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Curing with *Kaji*

Healing and Esoteric Empowerment in Japan

The Shingon practice of *kaji* is generally understood to be a mutual empowerment of self and Buddha that occurs in esoteric interpenetration visualizations. This doctrinal definition however, neglects the important role that *kaji* has historically played as a hands-on healing technique. This paper examines some of the theoretical, practical, and historical dimensions of *kaji*, while also considering some of the modern-day claims of *kaji* practitioners and patients in contemporary Japan. Such an investigation not only expands our understanding of Japan's religio-medical history, but also prompts our re-evaluation of the dominant discourses related to Chinese *kanpō*, Neo-Confucian, and Western European medicine.

KEYWORDS: *kaji* – Mikkyō – Esoteric Buddhism – medicine – Oda Ryūkō – Ikeguchi Ekan

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THIS PAPER focuses on the esoteric Japanese Buddhist healing technique of *kaji* 加持 (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*). Doctrinally speaking, *kaji* refers to the mutual empowerment between self and Buddha that characterizes tantric deity yoga. Practically applied, however, *kaji* is said to occur when a trained master concentrates and extends Buddha's universal energy to a receptive subject for healing purposes.

First brought to Japan from China in the ninth century by the esoteric master Kōbō Daishi Kūkai 弘法大師空海 (773–835), this hands-on healing technique supplemented the prevailing Chinese medical models of the day. It continued to be performed through the early modern period, and it continues to complement Western medicine in contemporary Japan. However, one rarely if ever sees it mentioned in the mainstream scholarly literature focusing on the history of medicine in Japan. Scholars such as HATTORI Toshirō (1959, 1964, 1971) and Margaret LOCK (1980) tend to focus on the history of traditional Chinese medicine (*kanpō* 漢方) in Japan and tend to present this history as one continuous narrative spanning the Asuka through Momoyama periods (roughly the sixth through sixteenth centuries). This view, however, completely neglects Kūkai's ninth-century Mikkyō 密教 contributions, as if these so-called secret teachings of Vajrayāna's middle-period had not helped to shape medical care both at court and throughout the countryside. Moreover, professional medical literature in contemporary Japan only occasionally mentions complementary (*hokan* 補完) and alternative (*daitai* 代替) medicine, yet disparagingly analyzes all such modalities in light of the placebo effect. In contrast to these dominant medical models, the Buddhist literature of the esoteric Shingon sect claims that Buddha's universal energy can heal everything from nearsightedness to terminal cancer. Shingon Master Oda Ryūkō, for example, claims that

In my own practice, *kaji* has cured leukemia, thyroid gland tumors, malignant tumors of the various organs—including the throat, esophagus, stomach, intestines, rectum, liver, lungs, brain, nasal cavity, uterus, ovary, prostate, and bladder. The effectiveness of *kaji* is by no means limited to tumors. *Kaji* has also greatly benefited conditions such as diabetes, renal disease, gastro-intestinal

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ulcers, epilepsy, asthma, and (the) Kawasaki syndrome.¹ In many cases, when *kaji* was administered to patients awaiting surgical operations, their conditions improved, eliminating the need for surgery. *Kaji* cured a heart condition that otherwise required surgery, as well as the complaints of a woman who long suffered from a gynecological disorder. Polio too, has been cured in its early state. For external injuries, the sooner that *kaji* is performed, the more effective it is. (ODA 1992, p. 92)

This paper makes no attempt to substantiate the medical validity of such claims. Nor does it strive to provide an in-depth introduction to Japan's medical history or to explain fully the intricacies of Shingon ritual. Rather, it simply aims to shed some light onto the relatively neglected topic of *kaji* ritual healing, especially as it appears in classic and contemporary accounts of faith cures. With this in mind, this paper will be organized into three main sections:

- 1 The theoretical or doctrinal definition of *kaji* as well as its practical applications;
- 2 the historical context of its introduction to Japan and its popular propagation within Japanese religious circles;
- 3 its contemporary relationship with prevailing medical models in Japan. This latter section will juxtapose the writings of Revs. Oda Ryūkō and Ikeguchi Ekan who were and are respectively two major *kaji* practitioners and Mikkyō medical theorists.

