

KAKUBAN'S INCORPORATION OF PURE LAND PRACTICES: THE
CATALYST FOR THE RESTORATION OF SHINGON DURING THE LATE
HEIAN PERIOD

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Although the Shingon school comprises several branches and divisions, Western scholarship tends to present it as if it were a homogeneous tradition. While such divisions largely resulted from administrative splits, they also reflect more fundamental philosophical and doctrinal differences. Kakuban's 覺鑊 (1095–1143) efforts to revitalize Shingon during the late Heian period represent one such example of a doctrinal divergence that led to the creation of a splinter group. The resulting new sect, called Shingi Shingon-shū 新義眞言宗 (New Doctrine Shingon), is recognizable by the importance given to the Buddha Amida and by its incorporation of Pure Land practices. In spite of the dissemination of practices related to the Pure Land among various Buddhist schools during Kakuban's lifetime, the Pure Land school did not emerge as an independent tradition until the beginning of the Kamakura period (1185–1333).¹ One of our tasks will thus consist in scrutinizing how Kakuban's Pure Land-oriented tradition developed prior to the founding of the Pure Land school.

Kakuban did not incorporate Pure Land practices into his teachings until his 1114 move to Mount Kōya. This seems to suggest that Kakuban's interactions with the *Kōya hijiri* 高野聖 who resided on the mountain and preached the salvific power of Amida must have triggered a decisive paradigm shift. An additional factor that may have served as an incentive for reforms was the presence on Mount Kōya of Shingon monks who actively worked for a revival of ancient practices. Since Kakuban trained with them, he may have shared their ambitions. Overall,

¹ Two notable figures in the formation of the Pure Land school were, Genshin 源信 (942–1017) and Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212). The *Ōjōyōshū* a treatise about rebirth in the Pure Land is attributed to Genshin. Genshin was a

Kakuban's close association with the *hijiri* 聖 — wandering Pure Land ascetics — was the primary factor that led to his introduction of new contemplation techniques. This thesis focuses on the controversial relationship between Kakuban and the *hijiri*, and on the consequences of their decisive encounter.

Existing Research on Kakuban

While English works on Kakuban are limited, there are numerous Japanese sources on his life and practices. Given the narrow timeframe during which research for this thesis was conducted, an exhaustive survey of all Japanese texts on Kakuban was not possible.² Nevertheless, I have become familiar with the *Kōgyō daishi kakuban kenkyū* 興教大師覺鑱研究 (Studies on Kakuban), and the *Kōgyō daishi zenshū* 興教大師全集 (Kakuban's Complete Works), which provide a basis for understanding Kakuban's life, writing, and philosophies. Most Japanese works related to Kakuban come from within the tradition and, although they provide valuable insight into his philosophy, they lack a nonsectarian viewpoint that could allow for a broader academic perspective.

Western scholarship has just begun to explore and understand Kakuban's life, work, and contribution to Japanese Buddhism. Hendrick (Henny) van der Veere's *A Study into the Thought of Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban* provides the most comprehensive overview of Kakuban's life and main works. Since Van der Veere's book, in depth studies and translations of Kakuban's two most well-known works, the *Amida hishaku* 阿彌陀祕釋 and the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* 五輪九字明祕密釋, have emerged in Western scholarship. Although research on Kakuban has

² Research for this thesis began during my studies at Taishō University in March 2012 and was concluded in April 2013.

increased in recent years, his interactions with the *hijiri*, and how they impacted his later understanding of Shingon eidetic contemplation practices remain unexplored.

Kakuban's contribution to Shingon Buddhism tends to be glossed over as a simple revival of the tradition. Yet, this thesis examines how his revitalization efforts go beyond the scope of Shingon revival to include the incorporation of Pure Land praxis and adaptations of Shingon visualization methods during the late Heian Period. Since the Shingon tradition centers many of its practices on visualizing or contemplating mandalas, Kakuban's reinterpretation of meditation techniques originally introduced by Kūkai may seem to simply reaffirm Shingon doctrine. Nonetheless, a closer examination shows that it was the introduction of these new methods that led to Kakuban's expulsion from the Shingon clergy, and eventually to the creation of a new branch of Shingon. Understanding the socio-political climate of Kakuban's lifetime and outside factors is essential to analyze this rift in the Shingon doctrine. Since Buddhism was strongly tied to the aristocrats and the imperial family, Buddhist monks were not always driven by religious convictions.³ For this reason, through researching historical records of the late-Heian period we can grasp a more secular viewpoint of Shingon Buddhism.

During the time of Kakuban, Japan faced a shift in power from wealthy aristocrats to powerful feudal lords, resulting in political change and social unrest. This prompted the general population to experiment with new spiritual guidance to lead them through these difficult times. Moreover, the belief that the world had entered the age of degenerate dharma made promises of Pure Lands more attractive. Many of these changes culminated in what would be called

³ This is made clear in Van der Veere's text, where he explains the political focus of Shingon monks at Tōji. See Van der Veere (2000), 39–40.

Kamakura Buddhism, which includes the formation of the Pure Land school. Although Kamakura Buddhism has become an oversaturated field of research, what preceded this seemingly golden age of Buddhism remains to be critically examined.

This thesis focuses on the role of Pure Land beliefs and practices before Hōnen 法然, when wandering ascetics were preaching the importance of *nenbutsu* 念佛, and retreating to the sacred mountains of Mount Kōya and Mount Hiei.⁴ The *hijiri* were key proponents in the spread of Pure Land practices across sectarian and social boundaries. Furthermore, the Pure Land aspects in Kakuban's writing and practices indicate that he learned and practiced with the *hijiri* while on Mount Kōya, as shown in Chapter two. As a result, Shingon adopted an esoteric veneration of Amida in the form of *nenbutsu* long before the founding of Pure Land schools. That being said, the methodology of Shingon's *nenbutsu* was drastically different from what later became the central practice of the Pure Land school.⁵ In his later years Kakuban would extend his practice of *nenbutsu* into original visualization techniques, which were used to unlock the mystery of speech.

Heian Buddhism

Kakuban lived in a society where long established power risked being overthrown and people grew increasingly negative toward their ability to attain buddhahood. As a result of shifts in social and political structures and overwhelming natural disasters, the late Heian period was a time of significant change for Japanese Buddhism. In the early Heian period Shingon and Tendai

⁴ Hōnen (1133–1212) is the founder of the Pure Land school, and is often credited for the spread of Pure Land practices across Japan.

⁵ In this thesis I will use the Japanese name Amida 阿彌陀 (S. Amitābha).

were introduced by Kūkai 空海 and Saichō 最澄 and largely benefited the imperial family and aristocrats. Yet, by the time of Kakuban, the lower classes were eager to participate in a different kind of Buddhism. Since Shingon had targeted the imperial court and wealthy patrons, commoners were excluded from understanding these complex Buddhist rituals and they sought a religion that would speak to their spiritual needs.

Late Heian Buddhism evolved to become increasingly involved with officials, who would in turn regulate the religion in their favor. With the imperial court controlling the ordination of monks, the Buddhist clergy acted more as government ministers than religious leaders. Since studying Buddhist philosophy meant reading classical Chinese sutras and understanding Chinese philosophy and literature, those outside of the aristocratic class were excluded from freely accessing and understanding complex Buddhist philosophy, just as they were excluded from politics.⁶ As a result, a religious divide grew between the wealthy and commoners during the Heian period. In addition, the introduction of tantric traditions during the 8th and 9th centuries made Buddhist rituals even more exclusive.⁷ Firstly, by requiring initiations for those involved and, secondly, the lavish and costly rituals promising protection, changes in weather, and prosperity were beyond the means of everyday people in Japan.

It was the rise in the Minamoto Clan during the late Heian period that sparked the turmoil and changes in social order. They established a feudal state headed by the shogunate, and moved

⁶ Although there are no surveys from this time period to determine the literacy rate, texts from the Heian period suggest that an in-depth knowledge of not only Buddhism but also Chinese culture and religion was a prerequisite for understanding these works. Those able to read these texts needed an advanced education, inaccessible to the average person.

⁷ In recent scholarship the term tantric has been favored over esoteric. When discussing tantric Buddhism I am referring to the Vajrayāna traditions that travelled from India through China, and eventually reached Japan.

the capital to Kamakura. With the military taking control of the country and overpowering the imperial family and the wealthy, this proved to be a redefining period for Japanese society. Moreover, the aristocrats were no longer the highest social class and the great centers for Buddhist study were no longer in the political capital. This forced Buddhism and Japanese society as a whole to adapt.

By the end of the Heian period, Buddhism was not only for the privileged aristocrats; practitioners seeking personal enlightenment became increasingly prevalent. This was seen especially with the *hijiri*, who preached amongst the working class. As a result, Buddhist philosophies and stories began trickling down to common people. Often, Buddhist traditions intertwined with local Shinto traditions, for example, Shingon mixed with Shinto traditions and became *ryōbu shintō* 两部神道. In this way, ascetic practices and a focus on the power of nature filtered into Buddhism. Although these ascetic aspects of Buddhism were strong during the formation of the tradition in India, during the Heian period the Buddhist clergy frowned on asceticism and personal spirituality since these would discredit their hierarchical system.⁸ As a result, ascetics like the *hijiri* chose an alternative religious path.

Due to their alternative methods the *hijiri* found themselves in an unusual state, where they were both outcasts and valuable members of the Buddhist community. Many *hijiri* were evangelists, preaching the message of Amida on street corners and in marketplaces. In doing so they were responsible for providing a form a Buddhism that lower social classes could grasp and practice. The *hijiri* were able to cross this barrier since they had detached themselves from regular society including the monasteries, and served as liminal figures for the community. Their

⁸ This will be examined further in chapter 2, where I examine the origins of the *hijiri*.

liminal status meant they were not a part of the official Buddhist clergy and, therefore, were not bound by the formalities of the official priestly roles. This allowed them to provide spiritual guidance for commoners. Furthermore, their detachment from the Buddhist clergy also allowed them to pursue the attainment of magical powers (Sk. *siddhi*). In attempts to be isolated from people, the *hijiri* were drawn to natural and spiritual locations and tended to congregate on mountainsides. For these reasons, the *hijiri* were drawn to Mount Kōya. When Kakuban ascended Mount Kōya, the *hijiri* outnumbered scholarly Shingon priests. As a result, Kakuban sought to understand and interpret their methods in a Shingon context.

The Life of Kakuban

Kakuban's childhood was like that of many other highly regarded Buddhist figures, and he was drawn to Buddhism from a young age. He was born in Kyūshū, his mother was of Tachibana lineage, and his father served as a local manor administrator.⁹ After the death of his father, Kakuban, his three brothers and mother became Buddhist monks and nuns.¹⁰ In 1108, when Kakuban was just thirteen, he entered the monastery. He studied largely under Kanjo 勘助 at Jōjuin, which was affiliated with Ninnaji in the capital (Heian). When Kanjo ordained him in 1110, he took on a priestly name, Kakuban Shōgakubō 覺鑠正覺房.¹¹ In 1112 Kanjo became the chief abbot of Tōji, the administrative center of the Shingon sect, resulting in the elevation of Kakuban's status. After which both Kanjo and Kakuban gained the support of Emperor Toba 鳥

⁹ While several biographies of Kakuban are available, I relied on Van der Veere's extensive work. Van der Veere 2000, 16–25.

¹⁰ This was a common practice for widows to become nuns when their husbands passed away.

¹¹ Shōgakubō literally means “the lineage of the perfectly enlightened” and Kakuban directly translates to “the enlightened *vam*.” The Sanskrit syllable *vam* is the seed syllable for Dainichi Nyorai in the Diamond Realm Maṇḍala. In Shingon all deities have their own seed syllable, used to represent their characteristics in the seed syllable mandala and other meditative practices.

羽天皇 (r. 1107-1123), which would persist even after his reign. Although this support helped facilitate much of their revitalization efforts the imperial backing of Emperor Toba eventually led to Kakuban's expulsion from Mount Kōya.

Kakuban was not the first Shingon priest to become aware of Shingon's need for revival. His teacher, Kanjo, led many restoration efforts, mainly to reestablish the philosophical debate system. Furthermore, Kanjo headed a group in the capital that fought for rebuilding and restoring Mount Kōya as a center of Shingon practices. Eventually, these ideals were passed down to Kakuban, who wished to continue the group's revitalization efforts. Following in the steps of his predecessors, Kakuban ascended Mount Kōya with the goal of reestablishing Shingon practices. Once on Mount Kōya, Kakuban found that he needed to diverge from his teacher's methods and turn to new trends in Buddhism to help revive Shingon.

Kakuban ascended Mount Kōya at the age of twenty, with two specific goals. Firstly, he strove to reestablish the *denbōe* system, which was a practice of debate among Shingon scholar monks that encouraged their philosophical pursuits. Since Kūkai's time the *denbōe* had fallen out of practice, and Kakuban hoped to revive this practice to bring focus back to the philosophy and practices of Shingon. Secondly, Kakuban wanted to practice the *gumonjihō* 求聞持法, which was a mantra promising great powers.¹² Kūkai himself practiced the *gumonjihō* and is said to have obtained the ability to remember everything he ever learned. Following his example, it became common place for Shingon monks to practice the *gumonjihō*, reciting the mantra of the

¹² The *gumonjihō* is a practice dedicated to the bodhisattva Kokūzō (Sk. Ākāśagarbha), whose name translates to "One Whose Store of Wisdom Is as Vast as Empty Space." The practitioner recites the mantra one million times ensuring that one will understand and remember all scriptures. It is this practice that is said to have motivated Kūkai to study tantric Buddhism. Kakuban performed in the *gumonjihō* several times before feeling satisfied with the results. Abe 1999, 74.

Bodhisattva Kokūzō 虛空藏菩薩 one million times. These two goals show that Kakuban intended to follow in Kūkai's footsteps once he ascended the mountain. Yet by interacting with the *hijiri* his motives began to shift.

Once on Mount Kōya, Kakuban came into contact with the *hijiri*, who taught him Pure Land practices. He first lived in the *bessho* 別所 of the Western Valley, where the majority of the *hijiri* resided.¹³ Although there is no direct link that connects Kakuban to learning from the *hijiri* exclusively, there is documentation in hagiographies of Kakuban showing that he lived amongst them and met with them during his time on Mount Kōya. Even his teacher, Meijaku 明寂 (?–1124), was considered a *hijiri* and also lived in the Western Valley. Even though there was a great population of *hijiri* on Mount Kōya they were still labeled as outcasts, and for this reason modern sources are hesitant to link Kakuban to them.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the overwhelming presence of the *hijiri* on Mount Kōya comes across in Kakuban's writings, where he expresses an urgency to define Pure Land praxis in a Shingon framework.

It was his close relationship with the *hijiri* and his association with the ex-emperor Toba that would lead to his expulsion from Mount Kōya. In his final years on Mount Kōya, Kakuban was appointed as the head priest of Kongōbuji, the main temple, a position previously under the supervision of the head priest of Tōji in the capital. Kakuban's role brought considerable power back to Mount Kōya, allowing the clergy to rebuild and reestablish the practices on the mountain. Despite this, Kakuban's position at Kongōbuji did not follow the traditional hierarchy and caused

¹³ *Bessho* literally means “separate place.” Since the *hijiri* were not officially involved in the Buddhist hierarchical system, they lived separately from the rest of the congregation.

¹⁴ Since the *hijiri* detached themselves from the Buddhist clergy and did not abide by the same rules they were seen as outsiders. This is indicated by their involvement in disposals of dead bodies and other lowly tasks. Todaro, 242.

dissent among the Shingon clergy. Additionally, Kakuban attempted to establish a system of hierarchy based on merit and scholarly achievements, as opposed to seniority, angering the elderly monks. Eventually, monks on Mount Kōya became outraged, attacking Kakuban and the temples he had established. Kakuban was forced to take refuge on Mount Negoro, where he founded what would become the center of the New Doctrine Shingon sect. It is here that Kakuban wrote his final work introducing his new visualization practices.

Shingon Visualization Practices

Visualization and contemplative practices are integral to Shingon teachings, more so than in other non-tantric Buddhist traditions. Since there is a focus on unlocking the mystery of the mind, Shingon tradition utilizes mandalas and other visual representations. Kakuban's writings introduce unique visualization practices that are grounded in Shingon doctrine. Instead of focusing on all three mysteries of the body, speech, and mind, Kakuban writes that a practitioner only has to unlock one of the mysteries to become one with Dainichi. Kakuban goes into great detail on this method in his *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku*, in which he details different methods for unlocking the mystery of speech. Yet, it is not only through mantra but also mudras and mandalas that a practitioner can achieve this.

By the time of Kakuban, there were three common eidetic contemplations in Shingon praxis. First of all, the Diamond and Womb Realm Maṇḍalas were widely used for initiation ceremonies and other rituals. These mandalas depict the universe with Dainichi at the center, and are a representation of non-duality.¹⁵ Secondly, the A syllable visualization was also widely

¹⁵ In this thesis I will use the Japanese name Dainichi 大日 (Sk. Mahāvairocana). For more information on the mandalas of the two realms see Snodgrass's *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*.

practiced by Shingon priests. This stems from the desire to become one with Dainichi's essential nature. Since Dainichi's seed syllable is the Sanskrit letter *A*, practitioners would meditate on the letter to become one with the unborn nature of the *dharmakāya*. Lastly, there was the full moon visualization, which was much like the *A* syllable visualization. In the full moon visualization practitioners strive to generate the awakening resolve (Sk. *bodhicitta*). The full moon is sometimes envisioned in conjunction with the Sanskrit letter *A*, with meditators imagining the full moon or Sanskrit letter *A* as their own body.

