

Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon

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Buddhist medical theory often describes the early stages of human gestation in terms of five one-week long stages. Certain Shingon texts take this theory and make of it a spiritual motif in which these five weeks, and by extension the whole term of human gestation, is construed of as a privileged period of nirvanic experience spent in a pre-samsaric pocket universe. In its developed representations this notion involves the mandalization of the maternal womb and the divinization of the growing fetus. The formulation of five steps further allows the motif to incorporate and deploy a number of other immanent pentads that ultimately implicate all of reality in a modality of nondual sacrality. This study examines five Shingon texts in which this theme emerges and develops.

SYMBOLIZATION THAT CONSTRUES spiritual transformation as a form of rebirth is virtually universal. In the case of Christianity such a “conversion” is often characterized as a partial or preliminary death from an old, unregenerate life into a new state of being that prefigures an eternal afterlife in another world. For Buddhism, however, in which each sentient being has a number of lives and deaths that give way one to the next in an almost unending cycle (the attainment of nirvana being considered a rare event), the symbolic ramifications of birth, death, and spiritual transformation take on forms that would not be expected in a Western setting.

Indeed, since one life normally leads to another in Buddhism, the gap between one lifetime and the next—its span, its nature, its stages—becomes an issue of considerable concern and speculation. This concern is typically directed to two separate post-mortem, pre-(re)birth periods: 1) the period from the physiological death of the former body to the conception of a new bodily holder, the embryo,

* I would like to thank my colleague, Thomas A. Tweed, for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

into which the transiting personality, or “self,” will move,¹ and 2) the subsequent interval between biological conception and the actual birth of a new body-mind complex some nine or ten months later.

Westerners are most familiar with these Buddhist themes from a single example, the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or *Bardo Thödol* (EVANS-WENTZ 1927; here and hereafter Tibetan romanization follows usage of sources cited). This text focuses on the three substates of the *bardo* afterlife—equally a prelife—that in Buddhist technical terminology is usually deemed “the intermediate state” (Skt. *antarābhava*). In these three *bardo* substates prior karmic accumulations commonly pull the discarnate personality further and further away from an initial encounter in the *chikhai bardo* with the potentially salvific Great White Light of Nirvana, first through a period spent in the astral-symbolic *chönyid bardo* and then in the *sidpa bardo*, where one is driven into a womb and thus takes anew the first step down the slippery road that leads irreversibly to rebirth in one of the six categories (Jpn. *rokudō* 六道) of samsaric existence: devas, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, hell dwellers.

The Book of the Dead briefly discusses biological conception as an aspect of the third, *sidpa bardo*, state, but does not consider in any detail the period of gestation that follows conception. Other Tibetan texts, however, fill this lacuna. sGam.po.pa’s *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, for example, treats gestation as a series of thirty-eight one-week-long stages each of which is filled with *duḥkha*, the pain and misery that constitutes the essential nature of all samsaric existence. This pain ranges from being “boiled and fried in the womb’s heat as in a hot vessel” in the first week of embryonic development on to birth itself, in which:

there arises the so-called “face looking down” (*kha thur.du lta.ba*) wind. It turns the head of the foetus downward and the child reaches the outer world with indrawn hands. This pain is as if being drawn through a net of iron wires.

(GUENTHER 1971, p. 65)

Other Buddhist texts also deal with gestation, although in many cases these treatments are more medical than spiritual in orientation (NORBU 1983 and 1987).² Such works tend to sketch out a standard

¹ In Chinese and Japanese Buddhism the notion of *anātman*, or nonself, early on came to be honored largely in the breach. As Bernard FAURE has written of this construct in Ch’an contexts, “In most cases, it remained a kind of wishful thinking that did not really threaten the common belief in an afterlife” (1991, p. 192), that is, in a *personal* afterlife—or afterlives.

² Early Buddhist texts devote substantial effort to providing a variety of proto-scientific

series of five or eight one-week long stages of embryonic development between conception and the completion of the fetus as a fully formed miniature human. The more common set is termed the *goi* 五位, or “five stages.” Details can vary somewhat, but the following outline would be representative:

- 1 *Kalalaṃ* (Jpn. *kararan* 羯刺藍), the embryo in the first week after conception.
- 2 *Arbudaṃ* (Jpn. *abudon* 頰部曇), the embryo in its second seven days (or alternatively after 27 days).³
- 3 *Peṣī* (Jpn. *heishi* 閉尸), the embryo in its third week (or after 37 days).
- 4 *Ghana* (Jpn. *kennan* 健南), the embryo in the fourth week (or after 47 days). In this stage the embryo is a viscid mass or lump, *ghana*.
- 5 *Praśākha* (Jpn. *harashakya* 鉢羅奢佉), the fetus after 57 days (or after 35 days), when form (with developed limbs and organs) has become complete.⁴

The eight-stage schema usually considers the above stages to last one week each and adds to them three more, unnamed, steps:

- 6 The period in which hair, teeth, and nails are formed.
- 7 The period in which the organs of sense are formed.
- 8 Complete formation. Hereafter, gestation is less a process of development than one of simple growth.

Neither of these schema continues on to birth itself; rather both stop at “complete formation,” the stage in which the fetus is thought

explanations of conception, gestation, miscarriage, birth, and the relationship of fetal life to the intermediate state (FUKUNAGA 1990, pp. 204–22). The Tibetan materials seem to follow fairly closely the encyclopedic treatments found in these early texts. GUENTHER, for example, anchors sGam.po.pa’s passage on birth to the *Abhidharma kośa* (1971, p. 73). Such texts were, of course, also part of the Sino-Japanese Buddhist canon, as for example the “Dwelling in the Womb” and “Entering the Maternal Womb” sections of the *Dai hōshaku kyō* 大宝積經 [Great sutra of accumulated treasures] (T no. 310, 11.322–336), and the *Bussetsu hōtai kyō* 仏説胞胎經 [Sūtra of the Buddha’s discourse on the fetus] (T no. 317, 11.886–890), but their impact on the Shingon speculations seems, at best, minimal.

³ Japanese sources show considerable confusion as to whether locutions like “four seven day” mean the fourth seven-days (i.e., the fourth week), the fourth month’s seventh day, or the forty-seventh day.

⁴ In modern English the terms “embryo” and “fetus” are not entirely synonymous, “embryo” being applied to the early weeks of gestation and “fetus” primarily from the third month of pregnancy on. In this article I use “embryo” for the first four of the Buddhist stages of growth and “fetus” thereafter.

to be a miniature, but physically complete human being.

Japanese Buddhist texts also discuss the intermediate span between one physiological death and the next rebirth, a state that is usually called *chūin* 中陰 or *chūu* 中有. The Japanese Shingon school developed certain speculations about this intermediate period—especially its post-conceptual, fetal portion—that are, I believe, unique.

The remainder of this article examines five examples of such speculations on the spiritual meaning of gestation. The choice of the specific examples cited and their arrangement is deliberate. Like the motif of fetal Buddhahood itself, the order here is developmental, progressing from simpler to more complex renditions of the theme. This procedure also turns out, interestingly enough, to deploy the texts, in spite of their varied provenances, into something close to chronological order. (Not all of the pieces are datable.) I have also limited my sample to texts that seemed particularly informative. This mode of selection has, however, produced the concomitant difficulty of casting up texts that are quite heavily laden with the specifics of Shingon thought and thus require a considerable amount of contextual backgrounding. The development(s) unfold slowly.

ONE

Conception as Ritual Act: Gonkaku's Aizen Myōō Initiation

The first Shingon text on gestation that I want to look at is concerned only with the earliest stages of embryonic development, that is, intercourse and conception—events that would fall at the very end of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead's sidpa bardo*. However, the metaphysical position of this text and the other Japanese examples cited below, is, in general, quite different from that of the Tibetan texts mentioned above in that it is based not on the ideology of samsara as a hellish vale of sorrow, but instead on a solidly non-dual equation of the identity of samsara and nirvana. Because of this positive reevaluation of samsara, the theme of misery that lies at the very center of sGam.po.pa's view is almost entirely absent in Shingon considerations of gestation.

Our first Japanese text, dated the eleventh day, eighth month, 1310, purports to be an initiation certificate originally transmitted from one Rishubō Jakuen 理趣房寂円 to the prelate Gonkaku 巖覚 (also read Genkaku; 1056–1121). The text is summarized, but not cited in full, in a note in KUSHIDA 1979 (p. 383), yet, in spite of its brevity, this reference implicates a number of key fetal Buddhahood subthemes. Gonkaku's initiatory teaching is said to derive from from the so-called Horse Penis Samādhi of the *Yoga Sūtra*. Commonly

referred to in Japanese as the *Yugikyō* 瑜祇經, the full title of the *Yoga Sūtra* is *Kongōbu rōkaku issai yuga yugi kyō* 金剛峰樓閣一切瑜伽瑜祇經 (T no. 867, 18.253–369), and its translation into Chinese is attributed to Vajrabodhi (671–741). This work contains a passage associated with Aizen Myōō 愛染明王 (literally, The Bright King Steeped in Love; Skt. Mahārāga Vidyarāja) that speaks of a Horse Penis Store Meditation (Jpn. *meonzō sanmaji* 馬陰藏三摩地). One of the thirty-two physical marks peculiar to Buddhas is their possession of a sheathed penis like that of a horse, an unusual—from a human perspective at any rate—trait that is sometimes interpreted as symbolic of modesty or chastity. (See EVANS, et. al. 1977, pp. 381–86 for the actual physiology of the equine scrotum and external prepuce.) In the *Yoga Sūtra* this unique mark is connected with a state of meditation. The relevant passage begins:

At that time the World-honored One once more entered the Horse Penis Store Samadhi. All the Tathāgatas were lost in mystery, sunk in darkness. Then a pure, mysterious, flaming light burst forth. It was valorous, raging, awesome. There was the sound of the lion roar shaking like a thunderstorm.

(T no. 867, 18.225)

In this canonical text the lion roar seems no more than a hyperbolic ornament. But in the more left-handed wings of Shingon tantrism, the *meonzō* lion roar was associated with the conjugal union of Fudō Myōō 不動明王 (Acalanātha Vidyarāja) and a feminized incarnation of Aizen Myōō, and was understood as an encrypted reference to their cries at orgasm. It is probably because of this passage that the notorious Tachikawa-ryū 立川流 “heresy” of Shingon counted the *Yoga Sūtra* as one of its foundational scriptures, but even the much less radical *Kakugenshō* 覚源抄 [Anthology of Kakukai 覚海 (1142–1223) and Yūgen 融源 (fl. 1160)] edited by Rendō 蓮道 (Miwa Shōnin 三輪上人) around 1200 states that:

Thus the mudra of the “human-shaped pounder” is like the union of the twin forms that beget people. But this cry of bliss is far louder than that of ordinary human relations. Thus it sung out in the five tones as a lion roar. [The *Yoga Sūtra*] tells us that if one visualizes⁵ the realm of men and women in this fashion, one can very quickly enter the Buddha’s path. This is

⁵ “Visualizes” (*kan* 観) is here used as a cover word for the moment of orgasm—as are “realization” (*nen* 念, or *nensō* 念想) and “intention” (*i* 意) in other esoteric texts. In any of these usages, sexual ecstasy is seen as a revelational state in which all differentiations of self and other have been lost.

not a love of intercourse. It is a wholly mysterious dharma-practice based on the image of one body with two heads. It is a secret text that testifies to an exchange that is deeply hidden, darkly profound.

