

# Transforming the Void

*Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery  
in East Asian Religions*

*Edited by*

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# Backdrops and Parallels to Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions

*Anna Andreeva and Dominic Steavu*

Attaining the ultimate of vacuity,  
Guarding the utmost of quiescence.  
The ten thousand things spring forth.  
I contemplate their return.  
They mill about indistinctly,  
But each one returns to its own root.

LAOZI DAODE JING 16.

•••

Sentient beings conceived by  
wombs, eggs, moisture, and transformation  
*all* harbor the adorned dwelling space  
of inherent enlightenment [within them].

KAKUGENSHŌ, "On the Kuṇḍalinī mūdra and ritual offerings."<sup>1</sup>

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Typically, the embryo conjures images of what is yet incomplete. It represents an undeveloped potential that has yet to undergo the full process required for it to reach finitude. Debates persist about whether the embryo is to be considered a complete living being or whether it merely constitutes the building blocks or raw matter for the human body. In contrast, classical perspectives from China and Japan understood the embryo as wholeness. It is the very image of finalised completeness. From the moment of birth, the body degenerates and grows further removed from its embryonic state of original

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1 *Kakugenshō* 覺源抄 (Extracts from Lectures by Kakukai and Yūgen), by Hōkyō Rendōbō 宝篋蓮道房, in *Shingonshū zensho* 真言宗全書, Takaoka Ryūshin 高岡隆心 et al., eds. (Kōyasan: Shingonshū zensho kankōkai, 1933–39), vol. 36, 385a.

pristineness, undergoing decay, illness, and ultimately death. Religious traditions underscore this perception: the embryo is the symbol for the culmination of self-cultivation. It is fullness embodied, but not only physically, as it also represents the “spiritual” perfection that adepts strive for. The embryo is the model that practitioners attempt to emulate in their quest for fulfillment and transcendence. Its developmental trajectory in utero – in other words, its embryology – becomes the template for the soteriological process that adepts embark on.

These traditions of self-cultivation are firmly rooted in the religious thought and rituals of Taoism and Buddhism. Yet, even in their contemporary incarnations, they rely, at least in part, on the medical understanding of embryological development. Indeed, the boundary that demarcates medicine, physiology, and obstetrics, from religious discourse is blurred when it comes to the self-cultivation practices couched in embryological models.<sup>2</sup> Numerous medical embryologies that furnished literal descriptions of the stages of development which an embryo undergoes during gestation were included in religious corpora. In addition, the Taoist and Buddhist canons contain hitherto little-studied references to a spectrum of medical texts covering topics from etiology and diagnosis to therapy and materia medica.<sup>3</sup> In early and medieval China and Japan, medical specialists were often ordained Buddhists or Taoist priests.

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2 This motif has already attracted some attention from the scholars of Asia. See, for example, Mathieu Boisvert, “Conception and Intrauterine Life in the Pāli Canon,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 29 (2000), Frances Garrett, *Religion, Medicine, and the Human Embryo in Tibet* (Abingdon, London and New York: Routledge, 2008), and Jane Marie Law and Vanessa Sasson, eds., *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

3 The Taoist canon (Daozang 道藏) consists of largely undated scriptures compiled and recorded between the beginning of the Common Era and the Ming dynasty. The extant version of this canon was compiled in the fifteenth century. The creation of the Chinese Buddhist canon (Ch. *Dazangjing* 大藏經, Jp. *Daizōkyō*) was a long and continuous process that began in the fourth century with the compilation of catalogues of Buddhist scriptures that had been brought to and translated in China at different times – the [*Da Sui*] *zhongjing mulu* 大隋眾經目錄 (The Catalogue of the Sui, 594, T. 2146) and the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (The Catalogue of the Kaiyuan Era, 713–742, T. 2154) being the representative but not singular examples. See Silvie Hureau, “Translations, Apochrypha, and the Emergence of the Buddhist Canon,” in *Early Chinese Religions, Part Two: Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 758–773. One of the most widely used versions of the East Asian Buddhist Canon nowadays is the *Taishō Tripitaka*, published in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that self-cultivation sources rhetorically enforce an ambiguity between their embryological models of practice and the strictly descriptive accounts of biological processes, the two categories of discourse are nonetheless distinguishable. For example, soteriologies expressed in embryological terms are often framed in terms of a return, or rebirth, in the sense that adepts typically experience or recreate their own gestation. Such terms are encountered in a variety of Taoist meditations or Buddhist funerary cults, particularly those focusing on attaining the state of being “unborn.” The process reaches its climax at the initial point in gestation, one that immediately follows conception or fertilisation. In contrast, purely medical embryologies culminate with the birth of the child. In other cases, embryonic growth is restaged and relived in a communal ritual context, which culminates in the emergence of new members of a religious group or a renewed sense of one’s religious identity. It is the diverse and culturally specific reformulations of these metaphors of conception and gestation, as well as reproductive imagery in a broad sense that the essays in this volume investigate.

From the outset, we intend to spell out that the scope of this volume is squarely on the soteriological applications of such embryological and gestational discourses in East Asian religious traditions. By and large, we have elected to leave aside sources on literal procreation to focus on the more figurative interpretations. However, since the former are crucial in framing the latter, a sizeable portion of this introduction is devoted to providing a requisite overview of what can be termed “medical embryologies,” that is, the models of conception and gestation embedded in premodern discourses on childbirth and health. References to these also occur in some of the chapters. Although such premodern “medical embryologies” sometimes skirt on the theological, the cosmological, or the philosophical, their mandate remains more closely tied to obstetrics, procreation, and the maintaining of bodily health than to self-cultivation. Thus, they deserve a separate in-depth study. In this optic, and perhaps to the detriment of the accuracy of modern medical terminology, the contributions to this volume on the China side will use the word “embryo” to denote both the embryo (the term normally used until the eleventh week of gestational age, nine weeks after fertilisation) *and* the foetus (the term used after the eleventh week). This inclusive use of “embryo” to refer, in broad terms, to the unborn child, best reflects the original Chinese sources. In contrast, the articles dealing with Japanese materials will use both the “embryo” and “foetus”: following the precedent set by James H. Sanford in his groundbreaking

research on “foetal Buddhahood” in Shingon.<sup>4</sup> Primary sources employ the Sinitic term *tai* 胎 (which in Buddhist texts also acts as a translation of the Sanskrit term *garbha*) to refer uniformly to the infant in utero during all stages of development, as well as to the womb itself.

Much of this introduction will thus be devoted to providing an overview of the Chinese, Indian, and Buddhist medical embryologies that are not discussed at length in individual articles but have nonetheless shaped embryological discourses and reproductive imagery in premodern East Asian religions. This will be followed by a synopsis of the individual essays of the volume.

## 1 Early Chinese Embryologies

In China, the earliest description of the gestational process is not found in a medical source but rather in the “Shuidi 水地” (“Water and Earth”) chapter from the *Guanzi* 管子 (fourth century BCE). Drawing parallels between the genesis of individual life and the genesis of the cosmos, the chapter in question is couched in a correlative idiom that firmly anchors the body in a broader cosmological framework. The text establishes that humans and Earth are composed of the same constitutive elements, chief among them, Water:

Earth is the origin of the ten thousand things, the root of all life. [...] As for Water, it is the blood and *qi* of Earth, like that which circulates in the vascular system [of the human body]. Thus it is said, Water is the prima materia. [...] Humans are Water. When man and woman unite their essences and *qi*, Water takes shape [lit. “flows into form”. By the third month, [the embryo] has viscera [lit. “is as if flavoured”] [...]. In the fifth month, it is complete. In the tenth month, it is born.<sup>5</sup>

地者，萬物之本原，諸生之根苑也。[...] 水者，地之血氣，如筋脈之通流者也。故曰水具材也。[...] 人，水也。男女精氣合，而水流形。三月如咀 [...]. 五月而成，十月而生。

The rest of the section describes how the Five Agents (*wuxing* 五行), in this case represented by the five flavours (*wuwe* 五味), are connected to each of the

4 James H. Sanford, “Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas: Foetal Buddhahood in Shingon,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24.1 (1997): 1–38.

5 *Guanzi* 39; *Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校注, 813–816. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are the authors’ own.

five viscera (*wuzang* 五臟) of the human body. After they are complete, each of the viscera generates one of the five “tissues” (*rou* 肉), namely mucous membranes, bones, the brain, skin, and flesh.<sup>6</sup> According to this early example, cosmology, the body, and its development are inextricable.

The earliest recorded East Asian embryology in a medical source is found in the *Taichan shu* 胎產書 (Book on the Embryo and Childbirth) excavated from the Mawangdui 馬王堆 (188 BCE terminus ante quem) tombs of the Western Han (206–220 BCE) and studied by Donald Harper.<sup>7</sup> This account, pertaining to what we may term “medical knowledge,” similarly inscribes its embryology within a broad correlative context replete with cosmological correspondences, although it does not go as far as juxtaposing its various stages with those of a process that could be understood as cosmogony.<sup>8</sup> Early Chinese medical descriptions of the embryo’s development were based on a ten-month gestational model. This particular model proved especially influential in women’s medicine during the medieval and late medieval periods in China, and in

6 *Guanzi* 39, 815–816; embryonic development is described as follows: 咀者何？曰五味。五味者何，曰五藏。酸主脾，鹹主肺，辛主腎，苦主肝，甘主心。五藏已具，而後生肉。脾生膈，肺生骨，腎生腦，肝生革，心生肉。五肉已具，而後發為九竅：脾發為鼻，肝發為目，腎發為耳，肺發為竅，五月而成，十月而生。

7 The following is slightly modified from Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 379–380: “In the third month it [the embryo] first becomes suet, and has the appearance of a gourd. During this time it does not yet have a fixed configuration, and if exposed to things it transforms. For this reason lords, sires, and great men must not employ dwarves. Do not observe monkeys. [...] In the sixth month Metal is bestowed on it, and muscle first forms. Exercise; go out to wander in the countryside; frequently observe running dogs and horses. You must eat without [these meats].” For more on the *Taichan shu*, see Harper 1998, 27–28 and 372–384; see also Li Jianmin 李建民, “Mawangdui Hanmu boshu ‘Yu zang mai bao tu’ jian zheng 馬王堆漢墓帛書「禹藏埋胞圖」箋證,” *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 65.4 (1994): 725–832. The *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor), a foundational canon of Chinese medical knowledge, is surprisingly mute on the topic of gestation; see *Huangdi neijing Suwen* 素問 70 for a rare mention of the subject.

8 This also applies to other early medical sources on gestation and related topics; see, for instance, the *Jingui yaolie* 金匱要略 (Essentials of the Golden Casket) by Zhang Ji 張機 (Zhang Zhongjing 張仲景) from the Eastern Han (25–220 CE), which discusses gestation, albeit in less detail than the *Taichan shu* and with more focus on the mother than the embryo; see Sabine Wilms, “The Transmission of Medical Knowledge on ‘Nurturing the Fetus’ in Early China,” *Asian Medicine* 1.2 (2005): 276–314, for this and other sources on pregnancy in early China.



medieval Japan.<sup>9</sup> Even centuries later, reformulations of the ten-month model strayed little from the original wording of the *Taichan shu*, maintaining a more or less mechanistic or literalist tone with respect to the transformative processes that define life in utero.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, the more speculative instances of embryological discourse, such as the one found in the earlier example from *Guanzi*, went beyond merely assigning cosmological value to reproduction. They stood out by infusing procreation with a pronounced cosmogonic dynamic, thereby, paving the way for soteriological interpretations. These were made possible by relating the human body (more precisely, its physiology) to the cosmos. From this viewpoint, gestation and parturition were considered cosmic events and the principles governing them could also be harnessed to actively extend one's life or otherwise augment it.

The embryology in the “Jingshen 精神” (“Essence and Spirit”) chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (139 BCE) further develops the ties between cosmology and procreation first alluded to in the *Guanzi*. The text lays out the embryo's developmental benchmarks during the ten months of gestation (in the fourth month the flesh forms; in the fifth, muscles form; in the sixth, bones form,

9 Although they do not specifically address embryology, the sources on women's medicine discussed in the special issue of *Nan Nü* 7.2 (2005) on “Medicine for Women in Imperial China,” Angela K. Leung ed., are enlightening with respect to knowledge surrounding reproductive functions and their associated medical issues; see especially Robin D.S. Yates' and Jen-Der Lee's contributions, “Medicine for Women in Early China: A Preliminary Survey,” 2005, 127–181, and “Childbirth in Early Imperial China,” 2005, 216–286, respectively. Jen-Der Lee's article, in particular, casts light on the process of transmission and further adaptation of Sui and Tang medical knowledge in Heian (905–1185) Japan, as witnessed in the *Ishinpō* 醫心方 (The Essentials of Medicine, c. 984), compiled by the court physician Tanba no Yasuyori 丹波康賴 (912–995). This source is discussed below.

