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***Nenbutsu* Mandala Visualization in Dōhan’s *Himitsu nenbutsu shō*: An Investigation into Medieval Japanese Vajrayāna Pure Land**

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Vajrayāna and Pure Land practices and traditions are often studied as if they are necessarily exclusive and autonomous spheres of Buddhist activity.¹ Arguing against this still common point of view, I will examine a *nenbutsu* mandala visualization ritual presented in the *Compendium on the Secret Nenbutsu* (*Himitsu nenbutsu shō*, 秘密念仏抄),² an important early twelfth century Pure Land text by the Mt. Kōya monk Dōhan (道範, 1179–1252).³ Dōhan was not the first, nor the last, Buddhist thinker to employ “Vajrayāna Pure Land” ritual technologies, cosmology, or soteriological goals in his ritual program. For Buddhist monks in medieval Japan, “tantric” or Vajrayāna⁴ ritual theory served as the dominant paradigm for negotiating Buddhist conceptions of ritual power, while Pure Land rebirth, an assumed component of Mahāyāna cosmology and soteriology, was a nearly universal aspiration and concern.⁵ In other words, these “two” served a variety of often overlapping functions in a complex intellectual, religious, social, and political environment that the study of Japanese religions based on a sectarian taxonomy has largely ignored. As will be demonstrated below, the example of Dōhan provides a new perspective on how medieval Japanese Buddhists conceived of the relationships between ritual, power, and salvation.

While Dōhan is primarily known as an influential scholar of the works of Kūkai (空海, 774–835), the early Heian period (794–1185) monk who is regarded as the founder of the Japanese Vajrayāna tradition, he was also an important early-Kamakura Pure Land thinker.⁶ The study of Kūkai and Vajrayāna in Japan has largely been conducted through the lens of contemporary Shingon sectarian orthodoxy, and the study of Pure Land thought has been significantly influenced in

particular contemporary Jōdo Shinshū historiography. When taken at face value, orthodox sectarian history might suggest that mantra- and mandala-based practices in some sense “belong” to Shingon (and to a lesser extent, Tendai⁷), and the chanting of the *nenbutsu* and aspiration for rebirth in a Buddha’s Pure Land belong to the Pure Land schools. This type of sectarian consciousness is a rather recent development in the history of East Asian Buddhism, and pre-modern monks would not have recognized such clearly defined demarcations.⁸ In other words, that Dōhan wrote about Pure Land and Kūkai’s thought seems surprising only to the contemporary observer who has been influenced by the taxonomic approach to Japanese religion. This still common approach tends to over-determine the boundaries between groups and define “schools” by their founders and doctrines.⁹ The main problem with this approach, which may at first appear to provide a useful hermeneutic for the study of Japanese religion, is the application of anachronistic and/or polemical criteria uncritically derived from the source material.¹⁰ Moreover, perspectives and concerns that do not fit into narrowly defined idealized contemporary orthodoxy and praxis (such as Vajrayāna ritual conducted for rebirth in a Buddha’s Pure Land) have been ignored. Therefore, in order to understand Dōhan’s contribution to Japanese Pure Land thought, we must first look beyond sectarian assumptions about the development of Japanese Buddhism.

KŪKAI AND THE EARLY SYSTEMATIZATION OF JAPANESE VAJRAYĀNA

Before turning to Dōhan’s *nenbutsu* mandala visualization, I will first briefly outline the early development of Vajrayāna ritual thought in Japan. I would like to suggest that in order to understand the “Vajrayāna Pure Land” thought of an early-medieval thinker like Dōhan, we must first understand how Pure Land thought fit into the writings of Kūkai and other early Japanese Vajrayāna thinkers. Recently, scholars have come to regard Kūkai’s ninth century transmission of Vajrayāna ritual culture not as the founding of a new “Mantra school” (the common translation of the term Shingon-shū, 真言宗) but rather as the presentation of a new vision of the meaning of ritual and the nature of speech acts as efficacious ritual technologies.¹¹ Kūkai established a new ritual program that centered upon initiation into the dual-mandala system of the Vajra World Mandala (*kongōkai mandara*, 金剛界曼荼羅) and the Womb World Mandala (*taizōkai mandara*, 胎藏界曼荼羅), symbolizing

the union of male and female, dynamic and static, dimensions of the universe, respectively, as well as a theory of ritual efficacy that centered upon the importance of mantras, or “true words” (the literal meaning of the characters used to translate the term “mantra” into the Sino-sphere: *zhenyan*, *shingon*, 真言), as tools for actualizing the inherent power of the buddhas. Kūkai taught the ritual activation of the “three mysteries” wherein the body, speech, and mind of an ordinary being was revealed to abide in a non-dual relationship with the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha,¹² and that through secret initiations the practitioner of mantras was able to gain access to the power of the universe itself, the *dharmakāya*, embodied in the form of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana. Kūkai based his ritual theory on the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* (*Dainichi kyō*, 大日經, T. 848) in which it is argued that the true state of the mind is the *bodhi*-mind (*bodhicitta*), and the cause of enlightenment is naturally arising from the universe itself.