(*Kakugenshō*, in MIZUHARA 1931, p. 23; MORIYAMA 1965, p. 141)

A key feature of Gonkaku's initiatory exfoliation of the *Yoga Sūtra's* Horse Penis Meditation is the fact that its elements are organized in terms of the five stages of gestation. Furthermore, it equates the taking on of human form in the womb not with sorrow in the manner of sGam.po.pa, but with the attainment of perfect Buddhahood—that is, with the core feature of the Japanese complex of ideas I have dubbed “fetal Buddhahood.”⁶ In the Gonkaku fragment, sexual intercourse and conception become steps toward a ritual entrance into a perfect Buddha-realm. This seems a far cry indeed from the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation's* vision of gestation and birth as Hell.

The ritual process of conception and enwombment described by Gonkaku (or his redactor) begins with three initiatory mudra “seals” (Jpn. *in* 印) that are symbolized respectively by a lotus blossom, a stupa, and a “human-shaped *vajra*.” The most common Buddhist meaning of *mudra* is in reference to iconic and ritual hand gestures, but the term has an especially complex history in tantrism, including the meaning of female sexual partner in a tantric ritual (BHARATI 1965, pp. 242–43). In the Gonkaku initiation the three specific mudras could refer to the changing shape of the embryo in the early stages of its development, but their most basic meanings here are more straightforward: these mudras represent three components of sexual intercourse. The stupa (which in other, similar, texts would be replaced with a *vajra*) is the male adept's phallus; the lotus blossom is his partner's vulva,⁷ while the unusual “human-form *vajra*” represents

⁶ As far as I know there is no technical term for this motif in Japanese. The expected *tainai jōbutsu* 胎内成仏 (Buddhahood of the womb) does not seem to occur. Perhaps this is because the quite similar term, *tainai butsu* 胎内仏, referring to a smaller Buddha statue that is inserted into a larger icon, preempts the embryological usage.

“Complex” here refers to a cluster of figures that gather together into a recognizable, but not invariable, pattern, and would, thus, seem to stand somewhere between the usages of “motif” and “type” made by Stith THOMPSON in *The Folktale* (1946, pp. 415–19). Beyond the core stages of fetal development, not all of these figures need be present in any given manifestation of the complex; some instantiations are more elaborate than others. I use the words “theme,” “motif,” and “complex” almost interchangeably.

⁷ This combination lotus and stupa recalls the well-known pair, *maṇi* (“jewel” = phallus) and *padme* (“lotus” = womb) of the *Oṃ maṇi padme huṃ [hrīḥ]* mantra favored by Tibetan Buddhists (BUCKNELL and STUART-FOX 1986, pp. 13–15, 132–35) and as well the so-called three families (see note 25, below). At the same time, the stupa may also prefigure the Japanese memorial marker-fetus-physical body complex discussed below.

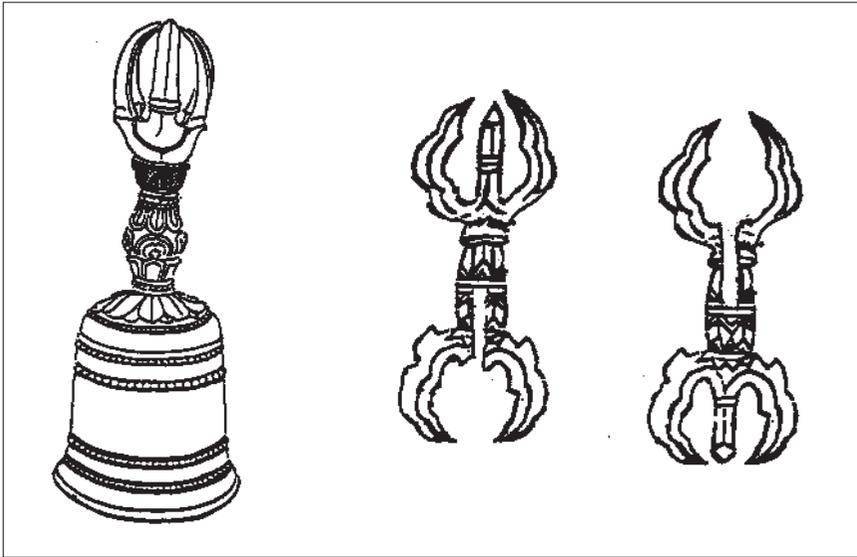


Figure 1. Examples of *vajras*. Left: *vajra-ghaṇṭā*. Right: two halves of human-shaped *vajra*.

the divine intercourse of Fudō and Aizen, and thus serves to mark the act of human intercourse as a religious ritual. Although the “human *vajra*” can, as this initiation suggests, be made with the physical bodies of a man and woman, in imitation of the macrocosmic coupling of Fudō and Aizen, it is most commonly embodied, as are most *vajras*, as a ritual implement cast in metal.

Vajra (Jpn. *kongō* 金剛) is often translated “diamond” or “diamond scepter,” but the phallic origins of the symbol are patent (COOMARASWAMY 1935, pp. 374–75). *Vajras* are ubiquitous in tantrism—as a technical term, as a decorative motif, and above all as a ritual instrument. The simplest form of ritual *vajra* is the “one-pronged” *vajra*, which is basically little more than a metal stick with a point at each end. More common is the five-pronged form, which has at each end a central point and four convergent secondary prongs. Also important is the *vajra-ghaṇṭā* variant, which has a five-pronged *vajra* at one end and a bell—representing the womb—at the other.

The much rarer human-shaped *vajra* (Jpn. *ninkeishō* 人形杵; *shō* is literally “pestle” or “pounder”; see fig. 1) is a more “left-handed” variant of these common forms. At first glance this form looks just like a standard five-pronged *vajra*, but closer examination reveals that it is, in fact, a longitudinally split, two-piece, “breakaway” *vajra* whose finial endpoints (three at the top and two at the bottom of one segment, two at the top and three at the bottom of the other half) represent the

heads, limbs, and generative organs of a sexually united man and woman.⁸ Its use is virtually always associated with rituals to Fudō and Aizen.

KUSHIDA suggests that, if its alleged connection to Gonkaku is historically accurate, this initiatory fragment may constitute the earliest evidence of highly eroticised Aizen rituals in Japan (1979, p. 383).⁹ In like manner, Genkaku's fragment is the earliest Shingon text I know of that begins to bring the five stages of gestation into an initiatory context. Furthermore, early as it is, this initiation already has embedded within it rudimentary precursors of several of the key elements of the fetal Buddhahood theme that we will see developed in greater detail in other, later texts.

TWO

Gestation as Bodily Buddhahood: The Golden Turtle Consecration

My second example of the thematics of fetal Buddhahood is, like the Gonkaku text, more concerned with intercourse and conception than the later stages of gestation, but it does provide a much richer elaboration of the spiritual meanings of conception and the earliest events of embryonic development. This anonymous text, entitled the *Shifu hō daiji* 次附法大事 [Essentials of the minor rituals], is written in classical Chinese and is undated, but its sectarian provenance would appear to be the Hirosawa 広沢 school of Shingon.¹⁰ This initiation, called the Golden Turtle Consecration (Jpn. *konki kanjō* 金龜灌頂) or “Chaos Consecration” (*konton kanjō* 渾沌灌頂), describes conception and the early stages of embryonic development as a secretly transmitted initia-

⁸ MIZUHARA has an interesting discussion of the human-shaped *vajra* (1931, pp. 20–25); MORIYAMA provides a good photograph of the two halves of a disassembled human-*vajra* implement (1965, plate 21); and GOEPFER has a long section on *vajras* and *vajra-ghaṇṭas* (1988, pp. 236–75) including a photo and schematic drawings of a human-shaped *vajra* (pp. 248–49). Other names for the human-shaped *vajra* are *wari gokushō* 割五鉗杵 (split five-pronged pounder) and *waeshō* 和合杵 (mating pounder).

⁹ KUSHIDA also points out that authorship by Gonkaku would place this text well before the time of Ninkan 仁寛 (d. 1114), the alleged founder of Shingon's left-handed Tachikawayū movement (1979, p. 383). It would almost certainly also be earlier than the usage made by Kakuban 覚鑿 (Kōgyō Daishi 興教大師; 1095–1143) of the five stages of gestation motif in a poem entitled *Jishinkan* 自身觀 [Visualizing one's own body] (MIYASAKA 1977, pp. 129–30), which sees the human fetus as a *tathāgatagarbha* or “Buddha-embryo” (the Sanskrit word *garbha* can mean either “womb” or “fetus”).

¹⁰ MIZUHARA quotes a sizable segment of this text (1931, pp. 47–49). In his introduction to it (p. 46), he suggests that concern for the Golden Turtle theme distinguishes texts (and presumably ritual practices) of the Hirosawa school from those of the Ono 小野 school, which tend to focus on the Horse Penis Samadhi associated with Aizen and Fudō.

tion and an “inner proof of the body”¹¹ that accords to the cosmogonic stage when Heaven and Earth were still united and chaos (Jpn. *konton* 渾沌; Chn. *hun-tun*) had not yet separated into any differentiated forms. Thus, in this text procreation is made one with Creation.

A key feature of the Golden Turtle Consecration is its project of making conception and the early phases of gestation homologous to the three forms of *sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛, or “bodily Buddhahood,” the most important innovation in Kūkai’s 空海 (774–835) recension of the tantric Buddhism he studied in China.¹² Kūkai’s emphasis on *sokushin jōbutsu* elevates materiality to a level equal with that of spirit/mind, and refuses to allow the possibility of mind without matter or matter without mind.¹³ Bodily Buddhahood is itself embedded in two other primary notions of Shingon: the six great elements (Jpn. *rokudai* 六大) and the Twin Mandalas (Jpn. *ryōbu mandara* 兩部曼荼羅).

According to Shingon cosmological ideas, just as human beings consist of five “material” elements (earth, air, fire, water, and space) and one “spiritual” element (mind), so too does Mahāvairocana (Jpn. Dainichi 大日), the primordial Buddha of Shingon, consist of an enlightened Mind and a physical Body. Eternal nirvanic cognition is his Mind; the physical universe is his Body. Human beings, just as they are, while fully enmeshed in the concrete materiality of samsara, are microcosmic embodiments of this Buddha. Thus Mahāvairocana, living beings, and even the seemingly nonsentient dead matter of the universe are, all alike, three expressions of the unity of mind and matter. This said, however, one should immediately proceed to assert that “unity” is too weak, that at a deeper level the two “modes,” mind and matter, are never *really* separate, and that the apparent duality of mind-body is the preliminary expression of a higher, nondual truth that totally conflates, coheres, and finally extirpates all distinctions, including those of “Buddha,” “sentient being,” and “material world.”

A principal encoding of this truth can be seen in Shingon’s two “Grand” Mandalas; the Vajradhātu (Jpn. *kongōkai* 金剛界), or Vajra

¹¹ The compound *naishō* 内証 is a favorite Shingon term for enlightenment. Its literal meaning, “inner testimony,” allows for easy association both with esoteric “inner” secrets and with the physiological connotations of Shingon mind-body theories.

¹² My quite direct, perhaps inelegant, translation of *sokushin jōbutsu* as “bodily Buddhahood” arises from my conviction that Kūkai explicitly intended to contrast his vision of the physically embodied nature of enlightenment with the more mentalistic views of other Buddhist schools.

