

## 70. YŌSAI AND ESOTERIC BUDDHISM

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### *Introduction*

Yōjōbō Yōsai 葉上房栄西 (1141–1215; also known as Myōan Eisai 明庵栄西), today considered to be the founder of Japanese Zen Buddhism, was in his own time widely known as a venerable esoteric Buddhist monk. Yōsai lived during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), a period in the history of Japanese religion that has been the subject of much scholarly debate. While other important figures in Japanese Buddhism of the Kamakura period, such as Hōnen 法然, Shinran 親鸞, Dōgen 道元, Eizon 叡尊, and Nichiren 日蓮, have been studied and revisited by both sectarian and non-sectarian scholars, Yōsai has not received much attention. He is still discussed in a single framework: as the founder of the Japanese Rinzai Zen school (Rinzai shū 臨濟宗).

Only a few Japanese scholars have surveyed Yōsai's esoteric production. Taga Munehaya was the first modern scholar to point out the importance of esoteric Buddhism in Yōsai's life. Nakao Ryōshin has approached the topic from a broader perspective, exploring Yōsai's successors and their historical roles. Yanagida Seizan's classic study on the *Kōzen gokokuron* 興禪護国論 argues for the great importance of examining esoteric Buddhism as the other half of Yōsai's persona, but does not offer any significant analysis of it. Recently Yoneda Mariko has published a revised biographical survey of Yōsai on the basis of newly discovered source material, the *Kaihen kyōshu ketsu*, which can be regarded as Yōsai's autobiography. For its part, Western scholarship has completely neglected the esoteric nature of Yōsai's thought and has only briefly dealt with Yōsai's political role based on the *Kōzen gokokuron*.

Much of the received image of Yōsai comes from later evaluations. Two examples can be given here: first, the *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書, the first official collection of Japanese Buddhist biographies written by the Zen monk Kokan Shiren (1278–1346), portrayed Yōsai as a Buddhist saint by classifying him, alone among medieval figures, alongside preeminent monks who “imported Buddhist wisdom” (*denchi* 伝智),

such as Ganjin (688–763) and Kūkai (774–835). Kokan distinctively suggested that Yōsai should be considered the founder of Japanese Zen Buddhism. The *Genkō shakusho* is one of the most significant sources to examine Yōsai, but its compilation served a distinct political agenda to establish Zen as a central Buddhist tradition in Kyōto in the early fourteenth century. The depiction of Yōsai served this religio-political aim.

Second, Yōsai's best-known work, the *Kōzen gokokuron* (On Protecting the Country by the Revival of Zen), was included in the *Taishō Tripitaka* with a preface written by an unknown seventeenth-century author, which firmly posits Yōsai as the founder of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Although there are other versions of the *Kōzen gokokuron* (Yanagida 1972, 487) that do not include such a preface, this version of the text and its accompanying preface have determined the modern reading of Yōsai.

It is clear that the received image of Yōsai as the Japanese Zen patriarch was constructed with institutional aims in mind and from a centralized sectarian perspective that did not take into account the importance of the local development of the Buddhism propagated by Yōsai. However, the biggest problem for understanding Yōsai is the fact that his earlier career as an esoteric Buddhist thinker has been so little studied. Yōsai's esoteric thought was highly influenced by Taimitsu, and the scholarly neglect of this tradition, in comparison with Kūkai's Shingon, has also contributed to the gaps in our knowledge of Yōsai. The purpose of this article is to clarify Yōsai's doctrines and practices and outline his esoteric lineage, the so-called Yōjō lineage 葉上流.

### *Yōsai's Works*

There are nineteen extant works by Yōsai, written over the course of his entire life. The earlier works that precede the *Kōzen gokokuron* are all esoteric Buddhist writings or short "origin narratives" (*engi* 縁起). Yōsai began to record his interpretation of esoteric Buddhism immediately after returning from his first period of study abroad in China, in 1175.<sup>1</sup> The *Shutten taikō* 出纏大綱 (General Principle of Enlightenment), the *Tai kuketsu* 胎口決 (Oral Transmission on the

<sup>1</sup> A bibliography of Yōsai, which includes recently discovered materials, is available in Sueki 2006, 573–75.