Kakuban built on these preexisting practices and introduced modern religious trends, allowing Shingon to adapt and incorporate new ideas. One of his main contributions was the *Gozō Maṇḍala*, or the mandala of the five visceral organs. In this mandala he not only adopted Pure Land practices but also Chinese medicinal practices. This introduced a new concept of the body in Shingon, which Kakuban would in turn relate to the Pure Land. Furthermore, he also created specifically Shingon interpretations of *nenbutsu* and visualizations of the Pure Land. Although these new additions are not vast departures from preexisting practices, they had a significant impact on how Shingon traditions have developed.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter two, "Conceptions of the Pure Land during the late Heian Period," details the interaction between Kakuban and the *hijiri* of Mount Kōya. Although the Pure Land school had not yet been developed, Pure Land practices and concepts had become fashionable not only among Buddhist monks but also among the common people. It was Kakuban's interactions with the *hijiri* that motivated him to include a focus on Pure Land practices in his works. This is important to highlight, the present-day Shingon clergy tend to deemphasize the impact of the *hijiri* on

Kakuban's teachings. The *hijiri* were seen as lower members of society, since they were outside of the official ordination system and they sought to improve their personal spirituality in a way that which the Buddhist clergy at Tōji did not condone.¹⁶ Yet, it was from these ascetics that Kakuban was motivated to incorporate Pure Land philosophy.

Chapter three, "Kakuban's Appropriation of Amida," examines how Amida fits into the Shingon pantheon and how Kakuban appropriated Amida without ostracizing the Shingon clergy. He attempted to show that since Amida is a manifestation of Dainichi, chanting Amida's words and visualizing his Pure Land are just another way of worshiping Dainichi, albeit a slower way. Furthermore, Kakuban dedicated an entire text, the *Amida hishaku* (The Secret Explanation of Amida), to explaining Amida's role in Shingon as a manifestation of Dainichi. Although Amida had always been a part of the Shingon pantheon, Kakuban reinterpreted Amida's role as a central figure of veneration. This was no doubt in response to the popularity of Amidist practices.

Chapter 4, "Visualization of the Pure Land in One's Own Body," introduces Kakuban's original visualization techniques, and how they have been incorporated into the Shingon doctrine. In order to incorporate the popular Amidist practices of the late Heian period, Kakuban formulated the concept of a Shingon Pure Land. In doing so he described a Pure Land inside Dainichi's body, which in turn is inside everyone, waiting to be realized. Therefore, when a Shingon practitioner achieves rebirth in the Pure Land, she is reaching an enlightened state within herself that leads to liberation. The visualization of Dainichi's Pure Land is detailed in Kakuban's *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* 密嚴淨土略觀, and is based on the Womb Realm Maṇḍala.

¹⁶ This is outlined in Hori's work, in which he details the anti-secularism of the *hijiri* groups towards the Buddhist clergy. Hori, 201.

The visualization of Dainichi's body culminates in the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku*, in which the *Gozō Maṇḍala* is depicted as a representation of Dainichi's body.

Chapter 2: The Relationship between the *Hijiri* and Kakuban

The ferment that occurred during the late Heian period created conditions in which Pure Land teachings became popular among monastics and lay people alike. As the number of Pure Land ascetics grew, other Buddhist monks increasingly wondered how to adapt to the new religious trends. The need to revive Shingon, along with the growing popularity of Pure Land practices, resulted in Kakuban incorporating Amida into Shingon doctrine and practice. Meanwhile, Kūkai's new status of sainthood marked the beginning of Shingon's revival by attracting both Pure Land followers and aristocrats to Mount Kōya.¹⁷ This was further facilitated by Shingon monks' efforts to rekindle Mount Kōya as the center of tantric meditation.

Typically, research on Japanese Buddhism emphasizes the tantric traditions introduced during the early Heian period, and only briefly discusses late Heian Buddhist developments. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a growing interest in the transition that took place during the late Heian, especially in the affinities between the tantric tradition and the increasingly popular Pure Land practices. The reason why this field has been neglected in the past largely results from the lack of resources documenting the lives of the *hijiri*. Additionally, since these *hijiri* generally did not believe in writing down their teachings or were not proficient writers, there is a dearth of primary resources that would allow scholars to understand their interaction with Shingon monks. Furthermore, this type of research is largely conducted by scholars from within the tradition, who are rarely concerned with how Shingon interacted with

¹⁷ After the imperial bestowal of the posthumous title Great Master Kōbō to Kūkai in 921, *hijiri* were increasingly drawn to the mountain by the hope of being reborn in the Pure Land upon making a pilgrimage to Kūkai's mausoleum. Abe 1991, 307.

other schools.¹⁸ Yet, scholars outside the tradition are now examining historical biographical works, as well as local archives and temple records. These primary sources help to define the *hijiri*'s role in popularizing Pure Land practices within late Heian Buddhism.

It is through the analysis of these resources that we can shed some light on Kakuban's relationship with the *hijiri* and how this affected his later writings. Once on Mount Kōya, he came into contact with the *hijiri* and utilized their teachings to revamp the Shingon praxis. This chapter focuses on Kakuban's activities and practices on Mount Kōya, and more specifically on his interactions with the *hijiri*. While on Mount Kōya Kakuban studied with Meijaku and lived with him in the *bessho* of the Western Valley. Given Kakuban's close relations with the *hijiri*, it seems as though he considered their practices as an answer to Shingon's growing decline. Examining the role of the wandering Pure Land ascetics and their relations with Kakuban, as well as the development of Pure Land practices as a whole, allows us to gain some degree of understanding of the *hijiri*'s impact on Kakuban. In doing so, one must venture outside the framework of purely Shingon scholarship and attempt to apprehend the main developments of Pure Land teachings as well.

Resources on *hijiri* in English are sparse, and tend to contain only fragmented accounts of their lifestyle and roles in society. "On the Concept of Hijiri (Holy-Man)" by Ichiro Hori (1958), played a pioneering role in introducing this field to Western scholarship. His work provides an overview of the *hijiri* and how they emerged from the religious milieu of medieval Japan. Studies in English tend to focus on the missionary work done by the *hijiri* and ignore the ascetic

¹⁸ This is an issue in Japanese scholarship across all Buddhist sects. Although Japanese scholars provide extensive details on Kakuban's life and philosophy, are mainly concerned with how this impacted the Shingon tradition.

component of their way of life. Janet R. Goodwin's work, *Alms and Vagabonds*, for example, gives an in depth survey of the fundraising and proselytizing roles of the *hijiri*. While this monograph has added a much-needed analysis of the *hijiri*'s fund raising efforts, it does not specifically address the *hijiri*-Shingon interaction on Mount Kōya. Lastly, other Western scholars mention the *hijiri*'s role in relation to the propagation of Pure Land tradition among commoners. Even though the *hijiri* were essential in this process, these scholars tend to exclusively focus on how this led to the emergence of the Pure Land schools of the Kamakura period, and little attention is given to the *hijiri* of Mount Kōya and their interpretations of the tantric doctrine.

Given the lack of comprehensive English resources on the *hijiri*, it is imperative to turn to Japanese sources to understand their role on Mount Kōya. Shigeru Gorai's monograph, *Kōya hijiri* 高野聖, is one of the most complete works on the *hijiri* of Mount Kōya. As a historian, Gorai provides an etic approach to researching the *hijiri*. His work has been a catalyst to further study of the *hijiri*, and it encouraged academics to challenge some of his controversial ideas.¹⁹ In addition to Gorai's work, the New Doctrine Shingon tradition has published several articles regarding Kakuban and his Pure Land practices. These are helpful in seeing how the tradition views its founder's interactions with the marginal ascetics. They do not, however, dispel the negative light cast on the *hijiri* and their roles as outsiders, since they possibly fear that it could tarnish Kakuban's image. Instead, they focus more on the philosophy of the practices themselves and only briefly mention where these Pure Land inklings derived from.

¹⁹ Gorai takes on the daunting task of defining the *hijiri* and also speculates that notable Buddhist figures were associated with the *hijiri*. This has opened the discussion on who qualifies as a *hijiri* and who was simply inspired by their ideas.

Ultimately, the *Kōgyō daishi denki shiryō zenshū* 興教大師傳記史料全集 yields the most valuable information regarding Kakuban's life events. This collection of primary sources provides an extensive account of events related to Kakuban's life on Mount Kōya. The encounter between Kakuban and Aba no Shōnin 阿波上人 is mentioned in two separate biographies, shedding light on Kakuban's initial ascent to Mount Kōya and on how he gained acceptance into the *hijiri* community.²⁰ That being said, the Kakuban-*hijiri* relationship cannot be studied in a vacuum and requires a basic understanding of the religious climate of the late Heian period.

Late Heian Religious Trends

Although tantric rituals flourished in early Heian society, Shingon's power began to wane in the later part of the Heian period. Tendai practices on the other hand remained strong. Many outside the tradition began to question the necessity of Shingon, since their distinction from the Tendai school was unclear to outsiders.²¹ This stands in stark contrast to the flourishing growth of this tradition during the life of Kūkai (774–835). In order to revive Shingon, its leaders faced the challenges of propagating their tradition, and some of them turned to the popular Pure Land practices of the time period for inspiration. Due to the socio-political climate of the late Heian period, Amidist groups and Pure Land thought became increasingly important to Buddhist practitioners including Shingon.

Late Heian Japanese society was in low spirits due to recurrent national calamities, such as war, famine and social unrest. As a result, the common people were discouraged, and this

²⁰ A translation from a passage of *Kōgyō daishi denki shiryō zenshū*, which describes Kakuban's encounter with Aba no Shōnin, is provided in Appendix A.

²¹ Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan 500–1600*. 231–3.

negativity pervaded their religious practices. It became a common understanding that the world had reached the stage of the final degeneration of the dharma, or *mappō* 末法.²² Therefore laypeople felt that it would be impossible to reach enlightenment in this lifetime or even to effectively practice the dharma. This hurt the Shingon tradition, since its main teaching is that one can become enlightened in this body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛). Lay people started to wonder how Shingon could help them during the *mappō* age. Furthermore, Shingon rituals were too complicated for commoners to perform, and too expensive for them to commission.

Many practitioners turned instead to the salvific nature of the Amidist belief to quell their fears. Even though Pure Land practices were not yet widespread among the public, Buddhist monks and wandering ascetics were beginning to practice and understand methods for being reborn in Amida's Western Pure Land, particularly through chanting *nenbutsu*.²³ Although Pure Land Buddhism was active in China during the 6th and 7th centuries, the Heian era popularity of Amida was not a product of this.²⁴ It was the Tendai school that brought devotional practices of Amida Buddha to Japan, through walking meditation performed on Mount Hiei. It is eventually from the Tendai tradition that the founder of the Pure Land school, Hōnen, emerged a few centuries later during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Pure Land influences started with walking meditation, which was derived from the founder of the Tiantai (Jp. Tendai) school in

²² This is the third stage of the dharma. The first stage is the age of the true dharma, which lasts for 500 to 1,000 years. This is the ideal age to be born in, since the teaching is valid and its practice and attainment are still possible. The second stage is the age of the semblance dharma, lasting for 500 to 1,000 years. While the teachings and practice still exist, no one is attaining enlightenment. Lastly, the degeneration stage lasts for 10,000 years, and only the teaching is possible. There are variations between India, China and Japan for the amount of years for each age. Rulu, 267.

²³ This seems to have been an important element of the early *hijiri*. Figures such as Genshin and Kūya were known for utilizing *nenbutsu* in proselytizing Amida's salvific nature. Hori, 202–3.

²⁴ Although Pure Land scriptures existed in Japan prior to the *hijiri*, it was not until the *mappō* thought became widespread that practitioners felt attracted to the practices. Hori, 214.

China, Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597). The Japanese monk Ennin 圓仁 (794–864) is credited for bringing constantly walking meditation to Mount Hiei, which he learned during his lengthy travels in China.²⁵ Since these meditations focused on Amida and consisted of circumambulating an image of the Buddha while performing *nenbutsu*, there are obvious Pure Land implications in the practice. Since Tendai practices remained strictly confined to officially ordained priests, the *hijiri* would be the agents who transmitted these practices to the public.

While Pure Land notions were becoming more prevalent in meditation practices among Tendai priests, un-ordained ascetics were preaching to commoners the salvific benefits of worshipping Amida. The *hijiri* in particular were active in venerating Amida and his Pure Land. These groups of mountain ascetics included many retired Buddhist monks nearing the end of their lives, as well as aristocrats searching for a way to fulfill their religious aspirations.²⁶ It is difficult to have a specific definition for all *hijiri*, since they include a wide range spanning from those who practiced exorcisms and magical spells, to wealthy patrons who travelled from temple to temple in an attempt to learn various paths to enlightenment.²⁷ Richard Bowring, for example, prefers the term “mendicant order” to define them as a collaborative group. In doing so, he leaves space for a broader interpretation of the term *hijiri*.

The *hijiri* flocked to spiritual mountains such as Mount Kōya for training, since they were drawn to the power of nature and otherworldly Buddhist sites. Beyond the power of nature alone, many *hijiri* were attracted to Kūkai’s salvific powers as well. After this site had been consecrated as a holy place, Kūkai’s mausoleum attracted many followers seeking enlightenment.

²⁵ Bowring, 200–203.

²⁶ Bowring defines the *hijiri* in his work. He gives an example of a *hijiri* of aristocratic birth on pages 230–231.

²⁷ Bowring, 230–231.

By making a pilgrimage to Mount Kōya, practitioners believed they would be granted rebirth in various Pure Lands:

Those who come on pilgrimage can eliminate all the karmic obstructions accumulated throughout countless rebirths even before they reach the mountain. As he climbs the mountain, he is assured of attaining his next rebirth, according to his wish, in any Buddha's pure land. (Abe 1991, 307)

This excerpt discusses the benefits of a pilgrimage to Kūkai's mausoleum. Furthermore, it shows that it was not only Amida's Pure Land but also all other Pure Lands that were popular during the late Heian period. This indicates how pervasive Pure Land praxis had become after Kūkai's demise and alleged access to sainthood. Kakuban too was drawn to Mount Kōya by Kūkai's teachings, yet he would not encounter Pure Land philosophy until he reached the mountain.

The Pure Land practices introduced by the *hijiri* in the late Heian period were essential in Kakuban's reshaping the Shingon tradition. The late Heian period saw an overall growth of interest in Pure Land tradition; a byproduct of this is the emergence of Pure Land themes in Shingon monk's texts as well as the increased popularity of the *hijiri* and their successful missionary efforts.²⁸ The co-emergence of Kakuban's works and his contemporaries' writing in the Shingon tradition marks the beginning of this Pure Land theme in Shingon. In a later section of this chapter we will discuss the affinities between Kakuban and the *hijiri* of Mount Kōya.

During the late Heian period, Shingon seemed to be following the path of tantric Buddhism in Tang Dynasty China, where Shingon only survived long enough to be passed on to its Japanese founder Kūkai, and then disappeared while being integrated into the main Mahayana

²⁸ Goodwin, *Alms and Vagabonds*, 21–2.

schools.²⁹ Kakuban's studies on Mount Kōya, and his determination to revive Kūkai's teachings, gave him the opportunity to interact with the *hijiri* and learn about the Pure Land tradition, leading to his formulation of a new doctrine for Shingon Buddhism. Simultaneously, the *hijiri* were attracted to the spiritual powers associated with the resting place of Kūkai on Mount Kōya. While on the mountain they were not necessarily affiliated with Shingon, nevertheless they relied on the temples of Mount Kōya for shelter and sustenance. Despite the fact that many of them were not officially ordained, the *hijiri* gained authoritative power through their successful fundraising (*kanjin* 勧進) campaigns. This raises the question of how the *hijiri* had such a deep impact on Shingon doctrine without being ordained monks. While the second chapter raises this question and explores the roles of the *hijiri* in relation to Kakuban, the later chapters show how although there is little documentation of their interaction, Kakuban's incorporation of Pure Land philosophy in his writing shows just how deeply they influenced him.