¹³ Shingon commonly distinguishes *shin* (or *kokoro*) 心 (Chn. *hsin*), “mind,” and *shin* 身 (Chn. *shen*), “body.” At other times the technical Buddhist term *shiki* 識, “consciousness,” replaces *shin/kokoro*. The Japanese homophonic transcription from Chinese of both *hsin* “heart” and *shen* “body” as *shin* has generated both easy confusions and some philosophically productive puns in Japanese texts.

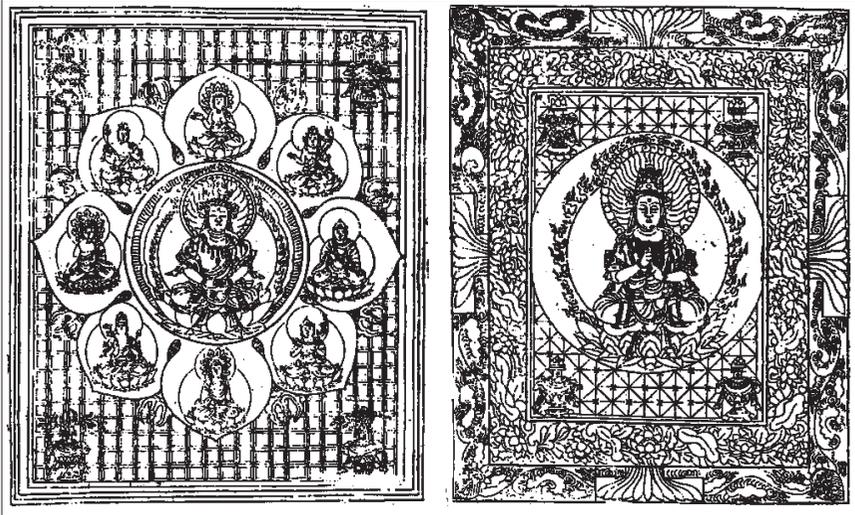


Figure 2. Two modes of Vairocana. Left: Central Court of the Womb Mandala (note meditation mudra of Mahāvairocana). Right: Vairocana of the One-Mudra Court of the Vajra Mandala (note Wisdom-Fist Mudra.)

Mandala, associated with mind, noumenality, stasis, and nirvana, and the Garbhakoṣa (Jpn. *taizōkai* 胎藏界), or Womb Mandala, representative of materiality, immanence, and change. These are twin icons that demonstrate in graphic medium the fact that the initial, apparent dualities of Vairocana's Mind and Body, or of the human mind and body, or of human beings and Buddhas, or of nirvana and samsara, or of immanence and transcendence, are all actually nothing but pre-figurations of the higher intuition that reality is in fact nondual.

Put another way, at the preliminary state, body (ours) and Body (Vairocana as cosmos) both consist of: 1) the five material elements, and are thus isomorphic with the samsaric Womb Mandala, and 2) the sixth element, mind/Mind, is isomorphic with the nirvanic Vajra Mandala. (For more on the Twin Mandalas, see KIYOTA 1978, pp. 81–104 and SNOGRASS 1988.) But since the modes represented by the Twin Mandalas are ultimately wholly coexistent, one might also say, to even greater effect, that reality is an organism—an organism whose name is Mahāvairocana. Sentient beings are at once both constituent organs within and microcosmic replicas of that living being.

A primary function of the secret truths encoded in the twin Mandalas is their potential for transmutation into spiritual procedures that will promote both an internal nondual unification of the mind/

body of the adept and a further cosmicized non-dual unity of that mind/body with the (already nondual) Mind/Body of Mahāvairocana. This conjunction of non-opposites can, given proper instruction and careful practice, take place in this lifetime within and with the aid of this very body via ritual application of mudras, mantras, and mandalic visualizations. From the Shingon adept's point of view the resultant unification is best called the attainment of bodily Buddhahood.

The essential features of bodily Buddhahood are laid out in Kūkai's *Sokushin jōbutsugi* 即身成仏義 [The meaning of *sokushin jōbutsu*]. There are two primary variants of this text. The main (*Seihon* 正本) version lays out bodily Buddhahood in a fairly straightforward manner. The explication given above is a rough paraphrase of that treatment. In the second, or *Ihon* 異本, version of Kūkai's text, bodily Buddhahood is recast into three subvarieties. It is this somewhat more complex recension that became normative for many later Shingon speculations.¹⁴

¹⁴ HAKEDA (1972, pp. 225–34) and INAGAKI (1975) both translate the main version of the *Sokushin jōbutsugi*. The so-called *ihon* (variant text) versions are generally treated in the Shingon tradition as a later rewrite—by Kūkai—of the main version, although even in early times some major Shingon prelates considered them the work of a later hand.

Paul GRONER argues that Saichō 最澄, the founder of Japanese Tendai (Chn. T'ien-t'ai), was using the concept and even the locution *sokushin jōbutsu* as early as Kūkai—both of them in criticizing the Hossō monk Tokuitsu's 徳一 assertion that not all beings were capable of enlightenment and that even for the lucky few it could take eons to achieve (1984, pp. 186–90). That bodily Buddhahood remains to this day principally associated with Kūkai and Shingon would be due in no small part to Kūkai's authoring the first systematic apology for the concept, the *Sokushin jōbutsugi* itself.

My use of the term *ihon* is at some odds with that of the Taishō Tripitaka, which reproduces seven variants of Kūkai's piece all under a single entry number (T no. 2428, 77.381–401). This entry considers its first variant as the primary text and lists the remaining variants as *ihon* versions one through six. However, versions two and three are close enough to the primary text to be considered simple redactions of it, while texts four through seven constitute variants of a second, substantially different version. Only in this second set is the theme of three kinds of *sokushin jōbutsu* taken up. I apply *Ihon*, with a capital "I," to any or all members of this second set of versions. Whatever its actual authorship and age, the *Ihon sokushin jōbutsugi* variant was at least as important historically to Shingon as was the "main" version.

It is also worth noting that the *Ihon*'s three categories of bodily Buddhahood are significantly like other Mahayana conceptual sets such as T'ien-t'ai's empty, provisional, and middle, or Zen's three mountains metaphor. The first two stages also recall the Zen debate over sudden and gradual enlightenment, the parallel Tendai distinction of *hongaku* 本覺 (primordial enlightenment) and *shikaku* 始覺 (acquired enlightenment), and Shingon's own division into the radically nondual, immanentist *honnu* 本有 (or *funi* 不二) wing and a more works-oriented, qualified nondual *shushō* 修生 (or *nini* 而二) wing. Useful discussions of the relevant debates in Chinese Buddhism can be found in BUSWELL 1989, FAURE 1991, and GREGORY 1991; for Japanese Buddhism the set of four articles on *hongaku* in *JRS* 21/1–2 (1995) by SUEKI, STONE, GRONER, and HABITO. A handy survey of the Shingon *honnu* and *shushō* doctrines is SAWA 1975, p. 645. All of these taxonomies are in some sense expressive of the broader stream of *tathāgata-garbha* thought in China, Korea, and Japan (see RUEGG 1969 and HOOKHAM 1991).

According to the *Ihon sokushin jōbutsugi*, the first form of bodily Buddhahood is *rigu* 理具 *sokushin jōbutsu*. *Rigu* in this context means “in principle,” and indicates that all beings—indeed, all Being—have/has naturally indwelling Buddha-nature. In fact, this is really the essential nature of all of Nature. All things, whether obviously sentient or not, are fundamentally composed of all six great elements, including, of course, mind/spirit. All things with bodies are thus, by their very nature, embodied Buddhas. The innate quality of this Buddhahood is best expressed in the pure Japanese reading of the Sino-Japanese compound *sokushin jōbutsu*, *sunawachi mi nareru hotoke*, “being a Buddha by simple virtue of having a body.”

Kaji 加持 *sokushin jōbutsu*, the second type of *sokushin jōbutsu*, exists because, in spite of their innate Buddhahood, living beings somehow misconstrue reality. They see nirvana and samsara as separate realms. Such a functional loss of Buddhahood can best be remedied by engaging in Shingon meditation and performing Shingon rituals. Through Shingon’s mantras, mudras, and mandalic visualizations, one’s own body gradually becomes identical with the divinity being visualized as one attains a state called *nyūga ganyū* 入我我入, in which the self enters the divinity and the divinity permeates the self. It is this state that is referred to as *kaji sokushin jōbutsu* or “invocational bodily Buddhahood.” It involves, from the practitioner’s point of view at least, a relatively dualistic understanding, one in which Buddhahood is sur-added to the adept.¹⁵ Invocational bodily Buddhahood lasts only for the duration of the meditative state of samadhi. It is thus characterized using another Japanese reading of *sokushin jōbutsu*: *mi ni sokushite hotoke ni naru*, or “Buddhahood based in the body.”

The third kind of *sokushin jōbutsu* is that in which one maintains the awareness of Buddhahood at all times. This is the union of the “innate” and “acquired” Buddhahoods of the first two states. It is termed *kendoku* 顕得 *sokushin jōbutsu*, “manifest bodily Buddhahood.” In this case *sokushin jōbutsu* is to be read *sumiyaka ni mi hotoke to naru*, “quickly [or perhaps “immediately”] the body becomes a Buddha.” This is truly nondual, unmediated Buddhahood, in which the body is still here but has become, individually and just as it always was, wholly a body of Buddhahood. The categories “transcendent” and “immanent” collapse into a singularity that is at the same time a multiplicity (there being more than one Buddha-being in Being as a whole).

¹⁵ I use the transcendently toned translation “invocation” here primarily because the term *kaji* (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*) implies the application of mantras and mudras to bring into play the presence of higher realities. However, given the ultimate oneness of Mahāvairocana and all other beings, this could just as well be called an act of evocation—invocation and evocation being essentially indistinguishable in a fully nondual context.

A prior understanding of the three forms of bodily Buddhahood and their place in Shingon metaphysics is prerequisite to any consideration of the Golden Turtle Consecration, since they form its primary ideological base. At a more practical level, this Consecration comprises a symbol-laden ritualization of sexual intercourse in which father and mother jointly take the role of grand *ācārya* (Jpn. *ajari* 阿闍梨), or master of ceremonies, and their Twin Waters, the red and the white, blood and semen, become the fluid used for ritual consecration (*kanjō* 灌頂, Skt. *abhiṣeka*). The “aspersion” of the Twin Waters within the womb constitutes the bestowal of a mudra and a mantra. This process also represents, or replicates, the blending and union of *a* and *vam*, the seed mantras of the twin Vajra and Womb Mandalas.¹⁶

Two symbolic images of central concern in this text are the Golden Turtle and the Great Ocean. These stand for all the expected, preliminary dualities to be nondually united in Shingon, and also—in spite of some symbolic cross-dressing that equates the Golden Turtle with blood and the Great Ocean with semen—for phallus and womb.¹⁷

The oral teaching tells us that the Golden Turtle is the red fluid of Principle and the Great Ocean is the white fluid of Wisdom. These two comprise the Principle and Wisdom of the Twin Realms¹⁸ in the most innately innate (*honnu no naka no*

¹⁶ The “red” and the “white” are recurrent terms in fetal Buddhahood texts. According to Buddhist medical theory, conception comprises the congealing together of maternal blood and paternal semen. During gestation, blood becomes flesh and semen becomes bone. SHAW decries “the common misconception that the red element contributed by the woman is premenstrual blood.... ‘Red’ refers to the endocrinal content of the female sexual fluid rather than its color” (1994, pp. 157–58). Japanese texts seem unaware of this Indo-Tibetan understanding.

