

Arising of Faith in the Human Body: The Significance of Embryological Discourses in Medieval Shingon Buddhist Tradition

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INTRODUCTION

It was on the early Heian 平安 time period that the principal components of the Buddhist embryological knowledge, such as the red and white drops (*shakubyaku nitei* 赤白二滯) or the five developmental stages of embryo (*tainai goi* 胎内五位) from *kalala* (*karara* 羯刺藍) to *praśākha* (*harashakya* 鉢羅奢佉), were adopted into Japanese Esoteric Buddhist traditions.¹ Since then, as discussed in the works of James H. Sanford² or Ogawa Toyoo 小川豊生,³ these discourses with regard to the reproductive substances of a mother and father or the stages of fetal development within the womb were the indispensable interpretative tools for both doctrine and practices of Shingon 真言 and Tendai 天台 Esoteric Buddhism.⁴ After being fully adopted, the embryological

1. As Toyoo Ogawa 小川豊生 points out, Enchin 円珍 (814–891), the Tendai Esoteric Buddhist monk during the early Heian time period, refers to the red and white drops and *kalala*, the mixture of these reproductive substances, in his *Bussetsu kanfugenbosatsugyōbōkyō ki* 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經記 (*Taishō*, vol. 56, no. 2194). See Ogawa Toyoo, *Chūsei nihon no shinwa mojishintai* 中世日本の神話・文字・身体 (Tokyo: Shinwasha 森話社, 2014), 305–6 and 331n6.

2. See James H. Sanford, “Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, nos. 1–2 (1997).

3. See Ogawa, *Chūsei nihon no shinwa mojishintai*.

4. For example, the fundamental non-dual nature between the womb realm mandala (*taizōkai mandara* 胎藏界曼荼羅) and that of diamond realm (*kongōkai mandala* 金剛界曼荼羅) was frequently represented by sexual intercourse and the mixture of the red and white drops. See Ogawa, *Chūsei nihon no shinwa mojishintai*, 317–322.

knowledge was also comprehensively reinterpreted through the Esoteric Buddhist teachings, and its components were given new significance. The subject of this paper is a series of discourses which were formulated through such interrelationship between the Buddhist embryological knowledge and the doctrine and practices of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism. In this paper, I will discuss the significance and purpose of these “Esoteric embryological discourses,” especially in the Shingon Buddhist tradition.

Needless to say, with respect to Shingon Buddhist discourses with regard to human conception, comprehensive research has been carried out by scholars such as Sanford and Ogawa, as well as Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖眞,⁵ Manabe Shunshō 眞鍋俊照,⁶ and Lucia Dolce.⁷ And it might be said that the greater part of their contents and sources has been already revealed by these scholars. On the other hand, however, the primary purpose or practical significance of the discourses has hardly been examined in previous research. The following questions still remain unsolved: For what purpose did Shingon Buddhist monks develop and transmit these discourses over the course of the Heian, Kamakura 鎌倉, Muromachi 室町, and Edo 江戸time periods? What role did they actually play when Shingon Buddhist monks attempted to attain buddhahood within this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛)? According to the aforementioned scholars, Shingon Buddhist monks in the Kamakura or Muromachi time periods entirely equated “taking on of human form in the womb” with attaining buddhahood within this very body, their ultimate goal.⁸ In this paper, I hope to answer these questions by means of investigating texts such as the *Sangenmenju* 纂元面授 and the *Datohiketsu shō* 駄都秘決鈔.

The *Sangenmenju* is a collection of the oral teachings, especially concerning *abhiṣeka* (*kanjō* 灌頂), the Esoteric Buddhist initiation ritual, which were transmitted among Shingon Buddhist monks who

5. See Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖眞, *Tachikawajakyō to sono shakaitekikaikei no kenkyū* 立川邪教とその社会的背景の研究 (Tokyo: Rokuyaon 鹿野苑, 1965), 126–155.

6. See Manabe Shunshō 眞鍋俊照, *Jakyō Tachikawaryū* 邪教・立川流 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō 筑摩書房, 1999).