10 See, for instance, the parallels in the “Renzen hou 妊娠候” (“Inquiries on Getting Pregnant”) chapter of the *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 諸病源候論 (Treatise on the Origins and Symptoms of Assorted Maladies) and the “Xu Zhicai zhuyue yangtai fang 徐之才逐月養胎方” (“Xu Zhicai's Monthly Recipes for Nourishing the Embryo”) section of the *Qianjing yaofang* 千金要方 (Essential Methods Worth A Thousand Ounces of Gold); see Harper 1998, 27–28, where he states that the embryology from the *Book on the Embryo and Childbirth* is “clearly the textual antecedent of the medieval accounts of gestation.” See also *Mawangdui Han mu boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985) 4.140–141; another example of an embryology directly inherited from the *Taichan shu* is the *Waitai miyaofang* 外台秘要方 (Arcane Essentials Collected by a Regional Censor) compiled by Wang Tao 王燾 (670?–755); this source is briefly examined by Jessey J.C. Choo, in “That ‘Fatty Lump’: Discourses on the Fetus, Fetal Development, and Filial Piety in China before the Eleventh Century CE,” *Nan Nü* 14 (2012): 191–194; Choo 2012, 215–219, also provides a translation of the text's embryology along with relevant prescriptions.

etc.).<sup>11</sup> The embryology is prefaced by the famous passage on the genesis of the cosmos from chapter 42 of the *Laozi Daode jing* 老子道德經 (Laozi's Book of the Way and Virtue): "The One generates Two. The Two generate Three. The Three generate the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry Yin and hold Yang. Infused with *qi* 氣, they are in harmony."<sup>12</sup> The "Jingshen" chapter then explains that after the seventh month, when the embryo has achieved the full form of the human body, the five viscera (*wuzang*) have coalesced.<sup>13</sup> They are correlated with the five "external organs" of the face (eyes, nose, mouth, tongue, and ears).<sup>14</sup> These and other body parts are then explicitly connected to cosmological elements, which double as cosmogonic elements as well – ones that mark stages in the development of the world and the progressive appearance of its components. Thus, the embryo's round head is fashioned in the shape of Heaven, its feet in that of Earth. Just as the cosmos has four seasons, Five Agents (*wuxing*), Nine Divisions (*jiujiu* 九解), and 366 days, the human body has four limbs, five organs, nine orifices, and 366 joints. The ears and eyes are likened to sun and moon, blood and *qi* to wind and rain. Finally, the five viscera are correlated with cosmic/natural elements: the gallbladder is related to clouds, lungs to air, liver to wind, kidneys to rain, the spleen to thunder. Exceptionally, in this account of the five viscera, the heart is absent, seemingly replaced by the gallbladder (*dan* 膽).

Nonetheless, the "heart" (*xin* 心) is mentioned in the very next line, where it is identified as the ruler (*zhu* 主), a figure that is resolutely as cosmological as

11 *Huainanzi* 7.2; *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋, 505–506: "Therefore, it is said: In the first month, there is suet; in the second month, there is a meaty lump; in the third month, there is an embryo; in the fourth month, there is flesh; in the fifth month, there are muscles; in the sixth month, there are bones; in the seventh month, it is complete; in the eighth month, it moves; in the ninth month, it is restless; in the tenth month, it is born." 故曰一月而膏, 二月而肤, 三月而胎, 四月而肌, 五月而筋, 六月而骨, 七月而成, 八月而動, 九月而躁, 十月而生。Cf. the translation by John Major et al., *The Huainanzi: A guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press., 2010), 241–242; see also Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), n. 16, 101.

12 道生一。一生二。二生三。三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽, 沖氣以為和; *Laozi Daode jing* 42; see also *Huainanzi* 7.2, 505.

13 In the *Guanzi* embryology, the five viscera are formed at the end of the fifth month.

14 The *Wenzi* 文子 3; *Wenzi shuyi* 文子疏義, 115–116, reproduces the embryological lines from the *Huainanzi*. There are, however, a number of notable lacunae and some of the correspondences – for example, between "internal" five viscera and their "external" counterparts – do not agree with the earlier *Huainanzi* passage.

he is “human” by virtue of constituting the extension of Heaven’s will or the incarnation of the principles of the Dao 道.<sup>15</sup> This last image, of the heart as a ruler, is repeated throughout the “Essence and Spirit” chapter of the *Huainanzi*.<sup>16</sup> Its basic message is one of self-cultivation, expounding that practitioners are to govern themselves according to cosmic principles just as the king governs the kingdom, and likewise, as the heart “governs” the body.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the embryological passage serves to highlight the fact that the human body is a cosmic body from its earliest stage of development, and to stress the extent to which it can be ordered on the basis of cosmic norms from a central authority within the body itself.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis here is on prolonging life by disciplining all extremes in behaviour, activity, and emotion so that the essence (*jing* 精) and spirit (*shen* 神) which give their name to the chapter, are preserved. Although the genesis of the cosmos/life is not directly tied to the self-cultivation practice that the *Huainanzi* describes, the fact that they cohabit in the same section of the text is suggestive enough, heralding future developments in China and Japan that are discussed in the chapters of this volume.

15 *Huainanzi* 7.2, 506–508.

16 For example, in *Huainanzi* 7.6, 520: 故心者，形之主也；而神者，心之寶也； or elsewhere, in chapter 8, for instance.

17 The contemplative focus on the heart – a point of the body in which cosmic principles such as essence and spirit were said to manifest – in early self-cultivation practices is not unique to the *Huainanzi*; the *Guanzi*, for instance, in its chapter on the “Neiye 內業” (“Inner Work”), lengthily disserts on the virtues of achieving the Dao through regulating the heart; see *Guanzi* 49, 935: 修心靜音 [意]，道乃可得。

18 Again, equanimity or more literally “fixing the heart in its center” (*ding xin zai zhong* 定心在中), is the aim of the “inner work”; once this is achieved, according to *Guanzi* 49, 937: “[T]he ears and eyes will perceive clearly, the four limbs will be firm, and one may become the abode of essence [...]. When [this essence] flows between Heaven and Earth, it is called manes and gods, when it is stored in the center of your chest, it is called sage.” / “... 耳目聰明，四枝堅固，可以為精舍 [...], 流於天地之間，謂之鬼神，藏於胸中，謂之聖人。” In the same “Water and Earth” chapter, which addresses embryology, the *Guanzi* 39, 832, also hints at another contemplation practice. This contemplation relies on Water to rectify (*zheng* 正) the heart of the individuals and thereby transform or “change (*yi* 易) the hearts of the people: 故水一則人心正，水清則民心易，一則欲不污，民心易則行無邪。是以聖人之治於世也。” This reflects the important cosmological and cosmogonic role that water played in early Chinese thought – a role notably confirmed in the “Taiyi shengshui 太一生水” (“Taiyi “Begets Water”) manuscript excavated from Guodian 郭店 (ca. 300 BCE); see Steavu, “Cosmos, Body, and Gestation in Taoist Meditation,” in the present volume, pp. 126–127.

## 2 Embryologies in Early Indian and Buddhist Materials

Early Indian texts constitute yet another important group of sources on conception and embryological development that impacted the religious traditions of East Asia. The ideas described in a variety of Indian sources dating from the first centuries of the Common Era may have made their way to East Asia as part of a long-term exchange that took place between the Indian subcontinent, Southeast, Central Asia, and East Asia during the first millennium. Although selectively modified or adapted and often fragmentary in their transmissions or translations, these early ideas on the origins of life can also be seen as important precursors to a number of religious writings, imagery, and practices in both China and Japan.

Recent studies have established that elaborate accounts of conception and gestation were already present in early Jain (c. 150 CE), Puranic (300–500 CE), and Āyurvedic sources.<sup>19</sup> For example, Hara Minoru has analysed the Puranic descriptions of intrauterine life that exhibited notions similar to those encountered in the later Indian and Buddhist treatises discussed below. Such descriptions focused on the extreme discomfort experienced by the embryo in the womb, and provided terms for different stages of embryonic development such as *kalala*(ṃ) (embryo-initiation), *budbuda/arbudaṃ* (after 27 days), *ghana* (after 37 days), *peśī* (after 47 days) and *praśakha* (after 57 days, that is,

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19 These sources were initially oral and were committed to writing considerably later. One of the notable examples in these early Indian texts is the *Garbhopaniṣad* (Upaniṣad of the Embryo; ca. 800–200 BCE). See, for example, Lakshmi Kapani, “Upaniṣad of the Embryo” and “Note on the *Garbha upaniṣad*,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Three*, Michel Feher, ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 176–197. See also the comparative discussion of embryological development and death in the *Mahābhārata* (ca. 400 CE, esp. the *Anugītā*, *MhB* 14.17–18) and the medical compendia, the *Caraka Saṃhitā* and *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, in Frederick M. Smith, “Narrativity and Empiricism in Classical Indian Accounts of Birth and Death: The *Mahābhārata* and the *Saṃhitās* of *Caraka* and *Suśruta*,” *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007): 85–102. Some of these texts are discussed in Mitchell Weiss, “*Caraka Saṃhitā* on the Doctrine of Karma,” in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, Wendy Doniger, ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1980), 90–115; Robert Kritzer, “Life in the Womb: Conception and Gestation in Buddhist Scripture and Classical Indian Medical Literature,” in Law and Sasson 2009; also, Frances Garrett 2008. A useful overview can be found in Amy Paris Langenberg, “‘Like Worms Falling from a Foul-Smelling Sore’: The Buddhist Rhetoric of Childbirth in an Early Mahāyāna *Sūtra*,” PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2008, 41–45.

when the external form and internal organs are complete). In the Puranic source analysed by Hara these terms appear to be not yet standardised.<sup>20</sup>

Āyurvedic texts like the *Caraka Saṃhitā* (Compendium of Charaka) and *Suśruta Saṃhitā* (Compendium of Sushruta) were largely based on the external observations of the female body by male physicians. However, according to Martha Ann Selby, they also acknowledged oral transmissions by “accomplished women,” that is, those who had given birth and were thus qualified to describe the internal sensations they had experienced during pregnancy.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, in its section on the body (*śārīra-sthāna*) and in its chapter on birth sutras (*jāti sūtrīyam*), offers detailed instructions for a woman and a man “who have viable semen, blood, and womb.”<sup>22</sup> In large part, the descriptions of the embryo’s growth in these medical texts were set within a prescriptive narrative that made recommendations on how to conceive and carry to term the desired offspring, namely “daughters and sons with good qualities.”<sup>23</sup> Scholars of Sanskrit literature have noted that although the early Āyurvedic texts exhibited their familiarity with the notions of karma and dependent origination,<sup>24</sup> such concepts remained distinct, except for brief references, from the topic of spiritual perfection and enlightenment.

The precise dating of these early medical compendia remains uncertain. Some parts of the *Caraka Saṃhitā* may be traced back to the second century CE, while the earliest components of the *Suśruta Saṃhitā* date to a hundred years later; however, both were the subject of substantial further editions.<sup>25</sup>

20 Hara Minoru, “A Note on the Buddha’s Birth Story,” in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme: mélanges offerts à Mgr. Étienne Lamotte* (Louvain: Publications de l’Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 23, 1980), 148–149. Cited and discussed in Vanessa Sasson, “A Womb with a View: The Buddha’s Final Fetal Experience,” in Law and Sasson 2009, 64. Hara has noted that disparate terms for the different stages of embryonic development occur in *Mārkaṇḍeya purāna*, *Garbhopaniṣad*, *Agni purāna* and several other received texts. Hara Minoru 原美, “Buttan densetsu no haikai 仏誕伝説の背景,” *Komazawa daigaku bukkyō gakubu ronshū* 駒沢大学仏教学部論集 26: 344–339 (opposite pagination). Some of these texts are also analysed in Kritzer 2009, 74–77.

21 Martha Ann Selby, “Narratives of Conception, Gestation, and Labour in Sanskrit Āyurvedic Sources,” *Asian Medicine* 1.2: 256–257, and 270–273.

22 Selby 2005: 259.

23 Ibid., 257–259.

24 Weiss 1980, 90–115; see also the discussion of the role of karma in the embryological accounts from the *Mahābhārata* (esp. the *Anugītā*, *MhB* 14.17–18) in Smith 2007, 91.

25 Selby 2005: 254–255, citing Dominic Wujastyk, *The Roots of Āyurveda* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3–5, 63–64, and Kenneth Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13–17, and 21–23.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding their dating and the itineraries of their circulation, a number of notions encountered in Āyurvedic and other early Indic sources are echoed in East Asian materials as well. Among these we may cite the understanding of conception as resulting from the merging of two sexual fluids, “red” and “white,” that of menstrual blood of women and the semen of men.<sup>26</sup> The *Caraka Saṃhitā* explains that “sperm and blood come together and settle in the womb; the *jīva* (living entity) descends and, following conjunction with *sattva* (mental character), it produces the *garbha* (embryo).”<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, it noted that the embryo receives some of its constitutive elements and organs from the mother (namely, blood, flesh, fat, umbilicus, heart, lungs, liver, spleen, kidneys, bladder, and other gastrointestinal organs) and others from the father (namely, hair, beard, nails, teeth, bones, blood vessels, sinews, and semen).<sup>28</sup>

Indian Buddhist sources are also remarkably detailed on the topics of conception, embryological development, and labour because of how they fit in with their arguments concerning pain, the cycle or rebirth, and the generation of karmic indebtedness. Far from positing procreation and gestation as potential channels or models for salvation, early Buddhist materials rely on literal and vivid descriptions of biological processes – most of them reflecting medical Āyurvedic knowledge – to paint pregnancy and birth as a prime sources of suffering.

In texts from the earliest Buddhist scriptural corpus, the Pāli canon, “embryo-initiation” or *kalala*(ṃ), the first of the five stages of intrauterine

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A more detailed analysis of the issues in dating these texts can be found in Jan G. Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999–2002); and Peter Rahul Das, *The Origins of the Life of a Human Being: Conception and the Female According to Ancient Indian Medical and Sexological Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003).

26 In early Indian thought, these colours were linked to the archetypal binary pair of *agni* (fire) and *soma* (cooling, watery substance). Das 2003, 487–495; Wujastyk 2003, 5–6, 347–370; also, Selby 2005: 260–261.

