteric pure land culture flourished (Tanabe 1998). Furthermore, Shingon scholar-monks such as Kakuban 覚鑁 (1095–1143) wrote several treatises on topics concerning the nenbutsu and Amitābha and their relation to esoteric Buddhist doctrine. Kakuban’s perspective on the nenbutsu and pure land was not simply a product of syncretism but rather represents the orthodox Shingon view on the pure land, as his writing was one part of a broader project to establish Kūkai’s doctrinal writings at the center of Shingon discourse (Van der Veere 2000, 11–12).

Kakuban is closely associated with his contemporary Jippan 実範 (d. 1144), and both Kakuban and Jippan are commonly identified as pure land thinkers within the Shingon school. However, their backgrounds and educations are
more complex than modern sectarian labels account for, requiring us to reconsider exactly what we mean by the word “shingon.” Jippan, for example, was based in Nara, studied Hossō at Kōfukuji, and worked to revive the precepts at Tōdaiji (Buijnsters 1999). Moreover, Jippan spent a considerable amount of time studying pure land thought in the Tendai tradition (Satō 1965, 22–24). Kakuban also trained at Kōfukuji and Tōdaiji, and when he relocated to Ninnaji he encountered ongoing efforts to promote devotion to Kūkai as a Shingon lineage patriarch through the study of his doctrinal and ritual texts. As it turned out, Ninnaji monks such as Shōshin (1005–1085), Saisen (1025–1115), and others working to establish Kūkai as the authority on esoteric Buddhism were also interested in pure land thought and practice (Satō 1979, 11–14, 397–425). Indeed, this makes sense because the primary object of devotion at Ninnaji is Amitābha Buddha. Kakuban also trained at Onjōji, a Tendai offshoot of Mt. Hiei, which was at that time the site of a major esoteric lineage. Kakuban’s most famous works, the Gorinkuji myō himitsu shaku and Amida hishaku, demonstrate the fluency with which he and others could simultaneously speak the language of the pure land mythos and esoteric ritual. While the tendency of Jippan and Kakuban to implement Hossō, Tendai, Shingon, pure land, and other areas of study into their writings may seem eclectic or heterodox when viewed through the lens of modern sectarian categories, this was the norm in premodern Japan. Dōhan, a Mt. Kōya scholar-monk working in the thirteenth century, expanded upon the writings of Kakuban and Jippan in his articulation of a nenbutsu taxonomy. Rather than an outlier, Dōhan’s view of nenbutsu reflects the orthodox nature of such an accumulative approach within the medieval Shingon tradition (Satō 2002; Nakamura 1994; 2010).

To provide some nuance to the study of the esoteric nenbutsu, it is necessary to look beyond the idea that Shingon orthodoxy was a monolithic tradition. While we may now identify Shingon Buddhism as a particular school of Japanese Buddhism, Shingon was first established as an area of study found across multiple institutions such as Tōdaiji, Kōfukuji, Mt. Hiei, Onjōji, Tōji, Ninnaji, Daigoji, Mt. Kōya, and others (Abé 1999, 371–376; Ruppert 2013, 391, n. 6). Rather than conceive of Shingon as a single school originating with the works of Kūkai, we must keep in mind the institutional heterogeneity of Shingon as a body of competing lineages and sub-lineages with significant points of rupture and discontinuity and retroactive bricolage.

Third, scholars taking a post-sectarian view tend to position esoteric pure land thought as an aspect of the dynamic doctrinal and ritual culture of medieval Japan. According to this interpretation, it was not the case that pure land Buddhism emerged as a distinct sectarian position through a rejection of esoteric Buddhism. Rather, pure land-oriented soteriology functioned within ritual and doctrinal contexts that were dominated by esoteric ritual culture (Hayami
The study of deathbed practices reveals a similar point about the works of Dōhan and Kakuban; both figures promote a view of pure land that encompasses multiple perspectives. Esoteric notions that awakening to buddhahood in our current world is immanent do not preclude the attainment of rebirth in the pure land as a worthwhile soteriological goal (Stone 2007, 155–159). Furthermore, such practices serve as a case study in how rituals for controlling the moment of death intersected with the pure land mythos and esoteric ritual regime, especially for those aristocrats able to harness the power of the sangha. We might, therefore, conceive of the esoteric nenbutsu as the confluence of “multiple logics” functioning simultaneously in the fluid environment of medieval Japan (Stone 2016, 4–5).

One of the issues that remain to be explored more fully in the study of the esoteric nenbutsu is the degree to which Shingon school orthodoxy and historiography should be the default point of reference. The Shingon school has dominated popular and academic discussion of esoteric Buddhism more broadly, often occluding the dominant role that Tendai Buddhism actually played in premodern Japan (Weinstein 1974). Following the career of Kūkai, Shingon as an area of study was dominated by Nara- and Mt. Hiei-based institutions and lineages (McMullen 2016, 8–9). Therefore, any consideration of premodern esoteric Buddhism in Japan must necessarily situate Shingon as an area of disciplinary focus and specialization, and eventually a sect or school in its own right, in this Tendai dominated doctrinal, ritual, and polemical context. The syncretism and orthodoxy models are insufficient. However, further inquiry beyond the traditional boundaries of the Shingon school reveal that, indeed, the esoteric nenbutsu developed through the establishment of competing and complementary taxonomies encompassing the Lotus Sūtra, the pure land mythos, and esoteric ritual culture.

The Tendai Roots of the Esoteric Nenbutsu

Many of the lineages that established pure land soteriology and esoteric ritual culture in Japan were based on Mt. Hiei and affiliated with the Tendai school of Japanese Buddhism, which was transmitted to Japan by Saichō 最澄 (766–822) in the early ninth century. Saichō traveled to China as part of the same delegation as Kūkai. After their ships were separated due to a storm, Saichō continued on to Mt. Tiantai 天台 where he learned the meditation and doctrinal system associated with Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597) as well as Chan and esoteric Buddhism. Upon his return, Saichō worked to establish institutional independence from the Nara monastic bureau for his monastic community on Mt. Hiei (Groner 2000, 38–64). Following Saichō and Kūkai’s early transmission of esoteric ritual lineages from Tang China, several monks affiliated with Mt. Hiei followed in their
footsteps. Ennin 円仁 (794–864) and Enchin 円珍 (814–891), for example, traveled to China and stayed significantly longer than either Saichō or Kūkai, and returned with many more texts and ritual implements as well (Groner 2002, 16–33). In this way, Mt. Hiei monks would eventually establish themselves as the dominant authority over esoteric ritual power.

Tendai Buddhism should not be taken as a monolithic entity, as competition among lineages was as prevalent within Tendai as without. The first major schism in Japanese Tendai was between the Enryakuji faction led by descendants of Ennin’s lineage and the Onjōji faction led by the descendants of Enchin’s lineage (McMullin 1984). Different lineages on Mt. Hiei developed over time and were associated with particular geographical features. For example, one way of dividing up Mt. Hiei’s geography is related to different pagodas such as the Eastern Pagoda of the Ichijō Shikandō 一乗止観堂 and the Western Pagoda of the Shakadō 釈迦堂. The Yokawa 横川 area near the Northern Pagoda was first established by Ennin and later associated with Genshin 源信 (942–1017), the famous pure land scholar-monk and author of the Ōjōyōshū. The Eshin’in 恵心院 in the Yokawa area was the site of the Eshin lineage, which looks to Genshin as its founder. There are also traditionally sixteen tani 谷 (valleys), such as the Kurodani 黒谷, near the Western Pagoda. The Kurodani was dominated by the Eshin lineage and came to be associated with Hōnen. The Higashidani 東谷 was the site of the Dannain 檀那院 from which arose the Danna lineage, which considers Kakuun 觉運 (953–1007) as its founder. Kakuun and Genshin were contemporaries and both studied under Ryōgen 良源 (912–985), who is responsible for Mt. Hiei’s close relationship with the center of political power (Groner 2002, 162; Fukuhara 2018). The Eshin and Danna lineages are two major streams of the Tendai school, which are in turn comprised of several sub-lineages, texts, and teachings associated with each of these lineages that were important for the development of the esoteric nenbutsu.

These lineages competed against one another through the production of scholarship, treatises, and taxonomies. The lineage best able to marshal sources and promote its own interpretation would fair better in acquiring patronage and prestige. Mastery of esoteric ritual and the promotion of the pure land path were both key to the success of Mt. Hiei lineages. Saichō’s Tendai lineage cultivated a dual focus on Chinese Tiantai doctrinal study and meditation with Tang esoteric ritual culture. Therefore, in Japan, Tendai was the vehicle for developing esoteric approaches to rebirth in Sukhāvatī.

Tendai pure land thought and practice stemmed from Zhiyi’s Mohezhiguan. Among the many meditations outlined in this expansive work on Buddhist practice, Zhiyi, the de facto patriarch of the Tiantai school, prescribes a ninety-day constant walking meditation. Due to the difficulty of this practice, he proposes that the recitation of the name of Amitābha Buddha may aid in concentration
during this period (T 1911, 46.12a19–13a23). This custom of invoking the name of Amitābha established a textual precedent for a systematic nenbutsu practice. Therefore, Tiantai in China and Tendai in Japan were central to pure land movements expounding devotion to Amitābha Buddha through the recitation of this Buddha’s name.

In Japan in particular, the recitation of Amitābha’s name became a regular part of practice on Mt. Hiei, and the Constant Walking Samadhi Hall (Jōgyō Zanmai Dō 常行三昧堂) became a powerful center for pure land practice. This form of practice may have been taught by Saichō himself, and eventually served as the foundation for the development of several forms of official and “unofficial” pure land practice (NARA 2002, 34–36, 65–66). This grueling regime is said to lead to a breakdown of one’s sense of self, ultimately resulting in a realization of the non-duality of the Buddha and one’s own existence. In Japan, the constant walking meditation harmonized with esoteric deity yoga practices and inspired a diverse range of popular practices, such as mountain-based thaumaturgical practices, or “mountain nenbutsu” (yama no nenbutsu 山の念仏).3 These forms of practice spread beyond Mt. Hiei and proliferated around other mountain-temple complexes, including Mt. Kōya by the early-medieval period (NARA 2002, 103–115, 243).

The career of Ennin may well signify the definitive fusion of esoteric ritual culture and Tendai pure land practice in Japan. Elsewhere, I have considered the important role of Ennin in the construction of Japanese esoteric Buddhism and pure land Buddhism, noting in particular that Ennin’s deathbed practice—which employed the mudra, mantra, and visualization of Amitābha Buddha—may be thought of as one of the first esoteric pure land practices in Japan, a model that would then be repeated and emulated by Buddhists in Japan throughout the early medieval period (PROFFITT 2019). Nara Hiromoto notes that there is disagreement over whether or not Saichō or Ennin may in fact have been aspirants for pure land rebirth in the way they are often depicted by medieval and modern Buddhists and whether or not these popular forms of pure land practice were retroactively attributed to them. For example, that nenbutsu practices attributed to Ennin, such as the constant walking meditation, uninterrupted nenbutsu (fudan nenbutsu 断不断仏), and so on, may in fact have predated Ennin’s career (NARA 2002, 47–62). In any case, Mt. Hiei was not an island, but rather one of many sites where monks from various temples and lineages studied. As Mt. Hiei lineages grew in power and prestige, these ascetic forms of nenbutsu, which were articulated through the language of esoteric ritual, eventually proliferated.

3. For a discussion of the role mountains played in the development of an esoteric approach to practice in medieval Japan, see BUSHELLE (2020).
throughout Japanese mountain centers such as Tōmine (遠峰) in Yamato (大和), various temples in Kyoto, and eventually Mt. Kōya (Kakehashi 2012, 85).⁴

Arguably the most important pure land thinker in Japanese history is the Mt. Hiei scholar-monk Genshin. Genshin’s work was broadly influential among monks and laity alike, and ultimately established the foundation upon which pure land Buddhism as a distinct form of Japanese Buddhism would be established (Rhodes 2017). As a direct disciple of Ryōgen, Genshin studied broadly across doctrinal disciplines, was well-versed in esoteric ritual, and systematized and categorized approaches to rebirth in Sukhāvati.⁵ He also compiled prescriptions for various exoteric and esoteric practices said to be effective for leading to pure land rebirth, including various mantras, dhāraṇī, and so on, as are found throughout the Mahāyāna sutras (T 2682, 84.46b19–23, 84.77b24–c1).

As mentioned above, Genshin is regarded as the founder of the Eshin lineage. As this lineage grew in power, affiliated monks began producing various texts attributed to Genshin. The fourfold rise and fall was an influential Eshin taxonomy that emerged from these texts, which discuss different approaches to Amitābha Buddha, rebirth in Sukhāvati, and the nenbutsu through a view of history rooted in the revelation of the Lotus Sūtra (Kitagawa 2001, 9–11).