Practice of Womb [Realm]), and the *Kaihen kyōshu ketsu* 改变教主決 (Revised Resolutions on the [Nature] of the Preacher of Esoteric Buddhism) were all written in this period, as was his *Imazu seiganji sōken engi* 今津誓願寺創建縁起 (Origins of the Erection of Imazu Seigan Temple).

By 1177, Yōsai had completed the *Kyōjigi kanmon* 教時義勘文 (Reflections on [Annen's] Meanings of Teachings and Times) and the *Mumyō shū* 無名集 (Collected Meanings of Dharma). In 1178 he wrote the *Hokke(kyō) nyū shingonmon ketsu* 法華[經]入真言門決 (Resolutions on the Meanings of Lotus Teachings in the Esoteric Discourse) and the *Urabon ipponkyō engi* 盂蘭盆一品經縁起 (Origins of the Ullambana Ceremony), and composed the *Bodaishin bekki* 菩提心別記 (Separate Records on *Bodhicitta*) the following year. In 1180 Yōsai completed the *Kechien ippen shū* 結縁一遍集 (Abbreviated Collection of Initiatory Rites) and the *Shohi kuketsu* 諸秘口決 (Secret Oral Transmissions), and in 1181 he composed the *Ingo shū* 隱語集 (Collection of Esoteric Idioms).

No work is extant from the following six years. In 1187, just before he departed for his second and final study in China, Yōsai completed the *Kongōchōshū bodaishinron kuketsu* 金剛頂宗菩提心論口決 (Oral Transmission of the Treatise on Awakening of *Bodhicitta*) and the *Jūhen kyōshu ketsu* 重編教主決 (Re-revised Version of the Oral Transmission on the Preacher of Esoteric Buddhism). During his second stay in China, from 1187 to 1191, Yōsai wrote the first draft of the *Shukke taikō* 出家大綱, which was completed in 1200, and re-drafted the *Ingo shū*, newly titled the *Hisō ingo shū* 秘宗隱語集 (Collection of Hidden Terminology in Esoteric Buddhism).

After this period, Yōsai's interest in Zen Buddhism increased and he compiled his two major non-esoteric works, the *Kōzen gokokuron* in 1198 and the *Nihon buppō chūkō kanmon* 日本仏法中興願文 (Supplication for the Restoration of Japanese Buddhism) in 1204. However, Yōsai's final composition, written in 1211, was another esoteric Buddhist work, the *Kiccha yōjō ki* 喫茶養生記 (Recover by Tea Drinking), which will be examined later.

All the works listed above contain multiple citations from the writings of Annen 安然 (841–889?), such as the *Shingonshū kyōjigi* 真言宗教時義 and the *Taizōkongō bodaishingi ryaku mondōshō* 胎藏金剛菩提心義略問答抄, the foundational works of Taimitsu doctrine.

The major topics of discussion in Yōsai's works are esoteric doctrinal tenets, texts, and ritual practices. In particular, the following

themes play a key role in his thought: a specific visualization technique, the *gosō jōjin kan* 五相成身觀; the notion of the preacher of esoteric Buddhism (*kyōshugi* 教主義); the *Treatise on Bodhicitta* and its practice; and the combination of Tendai “perfect teaching” and esoteric Buddhism (*enmitsu itchi* 円密一致). Yōsai presented the practice of visualizing five seed-letters on one’s body, a basic esoteric method for obtaining enlightenment following the *Treatise on the Awakening of Bodhicitta* (金剛頂瑜伽中発阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心論), in both his earliest work, the *Shutten taikō*, and in the very last one, the *Kiccha yōjō ki*.

