

Steven TRENSON

## Rice, Relics, and Jewels

### The Network and Agency of Rice Grains in Medieval Japanese Esoteric Buddhism

Rice fulfilled an important sacred function in medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhist practice and worship. Its religious use was primarily based on Buddhist doctrines establishing a connection between rice grains and relics of the Buddha, but there were also other, non-canonical beliefs that further enhanced the religious value of the grains. The present article first explains some of the basic Buddhist scriptural doctrines and then proceeds with a discussion of the historical networks in which these doctrines continued to develop in medieval Japan. Attention is given to the “agency” of rice in order to determine what effect rice grains had on the development of correlated Japanese esoteric Buddhist thought and conceptualizations and on the formation of some remarkable new religious objects, rituals, doctrines, and iconographies. In this way, the article aims to illustrate how rice, as an influential factor or agent, helped to shape the landscape of religion in premodern Japan.

KEYWORDS: rice—relics—wish-fulfilling jewel—esoteric Buddhism—Shingon—medieval Shinto

Steven TRENSON is Associate Professor in the Faculty of International Research and Education at Waseda University.

MEDIEVAL Japanese esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教) is characterized by a great variety of beliefs, doctrines, and practices. Among these, one recurring theme assumes an interconnection between rice grains and body relics of the Buddha (*busshari* 仏舍利). This connection was based on a number of scriptural Buddhist doctrines, and therefore its appearance in medieval Japanese Buddhism should not be considered unusual. However, in Japan the thought evolved in various interesting ways. Some of the new developments are not unexpected, such as the extended relationship with the wish-fulfilling jewel (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠), the latter after all being described in Buddhist scriptures as the alternate symbolic form of the relic, but others are quite surprising. For example, in the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu* 灌頂印明口決 (Oral Instructions on the Consecration Mudras and Mantras), a Japanese medieval text, we read the following rather uncommon interpretation of the “rice-relic” concept:

“The relics of the Buddhas of the past change into rice grains, and the rice grains engage in sexual acts to perpetuate [the existence of] sentient beings.”

(*Kanjō inmyō kuketsu*, sz 27: 128a)<sup>1</sup>

This phrase relates what seems at first to be a quite peculiar thought: that rice grains, as different forms of the Buddha’s relics, engage in sexual acts and that this has some relation with the continuation of the existence of sentient beings. What exactly this means will be discussed below, but from this instruction we may already understand that rice grains in medieval Japanese Buddhism were viewed in connection to not only relics or jewels but also, for reasons yet unclear, to religious concepts related to the reproduction of life.

This article sheds light on the development of the “rice-relic” doctrine in medieval Japanese *mikkyō* by investigating some of the religious contexts and networks in which the concept was taken up and worked out. For practical reasons, I mainly focus on Shingon sect examples, with occasional reference to Tendai thought. One of the purposes of this investigation is to highlight the “agency”

\* This article is an elaborated version of a paper delivered at the 2017 EAJS Conference in Lisbon. I wish to express special thanks to Caroline Hirasawa, Benedetta Lomi, and Achim Bayer for their valuable instructions and suggestions. Also, I would like to specify that the results of this article were obtained with the support of a JSPS KAKEN research grant (Grant Number 26770220).

1. There are different copies of the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu*. For a detailed study of these copies, see TAKAHASHI (2016).

of rice. To explain what is meant by this, it is first necessary to briefly discuss the question of the religious character of objects.

Any object is first and foremost merely a thing; it does not possess any religious value unless its thing-like nature is conceptually turned into something supernatural. Fabio Rambelli recently demonstrated that ordinary things may be transformed into objects that surpass their limited material or functional value in two ways: theoretical operation and/or ritual action (RAMBELLI 2007, 264). In other words, a physical thing only becomes a sacred object endowed with animation, sentience, and soteriological effectiveness once it has been transformed by human agency in the form of a theoretical thought or a ritual performance. This rather unshakable observation emphasizes external causes for things becoming supernatural or sacred, suggesting that objects are usually passive receivers of human action.

However, as the articles in this volume illustrate, the process through which ordinary objects are changed into religious items may be complicated by additional factors. One of these factors is the “agency” of the objects themselves. This idea is underscored in the actor-network-theory of Bruno Latour and others, which describes the role of nonhuman actors such as objects in a given network as “interactional.” In Latour’s wording, nonhuman objects are “mediators making other mediators do things,” similar to marionettes, which are not just being manipulated but also somehow making puppeteers move their fingers in a particular way (LATOUR 2005, 216–17). In other words, objects have material and conceptual properties that, when interacting with other factors, can have an effect on how they are used, perceived, or adapted.

Another way to explain the interactional agency of objects is to refer to Indra’s Net, the well-known metaphor wielded in Kegon Buddhism to illustrate the interlocking and inter-reflecting nature of phenomena. In this metaphor, each phenomenon is seen as a jewel attached to a node in a vast tangled net, reflecting all other jewels and in turn being reflected in all of them. Their nature is both projective (active) and reflective (passive) at the same time. Similarly, an object may be seen as a jeweled node set within a net of interrelated factors, not only reflecting the characteristics of these factors due to which its inherent aspect is altered but also projecting its own (material, conceptual) properties onto them, affecting their nature as well.

The idea of the agency of rice in this article follows the thoughts of interactivity as described above. In addition, however, this study takes this agency as something that happens primarily on a mental or conceptual level. In other words, the agency of rice is seen as arising when human actors use it or focus upon it and as a result set it in the mind like a jeweled node at the center of a network of correlated concepts. The structure of the network as well as the nature of the concepts embedded therein naturally vary according to different

historical situations, but in the case of medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhist priests, it mostly comprised the relic and symbolic cognates such as the jewel, the stupa, or the bowl. In this network, rice reflected the qualities of its correlated concepts, becoming a religious object. At the same time, however, it also projected its own material and conceptual properties onto these concepts, impacting on the way they were normally considered.

This article concretely illustrates how this agency of rice played out in medieval *mikkyō* while illuminating the historical and conceptual networks in which it occurred. The discussion unfolds in sections that highlight different aspects of the network and agency of rice. The first section explains how the “rice-relic” doctrine, the “core node” in the network, was established and codified in Buddhism. Ensuing sections discuss how this doctrine evolved in medieval Japan through the active agency of rice. By addressing these issues, the article hopes to clarify that rice grains, a modest materiality, were quite instrumental in shaping the landscape of medieval Japanese religion.

### *Lost in Translation: Establishing an Etymological Link between Rice and Relics*

One of the principle nodes to which rice was attached in Buddhist conceptual networks is that of the Buddha’s relic, but when and where were these two items first interconnected? It may be useful to begin the discussion of this question by citing the *Hizōki* 秘藏記 (Account of the Secret Treasury), a work of unknown authorship that was traditionally believed to have been written by Kūkai 空海 (774–835), the founder of Shingon.<sup>2</sup>

In India, rice grains are called “*shari*” 舍利. The Buddha’s relics, too, since they resemble the shape of rice grains are called “*shari*.” (*Hizōki*, KZ 2: 24)<sup>3</sup>

According to this instruction, *shari* was used in India to denote rice grains, and since they resemble the shape of the Buddha’s body relics, the latter were accordingly called “*shari*” as well in that country. How much is true about this assertion?

Objects considered to be body relics of the Buddha come in different materials, forms, and colors, but they often assume the shape of crystalline beads. According to the fifth-century Indian Buddhist scholar Buddhaghōṣa, the size of these beads vary from that of mustard seeds to those of broken grains of rice or split green peas.<sup>4</sup> That rice and relics were interconnected in India on the basis

2. The general consensus today, based on critical philological analysis of the *Hizōki*’s contents, is that the work must have been established after Kūkai’s time, somewhere between 865 and 910, with the exact dates slightly varying according to each scholar. See ŌSAWA (1992; 1999), YONEDA (1994), and HOSOKAWA (2009).

3. The phrase is also quoted in the *Asabashō* 阿婆縛抄 (TZ 9: 102c4–5).

4. See STRONG’s (2007, 11) citation of Buddhaghōṣa’s *Sumangalavilāsinī*.

of their similar forms is thus likely true, but the idea that these objects also had a common etymological ground in the Indian language is incorrect. In Sanskrit, the words *vrihi* and *śāli* were used to indicate rice. Among these two, *śāli* properly speaking means “rice,” “rice plant,” or “cereal.” In contrast, relics were commonly expressed with the term *śarīra*, but, although this word sounds similar to *śāli*, there is no etymological affiliation between them (SUGAWARA 1994, 240).

However, it appears that the etymological distinction between *śāli* and *śarīra* was blurred when the two words were translated into Chinese. In Chinese scriptures, the word *śāli* was either transliterated or translated. Among transliterations, we find *sheli* 舍利 (or *sheligu* 舍利穀), *shelimi* 奢利米, *sheli* 舍黎, and *sheli* 舍理, and among translations, we encounter the following words: *dao* 稻, *gu* 穀, or *mi* 米 (SUGAWARA 1994, 240–41). There are other transliterations and renditions, but what is important for our discussion here is the fact that the transliteration of *śāli* by *sheli* 舍利 appears exclusively in Paramārtha’s 真諦 (499–569) translation of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Treatise on the Abhidharma Storehouse, *Apidamo jushe shilun* 阿毘達磨俱舍釋論, T 1559, 29; hereafter *Bhāṣya*). Paramārtha translated many other sutras, but in them, he either transliterated *śāli* as *shelimi* 奢利米 or rendered it into *dao* 稻, *gu* 穀, or *mi* 米. In fact, before translating the *Bhāṣya*, he commonly used *sheli* 舍利 to transliterate *śarīra*, while translating *śāli* with *shelimi* 奢利米, *dao* 稻, or some other word. For his translation of the *Bhāṣya*, however, he decided to render *śarīra* with the words *shen* 身 or *ti* 体 and *śāli* with *sheli* 舍利. In other words, he applied the word *sheli* 舍利, which he previously used to translate the Sanskrit term for relics, to denote rice. We do not know why he did that (SUGAWARA 1994, 241–42).<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the reason, although his translation of the *Bhāṣya* was later superseded by that of Xuanzang 玄奘 (600?–664; T 1558, 29), and although his transliteration of *śāli* by *sheli* 舍利 constituted a rare case, the idea that the word *sheli* 舍利 may be used for both rice grains and relics lived on after him. For example, in the *Guan Mile shangsheng doushuaitian jing zan* 觀弥勒上生兜率天經贊 (Hymns for the Meditation on the Sūtra of the Ascension and Rebirth of Maitreya in the Tuṣita Heaven, T 1772, 38) by Kuiji 窥基 (632–682), the eminent Yogācāra scholar, we read the following line:

The word *sheli* 舍利 means “rice grain.” The word *tuodu* 駄都 means “body [relic].”<sup>6</sup> Since the size of the Buddha’s body [relics] is similar to rice grains, [the relics] are called with the name [used for rice grains]. (T 1772, 38.292a27–28)

5. SUGAWARA surmises that this peculiar change perhaps reflects the dire conditions, due to war and other factors, in which Paramārtha had to translate the *Bhāṣya* (1994, 242).

6. *Tuodu* (*dato* or *dado* in Japanese) is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit word *dhātu*, which has many meanings: layer, stratum, constituent part, ingredient, element, primitive matter, a constituent element or essential ingredient of the body, primary element of the earth,

In this instruction, *sheli* is taken to mean “rice grain,” which is further associated with the body relics of the Buddha on account of their similar sizes.

In sum, it seems that the main reason for associating rice grains with relics was based on their similar shapes. Since the similarity was noted by Buddhaghōṣa, the thought that rice and relics are religiously interrelated also might therefore go back to Indian Buddhism. However, it was in China, where Paramārtha expressed rice grains and relics with the same word *sheli* 舍利, that the religious connection between the two objects must have gained solid ground. Indeed, after Paramārtha, Chinese Buddhist monks could marshal not only a similar shape or size but also common etymological grounds as reasons to associate these objects. Judging from the reception of this thought by a scholar-monk as prominent as Kuiji, we can surmise that henceforth rice grains and body relics must have been regarded as closely interrelated religious items in Chinese Buddhism.

