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Kūkai, Founder of Japanese Shingon Buddhism: Portraits of His Life

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KŪKAI, FOUNDER OF JAPANESE SHINGON BUDDHISM:

PORTRAITS OF HIS LIFE.

by

Ronald S. Green

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Buddhist Studies)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MADISON

2003

KŪKAI, FOUNDER OF JAPANESE SHINGON BUDDHISM:
PORTRAITS OF HIS LIFE.

Ronald S. Green

Under the supervision of Professor Gudrun Bühnemann

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison

This dissertation is a study of the life of the Kūkai (774-822), known posthumously by the honorific title Kōbō Daishi (Great Teacher who Propagated the Dharma). Kūkai is best known as the founder of Japanese Shingon Tantric Buddhism. The study is based primarily on writings attributed to him and his immediate followers and secondarily on early legends (those apparently dating from the Heian period) as identified by modern researchers. These writings show that Kūkai was involved in a variety of social activities. In some instances I have attempted to understand the socio-political intention of Kūkai's biographers, his followers and others. However, I devote more time to interpreting the biographical stories and Kūkai's words in light of their literary, iconographic and religious images. I have based a large part of my own interpretations on modern iconographic guides, various encyclopedias and dictionaries of Buddhism.

In addition to exploring the specifics of Kūkai's religious practices based on those early writings, I point to the amount of time and effort he spent on other activities, based on those same writings, and examine the nature of these activities. Such activities include writing poems, compiling poetry anthologies and works of literary theory. The early writings indicate Kūkai must have also spent much time on fundraising and administrative tasks at various temples around Japan as well as charitable activities such as overseeing the building of ponds.

KŪKAI, FOUNDER OF JAPANESE SHINGON BUDDHISM: PORTRAITS OF HIS LIFE.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DZ *Dengyō daishi zenshū* (the Complete Works of Dengyō Daishi, i.e., Saichō).

KZ *Kōbō daishi zenshū* (the Complete Works of Kōbō Daishi).

KKZ *Kōbō daishi kukai zenshū* (the Complete Works of Kōbō Daishi Kūkai).

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*, i.e., the complete Chinese Buddhist Canon compiled in Japan during the Taishō era).

Ten Stages of Mind *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron, Mysterious Maṇḍala of the Ten Stages of Mind.*

C. Chinese
J. Japanese
S. Sanskrit

Introduction.

1. The purpose of and sources for this study.

The purpose of this dissertation is to present a study of the life of Kūkai (空海, 774-822), known posthumously by the honorific title Kōbō Daishi (Great Teacher who Propagated the Dharma), based primarily on writings attributed to him and his immediate followers and secondarily on early legends (those apparently dating from the Heian period) as identified by modern researchers. While I have sometimes alluded to later legends, I have done so only in cases when so doing illuminates the meanings of earlier stories or explains important events of Kūkai's life according to Shingon today (e.g., his date of birth). In some instances I have attempted to understand the socio-political intention of the biographers. However, I devote more time to interpreting the biographical stories and Kūkai's words in light of their literary images. As all representations of the life of Kūkai must be interpretive, I have strived to base a large part of my own interpretations on modern iconographic guides, various encyclopedias and dictionaries of Buddhism, all noted. I do not claim to understand Kūkai's experiences on a personal experiential basis. However, as a philologist, I have noted the frequency with which Kūkai's uses certain terms apparently indicative of his experience or interpretation of a situation in his life. For example, Kūkai often uses the term mysterious (秘密, *J. himitsu*), which is always central to his explanations of Shingon and what he identifies as the highest stage of human consciousness. In regards to Kūkai's usages of such terms, it occurs to me in some instances that the explanatory entries in the above mentioned sources are inadequate in that they do not convey the importance he apparently placed on these ideas. In such cases, where possible, I attempt to

provide an alternative explanation based on my training in philology and other aspects of Buddhist Studies at the University of Wisconsin. In particular, I have looked at the life and practices of Kūkai in relation to literature, iconography and comparative religions.

Some of the writings used in this dissertation are those that Shingon has come to consider the major biographies and resources on or by Kūkai. These biographies or writings with biographical information appear in the *Complete Works of Kōbō Daishi Kūkai* (弘法大師空海全集, *Kōbō daishi kūkai zenshū*, hereafter *KKZ*). An earlier version of Kūkai's complete works was published in six volumes from 1901-1911, under the title *Kōbō daishi zenshū* (弘法大師全集, *Complete Works of Kōbō Daishi*, hereafter *KZ*). I have consulted both of these versions in order to examine Kūkai's writings in what is considered the original Chinese as well as a turn of the century Japanese translation of these writings from the *KZ* and a modern Japanese translation from the *KKZ*. The Japanese translations in the *KKZ* are interpretive and do not always follow the Chinese strictly. Researchers today rely on the earlier *KZ* rather than the *KKZ* for reading and translating Kūkai's writings. In my view, there are several advantages to consulting the *KKZ* as well. Not only does the *KKZ* provide a contemporary interpretation of Kūkai's writing by translating them into pre-modern and modern Japanese, it supplements these with detailed footnotes. The *KKZ* also furnishes several extremely useful indexes. These include a chronological index based on the dates appearing in Kūkai's writings, of which I have made extensive use.

A brief summary of the biographical writings I have consulted, compared, contrasted and interpreted is as follows. A more complete list of those works considered by Shingon to be the

major biographies of Kūkai, with a translation of their titles and brief description, is provided in an appendix to this dissertation.

1. *The Biography of Sōzu Kūkai* (空海僧都伝, *Kūkai sōzu den*) by Kūkai's direct follower Shinzei (真濟, 800-60), found in *KKZ* 8:5. This is the earliest biography of Kūkai extant or known to exist and therefore is often thought of as the most accurate.

2. The *Honored Spoken Memento* (御遺告, *Goyuigō*), found in *KKZ* 8:37-95.¹ This writing is sometimes referred to as Kūkai's *Will* and is held up as Kūkai's last words of caution to his followers

3. *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* (遍照發揮性靈集, *Henjō hakki seireishū*). This is a collection of writings including letters, poems, prayers, etc., attributed to Kūkai and gathered by his direct follower Shinzei. Volumes 1-7 are found in *KKZ* 6:147-481. Volumes 8-10, collected after the time of Shinzei, continues as *Collection of Readings for Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō, Supplement of Related Selections* (読遍照發揮性靈集補闕抄, *Toku seireishū obasshō*) in *KKZ* 6:484-427. *Henjō* (遍照) is a name for Kūkai, literally meaning Everywhere Shining. Specifically, *Henjō* is the name Kūkai received from being granted the *abhiṣeka* and the name used by him when granting the *abhiṣeka* to the Emperors, Saichō and many others. It is also a name for Mahāvairocana, the sun deity, whom Kūkai not only represented but became as

¹ See the *Mikkyō dijiten* 847-8 for a detailed explanation.

the granter of the *abhiṣeka*. *Hakki* (発揮) is a term referring, in this context, to divination. Specifically, the expression is found in Confucian writings. *Seirei* (性靈) has a literal meaning of spiritual-nature or holy-nature. The title is interesting in that it connects Kūkai's doctrine not only with Shingon but with Confucianism, which, along with Daoism and Buddhism, he studied before entering China and in which he maintained a clear interest throughout his life. As he says in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* (see number 4 below), "If an individual chooses one, he does not necessarily repudiate loyalty and filial piety by doing so," (Hakeda 1972:102). In addition, the title points to the fact that according to Shingon, the truths it relates must, in some sense, be divined and approached experientially rather than understood on a strictly intellectual basis (at least as the term intellectual is typically understood).

4. *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, (三教指帰, *Sangō shiiki*), appearing in *KKZ* 6:5. This is a work of fiction considered largely biographical and attributed to Kūkai. Although the date of *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is unknown, another work by Kūkai, *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* (聾瞽指帰, *Rōko shiiki*, *KKZ* 6:125), is believed to be the draft for *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and is dated the first day of the twelfth month of Enryaku 16 (797). In China, Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism had already come to be known as the three teachings. *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is a drama apparently meant to

justify Kūkai's preference for Buddhism in the eyes of his parents and others. It is the oldest example of Japanese fiction extant or known to have existed.

As for modern biographies, among others, I have made extensive use of *Shamon Kūkai* by Watanabe Shokō. I have also found *Kūkai: Major Works* by Yoshito S. Hakeda of value for this study. Although the latter biography of Kūkai is short, it is packed with information. At times in this dissertation I have also used Professor Hakeda's translations or the translations of others where adequate. I have also made use of the 1951 dissertation by Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa entitled "Kōbō-Daishi and Shingon Buddhism." Professor Kitagawa included in his dissertation a biography of Kūkai, although at times I found it difficult to identify his sources and follow his style of transliteration. These books, along with Professor Kiyota's works on Shingon, had been all but the sole resources on Kūkai in English for the past few decades until the appearance in 1999 of Abé Ryūichi's *The Weaving of Mantra, Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse*. This excellent contribution concentrates on a single theme, the creation of Tantric Buddhist discourse in the Heian period. I found it quite useful in clarifying fine points brought out in imperial edicts as well as letters or other writings attributed to Kūkai, which helped me interpret the biographies.

Another work to which I often refer is *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai* (弘法大師空海, *Kōbō daishi kūkai*) by Wakamori Taro. This biography seems to be written as much for public appeal as academic research. I profited from the elaboration therein of early legends of Kūkai. Similarly, for legends of Kūkai's mother and other issues, I refer to *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai Living Today* (現代に生きる弘法大師空海, *Gendai ni ikiru kōbō daishi kūkai*) by Miyazaki Ninshō. The numerous

additional books and articles consulted less often can be found in the bibliography accompanying this dissertation.

I first became interested in stories of Kūkai as a graduate student of Japanese literature. Reading works such as *Tales of the Heike* and the poems of Saigyō and Bashō, many questions arose in my mind concerning references to Kūkai and Shingon. As my interests in Japanese Buddhism solidified, I sought out America's leading expert on Shingon and entered the Ph.D. program under the guidance of Professor Kiyota at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Now, after years studying Buddhist history and scriptures, I have produced this dissertation as an answer to my earlier questions.

2. The terms “Tantric Buddhism” versus “Esoteric Buddhism” versus “*Mikkyō*.”

In this study, I have preferred the expression Chinese and Japanese “Tantric Buddhism” to “Esoteric Buddhism,” even though the latter has typically been used in English studies of Shingon. In making this choice, I acknowledge there are also problems with words such as “Tantric” and “Tantrism,” created as categories by Western scholars within the past hundred years or so and often unknown by practitioners (Padoux 2002:17). Based on English dictionary definitions, esoteric means secret, limited to a select few who receive special initiation. Accordingly, esoteric is not the equivalent of Tantric. Traditions that scholars consider Tantric may be esoteric to greater or lesser extents (Padoux 22). Shingon is no different from any other Mahāyāna tradition in Japan in requiring an initiation. However, according to the *Sanmaya* vows, those most important to Shingon, their teachings should not be held back from anyone, but widely disseminated. This is contrary to the English term esoteric as defined above.

In Chinese Buddhist literature, we find the term *mijiao* (密教), pronounced *mikkyō* in Japanese. The term literally means “secret teachings” or “mysterious teachings,” which came to be used by Kūkai to distinguish what he saw as one type of Buddhist teachings from another. The contrasting term used to designate non-Shingon teachings is, in Japanese, *kengyō* (顯教), literally, “revealed teachings.” According to Padoux, a specialist on Hindu Tantric texts, historically, “Tantrism was not considered a particular philosophical system” (Padoux 17). Concerning Chinese and Japanese Buddhist Tantra, Orzech concurs. Nevertheless, Kūkai clearly attempted to delineate the categories of *mikkyō* and *kengyō*. A major portion of Abé’s recent study is devoted to analyzing this point. Abé argues this was not a popular distinction for classifying texts in the Nara or mid-Tang periods, before Kūkai’s time (Abé 151). I do not believe *mikkyō* and Tantra are equivalent. Instead, for the purpose of scholastic study, *mikkyō* can be considered a subcategory of Tantra. Kūkai spent considerable time making *mikkyō* an issue. He based his system, in large part, on another work making the distinction: *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna* (秣摩訶衍論, C. *Shimeheyanlun*, J. *Syakumakaen-ron* often abbreviated *Shaku-ron*, 秣論, T. 32 n. 1668), a text was likely created in China by a Korean. I will return to this subject later. My point here is that in Japan at Kūkai’s time and in China during the previous century, a subcategory of the larger body recent scholars have called Tantra was thought of as, if not a particular philosophical system, a ritualistic system differentiated from other forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is in the sense of this distinction that Shingon is often referred to as *mantrayāna*, the vehicle of mantra. In distinction to other Buddhist traditions, Kūkai referred to the teachings of Shingon as *mikkyō*.

However, what did Kūkai mean by *mikkyō*? In the final chapter of the *Ten Stages of Mind* (十住心論, *Jūjūshinron* T. 77 n. 2425) Kūkai equates Shingon with the tenth stage of mind (十住心, *jūjūshin*) and contrasts it to other philosophical systems, Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Therein, Kūkai defines Shingon as “The stage of mind adorned with mysteries.” The words “adorned with mysteries” in this definition are based on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and the *Vajrasekhara-sūtra* (Todaro 95). Mystery refers to the three mysteries of the body, speech and mind of the Dharmakāya Mahāvairocana. Accordingly, these mysteries are realized through ritual practice involving mudrā for body, mantra for speech and meditation on maṇḍala for mind. The specifics of these ritual practices are the “mysterious teachings” referred to by the term *mikkyō*. The mystery that is realized through these teachings is that we are innately enlightened.

Is this sense of the mysterious teachings equivalent to esoteric? In addition to meaning “exclusive,” the word esoteric has the connotation of “otherworldly.” Kūkai stressed the opposite of otherworldliness by stating Buddhahood can be attained in this very body, that it was unnecessary to wait for rebirth, as other Mahāyānists claimed. Likewise, he argued against the general Mahāyāna idea that enlightenment is beyond words. In fact, it can be said that emphasis on here-and-now experience characterizes Kūkai’s teachings. In the *Ten Stages of Mind*, describing the goal of Shingon practice, Kūkai quotes the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, “What is enlightenment? It is to know one’s own mind as it really is” (Kiyota 1982:59). I believe this sense of mystery is close to the expression often found in Heian period Japanese literature, influenced by Shingon, *yūgen* (幽玄). *Yūgen* is the subtle and profound state of nature. It is

similar to the Sanskrit *tathatā*, “thusness.” *Yūgen* is also used by Kūkai in his poetry to express mystery. This is not the sense I get from the word esoteric.

Scholars who have translated Kūkai’s expressions into English have typically rendered *mikkyō* as “esoteric,” *himitsu* as “secret,” yet *sanmitsu* as the Three Mysteries. Abé has done an extensive study showing all of Kūkai’s written designations for Shingon. Among the most often repeated of these are *mitsuzō* and *himitsujō*, which Abé translates as “secret treasury,” “secret vehicle” (Abé 1999:190-1). While I concur with the idea that this is not an incorrect translation, I wish to point out that due to the English connotations of these words (as mentioned above), in them the sense of “mystery” I believe Kūkai conveyed in his expressions is lost. I assume this is the reason no one has suggested translating *sanmitsu* as Three Secrets. Therefore, I join Todaro and Kiyota in preferring the expressions “mystery” and “mysterious.” I have left the terms “esoteric” and “secret” when used in quotations of scholarly materials and translations of others and reiterate, I do not find these to be incorrect.

Finally, as stated above, one of the goals of this dissertation is to examine the similarities between Shingon and other traditions. To the contrary, it appears after the time of Kūkai, in addition to using the term *mikkyō* in effort to distinguish Shingon from other forms of Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings, it was used to elevate Shingon above Indo-Tibetan Tantrism. The latter has sometimes been portrayed as depraved due to sexual content. I reject the implication that all traditions we have thus far labeled Tantric, other than Shingon, are depraved. Furthermore, Shingon is replete with sexual content, something that has been denied by some scholars.²

² In addition to the sexual symbolism scholars have found in Shingon iconography, Kūkai may have denied Saichō’s request for a commentary because of sexual content, as examined later in this dissertation. It is likely, in my opinion,

Following the example of Japanese writers, perhaps unwittingly, studies in English have likewise used the term esoteric to describe Shingon, or sometimes simply use the term *mikkyō* without translation. In any case, scholars have been careful not to call Shingon Tantric.

Regardless of the caution inspiring scholars to use the term *mikkyō*, Kūkai's use of the expression can not be seen as covering all traditions that have been called Tantric by today's scholars. In Kūkai's sense, *mikkyō* can only refer to Zhenyan and Shingon with some degree of certainty. It is unclear at what point, if at all, we may say the focus of Chinese Tantric Buddhism became the Three Mysteries. If we wanted to extend the word to other traditions considered related to Shingon under the category of Tantra, we would have to evaluate each under the criteria of the Three Mysteries, that is, using Shingon as the measuring stick. This might be appropriate in some situations, but not in the overall context of this dissertation, which does the opposite: locates Shingon in the larger picture. Therefore, the term *mikkyō* is used in this study when there is a reason to be specific about those practices of Shingon and Kūkai's classification system. The word is not used as a substitute for Tantra, which I will refer to as Tantra. Likewise, even though there has been no consensus on what does and does not constitute Tantra, it is clear the term esoteric should not be used as a substitution for Tantra, and I will not do so. In the scheme of this dissertation, Tantra is the larger category, or which *mikkyō* is a subset.

As a working definition of Tantra for this dissertation, I quote David Gordon White as follows.

that the most overt sexual images of Shingon, if such existed, were repressed or destroyed during the Kamakura era when it was a government policy to do so with such images throughout the country. I return to this point in Chapter II.

Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is no other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways (White 9).

3. Other notes on procedure.

Although it is traditional in studies of Buddhism in the English language to do so, I have tried to avoid using terms from the Christian Catholic tradition to describe entities of Buddhism. I believe it is often misleading to describe Buddhists in such terms as priest, monk, nun, bishop, abbot, etc. I have only used these terms in quoting other writers. I have opted to use transliterated titles from the Japanese language when referring to specific Japanese Buddhist designations. The more general Sanskrit term *bhikṣu* is used to refer to one elsewhere called a monk or priest, the distinction between the two (monk and priest) is unknown in terms of Japanese Buddhists. Likewise, the term *bhikṣuṇī* is used for female Buddhist called nuns in other studies. The relative ranks of ecclesiastic titles can be found in the appended glossary. Likewise, while terms such as temple and university may also be misleading in the context of the Heian period and Tang Dynasty, these have been more difficult to avoid.

I have cited sources following statements throughout this dissertation. Generally, there are two types of statements for which I do not cite sources. The first consists of those statements providing common information on Kūkai, that is, information that agrees with all or nearly all biographies and other historical sources. This may also include supplementary information on a location, etc. For example, the basic fact that Kūkai granted the *abhiṣeka* at Tōji is well known and does not necessarily require a citation. However, the fact that Kūkai granted the *abhiṣeka* to

Saichō deserves a citation. Likewise, the location and layout of Tōji are described briefly.

However, I do not believe it is necessary to give sources for this kind of information as I simply describe an area of Kyōto. The second type includes statements that are a matter of my own conjecture. This type of statement occurs often throughout this dissertation and is basic to my methodology. I have made efforts to make this type of statement easily recognizable as such.

I have used the Hepburn system to transliterate Japanese and Pinyin to transliterate Chinese. For Japanese transliteration, macrons are used to indicate long vowels. Apostrophes are used for syllables ending with 'n' followed by a syllable beginning with a vowel. Sometimes the readings of old Japanese names are unknown to today's scholars. In addition, the Classical Japanese reading of a name may be different than the modern reading. In such cases, in order of preference, I have done one of the following: provided a name typically used by other researchers; provided several possible readings; made a guess based on possible readings or other information. I have chosen to use Pinyin for Chinese transliteration because currently it is the preference of American libraries and other information systems. I only deviate from the Pinyin system (and possibly Hepburn) if a word is commonly in use in English under another spelling. Where the old or local reading of a Chinese name is unknown, I have relied on the modern reading in Mandarin. I have left quoted translations using other transliteration systems in the original, indicating the reading according to Pinyin or the Hepburn system where necessary.

Chapter I.

Kūkai's Ancestry and Childhood.

Among the numerous sources consulted in this dissertation, those addressing the early life of Kūkai all agree with the writings attributed to him stating he was born into the Saeki family. In the first article of the *Honored Spoken Memento* it says, “My father was of the Saeki family, a Sanuki Kunitado district person...My mother was of the Ato family.” (KKZ 8: 39). Also the Biography of *Sōzu Kūkai* says, “Those of the secular surname Saeki were Sanuki Kunitado district persons” (KKZ 8:5). The Saeki was a middle ranking noble family. Kūkai's parents and nearest relatives lived in the Sanuki (讃岐) prefecture of Shikoku. There they were removed from the activities of the capital and in many ways isolated from the ruling elite. Whether the Saeki family was originally a branch of the Ōtomo clan, as Kūkai and others around the time believed, is less agreed upon. In a sense, however, such issues of truth-value are quite unimportant. For this study, what is important is that the belief was held by many biographers and other individuals of Kūkai's time and afterwards, effectively building a piece of the persona. For this reason, what it meant to be considered part of the Ōtomo clan in the eighth century, how Kūkai apparently used this position and what it might mean in terms of metaphor is rightly a part of this interpretive biography.

During Kūkai's lifetime and apparently for centuries before, Ōtomo family members distinguished themselves in positions of government and military as well as by their scholarship. Ancient Japan was ruled by a small number of clans, each of which came to be identified with a specific function in the governing hierarchy. As one of these ruling clans, the Ōtomo trace their roots to mythological times and appear in the earliest written records of the Japanese still in

existence. By all accounts extant, they were one of the highest ranking and most powerful noble families of ancient Japan. In addition, there is reason to believe that for some time the Ōtomo may have been heirs to the emperorship. I begin this chapter by summarizing mythological and historical records of the Ōtomo clan and Saeki family as connected to Kūkai. Next, I examine what is believed to be the make-up of Kūkai's immediate family and the circumstances of his birth.

1. Kūkai's Ancestry.

In the third century CE, China sent out explorers who came upon what has been called the Yamatai kingdom somewhere in Japan. Their log is the oldest written record of Japanese civilization. Controversy surrounding the actual location and other details of Yamatai has accurately been described as “the longest and most-debated historiographic problem in Japanese history” (Hudson 186). The explorers' account, known as the *Record of Wei* (*Wei zhi*, 221-265 CE), forms a small part of the *Record of the Three Kingdoms* (*San guo zhi*). It records the explorer's finding of thirty countries ruled by the Shamaness-queen Himiko (or Pimiko), who bewitched her subjects (Tsunoda and Goodrich). Although the matter is an issue of some debate, historians generally admit the possibility that Queen Himiko, whose name can mean either Sun Deity or Sun Shamaness (among other possibilities), is the prototype for the mythical Sun Goddess Amaterasu, to whom the Japanese Imperial family traces their roots to this day. Accounts of Amaterasu are found in the earliest writings of the Japanese people, including the *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*, 712 CE) and the *Chronicle of Japan* (*Nihon shoki* also called *Nihongi*, 720 CE). These national histories, written only 50-60 years before Kūkai's birth, are

generally believed to have helped maintain a social and political status-quo in the country, defining the function and social position of each clan in the ruling hierarchy for many centuries even to modern times. It is my opinion that Kūkai's own situation, including his decision to study Buddhism, may have depended largely upon the hereditary social position and other situations concerning his family at the time.

According to the Japanese creation myth found in both the *Records of Ancient Matters* and the *Chronicle of Japan*, the male and female deities of the Plain of Heaven,¹ Izanagi and Izanami respectively, descended to the sacred island and erected a pillar. The two deities circumambulated the pillar, the male to the left and the female to the right. Behind the pillar they copulated and among the divine children they produced was the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. A custom coming about much later, growing in popularity from the twelfth through seventeenth century (Reader 1999 361), and still persisting on Kūkai's native island of Shikoku, involves making a pilgrimage to eighty-eight temples in honor of Kōbō Daishi. Traditionally circumambulation of a Buddhist stūpa or other structure is considered sacred only if performed clockwise. However in the Shikoku pilgrimage, owing to Kūkai's supposed desire to unite Buddhism with Shintō and folk beliefs, a counterclockwise trek around the island is valued not only because of the merit gained by undertaking the increased difficulties of the terrain in that direction but also because Izanami's steps were to the right, counterclockwise, around the pillar.

In the accounts from the *Records of Ancient Matters* and the *Chronicle of Japan*, the deity Ama-no-oshi-hi is named as the ancestor of the Ōtomo clan. Owing to his bravery and military prowess Ama-no-oshi-hi is appointed head of Amaterasu's guard and leads her

¹ Although the areas from which settlers first entered Japan is undetermined, the idea of the progenitors coming from the Plain of Heaven may suggest immigration from a great plain such as found in Central Asia.

entourage from the heavens to the sacred earth. The name Ōtomo itself means “Great Escort of the sovereign.” Later in the *Chronicle of Japan* narration of Imperial history, we find Hi no Omi, the Minister of the Sun, as head of the Ōtomo clan successfully leading the Emperor against people of hostile regions. Because of his success, Hi no Omi is granted by the Emperor the new title Michi no Omi, Minister of the Road. Like Izanagi and Izanami, the Emperor established his palace by sacred pillars, which extend beyond the level of the rooftop, rising towards the Plain of Heaven. At the time being described in the narration, said to be around 660 B.CE (Aston 1972:133), Michi no Omi “was enabled, by means of a secret device received from the Emperor, to use incantations and magic formulae so as to dissipate evil influences” (Aston 1972:133). This is a remarkable passage in relation to Kūkai’s later situation. As if restoring the historical position of his family, Kūkai returned from China with secret incantations (*dhāraṇī*) for the expressed purpose of protecting the emperor and preserving the sacred country of Japan.

While each ancient ruling clan preserved its own history in oral and written transmission, the Ōtomo clan’s own legend holds they have historically revered the Sun Deity. One branch of the clan was called Himatsuri, Sun Worshipers. Legendary clan-member-heroes often have the word for sun (*hi*) in their names as do both deities mentioned above as progenitors of the Ōtomo clan, Ama-no-oshi-hi and Hi no Omi.² Sun Mythology from the various powerful clans eventually became a part of the Imperial family mythology. The rising sun remains the symbol of Japan and the royal family. Likewise, for Kūkai the main deity for purposes of visualization is Mahāvairocana, known in Japanese as *Dainichi nyorai* (大日如来) the Great Sun *tathāgata* or,

² Since the stories found in the *Records of Ancient Matters* and the *Chronicle of Japan* are believed to have been passed along orally for centuries before the written language was adapted from Chinese, the original meaning of the word “*hi*,” presently represented by the Chinese graph for the sun, cannot be known with certainty.

metaphorically, the Great Illuminator. Before the Meiji restoration in 1868, when a mandate was passed to separate Shintō deities from those of Buddhism, Mahāvairocana was considered by many temples to be the same as the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. If in fact Kūkai made conscious efforts to unite Buddhism with Shintō and folk belief, he may have noticed the potential for the pairing of these deities early in his studies, even before going to China. Nor is it likely that he was the first to notice this possibility. According to legend, the first identification of Mahāvairocana with the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, supposedly marking the beginning of *honji-suijaku*, the practice of identifying the “original” form of a Shintō deity as a Buddhist deity, championed by Shingon and often attributed to Kūkai, occurred when Emperor Shōmu (724-748) sent Buddhist *bhikṣu* Gyōgi (died 749) to the Ise Shrine to ask the Sun Goddess for permission to cast the huge Mahāvairocana image at Tōdai-ji in Nara, sometime around 743. However, so far, this legend has only been traced to as early as the *Genkō Shakusho* of the fourteenth century, after *honji-suijaku* had become popular (Matsunaga 1984 I:122-3). Similarities among stories of Kūkai and those of the *bhikṣu* Gyōgi, known for performing miraculous deeds, will be taken up below. My point here concerns the issue that biographies say Kūkai found what he was looking for upon reading the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (e.g., *The Biography of Sōzu Kūkai*, KKZ 8:7-8), although he had to go to China to fully understand its profound meaning. It is possible that what he was looking for at one level was a scriptural source for bridging the deities of Buddhism and Shintō as well as efficacious practices of Buddhism and Japanese folk traditions. This is especially likely in light of the fact that he is believed to have rejected university learning in favor of shamanic practice in the mountains of Shikoku just prior to his “discovery” of the sūtra. Although Kūkai may have not understood or believed there was a

distinction between Tantric and non-Tantric Buddhist texts at this time, as argued by Abé, there is much evidence that he was attracted to what he refers to as mystery or the mysterious (*himitsu*).

There are several versions of how the Saeki branch was formed from the Ōtomo clan and perhaps, as Kitagawa claims, there were two divisions of the Saeki family (Kitagawa 1951:112). The root of one division is said to be traceable to Emperor Keiko (c. 291-322) (Kitagawa 1951:112). Other accounts hold it was during the reign of Emperor Yūroku (reigned latter half of the fifth century), twenty-first emperor in the traditional count, that the Saeki branch of the Ōtomo clan was born (Wakamori 6). At that time, Ōtomo Muroya (c. 456-506) took the name Omuraji and later came to be known as Saeki Muraji. The name Saeki is found being used as a family name in poetry written by Muraji's grandson.

According to a genealogy of Kūkai, a descendant of Ama-no-oshi-hi, Takehi-no-mikoto, a warrior for legendary Emperor Jimmu (c. 40-10 B.C.), accompanied Prince Yamato-takeru in a battle to subjugate the Ainu people and was later granted land on the island of Shikoku (Kitagawa 1951:112). In the *Honored Spoken Memento*, believed to be Kūkai's last words of admonition to his followers, Kūkai explains his family roots related to this story saying, "In olden days, on expedition to the Ainu, (he) covered the party with earth," (KKZ 8:39). As a reward, according to various records of Japan, Takehi-no-mikoto was given land in Shikoku and for generations his family ruled as feudal lords of that land (Watanabe 27). The Biography of *Sōzu* Kūkai also says, "Originally, he came from the heaven honored (Tenson, 天尊). The next ancestor, in olden days, was Yamato Takehi-no-mikoto on the Ainu expedition, who gained merit and as a result was granted land. This was a service to the nation" (KKZ 8:5). The son of

Takehi-no-mikoto, Muroya, became a minister. Muroya's son, Omono, and his grandson, Wako, became governors (*kunikko*) of Sanuki in Shikoku (Kitagawa 1951:112).

In the fifth and sixth century (Yamato period) the Ōtomo-Saeki family occupied a central position of governmental power. Just as their legendary ancestors, the Ōtomo-Saeki were especially well known for, and proud of their military prowess. Because of this, Ōtomo Kanemura (active 495-540)³ was enlisted in support of Emperor Keitai, twenty-sixth emperor in the traditional count (reigned early sixth century). Ōtomo Kanemura also supported the enthronement of Keitai's sons Ankan (twenty-seventh emperor) and Senka (twenty-eighth emperor). However, it was during the reign of Emperor Kimmei (reigned 531 or 539-571) that a fateful incident occurred that would be used by rival clans as a pretext to discredit the Ōtomo clan. The fallout from this and other family miscalculations would have what seems at first glance to be a negative effect on all clan members down to Kūkai himself.

In the midst of political power struggles with rival clans, as military leader, Kanemura was blamed for failing relationships with Paekche, one of the Korean kingdoms. Ōtomo family members had participated in two failed attempts to aid Paekche against neighboring Silla. As a result, in 540 Emperor Kimmei decided not to send any more support to Korea and to removed Kanemura from his post. Kanemura's sudden loss of power became well known and widely felt throughout the family. Afterwards, in 552 Paekche attempted to regain Kimmei's support by sending him a gilt statue of the Buddha Vairocana the Sun Deity which would be most revered by Kūkai. The *Chronicle of Japan*, cites this event for the date Buddhism was officially introduced to Japan, though some historians have said the year the Vairocana image was sent

³ See Frédéric 2002:764.

was 538 (Matsunaga 1982 I:9). Later, traditionalists (i.e., anti-Buddhism factions in government having vested interests in preserving the proto-Shintō status-quo) blamed the same Vairocana image for a plague. As a result, some stories hold that the image was thrown into the Naniwa canal (Collcutt 56). Other legends say that the statue was retrieved some time afterwards.

It is interesting to note then the official introduction of Buddhism and perhaps the first Vairocana image in Japan was directly associated with political conditions surrounding Kūkai's ancestors. Following the logic of the story, we may conclude that if Ōtomo family members had *not* failed in their attempt to aid Paekche, the statue of Vairocana may not have been sent. Taking this argument to the extreme, I might suggest in the tradition of the *Awakening of Mahāyana Faith*, this is an example of defilement and purity being necessarily interrelated.

In 645, the Taika Reform expounded the need for a permanent capital and afterwards Nara was built based on Chang'an, the capital of Tang China. In 646, by an edict, the governing position of *kunikko*, held in Shikoku by members of Kūkai's Saeki family, was discontinued. Losing their posts, many officials moved to the capital and took minor positions. Saeki Tadamochi and Saeki Masao, relatives of Kūkai, were granted the rank of *sukune*. However, the family of Kūkai's father was not granted a hereditary rank (Kitagawa 1951:113).

Among the best-known members of the Ōtomo clan during Kūkai's lifetime is the poet Ōtomo Yakamochi (718-785), who died when Kūkai was eleven years old. As we will see, poetry became one of the driving forces in Kūkai's life, a part of ones realization of identity with Mahāvairocana. Without a doubt, Kūkai was very familiar with Yakamochi's work.

Yakamochi compiled the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves (Manyōshū)*. The *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* is the first collection of poetry expressed in the Japanese

language and is still considered one the greatest collections of poetry in Japanese history. The first volumes of the twenty books making up the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* probably appeared in the late Nara period, around the end of the eighth century when Kūkai was at the university in the capital. It likely had several compilers over the years. Ōtomo Yakamochi occupied the influential position as the last compiler of the great work, which contains poems by emperors, members of the court and common people. Kūkai himself was intensely interested in poetry, contributing to and compiling Heian period anthologies of poetry. His biographers have grossly understated the strength and significance of this aspect of Kūkai's personality.

Witnessing his clan members being overpowered by others seeking to usurp their traditionally held political positions, a process still continuing since the time of Kanemura, likely prompted Yakamochi to write such poems of family encouragement as found in *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* poem number 4465, a translation of which follows.

Since the advent of the god upon Mt. Takachiho
 our ancestors have served the Imperial family with bow and arrow,
 and led the warriors throughout the land,
 vanquishing all who did not obey the Emperor.
 The conquest finished, at Unebi
 a palace was erected in Yamato,
 and the Sovereign sat upon the throne.

Ever since, the Ohtomo⁴ have been in favor with the court.
 Remember all this, my beloved clansmen,
 and n'er disgrace the good name of our forbears. (Honda 337).

I have included the poem because I believe it expresses family sentiment at the time of Kūkai's childhood and that this sentiment would continue to be expressed in Kūkai's own work. Specifically, the Ōtomo clan had always maintained a high position in society from the

⁴ This is another transliteration of Ōtomo.

perspective of the proto-Shintō deities, a position directly protecting the emperor, and family members felt they should remember this now in the period of their decline. Looking at Kūkai's work from this perspective, though rival clans introduced Buddhism as a tool for limiting the power of the Ōtomo and other old ruling clans, Kūkai, raised in the tradition of proto-Shintō mythology, mastered Buddhism, created an influential doctrinal classification hierarchy that would rank the temples of those rival clans below his own and brought the proto-Shintō pantheon into the fold of his styled Buddhism.⁵ I can only speculate that in childhood Kūkai may have known or at least met Yakamochi. This idea might gain support if we grant some credence to the stories that Kūkai was considered a child prodigy, at least to the extent that he was allowed at an early age to study poetry with his uncle, the tutor of Prince Iyo (d. 807).

Umehara Takashi believed the original books of the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* contain a disproportionate number of poems by those later considered political victims: Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, Ōtomo no Yakamochi, Prince Arima, Prince Otsu's sister,⁶ etc.⁷ This raises the question: was the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* published as an attempt to appease the wronged spirits of the victims, as was practiced in other circumstances of the time?

Among the contributors to the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* are twenty-seven poets giving their family name as Ōtomo. These include Yakamochi's father, Tabito (665-731) who is famous for his poems on drinking and hedonism, and one of Tabito's sisters, Lady Ōtomo of

⁵ Again, could this be why he said the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* was what he had been looking for?

⁶ Hitomaro died in obscure circumstance in exile. His ranks were posthumously restored, an effort to appease his spirit as we can tell from similar facts in later Japanese history. Yakamochi was executed as a result of having been implicated in the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu in 785. This was between the Nara period (710-784) and the Heian period (794-1185) when, because of political instability, emperor Kanmu decided to relocate his capital from Nara to Nagaoka (784-94) and then to what is now known as Kyoto. Princes Arima and Otsu were executed because of their involvement in imperial succession disputes.

⁷ "Suitei no uta," *Subaru*, vol 12 (1973) pp. 270-324. Also see Masuda Katsumi, "Nagasarebito Hitomaro," *Kokubungaku* (Kaishaku to Kyozaï no Kenkyu) vol. 21, no. 5, pp. 82-84 and Ohama Itsuhiko, "Chinkon no shi," *Bungaku*, vol. 39, no. 9, pp. 1005-15.

Sakanoe. Over four hundred of Yakamochi's own poems appear in the collection and numerous others written to or about him. As the Ōtomo family was in a state of social decline, like the poem above, poems by the family members often express this fact. Yakamochi himself was a chamberlain to Emperor Shomu, a position granted on basis of good looks and demeanor.

It was mainly the Fujiwara family who presented a threat to the Ōtomo as well as members of many of the other powerful clans. The Fujiwara had engineered and carried out a coup in 645. Then, imperial prince Naka no Oe enlisted the assistance of Nakatomi no Kamatari in killing two of his rivals to the throne, Prince Emishi and his son Iruka of the Soga family. After Naka no Oe was enthroned, to commemorate the coup, Nakatomi no Kamatari was given the name Fujiwara (literally, Wisteria Field). The Fujiwara family eventually solidified their control of Japan by arrangement of political marriages and the institution of the regent system in which Fujiwara family members ruled as "advisors" to an emperor, who was a child. When the emperor became an adult he was forced to abdicate the throne to another minor.

Faced with the power of the Fujiwara, Ōtomo Yakamochi remained distant from the ruling elite. However, when the four leading members of the Fujiwara family were killed by a smallpox epidemic in 737-8, Yakamochi grew close to the new leading minister Tachibana no Moroe (? -757). From 746 to 751 Yakamochi was Governor of Etchū (present day Toyama Prefecture). In 754 he undertook military duty in Kyushu. After ex-emperor Shōmu died, the Fujiwara family was able to regain power and work against Tachibana. Yakamochi was then appointed governor of Inaba (present Tottori Prefecture), a lesser position than he had known as governor of Etchū. His career suffered from that point onward. Fujiwara no Tanetsugu (737-85) was placed in charge of constructing a new capital in Nagaoka, a move believed by some

historians intended to facilitate the escape of the growing power of the Nara Buddhists. However, two members of the Ōtomo clan assassinated Tanetsugu in a coup attempt. Although Yakamochi had tried to remain neutral, after his death in 785, rival clans members posthumously linked him to the murder. As a result, Yakamochi's rank was stripped, his property was confiscated and his ashes, along with his son, who was probably around the age of Kūkai and very possibly known by him in the capital city, were sent into exile to distant Oki.

However, as it turns out, I would like to suggest this could be seen as another example of the interconnection of defilement and purity. Ironically the dishonor to Yakamochi may have at the same time preserved the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*. Yakamochi's property, including the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*, was confiscated and kept under government lock and key. The property remained in government custody until after the capital's eventual move to Heian-kyō (Kyoto) and was probably not opened until Yakamochi's titles were restored some twenty years later in an amnesty of 806. That year Kūkai returned from China and apparently was not allowed to enter the capital for uncertain political reasons likely related to this incident, as explored later in this dissertation. One of Yakamochi's last poems, found near the end of the *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* reads: "Man's life is brief. So turn your eyes to nature, taking care to follow Buddha's teachings" (number 4468, Honda 337).

After Kūkai's death, it was one of Ōtomo Yakamochi's great-grandsons, Tomo Yoshio, who, according to the *True Record of Three Generations (Sandai jitsuroku)*, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of Jogan 3 (861) petitioned the court, asking that the children of Kūkai's father, Saeki Tagime, be granted the posthumous hereditary high court title of *sukune*. During that time, and continuing to a lesser extent in Japan today, one person's achievements furnished

the means to social recognition or disgrace for the relatives. Therefore, granting this petition restored the hereditary titles to that branch of the Ōtomo clan based on Kūkai's merits (Hakeda 1972:12 n. 2). This also points to the fact that the court recognized the relationship between Ōtomo Yakamochi and Kūkai's Saeki family in the ninth century.

In summary, the argument against the familiar relationship between Kūkai's branch of the Saeki family and the Ōtomo clan is based on the fact that some families named Saeki were granted the court title and family name *Sukune* after fighting with Ainu, while others were not. Those granted the title were related to Saeki-no-Muraji in Saekibe and those not granted the title at that time, including Kūkai's father, were unrelated.⁸

There is a story that Kūkai had connections with Saeki no Ima Emishi (佐伯今毛人), who was the leader of the family descended from Saeki-no-Muraji. Ima Emishi took a leading role in building the Daibutsu-den, the building housing the large Vairocana statue at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara. Ima Emishi died on the third day of the tenth month of Enryaku 9 (790). Tsunoda Bun'ei (角田文衛) hypothesizes that Kūkai had no connection with Saeki no Ima Emishi but the confusion arose as follows. "Kūkai descended from the Sanuki Saeki no Atai, as did Chisen (智泉), Shinga (真雅), Shinzen (真然) and Chishō (智証),⁹ the family turning out in great numbers those who gained control of the Buddhist world. Because of this, imagination was extended to include Ima Emishi. Especially Kūkai was the elder statesmen of the Saeki family but there was probably no opportunity for him to meet with Ima Emishi," (Tsunoda Bun'ei, 256-7). However, because Ima Emishi's built the temple Saeki-in (佐伯院) in Nara and Kūkai was

⁸ See Inoue.

⁹ Enchin

known to have a connection to it, the meeting and family relationship appears likely to me. In addition, it is clear that Kūkai believed that he was related to the Ōtomo clan from various writings (e.g., his letter to an Ōtomo general Tomo no Kunimichi cited below) and so did others of his time (i.e., the great-grand son of Ōtomo Yakamochi). Also, as mention below, Enchin (814-89), the son of Kūkai’s sister, became head of the traditional Ōtomo clan temple in 866.

Near the time of Kūkai’s death, a report to the throne by Tomo no Yoshio’s (伴善男) also claims the Saeki of Sanuki and the Ōtomo descend from common ancestors, (Watanabe 27). Another writing from the time, True Record of Three Generations (三代実録), reports the eleven¹⁰ sons of the deceased Saeki Atai Takimi, who were living in the Sanuki Kunitado district, were granted the surname Saeki Sukune (佐伯宿禰)(Watanabe 27).

In the first year of Tenchō (824), Tomo no Kunimichi (伴国道), was sent out on a conquest of the Ainu. As a farewell gift, Kūkai wrote the poetic work “Presented Poem in Companionship for Proceeding to the Shore District,” seen in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*. Therein, Kūkai writes, “There is a distinction between Buddhists and Laypersons.”¹¹ Tomo (伴, abbreviation of Ōtomo, 大伴) and Sai (佐, as in Saeki, 佐伯) are older and younger brothers” (KKZ 8:251).

Although Buddhism was officially introduced to Japan in 552, two hundred and twenty-two years before Kūkai was born, it is traditionally believed that the traditions that came to be

¹⁰ It is unclear to whom “eleven sons” refers. Biographers postulate Kūkai had three brothers and two sisters (see below).

¹¹ Literally, “Black” (緇, used to mean Buddhists in China due to the drab color of their robes) and “White” (used as the first graph for laypersons, 素人).

called the Six “Sects” (*shū*, 宗) of Nara were imported from China between 747 and 751 (Matsunaga 1982 I:26). Thus, just twenty-five years before Kūkai’s birth the major traditions of Japanese Buddhism were being established. Before that, Japanese Buddhism may have been non-sectarian (Matsunaga 1982 I:26). Even after importation it appears that the six traditions were not antagonistic towards one another. Matsunaga explains, “...during the Nara period, *shū* refers to a group of scholars gathered together to study one tradition, but this does not necessarily mean that an individual or temple was restricted to a single tradition” (Matsunaga 1982 I:26-7). Also, expanding Buddhism throughout the country, just before this, in Tempyō 13 (741), Emperor Shōmu decreed that each province was to establish one official temple of twenty *bhikṣu* called a Temple for the Protection of the Nation by the Four Kings of the *Sūtra of the Golden Light*¹² (*Konkō-myō-shitennō-gokoku no tera*) (Matsunaga 1982 I:120).

As the six traditions of Nara entered Japan, a problem was perceived concerning how a *bhikṣu* should be officially ordained and what rules should govern behavior in the Buddhist community. Since the Vinaya tradition was known foremost for upholding such rules, Emperor Shōmu first sent three *bhikṣuṇī* to Paekche and then several *bhikṣu* to China to bring back the specifics of the procedures taught by Vinaya masters. In China, the Japanese *bhikṣu* found that neither they themselves nor any other Buddhists in Japan had properly received the complete or “perfectly equipped ordination.” After ten years of study, they convinced Vinaya Master Ganjin (C. Jiangchen) to formally bring the complete ordination to Japan. However, since the Chinese government was not allowing *bhikṣu* to travel abroad at the time, Ganjin had to sneak out of the country. After five perilous attempts he arrived in Japan in 753, but blinded from his hardships.

¹² J. *Konkōmyōsaishōkyō*, 金光明最勝王經; S. *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*, T. 16 n 665.

Although he had been asked by the emperor to come to Japan, in the meantime the Ritsuryō government, the system of governing imported from Tang China to partially replace the clan ruling system, had established their own rules for ordination based on suggestions of Japanese *bhikṣu* who now held government positions and who were not about to admit any inferiority in their methods. Under these circumstances, Ganjin resigned as an official in the Bureau of *Bhikṣu* (Sōgō) in 758 and decided to live out the rest of his days as a guest of the Ōtomo family until his death in 763, only 11 years before Kūkai was born into that clan in 774.

2. Kūkai's Childhood.

Kūkai was born in Hōki 5 (774) in Byōbu-ga-ura (Screen Bay), an inlet village near Tado district in the Sanuki prefecture (讃岐国多度郡屏風) of Shikoku. Zentsū-ji city (善通寺市), which is further inland, also claims to be his birthplace, pointing to a dilapidated temple said to be on the very spot once occupied by his parents' house. In an effort to reconcile the disputed honor, it has been suggested that at the time of his birth the sea was much further inland and Screen Bay was at Zentsū-ji (Casal 95).

People in Japan at that time often did not mark their date of birth clearly and this is the case for Kūkai as well. According to the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Kūkai said near the end of his life in 835, “It is now 62 years since I was born and 41 years since ordination” (KKZ 8:49). This places the year of his birth as Hōki 5 (774). Shinzei's Biography of *Sōzu* Kūkai agrees with the *Honored Spoken Memento*, saying when Kūkai died he had “lived 62 years and been ordained 41 years” (KKZ 8:13). Since Shinzei was close to Kūkai we may conclude this date was likely acceptable just after Kūkai's death. Biographies from the Kamakura period all follow

accordingly (Watanabe 25).¹³ However, according to the Japanese national history, *Continuation of the Continuing Record of Japan* (*Shoku nihon kōki*) written in 840, five years after Kūkai's death, Kūkai entered *nyūjō* at the age of 63. Calculating from that, he would have been born in Hōki 4 (773). In agreement with this date is a passage from a letter for Taihan (泰範, born 778) to Saichō, dated the fifth day of the eleventh month of Kōnin 3 (812). That letter, thought to have been written by Kūkai says, "Kūkai's living years are forty" (Watanabe 25). For these reasons, Watanabe feels that Kūkai was probably born in Hōki 4. However, since Amoghavajra died in Hōki 5, Kūkai could not have been the reincarnation of that holy man, as often presumed, if he was born in Hōki 4. For this reason, the year Hōki 5 may have been adopted (Watanabe 25).

Shingon followers celebrate Kūkai's birthday on June fifteenth. Critics however believe this date was decided upon some four hundred years after his death (Hakeda 1972:6; Watanabe 26). According to Watanabe, the first time this date was seen was in *Miscellaneous Records of True Customs* (*Shinden zōki*) by Raiyu (賴瑜, 1226-1304) of Kii-shū's Negoro Temple (根来寺) of the middle Kamakura period and future biographies followed the example (Watanabe 26). Such biographies explain that the fifteenth day of the sixth month is the day *Tripitaka* Master Amoghavajra died in China and was reincarnated in Japan as Kūkai. In Kūkai's own writing, the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, he says he was born when the sun strikes the fresh leaves of the camphor tree, which indeed corresponds to the sixth month (Watanabe 26; *KKZ* 6:5).

¹³ Also see the letter Jitsue sent to China to report Kūkai's death (Hakeda 13: *KZ* 5:391).

Kūkai's father was Saeki Atai Tasami or Tagimi¹⁴ (Hakeda) or Yoshimichi (Casal) or Saegi Ataegimi (Kitagawa 1951:112). His mother was Lady Tamayori of the Ato family. The family of Kūkai's father, the Saeki, and his mother's family, the Ato, were related. This family tie was strengthened when the younger brother of Kūkai's father, Ōtari, was adopted into the Ato family (Kitagawa 1951:112).

Like many founders of religious groups who are considered saints by the followers, much has been made of mysterious circumstances surrounding the birth of Kūkai. One story has it that he was born from a blossom (Wakamori 5).¹⁵ Kūkai's parents are also said to have both had a simultaneous dream in which an Indian saint appeared. The saint told his parents that a son would be born to them after a twelve-month pregnancy. At that moment the saint entered the womb of the mother and became Kūkai. Twelve months later, he was born, supposedly with his hands together as if in prayer (Watanabe 5).

Kūkai is held to be the reincarnation of the Indian saint Amoghavajra (J. Fuku Sanzo, also called Fuku Kongō, C. Bukong jingang, 705-774), who is the one said to have appeared in his parent's dream. Amoghavajra was born in Ceylon and was the third major master of Tantric Buddhism to come to China (at least as far as Shingon is concerned), bringing a part of what would become the Shingon teachings. He arrived in that country at the age of ten and at fifteen became a student of the second major Tantric Buddhism master in China, Vajrabodhi (J. Kongōsatta, C. Jingangji, 671-741). When Vajrabodhi died, Amoghavajra returned to Ceylon and India where he gathered numerous Tantric texts, which he brought back to China, translating

¹⁴ Takimi is another possible reading.

¹⁵ This parallels the birth story of Padmasambhava (Lotus Born), also of the eighth century, who is credited with bringing Tantra from India to Tibet.

many into Chinese. Amoghavajra became a teacher to three Chinese Emperors, Xuanzong (713-55), Suzong (756-62) and Daizong (763-79). It was under his leadership that Tantric Buddhism, known in Japan as *mikkyō*, the “secret” or “mysterious teachings” from the Chinese *mijiao*, reached its height of popularity in China. Because of his accomplishments, said to have been bestowed upon the people in compassion, Amoghavajra was named the sixth patriarch in the line of succession in transmitting the Shingon doctrine.

When Kūkai was born, feelings of political and social disgrace still lingered in the family. Some believe he was named Mao (True Fish, 真魚) or Tōtomono (Precious One or Our Treasure, 貴物) though the origins of these names are uncertain (see Hakeda 14n). Japanese legend often evolves from what seems to be a fishing-based culture, revering ocean deities, etc., and the name Mao may reflect this. The name Mao is seen in later biographies of Kūkai. In early materials such as the *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai* and the *Honored Spoken Memento*, this name is not found. In article one of the *Honored Spoken Memento* the name Tōtomono appears (KKZ 8:38).

The *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai* says, “The master was born with extraordinary perception (聰明). He had much insight into personal affairs. After the age of five or six years, in the space of the surrounding *ri*,¹⁶ he was said to be a wonder child” (KKZ 8:5). The *Honored Spoken Memento* incorporates various folk legends of Kūkai being a wonder child. Such stories of Kūkai are often similar to or identical with legends of other religious figures. One says he was

¹⁶ Old Japanese measurement of distance. It could be singular or plural here.

conceived when his mother drank the sun. There are also stories that he was in his mother's womb for 11 or 12 months and his crying voice was *dhāraṇī* (see Miyazaki 142-53).

Legends also hold that from early childhood Kūkai had the virtues of an advanced *bhikṣu* and recited sūtras. In a Saigoku temple in Onomichi in the Bingo prefecture there exists a small clay image of a Buddha believed to have been made by Kūkai when he was a child. The *Honored Spoken Memento* says, “At the time I lived with my parents in my past life, around the age of five or six years, I dreamed I spoke with the various Buddhas sitting on an eight-leaved lotus flower. That being the case, I did not talk of my devotion to my parents. Nor did I speak of it with anyone else. At that time, I received my parent's affection and was called Tōdomono. When I was twelve years old, my parents told me the following story. ‘Our child, in olden days, was certainly a disciple of the Buddha. Why do we say this? It is from an Indian, a holy man *bhikṣu* who came, appearing in a dream. We saw him entering the bosom. From this was the child's conception. Therefore, that child is probably some disciple of the Buddha.’ I heard this and in my child's heart was happy, always, out of mud, making Buddha figures, making a small practice hall near our house and, installing the Buddha figures inside, I bowed and prayed.” (KKZ 8:38-9). The Hōmotsu-kan Museum (宝物館) at the Zentsū-ji temple, near Kūkai's place of birth, has a small clay pagoda they say was modeled by Kūkai at the age of seven. They also have a sūtra scroll designated a National Treasure. On the scroll, a bodhisattva on a lotus pedestal accompanies each graph. The museum claims Kūkai did the calligraphy and his mother the painting. There is also a jar and begging bowl allegedly used by Kūkai. The museum also displays a robe and ritual stick, supposedly presented to Kūkai by his master in China, Huiguo.

Watanabe points out that if from the time he was twelve years old, Kūkai had heard that he was the reincarnation of a disciple of the Buddha, he would probably have set his sights on Buddhism from the beginning, without having studied Confucian teachings at the university (Watanabe 12). The *Honored Spoken Memento* seems to have anticipated this issue, or perhaps the author/s already had to deal with it in the past. It says in the voice of Kūkai, “Then, my uncle on my mother’s side, Ato Ōtari ((阿刀大足), said, ‘Even though I think you are a disciple of the Buddha, enter the university and study the written materials of the world of learning. That is the best foundation for a person’” (KKZ 8:39).

Other stories say as a child Kūkai declared to heaven that if he were not granted religious vision he would throw himself off Mount Shashin. Some say that he did so and was caught by one or more *vidyādhara* (Watanabe 9) Vidyādhara are angel-like flying beings that appear in Indian Buddhist iconography around the heads of deities. A *vidyādhara* is the “Bearer of Wisdom” (Huntington 730), perhaps symbolizing in this story Kūkai’s attainment of the vision he was seeking.

Another story says at thirteen years of age Kūkai entered a nearby state-established provincial temple and became a *bhikṣu* (Wakamori 9). Wakamori believes that these stories are almost certainly fabricated later and that a child at that time would not have been allowed to roam with such a degree of independence. However, little is known of his life before he was the age of fifteen that biographers have been able to accept as historical fact rather than legend.

To summarize the legends of Kūkai’s childhood, Lloyd and Kitagawa quote the following Japanese poem entitled “Namu-daishi,” (Praise Daishi) handed down by Shingon followers.

1. On the fifth day of the middle decade of the sixth month in the fifth year of Hoki, in the Baron's Hall on the shore of Byobu, in the land of Sanuki, a bright light shone. It was the birth of our great sage.

2. When the lad was but five years old he would sit constantly among the lotuses, and there hold converse with the Buddhas. But what he spoke of he never told, not even to his mother.

3. In his heart there arose the desire to save mankind from all their sorrows and pains, and he sought on Mount Shashin to accomplish this desire by the sacrifice of his own life. Then angels came and saved him from death.

4. Whilst at play he built himself a pagoda of clay. The four Heavenly Kings at once came and stood guard over it. The Imperial Messenger passing by saw the prodigy and was amazed. "This," said he, "is a divine prodigy." (Kitagawa 114; Lloyd 243).

3. Kūkai's Siblings.

At the beginning of the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* Kūkai explains that he is writing the story in part to justify to his disapproving relatives that he can still express filial piety while being a Buddhist. In part three of the story the Buddhist character comments that "My two elder brothers have already died and, to my sorrow, the fortunes of all our relatives are in decline" (Hakeda 124; *KKZ* 6:5). Biographers, such as Watanabe, have considered *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* to be closely based on Kūkai's life, even pointing to Kūkai having two elder brothers.

Assembling information from various sources, biographers postulate Kūkai had three brothers and two sisters. There appears more information about some of his siblings than others. A short summary of what is believed about his siblings follows.

Kūkai's older brother remained in Shikoku as a part of the local gentry (Kitagawa 1951:113). Kūkai's older sister, Chiye, married a Shintō cleric of Takino-miya. Their son was

Chisen, who became a disciple of Kūkai (Kitagawa 1951:113). Kūkai’s younger brother, closest to Kūkai’s age of the two younger brothers, was Shinga (801-879). Like Chisen, Shinga became Kūkai’s pupil and was placed in charge of the repository of scriptures at Tōji Temple after Kūkai’s death. Kūkai’s younger sister was the wife of Wake¹⁷ Iyenari (宅成), and mother of Enchin (814-91). Enchin played an important role in the development of Japanese Tendai’s Tantric tradition, known in Japan as *Taimitsu*, mysterious Teachings of Tendai¹⁸ as opposed to *Tōmitsu*, mysterious teachings of Tōji, i.e., Kūkai’s tradition propagated while at Tōji Temple. At the age of sixteen, Enchin became a pupil of Gishin (781-833), the successor of Saichō as leader of Tendai. Enchin spent six years in China and studied the teachings and practices found in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* and the *Susiddhikara-sūtra*¹⁹ at Qinglong temple, where Kūkai had studied. While in China, he also visited Mount Tiantai and built a sanctuary for Japanese *bhikṣu* at Guoqing Temple. Returning to Japan in 858, Enchin gained the support of Emperor Seiwa (850-80, r. 859-76), Fujiwara Yoshifusa (804-72) and the latter’s son Mototsune (836-91), who controlled the Heian court. Enchin was the founder of the Tendai Jimon tradition, in distinction from Ennin’s Sanmon tradition (山門) on Mount Hiei. In 866, he became head of the traditional Ōtomo clan temple, Onjōji (園城寺), Tendai Temple of the Jinmon tradition in Onjōji Town in Otsu city (大津市) (Imaisu 104). From there he engaged in a power struggle with Ennin (794-864) for the leadership of the Tendai tradition. In 868, Enchin

¹⁷ Wake: “Ancient title for imperial princes, and sometimes conferred upon noble families in the eighth and ninth centuries” (Frédéric 2002:1026).

¹⁸ “*Tai*” is the reading for the graph “*dai*” (台) in Tendai (天台) when it begins a word as well as in certain other situations.

¹⁹ The *Susiddhikara-sūtra* (蘇悉知羯羅經) T. 18 n. 883. Along with the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*, the *Susiddhikara-sūtra* is among the most important scriptures for Shingon. See glossary of this dissertation.

became the fifth *zasu* (座主, the person in charge of the congregation as opposed to administration of the temple) of Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, holding this position until his death at the age of seventy-eight in 891 (Matsunaga 1987 I:165; Imaizu 78). After their deaths, the rivalry between Enchin and Ennin broke into armed combat among their disciples. Enchin was known posthumously as Chishō Daishi.

Kūkai's youngest brother was the father of Shinnen (or Shinzen) (804-91), known by the honorific posthumous title Dentō Kokushi. Shinnen was entrusted as the head of the temple complex on Mount Kōya after the death of Kūkai. Along with Kūkai's brother Shinga, Shinnen proposed the idea that Mount Kōya was a Buddhist Pure Land and in 883, telling Emperor Yōzei that the main temple there, Kongōbu-ji, was the place of ancient manifestations (*kojaku*) of the Buddhas (Matsunaga 1987 I:196).

Kūkai's immediate family is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

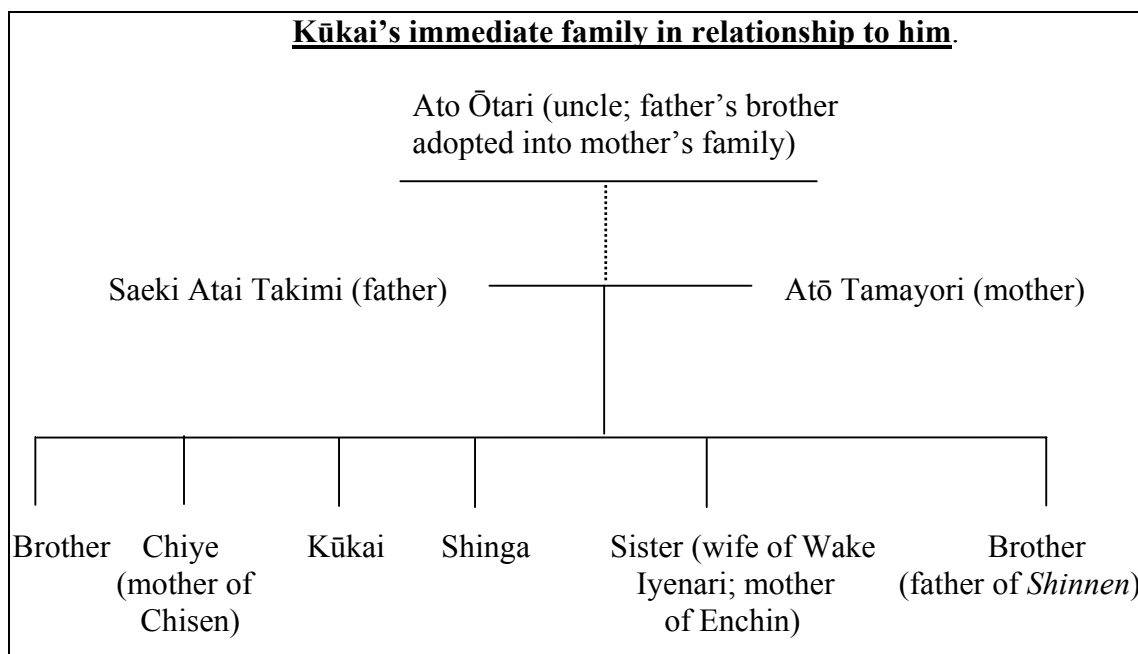


Figure 1 (adapted from Sawa 58).

Chapter II.

Images of Kūkai's Mother and other Women.

In this chapter, I look at research on images of Kūkai and women, paying particular attention that concerning his mother. Although revered as a Buddhist ascetic, there exist many stories of Kūkai's encounters with spiritually powerful women, especially *miko* (巫女, Japanese shamanesses). It is well accepted today that Shingon is devoid of sexual practice, though it maintains the tradition of powerful and overt sexual images symbolizing fertility, the cosmic order and, unity of the individual and the universe (Stevens 85). There has been a general downplaying of this sexual symbolism within the Shingon establishment at least from the time of the Muromachi period (1392-1567), when the samurai government issued a decree to effectively neuter all religious activities and symbols.¹ In addition, we find on Mount Kōya, Shingon officials have until recently banned women from setting foot on their sacred grounds. This prohibition existed in apparent disregard for Shingon's own tradition that Kūkai secured the land as a gift from the residing goddess, Nibu-tsu-hime. According to authorities at Mount Kōya, where one stone image of a women exists beside that of Kūkai, all such representations of women found in close proximity to Kūkai could not possibly denote any other than his mother since a Buddhist saint would have had nothing to do with other women (Wakamori 106). Meanwhile, icons of sexual imagery stand on display in the Shingon temple complexes. Sexual symbolism related to fertility, the cosmos and spirituality also exist in ancient proto-Shintō² icons, Shintō records, and present Shintō and folk tradition. These include provocative dances

¹ See Cazja for details.

² Shintō, literally the Way of the Spirits/Deities, is considered Japanese "other" religion alongside Buddhism. Shintō reveres spirits believed to reside within rocks, trees, mountains and elsewhere in nature. This is taken up further below.

and other practices on the part of *miko* indicating sexual union between the shamaness and a deity (*kami*) who “possesses” her (Blacker 118). It is important to note that together with Emperor Saga (786-842), Kūkai was ordained as a Shintō cleric.

Although Shingon scholars have largely ignored both the stone woman and Kōbō Daishi legends, I have found in literature concerning Kūkai, five interpretations of the female figure next to his image. I believe that these correspond to five larger views of women of foremost importance to either Shingon or Kōbō Daishi worship. These five interpretations are drawn mostly from materials in Wakamori Taro’s biography, *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai*, and secondarily from Miyazaki Ninsho’s *The Kōbō Daishi Kūkai Living Today*. The first of these five categories is 1) the Woman of Sōzuka, which is the river of three crossings at the border of hell. I have used the term “hell” here though I acknowledge the Judeo-Christian connotations attached to it. The Iwanami Dictionary of Buddhism (*Iwanami bukkyō jiten*) simply refers to that which the dead encounter beyond the border of the Sōzuka River as “the other world” (冥界) (Nakamura 321). The sūtra pointed to as the main source through which the legend of Sōzuka was spread in Japan (*Sūtra of Jizō and the Ten Kings*, 地藏十王經) refers to this simply as destiny (因緣). Since all of the conditions of this other world are clearly negative and described as punishment, the English term “hell” seems functionally appropriate. The other categories, listed in the order explored here, are 2) Kūkai’s mother interpreted as Hārītī, the Buddhist goddess of children and childhood diseases; 3) *Miko*, shamaness and spiritual helper; 4) Kūkai’s mother interpreted as Tomo-yori-hime, the daughter of the Dragon King and; 5) mountain goddesses

In apparent disregard for the historical connection of shamanesses and tantric *bhikṣu*, to explain all about the many examples of the stone images of Kūkai and the woman/women in various places throughout Japan, the official Shingon explanation from Mount Kōya holds that there is only one meaning. According to that institution, all fifty-four of these stone images are mutant representations of Kōbō Daishi's mother (Wakamori 108). It may also be that at one time stone images of women were used at Mount Kōya to be broken by practitioners in order to symbolize their renouncement of mother, wife and desire (Wakamori 108). According to this theory, the identification of the image evolved over the years to the current interpretation as Kūkai's mother. It is said that by the virtue and spiritual powers of Kōbō Daishi, his mother, though a woman, was saved from rebirth in *saṃsāra*. For this reason and because it was through his mother that the revered founder was able to cross over into this world, her image is allowed at Mount Kōya regardless of the ban on women (Wakamori 108).

