

Kakuban's Views on the Suchness:

An Analysis of the *Gorin kuji myō himitsu shaku*

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1. Introduction In this paper, I discuss the theoretical background of the Esoteric Buddhist discourses on the human body developed and disseminated by Japanese Esoteric Buddhist monks during the medieval time period. As I will mention later, the discourse on the human body is generally classified into the following two categories: embryology and physiology. I focus on the second physiological category and discuss the relationship between the body and the doctrinal concepts “suchness” (Skt. *tathatā*, Jp. *shinnyo* 真如) and “principle” (Jp. *ri* 理), focusing in particular upon the discourse called the “five viscera maṇḍala” (*gozō mandara* 五藏曼荼羅).

What is the five viscera maṇḍala? According to previous studies, it is the somatic mandalic concept first organized during the middle of Heian period and largely developed from the late Heian to early Muromachi period.¹⁾ It is well known that Kakuban 覚鑊 (1095–1144), an influential Shingon Buddhist monk during the late Heian period, examines the five viscera maṇḍala from multiple perspectives in his *Gorin kuji myō himitsu shaku* 五輪九字明秘密釈 (*Secret Interpretation of Mantras of Five Wheels and Nine Syllables*, hereafter, *Gorin kuji*). Kakuban attempts to establish both the theoretical structure and practical significance of the maṇḍala in the second chapter of the text.

With respect to the doctrinal background of the five viscera maṇḍala, scholars such as Nasu Seiryū 那須政隆 argues that the Esoteric Buddhist concept “attaining Buddhahood within this very body” (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏) is especially important.²⁾ As Nasu notes, in the *Gorin kuji*, Kakuban first introduces the legendary story of Kūkai 空海 (774–835) who rapidly manifested the five wisdoms (*gochi* 五智) of the five Buddhas (*gobutsu* 五仏) in the imperial palace through visualizing the five viscera maṇḍala. He also mentions that this visualization technique is considered the key element for achieving the profound meditational state immediately.³⁾

On the other hand, it is assumed that Kakuban also attempts to connect the five viscera

maṇḍala with the other Esoteric Buddhist doctrine in the different chapters of the *Gorin kuji*. For example, he develops in the first chapter of the text a series of theoretical discussions concerning suchness and principle, which may structurally correspond to the maṇḍala. I examine these discussions and consider the network of Shingon Buddhist doctrine around the five viscera maṇḍala from this new perspective.

2. The Discourses on the Human Body and the Five Viscera Maṇḍala Before the detailed investigation, the following questions should be examined. What discourses are classified into the Esoteric Buddhist discourses on the human body in Japan? What significance and function did they maintain in medieval Shingon 真言 and Tendai 天台 Esoteric Buddhist traditions?

Scholars such as Ogawa Toyoo 小川豊生, Lucia Dolce, Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎, and Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士 have produced research that attempts to answer these questions.⁴⁾ Considering their results, we are able to classify the Esoteric Buddhist discourses on the human body into the following categories: embryology and physiology. These could be considered the key elements for the development of the concept “attaining Buddhahood within this very body” in medieval Esoteric Buddhism.

The embryological category includes the discourses such as the “female red and male white fluids” (*shakubyaku nitai* 赤白二滲) and “five stages of an embryo within a mother’s womb” (*tainai goi* 胎内五位). According to Ogawa, the first discourse represents the fundamental union of two central maṇḍalas, womb (*taizō* 胎藏) and diamond realm (*kongō kai* 金剛界), within the context of medieval Esoteric Buddhist doctrine and rituals while the second is considered the profound meaning of the inauguration/consecration (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Jp. *kanjō* 灌頂), the initiation ritual unique to Esoteric Buddhism.⁵⁾

The physiological category signifies the idea called the “five viscera maṇḍala.” The five viscera correspond to the internal organs of the human body: liver, heart, lungs, kidneys, and spleen. They are regarded as the foundation of mental, physical, and social conditions of human beings in the premodern Chinese medicine, science, and philosophy which follow the network of correspondences between multiple fivefold categories based on the Chinese cosmology “five phases” (Cn. *wuxing*, Jp. *gogyō* 五行).⁶⁾

The Esoteric five viscera maṇḍala which follows this view is delineated as the horizontal lines which schematically indicate the correspondence between multiple fivefold categories in ancient Chinese cosmology, medicine, science, philosophy, and

Esoteric Buddhism. The earliest stages of this maṇḍala are described in texts such as *Gozō mandara* 五藏曼荼羅 (*Five Viscera Maṇḍala*), *Gozō mandara waeshaku* 五藏曼荼羅和会釈 (*Reconciled Interpretation of Five Viscera Maṇḍala*), and *Gorin kuji* written from the middle to end of Heian period.⁷⁾

3. Five Viscera Maṇḍala in the *Gorin kuji* In the second chapter of the *Gorin kuji*, Kakuban explains the five viscera maṇḍala and its significance. In the middle of the chapter, he describes the correspondence between the five elements (*godai* 五大), five wisdoms, and five viscera based on the Shingon concept “nonduality” (*funi* 不二).

The five elements correspond to the five wisdoms because the material (*shiki* 色) is not separated from the mind (*shin* 心). The five wisdoms correspond to the five wheels (*gorin* 五輪) because the mind is not separated from the material. Every phenomenon is considered the five wisdoms because the material is equated with the emptiness (*kū* 空). The five wisdoms are considered every phenomenon because emptiness is equated with the material. Because of the nonduality between the material and mind, the five elements correspond to the five viscera while the five viscera correspond to the five wisdoms.⁸⁾ (*KZ*, 2: 1134)

In this paragraph, Kakuban explains that multiple fivefold categories are equal because their material and mental foundations and principal emptiness are “nondual.”