Bija, “seed” mantras, are quintessential sounds that can generate or invoke whole categories of reality. Each material element has such a core mantra (*raṃ* for fire, etc.), as does every Buddha and bodhisattva and each of the Twin Mandalas (*a* for the Womb Mandala and *vam* for the Vajra Mandala; BUCKNELL and STUART-FOX 1986, pp. 130–36).

¹⁷ The turtle and ocean images probably derive from the Hindu myth in which *amṛta*, the elixir of immortality, is churned from the Ocean of Milk with Mount Sumeru as the pestel, a pestel that spins on the shell of the Cosmic Turtle. Buddhist cosmologized variants of this theme describe Mount Sumeru itself as resting on the back of the Turtle. SNODGRASS links these Buddhist usages to stupa imagery and to the stupa system of Kuṇḍalinī yoga (1985, pp. 178–79). These in turn are doubtless connected to the internal sea and turtle of Shang Ch’ing 上清 Taoist yoga (SCHIPPER 1993, p. 106).

¹⁸ Principle (*ri* 理) and Wisdom (*chi* 智) are virtually metaphysical qualities in Shingon. They are systematically associated with the Womb and Vajra mandalas, respectively.

“Twin Realms” translates *ryōbu* 兩部. This is a standard Shingon usage for all the apparent dualities of Shingon that are eventually transcended into nonduality, but its most central application is in the compound *ryōbu mandara* 兩部曼荼羅 for the Twin Vajra and Womb Mandalas. It is also the precursor of the term *Ryōbu Shinto* 兩部神道, which refers to the early Japanese theory of Shinto-Buddhist amalgamation.

honnu 本有中本有) aspect [i.e., they constitute *rigu sokushin jōbutsu*]. Therefore, the twin red and white waters are the Twin Waters of mother and father as they are found in the womb—innate (*honnu*) and natural (*hōnen* 法然)—prior to any sign of germination. (Shifu hō daiji, in MIZUHARA 1931, p. 48)

If in principal bodily Buddhahood is a timeless state of primordial Buddhahood (parallel to the all-consuming, time-dissolving rapture of orgasm), then gestation moves the issue into, or at least up to, the borders of the realm of time, preliminary delusion, duality, samsara, and gradual development. Indeed, the developmental aspect of embryonic growth is so powerful a notion that gestation quickly subsumes both the second and third stages of bodily Buddhahood into a single processual vector:

Gradually, the half-moon down below becomes the wind *cakra*.¹⁹ The most basic signification of wind *cakra* is the stirring up of conditioned causes in the world-vessel of matter [i.e., the womb]. This represents the activity of father and mother in union. This activity arises naturally from the innate (*honnu*) and exalted Twin Waters of the Golden Turtle and the Great Ocean and is the function of the stirring up of causality. When the activity of the innate Twin Waters concludes, what manifests next [and thus proceeds toward the *shushō* modality]²⁰ are the twin orbs of sun and moon, to the right and to the left. Thus, this stage of activity is also called the *kaji* [*sokushin jōbutsu*] stage. When further subdivision of the Twin Waters [the

¹⁹ “Half-moon” in this passage symbolizes the fertilized ovum. Its association with wind parallels that of early Buddhist embryological speculations, in which all the stages of fetal development, from conception to birth, were motivated by a series of differently named winds (FUKUNAGA 1990, pp. 216–20). Doubtless these embryonic winds are ultimately related to the similar cosmogonic winds of Buddhism: “According to the Buddhists, the seed (*bija*) of the new universe is the wind, . . . winds which create the heavenly bodies” (KLOETZLI 1983, p. 26). Note also in this context KIYOTA’s analysis of the crucial Wisdom-Fist Mudra made by Vairocana in the One-Mudra assembly of the Vajra Mandala: “the five left fingers symbolize the first five elements—four fingers are folded, while the index finger which symbolizes the wind element, points up, indicating life” (1978, p. 101). In this mudra, the right hand, which clasps the left index finger in a veritable sexual embrace, symbolizes Mind (see figure 2, page 10 above).

Cakra means circle. The most familiar usage of the term comes from yogic theory, in which the *cakra* are a series of four or more quasi-physiological, spiritual power plexi that lie in a vertical line along the spine of the yogi’s subtle body. Here, however, the term is used primarily in reference to the five elements theory, each material element being associated with one *cakra* of the *gorin no tō* 五輪塔 stupa (on which, more below).

²⁰ *Shushō* is, once again, the developmental counterpart of *honnu* (see note 14). This contrast encodes not only the distinction of nirvana and samsara but also that of *rigu sokushin jōbutsu* and *kaji sokushin jōbutsu*, mentioned just above.

embryonic mass] takes place we speak of *kendoku* [*sokushin jōbutsu*].

Thus the Golden Turtle and the Great Ocean are the life-giving Twin Realms (*ryōbu*). The half-moon is the root of all conditioned causality and the foundation of cultivated practice (*shushō*). Accordingly, as will be illustrated below, it is the primordial wind *cakra* that blows and stirs up the earliest of all bodily forms, the twin orbs of sun and moon.²¹ These two bodies are the first bits of shape and substance.

(MIZUHARA 1931, p. 48)

The earliest stage of conception thus consists of orgasm and the union of the red and white fluids that carry innate Buddhahood as their very essence. These fluids join and take on life under the aegis of the element air/wind. The first substantial trace of this cosmogonic process in the womb is the emergence of an inner sun and inner moon that parallels the emergence at Creation of the worldly sun and moon.

From this point on in the text, post-conception themes come to the fore. In the next stage the embryo takes on more concrete form, first as a sort of miniature stupa, then as Mount Sumeru:

Next comes the five-pronged stupa, which is already latent within that single bit of the phenomenal universe and which is already fully equipped with the Five Wisdoms.²² Thus, due to

²¹ “Orb” translates *rin* 輪, “wheel.” *Rin* also translates Sanskrit *cakra*. Sun and moon are commonly associated with the eyes in microcosm/macrocosm homologies, but here they seem also to signal the red and white, blood and semen.

²² The stupa-as-embryo image works in part simply because the shape of any stupa recalls that of a rudimentary body (see figures 3 and 4 below); beyond this, the stupa is a reliquary and thereby symbolizes death and the body as a corpse. In fact, metaphorical connections between stupas and bodies are quite widespread in Buddhism. SNODGRASS cites a number of examples ranging from a Nepalese stupa with eyes painted on the *harmikā*, to the seventy-two stupas with Buddhas ensconced [in fetus-like repose] within them on the upper reaches of the Borobudur monument, to a rendition of the Womb Mandala in which the central figure of Mahāvairocana is replaced with a stupa (1985, pp. 360–66).

The usage “five-pronged stupa” is odd. In part it suggests that this stupa is, in fact, a *vajra*. Its fiveness points also to the *gorin no iō* motif.

Shingon makes a great deal of the Five Wisdoms, each of which is correlated to one of the five central Buddhas of the Vajra Mandala. These wisdoms are: 1) Dharmadhātu Self-essence Wisdom associated with Mahāvairocana, 2) Great Mirror Wisdom associated with Akṣobhya (Jpn. Ashuku 阿闍), 3) Universal Identity Wisdom associated with Ratnasambhava (Jpn. Hōshō 宝生), 4) Wondrous Contemplation Wisdom associated with Amitābha (Jpn. Amida 阿彌陀), and 5) Activity Wisdom associated with Amoghasiddhi (Jpn. Fukūjōju 不空成就) (KIYOTA, 1978, p. 101). These fives can, of course, be further correlated with numerous other pentads, including the long lists of Chinese sets of fives that begin with the so-called five phases (*wu hsing* 五行; Jpn. *gogyō*: wood, fire, earth, metal, water) and go on to derived taxons such as east, south, center, west, north; green, red, yellow, white, black; spleen, lungs, heart, liver, kidneys; and so on.

true nonduality, this very world-vessel of ours is established and manifests “Buddhahood within the bodies of sentient beings.” By application of the secret meanings one can plumb the depths of this [truth].

Next comes Mount Sumeru, which was born in the age of metal *cakra*. We can understand this under the rubric of the Golden Turtle.²³ The [attendant] lotus blossom represents the unstained purity of the very first stage of form. Following that, the musical instruments to the right and left of the stupa represent the instruments that sound the lion roar and the other notes that play the hymn of Vairocana in the two-headed Aizen segment of the *Yoga Sūtra*. The sound of these instruments is the sound of the cries made during the half-moon activity.

One can say that the so-called Golden Turtle water *cakra* is the innate (*honnu*) Twin Waters of father and mother. The half-moon is the “realization” (*nensō* 念想) stirred up at the time of father and mother’s loving passion. The musical instruments play the *un-un* sounds intoned during union. The sun and moon are the completion, at last, of the Twin Waters.²⁴

A small lotus flower blossoms within the Twin Waters of sun and moon. That this lotus coheres the three families and the five families [of the Twin Mandalas] is shown in the three kinds of single *vajra* and in the summit points of the five-pronged *vajra*.²⁵ Further, the seeds of consciousness in those

²³ Mount Sumeru, the cosmic center of the Buddhist universe, is regularly homologized to the spine of the human body, the central axis along which the five *cakras* are strung and the conduit through which their occult powers flow. Consider also the following conflation of images:

Mt. Meru is contained within the body as the *merudaṇḍa*, the spinal axis; the centre of the world lies within the heart, like a cave within the Mountain; the breaths are the cosmic Winds and the directions of space, and in the same way that the world is woven by the Air (*vāyu*) man is woven by his breaths. The identity of the body and the cosmos is realized by the practice of meditational techniques. (SNODGRASS 1985, p. 360)

Metal is one of the five phases of Chinese proto-science rather than one of the five material elements of Buddhism. It works well here in part because Mount Sumeru is supported on a golden disk and surrounded by seven ranges of gold mountains. And, of course, the Turtle is golden too.

²⁴ *Nensō* is intercourse. The mantra *hum* is rendered in Japanese as *un*. When this is reduplicated as *un-un* (ostensibly deriving from *hum-hum*), the moans of sexuality are elevated to the status of powerful *bija*-mantras.

²⁵ The “three families” tripartite structure has numerous correlates. Subsumed under its main headings, Buddha, Lotus, and Vajra are such sets as meditation, compassion, and wisdom; body, speech, and mind; and so on. Three major sections of the Womb Mandala are construed in terms of the three families.

Twin Waters are lodged in the heart, chief of the five organs. This is the very embodiment of the Tathāgata Samantabhadra (Jpn. Fugen 普賢) of the Heart-king Vairocana's innate (*honnu*) Vajradhatu [Mandala].

[Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師] (Kūkai) said, "Hell and Heaven, those with Buddha-nature and the *icchāntika*, passions and enlightenment, samsara and nirvana, heresy and orthodoxy, are all but names of the Buddha of one's own heart. How can we take one and cast aside the other?"²⁶ (pp. 48–49)

THREE

Gestation and the Five-Cakra Stupa: the A-un jigi

If heresy and orthodoxy are indifferently true, as the Chaos Consecration has just concluded, then Taoist, Shinto, Confucian, and Buddhist ideas should all be equally capable of expressing the deepest esoteric truths. We can see just such "nondual," cross-tradition confluences in a text sometimes associated with the Shingon's Tachikawa-ryū, the *A-un jigi* 阿吽字義 [On the syllables *a* and *hum*]. This work begins with a series of homologies not unlike those we have already seen, but soon recasts them in terms of the five-layered stupa (Jpn. *gorin* [no] *tō* 五輪塔). This image is a rendition of the theme of the six elements as an embodiment of Vairocana. A literal translation of *gorin no tō* is "tower of five rings," but this construal falls a bit wide of the intended mark. *Tō* is one Japanese rendering of the Sanskrit word *stūpa*. Stupas are, of course, one of the most characteristic structures associated with Buddhism. Although they are the lineal descendants of ancient memorial mounds, the developed forms of these architectural reliquaries became quite complex. In like fashion, the range of symbolic meaning that can be attached to the stupa and to each and every one of its various parts is quite staggering (See SNODGRASS 1985).

One cluster of such symbolic permutations is the homology made between the Japanese *gorin no tō* form of the stupa and the body. First and foremost, this stupa (see figure 3) presents the body of Vairocana,

The "five families" rubric has as its primary referent the Five Wisdoms and the Five Buddhas of the Vajra Mandala. The cover categories are Buddha, Vajra, Jewel, Lotus, and Karma. In the present text the five stages of gestation are also implicated in these pentads. For related Indo-Tibetan usages of these taxonomies see SNELLGROVE 1987, pp. 189–98.

²⁶ I am not sure of the source of this quotation, but I have seen it in several Tachikawa-related contexts, where it serves as a primary proof-text for the validity of almost every "heretical" doctrine Shingon's radical Funi wing could come up with.

The *icchāntika* are persons so corrupt that they will never be enlightened. The Hossō school argued for their existence; Buddhists in the *tathāgata-garbhā*-oriented lineages argued, instead, for universal Buddhahood.

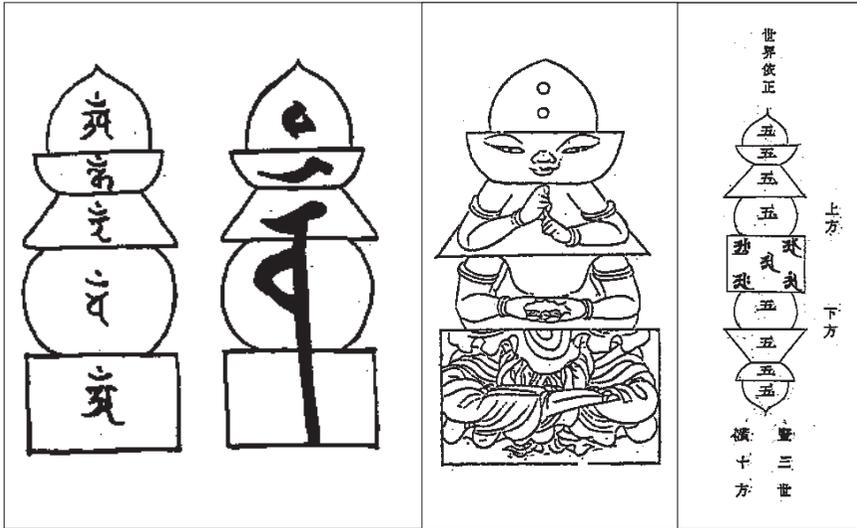


Figure 3. Five-*cakra* Stupas: Left: Memorial *gorin no tō*. Front shows *bija*-mantras of Five Elements; back, the *bija* of Mind, *vaṃ*. Center: *Gorin no tō* as a human body. Each set of arms produces “*bija*-mudra” of one of the Twin Mandalas (from Kakuban, *Gorin kuji myō hishaku*). Right: Space and time conflated as a doubled *gorin no tō*. Note resemblance of entire figure to a one-pronged *vajra* (from Kakuban, *Gorin kuji myō hishaku*).

but, since small-scale *gorin no tō* are commonly used as memorial markers for the dead in Japan, all bodies are actually implicated. The overt signal for this conflation in Shingon is the equation of the *gorin no tō* with the six great elements. The morpheme *-rin* can mean “wheel,” “circle,” or “ring,” but in this usage it translates *cakra* in the yogic sense of the five power centers of the subtle body. The *gorin no tō* shows each of these power centers as having a different shape, and each of these shapes indicates a different great element. From bottom up these are: 1) square for earth, 2) round for water, 3) triangular for fire, 4) semicircular for air, and 5) a crescent moon-shaped jewel for space (or the three-dimensional equivalents of these shapes). Often the five *cakras* are inscribed with the Sanskrit seed-syllables of the elements, *a*, *va*, *ra*, *ha*, *kha*. This allows the stupa to encode materiality. To indicate the sixth element, mind, which permeates all five other elements—even as in the final analysis they all permeate each other—the back of the stupa will have the seed-syllable of mind, *vaṃ*, incised through all five *cakras*. (An intriguing inversion of this is the monk Hōkan Yūzan’s 峯觀宥山 [c. 1700] segmentation of the strokes that write the Sanskrit syllable *vaṃ* in terms of the five *cakras* [VAN GULIK

1956, pp. 125–27]). Thus the stupa is, like the macrocosmic Mahāvairocana and like all the microcosmic beings that reflect his nature, a composite of mind and body. Not surprisingly, the five *cakras* can be correlated with other sets of five such as the five phases, the five categories of rebirth (reduced from six by conjoining devas and asuras), the Five Wisdoms, the five families, and the Five Buddhas. The *bija* syllables on the front and back of the vertically displayed *gorin no tō* can also be redeployed on a horizontal plane, in which case they can constitute a condensed representation of the Twin Womb and Vajra Mandalas, the five continents, etc. They also replicate the five shapes of the *homa* fire altars, a construct that may go back to Vedic times. (For more on the *gorin no tō* see SNODGRASS 1985, pp. 372–77.) A short segment from the *A-un jigī* will show how easily such correlations can be linked to the five stages of gestation as well:

The first stage of seven days, during which the syllable *a* takes lodging in the womb,²⁷ is like water and metal. It is the place wherein the mother and father's red and white come forth, then congeal. This is the [square, foundational] earth *cakra* and East. Its Buddha is the Buddha Akṣobhya.

Bi, the second seven days, is the water *cakra* and the belly. Its Buddha is the Tathāgata Śākyamuni (Jpn. Shaka 釈迦).

Ra, the third seven days, is the fire *cakra* and the chest. Its Buddha is the Tathāgata Ratnasambhava.

Un, the fourth seven days, is the wind *cakra* and the neck. Its Buddha is Amitābha.

Ken, the fifth seven days, is the space *cakra* and the head. Its Buddha is the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana.

The five seven-day stages in the womb are the seed syllables of the five great elements, earth, water, fire, wind, and space: *a*, *bi*, *ra*, *un*, *ken*.²⁸ We call this [the embryo] a stupa. But this stupa is also known as the *samaya* form of the Tathāgata

²⁷ The text writes all of these mantras in the Brāhmī-derived Siddhaṃ (Jpn. *shittan* 悉曇) script (for Siddhaṃ, see VAN GULIK 1956).

A is the most powerful of syllables. As the first letter of the Sanskrit syllabary, *a* represents all beginnings. Since *a-* is also a negative prefix, *a* also marks all endings. Since it is beginning and end, it also coheres all that lies between any beginning and ending. This makes for a very powerful, totally compact, symbolization of nonduality. *A* is, not surprisingly, the focus of a central Shingon meditation, the *a-ji kan* 阿字觀, or Meditation on the Syllable *A* (YAMASAKI 1988, pp. 192–215). In addition, *A* and *hum* are often used as the opening and closing elements of longer mantras.

²⁸ These syllables constitute a second set of five *bija*-mantras for the five elements. Their Sanskrit forms are *a*, *vi*, *ra*, *hum*, *kham*. Read as a unity they comprise a *bija* mantra for the whole physical universe.

Mahāvairocana.²⁹

Within the womb, O takes the form of the twin red and white bodies that unite and at the end of 35 days [become] 毘.³⁰ When these five *cakras* take shape, we have the five great elements, earth, water, fire, wind, and space; we have the five syllables, *a, bi, ra, un, ken*; and we see the five Great Buddhas, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, Śākyamuni, and Mahāvairocana, appear. Or this [may be considered] the appearance of the five pairs [of the Ten Heavenly Stems], *chia-i* 甲乙, *ping-ting* 丙丁, *mou-[chi]* 戊己, *keng-hsin* 庚辛, and *jen-kuei* 壬癸, or of the five colors, green, yellow, red, white, and black. Or these are the dance of the five constant virtues, humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity.³¹

This is to say that through the five sevens, the 35 days, one can reach the zenith of Buddha-dharma. That is, just as a stupa is erected 35 days after someone dies, so too, on the 35th day into a new life, the wondrous *samaya* form of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana appears [as a completed fetal body]. Thus nowadays [the stupa] is there when one dies and again when one begins to take on life anew. Since the stupa emerges at the end of both of these 35-day periods, we must consider it an object of prayer in both this life and in the life to come.

(*A-un jigi*, in MIZUHARA 1931, pp. 33–34)

The most important feature of the *A-un jigi* treatment of the five stages of Buddhist embryology is its directness and the wide range of correspondences it tabulates. The central theme of the piece is its

²⁹ The usage of the term *samaya* in esoteric Buddhism is extremely complex. One of its meanings is “symbol,” but here it has almost the opposite meaning, signifying a samsaric “concretization” of the more noumenal, Dharmakāya form of Vairocana. SNELLGROVE translates *samaya* as “sacrament,” defines its meaning as “coming together of transcendent being and immanent being,” and then notes, “To call such an empowered image a ‘symbol’ of the divinity is scarcely adequate, but sometimes one has to make do with such an interpretation” (1987, p. 165).

³⁰ The circle that is inserted into this passage is not, I think, an editor’s lacuna-marker. It is rather an original feature of the text, in which it gives rise to the stupa/body figure that follows a few characters later. This circle probably stands for primordial emptiness or the innate (*honnu*) Dharmakāya. It seems likely that the image is connected in some way to the circular figures (*ensō* 円相) of the Kuei-yang 灣仰 school of Ch’an/Zen and/or to the five ranks (*go-i* 五位) symbols of the Sōtō 曹洞 school (DUMOULIN 1988, pp. 217–18, 222–30).

³¹ The Ten Heavenly Stems are used to count things—especially units of time. The author, or a later hand, has accidentally dropped *chi* 己 from the list. The sets of five here are exfoliations of the five phases. Taken together, these usages give the text a strongly Neo-Confucian tone.

Japanese texts can make even less-expected correlations, as for example the linking of the five *gorin no tō cakras* to the five phrases of *waka* poetry criticism (BOWRING 1992, pp. 440–41).

equation of the five levels of the memorial stupa with the construction, from the square earth element's foundation up, of the embryo, and the construal of both the embryo and the stupa as literal embodiments of the Buddha Vairocana. The further connection of gestation-as-rebirth not only to the the Five Buddhas but also to a number of "Confucian" sets of five marks this text as almost certainly a composition of the Tokugawa period. (Two printings, neither necessarily the earliest, were made in 1652 and 1697.) Finally, the text's conflation of death and birth imagery somewhat "prefigures" the central theme of the *Sangai issshinki* (see below). If the *A-un jigū* is, as Mizuhara suggests, also a text of Tachikawa-ryū provenance, then it must be taken as an example from a late stage of that tradition's history, in which the direct eroticism of earlier times had been "mainstreamed" to the point of severe attenuation (compare SANFORD 1991). The simplicity of its style suggests that this work was written for a general, not an esoteric, audience, and, so too, its message seems largely unproblematic.