However, Mount Kōya's identification does not achieve the apparent goal of nullifying the connection between Kūkai and *miko* but in fact reinforces it. For in folk legend, Kūkai's mother is interpolated with none other than the Dragon King's daughter, the prototype for the image of *miko* (Miyazaki 143; Wakamori 118).

There is a common belief from later periods that Kūkai's mother was either named Tama-yori or Akoya (阿古屋)(Miyazaki 143; Wakamori 118). One of the meanings Tama-yori can have is Jewel Purity. This may be related to the idealization of a woman's role in the natural countryside of the past. In both Shintō and Shingon tradition, there is also an assumed purifying element to human suffering and the undertaking of austerities. Kūkai's mother is popularly seen as one who especially suffered for the sake of her son (Wakamori 118). As is well know, even

after seeing a child through youth a mother's worries and prayers typically do not end. It may be that people thought this was particularly true in the case of Kūkai's mother. She must have been troubled by their separation when at the age of fourteen or fifteen he left his parents' home in order to study with his maternal uncle. At eighteen Kūkai entered the National University in the capital, far from his native Shikoku. But perhaps causing a mother even more worry was his sudden decision to drop out of the university and throw away his earthy body into the mountain forest of Shikoku. In the later Heian period, such a forest quest received official government recognition and approval. However, at the time Kūkai did this it was not entirely condoned. Nor would his mother's worries have ended when he finally reemerging from the mountains and officially entered the path of the Buddha. It was then that Kūkai was determined to go abroad to China. The journey itself was perilous. His mother would have known of the severe weather at sea and numerous past shipwrecks occurring on the same route. Kūkai's own ship encountered bad weather and was fatefully washed to a remote area of China where he was stranded for months without being allowed to go ashore. He finally entered the Chinese capital city of Chang'an. But his life there would mean more separation from his aging and worrying mother who likely did not know of his condition for long periods.

A female deity by the name of Tama-yori-hime is found in Shintō myth recorded in both the *Records of Ancient Matters* and the *Chronicle of Japan*. In addition, the name Tama-yori-hime may be given to any woman (*hime*) who is god-possessed (Kitagawa 1990:370). Tama-yori-hime expresses the notion that a spirit (*tama*, 霊) has dropped into (*yoru*, 寄) a woman (*hime*, 媛 beautiful woman; or *hime*, 姫 princess). As these words are said to pre-date Buddhist influence in Japan, the spoken versions accordingly pre-date the introduction of Chinese graphs

into Japan. This situation, along with the fact that Japanese tradition places a high value on the many possibilities of double (or more) entendres or homonyms in the language, makes it difficult or impossible to determine one definite meaning for terms found in the *Records of Ancient Matters* and the *Chronicle of Japan*.

The first key term important for focus here is *tama*. Along with other possible denotations explored below, *tama* has a meaning of immortal spirit or soul.³ Traditionally there are four basic types of *tama* according to Shintō. These are thought to date to a time in Japan's past before the influence of Buddhism and are identified as follows.⁴

...*ara-mi-tama*, those which rule with authority and power; *nigi-mi-tama*, those which bring about union, harmony, and recollection; *kushi-in-tama*, those which cause mysterious transformation; and *saki-mi-tama*, those which impart blessings. (Kitagawa 1990:14).

Not only can these types of spirits (*tama*) of the gods (*kami*) possess a person, but each human body also contains its own *tama*, which endows it with life. If the conditions surrounding a human death are considered improper there is a widely held belief in the need to pacify the *tama* with rituals (Ebersole 142). The aggravated spirit of a dead person or even an animal may possess living beings and, if malevolent, require ritual exorcism to expel it. On the other hand, there are also rituals designed to prevent the spirit from leaving the body and thus bringing death (*tama musubu* or spirit binding) and others to restrict movement of a spirit (Ebersole 142).⁵ It was mentioned above that during a ritual the Vedic sacrificer (*yajamāna*) binds his wife (*patnī*)

³ The same graph is alternately read *rei* as mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation in the compound *seirei* (性霊), which is used in relation to Kūkai to refer to his spiritual-nature or holy-nature.

⁴ Kitagawa calls presumed pre-Buddhist influenced Shintō “early Shintō” and cites Sir Ernest M. Satow who calls this “pure Shin-tau” (Kitagawa 1990:11). Also see Ebersole, “Tama Belief and Practice in Ancient Japan.”

⁵ A similar belief may be found in connection to Chinese Han Dynasty practice of plugging the orifices of a corpse (see Imperial Tombs of China 102).

to prevent her spirit from wandering. Added to the complexity of spiritual possibilities, one kami might also have more than one *tama* (Kitagawa 1990:14).

Kitagawa explains the world-view of Shintō, admittedly at the risk of oversimplification, as follows. The purpose in the lives of human beings is to carry out the will of the immortals (*kami*). *Kami* “enable” (*yosasu*) human beings to act on their behalf. Although evil *kami* and malevolent spirits (*mono*) of humans and animals are cause for fear, in general, life is considered good (*yoshi*) and humans should express gratitude to the *kami* for being alive (Kitagawa 1990:13).

There are several versions the story of Tama-yori-hime preserved in the *Records of Ancient Matters* and the *Chronicle of Japan*, but all follow the same general pattern. Tama-yori-hime and her sister Toyo-tama-hime (Great Jewel Deity) were children of the Dragon King of the Sea. On land, the Heavenly Grandchild, Hiko-hoho-demi no Mikoto, was grieving because he had lost his elder brother’s sacred fishing hook and in order to find it, he sank into the sea in a basket. There, guided by a turtle, he met one of the Dragon King’s daughters Toyo-tama-hime and eventually a great child was conceived. Toyo-tama-hime instructed the Heavenly Grandchild to not look at her during childbirth. However, overcome with curiosity he stole a glance into the room to see that she had changed into a dragon. Because he had violated the taboo of the mystic instructions, Toyo-tama-hime abandoned him and the child on land and barred the path back into the sea. That is to say, had he not looked into the room, humans could walk between the worlds of the land and sea at will. Still, unable to completely abandon the child, Toyo-tama-hime sent her sister, Tama-yori-hime, to nurture and bring him up. Kūkai’s mother then is the namesake of this virgin nurturing mother deity. In this mythological story, when the Heavenly offspring is

grown, he takes his aunt Tama-yori-hime as royal consort and together they produce children of Japanese Imperial lineage. It is also said that during a storm on Kūkai's return voyage from China, the Dragon Deity of the Sea appeared to protect the patriarch of Shingon. In tantric symbolism, the appearance of the dragon goddess may indicate a mystical insight on the part of the practitioner.⁶

The other given name attributed to Kūkai's mother is Akoya. Akoya means Pearl Oyster. Likewise, as stated above, the name Tama-yori-hime means Great Jewel Deity. Furthermore, the word 'yori' also has the meaning 'drop into.' In that case the name Tama-yori would mean the Jewel Dropping Into (i.e., dropping into the oyster). Such double entendres, known as *kake kotoba*, are abundant in Japanese literature and so the possible relationship of the two names is not far fetched. In Japanese shamanism, to refer to the 'pearl dropped in the mouth' is to say that a shamaness has charm power (Miyazaki 145). It is through her mouth that the jewel, the voice of the world beyond, is received. The names Tama-yori and Akoya popularly attributed to Kūkai's mother may suggest this connection. In relationship to Kūkai these stories again link Shintō and Buddhism in a way similar in idea to those held by Shugendō practitioners as well as Kūkai himself.

We can only guess what Kūkai's relationship with his mother might have been like after he returned from China and rose to prominence in the world of Japanese Buddhism. However, according to tradition, Kūkai built Jison hermitage (慈尊院) for his mother and in honor of Maitreya (Imaizu 420). Jison hermitage is located at the foot of Mount Kōya, outside of the

⁶ The appearance of the dragon may also symbolize insight or the Dao itself for Chinese Daoists (Sullivan 171).

temple complex, and was possibly used primarily by *bhikṣunī* and other women interested in Shingon (Imaizu 420). Without citing his source, Kitagawa says Kūkai's mother and his cousin, Ato Mototada, lived at a lower temple located at the foot of Mount Kōya, outside of the temple complex proper (Kitagawa 1951:147). This makes for a nice image considering the idea that his mother may not have been allowed to ascend the mountain to visit her son at the temple owing to her gender.

As with *yakṣa* and *yakṣī* in India, from ancient times, people of the rural areas in Japan have placed stone symbols of fertility (*Dōsojin*) in fields and by roadsides. Often in male and female pairs, *Dōsojin* stand in abundance, presiding over agricultural and other success. In regards to size, demeanor and apparent social status the male and female deities are by all indications equals in the rural environment. Such a relationship, as a reflection of social conditions, rapidly changed to a situation of male dominance during the Edo and Meiji periods (1600-1868 and 1868-1912 respectively). During that time, masses of people moved away from the countryside where they were transformed into merchants and city dwellers forgetful of the agrarian past. Simultaneously, the samurai aristocracy moved by law to ban any public representation of sexuality.⁷ Add to this equation Shingon's role as vanguard in Japanese Buddhism's assimilation of Shintō and other folk beliefs into an increasingly rigid system often amounting to misogyny, and we find the resulting denial of, if not neutering of, the meaning of male and female stone images.

Man and wife stone images are still found today in rural areas where rice and silk are produced. These images are phallic and progenerative representations of the fertility of the earth

⁷See Czaja for a discussion of this.

and often stand side by side with the more numerous Buddhist representations. Not including the Buddhist images, some 40,000 *Dōsojin* have been counted (Czaja 28). The characteristics of the couples among these are drawn from all walks of life including royalty, peasantry and clergy. A common type of *Dōsojin* is the Buddhist couple sometimes represented as *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* and at other times as “kissing Jizōs.” Even before the advent of these stone images, a pairing of pine trees or a pine tree with a cavity or coiled roots may have suggested *Dōsojin* as does such a tree which can be found today near Myōbu Shrine at Fushimi Inari near Kyoto (Czaja 29).

Given these conditions historically and currently prevalent in rural Japan, and tying them with Indian and other East Asian parallels, the question of why stone images of Kūkai, a Buddhist ascetic and Tantric saint, are found in such close proximity to a female figure in those areas, ceases to be an issue. Instead, it would be surprising if Kōbō Daishi, himself an immensely popular folk deity, was *not* depicted as part of a *Dōsojin* couple.

Chapter III.

Kūkai in Nara.

1. Uncle Ato Ōtari and the University.

Early biographical writings (e.g., *Honored Spoken Memento*) report in Enryaku 7 (788) Kūkai’s uncle Ato Ōtari, realizing his nephew’s capacity for learning, took the fifteen-year-old boy to study in the capital (Hakeda 1972:14). However, scholars’ opinions are split as to when Kūkai actually moved to the capital. For this reason, it is unclear whether the word “capital” in Kūkai’s writings indicates Nagaoka or Heian. In 784, Emperor Kanmu transferred the capital from Nara to Nagaoka. Nagaoka’s ruins are in Kyoto prefecture’s Oto district, Mukō city (京都府乙訓郡向日町). In Shōwa 39 (1964), excavation and investigation was started. Ruins of that city continue to be found, indicating that even more than had been previously realized, Emperor Kanmu had the palace and other city buildings constructed to replicate those of the Tang capital Chang’an.¹ Within ten years, apparently due to a series of events considered ill omens, in disregard for the expense, in 794 Nagaoka was given up as the location for the new capital and Heian, modern-day Kyoto, was chosen.

The Biography of Sōzu Kūkai by his direct follower and close associate Shinzei, says Kūkai studied with his uncle, “At the beginning of the year he was 15” (KKZ 8:6). Other sources say Kūkai actually began his studies with his uncle four years earlier at eleven years of age, around the year the capital first moved from Nara to Nagaoka, or before this in Sanuki. Kūkai’s own account in the *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing* uses the words “in

¹ See *Kyōto shimbun*, 9 Feb. 2000 and *Yomiuri shimbun*, 4 Feb. 2000.

early childhood”, possibly reinforcing this (Watanabe 11). Nevertheless, for the following reason, it is difficult to believe that Kūkai moved to the capital that early. During the reign of Emperor Kammu (737-806), Ato Ōtari became the tutor of the third prince, Crown Prince Iyo. While it is possible that this appointment was made after he taught Kūkai, it is unlikely that tutoring began before 788 due to difficulties faced by the crown Prince. In short, a plot to assassinate the emperor was uncovered and loyalists to the Prince were implicated. The prince’s mother went into complete isolation and subsequently committed suicide. The prince would have surely been grief stricken (Wakamori 11).²

If Kūkai entered the capital at the age of fifteen years, that puts the date around Enryaku 6 or 7 (787 or 788). For this reason, Watanabe supports the idea that Kūkai moved to the Nagaoka, that year being too early for the transfer to Heian (Watanabe 32). According to the two theories, Kūkai received instruction from his uncle either from the time the capitol was transferred in 784 or from 788 until he entered the National University in 791 (Enryaku 10) when he was eighteen years old. The National University was the highest institute of learning in Japan at the time. It was set up with the intent of training the sons of the ruling class in Confucian classics so that they would be better equipped for official positions.

In *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, allegedly written in 797 when Kūkai was around twenty-four years old, Kūkai says he attended school when he was young. In his *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing* completed in 819 Kūkai writes, “In early childhood I engaged in study with a relative.” While the numerous biographies agree the

² Prince Iyo was executed in 807. He and his mother Kisshi were later considered victims of an imperial succession dispute in 807.

relative was Kūkai's uncle Ato Ōtari, Wakamori says Ōtari was Kūkai's maternal uncle while Sawa and others say he was the brother of Kūkai's father. Whether to avoid confusion, one explanation holds Ōtari, the brother of Kūkai's father, was adopted into the family of Kūkai's mother, the Ato family, where he became the male successor of the family name (Sawa 58).

The passage quoted above from *The Biography of Sōzu Kūkai* continues, "Following his maternal uncle Ato Ōtari, he learned the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Book of Filial Piety* as well the *Book of History*, combined with the study of literature." In the *Honored Spoken Memento*, also compiled by Shinzei, there is a similar reference to his "maternal uncle, Sir Ato Ōtari." (KKZ 8:39)

Watanabe states relatives on Kūkai's mother's side of the family, the Ato family, were especially known for producing good scholars and speculates that this may have been instilled in Kūkai. Watanabe also hypothesizes Kūkai may have studied written characters from an early age due to his father's position in the local government (Watanabe 7). Whether by assumption or an unnamed source, Hakeda adds the detail that Kūkai studied in Ōtari's own home (Hakeda 1972:14).

As mentioned in Chapter I, from certain stories it can be assumed that Kūkai and his family knew from infancy that he was to propagate Buddhism (e.g., Kūkai as the re-incarnation of Amoghavajra; construction of Buddhist images from mud, etc.). Other evidence suggests Kūkai studied with his uncle and then entered the university in order to become a court bureaucrat. The latter version of Kūkai's youth apparently appeals to contemporary scholars (i.e.,

Watanabe, Hakeda, Kitagawa, etc.).³ Kitagawa goes along with the speculation that Ōtari may have asked Kūkai's parents to let him study literature in the National University in the capital for the sake of his future career (Kitagawa 1951:116, citing Yamamoto 266 as the source of this speculation).

It is not surprising that Confucian education was the focus at the National University where students were being trained to become government bureaucrats. At that time the Chinese system of government and culture was widely emulated in Japan. Accordingly, from the late seventh and early eighth centuries the Ritsuryō governing system was adapted, “establishing the political and moral supremacy of the emperor and the great nobles, as well as written law” (Frédéric 2002:792). Literary arts of China were also highly valued and absorbed. The National University, located in the capital, stressed these values in its curriculum. There, aristocratic students could take courses in such subjects as music, writing, law, mathematics and history. Courses also included etiquettes, calligraphy and filial piety. Once Kūkai had entered the National University, we can imagine that he may have excelled in those courses involving teachings of Confucianism, since he had studied these with his uncle. But, we are told Buddhist scriptures were the most fascinating materials to Kūkai (e.g., the *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai*, *KKZ* 8:6). However, in fact, it is easy to discern much of the Japanese vogue for all things popular in China continuing in the pursuits of the young Kūkai in China: calligraphy, poetry and the most popular form of Buddhism for the aristocracy: Tantra.

³ It might not be such a stretch to see Kūkai's biographers here and elsewhere positing their own experiences as those making most sense to them in Kūkai's situation.

Most of the details of Kūkai’s university period are not known. The *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* briefly alludes to his steadfast fortitude during the university period. That writing says, “At two nines (which has been interpreted as age 18 rather than 29) I traveled to the city of Pagoda Trees⁴ (i.e., the university). My idleness compared to grasping at snow and fireflies (or: snow florescence);⁵ anger, a rope⁶ and a drill were (used against) not working diligently. Thereupon, there was a lone *shamon* (S. *śramaṇa*) who showed me the *Kokūzōgumonji* Dharma (hereafter referred to by its common name in Shingon, *gumonji-hō*). That sūtra explains, if a person, in accordance with the Dharma, recites this mantra (*shingon*) a million (times) in breadth, then (s/he) can grasp all teaching Dharma (i.e., doctrine) words and meaning in memory” (KKZ 9:118). The modern Japanese translation provided by the editor of the *KKZ* translates to English as follows. “At 18 years of age I studied abroad at the university and, by the glow of the snow and light of fireflies, I read manuscripts, thinking of the hard work of people of olden times. Also, I spurred myself onward, neglecting myself, hanging a rope around my neck, sticking a drill to my crotch and watching as much as a guard (against) not working diligently, being severe to myself. Here, there was an alone-practicing *bhikṣu* who taught me the ‘Dharma of the *Kokūzōgumonji*’” (KKZ 6:5).

⁴ Reference is to Chinese scholars of previous generations planting Pagoda trees (KKZ 6:8 n. 14).

⁵ *KKZ* 6:8 n. 16 says the idea of studying by the light of the snow appears in the Chinese writing 孫氏世錄 while studying by the light of fireflies appears in the Chinese writing the *Jinshu* (晉書, History of the Jin Dynasty), which was compiled in 644 and covers the years 265-419. After comparing Kūkai’s sentence with those in the *Jinshu*, I agree that the allusion is possible if not likely. I find this aspect of Kūkai’s work here to be in a tradition of Japanese prose and poetry that persists to this day in that he has built on a previous poetic tradition within the framework of his own personality. Indeed, this can be said about the nature of all poetry that aims to observe certain rules of a genre while contributing an individual freshness of the poet. Likewise, it is tempting to compare this approach not only to Kūkai’s treatment of Tantra in Japan, but to Buddhism at large as it was adapted by the people of each country in which it appeared.

⁶ *KKZ* 6:8 n. 17 points to a reference to a hanging a rope around the neck and watching like a guard in the *Taiping Yulan* (太平御覽), a 500 fascicle compilation after the time of Kūkai during the Song Dynasty at the order of the emperor, but containing early stories and biographies from the Han to the Five Kingdoms period.

Kūkai's university course of study was mainly Chinese classics. The number of Chinese classics Kūkai later quoted likely could not have been all studied in this short interval. It is reasonable to assume that he had already received a formal Confucian education and this contributed to his acceptance in the National University. This same assumption might be made in regards to his education about Buddhism before studying in China. In any case, it is noteworthy that among the founders of each Buddhist tradition in Japan, Kūkai alone studied at the country's highest institute of education. Kūkai's Shingon doctrine is typically presented as philosophically advanced as compared to the other Japanese Buddhist traditions (Watanabe 33). As a part of this assumption, the education he received in his youth is probably considered as a contributing factor (Watanabe 33). I think it is also fair to assume that Kūkai's study of Chinese poetry, literature and culture did not end with his withdrawal from the university. According to later biographies, from the age of 20 until 25, Kūkai studied Japanese literature. These years are a part of a ten year period of his life about which little is known. Again, judging from his poetic works and literary citations, the creative biographies of later periods may be accurate in this case. Late in life, Kūkai wrote his most voluminous piece of literature, *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing*, a lengthy exposition and positive appraisal of Chinese poetry and literature.

The university educational system at that time was determined according to the Taihō Code (大宝令), based closely on the Tang educational system. Significantly, the Taihō Code stipulates the age of persons entering university, "above thirteen and below twenty-three". This suggests Kūkai was within this age bracket. Whether the educational system at the time left room for modification is not known (Watanabe 34). Abé cites another document from the time saying

that no one older than sixteen would be admitted to the University (Abé 1999:72). Also, because Kūkai is known to have been fluent in spoken and written Tang Chinese before traveling to China, it is reasonable to assume he studied these subjects first hand at some point. In any case, it is not known whether Kūkai graduated from the university. Biographies assume that he probably studied there for two or three years.

2. Nara in Relation to Kūkai.

Specifics of the Buddhism existing in Sanuki at the time of Kūkai's youth are uncertain. Shikoku has many mountains that ascetics are known to have frequented. But at the time, Buddhism involving mountain asceticism involving "magic" was illegal. During the Nara period, the government required every district to have a state-supported provincial temple (*kokubun-ji*, 国分寺). Typically, powerful families built these as their personal temples. Matsunaga says the provincial temple system basically made Buddhism the national religion (Matsunaga 1987, I:123).

In the capital, Kūkai may have studied Confucianism to further his career goals but connected to this study he began to learn other things about China such as mountain mysticism and Daoist techniques for prolonging life. Some of those associated ideas along with the study of Buddhist texts may have contributed to a revelation in Kūkai's outlook on life. In Chinese records from the fourth through sixth century we find that belief in popularized versions of Daoism was widespread among the population. As a catalyst to this the Tang royal family claimed to be related to Laozi. They reasoned that protection could be gained by building images of Laozi and temples to honor him.

Knowledgeable people of Nara largely assimilated Tang culture including some knowledge of Daoist thought and Chinese versions of mountain mysticism. Collections of contemporary Chinese poetry were also available. However, unlike the situation in China, in Japan Tang type Daoist temples and images of Laozi for worship did not become popular. Likewise, in China Laozi's *Dao de jing* was popularly studied. This was not the case in Japan though at the time the text was not unknown.

Assuming Kūkai went to the capital to study in Enryaku 7 (788), this coincided with the year Saichō carved a statue of the medicine Buddha, Yakushi Nyorai (薬師如来, S. Bhaiṣajyaguru Tathāgata), installing it in a small temple he called Hieizan-ji (比叡山時), Mount Hiei Temple (Groner 30). The temple was re-named Enryaku-ji in 823 and was to be one of the major centers of Buddhism in Japan, remaining so to this day and becoming the home of the Japanese Tendai tradition as well as a destination site for millions of pilgrims and tourists. Saichō was apparently familiar with the mountain and knew it was deserted at the time. It is unclear why he decided to leave Nara after just being fully ordained three months earlier. But, it may have been to escape the political instability left in the wake of the ordeal with Dōkyō⁷ and others (Matsunaga 1987, I:140). Kūkai was just entering this environment. Saichō's choice of Mount Hiei for the site of his temple would come to be significant in that it was located to the northeast of what was soon to become Heian, the next capital of Japan. According to the Japanese geomancy believed at that time, the northeast was a particularly vulnerable direction for

⁷ For information on Dōkyō, the Nara *bhikṣu* who practiced some form of Tantric Buddhism and seduced the empress, see Matsunaga 1987, I:125 and Groner 10-11).

attacks on the capital. It is speculated that this is the reason Saichō first came to the attention of Emperor Kanmu (Groner 31).

The Great Buddha (*Daibutsu*) statue at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara was finished in 749. Afterwards, when gold found in Mutsu was interpreted as a sign of the Buddha's approval, "Emperor Shōmu became the first Japanese Emperor to declare himself a servant of the Three Treasures" (Matsunaga 1987, I:122). The *Daibutsu* in Nara is an image of the Buddha Vairocana, built as a result of the dominant influence of the Kegon tradition among the Nara Buddhists. The main text on which Kegon depends for its bases is the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*.⁸ Other sūtras of importance at the time include *Brahmajāla-sūtra*,⁹ the Sūtra of Golden Light (金光明經文句記)¹⁰ and the Two Kings Prajñā Sūtra (*Ninnō hannya-kyō*), used for protection of the country. Also, popular in Japan at the time were the *Lotus Sūtra*¹¹ and the Larger and Small Pure Land sutras (*Sukhāvātī-vyūha*, *J. Jōdōkyō*).¹² Tantric Buddhist scriptures already in Japan at the time include the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* (*J. Daibutsuchō-kyō*)¹³ and the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. These later important to Kūkai and already in Japan in the Nara period include the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* and the *Commentary on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (*J. Syakumakuen-ron*).¹⁴ It is likely that Kūkai had access to these as a young man but it is unknown how many he studied.

Before the Nara period, Japan had already imported what is today called old *mikkyō* (古密教) or *zōbu mikkyō* (雜部密教, miscellaneous or impure Tantra). I believe the differentiation

⁸ *T.* 9:278.

⁹ *T.* 24:1482, a Chinese apocryphal text (see Abé 1999:446 n. 115).

¹⁰ *T.* 39 n. 1786.

¹¹ *T.* 9:5.

¹² 佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴經 *T.* n. 363 and 阿彌彌陀經 *T.* 12:364

¹³ *T.* 19 n. 945 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經.

¹⁴ See Ōyama Kōjun's *Mikkyō gaisetsu to kyōri*, 71.

between the earlier importation and that of Kūkai and later persons, has likely come about in attempt to elevate the importance of the latter, rather than being based on actual differences in doctrine or practices. I will return to this subject in the next chapter.

According to Ishida Shigesaku in his *Study of Nara Buddhism Seen from Hand-copied Sūtras*, around the Nara period, already many co-called *zōbu mikkyō* scriptures had been imported. These are especially prominent among the various sūtras imported from China by the famous Genbō (玄昉, ?-746).¹⁵ Those scriptures historically known in Shingon as the Two Great Sūtras (兩部の大經) upon which Shingon depends, the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* were already imported to Japan in the Nara period. Also copied during the Tenhei sūtra copying period was the third most important sūtra to Shingon, the *Soshissuji-kyō* (蘇悉地經, S. *Susiddhi-sūtra*, also known as the 蘇悉地羯囉經, *Soshijikara-kyō*). These sūtras, the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* and the *Soshissuji-kyō* are known as Shingon's Three-fold Sūtras (真言三部經) (Imaizu 542).

From looking at the *Writings of Masakura Monastery* (正倉院文書), Watanabe believes the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* was copied at least four times in the Nara period. (Watanabe 21). A commentary on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the *Meaning of the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (大日經義

¹⁵ Genbō was a Nara period transmitter of the Hossō tradition. He was of the Shōsei Ato family (俗姓阿刀). It is unclear to me if he was related to Kūkai's Ato family. In 717 Genbō went to China, where Tang Emperor Xuan Zong (玄宗, r. 712-756) bestowed upon him the highest clerical rank. He returned to Japan in 735, bringing with him over 5000 scrolls of Buddhist scriptures as well as various iconography images. He is mentioned in connection to various efficacious deeds such as copying sūtras for the benefit of the sick or deceased in such writings as *Dainihon kobunshō* (大日本古文書) and Gyōnen's Record of the Transmission of the Buddha-Dharma to the Three Countries (三国佛法通縁起) (Imaizu 277-8). However, some sources claim that he seduced Empress Kōmyō (光明) or the wife of Fujiwara Hirotsugu (Matsunaga 1987 I:124). He was exiled to Kyushu in 745. There can be found a further connection with Kūkai in Kyushu, as taken up later in this dissertation.

積)¹⁶, also imported by Genbō, was in the possession of Nara's Kōfuku-ji (興福寺) (Watanabe 21).

There also exist examples of Tantric Buddhist iconography in Japan from before Kūkai went to China. Representative items are found in the area of the Ooita-ken (大分県) and Saga-ken (佐賀県) prefectures in Kyushu, where there are the remains of stone Tantric Buddhist images. The imported genealogy of these is unknown. However the Mahāvairocana images Kūkai imported typically have the bun type hair (髮髻冠, J. Hakkeikan) and a round halo. In contrast, the Ooita-ken Mahāvairocana images have snail-coil type hair (螺髻, J. *rahotsu*) and boat-form halos. The attributive deities surrounding the Ooita-ken Mahāvairocana images are Acalanātha (J. Fudō Myō-ō) and Vaiśravaṇa (J. Bishamon-ten), or Mahāvairocana and Acalanātha are found in parallel placement. This is not found in Shingon. The snail-coil hair type of Mahāvairocana image can be seen in Java and Nepal in the middle of five attributive deities similar to those in Kyushu. According to the art historian Suwa Ryūken, examples of Tantric Buddhist images in Japan before the time of Kūkai include the Four Devas (四天王), Brahma-Deva (梵天), Śakra/Indra (帝釈天), the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (觀世音菩薩), Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara (十一面觀音), Amogapāśāvalokiteśvara (不空羂索觀音), Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara (千手觀音), Cintāmaṇicakra (如意輪觀音), Horse-headed Avalokiteśvara (馬頭觀音). Examples of female Tantric Buddhist deities extant in Japan before the time of Kūkai's importation include Mahāśrī (吉祥天, J. Kichijō-ten), Sarasvatī (弁才天, J. Benzai-ten)

¹⁶ I think this refers to the *Dainichikyō gishakusōkeshō* (義釋搜決抄), a 12-fascicle commentary used as a fundamental text for Taimitsu (see *Mikkyō dijiten* 270c).

and Hārītī (鬼子母神, J. Kishimojin). Such images can be found in the temples of Nara, particularly Saidaiji (西大寺), Tōshōdaiji (唐招提寺) and Daianji (大安寺) (Suwa 87).

3. *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings.*

Historians, buddhologists, and the general public consider Kūkai's contribution to Japan the introduction of the immensely influential form of Tantric Buddhism to that country. However, through the lineage of Śubhakarasiṃha and others, Tantric texts, practices and images later associated with Shingon were already prevalent in Japan before Kūkai went to China. For this reason, Kiyota argues that Kūkai's unique contribution in relationship to Shingon was to systematize its doctrine, locating its place within the history of Buddhism as well as general Indian and Chinese philosophical thought (Kiyota, forthcoming). From that perspective, it is easy to see *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and the writing considered the draft of that work, *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* (聾瞽指歸, Indicating the Goals of the Deaf and Blind, KKZ 6:125), as Kūkai's first attempts towards achieving this monumental lifetime work of systematization. If so, the flowering of this effort can be found in his *Benkenmitsu nikyōron* (The Difference Between the Revealed and the Secret Teachings),¹⁷ as well as the works often considered the crowning achievements of his life, the *Ten Stages of Mind* and *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*, which sets out his doctrinal classification system.

Not so easily recognized is the importance of the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* in the history of Japanese

¹⁷ KZ 3.

literature. At the very least, the significance of these documents should be recognized in that the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* is the oldest extant work of Japanese fiction (Hakada 1972:17, n. 16). However, more than this, by all major accounts, Kūkai excelled in the production of Chinese literature, Chinese being the medium for writing in Japan at that time. In addition, it is clear from these works that Kūkai had diligently studied Chinese literary theory before going to China. By applying Chinese literary theories in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind*, Kūkai took an important step in launching in Japan a systemized way for producing literature. From this point of view, these works can be seen as the foundation for a standard in Japanese production of Chinese prose and poetry.¹⁸ In addition, as Abé argues, *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* was a challenge to the Ritsuryō government's control of the production of literature (Abé 1999:8).

From these writings, we may get an idea of Kūkai's exposure to and opinion of the Chinese religious doctrines at the time he wrote *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* in 797 (Enryaku 16). However, although most biographers agree the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* was also written at that time, when Kūkai was twenty-four years old, in fact, it might have been written when Kūkai was as old as 40 and Shingon was established (Kitagawa 1951:117). In the later writing, translated by Hakeda as *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* (Hakeda 1972:101-39), Kūkai sets up a conversation among characters he presents as representatives of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. These traditions had already long been referred to in China as the three teachings. To the extent of my research, Kūkai's biographers

¹⁸ See Kōsen Takashi, *Kūkai to kanbungaku* (空海と漢文学, Kūkai and Chinese Literature).

today unanimously agree that the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is a thinly veiled autobiographical work about his own struggle with the ideas of these three teachings and shows his state of mind towards those teachings around the age of twenty-four. While I am willing to accept that this is possibly what Kūkai wanted the reader to think about his struggle with the three teachings, I cannot agree that the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is the product of Kūkai at the age of twenty-four. I base this opinion on the fact that *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is close in content and form to the *Ten Stages of Mind*. Abé rightly maintains that the Buddhist character in *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* preaches what can be traced to so-called *Kengyō* (revealed as opposed to Tantric) Buddhist texts according to Kūkai's later distinction and praise of the superiority of Tantra in *Thesis on Distinguishing the Two Teachings, Kengyō and Mikkyō (Benkenmitsu nikyōron)* and *Ten Stages of Mind* (Abé 1999:92-3). Nevertheless, *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* ranks Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism in a general way, in no way contradicting the *Ten Stages of Mind*. In addition, in both writings we find Kūkai's style of continuously linking quotations. Remarkably, although quotes are sustained end-to-end for long intervals, he is able to blend them together to form a coherent monologue in these writings.¹⁹ In short, I think it is significant to find no contradictory statements are made between works written before going to China and Kūkai's later philosophy. I believe it is fair to say that had his opinion changed, so would the content of *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* during Kūkai's lifetime or afterwards and further speculate that a contradictory story written by Kūkai would not have survived. At the least, I

¹⁹ In some sense, this style is similar to developments in the Japanese poetic forms such as Renga, linking verses.

believe we must view with caution the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* as a true reflection of Kūkai's feelings at twenty-four years of age.

Because there is much similarity between the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* and the former appears more polished in terms of form and content, the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* is believed to be an earlier draft of *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*. The earliest existing copy of the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind*, believed to be written by Kūkai's own hand, is preserved at Mount Kōya in Kongōbuji and is designated a National Treasure by the Japanese government. Hakeda explains scholars have found *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* differs from *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* “only by its title, preface, and concluding poem, in addition to some minor matters of phrasing in the body of the work” (Hakeda 1972:17). Although Professor Hakeda believed that the bulk of both manuscripts were written when Kūkai was twenty-four years old, he presents the following research on the parts allegedly added to the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* later.

The date given in the preface to the *Indications*, however, was not written at the same time as the date in the preface to the draft. This is evident from the wording of the two dates, though in both cases the meaning remains the same, that is, the first day of the twelfth month, Enryaku 16.²⁰ In the *Indications* the date is expressed in a sober, dignified manner, while in the draft the impression is one of self-conscious elegance. This feeling of greater maturity is corroborated by the preface and the concluding poem themselves, for the change from the draft to the *Indications* manifests the same trend. Both are, in the case of the *Indications*, of far greater literary maturity and spiritual quality than in the case of the draft. In all probability Kūkai was in his thirties or forties when he performed the revision (Hakeda 1972:17).

²⁰ Professor Hakeda writes: “This difference was noted by Igarashi Tsutomu in *Heianchō bungakushi* (History of Heian Literature), I (Tokyo, 1937), 164-5. Igarashi classifies the *Indications* as a work of didactic fiction, thus recognizing it as the earliest Japanese fiction (*shōsetsu*) extant.” (Hakada 17, note 16).

In the opening passage, apparently but not decidedly before the fiction narrative begins, Kūkai explains that his own nephew was engaging in what Kūkai considered a frivolous life and opposition to such a lifestyle led him to write the story. Unless we are simply to consider this part of the fiction narrative, there may have truly been such a relative as the wayward nephew. On the other hand, the nephew and all the characters in the story could refer to Kūkai himself. He adds that he did not expect anyone to read the story but that he was just writing to “express my own unsuppressible feelings” (Hakeda 1972:103). In the story, a man called Tokaku (Hare’s Horn) also has a nephew, Shitsuga (Leech’s Tusk), who leads a hedonistic existence. Tokaku asks a renowned Confucian, Kimo (Tortoise Hair) to speak to his nephew. At first the scholar is reluctant, quoting from the *Analects of Confucius*, “I have heard that a wise man will not become a fool even if he is not taught, but a fool will not become wise even if he is taught” (Hakeda 1972:107). However after being asked three times, Kimo gives in, lecturing the wayward nephew on ethics and responsibility in a lengthy string of quotes and illusions. At the end of the speech, Shitsuga throws himself to the ground eager to mend his ways. Tokaku bows, greatly impressed as the reader might also be left feeling about this sincere and apparently successful address and Confucianism has won the day over hedonism.

If we are to view the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* as an indication of Kūkai’s own philosophical development, we might conclude that not only is Shitsuga a representative of Kūkai himself, but Kimo represents Kūkai’s uncle, the Confucian scholar Ato Ōtari. This makes sense in placing Kūkai as the wayward nephew. If so, it is possible that in Kūkai’s own life, as in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, the feeling of elation

towards Confucian teachings, at least to the neglect of all other teachings, was short lived. Exactly how long Kūkai remained at the National University is unknown but it appears to be from less than two years to perhaps three years. During that time, Kūkai must have been somewhat concerned about his family members who were increasingly losing their positions at court. Even if he was not concerned about his own future, the situation may have led to his loss of faith in Confucianism.²¹

In the story, a representative of Daoism (or some version of popular Daoism of the Tang period as Kūkai understood it), Kyobu (虚亡隠士, literally Empty Death Hermit) was listening to the words of Kimo and when the former decides to speak, he makes it clear that he was not as impressed with Confucianism as the others had been. Kyobu convinces all present that their chosen way is only good for carrying out superficial functions in the world and misses deeper hidden truths. After teaching them to build an altar and perform appropriate rites, a part of Tang popular Daoism, he proceeds to instruct on the ways to get rid of greediness and finally to prolong life. At the end of his talk, all decide that Daoism is superior to Confucianism.

As might be guessed however, a Buddhist, Kamei-kotsuji (乞児, Beggar Child; called “Mendicant X” by Hakeda), who was begging outside the house all this time, is able to convert the others to Buddhism. Further, he declares the Buddha had sent Confucius and Laozi to China in order to instruct those who could only understand parts of the greater doctrine. As many traditions of Buddhism had done throughout the world and Shingon would do in the future, Kūkai’s drama calls for syncretism in interpreting other philosophies while always holding

²¹ Likewise, in China, the political flux at the end of the Han dynasty is said to have contributed to a general loss of faith in Confucianism and give rise to the prominence of Buddhism among the Chinese population.

Buddhism in the position of supremacy. In short, according to the story, Confucianism is for success in life; it explains the path of human relations but not beyond. Daoism, in distinction, teaches to detest worldly fame and ambition. It is the path of the lone hermit. However, Daoism is not a teaching for the benefit of all humanity, the ultimate ideal of Buddhism. Beggar Child is a person who has virtue and compassion even in the face of ridicule. He travels as an *ubasoku*,²² unaffiliated with a temple and says, “If by chance I entered a city market, rubble would be thrown on me like rain. If I passed a harbor, horse manure would fly at me like fog.” (KKZ 6:64). Judging by the elevated position of this character in the story, at the time, Kūkai seems to have taken that lifestyle as the model for his own life.

The drama shows off Kūkai’s familiarity with Confucian thought and suggests his preference for Daoism relative to it. We must wonder why it was that he chooses to write only of popular Daoism and ignore the more philosophical aspects closer to his own Buddhist beliefs. Perhaps, like others of the time, he was unaware of these aspects. However, this may be an example of intentional exclusion for rhetorical purposes, in disregard for representing a completely accurate account of the three teachings. At any rate and regardless of the negative image presented in the drama, this type of popular Daoism, infused as it was with magic and incantation, may have greatly influenced his later thought in developing Shingon as it almost certainly did in the development of Huayan and other Buddhist traditions in China.

²² Abé explains, “The term *ubasoku* was originally a transliteration of *upāsaka*, a Sanskrit word denoting a male Buddhist householder. By Kūkai’s time, however, it had already assumed a particular connotation in the cultural context of the Nara and early Heian Buddhist community...*ubasoku* was a generic term referring to a variety of Buddhist practitioners who did not receive the official ordination sanctioned by the government” (Abé 1999:76).

In the end, Beggar Child chants a ten-verse (十韻) poem as Tortoise Hair *sensei* and Empty Death hermit harmonize. Hakeda's translation of Kūkai's closing verse is as follows.

"The light of the sun and moon breaks through darkness,
 and the three teachings illumine ignorance.
 Nature and desire vary from person to person,
 Treatment differs with each physician.
 Human duties were preached by Confucius;
 On learning them one becomes a high government official.
 Lao Tzu taught the creation by yin and yang;
 On receiving his instructions one can observe the world from the tower of a
 Daoist temple.
 Most significant and profound is the teaching of the ultimate path of Mahayana.
 It teaches the salvation of oneself and of others;
 It does not exclude even animals or birds.
 The flowers in the spring fall beneath the branches;
 Dew in autumn vanishes before the withered grass.
 Flowing water can never be stopped;
 Whirling winds howl constantly.
 The world of senses is a sea in which one well may be drown;
 Eternity, Bliss, the Self, and Purity are the summits on which we
 ultimately belong.
 I know the fetters that bind me in the triple world;
 Why should I not give up the thought of serving in the court?
 (Hakeda 1972:139).

It is interesting to speculate on the parallels between *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and what would later develop in Japan as *sarugaku nō* drama. First, the writing appears in three fascicles, which may be considered three acts. These conform in action to the classical *nō* progression: *jō*, an easy beginning; *ha*, an intensification of the drama and; *kyū*, a rapid finish (Zeami in Rimer 83-7). There are also parallels in the inclusion of an ending verse as well as the didactic, religious nature of the writing and the elements of humor interspersed. Could Kūkai have written *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* with the idea of a dramatic performance in mind? Zeami (1363-1443), the most famous of all *nō* producers, writes

in his famous *Fūshikaden*, that the origin of *sarugaku* may be India and Prince Shōtoku decreed the production of such dramas for the sake of the country (Rimer 4). *Sarugaku* troupes were often officially affiliated with shrines such as the Kasuga Shrine and the Hie Shrine on Mount Hiei (Rimer 4 n. 1).

The literary style of *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is that which prevailed from the Six Dynasties, known as *Shiroku benreitai* (四六辨麗体). Kūkai's writing is said to be identical to magnificent examples of writings by people in Mainland China at that time (Watanabe 45; Kōsen 137). The whole production is in accordance with the format of climatic writing (騷文). It is organized in a symmetrical literary style progressing in tone, rhythm and mood. Beginning with Tortoise Hair, the effectiveness of each person's persuasion is increased. According to Kōsen, its prose style in Chinese Six Dynasty Period literature is specifically related to the literary theory concerning the balance of verses having rhyme (有韻の文, that is, poetry) and those without rhyme (無韻の文, non-poetic literature). The originator of this writing style is thought to be Guiyu (擊虞, died 311).²³ Following the theory, by appending the poem at the end of *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, the philosophies preceding it, those of the Confucian and Daoist, are eclipsed (Kōsen 139). Nevertheless, Kōsen adds, the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is not simply an imitation of Chinese literature but in it, Kūkai introduces original elements (Kōsen 139). Watanabe compares it to writings of Sugawara-no-Michizane (菅原道真, 845-903) and other classical Japanese writers skilled in the Chinese style, wondering if such a work really could have been written by someone around the

²³ Kōsen names “文章流別集” in particular.

age of twenty-four (Watanabe 45). Likewise, experts of Japanese calligraphy consider the original handwritten version of *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* a masterpiece in the Ōgishi (王羲之) style of calligraphy.

Chapter IV.

Mountain Asceticism

1. Leaving the University.

We do not know the exact time or circumstances of Kūkai's departure from the university. Did he undertake the practice of *gumonji-hō*, involving reciting *dhāraṇī* for one hundred days while still enrolled? Did he graduate, withdraw or was he forced to leave? These are all questions still unresolved. There has been much speculation along the lines that while at the National University he underwent a process of conversion from Confucianism to some, also yet undetermined, version of Buddhism. If so, we can imagine this may have been due to any number of factors: a spiritual struggle; the lose of faith in Confucianism as his family members were being excluded from governmental positions; or a combination of these and other still unknown factors.

In the eyes of his family, going to school was probably viewed as a practicality, a means for future support. The *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* directly addresses their concerns about Kūkai's decision to embark upon the path of Buddhism. Becoming a Buddhist *bhikṣu* with no prospects of one day inheriting a family temple, as has long been a major motivating factor for doing so in Japan, was likely disconcerting to his parents. This may have been especially true if he indeed expressed an early interest in Tantric Buddhism, some associated practices of which had been outlawed in Japan. But to go the way of the *ubasoku*, those individuals undergoing self-training unaffiliated with a government sanctioned temple, was to concretely become a social dropout. In his early twenties, Kūkai was at a time in life when the children of aristocratic families were typically establishing the careers that would support

themselves as well as their parents in old age. Perhaps because this period is one of the sketchiest in his biographies, the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, taken as Kūkai's own words, has been viewed as telling the story of the next seven years of his life.

In the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* Kūkai says, "My relatives and teachers opposed my entering the priesthood, saying that by doing so I would be unable to fulfill the Five Cardinal Virtues or to accomplish the duties of loyalty or of filial piety" (Hakeda 1972:102). Yet in regards to Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism, clearly in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, as later in the *Ten Stages of Mind*, Kūkai is offering at the least pretense of arguing, as he says, "If an individual chooses one, he does not necessarily repudiate loyalty and filial piety by doing so" (Hakeda 1972:102). Kukai's initial decision to embrace Buddhism is sometimes viewed as a show of strength for his conviction for what seemed to him higher truths as compared to filial duty (e.g., Wakamori 10-2). It is well known that a major stylistic element of Kūkai's writings, used by later scholars in attempt to identify authentic manuscripts of his, is self-effacement. This may be the case in the above sentence as well. Whether or not we can consider such to be a true expression of his thoughts or simply a rhetorical device, the treatment of other traditions in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* as well as the *Ten Stages of Mind* cannot be considered to be on fair and equal footing to Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism respectively. By the time he wrote *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, Kūkai must have had advanced knowledge of Confucianism at least and likely other traditions of Buddhism by the time of the *Ten Stages of Mind*. In the end of both writings we find the opinion that Daoism and Confucianism express aspects of Śākyamuni's teachings for the popular mind while his full message is beyond the limits of those two

traditions. It may be that Kūkai's expression of this idea in these writings is more than an echo of that message found in the *Lotus Sūtra* and doctrinal classification systems popular in China. It is conceivable, as biographers have held, that indeed he experienced a personal crisis at which time he sought answers in one teaching and then another before finding guiding principles he felt comfortable with for his life. Regardless, biographies propose the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* indicates there was a turning point when a *bhikṣu* of uncertain identity assumes the role of initial Buddhist master in Kūkai's life. We are to assume that this *bhikṣu*, who appears in the explanatory introduction to the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, counseled him to take up ascetic training as a solitary practitioner (*ubasoku*) like both the *bhikṣu* himself and the fictitious Buddhist character, who appears as the hero in the body of the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*. Based on studies by various contemporary Japanese scholars, Abé suggests three ways the term *ubasoku*, originally a transliteration of the Sanskrit *upāsaka*, a lay Buddhist, was used: 1) to refer to a novice preparing to become a *bhikṣu*; 2) referring to those proclaiming themselves *bhikṣu* independent of the official ordination of the Bureau of Bhikṣu (Sōgō) and; 3) referring to those practicing mountain asceticism (Abé 1999:79-80).

In the *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai*, Shinzei writes, "He became a Buddhist layman and for some time went alone to engage in ascetic practices on the precipices of famous mountains and in the innermost recesses of lonely valleys surrounded by steep cliffs. Once, while he was meditating atop Mt. Tairyu in Awa, the great sword of Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva came flying toward him. Thus, the Bodhisattva showed his own mystical powers in response [to Kūkai's prayers]. Another time, while Kūkai was meditating with closed eyes, the planet Venus entered his mouth; the Bodhisattva had revealed to him the Buddha's supernatural power. In winter,

when the snow fell heavily, Kūkai’s hardships were great; he disciplined himself by exposing his body to the elements, clad in a cloth made of arrowroot fiber. In summer he practiced repentance day and night, all the while eating no grain at all” (trans. Hakeda 1972:16). A similar account appears in the *Honored Spoken Memento*.

Stories about Kūkai first becoming a *bhikṣu* can be seen as linking him to other folk heroes and popular traditions. According to legend, Kūkai became a preceptor (得度, J. *tokudo*) at a temple in Izumi known as Makiosan (formerly written 卷尾山: Scroll End Mountain; today, with the same pronunciation, written 槇尾山 Pine Top Mountain)¹ (Wakamori 21). There, at around the age of 24, he received the 10 precepts of a novice Buddhist, the 72 rules for deportment in everyday life (威儀, J. *igi*) and the Buddhist name Kyōkai (教海), meaning “Ocean of Teachings.” Later he would change his name to Nyokū (如空, “Thus Empty”). At Makiosan, he took the tonsure and, according to a legend, from a dry area there, suddenly pure mountain water gushed forth, giving him a divine *abhiṣeka* into the path of the Buddha (Wakamori 21).

Though he had done these things, it should be noted he still had not received the “complete ordination” ceremony important for officially leaving the world behind and accepting the Buddhist path in Japanese society. He received complete ordination at the Kaidan of Tōdai-ji in Nara in the fourth month of Enryaku 14 (795). At that time he received the name Kūkai.

Makiosan Temple is located in Makiosan town of Izumi City, in the Ōsaka urban district.² The temple has long been affiliated with Tendai, except during a brief period when

¹ Makiosan is also called Maki no osan, Maki no odera and Sefuku-ji (施福寺).

²大阪府和泉市槇尾山町.

Shingon experienced a surge of popularity from 1623 to 1644, when it changed into a Shingon temple.³ The principle deities (*honzon*, 本尊) enshrined at Makiosan are the bodhisattva Maitreya (J. Miroku) and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (J. Kannon). There is a popular belief that Kūkai did not die but sits in perpetual meditation awaiting the age when he will return for the well-being of humanity.⁴ In regards to Avalokiteśvara, Makiosan Temple is the fourth stop in a major pilgrimage of Japanese Buddhism, the Saigoku (Western Region) Thirty-three Site Pilgrimage of Sacred Grounds of Kannon. As a pilgrim himself and like the Pilgrimage to Eighty-eight Temples venerating Kōbō Daishi in Shikoku, Kūkai is associated with this pilgrimage and is said to sometimes appear to pilgrims along its route. In various places throughout Japan, from the Kamakura period (1185-1333 CE) through the Muromachi period (1333-1573 CE),⁵ belief about sacred mountains, Kōbō Daishi belief and Kannon belief were combined and intermixed. The Thirty-three Site Pilgrimage reflects this.

According to legend, Makiosan was founded by Ikuma⁶ (行満, sixth century) under a grant from Emperor Kinmei (欽明, r. 531-571). Ikuma, a saint from the Harima (播磨) region, is thought to have had the appearance of an old man at the time. He traveled in the Izumi region in search of a suitable plot of land to practice austerities. Following the directions indicated in a certain scriptural scroll (*maki*, as in Makiosan), which indicated the top of the mountain (*-osan*

³ From the Heian period on, Makiosan came to be under the patronage of the Imperial Court, rising in prosperity. However, during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (1336-1392), the temple declined with the Southern Dynasty. In the age of civil war it was destroyed by Oda Nobunaga (織田信長, 1534-82). In more recent times, it received the Tokugawa family patronage and was restored. The popularity of the Pilgrimage of Sacred Grounds of Kannon (観音霊場巡礼) contributed to its recovery, spreading faith among common people (Imaizu 588b-c).

⁴ The identification of Kūkai as Maitreya, the Buddha to come in the future, is explored in Chapter XIII of this dissertation.

⁵ Various dates have been given for the Muromachi period: 1392-1573, 1333-1573 and 1336-1573.

⁶ Possibly read Gyōman.

(尾山) as in Makiosan), Ikuma arrived at Makiosan's Ta-Ihara shining waterfall (卷尾山多伊原の光滝) and discovered the sacred peak (靈岳). According to a different legend, Gyōgi (行基, 668-748), another saint from Harimi, also climbed the mountain to practice asceticism and built a wooden graven tablet (or stūpa, 卒塔婆) there. Both being saints from Harimi, I have to wonder if this is a confusion of the two figures intertwined with the Kūkai legend.

Also connected to the origin of Makiosan is the mountain shaman En no Gyōja (also called En no Ozuno, 役小角). En no Gyōja is the legendary founder of Shugendō who is often associated with Kōbō Daishi belief. At first, Makiosan was a temple connected to the Katsuragi Mountain Range (葛城山系) branch of Shugendō. The legend holds that En no Gyōjo hand-copied the last chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the article on the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta (常不輕菩薩品), and it is buried on the extreme peak. Accordingly, this is where the name Scroll End Mountain (卷尾山) for Makiosan comes from. In many ways, En no Gyōja may be considered the prototype for the *ubasoku*. He is said to be from Kayahare-gō in the Kuzugami district of the Izumi region,⁷ near Makiosan.

Today in Sefuku Temple at Makiosan there exists what is called Kūkai's tonsure hall (空海の剃髮堂). This building is thought to have been preserved from ancient times. In 807, the year after returning from China, Kūkai is said to have once more climbed Makiosan before being called back to the Capital by imperial command. Concerning this three-year period and Makiosan, Buddhological inquiry continues. However, what are believed to be Kōbō Daishi relics for one winter can be found in the area; at the Winter Hall of Iō Mountain's Sōfuku-ji (医

⁷大和国葛上郡茅原郷

王山冬堂宗福寺) in the Kasugachō town (春日町) of Izumi city and in the inner sanctuary (奥院) of Matsu no Odera. There, one may see, for example, Kūkai’s water basin for washing hands and the container used for holding purification water at the time he renounced the world at Makiosan.

From the time Kūkai received the precepts and began practicing asceticism in the mountains of Shikoku there are stories of various strange occurrences taken as omens. For example, once he used the twigs of a Japanese cypress to wipe his hands. He threw the used twigs into a nearby Camellia tree and from it Cypress buds grew (Wakamori 22).

2. Gonzō

In the description from Kūkai’s *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* (translated in the previous chapter), the “lone *śramaṇa*” appears rather abruptly and is mentioned somewhat casually. The narrative continues, “Accordingly, I placed trust in the true words of the Great Hermit (i.e., the Buddha) and resolved to enthusiastically cultivate the path (修行), climbing Tairyū Peak in the region of Awa or else meditating in Muroto peninsula (室戸崎) in Tosa (土佐)” (KZ 9:118).

The portion of the passage mentioned earlier, “there was a lone *śramaṇa*,” has been analyzed and expounded upon in numerous biographies and studies of Kūkai. If, indeed, the encounter can be looked at as a chance incident, the meeting is certainly ironic in light of the impact it had on the history of Japanese Buddhism and all of Japan (Watanabe 36). Interestingly, neither reference to the *śramaṇa* nor the *gumonji-hō* appears in the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind*. If we are to take the *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* as the

draft for the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, assume both are largely biographical works and hold the latter was written some years after the former, perhaps we should also speculate as follows concerning the earlier omission and later inclusion. Events later in Kūkai's life led him to reflect on the importance of the meeting with the *śramaṇa*. Another possibility is that later he decided the inclusion was important for a certain message to a target audience of readers he envisioned. Alternatively, since such practices involving mantra and mountain asceticism were still illegal when Kūkai was young, he may have only felt secure for himself and the lone *śramaṇa* in including the reference later. Finally, as Abé suggests, perhaps the *śramaṇa* was someone of disrepute whom Kūkai did not want to name (Abé 1999:75).

In any case, in view of Kūkai's purported seriousness in study, which I can only believe based on what also seems to be the results of his later tenacity, it seems unlikely to me that there was a single chance meeting with a lone-practicing *śramaṇa* he happened upon, or that he casually tried the meditation practice. If, instead, Kūkai's search for a philosophical or spiritual path was more methodical, he likely sought out masters of the time about whom he had knowledge and possible connections through his family or others yet unknown.

From ancient times, the first Buddhist master to whom Kūkai refers is assumed to have probably been Gonzō⁸ (勤操, 758-826 or 827), a Sanron scholar. However, over the centuries researchers have raised various reasons for doubts concerning this point. Below I will summarize the basis of some of these doubts, as described mainly by Watanabe. Next, based on my own research, I present a case for accepting the position that it was Gonzō to whom Kūkai refers.

⁸ Perhaps read Gonsō.

Watanabe states, “That Kūkai had an intimacy with the senior person Gonzō, there is no room for doubt” (Watanabe 36). He cites several references to Gonzō in Kūkai’s writings, which I have checked and translated as follows. In the tenth fascicle of the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* there is an entry entitled, “Praise of the Shadow⁹ of the deceased Most Venerable (*daitoku*) Chief Executive (*sōjō*) Gonzō,”¹⁰ (hereafter “Praise...”) dated the thirteenth day of the fourth month of Tenchō 5 (828). Gonzō is known to have died on the seventh day of the fifth month of the previous year. In this writing, Kūkai states, “In association with the mendicant (i.e., me) and the public, there was fragrant friendship enduring Spring and Autumn (of his life). In the seventh month of Kōnin 7 (816), he led various famous *bhikṣu* in receiving the *sanmaya* precepts (S. *samaya-sīla*) at the *Vajra* practice hall (*Kongō dōjō*) of Takaosan Temple and was wet in the dual (i.e., *Garbhakośadhatū* and the *Vajrakośadhatū*) *abhiṣeka*” (KKZ 6:656). While records show after Kūkai returned from China, he granted the *abhiṣeka* to Gonzō at Takaosan Temple, there is no mention in this document that Kūkai studied under Gonzō. In the closing prose verse, Kūkai writes, “Although the features of our teacher were like those of a common person, in heart and practice he was the same as Mañjuśrī” (KKZ 6:657; Chinese p. 773). Still, though this is high praise, Watanabe argues it does not mean that Gonzō was Kūkai’s master (Watanabe 36).

In the eighth fascicle of the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* there is a document attributed to Kūkai entitled, “Expressing the way (my) previous teacher lectured on the

⁹ According to the editor’s note in the KKZ, disciples of Gonzō made a wooden image of him and the word “Shadow” refers to this image. The note explains that the disciples would pray to the image and Kūkai’s “Praise” was written as a prayer for their use in this activity (KKZ 6 702 n. 2).

¹⁰ KKZ 6:651; Chinese version p. 772.

Brahmajāla-sūtra”¹¹ (hereafter “Expressing...”). The editor of the *KKZ* says “previous teacher” (先師) refers to “deceased teacher”, explaining that in the past this was thought to be Gonzō, which is now doubted (*KKZ* 6:576 n. 1). This writing begins, “This is Tenchō 5, the thirteenth day of the fourth month (*KKZ* 6:523). This is the same date recorded at the end of the “Praise...” as mentioned above. Thus, we may have reason to conclude both writings refer to the same master. However, Watanabe points out that the master’s name is not given in “Expressing...” (Watanabe 37).

Although both writings have identical dates, Watanabe finds several discrepancies rendering doubt that Gonzō was Kūkai’s master. First, the titles in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* are believed to have been added by someone of a later generation and not by Kūkai (Watanabe 37). For this reason, we cannot be certain that the title referring to his “previous teacher” truly matches the content as Kūkai saw it. In addition, Watanabe points to a note in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* written according to the interpretation of detractors of the middle Edo period. The note says, “Gonzō is the master who granted the novice (*J. shami*) precepts (to Kūkai) but received the *samaya* precepts from that disciple, (therefore) they were associates of the same rank” (Watanabe 38). However, Watanabe continues, if they were equals, the disciple’s expression of gratitude becomes inexplicable in “Expressing...”¹² Accordingly, Watanabe concludes, “Expressing...” is ghostwritten by Kūkai for Gonzō’s disciples (Watanabe 38). He backs this up by looking at two other articles from the tenth fascicle of the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*, one apparently written in

¹¹ *KKZ* 6:651; Chinese version p. 772.

¹² This interpretation does not take into account the element of self-depreciation characteristic of Kūkai’s writings, as mentioned above.

Kūkai’s own voice and the other ghostwritten by Kūkai for someone. Respectively, these are, “Late Autumn Poems for the Eighth Anniversary of Gangō (Temple’s) Most Venerable (*daitoku*) Chief Executive (*sōjō*)”¹³ (hereafter “Late...”) and the “Autumn Day Anniversary Poems for the Most Venerable (*daitoku*) Chief Executive (*sōjō*).”¹⁴ (hereafter “Autumn...”). The “Late...” is signed at the end, “23rd day of the ninth month of Tenchō 6 (829). Śramaṇa Henjō Kongō,”¹⁵ Kūkai’s *abhiṣeka* name. Kūkai himself is known to have gathered writings and poems for the eighth birthday celebration of Gomyō (護命, 750-834), Chief Executive of Gangō Temple. In contrast with “Late...” the “Autumn...” ends with only the date, “11th day of the ninth month of Tenchō 6” and is not signed. Although no writer’s name is included at the end, beneath the title¹⁶ appears the name “Disciple *Bhikṣu* (J. *Bisshu*) Chūkei” (弟子苾芻中繼). The *KKZ* editor’s notes say the Chief Executive referred to in this document is Gomyō and Chūkei (dates and information unknown other than in this writing by Kūkai) was his disciple (*KKZ* 6:709 n. 1-2). As explored below, Kūkai was intimate with Gomyō, who also was knowledgeable of the *gumonji-ho*.

In short, “Praise...” is signed (One on the) “Path of Poverty” and refers to the subject of the writing by such terms as Most Venerable and Great Scholar (大士, *daishi*), etc. However, in the “Expressing...” the subject is referred to with such terms as Great Teacher (大師, *daishi*). Watanabe says this is a clear distinction and the latter terms would be appropriate for a disciple

¹³暮秋賀元興僧正大徳八十詩, *KKZ* 6:658.

¹⁴秋日奉賀僧正大師詩, *KKZ* 6:661

¹⁵沙門遍照金剛.

¹⁶ Watanabe does not admit this title was added later, as is important to his argument above. Instead, he assumes it is the way Kūkai signed the document for another, even though the name Chūkei does not appear elsewhere in the writing.

to use in reference to the master. Thus, because the two writings are roughly similar with the same date, yet contain different expressions, Watanabe surmises the “Expressing...” is ghostwritten by Kūkai for Gonzō’s disciples. Accordingly, he says, “The conclusion must be Gonzō is not Kūkai’s teacher” (Watanabe 38). Watanabe gives no explanation for his assumption that Kūkai is not included among the disciples of Gonzō for the purpose of the letter.

Watanabe offers the following as reason it has been believed that Gonzō was Kūkai’s first Buddhist master. In the “Praise...”, there is the sentence, “Grief is felt for the lost person whose bosom was full with the Sanron. The founder of the traditions (“Sanron and *mikkyō*” according to the *KKZ* editor’s modern translation, *KKZ* 6:656) was one: Nāgārjuna.” Then in the prose at the end of the writing Kūkai writes, “Grief for the phantom whose bosom was filled with the Sanron. Love for the bridge over waves whose bosom was wrapped in the *Ekayāna*” (*KKZ* 6:773; J. 657). In short, Kūkai is describing a Sanron specialist who was at the same time a lecturer on the *Lotus Sūtra*. Gonzō was both (Watanabe 38). Likewise, in the “Expressing...” there is the sentence, “In the seat of the Dharma flower, Śākyamuni is suddenly there; in the midst of Sanron hall, Nāgārjuna’s shadow is suddenly felt” (*KKZ* 6:526).

Various other comparisons can be made of these two documents, adding weight to the argument that the same person is being described. For example, we find in “Expressing...” the following description that compares closely to that mentioned above from the “Praise...”. “With the form of a person, the heart of a Buddha; with the appearance of a common (person), the spirit of a sage” (*KKZ* 6:763; J. 525). With so many similarities I am reminded of the conclusion modern scholars have come to concerning the relationship between the *Rōku shiiki* and the

Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings and wonder why one has not been said to be a draft of the other in this case.

Gonzō was one of the foremost advocates of the Japanese Sanron (C. Sanlun, the Three Treatises) tradition, which was one of the six traditions of Nara Buddhism. Though not mentioning his source, Kitagawa claims that Gonzō was a friend of Kūkai's uncle, Ato Ōtari (Kitagawa 1951:119). The Sanron tradition is a Japanese version Indian Mādhyamika philosophy and is based on three treatises (J. *Sanron*) of Nāgārjuna. These treatises established a method for negating all categories of thought in an attempt to point towards an ultimate reality beyond all conceptions. In China, among patrons of the Sanlun tradition there was a feeling that such negation should be balanced by a more affirmative treatise and so a fourth treatise was added in the fourth century CE. More important in terms of Kūkai's development, in 701, the Sanron *bhikṣu* Dōji (道慈, 674-774) traveled to China where he studied for eighteen years. There he met and studied the use of mantra under the Shingon patriarch, Indian Tantric master Śubhakarasiṃha (637-735) (Kitagawa 1951:119). Returning to Japan, Dōji established the Daian-ji tradition of Sanron, representing sixth and seventh century developments in the Indian tradition at the renowned Buddhist institute, Nālanda (Matsunaga 1987 I:67). In Daian-ji, Dōji's disciple was Zengi (善議, 728-812), who instructed Gonzō (Matsunaga 1987 I:111). The *gumonji-hō* was transmitted through Śubhakarasiṃha, who translated the scripture containing that Dharma, "Sūtra for Reciting: Being an Abridged Translation of the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*"¹⁷ (Kitagawa 1951:119). Sanron then became the first tradition in Japan to be connected with Tantric Buddhism. This was not a propagation of "impure *mikkyō*," as later writers labeled

¹⁷ T. 20 n. 1145.