The discussion of which buddha body preached the esoteric canon and thus established esoteric Buddhism was one of the most common subjects in Japanese Buddhism. Yōsai’s interpretation is quite original: while he regarded the buddhas of the Womb (Garbhadhātu; Taizōkai 胎藏界) and Diamond realms (Vajradhātu; Kongōkai 金剛界) as equal, overall he suggested that the buddha of the diamond realm was the real originator of esoteric Buddhism. This interpretation is closely linked with notions expressed in the *Treatise on the Awakening of Bodhicitta*, which constitutes the foundation of Yōsai’s entire system.

Finally, Yōsai advocated the equality of “perfect” and esoteric teachings, the most important concept in the Taimitsu tradition, yet at the same time he asserted the absolute superiority of esoteric Buddhism. This appears to be a contradiction, but it may be considered intrinsic to Taimitsu.

Three major writings by Yōsai may be identified as representative of his interpretation of these topics: the *Shutten taikō*, the *Kongōchōshū bodaishinron kuketsu*, and the *Kiccha yōjō ki*. These works also mark the three stages into which Yōsai’s career can be divided: up to his first trip to China, before his second stay in China, and after his return. The *Shutten taikō*, which addresses all the topics outlined above, may be regarded as the work where Yōsai laid out the basis for further elaboration. The *Kongōchōshū bodaishinron kuketsu* focuses on a practice informed by the *Treatise on Bodhicitta*, which will be discussed in the following section.

Here I want to briefly discuss the third key work, the *Kiccha yōjō ki*. While this has long been considered a Zen text, it in fact contains several esoteric elements. In it Yōsai presents the effects of tea drinking on one’s heart according to Chinese medical knowledge, in which the heart is regarded as the most important organ for human beings

(*Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho*, vol. 115, 505b). Yōsai connected the heart to one of the five steps in the meditative practice for obtaining a perfect body, quoting from the *Zunshengtuoluoni podiyu yigui* 尊勝陀羅尼破地獄儀軌 (T. 906.18:912a–914c). This apocryphal esoteric scripture was popular in late-Heian Japan and was used by earlier esoteric scholar-monks, such as Annen and Kakuban 覚鑿, as a key source for their doctrines.

### *Yōsai's Pivotal Esoteric Doctrine and Practice*

The characteristic of Yōsai's doctrine is the combination of the Womb and Diamond realms, variously called *taikon gōnyū* 胎金合揉, *gōgyō* 合行, or *myōgō* 冥合. In line with Taimitsu interpretations, Yōsai deemed the two realms equally important. Taimitsu scholar-monks had regarded the transmission of the two realms as separate and established a threefold system in which the “accomplishment class” (*soshitsujibu* 蘇悉地部) played the central role. This categorization is commonly understood to be based on the *Susiddhikara sūtra* 蘇悉地經, a sūtra belonging to the Womb scriptural tradition. Yōsai, however, based his interpretation on the *Yuqi jing* 瑜祇經, a sūtra of the Diamond scriptural tradition. This use of the *Yuqi jing* seems to have been a trend in the medieval period, drawing on the emphasis that Annen, for the first time, had placed on the *Yuqi jing* as the source of the evidence for uniting the Womb and Diamond realms (Mizukami 2008a, 639).

Yōsai also used the *Treatise on Awakening of Bodhicitta* and the *Dapiluzhe'na jing gongyang cidifashu* 大毘盧遮那經供養次第法疏 (Commentary on the Seventh Fascicle of the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*) as textual bases for the combination of the two mandalic classes. The *Treatise*, while classified in the Diamond class, in fact contains very strong combinatory elements; for example, in the way it uses the syllable *a*, which usually represents Mahāvairocana of the Womb realm.