Definitions: Doctrine and Practice

DOCTRINE

The original Sankrit word for *kaji* is *adhiṣṭhāna*, which has a wide range of meanings. In the secular sense, *adhiṣṭhāna* can indicate any position or site of authority and power (EIDSON 2004, p. 96). By extension, its sacred esoteric sense also indicates a powerful benediction or blessing that energizes its recipient with the enlightening power of universal Buddhahood. Yamasaki therefore has defined *kaji* as the “mutual empowerment” or universal energy exchange between self and Mahāvairocana Buddha (YAMASAKI 1988, p. 110). In Japanese, this universal Dharma body of Buddhahood is called Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 (Skt. Mahāvairocana), literally the Great Sun Buddha. Therefore, the Mikkyō patriarch Kūkai himself uses solar imagery to help explain the etymology of *ka* 加 and *ji* 持—the two Sino-Japanese characters used to translate *adhiṣṭhāna*. In his fascicle on “Becoming a Buddha in this Very Body” (*Sokushin jōbutsugi* 即身成仏義) Kūkai says:

1. See National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCID) for more information on Kawasaki syndrome.

The sun of the Buddha reflected in the water of the mind of all beings is called *ka* (adding or increasing). The water of the practitioner's mind experiencing the sun of the Buddha is called *ji* (holding or grasping).

(YAMASAKI 1988, p. 111)

The first character *ka* 加 therefore means to add, as in the Great Sun Buddha adding his powerful sun-lightenment to one's own. This expresses a typical Mahāyāna *hongaku* 本覚 sentiment, since it presupposes the inherent existence of one's original Buddha-nature. According to Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine that predominates in Japan, all sentient beings already are enlightened, they just have not realized it yet.² Thus when Dainichi adds his illumination to one's own original enlightenment, one's spiritual potential is fully augmented and actualized. For this reason, Buddha's "grace" is another term that is often associated with the definition of *kaji*. The second character *ji* 持 means to hold, as in the practitioner's embrace of Dainichi's universal light. This embrace by extension indicates an oceanic self-expansion and self-identification with universal Buddhahood. Thus in the ubiquitous field of the Dharma realm, *kaji* describes the state in which "Buddha enters me, I enter Buddha" (*nyūga ganyū* 入我我入).

The divine union between practitioner and deity is further expressed in Kūkai's Diamond World *nyūga ganyū* contemplation :

Assume the meditation *mūdra*. Contemplate as follows: Facing the principal deity I have now become the body of Tathāgata Mahāvairocana. The principal deity enters my body empowering me. I enter the body of the principal deity taking refuge in him. We are of one body, not two. Because [this rite] manifests the meaning of both the root and the traces [*honjaku*] 本迹, it constitutes a contemplation of empowerment and refuge.

(SHARF and SHARF 2001, pp. 183–84)

Thus doctrinally speaking, *kaji* is said to actualize the reciprocal feedback loop between the root source and the practitioner's trace of Buddha's original grace. It describes the state of *nyūga ganyū* in which Buddha's empowerment meets the practitioner's refuge, and where they mutually exchange their perfect and potential enlightenment. *Kaji*'s power thus lies in the enlightened and enlightening transference of power from Dainichi to the individual and vice versa.³

2. For more on *hongaku* thought, see Jacqueline STONE's seminal work (1999) on the wide range of medieval Japanese thought and practice surrounding the doctrine of original enlightenment, especially within the mainstream Tendai sect and its offshoots (notably Nichirenshū).

3. This identification of the self and deity is similar to other tantric deity yogas. Bhattacharya, for example, describes the Indian esoteric practice of *ahamkāra*, in which one visualizes "I am the goddess and the goddess is in me" (BHATTACHARYA 1963, p. 100). This method of identifying the "worshipper with the worshipped" entails the practitioner envisioning himself "with the same complexion, forms and limbs as described in the *sādhana*...he should instead of worshipping an external object, worship himself" (BHATTACHARYA 1963, p. 100).

