

Precepts, the *Nenbutsu*, and Moxibustion: The Monk Butsugon and the Toolkit of a Buddhist Healer in Medieval Japan

ALESSANDRO POLETTO

Washington University in St. Louis

Abstract: This paper examines a dynamic period of Japanese history—the second half of the twelfth century—when new techniques were added to the therapeutic toolkit of Buddhist practitioners, by focusing on the activities of the monk Butsugon-bō Shōshin 仏巖房聖心 (fl. 1141–1194), a figure often mentioned only for his close ties with Fujiwara no Kanezane 藤原兼実 (1149–1207), one of the most influential political figures in Japan at the time. Through an analysis of records written by his patrons and patients, I will attempt to outline Butsugon’s ideas and practices, to then zoom in on the therapeutic modalities that he employed. He can be seen carrying out rituals from both the esoteric and exoteric traditions, promoting the practice of the *nenbutsu* 念仏—the chanting of Amitābha Buddha’s name—but also conferring the precepts on ill and pregnant patients, and practicing moxibustion, a therapeutic modality typically associated with court physicians. The conferral of the precepts and moxibustion favored by Butsugon are especially noteworthy, as they constitute relatively new additions to the toolkit of Buddhist healers that would soon become popular among members of the court bureaucracy. The paper concludes with a reflection on the implications of the addition of these new technologies of healing to the toolkit of Buddhist healers, for example in terms of the relationship between status and ritual efficacy. It emphasizes the importance of the realm of worldly concerns and everyday life to understand the relationship between ‘Buddhism’ and ‘medicine’ in this period of Japanese history.

Keywords: Japan, *nenbutsu*, precepts, moxibustion, microhistory

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I. Introduction

Butsugon-bō Shōshin 仏殿房聖心 (hereafter, Butsugon;¹ fl. 1141–1194), while not a household name, has received some attention from scholars since the first decades of the twentieth century.² In particular his close relationship with Fujiwara (or Kujō) no Kanazane 藤原 (九条) 兼実 (1149–1207)—one of the most influential political

¹ In *Gyokuyō*, Butsugon-bō Shōshin is generally referred to as ‘Butsugon shōnin’, very rarely as Butsugon, and only once as Shōshin, his ordination name (*bōgō* 法号). Here I have, therefore, adopted Kanazane’s most common usage and dropped the ‘bō’ at the end of his *bōmyō* 房名. When I translate directly from the text, however, I maintain the original phrasing. Butsugon also appears in two entries of *Sankaiki*, where Tadachika calls him ‘Butsugon-bō’ and ‘Butsugon-bō shōnin’. See, respectively, the entry for Jishō 4/3/22, 3: 46; and Bunji 1/8/18, 3: 233.

² See for instance Ōya, ‘Butsugon to Jūnen gokuraku iōshū’ for one of the earliest examples of scholarship on Butsugon. In English, a brief biographical sketch of the monk can be found in Stone, *Right thoughts*, 303. Butsugon is also mentioned elsewhere in the book in the context of deathbed rituals.

Hattori Toshiro, in his classic study from 1964, *Kamakura jidai igaku shi no kenkyū* (in particular 54–64), locates Butsugon’s therapeutic practices within the context of what he defines ‘popular physicians (physician-monks)’ (*minkan’i* [sōi] 民間医 [医僧]). Hattori here conflates all healers that don’t belong to the established lineages of court physicians under the same label, and anything Buddhist is, in his scheme, classified as ‘popular physician’, despite the fact that some of these Buddhist healers, as is the case of Butsugon, were involved in the care of members of the family of the ruler and of the upper echelons of court aristocracy. For figures like Butsugon, the moniker ‘popular physician’ is, clearly, a misnomer that can only engender misunderstandings.

figures of his time—has affected the reception of his activities, and his ‘rivalry’ with Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), largely created by modern scholars,³ has been the object of several studies. When compared to the great figures that loom above Japanese Buddhism in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century—such as Hōnen, but also Shinran or Dōgen—the consideration that Butsugon has received is, however, limited, and often accorded to him more due to his relationships than because he is considered worthy of attention in his own right. He’s not seen as a grand thinker or an innovator, or so the argument goes, despite the fact that originality often lies in the eye of the beholder.⁴

Butsugon was a constant presence in Kanezane’s life, and a practitioner broadly patronized by some of the highest echelons of the Heian court, including members of the imperial family. An analysis of his activities reveals how deeply embedded some Buddhist actors were within the lives of their patrons, and to what extent they influenced some of the most quotidian aspects of their lives, including the discourses and practices that revolved around illness and healing. In the sources where his activities are recorded, Butsugon appears as a trusted adviser, a master of precepts, a skilled ritualist, and a practitioner of various modalities of healing. This paper will attempt to shed light on these aspects of Butsugon’s persona, focusing in particular on his relationship with Kanezane and, within it, on those aspects that concerned anxieties about ill health and the tools that an early medieval Buddhist healer like him had at his disposal to address them.

II. Butsugon and Kanezane: A Close Relationship

Written in an age of political, cultural, and military turmoil, the pages of *Gyokuyō* 玉葉, Kanezane’s journal, brim with dramatic

³ See the conclusion for a discussion of this historiographical issue.

⁴ For instance, the idea that also those who had committed grave sins could be reborn in the Pure Land is usually attributed to Hōnen, but Taira Masayuki has shown that by Hōnen’s time it already appeared in journals and poetry (Taira, *Nihon Chūsei no Shakai to Bukkyō*, 242–44; *idem*, *Hōnen*, 7).

events and major figures. Many of those who appear in the journal belong to the upper tiers of court aristocracy, state bureaucracy, and the Buddhist establishment. There are a few significant exceptions to this general trend, and they almost exclusively involve Buddhist monks of low status who were richly patronized by Kanezane. Butsugon is one of those figures, and among them, one of those he most cherished. While several episodes may be mentioned (and some will be discussed later in this paper), one crucial moment in particular, in which personal and political crises coalesced, highlights the extent to which Kanezane came to rely on Butsugon as a mentor: the death of the loathed Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 in 1180, and Kanezane's ritual response to it.

On the twenty-seventh day of the second month of the fifth year of Jishō (1181), Kanezane received news that Taira no Kiyomori, the de facto political leader of the time, was ill with *zufū* 頭風, or 'head winds'.⁵ On the first day of the intercalary second month, a retainer informed him that Kiyomori's health had deteriorated, and that, most likely, there was nothing more that could be done for him.⁶ On that following day, Kanezane ordered some of his most trusted monks, Chizen 智詮 (fl. late twelfth to early thirteenth century),⁷

⁵ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 5/2/27, 7: 290. Note that the edition of *Gyokuyō* used here employs two sets of numerals, Arabic and Sino-Japanese (Chinese characters), and that there is a roughly four-page gap between the two. For the sake of simplicity, references here are made to the Arabic numerals. Also note that the entries for the first year of Jishō are found in the table of contents under the heading 'Yōwa 養和 1', but the change of era occurred in the seventh month. This means that the year 1181 corresponds to both Jishō 5 and Yōwa 1.

⁶ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 5/U2/1, 7: 293. A 'U' preceding the month indicates an intercalary month (*urūzuki* 閏月 in Japanese, hence 'U'). An intercalary month was added roughly every three years to ensure that the calendar, otherwise based on the lunar month as its basic unit, remained aligned with the solar year and the cycle of seasons.

⁷ Chizen is an important presence in *Gyokuyō*, which is virtually the only historical source in which his activities are described. See Kikuchi, *Chūsei Bukkyō no genkei*; and Obara, 'Kujō-ke no kitōsō'. In English, see the brief account in Stone,

Shinjo 信助 (one of his uncles), and Butsugon to join forces (*dōshin gōriki* 同心合力) and carry out prayers to the best of their abilities.⁸ The situation was, clearly, critical for the country, for the court, and for Kanezane himself. Kiyomori, indeed, had gradually eroded the power and autonomy of the Heian court since taking power, most significantly, in 1160, after the disturbance of the Heiji era (*Heiji no ran* 平治の乱); he had married his female relatives into the families of the *tennō* 天皇⁹ and other prestigious families, and had even dared move the capital away from Kyoto, to Fukuhara 福原, in modern day Kōbe. Kanezane's reaction to the news of Kiyomori's imminent death is, therefore, not surprising.

Two days later, on the night of the fourth day, Kanezane was informed by someone of Kiyomori's passing, but was unable to confirm the authenticity of the news until the following day. Laconically, he writes: 'As for zenmon's [Kiyomori] death, it is now certain' (禪門薨逝一定也云々).¹⁰ His assessment of Kiyomori is disparaging; he points out not only Kiyomori's monopoly on power, and his disregard for commoners, but also what Kanezane saw as his efforts to destroy the Buddhist teachings of the Tendai and Hossō schools, concluding that 'he did not merely obliterate Buddhist icons and halls, he [also] made ashes of the correct teachings of *kenmitsu* 顕密. Records of transmissions from master to disciple, the deep teachings of the various schools, the secret inner

Right thoughts, 303–04.

⁸ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 5/U2/1, 7: 293.

⁹ Commonly translated as 'emperor', *tennō* is to this day the title of Japanese monarchs. Because 'emperor' suggests a gendered form of rule of a polity based on military conquest, this translation is ill-suited to premodern Japan (there were, in fact, several female *tennō*). It has, therefore, been left untranslated here. I have, however, for the sake of convenience retained the adjectival form 'imperial' to designate anything *tennō*-related.

¹⁰ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Jishō 5/U2/4 and 5, 7: 293–94. Kanezane regularly refers to Kiyomori as 'zenmon', a term that designated a man who had taken the tonsure without leaving their household, as Kiyomori had done. The female correspondent term is *zenni* 禪尼.

mysteries, [they all burnt down]’ (只非煙滅仏像堂舎、顯密正教悉成灰燼、師跡相承之口決抄出、諸宗之深義、秘密之奧旨等).¹¹ Kanezane here is clearly referring to the episode that led to the destruction of Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji in 1181, while *kenmitsu*, ‘exoteric and esoteric [teachings]’, is a term used to designate Buddhism as a whole. Kiyomori was, according to him, an enemy of Buddhism, and Kanezane sees his death as divine punishment (*shinbatsu myōbatsu* 神罰冥罰).¹²

However, on that same day, Kanezane also summoned Butsugon, and had him conduct various rituals on his behalf. First he had him draw a set of Buddhist deities, Ichiji-kinrin 一字金輪 (Skt. Ekākṣara-uṣṇīṣacakra; One Syllable Golden Wheel),¹³ Bishamonten 毘沙門天 (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa), and three ‘luminous kings’ (Jp. *myōō* 明王; Skt. *vidyārāja*), Fudō 不動 (Skt. Acala), Kujaku 孔雀 (Skt. Mahāmāyūrī), and Aizen 愛染 (Skt. Rāgarāja), followed by a dedicatory offering of those images together with a series of sūtras, including the *Sūtra for the Protection of Country Borders* (*Shugo kokkai kyō* 守護国界經),¹⁴ the *Sūtra for Humane Kings* (*Ninnō hannya kyō* 仁王般若經),¹⁵ and the *Sūtra of the Golden Light* (*Konkōmyō saishō kyō* 金光明

¹¹ *Gyokuyō* 7: 295.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ One of the five forms of *bucchōson* 仏頂尊. The *uṣṇīṣa* (the fleshy lump on the Buddha’s head and one of the thirty-two marks of the great man) was in esoteric Buddhism venerated as a deity in its own regard. Ichiji-kinrin is the personification of the Sanskrit syllable *bhrūṃ*, and associated with the ideal of the cakravartin, in Japanese *tenrin jōō* 轉輪聖王, ‘the sage king that turns the wheel [of the Law]’; hence the name *ichiji* (one character/syllable) *kinrin* (golden wheel).

