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PILGRIMAGE TO THE SACRED TRACES OF KŌYASAN:
PLACE AND DEVOTION IN LATE HEIAN JAPAN

Ethan Claude Lindsay

A DISSERTATION
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the emergence of the mountain Kōyasan as an increasingly popular site for pilgrimage, burial, lay patronage, and monastic practice in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This religious site in present-day Wakayama Prefecture, Japan, is now the headquarters of the Shingon tradition of Japanese Buddhism. Today it is very famous as the site where Japan's most famous monk, Kūkai (774-835), is said to dwell in perpetual meditation, awaiting the advent of the next Buddha. However, during the period of this study, Kōyasan was just emerging in the cultural imagination of the Japanese people. Using such sources as liturgical prayers, Buddhist tale literature, shrine and temple legends, and pilgrimage diaries, this study attempts to understand the early Kōyasan cult in all of its complexity.

One major argument is that the early institutional history of Koyasan cannot be understood apart from the history of the *imaginaire*, the non-material, imaginative realm in which life was experienced. Relatedly, pilgrimage to Kōyasan over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was intimately connected to the sacred myths that were recited both on the mountain and in the capital. Through several different case studies, this dissertation examines the complex interplay between sacred myths about Kōyasan and the religious practices of pilgrims who themselves ventured to the mountain or who sent someone else to this numinous peak in their place. Stories about the mountain inspired pilgrims to travel to this peak and conduct ceremonies in places on the mountain that had been sacralized in such myths. The pilgrims then wrote about their own pilgrimages, encouraging others to encounter the wondrous marvels at Kōyasan. One major contention of this dissertation is that the complex interaction between these stories and related religious practices lay at the heart of the Kōyasan cult. Understanding the

intersection of stories and religious practice at Koyasan enables us to better comprehend the localized nature of religious life in late Heian Japan.

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Abbreviations

Ch. Chinese.

DNBZ. *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho.*

DNS. *Dai Nihon shiryō.*

GR. *Gunsho ruijū.*

HJJ. *Heian jidaishi jiten.*

J. Japanese.

KDCZ. *Kōbō Daishi chosaku zenshū*

KDDZ. *Kōbō Daishi den zenshū*

KDZ. *Kōbō daishi zenshū.*

KDJ. *Kokushi daijiten*

MBD. *Mochizuki Bukkyō daijiten.*

MDJ. *Mikkyō daijiten.*

NKBT. *Nihon koten bungaku taikai.*

NST. *Nihon shisō taikai.*

SGR. *Shinkō gunsho ruijū.*

Skt. Sanskrit.

SNKBT. *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai.*

ST. *Shiryō taisei.*

T. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō.*

WK. *Wakayama kenshi.*

ZGR. *Zoku gunsho ruijū.*

ZST. *Zōho shiryō taisei.*

ZZGR. *Zoku zoku gunsho ruijū.*

ZZST. *Zōho zoku shiryō taisei.*

Introduction

Today Kōyasan 高野山, the High Plains Mountain, which rises over 800 meters above sea level south of Ōsaka in present-day Wakayama Prefecture, Japan, is renowned as a place of breathtaking natural beauty and the site of a large Shingon Buddhist religious complex possessing over one hundred temples. Visitors not only from throughout Japan but also from around the world travel to this mountain and its small secluded town. They stay overnight in temple lodgings and visit famous locations on the mountain. These renowned sites include especially the Inner Sanctum (Oku no In), or the area around the mausoleum of the founding saint Kūkai (774-835), where over two thousand individuals have been interred, as well as temple buildings at the central monastic complex. From the clerics at Kōyasan they hear stories about Kūkai's perpetual meditation on the mountain and his miraculous selection of this sacred location about 1200 years ago.

In 2004, UNESCO designated Kōyasan, in addition to several other locations in the Kii Peninsula, including Yoshino, Ōmine, and Kumano Sanzan, as World Heritage Sites, "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range." Like Yoshino, Ōmine, and Kumano, Kōyasan is situated in the dense forests of the Kii Mountains, which overlook the Pacific Ocean. Together, these sacred sites represent ancient traditions of worship, and all of these sacred mountains have histories extending over one thousand years. Home to many streams, rivers, and waterfalls, this area remains part of Japan's vibrant culture. Every year as many as fifteen million visitors travel to the sacred sites of the Kii Mountain Range in order to hike and conduct sacred rituals.

For many centuries, Kōyasan has been a very important site in the religious and cultural consciousness of the Japanese people. Most importantly, it is the site distinguished by the sacred

presence of Kūkai. Kūkai was the founder of the esoteric Shingon Buddhist school and a popular saint. A Japanese Buddhist monk with multifaceted talents, Kūkai traveled to Tang Dynasty China in 804 and then stayed in the capital of Changan. There he received a transmission of esoteric Buddhism from Huiguo (746-805), a Chinese Buddhist teacher. In particular, Huiguo transmitted to Kūkai a detailed knowledge of Buddhist mantras, rituals, and scriptures.

As Ryūichi Abé shows, when Kūkai returned to Japan, while he was not seeking to establish a new religious sect *per se*, he promoted a form of Buddhism previously unknown in Japan. In particular, he sought to disseminate a “new type of religious discourse grounded in his analysis of the ritual language of mantra.”¹ Kūkai was perhaps the first person in Japan to make this term mantra known in Japanese through the Japanese word Shingon. Shingon 真言 (literally, “true word;” Skt. mantra; Ch. *zhenyan*) refers to a string of syllables that, when enunciated, invoke the powers of the Buddha, bodhisattva, or deity with which they correspond. These tended to be shorter in length than dhārāṇi, another type of Buddhist spell. Kūkai taught that by enunciating these mantras correctly, one could engage in the mystery of speech (J. *kumitsu* 口密) and thereby become one with Mahāvairocana, the cosmic Buddha whose enlightened activity constitutes the universe itself. He held these mantras in such high regard that this was one of the main terms he used to refer to his new form of Buddhism.²

In 816 the court granted Kūkai permission to build a Shingon monastic center on Kōyasan. He had selected the site because of its remoteness, being situated in the remote mountains far to the south of Nara and even farther from Heian-kyō, the new capital in Japan that

¹ Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 4.

² Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 5. See Chapter 5, where Abé discusses Kūkai’s own usage of the term *shingon*, the Japanese translation of mantra.

eventually became today's Kyoto. Kūkai believed that natural wilderness was useful for religious discipline and practice. Kūkai used the name Kongōbuji as the general designation for his mountain monastery at Kōyasan, a complex that over time grew to include numerous separate temple buildings.³ In 835 Kūkai died on Kōyasan at the age of sixty-two.

Over time, within the Shingon tradition of Buddhism that he transmitted from China to Japan there developed the worship of Kūkai as a living savior, in addition to the study of esoteric Buddhist doctrines and practice of esoteric ritual. Even today, Kōyasan remains the destination of a number of pilgrims who continue to worship Kūkai, calling him by his posthumous name, Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, the Great Master Who Spread the Dharma. It is significant for my study that Kūkai was one of very few, and by far the most popular, historical figure in Japan to become revered across sectarian traditions.

This dissertation examines the formation of the sacred mountain Kōyasan as an increasingly popular site for pilgrimage, burial, and monastic practice in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While this peak is famous today, during the period that I study, Kōyasan was just emerging in the cultural imagination of the Japanese people. Using such sources as imperial chronicles, Buddhist tale literature, shrine and temple legends, and pilgrimage diaries, the dissertation sheds light on this formative phase of the mountain's history. The study, nevertheless, is not merely an institutional history of Kōyasan. Rather, I also use theoretical resources from Religious Studies and the social sciences to analyze larger issues such as the formation of sacred places, hagiography, pilgrimage, and the ritualization of death.

The following questions are central to this study: How was Kōyasan perceived as a sacred site? How did it become an important religious site possessing many Buddhist temples?

³ Today Kongōbuji refers to the head temple of Kōyasan Shingon Buddhism, a temple that is located on Kōyasan. However, the whole mountain is regarded as the precincts of this main temple, Kongōbuji, and thus all 117 active temples on the mountain can collectively be called Kongōbuji.

How does an understanding of this local religious institution add to our received views about Japanese Buddhist religious history?

I am especially interested in understanding the social processes involved in rendering this particular mountain a sacred Buddhist place. Those who participated in the social construction of this place included clerics on the mountain and the aristocrats and retired emperors who made pilgrimages during this era.

I show that the early institutional history of Kōyasan cannot be understood apart from the history of the *imaginaire*, the non-material, imaginative realm in which life was experienced. Relatedly, pilgrimage to Kōyasan over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was intimately connected to the sacred myths that were recited both on the mountain and in the capital, Heian-kyō. Through several different case studies, I will examine the complex interplay between sacred myths about Kōyasan and the religious practices of pilgrims who themselves ventured to the mountain or who sent someone else to this numinous peak in their place. Stories about the mountain inspired pilgrims to travel to this mountain and conduct ceremonies in places that had been sacralized in such myths. The pilgrims then wrote about their pilgrimages in literature that recorded both new and old stories about the peak, encouraging others to encounter the wondrous marvels at Kōyasan. One major contention of this dissertation is that the complex interaction between these stories and related religious practices lay at the heart of the Kōyasan cult. Understanding the intersection of stories and religious practice at Kōyasan, I will also show, enables us to better comprehend the localized nature of religious life in late Heian Japan.

I am placing my research in the context of a major trend in the study of Japanese religions, particularly in the West. That is, I affirm the position that it is very important to consider “place” as an analytical category when we reflect about Japanese religion. Although

many of the early Western-language studies of Japanese Buddhism focused on the teachings of the founders of the various traditions, more recently, scholars have started focusing on particular sacred sites. This has occurred as part of scholars' growing interest in social and institutional history, ritual, and material culture. Allan Grapard has been one of the major promoters of this style of scholarship in the field of Japanese religions. He has been among the very first, if not the first, scholar writing in a Western language to argue for the site-specific approach to the study of Japanese religion. Grapard has advocated the need to "study Japanese religious phenomena *in situ*, starting from the basic territorial unit and community in which they developed."⁴

Focusing on place enables us to see the complex relationships between doctrine, politics, rituals, and institutions. Recent work in anthropology, philosophy, literature, and history has featured place as a major analytical category.⁵ In addition, from the 1970s to today, research on local religions has grown significantly, and a few recent studies have focused on the emplacement of religious practices and the connections of these arrangements to broader religious and cultural trends.⁶ For several centuries, from Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century through Emile Durkheim in the late nineteenth century to Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade in the mid-twentieth century, "sacred space and time" were important analytical categories in the study of religion.⁷ Eliade drew upon Durkheim's opposition of the sacred and the profane in formulating his own ideas about sacred mountains. For Eliade, sacred mountains were numinous sites that manifested themselves through hierophanies, kratophanies, and

⁴ "The Textualized Mountain," 159-160.

⁵ Yifu Tuan's 1974 *Topophilia* was an important study in geography. In philosophy, see especially Edward Casey's work, including *Getting Back into Place* and *The Fate of Place*. In literature see Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, and Edward Kamens, *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry*. See Simon Schema, *Landscape and Memory* in history. The anthropologist Keith Basso made methodological contributions in *Wisdom Sits In Places*.

⁶ For example, see Sarah Thal, *Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods*, and Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City*.

⁷ James Robson, *Power of Place*, 7.

epiphanies. Historians of religion who studied sacred space have been strongly influenced by Eliade. However, in recent scholarship by Jonathan Z. Smith, Allan Grapard, and other scholars, new research questions have shifted the analysis away from concerns with "sacred centers" or sites that are manifestations of an essentialized holy. I aim to place my own study within the context of this new research, accounting for the complex nature of a sacred place and attending to its social, political, and religious history.

A number of recent publications on Asian sacred mountains also serve to contextualize this dissertation.⁸ Scholars writing in European languages have published many studies of Japanese mountains.⁹ However, studies of the ancient and medieval eras tend to be rarer than publications on the early modern period and contemporary practices on sacred mountains.¹⁰

For the most part, Kōyasan has been a neglected topic in English-language research, aside from a few recent exceptions. The recently published monograph *Sacred Kōyasan* by Philip Nicoloff offers a useful introduction to many aspects of this sacred site, especially for interested general readers. However, much of the historical information is not informed by

⁸ See especially James Robson, *Power of Place*, for a methodologically astute study of a famous sacred mountain in China. See also Anne-Marci Blondeau and Ernst Steinkellner, eds., *Reflections of the Mountain*; Donald Swearer, *Sacred Mountains of Northern Thailand and Their Legends*; Sherry Ortner, *Life and Death on Mount Everest*; Thomas Hahn, "The Standard Taoist Mountain and Related Features of Religious Geography"; Raoul Birnbaum, "Thoughts on Tang Buddhist Mountain Traditions and Their Context"; and Toni Huber, *The Cult of the Pure Crystal Mountain*.

⁹ For the early modern period, see Barbara Ambros, *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: the Ōyama Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan*; Gaynor Sekimori, "Paper Foul and Wooden Fish" on *shinbutsu bunri*, the separation of Shintō and Buddhism, at Haguro; and Allan Grapard, "Lotus in the Mountain, Mountain in the Lotus" and "The Textualized Mountain" on the Kunisaki area in Kyūshū. Ellen Schattschneider, *Immortal Wishes*, is an ethnography of women's religious practices at Mount Iwaki.

Other ethnographic studies include Karen Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel* on women's practices at Fushimi Inari; Helen Hardacre, "The Cave and the Womb World" about Korean women's practices at Ōmine; Byron Earhart, *A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendō*; John Stevens, *The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei*; and Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow*.

¹⁰ Max Moerman's *Localizing Paradise*, about Kumano, is a methodologically sophisticated analysis of religious activities in medieval times. Heather Blair's outstanding dissertation, "Peak of Gold," also focuses on Heian religion, especially pilgrimage to Kinpusen. The famous scholar of Shugendō Miyake Hitoshi has published two collections of essays in English pertaining to pre-modern practices and Kinpusen. See *Shugendō: Essays on the Structure of Japanese Folk Religion* and *The Mandala of the Mountain*.

specialized knowledge of the relevant texts and languages. In contrast, Mikael Adolphson's *Gates of Power* provides an insightful analysis of the Buddhist institution at medieval Kōyasan. In this wide-ranging historical study Adolphson effectively analyzes Kōyasan as an example of one of the Buddhist institutions that was competing for political and economic power in medieval Japan. However, his focus is limited to political and institutional history, and he does not analyze the religious rituals and doctrines associated with Kōyasan. Another study, William Londo's "The Other Mountain: The Mount Kōya Temple Complex in the Heian Era" (2004), focuses on the institutional history of Kōyasan from the time that Kūkai founded this monastic complex through the eleventh century. Londo shows special attention to the eleventh century, a very important time in which the monastic complex was revived and assured a significant place in Japanese history and culture. Londo's dissertation represents an important introduction to the early history of Kōyasan. However, the scope of the dissertation is quite narrow, with its main interest in the way in which the institution of Kōyasan functioned in Japanese society during the Heian era (794-1185). Like Adolphson, Londo does not deal extensively with either doctrine or ritual. Another recent study, Donald Drummond's dissertation, "Negotiating Influence: the Pilgrimage Diary of Monastic Imperial Prince Kakuhō," examines the diary-record of five pilgrimages to Kōyasan made by the imperial abbot of Ninnaji, Monastic Imperial Prince Kakuhō, between 1147 and 1150. Through an analysis of one of the most extensive primary sources from this era, *Omuro Gosho Kōyasan gosanrō nikki* (Omuro Kakuhō's Kōyasan pilgrimage diary), Drummond effectively argues that Kakuhō was a skillful negotiator among contending groups on the mountain and in the capital. Drummond's study contributes to our understanding of Kōyasan in the mid-twelfth century. However, the focus on a single primary source limits Drummond's vision of this sacred mountain and complex religious institution.

In contrast to all three of these studies of Kōyasan in English, I have endeavored to analyze a much wider range of primary sources in several different genres. This broader spectrum of literature reveals a number of different visions of Kōyasan and multiple perspectives on what particular authors saw as most important about the mountain. In addition, the study of documents spanning about one century offers a window onto the evolving Kōyasan cult and the changes in pilgrimages to the mountain over this period of history. New temple buildings continued to be constructed on Kōyasan, and people's loci of interest did not remain constant over the second half of the Heian era, my period of focus. I aim to show the importance of studying a wide range of historical documents if we are to comprehend the Kōyasan cult in all of its complexity.

In Japanese, there of course is a much larger literature on Kōyasan. Several very useful institutional histories of Kōyasan have been published by scholars affiliated with Kōyasan itself. For example, Miyasaka Yūshō and Satō Takashi's 1962 *Kōyasan shi* (The history of Kōyasan) is an extensive history of the Shingon Buddhist monastery on Kōyasan. The study has much useful information about the history of the institution during the time of the focus of my dissertation, and few scholars in the West have made use of this information. I have drawn upon this study as a resource for basic historical information. The Shingon institutional historian Wada Shūjō has also published studies that effectively overview the history of Kōyasan, such as his 1984 essay "Kōyasan no rekishi to shinkō" (The history and faith of Kōyasan). In this dissertation, in addition to Wada's helpful scholarship, I have also drawn upon the research of Kōyasan University professors Takeuchi Kōzen and Yamakage Kazuo, both of whom have published for both popular and scholarly audiences.¹¹ In addition, a recent series of books published by

¹¹ See Takeuchi, *Kōbō Daishi denshō to shijitsu: eden o yomitoku*, and Yamakage, *Wakayama, Kōyasan to Kinokawa* and *Chūsei Kōyasan shi no kenkyū*.

Kōyasan University collects articles on a number of different topics both historical and contemporary.¹² This series introduces the devotion, institution, rituals, literature, art, and history of Kōyasan.

In spite of this substantial body of literature in Japanese, there remains room for much new research, especially by scholars writing in Western languages. This dissertation aims to draw upon recent theoretical discussions of hagiography, pilgrimage, and the process of place-making in an attempt to advance our knowledge of this important religious institution.

Structure of the Dissertation

The separate chapters that comprise this study present several different visions of the intersection of narrative and religious practice at early medieval Kōyasan. The initial chapter, for example, analyzes some of the legends at the heart of Kōyasan devotion at this time. I introduce one of the most important primary sources from early medieval Kōyasan, *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* (A record of the establishment of the Temple of the Diamond Peak, unknown author, twelfth century). This text contains a biography of Kūkai as well as legends about his role in establishing a Shingon Buddhist monastery at Kōyasan. I show this text, which was both a product and producer of pilgrimages to this mountain in early medieval times, renders Kōyasan a sacred place in accordance with the genre of temple and shrine legends. In the midst of presenting the major legends about the sacred origins of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan, this text emphasizes that important sacred events have occurred on the mountain, in particular Kūkai's perpetual presence there in meditation. I argue that through legends such as this, Kōyasan was constructed as a sacred mountain in myth, hagiography, and ideology.

¹² See *Kōyasan to mikkyō bunka* and other books in the series *Kōyasan daigaku sensho*.

In the pilgrimage diaries that I analyze in chapters two through four, we find that such legends were told by Kōyasan clerics to impress upon the aristocrats and royals who traveled to Kōyasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that they were visiting sacred geography. Furthermore, this literature reveals much about the beliefs that motivated these high-ranking pilgrims to make the distant journey to Kōyasan in Kii province. We find vivid portraits of their deep reverence for Kūkai and their desire to honor him with magnificent ceremonies, conducted especially at his tomb. From this literature, we witness how Kōyasan became a site worthy of visitation because of the belief that important events have taken place there, both in the distant past and in the much more recent past. In addition, we will witness concrete instances in which wealthy pilgrims from the capital, inspired by these beliefs, profoundly exerted an impact on the religious institution at Kōyasan through generous gifts during their pilgrimages. In other words, with several vivid examples, we will see the complex interplay between myth and action, ideology and religious practice.

Chapter 2 focuses upon one of the most significant pilgrimages to Kōyasan in the first few centuries of this mountain monastery, Retired Emperor Shirakawa's 1088 journey to the mountain. Not only will we glimpse an important chapter in the life of the Buddhist institution of Kōyasan, but it will also be possible to use detailed knowledge of this particular imperial pilgrimage in order to modify the dominant theoretical model that has been used to analyze such imperial pilgrimages, that of the “theater of state.” I will show that this particular pilgrimage forces us to change a few major features of this model of imperial pilgrimages in medieval Japan.

Chapter 3 is a study of Retired Emperor Toba's initial pilgrimage in 1124. I have chosen to focus on this pilgrimage because many of its elements were modeled on the 1088 pilgrimage

by Shirakawa, examined in Chapter 2. This chapter aims to show both the similarities and differences between Toba's 1124 pilgrimage and Shirakawa's earlier one in 1088. I will show both the establishment of stable conventions for Kōyasan pilgrimage and also the development of new cultic elements on the mountain. In addition, this chapter also investigates which of these developments were particular to Kōyasan, such as the cult of Kūkai, and which developments were parts of a larger, emergent pilgrimage tradition.

In chapter 4, I will examine the devotion of Bifukumon'in (1117-1156), who became a major patron in the Kōyasan cult after becoming Retired Emperor Toba's favorite consort. Bifukumon'in's devotion to Kōyasan of course also was connected to larger societal issues regarding the limitations ascribed to women in the medieval Japanese religious world. Like other sacred mountains, Kōyasan prohibited women from ascending the peak and worshipping in the main areas of the monastery. Therefore, Bifukumon'in and other women devotees had to be creative in their forms of devotion at Kōyasan and the other temple complexes where they could not enter. As we will see, in spite of gender restrictions, Bifukumon'in exhibited strong devotion to this place and contributed greatly to the increase in buildings in the middle of the twelfth century. Bifukumon'in's devotion at Kōyasan thus offers a window onto both the challenges that women faced in their devotion to Kōyasan and the innovative ways in which they dealt with these challenges.

Chapter 5 examines a portrait of Kōyasan devotion by a lay person-turned-monk, Fujiwara no Sukenaga (1118-1195), a retired government official and the author of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* (Accounts of those from Kōyasan who achieved birth in the Pure Land, late twelfth century), one of the most revealing documents about religious life at Kōyasan in the late Heian era. Like other pilgrims featured in this study, Sukenaga had encountered powerful legends, in

this case about clerics who purportedly ascended to various pure lands at the time of their death on Kōyasan. Himself seeking the western Pure Land, Sukenaga traveled to Kōyasan with hopes of encountering the sacred traces of some of these holy men, and his collection of stories was the product of pilgrimages both to Kōyasan and to the influential Ninnaji temple in the capital. Narratives of great devotion inspired Sukenaga's own deep reverence for Kōyasan and its saints. His hagiographical collection in turn probably led to countless other pilgrimages by others in later eras who wanted to confirm the miraculous narratives that Sukenaga promoted and to encounter the living traditions of storied marvels and holy men.

In short, profound and powerful narratives now preserved in collections of temple legends, pilgrimage diaries, hagiographies, and other genres once were oral legends, recited stories about adventures to a secluded mountain and encounters with the resident saints and deities. Whether narrated by clerics attempting to promote the reputation of their own Buddhist institution at Kōyasan or by individuals profoundly in awe of previous pilgrimages by royals and aristocrats, these narratives led to new forms of religious practice, shaping motivations to travel to the mountain and to patronize the institution. Without these narratives the temples on the mountain could not have survived and would not have remained as part of one of the large religious centers of the Japanese islands. In the late Heian era, these stories were profoundly connected to the religious practice, the pilgrimage, patronage, and rituals, conducted by both clerics and lay people at Kōyasan. These stories not only influenced how the place was imagined and experienced but also how it would continue to be built physically.

Chapter 1

The Marvels of Kōyasan: Early Legends about Kūkai and the Opening of Kōyasan

"I know of a mountain area of about ten thousand square measures, and in that area there is a flat plain that is remote and quiet. There are many mysterious wonders there." (*Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*)

Introduction: Hagiography and the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*

Kōyasan was not always a well-known sacred Buddhist mountain. Prior to Kūkai's arrival in the early ninth century, there was very little, if any, Buddhist activity at all on this mountain. In addition, in the first two centuries of the monastery that Kūkai founded there, it often received but little support from the leadership of Tōji, the Shingon temple centrally located in the capital, or patronage by influential courtiers. Located far away in Kii Province (present-day Wakayama Prefecture), it was hardly known in Heiankyō, the capital. Yet by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Buddhist clerics were promoting this site as a quintessentially Buddhist sacred mountain, the land most suitable for the "esoteric" teachings of Buddhism and the place where the extraordinary Buddhist saint Kūkai had achieved a near-permanent residence on the mountain by "entering meditation" in 835. Prominent pilgrims began making a fairly arduous journey of several days from the capital to this remote mountain.

The process by which Kōyasan was transformed into a sacred Buddhist landscape and a popular religious site is complex. In order to understand this process, we must understand the historical developments at the end of the tenth century and the early eleventh century, when Kongōbuji, the Buddhist monastery situated atop Kōyasan, emerged from an era of decline and entered a period of flourishing. Following a series of fires in the tenth century, including the very destructive fire of 994, Kongōbuji faced a very dire situation. In the early decades of the eleventh

century, however, several Buddhist clerics such as Kishin and Ningai led efforts to revive it, gaining the patronage of some of the most politically powerful individuals of the day.¹³ As a result of these restoration efforts, the mountain entered the era when it flourished the most, from the end of the Heian era (794-1185) to the Kamakura era (1185-1333).

Much of this study focuses upon the devotion of a number of prominent individuals, such as retired sovereigns and high-ranking aristocrats, at Kōyasan, in the early medieval era, this era of flourishing. One of the basic questions surrounding this activity is why did these individuals want to visit the mountain? What significance did it have for them? Before launching into this analysis of the devotion of these individuals, however, it is necessary for us to reflect on the narratives that gave Kōyasan its primary religious significance for many of these devotees. After all, the telling of stories about the extraordinary wonders of the place was absolutely vital in the efforts to revive the institution in the early eleventh century and to ensure that it continued to receive the patronage of aristocrats and the royal family.

The *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* (A record of the establishment of the Temple of the Diamond Peak; hereafter *Shugyō engi*) is one of the most important Heian-era sources for the study of religious devotion, broadly conceived, at Kōyasan in the early medieval era.¹⁴ It is a compilation of many of the mythic tales about the life and religious accomplishments of Kūkai (774-835), perhaps the most renowned Buddhist cleric in Japanese history. It also recounts a

¹³ William Londo's outstanding article, "The 11th Century Revival of Mount Koya: Its Genesis As a Popular Religious Site," analyzes these efforts to revive the institution.

¹⁴ There are several published versions of this text. In a 1998 article, "*Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi no kenkyū*," Takeuchi Kōzen has published a critical edition of this text. He has compared various manuscripts as well as the major published versions. Revealing a close study, he also includes *kunten* to indicate his suggested readings of the sentences that comprise this document. I have made use of this critical edition in my study of this text.

There are also several published versions of the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* that are more readily accessible to scholars in North America. For example, this text is included in the KDDZ, vol. 1, 50-57. It is also included in ZGR, vol. 28a, 280-287. It is this published version that I have cited for my translations below.

George J. Tanabe, Jr., "The Founding of Mount Kōya and Kūkai's Eternal Meditation," has recently published a partial English translation of the text following his brief introduction to the primary source. I have used some of this translation with alterations below. In the cases below in which I have not cited Tanabe, the translations are my own.

number of legends about the origins of Kongōbuji, which Kūkai established as a center for Shingon Buddhism. The text was probably composed sometime in the twelfth century by a Buddhist cleric with strong connections to Kongōbuji.¹⁵ However, many of the stories that are included in this text started appearing much earlier, some in the writings of Kūkai, and others in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as Kūkai came to be deified and Kōyasan was undergoing growth as a pilgrimage site.

The *Shugyō engi* can be classified as a Buddhist "*reigen engi*." These texts narrate the wondrous origins of particular Buddhist temples in Japan. They often focus on the miracles that famous monks and holy persons performed at these sites. These stories also describe the numinous manifestations there of a variety of Buddhist sacred beings such as Shaka (Skt. Śakyamuni), Miroku (Maitreya), Yakushi (Bhaiṣajyaguru), Amida (Amitābha), and Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), which were the "main icons," or *honzon*, of the temples. Individual temples that wanted to enhance their own authority produced these stories. The larger *setsuwa* (tale literature) collections such as the *Nihon ryōiki* (early ninth century) and the *Konjaku monogatari* (probably early twelfth century) include many examples of this genre.¹⁶

Given the legendary nature of the stories that comprise this text, it might seem difficult to use it as a historical document about the early history of Kōyasan. In fact, many of the stories in this text are obviously legends that in all likelihood did not take place as narrated in these accounts. Japanese scholars who have studied this text have accordingly paid much attention to its nonfactual, legendary elements. In particular, Takeuchi Kōzen, perhaps the leading expert on

¹⁵ Kōhō 5 (968) is the date of composition on the text, but this is dubious. Because this text contains other texts that cannot be dated any earlier, Abe Yasurō believes that the *Shugyō engi* was composed at the beginning of the twelfth century, at the earliest (*Kōyasan engi no kenkyū*, 9).

¹⁶ See Mark MacWilliams, "Kannon Engi," 91, for a very useful introduction to the genre of *reigen engi*.

the *Shugyō engi*, has attempted to separate the historical facts from the legends.¹⁷ Showing that the *Shugyō engi* contains more legendary elements than any of the previous biographies, he has succeeded in contextualizing the *Shugyō engi* in relation to the previous biographies of Kūkai that were written after Kūkai's death. However, his underlying assumption about the nature of hagiographies—an assumption now abandoned in the most outstanding Western-language scholarship on hagiography—is problematic. Takeuchi assumes that hagiographies on a basic level are factual reports of the lives of holy persons, on top of which miracle stories have been added. Supposedly if one takes away the marvelous, fantastic elements, a factual biography will still be left. This form of scholarship fails to properly consider the hagiographical and ideological dimensions of texts such as the *Shugyō engi*. It is these aspects of the narratives in which I am most interested.

In the most nuanced recent studies of hagiographies and other narratives from classical and medieval Europe and other cultural worlds, scholars have stopped trying to find the historical facts supposedly at the heart of the hagiographic stories. Instead, they have now become interested in the collective mentality, collective memory, and communally shaped traditions in which certain individuals were assigned extraordinary status.¹⁸ Rather than treating the stories as the entirely fictive product, such as that of a modern fiction writer, these scholars have become interested in the ways in which these narratives were shaped within particular religious communities and enabled later communities to constitute and sustain themselves.¹⁹

¹⁷ See *Kōbō Daishi denshō to shijitsu*.

¹⁸ For representative examples of this approach, see the studies of Peter Brown, such as *The Cult of the Saints* and "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell's *Saints and Society: the Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, Elizabeth A. Castelli's *Martyrdom and Memory*, Teresa Shaw's "Askesis and the Appearance of Holiness," and Maud Gleason's "Visiting and News: Gossip and Reputation-Management in the Desert."

¹⁹ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 4-5, writes, "The notion of collective memory allows one to move past often irresolvable questions of 'what really happened' to questions of how particular ways of construing the past enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves."

Scholars who take this approach with respect to the study of hagiography desire to understand the role that literature plays in making religious worlds, roles, and selves.²⁰ In early medieval Japan, hagiographic and other narrative religious literature—in addition to the numerous stories told orally and now lost to modern historians—indeed played a major role in fashioning the religious and cultural realities experienced by the Japanese people at this time. No matter how fantastical they seem to a modern audience, these stories were integral to people's understanding of sacred places, sacred persons, and other such matters.

In his remarks on the interpretation of hagiographic literature, Robert Campany emphasizes that the writers of hagiographic narratives were each members of particular religious and social worlds.²¹ They were trying to persuade a particular audience within their own cultural world. He writes, "Each hagiographic narrative is an artifact of an attempt to persuade an audience. Reading such narratives for information about the past depends on understanding what this means and entails."²²

Hagiography and other narrative religious literature are artifacts of creative attempts within the social world to convince others of a particular vision of sacred realities. It is this approach that I will take with respect to the *Shugyō engi*. Its author was attempting to convince others within his own social world about his own particular vision of Kūkai and Kōyasan. This piece of narrative literature must be understood as coming out of the particular social and

²⁰ Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 9.

²¹ Robert Campany has done some of the most nuanced work on hagiography in East Asian religions. "Interpreting Hagiographic Sources," part of the first chapter of his book *Making Transcendents*, 8-22, provides a very useful introduction to the methodological issues that one needs to consider while interpreting hagiographical texts, regardless of social context. These considerations apply not only to the biographies of Daoist transcendents from early medieval China, his primary interest, but also to much of the hagiographical literature of premodern East Asia, including early medieval Japan. In fact, I believe that these considerations enable us to interpret more effectively the biographies about Kūkai that people wrote during the Heian era.

²² Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 10.

religious context of early medieval Japan at the same time as it is part of a larger process of fashioning a new vision of the sacred dimensions of Kōyasan.

Like hagiographers around the world, the early medieval Japanese author of the *Shugyō engi* collected and transmitted stories that were already being told at the time of its composition. This particular author gathered the various *engi* about Kōyasan and for the first time arranged them systematically in a single text, reshaping them to fit his own predilections. He collected stories from a variety of sources—the autobiographical writings of Kūkai, *engi*, hagiographies, and miracle tales—rewrote and recontextualized them, and put them into circulation again in the form of this text, the *Shugyō engi*. Many of the stories about Kūkai and the origins of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan had probably been recited for many years by Kōyasan's Buddhist clerics associated with the institution. From the early eleventh century, these individuals attempted to promote this institution in order to attract pilgrims and prominent patrons. While only a small educated percentage of the population had the skills to read the written versions, when heard, the stories undoubtedly appealed to persons of a variety of social classes and educational backgrounds.

As with hagiography more broadly, the audience of these tales undoubtedly played a very important role in the hagiographic process and in making the reputation of Kūkai and Kōyasan. A hagiographer is always constrained by the expectations, assumptions, and interests of his audience, by what they will recognize and approve, even in the cases in which he writes new stories.²³ In the words of Barbara Herrnstein Smith, who has written about the telling of tales as a process of mutual interaction between the storyteller and his audience, every telling of a story "always involves two parties, an audience as well as a narrator... As in any social transaction, each party must be individually motivated to participate... each party must have some *interest* in

²³ Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 16.

telling or listening to that narrative."²⁴ Very little information survives about the interaction between the audience who heard the stories of the *Shugyō engi* and the Buddhist clerics who were telling the stories. Nevertheless, by reading this text, it is possible to learn much about the kinds of things—in particular the kinds of holy persons and sacred places—that were of interest to the numerous devotees who listened to these tales and, in some cases, even chose to visit the mountain after hearing them.

Keeping in mind these methodological considerations about interpreting hagiographic literature such as the *Shugyō engi*, in this chapter I will argue that one of the major aims of the author of the *Shugyō engi* was to convince people in his own social world, potential pilgrims and patrons, that Kōyasan was a sacred Buddhist place with a number of extraordinary marvels. Part of what made the place so marvelous, this text suggests, was its deep, karmic connection with the unusually holy monk Kūkai. The purpose of the Kūkai biography in this text seems to be to provide more evidence of why this place is so extraordinary. In other words, it was not chosen by an ordinary individual in a mundane way but discovered by an exceptionally adept saint, with the help of deities and his own astounding Buddhist virtue. In addition, one of the major claims of this text is that Kūkai did not die an ordinary human death but remained in meditation on the mountain. It was this legend and the promotion of the "living body" of Kūkai at Kōyasan that has inspired much of the devotion on the mountain since the tenth century. Through these narratives, in myth, hagiography, and ideology, Kōyasan was constructed as a sacred Buddhist mountain.

This chapter is divided into three major parts. In the first part, in a study of the biography of Kūkai in the *Shugyō engi*, I focus on the ways in which this text portrays Kūkai as a Buddhist holy person with the valued quality of "spiritual resonance" (*J. kantsū*). In the next part, I

²⁴ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," 232-233.

analyze the stories about the founding of the Buddhist monastery on Kōyasan. I will show that the stories, ideological narratives, mask a complicated history of interreligious relations in Japan. In addition, the stories are products of an effort by Buddhists both at Kōyasan and other places to bring legitimacy to their temples. In the final major part of the chapter, I analyze the narratives about Kūkai's death at Kōyasan in 835. I will show that these stories make use of profound ambiguity regarding Kūkai's death in the attempt to assert that he did not die but continued to remain in meditation on the mountain. Even more so than the stories about the mythical origins of the Buddhist institution, this story was very significant in making Kōyasan into a sacred Buddhist mountain, a numinous site worthy of visitation and devotion.

The Biography of a Spiritually Resonant Saint

By the time of the Insei era (1086-1192), devotees on a broad scale in Japan believed that Kūkai was a wonder-worker on the order of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the two most exalted beings in the Buddhist tradition. Such reverence for Kūkai occurred across class and regional lines.²⁵ Behind this belief about Kūkai was a tradition of biographies about him, biographies that began appearing as early as the ninth century.²⁶ Over time, in this early tradition of biographies, legends about his extraordinary, even superhuman, accomplishments started appearing. By the time of the composition of the *Shugyō engi*, in the minds of many people, Kūkai was no longer a mere human being. Rather, he was a being with the unusual powers and spiritual capacities of a bodhisattva or Buddha.

Here I will analyze the portrayal of Kūkai in the *Shugyō engi*. In the stories about his early signs of remarkable spiritual ability, the account of his journey to China in order to study

²⁵ Shirai Yūko, *Inseiki Kōyasan to Kūkai nyūjō densetsu* (hereafter, *Inseiki Kōyasan*), 11.

²⁶ The main extant early biographies include the *Kūkai sotsuden* (835), *Zō Daisōjō Kūkai wajō denki* (895), *Yuigō nijūgo kajō* (mid-tenth century), and the *Kūkai sōzu den* (mid-tenth century).

Buddhism, and the legends that explicitly present him as a Buddha, we see an attempt to promote this individual as an exceptionally holy person. I will show that, while the *Shugyō engi* contains its own original compilation of legends about Kūkai, its portrayal of him fits with standard ideals about holy persons in the East Asian traditions of Buddhism. In particular, in these various stories, Kūkai exhibits the highly valued quality of spiritual resonance, or *kantsū*, discussed below, the ability to be in accord with the most divine dimensions of the Buddhist cosmos.

Early Signs of Kūkai's Spiritual Resonance

One major theme that stands out in the biography of Kūkai in the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* is the close relationship that he had with Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other sacred beings. According to this text, they revealed themselves to him throughout his life. There are also many extraordinary signs of Kūkai's virtue and piety, revealed both to himself and to others.

Even before his birth, the *Shugyō engi* reports, Kūkai's mother, Lady Tamayori, had a dream in which she learned of the unusual holiness of her child. According to the text, Kūkai's family lived in Byōbu no ura of the Tadono District of Sanuki Province (present-day Zentsūji City, Kagawa Prefecture), on Shikoku Island. The text states that his mother had a dream in which a saint from India came and entered her womb. She then became pregnant and gave birth to Kūkai.²⁷ This initial story suggests that he was no ordinary Japanese boy but, in reality, a saint from India, the land where Buddhism began.

There are also several stories about the remarkable Buddhist piety that Kūkai supposedly showed at an early age. According to this biography, as a boy, Kūkai once dreamed that he was sitting inside of a lotus blossom with eight petals and having conversations with various

²⁷ ZGR, vol. 28a, 280. Tanabe, "The Founding of Mount Kōya and Kūkai's Eternal Meditation," does not include this part of the text, the biography of Kūkai's early years, in his English translation.

Buddhas.²⁸ The dream suggests that, from a very young age, he had an unusual relationship with a variety of Buddhas and was able to converse with them about the teachings of Buddhism. In addition, given that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of East Asian Buddhism are often depicted as sitting upon lotus flowers, the text intimates that Kūkai was already a Buddha or bodhisattva, whether other people knew about it or not.

Other stories in the *Shugyō engi* indicate that Kūkai's remarkably close relationship with the sacred beings of Buddhism were evident not only to himself but also to some other individuals. For example, the *Shugyō engi* reports that a government official got a glimpse of the young Kūkai's remarkable holiness.²⁹ While Kūkai was still a child, the Monmin kushi, an official in the government who went around to various provinces to observe the life of the people who lived there, paid a visit to Sanuki province. While there, he observed that Kūkai was being accompanied by the Four Great Heavenly Kings (*shidai tennō* 四大天皇). Buddhists believe that these Four Great Heavenly Kings serve the deity Indra, protecting not only the Buddhist Dharma but also the human beings who are most dedicated to the Dharma. According to the *Shugyō engi*, after seeing that these deities were serving Kūkai, the government official descended from his horse and worshipped the young boy. That the Four Great Heavenly Kings would serve Kūkai indicated that he was an extremely important person within the Buddhist cosmos. After relating this incident, the *Shugyō engi* states that people in the area called him a "divine child."³⁰ The text intimates that gradually over time his remarkable holiness became known more widely because of the reports about his unusual actions and his interactions with the sacred beings of Buddhism.

²⁸ ZGR, vol. 28a, 280.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

However, the *Shugyō engi* provides still greater evidence for Kūkai's piety in its revelations about his inner aspirations. This text reports that Kūkai began to study non-Buddhist secular writings, and at the age of fifteen in the seventh year of Enryaku (788) entered the capital city. There he studied the Chinese writings that were used as textbooks in the school for aristocrats training to become government officials. However, the *Shugyō engi* states that Kūkai "only loved the Buddhist scriptures and over time formed the aspiration to renounce the world."³¹ Kūkai then met the monk Gonsō of Daianji Temple and started engaging in serious meditative exercises. The *Shugyō engi* gives the impression that Kūkai very quickly realized that the worldly affairs taking place in the capital did not have ultimate value. Therefore, what was most appropriate for him was to commit himself entirely to the path of Buddhism. "At the age of eighteen Kūkai reflected, 'In the past what I studied was secular writings, but the capital before my eyes is without merit. After my lifetime, this state of affairs [in the capital] will come to an end.'" ³² With this realization, Kūkai then decided to devote himself wholeheartedly to Buddhism.

According to the *Shugyō engi*, once Kūkai had renounced the world and was practicing Buddhism very seriously, he received several major confirmations of his progress in Buddhist discipline. He started difficult ascetic practices on some well-known mountains. Once he was performing the *Kokūzō gumonji hō* on the summit of Dairyū in Awa Province (Tokushima Prefecture). The *Kokūzō gumonji hō* is a meditative ritual dedicated to the Bodhisattva Kokūzō, or Ākāśagarbha in Sanskrit. While Buddhist scriptures about this bodhisattva prescribe complex rituals, most basically, the practitioner chants the mantra of this bodhisattva one million times

³¹ ZGR, vol. 28a, 280. The translation is my own.

³² Ibid., 281.

over a period of one hundred days, aiming to gain perfect powers of memory.³³ According to the *Shugyō engi*, Kūkai completed this rite, and a large sword then flew to him. According to the text, this was a "numinous response" (*reiō* 靈応) directly from the principal deity of the rite, the Bodhisattva Kokūzō.³⁴ This bodhisattva is the main figure of the Kokūzō In (Court of Kokūzō) of the *garbha* mandala (J. *taizō mandara*, the womb of enlightenment) based on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T. no. 848; see below for information about this mandala and scripture). In this mandala, one of his most well-known depictions, this bodhisattva holds the Treasure Sword of Wisdom in one of his hands. While the text does not state so explicitly, Kokūzō was apparently very pleased with Kūkai's performance of the ritual and rewarded him with his own sword.

On another occasion, the *Shugyō engi* reports, Kūkai was practicing the same ritual, the *Kokūzō gumonji hō*, at Cape Muroto of Tosa Province. At this time, the Morning Star entered his mouth. The Morning Star was believed to be an embodiment of Kokūzō Bodhisattva, so in this case the bodhisattva supposedly entered the very body of the practitioner, Kūkai. According to the text, this was "superlative verification" (*shōgen* 勝驗) manifested in response to Kūkai's outstanding religious discipline.³⁵

These two stories in particular show that, for the author of the *Shugyō engi*, Kūkai is an individual of remarkable "spiritual resonance," or *kantsū* 感通 (Ch. *kantong*). The word can be translated literally as "stimulus and fulfillment" and can be used interchangeably with the well-

³³ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 74.

³⁴ ZGR, vol. 28a, 281.

³⁵ Ibid. The term *shōgen* 勝驗 is not listed as a compound in the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, but the second Chinese character in the compound is the same as the second character in the term *reigen* 靈驗 (numinous verification). In this same type of situation in numerous miracle tales from East Asia, the term *reigen* refers to the numinous verification, or sacred signs, that Buddhist sacred beings reveal in response to a Buddhist practitioner's extraordinary piety. Given the context, I believe that my translation is appropriate here.

known Buddhist concept of "stimulus and response," or *kannō* 感応 (Ch. *kanying*).³⁶ Raoul Birnbaum defines "*kantsū*" as a type of "spiritual resonance" by way of which "the sage vibrates in sympathy with divine beings or with divine realms."³⁷ John Kieschnick has shown that this is an important category in several of the collections of hagiographies of Buddhist monastics that were written in medieval China.³⁸ Numerous stories in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (J. *Kōsōden*, Biographies of eminent monks) recount how extraordinary monks exhibited such spiritual resonance and were particularly responsive to wondrous visionary encounters with bodhisattvas and Buddhas because of their pure devotion or extreme sagacity. The stories about Kūkai in the *Shugyō engi* emphasize the same spiritual quality, the same type of intimate association with various beings of the sacred cosmos. They suggest that, even at an early age, Kūkai had a spiritual capacity similar to the great monastics honored in the hagiographical collections that recount astounding virtues and religious accomplishments.

The *Shugyō engi* indicates that only because of Kūkai's sincere practice in the ascetic disciplines in the mountains did he receive "numinous verification," or responses from the deities. Numerous stories in the collections of Buddhist miracle tales both from China and Japan also portray pious individuals who, through worshipping a deity or scripture, or through observing a particular practice in the proper manner, receive "numinous verification" (J. *reigen*; Ch. *lingyan* 靈驗) that their practice has been effective. Almost always in these stories the

³⁶ For one of the most detailed discussions of this Buddhist technical vocabulary and its frequent appearance in Chinese religious thought, see the chapter "Chinese Buddhism and the Cosmology of Sympathetic Resonance," in Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 77-136.

³⁷ Birnbaum, "The Manifestation of a Monastery," 137.

³⁸ See *The Eminent Monk*, 96-101.

underlying assumption is that Buddhist sacred beings respond to the sincere practice of faithful Buddhists who have acted out of proper Buddhist intentions.³⁹

In the *Shugyō engi*, there are additional stories that emphasize Kūkai's spiritual resonance and the responses by the sacred beings of Buddhism to his devotion. The *Shugyō engi* reports that Kūkai was tonsured at the Makinoo mountain temple and that he received the ten precepts, which indicated an official entrance into Buddhist monasticism for novice monks (Skt. *śramanera*; J. *shamī*). Then, at the age of twenty-two, he received the 250 additional precepts for monks at the Tōdaiji Temple in Nara.⁴⁰ After this, even though he had studied both Confucian and Buddhist writings, he was still troubled by doubt. Exhibiting utter sincerity to follow the path of Buddhism, "Kūkai prayed before the Buddha, stating, 'I will always seek the deep essence of the Buddhist Dharma. Yet in my heart there are doubts... All that I desire is that the various Buddhas of the Triple World in the ten directions reveal to me the Dharma Gate of Non-duality.'"⁴¹ In response to this prayer, the *Shugyō engi* reports, Kūkai received a divine revelation in the form of a dream, a common way for Buddhas to communicate with human beings. In this dream, a man appeared and told him that what he needed was the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T. no. 848; Ch. *Da Piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing*; J. *Daibirushana jōbutsu*

³⁹ For example, the mid-eleventh century collection *Dainihonkoku hokkekyō genki* (*Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sūtra*) contains numerous accounts of extraordinary events that occurred in the lives of the individuals most dedicated to the *Lotus Sūtra*. The stories emphasize not only the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* in bringing about these extraordinary events but also the role of the reciter's faith and virtue. According to this text, faithful devotees of the *Lotus Sūtra* achieved unusual abilities, such as the ability to cure illness (Tale 66), make one progress upward in the *rokudō*, or six paths of rebirth (Tale 25), expiate sins (Tale 27), quell the destructive forces of nature (Tale 81), cause non-believers to convert to faith in the *Lotus* (Tales 59 and 71), and cause aristocrats to mend their evil ways (Tale 14). According to the *Shugyō engi*, Kūkai in a similar manner exhibited pure devotion in his practice of Buddhism, and as a result he had extraordinary religious experiences and attained unusual powers.

See Yoshiko Dykstra's translation, *Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sūtra*, as well as the dissertation making effective use of this collection, William E. Deal, "Ascetics, Aristocrats, and the Lotus Sutra: the Construction of the Buddhist Universe."

