

THINKING THROUGH SHINGON RITUAL

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Preamble: Ritual Meanings

There must be readers who are shocked, angry, or depressed at the thought that ritual (not to mention religion and even language) is not only complex but also meaningless. I am not a bit sad about it. I prefer a thing, like a person, to be itself, and not refer to something or somebody else. For all we know life itself may be meaningless.

Frits Staal

In 1979 Frits Staal, a Sanskritist who specializes in Vedic ritual, published an article in which he proclaimed ritual to be devoid of meaning. Staal's argument, subsequently developed in a number of publications¹, is at first glance deceptively simple: when we ask about the meaning of a ritual we seek an explanation in language. Such an explanation will always involve a conceptual reduction, in that we seek to transpose the lived complexity of a ritual performance to a verbal formulation. Ritual, according to Staal, resists such reduction by its very nature. Ritual is "pure activity" (Staal 1979a: 9); it is a "discipline engaged in for its own sake, which cannot therefore be thus reduced.... Basically, the irreducibility of ritual shows that action constitutes a category in its own right" (Staal 1983: 1.16).

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¹ See, for example, Staal 1979a; 1979b; 1983: 2.127-134; and 1990.

Staal's claim that ritual is meaningless is predicated on the corollary claim that ritual is antecedent to language. A variety of non-human species display ritual behavior, and ritual may well have been commonplace among *Homo sapiens* long before the advent of language and culture. (Staal argues that language is actually an outgrowth of ritual in general and ritualized vocalizations — the precursors of mantras — in particular.) Besides, individuals often acquire competence in a rite before they learn what, if anything, the rite signifies. Scholars are then wrong to assume that there are symbolic meanings running through the minds of ritualists and that such meanings constitute the *sine qua non* of ritual performance. According to Staal, people do rituals simply because they have been taught to do so, often from an early age.

If ritual is meaningless — if it does not refer to a domain of meanings extrinsic to ritual action itself — then popular theories such as “rituals enact myths,” “rituals reflect social structures,” or “rituals inculcate values and norms” are misguided as they confound the historical and logical relationship between ritual and meaning. Besides, says Staal, those who hold that rituals enact myths, encode social structures, or impart collective norms, fail to explain why anyone would want to use ritual for these tasks when words would serve just as well if not better (Staal 1979a: 7; 1990: 123).

Ritual, according to Staal, is behavior — acts and sounds — that is governed by rules. The rules constitute a “syntax” allowing the creation of infinitely malleable recursive structures not unlike those of language. But unlike language, ritual has no semantics; the acts and sounds that constitute ritual interact without reference to meaning (Staal 1990: 433). Ritual is then not so much like language as it is like dance, about which Isadora Duncan famously proclaimed: “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it” (Staal 1979b: 120).

Needless to say, Staal does not deny that individuals do ascribe meanings to rituals. His point is that such meanings are secondary or superfluous and hence tell us little about the transcultural (not to mention cross-species) phenomenon of ritual *per se*. Following the earlier observations of Arnold van Gennep, Staal notes that rituals may be transmitted through time with little or no change, despite changes in the meanings ascribed to them. If a rite remains the same irrespective of shifts in meaning, then

meaning cannot be *intrinsic* to the rite. “In the development of our concepts and theories of ritual it is only a small step from ‘changing meaning’ to: ‘no intrinsic meaning’ and ‘structural meaning,’ and from there to: ‘no meaning’” (Staal 1979a: 11). Moreover, if the goal of ritual were the conveyance of meaning, then ritual would admit change in so far as this or any other goal was well served. Thus rituals lack not only meaning but also a purpose or goal.

One reason that the absence of visible or otherwise detectable results causes [the ritualist] no concern is that large rituals are ends in themselves.... The rites have no practical utility and have lost their original function, if ever they had one. The ritualists perform them not in order to obtain certain ends, but because it is their task. Lack of practical utility, incidentally, is a characteristic that ritual shares with many of the higher forms of human civilization. It may be a mark of civilization. (1983: 1.18)

Pushing this argument to its logical conclusion, Staal closed his original 1979 article with a passage, used as an epigraph above, suggesting that just as ritual is meaningless, so too is religion, language, and even life itself (1979a: 22). In doing so, Staal unwittingly revealed his hand: he had stipulated the conditions for ascribing “meaning” such that they can never be met. Staal will only admit meanings that are both invariant and intrinsic to the phenomena under investigation. But this is to ignore the insight, fundamental to linguistics and semiotic theory, that meaning does not reside within a sign. Rather, meaning emerges from the complex cultural system, determined in part through social interactions, that marks a particular phenomenon as a “sign” in the first place. A signifier is meaningful only as a point in a set of relations. And since meaning never resides in the “thing itself,” meaning must always be extrinsic, contingent, and variant².

In claiming that the thing-in-itself has no meaning, Staal has uncovered not the meaninglessness of the thing itself but rather the semiotic logic that renders meaning possible in the first place³. Rituals trade in signs that

² Some might argue that there is one case in which we can talk of “fixed meaning,” namely, as a defining feature of the class of proper nouns. Yet Derrida, for one, questions even this restricted sense of “fixed meaning” (Derrida 1985).

³ Or, one might say that Staal has simply reaffirmed the Wittgensteinian insight that the abstract “thing-in-itself” is a piece of philosophical nonsense. For a critique of Staal similar to my own, see Andersen 2001: 162-163.

don't *possess* meaning so much as they *invite* meaning. To speak of the meaning of a rite one must adopt a particular perspective — situate oneself in a particular world of discourse — and different perspectives yield different meanings. As anthropologists have noted since the time of Tylor, even participants in one and the same rite will hold various and often conflicting interpretations of the event, and the interpretations will change over time⁴. Moreover the “emic” accounts of ritual participants will differ dramatically from the plethora of “etic” readings offered by historians of religion, sociologists, anthropologists, or psychologists. But here ritual is surely no different from any other cultural product, including works of art and literature⁵.

Some of what is conveyed in a particular ritual performance may indeed be difficult if not impossible to convey in words. Even then it may be misleading to label these elements “meaningless.” When Isadora Duncan says, “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it,” she does not mean that dance is meaningless but rather that she is incapable of putting into words that which she puts into dance. Staal has every right to stipulate that meaning only be predicated to properly formed linguistic utterances — to restrict meanings to language. But such a stipulation renders the rest of his argument tautological. Few would quibble with the claim that ritual is constituted not by language so much as by action.

This criticism aside, Staal does make several important points. Ritual activity *qua* activity is indeed difficult to translate into words. Moreover,

⁴ “The old and greatest difficulty in investigating the general subject [of idolatry] is this, that an image may be, even to two votaries kneeling side by side before it, two utterly different things” (Tylor 1920: 2.168-169).

⁵ Staal's argument was, I suspect, inordinately influenced by the archaic nature of the rituals he was studying. The Agnicayana is an ancient rite consisting largely of mantric utterances in Vedic, the meaning of which is inaccessible to most of the participants. The archaic character of the rite, and the fact that so much of the liturgical content is gibberish to the actors, may account for its seeming invariance across generations. But even then Staal likely overestimates resistance to change. It is precisely because the rite has only been practiced in fits and starts over the last hundred years that the Brāhmins abide so closely to textual authority. (What other authority can they call upon, now that the authority of received tradition has been compromised?) Even then, many significant alterations were made in the performance Staal observed, including the use of plant offerings instead of goats.

rites have lives of their own, independent of the symbolic and mythological associations that may be ascribed to them. Finally, appreciation of the symbolic and mythological world of ritual does not in and of itself account for the obsessive, rule-bound character of ritual action. Adepts may spend years acquiring competence in elaborate and physically arduous rites the historical origins and symbolic associations of which remain obscure to them. To castigate such adepts for their “ignorance” would only betray our own.

Shingon Ritual

That ritual is resistant to conceptual reduction and discursive appropriation has posed a particular problem for modern Shingon exegetes. Shingon apologists, like their counterparts in other religious traditions, have felt compelled to respond to modern rationalistic and scientific critiques of religion in general and ritual in particular. This has led some writers to ignore or downplay elements of the tradition considered “unscientific” or “magical” in favor of Shingon teachings deemed properly philosophical, psychological, spiritual, or aesthetic. But this has not been easy, given that sacerdotal ritual lies at the heart of the Shingon tradition. Ritual performance was essential, of course, to virtually all schools of Buddhism throughout Japanese history, but other schools have had an easier time reinventing themselves in the light of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernist mores. Apologists for Zen, for example, insisted that “true” Zen eschews ritual altogether in favor of unmediated spiritual experience, while Pure Land exegetes recast their tradition in theological terms strikingly similar to Protestantism: Pure Land, we are told, is a doctrine of divine grace predicated on faith in an all-compassionate being⁶. Even Tendai and Nichiren partisans have gotten into the act: sectarian introductions to these traditions invariably foreground doctrine and cosmology at the expense of ritual practice.

Some Shingon exegetes tried adopting similar strategies. They produced books on Shingon that simply ignore ritual practice altogether⁷, or

⁶ For an alternative view of medieval Japanese Pure Land see Dobbins 2001.

⁷ Minoru Kiyota’s book *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (1978), for example, despite the title, is all theory and no practice. The English study of Kūkai’s works by

that depict Esoteric (*mikkyō* 密教) ritual as a means toward inculcating inner transformation and mystical experience⁸. Given the intellectual genealogy of categories such as “mystical experience,” such claims are always a bit suspect (Sharf 1995, 1998), but in the case of Shingon they are especially so.

The sticking point is not the absence of a sophisticated body of doctrine or theology through which to frame Shingon ritual. On the contrary, Shingon doctrine is conceptually rich and partakes of a certain literary and aesthetic elegance that may well appeal to modern sensibilities. One might cite, for example, the notion that the phenomenal world is the theophany of the *dharmakāya-buddha* Mahāvairocana (Dainichi 大日), or the related doctrine that the enactment of the “three mysteries” (*sanmitsu* 三密, the ritual performance of the body, speech, and mind of the deity) gives tangible form to the practitioner’s primordial identity with the divine⁹. Such tenets resonate, at least on the surface, with popular Western conceptions of mysticism and the “perennial philosophy.”

The problem for Shingon modernists is not doctrine. Rather, it is that doctrine is patently secondary to a complex set of ritual procedures that constitute the core of the monastic curriculum. The early popularity and rapid growth of the Shingon lineage in Heian Japan was due to its possession of the exalted eighth-century “Tantric” rites that Kūkai 空海 (774-835) brought back from the Tang capital. These rituals constituted a world unto themselves, and while their connections to “normative” Buddhist teachings were not always salient, they carried the imprimatur of celebrated Indian Buddhist masters. Most important, those with access to this ritual technology were promised the power to defeat their enemies, end droughts and famines, cure disease, and attain exalted states on the Buddhist path.

(Indeed, this is one reason why so many recent attempts to define “Tantra” have failed. To date, virtually all attempts begin by identifying the conceptual foundations — the soteriology, cosmology, metaphysics,

Yoshito Hakeda (1972), while learned and important, focuses exclusively on doctrine while remaining mute on the subject of ritual.

⁸ Matsunaga 1989: 25-27, 1990: 27. See also Toganoo 1982b: 23; Ishida 1987: 27; Yamasaki 1988: 123; and the discussion in Sharf 2001b: 193-195.