Kūkai's rapid rise to prominence may in part be attributed to the perception at the time that he was presenting to his Japanese audience the latest innovations in Indian and Tang dynasty ritual culture. After all, Kūkai studied under Indian and Chinese masters in Chang'an (長安), the Tang capital and center of the East Asian political and cultural world. As a result of his rise through the monastic hierarchy, Kūkai was able to work with the Nara clergy to establish lineages and ordination platforms at various major monastic centers.¹³ Therefore, after Kūkai, Japanese Vajrayāna was less of a “school” or “sect,” and more a common ritual technology, mastery of which was essential for the acquisition of patronage and prestige.

Upon his return to Japan, Kūkai presented a large body of previously unknown ritual texts to the court. One of these ritual texts was the *Muryōju nyōrai kangyō kūyō giki* (無量寿如来觀行供養儀軌, T. 930), a text composed by Amoghavajra (705–774). The *Muryōju nyōrai kangyō kūyō giki* presents a *sāadhanā*-style visualization practice centered upon the Buddha Amitābha said to lead to, among other things, Pure Land rebirth. Today, this text remains an important cornerstone of Shingon and Tendai practice. This text draws extensively upon the *Contemplation Sūtra* (*Kanmuryōju kyō*, 觀無量寿經), a text regarded as one of the three “Pure Land sūtras” by Hōnen (1133–1212).¹⁴ For this reason, it is often thought to have been compiled in China.¹⁵ Pure Land contemplation and visualization practices have a long history across the Mahāyāna world, and are well attested in Tibetan, Central Asian, Chinese, and Japanese

sources. It could be argued that the *Contemplation Sūtra* is itself representative of early forms of Buddhist practice that would later lead to the more systematic *sādhana* style visualization practices.¹⁶ It would be a mistake to regard this as an example of syncretism. Rather, it might be more accurate to suggest that Amoghavajra was merely presenting Indian Amitābha contemplative practice in the vocabulary of a text that had already proven quite successful in China.

Here I will briefly outline Kūkai's own summary notes on this ritual before moving on to Dōhan's "*nenbutsu mandala*" visualization ritual.¹⁷ As with other Vajrayāna rituals, the written component is merely one piece of the puzzle, and would have been supplemented by an oral commentary handed down from one's teacher. For now, however, this brief summary of Kūkai's written words will have to suffice.

First, the practitioner performs a series of preliminary purifications and invocations. Next, the practitioner envisions the Pure Land Sukhāvātī. As a great lapis lazuli ocean stretches out beyond the horizon, the Sanskrit seed-syllable *hrīḥ* emerges from this ocean, emitting a great crimson light, universally illuminating the Pure Lands of the ten directions. After describing a series of other ritual invocations and visualizations involving Avalokiteśvara and a host of bodhisattvas, the adept then contemplates the luminous crimson body of Amitābha.

Amitābha's chest possesses a moon disc with a Siddham script mantra inscribed on it, pronounced in Japanese as "On Amiri tateje kara un" (Skt. *oṃ amṛta teje hara hūṃ*). This mantra is written in the form of a mandala, with "oṃ" written in the center, and the other letters wrapping around the perimeter. The adept then imagines that his or her own chest also possesses such a moon disc with the same mantra written on it. Next, Amitābha begins chanting the mantra and shoots the moon disc from his mouth into the top of the meditator's head. This is followed by the meditator performing a similar projection wherein the moon disc on their chest shoots into the feet of Amitābha. It should be noted that it is Amitābha who initiates this "union," and it is the practitioner who responds. The mantra is the conduit for realizing the non-dual relationship between Buddha and practitioner. The practitioner is to realize emptiness and equanimity of all *dharmas* and that the mind is originally non-arising, its self-nature is emptiness, and it is as pure as the moon disc atop which the syllable *hrīḥ* sits. The adept is then to envision Sukhāvātī as described in the *Contemplation Sūtra*, understanding that the light of Amitābha universally illumines

the buddha fields of the ten directions. This practice is said to purify ones' past deeds, karmic afflictions, suffering, and sickness, and at the end of one's life they will certainly attain rebirth in the highest level of the Pure Land of Bliss.