¹⁴ Kanezane here used the abbreviated title of the *Shugo kokkaishu darani kyō* 守護国界主陀羅尼經 [Dhāraṇī Sūtra for the Protection of the Country Borders and its Ruler; Skt. *Āryadhāraṇīśvararāja sūtra*; T no. 997].

¹⁵ Abbreviated title for *Ninnō gokoku hannya haramitta kyō* 仁王護国般若波羅蜜多經 [Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra for Humane Kings Protecting Their Countries; T no. 246]. Kanezane specifies it’s the ‘new translation’ 新訳 in two scrolls; but since the scripture is believed to have been composed in China, it should rather be considered a re-elaboration or rewriting. In English, see Orzech,

最勝王経),¹⁶ all scriptures traditionally associated with the protection of the state, a remarkable fact given the circumstances. Kanezane is very explicit about the desired result of these dedicatory offerings: ‘The aim of the aforementioned offering of Buddhist scriptures and images is to drive away the misfortunes of this time, and to pacify all the disturbances (*yōō* 天殃) under the sky’ (件仏経図写供養之旨趣、且為扨當時之厄難、且為鎮天下之天殃也).¹⁷ The death of the loathed Kiyomori seems to have been perceived by Kanezane as an opportunity but also as a momentous threat to the stability of the country, and therefore important ritual measures had to be undertaken. In this critical context, Kanezane entrusted Butsugon with the execution of said rituals, which shows the extent of his trust.

III. A Patchy Biography: From Genealogical Texts to Mount Kōya

Despite his role as a crucial adviser to Kanezane, and his constant presence in *Gyokuyō* between 1171 and 1194, what we know about Butsugon is patchy; other than in Kanezane’s journal, he only makes a few scattered appearances in other contemporary sources such as *Sankaiki* 山槐記 (the journal of Fujiwara [Nakayama] no Tadachika 藤原 [中山] 忠親 [1132–1195]) and *Meigetsuki* 明月記 (the journal of Fujiwara no Sadaie [Teika] 藤原定家 [1162–1241]) and in a handful of genealogical Buddhist texts.

In documents preserved at Daigoji 醍醐寺, an important Shingon temple located in the southern part of modern-day Kyoto, the name of Butsugon appears on at least two occasions. In the *Kechimyaku buruiki* 血脈部類記 [Thematic Records of (Dharma) Lineage Transmission] a Shingon text about the transmission of teachings and school lineages, in an entry on the entrusting of the Law from the

Politics and Transcendent Wisdom.

¹⁶ This is the title of Yijing’s 義淨 (635–713) translation of the *Suvarṇa prabhāsōttama sūtra*, T no. 665. For a study of the uses of this sūtra in Heian Japan, see Sango, *The Halo of Golden Light*.

¹⁷ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 5/U2/5, 7: 296.

fourteenth head abbot (*zasu* 座主) of Daigoji, Shōkaku 勝覚 to his disciple Kenkaku 賢覚 (1080–1156) Butsugon appears within that same lineage as a disciple of Kenkaku under the name of ‘Shōshin (Butsugon-bō ācārya) 聖心 (仏巖房阿闍梨).¹⁸ The same genealogy is also presented in another text kept at Daigoji, the *Denpō kanjō shishi sōjō kechimiyaku* 伝法灌頂師資相承血脈 [Lineage Transmission from Master to Disciple of (Those Who Were Conferred) *Abhiṣeka*] in which Butsugon is placed within the Dharma lineage of Kenkaku, called Daigoji Rishōin 理性院. In this text, however, he is also listed as a disciple of Jōgen-bō Nichizen 浄巖房日禅, a second generation disciple of Meizan 明算, from the Chūin 中院 strain of Shingon Buddhism on Mount Kōya.¹⁹ Likewise, in the *Kōyasan sōjō keifu* 高野山相承系譜 [Genealogy of (Dharma) Transmission on Mount Kōya], Butsugon is listed as a disciple of Kyōjin 教尋.²⁰ We also know from the *Kōyasan ōjōden* 高野山往生伝 (on which, see below), that at some point he was *gakutō* 学頭 (head monk for educational affairs) at Daidenpōin 大伝法院 on Mount Kōya.²¹ These genealogical texts show that Butsugon inherited two strains of Shingon Buddhism, Rishōin (Daigoji) and Chūin (Kōya), and that he was a learned monk, which are all elements that help account for his versatility.

While we can identify Butsugon’s Dharma lineages with relative accuracy, we know nothing about his life beyond its monastic aspects; unclear elements include his ancestry and social status, while basic information such as his dates of birth and death are also unknown. The first mention of Butsugon beyond the simple genealogical records discussed above can be found in the *Omuro gosho Kōyasan gosanrō nikki* 御室御所高野山参籠日記 [Diary of the Retreat on Mount Kōya of the Abbot of Ninnaji (*Omuro gosho*)], in an entry for the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the fifth year of Kyūan 久安 (1149), in which he is said to have participated in an assembly to hold lectures on the *Ullambana Sūtra* (Jp. *Urabon-kō* 盂蘭盆講), held as

¹⁸ Muramatsu, ‘Ashō-bō Insai ni tsuite’, 73

¹⁹ Ibid., 74; Obara, ‘Butsugon-bō Shōshin to sono shūhen’, 218.

²⁰ Wada, ‘Jūnen gokuraku iōshū ni tsuite’, 3.

²¹ *Kōyasan ōjōden*, 699–700.

part of the rituals traditionally performed on this day to celebrate the Ghost Festival and offer nourishment to the dead.²² His presence on Mount Kōya is attested from this date, but it is possible that he had been residing there prior to this.

Early occurrences of Butsugon in historical and genealogical text, then, attest to a connection with Mount Kōya. The importance of this Buddhist locale in the monk's life can hardly be overestimated, and is also attested by the fact that Butsugon's biography as we know it is virtually bookended by episodes that involve Mount Kōya. In the *Kōyasan ōjōden* 高野山往生伝 [Biographies (of Those from) Mount Kōya Reborn in the Pure Land], a collection of biographies of monks active on Mount Kōya who were believed to have attained birth in the Pure Land of Amida (*ōjō* 往生), the author/compiler of the text, identified as Fujiwara no Sukenaga 藤原資長 (1119–1195), mentions Butsugon as his source of information for the monk Hōjō-bō Kyōjin 宝生房教尋, who had passed away in 1141, on the twenty-third day of the third month of the seventh year of Hōen 保延. While the date of compilation of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* is unclear—the introduction to a copy printed in 1677 gives the date of compilation as 1184, but there are doubts over its reliability²³—the passage, located at the end of Kyōjin's life account, explains that Butsugon-bō Shōshin, the head of educational affairs at [Dai]denpōin on Mount Kōya was well acquainted with the circumstances of Kyōjin's passing (as the reader may remember, Kyōjin was mentioned as one of Butsugon's masters in some Dharma genealogies). For this reason, Sukenaga concludes, he recorded what he had heard from him.²⁴ This account is particularly germane to our discussion of Butsugon for two reasons: it strongly suggests that Butsugon was on Mount Kōya already in 1141; and that, by the time when *Kōyasan ōjōden* was compiled—namely, 1194—Butsugon had moved back to Mount

²² On the origins and development of the Ghost Festival in China, see Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*.

²³ On the author and dating of the *Kōya ōjōden*, see Imamura, *Kamo no Chōmei to sono shūben*, 414–19.

²⁴ *Kōyasan ōjōden*, 700; Wada, 'Jūnen gokuraku iōshū ni tsuite', 3.

Kōya. These dates will come useful in thinking about Butsugon's relationship with Kanezane and, in particular, its cessation in or around 1194.

IV. Pure Land and Shingon: Butsugon and the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*

Butsugon is mentioned in *Gyokuyō* about thirty years after the events surrounding the death of Kyōjin, which he witnessed as one of his disciples. Around the same time, he also makes a brief appearance in *Sankaiki*. Fujiwara no Tadachika was at the time involved in a long pilgrimage program that included visits to a hundred temples within and outside the capital, and in the entry for the twenty-second day of the third month of the fourth year of Jishō (1180) he writes: 'We arrive at Tōji. [Afterwards] we pay homage to the pagoda of Butsugon-bō's Imatennōji (至東寺、於佛嚴房今天王寺塔禮了).²⁵ According to an entry in *Hyakurensō* 百鍊抄 [Records of (a Mirror) Polished a Hundred Times], Imatennōji 今天王寺 was a different name under which Fujōbutsuin 普成仏院 was known;²⁶ in addition, the same entry also mentions its many-treasured pagoda (*tabōtō* 多宝塔)—a single storied pagoda with an ornamental tier—which is probably the pagoda to which Tadachika paid his respects, in the *Sankaiki* passage simply referred to as *tō* 塔 (pagoda).²⁷

The circumstances of the foundation of Imatennōji are especially

²⁵ *Sankaiki*, entry for Jishō 4/3/22, 3: 46.

²⁶ Takahashi Shin'ichirō notices that in the late Kamakura period the temple would change name to Butsumyōin 仏名院. Takahashi, 'Butsumyōin to Daigoji Sanbōin', 23.

²⁷ *Hyakurensō*, entry for Angen 2 (1176)/8/13: 92; Obara, 'Butsugon-bō Shōshin to sono shūhen', 222. The fact that the Imatennōji's Butsugon-bō is the same Butsugon that also appears in *Gyokuyō* is further confirmed by a later entry in *Sankaiki* (Bunji 1 [1185]/8/18), in which Tadachika discusses about the Dharma with Butsugon-bō and later receives a physical examination from him. See *Sankaiki* 3: 233.

noteworthy. The land on which the temple was built had been given to Butsugon by Bifukumon'in 美福門院 (Fujiwara no Nariko, alt. Tokushi 藤原得子 [1117–1160]) consort of the tonsured retired *tennō* Toba 鳥羽法王 (1103–1156; r. 1107–1123) on the basis of her faith in Shitennōji 四天王寺, an ancient temple in modern-day Osaka that had, by this time, become an important centre of Pure Land worship. The foundation of Imatennōji can be seen as an attempt to create a center for the practice of Shitennōji Pure Land Buddhism closer to the capital.²⁸ We can identify here another aspect of Butsugon's praxis and thought that also frequently appears in *Gyokuyō*, namely, Pure Land Buddhism. Despite having inherited Dharma-lineages from two Shingon traditions, Butsugon was indeed extremely well versed in Pure Land literature, to the point that he was even tasked by tonsured retired *tennō* Goshirakawa 鳥羽法王 (1127–1192; r. 1155–1158) with the compilation of a Pure Land compendium.