⁹ On the *sanmitsu* see *Hizōki* 秘藏記, KDZ 2.40.

or what have you — supposedly common to Tantric traditions across Asia. Even in so-called polythetic definitions of Tantra, the extended set of salient characteristics is comprised entirely of symbols and concepts — what Staal would classify as “meanings” — rather than of ritual implements, gestures, sounds, and procedures. Yet, if it makes sense to talk about a pan-Asian phenomenon of Tantra at all — and this is a big “if” — then I believe it is better approached not in terms of thought [“meanings”] but of practice [“actions”]. If the term Tantra has any cross-cultural referent, it is to a body of technological expertise comprised of certain powerful tools — mantras, *mudrās*, icons, altars, esoteric implements including ceremonial weapons, and so on — and the arcane procedural knowledge necessary to wield them. This technology could be, and apparently was, appropriated by diverse religious traditions and transmitted independent of any theoretical or doctrinal overlay.)¹⁰

The fact that Shingon apologists may experience difficulty in recasting their ritual practices in an acceptably modern or rational light need not concern scholars who stand outside the tradition. There is no shortage of theoretical models and conceptual strategies on which scholars might draw. They could adopt a comparative approach, for example, noting structural similarities between Shingon and non-Shingon traditions. Think of the striking parallels between Shingon ritual and the traditions of shamanism, spirit mediumship, and possession that are so widespread throughout Asia. In each case an initiated master engages in an occult performance through which he or she comes to personify or embody a divine being. The performance endows the shaman or ritual master with the deity’s power and authority by virtue of which the performer is able to intervene in worldly and otherworldly affairs¹¹.

Comparativists might step back even further and view Shingon ritual under the rubric of “sacrifice” *à la* Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss

¹⁰ On the nature and status of Tantric Buddhism in China see Sharf 2002: 263-278.

¹¹ It is unlikely that the structural parallels observed between East Asian shamanism and Buddhist Tantra are entirely accidental. They may well be the product of shared ancestry or cultural diffusion and borrowing. Edward Davis, for example, shows how non-Buddhist ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) in Song China employed Tantric techniques (including mantra and *mudrā*) to invoke their “guardian spirits” who were then used in rites of exorcism (Davis 2001: 49). On the connections between Buddhist Tantra and East Asian spirit possession see also Strickmann 2002: 198-218.

([1898] 1981). In Shingon, as in all sacrificial traditions, particular goods are purified through consecration or aspersion rites and then offered to powerful supernatural beings in exchange for some boon¹². Or, following van Gennep, scholars might foreground the initiatory, ascetic, or transformative dimensions of Shingon ritual, placing Shingon under the broad rubric of *rites du passage*. Shingon rites thus create a liminal situation in which the officiant is transformed, at least temporarily, from one social or sacerdotal state to another.

Such broad theoretical models, under the rubrics of shamanism, sacrifice, liminality, or what have you, mitigate some of the arcane “otherness” of Shingon ritual by framing it as an instance of a larger transcultural and transhistorical human phenomenon. But this conceptual gain comes at a price: these theories impose a set of foreign categories and concerns that obscure as much as they reveal. Moreover, as grand narratives they tend to reduce the distinctiveness, complexity, and internal coherence of the particular tradition at hand.

In this paper I will focus, instead, on an expository narrative that originates not from without but from within the Shingon tradition. This is the so-called guest-host paradigm, according to which all major Shingon ritual practices (Sk: *sādhana*) are structured as feasts or entertainments for visiting deities, wherein the practitioner assumes the role of host (*shujin* 主人), and the main deity takes the position of honored guest (*hinkyaku* 賓客, *daihin* 大賓). This narrative, familiar to all Shingon priests, is of considerable antiquity and is believed to bespeak the ancient Indian provenance of the rites. The guest-host paradigm is used in both traditional commentaries and contemporary sectarian tracts to explain individual procedures and to relate them to the overall structure of the rite, lending narrative coherence to the whole¹³.

¹² Precisely because such a notion of sacrifice is so broad, some would limit the term sacrifice to situations involving the slaughter of a sacrificial victim; on the concept of sacrifice see esp. the discussion in Heesterman 1993: 7-44. For a brief discussion of Shingon ritual in the context of sacrifice see Payne 1991: 88.

¹³ On the guest-host structure (*daihin geishō no keishiki* 大賓迎請の形式), see Takai 1953: 109-110, 117; Toganoo 1982b: 45-46; Yamasaki 1988: 162; Strickmann 1989: 16-17; and Payne 1991: 88-89. The guest-host structure is also widely used in Tibetan exegesis of Buddhist Tantra, but that topic lies outside the confines of the present paper.

While this paradigm does account for the general structure of Shingon practices, it also engenders certain ambiguities and contradictions. These ambiguities, I will suggest, may shed light on features of the Shingon ritual system that relate to the early development of Buddhist Tantra. Thinking through the narrative will also allow us to revisit Staal's thesis concerning the relationship between ritual actions and meanings. Before turning to this narrative, however, it is necessary to say a few words about the Shingon monastic curriculum.

Shingon Training

Anyone wishing to become a Shingon priest today must undergo a sequence of four initiations known collectively as the Shidokeyō 四度加行 or "four preliminary practices of liberation." Each of the practices is centered around the invocation of a particular buddha, bodhisattva, or other divine being (known as the *honzon* 本尊 or "principal deity")¹⁴ and his or her retinue. The rite proper takes from two to five hours to complete and is repeated three times a day in the context of an extended ascetic retreat¹⁵. In addition to the central rite, the priest undergoing Shidokeyō training performs a variety of auxiliary practices, including daily visits to neighboring shrines and temples, ancestral rites for lineage patriarchs, offerings to hungry ghosts, and so on, leaving little time for meals or rest. If done in a traditional manner, the Shidokeyō sequence requires over one hundred days to complete, whereupon the practitioner is eligible for consecration (*kanjō* 灌頂, Sk: *abhiṣeka*) as a Shingon "master" (*ajari* 阿闍梨, Sk: *ācārya*). This consecration authorizes the priest to perform Esoteric rituals on behalf of others.

All Shingon rituals and ceremonies are organized as a sequence of smaller liturgical procedures that typically consist of an incantation

¹⁴ The term *honzon* (C: *benzun*) is likely derived from Tantric sources, but it lost its explicitly Tantric overtones rather early and came to be used by all sects of Japanese Buddhism. On this term see esp. the *Benzun sanmei* 本尊三昧 chapter of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (T.848: 18.44a-b); *Hizōki*, KDZ 2.30; Mikkyō Jiten Hensankai eds. 1983: 2068b-c; Mochizuki 1933-36: 5.4697b-4698a; and Goepper 1979.

¹⁵ The three daily performances, each of which is called a "single sitting" (*ichiza gyōbō* 一坐行法), are known respectively as "early night" (*shoya* 初夜), "late night" (*goya* 後夜), and "mid-day" (*nitchū* 日中).

(a mantra, *dhāraṇī*, hymn, etc.) accompanied by a hand gesture (*mudrā*) and a guided contemplation (*kansō* 觀想). The four initiations that comprise the Shidokeyō — namely the Jūhachidō 十八道 (eighteen methods), Kongōkai 金剛界 (*vajra*-realm practice), Taizōkai 胎藏界 (matrix-realm practice), and Goma 護摩 (fire ceremony)¹⁶ — consist of hundreds of such segments of varying duration and complexity. Of these hundreds, modern commentators regard three specific segments that usually appear in each of the Shidokeyō rites as the soteriological core of the practice. These three units — “interpenetration of self [and deity]” (*nyūga-ga’nyū* 入我我入, #51), “formal invocation” (*shōnenju* 正念誦, #53), and “syllable-wheel contemplation” (*jirinkan* 字輪觀, #55) — unite respectively the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner with the body, speech, and mind of the principal deity (*honzon*) of the rite. As such, they constitute the ritual instantiation of the “three mysteries” (*sanmitsu*), a cardinal Shingon doctrine that affirms the identity of practitioner and buddha¹⁷.

Traditional Shingon ritual manuals, known as *shidai* 次第 (sequential programs) or *giki* 儀軌 (ritual regulations), often list only the names of the dozens of procedures that comprise the rite. With less common procedures the manuals may include mnemonic aids such as the pronunciation of the mantras (in Siddham script, Chinese characters, and/or the Katakana syllabary), the text of liturgical hymns and recitations, directions on how to form certain *mudrās*, and diagrams to help in the contemplations. In any case, the manuals presume a vast store of ritual knowledge on the part of the practitioner. The more elaborate rites such as the Taizōkai and Goma consist of hundreds of such procedures, many of them of considerable complexity.

Traditionally, these manuals were not printed but were hand-copied and transmitted from master to disciple. Thousands of such manuals survive in temple archives, and hundreds have made their way into modern printings of Buddhist and Shingon canonical collections. A comparison of the manuals quickly reveals a host of small but notable alterations in

¹⁶ Prior to undertaking the Jūhachidō, the practitioner must complete the Raihai keyō 禮拜加行 (preliminary prostration practice), which today takes from one to four weeks to complete. As such, the modern Shidokeyō sequence is actually organized into five segments.

¹⁷ See, for example, the discussion in Toganoo 1982b: 66.

the liturgies: elements are added or removed, recitations and contemplations are modified, and some manuals include short expository directions and comments — interlinear notes that threaten to enter the liturgy proper — that may represent the “oral transmission” (*kuden* 口傳) of a particular master or lineage. The Shingon ritual tradition, now many centuries old, was conservative but — pace Staal — by no means invariant.

These differences gave rise to a profusion of independent lines (*ryū* 流) that differed in the details of their ritual performances and exegeses¹⁸. There was no opprobrium associated with amending the rites; all bona fide Shingon masters (*ajari*) were sanctioned to alter the rites as they saw fit. Two related reasons are given for this authority: (1) masters were regarded as spiritually advanced and ritually sanctified beings whose interpretations of the rites reflected their inner wisdom; (2) more practically, there was no single authoritative Chinese or Japanese textual source for the rites on which the Japanese could draw. There was, rather, a profusion of sanctioned texts and teaching lineages, a situation readily acknowledged by the tradition¹⁹. Annen 安然 (841?-915?), for example, notes that the reason there were so many differences in the ritual transmissions brought back to Japan by Ennin 圓仁 (794-864) was that he studied under eight different teachers²⁰.

At the same time, scholars should not exaggerate the differences between Shingon initiatory lineages. While these lines did compete for prestige and patronage, in the end the variations in ritual performance are relatively minor and rarely affect the rites’ underlying structure²¹.

¹⁸ According to tradition, there are twelve major Shingon initiatory lineages, six associated with the Ono line 小野流 and six associated with the Hirozawa line 廣澤流. However, there are dozens of sub-lineages, the two most important today being the Chūin-ryū 中院流 now dominant on Mount Kōya and the Sanbōin-ryū 三寶院流 stemming from Daigoji 醍醐寺 in Kyoto. For a full discussion of the complex relationship between the various lineages see Toganoo 1982a: 239-266; 1982b: 33-40; and Takai 1953: 25-58.

¹⁹ The absence of a single authoritative ritual text and the freedom of an *ācārya* to interpret and alter the ritual as he pleases is discussed in Kakuchō’s 覺超 (960-1034) *Sanmitsu shōryōken* 三密抄料簡 (T.2399: 75.633c14 ff.) and *Taizōkai shōki* 胎藏界生起 (T.2404: 75.806c1 ff.); see also Todaro 1986: 114.

