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On Maṇḍalas

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Maṇḍala, Maṇḍala on the Wall: Variations of Usage in the Shingon School

INTRODUCTION

Kōyasan is the name of the mountain, as well as the small community that occupies its peak, in Wakayama prefecture in Japan where Kūkai established an important rural monastic center devoted to the practice of esoteric Buddhism in the early ninth century. The modern town of Kōyasan is perhaps best known, by both Japanese people and foreigners alike, as a tourist destination. This is especially the case during the summer months in western Japan, when the company that owns the train line that carries people to the mountaintop town two hours south of Osaka pitches a high visibility advertising campaign to attract visitors to the distant peak. A recurrent theme in the poster ads stresses the temperature differential between Osaka and Kōyasan (the latter is cooler), with the poster colors of choice invariably being hues of green and blue. The invitation is to a respite from the sweltering heat of the urban plain into a land of cool and natural comfort. Another aspect of the invitation is the opportunity to visit a grand repository of cultural history as well as the burial site of many of Japan's greatest cultural heroes. A walk through Kōyasan's Oku-no-in, the country's largest cemetary with its breathtaking paths through canopies of ancient cryptomeria and massive moss covered gravestones, with all the paths culminating at the mausoleum of Kūkai, is frequently billed as a glorious trek through Japanese history. Whatever their various motivations, over one million people flock to Kōyasan each year, most during summer. But people visit during all seasons, and in the climatically still-tolerable portions of spring and autumn (the mountain has a long, cold winter) many will also attend one of the numerous annual festivals there, some of which have been celebrated for over one thousand years. While these festivals also get billed in full-size posters placed in the midst of busy urban centers, and the modern quality of the activities surrounding some of them—the stage sets, brightly clad kimono dancers, amplified music and colored lights—carry the sheen of a truly polished production, many of them maintain a core structure that appears to preserve key elements of the religious observations practiced by the founders of the

monastic complex nearly twelve hundred years ago. The town is a curious, and I think still attractive, blend of the past and present.

It would be as egregious a misrepresentation to portray Kōyasan's present as if bereft of the glorious religious traditions of the past as it would be to depict the town's earlier history as if it had lacked anything resembling an element of tourism. Ever since it became a widespread belief in the tenth century that the founder, Kūkai, had never died but was in an eternal *samādhi* at Oku-no-in awaiting the arrival of the future Buddha Maitreya, the mountaintop was an active recipient of the pilgrimages of innumerable sovereigns, aristocrats and common people. There were also vigorous advertising campaigns in the medieval period run by the famous Kōya-hijiri, the wandering "holy men" who promised bereaving family members splendid rewards for their deceased loved ones in the afterlife if at least some of the remains were buried near the "resting place" of Kōbō Daishi (Kūkai's posthumous title and the name by which he is still best known). Monies collected for the service of transporting remains to the distant mountain and caring for the burial seem at times to have been used to help maintain the struggling community of monastics in their remote locale. Thus the tradition developed of making the visit to Kōyasan for the dual purpose of making a pilgrimage to the site of Kōbō Daishi's tomb and to pay respects to one's own ancestors or loved ones who were buried there. This tradition is maintained strongly up to the present (the cemetary is still a major source of income for the main temple of the Shingon school, Kongōbūji, that is located at Kōyasan), and it manifests a remarkable exception to the common exclusivity of Japanese sectarian Buddhism by virtue of the multi-sectarian affiliation of the pilgrims. Both these two common purposes, in addition of course to the third "purely" touristic motivation mentioned in my opening, seem to animate visits even of people whose families are closely affiliated with other Buddhist sects beside Shingon. Kōyasan is a complex community fed by various streams of energy flowing along multiple currents.

The modern town of Kōyasan maintains an old pattern of struggling to maintain its livelihood on a mountain top far removed from the urban center. As part of this struggle, the images employed to ensure the tourist trade, which represents a significant influx of the wealth that supports the four thousand residents, rely not only upon the natural features of the locale but on its historical and cultural virtues as well. Borrowing from both geographical and cultural implications, one theme that has frequently been employed to characterize the community has been that of a maṇḍala. The circular rim of hills that surrounds the mountaintop basin has often

been likened to the perimeter of one, as has the complex plurality of religious practices and devotees that have comprised the community's long history. Indeed, the term maṇḍala in Japan has been popularized to such an extent, in particular since the "mikkyō (esoteric Buddhist) boom" of the 1980s brought on in part by the 1150th anniversary of Kūkai's passing, that it can often connote little more than an image of a melting-pot suggesting a sense of the connectedness and equality of all participants. A recent lecture series open to the public at Kōyasan utilized just this theme in its colorful brochures. But a maṇḍala has had other more specific meanings in its history at Kōyasan and this paper will address the question of how the term and its concrete expressions have been employed there.

As as well-known, the key maṇḍalas in the Shingon tradition focus on the Buddha Mahāvairocana and the system of Five Buddhas (*pañca tathāgata*) of which he is a central figure.[1] Since it is known that maṇḍalas focusing on Vairocana were also associated with the early founding of Tantric Buddhist monasteries in Tibet at around the same time, some of the features of the development of the monastic complex at Kōyasan might be of general interest to students of the history of Buddhist Tantric traditions. In the case of Kōyasan, and more broadly speaking the early years of Shingon school in Japan, we have a remarkable wealth of documents from which to learn about how a system of esoteric Buddhist practice took institutional form. And, although there have certainly been changes over the centuries, the contemporary religious community at Kōyasan preserves many symbolic architectural and ritual structures with very ancient roots.

This paper will address several related issues centering on the theme of the maṇḍala in relation to Kōyasan. I will tie these themes together by referring to several of Kūkai's writings on the subject. Some of the themes addressed include the conception of the esoteric Buddhist teachings themselves (or, perhaps more precisely, the world as envisioned in these teachings) as being a maṇḍala, the utilization of stūpas for housing maṇḍalas and for representing the center of a maṇḍala, and the employment of painted and sculpted maṇḍalas in various ritual contexts. Along the way I will forward a hypothesis regarding the design of the monastic complex at Kōyasan, and furthermore will argue for the importance of additional study of the ritual use of maṇḍala representations for coming to better

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1. For a recent and exhaustive study of the variety of Buddha systems in Tantric Buddhism, utilizing materials from India, Tibet and China, see Yoritomi Motohiro's *Mikkyō butsu no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1990), which contains a lengthy English summary on pp. 691-716.

understand the development of the esoteric Buddhist cults in Heian Japan.

ESOTERIC BUDDHISM IN EARLY JAPAN

The paper by Geri Malandra, prior to mine both in this volume and in presentation at the conference, opens up our topic in a grand manner. It treats us to images of an international esoteric Buddhist tradition spreading easily throughout Asia via a variety of means. She portrays it as being a remarkably adaptable tradition and as thus being eminently portable. Its diffusion throughout Asia is likened to the unfolding of a maṇḍala from center to periphery, like the petals of a flower emerging from a bud and pushing outward. My task is to direct attention to the easternmost edge of this unfolding in Japan where, in 806 when Kūkai returned from two years of study in the T'ang, we can find a reasonably well-documented case of the consciously directed establishment of an esoteric Buddhist system of practice. In what appears to have been his first public pronouncement of the unique qualities of what he was transmitting from Ch'ang-an, Kūkai borrowed the words of his master Hui-kuo, which indeed depict his lineage in floral (or at least botanical) imagery: "In the personal transmission of this teaching, from the Buddha's Body of Truth down to my master Pu-k'ung, there are six leaves."[2] The Shingon tradition counts Hui-kuo as the seventh and Kūkai as the eighth patriarch. Were we to add one more, we could imagine the tradition representing its lineage as something akin to the eight red petals surrounding the center of the Garbhakośadhātu (Womb World) maṇḍala, wherein resides the Buddha Mahāvairocana.

Within the thirty years since Kūkai's return from China (until his death in 835), he was instrumental in establishing four major centers of esoteric practice in Japan. These were at the Tōji temple and the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, at the Tōdaiji temple in Nara and at Kōyasan. He was also instrumental in setting up numerous other centers for esoteric practice in Nara, Kyoto and probably other localities as well. In the span of one generation Japan acquired a unified network of such establishments, many of them managed by Kūkai's students, which represented a new unfolding at the periphery of the Asian Buddhist world. As is well-known, this process only accelerated after Kūkai's death such that even in the "new" Buddhism of the Kamakura period (12th to 14th c.) we find not only

2. *Kōbōdaishi chosaku zenshū*, ed. by Katsumata Shunkyō, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Sankibō 1973) 390. This standard collection of Kūkai's writings will henceforth be referred to as KCZ, followed by a colon and then the volume and page numbers, so that the present citation is KCZ 3: 390.

widespread esoteric practice but also the incorporation of various elements of its tradition, such as the maṇḍala, manifesting in the Pure Land and even Nichiren traditions in the visual forms of maṇḍalas depicting the Buddha Amida or the sacred phrase in praise of the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *gohonzon* (sacred image, literally, "honorable main deity") of "Namu myōhō renge kyō." Historians of Japanese religion speak of the permeation of esoteric patterns of thought as the "esotericization" (*mikkyō ka*) of religious practice and theory at various levels.[3]

Early on in this development (in the 9th and 10th centuries) the Tendai school was more aggressive and successful in this regard than was the Shingon school. This was probably because its founder Saichō was not well versed in esoteric Buddhism, left very few writings on it, and so his disciples had to build a workable program on their own. Incidentally, although the Tendai sect afer Kūkai's death (Saichō died several years earlier) is often portrayed in Shingon scholarship as competitively trying to "catch up" during the late 9th century due to the fairly complete system that Kūkai had apparently transmitted to his students, there were surely other more internally driven mechanisms that propelled the propitious growth of Tendai esoteric Buddhist practice. Despite the Shingon rhetoric that hails Kūkai's accomplishments as the only real core of esoteric Buddhism in Japan, the subsequent journeys to China by Tendai and Shingon monks alike and their introduction of numerous new texts and practices speaks clearly of the multifaceted character of esoteric Buddhism in Japan as well as of its vitality in China at the time (after Hui-kuo's death).