⁴⁰ ZGR, vol. 28a, 281.

⁴¹ Ibid.

jinpens kajikyō, often abbreviated *Dainichikyō*). This scripture became one of the two most important texts in the Shingon tradition that Kūkai later promoted.⁴²

Having received this divine revelation, Kūkai apparently then knew where to look for the text. The *Shugyō engi* states, "Kūkai rejoiced and went to search for this text under the eastern pagoda of the Kumadera Temple of Takeuchi District of Yamato province. Kūkai found the text, opened it up, and read it extensively."⁴³

However, according to the *Shugyō engi*, the text was very difficult to understand, and Kūkai needed assistance that he could not find in Japan: "There was [spiritual] stagnation in the hearts of the people of Japan, and there was no one he could ask [about his doubts]. He thus made a vow and on the twelfth day of the fifth month in the twenty-third year of Enryaku (804), he went to Tang China. He was thirty-one years old."⁴⁴

This story idealizes Kūkai's reasons for traveling to China. In fact, it suggests that these motivations were not complicated in any manner and that he only wanted to further his understanding of Buddhist scriptures, in particular the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*. Yet again, the *Shugyō engi* has highlighted Kūkai's pure devotion and the responses from the sacred cosmos of Buddhism to help him along the way.

The Transmission of the Dharma to Kūkai in China

According to the *Shugyō engi*, at this time, Ambassador (*kentō taishi*) Fujiwara no Kadonomaro (?-818), the former governor of Echizen Province, made a voyage across the ocean to China. Kūkai went along on this trip, and once in China eventually reached the Tang capital,

⁴² For a brief introduction to the contents of this scripture, see Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 108-109.

⁴³ ZGR, vol. 28a, 281.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Changan.⁴⁵ At this time, he was able to meet several "esteemed monks" (J. *meitoku* 明德). The *Shugyō engi* then reports a fairly dramatic meeting between Kūkai and one of these esteemed monks, the one who would become his most significant Dharma teacher in China:

Kūkai met Huiguo Ajari, a monk of the Eastern Pagoda of the Qinglongsi Temple (in Changan). Huiguo saw Kūkai and smiled. He rejoiced, exclaiming, "I already knew that you had come, and I have been waiting for you for a long time. It is great to see you here, great indeed! My life is about to end, but there is no one to whom I can transmit the Dharma. You must prepare the offerings of incense and flowers quickly and enter the platform for the *abhiśeka* consecration ceremony."⁴⁶

This account works to emphasize Kūkai's unique spiritual capacity by stressing the extraordinary reception he received from the eminent master Huiguo.

The Chinese monk Huiguo (746-805) by this time was a renowned teacher of Buddhism. He had studied under Amoghavajra (705-774), an Indian Buddhist monk and translator, an important figure because of his major role in China in the transmission of the Buddhist teachings that Kūkai and others in his Shingon Buddhist tradition in Japan later regarded as the "esoteric teachings" (J. *mikkyō*). At least according to Kūkai's writings, as a very young monk, Huiguo had studied the ritual systems of the *garbha* (J. *taizō*) mandala of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* and the *vajradhātu* (J. *kongōkai*) mandala of the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* (T. no. 874; Ch. *Jingangding yiqie rulai zhenshishe dacheng xianzheng dajiaowangjing*; J. *Kongōchō issai nyorai shinjitsushō daijō genshō daikyōōkyō*, often abbreviated as *Kongōchōkyō*) with the guidance of Amoghavajra. (These two mandalas and their principal ritual practices will be discussed below.) Very soon after this, Amoghavajra initiated Huiguo as a master of Esoteric Buddhism by performing the *abhiśeka*, a consecration ceremony.⁴⁷ By the time that Kūkai had arrived in Changan, Huiguo had emerged as the most esteemed successor to Amoghavajra. Foreign students came to study

⁴⁵ For the brief account of these events in the *Shugyō engi*, see ZGR, vol. 28a, 281.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 281-282.

⁴⁷ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 121. I have relied on Abé's study for much of the historical information here.

with him from Korea, Central Asia, and even from faraway places such as Java. In addition, Huiguo was reputed to have over one thousand Chinese followers, both monastics and laity.⁴⁸

The author of the *Shugyō engi* has adapted the above passage about the initial meeting between Kūkai and Huiguo from the *Shōrai mokuroku* (Catalog of imported items), the official report that Kūkai presented to the court of Emperor Heizei after returning to Japan in 806.⁴⁹ One of the things we must consider is that Kūkai himself wrote about this meeting, and there are no other sources from another perspective about what took place. It is remarkable that Huiguo would choose to initiate a foreign disciple into the most secret disciplines of the esoteric ritual systems as quickly as the source suggests that he did with Kūkai. It is certainly possible that Huiguo was very excited about having a foreign disciple of such unusual spiritual and intellectual ability. However, in Kūkai's retrospective narrative, it was definitely in his interest to magnify the esteem that the renowned Chinese monk had for him. Doing so would enhance the status that Kūkai would be given in Japan. In addition, this story also serves the interests of the author of the *Shugyō engi*, who is attempting to convince others of Kūkai's exceptional spiritual abilities.⁵⁰

Once Kūkai actually takes part in the consecration ceremony that Huiguo so strongly recommends, additional wondrous events confirm his unusual spiritual resonance. In particular, there are revelations of the karmic affinity that Kūkai has with Mahāvairocana Buddha (J. Dainichi Nyorai), the Buddha at the center of the worldview of the Shingon Buddhist tradition. The *Shugyō engi* includes a brief summary of three important consecration rituals in which

⁴⁸ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 122.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 120. Abé provides much useful historical context for this important encounter between Kūkai and Huiguo. For a complete English translation of the *Shōrai mokuroku*, see Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 140-150.

⁵⁰ In what is otherwise a very useful summary of the historical events surrounding the initial meeting between Kūkai and Huiguo, Abé gives no consideration to the way that Kūkai's own interest undoubtedly shaped the narratives that he wrote once he had returned to Japan.

Kūkai was initiated into the main ritual systems of what he would later promote as "esoteric Buddhism." Like the passage above, this passage is adapted from Kūkai's autobiographical narrative about these events in the *Shōrai mokuroku*.⁵¹

During the first consecration ritual, Kūkai turned toward the Womb mandala, one of the two mandalas at the heart of the ritual practice that he later promoted within his Shingon school. At this time, he used a ritual method to determine his personal divinity. This procedure is prescribed in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, the Buddhist scripture that introduces the major divinities and rituals related to the Womb mandala. This mandala is the mandala created from the womb of great compassion. In this context, a mother's womb serves as a metaphor for the enlightened mind of a Buddha, a mind that is filled with great compassion for all sentient beings. This mandala is a visual representation of the realm of enlightened beings that are presented in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*.

In chapter 2, fascicle two of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T. no. 848, 18:11b-12b), there are instructions for the main procedure of esoteric Buddhist initiation of *abhiśeka*. First, the practitioner pledges to uphold the esoteric precepts, or *samaya-śīla* (J. *sanmaya kai*). Then, the practitioner's teacher blindfolds him and then guides him to the altar of the mandala. Next, the practitioner throws a flower on the mandala. Where it lands determines the particular Buddha or bodhisattva in the mandala who will become the personal divinity of the practitioner. After this divinity has been divined, the practitioner is permitted to remove the blindfold and see for himself the divinity to whom he will be most devoted.

According to the *Shugyō engi* passage above, when he took part in the ritual, Kūkai's flower fell on Mahāvairocana Buddha, the most auspicious location for it to fall. Mahāvairocana

⁵¹ See Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 122-124, for an English translation of the passages in the *Shōrai mokuroku*, as well as for useful explication of the events described. The following discussion is based on Abé's introduction to the mandalas and the rituals associated with them.

is the personification of the ultimate wisdom of enlightenment and, according to the theology of the Shingon tradition, the cosmic Buddha who personifies the entire enlightened universe. His position at the very center of the Womb mandala is emblematic of his central role in the Shingon Buddhist worldview. He is surrounded by four Buddhas who each represent one of the four attributes of his own ultimate wisdom, in other words, the related wisdoms of the great mirror, equality, observation, and action.

Of all the hundreds of divinities in the Womb mandala, Kūkai's flower landed on the most important one. This occurrence had special significance because it affirmed that Kūkai had exceptional qualifications to be a religious leader. According to Śubhakarasiṃha's commentary on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, if during this procedure, the disciple's flower falls on the Buddha's body, "the student will perfect all the mental faculties of the Buddha".⁵² This understanding, in particular the revelation that Kūkai will become a Buddha himself, seems to be behind the strong praise that Huiguo expresses.

Next, there is a description of Kūkai's initiation into the Diamond World mandala, the other main mandala that became central in Shingon Buddhist ritual. The Diamond World mandala is the "mandala of the realm of the adamantite weapon of the vajra."⁵³ The vajra, or diamond, signifies the wisdom of enlightenment, wisdom so sharp and so strong that it destroys follies, delusion, and ignorance. The Diamond World mandala is based on another important scripture in the Shingon tradition, the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra*. Like the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, this text describes the ritual procedure of throwing a flower on a mandala in order to discover one's personal divinity.

⁵² T. no. 796, 39:662a. Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 135, quotes this passage.

⁵³ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 123.

Again, against all odds, Kūkai's flower fell in the most auspicious location, the body of Mahāvairocana Buddha, the cosmic Buddha who is the most important sacred being in the Diamond World mandala. Even though there are numerous divinities within both of the mandalas, the blindfolded Kūkai has tossed his flower on the most important Buddha not once, but twice. The narrative states that Huiguo rejoiced just as before, an expected response given the extreme rarity of this event.

In the next month, Huiguo conducted yet a third *abhiśeka* on behalf of Kūkai, this time to grant him the rank of Master of Dharma Transmission. This rank enabled Kūkai to teach disciples the teachings and ritual procedures that he had acquired so quickly as part of this series of initiations with Huiguo in China. The conferral of the status was a rarity, as indicated by the enormous feast that was held to celebrate the event.

We will never know whether these events occurred exactly in the way that Kūkai and, then later, the *Shugyō engi*'s author narrate. After all, in this case, again we only have a narrative written by Kūkai himself. It certainly enhanced his image to report that he had twice divined that his personal divinity was Mahāvairocana Buddha. In addition, the dramatic narrative about the encounters between Kūkai and the Chinese Dharma Master Huiguo serves to heighten the status of Kūkai.

Nevertheless, while the *Shugyō engi* is selective in its emphasis of Huiguo's strongly positive views of Kūkai, there is strong historical evidence that Huiguo indeed held the Japanese monk in high esteem. In the final days before he died in 806, Huiguo appointed Kūkai as one of his six main Dharma successors. Although the *engi* does not include the text, there is an early biography of Huiguo written by a lay disciple, Wuyin. This text, which records Huiguo's final words, states that only Kūkai and another disciple, Iming, gained the status of master of the

teachings of both mandalas. In addition, Kūkai was chosen to write his teacher's epitaph, and this is additional evidence of the esteem that Huiguo had for him.⁵⁴

The *Shugyō engi* quotes part of this epitaph, which Kūkai included in the *Shōrai mokuroku*. In his final words to Kūkai, his teacher Huiguo offered words of strong encouragement to him: "Now I have transmitted the Dharma to you. The work of copying scriptures and producing sacred images is complete. You should return to Japan quickly. For the benefit of the state, spread these teachings far and wide throughout the realm and bring benefits to the people."⁵⁵ According to this passage, in his final days, Huiguo showed confidence in Kūkai's ability to benefit the people of Japan by transmitting the Buddhist teachings that he had acquired in China.

In the *Shugyō engi*, there is a final quotation apparently also from Huiguo. This statement reveals an even higher esteem for Kūkai than the previous passages convey. Huiguo stated, "There is a monk from Japan who has come here seeking the holy teachings. He has learned everything that I had to teach, as if I had poured water from one vase to another. This monk is not an ordinary mortal. He is a bodhisattva who is in the third stage along the path to Buddhahood. Inwardly he possesses the heart of the Great Vehicle that progresses to Buddhahood. It is only on the outside that he has the characteristics of a humble monk."⁵⁶ Huiguo here states that Kūkai is a bodhisattva who is progressing quite well towards perfect Buddhahood. This image of Kūkai as the ideal Buddhist monastic is the image of Kūkai that the author of the *Shugyō engi* most wants to convey.

⁵⁴ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 126-127. See *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, vol. 1, 44, for Wuyin's biography of Huiguo.

⁵⁵ ZGR, vol. 28a, 282.

⁵⁶ ZGR, vol. 28a, 282.

Kūkai Becomes a Buddha

The *Shugyō engi* reports a few more episodes of wonders that Kūkai supposedly performed before he left China. These legends appear to be based on his reputation as a master calligrapher and emphasize his unusual skill in writing Chinese characters. The text states that he performed even more wonders in China than it records.⁵⁷ These episodes add more to the *Shugyō engi*'s overall portrayal of Kūkai as an extraordinary human being who is spiritually resonant. Then, it states that in Daidō 2 (807) he returned to Japan.

There are several stories about Kūkai's efforts in Japan to spread the teachings of Buddhism that he had acquired in China, and these stories also emphasize the ways in which Kūkai's highly unusual spiritual capacity enabled him to do this. The text states that Kūkai established the Shingon school of Buddhism in Japan and that he preached the doctrine of the possibility of becoming a Buddha in this very body, or *sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏. However, many monks of the other schools of Buddhism in Japan had doubts about this doctrine, which differs from the conventional assumption that the attainment of Buddhahood requires lifetime after lifetime of serious Buddhist practice. The *Shugyō engi* states,

In order to put an end to the doubts of these monks, Kūkai sat in the Seiryōden Hall, facing toward the south. He formed the mudrā of Mahāvairocana Buddha and started meditating. At this time, Kūkai's face turned a golden color and emitted golden rays of light. One person got up and left his seat. All the people there lowered their heads in respect... The mistaken doubts of the monks [who did not agree with the doctrine of *sokushin jōbutsu*] were then obliterated entirely.⁵⁸

According to this story, when the need arose, Kūkai was able to literally become Mahāvairocana Buddha. In other words, when he wanted to convince some skeptical monks of the truth of his doctrine, he was able to enter meditation and then to become the Great Sun

⁵⁷ ZGR, vol. 28a, 282.

⁵⁸ ZGR, vol. 28a, 283.

Buddha whose body emits golden rays of light just like the sun. Generally in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the issue of such spiritual light from a Buddha or bodhisattva—the extraordinary power most commonly associated with the Buddha in the Mahāyāna scriptures—is linked to spiritual efficacy. It gives beings special insight into Buddhist doctrine, for example, or the ability to see and hear the Buddhas of the ten directions with divine ears and eyes.⁵⁹

This story suggests that Kūkai did not merely preach about becoming a Buddha in one's present lifetime but was already a Buddha himself. He had the power to reveal that, in reality, he was identical to Mahāvairocana Buddha, and this demonstration was far more effective than any debate or sermon could have been. This story depicts Kūkai's spiritual resonance in a stronger fashion than any of the previous miracle stories included in the *Shugyō engi* discussed thus far. In addition, it suggests that the Shingon tradition is superior to the other traditions of Buddhism of the day, in enabling the attainment of Buddhahood “in this body,” that is, in this lifetime. It enables us to imagine the sectarian politics of Heian Japan, a cultural world in which Shingon clerics such as those who were telling these stories or writing hagiography wanted to claim that their religious teachings and practices were superior to all others of the time.

The Founding of a Mountain Monastery

Having made the case that Kūkai is an extraordinary Buddhist saint, even a bodhisattva or a Buddha, the *Shugyō engi* proceeds to tell about the origins of Kongōbuji as a Buddhist temple on Kōyasan. Regardless of whether these events occurred in exactly the way in which they are narrated in this text, the myths about the origins of Kōyasan have much religious significance. It will be instructive to discuss briefly what we know about Kūkai's actions in

⁵⁹ Randy Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology*, 103-106.

founding Kongōbuji and then to proceed with an analysis of the *Shugyō engi*'s account of these events.

The Appeal for Secluded Mountain Land

On the nineteenth of the fifth month of Kōnin 7 (816), Kūkai wrote a document in which he requested that Emperor Saga grant him the land of Kōyasan. In this document, he stressed the importance of having monasteries in secluded areas such as high mountains so that Buddhist monks would have an appropriate place for the practice of meditation:

It is regrettable that only a few monks practice meditation in high mountains, in deep forests, in wide canyons, and in secluded caves. This is because the teaching of meditation has not been transmitted, nor has a suitable place been allocated for the practice of meditation.

According to the meditation sutras, meditation should be practiced preferably on a flat area deep in the mountains. When young, I often walked through mountainous areas and crossed many rivers. There is a quiet, open place called Kōya located two days' walk to the west from a point that is one day's walk south from Yoshino. I estimated the area to the south of Ito-no-kōri in Kii-no-kuni (Wakayama Prefecture). High peaks surround Kōya in all four directions; no human tracks, still less trails, are to be seen there. I should like to clear the wilderness in order to build a monastery there for the practice of meditation, for the benefit of the nation and for those who desire to discipline themselves.⁶⁰

Kūkai claimed to have sought, more than anything else, a place most suitable for Buddhist meditation. Kōyasan, a mountain with a flat plain at the top, was the place that he found most fitting with the scriptural prescriptions for places of meditation. This was a place in the middle of the Kii Peninsula that Kūkai remembered coming across while performing ascetic disciplines in the mountains in his youth. The rest of the document describes how he appealed to the emperor to grant him this land so that he could build a monastery on the mountain, known as

⁶⁰ Here I have used the translation by Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 47, with very minor changes. For the primary source, see *Kii no kuni, Ito no gun, Kōya no mine ni oite nyūjō no tokoro o ukekowaruru no hyō*, in *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, vol. 3, 523-524.

Kōyasan. In the month following this petition, Saga agreed to grant Kūkai the land that he had requested.⁶¹

The *Shugyō engi*'s narrative of the same events seems at least initially to be based on the historical realities about the origins of the Buddhist monastery at Kōyasan. After recounting a number of the miracles that Kūkai performed after returning to Japan, the *Shugyō engi* states that Kūkai eventually sought a place in the mountains where he could meditate: "Over time, Kūkai grew tired of the commotion and impurities of the secular world. He secretly sought a numinous mountain to be used for meditation."⁶² In keeping with its emphasis on Kūkai's piety, the *Shugyō engi* stresses that Kūkai wanted to separate himself from the secular world and to devote himself entirely to meditation. While this account is much shorter than the document that Kūkai issued to Emperor Saga requesting land for a monastery in the mountains, it retains the element of Kūkai's fundamental desire to find a place in the mountains where he, and possibly other monks as well, could engage in meditative disciplines.

Kūkai's Encounter with a Priestly Hunter

The *Shugyō engi* then begins narrating a story about Kūkai's auspicious meeting with an unusual hunter who led him to Kōyasan:

In midsummer of the year 816, Kūkai left the capital to travel beyond it. In Uchi County in the province of Yamato, he met a hunter, who was deep red in appearance and stood about eight feet in height. He wore a short-sleeved blue coat and had long bones and thick muscles. He carried a bow and arrows strapped to his body, and he was accompanied by dogs, one large and one small. He saw Kūkai pass by and asked some questions. Kūkai stopped and also inquired about certain details.

The hunter said, "I am a dog keeper from the southern mountains. I know of a mountain area of about ten thousand square measures, and in that area there is a flat plain that is remote and quiet. There are many mysterious wonders there.

⁶¹ For a useful overview of the major historical sources about the founding of Kōyasan, see "Kōyasan no kaisō," Chapter 4 of Takeuchi Kōzen's *Kōbō Daishi denshō to shijitsu*.

⁶² ZGR, vol. 28a, 283.

You should take up residence there; I will help you accomplish this." The hunter then released his dogs and had them run ahead. Then he disappeared.⁶³

According to this passage, after leaving the capital city, Kūkai met a hunter who had a highly unusual appearance. Possessing two dogs, the hunter agreed to guide Kūkai to a flat plain far beyond human civilization. Not only does this flat plain meet the ideal conditions for a place for meditation for which Kūkai was looking in that it is purported to be "remote and quiet." In addition, the hunter promises, this land also has unusual marvels.

Wada Shūjō points out that this strange hunter is portrayed as being very much like the Shugendō monks and mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*) renowned for their religious rituals and forms of mountain asceticism (*sanrin shugyō*) in the mountains of Japan.⁶⁴ This particular hunter apparently has been walking and hunting extensively throughout this mountain area where there is not yet any human habitation.

Why does such a hunter appear in this legend? Long ago in Japan hunters did their hunting in the mountains in order to earn their living. They became known as the priests of the mountain kami (*yama no kami*), the deities who dwelled in the mountains. In other words, a person known for hunting in the mountains often also had the role of conducting religious rituals dedicated to the mountain deities. This occurred throughout Japan, not just in the area around Kōyasan.⁶⁵ With this knowledge, we can surmise that the author of the *Shugyō engi* has introduced a religious figure, a priest, if not a god himself, who assists Kūkai in finding Kōyasan. In fact, later traditions deified this hunter as Kariba Myōjin, or the August Deity of Hunting, who was also known as Kōya Myōjin.

⁶³ This passage is where Tanabe, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 356, commences his English translation of the *Shugyō engi*. For the most part, I have used Tanabe's translation here, with minor alterations. See also ZGR, vol. 28a, 283.

⁶⁴ Wada, "Shingon mikkyō ni matsuwaru densetsu to shinkō," 204.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 202-204.

The Buddhist Conversion of the Ruler of the Mountain

After his encounter with the priestly hunter, Kūkai had another auspicious encounter with a person who claimed to live in this mountainous area:

Kūkai thought silently about this and proceeded. He stopped for a rest when he came to a large river on the boundaries of Kii Province. Here he met a person who lived in the mountains. Upon being told the details of the place, she said, "South of here there is a flat, swampy plain. The mountains range on three sides and the entry way from the southwest is open. Myriad rivers flow to the east and terminate by converging into one. During the day there are always strange clouds in the sky up above the land, and at night there are always holy lights." Upon further investigation, it turned out to be directly south of Ito-no-kōri in Kii Province.

The next day, he followed this mountain dweller, and they arrived at the swampy plain a short distance away. As he examined the place he felt that this certainly was the spot where he should build a monastery.⁶⁶

Kūkai continued walking and eventually he met a person living the mountains who gave him additional directions in order to find the "flat, swampy plain," or, in other words, Kōyasan.

Like the hunter, this person promises that this land has unusual occurrences, such as strange clouds during the day and holy lights that appear at night. The appearance of unusual natural phenomena was associated with a number of Buddhist sacred places in East Asia at the time of the composition of this text. Perhaps the most fascinating example is the parallel case of the Chinese sacred mountain Wutai Shan. Wutai Shan was a famous pilgrimage spot for religious seekers who had traveled to China from a number of faraway places including India, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Korea specifically to visit this sacred mountain.⁶⁷ Pilgrims' records and chronicles of the mountain indicate that, starting during the Tang Dynasty (608-907), pilgrims wanted to go to this sacred mountain in order to experience miracles and

⁶⁶ With very minor alterations, I have used Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 356-357. For this passage in the original primary source, see ZGR, vol. 28a, 283-284.

⁶⁷ See Raoul Birnbaum, *Studies on the Mysteries of Mañjuśrī*, 12. Birnbaum has published several articles about the experiences of devotees at Wutai Shan. For example, see "The Manifestation of a Monastery: Shen-ying's Experiences on Mount Wu-t'ai in T'ang Context." Robert Gimello, "Chang Shang-ying on Wu-t'ai Shan," also provides useful analysis of the Buddhist devotion occurring on Wutai Shan during the Song era.

visionary encounters with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in his various manifestations. One of these manifestations was strange clouds above the mountain, and sometimes these clouds were reported to be in five different colors. Another unusual occurrence that supposedly occurred on the mountain was the appearance of holy lights.

A number of Buddhist monks from Japan were able to visit Wutai Shan as part of more general pilgrimages to China in search of the Buddhist Dharma. Chōnen (938-1016), a Buddhist monk from Japan, traveled to China in 983 at least partly to worship at the sacred mountains of China such as Wutai Shan.⁶⁸ According to the documents about his journey, in addition to other extraordinary experiences, Chōnen was able to experience a vision of the strange clouds above Wutai Shan as well as the appearance of holy lights in the area of the sacred mountain.⁶⁹ We also know that Ennin (794-864) and other Buddhist monks had already traveled to Wutai Shan during their journeys to China and brought back reports of similar numinous encounters on the mountain.⁷⁰

Both in Japan and China, these stories formed part of a sacred lexicon of stories and images about the main features of sacred mountains. It is possible that similar experiences of encounters with unusual natural phenomena were being reported at Kōyasan in early medieval Japan, when the *Shugyō engi* was composed. Even if people were not yet reporting these numinous encounters with strange clouds and holy lights, the author of the *Shugyō engi* knew that his readers would be impressed by the reports that Kōyasan was very much like the great sacred mountains in China, mountains as renowned and amazing as Wutai Shan. This episode

⁶⁸ For information about Chōnen's trip to China from 983 to 986, see my M.A. thesis, "Chōnen and Vivifying Gifts," 37-91, in addition to Gregory Henderson and Leon Hurvitz, "The Buddha of Seiryōji: New Finds and New Theory," 5-8. It was during Chōnen's stay in China that the famous Śākyamuni Buddha statue that was eventually enshrined at the Seiryōji Temple in present-day Kyōto was constructed.

⁶⁹ Henderson and Hurvitz, "The Buddha of Seiryōji," 51.

⁷⁰ Regarding Ennin's journey to China, see Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*.

suggests that, at least partly because of the presence of these unusual marvels, Kūkai was drawn to this unusually numinous area and at this point decided to build his monastery there.

As the narrative continues, the mountain dweller reveals more about her special identity: "The mountain person secretly said to Kūkai, 'I am the Ruler of the Mountain, and I donate the land under my control to you in order to increase my power and blessings. I am accustomed to mountains and rivers and remain distant from the activities of men. Fortunately I have met a bodhisattva, much to my merit.'" ⁷¹ Stating that she is the "Ruler of the Mountain" (*yama no ō*), this mountain dweller is admitting that she is the *sanjin* 山神, or the deity who dwells in the particular locale of this mountain and who is in charge of the mountain area. Like trees, rivers, and other parts of the natural world, mountains have been one of the main places believed to be inhabited by *kami*. According to the ancient national chronicles, the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihongi* (720), mountains were places where the heavenly *kami* descended to earth and where human beings encountered them. Prior to the initial construction of the Buddhist monastery at Kōyasan, people in this area probably believed that this particular deity was the main local divinity in this area. ⁷² According to the *Shugyō engi*, with the belief that she would receive religious benefits in return, she agreed to donate the land of Kōyasan to Kūkai.

The text presents yet another story of Kūkai's interaction with this same local divinity:

On one side of the path in the mountains there was a swamp of about ten square measures. It was the shrine of the ruler of the mountain, the Great August Deity Niu. Today it is called the Amano shrine.

The first time Kūkai ascended the mountain, he spent a night in the area of the shrine. He received an oracle saying, "I belong to the realm of the *kami* (*jindō* 神道), the local deities, but I have hoped for power and blessings for a long time. Now you have come to this place much to my great fortune.

"In the past when I was a human being, the deity Kekunisuera-no-mikoto gave me about ten thousand square measures of land for houses. The boundaries

⁷¹ Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 357; ZGR, vol. 28a, 284.

⁷² It is possible to surmise this even though the stories about this deity in the *Shugyō engi* cannot be taken as straightforward factual history.

are south to Nankai, north to Yamato River, east to Yamato Province, and west to the Valley of Mount Ōjin. I wish to donate this to you for all eternity as an expression of my belief."⁷³

The setting of this episode is a famous religious site, which is now known as the Niutsuhime Jinja. It has played an important role throughout the history of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan. This shrine is dedicated to the Great August Deity Niu. Sometimes the shrine has been called the Amano no Miya, or the Amano Shrine, just as the *Shugyō engi* states. It is situated along the main pilgrimage route up to Kōyasan, and this path up the mountain is still in use today. This shrine is located at the midpoint of this path, between the foot of the mountain and the peak.

While scholars in Japan have emphasized the legendary aspects of this account, it is an instructive artifact of Buddhist interactions with local religion. We find here a literary account of an encounter between Kūkai—by now established in the text as a prime representative of Buddhism, a tradition that originated far away—and a local Japanese divinity. The setting of this encounter is the very place where this local Japanese deity is enshrined, and the representative of Buddhism wants to establish a Buddhist institution in the same locale. This *Shugyō engi* account is undoubtedly based on other literary accounts of the initial interaction between a representative of Buddhism and a local deity in a particular area in Japan or China where the Buddhist figure wants to establish a Buddhist monastery.⁷⁴ Since these accounts were written by the Buddhists, and not the ritualists dedicated to the local divinities, they usually emphasize the superiority of Buddhism relative to the cults of the local deities.

⁷³ Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 357. ZGR, vol. 28a, 284.

⁷⁴ Focusing on the use of such legends by the clerics of the early Chan Buddhist tradition in China, Bernard Faure has analyzed the ideological dimensions of many of these legends in "Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimage Sites," *The Rhetoric Of Immediacy*, 258-283, and "Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions." He shows how, in his language, the "reterritorialization" of the religious landscape was accompanied by "remythologization." In other words, the territorial legends told by these clerics were vital part of the efforts to establish new religious institutions in particular locations in which there already existed other forms of religious activity.

Some evidence exists for friendly relations between the Buddhist monks of Kongōbuji and the priests at the Niutsuhime Jinja. In his discussion of the story, Takeuchi Kōzen goes to great lengths to stress the friendly relationship between Gashin (?-999), a prominent monk at Kōyasan, and the Niutsuhime Jinja.⁷⁵ In 952, Gashin was invited to come to Kōyasan. Becoming the first person with the title *kengyō*, or abbot, Gashin himself eventually became the administrative head of Kongōbuji. Kūkai's tomb at the Oku no In had burned as a result of lightning in the month before Gashin arrived. In the summer of the next year, Gashin rebuilt the tomb and for the first time at Kōyasan built a shrine that enshrines both Niu and Kōya Myōjin. He built this shrine to the left of the tomb. The dedicatory celebration was held in the third month of Tentoku (957). This decision to enshrine these deities near Kūkai's tomb indicates the reverence that Gashin had for these local divinities. According to Takeuchi, he probably wanted to enshrine these deities in this location at least partly to repay the ritualists of the Niu no Hauri, or the officiants conducting the rituals associated with Niutsuhime, who had provided assistance in rebuilding the Oku no In.

In addition, the decision to include these deities in the *Shugyō engi* is additional evidence of the ways in which the clerics of Kongōbuji envisioned an intimate, friendly relationship between Kūkai and these local divinities. These divinities were enshrined not only in physical space on the Buddhist mountain. They were also enshrined in the narrative space of the grand story about the awe-inspiring origins of this Buddhist institution.

However, the story above masks what was undoubtedly a much more complicated history involving more tension and strain than we see in this account. Like many other mythical stories,

⁷⁵ See Takeuchi, *Kōbō Daishi denshō to shijitsu*, 163-164.

it has ideological dimensions and serves to fabricate a new reality.⁷⁶ While some evidence shows a friendly relationship between these two different institutions, we can surmise that at times during these years the priests of the Niutsumi Jinja were not so happy that Buddhists from the outside were encroaching upon their sacred territory. Were there a narrative about the origins of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan told from the perspective of the Niutsumi Jinja, it might convey a very different perspective.

A number of literary accounts relate the initially hostile relations between Buddhism and the local deities in locations where people wanted to build new Buddhist temples. These accounts provide evidence that, soon after Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the mid-sixth century, conflicts emerged over sites and materials associated with local *kami*. In the establishment of the early Buddhist institutions, places already deemed sacred were appropriated and transformed into Buddhist sacred locations.⁷⁷

There are many surviving stories about controversy over the treatment of the locations and materials most associated with local *kami*. Sacred groves or the bases of sacred hills were among the locations closely associated with *kami*, and it was prohibited to cut trees in these areas. In addition, *kami* worshippers believed that trees or wooden pillars were sacred containers of these deities. While many large temples were being founded along with the fast growth of the Yamato state, how these *kami* trees should be treated became a major source of controversy. According to the *Nihon shoki* (720), Emperor Kōtoku (r. 645-654) was accused of "honoring

⁷⁶ See the work of Bruce Lincoln, especially *Theorizing Myth*, for an analysis of the ideological dimensions of mythic narratives.

⁷⁷ This process of course not only occurred in the early spread of Buddhism in Japan but in other cultures as well. For a very useful overview of the early relations between *kami* and Buddhism in Japan in particular, see Fabio Rambelli and Mark Teeuwen, "Introduction: Combinatory Religion and the Honji Suijaku Paradigm in Premodern Japan," 7-13. I am indebted to this essay for the following discussion of stories about the initial contact between the local deities and Buddhism.

Buddhism and belittling the *kami*" as a result of allowing people to cut trees in sacred groves.⁷⁸ There are also reports of temples being moved to new locations because of their establishment in a particular area had angered the local deities. This occurred in the case of Kudara no Ōdera, which Shōtoku Taishi (574-622) had built. After this temple was moved to Tōchi, the *kami* from the nearby shrine, Kobe, purportedly started several fires on the temple grounds. The temple had to be moved yet again to Takechi by Emperor Tenmu (r. 673-686).⁷⁹ This story provides evidence of the hostility that local clans had against some of the Buddhist temples founded by the central government.

Other stories portray an intermediate phase of relations between Buddhism and the *kami*, a phase in which local deities supposedly recognized the inevitable rise of Buddhist temples on their lands. One story is about the construction of the Gangōji in Asuka during the reign of Empress Suiko (r. 592-628). According to the story, two successive woodcutters tried to cut down an old zelkova tree but were killed while trying to do so. They were intending to construct a new Buddhist temple. Eventually, a Buddhist monk, disguising his true identity, went to the tree and hid inside of it during a rainstorm. At this time, the *kami* of the tree spoke to the monk and revealed that he had killed the men who had come to cut him down. "However, sooner or later they will succeed," the tree *kami* conceded. The monk then rejoiced and reported what happened to the court. Soon woodcutters felled the tree with no difficulties.⁸⁰ In the story, the tree *kami* shows awareness that he will not survive much longer and that a Buddhist temple would eventually be constructed in his sacred territory.

⁷⁸ *Nihon shoki*, NKBT vol. 68, 268.

⁷⁹ *Daianji engi*, SGR, vol. 19, 88.

⁸⁰ For this story, see *Konjaku monogatari* 11, no. 22, in NKBT vol. 24, 100-102. Teeuwen and Rambelli, "Introduction," 8-9, discuss the story as part of their larger introduction to the history of relations between *kami* and Buddhism in Japan.

In contrast to the stories of hostile relations, more stories of the supposedly peaceful ceding of territory and trees to the Buddhist temples survive. Like the *Shugyō engi*, these stories were written by monks attached to the Buddhist institutions. They tell of seemingly remarkable success in gaining control of the local deities that dwelled in the lands from which the representatives of Buddhism took timber in order to construct new Buddhist temples.

With the rise of "shrine temples" (*jingūji*), Buddhist temples that were connected to shrines, some of which were built within shrine precincts or near the shrines, there appeared stories suggesting that local deities even wanted Buddhist temples established so that they could attain Buddhist liberation. According to these stories, oracles from the local deities initiated the founding of the shrine temples. An oracle of the *kami* of Tado, found in a text from 788, is a representative example. According to this story, a person possessed by the *kami* stated, "I am the *kami* of Tado... I have received the karmic retribution of being born as a *kami*. Now I wish to escape from my *kami* state and take refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddhism."⁸¹ This story is based on the idea that *kami* are sentient beings who need the ultimate liberation of Buddhism. By the eighth century, with the use of sophisticated ideological and hermeneutic tools not possessed by the *kami* ritualists, Buddhist clerics in Japan were using their doctrine of karma to explicate the status of the local deities in this manner.⁸² The Buddhist Dharma supposedly transforms such *kami* into more ethical beings instead of the sometimes dangerous spirits that they were known to be.

The *Shugyō engi* passage mentioned above about Kūkai's encounter with the Ruler of the Mountain also contains the element of an oracle from the local deity who expresses an aspiration

⁸¹ *Ise no kuni Kuwana-gun Tado jingūji garan engi narabi ni shizaichō* (c. 788), ZGR vol. 27b, 350-355. The translation is found in Teeuwen and Rambelli, "Introduction," 10.

⁸² Norman Havens, "Shintō," 23. Havens does a very good job in explaining the very complex developments in the relations between the Buddhists and the cult of the local divinities already in Japan when Buddhism arrived.

to convert to Buddhism. In this case, the Great August Deity Niu seems to be particularly eager to speak with Kūkai and to convey her religious aspirations to convert to a superior tradition. She tells Kūkai that she belongs to the realm of the *kami*, but she has hoped for something better, for "power and blessings." According to Wada Shūjō, such a statement spoken by a local Japanese deity means that the deity wants to enter the path of Buddhism and to receive true religious salvation.⁸³ The statement articulates an aspiration for conversion to Buddhism, which is contrasted with the traditions of the local divinities.

The implication of this story is that the land where Kūkai constructed Kongōbuji more properly belonged to this Buddhist monk from the outside than to the local deity who already lived there. The local deity chooses to convert to Buddhism and, by donating much land for the temple grounds of Kongōbuji, indicates her desire for Buddhist religious activities to flourish in an area where she has been worshipped presumably for many years. Furthermore, that this local divinity saw the arrival of the Buddhist monk more as a blessing than a threat indicates that there was little struggle between the Buddhists who newly established their temple in this area, on the one hand, and the people who had long been dedicated to the local deity, the Great August Deity Niu, on the other hand.

The story presents a hierarchical relationship between Buddhism and the local divinities in this area. It is important to consider that it was written by a monk at Kongōbuji who wanted to promote his own Buddhist institution, even if this meant presenting the local deities as sentient beings inferior to the Buddhist saint Kūkai. Ultimately, for the author of the *Shugyō engi*, Kūkai was an amazingly virtuous individual who deserved even more reverence than the local divinities who supposedly handed him the land for the new Buddhist monastery. Just as Kūkai remained at the center of the ritual space of the Oku no In—even after Gashin enshrined the two main local

⁸³ Wada, "Shingon mikkyō ni matsuwaru densetsu to shinkō," 199.

divinities to the left of his shrine—he remains the central figure in the narrative about the origins of this Buddhist institution. It is his extraordinary Buddhist virtue and accomplishments in the world that this author wants to emphasize.

In addition to the desire to promote devotion towards a particular individual, behind the writing of the *Shugyō engi* is the larger desire to indigenize the Buddhist tradition within the local religious landscape of Japan. In fact, the *engi* genre as a whole can be read as literary accounts that seek to make Buddhism much more of a seemingly natural and legitimate part of Japanese religion and culture.⁸⁴ In literature that spans a number of centuries, from the Heian through the Tokugawa eras, temple *engi* again and again use sacred narratives to make the case that Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the various individual temples have legitimate claims to the particular locales that they occupy. Like many of the other temple *engi* written in Japan, this particular story is a territorial legend that asserts that a Buddhist institution has as much of a right to be in this particular locale as the cults of the local divinities.

The Land Suitable for Esoteric Buddhism

Another famous story included in the *Shugyō engi* also asserts the right for this particular monastery to be located at this place in Japan. In doing so, however, it attempts to link the origins of Kōyasan to Kūkai's journey to China in search of the Dharma.

At the end of the narrative about Kūkai's journey to China, the *Shugyō engi* includes a story about Kūkai's attempts to select the proper location for a Buddhist monastery in Japan:

In the eighth month of Daidō 2 (807), Kūkai headed for Japan, his homeland. On the day that his ship set sail, he prayed, "There is a land that is suitable for the broad transmission of the holy teachings of esoteric Buddhism, which I have acquired (in China). This vajra (ritual implement) will quickly reach this land and select where it is."

⁸⁴ This is one of the major claims that Mark MacWilliams, "Kannon Engi," 27-31, makes about the narrative strategies of temple *engi*.

Kūkai faced Japan and threw a three-pronged vajra. It flew away into the clouds. On the twenty-second day of the tenth month of the same year, he returned home to Japan.⁸⁵

This narrative suggests that, having just acquired the teachings of esoteric Buddhism from Huiguo, Kūkai had already started to plan the building of a monastery in Japan even before he left China. According to this story, which echoes the previous accounts about his amazing Buddhist virtue, he was most interested in determining the place that would be most suitable for spreading these teachings.

After throwing the vajra towards Japan, Kūkai himself returned to his homeland. After nine years, he eventually was able to start building Kōyasan. The *Shugyō engi* then presents a story about his finding the vajra that he had found in a tree at Kōyasan: "While they were clearing the trees in order to build a monastery, they found the three-pronged vajra that he had thrown from China hanging majestically from a tree. Kūkai was filled with joy. Then he realized that this was a place suitable for the Esoteric teaching, just as the ruler of the mountain, the owner of the land, had said."⁸⁶

This is a brief story about Kūkai's immense joy at discovering the specific location where the ritual implement has landed in Japan. By this discovery, in effect an act of divination, Kūkai has received confirmation that this is the proper location to build his new monastery. In addition to his numinous encounters with the local divinities who granted him this land, this is yet another sign that Kōyasan is the place most suitable for his monastery.

The story gives added legitimacy to Kōyasan by connecting the mountain to China, a land where Buddhism had flourished much longer than in Japan. In particular, it seems significant that Kūkai threw the three-pronged vajra to Kōyasan while still in China. He had

⁸⁵ This translation is my own. Tanabe, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," does not include this passage in his English translation. See ZGR, vol. 28a, 282-283, for the passage in the primary source.

⁸⁶ Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 357. ZGR, vol. 28a, 284.

been transmitted what he later classified as the highest teachings of Buddhism, the "esoteric" teachings, directly from the authentic source, the teacher Huiguo. The story about the three-pronged vajra suggests that Kōyasan has a special karmic relationship with these esoteric teachings of Buddhism. Without the story, it would seem that Kōyasan would have had less of a direct, mysterious karmic relationship with esoteric Buddhism or with Chinese Buddhism. It would merely be the site that the human Kūkai had selected for meditation.

Many similar stories about the founding of temples in Japan and the origins of their sacred icons in India and China employ a very similar narrative device to create a direct connection between those temples and the larger sacred geography of Buddhism. In Japan there are many stories about icons that miraculously floated or flew to Japan from India, China, or mythical places in the Buddhist cosmos.⁸⁷ According to these tales, sometimes logs deliberately traveled to Japan from India and China in order to spread the Dharma. Once found in Japan, these logs were carved into the statues that became the central icons in Buddhist temples.

The basic aim of this literature seems to be very similar to the *engi* connected to Kōyasan. In other words, it legitimates the temples by connecting their origins to sacred places far away. In addition, the stories stress the mysterious karmic circumstances behind the initial construction of the temples.

Kūkai's Entrance into Meditation

Near the end of his life, Kūkai decided to retire to Kōyasan for his final years. We know that he was on the mountain at least by the eighth month of Tenchō 9 (832) and that from then on

⁸⁷ See Mark MacWilliams, "Living Icons: Reizō Myths of the Saikoku Kannon Pilgrimage," 60-62, which discusses stories about icons that miraculously floated or flew to Japan from India, China, or mythical places in the Buddhas cosmos.

he spent most of his time there.⁸⁸ While it cannot be trusted as a perfectly reliable historical document, the *Shugyō engi* presents a very important account of Kūkai's final instructions to his disciples in the months before he died. This story appeared just over a century following his death. It is this account that I will now consider.

Kūkai's Final Instructions

According to the *Shugyō engi*, Kūkai, sensing that his death was near, just a few months before dying in 835, assembled all of his disciples in order to give them final instructions:

Kūkai said to all of his disciples, "I think I will be leaving this world sometime during the third month of next year. To the great worthy Shinnen (804-891), I bequeath Kongōbuji, the construction of which is still not complete. Since, however, the efforts of this great worthy alone will not suffice; the great worthy Jichie (785-847) should help him."⁸⁹

According to this account, Kūkai had a premonition that the end of his life was near and that he needed to prepare his closest followers to take over the work of completing his Buddhist temple on Kōyasan. We know from other records that Kūkai put Shinnen in charge of Kongōbuji, just as he handed responsibility to nine other major disciples for the administration of other Shingon temples. Jichie, who had been entrusted with the administration of Tōji, an important Shingon temple centrally located in the capital, was to assist Shinnen in completing the building of Kongōbuji at Kōyasan.⁹⁰

In his final speech to his major disciples, Kūkai in the *Shugyō engi* then attempts to reassure them that things will be fine at Kōyasan. He tries to convince them that there is no need to worry about the future of the Buddhist institution that he has just established on this sacred mountain:

⁸⁸ Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 59.

⁸⁹ Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 358. ZGR, vol. 28a, 285.

⁹⁰ For a brief overview of these historical developments, see Wada, "Kōyasan no rekishi to shinkō," 167.

Initially I thought I might be able to live in this world for a hundred years, propagating the Esoteric Buddhist teachings and attracting ordinary people. Although meditation masters hold this ambition to an extreme degree, my desires have been fulfilled. You should know that I forgot about my own life amid the ten thousand waves of the ocean. I sought the Buddha's teaching in a place one thousand *ri* away. The teaching of the way I have transmitted to you will protect and uphold this place. It will bring peace to the country and nourish the people.⁹¹

Kūkai here expresses humility, claiming to have subordinated his own desires to the larger project of transmitting the teachings of Buddhism.

By putting these words of extreme humility in the mouth of Kūkai, the author of the *Shugyō engi* adds even more to his portrait of an exceptionally pious holy person. Like the many bodhisattvas and holy persons whose lives are remembered in the hagiographies and miracle stories of the East Asian Buddhist traditions, Kūkai made enormous personal sacrifices in seeking the Dharma and then propagating it. His strong faith in the Dharma even near the time of his own death is also characteristic of an extraordinary individual with remarkable piety.

In his final advice to his disciples before his death, Kūkai admonishes them to make sure that Kōyasan continues to function as a place for Buddhist training. He claims that the mountain has an ancient Buddhist heritage, more ancient than the recent history of his own activities to open the mountain. "Do not let this Diamond Peak fall into neglect," he states. "Outwardly it appears that this place is the property of the Mountain Ruler Niu, and I have requested this imperial deity to entrust it to me. What no one knows, however, is that this is the ancient place of an old Buddha. All the deities of the Diamond and the Womb mandalas were assembled and enshrined here."⁹²

This appeal to ancient origins is striking. The claim is that Buddhist activity has been occurring on the mountain long before Kūkai even arrived. Kūkai also claims that all of the

⁹¹ Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 358. ZGR, vol. 28a, 285.

⁹² Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 358; ZGR, vol. 28a, 286.

sacred beings who make up the main mandalas in Shingon Buddhism have been enshrined here, apparently for many years. We know that, for the historical Kūkai, the land of Kōyasan corresponded to the Mandalas of the Two Worlds. In 818, Kūkai wrote a document at the time of the consecration of the ritual space on Kōyasan. In this document he stated, "In accordance with the esoteric Buddhist teachings of the Vajrayāna, I will establish in this space the two mandalas of the Vajra and Womb worlds."⁹³ In a literal sense, Kūkai possibly meant that he was installing physical versions of the two mandalas in a newly established ritual space.⁹⁴ According to David Gardiner, however, this statement probably has much broader significance. In all likelihood, Kūkai intended Kongōbuji to be the center of the sacred cosmos most directly represented by the two mandalas. Kūkai's writings suggest that the entire cosmos is a divine assembly emanating from the Buddha at the heart of the dual mandalas. Kongōbuji was to be the very center of this world, the center of "two greater, all-encompassing mandalas."⁹⁵

According to Allan Grapard, Kūkai laid the philosophical foundations for the process of "mandalization" that occurred more broadly in medieval Japan.⁹⁶ In other words, after the construction of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan, not only Kōyasan but also other specific geographical locales and even fairly large territories such as the Yoshino-Ōmine-Kumano area

⁹³ *Kōya konryū no hajime no kekkai no keibyaku no mon*, KDCZ, vol. 3, 392-394. The translation is by David Gardiner, "Mandala, Mandala on the Wall," 254.

⁹⁴ Probably from the outset, the Great Stūpa and the Western Stūpa, two of the main structures at the central monastic complex, were intended to correspond to the Womb mandala and Diamond mandala, respectively. Both of these stūpas were positioned behind the Lecture Hall (Kōdō). Just as the Womb mandala would be hung on the eastern wall of a temple and the Diamond mandala would be hung on the western wall, the Great Stūpa was placed on the east and the Western Stūpa was placed on the west of the central north-south axis leading from the main gate into the central monastic complex. This arrangement suggests that indeed, from the beginning, these two structures were envisioned as large physical embodiments of the dual mandalas. For a discussion of these two stūpas and their religious significance, in addition to an introduction to the layout of the Kongōbuji complex, see Gardiner, "Mandala, Mandala on the Wall," 256-265.