#### *Extension of the Conceptual Network: Rice, Relics, and Jewels*

As the *Hizōki* indicates, the Chinese Buddhist perception that rice and relics share a common etymological basis was transmitted to Japan (SUGAWARA 1994, 242).<sup>7</sup> It cannot be affirmed with certainty that the knowledge had spread already from the time of Kūkai, since the authorship of the *Hizōki* is unclear, but there is no doubt that ideas about an interconnection between rice and relics circulated in Japanese esoteric Buddhist thought from some point during the early Heian period.

In medieval Japan, however, the conceptual network of the rice-relic notion was often further extended to include the wish-fulfilling jewel. For example, in the Shingon work *Kakuzenshō* 覺禪鈔 (Kakuzen’s Notes), we read the following instruction:

The *Great [Wisdom] Treatise* says, “Relics of the Buddhas of the past change into wish-fulfilling jewels, and the wish-fulfilling jewels transform into grains of rice.”  
(TZ 5: 601b24–25)

Here the relics of the Buddha are said to become wish-fulfilling jewels, which in turn change into rice grains. This is said to be recorded in the *Dazhidulun* 大智度論 (Great Wisdom Treatise), the well-known commentary on the *Mahāprajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* (Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom, T 1509, 25) translated by

---

element of words, the ashes of the body, and relics (see the MONIER-WILLIAMS [1899] *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “dhātu”). More succinctly, as explained by SNODGRASS, *dhātu* refers both to “a world” (or sphere, macrocosm, unity) and the “constituents” making up that world (1985, 200). Thus, although the Chinese phrase quoted here takes the word to mean “body,” in all likelihood it refers more exactly to the elements constituting that body, hence, relics. On *dhātu* (relics), see also FAURE (2003).

7. The perception still lives on today in Japan, where the vinegar-flavored rice used in sushi is called “*gin shari*” 銀舍利, “silver *shari*.”

Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413), but actually, contrary to what the *Kakuzenshō* asserts, there is no mention of the connection between relics, jewels, and rice grains in that treatise. To be more precise, the *Dazhidulun* explains that the wish-fulfilling jewel emerges from a dragon's brain or from a relic of a Buddha of the past to benefit sentient beings,<sup>8</sup> providing treasures, clothes, and food (*onjiki* 飲食) according to wishes, or healing diseases (T 1509, 25.478a20–b2), but it does not state that relics or jewels transform into rice grains. Or perhaps Japanese Buddhist monks interpreted “food” particularly as rice?<sup>9</sup>

Whatever its origin, the connection between relics, jewels, and rice grains became a distinctive feature of medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhism. The concept was especially valued in Shingon, as is evident from its quotation in the *Kakuzenshō*, but it was also upheld in Tendai (see below), and thus seems to have known quite a wide circulation.

The effect of this diffusion was that deities canonically related to the relic or one of its symbolic cognates were also sometimes associated with rice. For example, the *Hishō mondō* 秘鈔問答 (Questions and Answers Related to the *Secret Notes* [of the prince-monk Shūkaku]) informs us that the stupa held in the left hand of Bishamonten 毘沙門天, a deity originally unrelated to rice, contains a jewel that is equal to a Buddha relic and a grain of rice (T 2536, 79.518c3–4). Although concrete cases such as this are not numerous, it may be assumed that a fair number of deities officially related in some way to the relic, the jewel, or the stupa were envisioned as having an extended connection to rice. Conversely, it is no surprise to observe that Japanese kami that originally were exclusively identified as rice or crop deities, such as Inari 稻荷, Toyuke 豊受, and Ukanomitama 倉稻魂, were intertwined with relic and jewel concepts in medieval Japan.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Agency of Rice in the Network of Rain-making: Rice Tower and Rice-Grain Stupas*

Relics and jewels are closely connected to dragons, which, as divine masters of water, were naturally key players in esoteric rites for producing rain and making

8. This passage likely formed the scriptural basis of the interconnection between relics, jewels, and dragons, which had a profound impact on the development of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. On this theme, see RUPPERT (2000; 2002a), FAURE (2004; 2016a), NAITŌ (2010), and TRENSON (2016).

9. Brian Ruppert, who also noted the absence of the reference to rice grains in the *Dazhidulun*, surmises that the notion of the connection between relics, jewels, and rice either stems from the Japanese *mikkyō* tradition since Kūkai or from some unknown continental Buddhist work (RUPPERT 2000, 288, 293). At present, since such a work has not yet been found, the former possibility seems more likely.

10. This aspect has recently been extensively discussed and illustrated by Bernard FAURE in his discussion of Ugajin 宇賀神 (2016b, 269–98).

crops grow. Their interplay within this context produced some remarkable developments of the “rice-relic-jewel” concept, but before explaining exactly what developments and how it may be useful to mention first a few words about rice cultivation and the importance of rain prayers to this activity.

Rice was known in Japan from a fairly ancient period. Studies have shown that dry rice (a tropical variant of *Oryza sativa japonica*) was grown in Kyushu and western Honshu from the mid-Neolithic period (3000–2000 BCE) and that paddy rice (a temperate variant) was brought from the mainland to northern Kyushu between 1000 and 500 BCE (VERSCHUER 2016, 4–10). During the Yayoi period (500 BCE–300 CE), the two varieties were cultivated together with different dry crops for general consumption, but after rice was made the basis for taxes and land management of the Yamato state in the seventh century CE it was mostly consumed by the upper classes.

Since the economy depended on rice, it was a matter of great political concern to ensure the proper growth of the crop. Wet rice cultivation requires a fair amount of water, which was collected from rivers and stored in ponds and reservoirs. If it did not rain for a prolonged time, however, the management of water could be compromised, which could lead to a poor harvest. Moreover, modern scientific studies have shown that a drought occurring between fifteen and nine days prior to the appearance of the ears results in yields significantly lower than usual, even when the fields are amply flooded (HOSHIKAWA 1975, 240–41). It is likely that this was also known by farmers in premodern Japan. Therefore, since rain is indispensable to the growth of rice, it is no surprise that the Yamato state promoted a great variety of rain-making rites, both Shinto and Buddhist, from as early as the seventh century (VERSCHUER 2016, 32–34).<sup>11</sup>

Shingon priests were quick to recognize the political importance of rain-making or crop-growth-ensuring prayers and from an early stage appealed to the state to perform rituals for that purpose. In 835, Kūkai inaugurated the latter seven-day ritual of the palace (*goshichinichi mishiho* 後七日御修法), which was annually performed in the first lunar month for the purpose of protecting the realm and securing the growth of the “five grains” (*gokoku* 五穀), that is, foxtail millet, barnyard millet, wheat or barley, beans, and rice. Later, in the second half of the ninth century, a ritual specifically targeting the growth of the five grains, the *Rain Prayer Sutra* ritual (*Shōugyōhō* 請雨經法), was established, which was regularly carried out in times of drought at the Shinsen'en 神泉苑 imperial garden. These two rituals, which are the earliest established state rituals of Shingon and thus quite important to the history of the sect, were connected through the use of relics and a meditation on the wish-fulfilling jewel of the dragon (NAITŌ 2010; TRENSON 2016). This dragon was believed to live in the

11. For more on rain rituals, see YABU (2002) and TRENSON (2016).

pond of the Shinsen'en and at the same time at Mt. Murō 室生山 (in present-day Nara Prefecture), where Kūkai is said to have buried a jewel.<sup>12</sup> Other important cultic places included in the network of the dragon and the jewel were the Dai-goji 醍醐寺 and Kajūji 勧修寺 temples, where the secrets of rain-making were traditionally handed down.

The interaction between the concepts of the relic, the jewel, and (rice) grains in the ritual resulted in a remarkable development of the rice-relic doctrine: “rice tower stupas.” These objects are depicted in some remaining sketches of the great mandala (*dai mandara* 大曼荼羅), one of the two major mandalas used during the *Rain Prayer Sutra* ritual (FIGURE 1A).<sup>13</sup> This mandala shows the Buddha inside a jeweled pavilion, flanked by two bodhisattvas and worshiped by dragons. At the bottom, toward the middle, a monk stands in front of a low table on which rests a tower of rice (*bukku* 仏供). About this item, the *Zasshō* 雜鈔 (Miscellaneous Notes; KBA 43.4), a medieval text containing instructions of the Daigoji lineage transmitted in the twelfth century, specifies that the rice tower was assumed to be a five-wheel stupa (*gorintō* 五輪塔), that is, a stupa consisting of five parts—a square, a circle, a triangle, a half-moon shape, and a jewel—which symbolize the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. Indeed, some medieval drawings of the great mandala show the rice tower as part of a quintuple structure (FIGURE 1B), or as representing a stupa-like object (FIGURE 2), with the uppermost element corresponding to a small jewel. For lack of a better designation, I call these objects “rice tower stupas.”

The monk and the rice tower do not figure in the canonical scriptures describing the outlines of the great mandala.<sup>14</sup> Generally, although the structure and content of the rain ritual mandalas follow the instructions of the scriptures, they also show a number of features that are not indicated in the texts, which we can therefore assume were added in Japan. These features provide vital clues to hid-

12. Such beliefs were given primary importance in Shingon through the influence of the *Last Testament* (*Goyuigō* 御遺告), a tenth-century apocryphal text attributed to Kūkai. This text underscores the significance of relics, jewels, the dragon, Mt. Murō, and the ability of jewels to produce rain clouds (T 2431, 77.409a19–b3, 413a6–c24). On the Shingon cult of the dragon, see FOWLER (1997; 2005, 34–36), RUPPERT (2002b), YABU (2002, 163–89), and TRENSON (2016).

13. There is a wealth of primary materials on the rain ritual. Important sources include the *Ugon zōhiki* 雨言雜秘記 by the Daigoji monk Shōken 勝賢 (1138–1196) and the *Hishō* 秘鈔 (T 2489, 78.505c24–508c9), which contains instructions from the same monk, compiled by the prince-monk Shūkaku 守覺 (1150–1202). For more details on the liturgy of the ritual, see TRENSON (2013; 2016). The other mandala used in the rain ritual is called “the spread-out mandala” (*shiki mandara* 敷曼荼羅) and depicts the five dragons (*goryū* 五龍). For an image of this mandala, see *Besson zakki* 別尊雜記, fasc. 14 (TZ 3: 360).

14. The great mandala was based on the *Dayun jing qiyu tanfa* 大雲經祈雨壇法 (T 990, 19), and the spread-out mandala on the *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 (T 901, 18.880b12–c28).



FIGURE 1a. The great mandala, reproduced from *Besson zakki*, fasc. 14 (TZ 3).



FIGURE 1b. The rice tower in the great mandala (enlarged detail). The structure on the table seems to be made up of five different parts: a square base supporting a plate, the plate itself, the rice tower, a small circular part on the rice, and a tiny jewel at the top.



FIGURE 2. Monk standing in front of a rice tower made of several parts, resembling a stupa-like structure. Enlarged detail of the great mandala, in *Shōugyōhō* (Archives of the National Museum of Japanese History, H-743-120).

den beliefs considered important by the rainmakers.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the fact that these same rainmakers took the trouble to add a rice tower in a prominent position in the mandala reveals that rice must have occupied a rather important place in the conceptual network of the rite.

