The Red and White Drops and “Wrong Views” in the *Konkō shō*:

The Significance of the Sexual and Embryological Discourses
in Early Modern Shingon Buddhism

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1. Introduction

The boundary between the “orthodoxy” and “heresy” in Shingon Esoteric Buddhism has been shaken by sources recently discovered in Buddhist temples all over Japan. Modern scholars of Shingon Buddhism such as Mizuhara Gyōei and Moriyama Shōshin asserted that the Esoteric sexual and embryological discourses such as red and white drops (Jp. *shakubyaku nitai* 赤白二滯) and their spontaneous coalescence were the typical “heretical” teachings worshiped by immature practitioners who completely misunderstood the Shingon doctrine such as attaining Buddhahood within this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏).¹⁾ According to manuscripts found in Daigoji 醍醐寺, Ninnaji 仁和寺, or Shinpukuji 真福寺 temples, however, many “orthodox” Shingon monks frequently depended on this discourse in their interpretations of Shingon Buddhist doctrine and rituals, such that we may conclude that it constituted an indispensable element in premodern Shingon Buddhist exegesis.

Based on current research, scholars are required to reexamine the category of “heresy” in Shingon Buddhism, that is, the significance of the Tachikawa lineage (*tachikawa ryū* 立川流) which is said to enthusiastically worship the aforementioned sexual and embryological discourse. With respect to this issue, for example, Stefan Köck and Iyanaga Nobumi follow Kushida Ryōkō and state that though there historically existed multiple lineages similarly called Tachikawa ryū in medieval Shingon Buddhist tradition, all of them did not follow the sexual and embryological discourse.²⁾ They also assume the ideological nature of Yūkai’s 宥快 severe criticism against Tachikawa lineage. Kameyama Takahiko examines Shingon monks’ narratives concerning the lineage and discusses the notable differences be-

tween them and Yūkai’s view.³⁾

Shingon Buddhist monks transmitted multiple Tachikawa lineages both historically and ideologically. In other words, it is impossible to assume the transparent correspondence between the sexual and embryological discourse, the category of heresy, and the Tachikawa lineage as scholars have done previously. In this paper, I discuss the boundary between the “orthodoxy” and “heresy” in premodern Shingon Buddhism through the examination of the *Konkō shō* 根吼抄 (*Compendium of the Cry of Mt. Negoro*, hereafter *Konkō*), a controversial text written by the Shingon monk Kyōga 教雅 in the sixteenth century, and reveal the possibility of a third position between the orthodox teachings of Mt. Koya 高野山 and those associated with the supposedly heretical Tachikawa lineage.

2. Author and Background of the *Konkō*

Though the *Kinsei bukkyō shūsetsu* 近世仏教集説 (hereafter *Kinsei*) and Fukuda Ryōsei respectively introduce reprints of the *Konkō*, the locations of their original manuscripts are unclear.⁴⁾ As for the sources of the reprints, the *Kinsei* describes its source as “unclear,” while Fukuda explains that he relied on his private collection.⁵⁾ In this paper, I utilize Fukuda’s reprint as a primary source to advance the study of this text.

The postscript written by Kakuyū 覚融, ex-temple administrator of Mt. Koya in the sixteenth century, named the untitled manuscript *Konkō*, stating:

Though I repeatedly read this text, it surprised my old eyes and blew my mind. It is truly the essential part of the doctrine and rituals [of Shingon Buddhism]... Seeing it unconsciously, its author did not conceive of a title. Thus, I respectfully followed the title *Daikō shō* 醍醐抄 and named a text *Konkō shō*.

Twenty-fifth of July on 1553, Kakuyū, ex-temple administrator (Fukuda 1995, 64)

According to the postscript, Kakuyū designated the title *Konkō* based on the *Daikō shō*. Though the *Daikō shō* has no clear information other than the title, it is highly possible that the Chinese character *dai* 醍 of the title is the abbreviation of Daigoji temple 醍醐寺, which held huge influence upon the development of both doctrine and rituals in medieval Shingon Buddhism. The *Daikō shō* therefore literally means the “Compendium of the Cry of Daigoji temple.”

Based on this information, the character *kon* 根 of the *Konkō* is considered the abbreviation of Mt. Negoro 根来 which maintained a strong connection with Daigoji temple.