⁹⁵ Gardiner, "Mandala, Mandala on the Wall," 254.

⁹⁶ See especially Grapard's seminal essay "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness," 208-213, for discussion of this process of mandalization.

became associated with the mandalas.⁹⁷ That is, these particular physical places became associated with the universal metaphysical realms, the sacred realms portrayed in the mandalas. *Engi* and other texts over time increasingly identify particular sacred places in Japan with the Diamond and Womb Realms represented in the dual mandalas.

In the words of Max Moerman, "the mandala advances a totalizing vision of the religious environment and provides a universalizing map for a particular religious landscape."⁹⁸ The author of the *Shugyō engi* knows that by claiming that the various divinities of the dual esoteric mandalas were already enshrined within the sacred precincts of Kōyasan, his reader will have a "totalizing vision" of this particular religious environment and will realize that this particular religious landscape is connected on the deepest level with the most sacred beings in all the cosmos. In addition, because of the suggestion that these divinities were enshrined on the mountain long before Kūkai ever arrived, the mountain seems to have a special affinity with the Shingon Buddhist tradition. This claim further strengthens Kōyasan's legitimacy as a site for the particular form of Buddhist spiritual practice that Kūkai established on the mountain.

The Ambiguous (Non-) Death of Kūkai

After reporting Kūkai's supposedly final words to his disciples, the *Shugyō engi* provides the following account of his final "entrance into meditation," or his death, depending on how one interprets this event. For the tradition of religious faith that developed around Kūkai, this story is probably more significant than any of the other stories in the *Shugyō engi*.

In the early morning hours of the twenty-first day of the third month of the year 835, Kūkai sat in the lotus position, formed the ritual hand gesture of the Great Sun Buddha (Mahāvairocana), and peacefully entered the state of meditation.

⁹⁷ Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness," 210.

⁹⁸ Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 77.

For ten consecutive days services were held four times a day, during which his disciples chanted the name of Miroku Bodhisattva. His entry into meditation simply meant that he had closed his eyes and did not speak. In all other respects he was like a living person. He was sixty-two years old at the time.

Since he was like an ordinary person, no funeral was performed and he was positioned in a dignified manner. According to ordinary custom, memorial services were carried out on the forty-ninth day after death. When his disciples looked upon him, they saw that the color of his face had not faded, and that his hair and beard had grown long. Therefore they shaved him and took care of his clothing.

They closed off the stone structure and people had to get permission to enter it. They asked a stone mason to build a *gorin* stupa that represents the five basic elements of the cosmos, and they placed a book of Sanskrit mantras in it. They also built a jeweled pagoda on top of the structure and enshrined some relics of the Buddha in it. These matters were all arranged by Abbot Shinnen.⁹⁹

According to this account, in the third month of 835, Kūkai did not die an ordinary human death but in reality entered a state of meditation at Kōyasan. This account is one of the earliest examples of the *nyūjō densetsu* 入定, or the legends about Kūkai's "entrance into meditation," the end of his ordinary earthly life and the beginning of an extended period of meditation upon Kōyasan. It was this particular legend and similar variations upon it that motivated much of the religious devotion that has taken place on the mountain from the time of composition of this text to the present day. In particular, the belief that Kūkai did not die an ordinary human death but at the end of his ordinary earthly life entered a deep state of meditation, while his body in some significant ways continued to be alive, has been behind the pilgrimages, sūtra burials, devotional gift-giving, and other forms of religious practice to be considered in subsequent chapters.

In this account, there is much ambiguity regarding whether Kūkai actually died or just continued meditating at Kōyasan. Part of this ambiguity comes from the phrase "*nyūjō*" 入定, meaning "to enter meditation," which is used to refer to his death. The *Shugyō engi* uses this

⁹⁹ Tanabe's translation, "The Founding of Mount Kōya," 358-359; ZGR, vol. 28a, 286.

phrase several times in an ordinary, unambiguous way to refer to Buddhist meditation. For example, it states that in 816 Kūkai requested that the emperor grant him a "*nyūjō no tokoro*," or place for meditation. In this case, there is no suggestion that the phrase refers to the death of a monk. However, in the story about Kūkai's death, the author uses this phrase to euphemize Kūkai's death and to indicate that he was the paragon of a pious Buddhist monk even in his final moments.

The ambiguity over whether Kūkai truly died, however, is not limited to the usage of this phrase. The entire narrative is full of ambiguity. It makes use of statements that alternate between descriptions of death, on the one hand, and intimations that Kūkai remained in meditation while still alive, on the other hand.

For example, the text reports that when he died, Kūkai closed his eyes and stopped speaking, but his body remained "like a living body." He exhibited some of the main characteristics of dead corpses such as silence, yet also some characteristics of a living being. As if this event were the true end of his life, the text states that he was sixty-two years old and that he had been a monk for forty-one years. However, just after this statement, the text states that he was like an ordinary person living in the world and that no funeral was performed for him. Continuing the series of alternating contrasts, this text then states that memorial services were conducted on the forty-ninth day after death. This was a standard procedure following a person's death. Forty-nine days was the duration of the interim state; afterwards, one's rebirth destination would be determined. At this time, the text reports, his disciples came in to look at Kūkai, but what they saw was astounding. The color of his face was the same as the face of a living person, and his hair and beard had grown longer. As a result, they shaved him and arranged his clothing.

The final description of the way that Kūkai was enshrined in a stone structure also is unusual, given the juxtaposition with the preceding remarks about his "living body." This treatment would be highly unusual for someone still alive. On top of the stone structure, they installed a *gorin sotoba* 五輪卒塔婆, or five-element stūpa made of five different shapes that represent the five basic elements of the cosmos. These structures have been used frequently as tombstones, and many of them are found today in the cemetery at Kōyasan.¹⁰⁰ Enclosing Kūkai's body in the structure with a typical tombstone on the top seems very much characteristic of the treatment that people would give to a respected spiritual leader following death. It is unfathomable that they would install someone while still alive in the structure. Yet again we see the ambiguity over whether Kūkai truly died or simply entered a state of deep meditation in 835.

Like hagiographies about revered individuals in other social and cultural contexts, the story makes a claim about the postmortem destination of the featured saint, Kūkai. In addition, the postmortem destination and manner of death of the saint in this case were not entirely random, even if they were unusual. Instead, these aspects of the story fit the relevant cultural and religious *imaginaire*, the nonmaterial, imaginative world in which life was experienced in early medieval Japan. The faith that Kūkai was still in meditation at Kōyasan was influenced by stories about the various postmortem signs indicating that people had actually been born in the Pure Land and the stories about the numinous signs that appear after death in the *Kōsōden*, or the biographies of eminent monks.¹⁰¹ These elements were well known in Buddhist clerical circles in the tenth century, when this story first started to appear.

The death of a spiritual leader poses enormous challenges to his or her community, regardless of the cultural context. After his lifetime, the holy person no longer is still available in

¹⁰⁰ These *gorin sotoba* have been seen as representing the Dharma Body of Mahāvairocana Buddha.

¹⁰¹ Shirai, *Inseiki Kōyasan*, 20.

the world in the same manner that he or she once was. The holy person no longer has the power to negotiate his or her reputation, and the community devoted to that individual is forced to find new ways to continue life together in his or her absence.¹⁰² Nevertheless, holy persons like Kūkai survive after death in the world, in the words of Robert Campany, by "the ongoing work of memory and cross-generational transmission that summon them into a sort of ongoing presence long after they are otherwise gone."¹⁰³ The religious community that was transmitting stories about Kūkai and that produced the *Shugyō engi* summoned his ongoing presence through these stories and through the claims that Kūkai had not died but continued to meditate on the mountain.

This mythical account of Kūkai's transformation at death can be illuminated by Jonathan Z. Smith's remarks about the transformation of deceased ancestors that occurs in the myths of the Tjilpa tribe of Australia. According to Tjilpa sacred narratives, when they died, the ancestors of this tribe were transformed into permanent features of the physical landscape. Smith writes, "The transformation of the ancestor is an event that bars, forever, direct access to his particular person. Yet through this process of change... the ancestor achieves permanence."¹⁰⁴ Like the ancestors of this tribe, in myth, at the time of his death Kūkai was transformed into a long-enduring feature of the topography of the sacred mountain where he died. He continued to be at least partly accessible, both present and absent, to devotees at Kōyasan.

Kūkai's "entrance into meditation" at the end of his ordinary earthly life serves as the most striking feat that he accomplishes in the *Shugyō engi*. It is yet another sign of his unusual spiritual resonance. According to this text, it is also the wonder more than any of the other of his

¹⁰² Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness*, 73, makes this point in regard to the challenges posed by the death of historical Buddha for the early communities of Buddhists.

¹⁰³ Robert Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *To Take Place*, 12.

wonders that links him to Kōyasan, the mountain that he established as a site for Shingon Buddhist practice. It is what supposedly enabled him to remain on the mountain for many years as the "living body" that pilgrims wanted to meet. Like the numerous Buddhas, local deities, and eminent clerics that left "sacred traces," marks, or tracks of their previous activity at the sites of sacred locations in Japan, Kūkai has left an unusually significant "sacred trace," his entire "living body" at Kōyasan. Even more so than the other stories in the *Shugyō engi* that emphasize the spiritual resonance of Kūkai and the sacred origins of Kongōbuji, this story about Kūkai's entrance into meditation in this particular location turned the topography of this mountain into a sacred Buddhist landscape.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*, one of the most important texts about the sacred origins of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan. In particular, I have considered the major aims of its author, probably a Buddhist cleric with strong connections to Kōyasan. Its narratives about Kūkai's unusual spiritual capacities and extraordinary religious accomplishments stress that this individual was not an ordinary mortal. Presenting Kūkai as a paragon of spiritual resonance, this text suggests that Kūkai possessed the characteristics of the ideal Buddhist cleric. This portrayal of Kūkai fits with a desire to promote the sacred significance of the mountain that this Buddhist saint chose as the site for his Buddhist monastery.

We have seen how, in the *Shugyō engi*, Kūkai's biography is intimately connected with a specific place, the mountain Kōyasan. The story of Kūkai's transformation at his death into a "living body" that would remain on the mountain far into the future reveals the link between this Buddhist monk and the place where he began constructing a mountain monastery and where he died. This story and the other stories in the *Shugyō engi* suggest that, like the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre in Jerusalem that Jonathan Z. Smith has studied, the Buddhist temple Kongōbuji could not have been built in another location and still be the same. "It is tied, inextricably, to sacred biography and history. It is its locative specificity and thick associative context, rather than its arbitrariness, that guarantees the site's power and religious function."¹⁰⁵

In addition, throughout this chapter, I have considered the ways in which the compiler drew upon existing narratives and narrative devices to construct the religious significance of Kōyasan. The author was very much a member of a particular religious and social world, while he was also acting in new, creative ways to promote the Buddhist institution to which he belonged. The discussion of the stories about Kūkai's encounters with the local deities in the area around Kōyasan highlights this aspect. While the author was writing these stories, or at least editing them in new ways, he was doing so with the use of forms of narrative long used by Buddhists in Japan to legitimate the existence of their temples in places originally inhabited by non-Buddhist local deities. These stories also indicate ingenuity in positioning Kongbuji relative to the nearby shrine, Niutsuhime Jinja. In other words, these stories do not suggest that the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan entirely displaced the local deities or that these deities were unworthy of reverence. At the same time, these stories elevate the status of Kūkai above the local deities even while providing greater legitimacy to the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan by their inclusion.

As we will see in subsequent chapters, the legends about Kūkai and Kōyasan in the *Shugyō engi* continued to be important in the traditions of devotion connected to Kōyasan. These stories are found in records about the pilgrimages to the mountain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries by retired sovereigns and high-ranking aristocrats. In addition, while the stories were altered in minor ways, some of these legends were included in popular collections of tale

¹⁰⁵Smith, *To Take Place*, 86.

literature such as the *Konjaku monogatarishū*, which was probably compiled in the early twelfth century. The persistence of these traditions testifies to their continued relevance to the Japanese religious culture in general and to the lives of devotees with a special interest in Kōyasan in particular.

Chapter 2

The First Journey to Kōyasan by a Buddhist King— Retired Emperor Shirakawa's Pilgrimage of 1088

Introduction

From the early eleventh century onwards, Kōyasan became one of the shrines and temples in Japan to which the most prominent royals and aristocrats from the capital began making pilgrimages. Stories about the perpetual meditation of the still-living saint Kūkai, the renowned monk who had established this temple in the early ninth century, were probably starting to circulate in the capital, and these individuals probably wanted especially to encounter Kūkai in his tomb at the Inner Sanctum of Kōyasan. This was an important time in the history of Kōyasan, which was beginning to revive after a period of decline that had begun near the end of the tenth century, when a devastating fire ravaged much of Kongōbuji temple.

In this chapter I will seek to reconstruct and analyze Retired Emperor Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1088, one of the most important pilgrimages to the mountain in this early era. Most centrally, I am inquiring into the purposes behind this journey. Why did Shirakawa and the large group of men that traveled with him even go to the trouble of planning and then carrying out this complicated journey, despite considerable economic and logistical challenges? What were the various purposes and motivations behind this journey, whether political, religious, or economic?

In seeking to answer these questions, I will reevaluate the “theater of state” model that has been used to analyze pilgrimages by retired emperors, emperors who abdicated their official political positions yet still remained active in political and religious affairs, during this era of

Japanese history.¹⁰⁶ While the “theater of state” model helps one to understand the ritual performances that were the key events of imperial pilgrimages, I will propose major modifications to this theoretical model. A detailed reconstruction of this particular pilgrimage by Shirakawa reveals the need for these changes.

Clifford Geertz first proposed the theater of state model in order to analyze how kings in a variety of cultures construct their authority and achieve legitimacy by way of royal progresses, their travels throughout the realms that they rule.¹⁰⁷ Max Moerman has adapted this model to the case of medieval Japan, and he uses the metaphor of the “theater of state” as an analytical tool that helps us to envision the cosmic rituals of kingship, court, and state in early medieval Japan.¹⁰⁸ Within this theater of state, retired emperors performed their majesty by way of pilgrimages to sacred sites as well as a number of other forms of performance, including poetry competitions and court ceremonies. Instead of suggesting a theatrical performance of a make-believe play that only mimics reality, the theater of state metaphor points to state performances that were not merely artistic performances enacted for entertainment or expressions of the king’s power that existed independently from his kingship. Rather, they were themselves an essential aspect of the king’s power.¹⁰⁹ Especially as applied to the pilgrimages taken by retired emperors in early medieval Japan, this metaphor stresses the “ordering force of display, regard, and drama” at the heart of the ritual performances undertaken as part of these journeys.¹¹⁰

Through pilgrimages to sacred places relatively distant from the capital, the retired emperors of early medieval Japan constructed their authority. Moerman writes, “In the repeated

¹⁰⁶ Recent scholarship has focused on similar pilgrimages by retired emperors of the Insei era. See especially Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*; Heather Blair, “Peak of Gold”; and Donald Drummond, “Negotiating Influence.”

¹⁰⁷ See “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power.” In “A Reformulation of Geertz’s Conception of the Theater State,” Stanley Tambiah critiques Geertz’s model of the theater state.

¹⁰⁸ See *Localizing Paradise*, 139-180.

¹⁰⁹ Geertz, *Negara*, 120.

¹¹⁰ Geertz, *Negara*, 124.

royal processions through this national landscape (a natural world overflowing with historical and religious significance) retired emperors—performing rituals, exacting tribute, asserting status, and mobilizing loyalties—cast themselves as the prime movers in the pageantry of state."¹¹¹ Ceremonial statecraft was often used by these powerful individuals during their various journeys, and the retired emperors were not hesitant at all in displaying their wealth and sovereignty, by staging rituals that had both a political and religious dimension. These pilgrimages originated in the political and cultural center of Japan, and they involved large-scale rituals of state that required detailed planning and execution.

In addition to large-scale rituals deliberately constructed to perform his majesty, Shirakawa's journey to Kōyasan also entailed spontaneous expressions of religious devotion. Although much of this pilgrimage was planned from the beginning, many activities were improvised in the different locations where the pilgrims progressed. The unscripted nature of much that took place during royal pilgrimages has been overlooked by the scholars who have applied the theater of state model to the analysis of imperial pilgrimages in medieval Japan. The theater of state is but one dimension of the ritual process that must be considered if we are to understand these journeys in all of their complexity.

Another major modification that I will propose to the prevailing understanding of imperial pilgrimage and the theater of state is a consideration of the agency of many individuals other than the retired emperor in these journeys. Scholars who have analyzed imperial pilgrimage in early medieval Japan have for the most part failed to acknowledge the roles played by monks, courtiers, scribes, provincial governors, and others who no doubt performed many of the major tasks of these journeys. For example, these individuals were probably almost as responsible as the retired emperor in creating the ceremonial statecraft that dramatized his majesty. Even if

¹¹¹ *Localizing Paradise*, 178.

Shirakawa cast himself as the leading actor in a number of ritual performances, he depended on an enormous cast of subordinates. They desired the retired emperor's approval and wanted to advance to higher ranks in their respective offices, yet these individuals still displayed creativity and initiative and pursued their own agendas in representing the retired emperor in story and performance. The retired emperors did not construct their own authority in isolation.

In short, to a much greater extent than previous scholars have acknowledged, the theater of state was improvised and interactive. As we will see below, at some events retired emperors such as Shirakawa indeed performed the leading role. But on other occasions during the same pilgrimage the retired emperor became a member of the audience, and at these times his authority was neither expressed nor constructed. In addition, sometimes the monks or other accompanying assistants engaged in their own ritual activities, actions that for all intents and purposes did not have a very strong political component.

In summary, I call for more critical refinement of the theater of state model, and I suggest that at least even the case of Shirakawa's pilgrimage in which much was at stake politically, this model will not adequately explain everything. I will show that, even if Shirakawa was striving for a new position of authority by leaving the throne and embarking on journeys to relatively distant sacred sites, not all of the pilgrimage to Kōyasan was a consciously constructed ritual of state, an attempt by Shirakawa to construct his authority.

This chapter opens with a brief pre-history of Shirakawa's 1088 pilgrimage, in other words, a discussion of the political and religious context for this journey. Placing the 1088 journey in the context of several prior important pilgrimages helps us better understand the political motivations for this pilgrimage.

Then, making use of a very revealing record about the 1088 pilgrimage, much of the rest of the chapter reconstructs in detail Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage to Kōyasan. This record is the *Kanji ninen Shirakawa Jōkō Kōyasan gokōki* (The record of Retired Emperor Shirakawa's pilgrimage to Kōyasan in Kanji 2; 1088; hereafter, *Kanji ninen gokōki*).¹¹² In spite of the historical importance of this record and the quality of the information that it provides, this pilgrimage account has yet to be used in English-language scholarship on Japanese religion. I will show the ways in which it enables us to understand the major sacred places, especially the Buddhist institutions in Uji and Nara, that an influential figure such as Shirakawa wanted to visit on his way to Kōyasan. In addition, I will show how this record makes it possible to envision the major forms of devotion taking place on Kōyasan and the significance of specific places where these forms of devotion were enacted on the mountain. In particular, the *Kanji ninen gokōki* shows the strength of devotion to Kūkai, the Buddhist monk who had established this Buddhist

¹¹² It was written by Fujiwara no Michitoshi 藤原通俊 (1047-1099), who is most known as a poet active in the latter part of the Heian era. At the time of this pilgrimage, Michitoshi was the Udaiben 右大弁, or Major Controller of the Right. He was a personal attendant (*kinshin*) to Shirakawa. In fact, he served both Emperor Shirakawa and Emperor Horikawa as a *waka* poet, for example in 1086 presenting the *Goshūi wakashū* 御拾遺和歌集, his most famous compilation of poetry, to Shirakawa. He used *waka* poetry as a political and religious instrument in the service of Shirakawa's desire to revive the rituals of old and to return to an era of rule by the royal family. Michitoshi apparently also accompanied Shirakawa on his religious excursions following Shirakawa's abdication as emperor and, at least in this instance, was responsible for recording the activities of Shirakawa and the large group of attendants who went along.

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* is a sequential account of the pilgrimage by Shirakawa from the capital through Nara and then to Kōyasan in Kii province, and then back to the capital city. It provides much valuable information not only about the state of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan and the other Buddhist temples that the pilgrims visited but also about what imperial pilgrimage more generally entailed and signified at the end of the eleventh century.

In my study of this document, I have primarily used the printed version of this text in ZZST, vol. 18, 297-311. The editors of this volume, 7-9, provide a very useful introduction to this primary source. Wada Shūjō, one of the major institutional historians of Kōyasan, had introduced this primary source in two earlier articles, "Sainaninzō *Kanji ninen Shirakawa Jōkō Kōyasan gokōki*" and "Sainaninzō *Kanji ninen Shirakawa Jōkō Kōyasan gokōki ni*," where he published a printed version of the text for the first time based upon a manuscript preserved at the Sainan In at Kōyasan. See especially "Sainaninzō *Kanji ninen Shirakawa Jōkō Kōyasan gokōki*," where Wada discusses the most significant aspects of Shirakawa's journeys to Kōyasan. See also the series of articles by Wada, "Heian jidai no sankeiki ni arawareta Kōyasan," articles that synthesize some of the major historical information about Kōyasan that appears in the various records of aristocratic and imperial pilgrimage in the latter part of the Heian era. While I have applied different research questions to these pilgrimage records, I am indebted to Wada for introducing the major features of these records and for contextualizing them relative to larger developments at Kōyasan and during this era of Japanese history more generally.

institution in the early ninth century, and the ways in which this faith was strongly associated with Kōyasan at the end of the eleventh century.

Not only will we glimpse an important chapter in the life of the Buddhist institution of Kōyasan, but it will also be possible to use detailed knowledge of this particular imperial pilgrimage in order to modify the dominant theoretical model that has been used to analyze such imperial pilgrimages. The conclusion will call for even greater attention to both the strengths and limitations of the theater of state model.

The Prehistory of Shirakawa's 1088 Pilgrimage

While this chapter seeks to illuminate Retired Emperor Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1088, it is important to conceptualize this journey in relation to the prior pilgrimages by other politically powerful individuals, especially Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028) and Fujiwara no Yorimichi (992-1074). Understanding the political context in which these journeys were undertaken is crucial for the comprehension of their motivation and impact.

Fujiwara no Michinaga, the most powerful courtier in Japan at the time, made a pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1023, when the northern branch of the Fujiwara family (*sekkanke*) was at the height of its political power. This prominent family had placed itself at the center of state affairs by intermarrying extensively with the royal family. The Northern Fujiwara made their sisters and daughters empresses and the mothers of future rulers, thereby dominating emperors as maternal relatives. A number of generations of emperors were raised in Fujiwara households and were as much members of this Fujiwara family as of the royal house. In addition to intermarrying with the royal family, the Fujiwara family exerted considerable power through their control of the office of regent (*sesshō* 摂政 or *kampaku* 関白). In this capacity, even though they did not claim the emperor's title or ritual role, the Northern Fujiwara ruled in the emperor's

name. Historians have used the term *sekkan seiji* 摂関政治, or Regency Government, to refer to the era of from 967 to 1068, when members of the Fujiwara family continuously held the post of Imperial regent.

Perhaps the model for the hero of the *Genji monogatari* (Tale of Genji), Michinaga was regent only a little more than a year in 1016 and 1017, yet he was the most powerful person at court from 995 to his death in 1028. He exercised control of government via the private inspection authority he possessed and through his ministerial posts. Four of his daughters were married to emperors and three of his grandsons became emperors.

Michinaga was a serious Buddhist practitioner and undertook a number of pilgrimages to shrines and temples throughout his life. In 1023, he became the first prominent political leader to journey to Kōyasan. Michinaga's donation of a landed estate to Kōyasan undoubtedly benefited the Buddhist monastery. In addition, after this pilgrimage, other aristocrats in the capital, including Michinaga's son Yorimichi, began making their own pilgrimages to this mountain that was a bit distant from Heiankyō (today's Kyoto).

Yorimichi, himself also a powerful Northern Fujiwara leader, made a pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1048.¹¹³ Like his father, Yorimichi sponsored large-scale rituals at the Inner Sanctum and rewarded the participating monks with provisions that included clothing and food. Both sides benefited from this pilgrimage because Yorimichi gained much karmic merit from his auspicious activities and the Buddhist institution gained important provisions that would sustain its resident monks. These two pilgrimages set an important precedent, and retired emperors such as Shirakawa then wanted to travel to the same sacred site in order to establish their mark at this place, by sponsoring similar ceremonies at Kōyasan, donating large stores of monastic provisions

¹¹³ See the *Uji kanpaku Kōyasan gosankeiki*, a detailed pilgrimage record about this journey.

and thereby securing stronger relations with the monks, and engaging in other meritorious actions such as commissioning the construction of important temple buildings.

The Fujiwara Regency eventually declined. Although the heads of the Fujiwara family maintained the post of regent for the rest of the Heian period, they had very little political power following the accession of Emperor Go-Sanjō (1034-1073) in 1068. Go-Sanjō created a system in which the emperor was able to retire and remove himself from the court that was dominated by the Fujiwara, while nevertheless ruling from retirement. Emperor Shirakawa, Go-Sanjō's son, fully instituted this system. The retired emperor was able to counsel the person who succeeded him as reigning emperor as well as protect him from the influence of the Fujiwara.

Shirakawa (1053-1129) was the seventy-second emperor in Japanese history. He became the emperor in 1072 following his father's retirement. After he himself abdicated the emperor's position to his son Horikawa in 1086, as a retired emperor (*jōkō* 上皇) Shirakawa continued to remain a very powerful figure in the politics of the day during the reigns of three successive emperors, Horikawa, Toba, and Sutoku. During this time, like his father, Shirakawa was seeking to revive the prestige and political influence of the imperial family.¹¹⁴ After 1100, some years after his retirement, Shirakawa eventually succeeded in instituting a novel form of governmental rule by retired emperors, which is known as *Insei*.

On the very day that he retired, Shirakawa appointed the first men to his *in no chō*, or the administrative office of the retired emperor. At this time, he appointed five directors, or *bettō*, to this office. All five had been his close associates for many years and all of them were connected to the imperial house either by association or marriage. These men made up the initial group of *kinshin*, close associates or confidants of the retired emperor.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ For basic historical information about Shirakawa, see Hurst, *Insei*, 125.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

In spite of the establishment of this administrative office, during the early years of his tenure as retired emperor, Shirakawa did not attempt to rule exclusively. The *kugyō* council, or the government's senior ministers, continued to be the main body for political decisions. Nevertheless, Shirakawa exercised considerable political influence because of his position as retired emperor, head of the imperial family, and father of the reigning emperor of the time. Some of his close associates belonged to the elite *kugyō* council, and as a result, he probably had some influence there.¹¹⁶

In the years immediately following his abdication, rather than participating in the public activities of the Heian court, Shirakawa engaged in a range of other endeavors. For example, most of the time, he was entertaining people at his various palaces, conducting Buddhist and *kami*-related services, and overseeing affairs of the imperial family. In addition, for our purposes, it is important to note that one of the major activities that the retired emperor undertook during this time was trips both for pleasure and religious reasons, sometimes even to faraway places. No longer the reigning sovereign, he enjoyed far greater mobility relative than he had during his time as emperor.¹¹⁷ After retiring, Shirakawa started visiting religious sites such as Uji and Mount Hiei near the capital. In addition, he became very interested in the "southern mountains," as the mountains of the Kii Peninsula were called.

It is important to recognize that Shirakawa's first pilgrimage to the southern mountains was to Kōyasan. This pilgrimage in 1088, only two years after his abdication, took place two years before his first pilgrimage to Kumano in 1090 and four years before his initial pilgrimage to Kinpusen in 1092. While one must show caution in using this evidence to unduly elevate the

¹¹⁶ Hurst, *Insei*, 143. Fujiwara no Morozane (1042-1101) was the chancellor, and he was appointed to be the regent for Emperor Horikawa. He was the most powerful courtier of the day, the final arbiter for major political decisions. All the evidence suggests that Shirakawa and Morozane maintained a friendly relationship. For example, the diaries from this time indicate that Morozane visited Shirakawa frequently at one of his palaces.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

significance of Kōyasan at this time, the retired sovereign's 1088 pilgrimage to Kōyasan as the first of his remote pilgrimage destinations suggests the significance that this sacred place held for him and for the elite advisors who undoubtedly played a role in convincing him to make this journey.¹¹⁸

A Pilgrimage to the Sacred Traces of Kōyasan

The opening line of the *Kanji ninen gokōki* summarizes Shirakawa's motivation for traveling to Kōyasan: "On the twenty-second day of the second month of Kanji 2 (1088), the sky was clear, and on this day, Retired Emperor Shirakawa made a pilgrimage to the sacred traces of Kōya in order to fulfill a desire that he had for many years."¹¹⁹ According to this passage, Shirakawa was most interested in visiting the "sacred traces (*seiseki* 聖跡) of Kōyasan." The term *seiseki* requires some explanation here. As Heather Blair has shown, the term *seiseki* makes use of the idea of "trace," which was a key multivalent concept in Heian religion. Related to the term *suijaku* 垂迹, or "manifest traces," which refers to a deity that is a manifestation of a Buddha, the term *seiseki* at the time of the composition of the *Kanji ninen gokōki* was sometimes used to refer to the manifestation of deities in particular sacred locations such as the mountainous area in southern Nara prefecture known as Kinpusen.¹²⁰ The sacred traces of Kōyasan or, in other words, the sacred traces of Kūkai, were conceived in a similar manner. According to Miyano Toshimitsu, this statement about the sacred traces of Kōyasan is evidence for Shirakawa's consciousness of the tradition that Kūkai was sitting in perpetual meditation on

¹¹⁸ Shirakawa made twelve pilgrimages to Kumano, as compared to his three pilgrimages to Kōyasan. The sheer number of these repeated journeys to Kumano is striking evidence for his strong interest in this particular religious site.

¹¹⁹ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 297.

¹²⁰ Blair, "Peak of Gold," 181.

Kōyasan.¹²¹ Even though Kūkai had died long before, people by this time believed that the presence of the now deified Kūkai still was located at Kōyasan, and it was worth traveling to the mountain in order to encounter his sacred traces.

We learn that before the group departed, they conducted rituals of purification and abstinence (*kessai* 潔斎) in preparation for the pilgrimage. The term *kessai* refers to the cleansing of one's body and mind. Especially before a Buddhist rite (*hōe* 法会), the copying of a Buddhist scripture (*shakyō* 写經), a ritual dedicated to the *kami* (*jinji* 神事), and other similar occasions, individuals often abstained from alcohol, meat, and sexual activity for a specific period, and they cleansed their bodies by bathing. Nine days before the departure of Shirakawa's pilgrimage, a barrier was set up at one of the doors of Shirakawa's living quarters to keep out pollution.

At this time, these preparations were very common in instances of pilgrimage to Kumano, Kinpusen, and other sacred locales.¹²² Such rituals are not recorded for the prior pilgrimages to Kōyasan by Fujiwara no Michinaga and Fujiwara no Yorimichi.¹²³ Miyano Toshimitsu suggests that this record of the rituals of purification that Shirakawa performed prior to going to Kōyasan indicates a growing awareness that Kōyasan was a numinous place on a par with Kumano, Kinpusen, and other sacred locales where pilgrimage required these ritual preparations.

¹²¹ Miyano, “Jūisseiki kara jūsan seiki ni okeru reijō Kōyasan keisei no ikkōsatsu: Kōyasan ni okeru maikyō o chūshin toshite” (hereafter, “Kōyasan ni okeru maikyō”), 163.

¹²² Miyano, “Kōyasan ni okeru maikyō,” 166. For a discussion of similar preparations for pilgrimage to Kumano during the same era, see Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 161.

¹²³ Miyano, “Kōyasan ni okeru maikyō,” 166.

The Pilgrimage Personnel

Kanji ninen gokōki begins with a long list of the numerous courtiers and provincial governors who accompanied Shirakawa. At this time, twenty-eight men were serving in the top three court ranks. They constituted the highest-ranking nobility who had the privilege of entering the imperial audience chamber. No fewer than seventeen of these high-ranking courtiers, including the regent (*sesshō*), Morozane (1042-1101), participated in this pilgrimage.¹²⁴

Many of the men who accompanied Shirakawa had already entered relationships of service and loyalty to him prior to this journey. Patronage networks, in particular the control of appointments, were the basis of the retired emperor's power. The retired emperor was able to gain the loyalty and financial support of the wealthy class of provincial governors (*zuryō*) by assigning them an elevated social status. Conferring and denying status were also the ways in which a retired emperor expressed his power relative to the lower-ranking men who made up his household agency or who served as his retainers in personal and religious matters.¹²⁵

The group of pilgrims also included three clerics who were well-known members of the Office of Monastic Affairs: Supernumerary Archbishop Ninkaku (Gon no Sōjō Ninkaku 権僧正 仁覺), Supernumerary Greater Bishop Ryūmyō (Hōin Gon no Daisōzu Ryūmyō 法印権大僧都 隆明), and Supernumerary Lesser Bishop Kan'i (Gon no Shōsōzu Kan'i 権少僧都 寛意). According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, they went in order to assist in the Buddhist rituals that would be conducted at the Inner Sanctum (Oku no In) of Kōyasan as well as to provide ritual protection along the way.¹²⁶ It is noteworthy that, from the beginning of this journey, the group

¹²⁴ Morozane had already made his own pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1081. On this subsequent pilgrimage in 1088, Morozane and several others returned to the capital from Uji. The number of the high-ranking courtiers who went all the way to Kōyasan was eight.

¹²⁵ Blair, "Peak of Gold," 42.

¹²⁶ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 298.

was preparing for sacred rituals at the Inner Sanctum, where Kūkai's tomb was located. As we will see below, this extraordinary location was the ultimate destination of these pilgrims and the stage for the performance of the most elaborate rituals of the journey.

Of the three clerics, Kan'i (1054-1101) probably had the closest relationship with Shirakawa. In 1081, Kan'i had become a "protector monk" (*gojisō*護持僧) for Shirakawa. Later Shirakawa supported Kan'i's appointment to the Office of Monastic Affairs. After this 1088 journey to Kōyasan, Kan'i served Shirakawa during the retired sovereign's rituals of purification prior to his initial journey to Kumano in 1090. In addition, in 1092, along with the other two clerics mentioned above, Kan'i attended Shirakawa during his first pilgrimage to Kinpusen.¹²⁷

There is much evidence that Ryūmyō also had a very close relationship with Shirakawa and attended him on a number of occasions. Ryūmyō's biography is included in the *Jimon kōsōki*, a compilation of biographies of the eminent monks of the Onjōji-based Jimon branch of Tendai, the lineage to which Ryūmyō belonged. It provides several examples of interaction between the two men.¹²⁸ For example, it states that in Kanji 1 (1087), the year before Shirakawa's pilgrimage to Kōyasan, Ryūmyō became the protector monk of the new emperor, Horikawa, who was Shirakawa's son. This biography also records Ryūmyō's participation in Shirakawa's 1088 pilgrimage to Kōyasan and his service as an Officiant (*dōshi*) during this journey.¹²⁹ As we will see below, Ryūmyō performed this important ritual role once Shirakawa's group arrived at their primary destination, Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum of Kōyasan.

As evidence of Ryūmyō's continued service to Shirakawa, the next entry in Ryūmyō's biography in the *Jimon kōsōki* reports that he was summoned after Shirakawa became sick the

¹²⁷ Blair, *Peak of Gold*, 200-201.

¹²⁸ The biography of Ryūmyō is contained in the fourth scroll (*kan dai 4*) of the *Jimon kōsōki*. See ZGR, vol. 28a, 314-317.

¹²⁹ ZGR, vol. 28a, 314-315.

next year when the retired sovereign went to Hieizan. Hieizan is the mountain that sits on the border between present-day Kyōto and Ōtsu, and where the headquarters of the Tendai tradition is located. At this time, there was an evil spirit (*zake*邪気) that was possessing Shirakawa, but the clerics at Hieizan could not get rid of it. Shirakawa issued an order summoning Ryūmyō. Ryūmyō then offered prayers of protection (*goshin kaji*護身加持) for the retired sovereign, and these prayers appeared to banish the evil spirit. Shirakawa then returned to health.¹³⁰ This story helps us to understand the function of protector monks and why they were needed to participate in the pilgrimages by Shirakawa. They offered prayers for the health of the retired emperor and, through Buddhist devotion, were believed to keep away evil spirits.

Another prominent cleric, Jōken (1024-1100), assisted Shirakawa and his group once they arrived at Kōyasan. It is unclear if he went to the mountain specifically because he already knew that Shirakawa would be visiting or if he just happened to be on the mountain at that time. This Buddhist monk was the abbot (*chōja*) of Tōji, the important Shingon temple located in the capital. In addition, he was the administrative head (*zasu*) of the Daigoji temple, the head temple of the Shingon Daigo lineage, located in the eastern part of the capital. After becoming the thirty-third abbot of Tōji in Ōtoku 1 (1084), Jōken played an important role as a ritualist in the service of the state.¹³¹

As we will see below, these high-ranking clerics played a key role in Shirakawa's pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1088, especially once the group of pilgrims arrived on the mountain. Considerable evidence suggests that the service by these monks during Shirakawa's visit

¹³⁰ For this story, see the entry for Kanji 3, ZGR, vol. 28a, 315.

¹³¹ In Kanji 1 (1087), following the example of Kūkai, this prominent cleric prayed for rain and conducted the Kujakukyō Ritual at the Shinzen'en. In the years following Shirakawa's pilgrimage to Kōyasan, Jōken performed the same ritual successfully several other times and, as a result, was promoted to the rank of Gon no Daisōzu. See his biography in the *Honchō kōsōden*, *kan dai* 50, DNBZ, vol. 63, 304.

strengthened their ties with the retired sovereign and promoted a relationship of mutual benefit and obligation with him.

The Journey to Kōyasan

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* provides a record of Shirakawa's journey from the capital to Uji, Nara, and then to the ultimate destination, Kōyasan. This is an important record of how Shirakawa worshipped at well-known temples in Uji and Nara, temples that had strong symbolic and historical connections with the royal family and the highest-ranking aristocrats.

After departing on their pilgrimage, the group traveled south through Heiankyō to Fukakusa and then to the Byōdō-in at Uji. Like his father, Fujiwara no Michinaga, Regent Fujiwara no Yorimichi was a devout patron of Buddhism and had commissioned the construction of temple buildings, in addition to his pilgrimages to Kōyasan and other sacred sites. Only a few decades before Shirakawa's journey to Kōyasan in 1088, in 1052, Yorimichi had converted his Uji villa into a Buddhist temple, the Byōdō-in. The following year, 1053, Yorimichi had constructed the renowned Hōō-dō (Phoenix Hall) in this location. When viewed as part of the surrounding landscape, this Amida Hall was supposed to be an instantiation of the Pure Land of Amida Buddha in this world.¹³² At Uji, Shirakawa enjoyed the beautiful natural scenery (*sansui*) at this temple.

Around 6:00 p.m. the large group of pilgrims arrived on the bank of the Kizugawa River.¹³³ It was raining and the river was overflowing. After four small boats were made, the high-ranking nobility (*kugyō*) rode in them. Many people wanted to use a boat to cross the river, but there were not enough boats. Several courtiers and three servants were riding horses and

¹³² Weinstein, "Aristocratic Buddhism," 513.

¹³³ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 299.

were not able to cross. Thus, they were not able to join the entourage and had to remain at this place.

Around 10:00 p.m. the group arrived at their lodgings for the night in Nara, which had been the previous political capital and continued to thrive as a major center of religious activity. After the imperial court established itself in Nara in 710, large monasteries such as Daianji, Yakushiji, Gangōji, and Kōfukuji were relocated to this capital city. In addition, monasteries including Tōdaiji, Tōshōdaiji, and Saidaiji were built in Nara during the eighth century. Shirakawa's group stayed at one of these monasteries, Tōdaiji, in the cloister Tōnan-in. Once they were in Nara, Shirakawa had a messenger convey offerings (*hōhei* 奉幣) to the Kasuga Shrine, the famous shrine near Tōdaiji. This shrine was known as the place for worshipping the tutelary deities of the Fujiwara family, the family that had played a pivotal role in politics and had provided the mothers of many of the emperors.

On the twenty-third day, the group arrived at Tōdaiji and conducted Buddhist rites, including worship of the Great Buddha (*daibutsu*). In 743, when the capital was located in Nara, Emperor Shōmu had commissioned the construction of this enormous gilt-bronze statue of Rushana Buddha (Vairocana). Tōdaiji housed the statue, and this temple served as the center of an expanding network of provincial temples, which were intended for rituals of protecting the state (*chingo kokka*).¹³⁴

Shirakawa inquired into the origin of the religious practices at Tōdaiji. He was told that starting with Emperor Shōmu (701-756), who commissioned its construction, a series of "Dharma Kings of Meditation" (*zenjō hōō* 禪定法王) had traveled to this temple and worshipped the Great Buddha. In addition to Shōmu, renowned as a sovereign who patronized Buddhism in

¹³⁴ Kōyū Sonoda, "Early Buddha Worship," 401.

a major way, this line of rulers self-identified with Buddhism included Emperor Uda (867-931), Emperor Enyū (959-991), and others.¹³⁵

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* thus places Shirakawa's worship at Tōdaiji in the larger context of other emperors who had done the same. In so doing, it invokes the ideology of Buddhist kingship that was being used in the eleventh century to legitimate the authority of the emperors of Japan. For centuries, the emperor was regarded as a sacred king and the chief priest of Japan by virtue of his descent from Amaterasu, the principal female deity of Shintō mythology who was identified with the sun and seen as the mother of the imperial line. With the advent of Buddhism, however, the ruling family also had appropriated symbols and rituals of authority from this foreign-born faith. According to religious discourse popular during the eleventh century, the imperial law and the Buddhist law were mutually interdependent (*ōbō-buppō sōi*). Describing this relationship, writers compared the two interdependent laws to the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a cart.¹³⁶

The title "Dharma King" (*hōō*) was connected intimately to this discourse of sacred Buddhist kingship. Uda became the first sovereign in Japan to use this title, claiming both Buddhist and royal authority for himself. In the words of Max Moerman, this title "explicitly articulated, in both word and deed, the interdependence of imperial and Buddhist law."¹³⁷ Appropriating this title gave Shirakawa more authority as a sacred king whose behavior and piety was in accordance with previous sacred kings in Japan.

After worshipping at Tōdaiji, the group then traveled to Kōfukuji (here called Yamashinadera). Like Tōdaiji, this temple was one of the Seven Great Temples of Nara (*Nanto*

¹³⁵ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 300.

¹³⁶ Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 171-177, provides a very helpful overview of religious politics and Buddhist kingship in the late Heian era.

¹³⁷ *Localizing Paradise*, 173.

shichi daiji), and it also had a rich history of association with the families at the center of politics. After this temple was moved to this location in Nara when the capital was relocated there, Kōfukuji had expanded very quickly as the family temple (*ujidera*) of the Fujiwara family. At this Buddhist temple, Shirakawa's group made offerings of lamps and chanted Buddhist scriptures (*fujū* 諷誦) just as they had done at Tōdaiji.¹³⁸

Shirakawa's visits to the Byōdō-in, Tōdaiji, and Kōfukuji prior to traveling to Kōyasan indicate the importance of these Buddhist temples for him. The rituals that he had conducted at these temples were not as elaborate and grand as those that would take place at Kōyasan. Nevertheless, he found it necessary to worship at these sacred sites and to strengthen his ties with these institutions by making offerings to them. In addition, worshipping at places such as Tōdaiji enhanced Shirakawa's authority by connecting him with previous Buddhist kings who had done the same.

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* provides evidence that, in the minds of Shirakawa and the pilgrims traveling with him, Kōyasan was not an isolated sacred place. Rather, it was part of a more encompassing cultural and religious landscape that included the great temples of Nara and the Byōdō-in at Uji. Having made their way through this landscape filled with places so central in the cultural and historical imagination, the group finally reached their destination.

Ascending Kōyasan With Invisible Assistance

On the twenty-fourth day, just two days after beginning their journey, Shirakawa and his large group of associates arrived at the Administrative Office (*mandokoro* 政所) of Kongōbuji, located at the base of Kōyasan, their main destination. Shirakawa stayed in the Northern Room of the main hall. The high-ranking nobility and those below them who were accompanying the

¹³⁸ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 301.

group stayed in nearby rooms that the provincial governors (*kokushi*) designated for them. The provincial governors were responsible to supply goods for the group. They distributed white rice for the humans and fodder for the horses. They also made bathhouses available.¹³⁹

Very early on the next morning, from about 1:00 to 3:00, the group assembled at the Administrative Office of Kongōbuji. The meeting took place so that all of the group, including the attendants, could ascend the mountain early in the morning. This seems to be an indication of Shirakawa's eagerness to ascend the mountain well before dawn.

After eating a breakfast provided by the Sovereign's Dining Staff (*mizushi dokoro*), the cooks in the service of the retired emperor, Shirakawa started on foot up the path, with those of high and low rank following him. Shirakawa's attendants (*jishin*) and those of relatively low status lighted the way for the group with their torches. According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, at the base of the mountain below, it was possible to see a line of torches up above that stood out in the dark. Very soon after starting their ascent, the group sensed the steepness of the mountain path before them. After the group had ascended about thirty *chō* 町 (a little more than three kilometers), the sky was brightening as the day was dawning.¹⁴⁰

This large group of pilgrims was ascending the mountain via the path that later became famous as the *chōishimichi* 町石道, or the path whose distance was marked by stone stūpas. Stūpas are reliquary structures originally used in the Buddhist tradition to enshrine the relics of the Buddha. The author of this pilgrimage record was able to estimate this distance because on the side of the path there were wooden stūpas placed once every *chō*. A *chō* is equal to about 109 meters. This pilgrimage record is the earliest text to mention these wooden stūpas—predecessors to the stone stūpas that later replaced them—marking the way up the

¹³⁹ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 302-303.

¹⁴⁰ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 303.

pilgrimage path to Kōyasan.¹⁴¹ In contrast, the *Uji kampaku Kōyasan gosankeiki*, the relatively lengthy record of Yorimichi's pilgrimage in 1048, makes no mention of these wooden stūpas along the mountain path, suggesting that these structures were placed along the path some time during the forty years between the pilgrimages by Yorimichi and Shirakawa. Nonetheless, the presence of the 180 *chō* stupas that lined the path from the Administrative Office to the top of the mountain is evidence for pilgrimage to the mountain in this early era, even if these pilgrimages were not always recorded.

According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, Shirakawa exhibited extreme eagerness to climb the mountain quickly: "Shirakawa's walking was very difficult to follow [because it was so fast up the mountain]. The group of pilgrims marveled at this. This was due not only to the good karma that enabled him to become an emperor (*tennō*) in this life, but also to the invisible assistance of the Three Treasures (*sanbō meijo* 三宝冥助)." ¹⁴²

For the author of the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, Shirakawa's ability to walk quickly up the mountain path was a sign of his extraordinary spiritual capacity. One of the claims here is that Shirakawa became a king on the basis of personal religious achievement in previous lives. This assertion emphasizes individual merit as opposed to genealogical descent as a basis for kingship. This motif has been used to bring legitimacy to the kings of Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka, in addition to Japan. ¹⁴³

The assertion that Shirakawa enjoyed the invisible aid of the Three Treasures of Buddhism also merits attention, as it invokes the ideology of Buddhist kingship that was used to

¹⁴¹ Wada, "Heian jidai no sankeiki ni arawareta Kōyasan" (3), 7.

¹⁴² *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 303. According to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, vol. 6, 394-395, the term *sanbō* usually refers to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. But in some cases, it is another name for the Buddha, for example, being used in expressions to portray the power of the Buddha to heal people's sicknesses and to provide other types of similar divine assistance.

¹⁴³ Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 326.

stress the piety of supposedly sacred kings. Like the "Wheel-turning Monarch," or *cakravartin*, who has been idealized as the righteous Buddhist ruler throughout the Buddhist world, Shirakawa was a generous donor to various Buddhist institutions in Japan. Probably partly as a result of these actions, Michitoshi attributed to him an extraordinary relationship, a relationship of mutual benefit, with the sacred cosmos of Buddhism.¹⁴⁴

After the group had ascended about seventy *chō*, below the sacred gate (*torii*) of the Amano shrine, the eminent cleric Kan'i joined the group. This was the first time that this monk attended Shirakawa. Another cleric, Ninkaku, had attended Shirakawa since the departure. As seen above, by praying for Shirakawa and his health, these clerics were expected to provide their own form of invisible assistance for the retired sovereign throughout his journey. Ryūmyō was expected to join the group at Kōyasan because he had preceded them. Two other men, laymen, sometimes attended Shirakawa, apparently helping him climb the mountain throughout the journey with more visible, tangible assistance. According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, these men were chosen for this responsibility because they were strong and healthy.¹⁴⁵

Around 4:00 in the afternoon, the group arrived at Kasagi, which was halfway between the Administrative Office, where they started ascending the mountain, and the Central Hall (Chū In), their destination on the top of Kōyasan. Kasagi is where they spent the night.