To have a clearer understanding of its place in this network, it is important to note the particular use of the mandalas during the rain-prayer meditations. The great mandala was hung on a wall facing the rainmaker, who was seated in front of a ritual platform. On the platform was laid out another mandala, which showed the five dragons (of Taoist tradition). In the middle of the mandala, a relic was placed, inside a box or a vessel. During meditation, all elements and figures of the two mandalas were visualized together on top of the ritual platform, forming one whole, which was presided over by the majestic relic. The relic was further visualized as the jewel of the dragon (TRENSON 2016, 266–69). Although there is no specific instruction on how the rice tower connected to the other elements during this meditation, it may be assumed that it was in one way or another linked to the relic, the jewel of the dragon which sends forth rains, and the five dragons, which correlate with the five wheels and the five grains.

15. One such belief is the identification of the dragon with Rāgarāja (Aizenō 愛染王), the embodiment of lust, which was connected during meditation to Acala (Fudō 不動; see TRENSON 2016, 269–73). For more on the combination of these two deities, see DOLCE (2010), FAURE (2016a, 199–234), and TRENSON (2018).



FIGURE 3. “Rice-grain stupa” (*momitō*). Muromachi period. Murōji. Courtesy of Nara National Museum. Photograph by Morimura Kinji 森村欣司.

Hence, there is no doubt that rice was connected to numerous factors in an intricate conceptual network, and from the appearance of the rice tower stupa, it may further be assumed that the grain was an active component therein. Indeed, in this network, rice first of all seems to reflect the properties of the relic, due to which it appears in the structure of a stupa, one of the relic’s symbolic cognates. However, it does so not in a concealed or indirect way but rather prominently, by assuming a large part (FIGURE 1b) or the whole body (FIGURE 2) of a stupa. In other words, rice plays an active role here; it strongly projects its own presence onto the relic and the stupa, in particular the five-wheel stupa. This probably reflects the importance given to rice by the esoteric Buddhist priests commissioned to pray for rain.

We encounter another development of the “rice-relic” doctrine in the broader network created by rain-making activities in the rice-grain stupas (*momitō* 糶塔) of Mt. Murō (FIGURE 3). These are small wooden stupas fashioned in the style of a *hōkyōintō* 宝篋印塔, which contain one or two rice grains inserted through a hole in the bottom, along with a printed Sanskrit version of the treasure-casket seal formula (*hōkyōin darani* 宝篋印陀羅尼). In 1953, over thirty-seven thousand of these stupas were found beneath the altar of the Maitreya Hall (Mirokudō 弥勒堂) on the grounds of Murōji 室生寺. Careful investigation revealed that they date back to around the fifteenth century (FOWLER 2005, 27–30).

Besides an Edo-period government record mentioning the link of the stupas with Kūkai and rain-making, there are no historical documents that explain why these stupas were made. Based on a precedent of 1483 in which eighty-four thousand stupas were offered for rain at Nara, and the fact that Mt. Murō had a long

tradition of rain prayers, Sherry Fowler argues that the stupas were probably made to ensure rainfall and a good harvest. Furthermore, to support this theory Fowler also touches upon medieval Shingon doctrines equating rice grains with relics and jewels, and on the power of the latter to produce rain (FOWLER 2005, 31–33). This theory can now be corroborated with the fact, demonstrated above, that already in the twelfth century the concept of relics, stupas, and rice had been interconnected in Shingon rain-making. Since from that same period Mt. Murō had come under the strong influence of Shingon (FUJIMAKI 2002; TRENSON 2016), it is quite possible that the *momitō* were made based on the traditional relic and jewel cult of that sect.

In the case of the *momitō*, too, we can detect the interactional agency of rice in a conceptual network which comprises, at least, the elements of the relic and the stupa. Under normal circumstances stupas are supposed to contain relics. The fact that they are replaced with simple grains of rice illustrates the latter's appropriation or reflection of the properties of relics. However, the grains exerted their appeal as well; after all, not a single relic but only grains are enshrined in the stupas. Somehow they made the creator of the *momitō* consider relics unnecessary.

However, one striking detail about the *momitō* is that they were offered at the Hall of Maitreya, the bodhisattva and future Buddha who presides over a paradise (Tuṣita) where the faithful deceased may be reborn. That these objects were buried in the hall of that deity suggests that an additional element must have exerted influence in the conceptual network indicated by these stupas. Fowler surmises that the connection to Maitreya might be due to an attempt to enhance the rain-prayer efficacy of the *momitō* by associating them with Shūen 修円 (769?–835), a ninth-century abbot of Murōji and rainmaker, who established a hall at Kōfukuji 興福寺 dedicated to Maitreya (FOWLER 2005, 112–14). This is one possible explanation, but at the same time, as FOWLER also informs us, large quantities of stupas were sometimes offered to pacify dead spirits (2005, 30). Moreover, the *hōkyōin* stupa, like the five-wheel stupa, was often used as a cenotaph in medieval Japan, hence, as an object related to the spirits of the dead. As we will see shortly, rice grains were also connected to prayers for assisting departed souls to be reborn in paradise. Therefore, it could be that the *momitō* were fashioned to placate spirits and through this, since evil or grudging spirits were believed to cause natural calamities such as droughts, pacify the realm. However, to sustain this hypothesis, we first need to discuss the relation of rice to the concept of human life beyond death, an intricate issue that will be dealt with in the following sections.

*Consuming Cooked Rice to Eradicate Sin and Save Human Souls*

Esoteric Buddhist priests in medieval Japan did not just reflect or meditate upon rice; they also ate it. They were part of that fortunate group that could consume the high-class food. Since rice was also conceived—at least by the most knowledgeable of those priests—as relics or jewels in another form, they must have given some thought to the religious dimensions of eating it.

One medieval Japanese text illustrating this thought is a manuscript that bears the generic title of *Kuden* 口伝 (Oral Transmission; KBA 296.4.6; see the appendix for the full text). It is included in a set of seven documents entitled *Kajūji Zōyu gata hiketsu* 勸修寺增瑜方秘決 (Secrets from the Lineage of Zōyu of the Kajūji), which were copied in 1308 and kept by Kenna 鍛阿 (1261–1338), the well-known abbot of the Shōmyōji 称名寺.<sup>16</sup> The text describes a meditative practice involving the consumption of cooked rice from a bowl. First, the syllable *bhaḥ* (of the Buddha Śākyamuni) is visualized in front of the body. The syllable transforms into a bowl, in which the syllable *a* appears. This syllable turns into the Buddha’s relic and subsequently into a wish-fulfilling jewel. The jewel then changes into rice, which is eaten, an act said to obliterate all human sins as well as obstructions to rebirth in paradise, and to fulfill every wish. Hence, in this context rice interacts with the relic and the jewel and is therefore conceived not just as a means of subsistence but as a kind of “super food” capable of eradicating bad karma and realizing all desires. The bowl, also, is probably regarded as no different from the Buddha’s alms bowl.

These instructions stem from a Shingon lineage, but similar notions were also upheld in Tendai traditions. For example, the *Betsugyōkyō shō* 別行經抄 (Notes on the Scripture [Describing] a Particular Practice [Centered on Mahāvairocana]),<sup>17</sup> an anonymous Tendai work established by 1331, records the following:

The mudra of food is also called “mudra of the bowl.”... Food is the transformation of rice-relics. Also, the foodstuff rice has a jeweled bowl (*hōhatsu* 宝鉢) as its support. Although there are many different vessels in the world, when it is a vessel used for food that one is holding, [one should know that] it is a jeweled bowl. Moreover, a jeweled bowl is a precious vessel filled with relics. The term “jeweled” refers to the wish-fulfilling jewel. A jewel is a relic, and a relic (interlinear note: the passions) is a grain of rice.... Therefore, this mudra [of food] is like a pure vessel containing rice-jewels.

(*Betsugyōkyō shō*, Mikkyō 3: 82)

16. Zōyu was a Shingon monk affiliated with the Kajūji lineage active in the second half of the thirteenth century, whose teachings were later stigmatized as “heterodox.” See KUSHIDA (1964, 363–72).

17. This scripture more precisely refers to the *Qingjing fashen Piluzhena xindi famen chengjiu yiqie tuolu ni sanzong xidi* 清淨法身毘盧遮那心地法門成就一切陀羅尼三種悉地 (T 899, 18).

It is unclear where the Buddhist idea of rice as soteriological foodstuff comes from, but it was in all likelihood created from a combination of varied ideas beginning with the “rice-relic” concept. Another influence might derive from the Indian Buddhist belief that a bowl is the archetypal shape of the stupa. According to the story recorded by Xuanzang, the Buddha, upon being asked how his relics had to be worshiped, folded his three cloths into squares, piled them one onto the other on the earth, placed his alms bowl on top of them, erected his pewter staff upon the bowl, and declared that this is how a stupa should be made (*Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記, T 2087, 51.873a7–13; BEAL 1884, 47–48; LI 1996, 36; SNOD-GRASS 1985, 43). From this perspective, salvific rice meditations may already have existed in Indian Buddhism since food received in bowls could easily have been associated with relics.

In Japanese Buddhism, the thought of salvific rice might have arisen in a similar way since even today the dome of the stupa is called *fukubachi* 伏鉢 (upturned bowl). However, another contributing factor might again be found in the network of rain prayers. Indeed, we can observe that the rice meditation recorded in the above-mentioned *Kuden* has close affinities with the procedures of the Shingon offering to the dragon, a major feature of the *Rain Prayer Sutra* ritual. According to the *Ryūgu* 龍供 (Dragon Offering; KBA 296.4.7; see Appendix), the offering is made by means of a bowl filled with water and containing a relic. A visualization is made during which the dragon enters the bowl. Also, the syllable *a* appears in the bowl and transforms into a jewel, uniting Heaven and Earth. The *Ryūgu*, in fact, is part of the set of seven documents mentioned above, which also includes the *Kuden*. The other five documents are a text on the “ritual for prolonging life and calling [back] the soul” (*enmei shōkon hō* 延命招魂法), two texts on the *Rain Prayer Sutra* ritual, one text on the consecration ceremony (*kanjō* 灌頂), and one text on the *Sutra of Humane Kings*. The fact that the rice meditation was transmitted together with texts on the rain ritual and, moreover, bears a striking resemblance with the dragon offering, suggests that it might have emerged particularly in the context of rain-making.

One remaining intriguing feature of rice meditations, however, for which a simple explanation is lacking, is the statement in the *Kuden* that by eating empowered rice one can eradicate the karmic effect of sins and ensure a good rebirth. How is it that the consumption of rice can affect the well-being of human souls in the afterlife? A clue to answering this question can be found in the Tendai work *Betsugyōkyō shō*, already cited above, which asserts that human souls are contained within the very grains themselves. Concretely, the text conveys the following thoughts:

In human beings there are two kami: the *kon* 魂 and the *haku* 魄. These [two souls] are [at the same time] the essence of the five grains. The *kon* goes up and becomes a kami. The *haku* goes down and becomes a [hungry] ghost.... However, now, with this food empowered by this mantra, the *kon* and *haku* deities, which are the essence of rice grains, are able to avoid rebirth in the evil world (interlinear note: of [hungry] ghosts) and are born in [Maitreya's] paradise, manifesting the true body of Maitreya. This true body is [none other than] the relic, which is the *dhātu*, [the realm of enlightenment].

(*Betsugyōkyō shō*, Mikkyō 3: 83)

The instruction relates to the practice of food offerings to the hungry ghosts (*segaki* 施餓鬼), which further brings to mind the *ullambana* (*bon* 盆) or ghost festival still celebrated every year in Japan and various other Asian countries. The text introduces some remarkable beliefs about this practice, some of which deserve deeper scrutiny, such as the definition of the true body of Maitreya—who is not yet a buddha—as a relic.<sup>18</sup> However, for the purpose of this article it suffices to draw the attention to the text's explanation that the life essence of human beings, made up of the two souls called *kon* and *haku* of Chinese tradition, is identical to that of grains, especially rice grains. In fact, the text clearly suggests that the souls of the dead are at the same time in the grains and that by offering or eating cooked rice empowered by a mantra (of Avalokiteśvara, as the text explains elsewhere) one can prevent these souls from becoming hungry ghosts and instead cause them to be reborn in Maitreya's paradise.