Kūkai transmitted this ritual to Japan as part of the broader system of Vajrayāna “*mudrā*-mantra-mandala” based practices. We can see from this example that aspiration for Sukhāvātī was present “always-already” within Indian and Chinese Vajrayāna before it was transmitted to Japan. In addition, we can also see that within Vajrayāna there is not a clear division between “self-power” (*jiriki*) and “other-power” (*tariki*). Rather, through the ritual act, the practitioner is able to realize that they are not separate from the buddhas. Pure Land sectarian writing has often over-emphasized the “self-power” nature of Vajrayāna traditions, as well as the division between Pure Land and Vajrayāna traditions in the Japanese environment. How then could something called “Pure Land” and something called “Vajrayāna” be “syncretized” when they were not separate from the beginning? Vajrayāna systems evolved in a Mahāyāna Buddhist world in which Sukhāvātī functioned as a “generalized goal.”¹⁸ As Vajrayāna ritual systems proliferated throughout Asia, newly transmitted and older Pure Land traditions often blended. As Kūkai “systematized” his Vajrayāna traditions in Japan, there was no need to add in Pure Land “elements.” They were already present within the Buddhist environment of Japan, and present within the ritual texts he was transmitting. The *Muryōju nyōrai kangyō kūyō giki* is but one example.¹⁹

DŌHAN'S NENBUTSU IN MEDIEVAL JAPANESE VAJRAYĀNA

Between the time of Kūkai in the ninth century, and Dōhan in the twelfth century, Japanese Buddhism experienced a period of systemic *mikkyōka* (密教化) or “esotericization,”²⁰ wherein Vajrayāna ritual and doctrinal lineages had proliferated across the various monastic institutions, and a pervasive Vajrayāna Buddhist “*kenmitsu*” (顕密) discourse on the mutually dependent nature of the “revealed” (*ken*) and “hidden” (*mitsu*) teachings came to dominate Buddhist thought. It should be noted that in fact, the great architects of this *mikkyōka* development were often associated with the great temples of Nara and the monastic complexes based on Mt. Hiei. By the Kamakura period, all major monastic institutions trained monks in a variety of ritual and doctrinal traditions, and the retention of Vajrayāna specialists was essential

to the procurement of patronage. Moreover, monks tended to move from place to place and study with different teachers with expertise in a variety of areas of study. Like modern universities, a student could “major” or “double major” (*kengaku*, 兼学, literally “simultaneous study”) in a wide range of fields. In other words, both specialization and breadth in knowledge was important. Vajrayāna practices were more or less systematically integrated into each area of study such that monks specializing in Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, *Avatamsaka-sūtra* studies, *Lotus Sūtra* studies, etc., could also gain mastery of the “Diamond Vehicle.” This eclecticism is present in Dōhan’s work, to which we will now turn.

Dōhan’s *Compendium on the Secret Nenbutsu* provides a number of passages on *nenbutsu* practice drawn from a variety of sources, including great Chinese Buddhist masters like Zhiyi, Zhanran, Shandao, and Amoghavajra, as well as Japanese monks like Kūkai, Ennin, Enchin, Annen, Jippan, Kakukai, and Kakuban. At times Dōhan draws upon, incorporates, critiques, or builds upon the theories of these various thinkers, arguing for what he felt was the correct understanding of the *nenbutsu*, the Pure Land, and the nature of the Buddha Amitābha.

For example, Dōhan presents the *Amida santaisetsu* (阿弥陀三諦説), or the “three truths of A-MI-TA,” an exegetical strategy developed by Japanese Tendai thinkers whereby a series of Buddhist philosophical concepts are subsumed within the three syllables of the name of Amitābha, written with the Siddhaṃ characters A, MI, and TA.²¹ Therein, the very syllables composing the name of Amitābha are revealed to contain within them the entirety of Buddhist wisdom. For example, A-MI-TA is used first to present the theory of the “three truths” of the interdependence of emptiness, provisional truth, and the synthesis of both, the “middle.” The three truths were developed by Zhiyi as a way of conceiving of the non-duality of Nagārjuna’s two-truths Madhyamaka doctrine. The *Amida santaisetsu* posits that “A” may be understood as revealing the “ultimate truth” of emptiness, “MI” the “provisional truth,” and the “TA” the “middle” or the simultaneous realization of the truth of both provisional and ultimate reality. Next, A-MI-TA reveals the three bodies of the Buddha: *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*. These three spheres of the Buddha’s activity are represented by the three buddhas Mahāvairocana, Amitābha, and Śākyamuni. Finally, A-MI-TA is revealed to encompass the “three mysteries” of body, speech, and mind, thus signifying not only that the