Japanese Tantra before Kūkai's importations, but teachings connected directly to the lineage of a Shingon. There is no evidence that Kūkai separated “old” or “impure” Tantra from what he imported. In Kūkai's list of imported materials he gathered in China, he mentions three categories of scriptures indispensable to the Shingon Dharma. These are scriptures of the *garbha* teaching, the *vajra* teaching and miscellaneous mantra teachings (*zōmitsu*). Accordingly, Kūkai did not view those earlier Tantric teachings in Japan as “impure” but, indispensable to Shingon (Abé 1999:154).

Even before the connection with Śubhakarasiṃha at Daian-ji, there is evidence that Tantra was popular in Japan since Pankche sent a ‘magical priest’ (*jugonji*) to Japan in 577 (Matsunaga 1987 I:111). However, the history of Japanese Buddhism has been constructed with attention to the doctrine of powerful “sects”. Meanwhile, mountain asceticism and *Kaji kitō* (加持祈祷), invocation of the power of a deity, may have been practiced in the service of the masses outside the political centers (Watanabe 41). In addition, as early as the *Lotus Sūtra Explanatory Commentary* (法華經義疏) attributed to Prince Shōtoku (聖德太子, 574-622), found in the *Explanatory Commentaries to the Three Sūtras* (*Sangyō gisho*, 三經義疏) there is criticism of mountain ascetic practitioners. The origin of anti-establishment Buddhists may be traceable to this document in the sense that it provided a definition for them. Nevertheless, from sixth century CE, *bhikṣu* were expected by the aristocracy and common people to have theurgic powers and they sometimes turned to Tantra to obtain them.

Taking into account the history of the Daian-ji¹⁸ branch of Sanron during the Nara period, the instructions of Gonzō may help to explain several aspects of Kūkai's life that have been considered puzzling. First, it is likely due to the instructions of Gonzō, that Kūkai was versed in the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* before arriving in China. In addition, this may provide a key to understanding Kūkai's alleged revelation during a dream that a copy of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* existed in Kume Temple. According to unsubstantiated legends, Śubhakarasiṃha visited Japan with his pupil Dōji, copying and depositing the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* at Kume Temple. Whether or not this is true, because of the Tantric lineage specific to Śubhakarasiṃha at Daian-ji, the person most likely to have known about the existence of the sūtra at Kume Temple would have been Gonzō or someone at Daian-ji. Kūkai's early study of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* coupled with his instructions in the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* may have shortening the time required to master the Chenyan tradition in China, allowing him to focus on practice rather than doctrine while there.

In the fall of 770 Gonzō was among those in a group of 1000 who received ordination at Kōfuku Temple in Nara (Imaizu 357). Such a mass ordination was considered auspicious for the country and often occurred at the time of an emperor's death to restore prosperity.

Although the Sanron tradition took its name from the fact that it revered three particular treatises, as specified in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the tradition upheld the believe that all Buddhist sūtras were simply skill-in-means (*upāya*) for teaching the same underlying truth. According to the theory, the differences found in the scriptures were skillfully constructed to reach the largest

¹⁸ Interesting, though Tendai's early propagation of Tantric Buddhism was considered inferior to that of Shingon's, like Kūkai, Saichō's early instructions in Buddhism came through a Sanron Daian-ji *bhikṣu*, Gyōhyō (行表, 722-797), who was a disciple of Vinaya master Dao Xuan (道璿, J. Dōsen. 702-60).

number of individuals, each person being able to find something appealing according to his or her ability to understand. We can see the spirit of this Sanron thesis in Kūkai's *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* as applied to the teachings of non-Buddhist philosophies. This type of syncretism would become an important feature of Shingon and remain so to this day.

Gonzō was also thought to be an *avatāra* of the planet Venus which was itself an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha (J. Kokuzo Bosatsu). Art historians believe there are no representations of Ākāśagarbha in India or South-East Asia but that this Bodhisattva has been mainly revered by the Tantric Buddhist traditions in China, Japan and Tibet (Frédéric 1995:183). Even in the latter countries, the popularity of Ākāśagarbha has now waned and only Shingon apparently venerates him in secret (Frédéric 1995:183). Ākāśagarbha is often depicted, as in the two central maṇḍala of Shingon, as one of the guardians of Vairocana. The main text relating to Ākāśagarbha, and the one in which Kūkai found the *gumonji-hō*, is the *Kokuzo Bosatsu-kyō*.¹⁹ The full title can be translated as “The Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha’s Power-Filled Wish-Fulfilling Supreme-Mind *Dhāraṇī* Technique for Seeking, Hearing and Retaining” (J. *Kokuzo basatsu noman shogan saishoshin darani gumonji-hō*). The text was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese in 717 (Yamasaki 1988:182). It was brought to Nara in 718 by *bhikṣu* Dōji, mentioned above.

The text describes Ākāśagarbha as existing to destroy the obstacles to realizing perfection. The *gumonji-hō* mantra is the Morning Star Meditation, the Morning Star being Venus. Those hoping to pass the exam for ordination sometimes used the practice of repeating the mantra to improve memory. The entire ritual takes one hundred days of austere living in

¹⁹ T. 20 n.1145.

seclusion to complete. This is apparently what Kūkai is referring to in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* when he says he retired to the mountainous Pacific coast of Shikoku, Cape Muroto in Tosa and Mount Tairyū in Awa. Following the prescription, using rosary beads he would have counted 21,600 repetitions of the mantra each day while assuming a meditative posture facing the east towards Venus. While a condensed version of the practice has been incorporated into Shingon, today few have undertaken the entire arduous ritual. One who has carried it out in its entirety described “visions and phenomena of unusual intensity, which required courage and wisdom to withstand (Blacker in Yamasaki 1988:xii). In *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, Kūkai tells of his own experience. “Believing what the Buddha says to be true, I recited the mantra incessantly, as if I were rubbing one piece of wood against another to make fire, all the while earnestly hoping to achieve this result. I climbed up Mount Tairyū in Awa Province and meditated at Cape Muroto in Tosa. The valley reverberated to the sound of my voice as I recited, and the planet Venus appeared in the sky” (Hakeda 1972:102). In a moment of dramatic achievement, Kūkai experienced a vision of the planet Venus. From the time Kūkai was successful with the *gumonji-hō*, it is believed the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha became his guardian saint.

Shinzei’s account in the *Biography of Sozū Kūkai* (mentioned above) adds the details of Ākāśagarbha’s flying sword coming toward him and, while Kūkai was meditating with closed eyes, the planet Venus entered his mouth. The great sword of Ākāśagarbha and the planet Venus entering his mouth may be interpreted as metaphors for the achievement of extraordinary states or absorbing the Dharma by swallowing a metaphor for it. This metaphor appears in other

Buddhist literature and even in modern popular literature in Japan.²⁰ In traditional Mahāyāna iconography, such a sword is said to cut through delusion,²¹ Ākāśagarbha’s stated purpose in the sūtra. Likewise, the planet entering Kūkai’s mouth when his eyes are closed may symbolize the attainment of freedom from delusion gained when cutting off preconceived conceptions and chanting the mantra (through the mouth). It is basic to Kūkai’s philosophy that important insight can be gained by practices that take one beyond the confines of ordinary thought with language. It is possible as well that some of the legends surrounding the events in his life at the time have grown from allusion used metaphorically for overcoming temptations.

Abé summarizes the requirements outlined in the sūtra as follows. “If practiced in accordance with its scriptural prescription, the meditative exercise requires complex ritual procedures that include drawing an image of the bodhisattva, constructing a ritual altar in a meditative hall, preparing offerings – such as powdered perfume, flowers, incense, food, and lights – memorizing numerous mudrās that accompany the recitation of *dhāraṇī*, and visualizing the physical characteristics of the bodhisattva. All these ritual actions center on the recitation of Ākāśagarbha’s *dhāraṇī* one million times, a procedure requiring one hundred consecutive days of meditative practice” (Abé 1999:74). Noteworthy here are two points made by Abé. First, Abé speculates that as a novice, Kūkai would not likely have been able to carry out the complex requirements of the scripture but probably, in isolated places, concentrated on the recitation alone. Regardless of this speculation, I see no reason to believe Kūkai performed the ritual “incorrectly” in light of the assumption that he had a teacher (Gonzō) in direct lineage of

²⁰ For example, in *Yuki guni* (Snow Country) by the Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari, the protagonist swallows the star as an apparent metaphor for Buddhist-related realization.

²¹ See Frédéric 1995:67.

Śubhakarasiṃha and access to the sūtra. Second, although this incident has been believed by scholars to have sparked Kūkai's interest in Tantric practice, Abé believes that Kūkai did not recognize the *gumonji-hō* as “*mikkyō*” as opposed to “*kengyō*” teachings (Abé 1999:74-5). Even if Gonzō was his teacher, it is difficult to know if the Chinese classification *mijiao* (J. *mikkyō*) was recognized by Śubhakarasiṃha in a way that was later assumed in Japan. It seems likely to me that at that time the Three Mysteries was considered a method of practice rather than the basis of a doctrinal classification system. Abé bases his argument on the numerous texts Kūkai cites in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, none of which is among those considered Tantric.²² Abé feels this does show that Kūkai read sūtras and commentaries extensively just after leaving the university (Abé 1999:95). I must remark that instead it suggests that the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* could not have been written immediately after Kūkai left the university.²³ If that is the case, it invalidates Abé's argument that the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* indicates Kūkai was unaware of a distinction between *mikkyō* and *kengyō*. However, other documents not considered by Abé may support his argument. For example, Kūkai's statement of purpose for studying in China makes mention of his intention of studying what came to be called *kengyō*, no reference to *mikkyō* is found. Nevertheless, this, as well as the references in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* may have as easily been chosen based on the assumed knowledge or interest of the

²² Abé says that among the texts to which Kūkai makes reference in *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* “are twenty-eight sūtras, including major Mahāyāna texts – such as the *Lotus*, the *Golden Light*, the *Avataṃsaka*, the *Vimalakīrti*, the *Vajracchedikā*, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the *Śrīmālādevī*, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, and the *Śūraṅgama* – and many Āgama texts, in particular the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Majjhima-nikāya*. Other works cited include such principal treatises as the *Abhidharmakośa*, the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, the *Discourse on the Greater Prajñā-pāramitā* (C. *Ta-chih-tu-lun*; J. *Daichidoron*), and the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (C. *Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin-lun*; J. *Daijō kishinron*)” (Abé 1999:95).

²³ It is interesting that Abé notes as a novice Kūkai likely could not have handled the *gumonji-hō* but makes no such statement about Kūkai's alleged ability as a writer, philosopher and calligrapher at the same age.

audience Kūkai had in mind, or the image of himself he wished of portray for certain purposes (e.g., to the emperor at the time he requested study in China). Regardless of the later distention between *mikkyō* and *kengyō* texts, as mentioned previously, Kūkai may have been attracted to elements of “mystery” in the various texts he quotes.

Yamasaki Taikō has described his own experience carrying out the *gumonji-hō* practice. Because it may give us an idea of what Kūkai experienced, I have included Yamasaki’s description as follows.

I rose at two o’clock every morning, bathed, and then performed the ceremony to Venus and the ritual of drawing *aka* water, after which I entered the practice hall for two meditation periods totaling ten hours. During the practice I was isolated from the everyday world. The temple was surrounded by the great trees of a primeval forest, and stars in a clear sky were visible to me on awaking in the morning and before sleep at night.

At the beginning, I had pain in my legs and back from the long hours of sitting, making it difficult to concentrate on meditation. Gradually, however, my body and mind came into harmony, creating within me a feeling of lightness and tranquility. During meditation, my body came to feel almost transparent, while my mind and what I saw around me were clear, like crystal. Far from being a hallucination, this came from increased clarity of consciousness-as though I had come to a place where heaven and earth join.

Coming out of meditation and leaving the practice hall, the sense of the vastness of the universe would remain, as though I were seeing the world for the first time. The trees were no longer separate from myself, but seemed a part of me, as though we were a single being. Although my emotions were involved, this was not an experience of ordinary, sentimental intimacy, but rather an experience of consciousness, a realization that one is made of the very same substance as everything else and that nothing in nature is unrelated to the self

At night, after finishing the day’s sitting, I would go up to the mountaintop and meditate in the open, feeling the stars in the late autumn sky surrounding me on all sides, as though I were hanging in space. This sense of unity with all things remained in my mind even after the practice ended and I returned to the world. A profound feeling of gratitude and a new appreciation for life came to affect everything I did.

Because the Morning Star meditation consists of a single three-secrets ritual that must be performed at an even, unbroken pace throughout, it requires great determination. Initiation into the practice is not granted unless the candidate fulfills requirements of ability, training, and experience in meditation. To meditate concentratedly for so many hours day after day is physically strenuous, demanding good health and emotional balance. This meditation is a serious practice not to be undertaken lightly, and I have heard many stories of people who experienced considerable difficulty with it.

For instance, it is difficult at first to adjust to solitary practice after life in the everyday world. Unexpected things happen in the mind. Delusions and attachments come welling up, and subconscious fixations can grow out of all proportion because one's concentration is so deep. I had hallucinatory experiences of such intensity that it is difficult for me to imagine a physically weaker or older person withstanding them.

Hallucinations can become intense during the practice because one is going directly to a deep level of the mind. They should not be cut off, however, but recognized for what they are without either enjoying them or fearing them. Shubhakarasiṃha wrote that he was offered the secret of invisibility while doing this practice. I experienced something similar when a mysterious priest "appeared" and offered to teach me a secret mudra. The image was so vivid that I had difficulty realizing that it was not real. I understand now how unfortunate it could have been had I had the slightest inclination to accept, since it would have disturbed the entire practice.

During the course of the practice the hallucinations gradually diminished, my concentration deepened, and eventually I came to experience continuous samadhi. All my senses became clearer and sharper, including my smell and hearing, to the point that I felt I could hear the sound of incense burning—an experience recorded in Mikkyō texts (Yamasaki 1988:188-9).

It is unclear whether Kūkai practiced the *gumonji-hō* while still enrolled in the university. However, according to university rules, had Kūkai been absent for one hundred days in order to practice the *gumonji-hō*, he would have been expelled (Abé 1999:75).

Despite the efforts of various scholars, it is probably impossible to determine the identity of the Buddhist who taught Kūkai the *gumonji-hō*, described in the *Indications of the Goals of*

the Three Teachings only as “a lone *śramaṇa*.” Nevertheless, knowing the name of that person may not be necessary for considering the character of that *śramaṇa*, a character similar to what little we know of Gonzō. As mentioned above, there were others associated with the *gumonji-hō* including Dōji, Zengi and Gomyō. Because Kūkai does not name his teacher of the *gumonji-hō*, Horiike Shunpō suggests that it was Kaimyō (d. 806?), a *bhikṣu* of Daian-ji, who was involved in a scandal and exiled (Abé 1999:75). Apparently Kūkai was connected with Kaimyō in some way, as will be explored later.

It was politically advantageous for Nara Buddhists to have thorough knowledge of difficult Buddhist doctrine and the ability to outshine rivals by citing texts. Thus, if it was believed that there was a way that entire texts could be remembered by one reading, it almost certainly would have been popular. Still, it might not have been common knowledge or a simple matter to receive instruction in this “secret” teaching (*mikkyō*). There were others interested in such *Kaji kitō*, such as Dōkyō (道鏡, d.772). He is said to have memorized and lectured upon 84,000 texts (Watanabe 40). However, it does not appear that the *gumonji-hō* was practiced in Nara’s Large Temples.²⁴ Instead, practice in remote areas is an important characteristic of the lone *śramaṇa*.

Such an image is close to that characterizing Gyōgi, one opposing the Ritsuryō type Buddhism and at the same time supporting it. This is also in agreement with Kūkai’s personality of later years, especially, as Watanabe says, at the point when Kūkai was calling himself “*Shamon* (i.e., *śramaṇa*) Kūkai” (沙門空海) during his last years at Mount Kōya (Watanabe 41).

²⁴ “For the growing popularity of the *gumonji-hō* in the mid- and late Nara period and its relationship to the formation of Jinchishū (the school of Natural Wisdom) at Hisonzanji In Yoshino, see Sonada Kōyū 1957” (Abé 1999:490, n. 3).

Watanabe looks at Kūkai’s signature at that time as related to his teacher mentioned in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, the “lone śramaṇa”. Kūkai as a śramaṇa, the walking Buddha among the masses, is a major part of the mystique in Kōbō Daishi belief and the label “Śramaṇa Kūkai,” goes to the essence of the Kūkai persona (Watanabe 41).

3. Kūkai and Gyōgi.

The *Biography of the Preceptor Sōdaisjō Kūkai*, written in 895, relates an account of Kūkai’s youth that is noteworthy in that it connects him with his predecessor Gyōgi through an old woman who offers him encouragement on the path of Buddhism (Watanabe 13). There are numerous stories of such women helping Kūkai, some of which were explored in Chapter II. The story concerning us here says, once when Kūkai was wandering in the region of Harima, he stopped at a roadside hermitage to beg for food and ask for a night’s lodging. An old woman came out from the hermitage and gave him a mendicant Buddhist’s begging bowl with food, the type of bowl used in a memorial service. At that time, the woman told Kūkai the following. “I am the former wife of a *bhikṣu* who renounced the household (出家), becoming a disciple of the bodhisattva Gyōgi. That *bhikṣu* passed along this begging bowl to me saying, ‘In so many days, months and years, a lone bodhisattva will come probably seeking the inn. At that time, with the bowl, make an offering to him,’ he said, looking far forward to see. Now, that day has arrived.” (Watanabe 13).

The origin of the story of the wife of a disciple of Gyōgi, is unknown. However, in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, Kūkai describes his fictional, but perhaps autobiographical Buddhist character’s encounter with two women as follows. “Once he was attracted by a beautiful girl, Undō (*Undō no onna*), and his determination was somewhat relaxed,

but on meeting the nun Kobe (*Kobe no ama*) he was encouraged and his loathing for the world was intensified” (Hakeda 1972:121 – my parenthetical clarifications). Watanabe interprets the connection between the passage in *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* and the woman who offers the begging bowl as follows. “In Kūkai’s experience, the story of an old woman dealing with encouragement, is true I think...Here also it is probably an embodiment of himself. Accordingly, in this, at the time he was a young man, pale love is reflected, I think” (Watanabe 13). Furthermore, “Receiving the disciple’s memorial service begging bowl is the kind of thing known by the expression ‘receiving the mysteries of one’s master’s art’ (*ihatsu o tsugu*, 衣鉢をつぐ). This is the meaning of the connection with Gyōgi, I think” (Watanabe 13).

In at least one version of the story, the event with the former wife of Gyōgi’s disciple with the begging bowl is connected to another famous story of Kūkai in Izu. Although there is some doubt that Kūkai ever visited Izu (Watanabe 13), the location may connect Kūkai with the shaman En no Gyōja, who was from that area. The story says that Kūkai visited Izu and established Keikokusan Temple (桂谷山寺, the old name of Shuzen-ji, 修禪寺). There, he wrote in the air the graphs for the *dhāraṇī*²⁵ at the end of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (大般若經). Having done so, the strokes of the Chinese materialized in the refined calligraphic styles known as the eight bodies of the six classes.²⁶ Although this breaks with the tradition that Kūkai wrote *dhāraṇī* in the Indian Siddham script (described in Chapter X of this dissertation) the story is apparently related to Kūkai being revered as a master of calligraphy. This part of the episode appears in the *Biography of the Preceptor Sōdaisōjō Kūkai* of 895 (Watanabe 13), in the *Record*

²⁵ This *dhāraṇī* is explained by Kūkai in his Secret Key to the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*.

²⁶ 六書八体の文字の点画

of the Transforming Practice of Kōbō Daishi, in Collection of Stories Past and Present

(*Konjyaku monogatari-shū*, 今昔物語集) and elsewhere (Imaizu 462b). For this reason, it is likely a very well known story in the Heian as well as Kamakura periods. Since the story of the wife of the disciple of Gyōgi is connected to the calligraphy episode in Izu in only one version of the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Watanabe believes the two were originally different stories (Watanabe 13).

Folk images of Gyōgi and Kūkai hold many similar elements and are often intertwined. Like Kūkai, Gyōgi was a Buddhist *bhikṣu*, who was both supportive of the officially sanctioned Buddhism and yet independent from it, at times even engaging in illegal efficacious practices. Gyōgi was born in 668, one hundred and four or five years before Kūkai. Gyōgi entered the path of Buddhism at the age of fifteen, later becoming a follower of Dōshō (626-700), founder of the Japanese Hossō tradition, and other leading Hossō masters. Although he had renounced the household, when his mother became ill in 704, Gyōgi returned to her home, transformed it into a temple (Matsunaga 1987 I:118). Later, he moved her to a hermitage on Mount Ikoma where they lived until her death. The closeness to his mother may be connected to legends of Kūkai and his mother, such as Kūkai moving his mother to a temple at the foot of Mount Kōya, explored Chapter II.

After Gyōgi's mother died, he traveled to rural areas of Japan where he is said to have attracted thousands of followers (Matsunaga 1987 I:118). As with Kūkai, there exist numerous legends of Gyōgi exerting *kaiji kitō* powers and performing miraculous deeds in the countryside. Also like Kūkai, he is said to have built bridges, dams, irrigation systems, wells, hostels, etc., as a result of a sincere interest in the welfare of rural people. Matsunaga surmises, "Gyōgi traveled

about at the time when Ritsuryō taxation was most heavily exploiting the populace. His message of spiritual freedom made him welcomed as a saviour and his number of followers probably was not exaggerated” (Matsunaga 1987 I:119)

Likely alarmed by his growing popularity, the Ritsuryō government issued their first edict to suppress his activities in 718, followed by a series of others. Gradually, however, Gyōgi began to interest the aristocracy and his status improved. In 721, Empress Genshō invited him to lecture and Emperor Shōmu developed an admiration for him. Nevertheless, “As late as 730, after he had already begun to win government acceptance, the *Zoku Nihongi* was still describing Gyōgi as an individual who gathered thousands of people on the outskirts of the capital and spoke words of illusion” (Matsunaga 1987 I:118).

Perhaps it was in attempt to bring him into the official fold that Gyōgi was given a significant role in building the large Vairocana statue at Nara’s Tōdaiji Temple. At the time of his death in 748, he had more than 3,000 followers. He became the first person in Japan to be posthumously granted the title *bosatsu* (bodhisattva) by the emperor. (Imaizu 203-4; Nakamura 172).

4. Beginning Mountain Ascetic Practice

Those seeking *kaiji kitō* power at the time Kūkai learned the *gumonji-hō* have often been classified as belonging to one or both of two groups: the independent *bhikṣu* (私度僧) and the mountain ascetic *bhikṣu* (山林修行僧). In addition to his connection with the image of the lone *śramaṇa*, Kūkai’s early practice is very similar to that of the Shugendō tradition of mountain ascetics known to exist in the same area. It is for this reason that he is thought to have inevitably

had contact and at least some involvement with Shugendō practitioners while wandering the mountains for some part of the seven years between leaving the university and departing for China. Shugendō ascetics combine teachings of Buddhism, Daoism and Japan's indigenous Shintō for spiritual revelation. Since before Kūkai's time, the deep mountains of Shikoku attracted those interested in this. Evangelical and healing elements sometimes associated with these practices drew followers outside of the aristocracy including farmers and common impoverished people around and outside of the capital.

The Taihō (Great Treasure) Code of the year 702 specifically outlawed the propagation of Buddhism outside of government-sanctioned temples. Yet some *bhikṣu*, such as Gyōgi, left what they found to be the confines of the Nara temple institution to pursue their practices and propagate Buddhism among the masses. Many people saw mountain ascetic Buddhism as the way to enlightenment taken by the Buddha Śākyamuni in India as well as a continuation of the folk traditions of Shintō. The Imperial Record of the year 729 (*Tenhigen-nen*) states that “those who retire to mountain forests undertake the practice of profane Buddhism, seek enlightenment by oneself, transmit teachings, transmit practices, draw signs, mix medicine, make poison, carry out strange rituals...study heresy, accomplish visions, conjure hateful demons (as curses), and carry out hundreds of other harmful actions” (Wakamori 15-6).

Although the government actively sought to enlist the presumed powers of Buddhism to gain favor, its attitude towards efficacious practices in general is clear from the tone of the document quoted above. Such behavior was absolutely prohibited. If caught in such acts the ringleader could be executed and the followers exiled (Wakamori 16).

In addition, monastic laws at the time set by the statutory government prescribed excommunication and the forced return to secular life for anyone found in violation of the prohibition on shamanism, attempting divination for good or ill purposes, practicing spiritual healing or making incantations. Monastic rule declared specifically, “From Buddhist Law, incantation and healing is prohibited without exception” (Wakamori 16). Early texts report the Buddha himself prohibited such magical practices. The reason for the prohibition was that such practices did not help one in gaining true realization (Yamasaki 1988:5-6). It appears from the texts the Buddha believed such feats were possible.

Under strict prohibition, the expectation might be the decline of mountain *kaiji kitō* practices at the time. The opposite however seems to be the case; such practices were plentiful. Mountain ascetics performed incantations of all sorts, including those from Buddhism, and such practices became increasingly popular in Nara. According to the imperial record of 757 members of the established clergy secretly gathered to oppose loosening of the restrictions on unorthodox Buddhist practices, arguing that if everyone were allowed to go his or her own way it could mean big trouble for the entire Japanese Buddhist institution. Nevertheless, in the face of wide popular support, in Enryaku 4 (785) the government grudgingly decided to acknowledge mountain practices including incantation, heretofore unsanctioned ordinations and the rite of burning cedar (*goma*). From that time onward mountain ascetics did not have to hide but could without problem stay over in or leave temples as they choose. Still the seven largest temples in Nara refused to share their economic, social and political power. As the general population turned towards the mountain ascetics for such practices as divination and healing, the institutions felt they were left with no choice but to seek the same means for retaining their supporters. Not wanting to rely on outsiders, the temples sought out scriptures that would aid in making charms

or in other ways slightly ease the toll of daily life for the average person, which could be considerable at the time. Therefore, one after another, writings were imported prescribing practices for supernatural influence for good and evil, and treatment of disease became a popular activity for the clergy.

Legends of Kūkai's own practices in the mountains include one of a famous incident at Tairyu-no-take (Great Dragon Peak Falls). There, Kūkai meditated regardless of a killer dragon that was close by. Later at Cape Muroto "dragons and other monsters appeared out of the sea, and disturbed him in his devotions. These he drove away by repeating mystic formulae called Darani, and by spitting at them the rays of the evening star, which had flown from heaven into his mouth" (Casal 97). He got rid of other demons by surrounding himself with an imaginary consecrated area. At Mount Ashizure, "he saw a huge camphor-tree whose cavity was inhabited by a number of the long-nosed Tengu forest-goblins." After certain incantations "a great flame suddenly burst forth and those monsters fled in great perturbation" (Casal 97). In addition, foxes, famous as tricksters in Japanese folklore, pestered Kūkai. As a result, he is said to have banished them from Shikoku where none are found wild to this day.

Such stories seem to mix metaphor, myth and history, sometimes appearing similar to accounts of the life of Śākyamuni. Accordingly, in his mountain practice Kūkai was able to overcome whatever temptations arose before him and subsequently attained that which satisfied him in some way as being a glimpse of a greater truth. The Shingon poem "Namu-dashi," quoted above, continues as follows.

8. At Moroto in Tosa he was performing his devotions. A bright star fell from Heaven, and entered his mouth. At midnight an evil dragon came forth against him; but he spat upon it, and with his saliva he killed it.

9. It was in the nineteenth year of his age that, looking up to Gonzō as his religious guide, he took upon himself the vows of the Bodhisattva, and became a homeless Śramaṇa, striving after enlightenment, and wearing the black silk robes of the Buddhist priest.

10. At Shusenji in the province of Idzu, and in other places besides, he discovered the hot springs bubbling out of earth. At it was he that demonstrated to the world the use of coal.

11. Inside the tower of the Temple of Kumedera in Yamato there was revealed to him the doctrine which is above all others. But as there was none whom he could question thereon, he received permission from the Emperor to go to China for study. (Kitagawa 115, Lloyd 243-245).

4. Kūkai in his Twenties.

The *Indications of the Goals of the Deaf and Blind* is dated the first day of the twelfth month of Enryaku 16 (797). The *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* is traditionally thought to have been completely shortly thereafter. From that time until just before Kūkai's departure to China on the sixth day of the seventh month of Enryaku 23 (804), a period of 7 years, no letters or other writings of his are known exist. In biographies, his activities during that period consist completely of legends and speculations. The *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai* says, "Here, extending 10 years since receiving the tonsure, (he acted) according to his oath to a Buddhist image: 'I will go on the Path of the Buddha, seeking to know every vital point of the Three Vehicles,²⁷ the Five Vehicles²⁸ and the Twelve Divisions (of scriptures);²⁹ to overcome any

²⁷ The vehicles of the Sarvāsti-vādin, Pratyeka-buddha and Bodhisattva (KKZ 8:17 n. 36).

²⁸ The vehicles of the Sarvāsti-vādin, Pratyeka-buddha, Bodhisattva, people and heaven (KKZ 8:17 n. 37).

doubt my mind still possesses by determination. Bowing and requesting all Buddhas, please show to me the ultimate, I pray in single mindedness (*isshin*, 一心).’ Then in a dream, he was told of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*: ‘That which you seek is this. It is the delight of enlightenment (*kakugo*, 覺悟).’ Therefore, he obtained and opened the folded case, reading with enthusiasm. Though looking widely, he was hindered because he could not find anyone who could explain it. Therefore, he requested to go to Tang to study.” (KKZ 8:7).

If Kūkai truly spent those seven years carrying out his vow to know the Three Vehicles, Five Vehicles, and Twelve Divisions of scriptures he must have thrown himself into the doctrine of the existing traditions of Nara. At that time Sanron, Hossō, Ritsu, Kegon and Kusha were the most prosperous traditions in Japan. Scholars have examined Kūkai’s *Ten Stages of Mind*, one of the masterpieces of his later years, as well as other writings by him in an attempt to understand just what he knew about other traditions of Buddhism (see Onozuka). Accordingly, it has been found, for example, that Kūkai’s understanding of the Sanron was like that of Jizang’s (吉藏, 549-623, J. Kichizō) lineage, limited to the collection of Sanron materials available in Nara.

In addition, his writings are especially dependent on the Kegon scriptures extant at that time at Tōdaiji Temple. He may have spent several years there studying the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and the *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna* (釈摩訶衍論, C. *Shimeheyanlun*, J. *Syakumakaenron* often abbreviated *Shaku-ron*, 釈論, T. 32 n. 1668). This is likely why in the *Ten Stages of Mind* and the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*, Kūkai ranks the Kegon teachings close to Shingon, in the ninth stage of consciousness. The *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna*

²⁹ The twelve divisions of scriptures are *sūtra*, *geya*, *gāthā*, *nidāna*, *itivr̥ttaka*, *jātaka*, *adbhutadharma*, *avadāna*, *upadeśa*, *udāna*, *vaipulya*, *vyākaraṇa* (KKZ 8:17 n. 38).

became one of the principle commentaries for Shingon, along with the *Bodhicitta-sāstra*. These two documents were the most important for Kūkai in attempting to establish the difference between *mikkyō* and *kengyō*, especially in the *Ben kenmitsu nikyō ron* (Onozuka 18). In the *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna* alone there probably can be found the principles of Kūkai's argument in the *Ten Stages of Mind* concerning the structure of the *mikkyō* lineage. Although this writing is attributed to Nāgārjuna it may have been written by its alleged translator, the Korean *bhikṣu*, Wōnhyo (元曉, born 617). The *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna* is a commentary on the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*. The latter, attributed to Aśvaghōṣa, is currently thought to be of Chinese origin. Both texts solve a problem that became tremendously important in the history of Chinese Buddhism, by defining the relationship between *tathāgata-garbha* and *ālaya-vijñāna*. The explanation therein became the standard interpretation for East Asian Buddhism in general (see *Mikkyō daijiten* 1051b).

The *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna* is extremely prominent in Kūkai's thought. However, possibly due to nationalist trends in Japanese Buddhist scholarship from at least the Kamakura period onward (including that found in the works of the influential Buddhist historian Gyōnen), Wōnhyo's importance to the development of Japanese Buddhism has been ignored (Kosei 191-216). As a possible indication of the relative importance of these scriptures to Kūkai, in all of his known writings, he quotes the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* one hundred and three times, the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* forty-five times, the *Thesis on Interpreting the Mahāyāna* twenty-two times (including seven times in the *Ten Stages of Mind*) and the *Bodhicitta-sāstra* seventeen times (Onozuka 19 and 205). Although the legitimacy of the *Thesis on Interpreting the*

Mahāyāna, in terms of authorship, was already in dispute in Kūkai's time,³⁰ he continued to relay on it for theoretical grounding.³¹

If Kūkai studied Kegon texts at Tōdai-ji, he might have lived at Saeki monastery (佐伯院) in Katsumi temple (香積寺) for convenience, since that monastery may have been connected to his family (Watanabe 49). Two brothers, Saeki no Mamori (佐伯麻毛利) and Saeki no Ima no Emishi (佐伯今毛人), built the monastery in Hōki 7 (776), in the vicinity of Nara's Daian-ji (大安寺). It appears that the famous Ima no Emishi and his brother may have put the bulk of their assets into building it because it is truly a magnificent temple building. If Kūkai was connected to that rich monastery, this might also suggest a source for his connections for going to China.

In contrast to Saichō, Kūkai had a surprisingly close connection to Tōdaiji. According to tradition, the Buddha image, in front of which Kūkai made vows mentioned in the *Honored Spoken Memento* and elsewhere, refers to the Great Buddha statue in Tōdaiji temple (Watanabe 50). Supposedly, because of his prayers there, the location of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, at Yamato Kunitaka-shi Kunji Kome Temple, beneath the Eastern Pagoda, was revealed to him in a dream. Later, Kūkai was appointed administrative head (*bettō*) of Tōdaiji.³²

Kūkai's life during this seven year period must have been somewhat connected to the activities in the Japanese Buddhism. As mentioned, the capital was relocated to Heian in 794 and Saichō erected a grass hermitage called Hieizan-ji in 788. In 797, Saichō was appointed as one of

³⁰ For a discussion of this see Abé 1999:188-9.

³¹ It is possible that Kūkai was less concerned than others with tracing scriptures to the Buddha or other orthodox sources. I base this on the fact that Kūkai championed the idea that any individual is capable of becoming a Buddha and those *ācārya* who had, regardless of their country of origin, were qualified to produce new scriptures. I will return to this point later in this dissertation.

³² There was a time later when Mount Kōya's Kongōbuji was ran as a branch temple of Tōdaiji.

ten court *bhikṣu* (Matsunaga 1987 I:141). In the eleventh month of Enryaku 17 (798), Saichō initiated an annual Dharma gathering (法会) on Mount Hiei, known as the Ten Lectures on the *Lotus* (法華十講), drawing the participation of Nara scholars. In the following year, the Imperial court and Crown Prince Chōdō (朝堂) requested three hundred *bhikṣu* and fifty novices (*shami*) to copy and chant the *Greater Prajñāparāmitā-sūtra*. Saichō's Ten Lectures on the *Lotus* gathering of 801 was especially important to him for making important contacts in Nara (Groner 34). In the seventh month of Enryaku 21 (802), with support of the Wake family, Saichō participated in a retreat to study the *Lotus* teachings and a series of lectures at Takaosan temple. Notably, among the fourteen *bhikṣu* on the retreat was Gonzō, Kūkai's alleged master (Groner 35). If Gonzō was Kūkai's teacher, would the latter not have almost certainly either met or known of Saichō at this time?

During this time, the scholars of the Nara Sanron and Hossō traditions debated the Buddhist philosophy of existence and emptiness (有空). Saichō publicly criticized both of these traditions for relying on commentaries rather than sūtras as their primary sources. His edict of 803, arguing this point, caught the sympathy of those at court critical of the power of the Nara traditions (Groner 38). In the *Ten Stages of Mind* and *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*, Kūkai locates Hossō as the sixth stage of mind and Sanron as the seventh stage of mind. The superior position of Tendai, at the eighth stage of mind, may have resulted from Kūkai being persuaded by Saichō's lectures and arguments (Watanabe 52). Even though directed at the Hossō and Sanron, Saichō's lectures were also a confrontation with Kegon, the most powerful tradition

of Nara and keeper of the status quo at that time. On returning from China, Saichō attacked the exclusive sanctity of Kegon’s ordination platform at Tōdaiji Temple.

From indications of Kūkai’s attention to poetry, calligraphy and Tantric Buddhism, it is clear that he was interested in the current trends in Chinese cultural developments. Following the scriptural development of Indian Buddhism, the aristocracy in China had switched emphasis from the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. If Kūkai was sincerely following a vow to find the utmost teaching of Buddhism, he would have likely turned to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* since it was viewed that way by the Chinese court at that time. But what in particular in that sūtra did he find he needed to go to China in order to understand?

As was the case for American “expatriates” who went to Paris in the 1930’s, it is easy to imagine Kūkai wanted to go to China in order to immerse himself in the world’s center of culture, including Tantric Buddhism. In that case, understanding the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* provided a justification for his visit in the eyes of authorities, who were interested in promoting a new tradition of Buddhism for their own purposes. Likely, Kūkai and his teachers could understand the first chapter of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. For example, the section on the Stages of Mind (住心品, J. *jūshinbon*) is related to Kegon’s *daśabhūmi* (see Kiyota, forthcoming) and would have presented no problem to Nara scholars. However, it was probably concerning the actual Tantric practices involving mudrā, mantra and maṇḍala, Shingon’s Three Mysteries, that Kūkai could not find an adequate teacher in Japan and the sūtra specifies the necessity of this. These are the “mysterious” (*himitsu*) aspects of Shingon preferred by Kūkai over doctrinal study. According to Kūkai and Shingon doctrine, these mysteries must be passed directly from the mind of the teacher to that of the disciple (i.e., mind-to-mind transmission); not through written

documents, but via a mysterious process involving direct contact, likened to pouring water from one vessel into another. From that point of view, it becomes conceivable that Kūkai received the entirety of Huiguo's Tantric teachings in only one year. In addition, even discounting supernatural notions of transmission, if Kūkai had mastered Shingon's basic doctrine and perhaps Sanskrit in the seven years between leaving the University and going to China, conceivably he could have concentrated on rituals and learned them within the year. Not only would the seven years be sufficient for this with no assumption of genius, it is similar to that expected of any Ph.D. candidate to acquire expertise in Buddhist Studies today. Likewise, a year or two abroad is the typical time for doing the hands-on field research for a dissertation.

Still, we have to wonder how such a young person as Kūkai, with no apparent political connections gained approval for studying in China. If there were political connections, yet unknown, were the same persons instrumental in achieving Kūkai's later appointment as *betto* of Tōdaiji Temple, Nara Buddhism's highest place of authority? If so, there might be a connection to Saeki Ima no Emishi, head of the Saeki clan, who completed the construction of the building housing the Great Buddha statue of Tōdaiji (Daibutsuden). In 784, Emperor Kammu choose Ima no Emishi along with Fujiwara Tanetsugu to head the construction of the new capital in Heian. Within a year, Tanetsugu was killed and Otōmo Yakamochi, *Manyōshū* poet, head of the Ōtomo clan and opponent of the relocation, was indicated as the main conspirator, though he had died a month before the incident.³³ Ōtomo and Saeki family members were stripped of titles and some were exiled or executed. Ima no Emishi died in 790, the year before Kūkai entered the capital. Nevertheless, some connections between the two are possible.

³³ See Chapter I above.

As mentioned above, Ima no Emishi had built the Saeki monastery and it was probably one of the most prominent Large Temples in Nara. In the vicinity, the Saeki family may have had strong connections with individuals at Gangōji Temple (元興寺) and Daianji Temple (大安寺). Maybe someone there could have helped him gain permission to go to China.

At that time, those entering China to study were of two classes, Students Studying Abroad (留学生) and Students Returning Home (還学生). Students Studying Abroad were allowed to stay for a determined period of time in order to become competent in their studies (similar to study abroad students today). Students Returning Home were already scholastically advanced persons, visiting for a shorter term for research and observation (roughly equivalent to researcher scholars today). Due to their status, the latter group received better treatment than Students Studying Abroad. Saichō was already a leading person in the Japanese Buddhist world and because he was well known, he was chosen to be a Student Returning Home as a matter of course (Watanabe 59).

Kūkai, in comparison, was not blessed with such conditions in China. Since Kūkai himself expresses, at first, he wanted to stay abroad for 20 years, he must have been classified as a Student Studying Abroad. Unlike Saichō, before going to China, Kūkai was a nameless *bhikṣu*, perhaps living in conditions similar to independent *bhikṣu*. In Nara, it must not have been a simple matter for such a person to receive Imperial sanction to go to China. In fact, Kūkai was probably the only one with no connects to achieve this (Watanabe 59). Yet he was skilled at the Tang language so getting around on his own would have been no problem. But how was he to cover the expense of the voyage and living for twenty years is not known. Saichō had already

established relations with Emperor Kanmu and Wake no Hirose. If not for such rich patrons he could not have entered China.

Chapter V.

Kūkai in China

1. From Departure to Arrival in China.

In 804, a Japanese delegation of four ships left for China. Among those in the visiting party were four people who were to become important in Japanese history. Ship number two carried public officials including Vice Ambassador (*kentō fukushi*) Ishikawa no Michimasu. Aboard the same ship was Saichō, who would return to Japan and introduce Tendai Buddhism. Saichō had already established Enryakuji Temple as a small hut on Mount Hiei. When he returned, he would begin work that established it as a major center for Japanese Buddhism to this day.

Joining Saichō on ship number two was the one who would be his successor as Tendai patriarch of Mount Hiei, Gishin (義真, 781-833). In 824, Gishin would become the first official “Tendai abbot” in Japan (Matsunaga 1987 I:162). While Saichō could read the meaning of Chinese graphs in Buddhist texts, he could not speak Chinese. For this reason, Gishin was to act as Saichō’s interpreter. While one of Kūkai’s greatest strengths, in terms of establishing Shingon and attracting followers, was his ability to classify doctrine in a systemized way, Gishin was left with the monumental task of interpreting and systematizing Saichō’s thoughts and writings after the latter’s death.

Among those aboard ship number one were Tachibana Hayanari (橘逸勢, d. 842) and Kūkai. Tachibana was a calligrapher in “square style” (*J. reisho*; *C. lishu*). Along with Emperor Saga and Kūkai, Tachibana is considered one of the three great calligraphers of his era, still

revered today. Had these four people failed to make it to China and back safely one can only imagine the course of Japanese history.

Kūkai must have been excited to be at last going to China. Yet, he was likely also to have been apprehensive, knowing the ill fate of some of the previous voyages. As luck would have it, Kūkai's entry into China and unplanned early departure was only achieved by coincidental timing through a narrow window, open for such trips between the two countries for a very short time. Since the first official excursion from Japan to China in 630 under Emperor Shōmu, this was the sixteenth visit by a Japanese party. The twelfth and thirteenth attempts had been unsuccessful. Not long after Kūkai's voyage, in 838, the last embassy from Japan would sail for China carrying the Tendai *bhikṣu* Ennin (円仁, 794-864). During that last trip, Buddhist persecution began in China under Emperor Wuzong (武宗, r. 840-6) and Ennin was deported along with all foreign Buddhists in 847 (Matsunaga 1987 I:163). Kūkai's nephew, the Tendai *bhikṣu* Enchin (円珍, 814-889), went to Chang'an in 855 but, in such dangerous times, only found passage on a commercial ship (Matsunaga 1987 I:165).

At the time of Kūkai's expedition, because relationships were tense, the preferred northern route had to be avoided in favor of a southern one, which meant much rougher sailing. To make matters worse, it was a Japanese policy at the time, formed as a matter of pride, to arrive in ships made in their own country. Those ships were less worthy of deep-sea travel than vessels of Chinese or Korean construction at that time, and were prone to drifting about and ending in disaster. Rough seas often forced ships to return to Japan. Kūkai and the others

traveling in the delegation would have surely been aware of this. However, the passengers may have felt there was some good luck in traveling with Buddhists to Tang China (Wakamori 26).

Regardless of the danger at sea and financial hardships he was sure to face, apparently Kūkai was eager to go. In contrast, it appears that Saichō had not sought to go himself. Instead, Saichō had supported a petition to send two *bhikṣu* to China in order to receive the Tiantai Dharma. Nevertheless, Emperor Kanmu himself decided Saichō was the best candidate for this undertaking (Groner 38).

According to legends, before departure Kūkai prayed to the folk deities of Kinai¹ for safe travel. At the time, it was common before travel to pray for safety and prosperity to the heavenly deity of the Northern Field. This is a general heavenly deity revered before the time of belief in the efficacy of prayer to the dead spirit (*goryo*) of Sugawara Michizane² (Wakamori 26), whose posthumous name, Kitano Tenjin, means Deity of the Northern Field.

Preparations were made for the four delegation ships to accompany Ambassador (*kentōshi*) Fujiwara no Kadonomaro (藤原葛野曆, d. 818). Kadonomara was the son of Fujiwara no Oguromaro (733-794) (Frédéric 2002:203). Oguromaro was the commander of the Imperial army and after defeating the Ebisu in 780, was given the title Ise no Kami (Deity of Ise)(Frédéric 2002:207). Why Kūkai was selected to join the group is unknown. However, selection appears to

¹ Territories in the vicinity of the capital and under direct imperial rule; the five *kuni* (“countries”) in the immediate vicinity of Kyoto.

² Sugawara no Michizane (845-903), historian, poet and scholar of Chinese literature. Accused of plotting against Emperor Daigo, he was stripped of his title and died in exile. When various misfortunes occurred at court, his rank was restored. He was deified and people still pray to him for protection and help (Frédéric 2002:908). Perhaps it is because he appealed to the court to end the trips to China, due to the danger involved, that he became confused with the deity of the Northern Field as protector of travelers.

have been an honor. An extravagant banquet was held and farewell gifts given (Matsunaga 1987 I:172). That being the case, would Kūkai and Saichō have not met?

Saichō first attempted to go to China in the previous year, during the third month of Enryaku 22 (803). However, due to high winds and difficult waves, the ships were damaged and forced to return to port. During the next year, while repairs were being made to the ships, Saichō lived at Sōmonji Temple in Dazaifu, Kyushu. There is speculation that during that time Saichō and Kūkai may have met for the first time (Groner 39).

Saichō was Kūkai's senior by seven years. At the age of twelve, Saichō went to Kokubunji Temple (国分寺) in Ōmi to study with Gyōhyō (行表, 724-97) for six years. Gyōhyō had studied with Dao Xuan. The latter came to Japan from China in 736 at the insistence of two Japanese *bhikṣu* dispatched by the Japanese government to bring a Vinaya master to Japan (Groner 22-3). During their time together, Gyōhyō and Dao Xuan retreated to the mountains for prolonged periods of meditation and practice (Groner 27). Saichō apparently devoted considerable time with Gyōhyō to becoming proficient in translating Buddhist texts from Chinese and practicing meditation. At the age of nineteen, Saichō left Gyōhyō to receive official ordination at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara. After several months of training in the precepts at Tōdaiji, Saichō followed his teacher's example, leaving Nara to meditate in the forest of Mount Hiei. There he composed a short work called *Vows* (*Ganmon*, 願文), in which he promises to continue his meditation in the mountains until he becomes pure. Two theories exist on how Saichō came to the attention of Emperor Kanmu. One is through an aristocrat at court (Jukō, 壽興, dates unknown) who had read *Vows* and thereafter decided to leave his high position, following

Saichō's example. The second theory holds that Saichō was known to be on Mount Hiei, located to the north of the new capital, Kyoto, and thus in a particularly influential spot for the city in the popular geomancy of the time (Groner 31). At any rate, Saichō was appointed as one of the ten *bhikṣu* who served at court in 797 (Groner 31). It is widely believed that at the time, the court was looking to replace the old Nara establishment with new, unaffiliated *bhikṣu*. My guess is that Saichō, being so independent minded in his meditation practice, as witnessed in his writing, fit the profile particularly well.

In 802, Saichō discussed with Wake no Hiroyo (和氣廣世, d. 809) a plan for propagating Chinese Tiantai Buddhism in Japan as an alternative to the politically powerful and corrupt Nara traditions (Groner 38). The Hiroyo was one of Japan's most powerful families, interested in developing a Buddhism that would be separate from or not controlled by the government (Groner 34). Buddhism had become both a powerful element in influencing people's behavior and a tool for justifying the position of the ruling elite. Indeed, the timing of Saichō and Kūkai's voyage to China corresponds to the year in which the capital was moved to Heian (Kyoto), once again believed to have been done in attempt to strengthen the government.

Saichō had criticized the Nara Hossō and Sanron schools, Japanese versions of Yogācāra and Mādhyamika traditions respectively, based on the reliance of those traditions on commentaries rather than sūtras. He petitioned the court to allow two students to travel to China so they could study sūtras for an extended time, eventually bringing back texts and instructions to establish the Tendai tradition in Japan. Instead, for this potentially politically important task, the Emperor wanted Saichō himself to go for a short period of study and return immediately thereafter.

As is clear from this brief profile, Saichō was a part of political strategy involving Buddhism, as Kūkai may have been. However, in contrast to Kūkai, Saichō actively fought against the Nara Buddhist establishment, increasingly so after his return from China. There may be elements of political protest directed toward the Risturyō government's control of literature in Kūkai's *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*. In addition, Kūkai's support of the position of the independent *bhikṣu* in that story can be seen as an anti-Nara statement. Nevertheless, Kūkai declined to join actively in Saichō's battles with Nara, as seen below. This is not to say that Saichō was generally more outgoing and outspoken than Kūkai. In fact, scholars agree that the opposite was the case. While Saichō is known to have spoken diplomatically with members of court, some of Kūkai's efforts may be seen as relatively covert.

There are many varied stories about the circumstances of Kūkai's departure to China as well as about the voyage there and back. As with other incidents in the life of Kūkai, some of these exist in legends while others are preserved in biographies/hagiographies or elsewhere in historical records. The diversity of these stories contrasts with records of Saichō's journey to China, which appear, in comparison, quite straightforward and devoid of miraculous occurrences. Unlike Saichō, Kūkai was apparently outside the economic and political power elite. Although I have suggested possible family connections, how Kūkai, in this relatively underprivileged situation and as a newly ordained *bhikṣu*, was able to receive permission and financially afford to study abroad in China remains a mystery. Kūkai's voyage was probably a matter of unique circumstances. Below, I summarize the research into this question, mainly carried out by Watanabe, accompanied by my own comments on his findings.

First, there are two departure dates recorded, the twelfth day of the fifth month and the sixth day of the seventh month. In the *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai*, Shinzei simply states, “In the last year/s of Enryaku, following destiny, he crossed the sea” (KKZ 8:8). In the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Shinzei writes, “He carried out his resolution on the twelfth day of the fifth month in Enryaku 23 (804) by going to Tang” (KKZ 8:41).

Also reporting the departing date as the second day of the third month of Enryaku 23, the Will of Most Venerable Shinzen (遺告真然大徳等; Shinzen d. 891) describes the circumstances as follows. “Fujiwara no Kadonomaro, as the ambassador on the delegation ship, in the third month of the twenty second year (803) departed from Naniwa and stopped in the midst of a storm. On the twelfth day of the fifth month of the following year, the same passengers departed from Naniwa. Many preparations were made and, in new traveling clothes, on the sixth day of the seventh month they departed the harbor of Hizen in Kyushu (九州肥前), beginning the long journey of thousands of *ri*. At that time, there were four delegation ships. On ship number one was the ambassador Fujiwara no Kadonomaro, vice-envoy (副使) Ishikawa Dōeki (石川道益), Kūkai, Tachibana Hayanari, among a party of twenty-three people. On ship number two was minister (判官) Sugawara no Kiyogimi³ (菅原清公, 770-842) and Saichō, in a party among twenty-seven people aboard” (Watanabe 63-4).

The departure date of the sixth day of the seventh month appears in the *Continuation of the Annals of Japan* (*Nihon kōki*, 日本後紀, completed 843), the third national history of Japan covering the years 791-833. According to that source, Kūkai, took the number one ship from

³ After returning to Japan, Sugawara no Kiyogimi suppressed the practice of corporal punishment, reformed the National University and advocated a system of government based on his observations in China (Frédéric 2002:908).

Naniwa. Saichō was aboard the number two ship, departing from Taura. Saichō had been waiting since the previous year when the delegation he accompanied was stopped in Kyushu. Also, according to the *History of Enryaku-ji National Citadel* (*Enryaku-ji gokoku engi*, 延暦寺護国縁起), at the time of the Taura departure, Saichō and Kūkai did not see each other. While the *Continuation of the Annals of Japan* says Kūkai departed from Naniwa and Saichō from Taura, Wakamori and Abé report that Kūkai's boat left from Taura inlet.

According to the *Continuation of the Annals of Japan*, in order, ship number one, two, three and four set sail southward. Early in the next month, the eighth month, a storm was encountered at sea, scattering the ships. Ship number one, the ship with Kūkai aboard, was at sea for about one month. On the tenth day of the eighth month, far off course to the south, that ship proceeded to Fuzhou in China (福州, present day Fujian Province, China). The number two ship fell behind schedule and on the first day of the ninth month drifted ashore at Mingzhou (明州, in northern Zhejiang Province, China). Ship number three, was damaged and returned home, departing again on the fourth day of the seventh month of the next year, Enryaku 24 (805). This time the ship drifted in the current, becoming shipwrecked on a solitary island in the southward. Thus, the boat of the party of vice-ambassador (*hōgan*, 判官, one of the four palace ranks) Mimune no Imatsugu (三棟今嗣) was lost and those aboard narrowly escaped to be repatriated. Circumstances of the number four ship are unknown.

Wakamori reports that boats number three and four departed the day after Kūkai and Saichō left and number three was shipwrecked at Hira island in Matsu-ura prefecture (Wakamori

65). According to Abé, both number three and number four boats were lost at sea in a storm (Abé 1999:144, citing the *Continuation of the Annals of Japan*).

Because of ongoing political problems in China and the fact that local government officials in Fuzhou, where Kūkai's boat landed, were not accustomed to dealing with the arrival of foreigners, the delegation was detained while inquiries could be made to the capital. According to the *Continuation of the Annals of Japan*, on the third day of the tenth month, the boat was held in Fuzhou for a period of one month. The *Honored Spoken Memento* says, "At that time, the ambassador of Echizen (越前), Great Protector of the Third Rank (大守正三位) Fujiwara Asonkanō (藤原臣賀能) (i.e., Fujiwara no Kadonomaro), presented to the Fuzhou government office a letter written by Kūkai. Although he had submitted letters two or three times before this, suddenly arrangements were made for passengers to disembark" (KKZ 8:42). The same account appears in the *Will of Various Disciples* (遣告諸弟子等) and in the *Will of Most Venerable Shinzei* (Watanabe 66).

According to the writings above, the ambassador had written letters repeatedly without success when he asked Kūkai to try. If so, Fujiwara Kadonomaro may have felt that he had nothing to lose in letting the young *bhikṣu* Kūkai write a letter. Kūkai supposedly wrote a formal letter with elegant calligraphy in a highly literary style asking permission to go to Chang'an. This letter is preserved in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* under the title probably supplied by Shinzei, "The Ambassador's Writing Composed and Given to the Official at Fuzhou" (KKZ 6:331). This letter is considered an especially excellent piece among the numerous famous literary writings by Kūkai.

Following the often-recounted story, there may have been a Chinese official who was impressed by Kūkai's aristocratic refinement, evident in his prose and penmanship. For whatever reason, his letter was apparently effective and twenty-three members of his party received a permit for going to the capital (Abé 1999:115). The rest of the crew was to remain with the interpreter and scribe Yamada no Ōba, taking the ship to Mingzhou, where Saichō's ship had landed, to await the party's return to Japan (Abé 1999:115).

In the letter written for the Ambassador, addressed to "His excellency" (中丞), Kūkai describes the purpose of the party's visit to China. About his own activities, he says, for a period of twenty years, he intends to study "Ekayāna," and the "secret" or "mysterious Ekayāna" (秘密一乘). Biographers have assumed that Kūkai was probably speaking in the voice of the ambassador in indicating he (Kūkai) would study general Mahāyāna Buddhism and this does not indicate his own intent (Katsuno 138).

According to some stories, at first Kūkai was not among those chosen to accompany the ambassador to the capital. Therefore, Kūkai wrote another letter requesting his own permit to entry to the capital, arguing that he was indispensable to a state-sponsored scriptural translation project in the capital (KKZ 6:337). According to *The Biography of Kōbō Daishi as Seen Through Cultural History*, an official in Fuzhou was jealous of Kūkai's rare talent. Moriyama goes on to say this may have been the reason the entire party was detained in Fuzhou for so long.

Shinzei says an official of Fuzhou saw Kūkai as an advanced scholar and was suspicious. Watanabe quotes a poem from an official at Fuzhou asking, "Why, one asks, come thousands of *ri*. Is it not to show off that talent? Your learning is great and your understanding subtle. Such a

scholar is rare.” Shinzei records that Kūkai was given this as a poem. However, Watanabe believes the words “showing off that talent,” are making fun of Kūkai. He adds that since Shinzei heard the story directly from Kūkai and wrote it down accordingly (or so we are to assume), the above idea, that this person was jealous of Kūkai’s talent and hindered his entering Tang, should be considered (Watanabe 68).

I can only imagine that if there was hesitancy to admit Kūkai due to some perception of his abilities, it might have been due to the recent political chaos in and around Chang’an. Modern biographers have speculated that if Kūkai was really as proficient in Chinese as legends say, perhaps this would have raised suspicions about his nationality and motive for going to the capital. In other words, officials might have been weighing the possibility that Kūkai was a foreign spy (Watanabe 68). It is hard to imagine the problem was due to jealousy of the literary talents of a mendicant Buddhist.

2. Kūkai and Chinese Tantric Buddhism.

Kūkai finally received permission to be in the party of twenty-three persons to go to the capital. By then it was already late autumn of that year, the third day of the eleventh month, one month to the day since arriving in Fuzhou on the third day of the tenth month. During that time, it is assumed that Kūkai did not study Chinese Buddhism. If his objective was to study Tantric Buddhism, he probably wanted to go to Chang’an in particular, the center of Chinese Tantra at the time.

The *Continuation of the Annals of Japan* reports the party traveled thousands of *ri* on foot across the continent, finally arriving in Chang’an on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of

Tang Emperor Dezong's twentieth year of Zhenyuan (貞元, 804). Kūkai's *List of Imported Materials* (請来日録) says he entered the capital, "The last third of the twelfth month" (KZ 1:69). The trip was long and arduous. By the time the party finally entered the capital, the ship of Sugawara no Kiyogimi had preceded them by three months and, together with Gishin, Saichō was studying on Mount Tiantai.

Before Kūkai's arrival, Chang'an had arguably been the cultural center of the world during the peak of the Tang Dynasty. Emperor Xuan Zong (玄宗, r. 712-56) had sponsored Tantric Buddhism masters Śubhakarasiṃha (716-35) and Vajrabodhi (719-41) in Chang'an. In 741, the Emperor set up Daoist shrines and, in 747, declared the *Laozi* was the most important canonical book. A few years later, a series of rebellions and invasions began. During this time, Daizong (r. 762-779) was criticized for being influenced by the Tantric Buddhist master Amoghavajra (715-74). Afterwards, the energetic emperor Dezong (r. 779-805) tried to stop the decline. Dezong built up the palace army to 100,000, though command was given to the eunuchs, who got rid of him. A half-century of foreign wars was over by his death in 805, just as Kūkai entered Chang'an.

Kūkai was in Chang'an at the time of the coronation of Emperor Xian Zong (r. 806-820). Xian Zong used Tang imperial power to suppress rebellions in Sichuan and the Yangzi delta. In 807, chief minister Li Jifu reported that only eight provinces were paying taxes to the Tang government. By 809-10, mobilization for the internal wars had exhausted Tang finances.

When Kūkai arrived in China, the following Buddhist traditions were particularly popular there: the Sanlun (J. Sanron), Faxian (J. Hossō, i.e., Chinese Yogācāra), Huayan (J. Kegon; a

tradition of Chinese origin based on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*), Zhenyan (J. Shingon), Tiantai (J. Tendai), Jieli (J. Ritsu, based on Vinaya) and Chan (J. Zen). Traditional Confucianism and Daoism were also present, along with establishments of Christianity, Nestorianism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichæism.⁴

Kūkai also encountered a golden age of music, sculpture and other arts in Chang’an. Literary masters of the time include Han Yu (韓愈 768-824) and Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元, 773-819);⁵ there were the poets Bai Juyi (白居易, 772-846, also known as Bai Letian 白樂天), and painters: Zhang Cao (張操), Zhou Chun (周昉) and Bian Jing (邊驚). Biographies say that while in Chang’an, Kūkai studied with “a writing master.” Later, Shingon scholars said this was Han Yu. However, Han Yu is not named in the early sources.

At first, Kūkai lived at the ambassador’s residence and for some time he probably participated in many of the activities of Ambassador Kadonomaro. He acted as writer and interpreter for the Ambassador and some of his ghostwritten letters survive. However, Kūkai remained in China when, on the eighteenth day of the fifth month, the ambassador departed with the delegation ship from Mingzhou. Aboard Kadonomaro’s ship number one, the ship aboard which Kūkai had arrived, were the Students Returning Home. Among them were Saichō and Gishin, having met their objectives in China. If, as some biographers maintain, Kūkai had still not met Saichō, would the two not have met when the returning party gathered with Ambassador Kadonomaro?

⁴ Manichæism is a religion founded by the Persian Mani in the latter half of the third century. It claimed to be a synthesis of all religions.

⁵ A master of the *guwen* style of prose.

The return trip was tranquil and the party arrived in Tsushima (対馬) on the fifth day of the sixth month (*Continuation of the Annals of Japan*). The ambassador proceeded to the capital and reported to the court on the first day of the seventh month. His report upon return is in the *Continuation of the Annals of Japan*. Saichō's report of his returning was made the fourth day of same month (Watanabe 84). His writing is found in the Dharma Record of the Tendai Lotus Tradition (天台法華宗伝法個). He had lived in China for 8 months. On the fifteenth day of that month, Saichō, submitted a list of imported materials (将来日録), which can be found in the first section of the *Biography of Hieizan Daishi* (叡山大師伝). These included two hundred and thirty sūtras in four hundred and sixty fascicles, Tantric drawings, ritual implements, and other items (Watanabe 74). Thereupon, Emperor Kanmu and Wake Hirose had copies made of the newly imported Tendai documents, disseminating them to the seven largest temples of Nara. Afterwards, Saichō performed what is said to be the first *abhiṣeka* ceremony in Japan. Emperor Kanmu directed the Hossō *bhikṣu* Shuen (修円, 771-835) and Gonzō to be among those to receive the *abhiṣeka* from Saichō (Groner 66).⁶ According to Groner, Saichō had probably already faced the opposition of the Nara establishment because the emperor told Shuen and Gonzō not to be concerned about criticism (Groner 66).

Ambassador Kadonomaro left China on the tenth day of the second month. According to Kūkai's List of Imported Materials, after this, Kūkai moved from the ambassador's lodging house to Ximing Temple (西明寺) in Chang'an (KZ 1:69). The *Honored Spoken Memento* follows this account.

⁶ There has been some disagreement about the identities of these two *bhikṣu* since the Emperor referred to them by their family names (see Groner 66 n. 8).

Ximing was a large temple founded by Emperor Gaozong (高宗, 635-756).⁷ Nara's Daian-ji is based on the layout of that temple. At that time, Students Studying Abroad from Japan were often given lodging at Ximing. It was there that Kūkai began work with a team of experts on the massive state-sponsored translation project.

When Kūkai was entering Ximing, Eichō (永忠, 743-816) was leaving his residence there. Eichō was also a Japanese Student Studying Abroad, having entered China in the first year of Hōki, more than thirty years earlier and before Kūkai was born. After Kūkai returned to Japan and began to make allies of Nara scholars, Eichō was likely helpful. Eichō, left China for Japan together with Kadonomaro, on the tenth day of the second month (Imaizu 58-9).

At Ximing, Kūkai worked with *Tripitaka* master Bore (般若, 734-810?)⁸ from Kashmir (Abé 1999:116) or Kapisa (Maejima 82). Bore arrived in the south of China by ship some twenty years before meeting Kūkai (Abé 1999:83). After entering Chang'an, Bore received support from Emperor Dezong in 787 for translating the *Mahāyāna Six Pāramitā Sūtra*,⁹ a text imported to Japan by Kūkai and later important to him in establishing the difference between *mikkyō* and *kengyō* (Abé 1999:117). Bore had studied at Nālanda in India and so was likely quite familiar with Tantric Buddhism. Therefore, it is possible that Kūkai approached Bore for instruction on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, which he was perhaps unable to provide (Abé 1999:119). However, Kūkai may have improved his Sanskrit ability by studying under Bore, so that by the time he met

⁷ For more details on the history of Ximing see Abé 1999:116-7.

⁸ While Abé and Hakeda use the Sanskrit name for the graphs 般若 (read Bore in Mandarin), transliterated by them as Prajñā, this seems suspect since Prajñā is feminine in Sanskrit. Japanese sources use the graphs and sometimes transliterate according to the Japanese reading: Hannya. It is possible Bore was female. If so, however, I would expect this would be mentioned in the records examined.

⁹ T. 8:261.

Huiguo, he was ready to study the Indian scriptures. Abé describes Kūkai's relationship with Bore as follows; parenthetical conversions to Pinyin transliteration are mine.