The idea that rice is not just food for the dead but also the very abode of their souls may go back to Indian religion. Indeed, in traditional Brahmanical/Hindu services for the dead, ten rice balls (*piṇḍa*) are offered for ten days after death to allow the deceased to acquire a new body and escape becoming a hungry ghost. Importantly, in this context the *piṇḍa* do not just provide energy to build a new body but also its very physical substance. In other words, the dead spirits are supposed to enter the rice. It has been suggested that this practice influenced early Buddhist relic worship. This influence can be seen in the story of the dividing of the Buddha's relics into ten portions by the Brahmin Droṇa, who in some Gandharan depictions is shown making round shapes as though they were balls of rice. These observations imply that the practice of offering or consuming rice to save

18. As John STRONG has shown, in Indian Theravāda Buddhism it was believed that prior to the advent of the next Buddha Maitreya all relics of Śākyamuni will gather at the bodhi tree to reconstitute the Buddha's body before being completely consumed by a huge pillar of fire. Strong therefore argues that the relics in this context express a buddhology of discontinuity between one buddha and the next (2007, 221–28). In the Japanese case, however, Maitreya's true body is explained to be a relic constituted by the souls of the departed. Here, a kind of continuity is thus suggested between past and present buddhas through the intermediary of human souls.

souls, as well as the connection of the whole concept to relics, may have roots in India.<sup>19</sup>

Returning to Japan, we can now assume that the ritual consumption of rice for eradicating sins mentioned in the *Kuden* follows ideas similar to the ones described above. Also, regarding the *momitō* of Mt. Murō, judging from the fact that the stupas were buried at the Hall of Maitreya we can understand that, aside from bringing rain, they were likely fashioned to help the dead souls embedded within the grains to enter Maitreya's pure land. In both cases, the use of rice seems to have been based not only on relic beliefs but also on the religious perception that rice grains contain the souls of human beings. This perception resonates with yet another important aspect of sacred rice, their role in the reproduction of life, to which we will now turn in the next section.

### *The Sexual Life of Rice Grains: Rice and Buddhist Embryology*

As was mentioned in the beginning of the article, rice grains in Shingon Buddhism were believed to perform sexual acts to reproduce sentient life. Before explaining why or how this belief came about, let us first refresh our memory by quoting the phrase in the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu* where this thought occurs:

“The relics of the buddhas of the past change into rice grains, and the rice grains engage in sexual acts to perpetuate [the existence of] sentient beings.”

(*Kanjō inmyō kuketsu*, sz 27: 128a)

First, some remarks are due about the source. The colophon of the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu* informs that the text is a record of instructions by the Daigoji abbot Seigen 成賢 (1162–1231) written down by his disciple Kenjin 憲深 (1192–1263) in the eighth year of Kenkyū 建久 (1197). As this date is impossible since Kenjin was only five years old at the time, the work is regarded as a forgery in the Edo-period *Gisho ron* 偽書論 (Treatise of Apocryphal Texts, T 2508, 78.916c3–18). However, in a recent analysis of the different copies of this text, Takahashi Yūsuke has shown that it was in all likelihood written in 1254 by Nyojitsu 如実 (1206–?), a disciple of the Daigoji abbot Jitsugen 実賢 (1176–1249) and Hōkyō 宝篋 (d.u.), a monk often associated with the infamous Tachikawa 立川 lineage. He also argues that the authorship was later attributed to Kenjin or

19. The information on *piṇḍa* and relics is based on STRONG (2007, 119–20, note 48), citing an oral communication from Phyllis Granoff. Also, that the belief in the connection between rice and human souls is probably fairly ancient in India is attested by the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (OLIVELLE 1998, 237), which specifies that those who make offerings at sacrifices pass into the sky at cremation and, after having come down again as rain, are reborn as rice and barley, plants and trees, or sesame and beans.

other illustrious monks for reasons that still need clarification (TAKAHASHI 2016).

The phrase above is significant, not only because of the peculiar detail on the sexuality of rice grains, but also because of the specification in the original Sino-Japanese text that the instruction was quoted from a Buddhist scripture. A search through the SAT Daizōkyō Text Database of the University of Tokyo with the words *xiangxu* 相統 (perpetuate) and *youqing* 有情 (sentient beings) brought up a correspondence with the following passage in Xuanzang's translation of the *Bhāṣya* (*Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論, T 1558, 29; hereafter *Jushe lun*):

According to some sects, there is a discontinuity between the existence at death and the existence at rebirth. Therefore, they say that there is no intermediate existence. This should not be accepted. Why not? There is reasoning and [scriptural] teaching that proves it. What is this reasoning and teaching? It is as in the following verse: "Similar to the apparent continuance of grains, [human] existence does not reproduce itself after having been interrupted."... The principle of the continued existence of sentient beings is just like the continued existence of worldly grains. (T 1558, 29.44b15–24)<sup>20</sup>

The *Jushe lun* here explains that human life is not interrupted between death and rebirth but continues in a state referred to as the "intermediate existence" or "intermediate being" (*zhongyou* 中有) and sustains that idea by referring to the continued existence of grains, from the death of seeds and the birth of sprouts to the harvesting of new grains.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, this thought appears in a section of the *Jushe lun* that discusses Buddhist embryology at length. Indeed, a few passages later in the work explain how the intermediate being enters the womb due to sexual desire, aroused by the view of the parents' love-making—when male, desire for the mother, when female, desire for the father. Then, they also clar-

20. For the translation of this passage I have consulted both the French translation of the *Bhāṣya* by Louis de LA VALLÉE POUSSIN (1980, 2: 33–34) and the English translation by Leo PRUDEN (1991, 2: 383), which is based on the French. However, since these are not direct translations of the Chinese version of the Taishō Canon but of Sanskrit or Tibetan sources, I have adapted the translation to accord with the Chinese text.

21. In fact, in Louis de La Vallée Poussin's translation based on Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, it is clear that the "continuance of cereals" here concerns the transportation of grains from one village to another (LA VALLÉE POUSSIN 1980, 2: 33–34). The reference to grains thus serves to explain the continuity of human existence at different places after death. In the Chinese version, however, the aspect of transportation is not expressed. Japanese medieval monks, who could only consult the Chinese text, must therefore have been puzzled about what the continuity of rice was exactly about when reading this passage. However, some paragraphs later the uninterrupted existence of human life is further compared to the death of a seed and the birth of a sprout. Thus, in regard to the idea of the continuance of grains, medieval Japanese monks must have thought of grains or seeds dying and sprouting rather than of grains being transported from one place to another.

ify how conception occurs through the congealing of the father's semen and the mother's blood (that is, the ovum), with the intermediate being (as consciousness) merging with the mixture, and how the fetus subsequently grows in five stages, the so-called "five stages in the womb" (*tainai goi* 胎内五位).<sup>22</sup> In the Indic language the first stage is called *kalala*, in which the fetus has the consistency of whey. That section of the *Jushe lun* also draws an analogy with vegetal life:

Some [monks] say: "Semen and blood become the sense organs (*gen* 根). Therefore, it is said that there are no sense organs preceding [their union]. After the intermediate being has perished [together with the semen and the blood], sense organs arise, and this is what constitutes [the principle of] uninterrupted reproduction of [human] existence. It is like the principle of the destruction of a seed and the birth of a sprout." (T 1558, 29.46c24–26)<sup>23</sup>

Hence, after semen and blood form one substance in the womb, the intermediate being enters it, and then perishes together with the sexual fluids; but as this happens, immediately the sense organs of the fetus arise. This process is compared to the death of a seed. When the seed dies, immediately a sprout arises. This is how this important Buddhist text explains the continuation of human existence in the womb and beyond death.

There is no doubt that the text quoted in the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu* was Xuanzang's translation of the *Bhāṣya*; the latter work was well-known in Japan and the words *xiangxu* 相續 and *youqing* 有情 appear in connection to grains only in this scripture. Moreover, recent studies have shown that knowledge of embryonic gestation in five stages was widespread in medieval esoteric Buddhism and that Xuanzang's *Jushe lun* likely provided one of the basic sources of that knowledge (DOLCE 2016, 268–69).

Knowing that the authors of the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu* specifically read the *Bhāṣya*, then, we can make the following statements about them. First, since the *Bhāṣya* mainly discusses the rebirth of human life, it is likely that the authors interpreted the word "sentient beings" more concretely as "human beings" and that they regarded rice grains to be capable of reproducing not just sentient life but especially human life. In their view, not only a mother and a father (or their sexual fluids) but relics *qua* rice grains also were able to engage in sexual acts

22. See LA VALLÉE POUSSIN (1980, 2: 50–52), and PRUDEN (1991, 2: 394–96). For a more detailed description of the five stages, see KRITZER (1998; 2000), DOLCE (2016), and FAURE (2016c).

23. For a comparison with translations based on the Sanskrit text, see LA VALLÉE POUSSIN (1980, 2: 51), PRUDEN (1991, 2: 395–96), and KRITZER (2000, 250). Again, since my rendition is based on the Chinese text, it differs slightly from these translations. The Chinese word *gen* (root) serves as the translation of the Sanskrit term *indriya*, which indicates a sovereign element in human existence, mostly the five sense organs associated with the five faculties. However, it could refer to other vital elements such as the sexual organs. It is possible that medieval Japanese monks often interpreted the word in the latter sense, besides the sense of sprouts or plant roots.

and bring about the birth of a new human being. Second, the authors did not read the scriptural text objectively or philologically like scholars would today, but instead interpreted them through the lens of different thoughts. For example, although the *Jushe lun* passages quoted above only mention the generic term “grains,” they linked the instruction to rice grains in particular. It is not clear why they did so, but probably the knowledge of the connection between relics and rice grains was an important factor in their thinking. Another more substantial twist of the original content, however, is their almost literal interpretation of the analogy between human procreation and cereal life. In the *Jushe lun*, the comparison with grains and seeds only illustrates the uninterrupted continuation of human existence after death. Grains and seeds are said to have a continued existence after dying, but they are not described as imitating the activities of living humans. To the authors of the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu*, however, the analogy provided reason to think that grains behave like human beings and even engage in sexual acts to reproduce life.

Regarding the sexual activity of rice grains, the *Dhatu hō kudenshū* 法口伝集 (Collection of Oral Instructions on the Relic Rite; KBA 295.15) offers some clues about how this process was more concretely imagined. This medieval Japanese text, of unknown authorship and copied in 1281–1282, describes various features of the so-called “relic rite” (*dato hō* 駄都法), a practice valued in the Daigoji and Kajūji traditions.<sup>24</sup> An important characteristic of this rite is that despite its name it did not require the use of relics, since a grain of rice sufficed to serve as its primary icon. For that reason, the practice was also sometimes referred to as “rice-grain ritual” (*beiryū*, or *kometsubu hō* 米粒法).<sup>25</sup>

The *Dhatu hō kudenshū* includes a passage that explains the esoteric meaning of the rice-grain mudra used in the relic rite (see Appendix). What is especially remarkable in this passage is a phrase in which two different characters—愛/受 and 女/必—appear at the same place in two positions of the phrase, giving it a double meaning. The first character of each couplet is written in the main line, and the second character is added next to it, probably by the copyist, as a small interlinear note. Using the second character of each couplet, the phrase can be read as follows: “When the rice grain receives a drop of fluid, [it] surely

24. On the relic rite, see RUPPERT (2000; 2002a) and NAITŌ (2010). In Shingon, especially in the Daigoji lineage, the relic of the *dato hō* was associated with the jewel and the dragon of Mt. Murō (see, for example, *Hishō*, T 2489, 78.559b1–c13). The *dato hō* is also mentioned in the fourteenth-century Tendai work *Keiran jūyōshū* 溪嵐拾葉集 (T 2410, 76.555b10–c20), where the relic is linked to Buddhalaocanā (Butsugen 仏眼) and, at a different place, to the dragon maiden of the *Lotus Sutra* and Sarasvatī (Benzaiten 弁才天; T 2410, 76.772b15–25). The extent of Shingon and Tendai interactions in the domain of relic worship is a question worth examining more closely, but is beyond the scope of the present study.