Thus, the *Konkō* may be interpreted as the “Compendium of the Cry of Mt. Negoro.” In the tenth chapter of the text, the author examines the significance of the text written by Kenjin 憲深, thirty-fifth abbot of Daigoji temple, and Raiyu 頼瑜, patriarch of Negoro Shingon tradition.⁶⁾ This fact may also suggest the strong influence from Daigoji temple and Mt. Negoro upon the *Konkō*.

With respect to an author of the *Konkō*, Fukuda examines the postscript written by Kyōga and points out that he wrote the text.⁷⁾ In his postscript, Kyōga states as follows:

In the end of April on 1553, I received an order from the master Kakuyū, wrote this manuscript, and prepared it for his review. After carefully reading it, he invited me and said that the essential teachings continuously transmitted in both Ono 小野 and Hirosawa 広沢 lineages are solely included in this fascicle ... He made a copy of my manuscript and added it to his collection of important texts. Because the title of a manuscript was undetermined, the master graciously took up his pen and named it *Konkō shō* ...

Twenty-seventh of July on 1553, Kyōga (Fukuda 1995, 64–65)

Kyōga wrote his own postscript two days after that of Kakuyū. They introduce almost the same procedure of naming the text *Konkō*, though Kyōga does not mention the *Daikō shō*. Based on such correspondence, Kyōga is definitely regarded as an author of the *Konkō*. In addition, according to Kyōga’s postscript, the master Kakuyū first ordered him to write a text and praised his finished work. Kakuyū’s acts certainly suggest that we should reconsider the controversial history of the Esoteric sexual and embryological discourses in Shingon Buddhism.

Yūkai, influential scholar monk of Mt. Koya, wrote a text called *Hōkyō shō* 宝鏡鈔 (*Compendium of the Treasure Mirrors*, hereafter *Hōkyō*) and criticized the aforementioned sexual and embryological discourses and Tachikawa lineage a few hundred years before Kakuyū and Kyōga. Moriyama points out that many Shingon monks seemed to follow Yūkai and his *Hōkyō* and attempted to eliminate both the discourse and lineage as the heresy of Shingon Buddhism.⁸⁾ On the other hand, Kakuyū, an ex-temple administrator of Mt. Koya, not only highly evaluated the *Konkō*, but also made a copy of the text which frequently refers to the sexual concepts such as female red and male white drops. Such attitudes as Kakuyū’s suggest the possibility that the influence of Yūkai and the *Hōkyō* was actually limited even on Mt. Koya. It can also be assumed that premodern Shingon Buddhist monks were able to hold multiple views on a single issue.

3. The Wrong Views and Tachikawa Lineage in the *Konkō*

The *Konkō* consists of ten chapters in which diverse issues concerning both Shingon Buddhist doctrine and rituals are discussed in the form of questions and answers. Of these chapters, Kyōga examines the significance of the sexual and embryological discourses such as the spontaneous coalescence between female red and male white drops and intercourse between two sexual organs (*nikon kōe* 二根交会), and refers to the problem of Tachikawa lineage especially in the ninth chapter.⁹⁾ Kyōga develops his discussion as follows:

The ninth chapter includes five questions and answers whose main subject is the aforementioned sexual and embryological discourse. In a series of questions and answers, Kyōga first focuses on the perspectives through which the discourses are interpreted and discusses whether they are actually acceptable in Esoteric Buddhism. According to him, though the devotion to the concepts such as red and white drops is considered delusion from the ignorant perspective (*bonken* 凡見), they are equated with the Buddha's virtue and completely separated from the violation of the precept of no debauchery from the sacred perspective (*shōken* 聖見).¹⁰⁾ In the third and fourth questions and answers, he explains the doctrinal background of this view.