27 The Sanskrit term *garbha* could be interpreted both as “embryo” and “womb.” Such is the case with the embryological descriptions in the Pāli canon. See, for example, Mathieu Boisvert’s discussion of the Pāli term *gabbha* (an equivalent of the Sanskrit term *garbha*), which he interpreted both as a “living being that grows in the womb, and the receptacle where this being dwells.” However, in the Vinaya and other Pāli sources, the *gabbha* is seen as an independent entity; it does not belong to the mother, but rather has its own autonomy. Boisvert 2000, 302–303.

28 *Caraka Saṃhitā* 4.3.2–3, Weiss 1980, 103–104.

development according to Puranic and Āyurvedic sources, takes on a different meaning. There, the term *kalala(m)*, or “embryo,” seems to denote ovulation and thus heightened fertility in a woman and its physiological manifestation (an ovule?); in other instances, it describes that which is contained within the egg of a hen (*aṇḍa*).<sup>29</sup> In the story of Nāgasena and King Milinda from the *Milindapañha* (Questions of Milinda), the two recount and discuss the story of a nun who became pregnant by placing the soiled robe of the monk into her genitals:

[W]hen that nun was in season, when her *kalala* was established, when the motion of her blood was cut [her menses terminated], when her condition was laid down, she seized the semen and placed it in that *kalala*; because of this, she became pregnant.<sup>30</sup>

The Pāli *sutta* literature also classified the periods of gestation into five distinct stages. For example, Mathieu Boisvert notes that the Theravādin scriptures such as *Yakkhasaṃyuttaṃ*, *Kathāvatthu*, and *Mahāniddeśa* all refer to the stages of *kalala*, *budbuda*, *ghana*, *peśī*, and *praśakha*.<sup>31</sup> In these sources, the entire period of gestation is described as lasting approximately forty-two weeks; the first four stages have a duration of seven days each, whereas the fifth stage, in which the embryo takes on a distinct human form with its five extremities (head, two hands, and two feet), was considered to be thirty-eight weeks long.

The early Buddhist rhetoric of childbirth and intrauterine development was far from positive; the very root of suffering was to be found in the descent of a being into the womb. In his discussion of the Theravāda sources, Boisvert cites a passage from the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path to Purification). The treatise is attributed to Buddhaghosa, the fifth-century Indian commentator and scholar, who translated a number of Sinhalese commentaries into Pāli.

29 *Milindapañha*, no. 49, cited in Boisvert 2000, 308.

30 *Milindapañha*, no. 125, English translation by Thomas William Rhys Davids, *Milinda's Questions* (London: Sacred Books of the East, 1982 [1890, 1894]), cited in Boisvert 2000, 307.

31 Boisvert 2000, 307–308, citing the respective English translations of the first two aforementioned texts by T.W. Rhys Davids 1982, 263; and Shwe Hsang Aung and Caroline A.F. Rhys Davids, *Points of Controversy (Kathāvatthu)* (London: Pali Text Society, 1979 [1915]), 283–284.

When this being is born, he is not born inside a blue, or red, or white lotus, but on the contrary, like a worm in rotting fish, rotting dough, cess-pools, he is born in the belly [...], which is very cramped, quite dark, pervaded by very fetid draughts redolent of various smells of ordure, and exceptionally loathsome. And on being reborn there, for ten months he undergoes excessive suffering, being cooked like a pudding in a bag by the heat produced by the mother's womb, and steamed like a dumpling of dough, with no bending, stretching, and so on. So this, firstly, is the suffering rooted in the descent into the womb.<sup>32</sup>

Such passages from Pāli sources, some of which survived and were translated into Sanskrit as well as into Chinese and Tibetan, aimed primarily to convey the suffering of the embryo and the misery of being subjected to a painful birth and subsequent reincarnations: they did not focus on the theme of self-cultivation.<sup>33</sup> Most of these descriptions underlined the defiled nature of the human body and the discomfort of the new sentient being conceived in the womb, emphasising the point that physical bodies are impediments to liberation.<sup>34</sup>

32 Modified from Boisvert 2000, 309. He is citing the English translation by Bhikku Ñāṇamoli, *Path to Purification: Visuddhimagga* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975), 569.

33 A separate tradition of funerary cults ensuring a successful rebirth and based on the Theravādin traditions had developed in Cambodia, Laos, and northern Thailand. Justin McDaniel has noted that these funerary cults focus on the symbolic generation of the foetus destined for the next rebirth and has traced their evolution from the twelfth-century Abhidamma commentary and ritual manuals dating from the sixteenth century to modern times. Within this practice, the Pāli syllables are connected to the sense organs and parts of the body and mind, as explained in the Abhidamma teachings. In the 1970s, the French anthropologist François Bizot also observed and described a Cambodian ritual in which a cave is ritually constructed as a womb, and different parts of the body of the deceased are associated with different Pāli syllables. See Justin McDaniel, "Philosophical Embryology: Buddhist Texts and the Ritual Construction of a Fetus," in Law and Sasson 2009, 97–101, citing François Bizot and François LaGirarde, *La pureté par les mots* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1996), 44; for a detailed overview of the commentary concerning the generation of an embryo for soteriological purposes on the basis of the thirty-eight-week embryological model described in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, see François Bizot, *Le figuier à cinq branches. Recherche sur le bouddhisme khmer* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1976), 111–142.

34 Robert Kritzer, "Childbirth and the Mother's Body in the *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya* and Related Texts," in *Indo tetsugaku bukkyō shisō ronshū: Mikogami Eshō kyōju shōju kinen ronshū* インド哲学仏教思想論集：神子上恵生教授頌寿記念論集, Mikogami



One of the earliest Buddhist scriptures to contain a comprehensive description of embryological development is the *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra* (Scripture on Entering the Womb), recently studied by Robert Kritzer. Most likely produced in the early centuries of the first millennium within the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra schools of northwest India, it was translated into Chinese in the late third to early fourth century.<sup>35</sup> More attention will be devoted to this source in the subsequent section, but for now we may note that the text contains a detailed description of conception, gestation, birth, and death, discussing them from the perspective of the Buddhist teachings circulating in India at the time.<sup>36</sup> Of particular interest are elaborations on the mechanism of rebirth, the notion of an “intermediate being” (*antarābhava*) that animates the embryo-to-be at the moment of its conception and during the subsequent thirty-eight-week gestation cycle, as well as the division of this cycle into five major stages of embryological development (referred to above).<sup>37</sup>

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Eshō kyōju shōju kinen ronshū kankōkai 神子上恵生教授頌寿記念論集刊行會, eds. (Kyoto: Nagata bunshodō, 2004), 1095–96. On Tibetan sources, see Garrett 2008, especially 106–109. This perspective developed against the background of earlier attitudes toward birth. See Sasson 2009, 63–64 for a view of how these informed Buddhaghosa and Vasubandhu’s perspectives (mentioned below). Similarly, Robert Kritzer discusses the Indian background to the *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra*. See his *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra* (The *Sūtra* on Entry into the Womb), *Studia Philologica Buddhica, Monograph Series xxxi* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2014), 4, 20–21, and 51–54. We warmly thank Robert Kritzer for sharing his translation of this scripture in August 2014.

35 This text survives in Chinese recensions, the principal one being the *Foshuo baotai jing* (*T.* 317); some of these are examined below. A complete list of different Chinese translations can be found in Kritzer 2009: 77. Elsewhere, Kritzer notes that although the Sanskrit original of this sutra has not survived, it was evidently important enough to have been quoted in the early Sarvāstivāda Abhidamma texts. As demonstrated by Frances Garrett’s 2008 study, this sutra also proved a major template for medical embryological accounts in Tibet. Citing an unpublished conference paper by Yamabe Nobuyoshi 山辺能宜, “On the School Affiliation of An Shigao: Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra,” (international workshop, “The Works of An Shigao,” Leiden, 19–20 Dec. 1996), Kritzer 2014, 3–4, has suggested that this sutra most likely predated many of the major philosophical Buddhist treatises and that it was already in circulation at least by the middle of the second century. The research by Yamabe and Kritzer posits that the Indian scholar Saṃgharakṣa may have relied on an earlier version of this scripture when compiling his philosophical treatise, the *Yogacārābhūmi* (ca. first half of the second century), which discussed the universal cosmologies, the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, and the origins of life.

36 Kritzer 2009, 82–87, compares the accounts of gestation from the *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra* and *Caraka Saṃhitā*.

37 The thirty-eight-week gestation and the five stages are described in section 18 of the sutra. Kritzer 2014, 51–54; the terms describing the five stages that the embryo undergoes are

Much like the classical Chinese sources mentioned above, early Buddhist texts also had to address the critical issue of how the life of a human being springs forth. To this end, they employed several terms to indicate the different elements that could represent a vehicle for karma and descend into the womb, thus causing the embryo to congeal. One of them is the Sanskrit word *vijñāna*, which could be translated variously as “consciousness,” “mind,” or “life force.” This term had a complex philosophical history in India and was further entwined with major Buddhist doctrines, such as “dependent arising” (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the notions of the “five aggregates” (*skandhas*), until it emerged as the term *ālāyavijñāna* (Ch. *alāiye shi* 阿賴耶識; Jp. *arāyashiki*). In Chinese, this term was rendered as *zangshi* 藏識 (Jp. *zōshiki*), or “storehouse consciousness,” referring to the container or storehouse of latent residues of the previous actions and mind processes (that is, the base or seed consciousness).<sup>38</sup> The *Yogacārabhūmi śāstra* (Treatise on the Stages of Yoga), edited by Saṃgharakṣa, identifies this notion as the consciousness that manifests itself at the moment of conception.<sup>39</sup> According to this treatise, such consciousness

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mentioned again in section 31, *ibid.*, 91 and 96. Kritzer has addressed the more complex aspects of this argument in his article “*Garbhāvākṛāntau* (‘In the *Garbhāvākṛānti*): Quotations from the *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra* in the Abhidharma Literature and the *Yogacārabhūmi*,” in *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogacārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, Ulrich Timme Kragh, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 738–771. Yamabe Nobuyoshi has recently studied the embryological terms and descriptions occurring in different recensions of the *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra*, the Abhidharmic texts, the *Yogacārabhūmi*, and their respective Chinese translations; see his article “Parallel Passages between *Manobhūmi* and the *Yogacārabhūmi* of Saṃgharakṣa,” in the same volume, Kragh 2013, 596–737; especially the exhaustive comparative table of terms in the Appendix, 606–733.

38 On this concept of *ālāyavijñāna*, see the classic study by Lambert Schmithausen, *Ālāyavijñāna: On the Origin and Early Development of the Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy* (Tokyo: the International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987), 7. More recently, the complex history of this term and its interpretation has become once again highlighted in the aforementioned exhaustive volume on the *Yogacārabhūmi* edited by Ulrich Kragh. See, for instance, an essay by William S. Waldron, “*Ālayavijñāna* as Keystone Dharma: the *Ālāya* Treatise of the *Yogacārabhūmi*,” in Kragh 2013, 922–937.

39 Scholars of early Indian philosophy and Buddhist Studies point out that the *Yogacārabhūmi* is a composite production and thus was unlikely to have been accomplished by one person; see, for example, Hartmut Buescher, “Distinguishing the Two Vasubandhus, the Bhāṣyakāra and the Kośakāra, as Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda Authors,” in *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners*, Ulrich Timme Kragh, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 368–397.

animated the embryo and kept it growing. Along with life force and bodily heat, it also kept the body alive, withdrawing from it only at the moment of death.<sup>40</sup> In this scripture, composed in India around 300–350 CE and brought to China in the seventh century by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), *ālāyavijñāna* was understood as the consciousness that had the ability to penetrate the most minute coagulation of matter (in this case, the mixture of father’s semen and mother’s blood) and anchor itself within the arising mass of congealing embryo.<sup>41</sup> Taken as the very basic constituent of the embryo that has arisen to be, it was also understood as “mind containing all seeds/*bīja* [of past actions],” which had the potential to act as a prerequisite for the embryonic state of the body and a vehicle ensuring some continuity of human personality:

When in the parents [who have become more and more] impassioned [while making love] sexual passion reaches the [most] vehement state, finally... a drop of semen [in the father] and [a drop of] blood [in the mother]... get mixed in the mother’s womb and form a film, having become one single lump, just like boiled milk when cooling down [forms a film]. Into this [congealing mixture of blood and semen] merges that

40 Schmithausen points out that canonical Indian Buddhist sources, such as *Dirgha Nikāya* 11: 63, state that if the mind (*vijñāna*) “did not enter the mother’s womb, the *nāmarūpa* [(lit. “mind and matter,” i.e., the “animated matter,” embryo)] would not be able to coalesce, or the father’s semen and the mother’s blood would not be able to coalesce with the mind, so as to become the proto-embryo (*kalala*).” This statement is also repeated in the *Yogacārabhūmi*. Schmithausen 1987, 37, n. 238–239. Moreover, at death, this process, when the body is said to grow cold part by part, the *vijñāna* gradually withdraws, so this process of “gestation” happens in reverse. Schmithausen 1987, 39–40; see also the more recent analysis of this term and its links to the late Sarvastivāda treatise *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya* by Vasubandhu and the *Yogacārabhūmi* by Robert Kritzer, “The four ways of entering the womb (*garbhāvakrānti*),” *Bukkyō Bunka* 仏教文化 10 (2000): 1–41; and Waldron 2013.

41 There are two Chinese translations for this text, namely the *Xiuxing daodi jing* 修行道地經 (Sutra on Practicing the Grounds of the [Buddhist] Path; *T.* 606), translated by Dharmarakṣa (the translator of another canonical embryology; see below) in 284, and the *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 (Treatise on the Stages of Yoga; Sk. *Yogacārabhūmi śāstra*; Jp. *Yoga shiji ron*, *T.* 1579), translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) around 647; compare *Daodi jing* (Sutra on the Grounds of the [Buddhist] Path; *T.* 607) 232a–235b to *Xiuxing daodi jing* 1.183c–189a; see also Paul Demiéville, “La *Yogacārabhūmi* de Saṅgharākṣa,” *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 44.2 (1951); and the very useful translation of the embryology from the *Xiuxing daodi jing* 1.187a–187c in Choo 2012, 219–221; for more on the Chinese *Yogacārabhūmi śāstra*, see below.