The text in question, entitled *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū* 十念極樂易往集 [Compilation on Easy Rebirth in the Pure Land through the Ten Recitations (of the *nenbutsu*)] is mentioned twice in *Gyokuyō*. The first time, in the entry for the thirtieth day of the eleventh month of the second year of Angen (1176), Kanezane writes that: 'Butsugon-bō came and had me see [a collection of] excerpts from Dharma literature <Its title is *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*, in six scrolls>²⁹ It is a rare and precious text. Although it is a fair copy, there are some mistakes in the way it is written, and thus I have shown [those mistakes] to him. The *shōnin* agreed with me.' (仏殿房来、令見抄出之法文、<其名、十念極樂易往集、六卷也>珍重書也、但清書也、間書様有誤等、余示其由、聖人甘心).³⁰ On another

²⁸ Takahashi, 'Butsumyōin to Daigoji Sanbōin', 24–25; Obara 'Butsugon-bō Shōshin to sono shūhen' 224–25.

²⁹ < > (angle brackets) indicate an interlinear note in the original text, in Japanese known as *warigaki* 割書 or *warichū* 割注. The text that is part of the interlinear note in the original manuscript is in a smaller font; in modern typeset editions, it is usually rendered into two half-sized columns.

³⁰ *Gyokuyō* 4: 240.

occasion, about a year later, Kanezane mentions the text again and writes: ‘Today I have, for the entire day, read the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*, the book of Butsugon shōnin. It is a work of great erudition. The book has six scrolls in total, and I have heard it was compiled at the behest of the tonsured retired *tennō* (*hōō* 法皇) [Goshirakawa]’ (今日、終日見仏巖聖人所書之十念極樂易往集、広才之書也、件書總六卷、依法皇詔旨所撰集云々).³⁰ These passages, while lacking in details, provide a crucial piece of information: the text originally consisted of six scrolls.

The *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū* was long believed lost, until sections of it, corresponding to the sixth scroll, were rediscovered in the collection of Kanchiin 観智院, a temple part of the Tōji complex in Kyoto.³² Following Ōya Tokujō’s early interpretation, many scholars have seen in the text the heavy influence of Shingon thought and, consequently, have understood Butsugon’s own Buddhist thought as being mediated through Shingon notions. For instance, passages that claim the birth in the Pure Land can be obtained in this lifetime, and that Amida is a manifestation of Dainichi 大日 (Skt. Mahāvairocana), the central deity of the esoteric pantheon, have been frequently emphasized.³³ While it is undeniable that the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū* shows clear Shingon influences, Wada Shūjō’s research has demonstrated that Butsugon did not actually single-handedly compose it, but that he rather incorporated large sections of Kakuban’s 覚鑿 (1095–1143) *Ichigo daiyō himitsu shū* 一期大要秘密集. This text, which constitutes the bulk of the surviving portion of the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*, in turn shows influence of Jippan’s 実範 (d. 1144) *Byochū shugyō ki* 病中修行記.³⁴ It is unclear what themes or texts the other sections of the compendium, which to this day have not been discovered and are assumed to no longer exist, dealt with.

Kakuban, the founder of Daidenpōin on Mount Kōya, was an eclectic scholar-monk broadly versed in Shingon and Tendai Bud-

³¹ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 1/10/2, 5: 194.

³² Ōya, ‘Butsugon to Jūnen gokuraku iōshū’, 263.

³³ *Ibid.*, 269–74.

³⁴ Wada, ‘Jūnen gokuraku iōshū ni tsuite’, 7–8.

dhism. Today he is primarily known for incorporating Pure Land elements into Shingon thought,³⁵ as in one of his most famous works, the *Gorin kuji myōhimitsu shaku* 五輪九字明秘密釈 [The Illuminating Secret Commentary on the Five Cakras and the Nine Syllables], in which he argues the sameness of Dainichi and Amida 阿彌陀 (Skt. Amitābha)—a notion that is also brought up in the text that constituted the basis for much of what survives of Butsugon’s *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*. Kakuban and Butsugon were both initiated into Kenkaku’s Rishōin Dharma lineage, and Butsugon was affiliated for some time with Daidenpōin, a temple that Kakuban had founded and where one of Butsugon’s masters, Kyōjin, had served as head of educational affairs (*gakutō*). These are all aspects that surely influenced Butsugon’s thought and praxis, and the clearest proof of his indebtedness to Kakuban can be found in the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū* itself. They were, however, also very different in some significant regards, first and foremost in terms of status: whereas Kakuban managed to rise to the top of influential temples such as Kongōbuji 金剛峯寺, one of the head temples of the Shingon school, Butsugon was for most his life a monk of low status and no official rank—except for the aforementioned stint as head of education affairs at Daidenpōin towards the end of his career. It is also hard to gauge to what extent Butsugon praxis as seen in *Gyokuyō* can be considered evidence of influence from Kakuban’s Shingon-inflected Pure Land Buddhism. The attitude towards this issue, which has been the object of sustained discussion by Japanese scholars for decades now, seems to have been retroactively informed by the discovery of *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*; on the basis of this text, scholars have attempted to see or find Shingon Pure Land Buddhism in Butsugon’s actions and ideas, and affirm or deny the influence of his ideas—and of his presumed Shingon Pure Land character—over Kanzeane.

The analysis that follows, which is based on Butsugon’s appearances in *Gyokuyō*, doesn’t attempt to pigeonhole Butsugon as a repre-

³⁵ On ‘Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism’, see for example Proffitt, *Esoteric Pure Land Buddhism*.

sentative of a discrete Buddhist lineage, an approach that stems from traditional Japanese Buddhology, in which the school was usually conceived as the fundamental unit of analysis. My intention here is to examine Butsugon's actions in context and in all their complexity, without being too concerned with the fact that they might look contradictory. I also see with skepticism the idea that, only because he compiled the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū*, Butsugon's actions must hold a certain meaning and must be interpreted in a certain way. This is problematic in this specific case because the work only exists in an incomplete fashion, and therefore can't be seen as representative of Butsugon's scholarship concerning Pure Land or Shingon Buddhism, let alone his practice. From a more general methodological perspective, by conceiving the relationship between theory and practice in hierarchical terms, with the former unilaterally informing the latter, it is easy to lose sight of larger contexts within which individuals were active, their embeddedness in time and place. This will become clear, I hope, for Butsugon throughout the rest of this paper, but his case should not be conceived as unique nor isolated.

V. Kanezane's Esoteric Practices and Butsugon

Butsugon, as he appears in *Gyokuyō*, is a complex figure. In some ways he seems to embody the Shingon Pure Land practitioner one would expect on the basis of his Dharma lineages; however, once we zoom in and closely observe the array of practices he engages in on behalf of Kanezane and his family, it becomes clear that any attempt to classify him under that label would be at best simplistic.

A number of entries³⁶ in Kanezane's journal allude to meetings between the courtier and Butsugon during which the two men

³⁶ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Shōan 3 (1173)/4/12, 2: 226; Angen 1 (1175)/8/13, 3: 250 (where Kanezane notices that they 'discussed for several hours [数刻]'); Angen 3 (1177)/2/14, 5: 32 ('we discussed for a good while [良久]'); Angen 3/4/12, 5: 59; Jishō 4 (1180)/3/13, 7: 106; Juei 2 (1183)2/4/5 and 8/27, 8: 181 and 229.

discussed ‘Dharma literature’ (*hōmon* 法文), a generic and inclusive term that designates sūtras, commentaries, and other Buddhist literature; unfortunately, none of these entries provide any additional concrete information of what those texts might have been, or on the format of those conversations. Only in one case, rather than the usual verb ‘to discuss’ (*dan* 談), Kanezane writes ‘I asked [him] about Dharma affairs (*hōji* 法事), etc.’ (余問法事等)—where ‘hōji’ likely indicates doctrinal subjects and possibly texts—clearly indicating that it was Kanezane himself who initiated the conversation.³⁷ As the compilation of the *Jūnen gokuraku iō shū* and his role at Daidenpōin on Mount Kōya as head of educational affairs suggest, Butsugon must have been an erudite monk, and the entries in *Gyokuyō* in which he discusses Buddhist literature and other ‘affairs’ with Kanezane reflect that expertise.

There are two more ways in which Butsugon qua Shingon Pure Land practitioner seems to inhabit the pages of *Gyokuyō*, namely his knowledge of concepts and rituals from the Shingon esoteric tradition (*mikkyō* 密教), and his participation in ritual activity associated with Pure Land Buddhism. Concerning the former—his Shingon leanings—one can first of all notice that, despite his Rishōin and Chūin background, these are surprisingly few and scattered throughout Kanezane’s journal, and that they are sometimes associated with idiosyncratic notions.

The first such instance can be seen in an entry for the third day of the fourth month of the fourth year of Shōan (1174); in this short entry, Kanezane reports that the topic he and Butsugon discussed included *shinshū* 真宗—which is taken by scholars as a transcription error for *shingon* 真言 (mantra), or a reference to Shingon ideas—but also *goshō kakuron* 五性各論, a variant term for a Buddhist concept generally known as *goshō kakubetsu* 五性各別, or the ‘distinction of five natures’.³⁸ This theory, however, is not esoteric in nature and was advocated by the Yogācāra school, in Japan known as Hossō 法相 and whose most important institutional centre was Kōfukuji in

³⁷ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Bunji 1 (1185)/11/14, 9: 222.

³⁸ *Gyokuyō* 3: 61.

Nara. According to this theory, sentient beings are divided into five types on the basis of their innate nature, ranging from those known as *icchāntika*—who lack the ability to ever achieve awakening—to the bodhisattvas, who will be able to achieve the full enlightenment of a buddha.³⁹ It is, in this sense, at odds with the understanding of human nature embraced by the Japanese esoteric tradition, and it is of great interest that Butsugon would discuss such ideas with Kanezane.⁴⁰

On the seventh day of the fourth month of the fourth year of Jishō (1180), Kanezane summoned Butsugon and had him conduct a ritual offering of a copy of the *Heart Sūtra* (Jp. *Shingyō* 心經) Kanezane himself had hand-copied to an effigy of Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, noting that this had been a sudden decision. On this same day, the ritual offering of another scripture, the *Sūtra That Transcends the Principle* (*Risbukyō* 理趣經),⁴¹ copied in golden ink, was carried at the Ōku no in 奥之院 (inner sanctuary) on Mount Kōya⁴² Kanezane

³⁹ See for example the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. ‘*goshō kakubetsu* 五性各別’.

⁴⁰ Given the lack of context (several episodes discussed here consist of a few terse words), and since we don’t know who initiated conversations on specific topics (in this case, *goshō kakubetsu*), the fact that a certain topic is brought up shouldn’t be taken as a sign that Butsugon personally endorsed that specific doctrinal position. He *might* have, of course, but it’s also possible that Kanezane, who would have been familiar with his erudition, saw him as someone he could consult broadly on everything Buddhist, and not merely Shingon or Pure Land topics. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for prompting this clarification.

⁴¹ This is the most common abbreviation for this scripture, whose title in full (in Amoghavajra’s 不空 translation, the most commonly used within the Shingon tradition) is *Dairaku kongō fukū shinjitsu sanmaya kyō* 大樂金剛不空真実三摩耶經 [Skt. *Mahāsukhavajra amoghasamaya sūtra*; The Sūtra of the Vow of Fulfilling the Great Perpetual Enjoyment and Benefiting All Sentient Beings Without Exception]. For an English translation of this short but influential text into English, see Miyata, ‘The Sutra of the Vow’, 9–26.

