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Ritual of the Clear Light Mantra

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*On abogya beiroshanō makabotara mani handoma
jimbara harabaritaya un.*

—Clear Light Mantra in Japanese pronunciation

THE MANTRA OF THE CLEAR LIGHT (Kōmyō Shingon, 光明真言), “oṃ amogha vairocana mahā mudrā maṇi padma jvala pravarttaya hūṃ,”¹ has its origins in the tantric period of Indian Buddhism, and texts promoting its practice were introduced into China in the sixth to eighth centuries. For example, the mantra is found in the *Sutra of the Mantra of Divine Transformation of the Unfailing Rope Snare* (†Amoghapaśa vikriṇita mantra sūtra, T. 1092, trans. Bodhiruci²). A portion of that work that treats the Clear Light Mantra was translated as a separate text by Amoghavajra under the title *Sutra of the Mantra of Light of the Baptism of Vairocana of the Unfailing Rope Snare* (T. 1002).³ These works form part of what may be considered Pure Land Buddhism broadly defined, that is, although the chief deity of the texts is Mahāvairocana, birth in Amitābha’s Sukhāvātī is advocated.⁴ As has been suggested in another essay, this supports a view of medieval Indian Buddhism in which Pure Land and tantric forms were not clearly delineated as distinct sectarian entities.⁵

Although the work by Amoghavajra is recorded to have been brought from China to Japan by Kūkai, the mantra was not popularized in Japan until the late medieval period. Key to these efforts at popularization were such figures as Myōe Kōben (明慧高辯, 1173–1232)⁶ and Eizon (叡尊, also pronounced Eison, 1201–1290).⁷ It seems likely that efforts to popularize practice of the Clear Light Mantra were, like similar efforts related to visualization of the syllable A (*ajikan*, 阿字觀), intended to provide a simple practice comparable to, and perhaps

competitive with, the *nenbutsu* (念仏). Like the *nenbutsu*, both the Clear Light Mantra and visualization of the syllable A were presented as single practices sufficient in themselves of bringing the practitioner to awakening.

The importance of mantra such as this one for the Japanese esoteric tradition is evidenced by the way in which in some cases mantra became the focus of ritual practices. In this case, the Clear Light Mantra plays a central and repeated role in the ritual known as the Clear Light Mantra Ritual (*Kōmyō shingon bō*, 光明真言法). Several variations of this ritual exist, and the following translation is drawn from a contemporary collection of rituals, the *Thirty-Three Deities of the Chūin Lineage* (*Chūin sanjū san son*, 中院三十三尊).⁸ The author obtained a copy on Mt. Kōya, where the Chūin lineage is predominant, in 1982, during his studies there. At that time the collection was freely available in shops in the town. The place of esoteric practice in contemporary Japan has moved away from the “culture of secrecy,” and instead one finds works of esoteric Buddhism, including ritual manuals, freely available in bookshops. They are perhaps in a sense “self-secret” in that only those who are trained as priests would have any interest in them.

In addition to the version translated here, other versions of the *Kōmyō shingon bō* found in the following works were also consulted:

TANAKA Kaiō, *Kōmyō shingon shūsei* (Osaka: Tōhō Shuppan, 1978)

TOGANO Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū* (1940; reissue, Koyasan: Koyasan Daigaku Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, 1982)

UME Ō Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kōyasan Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1935)

TAKAI Kankai, *Mikkyō jisō taikai: toku ni Sanbōin Kenjingata o kichō to shite* (1969; reissue, Kyoto: Fujii sahei, 1987)

TANAKA Kaiō, *Himitsu jisō no kaisetsu* (1962; reissue, Tokyo: Rokuyaon, 1984)

Toganoo’s version has additional structural information about the organization of ritual actions. To facilitate further study, therefore, the numbers assigned to the different ritual acts or sets of actions by Toganoo are noted in braces { }—these numbers are not found in the manual itself, and there are some variations between the version found in Toganoo and the version translated here. In addition, the groupings of the ritual actions that he indicates are also included in braces.

RITUAL OF THE CLEAR LIGHT MANTRA (KŌMYŌ SHINGON BŌ)

Perform as per the *Jūhachi dō*.