*ālāyavijñāna* Containing All Seeds...appropriating the basis [of personal existence]. ... Together with that lump of semen and blood [which has formed a film], the [being of the] intermediate state...ceases to exist. Simultaneously with its cessation, there arises, by virtue of that same Mind Containing All Seeds, another lump of semen and blood, which is similar to the [preceding one but] is mixed with the gross elements of the subtle-sense faculties... (and is thus a living body). At this stage one speaks of mind being [re-]established [in a new basis-of-existence], and of Linking Up having taken place. This is the state of *kalala*.<sup>42</sup>

This Yogācāra version of conception also posited that when the father and mother have sexual intercourse, and their reproductive fluids merge, their “intermediate beings” (*antarābhava*) destined for rebirth also merge to give rise to an embryo in its germinal stage of *kalala*. This and the other four primary stages of embryonic gestation referred to above were also described by Vasubandhu (ca. fourth-fifth century CE) in the “Lokanirdeśa,” the third chapter of his *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya*.<sup>43</sup> However, in this source, the “intermediate being” is described as having the dimensions of a child five or six years old, already fully developed.<sup>44</sup> Robert Kritzer has noted that Vasubandhu may have also relied on an earlier version of the *Garbhāvākraṅti sūtra*, briefly discussed

42 The *Manobhūmi* chapter of the “Basic Section” of *Yogacārābhūmi*. Translation is from Schmithausen, 1987: 127–28. Brackets appear in the original translation. The Tibetan Buddhist traditions also have comparable accounts. For a detailed investigation, see Frances Garrett, “Ordering Human Growth in Tibetan Medical and Religious Embryologies,” in *Textual Healing: Essays on Medieval and Early Modern Medicine*, Elizabeth Lane Furdell, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 31–52; Garrett’s 2008 monograph as well as her article, “Tibetan Buddhist narratives of the forces of creation,” in Law and Sasson 2009, 107–120.

43 For example, Vasubandhu discussed the first embryonic stage of *kalala* in the section focusing on the basis for the arising of faculties of new sentient beings that are being conceived; see Gelong Lodrö Sangpo, *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its Commentary*, translated into French by Louis de La Vallée Poussin (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012), vol. 2, Chapter 3, 971–972 and 977. Vasubandhu also dedicated much space to debating the various theoretical expositions regarding the state of intermediate existence (also termed *antarābhava*), which, according to the Sarvāstivādin’ position “began at the place where death takes place”; see *ibid.*, 946, 957–58.

44 See Sangpo 2012, 965. From such accounts, some have fathomed a guess that such a being could have been conceptualised in similarity or in comparison to a homunculus as is outlined in non-Buddhist Indic sources; see Langenberg 2008, 71–74.

above.<sup>45</sup> His treatise, considered an explication of the principle tenets of Buddhist philosophy, was studied at major Buddhist institutions and thus may have been yet another important source of the embryological theories and metaphors that made an imprint on East Asian religious sources.<sup>46</sup>

The Sanskrit term for “intermediate being,” *antarābhava*, was rendered *zhongyou* 中有 (Jp. *chūū*) in the Chinese translation of the *Yogacārabhūmi śāstra*, thus denoting the intermediate (*zhong* 中) state in which one abides immediately after death and before re-entering existence (*you* 有), that is, being reincarnated into one’s next life.<sup>47</sup> The concept of “intermediate being,” because of its close associations with the notion of being “unborn” (Ch. *busheng* 不生, Jp. *pushō*), was critical to Buddhist understandings of conception, gestation, karmic imprint, and rebirth in East Asia.

To be sure, the Chinese translations of the *Garbhāvākraṅti sūtra*, the *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya* and the *Yogacārabhūmi śāstra* introduced Indian Buddhist views of conception and embryonic development to Chinese readers. These views may have had an impact on the Chinese medical traditions. However, these texts, although influential for their time, had by the Tang dynasty been overshadowed by indigenous Chinese Buddhist developments and come to be regarded as rather peripheral in the grand scheme of Buddhist teachings.<sup>48</sup>

45 This is particularly noticeable in the passage on the removal of a dead foetus in what Kritzer has identified as one of the surviving Sanskrit fragments in the *Garbhāvākraṅti sūtra*. Kritzer 2013, 755–758, and Kritzer 2014, 21 and 73.

46 This treatise reflects a tradition which emerged as an offshoot of the Indian Sarvāstivāda school; it is usually referred to simply as *Jushe lun* 俱舍論 in Chinese, or *Kusharon* in Japanese. There are two Chinese translations, both consisting of nine chapters. *Apidamo jushe lun* was translated between 563–567 by Paramārtha 真諦 (T. 1559); another version entitled *Apidamo jushe shilun* 阿毘達磨俱舍釋論 was translated between 651 and 654 by Xuanzang 玄奘 (T. 1558). These translations will be again mentioned shortly. On the five stages of the embryo in Vasubandhu’s treatise, see Sangpo 2012, 977; briefly discussed in Hara 1996, 340–339, and Yamabe 2013, Appendix. See also the discussion of these sources in Lucia Dolce’s contribution, “The Embryonic Generation of the Perfect Body,” in the present volume.

47 See, for example, *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論, T. 1579, especially lines 282a16–b16. Yet another Chinese term, *zhongyin* 中陰, was used in the Chinese translation of the *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya*, T. 1559, line 198b28; see also, Andrea Bareau, “Chuu,” *Hōbōgūrin* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1927), 5.560. For more on the intermediate being, see also Kritzer 2014, 44–45.

48 Some of the relevant historical developments have been highlighted by Yoshimura Makoto 吉村誠, “The Weishi School and the Buddha-Nature Debate in the Early Tang Dynasty,” in *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogacārabhūmi Treatise*

Nonetheless, much of their embryological imagery acquired particular significance later, in the esoteric Buddhist discourses of medieval Japan.<sup>49</sup>

### 3 Buddhist Embryologies in China

A handful of Chinese Buddhist scriptures also furnish thorough expositions of embryological development. The majority of them are amended translations of Indian originals; only a few are apocryphal.<sup>50</sup> But all of them very much accord with the tenor of their Pāli and Sanskrit counterparts: descriptions are literal and function as props for broaching broader theological questions related to suffering, rebirth, and karmic accretion. Embryologies in Chinese Buddhist sources are also deployed in arguments destined to underscore the importance of filial piety and gratitude that children should extend to their mothers for bearing them.<sup>51</sup> They are generally embedded in a narrative that deplores the toll that carrying, giving birth to, and nursing a child takes on the mother, in addition to suffering the impurities of conception, gestation, and parturition. Given the context, descriptions of the processes that both mother

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*and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, Ulrich Timme Kragh, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 1234–53.

- 49 Embryological motifs in Japanese Buddhist sources were first noted in Sanford 1997. Subsequently, these motifs, which also appeared in selected medieval Shintō texts were further analysed by Bernard Faure, “Japanese Tantra, the Tachikawa-ryū, and Ryōbu Shintō,” in *Tantra in Practice*, David Gordon White, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 551–556; and Lucia Dolce, “Duality and the Kami: The Ritual Iconography and Visual Constructions of Medieval Shinto,” in the special issue on “Re-thinking Medieval Shintō,” Bernard Faure, Michael Como, and Iyanaga Nobumi, eds., *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* (2006–2007), 140–143. See also their respective essays in the present volume.
- 50 Silvie Hureau 2009, 742–743, notes that the transmission and appropriation of Buddhist scriptures in China was not an entirely straightforward process, since the Chinese “accepted certain ideas and refused the others.” Chinese Buddhist masters who worked with foreign monks on translations from Sanskrit and from other languages validated scriptures according to their own culturally and historically contingent categories to distinguish between “authentic” and “spurious” scriptures. As highlighted in the next section, such processes of internal cultural signification continued in the context of early and medieval Japan.
- 51 The topic of filial piety and the agency of parents in the context of pre-1100 Chinese and Indic Buddhist sources dealing with embryological development has recently been discussed in Choo 2012. Citing the previous studies by John Strong and Gregory Schopen, Choo also notes that the idea of filial piety was not entirely unique to Chinese Buddhism. *Ibid.*, 201, n. 32.

and embryo undergo are very detailed and, in some instances, graphic. The aim is to vividly depict these transformations with documentary accuracy. Although botanic or other similes are used to illustrate the phases of development, the embryologies are decisively literal in the sense that they reflect what at the time was cutting-edge medical knowledge. Below is a representative ten-month embryology from the *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing* 佛說父母恩重難報經 (Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents Spoken by the Buddha):<sup>52</sup>

The mother's womb harbours the child usually for ten months. It is extremely burdensome for her. During the first month in its mother's womb, it is like [a drop] of dew atop grass, which, from dusk, may not last until dawn [...]. In the second month that the mother harbours the embryo, it is exactly as congealed curd. In the third month that the mother harbours the embryo, it is like coagulated blood. In the fourth month that the mother harbours the embryo, it somewhat espouses a human shape. In the fifth month that the mother harbours the embryo, the infant inside the mother's belly sprouts the five limbs.<sup>53</sup> What are these five? The head is one limb, the two arms and two legs are another each.<sup>54</sup> Altogether they make up the five limbs. In the sixth month that the mother harbours the embryo, the infant inside the mother's belly

52 The *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing*, allegedly translated by Kumārajīva (344–413) after 384 but settled in its present form around the thirteenth century, does not survive in the Sino-Japanese canon, nor is it listed in medieval Chinese bibliographic catalogues; the Chinese text has been reproduced in Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究 (Kyoto: Kyōtō daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1976), 55–60, on the basis of Chinese manuscript *hezi* 河字 12 from the Beijing Library, and Dunhuang manuscript P. 3919. Nonetheless, there are a number of canonical scriptures and commentaries that are closely connected such as the pre-sixth-century *Fumu en nanbao jing* 父母恩難報經 (Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents; T. 684) and the “apocryphal” *Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經 (Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents; T. 2887) as well as a number of manuscripts, from Dunhuang and elsewhere (P. 2285, S. 1049, S. 2084 and S. 1907 for the *Fumu enzhong jing* alone). However, only the *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing* contains an elaborate embryology, translated above. The *Fumu enzhong jing* briefly mentions the ten months of gestation. Makita 1976 provides critical editions of the *Fumu enzhong jing*, 50–52, and of another, later but related text, the *Fumu enzhong taigu jing* 父母恩重胎骨經 (Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents [in Generating One's] Body), 52–55. These texts are briefly discussed in Choo 2012, 207, n. 45.

53 Literally, “the five placenta” or “five cells” (*wubao* 五胞).

54 Literally, the “two elbows and two knees” (*liang zhou liang xi* 兩肘兩膝).

activates the six sensory organs.<sup>55</sup> What are these six? The eyes are the first sensory organ, the ears are the second, the nose is the third, the mouth is the fourth, the tongue is the fifth, and the sixth is the mind. In the seventh month that the mother harbours the embryo, the infant inside the mother's belly forms the 360 bones and joints along with the 84,000 follicles. In the eighth month that the mother harbours the embryo, it develops the faculty of thought and the nine orifices. In the ninth month that the mother harbours the embryo, the infant inside the mother's belly absorbs nourishment by extracting essentials from each [type of food] such as peaches, pears, garlic,<sup>56</sup> and the five grains.<sup>57</sup>

母胎懷子，凡經十月，甚為辛苦。在母胎時，第一月中，如草上珠，朝不保暮 [...]。母懷胎時，第二月中，恰如凝酥。母懷胎時，第三月中，猶如凝血。母懷胎時，第四月中，稍作人形。母懷胎時，第五月中，兒在母腹，生有五胞。何者為五？頭為一胞，兩肘兩膝，各為一胞，共成五胞。母懷胎時，第六月中，兒在母腹，六精齊開，何者為六？眼為一精，耳為二精，鼻為三精，口為四精，舌為五精，意為六精。母懷胎時，第七月中，兒在母腹，生成骨節，三百六十，及生毛乳[孔]，八萬四千。母懷胎時，第八月中，生出意智，以及九竅。母懷胎時，第九月中，兒在母腹，吸收食物，所出各質，桃李蒜果，五穀精華。

This embryology and others like it are fairly straightforward and unambiguously factual. Although these texts present clinical knowledge that is part of the complex of ideas known as “Buddhist medicine,” there is considerable stress on the “Buddhist” component of that typology.<sup>58</sup> Buddhist doctrinal notions, chief among them suffering, frame the account, and karma especially acts as a motor and determinant of development, as in the following example, gleaned again from the *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing*:

55 Also known as the “six perceptions” or “six sensations” (*liu jing* 六精).

56 That is to say, the vegetables of the *Allium* genus, also known as “pungent roots.”

57 Makita 1976, 56. We are indebted to Peter Romaskiewicz for his precious input and candid advice concerning the passages from the *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing*. He has co-translated a number of the sutras under discussion in this section; see Ven. Yifa and Peter Romaskiewicz, transl., *Yulan Bowl Sutra and Collection of Filial Piety Sutras* (Gaoxiong: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2008).