Definition and Etymology of the Term Hijiri

Understanding the evolution of the term *hijiri* can help shed light on the origins of their practice, and their status in late Heian Buddhism. The word *hijiri* has developed in meaning throughout Japanese history, and two theories about the etymology of the Chinese character (聖) and the Japanese sound associated with it have emerged. *Hijiri* historically referred to someone of high status, a teacher, a skilled worker, or even a saintly figure. This word was also often associated with the emperor. Today the character is used as the translation of "saint" in the English

²⁹ After Kūkai's journey to China from 804 to 806 his master Huiguo passed away. Although he left behind disciples, they were not able to survive the persecutions of Buddhism. Even though tantric practices remained popular, instead of being a separate school tantric rituals were incorporated into the mainstream Mahayana schools. For more information see *Han chuan mi jiao* 汉传密教 by Yaozhong Yan. It provides a survey of Chinese tantric Buddhism.

language. Ichiro Hori suggests that *hijiri* “means a man of great knowledge (*shiri* [知]) concerning the calendar or the movement of heavenly bodies symbolized by ‘sun’ or ‘day’ (*hi* [日])” (Hori, 129). On the contrary, the Japanese scholar Shigeru Gorai denounces this theory and suggests that the term *hijiri* derives from *hishiri* but using the characters 火治り instead of 日知り. Gorai argues that the *hijiri* controlled fire, the character *hi* 火 fire and *shiri* 治り means management.³⁰ This is supported by the *Mikkyō jiten* 密教辞典 (Dictionary of Esoteric Buddhism), which also suggests that the modern word *hijiri* derives from *hishiri* 火治り.³¹ Furthermore, Gorai asserts that the *hijiri* most likely began as shamans, using fire in their rituals. As the word has developed to characterize Pure Land ascetics, the connection with fire has been lost.³²

Western scholars have struggled to find a good translation for the term *hijiri*, and as a result, academics have turned to many different translations in their work. *Hijiri* has been translated as vagabonds, holy men, wandering ascetics, missionaries, and mendicant orders. Since *hijiri* encompass all of these attributes, none of these translations is wrong, while none is entirely correct. For example, many of the *hijiri* would occasionally spearhead fundraising efforts for temples out of necessity to earn food and shelter, and on another occasion retreat into the mountains to perform individual ascetic practices. Since there is no correlating term for *hijiri* in English, I prefer to use the Japanese word. Although the *hijiri* performed many roles, fundraising became their most important role in the eyes of the Buddhist clergy. It is often with

³⁰ Gorai, *Kōya Hijiri* 高野聖, 29.

³¹ *Mikkyō jiten* 密教辞典, 199.

³² Gorai, 29. Although the *hijiri*'s involvement in cremations would explain this etymology, I have not found any primary source confirming this role and am hesitant to make this connection.

the *hijiri*'s help that they were able to connect with the common people and raise money. For this reason the Buddhist clergy usually accepted and sponsored them as part of the temple, even though they were seen as outside members of the social order.

The eclectic role of the *hijiri* can be broken down into eight distinguishing characteristics. These characteristics are: hermit, ascetic, wanderer, *siddha* (magician), layman, community serviceman, fundraiser, and missionary.³³ There seem to be obvious contradictions in this list. Nonetheless, each *hijiri* can have various experiences throughout his lifetime, and therefore this list provides an accurate overview of the possible characteristics of the *hijiri*. On the other hand, these characteristics only depict vague boundaries for this term and do not provide an all-encompassing definition of *hijiri*. It was common for a *hijiri* to switch his focus as he progressed from doing austere practices in the mountains to collecting donations for the temples he was affiliated with. Furthermore, different groups of *hijiri* would have unique goals for their community, such as meditation, or preaching.

Although the *hijiri* as a group are difficult to define, they all shared an opposition to official Buddhist bureaucracy, which brought them together³⁴ In this respect Goodwin's adoption of Victor Turner's idea of *communitas* in identifying the *hijiri* as anti-structure, liminal facets of the community, works well to define the role of the *hijiri*.³⁵ Turner's concept of liminality is appropriate to describe the *hijiri*, who remove themselves from society. In detaching themselves not only from Buddhism but also from the comforts of a layman's life, they were able to reach a

³³ Gorai, 30.

³⁴ Hori gives short biographies of many *hijiri* in his article, after which he states: "The significant characteristic seen in all of these is that their attitudes and functions were the very opposite of that of priests in the official monasteries and large temples." This shows how the *hijiri* tended to oppose the official Buddhist clergy because of their secular affinities. Hori, 201–8.

³⁵ Goodwin, 4–5.

spiritual connection with Amida Buddha that those still attached to their desires could not fathom. This detachment from society freed them to accomplish undertakings that Buddhist monks were unable to, such as detaching themselves from priestly duties, and wandering from temple to temple to find a teaching that most benefited them. Many of these *hijiri* supported the ascetic teachings of Buddhism, and often used Buddhist practices to attain their goals. Yet, they were opposed to the rigid hierarchical and political institution that Buddhism had become. When corroborating their claim that Buddhism was in a *mappō* state, the *hijiri* would point to the secularization of Buddhism at the administrative level as evidence. Even though we can only approximate the profile of the *hijiri*, this rudimentary depiction may help us to understand their specific roles in late Heian society.

Origins of the *Hijiri*

Mountain ascetics like the *hijiri* were not an entirely new class of religious practitioners in Japan: several traditions throughout Japan's history have encouraged seeking spiritual awakening in nature and practicing austerities. Some of these movements stemmed from Shinto traditions and had a strong connection with supernatural forces within nature. In addition to Shinto traditions, Daoist aspects were also incorporated into the Japanese ascetic practice, through contact with Chinese culture. This happened especially during the 8th and 9th centuries, with Japanese envoys who were sent to China and brought back cultural relics, political strategies, architecture, and religious concepts.³⁶ As a result, the Japanese had an eclectic view of spirituality and culture, borrowing from many traditions they were exposed to from China and Korea.³⁷ The concept of

³⁶ Bowring, 226–9.

³⁷ Much of Japan's culture came through Korea and China. Buddhism originally came through Korea, and Daoist and Confucian ideals were firmly rooted in their culture. There is evidence in Kakuban's own works about Chinese

mountain asceticism had therefore been in existence in Japan for a long period, possibly even before the emergence of Buddhism.

Shugendō 修験道 practice, in particular, entails the worship of the spiritual nature of mountains. It is a tradition combining the tantric aspects of Shingon and Tendai and the spiritual power of Shinto. Although Shugendō was outlawed after the Meiji restoration, it is practiced in Japan in modern times. Yet, little is known about the origins of Shugendō. Since the tradition was outlawed during the Meiji period with the emergence of State Shinto, much of its history was lost.³⁸ It makes the comparison between the activities of Shugendō practitioners and those of the *hijiri* difficult, but it is important to point out that these ascetic practices and the inclination to feel a special bond with nature were deeply rooted in some segments of Japanese society. Although the Shugendō tradition also incorporates ascetic practices and venerates the spiritual power of mountains, the *hijiri* are unique in their inclusion of Pure Land elements into their ascetic practice.

Pure Land texts had been circulating in Japan far before the emergence of the *hijiri*, yet it was a later re-introduction of the practices and the prevalence of *mappō* thought that brought about the *hijiri* tradition on Mount Kōya. The *hijiri* seem to have been exposed to the Pure Land practices that were introduced to Japan through the Tendai monk Ennin during the early Heian period. Yet, as early as the Nara period (710–794) some of the Pure Land teachings of Huiyuan

medicinal practices that were passed down through religious and government documents. Since Shingon took over the Daoist tradition of maintaining the calendar and other astrology for the court, they inherited various Daoist practices and theories.

³⁸ State Shinto mandated that Shinto and Buddhist practices be separated.

慧遠 (334–416) had already reached Japan.³⁹ Subsequently, practices derived from these teachings were seen as just one method to reach enlightenment, and not as an independent school of thought. Early *hijiri*, such as Gyōgi and Kūya, also drew a lot of attention through their unique methods including dancing *nenbutsu* (*odori nenbutsu* 踊り念佛) which contributed to their success in attracting commoners to their faith.⁴⁰ Following the example of these early figures, the *hijiri* soon began congregating in groups, and forming different orders according to their specific paths to being reborn in the Pure Land. Commoners were attracted to these methods because of their accessibility. Anyone could become a *hijiri*, and they preached a simple way to realize enlightenment.

This phenomenon is seen in many traditions, where the hierarchical structure of the religion takes over and religious practice becomes secondary, causing those who seek personal enlightenment to detach from the mainstream religious groups. Not only were the Buddhist rituals and teachings rigidly structured, but also lay practitioners, especially those of low social standing, were unable to participate in this system. There was a need for religion to transcend the limitations of social class. Responding to this, the *hijiri* began a movement to incorporate lower social classes into Buddhist practice. This movement developed into a distinguishing component of Kamakura Buddhism, leading to the emergence of the Pure Land school.

³⁹ Huiyuan is considered the first patriarch of the Pure Land school. Hori, 137.

⁴⁰ Gyōgi 行基 (668–749) was famous for delivering his message on the streets and turning to an ascetic lifestyle. Kūya 空也 (903–372) was regarded as a bodhisattva, and he also took to the streets to preach the Dharma. He particularly emphasized the importance of *nenbutsu*.

The Role of the *Hijiri* in Late Heian Buddhism

Because of the *hijiri*'s liminal role vis-à-vis Buddhist temples during the late Heian period, many of the Buddhist clergy seem to have had to negotiate a new type of working relation with them. They were not officially ordained members of the temple, but were often offered lodging at the temple in halls called *bessho*, literally "separate places." Some of the tasks they were known to perform indicate that they belonged to a lower social stratum. For example *hijiri* on Mount Kōya performed cremations and other tasks associated with taking care of the deceased. Yet, even though they took part in these lowly responsibilities, the Buddhist clergy saw value in them outside of this context as well. The *hijiri*'s popularity among lay followers and their skills in raising money also forced the Buddhist clergy, in some cases, to incorporate the *hijiri* into their hierarchical system, albeit at the lowest level.

The *hijiri* were able to transcend boundaries that ordained monks were unable to and therefore, Shingon monks relied on them for communicating with the public. One of the main methods by which the *hijiri* accomplished this was through fundraising and community service projects, such as building bridges and infrastructure. While fundraising, the *hijiri* promised lay people spiritual connections with a specific Buddha or Bodhisattva. They would draw upon miraculous stories from the respective temple's *engi* 緣起, or story of origination, and would tell tales of miracles that proved very popular among the lay people.⁴¹ This practice of storytelling not only exposed common people to Buddhism, it also encouraged them to remain involved with the temple in the future. During the restoration of Mount Kōya in the late Heian period, this was the main method by which the temples raised money for rebuilding.

⁴¹ James H. Foard, 360–1.

The State of Mount Kōya during the Late Heian Period

By the late Heian period, Mount Kōya had fallen into disrepair, and it was not until Kūkai was elevated to the status of a saint that practice slowly became reestablished. The decline in Shingon had largely resulted from the behavior of some ordained monks, who were more interested in dabbling in the politics at Tōji than in focusing on their training at the secluded temples of Mount Kōya. Ironically, this allowed the *hijiri* to practice their faith on the mountain without disturbance. In reaction to the different roles held by Shingon monks and the *hijiri*, the Shingon clergy developed a three-tiered class system, solidifying the hierarchy and the purpose of each group on Mount Kōya.⁴² The groups were: 1) *Gakuryo* 學侶, monks who studied, discussed, and practiced the dharma. 2) *Gyōnin* 行人, monks who managed and were administrators of the temples. 3) *Hijiri*, ascetics in charge of chores and routine maintenance.⁴³ This classification system was active until the Meiji Restoration, and at the time of Kakuban it was firmly in place.

These three groups mirrored the structure of Buddhism in the capital as well. A monk was expected to be exclusively associated with only one of these three classes, be it religious practice, temple management, or wandering ascetic. Within the *gakuryo* there were two further divisions, one that discussed and preached the dharma, while the other one concentrated on meditation and contemplation. This category of monks was the highest ranked on Mount Kōya, and it was from the *gakuryo* that the imperial court selected monks for court rituals and ceremonies. They were essential in the development of Shingon, yet it was this very class that the *hijiri* resented.

⁴² *Kōya sangata* 高野三方. This is not a concept limited to Mount Kōya, Mount Hiei also had a similar structure in place. *Mikkyō jiten*, 197.

⁴³ *Mikkyō jiten*, 197.

Following the *gakuryo* were the *gyōnin* who, in a sense, served the higher *gakuryo* class. The *gyōnin* performed many menial tasks on Mount Kōya, such as cleaning, lighting the lamps, managing donations, etc. Yet, from medieval times, the *gyōnin* also had the job of enforcing rules and regulations, acting much like the police of the mountain. As a result, despite their lower status, they held considerable power. Later on, armed clerics known as warrior monks (*sōhei* 僧兵) were also incorporated into the *gyōnin* group. In any case, the *gakuryo* and the *gyōnin* often fought, but by the start of the Tokugawa period, the two groups were on equal footing, even going so far as to wear the same robes.⁴⁴

The lowest ranked class on Mount Kōya was the *hijiri*. They had their roots in the *geshū* 夏衆, meaning the people who ascended Mount Kōya during the summer to engage in Buddhist practices together.⁴⁵ As the group developed, they began to stay all year round rather than just for the intensive summer retreats. Specific groups of *hijiri* associated with precise locations developed on Mount Kōya, such as *Rengedani hijiri* 蓮華谷聖, *Kendō hijiri* 萱堂聖, *Senjuin hijiri* 千手院聖, and *Gomuro hijiri* 五室聖. Each one of these assemblies focused on different aspects of *hijiri* practice. Although the *hijiri* were a diverse group in their methods for enlightenment, they were unified in that they believed in the Pure Land as their answer for freeing themselves from *samsāra* during the *mappō* stage. During the time of Kakuban, there were only 300 *gakuryo* on Mount Kōya, but as many as 2,000 *hijiri*.⁴⁶ This relatively large number of lower class *hijiri* seems to have generated considerable tension on the mountain. As a

⁴⁴ *Mikkyō jiten*, 197.

⁴⁵ *Mikkyō jiten*, 197.

⁴⁶ *Mikkyō jiten*, 199.

result of this imbalance, the *hijiri* gained some degree of power and, simultaneously, made their teachings more prevalent.

The *hijiri* of Mount Kōya did not only practice Pure Land traditions, they also were aware of tantrism.⁴⁷ Furthermore, because of the imbalance between *gakuryo* and *hijiri*, these popular beliefs were seeping into aristocratic practices.⁴⁸ Many of the *hijiri* of Mount Kōya lived in the Western Valley, where Kakuban stayed when first arriving on the mountain. Since this was at a time when *hijiri* were flourishing on Mount Kōya, Kakuban certainly studied and worked with the *hijiri*, which would eventually lead to his skillful adaptation of Shingon contemplative practices. The affinities between Kakuban and the *hijiri* were not always accepted by the main clergy of Mount Kōya, but the practices he learned from them would prove invaluable when he began to revitalize the Shingon tradition.

Kakuban's Interactions with the *Hijiri*

It is difficult to find concrete evidence that Kakuban was part of a *hijiri* group, although there are many texts that allude to this connection. Since only a few scholars have examined these texts, considerable room remains for further research.⁴⁹ The New Doctrine Shingon texts, on the other hand, keep the topic of *hijiri* on Mount Kōya vague. This is in part due to their authors' fear of undermining their own tradition by admitting that their founder worked extensively with the lower *hijiri* class. More importantly, scholars from the New Doctrine Shingon sect are mainly

⁴⁷ Van der Veere explains that the *hijiri* often mixed different practices, such as the recitation of Amida's name and tantric mantras, to attain their goals. Van der Veere, 59–60.

⁴⁸ Since the *hijiri* were gaining popularity, not only among the commoners, but also the aristocrats, Pure Land ideologies were becoming a part of the elite culture.

⁴⁹ There have been Western scholars who analyzed Kakuban and the *hijiri* separately, but they only briefly mention their interactions. Scholars such as Henny Van der Veere, Janet Goodwin, and James Foard are the pioneers.

interested in researching historical details that pertain to their tradition exclusively. Their obvious omission of the influential *hijiri* in late Heian Shingon could indicate that they are hiding a piece of history, which the New Doctrine Shingon scholars feel would be detrimental to the New Doctrine Shingon's reputation. Conversely, it could merely be a result of the Shingon clergy thinking that their attention should focus elsewhere.

The story of Kakuban's relationship with the *hijiri* begins with his encounter with Aba no Shōnin 阿波上人. Once on Mount Kōya, Kakuban came into contact with Aba no Shōnin, who had been praying for someone to come and revive the Shingon teachings.⁵⁰ Their encounter is documented in biographies of Kakuban, yet little detail is provided about their interactions. Upon meeting Kakuban, Aba no Shōnin exclaims that he is delighted to have Kakuban come to Mount Kōya and revive the teachings. In his old age Aba no Shōnin feels young and hopeful again after meeting Kakuban. The embellishment of this hagiography foreshadows Kakuban's impact on Shingon.

Kakuban's teacher on Mount Kōya, Meijaku, is also referred to as a *hijiri*. He supported *nenbutsu* and the concept of rebirth in the Pure Land, as demonstrated by his contributions to the *Kōyasan ōjō den* 高野山往生傳.⁵¹ Kakuban studied with Meijaku, and learned the *nenbutsu*, and other Pure Land practices from him. Kakuban would later incorporate these teachings into Shingon, developing tantric *nenbutsu* meditative practices.

⁵⁰ *Kōgyō daishi denki shiryō zenshū*, 9, 49. The translation of an excerpt is provided in Appendix A.

⁵¹ This text was compiled by several *hijiri* and describes the methods for reaching the Pure Land on Mount Kōya. See Gorai, 71.