7. See Lucia Dolce, “Duality and the *Kami*: The Ritual Iconography and Visual Constructions of Medieval Shintō,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 16 (2006–2007).

8. See Sanford, “Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon,” 6.

belonged to the Sanbōin lineage of the Daigoji temple (*Daigoji sanbōin ryū* 醍醐寺三寶院流). The *Datohiketsu shō* is the commentary on each constituent element of Shingon Esoteric invocation rituals, which was written by the medieval Shingon monk Gahō 我寶 (?–1317). Both texts were written during the Kamakura period. Considering the following descriptions, it is assumed that in the Shingon Buddhist tradition the Esoteric embryological discourses were necessary for practitioners to acquire profound faith (*jinshin* 深信) in non-duality between the human body and those of buddhas, which enables them to attain buddhahood within this very body. In the *Sangenmenju*, first, one important procedure of the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission (*denbō kanjō* 傳法灌頂) is identified with both the salvific process of the Mahāvairocana Buddha (Dainichi nyorai 大日如來) and the process of human conception. Through the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission, Shingon monks intuitively comprehend the correspondence between two such processes and have profound faith in non-duality between the human body and those of buddhas. And, according to the *Datohiketsu shō*, those who intuitively acquire profound faith in the equality between the human body and those of buddhas are said to be able to attain buddhahood within this very body.

In conclusion, it was one of the specific purposes and significance of “Esoteric embryological discourses” in medieval Shingon Buddhist tradition to cause practitioners to intuitively understand the correspondence between the salvific process of the Mahāvairocana Buddha and the process of human conception, and to obtain firm belief in the living body of a human being which enables them to attain buddhahood within this very body. Incidentally, such connection between the embryological knowledge and the acquisition of belief in the living body of a human being is not seen in Indian and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist doctrine and practices and is unique to those of Shingon Buddhism.⁹ In the following sections, I will first investigate descriptions in the *Sangenmenju*, and next examine those in the *Datohiketsu shō*.

9. With regard to the details of the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist embryological discourses, see Frances Garrett, *Religion, Medicine and the Human Embryo in Tibet* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2008).

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABHIṢEKA OF DHARMA-TRANSMISSION IN
THE SANGENMENJU

1. Background of the Sangenmenju

In this section, I will investigate descriptions of *abhiṣeka* in the *Sangenmenju*, and point out the connection between it and the Esoteric embryological discourses in medieval Shingon Buddhism. In the *Sangenmenju*, one important procedure in the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission (*denbō kanjō*), a procedure of conferring the secret *mudrās* (in 印) and mantras (*shingon* 眞言) of the Mahāvairocana Buddha, is identified with both the salvific process of this buddha and the process of human conception. According to the text, through this procedure, Shingon Buddhist monks not only acquire the *mudrās* and mantras but also intuitively comprehend the correspondence between these two processes and have faith in non-duality between the living body of a human being and the buddhas' cosmic bodies. Thereby, they are also able to completely cease the desire to look for dharma outside themselves.

Before examining specific descriptions in the *Sangenmenju*, I hope to briefly explain the background of the text. According to one post-script at the end of the *Sangenmenju*, apparently written by Seigen 成賢 (1162–1231), a Shingon Buddhist monk who lived during the early Kamakura time period, this text is a collection of the “essential points” (*kanjin* 肝心) and “key meanings” (*yōi* 要意) of Shingon Buddhist doctrine and practices which were transmitted orally among the Shingon monks who belonged to the Sanbōin lineage of the Daigoji temple,¹⁰ the lineage of dharma-transmission (*kechimyaku* 血脈) that was based in the Sanbōin sub-temple of the Daigoji temple. More specifically, the content of the text was said to be originally oral teachings which were inherited by the powerful members of the Sanbōin lineage of the Daigoji temple from the end of the Heian to early Kamakura time periods by monks such as Shōkaku 勝覺 (1057–1129), Jōkai 定海 (1074–1149), Genkai 元海 (1093–1156), Jitsuun 實運 (1105–1160), and Shōken 勝賢 (1138–1196).¹¹ Incidentally, in addition to aforementioned Seigen, these five Shingon monks were all abbots of the Daigoji temple. Also,

10. See Zoku shingonshūzensho kankō kai 續眞言宗全書刊行會, ed., *Zoku Shingonshūzensho* 續眞言宗全書 (Kōyachō, Wakayama: Zoku shingonshūzensho kankō kai 續眞言宗全書刊行會, 1985), vol. 23, p. 18b.