FOUR

The Womb as a Pleromatic Mandala: The Konkushō

We next look at a segment of the *Konkushō* 根孔抄 [Compendium of the primal cavity]. This text, written in classical Chinese, is dated the twenty-fifth day, seventh month, 1554, but no author's name is given.³² Much of this long text is concerned with gestation. Early on it describes the embryo as a lump of flesh with eight segments. That is, the embryo is an exemplum of the central eight-petaled court that lies at the heart of the Womb Mandala.

The eight segments of this lump of flesh are an eight-petaled lotus blossom and take the form of the eight consciousnesses.³³ They are, in truth, the divinities of the four sides and four corners of the [Womb] Mandala.... The four stages of gestation—*kalalam*, *arbudam*, *peṣi*, and *ghana*—are matched to the eight petals and eight divinities. The Treasure Pennants are unfurled. Amitābha's Heavenly Drum is installed. They are deployed as

³² The translations below are mine, but Alexander Kabanov has produced a complete English rendition of this text that should become the standard version once it is published. The *Konkushō* is often cited as an Edo-era Tachikawa text. (Editions of the *Konkushō* were issued in the 1550s, 1570s, and 1620s.)

A second text, often paired with the *Konkushō*, is the *Fudōson gushō* 不動尊愚鈔 [Humble notes on the Divinity Fudō] of Eiken 英賢 (HAYAKAWA 1926, pp. 222–34), in which the five stages of gestation are systematically equated with five of Fudō's divine acolytes.

³³ The eight consciousnesses are those of the Hossō school, from the *ālayavijñāna* (store-house consciousness) down to raw sense date.

follows: Samantabhadra and the other three bodhisattvas are the fruit of the Four Buddhas. To the southeast, the southwest, the east, and the west are Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī (Jpn. Monju 文殊), Avalokiteśvara (Jpn. Kannon 観音), and Amitābha and the four bodhisattvas. On the fifth seventh-day the *praśākhā* completes the body of five families and four kinds of mandala,³⁴ and the king of enlightenment, Vairocana, sits in the central terrace. (*Konkushō*, in HAYAKAWA 1926, p. 236.)

From this fairly straightforward correlation of Shingon's Womb Mandala with human wombs and embryos the text shifts into a more Neo-Confucian mode organized in terms of the five phases of Chinese proto-scientific speculation:

From the 36th day onward the *praśākhā* is associated with the three kinds of saintly being of the outer world. Or the embryo can be equated with the five phases. The four early stages are wood, fire, metal, and water, and the fifth seventh-day is the phase earth. In terms of the four seasons, the first four stages of the embryo are spring, summer, fall, and winter; the fifth stage, which completes the body of the seasons, is T'u Yung 土用.³⁵ Related to language, they are the four tones, level, rising, departing, and entering.³⁶ In terms of the musical notes, the four stages are *chüeh*, *chih*, *shang*, and *yü*; the fifth is *kung*, which lies in the core of the other four. There are limitless other sets. (HAYAKAWA 1926, p. 236)

One might wonder just how the notes of the pentatonic musical scale match the stages of embryonic development in anything but bare fiveness itself. The author explains:

The answer is as follows: [the musical note] *chüeh* 角 (literally, "horn") is *ch'u* 觸, which means "to gore" or "to touch." Spring touches [the world] with the breath of *yang*, and trees and

³⁴ Any mandala can be represented in any one of four ways: as a depiction of divinities (Mahā-mandala form), as an array of the ritual implements associated with each divinity (Samaya-mandala), as the written *bija*-mantras of each divinity (Dharma-mandala), and as depictions of statues of each divinity (Karma-mandala).

³⁵ Many phenomena can be easily fit into the Chinese penchant for fives, but others do not match up so well. Directions, for example, were accommodated by counting the center as a fifth direction. To make the seasons add up to five, a fifth mini-season, *t'u yung* (Jpn. *dōyō*), was posited, often in late summer. The Chinese pentatonic musical scale fit in much more neatly, although whether that scale is a cause or an effect of a preference for sets of five I have no idea.

³⁶ This reference to the four tones of ancient Chinese could mean almost nothing to a Japanese reader. Its use here is a clear indication of the deeply formulaic nature of the images employed in this text. There also seems no way to generate a fifth taxon in this series.

grasses sprout forth.³⁷ The inner dharmas [of the womb] are just the same. When the twin “realizations” (*ni nen* 二念) of father and mother meet, the red and the white touch one another and the myriad virtues of the Twin Realms burst into flame. This is *kalam*, the first stage [of gestation]. This is *chüeh*.

[The note] *chih* 徵 (omen) is *chih* 祉 (happiness).³⁸ This means it is auspicious. The thousand grasses and the myriad trees transform after the arrival of early summer and their branches and leaves become a luxuriant forest. The inner dharmas are just the same, as [the embryo] moves on to the stage of *arbudam*. The three moments of Principle, Wisdom, and Materiality separate and flourish. This is the three-lobed wishing-jewel scepter, the veritable doorway to all blessings. This is *chih*.³⁹

[The note] *shang* 商 (commerce) is the same as *chang* 章 (to manifest). When the thousand grasses and myriad trees reach early autumn, they each manifest their own nature, whether by remaining evergreen [?] or by dropping their leaves. The inner dharmas are just the same. This takes us to the stage of *peñi*. Right and wrong are manifest without error in the blessed light of consciousness. This is *shang*.

[The note] *yü* 羽 (feathers) is *yü* 宇 (sheltering). In winter the myriad leaves all wither inward and gather in the roots. This is to take shelter. Inner dharmas are, again, just the same. This is the stage *ghana*. Because of entry into nirvana, the heart gathers a wellspring of unborn roots; Principle and

³⁷ The name of each musical note is written with a particular character. Each of these characters also has a literal, nonmusical, meaning. This fact encourages the use of character puns such as those seen here, where a part of one Chinese character is used to demonstrate an occult connection to some other graphically similar, though usually etymologically unrelated, character. This literary conceit constitutes an important hermeneutical technique in many Tokugawa texts. A variant technique that we will see in our next piece is that of character deconstruction, whereby the various parts of a character are individually construed as complete characters and read in sequence to generate a hidden phrase or sentence.

³⁸ The text actually equates the musical note *chih* 徵 with a similarly written character 𠄎 which means “cutting board,” but this is clearly a scribal error for 祉, “happiness.”

³⁹ The addition of a third category, *ji* 事, “materiality” or “facticity,” to the standard set, Principle and Wisdom, opens up Shingon speculation to a host of more or less pantheistic and “Hegelian” moves. Here the three terms stand at the very least for father, mother, and embryonic child. It is also possible to see this use of *ji* as a transmutation of the Shingon set Principle and Wisdom (*ri* 理 and *chi* 智) in the direction of the Chinese metaphysical categories *li* 理 and *shih* 事 (Jpn. *ri* and *ji*).

Nyoi 如意 regularly translates Sanskrit *cintāmaṇi*, the wish-fulfilling gem. *Nyoi hōshu* 如意宝珠 is a rather odd-looking scepter held by Zen masters, statues of Mañjuśrī, and other such figures. In Tachikawa usage, however, it is also a cryptonym for phallus. The application here to “embryo” seems not too distant from the phallic meaning. For a brief review of the iconic history of the *nyoi hōshu* see DAVIDSON 1950.

Wisdom settle together into darkness. This is *yü*.

[The note] *kung* 宮 (palace) is the same as *chung* 中 (center). It is the completion of the first four musical notes and their corresponding four seasons. In the center is the fifth stage, *praśākha* of the fifth seventh-day.⁴⁰

(HAYAKAWA 1926, p. 236)

The *Konkushō* goes on to identify the five stages of embryonic development as avatars of the primary Buddhas of the two Grand Mandalas. Here the mandalas are explicitly engendered, and the fully developed fetus, now identified with Vairocana, is installed at the center of each womb cum mandala:

Others speak of “five embryos.” The primary four comprise the Four Wisdoms and Four Buddhas of the Vajra Mandala (four male Buddhas and four Wisdoms) and the embryonic stages up to *ghana*. In the center of the womb is Vairocana as *praśākha*. There is also the secondary set of the Four Wisdoms and the Four Buddhas of the Womb Mandala (four female Buddhas and four Wisdoms). These too represent the first four stages of gestation. In the center of the womb on the central terrace is Vairocana as the fifth stage. These two sets are not different; the Womb and Vajra Mandalas are of a piece. This shows that mortal beings and Buddhas are not two separate things either.

(HAYAKAWA 1926, pp. 236–37)

The treatment of gestation provided by the *Konkushō* goes beyond that of the three texts already discussed. Here the womb is no longer simply a place of sanctity, a *dōjō* 道場 altar where a ritual is held; it has now become a pleromatic pocket universe, a mandalic world lying between—or beyond—the Absolute and the provisional, nirvana and samsara, and signaling, by its very intermediary nature and liminal position, that Absolute and provisional are themselves but provisional names that point to a nondual Singularity that both coheres and deconstructs Absolute and provisional alike. The womb is a Buddha-realm (Dharmadhātu; Jpn. *hokkai* 法界) and the fetus is the Dharmakāya (lit. “Dharma-body”; Jpn. *hosshin* 法身) within that self-contained universe wherein ontogeny recapitulates ontology.

⁴⁰ *Kung* represents the “do” of the Chinese musical scale, but the character literally means “palace.” It is also part of a common compound word for the womb, *tzu kung* 子宮 (literally, “child palace”). The locution also strongly suggests reference to the inner court of the Womb Mandala and perhaps to the inner shrine of Ise as well.

FIVE

Gestation as Memorial, Birth, and Rebirth: the Sangai isshinki

The most elaborated example of fetal Buddhahood that I have found in Shingon texts comes from an early Tokugawa work, the *Sangai isshinki* 三界一心記 [The three worlds in a single heart], also known as the *Sangen itchi sho* 三賢一致書 [Confluence of the three wise teachings]. This work is attributed to Dairyū 大竜, a Zen master of Daitoku-ji 大徳寺. Like the *Konkushō* and the *Fudōson gushō*, the *Sangai isshinki* is commonly accounted a Tachikawa-ryū text. According to MURAOKA, whatever the text's authorship its teachings were propagated primarily by the more or less Neo-Confucian Shingaku 心学 movement (1969, pp. 31–32). The syncretism of the text—chiefly a fusion of Shingon, Shinto, and *Yi-ching* 易經 (Jpn. *Ekikyō*) constructs—makes such a connection perfectly credible. In any case, the *Sangai isshinki* was repeatedly reprinted, a clear warrant of its attractiveness to Tokugawa readers.