It is not clear when Kūkai met Prajñā (Bore) or exactly what he studied with the Indian master. At the time of Kūkai's residence at the Hsi-ming (Ximing) temple, Prajñā was a resident master at nearby Li-ch'üan-ssu (Liquansi), another large monastery located across the Western Bazaar to the north. Kūkai mentioned only that his training with Prajñā included the study of Brāhmanical philosophical systems popular in southern India. However, circumstantial evidence suggests that the study of Sanskrit constituted a significant part of that training. For example, when Kūkai met Hui-kuo (Huiguo) in the sixth month of Chen-yüan (Zhenyuan) 21 (805), Hui-kou immediately permitted him to begin the study of esoteric rituals. Hui-kou's lay disciple Wu-yin reported in 806 that Kūkai was able to absorb with ease and accuracy the master's instruction in both Sanskrit and Chinese. Kūkai therefore must have acquired at least some knowledge of Sanskrit during the four months between his arrival to the Hsi-ming monastery in the second month and his meeting with Hui-kuo in the sixth month of 805. Upon Kūkai's departure to Japan, Prajñā entrusted him not only with his new Chinese translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* but also with the Sanskrit original in three boxes, an unlikely gift unless Kūkai had studied Sanskrit with him and attained some essential knowledge of the language (Abé 1999:118-9).

Even if the story is true in regards to Kūkai's ability to comprehend Huiguo's instructions in Sanskrit, it is difficult to know Huiguo's own ability in Sanskrit and at what level he instructed Kūkai using that language. If we are to consider Kūkai had an advanced knowledge of Sanskrit as clearly implied by the report cited above, I think we must conclude that he studied Sanskrit during those years before entering China, about which little is known concerning Kūkai's activities. Would not four months of study with Bore have been grossly inadequate for mastering Sanskrit, regardless of Kūkai's apparent genius for language?

It is unknown how long Tantric Buddhism has existed in China. During the four hundred years of disunity between the time of the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220 CE and the rise of the

Sui Dynasty in 581 CE, some thirty dynasties and minor kings arose and fell from power. During that time, various tribes occupied and looted the cities, including Loyang and Chang'an, killing thousands of inhabitants and capturing the emperor. In conditions of social and political chaos, people lost faith in the Confucian bureaucratic order and Buddhism became popular in China. With its spread, slowly, texts and individuals proclaiming the magical powers of Buddhism began to appear (Ch'en 88). In 230, Zhuluyan (竺律炎) and Zhiqian (支謙) made a Chinese translation of the *Sūtra of the Mātangī Girl*,¹⁰ a text containing *dhāraṇī*. In 280 CE, the country was briefly united, becoming the Former Jin dynasty, before falling again into disorder. Around 310, Fotuteng (佛圖澄 d. 348), a Buddhist from Central Asia who was on his way to the Jin capital of Loyang, "arrived just as the great capital was sacked and burned, and he found himself in the camp of a rude, illiterate Hun who was on his way to control of most of North China" (Wright 56). In order to gain support for Buddhism in these conditions, Fotuteng is said to have performed magic. Duly impressed, the foreign ruler embraced the offer of this power. Fotuteng served the Later Zhao emperors Shi Lo (r. 330-33) and Shi Hu (r. 333-48) allegedly by bringing rain and making military prognostications (Wright 56).

In 439, a Turkish tribe, the Toba Wei, succeeded in bringing unity to Northern China under their rule, establishing the Wei dynasty. At that time, the old Han aristocracy maintained control of the south of China, which became the center for literature, art and the non-magical traditions of Buddhism. The Turkish rulers of the north neither spoke nor wrote Chinese. Nor did they dress or act according to Chinese customs, but they were interested in the magical powers of

¹⁰ T. 21, n. 1300 摩登伽經.

mantra and *dhāraṇī*. The northern rulers spent vast sums building temples constructing huge rock-cut images. Like the Kushans in India, the Toba were outsiders who found in Buddhism a philosophy that would embrace them and so they enthusiastically embraced Buddhism. The massive imperial cliff shrines commissioned by the Northern Wei empire and carved at Yungang (460-94) and near Loyang (495-535) stood as testimony to the power of the Wei emperor. The colossal images were both the Wei's answer to the great imperial tombs (Paludgn 89) and even a literal representation of the emperor himself.

The unification of China under the Sui dynasty (584-618) brought together the interests of the North and South and the emphasis on magic in Buddhism declined. It was during the Tang dynasty that the popularity of Tantric Buddhism began to grow again in China, mirroring its growth in popularity in India. In 716, Śubhakarasiṃha (C. Shanwuwei) arrived and translated the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Four years later, in 720, Vajrabodhi (C. Jingangchi) and his disciple Amoghavajra (C. Bukong) arrived, soon producing translations from sections of the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*,¹¹ used in Japan under the name *Kongō-chō* (S. *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*). During the rest of the eighth century, these wonder-working *ācāryas* and the prestige of their newly translated scriptures strengthened the Chinese Tantric tradition. Contrary to histories of Chinese Buddhism that typically claim Tantric Buddhism was never a significant movement in China, “under Amoghavajra and Emperor Tai-tsung (Daizong), Chen-yen (Zhenyan) replaced Daoism as the dominant religious force among the elite” (Orzech 233).

During the Tang dynasty, popular Tantric Buddhist lineages emerged, eventually uniting to form Zhenyan. One was the lineage of Śubhakarasiṃha, concentrating on the *Susiddhikara-*

¹¹ T. 18, n. 866, 金剛頂瑜伽中略出念誦經.

*sūtra*¹² and on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. His disciple, Yixing (一行, 683-727), composed the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*,¹³ which is quoted often in Kūkai's writings. The other lineage was that of Vajrabodhi, concentrating on the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* tradition. Although it is not certain, Vajrabodhi's follower, Amoghavajra, may have united the teachings of these two traditions for the first time. The unified tradition, carried on through his disciples, including Huiguo, became Zhenyan. Even though Amoghavajra's synthesis in Zhenyan became the most influential tradition of Tantric Buddhism in China, the teachings of Śubhakarasiṃha continued to be transmitted independent of Zhenyan (Orzech 233). Both lineages also influenced non-Tantric traditions of Chinese Buddhism. Śubhakarasiṃha had great influence on Tiantai. Vajrabodhi influenced Huayan.

Following Amoghavajra's death in 774, his disciples continued to perform rituals in the Imperial Chapel, at Qinglong Temple and Ta Xingshan Temple in Chang'an, and at the Golden Pavilion on Mount Wutai. As fate would have it, just after Kūkai's time, the Japanese Tendai *bhikṣu* Ennin made an unplanned visit to Mount Wutai where Tantric Buddhism master Amoghavajra had lived. Later, not permitted to leave Chang'an to travel to Mount Tiantai, Ennin studied the *Vajradhātu*, *Garbhakośadhātu* and *Susiddhi* traditions, and thus was successful in finally bringing the Tantric doctrine¹⁴ to Japanese Tendai, a task Saichō was unable to achieve in his lifetime (Matsunaga 1987 I:163-4).

¹² T. 18, n. 893a, 蘇悉地羯羅經.

¹³ T. 39, n. 1796, 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏.

¹⁴ That is to say, the doctrine Kūkai had convinced Japanese scholars and practitioners was the complete *mikkyō* doctrine, which accordingly must include all three traditions.

According to Shingon scholars, the Tantric Buddhist tradition in China (as well as elsewhere) essentially dried up after Kūkai returned to Japan. The implication of this scholarship is that Kūkai became the utmost authority on Zhenyan and those of Shingon the sole heirs to the lineage.¹⁵ Accordingly, this is the reason Huigou was anxious for Kūkai to receive the teachings and propagate them in his own country. However, although the popularity of Tantric Buddhism clearly declined in China during the Huichang persecution of 845, it endured.

Scholars have held that treating the Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala and the Vajradhātu maṇḍala as a pair, as Kūkai argues is necessary, seems to be an historical accident unique to China, due to the merging of the lineages of Śubhakarasiṃha and Vajrabodhi. Orzech describes his understanding of this situation as follows.

Chen-yen's (Zhenyan's) preoccupation with two maṇḍalas is a distinctively Chinese adaptation. Since the two textual lineages came to be regarded as a pair, the maṇḍalas drawn from them also constitute a pair. Just as each mandala expresses the conjunction of conditioned and unconditioned reality, so too, during the late eighth century, did the pair become a graphic shorthand for that conjunction. Through a reinterpretation of Chinese philosophical categories the Womb Mandala was said to represent Mahāvairocana's numinous reality (*li*), bodhi as universally present in the Buddha's compassionate activities. The Diamond Mandala represented the enlightened mind in itself, wisdom (*chih*). There is evidence that this synthesis was taught by Amoghavajra's disciple Hui-kuo, and it may even have been initiated by Amoghavajra (Orzech 234).

Scholars have also argued for the uniqueness and Chinese innovation of the Zhenyan version of the Vajradhātu maṇḍala. Again, Orzech describes this as follows.

Another distinctive innovation is the selection of nine maṇḍalas from the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* and their arrangement in a three by three square.

¹⁵ It is not uncommon for East Asian Buddhist traditions to make such claims concerning the importance of their own lineage (e.g., the Chan lineage of Wei Neng). Likewise, Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhist developments after the time of Kūkai, claim to be the most advanced, eclipsing earlier Tantric Buddhist teachings such as those of Shingon (e.g., Kālacakra tradition).

The configuration is clearly based on the Lo-shu, one of a pair of ancient Chinese cosmograms representing the “earthly” realm. This cosmogram was the basis of an imperially sponsored Taoist cult of T’ai-i (“surpassing unity”), in which the sovereign of the universe circulated through a court of nine thrones. Moreover, Amoghavajra changed the maṇḍala’s traditional Indian attributions. Mahāvairocana, formerly associated with the color blue and the element ether, was now associated with yellow and earth, the traditional attributes of the Chinese sovereign and those chosen by the T’ang rulers. It is even possible that the paired cosmograms, the Ho-t’u and the Lo-shu, influenced Chen-yen’s pair of maṇḍalas (Orzech 237).

Regardless of the introduction of newly translated texts into China, the greatest influence Tantra exerted on Chinese Buddhism may have been ritual. Zhenyan *ācāryas* performed rituals for the protection of the state, for emperors’ health and well being, for bringing rain and for the well being of ancestors. Kitagawa mentions a Buddhist service for the ancestors called *U-lan-pan-chai* (“vegetarian entertainment”) sponsored by Emperor Wu Mi in 538. He writes, “Under Chen-yen and Daoist influences the ‘Vegetarian Entertainment’ was intermixed with the mantras Shingo-kwei (Sasaki in Japanese) or “distributing drink and food to the Pretas,” which was propagated by Amoghavajra. (Afterwards the same process took place in Japan; in both China and Japan the festival of the dead, celebrated in the seventh month of the old calendar, is a mixture of the two ceremonies). It is understandable that all these ceremonials, with pomp and splendor, must have impressed the visitors. Many Japanese *bhikṣu* busied themselves to imitate what they saw in China during the T’ang period” (Kitagawa 1951:200).

3. Kūkai’s Relationship with Huiguo.

According to Kūkai’s List of Imported Materials, he received the ordination into the realm of the Garbhadhātu maṇḍala, ordination into the realm of the Vajradhātu maṇḍala and the

five-fold *abhiṣeka* from Huiguo. Within three months, Kūkai would receive the final *abhiṣeka* and thus be ordained as a master of Tantric Buddhism (*KZ* 1:69).

Huiguo is considered the seventh patriarch of Tantric Buddhism and is named as Shingon's fifth patriarch.¹⁶ He served three Tang imperial generations, performing ceremonies for their protection. Kūkai's meeting with that *ācārya* and coming to found the Japanese Shingon tradition is held up as dictated by fate and destiny (*Wakamori* 29).

Huiguo, upon first meeting Kūkai may have admired his talent or sensed his potential. A year or two afterwards, Kūkai describes their first meeting as follows.

Having taken up residence at the Hsi-ming (Ximing) monastery, I visited and searched among eminent masters in the city. One day, I chanced to meet Master Hui-kuo (Huiguo), abbot of the East Stūpa Hall of the Ch'ing-lung (Qinglong) monastery. A Dharma heir disciple of the late Tripitaka Master Ta-kuang-chih (Daguanzhi) [Amoghavajra], he was a paragon of virtue for our age and a guide for the nation's rulers. Three successive emperors and their ministers received his initiation [into Esoteric Buddhism], and Buddhist practitioners of all the four classes studied the Secret Treasury with him

Accompanied by Chi-ming (Jiming), T'an-sheng (Tansheng), and several other Dharma masters from the Hsi-ming monastery, I went to visit him [Hui-kuo] and was granted an audience. As soon as he saw me, the abbot smiled, and said with delight, "Since learning of your arrival, I have waited anxiously. How excellent, how excellent that we have met today at last! My life is ending soon, and yet I have no more disciples to whom to transmit the Dharma. Prepare without delay the offerings of incense and flowers for your entry into the *abhiṣeka* mandalas" (*Abé* 1999:120; translating from the List of Imported Materials *KZ* 1:99).

In the face of decline in Tang and in the city of Chang'an, there may have truly been a feeling the Zhenyan lineage was in jeopardy. It is possible to interpret Huiguo's alleged waiting

¹⁶ The patriarchs are: 1) Mahāvairocana, 2) Vajrasattva, 3) Nāgārjuna, 4) Nāgabodhi, 5) Vajrabodhi, 6) Amoghavajra, 7) Huiguo, 8) Kūkai.

for Kūkai in this light. If so, Kūkai must have felt a keen sense of responsibility. His narration of the events continues as follows.

I immediately returned to my residence temple [Hsi-ming-ssu (Ximingsi)] and began preparing for the initiation. Earlier in the sixth month, I was guided into the *abhiṣeka* maṇḍala or mastering the Dharma [Ch. hsüeh-fa kuan-ting (Xuefa guanding); Jpn. gakuho kanjō]. Standing at the garbha maṇḍala of great compassion, I threw a flower on the maṇḍala according to the ritual prescription [of the sūtra]. It fell on the body of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana at the center. Delighted, the master exclaimed: “Marvelous, marvelous!” He praised me repeatedly. Thereupon I was sprinkled with the water of the fivefold wisdom and received the empowerment [Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*; Ch. *chia-ch'ih (jiachi)*; Jpn. *kaji*] of the three mysteries. Following the initiation, I was instructed in the Sanskrit terms and ritual procedures of the garbha maṇḍala and trained in the visualizing meditation of the divinities in the maṇḍala (Abé 1999:122; translating from the List of Imported Materials KZ 1:99).

The initiation into the garbha maṇḍala is described in the second chapter of the Mahāvairocana-sūtra. Abé summarizes the essentials of the ritual. “...first, the practitioners pledge that they are resolved to uphold the esoteric precept of samaya; then, blindfolded by their master, they are guided to the altar of the maṇḍala, at which they throw a flower. The particular Buddha or bodhisattva in the maṇḍala upon whom the flower of the practitioner alights becomes his or her personal divinity (*īśvara*) [sic].¹⁷ Thereupon, the practitioners’ blindfolds are removed so they can identify themselves with the divinities in the maṇḍala. The ritual concludes with the master’s sprinkling of the water of the fivefold wisdom on the practitioners’ crowns, symbolic of their new birth into the family of the Tathāgatas” (Abé 1999:122, paraphrasing *T.* 18:11b-12b).

Shingon delineates its lineage of transmission from its founder, the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana, to the Secret Master Vajrasattva, as described in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.

¹⁷ *īśvara*.

Afterwards, the transmission was from the bodhisattva Nāgārjuna to *ācārya* Nāgabodhi and then Vajrabodhi. Amoghavajra, the sixth Shingon patriarch, came from India to China and transmitted the teachings to Huiguo, the seventh patriarch. Kūkai became the eighth patriarch. Huiguo began his study with Amoghavajra, also at Qinglong Temple, at the age of nine. At the age of twenty he received ordination as a *bhikṣu*. Two years later, he received the final *abhiṣeka* establishing him as a Tantric Buddhist *ācārya* (Abé 1999:121). Thus, although Huiguo had known Amoghavajra for twelve years, it appears that from the time he became a *bhikṣu* until the final *abhiṣeka*, only two years elapsed. This situation is roughly analogous to that of Kūkai.

One year after Huiguo's death in 805, a lay follower, Wuyin, wrote the earliest dated biography of the Master, quoting some of Huiguo's last words. Abé translates from that writing as follows. "I have granted mastership in the garbha maṇḍala to Pan-hong of Java and Hui-jih of Silla. I have entrusted the great teaching of the *vajra* maṇḍalas. Also with us today is the Japanese priest Kūkai. Because he came to seek the sacred teaching, I have granted the secret maṇḍala rituals and the mudrās of the two maṇḍalas to him. Whether in Chinese or Sanskrit, he has absorbed all my instructions in his mind. It was just like poring water from one vase into another. I entrust these six disciples with the role of carrying on the torch of my Dharma" (Abé 1999:126).

Huiguo died in the twelfth month of 805. Commonly, Kūkai's biographies claim that by Imperial order, Kūkai wrote Huiguo's epitaph. Abé suggests Huiguo's followers may have chosen Kūkai because he had received initiation into both realms and Huiguo's complete teachings (Abé 1999:127). Kūkai is also said to have taken the leading role in Huiguo's funeral service and made the arrangements for his gravesite. If he did take the lead in these activities,

despite the fact that other students must have been present who knew Huiguo for decades, it might indicate that Kūkai indeed assumed some special role in the life of Huiguo, as Shingon and the biographies hold.

Kūkai returned to Japan after being away for thirty months. During that time, in addition to having become the (or an) eighth patriarch of his lineage of Tantric Buddhism, he had allegedly learned (or improved his ability at) Sanskrit, studied calligraphy with the most famous Chinese masters of the art and exchanged poetry with eminent Tang poets.

After Kūkai's death, the Tendai *bhikṣu* Enchin (814-91) went to China from 853-58 and inquired about Kūkai's life there as did Tendai's Dharma Master Ennin (784-864), who lived in China for seven years beginning in 837. Both reported a high regard for Kūkai in China. In the "Writings of Enjō Temple" (園城寺文書), Enchin is reported speaking with another disciple of Huiguo, Yizhen (義真), when he visited Qinglong temple. According to Enchin, Yizhen remembered Kūkai and praised his skill at the "five ways of writing calligraphy" (Wakamori 32). The five ways are by holding the brush with ones mouth, left and right hands, left and right feet. Legend has it that Kūkai was called Preceptor (S. *upādhāya*, J. *ōsho*, C. *heshang*) of the Five Writings (五書和尚). Wakamori says he believes this is more than legend since Enchin took the time to mention *ācārya* Yizhen's words (Wakamori 32). Also, Enchō (円澄, 771-836)¹⁸, second

¹⁸ In 812, along with Saichō, Enchō received the initiation into the Vajra realm from Kūkai (Groner 82). Enchō maintained correspondence with Kūkai and, in my opinion, this is one bit of evidence that Buddhists associated with Tendai and Shingon were not antagonistic towards one another while Saichō and Kūkai were alive. In 831, nine years after Saichō's death, Enchō requested Kūkai to instruct him and twenty-five of Saichō's direct disciples in Tantrism. (Matsunaga 1987 I:162-3). Enchō had long been interested in Tantric Buddhism. While in China he also asked Tiantai masters what the place of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* was in Buddhism according to the Tiantai

head of Tendai's Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, visited Kaiyuan Temple (開元寺) in China and reported hearing about Kūkai from a *bhikṣu* by the name of Huiguan (惠灌), who said of Kūkai, “he was a person in possession of many colors in the arts, there is not his equal among us...” (Wakamori 32).

It appears that Kūkai had developed an interest in calligraphy from an early age. During the Nara period, he had been devoted to the writing style fashionable among the Japanese aristocracy. At that time, the Chinese calligrapher Wang Xizhi (王羲之, 307-365) was revered as the greatest calligrapher of all time. His style of calligraphy is dictated by formal rules. Having traveled in the best calligraphy circles in Chang'an, upon his return to Japan Kūkai was highly skilled in the way of Wang Xizhi. It was Kūkai's skill in calligraphy that prompted Emperor Saga (嵯峨, 786-842, r. 809-823) to call him to court after returning to Japan, not his mastery of Tantric Buddhism. However, even with his skills, when working with the Emperor Saga, because he was the emperor, Kūkai was unable to criticize his calligraphy style and ability.

From the time of China's Six Dynasty period, a variety of tendencies in calligraphy can be seen. Wang Xizhi was from the south of China and his style was influential there. The style of the northern writing tradition came to be seen as favored by Kūkai for writing epitaphs and it is said that Kūkai drew his strength in calligraphy from that tradition (Wakamori 33). Yet, while he took in that school's methods, like other great artists, he fashioned his own hybrid style, which he brought back to Japan. Kūkai held the Tang calligrapher Yan Zhenqing (顏真卿, 709-785) of the

doctrinal classification system. The masters answered that it was in the category of miscellaneous Mahāyāna sūtras taught in the third period of the Buddha's life. Apparently, Enchō was hoping to receive confirmation from the masters that the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* should be equal in status with the *Lotus Sūtra* (Groner 289).

northern writing tradition in high esteem. From an early age, Kūkai excelled in written arts and had an apparent interest in language. This emphasis on the special use of language would become prominent in his Buddhist philosophy.

4. After Huiguo.

According to various records mentioned above, originally Kūkai had planned to study in China for twenty years. Allegedly, this changed because Huiguo was eager for the propagation of Tantric Buddhism in Japan to take place and urged Kūkai to return. There is also a legend that Huiguo's other disciples had been alarmed at Kūkai's genius and this facilitated his decision to return to Japan so soon (Wakamori 31). Another story claims that because some of Huiguo's other pupils had been greatly surprised at Kūkai's all around talent they were sorry to see him leave.

Around the time Huiguo died, at the end of the twelfth month, another delegation from Japan arrived in China with the magistrate Tōnari Takashina (判官高階遠成一行). This time the delegation was sent to officially congratulate Xian Zong on his enthronement of the previous year (Abé 1999:127).

Kūkai had been in China less than three years when he returned to Japan. It was just under half a year from the time Huiguo finished his transmission. According to the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Kūkai returned to Japan as an obligation to Huiguo to circulate good fortune to the world. However, in *Miscellaneous Studies in the History of Buddhism* (仏教史雑考), Matsumoto Bunmisaburō writes it was because funds ran short. Watanabe thinks Kūkai's age

should also be considered. “He was already 33 years old at the time of transmitting *mikkyō* and Tang culture to Japan. His lifetime was half over, he must have thought, and this may have factored into the cause for reducing the twenty years projection for studying abroad” (Watanabe 88).

After the day of Huiguo’s funeral service, the eighteenth day of the first month, Kūkai submitted an official document of request to Tōnari. This writing is seen in the *Seireishu* under the title, “I request to return to our home country with you.” In that document he writes that his sole aim is to propagate the Three Mysteries in response to the decree of heaven. He adds that waiting for the next delegation to China he would become a white haired old man (*KKZ* 6:347).

Watanabe thinks that shortly after Huiguo died, Kūkai could no longer afford to stay in Chang’an (Watanabe 89). It is unclear where he lived or who he may have studied under after that. However, in the fourth month, there is a writing by Kūkai to an official at Yuezhou (越州). In the fourth month of the previous year, Saichō had visited Yuezhou, there receiving a Tantric Buddhist *abhiṣeka* from Shun Xiao (順曉). Whether Saichō received the *abhiṣeka* into both the *Garbhadhātu* and the *Vajrakośadhātu* realms has been much debated. Groner writes, “Tendai scholars have long wanted to claim that Saichō had received these two transmissions (*ryōbu*) while in China, so that the Tendai School could compete effectively with Kūkai’s Shingon School” (Groner 53). Late in life, Saichō himself claimed to have received the *abhiṣeka* for both realms while in China (Groner 53). However, because of his eagerness to receive the *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai it is not likely that he had received it in China. In addition, Groner speculates that

Amoghavajra's tradition of dual maṇḍala may not have spread that far away from the capital.¹⁹ I doubt this is true considering his influence under three emperors. It seems more likely to me that either a separate Tantric tradition was intentionally maintained by Shun Xiao or that Saichō only received a single *abhiṣeka* due to time constraints and problems with language. According to the *Honored Spoken Memento*, there was a fellow student of Huiguo's at Yuezhou. This also leads me to believe that Saichō was constrained by time as opposed to having been limited by the unavailability of the tradition.

After Kūkai left Chang'an, there are indications that he went to Yuezhou and worked furiously on copying texts. There is an article in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* called, "Request to an official at Yuezhou for the inner and outer collections of classical writings" (KKZ 6:339). Kūkai's List of Imported Materials mentions 461 volumes of sūtras, theses and śāstras. Sources say he collected over 300 volumes in Chang'an (Watanabe 89). This means he probably copied another 161 volumes in the time he spent in Yuezhou. It was four months from the time he wrote the letter requesting the writings in Yuezhou until his parting date. According to this estimation and later legends, Kūkai wrote almost non-stop during this time, "forgetting food and sleep" (Watanabe 90). This too may suggest he had depleted his limited funds. There is no record of Kūkai meeting Shun Xiao, who gave Saichō the *abhiṣeka*, while at Yuezhou, but this persists in legend (Watanabe 90).

At any rate, it seems that for these months Kūkai may have been dependent on an official at Yuezhou, to whom he was likely introduced by someone. There is no mention of who this

¹⁹ Groner says, in support of this, Saichō only brought three short translations by Amoghavajra's to Japan (Groner 54 n. 70).

might have been or if the encounter was related to the fellow student of Huiguo mentioned in connection with Yuezhou in the *Honored Spoken Memento*. The letter to the official asks for access to writings of the Three Teachings: Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. Among these were sūtras, teachings of the vinaya, theses, commentaries, biographies, poems, verse, monument inscriptions, writings of divination, medicine and various sciences of India. Apparently, Kūkai was interested in bringing to Japan a variety of potentially helpful information. Seeing his time in China was ending, it appears he exerted a great effort for the development of Japanese culture. In addition, by bringing these items to Japan, Kūkai and others who were so motivated were able to preserve cultural items that were afterwards lost in the countries of their origin (Watanabe 91). Kūkai's interest outside of Buddhism can be seen as continuing from the time of his youth and study with his uncle. Likewise, his study in Chang'an did not only involve Buddhism but a wide range of social activities. Because of this, his contribution to Japanese culture extends to literature, calligraphy, education, construction and medicine.

5. The Return Trip to Japan.

Various stories are handed down about Kūkai and the calligrapher Tachibana Hayanari on their return trip to Japan. Poems also exist supposedly written by Chang'an poets and artists, expressing sadness to see them go. Kūkai's reply poems also exist. The following is said to have been written by his follow students at Qinglong Temple. It is addressed, "To the Japanese Tripiṭaka (master) and Superior person Kūkai, going on our Tang rivers, returning to the sea. To serve as objects paying tribute to his returning to the eastern ocean, these poems are sent..." The

poem praises Kūkai for his excellence in calligraphy, literature and his defense of the Dharma. It begins.

Just as it was said by the sages in ancient times
Who spoke the truth of suffering, explaining emptiness,
Very much should pass along from the previous six patriarchs
To the distant foreign island... (in Watanabe 91).

Kūkai had probably not left Chang'an when he received this poem. He returned a poem to *ācārya* Yizao called “Intimacy of those within the gate of Qinglong Temple” (青龍寺の門下の義操). Kūkai’s poem sent in return can be seen in Collection for Governing the Country (經国集, *Keikokushū*).²⁰ Translated by Beatrice Lane Suzuki, it is as follows.

Studying the same doctrine,
Under one master,
You and I are friends.
See yonder white mists
Floating in the air
On the way back to the peaks.
This parting may be our last meeting
In this life.
Not just in a dream,
but in our deep thought.
Let us meet often
Hereafter. (Suzuki 1931:312).

Kūkai, boarded Tōnari’s ship and together with Tachibana Hayanari left to return to Japan in the eighth month, according to the *Authentic Biography of Kōbō Daishi* (弘法大師正伝). At sea, the ship encountered a powerful storm. The wind howled and the ship was tossed in the waves so that it seemed like it could be the end for all aboard. At that point, according to many writings, Kūkai threw a *vajra* into the sky and the storm was calmed. For Shingon, a *vajra*

²⁰ A collection of the works of Chinese and Japanese poets who lived between 707 and 827 (Frédéric 2002:505).

can symbolize a sacred tool for destroying vile passions and is a symbol of *bodhicitta* (Wakamori 33). Perhaps related to the storm motif of this story, a *vajra* may also represent lightening as it is theorized to have evolved from representations of the thunderbolt weapon used by the Indian deity Indra (Frédéric 1995:64). It appears that Kūkai and Saichō may have imported the first actual *vajra* instruments (as opposed to the iconography representation of a *vajra*) into Japan (Nakamura 267). Various types of *vajras* were among the ritual implements Kūkai imported.

The story does not specify which type of *vajra* Kūkai threw. Most commonly used in Japan are five point *vajras*, three point *vajras* and single point *vajras*. The single point *vajra*, having a single point at each end of a short shaft, may represent the *axis mundi*, the union of the physical and the spiritual and, the Vajradhātu and the Garbhadhātu Maṇḍalas (Frédéric 1995:64). The three point *vajra* can represent the three jewels of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. It can also represent Shingon's Three Mysteries (Frédéric 1995:65). A five point *vajra* can represent five kinds of wisdom and the Buddhas of the four cardinal directions plus a fifth, usually Mahāvairocana, in the center (Frédéric 1995:65). Any of these ideas may arguably be applicable to the situation of Kūkai's ship in the storm. Perhaps more important is the legend that holds, when a *vajra* is thrown, one vows to establish dwelling in a temple hall in the direction in which the point of the *vajra* indicates when it lands (Wakamori 33). Among other sources, this account of Kūkai throwing the *vajra* is recorded in *Tales of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*), one of Japan's most beloved writings. The story concludes with Kūkai's retrieval of the same *vajra* which he finds hanging from a limb of a pine tree on Mount Kōya.

Also at sea on the return trip, legend says the Dragon King of the ocean appeared for the benefit of all living beings of all ages, giving Kūkai a sachet containing an amulet. This amulet was that of the Medicine Buddha (*Yakushi nyorai*) of the Golden Hall of Tōji temple, it is said. Apparently the meaning to this story is that no harm should come to the body of the one bringing the Shingon Dharma to Japan (Wakamori 34).

As explored earlier in this dissertation, the Dragon deity of the sea is an important image in proto-Shintō origin myths as in Japanese shamanic stories. Dragon deities also appear in various famous legends and literary stories of China and Japan. The Dragon image has been used in Chinese ritual situations since at least the Shang Dynasty (second millennium BCE). Throughout the ages in China, the appearance of a Dragon has been used in art and literature to symbolize spiritual insight. In Tantric Buddhist literature, the appearance of the Dragon deity has likewise served to represent what Yamasaki calls supra-rational insight. For these reasons, it is my analysis that the appearance of the Dragon deity in the story of the return trip from China might in part symbolize Kūkai's own attainment.

Chapter VI.

Return to Japan.

Kanseon Temple and Makinōsan Temple.

In this chapter I look at Kūkai's life immediately after his return to Japan. It is unclear exactly when Kūkai's returning ship arrived in Japan and what he did next. It is clear however, that in contrast with Saichō, Kūkai did not live in the capital until about three years after coming back to Japan. As with other "missing years" of his life, numerous stories exist in rural areas and temples around Japan about Kūkai's activities during this time. There is every indication that Kūkai was a man of enormous energy before and after going to China. As Hakeda points out, the three-year period before entering the capital is longer than he stayed in China (Hakeda 1972:34). Yet Kūkai does not say what he did during this time. He only mentions, "For many years after I returned from China, I was unable to propagate the teachings widely, for the time was not yet opportune" (Hakeda 1972:37).

Two temples stand out as having the most numerous stories and other supporting materials for sustaining present-day claims that Kūkai stayed there. These are Kanseon Temple in Kyushu and Makinōsan Temple in Ishikawa Prefecture on the Japan Sea in far northeastern Honshū. In my opinion, there is a good chance that Kūkai stayed at each of these temples for some period of time. In examining Kūkai's possible stay in these areas I look at his writings and touch on legends surrounding these temples. These legends include not only those about Kūkai but others circulating at the time that may have been important to him in the rather likely event that he heard them.

Other materials examined in this chapter including documents and legends concerning his alleged appearance at Kumedera in Yamato, believed to have occurred in between the time he lived and Kanseon Temple and Makinōsan Temple (see Hakeda 1972:38). At this time Kūkai is said to have delivered a lecture on the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and to have been involved in a debate among the foremost Buddhist philosophers of Japan. This event is regarded as the time Kūkai founded the Shingon tradition in Japan (Hakeda 1972:38, n. 6 [“Its unreliability is discussed by Moriyama, *Bunkashijō*, pp. 263-64”]).

In addition to staying at Kanseon Temple and Makinōsan Temple, it would have been natural for Kūkai to return home to visit his parents after his perilous journeys to and from China and his absence from them for at least the 30 months he was in China. As we have seen, Mao (Kūkai) was born in 774 in what is now Zentsūji City, the seat of Zentsūji Temple (善通寺). After returning from China, Kūkai is said to have built Zentsūji Temple in 806-7 in order to pray for the repose of his ancestors (Imaizu 602). Although Kūkai is primarily thought of as Buddhist and ancestor veneration is typically considered Confucian (or Vedic), there is a possibility that he would build a temple for his ancestors in light of at least four factors. 1) A tradition of building family temples in the cities and especially in the provinces had recently become popular in Japan. 2) Not only did Kūkai demonstrate a strong interest in Confucian thought before and after going to China, but it is clear that his family was Confucian to some extent. His uncle Ato Ōtari was a renowned Confucian scholar and Kūkai had already written *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* as an apologia about his choice of Buddhism over Confucianism. As mentioned previously, in that text he states his belief that accepting one does not mean rejecting

the other. 3) Amoghavajra had brought to China and translated a text for performing sacrifices to the *pretas* (ancestors).¹ We might guess his intentions by saying it was skill-in-means in making Tantric Buddhism more palatable to those of the long-standing Chinese Confucian tradition. 4) Due to Amoghavajra's and others efforts, there are numerous indications that East Asian Buddhism developed with many Confucian and Daoist elements.²

Zentsūji Temple takes its name from Kūkai's father, Zentsū. Today it is the seventh-fifth Sacred Place in the Pilgrimage to Eighty-eight Sacred Places of Shikoku in honor of Kōbō Daishi Kūkai. According to present-day temple legend, a person who has committed a crime cannot emerge from the darkness of the passage that runs under the temple building at Zentsūji. But Kōbō Daishi is said to appear with a light to lead a person who has practiced intense spiritual training.³ I have to doubt, however, that Kūkai was in a financial or political position to build a temple in Shikoku at that time in his life. If he did build the temple, might it not have been after he became more affluent only a few years later?

In the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Kūkai says, "I, the novice *bhikṣu* (少僧, J. *shōsō*), returned to Japan in the second year of Daidō (806-7). During the interval at sea, everyone was saying the Emperor of Japan had died and so forth. Listening to the words and asking about news of Japan, all the people on the boat debated the course of events and fought, and nothing was

¹ The idea of *preta* was somewhat incorporated into early Indian Buddhism. It became wildly accepted in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism (Matsunaga 1987 I:227).

² It is beyond the scope of this paper to enumerate these elements. Just to mention two major areas, however, related to Daoism there is the widely pervasive concept of "Buddha Nature" (see Hubbard, et al) and we might say the ideas of "lineage" so important in East Asian Buddhism could be related to the importance Confucianism places on this idea.

³ See the temple website at <<http://www.shikoku-iyashi.org/eigo/henro/tera.asp?teraid=7>>, accessed 3/8/03.

settled. I fixed my mind on reaching shore. When the boat arrived (in Kyushu), someone told us the specifics of the emperor's death. I, the novice *bhikṣu*, was full of sorrow, wearing mourning garments" (KKZ 8:44).

Emperor Kanmu died in the third month of Daidō 1 (806). According to the above-mentioned sources, Kūkai was onboard the ship when he heard about it, apparently picking up the news at a port. I would think that if someone had just brought this information via ship, Kūkai and his shipmates must have heard about it no earlier than a few weeks to a month or so after the Emperor's death (since it would have taken the informer's ship this long to cross from Japan, depending on the port where he might have heard this). Watanabe speculates that minister Tōnari Takashina likely would have had information on the emperor's death, since he lived in Chang'an during the third month, and wonders why he did not relay the news to the others (Watanabe 92). Possibly, Tōnari left Japan before the Emperor's death and no other ship had yet brought the news when they returned. Kūkai may have found out when first reaching Japan, at Hakata (博多) in the Fukuoka prefecture of Kyushu. On the other hand, Tōnari may have been suddenly dispatched to China in order to convey to the Chinese court that there had been a change of imperial reigns in Japan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Abé believes he was sent to congratulate the new Chinese emperor on his coronation.

When Kūkai returned from China his ship arrived at the port of Hakata. According to Shingon tradition, in Hakata Kūkai bought a boathouse. There he installed Buddhist images, scriptures and an altar, transforming the boathouse into a temple. His purpose for establishing the temple there was to pray for and perform rituals for the transmission and long life of the Shingon

Dharma in Japan. For this reason, the temple was named Tōchō Mitsuji (東長密寺, Eastern Long Mysterious Temple), called simply Tōchō Temple.⁴ Today the Tōchō Temple claims the honor of being the oldest sacred ground (靈場, *reijō*) of Tantric Buddhism established in Japan.⁵ The main image installed in the temple was a statue of Acalanātha (J. Fūdo Myō-ō), allegedly made by Kūkai (*Mikkyō daijiten* 1664).

According to legend, Kūkai first took up residence in Kanzeon Temple (觀世音寺) located in Chikushi (筑紫) in Dazai-fu (northern Kyushu), though this is uncertain. One record says Kūkai received an order from the emperor to reside at Kanzeon Temple, dated the twenty-ninth day of the fourth month of Daidō 2 (807) (Hakeda 38, quoting *KZ* 5:423). Whether it was Kanzeon Temple or elsewhere, it stands to reason that Kūkai spent quite some time putting his books in order and planning the propagation of Shingon in Japan. Kitagawa says, “in 807, Kūkai’s patron on Kyushu Island, Tanaka Yatsukimaro, built the first Shingon temple for Kūkai and called it Tochomitsuji or “Eastern Head Shingon Temple.” while this temple was being constructed, the court sent word that Kūkai was to remain at Kwannonji (temple dedicated to Kwannon) at Dazaifu, Kyushu” (Kitagawa 1951:134). I am more inclined to believe the following, which conflicts with Kitagawa’s interpretation.

Legend says Kanseon Temple was established by the Hossō Chief Executive (*sōjō*) Genbō (?-746) when he was exiled to Kyushu in 745. Coincidentally, although Genbō died 28

⁴ It is also called Nangakusan Tōchō Temple (南岳山東長寺). In the middle ages, Tōchō became the family temple and tomb for the Chikuzen *daimyo*, the Kuroda (黒田) family. Originally, the Kuroda family temple was in Sendai (千代町). But a theory says that in childhood the tutor of Kuroda Tadayuki (忠之) was a Shingon *bhikṣu* and this influenced him to change the family temple to Tōchō Temple. (<http://www.systemlink.com/ysr/otera/Toucyou.html>, accessed 3/8/03).

⁵ Perhaps this should qualify this by saying it is the oldest among those sacred grounds established by Kūkai.

years before Kūkai was born, they may have been in some way related through the Ato family (Imaizu 277). According to a folktale circulated since ancient times, Genbō's decapitated head gives the name to Sudō (頭塔, Head Pagoda) in Nara's Takabatake district.⁶ It is unclear how old this legend is or if it was in existence in Kūkai's time. However political scandals surrounding Genbō were well known and Kūkai likely took heed of his political successes and failures, possibly while staying at the temple Genbō had founded. For political reasons, Genbō had been banished from the capital to Dazai. It is possible that twenty-eight years later, Kūkai was sharing somewhat the same fate at the same temple with his relative.

One bit of evidence supporting the contention that Kūkai stayed at Kanseon Temple for some time comes from Kūkai's own writings. On the eleventh day of the second month of Daidō 2 (807), a memorial service for the late mother of a certain vice-minister (次官某) of Dasai-fu

⁶ Together with the literary Nara aristocrat Kibi Makibi (696-775), Genbō visited China to study in 717. There he mastered the Hossō tradition and was honored by the emperor after returning to Japan in 735. He is said to have brought back to Japan numerous Buddhist images and a large portion (5000 fascicles) of the Buddhist canon existing in China at that time (Imaizu 277). Two years later, he was appointed *Sōjō*. With support from Tachibana Moroe, Minister of the Right, Genbō became politically powerful. In 740, one of his detractors, Fujiwara Hirotsugu (藤原広嗣, 715-740) petitioned the emperor for removal of Genbō and Kibi Makibi from positions of power, blaming them for national calamities (Matsunaga 1987 I:124). The request of Hirotsugu, who had been appointed to a minor position in Dazai-fu, went unheeded. A month later Hirotsugu raised an army of 10,000 men and led a rebellion. After the Imperial army put down the rebellion, Hirotsugu was beheaded (Frédéric 2002:202). In my opinion, this may be related to the legend of Genbō's own beheading.

For unknown reasons, in 745 Genbō was relegated to Dazai-fu, where he either entered or established Kanseon Temple. Supposedly, he built Kanseon Temple in celebration of his political victory over Hirotsugu. However, according to legend, in the following year, on the day he was to dedicate Kanseon Temple, "just as he was about to enter the temple, something in the air grabbed his body and split his head open" (Matsunaga 1987 I:125). In legend, it was the vengeful ghost of Hirotsugu that tore Genbō to pieces, although it could have been flesh and blood assassins (Matsunaga 1987 I:125). The story says his head dropped off to the earth and became Sudō (Head Pagoda). Near Sudō to the east is Kagami Shrine (鏡神社), with the enshrined deity Fujiwara Hirotsugu. How long Hirotsugu has been celebrated there is not known but it seems likely related to Genbō and Sudō. In addition, to the southwest of Kagami Shrine there is the tomb mound of Genbō's ally Kibi Makibi. In the Edo period the mound shifted and the occurrence was inevitably ascribed to a curse. Whether or not it was known already at the time of Kūkai's stay in the area, the relationship of the departed spirits of the three men confined in the same region has long been celebrated as amusing and vengeful spirits are believed to have a stronghold in the area (奈良歴史漫歩 [A stroll through the History of Nara], <http://home.highway.ne.jp/ikekawa/mm021.html>, accessed 3/8/03).

was held and apparently Kūkai presided over the Dharma gathering, or at least wrote the prayer for it as seen in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.⁷ Since Kūkai must have stored his numerous scriptures, maṇḍala and ritual instruments somewhere, it is assumed that Kanseon Temple may have been the location for this.

Kūkai's *List of Imported Materials* is dated the twenty-second day of the tenth month Daidō 1 (806). Sometime after returning home, Kūkai stopped by to see the Takashina Tōnari to entrust him with this list, various ritual instruments and other materials he had brought back from China for submission to the Japanese throne. The *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai* and the *Honored Spoken Memento* both say Kūkai returned to Japan in the second year of Daidō, but, as Watanabe maintains, this might be a mistake. In the first year of Daidō, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Tōnari entered the capital and reported on his trip as seen in the *Collection of the Nation History* (*Roishū kokushi*, 類聚国史) (Watanabe 92). It is likely that Kūkai returned to Japan sometime between the first and the twenty-second day of the tenth month of Daidō 1 (806) (Watanabe 92).

Kūkai brought back from China 142 newly translated chapters of Tantric texts in 247 fascicles, 42 chapters of Sanskrit texts in 44 fascicles, 32 commentaries, essays, śāstras (etc.) in 170 fascicles. In addition, he brought “5 maṇḍala, 5 portraits of the patriarchs, 9 ritual implements, and 13 different objects given to Kūkai by his master Hui-kuo” (Hakeda 1972:34). These items and Kūkai's *List of Imported Materials* were probably presented to the emperor in

⁷ KKZ 6:448.

accompaniment with Tōnari's own report. On the day he presented these to the emperor, Tōnari was promoted to the rank of the fifth Upper Position (從五位上) (Watanabe 92).

Kūkai's *List of Imported Materials* attests to his meticulous precision in gathering and recording materials. Materials are listed in an orderly manner with dates neatly recorded. Again, this contrasts with Saichō's records and is perhaps another indication of the differences in personalities. Saichō's imported materials included 230 pieces in 480 fascicles. Saichō also brought Tantric drawings and a number of ritual instruments, according to his Taishū Catalogue (台州録, *Taishūroku*) and the Esshū (i.e., Yuezhou) Catalogue (越州録, *Esshūroku*) (Groner 47). In one and a half months in Yuezhou, making requests to his contacts at Taizhou (J. Taishū, seat of Mount Tiantai), more than one hundred works were gathered.⁸ The copies show disorderly corrections and possibly someone later scratched out mistakes. There is no record that Saichō collected materials in Chang'an.

Saichō returned to Japan one year earlier than Kūkai. While Emperor Kanmu was ill, Saichō prayed for his recovery and preformed purification rituals, growing closer to the court. Meanwhile, the government agreed to recognize two Tendai *bhikṣu* each year for annual appointments (年分度者), granting monetary allowances with the positions. In this way Tendai received national recognition and the court extended its protection to the newly imported

⁸ Groner has this to say about the articles Saichō brought to Japan. "Sources differ on the number of works which Saichō brought back from T'ai-chou. According to a document in the *Kenkairon engi* (DZ 1:276), Saichō brought back 102 works in 345 fascicles from T'ai-chou. The *Taishūroku* (*Dainihon Bukkyō zenshū* 95:230) includes a figure of 120 works in 245 fascicles in an almost identical passage. Finally, an actual count of the works in the bibliography yields 157 works in 406 fascicles. Ushiba Shingen has suggested that the *Taishūroku* may have been tampered with in order to make it compare more favorably with Kūkai's *Shōrai mokuroku* (*Dainihon Bukkyō zenshū* n. 877), but his theory has not met with widespread acceptance" (Groner 47 n. 39).

tradition. Tendai quickly gained a strong foothold and Mount Hiei became the home base for those aligning themselves with Tendai.

While Saichō was enjoying the success of his new tradition, Kūkai stayed away from the capital. This has led to speculation that he was not granted permission to enter due to a political scandal of the time to which his uncle Ato had ties (Watanabe 96). The following is a brief description of the affair with reference to Kūkai and Ato Ōtari.

Prince Iyo (?-807) was a government official in the early Heian period. He was the son of Emperor Kanmu and his mother was Fujiwara Yoshiko (藤原吉子, ?-807). Iyo's coming of age ceremony (加冠, *kakan*) was in 792. Since this ceremony was usually held for a male when he was the age of fifteen or sixteen, Iyo was probably born around 776-7. Accordingly, he was two or three years older than Kūkai, which is consistent with the timing of the tutoring provided by Ato Ōtari to the prince and to Kūkai. Iyo had successive positions as Third-class Minister of Court Ceremonies (三品式部卿), State Minister of Nakakkasa (中務卿) and Governor of Dazai-fu (太宰帥). It is clear from this that he was politically strong. In addition, he may have been close to his father, Emperor Kanmu. While Ato Ōtari instructed him in the Confucian classics, the Emperor himself was Iyo's tutor for hunting, often going on Imperial visits to villages together.

However, after Emperor Kanmu's death in the tenth month of Daidō 2 (807), a plot to kill his successor, Emperor Heizei was uncovered. First, the ringleader was identified as Fujiwara Munenari (藤原宗成, dates unknown). Upon questioning, Munemari contended that Iyo was behind the plot. Emperor Heizei, Prince Iyo's brother, arrested Iyo. His mother, Yoshiko, was

confined to Yamato Kawahara temple (川原寺) in Nara (a Shingon temple in modern times). Claiming they were innocent, Prince Iyo and his mother went on a hunger strike. The prince's social position was stripped on the eleventh day of the eleventh month. The next day he was ordered to drink poison. Afterwards, his mother killed herself in the same way.

At that time a series of political scandals and social calamities arose. Because Prince Iyo's innocence was widely accepted, Emperor Heizei's problems were attributed to vengeful spirits (怨霊, *onryō*), especially those of Prince Iyo and Yoshiko. This interpretation of history was especially accepted after Iyo's innocence was established.⁹ Under pressure and accusations, Heizei abdicated the throne to his younger brother Emperor Saga in 709. Soon afterwards Heizei plotted against Saga to regain the throne but was defeated by the army of Sakanoue no Tamuramoro¹⁰ (758-811). As a result, he became a Buddhist *bhikṣu* (see Ōsumi).

Because of the connection as tutor of Prince Iyo, Kūkai's uncle Ato Ōtani may have been banished from the capital along with Muneshige and others close to Iyo.¹¹ This sentence was overturned soon afterwards as government officials sought ways to appease the vengeful spirits.

Later, in the reign of Emperor Junna (786-840, r. 823-33), Kūkai was asked to perform a memorial service for Prince Iyo and his mother at Tachibana temple (桶寺). This fact may point

⁹ Later, Prince Iyo's innocence was brought to light and in 839 the government issued a statement to this affect. As a result, the tragedy of his death was confirmed and popular sentiment about the revengeful spirits of Iyo and his mother flourished, their spirits being seen as the cause of natural disasters. The revengeful spirit of Prince Iyo's mother is especially archetypal of this kind of belief.

In 863, there was a memorial service for the appeasement of their spirits (御霊会). In the Middle Ages the tale entered military history and through Kamigoryō Shrine (上御霊神社) the legend lived on in the religious faith of the people of Kyoto (Ōsumi).

¹⁰ According to legend, Sakanoue no Tamuramaro founded Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto. He began his military career as a lieutenant under Ōtomo no Otomara (Frédéric 2002:812).

¹¹ Kitagawa says Ato left the capital and blames Kūkai's delay in entering the capital on his uncle's problems (Kitagawa 1951:133-4).

to the intimacy or at least some connection between Kūkai and Iyo, thus adding weight to the theory that Kūkai’s entry to capital after returning from China was intentionally delayed (Watanabe 96).

Kitagawa quotes a letter to court supposedly written by Kūkai when he did not hear a response to his *List of Imported Materials*. The letter says, “Since I sent to the court a catalogue of sutras and ornaments, I have not received an official invitation to report to the capital. While waiting, I stay in this small temple, enjoying the scenery, practicing the Shingon teaching, visiting the shrines for the purpose of thanksgiving and studying the sutras” (Kitagawa 1951:134; quoting Matsumoto 131). Kitagawa continues, “Legend says this was the temple where Subhakarasiṃha (i.e., Śubhakarasiṃha) had stopped over when he visited Japan, but this is not reliable” (Kitagawa 1951:134).¹²

It appears the court was eagerly awaiting Saichō’s return, perhaps hoping to boost the campaign to limit the power of the Hossō tradition. In 804 the court requested two texts by Zhiyi (538-97) be sent from Tōdaiji (Groner,65). Saichō returned in 805 and as Emperor Kanmu’s health failed Saichō’s worked quickly to establish Tendai’s social position. On the third day of the first month of Enryaku 25 (805), Saichō suggested a revision in the ordination system that would allow Tendai two year-long government sponsored *bhikṣu* annually. Nara officials agreed but Emperor Kanmu revised Saichō’s proposal by stipulating that one of the *bhikṣu* study Tantric Buddhism, based on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Apparently Emperor Kanmu was more interested in Tantric Buddhism at the time than was Saichō, though the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (and not the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*, equally important for Shingon) would become a focus in Saichō’s life

¹² Kitagawa has Kūkai staying at Kume-dera before going to Kyūshū.

hereafter (Groner 69-70). Emperor Kanmu ordered Saichō to perform an *abhiṣeka* initiation (probably into the *Garbha* realm, although this is unclear) on the twenty-seventh day of the eighth month of Enryaku 25 (805). At that time, the emperor designated two *bhikṣu* to stand in on his behalf in receiving the *abhiṣeka* from Saichō. This was all remarkably different than the treatment Kūkai received from the throne under Emperor Heizei when he returned.

Watanabe suggests as Emperor Kanmu's health failed he may have been concerned about Kūkai's position. Although Kūkai had said that he would stay in China for twenty years, perhaps the court did not expect him to do so. Watanabe implies that this concern may have been connected to the sudden dispatch of ambassador Tōnari to China (Watanabe 97). Without debating the point unduly, I suggest if the Emperor was truly concerned about this unknown *bhikṣu* he might have provided monetary support to him, at least with the arrival of Tōnari.

According to tradition, on the eighth day of the first month of Daidō 2 (807), Kūkai left Kyushu and returned to Kume-dera (久米寺) where the *Honored Spoken Memento* says he had first found the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* under the Eastern pagoda. There he lectured on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* using the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.¹³ This event is sometimes said to mark the beginning of the propagation of Shingon in Japan.

The story of Śubhakarasiṃha coming to Japan says he stayed at Kume-dera around 718-20. There he deposited relics of the Buddha beneath four directional pagodas. Beneath the Eastern pagoda he placed the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. In the year 800, Kūkai came to Kume-dera

¹³ According to Watanabe this is recorded in the Continuous Record of Washū (Yamato) Kume-dera (和州久米寺流記) (Watanabe 98)

and found the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* Śubhakarasiṃha had left. In 807, Kūkai returned from China and began the propagation of the Shingon Dharma from Kume-dera.

Kume-dera is in Kashihara City in Nara Prefecture. Today it is affiliated with Kogi Shingon (古義真言).¹⁴ According to the Abbreviated Record of Japan (扶桑略記), in Engi 1 (901) Kume Sennin (久米仙人)¹⁵ of Yoshino Ryūmon Temple (吉野竜門寺) established the Kume-dera when he installed a sixteen-foot tall Medicine Buddha (J. Yakushi *nyorai*, S. Bhaiṣajyaguru) and images of the Medicine Buddha's two attendants the Sun Light Bodhisattva (日光菩薩像, J. Nikkō bosatsu, S. Sūryaprabha or Sūryavairocana) and the Moon Light Bodhisattva (月光菩薩, J. Gakkō bosatsu, S. Candraprabha or Candravairocana).¹⁶ However, it has been said since the Kamakura period that the younger brother of Prince Shōtoku, Prince Kume, founded Kume-dera (Imazu 243). In Yamato Province there is an inscription attributed to Kūkai at Masuda Pond (大和州益田池碑銘) from Tenchō 2 (825). In that inscription, which remains at the northeast of Masuda Pond, appears the words Kume Monastery (来眼精舍).¹⁷ The name also appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.

According to the *Honored Spoken Memento*, before going to China Kūkai found the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* in the Eastern pagoda of Kume-dera. According to the Continuous Record of Washū (Yamato) Kume-dera the monastery had a main temple building and east and west

¹⁴ See Dictionary and Glossary appended to this dissertation.

¹⁵ Kume Sennin is a legendary Japanese hermit who returns to the secular world after seeing the legs of a bathing woman one day while he was flying over a river. In popular culture today, he is the model for the depraved Master Roshi of the anime series *Dragon Ball* and *Dragon Ball Z*, who has the same name.

¹⁶ See Frédéric 1995:113.

¹⁷ In the inscription, the “me” of Kume is formed with a different Chinese graph than the one used for present-day Kume-dera.

pagodas. The complex was lost comparatively early according to the Abbreviated Record of Japan. In the seventh month of Tenkei 5 (942), lightning struck and burnt the East Monastery Great Pagoda (東院大塔) according to the Continuous Record of Washū (Yamato) Kume-dera. This possibly refers to a branch temple of Kume-dera. In the seventh month of Funmei 4 (1472) strong winds destroyed Kume-dera's pagodas.

In the Edo period, Many Jewels Pagoda (多宝塔, J. Tohōtō), which has been designated a National Treasure, was placed on the former grounds of Kume-dera's Eastern pagoda, transferred from Ninna Temple (仁和寺) in Kyoto. The foundation and large basement of the former Eastern pagoda, where Kūkai allegedly found the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, still remains. Other traces of the old monastery nucleus can be found the modern complex as well. From excavated roof tiles, it is assumed that the original temple was built in the second half of the Hakuō period (an artistic period from the late seventh to the early eighth century). (Imaizu 242.)

There is remarkably little information on Kūkai's alleged return to Kume-dera considering the abundance of Kōbō Daishi legends and the important of the lecture he delivered there to Shingon history. Only Kūkai's discovery of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* before going to China is mentioned in Kume-dera advertisements and web sites. If Kūkai did visit Nara prefecture on the eighth day of the first month of Daidō 2 (807), this is the closest he can tentatively be placed to the capital since his return to Japan. It is possible, as biographers accept, that Kūkai received Imperial instructions to proceed to Makinōsan Temple in 807. If so, it is conceivable that he stopped off at Kume-dera on his way from Kyushu to northeastern Honshu, where Makinōsan Temple is located. According to Kitagawa, Kūkai choose Kume-dera for his

first lecture on Shingon because it was associated the Śubhakarasiṃha in legend and it was where he had discovered the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (Kitagawa 1951:134). It seems as likely that he or someone later choose Kume-dera as the location where he was supposed to discover the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* because of the association with Śubhakarasiṃha, who allegedly deposited it there. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* was occasionally used in the Nara period and Kūkai would not have needed to seek it out at Kume-dera.

Kitagawa continues his account saying from the lecture Kūkai won many followers, “especially Jitsuye, a member of the same Saegi family, who later became the abbot of Toji (Shingon) temple” (Kitagawa 1951:135). He further says Kūkai received permission to enter the capital at this time, exactly one year after returning from Japan (Kitagawa 1951:134). Thereupon, “In the tenth month of 807, Kūkai reported personally to the court with the sutras and ornaments he had brought from China. He was given permission to reside at Makino-Osanji in the district of Izumi, where he had had his original experience of conversion” (Kitagawa 1951:134).¹⁸ According to Kitagawa’s account, at this time Kūkai visited Master Gonzō, who had given him the tonsure and taught him the *gumonji* practice (Kitagawa 1951:135).

As treated in a previous chapter, Kūkai is believed to have received the tonsure from Gonzō at Makinōsan before going to China. Later, legends hold, Kūkai returned to Makinōsan after coming back to Japan and resided there for two years.¹⁹ This uncertain time is often referred

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Kitagawa does not give the source/s for this and other information disagreeing with other biographies I consulted. I tend to think his source is a short and relatively obscure book entitled *Kōbō, Shinran, Nichiren* by Matsumoto Royei, Tokyo: Matsumoto Shokwai, 1919.

¹⁹ Hakeda writes, “...from 807 to the sixteenth day of the seventh month of Daidō 4 (809) he stayed in Makinōsanji in the province of Izumi [Hakeda’s footnote: This is probable but not proven. Tsuji (*Nihon bukkyōshi*, p. 301) and Moriyama (*Bunkashijō*, p. 265) accept it as a historical fact.]; that on the same day the governor of the province of Izumi was ordered to have Kūkai proceed to a Buddhist temple in Kyoto” (Hakeda 1972:38).

to in biographies as Kūkai's Makinōsan-ji period, about a two-year period when he is thought to have lived in Izumi.

According to Wakamori and others, Kūkai finally was approved to enter the capital in the eighth month of the Daidō 4 (809), not two years earlier as Kitagawa reports. At that time, he took up residence at Takaosan Temple (高雄山寺). There, Kūkai was still somewhat separated from the activities of the central government. Nevertheless, he was able to begin spreading his influence through activities likely different from those at the six large temples of Nara. This involved new scriptures and outlooks on enlightenment; viewing the profound mystery of nature; employing maṇḍala, mudrā and mantra; creating poetic expressions of symbolism and performing *goma* rituals.

Chapter VII.

The “Takaosan Period”.

In this chapter, I look at Kūkai’s activities immediately before and during the period of his first assignment as head of a temple in the capital, Takaosan Temple. As treated below, during this time Kūkai was granting various levels of the Tantric initiation (*abhiṣeka*) to both lay followers and *bhikṣu*, probably as skill-in-means for propagating the Shingon Dharma. This is usually considered one of the most important activities of Kūkai’s life in that, at least in theory, it made Kūkai the Tantric master to the recipients, which included powerful members of the Nara Buddhist establishment, Saichō, influential court aristocrats in Heian (Kyoto) and eventually Emperor Saga and former-emperor Heizei. How he suddenly came to this influential position is a matter that has received considerable speculation. Using the chronological index to the *KKZ*,¹ I locate the letters, notes and poems accordingly written by Kūkai during this period, most of which are collected in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*, thereby, reconstructing Kūkai’s activities during this period. This is compared and synthesized with information from the biographies and other sources,² which include additional facts and legends. Again, I approach this information from the point of view of Kūkai’s emphasis on “mystery” as well as speculate on possible social implications of Kūkai’s life and practices.

¹ A chronological index to Kūkai’s writings appears in *KKZ* 8:250-2.

² For the correspondence between Saichō and Kūkai, I have included translations and comments by Abé Ryuichi from his excellence study of 1995, “Saichō and Kūkai, a Conflict of Interpretation,” which I recommend for further reading on this subject.

1. Saichō and the Appointment to Takaosan.

In the eighth month of Enryaku 24 (805), Saichō's presented to the Imperial Court his list of imported materials he brought back from China. Almost immediately, on the first day of the ninth month, he was granted permission to open the Tantric *abhiṣeka* platform (灌頂壇) at Takaosan Temple. From there, he began granting some version of an *abhiṣeka*, probably based on his own preliminary initiation as a student of Buddhist Tantra in China. Although this is a secret process, it appears, according to Shingon theory, various *abhiṣeka* procedures admit students into eligibility for receiving levels of instructions accordingly. There is some indication that Saichō was unaware of this (as taken up below). In addition, students of Shingon are initiated into the various levels of two equally important realms: the realm of the Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala and the realm of the Vajrakośadhātu maṇḍala. Although Saichō's interest in Tantra seems to have been quite focused on the Garbhakośa realm in connection with the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and its Commentary, it appears from his writings he was initiated into some version of the *Vajrakośa* realm. Abé explains this as follows.

In the *Esshūroku* (the catalog of texts, iconographies, and ritual instruments collected by Saichō in Yuezhou), Saichō states, “The Master [Shun-hsiao] guided us [Saichō and Gishin] into the maṇḍala altar of the five-family *abhiṣeka* (*gobu kanjō mandara danjō* 五部灌頂曼荼羅壇上)” (DZ 4, p. 381). The Dharma-transmission document that Shun-hsiao gave to Saichō describes the maṇḍala used at the *abhiṣeka* as the “thirty-seven-deity maṇḍala of the Tathāgata Vairocana (*birushana nyorai sanjū shichison mandara* 毘盧遮那如來三十七曼荼羅).” These records suggest that Saichō was initiated into the Diamond Maṇḍala, which comprises thirty-seven principal deities representing the five distinct “families” of the Buddha, Lotus, Vajra, Jewel, and Dharma. (Abé 1995:105-6).

Because Tantra was new to Saichō, and because he could only communicate in China via his interpreter, Gishin, Abé believes Saichō may not have been aware that he was being initiated into the *Vajrakośa* realm as opposed to the *Garbhakośa* realm (Abé 1995:107). Nevertheless, before Kūkai was given the position at Takaosan, Saichō was granting what he thought of as a Tantric *abhiṣeka* to some of the powerful Buddhists of Nara. On the seventeenth day of the same month Saichō was granted the *abhiṣeka* platform, he lectured on Mahāvairocana at the imperial court. In the fifth month of the following year, 806, Tendai was granted their two annual appointments for imperial support. The imperial edict on the appointments specifies one of the appointees would study *shikangō* (止觀業, Stopping and Seeing meditation), practices described in Zhiyi's writing on the meditation of Stopping and Seeing (the *Mohe zhiguan*, 摩訶止觀). This meditative practice can be seen as the focus of Saichō's life and practice. However, at the insistence of Emperor Kanmu, the other Tendai appointee would study *shanagō* (遮那業), the study of “*Shana*” (abbreviation of a transliteration for Mahāvairocana) based on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Being a part of the most popular form of Buddhism of the Emperor and aristocracy in Tang China at the time, the Emperor of Japan had, no doubt, heard of its reputation for magical efficacy.

As shown in the previous chapter, Saichō's social position after returning from China is in stark contrast with that of Kūkai. Given Saichō's rise in power, Watanabe asks why did he not ask the Imperial Court to approve Kūkai's entry to the capital (Watanabe 97). In my estimation, just when Kūkai returned from China, Saichō was in no position to bring about the advancement of Kūkai.

Two months after granting Saichō the *abhiṣeka* platform, Emperor Kanmu died and Heizei was enthroned. Emperor Heizei's policies toward both Saichō and Kūkai differed dramatically from those of Emperors Kanmu and Saga who reigned immediately before and after Kanmu respectively. As we have seen, Kūkai was not allowed to enter the capital upon returning to find Heizei newly enthroned. Immediately after Heizei stepped down, Kūkai was allowed to enter. Likewise, whereas Kanmu had granted Saichō two government sponsored appointees, this was suspended under Heizei. Three years later, when Heizei abdicated, Emperor Saga, who was the sixth son of Kanmu, not only reinstated Saichō's appointees but also allowed him six appointees that year to make up for the two years of appointees lost while Heizei was on the throne. Later in life, at the age of 60, in a letter to a court official, Kūkai wrote that he was only able to retrieve his imported materials presented to the court after Emperor Saga was enthroned.³ Emperor Heizei may have been indifferent to the cause of Buddhism. However, in light of the later conspiracy to reinstate Heizei and relocate the capital to Nara, it is possible that his alliances were with the Nara clergy rather than newly imported Buddhism of Saichō and Kūkai, supported under the Kanmu and Saga administrations.⁴

From this we see during the reign of Emperor Heizei, Saichō may have been struggling with the losses of his own position. However, with the enthronement of Emperor Saga, various records suggest perhaps Saichō was instrumental in bringing Kūkai to the capital. At the very least, Saichō's success in establishing an *abhiṣeka* platform at Takaosan opened the door for

³ Letter to Fujiwara Fuyutsugu. See Abé 1995:109.

⁴ Later, retired-emperor Heizei received the *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai (Abé 1999:42). This may have been related to his son Shinnyo becoming an avid follower of Kūkai (see below).