body, speech, and mind of beings and buddhas are non-dual, but also, by placing speech in the middle, speech is seen to unify the spheres of body and mind. Dōhan's rendering draws extensively upon the Kōfukuji Yogācāra scholar Jippan.²² Dōhan and other monks who have employed the *santaisetsu* system arrange the corresponding concepts in various configurations in order to explicate a great variety of Buddhist teachings. This *kanjin* (觀心) style of exegesis grew in importance in the secret oral transmissions (*kuden*, 口伝) of ritual lineages across the medieval Japanese Buddhist world.²³ For Dōhan, the three truths, the three buddhas, and the three mysteries abide in a delicate tension. The three truths are unified by the "middle." This represents the idea that ultimate truth and provisional reality are inseparable, just as nirvana and *saṃsāra* are inseparable. The three buddhas are ultimately all manifestations of the *dharmakāya*, but as taught in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna texts, the *dharmakāya* compassionately takes multiple forms to meet the needs of sentient beings. Amitābha is in the middle position, here representing the simultaneous unity and independence of Mahāvairocana and Śākyamuni. The three mysteries of body, speech, and mind, as propounded by the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, are themselves the body, speech, and mind of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana. Sentient beings and buddhas are fundamentally non-dual; the three sources of our karma are revealed in fact to be the activity of the Buddha. Here "speech" takes the middle position, representing the unity of body and mind. How does this relate to the *nenbutsu*? Amitābha is the Buddha of the ritual speech act, thus revealing the interdependence of nirvana and *saṃsāra*. The *nenbutsu*, then, is in fact the highest truth, and deepest mystery. Dōhan presents the *nenbutsu* as the highest of the mantra technologies, stating that it was selected by Amitābha in his primal vow precisely because the voice represents the unity of the mysteries of body, speech, and mind. The unity of nirvana and *saṃsāra*, the three bodies of the Buddha, and the three mysteries are unified in this three-syllable *nenbutsu*: A-MI-TA.

Dōhan continues in this mode of exegesis through an analysis of the physiology of the ritual speech act. Dōhan elaborates upon the correspondences outlined above, perhaps driving the point home, by arguing that the letters A-MI-TA correspond to (and in some fundamental sense *are*) the throat, lips, and tongues of sentient beings. The breath that activates these three components to create speech is said to literally be the activity of the Buddha Amitābha in the world. Here

Amitābha is said to be the compassionate activity of the *dharmakāya* which abides in and enlivens not only the *nenbutsu*, but the very breath that sustains life. Amitābha is then the breath of life, the very life-force animating sentient beings.²⁴ A certain unity is suggested between the *nenbutsu*, the Buddha Amitābha, and the Pure Land. The Pure Land is realized at once as the site of the act of chanting, the letters of the *nenbutsu*, the organs of speech, and the activity of the Buddha. In this way, the goal and the destination are at once the same, while still remaining in a delicate tension.

Original Enlightenment thought (*hongaku shisō*, 本覚思想) on Mt. Hiei was key in the development of the *Amida santaisetsu* practice. Just as Vajrayāna ritual theory had come to permeate Japanese Buddhist practice from the time of Kūkai, Mt. Hiei's rise to prominence in the mid-Heian period established the Tendai tradition as the dominant political and intellectual force in the Japanese Buddhist world. Rather than view Dōhan's use of the *santaisetsu* as "syncretism" of Tendai and Shingon, it would be more correct to say that the medieval Japanese Buddhist educational environment necessitated the mastery of multiple areas of study. Tendai Lotus and Madhyamaka scholarship, Shingon mantra practice, Pure Land aspiration and contemplation, and other exegetical and ritual traditions constituted threads in a vast tapestry spanning all traditions and lineages. "Shingon" and "Tendai" were points on a broad continuum, and monks were stationed at various points along that continuum.

Following Dōhan's presentation of the three-syllable *nenbutsu*, he then presents a five- (or six-) syllable version NAMU-A-MI-TA-BUḤ, which is also written in the Siddham script throughout this section of the text.²⁵ These five syllables are arranged in the form of a mandala, mirroring in some sense the mantra inscribed on the moon disc from the *sādhanā* discussed above. Each syllable is presented in turn, from the center, to the bottom, and progressing in a counter-clockwise rotation, each time revealing a deeper interpretive layer.

Dōhan explains that "*namu*" is understood as a salutation to all buddhas. It is here said to be synonymous with the letter *om*, as found in various mantras, and often taking the central position in written mandalas. It is also said to symbolize the phrase that opens sūtras, "thus have I heard." Dōhan explains that "*namu*" is the act of taking refuge in the buddhas, and through contemplating the center of this mandala, one is contemplating the very act of taking refuge. Next, the syllable

A is said to signify *bodhi*, or perfect awakening. The syllable A by itself is an important object of devotion within the later Shingon tradition as it symbolizes the “originally unborn” (*honbushō*, 本不生) nature of reality.²⁶ MI is the nature of self, and ultimately the dissolution of self and the arousal of equanimity. TA is thusness, the realization of things as they truly are. BUḤ symbolizes our karma, which, when viewed correctly, is not simply that which binds us to *saṃsāra*, but rather, is in fact a vehicle to awakening.