Near the end of the entry on this day, we find the revealing passage:

Among those traveling with the group there was distress and there was joy. The people of the lower classes thought about the scarcity of food and did not consider anything else. In this case, there was distress. In contrast, the people of the higher classes made offerings that brought them good karmic connections (*zen'en* 善縁). In their hearts they were happy. In this case, there was joy.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 174, writes, "The king and the Buddha are structurally opposed yet mutually reliant figures in a moral economy in which authority circulates between religious and state institutions."

¹⁴⁵ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 303.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

This passage shows that pilgrimage reaffirmed the class distinctions of the day. Shirakawa and the high-ranking courtiers were able to enjoy this journey much more than the servants who hardly had enough food to eat. In addition, the retired emperor and the pilgrims of the nobility were dependent upon those of lower social positions serving them throughout the journey.

When they woke up on the next day, the twenty-sixth, the sky was clear. Around 8:00 a.m. the Sovereign's Dining Staff provided breakfast for everyone. Then they started on the path. The group of pilgrims reached a sacred gate about eleven *chō* from the Central Hall. From this point onward, the path became much steeper. In addition, according to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, the path up the mountain was not straight but had many twists and turns (*bansetsu* 盤折).¹⁴⁷ The group would have to climb a steep mountain path for several hundred meters.

Eventually they reached a point on the mountain where they could see the island province of Awaji below them. Retired Emperor Shirakawa stopped for a while and enjoyed the view. Here for the first time the group sensed the great size of Kōyasan.

Around 8:00 p.m. the group arrived at the Central Hall on top of the mountain. Shirakawa stayed there for the evening. The monks of Kongōbuji had built several structures to serve as the lodgings for this large group of pilgrims. One of the more interesting things that are noted is that the places where the attendants stayed depended on their rank. In other words, those of high rank had lodgings near the Central Hall whereas those of low rank had to stay in less conveniently located lodgings farther away. This is yet another example of the ways in which class and status played a role in the experience of the pilgrims.

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* includes an important reference to the unprecedented nature of Shirakawa's journey to Kōyasan. According to this record, after Shirakawa arrived at Kōyasan,

¹⁴⁷ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 304.

"a monk who lived on the mountain stated, 'Although there are many people of high class and low class who have made a pilgrimage to this mountain, I have not heard of the case of a sovereign (*daijōkō*) who has come here.'"¹⁴⁸ This statement provides more evidence that many persons of different social status had already been visiting Kōyasan. Nevertheless, Shirakawa was the first reigning emperor or retired emperor to do so.

Walking the Hill-less Path to Kūkai's Mausoleum

On the next day, the twenty-seventh, following their breakfast, Shirakawa and his attendants proceeded to Kūkai's Mausoleum, or the *byōdō* 廟堂, at the Inner Sanctum (Oku no In). First, before walking to the Inner Sanctum, the group of pilgrims made offerings to the divinities associated with Kōyasan. The location of the structure where these deities were enshrined is not mentioned, but it was apparently very close to the Central Hall. Later texts such as the *Omuro gosho Kōyasan gosanrō nikki* (1147-1150) state that there was the Miyashiro 御社, or "August Shrine," for Kōya Myōjin and Niu Myōjin at the central monastic complex (*danjō garan*), but in 1088 it is unclear what type of building existed.¹⁴⁹

Shirakawa and his attendants made offerings of three bolts of white fabric (*shirotae gohei* 白妙御幣) to Niu Myōjin, Kōya Myōjin, and all the deities associated with them. Throughout Japanese history, it has been a very common religious practice to make these types of offerings before the local deities in the places where they were enshrined. It is not clear whether Shirakawa offered only white fabric or other items as well.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 304.

¹⁴⁹ See *Omuro gosho Kōyasan gosanrō nikki*, Kyūan 3.5.21, *Dainihon komonjo, iemake dai-ichi, Kōyasan komonjo no shishū*, 450.

¹⁵⁰ Today *nusa* 幣 and *gohei* 御幣 refer primarily to strips of cloth or paper that have been cut into a zigzag pattern and attached to a stick of wood or bamboo. Devotees offer these items to a shrine or deity. In the *Procedures of the Engi Era* (*Engi shiki*), which was written sometime between 923 and 930, cloth, clothing, weaponry, sacred wine,

At this time, the abbot of Tōji, Jōken, made a speech about the special connection of these deities with Kōyasan:

The people who before now have made a pilgrimage to this mountain have always made offerings (*heihaku*) to these deities because they are the protective deities (*jishu myōjin*) of this place [...] When Kōbō Daishi opened this mountain, Niu Myōjin handed this land over to him. Now Niu Myōjin has tasted the Dharma. Because she is the benevolent deity of this temple, she certainly will receive these offerings.¹⁵¹

This speech summarizes the legend of the conversion of the deity Niu Myōjin to Buddhism, a myth that was later compiled in the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*, studied in chapter 1. Jōken is reminding the group that they are now standing in the very place where extraordinary events have occurred. Religious devotion of the present is intertwined with the memory of significant events of the past. In *To Take Place*, Jonathan Z. Smith states that, in the cases of scripture-based traditions such as Christianity, it is common for pilgrimage texts to state, "This is the place where a scriptural event occurred," to indicate the pilgrims' awareness that they were visiting places where significant religious events had taken place. In this case, the legends about the opening of Kōyasan probably were not yet circulating as a written text analogous to sacred scripture. Yet Jōken's statement shows that these particular places were significant in a similar way, because important sacred events had occurred there in the past, namely the local deity's conversion to Buddhism and her handing the land of Kōyasan over to Kūkai. It is important to point out that, whether or not Shirakawa and his attendants had heard these legends before coming to Kōyasan, they heard them recited during their stay on the mountain.¹⁵²

In this scene, Shirakawa is hardly featured and certainly does not perform the leading role. In fact, we see here that if this pilgrimage was a consciously constructed ritual of state

and food offerings are listed as *nusa* and *heihaku* (both literally meaning cloth offered to a deity). See *Shintō jiten*, s.v. "Gohei," 198, and s.v. "Heihaku," 206-207.

¹⁵¹ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 304.

¹⁵² Jōken was interacting with Shirakawa prior to this journey and probably had told him this legend.

planned in the capital prior to the departure, Jōken and the other clerics played a major role in the writing and the performance of this ritual drama once the pilgrims arrived at their destination. Jōken and the other monks who told sacred myths as part of this journey had the freedom to edit the stories, choosing how and when to tell them. Their agency needs to be emphasized in a "theater of state" model used to analyze these imperial pilgrimages. In addition, it is important to notice that Shirakawa did not necessarily benefit politically by making offerings at this point. He did not gain more authority or perform the authority that he already had. These instances of storytelling combined with the devotional actions provide some evidence that we need to modify the theater of state model to some degree.

Following their offerings to the deities, around 8:00 a.m. Shirakawa and his entourage departed and started walking towards the Inner Sanctum (*Oku no In*). The name for this site on the mountain apparently derived from its position relative to the more accessible Central Hall, where the pilgrims first arrived after ascending the mountain. The Inner Sanctum was located at the deepest, most interior place on the mountain. The *Kanji ninen gokōki* states that it was thirty-six *chō* from the Central Hall to Kūkai's tomb. As on the path up the mountain, for every interval of one *chō*, there was a stūpa marking the path. Along this route, according to this record, the narrow path was lined on both sides by a forest of trees.

Fujiwara no Michitoshi, the author of the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, also remarks on the unusually level nature of the path on top of Kōyasan, one of the mountain's characteristic geographical features. He writes, "When Kōbō Daishi came to this mountain, he recorded the 'three virtues' of Kōyasan. One of these three virtues is that after one ascends the [steep] mountain, at the top the path is not steep at all."¹⁵³ The relatively flat plain at the top of Kōyasan is an unusual geographical feature at which Kūkai marveled. This extraordinary characteristic of

¹⁵³ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 305.

the mountain's topography apparently was widely known at the end of the eleventh century as one of the "three virtues" of Kōyasan.¹⁵⁴

Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi also mentions this unusual feature of Kōyasan: "The valleys are deep and the mountain is steep, but the path that passes through Kōyasan does not have any hills. You should realize that *samsāra* is the same as *nirvāṇa*."¹⁵⁵ In other words, this paradoxical feature of the geography of Kōyasan was assigned religious significance. It serves as a symbol of an important doctrine in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the doctrine of the non-duality of *samsāra*, the cycle of rebirth and re-death in which all suffering occurs, and *nirvāṇa*, the cessation of all suffering. The mapping of doctrine onto the topography of sacred sites was a recurring feature of medieval Japanese religion.¹⁵⁶ In this case, human place-making activities by Kūkai and the monks who inherited his tradition rendered this unusual geographical feature of the mountain terrain meaningful in a specific Buddhist way.

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* continues with a description of the scenery near the Inner Sanctum. Heading to Kūkai's tomb, Shirakawa's entourage reached a river, spanned by a bridge made of logs.

Both the high- and low-ranking members of the party cleansed their feet in the water in order to ascend to the "pure place" (*jōen*浄筵) before them.¹⁵⁷ This reference to a pure place describes the land and buildings near Kūkai's Mausoleum at the Inner Sanctum. It is noteworthy that, in the mind of Fujiwara no Michitoshi, the physical barrier of the river also served as a metaphorical barrier between this "pure place" and the adjacent land that is much less pure.

¹⁵⁴ Wada Akio (Shūjō), "Heian jidai no sankeiki ni arawareta Kōyasan" (1), 4-5, states that the "three virtues" of Kōyasan started appearing in literature about the mountain around this time. The *Kanji ninen gokōki* is the first extant pilgrimage record in which these "three virtues" of Kōyasan are recorded.

¹⁵⁵ ZGR, vol. 28a, 286. See chapter 1 of this dissertation for references to other published versions of this primary source.

¹⁵⁶ See for example Allan Grapard's discussion of Kunisaki in "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness," 322-325, and doctrinal interpretations of Mt. Hiei in Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 125.

¹⁵⁷ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 305.

Because they were entering a different type of space, the pilgrims felt it necessary to cleanse their feet in this river.

Offering Sūtras to Kūkai

Shirakawa and his retainers had now arrived at the Inner Sanctum. Next, they went to the Worship Hall, or Raiden 禮殿, the building in front of Kūkai's Mausoleum. At this point, a sūtra offering service, or *kyōkuyō* 經供養, was held in the area in front of Kūkai's Mausoleum. Not uncommon as part of early medieval pilgrimages to sacred locations such as Kinpusen and Kumano, this ceremony marked the culmination of this journey. Shirakawa and his retainers had prepared for it from the very beginning, and the most intense period of ritual activity during the journey occurred in this location.

The chief purpose of this ceremony was to make an offering of the Buddhist scriptures that the pilgrims had carried to the mountain.¹⁵⁸ The general term for this class of ritual, ritual service of offering (*kuyō* 供養; *pūjā* in Sanskrit), means to make sacrifices or present other offerings to deities, ancestral spirits, or people who are worthy of veneration. In Buddhism, a *kuyō* rite refers to the offering of incense and flowers (*kōge* 香華), votive lights (*tōmyō* 灯明; *tomoshibi* 灯火), food and drink, materials, and other items given to the Three Jewels, as well as to parents, teachers, and the deceased.¹⁵⁹

In addition to these obviously religious features of the rituals at the Inner Sanctum, the ceremony exemplifies the "confluence of religious ritual and political theater" that was

¹⁵⁸ See Hinonishi Shinjō, *Kōyasan minzokushi: Oku no in hen*, 81. Hinonishi has included a chart that is useful for visualizing the arrangement of the various seats for the participants in this ceremony as well as for the various offerings.

¹⁵⁹ See Iwanami Bukkyō jiten, s.v. "Kuyō," 260.

characteristic of the pilgrimages by the retired sovereigns during this era of Japanese history.¹⁶⁰ This ceremony was simultaneously religious and political in nature. It was orchestrated in such a way to construct perceptions and interpretations of Shirakawa, the central actor of this performance, and his relationship to Kūkai. While not present in the same way as the other living participants, Kūkai was perhaps the most important member of the audience. This ceremony was intended "to image" the "cosmological truth" that Shirakawa was the central actor in the pageantry of state, that he was very much a Buddhist sacred king.¹⁶¹

For the most part, Fujiwara no Michitoshi does not explicitly point out the ways in which Shirakawa attempted to follow the examples of Michinaga and Yorimichi in carrying out these rituals. However, Shirakawa apparently wanted to establish his own mark on the mountain by following the precedents of the high-ranking Northern Fujiwara, who had already established themselves as major patrons of the institution. As we shall see below, a number of parallels between Shirakawa's actions and those of his Fujiwara predecessors suggest that he was aware of their activities and sought to repeat them.

Michitoshi found it necessary to record the placement of the items that were offered. Two tall altars were placed before Kūkai's mausoleum. Lamp offerings (*tōmyō*) and other items

¹⁶⁰ See Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 178, for this characterization of imperial pilgrimage.

¹⁶¹ The quoted phrases come from Stanley Tambiah, "A Reformulation," 317. Tambiah has been one major contributor to a recent move in Religious Studies to analyze as performative acts what had previously been considered religious rituals. See also *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, and the papers collected in *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*, especially "A Performative Approach to Ritual."

Tambiah and other theorists such as Catherine Bell have appropriated J. L. Austin's linguistic philosophy in their analyses of human action, especially ritual performances. See Austin's explanation of illocutionary speech acts in his philosophical classic, *How to Do Things with Words*. The contemporary philosopher John Searle has elaborated upon Austin's perceptive work on the performative dimensions of particular acts of speech in *Speech Acts and Mind, Language and Society*. A number of Religion scholars have built upon this work by Austin and Searle, extending their theories of speech acts into nuanced analyses of performative rituals that involve a combination of powerful speech and efficacious physical action. See especially Catherine Bell, "Performance" and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*; James H. Foard, "Ritual in the Buddhist Temples of Japan"; Lawrence Sullivan, "Sound and Senses: Toward a Hermeneutics of Performance"; and Stephen Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*.

such as offerings of rice (*shōgu* 聖供), normally intended for the *kami* and buddhas, were placed on the altar closest to the mausoleum. The Buddhist scriptures that had been brought by Shirakawa were placed on the other altar as an offering. Given the purpose of this ceremony, to make an offering to Kūkai, it is notable that these physical offerings were placed in the area closest to the tomb.

Michitoshi also carefully recorded the seats of the monks who participated in the ceremony. Behind the altars were three seats, including two high seats (*kōza*) for the monks who conducted the *sūtra* offering. There were also two different groups of seats for seven other monks (fourteen in total) on both sides of the high seats. On the right side of the upper group of seats there were three rows of seats for thirty more monks.

The seats for Shirakawa and his companions were arranged according to social status. The relative position of the retired sovereign, courtiers, and retainers formed an organized spatial configuration that replicated the hierarchies evident in the Japanese society of the time. Shirakawa's seat (*gyōza* 御座) was placed at the very heart of this arrangement, at the center of the portico in front of the Worship Hall. This placement suggests how the *sūtra* offering service dramatized Shirakawa's majesty. A folding screen (*byōbu*) surrounded Shirakawa's seat on three sides. In contrast to this central position, the high-ranking courtiers had their own seats beside the Worship Hall, less centrally located than Shirakawa's but still closer to the mausoleum than the adjacent seats for Shirakawa's lower-ranking retainers (*jishin*). The high-ranking Buddhist clerics Ryūmyō, Jōken, and Kan'i mentioned above came to the mountain on this occasion in order to conduct this *sūtra* dedication service. Ryūmyō served as the Officiant (*dōshi*), the monk in charge of carrying out the ceremony. Jōken fulfilled the role of Prayer Master (*jūgan* 呪願). Kan'i served as the Veneration Master (*sanrai* 三禮). Although Ninkaku was serving Shirakawa

during this journey, he did not belong to the Shingon tradition and thus did not participate in this ceremony.

While it might seem unusual at first to learn that a cleric from the Tendai tradition, Ryūmyō, served as the Officiant for a rite on Kōyasan, the *Kanji ninen gokōki* justifies this choice. "Ever since the pilgrimage [by Michinaga] in the Jian era [1021-1024], people in the lineage of Chishō Daishi [Enchin] have been the Officiants [in such rituals at Kōyasan]."¹⁶² During the pilgrimage by Fujiwara no Michinaga in 1023, a cleric from the Jimon branch of the Tendai tradition based at Onjōji served as the Officiant during a similar sūtra offering service. As seen above, Ryūmyō also was a member of the same Jimon branch that was established by Enchin (814-891) and thus at this time was chosen to be the Officiant.

Shirakawa had brought three Buddhist scriptures up the mountain to this location. The three scriptures listed are the *Lotus Sūtra* (T. no. 262, Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing*, J. *Myōhō renge kyō*, often abbreviated as *Hokekyō*) in golden ink, the *Wuliangyi jing* (T. no. 276, J. *Muryōgikyō*, *Sūtra of Innumerable Meanings*), the *Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing* (T. no. 277, J. *Kan fugen bosatsu gyōhō kyō*, *Sūtra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universally Worthy*), and the *Liqu jing* (T. no. 243, J. *Rishukyō*, *Sūtra of the Guiding Principle*). In East Asia, the *Lotus Sūtra* has probably been venerated more widely than any other Buddhist scripture. It was a central text in the religious culture of Heian Japan. Not only were its doctrines foundational to the development of Buddhist traditions such as Tendai and Nichiren, but this text has also provided images and mythic narratives that have been used extensively in literature, the pictorial arts, and architecture.¹⁶³ The two additional opening and closing sūtras were often treated as the introduction and conclusion to the *Lotus Sūtra* and combined with it. The three scriptures

¹⁶² *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 306.

¹⁶³ See Willa Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra*, and George Tanabe and Willa Tanabe, *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*.

together were known as the “threefold *Lotus Sūtra*” (*Hokke no sanbukyō*). The opening *sūtra* was the *Wuliangyi jing*. The closing *sūtra* was the *Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing*, which continues the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

The *Liqu jing* is an esoteric scripture used often in the Shingon tradition. This scripture expresses the “guiding principle” that passions (*bonnō*) are not distinct from awakening (*bodai*). In early medieval times, people believed that by reciting the scripture they could remove sins and karmic hindrances and avoid falling into the various hells.¹⁶⁴

Shirakawa's choice of the Buddhist scriptures that he brought to the mountain was probably based on his knowledge of two major pilgrimages to Kōyasan prior to this time. During his pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1023, Michinaga brought the *Lotus Sūtra* together with the *Liqu jing*, and he sponsored a *sūtra* dedication service at the Inner Sanctum.¹⁶⁵ Yorimichi brought a complete *Lotus Sūtra* in gold ink (*kindei*), as well as the thirty fascicles of the *Liqu jing* in black ink.¹⁶⁶ In this era, subsequent royal and aristocratic pilgrims such as Shirakawa sought to replicate this form of devotion and brought the same Buddhist scriptures to the mountain. Conforming with such precedents was a way for Shirakawa to demonstrate his own power and to perform his authority, while at the same time expressing his piety.

Although the *Kanji ninen gokōki* does not state so explicitly, in all likelihood the Buddhist scriptures that Shirakawa brought to the mountain were buried in this sacred location. After all, the record about Yorimichi's pilgrimage indicates clearly that the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Liqu jing* that he brought to Kōyasan were to be buried near Kūkai's tomb at the Inner

¹⁶⁴ See MDJ, s.v. “Rishukyō,” vol. 3, 2258-2259.

¹⁶⁵ For the only surviving contemporary record of this pilgrimage, see *Shōyūki*, Jian 3 (1023).11.10, ZST, suppl., vol. 2, 390.

¹⁶⁶ *Uji kanpaku Kōyasan gosankeiki*, Eishō 3.10.15; WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 553.

Sanctum.¹⁶⁷ Michinaga, Yorimichi, Shirakawa, and other prominent individuals of the eleventh century often buried the Buddhist scriptures that they brought with them on pilgrimage to other sacred mountains such as Kinpusen.¹⁶⁸ On the basis of the 1048 record about Yorimichi as well as knowledge of the common religious practices at the time, it is possible to infer that Shirakawa probably also intended his scriptures to be buried in this sacred location.

It is significant that the pilgrims wanted to make the scriptural offerings in this particular location, in the sacred presence of Kūkai. Abundant evidence indicates that *nyūjō shrinkō*, the faith that Kūkai had not died but had entered perpetual meditation at Kōyasan in 835, was well established by this time.¹⁶⁹ This particular form of religious faith was strongly associated with the specific location of the Inner Sanctum of Kōyasan, where the "living body" of Kūkai was supposedly located in the mausoleum.

The *Kanji ninen gokōki* suggests that, like Michinaga and Yorimichi before him, Shirakawa believed that Kūkai had the same status as a Buddha or *kami*. As seen in Chapter 1, during the Insei era, devotees believed that Kūkai was a wonder-worker on the order of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.¹⁷⁰ This was true across class and regional lines. Even as early as the end of the tenth century, the belief that Kūkai was in meditation at Kōyasan had reached the aristocratic society of the capital. Like Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and various gods, Kōbō Daishi manifested himself in the dreams of the nobility.¹⁷¹ Also like these supernatural beings, Kōbō Daishi was seen as meriting the offerings of hand-copied sacred scriptures in the location where he supposedly continued to live in meditation. Since sūtra offering services usually were conducted only before Buddhas and deities, the very act of offering Buddhist scriptures to Kūkai reveals

¹⁶⁷ *Uji kanpaku Kōyasan gosankeiki*, Eishō 3.10.15; WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 553.

¹⁶⁸ Blair, *Peak of Gold*, 169-174.

¹⁶⁹ Shirai Yūko, *Inseiki Kōyasan*, 11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

that the pilgrims to Kōyasan in the eleventh century envisioned him as a divine being.¹⁷² In addition, conducting such grand ritual performances before his tomb undoubtedly accorded him even holier status.

Serving as the Officiant, Ryūmyō sat in front of the tomb of Kūkai at the Inner Sanctum and conducted an explanatory lecture on the *Lotus Sūtra*. When it was time for a lecture on the *Liqu jing*, thirty monks from Kōyasan intoned the headings of the thirty scrolls of that sūtra.¹⁷³ Shirakawa then commanded that three hundred bolts of cloth and three hundred measures (*ton*) of cotton wool be distributed to the monks of Kōyasan. After the monks of Kōyasan chanted Buddhist scriptures (*fujū*), Shirakawa made an offering of an additional three hundred bolts of cloth.

Ryūmyō issued an invocation (*hyōbyaku* 表白, *keibyaku* 啓白), announcing the purport of this particular Buddhist rite to the beings of the sacred cosmos, in this case, especially Kūkai, as well as the assembly of monks and laity: "Long ago when Śakyamuni Buddha was the Prince Siddhartha, he left the palace and became devoted to Buddhism. Now Retired Emperor Shirakawa has abandoned his position as emperor and has climbed to this numinous cave (*reikutsu* 霊窟). From ancient times such an example has not been known. In the future this will also probably be rare."¹⁷⁴

By comparing Shirakawa with the historical Buddha, Ryūmyō elevated Shirakawa's religious status and made his pilgrimage to Kōyasan all the more remarkable. This characterization of Shirakawa's abdication of his position as sovereign was rooted in often used

¹⁷² As part of pilgrimages to other sacred locations, Shirakawa had sponsored similar sūtra dedication services before Buddha images and deities. See Blair, *Peak of Gold*, 219, for a diagram for the 1092 offering at Kinpusen. This diagram reveals that the scriptures to be buried were placed in front of a Buddha image.

¹⁷³ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 306.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. The compilers of the biography of Ryūmyō in the *Jimon kōsōki* found his service as Officiant during this ritual at Kōyasan to be one of the highlights of his career as a Buddhist cleric. They include this invocation that Ryūmyō issued on this occasion. See ZGR, vol. 28a, 314.

tropes about the intimacy between Buddhism and royalty. In early medieval Japan, the emperor's abdication was represented as a gesture parallel to the Buddha's renunciation of the world. According to the hagiography about Śākyamuni, the historical Buddha was destined to become either a *cakravartin*, a great wheel-turning king, or a Buddha, that is, a world conqueror or a world renouncer.¹⁷⁵ The man who became the Buddha chose to renounce the world and any political ambitions. Growing out of this myth, Buddhist iconography, hagiography, and cultic activity represented the *cakravartin* in a fashion very similar to the Buddha. Ryūmyō's invocation implies that Shirakawa was a Buddhist *cakravartin* who, like the Buddha, eventually chose the religious life over the rule of his kingdom. Shirakawa's pilgrimage to Kōyasan is also figured as an eminently pious act devoid of any political or economic ambition.

Like the other clerics and many of the other individuals who traveled with Shirakawa to Kōyasan, Ryūmyō relied on the patronage of the retired sovereign and could do nothing but praise him. Nevertheless, before he had finished speaking, Ryūmyō started crying, an indication of his immense joy. All the other people there, both eminent and lowly, also were wiping their tears.¹⁷⁶ It was apparently a very emotional, joyous occasion for these individuals to participate in this extraordinary event.

After Ryūmyō finished his lecture on the Buddhist scriptures, Shirakawa made offerings to him and the other participating monks. Ryūmyō received one white garment (*uchigi*), fifty rolls (*hiki* 疋) of silk, and thirty bushels of rice. The Prayer Master and Veneration Master each were given thirty rolls of silk and fifteen bushels of rice. Shirakawa donated a smaller amount of silk (ten rolls) and rice (ten bushels) to the ordinary monks.

¹⁷⁵ See Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*.

¹⁷⁶ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 306.

In his magisterial study of the economic dimensions of pilgrimage in Japanese history, Shinjō Tsunezō uses the example of these sizable donations by Shirakawa as part of this pilgrimage in order to illustrate the enormous contributions that male royals and courtiers were making during this time.¹⁷⁷ The wealthiest elites in particular were traveling to temples and donating large amounts of rice, cloth, monastic robes, lamp oil, and sometimes even large estates (*shōen*). Prior to Shirakawa's pilgrimage, Michinaga in 1023 and then his son, Yorimichi, in 1048 had traveled to the mountain and made enormous contributions, including large landed estates, to Kōyasan. The monks of Buddhist institutions such as Kōyasan warmly welcomed these donations, which ensured their temples' growing prosperity. In addition, having received such gifts, these monks undoubtedly entered into deeper relationships of loyalty and obligation with the high-ranking courtiers and royals who had benefited them. In such lavish exchanges of symbolic and material capital, Shirakawa and other generous donors received not only elevated status as patrons but also much karmic merit. As we will see below, sometimes the patrons also received valuable material rewards in return for their appreciated patronage.

Later, there was a *Rishu zanmai* 理趣三昧 ritual, the Buddhist rite in which monks chant the *Liqu jing*.¹⁷⁸ This ritual was conducted at this time probably because of the precedent of conducting the same ritual during the pilgrimages by Michinaga and Yorimichi. In accordance with these prior examples, thirty monks from Kōyasan were gathered in order to conduct the rite.

At this time, Yuihan was the most senior monk at Kōyasan, and he served as the Officiant. The other twenty-nine remaining monks sat inside of the Worship Hall according to

¹⁷⁷ *Shaji sankei no shakai keizaishiteki kenkyū*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ According to MDJ, vol. 3, 2266, the rite consists solely in the chanting of the *Liqu jing*, sometimes in an abbreviated form. In the more elaborate version, an Officiant conducts the *Rishukyō hō* in order to reveal the "inner realization" (*naishō*) of Kongōsatta Bosatsu (BodhisattvaVajrasattva, "Bodhisattva Diamond Being"). During this ritual performance, the other monks chant the *Liqu jing*. Performing this ritual was believed to enable Buddhist practitioners to gain benefits such as the elimination of defilements and the prevention of misfortune and calamity. Nakamura, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, vol. 2, 1413b, states that this ritual was a religious practice of chanting the *Rishukyō* in order to repent one's sins.

their relative seniority. After the ritual was over, Shirakawa issued several orders. First, there would be three positions for esoteric masters (*ajari*) established at Kōyasan in order to continue the transmission of the Dharma (*denbō kanjō*). This action enabled Shirakawa to gain more influence with the clerics of Kōyasan.

Also, the Great Stūpa, or Daitō, was to be rebuilt. Invoking the ideology of Buddhist kingship, the *Kanji ninen gokōki* places Shirakawa's act of commissioning this structure in the context of similar acts by other rulers. Kūkai first petitioned Emperor Saga for the land of Kōyasan in 816, and the construction of the Great Stūpa was begun after Emperor Saga granted the land to Kūkai. The structure was not completed until Emperor Uda (867-931), or the Dharma King of the Kanpyō era, as the text names him, commanded that others finish it. Michitoshi makes the case that Shirakawa's act of commissioning the rebuilding of the Great Stūpa is not to be considered in isolation but as an act according with the pious actions of several generations of "sacred kings" (*seiō*聖王).¹⁷⁹

Probably the first historical case in Japan of enshrining the main Buddhas from the dual mandalas inside of stūpas, the Great Stūpa originally housed five Buddha statues, the five most important Buddhas of the Womb mandala.¹⁸⁰ In contrast to most of the major temples of the time, including the Nara temples, the central monastic complex of Kōyasan did not have a Golden Hall, which normally housed a temple's most important icons. Instead, the enormous Great Stūpa and the smaller Western Stūpa nearby probably served the same function as a

¹⁷⁹ For this passage, see *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 307. For an overview of the early history of the Great Stūpa, also see Wada, "Kōyasan no rekishi to shinkō," 168.

¹⁸⁰ According to the *Shugyō engi*, inside of the Great Stūpa, there was a statue of Dainichi Nyorai as well as slightly smaller statues of the four Buddhas of the Womb mandala. All the statues were golden in color. This record states that all five of these Buddhas were the five Buddhas of the Womb mandala. This is evidence that the present mixed arrangement inside of the structure is much more recent.

Today, in the center of the Great Stūpa is a statue of Dainichi in the same form that he appears in the Womb Realm mandala. He is surrounded by the Buddhas of the four directions, which are Buddhas from the Diamond Realm mandala, and this arrangement is suggestive of the Shingon doctrine about the interpenetration of the two mandalas (Gardiner, "Maṇḍala, Maṇḍala on the Wall," 261).

Golden Hall because these structures together contained the statues of the Buddhas central to the two major Shingon mandalas. In a sense, the Great Stūpa was an enormous representation of the Womb mandala while the Western Stūpa was a large embodiment of the Diamond World mandala. Together representing the non-duality of the two mandalas, they were important symbols of the Shingon Buddhist tradition at Kōyasan.

These two structures burned down in a fire that destroyed many of the buildings at the central monastic complex in 994, and this fire was one of the major events that led to the decline of Buddhist practice on the mountain. According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, this fire was a source of "enduring chagrin" (*ikon*遺恨) for the entire Buddhist institution at Kōyasan.¹⁸¹ Even though the Great Stūpa was not completely rebuilt until 1103, gaining the retired sovereign's support for its reconstruction in 1088 undoubtedly signified new life for the institution as a whole.¹⁸²

According to Michitoshi's account, after Yuihan announced the invocation stating Shirakawa's above directives, all of the monks were overjoyed and each of them said that his wishes had already been fulfilled. After these Buddhist rituals were over, just as before, the participating monks were rewarded with offerings of clothing and silk.

Jōken, one of the principal representatives of the Shingon tradition in Japan at the time, then went to where Shirakawa was sitting and made a significant counter-gift to the retired sovereign, of two scrolls handwritten by Kūkai. The *Kanji ninen gokōki* does not contain much information about these texts or the significance that possessing them might hold. Yet these texts were undoubtedly sacra whose possession added to Shirakawa's legitimacy. In many Asian

¹⁸¹ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 307.

¹⁸² See the 1103 *Kōya gotō kuyō ganmon* (*Prayer for the inauguration of the Great Stūpa of Kōya*), WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 785, which survives from the consecration ritual. The text was originally included in the *Kongōbuji zatsubun*.

Buddhist contexts, the possession of palladia, regalia, and sacra has been closely connected with legitimate kingship, and medieval Japan was no exception.¹⁸³ The wish-fulfilling jewel, or *nyoi hōju*, a Buddhist object with much symbolic significance, was probably the main sacred regalia of the late Heian era.¹⁸⁴ This object gave sovereigns the royal and divine authority of Buddhist kingship. Like the wish-fulfilling jewel, handwritten texts by the saint Kūkai undoubtedly also had strong symbolic value. These texts were conceived as Buddhist relics, specifically "traces from the hands of Kōbō Daishi," and the possession of them conferred even more authority upon Shirakawa. After this important gift to Shirakawa, it started raining and Shirakawa went back to his lodgings.

At this time, some of the other pilgrims, both high- and lower-ranking nobility, made offerings of lamps in front of Kūkai's Mausoleum. Some also made offerings of Buddhist scriptures, apparently depositing texts that they had brought to the mountain. While *Kanji ninen gokōki* for the most part highlights Shirakawa's actions, in this case it indicates that other, much less exalted individuals engaged in ritual actions similar to those of the retired sovereign. Nevertheless, in the case of these individuals, the devotional activities of depositing Buddhist scriptures at Kūkai's tomb were not accompanied by the same grand ceremonies as those that framed the scriptural offerings of the retired emperor. In addition, there is no indication that the high-ranking Buddhist clerics praised these individuals for their Buddhist devotion. Still, this record shows that, even if the overarching aim of the pilgrimage is characterized as a consciously constructed ritual of state that dramatized the majesty of the retired emperor and enabled him to gain influence with the clerics of this growing religious institution, many of the other individuals participating had their own religious purposes in making the journey to Kōyasan.

¹⁸³ Tambiah, "A Reformulation of Geertz's Conception of the Theater of State," 327-336.

¹⁸⁴ Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 175.

Worshipping at Kūkai's Portrait Hall

On the next day, the twenty-eighth, after eating breakfast, around 8:00 a.m. Shirakawa visited the Mieidō, or Kūkai's Portrait Hall. According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, there were no resident monks at this hall. Ryōzen (1048-1139), a monk at Kōyasan who was working his way up the monastic hierarchy, had inherited the right to keep the key to this building, and other people were unable to open the door.¹⁸⁵

In describing this closed, restricted building, the *Kanji ninen gokōki* reports an interesting prohibition at the Portrait Hall: "It is prohibited for people of low status to approach the revered one (*omae*御前)."¹⁸⁶ Apparently only Shirakawa, the high-ranking clerics, and the high-ranking nobility were able to enter the Portrait Hall. While Shirakawa was inside the Portrait Hall, Jōken and the low-ranking men who were unable to enter the structure remained outside, walking around in the eastern courtyard of the Portrait Hall.

Following Shirakawa's command, the cleric Kan'i opened the door to the Portrait Hall. Inside it was dark, even though it was not night. Holding lanterns in their hands, the group worshipped the "true likeness" (*shin'ei*), or portrait, of Kūkai.¹⁸⁷

Along with *nyūjō shrinkō*入定信仰, the faith that Kūkai had entered perpetual meditation at the Inner Sanctum, at the central monastic complex of Kōyasan there has been *miei shrinkō*御影信仰, or "faith in the true likeness" of Kōbō Daishi. Portrait halls (*mieidō*御影堂) have been an important feature of Buddhist temples in Japanese history. They have not been limited to the Shingon tradition but have existed in every tradition of Japanese Buddhism. Depending on

¹⁸⁵ Ryōzen had become the student of a monk at Kōyasan at the age of eleven. He soon was tonsured and started conducting Buddhist discipline on the mountain. He received the consecration into the Dual World Mandalas the same year as Shirakawa's initial visit to Kōyasan. In Eikyū 3 (1115) he became the twenty-second abbot (*kengyō*) at Kōyasan (MDJ, vol. 3, 2881).

¹⁸⁶ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 308.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

the particular Buddhist tradition, sometimes they have been called the Founder's Hall (*soshi dō* 祖師堂 or *kaisan dō* 開山堂). Although many of these structures were constructed after the death of the tradition's patriarch, originally, they were created when the disciples devoted to a teacher converted his living quarters into a Mieidō.¹⁸⁸

According to the *Kongōbuji junrei jidai* and other texts, what eventually became the Mieidō at Kōyasan was originally Kūkai's private Buddha hall (*nenjudō* or *jibutsudō*).¹⁸⁹ After his death, Kūkai's portrait was enshrined in the Lecture Hall (Kōdō), which was the main place for assemblies of the monks on the mountain. There it was easily worshipped. However, because people believed that this "true likeness" of Kūkai should be treated with more respect, probably in the tenth century it was enshrined securely in the present structure, which came to be called the Mieidō.¹⁹⁰ The record of Yorimichi's 1048 pilgrimage states that this was a one-bay building where there was the portrait (*gazō* 画像) of Kūkai.¹⁹¹

While inside of the small Portrait Hall, in addition to worshipping this portrait, Shirakawa and the other men also viewed the possessions that Kūkai had while alive. These objects were not mere material objects but contact relics of the eminent monk Kūkai. Relics, whether bodily relics, such as the tiny fragments remaining after the cremation of the body of an eminent monk, or contact relics—the begging bowls, staffs, robes, texts, or even places that have come into contact with such monks—have played a major role in the acculturation of Buddhism in East Asian countries. Part of the significance of the relatively small Portrait Hall at Kōyasan was that the structure housed Kūkai's contact relics. Michitoshi did not find it necessary to record much

¹⁸⁸ For an overview of Mieidō in Japanese Buddhism, see Wada, "Heian jidai no sankeiki ni arawareta Kōyasan" (4), 2.

¹⁸⁹ *Kongōbuji junrei jidai*, *Zoku Shingonshū zensho*, vol. 41, 94.

¹⁹⁰ For this early history of the Mieidō and the *miei* of Kūkai, see Hinonishi Shinjō, *Kōyasan Kongōbuji nenchū gyōji*, 80.

¹⁹¹ *Uji kanpaku Kōyasan gosankeiki*, Eishō 3.10.16; WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 554.

information about these objects, other than remarking on their craftsmanship. He writes, "Although the materials that comprised these objects were very basic, their craftsmanship was entirely majestic."¹⁹²

The author of the *Uji Kanpaku Kōyasan gosankeiki* (1048), the record of the pilgrimage to Kōyasan by Yorimichi, recorded more information about these objects. From this work, we know that these items included a piece of furniture for sitting and sleeping (*kyōsoku* 脇息), a rope chair (*jōshō* 縄床), a pair of wooden shoes (*bokuri* 木履), and a staff (*tsue* 杖). According to this record, "Even though several hundred years had passed, these items were still like new."¹⁹³ This is a comment that later writers of pilgrimage records repeated. Apparently, the connection to the extraordinary saint Kūkai created the magical property of never aging. "The power actualized in living thaumaturges as *abhijnā* [the extraordinary powers gained by Buddhist monks in meditation]," writes Bernard Faure, "was believed to pass after their death into their relics, their charisma being, as it were, objectified and disseminated."¹⁹⁴

Following the very brief account of Shirakawa's worship inside of the Portrait Hall, the *Kanji ninen gokōki* proceeds to tell about the Sanko no Matsu, or the sacred pine tree on which Kūkai's vajra thrown from China purportedly landed:

Several meters in front of the Portrait Hall there was an old pine tree. The branches were thin and hard. It was extremely old.

An elder who lived at the temple stated, "When Kōbō Daishi was in Tang China, he used divination to find a land with a karmic connection (*J. uen no chi* 有縁之地) to the Buddhist teachings. He threw a vajra, a three-pronged ritual implement, very far. It flew across 10,000 *ri* of large waves [of the ocean]. This ritual implement that Kōbō Daishi threw from China now hangs from this very tree."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 308.

¹⁹³ *Uji kanpaku Kōyasan gosankeiki*, Eishō 3.10.16; WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 554.

¹⁹⁴ *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 133.

¹⁹⁵ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 308.

According to this passage, when they went to the Sanko no Matsu, Shirakawa and the other pilgrims were told the legend about the sacred origins of Kōyasan. The Kōyasan monks stressed to pilgrims that they were standing on the very spot where Kūkai's three-pronged vajra had landed when he threw it all the way from China, and that this numinous occurrence had identified Kongōbuji as the very place where the esoteric teachings would be established. The record in the *Kanji ninen gokōki* indicates that this story was very important in constructing the religious significance of Kōyasan for pilgrims such as Shirakawa.¹⁹⁶

According to the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, when the pilgrims heard the story about Kūkai's throwing the *vajra* from China and its landing on this particular mountain, they marveled. They were moved emotionally on a deep level. In order to form a karmic tie (*kechien*), they bent the branches of the pine tree and picked off pine nuts, sacred souvenirs that they all took with them when they left the mountain.¹⁹⁷ In this case, this record makes no distinction between the actions of the men with high status and the men with low status. The experience of marveling at the myth of the Buddhist institution's sacred origins and taking the sacred souvenirs away with them transcended class. In addition, apparently, these were spontaneous acts that were not planned as part of the theater of state.

After Shirakawa and the group of men with him had emerged from the Portrait Hall, they made offerings of silk and cloth to Jōken and other offerings to the other high-ranking clerics. Next, Shirakawa went to the Yakushi Hall. After he worshipped the Buddha there, he returned

¹⁹⁶ There is little variation between this story and the similar legend that is included in the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*. The *Kanji ninen gokōki* probably contains the oldest surviving literary record of the Sanko no Matsu story. See Takeuchi Kōzen, *Kōbō Daishi denshō to shijitsu*, 161-163, for a discussion of this legend as presented in the *Kanji ninen gokōki*.

¹⁹⁷ *Kanji ninen gokōki*, 308. Even today, a common practice for pilgrims to Kōyasan is to pick off the leaves from this tree and take them with them.

to his lodgings. Later in the morning the party prepared to depart Kōyasan below the sacred gate.

For the descent down the mountain, Shirakawa did not walk as he had while the group was ascending Kōyasan, but instead rode in a palanquin (*agegoshi* 肩輿), whose two poles were shouldered by bearers. Ninkaku had supplied sixteen boy-servants (*dōji*) to carry the palanquin, and these boys were chosen based upon their prior service at Hieizan. The high-ranking courtiers, or *kugyō*, led the way down the mountain on their horses. The retainers walked on foot, following Shirakawa's palanquin. At around 4:00 p.m. they arrived at the Mandokoro, and the high-ranking courtiers went to their lodgings.

On Shirakawa's return trip to the capital, the group took a slightly different route. They visited the Buddhist temples Horyūji, Yakushiji, and Tōdaiji in Nara on the thirtieth day prior to their arrival in the capital city on the first day of the third month. Yet again Shirakawa was able to establish his presence in several preeminent Buddhist temples.

In a pilgrimage of only ten days, Shirakawa and a large group of courtiers and servants had visited a number of Buddhist sites in Uji, Nara, and Kii province. The *Kanji ninen gokōki* indicates that, for Shirakawa, at this time the most significant place to visit was Kōyasan. This mountain stands out in this record as the pilgrimage site of the most intense period of ritual activity, the site for which enormous preparations were made prior to departure. Kōyasan was the stage for the major performances on this journey, performances with a multitude of layers and purposes, religious, artistic, political, and economic.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the pilgrimage by retired Emperor Shirakawa to Kōyasan in 1088. The concept of the "theater of state" is an effective analytical tool for illuminating many

of the dimensions of this journey. The pilgrimage was motivated by Shirakawa's complex and various purposes—political, religious and economic—especially by his desire to establish his own mark in a numinous place already visited by powerful individuals such as Fujiwara no Michinaga and Fujiwara no Yorimichi. Especially at Kōyasan he engaged in ceremonial statecraft that dramatized his majesty, enacting the authority that he enjoyed as the recently retired emperor. The large-scale pilgrimage rituals not only provided the framework for his enormous gifts to the Buddhist institutions that he visited but also impressed upon the audiences that he was a generous, pious king much in keeping with the examples of similar rulers in Japan and elsewhere in the Asian Buddhist world.

In analyzing this journey, I have also shown that certain episodes of the pilgrimage do not fit the theater of state model. For example, many of the ritual activities were not consciously constructed prior to embarking on the journey. The scene at the pine tree near Kūkai's Portrait Hall is perhaps the main scene in which we see improvised actions not planned from the beginning. In addition, in this scene, a range of pilgrims—of high and low rank—engaged in the same form of action, grasping a pine nut from the tree to take with them. This was a gesture neither scripted nor imposed from above.

All of this is evidence that scholars of imperial pilgrimage during this era need to continue reflecting on the "theater of state" metaphor and refining this model. After all, some aspects of royal pilgrimages were improvised and interactive, with the retired sovereign sometimes performing the leading role but at other times receding back into the audience, in scenes in which his authority was not necessarily being either expressed or constructed. We need to strive to imagine the ways in which, as part of these journeys, the retired emperor's authority was constructed not only by himself but also by others traveling with him, whether the high-

ranking clerics in his service, or a waka poet who was recording the events of the journey for posterity. While these individuals were very much dependent on the retired sovereign and probably could not criticize him, they still had a considerable amount of flexibility in the ways in which they represented the retired emperor in story and performance. Their agency must be included in a theater of state model.

Finally, it is important to ask about the effect of Shirakawa's pilgrimage on the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan. In other words, shifting the focus from Shirakawa to Kōyasan, we need to consider how the mountain changed as a result of this visit by a powerful king. First, certain monks on the mountain were promoted to positions of higher status, for example, the three men who were elevated to the status of esoteric master. Shirakawa also made enormous material contributions of cloth and food to the monks serving on the mountain. Moreover, Shirakawa's command to build the Great Stūpa set in motion a process that eventually resulted in building a structure with enormous significance and symbolism for the Shingon Buddhist institution, a gigantic representation of one of the two main mandalas central to the thought and practice of the Shingon Buddhist tradition.

Perhaps most importantly, Shirakawa's visit to Kōyasan in 1088 undoubtedly enhanced the reputation of the mountain as a place that the retired emperor wanted to visit and patronize. Shirakawa's large party of pilgrims returned to the capital with stories about a growing religious institution in Kii province, a numinous place characterized by the "sacred traces" of the increasingly famous saint Kūkai. This group of individuals probably told others in the capital the stories that they heard about the mountain, the stories of the sacred origins of the Buddhist institution and the stories of the continued presence of local divinities and the deified human Kūkai. The stories were intimately connected with ritual activities on the mountain. Fujiwara no

Michitoshi composed the *Kanji ninen gokōki* that recounted the details of much of this journey, probably inspiring others in the capital who read this account to make a similar journey to the mountain.

In addition to Shirakawa's two subsequent journeys to the mountain, in 1091 and 1127, a number of other high-ranking royals and aristocrats also chose to venture beyond the center of political and cultural activity to the peripheral mountain Kōyasan, a destination requiring a journey of several days. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Shirakawa's grandson Toba, after retiring from the position of emperor, attempted to repeat much of Shirakawa's 1088 pilgrimage several decades later, in 1124. In this regard, Shirakawa's 1088 journey paved the way for much significant patronage of Kōyasan by the retired emperors of the Insei era. Through both elaborate rituals of state and performances of individual devotion, these individuals would attempt to bring the increasingly flourishing religious institution under their own rule, the Insei, the government by retired emperors.

Chapter 3

In Accordance with a Few Rare Accomplishments: Retired Emperor Toba's Pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1124

Introduction

With his pilgrimages to Kōyasan beginning with the journey of 1088, Shirakawa inaugurated a strong tradition of lavish patronage by the retired emperors of late Heian Japan. While Shirakawa's connection with this sacred site proved significant in very immediate and tangible economic ways, the precedent that Shirakawa set with his initial visit to the mountain in 1088 also had incalculable symbolic value for the institution in preparing the way for the pilgrimages by several other retired emperors of the Insei era. Following Shirakawa, the next retired emperor who embarked on the fairly distant journey from the capital to Kōyasan in the Kii peninsula was Toba, Shirakawa's grandson.

Chapter 3 is a study of Toba's initial pilgrimage in 1124. I have chosen to focus on this pilgrimage because many of its elements were modeled on the 1088 pilgrimage by Shirakawa, just examined in Chapter 2. This chapter aims to show both the similarities and differences between Toba's 1124 pilgrimage and Shirakawa's earlier one in 1088. I will show both the establishment of stable conventions for Kōyasan pilgrimage and also the development of new cultic elements on the mountain. In addition, this chapter also investigates which of these developments were particular to Kōyasan, such as the cult of Kūkai, and which developments were parts of a larger, emergent pilgrimage tradition.