**The Fourfold Rise and Fall and the Three Truths of A-mi-da**

Early-medieval Japanese Buddhism was characterized by fluidity and diversity as well as fierce competition within and between the various lineages and sub-lineages connected to different temple complexes and institutions. Monks, as state employees, accumulated mastery of ritual and doctrinal lineages as they competed for patronage, prestige, and power. Therefore, the writings of monks from this period were not merely dispassionate chronicles of Buddhist thought and practice. They were also polemical statements of a tradition’s ideals. In other words, taxonomies, such as the fourfold rise and fall, were frameworks for thinking about the complex, and often contradictory, interpretations of practice and how the multifaceted dimensions of practice can ultimately lead to buddhahood.

As examined in the following sections, the fourfold taxonomy served as a template for the nenbutsu taxonomies used by Dōhan and Kōshū. Like other doctrinal

---

⁴ Ennin was perhaps the first to establish a crowned image of Amitābha, an esoteric form of the Buddha, in the Constant Walking Samadhi Hall on Mt. Hiei, and, from there, this image and texts associated with it flowed through diverse monastic centers throughout Japan (Kagiwada 2014, 259–267).

⁵ Ryōgen, the eighteenth abbot of Mt. Hiei, employed his mastery of esoteric ritual and the pure land myths to simultaneously address the this-world and other-worldly needs of the aristocracy in his Gokuraku jōdo kuho no ōjōgi (1–36). Kakehashi notes that Ryōgen’s emphasis on vocal recitation of the nenbutsu seems to have been especially influential upon later practitioners (Kakehashi 2012, 86–87, 90–93).
paradigms and discourses in medieval Tendai that were initially transmitted orally from master to disciple, it is difficult to establish a chronology for the fourfold rise and fall. Although the taxonomy had become a standard classification scheme by the mid-thirteenth century, there is substantial evidence that it existed in some form centuries earlier. Regardless of the precise dates for the taxonomy, it had a significant influence on medieval Tendai scholasticism as well as the formation of Nichiren’s 日蓮 (1222–1282) analysis of the Lotus Sūtra (Hanano 2002).

The fourfold rise and fall is a hierarchical taxonomy, stipulating that when a teaching “rises” the preceding teaching “falls.” In other words, the teachings become progressively superior as one gives way to the next. The taxonomy is intended to be comprehensive in that it includes all possible teachings of the Buddha, while also taking into account the abilities and needs of individual practitioners engaging with these teachings. The fourfold rise and fall can be outlined as follows (based on Stone 1999, 168–175).

1. Teachings that Preceded the Lotus Sūtra (Nizen 爾前)

In the most basic sense, this category includes all teachings expounded by Śākyamuni prior to the preaching of the Lotus Sūtra. Although the Lotus Sūtra was always important to the Tiantai/Tendai school, over time the sutra became more and more central to the school’s doctrinal identity. In Japan in particular, the supremacy of the Lotus Sūtra was a fundamental element of Saichō’s efforts to differentiate his new school from the Nara establishment. This polemic was even further stressed when Tendai scholiasts began to integrate the teachings of the sutra with esoteric Buddhism. Enchin, for instance, asserted that the perfect teachings of the Lotus Sūtra were superior to the teachings of other sutras and equated it with the esoteric teachings. Therefore, the teachings that preceded the Lotus Sūtra are the most basic form of Buddhist teachings, which “fall” away as the practitioner “rises” to a higher level of teachings in this seminal Tendai sutra.

2. The Trace Teachings (Shakumon 迹門)

Tiantai/Tendai exegetes traditionally divide the Lotus Sūtra into two halves. The first fourteen chapters are referred to as the “trace teachings,” which, like the preceding sutras, were expounded by Śākyamuni in his provisional aspect as the historical Buddha. The teachings in the first half of the sutra were, nonetheless, deemed superior to those of previous sutras. Thus, as the trace teachings of the Lotus Sūtra “rise,” the teachings that preceded them “fall.”

6. For a summary of the Japanese scholarship regarding the dates of the fourfold rise and fall, see Stone (1999, 417, n. 76).
3. THE SOURCE TEACHINGS (HONMON 本門)

The “trace teachings” are derivative of the “source teachings,” which are revealed in the latter half of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Along with other pairings such as principle (*li* 理) and phenomenon (*shi* 事), the source/trace dichotomy has deep roots in Chinese Buddhist thought. However, this distinction was even more pronounced in Japanese Tendai. While the trace teachings were preached by Śākyamuni Buddha during his lifetime, the source teachings were expounded by the Buddha who had awakened long ago (*kuon jitsujō butsu* 久遠実成仏). In the Eshin and Danna lineages, the source teachings were considered to be superior in that they directly revealed the truth of original enlightenment. This preference for the source teachings was further amplified in Tendai esoteric Buddhism, which equated the long-ago awakened Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra* with Mahāvairocana. As Mahāvairocana represented the inconceivable body of the dharma (*hosshin* 法身), the long-ago awakened Buddha was none other than the embodiment of original enlightenment. Thus, the trace teachings “fall” as one grapples with the profundity of the source teachings.

4. DISCERNING THE MIND (KANJIN 観心)

The final stage of the fourfold rise and fall taxonomy is not a specific set of teachings but references contemplation. However, in the Japanese Tendai context, contemplation not only denoted a form of meditation or practice but invoked “the insight of original enlightenment, considered as an a priori ground” (*Stone* 1999, 172). Contemplation methods were actually categorized as belonging to the trace teachings. As the source teachings were elevated by the Eshin and Danna lineages as well as in Tendai esoteric Buddhism, some practices for “discerning the mind” were associated with the source teachings. This association created the need for a final and supreme stage that encompassed all teachings and practices. The “rise” of contemplating the mind was to realize the original enlightenment of all phenomena and, thus, supersedes the distinctions between the preceding stages of the paradigm.

The version of the fourfold rise and fall paradigm in the *Jigyō nenbutsu mondō*, a medieval pure land apocryphon attributed to Genshin, maps this system onto the characteristics of Amitābha Buddha. Following the structure of the standard fourfold taxonomy, the text first discusses the appearance of Amitābha in pre-*Lotus* teachings in which the Buddha is presented as a potential object of devotion and a popular character in Mahāyāna sutra literature. Amitābha is then identified with the Tathāgata of Supreme Penetration and Wisdom in the “Parable of the Conjured City” chapter of the trace teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The text positions Amitābha as an arbitrator between the trace teachings preached
by Śākyamuni and the source teachings expounded by the long-ago awakened Buddha of the latter half of the sutra. Finally, the Jigyō nenbutsu mondō associates contemplating the mind with the invocation of Amitābha’s name, that is, the nenbutsu (Stone 1999, 175; DNBZ 31: 201a–b).

The fourfold rise and fall from the Jigyō nenbutsu mondō intersects with another taxonomy prevalent in texts associated with Genshin and the Eshin lineage: the three truths of a-mi-da. This exegetical technique explores conceptions of Amitābha Buddha and, thus, the doctrinal significance of the syllables chanted in the nenbutsu. In practical terms, the syllables constituting the name of this buddha—a, mi, and da in Japanese—are equated with the three truths of emptiness (kū 空), nominal existence (ke 仮), and the middle (chū 中) in which the truths of emptiness and nominal existence mutually coincide. According to this seminal Tendai doctrine, ultimate reality, which is the truth that all phenomena are empty of permanent existence, is accessible through the provisional reality of the nominal existence of all phenomena. It is at this point of tension between ultimate and provisional reality where sentient beings can attain liberation by realizing the truth of emptiness while abiding in a nominal state of existing. Therefore, the recitation of the name of Amitābha is tantamount to invoking the fundamental components of Tendai soteriology.

The three truths of a-mi-da discourse was an attempt to resolve the problem of how ordinary beings could perceive Amitābha Buddha in his pure land of Sukhāvatī from the position of nominal existence. The nenbutsu, thus, functioned as a nexus in which the ultimate truth of emptiness, the realization of which is the objective of practice in the pure land, could be made accessible in the mundane world of ordinary beings. Depending on one’s level of ability, the simple practice of reciting the name of the Buddha could have multiple soteriological outcomes: postmortem rebirth in Amitābha’s pure land, or enlightenment in one’s current body.

_Dōhan’s Fourfold Nenbutsu Taxonomy_

One of the earliest and most influential appropriations of the fourfold taxonomic model to the medieval discourse on the esoteric nenbutsu is Dōhan’s Himitsu nenbutsu shō. Composed around 1224, the Himitsu nenbutsu shō is a collection of dialogues (mondō 問答) between the author and an imagined interlocutor regarding theories of the nenbutsu found in multifarious Chinese and Japanese commentaries and other exegetical writings. As a Shingon monk based

---

7. This way of imbuing the nenbutsu itself with the content of the whole of the Buddhist path may have paved the way for Hōnen and others associated with the early pure land movement to advocate for the nenbutsu as the sole practice sufficient for rebirth in Sukhāvatī (SUEKI 1979; 2008, 141–144).
on Mt. Kōya, Dōhan was well-versed in the esoteric sutras and their respective commentaries. However, Tendai sources are also prominent in his analysis of the nenbutsu. Considering the fact that lineages based on Mt. Hiei dominated early medieval Buddhism, scholar-monks such as Dōhan, writing on the faraway and comparatively marginal Mt. Kōya, would have had to rely on the ideas at the political and religious center as he worked to establish his perspective on the nenbutsu. In the Himitsu nenbutsu shō, Dōhan calls upon both Shingon and Tendai exegetical traditions to craft his own nenbutsu taxonomy.

Dōhan was a prolific scholar and ritual master, and one interesting thread throughout his writings is an emphasis placed on devotion to Amitābha Buddha. Amitābha is the main object of worship (honzon 本尊) at Shōchiin 正智院, Nin-naji, and several other temples where Dōhan trained.8 The main image of a temple is not inconsequential, as it often takes center stage in the ritual program of that temple. The fact that Dōhan’s career began before an image of the Amitābha and much of his training and activities took place at temples where this buddha was the main object of devotion suggests that Amitābha-oriented practices were always a predominant concern for him. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the topics of nenbutsu and aspiration for rebirth in Sukhāvatī were at the core of his thought on ritual, doctrine, and practice (Proffitt 2015, 290–345).

Dōhan begins his Himitsu nenbutsu shō by asking why so many practitioners of mantra and shikan 止観 (the two basic forms of meditation, śamatha and vipaśyanā, which in Tendai became a general term for all contemplation practices), have come to rely on Amitābha Buddha as their object of devotion and the nenbutsu as their primary form of practice. Is it because the nenbutsu is easy, or is it because of the multivalent nature of this practice? This question from Dōhan’s imaginary interlocutor sets up the main thesis of the text: the soteriological goal of rebirth in Sukhāvatī, devotion to Amitābha Buddha, and the practice of nenbutsu can be interpreted from multiple perspectives depending on one’s level of ability to comprehend the esoteric nenbutsu (SAZ 2: 226).

Immediately following this rhetorical question regarding the diversity and popularity of pure land thought and practice, Dōhan lays out a fourfold esoteric explanation (shishu hishaku 四種秘釈) for categorizing the different levels of engagement with Amitābha and nenbutsu practice. While he organizes his taxonomy around Shingon doctrinal themes, such as the Vajradhātu and Garbhadhātu Mandalas and Mahāvairocana Tathāgata as the manifestation of

8. In addition to his writings on doctrine, perhaps Dōhan is most well-known historically for his involvement in the 1243 dispute over patronage, and the estates that accompany it, between Kongōbuji 金剛峰寺 and Daidenbōin 大伝法院, two competing monastic centers on Mt. Kōya. As a result of his role in the violent altercations that ensued, Dōhan, along with around thirty other monks, was exiled from the mountain until permitted to return six years later (KS 154, 157; SATÔ 2003, 89).
ultimate reality, there is substantial continuity between his taxonomy and the fourfold rise and fall associated with the Eshin lineage. Dōhan’s taxonomy outlined in the preface to the Himitsu nenbutsu shō (saz 2: 226) can be summarized as follows:

1. THE SHALLOW (SENRYAKU 浅略) INTERPRETATION OF AMITĀBHA BUDDHA

In the first level of his taxonomy, Dōhan proposes a “shallow and abbreviated” understanding of Amitābha as the former bodhisattva Dharmākara, who, upon fulfilling his vows to Lokeśvararāja Buddha, achieved buddhahood and generated the pure land Sukhāvati. As with the first category of the rise and fall taxonomy in the Jigyō nenbutsu mondō, Dōhan substitutes the historical Buddha of the pre-Lotus teachings with Amitābha. He begins his taxonomy with a hagiographical depiction of Amitābha that is common across traditions, which, much like the standard fourfold rise and fall paradigm, functions as a catchall polemical category for exoteric interpretations of this buddha. Labeling this category of his nenbutsu taxonomy as “shallow” may also have been a subtle criticism of Hōnen’s Senchakushū (Yamaguchi 2002, 113–115). It seems that Dōhan’s main critique of the exclusive nenbutsu associated with Hōnen’s movement hinged primarily on the notion that the recitation of Amitābha’s name could be isolated from other forms of practice. Rather than an exclusive practice, Dōhan subsumes the nenbutsu within a spectrum of interpretations of Amitābha. As the most basic understanding of devotion to the Buddha, it eventually “falls” away as the practitioner realizes the secret meaning inherent in such practices.