{I. Enter the hall, proclaiming vows section}

- {1} Perform the ritual before the Buddha [in the practice hall] as usual.
- {2} Prostrate before the altar.
- {3} Seated prostrations.
- {4} Powdered incense.
- {5} Three Mysteries.
- {6} Purify the Three Karmas.
- {7} Don the Armor of the Three Classes.
- {8} Empower the Perfumed Water.
- {9} Empower the Offerings.
- {10} Visualize the syllable RAM.
- {11} Visualize the Buddhas.
- {12} *Vajra* Arising.
- {13} Universal Homage.
- {14} Declaration to the *Kami*. Supplication.
- {15} Five Repentances.
- {16} Aspirations. *Samaya* (Vows).

Evocation, use the [same evocation as in the] *Vajradhātu* [ritual].

Initial Vows:

- Sincerely pledging
- Solely calling on the chief deity
- Dainichi Nyorai
- The Thirteen Great Assemblies¹⁰
- The Three Classes of Various Deities¹¹
- Both Classes of Worldly Deities.¹²

- {17} Five Great Vows.
- {18} Universal Offering and Three Powers.

{II. Samaya, command section}

- {20} *Mahāvajracakra*.
- {21} Bind the Earth.
- {22} Bind the Four Directions.

Visualize the Seat of Awakening; Prostrations to the *Tathāgata*.¹³

Above the heart is the syllable AHḤ; this changes, becoming the Clear Light Heart Palace (*Kōmyō Shinden*) and there is in the center of that the syllable HRIḤ; this changes into a great Lotus Blossom King

(†*Mahāpadmarāja*) above which is the syllable A; this changes, becoming a moon *cakra*, above which is the syllable HRIḤ; this changes, becoming an eight-petalled lotus blossom, above which is the syllable AḤ—this syllable is of five colors—a flame of five colors shines forth from the syllable; this changes becoming a five-*cakra stūpa* (*gorintō*, 五輪塔); these are your own five *cakras*, each [*cakra*] emitting light, namely the five colors of the clear light *stūpa*; this changes, becoming Dainichi Nyorai [Mahāvairocana Tathāgata] as dwelling in the *dharmadhātu*, namely, wearing the jeweled crown of the five wisdoms, seated with his legs folded into the lotus position, having a body emitting the clear light of five colors, shining throughout the *dharmadhātu*, on all of the living beings above and below oneself, leaving no space that is not filled with this clear light, [revealing] countless multitudes of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sages surrounding one on all sides, providing comforts and benefits of the four wisdoms¹⁴ and four practices¹⁵ to anyone suffering alone.

Empower the seven places [on the body], as usual.

{III. Majestic hall of practice section}

{29} *Mahākāśagarbha*.

{30} Small Vajracakra.

{IV. Respectful request, protective enclosure section}

{31} Send the chariot.

{32} Call back the chariot.

{33} Requests, Great Snare.

{34} Four *Vidyas*.

{35} Clap hands

{36} Close the circle [ritual enclosure], Fudō Snare *mudrā*, Loving Compassion (mantra).

{37} Empty Space Net.

{38} Fire Palace.

{39} Great *Samaya*.

{V. Pūjā and praises section}

{40} Offering of perfumed water (*argha*, aka *misu*, 闍伽水).

{41} Flower Thrones.

{42} Ring the Bell.

{44} Initial offerings: symbolic offerings and material offerings.

{45} Praises: Four Wisdoms.

{46} Disperse the offerings. Three Powers.

- {47} Supplications.
 {48} Bowing to the Buddhas, all as in the Vajradhātu.

{VI. Nenju practice section}

- {49} Me entering, entering me.
 {50} Empower the chief deity.

A BI RA UN KEN.

Five colored lights *mudrā*: extend the five fingers of the right hand open before the face; left fist held at waist.

Kōmyō shingon:

ON ABOKYA BEIROSANO MAKABODARA MANI HANDOMA
 JINBARA HARABARITAYA UN

(*om amogha vairocana mahāmudrā maṇi padmi jvala pravartaya hūṃ*)

- {51} Calming the mind recitation.

Kōmyō shingon.