There can be little doubt, however, that Kūkai was instrumental in the founding of the Shingon sect, and that his presence in Kyoto also greatly stimulated the development of Tendai esoteric practice. It is no secret that Saichō was eager to learn all that he could from Kūkai and that he sent many of his students to study under him. And for a while, at least, both men even appeared interested in collaborating in the building of new forms of esoteric practice in Japan.[4] Some types of esoteric-style practice existed already in Nara, but the great interest shown in Kūkai's new synthesis, which was part of a general vogue for anything from the T'ang capital, clearly spurred the efforts of both men's creative energies. Although Kūkai brought to Japan texts (especially translations by Amoghavajra),

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3. See for example Furuta Shōkin, *Nihon Bukkyō shisōshi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1961) ch. 5, 139-65.

4. For a reevaluation of the traditional view that their relationship was primarily a bitter one, see my doctoral dissertation, "Kūkai and the Beginnings of Shingon Buddhism in Japan," Stanford University, 1994, 194-224.

liturgical paraphernalia (such as vajras and maṇḍalas) and forms of ritual (such as advanced *kanjō*, Skt. *abhiṣekha*, consecration rites) that were entirely new to Japan, some forms of Buddhist practice transmitted from the continent that were already referred to as esoteric were clearly not new.[5] The extent to which such practices existed is not well documented in English, nor have they always been given due attention in Japanese studies of Kūkai. Yoshito Hakeda's oversight in this regard resulted in his statement that the first esoteric Buddhist ceremony in Japan was conducted in 805 by Saichō, just after returning from China, at the behest of the ailing Emperor Kammu.[6] Both Kūkai and Saichō were familiar with

5. On the elements of Kūkai's practice that were new to Japan, including some Sanskrit texts and the five-pointed *vajra*, see Kushida Ryōkō, *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sankibō, 1981) 36-42. As for esoteric practices during the Nara period, examples of leading research in this area are Kushida Ryōkō, *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sankibō, 1981); Ishida Mōsaku, *Shakyō yori mitaru Narachō bukkyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1930) (especially 146-59); Horiike Shunpō, "Nara jidai bukkyō no mikkyōteki seikaku," *Kūkai*, Nihon meisō ronshū 3, ed. Wada Shūjō and Takagi Shingen (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1982) 22-39 (originally published in *Nishida sensei kojū kinen nihon kodai shi ronsō*); Hayami Tasuku, *Heian kizoku shakai to bukkyō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1975) 1-33, and also his *Jūjutsu shūkyō no sekai* (Tokyo: Kōshobō, 1987) 25-40; Misaki Ryōshū, "Nara jidai no mikkyō ni okeru shomondai," *Nantō bukkyō* 22 (1968): 55-73; Katsumata Shunkyō, *Mikkyō no Nihonteki tenkai* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1989) 6-13, and Sawa Ryūken, *Nihon mikkyō —sono tenkai to bijitsu* (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai, 1966) 30-87. For a "state of the field" account that includes a review of several of these articles and arguments of its own, see Miyagi Yōichirō, "Nara jidai no mikkyō ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu," *Mikkyōgaku kenkyū* 18 (1986): 75-91. This is a growing area of research as evidenced in the listing under a recently published bibliography of fifty-eight articles and books (all published between 1985-89) under the heading of "Nara period esoteric Buddhism." See Takeuchi Kōzen, "Mikkyō kankei bunken moku-roku—Chūgoku, Nihon-hen," *Kōyasan daigaku mikkyō bunka kenkyūsho kiyō* (1991) 136-38.

6. Hakeda, Yoshito, *Kūkai: Major Works* (NewYork: Columbia University Press, 1972) 37. While on the one hand such a statement reflects a traditional bias against recognizing the precursors of Kūkai's Shingon in Japan, on the other it can be seen as preserving part of Kūkai's emphasis on the disparity between the existing practices and his own. Stanley Weinstein noted that Hakeda may have had in mind the earliest instance of a *kanjō* ceremony, of which indeed the case he mentions of Saichō's performance would probably have been the first. See Weinstein's review article of Hakeda's book, "The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: The Neglected Tendai Tradition," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 34.1 (1974): 185. It also appears that although

esoteric practices and texts before they went to China and their importation of new texts and practices, as well as the tremendous influence these came to have, is only conceivable in light of the knowledge of and interest in esoteric Buddhism possessed by each man prior to their travels.[7]

Nevertheless, it is clear that Kūkai brought something new even though it is hard to say for certain how much of his systematization relied upon Chinese precedents and how much was due to his own creative synthesis.[8] Testament to this is the immediate interest shown in his system by Saichō and the rapid growth of new centers of practice during his lifetime. Still, it is clear that he felt a need to distinguish his new texts and practices

there are references to *kanjō* in texts in Japan prior to this time, the term may have had an altogether different meaning denoting certain flags used in rituals. On sources designating Saichō's as the first *kanjō* in Japan as well as on the meaning of the term in Nara texts, see Paul Groner, *Saichō The Establishment of the Tendai School* (Berkeley: 1984) 66, fn. 7.

7. From catalogues recording the copying of scriptures we can know that of the nearly six-hundred texts classified as related to esoteric Buddhism in the modern Taishō canon, about one quarter (at least one hundred thirty) existed in Japan during the Nara period. This percentage is more significant than it sounds because so many of these six-hundred texts post-date the Nara period. Of texts translated (or composed) prior to the new tradition marked by Shan wu-wei (born in India as Subhākarasimha, 637-735), who translated the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (*Ta-jih-ching*) and the *Susiddhikara-sūtra* (*Su-hsi-ti-chieh-lo-ching*), almost all were on hand in Nara. In fact, a testament to the effectiveness with which the Japanese were obtaining materials from the continent is the fact that the *Ta-jih-ching* was copied in Japan as early in 737, just twelve years after its translation in China. As for texts translated by Śubhākarasimha, Vajrabodhi (Chin-kang-chih, 670-741) and Amoghavajra (Pu-k'ung, 705-74), which represented a new type of esoteric Buddhism (characterized within the Shingon tradition as being more concerned with the goal of enlightenment than earlier forms), there were only a very small portion available in Nara. It is noteworthy, however, that the three texts central to the systematized esoteric Buddhism of the Heian period, the *Ta-jih-ching*, *Chin-kang-ting-ching* (Vajrabodhi's translation) and the *Su-hsi-ti-chieh-lo-ching* were all available. In fact the first two of these three, which were the key texts in the Shingon school and are related to the two main maṇḍala, were even frequently copied and lectured on together during the Nara period, apparently as a pair (see Kushida, *Shingon mikkyō* 4, 21-22). Thus in terms of texts, pre-Śubhākarasimha materials had been very well transmitted and there was a smattering of newer texts also available, some of which were apparently in good use.

8. For a critical perspective on some issues related to our understanding of Chinese esoteric Buddhism, see Charles Orzech, "Seeing Chen-yen Buddhism: Traditional Scholarship and the Vajrayāna in China," *History of Religions* 29.2 (November 1989): 87-114.

from ones already existing in Japan. For example, in his first formal declaration of what he brought back from China, the *Shōrai mokuroku* (*Catalogue of Imported Items*, an extant copy of which is thought to be Saichō's hand), Kūkai writes that "within those teachings considered esoteric, there is [the difference between] source and tributary. The former transmitters of the Dharma [merely] tugged at leaves and swam in tributaries, but what I now transmit unearths the root itself and fully exposes the very wellspring."[9] In an effort to carve a niche for his system of esoteric Buddhism in the world of early Heian Japan, it needed to be differentiated on the levels of both doctrine and practice. It appears that the maṇḍala was a device eminently suited to just this purpose.

STRUCTURAL AND SYMBOLIC FEATURES OF THE MONASTIC COMPLEX AT KOYASAN

Flexibility (Multivalence) of the Concept of Maṇḍala

In order to understand what was new in the forms of esoteric Buddhism Kūkai brought from China, it is important to look both at his own self-congratulatory rhetoric regarding the superiority of his transmissions (his theory), as well as at what new developments he accomplished within actual institutional settings (his practice). In the present study the focus is on the latter but it is worth reiterating the degree to which all the energies he expended in the former stand as clear indication of the imperative *need* he must have felt to differentiate Shingon from other forms of Buddhist theory and practice in Japan. And, it is most fruitful to consider the two cornerstones of his doctrinal edifice—the theory that Shingon scriptures and practices are based upon the preaching of the Dharmakāya Buddha (*hosshin seppō*) and the claim that these same practices can enable one to attain Buddhahood in this very lifetime (*sokushin jōbutsu*)—in light of the classificatory wedge he was trying to insert between Shingon practice and not only the "exoteric" Buddhist schools but also the existing esoteric practices in Japan, to which he refers in his writings as "shallow" esotericism.[10]

At the levels of both theory and practice, the maṇḍala is one item that served to distinguish the Shingon school from all others. Whether consid-

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9. KCZ 2: 14.