As a result of interactions with *hijiri* in the Western Valley, Pure Land practices began to flourish on Mount Kōya. There are three important practices in Kakuban's writings providing evidence that he came into contact with Pure Land concepts, either via the *hijiri* or other Shingon monks. 1) The visualization of the Pure Land in one's own body, 2) the practice of the secret *nenbutsu* (*himitsu nenbutsu* 祕密念佛), and 3) death bed rituals to ensure one's rebirth in the Pure Land. The secret *nenbutsu* became especially popular, not only within Shingon but also in the Tendai tradition.⁵² Kakuban himself is said to be a founder of the secret *nenbutsu* movement within the Shingon school, yet, the other two practices were also essential in shaping the unique Shingon incorporation of the teachings of the *hijiri*. These Pure Land teachings were essential in redefining the Shingon school during the late Heian period, and it was these encounters with the *hijiri* that led to Kakuban's additions of visualization techniques to the Shingon doctrine.

Kakuban's Contemporaries

Kakuban did not formulate his teachings within a vacuum and, with such an imbalance between the *gakuryo* and the *hijiri*, several other Shingon monks also resonated with Pure Land thought. Jitsuhan 實範 (1089–1044) also incorporated Pure Land practices into his writings. At an early age Jitsuhan left home to become a monk at Kōfukuji in Nara. Like Kakuban, Jitsuhan was also patronized by former emperor Toba, as indicated by Toba's summoning of Jitsuhan to teach him tantric practices.⁵³ Jitsuhan also firmly believed that Buddhist practice was falling into degeneration, and therefore being reborn in a Pure Land was necessary for awakening one's

⁵² These three Pure Land concepts will be explored further in the third chapter, where I discuss Kakuban's appropriation of Amida.

⁵³ *Mikkyō jiten*, 313.

mind. This motivated him to live on Mount Kōya, where he both studied with the *hijiri* and came into contact with Kakuban.⁵⁴

A practical result of their collaboration is that Jitsuhan inspired Kakuban to write about Shingon deathbed rituals in a Pure Land context. Kakuban's *Ichigo taiyō himitsushū* 一期大要祕密集 from their close relation, since Kakuban's text is based on Jitsuhan's work, *Byōchū shugyō ki* 病中修行記 (Record of Practices During Sickness). Both texts discuss reciting *nenbutsu*, the contemplation of the Amida maṇḍala, and rebirth in the Pure Land. These writings cast a new light on which Buddha the practitioner calls upon for salvation. Although in original Pure Land scriptures one would call upon Amida, in the Shingon tradition practitioners rely upon their own power.⁵⁵

Kakuban and Jitsuhan's work on the incorporation of Pure Land practices in Shingon paved the way for the further development of secret *nenbutsu* in the Shingon tradition, in particular by Dōhan 道範 (1178–1252), who would become a leader in the area of secret *nenbutsu*. Dōhan was part of a group of monks labeled the *Kōya hakketsu* 高野八傑, the eight great monks of Mount Kōya, who were identified as such in the writings of Kakukai 覺海 (1142–1223).⁵⁶ Dōhan first ascended Mount Kōya at the age of 14, and was significantly influenced by secret *nenbutsu*. His text, *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* 祕密念佛抄 shows that

⁵⁴ *Mikkyō jiten*, 313.

⁵⁵ This is the distinction between *tariki* 他力 and *jiriki* 自力, which is discussed in chapter 3.

⁵⁶ *Mikkyō jiten*, 198.

Kakuban's ideas about the Pure Land became a part of not only New Doctrine Shingon but also left enduring traces in traditional Mount Kōya Shingon.⁵⁷

Overall, the late Heian period's unique religious climate at Mount Kōya facilitated Kakuban's combination of Shingon and Pure Land, a new interpretation of the teaching that would eventually lead to the emergence of New Doctrine Shingon. Conflicts triggered by Kakuban and his innovations forced Shingon monks to reexamine their tradition and question what needed to be done to revive it. Although Kakuban's expulsion from Mount Kōya effectively split the Shingon tradition into two sub-sects, he succeeded in motivating monks to reevaluate their practices and beliefs.

Having outlined the religious atmosphere of the late Heian, I now turn to what this meant for the development of the New Doctrine Shingon sect and how Kakuban used Pure Land practices within the framework of tantric beliefs. Two significant ideas introduced by Kakuban were the appropriation of Amida into Shingon cosmology and a redefinition of where Pure Land followers fit into this belief system. Kakuban even went so far as to write a text on the tantric explanation of Amida Buddha, *Amida hishaku*. We need to further question how Kakuban was able to label worshipers of Amida as those of "lesser wit," and nevertheless was successfully in attracting some of these Pure Land practitioners. Chapter three examines the place of Amida in Kakuban's writing and responses to his works.

⁵⁷ *Mikkyō jiten*, 522.

Chapter 3: Kakuban's Skillful Appropriation of Amida

Because of his interactions with the *hijiri* groups on Mount Kōya, Kakuban was determined to write texts explaining how Pure Land dovetailed with the Shingon approach. As part of these efforts, Kakuban intended to show how the Western Pure Land belongs to Shingon doctrine. Due to the contemporary popularity of Pure Land thought, as well as the increasing pessimism resulting from the *mappō* thought, Kakuban considered it essential to redefine Shingon's role in relation to these new traditions and beliefs. Yet, this was not simple, and a variety of fundamental differences, such as the location of the Pure Land and the role of the practitioner, had to be addressed. Of critical importance would be how Amida of the Western Pure Land fits into the tantric rituals centered on Dainichi.

Although Amida was included in Shingon iconography and in the tantric depictions of the five *Dhyāni* Buddhas long before the writings of Kakuban, this Buddha had never been a central focus of worship in Shingon. The Diamond and Womb Realm Maṇḍalas simply portray Amida as one of the five central Buddhas. In the Diamond Realm Maṇḍala, since the four Buddhas surrounding Dainichi represent different forms of his wisdom, Amida merely represents one particular aspect of Dainichi's cognitive acuity. In addition, Amida embodies part of the "perfected body," which eventually leads to enlightenment in this life according to the Shingon tradition.⁵⁸ Kakuban built upon this understanding of Amida and elaborated on how he is

⁵⁸ The "Perfected Body Assembly" is one out of nine assemblies in the *Diamond Realm Maṇḍala*. It is in the center of the mandala and symbolizes "Awakening while still in the fleshy body." Snodgrass, 576.

connected to the *dharmakāya*.⁵⁹ In Kakuban's early works, such as the *Amida hishaku*, he clearly attempted to abide by Kūkai's teachings. Yet, as he grew older, Kakuban incorporated unique practices that contributed to justify his appropriation of Amida.

This chapter provides an introduction to Kakuban's understanding of Amida, focusing on how this led to developing unique practices within Shingon. Once he had established the centrality of Amida in the Shingon tradition, Kakuban used this new position to incorporate Pure Land practices. In doing so, Kakuban slightly changed the method and philosophy of the Pure Land practices he had learned from the *hijiri*, and introduced entirely new methods of practice into Shingon. Even though Kakuban's writings aimed at reviving Kūkai's teachings, in the end, they sparked a conflict within the Shingon community, which led to the creation of a new sect on Mount Negoro.

The Key to the Tantric Explanation of Amida

Kakuban expresses his understanding of Amida most clearly in the *Amida hishaku*, which provides the best illustration of his appropriation of Amida. Judging by simplicity of the language, it seems as though he composed the text in reaction to the large presence of *hijiri* on Mount Kōya. Additionally, the simplistic and slightly condescending tone of the text suggests that this was intended for those outside the tradition, namely the *hijiri*.⁶⁰ It is shorter and easier to understand than his later works, indicating that he geared this work toward a broader audience.

⁵⁹ The *dharmakāya* is one of the three bodies of the Buddha's nature. *Dharmakāya* is the Truth Body and is a state of omniscient enlightenment. *Sambhogakāya* is the Body of Mutual Enjoyment, which is a state of blissfulness. Lastly, *nirmāṇakāya* is the Created Body, which is able to manifest in time and space. In the Shingon tradition Dainichi is the *dharmakāya*, Amida is an example of a *sambhogakāya*, and the historical Buddha is an example of a *nirmāṇakāya*.

⁶⁰ Although he uses tantric methods to address his audience, he does so in a way that those following exoteric traditions can easily follow and relate to.

That being said, given the low literacy rates of the time period it is unlikely that common people would have been exposed to his writings.⁶¹ It is more likely that Kakuban's works were intended for aristocrats, monks from other schools, and for the *hijiri*. Kakuban wanted to reach the *hijiri*, since Shingon as a whole may have felt threatened by their growing power and increasing influence. By writing the *Amida hishaku* he hoped to explain the importance of his tradition, and maybe also to convert some *hijiri* from Pure Land ascetics to Shingon monks. If he could accomplish this, Mount Kōya would no doubt return to being a prosperous center for Shingon practice.

In the *Amida hishaku* Kakuban articulates his main claim that Amida is a manifestation of Dainichi in two distinct ways. First, he establishes Dainichi as the *dharmakāya*, before analyzing the characteristics of Amida as manifestations of particular aspects of Dainichi. Secondly, he explains that since all words and sounds are products of Dainichi, practitioners may also use Pure Land practices to reach the *dharmakāya*, but they must do so while remaining aware of this tantric perspective of Dainichi (i.e., the nonduality between Amida and Dainichi). This suggests that while writing this text Kakuban's main goal was to explain to the *hijiri* that their practices were truly Shingon. Later in his life, it seems that Kakuban shifted his strategy and focused solely on teaching to the Shingon clergy how they could also benefit from Pure Land practices in a tantric context.

The *Amida hishaku* contains three sections supporting Kakuban's claim that Amida is merely a manifestation of Dainichi. The first section explains the role of Dainichi as the

⁶¹ There is little research on literacy rates from the late Heian period. The main issue is the lack of historical records and documents from the time period. Nevertheless, understanding Chinese texts, which would be necessary for reading Buddhist scriptures, would be the privilege of government officials, religious leaders, and aristocrats.

dharmakāya, highlighting the idea that all sentient beings are manifestations of him. The second section analyzes the thirteen names of Amida.⁶² Kakuban breaks down the meanings of Amida's different names and shows how they are essentially names for the *dharmakāya*. Finally, the third section dissects the name of Amida into its three seed syllables *A*, *Mi*, and *Ta*, and describes them as the essence of Dainichi.⁶³ In these three sections, Kakuban effectively argues for the nonduality (*funi* 不二) between Amida and Dainichi, and thus demonstrates why Pure Land practices essentially are compatible with the Shingon doctrine.

Kakuban utilizes distinctly tantric methods to justify the nonduality between Amida and Dainichi. As explained below, Kakuban was particularly interested in how language and speech relate to Shingon practice. He examined the names of Amida in great detail, since they are the most fundamental way in which words describe the nature of the Buddha. Next, Kakuban analyzed the three Sanskrit syllables of Amida's name from the viewpoint of the tantric tradition. After a thorough examination of these syllables, *A*, *Mi*, and *Ta*, he argued that *A* is equal to the nature of the Buddha, whereas various elements of the Buddha's nature reside in the syllables *Mi* and *Ta*.⁶⁴ Additionally, Amida is portrayed as Dainichi's "endless rich wisdom."⁶⁵ Although

⁶² These thirteen names arose during the process of translation in China. Some names were translated phonetically, whereas others were translated literally. These thirteen names include: the Buddha of Infinite Life, the Buddha of Infinite Light, the Buddha of Boundless Light, the Buddha of Unhindered Light, the Buddha of Incomparable Light, the Buddha of the light of the Flaming King, the Buddha of the Light of Joy, the Buddha of the Light of Wisdom, the Buddha of Unceasing Light, the Buddha of Inconceivable Light, the Buddha of the Light Beyond Praise, the Buddha of the Light of Purity, the Buddha of the Light Outshining the Sun and the Moon.

⁶³ Seed syllables are very important in the Shingon tradition. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have seed syllables that represent their nature. The original sound of Sanskrit is seen to be sacred, which is why these seed syllables cannot be translated but are often transliterated.

⁶⁴ There are several meanings for each syllable and they are outlined in Van der Veere's work. Overall the syllable *A* is a representation of Dainichi, and the syllables *Mi* and *Ta* are characteristics of the great whole. Van der Veere, 113–4.

⁶⁵ This is a translation from James H. Sanford's chapter, "Amida's Secret Life: Kakuban's *Amida hishaku*" in *Approaching the Land of Bliss*. Each Syllable has a different type of wisdom. "A" represents the non-duality of

Kakuban uses the tantric method of breaking down the name Amida into three seed syllables, he does so in a way that the *hijiri* would be able to understand.

Kakuban's descriptions of Amida as the *dharmakāya* are reminiscent of Kūkai's writings on the essence of Dainichi. Kūkai's poem *Voice, Letter, Reality*, depicts Dainichi as the *shingon*, or true word.⁶⁶

Vibrating in each other's echoes are the five great elements
That give rise to languages unique to each of the ten realms
All in the six sense-fields are letters, the letters
Of the Dharmakāya, which is reality. (Abe 1999, 278)

This poem depicts Dainichi as omniscient, and it is with letters and words that his universal nature is symbolized. Therefore, Dainichi is viewed as being in every letter of the alphabet. Abe comments that, "the poem unfolds itself as an exposure of the Dharmakāya as writing, as the world-text itself" (Abe 1999, 281). Kūkai's philosophy corroborates Kakuban's attitude towards Amida in the *Amida hishaku*. Throughout his works Kakuban expresses the intent to justify his claims by referring to the founder's teachings.

Kakuban faced many hurdles in recasting Pure Land practices as essentially Shingon, not only in language but also in regard to the question of who holds salvific power. Shingon had become well known by the end of the Heian period as advocating a method in which the practitioner can attain "enlightenment in this body" through *jiriki* 自力, or self-power.

Conversely, the Pure Land belief system was based upon a *tariki* 他力 understanding, where

Principle and Wisdom. *Mi* represents Wondrous Intuitive Wisdom or the Lotus-family. And lastly, *Ta* represents the Wondrous Wisdom of the Tathāgata of the Vajra-family. Sanford, 132.

⁶⁶ The word *shingon* 眞言 in Japanese has two meanings, mantra and true word. The meaning "true word" is only used in the Shingon context, and essentially means the *dharmakāya*. Conversely, the meaning "mantra" is a more generic definition that is used across all Buddhist schools.

practitioners rely on the help of Amida to reach the Pure Land. Thus, one of the greatest challenges in attempting to adapt Pure Land thought to Shingon practices was to explain that practitioners themselves were capable of achieving enlightenment in their current lives. A telling example of how Kakuban made this shift can be found in his incorporation of the Pure Land deathbed rituals.⁶⁷ Since the practitioner takes control of her rebirth by guiding her breath and doing *samādhi* meditation, this *tarikī* Pure Land deathbed ritual became a distinctly *jiriki*, and therefore Shingon, tradition.⁶⁸

Although Kakuban incorporated Amida into Shingon practice throughout the *Amida hishaku*, he cautioned that Pure Land practices must only be done while understanding the Shingon idea of the *dharmakāya*, including the assumption that every sentient being relates to it. This perspective was also emphasized by Kūkai, who was adamant on placing Shingon above other religious traditions and Buddhist schools. In Kūkai’s words, “[t]he language that is aware of this truth is called the true word (*shingon*) and other languages that are not conscious of their source are called illusory words (*mōgo*)” (Abe 1999, 283).⁶⁹ From this example, the illusory words refer to practices other than Shingon. Once again, Kakuban combined his explanation of Amidist practice with traditional Shingon concepts.

Since Kakuban had such in-depth interactions with the *hijiri*, one may question the seemingly condescending tone that surfaces in the *Amida hishaku*. One wonders in particular whether this was an indication of a strained relationship between Kakuban and the *hijiri*, or

⁶⁷ I will explain the deathbed rituals later in this chapter. In short the *rinjū raigō* 臨終來迎, or the practices for preparing for death, consist of tying the dying practitioner to a statue of Amida and practicing *samādhi* meditation and controlled breathing.

⁶⁸ This is the practice of becoming one with a deity, in this case Dainichi. The root *sam* means “together”, indicating that the practitioner is literally trying to come together with Dainichi as one.

⁶⁹ This translation is based on KZ I: 526.

whether he merely felt compelled to express the attitude of the mainstream Shingon clergy. On one hand, Kakuban was adamant about staying true to Kūkai's teachings, a feature that is ever present in the sources quoted in his texts. On the other hand, the analysis of Kakuban's writing style and the tentative reconstruction of his intended readership indicates that he kept the *hijiri* and their outcast status in mind. This also suggests that Kakuban's extensive interactions with the *hijiri* did not alter his fundamental adherence to the Shingon doctrine. Yet, in spite of his allegiance to Shingon orthodoxy, Kakuban felt the need to create a place for Amida in his tradition's teachings. Initially, he seems to have done this for the sake of followers of the Pure Land path, so that they could become aware of their tradition's "illusory words." In his later works, Pure Land practices became increasingly integrated into his writing, stirring controversy amongst the Shingon clergy. This shift in tone could have resulted from the fact that he was ostracized from Mount Kōya, and one needs to remember that these texts were completed on Mount Negoro during the last years of his life.