⁴² *Gyokuyō* 7: 116. From his journal, we know that Kanezane started copying the *Risbukyō* on the first day of the fourth month, and completed it three days

also wished to offer his copy of the *Heart Sūtra* to the Oku no in, and thus entrusted Butsugon with the task of carrying out the ritual. The entry concludes with Butsugon teaching Kanezane the ‘Secret Key (*biken* 秘鍵) to the *Heart Sūtra*’. Kōbō Daishi (lit. ‘great master who spread the [Buddhist] law’) is the posthumous title attributed to the monk Kūkai 空海 (774–835), traditionally identified as the founder of the Shingon school, while the *Sūtra That Transcends the Principle*, despite formally being a sūtra from the *prajñāpāramitā* (perfection of wisdom) literature, was highly valued within the Shingon school because in it Vajrasattva (Kongōsatta 金剛薩埵), a form of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra who was regarded as the second patriarch of the Shingon school, receives the teaching of the perfection of wisdom from Vairocana Buddha (Birushana 毘盧舍那). The *Heart Sūtra*, a brief and hugely influential scripture in the East Asian Buddhist tradition that explicates on the notion of emptiness, was also not in itself an esoteric text, but the ‘Secret Key to the Heart Sūtra’ was a commentary on the scripture penned by Kūkai, in which he expanded on the text from a markedly esoteric perspective.⁴³ Some scholars have seen Kanezane’s personal inclination towards Mount Kōya’s esoteric Buddhism as a product of his relationship with Butsugon;⁴⁴ while the dynamics of Kanezane’s relationship with monks and temples on Mount Kōya are not entirely clear—much like the circumstances of the beginning of his relationship with Butsugon—this is surely a possibility, once we consider the many occasions on which the two men discussed Buddhist literature and other topics, but also entries like the one above, in which Butsugon initiated Kanezane into esoteric interpretations of an ostensibly exoteric text.

later, on the fourth day. See *Gyokuyō*, entries for Jishō 4/4/1–4, 7: 115.

⁴³ This very short text has been translated into English several times. See for instance Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 262–75.

⁴⁴ For instance, Nakao, ‘Kujō Kanezane no jōdo shinkō’, 126. Wada Shūjō surmises that Kanezane’s connection with Mount Kōya—and, consequently, Butsugon—was initiated through his uncle Shinjo, who was also the person who conducted the offering of Kanezane’s copy of the *Rishukyō* at the Oku no in. See Wada, ‘Jūnen gokuraku iōshū ni tsuite’, 7–8.

In other instances, it is Butsugon's ritual prowess, rather than his bookish or erudite side, that emerges. Two episodes in this sense are especially noteworthy: in the first, on the second day of the seventh month of the third year of Shōan (1173), we read that Butsugon had been ordered in secret by the retired *tennō* Goshirakawa to conduct rain-making rituals, and that on that same day rain had actually fallen. Kanezane seems to have tentatively attributed this result to the efficacious nature of Butsugon's actions—although further rituals were planned for the following days, since the capital was in that period affected by a severe drought.⁴⁵

In the second instance, dated the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month of the fourth year of Jishō (1180), thunder suddenly started to roar and rain started to fall in the capital; the reason why this is noted is that the capital was in that period facing another serious drought. Kanezane writes that somebody had informed him that since all the rituals performed up to that point had proved unsuccessful, Taira no Kiyomori ordered Butsugon to conduct prayers to make it rain. He attributes, again tentatively, the thunder and the rain to the efficacy of Butsugon's rituals.⁴⁶ In both cases, regardless of whether his ritual exploits were actually efficacious, Butsugon's services were solicited by some of the most powerful men of the time—the retired *tennō* Goshirakawa and the de facto ruler of Japan in those years, Taira no Kiyomori. While Butsugon's activities are not well documented beyond *Gyokuyō*, these entries testify to the extent to which the monk was valued by the upper echelons of the late twelfth-century political establishment, well beyond Kanezane's family circle.

Other episodes recorded in *Gyokuyō* involve further aspects of esoteric Buddhist practice. On the twenty-fifth day of the second month of the fifth year of Jishō (1181), Kanezane learned the *daikongōrin* (great vajra wheel) mantra 大金剛輪喜言 from Butsugon—who then also applied moxibustion on Kanezane's son Yoshimichi.⁴⁷ About

⁴⁵ *Gyokuyō* 2: 240.

⁴⁶ *Gyokuyō* 7: 182.

⁴⁷ *Gyokuyō* 7: 289–90.

a week later, on the second day of the intercalary second month, Kanezane received from Butsugon the mudra of Aizen; earlier that day he had received the luminous mudra and the mantra of *issai jōju* 一切成就 (Skt. *sarvāthasiddha*, ‘all-attained’) from Jitsugen 実嚴, another monk he sometimes interacted with. Kanezane also notices that this day marked the completion of his plan to chant the mantra of *daikongōrin* a thousand times.⁴⁸ This entry, which has in part already been examined above, followed the news that Taira no Kiyomori was critically ill; the practice of the mudras and mantras (*shingon*) seen above is also part of the countermeasures designed to ritually contain the consequences of Kiyomori’s death. As we have already seen, later that same day Kanezane would summon the monks Chizen and Shinjo, and, together with Butsugon, ask them to join forces and carry out some rituals. The day after Kiyomori’s death, Kanezane again summoned Butsugon to have him conduct a number of rituals for him, including the drawing of a set of esoteric deities, and the dedicatory offering of those images and of some scriptures associated with the protection of the state.⁴⁹ It may be worth returning to the words that Kanezane wrote about the goal of all that bustling ritual activity: ‘the aim of the aforementioned offering of Buddhist scriptures and images is to drive away the misfortunes of this time, and to pacify all the disturbances under the sky’ (件仏経図写供養之旨趣、且為扨當時之厄難、且為鎮天下之天殃也). Butsugon was constantly at the very centre of it.

Along the same lines, on the twenty-fourth day of the first month of the third year of Kenkyū (1192), Kanezane received from Butsugon the mudra and mantra of Kichijōten 吉祥天印真言 (Skt. Śrīmahādevī), and there is at least another instance in which we can get a glimpse of Butsugon’s Shingon side—during the funerary procedures following the death of Kanezane’s son Yoshimichi in 1188—but I will discuss that sequence of entries later in this paper.

⁴⁸ *Gyokuyō* 7: 293.

⁴⁹ See above and entries for Jishō 5 (1181)/U2/2 and U2/5, 7: 293–95.

VI. A Feeble Body, Maladies, and Otherworldly Anxieties: Kanezane's Yearly *Nenbutsu*

As for the Pure Land aspects of Butsugon's practices, one has first of all to stress the importance of Pure Land Buddhism within Kanezane's system of practice and belief, which included—but went well beyond—Butsugon: Honjō-bō Tangō 本成房湛敷⁵⁰ from Ōhara and Hōnen, just to name two, are some of the notable figures among those associated with Pure Land Buddhism that appear in *Gyokuyō*. One of the most unique aspects of Kanezane's Pure Land praxis is what is generally referred to in his journal as *kōrei nenbutsu* 恒例念仏, or annual *nenbutsu*. This is a practice that, as far as we can tell from *Gyokuyō*, Kanezane began in the second year of Angen (1176), and continued throughout his life—with at least one exception and some documentary gaps—at least until the fifth year of Kenkyū (1194), and consisted in the intensive practice of the *nenbutsu* (the chanting or mental recitation of the formula 'Namu Amida butsu' 南無阿弥陀仏) for a period of seven days during the ninth month. The first instance of this annual *nenbutsu* sprint reveals much about Kanezane's inner world, his troubles, and aspirations.

While it is the first year of Jishō (1177) that marks the official beginning of the recitation of the *nenbutsu* over a seven-day period as a yearly event, it was first conceived the year before (Angen 2). In entries from the ninth month, Kanezane clarifies that the chanting (*nenzu* 念誦) he has in mind designates 'the name (*myōgō* 名号) of Amida' and that it is based 'on what is preached in the *Smaller*

⁵⁰ The spelling of this name in historical sources is unstable. The *bōmyō*, Honjō-bō, is sometimes written 本性房, but the most common combination of Chinese characters in *Gyokuyō* is 本成房. Occasionally, Kanezane also uses 本淨房, but either the use of his ordination name or other contextual information make clear that they all designate the same person. His ordination name, Tangō, is also attested in various combinations of Chinese characters, for example 湛敷, 湛教, 湛敬, and 湛豪. How his ordination name would have been read is not entirely clear, with Tangō and Tankyō both being possible readings.

Amida Sūtra (少阿弥陀經).⁵¹ He even reports the number of utterances for the day: a thousand times, which become 99,000 times on the ninth day, 125,000 on the eleventh day, 130,000 times on the twelfth day, 70,000 times on the thirteenth, and 60,000 times on the fourteenth, followed by, on the fifteenth, 150,000 repetitions of ‘silent (*mugon* 無言) *nenbutsu*’. He also continued on the sixteenth day—probably because he had skipped the tenth day, for which there is no entry in *Gyokuyō*—in order to reach his goal.⁵² Butsugon makes two appearances that are seemingly unrelated to Kanezane’s *nenbutsu* sessions, the second on the fifteenth day, for which no details are provided; and the first on the thirteenth day, when he conducts a dedicatory ritual for the completion of the restoration of some Buddhist statues—an Amida triad and a Fudō. Kanezane’s declared intent for that ritual was ‘[keeping] the proper state of mind at the moment of death (*rinjū shōnen* 臨終正念), [attainment of] rebirth in the Pure Land (*gokuraku ōjō* 極樂往生)’, but he also added that most of the merit accrued through that ritual was to be distributed to his ancestors and all sentient beings.⁵³ One can see here a mixture of practices and intents: even activities that don’t specifically belong to the Pure Land tradition could be used to attain benefits leading to the rebirth in the Pure Land—and vice versa, as we will see shortly.⁵⁴ It is also

⁵¹ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Angen 2/9/8, 4: 206. 少 was at the time used interchangeably with 小.

⁵² *Gyokuyō* 4: 206–07, 211.

⁵³ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Angen 2/9/13, 4: 207.

⁵⁴ This holds true broadly in the period in question; to only name one example, practices associated with the *Lotus Sūtra*, one of the most influential scriptures in Japanese Buddhism, were considered particularly efficacious in attaining rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida. For illustrations of this idea, see the *Dainihonkoku hokke genki* 大日本国法華驗記, usually known under its abbreviated title *Hokke genki* 法華驗記 [Stories on the Efficacy of the *Lotus (Sūtra)*], where dozens of stories, while extolling the numinous powers of the *Lotus Sūtra*, culminate in the rebirth in the Pure Land of their protagonists. For an English translation of this work, see Dykstra, *Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra*.

noteworthy that on the first day of the same month Kanezane had started a cursory reading (*tendoku* 転読) of the Lotus Sūtra, one scroll per day, to be completed in eight days—the declared goal is, again, attaining rebirth in the Pure Land (偏為往生極樂也).⁵⁵ Within a consistent framework of aspirations and a shifting set of anxieties, the ritual landscape of Kanezane’s household was composite and diverse.