In this chapter, I will show that in 1124 Toba to a large extent attempted to replicate the first pilgrimage by his grandfather Shirakawa. He aimed to conduct many of the same ritual

performances in the same locations and was undoubtedly trying to establish his own presence in a numinous location already visited by a number of high-ranking aristocrats and one retired emperor like himself. In the course of this pilgrimage, Toba also conducted religious activities that Shirakawa had not yet conducted at Kōyasan. The evidence for these innovations in 1124 points to broader developments in the religious faith associated with the mountain.

In the first major section of this chapter, I will show the great extent to which Toba attempted to copy Shirakawa's initial journey to the mountain in his pilgrimage route and activities prior to arriving at Kōyasan. Next, I will discuss Toba's initial activities at Kōyasan, focusing on points of both continuity and discontinuity with Shirakawa. The following section presents the large-scale rites that Toba sponsored at the Inner Sanctum. These rituals reveal a continued attempt to act in a manner in keeping with Shirakawa's exalted example. Then, I will show the ways in which Toba's burial of a Buddhist sutra at the Inner Sanctum was in accordance with many previous examples of the same activity in this sacred location, while at the same time suggesting some new developments in the religious devotion associated with the mountain. The final major section considers Toba's activities at Kūkai's Portrait Hall, activities that manifest the growing importance of Kōbō Daishi as the locus of religious devotion on Kōyasan.

Following in the Footsteps of Shirakawa: Toba's Journey to Kōyasan

This section introduces Retired Emperor Toba and overviews the preparations for his journey to Kōyasan as well as the initial period of the journey prior to the arrival at Kōyasan. I will show that Toba's pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1124 exhibited a number of parallels with Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage to the same mountain. For example, Toba's group took a very

similar route on their way to Kōyasan and conducted similar rituals at the same temples that Shirakawa visited in 1088.

Toba (1103-1156) was the seventy-fourth emperor. He was the eldest son of Emperor Horikawa (1079-1107; r 1087-1107) and was born in 1103 after much concern that Horikawa would not produce an heir. At the time of Horikawa's death in 1107, Toba became the next emperor. While Toba ruled in name as emperor, Shirakawa in reality was the most important political figure at court and served as the head of the imperial family. Given Toba's very young age, Shirakawa assumed the role of guardian for Toba just as he had for Horikawa. However, Shirakawa and Toba were not especially close, in particular after Toba matured.¹⁹⁸

In 1123 Toba abdicated his position of emperor on behalf of his supposed son, Sutoku. He had first issued an edict that established the five-year-old as the crown prince. Toba had not decided on his own to abdicate. Rather, the domineering Shirakawa had made this decision for him. It is possible that Shirakawa was the true father of Sutoku because he was known to have been especially fond of Sutoku's mother, Shōshi. Shōshi was Shirakawa's adopted daughter, but she also became Toba's empress (*chūgū*). If Shirakawa were Sutoku's father, his efforts to have Toba abdicate in favor of Sutoku seem all the more understandable.¹⁹⁹

In the first year of the Tenji era (1124), soon after his retirement as emperor, Toba made his first pilgrimage to Kōyasan. Fujiwara no Saneyuki (1080-1162), a courtier whose family had extensive connections with the royal family, was one of the numerous courtiers and retainers

¹⁹⁸ Hurst, *Insei*, 154.

¹⁹⁹ In addition, Shirakawa in all likelihood wanted Shōshi to have more honor and glory. This became a reality in 1124 when an edict gave her a palace name (*ingō*), Taikenmon'in, and she became a retired imperial lady (*nyōin*). This rank placed her just below the retired emperors, Shirakawa and Toba. Shōshi gave birth to five princes and became "the most honored lady in the land" (Hurst, *Insei*, 155-157).

who accompanied Retired Emperor Toba to Kōyasan, and he composed a detailed record of their pilgrimage, the *Toba Jōkō Kōya gokōki* (hereafter *Kōya gokōki*).²⁰⁰

According to the *Kōya gokōki*, Toba traveled to Kōyasan in 1124 in order to follow some "excellent accomplishments that have been rare (*kitai no shōchoku* 希代之勝蹟)." ²⁰¹ As we will see below, Toba was very aware of his grandfather Shirakawa's trips to Kōyasan, and he sought to follow his example in a number of ways. It is possible that Shirakawa encouraged Toba to travel to Kōyasan and convinced him to replicate much of his own initial pilgrimage. If Shirakawa had been responsible for persuading Toba to abdicate, it would not be remarkable for him also to have encouraged Toba to travel to the same major sacred places to which he had traveled. In spite of Shirakawa's possible encouragement, Toba probably also was motivated to establish himself as Shirakawa's equal and to put his own individual stamp on Kōyasan pilgrimage. Starting with this journey, Toba became a major patron of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan.

In Tenji 1 (1124), on the fifteenth day of the tenth month, the sky was clear. From this morning, Toba began his *shōjin* 精進, the observation of ritual purity in preparation for pilgrimage to sacred sites such as Kumano, Kinpusen, and in this case Kōyasan.²⁰² This was the

²⁰⁰ Fujiwara no Saneyuki was the son of Provisional Major Counsellor Fujiwara no Kinzane, who in 1087 became one of the first directors of Shirakawa's *in no chō*. The following year Kinzane was one of the numerous courtiers who accompanied Shirakawa to Kōyasan. Saneyuki's aunt Ishi was Toba's mother. His younger sister by a different mother was Taikenmon'in, the consort of Toba and the mother of Emperor Sutoku and Emperor Go-Shirakawa. In 1093, Saneyuki was promoted to the fifth rank at court. Later, in 1100, he ascended to the Hall of Courtiers (Seiryōden). He then ascended through a number of positions and in 1114 he became part of the upper nobility (HJJ, vol. 2, s.v. "Fujiwara no Saneyuki," 2103).

²⁰¹ *Kōya gokōki*, 651.

²⁰² *Kōya gokōki*, 651. The term *shōjin* 精進 originally referred to the Buddhist virtue of unrelenting effort in religious discipline, one of the six perfections of the bodhisattva path. Over time in Japan the term came to be associated with the observation of ritual purity. See Stone, "Do Kami Ever Overlook Pollution?," 207, and Okada, *Kodai no imi*, 409-416 (see 414 for a discussion of the shift in meaning of *shōjin*).

period of restricting speech, action, and the intake of food and beverage, of purifying one's body and avoiding impure things.²⁰³

Toba conducted his period of abstinence and purification at the Sanjōsaiden. The Sanjōsaiden was originally the residence of Retired Emperor Shirakawa in Heian-kyō. Later in the early twelfth century it temporarily became Toba's residence. Taikenmon'in, or Shōshi, was Toba's principal consort (*chūgū*), and she used this residence as a detached palace (*ritei*). Toba, Taikenmon'in, his sons, and his daughters on this occasion went to the Sanjōsaiden. At the Sanjōsaiden this group performed a *kessai* ritual, a rite conducted especially before a Buddhist rite (*hōe*), the copying of a Buddhist scripture (*shakyō*), a ritual dedicated to the *kami* (*jinji* 神事), or other similar occasions. *Kessai* entailed bathing and abstaining from alcohol, meat, and sex. Revealing the intention to keep away all impurities, they set up a protective barrier at the small door facing the Anegakōji Street. This barrier, an *inufusegi*, was a low lattice placed at the entry or exit of palaces, houses, and other places in order to keep out defilement.

As I will discuss at greater length in the following chapter, at this time women as a rule could not make their own pilgrimages to Kōyasan and other mountains such as Kinpusen with similar gender restrictions. Strong prohibitions made these mountains off-limits to living women, who were not permitted inside the sacred precincts, where male monastics lived and conducted religious discipline. Nevertheless, in this era of Japanese history women such as Taikenmon'in occasionally participated in the preparatory *shōjin* rituals prior to the pilgrimages of their male relatives. This seems to have been the case in this instance in 1124. We know of several similar examples around the same time. For example, prior to Shirakawa's 1092

²⁰³ Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 123-124.

pilgrimage to Kinpusen, his eldest daughter, Teishi, participated at least in part of the preparatory rituals.²⁰⁴

Toba bathed and from the fifteenth day of the month copied the *Liqu jing* (J. *Rishukyō*, *Sūtra of the Guiding Principle*) in golden ink.²⁰⁵ The term for bathing used here, *mokuyoku* 沐浴, has connotations of ritual bathing for religious reasons. Tales about sūtra copying from China and Japan often discuss the ritual bathing of scribes.²⁰⁶ For East Asian Buddhists, such bathing prior to copying a sūtra or performing a similar religious act was considered to be purifying for both the mind and body.

The lodgings and itinerary for the 1124 pilgrimage by Toba were almost the same as those used by Shirakawa during his 1088 pilgrimage. The main difference was that, after leaving the capital city, Toba stayed for two nights at the Tobadono.²⁰⁷ This large palace, located on three hundred acres of land beside the Kamo river, included boat landings, moats, gardens, pavilions, and chapels. This structure had originally been the detached palace of Shirakawa, but later it had also become the residence of Toba. Shirakawa had constructed this detached imperial palace in 1086, the year that he abdicated his position as emperor. Then in 1090 he started moving to this palace for the period of purification and abstinence prior to embarking on pilgrimages to Kumano.

The route of the junior retired emperor Toba's journey to Kōyasan was based on the route of the senior retired emperor, Shirakawa, who at the time was the most powerful person in the capital. Horiuchi Kazuaki labels the route of Shirakawa's first 1088 pilgrimage the "Yamato

²⁰⁴ *Chūyūki*, Kanji 6.4.28 and 4.30, ZST, vol. 9, 83.

²⁰⁵ *Kōya gokōki*, 651.

²⁰⁶ Bryan Lowe, "The Discipline of Writing," 14.

²⁰⁷ Horiuchi Kazuaki, "Chūsei zenki no Kōya sankei to sono junro," analyzes the changing routes of the retired emperors and high-ranking aristocrats who were traveling to Kōyasan at this time.

Path."²⁰⁸ After Shirakawa took this path, during the rest of Shirakawa's life, the higher nobility, chiefly represented by Morozane, as well as Retired Emperor Toba for the most part followed the same path on their treks to the mountain. This path followed a remarkably different route from the "Izumi Path" taken earlier by Moromichi and Morozane, the father-and-son leaders of the northern Fujiwara family (*sekkanke*), which in effect had ruled Japan as regents prior to the rise of the retired emperors at the end of the eleventh century.²⁰⁹

The pilgrims who followed the Yamato Path traveled to Kōyasan by observing the following basic route.²¹⁰ They arrived at the Administrative Office (*mandokoro*) of Kongōbuji by first leaving the capital and passing through Uji. The group traveled south, following the Izumi River (now the Kizu River). They went to Tōdaiji while traveling south through the center of the Yamato basin. They journeyed from Hiuchisaki (Go-jōshi Hiuchimachi) to Tamasaki along the Yoshino River. Then they arrived at the Administrative Office of Kongōbuji along the Kii River. Although the pilgrims had to board boats at the Izumi River, Kii River, and other parts of the journey, for the most part they were able to travel on land. Going to Kōyasan and returning to Heian-kyō usually took about ten days.

Following Toba's departure from the capital on the twenty-first day and his stay at the Tobadono, the group arrived at Tōdaiji in Nara on the twenty-third day. The group stayed at the Tōnan'in because Shirakawa had stayed in this building during his 1088 journey to Kōyasan. The monk Kanjo was not only the chief abbot (*chōja*) of Tōji but also the superintendent (*bettō*) of Tōdaiji, and he made it possible for the group to stay in this particular structure while at Tōdaiji. This eminent cleric apparently began the pilgrimage from Heian-kyō with Toba. On the twenty-fourth day, in accordance with the 1088 precedent, Toba made offerings, or *heihaku*, to

²⁰⁸ Horiuchi, "Chūsei zenki no Kōya sankei to sono junro," 23.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

the deities of the Kasuga shrine, the shrine that was built alongside Kōfukuji, the large Nara temple that had long been associated with the Fujiwara family, in the Fujiwara temple-shrine complex in Nara. Then the group went to Tōdaiji in order to worship the Great Buddha, chant offertory verses (*fujū*), and make offerings of fabric and lamps. After visiting Tōdaiji, the group visited Kōfukuji. There they conducted a ceremony of chanting scriptures and offering lamps just as they had done at Tōdaiji. After the ceremony was over, Toba made offerings to the monks who had participated. All of this religious activity in the great temples and shrines of Nara, religious institutions with a long history of association with the rulers of Japan and the protection of the state, was very much in keeping with Shirakawa's devotion in the same places while on his way to Kōyasan.

Toba's journey to Kōyasan paralleled Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage in a number of respects, including the choice of pilgrimage route and the religious activities that Toba's group conducted prior to arriving at Kōyasan. As we will see below, however, in addition to following Shirakawa's example in many ways, Toba engaged in several new religious endeavors at Kōyasan.

Initial Activities at Kōyasan

On the twenty-fifth day, the group started traveling towards Kōyasan again and arrived at the gates of the Administrative Office of Kongōbuji, an office at the base of the mountain that was their main destination. Saneyuki records Toba's visit to the Miroku Hall (Jison-in), which Shirakawa did not visit in 1088. His *Kōya gokōki* provides evidence that, in addition to the continuities with Shirakawa's trips to Kōyasan, Toba engaged in forms of religious devotion that Shirakawa had not performed. For example, there is evidence that Toba was devoted to Miroku Bodhisattva and that this faith was enacted on the mountain.

At least according to tradition, the Miroku Hall, a small hall near the gates of the Administrative Office, was originally built by Kūkai on behalf of his mother.²¹¹ It housed a statue of Miroku that had been made many years prior to this time. According to the *Kōya gokōki*, when Toba arrived at the Miroku Hall, he heard a story about the monk who was serving at the hall.²¹² Toba learned that the monk had conducted rituals that involved the recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Hokke zanmai*) for many years and was awaiting the dawn of the day when Miroku will come to earth.

There were three major Buddhist scriptures about the Bodhisattva Miroku that were read by Buddhists in Japan during the Heian era. These texts included the *Mile da chengfo jing* (T. no. 456, J. *Miroku dai jōbutsu kyō*, Sūtra on Maitreya's achieving Buddhahood), the *Mile xiasheng jing* (T. no. 454, J. *Miroku geshō kyō*, Sūtra on Maitreya's rebirth below), and the *Mile shangsheng jing* (T. no. 452, J. *Miroku jōshō kyō*, Sūtra on Maitreya's rebirth above). The scriptures introduce Bodhisattva Miroku and his practices in the Tosotsu (Skt. *Tuṣita*) heaven, where he is believed to dwell. They assert that if devotees accumulate enough karmic merit, they too can be reborn in this heaven. These texts also describe the golden age in the distant future, 5.67 billion years after the death of the Buddha Śakyamuni, when Miroku will restore the True Dharma after a period of decline. At that time, Miroku will descend to earth and preach the Dharma at three assemblies (*Miroku san'e*), which will be held beneath the legendary Dragon Flower tree (*ryūgeju*).

By the early twelfth century, the cult of Miroku had been well established in Japan.²¹³ In fact, the cult of Miroku was probably the earliest form of Buddhism that the Japanese elite

²¹¹ For basic information on the Maitreya Hall, see MDJ, vol. 1, s.v. "Jison In," 961.

²¹² *Kōya gokōki*, 658.

²¹³ Regarding the Miroku cult, see especially Hayami Tasuku, *Miroku shinkō*.

received from the Korean Peninsula in the mid-sixth century.²¹⁴ In the Nara era, statues of Miroku were enshrined in all the seven great temples of the capital (Daianji, Kōfukuji, Yakushiji, Gangōji, Tōdaiji, Tōshōdaiji, and Saidaiji), as well as a number of temples beyond the capital.²¹⁵ The cult of this bodhisattva continued into the Heian era, for instance with devotion by Saichō (767-822), the patriarch of the Tendai tradition.²¹⁶

The cult that developed around Kūkai following his death in 835 assumed a strong connection between him and Miroku Bodhisattva. As we will see below, stories in the Kōyasan cult portrayed this relationship in different ways. Furthermore, in connection with these narratives, by the late eleventh century, many people in Japan believed that Kōyasan was itself the Tosotsu heaven and that it would be the place where Miroku would descend when he comes to earth.²¹⁷ The association between Miroku and Kōyasan continued throughout the medieval period and played a role in the beliefs that motivated pilgrims to travel to the mountain.

After Toba heard the story about the monk at the Miroku Hall, he wanted to enter this temple. Inside of this temple, he worshipped the statue of Miroku and then departed. This account of Toba's worshipping Miroku is significant because devotion to Miroku is not explicitly mentioned in the accounts of Shirakawa's prior visits to the mountain. For example, the *Kanji ninen gokōki* provides no direct evidence that Shirakawa was interested in Miroku or that, in the eyes of the pilgrims who ventured to the mountain in 1088, there was a link between the faith regarding the deified Kūkai and the faith regarding Miroku.

²¹⁴ This at least is what the *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicle of Japan*), compiled by the state in 720, reports. See *Nihon shoki*, vol. 2, NKBT, vol. 68, 486-489, and W.G. Aston, *Nihongi*, vol. 2, 101-102, for stories about some of the supposedly earliest worship of Miroku Bodhisattva in Japan.

²¹⁵ Janet Goodwin, "The Worship of Miroku in Japan," 41-60.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 67.

²¹⁷ Shirai Yūko, *Inseiki Kōyasan to Kūkai nyūjō densetsu*, 21.

Following his visit to the Miroku Hall, Toba sought to emulate his esteemed grandfather, Shirakawa, in the way in which he ascended Kōyasan. On the twenty-six day, after eating breakfast provided by the Administrative Office of Kongōbuji, Toba and his group left to ascend Kōyasan. They departed somewhere between 5:00-7:00 a.m., early in the morning yet not nearly as early as Shirakawa had left to climb the mountain. Like Shirakawa's group, they abandoned their vehicles and horses in order to ascend the mountain on foot. If the *Kōya gokōki* is to be believed, like Shirakawa, Toba's climbing of the mountain path was so fast that it was hard to follow.²¹⁸ This statement suggests that Toba was attempting to copy Shirakawa even in the speed with which he ascended Kōyasan.

Like Shirakawa in 1088, Toba relied on the assistance of other men to climb Kōyasan. For example, the monk Gyōson, who is noted as a very healthy individual, diligently offered his labor in helping Toba to climb the mountain.²¹⁹ Gyōson had become Toba's protector-monk (*gojisō*) in 1107. He was also employed by aristocrats and performed prayers for them. He was promoted through the ranks of the Office of Monastic Affairs and eventually became the abbot (*chōri*) of Onjōji, the headquarters of the Jimon branch of the Tendai tradition. During this era, Gyōson often accompanied Shirakawa and Toba on their pilgrimages to Kumano and other sacred sites.

On the following day, around 4:00 p.m. the group finally reached the top of the mountain. As in Shirakawa's initial trip to the mountain, the Central Hall (Chū-in) was designated as Toba's

²¹⁸ *Kōya gokōki*, 658.

²¹⁹ Gyōson (1057-1135) was a monk who belonged to Onjōji and was called the Byōdō-in Daisōjō. At the age of twelve he entered Onjōji and studied *mikkyō* under Myōson. Later, at the age of seventeen he departed Onjōji and performed religious discipline at places such as Kumano, Ōmine, Kōya, and Kokawaradera. In addition, he was appointed to be the abbot (*bettō*) of Saishōji, Hōshōji, and other temples that were created by the retired emperors and flourished under the Insei. At the time of the construction of the Daidenbō-in at Kōyasan by Kakuban, Gyōson was recruited by Toba and assisted in this project. He was known as a poet and left many poems about his religious discipline in sacred places.

Biographical information about Gyōson is included in KDJ, vol. 4, 320, and MDJ, vol. 1, 301.

lodgings. The eminent cleric Kanjo, who had accompanied the group from the outset, designated the lodgings of all the men who had come with Toba to Kōyasan. Later that evening, based on the precedent of Shirakawa's pilgrimage in 1088, the group bathed.

On the twenty-eighth day, Toba and his entourage went to the Inner Sanctum, where they engaged in the most intense period of ritual activity during the pilgrimage. First, prior to traveling to the Inner Sanctum, in accordance with the prior pilgrimage of Shirakawa in 1088, the group made offerings of three pieces of white fabric, or *shirotae gohei* 白妙御幣, to the local deities Niu Myōjin, Kōya Myōjin, and all the deities associated with them. This was a simple ritual without a ceremony of purification (*gokei*).

In the *Kōya gokōki*'s description of the group's walk to the Inner Sanctum from the central monastic complex, we find understandings of the sacred landscape that were continuous with those presented in the *Kanji ninen gokōki*, as well as significant new developments. The text records that there were thirty-seven stupas placed at every interval of one *chō* along the path to the Inner Sanctum. These *chō* stupas had already been established by 1088, and they are mentioned in the *Kanji ninen gokōki*. The seed syllables of the thirty-seven main holy beings of the Diamond mandala were written on the stupas, according to the *Kōya gokōki*. Over time, as we see in these pilgrimage records, people increasingly correlated large geographical areas at Kōyasan with the dual mandalas. The area of the mountain stretching from the base of the mountain up to the central monastic complex corresponded to the Womb mandala, and the land at Kōyasan stretching from the central monastic complex to the Inner Sanctum corresponded to the Diamond mandala. These developments at Kōyasan fit with broader religious trends. According to Allan Grapard, Kūkai laid the philosophical foundations for the process of

"mandalization" that occurred more broadly in medieval Japan.²²⁰ In other words, after the construction of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan, not only Kōyasan but also other specific geographical locales and even fairly large territories such as the Yoshino-Ōmine-Kumano area became associated with the main mandalas used within Shingon and Tendai Buddhism.²²¹

The *Kōya gokōki* also reveals that the pilgrims envisioned the Inner Sanctum, the area around Kūkai's tomb, as a very special area. Just as during Shirakawa's pilgrimage, the group washed their feet prior to stepping onto the land at the Inner Sanctum. At the bridge over the river before the Worship Hall, the high- and low-ranking men washed their feet in the river "in order to step onto the pure realm (*jōkai*)." Like the corresponding reference in *Kanji ninen gokōki*, this passage shows that, for Toba and the men traveling with him, the Inner Sanctum was a special place that required purification prior to entering.²²²

Making Offerings to Kūkai

We are now prepared to examine the ritual activities that Toba's group conducted at the Inner Sanctum. These activities reveal major continuities with previous pilgrimages. From Toba's activities at the Inner Sanctum in 1124 we witness the enduring centrality of devotion to Kūkai in the Kōyasan cult. Yet there was also novelty at this time, for example in Toba's prayer to accumulate the merit needed to encounter Miroku Bodhisattva at the time of his advent in the

²²⁰ See especially Grapard's seminal essay "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness," 208-213, for discussion of this process of "mandalization."

²²¹ Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness," 210.

²²² The account of Toba and Shirakawa's joint pilgrimage in 1127 also provides more evidence of the views of the Inner Sanctum as an area of unusual sacredness. Shirakawa was already 75 years old at the time of this pilgrimage, his final journey to the mountain before he died in 1129. He rode in an *agegoshi*, a palanquin shouldered by other men, for most of this 1127 pilgrimage. However, when Shirakawa and Toba went to the Inner Sanctum soon after arriving on Kōyasan, at the bridge before the Inner Sanctum Shirakawa got out of the palanquin. He then put on straw sandals and walked into the Inner Sanctum. The behavior of Shirakawa at the Inner Sanctum reveals that, for such pilgrims, the Inner Sanctum was a sacred area and that special preparations were necessary prior to entering it (*Chōshūki*, Daiji 2.11.4, ZST, vol. 16, 200, and Miyano, "Jūisseiki kara jūsan seiki ni okeru reijō Kōyasan keisei no ikkōsatsu," 166).

distant future. The beliefs and legends at the heart of this Miroku devotion continued to evolve in accordance with shifting patterns of religiosity at the end of the Heian era. Yet the cult of Kūkai remained one of the major features distinguishing Kōyasan from other pilgrimage sites such as Kinpusen and Kumano.

Once Toba and his retainers arrived at the Inner Sanctum, they prepared for elaborate ceremonies very similar to those conducted by Shirakawa and other prior high-ranking pilgrims. From the time of Michinaga's first pilgrimage, it had become fairly standard procedure to conduct a sūtra offering service (*kyō kuyō*) first and then have a group of monks from Kōyasan conduct the *Rishu zanmai* ceremony in front of Kūkai's tomb. Starting with Michinaga in 1023, these activities were the highlight and goal of the pilgrimages by the aristocrats and royals from the capital. This 1124 pilgrimage was no exception to this pattern in the sense that its most intense period of ritual activity took place at this time and in one of the most significant places that the group would visit, the Inner Sanctum and the area of Kūkai's tomb.

Devotion to the deified Kūkai, Kōbō Daishi, lay at the heart of Toba's desire to visit Kōyasan. In fact, the opening statement of the *Kōya gokōki* articulates Toba's aspiration to travel to Kūkai's tomb: "Toba began a period of ritual seclusion and abstinence in order to make a pilgrimage to the numinous grave (*reibyō* 霊廟) of Kōyasan."²²³ The phrase "numinous grave" normally refers to the tomb of an ancestor or hero, and by this time Kūkai was regarded as an extraordinary human being who united in himself attributes of both. As seen in previous chapters, Kūkai had been deified by way of hagiography and forms of ritual worship at his tomb. For Toba, Kūkai's numinous grave served as a metonym, the most representative part, of the entire sacred mountain to which he traveled. Later, the *Kōya gokōki* greatly simplifies what had

²²³ *Kōya gokōki*, 651.

to have been complex motivations for Toba's journey to the mountain. Employing a different phrase for Kūkai's grave, it implies that Toba apparently had a singular purpose in traveling to Kōyasan in order to worship the "holy grave (*seibyō*聖廟) of Kōbō Daishi."²²⁴ In contrast to the phrase "the sacred traces of Kōyasan," which the *Kanji ninen gokōki* uses to describe Shirakawa's primary destination on Kōyasan, with these two different expressions for Kūkai's grave, the *Kōya gokōki* more explicitly points to a specific location on the mountain that pilgrims most associated with Kōbō Daishi. In addition, the terms "holy grave" and "numinous grave" indicate that devotion to a historical figure, a human being whose tomb is located within the boundaries of this sacred site, was the very heart of the cult on this mountain. In contrast, deities such as Zaō Gongen left sacred traces at Kinpusen and other places but did not have tombs to be visited.

While there were minor changes relative to the large-scale rituals conducted in the same location as part of Shirakawa's 1088 pilgrimage, Toba, the group of men who were traveling with him, and the monks of Kōyasan apparently sought to replicate the same ritual performances that were conducted in 1088. The arrangement of seats and altars for the large-scale rituals at the Inner Sanctum was very similar but not identical to the arrangement used in 1088. Just as Shirakawa's seat was established in the northern eaves of the Worship Hall in 1088, Toba's seat was set up in the northeast corner of the same northern eaves in 1124. The seats for the monks from Kōyasan who had been summoned to conduct the *Rishu zanmai* on this occasion in 1124 were arranged in the Worship Hall, the same area where the seats were placed in 1088. The configuration of seats and sūtra desks between the Worship Hall and the tomb of Kūkai was also very similar to that used in 1088. Two "high seats" (*kōza*) had been set up in the northern

²²⁴ *Kōya gokōki*, 651.

courtyard in front of the Worship Hall. In addition, two podiums (*raiban*) had been set up in the northern courtyard. A sūtra desk was set up to the north of the podiums, closer to the tomb of Kūkai. A sūtra box with a “sprinkled picture” (*makie*) lacquer ware decoration and containing the *Liqu jing* that Toba had copied prior to his departure from the capital was placed on this sūtra desk. In a similar fashion, in 1088 the sūtras that Shirakawa had brought to be offered at Kōyasan were placed on a similar sūtra desk in the same location in front of the tomb. There was indeed considerable continuity in the configuration of the ritual space at the Inner Sanctum in 1124 relative to that of 1088.

In addition, in 1124 the individual monks who performed the major ritual duties at the Inner Sanctum for the most part held the same institutional positions as the monks who performed the same functions in 1088. In this regard, there was additional continuity between the two pilgrimages. The Officiant (*dōshi*) for the initial ritual performance, the sūtra offering service, was Greater Bishop (*daisōzu*) Shōkan (1065-1137). It had become customary for a Tendai monk affiliated with the Jimon branch based at Onjōji to fulfill the role of Officiant in the sūtra offering services that prominent courtiers and royals sponsored at the Inner Sanctum. Having been tonsured at Onjōji in 1085, Shōkan appropriately fit the criterion of being affiliated with the Jimon branch of the Tendai tradition. In 1098 he had become the first esoteric master (*ajari*) at the Shōryū’in and conducted Buddhist rites (*hōe*) from time to time.²²⁵

The chief abbot (*chōja*) of Tōji, Grand Archbishop (*daisōjō*) Kanjo (1057-1125), was the Prayer Master (*jugan*). On these ritual occasions during imperial pilgrimages to Kōyasan, the chief abbot of Tōji usually performed this role, for instance with Jōken's service as the Prayer Master in 1088. Kanjo presided as the superintendent (*bettō*) of Henjōji, Ninnaji, Enkyōji,

²²⁵ Later, in 1124 he debated with Shōchō of Kōfukuji at the Saishōe. For biographical information, see HJJ, vol. 1, 1203-1204.

Kōryūji, Hosshōji, and Tōdaiji.²²⁶ He conducted rituals within the emperor's palace and was known for manifesting wonders. Among his many disciples were Monastic Imperial Prince Kakuhō (Omuro Kakuhō Hōsshinnō 御室覚法親王, 1091-1153), the *monzeki*, or Imperial Abbot, at the Ninnaji temple in the capital. In addition, Kakuban, the Shingon monk renowned for his scholastic writings on Shingon doctrine and his participation in institutional politics at Kōyasan, had received the esoteric consecration (*denbō kanjō*) from Kanjo at the Jōju'in at Ninnaji. Kanjo had already received Shirakawa's support, and his participation in the major role of Prayer Master during the 1124 pilgrimage reveals a strong relationship with Toba at this time.

In addition to these eminent clerics, several other monks also performed ritual duties on this occasion. Dharma Bridge (Hōkō) Kenkaku (1068-1135), a Shingon monk who had received the esoteric consecration from Kakui of the Daikyōin at Ninnaji, was the Reader (*dokushi*). The presiding abbot (*kengyō*) of Kongōbuji, Ryōzen (1048-1139), served as the Chanting Master (*bai* 唄). Ryōzen had lived on the mountain for many years and had assisted during Shirakawa's initial visit in 1088.²²⁷ Ryōzen and the other monks like him who had been practicing Buddhism at Kōyasan for several decades possessed much institutional memory. Ryōzen had many memories of similar ritual occasions in the past, and he probably provided advice on the proper performance of the rituals during this imperial pilgrimage in 1124.

After the Head of the Right Division of Outer Palace Guards asked Kanjo for them to begin the rituals, there was chanting of Buddhist sūtras in order to praise the virtue of the Buddha (*bai*), an activity followed by the scattering of flowers (*sange*). These two acts were standard features of large Buddhist rites (*daihōe*) in Japan. The lecturer then issued the invocation (*keibyaku*).

²²⁶ HJJ, vol. 1, s.v. "Kanjo," 572.

²²⁷ For biographical information about Ryōzen, see MDJ, vol. 3, 2881.

At this time, the Head of the Right Division of Outer Palace Guards announced Toba's vow: "May this single pilgrimage [to Kōyasan] become a meritorious cause to be present at Miroku's three assemblies." この一度の参詣により彼三會之善因と為す。The statement provides more evidence of Toba's devotion to Miroku and his eschatological hope to be present when Miroku comes to earth in the distant future.

Toba's statement is also significant in showing the link between devotion to Miroku and the particular place Kōyasan, a link that had become well established by this time.²²⁸ Since the latter part of the tenth century at the latest, Kōyasan was sometimes identified with the Tosotsu heaven where Miroku dwells, while it was also sometimes taken to be the place where Miroku will descend when he comes to earth. At this time, people commonly equated holy mountains with pure Buddha lands, and Kinpusen also was strongly associated with Miroku's paradise.

Not only the mountain Kōyasan but also Kūkai, the monk who founded the monastery and was said to be enshrined in a tomb there, became closely associated with the legends about Miroku. From as early as the tenth century, legends started linking Kūkai's death to faith in Miroku. A brief discussion of the relevant documentary sources and collections of tales will reveal the evolving beliefs about Kūkai's postmortem fate in relationship to Miroku. These changes in the legends corresponded to larger shifts in the beliefs about Miroku over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The oldest historical record about the connection between Kūkai's perpetual meditation at Kōyasan and the faith in Miroku is the *Goyuigō nijūgo kajō* (hereafter, abbreviated *Goyuigō*; Kūkai's final testament), Kūkai's apocryphal final testament, which Takeuchi Kōzen dates to the

²²⁸ A number of scholars have addressed the issue of how a connection between the stories about Kōbō Daishi's entrance into meditation on the mountain and the Miroku faith formed. See especially Hayami Tasuku, *Miroku shinkō*, 94-103, and Shirai Yūko, *Kūkai densetsu no keisei to Kōyasan*, 115-122.

mid-tenth century.²²⁹ In this text, Kūkai promises to be born in the Tosotsu heaven after dying and to return with Miroku when he descends to earth in the distant future: "After I close my eyes, I will without fail be reborn in the Tosotsu heaven, where I will serve Miroku. In more than 5.6 billion years, I shall descend to earth with Miroku and honor him."²³⁰ Although this text is apocryphal, composed by Kūkai's disciples long after his death, it is still important in revealing the imagined relationship between Kūkai and Miroku during the middle of the Heian era.²³¹ We should note that this story does not mention Kūkai's intention to wait in his mausoleum until Miroku's advent.

Later, around the early eleventh century, the belief that Kūkai still remains in meditation at Kōyasan was becoming more defined. The stories about Kūkai from this time sometimes no longer state that he will be reborn in the Tosotsu heaven. Rather, texts such as the *Seiji yōryaku*, compiled in 1008, stress that Kūkai has entered meditation on the mountain for a very long time: "After Kōbō Daishi entered meditation, his body did not decay. It is still at Kōya. This is a rare occurrence."²³² Over time, by the early twelfth century, the tradition that Kūkai's body remained on Kōyasan and Kūkai's relation to Miroku had morphed into a slightly different form. In other words, people started believing that Kūkai stayed in meditation on Kōyasan while waiting for Miroku to descend to earth.²³³ The 1103 *Kōya gotō kuyō ganmon* (Prayer for the inauguration of the Great Stūpa of Kōya), which was written for the ceremony inaugurating the famous pagoda that Shirakawa decreed be rebuilt in 1088, expresses this belief: "Kōya is the place where Kōbō Daishi, having entered meditation (*nyūjō*), sits in the meditation seat for a long time in order to

²²⁹ For this text, see *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai zenshū*, vol. 8, 37-95.

²³⁰ *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai zenshū*, vol. 8, 66-67.

²³¹ Moerman, "The Archeology of Anxiety," 252.

²³² WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 485.

²³³ Shirai Yūko, *Kūkai densetsu no keisei to Kōyasan*, 116-117.

encounter the advent of Miroku."²³⁴ Rather than immediately ascending to the Tosotsu heaven to be with Miroku, Kūkai in this literature chooses to meditate on Kōyasan for billions of years.

In observing these changes in the myths so central to the Kōyasan cult, we can make several important points. First, these legends about Kūkai and Miroku were not unchanging pieces of an original faith connected to the mountain. In other words, we have evidence that many of these stories were created by the preachers seeking to revive Kōyasan especially over the course of the eleventh century. They shaped the legends in accordance with shifting patterns of religiosity, for example the evolving faith in Miroku. In fact, we can observe that the cultic beliefs with regard to Miroku were changing in certain important ways and that these changes were reflected in the varying formulations of the basic story about Kūkai's entrance into meditation in 835.

That is, while the same basic legends about Miroku's career as a bodhisattva continued to inform cultic practices and beliefs, over the course of the last several centuries of the Heian era, in general devotees started shifting their focus from gaining rebirth in Miroku's heaven after death to encountering Miroku in the distant future on earth. In other words, around the time that the *Goyuigō* was composed, Miroku's devotees in Japan were primarily interested in earning karmic merit so that they could be reborn in the Tosotsu heaven. Then they would be able to descend with Miroku to earth when it is time for him to preach under the dragon-flower tree. Over the course of the Heian era, as we see portrayed in the legends about Kūkai's death, there occurred a general shift from this form of devotion to a somewhat different focus. In other words, the cult of Miroku in general became more concerned with encountering Miroku in this world. As we witness in Toba's 1124 prayer, around the early twelfth century, devotees increasingly prayed to be reborn with Miroku on earth. These devotees mainly wanted to be

²³⁴ WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 785.

present on earth at the time of Miroku's advent in the distant future. The faith that Miroku would descend to earth and preach the Dharma was not shared very widely in Japan prior to the latter half of the eleventh century. Around that time, however, this faith in the future descent of Miroku started appearing even in the funeral offerings (*tsuizen kuyō*) that nobility performed for the deceased.²³⁵ The faith in the future descent of Miroku then thrived in a major way in the Insei era.

In addition to the *Kōya gotō kuyō ganmon*, Fujiwara no Munetada's journal *Chūyūki* (Account of the Nakamikado Minister of the Right) contains more evidence for the belief that Kūkai had entered meditation at Kōyasan and now awaits Miroku. This text reveals the faith regarding Kōyasan that aristocrats and courtiers widely shared at the beginning of the twelfth century. The son of Shirakawa and the father of the subsequent emperor Toba, Emperor Horikawa (r. 1086-1107), died in 1107 at the young age of twenty-eight.²³⁶ According to the *Chūyūki*, his attendants then discovered a lock of hair that had been cut from his head at his coming-of-age ceremony many years earlier. There was much discussion about the proper place to enshrine this hair of the deceased emperor. In the entry for the thirteenth day of the first month of the year 1108, Munetada records his reply from Minamoto no Masazane about whether he should bury the hair of Emperor Horikawa at Kōyasan. Munetada responds, "This is truly the most appropriate thing to do. Kōyasan is a place of purity (*seijōchi* 清浄地). It is the place where Kōbō Daishi entered continual meditation and for a long time awaits the dawn of Miroku's three assemblies when Miroku bodhisattva appears in this world. In particular, the late emperor a long

²³⁵ Shirai, *Kūkai densetsu no keisei to Kōyasan*, 264.

²³⁶ The son of Shirakawa and Kenshi, Horikawa had ascended to the position of emperor at the time of Shirakawa's retirement from the position of emperor. He had reigned at least in name until the time of his death in 1107. While he probably never made a pilgrimage to Kōyasan while alive, the *Chūyūki* provides evidence that he had a deep religious interest in the mountain and had wanted to meet Miroku at Kōyasan when Miroku descends to Earth in the distant future.

time ago during his life made a vow to meet Miroku bodhisattva."²³⁷ The following year, in the first recorded case of the interment of a deceased person's hair at Kōyasan, Horikawa's hair was taken to the mountain and enshrined near Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum.²³⁸

This example shows that, for aristocrats at the beginning of the twelfth century, Kōyasan was a pure land in this world. Salvation by way of attending Miroku's three assemblies was promised there. Some aristocrats thought that Kōyasan was the most appropriate place for performing good karmic deeds (*sazen* 作善), including memorial rites (*tsuizen* 追善).²³⁹ In addition to the interment of the remains of the dead, whether the interment of hair (*nōhatsu* 納髮) or the interment of bones (*nōkotsu* 納骨), the interment of Buddhist scriptures near Kūkai's tomb was one of the characteristic good karmic deeds performed for the benefit of the deceased during this era.

The *Chūyūki* provides evidence of the continuity between Emperor Horikawa's religious faith with respect to Kōyasan and the devotion that Horikawa's son, Toba, displayed on the mountain a couple of decades later. While at Kōyasan, in expressing his desire to accumulate the karmic merit needed to encounter Miroku, Toba was very much in keeping with a developing line of religious devotion associated with this particular mountain. In addition, Toba probably shared with Horikawa and his associates the view that Kōyasan was a special place to perform religious devotion because Kōbō Daishi was in meditation there waiting for the descent of Miroku.

During Toba's 1124 pilgrimage, as part of the ceremonies at the Inner Sanctum, there was a sermon on Buddhist scriptures. This sermon was not necessarily on the same content, the

²³⁷ ZST, vol. 11, 312-313.

²³⁸ Later in the twelfth century, individuals started bringing the bones of deceased relatives as well to inter in this eminently sacred area.

²³⁹ Shirai, *Kūkai densetsu no keisei to Kōyasan*, 271.

Lotus Sūtra, as the sermon that had been conducted at the same time during the sūtra dedication service at the Inner Sanctum in 1088. In fact, the 1124 *Kōya gokōki* does not specify the content of the sermon but instead merely praises the eloquence of the monk who gave it.

After the sermon was over and the ceremony had been completed, Toba made offerings to the monks on the basis of their different duties. The Officiant, Prayer Master, and Veneration Master each received thirty rolls (*hiki*) of silk and twenty-six bushels of rice. While Shirakawa gave more than this amount to the Officiant who led his sutra dedication service in 1088, these offerings overall were comparable in size to Shirakawa's enormous donations. The four monks who served in the other major ritual roles on this occasion received fifteen rolls of silk and fifteen bushels of rice. Toba donated five rolls of silk and five bushels of rice to each of the other thirty monks who had participated in the rituals. Such donations, one of the most characteristic features of imperial pilgrimage to shrines and temples in this era, enabled Toba to cultivate more influence with these individual monks and with the institutions to which they belonged.

Following these offerings to the monks, Kanjo, who was serving in the role of the chief abbot of Tōji, replicated the same action that Jōken, at the time also the chief abbot of Tōji, conducted in 1088. Kanjo went to where Toba was seated and gave the retired emperor writings by Kūkai in Kūkai's own handwriting. The scrolls were inserted in a brocade pouch. While the *Kōya gokōki* does not record any details about the content of these writings, it is possible to infer that they were undoubtedly a special gift, sacred traces from the very hand of Kōbō Daishi. Those who had planned the ceremonies at the Inner Sanctum apparently were aware of the same gift that was made to Shirakawa during his 1088 pilgrimage, and they had arranged for the abbot of one of the most important Shingon temples to donate these precious writings to Toba in the

same place and as part of rituals very similar to those performed during Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage to Kōyasan.

Then, just as in 1088, a group of monks from Kōyasan conducted a *Rishu zanmai* ceremony, the Buddhist rite in which monks chant the *Liqu jing*, at the Inner Sanctum. The highest-ranking monk at Kōyasan, Ryōzen, served as the Officiant, in a parallel fashion to the way in which Yuihan had performed the same role in 1088. Ryōzen announced the invocation.

At this time, Retired Emperor Toba had one of his retainers make an important decree: "The Western Great Stūpa is to be rebuilt, and its old foundation must be restored."²⁴⁰ This decree was analogous to Shirakawa's 1088 decree that the Great Stūpa be rebuilt. It was articulated in the same place and as part of the same general ritual sequence as had occurred during the 1088 pilgrimage, and met with a similarly enthusiastic response.

As seen in Chapter 2, both the Western Stūpa and the Great Stūpa at the central monastic complex of Kōyasan had burned in the devastating fire of 994. Probably the first historical case in Japan of enshrining the main Buddhas from the dual mandalas inside of stūpas, the Great Stūpa originally housed five Buddha statues, the five most important Buddhas of the Womb mandala.²⁴¹ While the Great Stūpa was a gigantic representation of the Womb mandala, the Western Stūpa was an embodiment of the Diamond World mandala. The Western Stūpa contained statues of the most important Buddhas from the Diamond World mandala. These two structures together represented the non-duality of the two main mandalas used within the Shingon tradition and in so doing were important symbols of the Buddhist institution at Kōyasan. As seen above, Shirakawa commissioned the rebuilding of the Great Stūpa in 1088, and this pagoda was completed in 1103. The Western Stūpa had not yet been rebuilt, but construction

²⁴⁰ *Kōya gokōki*, 661.

began following Toba's 1124 decree. The Western Stūpa was completed by the time of Toba's subsequent pilgrimage in 1127 with Shirakawa. On this occasion, together they held a dedicatory ceremony of inauguration (*rakkei kuyō*) at the site of the newly rebuilt Western Stūpa

In 1124, following the announcement of Toba's decree, thirty monks of Kōyasan conducted the *Rishu zanmai* 理趣三昧. The performance of the *Rishu zanmai* at this time was very much in keeping with the performance of the same ritual in 1088. In fact, a note links this performance to the performance of the same ritual in 1088.²⁴² Kanjo stated that the monks were to "lift up the *Liqu jing*" in their seats, and Kanjo himself also contributed to the chanting (*inzei*) at this time.²⁴³

After the *Rishu zanmai* was over, offerings were distributed to the monks. Toba and his retainers gave one large garment (*uchigi*) to the Officiant, Ryōzen. In addition, Ryōzen was awarded a bundle of fifteen rolls (*hiki*) of other cloth offerings. The remaining twenty-nine monks received a smaller offering of five rolls each of cloth offerings.

We have seen how the large ceremonies conducted in 1124 before Kūkai's tomb paralleled the ceremonies on previous similar occasions, especially those conducted during Shirakawa's 1088 pilgrimage. New developments such as Toba's prayer to encounter Miroku Bodhisattva on earth in the distant future corresponded to significant developments in Japanese religion during this era. The cult of Kōbō Daishi on Kōyasan was becoming linked in a specific way to the more general phenomenon of Miroku devotion, through development of the belief that Kūkai was awaiting Miroku's advent. Through a discussion of Toba's pilgrimage activities, I have endeavored to reveal the enduring devotion to the once-human saint Kōbō Daishi. The cult of Kōbō Daishi constituted perhaps the most central and enduring feature of the overall

²⁴² *Kōya gokōki*, 661.

²⁴³ *Kōya gokōki*, 661.

Kōyasan cult, and it distinguished this sacred mountain from other mountains and pilgrimage sites in early medieval Japan. Pilgrims such as Toba undoubtedly performed similar ceremonies and offered great caches of gifts to other religious institutions around the same time. Yet they were drawn to Kōyasan largely because of the legacy of Kūkai, who had established the Buddhist institution on the mountain and who reportedly remained there in a state of meditation.

Burying a Sūtra Near Kūkai's Tomb

Following the large-scale rituals that Toba sponsored at the Inner Sanctum, he engaged in another significant devotional activity, the burial of a Buddhist scripture that he had carried to Kōyasan. As we will see below, sūtra burial was a thriving religious practice at this time in the early twelfth century. Aristocrats and royals frequently copied Buddhist sūtras and then took them to sacred sites such as Kōyasan, Kinpusen, and Kumano, where they offered these texts to the resident sacred beings and interred them in the ground. Toba's 1124 sūtra burial at Kōyasan thus fits into a larger history of burying Buddhist scriptures on this sacred peak. Probably begun in 1023 by one of Kōyasan's most important early pilgrims, Fujiwara no Michinaga, the practice of sūtra burial at Kōyasan endured at least for a couple of centuries. In this section, I will seek to illuminate Toba's sūtra burial by contextualizing this act with respect to similar instances of sūtra burial around the same time. We will see the significant place that this devotional activity held in pilgrimages at this time.

Toba had several men bury the *Liqu jing*, the Buddhist sūtra that he copied and carried to Kōyasan. The *Liqu jing* in one scroll had been copied in golden ink by Toba. It was inserted into a copper sūtra container.²⁴⁴ Ryōzen and two or three other monks entered into the area

²⁴⁴ At this time, ordinarily sūtras were copied on paper or silk scrolls that were then inserted into cylindrical stūpa-shaped containers (*kyōzutsu*, “sūtra tubes”) made of bronze, iron, ceramic, or stone. Then they were interred in small underground chambers containing stones and, on some occasions, charcoal intended to preserve the sūtra

enclosed by the *inufusegi*, the barrier in front of the tomb of Kūkai established in order to keep out defilement, and buried the scripture. While it is not clear whether Shirakawa buried scriptures at the Inner Sanctum during his 1088 pilgrimage, in Toba's case there is an unambiguous record of the burial of a Buddhist scripture at the Inner Sanctum.