2. THE PROFOUNDLY SECRET (JINPI 深秘) INTERPRETATION OF AMITĀBHA BUDDHA

This second level of the taxonomy refers to Amitābha as the manifestation of the cognition of wondrous observation (myōkansatsuchi 妙観察智) depicted in the Garbhadhātu Mandala and the esoteric sutras. Dōhan contrasts this level with the previous one. Invoking the exoteric-esoteric dichotomy typical of Shingon polemics, he notes that in the exoteric teachings of the first level, each buddha, such as Amitābha, becomes a buddha through their own efforts as a result of numerous lifetimes of cultivation. In the mantra teachings, however, the myriad virtues of the tathāgatas are revealed to the practitioner. In other words, the “shallow” nenbutsu of the first level merely leads to the realization of a particular buddha, whereas the “profoundly secret” interpretation of Amitābha reveals that devotion to the esoteric version of this buddha is actually a means for achieving the awakened wisdom of all buddhas. Much like the trace teachings of the rise and fall taxonomy, the second level of Dōhan’s fourfold model of nenbutsu posits the introductory esoteric practices regarding Amitābha, as one of the buddhas of
the mandala, as the first step of the superior path. Thus, the “shallow” interpretation of the nenbutsu “falls” away as the superior esoteric interpretation “rises.”

3. THE PROFUNDLY SECRET AMONG THE SECRET (HICHŪJINPI 秘中深秘) INTERPRETATION OF AMITĀBHA BUDDHA

The third level explicitly identifies Amitābha with Mahāvairocana Tathāgata, who in the Shingon and Tendai traditions is considered the body of the dharma’s unfading wisdom that pervades past, present, and future. Hence, Dōhan notes, Amitābha is also called Limitless Life (Muryōju 無量寿, which is also in the title of the pure land sutra, the Sutra of the Meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life). The confluence and interchangeability of Mahāvairocana and Amitābha goes as far back as the Mt. Hiei monk Kōkei 皇慶 (977–1049), who trained in various Shingon lineages (KAGIWAIDA 2009, 607), as well as a major doctrinal point in the works of Kakuban upon whom Dōhan relies throughout the Himitsu nenbutsu shō. The fourfold rise and fall created a precedent for identifying the long-ago awakened Śākyamuni of the Lotus Sūtra with the Buddha of Limitless Life, a view that became pervasive in Japanese Tendai and even appears in the writings of Shinran (KAKEHASHI 2004). However, Dōhan takes this correlation a step further in his version of the fourfold taxonomy by replacing the long-ago awakened Buddha of the source teachings in the Lotus Sūtra with Amitābha, who he exclaims to be none other than Mahāvairocana, the dharma body of the Buddha. Therefore, the second level of the nenbutsu taxonomy is merely a “trace teaching” of this level in which the practitioner recognizes that Amitābha in the outer levels of the mandala is identical to Mahāvairocana at the center. Thus, reciting the nenbutsu is the same as invoking the dharma body of the Buddha.

4. THE PROFUNDLY SECRET AMONG THE EXTREMELY SECRET (HIHICHŪ-JINPI 秘秘中深秘) INTERPRETATION OF AMITĀBHA BUDDHA

Like the “discerning the mind” category of the fourfold rise and fall, Dōhan’s final level attempts to dissolve the hierarchal nature of the previous three levels by declaring that Amitābha is the true aspect of form and thought (shikishin jissō 色心実相) for all sentient beings. In other words, from the perspective that Amitābha ultimately denotes the wisdom of the Buddha that surpasses all cognitive distinctions, even the “shallow” interpretation of Amitābha as one of many buddhas to whom one might worship is, in essence, the esoteric nenbutsu. Therefore, the “rise” of this fourth level of the taxonomy negates the superficial hierarchy of the preceding levels.

Following this exploration of the four levels of Amitābha Buddha, Dōhan spends a considerable amount of time exploring the exoteric and esoteric meanings of the three characters of the name of Amitābha Buddha in Japanese: a-mi-da.
Dōhan sets up his discussion of the three truths of a-mi-da through his imaginary interlocutor’s inquiry into the profoundly secret meaning of Amitābha’s name. Asserting that a single character of the Buddha’s name encompasses a myriad of meanings, he juxtaposes the three characters constituting the name with the three sections of the Garbhadhātu Mandala, namely, buddha, vajra, and lotus. The first character a denotes the originally unarisen middle way (honpusho chūdō 本不生中道), a standard trope for the origin of that Mahāvairocana’s mantra in esoteric Buddhism based on the Sanskrit syllabary. The second character mi is equated with the doctrine that the self as well as all phenomena are ultimately empty (ninpō nikū 人法二空). Finally, the third character da signifies the inherently pure principle of suchness (shōjō nyonyo ri 性浄如如理) (saz 2: 228).

As with the discussion of the three truths of a-mi-da in the Jigyō nenbutsu mondō, Dōhan compares the three syllables with the Tendai doctrine of the three truths. However, he adds another layer of interpretation to this paradigm. In response to his interlocutor regarding the “shallow” and “profound” meanings of each syllable, Dōhan asserts that each can be understood according to a superficial exoteric notion of the three truths or their more subtle esoteric meaning. If one follows the exoteric teaching (in this case, the classical Tendai view), then the syllable da, which signifies the truth of the middle, is merely the initial stage of awakening (shigaku 始覚). In contrast, for those who abide by the esoteric teaching of mantra, the utterance of the syllable da denotes inherent awakening (hongaku 本覚). Dōhan then proceeds to map the three syllables constituting Amitābha’s name onto the sections of the Garbhadhātu Mandala (saz 2: 228).

By devising his own version of the fourfold rise and fall taxonomy and the three truths of a-mi-da, Dōhan appropriated the systematic logic of these scholastic models to construct his own interpretation of the popular practice of nenbutsu. Ultimately, Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu is not simply the nenbutsu of a single doctrinal position or school, albeit he does associate the most profound interpretation with that of his own Shingon school. Rather, the esoteric taxonomy organizes diverse approaches to nenbutsu practice and orientates them toward the mantra path. By adopting the scholastic language of taxonomy from his Tendai counterparts in the Eshin lineage, Dōhan incorporates the nenbutsu, devotion to Amitābha Buddha, and rebirth in the Buddha’s pure land into the doctrinal framework of esoteric Buddhism in an effort to establish an esoteric orthodoxy.

Kōshū’s Fourfold Nenbutsu Taxonomy

About a century after Dōhan penned his Himitsu nenbutsu shō, the topic of the esoteric nenbutsu resurfaces in fascicle fifteen of the Keiran shūyōshū. Compiled by Kōshū, a chronicler in the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei and member of the
Eshin lineage, the *Keiran shūyōshū* is a massive compendium of orally transmitted interpretations of doctrines, rituals, and practices expounded in the Tendai school. Therefore, it should not be surprising that debates regarding the meaning of the *nenbutsu* are featured prominently in this compilation.

By the time Kōshū began his project of compiling and organizing the content of the *Keiran shūyōshū* in the fourteenth century, the various factions of the pure land movement had become an influential intellectual force in Japanese Buddhism. Thus, Kōshū considers Dōhan’s esoteric *nenbutsu* in the context of the evolving diversity of *nenbutsu* practice and thought. Although Kōshū relegates Dōhan’s taxonomy to just one of four categories of interpretations, the Mt. Hiei scholar-monk proclaims the theory of his Mt. Kōya predecessor, along with the Tendai view, as a means for directly realizing buddhahood.

Kōshū identifies four categories for interpreting the *nenbutsu* and devotion to Amitābha based on the Eshin lineage fourfold taxonomy. In a subsequent passage (*T 2410, 76.551c27–552a13*), he labels these interpretations as belonging to (1) the Shingon school, (2) the Tendai school, (3) Genshin’s *Ojōyōshū*, and (4) the school of Shandao 善導 (613–681), the patriarch of Chinese pure land thought. However, he uses slightly different language in his analysis of the four categories, which can be summarized as follows (*T 2410, 76.551*).

1. **ESOTERIC NENBUTSU**

Although he does not mention him by name or cite the *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* in this first category of *nenbutsu* interpretations, Kōshū alludes to the latter three levels of Dōhan’s taxonomy. As in the second level (the first esoteric level) of Dōhan’s discussion of Amitābha, Kōshū notes that this interpretation identifies Amitābha with the manifestation of the cognition of wondrous observation depicted in the Garbhadhātu Mandala. He also states that this interpretation equates Amitābha with the “single buddha of the esoteric teachings” (*mikkyō no ichi butsu* 密教之一仏), presumably referring to Mahāvairocana. This equation of the two buddhas resembles the third level of Dōhan’s taxonomy. Finally, Kōshū invokes the fourth level of the taxonomy by associating the recitation of Amitābha’s name with the esoteric practice of resonating the three secrets of the Buddha (*sanmitsu sōō 三密相応*). In other words, similar to the “discerning the mind” category of the fourfold rise and fall, the final level of the esoteric *nenbutsu* is to overcome the distinctions between the practitioner and the Buddha.

2. **NENBUTSU OF THE TENDAI SCHOOL**

Kōshū’s summary of *nenbutsu* theory in the Tendai school is by far the most extensive of the four interpretations discussed in the *Keiran shūyōshū*. He begins this section by clarifying that, from the Tendai perspective, the pure land of
Amitābha is synonymous with the entirety of the dharma realm (hokkai 法界). Thus, the pure land is, according to this interpretation, replete throughout the ten realms (jikkai enman 十界円滿; a metaphor for the respective worlds of all beings in the six realms, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas). As a singular vehicle (ichijō 一乘) of the Buddha’s teachings, Tendai can be understood from one of four perspectives (kehō shikyō 化法四教): tripiṭaka (sanzō 三蔵), shared (tsū 通), distinct (betsu 別), and perfect (en 円). Kōshū states that the Tendai approach to the nenbutsu is a perfect teaching. Therefore, by invoking the name of Amitābha, the practitioner brings to mind the self-realized wisdom of the buddha’s enlightenment (jijuyūshin 自受用身智).

Kōshū includes the three truths of a-mi-da in this interpretation. Similar to the theory found in the Jigyō nenbutsu mondō, the three syllables signify the doctrine of the three truths. However, this interpretation takes the correlation a step further. According to Kōshū, the oral activity (kugō 口業) of invoking the name of the Buddha is karmically equivalent to obtaining the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, simply by intoning the name, one’s oral, physical (shingō 身業), and mental (igō 意業) actions become the true characteristics (jissō 実相) of the Buddha, which, he declares, has the same purport as shikan practice. In other words, Kōshū not only aligns the three syllables with the three truths, but with the three activities through which the practitioner attains buddhahood.

3. SHARED MAHĀYĀNA VIEW OF THE NENBUTSU

Kōshū next identifies a general Mahāyāna approach to the nenbutsu, which he associates with theories proposed by various teachers including those in Gen- shin’s Ōjōyōshū and treatises on the Mahāvairocana Sūtra. From this perspective, ordinary people (bonbu 凡夫) who are incapable of realizing the true characteristics of the Buddha through the recitation of the nenbutsu are reborn in the pure land, where there are few obstacles to obtaining enlightenment. In other words, this interpretation is addressed to those who seek the pure land because they are weary of this defiled world (gonjō ene 欣浄厭穢).

4. NENBUTSU IN THE PURE LAND SCHOOL

The final interpretation ostensibly encompasses an array of views subsumed under the category of the Pure Land school. First, Kōshū summarizes the perspective of Shandao, which stipulates that one can be reborn in the pure land by taking refuge in the compassion of Amitābha and reciting the name of the Buddha. He next compares Shandao’s teaching with Hōnen’s school, which adds that even ignorant beings (gūchi 愚癡) can be reborn in the pure land. Kōshū additionally references theories that would typically be classified as esoteric. For instance, he notes that the ultimate goal for practitioners of the exo-esoteric teachings (that
is, Tendai esoteric Buddhism) is to realize that the defilements are inherent to the mandala. Citing an interpretation attributed to the semi-legendary Shingon patriarch Nāgārjuna, Kōshū suggests that this concept is embodied in the manifestation of esoteric deities such as Fudō Myōō 不動明王 and Aizen Myōō 愛染明王. In conclusion, Kōshū offers his own interpretation of the pure land view of nenbutsu, referring to it as the middle way (chūdō 中道) that allows rebirth in the pure land for ignorant beings who have yet to grasp the more profound meaning of the nenbutsu and who have not yet been able to sever their attachments to this impure world.