10. Later Shingon exegetes of course label these earlier forms of practice "mixed esoterism" (*zōmitsu*), but there is no evidence that Kūkai or anyone at his time was using such a phrase. Kūkai clarifies at different places in his works that by "shallow" esoteric Buddhism he refers to the practice of *dhāraṇī* recitation that derives from teachings by Śākyamuni Buddha.

ering maṇḍala as a philosophical / religious concept or as a material support for (or object of worship in) ritual practice, the appearance in Japan of the new maṇḍalas centered on Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana) was a novel presence indeed. Saichō had brought back some maṇḍalas associated with esoteric Buddhist practice when he returned from China nearly two years earlier than Kūkai, but he did not bring the Vajra and Womb Realm representations nor a doctrinal system describing their significance. These maṇḍalas played a central role in the *abhiṣekha* ceremonies Kūkai performed (which were well-attended by Saichō and his disciples as well as scores of monks from Nara) and in the doctrinal system he presented as the foundation for Shingon practice. They also played an important conceptual role in the layout of the Kongōbuji ("Vajra Peak") temple complex atop Kōyasan.[11]

The significance of the maṇḍala is attested in a document written by Kūkai in 818 on the occasion of the consecration of the ritual space on top of Mount Kōya. His votive account of the establishment of this center, whereby "the secret maṇḍala was transmitted to Jambudvīpa," contains the following passage:

> Mahāvairocana Buddha, the great compassionate one, enjoying for himself the taste of the equality that is enlightenment, was saddened by the plight of the beings in the six realms of rebirth. And so it was that the thunder of his wisdom that is one with reality trembled throughout His dharma-realm palace and the secret maṇḍala was thereby transmitted to Jambudvīpa [our world]. It was passed on to Vajrasattva, to Nāgārjuna and down to the present without a break in continuity. Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra came east, bearing their staffs from India to China, and transmitted the esoteric teaching in order to liberate all beings. And yet, here across the broad ocean in Japan, worthy vessels of this teaching had yet to appear and so the teaching remained hidden in the secret palace of Mahāvairocana without being transmitted to our land.
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> Fortunately, due to the power of the grace of the Buddha and other forces, hidden as well as visible, that mature beings for spiritual work, I was able to travel to T'ang China in 804, whence I safely returned with the two maṇḍalas

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11. See Kushida Ryōkō as cited in fn. 5 on what was new among Kūkai's importations. On what Saichō brought back with him, see the list of esoteric Buddhist paintings imported by each of the celebrated "eight monks who went to T'ang" (all from the Tendai and Shingon schools) provided by Yoritomi Motohiro in *Mandara no uchū* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1988) 37. It is important to note here that while the material maṇḍalas that Kūkai brought from China were clearly not of his own design, the theoretical system that tied them together into a structured practice may well have contained elements of his creation.

of the Womb Realm of Great Compassion and Vajra Realm and over one hundred scrolls of Vajrayāna scriptures. Still, people in Japan were not ready and the time was not right. Month after month passed in rapid succession and it is now more than twelve years since I returned. At last, since our devout Sovereign has taken it upon himself to help promote this teaching, we are in need simply of a place for the practice. I have searched far and wide and through divination have decided on Mount Kōya. The Sovereign, determined to spread this teaching, has granted the mountain for this purpose. Thus will a monastic complex be constructed on this land bestowed by the Sovereign.

So it is that now I will promote these esoteric teachings in order to return favor to the Buddhas above and to liberate beings here below, as well as to augment the dignity of the various beneficient spirits. Thus, in accordance with the esoteric Buddhist teachings of the Vajrayāna, I will establish in this space the two maṇḍalas of the Vajra and Womb Realms. May all the Buddhas rejoice in, and all the heavenly beings protect, my efforts here and may all virtuous spirits please vow to help realize our wishes.[12]

The term maṇḍala is used here in several ways. First, there is mention of the mytho-historical beginnings of the Shingon lineage in the initial transmission of the esoteric teaching from Mahāvairocana to Vajrasattva. Here the maṇḍala indicates the esoteric teaching as a whole. Next, there is reference to the scroll paintings of the two Realms that Kūkai transported from China. Lastly, he states that he will establish the maṇḍalas of the two Realms at Kongōbuji. It is of course possible that by "establishing the two maṇḍalas" Kūkai refers to setting up a ritual space within a temple where painted scrolls depicting the maṇḍala will be hung. But a more suitable interpretation is to understand him as saying that he is establishing Kongōbuji as a center of two greater, all-encompassing maṇḍalas that represent the esoteric Buddhist concept of the entire world as a divine assembly emanating from the Buddha. This is a common usage of the term maṇḍala in Kūkai's writings and its significance is revealed in the title of his famous essay on the stages of religious development, the *Himitsu mandara Jūjūshinron* (*Treatise on the Ten Levels of Mind of the Secret Maṇḍala*). The title of this work is frequently abbreviated

12. KCZ 3: 392-94. See also Allan Grapard's partial translation of the same text in his "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions," *History of Religions* 20.3 (1981): 203. Grapard translates a section regarding the sacralization of the monastery grounds that includes the ordering away of maleficient powers from, and the invitation of all beneficient ones into, the newly established boundaries of the sacred territory. He also comments on how similar this text is to Shintō texts that are also used for demarcating sacred space.

resulting in the omission of the reference to the secret maṇḍala. The full title expresses the view that all religious teachings, not only esoteric Buddhist ones, are part of the "secret maṇḍala" of the Buddha and as such serve to liberate living beings. The esoteric maṇḍala established at Kōyasan is one part of this broader one (and clearly the most soteriologically effective part from Kūkai's perspective). Regarding this last reference, there is another text that Kūkai wrote five years later, at a time when he was seeking patrons to contribute to the construction of stūpas at Kongōbuji, in which the following explanation is given:

> Thus it is that in the near future, in order to liberate beings and out of gratitude to our four great benefactors [parents, king, sentient beings, the Three jewels], I will establish at Kongōbuji two stūpas that represent Vairocana as the Essential Nature of the Dharmadhātu, in addition to two maṇḍalas of the Womb and Vajra Realms.[13]

In other words, he is not only consecrating the grounds of the monastic complex; he is also designating these grounds as the center of a sacred cosmos, as a place of religious practice where this world becomes transformed, through the power of the Buddhas and the practitioner's mystical identification with them, into a realm of perfection. In Shingon parlance, this perfection is depicted as partaking of the interlocking spheres of compassion and wisdom (and other pairs of qualities) that are visually represented in the painted maṇḍalas. This is a traditional understanding of what it means to "establish" the maṇḍala.[14]

In the last passage cited, Kūkai notes that he intends to establish two stūpas at Kongōbuji.[15] These stūpas are traditionally recognized as centers

13. KCZ 3: 366.

14. The maṇḍalas of the two realms are said to depict the complementarity, or non-duality, of a variety of concepts or realities. The most common expression for describing the pair in this regard is to see the Womb Realm as representing "principle" (*ri*) and the Vajra Realm "wisdom" (*chi*). Hence the oft-cited phrase "the non-duality of principle and wisdom" (*richi funi*) to describe the interpenetration of these realms. For a treatment of the various pairs of terms represented by the two maṇḍalas, see Adrian Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988) 124-41.

15. I use the term stūpa rather than the more common term pagoda (to refer to the Japanese architectural form corresponding to the South Asian stūpa) because the Sino-Japanese term makes no distinction between these two and is in fact derived from a transliteration of the word stūpa. Furthermore, the form of the present main stūpa at Kongōbuji preserves in part the hemispheric shape so characteristic of the Indian stūpa but often missing in its East Asian represen-

of the Womb and Vajra Realm maṇḍalas. As the center of a maṇḍala, each also symbolizes the Dharmakāya Buddha Māhavairocana, understood in this particular context as being the "essential nature of the *dharmadhātu*" (*hokkai taishō*), the very essence of that which pervades all existence. In fact in the paintings of the symbolic *samāya maṇḍala*, where the various deities are represented by sacred objects that express their vows to liberate beings, the Dharmakāya Buddha is represented by a stūpa. I will have more to say below on the relation between the maṇḍala and stūpa, the concept of maṇḍala as a sacred cosmos and on Kōyasan as an axis or center for the practice that is conducive to the realization of such a world. For now it will suffice to conclude this section by recalling that the introduction of various levels of theory and practice related to esoteric Buddhist maṇḍalas was one of the most conspicuous contributions that Kūkai made to the religious landscape of early Heian Japan.

The Layout of the Kongōbuji Complex

For the modern visitor to Kōyasan, the center of the monastic complex (or *garan*, as it is known in Japanese) would seem to be a single stūpa rather than two.[16] This large structure is called the "fundamental great stūpa" (*konpon daitō*, hereafter Great Stūpa) and, as older drawings of Kōyasan indicate, it seems to have stood out for centuries as a central piece of the landscape.[17] It has become such a key symbol for the community of Kōyasan itself that photographs of its ringed spire, more often than not shown piercing a cover of low-lying mist in the midst of the surrounding rim of green peaks, frequently grace the covers of tourbooks and pamphlets. It stands on the eastern side of the center of the Garan and is mirrored even today by another stūpa on the western side [See Diagram 1]. This second stūpa in the Garan is known simply as the Western Stūpa (*saitō*), and is notably smaller than the Great Stūpa and slightly removed from the center of ritual activities (monastic as well as lay) in the Garan that revolve around the Great Stūpa. Although there are no architectural plans dating from the founding of Kongōbūji to confirm the design, most scholars agree that the original conception likely contained both stūpas as equally prominent focii of the Garan. This is suggested by such evidence as the relatively symmetrical placement of the two stūpas

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tatives. The shape is known as the Tahō-tō (Prabhūtaratna-stūpa)

16. The term *garan* is derived from the Sanskrit word for the residence for members of the Buddhist order, *saṃghārāma*.

17. The present structure is a reconstruction dating from 1937. It stands over 48 meters in height with a square base of over 23 meters on each side.

with regard to what was once the entrance to the Garan, Kūkai's writing testifying to the plan to erect two stūpas and, lastly, the convention of such a double stūpa layout in the major monastic complexes in Nara. It is uncertain, however, whether both stūpas were actually ever constructed on an equal scale. It has been hypothesized by some scholars that the difficulties inherent in erecting two large stūpas at the rural mountain site prevented this from ever taking place. Thus the reason why one stūpa has come to play such a central role may have been an expediency due to economic and geographic conditions.[18] A more popular interpretation,

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18. Indications of the difficulties involved in constructing a stūpa can be found in Kūkai's letters of request for aid in the process. One such letter on the occasion of planning the stūpas for Kongōbuji was cited above (fn. 40). The letter also contains the following plea:

> We now have many workers engaged in this effort but food supplies are in shortage. What I wish for is that persons of whatever status, whether rich or poor, lay or cleric, would unite [with us in our purpose]. When it is said that a huge mountain can be made by innumerable contributions of a single grain of dust, or that the great ocean is created by the joining of many drops of water, it is only made possible by the sharing of a common purpose and the collective union of energies.
> And so do I humbly request, that all the patrons contribute anything, even as little as a single cent or a grain of rice, in order to assist us in this virtuous task. If you will do so, our work will surely be accomplished in no time at all and the merit thus produced will last for thousands of kalpas.