A striking feature of the *Sangai isshinki* is its construal of the stages of fetal development not only in terms of the standard five stages, but also under the aegis of the so-called Thirteen Buddhas, a set of Buddhas and bodhisattvas invoked in a fixed order. These entities, related to the famous Ten Kings/Judges of Hell, seem to have been brought together in Japan in the Muromachi period. Their primary provenance is death and dying. A dying person can serially invoke the Thirteen Buddhas as a form of final *nyūga ganyū* visualization. Then, once he is dead, his relatives, in their turn, invoke the same divinities at the key turning points of the long sequence of Buddhist memorial ceremonies (RAMBACH has a nice plate of the Thirteen Buddhas in mandalic arrangement [1978, p. 159]; SAWA provides a useful historical sketch [1975, p. 340]; TEISER discusses their connections to the Chinese Ten Kings of Hell [1994, pp. 60–61]). The full memorial procedure attended to by the survivors would run as follows:

- 1 Fudō Myōō (Acala); first seventh-day after death
- 2 Shaka (Śākyamuni); second seventh-day
- 3 Monju (Mañjuśrī); third seventh-day
- 4 Fugen (Samantabhadra); fourth seventh-day
- 5 Jizō 地藏 (Skt. Kṣitigarbha); fifth seventh-day
- 6 Miroku 彌勒 (Skt. Maitreya); sixth seventh-day
- 7 Yakushi 藥師 (Skt. Bhaiṣajya-guru); seventh seventh-day (the forty-ninth day marks the end of the primary cycle of memorialization.)
- 8 Kannon (Skt. Avalokiteśvara); the hundredth day
- 9 Seishi 勢至 (Mahāsthāmaprāpta); first anniversary of the death

- 10 Amida (Skt. Amitābha); third anniversary
- 11 Ashuku (Skt. Akṣobhya); seventh anniversary
- 12 Dainichi (Mahāvairocana); thirteenth anniversary
- 13 Kokuzō 虚空藏 (Skt. Ākāśagarbha); thirty-third anniversary of the death

Even given that both the embryonic stages and these memorial stages are initially based on sets of seven days,⁴¹ the overlay of a set of death Buddhas atop a schema of gestation is striking. But as we shall shortly see, in the *Sangai isshinki* these thirteen stages lead not simply to death, not simply through death to rebirth, but on further still, to enlightenment.

Other than its organization under the rubric of the Thirteen Buddhas, the *Sangai isshinki* begins its embryological discussion in a familiar fashion, likening the early stages of gestation to cosmological structures and powerful mantras:

Originally there was a single seed of brightness that divided and became the six conjunctions. This is also called the twin red and white drops of mother and father. These congeal to form a five-colored letter *a*. Menstrual flow ceases and on the first seventh-day [the embryo] takes on the shape of a jellyfish.⁴²
(*Sangai isshinki*, in WASHIO 1930, p. 524)

We are also told that the two seeds released by the mother and father reverberate to the living breath of the sounds *a* and *hum*. In the second month the embryo takes on the the shape of a monk's staff with small ears [i.e., its metallic rings] sticking out at the side. On the first seventh-day Fudō Myōō 不動明王 is taken as *honzon* 本尊 [principal object of contempla-

⁴¹ One has to suspect that virtually all symbolic sevens in Eurasian cultures can be traced ultimately back to Babylonian astrology, but the more proximate source of seven and forty-nine days in a Buddhist context are the seven weeks the Buddha spent under the Bodhi tree and his initial awakening that took place on the seventh day of the first of those weeks.

⁴² A list of these rather disparate "six conjunctions" occurs early in the *Sangai isshinki* (WASHIO 1930, pp. 512–13): "What are these six? The eye and some form join and there is sight; the ear and sound join and there is hearing; speech comes from the mouth; nose and odor join and there is smelling; the hand takes something and grasps it; the foot takes on motion and one walks."

"Jellyfish" (*suigetsu* 水月) is a doubly interesting term, since the characters that write the compound, "water" and "moon," also mean "moon's reflection in water" and thus recall the common image of the noumenal Buddha reflected in every immanent heart.

The embryological metaphors and visual illustrations of the *Sangai isshinki* may seem far-fetched at first glance, but a comparison with modern medical texts renders them much more empirically credible. See, for example, WHALEY and WONG 1979, pp. 209–17. That the *Sangai isshinki* illustrations do not always match up with the parallel textual passages may suggest that at least some of them have been imported from another, prior, venue.

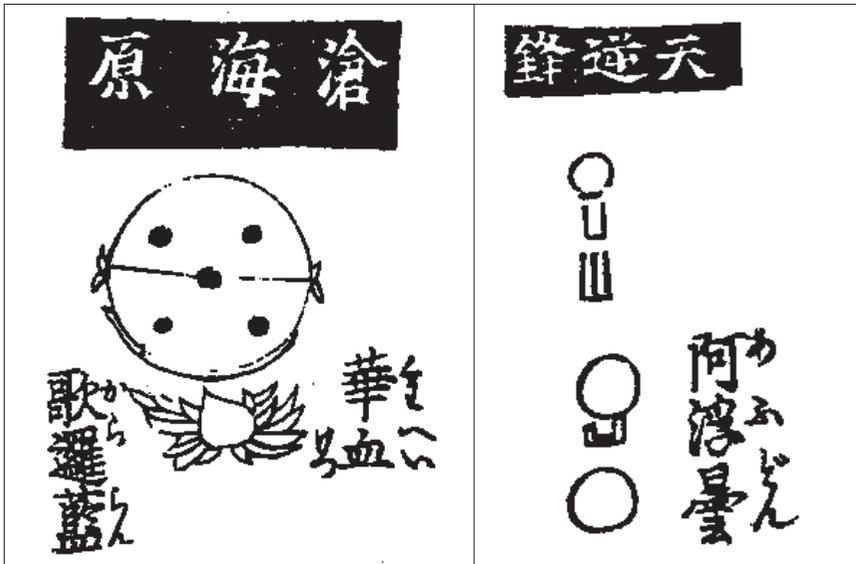


Figure 4. *Kalalam* and *arbudam* (from *Sangai isshinki*).

tion; but here the divinized fetus as well]. The character *fu* 不 consists of “one” 一 over “small” 小 and *dō* 動 is “power” 力 “made heavy” 重. *Myō* 明, “bright,” is man and woman (since it is composed of “sun” 日 and “moon” 月), while the three horizontal strokes of *ō* 王, “king,” are father, mother, and child.

(WASHIO 1930, p. 525)

In the second month the embryo in the mother’s womb takes the shape of a wishing-jewel finial on a monk’s staff. During the second seven days, Shaka is made the *honzon*. The characters of his name, 釋迦 [in premodern orthography], have as their constituents “rice” 米 and “to soak” 宰, “added together” 加 and “stirred around” 止. In the mother’s womb something like a sizing paste of milk and powdered rice begins to develop and the mother begins to make milk. Within the womb, the child is nestled down. It still has the form of a priest’s staff.

In the third month the shape in the mother’s womb is like a three-pronged *vajra*. The head and its two ears emerge. 出 is the character for “emerge” (出). The three prongs of the *vajra* are *a*, *vam*, and *hum*....

In the fourth month, head, torso, and feet develop in the mother’s womb. On the fourth seventh-day Fugen is taken as *honzon*. The two characters *Fu* 普 and *gen* 賢 mean “widely” and “sagacious.” At this stage the four limbs are developed....

(p. 527)

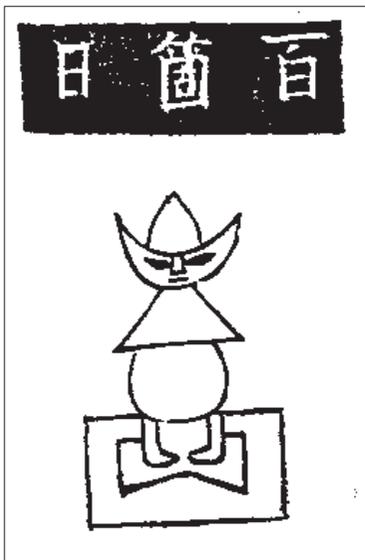


Figure 5. The hundredth day: Embryo as a *gorin no tō* (from *Sangai isshinki*).

In the seventh month the mother's womb is like the flourishing trees of Mount T'ai 泰 [an important abode of the spirits of the Chinese dead] and the four limbs are fully developed. The womb may be called the Jōruri 淨瑠璃 Pure Land of Yakushi or the Kezō 華藏 or Mitsugon 密嚴 Pure Lands [of Vairocana].⁴³ On the seventh seventh-day Yaku-shi, the Medicine Buddha, is taken as *honzon*, for the womb is like a crystal (*ruri*) pot containing a dose of the medicine that prevents all illness.

In the eight month the fetus is like a full moon on the fifteenth day....The place of the fetus in the womb is Vairocana Buddha or Mahābhijñā

Jñānābhibhu Buddha (Jpn. Daitō Chishō Butsu 大通智勝仏). This is the Dharmakāya form of Vairocana....⁴⁴

In the ninth month the fetus in the mother's womb is called a five-pronged *vajra*. Its hands make a mudra and the fetus intones a mantra. In its mouth are held the two syllables *a* and *hum*. This is the Buddha-form in a living body. It is also called Ise いせ [伊勢]. We are further told that within the womb the fetus wears a spotless surplice and clasps its hands in a mudra.

(WASHIO 1930, pp. 529-30)

The next segment of the *Sangai* begins in the same fashion as those already quoted, but then it takes a different turn and begins to cast its embryology not only in terms of Buddhism or Confucianism but of Shinto as well. (Actually, the mention of Ise, the Grand Shrine of Amaterasu 天照,⁴⁵ in the previous section has already begun this process.)

⁴³ I find it a bit surprising how little use is made of the imagery of Pure Lands in Japanese discussions of fetal Buddhahood, for which they would seem a natural symbol.

⁴⁴ Mahābhijñā Jñānābhibhu Buddha lived immeasurable kalpas ago. Incarnations of his sons became major Mahayana Buddhas. Thus, like Mahāvairocana, he is an apt symbol for Buddhahood in its most ancient and primordial *honnu* mode.

⁴⁵ Since Ryōbu Shinto notions often equated Mahāvairocana and Amaterasu as *honji* 本地 (primordial ground) and *suijaku* 垂迹 (manifest trace), the idea that the Grand Shrine is a Buddha-womb seems quite natural.

On the Anniversary, Seishi is taken as *honzon*, for the characters *sei* 勢 and *shi* 至 tell us that birth 生 arrives 至 after a cycle or round 丸 of potency 力. In terms of Shinto, we may compare Amaterasu's secreting herself in the Rock Cave of Heaven to the lodging of the child within the womb.⁴⁶ It is as if the mother's womb were the Grand Shrine, the child the kami 神 installed therein, and the mother's vulva the *torii* 鳥居 that marks the sacred boundaries. According to the Buddhist Dharma, this *yin* gate is the doorway through which all Buddhas enter this world—and it is the heart's desire of all bodhisattvas to enter the world in bodily form. Furthermore, the lodging place of the womb recalls the Tathāgata Amitābha of the [Western] Pure Land. In truth, the womb is the sacred precincts (*dōjō*) of the first arrival [in this world] of all kami, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas.