²⁰ *Taizōkai daihō taijuki* 胎藏界大法對受記, T.2390: 75.54a22; Todaro 1986: 114.

²¹ The same can be said for the differences between Shingon *mikkyō* writ large (Tōmitsu 東密) and Tendai *mikkyō* (Taimitsu 台密). The sequence in which Tendai priests perform the Shidokeyō is slightly different (in Tendai the Taizōkai rite precedes the Kongōkai), but the overall narrative structure and most of the individual procedures are identical.

This structure is rooted in a subset of eighteen ritual procedures known as the *jūhachidō* or “eighteen methods” which constitute a latticework around which are hung dozens if not hundreds of additional elements. *Jūhachidō* is also the name of the first of the four Shidokeyō practices, and it is through this extended rite that a Shingon priest comes to acquire a basic understanding of the ritual system²². (In this paper I use lower case italics [“*jūhachidō*”] to refer to the original sequence of eighteen procedures, and capitalized unitalicized script [“*Jūhachidō*”] to refer to the full Shidokeyō rite.) The guest-host narrative is captured in the root procedures of the eighteen methods.

History and Structure of the Eighteen Methods

The origin of the eighteen methods is far from clear. The *Daishōten kangī sōshin binayaka hō* 大聖天歡喜雙身毘那夜迦法, a work preserved in fascicle nine of Kūkai’s *Sanjūjō sakushi* 三十帖策子, contains what some Shingon scholars believe to be the earliest record of the rite²³. But the de facto *locus classicus* is another roughly contemporaneous text, the *Jūhachi geiin* 十八契印 (C. *Shiba qiying*). Tradition holds that this text, extant only in Japan, is the work of Kūkai’s teacher Huiguo 惠果 (746-805) as recorded by Kūkai himself, but little is known with certainty about the provenance of the work²⁴. The same is true of virtually all of the ritual manuals attributed to Kūkai, including his three other eighteen-methods

²² There are a variety of rites structured around the eighteen-methods sequence that can be used for the Shidokeyō *Jūhachidō* performance. These ritual forms, such as the *Nyoirinbō* 如意輪法, are referred to as “ritual sequences established on the eighteen methods” (*jūhachidō date no shidai* 十八道立の次第); see Togano 1982b: 47-49. The *Nyoirinbō* serves as the *Jūhachidō* in the *Sanbōin-ryū*, using a manual derived from the *Shōnyoirin Kanjizai bosatsu nenju shidai* 聖如意輪觀自在菩薩念誦次第 by Gengō 元果 (914-995); see the appendix to this paper.

²³ The *Sanjūjō sakushi* is traditionally considered a work by Kūkai dating to his years in China (Togano 1982b: 44; Ono 1932-36: 4.86).

²⁴ In his *Jūhachidō kuketsu* 十八道口決, Raiyu 賴瑜 (1225-1304) writes that Kūkai received the eighteen methods from Huiguo (T.2529: 79.71c9ff). Most modern Shingon scholars accept this position and view the *Jūhachi geiin* as Kūkai’s record of Huiguo’s instructions (Takai 1953: 116-117). The *Jūhachi geiin* is reproduced in both the *Taishō* canon (T.900), where it is attributed to Huiguo, and the *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 弘法大師全集 (KDZ 2.634-645), where it is attributed to Kūkai.

manuals: the *Jūhachidō nenju shidai* 十八道念誦次第, *Jūhachidō kubi shidai* 十八道頸次第, and *Bonji jūhachidō* 梵字十八道. While they are all likely early Shingon compositions, they may well postdate Kūkai's death.

The sequence of eighteen root procedures appears to be a Japanese systematization of a ritual pattern found in group of related Chinese manuals associated with Amoghavajra. The texts most commonly mentioned as sources for the eighteen methods are the *Wuliangshou rulai guanxing gongyang yigui* 無量壽如來觀行供養儀軌 (T.930), *Guanzizai pusa ruyilun yuqie* 觀自在菩薩如意輪瑜伽 (T.1086), *Guanzizai pusa ruyilun niansong yigui* 觀自在菩薩如意輪念誦儀軌 (T.1085), and *Dabao guangbo louge shanzhu mimi tuoluoni jing* 大寶廣博樓閣善住祕密陀羅尼經 (T.1005a). In his *Sangakuroku* 三學錄, Kūkai mentions the first two as the basis for his own *Jūhachidō* manuals (Takai 1953: 111-116), but all these texts were familiar to Kūkai and all share a common ritual structure. I will have occasion to return to these texts below. Here I will only note that there is some question as to whether or not the Chinese texts, and the *Jūhachi geiin* itself, contain the segment known as the “contemplation of the sanctuary” (*dōjōkan* 道場觀, #31), an important rite traditionally included among the list of eighteen²⁵.

As mentioned above, the term “*jūhachidō*” refers to (1) a skeletal structure of eighteen procedures that was incorporated into more complex rites such as the *Taizōkai*, *Kongōkai*, and *Goma*; and (2) a full-fledged rite in itself that, in its mature form, consists of some seventy or eighty discrete procedures. The latter *Jūhachidō* rite, typically with *Nyoirin Kannon* 如意輪觀音 (*Cintāmaṇicakra Avalokiteśvara*) as the principal deity, was incorporated into the Shingon monastic curriculum by the end of Kūkai's lifetime. Kūkai's *Shingon denju sahō* 眞言傳授作法, for example, mentions the *Jūhachidō* as one of six practices mandatory for all Shingon priests²⁶.

²⁵ Takai 1953: 117-118. The *dōjōkan* is also known as the “*Tathāgata fist mudrā*” (*nyorai ken'in* 如來拳印). The term *dōjōkan* is rare in Chinese texts; one of the few relevant instances is found in the *Sheng huanxitian shifa* 聖歡喜天式法, a ritual manual ascribed to the somewhat obscure Tang monk from the “western regions” *Prajñācakra* 般若(惹)羯羅 (also known as *Zhihuilun* 智慧輪; the reference is found in T.1275: 21.325b5). However, the provenance of the work is unclear, and it may well be a Japanese apocryphon.

²⁶ These six rites are (1) *Kechien-kanjō* 結緣灌頂 (consecration establishing a bond with the deity); (2) *Jūhachidō*; (3) *Issonbō* 一尊法 (single deity practice); (4) *Kongōkai*; (5) *Taizōkai*; and (6) *Goma*. These are followed by the *Koka-kanjō* 許可灌頂 and *Jumyō-kanjō* 受明灌頂 initiations (KDZ 4.417ff.; see the discussion in Togano 1982b: 25-26).

And a court document dated 2-23-835, shortly before Kūkai's death, records that the Jūhachidō was to be included among practices compulsory for monks seeking ordination among the annual ordinands (*nenbundosha* 年分度者)²⁷.

The Shidokeyō sequence was becoming standardized, with the Jūhachidō as the initial rite, by the time of Kakuban 覺鑊 (1095-1143) who writes in his *Shōjuhō shokan* 請授法書簡 that he received the Jūhachidō at age eighteen, the Kongōkai and Taizōkai at nineteen, the Koka-kanjō 許可灌頂 three times between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-seven, and lastly the Denbō-kanjō 傳法灌頂 a total of eight times²⁸. Today all Shingon (as well as Tendai) priests begin with the Jūhachidō, although the principal deity of the rite differs depending on the monk's initiatory lineage (*ryū*). Priests in the Sanbōin-ryū 三寶院流 use Nyoirin Kannon as the principal deity while Chūin-ryū 中院流 priests direct the ritual to Dainichi Nyorai 大日如來 (Mahāvairocana). Even then, the differences between the rites as actually performed are relatively few and far between.

The overview of the original eighteen-methods structure that follows is based primarily on the manuals ascribed to Kūkai, notably the *Jūhachi geiin*, *Jūhachidō nenju shidai*, and *Jūhachidō kubi shidai*²⁹. I have also consulted a number of medieval texts on the *jūhachidō*, including the *Jūhachidō kuketsu* 十八道口決 (T.2529) by Raiyu 賴瑜 (1225-1304) and the *Jūhachi geiin gishaku shōki* 十八契印義釋生起 (T.2475) attributed to Jōjin 定深 (fl. 1108), both of which provide considerable commentary³⁰. I have subdivided the eighteen methods into "six procedures" (*roppō*

²⁷ Study of the *Tattvasaṃgraha* and *Mahāvairocana* sūtras was also compulsory as was facility with *shōmyō* 聲明 chanting. See Todaro 1985: 104; on the system of annual ordinands see Abé 1999: 39-40.

²⁸ Toganoō 1982b: 26. On the complex problem of the historical origins of the Shidokeyō system see the discussions in Toganoō 1982b: 26-27; Takai 1953: 74-75; and Ueda 1986: 55-58.

²⁹ There are any number of modern accounts of the eighteen methods. The most comprehensive accounts in Japanese are Toganoō 1982b: 44-53, 286-318; Takai 1953: 109-216; Tanaka 1962: 95-151; Ōyama 1987: 67-143; and Ueda 1986: 102-207. In English see Miyata 1984; Miyata and Todaro 1988: "Eighteen Rites"; and Payne 1991: 207-227.

³⁰ There is some question about the authorship of the *Jūhachi geiin gishaku shōki*. The *Shoshū shōsho roku* 諸宗章疏錄 lists the author as Jōjin of Kiyomizu-dera 清水寺, but other traditions attribute it to Shinkō 眞興 of Kojima-dera 小島寺, or the Tendai monk Annen (Kamata et al. eds. 1998: 734).

六法), following a popular medieval mode of analysis³¹. (The numbers given for the individual rites correspond to their place in the modern Jūhachidō sequence provided in the appendix.)

(1) Procedure for Adorning the Practitioner (*shōgon gyōja hō* 莊嚴行者法, *goshin hō* 護身法). Traditionally, this section includes the first five of the eighteen methods, all of which serve to purify, adorn, and protect the practitioner, rendering him or her a suitable host. The practitioner begins by anointing his/her body with incense (*zukō* 塗香, #6), followed by a sequence of three rites — the buddha family assembly (*butsubu sanmaya* 佛部三昧耶, #9), lotus family assembly (*rengebu sanmaya* 蓮華部三昧耶, #10), and *vajra* family assembly (*kongōbu sanmaya* 金剛部三昧耶, #11) — that call upon the deities of the three assemblies to empower (*kaji* 加持) and purify the practitioner. Then one protects the body (*goshin* 護身) by donning armor (*hikō* 被甲, *kongō katchū* 金剛甲冑, #12); the mantra for this rite invokes Agni, and the sequence is said to protect the host from all manner of natural disasters, demons, and evil influences.

(2) Procedure for Binding the Realm (*kekkaï hō* 結界法). Now one prepares one's abode — i.e., the sanctuary — for the deity. First, one secures the sanctuary firmly to the earth by driving a *vajra* pillar through the practitioner's seat to the center of the earth (*jiketsu* 地結, *jikai* 地界, or *kongōketsu* 金剛橛, #29). The four sides of the perimeter are secured (*shihō ketsu* 四方結, #30) by erecting an indestructible *vajra* wall (*kongōshō* 金剛牆). The roof has not yet been sealed to allow for the descent of the deity.