25. See the *Kakuzenshō* (TZ 5: 599b23).

opens, and after receiving it, [it] closes again.” However, translating the characters in the main line, the following reading appears: “When [begging for] a drop of love[-making], a woman opens her mouth, and, after receiving [it], she closes it.”

By adding the characters 受 and 必, the copyist seems to express his doubts on the phrase. With this, however, he could not erase the original thought or belief conveyed by it, namely, that the conception and growth of a fruit inside the hull of a grain and the gestation of a human fetus inside a womb are interrelated analogous processes. Just as the rice hull opens to receive a drop of water, closes down, and produces its fruit, so too the female body receives the fluid produced through the sexual act and generates life. Of course, the passage does not fail to add that such processes are also similar to the way of attaining buddhahood: by receiving a drop of the nectar of the Buddha’s compassion, the seed of pure enlightenment is moistened and buddhahood realized.

Returning again to the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu*, we may now suppose that the sexual act rice grains are said to engage in was imagined to be similar to the one described in the *Dhatu hō kudenshū*, namely that of a grain hull opening up to absorb drops of water and produce fruit.<sup>26</sup> From a modern biological point of view, it is known that fertilization in rice plants proceeds through a sexual process, but this is different from medieval conceptions: right before the lemma and the palea, the two halves of the hull, open, the six anthers inside pollinate the stigma, and when the hull finally opens up, the anthers break out at the top to further spread their pollen (FIGURES 8a and 8b). Moisture, however, is not a necessary component here. In fact, too much rain is dangerous to the plants at this stage as it could compromise fertilization (HOSHIKAWA 1975, 249–57). In the medieval era, however, the absorption of drops of water was considered important, probably because this enabled symbolical associations with human conception and with esoteric Buddhist teachings involving water and seed imaginaries.

From a modern scientific perspective, the speculations of medieval Shingon priests lacked precision, but they were not devoid of logic, because, after all, the conception of a rice grain inside a hull resembles that of a human being inside a womb. This observation was probably one reason why some medieval Japanese monks interpreted the analogy between cereal and human life in the *Jushe lun* as indicating that grains engage in sexual acts like humans. Hence, although the *Jushe lun* does not mention anything about sexual rice grains, it is important to recognize that medieval esoteric Buddhist priests looked at the analogy through the lens of the apparent similarity between the formation of rice grains and human fetuses. Because of this lens, the concepts “rice grain” and “human fetus”

26. In other words, the sexual activity here is not one between male and female grains. As ROBERTSON (1984) has shown, in the Edo period the idea of male and female rice ears and seeds was widespread, but whether this conception goes back to the medieval period is uncertain.

were firmly interlocked in their minds. As a result, rice grains became objects intimately connected to notions of human procreation and life beyond death.<sup>27</sup>

However, as argued in this article, the conceptual network surrounding the node “rice grain” usually included those of “relic” and “jewel.” We may thus further assume that in the mind of a medieval monk aware of the connection between rice grains and human fetuses, relics and jewels were also closely related to embryology. Like “jewels in a net,” rice grains, relics, jewels, and wombs inter-reflected each other’s features. If we take this thought as a basis for further analysis, it may help explain the existence of sexual or embryological doctrines related to relics and jewels that can often be found in medieval Japanese *mikkyō*.

The *Dhatu hō kudenshū* again provides a good example of such a doctrine, this time in a passage related to a mudra called “the mudra that leaves no places unattained” (*musho fushi in* 無所不至印; see Appendix). To state the main point, the passage instructs that the bones of the Buddha—hence, his relics—emerged from the congealing of the red and white fluids (blood and semen) of Māyā and Śuddhodana, his parents. In fact, the two fluids, associated with the two middle fingers of the mudra, are also explained to be relics in themselves.

As far as I know, such sexual interpretations of relics do not appear in canonical scriptures. They must therefore originate in medieval Japanese speculations. Before the studies of ITŌ (2011) and IYANAGA (2004), any scholar of Japanese Buddhism would have unquestionably assumed that they derived from the “heterodox” Tachikawa lineage. However, owing to these studies, it has become clear that not all sexual imaginaries are to be immediately labeled “Tachikawa.” In fact, the thought that the relics of the Buddha were produced through the congealing of his parent’s sexual fluids is also expressed in the *Sanbōin hikuketsu* 三宝院秘口決 (Secret Oral Instructions of the Sanbōin [Lineage]), a Shingon work copied by the Kōyasan prelate Dōhan 道範 (1178–1252) in 1246, which contains the oral instructions of the Daigoji abbot Jitsugen (see KUSHIDA 1964, 378–79). Jitsugen, as will be recalled, is the master of Nyojitsu, the supposed true author of the *Kanjō inmyō kuketsu*. Therefore, it is possible to think that Jitsugen, or one of his masters, had been an early propagator of sexual instructions on relics and rice. However, there is no indication whatsoever that Jitsugen or one of his teachers inherited the Tachikawa lineage. In fact, they could have easily created sexual notions on relics and rice grains independently from any so-called “het-

27. Another contributing factor may have been the influence of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as expressed in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*. According to this doctrine, buddhahood (*tathāgata*) is concealed by a covering (*garbha*) of passions, a state that is further compared to something precious hidden within something abhorrent, such as the honey in a tree surrounded by bees or a noble son in the womb of an impoverished, vile woman. Another analogy is that of the kernel of wheat. In GROSNIK’s (1995, 97) translation, “it is like a kernel of wheat that has not yet had its husk removed.”

erodox” source. Indeed, all that is needed for such notions to arise is a monk well informed about the conceptual interconnection between rice grains and human fetuses on the one hand, and between rice, relics, and jewels on the other.

### *Syncretic Approaches to Rice Grains and Shinto Jewels*

So far, we have discussed the development of the “rice-relic” concept in medieval Japan mainly by focusing on the Shingon sect of esoteric Buddhism. Here I introduce another important node in the network, one that is essential to a discussion of sacred rice: Shinto.

According to the Japanese chronicle *Sendai kuji hongī* 先代旧事本紀 (Original Record of Ancient Matters from Previous Ages; eighth or ninth century), Nigihayahi, the divine ancestor of the Mononobe clan, received ten treasures (*tokusa no kandakara* 十種神宝) from the Heavenly Ancestor (Amaterasu) when descending from the Plain of Heaven. These treasures—two mirrors, one sword, four jewels, and three scarfs—were later stored at the Isonokami Shrine 石上神宮, where the Mononobe performed their ancestral rites, and were apparently used (“waved” as the chronicle explains) in rites for healing, the pacification of spirits (*chinkonsai* 鎮魂祭), or the resuscitation of a deceased person (*Sendai kuji hongī*, fasc. 3, ST 12: 41–42).<sup>28</sup> Hence, the primary religious function of the treasures concerned the control and manipulation of human life. It is unknown what these treasures originally looked like, or whether they actually existed as objects at all, since the *Sendai kuji hongī* provides no description of their form, but a fair number of drawings have been handed down, which date to the medieval or the early modern period. Perhaps the most famous among them are the drawings said to have been made by Kūkai in 825 at the Ise shrines (an unlikely event), which are recorded in the *Jisshu jinpō zu* 十種神宝図 (Drawings of the Ten Treasures), a text of unknown origin and date kept at Mt. Kōya 高野山 (KZ 5: 183–88).<sup>29</sup>

As KADOYA Atsushi (2002) has argued, the images were probably created in the medieval period on the basis of various beliefs, in particular esoteric Buddhist

28. On a study of the treasures, see KADOYA (2002; 2006a; 2006b) and MORIMOTO (2010a; 2010b; 2011). The ten treasures are different from the three imperial regalia (*sanshu no jingi* 三種神器) handed down by Amaterasu to Ninigi, but were later symbolically associated with them. For a discussion of this aspect, see KADOYA (2002; 2006a).

29. The Kōyasan text (*sanbon* 山本), together with another version (owned by the Nijō 二条 family; *tohon* 都本), is also reproduced in the collected works of the Shingon priest Onkō 欽光 (1718–1804; better known as Jiun Sonja 慈雲尊者). Other premodern documents also include drawings of the treasures, but a comprehensive study of them has yet to be made. For now, we can refer to the following documents: *Jinpō zukei shinpisho* 神宝図形神秘書 (copy dated 1645), *Kogorui yōshū* 古語類要集, by Jihen 慈遍 (fl. fourteenth century; KADOYA 2002, 29–30), and *Jisshu jinpō hiden ki* (ST 47), an Edo-period text belonging to the tradition of the Isonokami Shrine.

FIGURE 4. A typical example of a Buddhist blazing jewel. Drawing by the author based on SAUNDERS (1985, 154).



and yin-yang related thought. These influences can most visibly be recognized in the jewel of life (*ikutama* 生玉) and the jewel of resuscitation (*makarugaeshi no tama* 死反玉), two of the four Shinto jewels. Their shapes differ according to the document consulted, but they generally appear in a form resembling a blazing Buddhist jewel (FIGURE 4). Whereas the jewel of life is often oriented upward, though, the jewel of resuscitation is mostly turned downward (FIGURES 5 and 6). As medieval texts affirm, these two jewels were believed to represent the wish-fulfilling jewel and the two souls, the *kon* and the *haku*.<sup>30</sup> Concretely, the jewel of life was associated to yang, the *kon*, fire, and heaven, and the jewel of resuscitation to yin, the *haku*, water, and earth.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the jewels are said to be able to transform into the jewel of plenty (*tarutama* 足玉) and the jewel of turning back on the road (*chikaeshi no tama* 道反玉), which respectively symbolize the father and the mother (FIGURE 5). From this, it is evident that the jewels were regarded as having gendered properties.

The religious meaning of the images of these jewels was undoubtedly derived from the concept of the Buddhist jewel and from yin-yang principles, but in the case of some drawings something else was also at work. Indeed, a closer look at the images of Shinto jewels reproduced here shows that although they have an affinity with the typical shape of a Buddhist jewel, they are quite different. For

30. The belief that the Shinto jewels have the power to control human life, however, goes back to the classical period. On this, see MORIMOTO (2011, 20).

31. See KADOYA (2002, 8–9, 12) and Jihen's *Kuji hongigengi* 旧事本紀玄義, ST 91: 77.

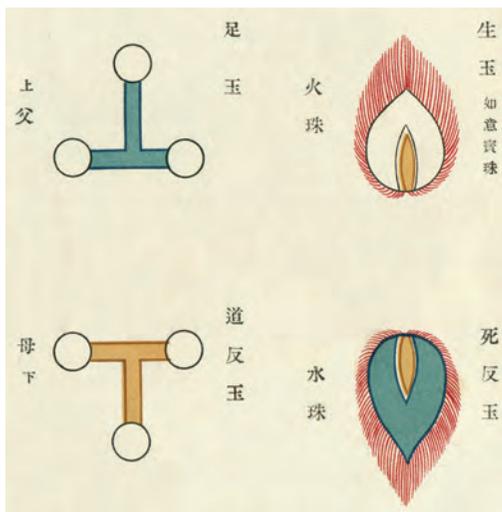


FIGURE 5. Jewel of life (upper right), jewel of resuscitation (lower right), jewel of plenty (upper left), and jewel of turning back on the road (lower left). Reproduced from *Jisshu jinpō zu* (tohon) (776).



FIGURE 6. Jewel of life (up), and jewel of resuscitation (below). Reproduced from *Jisshu jinpō zu* (sanbon) (785).