The *Kongōchōshū bodaishinron kuketsu* mainly discusses the issue of combination and the esoteric precepts. Yōsai's argument on the combination is founded on the practice of visualizing the sun and moon circles (*nichigacchirinkan* 日月輪觀, the “circles” here being *cakras*), which first appears in the *Treatise* as a method to develop buddha-nature. Following Annen, Yōsai maintained that the sun circle symbolizes the Womb realm and the moon circle symbolizes the Diamond realm; thus, to practice this type of meditation means to actualize the unity of Womb and Diamond.

Furthermore, this visualization practice plays an important role in actualizing the esoteric precepts (*samaya kai* 三昧耶戒 or *bodaishin kai* 菩提心戒). Once again following Taimitsu interpretation, Yōsai claimed that each of the three types of *bodhicitta*—practice (*gyōgan* 行願), wisdom (*shōgi* 勝義), and identification with buddha (*samaji* or *sanmaji* 三摩地)—contains the others. Similarly, each corresponds to one of the three secret activities (*sanmitsu* 三密) and at the same time contains all three. The three types of *bodhicitta* also embody the precepts of esoteric Buddhism. Eventually, all three types of *bodhicitta* are encompassed within the *bodhicitta* of identification with buddha, understood by Yōsai in absolute terms as the essence of the precepts (*kaitai* 戒体). The interpretation of this most accomplished type of *bodhicitta* resembles the role Enchin assigned to the syllable *bhrum* in his *Bodaijōkyō ryakugishaku* 菩提場經略義釈 (Abbreviated Commentary on the *Pudichang jing*; T. 2230.61:535b–536c).

In the *Kongōchōshū bodaishinron kuketsu* Yōsai explains that the practice of this *bodhicitta* and the visualization practice of the sun and moon circles are identical (T. 2293.70:30c). Visualizing the sun and moon becomes the crucial step by which the precepts are embodied by the practitioner who receives them. This also substantiates the notion that buddhahood can be attained by receiving precepts (*jukai jōbutsu* 受戒成仏), which had been argued by Annen on the basis of the Tendai “perfect” precepts (Fukuda 1954, 597–98). In his *Shutten taikō*, Yōsai claims that practicing the *bodhicitta* of identification with buddha is the same as visualizing the combination of the Womb and Diamond realms in one’s mind (*Nihon daizōkyō*, *Tendaishū mikkyō shōsho* 3: 655a).

This notion of combination is closely connected to and may be derived from an esoteric consecratory ritual performed only by Taimitsu monks, namely the combinatory *abhiṣeka* (*gōgyō kanjō* 合行灌頂). Kūkai maintained the nondual transmission of the Womb and Diamond realms based on the myth of the transmission in the Iron Tower of South India (*nantentettō sōjō* 南天鉄塔相承). Taimitsu did not subscribe to this mythology, however, and Taimitsu scholar-monks after Saichō endeavored to create a nondual pattern in ritual transmission. The combinatory consecratory ritual probably emerged by Annen’s time in parallel with the threefold system (*sanbu* 三部).

Yōsai also employed other patterns to explain the relation between the Womb and Diamond realms. In the *Ingoshū*, a text that has recently been reassessed as Yōsai’s genuine work, he used the metaphor of

woman and man: women symbolized the womb class and the sun; men symbolized the diamond class and the moon. He discussed the relation between these two opposites in terms of sexual intercourse and its result: if a woman's desire is stronger than the man's, the fetus will be female, symbolized by the color red or yellow. If the man's desire is stronger, the fetus will be male, represented by the color white. The combination of the two mandalic realms is thus represented by the union of blood and semen (赤白二滯) and flesh and bones (黄白二滯). The fetus is understood as the *cintāmaṇi* (*nyoirin hōju* 如意宝珠), signifying the result of enlightenment and at the same time symbolizing new life. Yōsai shared this type of interpretation, which has misleadingly been associated with the heresies of the Tachikawa-ryū, with several other figures of the medieval period.