Another example is in a similar letter drafted when he was seeking help erecting a stūpa at the Tōji temple in Kyoto. This temple's construction had been languishing for many years when it was placed under Kūkai's supervision in 824. An excerpt from the letter reads:

> By some mistake the Sovereign's wish [to complete construction of this temple] has fallen upon me instead of upon skilled artisans. I run about day and night, in the east and in the west, supervising the work. The lumber for the stūpa has now been secured in the nearby eastern hills. Together, monks and layman have been hauling timber . . . but since the trees are large and our strength is insufficient it is an extremely difficult task. It reminds me of [the story in Chuang-tzu about] the praying mantis who had to push a cart or the mosquito who tried to shoulder a mountain.

The letter continues by requesting that the Sovereign assign court officers, even of the highest rank (!), to assist in the labor. See KCZ 3: 374-76. If help was needed even in the capital, the project at Kōyasan must have been all the more burdensome.

based primarily on the appearance of a central stūpa similar to the Great Stūpa at other Shingon monastic complexes in Japan, is that the single-stūpa design was the original one. I will comment more on this theory later and for now say only that it ignores the evidence to the contrary listed above. In reliance on this evidence, the view presented here as most plausible is that the original plan was for two stūpas.

The present-day Garan at Kōyasan appears at a first look to be somewhat of a sprawling assemblage of buildings without symmetry or center. This is due to the gradual accretion, over the centuries, of structures adjacent to, and primarily in the eastern direction of, the center of the Garan, which is still today separated by stone steps on all four sides leading up to the elevated plateau where the Great Stūpa and the Western Stūpa are located. The "Garan proper," by which I mean the section that became the center, includes three main buildings: the two stūpas and a Lecture Hall (*kōdō*).[19] There was once a large covered gate from which one could enter the Garan from the south side (known as the *nanmon*, or southern gate) but only the stone foundations remain today. Upon entering from where the southern gate used to be, one comes first upon the stately Lecture Hall, behind which are placed more or less symmetrically the Great Stūpa to the east (and right) and the Western Stūpa (smaller and to the left). Before focusing attention on the stūpas themselves, it will be helpful to comment on the basic layout of these three main buildings.

First of all, based on the model of ancient Chinese imperial palaces, Buddhist temple complexes in China and Japan commonly placed the entrance gate on the south side, with the central structure, and thus its main Buddha images (like the Emperor), facing south toward those approaching from the entrance. This layout was very common in Nara and seems to have been based on T'ang models. Kongōbuji was no exception. It is unclear, however, if Kūkai—or his disciples since the complex was not completed during his lifetime—had a particular temple in mind as a model, whether from a Chinese or Japanese precedent, upon which he based its layout. Nevertheless, when compared with other Buddhist complexes in Nara, the Garan layout at Kōyasan has both significant similarities

19. Today there are actually five main structures in all, but I exclude from the present discussion the Miedō, which enshrines a famous portrait of Kūkai, and the large shrine to the local deity that stands west of the Lecture Hall. In spite of the significance of these buildings for ritual purposes, the focus is limited here to those buildings with the most explicit characteristics of esoteric Buddhist doctrine. It is thought that the Miedō may have originally housed the practitioners of the community.

as well as differences.

While there are certainly grounds for thinking that Kūkai made unique contributions to Japanese Garan design via his plan for Kongōbuji, it is nevertheless important to recognize that there were also key continuities with local precedents. Secondary literature occasionally refers to his contribution as a revolutionary remaking of Garan layout, but the limitations of his contributions must be clarified. Beginning with the stūpas, there was clearly nothing revolutionary about placing two stūpas on opposite sides of a central north-south axis. Archeological evidence evinces this as a common pattern throughout Nara in the eighth century. The correlation of these stūpas with the maṇḍalas of the Womb and Vajra Realms is, of course, a separate matter. This could not possibly have occured in Japan prior to Kūkai's efforts because the maṇḍalas did not exist until he brought them from China. Thus this correlation may be treated as a doctrinal innovation superimposed on an already existent architectural convention.

Regarding the placement of stūpas within Garan complexes in Nara, it appears that there was an evolution from one-stūpa to two-stūpa layouts. Many stūpas were regarded as reliquaries, and documents from the Nara period reveal that relics were indeed often buried underneath, or on occasion stored near the top of, the central pillar. Some scholars believe that the appearance of two stūpas in the complexes was likely due to aesthetic reasons, with two structures offering a more symmetrical and decorative layout, and that this development reflects a diminution in the overall significance of the stūpa within the sacred space of the Garan. Whatever the reason, several major Nara temple complexes in Kūkai's day—including Tōdaiji, Yakushiji and Daianji—contained two stūpas.[20]

The temple complexes also frequently contained two other halls: a Golden Hall and a Lecture Hall, and this holds for both the one- and two-stūpa Garan layouts. Furthermore, there was a pattern common to many Garan, which was that upon entering the entrance gate (or on occasion just before entering) one would first encounter the stūpa or stūpas, then

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20. For more on this, including helpful diagrams and photographs of three dimensional reconstructions based on archeological findings, see *Nara no jiin to Tempyō chōkoku*, vol. 3 of the series *Genshoku Nihon no bujitsu*, 1st ed. (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1966) 142-53. The author of this portion of the book, Asano Kiyoshi, notes that during the Nara period stūpas gradually lost their central position, which they had in the earlier Asuka period when their location suggested that their "ranking" was at least equivalent to that of the Kondō. He states that there seems to have been a tendency for stūpas to shift away from a central position and for the Kondō to become more of a focus.

the Golden (or Buddha) Hall[21] and finally the Lecture Hall. The Golden Hall is usually seen as the central structure of any complex and it traditionally housed cast or sculpted images of Buddhas and other deities. These were all placed on a raised platform known as a Shumi-dan or "Sumeru altar," which was commonly very large and took up much of the floor space inside the building. This hall was not designed for large gatherings, since there was often very little open space, but rather for worship. The Lecture Hall was frequently larger and provided space for religious talks as well as other ceremonies such as the recitation of sūtras. These same functions were available within the Kongōbuji complex but the "division of labor" among the buildings there is rendered different because the Golden Hall was no longer present.

The Kongōbuji complex presents three major features that appear to some degree to be unique. First of all, although not mentioned above, there is the marked absence of an enclosed walkway surrounding the buildings. It can be supposed that financial considerations as well as early estimates of the expected number of residents could easily have rendered this structure unnecessary atop of Mount Kōya. Secondly, there is the equally conspicuous absence of the Golden Hall. And third, there is the placement of the pair of stūpas at the back (north end) of the complex. As a pair, stūpas were most commonly located closer to the entrance before the Golden Hall. In some instances, such as at Hōryūji in Nara, the stūpa and the Golden Hall were adjacent (that is, on the same east-west axis). But the arrangement at Kongōbuji would seem to be novel.

Leaving aside the absence of an enclosure, the placement of structures at Kongōbuji poses interpretive challenges. I have yet to encounter any attempts in scholarship to put these pieces together. It would appear that there has been some kind of reversal in arrangement, such that the Lecture Hall comes first and the stūpas last, but I can forward no explanation for this. What does seem clear, however, is that although there is no Golden Hall, the stūpas seem clearly to have appropriated the role of this hall by housing the key images (representing the two maṇḍalas fundamental to Shingon practice) in a hall dedicated to worship. For one of the most remarkable characteristics of the stūpas at Kongōbuji is that the interiors were fully furnished with images, on a raised platform, in a manner most commonly reserved for a Golden Hall. Thus both the position and the interior of the Kongōbuji stūpas suggests that their relative status in

21. The most common name for this hall is Golden Hall (*kondō*) but it is also known as the Buddha Hall (*butsuden* or *butsudō*).

terms of sacred space seems to have been elevated over Nara counterparts.[22]

I cited earlier a passage from one of Kūkai's writings describing the establishment of the Kongōbuji complex that states, "I will establish at Kongōbuji two stūpas that represent Vairocana as the Essential Nature of the Dharmadhātu, in addition to two maṇḍalas of the Womb and Vajra Realms." There has been some scholarly debate over the centuries as to how to interpret this statement. At issue is whether the statement means that the stūpas and the maṇḍalas are "established" separately so that the stūpas, on the one hand, represent "Vairocana as the Essential Nature of the Dharmadhātu," while the maṇḍalas alone represent the two Realms. One historical factor that has led to understanding the stūpas themselves as not each representing one of the maṇḍala realms is that for several centuries the Great Stūpa at Kongōbuji has not been a representation of *one* of the maṇḍalas but of *both* of the maṇḍalas. This is also the case with the central stūpa at some other Shingon complexes, such as at Daigōji in Kyoto. In both Daigōji's five-storied stūpa and the Great Stūpa at Kongōbuji, the iconography clearly represents *both* the Vajra and the Womb Realms at once.[23] At Kongōbuji, on the central platform within the Great Stūpa are five Buddha images. At the center is Mahāvairocana of the Womb Realm (it is the same deity as Mahāvairocana of the Vajra Realm but is differentiated by *mudrā*), and he is surrounded by four Buddhas of the Vajra Realm.[24] The interior layout of the stūpa at Daigōji is somewhat different, but the combining of both realms is nevertheless an unmistakable feature there. Although at Daigōji there is just

22. The mere presence of Buddha statues inside a stūpa may not have been an innovation at Kongōbuji. Two other temples from the Nara period contain statues, Saidaiji (wooden) and Hōryūji (plaster). Some scholars have expressed surprise that, considering the importance of stūpas in the *garan* of Nara temples, it is surprising that we have only two extant cases where Buddha statues are found. See Asano Kiyoshi's comments in *Nara no jiin to Tempyō chōkoku* 96, section on the four statues at Saidaiji.

23. The interior layout of the stūpa at Daigōji, which is very different from that of the Great Stūpa, is represented by a diagram in Sawa Takaaki, *Art in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (New York: Weatherhill, 1972) 134.