Toba's burial of this Buddhist sūtra at this time was apparently connected to his desire to meet Miroku in the distant future and thereby attain a form of religious salvation. This aspiration is explicit in the vow that he had articulated at the Inner Sanctum. The desire to gain enough karmic merit to encounter Miroku and hear the three sermons on the Dharma beneath the Dragon Flower Tree was frequently stated in liturgical prayers (*ganmon*) included with sūtra deposits during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁴⁵ The interment of Buddhist sūtras in sacred locations such as Mount Hiei, Kōyasan, and Kinpusen had long been linked to the worship of Miroku, specifically to the hope that Miroku would use such buried scriptures in his sermons beneath the Dragon Flower Tree at the time of his advent in the distant future.²⁴⁶

The prayers that Toba and others expressed at Kōyasan at the time of their sūtra burials were premised on the mechanics of merit and karma, a cosmological understanding that can be traced back to the Indian context where the Buddhist religion arose. Buddhists from at least the third century B.C.E. maintained the belief that certain objects, when made and donated as offerings, created karmic "merit" that could bring health and happiness in one's present and future lives. In addition, the karmic merit created by offering material objects or by performing similar devotional practices such as recitations, ritual acts, and prayers could be transferred to others. In this way, not only the devotee who performed these devotional activities could benefit,

(Moerman, "The Archeology of Anxiety," 248). It is unclear in what kind of container the sūtra tube containing Toba's copied scripture was placed.

²⁴⁵ Moerman, "The Archeology of Anxiety," 264-265.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 260.

but also this person's family members, friends, or other intended recipients could obtain wondrous blessings in their present lives or in lives to come.²⁴⁷ These basic beliefs regarding merit and karma are fairly ubiquitous throughout Buddhist cultures, and early medieval Japan was no exception. For example, we find these beliefs expressed in the colophons accompanying the sūtras that have been buried in a number of sacred places in Japan. In many cases, the colophons state, "I vow with the merit from copying this sūtra that x may happen." In other words, copyists and donors believed that the merit (*ku*功, *kudoku*功德) gained from such pious acts could be applied to a variety of circumstances and could be used to obtain a range of different desired benefits, whether spiritual or material.²⁴⁸

Those such as Fujiwara no Michinaga and the others who followed him in burying scriptures at Kōyasan and other sacred locations for close to two centuries had a wide variety of stated reasons for so doing. In his article about sūtra burial at Kōyasan during this era, Miyano Toshimitsu identifies five major benefits that individuals expected to obtain as a result of burying sūtras near Kūkai's tomb: salvation by encountering Miroku, erasure of one's karmic afflictions, birth in a pure land, benefits for a deceased person in the afterlife, and this-worldly benefits such as a long life.²⁴⁹

Many scholars have suggested that the idea of the decline of the Dharma played a major role in these sūtra burials. Around this time, such scholars have argued, people increasingly recognized that the Dharma had entered an age of major decline (*mappō*) in 1052, so they started to inter sūtras in order to ensure that the Buddha's teachings would be preserved until the advent

²⁴⁷ Regarding karmic merit and merit transfer in Buddhism, see Richard Gombrich, "'Merit Transference' in Sinhalese Buddhism: A Case Study of the Interaction Between Doctrine and Practice"; John Holt, "Assisting the Dead by Venerating the Living: Merit Transfer in the Early Buddhist Tradition"; and Michael Walsh, "The Economics of Salvation: Toward a Theory of Exchange in Chinese Buddhism."

²⁴⁸ Blair, *Peak of Gold*, 166-167.

²⁴⁹ Miyano, "Jūisseiki kara jūsan seiki ni okeru reijō Kōyasan keisei no ikkōsatsu," 165-166.

of Miroku. However, Heather Blair has shown that the regents of the eleventh century were not especially concerned that the Dharma was declining, and their practice of sūtra burial did not seem to be attempting primarily to preserve the Buddhist teachings.²⁵⁰ In my study of liturgical prayers and pilgrimage diaries about Kōyasan, I also have not discovered a strong preoccupation with the decline of the Dharma or the fear that drastic measures had to be taken to save the teachings. In fact, these literary records from eleventh- and twelfth-century Kōyasan preserve a variety of other stated reasons why people buried sūtras on the mountain.

A collection of sūtras that the nun Hōyaku had interred in 1114 near the tomb of Kūkai has been one of the few collections of buried sūtras that survived and was found at Kōyasan by archaeologists. The extant materials from Hōyaku's sacred deposit help us to understand Toba's 1124 sūtra burial, in addition to much of the other devotional activity taking place at Kūkai's tomb. Hōyaku's collection included an eight-scroll *Lotus Sūtra* copied in gold ink, the *Wuliangyi jing* (T. no. 276, J. *Muryōgikyō*, Sūtra of innumerable meanings) in gold ink, the *Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing* (T. no. 277, J. *Kan fugen bosatsu gyōhō kyō*, Sūtra of meditation on the Bodhisattva Universally Worthy) in gold ink, a *Heart Sūtra* (T. no. 251, Ch. *Bore boluo miduo xin jing*, J. *Hannya haramita shingyō*) in silver ink, an *Emituo jing* (T. 366, J. *Amida kyō*, Amida sūtra) in silver ink, a liturgical prayer for an offering (*kuyō ganmon*) attributed to Hōyaku, another liturgical prayer attributed to Hōyaku, a Womb World mandala written in seed syllables (*shuji*), a Diamond World mandala written in seed syllables, a Lotus mandala written in seed syllables, and a few other items.

Hōyaku's collection of buried items reveals her strong Buddhist devotion. However, apart from these materials and the information that they impart, few details about her life survive. Her year of birth, Eishō 7 (1052), is written on the Diamond World mandala, but we

²⁵⁰ *Peak of Gold*, 182.

know very little else about her life. That Hōyaku, who is identified as a nun in these documents, apparently had such a fervent faith related to Kōyasan is striking because women were barred from setting foot on the mountain during this era, as we will examine more extensively in the following chapter. She apparently had to have a male associate take the various items to the Inner Sanctum at Kōyasan and deposit them very near Kūkai's tomb on her behalf.

The liturgical prayer that Hōyaku included with the sūtra burial expresses information regarding at least her stated motivations for making this deposit on the mountain. In addition, it is a valuable primary source more generally for revealing the nature of the religious devotion taking place at Kōyasan during the early twelfth century:

I bury these sutra scrolls in the numinous cave of Kōyasan. I wrote the characters [of the text] in gold [ink] so that they would not decay. The container [holding the texts] is made of copper so that it will not break. I did this in anticipation of the advent of Miroku, the Compassionate One.

The place that has been selected [for the sūtra burial] is none other than the land where Kōbō Daishi has entered meditation. I pray that Miroku has compassion regarding my wishes and that Kōbō Daishi perpetually protects these scrolls. I by all means will attend Miroku's three assemblies [where Miroku will preach three sermons], and [at that time] these scrolls of the One Vehicle of Buddhahood will be opened.²⁵¹

This liturgical prayer shows that her faith in Miroku and faith in Kūkai probably motivated Hōyaku to inter sūtras and other objects at Kōyasan. Probably like some of the other individuals who were burying sūtras at Kūkai's tomb during this era, she believed that Kūkai would protect the sūtra texts until Miroku descended to earth in the distant future. In addition, she apparently believed that Kōyasan itself would be the site where Miroku would preach the Dharma after arriving on earth because the sūtras were expected to spontaneously open at that time. These beliefs about Kūkai and Kōyasan were probably shared by many of the pilgrims to the mountain during this era.

²⁵¹ *Shihon bokusho bikuni hōyaku ganmon*, WK, *kodai shiryō*, vol. 1, 844-845.

In contrast to the large collection of multifarious items that Hōyaku buried in 1114, Toba interred only a single sūtra when he visited the mountain ten years later. It is notable that Toba only buried the *Liqu jing* and not the *Lotus Sūtra* or other texts at Kōyasan because the *Lotus Sūtra* was usually one of the texts that pilgrims buried on the mountain. In fact, during the Heian era, the *Lotus Sūtra* was the scripture that was buried most frequently in sūtra mounds in general. This text was probably the most prominent scripture in the religious culture of the time, and like many other Mahāyāna sūtras that promote their own worship it encourages its readers to transmit, enshrine, and venerate the text.²⁵² Yet Toba did not follow the precedent of Shirakawa and apparently did not even take a *Lotus Sūtra* with him.

Toba perhaps chose to bury the *Liqu jing* at Kōyasan because this place was associated most closely with Shingon esoteric Buddhism. Up to the present day, this text has become indispensable for Buddhist rituals in this tradition. There is no question that the *Liqu jing* was venerated at Kōyasan, a Shingon temple complex, in the early twelfth century. Thus, it was a very appropriate text for Toba to dedicate and bury while praying for positive karmic merit and this-worldly benefits.

In addition to the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T. 848, Ch. *Da Piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing*, J. *Dainichikyō*) and the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* (T. 874, Ch. *Jingangding jing*, J. *Kongōchōkyō*), the *Liqu jing* has been one of the three main texts in the Japanese Shingon tradition.²⁵³ The one-volume, seventeen-section version of the *Liqu jing* that the Shingon tradition in Japan has used was translated by Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong, J. Fukū不空) between 763 and 771. Saichō first brought this translation to Japan, but soon after this Kūkai also

²⁵² Moerman, “The Archeology of Anxiety,” 250.

²⁵³ Astley-Kristensen, *The Rishukyō*, 6.

imported the same text.²⁵⁴ In this sūtra, Mahāvairocana preaches the Dharma for the sake of Vajrasattva (Kongōsatta). By means of the “guiding principle” (*rishu*), which is the enlightenment attained and embodied by the Buddha himself, Mahāvairocana preaches that all of the dharmas in essence are pure. According to this sūtra, all of the basic passions that human beings possess, including the sexual passions, are entirely in accordance with the characteristics of bodhisattvas.²⁵⁵ Regardless of Toba’s level of doctrinal understanding of this sūtra, he was probably aware of its importance in the Shingon tradition and wanted to offer and bury his copied version at Kūkai’s tomb. After all, Kūkai had held the text in such high regard that he had written several commentaries on the scripture.

After his Buddhist scripture was buried in 1124, Toba departed from this area. Then, just as in 1088, some of his retainers also desired to perform devotional actions at Kūkai’s tomb. These individuals had brought scriptural texts that they now buried in the same area. Some of these individuals made offerings of lamps and dedicated scriptures at this time. In a parallel fashion, in 1088 Shirakawa’s retainers had waited until the completion of the major ritual events that he had sponsored until engaging in their own forms of religious devotion at Kūkai’s tomb. In keeping with the 1088 precedent, the form of devotion exhibited by the retainers in 1124 was very similar—most basically being devotional gift-giving—to the form of devotion exhibited by the retired emperor who was sponsoring the pilgrimage. After giving these offerings to the monks serving at Kōyasan, these individuals also departed the area of the Inner Sanctum.

Having examined Toba’s act of burying a Buddhist scripture, we have seen the importance of this activity as part of his 1124 pilgrimage and within late Heian religious culture more generally. Toba’s sūtra burial at Kōyasan represents an application of a practice beginning

²⁵⁴ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 251.

²⁵⁵ See MDJ, vol. 2, s.v. “Fukū,” 1896-1900; vol. 3, s.v. “Rishu,” 2257a-b; and vol. 3, s.v. “Rishukyō,” 2258a-2259b.

to gain a more general popularity at this time in Japan. With the other individuals that were burying scripture texts on this mountain and in other sacred locations in Japan, Toba prayed for karmic merit that would greatly benefit himself and others both in his present life and in future lives. For example, as with his pilgrimage more generally, through this offering Toba would gain much karmic merit that he hoped would enable him to be present at Miroku Bodhisattva's three assemblies in the distant future.

The Portrait Hall, the Rare Beauty of Kōyasan

In keeping with the ritual sequence established by Shirakawa in 1088, Toba in 1124 visited Kūkai's Portrait Hall soon after his visit to Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum. The Portrait Hall did not have the same priority as Kūkai's tomb, which according to increasingly popular legends was the repository of Kūkai's living body. Nevertheless, the Portrait Hall seems to have become the second most significant destination on Kōyasan for the prominent pilgrims from the capital. This is attested in the various pilgrimage records up to this time, and it continued to be the case not only throughout the twelfth century but also in later eras as well. According to the majority of pilgrimage records starting with the account of Yorimichi's pilgrimage in 1048, after arriving on the mountain the pilgrims first visited the Inner Sanctum, where they conducted large-scale rituals. Next, they went to the Portrait Hall at the central monastic complex and, with a much smaller group of people, worshipfully gazed on Kūkai's portrait and sacred possessions.

Following the large ceremonies conducted at the Inner Sanctum, around 2:00 in the afternoon Toba visited the Portrait Hall. At this time, Ryōzen was the administrator of this building, just as he was during Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage of 1088. Kanjo had Ryōzen open the Portrait Hall. Then, because the Portrait Hall was dark both during the day and at night,

Kanjo carried a torch inside in order to give light. In worshipping the objects inside this hall, Toba followed the same ritual sequence that Shirakawa had observed in 1088. First, he worshipped the portrait of Kūkai. Next, he viewed the possessions of Kūkai, just as Shirakawa had done in 1088. Like the 1088 *Kanji ninen gokōki*, the 1124 *Kōya gokōki* notes that these objects had stayed the same since the time of Kūkai, even though much time had passed.²⁵⁶ The perceived unchanging nature of these objects apparently added to their prestige and mystique.

In most of the pilgrimage records from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there is a major contrast between the description of the devotional activities at the Portrait Hall, on the one hand, and large-scale rituals at the Inner Sanctum, on the other hand. First, compared to the Inner Sanctum as a whole and the Worship Hall in front of Kūkai's tomb in particular, the Portrait Hall was a much smaller space. Normally closed, it needed to be opened by a monk on the mountain. At this building, the rituals were on a very small scale compared to those that took place at the Inner Sanctum. In the pilgrimage records, the Inner Sanctum always seems to have been a much more open, public space. There is no description of the Inner Sanctum as a very dark, closed place. The rituals in this location were conducted by many monks, and the participating group was considerably larger than the small group of men permitted inside the Portrait Hall at one time.

While other earlier documents describe the lightning fire of 994, the *Kōya gokōki* is the first pilgrimage record that includes an important story about the Portrait Hall. Although the fire burned the Dining Hall (Shokudō), the Great Stūpa (Daitō), and other buildings behind the Portrait Hall, the Portrait Hall itself was miraculously saved. "The outstanding nature of this place is the rare beauty of Kōyasan," states the *Kōya gokōki*.²⁵⁷ According to this story, because

²⁵⁶ *Kōya gokōki*, 661.

²⁵⁷ *Kōya gokōki*, 661.

of Kūkai's presence in the building, it was protected from fire, while the other nearby buildings were destroyed. According to the *Kōya kōhaiki* (Rise and fall of Kōyasan), a brief history of the mountain compiled in the Muromachi era, a divine youth that protects the Dharma, a *tendō*, stood in the northeast corner of the Portrait Hall and repelled the flames, protecting the structure from the fire. The people who witnessed this amazing occurrence regarded it as an unimaginable miracle (*fushigi no kiseki*).²⁵⁸ Not every building within the monastic complex at Kōyasan was believed to be equally sacred, and the Portrait Hall stood out with unusual holiness.

After Toba emerged from the Portrait Hall, he heard a myth about the sacred origins of Kōyasan, just as Shirakawa was told the same story at exactly the same point in his visit to the mountain. The occasion for the telling of the story was the pilgrims' encounter with the Sanko no Matsu, the sacred pine tree on which the vajra that Kūkai threw from China supposedly landed. The sacred pine tree stood just in front of the Portrait Hall, but the pilgrims were probably so eager to enter this important building that the monks at Kōyasan waited until everyone had exited the building before telling the story.

An elderly man, presumably a monk at Kōyasan, told Toba the tale about Kūkai's journey to China and his throwing of the three-pronged vajra to Japan in order to determine a suitable site for his new monastery. This ritual implement of course landed on Kōyasan, and the teller of the story in 1124 emphasized to Toba that the occurrence was a sign that the mountain was a place with a karmic connection to the esoteric Buddhist teachings. The inclusion of the story in the *Kōya gokōki* reveals that by this time the story had been established as one of the main myths about the origins of Kongōbuji. It was apparently being told to most of the pilgrims to Kōyasan. If Toba had read the 1088 *Kanji ninen gokōki* prior to his journey, which is a possibility, he would already have encountered this myth. Providing evidence of the numinous nature of the

²⁵⁸ DNBZ, vol. 87, 99.

mountain, such sacred stories had probably played a role in motivating him to make the pilgrimage in 1124. At this point in the early twelfth century, it was probably fairly common for pilgrims from the capital, such as Toba, to travel to relatively distant temples in order to confirm stories that they had already heard or to encounter new ones that they could bring back and share with others.²⁵⁹

Later in the afternoon, Toba visited the Yakushi Hall, where he engaged in devotion that was more complex than that enacted by Shirakawa in 1088. In addition to the main image of Yakushi, this hall housed statutes of Gōzanze myōō, one of the five bright kings, and the four Shingon bodhisattvas of the Diamond World. In addition, in front of the statues, as well as to the left and to the right, hung five different pairs of the dual world mandalas in gold ink. At this temple, Toba sponsored a ritual of chanting Buddhist scriptures. As payment for this ritual, he placed one hundred bolts of Shinano cloth on the altar set up in the courtyard. Very busy in a variety of administrative roles on this day, Ryōzen served as the Officiant for this ritual. Toba rewarded him and the other monks with offerings.

From around 3:00 to 5:00 p.m., Toba and his group went to the Great Stūpa (Daitō). At the Great Stūpa, Toba made offerings to the administrator monks. After these rituals were over, Toba returned to his lodgings at the Central Hall.

On the following day, the twenty-ninth day of the tenth month, Toba and the large group of men who were accompanying him departed Kōyasan on horseback. Two days later, the first day of the eleventh month, they arrived in the ancient capital of Nara once again. They stayed at the Tōnan-in at Tōdaiji just as they had done on their way to Kōyasan.

On the second day of the eleventh month, Toba and his group arrived back in the capital. Toba returned to the Sanjōsaiden, the site of the initial rituals of purification and abstinence that

²⁵⁹ Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji*, 42.

he had conducted with his family prior to embarking on his pilgrimage to Kōyasan. Signifying the end of this pilgrimage, someone removed the *inufusegi*, the barrier that had been set up prior to the departure in order to protect this ritual space from impure elements. With the assistance of numerous retainers and eminent clerics, Toba had accomplished his goal of worshipping Kūkai's grave at the Inner Sanctum of Kōyasan. In the process he also secured stronger relations with the clerics of Kongōbuji, establishing his own presence in this numinous place. Furthermore, he had succeeded in emulating the exalted precedent of his grandfather Shirakawa's first pilgrimage to the sacred mountain in 1088.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the pilgrimage to Kōyasan by Retired Emperor Toba in 1124. I have shown that Toba was very aware of his grandfather Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage in 1088 and that he attempted to replicate much of Shirakawa's pilgrimage. Toba's first journey to Kōyasan displayed major continuities with Shirakawa's devotion on the mountain in 1088. Possessing deep devotion to Kōbō Daishi, both men were motivated to perform large ceremonies near Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum. They both brought several of the most eminent clerics with them from the capital in order to conduct the ceremonies. In addition, both retired emperors made enormous offerings of textiles and food to these monks as well as to the monks already at Kōyasan. In so doing, they greatly benefited the religious institution on the mountain economically and forged stronger connections with the clerics who were living there.

In addition to the continuities between the two different pilgrimages by the two retired emperors, I have also focused on several important discontinuities between the two pilgrimages. For example, Toba's devotion to Miroku and Yakushi, as enacted during his pilgrimage, was far more pronounced than the devotion to these beings that Shirakawa displayed in 1088. By this

time, the purported link between Kōbō Daishi and Miroku had become stronger. As discussed above, stories linking Kūkai and Miroku evolved especially over the course of the eleventh century. Our textual records suggest that the earliest pilgrims to Kōyasan did not associate them to the extent that Toba and his companions did in 1124. While Toba wanted to worship Kōbō Daishi at his revered grave at the Inner Sanctum, it was also in this location that he prayed to meet Miroku at the time of his descent in billions of years in the future. We do not find such an explicit connection between the worship of Kōbō Daishi and the eschatology of Miroku's descent in the records about Shirakawa's pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1088. In addition, Toba's visit to the Miroku Hall at the base of the mountain in 1124 was another significant development not witnessed in many of the prior pilgrimages by nobles, if in any at all. There is no evidence from Shirakawa's 1088 pilgrimage that he worshipped Miroku at Kōyasan or that he visited the Miroku Hall there.

One of the major goals of this chapter has been to contextualize Toba's 1124 pilgrimage with respect to other similar devotion at Kōyasan around the same time. For example, I have shown how Toba's burial of the *Liqu jing* was very much in keeping with similar sūtra burials that began in the early half of eleventh century. As seen in the records of pilgrimage by Michinaga, Yorimichi, Shirakawa, and other eminent aristocrats and royals, a major element of pilgrimage to Kōyasan was to inter Buddhist sūtras at Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum. This particular area continued to be the focal point of the pilgrims' journey, the site of the most intense period of ritual activity, even while the devotion that the pilgrims displayed at Kōyasan was changing in other ways. Understanding the cult of Kōbō Daishi and the significance of this figure for the courtiers and royals who ventured to Kōyasan is very important for understanding their motivations for traveling to the mountain. In fact, perhaps more than anything else,

devotion to this deified Buddhist cleric was the most enduring feature of the cultic activity of these individuals at Kōyasan.

Chapter 4

A Woman's Devotion: The Case of Bifukumon'in

Introduction

Kōyasan was a site of extraordinary spiritual potential not only for the retired emperors of the early Insei era but also the women closest to them. In chapter 3, we witnessed the role that Taikenmon'in, Retired Emperor Toba's closest consort at the time, played in the preparations for his inaugural journey to Kōyasan in 1124. In this chapter, I will examine the devotion of Bifukumon'in, who became Toba's favorite consort after Taikenmon'in's death. She did much more than merely to participate in the preparations for her husband's pilgrimages. In fact, she herself became so devoted to this sacred mountain late in her life that she chose to be buried there after death. Such a decision suggests a great religious interest in the mountain, as we will see.

However, Bifukumon'in's devotion to Kōyasan also was complicated by the existence of widespread ideas about female hindrances to liberation. In medieval Japan women were ascribed a number of hindrances that supposedly limited their religious potential. In addition, much literature shows that many people believed that female bodies were inherently polluted and should not be permitted in certain sacred spaces. In fact, at this time, like other sacred mountains in Japan, Kōyasan prohibited women from ascending the peak and worshipping in the main areas of the monastery. Therefore, Bifukumon'in and other women devotees usually did not travel to the mountain during life, even though they sometimes chose to have their cremated remains sent to be buried on the sacred peak after their death.

As we will see below, in spite of such restrictions, Bifukumon'in exhibited strong devotion to this place and contributed greatly to the increase in buildings in the middle of the

twelfth century. Bifukumon'in's devotion at Kōyasan thus offers a window onto both the challenges that women faced in their devotion to Kōyasan and the creative ways in which they dealt with these challenges.

In this chapter, I will seek to answer the following questions: How did Bifukumon'in view Kōyasan? In contrast to Shirakawa and Toba in particular, what difference did Bifukumon'in's inability to step foot on Kōyasan make in her interest in and devotion to Kōyasan? How did she and those who wrote liturgical prayers for her negotiate the theological and cultural challenges with respect to the perceived limitations of female Buddhist practitioners?

In asking these research questions, I seek to position my findings with respect to a larger trend in the scholarship pertaining to the relationship between Buddhism and gender in premodern Japan. In the past, primarily basing their research on the doctrinal texts of Buddhist scholar-monks, scholars often took the absence of explicit counterargument to discourse about women's soteriological hindrances in medieval Japan to signify that women participated in their own subordination and despised their female bodies.²⁶⁰ However, more recent research by scholars such as Nishiguchi Junko, James Dobbins, Edward Kamens, and Lori Meeks has identified many different strategies by which women, especially those with elite status, were able to circumvent the gender hierarchy inherent in official doctrine as well as their exclusion from formal Buddhist institutions. In so doing, they developed their own relationship to the Buddha Dharma in creative ways.²⁶¹ Aware of this important trend in recent research on gender and

²⁶⁰See Jacqueline Stone, "Buddhism," 49. Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji*, 10, states that Hosokawa Ryōichi is a prime example of a scholar who has so argued.

²⁶¹See especially Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji*; Nishiguchi Junko, *Onna no chikara*; James Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*; and Edward Kamens, "Dragon-girl, Maidenflower, Buddha."

medieval Japanese Buddhism, I have composed this chapter about Bifukumon'in's own creative relationship with the Dharma and with the particular religious institution situated atop Kōyasan.

Following a brief overview of the prohibition against women in the early centuries of Buddhist activity at Kōyasan, I will analyze Bifukumon'in's major activities at Kōyasan, especially her construction projects and the religious aspirations connected to them. Her sponsorship of several temples at Kōyasan's Bodaishin-in reveals her strong devotion to this religious institution near the end of her life. Next, I will discuss Bifukumon'in's vision of Kōyasan, with special attention to both the continuities and discontinuities with the views of Shirakawa and Toba.

I will show that, at least as far as the liturgical prayers connected to her construction projects reveal, Bifukumon'in probably saw Kōyasan as a place of unusual soteriological potential, even though she was barred from the mountain because she was a woman. The liturgical prayers connected to her construction projects and devotional activities reveal great confidence and optimism regarding the possibility of her own ultimate liberation even if she was hindered by the doctrinal limitations imposed on living women in early medieval Japan. While Bifukumon'in observed the prohibition against women at Kōyasan, she nevertheless responded with creativity and determination to the challenges that female devotees faced both at Kōyasan in particular and in Buddhism in general.

The *Nyonin Kekkai* at Kōyasan

In order to understand the challenges that Bifukumon'in faced in her devotion at Kōyasan, we first need to examine the nature of the prohibition against women at Kōyasan and other sacred mountains. The following discussion introduces the ways in which Kōyasan was imagined as a gendered space that was off-limits to living women.

In contrast to Kumano, where direct pilgrimage and devotion by living women flourished during the Insei era, Kōyasan forbade Bifukumon'in and all other women from trespassing onto the main grounds of the monastery. Kōyasan possessed a *nyonin kekkai*, a line of exclusion that was powerful yet invisible and that prohibited women from entering the sacred precincts of the mountain monastery. The whole area of the temple complex was a restricted precinct in which only males could enter. While not present at every sacred site, these boundary lines were commonly found in medieval Japan, and they still exist on some of the sacred mountains in Japan even today. Similar restricted precincts existed at Mount Hiei, the Ōmine cluster of peaks, and Daigo, southeast of present-day Kyoto.

A number of scholars have debated the origins and significance of *nyonin kekkai* in Japan. Why such invisible barriers were established, and why women were prohibited from some temples but permitted in others, are issues central to these academic discussions. Theories advanced regarding the exclusion of women from temple grounds include the desire to protect monastic celibacy; the rise of Confucian values and the appearance of a patriarchal family system; local traditions linking ascetic practice in mountains with ritual purity; and new concepts of pollution associated with the decline of the *ritsuryō* system, the vulnerability of the capital to crime and disease, and the related desire to establish ritually pure zones (such as Mount Hiei), in order to protect the ruler's law (*ōbō*).²⁶² While they differ on the details, scholars now generally have reached the consensus that the *nyonin kekkai* began with the regulations enforcing the precepts by barring women from monasteries and men from nunneries. However, once nunneries disappeared, only the prohibition against women at monasteries continued. This ban later was rationalized as a concern about female pollution, and as we will see below the discourse about

²⁶² Jacqueline Stone, "Buddhism," 50.

female pollution emerges prominently in much medieval Japanese literature that discusses the institution of *nyonin kekkai* at particular temple sites.²⁶³

Texts from the ninth century present evidence of the practice of barring women from entering temple precincts. However, this practice did not become established on a broad scale until the tenth and eleventh centuries.²⁶⁴ In addition, not all Buddhist temples immediately instituted *nyonin kekkai*. In fact, the first temples to establish these barriers to women's entrance were located on mountains, and in most cases women were still allowed to enter parts of the monastic complex even if they were prohibited from specific areas within the temple grounds.²⁶⁵

The spatial demarcation of Kōyasan as a monastic space separated from lay territory dates to the earliest days of the monastery in the early ninth century. Kūkai performed a *kekkai* rite for the founding of Kongōbuji, the central temple on the mountain, probably sometime during his residence on the mountain from the winter of 818 to the summer of 819.²⁶⁶ A document surviving from this consecration ritual invites deities to enter a space atop Kōyasan in order to sacralize and protect it.²⁶⁷ This ritual created a protected space purified of all malevolent influences and extending seven *ri*, or approximately two to three miles, in all directions from its central point. Documents about the original purification rite that Kūkai performed at Kōyasan do not explicitly mention the exclusion of women, although no evidence remains suggesting that women were permitted to enter Kōyasan in the early centuries. By the eleventh century, however, people associated the term *kekkai* with the more specific *nyonin kekkai*, a restricted sacred precinct excluding women.²⁶⁸

²⁶³ See Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, “‘Nyonin kinsei’ sairon”; Yoshida Kazuhiko, “Josei to Bukkyō o meguru shomondai,” 27-31; and Paul Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei*, 262-265.

²⁶⁴ Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, *Kodai chūsei jiin soshiki no kenkyū*, 51-55.

²⁶⁵ Meeks, *Hokkeji*, 39.

²⁶⁶ David Gardiner, “The Consecration of the Monastic Compound at Mt. Kōya,” 121.

²⁶⁷ See *Shōryōshū* 99, *Kōbō Daishi chosaku zenshū*, vol. 3, 392.

²⁶⁸ Susan Matisoff, “Barred From Paradise,” 495, n. 3.

By the early medieval era, when the legends about Kōyasan's sacred origins started circulating in Japan, the establishment of the *nyonin kekkai* at Kōyasan was given mythological form. Given their quasi-historical status, such legends are not always the most direct window on the early history of *nyonin kekkai* at Japanese temples. Yet they convey much about the ways in which gender was imagined in reference to major religious institutions, religious ideas, and cultural practices of the time.

As discussed in chapter 1, according to the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi*, the mountain goddess Niu Myōjin granted some land to Kūkai so that he could construct a mountain monastery at Kōyasan. Niu Myōjin established the boundaries of this temple property with the same precision used in estate maps and garden manuals, informing Kūkai that his temple property comprised an area bounded by the following: "To the south, the southern ocean; to the north, the Japan River; to the east, the province of Yamato; and to the west, the valley of Mount Ōjin."²⁶⁹ According to this legend, at the very beginning of Kōyasan's history as a sacred site, a female deity established the boundaries that, among other functions, demarcated the area where women must stop when approaching the sacred precincts of Kōyasan. In other words, in a somewhat paradoxical fashion, this myth gives the female deity Niu Myōjin the responsibility for creating the invisible barriers that human women later could never cross.

There remain numerous stories about natural disasters that occurred following a violation of the *nyonin kekkai* at Kōyasan and other sacred sites in medieval Japan. For example, the *Gouda-in gokōki*, a record of Retired Emperor Gouda's pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1313, relates the occurrence of a sudden storm that erupted when a very large group of women, who hoped to see Gouda while he was on the mountain, "dressed as men and entered the *kekkai*."²⁷⁰ Only after

²⁶⁹ *Kōbō Daishi den zenshū*, vol. 1, 53.

²⁷⁰ *Gouda-in gokōki*, ZGR, vol. 4, part 1, 169.

these cross-dressing women from a village near Kōyasan were chased away from the sacred precincts did the storm abate. The pilgrimage diary then records that the retired emperor was moved with admiration at the marvelous efficacy of Kōyasan's sacred precincts. Explaining the origin of the prohibition against women at Kōyasan, the *Gouda-in gokōki* recites the story of Toran, the paradigmatic woman said to have violated the *nyonin kekkai* in stories connected to Kinpusen, Hieizan, Kōyasan, Tateyama, Hakusan, and other sacred sites: "In the past the nun Toran had wanted to climb the sacred peak, but before she had crossed the Narikawa River she was ashamed of her body hindered by the five obstructions."²⁷¹ As we will see below, the people of medieval Japan conceived the five obstructions, which originally referred to women's supposed inability to be reborn into the five most auspicious levels of being such as birth as a wheel-turning king or a Buddha, as major challenges to the spiritual possibilities of women. At least in this case these hindrances made it difficult for this nun to enter the sacred space of Kōyasan.

Buddhist literature from medieval Japan contains many similar stories about women who attempt to trespass onto sacred territory. Mount Hiei's *nyonin kekkai* is one of the earliest for which such tales survive. Minamoto no Tsuneyori's diary discusses this prohibition against women in an entry about a woman who violated the *nyonin kekkai* and entered Mount Hiei. In response, the resident Sannō deity became so angry at this woman's presence that it started a violent thunderstorm.²⁷² Abe Yasurō suggests that, in sending away the women who wanted to enter the sacred mountains, the sudden thunderstorms, extraordinary events in nature, reveal the harshness of the *nyonin kekkai*. In addition, Abe points out, these extraordinary changes in the

²⁷¹ *Gouda-in gokōki*, ZGR, vol. 4, part 1, 169-170. I have followed Max Moerman's translation in *Localizing Paradise*, 207.

²⁷² *Sakeiki*, Kannin 4.9.9, ZST, vol. 6, 104.

weather are signs indicating that such mountains were indeed sacred sites.²⁷³ In other words, these legends assert, through a type of ideology in narrative form, that the *nyonin kekkai* was not merely a cultural creation by human beings who built temples in particular places. Rather, the stories claim, having been established by the local deities, these invisible barriers against women's intrusion were built into the natural world.

Kūkai's mother, not Toran or the local goddess Niu Myōjin, is the woman who has most commonly been linked to the establishment of the *nyonin kekkai* at Kōyasan. Although many texts feature her story, the most famous version is the one contained in *Karukaya*, a medieval *sekkyō-bushi*, or sermon ballad. Many scholars believe that this narrative first appeared among itinerant Kōya *hijiri* based at Kōyasan's Karukaya-dō located at the area of the mountain known as Ōjō-in Dani. This story is about a family that has been separated from each other as a result of the father's desire to become a monk at Kōyasan. The mother and son travel to the mountain in order to meet the man who had been a beloved father and husband. When the mother and son reach an inn at the base of Kōyasan, the innkeeper informs the woman about the *nyonin kekkai*, which will prevent her from climbing the mountain with her son. At this juncture in the narrative, the innkeeper begins reciting the story about the origin of Kōyasan's proscription against women. This story, embedded in the larger narrative, is known as the *Kōya no maki*.

Kōya no maki probably circulated as an independent *engi* prior to its inclusion in the *Karukaya* tale.²⁷⁴ While this embedded story opens with a fairly standard biography of Kūkai, the end of the tale features the story of Kūkai's mother and her attempt to meet her son at Kōyasan. According to this story, in spite of her exalted status as the daughter of an emperor of Tang China, she is "the most evil woman in the three countries" and thus is banished from China

²⁷³ Abe Yasurō, "Nyonin kinsei to suisan," 179.

²⁷⁴ Abe Yasurō, "Nyonin kinsei to suisan," 182.

and abandoned in the ocean. Her boat happens to float to Japan, and there a local fisherman finds her and marries her. After this man dies, she gives birth to Kūkai. However, she is cast out of her village, and she then abandons the young Kūkai. Much later in her life, after becoming a nun, this woman travels to Kōyasan in order to meet the son that she abandoned. Kūkai prohibits his mother from climbing the mountain, yet she counters this prohibition with an argument very similar to ones that Toran makes in texts such as the *Genkō shakusho*: “I am eighty-three years old. I have not had a menstrual period for the past forty-two years. I am exactly like a noble monk. There is nothing wrong in my setting foot on the mountain.”²⁷⁵

In spite of the mother’s claims to exceptional status, Kōyasan trembles and shakes. At this time, Kūkai places his monastic robe, the ninefold *kesa*, on top of a rock and tells his mother to walk across the robe. When she starts walking across it, “her menstrual blood, which had ceased to flow for forty-two years, instantly began and the *kesa* burst into flames and carried her off into the sky.”²⁷⁶ Women’s pollution is so deep, this story suggests, that it remains in spite of a woman’s menopause or religious purity.²⁷⁷ As in numerous tales from medieval Japan, a piece of the natural world, in this case a rock, closely connected with the woman who attempted to intrude upon a sacred mountain becomes a boundary marker emblematic of the entire *kekkaï* around the mountain.

In other versions of this tale Kūkai’s mother does not depart suddenly into the air but instead first becomes a nun on this occasion. She then begins living just beyond the *nyonin kekkaï*, at the base of the mountain. In fact, in these tales, the Miroku Hall, or Jison-in, becomes her new home, and after her death this hall was named the Daishi bōkōbyō, or the Mausoleum of

²⁷⁵ *Sekkyō bushi*, 87-88; translation, Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 209.

²⁷⁶ *Sekkyō bushi*, 88-89; translation, Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 209.

²⁷⁷ Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 209.

[Kōbō] Daishi's Mother. Her body then does not decompose like an ordinary corpse but instead, with the aid of Kūkai's ritual powers, transforms into a self-mummified relic (*zenshin shari*) in the form of Miroku bodhisattva. Installed in a stone chamber, Kūkai's mother will then remain for many years waiting for the descent of the future Buddha Miroku in the distant future. A very important woman in the Kōyasan cult, a woman who after death was enshrined in one of the major temples at the foot of Kōyasan, Kūkai's mother became the center of a pilgrimage cult for women, who could congregate in this sacred place even if they were not permitted to ascend the peak. In effect, Kūkai's mother's tomb became an off-mountain female equivalent of the Inner Sanctum, where Kūkai is said to remain in meditation on Kōyasan. Both Kūkai and his mother are believed to be waiting in a supernaturally preserved state for Miroku's advent.

All of these stories show that, although women were banished physically from the monastic space on Kōyasan, their presence (and absence) was absolutely integral in defining the sacrality of this geographical location and religious institution. Furthermore, these narratives add to our image of Kōyasan as a complex, multivalent place filled with paradoxes. While a female deity supposedly handed this land to Kūkai, even his own mother would not be able to enter the monastic grounds to visit him. The stories about the violation of the *nyonin kekkai* and the disastrous consequences that resulted suggest that particular devout female practitioners were tempted to trespass the boundary and enter the mountain. The case of the group of women during Retired Emperor Gouda's pilgrimage shows that some women were not even permitted to witness men who were conducting pilgrimages to the mountain. Through an ideology of exclusion, many of these tales link the institution of the *nyonin kekkai* to the very nature of things, to a natural world that will respond violently if these barriers are violated. In so doing, they not only legitimate human-constructed practices and ideas about the limitations and

impurity of women in medieval Japan. They also reveal the depths of the challenges that women such as Bifukumon'in faced if they desired to demonstrate devotion to Kōyasan or a similar site that was off-limits to living women.

Bifukumon'in's Devotion to Kōyasan

Having examined the major ideas connected to the prohibition against women at Kōyasan, we are now prepared to consider Bifukumon'in's devotion to the mountain during the middle of the twelfth century. I will show that Bifukumon'in found creative ways to circumvent the prohibition against living women on Kōyasan. In addition, I will argue that the liturgical prayers connected to her construction projects at Kōyasan reveal great confidence in her ability to achieve ultimate liberation in spite of the theological limitations often associated with women in medieval Japan.

Bifukumon'in (1117-1160), whose original name was Fujiwara no Tokushi, was the Senior Queen-Consort (*kōgō*皇后) of Toba. Bifukumon'in's father, Fujiwara no Nagazane, was a close associate of the retired emperors Shirakawa and Toba. Although the family did not have high status, Bifukumon'in won the affection of Retired Emperor Toba. In 1135 she gave birth to the couple's eldest daughter, Eishi. In 1137, another daughter, Shōshi (later Hachijōin) was born, followed by the birth of a son, Konoe, in 1139. Konoe became the crown prince three months after he was born. In 1141, Bifukumon'in gave birth to a third daughter, Shushi, and in the same year Konoe became the emperor, so Bifukumon'in then ascended to the position of Senior Queen-Consort. The wife whom Toba most adored, Taikenmon'in, died in 1145, and Bifukumon'in then became Toba's favorite consort. In 1149, she became a *nyoin*, a royal woman

who received an *ingō*, an *in* title accompanied with rank and privilege similar to a retired emperor, and received the name Bifukumon'in.²⁷⁸

Surviving textual evidence suggests that Bifukumon'in was devoted to several pilgrimage sites, including the Kumano shrines in the southern reaches of the Kii peninsula. For example, in 1149, Bifukumon'in made a pilgrimage to Kumano with her daughter Hachijōin (the princess Shōshi). Bifukumon'in also accompanied Retired Emperor Toba on some of his annual religious pilgrimages, including his trips to Kumano in 1150, 1151, and 1152.

Bifukumon'in is also known to have been seriously devoted to Shitennōji, the ancient temple in Naniwa (present-day Osaka), said to have been founded by Prince Shōtoku. This temple had long been known as a site for Pure Land devotion. The west gate of Shitennōji, which faced the sea, was believed to communicate directly with the east gate of Amida's Pure Land. Bifukumon'in made a pilgrimage to this temple in 1150. At this time, groups were commonly conducting one million recitations of the *nenbutsu* outside of the western gates of Shitennōji. According to the detailed account in the *Taiki*, Fujiwara no Yōrinaga's diary, Retired Emperor Toba and Bifukumon'in entered the Nenbutsusho, the site for this religious activity, on the day after this customary ceremony had begun.²⁷⁹ They recited the *nenbutsu* until the middle of the night three days later. This account states that Bifukumon'in had already become a member of a group known as a *nenbutsu* association at this time as part of this pilgrimage. In addition to her participation in the *nenbutsu* ceremony, she also sponsored a Relics Ceremony (*shari-e*) and participated in the Ten Thousand Lamps Ceremony (*mantō'e*) at the Golden Hall. With visits by the royal family and the high-ranking aristocrats of the time, the Shitennōji cult was flourishing, and Bifukumon'in was a major patron.

²⁷⁸ Regarding the position of *nyōin*, see Meeks, *Hokkeji*, 65-66.

²⁷⁹ *Taiki*, Kyūan 6.5.9-21, ZST, vol. 24, 25-26.

In spite of the prohibition against women at Kōyasan, Bifukumon'in also became strongly devoted to this sacred place that she could never enter in life. It is not entirely clear how Bifukumon'in developed her interest in Kōyasan. Obara Hitoshi speculates that she perhaps was interacting with the renowned cleric Butsugon, who encouraged her devotion to Kōyasan.²⁸⁰ As we will see in chapter 5, Butsugon-bō Shōshin (or Butsugon) was an important Buddhist monk who had a very wide range of personal connections and influence not only at Kōyasan but also in Heiankyō, the capital. Renowned as both an esoteric monk and *nenbutsu* practitioner, he twice held the post of Head of Academic Studies (Gakutō) at the Daidenbō-in.²⁸¹ Founded by Kakuban, the Shingon monk renowned for his scholastic writings on Shingon doctrine and his participation in institutional politics at Kōyasan, the Daidenbō-in became one of Toba's prayer temples (*goganji*) in 1132.

The *Bifukumon'in ryōji an* dated Ninpei 4 (1154), second month, fifth day, a text that issues a directive for an unnamed male practitioner to make a pilgrimage to Kōyasan in Bifukumon'in's place, represents the earliest period of Bifukumon'in's interest in Kōyasan.²⁸² Someone else probably composed this letter and thus it may not be a direct expression of Bifukumon'in's thoughts. Nevertheless, she presumably commissioned it and may have had input into its content or at least would have approved it. This document suggests that Bifukumon'in's devotion to Kōyasan had begun by around 1154 and that at this time she was primarily interested in the Daidenbō-in.

We should probably first understand Bifukumon'in's religious activities with respect to Kōyasan as an extension of Toba's devotion. Of course we witnessed a concrete manifestation of

²⁸⁰ Obara Hitoshi, "Butsugon-bō Shōshin to sono shūhen," 220-230, discusses the relationship between Bifukumon'in and Butsugon.

²⁸¹ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 44.

²⁸² *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 267-268.

Toba's devotion to Kōyasan in chapter 3 with an examination of his inaugural pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1124. Not only did Toba visit the mountain and offer donations to the clerics there again in 1127 and 1132 but he also had a strong relationship with Kakuban, the cleric who played a major role in Shingon doctrinal studies and in establishing several major temples at Kōyasan in the 1130s. While no substantiating documents have been uncovered, it is very easy to imagine that Toba would have encouraged Bifukumon'in's devotion to this place that was so significant to him.

At the same time, in analyzing her devotion to Kōyasan, we must also recognize Bifukumon'in's independence and her own strong will. Statements about Bifukumon'in's female body in the documents about her devotion towards Kōyasan reveal that at least in part because of the fact that she, as a woman, could not visit the mountain in person, her faith in Kōyasan took on a very personal form that was not dictated by Toba's. The 1154 *Bifukumon'in ryōji an* states that, regardless of Bifukumon'in's devotion to the Daidenbō-in, the deep sins of her female body make it impossible for her to ascend Kōyasan.²⁸³

One way that Bifukumon'in attempted to get beyond these constraints was to send an unnamed male practitioner on a pilgrimage up the mountain in her place. We see this in the same text. In this document Bifukumon'in sends this substitute practitioner, who shared her religious faith regarding Kōyasan, to the mountain.²⁸⁴ Regarding this case, we should note that pilgrimage by proxy was a common religious practice that was performed on behalf of men as well. For example, the monk Chizen, a contemporary of Butsugon, made a pilgrimage to Kumano and buried sūtras there on behalf of the regent Kujō Kanezane. In this instance, Bifukumon'in adopted a more widespread practice specifically in order to maneuver around gender constraints.

²⁸³ *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 267-268.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

In addition to sending someone else to Kōyasan on pilgrimage on her behalf, Bifukumon'in also made major contributions to the monastic institution by sponsoring the construction of several temple buildings. In particular, Bifukumon'in became involved in the construction of several buildings at the Bodaishin-in, a temple complex that contained a number of different halls and that was located at what today is the site of the Fudō-in, an active Shingon Buddhist temple at Kōyasan. The Bodaishin-in constituted an area just to the east of the Odawara Dani, which became associated with Kyōkai (1001-1093), a saint memorialized in the late-twelfth-century hagiographical collection *Kōyasan ōjōden* and discussed in chapter 5. The Bodaishin-in was located between the central monastic complex and the Inner Sanctum, where Kūkai's grave attracted many pilgrims. First built in the early tenth century and closely associated with the royal family, the Bodaishin-in originally consisted of twelve different temples that included the Fudō-in. Even today, people who visit Kōyasan learn that Bifukumon'in played a major role in reviving the Bodaishin-in in the middle of the twelfth century, and they can visit her tomb, which remains on the grounds of the contemporary Fudō-in.

In addition to the 1154 *Bifukumon'in ryōji an* mentioned above, we know of Bifukumon'in's devotion to Kōyasan chiefly through three texts composed for the dedication of construction projects that she sponsored or the donation of an estate that would enable Buddhist rituals to continue to be conducted at particular buildings on the mountain. The *Bodaishin-in kuyō ganmon an* was written for the 1158 consecration of the Dainichi Hall, a hall at the Bodaishin-in in which a life-sized Dainichi Nyorai statue was enshrined. This text is dated Hōgen 3 (1158), twelfth month, fourth day.²⁸⁵ Another liturgical prayer, the *Bodaishin-in Amida-dō kuyō ganmon an*, was composed for the consecration of the Amida Hall in the same temple complex. This document is dated the fourteenth day of the twelfth month of Hōgen 3

²⁸⁵ *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 318.

(1158), showing that the Amida Hall was dedicated only ten days after the consecration ceremony for the Dainichi Hall.²⁸⁶ In addition, another *Bifukumon'in ryōji* is a document that announces Bifukumon'in's intention to donate the Arakawa estate to the Sūtra Repository at Kōyasan. This text was written on the seventeenth day of the seventh month of Heiji 1 (1159).²⁸⁷ These documents reveal that, over the course of a few years, Bifukumon'in made major contributions to Kōyasan by sponsoring the construction of several halls at the Bodaishin-in as well as donating one of her estates to the monastic institution.

In addition, Bifukumon'in made very personal offerings to several Bodaishin-in temples whose construction she had sponsored. For example, in 1158, her own hair was installed in a Buddha statue at the Bodaishin-in Dainichi Hall and in the main Buddha image (*honzon*) of the Amida Hall in the same area. The *Bodaishin'in kuyō ganmon an* states, "We install the disciple's hair within the benevolent body of a venerable Buddha image."²⁸⁸

What was the significance of this form of devotion, in which part of herself, her hair, was installed within Buddha statues at Kōyasan while she was still alive? The practice of installing hair, relics, Buddhist sūtras, and other votive objects inside Buddha statues constituted a well-established form of devotional activity in Japan often aimed at securing karmic merit that could be used for a variety of purposes.²⁸⁹ Shirai Yūko has suggested that the installation of hair and human remains at Kōyasan was done with the aspiration for two major benefits: 1) an encounter with Miroku Bodhisattva either on earth in the distant future or in his Tosotsu heaven and 2) birth in a pure land.²⁹⁰ Obara Hitoshi admits that Shirai's observations here may be accurate. However, he suggests that sending hair inside a Buddha statue that would be enshrined on

²⁸⁶ *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 319.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 318.