(3) Procedure for Adorning the Sanctuary (*shōgon dōjō hō* 莊嚴道場法). According to virtually all medieval texts, this section consists of two rites: the “contemplation of the sanctuary” (or “contemplation of the

³¹ On the six procedures see the *Jūhachi ge'in gishaku shōki*, T.2475: 78.115c19-27; Ōyama 1987: 69; and Takai 1953: 110. I have also consulted the *Taizōkai nenju shidai yōshūki* 胎藏界念誦次第要集記 (SZ 25) by Gōhō 果寶 (1306-1362). In this work Gōhō analyses the structure of the Taizōkai rite into “seven limbs” (*shichi shi* 七支), drawing on Annen's *Kongōkai daihō taijuki* 金剛界大法對受記 (T.2391: 75.170b8-10); the seven are (1) *gyōgan* 行願, (2) *sanmaya* 三昧耶, (3) *jōjin* 成身, (4) *dōjō* 道場, (5) *shōsei/hōsei* 招請/奉請, (6) *kuyō* 供養, and (7) *nenju* 念誦. This breakdown of the ritual is based, according to Gōhō, on fascicle seven of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (T.848: 18:45a ff.); see the discussion in Togano 1982b: 54.

locus of enlightenment,” *dōjōkan* 道場觀, #31)³² and the “universal offerings of the great sky-repository” (*dai kokūzō futsū kuyō* 大虚空藏普通供養, #32). As mentioned above, the *Jūhachi geiin* does not explicitly mention the *dōjōkan* — a rite that involves the visualization of the principal deity of the rite. However, there is a “contemplation” (*sō* 想) that is clearly related:

Next imagine that in the middle of the altar there is a lion throne set on top of a great eight-petaled lotus blossom. On the throne is a seven-jeweled tower bedecked with colorfully embroidered banners and jewel-covered pillars arrayed in rows. Divine garments are hung about and it is surrounded by fragrant clouds. Flowers rain down everywhere and music plays. Jeweled vessels hold pure water, there is divine food and drink, and a *mani* gem serves as a lamp. Having performed this contemplation intone the following verse: “Through the power of my own merit, the power of the Tathāgata’s grace, and the power of the dharma-realm, I dwell in universal offerings.”
 次應想：於壇中八葉大蓮華上有獅子座。座上有七寶樓閣垂瑠璃繒綵幡蓋寶柱行列。垂妙天衣周布香雲普雨雜花奏諸音樂。寶瓶闍伽天妙飲食摩尼爲燈。作此觀已而誦此偈：以我功德力，如來加持力、及以法界力、普供養而住。³³

Note that this contemplation from the *Jūhachi geiin* makes no reference to the presence of the principal deity. This is striking, since the *dōjōkan* found in all later manuals, including the *Jūhachidō nenju shidai* attributed to Kūkai (KDZ 2.621), foregrounds the appearance of the principal deity in his jeweled palace. The following liturgy, used in the Sanbōinryū *Jūhachidō*, is typical:

Form the “tathāgata fist *mudrā*” 如來拳印.... Contemplate 觀念 as follows: In front [of me] is the syllable *ah* (J: *aku*). The syllable changes into a palatial hall of jewels. Inside is an altar with stepped walkways on all four sides. Arrayed in rows are jeweled trees with embroidered silk banners suspended from each. 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. On top is the syllable *hrīh* (*kiriku*),

³² The term *dōjō* is used as a translation of the Sk. *bodhimaṇḍa*, the seat upon which a buddha sits at the time of his enlightenment. Its use for the sanctuary — the site of practice — is thus metaphorical, and the title of this section might well be translated “adornment of the seat of enlightenment.” See Takai 1953: 117-118, and Ōyama 1987: 101-104.

³³ T.900: 18.782c11-17. By the time of the compilation of the *Jūhachidō nenju shidai* attributed to Kūkai, the verses at the end had become separated from the *dōjōkan* and appear in a recurring unit called the “three powers” (*sanriki* 三力; KDZ 2.620).

and to the left and right there are two *trāh* (*taraku*) syllables. The three syllables change and become a *vajra* jewel lotus. The jewel lotus changes into the principal deity, with six arms and a body the color of gold. The top of his head is adorned with a jeweled crown. He sits in the posture of the Freedom King (*Jizai ō* 自在王), assuming the attribute of preaching the dharma. From his body flow a thousand rays of light, and his upper torso is encircled by a radiant halo. His upper right arm is in the posture of contemplation. His second right arm holds the wish-fulfilling gem. His third right arm holds a rosary. His upper left arm touches the mountain [beneath him]. His second left arm holds a lotus blossom. His third left arm holds a wheel. His magnificent body of six arms is able to roam the six realms, employing the skillful means of great compassion to end the suffering of all sentient beings. The eight great Kannon and the innumerable members of the Lotus realm assembly surround him on all sides³⁴.

Commentaries typically interpret the *dōjōkan* as the moment in the narrative in which the practitioner first establishes contact with the deity, visualizing him in his divine abode³⁵. But then the reference to the “sanctuary” (*dōjō*) in the title to this section (“adornment of the sanctuary”) is ambiguous: is the sanctuary being adorned that of the practitioner or the deity? (The term “*dōjō*” is most commonly associated with the site of practice — an earthly chapel — yet according to the narrative, the deity has not yet arrived on the practitioner’s altar.)

There are a few ways to account for the anomalous nature of this *Jūhachi geiin* segment. One possibility is that the *Jūhachi geiin* preserves an early tradition that, in contrast with later manuals, remains closer to the narrative logic of the guest-host structure. The scene is not the principal deity’s abode at all but rather the sanctuary being readied for the deity’s imminent arrival. The altar is imagined as the site of the jeweled palatial tower, with various offerings (flowers, water, food, music, light) laid out and ready for the god’s descent.

Alternatively, the *Jūhachi geiin* may be intentionally ambiguous as to the location of the divine altar: two of the important sources for the

³⁴ Miyano and Mizuhara 1933: *Nyoirin* 13-14; cf. Ozawa 1962: *Jūhachidō* 51-53. The Chūin-ryū *dōjōkan* for the *Jūhachidō* is similar except for the identity of the principal deity.

³⁵ Takai explains that the advanced practitioner will contemplate the *dōjō* as within his own mind, but the novice practitioner must begin by viewing the *dōjō* as outside of himself (1953: 161).

jūhachidō sequence — the *Wuliangshou rulai guanxing gongyang yigui* and *Guanzizai pusa ruyilun niansong yigui* — contain contemplations at this point in the sequence that, while not called “contemplation of the sanctuary” (C: *daochang guan*), are still close to the later Japanese *dōjōkan* in that they invoke the figure of the principal deity in his heavenly palace³⁶. From a doctrinal rather than narrative perspective, the ambiguity is felicitous, since the term *dōjō* refers to the locus of enlightenment itself. From this perspective there is no difference between the “abode” of the deity and that of the practitioner — they are ultimately coextensive.

Yet another possibility is that the *Jūhachi geiin* was not intended to serve as a ritual manual at all but rather as a template on which manuals for individual rites might be drafted. As such, the ambiguity concerning the site to be visualized is created by the omission of any descriptive details associated with a specific deity and his divine abode; one was supposed to “fill in the blanks” later on.

(4) Procedure for Inviting [the Deities into the Sanctuary] (*kanjō hō* 勸請法). The practitioner dispatches a jeweled vehicle for the deity (*hōsharo* 寶車輅, #34). The deity and his retinue are beckoned into the vehicle (*shō sharo* 請車輅, #35), whereupon they descend into the sanctuary and are welcomed by the practitioner (*geishō* 迎請, #36). Early commentaries note that the practitioner should imagine the carriage as adorned with jewels and Indian in appearance³⁷.

(5) Procedure for Binding and Protecting [the Sanctuary] (*kechigo hō* 結護法). Horse-headed Wisdom King (Batō myōō 馬頭明王, Batō Kannon 馬頭觀音, #39), a wrathful incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, is stationed outside the sanctuary to guard the precincts³⁸. The roof is then covered with an impregnable *vajra* net (*kongō mō* 金剛網, #40), and a wall of flames is established around the perimeter (*kain* 火院, #41). The sanctuary is now sealed off from the outside, making it safe from all malevolent forces.

(6) Procedure For Making Offerings (*kuyō hō* 供養法). This is the final and culminating section of the original eighteen methods. First, pure water

³⁶ See T.930: 19.69a27 ff. and T.1085: 20.205a7 ff. respectively.

³⁷ See, for example, *Jūhachi geiin gishaku shōki*, T.2475: 78.121b20.

³⁸ In later texts, notably those associated with the Chūin-ryū, the wrathful deity Gōzanze myōō 降三界明王 (Trailokyavijaya-rāja) is used instead.

is provided to wash the deity's feet (*aka* 闕伽, #43), and lotus seats are set out for the deity to sit upon (*rengeza* 蓮華座, #44). The *Jūhachi geiin* ends with a section simply called “universal offerings” (*fukuyō* 普供養), in which the practitioner imagines five offerings, each limitless and boundless as the clouds or the sea: (1) powdered incense, (2) flower garlands, (3) burnt incense, (4) food and drink, and (5) light. In the *Jūhachi geiin* these five are accomplished together with a single mantra, but later manuals will specify a separate rite for each (*go kuyō* 五供養, #46). They will also add offerings of music (enacted by ringing a bell, *shinrei* 振鈴, #45), hymns (*san* 讚, #47, #48), and so on.

The commentaries explain the content and function of each of the offerings in terms of ancient Indian protocol for receiving and fêting an honored guest. When the deity arrives the host first washes the deity's feet, as was supposedly the custom in India (although the practice was not unknown in East Asia as well)³⁹. Commentarial discussions of the sort of seat to be offered as well as the form and function of the five offerings (incense, garlands of flowers, and so on) similarly draw on East Asian conceptions of Indian etiquette⁴⁰. This is all in accord with the theme of the rite as a great Indian-style feast (*kyōyō* 饗應, Takai 1953: 109-110).

The Invocation Procedures

The enumeration of the eighteen methods and six procedures, as well as the ordinances of the *Jūhachi geiin*, end here with the universal offerings⁴¹. The host has prepared his or her abode, summoned the guest, and provided a sumptuous meal and entertainment. Yet Shingon exegetes agree that the center piece of the rite lies in what follows, namely, the “invocation procedures” (*nenju hō* 念誦法). As noted above, in contemporary Shingon this section consists primarily of three elaborately scripted contemplations: the “interpenetration of self [and deity]” (*nyūga-ga'nyū*,

³⁹ See, for example, *Jūhachi geiin gishaku shōki*, T.2475: 78.122b29-c8, which comments at length on the qualities and symbolic significance of the water offered to the deity.

⁴⁰ Ibid. T.2475: 78.122c9-123b17.

⁴¹ The *Jūhachi geiin gishaku shōki* acknowledges that this is where the eighteen methods ends, and explains that since the procedures that follow differ according to the identity of the principal deity they are not recorded (T.2475: 78.123b17-19).

#51), “formal invocation” (*shōnenju*, #53), and “syllable-wheel contemplation” (*jirinkan*, #55). The historical, structural, and doctrinal analyses of these three rites lies beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that they are said to unite the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner with the body, speech, and mind of the principal deity. Shingon commentators are quick to note, however, that the trope of “union” is yet another *upāya*; the rites of the three mysteries do not bring about this union so much as they give form to it. In other words, the practitioner has always been one with the deity; the rites of the three mysteries merely enact, express, or realize this primordial state of affairs⁴².