FIGURE 7. Jewel of life (left), and jewel of resuscitation (right). Reproduced from *Jisshu jinpō hidden ki* (ST 45: 179).

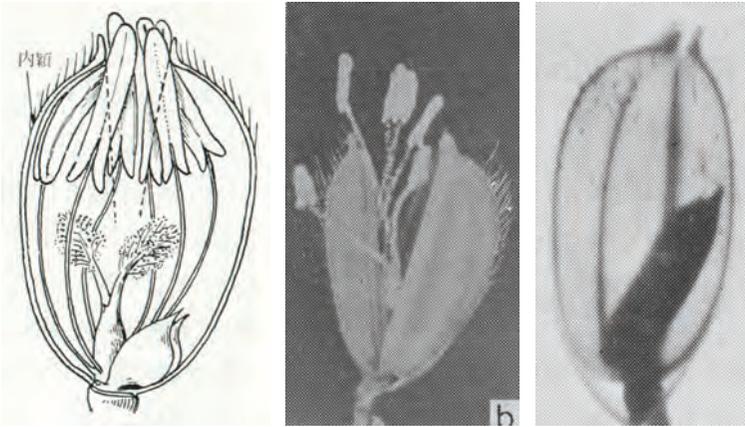


FIGURE 8. Fertilization and initial growth of a rice grain inside the hull. a) The anthers of the six stamens starting to protrude outside the hull (left); b) The six anthers fully broken through an opening between the lemma and the palea (middle); c) Transparent picture of a rice spikelet showing an early phase of a grain growing inside (right). Reproduced from HOSHIKAWA (1975, 248, 262).

example, the “flames” of the Shinto jewels in FIGURES 5 and 6, although resembling those of a blazing Buddhist gem, are rather long, thin, and quite numerous. Also, the form of the narrow pit or kernel at the bottom (or top when inversed), which in the case of FIGURE 6 resembles the shape of a double-edged sword, are normally lacking in Buddhist jewels.

In fact, when observing these Shinto jewels more carefully, one may notice certain details that point to the biological properties of the spikelet of rice grains. Indeed, the base of the jewel of life in FIGURE 6 recalls the two glumes (sterile lemmas) of a rice spikelet (FIGURE 9a) and that of the jewel of resuscitation in the same figure reminds one of the small shoots of a germinating rice seed (FIGURE 9c). Furthermore, the long, thin “flames” of these jewels in FIGURES 5 and 6 are quite similar to the pubescence (mucros) growing on a rice hull. In fact, when examined closely, rice spikelets show numerous tiny hairs (FIGURES 8b, 9a) that resemble the “flames” drawn on the outer skin of the Shinto jewels. Also, after fertilization (FIGURES 8a, 8b), a grain steadily grows inside the hull, assuming at some stage a narrow, elongated shape (FIGURE 8c). This, I assume, must have inspired the drawing of the narrow “kernel” or “sword” at the bottom (or top) of the jewel of life or the jewel of resuscitation. Alternatively, the idea of the “sword” was perhaps also drawn from the shoot of a rice seed (FIGURE 9c) and that of the “kernel” from the seed’s embryo, which remains visible at the bottom of a fully grown grain (FIGURE 9b). Lastly, in contrast to the other drawings, FIGURE 7 shows not tiny little “hairs” but instead only a few curly soft threads

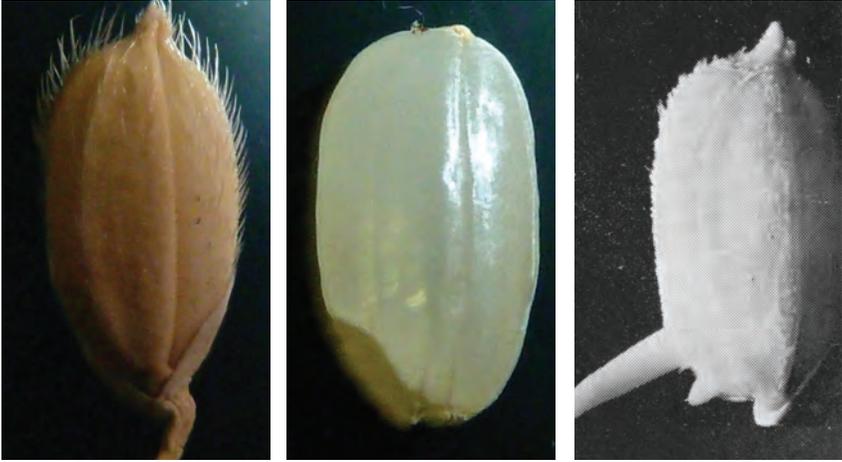


FIGURE 9. a) A rice spikelet showing the “flaming” pubescence on the hull and the two sterile lemmas at the basal region (left); b) A fully grown rice grain (middle); c) A germinating rice seed (right). Photographs of a and b by author; picture of c reproduced from HOSHIKAWA (1975, 43).

at the top. This could have been taken from the image of the six anthers when they have just broken out of the hull, with the lemma and palea still almost fully closed (FIGURES 8a, 8b).

The similarity between the biological properties of a natural rice grain and the appearance of the Shinto jewels shown in this study suggests that behind these jewels looms the image of a rice spikelet or rice grain. In fusing the concepts of a Buddhist gem and a rice grain, the Shinto jewels seem to tend more toward the shape of grains than of Buddhist jewels. These jewels are thus fine examples of the agency of rice in the conceptual network we have been examining. In linking the forms of rice grains and Buddhist jewels, their creator attributed a higher degree of importance to the grains, which being “activated” in this way projected their properties onto the Buddhist jewel, granting it the pubescence, the glumes, and the fruit of a rice spikelet, and transforming it into something entirely different from a normal Buddhist gem.

The images of the jewel of life and the jewel of resuscitation thus represent quite a remarkable harmonious bond between Shinto and Buddhist conceptions. The exact process of how this occurred needs to be further examined, but for now it may be assumed that rice itself must have been an important determining factor. Indeed, rice occupies a significant place not only in Buddhism, but was connected to various agrarian Shinto rituals and was often part of the food offerings in Shinto imperial rites. In one of these rites, the great thanksgiving feast (*daijōsai* 大嘗祭), which, incidentally, had a close connection with the *chinkonsai*

rite (MORIMOTO 2010b, 37), rice even played the central role, especially from the medieval period onward.<sup>32</sup> Finally, we should not overlook that the first kami in Japanese mythology are said to have been born from a reed-shoot (see ASTON 2005, 2–3). Although this is not a rice-seed sprout, this myth could easily have been associated with rice.

Rice may therefore have served as an active and potent mediator between Shinto and Buddhist belief systems and practices in premodern Japan, interlocking them like two major jeweled nodes in a vast net. The story of the important role that rice played in the process of medieval Shinto-Buddhist formations is far from being fully told.

### *The Network and Agency of Rice: Conclusions*

The sacrality of rice in medieval Japanese esoteric Buddhism was primarily derived from the various connections we have considered between rice grains and the Buddha's bodily relics. This notion likely goes back to Indian Buddhism but gained firmer ground in China where an idiosyncratic translation produced an etymological identification between the two items. In medieval Japan, the "rice-relic" concept was further worked out in remarkable ways, especially within the network of Shingon esoteric Buddhist rain-making. This tradition was related to various cultic places, such as the Daigoji temple and Mt. Murō, on which this study principally focused (but there are of course many other sites). It also brought together a variety of religious concepts, notably the relic and the jewel and their symbolic cognates, such as the stupa and the bowl.

Within this conceptual network, as this study has illustrated, rice exhibited a form of agency, which consisted of the projection of its material and symbolic properties on its correlated concepts, changing the way these concepts were normally considered or applied. Hence, rice sometimes did not only just passively reflect the qualities of its correlated concepts becoming a religious object, but also actively affected them, altering their nature, or altogether replacing them. As we have seen, this process led to the emergence of hybrid objects such as rice tower stupas, while in other contexts, it transformed simple vessels containing cooked rice into objects equal to the bowl of the Buddha. By the same agency, rice grains were considered sacred enough to replace the blessed relic in stupas or in relic rites. In still another case, rice grains, whose natural growth resembles that of a human fetus in a womb, stimulated the development of the idea that the grains engage in sexual acts to procreate human life. Another effect of the agency of rice can be discerned in the Shinto jewels, which in some cases, instead of

32. On the topic of rice in rituals and *daijōsai*, see VERSCHUER (2016, 285–89 and 276–80, respectively).

showing the regular shape of a Buddhist jewel, adopted a rice grain's biological properties.

The agency of rice in all these cases was naturally not intentional or causal but an interactive process in which the human mind was the receptor and initiator. Medieval monks were drawn to rice for various reasons, to use it as food or as an offering, and as they handled and observed it, the grain was set into motion in a complicated conceptual network. In the minds of practitioners and other participants in that network, the grains acquired a form of agency that may be described as a kind of “gravitational force,” a pulling at the other end of strings where the “jeweled nodes” of correlated concepts are attached. The more the monks focused on rice in their minds, the heavier this “pulling force” became. As a result, rice, while drawing the “jeweled nodes” of correlated concepts closer toward itself, came to reflect their properties, becoming a sacred object. At the same time, it also projected its own features onto them, changing their natures as well.

For example, although cooked rice in a simple bowl is just food for most people, for medieval Japanese monks aware of the Buddhist conceptual network of rice, it was something entirely different. In their minds, rice pulled the node of “relic” closer toward itself, reflecting its properties and thereby becoming more than merely food, and then, projecting its altered nature onto the bowl, changed the aspect of that simple object, turning it into the alms bowl held by the Blessed Buddha himself. Rice tower stupas, rice-bowl meditations, sexual rice grains, and Shinto rice-jewels emerged through similar processes; none of this would have appeared without the subtle but potent agency of rice.

## APPENDIX: MANUSCRIPT TEXTS

### A. Kuden 口伝 (KBA 296.4.6; copy dated 1308)

𑖀𑖄

口伝

自身之前有𑖀字、変テ成大鉢ト。大鉢中ニ有𑖀字、字変テ成仏舎利ト。仏舎利即成如意宝珠、々々変シテ成ル米ト。々ト者ハ今ノ飯ナリ。故ニ食スル此飯ヲ、人無量罪障ヲ消滅シテ、一切ノ悉地ヲ円満ス。我心(ム子)ノ間ノ三十七尊ヲ奉供養。思惟後ニ自身加持ヘシ。𑖀𑖀𑖀𑖀。印在口伝。𑖀𑖀𑖀𑖀。師云。是最極大事口伝也。耳可秘々々。徳治三年九月十六日書写了。

*Keṃ'a* (Kenna 釵阿)

*Oral Transmission*

In front of the body there is the syllable *bhaḥ* [of Śākyamuni] which transforms into a large bowl. Inside the bowl there is the syllable *a*. The syllable changes into a relic of the Buddha, and the Buddha relic turns into a wish-fulfilling

jewel. The jewel then changes and turns into rice. This is the cooked rice you now have [in your bowl]. Therefore, by eating this cooked rice, one destroys the [effect of] countless human sins and karmic obstructions [to rebirth in paradise] and realizes the object of all prayers. One pays homage to the thirty-seven worthies inside one's heart,<sup>33</sup> and after that thought, one should empower oneself [with the following mudra and mantras]: *A ā aṃ aḥ āḥ*. The mudra is only transmitted orally. *Vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hrīḥ aḥ*. The master says, "This is an oral transmission of the utmost importance. One should keep it secret." Copied in the third year of Tokuji (1308), ninth month, sixteenth day.