These five syllables also may be understood to represent the five buddhas (Mahāvairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi), as well as the five forms of wisdom associated with each buddha (see table 2). The five buddhas and the five wisdoms are both understood to emanate from the One Buddha, Mahāvairocana and his all-pervasive wisdom. Dōhan continues to list sets of five, thus revealing that the five syllables of the *nenbutsu* in fact encompass the whole of our spiritual and physical reality: the five elements, five viscera, the five sense faculties, five objects of the senses, five defilements, and the five realms of *saṃsāra*. As is somewhat characteristic of Vajrayāna theory, doctrinal concepts deal not merely with the abstract and ethereal, but are often tied directly to the physical body itself and the constituent particles of reality itself. In this way, for Dōhan, the *nenbutsu* of Amitābha is not merely a mental formation, nor merely an external reality, but rather, a facet of reality itself, manifesting within, around, and through sentient being's very bodies.

CONCLUSION: THE “SECRET” NENBUTSU

In summary, Dōhan suggests that the three-syllable mantra encompasses the Womb Realm Mandala, and the five-character mantra encompasses the Vajra Realm Mandala. Furthermore, the thirteen courts of the Womb Realm Mandala correspond to the thirteen-step contemplation in the *Contemplation Sūtra*. The nine assemblies of the Vajra Realm correspond to the nine levels of the Pure Land as expounded in the *Contemplation Sūtra*. Like the ritual outlined by Kūkai, the *Contemplation Sūtra* is featured prominently in Dōhan's *Compendium on the Secret Nenbutsu*. Just as Kūkai argued for the non-dual relationship between the two mandalas, understood to be two facets of the same reality, so too Dōhan argues for the mutual dependence of the three-syllable and five-syllable *nenbutsu*. The act of speech unifies body and mind, and through the *nenbutsu*, the mandalas are unified

Table 1. Three-syllable *nenbutsu* visualization.

Three-syllable <i>nenbutsu</i>	Three truths	Three bodies of Buddha	Three buddhas	Three mysteries	Three organs of speech
The character A	Emptiness 空	Dharmakāya 法身	Mahāvairocana 大日如来	Body 身	Throat 喉
The character MI	Middle 中	Saṃbhogakāya 報身	Amitābha 阿弥陀如来	Speech 口	Lips 唇
The character TA	Provisional 仮	Nirmāṇakāya 応身	Śākyamuni 釈迦如来	Mind 心	Tongue 舌

Table 2. Five-syllable *nenbutsu* mandala visualization.

Cardinal directions	<i>Nenbutsu</i>	Five buddhas	Five wisdoms	Elements ²⁷	Five viscera	Five faculties	Five sense objects	Five defilements	Five realms
Center 中	NAMU 南無	Mahāvairocana 大日	<i>dharmadhātu- prakṛti-jñāna</i> 法界体性智	Earth 地/土(空)	Liver 脾	Body 身	Touch 觸	Hatred 瞋	Hell 地獄
East 東	A 阿	Akṣobhya 阿閼	<i>ādarśa-jñāna</i> 大円鏡智	Wood 木(空)(風)	Spleen 肝	Eye 眼	Form 色	Craving 貪	<i>Preta</i> 餓鬼
South 南	MI 彌	Ratnasambhava 宝生	<i>samatā-jñāna</i> 平等性智	Fire 火	Heart 心	Tongue 舌	Taste 味	Delusion 痴	Animal 畜生
West 西	TA 陀	Amitābha 弥陀	<i>pratyavekṣaṇā- jñāna</i> 妙觀 察智	Metal 金(風)(水)	Lungs 肺	Nose 鼻	Scent 香	Doubt 疑	Human 人
North 北	BUTSU 佛	Amoghasiddhi 不空	<i>krtyānuṣhāna- jñāna</i> 成所作智	Water 水(地)	Kidneys 腎	Ear 耳	Voice 声	Pride 慢	<i>Deva</i> 天

in the practitioner. For Dōhan, Amitābha is this very act of speech, the breath that animates the life of all beings. The Buddha Amitābha is an all pervasive dimension of the *dharmakāya*, which penetrates to every corner of the universe.