Kūkai to propagate the Shingon Dharma through his own granting of various *abhiṣeka* at Takaosan.

Takaosan was the family temple of the Wake clan (和気氏). At the time of Kūkai's appointment, Wake Matsuna (和気真綱, 783-846) was the head of the family. His father, Kiyomaro (清麻呂, 733-99) was a close friend of Saichō. Kiyomaro is known in literature as a staunch supporter of Emperor Kanmu and was instrumental in building the new capitals at Nagaoka and Heian (Frédéric 2002:1026). Matsuna's older brother Hiroyo (弘世) was also an enthusiastic patron of Saichō (Groner 34 n. 27). According to the *Continuation of the Continuing Record of Japan* (*Shoku nihon kōki*), it was due to the support given to Tendai by Wake Matsuna that Shingon was established (Watanabe 98). Kūkai may have developed a friendship with Matsuna (Kitagawa 1951:135). Watanabe speculates that the person who introduced Kūkai to Wake Matsuna was either Saichō or Fujiwara Kudomaro (Watanabe 98). Kudomaro was the ambassador Kūkai accompanied to China. After Saga was enthroned, Kudomaro became the imperial tutor to the heir-apparent, Prince Takaoka (later known as Shinnyo, one of Kūkai's "Ten Disciples"), son of ex-emperor Heijo.

If Saichō was instrumental in Kūkai's appointment, what were the motivating factors? Within a month of being appointed to Takaosan, Saichō began borrowing numerous texts from Kūkai. Watanabe believes Kūkai's appointment at Takaosan was payment for the loaned texts, rendered by Saichō's patron Wake Matsuna (Watanabe 98). Interpreting one of Saichō's correspondence with his pupil Taihan might support this view (although Watanabe does not cite this as evidence of his theory). Further motivation on Saichō's part for installing Kūkai in

Takaosan might be his belief in Kūkai’s superior knowledge of the *abhiṣeka* (attested to in Saichō’s letters to Kūkai examined below), Saichō’s continual desire to retreat from public office into a life of research and meditation (held in popular view and affirmed in various writings), Saichō’s failing health and, in light of these other factors, Saichō’s belief that the Shingon (Tantric) Dharma and the Tendai (Lotus) Dharma were the same (also seen in Saichō’s letters to Kūkai and to Taihan, examined below).

In a letter to his former student Taihan, Saichō writes about Kūkai and the *abhiṣeka* as follows.

To my Dharma-colleague (*dōbō* 同法) Teacher Han [Taihan] at Takashima:

I, Saichō, the decrepit priest of Mt. Hiei, cordially announce to you the opportunity to receive the transmission of *abhiṣeka*.

On the twenty-seventh day of the last month, during the course of my pilgrimage, I took lodging at Otokuni-dera and paid reverence to the Teacher (*ajari* 阿闍梨) Kūkai. Painstakingly detailed and exhaustive was his instruction to me. He personally showed me the images of the deities of the three “families” (*sanbu* 三部) and their maṇḍalas. We made a promise about [the *abhiṣeka*] at Takao. I will first depart to Takaosan-ji. The Teacher [Kūkai] will resign from his post [of *bettō*] at Otokunidera and will make his permanent residence at Takaosan-ji... We have decided that the tenth day of the twelfth month will be the day of initiation. I beg you, my great Dharma colleague, hurry back to Mt. Hiei, complete your preparations here, and come to Takaosan-ji on the twenty-seventh of this month. Do not hesitate to accept my invitation. I will relay to you the details of the initiation through my messenger. Kōnin. Your humble Dharma-colleague, Saichō (Abé 1995, 114; translating from the *DZ* 5:462–63).

Saichō’s phrase, “We made a promise about [the *abhiṣeka*] at Takao,” is immediately followed by the announcement that Kūkai will resign his post at Otokuni Temple and come to Takaosan. Based on this, my interpretation of the promise is that it refers to Saichō’s arrangement for Kūkai to be appointed to Takaosan so that he may grant the *abhiṣeka* to Saichō

and his pupils. It is unclear from this and other letters what relationship Saichō saw between Kūkai and himself, if his term *ajari* (S. *ācārya*), which Abé translates as “teacher” was being used in a generic fashion. To the other extreme, in light of the theory of *Sokushin jōbutsu*, Shingon’s ultimate goal of becoming (or realizing one is) a Buddha in this lifetime, a Tantric *ācārya* is one who has become a Buddha.

If Saichō was responsible for Kūkai’s appointment at Takaosan, he did a great service for the propagation of Shingon. The number of people Kūkai had to involve in the *abhiṣeka* was tantamount to establishing his religious organization and this had to have been in place as a prerequisite to that ceremony (Watanabe 102). In “Writing on Being Selected for the Appointment as *Sangō* (三綱) of Takaosan Temple,”⁵ in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*, probably written in the ninth month of Kōnin 3, Kūkai writes of how he would be able to propagate the Dharma since being appointed *Sangō* of Takaosan. The *Sangō*, had three responsibilities. He was in charge of instructing the people of the temple; serving as head of administration including running the buildings and monitoring temple regulations. It was his duty to appoint three officials to carry out these tasks (KKZ 6:638 n. 2). Kūkai was able to gain pupils and to appoint his most trusted of these in to key positions. Kūkai appointed Gōrini (果隣) to the position of Dharma instructor (上座, J. *jōgi*); Jitsue (実恵) to be head of temple administration (寺主, *terashi*) and; he appointed Chisen (智泉) as director of on-going daily matters of temple regulations as (維那 J. *yuina*) (Watanabe 103). These pupils became the early core of Kūkai’s operations, which we probably should not at this point call “Shingon-shū,” a

⁵ KKZ 6:617.

Shingon “school” separate and distant from the other Buddhist traditions of Japan. Instead, apparently at that time, individuals primarily associated with each establish tradition would supplement their studies with Kūkai’s Three Mysteries teachings, practices, rituals and *abhiṣeka*.

Of equal importance in considering Kūkai’s return to the capital and sudden rise in prominence is the role in this played by Emperor Saga. Kūkai’s pupil Shinzei collected eleven letters Kūkai sent to Saga from 809 to 816. With the exception of one of these, all are in response to the Emperor’s interest in Kūkai’s knowledge and expertise of poetry and calligraphy. “The letters show that Saga repeatedly asked Kūkai to produce calligraphic works, to engage in exchanges of poems, to submit to the court samples of poetry and calligraphy as well as textbooks on poetics and calligraphic technique, and other related works Kūkai had acquired while in China” (Abé 1999:43).

In the fourth month of Daidō 4 (809), Emperor Saga was enthroned at 24 years of age. That year, Kūkai was 36 years old. There is a letter in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* from Kūkai to Saga acknowledging that on third day of the tenth month of Daidō 4 (809) the Emperor sent retainer (Ootomari) Yamase no Toyotsugu (山背豊繼, dates unknown) to visit.⁶ This would have been at Takaosan. The purpose of the letter is explained in the title Shinzei gave the document in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*: “Reporting the Presentation of the ‘Worldly Stories’ Folding Screen Presentation to the Imperial Court” (勅賜世説屏風書畢獻表). Worldly Stories refers to the “Worldly Stories and New

⁶ KZ 10:51; KKZ 6:268.

Tales” (世説新語, C. *Shishuo xinyu*, J. *Sesetsu shingo*), a three volume work by the Chinese writer Liu Xiqing (劉義慶) of the Southern dynasty. The work includes tales of the nobility and literati from the Later Han to the Eastern Jin periods. Kūkai brushed this work (or some part of it) in his calligraphy style and presented it to Emperor Saga. The letter of presentation is the first documented record of their familiarity. Judging from the numerous requests for Kūkai’s calligraphic works for over a decade to follow, the Emperor, himself an expert calligrapher, must have been duly impressed with Kūkai’s ability in this area.

In the ninth month of Kōnin 1 (810), Fujiwara Kusuko (藤原薬子) and his older brother Nakanori (仲成) attempted a *coup d'état* aimed at reinstating ex-emperor Heisei and relocating the capital to Nara. However, the plot was uncovered and as a result, Nakanori was put to death and Kusuriko committed suicide. The retired emperor and his third son, Prince Takaoka (高岳親王)⁷ became Buddhist *bhikṣu*. Immediately following the resolution of the scandal, on the twenty-seventh day of the tenth month, Kūkai wrote to Emperor Saga from Takaosan, asking permission to perform rituals to bless the *abhiṣeka* of ex-emperor Kanmu and for the protection of the country.⁸ The letter mentions several sūtras he imported to Japan, presumably for the first time.⁹ Offering to chant *dhāraṇī* found in these sūtras, as taught to him in China by Huigou, Kūkai writes as follows.

⁷ The prince became one of Kūkai’s Ten Great Disciples (十大弟子), taking the name Shinnyo Shinnō. Shinnyo went on a pilgrimage seeking the Dharma in India. It is said that he died in the region of the peninsula of Malaysia. See Chapter XII of this dissertation.

⁸ KZ 10:51; KKZ 6:269.

⁹ *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* on Benevolent Kings Protecting Their Countries (仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經), T. 246; Protection of the Country and King *Dhāraṇī* Sūtra (守護国界主陀羅尼經), T. 19 n. 997; and the Peacock Mother of the Buddhas (*Mahāmāyūrrividyārājñī*) Sūtra (仏母大孔雀明王經), T. 19 n. 982.

“The Buddha made these scriptures for the protection of the country, protection from destruction and the seven misfortunes (七難) through the four seasons, protection of the country, protection of the people, from my own tranquility to the tranquility of another person. These are the mysterious and subtle scriptures of the path” (KZ 10:52.).

Imperial sanction for the service/s was granted on the first day of the 12th month. This approval may have been given because these particular services for the protection of the country had never been performed in Japan before (Watanabe 99).

Around the same time, according to the Essential Record of Tōdai-ji (東大寺要録), from Kōnin 1 (810) to Kōnin 4 (813), Kūkai was given the additional appointment as *betto* (別当, intendant) at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara (Watanabe 99). Also, after the fifth month of Kōnin 1, retired Emperor Saga requested a prayer of mourning for the *bodhi* (菩提) of Prince Iyo and his mother, Fujiwara Yoshiko. Kūkai wrote the prayer for the dedication of a Buddhist image carved from sandalwood (KKZ 6:385).¹⁰

Over the next several years, Kūkai continued to submit a large array of items to the court and elsewhere. Since many of these are not listed in his List of Imported Materials, it is unclear if he brought all of them back from China or obtained them elsewhere. In the eighth month of Kōnin 4 (813), he presented one volume entitled the “assorted written letters,” including writings allegedly in the handwriting of Tang Chinese Emperor De Zong, original works in the handwriting of Tang poets, numerous Buddhist writings, epitaphs for Chinese and Japanese persons, his dictionary of Sanskrit characters and works of calligraphy.¹¹

¹⁰As stated in the previous chapter, Kūkai’s uncle Ato was the imperial tutor for Prince Iyo around the same time he was tutor for Kūkai.

¹¹ See Watanabe 100.

According to a letter by Kūkai dated the seventh day of the sixth month of Kōnin 3 (812),¹² he presented badger hair writing brushes (狸毛筆) to Emperor Saga's brother, Prince Otomo, who later became emperor Junna. Kūkai says a famous brush maker in China by the name of Guiben Xiaoquan¹³ (槻本小泉) presented the brushes to him. Japanese calligraphers were already using rabbit hair and sheep hair brushes. Kūkai was the first to import badger hair brushes. Craftspeople in Japan today sometimes credit Kūkai for introducing their style of brush making to Japan.¹⁴

With a letter dated the twenty-ninth day of the seventh month of the same year (812),¹⁵ Kūkai submitted various works of literature, a collection of miscellaneous poems, a collection of poems by the Tang Chinese poet Wang Changling (王昌齡集, 698-757), a collection of poems by Tang poet Zhu Qiancheng (朱千乘詩), who sent Kūkai a parting poem when he was leaving China, a volume of poetry of Wang Zhizhang (王智章詩, Tang Dynasty) and poetry by Zhu Zhou (朱昼, 785-804).

On the ninth day of the eleventh month of Kōnin 2 (810), he was given the position of *bettō* of Otokuni Temple (乙訓寺) located in Nagaoka, south of Kyoto. The next year, he was relieved of this obligation (Watanabe 101). A year later, on the twenty-ninth day of the tenth month of the Kōnin 3 (811), he must have received Prince Otomo at Otokuni. In an undated letter

¹² *KKZ* 7:68-9; further explained in his letter of 813, *KKZ* 6:275-6.

¹³ Rendered here according to the Mandarin reading.

¹⁴ For example, see <<http://www.kougei.or.jp/english/crafts/1105/d1105-1.html>>, accessed 3/8/03.

¹⁵ *KKZ* 6:276-8.

and poem to the Prince, Kūkai speaks of Otokuni Temple in the introduction and mentions in the poem it is rare to see a plum as cold weather is coming on.¹⁶

In 811 Kūkai granted Jitsue *abhiṣeka* into both realms. Jitsue was twenty-five years old at the time. According to legend, in the same year Kūkai and Emperor Saga together received a Shintō *abhiṣeka* (Kitagawa 1951:137).¹⁷ Affirming the later syncretistic trend in Shingon, this would have made Kūkai an initiate of both Buddhist and Shintō traditions. Kūkai is said to have written the following poem on the occasion.

Among various ways to become a Buddha
The most potent way is
Kami-no-michi (or ways of gods) (Kitagawa 1951:137).

2. Living Proof of *Sokushin jōbutsu*: Kūkai becomes Henjō.

The events of another often-repeated legend placed at this time, although not found in the earliest biographies, are important to Shingon today. The incident is said to have occurred on the fourteenth day of the first month of Konin 4 (813). At that time, Emperor Saga called a gathering at court of the leaders of eight Buddhist traditions in Japan: the six traditions of Nara plus Shingon and Tendai. The purpose was to hear the philosophical basis for each tradition. Over the course of the day, the Nara leaders explained their doctrines, specifying that three *kalpas* (an extremely large number of years and lifetimes) are required for an aspirant to attain Buddhahood. However, when it was Kūkai's turn to speak he contradicted his predecessors by explaining the

¹⁶ *KKZ* 6:281-2.

¹⁷ Kitagawa says the *abhiṣeka* was unknown to Shintō in earlier times but, “was adopted by Onakatomi-no-Kiyomaro and became a popular rite in the Miwa school of Shinto,” (Kitagawa 1951:137).

theory of *Sokushin jōbutsu* (realizing Buddhahood in this lifetime). According to the story, Kūkai explained this doctrine as follows.

“First, for humans, to know truth one must know one’s own mind. To know the origin of one’s own mind is to know the mind of the Buddha. To know the mind of the Buddha is to know the mind of all sentient beings. In this way, the truth of the world is realized. To do so is to unify with all life through the physical body and become a Buddha. To do so, the body, speech and mind of the Buddha, called the “Three Mysteries” and body, speech and mind of the human, called the Three Actions (三業, J. *sangyō*) are mutually coordinated in life. Human beings seek the wisdom of the Buddha and overlook the fact that they possess the mind of the Buddha. By the body one’s parents give in birth, one may quickly realize the condition of the Buddha. Profoundly and deeply the course of Becoming a Buddha is advocated.”¹⁸

However, the story continues, the leaders of each tradition were skeptical, this being the first time they had heard this doctrine. So, Kūkai formed a *mudrā* with his hands, recited a mantra with his mouth and became absorbed in concentration in his mind, thus invoking the Three Mysteries. His appearance suddenly became that of a Buddha. Specifically, from his body suddenly came a golden light of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana, and he was seen as sitting in the center of the eight petals of a lotus. The virtuous *bhikṣu* of the seven other traditions were astonished and everyone worshiped Kūkai as Mahāvairocana, even Emperor Saga came down from the throne and worshiped. Accordingly, at that time, the miraculous attributes of *Sokushin jōbutsu* were revealed as explained in Kūkai’s writing, *The Meaning of Realizing Buddhahood (Sokushin jōbutsu-gi)*.

¹⁸ From the web site of Shingon’s Betsuin monastery of Hōfuku Temple (法福寺別院,) in Tokyo <<http://www.hofukuji-betsuin.com/shinko.html>>, accessed 3/8/03. The web site also offers to read a person’s “physogamy” (meaning of one’s physical features) and couples this information with the *kaji* power of Shingon for the benefit of the health and welfare of the individual, for 5000 yen (currently about \$50 US). Also, see Wakamori 45-6).

For some Shingon practitioners, the miraculous attributes of *Sokushin jōbutsu* in this story are possible. Such individuals point to similar stories indicating that at the time Śākyamuni Buddha entered Nirvāṇa (*jōbutsu*), a golden light issued from his body and kings bowed down to worship him (see source cited in note 18).

3. Saichō, Kūkai and Taihan.

From the tenth month of the same year (811) to the tenth month of Kōnin 3 (812), a period of one year, Kūkai and Saichō met at Otokuni Temple (Imaizu 99). Kūkai received his appointment to Takaosan in the seventh month of Daidō 4 (809). The following month, on the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month, Saichō sent his pupil Kyōchin (經珍, dates unknown) to Kūkai to borrow twelve newly imported Tantric scriptures. The letter of request is preserved in the Letters of Dengyō Daishi (伝教大師消息) and is the oldest known correspondence between Saichō and Kūkai (Watanabe 98). Clearly, Saichō had looked over Kūkai's List of Imported Materials. Less clear is whether the list was what first brought Kūkai to his attention (although I have argued in previous chapters that this is unlikely). Ryuichi Abé closely examined the surviving documents identified as correspondence between the two (although the authenticity of a number of these have been doubted). In so doing, he surmised by the tone of the earliest existing letter that it was not the first correspondence between the two (Abé 1995:110).

It is not understood why Saichō wanted the particular texts he requested from Kūkai (Groner 78). In one letter,¹⁹ Saichō states his intention of copying all the scriptures declared in Kūkai's List of Imported Materials, perhaps in attempt to booster the Tantric aspect of the Tendai tradition. Before breaking off relations with Kūkai, Saichō had copied half of those scriptures (Groner 78).

Examining the letters to Kūkai from Saichō, Abé found Saichō's purpose in writings usually involved requests to borrow scriptures or requests for Tantric instructions. According to the chronological index to the *KKZ*, Saichō's letter requesting Kūkai grant him the *abhiṣeka* was sent in the second month of the Kōnin 2 (*KKZ* 8:195). Saichō's letter reads as follows.

To the Great Teacher of Takao:

I, Saichō, will visit the capital on the fourteenth day of this month. It is in the constant thoughts of this humble priest to receive your kind instructions and to study the secret school (*himitsushū* 秘密宗). However, I have not been able to make myself available, and years have passed. At this opportunity I would like to visit your temple to receive the *abhiṣeka* for the single deity of Vairocana (*henjō isson kanjō* 遍照一尊灌頂). For about seven days I would like to join your disciples and study your Dharma gate. If you, Master, could accept my request with your boundless benevolence, I will be at your side immediately. Your humble disciple, Saichō (Abe 1995:110; *DZ* 5:456).

It is important to notice from the wording of this and other letters to Kūkai from Saichō, that he is presenting himself to Kūkai as a disciple. By Shingon thinking, Saichō's reception of the Tantric *abhiṣeka* is or should represent acceptance of Kūkai as his Tantric master (*ācārya*). Specifically, this means as *ācārya* Kūkai is *Henjō*, the "Everywhere Shining," a living incarnation of Mahāvairocana, equally capable as Śākyamuni. This may be the meaning of the story about Kūkai taking on the appearance of Mahāvairocana during the lecture in Nara.

¹⁹ *DZ* 5:460.

With each level of the *abhiṣeka* comes the instructions of the *ācārya*. Of utmost importance to Shingon is the mysterious mind-to-mind transmission of the Dharma, *ishin denshin* (以心傳心 *C. yixin chuanxin*).²⁰ Accordingly, this is how Kūkai was able to master the Tantric teachings of Huigou in less than two years. He specifically uses the expression in one of his letters to Saichō.²¹ In addition to mind-to-mind transmission, Kūkai also required face-to-face transmission (面授口訣, *menju kuketsu*)²² of his pupils: in-depth oral instructions directly from him (as specified in a letter to his pupil Enzō [dates unknown]).²³

In contrast with Kūkai's view of mind-to-mind transmission of the Tantric Dharma, Saichō's letters suggest his own study of Tantra had been limited to texts. In addition, Abé points to Saichō's use of the expression “*isson kanjō*” (single deity *abhiṣeka*) in the letter above as an indication that his understanding of *abhiṣeka* differed from that of Kūkai.

The *isson* (single deity) in Kūkai's vocabulary - as well as in that of later Tendai esotericism - refers to a ritual meditation directed toward a particular deity, in contrast to meditations upon the multiple deities in the maṇḍala. Because in Kūkai's system the *abhiṣeka* is always performed before the maṇḍala images, the terms *isson* and *kanjō* are contradictory. This appears to reflect the difference between the *Mikkyō* initiation received by Saichō and that received by Kūkai. (Abé 1995:111)

²⁰ The term 以心傳心 (mind-to-mind transmission) appears in the following places in the *Taisho Tripitaka*, a number of which are associated with the Chan/Zen tradition. *T.* 35 n. 1735 p. 563a01; *T.* 36 n. 1736 p. 17a08; *T.* 36 n. 1736 p. 62b01; *T.* 36 n. 1736 p. 68a02; *T.* 44 n. 1848 p. 307b08; *T.* 44 n. 1850 p. 422b18; *T.* 44 n. 1850 p. 422b18; *T.* 46 n. 1937 p. 901b04; *T.* 46 n. 1955 p. 990c13; *T.* 46 n. 1955 p. 992b01; *T.* 47 n. 1973 p. 351b04; *T.* 47 n. 1988 p. 545b08; *T.* 47 n. 1998Ap. 813b02; *T.* 47 n. 1999 p. 959a01; *T.* 48 n. 2007 p. 338a18; *T.* 48 n. 2008 p. 349a29; *T.* 48 n. 2009 p. 373b13; *T.* 48 n. 2012Ap. 381b04; *T.* 48 n. 2012Ap. 383a24; *T.* 48 n. 2015 p. 400b20; *T.* 48 n. 2016 p. 417c01; *T.* 48 n. 2016 p. 673c03; *T.* 48 n. 2016 p. 940a18; *T.* 49 n. 2035 p. 177c17; *T.* 49 n. 2036 p. 650b20; *T.* 49 n. 2037 p. 872b13; *T.* 49 n. 2037 p. 885c10; *T.* 50 n. 2061 p. 724b25; *T.* 51 n. 2076 p. 272a06; *T.* 51 n. 2076 p. 307c10; *T.* 51 n. 2076 p. 348c09; *T.* 51 n. 2076 p. 349c28; *T.* 51 n. 2076 p. 432b09; *T.* 51 n. 2077 p. 542b13; *T.* 51 n. 2077 p. 640c26; *T.* 51 n. 2080 p. 777c19; *T.* 51 n. 2080 p. 783a24; *T.* 54 n. 2131 p.1141a14; *T.* 55 n. 2183 p. 1164b17.

²¹ *KZ* 10:166.

²² See *Mikkyō daijiten* 2155a.

²³ *KKZ* 3:273, 実相般若經答釈, *Jissō hannanyakō tōshaku*.

In the fifth month of Kōnin 3 (812), Saichō became seriously ill and appointed his successors on Mount Hiei, Taihan (778–858?) as head administrator (*sōbettō*) and Enchō (772–837) as head *bhikṣu* in charge of transmitting the Dharma (*zasu*) (Groner 81). However, Taihan was unhappy in the position and left Mount Hiei to return to his home province of Ōmi. In a letter to Saichō explaining his departure, Taihan does not mention the specific problem he was having but wrote he had “repeated offenses that merely polluted the sacred realm” (Abé 1995:112; *DZ* 5:136-7). Following this, Saichō repeatedly urged Taihan to return to Mount Hiei. Abe’s suggests the following.

Both Taihan’s letter and Saichō’s reply suggest that the former’s departure was caused by a serious dissension among Saichō’s disciples. In his letter Saichō comments, “Recently, our temple is rife with annoyances and distress. The novices, attendants, and teachers of every hall speak words of slander against one another” (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, *DZ* 5, p. 465). Taihan was not the only priest who left Mt. Hiei—according to a document written by Saichō in 819, out of the twelve ordinands who entered the two curricula between 807 and 812, only two, Kōjō 光定 (779–851) and Tokuzen 徳善, remained at Mt. Hiei (*DZ* 1, pp. 250–52). Many defected to the Hossō school, while a few left for Takaosan-ji to study *Mikkyō*. The defections, which persisted for several years, weakened the institutional foundation of Saichō’s new school (Abé 1995:112).

Facing these problems with his fledgling Tendai tradition, Saichō sent a letter to Kūkai at Okuni Temple asking for his help and cooperation. The letter dated the nineteenth day of the eighth month of Kōnin 3 (812) is as follows.

To the Teacher Henjō [Kūkai] of the West:

I thank you for your letter expressing your willingness to transmit the Dharma to me. How wonderful that with your timeless kindness you have kept your promise. The matter of transmitting and spreading our two schools is constantly in my thoughts.... These days, people are difficult to guide and teach; they hardly meet the government’s qualifications for the ordination. But the Vairocana school

(*shanashū* 遮那宗) and Tendai interfuse with one another. They also share the same commentary.... There should be no such thing as preferring one to the other. The *Lotus* and the *Golden Light* are those texts to which the previous emperor [Kanmu] devoted himself, and there exists no difference between the One Unifying Vehicle [of Tendai] and Shingon. I thus beg your help every year in finding suitable students [for the *shanagō*]. Please wait for my visit, when I will discuss this matter with you in detail. Your disciple at the East Mountain [Hiei], Saichō (Abé 1995:112-3; *DZ* 5:456).

The problem Saichō was having with the loss of students is reflected in the line “These days, people are difficult to guide and teach.” He adds near the end, “I thus beg your help every year in finding suitable students.” Clearly, Saichō, is attempting to convey the conviction that “there exists no difference between” Tendai and Shingon, adding, “They also share the same commentary,” referring to the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.²⁴ However, from this we notice a disparity between Saichō’s view of Tendai and Shingon and Kūkai’s distinction between the two traditions, as later specified in his *Jūjūshinron*.²⁵ Saichō’s view follows the doctrine of *Ekayāna* (一乘, One Vehicle) found in the *Lotus Sūtra*. In that sūtra, the Buddha explains to his disciple Śāriputra the existence of the various and contradictory teachings of the so-called Three Vehicles of Buddhism as follows.

The Tathāgata, by means of the One Buddha-vehicle, preaches to all living beings the Law; there is no other vehicle, neither a second nor a third. Śāriputra! The laws of all the buddhas in the infinite, numberless tactful ways and with various reasonings and parabolic expressions, expounded the laws for the sake of all living beings. All these laws are for the One Buddha-vehicle [so that] all those living beings, who have heard the Law from the buddhas, might all finally obtain perfect knowledge” (Katō 60).

In the *Jūjūshinron* and *Hizō hōyaku* Kūkai is not opposed to the analysis that Tendai and Shingon are related. However, in Kūkai’s view the teachings of Tendai represent a stage of

²⁴ *T* 39 n. 1796.

²⁵ However, Saichō was also later critical of Kūkai. The philosophy of both likely developed over the years.

human development remedial to the ultimate “mysterious” (*himitsu*) realization reached through Shingon. In the section on Tendai in the *Hizō hōyaku* Kūkai writes as follows.

Question: Can the principle that in truth there is ‘One Dharma-realm (法界, *dharmadhātu*), One Path’ be considered the ultimate teaching of the Buddha?

Nāgārjuna said,²⁶ “The principle that in truth there is ‘One Dharma-realm, One Path’ is not that which claims hundreds of negations, it is not that which claims thousands of affirmations nor is it the middle-path. That which is contrary to the middle-path is contrary to heaven (i.e., ultimate truth). Since it is contrary to heaven, the flowing stream of its argument is restrained and insufficient. Deprived of the capacity for further deliberation, thus this state of mind (一心, J. *isshin*) lies in the region of ignorance and not in the realm of wisdom.”²⁷

For Kūkai, not only is Tendai thought remedial to the ultimate realization attainable through Shingon, but he specifies those identifying with Tendai teachings as having the Eighth Stage of Mind, remedial also to the stage of mind of those associating with the teachings of the Kegon (C. Huayan) tradition. In fact, Kūkai’s views are much closer to those of Huayan than to Tendai,²⁸ at least the ideas of Tendai through Saichō’s time. Even so, in the section on the Tenth Stage of Mind, Kūkai states the preceding nine states are related to the many-in-one mind consciousness (J. *ta-ichi shinshiki*), i.e., discrimination of individual objects rather than the one-in-one consciousness (J. *ichi-ichi shinshiki*) of Shingon (Yamasaki 1988:97). Reaching the Tenth Stage of Mind, the Shingon practitioner realizes the Knowledge of All Knowledge (一切智智, J. *issai chichi*, S. *Sarvajñajñāna*), “knowledge of the omniscient one’s” (Kiyota 1982:150). Found

²⁶ The passage which follows is quoted from the Commentary on the Treatise on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith (釈摩訶衍論, C. *Shimohoyenlun*, J. *Shaku makaen ron* T. 32 n. 1668) attributed to Nāgārjuna, which may refer to the “Tantric Nāgārjuna” rather than Nāgārjuna of Mādhyamika. That Commentary states if the principle that in truth there is ‘One Dharma-realm, One Path’ is compared to that of mysterious (or ‘esoteric’) Buddhism, the former is considered to lie in the border of ignorance. This text is central to Kūkai’s philosophy and he quotes it often. The passage Kūkai quotes here is found at T. 32 n. 1668:37c12-c15.

²⁷ T. 77 n. 2426:371c18-c22.

²⁸ See Onozuka and Ishi.

in scriptures as a part of an epitaph for the Buddha Śākyamuni, in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, *Sarvajñajñāna* refers to the omniscience of one who has realized identity with Mahāvairocana (Kiyota 1982:150). According to Kūkai, this mysterious realization cannot be achieved through the teachings of Tendai or any tradition other than that of Shingon.

Saichō's former pupil Taihan apparently became convinced of this as well, likely through Kūkai's tutoring. Although Saichō had appealed to Kūkai for help recruiting students, Saichō's own pupils were abandoning him in favor of Kūkai, including Taihan. It was Saichō who had sent them, believing Shingon and Tendai were the same. Likely, Kūkai convinced them to the contrary.

Saichō wrote the letter to Taihan quoted earlier in this chapter on the fifth day of the eleventh month of Kōnin 3 (812) in hopes of bringing Taihan back to Mount Hiei. Saichō invites his former pupil to join him in receiving an *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai. Although Taihan refused to come back to Mount Hiei, he agreed to join Saichō in receiving the *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai. Taihan was to remain with Kūkai for the remainder of the latter's life, becoming one of Kūkai's top pupils (Ten Disciples).²⁹ Loss of the alliance with Taihan must have been a blow to Saichō, who had designated Taihan as a successor. In one of a number of appeals to Taihan to return to Mount Hiei, four years after the letter to Kūkai concerning the equivalence of Tendai and Shingon, Saichō maintains this conviction. On the first day of the fifth month, of Kōnin 7 (816), Saichō again sent a letter asking Taihan to leave Takaosan and return to Mount Hiei. Therein, Saichō asks Taihan, "The One Unifying Vehicle of the Lotus (*Hokke ichijō* 法華一乘), the One

²⁹ Shinga lists Taihan as one of Kūkai's ten leading disciples, in his report to the imperial court in 878 (Abé 1995: 122 n 14). This report filed forty-three years after the death of Kūkai, may have been the origin of the Ten Disciple theory, which parallels the life of Śākyamuni.

Unifying Vehicle of Shingon (*Shingon ichijō* 真言一乘) - what difference in excellence could there be?" (Abé 1995:113; *DZ* 5:469).

Following this, on the eighth day of the seventh month of Kōnin 7 (816), Kūkai received imperial permission to build the temple complex at Mount Kōya. He entrusted Taihan and Jitsue with its founding. Taihan appears to have been keenly interested in receiving Kūkai's teachings and the two had become close. Based on what is purportedly Kūkai's value of the mysterious transmission of the Shingon Dharma, I am assuming that the two believed they had established a mind-to-mind connection, unlike Saichō and Kūkai or Saichō and Taihan. In that light, we may see the intent of Taihan's response to Saichō's letter above asking what difference existed between Tendai and Shingon. That response follows.

I, Taihan, am so dull that I can hardly distinguish soy beans from wheat. How could I separate gems from pebbles? However, because I cannot remain forever perplexed by your thundering question, I would like to state my view, one that is as narrow as that through a bamboo pipe. The Tathāgatas, the great teachers, provide the medicine of Dharma according to the capacities of their patients. They prescribe myriad medications corresponding to countless proclivities in people.... And yet the Dharmakāya Buddha unfailingly distinguishes himself from the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha. How, then, could there be no difference in depth between the exoteric and esoteric teachings? The teaching of the Dharmakāya is absolute, hidden, and ultimate, while the teaching of the Saṃbhogakāya is relative, apparent, and provisional. Therefore I am now immersing myself in the nectar of Shingon and have no time for tasting the medicines of the exoteric schools. (Abé 1995:130-1).³⁰

It is a possibility that this letter, echoing Kūkai's point of view so closely, was actually written by Kūkai himself.

³⁰ See *KKZ* 6:664.

4. The Rift Between Saichō and Kūkai.

Even in the unlikely event that an advanced hermeneutical study someday ‘proves’ all the letters currently labeled correspondence among Taihan, Saichō and Kūkai are apocryphal, as apologists of Saichō’s philosophy have tried to convince others with greater or lesser success on the bases of individual letters for centuries, there is ample evidence from a variety of other sources to support the argument in this chapter that Saichō and Kūkai had an irresolvable difference in interpretation of the Dharma. This difference specifically involved Kūkai’s notion of the mysterious teachings. This is not said to disparage Saichō but, if anything, to exonerate him of alleged shortsightedness. After all, the position history has assigned to Saichō in this matter and elsewhere can be interpreted as that of a defender of the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* as he understood them, a lover of scholarship and as one with a predilection for tranquil meditation. If the stories concerning the rift between the two, from biographies past and present, are fabricated (as all stories tend to be to some extent), that would not diminish the consistency of the principle behind those stories with numerous other sources. In short, from Kūkai’s point of view concerning the mysterious teachings, it would be difficult to think of a more fitting legend of the conclusion to the relationship than the one handed down to us today.

As seen in the letters above, Saichō asked Kūkai to grant him and his pupils a Tantric *abhiṣeka* and to lend him numerous newly imported scriptures. In the tenth month of Kōnin 3 (812), Saichō attended the annual lecture on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* held at Kōfuku Temple in Nara. Before returning to Mount Hiei, Saichō visited Kūkai at Otokuni Temple to arrange for receiving the *abhiṣeka*, and to borrow the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*, perhaps discussing the possibility of Kūkai’s appointment at Takaosan in return for these favors. Afterwards, a friendship seems to

have developed between the two. Kūkai visited Saichō on Mount Hiei and they exchanged poems and letters of amiable tone. Kūkai’s poem to Saichō appears in *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* under the title (probably given later by Shinzei) “Poem on Mid-life Interests” (中壽感興詩).³¹ The poem is about the Mañjuśrī ritual manual,³² which Saichō borrowed from Kūkai afterwards (Abé 1995:127).

Saichō arrived at Takaosan on the fourteenth day of the eleventh month of Kōnin 3 (812), and the next day received the “*Abhiṣeka* for Connection to the Vajra Realm” (金剛界の結縁灌頂) from Kūkai (Watanabe 104). Today in the storage room of at Takaosan is the *Abhiṣeka* Record (灌頂記) said to be in Kūkai’s own calligraphy, recording the name of Saichō and three other recipients at that time, two of whom are members of the Wake family.

It appears that Saichō did not realize there would be separate *abhiṣeka* for each realm, *Garbhakośadhatū* and *Vajrakośadhatū*, and was not prepared to stay at Takaosan longer than one day (Abé 1995:115). On the day he received the first *abhiṣeka* (the fifteenth day of the eleventh month), Saichō sent a letter to Taihan requesting provisions be sent to Takaosan (Abé 1995:115). On the nineteenth day, he wrote a letter to Fujiwara Fuyutsuga (藤原冬嗣), requesting assistance while preparing to receive the *abhiṣeka* (Abé 1995:115),

It was likely impossible for Kūkai to rush this process. Apparently a large number of assistances were involved in the *abhiṣeka*. Each of these individuals required special instructions from Kūkai, the most extensive being given to the recipients. Reflecting the disproportionate interest in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* as compared to the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* among aristocrats

³¹ *KKZ* 6:245 and *KZ* 10:45.

³² *T.* 1195.

and *bhikṣu*, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Kūkai granted the “*Abhiṣeka* for Making a Connection with a Buddha of the *Garbha* Realm” (胎藏界の結縁濯頂) to 190 persons³³ at Takaosan. This was one month after Saichō received his first *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai.

Abé believes the disproportionate number of recipients of the *Garbha* Realm *abhiṣeka* reflects Saichō’s interests and urging of pupils. He further concludes, “This suggests that Saichō had no intention of adopting the entirety of Kūkai’s *Mikkyō* into the Tendai’s *shanagō* curriculum, and was determined from the outset to absorb only certain elements, particularly from Kūkai’s Matrix tradition. In fact, Saichō never included the study of the *Vajrasāekhara Sūtra* and its Diamond Maṇḍala among the official requirements for *shanagō* students. (Abé 1995:120). Though Saichō may have been mainly (if not exclusively) interested in the *Garbha* realm, in light of his situation at the time, one must wonder if he alone still held such influence over a large number of pupils. In my view, it is far harsher to regard Saichō as insincere than unaware of Shingon protocol as Kūkai understood (or fabricated) it, which would have been no fault of his own. Regardless, of his intent at the time, it soon became apparent from letters that Kūkai believed Saichō to be more interested in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, and intent on simply copying the *Vajra* realm scriptures Kūkai had imported from China rather than practicing their teachings under his instructions.

Probably in 816, Kūkai instructed Saichō to immediately return two scriptures he had kept for four years, the first book of Zheng Guan’s (澄觀) new *Commentary to the Huayan* in ten

³³ Concerning this number Abé writes: “Although the *Kanjō rekimyō* gives the total number of Matrix (*Garbha*) initiates as 145, the actual list of initiates shows that the figure 145 corresponds to the number of students originally registered prior to the *abhiṣeka*. Numerous additions and alterations of names in the list suggest that the actual number of students initiated on the fifteenth of the twelfth month was far greater than the 145 originally expected. KIUCHI identifies the total of the Matrix initiates as 194” (1984, p. 149) (Abé 1995:116).

volumes³⁴ and the ritual manual on *Ucchuṣma* (鳥枢沙摩, *J. ususama*) in one volume.³⁵ Saichō wrote a letter dated the tenth day of the second month of 816, stating he was not finished coping the texts but he would return them, “because of the urgent request in your letter,” (Abé 1995:121; *DZ* 5:450).

In an undated letter, which Abé suggests was written by Kūkai in late Konin 3 (812) since it appears Saichō has received the first *abhiṣeka* but not the second, Kūkai admonishes Saichō for trying to study Tantra through scriptures only, without a teacher. According to Kūkai, such a procedure puts Saichō at risk of violating a Tantric precept. That being the case, I assume that if Kūkai complied, he too would be in violation of the precept. The letter opens cordially but quickly assumes an air of gravity. The relevant conclusion is as follows.

As I mentioned to you before, it requires personal instruction to transmit the teaching of the scriptures you asked to borrow. Let me state again my principle [for teaching Mikkyō]: It requires a special occasion to reveal the profound Dharma of the maṇḍalas; it takes beings of exceptional capacity to promulgate it. The great masters [Shingon patriarchs] who established the method of transmitting the Dharma left admonishments to the followers of latter ages not to violate the *samaya*. Thus it is not my will that grants or deprives you of [the Mikkyō transmission]; it is your own mind that either attains or loses it. My only wish is to demonstrate with my own hands to you the mudrās, to convey to you mantras through my own mouth, and to transmit [Dharma] to your mind. I hope you clearly realize this principle (Abé 1995:123).³⁶

From the letter we see Kūkai has previously warned Saichō, who has committed himself to Kūkai as a pupil of the *ācārya*, about this issue of the requirement of the instructions of a master in approaching Tantric texts. Yet even after this letter, Saichō persisted in borrowing texts

³⁴ *T.* 1735.

³⁵ *T.* 1225.

³⁶ See *KKZ* 6:667.

apparently in his quest to copy all of the scriptures Kūkai brought from China. Kūkai's expression "it takes beings of exceptional capacity to promulgate it," seems to refer to Saichō's intention of becoming qualified to grant the *abhiṣeka*. Kūkai's statement, "It is not my will that grants or deprives you of [the *Mikkyō* transmission]; it is your own mind that either attains or loses it," is significant in a number of ways. It tells Saichō that he must undergo more training and Kūkai cannot just grant the advanced *abhiṣeka* without that training. That is, Saichō cannot be qualified to grant the *abhiṣeka* or to read certain scriptures without further training. It also implies mind-to-mind transmission, which was either not established or not yet cultivated to a sufficient extent to qualify him for the above. Does the sentence point to Kūkai reaching a decision that Saichō does not possess the mental aptitude for realization of the mysteries? If so, in order to remain consistent with other writings of Kūkai (which is certainly not a requirement), we must assume that this was not seen by Kūkai as a permanent state, that Saichō was at the Eighth State of Mind and needed time to advance. This may explain why Huiguo recognized Kūkai as an advanced student immediately, requiring a short amount of time to realize the ultimate truth, relative to Saichō. That is to say, in Huigou's view Kūkai was already at the Tenth Stage of Mind (or its equivalent) when he went of China, having studied Tantra in Japan and accepting its teachings as ultimate.

Scholars have identified another letter as "directly responsible for ending the affiliation between Saichō and Kūkai," (Abé 1995:124). Dated the twenty-third day of the eleventh month of Kōnin 4 (813), Saichō entrusted his follower Jōsō (貞聰) with a letter to Kūkai. The letter asks

to borrow and use the *Risyusyakukyō* (理趣积経)³⁷ (Groner 84). The *Risyusyakukyō* is a commentary on the *Path to Truth Sūtra* (*Adhyārḍhaśatikā prajñāpāramitā*) translated or written by Amoghavajra (*Mikkyō daijiten* 2266).³⁸ We can guess the reason for Kūkai's concern in a letter about the *Rishushakukyō* to another pupil, Enzō. In that letter, Kūkai warns the scripture uses violent and sexual metaphors not to be taken literally and “esoteric meditation that cannot be discussed on paper, that must be transmitted face to face from master to disciple” (Abé 1995:125).³⁹

Kūkai flatly refuses to let Saichō borrow the *Risyusyakukyō*. The lengthy letter to Saichō stating this appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* under the title, “Writing in answer to the master Saichō of Eizan concerning the *Risyusyakukyō*.”⁴⁰ A significant section from around the middle of the letter reads as follows.

In regards to your search for the Path to Truth, what path of truth are you seeking?... One who is unenlightened should follow the path of the Buddha. If one follows the path of the Buddha necessarily *sanmaya* should be observed. If *sanmaya* is transgressed there is no merit for the person receiving or transmitting the teachings. The rise and fall of the Mysterious Storehouse (秘藏), depends on it being giving to you by me. If you do not receive the Dharma, if I do not transmit the Dharma, then in the future, people seeking the Dharma, how will they grasp the intention of seeking the path of knowledge? Without the transmission and reception of the Dharma, this is called stealing the Dharma and cheating (or deceiving) the Buddha. Also, the inner points of the Mysterious Storehouse are not given or grasped in writing. They must be passed by mind-to-mind transmission.⁴¹ Literature is the dregs.⁴² Literature is rubble. If you love dregs and rubble, then you lose (the distinction between) the provisional truth and the

³⁷ T. 1003.

³⁸ T. 243.

³⁹ 実相般若経答积 (*Jissō hannyakyō tōshaku*), *KKZ* 3:273.

⁴⁰ *KKZ* 10:163-8; *KKZ* 6:667-76.

⁴¹ Here is an example of Kūkai using the expression mind-to-mind transmission of the Dharma, (以心博心 *J. ishin denshin* C. *yixin chuanxin*), *KZ* 10:166.

⁴² i.e., the most worthless part.

ultimate truth,⁴³ you throw away truth and pick-up lies. It is the Dharma of foolish people. The Dharma of foolish people, you must not follow, you must not seek. Also, people of old times sought the path for the sake of the path. People today do so to be famous. When fame is sought, seeking the path is not the aim. When seeking the path is the aim, one forgets oneself and becomes the path of the Dharma” (KZ 10:616).

This letter to Saichō reaffirms Kūkai’s conviction that the path to ultimate truth must be transmitted from mind-to-mind, *ācārya* to pupil. Elsewhere in the letter, he specifies that the practice of the Three Mysteries rather than the reading of scriptures is the path to realizing Buddhahood. Kūkai uses similar words in his letter to Emperor Saga requesting permission to build a temple complex on Mount Kōya. In that letter Kūkai writes, “The sūtras say, however, that a mendicant who avails himself of anything without permission is a thief. The rise or fall of the Dharma, indeed, depends on the mind of the emperor” (Hakeda 1972:47). This lends credibility to the letter to Saichō and suggests they may have been written around the same time.

The thrust of the letter to Saichō is clear. Saichō must cease to follow the path of the Buddha as he has heretofore understood it and accept Kūkai’s version of that path as superior. As Abé observes, “Obviously, it would have been impossible for Saichō to accede to this demand. To acknowledge that *mikkyō* study requires a training method distinct from his own would have been tantamount to accepting Kūkai’s distinction between Shingon as an esoteric school and Tendai as an exoteric school. To recognize such an unbridgeable difference between Shingon and Tendai would have defeated Saichō’s aim in establishing the *shanagō* curriculum, that is, the grafting of *mikkyō* onto the Tendai Lotus school. Saichō’s breaking off of his relationship with Kūkai must therefore have occurred immediately after he received this letter” (Abé 1995:127).

⁴³ literally “the fashionable truth and the arrived at truth.”

While scholars have suggested Saichō was insincere about his intentions from the beginning, it is interesting that none of the studies I came across mentioned the possibility from the other side. Is it not as likely that Kūkai realized once Saichō had copied all of the scriptures he possessed and received certification for granting the *abhiṣeka*, his own use to Saichō would be exhausted. If indeed Saichō had been instrumental in Kūkai's appointments in exchange for favors, dragging out the process as long as possible, at least until gaining political momentum himself, could only be in Kūkai's political interest. In my opinion Kūkai's (or the author of the letter's) line of reasoning is strictly consistent with the philosophy of other writings attributed to Kūkai, making the possibility that Kūkai was stalling appear more remote. I wonder, however, why the letter was only added to the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* at the time of the compilation of the tenth fascicle. Did Shinzei, the direct pupil of Kūkai who compiled the first seven fascicles, not have access to this letter in his time?

After Kūkai's refusal, Saichō ultimately soured toward him. In 813 when the relationship with Kūkai was still amicable, Saichō composed the *Meaning of the Dependence on Tendai Doctrine (by Other Traditions)* (*Eyō tendai gishū*, 依憑天台義集, DZ 1:343–66). In 816, after the break with Kūkai, he added a new introduction to this work. In the new introduction, he accuses the leaders of the Nara Buddhist traditions of ignoring the influence Chinese Tiantai scholars had on the thoughts and writings of their own traditions. Concerning Kūkai, Saichō now added, “The esoteric Shingon Buddhist, the newcomer, went so far as to deny the validity of transmission through writing (*hitsuju*, 筆授)” (Abé 1995:129, translating DZ 3:344).

As for Kūkai’s view of the rift, his letter makes it clear that he is speaking to Saichō as his Tantric master regardless of what it might do to whatever friendship they may have had. Kūkai’s tone seems quite patient considering that even after years of contact, Saichō had not ascended from what Kūkai considered the Eighth Stage of Mind. Kūkai’s view, both of the ‘mysterious’ and his position in their relationship, is perhaps best seen in the appellation with which he signs the letter. Kūkai signs, “Shaka Henjō,” the Buddha (or Buddhist) Everywhere Shining (i.e., Mahāvairocana).

As we saw in a previous chapter, Watanabe points out Kūkai often signed his letters and poems “Shamon Kūkai.” Throughout his biography of Kūkai by that title (*Shamon Kūkai*), Watanabe makes his view clear that the name *Shamon* (S. *śramaṇa*), homeless or wandering mendicant, captured the essence of Kūkai’s life and thought, more so than the founder of any other Buddhist tradition of Japan. For the purposes of this dissertation, the suitability of this term is intensified by the fact that it appears to have its root in the word we pronounce in English shaman. I would like to point out the equally appropriate title by which Kūkai also signs a number of letters and poems, including his letter to Saichō above: Henjō. The term Henjō (遍照) is mentioned hundreds of times in all varieties of scriptures recorded in the *Taishō Tripitaka*. It is fairly clear from Kūkai’s writings that for him it means Mahāvairocana. Kūkai signs his letter to a governor⁴⁴ dated late Spring of Kōnin 10 (819) “Shamon Henjō.” He also signs his undated poem to Atsuma no Hakase⁴⁵ “Shamon Henjō,” as he does a letter to a minister written at the

⁴⁴ *KKZ* 7:104.

⁴⁵ *KKZ* 7:105; *KZ* 10: 215.

time he was founding Mount Kōya (819).⁴⁶ His Poem for the Eightieth Birthday of Gomyō (護命, 750-834),⁴⁷ dated Tenchō 6 (829), is signed “Henjō Kongō” (Henjō Vajra) as is his “Ten Delusions Poem.”⁴⁸ In his prayer dedicating the pagoda at Mount Kōya, he refers to himself as “Shamon Hengō Kongō.”⁴⁹ He also refers to Mahāvairocana as Henjō,⁵⁰ the Honored Henjō (遍照尊),⁵¹ the Tathāgata Henjō,⁵² the Dharma King Henjō (遍照法王)⁵³ and Dharmakāya Henjō (遍照法界)⁵⁴ in numerous writings. It is unclear why, if there is a reason, Kūkai signed one way on some occasions and another way on other occasions. It is possible that he only used Henjō to sign letters to those who had received the *abhiṣeka* from him, but I cannot verify this or find consistency based on any other factor.

⁴⁶ *KKZ* 7:103-4; *KZ* 10: 215.

⁴⁷ *KKZ* 6:658.

⁴⁸ *KKZ* 6:677.

⁴⁹ *KKZ* 6:612; *KZ* 10:145.

⁵⁰ e.g., *KKZ* 3:69 and *KKZ* 4:58.

⁵¹ *KKZ* 2:288.

⁵² *KKZ* 2:200; 2:490; 2:542; 3:439; 4:364.

⁵³ *KKZ* 3:111.

⁵⁴ *KKZ* 3:643.

Chapter VIII.

Mount Kōya.

1. History and Early Legends of the Founding of Mount Kōya.

At the highest point, Mount Kōya (Kōyasan) is 985 meters above sea level. It is 5.5 kilometers East to West and 3.3 kilometers wide with a level top. Eight smaller peaks surround Mount Kōya and in the Kamakura period these came to be seen as the eight petals of a Lotus flower, Mount Kōya at the center being the Tantric Pure Land (蜜巖浄土, *mitsugon jōdo* also called 蜜巖佛国, *mitsugon bukkoku*).¹ A long, narrow basin forms the flat mountaintop. From there, a clear stream runs in a gorge below, gathering from the center of the basin and flowing eastward. This and other conditions are considered favorable for ascetic living on the cold mountain. There are many mountains in the Kii district. But there is only the Mount Kōya complex on those mountains. In his youth, Kūkai walked throughout the Kii mountains, practicing asceticism and meditation at Takano (Kōya) Mountain. We can only speculate on how long he had the location in mind for the center of his future assembly, the home base for Shingon.

Kūkai founded the complex on Mount Kōya in Kōnin 7 (816) when he was 43 years old. In a letter dated the nineteenth day of the sixth month of that year,² Kūkai asked Emperor Saga for permission to build a few small structures on Mount Kōya. In that letter, Kūkai mentions famous Buddhist training grounds in India and China. Concerning the *bhikṣu* of Japan, he says, “It is regrettable, however, that only a few are of the four *dhyāna* and have practiced *nyūjō* (入

¹ See *Mikkyō dijiten* 2107.

² *KZ* 10:139; *KKZ* 6:601.

定) in mysterious³ marshes of solitary mountain wilds.⁴ This is because the teachings of contemplation⁵ have not been transmitted; a suitable place has not been allocated.”⁶

In the portion of the letter above, Kūkai is referring to the scholastic nature of Nara Buddhism, contrasting it with the meditative practices he hopes to propagate. Saichō has a similar view of the Buddhism of the rich temples in Nara, expressing a positive view of meditation in the mountains in contrast to temple life. Yet, what this meant for Saichō and Kūkai was profoundly different. Japanese Tendai, as conceived by Saichō, included the so-called “complete teachings,” as well as Tantric teachings and precepts. The complete teachings are characterized by the doctrine that one is all and all is the same. This is central for Tendai and, as stated in the previous chapter, can be seen as related to Saichō’s rift with Kūkai. In addition, like the Chinese Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi, Saichō was deeply committed to meditative practice. As seen in Kūkai’s letter above, contemplation was called *zen*⁷ before the formation of the various traditions of Japanese Zen Buddhism, the popularity of which came about after the time of Kūkai and Saichō, in the warrior period. By means of *zen* passions are suppressed. Through it, by stopping ideation, a pure and clear mind is sought. This condition is known as *munen musō* (無念無想, no idea and no conception) and was championed by Saichō and Tendai. The nature of reality is realized through this state and this is called *satori* (Wakamori 51). At the time of Kūkai

³ 幽.

⁴ This has the feel of being a literary quote. However, if so, I am unaware of its source.

⁵ *zenkyō*, 禪教.

⁶ KZ 10: 140. I have not used Professor Hakeda’s translation here because he left out the specifics of the meditations Kūkai mentions and does not convey Kūkai feelings in describing the mountains. For this dissertation these are important indications of mystery. Prof. Hakeda’s interpretive translation of the section below is adequate for the purposes of this dissertation.

⁷ Since this is not the tradition of Zen with which we are most familiar, I will distinguish the term by italicizing (as it is a foreign word) and keeping the first letter in lower case (as it is not the established traditions of Zen to which I am referring). I will refer to the later established traditions of Zen without italics and with a capital Z.

and Saichō, the proper setting for practicing *zen* was thought to be the mountains. Since the Nara period, many Buddhists had undertaken that kind of study.

From the position of later Japanese Tantric Buddhism, the mountains are the mysterious embodiment of the Womb World (*garbhadhātu*). This may have been understood by Kūkai at the time, but probably not by Saichō. Today, both Tendai and Shingon traditions view the realms of the maṇḍala as the “mountain in the mountain” (*yama e yama e*)(Wakamori 51). In my view, this was important for Kūkai’s and not Saichō’s mountain practice, because the aim of Kūkai’s practice was to becoming Mahāvairocana.

The Nara Buddhist establishment also had a belief that mountain visits contributed to understanding of the Buddhist truths. Even before the existence of the Japanese nation, mountain spiritual beliefs are thought to have flourished. It was believed that the mountains were the places spirits went after death. Two seemingly opposite positions apparently existed simultaneously. In one case, after death it was thought that the appearance of a person’s spirit changed into various terrible looking apparitions and inhabited the mountains. In the other case, the mountains were thought to be a pure and sacred world. In addition, those horrible spirits were not those of people who had died of natural causes but from tragic deaths due to illness or war. The spirits were thought to be up in the mountains between the heavens and the earth, changed into *goryo* or *onryo*, revengeful ghosts cursing those living everyday life. Because of this, people prayed for a peaceful sleep for the spirit of the dead. Festivals were held with this in mind, later merging with the Buddhist *oban*.

Japanese Buddhism came to incorporate other aspects of this thought in study and practice as well, particularly concerning the time *bhikṣu* spent in meditative concentration in the

mountains. Mixed with the idea of achieving *satori* in the mountains, there is a vision of one's own death. We see this in Kūkai's poem on the "The Nine Appearances of Death"⁸ of a corpse. From the position of Japanese Buddhism, one should observe certain religious rules of etiquettes towards mountain spirits. The *Nembutsu* (chanting Praise to the Buddha Amitābha) memorial service and other practices arose to bring *goryo* and *onryo* under control. Likewise, Buddhists, particularly those of Shingon and Tendai, in the Heian period and afterwards performed exorcisms. Early schools read sūtras and gave lectures for this purpose. Later, the Shingon Dharma of incantation was singularly employed.

After Kūkai's time, *bhikṣu* entering the mountains to practice meditative concentration often recited the *nembutsu* and performed exorcism in order to somehow capture the spirits with these practices (Wakamori 52). Mount Hiei's *kaihōgyō* (回峰修行) practice (the mountain running practice of the so-called "marathon monks") also arose in response to these beliefs (Wakamori 52).

Shingon's negotiations with mountain spirits became deeply embedded in the tradition, later spreading with growth of the popularity of the Yamabushi of Shugendō. It should be remembered that before going to China and likely afterwards, Kukai was involved with this kind of ascetic concentration in the mountains. For this reason, the other world aspect of the mountains and the Tantric Buddhist Dharma became mixed in Japan. Mount Kōya, Kukai's ultimate place of study and meditation, can be interpreted within this setting.

Returning to Kūkai's letter to the emperor, he continues as follows.

⁸ KZ 10:173-6

According to the meditation sutras, meditation should be practiced preferably on a flat area deep in the mountains. When young, I, Kūkai, often walked through mountainous areas and crossed many rivers. There is a quiet, open place called Kōya located two days' walk to the west from a point that is one days' walk south from Yoshino. I estimate the area to be south of Ito-no-kōri in Kinokuni [Wakayama-ken]. High peaks surround Kōya in all four directions; no human tracks, still less trails, are to be seen there. I should like to clear the wilderness in order to build a monastery there for the practice of meditation, for the benefit of the nation and of those who desire to disciple themselves (Hakeda 47).

Near the end of his life, Kūkai recalls in the *Honored Spoken Memento*, “In Kōnin 7 (816), I traveled to the southern mountains of Kii especially to practice *nyūjō* (*samādhi*). I made a one *ryō* thatched hut, leaving my former residence of Takaosan, I crossed and entered the southern mountain. The peak, high and steep, was distant from the populous. At the time I lived under the protection of the Vidyārājas (J. *Myō-ō*).⁹ Often, colleagues say it is my nature to be used to mountains and water and neglect human affairs. I became a floating cloud” (KZ 7:254). The same appears in the *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai*¹⁰ and a number of other sources.

Legends surrounding the founding of the Mount Kōya complex are extensive with some variation. One story says while in China Kūkai prayed for a Tantric training ground in Japan. There, from the beach at Mingzhou (明州) he threw a three-pronged *vajra* into the sky, where it disappeared. Other versions of the story (as seen in a previous chapter) place the event of throwing the *vajra* into the sky during a storm encountered at sea on his return to Japan. In the summer of Kōnin 7 (816), Kūkai is said to have gone in search of the three-pronged *vajra* in the Mountains of Kii. When he reached the Uchi (宇智) district, he met an eight-foot tall giant

⁹ “The Vidyārājas (Japanese *Myō-ō*) are kings of mystic or magical knowledge symbolizing the power and the victory of the five Jinas over the passions and desires” (Frédéric 1995:202).

¹⁰ KZ 8:10.

hunter with a red beard, armed with bow and arrows. The hunter, who was the deity Kariba Myōjin (狩場明神) in disguise, had two dogs, one black dog and one white dog. The hunter told Kūkai the three-pronged *vajra* was on Mount Kōya. Guided by the dogs, Kūkai was led further up the mountain to the goddess Nibu Myōjin, who some accounts say was the mother of Kariba Myōjin. She guided him to the mountaintop where the three-pronged *vajra* was hanging from the branch of a tree. This story has been in circulation from ancient times as one of the earliest legends of the life of Kūkai. Some version of the legend appears in the *Honored Spoken Memento* and the *Biography of Sōzu Kūkai*. It also appears in the Kongōbu-ji Record of Practice (金剛峯寺修行縁起), *The Honored Biography of Kōbō Daishi* (弘法大師御伝), *Kōya Daishi Honored Wide Biography* (高野大師御広伝), *Record of the Lineage of Kōbō Daishi* (弘法大師行化記) and elsewhere (Watanabe 143). These sources present the story as a legitimate part of his biography. The story is also seen in the *Collection of Stories Past and Present* (*Konjyaku monogatari-shū*, 今昔物語集) and in the *Tales of the Heike* (平家物語). It is discussed extensively in the *Record of the Rise and Fall of the Genji and Heike* (源平盛衰記) (Watanabe 143).

Today, near the pagoda on Mount Kōya there is a pine tree called the Three-prong Pine (*sanko no matsu*). This is said to be the fifth generation of the original pine where Kūkai found his *vajra* hanging. The *vajra* itself is said to be at Kongōbu-ji on Mount Kōya. Indeed, the *vajra* there was made in the Heian period and is today designated a national treasure. Also, a Shintō shrine for Nibu Myōjin stands by the stream on Mount Kōya. By its entrance are stone images of the dogs. This also may explain why dogs are the only animals allowed at Mount Kōya (Hall 7).

Watanabe alludes to several sources¹¹ that state a minister named Toyoda Maru (豊田丸, dates unknown) was instrumental in securing the Emperor's approval of Kūkai's request for Mount Kōya. Toyoda Maru was the father of one of Kūkai's "Ten Great Disciples," Vinaya Master Enmyō (円明, ?-851). Whether this is true or not, it appears Kūkai did pursue channels in the hierarchy towards making the request of the emperor. In an undated letter from Kūkai in the *Miscellaneous Writings of Mount Kōya*, Kūkai mentions his desire to establish a center for meditation at Mount Kōya, asking permission perhaps of a local minister or provincial governor of Kii. He begins the letter either making light of the difference between him and the recipient of the letter or making it clear that he will return the favor, as he states in the end. The letter, in part, says, "People of old had a saying...The setting sun in the west returns to the east, the dawn clouds go to the west." After several of these aphorisms Kūkai gets to his point about Mount Kōya, "Please secure permission from the emperor for me to build one or two thatched huts there. My pupils, *bhikṣu* Taihan and Jitsue have already departed for that purpose. With begging bowl for protection of the Buddha Dharma, the circle and square can be mutually helpful. I would be very appreciative, very appreciative. The mendicant (I) will visit in the autumn moon of coming year without fail" (KZ 10:191).

We can see something of Kūkai's living conditions when first arriving at Mount Kōya from a letter of appreciation, not addressed, for a donation of a silver ornament. Apparently, the donation had been made in the winter of 818 and Kūkai remained unaware of it until the spring of

¹¹弘法大師弟子譜, 円明伝 and 高野大師御広伝, Watanabe 148.

819, since he was at Mount Kōya instead of Takaosan where the gift was sent. Now, aware of the donation, Kūkai writes as follows.

The mendicant (I), in the winter month (the 11th month) of Kōnin 9 settled with tranquility in Nangaku (南嶽) of the Kii district. In the Spring of the tenth year, the silver ornament was entrusted to the kindness of Kuzū (葛生). Being intended for this plot of land it is being transferred from Takaosan Temple. Opening the writing, I received your instructions. Seeing the pleasant things written, I think of the person. Thus, I wanted to offer a response. Kuzū (葛生) gave it to Chinzei (鎮西) and did not return so that matter has for a long time now been neglecting, I know.

Below remote pines, I feel like a person of white clouds. Autumn moon once pressed the Spring flowers to open up. Every morning, every night, who can endure nine cycles? ... Shamon Henjō.¹²

Accordingly to this letter, Kūkai went to Mount Kōya in the 11th month of Kōnin 9 (818) and was there through the winter and into the spring. It is probably the case that he and others coming and going, lived in one or two thatched huts on the mountaintop, as he had mentioned in the letter to the emperor. We can also see the conditions there in the following lines from a letter dated the 12th month (probably of Kōnin 9 818). “In the extremity of winter, lonely coldness. How to surrender thought and stop movements? I, Kūkai, since the second third of the last month, came to Mount Kōya to dwell. I am confined to a thatched hut I built and I am not hastening to rejoin people” (KZ 10:219; KKZ 7:115).

There is another writing preserved in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* under the name “Writing of invocation at the time of the first connection (with a Buddha)

¹² KZ 10:215; KKZ 7:104.

during the foundation of Kōya (高野建立初結果啓白文).¹³ The text beginnings, “(I) Shamon Henjō *Vajra*, speak in reverence to all the Buddhas of the ten directions, all the assemblies of the Dual Great Maṇḍala, all those of the heavens of the five realms extending to the deities of heaven and earth in Japan, in line with all the spirits of this mountain’s earth, water, fire, wind and space.”

The first building established at Mount Kōya was Kongōbu-ji (金剛峯寺), literally, *Vajra* Peak Temple. The name was based on the Japanese name for the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra* (*Kongōbu rōkakuitsusai yuga yuki-gyō*, 金剛峯樓閣一切瑜伽禪經) (Watanabe 152). The invocation above is in dedication of Kongōbu-ji. It shows Kūkai’s interest in tying the local deities with those of Buddhism. On the third day of the fifth month of Kōnin 10 (819), a Dharma gathering was held for seven days and seven nights for establishing the flat area on top of Mount Kōya as a sacred place by the power of all the Buddha’s and all other deities (Watanabe 151).

The flat top of Mount Kōya is still called *garan* (伽藍, S. *saṃghārāma*), the sacred precinct. Originally, Kūkai intended for all of the buildings on Mount Kōya to be in the *garan*. However, by the Edo period there were a thousand temples on the mountain. Today only 123 remain, 53 of which are *shukubō*, temples providing lodging for pilgrims and tourists. Like many of the sacred shrines in Japan these buildings are regularly rebuilt. Kūkai’s original *garan* consisted of the Main Hall (Kondō), the Great Pagoda (Dai-to) and the Western Pagoda (Sai-to). There is also an area called *honchū indani* (本中院谷, original valley of the central building),

¹³ KZ 10: 145; KKZ 6:612.

where the original clearing of trees by Kūkai, Taihan and Jitsue is believed to have take place (Watanabe 152).