B. Excerpt from the *Ryūgu* 龍供 (KBA 296.4.7; copy dated 1308)

金銀若白瓷鉢一口。入神泉苑ヲ、居壇中入名香等（白檀・沈水・龍腦・安息・薰陸等香也）。又鉢中奉入仏舎利（是最極秘事也）。入金銀壺若水精塔也。別本尊ヲ不用之云々。（中略）彼鉢ノ水ヲ無熱池ト可觀。此鉢ノ水ノ中へ勸請善女龍王云々。（中略）壇上宝鉢ノ水中ニ有<sup>ス</sup>字、成滿月輪。月輪内ニ有<sup>ス</sup>、天地惣合シテ成如意宝珠ト。々々即是釈迦金輪ナリ。為利益セム衆生ヲ變成シテ善女龍王。々々即一切諸龍眷屬トシテ此鉢中へ顯現シテ、所願ヲ成就シ。無量無数諸大小龍衆前後ニ圍繞。女是觀了。

Pour [water of] the Shinsen'en [pond] in a bowl made of gold and silver, or of white porcelain. Place the bowl on the platform and put fine incense (sandalwood, aloeswood, borneo camphor, benzoin, frankincense, and so on) in it. In the bowl, insert a relic of the Buddha (this is a great secret). The [relic] should be put in a vessel made of gold and silver or a crystal stupa. It is not necessary to use another primary icon.... Visualize that the water inside the bowl is the water of the Heatless Pond [in India]. Then invite the dragon king Zennyō [of the pond] [to enter] the water inside the bowl.... [Visualize] the appearance of the syllable *a* in the water inside the jeweled bowl placed on the platform. The syllable transforms into a lunar disk, and inside the lunar disk the syllable *bhrūṃ* appears, which unites Heaven and Earth and metamorphoses into a wish-fulfilling jewel. The jewel represents Shaka-Kinrin.<sup>34</sup> [This Buddha] transforms itself into the dragon king Zennyō to benefit sentient beings. The dragon king, with a retinue of numerous other dragons, appears inside the bowl and fulfills all wishes. It is surrounded in the front and back by countless dragons, great and small. One should visualize [the dragon king in the form of] a woman.

C. Excerpt I from the *Dhatu hō kudenshū* 法口伝集, fasc. 2 (KBA 295.15)

一初（頼）印。浄三業印。二中指ノ末ヲ少キ開テ<sup>ス</sup>ト誦ヨ。閉テ<sup>ス</sup>ト誦ヨ。口云。初愛

33. These are most likely the thirty-seven deities of the perfected body assembly (*jōjinne* 成身会) in the vajra-realm mandala (*kongōkai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅).

34. The term "Shaka-Kinrin" refers to Śākyamuni as the transformation of Ekākṣa-roṣṇiṣa-cakra (Ichiji Kinrin 一字金輪), a Buddha associated with the universal Buddhist monarch.

(受)露ヲ時、女(必)開ク口ヲ。受テ後ニハ又閉ツ。開テ<sup>ヲ</sup>誦台藏ナリ。万法ヲ入テ台内ニ長養義也。宝珠ニ万法ヲ執持スル義也。閉<sup>ヅ</sup>誦ハ金界ナリ。<sup>ヅ</sup>字ニ開閉功用有之(深秘)。物ヲ納テ其戸閉テ置成就果実義也。金界ノ果満ノ義也。金剛ノ果満義顕然也。又(空)有云。舎利印ニハ虚心合掌ニシテ、中指ノ端ヲ少キ開テ、此ヨリ諸仏大悲ノ智水ヲ受。一諦(諦)潤シテ浄菩提心ノ種子ヲ得仏果ヲ也。即是ノ印ヲハ勸修寺ノ方ニハ名タリ<sup>ヲ</sup>初印ト。初其ノサキノ少開タルヨリ春ノ雨ノ潤ヲ受テ、遂其果ヲ結ツ。如此可思合也。真言ハ<sup>ヅ</sup>ノ一字也。

**The rice-grain (begging) mudra.** It is the [same as the] mudra of the purification of the three actions. Make a space between the tips of the two middle fingers by removing them from one another and recite the syllable *a*. When closing the gap, recite the syllable *vaṃ*. An oral instruction says: “When the rice grain receives a drop of fluid, it surely opens, and after receiving the drop, it closes again. (When [begging for]<sup>35</sup> a drop of love[-making], a woman opens her mouth, and after receiving it, she closes it.)” Reciting the syllable *a* at the moment of opening [is the expression of] the womb [realm]. Its meaning is that of inserting all phenomena in the womb and slowly nurturing them [within]. It has the [same] meaning as the jewel that encapsulates all phenomena. Reciting the syllable *vaṃ* at the moment of closing [is the expression of] the vajra realm.<sup>36</sup> The syllable *vaṃ* has the effect of both opening and closing (this is a great secret). It bears the meaning of inserting things and closing the gate, leaving them to complete the fruit. It refers to the fruit and fulfillment of the [wisdom] of the vajra realm. That it means the fruition and fulfillment of the vajra [wisdom] is apparent.” Also, another explanation says, “To form the mudra of the relic, one [first] brings the hands together in the style of the empty mind clasp (FIGURE 10). Then one separates the tips of the middle fingers from one another to create a gap. From [this gap] one receives the Buddhas’ wisdom nectar of great compassion. When one drop of it moistens the seed of the mind of pure enlightenment, one obtains the fruit of buddhahood. In the Kajūji lineage, this mudra is called ‘the rice-grain mudra.’ A rice grain receives the moistening rain of spring through a slight opening at the top extremity, eventually resulting in fruit. One should associate this [with the mudra of the relic]. The mantra connected to this mudra is the single syllable *vaṃ*.<sup>37</sup>”

35. I assume that in the alternative reading 初 is to be interpreted as 頼.

36. The womb- and vajra-realm mandalas are often symbolized by the syllable *a* and *vaṃ* respectively. This is based on scriptural instructions. The former syllable expresses the earth element while the latter symbolizes the water element. Following this scheme, it is further said that water (vajra realm) poured on the earth (womb realm) produces the seed of buddhahood (MD, s.v. “Dainichi Nyorai” 大日如来).

37. An instruction on rice grains similar to the one quoted here but without any overt sexual connotation can be found in the *Betsugyōkyō shō* (Mikkyō 3: 82). Interestingly, in this source the opened hull is explained as being a “jeweled bowl.”

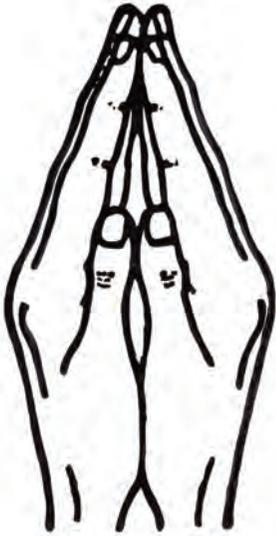


FIGURE 10. Empty mind clasp. Drawing by author based on SAUNDERS (1985, 41). The mudra of the purification of the three actions is very similar.

D. Excerpt II from the *Dhatu hō kudenshū* 法口伝集, fasc. 1 (KBA 295.15)

次無所不至印。明四、。或口云。二風者五輪塔、二大ハ扉、二地二水光、二火ハ尺迦ノ舍利也。又云。二火者浄飯摩耶ノ和合赤白(不二イ)二諦身骨也。是尺迦身骨ナリ。此尺迦身骨即自性身之身骨也。以之得意。即我大日觀時、我(身骨即大日身骨ト觀行スルヲ為本)意ト。(中略)二火ニ三義アリ。(中略)二ハ(者)浄飯摩耶赤白(左右)二諦、和合一尊躰、顯不壞金剛身骨ハ、利益衆生ヲ形ヲ顯也。三ハ我身ハ則父母赤白和合ヲ以テ造作スル身躰也。サレハ自身則也。然ハ四生悉ク舍利ナリ。

(中略)有云。二空ハ二界大日、二風ハ塔内三世諸仏法身肉身ノ二舍利ヲ納也。因位ノ赤白二諦和合スル時、身仏果ノ至窮底ニ成二舍利也。(中略)已上胎内五位ノ同自証義也。

Next, the mudra that leaves no places unattained (FIGURE 11). The mantra [associated to this mudra] is fourfold: *a āṃḥ vāṃḥ va*. According to an oral instruction, the two indexes are the five-wheel stupa, and the two thumbs the doors [of the stupa]; the two little and two ring fingers [express] light, and the two middle fingers the relics of Śākyamuni. Also, it is said that the two middle fingers are the bones formed by the union (non-dual) of the red and white [fluids] of Śuddhodana and Māyā; they are the bones of Śākyamuni. These bones of Śākyamuni are the bones of the body of self-being. This is how one should regard them. In other words, when meditating that oneself is Mahāvairocana, the fundamental thought should be that of (visualizing one's own bones as identical with those of Mahāvairocana)... There are three meanings to the two middle fingers.... The second meaning is that the red and white (left and right) fluids of Śuddhodana and Māyā form one venerable body, appearing as an unbreakable

FIGURE 11. Mudra that leaves no places unattained.  
Drawing by author based on SAUNDERS (1985, 115).



vajra bone (relic), which is the form assumed in order to benefit sentient beings. The third meaning is that one's own body is a body made by the union of the red and white [fluids] of one's father and mother. Therefore, one's own body is [nothing else but] a relic. In fact, all the four categories of living beings are relics.... Some say that the two thumbs represent the [twin] Mahāvairocana Buddhas of the twofold realms. The two indexes indicate [the idea] that inside the stupa are inserted two relics, which represent the dharma body as well as the flesh-body of all the Buddhas of the three ages. When the red and white [fluids], the cause, unite, their physical body [of substances] ultimately transform into two relics, the result, which is buddhahood.... The above [instruction] also constitutes the truth about the five stages [of gestation] in the womb.

## REFERENCES

### ABBREVIATIONS

- KBA Kanazawa Bunko Archives (Shōmyōji 称名寺 archives).  
 KZ *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 弘法大師全集. Third revised and enlarged edition. 8 vols. Ed. Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūsho 密教文化研究所. Kōyasan: Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūsho, 1965–1968.  
 MD Mikkyō Daijiten. 密教大辞典. Ed. Mikkyō Jiten Hensankai 密教辞典編纂会. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1931. Rev. ed. by Mikkyō Daijiten Saihan Iinkai 密教大辞典再版委員会, 1970 (reduced size reprint 1998).