Dōhan contends that those who rely upon the explicit meaning of the sūtras do not fully grasp the inner meaning of the name of Amitābha. Mind and body are one, the Buddha and ordinary beings are one, and yet the seemingly “provisional” teaching is itself a manifestation of the highest realization. If our breath is the functioning of Amitābha, then practice in the form of the *nenbutsu* is the activity of Amitābha as well. The *nenbutsu* is an efficacious ritual because of the compassionate activity of Amitābha, a force that courses through the universe, and within all beings. Dōhan certainly states that there are multiple levels of comprehension. There are those who simply seek rebirth in a Pure Land through their own activity. There are those who recognize Amitābha and Mahāvairocana as one, but there are those who recognize this deeper truth, that Amitābha is a force within and around us. While on the level of provisional reality, the Pure Land is far away. On a deeper level, it is immanent in our present reality. This “ultimate” reality does not negate the provisional reality.²⁸ Just as the *santaisetsu* suggests, they exist in a delicate tension. That pure lands exist “out there” does not mean that they do not also abide “within.” It is perhaps this tension that points towards an even deeper truth, that even the “surface” level interpretation itself is a conduit for awakening.

The question that remains for me, however, is whether or not Dōhan regarded this insight into the true nature of reality as a requirement for the *nenbutsu* to be rendered efficacious. Is the *nenbutsu* an efficacious practice because of something always-already present, or is the *nenbutsu* rendered efficacious through the attainment of a realization of its inner meaning? Dōhan’s ambiguity on this issue is precisely what makes him a fascinating subject. In one passage, for example, Dōhan suggests that there are superficial and profound levels of understanding Amitābha, the Pure Land, and the *nenbutsu*. In some passages he argues that there is no sense in seeking the Pure Land that is far away. And yet, there are numerous passages that seem to point to a resolution, and perhaps an inversion, whereby the “shallow” is revealed to be the “deep” understanding. At present, my own preliminary reading of Dōhan would suggest that it was precisely the “beginners mind,” the so-called shallow interpretation, that he regarded as

the highest realization. This is a “free” reading perhaps, but it seems to be more in line with Dōhan’s position that the compassionate activity of Amitābha functions as if it were a force of nature, forever embracing sentient beings.

ENDNOTES

1. English and Japanese language scholarship has often employed the rhetoric of “influence” or “syncretism” when dealing with Vajrayāna Pure Land thought. See for example, KUSHIDA Ryōkō 櫛田良洪, *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* 真言密教成立過程の研究 (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin 山喜房佛書林, 1965), 181–231. For a more recent example of English language scholarship on Japanese Vajrayāna Pure Land, see James H. Sanford, “Breath of Life: The Esoteric *Nenbutsu*,” in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 161–189; and James H. Sanford, “Amida’s Secret Life: Kakuban’s *Amida hishaku*,” in *Approaching the Land of Bliss*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 120–138. While the views expressed in this essay may differ significantly from both Kushida and Sanford’s presentations, I am deeply indebted to their work on Dōhan and the *himitsu nenbutsu* (秘密念仏). For a critique of the idea of “influence” and “syncretism,” see Richard K. Payne, “Introduction,” in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 31. For another critique of the supposed gulf between Vajrayāna and Pure Land Buddhism, see Richard K. Payne, “Aparimitāyus: ‘Tantra’ and ‘Pure Land’ in Medieval Indian Buddhism?” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 9 (2007): 237–308.

2. *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* 秘密念仏抄, *Dai Nippon Bukkyō zenshō* 大日本仏教全書 70:51–82, *Zoku jōdoshū zensho* 続浄土宗全書 15:79–110, *Shingonshū anjin zensho* 真言宗安心全書 2:225–266, *Himitsu nenbutsu shō kenkyūkai* 秘密念仏抄研究会. “Dōhan cho ‘Himitsu nenbutsu shō’ no kenkyū—honbun kōtei to kaki kudashi gochū 道範著 ‘秘密念仏抄’ の研究—本文校訂と書き下し・語註,” *Buzan gaku* 豊山学報 39 (1996): 105–130.

3. In recent years, some English language scholarship has emerged that focuses in particular on Pure Land thought and aspiration in Tibetan Vajrayāna. See, for example, Georgios T. Halkias, *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2013); Matthew T. Kapstein, “Pure Land Buddhism in Tibet? From Sukhāvātī to the Field of Great Bliss,” in *Approaching the Land of Bliss*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 16–51; Todd T. Lewis, “From Generalized Goal to Tantric Subordination, Sukhāvātī in the Indic Buddhist Traditions of Nepal,” in *Approaching the Land of Bliss*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 236–263. However, little work has been done on the importance of Pure Land

for Vajrayāna (esoteric Buddhism) traditions of East Asia. A few notable examples include Charles D. Orzech, “A Tang Esoteric Manual for Rebirth in the Pure Land: Rites for Contemplation and Offerings to Amitāyus Tathāgata,” in *Path of No Path: Contemporary Studies in Pure Land Buddhism Honoring Roger Corless*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2009), 31–55; Jacqueline I. Stone, “The Secret Art of Dying, Esoteric Deathbed Practices in Heian Japan,” in *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, ed. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), 134–174; and Hendrick van der Veere, *A Study into the Thought of Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban: With a Translation of His Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2000).