Kaji carries other doctrinal connotations in the Shingon tradition as well. The eminent monk Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban 興教大師覺鑒 (1095–1143), for example, uses the term *kaji* in several ways. First he discerns two levels of activity for the Dharmakāya. He distinguishes between the original ground of the Dharma body (*honji shin* 本地身 or *honji mon* 本地門) as opposed to its aspect in communication with sentient beings (*kaji shin* 加持身 or *kaji mon* 加持門) (VAN DER VEERE 2000, p. 92). In short, “the *honji mon* was considered the originally existing state of the *kaji mon*, the state of identification with the Absolute” (p. 93). In his *Uchigikishū* 打開集, Kakuban then uses the term *kaji* in two senses: to denote the activity of the Dharmakāya (*nō kaji shin* 能加持身), and to denote the location of the Dharmakāya (*sho kaji shin* 所加持身) in and as the world (p. 93). He also uses the term *kaji* analogously to describe the mind’s unity with a teacher (*sōō* 相應), which indicates an early form of esoteric guru yoga in which one’s teacher is recognized as a manifestation of Dainichi’s enlightened body, speech, and mind (p. 127). Kakuban believed that if one were properly initiated and had the religious capacity to fully trust in the efficacy of mantra and the *kaji* process, then even just one of the three secrets of body, speech or mind was sufficient for realizing immediate results (p. 102).

A century after Kakuban, the term *kaji-shin* continued to figure in major doctrinal disputes between the so-called new (*shingi* 新義) and old (*kogi* 古義) schools of Shingon doctrine. Raiyū 賴瑜 (1226–1304), for example, opposed Dōhan 道範 (1178–1252) over the preaching of the Dharmakāya. Raiyū maintained that the Dharmakāya preaches in and as the realm of phenomena whereas Dōhan maintained the primacy of the Dharmakāya preaching in the realm of the absolute (FOREIGN DEPARTMENT 1937, p. 21). Raiyū’s strict interpretation of *kaji shin* eventually splintered the new Shingon sect into two subsects, namely the Chizanha and the Buzanha (MATSUNAGA and MATSUNAGA 1993, p. 338).

At first these scholastic definitions of *kaji* appear to have little direct bearing on the topic of healing in Japan. However, they all indirectly do indicate an underlying belief in the power of *kaji* to channel Dainichi’s universal energy into concrete phenomenal forms for beneficial effect. These effects can range from enlightenment itself to the prevention of harm and even exorcism of malignant spirits. Let us now turn to the precise ritual contexts in which *kaji* is said to occur.

PRACTICE

In ritual practice, the power of *kaji* is believed to be converted and channeled into any number of practical applications. When combined with an initiated priest’s prayer (*kitō* 祈禱), the energy of deity yoga accessed in *kaji* is said to have the ability to extend to almost any physical or mental object. *Kaji* can be performed for example, to consecrate a newly sculpted main image (*honzon kaji*

本尊加持), the altar (*kaji dan* 加持壇), perfumed water (*kaji kōzui* 加持香水), incense and other ritual offerings (*kaji kumotsu* 加持供物), or one's own rosary of one-hundred and eight *mala* beads (*nenju kaji* 念珠加持). The latter *nenju kaji* in particular is believed to heighten the power of the priest's recitation of healing mantras and dharanis, since each rosary bead helps keep track of the prescribed number of incantations.

The priest's prayers and chants are thus integral to the *kaji* cure. The *Secret Great Compendium of Kaji Prayers* (*Kaji kitō himitsu taizen* 加持祈祷秘密大全) and the *Inner Transmission of Secret Shingon Kaji Prayers* (*Shingon himitsu kaji kitō okuden* 真言秘密加持祈祷奥伝) for example, list over forty different protective or preventative rituals with titles such as "Warding off Harmful Vermin," "Secret Rite for Forecasting Disaster for Self and Other," and "Prayer for the Recovery from Misfortune" (KUSAKA 1980, ONO 1993). Many of these prayers often involve swallowing paper talismans with *kaji*-empowered water. One prayer said to cure eye disease involves two *reifu* 靈符 paper talismans inscribed with the hiragana syllable *me* め, the Japanese word for eye. They are both dissolved in *kaji*-empowered water for the patient to ingest. Alternately, Kōbō Dai-shi's seal may be printed on talismans, the Mantra of Light recited, and the water and the paper imbibed together for curative effect. In such treatments involving the Mantra of Light, Kūkai's original solar imagery is further formulated to cure illness. Such recipes for the mantra's incantation draw upon the belief that the light of the Buddha can destroy all evil karma and hence can destroy a major retributive cause for disease (STATLER 1983, p. 158).⁴