24. These four Buddhas are from the group of five sometimes referred to as "Dhyāni" Buddhas. They are (clockwise from the east, which is at the "bottom"): Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddhi and Amitābha. The five Buddhas of the Womb Realm are Mahāvairocana at the center surrounded by (clockwise from the west, which is at the "bottom"): Amitāyus, Divyadundubhi-megha-nirghoṣa, Ratnaketu and Samkusumita-rāja. For more on the deities of the two maṇḍalas, see Snodgrass, *The Matrix World and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism.*

one main stūpa while at Kongōbuji there are two stūpas, the degree to which the Great Stūpa has usurped a central ritual position at the latter makes it virtually a one-stūpa complex today in spite of what was likely its original plan. The combination of iconography from both maṇḍala realms within one stūpa makes for a certain economy of architecture since the need for a second (hard to build) stūpa can be made obsolete. This reason, in addition to the convenient expression that such a combination makes of the doctrine that the two realms are ultimately indivisible, would offer ample grounds for understanding how a one-stūpa layout may have become popular. According to some Japanese scholars, the result of this economics of construction as well as of doctrinal expression has been that the original plan has been ignored. Evidence for the existence of an original plan based on two stūpas representing, respectively, the two maṇḍalas can be found in two places: Kūkai's statement that he would construct two stūpas and in one additional place: the second or Western Stūpa at Kongōbuji contains five Buddha images that are all derived from one maṇḍala, that of the Vajra Realm. And, although the building itself is not so old, the central image has been dated from the early Heian period. Thus it is supposed that the Western Stūpa has always represented the Vajra Realm and the Great Stūpa the Womb Realm, except that in the latter a transformation took place whereby the central Buddha image remained of the Womb Realm while the surrounding four Buddhas came to represent the Vajra Realm such that the Stūpa became symbolic of the union of the two. If such a tranformation took place, it must be assumed that it corresponded also with a donning of a new name, "Great Fundamental Stūpa" (perhaps to replace an original name such as "Eastern Stūpa").[25]

Another reason why it makes sense to understand the original plan as having been for two stūpas representing each of the two maṇḍala Realms

25. I have yet to encounter any supposition as to the possible former name of the Great Stūpa, but the suggestions by scholars that both the composition of its images and its role changed such that it became a sort of single axis, as it were, of the community, would be consistent with a change of name. Sawa Ryūken's *Mikkyō jiten* (under "konpon daitō," p. 249) explains how the Great Stūpa's combining of the images of both Realms derives from the doctrinal basis of this integration expressed in the *Chin-kangfeng lo-ko i-ch'ieh yü-ch'ieh yü-chi ching* (*T.* 18, no. 867), an important scripture for the Shingon tradition that is understood as integrating the teachings of the two key scriptures from which the two Realms are derived. Sawa adds, however, that the original Buddha images in the two stūpas seem to have been derived from the two different maṇḍalas. A careful argument in favor of this position appears in Nakagawa Zenkyō, *Kōyasan garan kaiso no kōsō to rinen* (Kōyasan: Kōyasan Daigaku, 1983) 41-51.

is in the wording of the passage from Kūkai stating that he will establish "two stūpas that represent Vairocana as the Essential Nature of the Dharmadhātu, in addition to two maṇḍalas of the Womb and Vajra Realms." A factor contributing to the "separate" interpretation must have been that the stūpas are given in this passage a name that is different from that of the maṇḍalas; they are not called "stūpas of the two Realms." But the name of the stūpas as representing "Vairocana as the Essential Nature of the Dharmadhātu" need not be understood as indicating that they are different from the maṇḍalas of the two Realms. Vairocana seen in this aspect is recognized as the Vairocana who is depicted at the center of both Realms. So the stūpas could be given this name and still each represent one of the maṇḍalas.

Nevertheless, since there are no extant documents clarifying in detail precisely what the original plan was, the problem as to the exact relationship between the maṇḍalas and the stūpas will likely remain unsolved. But whether each stūpa was intended to represent a different maṇḍala or whether, as some think, at least the Great Stūpa was envisioned from the start as an "integrated" model as it stands today, the transformation of a stūpa into a symbolic center of a maṇḍala (or of both maṇḍalas at once), with the interior of the stūpa adorned with images in a manner most consistent with those of a Golden Hall, was one of the most striking features of the Garan at Kōyasan not to be found in any previous Japanese temple complex.

I will return to the relationship between stūpa and maṇḍala after a brief discussion of the other building central to the Garan at Kōyasan, which is the Lecture Hall. In spite of the central position that the Golden Hall held in many temple complexes in Nara, the Lecture Hall played a very significant role as well. For example, the three most important annual Buddhist rituals in early Japan took place at Lecture Halls and were formal ceremonies where large numbers of monks recited, lectured on and debated about the doctrines of key Mahāyāna sūtras. The ceremonies were known as the Shōman-e (named after a translation of the *Śūraṅgama sūtra*, which was recited; held at Hōryūji), the Yuima-e (reciting a translation of the*Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa sūtra*; held at Kōfuku-ji) and the Saishō-e (reciting a translation of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa sūtra*; held at Yakushiji). To accomodate these gatherings, the Lecture Hall was usually more spacious than the Golden Hall.[26] The Lecture Hall at Kongōbuji seems to have played a role that combined that of both the Lecture Halls and Golden

26. Regarding the relative sizes of Golden Halls and Lecture Halls in Nara, see the chart in *Nara no jiin to Tempyō chōkoku* 146.

Halls of Nara temples since it was at once the central gathering place for important rituals and a repository of sacred images. In both these roles, however, it differed from predecessors in Nara because many of the rituals and images were new to Japan and reflected Kūkai's new systematization of esoteric practice and doctrine.

The central rectangular section of the Lecture Hall at Kongōbuji is demarcated by a ceiling-to-floor wooden latticed wall that permits the inside to be seen by all, but only entered by a few [see Diagram 3]. Surrounding this central section is floor space in which monks commonly gather for ceremonies. In the central section is an array of statues of deities in the back (to the north) and a wide space for ritual worship centered on the two maṇḍalas. At the eastern and western ends of this wide space are hung large (approximately ten feet square) painted scrolls of the Maṇḍalas of the Two Realms (Womb Realm to the east and Vajra Realm to the west).[27] In front of these painted maṇḍalas are square, horizontal altars (known as *daidan* and modeled after earlier Indian maṇḍalas) on top of which are placed a variety of ritual implements and before which the worshipper sits facing the hanging maṇḍala.[28]

Sūtras may have been read before these altars, as they were at the Lecture Hall in other temples, but whether they were exoteric or esoteric ones, it is clear that Kūkai saw that there were certain esoteric rites associated with the reading of sūtras that represented an altogether unique order of worship. He laid out his views on this matter quite clearly in a request written to the court in 834 that the annual Saishō-e ceremony held at the Sovereign's palace during the first week of the New Year be replaced by an esoteric ceremony.[29]

I have heard that there are two kinds of preaching of the Buddha. One is

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27. The painted maṇḍalas face the center and toward one another, perhaps ten meters apart, and are hung so as to preserve the directional orientation of the much earlier Indian convention of horizontal maṇḍalas. Thus the top of the Womb Realm maṇḍala (hung to the east facing west) represents the east, while the top of the Diamond Realm maṇḍala (hung to the west) represents the west so that if one were to lay the paintings flat atop of a horizontal altar their orientation would accord with the cardinal directions.

28. For more on these altars and drawings of their layouts, see Sawa Ryūken, *Mikkyō daijiten* (first one-volume edition of the original six-volume dictionary) (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983) 1493-96.

29. KCZ 3: 370-71. The same text is partially translated and briefly discussed in De Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1935) 476-77.

shallow and incomplete while the other is esoteric. The shallow teaching is comprised of the scriptures with long passages and verses, whereas the esoteric teaching is the *dhāraṇī* found in the scriptures. The shallow teaching is, as one text says, like the diagnoses of an illness and the prescription of a medicine. The esoteric method of reciting *dhāraṇī* is like prescribing appropriate medicine, ingesting it and curing the ailment. If a person is ill, opening a medical text and reciting its contents will be of no avail in treating the illness. It is necessary to adapt the medicine to the disease and to ingest it in accordance with proper methods. Only then will the illness be eliminated and life preserved.

However, the present custom of chanting the *Sūtra of Golden Light* at the Imperial palace is simply the reading of sentences and the empty recital of doctrine. There is no drawing of Buddha images in accordance with proper technique nor the practice of setting up an altar for offerings and for the ceremonies of empowerment. Although the reading of the *Sūtra* may appear to be an opportunity to listen to the preaching of the nectar-like teachings of the Buddha, in actuality it lacks the precious taste of the finest essence [*ghee*] of Buddhist truth.

I humbly request that from this year on, fourteen monks skilled in esoteric ritual and fourteen novices be selected, who while properly reading the *Sūtra* will for seven days arrange the sacred images, perform the requisite offerings and recite *mantra* in a specially adorned room. If this is done, both the exoteric and esoteric teachings, which express the Buddha's true intent, will cause great happiness in the world and thereby fulfill the compassionate vows of the holy ones.

We do know that a chapel designed expressly for the purpose of such esoteric rituals was indeed constructed within the Sovereign's residence, and what is thought to be the oldest remaining representation of the painted Womb Realm Maṇḍala is reported to have been used there. It is not known how the ceremonies performed there might have compared with those at the Lecture Hall in Kongōbuji (surely they were more elaborate), but there can be no doubt that representations of the maṇḍalas were employed.