11. See Moriyama, *Tachikawajakyō to sono shakaitekihaikai no kenkyū*, 82–89.

according to the same postscript, Seigen, a disciple of Shōken who received these oral teachings directly from his master, wrote them on paper and organized a text, the *Sangenmenju*.¹²

In the *Sangenmenju*, there is no clear information with regard to the date when this text was actually compiled. If the postscript which I mentioned above was really written by Seigen, however, it is assumed that the *Sangenmenju* was compiled sometime between the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth century.¹³

2. The *Abhiṣeka* of Dharma-Transmission in the *Sangenmenju*

At the end of the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission, the conferral of the status of *ācārya* (*ajari* 阿闍梨), there is a procedure through which disciples receive instruction in the secret *mudrās* and mantras of the Mahāvairocana Buddha, which are indispensable for Shingon Buddhist practitioners to merge their three karmas (*sangō* 三業) and the three mysteries (*sanmitsu* 三密) of this buddha and to immediately attain the buddha's omniscience inherent in them. Through this procedure in the ritual, disciples basically receive instruction in a set of following two *mudrās* and two mantras: the “*mudrā* of a five-pronged vajra clasped with fingers on the outside” (*gebaku goko* 在外縛五股印) and the “*mudrā* of a *stūpa*” (*sotoba* 率都婆印); the mantra *a vi ra hūṃ khaṃ* and the mantra *vaṃ*. In some lineages of dharma-transmission (*kechimyaku*) of Shingon Buddhist tradition, however, masters who presided over the *abhiṣeka* frequently initiated their disciples into a few more *mudrās* and mantras concerned with the Mahāvairocana Buddha's enlightenment. In the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission performed among the Sanbōin lineage of the Daigoji temple, disciples received instruction in the following four *mudrās* and the five mantras in total in three steps. In the

12. See *Zoku Shingonshūzensho*, vol. 23, p. 18b.

13. Itō Satoshi 伊藤聡, who carefully investigates the postscripts of the *Sangenmenju*, however, questions the reliability of these postscripts and suggests the possibility that the text might be written by a different author after Seigen's death, more specifically, sometime after the fourteenth century. See Itō Satoshi, “Sanbōinryū no gisho: Toku ni Sekisitsu o megutte 三宝院流の偽書—特に『石室』を巡って,” in *Gisho no seisei: Chūseitokishikō to hyōgen* 「偽書」の生成—中世的思考と表現, ed. Nishiki Hitoshi 錦仁, Ogawa Toyoo, and Itō Satsuki (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 1997), 219–221.

Sangenmenju, there is the detailed explanation of the conferral of these *mudrās* and mantras.

First Step

- a. The *mudrā* of a five-pronged *vajra* clasped with fingers on the outside¹⁴
- b. The *mudrā* of a *stūpa*¹⁵
- c. The mantra of *a vi ra hūṃ khaṃ*
- d. The mantra of *vaṃ*

In the first step, disciples receive instruction in the above two *mudrās* and two mantras. According to the *Sangenmenju*, the *mudrā* a and the mantra c signify the enlightenment of the Mahāvairocana Buddha of the womb realm mandala (*taizōkai mandara* 胎藏界曼荼羅) which represents principle (*ri* 理): the *mudrā* b and the mantra d signify the enlightenment of Mahāvairocana of the diamond realm mandala (*kongōai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅) which represents wisdom (*chi* 智).¹⁶

After giving instruction in the *mudrās* a and b and the mantras c and d, in the second step, masters initiate their disciples into the following *mudrā* e and the mantras f and g: after giving instruction in them, masters subsequently initiate disciples into the *mudrā* h and the mantra i in the third step.