Empowering water is in fact a major element of *kaji* practice during the Eighteenfold (*jūhachidō* 十八道) rites. During this ritual sequence, the Shingon practitioner empowers water offerings that symbolically wash away delusion (YAMASAKI 1988, pp. 167, 170). For example, according to Miyata's translation of the *jūhachidō* ritual instruction manual, the *dōjō* sanctuary should be purified with water that has been consecrated with a *sanjō* 散杖 stick, a ubiquitous esoteric ritual implement. This rite not only empowers the perfumed water, but it also automatically empowers the space in which such *kaji* is performed. The manual instructs:

Make the *shō sanko no in* 小三股印⁵...then consecrate the water by reciting the mantra of Kuṇḍali⁶ twenty-one times. Holding the rosary in the left hand,

4. For more on the Mantra of Light, see UNNO 2004. For more on the power of talismans and Shingon curatives in early modern Japan, see WILLIAMS 2004. The work of Williams on the Sōtō Zen pharmacopoeia raises fascinating questions regarding the production and distribution of Kōyasan's herbal remedies, but this is a topic for future research.

5. This refers to the eighth purifying small three-pronged *vajra mūdra* in which thumb and ring finger touch. It is typically used for consecrating and purifying offerings, water, rice, and fruits, as well as the air and space of the *dōjō* altar (MIYATA 1984, p. 29).

6. One of the five wisdom kings in the Shingon system.

count the number of mantras *Om Amrite hūm phat* [*Om* the deathless one *hūm phat!*].... Imagine that the consecrated water changes and becomes milky water. Visualize that the nature of water is pure, that the nature of all Dharma is likewise pure, that the water sprinkles your body and both the inner and outer offerings on the *dan* (altar).⁷ Next take the *sanjō* stick in your right hand and consecrate the water with the stick, reciting the syllable *Ram* twenty-one times, while imagining that the water washes away all impurities and stirring the stick counter-clockwise twenty-one times. Now, stir it clockwise twenty-one times for the syllable *Varṃ*, imagining that the water has become white and pure in nature...then swing (the stick) slowly, describing three circles in the air. Then, [wave it] up and down once. Do this three times, sprinkling the water upon the center of the *dōjō* altar. (MIYATA 1984, p. 29)

Once the *dōjō* has been purified with this consecrated water, the altar itself is also empowered. As the twelfth century Kōzen 興然 (1121–1203) explains, after making the *samādhi mūdra* and performing the *nyūga ganyū* interpenetration visualization,

the deity dwells in the altar and the self dwells in the altar. Reciting the mantra together, the result is like Indra's net. (YAMASAKI 1988, p. 165)

The Hua-yen rhetoric of non-obstruction amongst dharmas⁸ is further present when one empowers the merit of one's own bodhisattva vows. In order to perform this *kaji*, one invokes the three powers (*sanriki* 三力) of "self, deity and universe" (YAMASAKI 1988, p. 111). One affirms that:

(Self):	The power of my meritorious action
(Deity):	The power of Buddha- <i>kaji</i>
(Universe):	And the power of the universal Dharma Realm
(Summary):	Dwell in all-pervading mutual homage.

(YAMASAKI 1988, p. 170)⁹

7. There is a separate ritual sequence for actually consecrating the offerings (*kaji kumotsu*). "Fold the *juzu* into two coils with the left hand, taking it to the left waist and forming the *vajra* first. Make the...*shō sanko no in* with the right hand. The right thumb touches the ring finger on its nail, while the other three fingers are upright. Move this *mūdra* counterclockwise over the offerings three times and say "Om padākṣyavajra hūm!" three times. Now clockwise three times recite the above mantra. Imagine by virtue of this consecration the offerings become pure, marvelous offerings" (MIYATA 1984, p. 127).