4. While it is common practice to use of the terms *mikkyō* (密教) or “esoteric Buddhism” when referring specifically to Japanese and East Asian Buddhism, and tantra and Vajrayāna when referring to Tibetan or Indian Buddhism, I have instead chosen to retain the term Vajrayāna for three reasons. First, I hope to signal to readers that there is indeed great potential for trans-regional comparative inquiry into the various Buddhist traditions in East Asia and the Himalayas, as both have drawn deeply upon the tantric textual corpus. Second, while the term Vajrayāna is often assumed to be more pertinent to Tibetan Buddhist cultures, the term appears throughout ritual texts in the Sino-sphere as *jingang cheng* (金剛乘) in Chinese and *kongō jō* in Japanese. And third, I would like to suggest that Vajrayāna may be a useful alternative to the commonly used terms “tantra,” which has drawn heavy critique in recent years, and “esoteric,” which seems to imply a limited sphere of influence or importance. Though I have taken a different approach, other scholars have made compelling arguments for other strategies for conceiving of the reception of the tantras in East Asia. See Charles D. Orzech, “Seeing Chen-Yen Buddhism: Traditional Scholarship and the Vajrayāna in China,” *History of Religions* 29 (1989): 87–114; Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 263–278; Richard D. McBride, II, “Is There Really ‘Esoteric’ Buddhism?,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 329–356; Charles D. Orzech, “The ‘Great Teaching of Yoga,’ the Chinese Appropriation of the Tantras, and the Question of Esoteric Buddhism,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 34 (2006): 29–78; and Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, Richard K. Payne, eds., *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

5. ABÉ Ryūichi 阿部竜一, “Gorinkujimyō himitusyaku 五輪九字明秘密釈,” in *Nihon no Bukkyō: tēma Nihon Bukkyō no bunken gaido 日本の仏教: テーマ 日本仏教の文献ガイド*, ed. Nihon Bukkyō kenkyūkai 日本仏教研究会 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan 法蔵館, 2001), 80–83; ABÉ Ryūichi, “Mikkyō girei to kenmitsu bukkyō: Myōe Kōben no nyūmetsu girei wo megutte 密教儀礼と顕密仏教: 明恵房高弁の入滅儀礼をめぐって,” in *Chūsei Bukkyō no tenkai to sono kiban 中世仏教の展開とその基盤*, ed. Imai Masaharu 今井雅晴 (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan 大蔵

出版, 2002), 38–57.

6. Dōhan's Pure Land writings have been recently examined by NAKAMURA Honnen 中村本然 of Mt. Kōya University and SATŌ Mona 佐藤もな of Tokyo University. See in particular, NAKAMURA Honnen 中村本然, "Dōhan no Jōdo kan 道範の浄土観," *Kōyasan daigaku ronsō* 高野山大学論叢 29 (1994): 149–202; SATŌ Mona 佐藤もな, "Chūsei Shingonshū ni okeru jōdo shisō kaishaku: Dōhan *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* o megutte 中世真言宗における浄土思想解釈—道範『秘密念仏抄』をめぐる," *Indo tetsugaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* インド哲学仏教学研究 9 (2002): 80–92.

7. Shingon has often overshadowed Tendai in contemporary Japanese Vajrayāna scholarship; however, it was indeed the Tendai traditions of Mt. Hiei that truly established Vajrayāna as the dominating force it would become. For more on this historiographic bias, see Stanley Weinstein, "The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: The Neglected Tendai Tradition," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (1974): 177–191.

8. Carl Bielefeldt, "Filling the Zen shū, Notes on the Jisshū Yōdō Ki," in *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*, ed. Bernard Faure (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 181, 199.

9. In fact, many important Heian Period (794–1185) systematizers of Vajrayāna thought in Nara, Kyoto, and Mt. Kōya were keenly interested in Pure Land thought. In addition to such monks as Mukū (無空, ?–916), Ningai (仁海, 951–1046), Saisen (濟暹, 1025–1115), Kakuban (覚鑿, 1095–1143), Jippan (実範, d. 1144), Jōhen (静遍, 1166–1224), and Myōhen (明遍, 1142–1224), who are more or less well known for their Vajrayāna Pure Land leanings, there were also many famous Mt. Hiei scholars who pursued similar "simultaneous study" (*kengaku*, 兼学), such as Ennin (円仁, 794–864), Enchin (円珍, 814–891), Annen (安然, 841–915?), Ryōgen (良源, 912–985), and Genshin (源信, 942–1017).