In the tenth month the child falls head first from the maternal womb, and this is the beginning of the 84,000 hells. This is

⁴⁶ The conjunction of the names Seishi 勢至 and Ise 伊勢 in this passage is not accidental. First and foremost, they share the character 勢. But, even earlier in the *Sangai isshinki* (WASHIO 1930, p. 514), Dairyū expounds that the characters for *i-se* should be read: *hito tairaka ni umare maru chikara* 人平生丸力, that is, “the round potency from which all [beings] are gently born.” This notion is further expanded in a *waka* that reads: *Tairaka ni/ hito no umaruru/ minamoto wa/ mina kore maru ga/ chikara nari keru* or “The wellspring/ from which all/ are gently born:/ this ever round/ and potent force” (WASHIO 1930, p. 517).

A parallel, and doubtless related, set of permutations of *i* and *se* has been pointed out by Richard BOWRING, who notes that in the Reizeike 冷泉家 tradition of interpretation of the *Ise monogatari* the two characters *i* 伊 and *se* 勢 are read “woman” and “man,” respectively, and that the whole text is understood to be about sexual union and generation (1992, p. 431). Later in the same article Bowring deals with the *Waka chikenshū* 和歌知顯集 commentary on the *Ise monogatari*, a commentary that he feels shows direct influence from the Tachikawaryū. This text identifies Ariwara no Narihira 在原業平 (825–880), the Don Juanesque hero of the *Ise monogatari*, as an incarnation of the bodhisattva Batō 馬頭 (horse-head) Kannon who “eventually brought [sexual] comfort [i.e., enlightenment] to 3,733 women” via the way known as “the Principle of Union between the Two Fluids of Womb and Egg” through which “Narihira tried to encourage people towards enlightenment by treating the practice [of sexual intercourse] as the ultimate austerity” (BOWRING 1992, pp. 436–37). In another *Ise* commentary, the Tesshinsai 鉄心齋 Library version of the *Ise monogatari zuinō* 伊勢物語隨腦, Narihira, in what BOWRING calls “a cryptic note entitled ‘*niji no gi*’ 二字義,” is identified as the ancient poet Hitomaro 人丸 reborn (1992, p. 439). *Hito* and *maru/maro* are, of course, two primary constituents of *i* and *se*. *Niji no gi* also embeds the pat phrase *ni gi*, the twin principles (i.e., *yin* and *yang*). An even more radical passage in an unpublished translation of one version of the *Ise monogatari zuinō* describes *i* and *se* as “open” and “closed” characters. It then goes on to say:

Since the woman's genitals are open, they are referred to as “the opened lotus flower.” The male is a [bud-like] closed lotus flower; the female is an open lotus flower. These are referred to as the Diamond [Vajra] and Womb worlds. In general, among the myriad plants, trees, rocks, rivers, and mountains under heaven, there is nothing that is other than or external to this *i-se*. All emerge out of *i-se* and do *i-se*.
(*Ise monogatari zuinō*, in KLEIN n.d., p. 51)

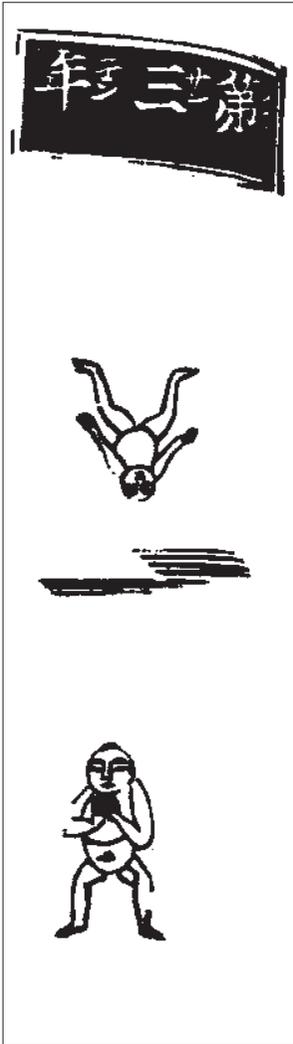


Figure 6. The third year: Birth as a Fall into samsara (from *Sangai isshinki*).

said to be when the ox-head falls and the horse-head revolves. The ox-head is the father and the horse-head is the mother.⁴⁷ And one's guardian spirit (*kushōjin* 倶生神) is one's own self. Further, that one falls out backwards is said to indicate that enlightenment is to awaken to the fact that one's own body is the Buddha. The birth of all Buddhas is like this.

(WASHIO 1930, pp. 530–31)

At last birth itself takes place. Several points, however, need be made concerning the passage above. One is the mention of hells. Birth here seems at first glance not only a physical fall but almost a Fall in the Christian sense, a fall from the nirvanic purity of the womb into a different, lower, realm. Momentarily, we seem to have returned almost to the net of iron wires of sGam.po.pa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. But this interpretation is largely, although not entirely, undercut when the passage restores the primacy of the bodily Buddhahood theme. If this is a fall, it is, in spite of the miseries of samsaric perceptions, a salvational fall, for the innate and immanent sacrality of the womb is carried forward into the ordinary realm of life and death. Perhaps the innate Buddhahood of the womb is forgotten. But it is not undone.

Physical birth has not at this point in the *Sangai isshinki* exhausted the paradigm of the Thirteen Buddhas, though surely a bit of creative numerology could have construed

⁴⁷ Usually the ox-head and the horse-head refer to the demonic warders of Hell. But in this case there seems to be a further physiological correlation made, although I'm not sure just what it is. Earlier in the *Sangai isshinki*, Dairyū tells us that at birth "the three *hun* 魂 (Jpn. *kon*) souls and the seven *p'o* 魄 (Jpn. *haku*) souls come together. These are called the Ten Kings of Yama or the nine gods of birth 九生神. The cow-head is *yang* and male. The horse-head is *yin* and female" (WASHIO 1930, p. 513).

the ten months of pregnancy in terms of thirteen stages. As the Buddhahood of the womb is carried into the new life, so too the remainder of the thirteen stages are allowed to prolong the transformation.

In the third year Amida is taken as *honzon* and dances on the three terraces. *A* is birth; *mi* is growth; and *da* is death. Amida is, in fact, my very own body. He is water, fire, and wind; birth, growth, and death....⁴⁸

The thirty-third anniversary is Kokuzō, whose name means “Womb of Emptiness.” The Five Buddhas with a Single Body, become my body. I travel the vale of life in perfect freedom and perfect sovereignty. When I leave, all bodies return to the Womb of Emptiness. (WASHIO 1930, pp. 531–32)

The last of the thirteen stages does not come until the fully developed adulthood of the new body. The passage seems, further, to imply two substages even in this final termination of the process of spiritual pregnancy: 1) a state of earthly perfection, i.e., bodily Buddhahood as a sort of *jīvan mukta*, or “liberation in life” (ELIADE 1958, pp. 30, 94), in which the liminal status of gestation has been transposed into a spiritual maturity that is relevant to one’s entire life, and 2) a later ultimate reversion to nonlife, perhaps suggesting a view of physiological death as absolutely final. Such a view would be interestingly reminiscent of the ideas of certain Japanese Zen thinkers, for whom rebirth is more metaphor than metaphysic.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The most important attribute of these literary expressions of the motif of fetal Buddhahood, is, I think, their most simple aspect: the mere existence of this, as far as I can tell, previously unnoticed, motif. Although specific instances of the theme are found relatively rarely, it did, nonetheless, persist across the centuries in varied textual environments, and appears to have become steadily more elaborate with the passage of time. The Gonkaku initiation really only adumbrates the notion, while the *Sangai isshinki* presents a complex and sophisticated transformation of it. In the previous pages I have tried to sketch out these developments and their intellectual contexts in some detail. Although the key features in this basically historical presentation are

⁴⁸ This passage is somewhat reminiscent of certain aspects of Shingon’s little-known *Himitsu Nenbutsu* 秘密念仏 (Esoteric Nenbutsu) and Jōdo Shinshū’s *Kakure* 隠 Nenbutsu (Hidden Nenbutsu) movements. See SANFORD 1994.

⁴⁹ On Zen and death, see FAURE 1991, pp. 179–83.



Figure 7. Alchemical fetus (from *Atalanta Fugiens*).

presumably already clear enough, I would like all the same to underline four general and two specific issues that I think emerge from the data:

- 1 In these texts intercourse, conception, and gestation involve or even constitute ceremonial activity in which the mandalized womb becomes a privileged pleromatic universe and the fetus a privileged entity—indeed in some of these texts an apotheosized Buddha.
- 2 All of these features can be logically gathered together under the crucial Shingon rubric “bodily Buddhahood.”
- 3 The nondual sanctity of fetus and womb seen in these texts is so thoroughly immanent as to constitute a modality of apprehension of the sacred that, while it is just as religious as familiar Western dualistic and transcendental modalities, is almost wholly unlike them. It is, therefore, as alien to conventional, comfortable pre-conceptions as it is to the range of meanings that the term “sacred” might cohere. The application of this fact has implica-

tions that reach well beyond the domain of Buddhist studies.

4 Also of a fairly general nature is the way in which the fetal Buddhahood motif echoes phenomena in other venues, such as the Tachikawa Shingon Skull Ritual, Taoism's immortal embryo texts, and *couvade*, all of which appear to reflect forms of spiritualized "womb envy" on the part of males.⁵⁰

Let me also make two final, more specific, points:

1 I am entirely certain that the Shingon school was the "matrix" out of which the fetal Buddhahood theme was itself born. I have, however, found late texts on this theme in other Japanese sectarian venues, including to date Nichiren, Sōtō, and Rinzai examples.⁵¹ I hope to examine the intriguing transformations that fetal Buddhahood took under those auspices in a subsequent study. The mere existence of these texts, however, is clear evidence of the broad impact that the fetal Buddhahood theme had on Japanese Buddhism in general.

2 In spite of the texts just alluded to, and the Shingon works treated herein, I have found no evidence that the notion of fetal Buddhahood had any impact whatsoever on the proto-history of Japanese attitudes towards *mizuko* 水子 and abortion.

PRIMARY SOURCE

A-un jiggi 阿吽字義. In MIZUHARA 1931, pp. 33–34.

⁵⁰ For the Skull Ritual, see SANFORD 1991. For the Taoist Immortal Fetus, see LU 1970, pp. 149–73 and SCHIPPER 1993, pp. 119–29 and 144–55. For *couvade*, the sympathetic mimicry of pregnancy and birth-giving by males, see PAIGE and PAIGE 1981, pp. 340–42. Male gestation also appears in the Western alchemical tradition, as for example in Michael Maier's (1568–1622) *Atlanta Fugiens*, where the first emblem in the book, "The Wind Has Carried It in Its Belly," shows the god of wind, Boreas, carrying the fetus of the Philosophical Child in his abdomen (see figure 7.) In the second emblem this same Child is nursed by the female figure, Earth (MAIER 1989, pp. 106–109). These emblems both derive from the fourth precept of the so-called Emerald Table of Hermes Trismegistos. Some standard pieces of apparatus used in the Western alchemical laboratory are, rather like the Twin Mandalas, androgynously sexual in structure, e.g., the alembic and retort—whereas the athanor and the hermetic vessel are straightforwardly one-sex artificial wombs (DE GIVRY 1931, pp. 366–73).

⁵¹ Actually, the use of the pronoun "I" is not wholly appropriate here. The sole Nichiren text was pointed out to me by Jacqueline Stone of Princeton University. In addition, Susan B. Klein of the University of California at Irvine recently sent me copies of two Shinto texts that use the theme of the five stages of fetal development. I am indebted to both of these scholars for their collegial kindness. The only major venue for which I have still seen no evidence of interest in this motif is the Pure Land tradition.

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