58 On Buddhist medicine in China, see Pierce Salguero, *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).



In the tenth month that the mother harbours the embryo, every part of the infant's entire body is complete, and it descends to be born. If the child is to be filial and obedient, it will be born peacefully, with arms raised and palms joined, without [further] injuring the mother or causing her any [additional] suffering. If the child is to commit the five transgressions,<sup>59</sup> it will rip its mother's uterus, tear at her heart and liver, trampling her and mounting her bones, as if a thousand knives were swirling [in her body] or ten thousand blades stabbing her heart. Such is the heavy burden of birthing children.<sup>60</sup>

母懷胎時，第十月中，孩兒全體一一完成，方乃降生。若是決為孝順之子，擎拳合掌，安詳出生，不損傷母，母無所苦。倘兒決為五逆之子，破損母胎，扯母心肝，踏母跨骨，如千刀攪，又彷彿似萬刃攢心。如斯重苦，出生此兒。

The text then lists the ten kindnesses (*shì'en* 十恩)<sup>61</sup> of motherhood and parenthood before elaborating on each of them. The sutra concludes by stipulating that the only way to properly repay the ordeal of childbearing specifically, and the ten kindnesses more generally, is by copying out its text and dedicating it to one's parents. Anything short of this would result in sons and daughters being deemed unfilial; upon their death they would be precipitated to the Avīci hell, the eighth of the eight hot hells, where they were to suffer fiery forms of torture without respite for eternity. In many ways, the scope of these Buddhist materials was to offer a way for children to repay the very important karmic debt incurred to their mothers and, to a lesser extent, to their fathers, in the quickest way possible.

Buddhist embryologies, such as the one from the *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing*, that are developed on the basis of ten-month gestation models often echo the earlier Chinese accounts highlighted in the first section of this

59 *Pañcānantarya*; Ch. *wuni* 五逆 (also known as the *wu wujian ye* 五無間業, "the five karmas of the uninterrupted [hell]), namely, parricide, matricide, killing an arhat, shedding the blood of a Buddha, and destroying the harmony of the saṃgha."

60 Makita 1976, 56.

61 The ten kindnesses are: harbouring the embryo and protecting it; anticipating childbirth and accepting its pain; giving life and forgetting its anxieties; keeping the bitter and giving the sweet; exchanging the dry for the wet (that is, giving up one's dry spot for a wet one so that the child may be dry); breastfeeding and child-rearing; washing away the filth; missing a child who is far away; profound sympathy; utmost solicitude. See *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing* in Makita 1976, 56; these ten kindnesses parallel the ten kindnesses, or more commonly the "ten graces" (*shì'en* 十恩) of the Buddha.

introduction. The ten-month model already existed in India, as evidenced in the above quote from Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* for example; and the *Foshuo fumu enzhong nanbao jing* is indeed based on Indic materials, but these are still considerably later than the embryologies from the *Guanzi* or *Huainanzi*, or that of *Taichan shu* (Book on the Embryo and Childbirth). It is not impossible that networks of knowledge circulation could have brought certain medical notions from China to India, to have them reintroduced into China via Buddhist scriptures sometime later.<sup>62</sup> Such conjectures must remain merely hypothetical until sufficient tangible evidence is uncovered. The fact remains that the Chinese self-cultivation practices discussed in the present volume appear to have developed more or less directly out of earlier autochthonous understandings of embryology on one hand, and earlier indigenous meditation/visualisation techniques on the other, bearing minimal influence from exogenous models, including those of Buddhism or Āyurvedic medicine. This last point will be addressed again in the "Overview of Chapters," but for now it suffices to underline that, for Japan, the opposite is true. Non-native religious and medical knowledge from both China and India were key ingredients in shaping spiritual practices that relied on embryological imagery.

Returning to China, a second embryological model, this time resting instead on a thirty-eight week developmental trajectory, is also featured in Chinese

62 Although the question of Indian influence on Chinese medicine has been relatively well documented by a number of Chinese scholars, chief among them Chen Ming 陳明 and Li Qinpu 李勤璞, the Chinese impact on Indian, especially Āyurvedic and Buddhist, medicines has remained unexplored. Li Qinpu, "Qipo wuzang lun' yanjiu-yinzhong yixue guanxi de yi ge kaocha 「耆婆五臟論」研究—印中醫學關係的一個考察," *Wenshi wen shi* 45 (1998), and *ibid.*, "Qipo wuzang lun' renshen xueshuo de yuanliu 「耆婆五臟論」妊娠學說的源流," *Zhonghua yishi zazhi* 中華醫史雜誌 27.3 (1997), has notably argued that the *Qipo wuzang lun* 耆婆五臟論 (Jīvaka's Treatise on the Five Viscera) introduced the ten-month gestational model into Chinese medicine. This extra-canonical medical treatise is tied to a variety of extant fragments or versions – the earliest of which date back to the Tang or slightly earlier. In his assessment of the impact of Indian embryologies on their Chinese counterparts, Chen Ming in his "Shiyue chengtai' yu 'qiri yibian': Yindu taixiang xueshuo de fenlei ji qi dui woguo de yingxiang 「十月成胎」與「七日一變」— 印度胎相學說的分類及其對我國的影響," *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究 13 (2004): 9–14, and 18, more cautiously argues that the *Qipo wuzang lun* "complemented" or "augmented" (*fiyi* 附益) Chinese medical theory; on the Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts related to the *Qipo wuzang lun*, see the informative article by Donald Harper, "Précis de connaissance médicale. Le *Shanghan lun* 傷寒論 (Traité des atteintes par le froid) et le *Wuzang lun* 五臟論 (Traité des cinq viscères)," in *Médecine, religion et société dans la Chine médiévale. Étude de manuscrits chinois de Dunhuang et de Turfan*, Catherine Despeux, ed. (Paris: Collège de France/Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2010).

Buddhist texts. Both models, the thirty-eight week model and the ten-month model, are attested in Indic sources, but some scholars, such as Chen Ming, have argued that the ten-month format is more representative of Āyurvedic medicine, whereas the thirty-eight week gestational scheme is typical of Buddhist medical lore.<sup>63</sup> This may explain why, in the context of China, the ten-month model is principally encountered in extra-canonical literature, while the thirty-eight week model disproportionately appears in canonical materials.<sup>64</sup> One canonical locus classicus is the *Daodi jing* 道地經 (Sutra on the Grounds of the [Buddhist] Path; *T.* 607), a Chinese translation of Saṃgharakṣa's *Yogacārabhūmi* attributed to An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148–ca. 170).<sup>65</sup> Another is the aforementioned *Garbhāvākṛānti sūtra*, known as the *Foshuo baotai jing* 佛說胞胎經 (Sutra Spoken by the Buddha On the Womb and Embryo; *T.* 317) in Chinese. It was translated by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (231–308) around the turn of the fourth century.<sup>66</sup> As other Buddhist embryologies, including the ten-month ones, this scripture frames intrauterine development according to the familiar themes of suffering and karma. However, perhaps as a result of being comparatively exhaustive in the scope of their descriptions, the thirty-eight-week models are distinctly more clinical in character:

In the third week that the embryo is in its mother's belly, there is a wind called the "Gate of Sound" that rises and blows on the embryo, causing it to become firm from within. What kind of firmness is this? It is like that which one would feel when the finger comes to rest on a wound or spoiled

63 See, for example, Chen 2004; the author goes through a painstaking comparison of both embryological schemes and the relevant Chinese sources in an effort to determine the influence of Indic medical models on Chinese understandings of in utero development.

64 For a list of both canonical and extra-canonical Buddhist embryologies in Chinese, see Chen 2004.

65 See n. 41 above.

66 On the differences and similarities between the *Foshuo baotai jing* *T.* 317 and the *Daodi jing* *T.* 607, see Choo 2012, 196–202. The *Foshuo baotai jing*, dated to the late third century, is the earliest extant Chinese translation of the *Gharbhāvākṛānti sūtra* (On Entering the Womb), mentioned in the previous section. Predating Saṃgharakṣa's *Yogacārabhūmi* (ca. first half of the second century), the text *Gharbhāvākṛānti sūtra* contains one of the earliest iterations of a thirty-eight-week embryology. The earliest attested ten-month embryology in an Indic source is from chapter 4 of the *Caraka Saṃhitā*. Kenneth Zysk, cited in Kritzer, 2009, 73–90, dates its composition to around one or two centuries before or after the Common Era, still later than the earliest Chinese ten-month embryologies examined above. As previously mentioned, Kritzer's chapter offers a point-by-point analytical comparison of the *Gharbhāvākṛānti sūtra*'s and the *Caraka Saṃhitā*'s embryologies. See also n. 35 above.

meat. Thus is the transformation of essence. It [the embryo] remains in the middle for a week, transforming and becoming hot. That which is firm in it is accordingly the Soil element. That which is soft and moist in it is accordingly the Water element. That which is warm in it is accordingly the Fire element. The spaces and gaps within it are accordingly the Wind element.<sup>67</sup>

[...] In the fourth week that the embryo is in its mother's abdomen, there is naturally a wind that is called "Passing Through the Narrow Gate." It blows on the essence of the body, developing the 90,000 muscles: 22,500 in the front, 22,500 in the back, 22,500 on the left side, and 22,500 on the right side.

[...] In the thirteenth week that the embryo is in its mother's abdomen, there arises naturally a wind that blows on the infant's body and causes its hair to grow. In accordance with actions from previous lives, the wind will either cause the infant's hair to be deep black and exquisite without measure, or it will make it grow in a blonder colour that is disliked by people.<sup>68</sup>

第三七日，其胎之內於母腹中，有風名聲門，而起吹之，令其胎裏轉就凝堅。凝堅何類？如指著息瘡息肉壞，精變如是。住中七日轉化成熟，彼其堅者則為地種，軟濕者則為水種，其熅燻者則為火種，間關其內則為風種。

67 *Foshuo baotai jing*, T. 317, 887b. The *Mahāratnakūṭa sūtra*, or *Dabao jijing* 大寶積經 (Scripture of Great Accumulation of Treasures; T. 310), contains two other translations of the *Foshuo baotai jing* and its thirty-eight-week embryological model; see section 13, 55.322a–326a, *Fo wei Anan shuo chutai hui* 佛為阿難說處胎會 (Sutra on Abiding in the Womb Spoken by the Buddha to Ānanda; translated by Bodhiruci 菩提流志 [d. 727]); and section 14, 56.326b–330b and 57.331a–336c, *Foshuo ru taizang hui* 佛說入胎藏會 (Sutra on Entering the Womb Spoken by the Buddha; translated by Yijing 義淨 [635–713]); the relevant embryologies are on 323a–325a and 329a–331a, respectively. Section 13 of the text (*juan* 55) is also found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* under the title *Rumu tajing* 入母胎經 (Scripture of the Embryo Entering the Mother); see *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pinaiye zashi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶雜事 (Various Matters of the Vinaya of the Mūla Sarvāstivāda School; T. 1451), 11–12, 251a–262a. Cf. Kritzer 2014, 18.3–5, 52–54.

68 *Foshuo baotai jing*, T. 317, 887b–889b. Cf. Kritzer 2014, 18.13, 58.

[...] 第十四七日。其胞裏內於母腹藏。自然有風名曰經縷門。吹其精體生九萬筋。二萬二千五百在身前。二萬二千五百在背。二萬二千五百在左脅。二萬二千五百在右脅。

[...] 第三十七日。在其胞裏於母腹藏。自然風起吹其兒體令生毛髮。隨宿所行。或令其兒毛髮正黑妙好無量。或生髮黃人所不喜。

As in most Buddhist embryologies, correspondences are established between the various phases of development and cosmological elements – in this case, the Four Elements (Sk. *mahābhūta*; Ch. *sida* 四大) of Buddho-Indian cosmology. Yet, despite their pronounced cosmic symbolism, Buddhist embryologies stop short of broaching the subject of cosmogony – a crucial step in establishing parallels between gestation and spiritual programmes. It is no surprise that early Indian and Chinese Buddhist sources, which considered the earliest form of intrauterine life as an incarnation of suffering and karmic entanglement, would not choose embryonic development as a template for spiritual progress.

Since this volume exclusively focuses on embryologies that are enlisted for the purpose of self-cultivation or soteriology, a sizable proportion of those that appear in the Sino-Japanese Buddhist canon are not considered. For the same reason, individual chapters do not address views on conception and gestation from the Taoist canon that are not part of a programme of spiritual attainment. In some cases, these “Taoist” embryologies are adapted from Buddhist scriptures. Thus, the early-Tang *Taishang Laojun shuo bao fumu enzhong jing* 太上老君說報父母恩重經 (Scripture on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents Spoken By Lord Lao; DZ 662) is closely modelled on the aforementioned *Fumu enzhong jing*.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the thirteenth-century *Sanyuan yanshou canzan shu* 三元延壽參贊書 (Book of the Three Primes for Achieving Longevity Equal to Heaven and Earth; DZ 851) opens with an embryology that is highly redolent of the one encountered in Yijing’s 義淨 (635–713) translation of the *Foshuo ru taizang hui* 佛說入胎藏會 (Sutra on Entering the Womb Spoken by the Buddha).<sup>70</sup>

69 See Livia Kohn, “Immortal Parents and Universal Kin: Family Values in Medieval Daoism,” in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

70 Compare *Sanyuan yanshou canzan shu* DZ 851, 1a–4a to *Foshuo ru taizang hui* 329a–331a; for the latter, see n. 67 above. Chapter 6 of the *Benji jing* 本際經 (Scripture of the Original Bound), preserved in a number of Dunhuang manuscripts, also expounds the thirty-eight-week gestational model; see Wan Yi 萬毅, “Dunhuang daojiào wenxian *Benji jing* luwen ji jieshuo 敦煌道教文獻「本際經」錄文及解說,” *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 13 (1998): 445–447.