Second Step

- e. The “*mudrā* of a tower” (*tō in* 塔印)¹⁷
- f. The mantra of *vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hrīḥ aḥ*
- g. The mantra of *a ā aṃ aḥ āḥ*

14. For more information about the *mudrā* of a five-pronged *vajra* clasped with fingers on the outside (*gebaku goko in*), see Mikkyōjiten hensan kai 密教辞典編纂会, ed., *Mikkyōdajiten shukusatsuban* 密教大辞典 縮刷版 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan 法藏館, 1983), 583c–584a.

15. For more information about the *mudrā* of a *stūpa* (*sotoba in*), see *Mikkyōdajiten shukusatsuban*, 181b–c and 1649a–b.

16. See *Zoku Shingonshūzensho*, vol. 23, pp. 3b–4a.

17. For more information about the *mudrā* of a tower (*tō in*), see *Mikkyōdajiten shukusatsuban*, 1649a–b, and Takai Kankai 高井觀海, *Mikkyō jisō taikai: Toku ni sanbōinkenjingata o kichō to shite* 密教事相大系—特に三寶院憲深方を基調として— (Kyoto: Takai zenkeshu chosaku kankō kai 高井前化主著作刊行會, 1953), 1090–1096.

Third step

h. The “*mudrā* of the *stūpa* of dharma realm” (*hokkaitōba in* 法界塔婆印)¹⁸

i. The mantra of *a vaṃ raṃ haṃ khaṃ*

Furthermore, in the *Sangenmenju*, it is explained that these three sets of the *mudrās* and mantras respectively have the following significance. The two *mudrās* and two mantras which are conferred upon disciples in the first step (a, b, c, d) are said to represent:

j. The Mahāvairocana Buddha of principle and the same buddha of wisdom,¹⁹ both of whom abide in the ultimate tranquility of their enlightenment and do not enlighten other sentient beings;

k. The primordial calm state of Yin 陰 and Yang 陽, the fundamental opposite forces in ancient Chinese cosmology;

l. A father and mother who have not yet started sexual intercourse.

One *mudrā* and two mantras which are conferred in the second step (e, f, g) are said to represent:

m. The Mahāvairocana Buddhas of both principle and wisdom who temporarily leave their ultimate tranquility in order to enlighten other sentient beings and merge their principle and wisdom together while maintaining individual bodies;

n. Yin and Yang which start to be active;

o. A father and mother who are having sexual intercourse.

And also, one *mudrā* and one mantra which are conferred in the third step (h, i) represent:

p. The Mahāvairocana Buddhas whose bodies merge into one completely (that is the representation of ultimate principle);

q. The mixture of a white drop (*byakutei* 白滯), a red drop (*shakutei* 赤滯), and the consciousness within the womb of a mother by means of sexual intercourse between a father and a mother.

18. For more information about the *mudrā* of the *stūpa* of dharma realm (*hokkaitōba in*), see Takai, *Mikkyō jisō taiki*, 1096–1099.

19. As I said above, they also signify respectively the Mahāvairocana Buddha of the womb realm mandala and the same Buddha of the diamond realm mandala.

On the basis of these interpretations of the procedure of conferring the secret *mudrās* and mantras in the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission, in the *Sangenmenju* it is further stated that Shingon Buddhist monks who receive this *abhiṣeka* intuitively learn the correspondence between the “process of the Mahāvairocana Buddha’s attainment of Buddhist path” (*hōbutsu jōdō no shijū* 法佛成道始終), that is to say, the salvific process of this buddha, and the “process of human conception from sexual intercourse to impregnation” (*rinne jushō no shogo* 輪廻受生初後).²⁰ Thereby, monks are able to have profound faith (*jinshin*) in non-duality between the human body and the Mahāvairocana Buddha’s cosmic bodies, and cease their desire to look for enlightenment outside themselves.²¹ In other words, through the *abhiṣeka* of dharma-transmission, they are able to obtain firm belief in the living body of a human being which is composed of the six elements (*rokudai* 六大). And also, according to the *Sangenmenju*, the correspondence between the aforementioned two processes is the foundation of *abhiṣeka*.²²