- ST *Shintō taikai* 神道大系. 120 vols. Ed. Shintō Taikai Hensankai 神道大系編纂会. Tokyo: Shintō Taikai Hensankai, 1977–1994.
- SZ *Shingonshū zensho* 真言宗全書. 44 vols. Ed. Shingonshū Zensho Kankōkai 真言宗全書刊行会. Kōyasan: Shingonshū Zensho Kankōkai, 1933–1939.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭, eds. Tokyo: Issaikyō Kankōkai and Daizō Shuppan, 1924–1934.
- TZ *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō zuzō* 大正新修大藏經圖像. 12 vols. Ed. Ono Genmyō 小野玄妙. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1933–1934.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

- Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論. By Vasubandhu. Trans. Xuanzang 玄奘 (600?–664). T 1558, 29.
- Apidamo jushe shūlun* 阿毘達磨俱舍積論. By Vasubandhu. Trans. Paramārtha 真諦 (499–569). T 1559, 29.
- Asabashō* 阿娑縛抄. By Shōchō 承澄 (1205–1282). 227 vols. TZ 8–9.
- Besson zakki* 別尊雜記. By Shinkaku 心覚 (1117–1180). TZ 3.
- Betsugyōkyō shō* 別行經抄. Anonymous. In *Zoku Tendaishū zensho* 續天台宗全書, Mikkyō 密教 3, Kyōten chūshakurui 經典註釈類 II, ed. Tendaishūten Hensanjō 天台宗典編纂所, 48–89. Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1990.
- Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記. T 2087, 51.
- Dayun jing qiyou tanfa* 大雲經祈雨壇法. T 990, 19.
- Dazhidulun* 大智度論. Attributed to Nāgārjuna. Trans. Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413). T 1509, 25.
- Dhatu hō kudenshū* 法口伝集. Anonymous. 3 fascs. Copy made 1281–1282. KBA, 295.15.
- Gisho ron* 偽書論. By Kyōi 恭畏 (1565–1630). T 2508, 78.
- Goyuigō* 御遺告. Attributed to Kūkai 空海 (774–853). T 2431, 77.
- Guan Mile shangsheng doushuaitian jing zan* 觀弥勒上生兜率天經贊. By Kuiji 窺基 (632–682). T 1772, 38.
- Hishō* 秘鈔. By Shūkaku 守覺 (1150–1202). T 2489, 78.
- Hishō mondō* 秘鈔問答. By Raiyu 賴瑜 (1226–1304). 22 fascs. T 2536, 79.
- Hizōki* 秘藏記. Attributed to Kūkai. KZ 2: 1–73.
- Jisshu jinpō hiden ki* 十種神宝秘伝記. Copy dated 1743. ST 47: 175–96.
- Jisshu jinpō zu* 十種神宝図. Attributed to Kūkai. KZ 5: 183–88.
- Jisshu jinpō zu (sanbon)* 十種神宝図(山本). In *Jiun sonja zenshū* 慈雲尊者全集, vol. 10, ed. Hase Hōshū 長谷宝秀, 781–89. Osaka: Kōkiji, 1924.
- Jisshu jinpō zu (tohon)* 十種神宝図(都本). In *Jiun sonja zenshū*, vol. 10, ed. Hase Hōshū, 772–80.
- Kakuzenshō* 覺禪鈔. By Kakuzen 覺禪 (1143–ca.1213). 116 fascs. TZ 4–5.

- Kanjō inmyō kuketsu* 灌頂印明口決. Alternative title: *Daigo Sanbōin daiji* 醍醐三宝院大事. Attributed to Kenjin 憲深 (1192–1263). SZ 27.
- Keiran jūyōshū* 溪嵐拾葉集. By Kōjū 光宗 (1276–1350). T 2410, 76.
- Kuden* 口伝. Anonymous. Manuscript copy dated 1308. KBA 296.4.6.
- Kuji hongī gengi* 旧事本紀玄義. By Jihen 慈遍 (fourteenth century). ST 91.
- Ryūgu* (*Gokuhi gokuhi*) 龍供(極秘々々). Manuscript copy dated 1308. KBA 296.4.7.
- Qingjing fashen Piluzhena xindi famen chengjiu yiqie tuoluo ni sanzong xidi* 清淨法身毘盧遮那心地法門成就一切陀羅尼三種悉地. T 899, 18.
- Sendai kuji hongī* 先代旧事本紀. Attributed to Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574–622). ST 12.
- Shōugyōhō* 請雨經法. Anonymous. Archives of the National Museum of Japanese History, H-743–120. Archived under the alternative title *Daiunkyō kiu shidai* 大雲經祈雨次第.
- Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經. T 901, 18.
- Ugon zōhiki* 兩言雜秘記. By Shōken 勝賢 (1138–1196). In *Zoku gunsho ruijū* 続群書類從, vol. 25, part 2, ed. Hanawa Hokinoichi 埴保己一. Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1960 (rev. ed., 3rd printing).
- Zasshō* 雜鈔. Oral teachings from Ikkaī 一海 (1116–1179). KBA 43.4.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

- ANDREEVA, Anna, and Dominic STEAVU, eds.  
2016 *Transforming the Void: Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions*. Leiden: Brill.
- ASTON, William G.  
2005 *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*. New York: Cosimo. (Originally published 1896.)
- BEAL, Samuel, trans.  
1884 *Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. London: Trübner.
- DOLCE, Lucia  
2010 Nigenteki genri no gireika: Fudō, Aizen to chikara no hizō 二元的原理の儀礼化—不動・愛染と力の秘像. In *Girei no chikara: Chūsei shūkyō no jissen sekai* 儀礼の力—中世宗教の実践世界, Lucia Dolce and Matsumoto Ikuyo 松本郁代, eds., 159–206. Kyōto: Hōzōkan.  
2016 The embryonic generation of the perfect body: Ritual embryology from Japanese Tantric sources. In ANDREEVA and STEAVU, 253–310.
- FAURE, Bernard  
2003 Dato. In *Hōbōgirin* 法寶義林: *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, vol. 8, ed. Hubert Durt, 1127–58. Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient; Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise.

- 2004 Buddhist relics and Japanese regalia. In *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, David Germano and Kevin Trainor, eds., 93–116. Albany: SUNY Press.
- 2016a *Gods of Medieval Japan. Volume 1: The Fluid Pantheon*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2016b *Gods of Medieval Japan. Volume II: Protectors and Predators*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2016c Buddhism *Ab Ovo*: Aspects of embryological discourse in medieval Japanese Buddhism. In ANDREEVA and STEAVU, 311–43.
- FOWLER, Sherry
- 1997 In search of the dragon: Mt. Murō's sacred topography. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24: 145–61. doi.org/bgk5
- 2005 *Muroji: Rearranging Art and History at a Japanese Buddhist Temple*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- FUJIMAKI Kazuhiro 藤巻和宏
- 2002 Nyoī hōju o meguru Tōmitsukei kuden no tenkai to Ben'ichisan engirui no seisei: "Ben'ichisan himitsu ki" o chūshin toshite 如意宝珠をめぐる東密系口伝の展開と一山縁起類の生成—『一山秘密記』を中心として. *Kokugo kokubun* 71, 1–17.
- GROSNICK, William H.
- 1995 The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra. In *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 92–106. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- HOSHIKAWA Kiyochika 星川清親
- 1975 *Ine no seichō: Kaibō zuzetsu* イネの生長—解剖図説. Tokyo: Nōsan Gyoson Bunka Kyōkai.
- HOSOKAWA Shin'ei 細川真永
- 2009 *Hizōki no seiritsu mondai* 秘藏記の成立問題. *Kōyasan Daigaku daigakuin kiyō* 11: 43–59.
- ITŌ Satoshi 伊藤 聡
- 2011 Ise niji o megutte: Kokin chū, Ise chū to mikkyō setsu, shintō setsu no kōshō 伊勢二字を巡って—古今注・伊勢注と密教説・神道説の交渉. In *Chūsei Tenshō daijin shinkō no kenkyū* 中世天照大神信仰の研究, 452–96. Kyoto: Hōzōkan. (Originally published 1996.)
- IYANAGA Nobumi 彌永信美
- 2004 Tachikawaryū to Shinjō "Juhō yōjin shū" o megutte 立川流と心定『受法用心集』をめぐる. *Nihon Bukkyō sōgō kenkyū* 2: 13–31.
- KADOYA Atsushi 門屋 温
- 2002 "Jingi, Shinpō" kō: Shintō zuzōgaku no kokoromi 「神器・神宝」考—神道図像学の試み. *Nihongaku kenkyū* 5: 1–31.

- 2006a Myths, rites, and icons: Three views of a secret. In *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds., 269–83. London and New York: Routledge.
- 2006b On the formation of Shintō icons. *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 16: 151–82. doi.org/10.3406/asie.2006.1255
- KRITZER, Robert
- 1998 Semen, blood, and the intermediate existence. *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 46: 1031–25. doi.org/10.4259/ibk.46.1031
- 2000 Rūpa and the antarābhava. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28 (June): 235–72.
- KUSHIDA Ryōkō 櫛田良洪
- 1964 *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* 真言密教成立過程の研究. Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin.
- LATOUR, Bruno
- 2005 *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LA VALLÉE POUSSIN, Louis de, trans.
- 1980 *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu: Traduction et annotations*. Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques, vol. XVI. 6 vols. Bruxelles: Institut Belge des hautes études chinoises. (Originally published 1923–1931.)
- LI, Rongxi, trans.
- 1996 *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. BDK English Tripiṭaka Translation Series, No. 79. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.
- MONIER-WILLIAMS, Monier
- 1899 *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- MORIMOTO Atsushi 森本 敦
- 2010a Tokusa no kandakara no denshō: “Sendai kuji hongī” ga nokosu kodai saishi no genzō (jō) 十種神宝の伝承—『先代旧事本紀』が残す古代祭祀の原像 (上). *Gobun* 137: 1–10.
- 2010b Tokusa no kandakara no denshō: “Sendai kuji hongī” ga nokosu kodai saishi no genzō (chū) 中. *Gobun* 138: 36–45.
- 2011 Tokusa no kandakara no denshō: “Sendai kuji hongī” ga nokosu kodai saishi no genzō (ge) 下. *Gobun* 139: 13–26.
- NAITŌ Sakae 内藤 栄
- 2010 *Shari shōgon bijutsu no kenkyū* 舍利莊嚴美術の研究. Tokyo: Seishi Shuppan.
- OLIVELLE, Patrick, trans.
- 1998 *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

ŌSAWA Shōkan 大沢聖寛

1992 “Hizōki” no senjutsu nendai ni tsuite 『秘蔵記』の選述年代について. *Mikkyōgaku kenkyū* 24: 47–61.

1999 *Hizōki no seiritsu nendai saikō* 秘蔵記の成立年代再考. *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 47: 623–27. doi.org/10.4259/ibk.47.623

PRUDEN, Leo, trans.

1991 *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. Translated into French by Louis de La Vallée Poussin. 4 vols. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.

RAMBELLI, Fabio

2007 *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

ROBERTSON, Jennifer

1984 Sexy rice: Plant gender, farm manuals, and grass-roots nativism. *Monumenta Nipponica* 39: 233–60. doi.org/10.2307/2384593

RUPPERT, Brian

2000 *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asian Center.

2002a Pearl in the shrine: A genealogy of the Buddhist jewel of the Japanese sovereign. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29: 1–33. doi.org/bgcp

2002b Buddhist rainmaking in early Japan: The Dragon King and the ritual careers of esoteric monks. *History of Religions* 42: 143–74. doi.org/10.1086/463701

SAUNDERS, Dale E.

1985 *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture*. Bollingen Series LVIII. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Originally published 1960 by the Bollingen Foundation.)

SNODGRASS, Adrian

1985 *The Symbolism of the Stupa*. New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications.

STRONG, John S.

2007 *Relics of the Buddha*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

SUGAWARA Yasunori 菅原泰典

1994 Gin shari kō 銀舍利考. *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 42: 240–44.

TAKAHASHI Yūsuke 高橋悠介

2016 Den Kenjin hen “Kanjō inmyō kuketsu” to Kūkanbō Nyojitsu 伝憲深編『灌頂印明口決』と空観房如実. *Shidō bunko ronshū* 斯道文庫論集 51: 189–213.

TRENSON, Steven

2013 Shingon divination board rituals and rainmaking. *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 21: 107–34.

- 2016 *Kiu, hōshu, ryū: Chūsei Shingon mikkyō no shinsō* 祈雨・宝珠・龍—中世真言密教の深層. Kyoto: Kyoto Daigaku Shuppankai.
- 2018 A study on the combination of the deities Fudō and Aizen in medieval Shingon esoteric Buddhism. In *Buddhist Encounters and Identities across East Asia*, Ann Heirman, Carmen Meinert, and Christoph Anderl, eds., 108–36. Leiden: Brill.

VERSCHUER, Charlotte von

- 2016 *Rice, Agriculture, and the Food Supply in Premodern Japan*. Trans. and ed. Wendy Cobcroft. London and New York: Routledge.

YABU Motoaki 籾元晶

- 2002 *Amagoi girei no seiritsu to tenkai* 雨乞儀礼の成立と展開. Tokyo: Iwata Shoin.

YONEDA Hirohito 米田弘仁

- 1994 “Hizōki” no seiritsu nendai 『秘蔵記』の成立年代. *Mikkyō bunka* 186: 67–93.