#### 4 Embryologies in Early and Medieval Japan

Let us now turn to Japan. The ideas about physiological processes of conception, gestation, and birth were encountered in a variety of early Chinese and Indian texts. Buddhist scriptures may have arrived to Japan, via Sui and Tang China and Korea, as a part of the historical process of acculturation of Chinese traditions and the various strands of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Japan's earliest medical compendium, Tanba no Yasuyori's 丹波康頼 (912–995) *Ishinpō* 醫心方 (The Essentials of Medicine) suggests that some aspects of conception and pregnancy, based on the ten-month model of gestation known from the earlier Chinese sources, were familiar to the court physicians at least since the tenth century.<sup>71</sup>

For example, the twenty-second volume of Tanba's compendium provides instructions for acupuncturists and cautionary prescriptions for women for each of the ten months of pregnancy.<sup>72</sup> The nineteenth-century printed editions also reproduce ten rare illustrations said to be in Tanba's original manuscript. Although these images are concerned with showing the vital meridians that ought to be avoided during acupuncture treatment, they also show a foetus in different stages of development depicted within an unclothed woman's body. Tamba's compendium is a unique source in that it used many Chinese medical writings that became subsequently lost in China; thus, some of them are only known through his quotations.<sup>73</sup> The *Chanjing* 產經 (The Classic of Birth) by De Zhenchang 德貞常 is one such case. A medical classic from Sui China, it was imported to Japan and existed in twelve volumes at least until the end of the tenth century. It appears in the *Ishinpō*'s opening section entitled "Charts of pregnant women's pulse meridians and monthly

71 From the viewpoint of medical history, see a recent discussion of this source in English by Katja Triplett, "For Mothers and Sisters: Care of the Reproductive Female Body in the Medico-Ritual World of Early and Medieval Japan," in "Childbirth and Women's Healthcare Across Cultures," Anna Andreeva, Erica Couto-Ferreira, and Susanne Töpfer, eds., *sp. is. of Dynamis* 34/2 (2014): 337–356.

72 Maki Sachiko 榎佐知子, *Ishinpō: Maki Sachiko zen'yaku seikai* 醫心方：榎佐知子全訳精解 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1993), vol. 22, 5–45.

73 Maki 1993, vol. 22, 3. The historians of Chinese medicine Jen-Der Lee and Sabine Wilms provide a detailed analysis of the *Ishinpō* in English. See footnotes 8 and 9 above for reference. Katja Triplett has recently argued that Tamba's collection also cited a number of Buddhist scriptures. See her article "Magical Medicine? Japanese Buddhist Medical Knowledge and Ritual Instruction for Healing the Physical Body," in "Religion and Healing in Japan," Christoph Kleine and Katja Triplett, eds., *sp. is. of Japanese Religions* 37 (1 and 2, 2012): 62–90, especially, 70–73.

prohibitions” (“Ninpu myakuzu gekkin hō” 任婦脉圖月禁法), which provides a simple scheme of conception and embryological development.

*The Classic of Birth* says:<sup>74</sup>

The Yellow Emperor asked: “How are humans born?” To that, Qibo replied: “To be born, humans are first conceived in the mysterious depth [of the mother’s body]; that is where they first take form in the internal cavity. If such form takes place without disruption, then the human being is conceived. In the first month of pregnancy [it] is called “a pre-embryonic substance”, or “a spore” (also, “placenta”). The second month [it] is called “embryo” (also, “womb”).<sup>75</sup> In the third month, [it develops] blood vessels, in the fourth month [it] procures bones, in the fifth month [it begins to] move, in the sixth month [it] takes [human] shape, in the seventh month [it] grows hair, in the eighth month [it acquires] vision, in the ninth month the grains enter [its] stomach. In the tenth month, the infant is delivered.”

In the “Grand Basis Classic,”<sup>76</sup> it is as outlined above: “In the first month, there is an oil-like substance. In the second month, there are veins. In the third month, there is a placenta. In the fourth month, there is an embryo. In the fifth month, it has sinews. In the sixth month, it has bones. In the seventh month, it is [fully] formed. In the eighth month, it moves. In the ninth month, it makes a fuss. In the tenth month, it is born.”<sup>77</sup>

74 On the use of this source in the *Ishinpō*, see Jen-Der Lee 2005, 226, n. 30, and 230–31; also Wilms 2005, 297–310.

75 In modern Japanese, the character *hai* 胚 means “embryo,” while *hō* 胞 can be translated as “placenta.” However, the following character *tai* 胎 may also mean both “embryo” and “the womb.” Both terms here indicate generative growth.

76 The modern editor of the *Ishinpō* Maki Sachiko points out that this text is most likely the *Huangdi neijing taisu* 黄帝内經太素 (The Grand Basis of the Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon), by Yang Shangshan 楊上善. Maki 1993, vol. 22, 5–7. This classic work was copied by the Tanba, hereditary court physicians, in 1151–1158 and 1167–1168; at least one such manuscript copy was preserved at Ninnaji 仁和寺 Temple in the Heian capital. On the reception of this text in premodern Japan, see Paul Unschuld, *Huang Di nei jing su wen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery in an Ancient Chinese Medical Text* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 26–27. Unschuld points out that the *Huangdi neijing taisu* was extant in China at least until the eleventh century and circulated in Japan during the period between the eighth and mid-fourteenth centuries.

77 This phrase appears in chapter 30 of the aforementioned classic. However, we have been unable to locate this line in the facsimile edition of the surviving Ninnaji manuscript, as

産經云

黃帝問人生何如以成。岐伯對曰人之始生冥乃始為形容無有擾乃為始収。任身一月曰胚又曰胞二月曰胎三月曰血脉四月曰具骨五月曰動六月曰形成七月曰毛髮生八月曰瞳子明九月曰穀入胃十月曰兒出生也。

今案大素經云一月膏二月脉三月胞四月胎五月筋六月骨七月成八月動九月躁十月生。

Although it is not entirely clear how exactly Tanba's treatise was used or whether his medical theories had been known outside the imperial court and aristocratic households, the ten-month gestation model grounded in the early Chinese sources played an important role in the discourse on childbirth in pre-modern Japan. For example, early modern woodblock print textbooks for women, such as *Onna Chōhōki* 女重宝記 (Treasure Records for Women) explained foetal development precisely in these terms.<sup>78</sup>

Buddhist theories on foetal gestation and the generation of organs deriving from earlier Indian sources and described in the section above similarly made an impact in Japan via Chinese Buddhism. The translations of important scriptures, attributed to Indian masters residing in China, such as Śubkhakarasiṃha (Ch. Shanwuwei 善無畏, Jp. Zenmui, 637–735) or Vajrabodhi (Ch. Jingangzhi 金剛智, Jp. Kongōchi, 671–741), may have been the early precursors to the medieval Japanese theories of the origins of life and Buddhist ritual practices related to the contemplation of internal organs, especially within esoteric Buddhist temples.<sup>79</sup> Some of these theories, for instance, the thirty-eight-week

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it is heavily damaged. *Huangdi neijing taisu: Ninnaji bon* 黃帝內經太素：仁和寺本, Tōyō igaku kenkyūkai, eds. (Tokyo: Tōyō igaku kenkyūkai, 1981), vol. 11, chapter 30, 385–459.

78 One example is the Kōka 弘化 4 [1847] woodblock printed edition of *Eiri nichiyō onna chōhōki* 絵入日用女重宝記 (Extremely Treasured Records for Women's Everyday Life, Illustrated), which contains illustrations depicting the ten stages of foetal development.

79 See, for example, Fabio Rambelli's English translation of a late Tang-period ritual text attributed to Śubkhakarasiṃha, the "Ritual of the Secret Dharanis of the Three Siddhis for the Destruction of Hell, the Transformation of Karmic Hindrances, and the Liberation from the Three Conditioned Worlds." Rambelli suggests that this text may have served as a certain template for Japanese Buddhist practitioners such as the early medieval Shingon reformer Kakuban 覚鑿 (1095–1143), who advocated the meditation on the five viscera (*gozōkan* 五臟觀). Fabio Rambelli, "Tantric Buddhism and Chinese Thought in East Asia," in *Tantra in Practice*, David Gordon White, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 377, and 379. The early discussion of Kakuban's practices related to the embryological patterns appears in Kushida Ryōkō 榎田良洪, *Kakuban no kenkyū* 覚鑿の研究 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1975). See n. 89 for further elaboration, as well as Lucia Dolce's contribution to this subject in the present volume.



gestation model seen in the Chinese translations of the *Yogacārabhūmi* and Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa bhāṣya*, were incorporated into medieval Japanese medical treatises on women's health.<sup>80</sup> One recently discovered example is the *Sansei Ruijūshō* 産生類從抄 (Encyclopaedia of Childbirth, ca. 1318), a two-volume collection containing the ritual and medical prescriptions for pregnant women.<sup>81</sup> Composed by the Buddhist clergy for the use by monks performing rituals for safe pregnancy and childbirth, as well as physicians and midwives assisting during delivery, this collection explained foetal development according to notions from Indian and Chinese Buddhist treatises and medical sources available in medieval Japan. On the subject of the embryo's internal development, it referred to one of the major Tiantai Buddhist works, Zhiyi's 智顓 (538–597) *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (Jp. *Maka shikan*, Stopping and Contemplating; T. 1911) and other less well-known Buddhist sources.

## 5 Overview of Chapters

The chapters in this volume are arranged chronologically in order to provide the reader with a progressive overview of how notions tied to reproduction and gestation gradually became more imbued with soteriological meaning in certain traditions. The arc that traces the changing understandings of these notions begins with the cosmologically laden early Chinese accounts of embryology discussed in this introduction, before extending to the earliest documented expressions of a spiritual path of self-cultivation grounded in the twin imageries of reproduction and gestation. These occur in late early China to early medieval China (ca. first century CE to third century CE), and so it is only fitting that this should be the starting point for the present volume.

80 Shinmura Taku 新村拓, *Shussan to seishokkan no rekishi* 出産と生殖観の歴史 (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppankyoku, 1996), and *Nihon iryōshi* 日本医療史 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2006).

81 The manuscript is currently preserved at Kanazawa Bunko 金沢文庫 archive, in Yokohama. This source has been acknowledged by Japanese scholars of Buddhism and medical history since 1950s but never studied at length. For the analysis of this text in Japanese, see Anna Andreeva, "Chūsei Nihon ni okeru osan to josei no kenkō – *Sansei Ruijūshō* no bukkyōteki, igakuteki chishiki o chūshin to shite 中世日本における御産と女性の健康—『産生類從抄』の仏教的・医学的知識を中心として," in *Hikaku shisō kara mita Nihon bukkyō* 比較思想から見た日本仏教, Sueki Fumihiko 末木文彦, ed. (Tokyo: Sankibō busshōrinkan, 2015, pp. 13–36).

Grégoire Espeset's "Prenatal Infancy Regained: Great Peace (*Taiping*) Views on Procreation and Life Cycles" surveys a cluster of early-period and early-medieval textual passages from the Great Peace (*Taiping* 太平) corpus and a weft (*wei* 緯) companion to the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of Changes), the *Qian zuo du* 乾鑿度 (Regulations Chiselled by Qian). The passages all deal with interconnected life-related topics – the stages of impregnation, gestation, intrauterine infancy, and birth – and connect them to the logic governing annual cycles. Analysing the momentum at the root of these cosmic processes and, more specifically, redefining them in relation to cosmogony set the stage for the visualisations that enjoin the practitioner to revert to a prenatal state of primordial unity. The chapter provides some insight into how cosmological speculations were translated into religious belief and community practice during the early imperial era. The materials examined by Espeset show how, in an initial stage, the notion of cosmogony, that is, the process of cosmic creation, is gradually woven into discourse concerning birth and pregnancy by means of cosmological symbolism.

The next contribution underscores this early transition from static cosmology to a dynamic cosmogony. This shift is marked by an emphasis on the action of creation, literally, as illustrated by its application in early Taoist sexual rites. In "Conceiving the Embryo of Immortality: 'Seed-People' and Sexual Rites in Early Taoism," Christine Mollier considers the ideological background to these Celestial Master (Tianshi dao 天師道) rituals. These practices, like others examined in this volume, were undertaken with the purpose of conceiving an embryo of immortality. But they stand out in that their mode of conception was physiological: through a form of ritualised conventional intercourse, initiated adepts produced spiritually pure chosen individuals, or "seed-people" (*zhongmin* 種民), to repopulate the world after the impending apocalypse. Particular attention is devoted to how the notion of "seed-people" came to be exploited by Taoist sectarian movements for purposes of elitist self-demarkation and in support of eugenic ends.

"Cosmos, Body, and Gestation in Taoist Meditation," by Dominic Steavu, focuses on the early medieval roots of Neidan 內丹 (Internal Alchemy) discourse on the generation of the inner embryo. The chapter notably highlights the contribution of materials from the Sanhuang 三皇 (Three Sovereigns) corpus. In the process, it identifies a series of key features in the development of Neidan, namely the anthropomorphisation of cosmic principles within the body, the combination of multiple cosmological models, and the use of cosmogonic reversal as a template for practice. One meditation encountered in a Sanhuang source which takes Taiyi 太一, the Great Unity, as its cosmogonic and procreative starting point, is particularly eloquent in that it vividly

illustrates those key features and also articulates the equivalence between Taiyi, the embryo and the Elixir.

The next two chapters, authored by Catherine Despeux and Fabrizio Pregadio respectively, centre on a fully articulated Neidan system that has already internalised and developed many of the processes discussed in earlier chapters. Moreover, in its formation, Neidan also absorbed a number of critical concepts from Buddhism. The Buddhist embryologies highlighted above were no doubt influential, but not directly so, as their contributions were likely much more important in the realm of medical knowledge. As previously noted, early Buddhist embryologies, both the ten-month and thirty-eight-week incarnations that circulated in China, were understood to have no soteriological value whatsoever.