In the next section, Kakuban first quotes the network of correspondence between fivefold categories which are introduced in the *Po deyu yigui* 破地獄儀軌 (*Ritual Manuals for Defeating Hell*)⁹⁾ and five viscera maṇḍala in the *Gozō mandara*. He also categorizes these two discourses respectively into two sections, the womb and diamond realm. With respect to the correspondence in the diamond realm, see the following Table.

In addition, Kakuban explains that Esoteric Buddhist practitioners are able to remove their delusions, ignorance, and hindrances and obtain the five wisdoms of the five Buddhas rapidly within this very body through visualizing the network of correspondence. They are also required to contemplate the cyclical movements and transformations of the five syllables which follow the mutual relationship between the five viscera called “mutual conquest” (*sōkoku* 相剋) in the five phases theory.¹⁰⁾ This is the practical significance of the five viscera maṇḍala.

Table

five viscera 五臓	five phases 五行	five colors 五色	five syllables 五字	five Buddhas 五仏	five wisdoms 五智
liver	wood	blue	<i>hūṃ</i>	Aksobhya	great round mirror
lungs	metal	white	<i>hrīḥ</i>	Amitābha	excellent observation
heart	fire	red	<i>trāḥ</i>	Ratnasambhava	nature of equanimity
kidneys	water	black	<i>aḥ</i>	Amogha	manifesting actions
spleen	earth	yellow	<i>vaṃ</i>	Mahāvairocana	essential nature of the dharma realm

4. Kakuban's Views on Suchness and Principle in the *Gorin kuji* Kakuban examines the nonduality between the material, mind, and principal emptiness as the background of the five viscera maṇḍala in the second chapter of the *Gorin kuji*. It is, however, noteworthy that Kakuban also develops similar discussions in the first chapter of the text. He describes the views on suchness and principle that are unique to Esoteric Buddhism through comparing them with the previous Buddhist understanding, that of Exoteric Buddhism. The multiplicity and universality of suchness and principle are discussed.

The essential subjects of the first chapter of the text are the discrimination between Esoteric and Exoteric Buddhism and establishment of their hierarchy. In this section, Kakuban discusses them from multiple perspectives including the views on the suchness and principle. With respect to them, for example, he argues the differences between Esoteric Buddhism and Exoteric Buddhism as follows.

Exoteric Buddhism explains that there is only one principle with numerous phenomena. According to Esoteric Buddhism, however, the principle and phenomena are both unified and separated from each other. (*KZ*, 2: 1127)

According to Kakuban, though Exoteric Buddhism assumes the fundamental opposition between the principle and phenomena, Esoteric Buddhism states both the separation and nonduality between them. In addition, Kakuban describes the relationship between principle and material as follows.

Exoteric Buddhism asserts that one principle is the foundation of multiple materials. According to Esoteric Buddhism, however, every material is equated with the principle without any transformation. (*KZ*, 2: 1126)

Following this paragraph, Kakuban employs the influential Buddhist metaphor

“Indra’s net” (*taimō* 帝網) and attempts to expound both the Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhist views on suchness and principle.

Though Exoteric Buddhas don’t refer to innumerable suchnesses, Esoteric Buddhism explains the principle that every existence is multiply intertwined like Indra’s net. (KZ, 2: 1126)

According to Kakuban, the Exoteric Buddhist view on suchness is fundamentally monistic. On the other hand, however, Esoteric Buddhism is said to maintain a completely different perspective. As for this issue, Kakuban states:

The Buddhas of Exoteric Buddhism are only able to understand the principle of one suchness. Those of Esoteric Buddhism are, however, able to understand the principle of manifold suchnesses which transcend the number of the sands of the Ganges River. (KZ, 2: 1126)

Kakuban clearly refers to the Esoteric Buddhist views on suchness and principle in this line. It is considered pluralistic rather than monistic.

5. Conclusion In this paper, I examined the network of Shingon Buddhist doctrines connected to the five viscera maṇḍala through examining the maṇḍala and theoretical discussions concerning suchness and principle in the *Gorin kuji*. Kakuban first introduces the nonduality between material, mind, and fundamental emptiness as the foundation of the five viscera maṇḍala in the second chapter of the text. On the other hand, in the first chapter, he refers to the nonduality between the multiple principles and phenomena and plural suchnesses and materials within Esoteric Buddhist discourses.

In conclusion, not only the concept attaining Buddhahood within this very body but also the views on suchness and principle unique to Shingon Esoteric Buddhism are considered the doctrinal background of the five viscera maṇḍala.

Notes

- 1) See Abe 2010, 195–214 and Sueki 2015, 131–135. 2) See Nasu 1970. 3) KZ, 2: 1149–1150.
- 4) See Abe 2010, Dolce and Matsumoto 2010, Ogawa 2014, and Sueki 2015.
- 5) Ogawa 2014, 301–334; 446–493. 6) See Tanaka 1984; 1988. 7) Abe 2010, 195.
- 8) Concerning the English translation, see also van der Veere 2000, 158. 9) The abbreviation of the *Sanzhongxide podayu zhuanyezhang chusanjie mimituoluoni fa* 三種悉地破地獄轉業障出三界秘密陀羅尼法 (T 18) translated by Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735). 10) Kameyama 2011.

Abbreviations

KZ *Kōgyō daishi zenshū* 興教大師全集. Ed. Tatsue Nakano 中野達慧 and Kōjun Tomita 富田敦純.

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