The Tantric Invocation of Amida

Kakuban played a central role in developing the *himitsu nenbutsu*, or the secret invocation of Amida.⁷⁰ Since this practice emerged before the foundation of the Pure Land school, one may wonder whether this interpretation of the Shingon tradition had some impact on the later emergence of Hōnen's Pure Land teachings. Although Hōnen did acknowledge that there are

⁷⁰ While this practice is most commonly called *himitsu nenbutsu*, it is also referred to as *shingon nenbutsu*.

three types of *nenbutsu*, Tendai *nenbutsu*, early Japanese *nenbutsu*, and Shandao's *nenbutsu*, the *himitsu nenbutsu* is not included in his understanding of this practice.⁷¹

The *himitsu nenbutsu* tradition is grounded in Kakuban's new concept of *ichimitsu jōbutsu* 一密成佛, meaning "realizing buddhahood through one mystery."⁷² In his writings Kakuban specifically focuses on the mystery of speech, and elaborates on practices that will help to unlock this secret. This is the foundation for the new Shingon philosophies introduced by Kakuban. Although the way in which he presented this concept makes it appear unique, it is not a jarring departure from Kūkai's teachings. Furthermore, the name of the Shingon school itself demonstrates how important words and speech are to the tradition, an indication that focusing solely of the mystery of speech should not be surprising. Nevertheless, even though Kakuban's philosophy derives from early Shingon thought, he used *ichimitsu jōbutsu* as a justification for introducing completely new additions to its doctrine.

Since *nenbutsu* is most often associated with the Pure Land school, scholars rarely discuss the recitation of Amida's name before Hōnen's time. Interest in Kakuban's *himitsu nenbutsu* actually resurfaced among the Buddhist clergy during the Kamakura period, when Pure Land practices were gaining popularity.⁷³ Since Kakuban's work predates the Pure Land school, one must question whether the New Doctrine Shingon tradition could have set the foundations for what later developed into the Pure Land tradition. Although this may seem an enticing

⁷¹ Tendai *nenbutsu* originated from a Chinese Tiantai text written by Zhiyi. Early Japanese *nenbutsu* refers to the *nenbutsu* traditions from the *Ōjō yōshū*, which was written by Genshin (942–1017) and predates Hōnen. Lastly, Shandao was one of the most prominent Pure Land advocates in China.

⁷² Shingon teaches the importance of *sanmitsu* 三密, or the three mysteries of the body, speech, and mind. These mysteries are enacted through the practices of mudra, mantra, and mandala or visualizations.

⁷³ Scholars such as Van der Veere, suggest that it is his writings on the *himitsu nenbutsu* that led to the establishment of the Shingi Shingon school. With the popularity of the *nenbutsu* practices in the Pure Land tradition, Kakuban's works became popular and widely quoted. Van der Veere, 45–46.

hypothesis, it seems implausible, since the *himitsu nenbutsu* is drastically different from the *nenbutsu* preached by Hōnen. Furthermore, Hōnen does not acknowledge the *himitsu nenbutsu* as one of the three different types of *nenbutsu*. Overall, the *himitsu nenbutsu* tradition seems to stand on its own, especially because of its unique association with tantric philosophy.

A description of the *himitsu nenbutsu* is found in Kakuban's *A-ji kan* 阿字觀, which gives detailed instructions on how to control one's breath to understand the *bodhicitta* of Amida.⁷⁴ As a justification for focusing on Amida, Kakuban once again breaks down the name of Amida, focusing in particular on the first syllable *A*. Dainichi's seed syllable is also the letter *A*, which also serves as the central focus for a Shingon practice existing from Kūkai's time, called the *A-ji kan*, or *A* syllable contemplation. The syllable *A* is not only the beginning of Amida, but also the central character in the invocation of Amida, *Namu Amida Butsu*, and the second syllable of the mantra of Amida, *Om amṛta teja hara huṃ*. In addition to the *A* syllable significance, Kakuban further justified the *himitsu nenbutsu* by connecting the mystery of speech to tantric breathing praxis. According to Kakuban, one's breath correlates to one's essential nature.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Dainichi is often associated with air, understood as one of the five fundamental constituents of the universe, and in later works Kakuban elaborated on how this concept relates to *himitsu nenbutsu*.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The term *bodhicitta* can be broken down into two parts, *bodhi* and *citta*. *Bodhi* refers to awakening, and *citta* means the mind. Therefore, the term literally means the awakened or the awakening mind. When producing *bodhicitta* one is striving to achieve the wisdom and knowledge of a Buddha.

⁷⁵ The syllable "A" is the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet and represents the unborn nature of the *dharmakāya*.

⁷⁶ The Sanskrit syllable *A* symbolizes the "Great Element Air (or Wind)." Since the syllable *A* is the seed syllable of Dainichi, air is also correlated with Dainichi. See Sanford, 77.

The *himitsu nenbutsu* practice is a controlled breathing exercise, much like *prāṇāyāma* in the yoga traditions. While breathing in, the practitioner visualizes the letter *A*, and in breathing out he envisions *hum*. Together they make up the mantra *A-hum*, which symbolizes the fundamental being of Amida.⁷⁷ Instead of the normative Pure Land notion of reciting the *nenbutsu* and being saved by Amida, Kakuban's *himitsu nenbutsu* allows the practitioner to become one with Amida's essential nature. This is a common theme in Shingon expressed by the term *nyūga ganyū* 入我我入, which means that the Buddha enters one's body while the practitioner enters the Buddha's body.⁷⁸ Thus, Kakuban's *himitsu nenbutsu* gave the practitioner an opportunity to merge with Amida's *bodhicitta* and thereby Dainichi's wisdom.

The *himitsu nenbutsu* practice was later further elaborated while being incorporated into Kakuban's texts. It marks his greatest contribution to Japanese Buddhism as a whole, since it transcends the borders of Shingon and also coincides with the emergence of the Pure Land tradition as an independent entity. One can nevertheless assume that the *himitsu nenbutsu* was devised in reaction to the Pure Land teachings of the *hijiri*, because of Kakuban's exposure to or awareness of a group called the *nenbutsu hijiri*, who focused their practice on invoking the name of Amida. This chapter will further introduce two additional practices stemming from Kakuban's *ichimitsu jōbutsu*,

⁷⁷ The combination of *A* and *hum* is seen throughout Japanese traditions. For instance, *Aun no kokyū* 阿吽の呼吸—which has come to mean “complete agreement” in modern Japanese—originally referred to these two sounds: the first and the last. These two sounds are represented by the pair of guardians or lions, usually positioned at the entrance of a temple or shrine to ward off evil. One of the guardians represents *A* with his mouth open, and the other represents *hum* with his mouth closed. The Japanese *hiragana* also reflect this perspective, since the syllabary begins with *a* あ and ends with *n* ん.

⁷⁸ The term body is used here to express the metaphysical body, not the physical body. It indicates the Buddha nature entering the practitioner and allowing her to become one with the Buddha.

The Esoteric Collection for the Essentials of Life's End

The *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* presents rituals and preparations for one who is approaching death. Kakuban's text was heavily influenced by his contemporary, Jitsuhan, who wrote the *Byōchū shugyōki*. *Nenbutsu* chanting was often practiced for the sake of dying practitioners, supposedly leading them to rebirth in the Pure Land. These Pure Land followers believed in the importance of right mindfulness and in the salvific efficacy derived from remembering the Buddha Amida at the last moment of life.⁷⁹ By remembering the Buddha (or by invoking him, according to the later Japanese interpretation) practitioners sought to be guided to the Pure Land by Amida himself. Stressing the importance of faith in Amida and in his power exemplifies the *tariki* traditions. In contrast, Kakuban changed the focus of the final moment of life by advocating reliance on the practice of *himitsu nenbutsu*. In doing so, he enjoined the practitioners to rely on their own spiritual power, rather than on the salvific powers of Amida.

The practice of praying for Amida to come and guide the dying person into the Pure Land is called *rinjū raigō* 臨終來迎. Kakuban's interpretation of this practice begins in the same way as in the Amidist tradition, where the dying person holds a string attached to a statue of Amida. After this first stage, Kakuban's practice diverges from Pure Land teachings because it involves the use of mandalas and mantras. The main difference lies in the importance given to the dying person's practice of controlling breath and in the understanding of the mystery of speech. Lastly, there is an emphasis on visualizing the syllable A, instead of positioning the body in the direction of the Western Pure Land.

⁷⁹ This is justified by the 19th vow formulated by the Bodhisattva Dharmakāra (a past reincarnation of Amida Buddha), which is included in the Chinese version of the *Large Sutra on Amitāyus*. See Gomez 1996, 168.

There are three distinctive characteristics of Kakuban's *rinjū raigō*, which are put forth in his *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū*: 1) The utilization of the *himitsu nenbutsu*, 2) the importance given to *samādhi* practices, and 3) the cultivation of the aim to be reborn in the Pure Land within one's own body. This text was intended to be taught by a teacher to his disciple, and is divided into nine sections representing the nine levels of Amida's Pure Land. In the sixth level, the practitioner is instructed to "awaken the enlightened mind."⁸⁰ This section introduces several visualization techniques to awaken one's mind.⁸¹ Furthermore, this stage emphasizes the importance of *samādhi* meditation in the Shingon tradition.

In this text Kakuban not only identifies the veneration of Amida as a Shingon practice, he also combines it with a renewed emphasis on the nuances of Shingon teachings, such as *jiriki*, and restates the importance of *samādhi* practice. It is essential for Kakuban to reclaim this practice as belonging to Shingon and therefore being a *jiriki* tradition. Shingon—like all Mahāyāna schools—teaches that Buddhahood resides within everyone, implying that all practitioners can free themselves and realize the state of a Buddha. Kakuban writes that one should cultivate buddhahood through practices related to his unique interpretation of the Shingon doctrine. All three practices mentioned so far (*ichimitsu jōbutsu*, *himitsu nenbutsu*, and *rinjū raigō*) culminate in Kakuban's *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku*, which was written during his final years spent on Mount Negoro.

⁸⁰ This is done through reciting the mantra to produce the enlightened mind. Jp. *Hotsu bodaishin shingon* 發菩提心眞言 Sk. *Oṃ bodhi cittam utpādayāmi*. Motoyama, 47. *Hotsu* 發 directly translates to "produce." Therefore it would be better to translate this as to "produce an awakened mind."

⁸¹ Ten different full moons and *A* syllable visualizations are introduced in this section. This section is replete with references to Kūkai and to Shingon practices. Motoyama, 51–61.

The Secret Understanding of Speech through the Five Cakras of Dainichi and the Nine Syllable Mantra of Amida

Kakuban's *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* (The Secret Understanding of Speech through the Five Cakras of Dainichi and the Nine Syllable Mantra or Amida) was completed in 1141, towards the end of his life. It articulates his unique visualization techniques and, unlike the *Amida hishaku*, seems to have targeted Shingon clerics. This text details the mystery of speech, explaining how its mastery leads to realizing Dainichi's *bodhicitta*. In this text Kakuban combines the concepts he had introduced in the *Amida hishaku* and applies them to Shingon visualization practices. The *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* is also significantly longer than his early works. Furthermore, in addition to describing eidetic contemplation practices of two new mandalas, the *Gozō Maṇḍala* and the *Amida Maṇḍala*, he provides a detailed explanation of medicinal practices related to the Shingon understanding of the physical body.⁸²

Kakuban introduced the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* by stating that it explains the method for understanding the fourteen mandalas, which includes internally achieving Dainichi's enlightenment through the five-syllable mantra, and realizing Amida's wisdom through the nine-syllable mantra.⁸³ Kakuban provided further details by characterizing enlightenment in this life as available to all, while rebirth in the Pure Land is depicted as only one among the many gates to

⁸² The addition of Chinese medicinal practices is most likely due to the fact that Shingon monks took over the role previously devoted to *Onmyōdō* 陰陽道. In ancient Japan this was a division at the Japanese imperial court overseeing the imperial calendar and presiding over matters related to Chinese astrology. Its representatives relied on an extensive set of practices derived from Yin and Yang theories, and on mostly Daoist concepts.

⁸³ The fourteen mandalas refer to the five syllable mantra of Dainichi and the nine syllable mantra of Amida.

realization.⁸⁴ The introduction reiterates what is discussed in the *Amida hishaku*, that Amida is a manifestation of Dainichi. The new practices developed by Kakuban are introduced in this work.

Starting in the second chapter Kakuban, presents the three secret practices of body, speech, and mind, and explains that the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* focuses primarily on the secret practices of speech. The practice of the mystery of speech is then divided into three methods: recitation, contemplating the syllables, and understanding the syllables. Lastly, Kakuban further divides the understanding of syllables into two sections. These two sections are represented by the *dharmakāya* method of the five cakras and five wisdoms, and by the *sambhogakāya* method of the nine syllables and the nine levels of the Pure Land. One could argue that the second chapter represents an extended description of the *himitsu nenbutsu* and of Kakuban's method of *ichimitsu jōbutsu*. This shows that Kakuban was utilizing the distinctive Shingon practice of unlocking the mystery of speech in response to the increased popularity of Pure Land practices.

After the introduction to chapter two, Kakuban describes the five cakra contemplative practice, which constitutes the bulk of the chapter. He only provides a brief introduction to the *Amida Maṇḍala* and to the meaning of the nine-syllable mantra, which is why this text lacks an in-depth analysis of contemplation practices. It is understandable that Kakuban would focus on Dainichi's five-syllable mantra and on the *Gozō Maṇḍala*, since Dainichi represents the *dharmakāya*, while Amida only represents the *sambhogakāya*. Furthermore, Kakuban stressed that, if one is able to do so, one should also engage in meditative practices related to Dainichi to

⁸⁴ KDZ, 1121–2.

ensure a quicker enlightenment. Why, then, was it necessary to include the *Amida Maṇḍala* at all?



Figure 1: *Amida Maṇḍala* (KDZ VII:1162)

To answer this question, an analysis of the structure and of the usages of the mandala proves necessary. The structure revolves around the Sanskrit letter *hrīḥ*, which is the seed syllable for Amida. In the center of the mandala there are nine drawings of Amida, representing the nine-syllable short mantra of Amida. On the outer eight-petaled lotus is a combination of Buddhas selected from the Diamond and Womb Maṇḍalas. While the structure of the mandala is understood by scholars, there is still little information as to how the mandala was used in the late Heian period. Nevertheless, the structure of the *Amida Maṇḍala* is a visual representation of how Kakuban places Amida in a tantric context. Additionally, the way in which Kakuban seems to disregard the *Amida Maṇḍala* as a method for those who are less spiritually inclined could

indicate his anticipation of how fellow Shingon monks would respond to such new practices. In short, the *Amida hishaku* seems constructed as a justification of Shingon for the *hijiri*, whereas the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* seems to validate these new Pure Land practices for the Shingon clergy, indicating that Kakuban was attempting to bridge the gap between these two communities.

The Reaction of the Shingon Clergy

While Kakuban recognized the importance of integrating Pure Land practices into his texts, he was also aware of the conservative stance of the Shingon clergy. For example, as mentioned before, Kūkai's works often depict Shingon practitioners as those of higher spiritual ability. This is done not only to place Shingon above other non-Buddhist religious traditions but also above other Buddhist sects. Therefore, if Kakuban had equated practices venerating Amida with those venerating Dainichi this would have contradicted Kūkai's hierarchical taxonomy. It was imperative for Kakuban to introduce these new concepts for those of "lesser wit" in order to keep in line with Kūkai's writings.⁸⁵ This circumspect approach surely contributed to prevent the initial rejection of Kakuban's teachings. As a result, when he was finally expelled from Mount Kōya he already had gathered a faithful following of approximately 700 monks, who eventually fled with him and settled on Mount Negoro.

⁸⁵ Kūkai's *The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury* outlines the ten stages of the mind, where the tenth stage is that of a Shingon practitioner. Those practicing other religious traditions are characterized as having a lower spiritual ability. Giebel, 205–215.



Figure 2: Kakuban's Mausoleum on Mount Negoro. Photographed by Camille Mori in June 2012

Although Kakuban introduced these practices of venerating Amida into the Shingon doctrine, the *Amida Maṇḍala* never seems to have been widely used. Instead of being introduced as a practice for Shingon practitioners, it rather aimed to explain how these popular Pure Land practices could fit into the tantric doctrine. This is further supported by the fact that the *Gozō Maṇḍala*, representing Dainichi, remains a popular symbol of Shingon even today, while the *Amida Maṇḍala* seems to have been forgotten. Even though the second mandala never became popular, it is not to say that Kakuban's introduction of Pure Land practices did not penetrate the

Shingon doctrine. The deathbed rituals and the *himitsu nenbutsu* that he introduced still remain a common practice in the New Doctrine Shingon teachings and practices.