Stūpas and Maṇḍalas

The Lecture Hall at Kongōbuji, which like the stūpas maintains apparent continuities with Nara temples, nevertheless differs from these structurally as well as ritually. An interesting feature of the stūpas and the Lecture Hall is that each of them contains within their structure representations of both maṇḍalas as well as stūpas. In the Lecture Hall, in the middle of the wide area used for worship there is another flat, square shaped altar. This is separate from the two such altars that face each of the hanging maṇḍalas to the east and west. It is a third altar between these other two, but with a

seat that faces the sacred images to the north side of the central section. Each of these three altars represents a horizontal maṇḍala and is covered with a variety of ritual implements and offerings such as a vajra and vajra-bell, small bowls for water and incense, candles, flowers and so on, and is surrounded by a single cord that connects the four corners atop a two-foot high metal stick at each corner.[30] In this third altar there also stands at the center a small bronze stūpa, approximately two feet in height. A very similar altar is found in the Great Stūpa. It also has a seat on the south side of the altar facing north, toward the five main Buddha images at center, and is adorned with the same implements and offerings. At its center again stands a miniature bronze stūpa. It is worth noting that there is a succession of representations here: the small bronze stūpa sits within a maṇḍala altar, which is located inside the Great Stūpa that enshrines the central Buddhas of the two maṇḍalas, which is itself understood as the center of a larger maṇḍala that encompasses at least the sacred precincts of Kōyasan if not the entire world beyond. Put simply, there is a motif represented here on more than one level: the stūpa as the center of the maṇḍala and the maṇḍala as the center of the stūpa.

Beyond this, however, is another relationship that pertains between the maṇḍala and stūpa. The stūpa can itself be a representation of the Dharmakāya, and in the Shingon painted maṇḍalas it is frequently found as a symbolic representation (*samāya*) of the central deity Dainichi (Mahāvairocana). There are also drawings of the precincts of Kōyasan that show the Great Stūpa at the center surrounded by the eight mini-mountain peaks that encompass the mountaintop valley in which the temple complex sits. These eight peaks do not naturally form a perfect circle but this fact has not prevented them from being depicted in such drawings as if they surround the Great Stūpa just as do the eight petals of the red lotus blossom at the heart of the Womb Realm maṇḍala.[31] Thus the natural features of Kōyasan have come to be interpreted as an actual embodiment of the maṇḍala with the stūpa at center as a *samāya* form of Dainichi.

The painted form of maṇḍala in which the deities are represented by symbols such as stūpas, wish-fulfilling gems, vajras, bells and so on, is known as the *sammaya-* (Sanskrit, *samāya*) maṇḍala. In his writings,

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30. A photograph of similar altars from the Kanshin-ji temple in Osaka can be found in Sawa, *Art in Esoteric Japanese Buddhism* 18-19.

31. These eight deities are four Buddhas in the cardinal directions and four bodhisattvas. The red lotus is also literally the "heart" of the maṇḍala since at one level of symbolism it is considered to represent the physical organ of the human heart.

Kūkai described this as one of four types of maṇḍala. The paintings on which are found anthropomorphic representations of the deities (the most commonly seen maṇḍala type) are known as *dai-* (*mahā*) maṇḍala. Then there are maṇḍalas of the same shape where the deities are represented by their mantric seed-syllables (*bīja*) written in Siddham script, and these depictions are known as *hō-* (*dharma*) maṇḍala. These three types are often found as painted hanging scrolls (bordered in cloth in a manner resembling Tibetan *tangkha* paintings). Lastly, there are three-dimensional representations where statues of deities are arranged on a horizontal plane, whether in miniature on an altar or on a large scale such as that found inside the Great Stūpa. This is known as the *katsuma-* (*karma*) maṇḍala.[32] These four are all important components of the Shingon symbolic and ritual systems. An indication of how highly Kūkai regarded such representations is one of his comments about the power of seeing a maṇḍala: "The esoteric essence is profound and mysterious and is not easily captured with brush and ink [i. e., through writing]. And so it is revealed to the unenlightened by means of drawings and paintings. The many postures and *mudrā* [represented in the maṇḍala] derive from the great compassion [of the Buddha]. With just one glance [at the maṇḍala], one becomes a Buddha."[33]

Thus these visual representations are held to be vivid and effective *upāya*, or skillful means. As such, they are invitations to another world of experience. An additional meaning of these four maṇḍalas is that they represent dimensions of enlightened perception, that is, the experience of one who has truly learned to see the world as a sacred maṇḍala. According to this view, the *mahā maṇḍala* is the physical world around us: all the objects of our senses as integral parts of the body of the deity. The *samāya maṇḍala* can be understood as a representation of the deity's intention, which in general suggests his compassionate wish to liberate beings and in particular to the myriad forms this compassion assumes.[34] The *dharma maṇḍala* represents all sound and speech seen as the words of the deity and, lastly, *karma maṇḍala* can be understood as taking all the movements in the world to be the actions of the deity. Thus a

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32. A small representation of a karma-maṇḍala is shown in a photograph in Sawa, *Art in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* 135.

33. KCZ 2: 25. See also Hakeda's translation in *Kūkai* 145.

34. The term *samāya* has many meanings. Key to understanding its application to this maṇḍala is the meaning of "vow," which can include the meaning of "promise" or "guarantee." The various symbolic depictions represent aspects of the deity's vow to awaken sentient beings.

maṇḍala may be an artistic representation or it may be a demarcated ritual sacred space, but it is also the entire world of sentient experience transformed by religious practice into a sacred realm that is the presence of the deity. As I noted earlier, it can also refer to the esoteric teachings themselves, but particularly with respect to their power to transform our experience of the world. It is in this context that Kūkai wrote about the origins of the esoteric teachings: "Mahāvairocana Buddha, the great compassionate one, enjoying for himself the taste of the equality that is enlightenment, was saddened by the plight of the beings in the six realms of rebirth. And so it was that the thunder of his wisdom that is one with reality trembled throughout His dharma-realm palace and the secret *maṇḍala* was thereby transmitted to Jambudvīpa."[35]

But the maṇḍala is not alone in having cosmic connotations, for the same can be said of the stūpa. It is not merely an architectural product nor just a bronze item adorning a ritual altar. If, as in the iconography of the interior of the stūpas at Kongōbuji, the stūpa is represented on top of the horizontal altar as part of a *karma maṇḍala*, it can be likened to the "dharma-realm palace" of the deity. Such a combination of stūpa and maṇḍala evokes complex meanings: while the stūpa is commonly taken as a symbol of the Buddha's absence, the maṇḍala is often interpreted as a symbol of his active presence in our world. Curiously, both of these meanings of absence and presence can be seen to coincide in the Shingon school's interpretation of the Buddha's *dharmakāya* insofar as this inconceivable, transcendent and ultimate body of the Buddha is understood to be the "preacher" of its main scriptures. Even outside the Shingon tradition, however, the stūpa is often said to represent the Buddha's *dharmakāya*.[36] As noted above, this is the case in the Shingon *samāya maṇḍala* when painted as a hanging scroll where the symbol stands for Mahāvairocana, but it is also true for the three-dimensional structure. There is as well an altogether different significance that recalls a legend of an ancient "iron stūpa" in India out of which Nāgārjuna is said to have retrieved the esoteric *Vajraśekhara sūtra*. This legendary metallic "cosmic egg" is thus said to have given birth to the esoteric Buddhist traditions. The Great Stūpa at Kōyasan is sometimes said to be a representation of this ancient one. Kūkai wrote about this legend as part of the history of his lineage and the later Shingon master Kakuban even said of it that "the iron stūpa is this very body," referring to the body in which a practitioner is said to

35. KCZ: 3: 392-94.

36. For example, see David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1 (Boston: Shambala) 37.

be able to attain enlightenment according to Shingon (*sokushin jōbutsu*).[37]

"This very body" commonly denotes "this lifetime" and as such is understood to refer to the capacity that esoteric Buddhist practice has to bestow Buddhahood rapidly. The Shingon tradition refers to itself as "the sudden among the sudden teachings." But in Kūkai's work entitled *The Realization of Buddhahood in This Very Body* (*Sokushin jōbutsugi*) "this body" also has a cosmic dimension and signifies the entire *dharmadhātu.* In Kūkai's exposition, all of existence whether mundane or transmundane is comprised of the same six elements, five material ones and the mind. It is with this grand "body" as our ground that we engage in the practices that engender awakening.[38] And, insofar as this universal "body" can be considered that of the Buddha, it can also be conceived as being a grand stūpa. As Kūkai writes[39]:

> The mind-palace of the many treasures is high and wide without limit, and the sun-residence of bright light extends everywhere.[40] The "great self" [as taught] in Shingon originally resides in the lotus of the mind while its myriad attendant mental-aspects naturally dwell in the moon of awakening. The Truth of the Three Equalities [of body, speech and mind, or of beings, the Buddha and one's own mind] resides in the effulgence of the Buddha-sun and is continually being taught. The Buddha's mystical embrace [*kaji*, Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*] ceaselessly responds to the faculties of beings. *How marvellous is the stūpa of the Dharma-nature body*; it is truly grand. [emphasis mine]

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37. Charles Orzech has translated this legend from the Chinese in Donald Lopez, ed., *Buddhism in Practice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 314-17. Orzech also evinces a further connection between stūpa and maṇḍala by noting that through "the process of consecration (*kuan-ting*, Sanskrit *abhiṣekha)* every initiate reenacts the entry into the Iron Stūpa with his or her own entry into the maṇḍala." Taikō Yamasaki also mentions the legend in his *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, (Boston: Shambala, 1988) 8. Kakuban's quote is from *Kōgyō daishi zenshū* (Tokyo: Kaji sekkai shisha, 1910) 510 (as cited in Orzech above, p. 315).

38. See Hakeda's partial translation of *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* in his *Kūkai: Major Works*, as well as my Master's thesis, "Kūkai's 'The Realization of Buddhahood in This Very Body,'" University of Virginia, 1986.

39. KCZ 3: 278, *Shōryōshū* no. 54. On the same occasion he also announces that he will make ten statues of deities, too. He dedicates the merit from these works to all people rich and poor in order to protect the country, improve the living conditions of all beings and to cause everyone to enter the path of enlightenment.

40. A standard interpretation in commentaries is to take "the mind-palace of the many treasures" and "the sun-residence of bright light" to refer to the Womb and Vajra Maṇḍala Realms, respectively.

Here the entire universe is likened to a palace. The all-pervading Dharma-nature body, co-extensive with the vast cosmos, is itself a stūpa.[41] And yet this same "body" is also a palace and also a maṇḍala.