However, certain Buddhist tropes were formative in later Chinese practices. Besides the notion of *tathāgatagarbha*, or Buddha nature (*foxing* 佛性), we may also cite the Chan 禪 topos of “before your father and mother engendered you” (*fumu sheng qian* 父母生前) or that of “without birth and death” (*wusheng wusi* 無生無死). To a large extent, these notions were part of the intellectual zeitgeist of medieval China, and thus a direct itinerary of their transit from Buddhist currents to Neidan is hard to trace – partly because Buddhism and Neidan were not clearly separate systems of thought and practice. They deserve, perhaps, their own separate full-length study. Nonetheless, some of the chapters, Catherine Despeux’s most notably, succeed in identifying key notions that made their way from Buddhism to Taoism. The notions in question are used in tropes that are chiefly figurative and rhetorical. They undoubtedly imply a self-cultivation that culminates in a return to a prenatal state, but they circumvent the cosmological/cosmogonic logic that is so typical of the development of Chinese soteriological embryologies. Their process is typically qualified as subitist, resting on a sudden realisation, in contrast to the slow drawn-out process of non-Buddhist autogestation. Because of this important distinction that excludes from soteriological programs (which are typically progressive), contributors to the present volume who deal with Chinese materials have broached these Buddhist tropes in passing only. Buddhism was one of the principle vectors through which self-cultivation systems, whether they were initially Buddhist or not, made their way across the Sea of Japan (in many instances, via the Korean Peninsula). Thus, in Japan, soteriologies grounded in embryological or reproductive imagery were on the whole more “Buddhist” and less gradualistic than in China. This cleavage is reflected in the basic structure of this volume, with the China part and Japan part being, broadly speaking, divided along the lines of Taoist and Buddhist traditions, and “gradual” and “sudden” methods.

Nevertheless, these divisions should not be exaggerated and made into templates of analysis. Catherine Despeux's chapter on "Symbolic Pregnancy and the Sexual Identity of Taoist Adepts," is elaborated on the basis of medieval to early modern Taoist and Buddhist sources alike, demonstrating that Buddhism was integral to the development of certain practices that relied on reproductive or gestational imagery in China. Her study is an investigation of the crucial notion of the "sagely embryo" (*shengtai* 聖胎). More pointedly, her contribution elucidates how gender was a ubiquitous yet fluid force in defining the meditational experience of adepts. Through the practice of Neidan, it was not uncommon for men to experience physiological symptoms of their spiritual pregnancy, enough to convince some of them that they were actually pregnant. Nonetheless, the dominant discourse was that of a symbolic pregnancy in which men shed external sexual markers and became both embryo and mother at the same time. For women, this held true as well. In pursuit of the same androgyny, one that physically manifested in the form of a prepubescent body, women aspired to nullify their biological capacity to bear children. Yet despite the seemingly egalitarian nature of symbolic pregnancy, according to Despeux, it is a "masculinised" Yang body that remains the paragon of spiritual refinement in Neidan.

Building upon the fundamentals of Neidan discussed in Despeux's chapter, Fabrizio Pregadio explores the use of analogy among Taoist views on the generation of the cosmos, the birth of the human being, and the compounding of the Elixir in "Creation and Its Inversion: Cosmos, Human Being, and Elixir in the *Cantong Qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three)." The medieval *Cantong qi* 參同契 draws elaborate analogies linking the stages through which the Dao generates the cosmos to those through which a human being receives life. These stages are also reproduced in the alchemical process, with the key difference that the practice mirrors – and therefore reverses – the stages of cosmogony and gestation in order to collapse each stage onto the previous one. This feature is especially important in Neidan, where practitioners invest themselves with the task of "regenerating" the world and their own persons. Here, the maternal generative function that adepts perform with respect to the cosmos is paralleled by the corresponding inner process of conception, gestation, and delivery of an "embryo," which is the Elixir itself.

The last chapter in the China half of the volume shifts to the setting of contemporary Fujian, offering an illuminating instance of the layering of semantic registers in the formation of discourses on pregnancy and birth. In "On The Effectiveness of Symbols: Women's Bodies as Mandalas," Brigitte Bapandier builds on her ethnological fieldwork to focus on the representation of women's bodies through the figure of the goddess Lady of Linshui (Linshui furen 臨水夫

人), otherwise known as Chen Jinggu 陳靖姑. A number of chapters consider the interface between two levels of representation, the literal or physiological and the symbolic; in this contribution, Baptandier reflects on the commingling of three levels of representation of women's bodies, namely, "the real," the mythological, and the symbolic, each in their respective contexts of the patri-line, the mythological ritual theatre, and the mandala. On a more general level of analysis, Baptandier frames the chapter by means of two seminal studies of structural anthropology: Jacques Lacan's "Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel"; and the work that inspired it, Claude Lévi-Strauss' "L'efficacité symbolique" (famously known in English as "The Effectiveness of Symbols"), which examines the therapeutic services offered by a Cuna shaman to a woman about to give birth.

The Japan part offers an exposé of gestational discourse and reproductive imagery, as well as critical notions and circumstances that surrounded its production and further application in the Japanese ritual context. Previous work on this topic has been insightful but limited, and thus an in-depth investigation of the scope and impact of such ideas on the sphere of cultural production of premodern Japan is still ongoing.<sup>82</sup> In this respect, the Japan part offers a detailed discussion of previously unstudied manuscripts and ritual practices.

For some time, the scholars of Japanese Buddhism have not paid sufficient attention to the significance of embryological patterns and reproductive metaphors. In part, the reasons for such disregard could be sought in the historical construction of Buddhist Studies in Japan as a discipline during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the study of sexual discourse in Buddhist sources was considered taboo and beyond the scope of academic scholarship. Moreover, the presence of such discourse in Japanese Buddhist sources was attributed to the so-called Tachikawa lineage (Tachikawa-ryū 立川流), which itself was a subject of criticism in Buddhist circles since at least the thirteenth century.<sup>83</sup> Yet more recently, as the study of Japanese Buddhism progresses

82 For previous studies on the embryological themes, see Sanford 1997, Faure 2000, and Dolce 2006–07; see n. 49 above. A study of medieval Japanese Buddhist manuscripts with embryological references is carried out by a research group of Japanese and Western scholars, including Abe Yasurō, Itō Satoshi, Yoneda Mariko, and Lucia Dolce, and independently, by Ogawa Toyoo. Some of these studies will be addressed in greater detail in the following pages.

83 This lineage was previously addressed by Kushida Ryōko 榎田良洪 in his exhaustive volumes on the history of Shingon Buddhism, *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* 真言密教成立過程の研究 (Tokyo: Sankibō busshorinkan, 1979; new edition, 2004) and *Zoku Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* 続真言密教成立過程の研究 (Tokyo: Sankibō busshorinkan, 1979); see also Mizuhara Gyōei 水原堯榮, *Jakyō Tachikawa-ryū no kenkyū*

both in Japan and in the West, the presence of embryological metaphors and sexual discourse, despite their previous categorisation as “heterodox” (Jp. *jakyō* 邪教), is becoming more acknowledged as a part of historical Buddhist paradigm as it developed in Japan.<sup>84</sup>

The embryological patterns appearing in Japanese Shingon Buddhism, such as the *tainai goi* 胎内五位 (“Five Stages of the Embryo in the Womb”), became the subject of a seminal article on foetal Buddhahood by James Sanford.<sup>85</sup> He briefly pointed out that some of the Japanese Buddhist ritual transmissions were structured around the five stages of gestation and were inspired by a particular part of an esoteric Buddhist scripture known in Chinese as the *Yuqi jing* 瑜祇經 (Jp. *Yugikyō*).<sup>86</sup> That some of the Buddhist discourses on conception and procreation had made a profound impact on classical poetry treatises was soon noted by the scholar of Japanese literature, Susan Blakely Klein.<sup>87</sup> This theme was further investigated in the study of esoteric Buddhism and

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邪教立川流の研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1981); Moriyama Shōshin 守山聖真, *Tachikawa jakyō to sono shakaiteki haikai no kenkyū* 立川邪教と其の社会的背景の研究 (Tokyo: Rokuyaen, 1990 [1965]); Manabe Shunshō 真鍋俊照, *Jakyō Tachikawa-ryū* 邪教立川流 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1999).

- 84 For instance, Iyanaga Nobumi has noted that the Tachikawa-ryū was a legitimate lineage of Shingon, and that the sexual imagery had been long present in ritual documents and writings of other major Shingon lineages. See Iyanaga, “Secrecy, Sex, and Apocrypha: Remarks on Some Paradoxical Phenomena,” in Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (London: Routledge, 2006), 204–228; and in Japanese, “Mikkyō girei to ‘nenzuru chikara’: Hōkyōshō no hihanteki kentō oyobi *Juhōyōjinsū* no ‘dokuro honzon girei’ wo chūshin ni shite 密教儀禮と「念ずる力」—『寶鏡鈔』の批判的検討、および『受法用心集』の「髑髏本尊儀禮」を中心にして,” in *Girei no chikara: chūsei shūkyō no jissen sekai* 儀禮の力—中世宗教の実践世界, Lucia Dolce and Matsumoto Ikuyo 松本郁代, eds. (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2010), 127–158.
- 85 Sanford 1997.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 3–5. The full Chinese title of this scripture is *Jingangfeng louge yiqie yuqi yuqi jing* 金剛峯樓閣一切瑜伽瑜祇經 (Jp. *Kongōbu rōkaku issai yuga yugi kyō*; the Sutra of All Yogas and Yogins of the Vajra Peak Pavillion, or the *Yoga Sutra*, T. 867). Although its compilation or Chinese translation is attributed to the Indian esoteric master Vajrabodhi, there seem to be no Sanskrit or Tibetan equivalents of this scripture. It is therefore plausible that it was composed in Tang China.
- 87 Susan Blakely Klein, “*Ise Monogatari Zuinō*: An Annotated Translation,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 53.1 (1998): 13–43, and *Allegories of Desire: Esoteric Commentaries in Medieval Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). On the five stages of gestation in the context of medieval *waka* commentaries, such as *Waka Kokin kanjō no maki* 和歌古今灌頂卷, see Klein 2002, 116–20 and 253–57. The said *Ise Monogatari Zuinō*, a medieval text replete with embryological metaphors, was first published in Japanese by Katagiri Yōichi

medieval *kami* worship by the Western scholars of Japanese Buddhism, Bernard Faure,<sup>88</sup> and most recently, Lucia Dolce, particularly in the context of *shintairon* 身体論 (theories of embodiment).<sup>89</sup> Dolce has highlighted the significance of Japanese interpretations of esoteric Buddhist sources, including those advocated by the Shingon monk Kakuban 覚鑿 (1095–1143), medieval commentaries to the *Yugikyō*, and the so-called “embryological charts,” inaugurating their detailed analysis.<sup>90</sup>

Four of the six chapters in the Japan part map out how embryological ideas – embedded in medical healing traditions, Buddhist doctrinal works, and Buddhist ritual compilations transported from the continent between the sixth and tenth centuries – were perceived, interpreted, and implemented in medieval Japan (1185–1600). Chapters 11 and 12 elucidate how medieval ideas about conception and foetal development were further integrated into the religious discourses and ritual practices of Sōtō Zen 曹洞禪 and the “mountain religion” Shugendō 修驗道 during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) and up to

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片桐洋一, in *Ise Monogatari no kenkyū: Shiryōhen* 伊勢物語の研究：資料編 (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1969).

- 88 Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 125–129, and Faure 2000.
- 89 Dolce 2006–2007, 138–44. She refers to the work by Itō Satoshi 伊藤聡, “Sanbōin-ryū no gisho: toku ni *Sekishitsu* wo megutte 三寶院流の偽書-特に『石室』を巡って,” in *Gisho no seisei* 偽書の生成, Nishiki Hitoshi 錦仁, Ogawa Toyoo 小川豊生, and Itō Satoshi, eds. (Tokyo: Rinwashā, 2003), 197–231. The previously overlooked significance of the medieval Japanese commentaries on the *Yugikyō*, particularly, its second chapter, is further analysed in Lucia Dolce, “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 Dolce and Matsumoto 2010, 159–208. Dolce discussed the *shintairon* theories in her conference paper, “Charting the Embryonic Generation of the Ritual Body: Visual Exegeses from Ninnaji Material,” at a panel entitled “The Embryological Discourse in Medieval Japan: A New Soteriology of the Human Body,” during the 13th meeting of the European Association of Japanese Studies, August 2011, in Tallinn, Estonia. We warmly thank her and Abe Yasurō, Itō Satoshi, and Yoneda Mariko, for sharing their views on the Buddhist manuscripts recently discovered at Japanese temples.
- 90 See her discussion of embryological patterns and imagery in medieval Shinto initiations and writings of Jichiun 実運 (1106–1160), Enni Ben'en 円爾弁円 (1202–1280), and other important medieval monks. She has also noted link of Kakuban's practices to the ritual visualisation of the body in five aspects (*gosō jōjinkan* 五相成身觀) described in the *Vajraśekhara sūtra* (*Kongōchōkyō* 金剛頂經, The Sutra of Diamond Peak, T. 874); this particular Chinese translation was attributed to the Central Asian scholar Amoghavajra 不空 (705–774). Dolce 2006–2007, 136–144, and 2010, 169–171 and 186–195, respectively. On the possible precursors to Kakuban's practices, see Rambelli 2000, and n. 79 above.

modern times. From the overall scope of these six essays, it becomes clear that medieval Japan, with its Tantric/esoteric Buddhist milieu acting as a matrix of ritual and political power discourse and imagination, provided a resonant echo for Japanese religious practices and cultural production in later times.