Kōshū structured his taxonomy based on the hierarchal model of the four teachings, which, like the rise and fall and Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu, assigns various levels of profundity to these categories. The nenbutsu of the pure land schools is most suitable for ordinary people who cannot comprehend the more complicated methods. In this case, like Dōhan’s first level, the nenbutsu is a simple practice that does not require adherence to the precepts or advanced capabilities in Buddhist practice. The shared Mahāyāna interpretation, which primarily refers to Genshin’s view of the nenbutsu in the Ōjōyōshū, is applicable to sentient beings at various levels of the path and can lead to buddhahood in the current world or rebirth in Amitābha’s pure land.

Kōshū’s taxonomy differs from the rise and fall of Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu in that it is not a sequential process but rather a typology of interpretations. One level does not “fall” away as another “rises.” However, like Dōhan, Kōshū employs the exoteric versus esoteric polemic to parse the soteriological significance of the four categories. The Shingon and Tendai interpretations are esoteric views that allow the practitioner to internally realize (naishō 内証) the current world as a pure land, whereas Shandao and Genshin’s exoteric views have the external function (geyū 外用) of aiding those who seek rebirth in Sukhāvatī where they can practice free of the defilements of this world. Nonetheless, as a taxonomy, Kōshū’s compilation of nenbutsu interpretations is an attempt to impose order on an ever-sprawling body of theory regarding Buddhist praxis. By including Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu in this paradigm, Kōshū accepts it as the orthodox esoteric understanding of nenbutsu practice.

Conclusion

The very act of constructing a taxonomy is prescriptive. Taxonomies were not only attempts to systematize various theories on the liberatory practice of nenbutsu that had proliferated through centuries of scholastic wrangling over the purport of the Buddha’s teachings. They were also propositions for how the teachings should be universally applicable regardless of the obvious differences among those who receive them.
In the case of the fourfold rise and fall and the three truths of a-mi-da, Tendai exegetes attempted to account for how the pure land mythos, the nature of Amitābha Buddha, and the salvific syllables of the nenbutsu could be engaged on multiple levels. As lineages such as the Danna and Eshin continued to diversify, so did variations on these fundamental taxonomies. While attempting to impose order on this cacophony, scholar-monks from inside and outside of the Tendai tradition adapted the fourfold rise and fall for their own polemical purposes.

Two such scholar-monks were Dōhan of Mt. Kōya and Kōshū of Mt. Hiei. Dōhan drew upon his training in esoteric ritual and knowledge of scriptural commentaries to imagine the interconnections between diverse perspectives on nenbutsu practice. In addition to paradigms found in esoteric sutras, their commentaries, and treatises by Kūkai, Dōhan utilized exegetical strategies from his Tendai counterparts and the growing pure land movement on Mt. Hiei. Applying the progressive model of the fourfold rise and fall, he devised a comprehensive taxonomy of nenbutsu based on esoteric Buddhist doctrine. A century later, Kōshū’s compilation of nenbutsu theories demonstrates the diversity of interpretations of the practice of chanting the name of the Buddha that existed in medieval Japan. In addition to nenbutsu practices in the pure land schools and Genshin’s references to this practice in his Ōjōyōshū that guided the ordinary person to rebirth in Amitābha’s pure land through the simple recitation of the Buddha’s name, Kōshū proposed that Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu, along with the Tendai view, was a major component of the nenbutsu orthodoxy.

Through this brief examination of Kōshū, Dōhan, and their predecessors in the Eshin lineage, the fluid intellectual context for the formation of nenbutsu taxonomies becomes clear. The study of the esoteric nenbutsu reveals the porous boundaries between esoteric and pure land Buddhism as well as highlighting the way lineages originating in different institutions, like Mt. Hiei and Mt. Kōya, borrowed from and influenced one another in the arena of the medieval Japanese struggle for orthodoxy.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


T  

**Primary Sources**


*Keiran shūyōshū* 渓嵐拾葉集. 113 fascs. Compiled by Kōshū 光宗 (ca. 1311–1348). T 2410, 76.


*Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集. 3 fascs. Genshin. T 2682, 84.

**Secondary Sources**

Abé, Ryūichi


Buijnsters, Marc


Bushelle, Ethan


Fukuhara Ryūzen 福原隆善


Groner, Paul


Hanano Jūdō 花野充道

Hayami Tasuku, 速水 侑

Hikino Kyōsuke and Jon Morris, trans.

Inoue Mitsusada, 井上光貞

Isomae Jun’ichi, 伊曽見淳一

Kagiwada Seiko, 鍵和田聖子
2009, Mandara jō no Dainichi kurai to Mida kurai no kōtai (kyogae) ni okeru taimitsu kara tōmitsu e no eikyō 萬法羅上の大日位と弥陀位の交替(居替)における台密から東密への影響. Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū 57: 604–607.
2014, Tōmitsu to Taimitsu no sōgo eikyō kara mita juyō to kensan no tenkai 東密と台密の相互影響から見た受容と研鑽の展開. PhD dissertation, Ryūkoku Daigaku.

Kakehashi Jitsuen, 梯 実円

Kakehashi Nobuaki, 梯 信暁

Kitagawa Shinkan, 北川真寛

Kuroda Toshio, 黒田直雄

Kushida Ryōkō, 橋田良洪

McMullen, Matthew D.

McMullin, Neil
Nakamura Honnen 中村本然

Nara Hiromoto 奈良弘元

Proffitt, Aaron P.

Quinter, David

Rhodes, Robert F.

Ruppert, Brian

Sanford, James H.

Satō Mona 佐藤もな
2003  Dōhan ni kansuru kisoteki kenkyū denki shiryō o chūshin to shite 道範に関する基礎的研究伝記史料を中心として. Bukkyō bunka kenkyū ronshū 7: 85–95.

Satō Tetsuei 佐藤哲英

Stone, Jacqueline I.


SUEKI Fumihiko 末木文美士


TANABE, George


VAN DER VEERE, Hendrik


WEINSTEIN, Stanley


WILLIAMS, Duncan


YAMAGUCHI Shikyo 山口史恭


YU, Jimmy

This study explores depictions of Sannō in the *Keiran shūyōshū*, a collection of orally transmitted teachings on Mt. Hiei compiled in the early fourteenth century. Originally a conglomeration of protective kami, Sannō rose in prominence to become the primary deity of the mountain and, by extension, the divine representation of the Tendai teachings. Based on the medieval hermeneutic of source-trace, Sannō was posited as the embodiment of Tendai esoteric doctrine. This article demonstrates that the Sannō deity of Mt. Hiei, as constructed in the *Keiran*, represents a concerted effort among Tendai scholastics in medieval Japan to specify an orthodox esoteric Buddhist tradition by associating the fundamental doctrines of their school and consolidating competing interpretations into the guise of a singular deity.

**KEYWORDS:** Tendai—esoteric Buddhism—*Keiran shūyōshū*—Sannō—kami—*honji sui jaku*
The *Keiran shūyōshū* (hereafter, *Keiran*) is a fourteenth-century compendium of orally transmitted (*kuden* 口伝) knowledge on medieval Tendai teachings, practices, rituals, and cultural traditions. Compiled by the Tendai monk Kōshū 光宗 (1276–1350), the *Keiran* is a record of the multifarious interpretations of Tendai doctrine that circulated on Mt. Hiei 比叡 during the early medieval period. For this reason, the text is often labeled as “encyclopedic” due to its exhaustive nature and for its ample discussions and records concerning the phenomenon of kami-buddha amalgamation (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合). The *Keiran* is also a valuable source for tracing the systemization of liturgies and textual exegesis constituting Tendai esoteric Buddhism.

Despite the significance of the *Keiran* to the study of medieval Japanese Buddhism, few scholars have delved into the contents of this massive collection of teachings.¹ Perhaps one reason for the dearth of scholarship on this text is the daunting size of this work; the version published in volume seventy-six of the *Taishō* canon runs over three hundred pages. Furthermore, the *Keiran* lacks a comprehensive narrative, and the logic behind the structure of the extant text is unclear. The compiler, Kōshū, was primarily concerned with documenting responses from various masters regarding specific doctrinal or ritual matters (*koto* 事), rather than organizing these responses chronologically or according to their exegetical relevance, as many commentaries and subcommentaries are structured. Therefore, the contents of the *Keiran* are usually examined piecemeal, rather than treated as a single work.

Although the *Keiran* lacks an overarching logic or systematic structure, we can discern an inner consistency throughout the various topics of a given division or section of the text. For instance, the paradigm of source and trace (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹), which is ubiquitous in the medieval discourse on kami-buddha relations, is a hermeneutical device employed consistently throughout the *Keiran*. Furthermore, the focus on one deity in particular, Sannō 山王 the mountain god of Mt. Hiei, is a reoccurring feature in the text.

In this article, I track the transformation of Sannō from a local guardian deity to the ultimate manifestation of Tendai esoteric Buddhist doctrine. The Sannō deity of Mt. Hiei, as constructed in the *Keiran*, represents a concerted effort among Tendai scholastics in medieval Japan to specify an orthodox

¹. Notable exceptions include the studies cited in this article (Tanaka 2003; Grapard 1987; 1998; Faure 2015).
esoteric Buddhist tradition by associating the fundamental doctrines of their school with, and subsuming competing sites and lineages under, the guise of a singular deity. Through the conflation of metaphors and traditional Tendai doctrines within the medieval hermeneutic of the source-trace paradigm, Sannō becomes a convenient floating signifier that can be used to explain away contradictions or complications in the doctrinal discourse.

The Mission of the Keiran

Compiled on Mt. Hiei during the first half of the fourteenth century, the Keiran is a record of orally transmitted knowledge regarding the teachings, practices, rituals, and cultural traditions of the Tendai school in medieval Japan. Previous studies on medieval Japanese religion have referred to the compilation as “encyclopedic” due to its comprehensive treatment of doctrine and practice (Grapard 1998; Teeuwen 2000; Breen and Teeuwen 2010, 89–90). The Keiran is also an important record of liturgical texts for Tendai esoteric Buddhism (Faure 2015, 31). Although such descriptions accurately describe the Keiran as a text, the compilation of this massive work also demonstrates the religious practice of “recording” and how such scholastic activities were fundamental to medieval Buddhism.

The original compilation of the Keiran consisted of more than three hundred fascicles. However, in her study of the Keiran’s textual history, Tanaka Takako notes that it must have been copied and circulated in independent fascicles or sections rather than as a single collection. The content and number of fascicles recorded in the Kokusho sō mokuroku vary depending on the edition. It was not until the early modern period that these dispersed fascicles were compiled into books (satsu 冊). The Shinnyozō 真如蔵 edition, copied in the seventeenth century and housed at Eizan Bunkō, was the source text for the Taishō publication, probably due to the fact that the Eizan Bunkō held the most complete version of the Keiran when the Taishō was produced in the early twentieth century (Tanaka 2003, 72).

Kōshū, the compiler of the Keiran, was a Tendai monk and Buddhist intellectual who was well-versed in poetry, mathematics, medicine, divination, and military strategy (Sueki 2003, 47). He obtained transmissions into multiple lineages on the mountain, including initiation into the precept tradition at Kurodani 黒谷 from Kōen 興円 (1262–1317).² He also received training in consecration rites for

² Kōshū records the date of composition for each subsection along with his name; in most cases he identifies himself simply as a Tendai monk (shamon 天台沙門) but in a number of cases he identifies himself as Kōshū of Tendai Kurodani or Sanmon Kurodani 山門黒谷. The precept tradition based at Kurodani transmitted the so-called “perfect and sudden precepts” (endon kai 円頓戒), which was a part of the Danna 檀那 lineage (Tanaka, 2003, 14; Yamamoto 1998, 404–406; Stone 1999, 126–129).
kami (shinmei kanjō 神明灌頂) from Gigen 義源 (ca. 1289–1351), whose chronicle Sanke yöryakuki includes an extensive collection of transmissions regarding the worship of Sannō (TANAKA 2003, 10–13; STONE 1999, 126). Despite his elite pedigree, Kōshū does not seem to have been involved in the political maneuvering typical of monks of his stature. Rather, based on available records, he appears to have primarily devoted himself to the compilation of the Keiran for most of his monastic career (TANAKA 2003, 30–31).

The extant version of the Keiran is arranged into four divisions of exoteric teachings (ken 領), esoteric teachings (mitsu 密), precepts (kai 戒), and records (kiroku 記録), with each division further split into subdivisions of kami (shinmei 神明), meditation (zen 禅), and doctrine (kyō 教). According to the table of contents, each of the four main sections of the Keiran includes its own listing of initiatory consecration rituals (kanjō 灌頂) followed by Kōshū’s commentary. Thus, the ritual for the exoteric teachings is the secret that “gives rise to wisdom that leads to wondrous awakening” (shochi myōgo 生智妙悟), the ritual for esoteric teachings is “the consecration of all dharmas” (shohō kanjō 諸法灌頂), the ritual for the “transmission of precepts for protection” (chingo jukai 鎮護授戒) is the consecration of “benefiting the land by dimming light and mingling with dust” (wakō dōjin ryaku kokudo kanjō 和光同塵利益国土灌頂) (t 2410, 76.503b23).