II. PROFOUND FAITH IN THE HUMAN BODY IN THE DATOHIKETSU SHŌ

1. Esoteric Embryological Discourses in the *Datohiketsu shō*

In the *Sangenmenju*, the importance of comprehending the correspondence between the salvific process of the Mahāvairocana Buddha and the process of human conception and acquisition of profound faith (*jinshin*) in non-duality between the human body and those of the Mahāvairocana Buddha is reiterated. Even if Shingon Buddhist monks understand this correspondence and thereby obtain firm belief in their living body, however, “one subtle delusion” (*ichimō* 一妄) still remains within their mind. Therefore, according to the *Sangenmenju*, Shingon monks also have to perform the practice of the three mysteries subsequently in order to develop and “manifest” (*kendoku* 顯得) buddhahood inherent in them.²³ On the other hand, texts, such as the *Datohiketsu shō*, maintain a different view with regard to the relationship between attaining enlightenment within this very body and acquisition of profound faith in non-duality between the human body and those of the Mahāvairocana Buddha. The *Datohiketsu shō* is the commentary on each

20. See *Zoku Shingonshūzensho*, vol. 23, p. 6a.

21. *Ibid.*, 5b.

22. *Ibid.*, 3b.

23. *Ibid.*, 9b.

constituent element of Shingon Esoteric invocation rituals, such as the procedure of protecting the body (*goshinbō* 護身法) or that of visualizing the practice hall (*dōjōkan* 道場觀), written by Gahō sometime between 1309 and 1310.²⁴ In this text, acquisition of the above profound faith is regarded as the ultimate destination for Shingon practitioners. It is clearly stated that those who obtain it are able to attain enlightenment within this very body without any other practices. Before examining the descriptions concerning such faith, however, I hope to briefly discuss the Esoteric embryological discourses in the *Datohiketsu shō*.

The author of the text refers to the Esoteric embryological discourses in order to demonstrate the following issues: the equality between the Amitābha Buddha and the Rāgarāja (Aizen myōō 愛染明王, “King of Love”; non-duality between sentient beings and buddhas; and non-duality between good and evil. In the *Datohiketsu shō*, first, it is stated that a syllable *hrīḥ* is not only the seed mantra (*shuji shingon* 種子真言) of Amitābha Buddha but also represents the three poisons (*sandoku* 三毒) and the equality between them and nirvana: strictly speaking, the four syllables *ha*, *ra*, *ī*,²⁵ and *aḥ*, which constitute *hrīḥ*, respectively signify craving (*rāga*), anger (*dveṣa*), ignorance (*moha*), and the equality between the three poisons and nirvana. On the other hand, it is explained that, because of having the three poisons, sentient beings in the dharma realm enter into the womb of a mother and obtain new physical bodies again after their decease. Therefore, Amitābha Buddha is regarded as equal to the Rāgarāja. In addition, according to the *Datohiketsu shō*, the three poisons produced from the consciousness enter into *kalala*, the mixture of the reproductive substances of a mother and a father, which is composed of the five elements (*godai* 五大), and this material subsequently grows into the full-fledged body of a sentient being. The body of a sentient being is, therefore, regarded as the “*stūpa* of the six elements as dharma nature” (*rokudai hosshō tō* 六大法性塔), the symbolic body (*sanmayashin* 三昧耶

24. For more information about the *Datohiketsu shō*, see Kameyama Takahiko 龜山隆彦, “*Datohiketsu shō no gozō mandara rikai* 『馱都秘決鈔』の五藏曼荼羅理解,” *Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 佛教學研究 71 (2015).