Kūkai conceived the layout of the buildings at Mount Kōya as forming a maṇḍala. Viewing the temple buildings on mountains and the mountains themselves as maṇḍala is not unique to Mount Kōya, although Kūkai was likely the progenitor of the idea in Japan.¹⁴ The Great Pagoda corresponds to the Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala, while the Western Pagoda depicts the Vajrakośadhātu maṇḍala. Roughly, the Great Pagoda represents the world of action, the Western Pagoda represents the world of wisdom, and the Main Hall represents the union of the two realms.

Biographers and historians are likely to glorify the founding of Mount Kōya as coming together easily at the will of a saint. Instead, there is much evidence that Kūkai had all varieties of difficulties in establishing the complex. He was unable to attain funding for completion of the buildings in his lifetime and likely invested much time in the solicitation of these funds. There is a writing found in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* saying now Kongōbu-ji is completed but there is no bell. Kūkai says he would like to have a 7 *shaku* copper bell cast.¹⁵ His letters also indicate that the original builders were not skilled carpenters and engineers but mostly Kūkai and his pupils. We see from his letters that conditions on Mount Kōya were difficult, especially in the winter. In addition, one of his closest pupils died while building the Mount Kōya complex. These are not the circumstances expected of a miracle worker and are not typically depicted in the biographies of Kūkai.

¹⁴ For further reading see Mamitzsch 1997.

¹⁵ *KKZ* 6:601.

The Record of Kongōbu-ji Training (金剛峯寺修行縁起) says Kūkai completed the building of the Many-Jeweled Pagoda (多宝塔) with a height of 16 *take* (丈), about 190 feet; a three-gates four-sided lecture hall; an eleven-gates residence hall. According to this record, the pagoda at the center of Mount Kōya and at the center of the flat top is a symbol of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana (Watanabe 152).

In the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* a letter appears entitled, “Informational writing on temple solicitation and the request for making the Buddha pagoda,” dated the twenty-third day of the eighth month of Shōwa 1 (834).¹⁶ Because that was the year before Kūkai died, we can assume the Great Pagoda and the West Pagoda probably were not completed during his lifetime.

In the end, the building of the Mount Kōya complex was entrusted to followers. In the seventh month of Kōnin 10 (819), Kūkai was called back to Heian at the command of Emperor Saga. After this, Kūkai is thought to have sometimes traveled between Heian and Mount Kōya. However, oddly, there is very little information on the relationship between Kūkai and Mount Kōya after this. According to legend, Kanshin Temple (観心寺) in Kawachinagano city (河内長野市) was built as a place for Kūkai to rest during his trip from the capital to Mount Kōya. In the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* there is a record of Kūkai performing a funeral service at Mount Kōya for his nephew and close pupil Chizen in Tenchō 2 (825).¹⁷ Afterwards, there is a record in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* dated the twenty-second day of the eighth month of Tenchō 9 (832), of the prayer Kūkai wrote for the Ten-

¹⁶ KKZ 6:540; KZ 10:132.

¹⁷ KZ 10:115; KKZ 6:503.

thousand lamps and Ten-thousand flowers Dharma gathering (*mandō manke*, 万灯万花会) at Mount Kōya.¹⁸ This “festival of lanterns” or “*mando* festival” was to be an annual event dedicated to the wisdom of the four kinds of maṇḍala of the two realms. According to the biographies, Kūkai retired to Mount Kōya in the Spring of Shōwa 2 (835), knowing he was dying, and remained there until entering *nyūjō* shortly afterwards.

I would like to make a suggestion which might tie together several elements in the founding stories, those deemed fiction and those not. These include elements of the stories of Nifu Myōjin and Kūkai’s Buddhist/Shintō syncretism; the maṇḍala layout of Mount Kōya and; the letter to the Emperor. These elements may be tied together through a passage from the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. We saw in Kūkai’s letter to the Emperor requesting Mt. Koya: “According to the meditation sūtras, meditation should be practiced preferably on a flat area deep in the mountains.” The writing to which he refers may be the second chapter of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Therein, Mahāvairocana gives instructions for establishing a Tantric meditation ground. The passage reads as follows.

You should acquire omniscience. A mantrayogin should have compassion and spread the mind of enlightenment. If he receives instructions steadfastly, he should select a plain ground. There may be many flowers and fruits in the mountainous forests and there may be very agreeable pure fountains... Oh master of mysteries, select a suitable ground for establishing a maṇḍala. Remove the reform gravels, fragments or earthenware, broken wares, skulls, hair, rice brans, ashes, charcoal, prickly bones, rotten words as well as insects, ants, minute worms, poisonous and stinging insects. Having got rid of such evils, the ācāryā should choose an auspicious day and time, decide good grahas (planets), lunar and solar mansions, and select a happy and suitable indication before the time of meal. He should revere all the Tathāgatas and should surprise the Earth Goddess with the

¹⁸ KZ 10: 131; KKZ 6:538.

following gāthā: “Oh goddess, you are the witness of all the Buddhas, the leaders when they did excellent works on the pure land in the Pāramitā. Just as Śākyasiṃha, the saviour of the world, broke the army of Māra, so also I will now conquer Māra and draw a maṇḍala.” The yogin of Mantrayāna will fall down on his knees and stretch the arms, touch the ground, recite this gāthā (verse), and offer with reverence fragrant powder and flowers (Yamamoto 1990:14).

This sounds remarkably like what stories say Kūkai did. It also shows Buddhist scriptural precedence for uniting the deities of the Buddhist pantheon, specifically those to the Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala, with the local deities.

2. Kūkai’s Poetry.

Examining the volumes of Kūkai’s collected writings in the *KZ*, it is clear that he devoted considerable time while on Mount Kōya and throughout his life to the composition, collection and criticism of poetry. Even for those only interested in Kūkai’s religious practices, I believe it is a mistake to overlook Kūkai’s poems and writings of and about poetry. By far, the most voluminous of all his writings is his *Bunkyō hifuron* (文鏡秘府論, *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing*). This is “an extensive compendium summarizing the major poetic theories and rhetorical strategies of classical Chinese literature and a work that had a lasting influence on the development of Japanese poetry and poetics” (Abé 1999:104).

Renowned Japanese poets who admired Kūkai’s literary criticism include Fujiwara no Sadaie (1162-1241)¹⁹ and Matsuo Bashō (1644-94).²⁰ Nor is this a work that can be written off by scholars as an indication of his nature as a youthful dilettante, as his interest in Confucianism and

¹⁹ Poet and court bureaucrat. He used the pen name Teika, the Chinese reading of Sadaie, became a *bhikṣu* and published numerous poems and collections. See Frédéric 2002:208.

²⁰ Japan’s most famous Haiku poet.

Daoism typically and unjustifiably are. Instead, Kūkai was working on some form of the *Bunkyō hifuron* as late as 820.²¹ This work appears to be the first writing in Japan on Chinese poetic syntax and is of interest to researchers today in that it mentions some lost writings of the Tang Dynasty (Bodman 1).

There are numerous indications that Kūkai's considerable writing talent was recognized at court and by several emperors. As preserved in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*, officials requested that he write speeches, sermons and letters in their names. For Kūkai, however, writing was more than a convenient means of expression. As Ryūichi Abé puts it, "Kūkai did understand writing as a technology; however, it was for him not a tool for statecraft but a sacred technology necessary for creating and maintaining cosmic order" (Abé 1999:310). In this statement, Abé gets to the heart of the issue. For Kūkai, poetry and mantra were closely connected.

Literature was more than a hobby for Kūkai then. According to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, ultimate reality is found in all speech and the root of speech is the soul of the universe, which Shingon calls Dharmakāya Mahāvairocana (Watanabe 204). Today this is known as the linguistic philosophy of what Kūkai called Sound, Word and Reality (声字実相の言語哲学) (Watanabe 204).²² Kūkai writes, "The Tathāgata reveals his teachings by means of expressive symbols" (Hadedá 1972:234). Accordingly, all literature expresses the universe of the Buddha. Kūkai

²¹ Kūkai composed a shorter work entitled *Bunpitsu ganshinshō* (文筆眼心抄, KKZ 6:913), dated the Summer of Kōnin 11 (820). Because this is believed to be a synopsis of the longer work, scholars believe Kūkai composed the *Bunkyō hifuron* several years before 820 (Abé 1999:480 n. 96). For a detailed study of the *Bunkyō hifuron*, see Konishi Jin'ichi, *Bunkyō hifuron kō*, Vols. 1-3. Kyōto: Daihasshū shuppan 1948-1952. Also see: *Nihon Bungakushi* by Konishi.

²² See Kūkai's *Meaning of Sound, Word, and Reality* (*Shōji jissō gi*, 声字実相義), translated into English by Yoshito S. Hakeda (Hakeda 1972:234).

likely hoped that the development of this idea would provide no less than a Buddhist alternative to the dominant literary theories of Confucianism of his time (Abé 1999:310).

From this perspective, Kūkai's activities in literary competitions and numerous exchanges of poems with individuals are occasions for widely disseminating Buddhist ideas. In this sense, poetry is *upāya* or skill-in-means, the very activity in which all Mahāyāna Buddhists should be engaged. Not only was he able to do this by including the abstractions of mantra in his verse, but by writing about meditative practice. We see this in his "Poem on Contemplation of Ten Illusions" (十喩觀 J. *Jūyukan*) and his "Poem on the Contemplation of Nine Appearances" (九想詩, *Kosōshi*).

For this reason, it would be a mistake to consider Kūkai's exegeses more "philosophical" than his poems. An analogy could be made to the tendency of scholars to concentrate on the first chapter of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, that dealing with doctrine, as the "most important" section to the detriment of the bulk of the sūtra, which deals with specific practice. In addition to understanding Kūkai's view of the religiosity of activities of poetry, by reading his poems and letters in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* we can also get a feeling for the depths of Kūkai's personality. We can also see how this could play a role in sustaining the tradition of Kōbō Daishi veneration.

As we have seen, in Kōnin 7 (816 when Kūkai was 43) Kūkai was involved in the momentous launching of the Mount Kōya temple complex. In the 8th month of that year, he received a request from the emperor to contribute to the advancement of writing in Japan. At that time the emperor asked him to brush Chinese poetic works of ancient and modern poets on a

four section folding screen. Kūkai's own poem is also on the screen. The emperor was extremely pleased with the product and returned the same kind of seven-graph, ten-line poem Kūkai had written. In that poem, the emperor praises Kūkai's virtue and purity of heart. In addition, the emperor compares Kūkai to the famous Chinese calligraphers Wang Xizhi (王羲之, 303-79)²³ and his son Wang Xianzhi (王獻之, 344-386). From the sentiments expressed in their poetry, it appears Emperor Saga and Kūkai may have surprisingly engaged in friendship. In modern textbooks, Emperor Saga, Tachibana Hayanari and Kūkai are known as the Three Brushes (三筆, *J. sanpitsu*). From this comes the well-known aphorisms in Japan today such as "Even Kōbō's brush makes mistakes" and "Kōbō does not need to select a brush." While the founding of the Shingon tradition is typically the focus of studies on Kūkai, we can see from the poem of Emperor Saga that Kūkai was already held in high esteem for his contribution to the arts of calligraphy and poetry in Japan. We also see the affection the emperor had for Kūkai as a person.

In the poem "Climb the Mountain to Contemplate the Hermit"²⁴ (i.e., the Buddha),²⁵ Kūkai uses a variety of mythological images to express his feelings during an ascetic venture in remote mountains. We see in this poem, contrary to typical depictions in biographies, even after returning from Tantric training in China, Kūkai was not hesitant to include Daoist and Confucian stories in his writings. Perhaps this can be seen as a testament to his non-sectarian attitude if not an indication that he was interested in combining beliefs (as later seen in Shingon's drive to

²³ Poet and the most famous Chinese calligrapher of the Jin Dynasty. He and his son Wang Xianzhi are known as the "Two Wangs," founders of the Wang tradition of calligraphy.

²⁴ The Buddha is referred to as the Great Hermit in the second chapter of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*. T. 12:375c. "The Great Hermit enters Nirvāṇa, the sun sets on the land." Also see the opening line of the *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing* below.

²⁵ 遊山慕仙詩. KZ 10:16-8; KKZ 6:158-64.

incorporate Shintō deities in their pantheon). Perhaps the most surprising point in the poem, in light of the biographical depictions, is Kūkai's self representation as a figure much like the Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai (李白, 701-62), who is often identified as a Daoist, experiencing the truth in nature while intoxicated on alcohol. While the poem shows off Kūkai's knowledge of Chinese literature, at the same time we see him as a human being rather than a saint. Beginning with classical Confucian references, the poem ends in contemplation of the mysteries of Mahāvairocana, immediate and before his eyes. This emphasis on immediacy or things just as they are (*tathatā*) is exactly that expressed in the previous chapter on the *Ajikan*. In my opinion, this is at the root of Kūkai's philosophy and practice.

According to Kitagawa (Kitagawa 1951:142), legend says Kūkai wrote the following poem in the tranquility of Mount Kōya. The date of the poem is unknown.

Late evening, hearing the Buddha-Dharma-Saṅgha (*Buppōsō*) bird (a title perhaps added later by Shinzei).

Quiet forest, alone sitting in a thatched hut at dawn.
 The *śrāvaka*²⁶ of the Three Treasures is a bird.
 A bird has the voice, people have the mind.
 Voice and mind, clouds and streams. Together clear, clear.²⁷

Beatrice Lane Suzuki explains in a footnote to her translation: “The Bu-po-so is a large bird found in the depths of forests in Japan, Korea, and China. It is sacred in Buddhism, for its song repeats the syllables *bu-po-so*: *bu*=butsu=Buddha; *po*=*ho*=Dharma=Law; *so*=Sangha=Brotherhood” (Suzuki 312). This bird, sometimes called Buppōsō, is a Broad Billed Roller (*Eurystomus orientalis*). The poem is filled with

²⁶ Hearer of the voice (of the Buddha).

²⁷ *KZ* 10:168; *KKZ* 6:677.

double meanings and implications of unity in duality. Dawn may have two implications. First, the poet has been up all night. Judging from the content of the poem, he has been engaged in meditation. Second, it may imply the dawn of something, i.e., being on the brink of enlightenment. Either way, as later with Bashō's frog leaping into the old pond,²⁸ the sound of the bird 'awakens' the poet to the Dharma. *Śrāvaka* (聲聞) is literally 'hearer of the voice,' a euphemism for the disciples of the Buddha. *Unsui* (雲水) is a *kakekotoba* (double entendre) meaning both itinerant priest and clouds and water. Beatrice Lane Suzuki translates these last words (了了, J. *ryōryō*) as "Express the Buddha-wisdom." While this may be Kūkai's intention, it is not his expression. I believe he chooses the words to sound like a bird, as he is fond of using or creating onomatopoeic word by doubling graphs at the end of his poems.²⁹ The doubled graph, although a single two-graph compound in modern Chinese, also implies both are clear: the voice and the mind. The use of an animal in this poem is in character with Kūkai's philosophy that the natural is natural world is none other than Mahāvairocana, all phenomena is the Dharma.³⁰ Note, along these lines, dogs lead Kūkai to the top of Mount Kōya. According to a series of notes in the *KKZ*, each line of the poem after Kūkai mentions the Three Treasures (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha) represents one of the Three

²⁸ Probably Bashō's most famous haikū: Old pond, frog leaps in, the sound of water (*furu ike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto*).

²⁹ See onomatopoeic words Kūkai uses in this way (doubling the character) also at the end of in his poems "Autumn day viewing Shinsen'en Garden" and "The Nine Appearances of Death." Another possibility is he wrote 了了 (phonetic symbols for 'A') rather than 了了. 'A' is the mantra seed-syllable for Mahāvairocana.

³⁰ See Kūkai's poem "Climb the Mountain to Contemplate the Hermit" in this dissertation and his *The Meaning of Sound, Word, and Reality* (*Shōji jissō gi*, 声字実相義), translated into English by Yoshito S. Hakeda (234).

Treasures. ‘A bird has the voice’ implies the Dharma (words of the Buddha); ‘People have the mind’ implies the Buddha-mind, ‘clouds and streams’ implies the Saṅgha.³¹

The same year, Kūkai wrote the *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing* (*Bunkyō hifuron*)³² while living in the forest at Mount Kōya. Perhaps it is an inspired state of mind that can be seen in the way he signs the work: Kongōbu-ji Meditation Śramaṇa Henjō *Vajra* (金剛峰寺禪念沙門金剛). Since its ‘rediscovery’ by scholars of Chinese poetry in 1901, Kūkai’s *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing* has been noted for its importance in elucidating techniques of Tang and pre-Tang Chinese poetry and prosody otherwise lost to researchers.³³ Bodman translates the title of the work “A Treatise, Comprising a Model for Writing and a Thesaurus of Rare Expressions” (Bodman 168). The original title does encompass these ideas Bodman points to as Kūkai’s two main concerns in the thesis: providing “both a ‘guide for composition’ (文鏡) and a ‘thesaurus of valuable expressions’ (秘府)” (Bodman 15). In addition, however, the component of “mirror” and “mysterious district” are equally important for Kūkai’s purposes of interpreting writing within the frame of Tantric Buddhism as he saw it. In this case, mirror, which has a long history of spiritual associations through Daoism in China and Shintō in Japan, indicates that writing and language are not simply entities detached from human beings but both a reflection of humans and, in reality, not separate

³¹ See *KKZ* 6:719 n. 6-9.

³² *KKZ* 5.

³³ Bodman notes, “In China, both Lo Ken-tse and Kuo Shao-yü drew on it heavily for their histories of Chinese literary criticism. In Japan, the study of *Bunkyō hifuron* reached full maturity with the completion of Konishi Jinichi’s three-volume study and critical edition in 1953, and with the publication of Nakazawa Mareo’s extensive textual notes in 1964 and 1965...in 1976 a new edition by Chou Wei-te was published in Peking, and in 1977 a master’s thesis by Cheng A-ts’ai was published in Taipei...The reason most frequently offered for the importance of the *Bunkyō hifuron* is the fact that it contains the first detailed description of the co-called “Eight Faults” of Shen Yüeh” (Bodman 2).

from humans. To rephrase this more succinctly, exactly like Mahāvairocana, language can be a mirror for individuals, who, in the end, realize primal inseparability of the assumed ‘other.’ For this reason, in the title, Kūkai also refers to language as the “mysterious treasury” or “mysterious district” (秘府). As we have seen, the idea of mysterious is of utmost importance in Kūkai’s writings and thought, associated inseparably with Shingon.

Kūkai writes in the introduction to *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing*, “As an old sūtra says, the non-backsliding bodhisattvas surely were the first to understand writing and composition” (KKZ 5:5). Bodman gives the following alternative rendering of the sentence, “Therefore, someone who is well-versed in the sutras and who bravely advances on the path to becoming a Bodhissatva (*sic.* Bodhisattva) must first of all understand literature” (Bodman 162). While Bodman does not profess to offer a literal translation, interpretively his rendering is on the mark. In the *Ten Stages of Mind*, Kūkai makes it clear that the highest level of a bodhisattva’s advancement is the stage in which mantra is understood. Likewise, Kūkai writes above, “In intonation, the meaning is grasped.” This is true of the intonation of Chinese words, to which Kūkai devotes considerable time in *Thesis on The Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing*, and to mantra and the mantra-like aspect of intoning all words. Accordingly, words, Mahāvairocana and humanity are all interconnected. The interconnection of humanity and Mahāvairocana can be realized through the study and use of words. This is the essence of Kūkai’s literary theory.

Chapter IX.

Kūkai at Tōji Temple and Shingon as the National Religion of Japan.

Biographers know the ten-year period Kūkai lived at Tōji Temple (hereafter Tōji), beginning in 823, as his ‘Tōji period.’ It is considered the most glorious era in his lifetime, a time of many diverse and productive activities. At that time, Tōji was in many ways the center of Heian life and Kūkai was at the center of Tōji. This chapter is a year-to-year investigation of his activities during that time based mainly on Kūkai’s own writings found in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* and elsewhere in the *KKZ*.¹ As in previous chapters, the information about Kūkai’s activities during this time is supplemented by the research of modern scholars.²

After Kūkai was called back to the capital from Mount Kōya in the seventh month of Kōnin 10 (819) he probably returned to Takaosan temple. For the next several years afterwards, various records and legends place him in a numerous places around Japan, typically involved in activities connected to the non-aristocratic population. Folklore tells us that he went about the Kantō (eastern) provinces of Honshū preaching. According to a legend, Kūkai climbed Mount Nikkō and had the religious experience of seeing the spirit of saint Katsumichi (勝道上人) through a stone monument at Hoda Rakuyamahi (補陀洛山碑) (Wakamori 158). Today, to the north of Mount Nikkō, in the Tōhoku district, there is an oral tradition that holds Kōbō Daishi

¹ I was able to locate these writings by date by referring to the Chronological Index to the *KKZ* 8:250-2 and the Chronological Record (年譜) found in the *KKZ* 8:171-218.

² In particular: Abé, Hakeda, Kitagawa and Watanabe.

traveled there to preach. However, Watanabe argues that looking at written records such as found in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*, the Kinki region around Osaka, Kyoto and Nara appears to be the area for the center of his activities (Wakamori 156).

In the summer of 820, Kūkai wrote a synopsis of his large *Thesis on the Mysterious District of the Mirror of Writing*. At the time, Emperor Saga was interested in improving the literary ability of the aristocracy and according to a document in the *Miscellaneous Writings of Kōya*, Kūkai was to lead this effort. The synopsis, entitled Essentials of Poetry and Prose (*Bunpitsu ganshinshō*) appears to be a step in this direction. Since the Emperor dictated the project, Kūkai's Essentials of Poetry and Prose was likely widely read around Japan.

In the *Collected History of Kōbō Daishi's Activities* (弘法大師行状集記) there is an entry stating in the year Kōnin 12 (821) Kūkai completed the restoration of Mannō pond (万濃池) in Shikoku. Mannō Pond is the oldest and largest reservoir in Kagawa Prefecture of Shikoku. This huge pond, more than twenty kilometers in size, is in today's Kanno of Nakatado (仲多度神野) in Kagawa prefecture. Watanabe found many documents in Japan indicating Kūkai's work on the restoration of Mannō Pond. Chapter 20 of the *Collection of Stories Past and Present* (*Konjyaku monogatari-shū*, 今昔物語集) entitled "Stories of The Dragon King and Tengu, Number 11" (竜王為天狗被取語第十一) says, "Now and in the past, in the district of Tado in the country of Sanuki, there is an extremely large pond called Mannō Pond. Kōbō Daishi built the pond out of compassion for the people of that region. The circumference stretches far and wide and the embankment is high all around. The pond and all (the embankment) extends in

sight like an ocean. Because of the limitless depth of the bottom, the sizes of the marine creatures are without limit. Also, it is a dwelling for dragon(s)” (Watanabe 170).

The beginning of Chapter 31 of the same collection, says the pond had been built between 701 and 703 to be used in that area in times of drought and as protection against flood. However, because the surrounding mountain forests had many creeks that entered the valley from the south, there was a large amount of water and high water pressure. In ancient times, it collapsed several times. The worst happened in 818 when a great collapse occurred. At that time, the whole region was completely changed to a muddy sea and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Thereupon, in 820, the Imperial Court sent a dispatch, Michi no Hamatsugu (路浜継), with a large number of workers to build a larger pond. However, when Hamatsugu could not complete the task, he sent a petition asking the Imperial Court to change the supervision of the construction work from the provincial governor to Kūkai (Watanabe 170). His approval came around the fourth month of Konen 12 (821). The following record of this request appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.

Since last year, the officers responsible for building the reservoir have been trying to repair it. The lake is large and the workers are few so that there is as yet no prospect of completing the work. Now the head of the county office tells me that the monk Kūkai is a native of Tado County. He is a man of exemplary conduct and his fame, like that of Mount Sumeru, is unsurpassed. They say that, when he sits in meditation in the mountains, the birds build nests on him and animals grow tame. He studied abroad to see the Way; he went empty-handed and returned fully equipped. Clergymen and laymen alike are delighted to receive his good influence, and the people look forward to seeing him. If he stays, a crowd of students assembles around him; if he goes, a multitude follows him. He has long been away from his native place and lives in Kyoto. Farmers yearn for him as they do for their parents. If they hear that the master is coming, they will run out in haste to welcome him. I sincerely request that he be appointed the director (Hakeda 1972: 52-3).

Kūkai applied for leave from the capital to go to Mannō Pond. From his wording, he had apparently being turned down on previous requests before finally being approved. Kūkai arrived in Sanuki on the tenth day of the sixth month Konen 12 (821) with some of his followers and workers from the capital. The *Shingon Appendix to the Transmission of the Dharma* (真言付法伝) says the reconstruction of Mannō Pond was completed on the sixth day of the ninth month of that same year (821) and Kūkai returned to Heian.³ Thus, in a period of only three months the repairs were completed. Watanabe suggests the three years of work put in by the previous supervisor allowed Kūkai to complete the project in such a short period of time (Watanabe 171). Hakeda says, “His success was probably due to his advanced knowledge of civil engineering and the willing cooperation of the local people under his leadership” (Hakade 1972:53). Outside of these explanations, local legend explains Kūkai’s success as a miracle. As a part of this legend, Kūkai is said to have carried out a secret Goma service for completion of the pond. This supposedly took place on a rock in the middle of the pond, on which later a shrine called Kanno Rock Shrine (神野神社岩) was placed (Watanabe 172).⁴ To me, the biographers’ case for bringing the story into the realm of non-fiction is not helped by their portrayal of Kūkai’s legendary advanced knowledge of construction technology from China. This is a tale much like those of Kūkai’s mystical predecessor, Gyōgi. We have seen that often stories of Kūkai parallel those of Gyōgi. In this connection, we see an image of Kūkai loved by the masses of common people and performing miraculous deeds for their benefits when the capital had deserted them. Unlike the academic Buddhism of the Nara traditions, the Buddhism Kūkai propagated is viewed

³ *KKZ* 2:525.

⁴ The shrine endured the pressures of the water until the repairs of the 1930’s (Watanabe, 172). In 1953 a modern dam was built.

as a religion for ordinary person. As with Gyōgi, the ideal behind Kūkai's social activities is seen as bodhisattva practice.

There are indications that Kūkai and his followers⁵ were also involved to some extent with official procedures at other ponds as well. There is a document in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* entitled, "The stone monument for the farms and ponds of the Yamato," dated the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month of Tencho 2 (825).⁶ In that writing, Kūkai talks about the dedication of Masuda Pond in Nara with Emperor Saga, speaking of the classical Shintō progenitors of Japan found in the *Records of Ancient Matters*, Izanagi and Izanami. These were the first deities, male and female respectively, to descend from the heavenly plain after the creation of the island by dipping a jeweled spear into the heavenly pond, to which Kūkai also refers. In addition, Kūkai mentions the sacred bird of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, Yatagarasu, the eight-handed crow, which may be identified with Yangwu, the sun-crow of China. Amaterasu is considered the direct progenitor of the Imperial family.

On the Pilgrimage to Eighty-eight Sacred Places of Shikoku in honor of Kōbō Daishi, Kōyama Temple (甲山寺) is the seventy-fourth site. According to the temple's history, Kōyama Temple was founded by Kōbō Daishi with half the money he was rewarded in 821 for successfully repairing Mannō Pond. The other half was spent on a temple he built on the bank of the reservoir.⁷ Kūkai is believed to have carved the main image of Bhaiṣajyaguru (J. *Yakushi-nyorai*, the Medicine Buddha) for offering prays for the success of his work on the pond. In the

⁵ Shinen (真円), was appointed caretaker of Kizuku Pond (築池).

⁶ *KKZ* 6:203.

⁷ <http://www.kagawa-jc.ac.jp/~steve/kagawa/mecca.html>, accessed 3/11/03.

Vajradhātu maṇḍala, Bhaiṣajyaguru takes the place of Mahāvairocana at the center and is counted among the thirteen Buddhas of Shingon (Frédéric 1995:111; 306 n. 110).

At the end of that year (821), Kūkai drew the Vajradhātu and the Garbhadhātu maṇḍala for the second time since returning from China. A writing in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* supports this. Entitled “In Presentation of the Two-fold Great Maṇḍala of the Four Devotions,”⁸ the text mentions the maṇḍala is used in both Shingon and Tendai.

On the first day of the second month of Kōnin 13 (822) an *abhiṣeka* hall was built for Kūkai’s use at Tōdaiji Temple. This placed Kūkai at the heart of the Nara Buddhist establishment. Kūkai was placed as an administrator there and began successfully raising funds for refurbishing Tōdaiji. Two months later, on the fourth day of the sixth month of that year, Saichō died at Mt. Hiei after several months of failing health. This left the Tendai tradition with no strong leader. Although during an illness ten years earlier Saichō had named Enchō as his successor to head the Tendai tradition, now in 822 he named Gishin for that position. Gishin had studied with Saichō in China and received the Bodhisattva Precepts there. For years, Saichō had been involved in debates with the Nara authorities over whether the Bodhisattva precepts were sufficient for ordination. Saichō hoped to establish the ability of ordinate monks at Mount Hiei independent of the Nara control. Probably in Saichō’s mind, more so than Enchō, Gishin had the qualifications to stand up to the ongoing criticisms of Tendai by the Nara establishment as well as by Kūkai. However, we can see a sign of Gishin’s ability in this area in 830 when the emperor ordered the heads of all the Japanese traditions of Buddhism to submit a statement of there

⁸ KZ 10:912; KKZ 6:418.

beliefs, Gishin submitted *Tendai hokkeshū gishū*, a comparably weak writing in only one fascicle. This was particularly important in light of the fact that most of the statements submitted by the heads of the other Japanese traditions attacked Tendai on one or more grounds. In addition, as we saw in the previous chapter, the imperial family, members of the aristocracy, *bhikṣu* of the Nara temples and some of those from Tendai itself had become interested in Tantric Buddhism under the growing influence Kūkai was having on the country. Kūkai's masterpiece, the *Mysterious Maṇḍala of the Ten Stages of Mind* (秘密量茶羅十住心論, *J. Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron*, hereafter *Ten Stages of Mind*) was submitted at this time at the request of the emperor. In that ten-fascicle statement, Kūkai ranks Tendai below both Hōso (C. Huayen) and Shingon in the stages of human spiritual growth, pointing out the fact that Tendai was not a Tantric tradition. Thus, with Saichō's death, without a doubt, the leadership of the new Buddhist movement could fall to no one other than Kūkai. Likewise, scholars of Shingon believe among the "Nara leaders there were none who could equal Kūkai in breadth of learning, religious authority, leadership, and popularity among all classes of society" (Hakeda 1972:56). Whether or not this was the case, in reality, there were probably none who the emperor could trust as completely as he did Kūkai.

Interestingly, as Saichō had failed to master the Tantric doctrine, there is evidence that in 831 Saichō's early choice for successor, Enchō along with thirty-five other *bhikṣu* and additional administrators, wrote to Kūkai asking to study Tantric practice under his guidance (Groner 288). Later, Tendai adherents argued that the letter of request was not authentic (Groner 82 n. 25).

Some scholars believe that Kūkai wrote *Ten Stages of Mind* in 822,⁹ thus stepping forward as Japan's foremost ecclesiastical leader by systematizing not only Shingon but also showing the place of Buddhism within all religious thought. After all, according to this doctrinal classification system, Shingon represents the highest stage of spiritual development for humankind and Kūkai was the undisputed leader of Shingon, allegedly capable of becoming a Buddha at will as evidenced in the debate in Nara. What better qualification could there be for the religious leader of a country?

Also in 822, according to the Chronological Record, Retired-emperor Heizei received the precepts and *abhiṣeka* from Kukai in 822 (KKZ 8:206).

On the nineteenth day of the first month of Kōnin 14 (823) Emperor Saga dispatched Fujiwara Yushifusa (藤原良房) to Takaosan to present Tōji Temple to Kūkai. From then on, Tōji temple became the center for Kūkai's activities. Kūkai appointed the leadership of Takoasan to his followers and right away moved into Tōji. (Hakeda 1972:54).

Kūkai may not have been expecting the appointment (Hakeda 1972:54). The purpose of it seems to have been connected with the idea of making Tōji a National Citadel for the Protection of Emperor Saga (王城鎮護, J. *ōjō chingo*). Naming Tōji the National Citadel for the Protection, as opposed to Tōdaiji to the south capital, was another way of establishing religious authority in the newly created capital of Heian (Watanabe 157). Kūkai's appointment came just three months before Emperor Saga's retirement. The emperor may have wanted to make sure Kūkai was well

⁹ Kitagawa 1951:145. Shingon scholars generally cite 831 as the year Kūkai wrote this most important work.

placed before he retired, for the good of both. This appointment also served as a grand culminating act of Shingon patronage on the part of the emperor (Hakeda 1972:55). As stated earlier, Kūkai had become close to Emperor Saga due to their shared interest in and Kūkai's expertise in calligraphy. Allegedly, the two had also received the Shintō *abhiṣeka* together. In addition, Kūkai had likely attained the special confidence of Emperor Saga as a manager with such activities as the completion of Mannō Pond and the management of Tōdaiji and Takaosan. Also, it could be seen that Kūkai had the ability to solicit temple funds, as this skill was necessary for building Kongōbuji and refurbishing Tōdaiji. This showed his connections and influences with members of the court and aristocracy. This skill would also be needed for the construction of Tōji's five story pagoda. A possibility Hakeda suggests as another factor in Emperor Saga's decision to give Kūkai Tōji "is that about six months earlier, seven days after Saichō's death, Saga had permitted the Tendai sect to build an independent initiation platform on Mt. Hiei. He might have felt compelled in all fairness to do a favor for Kūkai also" (Hakeda 1972:55 n. 1). Kūkai founded Kōyasan as a ground for practicing concentration exercises. Now, Tōji would serve as the home base for Tantric Buddhism in the heart of the secular community, the center for propagating the Shingon doctrine. Kūkai speaks of this in the *Honored Spoken Memento* as follows.

I received the bequest of Tōji from Emperor Kōnin (i.e., Saga). This gave me great joy. It became a mysterious¹⁰ training hall. It was a difficult task to say a person of the dusty world (outside of Shingon) could not be in charge there in the future. This was not narrow minded but the planned transmission of Truth, to ensure the supreme Dharma was not scattered in 5000 pieces. Although, the size of Tōji is expansive, the land is not exceptional. How can this be said? On the nineteenth day of the first month of Kōnin 14 (823), notice that custody of Tōji

¹⁰ *Himitsu* (秘密) often translated as "secret."

had been entrusted to this humble *bhikṣu* was delivered by an imperial messenger, the court noble Fujiwara Yushifusa. The Imperial Script was particular. That is to say, it concluded that (Tōji) would be the garden of the sweet teachings of mantra (Shingon).¹¹ Inheritance of the dōjō hall should be from master to pupil. Non-followers are not to be confused into this process. (KZ 7:257; KKZ 8:49-50)

Kūkai picks up the discussion later as follows.

So, if we think about this, Tang master Huigou gave a decree to follow the master-to-pupil lineage for the leadership of Qinglong Temple. That (temple) is also the basis for the name for our great hall. When under the *ācārya*, Daxingshan Temple (大興善寺) became a mysterious grounds, the name was changed to Qinglong Temple. Thus, today, it is associated with Tōji by the being a Temple for the Kyōō and for National Protection. In sum, as said, this was done by imperial decree. Please remember the reason (for its existence) is for protection. Also, to use the Chinese name, it is called Temple of the *Vajra* of the Expansive Light (Henjō, i.e., Mahāvairocana. 遍照金剛寺). This is suitable for the country (KZ 7:258; KKZ 8:54).

From this we get the impression Kūkai may have engineered the changes at Tōji based on the situation of Huigou and other Tantric *ācārya* in China. After his appointment, Kūkai transferred to Tōji the Buddhist images, Buddhists pictures, scriptures, ritual implements, etc., he brought back from China. The practices there must have been a radical departure from those of Nara. As Kūkai says above about the emperor's decision, "This was not narrow minded but the planned transmission of Truth." Even though the emperor's decree was effectively a ban on the Nara leadership, Kūkai had not been antagonistic towards that leadership and was probably seen as a part of the Nara establishment. In fact, Watanabe suggests by appointing Kūkai to Tōji the Nara establishment pulled him further towards their side in the struggle against Saichō's Mahāyāna ordination platform at Mt. Hiei (Watanabe 159).

¹¹ The Edo period translation and the modern translation of this passage says "*Shingon mikkyō*" rather than sweet teachings of mantra. The classical Chinese version found in the KZ reads "真言蜜教" with the graph 蜜 marked as strange but without further explanation.

The building of Tōji in Enryaku 15 (796) and the designation of it as the National Temple for Protection of the Emperor and the Country can only be explained in context of the political situation at the time. As we have seen, in 794, Emperor Kanmu relocated the capital to Heian (Kyoto). Tōji temple was first called the Temple of the Kyōō for National Protection (教王護国寺). Kyōō is a term literally meaning King of the Teachings. Used by Kūkai and Amoghavajra in theses on scriptures belonging to the *Tattvasaṃgraha* lineage (e.g., the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*). Specifically, the King of the Teachings refers to Dharmakāya Mahāvairocana (*Mikkyō daijiten* 288). Tōji was to be the most powerful of the temples built in the new capital for the purpose of rivaling the clergy of the large temples of the old capital, Nara.

According to legend, the main city gate of Heian facing south, Rajōmon (羅城門), was installed soon after the city was established. Facing the city from that reference point, Tōji, literally East Temple, was built to the east, on the left side of the main road. Tōji is also called Hidaridaiji (左大寺), literally the Left Great Temple. In the west, Saiji (西寺), literally East Temple, was built and also named Migidaiji (右大寺), literally the Right Great Temple. In addition to the aesthetic qualities of this placement, the cardinal orientation of these temples was likely theurgic in nature, meant to guard the city against evil influences from those directions (Hakeda 1972:55). Although it is believed that the city was built outward from these two points of reference, in fact, Heian was almost complete before the temples were built (Watanabe 157). The architectural prototypes for Tōji and Saiji are not known for certain. However, because the engineers do not appear to have drawn from the castle plan found in Chang'an and at other

temples, it is commonly thought that at least in name and placement, Tōji and Saiji were modeled on Tōdaiji and Saidaiji of Nara (Watanabe 157). As with the east/west placement of Tōji and Saiji, the name Tōdaiji (左大寺) literally means the East Great Temple Saidaiji means the West Great Temple (Watanabe 157; Hakeda 1972:55).

Although nearly thirty years had elapsed since the capital had moved to Kyoto, the construction of the new temples progressed slowly with frequent changes of director. The unfinished buildings at the entrance to the city must have been unsightly, and quick completion of the work was desirable (Hakeda 1972:55).

By now the Nara Buddhist establishment must have realized an alliance with Kūkai was important. For by placing Kūkai at the head of the Temple for Protection of the Nation and providing that it be ran solely by Shingon ordinates in the future, the Emperor made Shingon the national religion (Kitagawa 1951:145).

In the fourth month of Kōnin 24 (823), Emperor Saga abdicated and Emperor Junna was enthroned. Just before this, Kūkai sent to court his *Encyclopedia of Sūtras, Commentaries and Vinaya of the Shingon Tradition* (真言宗所学経律論目録, *Shingonshū shogaku kyōritsuron mokuroku*).¹² In this *Encyclopedia*, we can see at least some of the texts Kūkai established as orthodox for Shingon study. While later scholars denigrated Japanese Tantra before the time of Kūkai by assigning it to the category of “zōmitsu” (as explained in a previous chapter), the *Encyclopedia* indicates that, while Kūkai placed those texts in a special category, he accepted them as a part of Shingon (Abé 1999:153). Abé explains this as follows.

¹² KZ 1:105.

Kūkai included sixty-three texts of this type, which he classified as zōbu shingonkyō. In the context of the catalog, this phrase can be rendered either as “sūtras of miscellaneous mantras” or as “miscellaneous sūtras of the Shingon (School). In either case, it appears that Kūkai regarded this “miscellaneous Shingon” class of texts as important not only because the ritual devotions based on these scriptures were widely practiced in the Nara Buddhist community but because many of them were the canonical texts of the Shingon School, which is to say of the Esoteric Teaching (Abé 1999:261).

On the twenty-fourth day of the fourth month of Kōnin 24 (823), Kūkai sent a letter of congratulations to Emperor Junna on his ascension to the throne. Like Emperor Saga, Emperor Junna was well disposed towards Kūkai, who hoped the new emperor would approve his *Encyclopedia*. Hakeda views Kūkai’s presentation of the *Encyclopedia* “as a request for the recognition of Shingon, on a doctrinal basis, as an independent sect (Hakeda 1972:55). Emperor Junna approved the *Encyclopedia* on the tenth day of the tenth month of the same year. Hakeda explains the significance of this as follows.

His imperial decree (KZ., V, 435) used the term “Shingon sect (*Shingon shū*)” for the first time in an official document. It authorized Kūkai to retain fifty Shingon monks regularly at the Tōji and to educate them according to the requirements defined in the List. The decree also permitted Kūkai to use the temple exclusively for Shingon students and forbade monks of other sects to reside there. This was revolutionary...Kūkai, who had selected Esoteric Buddhism as the most effective approach to attaining enlightenment, had now succeeded in establishing his religion on a solid institutional basis by state authorization. His entry into the Tōji, therefore was the final step toward the independence of Shingon Buddhism. (Hakeda 1972:55).

On the same day approval was given for the *Encyclopedia*, Kūkai instructed Emperor Junna in the Shingon teachings based on the *Encyclopedia*. Kūkai also granted initiation to the head of the Fujiwara clan, Fujiwara Fuyutsugu (775-825) and the commander-in-chief of the army, Yoshimine Yasuyo (Kitagawa 1951:145). Fujiwara no Fuyatsugu was a court poet and in

818 “helped compile the *Bunka shūrei shū*, a collection of poems in Chinese” (Frédéric 2002:202). Since Kūkai had been at the head of Emperor Saga’s effort to improve the literary understanding and ability of the Japanese aristocracy, as well as a strong advocate of Chinese poetry, his connection with Fuyutsugu was natural.

According the *Circumstances of the Head of Tōji* (東寺長者次第, *Tōji chōsha shidai*), on the second day of the eleventh month of that year, Kūkai would lead fifty followers in study of the Shingon teachings for ensuring good fortune for the government and the protection of the family of the nation (Watanabe 160).

On the thirteenth day of the tenth month of Kōnin 24 (823), by Imperial order, Kūkai performed a ceremony in the empress’ chambers for recovery of her health (*KKZ* 8:207). Also that year, former-emperor Saga received the precepts from Kūkai (*KKZ* 8:208). Thus, former-emperor Saga, former-emperor Heizei and his brother Prince Shinnyo all received the *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai.

In the second month of Tenchō 1 (824), Kūkai was ordered by the Emperor to pray for rain (*KKZ* 8:208). Because there was crop failure in the previous year, the imperial court exempted the people from paying taxes and from civil assignments. On the second day of the third month, Kūkai held a Dharma Gathering of the Three Jewels Memorial Service (三宝 供養の法会) at Tōdaiji in Nara (*KKZ* 6:435). At that time, Kūkai prayed for rain at the imperial garden of Shinsen’en for seven days (Kitagawa 1951:145). On the twenty-sixth day, because rain finally came, Kūkai was promoted to the ecclesiastic rank of *Shōsōzu* (少僧都) according to the

entry for that day in a record called The Office of Buddhist Ecclesiastical Authority (僧綱補任) (KKZ 8:208). This event has been widely celebrated in Japanese literature, found in such writings as the *Collected Stories of the Past and Present* and the *Legends of Spirits and Immortals* (神仙伝).

In the *Miscellaneous Collection* (拾遺雜集) there appears Kūkai's request that Tōji annually perform a ceremony for rain (安居, *J. ango*) from the Protection of the Country Sūtra.¹³ The document is dated the tenth day of the third month of Tenchō 2 (824). In the same Collection, we find a document on the establishment of a lecture hall in Tōji, dated the twentieth day of the fourth month of Tenchō 2 (824).¹⁴

A month after being appointed *Shōsōzu*, on the sixth day of the fourth month of Tenchō 1, Kūkai tried to decline this position. But the court was insistent (Hakeda 1972:56). His letter of decline is seen in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.¹⁵

Also in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* there is a letter from Kūkai for Fujiwara no Shūnari (藤原宗成) dated the first day of the sixth month of Tenchō 2.¹⁶ In that letter, Kūkai talks about Shūnari's loss of office from being implicated in the Prince Iyo affair.

According to the *Circumstances of the Head of Tōji*, on the sixteenth day of the sixth month of Tenchō 1 (824), Kūkai was named administrative chief of Tōji, in charge of maintenance and construction of the temple (Hakeda 1972:56).

¹³ KKZ 7:169.

¹⁴ KKZ 7:173

¹⁵ KKZ 6:292.

¹⁶ KKZ 6:306.

A report appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* which indicates Kūkai performed a service at the Imperial court in accordance with the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra on Benevolent Kings Protecting Their Countries* (仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經, abbreviated in Japan as *Ninnō hannya kyō*)¹⁷ on the twelfth day of the ninth month of Tenchō 2.¹⁸

In a document dated the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month of Tenchō 2, Kūkai's inscription at Masuda Pond is found.¹⁹ It is labeled, "The writing of the Śramaṇa of Tōdaiji, *Daisōjō Denchō Taihōshi Henjō*."

Also in 824, former emperor Heizei died. Kūkai and his pupil Shinnyō (the son of Heizei) presided over the funeral service (Kitagawa 1951:145).

In the third month of Tenchō 2 (825), Kūkai confirmed his younger brother Shinga (801-79) as an *ācārya* of the Dual Realms of the *Vajra* and Womb (KKZ 8:209). On the eighth day of the fourth month an exhibition opened of Tōji's peaceful living community (安居会). Kūkai lectured on sūtras and petitioned for imperial sanction of the event (KKZ 8:209).

On the twenty-ninth day of the seventh month of the Tenchō 2 (825), Kūkai delivered a lecture to Tōmiya (東宮, later Emperor Nimmyō 810-850, r. 833-850), on the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra on Benevolent Kings Protecting Their Countries* (KKZ 8:209). Afterwards, Kūkai delivered a prayer observing the forty-ninth day after the death of *bhikṣu* Shintai, who died on the eighth day of the tenth month of Tenchō 2 (825).²⁰ In that prayer Kūkai says, "In practicing the Buddha

¹⁷ T. 246

¹⁸ KKZ 6:536.

¹⁹ KKZ 6:203.

²⁰ KKZ 6:495.

Dharma, (Shintai) entered the realms the *Vajradhātu* and the *Garbhadhātu* of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana. Now he has returned to that same realm. The realm of Mahāvairocana is wide and deep like an ocean without limits. The realm of unparalleled wisdom is like a mountain that continues in height with no summit. The Great Self of the inner heart becomes the permanent capital of the Dharma realm (*dharmadhātu*)” (KKZ 6:495). It is interesting that Kūkai expresses the idea of the eternal self, not extinction as we might expect from a Japanese Buddhist before the rise of the Pure Land traditions in that country. While the “Great Self of the inner heart” parallels descriptions found throughout *Upaniṣads*, in fact it is found in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.²¹

Also in 825 Kūkai was granted permission to build a Lecture Hall (*kōdō*) at Tōji. Hakeda explains how the hall, once again, shows Kūkai’s vision of the fusion of art and ultimate truth. “This hall was designed by Kūkai to contain an altar, or rather a sacred stage; art was used to manifest fully the essential truth of Shingon. Thus the entire setting was transformed into a spiritual vision. The carving of the images to be installed in the hall was also undertaken under Kūkai’s guidance and supervision. Among the twenty-one images standing in the hall today, fourteen date from then.” (Hakeda 1972:56). In the same year, like his uncle Ato before him, Kūkai was asked to be the tutor of the crown prince (Hakeda 1972:56).

On the tenth day of the third month of Tenchō 3 (826), Kūkai wrote a prayer to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Emperor Kanmu. This appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* under the title, “Lecture and reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*

²¹ T. 39:588b.

written in gold letters (on dark blue paper) in the handwriting of Emperor Saga, a donation of charity (S. *dakṣiṇā*) read as a prayer on behalf of Emperor Kanmu.”²² Kūkai begins this writing by speaking of the lotus at the center of the physical heart (S. *hṛdaya*) (KKZ 6:368).²³ At the time, Emperor Junna carried a copy of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the personal handwriting of former Emperor Saga to Saiji for a meeting held for the annual eight lectures on the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Kūkai writes for donations for timbers to begin construction of a five-story pagoda at Tōji in a document dated the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month of Tenchō 3.²⁴ Another document with the same date lists the names and donations of contributor to the project so far.²⁵ Accordingly, 3,490 workers from nearby Mount Higashiyama were mobilized to haul the timbers for the pillars of the pagoda. However, the pagoda was not completed during Kūkai’s lifetime. “The present pagoda, towering conspicuously in the southern part of Kyoto, was rebuilt in 1644 by the third Tokugawa Shōgun, Iemitsu (徳川家光, born 1604, shōgun 1623-1651).” (Hakeda 1972:56; Watanabe 164).

In his lifetime, Kūkai helped build Tōji’s *abhiṣeka* hall, the bell tower, the sūtra house and the lecture hall. Tōji was established as a Temple for Protection of the Nation and held in high esteem among the population. Kūkai’s efforts in construction of buildings and installation of art increased what would later be considered valuable cultural assets.

On the eleventh day of the first month of Tenchō 2 (826), Kūkai held the inaugural Dharma gathering for the protection of the king and country called the Great Benevolent King

²² KKZ 6:368.

²³ See Chapter X for the importance of this concept for the Shingon *Ajikan* meditation.

²⁴ KKZ 6:597.

²⁵ KKZ 7:175.

Gathering (大仁王会). This was held at the Jison hermitage (慈尊院) at Mount Kōya. According to tradition, Kūkai built Jison hermitage for his mother and in honor of Maitreya (Imaizu 420). It is located at the foot of Mount Kōya, outside of the temple complex, and was possibly used primarily by *bhikṣuṇī* and other women interested in Shingon (Imaizu 420). According to Kitagawa “later Kūkai’s mother and his cousin, Ato Mototada, lived here. It is to be noted that four other members of the Saegi family moved to this district and were given minor local positions” (Kitagawa 1951:146).

Kūkai dated his poem entitled “Poem on the Ten Illusions Verses”²⁶ the first day of the third month of Tenchō 4 (827). The theme of this poem is taken from a section of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, which reads as follows. “Secret Master, when the bodhisattvas practice the bodhisattva practices [of the mantra school] and deeply contemplate [*bhāvayitvā*] on the ten verses [which explain] co-arising, they will realize the mantra-path [*mantra-naya*]” (Kiyota 1982:77). In accordance to the enumeration of the ten verses²⁷ that follows the sentence above in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, Kūkai writes a ten-section poem apparently as a meditation on these illusions. Kūkai signed the poem The *Śramaṇa* of Shingon’s Temple for National Prosperity, *Shōsōzu Henjō Vajra*.²⁸

On the first day of the fifth month of Tenchō 4 (827), Emperor Junna invited one hundred *bhikṣu* to the Council Hall in the Imperial Palace to perform services for rain. Kūkai’s prayer for

²⁶ KKZ 6:677.

²⁷ These are a phantom; a mirage; a dream; a reflection; the city of Gandharva; an echo; the moon reflected on a body of water; a bubble; a flower in the sky; a firebrand (Kiyota, 1982:77).

²⁸ KKZ 6:687.

the occasion appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.²⁹ In the writing, Kūkai indicates that day the *Greater Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* was to be copied and from that sūtra the Dharma for Bringing Rain (請雨經法, *Syōukyōbō*) was to be performed (KKZ 6:379).

In a memorial address,³⁰ Kūkai later recalls that on the seventh day of the fifth month of Tenchō 4 (827) a certain *Sōjō*, identified (probably by Shinzei) in the title as Kūkai's preceptor Gonzō, came to stay at Saiji. Kūkai recalls that three days later, on the tenth day of the fifth month, the person in question was granted the high-ranking title *Sōjō* (僧正) by imperial order.³¹

On the twenty-second day of the fifth month of Tenchō 4 (827) at Shingo Temple (神護寺) in Heian, a Dharma gathering was held as a memorial service for the late wife of a minister. According to the written version of Kūkai's prayer for that occasion,³² at that time, a Tathāgata Mahāvairocana One Mudrā Maṇḍala (大日如来の一印量茶羅) was drawn. This is the maṇḍala appearing as the sixth assembly of the nine assemblies of the Vajradhātu maṇḍala. The One Mudrā Maṇḍala reveals the Buddha-wisdom (智慧 *S. jñāna*) of Mahāvairocana. Also, a group of *bhikṣu* copied a section of what Kūkai refers to as the Wide-eyed Dharma Maṇḍala (広眼法量茶羅).³³ This refers to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, wide-eyed meaning Mahāvairocana's *jñāna* as Kūkai explains in his *Meaning of the Vajraśekhara-sūtra*³⁴ (KKZ 6:543 n. 39). Kūkai's document also records that an image of Mahāvairocana was painted and a lecture was given on the

²⁹ KKZ 6:376.

³⁰ In a document dated the thirteenth day of the fourth month Tenchō 5 (828). In Praise of Gonzō, KKZ 6:651.

³¹ See "Sōkai" ranking in Dictionary and Glossary of this dissertation.

³² KKZ 6:484.

³³ KKZ 6:485.

³⁴ 金剛頂經義決 *Kongōchōgyōgiketsu*.

Mahāvairocana-sūtra.³⁵ Kūkai had made connections with Shingo Temple through his powerful allies the Wake brothers, to whom he may have been introduced by Saichō.

On the twenty-sixth day of the fifth month of Tenchō 4 (827), once again the Rain Prayer Dharma was performed at the Imperial Palace as recorded in the Record of the Rain Prayer (祈雨記) (KKZ 8:210). Two days later, on the twenty-eighth, Kūkai was given the high title *Daisōshō* (大僧都) according to *the Record of the Head of Tōji* (東寺長者補任)(KKZ 8:210). As when he was appointed *Shōsōzo*, Kūkai again tried unsuccessfully to decline the title (Hakeda 1972:56). Though his sources are not cited, Kitagawa provides more information on this as follows. “In 827, a drought lasted throughout the summer, and the emperor ordered Kūkai to lead an invocation ceremony, asking for rain by reciting *Daihannya-kyo* or *Mahaprajnaparamita-sutra*.³⁶ The ceremony lasted for three days without any success. Kūkai carried the Buddha relics, which had been kept at Toji temple, into the court and sprinkled them with holy water. The rain came and Kūkai was promoted to Dai-sozu” (Kitagawa 1951:146).

At this time, Kūkai was still involved with building the complex at Mount Kōya. But with the new appointment, his activities expanded on many levels (Kitagawa 1951:146). On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month of that year (827), Kūkai composed a prayer to be read

³⁵ KKZ 6:484.

³⁶ *Daihannyakyō; Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*.

by Yoshimine no Yasuyo (良琴安世, 785-830),³⁷ who was the chief mourner for the first anniversary of the death of Fujiwara Fuyutsugu (藤原冬嗣).³⁸

In the ninth month of Tenchō 4 (827), Kūkai wrote a prayer for Emperor Junna's observance of the anniversary of the death of Imperial Prince Iyo.³⁹ The pray dedicates ritual items the Emperor is donating to the temple in the name of Prince Iyo. It begins as by saying, "The all-complete Great Self crosses the single condition⁴⁰ of the eternal truth. The five-divisions of maṇḍala⁴¹ are connected with the wisdom of wisdom. The teachings of heaven and humans are weary with the fat of the ox cart and goat cart⁴² and the magic city⁴³ has the affliction of birds and rabbits (i.e., time). Far and near is the heart/mind of the Self. Beyond and within is our nature. If we become pure as water then there is arrival at the place of non-arrival. If the mirror is polished then it grasps the non-grasped. (The echo of) the bell in valley is long awaited" (KZ 10:82). Kūkai also lectured on the *Lotus Sūtra* at the gathering (KKZ 8:211).

On the eighth day of the eleventh month of Tenchō 4 (827), Kūkai was ordered by the Emperor to lecture to the ministry of judicial affairs (Watanabe 168).⁴⁴

³⁷ Yoshimine no Yasuyo was Imperial prince and son of Emperor Kanmu. "He helped write the *Nihonkōki* (819), the *Dairi-shiki* (821), and the *Keikokushū* (827). He also had irrigation works built in the Heian-kyō region" (Frédéric, 2002:1061).

³⁸ KKZ 6:380. Fujiwara Fuyutsugu will be remembered from previous chapters as the literary courtier who worked with Kūkai on several projects, including providing sponsorship for Kūkai in the creation of the first public school in Japan.

³⁹ KZ 10:82; KKZ 6:372.

⁴⁰ Single condition (一居), from the *Shakumakaenron* (釈摩訶衍論). T. 32:606c.

⁴¹ The Buddha division, the *Lotus* division, the *Vajra* division, the Karma division, the Jewel division.

⁴² The Buddhist vehicles mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

⁴³ A chapter in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

⁴⁴ Watanabe finds this entry in the Record of Office of Judicial Affairs (法務補任). It is not listed in the Chronological Record in the KKZ.

Kūkai's writing for the funeral of his preceptor Gonzō is dated the thirteenth day of the fourth month of Tenchō 5 (828).⁴⁵ Kūkai lectured on and read from the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* on this occasion. His draft for this lecture is seen in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.⁴⁶

On the seventh day of the seventh month of that year, Kūkai gave a talk for a gathering to copy the *Lotus Sūtra* in commemoration of the death of the daughter of Mishima no Matsuto Sukenari.⁴⁷ Also, in the seventh month, Kūkai led the first Gathering of Mañjuśrī, (文殊会, J. *Monjue*). This was a Dharma gathering in veneration of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, offering ascetic practice and gathering alms to be distributed to the poor and lonely of the world, as explained in the *Sūtra of Mañjuśrī for the Benefit of Happiness in Nirvāṇa*.⁴⁸ Accordingly, it is a gathering in offering for poor and sick people. On the fifteenth day of the second month of Tenchō 5 (828), the government decreed that on the eighth day of the seventh month each year, rice would be allotted to the whole country at the time of the Mañjuśrī gathering. The first Mañjuśrī gathering was held in honor of the virtue of *Sōjō* Gonzō and *bhikṣu* Taizen (泰善, dates unknown) of Gangō Temple (元興寺) in Nara. Thereafter, it was an official event (Imaizu 1021).⁴⁹ In connection with the gathering, Kūkai offered an *abhiṣeka*, thereby drawing interest in Shingon.

⁴⁵ KKZ 6:651.

⁴⁶ KKZ 6:523.

⁴⁷ KKZ 6:515.

⁴⁸ T. 14 n. 463 佛說文殊師利般涅槃經.

⁴⁹ In 840 the government passed further regulations for the collection and distribution of taxes for this event. Tōji and Saiji prospered accordingly. However, when the Ritsuryō government collapsed the Mañjuśrī gathering was diminished. In the thirteenth century, the Shingon Vinaya Tradition (真言律宗) revived the gathering (Imaizu, 1021).

On the twentieth day of the fourth month of Tenchō 5 (828) imperial sanction was granted for the construction of an auditorium at Tōji. In the third month of that year, Emperor Junna became ill and imperial support for the temple construction was granted in hopes that this good deed with speed his recovery (Watanabe 161). Kūkai was in charge of the construction and the installation of five Buddhas, five Bodhisattvas, five directional deities (大明王) and images of 21 deities of the 6 heavens. According to Watanabe, these were the first images that Japan officially called those of *mikkyō* (Watanabe 161). The Fudō image among the five directional deities is today considered a representative Buddhist image of the Kōnin Era.

Kūkai was overseeing projects in Heian and at Mount Kōya. Legends say the emperor built Kūkai a lodging for resting half way between the two locations. This seems to be confirmed in that in the second month of Tenchō 5 (828), Kūkai wrote a poem to be conferred to the building on the national highway.⁵⁰ The poem is specifically aimed at imparting to travelers the medicine of the deities' *kaji* power (KKZ 8:211).

Perhaps Kūkai's most spectacular activity in 828, in terms of history's assessment of him, is his founding of the first public school in Japan. As with previous projects, Kūkai founded the school with the patronage of Fujiwara Fuyutsugu. It was named Shugeishuchi-in (or Sogeishuchi-in, 綜藝種智院).

Kūkai's school was built next door and to the east of Tōji. Although the school closed within a few years of its opening, present day Syuchi-in University (種智院大学) in that location claims to be the same school. Education in the first part of the Heian period was dictated by

⁵⁰ KKZ 6:249.

Imperial codes. The National University in Heian was based on the Chinese Confucian model of education and was for the children of the aristocracy who wished to secure a bureaucratic post in government. The qualifications for entering the school were rank and class. Entry was limited to approved young people of the five top ranks. Young people from the sixth rank and below could only be admitted by special application.

At the National University there was the Yin-Yang facility (*inyōryō*, 陰陽寮) for the study of the way of yin and yang (*onmyōdō*, 陰陽道) and the study of history (*rekigaku*, 曆学); there was the court physician facility (*tenyakuryō*, 典藥寮) for medical science and pharmacy; the Japanese court music facility (*gagakuryō*, 雅樂寮) for music; and a facility for the study of fabric and textile art. It was well known that aristocratic families built the dormitory buildings specifically for their children. The son of Emperor Junna, Prince Tsunesada (皇子底郎) had the Junna building (淳和院) built for him by the Emperor. The Wake clan had the Hisofumi building (弘文院), The Fujiwara clan had the Kangaku building (勸学院), the Tachibana clan had the Gakutachi building (学館院), the Arihara clan (在原) had the Syōgaku building (奨学院), the Ooe (大江) and Sugahara clans (菅原) had the Bunsyō building (文章院) and so forth (Watanabe 175).

In short, before the time of Kūkai's school, the general public had no facilities for education. Growing up in Shikoku, from early in life Kūkai may have noticed the need for public education. Today this only makes sense from the view of East Asian Buddhism. Kūkai himself may have participated as a teacher at the school (Watanabe 176). According to Kitagawa,

“Kūkai’s uncle, Ato Otari, who at one time was the tutor to Prince Iyo, became the administrator of Sogeshuchi-in” (Kitagawa 1951:150).

Kūkai states the school’s ideals and regulations in a document dated the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of Tenchō 5 (828), as seen in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.⁵¹ According to this document, the characteristic feature of the education ideal can be seen in the name, Syugei syuchi, which Kūkai took from the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Accordingly, all arts of scholarship and various kinds of knowledge is exactly the materialization of the absolute Dharmakāya Mahāvairocana. This is also the underlying principle of Kūkai’s literary theory as it is in his *The Meaning of Sound, Word, and Reality*.

Kūkai’s school was not simply a place to study the Buddhist scriptures. In accord with the message expressed in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, in his school Kūkai wanted people to study Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. In his letter requesting approval of his school from the emperor, Kūkai says he saw in each prefecture to which he traveled in China local schools opened to children and hoped to emulate this system in Japan. He writes, “Now in our capital there is only one university. The children of the poor and lowly have no place to go to seek knowledge, people who love learning come and go from distant places with much fatigue. If this dormitory was built it would greatly assist the young and uneducated, would it not be good?” (KKZ 6:647). He also says there would be no qualifications for matriculation but the school would be open to people of all ranks and classes.

Kūkai outlines four required conditions for his education system. First, it would have to have an atmosphere conducive to the education. Second, an “integrated education of the whole

⁵¹ KZ 10:151; KKZ 6:644.

person” would be stressed. Third, superior teachers must be obtained from each area of study: Buddhist teachers teaching Buddhism, Confucian teachers teaching Confucianism, and Daoist teachers teaching Daoism. Concerning this Kūkai writes, “In the three worlds, we are children of the Great Enlightened Lion (i.e., the Buddha), in the four oceans, children of the Scholar Sage of Beautiful Discourse (Confucius), we cannot turn away” (*KKZ* 6:650). Fourth, livelihood of teachers and students had to be assured by a system of full scholarships (完全給費制). About this Kūkai writes, “People cannot hang in a gourd,⁵² so it says in a Confucian aphorism. All live by food, as was said in a talk by the honored Śākyamuni.⁵³ This is to say, if one wants to propagate the path, then the people must be fed. Whether leaving home on the path or a Buddhist living at home (laity); whether practitioner or contributor, to persons whose hearts are on the path of learning, down the line, all things should be supplied” (*KKZ* 6:650). It is easy to imagine Kūkai is speaking from his actual experiences of poverty while at the National University and in Chang’an.

There are two documents attributed to Kūkai as presented in commemoration of the eightieth birthday Gomyō (護命, 750-834). One is Kūkai’s “Autumn Day” poem dated the eleventh day of the ninth month of Tenchō 6 (829).⁵⁴ The other is a statement of congratulations dated twenty-third day of the ninth month of Tenchō 6, the day the celebration took place. Kūkai is known to have organized the anniversary celebration for Gomyō, who was the leader of the Hossō tradition. At that time, it seems Kūkai and the top scholars of Nara gathered in a congenial

⁵² *Analects* 17:6.

⁵³ 成唯識論: *T.* 31 n. 1585:17b11.

⁵⁴ *KKZ* 6:658.

setting. Gomyō had bitterly opposed Saichō's attempt in 819 to establish the Mahāyāna ordination platform at Mount Hiei. In contrast, Gomyō never attacked Kūkai for granting the *abhiṣeka* outside of Nara. Instead, Kūkai found a powerful ally in Gomyō and the two appear to have grown close. In the poem, Kūkai writes the following praise for Gomyō. “Our famous guest became a *Sōjō*. Truly his virtue is next to the Buddha,” and “This excellent person should be called a rare national treasure” (KKZ 6:658).⁵⁵ Also in 829, at the age of 56, Kūkai was appointed head of Daianji Temple in Nara. This is the temple where Gomyō had been leader for many years (KKZ 8:212).