The phrase “dimming light and mingling with dust” (wakō dōjin 和光同塵) originally comes from a passage found in the Daodejing on the meaning of the way (dao 道) (Daodejing, chapter 4). In Japan, this phrase was appropriated as a synonym for the manifestation of a buddha in accordance with the source-trace hermeneutic of medieval Japanese Buddhist discourse on the nature of buddhas and kami. In the Keiran, a variation of this expression, “dimming the light and suspending the traces” (wakō suijaku and光垂迹), is used to refer to the manifestation of a kami with the express purpose of saving sentient beings (t 2410, 76.530a12–13). Therefore, by assigning a specific consecration rite with “benefiting the land by dimming light and mingling with dust,” Kōshū implies that such rites were conducted for the benefit of sentient beings in the current, impure world.

3. From the mid-thirteenth century onward, esoteric Buddhist notions of kami began to take the form of initiation rituals through which each practitioner established a bond with a specific kami. These kami rituals were referred to by a variety of names, including shintō kanjō 神道灌頂, shinmei kanjō 神明灌頂, jingi kanjō 神祇灌頂, Ise kanjō 伊勢灌頂, and Nihongo kanjō 日本記灌頂 (TEEUWEN 2000, 102). Although the authorship of the Sanke yöryakuki is traditionally attributed to Kenshin 顕真 (1132–1192), Gigen was probably responsible for editing and compiling this work. Considering Kōshū was Gigen's disciple, the attribution to his master in the Keiran is more reliable than later references (SUEKI 2003, 41).

4. This four-part taxonomy was typical of texts produced as a part of the educational system on Mt. Hiei in medieval Japan (SUEKI 2003, 37). See, for example, Aaron PROFFITT’s (2020) contribution to this special issue on the topic of taxonomies in esoteric Buddhism.
It is worth noting that Kōshū assigns this rite to the division of records. Kōshū belonged to a genre of Tendai scholastic commonly referred to as the “chroniclers” (kike 記家). The tradition of chroniclers emerged from the custom of recording secret transmissions of oral teachings on small scraps of paper called kirigami 切紙. With the influx of competing lineages on Mt. Hiei, the number of idiosyncratic transmissions of secret teachings on the mountain escalated, as did the production of kirigami. Chroniclers such as Kōshū endeavored to compile these disparate writings into a reference for scholastics to utilize when debating doctrines from outside the Tendai school (Tanaka 2003, 24).

For medieval Tendai chroniclers, “recording” was in and of itself a bodhisattva practice for the spiritual benefit of sentient beings by manifesting and transmitting the Dharma. Another chronicle compiled shortly after the Keiran, the Kuin bukkaku shō, associates the act of recording and the task of the chronicler with the general mission of Enryakuji 延暦寺, using the same expression of “dimming the light and mingling with dust” (Stone 1999, 124). Therefore, the compiling of massive collections of teachings was not only for the sake of historical posterity or the frivolous activity of scholastic monks. Rather, it was a religious practice with a soteriological intent.

Sannō, The Lord of the Mountain

One of Koshū’s records in the Keiran documents the development of a cult on Mt. Hiei centered on the mountain deity Sannō, which literally means “the lord of the mountain.” Buddhist sutras such as the Dirgha Āgama (T 1, 1.114b27, c12, c18) and the Diamond Sūtra (T 235, 8.751c29–30a1) often use the term “lord of the mountain” as shorthand for Mount Sumeru, the axis mundi of Buddhist cosmology. However, the association of this term with a particular deity appears to have originated at Guoqingsi 国淸寺 on Mt. Tiantai, where according to the Guoqing bai lu monks venerated the “Lord of Mt. Tiantai” (Tiantaishan wang 天台山王). Saichō 最澄 (766–822), who studied on Mt. Tiantai, imported this deity to Japan and installed him as the tutelary deity of Mt. Hiei (Mizukami 2011, 245; Breen and Teeuwen 2010, 77).

Even before Saichō constructed Enryakuji, Mt. Hiei had long been venerated as a sacred mountain. After the capital had moved to Heiankyō in the late eighth century, Mt. Hiei’s location to the northeast of the capital—the malefic gateway of demons (kimon 鬼門)—was regarded as the sacred protectorate of the capital.

5. Sueki interprets the term “record” or “recording” (kiroku 記録) in the Keiran to have both a narrow and broad meaning. On the one hand, the word “record” as in “the record section” is used in a narrow sense to denote a collection of records. On the other hand, it also refers to the “spirit” of recording as a form of religious praxis. Thus, Kōshū’s comments on the initiation ritual for the record section reflect his view on the task of chronicler (Sueki 2003, 36–41).
and the imperial court. Mt. Hiei’s role as the protector of the state (chingo kokka 鎮護国家) further strengthened the political influence of the Tendai school. The Keiran provides a record of this concentration of power in the Tendai school. In particular, the chapter entitled “Protection of the State” outlines how Mt. Hiei, and thus the Sannō deity, is the divine protectorate of Japan.

Although the “lord of the mountain” is generally rendered in the singular tense, Sannō of Mt. Hiei does not refer to just one individual deity. Rather, the epithet denotes a collective of guardian deities known as the “three sacred deities of Sannō” (Sannō sanshō 山王三聖): specifically, Ōnamuchi 大己貴 (or Ōkuni-nushi 大国主), who is enshrined at Ōmiya 大宮, Ōyamakui 大山咋 enshrined in Ninomiya 二宮, and Shōshinshi 聖真子. However, these three gods of Sannō were not originally a set. This amalgamation of the Sannō trinity developed over a long and complicated history that paralleled shifts in the pantheon of Hie Taisha 日吉大社.

The Kojiki, Japan’s oldest extant chronicle, singles out Ōyamakui 大山咋 as the main deity enshrined on Mt. Hiei, but by the ninth century additional deities had come to occupy the mountain (Philippi 1969, 118). At some point, the deity Ōnamuchi was invited to reside on the mountain from Mt. Miwa 三輪. Later, Shōshinshi 聖真子, from Usa Hachimangū 宇佐八幡宮, was added to the two deities already abiding on Mt. Hiei. Many scholars view the Sannō trinity as having been established by the tenth century, but this is a controversial topic among modern scholars (Mizukami 2011).

An alternative study traces the history of Sannō worship on Mt. Hiei by focusing on how the trinity evolved over time. After dividing Mt. Hiei into the Eastern and Western Pagodas, Saichō allocated Ōmiya and Ninomiya to each pagoda respectively. Saichō’s disciple Enchin 円珍 (814–891) later enshrined a mountain deity called Sannō Myōjin 山王明神, which he had seen in a dream. This addition led to the formation of the first trinity of Ōmiya-Ninomiya-Sannō Myōjin, which came to be referred to as the “three sacred ones of the two areas” (ryōsho sanshō 両所三聖). Furthermore, Ryōgen 良源 (912–985) later established Yokawa 横川 as a separated institution from the two pagodas and enshrined Shōshinshi as its guardian deity. It was following this development that the Ōmiya-Ninomiya-Shōshinshi pantheon was first recorded in 968 as the “three sacred ones as the lord of the land” (jishu sanshō 地主三聖). This transformation fueled the conflict between the Ennin 円仁 (796–864) and Enchin factions, which eventually led to the 993 split into the Sanmon 山門 branch (Ennin faction) and the

6. It is often assumed this conflation of deities coincided with Saichō’s establishment of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei, but this is open to debate.
7. According to Egashira Tsutomu (2013, 7), Enchin promoted Sannō Myōjin as the primary divinity and as the symbol of Mt. Hiei. The phrase “three sacred ones of the two areas” first appeared in Tendai records in 888.
Jimon 寺門 branch (Enchin faction) of Tendai. Finally, by the eleventh century a “source buddha” (honjibutsu 本地仏) was assigned to each Sannō deity: Śākyamuni to Ōmiya, the Medicine Tathāgata to Ninomiya, and Amitābha to Shōshinshi (Egashira 2013, 7).

The pantheon of Sannō at the Hie Taisha further expanded over time. In addition to the trinity, four more divinities—Hachiōji 八王子, Jūzenji 十禅師, Marōdo 客人, and Sannomiya 三宮—were added, resulting in the creation of the seven shrines of Sannō (Sannō shichisha 山王七社). During the Kamakura period, these seven shrines were divided into upper shrines (kamisha 上社), middle seven shrines (naka shichisha 中七社), and lower seven shrines (shimo shichisha 下七社). Thus, altogether there were twenty-one shrines of Sannō. Eventually, the number expanded to a total of one hundred and eight shrines with the addition of branch shrines.

The explanation of Sannō in the Keiran, however, differs from these later historical developments. The Keiran describes Sannō as an earth god (chigi 地祇) (T 2410, 76.520c21; 529b28). In Japanese mythology, earth gods are contrasted with heavenly gods (tenjin 天神) such as Amaterasu. According to Kōshū, heavenly gods lack an abode on earth, so they must demonstrate their benevolence. Conversely, earth gods dwell on the earth, so they are manifested in the land (T 2410, 76.515a5–6, 518b12–13, 864c10–11). The text continues to describe the role of earth gods as overseeing the performance of veneration rites for ancestral deities and making the soil fertile (sōbyōshashoku 宗廟社稷). The Keiran further dissects the roles of the seven shrines of Sannō, thus identifying Ōmiya, Shōshinshi, and Jūzenji as the deities of veneration rites for ancestral deities and Ninomiya as the deity of soil and grain (T 2410, 76.514.c25–515a11).

Considering the fact that Ninomiya (Ōyamakui) was the only god indigenous to Mt. Hiei, one might be tempted to conclude that this association points to an indigenous religious belief regarding Mt. Hiei and stipulates that the mountain was originally a cultic center for agricultural production. However, with the rise of Mt. Hiei's political and religious influence, later efforts to “complete” a Mt. Hiei pantheon could have been made. The final resulting conception was of the full pantheon of earthly spirits that managed ancestral rites as well as production.

The Keiran also includes a discussion of Sannō in its division on exoteric teachings entitled “the august matters of Sannō” (Sannō on koto 山王御事) (T 2410, 76.514c16). However, it appears that this Sannō subsection belongs to the division of records. Given that the division of records typically deals with mat-

---

8. The rationale for the inclusion of the kami division in the exoteric portion of the text is unclear; in addition to the kami division, the exoteric portion contains two fascicles about meditation and the doctrinal teachings of the Zen schools. Considering that these two fascicles have nothing in common with the kami division, it is uncertain why Kōshū would group them together.
ters concerning kami, Sannō, the Hie Shrine, and the cultural traditions of Mt. Hiei, we can surmise that the Sannō subsection was originally a part of the division of records along with other Shinto-related records among the lost fascicles.

Sannō as Esoteric Deity

The division on the esoteric teachings in the *Keiran* is considerably longer than the others. The fact that the majority of the compilation is devoted to this topic suggests that the primary objective of this work was to collect and record secret transmissions regarding the esoteric teachings on Mt. Hiei. Furthermore, the extant version of this division of the *Keiran* includes one of the most exhaustive treatment of esoteric teachings in the Tendai school in medieval Japan. Therefore, the depiction of Tendai esoteric Buddhism in the *Keiran* provides a window into how the category of esoteric Buddhism was debated and defined in medieval Japan.

In the division on esoteric teachings, Kōshū outlines the doctrines of Tendai esoteric Buddhism that distinguish it from the Shingon tradition based at Tōji 東寺. According to Kōshū, the Tōji Shingon school is only concerned with secret transmissions on practice (*jimitsu* 事密), especially regarding the recitation of incantations. Tendai esoteric Buddhism, however, emphasizes the unification of the exoteric and esoteric (*kenmitsu itchi* 頭密一致) based on the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*.9 He further stresses that the Mt. Hiei tradition of esoteric Buddhism encompasses not only the esoteric teachings but the integration of precepts with exoteric and esoteric teachings (t 2410, 74.545a). In other words, based on his collection of various transmissions on esoteric teachings, Kōshū proposes that such teachings were subsumed within the broader scope of the Tendai ideal of the singular vehicle (*ichijō* 一乗). This synthesis of esoteric practices and classical Tendai exegesis stood in contrast to the Tōji-Shingon tradition, which, at least according to Kōshū, was solely focused on incantation rites.