CONCLUSION

This last passage comes from a text entitled "Votive Document on the Occasion of Producing the Two Maṇḍalas for the Sake of Repaying Our Benefactors," which Kūkai wrote dedicating the production of painted *mahā maṇḍala* representations of the Womb and Vajra Realms in 821. As the text notes, in the fifteen years since Kūkai's return from China with these maṇḍalas, their continued use in ritual settings had worn them considerably and it had become necessary to reproduce them. Records indicate that this was the first of several times that Kūkai had them reproduced.[42] Drawing attention to this votive document (*ganmon*) that Kūkai drafted on the occasion of reproducing a pair of large painted maṇḍalas in 821 provides an entry into one final consideration of the roles that maṇḍalas played in the early Shingon tradition. The collection of Kūkai's writings known as the *Shōryōshū* contains at least seven votive documents in which it is recorded that maṇḍalas were produced. Many of these documents were drafted on the occasion of a memorial service commemorating the death of a court noble. It is not clear precisely to what use these maṇḍalas were put once they were produced.[43] Most would surely have been used solely for formal initiations into esoteric practice, but such initiations were not intended only for the monastic practitioner. Large numbers of laymen also received consecrations from Kūkai in ceremonies for both the Vajra and the Womb Realm maṇḍalas. It seems that there was widespread interest in Shingon teachings and practices among clerics and court nobles alike in both Nara and in Kyoto.

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41. One last reference to another usage of the term stūpa takes us to I-hsing's commentary on the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*. There he refers to "the mind as a Buddha-stūpa" (*shin i buttō*). As cited in Sawa Ryūken, *Mikkyō Daijiten* 1706, under *nanten tettō*.

42. The phrase "for the sake of our benefactors" refers specifically to four objects of gratitude: parents, the sovereign, sentient beings and the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha). This term appears frequently in Kūkai's works as an expression of a sense of indebtedness as well as dedication.

43. Although the patrons of these memorial services must have provided for the costs of materials and labor required by such work, it is doubtful at this early date that the painted-scroll maṇḍalas themselves would have graced the walls of an aristocrat's living room as they might today.

The first large formal ceremony for which we have a record took place in 812 at the Takaosanji temple in the mountains outside Kyoto. Extant in Kūkai's hand is a list of those who received initiation. The names include Saichō and several of his disciples, many important monks from the main Nara temples and some laymen, numbering over one hundred forty in all. While a few of these initiants would later study further with Kūkai, it is doubtful that for the majority their initiation into the world of the maṇḍalas was the actual beginning of dedicated cultivation of esoteric practice. These were probably lower level initiations that served to "establish a bond" (*kechi-en*) with the deities of the maṇḍala, and this bond was considered to be beneficial in and of itself regardless of the extent of subsequent engagement.[44] Such ceremonies became popular later in the Heian period among the aristocratic class and we can be sure that for many people, partaking in a consecration was like receiving a blessing, if not making a statement of fashion or status, more than it represented any committment to a spiritual discipline. But participation in such ceremonies was something desired by both the *acārya* and the recipients. That is, while there was among the aristocracy in general (lay and cleric alike, as they often came from the same sectors of society) a strong interest, perhaps even fascination, with the new esoteric rites and ritual paraphernalia that had just recently been introduced from China, there was clearly also a keen desire from Kūkai's side to promulgate these practices and related texts widely at a variety of levels. As he wrote around 816:

> What I wish for now is that people with some affinity for this teaching might read the texts, lecture on them and make them known to the world, thereby repaying the kindness of the Buddha. Since the circulation of the teaching has been inhibited because the texts themselves are so few in number, I have sent my disciples Kōshu and Angyō to distant regions bearing these texts.
>
> If there be persons with predilections for the vehicle of supernatural power—virtuous men or women, whether cleric or lay—who share the same wish as I, may they establish a bond with this teaching; copy, read and recite the texts; practice in accordance with the teaching and harmonize their thoughts with the principle taught therein. By so doing, they will ascend beyond the ten stages of the bodhisattva path without having to pass through the incalculable aeons traditionally required by the path, and in the very body born of their parents will quickly realize the Buddhahood inherent within their mind.[45]

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44. The exact status of these initiations into the two Realms given by Kūkai in 812 is unclear. Paul Groner treats this topic in his *Saichō* 81-83.

45. KCZ 3: 386-91 (*Shōryōshū* no. 98).

This passage is taken from a letter that Kūkai sent to numerous people throughout Japan along with copies of various esoteric scriptures. The main emphasis of the letter is on the importance of copying and thereby disseminating these scriptures. Whether or not the texts were actually ever recited or studied by their recipients, implicit in the enterprise of copying scripture was, of course, the power that is to be derived from the mere presence of the texts themselves as well as the merit to be obtained by those who copy (or sponsor the copying of) them. The letter indicates that Kūkai envisioned a broad field of practice developing in connection with these texts. Surely it was not long before some of the communities to which these texts were sent received also the liturgical paraphernalia—vajras, bells, offering vessels, and so on—and some of the maṇḍalas that were so central to the promulgation of the esoteric cult.[46]

In fact, it is very important to keep in mind the role of financial / material support provided by court aristocrats if we are to understand fully the manner in which new religious practices such as those promoted by Kūkai actually took root in Japan. As was noted earlier, support for the construction of stūpas and temple buildings, especially in the remote region of Kōyasan, was not easy to come by. Perhaps in the case of smaller projects like the production of painted maṇḍalas or of a few carved Buddhist deities, patronage was easier to procure. One can imagine how this might be particularly true when the aims of a specific ceremony in which such material is to be employed are clearly spelled out in terms of the kinds of soteriological benefits that can accrue from memorial services offered on the behalf of a loved one. The following is a passage from one of the votive documents written by Kūkai on the occasion of a memorial ceremony:

> To come together and then to drift apart is the law of things in this world. Alas, the late fifth daughter of the Fujiwara family married in full possession of virtue as well as beauty; she went to her husband with all the requisite skills and proper speech. Her numerous children and grandchildren filled homes and gardens alike. All had hoped that like a crane or a tortoise she

46. I have translated this text, commonly known as the *Kan'ensho* ("letter of appeal to those with interest"), in my dissertation and it will also appear in the forthcoming volume of the Princeton Readings in Religion series called, *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. by Robert Morrell, Princeton University Press. My dissertation contains a study of the contexts in which this letter was sent (pp. 14-52) as well as an annotated translation, (pp. 244-57). See my "Kūkai and the Beginnings of Shingon Buddhism in Japan," diss., Stanford University, 1994.

would live a long life closely united with her husband . . . How pitiful and desolate we are. Dew and frost vanish quickly and lightning flashes only briefly. And now many days have passed, the stars have coursed their way and we face the one year anniversary [of her decease].

On the 22nd day of the 5th month of the fourth year of Tenchō [827], in order to deliver her spirit we drew the "one mudrā" maṇḍala of Dainichi on one canvas made of five strips.[47] We also copied in seven fascicles the entire dharma maṇḍala [text?] of the broad eye[d one, that is the *Dainichi kyō* or *Mahāvairocana sūtra*]. In addition, at Jingōji temple [Takaosanji] monks assembled to recite the *Dainichi kyō*. The sound of bells resounded throughout the broad valley . . .

My wish is that by means of this virtuous cause we might bring succour to her lost spirit. May the thunder of the Dharma awaken the long slumber of Buddha nature, and its sweet ambrosia nourish the roots and leaves of the tree of bodhimind . . .[48]

The text is unclear as to whether the Buddha nature to be awakened by the thunder of the Dharma is that of the deceased woman alone or of all beings in general. But since later in the text it is hoped of the latter that they might enter into the "palace of awakening," it would be natural to conclude that the ceremony is intended to transfer merit to both, near and far. Yet the document also refers, on the near side, to the bereaved's family, chief among which is the husband Nakamori Kasa, officer in the court Department of Ceremony (*shiki bu*). Another votive document, dated the 15th day of 10th month of the sixth year of Kōnin (815), also records a different memorial ceremony that Kūkai performed on behalf of this same Nakamori's deceased parents.[49] Kūkai commonly wrote multiple votive documents for a given individual, many of them for a member of the influential court family Fujiwara. It would appear that through these ceremonies he was offering them something of value. Further studies are needed in the history of funerary and memorial rites in early Japan before proffering any judgement as to how novel were these ceremonies that Kūkai performed, but one cannot deny that some of the esoteric elements of these Shingon rites—the maṇḍalas painted, the scriptures copied, the new esoteric deities carved in statue form, in addition to the overall mystifying atmosphere of the complex liturgy—contributed greatly to the attractiveness and subsequent popularity of such rites. In other words,

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47. This is the *ichi in'e*, which forms one of the nine square panels of the maṇḍala of the Vajra Realm. It is the panel at the top center, which depicts a large image of Dainichi nyorai in the "wisdom fist mudrā."

48. KCZ 3: 312-14 (*Shōryōshū* no. 66).

49. KCZ 3: 270-72 (*Shōryōshū* no. 51).

the ceremonies offered more than just the accumulation of merit for both the deceased and the bereaved. These ceremonies were part of an economy of exchange between Buddhist priests and the laity (especially members of the court) that provided, on the one hand, the resources essential for the propagation of a new cult and, on the other, the solace and perhaps status to be gained from the participation in what must have been seen as a grand system of religious meaning and even legitimation.