To sum up, Shingon was the only Japanese Buddhist tradition choosing to reappropriate Amida and daring to redefine it as a tantric deity. Although Tendai also includes tantric practices as part of its tradition, Tendai monks did not adapt exoteric practices to fit a tantric mold. Furthermore, some of them embraced the Pure Land tradition so completely that, eventually, Tendai followers were the ones who established the Pure Land school.⁸⁶ In Shingon, however, Pure Land ideas were tailored to fit into a tantric worldview. This should not conceal the fact that, even after having promoted a certain degree of integration of Pure Land-related practices, the particular Shingon interpretation still confined Pure Land practitioners to a lower level. Therefore, although it sometimes appears that Kakuban departs from Kūkai's writings, in reality he used Kūkai's philosophy to interpret contemporary culture and popular religious trends.

In Kakuban's view, Shingon was meant to constantly evolve, something the *denbōe* facilitated by fostering discussion about the gist of Shingon philosophy.⁸⁷ Considering Kakuban's appropriation of Amida from this perspective allows us to understand how he intended to honor Kūkai's teachings, while also attempting to improve the Shingon meditative and philosophical practices. Such treatment of Amida had to be done in a skillful way, to secure the support of the *hijiri* while minimizing antagonism from the Shingon clergy. The next chapter will explore Kakuban's further step in expanding his school's outreach.

⁸⁶ The founder of the Pure Land school, Hōnen, originally was a Tendai monk who broke away from his school and formulated his own approach to practice. This is the so-called exclusive practice of *nenbutsu*, redefined as the sole recitation of Amida Buddha's name. See Senchakushū English translation Project, 15.

⁸⁷ Reestablishing the *denbōe* was Kakuban's main motivation to move to Mount Kōya. He was determined to revive this debate system, a tradition he believed would restore meditative practices and scholarly pursuits.

Chapter 4: The Visualization of Dainichi's Pure Land in One's Own Body

Adapting Pure Land practices to the tantric rituals of the Shingon tradition proved to be challenging for Kakuban. More specifically, he needed to determine the function of the practitioner's own body as it correlated to the Pure Land. Since realizing enlightenment in one's own body had been a central Shingon teaching for centuries, this doctrine constituted the starting point. Kakuban thus chose to introduce an eidetic contemplation of the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments (Jp. *Mitsugon bukkoku* 密嚴佛國 Sk. *Ghanavyūha*),⁸⁸ which provided yet another method for becoming one with the *dharmakāya* and realize enlightenment in one's own body.⁸⁹ Much like Kakuban's works on Amida, his writings on the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments redefine the Western Pure Land as an aspect of Shingon doctrine. In doing so, Kakuban effectively opened a dialogue on this Buddha-land among the Shingon clergy. Eventually, this resulted in Kakuban carefully crafting a method for contemplating the Pure Land, which retained close ties to Kūkai's texts.⁹⁰

This chapter analyzes the elaboration of the mandala of Dainichi's Pure Land, and examines how this new device fit into the religious context of the late Heian period. Similarly to

⁸⁸ The Sanskrit *ghanavyūha* was translated as *miyan* 密嚴 into Chinese. This means that *mi* 密 was used to render the nuance of *ghana* meaning something "thick" or "dense," like in a "thick forest" 密林. Hence, the derived meanings of something "impenetrable," "mysterious," or "secret," seems to have been constructed around this initial visual metaphor. The first meaning of *ghana* is that of something compact, solid, material, hard, firm, or dense. This is why it seems more accurate to translate this term as "impenetrable adornments," the idea being that there are so many of these superb adornments that one cannot fathom their beauty.

⁸⁹ The term "eidetic contemplation" has been used by scholars such as Cynthia Bogel in *With a Single Glance* and Alan Sponberg's "Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism" in *Tradition in Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*. Eidetic contemplation is used to discuss the contemplation of mandalas, and the act of envisioning the mandala as one contemplates the meaning of the structure. I use this term since it encompasses both the visualization and contemplation aspects of *kan* 觀 (Ch. *guan*). For a detailed analysis of visualization and contemplation in relation to modern Shingon mandala practice see Sharf 2001.

⁹⁰ Kūkai's teachings stress the importance of attaining enlightenment in this lifetime, something achieved by envisioning oneself as Dainichi. Kakuban built upon this by introducing the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments.

what he did in creating a context for Amida, this device can be understood as a way for Kakuban to respond to the *hijiri*'s overwhelming presence on Mount Kōya. This time, he constructed a new Shingon framework in which to understand the Pure Land by composing the *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* 密嚴淨土略觀 (The Abbreviated Contemplation on the Pure Land of Impenetrable Adornments), which describes the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments, and uses both traditional Pure Land terminology and Shingon iconography. Kakuban's later work, the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* 五輪九字明祕密釋 (The Illuminating Secret Commentary on the Five Cakras and the Nine Syllables), provides a synthesis all of his teachings and claims that by meditating on Dainichi's Pure Land one can become one with Dainichi. Since the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments is considered as the body of Dainichi, this Pure Land is presented as intrinsic to everyone's *dharmakāya*, and as something that can be actualized by all followers of Shingon practice.⁹¹

Kakuban claimed that rebirth in the Western Pure Land is a lower form of spiritual understanding.⁹² Nevertheless, since from the perspective illustrated in the mandalas all Pure Lands ultimately are derived from Dainichi's, Dainichi is depicted as been capable of visiting the various Buddha-lands and save all sentient beings within them.⁹³ It implies that if a practitioner is born in Amida's Pure Land, then he gets closer to salvation by Dainichi. This correlates with

⁹¹ Since this Buddha-land is associated with the Womb Realm Maṇḍala, it is viewed as a representation of Dainichi's body. See *Mikkyō jiten*, 657. The Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments is associated with the *sanbon shiji* 三品悉地, or the three esoteric kinds of *siddhi*. Also it is specifically associated with the "palace of the womb realm," *kongō hokkai gū* 金剛法界宮 of the *Dainichikyō* 大日經.

⁹² This is from the opening of the *Amida hishaku*. See Payne and Tanaka 2004, 128–129.

⁹³ All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are manifestations of Dainichi, which is why his Buddha-land encompasses all of their lands. Since they are all essentially Dainichi's Buddha-land, it is understood that he can be present in all of them.

Kūkai's *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury*, which articulates the ten stages of the mind.⁹⁴

According to this text, while practitioners can be said to follow different schools of Buddhism, their mind is not fully perfected unless they choose to practice the Shingon approach. This reinforces the traditional Shingon understanding that Pure Land practitioners are of a lesser wit as long as their practices are not undertaken in a tantric context.⁹⁵

Pure Lands in Japanese Buddhism

Since there are several Pure Lands and Dainichi is viewed as encompassing them all, it is necessary to gain a general understanding of what a Buddhist Pure Land is. We need in particular to determine how Dainichi's Pure Land is similar to or different from other Pure Lands.

Although Pure Land terminology and philosophy are generally associated with Amida's Pure Land, it is believed that all Buddhas create a sacred space where they are the central omniscient figure.⁹⁶ These various lands differ depending on the personal vows taken by the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. Thus, when scholars discuss Amida's vows, they tend to indicate his personal vows only. These personal vows are observed in addition to the original vows, *hongan* 本願, which are the vows originally made by all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to create a Pure Land. Amida's land is considered the fruit of the personal vows he formulated when he was still the Bodhisattva Dharmakāra in a previous existence. Two of these vows stand out: vow 18th, where he grants that any sentient being who brings to mind the aspiration to be reborn in his land for

⁹⁴ In this text Kūkai defines ten different stages in the mind's progression, beginning with the mind of an animal and leading up to the mind of a Shingon practitioner. See Giebel 2004, 139–141.

⁹⁵ In the *Amida hishaku* Kakuban introduces the concept of Pure Land practitioners being of lesser wit, see Todaro 2004, 303–4.

⁹⁶ Amstutz and Blum, 217.

even ten moments of thought will be reborn there, and vow 20th, where he grants that if sentient beings fix their thoughts on being reborn in his land they will attain this goal.⁹⁷

Monks and scholars have attributed multiple Pure Lands to each of the four cardinal directions. For example, while Amida's Pure Land is associated with the west and Ashuku's with the east, several other less known Pure Lands are associated with these directions as well.⁹⁸ While it was not uncommon in Buddhist traditions to consider that one could be reborn in a heavenly state, the Pure Lands were depicted as providing a unique opportunity to gain release from the cycle of rebirths.⁹⁹

Besides the specific locations of these sacred lands, there was also a debate among Japanese Buddhist schools about whether the lands are physically separated from one's own body or constitute an integral part of it. This is crucial for understanding where Kakuban placed the Pure Land and how this departs from the mainstream Pure Land practices of the *hijiri*. While the teachings that would later become the Pure Land tradition often viewed the Pure Land as a post mortem land detached from the defiled world, Kakuban believed that the Pure Land resides within one's own body and that by breaking through the veil of delusion one can perceive this essential world. Kakuban also portrayed the Pure Land of Impenetrable Adornments as coinciding with the highest stage of awakening.

⁹⁷ Gomez, 2002, 136 and 168.

⁹⁸ Ashuku 阿闍 is the Japanese name for Akṣobhya, represented at the east of Dainichi in the *Womb World Maṇḍala*. Akṣobhya means "immovable one."

⁹⁹ Being reborn in a Pure Land was not considered as equivalent to final release or *mokṣa* but as an ideal "location" where one could be exposed to the Buddhist teachings. It is in this Pure Land that practitioners could learn the dharma and possibly achieve liberation without too much struggle.

One of the early texts transmitted to Japan mentioning a Pure Land distinct from Amida's Pure Land is the *Yuimakyō* 維摩經.¹⁰⁰ Its first chapter, "Buddha Land" asserts that the defiled world is nothing else than the Buddha Land. Śāriputra—one of the Buddha's disciples who often represents the pre-Mahāyāna supposedly self-centered stance—was wondering: if this world is the Buddha Land, how can it be so defiled? The Buddha, who read his thoughts, reacted by asking him, "What do you think? Although the blind do not see them, can the sun and moon be anything but pure?" (McRae 2004, 87). This line articulates the idea that although not everyone sees the world's purity, it remains ever present and unchanged. Because the *Yuimakyō* was transmitted to Japan during the earliest phase of Japanese Buddhism, it was not exclusively associated with one sect. Thus, it contributed to disseminate the concept of Buddha Land, and hence Pure Land, across all Buddhist schools.

Dainichi's Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments

Since Pure Lands constitute an integral part of the Buddhist cosmology, knowledge of Amida's Western Pure Land obviously existed before the resurgence of the *mappō* thought during the late Heian period.¹⁰¹ Even though Kakuban did not introduce the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments into Shingon doctrine, he was able to incorporate it as a reinterpretation and reappropriation of the Pure Land that would be particularly appropriate for the Shingon philosophy. In doing so, Kakuban was the first to provide a detailed description of the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments.

¹⁰⁰ *Yuimakyō* is the Japanese pronunciation for the Chinese translation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sutra*. This sutra became popular among aristocrats because its main character, Vimalakīrti, is depicted as a Bodhisattva who lives the life of a normal layman. See McRae 2004 (T 14 no. 475).

¹⁰¹ For detailed diagrams of Buddhist cosmology see Inagaki, 382–5.

Kakuban's *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* provides a detailed picture of Dainichi's Pure Land.

The lower section of one of the two main mandalas is depicted as follows:

In the middle of the ocean lives a golden turtle of great compassion. The jeweled lotus of pure consciousness blossoms on the back of the turtle. On this [lotus] throne soars Mt. Meru, and atop the mountain resides the Mandala. (Abe 1991, 414)

This description is characteristic of tantric mandalas, in this case the *Womb Realm Maṇḍala*. By using such terminology Kakuban evoked Kūkai's previous descriptions and succeeded in maintaining their familiar expressions. In doing so, he brought attention to the existence of a Pure Land in the Shingon tradition. The following section of Kakuban's text provides an elaborate description of the adornments found in Dainichi's Pure Land, very similar to depictions of other Pure Lands.¹⁰² It is only towards the end of his work that Kakuban enunciates his unique views about the location of this particular Pure Land and how it can be realized.

In the final section of the *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* Kakuban explains how Dainichi's Pure Land is superior to all other Pure Lands, since it encompasses all of them. According to this interpretation, each Pure Land represents a different aspect of Dainichi's omnipresence. The Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments reincorporates the various Pure Lands, which are said to represent the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas surrounding Dainichi in the Womb Realm Maṇḍala. Nevertheless, being reborn in one of the lesser Pure Lands only functions as a stepping-stone to being reborn in Dainichi's all-encompassing Pure Land. Incidentally, these different levels of rebirth can be equated to the nine levels of Amida's Pure Land.¹⁰³ Being reborn in different

¹⁰² For examples of the Pure Land school's descriptions of the Western Pure Land see the Numata Center translations by Inagaki and Steward 2003.

¹⁰³ This is suggested by Kakuban's use of the expression *jōbon jōshō* 上品上昇, literally "ascension to the highest level." In the Amidist Pure Land tradition, this refers to a rebirth in the highest level of the Western Pure Land. Kakuban reinterprets this term to signify achieving the highest form of enlightenment.

stages of Amida's Pure Land still benefits the practitioner, but the ultimate goal is to be reborn in the highest level.

Although the idea of Dainichi's Pure Land existed in Shingon before Kakuban, there were no texts that described this Buddha-land in detail or explained how a practitioner could understand its location. For instance, there is no mention of the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments in the works of Kūkai included in the Taishō Canon.¹⁰⁴ Further research into the development of early Pure Land writings is necessary, since taking only Kūkai's works into account ignores the other developments of the Shingon tradition before Kakuban. Yet, it seems safe to assume that such a detailed account of Dainichi's Pure Land did not exist in the Shingon teachings prior to the emergence of Kakuban's work.¹⁰⁵

Use of Pure Land Terminology

Kakuban's incorporation of an extensive description of the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments allowed him to redefine the Shingon position regarding the Pure Land teachings, without seeming to contradict Kūkai's philosophy. Kakuban did not want to radically alter the Shingon doctrine, which would have openly triggered opposition from the conservative Shingon clergy. A seemingly contradicting perspective has been formulated by Van der Veere, who argued that some of the terms used in Kakuban's description of the visualization of the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments, such as *jōdo* and *hongan*, suggest his attempt to add a Western Pure Land flavor to Dainichi's Pure Land. I would object that during the late Heian

¹⁰⁴ It is important to note that not all of Kūkai's works are included in the Taishō canon. He could have mentioned the *Mitsugon bukkoku* in other texts, but it is unlikely.

¹⁰⁵ Although the *Mitsugon bukkoku* is mentioned in some texts of the Taishō Canon, such as T 681, Kakuban's work is the first to focus solely on the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments as a mandala and visualization practice.

period these terms did not yet have a connotation exclusively evoking the Western Pure Land, and that they were the only terms available to Kakuban for describing *any* Buddha's Pure Land.

While Van der Veere claims that the use of words such as *jōdo* 淨土, *jōbon jōshō* 上品上昇, and *hongan* 本願 were indications that Kakuban wished to paint the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments in the light of the Western Pure Land, such terms constituted the generic vocabulary for all Pure Lands, and were not limited to depicting Amida's Pure Land. Although Van der Veere writes that Kakuban used Western Pure Land terminology to express his Shingon philosophy, this reflects a misconception about the development of Pure Land terms.¹⁰⁶ As Amstutz and Blum state in the *Japanese Journal for Religious Studies*:

The emergence in the latter half of the Heian period of Amida's Pure Land as an ideal postmortem state eventually led to a general if not universal acceptance in Japan of the persuasiveness of this particular pure land conception. In the process, the attractiveness of its own paradisiac quality spread out to these other notions of pure lands. In other words, the Amida pure land known as *gokuraku* 極樂 became so appealing that notions of seeking rebirth in a pure land of other buddhas or bodhisattvas came to look very much like rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida. (Amstutz and Blum 2006, 219–220)

Therefore, although Kakuban used Pure Land terminology throughout his works, it had become so widespread during the late Heian period that such words were not necessarily linked to Amidist Pure Land practices. Yet, it is true that the term *gokuraku* 極樂 used by Kakuban in his *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan*, evokes Amida's Pure Land.

Kakuban's use of the phrase *Mitsugon jōdo* 密嚴淨土 (Pure Land of Impenetrable Adornments) seems to have sparked the discussion about his incorporation of Pure Land

¹⁰⁶ “Although [Kakuban] describes Mitsugon as a Pure Land, the word Jōdo takes on a different meaning” (Van der Veere 2000, 117). This passage suggests that Van der Veere assumed a connection between the Amidist *jōdo* and Dainichi's Buddha-land.

terminology. Prior to Kakuban's writings, *Mitsugon bukkoku* 密嚴佛國 was the common term for the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments. Following the increasing popularity of Amida's Pure Land depicted as *jōdo*, Kakuban seems to have incorporated this term into his vocabulary as a gesture toward his readers, for whom it must have sounded familiar. Van der Veere rather assumed that Kakuban borrowed the word designating Amida's Western Pure Land and applied it to Dainichi's Pure Land, in an attempt to show that both are the same. This hasty conclusion could have resulted from Van der Veere's inattention to the fact that the exclusive association of the term *jōdo* with Amida's Pure Land only emerged later.¹⁰⁷ In such light, the claim that Kakuban was attempting to combine Amida's Pure Land with the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments is inaccurate and seems to result from a misinterpretation of late Heian texts by projecting later developments onto them. It is more plausible that Kakuban was merely using this terminology because it was the only language available to depict Dainichi's enlightened realm.