Central to Kōshū's view of esoteric Buddhism was the deity of Mt. Hiei, Sannō. Kōshū's construction of Sannō as an esoteric deity was developed within the context of Tendai esoteric Buddhist discourse on the bodies of the Buddha, which employed a logic of source and trace correlations. In the Tendai exegetical tradition of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Śākyamuni's identity as the historical Buddha was revised and redefined as the Buddha that long-ago achieved awakening (*kuon jitsujō* 久遠実成). This emphasis on abstract bodies of the Buddha's teaching was

---

9. Kōshū refers to esoteric Buddhism in the Tendai school as “mantra of the Tendai lineage” (*Tendairyū shingon* 天台流真言) and what is commonly referred to as the Shingon school as the "mantra of the Tōji lineage" (*Tōjiryū shingon* 東寺流真言). The term “mantra teaching” is, therefore, a general reference to esoteric teachings, which are divided into the two strands of Tōji and Tendai (t 2410, 76.505c16–506a6).
central to the Tendai school in medieval Japan and efforts to esotericize the sutra (Stone 1999, 21–27). This esotericization process developed in several stages. At the most fundamental stage, Śākyamuni was identified with the Tathāgata of Abundant Treasure (Prabhūtaratna), who appears in the “Treasure Tower” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* as a buddha from the ancient past. In this episode of the sutra, Śākyamuni enters the opened tower and sits alongside the ancient Buddha. This unorthodox depiction of two buddhas occupying the same space (*nibutsu byōza* 二仏並座) required further explanation, and it is later revealed that Śākyamuni is but one of countless buddhas (Lopez and Stone 2019, 136–148).

Kōshū references this scene of the two buddhas from the *Lotus Sūtra* numerous times throughout the *Keiran*, as it was the canonical basis for buddha body theory in the Tendai school. However, he takes this association between the two buddhas in the sutra and its role in the esotericization of the sutra a step further by evoking the doctrine of the three secret activities (*sansmitsugō* 三密業). According to Kōshū’s analysis, the “two buddhas seated side by side” reveals the secret mental activity (*imitsu* 意密) of the Buddha, the passages of the sutras are the spoken activity (*kugō* 口業) of the Buddha, and the treasure tower itself represents the body of the Buddha’s preaching (*seppō* 説法), that is, the body of dharma (*hosshin* 法身) (t 2410, 76.608a18–20). In other words, the treasure tower of the *Lotus Sūtra* is the embodiment of this core esoteric doctrine that the body, speech, and mind of the long-ago awakened Buddha is not beyond human conception but is accessible through the revelation of the sutra.

Sannō is likewise connected to the treasure tower episode of the *Lotus Sūtra*. When recording an interpretation of the meaning of Sannō’s name from the abbot Keimyō 慶命 (965–1038), Kōshū prefaces the quote by stating, “From within the treasure tower, Śākyamuni suspended his traces (*suijaku* 垂迹) to the foot of Mount Hiei where they became the avatar Sannō” (t 2410, 76.510b8–9). By identifying Sannō with Śākyamuni of the treasure tower, Kōshū incorporates the mountain deity into the medieval Tendai discourse regarding the orthodox view of esoteric manifestations of the Buddha’s teachings. Therefore, Sannō, formerly a composite deity of the various gods occupying Mt. Hiei, effectively becomes an avatar of the secret mental activities of the Buddha, or enlightenment itself.

The esotericization of Sannō was part of a broader scheme of source-trace associations in Tendai esoteric Buddhism, which linked local deities with buddhas as well as gods of the Japanese pantheon. For instance, the kami division of the *Keiran* opens with a discussion of Sannō and Amaterasu. The objective was to connect the guardian deity of Mt. Hiei (and by extension the Tendai school) to the protector of the nation, thus expanding Sannō’s relevance and power to all

10. For a detailed discussion of source-trace thought in the *Keiran*, see Park (2020).
of Japan (T 2410, 76.511a11–14; Dolce 2007, 293–294). Through this connection with Amaterasu, Sannō is further identified with Mahāvairocana Tathāgata. The Keiran explains this source-trace scheme as follows:

1. Amaterasu of Ise Jingū is the manifestation of Mahāvairocana (T 2410, 76.511b15).
2. Sannō of Hie Jingū is the manifestation of Śākyamuni (T 2410, 76.514c21).
3. Śākyamuni is the manifested body of Mahāvairocana (T 2410, 76.515c17–18).
4. Amaterasu and Sannō are united into one (T 2410, 76.514.c23, 528c26).
5. Mahāvairocana and Śākyamuni are nondual (juni 不二) (T 2410, 76.528c27, 598c11–12).

Based on this series of correlations, the Keiran effectively equates Sannō with Mahāvairocana, who in both the Tendai and Shingon esoteric traditions is portrayed as the embodiment of the Dharma of the Buddha. Therefore, Sannō is none other than the body of the Dharma.

Kōshū further elaborates on the multifaceted nature of Sannō by proposing what he refers to as a secret transmission of Sannō in seven stages (Sannō shichijū 山王七重). These stages can be summarized as follows (T 2410, 76.515a12–b14; Grapard 1998):

1. Sannō as trace (suijaku no Sannō 垂迹ノ山王): Since Saichō established the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei, Sannō has served as the manifestation that protects (shugo yōgō 守護影向) the school of the perfect teaching (enshū 円宗).
2. Sannō as source (honji no Sannō 本地ノ山王): Because Japan is the land of gods, there are myriad transformed deities (ōjaku myōjin 応迹神明). Currently, the transformation of the teacher Śākyamuni is Sannō, the Hie Daigū Gongen 日吉大宮権現. Therefore, all other deities in Japan are traces of Sannō.
3. Sannō as contemplation of the mind (kanjin no Sannō 観心ノ山王): This stage takes the cultivation of perfect and sudden meditation (endon shikan 円頓止観) to be the essence of Sannō.
4. Sannō as unconditioned (musa no Sannō 無作ノ山王): This stage reveals the path of true cultivation and true realization, which means there is neither beginning nor end, neither near nor far. Sannō is the unconditioned, original nature of all phenomena.
5. Sannō as the three secrets (sanmitsu no Sannō 三密ノ山王): This stage takes the five syllables constituting the title of the Lotus Sūtra of the Wonderful Dharma (Myō hō ren ge kyō 妙法蓮華経) to be the essence of Sannō. This essence is precisely the three bodies of the Tathāgata as well as the three secrets of the practitioner (gyōja 行者).

11. The author has previously discussed these associations in Park (2018).
6. Sannō as having an unknown beginning (gensho fuchi no Sannō 元初不知ノ山王): According to this stage, Sannō is the foundation of the myriad phenomena and all buddhas. Thus, its form is neither yin 隱 nor yang 陽. Since we cannot determine whether it is yin or yang, it is labeled as having an “unknown beginning.”

7. Sannō as celestial manifestation13 (nyōyō zuiyō Sannō 如影隨影山王): When abiding in the heavens, this Sannō is called the Big Dipper (literally, the seven stars). When abiding on earth, this Sannō is called the deity of the seven shrines. This is equivalent to the seven factors of enlightenment (shichi kaku bun 七覚分) for practitioners.14 It is said that the Big Dipper originated with the seven buddhas of the east moving and casting their shadow over Jambudvīpa. The spirit of the Big Dipper descends and gives life to all sentient beings. Thus, they are called birth stars (honmyōshō 本命星). Therefore, Sannō is the very spirit of the Big Dipper, and the form and essence of the practitioner is, in its entirety, the essence of Sannō.

In the seven stages of Sannō, the deity is effectively equated with various doctrines of Tendai esoteric Buddhism. Kōshū’s seven-part analysis is consistent with writings on kami-buddha syncretic combinations by Tendai chroniclers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which tended to elevate the status of Sannō (Breen and Teeuwen 2010, 87). However, the Keiran does more than merely praise Sannō as a superior manifestation of the Buddha. Rather, the deity has become a heuristic for an array of esoteric doctrines. As noted above, Sannō

12. In traditional East Asian philosophy, yin-yang duality is the basic paradigm for understands the universe. All beings in this world are divided into two kinds of energy, either yin or yang. At the simplest level, yin is characterized as feminine and yang as masculine. These two energies seem to be opposite, yet are mutually complementary and interconnected. The universe functions as the harmony of yin and yang, and all phenomena arise and change due to the interaction of these two basic forces. By stating that Sannō is neither yin nor yang, the Keiran asserts that Sannō transcends such distinctions. For example, if day is yang and night is yin, Sannō is time itself and, thus, has an “unknown beginning.”

13. The character yō 影 has several possible meanings, but considering the above discussion relates Sannō to the seven stars in the sky (that is, the Big Dipper), I translate it as “celestial manifestation.” In a broader sense, the meaning of 影 in the Keiran is similar to sui 垂, meaning “manifest” or “incarnate,” particularly when paired with gen 現. The term yōgen 影現 is often used as a synonym for suijaku 垂迹, but without the hierarchical nuance of the phrase honji suijaku. The term is also associated with the manifestation of celestial bodies, such as luminaries, planets, and stars.

14. Kōshū equates each of the seven stars constituting the Big Dipper with the seven factors of enlightenment, an ubiquitous phrase found in various Buddhist sutras to denote the various effects of attaining enlightenment. The basic list includes mindfulness (nen kakushi 念覚支), investigation (chakuhō kakushi �拆法覚支), effort (shōjin kakushi 精進覚支), rapture (ki kakushi 喜覚支), relaxation (kyōan kakushi 軽安覚支), concentration (jō kakushi 定覚支), and detachment (sha kakushi 撤覚支) (Muller 2015).
can be a source or a trace; the deity is neither yin nor yang yet is also a radiant constellation. Therefore, just as Tendai esoteric Buddhism is a comprehensive set of doctrines and practices, Sannō represents all phenomena to all people.

**Japan as the Land of Sannō**

As highlighted in the previous section, Sannō was transformed into the premier esoteric deity in Tendai esoteric Buddhism. Not only was he the protectorate of the Dharma, he came to embody the Dharma itself. This embodiment included the heavens and the land, especially the divine land of Japan.

As Lucia Dolce notes in her study of sacred geography in medieval Japan, the *Keiran* points to a broader tendency at the time to address Japan’s marginal location on the periphery of the Buddhist world. Chroniclers such as Kōshū and the masters whose teachings he compiled in the *Keiran* were aware that the teachings of their school and lineages were far removed from the time and location of Śākyamuni’s preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* in India. Therefore, they inverted the geographic relationship between Japan and India by positing the local kami as the propagators of the Buddha’s teaching (Dolce 2007, 277; T 2410, 76.511).

In an astute play on words, Kōshū explicitly identifies “the great country of Japan” (*Dai Nihon koku* 大日本国) with the “original land of Mahāvairocana” (*Dainichi no honkoku* 大日ノ本国). He further elaborates on this association in a question and answer dialogue:

**Question:** What does it mean that at the very bottom of the great sea on which our country rests lies the seal of Mahāvairocana?

**Answer:** When the deity Kuni no tokotachi dropped his heavenly halberd upside-down, there was no country below. He searched for it, and at the bottom of the sea he found three rings emitting golden light. These three rings indicate the seal of Mahāvairocana. They also signify the three venerable deities of Sannō as well as the secrets of the three major scriptures (*sanbu* 三部). Secret transmissions say that the seal of Mahāvairocana is the single-pronged vajra. Accordingly, our country is shaped as a vajra.

(adapted from Dolce 2007, 274; T 2410, 76.518c8–12)

In this passage, Kōshū locates the Sannō deities within the creation myth of Japan. Along with other esoteric doctrines such as the three secret activities and the three primary texts in Tendai esoteric Buddhism (*Vajraśekhara*, *Mahāvairocana*, and *Sussidhikara* sutras), Sannō literally formed the foundation of the nation.

In a recent study on mythology in medieval Japan, Ogawa Toyoo discusses the broader doctrinal implications of the Tendai appropriation of the creation myth. According to Ogawa, chronicler’s such as Kōshū compiled various teachings regarding seminal Tendai doctrines such as original awakening (*hongaku*...
Many of these orally transmitted teachings were cast in metaphorical terms that incorporated the language of the creation myth (Ogawa 2014, 437–444). Considering that the purveyors and audience of such tales were based on Mt. Hiei, the mountain was conveniently identified with Mt. Sumeru, the central locus of the Buddhist cosmos, and the “great sea” from which it arose denoted the sea surrounding the mythic mountain. As the protector of the mountain, Sannō likewise signifies the teachings of the Buddha that are propagated there.

The correlation between Sannō, Amaterasu, Śākyamuni, and Mahāvairocana is the logical outcome of the source-trace paradigm. The equation of Śākyamuni as the long-ago awakened Buddha of the Lotus Sūtra with Mahāvairocana was a standard Tendai doctrine by the time the Keiran was compiled. Furthermore, the association of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, with Mahāvairocana, literally the “Great Sun Tathāgata” (Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来), was a scholastic maneuver that situated Japan within the heart of the Buddhist cosmos. Linking Sannō to Amaterasu inserted the protector of Mt. Hiei into the center of Japan as a divine land. Moreover, these references to Sannō and Japan hint at a burgeoning nationalistic discourse that positioned the Buddha’s teaching within the geographic region of Japan. Sannō played a seminal role in this discourse by drawing a parallel between Japan as the land of the gods and Japan as the locus of the esoteric teachings. Therefore, Kōshū extols Sannō as the “Lord of the Lotus Teachings,” and proclaims the mountain god to embody the “unification of the exoteric and esoteric teachings” (kenmitsu itchi) (T 2410, 76.593b17, 838c27, 672b27).