- {52} Empowerment of the Chief Deity, as usual.
 {53} Akṣaracakra. [Visualize] the five great.
 {54} Empowerment of the Chief Deity, as usual.
 {55} Buddha eye (*buddhalocana*): *mudrā* and *vidya*.
 {56} Expanding the mind recitations.

Buddha eye.

Dainichi.

Kōmyō shingon.

Amida.

Sonshō dhāraṇī.

Amoghapāśa.

Fudō.

Mahāvajracakra.

One-syllable.¹⁶

{VII. Latter offerings, upāya}

- {57} Latter offerings. Symbolic and material offerings.
 {58} Offering of perfumed water.
 {59} Latter bell.
 {60} Praises, as usual.
 {61} Disperse the offerings. Three powers.
 {62} Supplications. Bow to the buddhas.
 {63} Returning.

- {64} Sincere returning.
 {65} Open the boundaries.
 {66} Send [the deities] away.
 {67} Three classes. Don the armor. Prostrate to the buddhas.
 {68} Leave the hall.

NOTES

1. HATTA Yukio, *Shingon jiten* (Tokyo: Heika Shuppansha, 1985), #53, 13. Toganoo gives a variant in the form of “om̐ bhuh̐ kham̐ amogha vairocana mahā mudrā maṇi padma jvala pravartaya hūṃ.” TOGANOO Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū* (Koyasan: Koyasan Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1940).
2. According to the *Hōbōgirin* catalogue, this is Bodhiruci II. See Paul Demiéville, Hubert Durt, and Anna Seidel, eds., *Répertoire du Canon Bouddhique Sino-Japonais* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, and Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1978), “Table des Auteurs et Traducteurs,” s.v. “Bodairushi,” 237.
3. Mark Unno, *Shingon Refractions: Myōe and the Mantra of Light* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 26. Unno gives additional textual information regarding the sources for the Clear Light Mantra. On Amoghavajra, see Martin Lehnert, “Amoghavajra,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles Orzech, Henrik Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne, *Handbook of Oriental Studies/Handbuch der Orientalistik*, section 4 China, vol. 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 351–359. According to Charles Orzech, although the attribution of T. 1002 to Amoghavajra is widely accepted, it is subject to debate. In particular, the title does not show up in Amoghavajra’s own “catalogue.” The title is, however, recorded in Tang period catalogues. The first appearance of the title and ascription to Amoghavajra is, it seems, in Yuanzhao’s *Da Tang zhenyuan xu kaiyuan shijiao lu* 大唐貞元續開元釋教錄 (T. 2156) of 794. The date of this reference to the text and ascription is very close to Amoghavajra’s own dates of 705–774. At the very least then, that record would appear to rule out any likelihood that the text is a Japanese pseudepigraphon (personal communication, 27 August 2011).
4. Cf. Gregory Schopen, “Sukhāvātī as a Generalized Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Literature,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 19 (1977): 170–210.
5. Richard K. Payne, “Aparimitāyus: ‘Tantra’ and ‘Pure Land’ in Medieval Indian Buddhism,” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3rd ser., 9 (Fall 2007): 273–308.
6. See Unno, *Shingon Refractions*, for a comprehensive study of Myōe’s works on the Clear Light Mantra.
7. See James L. Ford, “Exploring the Esoteric in Nara Buddhism,” in Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne, eds., *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 790–

791.

8. KŌYASAN Daigaku, ed., NAKAGAWA Yoshinori, ed. in chief, *Chūin sanjūsan son*, 5 vols. (Kōyasan: Wada Yugen, 1979/Showa 54), vol. 4 (unpaginated).

9. See Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2006), the last three chaps. in particular.

10. Groups of deities found in the thirteen sections of the Vajradhātu Mandala.

11. Buddha, Padma, and Vajra classes.

12. The two classes of Vedic deities.

13. Not numbered by Toganoo.

14. *Shichi* 四智, *catvāri jñānāni*; the four transformed consciousnesses that arise when the eight consciousnesses of the Yogācāra tradition are purified.

15. *Shigyō* 四行, the four practices.

16. See YŌEN Ariga, *Darani daijiten* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankokai, 1998), 797.