²⁸⁹ Ethan Lindsay, "Chōnen and Vivifying Gifts," 20-26.

²⁹⁰ *Kūkai densetsu no keisei to Kōyasan*, 285-286.

Kōyasan was one way for a woman such as Bifukumon'in, normally prohibited from entering the sacred territory of Kōyasan while alive, to travel to this revered mountain.²⁹¹ In other words, this was yet another example of Bifukumon'in's creative circumvention of the prohibition against women at Kōyasan, and it enabled her to make a very personal donation to the mountain even though she herself could not make a pilgrimage.

The *Bodaishin-in kuyō ganmon an* affirms that women have the innate capacity for Buddhahood:

Every sentient being has the Buddha nature. How could women be left out? This place of Buddhist practice is itself the Dharma World. How can we call another place [the Land of] Utmost Bliss?²⁹²

Those who participated in drafting this dedication text for the consecration of the Bodaishin-in Dainichi Hall were very conscious of the prohibition against women on Kōyasan, yet they decided to affirm in strong terms the soteriological potential of Bifukumon'in and other women. This liturgical prayer states with confidence that a woman can even achieve Buddhahood in the pure land that is Kōyasan.

The *Bodaishin-in Amida-dō kuyō ganmon an*, the liturgical prayer connected to the construction of the Amida Hall at the Bodaishin-in, also exhibits similar beliefs about the salvation of women. This text articulates the desire that Bifukumon'in obtain salvation in the Pure Land. This would occur by means of the good karmic act of constructing an Amida Hall at the Bodaishin-in:

I hope that this act of blessing at this time by all means will secure Awakening in the next world, that the deep five obstructions will open into three kinds of supernormal cognition (*sanmyō* 三明). How can I not follow in the footsteps of the daughter of the Nāga King Sāgara? I will eradicate serious sins in order to

²⁹¹ Obara Hitoshi, "Butsugon-bō Shōshin to sono shūhen," 228.

²⁹² *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 318.

seek the ninth level of rebirth in the Pure Land. I will revere the encompassing vows of the Buddha (Amida). The benefits of the Dharma world are limitless.²⁹³

While acknowledging the supposedly intrinsic limitations of women that bar them from sacred mountains during life, this text also affirms in strong terms that female devotees such as Bifukumon'in could achieve the highest, most complete form of salvation in Amida's Pure Land.

The notion that the "deep five obstructions" will open into the three kinds of supernormal cognition possessed by enlightened beings such as buddhas and arhats merits special attention. In medieval Japan, the *Lotus Sūtra* and other texts articulated a deeply ambivalent attitude about women's potential for liberation, making use of concepts such as five obstructions that hinder women. Chapter 12 of the *Lotus Sūtra* contains an episode that became the *locus classicus* for this attitude in medieval Japan.²⁹⁴ In this episode, the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī presents the daughter of the Nāga King as someone with the potential for Buddhahood. However, Śariputra states that, regardless of her accomplishments, just being female means that she could never attain five levels of being (J. *gokai*), which included birth as the deities Śakra, Brahmā, Māra, as a wheel-turning king (Skt. *cakravartin*), or as a Buddha. These restrictions regarding women's rebirth became known as the five obstructions (J. *goshō* or *itsutsu no sawari*). However, following Śariputra's speech on the severe limitations of women, the Nāga-girl instantaneously transforms herself into a male bodhisattva and then into a Buddha possessing the marks of a Great Man. This story thus ends with an exceptional display of female possibility. At the same time, only in the form of a man could the Nāga-girl reveal her great potential for spiritual emancipation.

²⁹³ *Bodaishin'in Amida dō kuyō ganmon an, Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 319.

²⁹⁴ For the famous translation of the *Lotus Sutra* by Kumārajīva, see T. no. 262, 9:35c. For some of the major scholarship discussing this famous scriptural episode, especially with respect to its reception in Japan, see Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 91-118; Kamens, "Dragon-girl, Maidenflower, Buddha"; and Yoshida, "Enlightenment of the Dragon-king's Daughter."

Not only the *Lotus Sūtra* but also the Pure Land sūtras and doctrinal treatises were cited in Japan to justify an ambivalent view about women's salvation. In the Pure Land tradition, a passage in the *Jingtu lun* (J. *Jōdoron*, Treatise on the Pure Land), a text attributed to Vasubandhu, more than any other text raised doubts regarding women's potential to be born in the Pure Land.²⁹⁵ This text states that in addition to other classes of beings such as adherents of the "Two Vehicles," or the "hearers" (Skt. *śrāvakas*) of the Buddhist teachings and "self-enlightened Buddhas" (Skt. *pratyeka-buddhas*), women will not be born into Amida's Pure Land.²⁹⁶

The scriptural basis for this claim was the *Wuliangshou jing* (J. *Muryōjukyō*, Sūtra on the Buddha of Infinite Life), a text whose most popular Chinese translation was probably written in the early fifth century.²⁹⁷ Many commentators wrote specifically about this text's presentation of the thirty-fifth vow, made by the bodhisattva Dharmākara, who would later become the Buddha Amitābha (J. Amida). This bodhisattva vows that, if women "who, having heard my name, rejoice in faith, awaken aspiration for Enlightenment and wish to renounce womanhood, should after death be reborn again as a woman, may I not attain perfect enlightenment."²⁹⁸ Paul Harrison has shown that this passage in this particular translation does not necessarily imply that women must be transformed into a male body before being born in the Pure Land because it does not specifically refer to birth in the Pure Land at all.²⁹⁹ Rather, birth as a man, wherever these female devotees happen to be reborn, is guaranteed as a general positive result of displaying faith in the Buddha, a benefit that presumably aids them immensely along the bodhisattva path to

²⁹⁵ Christoph Kleine, "Portraits of Pious Women," 335.

²⁹⁶ T. no. 1524, 26:231a.

²⁹⁷ T. no. 360, 12:265c-279a. Late medieval Chinese catalogues and the editors of the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* attribute this translation to the third-century monk Saṃghavarman. However, most scholars now believe that Buddhābhaddra and Baouyun, two translators active in the early fifth century, composed this translation (Jan Nattier, "The Indian Roots of Pure Land Buddhism," 189).

²⁹⁸ T. no. 360, 12:268c, quoted from Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sūtras*, 246-247.

²⁹⁹ See "Women in the Pure Land," 559.

Buddhahood. Regardless of whether this verse addresses the gendered form in which birth in the Pure Land occurs, preachers of Pure Land Buddhism in medieval Japan used this passage as justification for their belief that women had spiritual capacities inferior to those of men.

While Hōnen (1133-1212), the founder of the independent Pure Land school, did not write very much about the doctrinal aspects of women's birth in the Pure Land, an early text, the *Muryōjukyō shaku* (Interpretation of the Sūtra on the Buddha of Infinite Life) addresses this issue. Hōnen participated in broad patterns of religious discrimination in assuming that women did not have the same ability as men to make progress on the spiritual path and thus needed an exceptionally simple way of salvation as well as the assurance of Amida's grace: "Now what is the meaning of [Amida's] establishing this [thirty-fifth] vow [especially for women]?... [Answer] "Because the karmic obstacles of women are heavy, they might doubt [their ability to gain *ōjō*]. Therefore [Dharmākara] established a vow especially for the birth of women [in the Pure Land]." ³⁰⁰ Hindered by bad karma, women required special assurance that they could make it to Amida's Pure Land in any form, male or female, Hōnen implies.

Outside of scholastic circles, there existed considerably more flexibility in ideas regarding the capacity of women to achieve very advanced stages on the Buddhist path and even possibly attaining birth in the Pure Land as women. In fact, non-doctrinal sources such as tale literature (*setsuwa*), women's letters, and accounts of birth in the Pure Land (*ōjōden*) reveal a striking disjuncture between formal doctrine and understandings on the ground, that is, practiced religion among devotees. James Dobbins has documented examples from the letters of Esshini, the wife of the famous Pure Land preacher Shinran (1173-1262), suggesting the view that women can be reborn into the Pure Land in female form, not having to undergo the transformation into a male body. Dobbins suggests that this belief, which contradicts the

³⁰⁰ T. no. 2611. I have used the translation in Christoph Kleine, "Portraits of Pious Women," 350.

assertions of many doctrinal treatises, was probably the predominant belief among ordinary Pure Land devotees. After all, there are intimations of this view in much popular literature such as the *Genji Monogatari* (Tale of Genji), where Genji expects to share the same lotus pedestal in the Pure Land with his lover, Murasaki, who presumably is expected to be born the Pure Land as a woman.³⁰¹

The *Bodaishin-in Amida-dō kuyō ganmon an*, Bifukumon'in's liturgical prayer for the consecration of a new Amida Hall at Kōyasan, like other literature composed by or for women, looks beyond the constraints on female salvation that the Nāga-girl episode in the *Lotus Sutra* suggests. In other words, it stresses female possibility instead of limitation. In a similar fashion, the court women who commissioned the *Heike nōgyō*, which was probably the most impressive transcription of the *Lotus Sutra* from the Heian era, gave a positive interpretation to this narrative. In the illustrated frontispiece of the *Heike nōgyō*'s twelfth chapter, the Nāga-girl transforms into a glorious female body, not the male form indicated in the sutra text.³⁰² Likewise, verses written about this topic around the same time, including the songs (J. *imayō*) of the itinerant female entertainers compiled in the song collection known as *Ryōjin hishō* or the Buddhist poetry (J. *shakkyōka*) of noblewomen included in a variety of imperial anthologies, praise women's potential for religious salvation instead of focusing on their limitations.³⁰³ Max Moerman suggests that these creative interpretations of the *Lotus Sutra* passage constituted a "constructive theological project" that emphasized women's agency.³⁰⁴

The liturgical prayer for the consecration of the Amida Hall at the Bodaishin'in is ambiguous as to whether or not Bifukumon'in will have to be transformed into a man in order to

³⁰¹ Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 104.

³⁰² For illustrations and discussions of the *Heike nōgyō*, see Julia Meech-Pekarik, "Disguised Scripts and Hidden Poems in an Illustrated Heian Sūtra," and Willa Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra*.

³⁰³ Kamens, "Dragon-Girl, Maiden-flower, Buddha," 402-403.

³⁰⁴ *Localizing Paradise*, 191.

be born in Amida's Pure Land. Yet it implies that she can achieve the highest level of birth in the Pure Land. To what extent the liturgical prayer consecrating the Amida Hall at the Bodaishin-in represents Bifukumon'in's own thinking is impossible to know; nonetheless it represents an unusually strong and clear positive assertion of this one woman's potential for salvation, regardless of the doctrinal status of her female body and despite the fact that she could not set foot on Kōyasan.

Bifukumon'in's Vision of Kōyasan

Having examined several confident views regarding Bifukumon'in's potential for spiritual liberation as expressed in the liturgical prayers accompanying her construction projects, we can now turn to her vision of Kōyasan. How did she envision and imagine the mountain? In contrast to Shirakawa and Toba in particular, what difference did Bifukumon'in's inability to set foot on Kōyasan make in her interest in and devotion to Kōyasan? Did it change her views, which were shaped in a major way by the stories that she heard from Toba and others? While aware of the limitations in our knowledge because Bifukumon'in herself did not directly write the relevant extant primary sources, I will show that she probably shared Shirakawa and Toba's vision to some extent but also developed her own distinct perspective.

The liturgical prayers connected to Bifukumon'in's construction activities at Kōyasan reveal that the basic stories about the sacred origins of Kōyasan, the same stories that monks recited to Shirakawa and Toba when they made their pilgrimages to the mountain, informed her overall understanding of this mountain. According to the *Bodaishin-in Amida-dō kuyō ganmon an*, Kōyasan is the place where Kūkai has entered meditation and where the future Buddha Miroku will make his advent: “Kōyasan is the numinous cave that Kōbō Daishi selected and where he entered meditation. It is the famous site where Miroku, the Compassionate One, has

promised to appear in the world.”³⁰⁵ In addition, the *Bodaishin-in kuyō ganmon an* begins with a recitation of the tale about Kūkai's throwing the vajra that landed on Kōyasan, selecting this particular location as the site for his new monastery. This document also mentions the all-important mythic event of Kūkai's entrance into perpetual meditation. These basic stories about the origins of Kōyasan show little variation from the major mythic narratives examined in previous chapters.

The 1159 *Bifukumon'in ryōji*, a document that announces Bifukumon'in's intention to donate the Arakawa estate to the Sūtra Repository at Kōyasan, expresses similar ideas regarding the sacred significance of Kōyasan. This text states that Kōyasan is a numinous land where Kūkai has entered meditation and that the mountain is a pure land where release from the cycle of rebirth is possible.³⁰⁶ This particular view that a visit to the mountain guarantees unimaginably quick progress along the Buddhist path, probably first appeared around the middle of the twelfth century.

We find two major commonalities between the religious faith expressed in this document and in the prayers accompanying Shirakawa's and Toba's sūtra dedications and burials at the Inner Sanctum. First, those who composed the 1159 *Bifukumon'in ryōji* express devotion to Kōbō Daishi and Miroku Bodhisattva, in accordance with the general cult of Kōyasan exhibited by the pilgrims who had dedicated Buddhist scriptures at the Inner Sanctum. Second, both cases express prayers for the salvation of their sponsors and others in the afterlife.³⁰⁷

However, the places at Kōyasan where the devotion was performed was different in the cases of Shirakawa and Toba, and that of Bifukumon'in. Up to this point, as we witnessed in chapters two and three, the sūtra burials and sūtra dedications usually were performed in front of

³⁰⁵ *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 319.

³⁰⁶ *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 329.

³⁰⁷ Miyano, “Jūisseiki kara jūsan seiki ni okeru reijō Kōyasan keisei no ikkōsatsu,” 169.

Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum. However, in Bifukumon'in's case, the liturgical prayers do not show a special interest in Kūkai's tomb. Instead, they use phrases pointing to Kōyasan as a whole. For example, the *Bodaishin-in Amida-dō kuyō ganmon an* states, "Kōyasan is truly the place where the Buddhist Dharma will spread. It is the land of the luxuriant forest of karmic merit."³⁰⁸

Miyano Toshimitsu suggests that, with these documents, we can see how Kōyasan was increasingly being seen as a numinous place in ways that went beyond the cults of Kōbō Daishi and Miroku Bodhisattva.³⁰⁹ In fact, as Kōyasan came to be associated not only with Kūkai but with multiple pure lands and the cults of various buddhas and bodhisattvas, the kind of devotional practices conducted there also multiplied, as did the places on the mountain where they were performed. Bifukumon'in's sponsorship of the construction of the Dainichi Hall and Amida Hall at the Bodaishin-in, a temple complex at Kōyasan located between Kūkai's Inner Sanctum and the central monastic complex, is one concrete example of the diversification of religious practice at Kōyasan. This activity exemplifies devotional activity apart from Kūkai's tomb, which was almost always the main destination of pilgrims from the capital, and it also represents the growing cult of Amida Buddha at Kōyasan. Kōyasan and Pure Land devotion will be addressed in the following chapter, where I will also show the increasingly prominent devotion to human saints other than Kūkai on the mountain. In accordance with this phenomenon, saints such as Kyōkai (1001-1093), a figure strongly associated with early Pure Land worship at Kōyasan, were memorialized in their own portrait halls, where pilgrims visited to pay their respects.

³⁰⁸ *Wakayama kenshi, kodai shiryō*, vol. 2, 319.

³⁰⁹ Miyano, "Jūisseiki kara jūsan seiki ni okeru reijō Kōyasan keisei no ikkōsatsu," 169.

At this point, we must ask the following questions: Did Bifukumon'in's position and status as a woman influence her overall view of Kōyasan? Did not being able to set foot on the mountain while alive make any difference in how she imagined the mountain? Could it be that she did not show any special interest in Kūkai's tomb and the Portrait Hall because she knew that she would never be able to visit these locations? Toba had planned to visit specific sacred locations on the mountain such as Kūkai's tomb, which for him was more important than anywhere else. We can recall that in the 1124 record of Toba's initial journey to Kōyasan, Kūkai's tomb serves as a metonym for the entire mountain. In contrast, even if Bifukumon'in had heard stories about Kūkai's living presence at the Inner Sanctum, she perhaps did not become as interested in these particular holy sites because she could never actually visit them, make gifts there, or perform magnificent ceremonies in these locations. Had she been able to visit Kōyasan perhaps her interest in the main Kūkai-centered sites on the mountain would have been stronger. Instead, the activity that she sponsored at the mountain for the most part centered on temples not directly affiliated with Kūkai's memory.

Bifukumon'in's desire to obtain birth in the Pure Land, or *ōjō*, by means of religious activity at Kōyasan did not abate but instead continued until the culminating act of installing her remains on the mountain. Bifukumon'in died on the twenty-third day of the eleventh month of Eiryaku 1 (1160). On the following day, a funeral was conducted, and her body was cremated. On this day, her remains were carried to the Toba Rikyū detached palace, which had begun functioning as a mausoleum for the royal family. While he was alive, Retired Emperor Toba had already decided that her grave would be located there. After all, other stūpas at the same place would hold the remains of Toba himself and those of his grandfather, Retired Emperor Shirakawa. However, contrary to Toba's decision, Bifukumon'in left a will stipulating that her

remains be deposited at Kōyasan. As a result, someone took her remains to the mountain, where they were installed in a stūpa at the Bodaishin-in.

Depositing Bifukumon'in's remains at Kōyasan in 1160 was a prominent example of this practice in the earliest period in which it occurred. As we saw in chapter 3, beginning with the interment of Horikawa's remains at Kōyasan in 1108, in the twelfth century both men and women started having their remains transported to Kōyasan in order to rest eternally in the presence of Kōbō Daishi. In 1153, the remains of Ninnaji Monastic Imperial Prince Kakuho, who had made a number of well-documented pilgrimages to Kōyasan during his life, were interred in a stūpa on Kōyasan. Five years later, Fujiwara no Tadamasa enshrined his mother's bones within a statue of Dainichi Nyorai at the temple Henjō-in on the mountain. Following the installation of Bifukumon'in's remains at Kōyasan, the remains of her son, emperor Konoe (1139-1155), were also interred on the mountain.³¹⁰

That women could be interred on this sacred mountain is notable because it shows that the *nyonin kekkai* prohibited only women still alive but not the relics of deceased women.³¹¹ In contrast to their prohibition of living women, mountain temple complexes allowed women's ashes and relics to be interred within the pure precincts of the sacred area. Thus it seems that people envisioned such ashes and relics as not embodying the same hindrances as the living women from whose bodies they had come. Relics from women's bodies were not bound by the same logic about the limitations and impurity of the female body that applied to living, breathing women.

³¹⁰ Brian Ruppert, "Beyond Death and the Afterlife," 115.

³¹¹ A number of scholars have written about the interring of women's ashes at sacred sites as a way of circumventing the *nyonin kekkai*. The classic study is "Hone no yukue," chapter 2 of Nishiguchi Junko's *Onna no chikara*, translated as "Where the Bones Go" in Barbara Ruch's *Engendering Faith*.

Bifukumon'in desire to have her remains be interred at Kōyasan reveals her strong devotion to the mountain that apparently had great soteriological value for her. Even if she could not enter the mountain while alive, she selected this particular mountain as the most appropriate place for the long-term interment of her remains.

Conclusion

Bifukumon'in was an active participant in the Kōyasan cult, a cult that continued to grow, change, and develop over the course of the twelfth century. While many of her religious views regarding the significance of Kōyasan were continuous with those held by Shirakawa and Toba, Bifukumon'in also held different interests, for example in the Bodaishin-in, an area of the sacred mountain apart from the Kūkai-centered sites that had been the locus of devotion for most of the pilgrims up until this time. The liturgical prayers connected to her major construction projects indicate the growing sense that Kōyasan as a whole was a numinous site where a wide range of devotional activity was beginning to flourish. In addition, Bifukumon'in's construction projects and associated liturgical prayers may also reflect her lack of specific interest in Kūkai-related sites, stemming from the fact that she could not physically visit the mountain to see them.

I have shown the ways in which these liturgical prayers reveal Bifukumon'in's creative efforts to circumvent the challenges that female devotees faced in the medieval Japanese religious world. In spite of common assumptions that women were greatly limited in the liberative possibilities to which they could aspire, those who drafted these liturgical prayers expressed great optimism regarding Bifukumon'in's ultimate salvation. Furthermore, although there existed clear prohibitions against living women at Kōyasan and other sacred mountains, Bifukumon'in was not deterred in sending part of herself, her hair, to the mountain even before her death. Just as several scholars recently have argued, elite women in medieval Japan indeed

were hardly passive recipients of the rhetoric in doctrinal texts suggesting that their possibilities for salvation as women were drastically inferior to the religious possibilities of men. The liturgical prayers connected to Bifukumon'in's construction projects at Kōyasan provide evidence complementing the portrayal of the world of actual religious practice in other non-doctrinal texts such as women's letters and accounts of birth in the Pure Land (*ōjōden*). In other words, the wide-ranging, multifaceted religious world represented in all of these non-doctrinal forms of literature reveal the need for scholars of medieval Japanese religion to analyze a wide variety of primary sources and not to base all of their knowledge of religious life on only doctrinal texts. After all, doctrinal texts represent the perspectives of elite scholar-monks but not the views of laypeople, who usually did not study Buddhist texts and doctrines extensively.

Bifukumon'in's devotion at Kōyasan shows that Kōyasan constituted an important site for the devotion of at least a few elite women, even though they could not travel there while alive. In life, Bifukumon'in had to express her devotion from a considerable distance, and I do not wish to overstate from her example the involvement of women in the Kōyasan cult during this era of Japanese history. Nevertheless, Bifukumon'in's strong interest in the mountain near the end of her life suggests that this religious site had great appeal for a few aristocratic and royal women in the capital. Around the same time, other aristocratic women such as Fujiwara no Tadamasa's mother had their ashes interred on Kōyasan, showing more evidence that at least a few elite women in the capital were devoted to Kōyasan. The prohibition against women at Kōyasan meant that these individuals could not engage in the same form of direct pilgrimage to Kōyasan as men. Not being able to travel to the most sacred areas of the mountain of course meant that women could not experience the Kōyasan cult in the same vivid manner as the men who could participate in extravagant ceremonies at Kūkai's tomb and who could directly offer gifts of food,

clothing, and other provisions to the monks in residence on the peak. However, such a prohibition did not prevent Bifukumon'in, a woman with elite status and extraordinary financial means, from sponsoring the construction of temple buildings and from having her remains sent to be interred on the mountain after death. In short, Kōyasan may not have been “a woman's place” like Kumano, yet it was a place towards which this one powerful woman directed considerable energy in fulfilling her pious desires.³¹²

³¹² Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, Chapter 5, “A Woman’s Place,” 181-232, analyzes the devotion of women at Kumano, a large religious site where, in contrast to Kōyasan, women were permitted to travel in the medieval era.

Chapter 5

Seeking the Pure Land at Kōyasan: Fujiwara no Sukenaga and the *Kōyasan ōjōden*

Introduction

Kōyasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was an increasingly vibrant sacred mountain. This was a period of great growth for this religious institution and pilgrimage site. The various visions of the mountain during this era, I have endeavored to show, have been mediated by the different genres of literature that feature this place, as well as by the particular historical moments in which such accounts were composed. For example, in chapter one I have shown how the *Shugyō engi*, which was both a product and producer of pilgrimages to this mountain in the late Heian era, renders Kōyasan a sacred place in accordance with the *engi* genre of temple and shrine legends. This text emphasizes that important sacred events have occurred on the mountain, in particular, Kūkai's entrance into meditation in 835. In the pilgrimage diaries that I analyzed in chapters two and three, we find that such legends were told to impress upon the aristocrats and royals who traveled to Kōyasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that they were visiting sacred geography. Furthermore, this literature reveals much about the beliefs that motivated these high-ranking pilgrims to make the distant journey to Kōyasan in Kii province. In other words, we find vivid portraits of their deep reverence for Kūkai and their desire to honor him with magnificent ceremonies, conducted especially at his tomb. From this literature, we have witnessed how Kōyasan became a site worthy of visitation because of the belief that important events had taken place there both in the distant past and in the much more recent past. In addition, visits to this holy spot were thought to create karmic merit.

The *Kōyasan ōjōden* 高野山往生伝 (late twelfth century, Accounts of those from Kōyasan who achieved birth in the Pure Land), which is the focus of the present chapter, has much in common with the literature considered in previous chapters. This text belongs to the *ōjōden* genre of religious literature, religious biographies of Buddhist practitioners who have purportedly been born in a pure land at death. It contains the biographies of many men reported to have achieved birth in a pure land following their deaths at Kōyasan. Like the *Shugyō engi*, it emphasizes the sacred history of Kōyasan by focusing on important events that have occurred on the mountain. For example, as we will see below, according to this text, holy men have left their "sacred traces" on the mountain and it is now worth visiting because of this unusual status. In addition, the *Kōyasan ōjōden* resonates with the pilgrimage diaries. In fact, while somewhat unusual for the *ōjōden* genre of religious literature, the *Kōyasan ōjōden* is itself a pilgrimage record, that is, the record of Fujiwara no Sukenaga's pilgrimage to Kōyasan and his collection of a set of extraordinary narratives about the lives of a diverse group of Buddhist practitioners at Kōyasan. As we see in many pilgrimage diaries from this time, individuals like Sukenaga often made pilgrimages to shrines and temples in order to confirm miraculous stories that they had already encountered.

In spite of these commonalities with the texts and issues treated in previous chapters, the *Kōyasan ōjōden* also contains several major differences. In addition, more so than the *Shugyō engi* and the pilgrimage diaries from the Insei era, this text gives us a vision of the range of practices occurring on Kōyasan during this time and the variety of religious goals that the residents and a few pilgrims possessed. From the narratives of this text, we see that Kōbō Daishi received the devotion of many of the monks who lived on the mountain, yet there was also much religious diversity in the sense that there were multiple objects of religious devotion.

In this chapter, I will examine the process of composition of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* and the way in which it was related to the author Fujiwara no Sukenaga's (1118-1195) religious practice. This topic has yet to be investigated in English-language scholarship on the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.³¹³ Specifically, I will seek to answer the following questions: What was the nature of Sukenaga's religious faith? How did his pilgrimage to Kōyasan and subsequent composition of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* relate to his religious aspirations? For him, what was most significant about Kōyasan, and why did he want to visit the mountain? Finally, what dimensions of the religious practice on the mountain did he most want to promote in his literary collection?

I will show that compelling stories led Sukenaga to make a pilgrimage to Kōyasan. Some of these stories expanded and became more vivid once Sukenaga visited the places connected to the holy men about whom he had heard prior to traveling to Kōyasan. In addition, with his interest in gaining birth in a pure land, Sukenaga apparently tried to gather new stories about other saints who had attained birth in a pure land after dying on this particular numinous peak. Sukenaga then added these stories to the ones that he already had and compiled the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.

Sukenaga wanted to put all of these narratives into wider circulation and to convince others to also make the trip to Kōyasan, to continue performing the devotion to the saints whose reputations he was promoting. Promoting the reputations of the thirty-eight holy men treated in his collection also was connected to Sukenaga's own religious aspirations, in that through compiling these stories of holy men he could gain karmic merit to be used towards achieving birth in Amida's Pure Land. Praising those thought to have achieved birth in the Pure Land was

³¹³ While Jacqueline Stone, "The Secret Art of Dying," and Donald Drummond, "Negotiating Influence," have made effective use of this primary source, they show little interest in the connection between this text and the religious practice of its author, Fujiwara no Sukenaga.

an act believed to form auspicious karmic connections that would assist one's own and others' birth there. Furthermore, the promotion of these saints' reputations was very much entwined with Sukenaga's intention to present Kōyasan as an exceptional place, a numinous peak with extraordinary religious potency. In fact, one of the major arguments that Sukenaga makes by way of his various narratives is that Kōyasan is an unusual place where it is relatively easy to achieve birth in a pure land, just as so many men have already done in this particular sacred location.

Background of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*

The *Kōyasan ōjōden* is one of the most important sources about devotees at Kōyasan who were aspiring for some type of *ōjō*, or birth in a pure land at death. The practitioners represented in this collection were believed to have achieved birth in the western Pure Land of Amida Buddha or some other superior realm. Many world-spheres away to the west, the Pure Land of Amida Buddha (Skt. Amitābha), or "Utmost Bliss" (Skt. Sukhāvatī; J. Gokuraku), lies completely outside *saṃsāra*, the cycle of rebirth and suffering from which Buddhists hope to escape. Being born in Amida's Pure Land meant that one had escaped deluded rebirth and would never regress on the path of awakening. In early medieval Japan, Buddhists aspired to a range of postmortem destinations, including the Tosotsu (Skt. Tuṣita) heaven, where the future Buddha Miroku (Skt. Maitreya) resides; Mount Fudaraku (Skt. Potalaka), the paradise of the bodhisattva Kannon (Skt. Avalokiteśvara); or Vulture Peak (J. Ryōjusen), where the eternal Śākyamuni Buddha preaches the Dharma. However, by far the most popular postmortem destination at this time was Amida's Pure Land of Utmost Bliss.³¹⁴

Ōjōden, or "accounts of birth in the Pure Land," played a key role in the spread of beliefs about birth in Amida's Pure Land, in particular for promoting the ideal of dying in a state of right

³¹⁴ Jacqueline Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu," 78.

mindfulness.³¹⁵ *Ōjōden* collections feature biographies of monks, nuns, and lay men and women of a variety of social classes who were believed to have been born in a pure land, usually Amida's Pure Land. In most cases, *ōjōden* describe the final hours of the individual and, in so doing, provide models for what a death with right mindfulness should be. The *ōjōnin* usually are expecting death, sometimes even predicting the day and hour at which they will die. These devotees bathe, put on clean clothes, and sit upright in a posture of meditation or lie down in the "nirvāna position" in which they face west and position their head to the north. Extraordinary signs (*isō*) usually demonstrate the liberative aspect of their death. Signs that Amida has already descended to welcome the person in his Pure Land include strange music, unearthly fragrance in the death chamber, and five-colored clouds that appear in the west. In some cases, the bodies of the deceased emit fragrance rather than decaying, or the bodies remain in the meditation posture even after entering crematory fires. In addition, relatives and close associates, but sometimes complete strangers as well, have dreams revealing the person's birth in Amida's Pure Land. The hagiographical portrayals in *ōjōden* spread a normative ideal about how one should die.

Prior to the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, six previous *ōjōden* collections had been compiled, beginning with Yoshishige no Yasutane's *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* (A record of Japanese who achieved birth in [the Pure Land of] Utmost Bliss, c. 985). Yasutane (c. 931-1002) is known for his Chinese learning, and he was closely associated with Genshin (942-1017), another monk on Mount Hiei, the large Tendai center northeast of the imperial capital. Around the same time that Yasutane compiled the inaugural collection of *ōjōden* in Japan, Genshin completed *Ōjō yōshū* (Essentials of birth in the Pure Land), a seminal religious treatise that had a deep impact on the emergence of Japanese Pure Land thought and practice. *Ōjō yōshū* provides instructions for practice to gain birth in the Pure Land, in particular emphasizing the value of the contemplative

³¹⁵ Frederic J. Kotas, "Ōjōden: Accounts of Rebirth in the Pure Land," 32-33.

nenbutsu, or the visualization of Amida Buddha. In compiling his collection of *ōjōden*, Yasutane also attempted to lead others to practice Buddhism in such a way as to gain entry into Amida's Pure Land. Yet he chose to instruct practitioners with hagiographic images of exemplary deaths that had supposedly been successful. Prior to Yasutane, in China Jiakai's *Jingtu lun* (Treatise on the Pure Land, c. seventh century) presented twenty similar biographies of both clergy and laity. In addition, Wenshen (n.d.) and Shao Kang's (d. 805) collection, *Wangsheng xifang jintu ruiyang zhuan* (Accounts of auspicious responses accompanying birth in the western Pure Land) contains forty-eight such biographies. Yasutane's compilation is a collection of forty-two accounts that he found in previous records and through personal inquiry, about Buddhist devotees regarded as successful attainers of birth in the Pure Land. Following *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*, five other major *ōjōden* collections were produced in the twelfth century, prior to the compilation of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*. These collections included Ōe no Masafusa's *Zoku honchō ōjōden*, Miyoshi no Tameyasu's *Shūi ōjōden* and *Goshūi ōjōden*, Renzen's *Sange ōjōki*, and Fujiwara no Munetomo's *Honchō shinshū ōjōden*.³¹⁶

In contrast to the previous collections, the *Kōyasan ōjōden* includes monks of only one place, Kōyasan. This collection is thus unusual among *ōjōden* in that it focuses upon a single temple instead of featuring people who achieved *ōjō* at a number of different places.³¹⁷

Beginning with Inoue Mitsusada's scholarship on Heian Pure Land Buddhism, which made use of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* as an illuminating document about Pure Land practices on Kōyasan, a number of scholars have studied this text with an eye to the ways in which it reveals

³¹⁶ These collections are all contained in NST, vol. 7, as is the *Dainihon Hokekyō kenki*, which contains many *ōjōden* even though it is not exclusively an *ōjōden* collection.

³¹⁷ *Mii ōjōden* is another *ōjōden* collection focusing on residents of a single place. Its chief editorial principle is to highlight the spiritual attainments of Onjōji monks, in contrast to earlier collections, whose biographies of Tendai clerics were largely limited to monks of Mount Hiei. In this regard, *Mii ōjōden*'s focus differs somewhat from *Kōyasan ōjōden*, even though they both deal with a single place.

the Pure Land faith of the monks of Kōyasan.³¹⁸ These scholars have also used the text because of its valuable information about the formation of Kōyasan as a sacred place more generally. Recent scholarship about authorship of the text has added much to our understanding of this collection and the circumstances in which it was compiled.

This text was composed by Nyojaku如寂, a monk who reveals only a very small amount of information about himself in the preface. For many years, the identity of Nyojaku was unclear, but several scholars have recently shown that he was Sukenaga資長 (1118-1195) of the Hino-ryū日野流 of the Fujiwara clan.³¹⁹ Like many of the men of his family, Sukenaga was active as a courtier in the government. He ascended through various court ranks, including Head Chamberlain (Kurōdo no Tō), Consultant (Sangi), Major Controller of the Left (Sadaiben), and Counselor (Nagon).³²⁰

Sukenaga states in the preface that he maintained his aspiration to be born in the Pure Land even while being very busy in his duties as a government official. Sukenaga himself claims to be a serious person of faith who has done *nenbutsu* practice for many years, hoping to be born in Amida's Pure Land after death. Eventually, in 1181 he decided to seclude himself from the secular world and to single-mindedly engage in Buddhist discipline.

According to his epigraph at the beginning of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, Sukenaga had become a monk of the Hōkaiji temple, which today is located in the Hino area of the Fushimi ward of Kyoto city. Hōkaiji began when Hino Sukenari, Sukenaga's great-great-grandfather, constructed

³¹⁸ See especially Inoue Mitsusada, “Inseiki ni okeru Kōyasan no jōdokyō,” and Gorai Shigeru, *Kōya hijiri*.

³¹⁹ See Murakami Hiroko, “*Kōyasan ōjōden* sensha Nyojaku ni tsuite—sono shinkō to senjutsu ishiki o chūshin ni”; Shimura Kunihiro, “*Ōjōden no keifu*”; and *Nihon setsuwa densetsu daijiten*, s.v. “*Kōyasan ōjōden*” and “Nyojaku.”

³²⁰ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 13.

a Yakushi Hall in the area in 1051.³²¹ This clan temple (*ujidera*) then became famous as a site for the Hino branch of the Fujiwara family's Pure Land faith.

The preface states that Sukenaga first visited Kōyasan in 1184. He left the seclusion of Hōkaiji and climbed Kōyasan. He then engaged in a one-hundred-day period of intense prayer. He met an elderly monk, who encouraged Sukenaga to compile a literary collection of the stories about the men who had obtained birth in a pure land when they died at Kōyasan. According to Sukenaga's preface, this monk had witnessed the deathbed rituals (*rinjū gyōgi*) of many men at Kōyasan. A number of monks at this mountain had achieved *ōjō*, and various extraordinary signs (*isō*) confirmed their births in a pure land. Monks on Kōyasan encouraged Sukenaga to make a record of these *ōjōnin*, or the practitioners who had actually achieved birth in a pure land after death, so that these accounts would be left to later generations. This he did in the manner of Yoshishige no Yasutane and Ōe Masafusa, who had compiled similar collections prior to this time.

By compiling this collection of *ōjōden*, Sukenaga hoped to secure religious benefits, including his own successful entry into the Pure Land. We should note that Sukenaga did not compile this text until near the end of his life, when he was becoming increasingly aware of his approaching death. In the preface he writes, "If I transmit [these stories] to later generations, I will plant good karmic roots (*zenkon* 善根)... I have practiced the *nenbutsu* for many years... What day will the Buddha [come and] welcome me? By all means I will be born in the Pure Land in my next rebirth."³²²

³²¹ The Hino branch of the Fujiwara family produced many Enryakuji monks and this temple enjoyed a close relationship with the Enryakuji temple at Mount Hiei, one of the major centers of Tendai Buddhism (Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 17).

³²² NST, vol. 7, 695.

Sukenaga probably wrote the *Kōyasan ōjōden* in a very short period of time after 1187. The thirty-eight biographies in this collection for the most part are presented in chronological fashion. They cover about one hundred years from Kyōkai's death in 1094 to Shōin's in 1187. The monk of the thirty-third account passed away the year that Sukenaga arrived on Kōyasan. The final five monks were probably still alive when Sukenaga came. It is possible that Sukenaga witnessed the deaths of these five monks still living at Kōyasan during his stay on the mountain. Six of the men included in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* had been included in previous *ōjōden* collections. For example, in compiling his collection, Sukenaga appropriated the biographies of Kyōkai, Kiyohara Masakuni, Yuihan, and Rentai from the *Shūi ōjōden* and the biographies of Keisen and Shinmyō from the *Sange ōjōki*.³²³ Sukenaga included these prior stories but also added his own editorial remarks to these tales.

The practitioners portrayed in this collection display a variety of geographical and religious backgrounds, reflecting the social realities on the mountain at the time. Many came from nearby. Among the *ōjōnin* included in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, as many as thirteen were from Kii province. Yet several of those included came from faraway locales such as Kyūshū, Tosa, and Shinano. Rentai moved to Kōyasan from Tosa; Minami Chikushi and Kita Chikushi, from Kyūshū; and Sainen, from Shinnō. There are also a fairly large number of monks who moved to Kōyasan in middle age after studying a range of Buddhist traditions. For example, Kyōkai had previously lived at Kōfukuji, one of the Seven Great Temples of Nara and the headquarters of the Japanese Hossō school. Rinken came from Tōdaiji, the enormous Nara temple that had been the center of the “provincial temples” system (J. *kokubunji*). Rentai and Shōyo had been monks at Ninnaji, a temple in the northwestern area of Heiankyō and the headquarters of the Omuro

³²³ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 22.

lineage of the Shingon tradition. Kyōjin and Shinkaku began their monastic careers at Onjōji, the headquarters of the Jimon branch of the Tendai tradition.

Despite this variety in geographical and religious background, the practitioners in this collection are primarily male monastics. Kiyohara Masakuni is the only lay person included, suggesting most of the practitioners on the mountain who were seeking *ōjō* were usually monks. In addition, the exclusion of all nuns from the collection is in accord with the prohibition against women on Kōyasan.

Sukenaga's Informants

By the late twelfth century, when Sukenaga composed the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, there existed a network of monastic connections through which information about Kōyasan circulated. This network, comprised at least in part by several eminent monks who were traveling often between Kōyasan and the capital, served Sukenaga as a source of information. This section serves as an introduction to this network of monastic connections in which Sukenaga participated. I will focus especially on two renowned monks, Butsugon and Shukaku, who probably played a role, if somewhat indirectly, in the composition of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*. Yet I will show that it is possible to overemphasize the role that these two men played in the composition of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, as Murakami Hiroko has done. Instead I will stress Sukenaga's active participation in a large, complex monastic network in which he gathered the various biographies and then composed this document. Sukenaga probably interacted with Butsugon and Shukaku and may have gained some information from them. However, he was also interacting with a number of other monks, many of whom went unnamed in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*. Ultimately, regardless of the advice and encouragement that he received from others, Sukenaga was most responsible for the stories that he eventually included and for the ways in which he presents these narratives.

Butsugon-bō Shōshin (or Butsugon, d. 1194) at the time was an extremely important Buddhist monk who had a very wide range of personal connections and influence not only at Kōyasan but also in the capital. Renowned as both an esoteric monk and *nenbutsu* practitioner, he twice held the post of Head of Academic Studies (Gakutō) at the Daidenbō-in.³²⁴ The Daidenbō-in constituted a center for Buddhist study that Kakuban (1095-1144), later revered as one of the few most important monks in the history of the Japanese Shingon tradition, second in importance only to Kūkai, had built in 1132 on Kōyasan. Butsugon was a disciple of the monk Kyōjin (d. 1141), the subject of Biography 13 in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, and when Sukenaga asked, Butsugon conveyed the information about Kyōjin that Sukenaga reports. Kyōjin had served as the second Head of Academic Studies at the Daidenbō-in. Butsugon was a very knowledgeable disciple of Kyōjin in Kakuban's Dharma lineage. Butsugon also belonged to the Chūin-ryū, the dominant Dharma lineage at Kōyasan that included the prominent Kōyasan monks Meizan and Ryōzen.

A number of different historical sources provide portraits of Butsugon's religious practice at Kōyasan and in the capital, where he interacted with renowned courtiers. *Gyokuyō*, the diary by Kujō Kanezane (1149-1207), who served in the prominent political position of regent, shows that Butsugon received Kanezane's devotion. Butsugon's name appears frequently in *Gyokuyō* over a period of about thirty years at the end of the twelfth century.³²⁵ In his diary, Kanezane

³²⁴ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 44.

³²⁵ See the entries from Jōan to Kenkyū (1171-1199). The *Gyokuyō* constitutes the most important source of information about Butsugon's religious activities. Most of the entries are about Butsugon's rituals and lectures on Buddhist teachings. For example, on Jōan 3.3.30 Butsugon came and discussed Vulture Peak, the mountain where the Buddha preached the Dharma. On Jōan 4.3.3 he visited and discussed issues pertaining to the Shingon tradition. On Jishō 1.9.9, he lectured on the doctrine of the emptiness of the five aggregates (*skandhas*) that comprise a human being. On Jishō 4.4.7, he made an offering of the *Heart Sūtra* in his own handwriting to an image of Kūkai. On Jishō 5.2.25 Butsugon was summoned and then taught a mantra. Later, on Kenkyū 3.1.24, Butsugon received the mudrā and mantra of Kichijōten (.

An entry for Angen 3.4.12 reveals that Butsugon was skillful in the art of medicine. In addition, the entry for Juei 2.1.29 states that Butsugon performed a successful medical examination (This note continues below).

claims that Butsugon has special healing abilities, among other skills. Butsugon lectured on scripture, cured the illnesses of Kanezane and the women of his household, and served as an instructor for Kanezane's *nenbutsu* practice. In addition, several other different records reveal Butsugon's prominence in the practice of Buddhism at Kōyasan. For example, as Inoue Mitsusada first noted, Butsugon was one of the seven holy men (*shōnin*) who conducted rituals connected to the Urabon during Monastic Imperial Prince Kakuhō's pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1149.³²⁶

Sukenaga probably obtained from Butsugon information beyond what he used to compose the biography about Kyōjin. Butsugon's prominent role within the temples that Kakuban had established ensured that he was in close contact with the numerous monks who were studying and practicing esoteric Buddhism in these religious institutions. For example, Butsugon probably also conveyed information used in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* biographies about Kenkai, Shōchoku, Shōin, and other monks who had served in various posts at the Daidenbō-in and the Mitsugon-in, which were both established by Kakuban in 1132.³²⁷ Kenkai was the fourth monk to fulfill the role of Head of Academic Studies at the Daidenbō-in. He also served as the first abbot (*inju*) of the Mitsugon-in. Shōin twice served as the Head of Academic Studies at the Daidenbō-in and also as the second abbot of the Mitsugon-in. Shōchoku ascended to the position of the fourth abbot of the Mitsugon-in.

There also exist many entries about Butsugon's visits with Kanezane during which they discussed the Dharma or Butsugon transmitted the precepts to Kanezane or members of Kanezane's family. For example, on Jōan 1.4.12, Butsugon came to Kanezane and preached on the Buddhist teachings. He also authenticated a Buddha relic for Kanezane at this time. On Jōan 3.9.9, Butsugon transmitted the precepts to court ladies. On Angen 2.8.26 Kanezane himself received the precepts. On Jishō 1.9.21, Butsugon was summoned on behalf of a sick man, and they had Butsugon conduct a ceremony for renouncing the world. On Jishō 3.9.8 Kanezane began his customary practice of the *nenbutsu* and received the precepts from Butsugon. Again on Jishō 4.9.8, Kanezane summoned Butsugon to serve as his guide in his customary practice of the *nenbutsu*.

These entries and many similar ones provide vivid portraits of Butsugon's activities.

³²⁶ Inoue Mitsusada, "Inseiki ni okeru Kōyasan no jōdokyō," 379.

³²⁷ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 45.

Given that Butsugon also belonged to Ryōzen's Dharma lineage based at Kongōbuji, he probably also had much information about monks affiliated with Kongōbuji who purportedly attained birth in a pure land. Thus, because of Butsugon's wide range of affiliations at Kōyasan in both the lineages established by Kakuban and those based at the central Kongōbuji temple, he was in a position to know much about many of the monks included in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.³²⁸ In addition, Butsugon was probably a key player in convincing Sukenaga which monks to include in his collection.³²⁹

I will now consider Sukenaga's second major informant, Shukaku. Sukenaga indicates that he also received information about some of the monks that he included in his collection of *ōjōden* at the influential temple Ninnaji in the capital. Sukenaga possibly was consulting with the prominent monastic imperial prince Shukaku at this temple.

One point about the composition of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* that we should note is that Sukenaga's pilgrimage retreat at Kōyasan took place around exactly the same time as the two monastic imperial princes Shukaku and Dōhō were making a pilgrimage to the mountain. Shukaku ascended Kōyasan on the eighth day of the third month of Genryaku 1 (1184), just one month prior to Sukenaga's pilgrimage. According to the *Ninnaji goden*, Dōhō made a pilgrimage to the mountain on the sixth day of the next month.³³⁰ Sukenaga himself possibly accompanied Dōhō on his pilgrimage to Kōyasan given that the dates for the two pilgrimages are so close.³³¹ Shukaku and Dōhō descended Kōyasan very soon after Zen'e's *ōjō* on the ninth day of the ninth month of Genryaku 1 (1184), so they and the men who accompanied them may have witnessed

³²⁸ Gorai Shigeru, *Kōya hijiri*, 115-119, speculates that he played a major role behind the scenes in the compilation of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.

³²⁹ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 46.

³³⁰ *Ninnaji shiryō, jishihen*, vol. 2, 151.

³³¹ The *Kōyasan ōjōden*, NST, vol. 7, 695, states that Sukenaga traveled to Kōyasan in the fourth month of Genryaku 1 but does not give any specific information about the day of the month on which the journey commenced.

or heard about Zen'e's death. Once Shukaku and Dōhō returned to the capital, Sukenaga visited Ninnaji and possibly asked them about whether Zen'e's death suggested his birth in the Pure Land.³³²

It is highly probable that Sukenaga knew Shukaku because of his family's connections with the royal family. Sukenaga and his family had already maintained close relationships with Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa and his sons Shukaku and Dōhō for a number of years. Sukenaga had served as an attendant to Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa. In addition, his eldest son accompanied Go-Shirakawa on a pilgrimage to Kōyasan, where he served as a messenger taking an imperial order to the Inner Sanctum. This son also was visiting Shukaku in the capital in his capacity as the retired emperor's attendant. Furthermore, there is enough evidence to suggest that Sukenaga himself probably visited Shukaku and Dōhō at Ninnaji following his withdrawal from the world and his entry into monasticism.³³³

By this point in Japanese history, Ninnaji was renowned as a Buddhist temple where both emperors and sons of emperors renounced the world and then lived out the rest of their lives as Buddhist monks. Emperor Kōkō (r. 884-887) had Ninnaji constructed starting in 886. In 888, Emperor Uda sponsored the ceremony of dedication (*rakkei kuyō*) for the Golden Hall, and the temple was named Ninnaji. In 899, after Uda had abdicated the throne, he took Yakushin, a Shingon master, as his precept master and renounced the world at Ninnaji. After Emperor Uda died, he was succeeded by Kankū, Kanchō, and Saishin at this temple at Ninnaji. Then, Shōshin, who was the son of Emperor Sanjō, entered Ninnaji. Kakugyō, the son of Emperor Shirakawa, then followed and became the first monastic imperial prince (*hōshinnō*).