Conclusion

Originating as a conglomeration of protector deities assembled on Mt. Hiei, in the Keiran Sannō is promoted to the exalted status of embodying the exoteric and esoteric teachings. This transformation was a part of a broader discourse in esoteric Buddhism, and Tendai esoteric Buddhism in particular, that employed hermeneutic tools such as the source-trace paradigm to establish an orthodox position on the ontology of the Buddha as well as the manifestations of the Buddha’s teachings in the surrounding landscape. In fact, one of the objectives of compiling such massive compendiums was to document the process of orthodoxy.

As Allan Grapard argues in his classic article on linguistic cubism and the Sannō cult, the hermeneutic tools wielded by chroniclers such as Kōshū often began as metaphors and other linguistic games. These skillful turns of phrase were combined with expressions in traditional writings to create new interpretations of doctrines (Grapard 1987, 211–212). The seven-stage explanation of Sannō is a case in point. Sannō is literally the “sovereign of the mountain.” As such, he is the local (Mt. Hiei) manifestation of the Buddha’s teaching, a so-called “trace.” Just as Mt. Hiei is the source from which the Tendai teachings
spread throughout Japan, so is Sannō a source for transmitting the Dharma to other deities. Expressed in the doctrinal terms of Tendai buddha body theory, Śākyamuni is the manifested body of Mahāvairocana, and, as a trace of Śākyamuni, Sannō is likewise associated with the dharma body of the Buddha. Via the homonymic play between the Japanese rendering of Mahāvairocana’s name (Dainichi) and “the great country of Japan” (Dai Nihon koku), Kōshū posits that Japan is the land of Mahāvairocana. Thus, Sannō is the foundation of Japan.

For medieval Tendai thinkers, the concept of Sannō could be mobilized as a sign that signifies any number of doctrinal formulations: a local god, a protector deity, a manifestation of the Buddha, or the very land of the Japanese archipelago. The discourse on Sannō demonstrates that orthodoxy in medieval Japanese Buddhist thought was more a matter of method than dogma. The flexibility of the source-trace paradigm allowed for countless possible combinations, which was precisely the point. In the world of Tendai esoteric scholasticism, Sannō was a formula that demonstrated the unchanging mutual identity of all possible realities.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


PRIMARY SOURCES

Chō agonkyō 長阿含経 (Dirgha Āgama). 22 fascs. Trans. Buddhayaśas (fifth c.) and Zhu Fonian 竺仏念 (fifth c.). T 1, 1.
Daodejing 道徳経. Laozi 老子 (fourth c. BCE). https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/zh
Sanke yōryakuki 山家要略記. Gigen 義源 (ca. 1289–1351). In Zoku Tendaishū zensho,


t

**Soshitchikyō** 蘇悉地経 (Sussidhikara Sūtra). 3 fascs. Trans. Šubhakarasimha. T 893, 18.

**SECONDARY SOURCES**

**BREEN, John, and Mark TEEUWEN, eds.**


**DOLCE, Lucia**


**EGASHIRA Tsutomu 江頭 務**


**FAURE, Bernard**


**GRAPARD, Allan G.**


**LOPEZ, Donald S., and Jacqueline I. STONE**


**MIZUKAMI Fumiyoshi 水上文義**


**MULLER, Charles**

Ogawa Toyoo 小川豊生

Park, Yeonjoo

Philippi, Donald L., trans.

Proffitt, Aaron P.

Stone, Jacqueline I.

Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士

Tanaka Takako 田中貴子

Teeuwen, Mark

Yamamoto Hiroko 山本ひろ子
Monkan 文観 (1278–1357), also known as Juon 殊音 or Kōshin 弘真, was a Shingon Ritsu monk who worshiped dākini (T 2456, 77.850a14), demonic witches controlling human vital and sexual energy. In the popular imagination, these female spirits were thought to manifest as furry foxes or lascivious courtesans, causing the death of their king by draining his vitality, such as Bao Si 奖姒 in China or Tamamo no Mae 玉藻前 in Japan (Minobe 1988, 185–205). According to secret Shingon instructions, however, dākini can be powerful allies to ensure health and longevity, especially that of sovereigns, when properly worshiped. Indeed, dākini are said to be in control of the ninno 人黄 (“human yellow”), the condensed form of human life force (Iyanaga 2016), which was alternatively read ninno 人王 (human king) (Tz 5: 252c) or ninno 仁王 (benevolent king) (Zasshō). Therefore, the dākini were more relevant for the well-being of kings than for any other person. Moreover, following instructions in various scriptures, it was held in those days that by worshiping foxes one could transform an ordinary man into a sovereign (T 2410, 76.633b25–29). It should therefore not be surprising to know that Monkan’s master, Dōjun 道順 (d. 1322), had integrated the worship of dākini in the liturgy of the imperial enthronement unction ceremony (Matsumoto 2005, 64–67).

Monkan himself was especially skilled at manipulating these ambivalent sexual powers because he had inherited the Tachikawa 立川 lineage (Zoku dentō kōroku, 456), which specialized in a practice called the “skull ritual” (Moriyama 1965). This was a ritual in which a human skull was first empowered by the
magical effect of aphrodisiac frankincense fumes and one-hundred-and-twenty layers of a mix of semen and menstrual blood—implying that one had to do the “act” far more than one hundred and twenty times. Then, the skull was embellished to look almost exactly as the white-faced onna 女 (woman) mask of Noh theater, with silver-colored teeth, narrow deep-penetrating eyes, and thin red lips. After carefully keeping the female head warm and nourished for seven years, a practice said to be a type of ḍākinī ritual, it would eventually, in the eighth year, commence talking to the practitioner, instructing him into the secrets of the world while fulfilling all his desires. Monkan, empowered by this female spirit—who is, moreover, the manifestation of the celebrated dragon maiden of the Lotus Sūtra—did not falter in cursing the military government in Kamakura for four years while praying for the safe “pregnancy” of an imperial consort and felt no fear in donning armor to face hard-boiled samurai warriors when necessary (Taiheiki).

The emperor to whom Monkan dedicated his exceptional magical talents, Go Daigo 後醍醐 (1288–1339), likewise did not belong to the meek and faint-hearted. Supported by a mob (akutō 悪党) of low-life samurai and outcasts called hinin 非人 (nonhumans), this emperor plotted to overthrow the Kamakura Bakufu and eventually succeeded (albeit only temporarily). Monkan, relying on his position as the primus inter pares within the esoteric Buddhist establishment, created hundreds of sacred writings and manipulated Shingon doctrines to illustrate that Go Daigo is the reincarnation of the founder of Shingon, Kūkai 空海 (774–835), as well as the embodiment of Kongōsatta 金剛薩埵, the bodhisattva who rediscovered the secrets of esoteric Buddhism from the Iron Tower in India. Monkan and Go Daigo were not alone in believing these thoughts, since the former is said to have had more than two hundred disciples.

The “Monkan” in the above description, to clarify to the inadvertent reader, probably never existed. Yet, if one were to uncritically assemble data on his person and on the subjects he is said to have been acquainted with (such as ḍākinī and Tachikawa) from existing sources—such as the Hōkyōshō, Kakuzenshō, Zoku dentō kōroku, Taiheiki, and so on—and see this data through the lens of beliefs current in the religious culture of that time, one would easily conclude that this kind of sensational description were true. This constructed image, or “memory,” of Monkan appeals to the imagination and turns him into a “wicked monk” (yōsō 妖僧), the “Rasputin” of Japan, whose charismatic mastery of esoteric magic and sexual energy made him one of the most influential characters of his time. That time, the fourteenth century, was one of great and fundamental changes, sometimes defined in scholarship as the true transition from the classical age to the medieval period in Japan.

Until recently, the above description of Monkan would probably not have been considered that remarkable. In fact, a swathe of premodern and modern
works, from Yūkai’s 宥快 (1345–1416) Hōkyōshō and Yūhō’s 祐宝 (1656–1727) Zoku dentō kōroku to the books of Mizuhara (1968), Moriyama (1965), and Amino (1986), to name the most salient examples, have done nothing but perpetuate such an image of this monk. Rather than studying Monkan objectively, it seems these authors were more driven by their own personal agendas and predilections and, perhaps, also a fascination with that alluring concept that is the combination of sex, death, and power.

Recent critical studies on Monkan, the Tachikawa lineage, and fourteenth-century Japan have done much to demystify Monkan’s image and place his life in a more objective historical context (Iyanaga 2004; Abe 2013; Conlan 2011; Quinter 2015). Special credit is due here to Iyanaga Nobumi, whose insights regarding distinctions between the skull ritual and the Tachikawa lineage have truly been groundbreaking in this area. And now Gaétan Rappo’s critical study of Monkan’s life, Rhétoriques de l’hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne, can be added to the list of new outstanding scholarly achievements that have been produced in the wake of Iyanaga’s discoveries.

Besides providing a beacon through the swamp of hagiographical fantasies and unfounded judgments surrounding Monkan, Rappo’s book also gives insight into the processes, running from premodern to modern times, which led to Monkan being characterized as a monk who espoused heretical views. The purpose of the study, as the author himself underscores, is not to reinstate Monkan’s reputation but to analyze the trappings of historiography and of the study of “hersesy,” a notion that is always enmeshed with prejudices of given time and place. In doing so, Rappo has produced not only a polished image of Monkan, whose life and achievements still stand out as quite extraordinary even after the removal of all posterior unfounded accruements, but he also illustrates that the notion of “hersesy” in a medieval Japanese context has to be clearly distinguished from that in the West, despite showing a number of apparent similarities.

Although focusing on this important Shingon Ritsu monk, the book is also a profound study of Shingon history and doctrine. The work is the first volume in a two-volume project—the second volume is currently being edited—which will highlight Monkan’s extensive esoteric Buddhist doctrinal system. Traditionally, due to an uncritical reading of the sources smearing his name, scholars at best simply ignored Monkan, or at worst denigrated him as a wicked character involved in black magic and aberrant sexual practices. It hardly occurred to previous scholars that Monkan had, in fact, been one of the most important figures in the development of orthodox Shingon doctrine.

In some broad explanations of Shingon it is sometimes stated that its doctrine did not change significantly until the emergence of Kakuban 觉鑁 (1095–1144), the founder of the Shingi 新義 branch of the school, after which few doctrinal developments have ensued. This view is, of course, oversimplified, as multiple
important changes did occur in Shingon’s intricate esoteric system. Owing to the work of Abe Yasurō, it has become clear that Monkan had been a prolific writer and a creative systematizer of Shingon thought. His texts, the full scope of which have just begun to be reconstituted and analyzed, may, in fact, be regarded as the crown of medieval Shingon esotericism. Indeed, after Monkan it is hard to pinpoint a Shingon monk who had an equal impact on doctrinal matters, except perhaps Yūkai, Monkan’s fiercest critic. Rappo’s study builds on these achievements and the result is a work that, together with the second volume, will serve as an important basis for any researcher interested in the history of medieval Shingon Buddhism.

Rappo’s book, while sweeping away many uncertainties about Monkan’s life and achievements, also gives rise to new questions, which is of course one of the book’s merits. Indeed, having a clearer and more objective picture of Monkan now enables the future researcher to make better assessments of his place in the history of Shingon. Rappo’s study unveils a Monkan who had been instrumental in furthering Go Daigo’s project, initiated by his father, Go Uda後宇多(1267–1324), to bring a fragmented Shingon under tighter imperial control. In this process, Monkan, who had inherited the teachings of one of the Ono lineages based at Daigoji醍醐寺, reworked various Shingon doctrines and beliefs to enhance the legitimacy of Go Daigo’s Southern court. At the same time, Kenshun賢俊(1299–1357), head of a rival Ono lineage at Daigoji, served the Ashikaga-controlled Northern court with his own version of esoteric Buddhist secrets. This quite complex historical situation has recently been investigated by Thomas Conlan(2011), who defined the fourteenth century as an “age of ritual determinism”: that is, an era in which ritual knowledge, especially of Shingon, was the decisive element behind the legitimation of power.