25. In the *Datohiketsu shō*, a syllable *ḷi* is used instead of *ī*. See Takaoka Ryūshin 高岡隆心, ed., *Shingonshūzensho* 真言宗全書 (1935; repr., Kōyachō, Wakayama: Zoku shingonshūzensho kankō kai 續真言宗全書刊行會, 1978), vol. 23, p. 277b. This syllable *ḷi*, however, is not originally included in the four syllables which constitute a syllable *hrīḥ*. This seems to be a miscopy of *ī*.

身) of the Mahāvairocana Buddha. On the basis of such a view, sentient beings and buddhas and good and evil are also regarded as non-dual.²⁶

2. Profound Faith in the Human Body in the *Datohiketsu shō*

According to the *Datohiketsu shō*, Shingon Buddhist faith (*shin* 信) is divided into two kinds: *shinge* 信解, which literally means “believing and understanding,” and *jinshin* 深信, which means “profound faith.” These two terms are also respectively the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit words *abhibodhi* and *śraddhā*. Furthermore, in the *Datohiketsu shō*, *shinge* is said to be belief in Buddhism which is acquired as a result of discriminating between good and evil and fully understanding both the “Buddhist teachings and those of non-Buddhism” (*naige* 内外), in other words by means of the “function of wisdom” (*chiyū* 智用).²⁷

In addition, there is another kind of faith, *jinshin* 深信, the translation of the Sanskrit term *śraddhā*. It means intuitively having faith in the “fundamental principle of the equality between our bodies and those of buddhas” (*jishin honbutsu no dōri* 自身本佛之道理). In other words, *jinshin* is profound faith in the “essential nature of our bodies” (*jishin no taishō* 自身體性) which is obtained without either discriminating between good and evil or fully understanding both the Buddhist teachings and those of non-Buddhism.²⁸

In other words, *jinshin* is profound faith in non-duality between the human body and those of buddhas which is intuitively acquired without the “function of wisdom.” In addition, in the *Datohiketsu shō*, Shingon Buddhist monks who acquire *jinshin* are regarded as those who have the most excellent spiritual faculty in this Buddhist tradition.²⁹

They are also called “those who are able to directly enter and practice Shingon Buddhism and immediately attain enlightenment” (*jikinyū jikishū jikigo jikishō no ki* 直入直修直悟直證之機)... If having faith in the equality between our bodies and those of buddhas, even immature practitioners who only receive instruction in one *mudrā* and one mantra are regarded as those who have the “most excellent spiritual

26. See *Shingonshūzensho*, vol. 23, p. 277b.

27. *Ibid.*, 200b.

28. *Shingonshūzensho*, vol. 23, p. 200b.

29. See *ibid.*, 200b.

faculty of Shingon Mahāyāna Buddhism” (*shingon daijō no jōki* 眞言大乘上機).³⁰

According to the *Datohiketsu shō*, if they have firm faith in the equality between the human body and those of buddhas, monks are able to attain enlightenment within this very body without performing the practice of the three mysteries. In conclusion, the author of the text describes the significance of *jinshin* (profound faith).

In Shingon Buddhism, *shin* (faith) is considered the most important. It is because *shin* means having firm faith in the equality between our bodies and those of Buddha. In other Buddhist traditions, however, it is merely regarded as an “entrance to the way of Buddha” (*nyūbutsudō no shomon* 入佛道之初門).³¹

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the “Introduction,” the subject of this paper is a series of discourses with regard to human conception, which were formulated through the interrelationship between the Buddhist embryological knowledge and the doctrine and practices of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism. More specifically, in this paper, I discussed the significance and purpose of such “Esoteric embryological discourses” especially in medieval Shingon Buddhist tradition through an investigation into the *Sangen menju* and the *Dato hiketsu shō*. Consequently, it was one of the specific purpose and significance of the Esoteric embryological discourses in medieval Shingon Buddhist tradition to cause Shingon practitioners to acquire profound faith in non-duality between the human body and those of buddhas, that is to say, firm belief in the living body of a human being, which enables them to attain buddhahood within this very body.

30. *Ibid.*, 200b.

31. *Ibid.*, 200b.