Amstutz and Blum's general depiction of the Pure Land concept concurs with my conclusion that Kakuban did not necessarily attempt to make Dainichi's Buddha-land the same as Amida's Pure Land:

[T]here has always been a flexibility, variety, and even inconsistency in the concept of "pure land" within Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole. With regard to the belief and practice of Buddhism in East Asia, however, scholars add their speculations on different types of pure lands, even those associated with the same Buddha. For example, each body of the same Buddha is expected to have a different pure land associated with it and different inhabitants as well; thus the manifest or incarnate-body, the reward-body, and the Dharma-body of each Buddha has a different pure land associated with it. (Amstutz and Blum 2006, 219)

¹⁰⁷ See Amstutz and Blum 2006, 217.

Thus, not only do many Buddhas have Pure Lands but they also may have several of them. More importantly, each Buddha or Bodhisattva can have a different Pure Land linked to its three different bodies, the *dharmakāya*, the *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*. It suggests that Kakuban's description of Dainichi's Buddha-land was in line with the Pure Land trends of the late Heian Period and did not represent such a radical departure from his own tradition.

As mentioned above, all Pure Lands may include several levels, depending on the practitioner's ability to cultivate *bodhicitta* or the awakening resolve.¹⁰⁸ In the Amidist traditions *jōbon jōshō* 上品上昇 means rebirth in Amida's highest Pure Land, literally the ascension to the highest level. Conversely, in Kakuban's *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* the expression *jōbon jōshō* indicates the realization of buddhahood. From this latter perspective, when practitioners achieve *jōbon jōshō* they are said to be reborn in Dainichi's Pure Land. To reinforce this idea, Amida's Pure Land was now considered to function as a lower level of rebirth, a strategy suggesting that there is gradual path leading to the highest Pure Land of Dainichi. This is yet another way through which Kakuban created a hierarchy between Dainichi and Amida's Pure Lands.

Lastly, although *hongan* 本願 is often understood as referring to Amida's original vows, during the late Heian period this was not always a term specifically connected to the Western Pure Land. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas create vows for their Pure Lands. In this regard Van der Veere suggests that in the Shingon tradition *gan* can be translated as "bond," and that *hongan* means original bond, or the union between the practitioner and Dainichi. He explains that "Kakuban...[did] not connect *gan* with the *nenbutsu* or with the idea of *tariki*." He adds, "[a]s a

¹⁰⁸ *Bodhicitta* literally means "awakening mind" or "awakening resolve." It is central to all Mahāyāna schools and Shingon practices.

translation of [the] Sanskrit *samaya* the term has meanings of symbol, union, bond, etc.” (Van der Veere, 121). While *hongan* can translate to *samaya* according to the *Mikkyō jiten*, Van der Veere forgets to acknowledge that all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are said to take vows called *hongan* to create their Pure Lands.¹⁰⁹ The same Chinese compound *hongan* is utilized in sutras that have no relation to Amida, for instance in the title of the *Sutra of the Medicine Buddha*, *Yakushi nyorai hongan kyō* 藥師如來本願經.¹¹⁰

Even though some of the terminology in the *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* would later explicitly be interpreted as referring to Amida’s Pure Land, at the time of Kakuban these terms were broadly connected to the Pure Lands of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This illustrates the need for a meticulous investigation of these technical terms within their particular socio-historical contexts. Furthermore, especially in the case of Pure Land terminology, although identical Chinese compounds were often used, their meaning drastically shifted with time, sometimes even over a few decades. Having gained a somehow better grasp of how Kakuban used Pure Land terminology, we now turn to analyzing the eidetic contemplations of the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments.

Eidetic Contemplation of Dainichi’s Pure Land

Among the three mysteries emphasized in Shingon, scholars have always found it particularly difficult to describe and define the keys to unlocking the mystery of the mind. Although Shingon teaches that mandalas and depictions of deities are used to attain perfection of the mind, the

¹⁰⁹ For a translation of *hongan* see *Mikkyō jiten*, 643.

¹¹⁰ T 14 no. 449. Galen Amstutz and Mark L. Blum provide an excellent overview of Pure Lands in Japan in the special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. See their “Editors’ Introduction: Pure Lands in Japanese Religion,” 218.

practical modalities for these practices and the way they were experienced by practitioners remains shrouded in secrecy. Nevertheless, scholars agree on the premise that these eidetic contemplation practices aim to achieve nonduality between the practitioner and a deity.¹¹¹

It is much simpler to explain the meaning of mudras and mantras, since they provide visual and auditory clues. In contrast, mandala-based practices are tied to subtle inner perceptions that tend to be ineffable and indescribable. This feature is expressed as follows in the *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan*:

[T]he Lord Mahāvairocana, the Mind King, the Highest Buddha, comes to greet you, the practitioner, and takes you back [to his Pure Land]. Yet, [in truth,] he neither departs from [his abode] nor leaves [this world] behind. What happens then is impossible to express by words. (Abe 1991, 422–3)

Hence, what practitioners actually visualize when they contemplate the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments can only be the object of speculation. Nevertheless, what is gained by these visualizations was outlined in Kakuban’s works.

Since Dainichi’s Pure Land represents the Womb Realm Maṇḍala, this visualization essentially trains practitioners to become Dainichi. In order to achieve this, they must cultivate the Buddha-land of Impenetrable Adornments within their current body. Once they have reached this level, practitioners can then aspire to realize complete awakening through meditation on Dainichi. What occurs upon completion of the visualization is described in the last lines of the text:

¹¹¹ The term “eidetic contemplation” has been used by scholars such as Cynthia Bogel in *With a Single Glance* and Alan Sponberg’s “Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism” in *Tradition in Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*. Eidetic contemplation is used to discuss the contemplation of mandalas, and the act of envisioning it as the symbolic representation of a structure. I use this term since it encompasses both the visualization and contemplation aspects of *kan* 觀 (Ch. *guan*). For a detailed analysis of visualization and contemplation in relation to contemporary Shingon mandala practice see Sharf 2001.

Your eye of wisdom opens for the first time, and the Buddha's realms begin to reveal themselves to [you]. Then your hut of grass transforms itself to the field of vajra, and your tainted land is now identical with the Pure Land. All the grasses and trees in the deep forests are identical with the Dharmakāya of Three Equalities, and every wriggling animal is equal to the Buddha, who is endowed with the six great elements as his intrinsic nature. (Abe 1991, 423-4)

This passage corroborates the idea that the purpose of the eidetic contemplation of the *Mitsugon jōdo* is not simply to realize the nonduality between the practitioners' defiled world and Dainichi's Pure Land. Ultimately, the purpose of this practice is the practitioner's merging with Dainichi, and the realization that everything is identical with Dainichi's Pure Land. It is precisely by breaking through the illusion of a defiled world that practitioners realize oneness with the *dharmakāya*.

A similar description is found in the aforementioned passage of the *Yuimakyō*, in the Buddha's dialogue with Śāriputra, where Śāriputra exclaimed, "Originally I did not see it; originally I did not hear it. Now the purity of the Buddha's country is entirely apparent" (McRae 2004, 88). Knowledge about this sutra, which entered Japan shortly after the introduction of Buddhism, must have contributed to a spreading the idea that anyone can realize how this apparently defiled world is not separate from the Buddha-land.

The theme of a sudden realization of the Buddha-land is reiterated in Kakuban's last work, the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku*. The last sentence of the text constitutes an autobiographical account reflecting what may have constituted the most decisive event in Kakuban's life: "When suddenly seeking the outlines of the [Pure] Land Adorned with Mysteries I realized the end of samsara" (Todaro 2004, 328). In this passage, Kakuban claims that upon contemplating Dainichi's Pure Land he achieved buddhahood during his lifetime.

Overall, one of the distinctive features of the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* is to introduce the mandala of the five visceral organs as a method for visualizing the Pure Land within one's own body, thus emphasizing the importance to train one's whole being, including the physical constituent. This is why I argue that the contemplation of Dainichi's Pure Land and the mandala of the five visceral organs are the two crucial devices Kakuban put forward as the Shingon tradition's innovative tools for achieving *samādhi*.

Kakuban's View of the Body

Kakuban's *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* provides a minute description of the practitioner's body and of how it should be visualized. Since the time of Kūkai and his establishment of the Shingon tradition, meditative practices aiming at becoming one with Dainichi were widespread but Kakuban's new visualization techniques—while sharing the same objective to envision oneself as Dainichi—also incorporated popular practices of the late Heian period.¹¹² Kakuban achieved this combination by introducing the *Gozō Maṇḍala*, or mandala of the five visceral organs.¹¹³ Simultaneously, Kakuban introduced Chinese medicinal practices designated to keep a proper balance between the five visceral organs.

¹¹² Meditative practices such as the A-visualization and the moon disk visualization were introduced by Kūkai. The Syllable 'A' is a seed syllable for Dainichi and practitioners strive to become one with him by contemplating this letter. The moon disk symbolizes *bodhicitta*, the driving force to realize awakening. For more information on these practices see Yamasaki's *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*.

¹¹³ The idea of five viscera derives from a long tradition of Chinese traditional medicine. These five are usually listed as the liver, the heart, the spleen, the lungs, and the kidneys, but although the names are the same as the organs of western anatomy they indicate radically different things and a different approach to the human body focusing on its energetic balance. For instance, the "kidneys" serve to describe a whole range of somatic and energetic functions that are closer to the endocrine system as a whole than to the limited physical organs. In short, these five viscera (*zō* 臟) refer to five Yang energy channels or meridians (*keiraku* 經絡), which have five corresponding Yin meridians (*fu* 腑).

The five wheels or *cakras* in the *Gozō Maṇḍala* also correspond to the five families (buddha, jewel adorned, vajra, lotus, and karma), to the five elements, to the five sections of the body, etc.¹¹⁴ All of these groups of five are in turn connected with Dainichi's five syllable mantra, *A vī ra haṃ khaṃ*, and are displayed in a five-storied mandala. "Vertically it displays ten types of shallow and profound [minds]. Horizontally it displays a countless number [of minds]" (Todaro 2004, 273). From one perspective this mandala represents the ten stages of the enlightened mind, and from another it encompasses all Shingon practitioners' minds. Following the introduction, Kakuban later provides a detailed description of the five visceral organs in relation to the five elements.

¹¹⁴ The five elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and space, are often represented on gravestones. Since Kakuban refers to Chinese medicine he explained their correspondence with the five agents (*gogyō* 五行), which are usually listed as wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Like the five viscera, the five agents do not correspond to "elements" or chemical components, but rather to qualities and forces. For instance, fire represents "heat," and not an actual burning fire. An extended discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but Kakuban's work provides further helpful indications discussed below. The five families mentioned here are unique to the tantric traditions. They appear in the mandala and represent different attributes of Dainichi. All the various deities including the Bodhisattvas are categorized as belonging to one of the five families of Tathāgatas (*gozoku nyorai* 五族如來, Sk. *pañca-kula-tathāgata*).

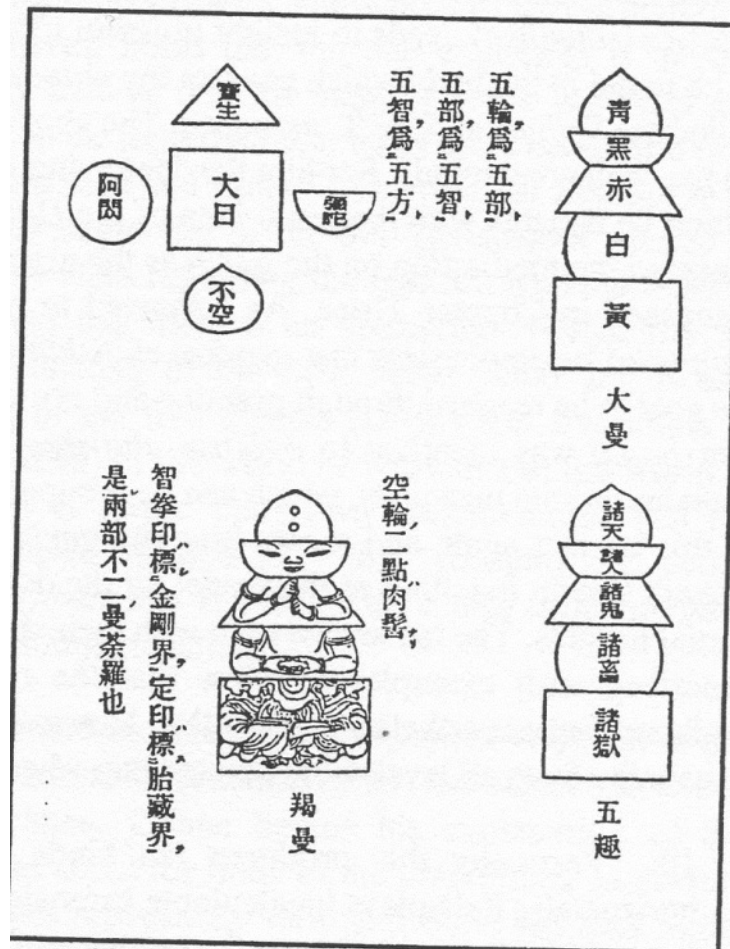


Figure 3 *Gozō Mandala* (KDZ VII:1132)

Although Kakuban was not the first cleric to associate the five elements with the five visceral organs, he was the first Shingon monk to provide such an in-depth description of their mutual interactions.¹¹⁵ For him, there was an exact correspondence between the physical and the metaphysical realms, a perspective expressed in his claim that “[t]he five organs are the five wisdoms” (Todaro 2004, 276). In any case, he relayed the prevailing idea that the five organs usually work in harmony with each other, except when one of them overcomes the other because the element it represents acquires excessive power. Thus, the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku*

¹¹⁵ Kakuban’s contemporary Jitsuhan also discussed the five visceral organs in his writings.

provides practical explanations about how to keep one’s body in balance, and how to prevent one organ or the corresponding element, from overpowering or weakening the others, thereby causing illness. The way Kakuban envisioned the correspondence between the five viscera, the five agents, and the five elements can be summarized as follows.¹¹⁶

<i>Five viscera</i>	Liver	Lungs	Heart	Kidneys	Spleen
<i>Five agents</i>	Wood	Metal	Fire	Water	Earth
<i>Five elements</i>	Earth	Water	Fire	Wind	Space

Situations of unbalance occurring when one viscera overpowers the other are described as following a prescribed one-way pattern. If we start with the liver, it may overpower the spleen. The spleen may overpower the kidneys. The kidneys may overpower the heart. The heart may overpower the lungs. The lungs may overpower the liver, which brings the pattern to a full circle of mutual negative interactions. This corresponds to the process of *sōkoku* 相剋—literally “mutual conquest”—depicted in traditional Chinese medicine as a characteristic of the five agents.¹¹⁷ Thus, Kakuban was eager not only to incorporate contemporary Pure Land practices but also the medical knowledge of his time. Furthermore, since the *hijiri* were often associated with the acquisition of *siddhi* or supernatural abilities including healing powers, Kakuban may have chosen to include traditional medical knowledge in his works to counter-balance the *hijiri*

¹¹⁶ This table follows Kakuban exposition in the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* as translated in Todaro 2004, 276. One minor difference is that Todaro uses the singular for lung and kidney, whereas I used the plural.

¹¹⁷ During the Heian period medicinal practice was often connected with Buddhism. Although research conducted in this area remains fragmentary, Kakuban’s adoption of the theory about the five visceral organs suggests that this type of knowledge was widespread in the priestly class. It also coincides with a time when Shingon priests took the role hitherto played by Onmyōdō 陰陽道 practitioners and fortune tellers at the imperial court.

and the magical powers attributed to them. By doing so he would also have demonstrated that Shingon monks had a similar ability to heal people.¹¹⁸

Let us now ask to what extent these writings and practices related to the viscera and the contemplation of the body were relevant to the central endeavor of realizing buddhahood within one's lifetime. Kakuban justified his apparent digressions by referring to the following dialogue between Emperor Saga (r.809–823) and Kūkai:

Emperor Saga asked, “What is the proof of attaining buddhahood in the present body in the Shingon school?” Reverently the monk “[Kūkai] entered the *samādhi* of the contemplation of the five organs. Suddenly on the monk's head a jeweled crown of the Five Buddhas appeared, and from his physical body of the five substances a brilliant light of five colors radiated.” (Todaro 2004, 289)

It reflects Kakuban's eagerness to demonstrate that his thought was anchored in Kūkai's teachings and remained faithful to its spirit. Although in this story Kūkai did not explain what the contemplation of the five visceral organs entailed, Kakuban further elaborated on this topic and created his own teaching device to convey the gist of his perspective. The *Gozō Maṇḍala* constitutes such device, and may be interpreted as Kakuban's attempt to explain how Kūkai's body became one with that of Dainichi. A distant reminder of Kakuban's teaching about the five elements and their various correspondences is the five-storied headstone, which is found in many Japanese temple graveyards. Its serves as a marker suggesting that one's relatives have been freed from the bondage of *saṃsāra* and that their five elements have once again merged into the primordial *dharmakāya*.