In 830, Emperor Junna ordered the leaders of each of the major Japanese Buddhist traditions to present a statement of their doctrine to the court. At that time, “Gomyō presented *Kenshinsho* for the Hossō tradition, Fusan of the Kegon tradition presented *Ichijo kaishinron*, Gishin of the Tendai tradition presented *Gishu*, Genyei of the Sanron tradition presented *Daigisho*, and Buan of the Ritsu tradition presented *Kairitsu-denraiki*. Some scholars believe that Kukai presented his *Jūjūshinron* [*Ten Stages of Mind*] on this occasion.” (Kitagawa 1951:150). This collection of works was named the Writing of the TENCHŌ Six Great Sects (天長六本宗書). At that time, Kūkai was fifty-seven years old.

The *Ten Stages of Mind* and its synopsis the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse* (秘藏宝鈴, *Hizō hōyaku*) are often considered the mature expressions of Kūkai's philosophy and as such, among the crowning achievements in his life. Today these works are viewed together

⁵⁵ For further discussion of these two writings see Chapter IV of this dissertation.

with Dōgen's (道元, 1200-53) *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (正法眼藏, *Shōbō genzō*) as expressing “the birth of true Japanese original philosophical writing by the two greatest writers” (Watanabe 169). It has sometimes been assumed that Kūkai's “ten stage” scheme is a thinly veiled sectarian criticism as opposed to a true statement of what he saw as a summery of legitimate doctrine providing the foundation for Japanese Tantric thought. While there may be a certain element of truth to this view, it is also the case that Kūkai saw the tenth stage, that of the ultimate Shingon teachings, as the fulfillment of the previous levels and not the rejection of them. The *Ten Stages of Mind* consists of 75,000 Chinese graphs in ten fascicles. The work contains 600 allusions to, and quotations of sūtras and other doctrinal works. Thereby, Kūkai locates Shingon within the larger scheme of Buddhist and other teachings of the world. The *Ten Stages of Mind* was the first writing in Japan to ever attempt such a grand systemization and synthesis of Buddhist teachings. Hakeda calls the *Ten Stages of Mind* “perhaps the most comprehensive religious work that has come down to us in Japan” (Hakeda 1972:67).

Kūkai said his ten stages of consciousness were based on a passage from the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* that states: “to attain enlightenment is to know one's own mind as it really is.” Kūkai wrote:

Now, on the basis of this sutra, I am going to reveal the stages of development of the mind of one who practices Shingon and the distinctions between the Exoteric and Esoteric teachings contained therein. There are innumerable stages in the development of mind, but, for the moment, I shall present ten categories into which they will be combined (Hakeda 1972:68).

For Kūkai, coursing the ten stages of human consciousness is essentially the process of awakening *bodhicitta*, spoken of in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Likely, a model for his ten-stage theory was the six *nirbhaya*, literally “fearlessness,” described in that sūtra as stages of

awakening the *bodhicitta*. According to Kiyota, the basic message revealed in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* is, “*bodhicitta* is the cause, great compassion is its root and skill-in-means its results” (forthcoming). Kūkai believed that all sentient beings are inherently enlightened. The key to realizing this is awakening the *bodhicitta* by first simply desiring to do so. According to this theory, even in the initial stages of development towards realization of enlightenment there is enlightenment. This is the essence of Shingon’s “first-as-final” concept.

The six *nirbhaya* theory elaborates stages of meditative practices. Kūkai modifies these stages in a way similar to that of the *daśabhūmi* theory found in the doctrine of the Kegon (C. Huayan) tradition, in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. To that sūtra’s analysis of Indian philosophic traditions however, Kūkai appends those of Japan that developed in China: the Tendai, Kegon and Shingon stages. In the end, Kūkai says it is the Three Mysteries of body, mind and speech that facilitate realization of Buddhahood in this lifetime, an idea that sometimes clashed with the orthodoxy of Nara Buddhism.

Ideas concerning realization of Buddhahood in this lifetime (J. *sokushin jōbutsu*) appear in the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*. The expression “*sokushin jōbutsu*” may have first appeared in the *Bodhicitta-śāstra*, which is a discussion of the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*. Kūkai refers to these writings not only to describe that stage of consciousness, but in so doing, to refute the dominant concept distinguishing sentient beings from the Buddha. Human-Buddha integration assumes universal Buddhahood as its basis. Certainly, this theory had been advanced in many Mahāyāna writings, though the meaning of this was subject to debate for centuries. Indeed, from the point of view of Shingon, this has been the goal of the Mahāyāna from its inception. Kūkai’s writings follow the teachings of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* as he understood them. He proposes an integration of

theory and practice, and advocates a realistic way to verify the universal buddhahood ideal in actual life by the unconditional acceptance of the proposition that *bodhicitta* is inherent in all sentient beings.

In light of the importance scholars place on the *Ten Stages of Mind*, it is curious that few works of modern western scholarship in both Japanese Studies and Buddhist Studies have focused on it. In fact, only a small handful of writings exist in western languages on the Shingon tradition, much less on the life and thought of Kūkai and the *Ten Stages of Mind*. To date, there is no study in a western language on the meaning and importance of the *Ten Stages of Mind*. Nor has there been a translation of the *Ten Stages of Mind* into English or any other western language.

In the *Collection of Miscellaneous Bequeathed Writings* (捨遺雜集) there is a record of an inscription by Kūkai dated the seventh day of the third month of Tenchō 7.⁵⁶ The writing is for the installation of the *Cintāmaṇi* Avalokiteśvara (如意輪觀音菩薩, J. Nyorin Kannon Bosatsu) in a temple at Mount Rokko (六甲山) near Kobe. Legend says Emperor Junna built the temple for his concubine Manai Gozen, who accepted Shingon under the guidance of Kūkai. Manai left the court and dedicated her life to Buddhism accompanied by two female attendants who followed her example (Kitagawa 1951:146-7). The temple, still affiliated with Shingon today, is called Jūrin Temple (鷲林寺) (Imaizu 456).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ KKZ 7:137.

⁵⁷ An alternative legend says Jūrin Temple was founded by the hermit Hōdō (法道仙人)(Imaizu 456).

According to temple tradition,⁵⁸ Kūkai gave Manai the Buddhist name Nyorin, after Nyorin Kanzeon Bosatsu, the *Cintāmaṇi* Avalokiteśvara. Interesting to note, “a Japanese synergetic form of Nyorin Kannon, called Seiryū Gongen, is represented as a feminine Shintō Kami in the court costume of the Heian period, holding a *cintāmaṇi* in the right hand. This form was reportedly brought by Kōbō Daishi to the monastery of Jingo-ji” (Frédéric 1995:172-3). Since the image is dressed in the clothes of a Heian period court woman and identified with Nyorin Kanzeon Bosatsu, it is easy to draw a connection to the *bhikṣuṇī* Nyorin.

As for the connection with Shintō, in the same year Kūkai wrote an article pledging his devotion to the shrine of the Sun-goddess of Ise, Amaterasu (Kitagawa 1951:151) Amaterasu is the symbol and progenitor of the Imperial family. That year he also “received a petition from twenty-six *bhikṣu* of Mount Hiei, including Tokuyen, Nangaku, Genben, Kaiyen, Jishun, Jiyei, Jitsuen, and Nanryo, asking for the transmission of the *Garbha* realm. The petition was written by Encho” (Kitagawa 1951:151).

On the fourteenth day of the sixth month of Tenchō 8 (831), Kūkai asked to be relieved from his position as *Daisōzu* due to recurring illness (KKZ 6:564).

⁵⁸ See <http://www.ne.jp/asahi/tanba/kirinosato/HANSINgorogorodake-docu.htm>, accessed 3/11/03.

Chapter X.

Kūkai's Meditation: The *Ajikan*.

1. The Syllable 'A' in Kūkai's Writings.

In this chapter, I examine what has been described as the most basic and essential element of Kūkai's religio-philosophical system (Yamasaki 1988:190), meditation on the Sanskrit syllable 'A,' (hereafter referred to as the *Ajikan*). First, by examining Kūkai's own writings as well of those most important for Shingon, it will be shown that the *Ajikan* is part of the dynamic believed to set Shingon apart from other traditions of Buddhism. Indeed, Kūkai is said to have believed that by means of the *Ajikan* meditation one could become a Buddha within this very lifetime. Next, for the purpose of clarification and comparison, I will look briefly at a separate but related meditation practice in Shingon, which involves concentration on the 'A' syllable as a part of a six syllable mantra referred to as the *rokudai enyū*. I will then proceed to analyze the standardized objects of meditation used in the *Ajikan*, the 'A' character, the moon disk and the lotus.

Materials clearly showing the origin and development of the *Ajikan* have either not been discovered or have not been analyzed in light of this purpose. In hopes of contributing to this process, in this chapter, I will present materials from Hinduism, as well as Buddhism in India, Southeast Asia and East Asia that parallel *Ajikan* practice.¹ In so doing, I will identify several motifs common among these and central to each. Such motifs include the primacy of the 'A' syllable, identification of the 'A' syllable with a deity or *ātman*, the appearance of the moon disk

¹ As in Chapter II, I have limited my comparisons to religious traditions of India and East Asia as these are considered most relevant for Kūkai in terms of the transmission of Shingon theories and practices.

as an object of meditation, mental transformation of the moon disk and the written ‘A’ character during meditative practice, identification of the moon disk with the mind and the lotus with the heart of the practitioner.² These materials suggest that contrary to setting Shingon apart from other Buddhist philosophical systems, the *Ajikan* locates a part of Shingon practice firmly within a tradition of Indian Buddhist Tantric and non-Buddhist meditation practice.

As seen in the previous chapter, the *Ten Stages of Mind* sets out to describe a great range of human behavior, from those driven by basic desires to that leading to the revelation of one’s innate pure consciousness or Buddha-mind (S. *bodhicitta*, J. *bodaishin*, 菩提心). This ultimate stage of human consciousness is connected with the experience of “absolute truth” (*paramārtha*), achievable through Shingon concentration exercises. Specifically, in the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*, Kūkai names the meditation on the letter ‘A’ in this context. Quoting from the *Bodhicitta-śāstra*,³ Kūkai writes:

Those who understand the meanings of the letter A are to meditate on it resolutely; they should meditate on the perfect, luminous, and Pure Consciousness. Those who have had a glimpse of it are called those who have perceived the absolute truth (*paramārtha*). Those who perceive it all the time enter the first stage of Bodhisattvahood. If they gradually increase their competence in this meditation, they will finally be able to magnify it [the moon] until its circumference encompasses the entire universe and its magnitude becomes as inclusive as space. Being able freely to magnify or to reduce it, they will surely come to be in possession of the all-inclusive wisdom.

The student of the yoga should devote himself to the mastery of the Three Mysteries and the Five Series of Meditation. The Three

² This chapter focuses on the elements of the *Ajikan*. For a description of the procedure of *Ajikan* practice, see Richard K. Payne, “The Shingon *Ajikan*: diagrammatic analysis of ritual syntax,” *Religion* v. 29, n. 3, July 1999 and Richard K. Payne, “*Ajikan*: ritual and meditation in the Shingon tradition” in *Re-visioning Kamakura Buddhism*, Richard K. Payne (ed). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

³ T. 32, N. 1665, B30-34; 241-243 in White’s translation.

Mysteries are: the mystery of body – to make mudrās and to invoke the presence of the sacred object of meditation; the mystery of speech – to recite the mantras in secret, pronouncing them distinctly without making the slightest error; the mystery of mind – to be absorbed in yoga, keeping one’s mind in a wholesome state like that of the bright, pure and full moon, and to meditate on the enlightened Mind. (Hakeda 1972:220).

Kūkai said that his ten stages of consciousness were based on a passage from the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*⁴ that states: “to attain enlightenment is to know one’s own mind as it really is.” Accordingly, the process of rising from the lower stages to the higher is essentially that of awakening *bodhicitta*, spoken of in connection with the ‘A’ syllable and other syllables in the *Bodhicitta-śāstra* and to a lesser extent in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. In the *Ten Stages of Mind*, Kūkai quotes the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* saying, “Why is this the mantra teaching? Because the principle of the letter A is that all natures (*dharmas*) are fundamentally unborn...” (Todaro 92). The passage goes on to explain the principle of numerous other Sanskrit syllables of which ‘A’ is among. Following the quote, however, Kūkai returns to the ‘A’ –syllable. He writes, “Again, the five types of letter A⁵ are the mind of the highest enlightenment. That is, based on these letters sounds issue forth and Buddhism is taught, i.e., these are speakers and listeners. This is an affair of the Buddhas of the Law maṇḍala body...” (Todaro 92). It is interesting to note that while this is all the *Ten Stages of Mind* has to say about the ‘A’ syllable, Kūkai choose to expand upon the subject afterwards in the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*. The latter was written in response to a request on the part of Emperor Junna (r. 823-833) for clarification and a synopsis of the *Ten Stages of Mind*.

⁴ T.18, 848.

⁵ Refers to *a, ā, aṃ, aḥ, āḥ* as elucidated in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (Hakeda, 220-1)

As primary written sources for his comments on observances of the ‘A’ syllable, Kūkai also relied on two documents of great importance to Shingon doctrine, the *Bodhicitta-śāstra* and the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.⁶ Kūkai refers to these documents extensively in the *Ten Stages of Mind* and many of his other writings. The *Bodhicitta-śāstra* states:

In the minds of all sentient beings there is an element of pure nature...It is likened to one of the sixteen phases of the moon – that in which the moon appears brightest...Therefore, a mantra practitioner should, by means of ‘A’ –syllable visualization, awaken the inherent brightness within his mind, causing a gradual cleansing and brightening, and a realization of the knowledge of the non-arising of phenomena. The ‘A’ –syllable has the meaning of the originally non-arisen nature of all dharmas (White 238-9).

Meditation on the letter ‘A’ is indicated by Kūkai in connection with attainment of the tenth stage of consciousness (*jūjūshin*, 十住心) and thus realizing buddhahood (*jōbutsu*, 成仏). For this reason, it is alternatively named in Shingon “Pure *Bodhicitta* Concentration” (淨菩提心觀) (*Mikkyō dijiten* 16).

In light of the fact that the *Ajikan* became so important to Shingon, it is interesting to note that in his writings, Kūkai made no specific mention of it *per se*. In *Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in this Life (Sokushin jōbutsu gi)*, Kūkai addresses the ‘A’ –syllable only in relationship to five other syllables mentioned in relationship to the ‘A’ in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. These are ‘A,’ ‘Va,’ ‘Ra,’ ‘Ha,’ ‘Kha’ and ‘Hūṃ.’ The significance of these syllables for Shingon will be taken up below. In his writing entitled *Meaning of Sound, Word, and Reality (Shōji jissō gi)*, Kūkai uses the ‘A’ –syllable as an example, seemingly chosen casually from among many candidates.

⁶ T.39, 723.

Again, if we interpret “sound, word, and reality” on the basis of a syllable, we can make the following analysis. Take, for example, the first syllable of the Sanskrit alphabet *A*. When we open our mouth and simultaneously exhale, the sound *A* [ə] is produced. This is the sound. For what does the sound *A* stand? It denotes a name-word (*myōji*) of the Dharmakāya Buddha; namely, it is sound and word (Hakeda 1972:239).

Likewise, in the *Meaning of the word HŪM (Ungi gi)* Kūkai writes of the ‘*A*’ –syllable in the midst of others. In that work, Kūkai creates two categories for interpreting these syllables, the Invariant Meanings and the Ultimate Meanings. In the category of Invariant Meanings he writes:

The graphic form of the word *Hūm* can be divided into four components. In the *Vajraśekhara* it is interpreted as consisting of four letters [*H A Ū M*]⁷ (Hakeda 1972:246).

Next, in the midst of describing each of these four letters, he writes,

“The *A* [ə] is inherent in the letter *H*. The sound *A* is the mother of all letters; it is the essence of all sounds; and it stands for the fountainhead of all-inclusive Reality. ‘The very act itself of opening the mouth in order to utter any sound is accompanied by the sound *A*; therefore, apart from the sound *A*, no sounds are possible. The sound *A* is the mother of all sounds.’⁸ If we see the letter *A*, we know that all things are empty and nil [as isolated individual entities apart from the all-inclusive Reality]⁹. This is the invariant meaning of the letter *A* (Hakeda 1972:246).

In the category of Ultimate Meanings, he writes:

Three ultimate meanings of the letter *A* can be identified: a) being, b) empty, and c) uncreated.

The letter *A* in the Sanskrit alphabet represents the first sound. If it is the first [in contrast to others], it is relative. We therefore define it as “[relative] being.”

A also has the meaning of non-arising. If anything arises in dependence, it does not have its own independent nature. We therefore define it as “empty.”

By “uncreated” is meant the Realm which is one and real, that is, the Middle Way [Absolute]. Nāgārjuna said: “Phenomena are empty,

⁷ *Ha, ū, ṃ*

⁸ Quoting from the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, T.39, 656a.

⁹ Comment in brackets here is that of Hakeda.

temporal, and also middle.”¹⁰ ...this single letter is the mantra of Mahāvairocana.

A sūtra states: “The letter *A* signifies ‘the enlightened mind,’ ‘the gateway to all teachings,’ ‘nonduality,’ ‘the goal of all existences,’ ‘the nature of all existences,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘the Dharmakāya.’” These are the ultimate meanings of the letter *A*. The same sūtra further elucidates the letter *A* (Hakeda 1972:249).

In the last paragraph above, the sūtra Kūkai refers to in his quote is the *Protection of the Country and King Dhāraṇī Sūtra*.¹¹ This sūtra lists a hundred meanings for the ‘*A*’ –syllable. While showing support of the sūtra by citing it, more so than Kūkai’s own words in this writing, the tone of the sūtra conveys a strong expression of a belief in the primacy of the ‘*A*’ –syllable. It is not until *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse* that we find anything near this kind of enthusiasm for the ‘*A*’ –syllable expressed in Kūkai’s own words, whether or not this is indicative of a development in his own philosophy. But even in the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse* Kūkai does not lay out the basis for the standardized features that have come make-up the *Ajikan*.

Chronologically, *Meaning of Attaining Enlightenment in this Life* appeared in 817, followed by *Meaning of Sound, Word, and Reality* in the same or the following year. *Meaning of the word HŪM* appeared next, also in the same year, when Kūkai was 44 years old. The *Ten Stages of Mind* was written in 830 when Kūkai was 57, and the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse* appeared later that same year. Near the end of what may have been his last writing, *Secret Key to the Heart Sutra (Hannya shingyō hiken)* from 834, the year prior to his death at 62 years of age, Kūkai seems intent on setting the record straight concerning the various interpretations of the ‘*A*’ –syllable and the value of these. Kukai writes,

¹⁰ From *Mādhyamika-kārikās*, T.30, 33b.

¹¹ *Shouhukuojiechu jing*, T.19 n. 997.

Among the sermons of the Tathāgata, there are two kinds. One is the exoteric; the other, the esoteric. For those of exoteric caliber he preached lengthy sermons containing many clauses, but for those of esoteric caliber, he preached the *dhāraṇīs*, the words that embrace manifold meanings. It was for this reason that the Tathāgata explained the various meanings of such words as *A* and *Oṃ*.

As we saw in Kūkai's admonition to Saichō in a previous chapter, Kūkai valued a "mysterious" mind-to-mind transmission above textual study alone. This may explain the ellipsis in regards to the unified system of *Ajikan* practice in Kūkai's own writings. For whatever reasons, the written elucidation of what became the fixed system in Shingon would have to wait for the writing of one of Kūkai's direct disciples, Jitsue (実惠, 786-849), who attributed his work on the subject, *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan* (阿字觀用心口決, *Ajikan yōjin kuke*) to his master's personal tutelage.

Standardized elements in the *Ajikan*.

The single system of *Ajikan* that survives in Japan today is believed to have been systematized by Kūkai and transmitted through a series of instructional manuals beginning with that of his direct disciple Jitsue and continuing to this day (Nakamura 1999:7). Since Kūkai's time, over one hundred such instructional texts on the *Ajikan* have been written (Yamasaki 1988:190). As we have seen above, scattered references to elements important in the *Ajikan* appear in those writings considered most important to Shingon, such as the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*¹², the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the *Bodhicitta-sāstra* and Kūkai's own works. Various symbols and elements of practice that have come to be identified as the *Ajikan* appear to have their origin in India and China. Even so, it is unclear

¹² T.18, 865

whether either the individual components of the meditation or a combination thereof, occupied a position of central importance in Buddhist practice before the time of Kūkai. It is in Jitsue's instruction manual that we first find the formula that becomes standardized for use as the objects of the *Ajikan*. *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan* contains a description of the three main elements or principal images (本尊) used in the meditation. These are the 'A' character drawn in Siddham script, the moon disk and the lotus base. As a part of the meditation, we also find the set interpretation of the moon disk as the mind (S. *citta*) and the lotus base as the physical heart (S. *hrdaya*).

According to *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan*, the 'A' character has three aspects: emptiness (*śūnyatā*), being and origination. Likewise, the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* says, "The A character has itself three aspects. That is, the aspect of being, the aspect of non-origination, the aspect of emptiness." Although Kūkai seems to have modified these three to fit his two categories of the Invariant Meanings and the Ultimate Meanings in his *Meaning of the word HŪM* (quoted above), Yamasaki points out that in fact, all three aspects of the 'A' –syllable mentioned in the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* are included in Kūkai's category of Ultimate Meanings. It appears that Kūkai created a separate category for Invariant Meanings not mentioned in the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* as a way of describing provisional truth in distinction to the ultimate truth, in accordance with Mādhyamika philosophy. For this reason, Yamasaki believes that Kūkai interpreted the lines from the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, 'The very act itself of opening the mouth in order to utter any sound is accompanied by the sound A; therefore, apart from the sound A, no sounds are possible. The sound A is the mother of all sounds,' which he quotes in explanation of the

Invariant Meanings, from the perspective that all beings are completely non-existent. In distinction, Kūkai places the three aspects of the ‘A’ –syllable from the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, emptiness, being and origination, in the category of Ultimate Meanings. According to Yamasaki, Kūkai does so by slightly changing the reading in the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* so that the “real character of the ‘A’ syllable is that there are three aspects: the aspect of non-origination, the aspect of emptiness, the aspect of being.”

In *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan*, the ‘A’ character, the moon disk and the lotus flower are all interconnected. In regards to the relationship of the ‘A’ character to the moon disk it says, “The character ‘A’ becomes the seed of the moon disk and the moon disk becomes the radiance of the character ‘A’. Therefore, the moon disk and the ‘A’ character become completely one.”¹³

As for the relationship with the lotus flower, *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan* says,

The eight petals of the lotus flower are exactly *Hṛdaya*. *Citta* abides on the lotus flower. These two minds cannot be separated at any time. Therefore, upon the lotus flower, the moon disk is seen. The moon disk becomes *citta*. *Citta* looks exactly like the moon disk. So that the circle form of the moon disk looks like a crystal jewel and the seed of the lotus becomes the character ‘A’. Therefore, in the middle of the moon disk, the ‘A’ character is observed.¹⁴

Yamasaki explains this passage as follows. “That is to say, the original mind of the sentient being is divided into two minds: *hṛdaya* and *citta*. In the *Ajikan*, the lotus flower represents *hṛdaya* while the moon disk represents *citta*. The character ‘A’ is the seed for both of

¹³ KKZ 1:470.

¹⁴ KKZ 1:475.

them. *Hṛdaya* and the lotus flower, *citta* and the moon disk and, the character ‘A’, all five are completely non-dual and completely one” (Yamasaki 1982:32).

Kūkai’s own written references to the inter-relationship of the ‘A’ character, the moon disk and the lotus flower, along with their interpretations as *citta* and *hṛdaya* respectively, are less concrete.¹⁵ In his Lectures on *Mahāyāna for Emperor Kanmu*,¹⁶ Kūkai writes, “the lotus principle of *hṛdaya* lends wetness to the bamboo fishing basket.” In *Introductory Explanation of the Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra* Kūkai writes, “*Hṛdaya* is in the exact center of the sentient being. In the future, (practitioners) will realize Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Then the form of the lotus flower will be known.” In both passages the images of *hṛdaya* and the lotus flower appear together.

In *Shūhiron*¹⁷ Kūkai writes, “the moon arrives at the dirty pond, like the lotus flower it is not polluted.” In the *Epitaph for deceased disciple Chisen* he writes, “(Chisen) proved non-origination in the single character ‘A’ and the five wisdoms were obtained in murky water. He long studied the *samādhi* of *dharmadhātu* and he will be eternally idle in the four mysteries of *Cana* (i.e., Vairocana). As for the moon realm, the mind lotus was contemplated, and deep-rooted delusion was burnt by the flames of wisdom.” In this last passage, we find in Kūkai’s own writing what might be construed as a cryptic reference to a disciple’s devotion to *Ajikan*. Although there is no mention here of *hṛdaya* or *citta*, the three material elements of the practice

¹⁵ I am indebted to Yamasaki (1982) for pointing out these following references in Kūkai’s writings.

¹⁶ *Kanmu kōtei no ontame ni daijō gyōsho no kinji no hokke o kōzuru dasshin*, KKZ 3.

¹⁷ *Gobu darani mondō ge san shūhiron*, KKZ, 2.

are present. In addition, Kūkai begins a prayer to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Emperor Kanmu by speaking of the lotus at the center of the physical heart (S. *hṛdaya*).¹⁸

Again, in *Introductory Explanation of the Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra*, Kūkai writes,

As for the bright shining jewel pagoda, heaven's shore is pointed to by the parting moon. As for the colorful colors of the lotus ceremony, the edge of land is passed through by means of the writing of stars. How much more, in the pond of many answers, the eight petals of the lotus flower open wide and float completely ordinarily, and three flat moon disks radiate in the emptiness of self nature, and the light of complete knowledge shoots forth.

In this passage moon disks, the lotus flower and emptiness (one of the characteristics of 'A'), are brought together. But in no way is this passage sufficient for establishing the fixed relationship of these elements found in the *Ajikan*.

Because such fragments are all that Kūkai left in writing to vaguely suggest a systemized connection among the elements that became the fixed form of the *Ajikan*, Yamasaki cautiously suggests that sufficient evidence does not exist to conclude that Kūkai is the voice behind the *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan*. More compelling is Yamasaki's observation that in the *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan* the words "Explanation of Meaning" appear as what seems to be a heading, halfway through the writing. This may signal that what follows are the comments of Kūkai's disciple, Shingon Master Jitsue. Indeed, following this sentence is the section on what became the fixed forms for the objects of meditation in the *Ajikan*. The section preceding this contains the information on the three aspects of the 'A' character quoted by Kūkai from the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.

¹⁸ KKZ 6:368, see Chapter IV of this dissertation.

3. The five-syllable mantra used in the Ajikan and its relationship to the Shingon Meditation on the Six Elements.

The *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan* gives the following instructions for performing the *Ajikan*.

First, if you desire to visualize this syllable, find a place where the ceiling and the four walls do not seem cramped and it is neither too dark nor too light, and sit there. If it is too dark, deluded thoughts will arise, and if it is too light, the mind will be distracted. At night, sit with a dim lamp hung behind you.

Place a cushion and sit in full or half lotus. Form the Dharma Realm Samādhi Mudrā and have your eyes neither fully open nor closed. If they are open, they will move and distract you, while if they are closed, you will sink into sleep. Narrow your eyelids without blinking and fix both eyes on the bridge of the nose. If the tongue is put to the palate [just behind the teeth], the breath will quiet of itself. Do not shift or bend the lower back, but sit straight to aid the circulation. If the blood circulation is impaired, illness may arise, or the mind may become disturbed.

Being careful in these things, first form the Vajra Añjalikarma mudrā¹⁹ and recite the Five Great Vows. Next recite the five-syllable mantra of the Tai-zō one hundred times. Then perform the visualization. First, visualize the syllable in its ultimate, essential aspect, then contemplate the truth of its limited, phenomenal aspect...(Yamasaki 1988:196).

In this passage, *Tai-zō* refers to the *Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala*. The five-syllable mantra used at the beginning of the *Ajikan*, *A, VA, RA, HA, KHA*, appears in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, in which that maṇḍala is described. The five-syllable mantra is explained in relation to five constitute elements of the material world. In the *Shōji jissō gi*, Kūkai writes, “The exoteric five elements are as commonly explained. The esoteric five symbolic elements are the five syllables, the five Buddhas, and the entire oceanic assembly of deities” (Yamasaki 1988:68). To these five elements in the *Ajikan*, Shingon adds a sixth in a related practice known as the Meditation on the

¹⁹ J. *Kangō Gasshō-in*; C. *Jingang Hezhang Yin*. Formed similar to the Añjali mudrā but, as Frédéric writes, “with the thumbs crossed over each other and the tips of the fingers interlaced, the arm projected slightly forward instead of adhering to the breast” (Frédéric 1995:48).

Six Elements (*rokudai enyū*). These two meditation practices believed to have been indicated by Kūkai, are the most important ones practiced in Shingon today (Yamasaki 1988:68).

The term “*rokudai enyū*” literally means “the harmonious interpenetration of six elements.” In the context of this meditation, “interpenetration” refers to co-arising, while “harmony” refers to the orderly arrangement of what has co-arisen within *dharmadhātu*. The Shingon practitioner meditates on the six elements in order to integrate with Dharmakāya Mahāvairocana. These elements are earth, water, fire, wind and space, all of which are reflected within the sixth element, consciousness (*S. vijñāna*).

The creation of the physical universe based on the elements is basic to Indian and other religious thought. In hymn 10.90 of the *Ṛg Veda* (c. 1200-900 BCE), to create the elements, the primordial man, Puruṣa, performs a sacrificial dismemberment of his own body, which thus form the constituents of the universe.

The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born. Indra and Agni came from his mouth, and from his vital breath the Wind was born. From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his two feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they set the worlds in order (O’Flaherty 31).

Here in an early Indian text we find the equation of the moon and the mind as in the *Ajikan*. This dismemberment of Puruṣa into creative elements became the basis for Vedic sacrifice. Related to this, Vedic sacrifice seeks to ritually transform the spirit of the deceased (*preta*) into an ancestor (*pitr*) and reintegrate the various elements of the body into the universe. This dissolution into parts is described in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.2.13), “The voice of the dead man goes into fire, his breath into wind, his eye into the sun, his mind into the moon...”

(Smith 90). Similar descriptions are found in the *Ṛg Veda* (10.16.3) and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (10.3.3.6) (O’Flaherty 31).²⁰

Likewise, in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, the beginning of the world and humankind is described as follows. “–a heart was hatched; from the heart sprang the mind, and from the mind, the moon” (Olivelle 195).

Upaniṣadic, Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika traditions all supported theories of various elements comprising the physical universe. Early Buddhism is thought to have borrowed the concept of the five elements, which appears in the texts of these various Indian schools as four, five or six elements.

In the *Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in this Life* Kūkai explains the Shingon observance of the elements as follows. “In the various revealed teachings, the four elements are considered to be non-sentient. But, the mysterious teachings explains that they are the Tathāgata’s *samaya* body. The four elements are not apart from the heart. Though heart and form may be said to differ, their nature is the same. Form is the heart; the heart is form.”²¹ Contrary to the sound of this theory as philosophical speculation, for Kūkai it means the opposite. That is, the Tantric interpretation of the elements as the Buddha’s mysterious all-pervading body (*dharmakāya*) removes them from the realm of the philosophical speculation of other traditions, and has them express the concrete reality of the here and now (*tathatā*).²²

²⁰ Also see, David M. Knipe, “Sapiṇḍīkaraṇa: The Hindu Rite of Entry into Heaven,” in Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1977, p. 111.

²¹ *KZ*, 3:95-6.

²² In a forthcoming publication on Shingon theory and practice, Minoru Kiyota expresses the opinion that since no immediate model for this idea has been found, it appears likely that the explanation of *tathatā* in terms of the six elements is Kūkai’s own innovation.

As in the story of Puruṣa quoted above from the *Ṛg Veda*, for Shingon the first five elements are not conceived of as stationary, but sources of creation. Likewise, Kūkai personified *tathatā* as a living organism, *dharmakāya* Mahāvairocana. Mahāvairocana as the elements is represented in Shingon as seed syllables (*bīja*). Concerning this identification, the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* says,

I am of the mind, self-abiding in all places and pervading the states of sentient and non-sentient beings, [because:]

- 1) ‘*A*’ represents the essence of life;
- 2) “*VA*” represents the water element;
- 3) “*RA*” represents the fire element;
- 4) “*HA*” represents the wind element;
- 5) “*KHA*” represents the space element (Kiyota 1982:98)²³

This important identification for Shingon is also described in the *Commentary on Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, in the *Bodhicitta-śāstra*, and in Kūkai’s own writings. In a section entitled “The Meaning of ‘Becoming a Buddha in this Life’” in the *Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in this Life*, Kūkai quotes the passage above, explaining the elements and adding consciousness as a sixth element, complete with a seed syllable. Kūkai writes,

The *Bīja* [also known as the Dharma] Mantra is recited as follows: “*A, VA, RA, HA, KHA, HŪM*” [to convey the meaning of “original non-arising”] which is beyond words.

‘*A*’ indicates [the truth] that all elements are originally non-arising. It is [symbolically] represented by the element earth.

“*VA*” indicates that [truth] is beyond words and speeches. It is [symbolically] represented by the element water.

“*RA*” indicates that [truth] is pure and undefiled. It is [symbolically] represented by the element fire.

“*HA*” indicates that [truth] is beyond causes and conditions. It is [symbolically] represented by the element wind.

“*KHA*” indicates that [truth] is emptiness. It is [symbolically] represented by the element space.

“*HŪM*” indicates enlightenment [symbolically] represented by the

²³ T. 32 n. 1665:573c.

consciousness element. From the perspective of the causal aspect of enlightenment, it is called the discriminating consciousness [*viññāna*]; but from the perspective of the resultant aspect of enlightenment, it is called wisdom [*jñāna*]. Wisdom is enlightenment (Kiyota 1982:97-8).

While there is no written evidence from Kūkai that he endorsed what became the standardized form of the *Ajikan*, it is clear from the passage above that Kūkai is presenting the Meditation on the Six Elements with the corresponding mantra as a means for attainment of buddhahood in the present body. Again, the first five of the elements are used as a mantra in the *Ajikan* and one has to speculate as to why the sixth element is not. While Kūkai quotes the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* as a source for the first five elements, the ‘*HŪM*’ syllable can be found to be exalted in the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*. Yamasaki explains the use of ‘*HŪM*’ to express consciousness. Parenthetical clarifications are mine.

...universal Buddha-mind, personified in the deity Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana), also manifests as Kongōsatta (Vajrapāṇi). This bodhisattva, who represents the enlightened individual, is associated with the consciousness element. The mantra associated with Kongōsatta is the syllable UN (*HŪM*), and this same syllable is also used, therefore, to symbolize the sixth element, consciousness (Yamasaki 1988:67).

A meditation scheme based on integrating with a harmony-interpenetrating body is by no means original to Kūkai’s thought. The Chinese Tiantai (J. Tendai) tradition postulated the “three-thousand worlds immanent in an instant thought” (C. *Yinian sanqian*, 一念三千), meaning all elements of existence (referring to *tathatā*, not the *Abhidharmakośa*’s dharma concept), which dependently co-arise, are immanent at any one given state of mind (*yi nien*). The Japanese Tendai tradition also maintains observances of ‘*A*’ based on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. In one such observance, the practitioner is to “picture at one’s heart a moon one inch in diameter.

In the center of the moon visualized a lotus. In the center of the lotus place the Sanskrit letter *AH*’ (Saso 38).

Likewise, the Chinese Huayan tradition holds that all the elements of the world are interrelated²⁴ and reflected in the enlightened mind (*yi xin*).²⁵ This interrelatedness is found illustrated throughout the main sūtra for Huayan philosophy, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The final book of that sūtra, the *Gaṇḍhavyūha*, describes the physical and spiritual journey of Sudhana, a seeker of truth and enlightenment. Sudhana visits 53 spiritual teachers and eventually, reaching Maitreya, becomes integrated with Samantabhadra, the bodhisattva of Universal Good and the embodiment of enlightenment. Throughout the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, the moon appears as “a symbol of truth or reality, being reflected everywhere while itself remaining undivided” (Cleary 1987:1637). The *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* was also revered and quoted by Kūkai. Related to this, in the Shingon ‘moon visualization’ (月輪觀, *Gachirin-gan*) the moon is likened to the mind of Samantabhadra.²⁶

The Taoist influence is also apparent in the Chinese Buddhists’ predilection for this harmony-interpenetration concept found in the Meditation on the Six Elements. Yet, the Chinese development of this idea is not a deviation from basic Mahāyāna doctrine, although the Chinese terms *yi nien* and *yi xin* are found in non-Buddhist classical Chinese writings. It is a widespread

²⁴ Huayan uses the Chinese term *fajie yuanji* to refer to the elements within *dharmadhātu*, which dependently co-arise.

²⁵ Kiyota notes, “although the former leans toward an ontological theory and the latter toward a causal theory, what they are describing are ontological harmony and causal harmony respectively” (Kiyota, forthcoming).

²⁶ “*Gachirin-gan* (月輪觀). Known as the ‘moon visualization,’ this technique is employed for visualizing one’s pure *bodhicitta*. The moon is likened to the mind of Samantabhadra, and this potential is found to inhere in all sentient beings. This is the method whereby the ‘pure mind’ of sentient beings can be revealed. Mention of it is made in *Bodhicitta-śāstra*...” (White, II, 473).

The mind of an ordinary being is as a lotus bud, the mind of a buddha as the full moon. (B36).

Mahāyāna tenant that all things that exist in the realm of the dharma (*dharmadhātu*) are interrelated and interdependent because they dependently co-arise.

The Tiantai and Huayan notions of *yi nien* and *yi xin* respectively, both emphasize direct perception of truth. To this extent, the influence of the Chinese Buddhist apocryphal text, *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* is apparent. In the Meditation on the Six Elements, Shingon follows this tradition developed in China. The practitioner faces an image or a picture of Mahāvairocana, in this case a representation of harmony-interpenetration, and attempts to integrate with that deity, i.e., with all elements in the realm of the Dharma.

At least doctrinally, the ultimate goal of Shingon practice may be summed up as to realize buddhahood (or human-Buddha integration) in this lifetime (*sokushin jōbutsu*) (Murakami 23). In the case of both the *Ajikan* and the Meditation on the Six Elements, this means the mantra practitioner should realize a harmonious-interpenetration with the elements or, following the explanation in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, “to know the self as it truly is” (Kiyota 1982:14). Yamasaki describes what this means in the context of *Ajikan* practice.

The practice has many forms of varying complexity, emphasizing different techniques and aspects of Mikkyo doctrine, but in all case centers on the sound, the form, and the meaning of the syllable A as a way to experience suprapersonal reality...Mikkyo sees this syllable as an embodiment of the true nature of the myriad phenomena of the universe, transcending birth and death, ephemerality and permanence, the one and the many, past and future, in a single symbolic form (Yamasaki 1988:190).

The ‘A’ character used in the *Ajikan*.

As we have seen, the Shingon tradition values ‘A’ as the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet and the basic vowel in all Sanskrit syllables. In Sanskrit, ‘A’ (‘an’ when preceding a

vowel) can also be a negative prefix. In relation to this, Shingon defines ‘A’ as *anutpāda* (J. *honpushō*, 本不生), a term meaning non-arising (Nakamura 1999:7). Many Shingon commentaries have been written on *anutpāda*. The most representative one is that of Kakuban (1095-1143), the founder of New Interpretation Shingon (*Shingi shingonshū*). In a work entitled *Aji hishaku* (The Secret [School’s] Interpretation of “Aji”), Kakuban says that ‘A’ is a verbal representation of emptiness and signifies eternal truth, the non-creatable, and the indestructible. As such, all things are distilled into and emerge from ‘A’ (Kushida 210ff). One of the most fundamental ideas in Shingon is that *anutpāda* is the state ascribed to *dharmakāya* Mahāvairocana (Nakamura 7; van der Veere 94). The goal in the *Ajikan*, being becoming a Buddha in this life, is to join with the deity in the sense of experiencing the state of original emptiness. ‘A’ here symbolizes the seed (S. *bīja*) of Mahāvairocana.

Kakuban wrote at least ten manuals and treatises on the *Ajikan*.²⁷ In these writings, Kakuban explains that the ‘A’ syllable represents *anutpāda*, *bodhicitta* and that it is a symbol of the earth, upon which all things are based (van der Veere 96).

Following the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, in both the *Ten Stages of Mind* and the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse* Kūkai identifies ‘A’ with five separate sounds. These are, *a* (阿), *ā* (阿長), *aṃ* (暗), *aḥ* (噫), *āḥ* (噫引)²⁸. In a related way, many Indian texts, Hindu and Buddhist alike, describe how the syllable “OM,” considered sacred, is comprised of the three elements, ‘A,’ “U” and “M.” These elements are sometimes symbolized Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva respectively, or male, female and both genders (Kiyota, forthcoming).

²⁷ See van der Veere, 95.

²⁸ Nakamura, 7.

The representation of the ‘A’ character that has become standardized in the Shingon *Ajikan* practice is written in Siddham lettering. Siddham is an Indian script popularly used in the fourth and fifth centuries in India, the Gupta period. “The Siddham script owed its popularity in China and Japan especially to the rise of Mantrayāna, the esoteric School of the True Word. It was used in particular for writing *dhāraṇī* and mantra, and for the magic syllables known as *bījākṣara* or ‘germ-letters’” (Gulik 7). The Shingon patriarch Amoghavajra and other Indian Tantric masters developed a variety of methods for transliterating Sanskrit by using Chinese graphs. However, the Indian Tantric masters who came to China in the fifth - sixth century, Śubhakarasiṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, wrote using the Siddham script, a variety of the Brāhmī script. For this reason and because the script was thought to render the syllables more powerful than if represented in Chinese, it was the Siddham script that became the style of writing favored by Chinese Buddhists above all others for Sanskrit mantra and *dhāraṇī*. It remains in use for that purpose still today in both China and Japan.²⁹ Siddham is believed to have still been in use in India around the year 1000 (Gulik 7).

Since the Siddham script was used for transliterating Sanskrit words, especially mantras and *dhāraṇī*, it was considered a sacred script. The Tantric reverence for mantra syllables, both chanted and written, matched well with the long history in China of veneration of writing, for purposes from divination to government documents. Gulik observes, “...until recent years the Chinese considered it a sin to throw away scraps of paper bearing some written characters”

²⁹ In these countries, it is referred to by the term *xitan* (C. 悉曇) and *shittan* (J.), transliterations of Siddham. This name has given rise to some discussion in Buddhological literature. Gulik gives the following explanation for the term *siddham*. “When the Indian children were being taught the *varṇapāṭha*, the teacher would distribute among them small wooden writing boards where he had written out the letters...Now every time the teacher wrote a new paradigm on the writing board he would first write at the top the word *siddham* “success”, *siddhir-astu* “may there be success!” p. 55.

(Gulik 52). He describes the Chinese adaptation of writing Siddham characters that is used in the *Ajikan* in Japan today as follows.

After their arrival in China the Tantrik masters wrote Siddham with the ordinary Chinese writing brush rather than with the Indian reedpen; the latter was meant primarily for writing letters of small size dictated by the limited size of the palm leaf and the Chinese liked larger letters which do more justice to the calligraphic possibilities of Siddham...At the same time, however, they also employed on occasion a kind of wooden stylus, in Chinese called *mu-pi* “wooden brush”...a thin flat piece of wood shaped like a wedge...In Japan it is used to the present day for writing Siddham letters...Since in Chinese texts the characters are written in vertical columns, from top to bottom and from right to left, Chinese monks wrote Siddham texts as a rule in the same way (Gulik 56-62).

Both ‘*A*’ and ‘*OM*’ appear as important syllables in ancient India texts. In the *Bhagavadgītā* (10:33), Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, “Of sounds I am the first sound, *A*” (Mascaró 87).

In Vedic literature the syllable ‘*OM*’ is frequently used as an interjection. Ancient Indian yogins focused on ‘*OM*’ for concentration. What then is the difference between ‘*A*’ and ‘*OM*’?

One theory claims that the composite of ‘*A*’ and ‘*OM*’ corresponds to *namo* (according to Kiyota, not an exact equivalent but close enough in sound when chanted that this association has been made)(Kiyota, forthcoming). *Namo* is a term most commonly observed as an invocation in Buddhist services (e.g., *namo ratna-trayāya*, obeisance/salutation to the three jewels). In Shingon, however, these two syllables are derived from breathing, ‘*A*’ representing inhalation and ‘*OM*’ exhalation. Dōhan (1178-1252), a medieval Shingon monk, described these two syllables symbolically, identifying ‘*OM*’ as that which eliminates delusion (J. *shajyō*), and ‘*A*’ as that which reveals truth (J. *hyōtoku*).³⁰ As such, ‘*OM*’ and ‘*A*’ supplement one another, are frequently used individually as an incantation and are sometimes conceived of as identical

³⁰ “*A-ji kan sho*,” in Mitsu’un’s *Ajikan hiketsu-shu*, p. 21. A private collection of the late Nakagawa Zenkyō.

insofar as the purpose for which they are chanted is concerned. This identity issue was intensively studied and most popularly articulated from around the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries by scholars such as Dōhan, In'nyu (1435-1519) and Yusei (1562-1639). In 1966, Sakai Shinten, referring to the Tibetan translation of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, asserted that 'OM,' rather than 'A,' is the basic syllable, and claimed that the employment of 'A' in Shingon is a revision made sometime in the past.³¹ In fact, around the same time as Sakai's assertion, pictures using the syllable 'OM' were found in the Kōyasan University Library, one drawn in 1772, another in 1799 and still another in 1801. Based on this evidence, Ono Junran, then also a professor at Kōyasan University, wrote an essay asserting that 'OM' preceded 'A' as a meditation devise.³²

According to Gulik, the *Ajikan* was already being taught in China by the Indian Tantric master Śubhakarasiṃha (Gulik 72). Śubhakarasiṃha is believed to have been a missionary from the famous Indian institute of Tantric Buddhism, Nālandā. Since he first translated the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* into Chinese shortly after its believed origin at that same Indian institution, it is difficult to accept the notion that 'A' was mistaken for 'OM.' Likewise, a subsequent Chinese translation made by Amoghavajra, also of Indian origin, yielded the same results: the 'A' character is used. Calligraphic renderings of the 'A' character attributed to both Kūkai's direct master, Huigou (746-805), and Huigou's master, the aforementioned Amoghavajra, still exist in preservation. For these reasons alone, the discrepancy between the Chinese and Tibetan versions concerning 'OM' as opposed to 'A' in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* can conservatively only be attributed to variations in lineage and more boldly characterized as an error on the part of the

³¹ *Kōya-san Jihō* (Kōya-san Newsletter), No. 1791, October 11, 1966.

³² *Mikkyō Bunka*, No. 80:1967, 29-40.

Tibetan version. Nevertheless, the ‘A’ is inherent in ‘OM’ and, as far as I know, there is no Indian tradition of meditation on the syllable ‘A’ as there is concerning ‘OM.’

Meditation on a given syllable can be found in many Mahāyāna texts. For example, the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*³³ and the *Wisdom Sūtra*³⁴ refer to the “forty-two syllable *dhāraṇī*,” beginning from ‘A.’ The *Dazhitulun* states that the forty-two syllables are the basis of all words.³⁵ In addition, Sanlun (the Chinese version of Indian Mādhyamika) and Tiantai texts describe the forty-two stages of bodhisattva practices in terms of forty-two syllables.

Likewise, in Shingon the *Ajikan* is just one of a number of very similar meditations using other syllables. Sharf observes, “Shingon ritual invocation is comprised of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of small ritual segments” (Sharf 12). Quoting a ritual text, he describes, for example, the *Sanmikkan* (Contemplation of the Three Mysteries), which sounds very close to the *Ajikan*. “...imagine 想 [C. *kiang*, J. *sō*] that in between the palms and on top of the tongue and the heart there is a moon disk. On the disk is an eight-petaled lotus blossom, on top of which is the syllable *un*. The syllable changes and becomes a five-pronged vajra” (Sharf 13).

Likewise, Sharf quotes another ritual text describing the *jirinkan* (Contemplation of the Syllable Wheel). “...contemplate 觀 [C. *guan*, J. *kan*] as follows: In my heart there is an eight-petaled white lotus blossom, on top of which is a full moon disk. On top of the disk there are the syllables *on ha ra da han domei un*” (Sharf 26).

5. The Moon Disk and transformation of images.

³³ *Mahā-vaipulya-buddha-avatamsaka-sūtra*, T. 9, n. 278.

³⁴ *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, T. 8, n. 223.

³⁵ T. 25, n. 1509.

Significantly, the ‘A’ character in the *Ajikan* is used as a beginning focal point, which then transforms in the mind of the practitioner, becoming a part of a series of changing images. Such transformation was mentioned above as also occurring in the Shingon *sanmikkan* contemplation. Quoting a ritual manual, Sharf describes a similar change of images during the Shingon *dōjōkan* (Contemplation of the Sanctuary).

Contemplate 觀念 as follows: In front [of me] is the syllable ah³⁶ (J. pron.: aku). The syllable changes into a palatial hall of jewels... On the altar is the syllable hrīh (kiriku) which changes and becomes a crimson lotus blossom terrace. On top is the syllable a (a) which changes and becomes a full moon disk (Sharf 15).

Transformations of meditation objects similar or identical to that occurring during the *Ajikan* also appear in texts from other Indian traditions. Such is found in the second *sādhana* of the *Sāadhanamālā*, attributed to the Indian Tantric master Anupamarakṣita (fl. 1165) but containing passages traceable to as early as the seventh century (Gómez 319-20). One of several relevant sections in regards to this, reads as follows.

[Then] one should mentally perceive, [as if present] in one’s own heart, the first vowel, “A” which gradually turns into the orb of the moon. In the middle of this moon one should see a lovely blue lotus. On the filaments of this lotus one will see the spotless orb of [a second] moon, upon which [appears] the yellow seed-syllable (*bīja*) *Tāṃ*” (Gómez 321-2).

In this passage, the syllable ‘*TĀM*’ represents the principle deity of visualization in the *sādhana*, *Tārā*. This is similar to the representation of Mahāvairocana with the syllable ‘A’ in the *Ajikan*. The *Sāadhanamālā* continues, describing the changes in the objects of meditation.

Thereupon, one should bring to mind [a] detailed [visual image of the] blessed holy *Tārā*. [One should see her as] proceeding from the yellow germ-syllable *Tāṃ* [one had previously visualized] resting on the spotless orb of the moon within the filaments of the full-blown blue lotus

³⁶ *āḥ*

[growing] in the middle of the lunar orb [on the syllable A] originally visualized in one's own heart (Gómez 322).

Here in one short passage of a Sanskrit text, possibly existing before the time of the writing of *Record of Oral Instruction on the Ajikan*, we find more of the standardized elements for concentration used in the *Ajikan* than in any of Kūkai's own writings. These include the mind, the heart, the moon disk, the lotus, the syllable 'A,' the identification of the visualized deity with a seed syllable, and the progressive transformation of these elements one into the other. These same images occur repeatedly throughout the *Sādhanamālā*. Not only does this similarity point to a relationship in lineage, but it also reaffirms the point that the 'A' was not a mistake in translation of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* into Chinese.

It will be remembered from the discussion above that the 'A' syllable is also a symbol for earth. This is true in Kūkai's discussion of the six elements as it is in Kakuban's writings on the *Ajikan*. Similar to the observation of the moon disk in the *Ajikan*, the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification) by Buddhaghosa (fl. early fifth century), revered by Theravāda Buddhists, describes the "earth *kaṣiṇa*," a disk used as an object of meditation. Fashioned smooth from clay or earth, the disk is concentrated upon and begins to change into a "counterpart sign" in the mind of the practitioner. The text (IV 31) reads, "The difference between the earlier learning sign and the counterpart sign is this. In the learning sign any fault in the *kaṣiṇa* is apparent. But the counterpart sign appears as if breaking out from the learning sign, and a hundred times, a thousands times more purified...like the moon's disk coming out from behind a cloud...(Ñanamoli 125). Later (in IX 121), we find another transformation of the earth *kaṣiṇa*. The practitioner's experience is described as follows. "...well knowing the danger in materiality, when he removes whichever *kaṣiṇa* [concept he was contemplating], whether that of the earth

kaṣiṇa or another, and applies his mind to the space [that remains], which is the escape from materiality, then his mind enters into that [space] without difficulty. So compassion is the basic support for the sphere of boundless space, but not for what is beyond that” (Ñanamoli 317).

Likewise (in X 6), “Then, when he has spread out the *kaṣiṇa* to the limit of the world-sphere, or as far as he likes, he removes the *kaṣiṇa* [materiality] by giving his attention to the space touched by it...” (Ñanamoli 321). It will be remembered from the passage from the *Bodhicitta-śāstra*, quoted by Kūkai above, that the Shingon practitioner of concentration on the ‘A’ character (if not the *Ajikan per se* in that document) is instructed to magnify the “moon until its circumference encompasses the entire universe and its magnitude becomes as inclusive as space” (Hakada 1972:220). It is believed that the author of these similar passages in the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, came from India, traveling to Sri Lanka, in the early 5th century, where he consulted early Buddhist Pāli texts as the basis for his writing.

6. The Lotus Flower of the *Ajikan* and *Hṛdaya*.

In China, before Kūkai’s arrival, such renounced masters as Zuen, Fazhang, Won-cheuk and others had composed written commentaries on the *Heart Sūtra*. In Japan, Chigon wrote such a commentary and Saichō wrote his own *Commentary on the Heart Sūtra*. The original Sanskrit word used for “the mind” in the *Heart Sūtra* is *hṛdaya*. In the Chinese rendering of that sūtra, this has been understood to mean the deep mind (心要, C. xinyao) (Yamasaki 1982:33). While the *Heart Sūtra* is widely regarded as a summarization of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, in his *The Secret Key to the Heart Sutra*, Kūkai considers the entire *Heart Sūtra* a mantra. He writes, “*The Heart Sūtra of the Prajñāpāramitā* is the dharmic gate for the great heart mantra and samādhi of

the *Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.³⁷ According to Yamasaki, in this passage *hṛdaya* is understood as the heart mantra of the *Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (Yamasaki 1982:33). The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is symbolic of human wisdom and Tantric practice. At the same time, *hṛdaya* is also the physical heart organ of the bodhisattva. This is to say, through Tantric practice, such as the *Ajikan* meditation, the wisdom (*prajñā*) of the physical heart becomes activated.

From a Shingon point of view, the ‘revealed teachings’ of Buddhism (*kengyō*) speaks the philosophy of the Dharma while mysterious teachings (*mikkyō*) explain the human side (Yamasaki 1982:33). Indeed, this depiction is in line with Kūkai’s thought. Accordingly, *kengyō* interprets the *Heart Sūtra* as a means towards manifestation of the non-tangible mind (*hṛdaya*), while Kūkai interrupts it from the perspective of the activation of the human heart (*hṛdaya*). Moreover, by setting a formula of five elements comprising the *Ajikan* (*hṛdaya*, *citta*, the ‘A’ character, the lotus flower and the moon disk) not only are the pre-existing separate elements systematized, but they are also solidified in terms of what Kūkai saw as concrete physical reality (*tathatā*). We find this idea expressed as follows in Kūkai’s *The Secret Key to the Heart Sutra*. “The Buddha Dharma is nowhere remote. It is in our heart; it is close to us. Suchness is nowhere external. If not within our body, where can it be found?” (Hakeda 1972:263).

In the *Upaniṣads*, a variety of terms are used in relationship to “mind.” These include *manas*, *citta*, *vijñāna* and *hṛdaya*. In a sense, the mind became itemized by means of these terms. For example, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* says, “The mind (or intention: *manas*) is clearly greater than speech...intention is clearly greater than the mind...thought is clearly greater than intention, deep reflection (*citta*) is clearly greater than thought...perception (*vijñāna*) is clearly greater than

³⁷ See Hakeda, 264.

deep reflection...” (Olivelle 158-160). The same *Upaniṣad* is greatly concerned with speculation on the syllable ‘OM.’ being the High Chant (*Udgīta*) of the *Sāmavedic* Soma sacrifice.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads*, thought to be have been subjected to the same editors as the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* due to many similarities (Olivelle 95) says, “Heart (*hṛdaya*) becomes king of life, who is Brahman, who is everything and who is the three sounds of *huri, da, yamu.*”

Thus, *hṛdaya* is interpreted in many *Upaniṣads* as the heart within which abides the *ātman*. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* expresses this well known idea, “That which exists in the middle of the heart becomes *ātman*.” In addition, the heart is seen as a lotus flower, “now, that which exists in the middle of the body of the Brahman becomes the house (the heart), which is a lotus flower” (Yamasaki 1982 34).

In Buddhism, particularly Yogācāra doctrine, which analyzes the world from a perspective of “mind only,” the terms *hṛdaya*, *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna* are used as designations. For the activities of the mind, the term *citta* is mainly used (Yamasaki 1982 34). In comparison, *hṛdaya* is not often used. For example, in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* the following statement occurs, “This is the nature of all Buddhas of the three periods, past, present and future, and the mind of the absolute aspect of nature.” The editors of the *Taisho Tripiṭaka* append the following note to this passage, “Mind here is from *hṛdaya* in Sanskrit. *Hṛdaya* is called the mind in the Song Dynasty. That is, it is like the mind of a plant. It is not different from the mind of mindfulness. Mind of mindfulness is called *citta* in Sanskrit.”³⁸

In *Stopping and Seeing (Mohe zhiguan)*, the famous work of Zhiyi (538-97), a Chinese patriarch of the Tiantai tradition, it says, “*Citta* is a Sanskrit word. It is called mind, which is

³⁸ T. 16 n. 483b.

mind of mindfulness. In India mind is also called *hṛdaya*. This becomes the mind of a plant” (Cleary 1997:151). While Zhiyi here has considered *hṛdaya* to be the mind for plants, he does not connect that term to beings with personality.

The *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* says, “This is the location of the mind, that is to say, the physical mind of sentient beings exists in the middle of them. This mind is *hṛdaya*.”³⁹ In Kūkai’s *Secret Storehouse Record* he writes, “That called *hṛdaya* is in the middle of (a being)...*Citta* is a term used for mindful knowledge as well as the mind for sentient beings. The mind becomes that located in the center of beings, *citta* also took on the name *hṛdaya*” (Yamasaki 1982:34). Here, *hṛdaya* and *citta* are represented as being identical. In the same writing Kūkai says, “the mind of sentient beings is like a closed lotus flower. The mind for holy beings is like the opening of (the lotus flower)” (Yamasaki 1982:34).

In Sanskrit, *hṛdaya* is a part of the physical body, the heart organ. In some Indian writings, the mind (*citta*) may be seen as residing within the heart (*hṛdaya*). In Buddhism, rather than considering the mind a part of the physical heart, emphasis is typically placed on its non-material aspect or spiritual function. For this reason, in Buddhist texts, *citta* often became the main theme and the physical heart (*hṛdaya*) with characteristics was forgotten. However, in the tradition of Kūkai and others of Tantric lineage, ‘thusness’ of the here and now (*tathatā*) is emphasized. Accordingly, Buddhist philosophical thought is all but prohibited and once again the flesh and blood of *hṛdaya* becomes a consideration.

7. Conclusion.

³⁹ T. 39, 705c.

In the *Ajikan*, *citta*, which is non-characteristic mind, is considered the moon disk. *Hṛdaya*, which is the mind (or heart) with characteristics, is considered the lotus flower. In the *Ajikan*, Shingon conceptualization of *dharmadhātu* may be similar to *ātman*. *Ātman*, in this case, is Mahāvairocana, which is without limits and free of obstructions. Likewise, in the Shingon Meditation that Penetrates into the Bottom of the Lotus Flower, the practitioner visualizes the origin of life and non-origination of the ‘A’ character in the heart of the physical body (Yamasaki 1982:34). This visualization parallels the Upaniṣadic notion of the *ātman* existing at the center of the heart. Likewise, conceptualization of Mahāvairocana as ‘A’ parallels both the notion of Kṛṣṇa as ‘A’ (sited above) and Īśvara as ‘OM’ in the *Yoga Sūtras* (1.24-25).

Chapter XI.

Kūkai's Ten Great Disciples.

Kūkai had a large number of followers as documented in a variety of sources. Among the names appearing in written references, biographies and elsewhere are those known as his Ten Great Disciples (十大弟子). These are: Jitsue (or Jichie, 実慧, 786-847), Shinzei (真濟, 800-60), Shinga (真雅, 801-79), Shinnyo (真如, dates unknown but is thought to have died around 864), Dōō (道雄, died 851), Taihan (泰範, born 778), Chisen (智泉, 789-825), Gōrin (杲隣, born 767), Enmyō (円明, died 851), and Chūen (忠延, dates unknown, see 701). In this chapter I provide information on the Ten Great Disciples based mainly on entries in the *Dictionary of the History of Japanese Buddhism* (*Nihon bukkyōshi jiten*, Imaizu,). Although several of these followers are credited with furthering the cause of Shingon, no individual arose as the single leader or patriarch of the lineage. Perhaps this is the reason the Tantric branch of Tendai was able to outshine that of Shingon after the death of Kūkai, particularly in terms of influence the tradition was to have on Kamakura Buddhism

We can see a difference in the names of Kūkai's followers distinguishable in terms of when they entered the path of Buddhism. Those whose Buddhist name begins with the graph *Shin* (真) entered Buddhism under Kūkai, that is, after he returned from China. Persons without that graph entered Buddhism through another tradition, most likely in Nara. Examples of the former include Shinzei, Shinga and Shinnen (真然, 804-91). Examples of the latter are Jitsue and Dōō.

Many of Kūkai's closest followers appear to be related to him through his secular family, although this is not always certain. Jitsue, Dōō, Chisen, Shinga, Shinnen are all said to have been from Kūkai's Saeki family, his father's side of the family. In addition, the intendants of Tōji for many generations are said to have been from the Ato side of Kūkai's family, his mother's side. Watanabe thinks among the family members, those of the Saeki family were the first to follow Kūkai, the Ato relatives entering the Shingon lineage later as a family business (Watanabe 181).

From letters and poems written at times of illness and death of some of his pupils such as Shinsai (真際, dates unknown – not to be confused with Shinzei) and Chisen (智泉), the reader feels that Kūkai was very close to his followers. In 825, Chisen, Kūkai's nephew through the Ato family, died during the founding of the Mount Kōya temple complex. Kūkai's writing on the event, preserved in Chapter 8 of the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*, expresses his heartfelt grief. Chisen had been Kūkai's understudy from childhood until he died at the age of 37. Kūkai writes, "If we consider the death of this child of the *vajra* Buddha, in secular family, he called me father-in-law. He became like my eldest child entering the path. He showed filial devotion towards me now for a second period (24 years, a division in solar years)...It is a pity, is it not? It is a pity, is it not? There is pity within pity. It is sad, is it not? It is sad, is it not? There is sadness within sadness" (KZ 10:115). He continues as follows.

At the dawn of enlightenment, the dream tiger ended.
On the day of *satori*, the phenomenal illusion ends.
Perhaps with the parting of every night, I will cry in spite of myself (KZ 10:115).

Kūkai's prose expresses the transience of life in relationship to the world of enlightenment, supposing pleasure and sorrow are necessary in the scheme. In the end, he says,

the sorrow of parting is unbearable and it is impossible to hold back tears. Kūkai wishes Chisen happiness in the next world.

At the time of Shinsai's illness, Kūkai writes to express his sympathy and perhaps to send herbal medicine.¹

Austerities should not be continued for a long time.
 Please recover soon and come back to me.
 I will keep you in memory by chanting
 and hope you will come back right away to cultivate the path (KKZ 6:509).

Throughout the ten chapters of the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* we can see the affection between Kūkai and his pupils. One of these, Shinzei, who gathered Kūkai's writings for the collection, wrote the following as an introduction to the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*. "For a long time I had been thirsty for the pure within this dusty world. Respectfully reaching up from my low position, I became the pupil of master Kūkai, who resounded truth like a bell or flute. His pupils depended on the various instructions he handed down. Yet even as a newcomer disciple, he treated me like an old friend. I was with the master many months and years and never once did he show shallowness of speech and behavior" (KKZ 6:147). From the time Shinzei was fifteen years old until he was thirty-five, at the time of Kūkai's death in 835, he studied under Kūkai, a period of 20 years. In the writings of Kūkai and his pupils we find repeated and consistent expressions of mutual respect and affection.

Jitsue was Kūkai's successor at Tōji. Like Kūkai, he was of the Saeki clan from Sanuki. Jitsue was twelve years younger than Kūkai. On the twenty-seventh day of the sixth month of

¹ Kūkai was known to have brought to Japan writings on Chinese medicine.

Kōnen 2 (811) he became the *Sankō* (三綱) of Takaosan temple. As we saw in a previous chapter, in the sixth month of the same year, Kūkai dispatched Jitsue to Mount Kōya along with Taihan to begin the founding construction. Jitsue also sent the letter to Qinglong temple in China announcing Kūkai's death and setting up future visits there for Shingon practitioners (quoted in Chapter XIII). Jitsue is also known for writing the first handbook on the Shingon *Ajikan* meditation (meditation on the syllable 'A') (see Chapter X of this dissertation). Jitsue died on the third day of the 11th month of Jōwa 14 (847), at Kashu Hōkan temple. He was 62 years old. On the thirteenth day of the eighth month of 1774, Jitsue was bestowed the title Dōkyō Daishi (道興大師) by imperial grant. (Imaizu 421-2).