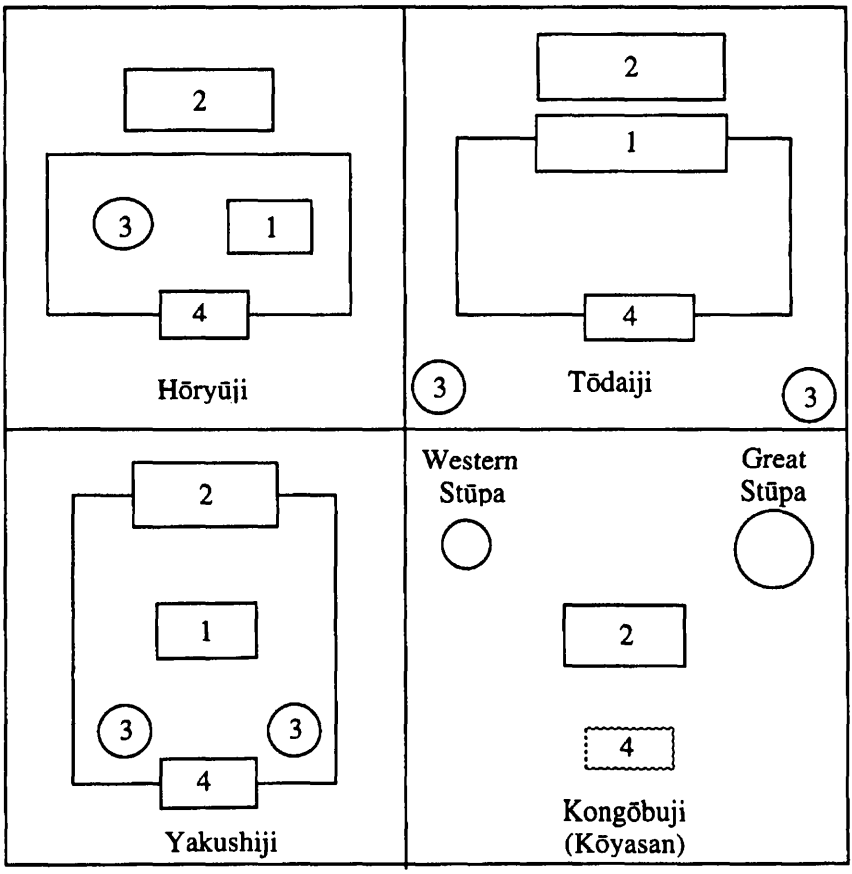
Although not all esoteric Buddhist practice was devoted to such "worldly" matters, it was nonetheless in contact with this economy of exchange that the earliest communities of systematized esoteric Buddhist practice thrived in Japan. The Kongōbuji monastery complex at Kōyasan was the first attempt to establish a center devoted exclusively to this practice though many centers were being developed at the same time within the already established "exoteric" monasteries in Nara. The founding of these centers for esoteric Buddhist practice in the early Heian period is a relatively well-documented process but one that has yet to receive adequate attention outside of sectarian studies focused on Kūkai's life. Nevertheless, the writings of Kūkai—especially his various correspondences and votive documents —preserve a vast amount of information that represents a valuable record of the emergence of one of the earliest known coherent systems of esoteric Buddhist theory and practice. By "emergence" I of course refer to causes and conditions both intrinsic and extrinsic to the work of the monastic specialists themselves. Esoteric Buddhism in Japan did not develope in a vacuum but in the rich atmosphere of an active social and political world. It is within the dynamics of this particular world that we must learn to discern the processes whereby "the secret maṇḍala was transmitted to Jambudvīpa."

GLOSSARY

bettō 別当
Chin-kang-chih 金剛知
Chin-kang-ting-ching 金剛頂経
Chin-kangfeng lo-ko i-ch'ieh yü-ch'ieh yü-chi ching
金剛峰樓閣一切瑜伽瑜祇経
chingo kokka 鎮護国家
Daianji 大安寺
Daigōji 醍醐寺
Dainichi 大日
hō mandara 法曼荼羅
Dōji 道慈

Dōkyō 道鏡
Dōshō 道昭
ganmon 願文
Genbō 玄昉
Gomyō 護命
Gonzō 勤操
Gyōhyō 行表
hokkai taishō 法界体性
honzon 本尊
Hōryūji 法隆寺
hosshin seppō 法身説法
Hsi-ming 西明
Hui-k'uo 惠果
ichi inè 一印会
I-ching 義浄
jinenchi shū 自然智宗
Kai-yuan shih-chiao-lu 開元釈教録
kaji 加持
katsuma mandara 羯磨曼荼羅
kōdō 講堂
Kōbō daishi gyōka ki 弘法大師行化記
Kōfuku-ji 興福寺
kokuzō gumonji hō 虚空蔵求聞持法
Kongōbuji 金剛峰寺
Konkōmyō saishōō-kyō 金光明最勝王経
konpon daitō 根本大塔
dai mandara 大曼荼羅
mikkyō ka 密教化
nenbun dōsha 年分度者
Nihon ryōiki 日本霊異記
Pu-k'ung 不空
Saishō-e 最勝会
sammaya mandara 三昧耶曼荼羅
Sangōshiiki 三教指帰
Shan wu-wei 善無畏
shiki bu 式部
shin i buttō 心為佛塔
shinzui 神水
Shōman-e 勝鬘会
Shōryōshū 性霊集

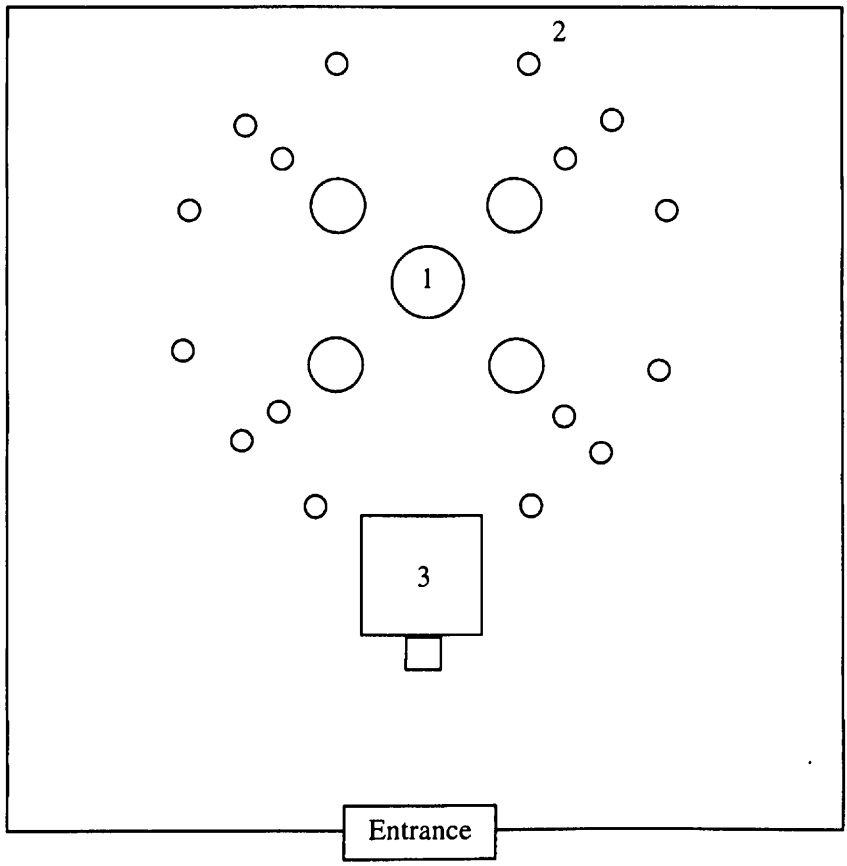
sokushin jōbutsu 即身成佛
Su-hsi-ti-ching 蘇悉地経
Ta-jih-ching 大日経
Takaosanji 高尾山寺
Tao-hsüan 道 叡
*Tōji chōja honin*東寺長者補任
uchi dōjō 内道場
Yakushiji 藥師寺
Kusuko no ran 藥子の乱
Yakushikyō 藥師経
Yao-shih liu-li-kuang ju-lai pen-yuan kung-te ching
藥師琉璃光如来本願功徳経
Yuima-e 維摩会
Zengi 善議
zō 雑



Key

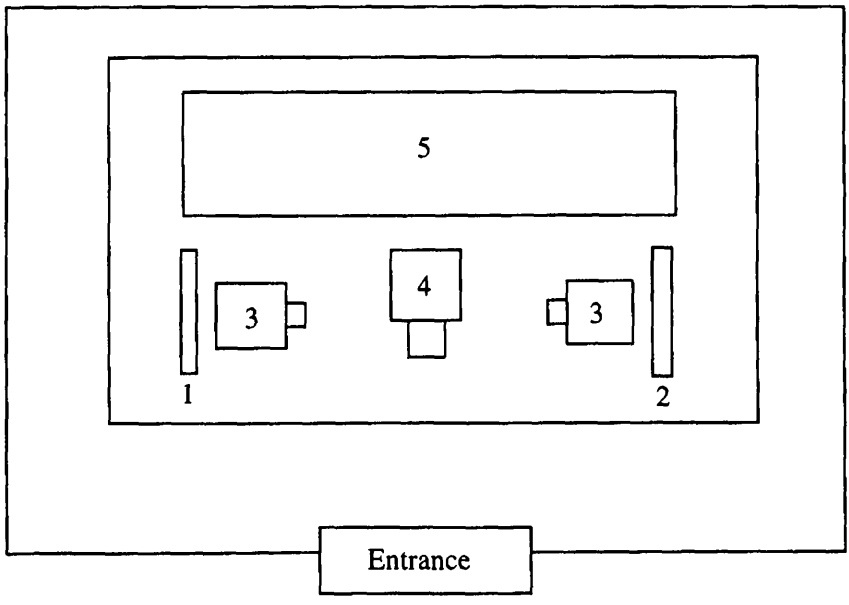
1 Kondō (Golden Hall)
2 Kōdō (Lecture Hall)
3 Stūpa
4 Main (Southern) Gate (Foundation only remaining at Kongōbuji)

Diagram 1: The Layout of the Kongōbuji Garan Compared with Three Others from Nara



Key
1 Statue of Mahāvairocana Buddha of the Womb Realm surrounded by the Four Buddhas who accompany Mahāvairocana in the Diamond Realm
2 The sixteen small circles represent round pillars on which are painted representations of the Sixteen Great Bodhisattvas of the Diamond Realm
3 Altar upon which are various bronze implements laid out in maṇḍala form with a small stūpa at the center

Diagram 2: The Interior of the Great Stūpa at Kongōbuji



Key
1 Hanging Diamond Realm Painted Maṇḍala
2 Hanging Womb Realm Maṇḍala
3 Altars placed before each Maṇḍala—accompanying seat faces hanging maṇḍala; surface decorated with offering implements and small stūpa at center
4 Central Altar Facing Statues (with accompanying seat)
5 Statues of Various Esoteric Deities

Diagram 3: Interior of the Lecture Hall at Kongōbuji