Each of the rites of the three mysteries is punctuated by a short segment known as the “empowerment of the principal deity” (*honzon kaji* 本尊加持, #52, #54, #56), consisting of the recitation of the three mantras of the principal deity. The three-mysteries sequence, interspersed by this empowerment, constitutes the core of the “invocation procedures” (*nenju hō*) and the heart of all Shidokeyō rituals.

The invocation procedures initiate an abrupt and somewhat dramatic shift in the liturgical narrative. The guest-host scenario is temporarily suspended, and the ritual takes a decidedly soteriological and “yogic” turn as the practitioner is instructed to “enter meditation” (*nyū jō* 入定) or “enter *samādhi*” (*nyū zanmai* 入三昧). This results in a two-tiered and somewhat incongruous structure that is sometimes explained by reference to the history of Buddhist Tantra.

Buddhist Tantra, we are told, emerged from a deliberate attempt to appropriate popular non-Buddhist Vedic or Brahmanic rites. Yixing 一行 (683-727), in the Goma chapter of his *Dapiluzhe’na chengfo jingshu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏, says that the Mahāyāna fire ritual was based on its Vedic counterpart in order to convert followers of the Vedas to Buddhism (T.1796: 39.779a19-21). “Buddha created this teaching out of his desire to convert non-Buddhists and allow them to distinguish the true from the false. Thus he taught them the true Goma.... The Buddha himself taught the very foundation of the Vedas, and in that way manifested

⁴² A comprehensive description of these rites along with an analysis of their symbolism and doctrinal significance can be found in Takai 1953: 192-206, and Ueda 1986: 168-182. See also the discussion in Sharf 2001b: 183-187.

the correct principles and method of the true Goma. This is the ‘Buddha Veda’ 佛韋陀.”⁴³

While the Buddhist Goma may resemble the Vedic one, Yixing insists that only the Buddhist version leads to real knowledge and salvation. To this end Yixing repeatedly distinguishes between the “outer Goma” (*wai humo* 外護摩), which is the manifest physical performance of the rite, and the inner Goma (*nei humo* 內護摩), which takes place in the practitioner’s mind. The Vedas teach the outer Goma alone; the Buddhists, in contrast, understand the deeper significance and symbolism of the Goma and thus perform both inner and outer at once. The Goma fire, for example, is correctly understood by Buddhists to be the purifying wisdom of the Tathāgata (T.1796: 39.662b7-13).

Buddhist polemics aside, this historical or pseudo-historical account does have a certain explanatory elegance. It seems plausible that the rise, popularity, and increasing status of non-Buddhist Tantric ritual in fifth- and sixth-century India led Buddhist practitioners to appropriate the new ritual technology. Buddhist scholiasts legitimized the appropriation by reinterpreting the rituals (after the fact?) according to hoary Buddhist principles. On the one hand, specific elements in the liturgies were explained as symbols for Mahāyāna teachings (Goma fire = Buddha wisdom). On the other hand, the entire ritual performance was rationalized as a skillful means for manifesting one’s intrinsic buddha-nature and realizing the bodhisattva vows. The constant refrain running throughout Yixing’s commentary, and indeed all East Asian Esoteric exegesis, is that the practitioner must envisage his or her body as the body of the principal deity⁴⁴. In a single stroke the guest-host narrative of the Indian *pūjā* rites dedicated to a bewildering menagerie of deities is rendered a mere *upāya* for the realization of inherent buddhahood.

The early Chinese manuals — supposedly translations from Indic originals — lend further support to this theory. Recall that the locus classicus for the eighteen methods, the *Jūhachi geiin*, abruptly ends at the conclusion of the offering section, prior to the more soteriologically oriented

⁴³ T.1796: 39.780b11-15; see the discussion in Togano 1982b: 85-86.

⁴⁴ See, for example, T.1796: 39.582a26, 688c5, 688c12-13, 701a6, 752b21, 781c27-29, and so on.

“procedure for invocation.” There is, as it were, no room for the invocation/contemplation procedures in this stripped down version of the guest-host paradigm. Most of the Chinese precursors of the eighteen methods do, however, continue past the guest-host narrative; the offering section is followed by a wide miscellany of *samādhis*, discernments (*guan* 觀), contemplations (*nian* 念), recitations (*niansong* 念誦), and so on, all of which foreground traditional Mahāyāna doctrine and soteriological goals.

The offerings in the *Wuliangshou rulai guanxing gongyang yigui*, for example, are followed by a series of mantra recitations and guided contemplations centered around Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara⁴⁵. These practices are said to induce a *samādhi* wherein the practitioner’s body becomes indistinguishable from the body of the deity (T.930: 19.71a28-29). The power of this *samādhi*, claims the text, will bring about the eradication of defilement, allowing the practitioner to attain the highest level of rebirth in the Pure Land at death.

The *Guanzizai pusa ruyulun niansong yigui*, another text that closely follows the *jūhachidō* structure, has a similar series of recitations (*song santan jie* 誦讚歎偈), contemplations (*siwei* 思惟) of the principal deity, mantras, and *dhāraṇī* following the offerings (T.1085: 20.206a18 ff.). These practices culminate in the repeated recitation of the principal deity’s mantra such that the “mind comes to rest in the *samādhi* of the principal deity” (206b22). The text goes on to promise those who practice the rite three times a day freedom from defilement, the attainment of wisdom, perfection of *samādhi*, a vision of the deity, and so on, “just as it says in the scriptures” (206c3-5).

The meditative exercises described in these Tang manuals are invariably framed in terms of traditional Mahāyāna doctrine and soteriology. At the same time, the meditations and recitations seem less mechanical or scripted than the concatenation of mantra/*mudrā* units comprising the earlier guest-host sequence. The Tang texts grant the practitioner greater latitude and flexibility in his or her approach to the invocation procedures, a flexibility redolent of more traditional Buddhist meditative practices (*bhāvanā*). The ad hoc quality of the invocation procedures in the

⁴⁵ The offerings are accomplished with the “Offering of the Great Wish-fulfilling Gem” (*guangda bukong mani gongyang* 廣大不空摩尼供養) *mudrā* and accompanying *dhāraṇī* (T.930: 19.70b6ff.).

early manuals is further evidence of an underlying “two tier” structure to the rites.

As the rites developed in Japan, the invocation procedures following the offerings became more routinized, and by the medieval period they had come to assume the set form still practiced today: three discrete rites corresponding to the three mysteries. It is unclear, however, exactly when and how this transformation occurred. Two of the three-mysteries rites — the all important “interpenetration of self [and deity]” and “syllable-wheel contemplation” — do not appear in any of the Chinese sources for the eighteen methods. Indeed, they rarely appear in Chinese texts at all, and when they do they are not identified with the specific “mysteries” of body and mind⁴⁶. Nor are they found in the *Jūhachidō* manuals attributed to Kūkai. They do appear, however, in several other ritual manuals ascribed to Kūkai, suggesting an early date for the establishment of these rites as set pieces in the Shingon curriculum⁴⁷. Even then, with few exceptions, the early manuals do not construe the “interpenetration of self [and deity]” and “syllable-wheel contemplation” as part of the three-mysteries sequence⁴⁸.

In fact, the various invocation procedures found in the early manuals attributed to Kūkai appear relatively fluid, with considerable variation from rite to rite much like their Chinese prototypes. One frequently comes

⁴⁶ For a rare appearance of the phrase *ruwo woru* 入我我入 in the Chinese Buddhist canon see the *Jingangdingjing dayuqie bimi xindi famen yijue* 金剛頂經大瑜伽祕密心地法門儀訣 (T.1798: 39.813b15-17). Among the few Chinese references to “contemplating the syllable wheel” (*guan zilun* 觀字輪) see the *Achu rulai niansong gongyang fa* 阿闍如來念誦供養法 (T.921: 19.15c11, 19c12), and Yixing’s *Dapiluzhe’na chengfo jingshu* (T.1796: 39.689c9).

⁴⁷ Mention of *nyūga-ga’nyū* is found, for example, in the *Senju Kannon gyōhō shidai* 千手觀音行法次第 (KDZ 2.552), *Jihō kongō nenju shidai* 持寶金剛念誦次第 (KDZ 2.567; cf. 2.580; 4.787), *Mujin shōgonzō shidai* 無盡莊嚴藏次第 (KDZ 4.506), *Taizō bizai shidai* 胎藏備在次第 (KDZ 4.616; cf. 4.659), *Taizōkai unji shidai* 胎藏界吽字次第 (KDZ 4.694), *Shugokyō nenju shidai* 守護經念誦次第 (KDZ 4.768), and *Shari hō* 舍利法 (KDZ 4.772). The *jirinkan* is found in the *Kongōkai dai giki* 金剛界大儀軌 (KDZ 4.487), *Taizō bizai shidai* (KDZ 4.617; cf. 4.659), *Taizōkai unji shidai* (KDZ 4.694), *Shugokyō nenju shidai* (KDZ 4.769), and *Shari hō* (KDZ 4.773).

⁴⁸ Two notable exceptions are the sequences found in the *Taizō bizai shidai* (KDZ 4.616; cf. 4.659) and *Taizōkai unji shidai* (KDZ 4.694). In both cases the sequences are almost identical to the one found in later medieval manuals, such as the manuals by Gengō, that form the basis of the modern rite. This may be evidence of a relatively late date for the *Taizō bizai shidai* and *Taizōkai unji shidai*.

across units such as “formal recitation” (*shōnenju*) and “entry into meditation” (*nyū jō* 入定)⁴⁹, yet the specific liturgical content of these segments was not yet systematized. Moreover, there are several instances in which the specific contemplations now associated with the “interpenetration of self [and deity]” and “syllable-wheel contemplation” are not identified as discrete units under those headings, but simply appear as part of other liturgical units⁵⁰. It likely took several generations for the rites to crystallize into their current forms, but given the problems dating the extant manuals it would be difficult to determine precisely how this happened.

In any case, the available evidence of the Chinese and early Japanese manuals suggests that the two-tiered structure of the Shidokeyō rites is the result of a complex historical evolution, in which the “Vedic” guest-host narrative was both legitimized and confounded by the superimposition of an explicitly “Mahāyāna” *bhāvanā* segment. This *bhāvanā* segment was originally less structured and routinized than the rites of the guest-host narrative, which is not surprising given the greater antiquity of the guest-host rites. In any case, the guest-host sequence was reinterpreted in light of the *bhāvanā* segment, transforming the entire rite into an extended meditation on, statement about, or performance of one’s inherent buddha-nature. One might view this transformation as conceptually elegant and clever, or clumsy and confusing, depending upon one’s point of view. Needless to say, such value judgments were not germane to traditional exegetes. These exegetes were, however, forced to confront the confusions that arose from the imposition of two somewhat discordant narratives.

The Dispersed Invocations

The structural ambiguity of the rite comes to a head in the “dispersed invocations” (*sannenju* 散念誦, #57), the segment that follows the three mysteries in the Shidokeyō liturgies. The dispersed invocations are followed by the “latter offerings” (*go kuyō* 後供養), a ritual sequence that

⁴⁹ See, for example, the *Mujin shōgonzō shidai* (KDZ 4.506); and *Sahō shidai* 作法次第 (KDZ 2.499, cf. KDZ 2.523).

⁵⁰ See, for example, the *Sahō shidai* (KDZ 2.503-504).

resumes the guest-host narrative and brings the ritual to a close. If only by virtue of their position in the rite, the dispersed invocations serve to negotiate the gap between the soteriological program of the three mysteries and the guest-host narrative that returns in the “latter offerings.”