³³² Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 47.

³³³ Ibid.

After this, from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura era, monastic imperial princes Kakuho (Kōya Omuro), Kakushō, Shukaku, Dōhō, and Dōjo succeeded each other in receiving the Dharma transmission at Ninnaji. These men were the sons of the retired emperors, the individuals who possessed the most political power at this point in Japanese history. This group of monastic imperial princes had an intimate relationship with the administration of the political rule of the retired emperors (*insei*). For example, they conducted various esoteric rituals (*mishihō* 御修法) on behalf of the state. At the same time, some of these politically prominent monks served as the superintendents (*kengyō*) of the four imperial temples known as *shienji* 四円寺 and the six imperial temples known as *rokushōji* 六勝寺, temples in the capital with strong connections to the royal family.³³⁴

One of the most prominent monastic imperial princes, Shukaku (1150-1202), achieved a position of high stature in the religious world of early medieval Japan. In 1160, under the tutelage of his uncle Monastic Imperial Prince Kakushō, he became a monk and in 1168 received esoteric initiation. After Kakushō died in 1169, Shukaku assumed the position of head administrator (*monzeki*) of Ninnaji as well as a series of other temples. He became the head (*kengyō* or *bettō*) of the retired emperor's imperial temples. His authority was based at least in part on the extraordinary effects of the state rituals that he conducted. He received initiation into both Ono and Hirosawa lineages, the largest lineages of transmission within the Shingon tradition of his day. In addition, Shukaku possessed a strong interest in Kōyasan. The *Ninnaji*

³³⁴ Some of these monastic imperial princes were not so involved in politics and retired to a cloister (*monzeki*). In contrast, others rose to prominent positions such as head abbot of large religious institutions. A very important historical development was that the imperial abbots of Ninnaji took over control of the imperial temples and the estates of such temples (Adolphson, *Gates of Power*, 87).

goden reveals a number of pilgrimages that Shukaku conducted to the sacred mountain, beginning with his initial pilgrimage retreat in 1177.³³⁵

Murakami Hiroko argues that Shukaku played a major role in commissioning the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.³³⁶ By means of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, Shukaku was trying to make others know about the sacred nature of Kōyasan, Murakami argues, where he and others were performing religious disciplines. At that time, Shukaku was working to increase his own power and authority. By having Sukenaga describe the sacred land Kōyasan, where people had died and achieved birth in a pure land, argues Murakami, Shukaku expected that his own religious authority would increase, since he himself had practiced Buddhism on this peak.

Around this time, Shukaku and other monastic imperial princes at Ninnaji engaged in several major actions probably motivated at least in part by their desire to gain more religious authority within the Shingon tradition. For example, in 1186, Shukaku had the *Sanjūjōsashi* 三十帖冊子, a small ritual manual that Kūkai obtained during his trip to China in the early ninth century, moved from Tōji, the important Shingon temple in the capital, to Ninnaji. Murakami believes that in this instance we can see Shukaku's attempt to increase the monastic imperial princes' own religious authority by possessing objects connected to Kūkai.³³⁷ According to Murakami, it is also possible to imagine that, from the perspective of the monastic imperial princes, who had the responsibility of protecting the state and praying for the well-being of the sovereign, pilgrimages to Kōyasan were a form of religious discipline that had the purpose of increasing their power. Furthermore, argues Murakami, it is not difficult to imagine that

³³⁵ See the entries about Shukaku in *Ninnaji goden*, *Ninnaji shiryō*, *jishihen*, vol. 2, 30-38.

³³⁶ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 46-50.

³³⁷ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 48.

Shukaku welcomed the compilation of the *Kōyasan ōjōden* with great enthusiasm because it makes known the sacredness of Kōyasan.³³⁸

One potential problem with Murakami's argument is that the *Kōyasan ōjōden* does not give any direct evidence that Shukaku commissioned the text. The text offers abundant evidence that Sukenaga was consulting with monks at Ninnaji and probably visiting there. However, the text provides no direct evidence that he was meeting with Shukaku, or that Shukaku made an effort to ensure that Sukenaga compile these narratives into a new text that would be disseminated in order at least partly to enhance Shukaku's own religious authority.

Furthermore, Murakami's argument diminishes Sukenaga's agency and the major role that he played in composing this collection. Murakami in effect elevates Butsugon and Shukaku above Sukenaga, even though he provides only indirect evidence that these two prominent men were consulting with Sukenaga and encouraging him to compile this collection. We must not lose sight of Sukenaga as the ultimate author and editor.

However, even if Shukaku did not commission the *Kōyasan ōjōden* directly, the text indeed provides a vivid portrait of concrete human connections between Ninnaji and Kōyasan. It helps us to imagine a situation in which many monks based at Ninnaji were travelling to Kōyasan, where they conducted ceremonies and experienced unusual numinous events. These individuals then returned to Ninnaji and in the capital probably played a major role in disseminating the various legends associated with the cult of Kōyasan.³³⁹

In this section we have overviewed the network among various Shingon prelates that Sukenaga relied upon for information in compiling his collection. Shukaku and Butsugon were

³³⁸ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 48.

³³⁹ Hyōtani Kazuko, "Kōbō Daishi nyūjō densetsu to Ninnaji," even argues that the monastic imperial princes at Ninnaji played a major role in developing and spreading the legends that Kūkai has entered meditation at Kōyasan and now awaits the advent of Miroku Bodhisattva.

two of the most prominent monks within this network, and Sukenaga probably had extensive discussions about Kōyasan with them, given their strong interest in this particular sacred peak. Sukenaga undoubtedly interacted with a number of other monks both at Kōyasan and in the capital while gathering information that he would eventually compile in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*. Regardless of the extent to which these monks wanted to promote Kōyasan, Sukenaga himself made the final editorial decisions about which stories to include and about which features of the Buddhist institution would be memorialized.

A Special Place for Achieving Birth in a Pure Land

The *Kōyasan ōjōden* provides significant evidence for the distinctive ways in which people in the eleventh and twelfth centuries understood Kōyasan as a site of religious practice. For several reasons, the text reveals, people viewed this cultic center as being especially sacred. One of the reasons that the place was deemed sacred was that pilgrimage to this place created karmic merit that contributed to one's birth in a pure land at death. Like Shitennōji and other numinous sites, it offered great soteriological advantage to those who practiced Buddhism on this particular mountain.

In keeping with the conventions of the *ōjōden* genre of religious literature, Sukenaga stresses the wonder and value of birth in a pure land by reporting many extraordinary signs (*isō*) that indicated that particular individuals had indeed achieved birth in a pure land. These stories draw on the conventional stock of imagery associated with *ōjō*, including the presence of unusual natural occurrences, revelatory dreams, and the unnatural preservation of corpses—all signs that the person in question succeeded in gaining birth in a pure land.

Some of the stories, such as the biography of Kyōtoku (unknown dates, Biography 8), suggest that people in the capital and elsewhere were aware of the extraordinary signs that

indicated the *ōjō* of holy men at Kōyasan. After Kyōtoku died, Ajari Shūkan from Ōmi province, who at the time lived at Ninnaji, had a dream revealing that Kyōtoku had been born in the Pure Land. In his dream, a figured silk banner flew from the western direction (where the Pure Land was) toward Kōyasan. The banner then flew back to the west. This sign indicated to Shūkan that at Kōyasan Kyōtoku had achieved birth in the Pure Land.³⁴⁰ This story shows that people in the capital, in particular at Ninnaji, were aware that Kōyasan was a site where *ōjō* was possible.

Another biography in this collection indicates that some individuals traveled to Kōyasan specifically because it was a site of enormous spiritual potential, where one could fairly easily secure the karmic merit needed for birth in Amida's Pure Land. In the second story in this collection, Kiyohara Masakuni (1007-1093) moves to Kōyasan in order to be born in Amida Buddha's Pure Land when he dies. According to this text, Kiyohara Masakuni loved the military arts from a very young age, and there was no evil that he did not commit. However, at the age of sixty-one, suddenly he renounced the world, and after that he devoted himself entirely to gaining birth in the Pure Land. Every day for twenty-seven years he chanted the *nenbutsu* one hundred thousand times. One day, Nichien Shōnin, a monk who had gone to Tang China, appeared to Masakuni in a dream and instructed him, "If you want to be reborn in the Pure Land of Supreme Bliss, you should live on Kōyasan."³⁴¹ After reporting that Kiyohara Masakuni indeed followed the advice that he received in the dream and moved to Kōyasan, the text then describes two major indications that this man achieved birth in the Pure Land of Supreme Bliss upon his death. First, a few days prior to Kiyohara Masakuni's death, Shinmyō, a monk who lived nearby who was also called the Holy Man of Kita Chikushi (Kita Chikushi no hijiri 北筑紫聖), had an

³⁴⁰ NST, vol. 7, 698.

³⁴¹ NST, vol. 7, 696.

auspicious dream in which he saw Amida Buddha and his holy retinue coming to greet Masakuni. After Masakuni died while facing the western direction, another revelatory dream confirmed that he had indeed been reborn in Amida Buddha's paradise. A person spending the night praying to the *kami* Kunikakasu at the Hinokuma shrine in Kii province had a dream indicating that Masakuni had been born in the Pure Land.³⁴²

Nichien Shōnin's instructions to Kiyohara Masakuni show the belief that, because of the mountain's potency as a sacred site and the number of *ōjōnin* who had died there, practice in residence on Kōyasan was thought to vastly increase one's chances of birth in the Pure Land. In other words, for many devotees at this time, Kōyasan was one of a number of places in Japan where superior karmic connections made birth in the Pure Land more likely. This story provides strong evidence that people in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were viewing Kōyasan as an appropriate place to visit, particularly if one wanted to be born in the Pure Land of Supreme Bliss. This account is based upon the very similar account of Masakuni in the *Shūi ōjōden* 拾遺往生伝, an earlier collection compiled by Miyoshi no Tameyasu 三善為康 in the early twelfth century.³⁴³ This and several other biographies in the *Shūi ōjōden* show that Kōyasan had become a foothold for practitioners seeking birth in the Pure Land.³⁴⁴

The *Shūi ōjōden* provides evidence that other temples such as Shitennōji, along with Kōyasan, were also increasingly becoming known as places where direct entry into Amida's Pure Land was likely. In other words, during this era individuals in Japan were travelling to a number of different sacred places where one could fairly easily secure the karmic merit needed for birth in Amida's Pure Land. Shitennōji was a Buddhist temple located in present-day Ōsaka that, according to tradition, was originally founded by Prince Shōtoku. The western gate of this

³⁴² NST, vol. 7, 696.

³⁴³ NST, vol. 7, 339-340.

³⁴⁴ Shirai, *Inseiki Kōyasan*, 152.

temple faced the sea, and many people believed that this gate directly communicated with the eastern gate to Amida's Pure Land.³⁴⁵ Numerous devotees travelled to Shitennōji. Some individuals sought immediate salvation by drowning themselves in the sea there. For example, according to the *Shūi ōjōden*, after making a pilgrimage to Shitennōji and continually chanting the *nenbutsu* until he reached the eastern gate of the temple, a resident monk from the Senjuin (Hall of The Thousand-Armed Kannon) at Kinpusen jumped into the sea, committing ritual suicide.³⁴⁶

Having read the *Shūi ōjōden*, Sukenaga was probably aware that a number of sacred locations such as Shitennōji were being celebrated as places of great numinous power, especially if seeking birth in a pure land. With the composition of the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, Sukenaga then tried to convince others to travel to Kōyasan.

Forming Karmic Connections With the Holy Men of Kōyasan

For Sukenaga, not only did Kōyasan have unusual status because it was an auspicious place to die but also because many eminent saints had lived on the mountain. The possibility of forming karmic connections (*kechien*) with these holy men, even if they had died years before, held a special attraction for Sukenaga. In fact, he envisioned these karmic connections as an integral part of the path of salvation that he was seeking, and it became very important for him to promote the reputations of these saints in his literary collection, the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.

According to the twelfth biography, that of Precept Master Gyōi (1062-1141), when Sukenaga made his pilgrimage to Kōyasan, he visited the hut where Gyōi had lived. According to this biography, Gyōi spent many years of serious devotion at Kōyasan. He then obtained birth

³⁴⁵ Fujiwara no Yorimichi went to worship in this location following his pilgrimage to Kōyasan in 1048 and the account of his pilgrimage provides one of the earliest records of the belief that the western gate of Shitennōji was the entrance to the Pure Land.

³⁴⁶ Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 102.

in Amida's pure land at least in part by chanting the name of Amida Buddha as he was dying. Sukenaga chose to stay in the area near Gyōi's hut in order to form an auspicious karmic connection (*hōen* 芳縁) with this deceased holy man.³⁴⁷ From this and other examples to be considered below, we see that Sukenaga intended to form karmic connections with the monks of Kōyasan who had attained birth in a pure land. These actions were connected to Sukenaga's concern about his own postmortem fate and his desire to attain birth in the Pure Land himself, which he articulates in the preface to the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.

This theme that some devotees sought *ōjō* by means of forming karmic connections with those who had already been born in the Pure Land is found in many *ōjōden* collections and collections of tale literature (*setsuwa*) from this era.³⁴⁸ In fact, for both the compilers and readers of *ōjōden* literature, a major purpose was to form a karmic connection leading to birth in the Pure Land by gathering and reading stories about devotees who had successfully been born in the Pure Land.³⁴⁹ Regarding this issue, Yoshishige no Yasutane quotes Jiakai, a seventh-century Chinese monk who tried to systematize Pure Land teachings: "The wisdom of the beings is shallow, and they cannot understand the sagely intent [set forth in sūtras and treatises]. Unless one records examples of those who actually achieved *ōjō*, one will not be able to encourage them."³⁵⁰ In compiling the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, Sukenaga probably had similar motivations, in other words, to reveal authentic examples of *ōjō* in order encourage others in their Buddhist practice. In addition, he was probably seeking to accumulate good karmic merit through the act of his compilation. In so doing, he was connecting with the holy men not only by staying at the physical locations

³⁴⁷ NST, vol. 7, 699.

³⁴⁸ Murakami, *Kōyasan shinkō*, 25-26.

³⁴⁹ Jacqueline Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu," 88.

³⁵⁰ *Jingtu lun* (Treatise on the Pure Land, c. seventh century), T. no 1963, 47:97a. This text is cited in Yasutane's introduction to *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*, in NST, vol. 7, 11. I have followed the translation in Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu," 88.

where they had dwelled at Kōyasan but also by studying their hagiographies and attempting to put these narratives into wider circulation.

The holy man at Kōyasan with whom Sukenaga most wanted to form a karmic connection was probably Kyōkai (1001-1093). According to the first biography in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, Sukenaga ascended to the Odawara *bessho*, a small reclusive community at Kōyasan, in 1184 in order to visit the "sacred traces" of Kyōkai. At this hermitage in the recesses of the Odawara Valley of Kōyasan, Sukenaga met an old monk who was living there, and this old monk informed him that this was the place to which Kyōkai had moved in 1073. Kyōkai named it Odawara based upon the name of the community from which he had come, the Odawara *bessho*, the community at Minami Yamashiro where *nenbutsu* practitioners affiliated with the famous Kōfukuji Temple in Nara had gathered.³⁵¹ During his twenty years at Kōyasan at the end of his life, Kyōkai practiced the traditional esoteric rituals of the dual mandalas, the recitation of the esoteric *Dharani of the Buddha's Crown* (*Sonshō darani*) and the esoteric mantra of Amida.³⁵²

According to the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, at the time of his death, Kyōkai faced death with right mindfulness and, in so doing, achieved birth in Amida's Pure Land. Another biography in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, the narrative about Yuihan to be considered below, suggests that extraordinary signs confirmed that Kyōkai had been reborn in the Pure Land. This biography relates that, at the time of Yuihan's death, Keinen Shōnin had a dream in which Kyōkai was riding on a cloud, coming along with the other members of the holy retinue from the Pure Land to guide Yuihan

³⁵¹ Because of his time of religious practice at the original Odawara *bessho*, Kyōkai became known as the holy man (*shōnin*) or renunciant (*hijiri*) Kyōkai of the Goshō residence at Odawara (Odawara Gōshōbō Hijiri Kyōkai).

³⁵² NST, vol. 7, 696.

there. This dream thus confirmed both Yuihan and Kyōkai's successful births in the Pure Land.³⁵³

Even prior to visiting Kōyasan in 1184, Sukenaga had some knowledge about these traditions about Kyōkai, probably from reading the biography of Kyōkai in the *Shūi ōjōden* 拾遺往生伝, which he used as a basis for his own biography of Kyōkai in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*.³⁵⁴ Even nearly a century after Kyōkai's death, Kyōkai's grass hut still remained on Kōyasan, and Sukenaga wanted to see the "true likeness" (*shin'ei* 真影), or portrait, of this monk that was preserved in a temple in the same area.³⁵⁵ It is notable here that a building had been erected and that Kyōkai's portrait was installed so that the community could perpetuate a collective memory of Kyōkai and his achievements. Suggesting Kyōkai's strong reputation on the mountain, this structure is the only such memorial shrine for a departed *ōjōnin* that is mentioned in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*. The temple was probably the Kyōkai Shōnin-dō, which Imperial Monastic Prince Kakuhō (Omuro Kakuhō Hōsshinnō 御室覚法親王, 1091-1153) recorded visiting in 1150 and where seven holy men (*shōnin*) had conducted rituals connected to Urabon.³⁵⁶

In 1184, Sukenaga was very impressed with the true-to-life appearance of Kyōkai's portrait:

Those who see it are choked with tears, and those who hear about it feel their entrails rent by grief... Although the drawing is old, the appearance is fresh. Kyōkai's tongue hangs down in a slanted fashion and his eyes seem as if they are blinking. His neck leans to the right. It is a [realistic] image of his body sitting peacefully and dying.³⁵⁷

³⁵³ NST, vol. 7, 696.

³⁵⁴ See NST, vol. 7, 296-297, for the biography of Kyōkai in the *Shūi ōjōden*.

³⁵⁵ NST, vol. 7, 696.

³⁵⁶ *Omuro Goshō Kōyasan gosannō nikki*, 466. See the entry for Kyūan 5 (1150).7.15.

³⁵⁷ NST, vol. 7, 696.

Like Kūkai, Kyōkai has become a sanctified spiritual leader. His portrait received similar reverence as the devotion that the devotees paid to Kūkai at his Portrait Hall. Sukenaga stresses that Kyōkai's portrait was the appropriate focus for his devotion: "I wholeheartedly worshipped this portrait in order to establish the [auspicious] karmic conditions of my next rebirth."³⁵⁸

For Sukenaga, Kyōkai's sacred traces were just as important as the sacred traces of Kūkai at the Inner Sanctum and the Portrait Hall. In contrast, according to the eleventh and twelfth century pilgrimage records, Kūkai's tomb at the Inner Sanctum was typically the main site worth visiting and the site of the most intense period of ritual activity for the royals and aristocrats from the capital. The *Kōyasan ōjōden* thus shows that, by the end of the twelfth century, the number of sacred sites on Kōyasan had expanded, and some of the most sacred places on the mountain were connected as much to holy men other than Kūkai as they were to Kūkai himself. The *Kōyasan ōjōden* provides evidence that individuals were climbing the mountain in order to visit the "sacred traces" (*seiseki*) of Kyōkai and other holy men who had lived on the mountain. Devotees such as Sukenaga wanted especially to form a karmic connection (*kechien*) with these saints.

In addition, Sukenaga had apparently heard different stories about extraordinary occurrences at Kōyasan, especially the accomplishments of those seeking birth in a pure land, than the stories that motivated Shirakawa and Toba to travel to Kōyasan. Not only were the miraculous narratives about the marvels of Kōyasan becoming increasingly known at the end of the twelfth century, but also the kinds of narratives about the unusual salvific powers of this mountain were expanding. It was no longer simply narratives about the eminent monk Kūkai that attracted pilgrims to Kōyasan. In Sukenaga's case, narratives about the other holy men who had

³⁵⁸ NST, vol. 7, 696.

lived on Kōyasan several centuries after Kūkai's lifetime inspired him to journey to the mountain.

One of these other holy men was Yuihan (1015-1096), whose biography, the third account in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, narrates one of the most striking instances of an attempt by devotees to form an auspicious karmic connection with one of the saints of Kōyasan. Having served as the superintendent (*kengyō*) of Kōyasan at the time of Shirakawa's initial pilgrimage in 1088, Yuihan was one of the devotees in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* who had attained great status within the Shingon monastic world.

Like many of the other hagiographic portrayals in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, the biography of Yuihan stresses his Buddhist devotion that was especially remarkable at the time of his death. When his death was approaching around 1096, he performed a ritual offering (*kuyō*) in which he made a copy of the complete *Lotus Sutra* as well as ten thousand copies of a Fudō image. He bathed, put on a robe, and had Son'en Shōnin carry out the Sonshō Goma fire ritual. This was the fire ritual in which the esoteric deity Unexcelled, or Sonshō, was the main Buddha image. On this day, Yuihan faced the Goma platform and worshipped reverently. He then returned to his room, where he sat upright facing the west. With his hands he formed the Meditation Mudrā of Marvelous Penetrating Wisdom. Furthermore, in fairly typical fashion for persons seeking birth in Amida Buddha's Western Pure Land, Yuihan connected one end of a string of five colors to his own hands forming the meditation mudrā and the other end to the hand of a Buddha statue, presumably one of Amida Buddha. Around midnight he passed away as if he were sleeping and obtained birth in Amida's Pure Land.³⁵⁹

The rest of this biography focuses on Yuihan's extraordinary death, the narrative of which is very similar to the stories about Kūkai's "entrance into meditation" at Kōyasan in 835. On the

³⁵⁹ NST, vol. 7, 696-697.

fifth day after Yuihan's death, some people dressed his corpse for burial and sent it to a mausoleum. The *Kōyasan ōjōden* reports that during the period of fifty days following Yuihan's death, disciples came to view the corpse but the appearance had not changed from his living flesh. In addition, the positioning of his hands forming the meditation mudrā had not been disturbed, and his hair was still growing—one of the major characteristics of Kūkai's "living body" following his death. Furthermore, the *Kōyasan ōjōden* states, "The corpse was not giving off any rotten odor. Therefore, both monastics and laity gathered at the door, forming karmic connections (*kechien*) with Yuihan."³⁶⁰

The disciples of Yuihan appear to have been extremely curious about the fact that Yuihan's body did not decay and that it maintained the same posture that he had assumed while dying. After thirty-five days, they opened the door of the mausoleum once more, and Yuihan's hands were still in the meditation mudrā as before. They were awed by this strange occurrence, so they shut the mausoleum and did not open it anymore.

Much like Kūkai in the various narratives about his "entrance into meditation" at the time of his death, Yuihan's body does not simply decay like an ordinary corpse. Rather, it becomes a whole-body relic, an icon that is venerated by Yuihan's followers at Kōyasan. While this narrative was probably influenced by the narratives of Kūkai's entering meditation in 835, the perfect preservation of the corpse is also one of the signs that a practitioner has successfully been born in Amida's pure land. This absence of decomposition is a fairly common indication of extraordinary spiritual attainment in the *ōjōden* collections of medieval Japan. "In a Buddhist context, such refusals of the body to conform to ordinary processes of decay," writes Jacqueline

³⁶⁰ NST, vol. 7, 697.

Stone, “signal that the deceased has escaped the cycle of deluded rebirth; what has happened to that person is not ‘death’—the mark of deluded existence—but liberation.”³⁶¹

In her discussion of this narrative and similar stories about the perfectly preserved corpses of other *ōjōnin*, Stone raises an important hermeneutical question that applies to these materials. She asks about the extent to which such stories describe events as they actually occurred or, on the other hand, to what extent such narratives exhibit a hagiographical intention to stress the auspicious nature of an *ōjōnin*'s death.³⁶² After all, in addition to the mysterious fragrance, favorable dreams, and music heard in the air, the gathering of devotees to view an *ōjōnin*'s perfectly preserved corpse is a common narrative detail that confirms that the individual has in fact made it to the Pure Land.

While it is impossible to determine the extent to which venerating the corpse actually occurred in historical practice, it is possible to appreciate these narratives *as hagiography*. In other words, we can accept the fact that Yuihan's biography does not provide a transparent window onto the religious practices of Yuihan's day. Nevertheless, this kind of narrative very much shaped religious practice as it was lived. Yuihan and those who venerated him were probably familiar with narratives about successful *ōjōnin* who left entirely intact, near-living corpses. Such stories were very much in keeping with the larger imaginaire of *ōjō* in early medieval Japan. These stories were expressions of the cultural ideals and religious imagination of the day. Furthermore, whether the historical details about Yuihan's passing are purely factual or not, this was one of the narratives that inspired Sukenaga to venture to Kōyasan and to earnestly seek to become an *ōjōnin* himself.

³⁶¹ “The Dying Breath,” 216.

³⁶² “The Dying Breath,” 218.

In other words, not only is it the case that this narrative was profoundly shaped by religious life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but this and similar narratives stressing the wonder and value of birth in a pure land continued to shape the religious lives of Sukenaga and many other individuals in early medieval Japan. We must not lose sight of the value of *ōjōden* as historical sources, stories that were shaped by actual religious life and in turn shaped lived religion on the ground.³⁶³

In spite of their hagiographical embellishments, the narratives that Sukenaga included in his collection of *ōjōden* provide a vivid, historically accurate portrayal of the devotion that he and others were conducting on the sacred peak Kōyasan. These narratives convey the importance of forming positive karmic relationships with saints who had already died. They provide considerable evidence that the opportunity of forming auspicious karmic connections with Kyōkai, Yuihan, and other eminent holy men at Kōyasan was one of the major motivating factors in his decision to ascend this particular peak as part of a sacred pilgrimage. These karmic connections figured centrally in Sukenaga's religious aspirations, most especially in his desire to be reborn in Amida's Pure Land.

The Variety of Devotion Portrayed in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*

In addition to the numerous human saints who had left sacred traces for devotees to venerate, many different sacred beings such as Buddhas and bodhisattvas were enshrined at Kōyasan. In fact, the practitioners portrayed in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* exhibit devotion to a remarkable variety of sacred beings. This text enables us to understand the great range of

³⁶³ While Robert Campany focuses on the hagiographies of Daoist transcendent in early medieval China, his remarks about the interpretation of hagiographic texts applies just as much to the medieval Japanese *ōjōden* collections. Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 13, writes, "There is nothing that compels us to assume that the *sorts* of stories of transcendents that have reached of us are of a radically different *kind* than those told during the lives of the adepts, or that it cannot have been the case that such stories both informed and emerged from their and others' lives."

devotion that was taking place at Kōyasan during the Insei era. Several of the practitioners display devotion to Kūkai alongside their devotion to other sacred beings. However, the text reveals that, in addition to the strong faith in Kōbō Daishi, many other forms of devotion were occurring at the time. It also enables us to understand this very complex syncretistic context in which devotion to Kūkai was taking place.

Several biographies in Sukenaga's collection reveal that Kōyasan's close connection to the saint Kōbō Daishi attracted serious Buddhist devotees to the site. In stories such as the hagiography of Chimyōbō Raisai (d. 1167), the twenty-third story in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, Kōyasan is an appropriate place for Raisai's serious religious discipline because of its continued relationship with the tradition transmitted by Kūkai. The story reports that Raisai was especially interested in studying the Shingon tradition: "He sought the teachings in Kōbō Daishi's branch streams. His learning was extensive and pure."³⁶⁴ Kōyasan was obviously a place where this man could study the Shingon teachings, and he moved there and began rigorous Buddhist discipline. Prior to this time, although it had been prophesied at Raisai's birth that he would become a holy person (*shōnin*), his practice of the *nenbutsu* had been weak. The biography states, "Although he chanted the *nenbutsu*, it was impossible to hear it outside of the walls (of his room)."³⁶⁵ Kōyasan apparently offered a much better environment for his religious practice, and he made much more progress in his religious discipline after moving to this mountain. Although the text does not state explicitly that Raisai was planning to die on the mountain, his numerous years of Buddhist discipline in a place where the saint Kōbō Daishi's scholastic tradition was alive apparently made it possible for him to attain right mindfulness at the crucial time of death.

³⁶⁴ NST, vol. 7, 701.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

Only a small number of the other accounts in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* contain explicit references to Kōbō Daishi or to the places at Kōyasan most associated with him. For example, the account of Rentai's death provides evidence for devotion to Kōbō Daishi alongside devotion to Amida Buddha and Kongō Bodhisattva. Rentai (1013-1098), who had trained at Ninnaji in addition to conducting mountain asceticism at Kinpusen, sought to live as a hermit who has renounced the lay world and moved to Kōyasan. At the time of his death, Rentai “was under a tree and straightened his robe. He faced the western direction and his hands formed the meditation mudrā. He raised his voice, chanting, ‘Hail Three Bodies in One Amida Nyorai! Hail Kōbō Daishi! Hail Universally Luminous Kongō Bodhisattva!’ In this way he worshipped. He sat on ground covered with dew, and his breathing ceased.”³⁶⁶ Rentai's chanting the name of Kōbō Daishi at the time of his death reveals the significance of Kūkai in his life. However, Rentai reveals an equal amount of devotion to Amida Buddha and Kongō Bodhisattva in this account.

The account about the life and death of Kengyō Ajari Ryōzen (1048-1139), who lived at Kōyasan for eighty-one years, eventually attaining the highest administrative position, also provides fascinating evidence that devotion to Kūkai often took place only within the context of other forms of devotion. During his life, according to this account, Ryōzen was devoted to various sacred beings, enshrining a variety of unspecified sacred images in the Shingon-dō that he built. He also built a Jishi-dō, revealing his devotion to Miroku bodhisattva, in addition to conducting the *Hokke hō*, a rite involving the recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* and performed for a range of purposes.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ NST, vol. 7, 698.

³⁶⁷ NST, vol. 7, 699.

The actions that this monk took at his death further revealed the multifaceted nature of his religious faith. On the twenty-first day of the second month of the fifth year of Hōen (1139), Ryōzen put on "pure robes" and spread out a mat. He worshipped Fudō and made a special prayer. Next, he faced the south and worshipped Kūkai's Portrait Hall. After doing this, he faced the western direction and prayed to be born in Amida's Pure Land of Supreme Bliss. Then, as his body and mind remained still, without moving, he passed away. Ryōzen's decision at the time of his death to venerate the Portrait Hall, where a "true likeness" of Kūkai was enshrined, reveals his deep devotion to Kūkai. His decision to turn and face the specific direction in which the structure was located provides evidence of the embodied nature of Kōbō Daishi devotion and its connection to the landscape of Kōyasan. Yet, as in the account about the death of Rentai, this devotion to Kōbō Daishi took place in the context of devotion to a number of other sacred beings, such as Miroku bodhisattva, Fudō, and Amida Buddha. Indeed, at the very end, Ryōzen appears to have placed most of his trust in Amida Buddha, expecting to be reborn in his Pure Land in the west.

Another account, about the Precept Master Gyōi (1062-1141), provides other evidence of the relationship between faith in Kōbō Daishi and other forms of devotion being practiced at Kōyasan. According to this story, Gyōi in his youth served a courtier and ascended the sacred mountain with him. This courtier advised Gyōi, "You should definitely become a disciple of Kōbō Daishi."³⁶⁸ So Gyōi went to the Inner Sanctum, the site of Kūkai's tomb, and renounced the householder's life. After many years of serious devotion at Kōyasan, Gyōi became sick and eventually faced death. When the time of his death was near, Gyōi faced an Amida Buddha statue and chanted the name of Amida. His meditation mudrā was not disturbed as he died. Although it would be very possible to infer so, this account gives no indication that Gyōi

³⁶⁸ NST, vol. 7, 699.

continued his devotion to Kōbō Daishi after following the advice of the courtier when he first arrived on this sacred mountain. In addition, in contrast to the two accounts discussed above, at the time of his death this practitioner did not find it important to exhibit devotion towards Kōbō Daishi. Instead, he showed devotion only to Amida Buddha and sought birth in his land.

Aside from the accounts discussed above, Sukenaga does not even mention forms of devotion to Kōbō Daishi in the other thirty-four biographies in this collection. It would be a mistake to use this absence of discussion to infer that most of these individuals did not display devotion to Kōbō Daishi in their religious practice on Kōyasan. In fact, the Amidist strand in the practices of Kōyasan comes to the fore especially in connection with death, and a genre other than *ōjōden*—that is, one less focused on the moment and manner of death—might well have paid more attention to the cult of Kūkai as well as other non-Amidist practices on the mountain. Furthermore, in the attempt mainly to convey the miraculous nature of these figures' death and birth in a pure land, Sukenaga possibly left out many details of their Buddhist practice in life, including their devotional activities directed toward Kūkai. Nevertheless, it is significant that this author did not find it important to record such devotion and instead focused more on devotion to Amida Buddha as well as other Buddhas and bodhisattvas. While devotion to Kōbō Daishi, the human saint who had established the Buddhist institution on the mountain, continued to be prominent throughout the twelfth century, we must understand this devotion to Kōbō Daishi in a larger context in which devotees paid reverence to a number of other human saints as well as many superhuman beings who inhabited the Buddhist cosmos.

To Which Pure Land Shall We Go?

Not only do the devotees discussed in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* exhibit devotion to a variety of sacred beings, but they also seek a number of different postmortem destinations. In this, the

men featured in this collection probably were not unique. In fact, hagiographical literature of the same era presents a range of postmortem destinations and a number of different practices to achieve those goals. Nevertheless, the range of possible postmortem destinations available at Kōyasan indicates what Sukenaga perceived as the great soteriological potency of this place. In addition, it is a sign of the broad, accommodating religious faith of Sukenaga and other like-minded devotees. He himself was clearly seeking birth in Amida's Pure Land, but he had no problem imagining the possibility of other forms of salvation and other possible wondrous lands in which to be born at death.

The majority of the practitioners in this collection showed devotion to Amida Buddha and sought birth in his western Pure Land at death. According to my calculation, thirty-three of the thirty-eight devotees in this text achieved birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land of Utmost Bliss. Even in the cases in which the author of the text did not clearly indicate the postmortem destination, it seems fair to assume that the devotees were probably seeking birth in Amida's Pure Land. Given that this was the most popular destination and that the author himself claims to be seeking this pure land, in the cases in which he does not specify directly the postmortem destination, the person was probably seeking this land as well.

The five main accounts in this collection in which the devotee was seeking another land, or in which the destination of rebirth is not clear, certainly are some of the most fascinating biographies in this collection. A few of these narratives merit special discussion.

The account of Rinken's life (1074-1150, Biography 14) in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* expresses uncertainty regarding the place of his rebirth after death. After receiving the dual Womb and Diamond Mandala transmissions from Ryōzen, Rinken had become the nineteenth superintendent of Kongōbuji in 1139. He served there until the time of his death in 1150. When

he became fatally ill, Rinzen set up a statue of Miroku Bodhisattva. He formed an esoteric mudrā (*mitsu'in*) with his hands and chanted the name of Miroku Bodhisattva. However, whether these practices led to rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida or the Tosotsu heaven of Miroku was unclear. After he died, "people that Rinzen knew and those that he did not know very well ... did not know if he, with Amida's guidance, was born in Amida's pure land or if he had gone to the Tosotsu heaven before Miroku's descent to Earth [in the distant future]. Where karmic connections will lead one is something that people cannot fathom," states this biography.³⁶⁹ While many of the other biographies in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* state the place of rebirth of the aspiring devotee with confidence, in this case, there is much more ambiguity and uncertainty.

Another biography in the collection, about Kyōjin (d. 1141, Biography 13), expresses greater certainty over the place of rebirth but is unusual in its claim that he was born in the heaven of Monju (Skt. Mañjuśrī) Bodhisattva. Kyōjin, the Buddhist teacher of the more famous monk Butsugon, originally lived at the Tendai stronghold Onjōji but later moved to Kōyasan. He had studied in the eight main traditions of Buddhism in Japan and took Monju Bodhisattva as his principal object of worship (*honzon*). When the time of Kyōjin's death was near, Monju Bodhisattva manifested himself to Kyōjin and told him that in three days he and ten thousand other bodhisattvas would come and lead him to Monju's Golden-hued heaven. Kyōjin rejoiced that Monju had manifested himself for him and that his devotion would be rewarded at death. Kyōjin's devotion to Monju then led to a deathbed practice with Monju at the center. On the night that he was to die, Kyōjin instructed his disciples to read from the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* (chapter 12), and to intone the mantra of Monju. Kyōjin then formed the secret mudra of Monju and then departed this world as if he were entering meditation.³⁷⁰ This story

³⁶⁹ NST, vol. 7, 700.

³⁷⁰ NST, vol. 7, 699-700.

mentions neither Kōbō Daishi nor Amida Buddha, suggesting that some monks at Kōyasan were devoted primarily to Monju and other bodhisattvas.

The monk Shōyo (d. 1167, Biography 22) was another resident of Kōyasan who purportedly achieved birth in an unusual place, "the land of Esoteric Splendor" (*mitsugon kokudo*), the universal realm of Dainichi Nyorai's enlightenment. Shōyo had moved to Kōyasan from Ninnaji, the renowned temple in the capital with strong associations with the royal family. On the nine hundred ninety-ninth day of a thousand-day Fudō ritual, he stated that he desired to complete the entire ritual at this time because on the following day he would be born in the land of Esoteric Splendor.³⁷¹ While unusual as a place of rebirth in the larger context of *ōjōden* literature, such a destination probably seemed appropriate for those practicing Shingon esoteric Buddhism at Kōyasan.

Another fascinating example is the biography of ascetic Rentai (d. 1098, Biography 4), mentioned above, who had originally trained at Ninnaji but later travelled to Kōyasan. In the account about Rentai in the *Kōyasan ōjōden* it is unclear whether or not he was performing Buddhist practice throughout his life in order to attain birth in the western Pure Land. In fact, Rentai himself in this account emphasizes that he was not seeking a particular place of rebirth. After he had returned to Kōyasan when he had become aware of his imminent death, someone asked him whether he was seeking birth in the western Pure Land or in the Tosotsu heaven. Rentai responded, "My own wish is not necessarily in accord with the religious practices of my predecessors. The Dharma realm is all Thusness. Which place should I aspire to?"³⁷² Rentai here shows a sophisticated understanding of Buddhist doctrine, realizing that the Buddhist world

³⁷¹ NST, vol. 7, 701.

³⁷² NST, vol. 7, 697.

is all the same in its ultimate essence. Therefore it makes no sense to attempt to be reborn in a particular Pure Land or heaven.

The day after Rentai's death, a disciple dreams that the Diamond Realm mandala is spread out in the sky. Rentai is sitting upright within the moon disk of Muryōju Nyorai (Amida Buddha) in the position where the bodhisattva Saihōin ordinarily resides.³⁷³ Jacqueline Stone points out that such dreams are usually presented in typical *raigō* imagery that confirms the successful *ōjō* of the aspirant with purple clouds, other-worldly music, and the subtle fragrance that comes with Amida's welcoming descent. However, in this case, the iconography has a strong *mikkyō* flavor. While Rentai successfully was born into Amida's land, it was not the distant pure land to the west but the Diamond Realm mandala, where Amida and his attendants are expressions of the universal Buddha Dainichi. "Without making explicit doctrinal claims," writes Stone, "such stories draw on conventions of the Pure Land tradition and rework them in an esoteric mode."³⁷⁴

Sukenaga's inclusion of these narratives about fairly unusual places of rebirth or uncertain places of rebirth following death reveal the flexible, inclusivistic form of religious faith that he possessed. He and probably many other serious Buddhists of the time celebrated the possibility of being reborn in a number of different wondrous places. In particular, we must note the ways in which Sukenaga's religious outlook differed from modern Buddhist orthodoxy in Japan, which separates the devotion directed toward birth in a pure land from the Shingon Buddhist disciplines involving mandalas and aimed at "gaining enlightenment in this very body," practices that Kūkai advocated. Sukenaga and many others simply saw no contradiction between the practices and goals of Shingon esoteric Buddhism, on the one hand, and Pure Land

³⁷³ NST, vol. 7, 698.

³⁷⁴ Stone, "The Secret Art of Dying," 142.

Buddhism, on the other hand. Furthermore, his collection of religious biographies shows that, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, devotees at Kōyasan engaged in a range of practices for a wide variety of ultimate religious goals. The *Kōyasan ōjōden* does not show whether these practitioners sometimes debated with each other over the validity of their particular practices and goals. What it does convey is an image where practitioners seeking birth in Monju Bodhisattva's heaven and other locations often practiced Buddhism in harmony beside other practitioners who aspired for different forms of salvation such as birth in Amida's Pure Land.

Conclusion: Promoting Kōyasan, A Numinous Peak

In this chapter, I have highlighted Sukenaga's religious devotion, in particular his earnest desire to be born in Amida's Pure Land at death, and I have connected this religious devotion to Sukenaga's interest in Kōyasan and the thirty-eight *ōjōnin* whose reputations he promotes in the *Kōyasan ōjōden*. Sukenaga was clearly convinced that Kōyasan was a numinous peak with extraordinary sacred power for Buddhist practitioners, many of whom he believed had already gained enough karmic merit to achieve birth in a pure land at death. His own strong religious convictions about the numinous nature of this mountain as well as his interest in forming karmic connections with the holy men who had practiced Buddhism there compelled him to gather a group of religious biographies that he attempted to put into wider circulation.

I have argued that one of the most important things that the *Kōyasan ōjōden* conveys is the diversified nature of the religious faith associated with Kōyasan. As might be expected following my discussion in previous chapters about the enduring forms of Kūkai-centered devotion, veneration of the human saint who established the Buddhist monastery at Kōyasan appears even in this text that mostly features deathbed practices and stories about the wondrous deaths of those who succeeded in being born in a pure land. Nevertheless, in contrast to the

various pilgrimage records from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this devotion to Kōbō Daishi was hardly the central aspect of the religious practices of Sukenaga and the *ōjōnin* in his *ōjōden* collection.

Rather, with this text, we find a richer portrayal of the wide-ranging religious diversity evident at Kōyasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Sukenaga himself claims to have made a pilgrimage to Kōyasan in order to form a karmic connection with Kyōkai's sacred traces. In other words, we see that many holy men other than Kūkai, men who had also lived on the mountain while practicing Buddhist discipline, received the devotion of others who subsequently visited Kōyasan. It was the reputation of many of these saints, not that of Kūkai, that Sukenaga most promoted in his hagiographical collection.

In addition, the text conveys the wide variety of soteriological possibilities on the mountain, in particular showing a large range of possible pure lands for one's next rebirth as well as a rich assortment of religious practices, many very different from Amida-centered *nenbutsu* practice. I have highlighted the ways in which Sukenaga celebrated the religious diversity evident in the deathbed practices and outlooks of the thirty-eight holy men in his collection. We must recognize that the multiple forms of devotion and practice seen on Kōyasan represented the mainstream of medieval Japanese Buddhism.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have presented several portraits of devotion at one of Japan's enduring religious institutions, the mountain monastery Kongōbuji, located on Kōyasan in present-day Wakayama Prefecture. While very famous today, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the mountain was still emerging as a popular religious location and site for pilgrimage. This study of Kōyasan has revealed a time in which many of the central features of the Kōyasan cult were still being established. In particular, I have highlighted the ways in which sacred narratives about the mountain itself, Kūkai, or the saint who established the monastery and then continued to stay there in a state of perpetual meditation, and other holy people strongly associated with the site became connected to vibrant forms of religious devotion on the mountain. I have shown how many of the early legends about Kōyasan, for example, were both products of and producers of pilgrimage during this formative era of the mountain's history. For instance, pilgrimage records of the pilgrimages by Retired Emperor Shirakawa and Retired Emperor Toba reveal that narratives about Kongōbuji's sacred origins compelled a few of the most eminent men in Japan to travel to this remote mountain and to forge a relationship of reciprocity with the resident clerics there. These pilgrims returned to the capital with stories of confirmed miracles, encounters with saints and deities. Inspiring new pilgrimages and acts of major patronage, storytelling in the capital in turn led to greater interest in this particular numinous peak.

I have endeavored to analyze a much wider spectrum of literature about devotion at Kōyasan in the late Heian era than scholars writing in English yet have studied. This literature is composed in diverse genres such as tales of temple origins, pilgrimage records, aristocratic diaries, stories of miraculous deaths, and monastic biographies. This literature provides a

number of different perspectives on religious life at Kōyasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. From it we have learned much about the people who lived there, made a pilgrimage, or worshipped in the Kōyasan cult from a distance. Common elements such as devotion to Kūkai continued to be central in the Kōyasan cult throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and evidence of this devotion appears pervasively in the wide range of primary sources analyzed in this study. In addition, we have seen how the Kōyasan cult became more diverse and multifaceted over the latter half of the Heian era. Over this period, Kōyasan became increasingly associated with a number of different pure lands and sacred beings. According to primary sources such as the *Kōyasan ōjōden*, the eminent monks who were often compelled to move to Kōyasan because of its storied marvels and connection to Kūkai themselves started leaving sacred traces on the mountain, traces that then became new sites for visitation and reverence. In short, in this literature we witness a vibrant sacred site that continued to grow and change in response to new circumstances, including the demise of temple structures in fires.

Stories lay at the center of all of this activity, the pilgrimages, the ceremonies on Kōyasan, and the efforts to promote the mountain's reputation in the capital city. In fact, a central contention of this dissertation is that a rich, complex interplay of narrative and religious practice constituted the core of the Kōyasan cult. Furthermore, I have argued that an understanding of the dialectic of story and ritual at this place leads to a deeper comprehension of the localized nature of religious life in late Heian Japan. Just as was the case at Mount Hiei, Kinpusen, Kumano, and many other sacred sites, religious life was situated in a specific physical environment at Kōyasan, an environment sacralized both through story and ritual performance. Furthermore, in addition to the physical construction of increasingly numerous temple buildings on this mountain during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Kōyasan was constructed again and

again in the religious imagination of the Japanese people. It was created in the minds both of pilgrims who themselves ventured to the peak and of devotees in the capital and elsewhere who encountered this site primarily by way of the stories of clerics and lay pilgrims who had actually visited the mountain.

One of the major things that I have tried to understand is the role of stories, in both oral and written form, in fashioning the reputation of Kōyasan. Religious narratives, such as *engi*, myths, and hagiographies, were probably the source of the main information about Kūkai and Kōyasan circulating in Japan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These religious narratives would have been central especially for the lay devotees such as the aristocratic and royal pilgrims who ventured to the mountain because most of these people probably did not study Shingon Buddhist doctrine very seriously. However, religious narratives also played a major role in the ways that Buddhist monks viewed Kūkai and Kōyasan. After all, as I have shown in chapters 2 and 3, Buddhist monks, both those residing on the mountain and those who lived elsewhere such as the large Shingon temple Ninnaji in the capital, were undoubtedly telling stories about the past to each other as well as to the lay devotees who made pilgrimages to the mountain.

In the subsequent Kamakura period (1185-1333), these narratives that sacralized Kōyasan continued to be central in the Kōyasan cult. Kōyasan remained a popular sacred site and destination for the pilgrimages of the royal family and aristocrats, as had been the case in the Heian era, but it also began attracting the attention of the new samurai leaders. These diverse groups requested that religious services be conducted by Kōyasan monks, and they made donations to support the construction of more temple buildings throughout this era. While visiting the mountain, these royal, aristocratic, and samurai pilgrims participated in various

rituals, received the precepts, listened to sermons, wrote essays, donated estates in rural areas, and believed that Kōyasan was a special sacred place where extraordinary religious benefits could be obtained.³⁷⁵ In addition, over the course of the Kamakura era, Shingon clerics increasingly appealed to the common people in preaching about the extraordinary virtues of Kūkai and the mountain monastery that he established at Kōyasan.³⁷⁶ As a result, a wider range of people throughout Japan became more interested in the mountain.

By the modern era, the reputation of Kōyasan had been well established in the cultural imagination of the Japanese people. In spite of setbacks and periods of decline, today this mountain monastery continues to thrive as one of the great religious centers of the Japanese islands. It is a site that is visited by millions of pilgrims and tourists every year. The basic narratives about the monastery's sacred origins in the early ninth century and the stories about Kūkai's perpetual meditation on the mountain since 835—narratives that began appearing in the Heian-period texts examined in this study—continue to define the sacred character of this enduring institution and to give meaning to the lives of the many people who remain devoted to it.

³⁷⁵ George Tanabe, "Kōyasan in the Countryside," 44.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

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