The following year, on the eighth day of the ninth month of the first year of Jishō (1177), Kanezane writes that ‘starting from today, and until the fifteenth day, I will do the *nenbutsu*. This is a practice that I will perform until the end of my life. I made a vow last year’ (自今日至十五日可念仏、是限一期所修之行業也、去年立此願了).⁵⁶ The following day, Butsugon visited Kanezane, who informed him of his intention to ‘[recite] the *nenbutsu* every year for seven days, and never retrogress [to other practices]’ (毎年七日念仏、一生無退轉可遂之由) for his entire life. The motivations that led Kanezane to this new format of *nenbutsu* practice are explicitly reported: he is chronically ill, and there are various issues concerning his ‘public and private affairs’.⁵⁷ Despite the assumed connection made by numerous scholars between Pure Land notions and the afterlife, Kanezane seems not to be too concerned with issues of birth or rebirth in this context, and the *nenbutsu* he advocates here is no different from other ritual measures that can be seen in other parts of his journal being applied to illness and other worldly affairs. This vividly shows that, far from an exclusive concern with the afterlife, as many scholars have long claimed, Pure Land practice was also associated with worldly benefits, not unlike esoteric and exoteric ritual modalities. The entry closes with a sermon delivered by Butsugon on the emptiness of the five aggregates (*goun kaikū* 五蘊皆空), thus displaying again his scholarly side. On the fifteenth, Kanezane reports the completion (*kechigan* 結願) of his *nenbutsu* chanting for the current year.

The following year (Jishō 2 [1178]), on the eighth day of the ninth month, Kanezane engaged in preparations for his annual *nen-*

⁵⁵ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Angen 2/9/1, 4: 205.

⁵⁶ *Gyokuyō* 5: 190.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

butsu. In the afternoon, at the hour of the monkey (ca. 3–5 p.m.), he washed his hair, and later, at the hour of the dog (ca. 7–9 p.m.), received a visit from Butsugon who conferred upon him the precepts, and, afterwards, began chanting the *nenbutsu*. On the fifteenth day, which marks the completion of the week-long ritual, Kanezane notes having chanted the *nenbutsu* 370,000 times over seven days.⁵⁸ On the ninth day Kanezane paired *nenbutsu* recitation with the reading of one scroll of the *Lotus Sūtra*, a practice also mentioned in 1176 and that Kanezane must have carried consistently despite a certain lack of records; he writes, indeed, that ‘the cursory reading of one scroll per night’ (每夜一卷転読之例事也) was a ‘customary practice’ (*reiji* 例事) of his.⁵⁹

The annual *nenbutsu* of the following year, Jishō 3 (1179), follows closely the preparatory practices established the previous year. On the eighth day of the ninth month, Butsugon visited Kanezane and, after conversing with him, imparted to him the precepts; after this, Kanezane began his *nenbutsu* practice. On the fifteenth day, which marked the completion of the seven-day ritual, Butsugon once again paid a visit to the courtier in order to conduct the dedicatory offering of two images of *hrīḥ* (*kirikuji* 哩字; a phonetic approximation of the Sanskrit syllable followed by ‘字’, which means letter or character), the seed syllable symbolizing the buddha Amida, said to have been drawn by Kūkai himself, to renew the vow of never retrogressing to lower practices. He also added that Butsugon’s sermon was ‘most precious’ (尤貴).⁶⁰

The following year (Jishō 4 [1180]), on the eighth day of the ninth month, Kanezane again summoned Butsugon and received the precepts from him before beginning to chant the *nenbutsu*. However, this year Kanezane was severely ill, and this affected his ability to engage in such an intensive and demanding practice. He could not properly move his limbs, and was therefore unable to properly handle the rosary-like string of beads (*nenzu* or *nenju* 念珠) that was

⁵⁸ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Jishō 2/9/8 and 9/15, 5: 337.

⁵⁹ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Jishō 2/9/9, 5: 337.

⁶⁰ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Jishō 3/9/8 and 9/15, 6: 236–37.

employed to keep count of one's repetitions of the *nenbutsu*; as an alternative, following Butsugon's instructions, he kindled incense sticks (只焚香知数遍、依聖人教也). Kanezane also adds that since he was unable to walk, stand, or sit during the ritual because of the weakness of his body, he laid in bed for the entire time. This is also something that Butsugon had allowed given his poor health. Many had encouraged Kanezane to delay this year's annual *nenbutsu* session, but he writes: 'Ill for many years, I am at the twilight of my life. If my life were to end without me carrying out this practice, how much would I regret it?' (然而多年之病疾、餘命在旦暮、若不遂此行終命者、奈後悔何).⁶¹ By the end of the seven-day period, his total repetitions of the *nenbutsu* amounted to 300,000, a relatively low figure when compared to the previous years, which Kanezane attributes to his poor health: 'Because my afflictions have left me powerless, the number of repetitions do not amount to much' (所惱無術、仍反数不幾); but he also stresses that in order to reach his objective, he fought back his illness and forced himself to conduct the annual *nenbutsu*.⁶²

In the ninth month of the following year (Yōwa 1 [1181]), the ritual follows the same format—precepts from Butsugon and *nenbutsu* on the eighth, and so on—with one exception. On the fifteenth day, which marks the end of the seven-day ritual, Kanezane had Butsugon once more bestow the precepts on him; he writes: '[This is] because [today] it's the day of the completion of the *nenbutsu*, and it's of great importance to maintain ritual purity (*kessai* 潔齋), and also to observe prohibitions (*kinkai* 禁戒)' (念仏結願之日殊可潔齋、又重可持禁戒之故也). This passage clarifies the function of the granting of precepts in such ritual contexts: it was believed to fulfill a purificatory function. In addition to these regular ritual procedures, Kanezane then made a 'great vow' (*taigan* 大願) in seven parts, in order to escape the cycle of rebirth (出離生死) and be

⁶¹ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 4/9/8, 7: 196.

⁶² At the end of the same entry, we read that Kanezane also observed the cursory reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*, one scroll per day, starting from the eighth day, as also seen in previous years. He writes that 'this is also a yearly observance' (是同恒例之勤也). *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 4/9/15, 7: 199.

reborn in the Pure Land (生極樂); the details, he says, are recorded separately, which indicates the existence of a text apart from the main body of *Gyokuyō*, possibly a *bekki* 別記 (separate record; a record produced on a separate scroll) or a *ganmon* 願文 (a votive text) that is no longer extant.⁶³

Two years later, in the ninth month of the second year of Juei (1183)—there is no mention of Butsugon (or of any other monks, at that) in the entries for the first year of Juei (1182)⁶⁴—Kanezane’s annual *nenbutsu* followed once again the same format, with Butsugon imparting on him the precepts on the eighth day of the ninth month, but on the fifteenth day, Kanezane, after chanting the *nenbutsu* 10,000 times (of which a thousand times ‘in a high voice’ [其中一千遍高声念仏也]), also chanted the ‘great dhāraṇī of Amida’ (阿弥陀大咒), and performed ritual prostrations, which he notes were a new practice for him.⁶⁵

Starting from the following year, first year of Genryaku (1184), the performance of the annual *nenbutsu* is no longer held in the ninth month. On the eighth day of the eighth month, Kanezane summoned Butsugon to receive the precepts; he notes, however:

For many years this was held in the ninth month. However, since in the first part of the ninth month I will have to consume *hiru* 蒜,⁶⁶ I

⁶³ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Yōwa 1/9/15, 8: 38.

⁶⁴ This year is also anomalous in other regards; since Kanezane was involved in another time-consuming ritual initiative at the time (a sūtra copying procedure known as *nyohōkyō* 如法經), he mentions starting the yearly *nenbutsu* on the eighth day as usual, but then doesn’t actually begin his recitations until the fifteenth day, after the completion of the sūtra copying. Seven days are then counted starting from this day, and the completion (*kechigan*) of the yearly *nenbutsu* is recorded on the twenty-second day. See *Gyokuyō*, entries for Juei 1/9/8 and 9/15–9/22, 8: 127 and 129.

⁶⁵ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Juei 2/9/8 and 9/15, 8: 235 and 236.

⁶⁶ This is the ancient name for the genus *allium*, which includes, among others, garlic, onion, leek, and chive. Monks were prevented from consuming these plants—and other pungent herbs, collectively known as *goshin* 五辛 (five

would not be able to conduct the nenbutsu within the limits of the restraint [dictated by my consumption of *hiru*]. Therefore, I have decided to bring it forward to this month. On the issue of changing the month, since I was afraid this could be interpreted as belittling towards the Buddhist rituals, I asked the *shōnin* [Butsugon], and he replied saying: ‘That’s not the way it is. The eighth month is when the handle of the Big Dipper points towards the west. In other words, it is a month that has a karmic connection with [A]mida of the West.’ 年来毎年九月有此事、而今年九月上旬可服赫、彼忌限内不能念仏、仍縮行今月、改月之条、可有輕仏事之恐哉否問聖人、答云、不可然、故何者、八月者酉建也、即当西方弥陀縁月也。⁶⁷

Starting from this year, on the basis of Butsugon’s endorsement, the annual *nenbutsu* was held during the eighth month—with exceptions, such as in 1190, when it was held at the end of the seventh month. The following year Kanezane would summon Honjō-bō Tangō, a monk from Ōhara he held in high esteem, for the purificatory conferral of the precepts before the opening of the annual *nenbutsu*, but in 1186 and 1187 (Bunji 2 and 3),⁶⁸ Kanezane would go back to Butsugon for the purificatory precepts, but entries for these years are rather sketchy. With the only exception of 1194 (Kenkyū 5),⁶⁹ these would be the last annual *nenbutsu* sessions in which Butsugon appeared; in 1188 the event does not seem to have been held—or recorded—and from 1189 to until 1193, Kanezane used Hōnen as the master of precepts.

pungent herbs), and in specific ritual settings laypersons were also to abstain from their consumption. This is the source of Kanezane’s anxiety. On this topic, see for instance Funayama, *Bonmōkyō no oshie*, 221–40.

⁶⁷ *Gyokuyō* 9: 66.

⁶⁸ Interestingly, the annual *nenbutsu* in the third year of the Bunji era is conducted from the eighth to the fourteenth day of the eighth month; Kanezane notes that it should have continued until the following day, but that because of a kami ritual (*jinji*) scheduled for the fifteenth day, he had to conclude it in advance.

⁶⁹ This entry, dated Kenkyū 5 (1194)/U8/2, also marks the last appearance of Butsugon in *Gyokuyō*.