In the third, for example, Kyōga describes that while ignorant people still maintain the dichotomy between the subject and object, the source of their lust, the practitioners who grasp the sacred perspective completely overcome it and eliminate the possibility of the violation of the precept of no debauchery.¹¹⁾ In the fourth, he discusses from a different point of view the reason why those who obtain the sacred perspective equate the sexual and embryological discourses with the Buddha's virtue by focusing on their views on human bodies. From their sacred perspective, human bodies are inherently immeasurable and surpass the material world because they consist of the five elements (*godai* 五大) which correspond to the five wisdoms (*gochi* 五智) of five Buddhas.¹²⁾ The red and white drops and two sexual organs are parts of such sacred bodies and equated with the Buddha's virtues. After this analysis, Kyōga describes the patriarchs of Tachikawa lineage as follows:

Shinkei ajari 真慶阿闍梨 of Tennōji 天王寺 temple and Rennin 蓮念 of Tachikawa 立川 region, however, misinterpreted the differences between the ignorant and sacred perspectives and fell into the wrong view. On the other hand, some ancient monks severely criticized the teaching that a female red and male white drop respectively correspond to one of the two realms and committed

the error regarded as the transgression of their own teaching. [The views of] these people are sometimes excessive and sometimes insufficient. Both of them are improper. (Fukuda 1995, 62)

Shinkei and Rennin have been long regarded as the influential patriarchs of Tachikawa lineage in Shingon Buddhism.¹³⁾ In this paragraph, Kyōga first asserts the distinction between his view on the sexual and embryological discourses and those of the Tachikawa patriarchs. As I mentioned above, he pays great attention to the issue of the perspectives and carefully interprets the manifold significance of the discourses in accordance with them. The Tachikawa patriarchs who do not comprehend the difference between ignorant and sacred perspectives, however, fail to hold such correct views on the sexual and embryological discourses.

In addition, Kyōga mentions the monks who criticize the Esoteric Buddhist exegesis which employs the sexual and embryological concepts and asserts that their views are also insufficient and improper. They seem to be Kaisei 快成 who calls the equation of the red and white drops with two realms the extreme wrong view and his disciple Yūkai.¹⁴⁾ According to Kyōga, they also do not understand the difference between the two perspectives and transgress the correct teaching. In other words, Kyōga attempts to separate his view from not only the wrong view of “heretical” Tachikawa patriarchs but also of Kaisei and Yūkai frequently regarded as the representative “orthodox” monks on Mt. Koya.

4. Conclusion

In the ninth chapter of the *Konkō*, Kyōga first asserts that the Shingon practitioners who fully comprehend the sacred perspective separated from the ignorant are able to discover the Esoteric significance of the sexual and embryological discourses such as red and white drops. In addition, he describes that those who misunderstand the difference between the two perspectives cling to or criticize the discourses. According to the *Konkō*, those who improperly cling to the discourses signify the patriarchs of Tachikawa lineage, and those who improperly criticize them are interpreted as the Shingon monks such as Kaisei and Yūkai.

As I mentioned above, modern scholars frequently assume the following dichotomy in premodern Shingon Buddhist tradition: the “orthodox” monks follow the correct teachings transmitted from Kūkai and criticize the sexual and embryological discourses as the wrong view, while the “heretics” enthusiastically rely on them. Kyōga, a Shingon monk in sixteenth century, however, maintains a different idea: he accepts neither the “orthodoxy” nor “heresy” and suggests the third position which transcends them. This fact also clearly sug-

gests that we should reexamine some influential categories and concepts concerning Shingon Buddhist doctrine and rituals.

Notes

- 1) See for example Mizuhara (1968, 58–66) and Moriyama (1965, 74–93).
- 2) Kushida (1964, 340–362), Köck (2000, 82), and Iyanaga (2011, 804).
- 3) Kameyama (2018, 27–32).
- 4) The reprints of the *Konkō* are introduced in the following texts: Kokusho kankō kai 国書刊行会, ed. *Kinsei bukkō shūsetsu* 近世仏教集説 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankō kai, 1916), 235–250 and Fukuda (1995, 40–65).
- 5) *Kinsei*, 8 and Fukuda (1995, 35–37; 39).
- 6) Fukuda (1995, 64).
- 7) Fukuda (1995, 37–39).
- 8) Moriyama (1965, 170–179).
- 9) Fukuda (1995, 60–62).
- 10) Fukuda (1995, 61).
- 11) Fukuda (1995, 61).
- 12) Fukuda (1995, 61–62).
- 13) Rennan was originally a monk of Daigoji temple who was called Ninkan 仁寛. With regard to their background, for example, see Moriyama (1965, 14–33; 67–74).
- 14) Moriyama (1965, 171).

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(This research was supported in part by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP16K21497.)

Key words Kyōga, *Konkō shō*, red and white drops

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