The latter offerings consist of many of the same procedures found in the eighteen methods, except that they are performed in reverse order and often abbreviated. Thus it begins with the five offerings and proceeds to offerings of water, music, hymns, and so on. Following these offerings there is a dedication of merit (*ekō* 廻向, #64), a standard element appearing near the close of all Buddhist rites. The sanctuary is then unsealed: the encircling flames and the *vajra* net are removed, Horse-headed Wisdom King is relieved from sentry duty, the *vajra* wall is withdrawn, and the principal deity is dispatched back to his abode (*hakken* 撥遣, #67). The rite closes with a repeat of a few of the apotropaic procedures that opened the performance (*goshin bō*). The final offerings serve as a denouement of the guest-host narrative, running the sequence in reverse.

The dispersed invocations that precede the latter offerings consist of a group of mantras that are repeated anywhere from seven to one thousand times each. The specific mantras used vary depending on the rite, the lineage (*ryū*), and the principal deity, although three of the mantras — Buddha-locanā (Butsugen 佛眼)⁵¹, Mahāvajracakra (Dai kongōrin 大金剛輪), and Ekākṣara-uṣṇīṣacakra (Ichiji kinrin 一字金輪, Ichiji chōrinnō 一字頂輪王) — always appear⁵². In the Chūin-ryū Jūhachidō for example, in which Mahāvairocana is the principal deity, the mantras used in the dispersed invocations consist of (1) Buddha-locanā, repeated twenty-one times; (2) Garbhakośadhātu Mahāvairocana, repeated one hundred times⁵³; (3) Vajradhātu Mahāvairocana, repeated one thousand times;

⁵¹ The Sanskrit reconstruction of the Buddha-locanā mantra, which appears at the beginning and end of the dispersed invocations, is: *Namo bhagavat-uṣṇīṣa om ruru sphuru jvala-tiṣṭha-siddha-locani sarvārtha-sādhanīye svāhā*. Miyata and Todaro render this into English as “Homage to the *uṣṇīṣa* of the Bhagavat! Om Speak! Speak! Fill up! Radiate! Remain! Oh, the gaze of the accomplished ones! May you accomplish all aims! Svāhā” (1988: “Eighteen Rites,” 31).

⁵² For an account of why these three mantras are always present see Raiyu’s *Usuzōshi kuketsu* 薄草子口決, T.2535: 79.178b27-c11.

⁵³ Reconstructed as: *Om a vi ra hūm khaṁ* (“Om,” followed by five seed syllables).

(4) the Four Buddhas — Akṣobhya (Ashuku-nyorai 阿閼如來), Ratnasambhava (Hōshō-nyorai 寶生如來), Amitāyus (Amida-nyorai 阿彌陀如來), and Amoghasiddhi (Fukū-jōju 不空成就), repeated one hundred times each; (5) Vajrasattva (Kongō satta 金剛薩埵), repeated one hundred times; (6) Trailokyavijaya-rāja (Gōzanze myōō 降三世明王), repeated twenty-one times; (7) Mahāvajracakra, repeated seven times; (8) Ekākṣara-uṣṇīṣacakra, repeated one hundred times; and (9) Buddha-locanā, repeated seven times⁵⁴. These mantras need not be accompanied by any specific contemplation; the manuals say only that the practitioner repeats the mantras using the rosary with hands forming the “preaching the dharma *mudrā*” (*seppō no in* 說法之印)⁵⁵.

The mantras of the dispersed invocations, like most Japanese mantras, consist of Japanese pronunciations of Chinese transliterations of Sanskrit invocations, making it difficult for most priests to discern the semantic content (if indeed there is any) of the underlying Sanskrit phrases. (Contemporary training manuals and scholarly commentaries often provide Sanskrit reconstructions, Japanese translations, and explanations of the mantras.) As there are close to two thousand repetitions to perform, the dispersed invocations can take upwards of an hour to complete, constituting one-third to one-half of the duration of the rite.

Given their duration and their placement within the ritual sequence — situated immediately after the climax of the three mysteries — one might suppose that the dispersed invocations comprise a particularly important section of the Shidokeyō practices. Yet traditional Shingon commentators have little to say about the meaning and function of this segment, and what they do say is often vague and equivocal. The meaning of the term *sannenju* itself is ambiguous (see below), and my use of “dispersed invocations” is little more than an expedient; “supplemental” or “scattered invocations” might serve just as well.

⁵⁴ This list, typical of Chūin-ryū manuals, is taken from Ōyama 1987: 129-133, and Nakagawa 1986: *Jūhachidō*. The mantras will differ depending in part on the identity of the principal deity used for the rite. On the dispersed invocations, in addition to Ōyama see Toganoō 1982b: 66-67; Takai 1953: 206-208; Tanaka 1962: 147-148; Ueda 1986: 182-187; Miyata 1984: 91-94; Sawa 1975: 271b; Foguang da cidian zongwu weiyuanhui 1989: 5.4973c-d; Nakamura 1981: 496d; and Ding 1984: 1145d.

⁵⁵ The rosary is used along with counting sticks to keep track of mantra recitations.

The confusions are in part due to the absence of authoritative textual sources for the dispersed invocations. The *sannenju* segment does not appear in any of the dozens of Chinese texts on which the Shidokeyō liturgies were based; nor does it appear in the *Jūhachi geiin*, which concludes, as mentioned above, with the offerings at the end of the eighteen methods⁵⁶. The dispersed invocations are mentioned, however, in many of the manuals attributed to Kūkai, including the *Jūhachidō nenju shidai* (KDZ 2.627)⁵⁷. And even when the term *sannenju* does not appear, early Shingon ritual manuals that conform to the eighteen-methods structure will often prescribe mantra recitations immediately following the three-mysteries rites; these recitations appear to be the functional equivalent of the *sannenju*.

The absence of a canonical Chinese precedent meant that Japanese practitioners enjoyed considerable latitude in their approach to the dispersed invocations. Manuals and commentaries agree that practitioners — or at least advanced practitioners (*itatsu* 已達) — are free to add, subtract, or substitute mantras in accord with their own predilections, to augment or decrease the prescribed number of recitations, or to omit this section entirely. Accordingly, the dispersed invocations were also known as the “discretionary invocations” (*zuii nenju* 隨意念誦), and some medieval commentators alternate freely between the two terms⁵⁸. Moreover, the

⁵⁶ I have found only a single reference to the term *san niansong* 散念誦 in the “Esoteric teachings section” (*mikkyō bu* 密教部) of the Taishō canon. This is in the *Yaoshi yigui zizhu* 藥師儀軌一具 (T.924c: 19.32c23), a text of uncertain authorship and provenance, but here it refers to a segment occurring *before* the major invocations of the rite, and hence it appears of limited relevance to the discussion at hand. The *Jingangdingjing yuqie shibahui zhigui* 金剛頂經瑜伽十八會指歸 translated by Amoghavajra contains a reference to an “esoteric dispersed recitation that augments skillful means” (*bimi zhucheng fangbian sansong* 祕密助成方便散誦, T.869: 18.286a22). This locution may have influenced Kūkai’s use of the phrase *tō sannenju shitchi hōben* 當散念誦悉地方便 in the *Ninnō hanyakyō nenju shidai* 仁王般若經念誦次第 (KDZ 4.751); see the discussion in Ueda 1986: 183.

⁵⁷ The *sannenju* is also mentioned in the following manuals ascribed to Kūkai: *Fudō myōō nenju shidai* 不動明王念誦次第 (KDZ 2.677), *Sahō shidai* (KDZ 2.507); *Issai nyorai taishō kongō shidai* 一切如來大勝金剛次第 (KDZ 2.609); *Taizō bizai shidai* (KDZ 4.617); *Taizō bonji shidai* 胎藏梵字次第 (KDZ 2.286); *Bizai shidai* 備在次第 (KDZ 4.659); *Gumonji shidai* 求聞持次第 (KDZ 4.701); and *Ninnō hanyakyō nenju shidai* (KDZ 4.751). Usually the texts simply say, “Next, the dispersed invocations” 次散念誦, although occasionally, as in the *Fudō myōō nenju shidai* and *Issai nyorai taishō kongō shidai*, the text will list the names of the mantras to be used.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the *Taizōkai nenju shidai yōshūki* by Gōhō (SZ 25.519b). Kūkai’s *Sahō shidai* contains a short gloss under the *sannenju* saying it is “optional” (*nin’i* 任意);

dispersed invocations are not found in the liturgies of the Tendai esoteric tradition (Taimitsu 台密), marking it as one of the few notable differences between the Shidokeyō rites of the Tendai and Shingon schools.

The origins and meaning of the term *sannenju* are unclear⁵⁹. Commentators typically begin their discussions of the term by opposing the *sannenju* to the *shōnenju* 正念誦 or “formal invocation” of the three-mysteries segment⁶⁰. In its narrow sense, the “formal invocation” refers to the second of the three mysteries — the “mystery of speech” (*gomitsu* 語密) — realized through a stylized recitation of the mantra of the principal deity accompanied by an elaborate contemplation of the mantra circulating between the deity and the practitioner. However, the term “formal invocation” can also denote the entire three-mysteries sequence. In either case, the *shō* 正 of *shōnenju* is interpreted as “formal,” “solemn,” and “direct,” while *san* 散 is understood as “scattered,” “dispersed,” and “diffuse” (*santa* 散多). Whereas the *shōnenju* is a highly stylized invocation directed toward the principal deity alone, the *sannenju* is a less stringent “scattering” of invocations among a variety of supplementary deities. Thus the *shōnenju*, which is accompanied by a *mudrā* as well as an elaborate “visualization,” is considered the “primary” recitation, while the *sannenju*, which is accompanied by a *mudrā* alone, is treated as “secondary.”

Commentators also suggest that the *shō* of *shōnenju* has the sense of *shōshin* 正心, meaning a “focused” or “directed mind,” in contrast to *san* as *sanshin* 散心 meaning a “diffused” or even “distracted mind.”⁶¹ According to this reading, during the three-mysteries segment

KDZ 2.507). And the reference to the dispersed invocations in the *Jūhachidō sata* 十八道沙汰 by Kakuban lists the mantras to be included in this section, namely Buddha-locanā, Mahāvairocana, Trailokyavijaya-rāja, Vajrasattva, and Acalanātha, following which one can “continue at one’s own discretion” (*sonogo zuii* 其後隨意; T.2517: 79.26c8). Lexical sources note other names for the *sannenju* as well, including “supplementary invocations” (*kayō nenju* 加用念誦), and “miscellaneous invocations” (*shozō nenju* 諸雜念誦; Foguang da cidian zongwu weiyuanhui 1989: 5.4973b; Sawa 1975: 271b).

⁵⁹ See the sources mentioned in note 54 above.

⁶⁰ The *shōnenju* is also known as *sannaya nenju* 三昧耶念誦, *jō nenju* 定念誦, and *kaji nenju* 加持念誦 (Sawa 1975: 388b-389a).