¹¹⁸ *Siddhi* are powers gained through ascetic practices. This tradition began in India where those with *siddhi* were very powerful and could be dangerous. At the time of the formation of Buddhism, monks chose to exclude *siddhi* from their practices.

Possible Correlation between Dainichi's Pure Land and the Gozō Maṇḍala

Examining the range of new practices introduced by Kakuban suggests that there may be a connection between the contemplation of Dainichi's Pure Land and the visualization of the *Gozō Maṇḍala*. Although Kakuban's texts include no explicit reference to the correlation between these practices, and although their similarities do not seem to have received scholarly attention in research focusing on Kakuban, the parallels seem undeniable.¹¹⁹ The wording used in both Kakuban's *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* and in his *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* suggests that his earlier practices focused on Dainichi's Pure Land later developed into those described in the *Gozō Maṇḍala*. The following section will discuss a few examples.

Kakuban's introduction to his *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* presented Dainichi's Pure Land as a locus encompassing all other Buddha Lands, and including Amida's Western Pure Land in particular. In this final work Kakuban aggregated various theories to formulate an original blend of related teachings:

Through the supernatural power and virtue of discriminative wisdom (*pratyavekṣa-jñāna*), the form of Amitābha appears on the body of Mahāvairocana. If one fully attains such a visualization...there is nothing that is not the body of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana. In opening the gate of the five *cakras* one reveals the *svabhāvakāya* (*svabhāvakāya-dharmakāya*). In erecting the gate of the nine syllables one indicates the *sambhogakāya* of bliss. One already knows that the two Buddhas are the same. (Todaro 2004, 261–2)

Thus, the *Gorin kuji myō himitsushaku* constitutes Kakuban's synthesis of his previous teachings, where he shows in detail how the mandalas of Dainichi's Pure Land and of Amida's Pure Land

¹¹⁹ In my research I have not found any scholars who made this connection. Although some Japanese scholars may have examined this link, I have not come across any mention this dimension.

correspond to one another. Kakuban wrote this text after his self-reported realization, which coincided with the claim to have achieved rebirth in Dainichi's Pure Land. His last text is conceived as a guide for practitioners, which served to share his personal realization and to awaken practitioners to the salvific powers of Dainichi's Pure Land:

How unfortunate that the ancient masters should quarrel about the difficulty or ease of attaining the Western Paradise. How fortunate that here and now I have attained birth in that paradise! Moreover, the meaning of giving this secret commentary lies in just this. The difficult realm of the Pure Land must be made discernible, nothing more! (Todaro 2004, 262)

Although the initial depiction of Dainichi's Pure Land in the *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* did not offer the same degree of complexity and maturity as in Kakuban's later works, it provided a first glimpse of how his Pure Land philosophy emerged. As mentioned earlier, Kakuban had set the tone in asserting the existence of a Pure Land in this world, a realm that is knowable insofar as practitioners can overcome the delusory creation of a defiled land (*edo* 穢土). After having provided a first description of the structure of Dainichi's Pure Land, Kakuban attempted in his *Mitsugon jōdo ryakkan* to provide a snapshot of the inner transformations taking place within the practitioner:

The deity merges deeply with the practitioner, and the practitioner interfuses with the deity. Together, they manifest the Lord of Buddhas and his vassals in the five families or return to the One Body [of Dharmakāya] in order to fuse the subject and object. Then, myriad virtues are produced in one moment of thought, and the two merits are thoroughly realized in a matter of seconds. (Abe 1994, 423)

This passage clearly depicts how practitioners merge with their meditational deity upon completion of their visualization of Dainichi's Pure Land.

The above excerpts substantiate the claim that Kakuban's *Gozō Maṇḍala* was conceived as an extension of the practices focusing on the visualization of Dainichi's Pure Land which he

developed in the earlier stages of his career. By incorporating Chinese medical practices into his final interpretation of the body of Dainichi and connecting this with everyone's physical body, Kakuban provides practitioners with even more tangible images for their visualization. Kakuban's knowledge of Chinese medicine and his integration of such elements within his teachings is a fascinating topic that provides many promising avenues for further research. Since medicine and Buddhism went hand in hand during the Heian period, a better understanding of their symbiosis could contribute to provide a deeper understanding of how commoners and clerics in ancient Japan perceived their own bodies, and how healing and care for the sick were performed during the late Heian period. One could further venture to explore the extent to which temples were involved in healing practices, and to scrutinize the types of medical interventions that were prevalent.¹²⁰

Conclusion

The unique visualization practices introduced by Kakuban have vast implications for both the understanding of the historical developments of the Shingon tradition and of its capability to adapt to an ever-changing society. Although during the late Heian period Shingon was becoming increasingly secular and politically oriented, this eventually led to a revival of the tradition. While the political faction of the Shingon school was active at Tōji in the capital, religious practices were stalled on Mount Kōya and Shingon was facing the prospect that the traditions introduced by Kūkai could disappear. It was in this context that several Shingon monks worked

¹²⁰ A similar type of research has been conducted in regard to interactions between Chinese medicine and religious practices in China. See Kanō Yoshimitsu 加納喜光. 1987. *Chūgoku igaku no tanjō* 中国医学の誕生 (The Birth of Chinese Medicine).

to restore the teachings and infuse them with new vitality, but none was as radical and successful as Kakuban.

We have seen that Kakuban's impact on Shingon doctrine and practice cannot be understood without taking into account his interactions with the *hijiri* on Mount Kōya. Though Kakuban belonged to a lineage of Shingon monks who were dedicated to the revival of the original tradition, once he arrived on Mount Kōya Kakuban diverged from this group to invent new methods for revitalizing his school. While on Mount Kōya Kakuban first stayed with the *hijiri*, a decisive phase that allowed him to familiarize himself with Pure Land practices and suggested ways to integrate them into the Shingon orthopraxy. The deep intertwinement of Kakuban's thought with the *hijiri*'s practices also allows one to better understand why Kakuban's teachings met with opposition.

Although the political strife between Kakuban and the Shingon clergy is clearly mentioned in academic works, so far little or no attention has been given to how the attitude of the clergy on Mount Kōya unfolded and to their motivation for rejecting Kakuban's new practices. This is an area that also deserves further study, and scholarship needs to determine more precisely which aspects of Kakuban's teachings were deemed threatening to Mount Kōya's clergy. Research focusing on these clashes could also contribute to provide a cross-sectarian understanding of the socio-religious climate of the late Heian period by looking at what occurred beyond the confines of the Shingon tradition per se, and in the periphery of the clerical world. In this regard, the *hijiri* and their liminal position in medieval society constitute an especially promising ground for further exploration, in spite of the limitation of textual resources. This thesis referred to hagiographical records depicting Kakuban's life on Mount Kōya. They were used in an attempt to better grasp the nature of the relationship between Kakuban and the *hijiri*.

Such resources, however, only constitute the tip of the iceberg and a wealth of materials remain to be explored, which will certainly shed further light on Kakuban's attitude towards the *hijiri*, and maybe on some other unsuspected dimension in their interactions.

The existence of a Shingon school that promotes certain Pure Land practices remains a topic barely discussed in Western academic circles, which provides fertile ground for further research. Moreover, large amounts of Kakuban's writings remain to be translated, leaving ample room for additional work.¹²¹ Other Shingon monks of the late Heian period, such as Jitsuhan, also need to be further studied so that we can truly understand the scope and importance of Pure Land practices within Shingon.

This thesis is a modest attempt to scrutinize Kakuban and his distinctive visualization techniques combining tantric methods with Pure Land elements. We saw that his interactions with the *hijiri* triggered his awareness that there was an unprecedented potential to revive the Shingon teachings by catering for new needs and new trends in society. Kakuban could have discredited the Pure Land practices, but he saw an opportunity in rather choosing to incorporate them into the Shingon doctrine. While several factors must have contributed to this choice, the fact that the *hijiri* outnumbered Shingon monks on Mount Kōya seemingly weighted in Kakuban's decision to embrace their Pure Land inclinations. This constitutes the turning point, where Kakuban's decisive story unfolded as a lifelong circumspect negotiation between the need to redefine these contemporary and trendy Pure Land elements as tantric practices and the inclination to espouse them as his own.

¹²¹ A list of Kakuban's works in the Taishō Canon is provided in Appendix B.

Appendix A: Excerpt from the *Denbōin Hongan Kakuban shōnin engi*

傳法院本願覺鑿上人緣起

Included in *Kōgyō daishi denki shiryō zenshū* 興教大師傳記史料全集, 49–50

Text and Translation of the Encounter between Aba no Shōnin and Kakuban

上人自元登山之志勵重之上、大師明神頻告可來之由之間、仍生年廿歲之時、(○以上二字無)、永久二年(甲牛、鳥羽院御宇)、十二月晦日、自大和路令登山之間、(○以上二字無)、阿波上人青蓮房、爲歲末之入堂、被參大塔之處、本願上人大塔前而行合、互相兩聖人、委細事共物語時、阿波上人云、我身生年七歲發心、其性異世人、漸及長大、其心猶切、常詣熊野寶前、祈出離之要道、明神垂感應、靈驗超他人、因茲國郡尊我縑素仰我、名半權現、雖然馱世間之衆務、期極樂之來迎、尋往生之勝地、詣入定之靈洞、興隆佛法人、當山令出來給祈念申事、成就者哉致信心申、其故幸奉值覺鑿上人、「併」我願已滿、老體忘懈倦給仕事如童子、遂請召往生院弊坊、仰聖人之雅訓者也。其後自往生院、移往最禪院明寂上人之許、事相被祕談、其間明寂上人住坊、遭不慮之回祿、無程被儲新造之坊、然上人者得西谷

Since the beginning, in addition to his earnest desire¹²² to climb the mountain, [Kakuban] was repeatedly told by the Great Master Deity¹²³ that he should ascend the mountain. Thus, at the age of 20, on January 27th 1115,¹²⁴ from the Yamato Road¹²⁵ he climbed up to Mount Kōya.

¹²² The Kanbun text has the compound *reijū* 勵重 to qualify the noun *kokorozashi* 志, which does not make sense, but it contains a marginal annotation indicating the variant 鄭 in one of the other manuscripts identified as *chi* 子. The compound *teijū* 鄭重 would be appropriate in this context, with the meaning of “serious, solemn.”

¹²³ The expression used here, *Daishi myōjin* 大師明神, indicates the deified form of Kūkai. This name, which is a remarkable product of the increasingly syncretist tendencies emerging on Mount Kōya, seems to appear first in the *Henmyōin daishi myōjin gotakusen ki* 遍明院大師明神御託宣記 composed in 1251. The fact that this invitation comes from a Kami is reinforced by the usage of the verb *tsugetamau* 告, suggesting the transmission of an oracle, with this particular reading added in the *rubi*: *tamau* 玉フ. An academic paper on *Daishi myōjin* was presented by Elizabeth Tinsley at the *Nihon sangaku shugen gakkai* 日本山岳修驗学会 in November 2009. The abstract is available on the following website: http://www.academia.edu/1659844/Daishi_Myōjin_of_Medieval_Koyasan_in_Historical_Context (accessed April 18, 2013).

¹²⁴ *Eikyū* 永久 2 (1114), *kinoe uma* 甲牛, last day (*kaijitsu* 晦日) of the twelfth lunar month, during the reign of Emperor Toba (*Toba-in no gyō* 鳥羽院御宇).

¹²⁵ This road (*Yamato-ji* 大和路) led to Nara from the Gojō area of Heian (Kyoto), through Fushimi and Kitsū. It is already mentioned in the *Man'yōshū*.

Aba no Shōnin Shōrenbō 阿波上人青蓮房¹²⁶ went to the great pagoda and was about to enter the hall for the end of the year,¹²⁷ when he met¹²⁸ Hongan shōnin 本願上人 [Kakuban]. While the two holy men¹²⁹ [Kakuban and Aba no Shōnin] were discussing together the particulars of many things, Aba no Shōnin said:

I¹³⁰ produced the awakening resolve at the age of seven. My nature was different from that of the worldly people. Gradually, as I grew up this resolve became even stronger. I was always going to worship the Treasure Hall of Kumano,¹³¹ where I prayed to receive guidance regarding the essential path to liberation.¹³² The Bright Deity¹³³ bestowed a sympathetic response in the form of mysterious powers¹³⁴ surpassing those of the others. For this reason in the provinces and districts lay people and clerics alike held me in high reverence and called me a half divine manifestation.¹³⁵ In spite of this, I loathed all the worldly obligations and was waiting to be welcomed into the Land of Bliss.¹³⁶ I visited exceptional locations linked to Rebirth,¹³⁷ and went to worship the spiritual cave where [Kūkai] entered samādhi. I prayed that someone would be brought to revive the Buddha Dharma on this mountain, and I asked to please indicate me who will realize this prayer, with my whole trusting mind. Because of this, fortunately, I had the privilege of meeting [you] Venerable Kakuban, and my vow was fulfilled.

¹²⁶ Another version of the same episode has a marginal note saying that his real name was Jōshin-bō 淨心房, literally “pure heart.”

¹²⁷ The expression “entering the hall” could mean several things. The whole sentence literally has “because of the end of the year entrance into the hall” (*Saimatsu no nyūdō no tame* 爲歲未之入堂) as the reason why he was on Mount Kōya. This suggests a yearly pilgrimage, maybe for the purpose of paying homage to Kongōbuji or to Kūkai’s mausoleum. An alternative reading would be to understand this as an indication that Aba no Shōnin was formally entering a training temple, either to perform certain rituals or to give sermons.

¹²⁸ Although the verb used in this text (行合) probably means “passing each other” it is not entirely clear. Fortunately, the other version of this episode uses the compound *sankai* 參會 indicating that they met there, either during a gathering or just bumping into each other by chance.

¹²⁹ The expression for “the two holy men” (*ryō shōnin* 兩聖人) uses different characters than the other honorific title Shōnin 上人 used throughout this text.

¹³⁰ The expression used for the first person is an expression of modesty, which can in some cases be translated literally as “my humble person” (*waga mi* 我身).

¹³¹ This expression (*Kumano hōzen* 熊野寶前) probably refers to one of the halls of the Kumano religious cultic center. Following Grapard’s lead, we cannot restrict the scope of this center by speaking of a shrine or a temple. See Grapard, Allan G. 1992. *The Protocol of the Gods: A Study of the Kasuga Cult in Japanese History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1.

¹³² Obviously referring to awakening (*shutsuri no yōdō* 出離之要道).

¹³³ This indicates an unspecified Kami (*myōjin* 明神), and those worshipped at Kumano were many.

¹³⁴ These mystical powers or “effects” (*reigen* 靈驗) were particularly sought by Shugendō practitioners.

¹³⁵ He was called *hangongen* 半權現, the *gongen* referring to a Buddhist or Shinto deity taking a human form.

¹³⁶ Refers to the way a Pure Land practitioner is welcomed by Amida at the moment of death (*gokuraku no raigō* 極樂之來迎).

¹³⁷ Alludes to sacred sites linked with Pure Land followers seeking Rebirth (*ōjō no shōchi* 往生之勝地). It might include places associated with Genshin.

[Thus, Aba no Shōnin] forgot the laziness associated with his advanced age, and accomplished work like a young child. Eventually, he was invited to the humble abode of Ōjōin 往生院, where he received the refined teachings from the holy man [Kakuban]. Then he relocated to Saizen-in 叡禪院, where he studied under Venerable Meijaku 明寂 and received his hidden transmission.¹³⁸ During that period of time the subtemple of Venerable Meijaku suffered an unexpected fire, but within a short duration they reconstructed a new building. Meanwhile the Venerable [Meijaku] was given the main subtemple belonging to Chidairenbō 智大蓮房, the head of the *bessho* in the Western Valley, a place that had been administered by Shōkyō 聖教 and others. The Getsujō-in 月上院 of that time corresponds to this location. It is in this subtemple that the Venerable [Kakuban] engaged in a thousand-days practice.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ In this context the compound *jisō* 事相 refer to the tantric initiation ceremony (Sk. *abhiṣeka*), which he received through a secret transmission (*hidan* 祕談).

¹³⁹ This practice lasting a thousand days (*sennichi no gyōhō* 千日之行法) may refer to the *gumonjihō* 求聞持法, a ritual linked to the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, which Kakuban performed during the same time period. Yet, usually, this ritual does not last so long and it may simply refer to an extensive three-year retreat.

Appendix B: List of Kakuban's Texts in the Taishō Canon

Sorted by Taishō Number

Hokkekyō hishaku 法華經祕釋. T 56 no. 2191

Hannya shingyō hiken ryakuchū 般若心經祕鍵略註. T 57 no. 2203

Rishukyō shuji shaku 理趣經種子釋. T 61 no. 2238

Shaku makaenron shiji 釋摩訶衍論指事. T 69 no. 2285

Kongōchō yugachū hotsu anokutara sanmyaku sanbodaishinron hishaku 金剛頂瑜伽中發阿耨
多羅三藐三菩提心論祕釋. T 70 no. 2291

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