Kanezane's annual *nenbutsu* has attracted a great deal of attention from many scholars, who have attempted to use it as a key to understand Kanezane's shift towards Hōnen and, possibly, towards the exclusive practice of the *nenbutsu* (*senju nenbutsu* 専修念仏) he advocated. In particular, a point of contention has been Butsugon's influence on Kanezane's Buddhist ideas and practices, with scholars reaching in some cases antithetical conclusions. Shigematsu Akihisa, for instance, considered such an influence unlikely on the basis of Butsugon's Shingon-inflected Pure Land ideas; according to him, Butsugon's only involvement in the annual *nenbutsu* ritual was the bestowal of precepts as a purificatory measure. Shigematsu also observed that Kanezane's practice of the *nenbutsu*, in its emphasis on large figures—which was very common at the time—and associations with non-Pure Land practices, also seems to be very distant from Hōnen's ideas, and closer to the Pure Land teachings presented in the *Ōjō yōshū* 往生要集 [Essentials for Rebirth in the Pure Land], a compendium of Pure Land scriptures and commentaries compiled by Genshin 源信 in 985.⁷⁰

Others, like Takahashi Masataka and Nakao Takashi, have criticized such a simplistic dismissal of Butsugon's influence on Kanezane's Pure Land praxis. Takahashi, for instance, takes issue with Shigematsu's vague suggestion that the source of Kanezane's Pure Land views was the *Ōjō yōshū*; he points out that most practitioners portrayed in collections of stories of rebirth in the Pure Land (*ōjōden* 往生伝) show tendencies similar to that which we see in *Gyokuyō*, and that assuming that Kanezane was specifically inspired by the *Ōjō yōshū* in his idea of an annual seven-day intensive *nenbutsu* should be based on more solid evidence.⁷¹ Indeed, while we know that Kanezane had read it, it is only briefly mentioned twice in his journal,⁷² which is surely suspicious if we are to take Shigematsu's suggestion seriously. Taka-

⁷⁰ Shigematsu, 'Jōdoshū kakuritsu katei ni okeru Hōnen to Kanezane to no kankei', 451–53. For an English introduction to the *Ōjō yōshū*, see Rhodes, *Genshin's Ōjōyōshū*.

⁷¹ Takahashi, 'Kujō Kanezane ni okeru Hōnenkyō juyō no katei', 196.

⁷² *Gyokuyō*, entries for Jishō 1/10/16 (5: 197) and Bunji 4/3/30 (11: 299).

hashi also highlights what I think is a crucial passage in the first iteration of Kanezane's annual *nenbutsu* in 1177: the political situation was complicated, and Kanezane chronically ill.⁷³ As we have already seen, he explicitly mentions his poor health and various unnamed issues related to his 'public and private affairs' as the motivation behind the devising of the practice. Worldly benefits are what Kanezane was expecting, a view that does not resonate with the *Ōjō yōshū*. Takahashi also points out that this was for Kanezane a period of experimentation in terms of Buddhist rituals, and that the establishment of the annual *nenbutsu* can be seen as part of a larger attempt to expand the ritual arsenal he had at his disposal. This period is also when his relationship with Butsugon starts in earnest, which may not be a coincidence.⁷⁴

Another point that further corroborates the idea of Butsugon's influence over Kanezane, and that scholars seem to have overlooked, has to do with the practicalities of the annual *nenbutsu*. While Butsugon didn't contribute to the inception of the practice, and while his main role was in most cases limited to conferring the precepts every year before the ritual program began, it is crucial to notice that at several junctures, Kanezane consults Butsugon for guidance and advice on various aspects, including practical instructions on how to practice *nenbutsu* while sick, or on the date of the ritual itself, most notably in 1180 and 1184. Butsugon is also frequently present at Kanezane's residence during the annual *nenbutsu* to conduct other rituals, especially in earlier iterations of the event, which are also portrayed in richer details. The detailed

⁷³ Takahashi, 'Kujō Kanezane ni okeru Hōnenkyō juyō no katei', 197.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Likewise, Nakao has identified shifts that seem to confirm Butsugon's influence over Kanezane's Pure Land praxis. In particular, while in early section of *Gyokuyō* Kanezane's beliefs and practices were characterized by a mix of *Lotus Sūtra* and Pure Land elements—what we may call basic Tendai Pure Land—later we see an increase in esoteric rituals and practices. It was, according to Nakao, the influence of Butsugon, with whom he was closely related for over thirty years, that made Kanezane's Buddhist praxis veer towards esotericism. Nakao, 'Kujō Kanezane no jōdo shinkō', 125–28.

descriptions of the event presented above allow us to see some of the nuances of the relationship between the two men that would otherwise escape our attention; and while scholars have preferred to emphasize major ideas or prominent practices, this level of analysis allows us to see little moments and episodes that, however, reveal a great deal. Then, on the basis of all these elements, it is simply not tenable to pigeonhole Butsugon and downplay his contributions to Kanezane's Pure Land praxis on the basis of his Shingon lineage. All the elements we have point in the same direction: Butsugon was a decisive influence.

VII. Butsugon's Healing Toolkit: Precepts, Moxibustion, and Incantations

Butsugon was a skilled healer, who employed *ijutsu* 医術⁷⁵ and precepts, among other things, to treat illness. In general, it would appear that virtually the entire arsenal of Buddhist rituals—including sūtra chanting, the practice of the *nenbutsu*, esoteric rituals, dedicatory offerings, the construction and consecration of icons—could be used to cure illness, and the fact that one of the motivations behind the establishment of Kanezane's annual *nenbutsu* was his poor health

⁷⁵ *Ijutsu* is a term that designates a body of therapeutic modalities that originated on the Chinese continent and were later brought to Japan by immigrant Buddhist monks and other technicians of healing, largely via the Korean Peninsula. It includes herbalism, moxibustion, and needles—all still today closely associated with 'traditional Chinese medicine'—but also, a large corpus of divination techniques, spells, talismans, and incantations. In Japan, starting from the establishment of a centralized system of government based on continental models, the prime specialists of *ijutsu* were court physicians (*isbi* or *kusushi* 医師) within the Bureau of Medications, but starting from the period covered in this paper, Buddhist monks can be seen commonly carrying out similar practices, for example moxibustion, as we will see shortly. I discuss the topic of *ijutsu* more in detail in Poletto, 'Pregnancy, Incantations, and Talismans', with an emphasis on its 'ritual' aspects; and *idem*, 'Therapeutics and Botany'.

further reinforces this point: his *kōrei nenbutsu* was, among other things, meant to have a therapeutic function. However, Butsugon is notable in that he also mastered *ijutsu*, and was specialized in the bestowal of precepts, not just as a purificatory action prior to ritual pursuits of the recipient, but also as a therapeutic device. These aspects in themselves are not unique, but it is his versatility—he mastered all these ritual domains and therapeutic modalities—that makes Butsugon so distinctive.

The first mention of Butsugon's therapeutic practice can be considered the sequence of Kenshunmon'in's 建春門院 (Taira no Shigeiko, alt. Jishi 平滋子 [1142–1176]) illness in 1176 (Angen 2). When on the twenty-seventh day of the sixth month Butsugon was summoned to impart on her the precepts, Fujiwara no Tsunefusa 藤原経房 (1143–1200)—the author of *Kikki* 吉記, the journal in which this episode is recorded—expressed his discontent that a monk of humble status like Butsugon had been employed, rather than someone of higher status from one of the established Buddhist schools.⁷⁶ In this case, Butsugon was ordered to bestow the precepts on Kenshunmon'in on a daily basis for seven days, an aspect that shows that this was not an instance of ordination practiced on one's deathbed, but a therapeutic technique that was expected to have immediate effects. I will return to this sequence and offer a more detailed analysis of selected moments in the conclusion of this paper.

A particular revealing description of Butsugon's healing abilities appears early in *Gyokuyō*. On the twelfth day of the fourth month of the third year of Angen (1177), Butsugon visited Kanezane and the two men discussed Dharma literature; afterwards Kanezane asked him about the treatment for *fūbyō* 風病 (wind malady), and then added: 'This *shōnin* [Butsugon] is a person skilled in *ijutsu*' (此聖人能得医術之人也),⁷⁷ as if to explain why he had brought up that issue with him. *Fūbyō* and similar wind maladies appear in continental and Japanese *ijutsu* compendia, and Kanezane's remark here confirms the

⁷⁶ *Kikki*, entry for Angen 2/6/27, 1: 229.

⁷⁷ *Gyokuyō* 5: 59.

close connection between this class of diseases and *ijutsu* therapeutic modalities.⁷⁸

Kanezane's reliance on Butsugon's *ijutsu* skills can be seen in numerous passages scattered throughout *Gyokuyō*. For instance, on the seventeenth day of the sixth month of the third year of Jishō (1179),⁷⁹ Kanezane consulted Butsugon about his illness, and on the twenty-fifth day of the second month of the fifth year of Jishō (1181), Kanezane first learned from Butsugon the mantra of *dai-kongōrin*, as discussed above, and then had him perform moxibustion on his son Yoshimichi 良通, who was—and would be—often sick.⁸⁰ Later that year, Kanezane had Butsugon once again examine Yoshimichi,⁸¹ and the following year, when both father and son were ill, Butsugon was summoned; while Kanezane's condition was not deemed too serious, in Yoshimichi's case it seemed to have been caused by a 'little *jake*' (小邪気, a malicious spirit) and thus Butsugon suggested transferring the spirit out of Yoshimichi's body first, and then performing moxibustion on him.⁸²

Butsugon was, however, also a famed master of precepts, and precepts in this period were often performed as a therapeutic technique. I have mentioned the case of Kenshunmon'in's illness in 1176, but for instance, Fujiwara no Chikatada's wife also received the precepts from Butsugon in 1180⁸³ during one of her frequent attacks of *okori-yami* 瘧病 (also *gyakubyō*; possibly malarial fever). Also in *Gyokuyō*

⁷⁸ It also shows that Kanezane understood some of Butsugon's healing tools as belonging to a specific domain, which in this passage he clearly labels as *ijutsu*. This understanding seems to have been relatively common among members of the court aristocracy at the time; in *Meigetsuki*, we see a similar passage in which monks are classified on the basis of their mastery of *ijutsu*; see the entry for Kangi 2/9/13, 3: 281. For a more detailed analysis of this and other passages, see also Poletto, 'Therapeutics and Botany', 88–94; the passage in question is on page 92.

⁷⁹ *Gyokuyō* 6: 214.

⁸⁰ *Gyokuyō* 7: 289–90.

⁸¹ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 5/5/2, 7: 326.

⁸² *Gyokuyō*, entry for Yōwa 2 (1182)/2/26, 8: 90.

⁸³ *Meigetsuki*, entry for Jishō 4/7/19, 1: 22.

there are several passages that recount Butsugon's use of precepts on people who were ill, but not yet at death's door. On the eighteenth day of the ninth month of the second year of Juei (1183), Kanezane's son Yoshimichi was gravely ill; his father summoned Butsugon, who imparted the precepts on him, while Jien 慈円, an eminent monk from the Tendai school who was also Kanezane's brother (who refers to him in the text as 'the *bōin*' 法印, or dharma seal), who was also present, conducted a ritual offering to the medicine buddha, Yakushi 薬師 (Skt. *Bhaiṣajyaguru*).⁸⁴ A few months later, on the twenty-fourth day of the first month of the third year of Juei (1184), Yoshimichi was once again in critical condition, and Kanezane, in what by now seems to have become a habit, summoned Butsugon to have him impart the precepts on Yoshimichi. Afterwards, he had the *onmyōji* Abe no Yasushige 安倍泰茂 write a talisman to eradicate illness (除病之符), and divine on whether *kaji* 加持 (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*; 'assistance' or 'empowerment'),⁸⁵ should be carried out (yes, he adjudicated). Kanezane also made two vows to Kasuga-sha 春日社 (modern-day Kasuga Taisha 春日大社), the ancestral shrine of the Fujiwara clan: to visit the shrine every year for three years, and to hold an abbreviated reading of the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Kongō hannya kyō* 金剛般若經; Skt. *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) at the shrine every month. In addition, he had a small statue of a Kannon in the iconography of 'not-empty lasso' (*fukū kensaku* 不空羂索; Skt. *amoghapāśā*) made and offered to the shrine, and Butsugon was on this occasion tasked with reading aloud his written vow. The monk Chizen conducted a ritual offering to Fudō, thus transferring the jake

⁸⁴ *Gyokuyō* 8: 237.