Lucia Dolce's chapter "The Embryonic Generation of the Perfect Body: Ritual Embryology from Japanese Tantric Sources" discusses the newly discovered medieval Buddhist manuscripts which position the process of conception and gestation of the human body within Tantric ritual practice. One of them, entitled *Gochizō hishō* 五智蔵秘抄 (Secret Treatise on the Repository of Quintuple Wisdom) from Ninnaji in Kyoto is an example, somewhat representative for the esoteric Buddhist milieu of medieval Japan. This text includes a diagram, perhaps the earliest of its kind in Japan, that draws from Indian medical knowledge, classical Chinese notions of Yin and Yang and the Five Agents, as well as esoteric Buddhist or Tantric ideas on conception, gestation, and birth. Such charts depicting the five stages of the embryo's development in the womb aimed to guide the actions of Buddhist practitioners mapping their progress toward reaching the ultimate stage of enlightenment; they can be found in a number of other ritual documents, either as drawings or descriptive references. Dolce points out that the sexual overtones might have been one of the reasons why these sources have been neglected for so long or were regarded as marginal.

Despite the lack of systematic research and study, the significance of such Tantric documents is multivalent and prompts further questions as to how the embryological ideas seen in medieval texts were conceptualised in the first place and how they further impacted on the fields of religious and cultural production of premodern Japan. Bernard Faure's chapter in this volume, "Buddhism *Ab Ovo*: Aspects of Embryological Discourse in Medieval Japanese Buddhism," focuses on yet another cluster of ideas related to the embryo's growth in the womb: that of divine protective forces which influence the life span, life quality, and further karmic imprint of the future human being – the cult of the placenta (*ena* 胞衣), and the placenta deity (*enagami* 胞衣神 or *ena kōjin* 胞衣荒神). The ambivalence of the placenta, at once the source of life and pollution, was rooted in its perception as being "the mysterious power that watches over the gestation process and protects it from malevolent forces." But it could just as easily become a threat if it was not properly buried or ritually placated. After birth, the placenta deities, also called "childbirth deities" (*ubugami* 産生神), would be transformed into one's "protective deities" (*tatemashigami* 立増神) dwelling above child's head until the age of eight, after which the deity would become a "god protecting the house" (*shutakujin* 守宅神). Upon the death of the adult, as if mirroring the process of corporeal



dissolution and “reverse gestation,” the said placenta deity would once again transform into “a spirit-demon” (*reiki* 靈鬼) that watches over one’s bones. After the skeleton and bones have disappeared, it becomes a god of the grave: it is the “clan deity” (*ujigami* 氏神) that protects one’s descendants.

The potent idea of the human head as a locus of divine presence is taken up further in Iyanaga Nobumi’s contribution to this volume, discussing the mysterious substance called “human yellow” and the provenance of magical power in medieval Japan. Insofar as it relates to embryological discourse, this chapter elucidates the many intersections between medieval Tantric Buddhist ideas about conception, gestation, the issue of animation, the production of artificial (albeit divine) life, power discourse, and gender. The “sweet drops” (*tenteki* 甜滴) existing in the human head were equated with “vital essence” crucial for the beginning of human life, as discussed by the ninth-century Tendai thinker Annen 安然. This notion provided a powerful metaphor for those medieval monastic minds engaged in the elaboration of embryonic development and its potential for finding salvation, achieving enlightenment, and seeking to understand matters of life and death. Elucidated through links to esoteric deities Aizen and Dakini-ten, the Tachikawa skull ritual, and medieval Japanese commentaries on the aforementioned *Yugikyō*, “human yellow” emerges as the “seed” which makes up the “root of life” (*myōkon* 命根) of a human body and one of the impersonations of the esoteric notion of *ālāyavijñāna*, “the eighth consciousness” (*daihachishiki* 第八識).

The gender agents involved in the act of conception, the “father” and “mother,” are typically represented in Japan’s medieval discourse on embryological growth as the two vital essences, the “two drops, red and white.” While this association of the male and female sexual fluids goes back to the early Indian sources, in medieval Japan during the thirteenth and fourteen centuries, as Tantric Buddhist imagery and ideas penetrated the very core of religion and politics, it became dispersed in a variety of ritual, religious, literary, and performative texts, and later, even some social practices. Anna Andreeva’s chapter, “‘Lost in the Womb’: Conception, Reproductive Imagery, and Gender in the Writings and Rituals of Japan’s Medieval Holy Men” focuses on the religious ideas that circulated among the scholar-monks and semi-itinerant “holy men” (*shōnin* 上人, or *hijiri* 聖) and the impact of such ideas on the sphere of Shinto-Buddhist discourse on *kami* as well as notions of womanhood. The dissemination of secret commentaries on Tantric scriptures (including embryological discourse) at local Buddhist facilities resulted in a construction of new types of Buddhist *abhiṣeka* initiation, such as the “*Abhiṣeka* of Father and Mother” (*Kazoiro kanjō* 父母代灌頂). On the one hand, such rituals were firmly rooted in Japan’s own cosmogonic myths recorded in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀

(The Annals of Japan) and, on the other hand, they were steeped in Tantric Buddhist culture, imagery, and metaphor. The Tantric discourses set in motion by medieval Buddhist clerics from Kōyasan 高野山 and Daigoji 醍醐寺 led to the deification of gendered agencies as primordial “father and mother,” deities Izanagi 伊弉諾 and Izanami 伊弉冉, within the discursive field of local Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. At the same time, the medieval discourse left limited space for a reconsideration of ideas on the female body. Albeit still embedded in the androcentric paradigm, esoteric Buddhist emphasis on the two principles brought forth an understanding that the female body could also be interpreted in sacralising terms and envisioned as manifestations of the Lotus, the Womb Realm (Taizōkai 胎藏界), and the Pure Land.

Kigensan Licha, in his “Embryology in Early Modern Sōtō Zen Buddhism,” focuses on how embryological charts, such as those discussed in Lucia Dolce’s contribution to this volume, were appropriated and further embedded in Sōtō Zen thought and ritual practice during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). He shows that, again, far from being a marginal footnote in the history of Japanese Buddhism, embryological ideas played a very significant role in Sōtō Zen discourse on both foetal and post-mortem enlightenment (the latter is seen through the prism of the Thirteen Buddhas cult). Zen *kirigami* absorbed a broad range of ideas from the mainstream of the post-medieval Buddhist thought and practice, including esoteric Buddhist teachings, popular practices, and cosmological speculation based on the *Yijing* – as well as possibly other notions rooted in Neo-Confucian thought that entered Japan as a part of the large transfer of culture and knowledge from the Southern Song (1127–1279) onward. The Sōtō Zen transmission texts, such as the *Chūteki himissho* 中的秘密書 (The Secret Writing of Hitting the Mark), offer an overview of the complex conceptual framework underpinning early modern Sōtō Zen ideas about the sacralised body, which was “equally individual and universal, encoding within itself soteriological, cosmological, and metaphysical structures.”

Based on extensive participant observation, Gaynor Sekimori’s contribution to this volume maps out the minute details of embryological theory as embedded within the annual Autumn Peak (Akinomine 秋の峯) ritual of Haguro 羽黒 Shugendō in Yamagata Prefecture, northern Japan. The embryological symbolism imbued in the ritual procedure there is customarily explained as the “death and rebirth in the womb of the mountain through the ten realms” of Buddhist cosmology. Although the trope of the embryo’s enlightenment is central to the ritual’s rationale, it rarely takes central stage in modern practice, where the motif of rebirth is emphasised instead. Sekimori shows that, when read through a variety of seventeenth-century transmission records outlining

the earlier meanings of this practice, Haguro Akinomine fully emerges as a practice employing embryological imagery to bind together doctrinal theory and ritual performance in order to enforce practitioners' realisation of non-duality as expressed in teachings of esoteric Buddhism. For example, the ascetics' attire and accoutrements act as vessels for carrying the symbolism of sexual intercourse, conception, and gestation, necessitating the ascetics' progress "within the womb of the mountain" (*tainai shūgyō* 胎内修行) and participating in their symbolic gestation from embryo to Buddhahood.

### Concluding Remarks: On Embryologies and Gender

Some additional comments about the content of this volume are perhaps in order. Although some of the chapters touch upon gender issues, it is inaccurate to exclusively associate embryological discourse and reproductive imagery with notions of femininity. After all, the overwhelming majority of those who practised the rituals or meditations described in the pages that follow were men. With few exceptions, the contributions in this volume deal with ritual manuals, doctrinal commentaries, and practices that were compiled by men for men.

The religious texts studied here are only partially based on the understanding of the "inner workings of the female body." In many instances, these "inner workings" were purely imagined by the male ascetics involved in composing these texts or practising the rituals described in them. The symbolic male pregnancy, or the contemplation of the "five stages of the embryo" are essentially, as described by Catherine Despeux, the acts of "borrowing of the female power of pregnancy and gestation"; they may reveal a hint of "ascetic's misogyny," as described by Alan Sponberg,<sup>91</sup> or, perhaps, "ascetic's envy."

Some old questions persist. One of them is whether or not the sexual acts were actually undertaken as a part of ascetic or initiatory rituals practices by Taoist adepts and esoteric Buddhists. In the case of Christine Mollier's "seed-people," the answer is affirmative; in the case of medieval Japan, as described by Lucia Dolce, Nobumi Iyanaga, and Anna Andreeva, the evidence remains inconclusive. But rather than searching for the elusive signs of such doings in the historical sources, one soon understands that it is "the effectiveness of symbols," so convincingly demonstrated by Brigitte Bapandier in her analysis

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91 See his "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, José Cabezon, ed. (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1992), 18–24.

of the theatrical re-enactment of the story of the Lady of Linshui, that perplexes and entices the male adepts, ritual practitioners, and ascetics. They “perform” the symbolic sexual act of father and mother, or of the esoteric Buddhist deity Kangiten, in the hope that the efficacy of engaging in the symbolic act of creation will shadow the effective act of reproduction – whether it concerns religious merit, transcendence, seed-people, or the Elixir.

Another question pertains to how the ritual practices and doctrinal notions linked to embryological discourse and described collectively in this volume relate to or impact notions of gender. In this respect, medical texts may prove to be richer sources.<sup>92</sup> And yet, as Catherine Despeux’s chapter shows, the gender constructs deployed in embryological and reproductive soteriologies affected and reflected the experience of gendered identities for both men and women in China. In late medieval and early modern Japan, such notions may well have impacted notions of feminine beauty and womanhood; the embryo, a subject of divinisation within medieval monastic ritual thought, increasingly came to be seen as separate and independent from the mother’s body.<sup>93</sup>

As a direct result of the complexity of some of these issues related to gender, we have consciously avoided reinforcing “positive” stereotypical depictions (for example, describing the Dao as feminine, or interpreting Buddhist traditions as gender-neutral, or egalitarian). More often than not, such stereotypes are distortions generated by the redemptive lens of Western scholarship – particularly the brand that seeks to find all antidotes to the ills of an oppressive, disenchanting, and masculinised modernity in the “maternal” and “ageless wisdom” of the Other. A handful of studies not dealing with the topic of procreation have accomplished the crucial task of shedding light on the role of women in East Asian religions without, to their credit, succumbing to essentialising, colonising, or orientalist definitions of womanhood.<sup>94</sup> At the risk of disappointing the reader that may see in the embryological soteriologies of East Asia a more sympathetic and valorising view of women, it should be recalled that patriar-

92 The aforementioned studies by Selby 2005, Harper 1998, and Furth 1999, among others, remain as definitive hallmarks in this respect.

93 Hank Glassman, “At the Crossroads of Birth and Death: The Blood Pool Hell and Postmortem Fetal Extraction,” in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*, Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 192–195.

94 See for instance, Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge MA: Three Pines Press, 2003); Wendy Adamek, “The Literary Lives of Nuns: Poems Inscribed on a Memorial Niche for the Tang Nun Benxing,” *T’ang Studies* 27 (2009): 40–65; and Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: Hawai’i University Press, 2010).

chal hegemony was, and is, a global product of many traditions, including Taoism and Buddhism.

Despite the manifold ways in which in embryological and reproductive imageries are deployed and interpreted, there remain some commonalities. These provide the unifying thread that ties together the contributions of this volume, *Transforming the Void*, and gives it shape. Transformation (Ch. *bian* 變, Jp. *hen*; or Ch. *hua* 化, Jp. *ke*), especially in metaphysical contexts, is synonymous with generation or birth (Ch. *sheng* 生, Jp. *shō*, or *sei*).<sup>95</sup> Yet, as “transformation,” birth does not occur *ex nihilo*. It is a passage from one state to another, a transition that is defined by change (Ch. *yi* 易, Jp. *i*), which is, in turn, what fuels and defines life. In this way, transformation, that is, the generation of life, is a process that simultaneously arises from and results in the void. Whether understood as the Dao, Buddha nature (Ch. *foxing*, Jp. *bussō*), Buddhahood (Ch. *chengfo* 成佛, Jp. *jōbutsu*), emptiness (Ch. *kong* 空, Jp. *kū*), or vacuity (Ch. *xu* 虛, Jp. *kyō*), this void is the motor of generation. In East Asia, it is not defined by an absolute absence or non-existence, as it was in earlier Indian traditions of thought, including Buddhism. Instead, this transformative and transformable void is pregnant with potential, with the promise of something new to arise from it – a birth or rebirth that, in each instantiation, amounts to nothing less than a return to the fundament and shared root of all things.

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95 See n. 24 in Pregadio, “Creation and Its Inversion: Cosmos, Human Being, and Elixir in the *Cantong Qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three),” in this volume.

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**PART 1**

*China*