10. In the study of Vajrayāna one anachronistic hermeneutics has perhaps been the most prominent: the supposition that Vajrayāna ritual theory may be divided into "pure Vajrayāna" (*junmitsu*, 純密) and "miscellaneous Vajrayāna" (*zōmitsu*, 雜密). This is a polemical/prescriptive term that privileges particular sectarian readings of history over the complex relationships between the various *dhāraṇī*, mantra, and tantric genres of texts. Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 153; cited in Payne, "Introduction," 18n68. The same argument could be made for Vajrayāna and its supposed opposite, *kengyō* (顕教), or "exoteric or revealed teachings." The supposed line between *ken* and *mitsu* arose with the proposition that there existed a Vajrayāna or secret teaching. I would suggest that *kengyo* is not a kind of Buddhism distinct from *mikkyō*, but rather, the *ken/mitsu* distinction served the same polemical function of the early Mahāyāna usage of the term Hinayāna. On the issue of

the problematic and often anachronistic use of the term “sect” (*shū*, 宗) in Japanese Buddhist history, see Abe, *Weaving*, 203–204 and 411–412.

11. Abé, *Weaving*, 4–7.

12. *Ibid.*, 109.

13. *Ibid.*, 55–65.

14. As Sharf has noted, Hōnen’s *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* (選択本願念仏集, T. 2608) is the first time that the “three Pure Land sūtras” are listed as such. “On Pure Land Buddhism and Ch’an/Pure Land Syncretism in Medieval China,” *T’oung Pao* 88, nos. 4–5 (2003): 299–301.

15. While Orzech seems to take for granted that Pure Land and Vajrayāna are in some sense mutually exclusive, his examination of this text is quite useful. See Orzech, “A Tang Esoteric Manual for Rebirth in the Pure Land,” 32. Regarding this text’s place in Shingon ritual, as well as a general overview of how ritual functions in the contemporary Shingon tradition, see Robert Sharf, “Thinking through Shingon Ritual,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003): 63, 68.

16. See: Jeff Wilson, “Pure Land Iconography and Ritual Intent: A Comparative Study of the Visualization Texts *Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching* and *Amitabha Sadhana*,” *Pure Land* 22 (2006): 167–186.

17. *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 弘法大師全集, ed. Sofū Sen’yōkai 祖風宣揚會 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan 吉川弘文館, 1910), 2:495–521. Kūkai wrote many ritual texts on many different deities. This text, if it was indeed written by Kūkai, should not be taken to suggest that Kūkai himself aspired for Sukhāvātī. In fact, it appears that Kūkai aspired for “Pure Land rebirth” in the Bodhisattva Maitreya’s (Miroku Bosatsu, 弥勒菩薩) Tuṣita heaven (*tosotsu ten*, 兜率天), perhaps the second most important post-mortem destination sought by East Asian Buddhists.

18. Gregory Schopen, “Sukhāvātī as Generalized Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature,” in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 167, 180.

19. A simple word search through the *Taishō* canon’s Vajrayāna section (密教部) reveals that there are perhaps more texts with references to Pure Land imagery, cosmology, and aspiration than without.

20. Abé, *Weaving*, 1–4.

21. For an examination of the *Amida santai setsu*, see SUEKI Fumihiko 末木文美士, “Amida santai-setsu o megutte 阿弥陀三諦説をめぐって,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究 28, no. 1 (Dec. 1979): 216–222; Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval*

Japanese Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 162. For a brief examination of Dōhan's views on the *nenbutsu*, see Sanford, "Breath of Life," 177–179. In addition, Stone suggests that rather than considering this form of reading an "exegesis," a "reading out," we should consider this technique a "reading in," or "eisegeisis" (Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 158).

22. Marc Buijnsters, "Jichihan and the Restoration and Innovation of Buddhist Practice," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 1–2 (1999): 39–82.

23. For a discussion of *kanjin* style commentary and its significance in the Tendai school and broader medieval Buddhist environment, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 156–189.

24. For more on the context for the concept of Amida as breath, and how this idea develops in later Japanese Buddhism, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 133–134, 162–167; Sanford, "Breath of Life," 178, 181, 183, 188–189.

25. According to Stone, this arrangement of fives draws upon Chinese intellectual precedent (*Original Enlightenment*, 160–161).

26. Dōhan in fact wrote meditation manuals for the contemplation of the letter A (*ajikan*, 阿字觀). See Richard K. Payne, "Ajikan: Ritual and Meditation in the Shingon Tradition," in *Revisioning "Kamakura" Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 221–222, 231–233.

27. Dōhan has here woven together several distinct traditional views from several Indian and Chinese thinkers.

28. Stone notes that for some "immanentist" Pure Land thinkers, the Pure Land is right here and now does not preclude aspiration for Pure Land rebirth, "as a real event" (Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 192).