An important question in need of investigation in this regard, as Brian Ruppert(2013) has suggested in his review of Conlan’s book, is to what extent the situation of Shingon ritualism in the fourteenth century had been “different” from previous ages. Indeed, already at the end of the eleventh century Shingon Buddhism had become deeply involved with the legitimation of imperial power. Emperor Shirakawa白河(1053–1129) did much to unify the school under the imperial banner by placing the figure of the omuro御室(abbot of imperial descent) of Ninnaji仁和寺at the head of Shingon(Yokouchi 2008, 19–61). After Shirakawa, the omuro would be further promoted to the position of sōhōmu総法務, the head administrator of the office of monastic affairs, thus de facto becoming the head of the entire Buddhist establishment. Interestingly enough, while recognizing Ninnaji’s superior position, Shirakawa had personally entrusted an Ono-branch monk trained at Daigoji named Hanjun範俊(1038–1112), an act that was replicated by Go Uda and Go Daigo two centuries later. A major difference is that there is no indication that before Go Uda an emperor had
been initiated into Shingon or performed esoteric rites. Nonetheless, there are many points in common between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in terms of Shingon’s connections to imperial power. Therefore, it remains to be investigated how exactly the Shingon doctrines and rituals promoted by such monks as Monkan and Kenshun differed in terms of content and function from earlier ages. There is still much work to be done to clarify Shingon development from the late eleventh to the fourteenth century. Rappo’s study of Monkan proves to be crucial in dealing with such pivotal historical issues.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS


PRIMARY SOURCES


\[Zasshō\] 雑鈔. Manuscript including oral teachings from the Daigoji monk Ikkai 一海 (1116–1179). Kanazawa Bunko Archives, 43.4.


SECONDARY SOURCES

\[Abe Yasurō\] 阿部泰郎


\[Amino Yoshihiko\] 網野善彦


\[Conlan, Thomas Donald\]

IYANAGA Nobumi 彌永信美

MATSUMOTO Ikuyo 松本郁代

MINOBE Shigekatsu 美濃部重克

MIZUHARA Gyōei 水原堯榮

MORIYAMA Shōshin 守山聖真
1965 Tachikawa jakyō to sono shakaiteki haikei no kenkyū 立川邪教とその社会的背景の研究. Tokyo: Rokuyaon.

QUINTER, David

RUPPERT, Brian

YOKOUCHI Hiroto 横内裕人

Steven Trenson
Waseda University
Ever since the groundbreaking and pioneering work of Kuroda Toshio in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars of Japanese religions have accepted the notion that before the fifteenth century Shinto was not an autonomous, independent, and self-conscious tradition that was clearly separate from Buddhism. Rather, it was found in combinatory and amalgamative interactions with Buddhism. With the emergence of Yoshida Shinto, Kuroda noted the first instance of a Shinto movement that saw itself as non-Buddhist and purified of foreign elements. For Kuroda, the constellations of praxis and dogma of premodern Shinto were subsumed under the exoteric-esoteric system (kenmitsu taisei), largely spearheaded by the kenmon taisei system of ruling elites and undergirded by esoteric Buddhism (mikkyō). While there have been many studies on Shinto in recent years, Kuroda Toshio’s paradigm remains unchallenged, with the exception of a few minor criticisms. Moreover, the idea that Shinto was just an extension of Buddhism in premodern times made its theoretical and practical boundaries confusing for many, not to mention a terra incognita for scholars of modern Japan.

Anna Andreeva’s new study on medieval kami-buddha interactions in the ancient cultic site of Mt. Miwa, Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan, echoes Kuroda’s understanding that Shinto is “the worship of kami based on the concepts and practices of Esoteric Buddhism” (4). As Andreeva puts it, the “book offers a case study through which the key stages of ‘assemblage’ (that is, the process of assembling) and the medieval pedigree of Ryōbu Shinto, a major forerunner to modern Shinto, ought to become clear” (5). In fact, Andreeva’s coverage of Shinto is wider than “Ryōbu,” and she expands the focus of the book to include documents produced by Miwa-related personalities that laid the foundation for the latter medieval Miwa-lineage movement. The Miwa lineage was concerned with a wide array of doctrinal engagements, including, but not limited to, Buddhist ideas on the Yugikyō and Rishukyō scriptures (bound together by devotional worship of Aizen Myōō), esoteric conceptions of “enlightenment in this very body,” as well as kami-centered objects and rituals such as the three regalia (sanshu no jingi) and esoteric kami consecration rites (jingi kanjō). Through the trope of “assemblage,” Andreeva challenges the idea of a monolithic and stable Shinto tradition and argues that it was
formulated through dynamic interaction between different groups. Here, Andreeva goes beyond Kuroda’s idea that it was merely Buddhist functionaries that shaped medieval Shinto and paints a much more complex picture: it was the interaction “between different agents and institutions and multiple strands of religious thought and practice” (15) that assembled medieval Shinto.

Andreeva shows that before the end of the twelfth century, kami were often understood as manifestations of transcendental buddhas as part of the honji suijaku doctrine. By the end of the twelfth century, the kami were understood to epitomize ignorance, but, at the same time, would be used as vehicles for attaining Buddhist awakening. Then, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, perhaps the most illuminating part of the book, ideas about the kami began to expand and became increasingly mobile. According to Andreeva, during this period new forms of kami worship were devised, not only in elite temples or shrines such as Mt. Hiei or Mt. Kōya but also in Miwa Shrine, a seemingly neglected establishment in the Yamato basin. Andreeva’s research demonstrates that, contrary to what scholars may think, the Miwa Shrine, and especially the private Buddhist facility (bessho) on Mt. Miwa, served a crucial role in the production and dissemination of knowledge and rituals concerning kami by casting them in an esoteric framework. These developments stand as a backdrop to the rise of Miwa Shinto as an eclectic gathering of Buddhist-Shinto teachings and rituals that evolved well into the early modern period.

Miwa was part of a vast network of temple-shrines where eminent monks hailing from various backgrounds, such as Eison (1201–1290) and the Saidaiji movement he spearheaded, would often visit. Yet, it was actually lesser-known religious figures who were active in the creation of kami-buddha knowledge. These were institutionally unaffiliated figures, such as mountain ascetics (shugen), holy men (hijiri), and other itinerant religious specialists. They developed kami theories and rituals at Miwa, and it is very likely that later on such ideas were carried on into elite temples. Assembling Shinto suggests that Miwa was not a final destination in these popular routes of pilgrimage and travel. It was a node, albeit in a complicated and major network. In short, the book demonstrates that the nodes of a religious network were just as important as the primary sites. Andreeva’s network-theory-driven approach is unique; she provides a decentered account of an oft-overlooked religious space, which serves as a case study for the complex interweaving of kami-buddha concepts that took place throughout the medieval era. It highlights the interstitial quality of Shinto, as being formed through constant dialogue, negotiation, and sometimes conflict.

Since several book reviews were already published about this monograph, and most of them offer a succinct summary of the book’s arguments, I will touch upon a few aspects worthy of mention. First of all, it is important to note that Assembling Shinto is the first ever monograph published on the study of the Miwa
lineage. There are no other books dedicated to this religious phenomenon, apart from edited volumes in Japanese and collections of primary sources. In this regard, the book is an achievement on an international scale. Moreover, Andreeva’s breadth of sources is impressive. Most of the documents were borrowed from well-known archival sites such as Kanazawa Bunko at Shōmyōji in Kanagawa, Shinpukuji in Osu Kannon, Nagoya, and many other institutions. Andreeva conducts a major portion of her research on handwritten primary sources from a variety of temple repositories and archives across Japan, also incorporating iconological analysis to her work. Additionally, Andreeva’s investigation and theoretical discussions are driven by philological rigor and an acute attention to theological considerations. For example, she identifies the importance of certain religious concepts, such as original enlightenment thought and sokushin jōbutsu, Buddhist ideas that carried increasing weight in the development of doctrines in which ignorance (mumyō) was harnessed in order to trigger enlightenment under the guise of kami theology.

If there is any issue with the book, it is the fact that it can be too successful in revealing how multifarious, site-specific, and ultimately ambiguous Shinto is. Readers may accept too readily that “Shinto should be understood as multiple attempts to invent its meaning depending on the specific historical circumstances” (303) without always fully comprehending all the complexities discussed throughout the book. The contours of Shinto are still blurry, and many questions are left unanswered. If much of the kami-buddha discourse is centered on the cult of Ise, then why was Miwa, an old rival, mobilized in its favor? Moreover, the network model, while raising new perspectives on Miwa, also raises questions about the degree of Miwa’s prominence in the development of Shinto. Considering the substantial attention paid to Ise’s worship of Amaterasu and its appropriation of the double mandalas as pervasive elements of medieval religiosity, this reader cannot help but wonder about the influence of other sites and especially the kenmon institutions more commonly studied. Additionally, while the Miwa daimyōjin engi indicates that the Miwa deity achieved the prominent symbolic role of a supreme deity, how can we be sure that this status was not limited to Miwa-related establishments? After all, Miwa did not enjoy the same geographical spread in Japan like other deities such as Hachiman, Amaterasu, Inari, and Sannō. It is likely that the book will not put to rest the many controversies involving the study of Shinto, but its insights provide new directions for reexamining the central issues that lie at the heart of Japanese religion. These quibbles aside, this is by far one of the best studies on kami-buddha interactions, and I wholeheartedly recommend it to scholars in the field of Japanese Studies.

Or Porath
University of Chicago
CONTRIBUTORS

Anna Andreeva is Research Fellow at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, Heidelberg University. In 2016–2017, she was interim Chair of Japanese History at the Faculty of East Asian Studies, Ruhr-Universität-Bochum. She is the author of *Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan* (Harvard, 2017), and the co-editor of *Transforming the Void: Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions* (Brill, 2016).

Ethan Bushelle is Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Humanities and Religions at Western Washington University. He is presently working on a book that explores the role of liturgy in the transformation of Japanese culture and society in Japan’s classical period and co-author of a new study and revised translation of Minamoto no Tamenori’s *Three Jewels*. In addition to an article in *JJRS* 45/1, he recently published a chapter on waka poetry and Buddhist culture in Japan in *Buddhist Literature as Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy as Literature* (SUNY, 2020).

Kameyama Takahiko is Research Fellow at the Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures, Ryukoku University, and Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. His field of research is the doctrinal and ritual discourses developed in Japanese esoteric Buddhist traditions. His current project focuses on the physiological and embryological teachings transmitted by Shingon Buddhist practitioners during the medieval period.

Matthew D. McMullen is Senior Research Fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, where he serves as editor of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. His research focuses on the development of esoteric Buddhist traditions in medieval Japan. He is currently working on a monograph based on his translation of Hōjibō Shōshin’s *Essay on the Similarities and Differences between the Two Schools of Tendai and Shingon*.

Yeonjoo Park is HK Research Professor at the Institute of Humanities Korea Plus and the Academy of Cultural Studies at Dongguk University. Her recent publications include “Medieval Tendai Buddhist Views of Kami” in *Exploring Shinto* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2020). Park is also Research Associate at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture and has contributed to the


Aaron P. Proffitt is Assistant Professor of Japanese Studies at the University at Albany, suny. His monograph entitled Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism is currently in press with the Pure Land Buddhist Studies Series for University of Hawai’i Press. His research interests include developments within medieval Japanese Shingon, Tendai, Zen, and Pure Land Buddhist traditions.


Steven Trenson is Associate Professor in the Faculty of International Research and Education at Waseda University. His research focuses on the history of esoteric Buddhism in premodern Japan. He has published a number of articles on dragon cults and rain-making rites, as well as the monograph Kiu, hōju, ryū: Chūsei Shingon mikkyō no shinsō 祈雨・宝珠・龍―中世真言密教の深層 (Kyoto Daigaku Gakujutsu Shuppankai, 2016).

Bruce Winkelman is currently a PhD candidate in the History of Religions at the University of Chicago. He specializes in the study of religion in premodern Japan, and his work focuses on esoteric Buddhism during the medieval period in particular. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation, which studies the politics of esoteric Buddhist historical writing during the fourteenth century. His research interests also include ritual discourses on Buddhist kingship and Buddhist manuscript cultures.
The *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal specializing in the publication of research on the study of Japanese religions. The journal aims for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of religion in Japan, and submissions are welcomed from scholars in all fields of the humanities and social sciences. Responsibility for factual accuracy and for views expressed in individual articles lies with the author, not necessarily with the *JJRS*.

The *JJRS* no longer accepts paid subscriptions for printed copies. Print-on-demand hard copies may be ordered through Kindle Direct Publishing (a division of Amazon).

The *JJRS* is a peer-reviewed, open access journal freely available online (http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/en/publications/jjrs/) and can also be accessed through the following online databases: *JSTOR, WorldCat, Crossref, ATLAS, Gale* (Cengage Learning), and *IIS* (International Information Services) and is included in the Thomson Reuters Arts and Humanities Citation Index.

The *JJRS* is produced by the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture with support from the Center for Information on Religion.

Please consult the “Submission of Manuscripts” and “Style Guide” on the homepage prior to submitting a draft:


All inquiries regarding back issues, permissions to reprint, manuscripts for submission, and books for review should be addressed to:

*Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*
Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture
18 Yamazato-chô, Shôwa-ku, Nagoya 466-8673 Japan
TEL (81) 52-832-3111 / FAX (81) 52-833-6157
E-MAIL: jjrs.submissions@gmail.com

© 2020 Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

ISBN 9798582243113
ISSN 0304-1042