⁸⁵ Originally understood as a form of prayer to invoke the protection of buddhas or bodhisattvas, *kaji* was by the tenth century reinterpreted in Japan as an efficacious technique for warding off the attacks of nefarious entities. In case of illness caused by a spirit or other non-human entity, *kaji* was in fact employed to expel the spirit from the body of the patient. Once transferred to another person—a court lady, in some cases an unidentified spectator, later on specialized mediums—the spirit was forced to declare its identity. See Taniguchi, 'Heian kizoku no shippei ninshiki' for a classic study on this topic.

out of Yoshimichi's body. His condition improved: 'it is the potency of the Buddhist Law' (是仏法之驗也), Kanezane writes the following day.⁸⁶ And yet, on the twenty-ninth day he summoned once again Butsugon so that he could examine Yoshimichi, and he concluded that he was now cured. Kanezane rejoices: 'It is wholly [the result of] the protection of the buddhas and kami' (徧仏神之加護也).⁸⁷

On another occasion, when Kanezane himself got seriously ill in the ninth month of the first year of Genryaku (1184), Butsugon was summoned and bestowed the precepts on him for three days, starting from the eighth day. A few days later, since despite the sustained ritual activity around him Kanezane's health did not seem to improve, he once again summoned Butsugon in order to be examined by him, 'because he is able to see when someone is about to die' (善依見死相也), we are told. Butsugon comforted Kanezane: his condition was deemed serious but nothing to be too worried about.⁸⁸ The following month, on the seventh day, Butsugon visited Kanezane again, and since he had not recovered yet, the monk performed moxibustion on him.⁸⁹

In other cases, Butsugon used precepts more unconventionally as some sort of loosely defined protective ritual. An example of this usage is the entry for the thirteenth day of the seventh month of the second year of Jishō (1178). Kanezane summoned Butsugon and has him impart the precepts to his wife for three days; the reason for this was a dream that he or she had, which suggested they exercise restraint.⁹⁰ Similarly, on the fourteenth day of the sixth month of the first of Juei (1182), to mark the completion of the chanting of Aizen (愛染王念誦)—it is unclear here whether what was being chanted is the name of Aizen, or his mantra—Kanezane received the precepts from Butsugon, but then added that 'today coincides with a day of restraint, thus it is especially necessary to receive the precepts' (此日

⁸⁶ *Gyokuyō* 9: 17–18. The quote is on page 18.

⁸⁷ *Gyokuyō* 9: 21.

⁸⁸ *Gyokuyō*, entries for Genryaku 1/9/10 and 12, 9: 71–72.

⁸⁹ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Genryaku 1/10/7, 9: 80.

⁹⁰ *Gyokuyō* 5: 332.

当可慎之日、仍殊所受戒也).⁹¹ In these instances, while not meant to treat illness, the precepts function within a similar ‘semantic’ area, in situations in which the well-being of the recipient was in question.

Butsugon—and other monks and people around him—often had dreams that he narrated to Kanezane; oftentimes ritual measures were undertaken as a consequence of such dreams. The most famous among Butsugon’s dreams recorded in *Gyokuyō* followed the great earthquake that struck the capital in 1184, on the first day of the eighth month, but there are other instances that range in details and ramifications. On the twenty-fourth day of the third month of the third year of Juei (1184) Butsugon told Kanezane he had a dream ‘most propitious’ (最吉) for him—and the courtier rejoiced for that.⁹² Two years before, on the first day of the sixth month, Butsugon recounted to Kanezane the less reassuring dream a monk had had. According to this dream, disease would hit middle-ranked courtiers in the sixth—and current—month, and then spread to high-ranking courtiers in the following seventh month, without sparing anyone, but this could be avoided by building a three *shaku* (approx. 90 cm) statue of eleven-headed Kannon. Kanezane took this dream very seriously, and three days later the construction of the statue was initiated, but, on the basis of commentaries and scriptures, it measured one *shaku* and three *sun* (approx. 39 cm).⁹³

In other cases, it was Kanezane’s dreams that informed Butsugon’s practice. A significant example of this is in 1186 (Bunji 2); on the eighteenth day of the second month a dedicatory offering of Buddhist scriptures and images officiated by Butsugon and carried out for the deceased Chisokuin dono 故知足院殿 (‘lord of Chisokuin’), a name under which Fujiwara no Tadazane 藤原忠実 (1078–1162) was known. About this ritual Kanezane writes: ‘I had a dream that recent disturbances under the sky are the working of the revengeful spirit (*onryō* 怨靈) of the Hōgen era. Therefore, in order to pacify all under the sky, and in order to reach the other world, this Buddhist ritual

⁹¹ *Gyokuyō* 8: 108.

⁹² *Gyokuyō* 9: 39.

⁹³ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Juei 1/6/1, 8: 106.

was conducted' (近日天下之乱、偏保元怨靈所為之由、有夢想等、仍且為鎮天下、且為訪冥途、殊所姪此仏事也)。⁹⁴

When his eldest son Tadamichi 忠通 (1097–1164) was appointed *kanpaku* 関白 (chief advisor to the *tennō*), Tadazane openly supported his second child, Yorinaga 頼長 (1120–1156) and his claims to that position, a confrontation that would eventually lead to what is known as the disturbance of the Hōgen era (*Hōgen no ran* 保元の乱). After Yorinaga's defeat—and death—Tadazane lived in seclusion at Chisokuin until his death (hence the name under which he's known). While the events leading to this ritual are not precisely reported, by this time Tadazane was believed to have turned into a revengeful ghost who needed to be pacified, and Butsugon was in charge of that operation. Interestingly, the spirit of Tadazane was gracious enough to manifest itself in a dream, and not via disease or other more aggressive means, as it was often the case in situations of this sort.

On the nineteenth day of the second month of the fourth year of Bunji (1188), Kanezane was informed that his son Yoshimichi had fainted, but soon his condition soon appeared to be desperate. Despite no hope of recovery, Kanezane stood by his side ceaselessly chanting the *sonshō darani* 尊勝陀羅尼 (*Uṣṇīṣa vijaya dhāraṇī*), a long *dhāraṇī* that, among other things, was believed to have to power to ensure a long life; at the same time *sūtra* chanting was carried out in other locations, and rituals of all types were conducted. The '*shōnin* from Ōharano', Honjō-bō, who had already visited Kanezane's residence earlier that day, returned to chant *jinsbu* 神咒 (mantra) by Yoshimichi's side. Later that night Butsugon arrived, looked at his body and exclaimed: 'he has attained rebirth in the heavenly realm 生天上'—but not in the Pure Land, interestingly.⁹⁵ The following day, Chizen conducted *kaji*, but Kanezane writes:

Generally, of the people that lose consciousness because of a *jake*, there are many cases [of people who] are brought back to life by the grand efficacy of the Buddhist Law, but [Yoshimichi's] appearance now is not

⁹⁴ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Bunji 2/2/18, 9: 305.

⁹⁵ *Gyokuyō* 11: 287.

that of a person who has lost consciousness, it is definitive death. Not even countless repetitions [of the *nenbutsu*] could do anything.

凡為邪氣絕入之人、依佛法之威驗蘇生、其例雖多、今之有樣非絕入之儀、如法之閉眼也、於今者百千万秘計不所及。⁹⁶

Despite this, *kaji* rituals were conducted for many hours, until Yoshimichi's body turned cold and he was finally declared dead. Kanezane had a retainer go to Goshirakawa to inform him that he was ritually defiled because of the *shokue* 触穢 (defilement from contact) caused by the death of his son. At night, Butsugon conducted an ordination ritual (*shukke jukai* 出家授戒) on Yoshimichi, while another monk cut his hair; he was given the ordination name of Zōdō 増道 ('progress in the Way').⁹⁷ This is the first case of post-mortem ordination attested in the history of Japanese Buddhism—a ritual innovation dating from these years or this specific instance; or merely an instance of a new trend whose earliest extant record is Yoshimichi's death.⁹⁸ On the twenty-second day, Yoshimichi was placed in a coffin, and Butsugon wrote Sanskrit syllables on the cloth in which his body was wrapped, in this period known as *yasōe* 野草衣,⁹⁹ and brought to Saga, in the north-western outskirts of the capital.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Bunji 4/2/20, 11: 287–88.

⁹⁷ Descriptions of important moments following Yoshimichi's death (including his ordination, encoffinment, etc.) are found in the entry for Bunji 4/2/20 (11, 287–91). This entry, unusually long, was written in two moments: the first part, almost in real time; and the second part, months later, in the fifth month. We know this on the basis of a note by Kanezane himself, which covers the last lines of page 288, where he writes that he decided to temporarily stop updating his journal following Yoshimichi's death, and that when he resumed in the fifth month, he filled the gaps on the basis of his own recollections, but also by asking people around him.

⁹⁸ Mitsuhashi Tadashi notices this is the earliest unambiguous instance of this practice, but mentions at least one possible earlier occurrence. See Mitsuhashi, *Heian jidai no shinkō*, 643–44.

⁹⁹ On *yasōe*, see Yoshino, 'Yasōe kō'.

¹⁰⁰ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Bunji 4/2/22, 11: 291. For another analysis of this

A year later, on the twenty-third day of the tenth month of the fifth year of Bunji (1189), Kanezane held a commemorative ritual for Yoshimichi in the form of an *ichinichikyō* 一日經, which consisted in a group of people gathering to copy scriptures (most commonly the *Lotus Sūtra*) on behalf of a deceased loved one. After a ritual of penitence (*senpō* 懺法), Kanezane, his wife Kenshi, his brother Jien, and his servants started copying scriptures that would then be dedicated to Yoshimichi; needless to say, Butsugon officiated the ritual.¹⁰¹ Again in 1191 (Kenkyū 2), on the twentieth day of the sixth month—which corresponded to the third anniversary of Yoshimichi's death—Kanezane's family, his servants, Jien and some of his disciples, and several other people—thirty in total—gathered for another commemorative ritual. As in the 1189 precedent, after a ritual of penitence they engaged in the copying of scriptures—this time, Kanezane copied the 'Skillful Means' 方便品 chapter from the *Lotus Sūtra*—that would later be ritually dedicated to Yoshimichi; Butsugon is once again in charge of the ritual. The reason Kanezane decided to hold this ritual gathering was a dream he had, in which Yoshimichi appeared sickly and wrapped in filthy clothes—his fear was that he had fallen into an inferior realm of rebirth.¹⁰²

It is clear, from the episodes discussed above, that Butsugon was tasked by Kanezane with some of the most personal, intimate interventions: those involving his physical welfare and that of the members of his household, through a diverse range of therapeutic modalities; and those involving the peaceful passage of his son Yoshimichi to the otherworld, and his commemoration in this world. Butsugon's eclecticism is, once again, prominently manifested in these episodes: he deals with ill and aching bodies, as well as with crushed hearts and mourning families. He takes care of the living and the dead, with ritual interventions that are manifold and, possibly, original. In taking care of the living, we have seen that Butsugon also employed a therapeutic modality that was, in that period, starting to

sequence, see Stone, *Right thoughts*, 241–42.