Shinzei's father was a government official of the fifth rank. Shinzei was born in 800 and became a follower of Kūkai while young. The two remained close until Kūkai's death. He studied Mahāyāna and is said to have thorough knowledge of supplemental stories. He is known to have had literary talent and Kūkai recognized this. He is famous for compiling and publishing Kūkai's literary works as the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*. In 824, Kūkai confirmed Shinzei as an *ācāryā* in both realms (the *Garbhakośadhātu* and the *Vajrakośadhātu*). At the time Shinzei was twenty-five years old, unusually young for such an honor. He was only the third person Kūkai confirmed as *ācāryā*. In 836, together with Shinnen, he too attempted to go to China to study, but his ship wrecked. Afterwards, he went to Takaosan Temple where he remained without leaving for twelve years while practicing asceticism. In 839 he was appointed administrative head (*bettō*) of Shingō Temple, which was a sūtra storage center at Takaosan. He

became an influential Vinaya master and later became the third head of Tōji temple, succeeding Kūkai and Jitsue. In 851 he was granted the official title of Shōsōzu from the government. In 856 he petitioned Emperor Montoku (827-58, r. 850-8) to grant Kūkai the title *Daisōjō*. At that time Shinzei was granted the title *Sōjō*. When Emperor Montoku died in 858, Shinzei retired under pressure from the Fujiwara. He died in 860 at the age of 61 (Imaizu 549).

Shinga is famous for being Kūkai's true brother, although this is uncertain (Watanabe 182). He was nine years old when Kūkai first moved to the capital. At the age of sixteen he began studying Tantric Buddhism under Kūkai's guidance. He received the complete precepts at the age of nineteen and at the age of twenty-three, on the twenty-seventh day of the ninth month Tenchō 1 (824), he became a government appointee (定額僧) at Takaosan Temple, responsible for reciting the thirty-seven important Sanskrit mantra of Shingon. The Emperor is said to have been impressed by his piecing voice. In 859 he was appointed to perform the annual memorial to the emperors. In 860 he became the head of Tōji temple and was appointed *Sōjō* the same year. He completed repairs to the Great Buddha Platform at Tōdaiji in the third month of 861. He built and restored several temples and solicited imperial support for others. Because of his efforts, the court decreed that anyone who came from Kūkai's Saeki family, before or after his time, should be seen as having the title Sukune (宿禰) in their family name (Watanabe 182). Shinga died in 879 at Jōkan temple at the age of 79 years. In 1828 he was bestowed the title of Hōkō Daishi (法光大師) by imperial grant (Imaizu 534).

One of the most famous of Kūkai's Ten Great Disciples, is known as Shinnō Shinnyo (Prince Shinnyo), whose secular name was Prince Takaoka (高丘). As mentioned in a previous chapter of this dissertation, Shinnyo was the third son of Emperor Heizei. His mother was related to the family of Prince Iyo, who was tutored by Kūkai's uncle Ato Ōtari. Ex-emperor Heizei was involved in a plot to overthrow his brother, Emperor Saga, aimed at regaining the throne and moving the capital back to Nara. When the plan was foiled, Prince Iyo was implicated (perhaps falsely) and executed. Ex-emperor Heizei and his son Takaoka were forced to become Buddhist *bhikṣu*.² Prince Shinnyo embraced Buddhism enthusiastically, at first studying the teachings of the Sanron tradition under Vinaya master Dōsen (道詮, Dao Xuan) later becoming a follower of Kūkai. In 855 Shinnyo was appointed administrator for the repair of the Great Buddha at Todaiji, finished in 861. He gained imperial permission to study in China the following year as a part of a sixty-person voyage leaving from Dazai in Kyushu, arriving in Mingzhou two months later. In Chang'an he received training in both realms under Fazhuan (法全) at Qinglong Temple, where Kūkai had studied under Huigou. At that time he changed his Dharma name to Henmyō (遍明, All Pervasive Light), which may be an *abhiṣeka* name not negating the name Shinnyo, like Henjō for Kūkai.³ Afterwards, on New Years day in 864, he attempted to go to India to continue his studies, boarding a ship together with three followers in Guangzhou. However, en route, the ship wrecked on the southern tip of Luoyue (羅越国, what is not Malaysia), it is believed, killing

² It is believed that Kūkai's connections with Prince Iyo, through his uncle Ato, at this time prevented him from receiving permission to enter the capital immediately upon returning from China.

³ Like the name Henjō, the name Henmyō is found in scriptures as a designation for Mahāvairocana.

those on board (Imaizu 554-5). Shinnyo had a great potential to succeed Kūkai as a powerful leader of the Shingon tradition. There is a monastery named after him at Mount Kōya.⁴

Dōō (道雄) was also of the Saeki family of Sanuki. He began studying Hossō (Yogācāra) Buddhism under Jishō (慈勝), and was later the seventh patriarch of Kegon at Tōdaiji. It is not clear when he became a follower of Kūkai. However, in the ninth month of Tenchō 4 (827), Kūkai's memorial prayer for Imperial Prince Iyo found in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* lists Dōō among the names of those of the Shingon tradition in attendance. In 851 Dōō established Kaiin Temple (海印寺) and was chosen as one of the two government annual appointees at a Ritsuyō temple. He became a Vinaya master in 847 and in 850 he was given the title of *Shōsōzu* (少僧都). He died in 851 (Imaizu 749).

Taihan was discussed in Chapter XII of this dissertation. In brief, Taihan entered Buddhism at Gangō Temple, later becoming a pupil of Saichō. Saichō chose him as a successor in the Tendai lineage. Due to what Taihan referred to as a violation of the precepts on his part, he left Mount Hiei, not returning after Saichō's numerous requests to do so. Taihan received a Tantric *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai at Takaosan, afterwards remaining close to Kūkai for the remainder of the latter's life. Kūkai sent Taihan along with Jitsue to undertake founding construction of the Mount Kōya temple complex. Scholars see Taihan's preference for Kūkai's teachings over those of Saichō as possibly contributing to the rift between the teachers. After this, Taihan's activities

⁴ There is an in-depth study of his life by Sugimoto Naojirō entitled A Study of the Legend Shinnyo Shinnō (杉本直治郎氏著『真如親王伝研究』Yoshikawa Kōbun publications 古川弘文館刊).

are unknown. However, his name does appear as a government appointee at Tōji in 837 (Imaizu 637).

Chisen was Kūkai's nephew. He became a *bhikṣu* at Daianji in Nara. In 808 he received the *abhiṣeka* in both realms from Kūkai. In the twelfth month of Kōnin 2 (812), Kūkai named him as one of the three administrators (三綱, *sankō*) of Takaosan Temple. Kūkai also choose Chisen as his successor in running the Mount Kōya temple complex. However, in 825 Chisen died at Mount Kōya at the age of thirty-seven. Kūkai's memorial writing for Chisen appears in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*.⁵ From the writing it is clear that Kūkai held Chisen in high esteem as a student and as a person. In it, one senses Kūkai's emotions at the loss.

Gōrin's family and place of origin are unknown. He became a Buddhist in 808, first as an unaffiliated *bhikṣu* (私度僧) at Tōdaiji, where he became known as a specialist in Abhidharma (Abé 1999:45). It is unclear when he became a follower of Kūkai. In 812 Kūkai appointed Gōrin as Dharma instructor (上座) at Takaosan Temple, one of the three administrative positions there. In the same year, he received the transmission of the Sūtras, Buddhas, etc. (經佛等). In 833, he followed Kūkai to Mount Kōya and opened a meditation hall there. After Kūkai's death, he founded a temple for meditation at Mount Sōyu (走湯山) in Izu where he received a government

⁵ KZ 10:115.

appointment. The date of his death is unknown but he was seven years older than Kūkai (Imaizu 321).

The place and date of birth of Chūen are unknown. Those on his mother's side of the family were courtiers. Chūen received the precepts at Tōdaiji in 824. He traveled to a range of temples to study various doctrines and practices. He received initiation into both Shingon realms from Kūkai. In the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*,⁶ there is Kūkai's manuscript for the service on the anniversary of Chōen's death. In that document Kūkai says his secular surname was Tadanobu (忠延). Kūkai lectured on the *Risyukyō* (理趣經)⁷ for the occasion. In 824, Chūen was given an appointment at Shingō Temple. According to Watanabe, in 834 Chūen's name appears among those receiving a court appointment at Takaosan Temple (Watanabe 184). During his trip to China in 837, he was entrusted with a letter from Jistue to Qinglong Temple, announcing the death of Kūkai. However, it is unclear why his name appears as a court appointee at Tōji the same year (Imaizu 701).

Enmyō's birth date and secular family are also unknown. He may have been a child of the minister Yoshitoyo Tamaru (良豊田丸) of Kyushu, though this is not certain. He began studying Sanron doctrine at Tōdaiji, later becoming a pupil of Tantric Buddhism under Kūkai. In 824, Enmyō received a court appointment at Shingō Temple. For the next two years he was appointed to assist Shinzei at Chōshin Temple (澄心寺) in the City of Nishinomiya in Hyogo

⁶ KKZ 6:513.

⁷ T. 8 (see KKZ 6:568 n 3.)

Prefecture. In 834, he led a memorial service for Kūkai at Mount Hiei. In the same year, in a letter addressed to Qinglong Temple in China, he is called Tōdai Enmyō (Enmyō of Tōdaiji Temple). That year he received a court appointment to Tōdaiji together with Jitsue. Later in the year he became administrative head (*bettō*) of Tōdaiji. In 850, he became Vinaya master at Tōdaiji. He died the next year (Imaizu 84).

Another well known follower of Kūkai, though not included as one of the Ten Great Disciples, is Shinnen. Shinnen is believed to be Kūkai's nephew, but this is not certain. After Kūkai's death, he was known to have taken over of the management Kongōbuji Temple at Mount Kōya. In 836, together with Shinzei, Shinnen attempted to travel to China but was shipwrecked in a storm (Watanabe 184). Shinnen managed Mount Kōya for fifty-six years. During that time, one of his achievements at Mount Kōya was the establishment of the Gathering for the Transmission of the Dharma (伝法会, *Denpō-e*) (Matsunaga 1987 I:194). Apparently a dispute broke out between Shinnen at Mount Kōya and Shinzei at Takaosan Temple over the proper place for Shingon ordination. The conflict is explained as follows. The parenthetical notes are mine.

This (*the Denpō-e*) had begun with the official grant of three *nembundōsha* (yearly court supported appointees) to Mt. Kōya in the year 835 and represented the Shingon method of training monks. Applicants were screened by being required to pass a minimum of five out of ten questions and the names of successful candidates were submitted to the government. The official ordination was held at the Tōdaiji and after this, the monks were required to spend six years engaged in assigned duties on Mt. Kōya without being allowed to leave. Every spring and fall, the *Denpō-e* were held, these were actually seminars in Shingon doctrine. After nineteen years, in 853, this system was altered when Shinzei of the Takosanji requested and received three more *nembundōsha*, raising the Shingon total to six. Then, those who qualified from both Kōyasan and Takaosanji were

initially examined at Tōji. As time passed however, due to the distance between Tōji and Kōyasan, the ordained monks ceased to go to the mountain. Disturbed by this state of affairs, Shinnen petitioned the court in 882 to henceforth examine and ordain the Kōyasan *nembundosha* on the mountain. This petition was granted two years later and initiated a battle between the two temples. In 897, Yakushin (827-906) of the Tōji temple requested court permission to ordain all six Shingon *nembundosha* at Tōji but this request was not granted. Finally, in 907 the Retired Emperor Kamyō granted additional *nembundosha* and solved the dispute (Matsunaga 1987 I:194).

At Mount Kōya, Shinnen was able to complete buildings Kūkai had begun. This was partially due to his ability to draw donations from the aristocracy by convincing them Kōyasan was a Buddhist Pure Land and Kongōbuji was a place where Buddha became manifest in the ancient past (Matsunaga 1987 I:196). This would become important in the Kamakura period and afterwards. This issue of Mount Kōya as the Pure Land and Kūkai as the future Buddha is taken up in Chapter XIII of this dissertation.

Chapter XII.

Belief in *Nyūjō* (入定信仰); Kūkai's Perpetual *Samādhi*.

“There is a legend that when the retired Japanese Emperor Saga died, his coffin was carried mysteriously through the air to Mt. Koya, and Kobo Daishi came forth from his grave to conduct the Imperial funeral rites” (Hall 1970:5).

In a letter to the emperor dated the last day of the fifth month of Tenchō 8 (831) Kūkai tries to resign from his government positions due to illness. Kūkai writes, “Śramaṇa Kūkai's words. I, Kūkai, having been bathed in benevolent favors and done the best for the country, report my years of loyalty are long. Always, willingly, with the tenacity of mosquitoes and horseflies, I asked for the virtue of ocean and mountains. However, now in the final day of the departing moon, bad sores rise up on my body and I do not see the prospect of recovery” (KKZ 6:594). After this, he requests that his resignation be accepted but that the emperor does not abandon the Three Mysteries, expressing his desire that the “Dharma citadel of the emperor be protected throughout the ages” (KKZ 6:595). Thus, four years before his death, Kūkai's health was already failing to the point that he wished to resign from office.

It is unclear what Kūkai was calling “bad sores.” The translators of the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō* into the contemporary Japanese language of the middle Edo period used the word “yō” (癰), a graph that can mean an ulcer, an abscess, a carbuncle and sometimes a cancer. The *Biography of Kōbō Daishi Kūkai from the Standpoint of Culture* carries out a detailed inquiry into yō from the perspective of modern medical science and finds accordingly, yō itself is not fatal but may be connected to other problems such as liver damage. In disregard for Kūkai's condition, however, the emperor did not accept Kūkai's resignation at this

time. From the emperor's reply it seems he thought Kūkai's great virtue and strength of spirit would cause him to recover (Wakamori 251). Thus, Kūkai continued to work.

On the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month of Tenchō 8 (831), Enchō (円澄), a former pupil of the late Saichō, received the Tantric transmission from Kūkai (*KKZ 8:312*). On the twenty-fourth day of the first month of Tenchō 9 (832), Kūkai was involved in a debate on the doctrines of various traditions (*KKZ 8:312*). From the second to the third month, he granted the Tantric Dharma to Shinga (Watanabe 210).

On the twenty-second day of the eighth month of Tenchō 9 (832), Kūkai wrote his prayer for the Ten-thousand lamps and Ten-thousand flowers Dharma gathering (*mandō manke*, 万灯万花会) at Mount Kōya.¹ This “festival of lanterns” or “*mando* festival” was to be an annual event dedicated to the wisdom of the four kinds of maṇḍala of the two realms. Kūkai begin the prayer saying, “Black darkness is the source of life and death. All-Pervading Light (遍明 *J. Henmyō*)² is the root of complete death. The origin of our first beginnings is cause and effect. Like the sun takes away the darkness of the sky and the moon hanging in the mirror of the milky way makes the light of the three thousand (worlds), the Tathāgata's All-Pervading Shine (遍照, *J. Henjō*) hangs the Dharmadhātu wisdom mirror high from the spirit tower so that even those with the internal hindrances of the inner and outer fully see the light raised on self and other, and although clinging to desires one sees the light. How can one not stop and look up?” (*KZ 10:132*).

In a letter dated the twelfth month of Jōwa 1 (834), Kūkai requests a mantra hall be established in the palace. In that letter Kūkai writes, “I make this humble request, that hereafter,

¹ *KZ 10: 131; KKZ 6:538.*

² A name sometimes used for Mahāvairocana.

in connection with explaining the sūtra Dharma (i.e., doctrine) of the sūtras, for a period of seven days, twenty-seven³ *bhikṣu* with excellent understanding of the Dharma gather with twenty-seven chosen *shami* (沙弥, novices who have not received the complete precepts) in a special room. There they will prepare images of the various honored ones and make offerings to them, reciting mantra so that the two tendencies, the revealed and unrevealed, devoted to the original thought/s of the Tathāgata for benefit now and in the future, accomplish the solemn desire of all the honored ones.”⁴ Kūkai had seen this situation in the Chinese palace of Chang’an. His request was approved, making the weeklong service in the palace an annual event (Hakeda 1972:59).⁵

According to biographies, Kūkai retired to Mount Kōya in the Spring of Shōwa 2 (835), knowing he was dying, and remained there to enter *nyūjō* shortly afterwards. Two months before his death, the emperor granted Mount Kōya three court sponsored *bhikṣu*. According to Hakeda, “This meant that the hitherto private monastic center on Mt. Kōya had been officially recognized as a state-supported Buddhist institution” (Hakeda 1972:59).

According to the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Kūkai spent his last days in meditative contemplation (*nyūjō*, 入定), practicing *dankoku* (断穀), i.e., abstaining from eating the five cereals. According to that document, Kūkai told his followers, “Since the twelfth day of the eleventh month of Tenchō 9, I deeply disliked the taste of cereal, preferring to solely sit in meditation (坐禪)...I return to the eternal mountain” (KKZ 8:48).

³ Inexplicably, the modern translation in the *KKZ* says twenty-four *bhikṣu* and twenty-four *shami*.

⁴ *KZ* 10:134; *KKZ* 6:590.

⁵ According to Hakeda, “This is the origin of the annual ritual in the palace called *mishuhō*, *mishiho* or *misuho*, often mentioned in the works of Heian literature” (Hakeda 1972:59 n. 3).

Hundreds, or more likely thousands of people have reported seeing Kūkai since his death. Today, most typically Kūkai is reported to appear to pilgrims in need along the route of the Pilgrimage to Eighty-eight Sacred Places of Shikoku, which is undertaken in honor of Kōbō Daishi (Reader 1999). In Japan today, Kōbō Daishi belief is tantamount to a religious sect in itself. The justification in faith that Kōbō Daishi is still living is found in a doctrine known in Japan as the “great guiding teacher who came in the time between two Buddhas” (二仏中間の大導師 J. *nibutsu chūgen no daidōshi*) (Nakamura 1999:635). The doctrine is adapted from such canonical writings as the Āgama scriptures⁶ and the *Mahāyāna Great Collection Kṣitigarbha Ten Wheels Sūtra* (abbreviated 十輪經 J. *Jūrinkyō*).⁷ Accordingly, 567 million years after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha Śākyamuni, the future Buddha, who is Maitreya (J. Miroku Bosatsu), will appear for the salvation of all sentient beings. In the Buddhist scheme of the three great eras after the death of Śākyamuni, Maitreya will appear in the time when the Buddha Dharma cannot be understood nor followed (永い無仏時代, abbreviated as 無仏, J. *mubutsu*), at the time of the “Third Assembly” of Buddhists (Nakamura 1999:788). In that age, sentient beings must rely on the activities of the Maitreya for their salvation.

The veneration of Maitreya became extremely popular in China as it did to a lesser degree in Japan. Later, Maitreya’s popularity was eclipsed in both countries by reverence for the similar savior deity, Amitābha (J. Amida). Like Maitreya belief, Amitābha belief generally holds this deity’s advent will occur after the third great Buddha age, in Japan referred to as the period

⁶ The Chinese translations of the Āgama scriptures roughly correspond to the Pali *Nikāyas*. In particular see *T.* 2 n. 100.

⁷ 大乘大集地藏十輪經, *T.* 13 n. 411.

of *mappō*.⁸ In Japan, this idea became extremely popular in the Kamakura period and Mount Kōya adapted versions of the Maitreya and Amitābha legends to fit with those of Kūkai's *nyūjō*.

Frédéric describes Maitreya's importance to Shingon as follows.

Maitreya is the only celestial Bodhisattva recognized by the sects of the Small Vehicle, who represented him from the outset. His images appear in Gandhāra, perhaps even before those of the Buddha...Although his tradition remained virtually uninterrupted in Japan, and the Shingon sect attached great importance to the cult of Miroku Bosatsu, the latter, despite the efforts of the Shingon sect and the Nara sects, was eclipsed by the growing favour enjoyed by Amida. A revival of his worship occurred in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the Garbhadhātu Maṇḍala, Maitreya (under the name Jishi Bosatsu) is placed to the north-west of Mahāvairocana where he represents the 'treasure of the beings who profit inexhaustively', Maitreya being 'the root, the bud, the stem, the leaves which are born in the Garbha (womb) of the seed of the pure heart of Bodhi (spirit of Awakening)' (last quote from R. Tajima; entire quote from Frédéric 118-9).

Scholars today believe Kūkai was not responsible for the legends connecting his *nyūjō* with Maitreya, which accordingly arose after the time of his death. However, mention is made of Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven in several writings attributed to Kūkai. In the seventeenth article of the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Kūkai addresses his status after death, giving advice to the pupils and the future teachers from then until the end of final age of the world. In that article Kūkai writes, "If we think of the (future) meditation instructors of Tōji, generations of *ācārya*, I will live on in the final age of the world through those followers. After my death the followers to come will be in the thousands of ten thousands. Among them, there will be other leaders. The various adherents to the tradition (門徒) will number thousands of ten thousands and they will all be my followers after my life. Those founding teachers will not see my face directly, but in their hearts/minds necessarily they will have heard my name and know the history of the former

⁸ For a summary see Lamotte 699.

teacher. Then I, with the wishes of a white corpse, will not desire the kindness of people. Protection following the mysterious teachings is the decree of destiny at the opening of the Ryūke third flower garden plan (i.e., the Third Assembly of Maitreya). I, after closing my eyes, must have abiding life in Tuṣita Heaven, to await the honored presence of tender Maitreya for the remainder of fifty-six hundred million (years). Then, together in the honored presence of the tender one who will descend to the world, I, respectfully waiting, will perhaps regarding my previous tracks. Furthermore, looking down from the cloud palace there will be sympathy for believers in times of doubt and help will be given. Non-believers are unfortunate. You must work diligently, diligently without neglect” (KZ 7:265-6).

Watanabe finds almost the same sentences in the *Biography of Kōbō Daishi*. Dated the twenty-first day of the third month of Shōwa 4 (1316), four hundred and eighty years after Kūkai’s *nyūjō*, this biography was written by ex-emperor Go-Uda (1267-1324 r. 1274-87) after he became *bhikṣu*. From looking at the similarities in the passages and finding no evidence of such a report in the earliest biographies, Watanabe concludes Kūkai’s mention of his presence in Tuṣita Heaven in the *Honored Spoken Memento* was probably a later addition (Watanabe 15).

Nevertheless, Watanabe admits during Kūkai’s lifetime belief in Maitreya circulated and Kūkai mentions this in the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings* (Watanabe 15). In that story, Kūkai’s semi-fictitious Buddhist mendicant tells the representatives of Confucianism and Daoism, “Therefore, the compassionate Buddha, on his last day on earth, instructed Maitreya, the virtuous Mañjuśrī, the great Kaśyapa, and the others sent a message to all countries, declaring that Maitreya would assume the throne of the kingdom of the true teaching. When I heard this

message, I made all necessary preparations and started out at once for the Tuṣita Heaven where Maitreya resides” (Hakeda 1972:130).

Kūkai also indicates faith in Maitreya in the *Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō*. In a prayer written for the observance of the thirty-seventh day after the death of the mother of Tōsakon no Syōken, a Fujiwara family member, Kūkai says, “The one called the Great Teacher (i.e., the Buddha) is not a different person from Ārya-mahā-maitreya-bodhisattva (i.e., Maitreya). Residing in the Dharmadhātu shrine (法界宮),⁹ assisting the virtue of Mahāvairocana. In Tuṣita Heaven the Honored Ranking (i.e., Maitreya) spreads the teachings of Śākyamuni” (KZ 10:108). Kūkai goes on to say the bodhisattva Maitreya, though already a buddha, took the form of a bodhisattva for the sake of sentient beings, and “Tuṣita Heaven is longed for in the moon” (Watanabe 15). I assume from this that Kūkai, at least allegorically, is placing Tuṣita Heaven on the moon.¹⁰

It is unclear if Kūkai’s notions of Tuṣita Heaven and *nyūjō* are connected. The term *nyūjō* appears in numerous sūtras and commentaries throughout the Chinese Buddhist canon, where it often appears in conjunction with the term yoga, as it often does in the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*.¹¹ In Kūkai’s writings, we find the word *nyūjō* in his letter to the emperor requesting Mount Kōya be given to him as a ground for practicing meditative concentration (*nyūjō*). That letter is dated the twenty-ninth day of the sixth month of Kōnin 7 (816). In the context of that letter, the term *nyūjō* implies entering (*nyū*, 入) an unchanging or “fixed” state (*jō*, 定). The pivotal second graph is

⁹ A note in the *KKZ* says Dharmadhātu shrine refers to the Maitreya assembly northeast of the central lotus in the Garbhakośadhātu maṇḍala, *KKZ* 6:547 n. 10.

¹⁰ Similarly, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says the mind of the deceased enters the moon (Smith 206).

¹¹ For example *T.* 18 n 866:226b.

that also used for the Japanese rendering of the term *samādhi* (禪定, J. *zenjō*). The first of the two graphs for *zenjō*, is the character for *zen* (禪) meditative practice and later the religious tradition by that name. From the time before the rise of the Zen tradition, including usage in Kūkai's writings, the graph has been used as the equivalent of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna*, meditation (Nakamura 1999:496). The term *jōryō* (靜慮)¹² has also been used for *dhyāna*, as in the third chapter of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*¹³ and throughout Kūkai's *Ten Stages of Mind*, particularly in chapter three.¹⁴ In the latter cases, Kūkai may use the term *jōryō* to indicate the proper names of specific practices (e.g., the Four *Dhyāna*). In contrast, Kūkai does not use the term *nyūjō* in the *Ten Stages of Mind*. The same is true of Kūkai's use of *jōryō* and not *nyūjō* in the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*.¹⁵ Also in the opening outline of the *Jeweled Key to the Mysterious Storehouse*, Kūkai apparently refers to the Four *Dhyāna* as the four meditations (四禪, S. *catur-dhyāna*). There he writes, "The observance of the six ascetic practices (of Brahmans) and the four meditations awaken one to despise that which is evil and to take delight in that which is good" (T. 77 n. 2426:363a). Although Kūkai mentions these as examples of practices introduced as *upāya* by the Buddha for people whose minds have not sufficiently developed to accept the ultimate truth of Tantra, the description sounds close to what may be assumed to be his own meditation practice described in his poem "The Nine Appearances of Death."

¹² See Nakamura 1999:447.

¹³ T. 18 n. 848:22c.

¹⁴ T. 77 n. 2425:323b, 323c, 326c etc.

¹⁵ T. 77 n. 2426:369a. Here Kūkai quotes the *Deśāntapālapati-dhāraṇī-sūtra* (T. 19 n. 997:547a) saying, "The Buddha subdues the various afflictions through the practices and the observance of *dhyānas* and *aṣṭa-vimokṣa*. Again, *dhyāna* here refers to the Four *Dhyāna*. *Aṣṭa-vimokṣa* means the eight ways to spiritual liberation: attainment of liberation by casting away greed and afflictions by means of eight meditation practices.

The second graph used in both the term *nyūjō* and *zenjō* (i.e., 定) has been used by itself to express the term yoga as well as the term *samādhi*, a state of trance or death. (Nakamura 1999:417). In the Japanese Buddhist tradition, the trance state indicated by *jō* is not equivalent to death but one from which the meditation practitioner can return to the mundane world. Apparently, a suitable location is needed for this practice, and this was the reason for Kūkai's request to build a training ground on Mount Kōya.

The *Iwanami Dictionary of Buddhism* defines *nyūjō* as follows. "Enter *samādhi*. Entering is with the consciousness by means of concentration of the mind. Because things of the physical world are an illusion one enters a condition in which they are not thrown out of order. *Nyūjō* is the opposite of *syutsujō* (出定), to emerge from *samādhi*. *Jñāna* (wisdom) and power is obtained by having undertaken *nyūjō*. One is said to not need food or drink. In the Shingon tradition, Kūkai did not die. It is believed his body remains in *nyūjō* in a stone hut. Also Kāśyapa (or Mahākāśyapa, 迦葉, J. Kashō),¹⁶ waits until Maitreya returns to earth, at Jizu Mountain (鷄足山 or 雞足山, literally Chicken Foot Mountain due to its shape) in *nyūjō* retaining his body, according to tradition" (Nakamuri 1999:638). Various texts in the *Taisho Tripitaka* confirm this (e.g., *T.* 52 n. 2117:784a02; *T.*53 n. 2121:63c29) including the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa-sāstra* (大智度論, J. *Daichidoron*),¹⁷ which was influential for Kūkai. The basic story holds that after Śākyamuni entered Nirvāṇa, Kāśyapa went to Jizu Mountain (Chicken Foot Mountain), which is in present-day Yunnan Province (雲南) of Southwestern China, but was in the past a part of a devoutly Buddhist proto-Thai kingdom known to have had close ties with Tantric

¹⁶ Mahākāśyapa was one of the Buddha's Ten Great Disciples.

¹⁷ *T.* 25 n. 1509.

Buddhism in India. There, Kāśyapa still waits in *nyūjō* for Maitreya to return to the world. At that time, he will give Maitreya the bowl which the Four Heavenly Kings gave Śākyamuni Buddha and which Śākyamuni gave him. Afterwards, Kāśyapa's work in the world will be finished. In relation to the bowl as a symbol of the passing of lineage, it will be remembered that according to legend, Kūkai received Gyōgi's begging bowl from a pious woman who had been waiting for his predicted arrival. Jizu Mountain is one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism and a Buddhist site during the Tang dynasty when Kūkai was in that country. Kūkai almost certainly knew of this legend.

The *Iwanami Dictionary of Buddhism* says *syutsujō* is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *vyutthāna*. It is defined as “Returning to one's usual senses from *zenjō* in the mountains. In many Mahāyāna scriptures, it is described as the realm of the Buddha or Bodhisattvas after returning from *samādhi*” (Nakamura 1999:411).

Also, according to the *Iwanami Dictionary of Buddhism*, *nyūjō* is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *samādhi-praviṣṭa* (Nakamura 1999:638). When Śākyamuni was entering a state Nakamura associates with *samādhi-praviṣṭa*, at the age of eighty in the forest on the outskirts of Kuśinagara in Northern India, he is said to have taught the Four *Dhyāna*. Accordingly, *samādhi* was conceived as a four-step meditation process related to the death the Buddha and also his ultimate state, that is the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* (般涅槃 J. *hannehan*). In the same way, the word *nyūjō* is used for both the *samādhi* of meditation and attaining immortal existence. It will be remembered that in his memorial talk at the death of his follower Chisen, Kūkai equates the state of the *samādhi* of *dharmadhātu* with death.

Among the Tantric texts to which Kūkai refers, the Four *Dhyāna* appear throughout the *Dhāraṇī Collection Sūtra* (陀羅尼集經)¹⁸ and the *Protection of the King and Country Dhāraṇī Sūtra* (守護國界主陀羅尼經).¹⁹ In these and other Tantric sūtras the practitioner is instructed to enter the mental state of the fourth *Dhyāna* in order to engage in efficacious practice. In some scriptures, the state of the fourth *Dhyāna* is referred to as the Fourth Meditation Heaven (四禪天).²⁰ Significantly, for Kūkai the Fourth Meditation Heaven is mentioned in the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.²¹ In the first *Dhyāna* one experiences happiness and bliss by abandoning desires; in second *Dhyāna* one experiences happiness and bliss in contemplating life; in the third *Dhyāna* one abandons happiness and attains true bliss; in the fourth *Dhyāna* one experiences neither pain nor bliss (Nakamura 1999:355). Clearly there are parallels between the notion of the Fourth Meditation Heaven and various Buddhist concepts of death, including Kūkai’s description: “Then I, with the wishes of a white corpse will not desire the kindness of people” (translated above). Likewise, in Kūkai’s request from Mount Kōya as a place to practice *nyūjō*, Kūkai speaks of the mysterious depths of the forest as the appropriate place for practicing the Four *Dhyāna* and *nyūjō*.²² It is unclear from the passage if Kūkai considers these the same practices but they are obviously related in his mind.

In the *Honored Spoken Memento*, Kūkai prophesied his death would be on the twenty-first day of the third month. The *Biography of Sōzō Kūkai* gives the following account of the day.

¹⁸ *T.* 18 n. 901.

¹⁹ *T.* 19 n. 997.

²⁰ For example, *T.* 16 n. 662; *T.* 36 n. 1739. etc.

²¹ *T.* 39 n 1796:641a.

²² *KZ* 10:140.

On the last day of the fifth month of Jōwa 1 (834), he asked his disciples to gather around him and said: “My life will not last much longer. Live harmoniously and preserve with care the teaching of the Buddha. I am returning to the mountain to remain there forever.”

In the early part of the ninth month, the master chose his burial place. From the first month of the second year (835), he drank no water. Some one advised him to take certain herbs as the human body is readily subject to decay, and a celestial cook came day after day and offered him nectar, but he declined even these, saying that he had no use for human food.

At midnight on the twenty-first day of the third month (835), Master Kūkai, lying on his right side, breathed his last. One or two of his disciples knew that he had been suffering from a carbuncle. In accordance with his will, Kūkai, clad in his robes, was interred on the Eastern Peak. He was sixty-two years of age (Hakada 1972:59-60).

From the earlier treatment in this dissertation of Japanese beliefs in mountains and the spirits of the dead, we can interpret Kūkai’s line, “I am returning to the mountain to remain there forever.” The inclusion of the detail that Kūkai “lying on his right side, breathed his last,” is likely a metaphor linking him with the Buddha and other Buddhist saints said to have assumed the same auspicious position upon dying. Further description is seen in the report Jitsue sent to Qinglong Temple where Kūkai had studied in Chang’an.

In the third month of Jōwa 2 (835), his fuel became exhausted and his fire was extinguished. He was sixty-two years old. Alas! Mt. Kōya turned gray; the clouds and trees appeared sad. The emperor in sorrow hastily sent a messenger to convey his condolences. The disciples wept as if they had lost their parents. Alas! We feel in our hearts as if we had swallowed fire, and our tears gush forth like fountains. Being unable to die, we are guarding the places where he passed away... (Hakada 1972:60).

Fifty-eight years after the death of Kūkai, the Shingon *bhikṣu* Kangen (853-925), who became head of Tōji and later Kongōbuji at Mount Kōya, petitioned the emperor to grant a posthumous title to Kūkai, as had been granted Saichō. At that time Kūkai was given the title

Kōbō Daishi. Kangen took the imperial edict to Mount Kōya, opening Kūkai's vault to present it to the master. Kangen reported finding Kūkai still in the meditative posture, his hair grown long. Kangen is said to have cut Kūkai's hair and changed his robe. When one of Kangen's followers refused to believe Kūkai was in perpetual *samādhi*, he touched Kūkai's knee and reported finding it was still warm (Matsunaga 1987 I:197). Kangen had been a pupil of Shōbō, who propagated the idea Mount Kōya was the Tantric Pure Land (*mitsugon*). In opposition to these stories, Kiyota joins others in arguing there are written indications from the time pointing to the possibility that Kūkai was cremated, as was the Buddhist practice (forthcoming).

At Mount Kōya, every year on the twenty-seventh of March, the Dharma gathering of the Honored Robe *Kaji* (*Gyoi kaji*, 御衣加持) is held at the Hōki building (宝亀院). On that day, a robe the color of Japanese cypress bark (*hiwada iru*, 檜皮色) is presented in front of the tomb of Kūkai as a *kaji* offering. The robe is dyed in the temple's water of *Mikoro moido* (御衣井戸), literally, Honored Robe Well Door. On the twenty-first day, the dyed robe enters a Tang Chinese chest called *karabitsu* (唐櫃) and is taken to Kongōbuji. After a service, it is taken to the front of the tomb, further in the inner forest building (奥の院). Likely, this annual event has its origin in the legend of finding Kūkai alive at the opening of his tomb (Watanabe 222). Before and after that time, to this day, some of Japan's greatest poets (e.g., Saigyō), emperors, *bhikṣu* and ordinary people have reported seeing Kūkai or experiencing his presence. Jitin (慧鎮, 1155-1225), a famous Tendai *Sōjō* and poet of the first era of the Kamakura period wrote the following poem.

That which is in the shadow of the rocks at Takaosan
is Daishi, still blessedly present (Watanabe 219).

Conclusion.

While carrying out the research for this dissertation, I was able to answer many questions I had about the life and practices of Kūkai. I have organized this information for myself and others into a narrative of his life based on writings attributed to him and his immediate followers. While legends of Kūkai abound, I have limited my selection to those dating from the Heian period, occasionally including later legends when so doing illuminated earlier stories or explained important events of Kūkai's life according to Shingon today.

As far as I know, this dissertation is the most extensive study of the life of Kūkai in a Western language. While the English sources I consulted were helpful in achieving this, in my mind, many gaps in the life and practices of Kūkai were left to be filled by research into the Japanese sources. Particularly important in this study has been the philological consideration of those writings attributed to Kūkai. From this I have found a richness to his life typically overlooked or ignored by his biographers. For example, interpreting the *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, biographers have represented Kūkai's interest in Confucianism and Daoism as passing after he embraced the path of Buddhism. Numerous allusions in his poems show this was not the case. From his letters we get a hint of the richness of his meditation practices and the nature of both the austerities he carried out and pleasures he found. These too seldom enter his biographies. Likewise, the depths of his feelings for those close to him can be gleaned from reading the eulogies Kūkai wrote for those deceased and the notes of encouragement to his friends. His writings also reveal Kūkai as a meticulous bookkeeper and one who spent much time in the attempt to raise funds for various projects.

In this dissertation, I have pointed out many references by Kūkai to the mysterious. One can see in these that for Kūkai, the mysterious is related to *dharmakāya*; *dharmakāya* being the distinguishing point between the revealed teachings and the mysterious teaching. *Dharmakāya* is the “equivalent to reality as perceived by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” (Kiyota 1982:141). I have examined many indications of Kūkai’s overriding interest in this topic as illustrated in the story of him becoming a Buddha before an audience, in the emphasis on the here-and-now seen in the *Ajikan* meditation, in his poetry and other references to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Kūkai often repeated the message of that sūtra, supreme enlightenment consists of knowing one’s mind is it really is (Kiyota 1982:59). For Kūkai, this was the mysterious truth of ordinary life. This is also the thrust of much Chinese and Japanese Buddhist poetry as well. Also using the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and other Tantric sources, Kūkai was able to extend his vision of the mysterious in the ordinary to include what has come to be considered an influential linguistic philosophy.

Kūkai’s theory of the difference between these two types of teachings (the revealed and the mysterious) likely developed throughout his life. Even so, I have pointed out his interest in the mysterious is present in those writings called his earliest. Although his concept of the mysterious probably changed as well, what he had found in first reading the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* may have been a way to deal with the mysterious in the context of Buddhist scriptures, specifically in the concept of *dharmakāya*. Along these lines, I have pointed to Kūkai’s repeated use of the name Henjō for himself, an indication of his mysterious identification with *dharmakāya* Mahāvairocana. For this reason, while Watanabe argued Kūkai’s addition of the

term *Shamon* to his name captured an important aspect of his personality, I have found equal relevance in his use of the name Henjō.

In this study I was able to look at some of the Tantric Buddhist writings and images existing in Japan before Kūkai went to China. In contrast to some studies of Kūkai, this revealed that certain Tantric images in Japan before Kūkai's massive importation should not be considered "impure *mikkyō*" but can be considered directly connected to the Shingon lineage via Śubhakarasiṃha or others. Just as Kūkai may have practiced mountain ascetic activities banned by the government during or before his time, or because the teachings were esoteric in nature, these items show earlier Tantric practices similar to those imported by Kūkai may have taken place in secrecy in Japan.

Since I have limited my study to the earliest writings and stories, there is much information on the life of Kūkai I have not included in this dissertation. This is particularly true in terms of regional legends, many of which likely developed in the Middle Ages. Among the most well known topics I have not included here is the authorship of the famous *Iroha* poem, attributed to Kūkai. The *Iroha* poem uses each of the sounds in the Japanese syllabary only once and is a Buddhist reflection on the transience of life. Although the authorship of the poem is disputed, it appears to have been written around the time Kūkai lived, likely by a *bhikṣu* who knew Sanskrit, was interested in the Japanese language and was an expert in poetry. Like others, in my mind none stand out as prominently in fitting this description as Kūkai. For a summary of the issue, refer to Abé 1999:391-3.

Related to the *Iroha* poem is the idea that Kūkai may have created the written system of Japanese *kana*. Again, *kana* is believed to have been conceived around the time Kūkai lived,

likely by a *bhikṣu* who knew Sanskrit and modeled it after that language, and was interested in the Japanese language. Again, Kūkai fits the description so well that it was likely easy to image he was the creator. While this apparently was assumed to be true for centuries, scholars today are skeptical.

Another point I have not covered is Kūkai's connection to the Hossō *bhikṣu* Tokuitsu (徳一, 760?-840?). Although Saichō had deep problems with Tokuitsu,¹ it appears that Kūkai was able to begin spreading Shingon scriptures in Japan with his help. Likewise, Tokuitsu's criticisms of Kūkai's philosophy may have been instrumental in the latter's important clarification of the difference between the revealed and the mysterious teachings. David Gardiner has presented an excellent study of the relationship of Kūkai and Tokuitsu in his "Kūkai and the Beginnings of Shingon Buddhism in Japan."

For me, one of the most pleasurable parts of writing this dissertation has been the research and analyses of Kūkai's writings and legends in terms of literature, iconography and comparative religions. In fact, one of the reasons I was attracted to the University of Wisconsin is the historical inter-departmental connection between Buddhist Studies, East Asian Languages and Literature and South Asian Studies. While biographies and other sources on Kūkai sometimes include pieces of one or another of the perspectives I was able to incorporate, I have combined the three in hopes of presenting a rich commentary. As with the whole study, these choices have been based largely on my own interests and questions. I can only hope others find some benefit in reading what I have enjoyed writing.

¹ See Groner 91-109.

Appendix: A List of Biographies of Kūkai

The following is a description of the writings listed in the *Kōbō daishi kūkai zenshū* (KKZ) as the major biographies of Kūkai. Adapted and expanded from KKZ 8:135-6.

1. Biography of the Preceptor *Sōdaisōjō* Kūkai, 贈大僧正空海和上傳記, written in 895 in *Kanhei goden* (寬平御伝, Honored Biographies of the Kanhei period) by the Sitting Master (座主) of Jōgan-ji (貞觀寺) in Kyoto, probably the successor of Shinga. KKZ 8, 137-8.
2. A Short Biography of the Eighth Patriarch, Kōbō Daishi Kūkai (第八祖弘法大師略伝) from the 付法伝, by 濟遲僧都.
3. The Record of Kōbō Daishi's Honored Ever Enduring *Nyūjō* (弘法大師御入定勘決記) also by 濟遲僧都. KKZ 8, 140-3.
4. Biographical Record of the Actions of Daishi (大師御行狀集記) written in 1089 (寛治三年) by 経範法務. KKZ 8, 143-5.
5. The Honored Biography of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師御伝) by *Acāryā* Ken'i (兼意阿闍梨) (edited in 1152).
6. The Honored Wide Biography of Kōya Daishi (高野大師御広伝) written in 1118 by *Acāryā* Shōken (聖賢阿闍梨, 1083-1147). KKZ 8, 146-8.
7. Record of the Transforming Practice of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師行化記) by Fujiwara Taikō (藤原敦光). KKZ 8, 148-9.
8. Record of the Transforming Practice of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師行化記) written in 1219 (承久元年) by *Acāryā* Shinken (深賢阿闍梨, d.1261). KKZ 8, 149-150.
9. The Abridged Essential Biography of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師伝要文抄) written in 1251 (建長三年) in the Abridged Essential Biographies of Japan's High *Bhikṣu* (日本高僧伝要文抄) by *Sōzu* Shūsei -check (宗性僧都) KKZ 8, 150-151.
10. The Biography of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師伝) written in 1315 (正和四年) by (後宇多法皇). KZ 8, 151-2.
11. The Biography of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師伝) written in 1325 (正中二年) by *Acāryā* Yōkai (栄海阿闍梨, 1278-1347). KKZ 8, 152-153.

12. The Essential Collection of the Actions of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師行状要集) written in 1374 (応安七年) by (賢宝法印). *KKZ* 8, 153-4
13. The Record of Daishi's Travel (大師遊方記) written in 1684 (天和四年) by *Acāryā* Chidō (智燈阿闍梨). *KKZ* 8, 154-5.
14. The Biography of Kōya Kōbō Daishi (高野弘法大師伝) in the Biographies of High *Bhikṣu* of the Eastern Country (東国高僧伝) written in 1687 (貞享四年) by Meditation Master Kōsen (高泉禪師, 1633-95). *KKZ* 8, 155-6.
15. The Biography of Shamon Kūkai of the Kii District's Kōyasan (or) of Kongōbu-ji (紀州高野山/金剛峰寺沙門空海伝) from the Biographies of High *Bhikṣu* of Founding Dynasties (本朝高僧伝) written in 1702 (元禄十五年) by Meditation Master Shibān (師蛮禪師). *KKZ* 8, 156-7.
16. The Collected Records of Kōbō Daishi's Effects (弘法大師験記集), writer unknown. *KKZ* 8, 157-8.
17. The Chronicles of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師年譜) in 12 *chūan*, written in 1833 (天保四年) by (得仁上綱). *KKZ* 8, 158-9.
18. The Written Chronicles of Kōbō Daishi (続弘法大師年譜) in 9 *chūan*, written in 1840 (天保十一年) also by (得仁上綱). *KKZ* 8, 159-60.
19. Chart of the Actions of Kōya Daishi (高野大師行状図画) in 10 *chūan*, writer unknown. *KKZ* 8, 161-2.
20. Chart of the Actions of Kōya Daishi (高野大師行状図画) Yamato Taizō-ji Original (大和国/大蔵寺本) in 10 *chūan*, writer unknown. *KKZ* 8, 162.
21. Chart of the Actions of Kōya Daishi (高野大師行状図画) Kōyasan Chizō-in Original (高野山地蔵院本) in 6 *chūan*, writer unknown. *KKZ* 8, 163.
22. Record of the Actions of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師行状記) Kyoto's Tōji Original in 12 *chūan*, writer unknown. *KKZ* 8, 164.
23. *Shinzen menen kie makino* (神泉苑縁起絵巻物) in 1 *chūan*, writer unknown. *KKZ* 8, 165-7.

24. Kōbō Daishi Honored Original Grounds (弘法大師御本地) in 3 *chüan*, written in 1654 (承応三年), writer unknown, *KKZ* 8, 167-8.
25. Supplemental Words of Praise for Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師賛議補) in 3 *chüan*, written in 1689(元禄二年) by *Acāryā* Jakuhon (寂本阿闍梨). *KKZ* 8, 168-9.

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Dictionary and Glossary of Technical Terms, Names, Calendar Periods, etc.

Japanese Calendar periods relevant to Kūkai's lifetime.

Late Nara (奈良) period. (710-794 CE)

Hōki (宝亀) 770-780

Early Heian (平安) period. (794-1185)

Enryaku (延暦) 781-805

Daidō (大同) 806-808

Kōnin (弘仁) 809-823

Tenchō (天長) 824-833

Jōwa (承和) 834-868

Japanese Emperors relevant to Kūkai's lifetime.

49. Emperor Kōnin 709-782, r. 770-781

50. Emperor Kanmu 737-806, r. 781-806

51. Emperor Heizei (or Heijō, 平城天皇) 774-824, r. 806-809

52. Emperor Saga (嵯峨天皇) 786-842, r. 809-823

53. Emperor Junna (淳和) 786-840, r. 823-833

54. Emperor Nimmyō 810-850, r. 833-850

Tang Chinese Emperors relevant to Kūkai's time.

De Zong (德宗) 780-805

Sun Zong (順宗) 805-806

Xian Zong (憲宗) 806-821

Tangs "Four Great Poets." (四大詩人)

Han Yu (韓愈) 768-824)

Li Bo/Li Bai (李白) 701-762

Du Fu (杜甫) 712-770

Bo Quyi (韓愈、白居易) 772-846

Ecclesiastic Ranks and Titles with English translations by
Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura (Nakamura 1973:294)

<u>English</u>	<u>Japanese</u>	<u>Sanskrit</u>
acolyte	<i>dōji</i> 童子	<i>kumāra</i>
ascetic	<i>gyōja</i> 行者	
assistant officer	<i>sakan</i> 佐官	
chief executive	<i>sōjō</i> 僧正	
dean	<i>gakutō</i> 學頭	
dharma king	<i>hōō</i> 法王	<i>dharmarāja</i>
dharma master	<i>hōshi</i> 法師	
<i>dhyāna</i> master	<i>zenji</i> 禪師	
director	<i>teranushi</i> or <i>teraju</i> 寺主	<i>vihārasvāmin</i>
elder master	<i>rōsō</i> 老僧	
full-fledged monk	<i>biku</i> 比丘	<i>bhikṣu</i>
full-fledged nun	<i>bikuni</i> 比丘尼	<i>bhikṣunī</i>
great chief executive	<i>daisōjō</i> 大僧正	
lay brother	<i>ubasoku</i> 優婆塞	<i>upāsaka</i>
lay sister	<i>ubai</i> 優婆夷	<i>upāsikā</i>
lecturer	<i>kōji</i> 講師	
monk	<i>shamon</i> 沙門	<i>śramaṇa</i>
	<i>sō</i> 僧	<i>saṃgha</i>
(the) Most Venerable	<i>daitoku</i> 大德	<i>bhadanta</i>
novice (monk)	<i>shami</i> 沙彌	<i>śrāmaṇera</i>
novice (nun)	<i>shamini</i> 沙彌尼	<i>śrāmaṇerikā</i>
nun	<i>ama</i> 尼	
preceptor	<i>risshi</i> 律師	
presiding officer	<i>jōza</i> 上座	<i>sthāvira</i>
provincial preceptor	<i>kokushi</i> 國師	
provost	<i>(tsu) ina</i> (都)維那	<i>karmadāna</i>
scripture copier	<i>kyōji</i> 經師	
secretary	<i>hōzu</i> 法頭	
supervisor	<i>sōzu</i> 僧都	
venerable master	<i>daishi</i> 大師	
(the) Venerable	<i>-shi</i> 師	

abhiṣeka (灌頂, J. *kanjō*). Tantric consecration involving sprinkling of water

ācārya (阿闍梨 or 阿闍梨, *ajari*). A spiritual teacher or guide.

Amitābha (阿弥陀, J. Amida). A savior Buddha residing in the Western Paradise.

bhikṣu (比丘, J. *biku*). A man who has taken the Buddhist vows, typically translated “monk.”

bhikṣuṇī (比丘尼, J. *bikuni*). A woman who has taken the Buddhist vows, typically translated “nun.”

bodhicitta (菩提心, J. *bodaishin*). In the context of Shingon, Kiyota explains *bodhicitta* as follows. “‘Enlightenment Mind’. ‘A mind turned towards Enlightenment’. A term used to describe the initial aspiration of a practitioner to gain enlightenment. Such an aspiration is frequently seen as expression of the inherent Buddha-nature of all sentient beings” (Kiyota, 1982:139).

Chang’an (長安). Capital city of Tang China, present day Xian. Kūkai spent most of his time while in China living in Changan. There he received the Tantric teachings of Huiguo at Qinglong Temple.

chindanhō (鎮坦法, or *chindanku* 鎮壇具). The practice of purifying the earth at the time of constructing a temple building, particularly a pagoda. At that time, relics or other precious objects may be buried. In Japan, this has been practiced since the late 6th century when precious objects were buried in the center of the pagoda foundation at Asuka Temple (飛鳥寺) in Nara (Imaizu, 726-7).

daijō kaidan (大乘戒坦). The Mahāyāna Ordination Platform established at Mount Hiei in the month of Saichō’s death.

Daikoku-ten (大黒天, S. Mahākāla). Literally the Great Black Heavenly one, thought to be a fierce form of Śiva. According to Frédéric, “he (Mahākāla) is particular to Tibet and was accepted in the seventeenth century as the tutelary good of Mongolia, under Tibetan influence. He has never been worshipped in China. In Japan, where his image appears to have come from Mongolia, he does not have the same symbolism and, as Daikoku, he was worshipped from the seventeenth century as a good of good luck” (Frédéric 1995:237). If Kūkai buried an image of Daikoku in 813, this would seem to contradict Frédéric’s notion that the image was not venerated in China, where Kūkai studied, and place the figure in Japan long before the seventeenth century, when it may or may not have re-entered Japan via Mongolia. This being the case, the iconographic symbolism of Daikoku-ten is uncertain at the time of Kūkai.

dankoku (断穀). Abstaining from eating the five cereals.

dharmakāya (法身, J. *hosshin*). The Dharma-body. One of the three Buddha-bodies (*trikāya*) along with *nirmāṇakāya* and *sambhogakāya*. “The embodiment of Buddhist doctrine as absolute and unconditioned, equivalent to reality as perceived by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” (Kiyota 1982:141). According to Kūkai, Huiguo taught the Shingon teachings did not arise from the historical Buddha (i.e., *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha), or from a savior such as Amithāba (*sambhogakāya* Buddha). Instead the Shingon sūtras came from the Dharmakāya Buddha, the

cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana, “the timeless Buddha whose body consisted of the Dharma itself” (Abé 1999:128-9).

Dōgen (道元, 1200-1253). Zen *bhikṣu*, founder of the Sōtō Zen tradition.

dōjō (道場). Training hall, maṇḍala, literally: place of the way.

dōsojin (道祖神). Roadside deities typically carved of stone and associated with Shintō, often for protection of travelers or crop fertility.

dōzoku (道俗). *Bhikṣu* and laity

Fragrance of Sacred Teachings (*Nioi no seikyō*, 匂いの聖教). A manuscript by Jūn'yū, today in the position of Ishiyama Temple, to which he was attached. The manuscript contains the account that Jūn'yū touched the knee of Kōbō Daishi and found that he was living.

Fujiwara no Kadonomaro (藤原葛野麿, 733-794). The ambassador Kūkai accompanied to China. After Emperor Saga was enthroned, Kudomaro became the imperial tutor to the heir-apparent, Prince Takaoka, son of ex-emperor Heisei (Heijo).

Gishin (781-833). Succeeded Saichō, becoming the second Japanese Tendai patriarch and, in 824, the first official Tendai ‘abbot’ in Japan (Matsunaga, 1987, I:162).

Gomyō (護命) 750-834. A scholar-*bhikṣu* (学僧) of the Hossō tradition in Nara. From Mino (see Imaizu, 348). According to Matsunaga, Gomyō divided his time each month between study at his temple and mountain asceticism (I:111).

gumonji-hō (also called *kokūzōgumonji*, 虚空藏聞持法). A practice involving the recitation of certain mantra a million times with the result that entire sūtras can be memorized.

gyōhō (行法). Asceticism, to practice the Dharma or the Dharma of practice.

Henjō (遍照) or *Henjōson* (遍照尊). The Eminent Transformed, the living embodiment of the Buddha Mahāvairocana, i.e., Kūkai

higan (悲願). Buddha's vow to save humanity.

hōben (方便, S. *upāya*). Skill-in-means.

hosshin (発心). Spiritual awakening.

hōtō (法灯). Literally, Dharma torch. A metaphor for a transmitted ecclesiastic position; *Dentō* (伝灯), Literally, transmitting the torch. (see Imaizu, 611): in 760 there were four *Dentō* ranks under the Great Dharma Teacher Rank (*Daihōsshi-i*). These were *Dentō hōsshi-i*, *Dentō man-i*, *Dentō jū-i*, *Dentō nyū-i*.

Huiguo (惠果, J. Keika, 746-805). Kūkai's direct Tantric master at Qinglong Temple in China.

ichijō (一乘). *Ekayāna*, the One Vehicle of the Lotus Sūtra.

isshin (一心). One mind, wholeheartedness, the whole heart/mind.

Jambu-dvīpa (J. *enbudai*, 閻浮提). The realm we live in.

kyukai (受戒). Vowing to follow the Buddhist precepts, receiving the precepts.

kyukugō (宿業). Karma.

kaji (加持, S. *adhiṣṭhāna*). The means by which to realize integration with a deity. In Shingon, the Three Mysteries (*sanmitsu*), which make possible the realization of *sokushin jōbutsu*, are collectively referred to as *kaji*. (see Nakamura, 177). *Kaiji kitō* (加持祈祷) is incantation and prayer calling on the power of a deity, sometimes translated “faith healing.”

kajishin (加持身). In Shingon, the Buddha-body (Nakamura 1999:117).

kechien (結縁). Making a connection with the/a Buddha.

keshin (化身). Buddhist incarnation, impersonation, personification.

Knowledge of All Knowledge (一切智智, J. *issai chichi*, S. *Sarvajña-jñāna*). Knowledge of omniscience. “Found in scriptures as a part of an epitaph for the Buddha Śākyamuni, in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, *Sarvajña-jñāna* refers to the omniscience of one who has realized identity with Mahāvairocana” (Kiyota, 1982:150).

Kōfukuji (興福寺, traditionally called Kōbukuji). One of the seven Great Temples of Nara, main temple (Daihonzan, 大本山) of the Hossō-shū.

Kogi Shingon (古義真言). A branch of Shingon. The name means “Old Interpretation Shingon” and is used in contrast with “New Interpretation Shingon” (新義真言, Shingi Shingon). This distinction was made at Mount Kōya in the late Heian period as the result of a debate over the

meaning of the *kaji* body of Mahāvairocana (Imaizu, 326). At that time, Kakuban (1095-1143) argued that Mahāvairocana could not communicate directly with people but required an intermediary such as the Buddha Amitābha. In this way, Kakuban attempted to synthesize Shingon and Pure Land Buddhism. The traditionalists at Mount Kōya disagreed, arguing that Kūkai taught the five elements were nothing more than the manifestation of Mahāvairocana. In my opinion, Kūkai's poem "Climb the Mountain to Contemplate the Hermit (the Buddha)" (translated in this dissertation) and other writings supports the latter conclusion. As a result, Kakuban left Mount Kōya to found the *Shingi* Shingon tradition.

Maitreya (J. Miroku *bosatsu*, 弥勒菩薩), also called the Bodhisattva Jishi (慈氏菩薩) by Shingon. In a time when Buddhism has disappeared, Maitreya will appear as the new Buddha. Until then, Maitreya, is living in Tuṣita heaven. The name Maitreya means 'benevolence' or 'friendship' (see Frédéric, 118-9).

mandōe (万灯会), Buddhist lantern festival, gathering of Myriad Fires and Myriad Flowers.

Mannō Pond is in today's Nakatadogun kanno (仲多度神野). It was rebuilt by Kūkai under Imperial patronage.

meisō (瞑想). Meditation.

mikyō sōgonshin (秘密莊嚴心). The Mysterious Teaching's Solemnity of Mind.

miko (巫女). Japanese shamaness.

Mind-to-mind transmission of the Dharma from teacher (*ācārya*) to pupil (以心伝心 or 以心傳心, J. *ishin denshin* C. *yixin chuanxin*). Literary "by means of the mind, transmission to mind." An often-used term in texts of Zen traditions.

Mount Hiei (比叡山). Home temple complex for the Tendai traditions. Located outside of Kyōto.

munen musō (無念無想). No idea and no conception, the ideal state, according to Saichō and Tendai, reached via contemplation (*zen*), during which passions are suppressed. Stopping ideation in order to gain a pure and clear heart is sought.

musō (無相). Without aspects, S. *alākṣaṇa* or *nirākāra*.

namu myōhō renke-gyō (南無妙法蓮華經). "Glory to the Sūtra," "Hail *Lotus Sūtra*."

nembutsu (念仏). Prayer consisting of repetition of the name of the Buddha Amitābha.

Nichiren (日蓮, 1222-1282). Founder of the Nichiren tradition of Buddhism in Japan.

Nihon koki (日本後紀). Written in 840, the 3rd national history covering years 791-833.

nyūjō (入定). Meditative concentration or *samādhi*, sometimes called Perpetual Samādhi.

precepts (S. *śīla*, J. *kai*, 戒). Buddhist vows.

Qinglong Temple (青龍寺). Tantric Buddhist temple in Chang'an where Kūkai studied Zhenyan under *ācārya* Huigou.

Rishukyō (理趣釋經, C. *Lichu shijing*) T. 1003. The sūtra Kūkai allegedly declined to lend to Saichō, possible on the grounds of its sexual content.

Ritsuryō governing system. “General legal code written in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, establishing the political and moral supremacy of the emperor and the great nobles, as well as written law” (Frédéric, 2002:792).

Ryūge sanne (龍華三會). The Third Assembly. The Buddha to come (當來仏), who is the Bodhisattva Maitreya, will descend to earth from Tuṣita heaven (兜率天) 567,000,000 years after the death of the Buddha Śākyamuni. At that time, he will call together the Third Assembly of the Dharma. People will be saved in great numbers (Nakamura, 1999:326).

sangō (三綱). Three principles positions in a temple, these are: *gyōza* (上座), *jishu* (寺主) and *tsuina* (都維那 or 維那) (see Imaizu, 314).

sanki (三歸, also called *sankii*, 三歸衣). The vows to preserve the three Jewels of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

sanmaya kai (三摩耶戒, S. *samaya-śīla*). Tantric Buddhist precepts.

Seireishū, *Henjō hakki seireishū*, (遍照發揮性靈集). Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō (i.e., Kūkai and Mahāvairocana). This is a collection of writings including letters, poems, prayers, etc., attributed to Kūkai and gathered by his direct follower Shinzei. *KKZ* 6:147-481.

shami (沙弥, S. *śrāmaṇera*). Buddhist novice who has not received the complete precepts.

Shoku nihon koki (續日本後紀). Written in 840, the 4th national history covering years 833-50.

Shugendō (修驗道). Way of the ascetic, which is to undertake mountain asceticism for acquiring supernatural or spiritual powers. Practitioners are known as *yamabushi* (山伏) and are often associated with Shingon.

shukke (出家, S. *pravrajyā*). Leaving home to enter the path of the Buddha, renouncing worldly affairs.

Sōgō (僧綱). Bureau of *Bhikṣu* governing Buddhist ecclesiastic affairs such as official ordinations.

sokushin jōbutsu (即身成仏). Attainment of Buddhahood during this lifetime.

Susiddhikara-sūtra (蘇悉知羯羅經) T. 18 n. 883. Along with the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*, the *Susiddhikara-sūtra* is among the most important scriptures for Shingon. “Translated into Chinese by Śubhakarasiṃha, this work proclaims that if one is unable to achieve desired results by employing other Mikkyō practices, through application of the principles expounded in the *Susiddhikara-sūtra*, he can find fulfillment” (White, 493).

Taihan (泰範, born 778). First a pupil of Saichō, Taihan left Mount Hiei though Saichō had named him successor. Taihan became one of Kūkai’s Ten Great Disciples.

Taimitsu (台密). Mikkyō of Tendai, the version/s of Tantric Buddhism propagated by the Tendai tradition in Japan.

tariki (他力). Reliance on the power of a savior. Contrasts with *tariki*.

Ten Great Disciples (十大弟子) of Kūkai. These are: Jitsue (or Jichie, 実慧, 786-847), Shinzei (真濟, 800-60), Shinga (真雅, 801-79), Shinnyo (真如, dates unknown but is thought to have died around 864), Dōō (道雄, died 851), Taihan (泰範, born 778), Chisen (智泉, 789-825), Gōrin (杲隣, born 767), Enmyō (円明, died 851, see 84a), and Chūen (忠延, dates unknown).

The three worlds (三世, J. *sanze*). Past and present and future existences

Three Brushes of Japan (日本三筆). Calligraphy masters Tachibana Hayanari, Emperor Saga and Kūkai.

The Three Mysteries (J. *sanmitsu*, 三密) are the mysteries of the body, mind and speech. Shingon prescribes corresponding practices for attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime (J. *sokushin jōbutsu*, 即身成仏). Three Mysteries practice (*sanmitsu-gyō*, 三密行): forming mudrās (the mystery of the body, 身密), chanting mantra (mystery of mouth/speech 口密), and in the mind, attaining the same condition of *satori* as the Buddha, typically via use of a maṇḍala (the mystery of mind, 意密).

Tendai (天台, C. Tiantai). The Buddhist tradition founded by Saichō in Japan. Named for Mount Tiantai in China, where its teachings were formed and practiced.

tokudo (得度). A term for becoming a Buddhist. Created in China from the content of Buddhist scriptures. The term literally designates “crossing over” (度 being a simplification of 渡), meaning crossing over the waves of the cycle of life and death (Iwanami, 617).

Tōmitsu (東密). *Mikkyō* of Tōji Temple, the version/s of Tantric Buddhism propagated by the Shingon Tradition in Japan.

Tōnari Takashina (判官高階遠成一行), Takashina Mahito Tōnari of the senior sixth rank, upper grade, judge and senior secretary of Dazaifu (see Hakeda, 1972:142).

Amoghavajra (不空金剛 J. Fukūkongō, 705-774). *Tripitaka* Master Huiguo’s direct Tantric master (*ācārya*) at Qinglong Temple in China. Kūkai is said to have been the Amoghavajra reincarnated.

tsuizen (追善). Buddhist service held on the anniversary of someone’s death .

ubasoku (優婆塞 or *ubai* 優婆夷). “The term *ubasoku* was originally a transliteration of *upāsaka*, a Sanskrit word denoting a male Buddhist householder. By Kūkai’s time, however, it had already assumed a particular connotation in the cultural context of the Nara and early Heian Buddhist community...*ubasoku* was a generic term referring to a variety of Buddhist practitioners who did not receive the official ordination sanctioned by the government” (Abé, 1999:76)

uen (有縁). Dependently arisen, related.

Vajrasattva (金剛薩埵). Supreme Being of Tantric Buddhism.

Ximing Temple (西明寺). Temple in Chang’an where Kūkai was involved in a translation project with the *bhikṣu* Bore.

yamabushi (山伏). Mountain ascetics who became associated with the Shugendō and Shingon traditions. The term literally means one who ‘lies down on mountains.’

zaisyō (罪障). Faults which prevent entry into bliss

zazen meisō (座禪冥想). Sitting in *dhyāna* meditation.

zenjō (禪定). Meditative concentration or *samādhi*.

Zhenyan (真言). Chinese Tantric Buddhist Tradition from which Kūkai developed Shingon. The “True Word” or Mantra tradition.

Zhiyi (智顓, 538-597). Systemized (or founded) the Tiantai tradition in China. He is the author of numerous scriptures including is seminal work on the meditative practice of Stopping and Seeing (the *Mohe zhiguan*, 摩訶止觀, 20 fascicles. T. 46 n. 1911, translated into English by Thomas Cleary as *Stopping and Seeing*). This writing records a series of lectures given on meditation by Zhiyi. It was compiled by his follower Guanding and was completed in 594. This is a major text for the Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai traditions.