⁶¹ See, for example, Ueda 1986: 182, who cites chapter six of the *Zuigyō shishō* 隨行私鈔.

the practitioner is one with the deity, in a state of meditation (*jōchū* 定中) in which the practitioner enters into the deity's *samādhi*. In the dispersed invocations that follow, the practitioner emerges from *samādhi* in order to fulfill the bodhisattva vows, enlightening others by “scattering” mantras in all directions. How, one might ask, is the practitioner to practice if the mind is “scattered”? This question is raised in the *Jūhachidō kuketsu* by Raiyu, who provides one of the more detailed discussions of the dispersed invocations⁶². Citing the *Hizōki* 祕藏記 (thought to be Kūkai's record of Huiguo's teaching), Raiyu says that the practitioner and the deity have both merged into the single dharma realm (*ichi hokkai* 一法界) during the previous invocations, and thus the practitioner is able to retain control 治 even though his or her mind is scattered. Having just merged with the deity, the practitioner is able to reenter the phenomenal world while remaining identified with the principal deity⁶³. Raiyu goes on to equate the formal invocation with meditation and the dispersed invocations with wisdom 正是定散是惠⁶⁴.

Modern commentators pick up this opposition, saying that the formal invocation is the “practice of inner realization” (*jinaishō no hōmon* 自内証の法門), while the dispersed invocations effect the liberation of others (*keta* 化他)⁶⁵. The liberation of others is achieved through the invocation of a host of deities (*shoson* 諸尊) that have a karmic bond (*en* 縁) with either the principal deity or the practitioner, thereby augmenting the grace and power of the principal deity (Tanaka 1962: 147). The structural relationship between the formal invocation and the dispersed invocations is thus equated with the standard Mahāyāna moieties of buddha versus bodhisattva, emptiness versus skillful means, and so on.

⁶² T.2529: 79.70b11-c4. See also his *Usuzōshi kuketsu*, T.2535: 79.178b22-179a1.

⁶³ Moriya Eishun 森谷英俊, a priest at Kōfukuji, explained this to me by saying that during the *sannenju* the wandering mind of the practitioner is identical with the wandering mind of the principal deity, eliminating the need for any prescribed contemplations to accompany the *sannenju* recitations.

⁶⁴ T.2529: 79.70c3. Raiyu also comments that since the dispersed invocations do not appear in the scriptures and early recitation manuals, it is optional in the Rishōin-ryū 理性院流.

⁶⁵ Tanaka 1962: 147. Tanaka notes that, according to exegetes such as Kakuban, the formal invocation is also effective in liberating others.

Ritual Incoherence

One question that arises is how, if at all, the dispersed invocations fit into the overall narrative program of the Shidokeyō rituals. We have seen that there is a break between (1) the offerings segment that complete the traditional eighteen methods, and (2) the enactment of the three mysteries that follows. At best, the rites of the three mysteries would seem to render the preceding guest-host narrative an *upāya*; the true relationship between practitioner and deity is not that of host and guest after all but rather one of identity. Yet the guest-host narrative recommences with the “latter offerings” that follow the dispersed invocations. If this denouement to the narrative, in which the host unbinds the sanctuary and bids farewell to the guest, is taken at face value, then at what point in the narrative does the practitioner “emerge from *samādhi*” and disengage from the deity? This question bears directly on the narrative significance and function of the dispersed invocations.

Commentators have explored, explicitly or implicitly, three possibilities. The first is that the practitioner disengages from the deity and reverts to his or her former self with the commencement of the dispersed invocations. The dispersed invocations then represent the activity of a bodhisattva; the practitioner, having “reentered the marketplace” (to borrow a popular Zen image), scatters invocations for the liberation of all sentient beings. The second possibility is that the dispersed invocations are themselves intended to reintegrate the practitioner into the world; they facilitate a gradual and controlled emergence from *samādhi*⁶⁶. The third possibility is that the entire sequence of dispersed invocations is performed while ensconced in the *samādhi* of the principal deity.

There is a certain elegance to the last position, according to which the dispersed invocations are the manifest performance of the principal deity himself. This renders the dramatic narrative of the Shidokeyō rituals structurally analogous to the performance of a shaman or spirit

⁶⁶ See esp. Miyata 1984: 91-94, who views everything following the three mysteries as a gradual process of “dissociation.” According to Miyata, the process continues through the dispersed invocations to the latter offerings, the unsealing of the realm, and the departure of the deity.

medium, in which the *raison d'être* of the ritual prologue is to efface the agency of the practitioner and invoke in his place the presence of the deity. In Shingon, this is viewed not as possession, of course, but rather as an extended communion, referred to as “reciprocal resonance [with the deity]” (*kannō dōkō* 感應道交), wherein practitioner and god act in total accord⁶⁷. This should not be construed merely as an interior “meditative state”; rather, the physical activity of the performer is precisely the physical activity of the embodied deity (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛).

This is how the practitioner is instructed to approach the fourth and final rite of the Shidokeyō sequence, namely, the Goma. Like all Shidokeyō rites, the Goma ritual is built around the eighteen methods of the *jūhachidō*. But there is an important difference: the Kongōkai and Taizōkai rituals are constructed as *expansions* of the *Jūhachidō* rite, with dozens of additional ritual elements interspersed among those of the *Jūhachidō*. The Goma, in contrast, is constructed by taking the entire fire ritual segment and nesting it whole in the midst of the *Jūhachidō* dispersed invocations. Thus the Shidokeyō Goma opens with the *Jūhachidō* sequence, running it all the way through the main offerings, three-mysteries invocations, and most but not all of the dispersed invocations. The fire ritual proper commences just before the final three mantras of the dispersed invocations (Mahāvajracakra, Ekākṣara-uṣṇīṣacakra, and Buddha-locanā). When the Goma is complete the practitioner performs the three mantras that remain from the dispersed invocations and then continues through the “latter offerings” of the *Jūhachidō* (Takai 1953: 389). The fire ritual is thus framed by the recitations of the dispersed invocations, and the practitioner is to remain in a state of unity with the principal deity throughout the fire offerings.

In the end, there is little agreement among traditional or modern Japanese exegetes as to the specific point at which the practitioner emerges from *samādhi* — the point at which, according to the logic of the narrative, guest and host are not one but two. This narrative ambiguity mirrors an ambiguity in the rites’ underlying soteriology.

⁶⁷ Togano 1982b: 66. On the notion of reciprocal accord with the deity see *Hizōki*, KDZ 2.36; Togano 1982b: 151; and Sharf 2002: 77-133.

Mahāyāna notions of *tathāgatagarbha* and intrinsic buddha-nature gave rise to a conundrum that captivated generations of scholiasts: if buddha-nature is innate, why practice? The Zen patriarch Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253) is often associated with the response that one practices not in order to attain buddhahood but in order to manifest it. But in various guises this “solution” to the problem predates Dōgen by many centuries, and Dōgen’s own approach may have been influenced by his *mikkyō* training at Enryakuji 延暦寺. In any case, Shingon ritual is predicated on a view of the phenomenal universe as the theophany of the *dharmakāya*, a view that confutes, at least in theory, the notion that Shingon ritual is intended to bring about a fundamental change in the ontological status of either the practitioner or the world. The point of the rites, in other words, is not the attainment of buddhahood but rather its expression. This expression takes the form of an elaborately scripted drama wherein the practitioner compels the presence of a buddha only to reveal that the buddha was never absent⁶⁸. Among other things, this notion provides doctrinal justification for the seemingly obsessive character of *mikkyō* ritual; since there is no ultimate “goal” to be achieved, one is left, like Sōtō practitioners of *zazen*, with practice for its own sake. This also provides conceptual grounds for the ambiguity in the ritual narrative noted above: from the standpoint of *tathāgatagarbha* theory and the doctrine of intrinsic buddha-nature, it makes little sense to mark a ritual moment at which one *ceases* to be a buddha.

Finally, a similar conceptual ambiguity can be discerned in the treatment of the central image (*honzon*) enshrined on East Asian Buddhist

⁶⁸ This is made explicit throughout the liturgical recitations and contemplations of the Shingon ritual manuals. Take, for example, the “interpenetration of self [and deity],” the first of the three-mysteries rites which brings about the union of the body of the practitioner and the body of the deity. The contemplation associated with this rite reads: “The principal deity sits on a *maṇḍala*. I sit on a *maṇḍala*. The principal deity enters my body and my body enters the body of the principal deity. It is like many luminous mirrors facing each other, their images interpenetrating each other 如多明鏡相對互影現涉入也” (Miyano and Mizuhara 1933: *Nyoirin* 27-28; cf. Ozawa 1962: *Jūhachidō* 78-79). Traditional exegetes interpret the use of the mirror image as showing that the body of the principal deity does not literally “enter” the practitioner; rather, one is to look upon the principal deity as if gazing at one’s own reflection. The body of the principal deity and the body of the practitioner have always subsumed each other (Takai 1953: 194).

temple altars. In order to be ritually efficacious, such images must be consecrated in an “eye-opening” (*kaigen* 開眼) ceremony when first installed. Such a consecration transforms an image from a mere physical likeness into a vivified icon that literally embodies the deity⁶⁹. At the same time, if one looks at the structure of the services regularly performed before such images (J: *kuyō* 供養, from Sk: *pūjā*, “rites of offering”), they typically involve a ritual segment, however brief, that invites the deity to descend into the image⁷⁰. This raises the question: if the icon was successfully consecrated at the time of its installation, thereby transforming it into the living body of a deity, what need is there to request the descent of the deity yet again at the time of worship? Is this merely a case of ritual anxiety fueling a ritual obsession that betrays a lingering doubt over the efficacy of the rites?

Phyllis Granoff has argued that this “confusion” can be explained by reference to the historical evolution of image worship in India⁷¹. According to Granoff, the two moments of invocation — one during the initial consecration of the image and the other during regular “feedings” — may derive from two different paradigms of worship that became incorporated into the later image cult. One is an earlier “Vedic” model, in which the worshipper must solicit the presence of the deity prior to each sacrifice. This paradigm was established long before the use of sacred icons in India; Brāhmin priests invoked invisible beings on an altar that was often a temporary structure built specifically for the occasion.

The spread of the cult of the image is associated with a later “Purāṇic” mode of worship focused around a consecrated icon permanently enshrined in a temple⁷². The image, which some believe was introduced from Greece, was approached as the animate physical incarnation of the

⁶⁹ See Sharf 2001a; for references to the secondary literature on eye-opening ceremonies see Sharf 2001b: 248n. 64.

⁷⁰ This is true of both “exoteric” (*kengyō* 顯教) and “esoteric” (*mikkyō*) Buddhism, but as far as I am aware only in the latter case is the deity explicitly sent back to his or her abode at the close of the rite.

⁷¹ See Granoff 2001, n.d.a, and n.d.b. I want to thank Phyllis Granoff for generously sharing and discussing her unpublished work with me.

⁷² It is worth noting that the gap between these two paradigms was so great that the orthodox Brāhmin priests originally distanced themselves from and castigated the emerging temple cult.

deity. The icon/deity became a permanent resident in the community; it needed to be bathed, dressed, fed, and entertained on a regular basis. But the earlier Vedic paradigm was soon superimposed on the treatment of these images; Vedic-style incantations (mantras) were used to impel the deity's descent at the initial consecration and again during regular *pūjā* offerings. The Buddhist treatment of images appears to be based on this pan-Indian synthesis of Vedic and Purāṇic models. (In Shingon, the Vedic antecedents are somewhat more pronounced, as a new "temporary" altar is ritually constructed during the course of each performance.) If Granoff is correct, then the ambiguities, if not the discursive incoherence, that result from the fusion of Vedic and Purāṇic modes of worship is analogous in many respects to the narrative ambiguities that result from the fusion of Vedic ritual and Mahāyāna *bhāvanā* found in the East Asian Esoteric rites discussed above.