¹⁰¹ *Gyokuyō* 12: 127.

¹⁰² *Gyokuyō* 13: 73.

become more widespread among members of the Buddhist monastic community, albeit still on a limited scale: moxibustion.¹⁰³

VIII. Conclusion: Butsugon, Hōnen, and Buddhism in the Everyday

Despite the pain for Yoshimichi's death, Kanezane had kind words for Butsugon: 'This person will be the master of precepts of my last ordination' (最後出家之戒師也).¹⁰⁴ Things, however, would take a different direction: Butsugon makes his last appearance in *Gyokuyō* in 1194, and Kanezane would eventually take the tonsure and receive his ordination precepts from Hōnen years later, in 1202 (Kennin 2), on the twenty-eighth day of the first month, on the forty-ninth day after the death of his wife Kenshi.¹⁰⁵ His ordination name (*hōgō* 法号) was Enshō 円証 ('perfect realization'). On this occasion, he renounced his position at court and, as a consequence, stopped writing.

Much has been written about the 'disappearance' of Butsugon, with some scholars, such as Inoue Mitsusada and Shigematsu Akihi-sa, interpreting it as a victory of Hōnen over Butsugon engendered by the so-called Ōhara *mondō* 大原問答 (debate at Ōhara).¹⁰⁶ This interpretation, however, is simplistic and unjustified, based as it is exclusively on the fact that interactions with Butsugon become more rarefied in the 1190s, to eventually entirely cease in 1194. By this time Butsugon would have most probably been at least in his 70s,

¹⁰³ For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, see Poletto, 'Therapeutics and Botany', in particular 84–93.

¹⁰⁴ This is part of the same entry discussed above, in which Kanezane described the rituals to mark the third anniversary of Yoshimichi's death following a bad dream. See *Gyokuyō*, Kenkyū 2/6/20, 13: 73.

¹⁰⁵ Entries from *Gyokuyō* for the second year of Kennin 建仁 (1202) are not extant, but Teika writes about this episode—in an extremely critical fashion—in his journal, in the entry for Kennin 2/1/28, 1: 354.

¹⁰⁶ Shigematsu, 'Jōdoshū kakuritsu katei ni okeru Hōnen to Kanezane to no kankei', 457; Inoue, *Nihon jōdokyō seiritsuushi no kenkyū*, 330–31.

and once we consider that he had in this period of his life moved his center of activity from the capital to Mount Kōya, as shown by the circumstances revolving around the compilation of *Kōyasan ōjōden* in or around 1194, it is not hard to imagine that the relationship was interrupted by practical complications rather than ideological motivations.

A relatively obscure monk today, Butsugon was, as I have attempted to show in this paper from a variety of perspectives, a multidimensional polymath: a Shingon monk whose ritual prowess was patronized by the highest echelons of the court; who was well versed in Pure Land doctrine; who possessed a solid grasp of *ijutsu* and, in particular, moxibustion; and who displayed a mastery of the precepts as a therapeutic device, deathbed practice, and purificatory ritual, among other uses. This breadth of expertise (very likely paired with his personal qualities, which are only hinted at but that, I believe, we should take for granted) made him a crucial presence in the world of Kanezane. His domain was primarily that of worldly concerns and everyday life, but he was also involved in the care and commemoration of the dead. Much of Butsugon's activity was concerned with bodies in pain and ill bodies, and the variety of rituals he engaged in reflects the diversity of the therapeutic techniques that Buddhist monk had at their disposal in early medieval Japan, including (Buddhist) *ijutsu*. Butsugon's healing toolkit also included the bestowal of precepts to the sick, a relatively new development that started in earnest in this period, with an emphasis on quantitative aspects that became more and more conspicuous towards the second half of the twelfth century. In this period, these precepts in which quantitative and iterative aspects were so prominent started being conferred not only to the sick but to pregnant women as well; while not a form of illness, in terms of practices utilized, technicians involved, and symbolic associations, these two domains—illness and pregnancy—shared significant similarities.

As mentioned before, the relationship between Hōnen and Butsugon has been a vexed question among scholars. In particular, the apparent shift from Hōnen to Butsugon has proved puzzling to many, who have attempted to explain in terms of a shift in Buddhist belief on the part of Kanezane. For example, Shigematsu Akihisa has writ-

ten that while Kanezane was planning to have Butsugon as his ‘final ordination master of precepts’, he eventually chose Hōnen, which he interprets as a clear sign of the shift from Butsugon to Hōnen. Shigematsu goes as far as to say that Butsugon’s Shingon-inflected Pure Land ideas had no influence on Kanezane’s practice, and that the primary influence on the latter’s practice of the *nenbutsu* is to be found in the *Ōjō yōshū*.¹⁰⁷ As it has been shown in my discussion of the relationship between Kanezane and Butsugon, there is no doubt that Butsugon’s influence over Kanezane was significant and persistent, spanning from big ideas to small practical details. It is also very likely that Butsugon was, by the early 1200s, no longer alive; and that already by the mid-1190s, he had left the capital. Considering this, and Kanezane’s rather steady Buddhist interests as depicted in *Gyokuyō*, one may even wonder whether that shift needs to be explained in ideological terms at all. This becomes, I believe, all the clearer once we look at how Kanezane interacts with the two men: Butsugon and Hōnen as depicted in *Gyokuyō* are, in fact, not that dissimilar, as they perform similar roles and appear in similar contexts.¹⁰⁸

There are two passages that shed light on how the reception of *shōnin*-like monks, like Butsugon and Hōnen, was conflicting among members of the rarefied court bureaucracy. The first is from *Kikki*, the journal of Fujiwara no Tsunefusa, and concerns Butsugon, who was summoned to impart the precepts to Kenshunmon’in. This passage has been mentioned before, but in full it reads:

Starting from today, the consort of the retired *tennō* [Kenshunmon’in] will receive the precepts for seven days. It is Butsugon *shōnin* who will impart her the precepts. This is something that has ordinarily been done before, and should certainly be thus [done this time

¹⁰⁷ Shigematsu, ‘Jōdoshū kakuritsu katei ni okeru Hōnen to Kanezane to no kankei’, 451, 463.

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that *Gyokuyō*, for the years in which Hōnen appears, only exists in a fragmentary fashion. We see, however, that Hōnen acts as master of precepts on the occasion of Kanezane’s *kōrei nenbutsu*, and, in at least one case, confers the precepts onto a sick person. This episode is described below.

as well]. Butsugon is a highly esteemed person, but should not [in a situation like this] a leader of one of the established Buddhist schools have been summoned first?

自今日女院限七ヶ日、有御受戒、仏嚴聖人奉授之、此事日来所申行也、尤可然、但仏嚴雖無止者、先被召[可?]然之一宗長吏等歟。¹⁰⁹

An indirect response to Tsunefusa's objections can be seen in an entry from *Gyokuyō* in which Kanezane summoned Hōnen to have him impart the precepts to his daughter Taeko. This entry is a precious window into the mind of Kanezane and into the culture of the late twelfth century, as it explicitly addresses some of the tensions that seem to have been at work even in a relatively homogenous society as that of the imperial court. Kanezane records:

Today I summoned Hōnen-bō *shōnin* Genkū, and the *tennō*'s consort received the precepts [from him]. There are people who criticized me saying that according to precedent, a *shōnin* like him should never be allowed to visit the residence of an aristocrat. [Such criticism] is based on the fact that people are ignorant on the matter. Precepts are something that should not be taken lightly, and one should only take as their master someone who has been properly instructed. However, nowadays eminent monks do not know anything at all about precepts. Up until the time of Zennin and Chūjin, eminent monks all favored the granting of precepts. Since then, there has not been anything like that. In these times, the *shōnin* all learn this Way (学此道), and they are efficacious (又有効驗). For these reasons, I disregarded their opposition and summoned him.

此日、請法然房上人源空、中宮有御受戒事、先例如此上人、強不參貴所之由、有傾輩云々、是不知案内也、受戒者、是事不聊爾、以伝受人可為師、而近代、名僧等、一切不知戒律事、禅仁、忠尋等之時までは、名僧等、皆好授戒、自其以後都無此事、近代上人皆学此道、又有効驗、仍不顧傍難、所請用也。¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Kikki*, entry for Angen 2/6/27, 1: 229. Kikuchi Hiroki also discusses these two episodes through similar lenses. See Kikuchi, *Chūsei Bukkyō no genkei*.

¹¹⁰ *Gyokuyō*, entry for Kenkyū 2/9/29, 13: 111.

Here Kanezane on one hand takes a very critical stand on those whom he labels ‘eminent monks’ (*meisō* 名僧), while on the other he extolls the virtue of *shōnin* like Hōnen—and, we may add, Butsugon as well. It is a manifesto of sort that puts into words what actions of patronage throughout *Gyokuyō* make clear. It also locates the conferral of precepts—which is referred to as a ‘Way’ 道—within the domain of *shōnin*. The statement that follows—‘and they are efficacious’—makes perfectly clear that the function they were understood to have was also practical—ritual, apotropaic, therapeutic.

In conclusion, the toolkit of Butsugon as a healer incorporated elements old and new: esoteric rituals and exoteric liturgies from the Buddhist arsenal, the chanting of the *nenbutsu*, the conferral of precepts as a therapeutic device, and the practice of *ijutsu*, a set of therapeutic modalities at the time more closely associated with court physicians, whose mastery Butsugon displayed through his frequent use of moxibustion. He is, however, quite different from figures like Kajiwara Shōzen 梶原性全 (1265–1337), a monk active over a century after him, who read extensively the new works on therapeutics composed and systematized in Song China (960–1279) and, on the basis of them, produced two voluminous compendia, entitled *Ton’ishō* 頓医抄 (ca. 1303) and *Man’anpō* 万安方 (1315).¹¹¹ We know painfully little about how Butsugon mastered moxibustion and to what extent he was also proficient in other *ijutsu* practices, and, as far as we know, he didn’t write or compile any works in that domain.

What we *can* say, broadly, is that his eclectic approach reveals the range of techniques that some Buddhist monks could resort to in order to treat illness in early medieval Japan, but also how deeply embedded within the daily lives of their patrons they were. I think it’s fair to say that ‘Buddhist medicine’ didn’t exist as a discrete, clearly defined sphere within the activities of Buddhist ritualists, many of whom were also healers. The treatment of illness, more vaguely contoured protective and purificatory rituals, the safeguarding of parturients, and the care of the dying and the dead, including their

¹¹¹ On Kajiwara Shōzen, see Goble, *Confluences of Medicine*.

commemoration, existed on a continuum that often involved the same individuals.

Looking at these activities and their everyday quality, one can unearth networks of personal relationships and quotidian details that would otherwise get lost in macro-narrations concerning the relationship between Buddhism and healing. This study of Butsu-gon, therefore, is also an attempt to rediscover within the therapeutic and ritual arena of early medieval Japan, through an analysis of the vivid microcosm of an early medieval court aristocrat, some of the personal dynamics that shaped the interactions between patients and Buddhist healers, and return a fuller picture of what we might call ‘Buddhist medicine’, on the ground, in its most intimate, everyday dimension.

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