### *Yōsai's Esoteric Lineage*

It has been historically ascertained that Yōsai received multiple esoteric lineages, but a particular lineage is emphasized in the *Kaihen kyōshu ketsu*, which includes Yōsai's autobiography (see Taga 1965, 279–81). According to this work, Yōsai's master was Kikō 基好 (1167?–1198?), resident monk at Mt. Dai 大山 (modern Tottori prefecture), known as one of three major Tendai centers in medieval times. The esoteric lineage chart contained in this work is that of a combinatory *abhiṣeka*. Kikō also instructed other famous monks, such as Jien Jichin (1155–1225), in the combinatory *abhiṣeka*. Although details of Kikō's life are still obscure, his crucial role in Taimitsu should be underlined.

The esoteric lineage founded by Yōsai is known as the Yōjō-ryū or Kenninji-ryū 建仁寺流. It developed as part of the Tani 谷流 branch of Taimitsu, one of the two major divisions of Tendai esoteric Buddhism,<sup>2</sup> and still constitutes one of the existing Taimitsu lineages, with headquarters at Mitsuzō-in 密蔵院 in modern Nagoya (Aichi prefecture).

Yōsai's lineage was transmitted by Shakuenbō Yōchō 釈円房栄朝 (1165–1247), who was Yōsai's first disciple according to the *Rengeinryū*

<sup>2</sup> In fact the Tani lineage (founded by Kōkei 皇慶, 977–1049), after the time of Chōen 長宴 (1016–1081), incorporated the Kawa-ryū 川流, the other lineage (created by Kakuchō 覚超, 960–1034). See Inada 1936, 2 and Ōkubo 2008, 79–80.

*kechimyakufu* 蓮華院流血脈譜 (Lineage Chart of Rengein-ryū).<sup>3</sup> Yōchō established Chōrakuji 長樂寺 (in modern Gunma prefecture), which became the center of the Yōjō lineage until late medieval times. This temple was a very important platform of ordination for esoteric and Zen monks in the Kantō area, and many famous medieval monks, such as Ben'en Enni 弁円円爾 (1202–1280) and Mujū Ichien 無住一円 (1226–1312), trained there (Yamamoto 2003, 25). Within a hundred years, the center of Yōjō lineage moved to Mitsuzō-in, later known as the Shinogi Tendai Academy (Shinogi Dangisho 篠木談義所). Chōrakuji still exists, but in the Edo period the temple was known as one of the Tokugawa shogun family temples (*Tōshōgū* 東照宮).

Yōsai's other prominent disciple was Sōgonbō Gyōyū 莊嚴房行勇 (1163–1241). The first reference to him is found in the *Tsurugaoka hachimangūji gusō shidai* 鶴岡八幡宮寺供僧次第 (Program of the Serving Monks of Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine-Temple) (ZGR (1923–1933), vol. 104, 894). Gyōyū in fact served at the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine-Temple, the religious center of the Kamakura shogunate, and through him Yōsai established close links to the political power of the time. Yōsai and Gyōyū performed several esoteric rituals for the shogunate.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in response to a request from the shogun family, they helped establish Kongō Sanmai Temple 金剛三昧院 on Mt. Kōya, which became a leading institution for the instruction of well-known monks such as Shinchi Kakushin 心地覺心 (1207–1298) of Kōkoku Temple 興国寺 (Nakao 2005, 115, 123–24; Girard 2007, 51). The Yōjō lineage thus played a crucial role in the religio-political life of Kamakura Japan.

<sup>3</sup> See Gunmakenshi hensan iinkai, ed. 1984; Okonogi 2002; Yamamoto 2003, 28. Other sources, such as the *Tōji tendai kechimyaku zu* 東寺天台血脈図 (Tōji Version of Tendai Lineage Chart), introduce a different master. See *DNK*, Iewake 20, Tōfukuji monjo 1, 70–74.

<sup>4</sup> *Azuma kagami*. See also Sasaki Kaoru 1997, 84.