Ritual Meaning

My musings on the history of Buddhist ritual and image worship are just that: the musings of an outsider based largely on the evidence of ritual texts the provenance and historical development of which are still poorly understood. Historical questions aside, however, my overview of the narrative content, structural logic, and doctrinal import of the ritual procedures is by no means an etic imposition. The guest-host narrative is made explicit in the sequence of Shidokeyō ritual procedures and is further amplified in oral and written commentaries from early on. Moreover, basic Shingon teachings concerning one's identity with the principal deity, the dependently arisen nature of all phenomena, the bodhisattva vows, and so on, are reiterated ad nauseam in the content of Shidokeyō recitations and contemplations⁷³.

⁷³ For example, the culminating moment of the Shidokeyō rites is the ritual identification of the mind of the deity with the mind of the practitioner. This takes place in the "syllable-wheel contemplation," which consists in a Mādhyamika-style "deconstruction" of the principal deity's mantra. According to the discursive logic of this rite, to appreciate the dependently arisen nature of the deity's mantra, and thus the emptiness of the deity himself, is precisely to become one with the deity's mind. See Sharf 2001b: 184-185.

In a parenthetical comment earlier in this paper I suggested that what makes tantra “tantra,” in any critical cross-cultural sense, lies not in its “meanings” but in its techniques. Tantra is an applied knowledge pertaining to the use of a cornucopia of ritual implements, icons, occult gestures and utterances. These techniques were adopted into diverse religious contexts across Asia and reinterpreted in the light of local tradition. There is thus no reason to assume that the specifically Shingon understanding of the narrative or doctrinal content of the rites examined above is commensurate with non-Buddhist interpretations of Tantra found in South or Southeast Asia. Buddhist exegetes would agree with this assessment, since by their own account the Buddha borrowed the outward forms of Vedic worship and supplied them with new Mahāyāna meanings.

But by the same measure, any robust account of Shingon Tantra must acknowledge the discursive content of the rites that was salient in the Shingon school. Each element in the rite was understood in the context of this content — its place in the overarching guest-host narrative — and modifications to the ritual form were made in full awareness of their narrative and doctrinal consequences. As such, Staal’s thesis as to the essential invariance and meaninglessness of ritual cannot stand, for in Shingon we have a sophisticated ritual tradition of considerable antiquity in which (1) rituals underwent continual, albeit incremental, change, and (2) semantic content clearly mattered.

This still leaves us with the question as to why anyone would perform these rites in the first place. Here Staal raises an important point, for the meanings themselves cannot account for or justify the tremendous commitment of human and institutional resources necessary for the performance of these rites. Considerable expense is involved in the acquisition and preparation of the essential ritual paraphernalia, and a monastery must be willing to offer material support to the priests in cloistered retreat. More important, the rituals themselves are hard work: the retreats are long, arduous, and mentally and physically exhausting. Why spend years of one’s life perfecting a surfeit of rites that all end up “saying” much the same thing?

Any full response to this question must take into account a host of sociological and psychological factors, bearing on everything from institutional structure, to issues of social status, to questions of identity formation and personal faith — issues that cannot be addressed here. But our

response must also take into account the power and allure of the rituals themselves, an allure derived in part from the narrative explored above. This narrative situates the practitioner as the protagonist in a dramatic encounter with powerful and mysterious forces. The constructed, fictive, dramatic, and patently playful aspects of the encounter make it no less enchanting⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ See Sharf n.d. for an analysis of the element of “play” in the workings of ritual.

APPENDIX

Procedural Sequence for the Eighteen-Methods Practice
(Jūhachidō nenju shidai 十八道念誦次第)

The following outline of the Eighteen Methods sequence is that used by contemporary priests in the Sanbōin-ryū, in which Nyoirin Kannon functions as the principal deity (see Ozawa 1962: *Jūhachidō*, and Takai 1953: 109-216). Among the prototypes for the contemporary rite, the most influential manual is the *Shōnyoirin Kanjizai bosatsu nenju shidai* 聖如意輪觀自在菩薩念誦次第 by Gengō 元杲 (914-995). Gengō's manual is in turn based on the *Jūhachi geiin* 十八契印, *Jūhachidō nenju shidai* 十八道念誦次第, and *Jūhachidō kubi shidai* 十八道頸次第, all of which are attributed to Kūkai.

The symbol “△” indicates a procedure included in the traditional list of eighteen procedures traced to the *Jūhachi geiin*. The symbol “☆” indicates a section included in the “six practices” (*rokuhō* 六法).

Various ritual purifications precede the formal entrance to the hall.

☆ SECTION ONE: PROCEDURE FOR ADORNING THE PRACTITIONER 莊嚴行者法

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. 上堂 | Enter the Sanctuary |
| 2. 普禮 | Universal Prostration [to all Tathāgatas] |
| 3. 着座 | Sit Down |
| 4. 辨供 | Separate the Implements |
| 5. 普禮 | Universal Prostration (as above) |
| 6. 塗香 | Rub Powdered Incense (Powdered incense is rubbed on the hands and arms, and then across the chest, anointing the five-part dharma-body 五分法身.) |
| 7. 三密觀 | Contemplate the Three Mysteries (This contemplation uses the “ <i>um</i> ” syllable to purify body, speech, and mind.) |
| The following five procedures constitute the <i>goshin bō</i> 護身法, or bodily purification and protection. | |
| △ 8. 淨三業 | Purify the Three Karmic Actions (body, speech, mind) |
| △ 9. 佛部三昧耶 | Buddha Family Assembly |
| △ 10. 蓮華部三昧耶 | Lotus Family Assembly |
| △ 11. 金剛部三昧耶 | Vajra Family Assembly |

- △ 12. 被甲護身 Don Armor and Protect the Body

SECTION TWO: THE VOWS OF SAMANTABHADRA 普賢行願法

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 13. 加持香水 | Empower the Perfumed Water (ambrosia) |
| 14. 加持供物 | Empower the Implements |
| 15. 覽字觀 | Contemplate the Character “ <i>ran</i> ” |
| 16. 淨地 | Purify the Earth |
| 17. 觀佛 | Contemplate the Buddhas |
| 18. 金剛起 | Arouse the Vajra |
| 19. 普禮 | Universal Prostration |
| 20. 表白 | Declaration of Intent |
| 21. 神分祈願 | Sūtra Offerings to Divine Spirits |
| 22. 五悔 | Five Repentances (Samantabhadra’s vows) |
| 淨三業 | Purify the Three Karmic Actions (as above) |
| 普禮 | Universal Prostration (as above) |
| 23. 發菩提心 | Give rise to the Mind of Awakening (Bodhicitta) |
| 24. 三昧耶戒 | Three Samaya Precepts |
| 25. 發願 | Recite the Vows |
| 26. 五大願 | Five Great Vows (to save all beings, to cultivate all merits and wisdoms, to awaken to all the dharma-gates, to serve all tathāgatas, and to realize unexcelled awakening) |
| 27. 普供養 | Universal Offering |

☆ SECTION THREE: PROCEDURE FOR BINDING THE [SACRED] REALM
結界法

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 28. 大金剛輪 | Great Vajra Wheel |
| △ 29. 地結 | Bind the Earth (also called the Vajra Pillar) |
| △ 30. 四方結(金剛牆) | Bind the Perimeter, or the Vajra Wall |

☆ SECTION FOUR: PROCEDURE FOR ADORNING THE SANCTUARY
莊嚴道場法

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| △ 31. 道場觀 | Contemplate the Sanctuary |
| △ 32. 大虛空藏普通供養 | Universal Offerings of the Great Sky-Repository |
| 33. 小金剛輪 | Small Vajra Wheel |

☆ SECTION FIVE: PROCEDURE FOR INVITING [THE DEITIES INTO THE SANCTUARY] 勸請法

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| △ 34. 寶車輅 | Send Forth the Jeweled Vehicle |
| △ 35. 請車輅 | Invite the Deities to Ascend the Vehicle and Ride to the Sanctuary |
| △ 36. 召請 | Welcome the Deities |
| 37. 四明 | Four Syllable Mantra |
| 38. 拍掌 | Clap Hands (in welcome) |

☆ SECTION SIX: PROCEDURE FOR BINDING AND PROTECTING [THE SANCTUARY] 結護法

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| △ 39. 馬頭明王 | Invoke the Horse-headed Wisdom King |
| △ 40. 虛空網(金剛網) | Sky Net (or Vajra Net) |
| △ 41. 金剛炎 | Vajra Fire |
| 42. 大三昧耶 | Great Samaya [Assembly] |

☆ SECTION SEVEN: PROCEDURE FOR MAKING OFFERINGS 供養法

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| △ 43. 闍伽 | Offer Pure Water |
| △ 44. 蓮華座 | Offer Lotus Seats |
| 45. 振鈴 | Offer the [Five Pronged] Vajra and Bell |
| 46. 五供養 | Five Offerings (powdered incense, garland, burnt incense, food and drink, light) |
| 47. 四智讚 | Eulogy of the Four Wisdoms (accompanied by clapping) |
| 48. 本尊讚 | Eulogy to the Principal Deity |
| △ 49. 廣大不空摩尼供(普供養) | Offer the Great Wish-fulfilling Gem (or Universal Offerings) |
| 50. 禮佛 | Worship the Buddhas' [Names] |

SECTION EIGHT: PROCEDURE FOR INVOCATION 念誦法

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 51. 入我我入 | Interpenetration of Self [and Deity] |
| 52. 本尊加持(本尊三種印真言) | Empowerment of the Principal Deity |
| 53. 正念誦 | Formal Invocation |
| 54. 本尊加持 | Empowerment of the Principal Deity (as above, 52) |
| 55. 字輪觀 | Syllable Wheel Contemplation |
| 56. 本尊加持 | Empowerment of the Principal Deity (as above, 52) |
| 57. 散念誦 | Dispersed Invocations |

SECTION NINE: LATTER OFFERINGS 後供養

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 58. 五供養 | Five Offerings (as above, 46) |
| 59. 闍伽 | Offer Pure Water (as above, 43) |
| 60. 後鈴 | Latter Offering of Bell and Vajra (as above, 45) |
| 61. 讚 | Eulogy (as above, 47) |
| 62. 普供養三力 | Universal Offering with the Verses of the Three Strengths (as above, 27) |
| 63. 禮佛 | Worship the Buddhas' [Names] (as above, 50) |
| 64. 廻向 | Dedication of Merits |
| 65. 五悔至心回向 | Five Repentances and Vows of a Sincere Mind |
| 66. 解界 | Release the Realm, consisting of the following five segments, in the reverse of their order above: |
| 大三昧耶 | Great Samaya [Assembly] (as above, 42) |
| 火院 (金剛炎) | Vajra Fire (as above, 41) |
| 網界 (處空網) | Sky Net (as above, 40) |
| 馬頭明王 | Horse-headed Wisdom King (as above, 39) |
| 金剛牆 | Vajra Wall (as above, 30) |
| 67. 撥遣 | Send Off [the Principal Deity and His Assembly] |
| 68. 三部三昧耶 | Three-fold Samaya |
| 69. 被甲護身 | Don Armor and Protect the Body (as above, 12) |
| 70. 普禮 | Universal Prostration |
| 71. 出道場 | Leave the Sanctuary |

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