8. *Jōjimuge* 情事無礙 refers to the non-obstruction among all manifest phenomena. Hua-yen's *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* describes this enlightened vision of dharmas in terms of a vast latticework of interconnected jewels at every node. Every facet of every jewel reflects every other facet of every other jewel in the infinite netscape of being. This visual metaphor for describing the unobstructed interpenetration of holographic dharmas is known as Indra's Net.

9. Charles MULLER translates the verse of the three powers differently: "以我功德力 [*iga kudoku riki*] In the power of my virtue, 如來加持力 [*nyorai kaji riki*] And the aiding power of the

This all-pervading mutual interpenetration of the three powers is further extended in the *Dainichi-kyō* 大日經 (Skt. *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*) whose descriptive namesake indicates that it “freely heals sentient beings, to aid their enlightenment.”¹⁰ In this key text, the powers of self, Buddha, and universe are likened to three kinds of medical vision:

First, the mastery of diagnosis and the administration of treatment, is called “the power of the healing eye,” in Japanese *e(i)gen-riki* [慧眼力]. Second, the ability to diagnose the causal sources of disease and the difficulties involved in healing, is called “the power of the dharmic eye,” *hōgen-riki* [法眼力]. Third, the ability to administer the proper and effective treatment according to each disease and patient, is called “the power to guide and transform,” *kedō-riki* [化導力].

Of these three forces, *e(i)gen-riki*, the power of the healing eye, promotes the inherent life force of the human body, so that the natural strength of human physiology itself acts as medicine. [Once the healer’s *hōgen-riki* or power of the dharmic eye discerns the illness’ etiology and prognosis, then his] *kedō-riki*, or the power to guide and transform, allows (him) to know the patient’s particular illness and mental suffering by identification. (ODA 1992, p. 41)

Thus when the master, the Buddha, and the world meet in *kaji*, the master stimulates the patient’s own defenses, is aided by the Buddha’s causal insight, and intimately knows how each patient feels and how best to help. When the *ajari* 阿闍利 (Skt. *ācāryā*) master works to end suffering in the world in this way, he is said to embody the highest “manifest attainment” level of enlightenment (*kentoku jōbustu* 顯得成仏) (ODA 1992, p. 76).¹¹ Conversely, when the patient is cured of his/her disease, then it is called *gense riyaku* 現世利益 or “receiving (this-)worldly benefits from the Buddha” (ODA 1992, p. 30).

Therefore, these doctrinal and ritual contexts of *kaji* involve the transference

Tathāgata, 及與法界力 [*gyūyohōkai riki*] And the power of the spiritual realm, 周遍衆生界 [*shūhen shujōkai*] I can go anywhere in the land of the living” (see [www.acmuller.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?e.xml+id\('b4e09-529b-5058'\)](http://www.acmuller.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?e.xml+id('b4e09-529b-5058'))). It is further interesting to note that this body=Buddha=universe sentiment reflects Mahāyāna’s basic *trikāya* paradigm, but adds a typical fourth Mikkyō summation of the previous three.

10. Its full Sanskrit name, *mahā-vairocanaḥ bodhi-vikurvitādhiṣṭhāna-vaipulya-sūtrēndra-vāja-nāma-dharma-paryāya*, means “when the light of Great Enlightenment shone upon the darkness of ignorance, freely healing sentient beings, to aid their enlightenment, it did so through a great sutra, which was named the King of sutras” (ODA 1992, p. 69).

11. In the esoteric scheme there are three levels of enlightenment: (1) *rigu-jōbutsu* (理具成仏) intrinsic embodiment, which refers to the unity of the self and Buddha as well as to the unity of mind and matter via the six elements; (2) *kaji-jōbutsu* (加持成仏), transference of power and response, which refers to *kaji*’s experiential realization of self-Buddha identity and its healing effects; (3) *kentoku-jōbutsu* (顯得成仏), manifest attainment, which refers to one’s enlightened attempt to remove the obstacles, errors, and causes of suffering in society at large (ODA 1992, p. 44–45).

